

Some Thoughts about Adult Confirmations and Conversions

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In September of 2006, the Rootsweb Quebec-Research e-mail list included a question about the many adults listed in various genealogical sources as receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation in New France. The assumption was that they must all have been converts to the Faith, if they were Confirmed after the traditional age for receiving the sacrament. This led to asking about the sincerity of what one questioner called "dockside" conversions by those who traveled to New France as protestants but became Roman Catholics, and whether some of the *Filles du Roi* might have been protestant. I share my reply here, updated with some examples.

I cannot presume to judge the conscience of converts to any faith. It is true that New France required those who decided to remain as *habitants*, inhabitants, to be or become Catholics. That does not mean there were not any non-Catholics present in the colony, mainly as merchants or temporary visitors, such as soldiers (even some officers) or mariners. Some of them, including several of my ancestors, converted, some then also being Confirmed when they were adults. This, however, does not mean that all adults in the Confirmation lists were converted protestants.

When the Carignan soldiers arrived in 1665, some Roman Catholics in the regiment had not been Confirmed in the Catholic faith in France because France itself was lax in providing the sacrament.¹ Since the soldiers were in danger of death as they went to war against the Iroquois, there were sermons and instruction given to them, followed by the administration of the sacrament by Bishop François de Laval, who had originally arrived in the colony only in 1659.² Only a bishop can administer the sacrament, without special dispensation, so there had been no Confirmations prior to the bishop's arrival. Bishop Laval even administered Confirmation en route, while he was in the Gaspé region, and he then, in 1660, began his many voyages up and down the St. Lawrence River to the settlements of New France to Confirm those who had not yet received the sacrament and the younger children who had prepared to receive it.

The lists of Confirmations on **PRDH** for the year 1665 include the names of many of the Carignan Regiment soldiers and officers and also other adults who were Confirmed that year.³ Some of these Carignan soldiers, however, did convert after they arrived and were then also Confirmed. One such soldier was Jean Renouard, age 20, who arrived on *l'Aigle-d'Or*, *soldat de Lafredièrre*, and abjured Calvinism at the hospital of Québec, 26 August 1665. Originally from

¹ Jack Verney, *The Good Regiment*, The Carignan-Salières Regiment in Canada 1665-68, Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991, p. 24, citing Order to the Sieur de La Fredière, 27 August 1667, Collection Moreau Saint-Méry, vol. 3, pt. 2. See Michel Langlois's account of the regiment, including his excellent fictional "journal" of some of the regiment's activities. Michel Langlois, *Carignan-Salière*, 1665-68, Drummondville: La Maison des Ancêtres, 2004, p. 461. This book reconstitutes the regiment, according to surviving records examined by Langlois. It is 517 pages, complete with documentation. Langlois is the first to say his work is (as is everyone's) sometimes tentative, given extant sources. Documents he explores include the lists of the Confraternity of the Holy Scapular (*Registre de la Confrérie de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel dite du Saint Scapulaire*) and Confirmation records, as well as notarial records and other little-used sources. He uses the spelling *Salière* because this is how Henri Chastellard de Salière signed his name.

² See the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* on-line.

³ The Confirmation lists are also being published in *Michigan's Habitant Heritage*, the journal of the French-Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan, in recent years, with additional information about individuals.

Janserre, he was Confirmed on 31 August.⁴ The registers for Hôtel-Dieu, one of the hospitals in Québec City, is another source for records of conversions.

You will also find non-soldier Catholic adults on the lists of Confirmations, for the same reason that they had not been Confirmed in France before they emigrated. Some of the lists of Confirmations give ages of those Confirmed. I scanned the copies of the lists of Confirmations I have for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵ The younger people, most of them born in the colony, were 10 to 15, and other children born in the colony were in the 7 to 10 range. I saw no age younger than 7. But there was another reason for older individuals, known to be baptized Catholics, to be Confirmed after the age of 15.

The second bishop of Québec, Jean-Baptiste La Croix de Saint-Vallier, was absent from the colony for thirteen years, from 1700 to 1713. He tried to return in 1704, but the ship he was on was pirated by the English, and he and sixteen ecclesiastics traveling with him were taken as prisoners. Four of the years between 1704 and 1713 he spent in England.⁶ There were, therefore, no Confirmations for those years he was gone except for some administered by the elderly former bishop, Laval, in 1700 in Québec City, although he was then retired from the office. Bishop Laval died in 1708, five years before Bishop La Croix de Saint-Vallier returned.

So, whatever the official schedule or recommendation for the age at which Confirmation should be conferred, there still has to be someone present to officiate. No bishop available, no Confirmations, regardless of the age an individual might have attained when Confirmation was eventually performed.

As for the sincerity of conversions to the Catholic Church, while I am sure the religious of New France were eager for converts, I have read enough entries of abjurations and baptisms of young people and adults, of all origins, including Native Americans, that say the individual was "sufficiently instructed" or had been a "catechumen" (a student of the religion) to believe that conversions were not accepted merely on a whim. I am also aware of at least one protestant who converted and who was thereafter deported for allegedly not following the religion. John Lydius, the son of a Dutch Reform minister in Albany, abjured Protestantism before marrying Geneviève Massé at Montréal on 13 February 1727.⁷ The abjuration appears just before the marriage record in the registers of Nôtre-Dame de Montréal (although some sources say it is lost!). He was deported to France in 1730 under the accusation that he was not practicing his new religion, but there were also political questions involved.⁸

⁴ Langlois, p. 452.

⁵ See Family History Library microfilm #1311432 for a master list of Confirmations and also for abjurations.

⁶ See the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* on-line.

⁷ Registers of Nôtre-Dame de Montréal, FHL #0375842, photocopy.

⁸ It is more likely that he was a political liability because of his involvement with the domiciled Iroquois and his trading with New York. I have read the letters written by two priests supporting this accusation. They say they have not seen Lydius attend religious services. His children, however, were baptized as Catholics. See also *Lettre de Beauharnois et Hocquart au ministre concernant l'affaire de John Hendricks Lydius, originaire d'Orange, établi à Montréal, convaincu d'avoir entretenu un commerce illégal avec les colonies britanniques [convicted of having illegal commerce with the colonies of Great Britain, not of failing to follow the Catholic religion] - jugement du Conseil supérieur qui l'a banni à perpétuité de cette colonie; l'envoient en France car il serait dangereux de le retourner dans son pays; accusations portées contre lui par les missionnaires du Sault-Saint-Louis et du lac des Deux-Montagnes; projet des Indiens de ces deux villages de demander son élargissement; calomnies de Lydius contre le jésuite Pierre de Lauzon.*

A final comment: The many *Filles du Roi* who married in New France, as well as the former political prisoners taken in the colonies of the future United States, had to be Catholic in order to be married in the Church and to remain as inhabitants. I am aware of baptisms of former prisoners who renounced the protestant faith but not of *Filles du Roi*, because these women were sent specifically to become brides. Therefore, they had to be Catholic to participate in the program sponsored by the king. It has been shown that a great deal of care was given in selecting these women.⁹ Yves Landry indicates that only twelve *Filles du Roi* were known to have been protestant.¹⁰ That's about two percent of the total number —770— he identified. Only two of these twelve abjured their protestant faith in the New World: Catherine Basset, 16 Oct 1667, married 17 October 1667; and Marthe Quitel, abjured 17 July 1665, married 22 September 1665. The other ten are recorded as having been baptized protestant, most of these baptized at the protestant temple in La Rochelle: Marguerite Ardion; Catherine Barré; Madeleine Delaunay; Elisabeth Doucinet; Anne Javelot; Marie Léonard; Anne Lépine; Barb Ménard; Marie Targer; Marie Valade. Where these ten women accepted Catholicism is unknown, but it may have happened in France.

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Summary on Library and Archives of Canada, *ArchiviaNet* for entry NAC F-52, ff. 21-26. I have a photocopy of the full document.

⁹ Yves Landry, *Orphelines en France, pionnières au Canada: Les Filles du roi au XVII^e siècle*, Montreal: Leméac, 1992. In 2001, *King's Daughters and Founding Mothers: The Filles du Roi, 1663 -1673*, in two volumes, by Peter J. Gagné, was published by Quinton Publications.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58. Information about the women is found in the individual biographies.