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The Genealogy Corner

Louis Ledoux

by Denis Ledoux



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The Montréal region was the western outpost of New France when our first *Canadien* ancestor, Louis Ledoux, arrived the 1660s. Louis was also called Louis Ladouceur and Louis Doux and was born in Le Mans in the *ancien régime* province of Maine in France. Several sources give the year of his birth as 1628; others give it as 1639. He was baptized in the church of *Notre Dame de la Couture*. While the name suggests a sartorial history, the word *couture* is really a deformation of *culture* (as in *agriculture*) and refers to a time when the church and its abbey were not well within city limits but out in the country surrounded by farms.

LeMans has a Romanesque cathedral, St-Julien, that stands high above the city and near it is the Old Town whose narrow streets twist down to the Sarthe river. The city dates to the times of the Romans and there are broad stone steps that cut through the Roman walls and lead from the lower to the upper town. These steps are bordered by three and four story buildings for whom the stairs served the function of a city street, front doors opening up to a landing.

His parents, Louis Ledoux (born about 1590 and Marie Provost (born about 1600), had married in 1625 in Le Mans. Here in this town whose medieval characteristics are still evident in the twenty-first century, perhaps Louis Ledoux, *filis*, played, running up the winding stairs between the lower and the upper towns chasing his friends and causing mischief or perhaps it was they who chased him. Eventually the playing came to an end and this young Mancelle (as the inhabitants of Le Mans are called) grew up to be a man who was a maker of stained glass windows for churches. In fact, it is believed that he made several stained glass windows for Notre Dame de la Couture, but since none of them are signed it is impossible to identify which ones.

Like many young men in France at the time, working men without much of a future in the mother country, it is believed that Louis went to the New World with the military where he served perhaps as a soldier in the famed *régiment de Carrignan*. In 1663, New France had gone from being a proprietary colony of the One Hundred Associates to being a Royal Colony, administered directly by the crown. Among the colonists, there was some hope as a result of this change of administrative structure that the colony would at last receive the attention it deserved and experience growth.

We do not know when Louis came to Canada. On the 20th of May 1668, the bishop of Québec, the famed Monseigneur Laval, came to Fort St-Louis (at the present day city of Chambly) to preach to the soldier and to administer the sacrament of confirmation. A document was drawn up of the men who were confirmed and the name of Louis Doux is on the 16th line of 66. At the time, the famed Carrignan-Sallières Regiment had been disbanded for at least a year—so Louis was either a former Carrignan soldier who had stayed on or a new recruit at the fort.

Fort St-Louis was strategically located on the Richelieu River, the major waterway between Lake Champlain, the British colonies and their treacherous Iroquois allies to the South and, to the North, the Saint Lawrence River and the French settlements. It is not known how long Louis served at Fort St-Louis but we do know that, like many French soldiers, he chose to remain in New France after his service was over. We do not have any other record of his whereabouts until 1671.

On February 2, 1671, however, Louis bought 20 *arpents* of land located on Cote St-François. This first attempt at farming apparently did not suit him, or he was not good at it, because he sold his land on December 9, 1671, just ten months after acquiring it. He is next listed in Trois-Rivières in the 1674 census. That year, on May 1, he served as godfa-

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ther to Adrien Sénécal, son of the colonist of the same name, and of Jeanne Lecomte. The godmother who stood with Louis Ledoux was Marie-Antoinette Chouart dit Desgrosseillers, the 13-year-old daughter of the famous explorer Médard Chouart dit Desgrosseillers.

Louis soon went on to Québec City where, on June 14, 1674, he signed an agreement to serve as a carpenter and navigator to Jacques Cachelièvre and Guillaume Boissel. They were to pay him 18 *livres* a month in salary and to feed, house and support him "humanely as is fitting."

Surprisingly, that same summer, Louis obtained a concession of 2 *arpents* by 30, in the *seigneurie* of Varennes—which is at the Montréal end of the Saint Lawrence. That the *seigneur*, René Gauthier, had likely been Ledoux's commanding officer at Fort St-Louis explains perhaps why Louis chose to situate himself in the Montréal region.

He does not seem to have prospered since the next year, on October 25, 1675, before a royal notary in Montréal, Louis promised to furnish wheat in payment for a debt he had accumulated.

Louis spent the 1670s as a single man. This is most unusual in New France where men were taxed for not being married. On February 18, 1679, however, he entered into a marriage contract with Marie-Nicole Valiquet. Born on December 20, 1662, Marie was the daughter of Jean Valiquet and Renée Loppé who had settled in Montréal the decade prior to Marie-Nicole's birth. Among Louis' witnesses to the marriage contract were his fiend Adrien Sénécal (for whose son Louis was godfather). Witnesses on Marie's side included Mathurin Langevin her father's cousin.

On March 20, 1679, Father Gilles Perot married the two in Montréal at the church of Notre Dame. At the time of the wedding contract, the notary had written of Louis that he was "banished from the Seigneurie of Cap de Varennes." We do not now anything of this banishment. We do know that Louis and Marie's first child, Mathurin, (named after Mathurin Langevin?) was born in Varennes on April 9, 1680, so the banishment did not last long. Unfortunately, Mathurin died six days later, on the fifteenth of April. The following year, the census of 1681 notes that the family had 6 *arpents* under cultivation but had no cattle. In 1681, too, a second Ledoux son was born but, on January 19, he too died. A third son, Louis was born in 1682 but died in 1684. A fourth son Jacques, was to be born in 1683 and live to adulthood. He was followed by Nicolas in 1684.

In 1686, our ancestor Louis-Gabriel was born in Varennes and baptized in Boucherville on April 12. (This indicates that Varennes did not yet have its own church but went to the nearby *seigneurie* of Boucherville for church functions. It was only in 1698 that a Ledoux child was to be baptized in Varennes.)

In 1689, the Iroquois launched a fierce offensive on the French, an offensive that centered around the town of Lachine.

After the 1689 Iroquois massacre of Lachine, to protect themselves from marauding Indians, the citizens of Varennes decided to build a fort and construct a road leading to it. Land which the Louis Ledoux family had settled on was chosen on which to build a redoubt. On June 12, 1690, Louis Ledoux settled on a contract with the people of Varennes. They would pay him for the damages which would be incurred for the time that the road to the fort would last and for the time a part of the farm would be occupied. From that time on, Louis Ledoux's land was known by the name "Le petit fort."

Louis Ledoux died on October 3, 1708.

Of Marie and Louis' children, Christophe Ledoux (born December 21, 1701) became a *coureur des bois* between 1723 and 1726. He died on January 5 1728—one wonders if his early death could have been attributed to the rigors of his life in the woods. Another son, Jean Baptiste, made a trading voyage to the West in 1715.

Marie Valiquet married Isaac Brien about 1713. It is not known when she died.