



Neil Payne, 7, and Rover are shown beside the Payne home on Highway 2, west of Thamesford. The house, to be torn down in November, has been replaced by a modern ranch-style house.

Biddulph Families Can Claim French Royalty as Ancestors

By
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The Coursey (DeCoursey) families of Biddulph can trace their origin back to French royalty.

The early DeCoursey families arrived in England from Normandy, a province of France, around 1150 and as early as 1177 began to settle in Ireland.

In the history of British peerage there was a Sir John DeCoursey involved in battles who was a descendant of Charles, Duke of Lorraine, a son of Louis IV of France and who reigned in the 12th century.

Sir John was given the province of Ulster in Ireland, no doubt for favors to the monarch reigning at that time.

England had made conquests in Ireland and was slowly trying to take possession. Because the northern chiefs had not submitted to English rule, the fierce warrior, Sir John, used this excuse to enter Ulster in a hostile manner and begin conflicts with the surrounding chiefs until he eventually succeeded in subduing the north. He was honored by King Henry II and was given the title of Lord of Connaught and Earl of Ulster. He ruled wisely and improved Ulster.

There was another warrior, Hugh DeLacy who became jealous and fought against Sir John. He travelled to England and carried tales to the king about the bold and bad Sir John DeCoursey and a price was put on his head. When DeLacy returned from England with papers to arrest Sir John, the family protected him but one day after DeLacy had hired his servants to shadow him, Sir John was captured in a church while he was unarmed, but not before the bold fighter had killed 13 of DeLacy's men with a wooden cross. Sir John was taken to England and put in prison.

The king at this time was having a dispute with France over lands and the lords decided it should be settled by a duel of swords. They knew they had the mighty DeCoursey in jail and offered him his freedom if he would fight a Frenchman. Sir John agreed and the day of the fight a large crowd gathered at the field that had been set aside for the duel but when the Frenchman looked at big Sir John he took to his heels and fled, leaving England immediately.

The king was pleased over the settlement of land and

asked Sir John what favor he might bestow on him. Sir John requested that he and his descendants be allowed to wear hats in the presence of the king evermore. This wish was granted and the custom honored for more than 600 years.

Sir John returned to Ireland and it is presumed that the DeCourseys of Ireland are descendants of this bold fighter.

The surname DeCoursey has undergone many changes. In England it was DeCoursey; in Ireland it was DeCoursey. It has varied from DeCoursey to DeCorci, DeCourci, DeCoursey etc., but DeCoursey appears to be the correct Irish spelling that has lasted through the years. Apparently the "De" was dropped when families left Ireland for Canada during the great potato famine. The late Richard DeCoursey made a study of the name and as a result his three children were christened DeCoursey—believed to be the only ones in Canada with the "De" at that time.

John Coursey came to Biddulph at an early date. He was so favorably impressed with the country that he sent word to his father and broth-

ers in Tipperary to come to Canada.

In Ireland at this time there was a great famine of potatoes, the chief food product. Also, the country was ravaged by violent and often torturous fights over religion and religious convictions and many were glad to leave Ireland. Hundreds left the old land to seek fame or fortune in the new world.

Several families of DeCourseys left Tipperary. They disembarked at Boston or New York and made their way up through New York State to Canada. Some of the DeCourseys dropped off around Buffalo and their descendants can be found in New York State and Buffalo today.

One family, the father, mother, two sons and a daughter, bound for Biddulph went by way of Hamilton. Here the father, old and feeble, stopped at a tavern awaiting a promised ride in a wagon. When the rest of the family had gone some distance and the father did not appear, the mother sent the boys back to find him but no one could offer any information. Thinking the father had met with foul play, the brothers resumed their journey to Biddulph.

The father was never heard of again but if he had been

killed it was not for gold because the mother carried all the money with her. On went the family, the mother, sons, Thomas and Richard and daughter Ann to meet the other son John already in Biddulph. After the family reached their destination, nothing more is told about the mother. Presumably she died and was buried in St. John's Cemetery, Arva.

John, Thomas and Richard all took up land on the Coursey Line, Biddulph. John who took up lot 37 con. 2 married Elizabeth, daughter of Col. James Hodgins. The farm is still in the Coursey name, being owned by Harold Coursey. Thomas married Jane, another daughter of Col. James. They lived on lot 38 con 3 now owned by Lawrence Hodgins. Richard never married but lived on lot 32 con. 2, now owned by Wilson Hodgins.

John and Thomas both had large families and all the Courseys in Biddulph could trace their origin back to the one family who arrived from Ireland. Now there are Courseys and DeCourseys of the same origin scattered throughout Canada and United States.

I am indebted to Miss Helen DeCoursey, of Dearborn, Michigan for information in this article.