

**French-Canadian Voyages and Attempted Voyages
to the Northern Sea (Hudson Bay) 1611 to 1672 – A Genealogical Guide**
By FCHSM Member Diane Wolford Sheppard - bluecolumbine@comcast.net

While researching in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*¹ I came across references to the French-Canadian attempts to reach the Northern Sea or Hudson Bay. While the subject of these voyages might seem, at first glance, to have little to do with the Great Lakes, many of the men involved also had ties to the Great Lakes as traders, explorers or missionaries. The purpose of this article is not to give you a detailed summary of the voyages; instead, the purposes are: 1. to alert you to events in your ancestor's lives that are not immediately apparent by reading Jetté;² 2. to provide you with a source where you can read a history of the voyage; and 3. to provide you with a brief genealogical guide to these individuals and their famous or well known descendants.

1611 to 1613 - **Nicolas Vignault** spent the winter of 1611 with **Tessouat**, an **Algonquin** chief on Allumette Island. He is believed to have accompanied one of the **Tessouat's** relatives to the Northern Sea (Hudson Bay) and saw the wreck of an English vessel in the bay, which he described to **Champlain** in France. In 1612, **Champlain** published a map of New France which included information that he learned about Hudson Bay. In 1613, **Champlain** set off with **Vignault** in an attempt to reach the Northern Sea, but they were stopped by **Tessouat**. **Tessouat** controlled the access to the **Northern Tribes** and wanted to prevent the **French** from having access to these tribes and possibly entering into trade relations with the tribes; thereby, potentially depriving the **Algonquin** of the heavy tolls they charged anyone who wished to pass through their territory. The **Algonquin** told Champlain that the **Nipissing** tribe were enemies and vigorously denied that **Vignault** visited the Northern Sea. After he was subjected to an interrogation that was filled with threats, **Vignault** told **Champlain** that he had lied and only told **Champlain** about his voyage in order to return to New France. Although the **Algonquin** wanted to keep **Vignault** (so they could assure that he never told another lie), he left with **Champlain** to return to Québec. When they reached the Sault St. Louis Rapids, Vignault asked to be left in the area, but none of the **Native Americans** wanted him. **Champlain** left him in the area and nothing is known about the remainder of his life. In spite of denials, many historians believe that **Vignault** made the journey.³

2 May to 11 August 1657 – **Jean Bourdon** left Québec on 2 May with 16 **French-Canadians** and two **Huron** in an attempt to reach the Northern Sea. They went to Kibokok at the mouth of the Ashouanipi River (latitude 55° north), but were forced to turn back when their Huron guides were assassinated. The group returned to Québec on 11 August.⁴

¹ University of Toronto and Université Laval, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, <http://www.biographi.ca/index-e.html>. Future references will refer to this work as *DCB*.

² René Jetté, *Dictionnaire généalogique des familles du Québec des origines à 1730*, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal: 1983.

³ *DCB*, Biography of Vignault (Vignau in the *DCB*); Brian Leigh Dunnigan, *Frontier Metropolis Picturing Early Detroit, 1701-1838*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, Michigan, 2001, Figure 1.1, page 8 is a depiction of Pierre Du Val's map based on Champlain's maps; Louise Phelps Kellogg, *The French Régime in Wisconsin and the Northwest*, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1925. pp. 47-48, hereafter *French Régime in Wisconsin*, p. 53. Available from Ancestry.com; Bruce G. Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic A History of the Huron People to 1660*, Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press, paperback edition, 1987, pp. 275-286; David Hackett Fisher, *Champlain's Dream*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 2008, pp. 303, 308-310. Author's note: Henry Hudson was abandoned by his crew in Hudson Bay in June 1611. See his biography in the *DCB*.

⁴ *DCB*, Biography of Bourdon; Ruben Gold Thwaites, editor, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*. Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers. Available online at: (<http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/relations/>), vol. 43, pp. 35, 53, hereafter *JR*.

1660 – 1668 **Médard Chouart sieur DesGroseilliers** and **Pierre Esprit Radisson** returned to New France from a voyage to the Great Lakes. They were interviewed by the **Jesuits**, fined by the civil authorities, their furs were confiscated and **DesGroseilliers** was imprisoned. **DesGroseilliers** went to France in an unsuccessful effort to get justice but returned to New France. In 1662 they told authorities that they were embarking on a voyage to the Northern Sea, but instead went to New England where they received a more favorable reception. They made at least two attempts to reach the Northern Sea by ship. In 1665, they were interviewed by representatives of **King Charles II** of England and urged to go to England. They departed in 1665 aboard the *Charles*, which was captured and looted by the Dutch. The ship and its crew made its way to Spain, and **DesGroseilliers** and **Radisson** made their way to London, where they eventually received the backing of **Charles II** for voyages to the Northern Sea.⁵

11 May to 27 July 1661 – **Gabriel Druillettes, S.J.**, was the initiator of the project of founding missions in the areas of the Great Lakes. A 1656 attempt to reach the Great Lakes was stopped by a Mohawk attack.⁶ He decided to resume his voyage to the Great Lakes in 1661; however, he decided to go via Tadoussac, the Saguenay River, and the Northern Sea. He was accompanied by **Claude Dablon, S.J., Guillaume Couture, Denis Guyon, and François Pelletier**. One of the objectives of this trip was to determine if the Northern Sea (Hudson Bay) linked to the Western Sea (Pacific Ocean) and the Southern Sea (Gulf of Mexico). The group left for their voyage on 11 May and left Tadoussac on 1 or 2 of June, accompanied by 80 canoes of **Native Americans**. The journey from Tadoussac to Nikabau/Nekauba took 30 days and required 64 portages. The Montagnais guides were apprehensive of an attack by the Iroquois and abandoned the French at the watershed near the lake. Dablon, Druillettes, and the French-Canadians returned from their voyage on 27 July 1661.⁷

1663 – **Guillaume Couture** agreed to lead a second expedition to the Northern Sea. He was accompanied by **Pierre Duquet, Jean Langlois**, who was a shipwright, and 44 canoes of **Native Americans**. They left Québec in mid-May and headed north via the Saguenay River. The group reached Lake Mistassini on 26th of June where they were delayed by a storm that left a foot of snow. When they reached the Rupert River, the Native Americans refused to go any further.⁸

1668 – 1670 – **Pierre Esprit Radisson** and **Médard Chouart DesGroseilliers**, with the support of **King Charles II**, departed for Hudson Bay in two ships. One ship, with **Radisson** aboard, was storm damaged and was forced to return to England, but the *Nonsuch*, with **DesGroseilliers** aboard, reached Hudson Bay. They built Charles Fort (later Rupert House, present day Wakaganish) at the mouth of the Rupert River in James Bay on Hudson Bay. The *Nonsuch* returned to London in 1669 with furs worth £1,380. On 2 May 1670, **King Charles II** granted the “Governor and Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson Bay” a Royal Charter which gave the group a monopoly on trade in Hudson Bay.⁹

1671 - **Charles Albanel, S.J.**, and **Paul Denis de Saint-Simon** led an expedition that reached Hudson Bay in 1672. They were accompanied by **Sébastien Provencher**. They traveled down the Rupert River to Hudson Bay, claiming all the lands for France on 9 July 1672 at Lake Nemiskau. In Albanel’s words,

⁵ *DCB*, Radisson and DesGrosselier’s biographies.

⁶ *DCB*, Biographies of Druillettes and Garreau; *JR*, Vol. 42, pp. 224-235.

⁷ *DCB*, Biography of Couture, Dablon, Duquet; *JR*, Vol. 46, 171-173, 180, Author’s note: Lac Nikabau is located north west of Lac St Jean and south east of Chibougamu and Lac Mistassini, which are south east of Hudson Bay’s southern shore. **Michel Leneuf sieur de LaVallière** did not go on this journey, although Louis Jolliet’s biography in the *DCB* states that he did. See Leneuf’s biography in the *DCB*.

⁸ *DCB*, Couture’s biography.

⁹ *DCB*, Radisson and DesGrosselier’s biographies; Hudson Bay Company, *Hudson Bay Company Our History & Heritage Books* (<http://www.hbc.com/hbcheritage/history/timeline/hbc/>); and (<http://www.hbc.com/hbcheritage/learning/ebooks/Adventurers/Adventurers-Ch1.pdf>)

“There are 200 saults, or water-falls, and consequently 200 portages. . . . There are 400 rapids.”¹⁰ The subsequent complicated history of Hudson Bay and the control of its posts by France or England preclude further coverage in *MHH*.¹¹

Genealogical Guide to the men who participated in the voyages to the Northern Sea:

The material that appears below the genealogical information refers to their voyages or attempted voyages to the Northern Sea or Hudson Bay. Please refer to the respective biographies in the *DCB* for other biographical details, especially for Albanel, Chouart, Druillettes, and Radisson, all of whom came to what became Michigan.

Charles Albanel, S.J. (unknown parents). He was from Auvergne, France. He died 1 November 1696 in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.

- Presence in the Hudson Bay area: He was part of the group that claimed Hudson Bay for France in 1672.
- Sources: Jetté, p. 6, *DCB*.

Jean Bourdon sieur de Saint François and Saint Jean (unknown parents). He was from St Cande le Vieil, Rouen, Normandie (Seine-Maritime), France. He died 12 January 1668 in Québec. Spouses: 1. **Jacqueline Potel** (unknown). They married 9 November 1635 in Québec. 2. **Anne Gasnier** (Claude and Marie Chaunoys, widow of Jean Clément). They married 21 August 1655 in Québec.

- Presence in the Hudson Bay area: Bourdon attempted to reach the Northern Sea in 1657.
- Famous, notable, or interesting descendants include: Son, **Jacques Bourdon sieur d'Autray** accompanied **René Robert Cavalier sieur de La Salle** on his successful voyage to the Gulf of Mexico.
- Sources: Jetté, pp. 149-150, Trudel, *Catalogue*, p. 34.

Médard Chouart sieur DesGroiseilliers (Médard and Marie Poirier). He was baptized 31 July 1618 in Charly-sur-Marne, Château Thierry, Champagne (Aisne), France. He died between 19 December 1695 and 1698 in the region of Sorel. Spouses: 1. **Hélène Martin** (Abraham and Marguerite Langlois, widow of Claude Étienne). They married on 3 September 1647 in Québec. 2. **Marguerite Hayet** (Sébastien and Marguerite Hénault, widow of Jean Veron). They married on 24 August 1653 in Québec. Chouart also had a daughter by **Marie Thérèse Viel** (Charles and Marguerite LeChevalier), wife of **Étienne Boyer**.

- Presence in Hudson Bay: He reached Hudson Bay in 1668.
- Connections to Détroit: Marguerite Hayet was **Pierre Esprit Radisson's** half-sister and grandmother of **Étienne Veron de Grandmesnil** who became **Cadillac's** personal secretary in 1705). Thérèse Viel is the ancestor of numerous descendants in southeastern Michigan and southwestern Ontario.
- Famous, notable, or interesting descendants include: **Éric Gagné** [Cy Young and World Series Pitcher].
- Sources: Sources: Jetté, 254, 778, 1120; *DCB* – see his biography for other details about his life; *Catalogue*, p. 103

Guillaume Couture (Guillaume and Madeleine Malet). He was from St. Godard, Rouen, Normandie (Seine-Maritime), France. He died 4 April 1701 in Québec. Spouse: **Anne Émard** (Jean and Marie Bineau). They married on 14 November 1649 in Québec.

¹⁰ *DCB*, Denys' and Albanel's biographies; *JR*, Vol. 56, pp. 149-217; Marcel Trudel, *Catalogue des immigrants 1632-1662*, Montréal, Hurtubise HMH, 1983, p. 71.

¹¹ See Public Broadcasting Company, *Empire of the Bay*, (<http://www.pbs.org/empireofthebay/>) & HBC websites (cited in previous footnotes) for maps, timelines, the transcript from *Empire of the Bay*, mini biographies, mini books & other educational material.

- Presence in the Hudson Bay area: Couture was part of the 1661 and 1663 attempts to reach the Northern Sea.
- Famous, notable or interesting descendants include: **Antonio Barette** [Premier of Québec], **Jules Isaïe Benoît dit Livernois** and his son, **Jules Ernest Livernois** [photographers]; **Gérard Bouchard** [historian], **Lucien Bouchard** [Premier of Québec], **Isabelle Boulay** [Canadian singer], **Paul Brazeau** [*patriote*]; **Pierre Joseph Olivier Chauveau** [Premier of Québec], **Madonna Ciccone**, **Gaston Côté** [Member of U.N. peacekeeping Missions], **Maurice Couture** [Archbishop of Québec], **Céline Dion**, the **Dionne quintuplets**, **Joseph Adélarde Godbout** [Premier of Québec], **Robert Goulet**, **Roland-Yves Gagné** [genealogist, especially French-Canadian royal ancestry], **Maurice Robert Gravel** [United States Senator from Alaska], **René Jetté**, **Jacques Labrie** [*patriote*], **Joseph René Lévesque** [Premier of Québec], **Members of the Miami Indian Tribe of Indiana**, **Alanis Jeanne Morissette**, **Marc Ouellet** [cardinal of Québec], **Pierre Flavien Turgeon** [Archbishop of Québec].
- Sources: Jetté, p. 288, *DCB, Catalogue*, p. 68.

Claude Dablon, S.J. (unknown parents). He was born on 21 January 1619 in Dieppe, Rouen, Normandie (Seine-Maritime), France. He died on 3 March 1697 in Québec.

- Presence in the Hudson Bay area: He was part of the 1661 attempt to reach the Northern Sea.
- Sources: Jetté, p. 298, *DCB*.

Paul Denis sieur de St Simon (Simon and Françoise Dutartre) He was born circa 1649, possibly in Tours, Touraine (Indre-et-Loire), France. He died on 14 October 1731 in Québec. Spouse: **Louise Madeleine (de) Peiras** (Jean and Denise Marion). They married on 18 January 1678 in Québec.

- Presence in Hudson Bay area: He was part of the group that claimed Hudson Bay for France in 1672.
- Sources: Jetté, p. 334; *DCB* under Denys.

Gabriel Druillettes, S.J. (unknown parents). He was born on 29 September 1610 in Garat, Limoges, Limousin (Haute Vienne), France. He died on 8 April 1681 in Québec.

- Presence in the Hudson Bay area: He was part of the 1661 attempt to reach the Northern Sea.
- Sources: Jetté, p. 364; *DCB*.

Pierre Duquet sieur de La Chesnaye (Denis and Catherine Gauthier). He was baptized 14 January 1643 in Québec. He was buried 13 October 1687 in Québec. Spouse: **Anne Lamarre** (Adrien and Marie Mercier). They married on 25 August 1666 in Québec.

- Presence in the Hudson Bay area: He was part of the 1663 attempt to reach the Northern Sea.
- Sources: Jetté, p. 392; *DCB*.

Denis Guyon (Jean and Mathurine Robin). He was baptized 30 June 1631 St Jean de Mortagne, Chartres et Sées, Perche, (Orne), France. He died 30 August 1685 in Québec. Spouse: **Élisabeth Boucher** (François and Florence Gareman). They married on 21 October 1659 in Québec.

- Presence in the Hudson Bay area: He was part of the 1661 attempt to reach the Northern Sea.
- Famous, notable, or interesting descendants include: His daughter **Marie Thérèse** married **Antoine de La Mothe, sieur de Cadillac**. She arrived in Detroit during the fall of 1701. Son, **François Guyon** was a privateer off the coast of Acadia and New England.
- Sources: Jetté, p. 548; *DCB* – biography of Guillaume Couture.

Jacques Langlois – there are too many men with this name to positively identify him.

- Presence in the Hudson Bay area: He was part of the 1663 attempt to reach the Northern Sea.
- Sources: *DCB*, Couture's biography.

François Pelletier dit Antaya (Nicolas and Jeanne de Vouzy). He was born *circa* 1635 possibly in Gallardon, Chartres, Beauce (Eure-et-Loire), France. He died before 1 August 1688, probably on a trading voyage to Michigan. Spouses: 1. **Dorothée**, a Native American (unknown); they married in April 1660 in Tadoussac. 2. **Marguerite Madeleine Morisseau** (Julien and Anne Brelancour). They married on 26 September 1661 in Québec. On 1 August 1688, Marguerite hired Jean Coutu and Jean Beaugrand for a voyage to the 8ta8ois (Ottawa) to retrieve the furs that her husband had left there and to return them to her in 1689. Their son, Joseph may have accompanied them on the voyage because on 17 July 1689, Charles de Couagne discharged a debt incurred in August 1688 by Marguerite Morisseau, Jean Coutu, Joseph Pelletier, and others for merchandise for the voyage.¹²

- Presence in the Hudson Bay area: He was part of the 1661 attempt to reach the Northern Sea.
- Connections to Détroit and Michigan: Their son, **François Xavier**, was hired by Claude Greysolon on 31 August 1691 to trade with the 8ta8ois (Ottawa Indians); François Xavier's son **Jean François** probably came to Detroit with his mother, **Marie Madeleine Thunay**, and her second husband, **Pierre Mallet**. There are numerous descendants in southeastern Michigan and southwestern Ontario.
- Famous, notable or interesting descendants include: **Antonio Barette** [Premier of Québec], **Gérard Bouchard** [historian], **Lucien Bouchard** [Premier of Québec], **Madonna Ciccone**, **Jean Chrétien** [Prime Minister of Canada], **Maurice Duplessis** [Premier of Québec], **Éric Gagné** [Cy Young and World Series Picher], **Robert Goulet**, **Maurice Robert Gravel** [United States Senator from Alaska], **Angelina Jolie**, **Jules Léger** [Governor General of Canada], **Paul Émile Léger** [Cardinal of Québec], **Members of the Miami Indians of Indiana** tribe, **Joseph Alfred Mousseau** [Premier of Québec], **Marc Ouellet** [Cardinal of Québec], and **Jacques Parizeau** [Premier of Québec], **David Plouffe** [Campaign Manager for Barack Obama].
- Sources: Jetté, p. 888; *DCB*, biography of Couture; *RAPQ1930*, pp. 197, 199.

Sébastien Provencher (unknown parents) He died 1710 in Bécancour. Spouses: 1. **Marguerite Manchon** (unknown). They married *circa* 22 January 1663 (date of contract: Laurent du Portail); 2. **Marie Catherine Guillet** (Pierre and Jeanne St. Pierre, widow of Jacques Massé). They married on 14 May 1691 in Cap-de-la-Madeleine.

- Presence in Hudson Bay: He was part of the group that claimed Hudson Bay for France in 1672.
- Famous, notable or interesting descendants include: **Antonio Barette** [Premier of Québec], **Joseph Armand Bombardier** [Founder of Bombardier], **The Dionne Quintuplets**, **Maurice Duplessis** [Premier of Québec], **Éric Gagné** [Cy Young and World Series Pitcher], **Robert Goulet**, **Paul Grégoire** [Canadian Cardinal], **David Plouffe** [Campaign Manager for Barack Obama], **Shania Twain** and **Jean Marie Rodrigue Villeneuve** [Cardinal of Québec].
- Sources: Jetté, p. 949-950; *DCB*, biographies of Albanel and Denys.

Pierre Esprit de Radisson (Pierre Esprit and Madeleine Hénault). He was from Avignon, France. He died before 2 July 1710 in London, England. Spouses: 1. **Unknown Kirke** (Sir John and unknown¹³) They married in 1672 in London; 2. **Marguerite Godet** (Gédeon and Unknown). They married on 3

¹² E.Z. Massicotte, "Répertoire des engagements pour l'ouest conservés dans les Archives Judiciaires de Montréal (1670-1778)" *Rapport de L'archiviste de la Province de Québec pour 1929-1930*, Rédempti Paradis, 1930 (RAPQ). Michel Langlois, *Dictionnaire Biographique Des Ancêtres Québécois (1608-1700)* Sillery: La Maison des ancêtres inc., 2000, Vol. 3, p. 486. Archives of Québec, *Inventory des Greffes des Notaires de la Régime Français*, Quintin Publications (Available on CD-ROM), Vol. 9, Claude Mauge, p. 157.

¹³ Grace Lee Nute, *Caesars of the Wilderness, Médard Chouart Sieur des Groseilliers and Pierre Esprit Radisson, 1618-1710*. New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1943, p. 110. Nute states that John Kirke was one of the five Kirke brothers who captured Québec. Note: In the Hudson's Bay Company website, John Kirke is identified as the son of a merchant who had captured Québec in 1828 [sic] and the only one who had first hand knowledge of the North American fur trade. Five Kirke brothers were involved in the capture of Québec in 1628: Sir David, Sir Lewis, Thomas, John, and James. According to the biographies in the *DCB*, Thomas did not have any heirs. See the HBC website: <http://www.hbc.com/hbcheritage/learning/ebooks/LordsProprietors.pdf>

March 1685 in St Martin in the Fields, London; 3. **Elisabeth Unknown** (Unknown). They married after 1698.¹⁴

- Presence in Hudson Bay: Radisson reached Hudson Bay in 1670.
- Sources: Jetté, p. 960; *DCB* – see his biography for other details about his life.

Nicolas Vignault (unknown parents). Nothing is known about his birth, origins, or death.

- Presence in Hudson Bay: Nicolas Vignault is believed to have reached the Northern Sea during the winter of 1611-1612.
- Sources: Jetté, p. 1127; *DCB* (under Vignau).

¹⁴ Nute: pp. 142 (date of 2nd marriage), 277 (third marriage).