

Certain Surprises in Research about Vidrine Family History

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Genealogical research, like all of history, is filled with various surprises along the way, and the work I've done through the years has been no different in this regard. Of course, all who research the history of the Vidrine Family are indebted to Drouet and Jackie Vidrine's tremendous work in the last 40 years. Without it, none of the ongoing research today would be possible. But because of it, I and many others, peeked by both personal interest as well as love of history, can continue the quest...and discover surprises along the way. I would like to share three of those areas of research, which contained delightful surprises to me.

1 - Védrières (Vidrine) family who remained in France.

Once I entered seminary college and began to study the history of the Church, and particularly, the French Revolution, I remembered that the background to my family's history was in France. I also remembered from Jackie Vidrine's book that two of Jean Baptiste Lapaise de Védrières' brothers had professed vows as Benedictine Monks.¹ I wondered, therefore, if and how the Védrières family who remained in France (especially Francois and Guillaume de Védrières) may have been impacted by the violent and turbulent years of the French Revolution which began in 1789 and even wrote a research paper about that topic for a class at seminary.

Just a few years ago, while doing an internet search, I came across a quarterly newsletter published by the Commune of Barsac, France, which included a passage of Barsac's history during the time of the Revolution from the book, *Barsac au Temps de la Carmagnole*.² Interestingly (and surprisingly!), it happened to contain some information about our family's history. Basically, the passage that month traced certain citizens who were fined by the State for failing to report and/or pay the necessary taxes for their income or wealth. One of those highlighted was Jean Baptiste de Védrières, nephew and godson of Jean Baptiste Lapaise de Védrières (son of his brother, Pierre de Védrières). Facts found in this newsletter included the following: 1) It was well known that Pierre de Védrières had houses in the town of Ste. Livrade and a farm [at Lapeze] in addition to the Chateau [Doisey-Vedrières] near Barsac [all inherited from his father] and property inherited from the family of his wife (Marie Pinsan) at the nearby town of Preignac. 2) That three of Pierre de Védrières' sons also moved to the new world (literally "out of the Kingdom"). 3) That Jean Baptiste de Védrières was the one who sold the property in Ste. Livrade, Lapeze, and Preignac, some time before 1790, retaining only the Chateau at Barsac. 4) That three sisters of Jean Baptiste de Védrières who were living with him at the Chateau and who were single girls whom Jackie Vidrine surmised had never married³ were, in fact, Religious Sisters who had been banished from Religious Life at the start of the Revolution and all sought refuge with their brother. 5) That Jean Baptiste de Védrières' sister, Marie de Védrières, a former Religious Sister who had to testify about where she lived (in 1790) was 58 years old, and described in her passport as: 5 feet tall, brown hair, blue eyes, well made nose, round front, average mouth, short chin and round face.⁴

I also learned about the life of Fr. Michel Bernard Barriere who fled France because of the Revolution and ended up ministering to Jean Baptiste Lapaise de Védrières' family in LA (He baptized several of their children and buried Elizabeth de Moncharvaux).⁵ Included along with his records in the Baptismal Register of St. Landry Church is the note he left: "this family was well known" to him in Bordeaux in 1770.⁶

It is clear that the French Revolution did indeed impact the Védrières family, both in France and in LA. But further research in this area should be pursued.

¹ *Vidrières-Vedrières: Our Vedrières in France*, Jacqueline O. Vidrine, Acadiana Press, 1981

² Barsac Infos, July-September 2008 (http://www.barsac.fr/images/upload/journal/infos_n_20.imp.pdf), p. 15

³ *Vidrières-Vedrières: Our Vedrières in France*, Jacqueline O. Vidrine, p. 137

⁴ Barsac Infos, July-September 2008 (http://www.barsac.fr/images/upload/journal/infos_n_20.imp.pdf), p. 15

2 - The early years of Jean Baptiste Lapaise de Védrières in LA with Governor Vaudreuil

A second surprise I discovered as I learned more about the life of Jean Baptiste Lapaise de Védrières once he departed France for LA, including his relationship with Governor Pierre de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil. As Jackie Vidrine and her son Warren point out in their book, *Governor Vaudreuil's Voyage to Louisiana*, Jean Baptiste Lapaise, as a newly appointed Officer of the French Marines, was aboard the ship La Charente that sailed from Rochefort, France with the newly-appointed Governor of LA. Jean Baptiste Lapaise must have attended what was by all accounts a very lavish party in St. Domingue (now Haiti)⁷, where they stopped off before arriving in New Orleans in May of 1743.

He would spend a decade in New Orleans at the service of the Governor. Vaudreuil was well liked, in part, because he stimulated the economy of LA, bringing great prosperity. He enjoyed pomp and splendor and was quite the entertainer, known for throwing lavish balls.⁸ He's remembered thus:

The administration of the Marquis of Vaudreuil was long and fondly remembered in Louisiana, as an epoch of unusual brilliance. His administration...was for Louisiana, with regard to splendor, luxury, military display, and expenses of every kind, what the reign of Louis XIV had been for France. He was a man of patrician birth and high breeding, who liked to live in a manner, worthy of his rank. Remarkable for his personal grace and comeliness, for the dignity of his bearing and the fascination of his address, he was fond of pomp, show and pleasure; surrounded by a host of brilliant officers, of whom he was the idol, he loved to keep up a miniature court, in distant imitation of that of Versailles; and long after he had departed, old people were fond of talking of the exquisitely refined manners, the magnificent balls, the splendidly uniformed troops, the high-born young officers, and many other unparalleled things they had seen in the days of the *Great Marquis*.⁹

Governor Vaudreuil's wife, Jeanne-Charlotte de Fleury, herself was a known to be a feisty lady. She operated a retail business in New Orleans that caused a bit of a scandal.¹⁰

Jean Baptiste Lapaise de Védrières' years in New Orleans were concurrent with Vaudreuil's as Governor. Afterward, he was sent to the Fort de Chartres in IL just before the new Commandant of the Illinois Country, Jean Jacques Macarty, was appointed; he would serve there with Commandant Macarty for about ten years until they both retired to New Orleans after the Treaty of Paris in 1763. Macarty himself was known to be a strong leader who, at times, was difficult to get along with:

Macarty's general irascibility and tendency toward arrogance seemed to become more pronounced after his arrival in Illinois, and sooner or later he aroused the ire of most of those who came in contact with him. Government officials, clergymen, and habitants, all complained of his general tactlessness and lack of consideration.¹¹

Continued research in this area would reveal greater detail about what the first 20 years of the life of Jean Baptiste Lapaise de Védrières was like before resettling to lower LA and planting of the seeds there that would eventually blossom as the Vidrine family of LA.

⁷ *Governor Vaudreuil's Voyage to Louisiana*, Vidrine and Vidrine, Drouet Warren Vidrine, 2014, p. 3

⁸ *Louisiana: A History*, Bennett H Wall and John C. Rodrigue, editors, Wiley-Blackwell, 2014; see also [Meet Monsieur de Vaudreuil-Cavagnial](http://viedechateaucanadien.weebly.com/blog/meet-monsieur-de-vaudreuil), Philippe Halbert (<http://viedechateaucanadien.weebly.com/blog/meet-monsieur-de-vaudreuil>)

⁹ *Louisiana; Its Colonial History and Romance*, Gayerré, Charles Étienne Arthur, 1805-1895, Harper & brothers, 2005, pp. 237-238

¹⁰ "A Baser Commerce": Retailing, Class, and Gender in French Colonial New Orleans, Sophie White, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Jul. 2005), pp. 517-550; see also [Meet Madame de Vaudreuil-Cavagnial](http://viedechateaucanadien.weebly.com/blog/meet-madame-de-vaudreuil-cavagnial), Philippe Halbert

3 - Jean Baptiste Lapaise's young bride, Elizabeth de Moncharvaux

Finally, a great surprise was to learn more about the roots of the young bride of Jean Baptiste Lapaise de Védrines and matriarch of the Vidrine family in LA.

Whereas Jean Baptiste Lapaise de Védrines arrived in LA from France, the young woman he married 15 years afterward in the chapel of St. Anne at Fort Chartres, IL was, in many ways, a native of the New World. Because she carried her father's French name, her maternal heritage is not immediately recognizable. However, her maternal ancestry most likely stretched back in the New World for centuries. Her maternal great grandmother was Marie Rouensa "Aramepinchone" (1677-1725), a full-blooded Native American of the Illinois Kaskaskia tribe.

Marie Rouensa was the daughter of Chief Francois Xavier Mamentouensa Rouensa, who at one time was the Chief not only of his tribe of Kaskaskia Indians, but also of the whole confederation of Illini Indians. Marie converted to Christianity shortly after the Jesuit Priests arrived in IL in the last 17th century and became an influential woman in their missionary work and in the village of Kaskaskia, IL. Her life was so significant that Duke University included her in their seminars on women who helped to shape the nation in 1999. Moreover, Ohio University teaches a history course based on her life, and the Illinois State Museum has an entire wing dedicated to Marie and her tribe.

The Jesuit Fr. Jacques Gravier described Marie's conversion to Christianity at Peoria, IL probably in 1694, when she was 17 years old: "The girl made her first communion on the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady; she had prepared herself for it during more than three months - with such fervor, that she seemed fully penetrated by that great mystery."¹²

Fr. Gravier's letters also described with great enthusiasm Marie Rouensa's prominent public role as a catechist. She became an important assistant who translated the teachings of the Christian faith into the language of the Illini Indians. Fr. Gravier says:

This young woman who is only 17 years old, has so well remembered what I have said about each picture of the Old and New Testament that she explains each one singly, without trouble and without confusion, as well as I could do - and even more intelligently, in their manner. In fact, I allowed her to take away each picture after I had explained it in public, to refresh her memory in private. But she frequently repeated to me, on the spot, all that I has said about each picture; and not only did she explain them at home to her husband, to her father, to her mother, and to all the girls who went there, as she continues to do, speaking of nothing but the pictures or the catechism, but she also explained the pictures on the whole of the Old Testament to the old and the young men whom her father assembled in his dwelling.¹³

She was an instructor for the adults and children of her village of Kaskaskia and an interpreter who was recognized as a gifted storyteller. Even the elders came to hear her. Because of her generous and important help, Fr. Gravier was able to do go about doing his daily round of devotional duties while Marie drew new converts to his mission.

Some of her most important converts where her parents, Chief Rouensa and his wife.¹⁴ Devotion to the Roman Catholic faith as it was conveyed to her by French Jesuit priests seems to have been a central element in Marie's life from the time of her conversion in 1694 to the moment of her death.¹⁵ She continued to help the Jesuits in their work throughout her life, and when she died on June 25, 1725, she was buried beneath her pew in the parish church, the only woman in the history of Kaskaskia to have that honor. Her burial record states that at the time of her death at

¹²*The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Vol. LXIV, p. 210

¹³*The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Vol. LXIV, p. 228

Kaskaskia in 1725, she was “about forty-five years old.” Her eight children ranged in age from 4 years old to 28 years old.

It isn't a great surprise then, that when Elizabeth de Moncharvaux, Marie's great granddaughter, died in September of 1816 in Ville Platte, LA, she had received the spiritual care of Fr. Barriere during a sickness of three years, and “received all of the Sacraments” from him.¹⁶ Likewise, when her husband died 28 years earlier, Jean Baptiste Lapaise de Védrines, had received “the Sacraments of Penance, Euchariste, & Extreme Unction “con particular devocion” (with particular devotion or piety) at the age of 80.¹⁷

Much more can be learned about the life and customs of the Kaskaskia Native Americans, maternal ancestors of the Vidrine Family in LA. The exciting and courageous service of Jean Baptiste Lapaise de Védrines in the French Marines could also be researched further. There are certainly many more surprises to be discovered in the history of the Vidrine family, both in France and in LA.