IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR ANCESTORS …

ESCAPE FROM LOUIS XIV'S FRANCE, TO ENGLAND, THEN ON TO AMERICA

Daniel L'Estrange (c. 1650 – c. 1707) & Charlotte LeMaistre (? – c. 1672)

— Excerpt from Helen Evertson Smith,* Colonial Days and Ways*, 1901, chapters 7, "The Escape of a Huguenot Family," and 8, "Huguenot Homes in New Rochelle"

Sometime around 1650, Daniel L'Estrange was born in the Orleans region of France. He and his eventual wife, Charlotte LeMaistre, were devout Huguenots (Calvinist Protestants) in the era of severe Protestant oppression by France's devoutly Catholic king, Louis XIV. Yet, both Daniel and Charlotte each worked in the court of Louis and his family.

In 1901, family historian Helen Evertson Smith published her book of colonial American family lore, Colonial Days and Ways*, including the following recollection of the escape of Daniel and then Charlotte L'Estrange from France:*

In 1672 Daniel L'Estrange of Orleans, France, was matriculated as a student of philosophy in the Academy of Geneva, Switzerland, which at that time was the only existing place where a French Protestant could receive a liberal education in his own language. The "pretended reformed" were not allowed to have schools of their own in France; nor, on the other hand, was it permitted to send their children to the Catholic schools without previously renouncing their own and professing the national faith.

A few years later we find that M. L'Estrange married Charlotte LeMestre of Orleans. A few years later still, the pair are residing in Paris, where the

VISIT TO RYE, NEW YORK:

forthcoming

husband is traditionally believed to have been an officer of the Royal Guard — a tradition which seems to derive some support from the fact that after his arrival in England he is known to have held a lieutenancy in the Royal Guard of James the II. Strange as it may seem, many Huguenots filled positions in the personal guard of Louis XIV, where they were comparatively safe from persecution, as their places were held by a certain unwritten law of inheritance from the days when Henry IV. had filled its ranks, from the commander down to the privates, with those upon whose fidelity he could best rely; and these were undoubtedly his old brethren in arms and in the faith which political reasons had caused him to forsake.

While her husband was in the Royal Guards Mme. L'Estrange was one of the ladies in waiting upon the dauphiness, Marie de Baviere, the gracious, studious, retiring and accomplished daughter-in-law of Louis XIV. Thus the wife of the Huguenot was often obliged to serve her turn of duty at St. Germain and sometimes at Versailles. Although Mme. L'Estrange was well known to be of the "pretended reformed" faith, she was not molested, because she was a recognized favorite of the dauphiness. Perhaps the position of his wife at court combined with his own in the Royal Guard to save M. L'Estrange for a while from persecution, although he was known to be a determined, if not an aggressive, Huguenot; but the time came when he was obliged to seek safety in flight, and that, too, without

HOW WE'RE RELATED

Daniel L'Estrange and Charlotte LeMaistre were my great-great-great-great-great-great -grandparents through my father, Albert James Rymph.

Daniel L'Estrange (c. 1650 – c. 1707)	=	**Charlotte LeMaistre** (? – c. 1722)
▼		
John Budd (c. 1696 – c. 1757)	=	**Mary Prudence Strang** (c. 1695 – aft. 1745)
▼		
John Budd (11/8/1730 – 10/1/1813)	=	**Mary Merritt** (9/19/1741 – 7/31/1820)
▼		
James Budd (12/18/1781 – 1/7/1844)	=	**Eleanor (Neeltjen) Schryver** (5/17/1788 – 3/24/1866)
		▼
James Rymph (5/28/1810 – 2/18/1885)	=	**Hannah Budd** (6/23/1815 – 2/11/1903)
▼		
Albert James Rymph (11/29/1851 – 7/3/1926)	=	**Luella Maria King** (11/29/1861 – 7/3/1949)
▼		
Levi Budd Rymph (6/10/1901 – 12/8/1987)	=	**Jessie Mae Hershey** (3/26/1903 – 11/15/1991)
▼		
Albert James Rymph (11/9/1925 – 2/16/2019)	=	**Edna Mae Heath** (11/5/1928 – 9/10/2022)
▼		
Bradley Budd Rymph (*living*)	=	**José Verzosa Baquiran III** (*living*)

seeing his wife. She was then performing her tour de service at Versailles; and her husband could only send her a verbal message requesting that she should join him, with their child, and as much of their property as she could convert into ready money, at some designated point on the coast, where he would wait for her as long as possible, and whence they could take ship for England.

The person who was intrusted with the message either could not or did not convey it to the wife until many days, if not some weeks, after her husband's flight from Paris. I relate the story as I heard it from the lips of my maternal grandmother, who had it from her paternal grandfather. Some of the particulars which she related are also given in Baird's *History of the Huguenot Emigration to America*. I believe that the parts which rest only on oral tradition are not less trustworthy than those quoted by Mr. Baird, which rest upon documentary evidence.

The husband's message was at last delivered, not directly to the wife, but to some one who conveyed it to the dauphiness. In spite of, or rather because of, her high position, the dauphiness was herself so closely watched that she had not the opportunity to transmit the husband's message safely until the hour of the coucher, which that night chanced to be particularly late. As the Huguenot lady was slipping the nightrobe over the head of the dauphiness, the latter hastily whispered: "In the cabinet at the foot of the stairs leading to my apartments, you will find one who will tell you what you must do, and do without a moment's delay." Aloud she added: "I am sorry you are suffering so much. You are excused from duty until I send for you."

A few moments later Mme. L'Estrange was in the designated cabinet. There she first heard that her husband had left Paris, she having for some time supposed him to be in hiding in that city, and also learned that, his flight having become known to the authorities, his property had been confiscated. The kind dauphiness had thoughtfully given a purse of money to the messenger, but it was not large, as she was not highly favored by her father-in-law, and had never very much cash at her command. The messenger also had two horses in readiness, and was ordered to accompany Mme. L'Estrange until she should have got safely started on her journey, under the care of friends whom she expected to meet. But the dauphiness had apparently forgotten the existence of the child. The infant of two years was under the care of the married sister of Mme. L'Estrange in Paris, and thither

the mother felt that she must first proceed, though the delay was well-nigh fatal to the success of her undertaking.

So well watched was every avenue of escape from Paris that several days were lost before an opportunity for leaving presented itself. One morning, before daybreak, Mme. L'Estrange disguised herself as a very poor woman seeking to go beyond the walls to glean food from the over-laden market wagons coming in. She carried her sleeping child in her arms. Her twin sister, dressed in all respects precisely as herself, followed at a safe distance. Arrived at the city gate, the mother begged to be allowed to take her child with her, but was not permitted, and it was only by addressing the entry in his native patois of Orleans country that he was induced to let the mother herself pass out, while he retained the child as a hostage for her return. Two hours later, while the awakened child was crying lustily, and the half distracted sentry was busily looking for contraband goods in the market-wagons of the peasants, the aunt suddenly appeared, as if she had come in with the wagons, and claimed the child, which was gladly yielded to the supposed mother. Not for many years after did the true mother again see her child; but when he was grown he came to America, and married here. He it was who related the story to his son, the father of my mother's mother.

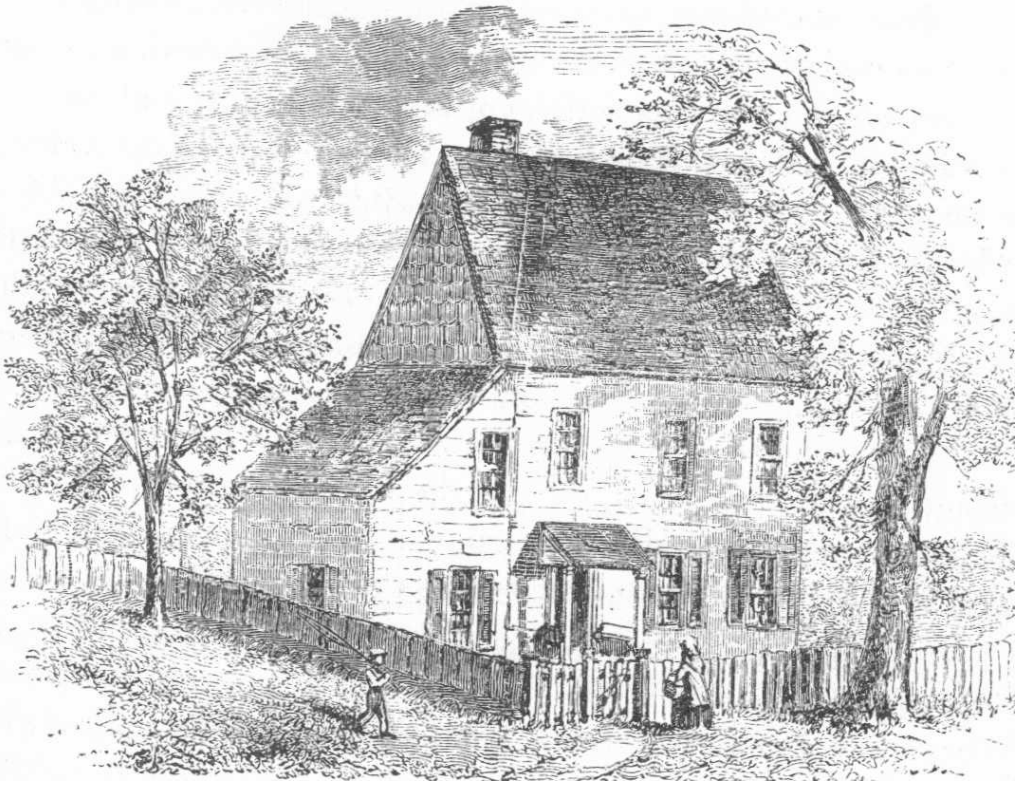
During several weeks after Mme. L'Estrange had escaped from Paris her adventures were many. When she finally reached the coast, it was only to find that her husband had been obliged to fly some time before. Her voyage to England was made inside of one of the very large casks in which the common kinds of wine were shipped to the wholesale dealers in London. In similar casks more than sixty persons are said to have been shipped, at the same time, in the hold of the same small trading-vessel, whose English captain was liberally paid for running risks attending such shipments.

During several years there were many hundreds, if not thousands, of escapes made in the same manner; and who can now imagine the horrors of such a voyage? The trip across the English Channel is not very welcome to the majority of travelers to-day, when not more than two or three hours are required, in vessels which, though bad enough according to our present standards, are princely compared with those of two centuries ago. In those days it frequently took a week to cross, and sometimes as long a time, or longer, was spent rocking at anchor, waiting for a favorable wind. Of course, the casks holding human freight were

not hoisted on board until the latest moment; but whether waiting on shore in momentary peril of detection, or confined in casks on board ship, what an eternity must every hour have seemed!

With a small store of wine in a leather bottle, and some bread, a pillow or two, and such clothing as might be conveniently packed in with her, the wretched refugee was placed in the great cask, into the sides of which many small holes had been bored to admit air without attracting notice. The head of the cask was then secured in its place, and — carefully right side up — it was placed in the hold, where it was skilfully braced to prevent its being rolled about when the vessel was under way. My mother has seen, in the possession of one of her mother's brothers, a small pillow, filled with softly carded rolls of wool, covered with a stained and faded slip of brocaded silk, which was sacredly treasured because it had eased the buffeted head of the revered great-grandmother, when she was tossed about in her narrow prison in the hold of the blockade-running vessel on the uneasy waves of the English Channel.

Their “Red Sea” the refugees were wont to call this Channel, though they certainly did not cross it in the triumphant fashion of the hosts whom Moses led from bondage to freedom. Some of the “cask refugees” were found suffocated when their “arks of refuge” were unheaded. Many more were seriously injured. The only wonder is that such great numbers were taken from the French coast in this way, and that so many escaped without more than temporary injuries, before the persecuting authorities had discovered and put a stop to similar shipments. More fortunate than those who had to cross the Channel were those who … were able to cross the frontiers into the Low Countries. They had trials enough and hairbreadth escapes by dozens, but their bodily sufferings were much less.



Daniel L'Estrange's Tavern in Rye, Westchester County, New York.

For the first few years after their escape, M. and Mme. L'Estrange fared comparatively well in England, because the friends of the former had procured for him a lieutenancy in the Royal Guard of James II. But this monarch was not himself a Protestant and not too well disposed towards the Huguenots, though state policy forced him to receive them well. It was probably for this reason that Lieutenant L'Estrange, a few months before James was forced to fly from his throne, sold his commission, and, with the proceeds of this sale and that, of some jewels, came, with his wife, to this country. Here he soon joined the settlement at New Rochelle and there and in New York City for many years he taught his own language to those Americans who wished to learn it, as well as gave instruction in the classical languages to boys who wished to enter Yale or Columbia (then King's) College.

At the same time, his wife, and later on their daughters, all of whom were born here, applied themselves to the new duties imposed by the new circumstances, in the cheerful spirit common to all persons who lead lives of faith and kindliness….

It was twenty years after the first Huguenots came to New Rochelle before the refugees could spare the money to build a church or support a pastor. The nearest place where religious services were held in their own tongue was New York City, twenty miles away; therefore, on every Sunday during the year, in fair weather or in foul, all who were able to do so started

very early in the morning, that they might not miss the opening prayer at 10:30 A. M. There were few horses owned among the refugees and fewer vehicles of any kind. Such of both as they possessed were devoted exclusively to the use of those who were not strong enough to walk.

Many persons now living [1900] may still remember Miss Isabella Donaldson, lately of Barrytown, N. Y., as a person greatly interested in religious matters. She kept a scrap book composed of original communications concerning the hardships and trials of those who had come to this country under stress of persecution. In this book was a copy of a letter which was written about 1704 or 1705. I give this letter as I copied it in 1860 from her scrap book:

> "Every week I see the Huguenots pass the house in troops on their way to church in the City. As they pass here all have lunch bags or baskets and also their shoes on their arms. Yet they are not bare-footed, for they are all provided with wooden shoes, such as the peasants wear in France and in the Low Countries. When they reach a stream not far from the church where they have erected a shed, they all stop and such of them as have other shoes change them before going on ; the others wash their feet and their wooden shoes and put them on again. They are all very plainly dressed, but some of them are very elegant looking persons with most charming manners. As they pass they are generally singing some of their psalms, that is, the psalms of David, translated into French. Some of the airs are very grand and spirit-stirring, but many of them are sad as dirges, and why should they not be? For surely this people have suffered much. Still they are nearly always smiling and happy. But to think of walking forty miles in going to and from church every Lord's Day! I am afraid my Christianity would never be equal to that." ...

Homespun linen yarn of heavy quality was by the Dutch and English colonies dyed and then woven into stripes and checks of varying degrees of ugliness for bed and window curtains. The French settlers used for the same purpose either purely white linen or that which had but one color. The prefered shades seem to have been a light blue, a sort of dusky green, and a subdued gold-color made by dyes of which they brought the secret with them. These linens, when made into hangings bordered by an embroidered vine or arabesque design in white upon the gold or in gold and white upon the

blue, or of varied colors upon all the white, were delicately beautiful, and became heirlooms in many a family, including that of my mother's mother….

The bedroom of my mother's grandmother L'Estrange has often been described to me. The floor was painted as nearly as possible to match the subdued gold of the linen hangings. The ceilings and side walls were whitewashed with lime. The windows and dressing tables were hung with tastefully arranged draperies, bordered with a grape-vine pattern embroidered in white, and further trimmed at the edge with a knitted fringe of white linen yarn.

The tall four-posted bedstead of carved mahogany was provided with a tester, with long draw-curtains, over which valances about two feet and a few inches deep, and cut into deep scallops on the lower edge, hung in a full ruffle from the cornice. Foot-curtains and all were of the same linen, all embroidered and edged with fringe in the same manner. Over the high and downy bed lay a fringed and embroidered coverlet of the same linen, only that in this case the vine was embroidered over the center part as well as the border. An immense stuffed chair, running easily on wooden globes the size of billiard-balls, which were the precursors of the modern caster, had a very high back and side wings, against which the head might rest. Such chairs were really comfortable, and some may still be found. This one had a neatly fitted slip-cover to match the draperies of the room.

The linen yarn for the draperies of this room was all said to have been spun by the first Mme. L'Estrange and her daughters, and it was afterward woven under their direction and embroidered by themselves. Until a comparatively late date there still existed other bits of their handicraft, in the shape of fans of peacock feathers, and humbler ones of goose and turkey feathers—these last decorated with painted flowers. There were also some hand-screens made by covering small hoops with tightly drawn slips of white silk, the joinings hidden by narrow fringe. One screen was embroidered with colored silks, others were daintily painted, and all were supplied with handles of carved or smoothly turned and polished wood. When a child I saw one of the peacock-feather fans (unfortunately, moth-eaten), and a pair of the prettily painted hand-screens. The latter were used to hold between the face and the blaze of the open wood fires, which, genial and delightful as they are, have a disagreeable way of scorching one's face and eyes.

Very graceful and delicately executed

embroideries upon the daintiest of muslins are still shown which were made by members of this family, but possibly by those of a later generation. They are evidently of a French design. In the courts of Louis XIV. lace-making was an art cultivated almost assiduously as that of embroidery. My sister and I now have a few yards of two patterns of lace made by Mme. L'Estrange, which happened to be trimming some part of her under-dress at the time of her escape from Paris. She taught the secret of its manufacture to her daughters, and for three generations her descendants made similar lace, though none was as filmy as that wrought in the boudoirs of Versailles, because it was impossible to get threads sufficiently fine….

Daniel — afterwards the refugee — was sent to Switzerland to enter the academy there as a student of philosophy, July 29, 1672, his surname was purposely misspelled as Streing to avoid giving a clue by which his father's persecutors might discover whither the son had been sent; and that afterward, upon the young student's return to France, and during his stay there as a member of the Royal Guards, he had resumed his rightful name. But later, when he was obliged either to abandon his principles or to fly for his life, he thought it wise to again adopt the name of Streing for the sake of the members of his family still residing in France; for as is well known, the spies of Louis XIV. were almost as active in London as in Paris.

TO LEARN MORE

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