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This newsletter may of interest to persons related directly or indirectly to Grace and Clifford Retson. My genealogy website is located at <http://www.retson.ca/retsongeneology.html>

The History of Religion as it Relates to Retson Ancestors (1st in a series)

Pre 1603 All Our Ancestors

With the exception of very few German / Swiss lines all our traced ancestors were from the British Isles, and untill 1530 were all Roman Catholic. England officially became non-Catholic during the reign of King Henry VIII. The break with the Roman papacy and the establishment of an independent Church of England occurred during his reign (1509–47). The Act of Supremacy 1534 declared the English crown to be “the only supreme head on earth of the Church in England” in place of the Pope. The Catholic Mass became illegal in England in 1559, under Queen Elizabeth I’s Act of Uniformity. The Recusancy Acts, legally obligating English citizens to adhere to Anglicanism, date from Elizabeth’s reign. In the Bill of Rights of 1689, Parliament declared that no future monarch could be a Catholic or be married to a Catholic. This was reaffirmed in 1701 “Act of Settlement”.

The theology of the Catholic Church before Henry VIII was based on the teachings of the pope and the Catholic Church, which were considered the supreme authority on matters of faith and morals. The Catholic Church upheld the doctrine of the Trinity, the incarnation of Christ, the sacraments, the intercession of saints, the veneration of relics and images, the existence of purgatory, and the necessity of good works for salvation. The Catholic Church also followed the Latin rite of liturgy, which used the Latin language and the Roman Missal for the celebration of the Mass. The Catholic Church in England was rich and influential and had a strong devotion to the Virgin Mary and the saints. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium), promulgated on December 4, 1963, specifically addressed the introduction of vernacular languages into Mass. In 1964, parts of the Mass began to be prayed in English, priests started facing the congregation, and the approach to liturgical music took on a different note. The actual implementation of vernacular languages varied across regions and dioceses, but this quiet revolution marked a turning point in the history of the Catholic Church, enabling a more inclusive and participatory worship experience for countless faithful.

Back in the pre- 1603 era our Ancestors religion changed with the monarchs. The actual theology changed little. The theology of the Church of England (Anglican) is based on the belief and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as expressed in the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. The Church of England claims to be both Catholic and Reformed, upholding the teachings of the early Christian doctrines and the English Reformation. The Church of England has various doctrinal strands, such as Anglo-Catholicism, high churchmanship, central churchmanship and low churchmanship, which reflect different emphases on the sources of authority, the role of liturgy, the nature of the sacraments and the relationship with other Christian traditions. [To understand any of these term and doctrinal strands use google or copilot in Windows “Edge”.]

After 1662 its liturgy followed the 1662 Book of Common Prayer and the Common Worship as its main liturgical texts. Outside of England the Church is called by other names such as Episcopalian, Anglican etc. many of our English ancestors clamored for further reforms.

Religious beliefs can be a significant factor in migration, as individuals and groups seek to escape persecution, find religious freedom, or join established communities of co-religionists. Freedom from religious persecution played a major role in encouraging our ancestors' migration from Europe to North America. The first of our known ancestors to migrate for religion freedom were known as pilgrims, followed a decade later by the puritans. In this newsletter I will follow one of our pilgrim ancestors. In future newsletters I will cover other sects/religions/denominations such as Congregationalist, Unitarians, Presbyterian, Baptists, and United hrlid by later ancestors.

Pilgrims

Francis Cooke, our 10th great grandfather, also known as: ffrancis Cooke, Franchoy's Couck and Couk, Franchoy's of England, was born probably in 1583 in England, the exact date and place are unknown. He first appears in the records of Leiden, Holland in 1603 when "Franchois Couck" became engaged to marry Hester Mahieu. He was English and a wool-comber. She was a Walloon, who had come from Canterbury, England. The Puritans and the Pilgrims both followed Calvinist theology, but they had different views on church organization, worship and social issues. You can learn more about their history and beliefs by visiting these links: [What's the Difference Between Puritans and Pilgrims?](#) and [Who Are the Pilgrims vs. the Puritans?](#)

In 1620 Francis Cooke and his son John, born in 1607, left Holland on the Speedwell. They joined the Pilgrim Company on the Mayflower and arrived in what would become Plymouth, Massachusetts. Francis signed the Mayflower Compact. Hester Cooke and the younger children came over in 1623 on the Anne. The youngest two children may have been born in the new world. His occupation in the new colony was probably husbandman.

The Walloon Church in Holland during the period from 1600 to 1620 was part of a broader context of religious and social change in the Dutch Republic. The Walloon Church refers to the French-speaking Reformed (Protestant) congregations established in the Netherlands. These churches primarily served the Walloon (French-speaking) communities, many of whom had fled from the Southern Netherlands (present-day Belgium) due to religious persecution by the Spanish Habsburg rulers during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The Dutch Republic, having declared its independence from Spanish rule in the late 16th century, offered a haven for religious refugees due to its relatively tolerant religious climate.

During this period, the Walloon Church played a significant role in the life of its members, offering religious services in French, and thus catering to the needs of the expatriate and refugee community. It functioned within the broader Calvinist tradition, aligning with the Dutch Reformed Church in terms of theology but maintaining its distinct language and cultural identity.

The Walloon Church established several congregations across the Dutch Republic, in cities such as Amsterdam, Leiden, Haarlem, and The Hague, among others. These churches were integral to the communities they served, providing not only spiritual guidance but also support in adjusting to life in exile and maintaining the cultural and linguistic heritage of their members.

On New Year's Day, 1608, among those admitted to communion by letter of transfer from another Walloon congregation were `Francois Cooke et Esther sa femme, de Norwich' ... This entry informs us that before 1608, the Cooke-Mahieu couple had lived in Norwich among the Walloons there. They evidently left for Norwich on 8 August 1606, as a note in the Walloon Library of Leiden mentions their departure on that date with letters of transfer ... Both the departure with attestation and the return to communion in Leiden with a similar letter indicate that Francois Cooke, as well as Hester his wife, was a member of the Leiden Walloon congregation. The Cookes evidently returned briefly to Leiden, between the quarterly dates of communion, which they missed, in order to have their son Jean baptized within the Leiden Walloon congregation with family as godparents to raise him in case he became orphaned.

Scholars at the Leiden Municipal Archives discovered two other children of Francois and Hester besides their son Jean : Elizabeth, baptized on 26 December 1611, and a child, whose name is not given, buried in the Pieterskerk on 20 May 1608 ... The burial record imparts the further information that at that time Franchoy's Couck lived on the Levendaal, a canal on the southeast side of Leiden. The Cookes' other children, Jane, Hester, Jacob, and Mary, were presumably baptized in the Separatist congregation of Leiden, for which no records are preserved, although it is possible that one or two might have been born in Norwich, or some may have been born in the colony of New Plymouth.

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The religious beliefs of the Pilgrims are well described at <http://mayflowerhistory.com/religion>, an extraction of which:

The Pilgrim church had a number of religious differences with the Church of England and the Catholic Church.

Predestination.

The Pilgrims believed that before the foundation of the world, God predestined to make the world, man, and all things. He also predestined, at that time, who would be saved, and who would be damned. Only those God elected would receive God's grace and would have faith. There was nothing an individual could do during their life that would cause them to be saved (or damned), since God had already decided who was going to be saved before the creation of the world. However, God would not have chosen blatant sinners to be his elect; and therefore those who were godly were likely to be the ones God had elected to be saved.

Sacraments

To the Pilgrims, there were only two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. The other sacraments of the Church of England and Roman Catholic church (Confession, Penance, Confirmation, Ordination, Marriage, Confession, Last Rites) were inventions of man, had no scriptural basis, and were therefore superstitions--even to the point of being heretical or idolatrous. The Pilgrims opposed mass and considered marriage a civil affair to be handled by the State (not a religious sacrament). Icons and religious symbols such as crosses, statues, stain-glass windows, fancy architecture, and other worldly manifestations of religion were rejected as a form of idolatry. They also rejected the Catholic and Anglican Book of Common Prayer, believing that prayer should be spontaneous and not scripted.

Church Hierarchy.

The legitimacy of the Pope, the Saints, bishops, and the church hierarchy were rejected, as was the veneration of relics. The church of the Pilgrims was organized around five officers: pastor, teacher, elder, deacon, and deaconess (sometimes called the "church widow"). The Pastor was an ordained minister whose responsibility was to see to the religious life of the congregation. The Teacher was also an ordained minister who was responsible for the instruction of the congregation. The Elder was a lay-person responsible for church government, and he was also the church's eyes and ears, assisting the Pastor and

¹ https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Cooke-36#_ref-LogMayflower_0

Teacher in admonishing the congregation. The Deaconess attended the sick and poor, and often played the role of midwife for the congregation.

The Church Building.

The church building itself had no significance to the Pilgrims, and was kept intentionally drab and plain, with no religious depictions, crosses, windows, fancy architecture, or icons, to avoid the sin of idolatry. At Plymouth, the Pilgrim's church was the bottom floor of the town's fort--the top floor held six cannons and a watchtower to defend the colony. The church room was also the town's meetinghouse, where court sessions and town meetings took place.

Infant Baptism.

The Pilgrims believed baptism was the sacrament that wiped away Original Sin and was a covenant with Christ and his chosen people (as circumcision had been to God and the Israelites), and therefore children should be baptized as infants. This was in opposition to the Anabaptists, who believed that baptism was essentially an initiation ceremony into the church-hood of believers, and therefore could only be administered to believing adults who understood the meaning of the ceremony. The Pilgrims, on the other hand, believed that "baptism now, as circumcision of old, is the seal of the covenant of God," and they felt that groups like the Anabaptists who did not baptize their infants were depriving Christ's flock of all its young lambs. They further believed that at least one parent must be of the faith for the child to be baptized into the church.

Holy Days and Religious Holidays.

The Pilgrims faithfully observed the Sabbath and did not work on Sunday. The Pilgrims did not celebrate Christmas and Easter. They believed that these holidays were invented by man to memorialize Jesus and are not prescribed by the Bible or celebrated by the early Christian churches, and therefore cannot be considered Holy days.

Marriage.

The Pilgrims considered marriage a civil affair, not to be handled by the church ministers, but instead by civil magistrates. Marriage was a contract, mutually agreed upon by a man and a woman. Marriage was created by God for the benefit of man's natural and spiritual life. Marriages were considered important for two main reasons: procreation of children to increase Christ's flock; and to avoid the sin of adultery... The Pilgrims refused to include religious symbolism in a marriage ceremony, including the exchange of wedding rings, which they considered a "relic of popery" ... and "a diabolical circle for the Devil to dance in."

The Pilgrims only sang actual Biblical psalms, they did not believe in singing hymns that were not direct Biblical texts. They believed it more accurately translated the Biblical Psalms into verse than other psalm books. The Pilgrims believed the Apocrypha was worth studying as religious texts but were non-Canonical.

The pilgrims settled initially in what became known as the Plymouth colony. The initial voyage in 1620 has become a legend of American history known as the Voyage of the Mayflower. Their were a total of about 100 passengers. Throughout the decades a number of relatives and friends joined the pilgrims. The second group to leave England for religion freedom between 1629 and 1640 became known as puritans. We had several ancestors that left England during this decade which I will cover in a subsequent newsletter.

This newsletter was sent to individuals who have expressed an interest in this genealogy at some time. If you do not wish to receive future updates, please email me at jretson@shaw.ca and indicate so.