

## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE FAMILY SURNAME

--Researched by Arden J Fewster

Before the time of William the Conqueror, only the nobility had hereditary surnames; the common people were simply called John or Will etc. However, the first census of England (the Domesday Book) as well as tax rolls, militia rolls etc. made it necessary to differentiate between people with the same name; thus another name was added to people's names to distinguish them. Some words used referred to where a person lived e.g., Churchill, Brooks, Fields etc.; others were colours such as Black, and Green. The majority were taken from the person's occupation e.g. Cook, Miller, Wright etc.

Research in several volumes on British surnames at the University of Western Ontario library gives one of these occupational names of a man who made the wooden framework or "tree" of a saddle as a Fewster; thus the name FEWSTER means a "saddle-tree maker." An old French word, 'fust', meaning stake, stump or log is the root of the name FUSTER. The earliest reference to this name that I have is 1179, Walter le Fuster. Some other ancient forms of this are FUISTER, FUYSTER, FUYSTOUR and FOISTER.

In those days most people had little or no education and the many variations of names were simply the result of people who could barely read or write; thus we have recorded in 1627, the baptism of William FUISTER, son of Nicholas FEWSTER. FOSTER and FORSTER also go back to the same root. By the 12th or 13th century, surnames had become hereditary, so that a man named Smith was not necessarily a blacksmith. In contrast, Iceland is the only western country which still does not have hereditary surnames i.e. there you are known as your father's son or daughter.

Our ancestors, Robert and William FEASTER came to Canada from Cropton, Yorkshire but their grandfather lived in the Parish of Hackness, Yorkshire nearer to the coast (east) of England. A copy of the Hackness Parish Register (Hackness) at the Buffalo N.Y. library gives the baptisms, marriages and deaths back to 1573. The names in order of appearances are FUSTER 1573, FUISTER 1605, FEWSTER 1621, FEASTER 1722. Study of this register shows that John FUSTER and John FEWSTER appear to be the same man; also the name FUISTER probably became FEASTER.

I have been able to find only one reference to FEASTER in these books, and that said that it was the same as FEWSTER. FEASTER may have been only a local Yorkshire variation that reverted back to the better known surname FEWSTER when it came to Canada.