



OUR HUGUENOT
ANCESTOR



INTRODUCTION

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the name of Huguenots came to apply to members of the Protestant Reformed Church of France, or historically as the French Calvinists.

In reaction to the growing Huguenot influence, and the aforementioned instances of Protestant zeal, Catholic violence against them grew, at the same time that concessions and edicts of toleration became more liberal.

Tensions led to eight civil wars, interrupted by periods of relative calm, between 1562 and 1598. With each break in peace, the Huguenots' trust in the Catholic throne diminished, and the violence became more severe, and Protestant demands became more grand, until a lasting cessation of open hostility finally occurred in 1598.

The wars gradually took on a dynastic character, developing into an extended feud between the Houses of Bourbon and Guise, both of which – in addition to holding rival religious views – staked a claim to the French throne. The crown, occupied by the House of Valois, generally supported the Catholic side, but on occasion switched over to the Protestant cause when politically expedient.

When the Religious War, known as the Thirty years War commenced in 1619, fifty-five families, including the Martiaus who were French Walloon Huguenots residing in the Valley of the Meuse, Belgium, fled for their lives because of their religion and took refuge in Holland. In the spring of the year 1620, some months before the Mayflower sailed for America, Nicholas Martiau, of a family of French Protestants sailed from England for America in the vessel, The Francis Venture. Martiau acquired and settled upon a tract of land along the York River in Virginia. One hundred and sixty years later, upon this same land, his descendant, General George Washington, fought and won the Battle of Yorktown that ended the War of the American Revolution.

This is the story of our Huguenot ancestor, Captain Nicholas Martiau.



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History of the Huguenots



The Huguenots were French Protestants who emerged in the mid-16th century, following the teachings of John Calvin. Their movement grew out of earlier reform efforts by Catholics such as Jacques Lefevre d'Étaples, and was also influenced by Lutheran ideas before fully adopting Calvinism. They rejected the authority of the

Catholic priesthood, traditional sacraments, and many established doctrines, calling instead for a simpler, scripture-based faith.

A central belief of the Huguenots was that salvation depends entirely on God's will. Just as God created the world, He alone determines who is saved through predestined grace. This emphasis on God's sovereignty shaped not only their theology but also their disciplined way of life and even aspects of their craftsmanship and culture.

The term "Huguenot" first appeared around 1550, often in legal cases against those accused of heresy. Its exact origin is uncertain. One theory links it to Besançon Hugues and a German word meaning "confederate," while another, described by O. I. A. Roche, traces it to terms for groups bound together for secret Bible study. Originally a nickname—sometimes insulting—it eventually became widely used, though French Protestants themselves preferred "Reformed" (réformés).

Huguenots were outspoken critics of the Roman Catholic Church, opposing what they saw as excessive ritual, the veneration of saints, and the authority of the Pope. They promoted a strict moral life guided by the Bible. These tensions often turned violent: Huguenots carried out iconoclastic attacks on churches and religious images, while Catholic authorities and mobs responded with persecution and massacres.

Their numbers grew rapidly between about 1555 and 1562, reaching perhaps one to two million people—especially among nobles and urban populations. As their influence increased, so did conflict. Attempts at compromise, such as the Edict of Orléans (1561) and the Edict of Saint-Germain (1562), failed to resolve deep divisions.

Open war broke out in 1562, beginning with the massacre at Wassy, and escalated into the French Wars of Religion. These conflicts lasted intermittently until 1598 and became intertwined with political rivalries, especially between the Bourbon and Guise families. Huguenots organized military forces under leaders like

Gaspard de Coligny, while Henry IV of France (originally a Protestant) became a key figure in the struggle.

At their height, Huguenots controlled dozens of fortified cities and posed a serious challenge to the Catholic monarchy. The conflict finally eased when Henry IV issued the Edict of Nantes, granting them limited religious freedom and political rights—though tensions would continue in the years that followed.

In the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (August–September 1572), thousands of Huguenots were killed in Paris, and similar uprisings spread to other cities in the following weeks, bringing the total death toll into the tens of thousands. An amnesty issued in 1573 later pardoned those responsible.



The massacre was carried out under the authority of King Charles IX of France, heavily influenced by his mother, Catherine de Medici. The violence lasted several days in Paris and extended into the countryside. Among those spared was Henry IV of France (then Henry of Navarre), who temporarily converted to Catholicism to save his life. He later formally converted again in 1593 and became king, eventually helping to restore stability.

News of the massacre was celebrated in Rome by Pope Gregory XIII, who ordered prayers of thanksgiving and commemorations marking what was seen as a Catholic victory. Celebrations and artistic commissions followed, reflecting the deep religious divisions of the time.

Fighting between Catholics and Huguenots resumed in subsequent years, including renewed conflict beginning in 1574, as part of the broader French Wars of Religion. The wars continued until 1598, when Henry IV issued the Edict of Nantes. This edict granted Huguenots limited religious freedom, legal rights, and control of certain fortified towns, while still protecting Catholic dominance in most of France.

A period of relative peace followed, but after Henry IV's assassination in 1610, persecution of Huguenots resumed. Under Cardinal Richelieu, royal policy increasingly aimed to weaken their political and military power, marking a new phase of pressure against the Protestant minority.

After the Edict of Nantes, Huguenots were granted limited protection, and large-scale emigration from France slowed. However, this changed dramatically under Louis XIV. Promoting the idea of "one faith, one law, one king," he intensified pressure on Protestants through policies such as the Dragonnades, which forced soldiers into Huguenot homes to harass and intimidate them. In 1685, he revoked the Edict of Nantes with the Edict of Fontainebleau, ending official tolerance and restarting widespread persecution.

As a result, between 200,000 and 500,000 Huguenots fled France to Protestant regions such as England, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Prussia. There, rulers like Frederick William, Elector of Brandenburg welcomed them for their skills and helped them settle. Meanwhile, those who remained in France faced severe repression: churches were destroyed, religious materials burned, and Protestant worship banned. Emigration was outlawed, and many Huguenots were imprisoned, executed, or condemned to serve as galley slaves.

Huguenot migration had begun earlier, even before these events. In 1562, a group led by Jean Ribault attempted to establish a colony in North America. They founded Fort Caroline in 1564 near present-day Jacksonville, Florida—one of the earliest European settlement efforts in what is now the United States. However, the colony was short-lived; in 1565, Spanish forces from nearby St. Augustine attacked and destroyed it, killing most of the settlers.

The Huguenot Legacy

Huguenot refugees left a lasting mark on the countries where they settled. In North America, many prominent early figures—including Alexander Hamilton and John Jay—had Huguenot ancestry, and historians often note that a significant number of early American leaders came from Huguenot-descended families. Their influence extended into politics, finance, craftsmanship, and trade. In Europe, especially in Prussia, Huguenot refugees contributed greatly to economic development, particularly in skilled industries like textiles, which benefited from their expertise.

Their legacy has also been commemorated in American history. In 1924, the United States issued the Huguenot-Walloon Half Dollar to mark the 300th anniversary of early Huguenot and Walloon settlement in North America. Among the early Huguenot immigrants was Apollon Rivoire, who anglicized his name to Paul Revere; his son, Paul Revere, would later become a famous figure in the American Revolution.



Place names in the United States also reflect Huguenot heritage. The Huguenot community gave its name to neighborhoods such as Huguenot Staten Island, while the city of New Rochelle was named after La Rochelle, one of the most important Protestant centers in France. These cultural traces highlight how Huguenot refugees carried their identity and influence far beyond their original homeland.

Captain Nicholas Martiau (1591-1657)

Nicholas Martiau "Captain Nick" was born in Il de Rhe France 1591. The Martiaus were French Walloon Huguenots residing in the Valley of the Meuse, Belgium Walloon refers, in daily speech to French-speaking Belgians from Wallonia, "the land of the valleys." When the Religious War, known as the Thirty years War commenced in 1619, fifty-five families, including the Martiaus, fled for their lives and took refuge in Holland. In the spring of the year 1620, some months before the Mayflower sailed for America, Nicholas Martiau, of a family of French Protestants sailed from England for America in the vessel, the *Francis Bona Venture*. Martiau acquired and settled upon a tract of land along the York River in Virginia.

Nicholas Martiau was in the service of Henry Hastings, Earl of Huntington and member of the Virginia Company, and educated as a military engineer. He was naturalized as an Englishman by royal decree. He came to Jamestown in 1620, legally representing the Earl to plan fortifications.

After the 1622 massacre at Jamestown, the depredations of the Indians had caused such concern among the first settlers that a series of forts and outposts were planned, and the first "western" frontier was established by a line crossing the Tidewater Peninsula from Jamestown to the Charles (York) river along which it was proposed to erect a wall of logs. The construction of this log palisade and the protective forts was entrusted to Martiau, and the site on the Charles selected of a fort was called York.

Martiau's defense of the French king in an argument with Capt. Thomas Mayhew forced him to take a loyalty oath in Jamestown in 1627.

The fort at York occupied a point on the river at the mouth of the Wormley Creek, named for the first settler in that section, Colonel Christopher Wormley, and lies about two miles down the river from the present site of Yorktown.

The safety of the fort caused a settlement to spring up around it, and in 1633 York was selected as a receiving port. A store was built for receiving and shipping purposes, and to serve the inhabitants both of York and the settlement at Kiskiack.

So sturdily did Martiau build York for that it was still in active use more than forty years later when it was described as "*the most considerablest fortress in the country.*" During the Indian uprisings along the Rappahannock in 1676 the terror-stricken county folk of Gloucester fled across the river for refuge in the fort at York. They were dismayed to find that they could be afforded scant protection there, however, for to prevent the fort's stores of arms and ammunition



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LINEAGE *from* NICHOLAS MARTIAU

14. Nicholas Martiau
m. Jane Berkeley
13. Elizabeth Martiau
m. George Reade
12. Mildred Reade
m. Augustine Warner
11. Elizabeth Warner
m. John Lewis II
10. Robert Lewis
m. Jane Meriwether
9. Nicholas Lewis
m. Mary Walker
8. Jane Meriwether Lewis
m. Hudson Martin
7. Mary Walker Martin
m. Thurston Dickinson
6. Frances Elizabeth Dickinson
m. John Duggins
5. Elizabeth Marshall Duggins
m. James Henry Smith
4. Laura Ann Smith
m. Peter Christen Jensen
3. Lucile Marguerite Jensen
m. Wilhelm August Heineman
2. Peter Edward Heineman
m. Doris Jean Crum
1. Peter Lea Heineman

falling into the hands of Nathaniel Bacon, who was also on the warpath, Governor Berkeley had taken them with him in his flight to the Eastern shore.

Having engaged so actively in the defense against the Indians, it is reasonable to assume that Captain Martiau was eager to begin reaping some of the benefits to be derived from his own defensive works. He was also active in the legislative affairs of the Colony, as Representative in the House of Burgess from both Kiskiack and the Isle of Kent in the Chesapeake, and he probably had a hand in framing the Court Order of October 8, 1630.

Captain Martiau was among the first settlers to qualify for land under this Act, following Captain Robert Felgate, John Utie, and John West into the wilderness of Kiskiack. For "*Adventure of himselfe, his wife and ten persons to Chiskiake...and for the transportation at his own costs and charges of fourteene persons into this Colony,*" Governor Francis Wyatt granted Martiau patent to sixteen hundred acres on May 20, 1635, to be "*augmented and doubled when he or his assigns shall have sufficiently peopled and planted the same.*" This land included the present site of Yorktown and lay between the holdings of Sir John Harvey who held patent to the land from directly east of Martiau to York at the mouth of Wormley Creek and the estate of Richard Townsend west of what is now Yorktown Creek.

Because of the tyrannical rule of neighbor Sir John Harvey during his term as Governor, Martiau strongly opposed him. Opposition, while general throughout the Colony, centered at York and Kiskiack, both being Burgess districts separately represented in the Jamestown Assembly. It was daring of Captain Nick but typical of the man's spirit of fearless independence. If the campaign against Harvey had proven unsuccessful there is no doubt that Martiau would have lost favor with his patron in England, the Earl of Huntington, and his fortunes in Virginia would have come to a very definite ending. But Martiau was again fortunate. Governor Harvey was finally arrested by the colonists themselves and sent back to England.

Harvey returned, bringing George Reade--Martiau's future son-in-law with him. Martiau moved to the present Yorktown site in 1630 on 600 acres, plus 700 for headrights, where he grew tobacco. On this land Cornwallis surrendered his troops to Martiau's great-great-grandson, General George Washington in 1781.

Martiau later was granted 2000 acres on the south side of the Potomac River, which he gave to Col. George Reade in 1657.

The Harvey affair was one of the first manifestations of the strange new force of uncontrollable power at work in the minds of the first settlers. They tingled with

unaccustomed impulses of freedom in this wild, new land; and for the first time, the united strength of the English yeomen seemed adequate to their imaginings. It was this unity of effort, while preserving the rights of the individual that furthered their every activity.

In 1633 every fortieth man between the James and the York was directed to repair to the plantation of Dr. John Pott to be employed in building the houses of "Middle Plantation," that tiny budding settlement that was to blossom out into the City of Williamsburg and the Colonial Capital of Virginia. The men of York and Kiskiack can well be depended upon to have entered into the construction of Middle Plantation with the same energy and spirit with which they greeted each new enterprise.

The Legislature had divided Virginia into eight shires or counties in 1634, and Kiskiack and York had been included in Charles County which extended from beyond the Charles River to the center of the peninsula where it met James City County which, in its turn, included the land south to beyond the James River. Middle Plantation lay along the boundary dividing these two counties. In 1642 the name for both the river and county of Charles was changed to York, in honor of the Duke of York who became James II, and the future site of Williamsburg founded itself half in York County. The records of James City County were destroyed during the Civil War, but those of York County were preserved; and through their preservation, invaluable documentary research material for reference in the John D. Rockefeller restoration of the City of Williamsburg was provided.

In 1642 he married Jane Berkeley, widow of young Lieutenant Edward Berkeley who had been killed in the Indian massacre of 1622. She arrived on the *Seaflower* in 1621. Berkeley, a man of great industry, established the first iron works in America and would, no doubt, have made a real name for himself had not the Indians cut him down along with all of his iron-workers in a surprise attack. In marrying Jane, Martiau established himself and his family as the first ancestors in America of another eminent military engineer, George Washington. Good-wife Jane had a daughter, Jane, whom Martiau raised as one of his own. After the death of Jane, Nicholas married Isabella widow of Robert Felgate and George Beech, in 1646.

Martiau was the most important of all the many Huguenots who increased in the early population of the Colony, most of whom had been imported in order that the English settlers might "*benefit by the frenchmen's skill and instructinge of others in the Arte of plantinge and settinge of Vines and in the ministry of making Wyne.*"

Captain Nick scorned such puerile pursuits. He led expeditions against the Indians, continued to study and improve the colony's fortifications, brought many new immigrants to Virginia at his own expense, became a successful planter, was ever an active vigilant protector of the people's rights in his legislative capacity in the Assembly and became the First Citizen of the land that later was chosen for the site of Yorktown.

Besides his stepdaughter, Jane, Martiau had four children of his own. His son, Nicholas Jr., died before reaching maturity. One daughter, Sarah, married Captain William Fuller, the Governor of Maryland. Another daughter, Mary, married Colonel John Scarsbrook, a leader in the Bacon Rebellion. The third daughter, Elizabeth, married Colonel George Reade who in 1637 was Secretary of the Colony and in 1638 was acting Governor. It is through Elizabeth and George Reade that Washington traces his ancestry to Martiau, for the Reade daughter, Mildred, married Augustine Warner II; the Warner's daughter, Mildred, married Lawrence Washington; the Washington's son, Augustine, married Mary Ball who was the mother of George Washington. Captain Nicholas Martiau thus became the great-great-great-grandfather of the First President.

Capt. Nicholas Martiau died 1657 in York County, Virginia. The burial place of Captain Martiau has never been located.

Recognition was given in 1931 when a monument was dedicated in Yorktown to his everlasting glory. The dedication address was delivered by General John J. Pershing. The monument was designed by the eminent Philadelphia architect, Paul Cret, and consists of an eleven-foot shaft of Vermont granite bearing a bronze tablet.



SITE OF THE HOME OF NICHOLAS MARTIAU THE ADVENTURER HUGUENOT HE WAS BORN IN FRANCE 1591 CAME TO VIRGINIA 1620 AND DIED AT YORKTOWN 1657. HE WAS A CAPTAIN IN THE INDIAN UPRISING A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF BURGESS JUSTICE OF THE COURT OF YORK IN 1635 A LEADER IN THE THRUSTING OUT OF GOVERNOR HARVEY WHICH WAS THE FIRST OPPOSITION IN THE BRITISH COLONY POLICY. THE ORIGINAL PATENTEE FOR YORKTOWN AND THROUGH THE MARRIAGE OF HIS DAUGHTER ELIZABETH TO COL. GEORGE READ HE BECAME THE EARLIEST AMERICAN ANCESTOR OF BOTH GEN. GEORGE WASHINGTON AND GOVERNOR THOMAS NELSON

Marked by the Huguenot Society of Pennsylvania in cooperation with the National Federation of Huguenot Societies and the Yorktown Sesqui-centennial Commission 1931



NATIONAL HUGUENOT SOCIETY
LIBERTY FAITH

The National Huguenot Society began in 1931 as the Federation of Huguenot Societies, formed by groups in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., and others with shared interests. The federation met annually in Washington, D.C., and gradually expanded as more state societies joined.

In 1951, at a meeting in Washington, the organization adopted a new constitution and changed its name to the National Huguenot Society. This shift created a centralized structure with governing authority, replacing the looser federation model. Additional societies—including the French Church of Saint Esprit and the Huguenot Memorial Association—also supported the change. The society continued to grow, eventually including more than forty state organizations, and was formally incorporated in Maryland in 1969.

The objectives of *The National Huguenot Society* are patriotic, religious, historical, and educational. Their design is to perpetuate the memory, the spirit, and the deeds of the men and women in France known as Huguenots who were persecuted in the 16th and 17th centuries because of their adherence to the basic tenets of the Protestant faith and their devotion to liberty, and who emigrated either directly or through other countries to North America and contributed by their character and ability to the development of the United States.

Membership typically requires documented Huguenot ancestry and adherence to Protestant beliefs. The society's mission is patriotic, historical, and educational: to preserve the memory and legacy of the Huguenots, who were persecuted in France for their faith in the 16th and 17th centuries and later contributed significantly to the development of the United States.

