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Marriage and the Women of Louisbourg

Who were the women of Louisbourg? The first ones came from Placentia, Newfoundland, born in Acadia, Quebec and the four corners of France. Three generations of them lived, married and raised their children on the shores of the Isle Royale, France's last remaining colony on the Atlantic seaboard. They founded a capital, the largest city in New France outside Quebec, a town where cod was king and trade a thriving cosmopolitan link with Europe, New England, the West Indies and Canada, a town which, huddled beneath the walls of its fortress, looked to the sea, unsupported by a rural economy, dependent for supplies on the ocean life line from France, and which was to last, from its foundation in 1713 to its fall in 1759, only forty-six years. Its inhabitants twice knew the perils of siege and the bitterness of exile, once for a mere four years, the second time forever. Many born in Louisbourg lived through its two disasters then, resettled in France, saw the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon. Some saw his fall. What were they like those women, what gave them the strength and resilience to ride out the storms of their times? What light can their destiny and lifestyle shed upon the total picture of New France or the history of women or the portraiture of fictional heroines?

This article does not claim to answer all these questions, nor even to be a comprehensive study of marriage in Louisbourg. It offers a glimpse of the way a key institution was lived by a certain class, that group of sedentary, property-owning inhabitants whose names occur most frequently in the records and the thematic studies done for the reconstruction of the fortress town. It is a glimpse derived, moreover, rather from the exceptions than from the norm, for it was the problems and the unusual that earned a place in the archives. Yet history, like literature, celebrates the exceptional and from those episodes that reached the law courts, the diaries, the official correspondence and which—had Louisbourg had a newspaper, would

doubtless have formed its daily fare—we can begin to sketch a shadowy portrait. It is offered here in the hope that others will complete it.

It is difficult to calculate with any accuracy how many women there were, for the census did not systematically include all females. Servants, slaves, wives of fishermen and other employees were not classified, and women all too often were mentioned only when they were the wife or daughter of a property-owning man. Within that group, however, there was a range extending from fairly modest shopkeepers to fishing boat owners through to rich merchants and officers of rank and noble family. It was society with considerable upward mobility in which judicious marriage played a not inconsiderable part, and in which the class lines were blurred by the participation of merchants in the administration of the colony, and the participation of officers in trade. Examples are not infrequent of tradesmen becoming, by wealth and marriage, members of the most influential and comfortable class.

Marriage was, among the women of the sedentary core of Louisbourg, the normal adult status. Almost all women married, as did the men of this group. Widows often remarried, some several times. Out of 113 women chosen almost at random from the three generations, forming a list which includes a slave, a servant, wives of officers, wives of merchants and tradesmen's wives and daughters, 102 were married. Twelve were married twice, three were married three times. Nineteen widows did not remarry. Of the eleven spinsters, two were nuns, two died young and the others may have married later. Louisbourg always had more men than women, its population including great numbers of transitory males, soldiers of the rotating garrison, and seasonal fishermen, but a similar check among the men of the sedentary merchant population reveals that approximately the same number of them married as women, twelve of them at least twice.

The age at which people married varied. On average, the girls married for the first time between nineteen and twenty-three and for the second time in their thirties. The men married a little later, at an average age on first marriage of twenty-eight. They were usually slightly older than their brides of first marriages. There are, however, spectacular exceptions. One girl was married at fourteen. One bridegroom was fifteen, and one widow married for the third time at sixty-nine. Her husband was twenty-eight.

Many marriages seem to have been influenced by a common geographical or cultural origin, Basques marrying Basques, Normans marrying Normans, particularly among the more modest classes. Among the officers and the well-to-do merchants, wealth and rank were perhaps more decisive factors. Among the middle class *habitants*, equality of wealth and solid family connections were evidently important. *Mésalliances* were not unknown, but the general impression gained is that worldly advantage was an enhancement to love and inclination.

If at the personal level, where people exercised their preferences and encountered their unique difficulties, one senses a pragmatic individualism that makes Louisbourg, Acadia and Quebec distinctly different from each other, this was not the intention of the authorities. Marriage was an institution taken seriously by both church and state, and therefore closely defined and regulated for all New France, as the key to a successful colonial and ecclesiastic policy. It was the foundation of the basic unit of society, the family. At the official level, therefore, marriage in Louisbourg parallels to a considerable degree, the history of marriage elsewhere as recounted by the Reverend P.A. Leclerc in his comprehensive article "Le mariage sous le *Régime français*".¹ To the church, marriage was a sacrament, subject to canon law. To the state, it was also a civil contract, regulated by the Custom of Paris.

Canon law was recorded for the guidance of the diocese, by the second bishop of Quebec, Saint Vallier. In his *Rituel*,² he detailed all aspects of marriage from the style of the bride's dress (arms and bosoms to be covered, not just veiled) to the emergency baptism of babies. His prescriptions were designed to provide a clear moral code for all eventualities, yet he seemed to recognize the need to provide for transgressions and exceptions. He described marriage as a "holy alliance" where children would be raised in the love and fear of God, an alliance where consummation was a duty and where if one member of the couple "demands the duty," the other was obliged to grant it, but modified this laudible equality by adding that women "must obey their husband's will in all things not contrary to the law of God." He specified the details of the three ceremonies for marriage: the banns, the betrothal and the nuptial mass, but provided for irregular situations. He listed the dates of the church calendar during which marriage could not be celebrated but described a curtailed form for the forbidden periods. He reminded the officiating clergy that for marriage to be valid under civil and canon law, males had to be four-

teen and girls over twelve. Couples had to have the consent of their parents or commanding officer, unless they were aged thirty and male, or twenty-five and female, and he explained the canonical impediments to marriage: mistaken identity, homicide, adultery and incest (consanguinity closer than the fourth degree). Were an impediment to be discovered after a marriage had taken place, the couple had to be separated until a dispensation could be granted. There was no question of divorce.

The contingency directives written into the *Rituel* were doubtless born of a recognition that the diocese was enormous and sparsely served, and they proved indeed to be necessary. There were in Louisbourg cases of marriage without permission, of unions between cousins, of premature pregnancy, hasty nuptials, breach of promise and weddings without banns. There were perhaps not very many of these and indeed Louisbourg seems to have been a relatively law-abiding place, its parish records blandly relating the three main events of hundreds of ordinary lives. Yet a study of the difficulties people encountered with the legalities of marriage reveals something of their individual and regional character.

In a garrison port, it is not surprising to find examples of irregular marriages among the military, nor to find the authorities struggling to control them. An *ordonnance* of the 13 December 1681³ forbade priests and *curés* to celebrate marriages involving officers, troopers or soldiers except according to the laws of the church and the realm, on pain of punishment as aiders and abettors in the crime of rape. Chaplains who married soldiers to women of the garrison town would be arrested; officers marrying without permission would be cashiered and stripped of their seniority. A similar ordinance in 1713⁴ forbade marine officers to marry without the king's permission.

And yet some did so. One of the founding officers, François Dupont Duvivier married Marie Muis d'Entremont in 1705, without permission⁵ and was not disgraced. They had four children born at Port Royal and one daughter born in France. Duvivier, had he lived long enough, would probably have been admitted to the order of St. Louis. One of his sons, another François Duvivier would lead expeditions from Louisbourg to Canso and Annapolis. Another officer, Georges François de Boisberthelot did not wait for permission, but married a de Goutin girl who was 8 1/2 months pregnant.⁶ In "Canada" (present Quebec) the nephew of Governor Vaudreuil, was similarly disobedient, much to the annoyance of the *Conseil*, so he was transferred to Louisbourg but allowed to stay in service.⁷ The

Sieur de la Perelle, Lieutenant, aged twenty-six, did request permission to marry Francois Charlotte Aubert de la Chesnay, but had to wait for it.⁸ Some had to wait quite a while, their affairs being complicated by a change of administration: Bouville granted permission for the marriage of M. de La Vallière the elder, to Mlle Rousseau de Souvigny, but the marriage was stopped until Governor de Forant arrived. He confirmed the permission.⁹ Some were less fortunate. Permission was refused to the Chevalier Duvivier to marry Mlle de la Vallière because the Acting Governor had said that no officer of that family could be married without the consent of both the Du Chambon and the Duvivier families.¹⁰

Soldiers in the ranks were theoretically not supposed to marry, but one or two a year were permitted to do so from the earliest times. Some were given permission on the condition that neither they nor their wives left the colony. Governor Raymond allowed twenty two soldiers to marry and settle on the shore of the lake at the Miré during his regime.¹¹ Subsistence was given to them and their families, but Prévost expressed a low opinion of them: the *Commissaire-ordonnateur* thought that they were merely seeking their freedom and libertinage, and feared that the spirit would spread to all the troops.¹² He worried lest such establishments would be a charge on the king.

If soldiers had few rights, slaves had none at all, and yet even they occasionally contrived to marry. The female slave of Jean-Chrysostome Loppinot, officer, gained her freedom just before she was forty. She married a converted Indian. Together, Marguerite Rose and Jean Baptiste rented a house in one of Louisbourg's most fashionable areas. Their happiness did not last long: Marguerite Rose died two years later.¹³ On another occasion,¹⁴ Jean Baptiste Cupiton paid five hundred *louis* to Blaise Cassaignole for the freedom of Catherine, a slave in the Cassaignole household. The couple were married, and the bride described in the records as "free, residing in the house of Monsieur Blaise."¹⁵

Given the very late age of emancipation from parental control, it is not surprising to find problems arising from the marriage of minors. The intention of the law was apparently to ensure that elderly parents were not left destitute by their married children. Few, it seems, abused the situation, withholding their consent without cause. Yet many couples had their troubles as a result. Church and state worked together to avoid problems. Saint Vallier reminded the vicars general that all were required "to observe the ordinances and canonical laws concerning the publication of banns," and "to note in the rites of

celebration of marriage whether the contracting parties were minors under the guardianship of their family, or of appointed guardians, or emancipated with trustees."¹⁶ All marriages had to conform to the King's earlier ordinance of 9 April 1736 whereby marriages "would be recorded in the parish church of the place where the marriage takes place." In the case of a marriage taking place outside the parish of residence, the contract was to be recorded, after the wedding, in the home parish. These provisions were to be read and published in the *prévôtes* of Quebec, Trois Rivières and Montreal. Yet in Louisbourg there are numerous cases of the banns being dispensed with, or only partially published. The marriage of François du Pont, *Ecuyer*, Sieur Duchambont, to Marie Josephe d'Entremont, *veuve*, took place after "publication of one ban and dispensation of the two others, and also dispensation for consanguinity of the second degree"¹⁷ and Joseph Du Pont, *chevalier* Duvivier married Marie Josephe Le Borgne de Belleisle, *veuve*, with no banns at all.¹⁸

There were people who found the regulations so complex that they either did not understand them, or could plausibly argue that they had misunderstood, or who were involved in issues beyond their control. Such a case,¹⁹ a minor "*cause célèbre*," concerned Michel Daccarette, a merchant, and his wife, Catherine Gouillon, who had obtained a dispensation for cousinship of the first degree under the guidance of the Récollets of Brittany. Ten years later, Bishop Saint Vallier, anxious to oust this order from Louisbourg, seized on this marriage as an example of their incompetence. The Daccarette-Gouillon marriage was challenged with lengthy legal disputes and some semi-comical exchanges. They were accused of having obtained the papal dispensation on false pretences and having deliberately hidden their relationship from the authorities. They retorted that their first degree cousinship was no secret: everyone knew. The examining priest, Joseph Denys, argued that the marriage ought to be annulled. The accused retorted that they lived "amidst infidels and barbarians." Denys retorted hotly that "there is not a single person on this island who is not appalled by such a marriage which has revolted everybody." The couple then pleaded that they were poor, to which Denys commented wryly, "If a person who does a trade of more than 40,000 *livres* must be considered poor and destitute, the excuse may be valid." Eventually the couple was declared in the clear, their marriage rehabilitated and their four children pronounced legitimate.²⁰

In another case,² the defendents were not quite so original in their defending arguments. Pierre Santier and Servanne Bonnier, accused of incest, claimed that they did not understand, and that she was not aware of the law. This may have been true as Servanne could not write, but there is a naively sly tone to the whole interrogation. Servanne first gives her name and station: "Servanne Bonnier, daughter of Bertrand Bonnier and Olive Bonnier, both of St. Malo. Age approximately nineteen, seamstress by profession, Roman Catholic." She had, she said, been in the country one year, with the consent of her parents, "to work at her trade." She had intended to work for the widow Chevalier, but her uncle had brought her to stay at his house. Her child was born September 1734, a boy, by her cousin, Pierre Santier. Her son was not yet baptised, but had been "*ondoyé*" by M. le Curé the day after his birth. Yes, the child was in her uncle's house. He was not yet baptised because his father was away and they were waiting for him. Yes, the ceremony was expected to be held the next day. When had she first had "a carnal relationship with the said Pierre Santier?"—on 4 October 1733. Had he promised marriage? Well, since living together they had "*badiné ensemble*," and he had made "several propositions which she had always refused." She had submitted on 4 October 1733, and afterwards he had promised to marry her and said "he had never had any others." After Easter she had admitted to her aunt that she was pregnant by her cousin. She was asked if she understood about canonical taboos, and she replied that Pierre was not her first cousin, but merely the son of a first cousin and that "the Father Superior had promised them before she gave birth that he would grant a dispensation." They had not married before the birth because Pierre's father did not want them to, and Pierre would not go against his father's wishes. The court found it disturbing that the Santiers had permitted the scandal and had taken no measures to prevent a repetition of the "crime," and that "those who ought to have seen to correcting their descendents, far from putting an end to this criminal business, seem to approve of the debauchery of their son and the prostitution of their niece." However, having deplored that the event "offends modesty and decent morals," they stated that the law required that children be provided for: "that justice ensure that the natural father of children provide for their food, maintenance and education according to their estate." Servanne and Pierre did marry and went on to other law cases.

Not always, however, did the pregnant girl find a happy outcome. Marie Anne Carrerot²² had her parents to guide her, she had

previously been married, she was probably educated and had a merchant father who should have been aware of the law, unlike the more vulnerably circumstanced but shrewd Servanne Bonnier. Nothing stood in the way of her marriage to the young officer, Michel de Gannes, except de Gannes himself. Having seduced Mlle Carrerot, he changed his mind about the promises he had made her. The Carrerots sued for compensation and for child maintenance. At first, claimed her parents, de Gannes had frequently visited the Carrerot house and was regarded as "a presumptive son-in-law." Marie Anne yielded to de Ganne's urging, then "as soon as she noticed her pregnancy, she had informed the defendant so that prompt measures could be taken to save her honour." He promised to marry her, but stipulated that she must do her best to persuade the Governor to grant permission." The Governor made no difficulty, telling Marie Anne that he would grant the permission as soon as de Gannes requested it. This, the young man did not do. In January she took her complaint to the *Conseil Superieur*, hoping that de Gannes would be prompted to honour his promises, and that he would be made to contribute to the expenses of the confinement and the child's maintenance. In March the child was born, and after that the *Conseil* ordered that the baby be baptised with de Ganne's name and be "fed and raised at his expense." Not all girls were so unfortunate. Jeanne de Goutin, pregnant by the *chevalier* George Francois de Boisberthelot,²³ heard the judge declare that they would be married "at the pleasure of the Court." She sued on October 8th and they were married on October 15th.

Some engagements were broken without much apparent grief. Yves Glamur of Niganiche (Inganish) had promised to wed Isabelle Lenordan and had duly had three banns read, only to discover that she had transferred her affections to another man.²⁴ He had given her 500 *louis* "in anticipation of their marriage" and now, quite naturally, wanted his money back. As insurance, he also requested the *curé* not to read the banns for her proposed marriage. The *curés* quite frequently received such requests, for a variety of reasons, emotional, legal and financial.²⁵

One of the reasons why the authorities were rarely adamant in their withholding of permission and dispensation was that their power was ultimately limited.²⁶ People always had the alternative of living together in *le grand pèche* or of marrying *à la gaumine*. A couple being married *à la gaumine* went together to Mass, waited carefully for the moment just before the priest gave the general benediction, then pronounced themselves aloud, to be man and wife. Two mem-

bers of the congregation served as witnesses, the general blessing served as the nuptial benediction and thus the basic requirements of canon law were fulfilled. This device for forcing the hand of reluctant parents or officials spread from France and was very popular in Quebec in the early years of the eighteenth century. The priests threatened the participants with excommunication and St. Vallier issued a *mandement* condemning the practice, which virtually put a stop to it.²⁷ Nevertheless, there was at least one famous one in Quebec after that date, when Michel Bégon, brother of the *intendant* of Canada, married Elizabeth Roberth de la Morandière à la *gaumine* to put an end to their six years of fruitless attempts to be married with their families' approval.²⁸ And there was at least one case in Louisbourg in 1737. Jean Larges, *navigateur et résident de Louisbourg*, was unable to obtain his mother's consent to his marriage to Louise Samson.²⁹ Louise, who was twenty-one had her father's permission and the couple often consulted *le Père Curé* about their wishes. They waited for four years, then took matters into their own hands, with a little prompting apparently from the *curé*, who probably feared that they would be tempted into immorality otherwise. During the legal hearing afterwards, the marriage was described by several witnesses. Louis Loppinot testified that he had arrived late and had stayed at the back of the church from where "he saw the *Sieur* Larges and the *Demoiselle* Samson who were on their knees at the altar rail, rise to their feet and say a few words to each other." This, according to the court, caused a scandal in church, and it is probable that it did cause a stir amongst those members of the congregation who had not known in advance what the couple intended.

Once such a ceremony had taken place, objections to the match had often to be withdrawn, as was the case when Mme Bégon was married. Her marriage was ratified a few weeks later. However, Jean Larges and Louise Samson were not let off lightly. The *procureur général*, on being informed of the incident, called it "a scandalous debauch in public" and decreed that the couple "should live apart." Louise was sent to the convent and Jean to the guard-house until the matter could be settled. The final decision was less severe than others at first proposed. The couple were to remain fifteen more days apart in confinement, then would be freed. They would pay fines to the church and the poor. They would have to receive penitence from the Bishop of Quebec, and to appear before the Council to be "admonished." On 8 July 1737, with only one bann published, they were finally married.

Marriage was not only a sacrament but also a closely regulated transfer of property. The signing of the marriage contract was an important occasion to which came all the wedding guests. It usually took place the day before the religious ceremony. The notaries and the families of the bride and groom had previously worked carefully on the wording of the contract, for on it depended the financial stability and legal status of the future family. Its terms were those of the Custom of Paris, the legal code of all New France, designed to "preserve the traditional order, founded for the most part on freehold and the family."³⁰ The bridal pair, emancipated from their parents by the marriage rites, were considered to be founding "a new family unit which was regulated minutely by the Custom, independent of the spouses' will."

Unless otherwise stipulated in the contract, the couple lived under the regime of community of property. They were responsible for each other's debts, and they held in common all property and revenues except those designated *biens propres*. The common goods (*la communauté*) were subdivided into *biens meubles* (furniture, linen, tools, bonds, money, fishing gear etc) and *conquêts immeubles* (land, houses, ships purchased during the marriage, rents from these, money earned or acquired from sales or investments). These often came as dowries to men and women. The marriage contract also itemized the *biens propres*, those personal belongings which had been inherited in the direct or collateral line and which were gifts in the direct line and thus the sole property of one of the partners. People could dispose, almost at will, of their *biens conquêts*, but their *biens propres* could not be touched by the spouse. These might be quite valuable (land, houses, ships), but among the smaller items perhaps came the personal possessions so rarely mentioned in Louisbourg inventories such as fans, jewelry, crystal, toilette accessories, wigs, sporting guns, prayer books and canes.

The administration of property was the right and duty of the husband, but the Custom of Paris was designed to ensure some security and some control for the wife. The husband could sell, give away or mortgage the common property (*conquêts*) providing he had the common good in mind, but over his wife's *biens propres*, his authority was limited. He could dispose of its *fruits* such as the harvest of her land, the cod from her fishing fleet, but he could not touch the *bien* itself without her consent. In this way the wife was ensured some say in the daily direction of the family affairs, but she could not go to law or embark on a business deal without her husband's con-

sent. An ambivalence in the status of women is thus apparent in the legal domain which parallels that noted in the religious duties of marriage. Women had rights, but were thought of as the weaker of the two sexes and so in need of protection by the law. The Custom therefore provided certain safe-guards against a feckless or wasteful man. The wife could not divorce an unsatisfactory husband but "the community could be dissolved by a corporal separation which was the exclusive domaine of the ecclesiastical courts, or by a separation of property that the wife could demand if the lack of care or lack of skill of her husband constituted a danger to the common goods."³¹

The fundamental purpose of the law was to protect the continuity of family prosperity, not simply individuals', and because of this, husband and wife were forbidden to give each other property in their lifetime or will it to each other. Some jurists also believed that mutual enrichment would have marred conjugal love and thus harmed the family. Only in cases where there were no children and where the gift was mutual, could spouses dispose of their property in each other's favour. *Le don mutuel* was a contract signed before a notary, authorizing the surviving partner after a bereavement to enjoy during his or her lifetime, the possessions of the dead spouse. The property reverted to the heirs on his or her death.

Certain guarantees were written into the marriage contract, however, to protect the surviving spouse. The *préciput* was a stipulated sum that could be withdrawn from an estate before the inventory was taken, as was the wife's *douaire*. The latter was designed to recompense a widow for her services to her dead husband's household and to assist in raising his children. On the death of the widow, the *douaire* reverted to her children or if there were none, to her husband's family. The *douaire* could not be touched during the husband's lifetime nor could it be used to pay debts outstanding from the *communauté*. It thus gave the widow first claim on her husband's estate. This right was a fundamental tenet of the Custom of Paris.

Despite the law, women were not always provided for. In 1731 there were four destitute widows in Louisbourg to whom de Mézy gave assistance³², and the widow of Costebelle was left penniless, for her husband was so ill while writing his will that he forgot her.³³ Several women were the victims of unscrupulous men. When Miqueton Boudrot died, he left a debt of 2,800 *livres* owing to a rich merchant, Delort. The widow could not pay it and was forced to yield to Delort a schooner evaluated at 2,500 *livres*, which Delort promptly resold for 2,800 *livres*.³⁴ Delort was not any kinder to his second wife. He

married her under the regime of separation of property and stipulated in his will that if she remarried, she would lose control of her childrens' money and hers.³⁵ Mathurine Le Ferne, the second wife of a fisherman, Michel Vallée, was excluded from the succession when her husband died: the three children of his first marriage inherited the house and fishing enterprise.³⁶

If some women had to struggle for their rights, others did not, Marie Daccarette received a dowry worth 4,000 *livres*³⁸ and Anne Madeleine Richard whose father began as a *navigateur*, and who became an inn keeper and an employer of four fishermen and a servant, was given a *chambre garnie* on her marriage worth 3,500 *livres*.³⁹ Many marriages were of obvious mutual advantage to the families involved. Marguerite Thérèse Carrerot, daughter of a wealthy merchant married the *commissaire-ordonnateur*, Jacques Prévost,⁴⁰ who did not scruple to grant ever greater influence and power to her family. He meanwhile benefitted from the wealth of the Carrerots and the merchants to whom they were allied. Among the wealthy merchants, the Bertrand family was perhaps particularly skillful at making "good" matches for their daughters. Marie Josephe, the eldest married the eminent Gabriel Pierre Rousseau de Villejoin, who died but left her with excellent connections. She then married the Sieur d'Ailleboust who was also of high rank and officer class. Her children married into the same class and thus she became the ancestor of much of Louisbourg's upper strata. Her sister Marguerite married Gabriel Dangeac, and their daughter married a converted protestant baron of the Holy Roman Empire.⁴¹ The third Bertrand sister, Renée, married Michel Le Neuf de la Valliere, a senior officer, and became the mother of twelve children, among them Barbe Leneuf who first married Louis Delort, a rich merchant. This was unusual, for it was more commonly merchants' daughters (with money) who married upper class sons (for rank). Barbe inherited 80,000 *livres* from Delort and then married a Rousseau de Villejoin, thus solidifying her family connections throughout upper class Louisbourg.

With health, hard work and luck, a solidly established family could emerge in two generations. Such an alliance of mutual interest was that of Marie Magdeleine Bottier *dit* Berichon and Jean Chrysostome Loppinot.⁴² The bride's parents came from Plaisance, Newfoundland, as modest owners of fishing boats. It is possible that Nicolas Bottier had begun as a fisherman employed by someone else. By the time he died, he already employed a "great number" of fishermen

and needed shore space for drying seven boats. After her husband's death, the Widow Berichon raised five children alone and enlarged her business, becoming an *habitante marchande* with several houses, four servants, two *engagés* and forty-eight fishermen. That made her Louisbourg's largest employer. Loppinot at the time of his marriage held the rank of *ensigne*. His father had been unable to give him financial assistance at the start of his career, being himself deeply in debt, but he had an aura of prestige from having been the *procureur du roi* in Port Royal and this, combined with ability and energy ensured that Jean Chrysostome rose steadily throughout his military career. He became a major of troops with the cross of St. Louis and, with the help of his wife's commercial assets, a wealthy man. They raised twelve children whose godparents and baptism guest lists mark the prominent of Louisbourg.

If we know that Loppinot was liked and can deduce that his marriage brought him some satisfaction, it is difficult to evaluate the overall quality of marital happiness in Louisbourg because personal documentation is sparse. Our impressions of the prevailing mores of the time must be tempered by consideration of the geographical situation of Louisbourg. The Isle Royale was both isolated and cosmopolitan, far from France yet part of a great trade triangle. To what degree did fashions and ideas reach Louisbourg? Were the people there "proud men in a new land" as Groulx said of the St. Lawrence *habitants*?⁴³ Were they as different from the Québécois, and Acadians as contemporaries said the Québécois were from the French? Were they isolated enough, long enough, to develop their own way of doing things, their own concepts and attitudes? Did they sing the songs, half cynical, half romantic, about love and marriage that were sung in Quebec and France? Must one conclude as Jaenen does of the Québécois that "the colonists were . . . remarkably independent, aggressive, self-assertive, freedom-loving individuals?"⁴⁴ Were any two marriages on the Isle Royale any more alike than those of any other society? If the final answers elude us, we can nevertheless turn back to the records and make some deductions.

It seems that conjugal problems on the Isle Royale that reached the law courts, rose more often from obstacles to the union of two people who desired it, than from infidelity or indifference ensuing from it. And it is certain that whether or not people expected and found happiness in wedlock, they almost all entered it. Many widows, however, remained single, which might suggest that widowhood was a desirable state for women, were it not that even more of them did

remarry. Many undoubtedly did so out of economic necessity, some may have done so for love. Some certainly remarried very quickly. Madeleine Ferret was widowed on 3 November 1731.⁴⁵ She married Dominique Collangues four months later on 21 March 1732, and had a child seven months after that. Some widows married several times: Francoise Charlotte Alavoine had three husbands.⁴⁶ So did Jeanne Galbaret who must have had great zest for life. Her first husband, a Basque cabaret owner, went bankrupt, but she, undaunted, married a second Basque and continued the task of redeeming her fortunes. By the time of her second marriage, she was said to have had property worth 1000 *louis*, and when in 1738 she married Georges Desroches, she was a rich woman, aged sixty-nine. He was twenty-eight. That marriage lasted sixteen years for she lived to be eighty-five.⁴⁷

Although worldly goods and social prestige undoubtedly played a role in the selection of a partner in Louisbourg, marriage there was probably not the unemotional alliance of family and land that one associates with the upper classes in France and England at the time. Houses in which couples could lead separate lives were unknown. There were some largish homes, but the average size was relatively small: "Their standard height was one storey or one storey and a half, their length approximately forty *pieds*, their width twenty *pieds*."⁴⁸ In these houses, large families and sometimes several families, shared the available space.⁴⁹ The long winters must have forced married couples into proximity, but there is little evidence that they were driven to extremes by it, though one husband at Niganiche murdered his wife on New Year's Eve 1731.⁵⁰ Then if among the governing classes the men were occupied during the day with administrative and military duties while their ladies played cards and oversaw their households, the majority of Louisbourg was not in that class. Storekeepers, bakers, butchers, innkeepers, merchants had their businesses in their homes, so it is reasonable to suppose that the wives were familiar with their husbands' work. One is not unduly surprised to find widows continuing the business alone, for many must have been their husband's assistant, if not working partner.

There were so many dispensations for marriage between second and third cousins that despite the hundreds of visiting seamen and fishermen each year, and despite the rotation of the garrison, it seems probable that the stable nucleus of the community did not change much except for the upheavals of the sieges, and that few couples were wholly unacquainted before their betrothal. It is also probable, since Louisbourg was at no time very large, varying between 160

inhabitants in 1713 and approximately 3000-4000 civilians at the time of the second siege that the choice of mate was relatively limited and that many couples were raised as neighbours with a lifestyle and family background in common.

As to how much individual freedom of choice the couples were permitted by their parents and by social pressures to make, the absence of personal records leaves us guessing. There is, however, one notable eye witness account of an unhappy match, where the girl was married against her will. De Surlaville describes⁵¹ how Charlotte Chassin de Thiery was married despite her love for another man:

M. de Montalembert has just married Mlle Chassin de Thiery. The rumour has it that she does not love him. Yesterday they dined with M. Drucourt, his wife wept all through the meal: her behaviour was most out of place and would hardly have been tolerated in a child of ten. I am assured that upon leaving the Governor's house, Montalembert wished to take his wife's hand and that she refused it scornfully. She rose at three o'clock in the morning on her wedding night; she was seen at that hour leaning against her casement and weeping bitterly. It is believed that she had more of a taste for a captain from Bourgogne, called Desmalle, than for Montalembert.

De Surlaville reflects optimistically that "good manners may win her," but the sequel was otherwise, as he learns later from a letter from a friend who wrote:

It is with great pain that I inform you of the sad destiny of poor Montalembert. Since a month ago, no-one knows where he is; he has been sought everywhere, the woods of the Miré have been beaten by detachments and by Indians without a single trace of him being found. He left Mme Thiery's house . . . on a Wednesday, with his gun. He took the road to the Miré. Since then, no-one has seen him. For some months he has been most unlike himself because of the sorrows that his wife caused him. Not content with mistreating him in many ways, she conducted a flirtation with a land officer in a positively public manner. That unfortunate woman has ruined him; Montalembert before his marriage had more than 250 *louis*; today it seems, he owes about 9,000 *livres*. His mother-in-law, who was not unaware of the problem, far from improving the situation when they went to live with her, no longer able to hold household, permitted the attentions of the beau and said to Montalembert when he complained: you have to admit, my dear Montalembert, you are no longer young, your person is not such as must please a young girl.

The bride-groom's friends sought him in vain and de Surlaville's correspondant ends with the smug satisfaction of one who had foreseen disaster:

He was so wildly in love with that woman, unfaithful though she was to him, that he never found the strength to detach himself from her. If he had listened to me he would not have perished. I did all I could to dissuade him from that match, but he listened only to his passion and to the fine speeches of his mother-in-law.

Alas that such pages are rare! Yet the glimpses of human drama continually assert themselves in the meticulous bureaucratic records. On the one hand we find marriage as an institution, designed by church and state to be an unyielding framework for the family, bounded and regulated to mould the character and ways of diligent, pious citizens. And on the other we find the diversity of individual destiny bursting the bounds of officialdom and revealing the idiosyncracies of a community which produced few personalities whose names resound through the ages, but where heroism of the every day order must have been far from unknown. Resilient they certainly were, those women who survived disease, famine, exile, war—and self-reliant in face of their isolation. A trifle wilful, some of them perhaps, shrewd and determined when the law was not in their favour, quick to see their advantage in the major decisions of life. Except for courage, these are not very heroic virtues, but those of a society living very close to the limits of survival. Louisbourg, indeed, between the sieges, belongs essentially to *la petite histoire*, its women are unsung, anonymous, and yet for this very reason, they form a pale contrasting strand in the tapestry of that most colourful period, the reign of Louis XV. Without them and the sombre lustre of their lives, the history of France, of Canada and of the eighteenth century remains, however slightly, incomplete.

NOTES

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3. Ordonnance, 13 Dec. 1681, Vol. 1 of Compilation of Ordonnances, pp. 213-216.
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9. A.N., C 11 B, vol. 21, ff 84-84v, de forant, 15 nov. 1739.
10. A.N., C 11 B, vol. 22, ff. 128-131v, Bourville, 1 nov. 1740.
11. A.N. Colonies, C 11 B, vol. 30, Fol. 16-18, Bonnaventure à Desherbiers, 13 juin 1751, and Fol. 60-61, Raymond, 10 sept. 1751.
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17. A.F.O., G¹, 408, 1^o registre: 125v, Acte de mariage. Louisbourg, 12 oct. 1750.
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25. A.F.O. G³, 2041 suite, pièce 22, 2 mai 1752.
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33. *Ibid.*
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35. *Ibid.*, pp. 8 and 13.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
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