

Gourdin-Gourdine in America

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The Gourdin family name has a long history in America dating back more than 300 years. For the most part, the surname name GOURDIN arrived in America during the latter part of the 17th Century when several hundred-thousand HUGUENOTS fled from France and settled in several European countries and in the English colonies of North America -- primarily Massachusetts, New York, and South Carolina.

Huguenot is a name given to Protestants of France who opposed the established religion of Catholicism during the 16th and 17th Centuries. During the later part of the 16th Century, hostility between Roman Catholics and Protestants led to several religious wars. As a consequence, during the 17th Century Huguenots were persecuted mercilessly, and in order to avoid annihilation they sought asylum elsewhere.

Among the first Huguenots to settle in America was Louis Gourdin or "Louis the Emigrant." Louis, the son of Valentin Gourdin, was born in Caucourt, Artois, France and arrived in America about 1695, then settled near the city of Jamestown in an area called the French/Orange Quarters -- now the counties of Berkeley and Charleston, South Carolina.

The Gourdin family saw moderate success during the Colonial period in America but prospered substantially after the American Revolution. After America became a nation in 1789 the Gourdin family continued to develop status and wealth, especially during the first half of the 19th Century preceding the Civil War. Theodore Gourdin, the great-great-grandson of Louis the Emigrant, is generally credited with the financial successes of the Gourdin family.

During the first two decades of 1800, the Gourdin family amassed an empire primarily in the counties of Berkeley, Charleston, Georgetown and Williamsburg accumulating more than 100,000 acres of land and nearly 600 slaves. But the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation brought that empire to an end.

During the 10 to 15 years following the Civil War, or the Era of Reconstruction in America, the Gourdin family fortune crumbled due to the end of free slave labor and the institution of the sharecropping system. The once grand plantations and plantation houses fell into default and decay, and by 1905, practically all of the Gourdin family properties were sold or auctioned off to the highest bidders with the exception of the personal holding of the remaining descendants of the Gourdin empire.

For the most part, the surname GOURDINE, in America, emerged from the surname Gourdin during the mid- to late-1800s as Afro-Gourdins from South Carolina began migrating northwardly and added an "e" to their names for reasons yet to be substantiated. As a result, in America, the surname Gourdine is almost uniquely, but not entirely, associated with African-Americans; while the surname Gourdin is closely

Gourdin-Gourdine (cont'd)

aligned with European-Americans, however, both surnames can be found, at least sparsely, among several races and nationalities from a variety of locations.

In America, some Gourdins and Gourdines, of African Descent, are direct descendants of Louis the Emigrant, while others systematically adopted the surname from their former owners after the Civil War. Although the surnames of Gourdin and Gourdine in America are explicitly tied to the Louis the Emigrant, this connection is not unique to the Gourdin family origin.

There are other Gourdin families in America. Their origins are both European and South American who appear to have arrived in America during the late 19th and early 20th Century. Likewise, there are a number of Euro-American Gourdines sparsely populated here and about in America who, for the most part, arrived in America through a circuitous route. They are primarily Belgians who first settled in Canada under the name of Gourdinne, then further traveled to America and dropped the second “n” to become Gourdine.

So we are not alone. While the Gourdin-Gourdine Family Association is primarily focused on families and individuals of African Descent, our membership remains open to anyone who shares an interest in exploring the history and genealogy of Gourdins and Gourdines in America.

EXCERPT: [*Gourdin-Gourdine Quarterly Newsletter*](#)