

THE GENN FAMILY OF CANADA
CHAPTER 2 - ANJOU, FRANCE, 1095 - 1730

The surname Genne emerged as a distinguished family name from the former province of Anjou in west central France. Count Robert le Fort became nominal head of the province in 870. Geoffrey Martel of Anjou expanded its territory considerably between 987 and 1060. Geoffrey Martel married Matilda, daughter of King Henry I of England. Their son, Henry Plantagenet, inherited Anjou from his father and the English crown from his mother. He became King Henry II of England in 1154, married Eleanor of Aquitaine, and in doing so secured not only Anjou but also most of western France under the English crown. There it remained until the 13th century. Henry II, while King of England, spent half his 35 year reign in France, and is, in fact, buried at Fontevrault in Anjou.

Sometime during the period when the Plantagenets held the English crown (1154 - 1399), the Gennes, we surmise, found their way onto English soil. The common English spelling during that period was Genne, the final "e" being dropped about 1600.

England, at the time, was a complex mix of cultures and languages. Latin, since Roman times, had been the language of scholarship. But since the Norman Conquest (1066) French had been the language of the nobility and the gentry. The use of English, a spoken language, was confined to peasants and villeins. The earliest English written lyric on record, "Sumer is icumem in," appeared about 1250, but it was not until 1362 that the English language replaced French in English courts of law, and not until 1385 that the English language became the language of the grammar schools. It should not surprise us if we found that a 13th century English surname had its roots in the French language.

The Genne family was well established during these times in Anjou with land and manor. Jean de Genne, Lord of Gennes is on record in 1095 as witnessing a donation made by the monks of Marmoutiers. In 1144 Etienne de Genne, Lord of La Motte de Genne, married Anne de La Faucille and their son, Guillaume, became the Knight of La Motte de Genne in 1188.

Etienne de Genne, Knight and Lord of La Motte de Gennes (son of Guillaume?) took part in the Crusade of 1248. Led personally by King Louis IX, this was the best prepared and most expensive expedition ever mounted to the Middle East (Desert Storm excluded).

At the end of August 1248 Louis IX sailed with his army to Cyprus where they spent the winter making final arrangements for the seizure of the Holy Land. They then landed in Egypt and the following day they captured Damietta without difficulty.

His next attack was on Cairo in the following spring, but this turned out to be a total disaster. The Crusaders failed to guard their flanks and the Egyptians opened the sluice gates of the water reservoirs along the Nile, creating floods that trapped the entire crusading army, leaving

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Louis with little option but to surrender. After paying a huge ransom of 167,000 pounds and surrendering Damietta, the king sailed to Palestine, where he spent four more years building fortifications before returning with his army to France in the spring of 1254.

Etienne survived this misadventure and on his return he was sent as Ambassador to the Duke of Bourgogne, who authorized the addition of a gold fleur de lys on his Coat-of-Arms.

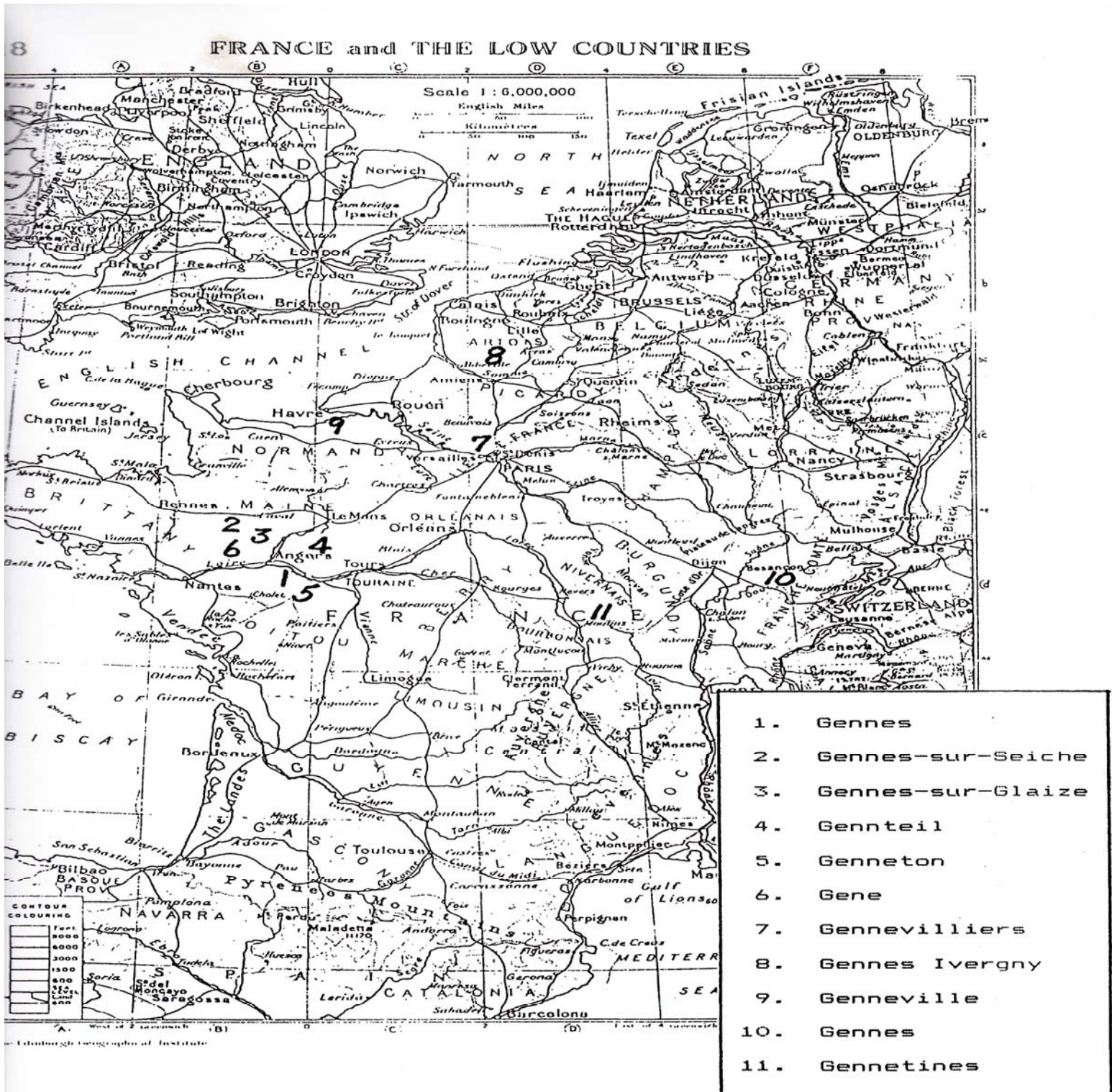
There were marriages of note. Noble Charles de Genne, Horseman to the King and Lord of Launay, married Charlotte du Bois of La Salle in 1346. The Lord of Masures, Guillaume de Genne, married three times: first, in 1472 with Jeanne Lambert, second, in 1473 with Etienne la Haste, and third, to Perrine Hardy.

Jean de Gennes, Lord of Bastie is mentioned in 1578 for contributions he made to his community. Daniel de Gennes, Lord of Vaudue', was Lawyer at Parliament and the Chief of Waters and Forests in 1654. Mathieu de Gennes, born in 1654, was the Lord of the Chanceliere and a Councilor to the King. Francois-Benjamin de Genne, Lord of la Chanceliere, was the Captain of the Infantry at the service of the Indian Company at Dinan in 1730.

The Huguenot Society of London reported in their correspondence that the name GENN was originally DE GENNES. "Huguenot Pedigrees" by C. E. Lart makes several references to the name. Jean de Gennes was Procureur Fiscal at Vitre, near Rennes, north-western France and 120 km. north-west of Gennes. Renee de Gennes, daughter of Jean de Gennes, married into the Protestant family Ravenal in 1651. Also, Andree de Genne married Lucas Ravenal in 1550 and their son, Jean Ravenal was elder of the Protestant church at Rennes in 1616.

While these events are much too recent to support the theory we are suggesting, it is also of interest to note that in the register of the French Protestant Church in Threadneedle Street, London, there is a record of a Marie de Genne who acted as sponsor in 1697 and 1698. The name was spelled "de Genes" in the entry for 1698. It would appear from this slight evidence that the de Genne family were French Protestants and that they had reached London after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, when so many refugees arrived in England.

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