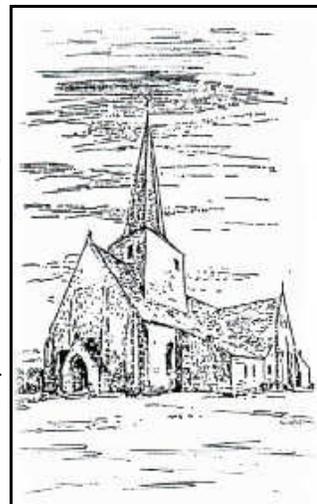


NEAR 350 YEARS AGO: THE GREAT RECRUITEMENT OF 1653

Recruitment of Pioneers

Nine years after its foundation, Ville-Marie still lives under the Iroquois threat. That is why in 1651 (the very year Denys Archambault, elder son of our ancestor Jacques, died tragically), the founder, Monsieur de Maisonneuve, at the invitation of Jeanne Mance, goes back to France to ask for reinforcements. The recruiting officers look for young men, as vigorous as they are audacious, with different crafts, and able to defend the emerging colony.

After two years of recruitment, 154 men sign contracts of five-year terms. Only 120 are present on the pier of Saint-Nazaire (Brittany France), and embark on the Saint-Nicolas. On board are Marguerite Bourgeoys and fifteen girls to be married. Among the future settlers are two men who will become the sons-in-law of our ancestor. The first one is Jean Gervaise. Baker and land-clearer, he is considered as one of the most handsome men of them all and of great human value. In signing his contract Gervaise asks for an advance of 120 pounds on his yearly salary of 80 pounds. The second settler is Gilles Lauzon, master coppersmith, hired at a salary of 85 pounds per year. He boasts the reputation of a devoted worker and honest lad.



Saint-Nazaire Church

It is in this church that Marguerite Bourgeoys, M. de Maisonneuve and most of the members of the great recruitment have kneeled before departure

The crossing

The departure from Saint-Nazaire takes place on June 20, 1653. It is the beginning of a harsh and tragic crossing. As soon as they leave the shore, the passengers find out that the Saint-Nicolas is nothing but an old tub. The poor settlers never stop to bale out and to staunch. Even though everyone is working hard, supplies start to deteriorate, and they have to go back to Brittany.



Marguerite Bourgeoys writes on this episode: "I was most distressed to see us in this dangerous situation... Our people were ill prepared to die... Monsieur de Maisonneuve left all of his soldiers on an island from which it was impossible to escape. Otherwise none would have stayed with us. A few of them try to escape by throwing themselves into the water.

They became crazy and accused us of leading them to their perdition. We had to wait quite a long time to find and gear a new ship and see to all our needs. We were able to leave finally on July 20, 1653 after the holy mass."

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The delayed departure and various damages affected the spirit of the passengers. Furthermore a serious epidemic on board took the lives of eight persons.



Ship transformed into an hospital.

The departure

The arrival of the ship, transporting ill passengers and 40 days late, creates concerns. “We arrived on St. Maurice Day (September 22), writes the nun Bourgeoys, but we did not take notice of a spine that pierced the ship in front of Québec City. The powerful tide could not lift it up and that we had to burn it right on the spot”

Jeanne Mance, founder of the first hospital of Ville-Marie (Hôtel-Dieu Hospital), is overwhelmed with joy and greets the settlers recruited, with numerous inhabitants of the small town of Québec. Please note that Jeanne Mance becomes the godmother of Marie Archambault’s child a few years later. Marie, the daughter of Jacques Archambault, is only twelve years old when she is married to Gilles Lauzon, on November 27, 1656.



On September 22, 1653 de Maisonneuve lauded at Québec with around 110 recruit, craft men and inhabitants, all of them capable of handling arms.

On February 3, 1654, Jean Gervaise is wedded to Anne Archambault, who is 23 years old, another daughter of our ancestor, Gervaise earned the respect of the whole community of Ville-Marie. Anne Archambault, traumatised by her first marriage to the bigamous Michel Chauvin with whom she had a son Paul born and died in 1650 and a daughter Charlotte, finds peace and affection with Jean Gervaise. She is supported by Monsieur de Maisonneuve himself and by Marguerite Bourgeoys who offer to be the godfather and godmother of the child. Jean Gervaise chooses Anne Archambault only five month after his arrival even though the pretty misses were numerous among the fifteen girls to be married on board of the Saint-Nicolas. Gervaise is one of the first men of the great recruitment to marry.

In the preface of Roland J. Auger’s book entitled *La Grande Recrue de 1653* (The Great Recruitment of 1653), Father Joseph Papin Archambault writes: “Our ancestors lived righteous lives and deserve our respect. Do these brave men have not saved Montréal and therefore all of Canada? They knew that they were headed for a life of risky adventures. Proof of that, a lot of their companions gave up and abandoned them at the rime of the departure. The hundred men that stayed braced themselves up in a heroic resolution, led by the burning dynamism of Monsieur de Maisonneuve and the sweet conviction of Marguerite Bourgeoys. (...) More than ever, our youth needs those great role models as it knows about the founders of Ville-Marie and is bound to live an existence with a readiness to fight.”

