

La Famille Gauthier dit Saguingoura/Capi8ek8e: Métis Heritage in the Detroit River Region and Pays d'en Haut

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the development of one family in the interior of "New France" from the 17th through the 20th century, its cultural legacy in the region and among future generations. It addresses two issues: subjective views on race and ethnicity and genealogical errors by scholars, both of which perpetuate historical narratives that disregard the agency and historical significance of mixed Indigenous/French Canadian marriages and their Métis offspring, particularly in the area of the Great Lakes. I contend that this family is an example of cultural continuity in the face of pressure to conform to societies that did not value French Canadian and Métis history and culture.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Great Lakes French Canadian and French Métis experience demands an understanding of context. For those people who seek to more fully understand their culture and family history, this paper will provide them with a concrete example of what métissage looked like in our historical experience. That it needs to be written is due in part to controversial writings by respected scholars and genealogists. Genealogical facts have been glossed over, distorted, or interpreted in ways that are biased toward a

worldview that privileges one aspect of our history, the European aspect. Furthermore, the names of some of the individuals found in this paper have been used to project a historical narrative that belies the actual experience of our local and regional culture.

Métis identity is a complicated and controversial topic. It is controversial in Canada, where registered, documented Métis people are considered an Aboriginal people. Some people argue that only a particular group of people whose ancestors can be placed at a particular place and time should be considered Métis (the Red River area under Louis Riel). Others argue that Métis is a category, lifestyle, and sense of being that arose much earlier than the mid-19th century, the era which some scholars point to as the timeframe that saw the "ethnogenesis" of Métis culture (Kessler, "Aboriginal Identity & Terminology").

Métis identity is even more fraught in the United States, where Métis status is less understood and has largely been associated with Western States such as North Dakota and Montana where 19th century Manitoba Métis culture is recognized as having had some influence. Reinforcing such perceptions is the work of contemporary scholars, genealogists, and activists. Some seek to restrict the understanding of who can be considered Métis using standards that define ethnic groups. Arguments are made that diminish claims to the legitimate perpetuation of culture. One example of this is the claim articulated by a lay researcher to a doctoral student that, when an Indian woman married a French or French Canadian man, their children took his culture and all subsequent generations should be considered European (Marrero 1).

Proof of cultural genesis and continuity might include political consciousness, musical traditions, religious beliefs, land claims, and documentation proving that a particular group of people was distinguished as separate from other groups. Ethnonyms, as used historically, are used to assert cultural identity (Métis Nation of Ontario). Another standard of proof frequently used to *deny* that descendants of mixed French Canadian and Indigenous families in Detroit, the rest of the Pays d'en Haut, and Pays des Illinois among other areas should be considered Métis, is endogamy. Endogamy is the practice of marrying within your own group, perpetuating a culture from generation to generation through bloodlines as well as customs. Yet this standard conflicts with the very nature of Métis identity, which is predicated on the marriage of European and Indigenous peoples, a practice which began in the earliest days of New France and continues today. To be Métis must include the necessity of 'marrying out.'

Strict endogamy therefore is an unreasonable standard by which to judge Métis identity and cultural status. I would instead submit that Métis identity must be understood by means of a modified endogamy. In the genealogical study that I present below, I will show that in the context of one extended family, marriages between two Métis individuals, between French/French Canadians and Métis, between Métis and First Nations, and between First Nations and French Canadians should be understood as the experience of an "intercultural endogamy" that was perpetuated over many generations *among* First Nations, French/French Canadians, Métis, and to a lesser extent other European and African ethnic groups (United Church of Canada).¹

While each of these primary cultures largely retained its own autonomy, unique values, and histories *vis-à-vis* each other, marriage among these groups has long been considered if not always fully acceptable, then at least a cultural norm in the regions mentioned (Peterson 50-52; Morrisey 140-141). Furthermore, these groups have historically been identified with one another, sharing family names (ex., LaDuke, Peltier, LaPointe), cultural traits (ex., ceinture flechée, trapping, oral tradition), and socio-economic challenges based on real or perceived indigeneity. They also have shared *genealogies* and according to some scholars, kinship networks that help to define métissage and subsequently the birth of Métis people (Sleeper-Smith , Women, Kin 441; Indian Women 54-72).

This essay includes the voices of people who identify as Métis today. They regard their identity to be continuous from the earliest days of European and Indigenous contact in the Great Lakes. They base their identities on cultural transmission within their immediate families and extended cultural networks. I will show, using the genealogy of one family who resided in New France beginning in the 17th century, that "intercultural endogamy" existed among Métis, French Canadian, and Indigenous peoples in the Great Lakes region and continued to do so as the fur trade ended. I also show based on contemporary narratives that intercultural endogamy continues to exist among Métis, French Canadians, and Indigenous peoples perpetuating the centuries-old Métis culture that evolved out of the fur trade. In other words, métissage among these peoples should be understood to be

an ongoing phenomenon in addition to an historical one. Further I will demonstrate how research errors and biases perpetuate the marginalization of Métis identity.

CASE STUDY

The case study for this paper is found among the descendants of Jean Gauthier dit Saguingoura (GEN 1), an *engagé* from Lachine, Quebec whose travels began in the 1690s on trips throughout the Great Lakes, and Capi8ek8e or Capioukoue (GEN 1), a woman from the Kaskaskia tribe of Illinois Indians (White 178; PRDH Family 8932; Massicotte 199-200).² This couple married, had children, and lived in the *Pays des Illinois* along the Kaskaskia River. They had at least four children who are recorded in the registers of the parish of Notre Dame de la Conception Immaculee in Kaskaskia, Illinois. My study deals specifically with their daughter Suzanne (GEN 2) and her descendants.

It is important to note first however the presence of *another* Jean Gauthier dit Saguingoura (GEN 2) who was born at Kaskaskia and whose life has been explored by scholar Sophie White. This Jean was born in 1713, one of two sons named Jean of Jean Gauthier dit Saguingoura and Capi8ek8e (White 180, Tanguay 206).³ Like his siblings, he was also half Kaskaskia Indian. White uses this Jean Saguingoura (as he came to be known - 'Gauthier' was dropped) as an example of the "frenchification" of a half Kaskaskia Indian male. "Frenchification" has been accepted by many scholars, depicting Indigenous and Métis peoples as giving up native cultural ties in favor of French society

in the colonial era. "Frenchification" has been used to deny the emergence and continuity of Métis culture, perpetuating views that Indigenous and Métis people, such as Marie Rouensa also of the Kaskaskia and her children, abandoned their Indigenous cultural influences and passed nothing of Indigenous culture on to future generations (Ekberg 153; Morrisey 145; Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women* 35).⁴

This Jean Saguingoura was a protégé of Nicolas Pelletier de Franchomme, a French military officer and nobleman who himself was married to an Indian woman. To prove his "frenchification" White uses, among other evidence, the presence of a laundry clause in a 1739 contract, an unusual clause that she says would mark him out as a Frenchman rather than an Indian in French colonial society. Yet she also provides evidence that shows Jean to have been seen by Franchomme himself "in ambiguous and fluid terms: as one who could be either Indian or French." Jean was included in Franchomme's will with the admonition that he be protected (by Franchomme's Indigenous widow Marguerite Ouaquamo Quoana) from returning to Illinois culture (White 181-182).

White indicates nonetheless that Jean's later life was spent in the "liminal role of voyageur" which "ensured that he slipped in and out of contact with various indigenous societies (each with its own way of gauging his identity)." I would argue that Jean Saguingoura should be seen not as a frenchified Kaskaskia Indian, but instead as a prototypical Métis voyageur: a half Indian, half French man crossing in and out of many cultures in the course of his life, effectively navigating a complex and rapidly changing world based in part on his own mixed lineage. He gained advantage from his association

with a highly placed French officer while retaining his ability to return to the rugged life of a voyageur, following a family tradition started by his father and continued in future generations. Just as White claims Franchomme had "initiated Saguingoura in the cultural practices of the French elite," as a voyageur, he would have undoubtedly been initiated into the cultural practices of the voyageur world as well, the world that gave rise to Métis culture (White 184).

In the first half of the 18th century Jean Saguingoura's sister (or, according to White's analysis, his cousin), Suzanne Gauthier dit Saguingoura (GEN 2), relocated to Montreal for reasons unknown. There in 1732 under the name of Suzanne Gauthier she married a recent immigrant from France named Jacques Souchereau dit Langoumois (Ste Anne de Bellvue 76). Both of her parents are listed as dead in her marriage registry. Together, Jacques and Suzanne had children while residing in Quebec. At least three of *their* children, the one-quarter Kaskaskia grandchildren of dit Saguingoura and Capie8k8e, returned to the Pays d'en haut by the last quarter of the 18th century residing in the Detroit River region with their own families (PRDH Family #81192, Couple #18150; Kaskaskia records; Ste Anne de Bellevue 21).

Two of these siblings, sisters Marie Elisabeth and Agathe Souchereau (GEN 3) married brothers Louis and Etienne Robidou (in 1764, 1767 respectively). The Robidou brothers were descendants (great-great grandsons) of a Spaniard named Manuel Robidou via one family line and of a woman known as Michelle Mingroy or Nègresse via another. I have been unable to locate any other biographical information or a birth registry for Michelle

Mingroy. However, the alternative name that is widely assigned to her (Negresse) suggests that she was of African heritage.⁵ If this is true, the Métis Souchereau sisters lived with their part African husbands and their Métis children of Kaskaskia, French, Spanish, and African descent at River Raisin, Monroe, Michigan. If Michelle Negresse was not African, it still remains that these two sisters resided with their husbands and their Métis children at River Raisin (PRDH Family #18150).

Another Souchereau Langoumois sister, Marie Françoise (GEN 3), settled in the Assumption/Detroit area with her French Canadian husband Etienne Godefroy Balard dit LaTour. In this line of descent, their Métis children (GEN 4), the one-eighth Kaskaskia great-grandchildren of Jean Gauthier dit Saguingoura and Capi8ek8e, lived along the shores of Lake St. Clair among old Detroit French families and recent migrants. Their daughter Marie Françoise (GEN 4), the eldest of the family was married on February 19, 1798 to the half-Indian Antoine Descompt Labadie, the son of Antoine Louis Decompt dit Labadie and Marie, an Ojibwe/Sauteuse Indian (Denissen 619). The marriage registry for this couple indicates that the bride's father was dead. But, unusually, the mother is highlighted. The record states that the marriage was "autorise par sa mere" - authorized by her mother, Marie Françoise Souchereau. Here, the granddaughter of a Kaskaskia woman is actively involved in the marriage of her daughter to a half-Ojibwe man and together they would pass on their family lines. It betrays the imagination to suggest that all of these people were unaware of their Indigenous cultures and that those cultures played no role in their family lives (Ste Anne de Detroit 1470-71). However, this is what genealogists and scholars who deny that Métis culture existed in the Detroit River region

would have us believe.

Another daughter, Geneviève (GEN 4), married, on September 7, 1806, a member of the Pelletier family that had long resided in the area. In this instance, the groom is Isaac Pelletier whose grandfather Pierre Meloche was a confidante and friend of Chief Pontiac (Denissen 820, 957-958). Further, his uncle Jean-Baptiste Meloche is mentioned in accounts of Pontiac's War as the supporter whose residence Pontiac used as a theater of operations (Burton 11, 56-57, 98, 184, 242-243; Paré 53). It was also a Pelletier who, according to a popularly discredited tradition, was already living in the area with an Indian wife when Cadillac came ashore to 'found' Detroit in 1701 (Hamlin 29, 311). That is not the only Labadie/Balard connection. Nicolas Godefroy Balard dit Latour (GEN 4) married Genevieve Nantais, the Ojibwe/French granddaughter of Antoine Labadie and Marie his Ojibwe wife through their own daughter Marie, who was married to Benjamin Grégoire dit Nantais. In this case, a one-quarter Ojibwe/French Métis has married a one-eighth Kaskaskia/French Métis in the Detroit River region on October 25, 1832 (Denissen 885). And in the next generation, Thésèse Godefroy Balard (GEN 5), the daughter of Nicolas and his first wife Cecilia Yax, married Simon Charron, a descendant of Catherine Pillard ((DesHarnais, Leclair, and Robitaille). Was the memory of Pillard's Huron ancestry edited from the oral tradition of her descendants when Simon married the Métisse Thérèse on February 8, 1830 at St. Pierre, Ontario along the southern shore of Lake St. Clair (Denissen 258)?⁶ Was the wider community of old French Canadian and Métis families blind to their own ethnic ancestries and those of their neighbors?

A pattern is seen emerging in this account of five generations of an extended family beginning with Jean Gauthier dit Saguingora and Capi8ek8e. One-hundred and thirty years plus after the first Indigenous/French Canadian marriage, descendants continue to marry other mixed-race individuals or members of French Canadian families whose social connections reflect the cultural métissage that is widely understood to be a feature of the fur trade settlements of the Great Lakes (Marrero; Jung 45-55; Murphy 142-166). Genealogies of the Detroit River region French families tend to show a small number of names over and over again. The early population was small and intermarriage among distant cousins was practically inevitable. However, it was *not* inevitable that Métis people would find themselves marrying other Métis people or people who were not of pure French (or European) lineage in some way.

As part of the research for this paper, I was provided with narrative descriptions of family lineages submitted by informants who descend from First Nations and Métis ancestors and the earliest French Canadians in the Pays d'en Haut. Descendants of these 17th and 18th century marriages later congregated in the Detroit River region and along the shores of Lake St. Clair and Frenchtown/River Raisin. This includes people whose families left the Pays d'en haut or Pays des Illinois in one generation, but who, it is reasonable to assume, retained some cultural connection to the area and returned continuing the mobility established by people like Jean Gauthier dit Sanguingoura, his nephew Jean Saguingoura, and his daughter Suzanne. An example of this are the children of Suzanne Gauthier and Jacques Souchereau Langoumois.

The informants are members of a community that accepts them as Métis and they practice a culture today that they regard as a modern manifestation of the Métis culture that arose in the earliest days of settlement in the Pays d'en Haut. They consider that their modern community is part of a culture that they have inherited from the people who formed the concentration of settlement in the Detroit River Region beginning in the 18th century. Their narratives describe unique ways in which individuals today find community and connection within the Windsor/Detroit-area French Canadian and French Métis culture(s) known colloquially as "Muskrat French." These communities are represented by organizations such as the Voyageur Métis, The French Canadian Cultural Alliance of the Great Lakes, and a loose collective of writers, researchers, musicians, artists, and families who engage in activities bringing forward traditional culture into our current days.

The description above of the interconnected Métis, French Canadian, and First Nations families represents the ancestry of many people who might identify as "Muskrat French." Combined, they are an example of many similar family lines of old Detroit French families that interweave and include a Métis line back to one or more Indigenous ancestors. Names like Reaume, Chevalier, Pelletier, Droulliard, LeBlanc, and many others are actually emblematic of the Muskrat French appearing in early narratives of the culture as seen by outsiders (LaForest 87-100). A study of the genealogies of these families will perhaps not include *numerous* Indigenous individuals; a study may contain only one or two Indigenous family lines. However, to understand this therefore as a rare event or without implications for their descendants is to ignore the culture in which these

people lived, the fur trade and the kinship networks that provided the context of métissage in which such marriages could take place in the first place.

Anecdotes, historical documents, and proven genealogies provided by members of the community Voyageur Métis (who self-identify variously as Métis, First Nations, and French Canadian) show that the Labadie/Souchereau couple noted above was not an isolated occurrence, but rather reflects a pattern found throughout the area and continuing through the 20th century. One example provided is Paul Souchereau Langoumois (GEN 3), a brother to the sisters described earlier. Paul, born in 1741 in Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec, followed in the footsteps of his grandfather Jean Gauthier dit Saguingoura and uncle Jean Saguingoura by becoming a voyageur (Voyageur Contracts Database 17690623). A descendant has proven that Paul's granddaughter married into the Bourbonnais fur trade family, and a generation later, a great-granddaughter married a descendant of the Indigenous Manitouabeouich family, merging French, Algonquin, Cree, and Kaskaskia family lines. In another example, several lines of descendants of Catherine Pillard merge repeatedly in one family, with many descendants tracing their ancestry back to her multiple times while intermarrying among old Detroit French families (DesHarnais, Leclair, and Robitaille). According to another informant, recent generations of the Labadie family continued to marry among First Nations and Métis families. Adoption in this family perpetuated Métis culture and is considered a legitimate means of cultural transmission (Belcourt 137).

Just as the early Métis descendants of Jean Gauthier dit Saguingoura and Capi8ek8e were highly mobile, moving from the Pays des Illinois, to Quebec and back to the Pays d'en haut, 20th-century family members included Métis and First Nations from Sudbury, Ontario relocating to the Lake St. Clair area and intermarrying with local Métis and French Canadian families. Their narratives also describe families in which married couples were aware they were distant cousins, were aware they were both Métis, in which indigenous ancestors can be clearly identified, where families were connected in some way to the fur trade, and where cultural values did not preclude interracial marriage. The narratives describe kinship networks that are widely considered fundamental elements of the fur trade and the cultures that developed out of that trade as noted above (Anderson, Sullivan, and Laprise).

The partial genealogies of four Souchereau-Langoumois siblings presented in this paper portray a family in which intermarriage between French Canadian (or other European), Indigenous, Métis, and African individuals over many generations left thousands of descendants in the Detroit River region. Where there was not actual intermarriage between two Métis spouses, there were marriages such as the one between the Métis Geneviève and the French Canadian Isaac. His was a family that was not just residing in the same area as First Nations settlements living fully separate lives in unconnected communities; to the contrary they were interacting on a long-standing and personal basis, with shared concerns including each other's well-being and survival. To suggest, as some scholars have, that Indigenous people, Métis, and the French Canadians of Detroit did not have common interests, or that those faded over time, is a conception of history and

culture that is easily refuted by historical events such as the Pontiac/Meloche relationship, genealogical studies, and oral tradition (Teasdale 20-21, *Voyageur Heritage*).

A 2010 York University dissertation attempts to prove that a Métis culture in the Detroit River region did not emerge at any time. Guillaume Teasdale argues that mixed marriages when they did occur were peripheral to the broader regional *French* culture. To prove this he cites the couple described above, Antoine Labadie and Marie-Françoise Godefroy Balard (GEN 4) who he presents as an example of a half-Indian man marrying a **French** woman. Teasdale writes: "One of them, Antoine Louis Descomps dit Labadie, [*senior*] had children with a Chippewa woman between his two marriages with Frenchwomen. However, none of his children from this relationship married an Indian or an individual of mixed-ancestry" (Teasdale 249). Using the extensive genealogy of Father Christian Dennisen, it takes a very short time to trace from Marie-Françoise, to her great-grandmother Capi8ek8e of the Kaskaskia, wife of Jean Gauthier dit Saguingoura.

The purpose of this paper is not to nitpick (as unfortunately, papers by lay researchers are too often guilty of) by pointing out genealogical errors in a dissertation not widely available to the public. Highlighting this error is necessary because an argument is being made that includes a widely shared perspective: that Detroit River region French Canadians and French Métis do not have a legacy that would lend itself to a continuity of culture. Teasdale's argument also contends that any Métis presence in the area was marginal at most and should be characterized as 'cultural métissage' that disappeared over

time (Teasdale 268). On the one hand, I'm inclined to say that this genealogical error was just that a mistake: I know how complicated the old Detroit family trees can be. Yet it must be asked, was it a mistake or was it the presentation of a worldview — a bald statement about identity politics in alignment with the genealogist whose statement is recorded by Karen Marrero in her dissertation, and with an array of scholars many of whom once entertained the idea of the 'Detroit Métis' but have since come out against it? Can a scholar afford to write about the *métis* (the undifferentiated people of mixed heritage) of Detroit as *Métis* (the mixed heritage people who claim a unique culture and identity) without repercussions for their career?

The marriages of Antoine Labadie and Marie-Françoise Godefroy Balard; Genevieve Nantais and Nicholas Godefroy Balard; and Thérèse Godefroy Balard and Simon Charron are proofs that are contrary to the idea that the Métis of Détroit did not know each other, did not know themselves, and did not perpetuate their culture and identity. They represent links among Ojibwe, Huron, and Kaskaskia Indians with Detroit French Canadians that stretches for nearly 150 years. Nonetheless, the details of local Métis men marrying local Métis women, all connected to old Pays d'en haut families in the years 1798, 1830, and 1832 respectively in the Detroit River region and bearing children in the early years of the 19th century, are lost in a broader argument. That argument seeks to assign a fully French culture to an area that was routinely characterized in ways that resembled characterizations of other Métis and Creole areas throughout the region (LaForest 98-99).

In 1892 Vitaline Benoit of Pointe aux Roches, Ontario on the south shore of Lake St. Clair, married David LaForest.⁷ A branch of the LaForest family was long connected to Pêche Island off Tecumseh, Ontario in the Detroit River, living there from the last decades of the 18th century. Folk narratives suggest that a branch of the LaForest family lived alongside resident First Nations in a harmonious relationship; the last generation to live on the Island saw the marriage of Leon LaForest to Rosalie Droulliard whose family was deeply associated with Native Americans. It is arguable that this was a family who, while not Métis, was impacted by the experience of cultural métissage over the course of the several generations that they lived on Pêche Island (Weeks).

For her part, Vitalie Benoit, a seventh generation descendant of Jean Gauthier dit Saguingoura and Capi8ek8e, passed on the family story of Indigenous ancestry to her son, my grandfather, who passed it on to his children and finally to the present generation. The narrative as it was related to me reflected the social discourse of earlier generations and I grew up understanding that I was "Part Indian" unaware like others of the exact extent and origins of those roots until the era of digitization opened a wealth of information to researchers. "Part Indian" was our way of saying Métis, existing alongside "French Canadian" in expressing our identity and culture. It reflected a pride in our ancestry that we knew to be true as part of our family oral tradition. It reflected a lifestyle practiced up through my generation that includes hunting, trapping, and wild harvesting, as well as honoring ancestors through perpetuating their memories, stories and the cultures they lived through eras of great change. David and Vitaline's family represent another generation of French Canadians and French Métis on the shores of Lake St. Clair

and the Detroit River perpetuating the legacy of métissage and Métisness into the 21st century.

Finally, a communication from another descendant of Jean Gauthier dit Saguingoura and Capi8ek8e through their granddaughter Françoise Souchereau Langoumois and her husband Etienne Godefroy Balard dit Latour via their son, also called Etienne (GEN 4), indicates that the awareness of the family's indigenous ancestry passed down widely among their descendants, even among people who do not identify as Métis today. This informant reports that her great-grandfather Joseph Balard/Ballor/Bellor (GEN 6, 1862-1948, son of Thomas Balard and Elizabeth Dubay) was the last person in her family to receive an "Indian Payment" from the government (Denissen 38). While the informant was unaware of her now-proven Kaskaskia lineage, she narrated a family story claiming Ojibwe origins as an explanation of her great-grandfather's receipt of such funds. This type of confusion is common. The downstate Illinois Kaskaskia tribe lost their lands and merged with the Peoria in the early 19th century. Consequently, their history is not widely known (Peoria Tribe). The Ojibwe on the other hand are a large, extant Michigan tribe and it is easy to imagine how an accurate family story became modified over time to reflect a local connection. Yet the informant also pointed to the possibility that she had both Ojibwe *and* Kaskaskia ancestry. However this particular family scenario is finally unraveled, it is clear that either through his proven Kaskaskia lineage or through a potential Ojibwe lineage, Joseph Balard's First Nations ancestry is associated with receiving a payment from the government intended for *Indians*, a payment he would not have received were this not the case. If this can be proven, it would illustrate that a

relative of other historical individuals cited as Métis in this paper was actually considered *Indian* through the early 20th century (Posell).

A number of issues arise in examining the unique population of the Detroit River Region. One, of which the misidentification of a Métis woman as French is emblematic, is the identification of people based on incomplete research or the views of 20th and 21st century researchers who assert that a person of mixed ancestry or unknown ancestry in the Pays d'en haut and later in post-colonial Detroit should be considered French. A second problem is the international border, which did not exist in much of the timeframe when French Canadian, Métis, and First Nations were dominant in the area. The border artificially imposes a conception of history flawed by the idea that the Detroit River region's French Canadian community has been historically divided, limiting cultural connections. Thirdly are contemporary beliefs about how many indigenous ancestors are required to be Métis and how recently they lived, which serve as benchmarks of identity for cultural gatekeepers. Such beliefs constitute a new sort of blood quantum requirement with capricious standards for inclusion in Métis culture, a milieu that has become a political minefield. Finally, there is the widespread view among scholars that Métis in the Great Lakes disappeared after their *raison d'être*, the fur trade, ebbed, with the only lasting manifestation of Métis culture predicated on the political uprising in Manitoba led by Riel.

Yet, until recently the late 19th-21st century French legacy cultures of the Windsor/Detroit area were hardly studied at all, with numerous writers simply writing the

interconnected French Canadian, Métis, and "Muskrat French" communities out of history with little comment or understanding of them, a troubling practice that continues to be seen in the works of academics, genealogists, and commentators today. The cultural history has not been extensively addressed by French-speaking scholars because much of the study is based in the United States, nor by English-speaking scholars because much of the source material is in French. Complicating any study is the inconsistency of records, names, and dates from the 17th century onward particularly when the interpretation of said records (by both academics and lay researchers) have introduced new errors and confusion. Controversy over the reliability, acceptability, and legitimacy of oral tradition, through which evidence has been passed down in families for many generations, taints the relationship between cultural advocates, scholars, and genealogists. Interested parties may act out of self-interest rather than the out of the interest of a fair reading of culture and history.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I would like to return briefly to the issue of ethnonyms, a topic to which I have alluded throughout this essay. Recounting a meeting he attended around 2013, Métis leader Tony Belcourt describes a conversation that took place about identity, at the heart of which was the names by which he and other prominent Métis people have been known. He relates how one person grew up saying that her family were "Indians" and then they would say "Métis"; another person also said that they were "Indians" but that she knew her family was different because she didn't get crayons and pencils in school when the other kids did — a benefit accorded only to Indians. Belcourt said that he

remembered growing up that people said "*Apihtawkosanak*, meaning 'we are Cree half-cousins.'" He goes on to suggest that "Although we share a similar history, culture, ancestors, territory, and traditions, one fact that we need to realize is that the Métis are not a single homogenous group. History shows that we have seen ourselves in different ways: either, in part, because of the European or First Nations ancestry that was fundamental in shaping our culture and customs, or in part because ways of life, depending on where we live" (Belcourt 140-141).

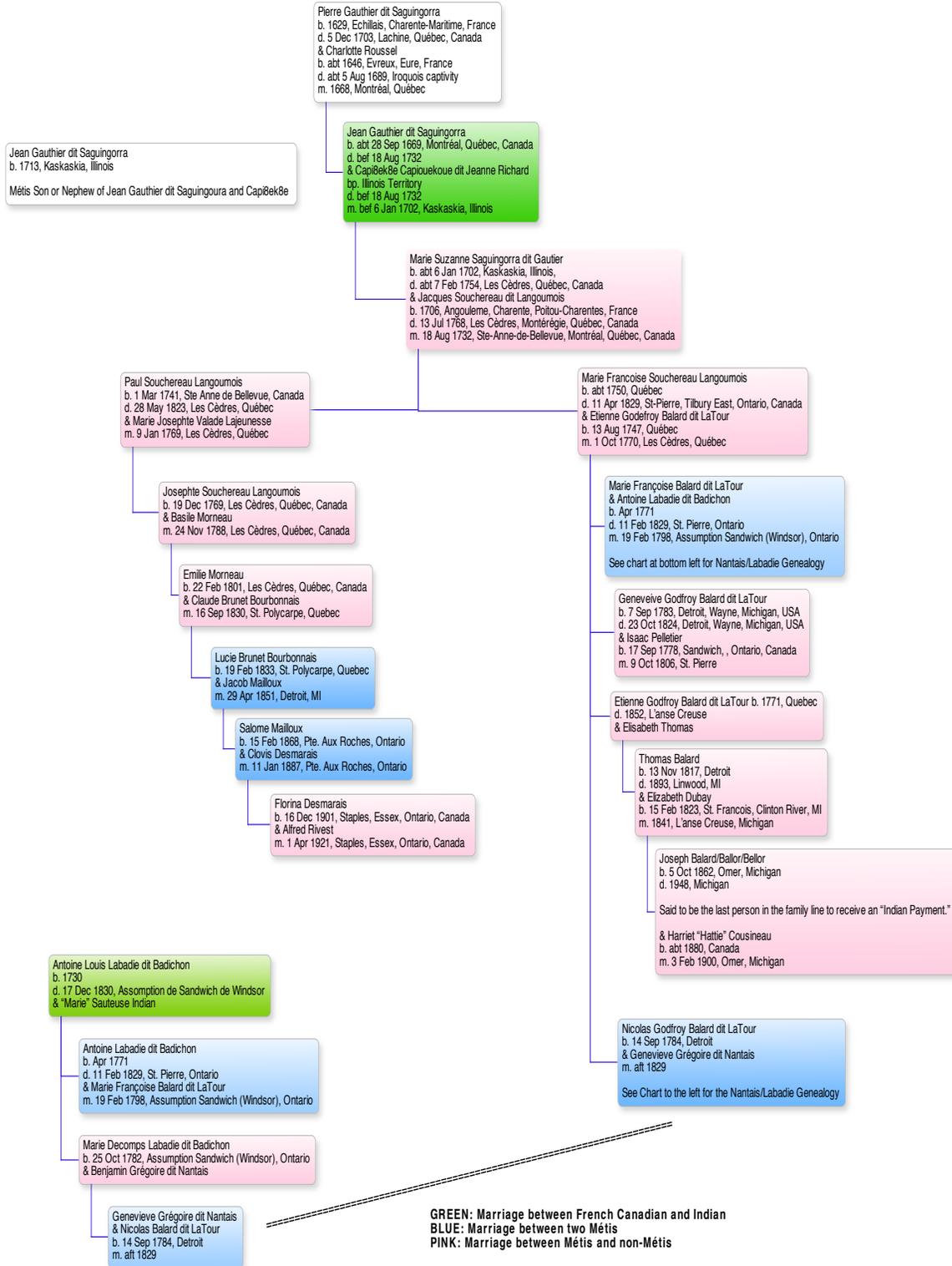
Over the course of 300 years from about 1700 through the 20th century, descendants of Jean Gauthier dit Saguingoura and Capi8ek8e practiced "intercultural endogamy" among First Nations, French and French Canadians, and Métis peoples facilitated first by the métissage of the fur trade and then by individuals seeking out marriage partners based on common cultural attributes, resulting in the perpetuation of a distinct Métis population and culture in the Detroit River region. This population is comprised of people who have long referred to themselves as "Part Indian" and is closely connected to the local French Canadian population. It is rightly considered as much a part of the regional "Muskrat French" subculture as are non-Métis French Canadians, a culture that scholars have identified as developing out of the fur trade (Naveaux 3). These "Part Indian," Muskrat French, and French Canadian populations passed their cultural legacy down to the present generation through intercultural endogamy and through a long-standing oral tradition. Only recently has genealogical research been needed to confirm and document their cultural heritage.

The rootedness of the descendants of dit Saguingoura and Capie8k8e in their own Métis culture can be traced by their presence along old land and river routes and the re-gathering of families in the Detroit River region and other areas as the fur trade ended. But it can also be traced to other valued connections that were ported, like a voyageur's wares: learned, adopted, adapted, preserved and maintained from generation to generation to the present day. They, as Tony Belcourt and his colleagues experienced, came to be known by different names depending on their particular experience and geographic location. Contemporary descendants of fur trade marriages in the Great Lakes region who perpetuate the culture of their ancestors express a legitimate manifestation of Métis culture. They rightly embrace a name that describes, in a unifying way, the experience of their ancestors while recognizing that all Métis do not form one single, homogenous entity. In so doing, they challenge historical narratives, which silence them and which revise the lives of their ancestors in ways that suit the needs of other players. It is incumbent on researchers to recognize that subjective views and factual errors have the potential to distort history and to thoughtlessly diminish, if not erase, legitimate forms of culture practiced historically and today.

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GENEALOGICAL CHART

DESCENDANTS of JEAN GAUTIER DIT SAGUINGOURA and CAPIE8K8E



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¹ One definition of intercultural as used today: "In intercultural communities, there is comprehensive mutuality, reciprocity, and equality." The term "intercultural endogamy" was used by Adam William Keul in his dissertation "Social Spatialization in the Atchafalaya Basin", Florida State University, Department of Geography, 2011 as an alternative term used to explain how exogamy among Cajuns did not lead to a "watering down of the community" but rather to the inclusion of non-Cajuns into the Cajun community. See Kuel, page 48.

² Henceforth, I will note the generation in question by using the format (GEN 1); I will use the form Capi8ek8e as used by Sophie White and found in other places. "dit" means also known as - Jean Gauthier dit Saguingoura means his name was Gauthier, but the family was also known as Saguingoura.

³ Sophie White has taken the position that the junior Jean Gauthier is the nephew of Jean Gauthier dit Saguingoura and Capie8k8e, yet the original parish record from Kaskaskia clearly indicates that he was their son, as he is considered in published genealogies such as Cyprien Tanguay's *Dictionnaire Généalogique*.

⁴ Marie Rouensa is a widely used example of frenchification because she was a prominent convert to Catholicism and became wealthy through the fur trade. Her disinheriting a son for returning to Indigenous ways is presented as evidence of her thorough conversion not just to Catholicism, but also to purely French ways. Yet she herself demanded that her last will and testament be recited to her twice in the Illinois language. Questions therefore are left unanswered about the extent that she may have remained "Illinois" and what knowledge of Illinois culture her children retained and passed on to future generations.

⁵ French Canadian Catholic parish registers from the colonial era routinely refer to people of African descent as Negre/Negresse.

⁶ See also "Diane's Database" person number I90113 <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=wolfordsheppard&id=I90113> for the pedigree of their son Simon.

⁷ These individuals are my great-grandparents. I am, in the interest of full disclosure, a member of the community Voyageur Métis. I identify as French Canadian and Métis, and associate myself and my ancestors in the Detroit River region with the Muskrat French.