
The Fall and Rise of Thérèse Catin: A Portrait from Indiana's French and Canadian History

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The unusual portrait drawn in this essay has as its dual setting the early eighteenth-century French-colonial community of Montreal linked with sections of the *pays d'en haut* (the upper country or Great Lakes basin) that are now part of the American Midwest. Its three subjects, a commoner businesswoman, her merchant husband, and a renegade nobleman, all virtually unremembered for 250 years, played an active and at times controversial role in the French trade at the Miami post on the Maumee River (today's Fort Wayne, Indiana), the Ouiatanon (Wea) post on the Wabash (now West Lafayette, Indiana), and Detroit. In their home city of Montreal these three individualists dared to thumb their noses publicly at the Church, at French officialdom in Quebec and in Versailles, and at the society in which they lived. In the face of all, they defiantly maintained their nonconformity and remained the subjects of a major scandal on both sides of the Atlantic for more than a decade. In the process, the political activities of two of them contributed in the 1720s to the royal disfavor of the venerable governor-general of New France.

The central figure of this trio was Thérèse Catin, born in 1686 of humble origin, the third of nine daughters and three sons of Henri Catin, a Montreal butcher, and his wife, Jeanne Brossard.¹

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¹ René Jetté, *Dictionnaire généalogique des familles du Québec des origines à 1730* (Montréal, 1983), 208; Cyprien Tanguay, *Dictionnaire généalogique des familles canadiennes depuis la fondation de la colonie jusqu'à nos jours* (7 vols., Montréal, 1871-1890), II, 580; Peter N. Moogk, "Lorimier de la Rivière, Guillaume de," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (12 vols., Toronto, 1966-1991), II, 446 (hereafter cited as *DCB*). In addition to being a family name, *catin* is in French a pejorative term meaning "woman of ill repute." However, the same term in Quebec French also means "doll" or "figurine." *Dictionnaire du français québécois: Description et histoire des régionalismes en usage au Québec depuis l'époque de la Nouvelle-France jusqu'à nos jours incluant un aperçu de leur extension dans les provinces canadiennes limitrophes, volume de présentation* (Sainte-Foy, Québec, 1985), 48-50.

In 1686, Montreal was a small town of about 1,700 inhabitants, having been founded only forty-four years earlier by the *Société de Notre-Dame de Montréal pour la conversion des sauvages*. The title of Montreal's conservative-Catholic founding society announced the sole mission of the original settlement as religious, and in 1642 about fifty devout settlers from France established Montreal as an isolated western outpost. The settlement was soon attacked by the Iroquois Indians, with whom the French had been at war. Two months before Thérèse Catin's third birthday, in 1689, fifteen hundred Iroquois swooped into the settlement of Lachine on Montreal Island, only eight miles from the town, killing one hundred settlers and soldiers and burning the farms. It was not until 1701, when Thérèse was fifteen, that the French and Iroquois finally signed a general peace treaty which was to endure.²

Over the years, Montreal, much closer than Quebec to the western Indians, had become a major trading center. Each spring Lachine, Montreal's port of embarkation, saw hundreds of huge canoes laden with tons of trade goods head for the distant fortified trading posts and Indian villages in the *pays d'en haut*. In Montreal, the need grew for merchants to supply the voyageurs and military officers on their way west, providing business opportunities for enterprising individuals. While the Church retained great influence in the colony, the nature of Montreal had shifted away from the piety of the city's founders, particularly for the untamed voyageurs. Nevertheless, for the stable, church-going portion of the population, including the growing middle class and the upper class composed of nobles, government officials, military officers, and seigneurs (estate owners), the Church and the bishop of Quebec's pronouncements remained authoritative.

In order to stimulate commerce, Louis XIV's edict of 1685 permitted Canadian nobles to engage in business, a practice which was generally forbidden to nobles in France. This edict not only permitted a number of impoverished Canadian nobles to improve their financial standing, it also stimulated the upwardly mobile commoner to seek noble status. W. J. Eccles has described the effect of this edict:

The edict of 1685 allowed an ambitious roturier [commoner] to acquire capital and an adequate income in the fur trade, then a seigneurie, then commissions for his sons in the Troupes de la Marine, who could then aspire to obtain *lettres de noblesse* for valorous service.³

² Louise Dechêne, *Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVII^e siècle* (Paris, 1974), 24; Marcel Trudel, *Initiation à la Nouvelle-France* (Montréal, 1971), 56; W. J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier, 1534-1760* (rev. ed., Albuquerque, N.M., 1983), 39, 120.

³ W. J. Eccles, *France in America* (rev. ed., East Lansing, Mich., 1990), 120; Eccles, *Canadian Frontier*, 100-101.

Another way to advance socially was, then as now, through marriage. John F. Boshier characterized such marriages as follows:

To marry above the family station was a triumph, a step upward for the entire family. The new link with a grander or more noble family was a source of benefit through the influence it afforded. If the daughter of a successful merchant married a government official or his son, the assumption was likely to be that henceforth they were allies in a common struggle for advancement.⁴

Not surprisingly, marriages were arranged by the families and were considered much like business deals. Marriage contracts contained the particulars of property transfers, and the wife, often "bringing considerable property to the marriage, tended to have greater material equality with her husband than most wives in our time."⁵ Thus, despite her hopes to marry well, the young Thérèse Catin knew that her limited dowry and low social status were likely to result in her parents' marrying her off to someone of similar standing. Her first employment was as chambermaid to the governor-general of New France and his wife, the Marquis and Marquise de Vaudreuil. While this menial position brought her physically close to the upper level of society and added to her dreams to be part of it, being a chambermaid did little to enhance her opportunity.⁶ Her chances were further diminished in the spring of 1707 when the twenty-year-old Thérèse gave birth to an illegitimate son fathered by one Michel Montigny. The son, baptized Pierre-Michel Montigny, apparently was not raised by Thérèse.⁷

That same year, Thérèse's father was the victim of a series of incidents which added to her distress. The fifty-four-year-old butcher was maliciously accused by an "ill-tempered and wine-loving" captain of the *Troupes de la Marine* of having maligned Governor-General Philippe de Rigaud de Vaudreuil. The officer then proceeded to beat the butcher with the flat of his sword. Henri Catin filed suit in the royal court in Montreal against the officer, and the latter was found guilty of both slander and battery, for which he was sentenced on appeal to pay 200 livres in damages, for medicine and for the surgeon's report, plus over 250 livres as a fine and for court costs.⁸ However, the minister of Marine, the governor's superior in

⁴ John F. Boshier, "The Family in New France," in R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith, eds., *Readings in Canadian History*; Vol. I, *Pre-Confederation* (Toronto, 1986), 107.

⁵ Boshier, "Family in New France," 107.

⁶ Maurepas to Robert, May 30, 1724, National Archives of Canada, Manuscript Group 1, Archives nationales, Colonies (hereafter cited as AN Col.), ser. B, vol. 47, transcript p. 148. Although Governor-General Vaudreuil's regular residence was at Quebec, he and his wife did reside in Montreal on occasion for more than a month at a time. Joseph L. Peyser, *Letters from New France: The Upper Country, 1686-1783* (Urbana, Ill., 1992), 112-13. It is not clear whether Thérèse served as the Vaudreuils' chambermaid in both towns.

⁷ Jetté, *Dictionnaire généalogique*, 208, 826.

⁸ The livre may have been worth from six to twelve 1990 U.S. dollars. Its value today is virtually impossible to determine because of the many variables that affected the livre, including period, region, inflation, supply and demand, nature of goods

France, later received word that the governor-general had "prevented collection of the fine [and] protected his officers from the normal course of the law," charges that the governor denied.⁹ The brutal beating of her father by an officer, the former's successful recourse to the royal court in Montreal, and Governor-General Vaudreuil's interference with the carrying out of the sentence against this officer provided lessons for Thérèse that she was not to forget.

In 1710, some three years after this series of events, Thérèse Catin, now twenty-three years of age, was married to a forty-six-year-old Montreal merchant and voyageur named Simon Réaume. Réaume had achieved some success by virtue of his trading trips into the *pays d'en haut*. His knowledge of the Ottawa Indians, the major trading partners of the French, and of their language, had resulted in his being asked by Governor Vaudreuil to serve as interpreter on those occasions when the governor met with the Ottawa chiefs in Montreal. Réaume had, in addition, carried out Vaudreuil's orders on a number of his trips as a voyageur into the *pays d'en haut*. Thus, Thérèse Catin's marriage to this grizzled merchant did provide her with certain advantages and opportunities: her new husband was well established in the fur trade and as a merchant in Montreal; he knew and was respected by the elderly governor-general; and, finally, the marriage helped Thérèse overcome the stigma of being an unwed mother.¹⁰

In October, 1711, Thérèse gave birth to the first of her four children from this marriage: Charles-Auguste Réaume, who was baptized in Montreal on October 24. The infant's godfather, despite any reservations Thérèse may have had about him, was the governor-general of New France who knew both Thérèse and Simon. During the next seven years, Thérèse was to give birth to three other children: two more sons and her only daughter, who died at the age of two months in 1718.¹¹ In addition to caring for the children and the house, Thérèse assumed greater and greater responsibilities for her husband's business, becoming his agent and handling all kinds of transactions. These included renting out a room in their home and providing meals to officers when Simon was away on his long canoe trips to the Great Lakes posts. Simon engaged at various times in the fur trade among the Ottawas at Detroit, at the Ouiatanon post, at the Miami post, and possibly at the St. Joseph River post (now Niles, Michigan) and at Green Bay. These trips lasted as long as

and services, and government economic policy. A further complication is the ever-changing buying power of the modern currency to which the livre is being compared.

⁹ *Jugements et délibérations du Conseil souverain de la Nouvelle-France* (7 vols., Québec, 1885-1891), V, 584-86; Moogk, "Lorimier de la Rivière, Guillaume de," *DCB*, II, 446.

¹⁰ Vaudreuil to the Council, Quebec, October 20, 1722, AN Col., ser. C¹A, vol. 44, fol. 356.

¹¹ Tanguay, *Dictionnaire généalogique*, VI, 524; Jetté, *Dictionnaire généalogique*, 970.

several months, and Thérèse proved very capable in running the business in Montreal during her husband's protracted absences. While it was not unusual for the wife of a merchant or officer to act as her husband's agent during the latter's extended absence from the lower colony, the scope of Thérèse's business activities was unusual for a woman of her day. Going far beyond the strictures imposed upon the women of her society, Thérèse Catin was able, by virtue of the power of attorney granted her by her husband, to conduct lawfully all kinds of business and legal affairs.¹²

Not all of her business experience, however, was pleasant or successful. In 1719, Thérèse sold a number of items of clothing and loaned an ounce of silver to a young officer garrisoned in Montreal who was being transferred the following year to Ile Royale (Cape Breton Island). The officer bore the same distinguished and noble name as his father, Baron Alphonse de Tonty, a captain in the colonial regular troops and commander of Detroit. Thérèse did not know at the time that the son was as impecunious as the father. Alphonse *fils* failed to pay his debt to Thérèse, and in 1720 she proceeded to have the royal court in Montreal serve him with a summons just before he was to leave for his assignment on the Atlantic Coast.¹³

In court, young Alphonse disputed most of the listed items, but on April 20 the judge ordered him to pay a portion of the bill, pay for the ounce of silver and the court costs. The day after this judgment, Thérèse had a second summons served on Tonty in order for him to acknowledge his signature on a promissory note she alleged he had signed the previous year. Tonty pleaded that the agreement was forged, and, indeed, the court did pronounce the document a forgery. She appealed to the Superior Council of Quebec which on October 27, 1721, dismissed her appeal and ordered her to pay the costs of the appeals.

Thérèse was not present at the deliberations of the Superior Council, the highest court in New France, which refused her repeated requests for a copy of the decision and the proceedings. She thereupon went over the head of the highest civil official governing in New France, the intendant Michel Bégon. She wrote to Charles-Jean-Baptiste de Fleuriau, Count de Morville, France's minister and secretary of state, to order the intendant to provide her with the desired information so that she might "formulate objections to the decree." The results of her petition to the minister are unknown, but it is clear that by 1721 Thérèse Catin, the thirty-five-year-old wife and agent of Simon Réaume, had developed the

¹² *The Cadillac Papers* (Collections of the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, Vol. XXXIII; Lansing, Mich., 1904), 675-76; Council to Vaudreuil, Paris, May 5, 1722, AN Col., ser. B, vol. 45, fols. 763-67; Vaudreuil to the Council, Quebec, October 20, 1722, AN Col., ser. C¹A, vol. 44, fols. 356-63.

¹³ *Cadillac Papers*, 675-76.

necessary self-assurance and willingness to fight for what she wanted against the highest authorities in New France. Although on occasion women took men to court in New France, Thérèse stands out by virtue of the frequency of her suits and her dogged persistence in appealing negative judgements. Her appeals and petitions against Tonty were but the beginning of her open expression of defiance against the conventions of her society.¹⁴

In the fall of 1720, the year in which Thérèse first brought the young Alphonse de Tonty to court, her voyageur-merchant husband was sent by the governor-general on an official mission first to Detroit, then to the Miami village, and finally to the newly created Ouiatanon post on the Wabash River. Ensign Eustache Lambert Dumont commanded the six-canoe convoy which included the canoe of a twenty-year-old cadet, François-Marie Bissot de Vincennes, who was acting as commander of the Ouiatanon post. Ensign Dumont and Simon had received specific orders from the governor to fit out two canoes with the king's goods, to be given as presents to the Miamis and the Ouiatanons if these tribes would agree to relocate westward, farther away from the Iroquois and English trade rivals of the French. These two canoes were manned by ten men in addition to Réaume and Dumont. Accompanying the two canoes of Réaume and Dumont and the third canoe of Vincennes were three canoes which had received trade permits earlier from Governor Vaudreuil.¹⁵

The convoy had been ordered to go to Detroit, where Dumont and Réaume were to report to the commander, Alphonse de Tonty, whose son was being sued in court that same year by Réaume's wife. All but the two canoes carrying the presents were to stay there with their merchandise stored under Tonty's supervision. Dumont and Réaume were to proceed first to the Miami and then to the Ouiatanons to try to convince them to move westward. They were also to be ready to distribute the king's presents to them and to leave their personal trading goods with Tonty at Detroit while they were negotiating with the Indians. The governor's orders gave them permission to take along four men from the other canoes in addition to their own ten. Finally, his orders were that no personal merchandise should be traded until after the Indians had made a decision on whether to relocate or not.¹⁶

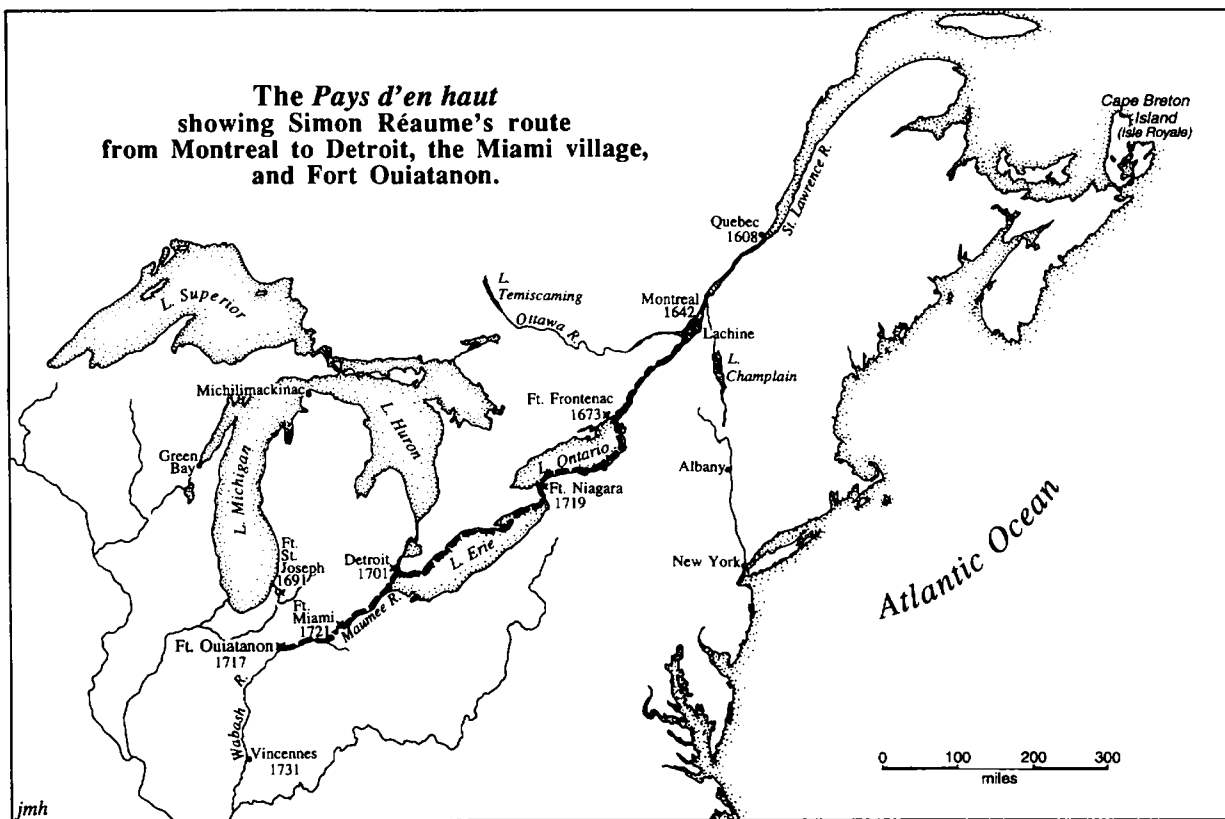
After taking on fresh food at Detroit, however, Ensign Dumont decided to modify the governor's written orders. He permitted all six canoes, rather than just the two authorized, to proceed to the Maumee River, some fifty miles down the coast from Detroit. Find-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Frances Krauskopf, ed., *Ouiatanon Documents* (Indiana Historical Society Publications, Vol. XVIII, No. 2; Indianapolis, 1955), 165-66; Eccles, *Canadian Frontier*, 203n.

¹⁶ Krauskopf, *Ouiatanon Documents*, 166-68.

The Pays d'en haut
showing Simon Réaume's route
from Montreal to Detroit, the Miami village,
and Fort Ouiatanon.



Map by John Hollingsworth.

ing the level of the river too low for the canoes to go sixty leagues (more than one hundred miles) upstream to the Miami village, Dumont allowed his party to winter at the mouth of the river. He later reported to the governor that he had not permitted his convoy to trade with the Indians there, since that area was in the Detroit trading territory. His report also stated that after he and Réaume determined that the Miamis refused to move their village, they had their men as well as those from the other four canoes carry on their backs not only the king's presents but also the private trade goods over the more than one hundred miles from the mouth of the river to the Miami village. There they traded for furs.

In the spring of 1721 they proceeded some one hundred miles southwest to the Ouiatanon post where they traded the rest of their goods. By the beginning of July Simon and the heads of the other canoes were back in Montreal, having, in the governor's words, "conducted their business extremely well."¹⁷ (It is revealing to note how pleased Vaudreuil was over the profits made, in light of the failure of his envoys to accomplish their official objective of persuading the Indians to relocate.) Upon his return, Simon had been away from home for the better part of a year. This trip was the first of ever more lengthy stays that the frontier veteran was to make at the Ouiatanon post.

In the spring of 1722, Vaudreuil, now seventy-nine years old and in his nineteenth year in office, received a disturbing official dispatch from his superiors in the Council of Marine in Paris. The council had received two serious complaints about the recent conduct of the governor-general, the first from a group that the council said was "all the Montreal merchants" who protested the governor's agents' open fur trading on two of the governor's own properties west of Montreal. His agents at the closer of the two posts were ideally situated to intercept the Montreal-bound, fur-laden Indians before they reached the town's merchants to whom the Indians owed money and with whom they normally traded. The council reminded Vaudreuil that such trading of merchandise outside the towns was against the law and added, "If all these deeds were found to be true, His Majesty would not be pleased with your conduct, and the Council wishes you to inform it truly about everything on this topic." Vaudreuil, no doubt remembering that years earlier he had come perilously close to being removed from office through the attacks of his political enemies, did not take this complaint lightly.¹⁸

¹⁷ Council to Vaudreuil, Paris, May 5, 1722, AN Col., ser. B, vol. 45, fol. 763; Vaudreuil to the Council, Québec, October 20, 1722, AN Col., ser. C¹¹A, vol. 44, fols. 356-63. This and all other translations from French-language sources quoted in this essay are by the author.

¹⁸ Council to Vaudreuil, Paris, May 5, 1722, AN Col., ser. B, vol. 45, fol. 763-67; Yves F. Zoltvany, "Rigaud de Vaudreuil, Philippe de," *DCB*, II, 569, 571. The more distant of Vaudreuil's two trading posts was Temiscaming, about three hundred miles up the Ottawa River; the closer post was the Ile aux Tourtes where the Ottawa flows into the St. Lawrence River.

The second complaint that the council had received was from “the wife of Simon Réaume, a Montreal merchant.” In her complaint, Thérèse claimed that in his 1720 trip with Ensign Dumont, her husband had to stop for food at Detroit where Alphonse de Tonty forced him to carry *his*, Tonty’s, merchandise. She also alleged that Tonty required Simon to sign a statement agreeing not to trade in the lower part of the Maumee River where, she stated, Vaudreuil had given Simon permission to trade. She also complained that Tonty required Réaume to have all those in his six-canoe convoy carry the king’s presents as well as their own merchandise on their backs over the sixty leagues to the Miami village.

Thérèse included in her petition for redress the claim that her husband had forgotten at Tonty’s post an eight-gallon keg of wine worth over eighty livres for which Tonty never paid. She added that she had lodged complaints with the governor both about the wine and Tonty’s alleged trading restriction, and that the governor would not listen to them. Thus, Thérèse Catin fired two long-distance salvos at her enemies the Tontys and the governor. The council was sufficiently persuaded by her complaint to order the governor to “verify all these facts” and to send his explanation. The council concluded its instructions to the governor with its final accusation, that instead of sending two canoes to bring about the relocation of the Miami village, Vaudreuil apparently had sent seventeen, and it ordered him to give the reasons for exceeding the needed number.¹⁹

In October, 1722, Vaudreuil responded at length to the accusations in the council’s dispatch. Most of his reply provided a detailed account of Dumont and Réaume’s mission, answering all but one of Thérèse Catin’s allegations and effectively protecting Ensign Dumont and Réaume as well as himself. As to the purportedly missing keg of wine at Tonty’s post, Vaudreuil stated that he had no knowledge about it, but that he would write to Tonty so that if the event were as stated, Tonty would have to explain the matter to *Réaume*, and Vaudreuil would report the outcome to the council. Vaudreuil then added:

Neither Réaume nor his wife have ever filed any charges with me . . . although she impudently states in her petition to the Council that after they had been brought to me, I would not hear anything about them, to which I will add that if Réaume had cause to file any charges with me, it was up to him and not his wife to bring them to me, having every means he could hope to have for that purpose, since he was in Montreal when he returned from the Miamis. I stayed there one more month afterward and during that time he came to my office almost every day regarding the Ottawa Indians who often used him as an interpreter. Furthermore, I have always shown

¹⁹ Council to Vaudreuil, Paris, May 5, 1722, AN Col., ser. B, vol. 45, fols. 763-67.

him affection because he is a good subject who has served well on those occasions when he was employed. And because he has made no complaint whatever to me during that time, one can conclude that he had no cause to do so.²⁰

Having thus rather effectively parried Thérèse Catin's accusations, Vaudreuil then turned to the more serious matter of his allegedly siphoning off for his own personal profit the fur trade that should have been going to the Montreal merchants. Here his tactics changed from providing detailed responses to counterattacking the probity of his accusers. The last portion of his reply to the council began boldly: "After having complied with what the Council wanted of me concerning the events contained in the petition from Simon Réaume's wife, I shall have the honor of stating to it that it is extremely sad for me to be exposed in this way to this kind of calumny because of the permissiveness with which the Council accepts unfounded complaints from unscrupulous people."

Vaudreuil then stated that the merchants' petition was

the work of Monsieur Dauteuil de Monceaux who is imitating his father, Monsieur Dauteuil, the former Attorney General of the Quebec [Superior] Council, and Madame Laforest, his aunt, my cruelest enemies, who are looking for and inventing everything imaginable that could be used to wrong me. It is he who drew up the petition that the Montreal merchants presented to me last year concerning the Temiskaminque Post. The most important merchants refused to sign it, but the others allowed themselves to be swayed by the assurances he gave them that his father would act effectively for them in France.²¹

The wily old governor concluded his defense with a telling counterattack against Thérèse Catin:

Réaume's wife is a wretch who acts only on the instructions of Monsieur Dauteuil who lives at her house despite the feelings of her husband, who is too smitten with his wife since everyone is convinced that she is having an illicit affair with Monsieur Dauteuil. It has already been a long time since the Bishop has done everything he could both personally and through the Montreal priests to constrain them to no longer live together, but they have not been able to achieve this. The obstinacy of Monsieur Dauteuil in not being willing to live anywhere but at that woman's house and the obstinacy of that woman in wanting to keep him at her home despite the great scandal they are creating have brought things to the point that for the last two years Monsieur the Bishop has had his head vicar in Montreal forbid all priests and religious to receive them at communion or even at confession. From all of this the Council can judge what people of this character are capable of.²²

Vaudreuil's tactics apparently were successful only insofar as Thérèse's divergent account of her husband's trip was concerned.

²⁰ Vaudreuil to the Council, Quebec, October 20, 1722, AN Col., ser. C¹A, vol. 44, fols. 356-63, translated in Peyser, *Letters from New France*, 112-13.

²¹ Vaudreuil to the Council, Quebec, October 20, 1722, translated in Peyser, *Letters from New France*, 113-14. Temiscaming is about three hundred miles northwest of Montreal, and Ile aux Tourtes is just west of Montreal. See Zoltvany, "Rigaud de Vaudreuil, Philippe de," *DCB*, II, 571, for a discussion of Vaudreuil's need for money and his controversial fur-trading.

²² Vaudreuil to the Council, Quebec, October 20, 1722, translated in Peyser, *Letters from New France*, 114.

As for the merchants' protests against the governor's private fur trading (despite the latter's *ad hominem* response), he was finally ordered to stop the trading at his two posts. Vaudreuil did yield reluctantly on the post closest to Montreal, the Ile aux Tourtes, but the embattled official failed to comply with his orders for the Temiscaming post until his death in 1725. The governor-general's disclosure to the council of "the public adultery" being committed by Simon Réaume's wife with the son of a prominent noble family led to the council's giving formal support to the bishop of Quebec by ordering the intendant of New France to suppress the scandal. But all the efforts of the council, the bishop, the head vicars, the priests, the intendant, the minister, and the king failed to put an end to the scandalous affair in Montreal.²³

This insolent young noble, the son of one of Governor Vaudreuil's "cruellest enemies" and the constant companion of the low-born Madame Réaume, was, as the governor had informed the council, the son of the former attorney general of the Superior Council of Quebec whose own father had been attorney general before him. His full name was, as was common for those of noble birth, lengthy: Charles-François-Marie Ruelle d'Auteuil de Monceaux. By his contemporaries he was known as Charles de Monceaux and Charles d'Auteuil. Charles was born in 1690, four years after Thérèse Catin. As adolescents, he and his younger brother, Pierre, were uncontrollable. In 1706 their repeated violent and disorderly conduct on the Quebec fortifications went too far when they badly injured a soldier. Governor Vaudreuil issued orders to the town major of Quebec to put the brothers in prison if they continued. Three weeks after this order, the soldier that they had injured died, and the intendant attempted to bring the two brothers before the royal court in Quebec. By this time, however, the boys' father, François-Madeleine-Fortuné Ruelle d'Auteuil de Monceaux, who was the attorney general and a long-time enemy of Vaudreuil, had taken one of them to France where he, the father, also in difficulties over a major conflict of interest, was to meet with the minister in an effort to save his own career. He was unsuccessful and was dismissed from office by Louis XIV in 1707. No longer in office but not devoid of influence, he took up residence in Paris. Despite his own dismissal, he was still able to avoid trial for Charles and his brother, a service he was to render to his disreputable sons on other occasions.²⁴

²³ Zoltvany, "Rigaud de Vaudreuil, Philippe de," *DCB*, II, 571; Micheline D'Allaire, *Montée et déclin d'une famille noble: les Ruelle d'Auteuil (1617-1737)* (Ville La Salle, P.Q., 1980), 173n, 273. This meticulously researched book by Professor D'Allaire provides valuable information on both Charles Ruelle d'Auteuil and Thérèse Catin.

²⁴ Marie Leland, "Ruelle d'Auteuil de Monceaux, François-Madeleine-Fortuné," *DCB*, II, 585, 587; Zoltvany, "Rigaud de Vaudreuil, Philippe de," *DCB*, II, 569; Tanguay, *Dictionnaire généalogique*, III, 251-52; D'Allaire, *Montée et déclin d'une famille noble*, 273-74.

In France, and now in his twenties, Charles went into hiding for several years in the city of La Rochelle where, in 1714, he was sentenced to two years in prison and assessed a heavy fine for having clubbed an infantry captain. Once again he took flight and headed for Canada, where the authorities had been ordered by the minister to imprison him for fleeing from the authorities in La Rochelle and for having insulted the governor of Montreal. Charles dropped out of sight in Louisbourg (in today's Nova Scotia) and in New England until his father was able to convince the minister in 1716 to rescind the orders to imprison his son. For the next eight years, Charles engaged in highly suspicious large-scale business transactions between New England and Canada that included the shipment of all kinds of goods from New York and the alleged shipment of beaver pelts to that British colony. Despite the accusations sent to the Court, Charles seems to have avoided any further formal charges, probably due to the unflagging efforts of his father and to the reluctance of the intendant to take any forceful action against him.²⁵

In 1724, when authorities on both sides of the Atlantic were attempting to suppress Charles's scandalous liaison with Thérèse Catin, his father submitted the following *mémoire* to Intendant Michel Bégon which in retrospect does not appear to be very convincing as an attempt to clear his son:

Sieur Réaume is a Montreal entrepreneur, a merchant and Voyageur. His wife keeps this business going in the Town of Montreal with Retail sales and in Quebec by the purchases that she makes there.

Sieur [Charles] Dauteuil de Monceaux, who was obliged to take Trips to new england and to stay in Montreal, having had business dealings with Réaume, stayed at his house where he had his Meals, like several officers who did not like the Tavern, such as Messrs. de Lusignan, de Langloiserie, Demuy and others. Jealousy and Self-interest on the part of several Individuals secretly caused nasty Rumors to circulate about him and Mme. Réaume.

Sieur Réaume who for several years has Come [back] from his Trips And spent a very long time in The house has not taken these Rumors seriously although the Church people and others have employed every means to warn him And arouse him to action, because he found out that the rumors were calumnious and because he is sure of his wife's faithfulness. That is so true that after Sieur Demonceaux was made a prisoner in Montreal by order of the Governor general for a very long time, the aforesaid Réaume went every day to have lunch or dinner with him.

Sieur Demonceaux has just made the trip from france And is getting ready to go with Sieur Dauteuil his Father to the isles madame and Isle Royale,²⁶ thus what is being imputed to him is without foundation.

Sieur [François Ruelle] Dauteuil his Father who since last August 14 has been in this Town [Quebec], having arrived from his Isles madame Settlement, entered into an examination of the matter And found out that there was malice in what has

²⁵ Minister to Robert, May 30, 1724, National Archives of Canada, Manuscript Group 1, AN Col., ser. B, vol. 47, transcript p.149; D'Allaire, *Montée et déclin d'une famille noble*, 273-76.

²⁶ Iles Madame are at the entry of the Gulf of St. Lawrence; Isle Royale is now known as Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia.

been set forth. It has appeared to him that the church people and those whom they cause to act recklessly and too rashly—whom respect prevents naming—are so badly calumniating *Sieur Demonceaux* and *Mme. Réaume* that they are risking disturbing the Union and Good Relations that exist between *Réaume* and his wife. That is what has up to now appeared to *Sieur Dauteuil*. Quebec, October 18, 1724. *Dauteuil*.²⁷

The dual administration of New France, shared by the governor-general and the intendant, placed all civil matters—including justice—under the latter, *Michel Bégon*, thereby preventing the infuriated *Vaudreuil* from taking any effective legal action against the defiant threesome (although the former attorney general's statement above suggests that *Vaudreuil* improperly imprisoned *Charles* for a period of time). The minister of Marine, *Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux de Maurepas*, after noting that *Réaume* "seemed to be giving permission to his wife to Lodge *Sieur de monceaux* in her house," wrote that *Bégon*, who "does not wish to cause the slightest distress to any *habitant*, has no Concern at all regarding the admonitions of *Monsieur de Vaudreuil*." *Bégon's* own stated position on the matter was that "Crimes must be prosecuted according to the Rules of Justice, and Judges can not convict except when the crime is Confirmed by an inquiry nor initiate an inquiry when there is neither a plaintiff nor a denunciator."²⁸

The bishop of Quebec, *Jean-Baptiste La Croix de Chevrières de Saint-Vallier*, also found himself frustrated by *Thérèse Catin*, her lover, and her complaisant husband. The minister wrote that

it has been Impossible for [the bishop] to bring effective remedies [to end this licentiousness] however great was his care to act with those in Authority and with the parties Concerned by threatening them with Ecclesiastic censures which however he has not issued being certain that they cause more harm than good when they are scorned. He requests the King's protection to remedy these disorders.²⁹

In attributing the Montreal businessmen's petition against him to *Charles d'Auteuil de Monceaux*, *Vaudreuil* claimed that *Charles* was imitating his father and his aunt, *Madame Laforest*, his "cruellest enemies." This indeed was true. *Charles's* father, the former attorney general, had unscrupulously assisted his sister-in-law, *Madame Laforest* (*Charlotte-Françoise de Juchereau de Saint-Denis*), in her lawsuits, which led to his dismissal from office. Her eleven-year-long battles in the law courts of Canada and France were for the purpose of retaining the *Ile d'Orléans* near Quebec and the accompanying title of countess of Saint-Lawrence which she

²⁷ *François Ruette d'Auteuil* to *Bégon*, Quebec, October 18, 1724, National Archives of Canada, Manuscript Group 1, AN Col., ser. C¹¹A, vol. 46, transcript pp. 165-66.

²⁸ *Maurepas* to *Robert*, May 30, 1724, National Archives of Canada, Manuscript Group 1, AN Col., ser. B, vol. 47, transcript pp. 149-50; *Bégon* to *Maurepas*, Quebec, November 2, 1724, National Archives of Canada, Manuscript Group 1, AN Col., ser. C¹¹A, vol. 46, transcript p. 161.

²⁹ *Maurepas* to *Robert*, May 30, 1724, National Archives of Canada, Manuscript Group 1, AN Col., ser. B, vol. 47, transcript p. 148.

had purchased and for which she had not finished paying. After losing all her legal battles, she repeatedly appealed directly to Louis XIV who in 1713 firmly rejected her petitions and forbade her to send any more appeals to him. In writing Vaudreuil this information and advising him that Madame Laforest was returning to New France, the minister described her as "a dangerous character."³⁰

As late as 1716, however, Madame Laforest had yet another appeal rejected in France by the council on a different matter, this one her claim that the government had not paid her first husband for supplies he had provided to the Mackinac post twenty-nine years earlier, in 1687!³¹ One is reminded of Thérèse Catin's stubborn legal appeals and recourse to the council in France. Thérèse as a businesswoman began filing her own suits (and continued to do so at least until well into the 1730s) soon after Madame Laforest's last one ended. It may well be that the older woman served as a model for her nephew's inamorata, both as litigant and businesswoman.

The correspondence between Charles's father and Vaudreuil indicates that the younger man's business and need of lodging in Montreal had brought him into contact with Simon Réaume and his wife and that he began living and taking his meals in their house as early as 1720. Interestingly, in that year, both Charles de Monceaux and "Madame Rhéaume" are listed as creditors of Charles's father (who was still in Paris) for merchandise received.³² It was also in 1720 that Simon took his first known—and extended—trip to the Ouiatanon post.

François-Marie Bissot de Vincennes remained as commander of the Ouiatanon post until 1730. In 1726, however, perhaps because of Vincennes's absence, the new governor-general, Charles de La Boische de Beauharnois, had sent Simon Réaume to "lead and maintain the Ouyatanons," among whom he remained until his death. In 1730, he led his four hundred Ouiatanon warriors and twenty-eight Frenchmen into battle against the Fox Indians, and from 1731 to 1733, in his late sixties, Simon was acting commander of the Ouiatanon post.³³ In late 1733 or early 1734 the elderly merchant,

³⁰ Minister to Vaudreuil, Versailles, July 4, 1713, AN Col., ser. B, vol. 35, fol. 320. In early 1702, this "energetic and enterprising businesswoman," the widow of Captain François Viennay-Pachot, purchased the Ile d'Orléans. Several months later she married Captain François Dauphin de la Forest from whom she soon obtained separate maintenance, continuing to be in business for herself. Judging from her own frequent lawsuits and business ventures, Thérèse Catin seems in significant ways to have followed in Charlotte-Françoise Juchereau de Saint-Denis's footsteps. See Antonio Drolet, "Juchereau de Saint-Denis, Charlotte-Françoise de," *DCB*, II, 305.

³¹ Council of Marine minutes, September 14, 1716, Archives de la Marine, ser. B1, vol. 9, fol. 371.

³² D'Allaire, *Montée et déclin d'une famille noble*, 245.

³³ Joseph L. Peyser, "The Fate of the Fox Survivors: A Dark Chapter in the History of the French in the Upper Country, 1726–1737," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, LXXIII (Winter, 1989–1990), 104, 106; Krauskopf, *Ouiatanon Documents*, 145–46; Yves F. Zoltvany, "Bissot de Vincennes (Vincennes)," *DCB*, II, 66–67.

voyageur, interpreter, and occasional soldier died, leaving the forty-seven-year-old Thérèse and three grown sons in Montreal.³⁴

What had caused this man willingly to give up his wife, his family, and his society in exchange for life among the Ojibwan Indians? Simon was undoubtedly affected by the powerful pull exerted by the Indian way of life on many hundreds of the *habitants* of New France.³⁵ Early in the eighteenth century Simon had seen his younger brother, Jean-Baptiste, drawn to the French and Indian posts of Lake Michigan where the latter was an interpreter. Jean-Baptiste settled at Green Bay, where he lived with and later married Symphorose Ouaouagoukoue.³⁶ The two brothers, both widely traveled in the *pay d'en haut*, continued to see each other on occasion both in Montreal and in the upper country. By 1720, then in his early or mid-fifties and with the *démon de midi* possibly adding to the lure of the frontier, Simon effectively turned his back on Thérèse and the lower colony and took up residence at the flourishing French post among the Ojibwan.

After Simon's death, Thérèse Catin and Charles d'Auteuil de Monceaux finally put a stop to the tongues that had been wagging for fourteen years by getting married in Montreal on September 27, 1734. In addition to legitimizing their passion, the marriage brought certain other advantages to each. To Charles, a noble forced to turn to commerce to enjoy the lifestyle he desired, Thérèse, the widow of a merchant, brought business contacts that she had made as Simon Réaume's agent and *de facto* partner. As Micheline D'Allaire has noted, Charles's noble family had become oriented toward commerce in only two generations. Charles's values had changed entirely from those of the noble class in the metropole to the more realistic outlook of the less clearly structured Canadian society of the eighteenth century. Although Charles had, in effect, metamorphosed into a commoner, he brought to Thérèse his noble name and the social position attached to it, as well as his hereditary rights to a portion of his land-rich but debt-ridden father's estate at such time as his father died.³⁷

The concomitant rise of the lowborn Thérèse Catin and decline of the noble Charles d'Auteuil de Monceaux provide a striking case history of what Marcel Trudel identified as the "social confusion" reigning in New France. Trudel wrote:

³⁴ *Inventaire des Biens de La Succession du feu Sieur Simon Réaume*, Montreal, March 29, 1734, Archives nationales du Québec, Protonotaire Montréal, Microfilm M 6620/1072, Greffe de Chèvremont, Image 506.

³⁵ See Eccles, *Canadian Frontier*, 89-97, on the great impact and attraction of Indian culture on the French colonists.

³⁶ George Paré and M. M. Quaife, eds., "The Saint Joseph Baptismal Register," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XIII (September, 1926), 212; *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin* (30 vols., Madison, Wisc., 1854-1931), XVIII, 473-74.

³⁷ Tanguay, *Dictionnaire généalogique*, III, 252; D'Allaire, *Montée et déclin d'une famille noble*, 288-89.

If one considers that [the noble class] was nearly without privileges, that its social duties were everyone's and that it was as needy as one could be at any level of society, the noble class merged with the common run of people. Unlike in Europe, humble folk were not condemned to remain humble folk; they easily rose to the upper levels. They went from one level to another according to their dynamism or their success: a particular trader all at once could become an influential merchant; at the end of the French régime, most of the seigneurs were descended from the common people . . .³⁸

Louise Dechêne has demonstrated, however, that most of the upward mobility in the colony had occurred by 1715 and that "the ways to rise were limited." Noting that "a good marriage furthered the rise of the family," Dechêne observed that "one of the ways to help poor gentlemen was to encourage profitable marriages." She illustrated the practice with examples of officers whose marriages to lower-class women (some of whom were widows) brought them substantial dowries. Although "social mobility was pronounced" in New France, she added that "it was practiced especially from the top downward."³⁹

The commercial side and benefits of the union of Thérèse and Charles are illustrated by the energetic husband's signing, from 1734—the year in which he married Thérèse—to 1738, seventy-one contracts as an *engagé* (employee of the fur trade) to bring goods and furs to the Detroit post. Operating on a much higher level in the trade, Thérèse became the first woman to make a business investment in what is now the state of Indiana on June 11, 1735. On that date the commandant of Fort Miami, Philippe Damours de La Morandière, signed an agreement with "Thérèse Catin, wife of Charles Ruette Dauteuil de Monceaux by which the aforesaid Sieur Damour promised and obligated himself to give up the Miami post to Mme. Dauteuil." In 1736, Charles signed a contract to carry goods there, and he wintered at Fort Miami in 1738–1739, undoubtedly taking care to oversee his wife's business.⁴⁰

D'Allaire saw the business relationship between Thérèse and her second husband as typical of the social exchanges occurring in a changing Canadian society. She wrote:

This type of familial departure from the requirements of the nobility, in comparison with his father and grandfather, which Charles de Monceaux announced early, is as it were confirmed by the marriage he contracted with Thérèse Catin in 1734. A social exchange was taking place then, one which was, moreover, common in the colony: Thérèse Catin, through her late husband, Réaume, provided her husband with entry into the trade bourgeoisie of Montreal, while she rejoiced over marrying into the

³⁸ Trudel, *Initiation à la Nouvelle-France*, 157-58.

³⁹ Dechêne, *Habitants et marchands*, 402-13, *passim*.

⁴⁰ D'Allaire, *Montée et déclin d'une famille noble*, 278; Antoine Roy, *Inventaire des Greffes des Notaires du Régime français* (27 vols., Québec, 1948), XII, 36. The contract between Damours de la Morandière and Thérèse Catin that conveys the post to her is of considerable interest for the light it throws on the French fur trade in the upper country and on the degree of autonomy exercised by Catin in a major transaction. The author's translation of this contract is appended to this article.

nobility. We have here another example of this colonial society formed by permeable groups which gave it its hybrid character. Charles Ruette d'Auteuil was seeking to join with the individuals who would permit him to trade. He found them, and it was effective, at least for several years.⁴¹

In 1746 by means of a complicated settlement among the heirs of Charles's father, who had died in 1737, Charles and Thérèse acquired most of the former attorney general's seigneurie of La Pocatière. As owners of this choice domain, they became members of the landed gentry of Canada. Charles died in 1755, and in 1763, the year in which England confirmed its possession of French Canada after the Seven Years War, Thérèse Catin, now seventy-seven years of age, gave all of her possessions to her first-born son, Charles-Auguste Réaume. In 1767, Charles-Auguste purchased the remainder of La Pocatière, thereby becoming the sole owner of the seigneurie of the former Sovereign Council's attorney general. Thus, in the space of her own lifetime, this contentious butcher's daughter and onetime chambermaid personified the merging of three levels of her evolving North American colonial society.⁴²

While Thérèse Catin's history is centered in the lower colony of New France, it is also linked to today's Great Lakes states through her business ventures, her civil suits involving upper-country post commanders, her two husbands' trade and military activities, and the close relatives and descendants of her first husband.⁴³ Her story, in addition to its inherent interest as the portrait of a defiant, non-conforming, and successful woman, illuminates not only the evolution of Canadian society but also the French and Canadian history of the American Great Lakes.

⁴¹ D'Allaire, *Montée et déclin d'une famille noble*, 278.

⁴² Tanguay, *Dictionnaire généalogique*, II, 580, III, 252; D'Allaire, *Montée et déclin d'une famille noble*, 180n, 254-55, 255n. Tanguay stated that Thérèse's eldest son was named Charles-Augustin, not Charles-Auguste, and, erroneously, that he drowned in 1751. Tanguay, *Dictionnaire généalogique*, VI, 524, 526.

⁴³ The author expresses his appreciation to Floyd R. Réaume of Saginaw, Michigan, for sharing his extensive genealogical files on the Réaume family in the United States and Canada.

APPENDIX

Contract for the Miami Post between
M. Damour and Mme Dauteuil¹

There appeared before the resident and undersigned Royal Notaries in the Jurisdiction of Montreal Philippe Damour, Esquire, sieur de la Morandière, Lieutenant of the Troops of this Country, Commandant of the Miami Post residing in Beaupré near Quebec, presently in this Town [Montreal] Staying in Sieur du Manthet's house Situated on St. Paul Street on the one hand, And Madame Thérèse Catin, Wife of Charles Ruette Dauteuil, Esquire, Sieur de Monceaux, residing in this aforesaid Town on the Above named St. Paul Street both in her own name and holding an authorized power of attorney from the aforesaid Sieur Dauteuil drawn up before the undersigned notary on the twenty Second of last February of which there is an original on file, on the other hand, Who came to the following agreements.

To wit, that the aforesaid Sieur Damour promised and bound himself by these presents to give up to the Aforesaid Madame Dauteuil the Miami post for as long as it pleases Monsieur the Governor general to keep him there, with all fur-trade and Trading Rights in the entire Extent of the aforesaid Post to the exclusion of any other person without authorization by the aforesaid Sieur Damour to carry on any fur trading or Trade directly or Indirectly And under any pretext that there might be or could be at the aforesaid post.

And the aforesaid Madame Dauteuil in the aforesaid name promised and bound herself to send the aforesaid Sieur Damour up [to the post] at her expense and also to bring him down from the aforesaid post at her expense when he is relieved; to feed him at the aforesaid post in the same way as her partner the aforesaid Sieur Dauteuil in his absence; to Provide him Each year at the aforesaid Post with a half *Barrique* of good wine, and three *Barils* of Brandy each containing fifteen *pots*²; to send up to Him this year only one *Baril* of wine and one *Baril* of brandy which he is to purchase himself at his expense, in addition to the Tobacco, powder and lead for his Hunting and his use.

¹ *Conventions pour le Poste Des miamis Entre M. Damour et Mme Dauteuil*, June 11, 1735, Montreal, Archives nationales du Québec, Protonotaire Montréal, Greffe de Chèvremont, Microfilm M 620/1072.

² A *barrique* was a barrel containing from fifty-five to ninety gallons; a *baril* was a keg containing up to twenty gallons; a *pot* was approximately one-half a gallon. Marcel Trudel, *Initiation à la Nouvelle-France* (Montréal, 1971), 238.

The presents which will be given to the Indians of the aforesaid Post by the aforesaid Sieur Dauteuil and partners, if they [the Indians] respond by [giving in return] another present, as they [the original presents] are to be provided by the aforesaid partnership, the aforesaid Sieur Damour will give up the aforesaid presents [from the Indians] to them [the partners].

The Aforesaid Madame Dauteuil promises and binds herself to pay Each year to the aforesaid Sieur Damour or other person holding His authorized power of attorney The sum of two thousand Livres of which The first payment will be made in the month of September of Next year, under pain of Etc., and thus it will continue for such Time as the aforesaid Sieur Damour remains at the aforesaid Post. The aforesaid Madame Dauteuil will pay Each year for the lease of the aforesaid Post upon the request of the aforesaid Monsieur the Governor general the amount of twelve Hundred Livres. She will pay furthermore The Interpreter, the blacksmith, and all the other expenses to be made at the aforesaid Post so that each year the aforesaid Sieur Damour will be able to receive the above two thousand Livres free and clear of any fees and expenses by virtue of the foregoing relinquishment executed by Him.

Thus has it been Agreed and conceded between the parties, and for the Execution of these presents They have designated their residence and abode identified above at which Locations Etc. notwithstanding Etc. Promising Etc. obligating Etc. Relinquishing Etc. Drawn up and accepted at the aforesaid Montreal in the Study of Gaudron de Chèvremont One of the aforesaid Notaries in the Year one thousand seven Hundred Thirty-Five on June eleventh in the forenoon and signed after the reading done in accordance with The ordinance.

[Signed:] Damour de lamorandiere
Catin dauteuil
Gaudron de Chevreumont

Chaumond