
A New Document Bearing on the History of George Rogers Clark in Vincennes

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An unpublished document bearing the signature of Leonard Helm acting under the "Power and Authority given" him by George Rogers Clark has come to light among the manuscript collections of the Old Cathedral Library and Museum in Vincennes, Indiana.¹ The document was found in an unlabeled archival folder in one of several archival document storage boxes that contain the loose leaf manuscripts in the library's collections. It was immediately apparent that the text, in French, was in a different hand than the signature. Clark's name in the initial sentence; the date, "the 1st day of May 1779," a mere nine weeks after the surrender of Fort Sackville by British Commander Henry Hamilton to the American cause; and the signature of Helm, Clark's compatriot who had fought with him in Dunmore's War and who had been held prisoner by Hamilton from December, 1778, to February, 1779, attested to the document's significance.

The sheet upon which this document was written is a well made, thin cotton rag paper bearing a circular watermark containing what appear to be letters and figures that are not readable and having between eight and nine chain lines per centimeter. The original sheet measured no less than 40 centimeters wide and 32.5 centimeters high, but at some point it was folded in half along its height and had the recto of the sheet pasted or glued onto another, central sheet. The fact that Helm used a full sheet, and wrote on only one side, suggests that he had ample paper at his disposal at this time.² The document follows:

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¹ Manuscripts in the Old Cathedral Library and Museum cover the period from 1740 through the 1900s. While there are a very few that are older still—some brought from Europe date from the very early fourteenth century—most date from the settlement of "St. Vincennes" forward and in content deal with the political and ecclesiastical history of the settlement, in particular the Catholic congregation of St. Francis Xavier in its various incarnations as church, cathedral, and basilica.

² Clark's company often found paper in short supply and wrote requisitions and receipts on whatever scrap was available.



**COMPUTER ASSISTED AGE REGRESSION OF GEORGE ROGERS CLARK
TO HIS MID-TWENTIES**

*Courtesy Glenn Miller, National Center for
Missing and Exploited Children, Arlington,
Virginia.*

By virtue of the Power and Authority given me
by George Rogers Clark, Esquire, Col.
Commander of the Northern Department of the Illinois
St. Vincennes and its Dependencies, &c, &c, &c.

Being necessary for the	5
conservation of the village and the good of the service in general	
to establish the Militia and For the Security of the Public to	
appoint its Officers, and being Persuaded of the Zeal and fidelity	
of François Godere. I have deemed it appropriate that he be na-	
med and appointed Lieutenant and By these Presents	10
Name and appoint him Lieutenant in the Com-	
pany of Capt. Louis Deligne, with these orders in par-	
ticular; to obey the instructions which he will Be given	
by me or any other Superior Officer, and to	
Communicate them to the whole Company, so that they	15
do not have reason for not knowing. For which this	
will Be a Complete Authorization for you to act according to my	
Orders	
Given under my hand	
and Seal at St. Vincennes	
this 1st day of May 1779	20

(Seal)

Leo^d Helm

Line note: 12—usual form of name: Louis Edeline.

The signer of the document has rightly been called "one of Clark's most valuable captains. He was an interesting, if somewhat rugged character—outspoken, abounding in wit and fun, fearless, even in the presence of danger that would have appalled most brave men, intelligent, level-headed, and absolutely trustworthy. His reputation for courage was unique, even amongst the pioneers."³

Helm was born in Stafford County, Virginia, the son of Thomas Helm and Margaret Lynaugh (Linaugh, Linah) Helm. His father had arrived in Virginia as a child with his father and mother and four siblings sometime before May 5, 1720. Nothing is known of the early life of Leonard Helm in Stafford and Prince William counties although his later "letters and records indicate that he had the fair education given to gentlemen's sons who could not be sent back to England." The last Virginia records that refer to a Leonard Helm are from Loudoun County and show that he bought land there in 1770, but no sale or disposition of it in will or estate is recorded.⁴ Perhaps Helm left Virginia shortly after purchasing this land. He is lost to record from

³ Temple Bodley, *George Rogers Clark: His Life and Services* (Boston, 1926), 48.

⁴ Bessie Taul Conkwright, "Captain Leonard Helm," *Indiana History Bulletin*, X (March, 1933), 409.

Par l'ordre du Gouverneur et l'Autorité à moi
Donnée par George Rogers Clark, Major Général
Commandant du Département Septentrional des Illinois
St Vincennes et Ses Dépendances de J. J.

Proclamation nécessaire Pour la
Conservation du Village et bien du Service en Général
d'établir la Milice et Pour la Sécurité du Public d'y
appointer des Officiers, et étant Persuadé du Zèle et Pouvoir
de François Godere, J'ai Jugé à Propos de lui Nom-
mer et appointer Lieutenant, et Par ces Présentes
Nommons et appointons Lieutenant dans la Com-
pagnie de Cap^t Louis Delorme avec des ordres Part-
iculiers d'obéir les instructions qui lui sera envoyées
Par moi en vue de l'Officier Supérieur et de
Communiquer à tout la Compagnie, afin qu'ils
n'aient aucune cause d'ignorance. Pour laquelle ces
vous sera une Pleine Pouvoir. pour Agir selon mes
Ordres

Donné sous ma main
et Scellé à St Vincennes
le 1^{er} Jour de Mai 1779

Lesclapart

1770 to 1773, and this document, unfortunately, does nothing to remedy that situation. A fellow soldier mentions that Helm went down the Ohio River with Captain Thomas Bullitt "at an early period," and Lyman Draper suggests that this trip perhaps occurred in 1773.⁵ Helm and Clark were among the men gathered at the Little Kanawha River in the spring of 1774 to undertake a settlement in Kentucky. Both were involved in Captain Michael Cresap's war against the Shawnees in April of that year.⁶ Three months later four hundred men led by Major Angus McDonald crossed the Ohio at Fish Creek and destroyed Indian villages on the Muskingum. Historians generally concur that "there is some reason to believe that Clark, and William Harrod, Leonard Helm and Joseph Bowman . . . went on this expedition."⁷ Clark and Helm served in the same division in Dunmore's War during that summer and fall, and Dunmore made Clark "captain of the militia of Pittsburg and its dependencies."⁸

Clark received his public and secret orders for the Illinois campaign from Governor Patrick Henry on January 2, 1778. Apparently Helm was one of the first men Clark sought to accompany him, as his diary entry for January 18, 1778, states: "found my old Friend L Helms at Mr Floyds."⁹ Helm was to recruit a company of men from Fauquier County, Virginia, and meet Clark at Redstone in Pennsylvania. By early April Helm marched the few men he could find from interior Virginia to the Monongahela River and descended the river to the rendezvous point.¹⁰ After the bloodless taking of Kaskaskia and Cahokia, Clark turned his attention to Vincennes. Aided by Father Pierre Gibault, the inhabitants of Vincennes took the oath of allegiance on July 20. In his memoir of that campaign Clark wrote of his plan for the occupation of Fort Sackville: "Capt. L. Helms appeared Calculated to answer my purpose he was past the Meridian of life and a good deal acquainted with Indian business I sent him to Comand at that post and also appointed him Agent for Indian affair in the Department of the waubash."¹¹

It was in his capacity as commander at Fort Sackville and agent for Indian affairs that Helm signed the document under consideration. Even though he surrendered his post to Governor Henry Hamilton on December 19, 1778, and was held prisoner in Fort Sackville

⁵ Captain John Murphy to Dr. Lyman Draper, 1846, manuscripts 8J74, 8J77-80, Lyman C. Draper Collection (State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison).

⁶ James A. James, ed., *George Rogers Clark Papers*; Vol. I, 1771-1781 (*Collections of the Illinois State Library*, Vol. VIII; Springfield, 1912), liii.

⁷ William H. English, *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio, 1778-1783, and Life of Gen. George Rogers Clark* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1896), I, 64.

⁸ Reuben G. Thwaites and Louise Phelps Kellogg, eds., *Documentary History of Dunmore's War, 1774* (Madison, Wis., 1905), illustration following 156, 421.

⁹ James, *George Rogers Clark Papers*, I, 27.

¹⁰ Conkwright, "Captain Leonard Helm," 413.

¹¹ "Clark's Memoir, 1773-1774," in James, *George Rogers Clark Papers*, I, 240-41.

until Hamilton surrendered to Clark on February 25, 1779, his appointment as agent for Indian affairs was not rescinded, and he remained at Fort Sackville after Clark had returned to Kaskaskia.

The formal recognition of a militia in Vincennes was probably among the first things Helm oversaw, and it is in that context that the other two names mentioned in the document—Louis Edeline and François Godare—occur.

Louis Victor Edeline was one of the very early French settlers of Post Vincennes. He was listed as one of the heads of families settled there on or before August 1, 1783, thereby qualifying for a donation of four hundred acres of land in the old Donation tract.¹² He was born in Longvevil, Quebec, on December 23, 1730, the son of Louis Antonie Edeline and Madeleine Drousson Edeline. He married Marie Joseph Thomas, a Philadelphian, on May 14, 1759, in Detroit. They moved to Vincennes sometime shortly thereafter, probably arriving before 1765. Edeline died on April 28, 1799, and is buried in the Old French Cemetery adjacent to St. Francis Xavier church—one of eleven Revolutionary War veterans buried there. His great-great-great-great-granddaughter, Joy Thomas Decker, still resides in Vincennes.¹³ As evidenced in the document under consideration, the name “Edeline” has many variant forms. In addition to Louis Deligne one finds reference to L. E. Deline, Lewis Edeline,¹⁴ L. E. Doline,¹⁵ and Louis Edeline.¹⁶

Shortly after the events to which this document refers, Captain Edeline was appointed one of four judges for the district of Vincennes by Colonel John Todd, then Virginia’s lieutenant-in charge of the civil affairs of Clark’s conquered territory. This “Court for the District of Post Vincennes” continued in existence until it was superseded by the courts of the United States set up under the ordinance of 1787.¹⁷

Like Edeline, François Godere was an early French settler of Vincennes. He, too, was listed as one of the heads of families who settled there on or before August 1, 1783, thereby qualifying for a donation of four hundred acres of land in the old Donation tract. He was claimant of 400-acre donation #48 in 1783, a tract claimed by Francis Vigo in 1806.¹⁸ Godere’s marriage to Marie Therese Compagout on

¹² Henry S. Cauthorn, *A History of the City of Vincennes, Indiana, from 1702 to 1901* (Vincennes, Ind., 1902), 167; June B. Barekman, *Knox County, Indiana: Early Land Records and Court Indexes, 1783–1815* (3 vols. in 1, Chicago, 1966), II, 6.

¹³ Mifflin Thomas, *A Genealogy and History of the Thomas Family: Prepared for Joy Thomas Decker* (Privately printed, 1991).

¹⁴ Goodspeed Publishing Company, *History of Knox and Daviess Counties, Indiana . . .* (Chicago, 1886), 124, 148.

¹⁵ Cauthorn, *History of the City of Vincennes*, 48.

¹⁶ Joseph Henry Vanderburgh Some, *The History of a Famous Old Town and Its Glorious Past* (New York, 1962), 81, 107.

¹⁷ Cauthorn, *History of the City of Vincennes*, 47–48.

¹⁸ *American State Papers; Class VIII, Public Lands* (8 vols., Washington, D.C., 1832), I, 291.

January 30, 1774, is recorded in the earliest Old Cathedral Parish records. The Goderes had one son, Antoine.¹⁹ Godere was probably illiterate, as he signed an "X" on an 1806 petition to Congress advocating passage of a law extending time for the filing of notices and making proofs of claims to lands.²⁰ Little else is known about Godere other than that he was one of the French villagers (like most of the male population of Vincennes) who assisted the Virginians under Clark in retaking Fort Sackville for the American cause. His wife, the "Madame Godere" who sewed the flag flown by Clark above Fort Sackville, is better known. Variant spellings of Godere include Godare,²¹ and Coder.²²

The signature of Charles Vachet, which appears on the back of this document (and many others in the Old Cathedral manuscript collections) in blue pencil, is perhaps the hardest to pin down of all names associated with the Helm document, if only because the name belonged to more than one person in the same family. Ultimately, the specific Vachet who signed the document is less important than the different stories associated with the Vachet family name, stories that provide many different plausible routes by which the document could have come into the Old Cathedral collections.

Charles Vachet, Jr., whose name appears at the bottom of the abbreviated family tree below,²³ is the most likely person to have signed this document and presented it to the Old Cathedral Museum. His great-grandfather, Charles-François Vasher, was born in Montreal in 1741 but was married in Vincennes in 1778. He fought on the side of the Virginians in the battle of Fort Sackville and may very well have served in the company of Lt. Godere.²⁴ Another great-grandfather, Jean Baptiste DeElaurier (DeLuyear, Delaurier), was out hunting ducks with Charles-François Vasher's father-in-law, Nicholas Cardinal, when the two were captured by Clark's company. They informed Clark that the British were entirely unaware of his coming and guided him to the Sugar Camp and from there to Warriors Knoll.²⁵ Any of these three direct ancestors of Charles Vachet, Jr., could have handed the document down to their great-grandson. But there is one more possibility.

¹⁹ "He Dug Out Bullets Fired into Old Fort Sackville," *Vincennes Sun-Commercial*, March 10, 1935.

²⁰ Clarence Edwin Carter, comp. and ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*; Vol. VII, *The Territory of Indiana* (Washington, D.C., 1939), 336-37.

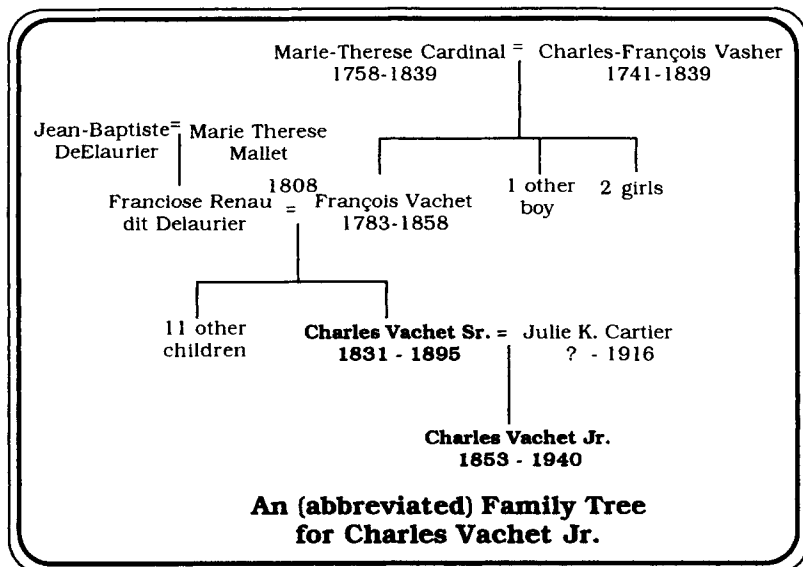
²¹ Richard Day, *Vincennes: A Pictorial History* (St. Louis, 1988), 22.

²² *Ibid.*, 167; *History of Knox and Daviess Counties*, 110.

²³ Information for the construction of this "abbreviated family tree" was taken from Baptism Book B (1814-1838), Old Cathedral Parish Records (Old Cathedral Library and Museum); and from Milford Harbison, *The Genealogy of James Harbison* (Vincennes, Ind., 1976), irregularly numbered.

²⁴ Charles Francois Vachet appears as number 107350 in the register of the Sons of the American Revolution, Louisville, Kentucky.

²⁵ This account developed from information in "He Dug Out Bullets Fired into Old Fort Sackville"; and Day, *Vincennes*.



In a newspaper interview published in 1935, an eighty-five year-old Charles Vachet, Jr., states: "I knew Madame Godare's son, Antoine Godare. He lived on Nicholas between Sixth and Seventh."²⁶ It is just possible, therefore, that this document was given by Antoine Godere to Charles Vachet, Jr. This theory is strengthened by another document in the Old Cathedral manuscript collections bearing the signature of Charles Vachet in blue pencil—a document listing the estate of François Godere.

Finding the unexpected, especially when it is something that informs both national and local history, is always interesting. Early French inhabitants of Vincennes, such as the Edelins, Goderes, and Vachets, played a very important role in the history of Fort Sackville. Events that loom large in the history of a place are, indeed, affected by very common, "everyday" people.

²⁶ "He Dug Out Bullets Fired into Old Fort Sackville."