

Robitailles in America

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The history of the Robitaille family and of New France has been a personal passion of mine for many years. There are many Robitailles in the United States and no doubt many have interesting stories to tell. This article is the first of a planned series of articles that will tell the stories of Robitaille family ancestors who emigrated to America. In this first article, we will learn about two early Robitaille family ancestors, **Joseph Martin** who was from the suburbs of present-day Québec City, and **Philippe**, who possibly came from Montréal. Both of these men ventured to the fuzzy boundaries of French Mississippi, and French Illinois. They explored regions in America that were new to the French, those which bordered on Spanish colonial territories. Both regions had already begun to experience English incursions.

For readers who may not know the origins of the Robitaille family, let me provide a brief background. In North America the story begins with the immigration of four Robitaille brothers who came from the North East of France in the region then known as Artois. It was a region that experienced a turbulent history with many wars over the years. Their parents, **Jean Robitaille** and **Martine Cormont**, were from St-Georges Les Hesdin, Boulogne, Artois, France.¹ Three of their sons, **Nicolas**, **Jean** and **Pierre**, arrived in New France about 1670.² In 1670, Nicolas, Jean, and Pierre obtained land in the *Seigneurie de Gaudarville*, close to the current town of L'Ancienne-Lorette, near the present-day Québec City Airport, slightly northwest of Québec City. On 23 November 1693,³ Nicolas sold his concession to his brothers Jean and Pierre.⁴ It is believed that he returned to France. The fourth brother to emigrate was Philippe. The exact date of his arrival is not known, but on 14 October 1693, Philippe signed a marriage contract with **Madeline Warren**, before notary **Bénigne Basset** in Montréal.⁵ Of the four brothers who came to New France, only Jean and Pierre are known to have had surviving descendants. Philippe and his wife Madeline had five children. Only one is known to have married and she had no children. Jean and his

¹ Pierre-Georges Roy, "Les familles Robitaille," *Bulletin des Recherches Historique*, Vol. 44, (Levis, Québec, 1938), 112.

² Pierre-Georges Roy, "Les Origines d'une Famille Joliettaine," *Bulletin des Recherches Historique*, Vol. 48, (Levis, Québec, 1942), 69-75.

³ Antoine Roy, *Inventaire des Greffes des Notaires du Régime français*, Vol. III, Archives de la Province de Québec, 1943, 236.

⁴ *Association des familles Robitaille*: <http://www.robitaille.org/Eng-Nicolas.htm> (accessed September 23, 2011).

⁵ *Association des familles Robitaille*: <http://www.robitaille.org/Eng-Philippe.htm> (accessed June 15, 2011).

wife **Marguerite Bulté / Bultez**, a *filles du Roi*⁶ had six children.⁷ Pierre and his wife, **Marie Maufay / Maufait**, had 13 children, 10 of whom were sons!⁸ The author of this article is an eighth-generation descendant of Pierre.

And so this story begins....

Before my retirement in 2010, I was frequently on business travel to various locations within the United States and abroad. As my work schedule permitted, I always tried to visit the local library to see if there had been any Robitaille ancestors in these locations. As you might expect, there were “more misses than hits” using this unstructured approach, but in the two instances we will shortly explore together, it was just this random search that opened forgotten doors to our family’s past.

In the mid 1980s, I was at a shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi, for several weeks on a field assignment. On one scarce day off, I visited Ocean Springs, and Biloxi, Mississippi, which are both a short distance west of Pascagoula. I walked around both towns, had lunch, and then visited the Biloxi Public Library. There were several hours left before it closed so I started leafing through some of the local history books and records that covered the period of French rule. There I discovered two interesting leads. The first find was a transcription of a French Department of Marine letter dated 5 May 1699, in Rochefort, France. The letter included a list of names of two French Officers and 58 Canadians who had crossed the Atlantic from Plaisance (present-day Placentia, Newfoundland) to France during the year, to ultimately serve aboard vessels bound for Mississippi later in 1699.⁹

The document provided their names. Among the Canadians listed was **Joseph Robitaille**. There are other Canadians listed with surnames that appear on *La Carte du Sieur De Catalogne*:¹⁰ **Hamel, La Pointe, La Rose, and Le Vasseur**.

A later document, dated 25 August 1699, provided a second list of individuals scheduled to leave Rochefort, France, on the royal frigate *Le Renommée* to join the first group of soldiers who reached Louisiana earlier the same year. This list contained Joseph Robitaille’s name and stated that the officers received fifty *livres* per month while the Canadians received thirty, and that their pay commenced in September of that year.¹¹ While the pay was not extraordinary, it was significant for that time. Having found these interesting tidbits of information, I had no choice but to find out more about the voyage and the project.

The notable French Canadian, **Pierre LeMoynes, Sieur d’Iberville**, who had gained acclaim in the 1686 expedition against the British in Hudson Bay and Newfoundland, and even further acclaim as a Naval Commander in King William’s War of 1688, was selected to lead a royal project to establish a permanent colony in the *sud de l’Amérique Septentrional*. His commission would result in at least three voyages. The project was a follow up to previous Mississippi River valley explorations by René Robert Cavelier, *Sieur de LaSalle* in the 1680s.¹²

⁶ Silvio Dumas, *Les Filles du Roi en Nouvelle-France* (Québec: La Société Historique de Québec, 1972), 197; Marguerite’s name has been standardized per René Jetté, *Dictionnaire généalogique des familles du Québec des origines à 1730* (Montréal: Les Presses de l’Université de Montréal: 1983), 999.

⁷ *Association des familles Robitaille*: <http://www.robitaille.org/Eng-Jean.htm> (accessed May 16, 2011); Jetté, 999.

⁸ *Association des familles Robitaille*: <http://www.robitaille.org/Eng-Pierre.htm> (accessed May 16, 2011).

⁹ Report Concerning the Canadian Archives, 5-6, Edward VII, A 1905, *Seasonal Papers No 18, Orders of the King & Dispatches*, 536.

¹⁰ *Éditeur officiel du Québec, la carte du Sieur De Catalogne*, 1976, Part 2, Est de la rivière du Cas (Cap) Rouge.

¹¹ Winston DeVille, “The First Louisianans 1699,” *Louisiana Genealogical Register*, Vol. 17, Number 4, (December 1970), 314-321.

¹² *Pierre LeMoynes d’Iberville*, www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Le_Moyne_d'Iberville (accessed July 20, 2011).

On his first voyage, LeMoyne explored the coasts of present-day Florida, Mississippi and Louisiana. He had been instructed to locate the mouth of the Mississippi River and establish a fort and temporary colony to protect the French territorial claims to that region from likely Spanish and English incursions. Following months of exploration, he decided to construct the initial fort on the Eastern shore of Biloxi Bay, near present-day Ocean Springs, Mississippi.¹³

Construction of the square, four-bastioned log fort commenced on 8 April 1699 and was completed three weeks and two days later. There was a chapel, officers' quarters, lodging for the settlers, a bakery, well, powder magazine, and a dozen cannons. It was named Fort Maurepas, in honor of the French Minister of the Navy, **Jérôme Phélypeaux de Maurepas**, *Comte de Pontchartrain*. Fort Maurepas became the first permanent French Colony in the Lower Louisiana Territory.¹⁴ See Figure 1.

In May, following completion of the fort, Pierre LeMoyne returned to France to report his progress to the *Comte de Pontchartrain* and obtain additional supplies for the colony. He left his trusted subordinate, **Sauvolle**, in charge and his brother, **Jean Baptiste**, as Sauvolle's deputy. It was 8 January 1700 before he returned.¹⁵



Figure 1. Fort Maurepas Replica

Photo was taken in February 1995 by Ray L. Bellande

Note: Unfortunately this replica was destroyed in August 2005 by Hurricane Katrina and was not rebuilt.¹⁶

The colonists, who remained behind in LeMoyne's absence, had a very rough year and had many deaths due to disease and lack of supplies. LeMoyne returned with supplies and orders from France to establish a more robust permanent colony. A decision was made to move the settlement to Mobile Bay, in present-day Alabama, which had been determined to be a more favorable location. A number of the Canadians, who seemed to do better at wilderness living and some of whom had made familial relationships with local Indians, chose to stay at Biloxi Bay rather than relocate.

A census taken in December 1699 of those at Fort Maurepas did not list Joseph Robitaille.¹⁷ However, on 25 May of 1700 another census was taken of officers, petty officers, sailors, Canadians, freebooters and

¹³ *Découvertes et établissements des Français dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amérique Septentrionale* (1614-1754) Mémoires et Documents Originaux, recueillis et publiés par Pierre Margry. [http://rs6.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?intldl/ascfr:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(gcf0022_0221\)](http://rs6.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?intldl/ascfr:@field(DOCID+@lit(gcf0022_0221)): (accessed April 21, 2011).

¹⁴ René Chartrand, *The Forts of New France: The Great Lakes, the Plains and the Gulf Coast 1600-1763*, (Long Island City, New York: Osprey Press, 2010), 51-53.

¹⁵ [http://rs6.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?intldl/ascfr:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(gcf0022_0221\)](http://rs6.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?intldl/ascfr:@field(DOCID+@lit(gcf0022_0221)):

¹⁶ Ocean Springs Archives by Ray L. Belland. <http://oceanspringsarchives.net/book/export/html/203> and Charles E. Schmidt, *Ocean Springs – French Beachhead*, 1972.

others located at Biloxi.¹⁸ Under the category of Canadians, Joseph Robitaille was listed. He had clearly survived the journey to Rochefort, France, and the journey to Biloxi. It seems reasonable to assume that he arrived in Biloxi in January of 1700 aboard the ships of Pierre LeMoyne's second voyage. I checked further and could not find any mention of Joseph Robitaille in the subsequent Louisiana census reports of 1726 and 1732,¹⁹ or in similar records for the settlement in Mobile, Alabama, in 1706. He was not reported as having died or returning to France. So who was Joseph Robitaille and what became of him?

The second lead I discovered in Biloxi came from the same document as the first;²⁰ under the title "Santa Fe." The entry is a partial transcription, in English, of a certificate given to seven Frenchmen by **General Jean Paez Hurtado**, Major and Captain of War of the City of Santa Fe in New Spain (present-day Santa Fe, New Mexico) which reads as follows:

On the 24th day of July 1739, there arrived at the capital city of Santa Fe, 8 Frenchmen named **Pierre** and **Paul Mallet**, brothers, **Louis Robitaille**, **Louis Morin**, **Michel Destot**, **Joseph Bellecour**, and **Manuel Gatien**, creoles from Canada, and **Jean David**, a native of France. Having received them in his palace, he asked them whence they came. Paul Mallet answered that they came from New France and that they had come with the intention of entering into a trade connection with the Spaniards. While awaiting an answer from the Viceroy of Mexico, which took nine months to arrive, Hurtado lodged them and admitted them to his own table and they had conducted themselves like proper Christians.

Author's Note: Several names in the preceding paragraph were incorrectly recorded by the Spanish. They are as follows: Louis Robitaille was **Philippe Robitaille**; Louis Morin was **Louis Moreau**; Michel Destot was **Michel Belleau dit LaRose**; and Manuel Gallien was **Noël Gallien**.²¹

General Hurtado, prior to allowing the party to depart Santa Fe, advised them to bring back certificates and passports from their Governor, because without these, any goods or possessions they carried on their return would be exposed to confiscation as they would be regarded as contraband.

The Mallet brothers and their colleagues had just made history – they were the first white men recorded to have successfully travelled from French Illinois to Santa Fe in New Spain. The significance of this discovery of a route can only be underscored in the context of 18th century politics and the often diametrically opposed ambitions of the colonial governments.

By the early 1700s, lured by tales of silver bullion in New Mexico and lucrative fur trade, French explorers and voyageurs had already begun to trade with a number of Indian tribes in present-day Arkansas, Illinois, Missouri, and Oklahoma. The Spanish Colonial authorities in present-day Texas and New Mexico eyed these intrusions as violations of their territorial boundaries. On the other hand, the French Colonial Government in the Louisiana Territory was motivated to make Louisiana a profitable enterprise and wanted to establish open trade with their Spanish neighbors. Rumors even abounded that

¹⁷ Charles R. Maduell, Jr., *The Census Tables for the French Colony of Louisiana from 1699 – 1731* (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company Inc. 1972), A99.

¹⁸ Maduell, Table A-00.

¹⁹ Maduell, Tables A-26, A-32 and A-06.

²⁰ Report Concerning the Canadian Archives, 5-6, Edward VII, A 1905, *Seasonal Papers No 18, Orders of the King & Dispatches*, 462.

²¹ Ann Dubuisson, *Dupré, Terrebonne, Fontenot, Garland, Stagg and Dubuisson, Including both the Life of Governor Jacques Dupré and the Santa Fe Expeditions of Pierre Mallet* (Knoxville, Tennessee: Tennessee Valley Publishing, 2009), 102-106 and 471-486.

the Platte River provided a pathway to the Pacific which could offer Louisiana trade opportunities with the Orient.²²

The two countries were pursuing different development models. The French promoted exploration and settlement, and the presence of settlements was then used to substantiate ownership. Spain made territorial claims, but at least in the Southwest, did not follow these claims with aggressive settlement of their territory. The Spanish Viceroy had blocked the establishment of direct trade with the French; however, at the local level, as the Frenchmen learned in Santa Fe, the Spanish settlers desired trade opportunities with the French.

In 1717, the speculative French Company of the West (or Mississippi) granted land concessions to settlers. One in particular was given to **Jean Baptiste Bénard de La Harpe**, who received a grant of four square leagues northwest of present-day Texarkana, Texas. He was given the charge to promulgate alliances with the various Indian Tribes near his concession. In 1724 **Étienne Veniard, Sieur de Bourgmond**, journeyed to present-day Kansas to meet with Paduca or Apache Indians. A great council was held with a number of tribes to promote friendship and trade with the French. The combined effect of these activities, and the unsanctioned trade between individual French trappers and traders and Indian tribes in the west, made it less dangerous and more enticing to the French to explore deeper into New Spain.²³

In 1696-1700, the trading posts established by LaSalle and the Indian missions south and south west of Lake Michigan became points of attraction for emigrants and adventurers from New France. The descriptions of this region by LaSalle and others who had been there featured a warm climate, fertile ground and an abundance of game. Settlers from New France and the Louisiana Territory began to arrive and established villages such as Cahokia, Chartres, Kaskaskia, Ste Genevieve, St Philippe, Prairie Du Rocher and Vincennes, in what became known as "*des Pays des Illinois*".²⁴ See Figure 2. By 1743, there were 2,000 to 3,000 whites in the Illinois settlements of Kaskaskia, St. Philippe, Cahokia and Prairie Du Rocher.²⁵

Against this background of somewhat improved relations with Native Americans, Pierre and Paul Mallet and their team set out in 1739 on their unsanctioned and privately funded expedition to Santa Fe. They departed either from Kaskaskia, where the Mallets lived, or from Fort De Chartres, see Figure 3, a French military and administrative post. It is located in present-day Southern Illinois, south-east of Saint Louis on the Eastern bank of the Mississippi River. Chartres was the French town that developed nearby the fort.

As they ascended the Missouri River, they learned from local Indians that they had gone too far north. Retracing their route, they crossed by land to the Platte River, took it to the south fork, and from there travelled by land southward, guided by an Indian slave. Eventually they reached the Spanish pueblo of Picuries (not far from present-day Taos, New Mexico) and finally arrived at Santa Fe on 22 July. As was previously said, the party was detained by the local government officials for nine months awaiting the outcome of a request to the Spanish Viceroy to conduct trade. The answer was "no" and they were ordered to leave.²⁶

²² Jerome C. Smiley, ed., *History of Denver with Outlines of Earlier History of the Rocky Mountain Country* (Denver: Old America Publishing Company, 1901), Chapter X.

²³ Smiley, Chapter X.

²⁴ Floyd C. Shoemaker, ed., "The French in the Valley, Part 1," *Missouri Historical Review*, XL (October 1945).

²⁵ Evarts B. Greene and Virginia Harrington, *Americans in Illinois Prior to 1790 Census*, Illinois Genealogy Trails History Group, www.genealogytrails.com/Ill/pre1790.html (accessed Jun. 11, 2011).

²⁶ Dubuisson, 102-106 and 471-486.

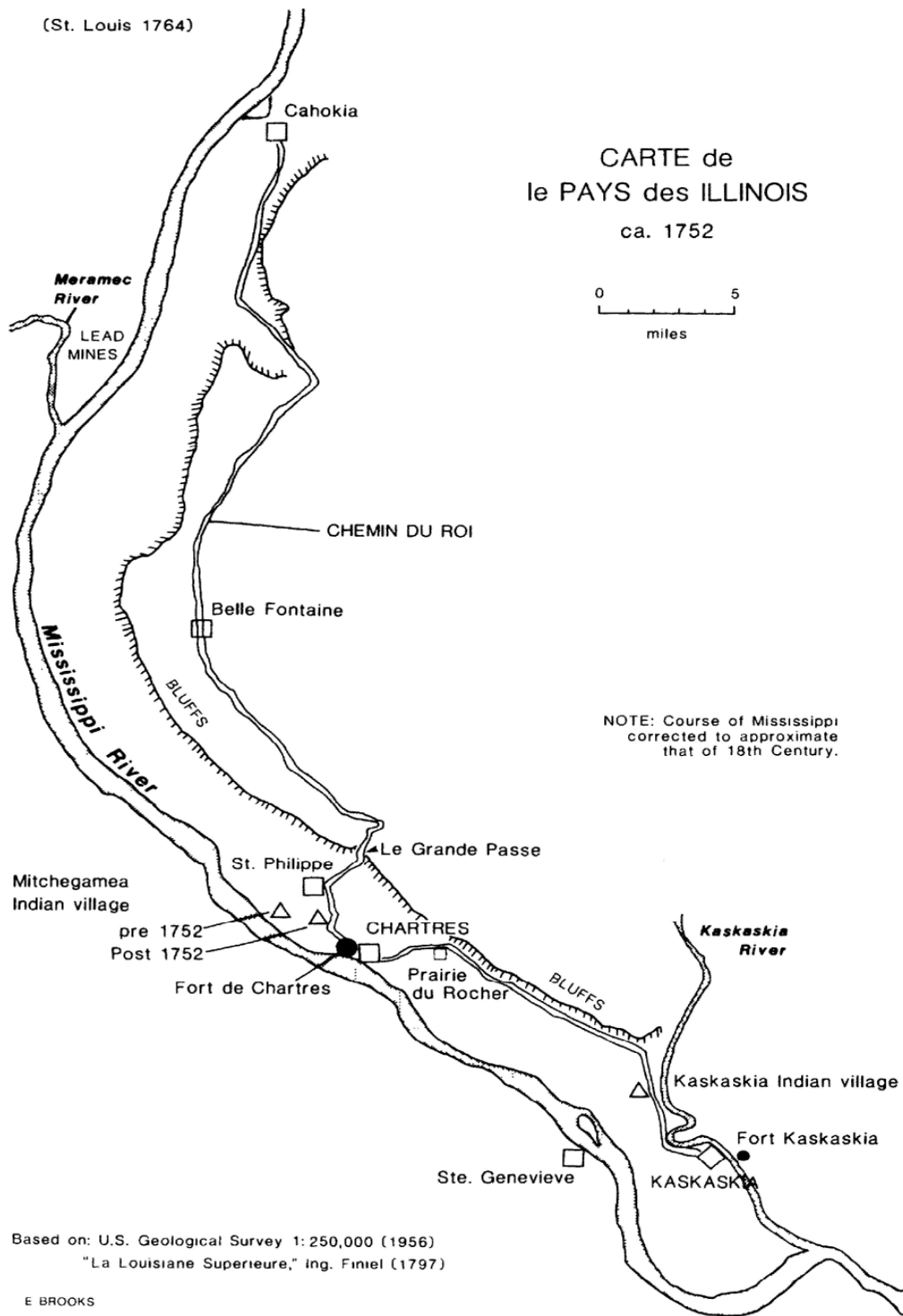


Figure 2. Map of *le Pays des Illinois*
Winstanley Briggs, *William & Mary Quarterly* 3rd Series 47:1 (January 1990), 30-56.



Figure 3. Photograph of Fort De Chartres

Photograph taken from Fort De Chartres website. It was reconstructed, largely in stone, per original French plans as it looked in its 1752-1760 configuration. There were three successive versions of the fort. It was a wooden structure when the expedition set out for Santa Fe in 1739.²⁷

On 1 May 1740, seven of the party departed Santa Fe travelling eastward to present-day Pecos, New Mexico. One or two chose to stay in Santa Fe, having married Spanish women during their detainment. On the 13th of May, three members of the group set out on their own to the Northeast. Four of the original party, including Pierre and Paul Mallet, Philippe Robitaille and Michel Belleau *dit* LaRose went on to New Orleans.

The Mallets and their two Canadian colleagues, Belleau *dit* LaRose and Robitaille, had an audience with the Governor of Louisiana, **Jean Baptiste LeMoyne, Sieur de Bienville**, who was the younger brother of Pierre LeMoyne who led the 1699 project to establish a settlement in the Mississippi country. He was surprised by their report, since the Mallets had not requested official permission for their journey, but at the same time he could also see the potential advantage of their achievement. It offered the potential of foreign trade with the Orient, with the Indian tribes along the route they followed, and potentially even with New Spain. Bienville and his Colonial *Ordonnateur* of the Province, **Edmé Gatien de Salmon**, sent a letter to Paris to inform them of the discovery.²⁸

So who were these Robitaille family relatives who went to Biloxi and Santa Fe?

First, let us return to Biloxi and discuss Joseph Robitaille. According to the *Programme de recherche en démographie historique* (PRDH, Research Program in Historical Demography),²⁹ there were only two Joseph Robitailles in New France at the time of the expedition. The first was Joseph, the son of Pierre Robitaille and Marie Maufay / Maufait of L' Ancienne-Lorette. He was born 25 October 1693,³⁰ and, thus, would have only been seven years old in 1700. He was probably too young to have gone on such a strenuous mission. The second was **Joseph Martin**, the son of Jean Robitaille and Marguerite Bulté / Bultez of L' Ancienne-Lorette. Joseph Martin was born 2 August 1676,³¹ making him 24 in 1700. This seems a more likely age for a member of the expedition. As I said previously, he does not appear in any census records for the French settlements in Mississippi, Alabama or Louisiana; he does not appear in the

²⁷ *Fort de Chartres History*, www.ftdechartres.com/page/page/1396754.htm (accessed June 10, 2011). See also pages 37-45.

²⁸ Dubuisson, 102-106 and 471-486.

²⁹ *Programme de recherche en démographie historique de l'Université de Montréal* Online: <http://www.genealogie.umontreal.ca> (PRDH) Note: Subsequent references to this source in this document are referred to as PRDH, with the record number associated with the data, and the date the record was accessed.

³⁰ PRDH, record number 78197 (accessed 21 April 2011).

³¹ PRDH, record number 78119 (accessed 21 April 2011).

1716 or subsequent 1744 census of Québec, nor are there any obvious life events recorded for him in the PRDH such as a marriage or a burial. Could he have stayed in the Louisiana Territory but chosen to live in a remote location and hence remained off the official records? Did he return to France or was the Joseph Robitaille, listed as a Canadian on the 1699 crew list at Rochefort and subsequently at the 1700 census at Fort Maurepas, from some other line of the family? It appears from the evidence currently at hand that Joseph Robitaille was likely Joseph Martin Robitaille, son of Jean Robitaille, but at least at this time, we cannot say this with certainty.

Now let us discuss Philippe Robitaille. The journals from the two expeditions provide no further information on what became of him.³² Who was Philippe? He spent nearly four years with the Mallets exploring the western margins of the Louisiana Territory and parts of New Spain and then disappeared. How did he come to know the Mallets and become part of such a bold expedition? Where did he go afterwards?

We know that Philippe Robitaille was born in 1663 in France,³³ the youngest of the three Robitaille brothers who came to and remained in New France. Unlike his brothers Pierre and Jean who arrived around 1670 and settled in Lorette, close to Québec City, Philippe arrived from France about 23 years later and settled in Montréal. He was a master cooper and worked for **Paul LeMoyne, Sieur de Maricourt**.³⁴ Philippe married Madeline Warren in Montréal on 15 October 1693.³⁵ Paul LeMoyne attended their wedding.

Paul LeMoyne, also born in 1663,³⁶ was a son of the famous **Charles LeMoyne Sieur de Longueuil**. *Sieur* de Longueuil had two daughters and twelve sons. Recall that it was Paul LeMoyne's brother Pierre LeMoyne, *Sieur* d'Iberville, who led the expedition to the Louisiana Territory in 1699 that the other Robitaille relative, Joseph Robitaille, was engaged in. Another brother of the *Sieur* de Maricourt was Jean Baptiste LeMoyne. He was also on the expedition to Louisiana and subsequently succeeded Sauvolle de la Villantry on his death as the Governor of the Louisiana Territory 1701 – 1743. As governor, he approved and sponsored the second expedition to Santa Fe.

As *Capitaine* of the Montréal detachment of *Les Compagnies Franches De La Marine*,³⁷ (the French troops that were stationed at the various forts in New France, French Illinois and the Louisiana Territory), Paul LeMoyne would have been knowledgeable about the military affairs of the colony. It is interesting to note that Paul and his wife both witnessed the baptism of Philippe Robitaille's first son, Philippe, on 5 February of 1695.³⁸ This suggests a reasonably close relationship existed between Paul LeMoyne and Philippe Robitaille. It would seem likely with Philippe being in the employ of Paul LeMoyne, he would have heard about the exploits of Paul's brothers Pierre, *Sieur* d'Iberville, and Jean Baptiste, *Sieur* de Bienville.

Philippe Robitaille and his wife Madeline Warren had five children, **Philippe, Jacques, Jean, Marguerite** and **Georges**. All of their children were born in Montréal and baptized at Notre-Dame de

³² Dubuisson, 102-106 and 471-486; 1741 Août 21 – 1742 Octobre 24 – *Extrait de la correspondance de Fabry de la Bruyère à l'occasion du voyage projeté à Santa Fé. Copie.* (Paris: Archives Nationales, Colonies) F324: 392 -406. Note: a photocopy of this document was provided by U.S. Library of Congress.

³³ Note: Philippe's *sépulture* (burial) was dated October 10, 1740 and it states he was 77 years old. His birth in 1663 was calculated from this data.

³⁴ Isaac J. Greenwood, "Otis Family of Montréal, Canada," *New England Historical & Genealogical Register*, Vol. 46, 211.

³⁵ PRDH, record number 7104 [Family] (accessed 21 April 2011).

³⁶ Donald J. Horton, "**Le Moyne de Maricourt, Paul**," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online* (accessed May 18, 2011). Editor's note: Maricourt died on 21 March 1704.

³⁷ Horton.

³⁸ PRDH, record number 41504 (accessed 21 April 2011).

Montréal. Georges died young at the age of two in 1703.³⁹ Philippe was baptized February 5, 1695⁴⁰ and died 17 December 1720⁴¹ at age 26. Jacques was baptized on 29 January 1697.⁴² Jean was baptized 10 March 1699.⁴³ Marguerite was baptized 2 April 1703.⁴⁴ On April 13th of 1722, Marguerite married **Jean Baptiste Biron** in Montréal.⁴⁵

PRDH shows only two Philippe Robitailles in all of New France between 1690 and 1750: Philippe and his son. None of Philippe's sons that survived childhood appears to have married and to date, no evidence has been found that his daughter had any children.

The most obvious connection between the Robitailles and the Mallets was the fur trade. Philippe (the son), Jacques, Jean, and Marguerite, after her marriage to Jean Baptiste Biron, were all involved in the fur trade business. There are at least 11 notarized trade documents involving Philippe's sons over the period 1715-1726.⁴⁶ One in particular, dated 29 August 1715, is a contract entered into by Philippe Robitaille, who lived in Montreal, on one part, and **François Picard** and **François Fafard dit Delorme**, both of Detroit, on the other part. It calls for Philippe Robitaille to take merchandise to Detroit and return with furs for a period of one year, commencing 29 August 1715.⁴⁷ Ten days later, Philippe's brother Jacques entered into a contract with similar terms, but with different parties.⁴⁸

In 1713, François Fafard *dit* Delorme married for a second time. At his wedding to **Barbe Loisel, Pierre Mallet** (the father of Pierre and Paul Mallet) was present.⁴⁹ By this time, both Fafard and Mallet were residents of Detroit and were business associates and possibly even friends. Since Philippe (the son) was in the service of François Fafard for one year in Detroit, which was a relatively small outpost at this time, there was ample opportunity for Philippe Robitaille, the son, and Pierre Mallet to meet. If they did, I asked myself, could this be the contact that led Philippe Robitaille, the father, to participate in the expedition to Santa Fe? Philippe (the son) had died at age 26 in 1720.

Philippe's niece provided another connection to the Santa Fe Expedition. While Philippe's sons and the Mallets were active in the fur trade, on 14 November of 1707 in L'ancienne-Lorette, **Marie Robitaille**, daughter of Philippe's elder brother Jean Robitaille, married a neighbor, **Guillaume Belleau dit La Rose**, the son of **Blaise Belleau dit LaRose**.⁵⁰ Among the witnesses to the wedding were both parents of the bride and the groom, two **Bonhommes** and **Louis Maureau** (Moreau). Together Guillaume and Marie had ten children; their second child was Michel Belleau *dit* LaRose, baptized 2 May 1709,⁵¹ who accompanied the Mallets, Philippe Robitaille and the others, including Louis Moreau, on the 1739 expedition to Santa Fe.⁵² Recall that the Mallets, Philippe Robitaille and Michel Belleau also participated, with others, in the second expedition under Fabry de la Bruyère in 1741.

³⁹ PRDH, record number 49979 (accessed 22 April 2011).

⁴⁰ PRDH, record number 41504 (accessed 22 April 2011).

⁴¹ PRDH, record number 51731 (accessed 22 April 2011).

⁴² PRDH, record number 41716 (accessed 22 April 2011).

⁴³ PRDH, record number 42023 (accessed 22 April 2011).

⁴⁴ PRDH, record number 42621 (accessed 22 April 2011).

⁴⁵ PRDH, record number 14005 [Couple] (accessed 23 April 2011).

⁴⁶ *Montréal Manuscripts: transcripts of notarial records of New France 1689-1822* (Detroit: Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, 1939-1940). Note: This work was done by Works Progress Administration (WPA). It is a multi-volume set and the records are indexed by surname.

⁴⁷ *Montréal Manuscripts*: Vol. 3, 911.

⁴⁸ *Montréal Manuscripts*: Vol. 3, 919.

⁴⁹ *Montréal Manuscripts*: Vol. 6, 1951.

⁵⁰ PRDH, record number 78826 (accessed 23 April 2011).

⁵¹ PRDH, record number 78360 (accessed 23 April 2011).

⁵² Dubuisson, 102-106 and 471-486.

Note: I have not as yet been able to verify if the Louis Maureau (Moreau) who was a witness to Guillaume's wedding was the same Louis Moreau who went on the expedition because Louis seems to be an extremely popular name in the Moreau family!

Another piece of evidence for potential collaboration between the Mallets and Robitailles was that on 4 February 1728, a permission was granted to Jean Baptiste Robitaille and Jacques Robitaille, possibly Philippe senior's sons, Jean and Jacques, together with **Jean Daudy**, **Mourant dit LaBonte**, and **Joseph Chapongas (Chapoton?)**, all listed as residents of Illinois, to travel from Montréal to the Tamaroas Indian mission (located in French Illinois near Kaskaskia) to provide supplies for the missionaries.⁵³ The Mallets, still active in the fur trade business, had already moved to Kaskaskia in 1720.⁵⁴ The 1728 notarial record mentioned above was the last trade related document in the Québec Archives involving Robitailles until 1815. The extended absence of Philippe's sons Jacques and Jean from Montréal is confirmed by another notarial document, this one dated 24 March 1750, filed by Madeline Warren, the widow of Philippe Robitaille, concerning the settling of inheritance and real-estate matters, in which she mentions the absence of her sons, (Jacques and Jean) who have been *dans les pays d'en haut*, (**Author's Note**: a term describing in generic terms, the upper country – sometimes used in a more colloquial manner to refer to “in the wilderness”) for more than twenty years.⁵⁵ A recently discovered commercial agreement dated 9 February 1725 involving Jacques Robitaille, referred to him as being from Kaskaskia, with **Pierre Bourdon** of Montréal. In the document, Jacques mentions his father Philippe and his sister, Marguerite. The document was signed by Jacques in Kaskaskia.⁵⁶ It seems certain that Philippe's sons had been in French Illinois since at least 1725.

What happened to Philippe's sons Jean and Jacques? There are no marriage or death records for either of them in the PRDH, which isn't particularly surprising if they married or died outside of *Nouvelle France*. French Illinois was initially administered by Québec, then New Orleans and finally, seems to have kept most of their records themselves. To date no marriage or death records for Jean or Jacques have been found in French Illinois either. However, I have found a record in the Kaskaskia Manuscripts (the old French legal records for the French Illinois) which states that Jean Baptiste Robitaille was a witness to a legal proceeding in Kaskaskia 13 March of 1748.⁵⁷

Author's Note: The Kaskaskia Manuscripts were documents pertaining to the French Colonial Government and notarial records of what was then called “French Illinois”. They exist on microfilm and have not been exploited as thoroughly as the notarial records of New France or Louisiana. The search continues for further information on Jean and his brother Jacques in French Illinois.

This is where the real mystery begins. According to the PRDH and church records at Notre-Dame de Montréal, Philippe (*père*) died on 3 October 1740.⁵⁸ No family members or family friends were recorded as being at the burial even though Philippe's wife, his daughter and two sons, Jean and Jacques, survived him. The only witnesses listed on his *sépulture* were Father **Doinet**, Father **Falcoz** and the Vicar, **Déat**.

Philippe (*père*) was a long time parishioner and a regular attendee at baptisms, marriages and burials of family and friends at Notre-Dame de Montréal. Vicar Déat, a Sulpician priest, served at Notre-Dame de Montréal from 1723 until his resignation in 1760. He died 23 March 1761 at 65 years of age.⁵⁹ It seems

⁵³ *PISTARD database*, Archives Nationales du Québec, Cote TL4, S34, P254, Image 06M_TL4S34P200.

⁵⁴ Dubuisson, 102-106 and 471-486.

⁵⁵ *PISTARD database*, Cote TL4, 51, D5495 (accessed 24 April 2011).

⁵⁶ Kaskaskia Commercial Papers I, 1717-1729, Family History Library microfilm #956807.

⁵⁷ Margaret Kimball Brown & Lawrie Cena Dean, *The Village of Chartres in Colonial Illinois 1720 - 1765* (Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing Division, 2010), 555-556.

⁵⁸ PRDH, record number 152203 (accessed 25 April 2011).

⁵⁹ *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*: www.biographica/EN/ooopoo4-119.01-c.php?id_nbr=1333, accessed December 2, 2012.

quire plausible that Vicar Déat and Philippe knew each other. Philippe's *sépulture*, (burial record), which appears in the parish records in proper sequence with events of others, states that Philippe's remains were buried in the cemetery near the church.

According to their journal, after returning from Santa Fe, in late 1740, the Mallets with Philippe Robitaille and Michel Belleau *dit* LaRose wintered at Arkansas Post, a small French outpost near the junction of the Arkansas, White, and Mississippi Rivers. In March of 1741, they travelled on to New Orleans with the Mallets and briefed Bienville on the results of the first expedition.⁶⁰ The second expedition, which Philippe and Michel were also recorded in the journal as having been part of lasted from August 1741 until October 1742;⁶¹ however, Philippe Robitaille is recorded as having been buried in Montréal two years earlier. Philippe's son Philippe died in 1720. Puzzlingly, Philippe Robitaille is referred to as "*le vieux Philippe*" by Fabry de la Bruyère in his journal for the second expedition. At this point, it appears that the Philippe Robitaille who went on the Mallet expedition could not have been Philippe (*père*) and brother of Jean, Pierre and Nicolas, nor could it have been his son named Philippe. We can only assume that this explorer must have come from another line of the Robitaille family. I continue to search for further evidence.

Both Joseph and Philippe Robitaille were participants in key events in the history of North America. That they were Robitailles is something the Robitaille family can be proud of, no matter what branch of the family these early explorers belonged to.

I encourage anyone reading this paper that might have new information on these two mysteries to please contact me. It has been a very interesting project researching this story. Learning who these two men truly were and what happened to them would be most satisfying for me.

Read more about it:

For those of you who may want to read further, I offer the following recommendations:

For the journals of Pierre LeMoynes, *Sieur d'Iberville's* expeditions to the Louisiana Territories and the South East coast of America, refer to the following URL: [http://rs6.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?intldl/ascfr:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(gcfr0022_0311\)\)](http://rs6.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?intldl/ascfr:@field(DOCID+@lit(gcfr0022_0311))):

Since the original text of the Mallet Expedition has never been found, the following document provides the only available insight: "*Extract of the Journal of the Expedition of the Mallet Brothers to Santa Fe, 1739-1740*"; America Journeys Collection, document number AJ-092, Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Library and Archives. It can be accessed at the following website: <http://www.americanjourneys.org/aj-092/index.asp>.

Dr. Donald J. Blakeslee has traveled the route of the 1739 expedition to Santa Fe and provides a great deal of contextual insight into the adventure of the original journey in his book *Along Ancient Trails - The Mallet Expedition of 1739* (University Press of Colorado 1995), ISBN 0-87081-410-9. Also see Irene Belleau's book, *Blaise Belleau dit Larose et ses enfants*, 3^{ème} impression, 2004, ISBN: 2-9807 974-1-3.

A further discussion of the second expedition to Santa Fe can be found in Martha Royce Blaine's article: "French Efforts to Reach Santa Fe: André Fabry de la Bruyère's Voyage up the Canadian River in 1741-1742," *Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* XX:2, (Spring 1979):111-157.

⁶⁰ Dubuisson, 102-106 and 471-486.

⁶¹ *1741 Aôut 21 – 1742 Octobre 24 – Extrait de la correspondance de Fabry de la Bruyère à l'occasion du voyage projeté à Santa Fé. Copie.* (Paris: Archives Nationales, Colonies) F324: 392-406.