



The Catholic  
Archdiocese  
of Edmonton

Joy in Christ  
**100** Jubilee  
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## Jubilee 100 Biography Project

### Biography of the LeCerf Family

Submitted by St. Matthew Parish, Rocky Mountain House

The Parish of St. Matthew Catholic Church in Rocky Mountain House includes the Mission Parishes of Evergreen (Jesuit Martyrs), Caroline (St. Joseph the Worker) and Nordegg (St. Theresa - now used inter-denominationally). For many years prior to the coming of the Alberta pioneer families, the area witnessed the early beginnings of our Catholic faith through the impact of the Oblate Missionaries visiting the nearby fur trade posts from 1800-1878, converting many Métis and First Nations. Soon the pioneers began arriving with the promise of new land and new beginnings and with their Catholic Faith paramount. This area offers as testament two very special families who persevered in the faith: the Hoven and the LeCerf families.



Mr. and Mrs. Pierre LeCerf and family; Henri, Albert, Charles, Genevieve, Alice, Yvonne, Louise, Jeanne, George, Theresa and Marguerite, on the occasion of Mr. and Mrs. LeCerf's 55th wedding anniversary, 1976.

The saga of the LeCerf family's journey to Alberta from France is not only intriguing but inspirational. Pierre, the eldest son of Jules LeCerf, arrived in Canada in 1906.

What a change from a wonderful home in France to a sod house. Pierre was born in Arras, France, on April 27, 1897. His father, Jules, an accountant, arrived in 1902 with the little family in tow, 6 children, to take up a mining position near Frank. The company bankrupted, and he returned to France but returned once more to Canada in 1906, this time first homesteading near Raven (Caroline), Alberta. Living in a tent at first they eventually built a home. The history of the LeCerf family is one of devout religion. Their many diaries are continually sprinkled with visits by priests to celebrate mass in homes and even Bishop Legal visiting twice. On one occasion they were befriended by Rev. Voisin, who came upon the struggling family in the dead of winter in their unheated home near Raven, and arranged for food for the family and a heater. One sister, Marie, would take vows in a convent but would leave after 10 years. Pierre, energetic and enterprising apart from his homesteading, would also operate lumber mills in Ricinus near Caroline and at Harlech near Nordegg.

“On Sunday May 15, 1921, I took Father Renut home with me to baptize our first born, Henri, and the next day I took him to the home of Frank Dobia for their marriage ceremony.”

- Pierre LeCerf Diary

Pierre Married Blanche Deberg in 1920. In the intervening years Pierre would establish lumber camps at Ricinus, near Caroline, at Harlech, and near Nordegg, settling down in Rocky Mountain House in 1947. Pierre is quoted in the Hoven family biography about the vital priestly visits of the early Trenchbary Priests. These priests travelled in horrendous conditions; half-starved and freezing themselves, they would make their way through over 40 communities seeking Catholic families with many new baptisms along the way. Pierre LeCerf was a longtime member of the Knights of Columbus and was honoured by them in 1975 and also represented the Raven District on the County Board and was Chairman of the School Board. Pierre saw well the fruits and growth of the Catholic faith, with churches built in the area at Caroline, Evergreen, Rocky Mountain House and Nordegg. As a young altar boy in St. Albert, he served Father Lacombe.

As churches began to emerge, Catholic families drew close and so did the communities. Many LeCerfs lie in the Evergreen Cemetery. Marie LeCerf would marry Edgar Vick of Evergreen. Jacques LeCerf would marry Helen Elizabeth Hoven.

“Jacques LeCerf attended the Seminary of St. Albert where he was studying for the priesthood. He left the Seminary and married Helen Elizabeth Hoven. Future Bishop Routhier attended the seminary at the same time and later told Henri and I that Jacques would have made an excellent priest. We laughed and said that Jacques turned out to be a wonderful husband and father too...”

- Peggy LeCerf –Widow of Henri LeCerf

The children of Pierre LeCerf have each been very involved with their parishes, particularly in Rocky Mountain House where Pierre was honoured by the Knights of Columbus and the Canadian Legion. His son Henry also was very active in the Knights of Columbus in Grande Prairie, and Pierre’s daughter Genevieve has been and is still active in the Catholic Women’s League, the St. Matthew Parish Council and the adult choir. Yvonne LeCerf (Overgaard) is still active in the Catholic Women’s League. In the early childhood years the children all attended convent schools, particularly in Red Deer with the Daughters of Wisdom.

It was not unusual on occasion for the young LeCerf children to take the train from Red Deer to visit their parents in their lumber camp near Nordegg.

On August 10, 1909, the Belgian-born Jules became a British Subject and naturalized Canadian. He was very proud of this.

Excerpts from the LeCerf family diaries attest to their strong Catholic upbringing.

“Mother (Louise) and the 2 children made such a good impression on the two Sisters (nuns) of the Hospital and Convent that the two Mother Superiors decided to hire Mother and we entered their Convent School...”

“It was lucky we had an extra mattress so Father Voisin slept on the floor downstairs with his Buffalo Coat still on. The next morning he celebrated Mass using the table as an Altar. Raven (Caroline) 1906”

“Bishop Legal, who had just succeeded Bishop Grandin as Bishop of St. Albert, came to the camp and stopped at our place. After that Oblate Missionaries from the diocese came once in a while. That is how we came to know Father Lacombe, Father Lestang, Father Blanchet and others. Bishop Legal came one other time and confirmed Madeline after he asked to see us. I was still too young – in those days children were admitted to the Holy Table before 12, rarely at 10.”

In 1779 a beautiful engraved glass vase was presented to Gaspard LeCerf by his devoted employees. That vase has been passed down to each succeeding generation of LeCerfs. The Family now will present this memorial of the Generations of Catholic Devotion in Alberta to the Archives of the Edmonton Catholic Archdiocese.

In the summer of 2006, the Town of Caroline officially thanked and recognized the family of Pierre LeCerf and Jules as being Century Pioneers having arrived in the area in 1906. Yvonne Overgaard, daughter of Pierre and granddaughter of Jules, accepted the honour on behalf of the LeCerf family.

When the patriarch Jules LeCerf died at Raven, Alberta in 1928, his will stated “I want to be buried in my Lay Apostolate Robe and Rope and Rosary.”

Jules went on to write, “I pray my children to always practice their duties of honour, harmony, and Christian Charity. May I always from above have the joy to see them always follow the right path...”

No doubt Jules would be proud of his extended LeCerf Family today. Over the past century in Alberta, their lives have followed the Catholic faith closely, and served their Lord and their parish communities until the present day.