

Canadian Marriages between First Cousins are Common!

By Joe Petrie

Dad (Leo Ignatius Petrie) was born in Bridgeport and raised in Dominion. Mom (Loretta Elizabeth "Ethel" Tobin) was born in Glace Bay and raised in both Glace Bay and Halifax where she attended Mount Saint Vincent's Academy and College. They each migrated to Boston in the mid-1920s, met, were married and are buried in Boston. They were Boutilier third cousins once removed – but did not know it. Dad did not know that his Rockett grandmother was a Boutilier.

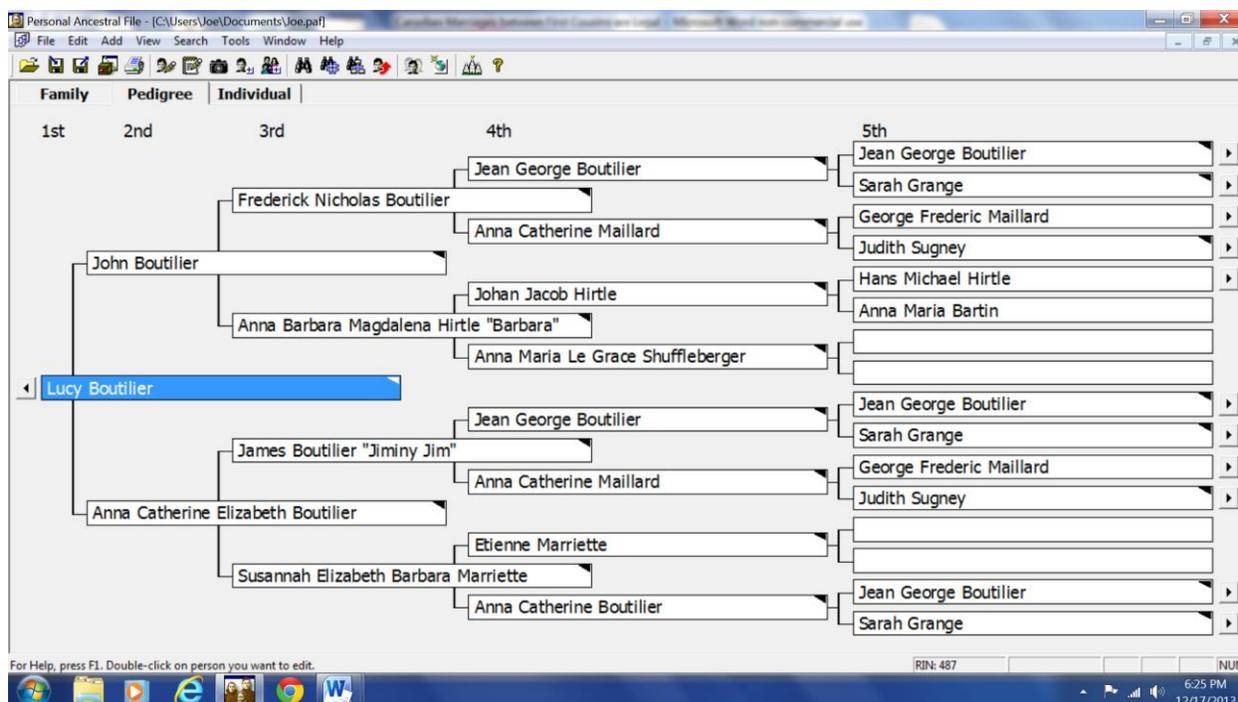
Our parents raised us to believe that marriage between close cousins (even second cousins) was illegal in our state and frowned upon by our religion. I never thought very much about it. I took a second cousin to my Junior Prom. My brother took second cousins to sporting events during and after his college days. For years, Dad and Mom played cards with three of his first cousins from Bridgeport and Gardiner Mines (and their spouses) every Saturday night on a rotating basis except when they were on vacation. Lots of times their children hung out with us! We even played cards with the adults if we arrived early enough.

I knew that two first cousins in Mom's family even dated. We knew that it broke off and both got married to someone else. It was a tightly held (in fact whispered) secret and we children never knew which cousins dated.

A few years ago, at the request of two of my Canadian second cousins, I went to visit an elderly gentleman cousin (Richard, a widower) in a Nursing Home. We had not seen each other in nearly 50 years. After a little chit-chat principally to establish who I was and our relationship, the first really significant family question that he asked was: "How is Tere?" My answer was: "Tere has passed away!" I found out later from the cousins that sent me to visit him that Tere was the first cousin that he dated and he wanted to marry. I suspect that Tere broke off the relationship. He and Tere later married other people. I suspect that Richard always loved Tere, We loved Tere! I even went to Tere's wedding and caught the garter! I never knew that Richard and Tere had dated.

The irony was that Richard and Tere, the first cousins, had dual US and Canadian citizenship and could have been married legally in Canada. Or they could have found a state in the US where marriage of first cousins was legal.

When I was researching Mom's Boutilier grandmother (Lucy daughter of John and Anna Catherine Elizabeth (Boutilier) Boutilier) I discovered that Lucy's parents were first cousins. Believe me when I say that it was a culture shock. See the following Pedigree Chart.



At the third generation, two of my great grandmother's grandparents were siblings. Susannah Marriette was a first cousin. Only Anna Barbara Hirtle was related through marriage. The fourth generation was: "More of the same." Four of the 8 were Boutilliers. In the fifth generation, three of the 8 marriages were the same couple. It took me by surprise! Initially I was stunned.

In my research, I found out that marriage of first cousins was not uncommon. It was also not uncommon in the United States until starting in the mid-19th century, when individual states began to make it illegal.

The following is a summary from: Facts about cousin marriage | Cousin Marriage Resources (<http://www.cousincouples.com/?page=facts>). It identifies where marriage between first cousins is legal. The fact is that it is legal in most countries and in a majority of the states in the United States. It traces the laws in some states that are based on fears, not facts.

Some people are fixated on the fallacy that cousin couples pose an intolerable risk to their offspring. However it is likely that we are all descendants of cousin marriages. Before civil laws banning cousin marriages, it was preferable to marry a cousin in some communities as it is to this day in many countries. The notion "why marry a stranger" is just as prevalent in many countries as the cousin marriage taboo in America today. There are a wide range of opinions on the subject of cousin marriages. This is fuelled by erroneous information, bigotry, and presumptions. Further we have civil laws and religious creeds based on obsolete information.

The facts about cousin marriages are much clearer.

Fears of cousins who marry having children with birth defects are exaggerated. Simply marrying within your own race increases the odds of birth defects. Marrying within your own town further increases your chances. Cousin couples have only a slightly higher incidence of birth defects than non-related couples.

26 states allow first cousin marriages; most people can marry their cousin in the US.
US prohibitions against cousin marriages predate modern genetics.
No European country prohibits marriage between first cousins. It is also legal throughout Canada and Mexico to marry your cousin. The U.S. is the only western country with cousin marriage restrictions.
Children of non-related couples have a 2-3% risk of birth defects, as opposed to first cousins having a 4-6% risk. Genetic counseling is available for those couples that may be at a special risk for birth defects (e.g. You have a defect that runs in your family) In plain terms first cousins have at a 94 percent + chance of having healthy children. Check the links section for more information on genetic counselors. The National Society of Genetic Counselors estimated the increased risk for first cousins is between 1.7 to 2.8 percent, or about the same as any woman over 40 years of age.
Second cousins have little, if any increased chance of having children with birth defects, per the book "Clinical Genetics Handbook"
The frequency of cousin marriages in the USA is about 1 in 1,000. The frequency of cousin marriages in Japan is about 4 in 1,000
It is estimated that 20 percent of all couples worldwide are first cousins. It is also estimated that 80 percent of all marriages historically have been between first cousins!
In some cultures, the term cousin and mate are synonymous.
Albert Einstein married his first cousin. And so did Charles Darwin, who had exceptional children.
Franklin D. Roosevelt, the longest serving US president in history married his cousin (not a first cousin, however they shared the same last name).
Leviticus 18 lists all forbidden sexual relationships. Cousin relationships are not included.
God commanded many cousins to marry, including Zelophehad's 5 daughters, Eleazar's daughters, Jacob (who married both Rachel and Leah, first cousins), and Isaac and Rebekkah (first cousins once removed)
It is likely that Joseph and Mary-- Christ's earthly parents were first cousins.
Current studies indicate that cousin couples have a lower ratio of miscarriages -- perhaps because body chemistry of cousins is more similar. The verdict is still out.
We are all cousins. No two people are more distantly related than 50th cousins.

Source: Facts about cousin marriage | Cousin Marriage Resources
<http://www.cousincouples.com/?page=facts>

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