Misconceptions, Misunderstandings, Myths, and Facts Regarding French-Canadian and Native-American Relationships in the Detroit River Region through 1763

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French-Canadian and Native-American Relationships in the Détroit River Region

• Misconceptions regarding how the Fur Trade operated during the French Regime

• Myth: The Detroit River Region was a métis community between 1701 – 1830
  • No one is denying that métis families existed! Instead of a métis community, I believe that it was a community known for its cultural métissage!
Result of relying on these misconceptions or myths – an inaccurate picture of history, life, and culture in Michigan and southwestern Ontario during French Regime!

Loraine DiCerbo’s photo of buildings at Colonial Michilimackinac provides a visual representation of how our ancestor’s actually lived.
Misconceptions and Facts about How the Fur Trade Operated During the French Regime

Winslow Homer’s Painting – *The Portage*
Bibliography – Fur Trade During the French Regime


• Timothy J. Kent, *Rendezvous at the Straits Fur Trade and Military Activities at Fort de Buade and Fort Michilimackinac, 1669-1781* (Ossineke, Michigan: Silver Fox Enterprises, 2004).


• Timothy J. Kent, *Birchbark Canoes of the Fur Trade* (Ossineke, Michigan: Silver Fox Enterprises, 1997).

We invite everyone to meet Tim Kent at the next meeting of the FCHSM on 14 November 2015 at 11:00 a.m. the Mount Clemens Public Library.
Bibliography – Fur Trade During the French Regime – additional books


Bibliography – Fur Trade During the French Regime – continued


Although it is often cited by scholars and genealogists, Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), should be avoided!

I will be discussing four issues related to the many topics covered by Sleeper-Smith:

- “Catholic Kin Networks” and their “appearance during”
- The “fur trade ban”
- The participation of women in the fur trade
- Certificates and *memoires* issued between 1739 – 1750

Unfortunately, Sleeper-Smith is inaccurate, misunderstands the topic, and misrepresents sources!
Susan Sleeper-Smith’s Misconceptions and Misstatements about the Fur Trade and Catholic Kin Networks from 1696 – 1714 (pp. 42-44)
– No sources are offered for any of these statements! They are just her opinions – as we will see, her opinions are deeply flawed

“The Catholic kin network that appeared during the years of the fur trade ban, 1697-1714, was firmly established by the time many of the western posts were reopened between 1718-1720.”

“Entrée into the eighteenth-century trade was increasingly governed by Catholic kin networks, rather than by the regulating authority of the New France government.”

“Without kin and allies, one could neither govern nor trade.”
Facts about “Catholic Kin Networks”

• I have found that 196 Fur-Trade Families or Military-Expedition Families travelled to the Great Lakes during the 17\textsuperscript{th} century.

• They did not appear “during the years of the fur trade ban, 1697-1714” as alleged by Sleeper-Smith. See the Fur Trade Page for a list of these families.

• For many families, individuals continued to be involved in the fur trade; others became officers assigned to Great Lakes’ Posts during the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, and additional members were added to the families.
Sleeper-Smith’s statements about the “fur trade ban” reveal that she knows very little about the history of New France and the fur trade!
1696 – 1700 – Abbreviated Timeline – A detailed chronology with sources can be found on the History of New France Page

• 1696 – Louis XIV ordered the closure of the Great Lakes Posts or Forts due to a surplus of furs, but did not order the closure of Fort St. Louis (Illinois).

• 1697 – Louis XIV changed his mind in order to maintain the alliances with New France’s Native Allies, but forbade the commandant and officers from taking part in the fur trade.

• 1697 – Frontenac disobeyed Louis XIV’s orders and closed Fort Frontenac, Fort St. Joseph, and Michilimackinac because he felt that the commandant and officers could not exist on their salaries alone. Fort Frontenac was re-opened in 1699 after Frontenac’s death.

• 1700 – The Company of the Colony (Compagnie de la Colonie) was formed and given the monopoly on the fur trade in New France.
1701 – Abbreviated Timeline

• 31 May 1701 – Louis XIV pardoned the traders who fled to the Mississippi Valley following Frontenac’s closure of the posts.

• 24 July 1701 – Cadillac founded Detroit.

• July and August 1701 – Callière held the Great Peace of Montréal. Callière invited the Native Americans to settle in Detroit.
  • 1640s and 1650s – Native Americans began to move north and west from present-day Ontario, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania to avoid Iroquois attacks.
  • These areas were only used a hunting ground.

• 31 October 1701 – Callière and Intendant Champigny turned over management and control of the fur trade at Fort Frontenac and Fort Pontchartrain (Detroit) to the Company of the Colony.

Hundreds of voyageurs, including Native Men, were hired during the periods between 1697 – 1714 – see Massicotte, pp. 205 – 216
Contrary to Sleeper-Smith’s allegations that “Catholic Kin Networks” and métis women controlled the fur trade, the fur trade was actually controlled by the following individuals:

• The Governor and Intendant issued licenses (congés) from 1681 – 1696 and 1715 – 1760, and also granted permissions during the 18th century.
• The Company of the Colony (from 1700 – 1706 when it collapsed; the Company turned over control of Detroit to Cadillac in 1705).
• The commandants of a post.
• Merchants who leased the post from the commandants; during the period of their lease, they had exclusive rights or a monopoly over the trade at a post.
Individuals who were authorized to hire *voyageurs* and send a certain number of canoes to a post:

Individuals who had been granted or purchased a license (*congé*), as well as those who had been granted permission by the Governor or Intendant.

- Licenses and permissions both required that a list of the *voyageurs* be registered in Montréal and carried with the license or permission.
- Individuals who violated the provisions of a license or permission were subject to arrest and could be punished with six-months imprisonment.
Evidence of involvement in the fur trade include the following Official Records:

• permissions,
• licenses (congés),
• leases,
• and correspondence.
The Fur Trade from 1714 – 1760 – Evidence of an Individual’s Involvement in the Fur Trade – Continued

• Documents found in notary or merchant records: engagements, obligations, powers of attorney, societies, partnerships, and associations, and merchant records or invoices.
  • Representative examples have been uploaded to the FCHSM website on the Fur Trade Page

• If an individual is not named in one of these documents or records there is no evidence that they controlled or were even involved in the fur trade at a particular location.
An example of how the role women played in the fur trade can be misrepresented – Sleeper-Smith

Marie Madeleine Réaume was the daughter of Jean Baptiste Réaume and Symphorose Ouaouougoukoué, his Native wife. Jean Baptiste Réaume was the interpreter and a trader at present-day Green Bay starting in 1718. He was briefly at Fort St. Joseph in 1729.

Sleeper-Smith alleges that Marie Madeleine Réaume and her husbands “controlled the fur trade” at Fort St. Joseph.
Sleeper-Smith also makes a number of genealogical, ethnic, and factual errors about the families:

- See the profile of the Réaume Family on the French Canadian and Native Families’ Page on the FCHSM Website.
- See the articles about the Chevalier Family on the Michilimackinac Page on the FCHSM Website.
Sleeper-Smith – misrepresentations about Marie Madeleine Réaume and her involvement in the fur trade

Speaking about Marie Madeleine Réaume, Sleeper-Smith alleges:

• “throughout her life she was an active fur trade participant. . . . [p. 44 – no source; just her opinion].

• “During the 1850s [sic], there was a dramatic increase in the number of furs harvested in the St. Joseph River Valley. More engagements or contracts for hiring canoemen were issued for Fort St. Joseph during this period than in any previous period.” [cites Idle, and Massicotte, RAPQ1930].

• “Thus, fur exports, increased when the L’archevêque-Chevalier kin network and their Potawatomi allies controlled the trade.” [p. 50].
Facts about Marie Madeleine Réaume and the fur trade

It would have been impossible for Marie Madeleine Réaume or her husbands (Augustin Larchevêque and Louis Thérèse Chevalier) to have controlled the fur trade at Fort St. Joseph because:

• The husbands were not *commandants*, and
• They did not lease the post, which would have given them a monopoly on the fur trade at Fort St. Joseph.
Facts about Marie Madeleine Réaume and the fur trade - continued

• In fact, the sources Sleeper-Smith cited for the 1750s definitively prove that Marie Madeleine Réaume and Louis Thérèse Chevalier were not even involved in the fur trade because were not granted a license or permission to participate in the fur trade at Fort St. Joseph (Idle and Massicotte, RAPQ1930).

• I have extracted from Idle the names of the individuals involved in the fur trade in Fort St. Joseph and uploaded them to our website on the Fort St. Joseph Page.
French Canadian and Native Women were documented to have been involved in the Fur Trade under the French Regime, but Marie Madeleine Réaume was not one of those women!

Their involvement included

- investments, including becoming shareholders of the Company of the Colony,
- acting as engageurs,
- handling the business affairs of others, including their husbands, and
- acting as an agent of a merchant.

A list of these women have been uploaded to the Fur Trade Page on the FCHSM website.
Misunderstandings regarding the Certificates and *Memoires* issued between 1739 – 1750

Loraine DiCerbo’s Photo taken at Colonial Michilimackinac
During the period from 1739 – 1750, the *commandants* of the posts in the Great Lakes ordered some of their residents to provide goods and services for the “benefit of the King”

- Supplies were not readily available due to:
  - campaigns against the Chickasaw,
  - King George’s War (1744-1748),
  - the British encouraged New France’s allies to attack Detroit and the posts in the Great Lakes, and
  - the movement of the Huron Mission.
- The individuals or companies supplying goods or services submitted a statement listing the goods or services provided so that they could be reimbursed.
- Many of the goods and services were supplied to Native Americans, their families, or for their benefit.
Sleeper-Smith also misunderstood the certificates, *memoires*, and other official documents issued between 1739-1750 and used them to bolster her erroneous statement that Marie Madeleine Réaume was a fur trader.

“... before she married Louis Chevalier, Madeleine Réaume L’archevêque can be traced in the official reimbursement records of the fort. Madeleine supplied the wheat, oats, and corn needed by the St. Joseph *commandant* in the fight against the Chickasaw.” “*Traders were now brokers of foodstuffs as well as furs.*” [Emphasis added] p. 76.
Facts about the previously mentioned memoire

Marie Madeleine Réaume did not file this memoire; it was filed by her husband Augustin Larche (Larchevêque)
Marie Madeleine Réaume’s Memoire

On 15 May 1746, Marie Madeleine Réaume, widow Larche filed a memoire regarding the items she furnished on 15 September 1745. Her contribution included a fat pig worth 100 livres; a cow worth 120 livres; 4 pairs of snowshoes (Raquettes) at 10 livres each, equals 40 livres; and a birchbark canoe at 80 livres Reference: Library and Archives Canada – Mikan # 3074768.

A list of all of the people who provided goods and services to the commandants at Fort St. Joseph and Detroit have been uploaded to the FCHSM website.
The 1739 – 1750 Certificates and *Memoires* provide documented evidence of cultural *métissage* in the Great Lakes and the Detroit River Region

I have uploaded to the Military Page on the FCHSM website:

• A detailed timeline for this period,
• a list of the types of goods and services supplied,
• and a list of the people who supplied these goods and services in Detroit and Fort St. Joseph.

Gail Moreau-DesHarnais will be providing us with additional examples during her presentation.
Myth: The Detroit River Region was a métis community between 1701 – 1830
20th century origins of the myth that Detroit was a métis community between 1701 – 1830


Peterson’s current (2012) belief


“...the Great Lakes was the birthing ground of neither the Red River Métis nor a separate ethnic group of mixed ancestry and culture. ...”

“... it was impossible to discern how most Great Lakes people of mixed French Canadian and Indian descent viewed themselves.”
The 2003 Canadian Supreme Court Powley Case Provides Guidance as to why the Detroit River Region was not a métis community:


The Court stated that:

• [t]he term Métis in s. 35 [of the Canadian Constitution] does not encompass all individuals with mixed Indian and European heritage;

• rather, it refers to distinctive peoples who, in addition to their mixed ancestry, developed their own customs, ways of life, and recognizable group identity separate from their Indian or Inuit and European forebears (emphasis added).
Facts about the *métis* families in the Detroit River Region

• I have been able to document that approximately 76 French Canadians or British individuals had children by Native Americans and lived in the Detroit River Region between 1701 and 1850.

• The 1710, 1750, and 1762 censuses prove that the Detroit River Region *métis* families lived with the rest of the French Canadians and not in separate *métis* communities. The censuses are available on the Census Page on the FCHSM website:

• Detailed profiles (with images from original parish records) of 58 of the 76 families can be found on the FCHSM Website on the French Canadian and Native Families Page:
Examples of cultural *métissage*

French Canadians living in the St. Lawrence settlements and the Detroit River Region have been documented as following practices learned from Native Americans.

- Hunting and fishing for food;
- Trapping muskrat and beaver for food;
- Making maple sugar;
- Growing and using plants or herbs used in Native medicine

They are not distinct ways of life separate from their ancestors as required under Powley. Instead, they are examples of cultural *métissage*
Rather than a métis community, Detroit was a community noted for its cultural métissage!
Suzanne Sommerville will discuss two métis families in detail and Gail Moreau-DesHarnais will provide additional examples of memoires
Frances Anne Beechey Hopkins, *Encampment of Voyageurs* – LAC
The remainder of this presentation document additional examples of shared culture or *métissage*

Links are also provided to additional resources available on the FCHSM website such as the 1762 Census and detailed profiles of Detroit’s Slave Owners (an ongoing project)
Rather than a *métis* community, Detroit was a community noted for its cultural *métissage*

Examples include, but are not limited to, the following adoptions by French Canadians – These adoptions originated in the St. Lawrence settlements.

- **Native transportation methods** such as canoes, snowshoes, and sleds
  - The use of snowshoes by French Canadians was probably a key factor in saving the lives of those who accompanied Courcelle on his disastrous 1666 campaign against the Iroquois – see the Timeline, Part 4, p. 14 on History of New France Page on the FCHSM Website:
Examples of cultural métissage – adoptions by French Canadians continued

• Native hunting, fishing, trapping, and harvesting methods appropriate to their environment, including the trapping of muskrat and beaver for food.
  • Intendant Hocquart noted that botanist Catherine Jérémie had “long striven to discover the secrets of Indian medicine.” (*DCB*).

• Smoking and raising tobacco in the St. Lawrence Settlements.
  • Officials incorporated ceremonial uses of tobacco as well as other Native Customs into their conferences with Native Americans (*LAC*).
Examples of cultural métissage – continued
Adoptions by Native Americans. These items are documented in merchant records, certificates issued between 1739 – 1750, and art.

• French or French-Canadian manufactured items such as pots, cooking utensils, knives, awls, and weapons such as guns, tomahawks, and iron arrow points.

• French or French-Canadian manufactured personal items such as rings, mirrors, and combs, as well as pigments such as vermilion for painting their faces.

• Manufactured glass beads for use in Wampum belts and to decorate clothing.
  • Native women used embroidery techniques learned from Nuns
Examples of cultural *métissage* – continued

• French Canadians and Native Americans borrowed clothing styles and preferences from each other such as:

  • **French Canadians** wore moccasins, and wore cloth leggings – see Suzanne Sommerville’s article *Does the Apparent Lack of Evidence. . . .”* citing Tonty in 1682 on the Fur Trade Page on the FCHSM Website.

  • **French Canadian women** adopted the short skirts worn by Native women
Examples of cultural métissage – continued – borrowed clothing styles

• Native Americans replaced their fur robes with blankets, and cloth replaced deerskin for use in coats, shirts, hooded coats, and leggings – documented in merchant records and certificates issued between 1739-1750 on the Military Page on the FCHSM website:

Detroiters also took part in Native recreational activities such as lacrosse games (1715 – 1718) and races (1758) – see the article *Outdoor Activities in Detroit* on the French-Canadian Heritage, Culture, and Traditions Page on the FCHSM Website:

George Catlin – *Lacrosse Players*  
George Catlin – *Foot Race*
As a percentage, Detroit had a very small *métis* population, but its culture was greatly enriched by the elements of Native culture that they adopted. Many of the accounts left by visitors described French Canadians in a manner that reflected the author’s bigotry against Native Americans and French Canadians:

“The land is very good, producing all the necessaries of life in abundance, but by reason of the inactivity and idleness of the French inhabitants provisions are very dear, they themselves living but a little better than the Indians and even here seem fully to possess that spirit of gaiety so natural to that nation, for it is not uncommon to see a Frenchman with Indian shoes and stockings, without breaches, wearing a strip of woolen cloth to cover what decency requires him to conceal. Yet at the same time he wears a fine ruffled shirt, a laced waistcoat with a fine handkerchief on his head. But since the English have frequented these parts the French have laid by many of their savage customs,” [Carver, p. 66].