

Thomas O. Gilman

The Story Behind the Family Name

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(Thomas was born in 1825 in Boucherville, Canada. He immigrated with his family to Plattsburgh, New York early in the 19th century. He died in 1889 in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.)

Things aren't always what they seem. So it is with the Gilman surname. Over the years there has been much speculation over the name. Was it English? Was it German? Who were his parents? We knew that Thomas O. Gilman and Matilda Gratton were born in Canada, but where? Tracing families back through the generations requires careful research. Name changes are especially challenging for family historians.

In centuries past, it was not uncommon for people's surnames to be spelled in a variety of ways. Many people in earlier generations were illiterate, so they didn't know how their name should be spelled. Low literacy, indifference, and carelessness on the part of the recorders was also a factor in name changes and misspellings. Among the French-Canadians, traditional French naming patterns ("dit" names) contributed to the confusion. It was also not infrequent for people to intentionally change their surnames, with little or no formality. No official document recorded the name change. It is often necessary to look at a lot of different documents in order to establish family connections and trace people back to the previous generation. Clues may be found in family histories, and then public records linking various members of the family can provide more substantive evidence of relationships.



This Church of Sainte-Famille de Boucherville was constructed in 1801. Thomas O. Gilman, born in Boucherville, Canada in 1825, was baptized here. (Photo by SAM)

Descendants of Thomas O. Gilman, myself included, owe a debt of gratitude to Michael Christiansen, another descendant of Thomas O. Gilman. Michael started with the family notes of Mabel Gilman Fox (1895-1967) and Violet Fox Christiansen. He traced the family from Fond du Lac, Wisconsin to Plattsburgh, New York, to Boucherville and Longueuil in the province of

Quebec. By means of a thorough search of the parish and census records, as well as an analysis of spelling variations, Christiansen was able to

***The Gilman Family Name:
Oh so many ways to spell it!***

The Heinmann surname was recorded with a number of variations in spelling, beginning with this immigrant ancestor and continuing through at least three generations. These included: Heinman, Honnemann, Honman, Anéman, Auglemene, Augleman, Agninal, Anglemene, Ogleman, O'Gleman, Hogleman, Hogelman, Ogilman, and Gilman. In at least one record, Jean Conrad Heinmann, is identified simply by his "dit" name, "Allemand" (the German).

For one branch of descendants of Jean Conrad Heinmann, the surname of his wife, Appoline Bourgis, became the family name, in the tradition of "dit" names. It, too, was spelled in a number of ways in the records: Bourgis, Bourgeriy, Bourgerit, Bourgit, Bourgie, Bougery, Bourgie, Baurgie, Bourgi. The fact that wives retained their family names after marriage made the tracing of Thomas Gilman's family back to Jean Conrad Heinmann a bit easier.

Appoline was also spelled Apolline and Pauline.

document the relationship between Thomas O. Gilman, Alexis (Hogelman) Bourgeriy, and Jean Conrad Heinmann. We have come to learn in this case that the original name was actually Heinmann and it belonged to Thomas' grandfather, Jean Conrad Heinmann. This man was a German immigrant who settled in Canada in the late eighteenth century. In Canada, the French, many of them illiterate, had trouble pronouncing and spelling the name. So Heinmann became Anéman, became Ogleman, which, in the case of grandson Thomas, became O. Gilman and finally Gilman.

Jean Conrad Heinmann, our immigrant ancestor

On February 12, 1787, Jean Conrad Heinmann appears for the first time in the church records.¹ He is described as "Allemand de Nation" (German). On this date, he married a French-Canadian woman named Appoline Bourgis in Longueuil.² This was a French settlement located on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River directly across from Montreal. This couple had five children, all sons. The two oldest children were born in Longueuil and the last three, in the nearby village of Boucherville. They were listed on their baptism records as follows: Nicolas Heinmann (1788), Joseph Honneman (1791), François Allemand (1793), Alexis Agninal (1795) and Baptiste Anéman (1802). The first time the name Hogleman appears in the parish records of Boucherville is in 1811.³ Fortunately, the mother's name of Appoline Bourgis is recognizable in all of the documents. Jean Baptiste died before he was a year old.

It is assumed that Joseph also died at a young age, because the only record of this child is that of his baptism. Nicolas and François remained in Boucherville, where they married and raised families. Their descendants used the name Hogleman, Ogleman, and O'Gleman. In the Canadian census of 1851, there were 19 individuals listed with the surname of Ogleman.⁴ All resided in Boucherville or in nearby settlements. Jean Conrad Heinmann died in Boucherville on July 12, 1815.⁵ Alexis would be the only child to emigrate from Canada to the United States.

Alexis, son of Jean Heinmann and Appoline Bourgie

By the time of his marriage to Félicité Sabourin in Boucherville on August 3, 1819, Alexis was using the surname "Ogleman." Alexis and Félicité had nine children, all born in Boucherville between 1820 and 1835 and generally known by the name of Ogleman or something close in spelling. At some time between 1835 and 1844, the family moved to Plattsburgh, New York.⁶ By 1857, Alexis and his children were using the name of Bourgie (Bourgeriy), the family name of Alexis' mother, Appoline.⁷ On the US census record of 1860 for Plattsburgh and at his death

there on August 15, 1874, Alexis' surname is listed as Bourgerie (Bougerie).⁸ Alexis' descendants who stayed in the Plattsburgh area continued to use that name.

Thomas O. Gilman, son of Alexis (Ogleman) Bourgerie and Felicite Sabourin

On the baptism record from the Boucherville parish, dated April 3, 1825, Thomas' surname is listed as Hogelman.⁹ Thomas moved to Plattsburgh, New York with his family and there he married Domitille Gratton on April 18, 1845.¹⁰ Thomas and Matilda had thirteen children, born between 1846 and 1871. Their older children were born in New York, Vermont, and Canada. The youngest was born in Wisconsin. Like his father, Thomas used several surnames during his life, including the name of Baurgie, his grandmother's name.¹¹ At some time in New York and certainly by the time he reached Wisconsin, Thomas had anglicized the name to O. Gilman, and later simply to Gilman.¹² Thomas and Matilda Gilman and ten of their children are listed in the US Census of 1870 for Chilton, Calumet County, WI.¹³ Ten years later, Thomas and Matilda Gilman are listed in the US Census in Lamartine Twp., Fond du Lac, WI. Thomas died on August 4, 1889 and is buried at Lamartine Twp. Fond du Lac, WI. His name on his death certificate is listed as Gilman.

So we have learned through careful and methodical investigation that, in this case, the Gilman surname is not English but German in origin. Thomas O. Gilman turns out to be the grandson of Jean Conrad Heinmann who settled in Longueuil, Canada in 1787. This German is the source of our Gilman family name. The rest of Thomas' ancestral lines are French-Canadian. Thomas' wife, Domitille (Matilda) Gratton was entirely French-Canadian. The family stories go back to the very first French to settle in the province of Quebec in the seventeenth century.¹⁴

(Note: The author of this article is a descendant of Thomas O. Gilman through his son Joseph who was born in Plattsburgh, NY on August 13, 1853. Joseph's surname on his baptism record is given as Anglemene.)

¹ Baptism, burial, and marriage records from Boucherville and Longueuil in the province of Quebec, Canada are found in the Quebec, Catholic Parish Records, 1621-1979. This is a collection of un-indexed records available at FamilySearch.org. The images of the actual records have been digitized and may be downloaded.

² On their marriage record, Jean Conrad Heinmann is listed as the son of André Heinmann and Marie Grai. Appoline is listed as the widow of Thomas Xavier.

³ The baptism record of Louise Favreau from Boucherville, dated March 30, 1811, lists Nicolas Hogelman as godfather. The name is crossed out and the name Anéman is written in the margin.

⁴ The indexed Canadian Census of 1851 is available at FamilySearch.org.

⁵ Appoline Bourgerie died there sometime between 1803 and 1814. Her death and burial record has not been located. This approximate date of death is based on the fact that she is living at the time of son Jean Baptiste's death in 1803 and is deceased at the marriage of her son Nicolas in 1814.

⁶ This is based on the fact that Alexis' son Antoine had a child born in NY in 1844 (US Census of 1860 for the Village of Plattsburgh, New York) and Alexis' son Thomas married Matilda Gratton in Plattsburgh in 1845.

⁷ In the 1857 census records for St. Peter's Catholic Church in Plattsburgh, New York, Alexis Bourgie (age 62) and Félicité Sabourin (age 62) are listed as residents of the Village of Plattsburgh. Also listed in the census are four of their children: Aurelie Bourgie, Félicité Bourgie, Thomas Baurgie, Henriette Baurgie. (Botten, Elizabeth, compiler and editor, *St. Peter's Church Census Records, Plattsburgh, Clinton County,*

New York 1857-1859-1860. New York: Northern New York American-Canadian Genealogical Society, 1996. A copy of the book is in the Plattsburgh Public Library.)

⁸ Death record from St. Peter's Catholic Church in Plattsburgh, New York.

⁹ On Thomas' baptism record, his parents' names are Alexis Hogelman and Félicité Sabourin.

¹⁰ Domitille Gratton was a French-Canadian who was born on July 30, 1829 at St. Constant, Quebec, Canada to André Gratton and Marie Son dit Martin Agement. Domitille's family had also migrated to Plattsburgh. The marriage record of Thomas and Matilda has not been located; the date of marriage comes from the family notes of Michael Christiansen. Adeline, Thomas and Matilda's first child, was born on February 24, 1846, so the date of marriage seems reasonable.

¹¹ In the 1857 church census of St. Peter's Church in Plattsburgh, NY, Thomas Baurgie (age 33) is listed, along with Domitille Gratton (age 27), Adeline (11), Narcisse (8), Nicolas (6), Joseph (3), and Pierre (1) on page 69. (Botten, Elizabeth, compiler and editor, *St. Peter's Church Census Records, Plattsburgh, Clinton County, New York 1857-1859-1860*. New York: Northern New York American-Canadian Genealogical Society, 1996. A copy of the book is in the Plattsburgh Public Library.)

¹² The US Census of 1860 for the Village of Plattsburgh lists Alexander (Alexis) and Filicette (Félicité) Bourgerie, along with Adeline (14), who is using the surname "O. Gilman." It is assumed that this is Thomas O. Gilman's daughter. The other children of Alexis and Félicité used the Bourgerie surname (that of their grandmother). Immediately above this listing is the household of Alexis' oldest son Antoine Bourgerie with his wife Emily and seven children.

¹³ They are listed in the household of Andrew Gratto, Matilda's father.

¹⁴ Having found our roots in French Canada, we can trace our ancestors back, one generation at a time, to many of the seventeenth-century French Canadian pioneers. The Programme de recherche en démographie historique (PRDH) is an online database that provides us with information contained in the records of all of the Catholic parishes in the province of Quebec. Listed in this database are the baptisms, marriages, burials, census records and other events that took place between 1621 and 1799.