

Jean-François Gaultier (1708 – 1756)

Jean-François Gaultier (Gautier, Gauthier or Gaulthier) was born in La Croix-Avranchin, France, on 6 October 1708, the son of René Gaultier and Francois Colin. Little is known about his childhood or education, but a letter dated 11 May 1741 showed that he had studied medicine and been practising in Paris for six or seven years. After Michel Sarrazin's death in 1734 the position of King's physician in New France (now Quebec) was kept open for his eldest son Joseph-Michel, a medical student in Paris, but he died of smallpox in 1739 before completing his degree. Gaultier was well known to the Jussieus, members of the Académie Royale des Sciences; he needed little persuasion to apply for the position, and was appointed in 1741. Gaultier did not leave for Canada immediately, but studied the treatment of illnesses in Paris hospitals for another year before sailing on the *Rubis*. He took with him a text of nearly 200 pages based upon Sarrazin's collections and notes, *Histoire des Plantes de Canada*, compiled in about 1707 by Sébastien Valliant, Bernard de Jussieu's predecessor at the Jardin du Roi. The manuscript became one of Gaultier's main aids, and with his marginal notes, survives in the archives of the Saint-Hyacinthe seminary, Quebec.

Upon his arrival in Quebec Gaultier attended the attorney general's law classes and was appointed to the Conseil Supérieur in 1744, serving principally as assessor in several cases. In May 1745 he was elected a corresponding member of the Académie Royale des Sciences, undertaking to report his observations on medicine, botany, meteorology, zoology, geology and agriculture in the colony. His memoir to fort commanders resulted in a network

of bases for collecting and cataloguing specimens, which were then sent to Quebec and on to Paris. When Swedish botanist Pehr Kalm (1716–1779) went to Quebec in 1749 he was received as an official guest, and Gaultier, the foremost naturalist in Canada, served as his guide. A fruitful two months of botanical exploration in the region resulted in Kalm's *Flora Canadensis*, which was used by Linnaeus, but remained in manuscript form and has since been lost. Kalm also suggested the genus name *Gaultheria* in recognition of Gaultier's services. *Gaultheria procumbens*, commonly known as wintergreen or teaberry, is the species native to eastern North America.

On 12 March 1752 Gaultier married twice widowed Madeleine-Marie-Anne, and confided to a correspondent, "My wife has much wit, a fine education, and great ability for running and organising a house, and she can expect wealth after the death of her father, who is 78 ... I shall probably not leave for a good while." His father-in-law was to outlive him! Ship-borne typhus swept through the colony and Gaultier died on 10 July 1756, after nine days of illness. He had no children, but was paying for the education of a nephew in Paris, and his widow arranged for this to continue. She retired to a convent in 1774, and died there in 1776, aged 68.

A likeable man of many talents, Gaultier continued Michel Sarrazin's work, and also opened up fields of research new in the colony. His scientific contribution was considerable but mainly indirect, through the work of others; he did not mind, and was conscious only of doing his duty as a physician and as a naturalist to the best of his ability.

Gaultheria depressa

Gaultheria is a genus of about 170–180 species of evergreen shrubs of the heath family, found from Asia and the Americas to Australia and New Zealand. Except for one, the New Zealand species are endemic. *Gaultheria depressa* var. *novae-zelandiae* (mountain snowberry) is a small, low-growing shrub with dark green tough shiny leaves with obvious veins, the stems and leaves with dark hairs. Small white bell-shaped flowers occur singly, followed by large, fleshy, brightly coloured fruits, red, pink or white on separate plants. It grows in tussock grassland, extending into the alpine zone, from the Volcanic Plateau southwards. *Gaultheria depressa* var. *depressa*, with long, persistent bristles on the leaf margins, grows also in Tasmania.

