

Guillaume Couillard

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Louis Hébert, Marie Rollet, and their three children arrived at Québec on 15-Jul-1617. According to Champlain's writings, Guillaume Couillard had preceded them four years earlier, in 1613. Was Guillaume from St. Malo or Paris? The few lines which remain concerning the small village of the son of Guillaume Couillard and Élisabeth Vesin are not conclusive; city of Saint-Malo or the parish of Saint-Landry in Paris. Born about 1591, Guillaume must have been about 22 when he accepted Canada as his new country. He was a servant in the Company of New France.

CAP-AUX-DIAMANTS

Guillaume Couillard's first fifteen years in the Colony had been commented on by Champlain, himself, in 1628.

"We refer to an inhabitant of the country, who fed himself from what he has cleared in the countryside, named Couillard, good sailor, carpenter, and caulker, who was subject only to necessity, in whom we placed all our assurance that he would help us with his work and industry, all the more so that for the fifteen years he has been in the service of the Company, he always showed himself to be courageous in all things which he did, that he had earned the friendship of everyone, doing what one could for him, and for me and I did not spare myself in anything that he had to do."

Such praise• deserves to .be remembered forever.

It appears that there was only an arpent and half of cleared land at Cap-aux-Diamants when Guillaume settled there. The clearing was done by hand, with hatchet and pickaxe. On 28-Apr-1628, with oxen and a plow, Guillaume laid the first furrow in New France. He was appropriately called the first habitant of the country.

WEDDING IN 1621

On 14-Jun-1640, fire destroyed the church of Québec and its registries. They were reconstituted from memory. The first marriage celebrated, recorded, and preserved in New France was that of Guillaume Couillard and Guillemette Hébert, on Thursday, 26-Aug-1621, in the presence of Champlain, himself, and Eustache Boulle, Hélène's brother.

Louis Hébert, son of Nicolas, Queen's apothecary, and of Jacqueline Pajot, was in Acadia first from 1606 to 1607, and from 1611 to 1613. His children were Guillaume, Guillemette, and Anne. Guillemette was born about 1608, the year of the founding of the city of Champlain. Anne was married at Québec to Etienne Jonquest, a Normand, at the beginning of 1618. This marriage certainly preceded that of Guillaume Couillard. Anne died giving birth to a child who did not survive. On the first of October 1634, after the occupation of Québec by the Kirke brothers, Guillaume Hébert took Hélène Desportes as his wife. Guillaume did not leave his last name to descendants; his name died with his grandson Joseph.

By marrying Guillemette Hébert, Guillaume Couillard joined a worthy family. We know that Louis Hébert, an educated man, obtained the concession of the Sault-au-Matelot fief, on 4-Feb-1623, and that of Saint-Joseph (or de Lespina) on the Saint-Charles River on 28-Feb-1626.

A great mourning struck the Colony in 1627. On 23 January, Louis Hébert died following a fatal fall on the ice. He had made Cap-aux-Diamants his adopted garden. The Cap held him like an immortal flower. On 16-May-1629, Marie Rollet was remarried to Guillaume Hubou, a worthy Normand, native of Saint-Andre du Mesnil-Durand, who had arrived at Québec in 1627.

The Couillard's and the residents of the village, in hardships and in joy must have backed each other up as life offered them challenges to take on, obstacles to overcome, and dreams to realize.

THREE YEARS OF HARDSHIP

The inhabitants of Québec feared wind and fire especially. Their early trial came from the sea. In 1627, there was the first sign of danger. The Kirke brothers, who spoke French since they had been born at Dieppe, united together under the leadership of David Kirke, were at Tadoussac where

they seized a French vessel carrying provisions to Québec; they then sent Basque fishermen to ask Champlain to surrender the fort. He refused. This was only a delay.

On 19-Jul-1629, while the small garrison was almost at the point of starvation, Champlain felt obliged to surrender to the will of the aggressors. He surrendered the key to the fort the next day, after having removed the *fleur de lis*. Remaining at Québec, under English authority were twenty stubborn people following the example of Guillaume Couillard, but with the secret hope that the French would return. They waited for three long years. Guillaume continued to work his land, to harvest his wheat, his pumpkins, and his corn.

Through the treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, signed in 1632, Port-Royal and Québec regained their liberty. Emery de Caen, on 6-Jul-1632, summoned Thomas Kirke to give back the keys to the city. Champlain reappeared at Québec on 22-May-1633, after an absence of nearly four years. The Hurons, themselves, went down to Québec in the month of July, and told Champlain that since his return, *"the land was land again, the river was a river again, the sky was a sky again"*.

The mass of grace celebrated to welcome the return of the masters was held in the house of Guillaume Couillard. The English had burned his original establishment.

SERVICES RENDERED

Guillaume Couillard provided an active presence in the capital of New France for thirty more years. His marriage to Guillemette Hébert helped him to rise up the social ladder, even if he did not know how to write. Thus, in 1634, he took part in the dividing of the fief of Sault-au-Matelot, owned by the late Louis Hébert since 4-Feb-1623, very precious land located near the Hôtel-Dieu and measuring more than 100 square arpents [84.48 acres]. Guillaume was even *"ennobled by the king in December"* 1654, for *"the services rendered to the country of Canada"*.

What were these services? The first was that of having been faithful, present, and accommodating to all his compatriots. After the church fire in 1640, a new church was to be built on a plot of land given by Sieur Couillard. On 29-Oct-1644, he had sold a piece of land to the Nursing Sisters. On 22-Jul-1646, he abandoned his right to fish in Lake Saint-Charles. That year, Father Jérôme Lallemant went to his home to wish him a happy new year. On 24 May, the feast of Corpus Christi, there was an altar at Guillaume's home. Also, there was a salute *"of muskets & guns"* behind his homestead. The following year, on 21-Jun-1647, Guillaume was one of the bearers of the dais in the procession. On New Year's day 1651, Father Paul Ragueneau offered Guillaume *"a pipe of stone"*.

All these facts combine to demonstrate that Guillaume Couillard was a man valued and respected by everyone. On 25-Jul-1661, Guillaume made a gift of a parcel of his precious land: 20 X 60 feet, to be used as a cemetery for the poor of the Hôtel-Dieu.

The Couillard home welcomed a few servants who could thus get used to the country and decide their future. Let's mention, in particular, Olivier Lejeune, a Negro from Madagascar brought to Québec by the Kirkes, Antoine Brassard, Jean Odon, Cardeau Manoury, Jacques Perroche, Daniel Margot, and Jean Leblanc dit Lecourt.

Couillard signed leases with Mathurin Leroy and Philippe Hulin, in 1653. Guillaume's concessionaires were François Blondeau and Jean Guyon. On 3-Feb-1653, Thomas Touchet promised to build Couillard an addition of 18 by 18 feet in half-timbers 6 inches thick, at the end of his house, and also to build a double mantel on the fireplace. It is to be noted that it was in this house, of

about 1,250 square feet, that the *Petit Seminary de Québec* was begun in 1668 and that it remained there until December 1677.

WORTHY FAMILY

Guillaume Couillard and Guillemette Hébert were important people attached to the history of the founding and development of the city of Québec. Without this fine and worthy family, Québec would be missing many of the lights on their halo.

They had ten pearls in their crown: Louise, Marguerite, Louis, Élisabeth, Marie, Guillaume, Madeleine, Nicolas, Charles, and Catherine-Gertrude were their children. These ten pearls possessed many different shades of personality.

1. The eldest, Louise, became the god-daughter of Emery de Caen and of Marie Rollet on 30-Jan-1625. Engaged to Olivier Tardif on 30-Nov-1637, mother of Pierre Tardif who did not survive them; she died on 23-Nov-1641 at Québec at the age of 16. This was the first painful mourning for the Couillard family.

Samuel de Champlain and Marguerite Langlois, wife of Abraham Martin, held Marguerite Couillard at the baptismal font. Father Charles Lallemant baptized her on 10-Oct-1626. Still a child, she was married on 7-Oct-1637 to Jean Nicolet. Their son Ignace died in 1640, after a year of life. Their daughter Marguerite, born at Trois-Rivières in 1642, married the famous Jean-Baptiste Legardeur, Sieur de Repentigny, and became responsible for a respectable progeny of 20 children. After the death of Jean Nicolet, his widow Marguerite was remarried at Québec on 12-Nov-1646, to Nicolas Macard, clerk of the Company of One Hundred Associates. Mother of six Macard children, Marguerite was a widow from 1659 until her death in 1705. She was buried on 4 April. She had been the first to join the great families of New France.

2. As for Louis, baptized on 18-May-1629, he was married on 29-Apr-1653, to Geneviève Despres, Parisian, daughter of Nicolas and of Madeleine Leblanc. Louis, merchant of Québec, merchant-fisherman, seigneur of Rivière-du-Sud, bore the surname of l'Espinay, but several of his descendants are recognized as Despres. Louis and Geneviève had six children. Louis died before the inventory of his property which was drawn up on 24-Sep-1678.

3. On 9-Feb-1631, a Lutheran minister baptized a Couillard daughter with the name of Élisabeth, her godfather Louis Kirke. The act was recorded in the Catholic registry on 20-Dec-1633. Jean Guyon, royal surveyor, became her husband on 27-Nov-1645. During their wedding, an unusual occurrence, two violins accompanied hymns in the chapel. They were given thirteen cherubs, a sign of numerous descendants. Élisabeth died at Chateau-Richer on 5-Apr-1704, after having known the children of her children.

4. Marie Couillard, born on 28-Feb-1633, founded her home on 25-Oct-1646 with François Bissot, Sieur de LaRivière, future fiscal administrator, provost judge, member of the Company des Habitants, and founder of the first family tannery at Lauzon. They counted a dozen children. After the death of François, Marie was remarried, to Jacques de Lalande, Sieur de Gayon, in 1675. Their only son Jacques-Marie died at Bayonne in 1753. Our ancestress Marie left her loved ones on 22-Jun-1703, at Saint-Pierre on the island.

5. Guillaume, godson of Robert Giffard, and Nicolas, godson of Nicolas Marsolet, were endowed with a fatal future. The two fell under Iroquois hatchets; Guillaume in 1662, and Nicolas in 1661.

6. Madeleine Couillard, represented at her baptism on 9-Aug-1639 by Marie-Madeleine de Chauvigny, Dame de LaPeltrie, left no other sign of her presence.
7. Charles Huault, Sieur de Montmagny, governor of New France, stood up for Charles Couillard as his godson, on 10-May-1647. Charles had six children with Marie Pasquier de Franclieu, and a dozen more with Louise Couture. He became the owner of the seigneurie of Beaumont on 3-Nov-1672. This seigneur de Beaumont died in May 1715, at the age of 68.
8. The youngest Couillard, baptized on 21-Sep-1648, bore the combined name of Catherine-Gertrude. Raised by the Ursulines, she was married on 6-Feb-1664 to Charles Aubert, Sieur de LaChesnaye, who would become one of the greatest businessmen of New France. Alas! Catherine-Gertrude died on 18-Nov-1664, following childbirth. Her son Charles would become a soldier. He died in battle on French soil, after 1690.

Such is, in a very few words, the memory of the second Couillard generation in America.

GUILLEMETTE HÉBERT

Guillaume Couillard was an active witness to the beginnings of the Colony; lifelong friend of Champlain, captured at Québec by the Kirkes, he saw the arrival of the Nursing Sisters, the Ursulines and Msgr de Laval. Two of his sons fell victim to the Iroquois. On 4-Mar-1663, Guillaume surrendered his beautiful soul to God a few weeks after *"the frightful & surprising earthquake"* of the preceding 5 February. Sieur Couillard was buried in the chapel of the Hôtel-Dieu, in recognition for the gifts made by him to this institution.

In the administration of his property, his widow Guillemette Hébert showed herself worthy of her father and mother and of her late husband. She was the heir of Sault-au-Matelot and the fief of Saint-Joseph. She made concessions of land to André Mignier, Jean Giron, Simeon LeRoy dit Audy, André Barbeau, Jean LeRouge, André Morin, Battanville, Simon Bourdeau, and Thomas Touchet.

Guillemette sold to Msgr de Laval the land which he needed for his Petit Seminary. The Hôtel-Dieu bought from her a piece of land for the poor. Guillemette had her will made on 5-Jul-1681; ratified it on 7-Oct-1683, and modified it on the following 12 October.

The ancestress of the Couillard's spent her last days in the peace of the convent of the Hôtel-Dieu, October 1684. She was buried next to her husband in the chapel of the Hôtel-Dieu. At that time, she left 250 descendants. They bore the following surnames: de Beaumont, de L'Espinay, des Essars, des Islets, Despres, Dupuis, and Hébert.

Guillemette and Guillaume, you still continue on the silent steps of time. You opened for us the road to hope. Your secular example carries us along.

FAMILY NAME VARIATIONS

The following variations of Couillard are known: Baumont, Beaumont, Couillarat, Couilliart, Couleau, Coulliart, Desilez, de L'Espinay, DeBaumont, DeBeaumont, DesEmars, DesIslets, Despres, Dupuis, Gilbert, Hébert, Lafontaine, Larocque, Lilois, Roch, and Rocquebrune.

ENDNOTES

- 1) Records of Audouart, 15-Sep-1634; 3-Feb-1653; 30-Aug-1654; 23-Aug-1659; 25-Jul-1661; 29-Oct-1661; 19-Feb-1663.
- 2) Record of Genaple, 19-Oct-1683.
- 3) Records of Guitet, 15-Jun-1642; 4-Oct-1642.
- 4) Record of Lecomte, 14-Oct-1668.
- 5) Record of Peuvret, 15-Jan-1659.
- 6) Records of Rageot, 7-Aug-1668; 28-Oct-1668; 10-Dec-1670; 15-Dec-1670; 10-Jun-1671; 15-Jun-1671; 20-Mar-1672; 3-Jul-1680; 5-Jul-1681; 7-Oct-1683; 12-Oct-1683.
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- 20) Marcel Trudel, Catalogue des Immigrants 1632-1662 (1983), pp. 21, 53, 131-133, 167, 185, 218, 277-278; Le Terrier du Saint-Laurent en 1663 (1973), pp. 46-53, 99, 108, 532.
- 21) _____, BRH, Vol. 6, p. 115; Vol. 18, p. 114; Vol. 20, pp. 221-224.
- 22) _____, DBC, Vol. 1, pp. 243-244.
- 23) _____, JJ (Laverdière 1871), pp. 14, 25, 48, 49, 68, 89, 147, 181, 292.
- 24) _____. Oeuvres de Champlain (Laverdière 1870), Vol. 6, pp. 1152-1156, 1232, 1264.
- 25) _____, SRC, 1924, Section 1, pp. 115-130; 1934, Section 1, pp. 149-178.