

The Tragic Story of Marie Joseph Edeline, First Wife of Jean François Hamtramck

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He would have been in utter amazement, my dad. He had gone down to Chevrolet Gear and Axle in Hamtramck, Michigan, all those years never realizing the connection. Hamtramck was always for him, and for us, the place where he worked every weekday and sometimes even Saturday for the greater part of his adult life, some thirty-five years in all. It was a place my father, Armand DeLisle, had enjoyed at times. Then again, there is a drudgery about one's workplace. Every morning, the same routine: Up at five-thirty. The same slow ride down Woodward to Holbrook and the factory, the never ending noise, the yelling of the bosses, and the heat of the General Motors plant that were his every day existence.

Now, come to find out, the Hamtramck after whom the city was named was not some Polish hero, as my brothers and I and dad had always thought. **Jean François Hamtramck** was not a Pole or a Lithuanian. Instead, like our father, he was of French-Canadian origin, born in Quebec City on 16 August 1756.¹



Baptism of **Jean François Hamtramck**, Notre-Dame de Québec, 16 August 1756

Sixteen August seventeen hundred and fifty-six by us the undersigned vicar was baptized *jean françois* born the said day of the legitimate marriage of Sr. **Charles David hamtrenk** [*sic*] and of **marie anne laronde** his wife the godfather was **sr. jean Baptiste Magnan** *negotiant*, and the godmother Dame **Françoise Barolet** wife of Mr. *Bedoux* counselor
[signed] *Barolet bedoul magnan hamtrenik collet vic[ar]*

What would have been even more incredible to Armand, and is now to us, is that **Marie Joseph Edeline**, the first wife of this historical figure and decorated Revolutionary War hero, is a relative, my father's second cousin four times removed.²

In origin we are actually **Edelines**, a fact demonstrated to us through a paper trail of documents elucidated by researchers such as Bertrand Desjardins, of the *Programme de Recherche en Démographie Historique* at the University of Montréal (PRDH), and Denis P. Edeline, family genealogist and historian from California. DeLisle was a *dit* name adopted at a certain point in its history by our branch of the family.³

¹ See RootsWeb, ID# I26672, Name: Jean Francois Hamtramck, Birth: 16 August 1756, Quebec City (<http://www.genealogie.umontreal.ca/en/> PRDH record #246739 of baptism reads Jean François Hamtrenk, s/o Charles David Hamtrenk and Marie Anne Laronde). Record image from Family Search, Notre Dame de Quebec, 1752-1757, image 1277 of 1339, translation by Suzanne Sommerville. Hamtramck's mother, Marie Anne Bertin dite Laronde, was the daughter of Jacques Bertin dit Larond and Marie Catherine Beriault dite Poitevin. She remarried to Joachim Biron 1753-11-26, at Québec City (PRDH) and died at Detroit, having been called there to take care of her grandchildren. See note below.

² Verification by calculation of genealogist/historian, Denis P. Edeline, in e-mail message of 1-4-2009.

³ Verification of Edeline Ancestry per e-mail from Bertrand Desjardins of PRDH, 9-19-2008, and per e-mail from Denis P. Edeline, 9-17-2008 *inter alii*.

While not direct descendants of **Louis Antoine Edeline**, the grandfather of Marie Joseph Edeline Hamtramck, we are descended from Louis's older brother, Pierre, who appeared briefly at Detroit as a voyageur in 1704.⁴ Both brothers and Marie Joseph—and my father Armand, my brothers and their children, my sons and I—descend from the original Edeline, Charles, the first immigrant of the family, who arrived at Montréal from France in 1668.⁵ Because there seem to be no Edelins (or Edeline *dit DeLisles*) from Louis Antoine's branch living in the Detroit area who have stepped forward, I have agreed to commemorate and honor the memory of the Edelins to whom we are related, and also Jean François Hamtramck, with the present article.

How Jean François and Marie got together in the first place is a story in itself. Hamtramck biographer William L. Otten Jr. suggests it was less than a chance encounter. Marie had been recently widowed (1789) and was attempting to carry on the business of her deceased husband, **Nicholas Perrot**, who was in the fur trade. Hounded by a certain Angus Mackintosh for the payment of a debt incurred by her dead spouse, Marie went for assistance to the man with the most authority around Post Vincennes (now in modern Indiana), its commandant, Hamtramck.⁶ Whether or not he was helpful to her in the matter, we do not know. What we do know is that he soon would become so enamored of the still-young (28) widow that he quickly withdrew from his immediate superiors his request for transfer, for the stated reason that the climate had been making him sick. He suddenly seemed to be feeling much better and was no longer in a hurry to get out of Vincennes.⁷

But what fascinates about the Edelins is that they are an original American family, at least of the fledgling Northwest Territory, after the Battle of Vincennes in 1779 made it a part of the new nation. That battle was the one in which Marie Joseph's father, **Louis Victor Edeline**, participated as a Second Captain.⁸ If one's involvement in a critical Revolutionary War Battle does not qualify a person for status as an American, then, I'd like to ask, what does? Let us just say we are less than sure of how the group of Frenchmen of Vincennes—who had sworn their allegiance to the cause of the Americans before participating in what has been described as a fierce fight against the British—are regarded by some historians looking back. The Edelins and their fellows were Americans, of that everyone can be sure. Without fully intending to be, or knowing exactly what it was they were getting themselves into (let me re-iterate), the Edelins were among the first Americans! In fact, a younger sister of Marie Joseph, Victorie, was said to be the first American born in the Northwest Territory. This blessed event took place the day after the victory at Vincennes, February 25th, 1779.⁹

⁴ Denis P. Edeline, "Known Descendants of the Sons of Charles Edeline," 112, list of voyageurs by Notary Antoine Adhémar St. Martin: Pierre Edeline, July 28, 1704.

⁵ Denis P. Edeline, "Direct Descendants of David Edeline," per e-mail of 19 September 2008.

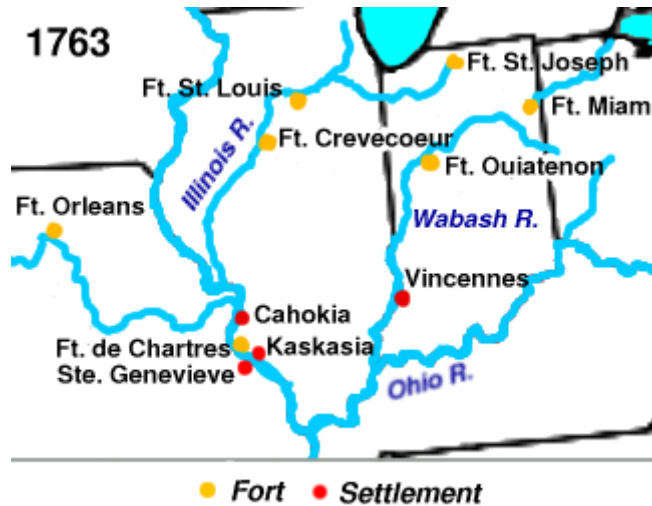
⁶ William L. Otten, Jr., *Colonel J. F. Hamtramck His Life and Times, Volume Two (1783-1791): Frontier Major*. Précis of anecdotal material, 330.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 330. Note by Suzanne Sommerville: "At the first session of the court of common pleas in July, 1790, Major Hamtramck's wife, the former Maria Edeline Perrot, was assured of her share of the estate of her late husband, Nicholas Perrot, according to the usages and customs of the French." Reported by John D. Barnhart & Dorothy L. Riker, *Indiana to 1816: The Colonial Period*, Vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1994), footnote 7, 271. These "usages and customs" would have been according to the Custom of Paris. The records are said to be available at the courthouse in Vincennes.

⁸ See *History of Knox County*, Roster of Soldiers and Patriots of the American Revolution, Vol. 2, 36, 37, published by the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1966, as cited on RootsWeb under L.V. Edeline. Hereafter, Roster. Louis Victor and Marie Thomas married at Ste. Anne de Detroit, 14 May 1759. Early U.S. French Catholic Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1695-1954, D > Détroit, Ste-Anne >1702-1780, image 87 of 238.

⁹ Vincennes Records, L72V7, 282, S138r, V.2, 1770-1831, 97, as cited on RootsWeb under Victorie Edeline. First citizen born in Northwest Territory as cited by Denis P. Edeline.

Marie Joseph's grandfather, Louis Antoine, had come down from Canada to the interior of North America, specifically to the Fort of the Miamis (later Fort Wayne, Indiana) and to Detroit, to be what we would call a kind of registrar or accountant in behalf of the royal authority of France.¹⁰ He wasn't really envisioning at the time that his family would become involved in the fashioning of a new nation. Nor, fast-forwarding, was his son Louis Victor altogether clear on why he became engaged in the War of Revolution on the side of the Americans. In part, he may have thought it was a better option than living under the oppressive rule of the hated British. And, in part, it was likely because his priest, the great American patriot **Father Pierre Gibault**, encouraged him to do so.¹¹ And, also, because he had some personal convictions about the values of freedom and the liberty of the individual, just as did those who fought with him.



Note that this map appears to show Ft. St. Joseph in modern Indiana instead of at Niles, Michigan.
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/88/Wpdms_illinois_country_settlements_1763.png

When my wife, Mary Ann, and I stopped by the cemetery outside St. Francis Cathedral in Vincennes last spring (2009), I did not realize that buried there, as well, was the daughter of Louis Victor, Marie Joseph Edeline, the first wife of Jean François Hamtramck, as stated above, American Revolutionary War hero and future commandant of Detroit (July of 1796). We had been intent only on finding the grave of Louis Victor Edeline, having just recently discovered that my brothers and sons and I, like those ancient cousins, descend from a common ancestor, Charles Edeline of Paris and of Montréal. Conveniently, a chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution only a short time before had placed twelve representative markers there in memory of the participants of the Battle of Vincennes. One of those so honored was the aforesaid, Louis Victor, our ancient relative whose status as Second Captain can be found etched into stone and who fought under the illustrious George Rogers Clark.¹² We took a picture.

¹⁰ See "My Ancestry and their Descendants" by Denis Paul Edeline, cited on RootsWeb under Louis Antoine Edeline, notes for 3 July 1747. [Note by Suzanne Sommerville: Louis *deLisle* at the *poste* of the Ouiatanons (Lafayette, Indiana) supplied and itemized the gifts, amounting to 1458 *livres*, 6 *sols*, given to Miami and other Indians by 3 August 1748 to hold them in the French interest, certified that day at Fort Miami (now Fort Wayne, Indiana) by Laperade, *films*. MGI C11A, Vol. 118, fol. 205-211v, read at Library and Archives Canada (www.collectionscanada.qc.ca).]

¹¹ See Clarence Walworth Alvord, "Fr. Pierre Gibault and the Submission of Post Vincennes 1778," *The American Historical Review*, 14:3, Apr. 1909, 544-557.

¹² *Roster of Soldiers and Patriots of the American Revolution in Indiana*, 36, 37, 1966.



Karl Francis DeLisle at Vincennes, memorial for Louis Victor Edeline

Since that time our knowledge of the lore of the Edelines has increased somewhat. Hamtramck's wife, Marie Joseph, we learned, had lost her life tragically on the Wabash River on the 21st day of May in 1796,¹³ just months before her husband would assume command of Detroit. What we did not know and still do not are the exact circumstances of her death, and herein lies a great mystery.

Where had she been going? Was she alone in a canoe on the Wabash River? Where was her husband, Jean François, at the time? Did she drown or was she murdered by Indians or the British? Why would she have ventured out alone, if, in fact, she did? These questions occur because there is very little direct information on the event. One would have thought that the death of the wife of a key figure in American history like Hamtramck would have been noticed in military and civilian records with much greater clarity. That any detailed, descriptive reference to it seems to be lacking is a surprise. Even the older *habitants* of New France some one hundred years before this era often had much more specific anecdotal material written about them.

The death record of this young woman in the parish ledger of St. Francis Xavier in Vincennes is about all we seem to have about how she met her fate.¹⁴ While it tells us some things, decisive language, clinching exact words, are absent from the ecclesiastical account of her death on the 21st of May and funeral on the subsequent day. It is just a word or two or maybe a sentence away from precision and some substantive elaboration. The note is in French, but even for someone unacquainted with the fine nuances of the language, it seems relatively simple and straightforward in expression. With the help of French-language expert Suzanne Sommerville,¹⁵ this is my translation of the entry:

On the 22nd day of May 1796, was buried in the cemetery of this parish the body of Marie Edeline the spouse of Colonel Hamtramck, dead on the preceding day in descending the Wabash and coming from the village of the Miamis, the place of her residence, in order to visit her family. Assisting at her funeral rites were a great number of persons, both Frenchmen and Americans at *Poste Vincennes*. [signed] Rivet, missionary priest

¹³ Denis P. Edeline, "Known Descendants of the sons of Charles Edeline," 578.

¹⁴ Vincennes Records, vol. 3 1786-1796, L72v7, 282, S138r, as cited on RootsWeb: for Marie Joseph Edeline ID 126670, under "My Ancestry and Their Descendants Plus Miscellaneous Research" by Denis P. Edeline.

¹⁵ Suzanne Sommerville, from e-mail messages of February 1, 2010 and February 3, 2010.

Succinct, concise, to the point, and maddeningly incomplete. There appears to be no word here for “drowned” or “having been ill,” or “shot and killed.” Nor is there mention of anyone accompanying her in a canoe or other boat, nor of how the body was so quickly recovered as to be able to be buried the very next day after her death, at St. Francis Xavier in Vincennes.

As it stands, the record may tell us some things about the incident. If she was, in fact, “descending” the Wabash at the time of her death, she would have to have been traveling in the direction of the Ohio River or to the southwest. Suzanne Sommerville suggested that “descending always meant for the French literally ‘going down,’ or with the flow of the river from a higher place to a lower, and not, necessarily, north to south.”¹⁶ That this reckoning of “descent” holds yet today was confirmed by two agents of the Bureau of Land Management from their regional office at Milwaukee, whom we consulted for further clarification of the current use of the term.¹⁷ Then, in addition, to determine what this would mean for the Wabash at Vincennes, we were told by Army Corps of Engineers technical experts in Indiana that the River indeed flows toward the southwest.¹⁸

Hamtramck’s wife, then, had to have been “descending” the Wabash in the direction of Vincennes when she met her fate. And she had to have been close enough to that settlement when she died to permit a funeral the next day. It is possible, though not certain, that someone was with her. Otherwise, the quick recovery of a body, or the expeditious presentation of the dead person at St. Francis Xavier for burial on the following day would not be easy to explain. And so, if the above account is correct, she had to have been quite close to the outpost when she expired. If she was going there to “visit her family,” as the church record has it, the relatives she intended to see were likely her own father and mother, who were by this time aged, for this is where they lived.

Her father, Louis Victor, since his military undertakings had ended, had been a magistrate at Vincennes, among a few others who were appointed to the tribunal of the Northwest Territory, and served in this capacity for several years appointed by Virginian Lieutenant and overseer John Todd.¹⁹ Had this Edeline daughter been on a mission of mercy to attend elderly parents? We know, in fact, that her father died just some three years after the incident on the 28th of April, 1799.²⁰ The sense is that, since Hamtramck was at this time commandant of Fort Wayne (formerly French Fort Miami), it is likely that his wife and children had been with him there as they had been, quite clearly, when he had held the same position at Vincennes. That wives and families were present with soldiers at Forts or even in the field is not at all unprecedented.²¹

And so we think it is quite possible that Marie Joseph was going from the Fort of the Miami (at that time named Fort Wayne) to be with her parents for a period of time, once the spring flooding of the river, in her judgment, had subsided; it had, perhaps, appeared safe to go, by that time in the middle of May. Nor is it impossible to imagine that a Frontier kid raised in this wild country might have been an accomplished canoeist herself. She may not have been prepared, though, for the torrent of water that the Wabash might have become that spring in a possibly-overloaded canoe. Reinforcing this potential scenario is the fact that Hamtramck’s biographer, William L. Otten Jr., states that our heroine was caught up in the fur trapping trade with her father.²² Was she, that day, in addition to visiting aging parents, helping her father by transporting goods traded for pelts previously delivered upriver? An added problem may have been

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, February 3, 2010.

¹⁷ Telephone conversation with Bureau of Land Management in Milwaukee, February 15, 2010.

¹⁸ Telephone conversation with Army Corps of Engineers in Vincennes, February 2010.

¹⁹ See George E. Greene, *History of Old Vincennes and Knox County, Indiana*, Vol. I, 1911, 132.

²⁰ Denis P. Edeline, “Known Descendants of the Sons of Charles Edeline,” 574.

²¹ See William L. Otten Jr., *Colonel J. F. Hamtramck*, Vol 1, 1997, 167.

²² Information from conversation with William L. Otten, Jr., biographer of Hamtramck, February 2010.

that neither Hamtramck nor one of his military aides was available to the task of accompanying her. Otten's opinion is that the commandant would have been court-marshaled if he had left his post to escort her. For one thing, the Americans were getting in position to take over at Detroit. They were busy, very busy, at that particular moment in 1796.²³

Life on the frontier was fraught with danger, something the disinterested observer looking back today may not recognize. There was always the chance of Indian attack, starvation, malaria and various diseases, and of drowning in rivers. Risks were met everywhere and almost every day. And acceptable risks were routinely taken for a person's family, in this case, perhaps, on behalf of sickly parents or of a venerable father's business. When Marie Edeline perished in the Wabash (or on it), Hamtramck, her husband, and two very young children were left behind, motherless. We do not know the exact circumstances of her passing or the purpose of her excursion on the Wabash that day. We can only speculate.

Maybe the definitive answer or answers to our questions as family members, and of those who might have an interest in the history of this event, lies buried in some dusty archival box. There are many sources from which we might expect to find out more. There are the papers of Jean François Hamtramck, other records of the Church of St Francis Xavier, those of Post Vincennes, and even the papers of William Henry Harrison, who became the guardian of the Hamtramck daughters after their father's death in 1803. So far we have had no further enlightenment from any of these sources. Until such information is obtained, what happened is shrouded in mystery. It is certainly possible that some branch of the family knows all the facts, that the story has been handed down from generation to generation, and this will tell us once and for all what took place on the Wabash River that day, how the life of Marie Joseph was taken and where she was going and whom she was going to see.

Meanwhile, ancient *cousine*, be assured that we relatives and descendants honor your memory and revere all your courageous undertakings, known and unknown. Your relative Armand would have been proud. A curious coincidence it is, indeed, that he who worked each day in the town named after your husband and knew nothing of him or you, was born on the 21st day of May 1896, one hundred years to the day after your death on the Wabash!

²³ Letter of January 24, 2010 received from historian William L. Otten to Karl DeLisle. Note from Suzanne Sommerville: F. Clever Bald reports in "Colonel John Francis Hamtramck," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 44:4 (December 1948): 335-354 (asterisk and explanation mine):

As the time approached for occupying Detroit in accordance with Article II of Jay's Treaty, Colonel Hamtramck was ordered to descend the Maumee [from Fort Wayne] and be ready to advance. On June 7, 1796, he made camp a short distance above the British Fort Miamis,* where he waited until July 7, when two small schooners arrived. Embarking a detachment of sixty-five men under Captain Moses Porter, he ordered them to sail for Detroit. There on July 11, 1796, at noon, after the British had withdrawn, Captain Porter occupied Fort Lernout and raised the flag of the United States.

On the same day Colonel Hamtramck, after leaving a garrison at [British] Fort Miamis, sailed for Detroit where he arrived on July 13 and took command.

*This "British Fort Miami" is is not the same as the French Fort Miami. According to Wikipedia, "Fort Miami was a fort built on the Maumee River at the eastern edge of the present-day city of Maumee, Ohio, and southwest of the present-day city of Toledo, Ohio. It was built by the British on U.S. territory in defiance of the terms of the Treaty of Paris that ended the American Revolutionary War." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Miami_\(Ohio\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Miami_(Ohio)) The full article by F. Clever Bald can be read by typing Hamtramck in the search box at <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/imh/>

Descendant List of Charles Edeline submitted by Karl DeLisle

- 1-Charles Edeline (b. about 1641-27 Oct 1711)
 - +Jeanne Bracconier (abt. 1651-20 Feb 1711)
 - 2-Catherine Therese Edeline (15 Feb 1677-16 April 1715)
 - 2-Pierre Edeline (30 June 1683-18 Jun 1742)
 - +Louise Catherine Patenaude (20 May 1694-21 May 1742)
 - 3-Francois Edeline (15 Mar 1720-29 Jun 1802)
 - +Marie Louise Valet (28 April 1734-3 Aug 1795)
 - 4-Antoine Edeline (16 Dec 1757-Jan 1850)
 - +Charlotte Rougeau (8 Oct 1763-4 May 1846)
 - 5-Jean Baptiste DeLine 5 May 1808-6 Mar 1873)
 - +Marie Patenaude (30 Oct 1811-15 Aug 1885)
 - 6-Adolphus Octave DeLine (20 Sep. 1840-5 Jun 1869)
 - +Julienne Aubry (1846-1888)
 - 7-Alfred DeLisle (28 November 1867-28 Aug 1965)
 - +Celina Laplante (1871- Jan 1957)
 - 8-Armand Joseph DeLisle (21 May 1896-29 Jan 1969)
 - +Charlotte Huhn (21 Aug 1910-11 Oct 1999)
 - 9-**Armand Joseph DeLisle Jr.** (4 Jun 1931-)
 - 9-**Gerald Leo DeLisle** (31 Aug 1934-)
 - 9-**Karl Francis DeLisle** (8 Sep 1939-)
-
- 2-Charles Edeline (15 Nov 1678-3 April 1726)
 - 2-Francois Edeline (3 Aug-1680-after 1681)
 - 2-Pierre Jean Edeline (9-Dec 1681-14 Dec 1681)
 - 2-Pierre Edeline (30 Jun 1683-18 Jun 1742)
 - 2-Marie Anne Edeline (25 Jul 1685-Dec 1739)
 - 2-Angelique Edeline (19 April 1687-8 Jun 1687)
 - 2-Marie Madeleine Agathe Edeline (16 Aug 1688-22 Aug 1741)
 - 2- Louis Antoine Edeline (22 Sep 1690-4 May 1758)
 - +Marie Madeline Drusson (1689-26 Aug 1747)
 - 3-Louis Victor Edeline (23 Dec 1730-28 Apr 1799)
 - +Marie Joseph Thomas (about 1743—bef 1808)
 - 4-Marie Joseph Edeline** (Oct 1763-21 May 1796)
 - 2-Jean Baptiste Edeline (3 Jan 1693-14 Aug 1715)

Note from Suzanne Sommerville: F. Clever Bald, in the article cited above, adds these details:

Mrs. Hamtramck had been drowned [*sic*] on May 21, 1796, while descending the Wabash from Fort Wayne to Vincennes. (59) Wanting to provide a home for his two small daughters, Julienne and Henriette, Hamtramck invited his widowed mother, who had remarried and was now Mme. Joachim Biron, to come to Detroit. He bought a farm for her east of the fort and provided that it should pass to his children when she died. (60) [Page 359, footnote 59: "Louise Rau, unpublished biographical sketch of Hamtramck, 6, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan." Footnote 60, "*Ibid.*, 19. Madame Biron died in July 1800."]

The burial record of **Marie Anne Laronde**, wife of **Joachim Biron**, can be found at Ancestry.ca, Drouin, Detroit, Ste-Anne > 1780-1801, image **303** of 625. She died at the home of **James May**, esquire, on the 5th and was buried on the 6th of July 1800. Searching for the burial record of Hamtramck's mother, I, at first, could find only the transcription (hand-written copy), also on Detroit, Ste-Anne > 1780-1801, but on image **608** of 625. Trying to discover the original record, I eventually located it, as cited above. This collection of original images ends at image 317, and the transcription begins on image 318 with a 19 January 1780 record, page 978 of that transcription. Those of you searching for original records for the 1780 to 1800 period should look at the **first 316** images of Detroit, Ste-Anne, 1780-1800 at Ancestry.ca.

Bald also reports:

Sometime in 1797, Hamtramck married Miss Rebecca Mackenzie. On April 19, 1798, at Fort Wayne [*sic*] was born a son who was named John Francis, Junior. Another son, Alexis H. was born on April 8, 1799. [Page 352, footnote 64, Rau, Hamtramck, 20, 21.]

Actually, both Alexis and Jean François were baptized at Ste. Anne de Detroit on 8 April 1801, with their birth dates given but no birth location cited. Ancestry.ca, Drouin, Detroit, Ste-Anne; Autres Registres > 1801-1810, image 1 of 58.