

Cultural *Métissage* – Games
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Lacrosse

Pierre Charles de Liette was Henri and Alphonse Tonty's nephew. He spent most of his adult life among the Illinois and Miami. In 1721, when he was briefly in Montréal, he wrote a memo which is known as a the *De Gannes Memoir*. He accompanied the Illinois on a buffalo hunt in 1688; in his memoir, he described how different Illinois villages played **lacrosse** against each other:¹

I have forgotten to say that before they set out for the chase, the men play at Lacrosse, a few women mingling with them. They make the [racket] of a stick of walnut, about three feet long, which they bend half way, making the end come within a foot of the other end which serves them for a handle. To keep it in this shape they fasten a buffalo sinew to the curved end, which, as I have already said, they fasten about a foot from the end of which serves as a handle. They lace the interior with more buffalo sinew so that the ball, which is a knot of wood of the size of a tennis ball, cannot pass through. . . .

They place in the middle of the prairie, on whose edge their village stands, two forks about ten paces apart. An old man, who is neutral, rises and utters a cry which signifies: It is time. Everybody rises and utters cries similar to those they utter when they attack the enemy. The old man throws the ball into the air and pell-mell they all try to catch it. They strike their legs in such a manner that they are crippled sometimes, especially when someone manages to get the ball in hand so as to send it very far so that it has a reasonable distance for getting an impetus and then strikes a player's legs in front. This makes them fall in such a manner that it might be supposed that they would never get up again. I have seen men in this state who were thought to be dead. The players pass over them without paying any head; only the women, their relatives come and carry over them off in a deerskin. It is at times as much as two months before they can make use of their legs, and often they break them.

Antoine Denis Raudot was co-Intendant of New France, serving with Jacques Raudot, his father. While he was in New France, he wrote a series of letters about the Native Americans. According to his biography in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, his letters were probably based on memoirs of Louis Laporte, *sieur* de Louvigny, and Charles de Liette. Raudot would have also gained information from missionaries, military officers, and others who travelled to the Great Lakes. There is no evidence that he ever visited the Great Lakes.

Following is his 1709 description of the game of **lacrosse**:²

In regard to the game of lacrosse, it is played village against village, or family against family in a prairie where they establish limits. Their sticks have handles three and a half feet long, and there is a sort of laced racquet at the end; with this they hurl the ball, which is returned by their adversaries. This game is very dangerous and may cause injuries.

Jacques Charles de Sabrevois, *commandant* at Détroit from 1715 – 1717, wrote a memoir about the Native Americans from the Great Lakes. He wrote the following about the **Potawatomi**:³

¹ Theodore Calvin Pease and Raymond C. Werner (editors), *Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, The French Foundations 1680-1693 (Volume 23 of the series)* (Springfield, Illinois: Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library, 1934), pp. 341-343.

² W. Vernon Kinitz, *The Indians of the Western Great Lakes 1615-1760* (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1972), translation of Letter 28, pp. 348-349.

In summer they Play a great deal at la cross, twenty or more on each side. Their bat [*crose*] is a sort of small racket, and The ball with which they Play is of very Heavy wood, a little larger than the balls we use in Tennis. When they Play they Are entirely naked; they have only a breech-clout and Shoes of deerskin. Their bodies are painted all over with all Kinds of colors. There are some who paint their bodies with white clay, applying it to resemble silver lace sewn on all the seams of a coat; and, at a distance, one would take it for silver lace.

They play for large Sums, and often The prize Amounts to more than 800 *livres*. They set up two goals, and begin Their game midway between; one party drives The ball one way, and the other in the opposite direction, and those who can drive It to the goal are the winners. All this is very riveting and interesting to behold. Often one Village plays against another, the **poux** [**Potawatomi**] against the outaouacs [**Ottawa**] or the **hurons**, for very considerable prizes. **The French frequently take part in these games.**



George Catlin, *Ball Players*, courtesy of the Smithsonian:
<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=3891>

Annotated list of French-Canadian men and young men who were present in Détroit during this time period. The following lists are based on the parish registers for Fort Pontchartrain and the *engagements*.

³ Jacques Charles de Sabrevois, “Memoir on the Savages of Canada as far as the Mississippi River, Describing their Customs and Trade” in *Wisconsin Historical Collections* (Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Historical Collections, 1902), Vol. XVI, pp. 366-367.

Dates in Detroit, birth date, age in 1715; a star next to a name indicates a man or young man between the ages of 15 and 40

*Raymond Babie, godfather on 3 October 1716, 16 October 1716; baptized 25 December 1688, age 27 in 1715.

*Joseph Bénard, of Boucherville, godfather on 18 November 1715; probably the one born 19 November 1698; age 15 in 1715

Rene Bénard, godfather on 2 January 1716; baptized 23 September 1670; age 45

François Bienvenu *dit* Delisle, daughter baptized 27 March 1716; born circa 1668; about 47

Jean Baptiste Bissot de Vincennes, godfather on 9 July 1717; born 19 January 1668; age 47

Guillaume Boucher, married Angélique Ptolomé 16 August 1716; born 19 January 1665; age 50 in 1715

*Jean Louis Bourgeroy, married Anne Alimacoua, a Native American, 6 August 1717 in Détroit; born 9 December 1685; age 30

Étienne de Bragelone, officer, godfather on 4 January 1718; born circa 1674; about 41

*Jacques Campeau, he may have returned to Détroit in 1716 following the 25 August 1715 death of his wife Jeanne Cécile Catin in childbirth (Claude); baptized 31 May 1677; age 38

Jean Louis Campeau : born 25 August 1702; age 13 in 1715

*Jacques Cardinal, *fils*, godfather on 12 January 1716; baptized 23 July 1785; age 30

Jacques Casse *dit* St Aubin, son baptized on 23 June 1715, daughter baptized on 6 October 1716; born circa 1666; age 49

Jean Content, godfather on 25 April 1716; born 14 April 1671; age 44

Jacques Desmoulins *dit* Philis, son baptized on 23 June 1715, daughter baptized on 4 June 1716, daughter baptized on 4 January 1718; his birth date is not known.

Sieur Dumont, godfather 16 January 1718; he has not been identified

*Simon Dupuis, officer, godfather on 26 July 1715; born 31 March 1677; age 38

*Pierre Estève *dit* Lajeunesse, son baptized on 3 September 1715, son baptized on 29 August 1716; he was born circa 1678; age about 37

François Fafard, godfather on 6 January 1716; born circa 1660; age 55

*Jean Baptiste Fafard *dit* Macouce, daughter baptized 23 June 1715; born in the 1690s; no more than 25

*Jean Baptiste Forestier, surgeon, godfather on 26 November 1715, godfather on 29 August 1716; baptized 16 November 1688; age 27

Ignace Gamelin, godfather on 10 July 1716; he returned to Montréal later that summer or fall. The following April, he acted as a manager for Jacques Charles de Sabrevois hiring men to travel to Détroit; he was born circa 1664; he was about 51

Louis Gatineau (*sieur* Gatineau), godfather on 23 June 1715; born 14 June 1674; age 41

*Pierre Godefroy *dit* or *sieur* Roquetaillade, godfather on 3 September 1715; he was born 20 August 1683; age 32

*François Goguet, godfather on 27 March 1716; he was born circa 1684; about 37

*Jacques Hubert *dit* Lacroix, adopted a Fox/Mesquakie who was baptized on 26 November 1715, daughter baptized on 9 July 1717; baptized 12 May 1684; age 31

*Jacques Langlois, wife Marie Renée Toupin *dite* Dussault was a godmother 23 June 1715; born circa 1676; age 39

Joseph Lefebvre, son baptized 16 January 1718; hired as an *engagé* on 21 May 1717; he has not been identified with certainty

Jean Baptiste Legardeur *dit* Repentigny, godfather on 20 January 1716; born 26 February 1668; age 47

*Antoine Magnan *dit* Lespérance, natural daughter was baptized on 23 June 1715; born 12 September 1682; age 33

*Pierre Mallet, godfather on 4 June 1716, godfather on 29 July 1717; baptized 16 February 1676; age 39

*Jacob de Marsac, wife Marie Thérèse David was a godmother 4 June 1716; born 19 May 1675; age 40

Michel Masse, step-daughter Marie Anne Fafard *dite* Macouce was a godmother 23 June 1715, 12 January 1716, wife Marguerite Couc was a godmother on 6 January 1716; he was born circa 1671; age 44

*Nicolas Millet, his wife Marie Louise Cardinal was a godmother on 9 July 1715, 9 July 1717; baptized 26 March 1689; age 26

*Jacques Neveu, daughter Catherine was a godmother 10 July 1716, 16 October 1716; wife Michelle Chauvin was a godmother 1 September 1716, 2 September 1716; he was an *engageur* on 2 May 1716; born 6 March 1663; age 32

*Jean François Pelletier, his stepfather (Pierre Mallet) and mother were in Détroit during this time period; he was baptized 15 August 1691; age 24

François Picard, godfather on 6 October 1716; he was born 3 August 1673; age 42

Pierre Robert, daughter Marie Louise was a godmother on 23 June 1715, 26 July 1715, 3 January 1716; he was born 19 August 1671; age 44

*Étienne Roy, godfather on 23 June 1715; baptized 8 January 1691; age 24

*Pierre Roy, natural daughter baptized on 3 June 1717; he was born 3 January 1677; age 38

***Engagés* hired to travel to Détroit between spring 1715 and spring 1717.** They are less likely to have participated in a lacrosse game because many *engagés* made the round trip in a season and did not remain for a long time in Détroit prior to returning to the St. Lawrence settlements.

Julien Bariteau, hired as an *engagé* on 2 May 1716

Albert Beaune, hired as an *engagé* on 10 May 1715

Joseph Bonin, hired as an *engagé* on 30 April 1716

Pierre Bourdon, hired as an *engagé* on 8 May 1715

Pierre Bourgerie, hired as an *engagé* on 1 May 1717

Joseph Chagnon, hired as an *engagé* on 9 September 1716

Jacques Charbonneau, hired as an *engagé* on 7 April 1716

Jacques Chénier, hired as an *engagé* on 22 April 1717

Louis Daunay, hired as an *engagé* on 21 March 1715

Pierre Daunay, hired as an *engagé* on 19 March 1715

Joachim Deniau, hired as an *engagé* on 7 April 1715, hired as an *engagé* on 20 May 1717

Pierre Desroches, hired as an *engagé* on 14 May 1715

Jean Baptiste Dubois, hired as an *engagé* on 31 March 1717

Henri Dubreuil, hired as an *engagé* on 29 August 1715

François Duclos *dit* Carignan, hired as an *engagé* on 2 June 1717

Marien Huet, hired as an *engagé* on 17 August 1715

Louis François Latrelle, hired as an *engagé* on 5 April 1717

Michel Marcot, hired as an *engagé* on 9 May 1716

Charles Ménard *dit* Bellerose, hired as an *engagé* on 4 April 1716

Paul Laporte, hired as an *engagé* on 7 April 1716

Jean Baptiste Mongeau, hired as an *engagé* on 6 May 1716

Nicolas Monplaisir, hired as an *engagé* on 29 April 1716

Louis Quintal, hired as an *engagé* on 25 August 1715

Jean Baptiste Regeas *dit* LaPrade, hired as an *engagé* on 21 August 1715

Jean Baptiste Richaume, hired as an *engagé* on 31 March 1717

Jacques Robitaille, hired as an *engagé* on 9 September 1715

Philippe Robitaille, hired as an *engagé* on 29 August 1715

Jacques Seguin, hired as an *engagé* on 26 August 1715

Louis Venne, hired as an *engagé* on 2 September 1715

Jean Baptiste Veronneau, hired as an *engagé* on 4 April 1716

Foot Races



George Catlin, 1832-1833, *Footrace behind the Mandan Village*, courtesy of the Smithsonian:
<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=4060>

Kent, p. 805, quoting French Officer **Louis Antoine de Bougainville** describing the foot races which were regularly held at Fort Pontchartrain in 1757:

At Detroit, foot races between the natives and the Canadians are as celebrated as horse races in England. They take place in the spring. Ordinarily, there are five hundred natives present [as spectators] sometimes as many as fifteen hundred. The course is a half *league* [*circa* 1 ½ English miles], going and returning from Detroit to the village of the Potawatomis; the road is well made and wide, and there are posts planted at the two extremities. The wagers are very considerable, and consist of packs of pelts laid against French merchandise such as in use among the natives. The most celebrated Canadian who had run and won against the natives is a certain Campo; his superiority is so well recognized that he is no longer admitted to the races.