

Marie Claude Chamois, *Fille du Roi*, Wife of François Frigon: A Mystery

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I'm for mystery, not interpretive answers. ... The answer is never the answer. What's really interesting is the mystery. If you seek the mystery instead of the answer, you'll always be seeking. I've never seen anybody really find the answer, but they think they have. So they stop thinking. But the job is to seek mystery, evoke mystery. ~ Ken Kesey¹

Those of you who have read my articles in the past may be surprised that I am advocating mystery as I begin this one. Notice, though, that the opposite of mystery in the opening quotation is “interpretive answers.” Interpretive answers appear to resolve the questions that remain unanswered, that will most likely never be answered. Sometimes they are presented not as “interpretation,” but as fact; not as opinion, but as a moral or ethical judgment. All of the *Filles du Roi* of New France have been subjected to such judgments over the years, judgments often based on insufficient or inaccurate evidence,

Thanks to Jean Baptiste Colbert, who initiated the plan, and King Louis XIV of France, who agreed to set aside funds to sponsor marriageable women, the *Filles du Roi* (King's daughters) began, in 1663, to leave home, family, and friends behind to journey to a world new to them. Their intention was to find a husband among the colonists of New France, Canada. The 350th anniversary of the arrival of the first *Filles du Roi* in 1663 is being commemorated this year in celebrations and in publication of the results of renewed research into their lives.² Those who have written about them in the past have not always been balanced in evaluating them, nor have they had access to documents that have been found recently or that have become more easily available to researchers.

Because these *Filles du Roy* have sometimes been confused with the girls who ended up in the West Indies, “to which women of ill fame were sometimes sent,”³ some historians, like Gustave Lanctot in 1964, have been careful to point out:

The authorities in Québec were even more exacting in their choice of girls destined for marriage with the bachelors of the colony. Some of the girls came from religious orphanages; these were chosen with the help of parish priests in Normandy, or of the Seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris. Elsewhere candidates had to present a certificate of good conduct before they embarked. The Intendant insisted that the girls must not be too delicate; Canada needed strong, healthy young women “at the child-bearing age.” Talon even added the recommendation that there should not be “anything unattractive in their appearance.” During the crossing the prospective brides were under the supervision of nuns or of Marguerite Bourgeoys [named a saint in the twentieth century]. These “King's daughters,” as they were called, were very carefully chosen for their moral and physical qualities. They were very superior immigrants, the best of that period. It is not surprising that the young men of the colony found these fresh, healthy girls very attractive, and they were [sometimes] married, thirty at a time, almost as soon as they

¹ Ken Kesey in “The Art of Fiction” - interview by Robert Faggen, *The Paris Review*, No. 130 (Spring 1994), found at <http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mystery>.

² I am indebted to the Associations des Familles Frigon, Inc., especially to Pierre Frigon and Gérald Frigon, for their correspondence in late 2012 and for sending me copies of the published court case of Marie Claude Chamois versus Jacqueline Girard, her mother, the 22nd *plaidoyer* (plea to the court) of Henry François d'Aguesseau and also the newly-obtained documents and their transcriptions that I will cite. For the website and membership information, see <http://www.genealogie.org/famille/frigon/e-index.html>. *The Frigons* is their eight-page newsletter, published three times per year in both French and English. Back issues are also available.

³ Gustave Lanctot, *A History of Canada*, Volume II: From the Royal Régime to the Treaty of Utrecht, 1663-1713, translated by Margaret M. Cameron (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964) 37.

landed. Authors of fictitious travel tales, such as La Hontan and Beauchesne, have scattered their books with slanderous stories about the "King's daughters," but there is not one single authoritative document which might lead one to suppose that any prostitutes were sent to Canada. ... Female immigrants to Canada were above reproach.⁴

More recent studies have shown that a few of the women were not necessarily paragons of virtue, but, as a group, they were definitely not trollops.⁵

Ever since I learned about **Marie Claude Chamois**, one of my sixty-two,⁶ first-generation female ancestors who arrived in New France as *Filles du Roi* / King's daughters and began reading about her, I have found myself unable to accept some of the judgments that have been pronounced about her. Some consider her a terrible mother; others call her and her husband fortune hunters; and some even accuse her of being a charlatan. In the process of studying her life, I learned that even her own mother called her an impostor, a judgment that some writers 300 and more years later still consider possible. They seem to believe she was a seventeenth-century French version of the several women who called themselves Anastasia, each alleging she was a daughter of the Romanovs of Russia who claimed to have somehow escaped the assassinations of her siblings and parents.⁷

Ironically, of all of the *Filles du Roi*, it is Marie Claude Chamois about whom the most is known, and yet about whom mystery abounds. Documents tracing her life survived not only in New France, but also in France. She thus became a featured subject of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation television series *Canada: A People's History* in Episode 2. If you saw this television program, you might recall the image of a blonde actress with a sullen and sad expression on her face, an image repeated with every running of the credits. Unfortunately, this image came to represent all of the more than 700 *Filles du Roi* who voyaged to New France.⁸ The treatment of Marie Claude Chamois in Episode 2 was not the only segment of this CBC-TV series I took objection to, but the portion presenting her life was so egregiously in error that I wrote to the website maintained by the CBC after Episode 2 first aired (10/29/2000 8:00 to 10:00 p.m.):

I must protest your absolutely negative representation of Marie Claude Chamois, *Fille du Roi*, one of my ancestors. Could you not have allowed her to smile at least once? You have her say, "I resigned myself to silence in an alien land, with neither friends, assistance nor parents, condemned to a perpetual exile."

⁴ Lanctot, 37.

⁵ See Yves Landry's extensive research. Yves Landry, *Orphelines en France, pionnières au Canada, Les Filles du roi au XVII^e siècle*, (Montreal: Leméac, 1992). All translations from works originally written in French are mine.

⁶ See also my "Maternal Ancestry: *Fille du Roi* Marie Grandin, 'good wife Baudet,' and mtDNA," *Michigan's Habitant Heritage*, Vol. 27, #4, Oct. 2006, 185-191.

⁷ "Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna of Russia ... (June 18 [O.S. June 5] 1901 – July 17, 1918) was the youngest daughter of Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, the last sovereign of Imperial Russia, and his wife Alexandra Fyodorovna." See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Duchess_Anastasia_Nikolaevna_of_Russia for an account of the recent DNA evidence that has conclusively verified the death of Anastasia. According to this article, "Several women have falsely claimed to have been Anastasia, the most notorious of whom was Anna Anderson. Anderson's body was cremated upon her death in 1984, but DNA testing in 1994 on available pieces of Anderson's tissue and hair showed no relation to the DNA of the Imperial family."

⁸ Perhaps 1,000 *Filles du Roi* were recruited in the eleven years the program remained in existence. Estimates vary depending on the criteria applied. Yves Landry sets the number at 770 between 1663 and 1673 but acknowledges that an additional ten percent of that number may have died in crossing the Atlantic. In 2001, *King's Daughters and Founding Mothers: The Filles du Roi, 1663 -1673*, in two volumes, a study in English by Peter J. Gagné, was published by Quinton Publications.

And I explained that the words the script put into her mouth were actually excerpted from the published words of her lawyer in France, Henry François d'Aguesseau.⁹

He defended her attempt to gain her rightful inheritance in 1693, after she had returned to France from Canada in 1685 as the sole surviving child of her family. He did not come to her assistance until after years of pleadings in the lower courts of Paris and the legal delays that followed. It is these earlier, lower court rulings, the "Requêtes du Palais" and "Sentence d'audience" that have recently been transcribed.¹⁰ As d'Aguesseau used the words in 1693 in his arguments in her defense, they described Marie Claude's inability to speak the truth in France, where she was even given a different name, **Marie Victoire**, after she fled her mother's home at the age of thirteen, denying that she knew her parents because of her fear of her family. This occurred a year before she became a *Fille du Roi* in 1670. These words do not, in fact, refer to her time in New France once she married there, but they are made to seem to be her response to journeying to Canada, and, by inference, the response of all of the *Filles du Roi*. In the book published about the series, *Canada: A People's History*, her words are "quoted" as:



... I preferred to give up my homeland, make a perilous voyage and arrive in a new world. I remained there in silence, far from my country, without friends, or support of any kind, or parents, condemned to perpetual exile.¹¹

Except for reporting, in error, that Marie Claude had seven (*sic*)¹² children, this is basically the extent of her story presented on the program or in the book. No mention was made of her return voyage to France. In fact, the program stated that immigrants were forbidden to return to the mother country "except if they had considerable property," a blatant exaggeration. There is so much more to the story of Marie Claude and the other *Filles du Roi*! Silvio Dumas, in his 1972 *Les Filles du Roi en Nouvelle France*, devotes a whole chapter to her story, calling it the only example of a somewhat complete background for this group of women and one worthy of being the subject of a novel.¹³

To begin by citing documents that survive in Canada (the only sources before the discovery of d'Aguesseau's account of the case), Marie Claude arrived in New France in 1670, bringing 100 *livres* in clothing and personal possessions. In her first marriage contract, written by the notary Séverin Ameau on 16 October 1670,¹⁴ with **Pierre Forcier**, she called herself **Marie Victoire Chamois**, declared she could

⁹ *Œuvres de M. le Chancelier d'Aguesseau, tome second, contenant les plaidoyers prononcés au Parlement en qualité d'Avocat Général dans les années 1691, 1692, 1693*, Paris, Les Libraires associés, 1761 (22^e plaidoyer). Copy purchased from the Associations des Familles Frigon, Inc., hereafter, d'Aguesseau. His name is spelled both Henry and Henri. Portrait of Henri François d'Aguesseau (1668-1751) - Jurist - Chancellor of France, http://www.oldantiqueprints.com/D-Aguesseau_1c0-en.html

¹⁰ Hélène-Andrée Bizier provided copies to the Associations des Familles Frigon, Inc. of « Requêtes du Palais, sentence du 12 juin 1688 et résumé des témoignages. Archives nationales de France. Section ancienne, Parlement de Paris, X^{3b} 16662, 21 juin 1688 (localisation citée dans Yves Landry, *Orphelines en France pionnières au Canada - Les Filles du Roi au XVII^e siècle*, Montréal, Leméac, 1992, 436 p., p. 101, note 137). » Hereafter, "Requêtes du Palais." The earliest document is dated 1686.

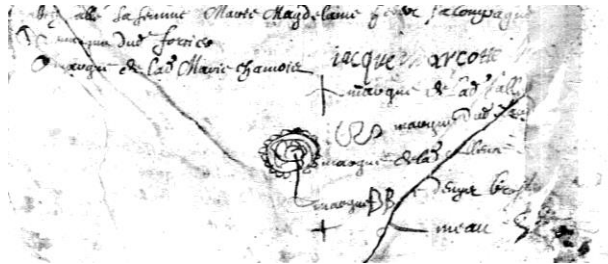
¹¹ Don Gillmor and Pierre Turgeon, *Canada: A People's History* (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2004), 83.

¹² Tanguay named Marie Claude Chamois as Marie *Chambo*y (it is so spelled on a record) and counted daughter Françoise twice. Cyprien Tanguay, *Dictionnaire généalogique des familles canadiennes depuis la fondation de la colonie jusqu'à nos jours*, Vol. 1 (Québec, Canada: Eusèbe Senécal, 1871-1890), 242.

¹³ Silvio Dumas, *Les Filles du Roi en Nouvelle France*, (Québec: La Société Historique de Québec, 1972), 131.

¹⁴ *Programme de recherche en démographie historique de l'Université de Montréal online*: <http://www.genealogie.umontreal.ca>, #94451, hereafter PRDH. Pierre Forcier (Guillaume and Sébastienne Gauthier)

not read or write, and gave the name **Henry** as her deceased father's first name (actually the name of a brother). Her mother, **Jacqueline**, had no last name. She did use the last name Chamois and identified her origin as the parish of *St Jean des Greves (sic)* in Paris. Two other *Filles du Roi* were present with their husbands at the signing of the contract, **Elisabeth Sallé** and her husband, **Jacques Marcotte**; and **Marie Magdelaine Hébert**, wife of **Denis Brosseau**. Marie Magdelaine Hébert was identified as Marie Claude's companion (*campagne*).



Signature page of 16 October 1670 marriage contract with the marks on the upper left of Pierre Forcier and Marie Chamois

This contract was later annulled, so she was not forced to marry the first man who chose her, nor were a good number of the other women who arrived between 1663 and 1673, the years in which the program was in effect. Pierre Forcier later married another *Fille du Roi*, Marguerite Girard.¹⁵ Marie Claude next appears in the extant records eleven years later in the 1681 census for Batiscan, where her husband had property, as **Marie** Chamois, twenty-three years old (she was actually twenty-five), wife of François Frigon, thirty-one, with children **Jean François**, age seven; **Madeleine**, age five; **Marie**, age three; and **Françoise**, age six months.¹⁶ Neither the Frigon and Chamois marriage contract nor the record of the church marriage is extant in Canada today, but they existed then. Marie Claude carried copies of them to France in 1685. They are cited in the legal documents recorded there, as is as her birth, 8 January 1656, from her baptismal record on 29 January 1656 at St. Gervais in Paris. (See the image of the record later in the article.) Of the four children mentioned in the 1681 census, the baptism record is extant only for Françoise on 30 March 1681 at Batiscan,¹⁷ but other notarial and church records are missing for Batiscan and near-by Champlain and Cap de La Madeleine. Jean François Frigon's Confirmation at Batiscan, on 2 June 1681, has survived, though. He was said to be age seven,¹⁸ just as he was in the census data, so he was born when Marie Claude was about 19 years old. Compilers of indexes of vital events have guessed, as does PRDH, that Frigon married Marie Claude Chamois "before 1674-12-31."¹⁹ Documents cited in France provide a more precise date for the Frigon and Chamois marriage contract, October 1670, and for the church ceremony, November 1670. They also identify her father as **Honoré Chamois**, not Henry. He was a secretary of the king and herald at arms. Her lawyer in 1693 argued convincingly that it is understandable she might not have known the first name of a father who had died when she was only four years old. The church record of the marriage carried to France names Marie Claude's parents as deceased Henry Chamois and Jacqueline **Girard**.²⁰ Thus, by the time of the second marriage contract, just months after her arrival in the colony, Marie Claude was no longer obscuring her identity or remaining silent about the last name of her mother.

later married Marguerite Girard, but the church record has not survived, just as the Frigon and Chamois church marriage has not survived. The Forcier / Chamois marriage contract is available on Ancestry, Quebec Notarial Records (Drouin Collection), Letter A, 1663-1670, Séverin Aneau, images 240 and 241 of 253.

¹⁵ PRDH Individual #27961.

¹⁶ PRDH 1681 Census at Batiscan, #97376.

¹⁷ PRDH #7413.

¹⁸ PRDH Confirmations at Batiscan, #403522.

¹⁹ PRDH Individual record for Marie Claude Chamois #27330.

²⁰ D'Aguesseau, 512.

The next child born to the couple after the 1681 census was **Jeanne**, 14 September, baptized the 15th, in 1683, followed by **Antoine**, born the 27th, baptized the 28th of July 1685, both at Batiscan.²¹ The records preserved in France identify the six Frigon children as Jean François, Marie Magdeleine, Marie Louise, Marie Françoise, Marie Jeanne, and Antoine Frigon.²² As the baptism record for the “Marie” in the 1681 census has not survived, the name Louise for the three-year-old Marie of 1681 is additional information.

In the same year of Antoine’s birth in 1685, or soon before, Marie Claude learned that the last of her three siblings had died in Paris. She decided to return to France to claim her inheritance, leaving behind her husband and six children, the youngest a baby of four months when she boarded a ship in November. Her husband, François, must not have objected because he saw to it that she carried with her a lengthy legal document, a *procuration* or power of attorney, written by the notary Genaple,²³ empowering her to do business in France. A married woman could not engage in legal matters without her husband’s approval, or a woman under the age of 25 without her father’s or guardian’s approval. This was not the first time he had granted his wife this authority, having done so two years earlier, in 1683,²⁴ so that she could transact business while he was away and involved in a fur trading partnership to travel to the *Sta8aois* (Ottawa) Indians.

After arriving in New France by the 1666 census, François Frigon had worked for others or on their land and on his land in Batiscan. By 1683, though, after the *congé* system of permits to leave the colony and trade with the Indians in their territory had gone into effect, he joined **Jacques Babie**, merchant of nearby Champlain, in a partnership to make use of three permits granted by the governor-general, two to Babie and one to Frigon. They borrowed 6,026 *livres*, 6 *sols*, 3 *deniers* in merchandise from **Charles Aubert, sieur de LaChesnaye**. Others involved in the venture were **Adrien Neveu**; **Jean Desrosiers dit Dutremble** of Champlain; **Jacques Daneau** (or Daniau), of Cressé (Nicolet); **Vivien Jean**, **Charles Jobin**, **Antoine Desrosiers** (brother of Jean), and **Jacques Sauvage**, all of Champlain; and **Mathurin Cadot dit Poitevin**, of the Rivière St. Michel.²⁵ The contract is more than four pages long in outlining responsibilities of the partners and their hired men. Each of the *congés* allowed three men in one canoe to transport trade goods and return with furs and skins to be delivered to the official market for sale. During her husband’s absence, Marie Claude used the 1683 power of attorney to take care of a property agreement with Mathurin and Louis Guillet.²⁶ No other records naming her appear to survive in New France until the similar *procuration* of 2 November 1685, two years later, drawn up in Québec City by the notary Genaple, specifying that she was departing for France.

²¹ PRDH Baptisms #7429 and #7442.

²² Lines 68-70, “Sentence d’audience, Requête du Palais,” transcribed in French by Sébastien Gaudelus *et. al.* at the request of Odette Frigon.

²³ 2 November 1685, Genaple, *Procuration de François Frigon à sa femme*. This and the next three notarial documents are photocopies from the Montréal archives.

²⁴ 14 May 1683, Adhémar *dit* St. Martin, *Procuration de François Frigon à sa femme*.

²⁵ 16 May 1683, Adhémar *dit* St. Martin, “Convention...” Names standardized. Notice that this agreement is signed two days after the power of attorney of 14 May 1683. Daughters of Jacques Sauvage, from Paris, as well as his wife, Catherine Jean *dite* Vien, daughter of Vivien Jean, would eventually settle at *Le Détroit du Lac Érié*. Charles Jobin, born about 1661, is the son of Charles and Marie Madeleine Girard, who had married in Paris in January of 1657, a year after Marie Claude’s birth. His sister Marie Madeleine was born about 1664, from *St. Germain l’Auxerrois de Paris*. She married François Fafard 3 November 1683 at Champlain, the year of her brother’s employment by Babie and Frigon. (PRDH #1037) It seems impossible to know whether these families from Paris knew the Chamois family. The Fafards settled first in Batiscan and then in Detroit, where both of them died. François Fafard and Jean François Frigon were part of the 1701 convoy to found Fort Pontchartrain. See the FCHSM website for their names on the plaque erected by our society.

²⁶ 25 January 1684, Adhémar *dit* St. Martin, *Entente* [agreement] *entre Marie Claude Chamois et Mathurin et Louis Guillet*. 21 February 1684, Rageot, *Compromis* [compromise] *entre Mathurin Guillet et. al. et Marie Chamois, épouse de François Frigon*.

Marie Claude must have boarded the last ship leaving for France in November that year because she was at La Rochelle 20 December 1685 and in Paris at the beginning of January 1686. It was reported that, when she arrived,

she did all that was possible to see her mother, who always hid herself from her, that she was recognized by *Marevel* [*sic*, Pierre Mareuil], her brother-in-law [husband of her deceased sister, Marie], by *s' Millet*, her [priest] confessor

and by the husband of the woman who had served as her wet nurse, Bouthilier. These details about her in France were recorded in the 21 June 1688 "Sentence, Requête du Palais."²⁷ Also, a woman named *du Rivault*, and Marie Chamois's "uncle and aunt Ménard" acknowledged knowing her,²⁸ as did others. The story of her legal appeals is detailed in the recently-transcribed *Requêtes du Palais*, and in the published 1693 *plaidoyers*, arguments of d'Aguesseau on behalf of Marie Claude. I will quote directly from these sources.

Marie Claude had a sister, Marie, and two brothers, Henri and Philippe Michel, all older than she. At birth, she had been sent to a wet nurse, a woman married to the cabinet maker Bouthilier at a home across the street from the family's residence on *rue de la Truanderie*. Placing a baby in the care of another woman was normal practice for the upper classes in France and also in New France.²⁹ After the death of her father in 1660, when she was only four years old, she was

entirely abandoned by her mother, who even neglected to see to her education and matters concerning her health and well-being, not having sent her to the institutions of her parish nor to a school and she always kept her badly clothed such that it was shameful for her to be seen in public, all of which had been the same for the other children.

Her mother changed residence several times. She had left *rue de la Truanderie* to live

on *rue Saint Etienne des grets* [*sic*, Grès], where she took her children to the house of *sieur Morel*, where Michel Chamois, her young son, died; after the said death, [the mother] returned to live on *la rue de la Truanderie* [Truanderie, but farther from the original residence], in the house of the man named *Delespine*, where dwelled [unreadable] vis à vis Blondin, surgeon, and on the third floor, (*Trouson*?) ... who had a daughter named *Babeth*, who became a companion of [Marie Claude].

That in this house, the mother

changed her [the mother's] name and took that of [*Tailembey*?], that she also made her son take this name, and, after the marriage of Mareuil to her elder daughter, all of them lived in *faux bourg Saint Anthoine* in the house of the man named *Dechartre* in which Mareuil had rented two apartments ...

That the mother acquired one of the apartments "where she lived with her son and her daughter, who all

²⁷ 21 June 1688, "Sentence, Requête du Palais," transcription of this section provided by Hélène-Andrée Bizier.

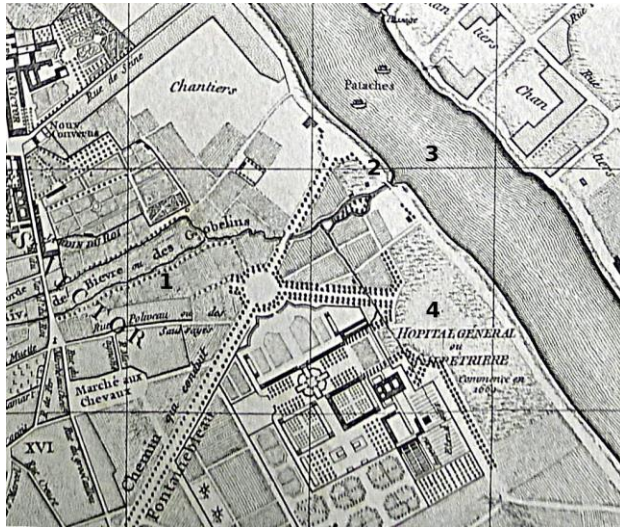
²⁸ D'Aguesseau, 521.

²⁹ See my "Who Was the Anonymous 1702 Wet Nurse for One of Lamothe Cadillac's Children?" *Michigan's Habitant Heritage*, Vol. 26, no. 1 (January 2005): 21-27.

three slept together” and in the other, Mareuil and his wife.³⁰

Near the end of the month of April 1669, the mother, having gone away, had left her son and daughter alone in the room, from which [the daughter] fled on the night of 28 – 29 of the said month of April, terrified and weeping, to seek refuge in the room of the woman named *Du Rivault*, who kept her hidden several days when she knew [what had happened. A rape or attempted rape?] and took her to *sieur le Rêtz*, assistant vicar of St. Paul, who put her into the care of *Gabrielle Esmery*, a single woman dwelling in his parish, until they could decide what to do for her and then had her conducted by the said Esmery on 11 May to *Hôpital de la Pitié*, and, not wanting to identify who she was out of fear of having to then fall back into the wretched state she had escaped, [Marie Claude] would not reveal her name nor the names of her parents and was given the name *Marie Victoire* by *sieur le Rêtz*, who furnished the things she needed.³¹

Three days later, she was transferred under the same name to the *Hôpital de la Salpêtrière*, whose register enrolled her as “Marie Victoire, fourteen years old [*sic*], who does not know either her father or her mother, will be observed.”³² In the *Salpêtrière*, the State cared for women in need, some of whom were “poor old women, abandoned women, beggars, orphans, poor or mentally ill girls.”³³ These agencies were not “hospitals” in the usual sense of the word.



Carte de Paris, Vaugondy, 1760³⁴. 1- La Bièvre. 2- Le pont de Bièvre. 3- La Seine. 4- L’Hôpital général ou Salpêtrière.



³⁰ These details from lines 114-126, 21 June 1688, “Sentence, Requêtes du Palais,” transcription by Hélène-Andrée Bizier. Punctuation added by me. Thanks to Gail Moreau-DesHarnais for the reading of *Tailembey*. St. Étienne des Grès and La Salpêtrière are on the Left Bank of the River Seine; the other sites are on the Right Bank.

³¹ “Sentence, Requêtes du Palais,” lines 127-134.

³² Cited by d’Aguesseau, 507.

³³ Dumas, 134. Image of L’Hôpital général (or La Salpêtrière), near the Seine River, and the map courtesy of Pierre Frigon and with his permission, from his recent article about Marie Claude Chamois. Source of the map: H. Gourdon de Genouillac, *Paris à travers les siècles*, Paris, 1882. Musée de la civilisation, bibliothèque du Séminaire de Québec, fonds anciens.

³⁴ Image of *L’Hôpital général ou Salpêtrière* is also in the public domain from: http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:P1010310_Carte_de_Paris_Vaugondy1760_Salp%C3%A9tri%C3%A8re_avenue_Hopital_reductwk.JPG

She stayed at Hôpital de la Salpêtrière “for about a year and made her First Communion under the direction of *Sr. Millet*.” Then

at the beginning of May 1670, having been named along with several other girls at the hospital to go to Canada by order of the King, they were conducted as far as *pont rouge* by ecclesiastics and by (*Auber?*) surgeon of the hospital, *la dame Moussy*, superior, and others, with whom [Marie Claude] was with *Sr. Millet* in his carriage, and embarked at this place [Pont Rouge, a bridge]³⁵ to go to Canada.³⁶

The 21 June 1688 text then gives details about Marie Claude in Canada:

that having arrived in Canada in the month of August 1670, she contracted marriage with François Frigon in the following month of October and the marriage was celebrated by a priest of the seminary of Québec functioning as pastor of *la coste de Batiscan*,³⁷ that in the marriage contract she declared her true name of **Marie Chamois** daughter of *Sr Chamois* and of *Jacqueline Girard* of the parish of *St Paul* of this city of Paris, the said marriage celebrated in the month of November of the said year.³⁸

The next important passage reveals that Jacqueline Girard knew about her daughter's whereabouts after her escape from her brother, that she had used the name Marie Victoire at the hospital, and that she had gone to Canada, although she did not know about her marriage. Thus, the mother, Jacqueline Girard,

wrote at the beginning of 1671 to the widow of *Sr Bourdon*, *procureur général* [attorney general] *du souverain conseil de Canada* [sovereign council, the governing body of New France], to *sr de (Courcelle)* and *Talon*, governor and intendant of that country, and begged that they inquire about Marie Chamois, her daughter, arrived in that country under the name of Marie Victoire, and to send her back if this was possible, also wrote to [Marie Claude] and informed her of her distress at [Marie Claude's] embarking on a ship, that she pardoned her for running away, invoking her to return, assuring her that she would receive her well and would forget everything....³⁹

D'Aguesseau, in 1693, also mentions the mother's letters and a *Dame Bourdon*, whose declaration confirmed the existence of Jacqueline Girard's letters of inquiry sent to Canada.⁴⁰ The “attestation” of Madame Bourdon, **Anne Gasnier**, is extant in the records of the New France notary Genaple. On 5 November 1686, the widow Bourdon

said and declared that in response to the request made to her by letters sent from *françois frigon habitant de Batiscan* at present on a voyage *aux Illinois* and dated this year [1686] 24 September, she certifies and attests on her soul and conscience that in the years 1671, 1672, and 1673 she received during each of these years letters to her written and

³⁵ Pont Rouge is now called “Pont Royale (joining the Île-Saint Louis to Saint-Gervais Parish).” See Gérald Frigon, “Another Look at the Life of Marie-Claude Chamois,” *The Frigons*, Vol. 19, #3, Fall, 2012.

³⁶ 21 June 1688, “Sentence, Requêtes du Palais,” lines 134-140.

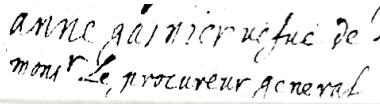
³⁷ This priest was most likely Germain Morin, son of Noël Morin and Hélène Desportes, widow of Guillaume Hébert. He was named in June 1670 to serve at Batiscan, although the church did not exist right away. Religious rites were held in the home of Nicolas Rivard *dit* Lavigne. Jean-Paul Foley, *Batiscan s'érige: prémices paroissiales, 1670-1708* (Trois-Rivières, Québec: Editions du Bien public, 1981), 62-65. Read at Our Roots, Nos Racines online.

³⁸ “Sentence, Requêtes du Palais,” lines 142-146. The parish of St. Paul is very close to the parish of St. Gervais on the Right Bank.

³⁹ “Sentence, Requêtes du Palais,” to line 152.

⁴⁰ D'Aguesseau, 521.

addressed by a person named the widow Chamois, by which she begged her to find out about Marie Chamois her daughter come to this country a few years earlier, and to employ [her influence...] to have her return to France; since she had not passed to this country except by the practices of her brother-in-law and her sister who had planned by this means to get rid of her⁴¹

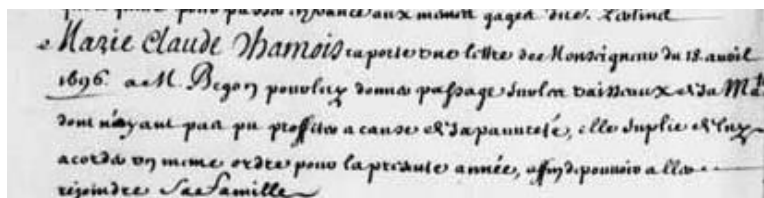


Signature of *anne gasnier*, widow of *monsieur Le procureur general* [attorney general]

François Frigon wrote his letters dated 24 September 1686 to Anne Gasnier, widow Bourdon, after he had appeared in Québec City on 16 May, 10 August, and 16 August 1686 at the office of the notary Genaple. He went there to sign legal documents recording an agreement to exploit “two *congés* granted by *Monsieur dela Salle* governor and lieutenant general for the King *au Pays de la Louisiane* [René Robert Cavelier, *sieur de LaSalle*], and signed by him, to go in two canoes loaded with merchandise conducted by six men to trade in Illinois country with the Indians of that place.”⁴² Thus, Frigon had already left the colony before Madame Bourdon registered her reply to his request. In addition to asking for testimony from Madame Bourdon, François Frigon, as guardian of his underage children, had sent to France an appeal taken up by the courts there in an attempt to safeguard his and Marie Claude’s children’s right to inherit from their grandparents.⁴³ These two actions show that he definitely approved and was actively involved in his wife’s quest for justice.

Although the lower courts confirmed Marie Claude’s identity and ruled that she must be granted her legal due, her mother refused to acknowledge Marie Claude, calling her an impostor and appealing the decisions. Henry François d’Aguesseau did not argue the case until 21 April 1693 and won it in the court of last appeals in Paris. Jacqueline Girard was ordered to provide documentation for her handling of the estate of her deceased husband and to give Marie Claude her portion. But there were further complications, some, apparently, from those in high places who had a stake in the funds, if I am reading accurately. (I cannot possibly summarize all of the details in this article.)

There does not, however, seem to be any firm evidence that Marie Claude ever received anything from the estate of her father, although the lower courts ordered specific sums of money to be given to her, and the mother was ordered to pay the legal fees. The years after April of 1693 are a mystery until the mention in the colonial correspondence of a request recorded in 1696, three years later, in a set of petitions to be honored the following year.⁴⁴



Marie Claude Chamois’s 1696 request

⁴¹ *Attestation de Mad^e Bourdon en faveur de M^e Chamois*, 5 November 1686, Genaple, photocopy.

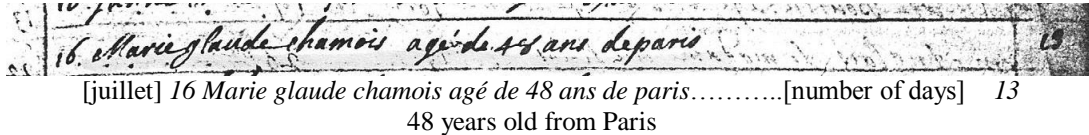
⁴² All documents by Genaple. The description of the merchandise taken on this trading voyage is extant and has been summarized in French by Pierre Frigon of the Associations of Frigon Families. The cost of the loan of the merchandise was more than 6,000 livres to be repaid in *pelletteries* traded on their delivery to the colony. His associates were the Desrosiers brothers, and, also, *sieur Bellefond, fils*, along with two hired men.

⁴³ His petition is mentioned in 21 June 1688, “Requêtes du Palais,” line 72.

⁴⁴ Library and Archives Canada (LAC), 1696 “Demandes pour les ecclésiastiques, officiers et particuliers de Canada pour les ordres de 1697,” folios 42v-43 (item 4) MIKAN no. 3075317.

Marie Claude Chamois brings a letter from Monseigneur of 12 April 1696 to M. Begon to give her passage on his Majesty's ships [;] having not been able to use it because of her poverty, she begs to be granted the same order for this year, in order for her to go to rejoin her family

Did she depart for New France in 1697? The surviving records do not document Marie Claude again in Canada until 1704, when she entered Hôtel-Dieu, the hospital in Québec City on 16 July 1704,⁴⁵ for thirteen days:



The months of June and July in 1704 record the presence at the hospital of a number of men from France. It is likely these men had been aboard a ship arriving in those months.⁴⁶ Had Marie Claude just returned, finally, after nineteen years of absence? Had she become ill during the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean? It is worthy of note that her husband was also in Québec City that summer, on 18 August 1704.⁴⁷ Had he come to meet her and take her home? An anonymous woman was cared for in August but not charged to the hospital's account. Was this Marie Claude? Frigon's legal business in the city involved **Antoine Trottier, sieur DesRuisseaux**, merchant, in an appeal about a judgment of 26 May 1704 that had been passed in Trois Rivières.⁴⁸ Antoine Trottier, *sieur DesRuisseaux*, and François Frigon appeared on the next day, 19 August 1704, before **Martin Delino** and **François Hazeur**, members of the Sovereign Council in Québec City, to settle the differences raised in the 18 August case concerning the help DesRuisseaux had given Frigon's family while he, Frigon, was away among the Ottawa and also concerning the loss of Frigon's canoe that had been left in DesRuisseaux's barn during their partnership in 1695-96. The terms of the settlement are interesting.

The two men agreed that if they were to continue their court case before the Council, it would

oblige them to a prejudicial delay by their absence [from their homes] and the need they have to be present among their families, and the costs of the procedure would absorb any gain they might win in the case and cause hatred and enmity that would extend even to their families, which they wish to avoid and [instead] preserve the friendship, union, and good judgment [*intelligence*] that they have had up to the present time.

Therefore, DesRuisseaux gave Frigon 150 *livres* for the damaged canoe, and he did not require Frigon to repay him for the assistance he had given to the Frigon family in Frigon's absence among the Ottawa, saying he had been fully compensated. Their agreement was written in triplicate, with one copy filed in

⁴⁵ Registres des malades, 1698-1722, Family History Library US/CAN Film #1287129. The spelling *glaude* for *Claude* is characteristic of the scribe for these entries. Thank you to Gail Moreau-DesHarnais for spotting this record so many years ago.

⁴⁶ In later years, as soldiers arrive, they are identified by the names of the captains under whom they served.

⁴⁷ Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ), Cote: TP1,S28,P7920, 18 August 1705, Sentence interlocutoire dans la cause d'Antoine Trottier, sieur DesRuisseaux, marchand, appellant d'une sentence rendue en la Jurisdiction des Trois-Rivières, le 26 mai 1704, et François Frigon, tous deux de Batiscan. For the 1695 partnership, see Adhémar, 12 and 13 June 1695.

⁴⁸ BAnQ, Cote: TL3,S11,P2705. The judgment in May had ordered DesRuisseaux to pay Frigon 307 *livres* in money of New France.

the papers of the notary Chambalon. (Wouldn't you love to hear the discussion the two men had before Delino and Hazeur?) Was part of the reason the men wished to cut short and cancel the court case that Marie Claude had returned to New France? Did she bring some of the money she was supposed to have received from her mother? Did this money pay DesRuisseaux? Did they cancel their litigation, one against the other, because of Marie Claude's lengthy and stressful experience in Paris? We will never know.

We will also never understand with certainty yet another of the puzzling issues concerning this family. Both François Frigon and his son, Jean François Frigon, had been present in Batiscan at the writing of the marriage contract of **Joseph Moreau** and Françoise Frigon on 4 February 1700. On that day, François Frigon promised to give his daughter 200 *livres* and other items, and Jean François Frigon pledged an equal amount of money to his sister. The marriage contract of Jean François Frigon and his first wife, **Marie Madeleine Moreau**, sister of Joseph Moreau, was written by the same notary, François Trottain, on the same day, 4 February 1700. Marie Claude Chamois is named on the contracts as mother of both Jean François Frigon and of Françoise Frigon, but she is not indicated as present at the signing of the contracts or at the church weddings of the Moreau and Frigon brothers and sisters on 8 February 1700.⁴⁹ If I had stopped with summaries and the PRDH "certificates" of the contract and church documents for these two marriages, I would have missed an important addition to the marriage contract of Joseph Moreau and Françoise Frigon.

The addition is dated 21 February 1705, five years later, therefore after the presence of Marie Claude Chamois at Hôtel Dieu in July 1704 and also after the mutual agreement of François Frigon and Antoine Trottier, *sieur* DesRuisseaux in August of 1704. The notary Trottain recorded that the father of Françoise Frigon was present to affirm that he had paid his daughter the 200 *livres* in items promised to her in her marriage contract five years earlier in 1700. Also, Françoise Frigon received from her brother Jean François the 200 *livres* he had pledged in 1700. Jean François would have returned and have collected his salary of 200 *livres du pais*, money of New France, for his voyage to Fort Pontchartrain that he signed 28 July 1704.⁵⁰ Joseph Moreau was also hired for that voyage that was sent to bring down that year the *pelletries* the Indians had refused to send earlier in the year. But what was the source for the 200 *livres* gift suddenly paid by his father? If I were writing the novel that Silvio Dumas believes should be written, I would be tempted to say that it came from Marie Claude Chamois, returned after nineteen years of absence. This would be a pure invention, not factually proven, but allowable in historical fiction.

Leaving speculation aside, note that one year later, on 15 October 1705, again with her husband's approval, Marie Claude was in Québec City before the notary Florent de La Cetièrre to borrow from **Nicolas Gillet**, wigmaker, 1,000 *livres* that would allow her to return to France. The loan was to be repaid the following year, but there is no indication on the document (as can sometimes be seen on loans like this one and on the 1700 marriage contract above) of a codicil or postscript stating that it was duly paid. Amazingly, though, the actual photocopy of the 15 October 1705 act reveals that, thirty-five years after declaring in 1670 that she did not know how to sign her name, Marie Claude signed this contract:

15 October 1705 signatures of **Marie Claude Chamois** and Nicolas Gillet, Notary *DelaCetièrre*


⁴⁹ PRDH marriage records #8279 and #8280, and marriage contracts by Trottain, photocopies. Inexplicably, the priest entered the name of Jean François's mother as Marie *Madeleine* Chamois.

⁵⁰ Notary Adhémar, 28 July 1704, *Engagements* [hiring contracts] by Dumontier, principal *commis*, clerk, of the Company of the Colony.

No records have been found to confirm whether Marie Claude Chamois ever left New France in 1705 or returned from France or where her death occurred, in Canada or in France, or on the Atlantic Ocean during a voyage. I must add here that France and England were at war from 1702 to 1713, and the seas were perilous in these years because of piracy by both sides of the conflict.⁵¹

Nevertheless, one more record survives that mentions Marie Claude. On 11 July 1707, François Frigon appeared before the Royal Jurisdiction of Trois Rivières to answer a request from **Marie Benier** (Bénier, Besnier) of Paris, whose cause was represented by a power of attorney given to **Pierre Lemaître**.⁵² Marie Benier claimed she was owed 71 *livres*, money of France, for the lodging, food, and other needs she provided to Frigon's wife, Marie Claude Chamois, according to a promise made 16 March 1689.⁵³ Frigon replied that he had not given his wife any permission to borrow money, having given her sufficient for her needs. It was understood, he said, that she was to repay any debts she contracted herself from the funds she expected to receive "in Paris as a result of a decision of *Parlement* against her mother, with whom she was then in litigation." Frigon requested that he be absolved of the debt and be paid for his appearance before the tribunal, both of which were granted. The petitioner was advised to seek repayment in any way she could, "pourvoir comme bon lui semblera."

To all intents and purposes, then, Marie Claude's children never knew her, except for perhaps the two eldest who might have retained a memory of her. Since their father, François Frigon, worked the fur trade, he too would have been gone often, at times with his eldest child, Jean François. In addition to his 1704 contract cited above, Jean François also signed to travel to Fort Pontchartrain in his own right in 1705, and he had been a member of the first convoy in 1701 that founded the fort. Some historians, those who have never examined the full 28 May 1701 contract,⁵⁴ believe it is his father who made this 1701 voyage and the other two, because the texts of the documents refer to a François, but, while only a *François* Frigon is mentioned in the text, the signatures are definitely the son's on all three contracts. This is his signature in 1701:



jf frigon = **Jean François Frigon**,

As the eldest in the family, Jean François Frigon must have had the clearest memory of his mother. He was eleven when she left in 1685 and would have been old enough to have some understanding of her reasons for going to France. Given the fact that his mother is documented at the hospital in Québec City in the summer of 1704 (while he himself was voyaging to Fort Pontchartrain), I find it compelling to take

⁵¹ By spring of 1704, the king had accepted Lamothe Cadillac's proposal to take over the trade at Fort Pontchartrain as "absolute Master at that place": "maitre absolu en cet endroit." The ship *La Seine* carrying this document to Canada was, however, captured by the English, and word of the king's decision did not arrive until late summer of 1705. Pontchartrain to Vaudreuil, 17 June 1705: "You will find attached duplicates of the letters I wrote you last year." Transcription in *Les rapports des Archives nationales du Québec*, 1920-1975, Les Publications du Québec, CD-Rom version. (RAPQ) The bishop of Québec and others were taken as prisoners and carried to England.

⁵² Pierre Lemaître appears to be the son of my ancestors François Lemaître (Lemaistre) and Judith Rigaud. Judith had traveled to France about the same time as Marie Claude. A marriage contract was written there, 6 February 1686, between her and her fourth husband, Louis Gillet *de Laplante*, bourgeois, and originally from the city of Paris, dwelling then in the city of *Saint Jean Dangel*, where the contract was written, photocopy from the archives. The couple then came to New France after the wedding. I have no idea whether Louis Gillet and Nicolas Gillet, who loaned 1,000 *livres* to Marie Claude Chamois in 1705, are related in any way.

⁵³ BAnQ, TL3,S11,P2818, *Registres des procès-verbaux d'audiences*, signed by Lechasseur.

⁵⁴ *Marché pour le detroit, 27 mai 1701*, Antoine Adhémar. The other voyages to Fort Pontchartrain were 28 July 1704 and 30 May 1705, both Adhémar.

note of the baptism of his child who was given the name Claude Joseph on 20 July 1703. Claude Joseph's godfather was not named Claude, so this is not the origin of the name. Louis Joseph Rivard served as godfather and Marie Françoise Frigon, the baby's aunt, as godmother.⁵⁵ Was Jean François anticipating the return of his mother the following year and honoring her by choosing this name for his son? Was Claude a name that Marie Madeleine Moreau, the baby's mother, favored? Yet another detail we will never know. This name, however, is not common in New France.

François Frigon "donated" himself to his son Jean François three years after Marie Benier's request for payment of his wife's debt. He transferred his property to his son's name in 1710,⁵⁶ in return for being cared for until his death, and his other children renounced any right to their mother's portion of the marital community or to any part of her widow's dower. This would seem to suggest that Marie Claude Chamois was still alive in 1710, or believed to be alive. If she was, she would have been fifty-four years old. Her husband did not die until 1724, buried 13 May in Batiscan, said to be seventy-five years old.⁵⁷

Silvio Dumas concludes by saying: "This *Fille du Roi*, did she make so many sacrifices for so many years, attracted by an unattainable mirage, without having the consolation of receiving that for which she had so ardently fought? All of her life was nothing but a moving drama."⁵⁸ Ah, but what a drama!

It is a cautionary tale to all of those who would make hasty judgments about her, her family, or any of the other King's daughters. Each of these women was an individual, with talents, faults, personal histories, and the full gamut of human emotions that women continue to feel today. They lived in a historical time that had customs of its own, with daunting space-and-time distances between France and New France: no telegraphs, telephones, or internet existed. Those of us who rely on documentation to tell their story can cite the surviving written records, such as the baptismal record of Marie Claude Chamois below. But can we ever understand fully the feelings and personal motivations, the joys and regrets, the tragedies, with complete certainty? As Ken Kesey wrote: "I've never seen anybody really find the answer, but they think they have." I'll leave you to wonder about the mysteries and think about the questions that remain for yourself.

Lineage of *Fille du Roi* Marie Claude Chamois to Suzanne Boivin Sommerville

François Frigon & Marie Claude Chamois (Honoré & Jacqueline Girard, of Paris)
November 1670, Batiscan

Jean François Frigon & his 2nd wife, Marie Anne Gertrude Perreault (Pierre & Geneviève Duclos)
4 June 1715 La Pérade

Marie Gertrude Frigon & Pierre Marchand (Valentine & Claudine Albrant)
08 May 1750 in Batiscan

Angélique Marchand & François Vanasse (Nicolas & Marie Anne Desrosiers *dite* Lafrenière)
13 Jan 1783 Maskinongé

Théotiste Vanasse & Joseph Dupuis (Pierre Charles & Françoise Baril *dite* Duchesny)
8 Jan 1810 Maskinongé

Joseph Dupuis & Éloïse Bibeau (Pierre & Christine Labonne)
21 Feb 1843 St. Guillaume d'Upton

Édouard Dupuis & Marie Rose Jarret *dite* Beauregard (Louis & Zoë Meunier *dite* Lapierre)
20 Feb 1882 St. Hughes

⁵⁵ PRDH Baptism #7746. After Marie Madeleine Moreau's death, Jean François Frigon remarried 4 June 1715 at La Pérade to Marie Gertrude Perrault, PRDH marriage #9276. It is from the second marriage that I descend through Marie Gertrude Frigon and her husband, Pierre Marchand.

⁵⁶ *Donation des biens par François Frigon*, 18 March 1710, by the notary François Trottain, photocopy.

⁵⁷ PRDH Burial #8646.

⁵⁸ Dumas, 145.

