

## **Barbe Perrin (1667–c1713)** **Five Years a Captive of the Iroquois**

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Includes excerpts from  
*The Women of Ville-Marie – Pioneers of Seventeenth-Century Montréal*,  
a book by the same author



*Model of St. Lawrence Iroquoian Village (Circa 1500-1550). Michel Cadieux – archeofact.ca, 1995. Château Ramezay – Historic Site and Museum of Montréal. Used with permission. Photo by S. McNelley*

In the fall of 1689, twenty-two-year-old Barbe Perrin found herself a captive in Iroquois territory south of the Saint Lawrence River. However, this story doesn't begin there. Barbe was born to Henri Perrin and Jeanne Merrin at Ville-Marie (later known as Montréal) on Jan 4, 1667.<sup>1</sup> She was their fourth child; the household also included three half siblings from her mother's first marriage.<sup>2</sup> Barbe's father died before she was five and her mother married again in June 1672. Barbe, along with some of her siblings, attended the school established in Montréal by Marguerite Bourgeoys. It was likely for only a short period, but long enough for her to learn to write her name.

Sometime between 1678 and 1680, Barbe and her family moved to the fief Verdun, a small settlement near Lachine, six miles southwest of Ville-Marie. At that time, the whole of the western shore of Montréal Island, including Lachine, was often referred to as Verdun.<sup>3</sup> Barbe's childhood did not last much beyond the first stirrings of adolescence. On October 16, 1680, when she was thirteen, Barbe was married to René Huguet in the church of Sts-Anges at Lachine. The groom was a thirty-year-old soldier who had come to New France in 1665 with the Rougemont Company

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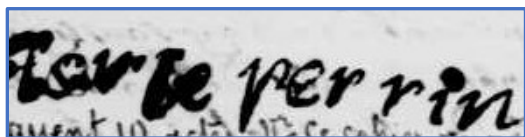
<sup>1</sup> Dates of marriages, births, and burials in this history come from the PRDH, with linkages to scanned parish records at Genealogy Québec.

<sup>2</sup> The census of 1667 lists seven children in the household of Henri and Jeanne, with the youngest being Barbe, a baby at the time (PRDH Census record of 1667).

<sup>3</sup> Girouard, *Lake St. Louis, Old and New*, 44. The census of 1681 includes residents of Lachine with residents of the fief Verdun.

of the Carignan-Salières Regiment.<sup>4</sup> René, the son of Nicolaus Huguet and Marie Beaunet, was born at Fontenay-le-Comte in the Vendée on December 2, 1650. André, Barbe and René's first child, was born in 1683, followed by Anne-Françoise in 1686, and René in 1688. The youngest child died in January 1689, before he was four months old.

When the census of 1681 was taken, Barbe and René were living on the fief Verdun. They had six arpents of land under cultivation and owned two firearms. Barbe's mother, Jeanne Merrin, by then a widow, and four brothers were living nearby. Barbe's three married sisters and their families had homesteads at Verdun as well.<sup>5</sup>



*Barbe's signature on baptism record, dated July 5, 1711.*

Barbe's birth family was close-knit. The siblings came together to celebrate each other's marriages and the births of the children that followed. The parish register of the church in Lachine bears witness to the close bonds of this family.

Barbe had grown up in a time of peace following the subduing of the Iroquois Confederacy in 1666. But, by the mid-1680s, trouble was again brewing with the Iroquois. Attacks on French settlers were increasing. The Marquis de Denonville, the Governor-General of New France and a veteran soldier, had the authority to subdue the Iroquois by whatever means he deemed necessary. In 1687, with an army of two thousand men, he marched into hostile Seneca territory. While the French troops did not engage the Seneca in battle, they mercilessly destroyed villages and crops.

The Iroquois exacted their revenge some two years later, in August 1689. A party of about fifteen hundred Iroquois crossed Lake Saint-Louis and stole onto the west end of Montréal Island after dark on the night of August 4, under the cover of a severe summer thunderstorm. The soldiers within the nearby forts had not detected the approach of the enemy in the blackness and pelting rain. The canines failed to identify anything amiss. No one rang the bell, as was customary to alert villagers of impending danger. The Iroquois scattered and in small groups surrounded the cottages of the habitants in the settlement at Lachine. Shortly before dawn they attacked, filling the early morning air with the sounds of war whoops, screams, and terrified cries. Bullets whizzed and tomahawks flew, cutting down anyone trying to escape. The assailants set homes ablaze, reducing them to smoke and ash, and slaughtered the livestock. Chaos and confusion reigned among the soldiers and settlers, caught completely off guard. Many villagers lost their lives, while even more became prisoners of their assailants. The event came to be known as the Lachine Massacre.

It was some time before an accurate account of the damage could be established. Lachine in 1685 was a settlement of some 375 inhabitants. The Iroquois assailants destroyed fifty-six of the seventy-seven houses in Lachine. Later historians believe that twenty-four villagers were killed on the spot. Somewhere between seventy and ninety men, women and children were taken prisoner.<sup>6</sup> Of these, many were eventually released and returned. They were part of the prisoner exchanges that occurred between 1694 and 1700 in an effort to reestablish peace between the French and the Iroquois. However, some forty-two of the captives never made it home.

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<sup>4</sup> Record #242099 for René Huguet, Fichier Origine. Accessed 18 Jan 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Sulte, *Histoire*, 70.

<sup>6</sup> The census records of 1692 show that the population at Lachine had decreased to 270.

It was common for First Nations warriors to take captives in their raids and assaults on other tribes as a replacement for someone who had died in the abductors' own village. These forays into enemy territory to find replacements for the deceased became known as mourning wars. They were a part of the Iroquois grieving process long before the arrival of the Europeans.

Twenty-two-year-old Barbe was abducted that ill-fated morning along with five-year-old André and three-year-old Anne-Françoise, her two remaining children, and taken to Iroquois territory in what is now upper New York state.

The French captives left no record of their years spent in captivity. A Jesuit missionary did allude to the experiences of the captives when he wrote in his annual report in September 1694, "The French who were slaves among the Iroquois were eyewitnesses to all this butchery and cannot relate these things to us without weeping."<sup>7</sup>

A captured English woman provides more insight into what French, as well as English captives, experienced. Hostile Iroquois captured Mary Rowlandson, the wife of a minister, in a raid on Lancaster, Massachusetts in February 1676 during Metacom's Rebellion, also known as King Philip's War. This was a war waged by the First Nations of New England against the English colonists. King Philip was the adopted name of Metacom, a Wampanoag chief. Mary spent eleven weeks with her captors before being released. Following her liberation, she wrote about her experiences in captivity. Her memoir was first published in 1682 under the title, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*.

On the day of the raid, Metacom and fifteen hundred men descended on the town of Lancaster, Massachusetts. Mary witnessed the brutal slaughter of family and friends. Her home was put to the torch and reduced to ashes. Mary, a son, and two daughters were taken captive. Although she was told by her captors that they had killed her husband, he was spared because he was away on business. Mary's six-year-old daughter Sarah died in captivity a week after capture. Mary was separated from her older son and daughter, although she could occasionally visit them.

Mary wrote that the captors and their captives were almost constantly on the move. Every few nights, if not more often, they moved to a new place to elude the English militia or to conduct raids against other English habitations. The treatment Mary experienced from her Indigenous master alternated between kindness and cruelty. She was permitted to ride horseback with her daughter on her lap part of the time in the flight away from the English. Her captor decided where she would sleep. There were nights spent clasping her sick child on snow-covered ground with no protection from the cold. At other times, Mary could sleep next to a warm fire in her master's wigwam.

What and when she ate depended on the whims of her master. There were days with no nourishment other than sips of cold water. Mary consumed with pleasure food she would have found repulsive before her capture. She and her abductors ate what they could scrounge along the way: roasted groundnuts, the flesh of bear, deer, or horse. Sometimes she received a little corn, a handful of peas, or a small amount of wheat. There was seldom sufficient food, but what little there was, sustained her so that she did not starve to death.

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<sup>7</sup> *Jesuit Relations*. Ed. Thwaites, 64:144-145.

Mary's captors slapped her, threw ashes in her face and threatened her with blows to the head. She witnessed women shot to death or killed with the blow of a tomahawk. Mary suffered physical and verbal abuse from her abductors; however, she experienced no sexual assault. In the First Nations villages and when they were traveling, men, women, and children all slept together under various circumstances "and yet not one of them ever offered the least abuse of unchastity, to me in words or action."

The deadly assault at Lachine was the beginning of another series of attacks carried out by French, English, and Iroquois combatants against each other. The warfare lasted through the last decade of the seventeenth century and ended with the signing of the Peace Treaty between the French and the Five Iroquois Nations in August 1701.

Barbe Perrin spent some five years in captivity in Iroquois country. When she was released in 1694, she was pregnant and had a two-year-old daughter with her. Thierry Pierre Lorrain, another French captive, had fathered both children.<sup>8</sup> Marie-Anne, born among the Iroquois of northern New York, on November 1, 1692, was baptized on July 27, 1694.<sup>9</sup> Barbe gave birth to a son named Jean in Montréal on December 13, 1694. Sadly, the infant died the next day.

Of her two children taken captive with Barbe, André died in captivity. Anne-Françoise, eight years old in the summer of 1694, remained with her Indigenous family. First Nations adopted men, women, and children. However, children, particularly the girls, were most likely to remain with their Indigenous families. Girls between the ages of seven and fifteen were considered ideal for adoption. They adapted more easily to the Indigenous way of life, often forgetting their French language and customs.

Barbe's husband, René Huguet, had somehow survived the massacre at Lachine in 1689, but two years later, in the early morning hours of June 26, 1691, Iroquois ambushed and killed him as he worked in his wheat fields at Lachine. René's brother-in-law, Jean-Baptiste Gourdon *dit* Lachasse, and a friend Jean Guignard *dit* Lesperance also lost their lives that morning. All three had come to New France as Carignan-Salières soldiers and had married and settled at Lachine. Also killed in the attack were four soldiers from Fort Rolland who were serving as armed guards for the men in the fields.<sup>10</sup>

Barbe returned to Lachine and picked up the pieces of her former life as best she could. She was a widow now, as were her mother and her sister Michelle. Her sister Marie had been killed in the Lachine Massacre. On December 31, 1696, Barbe Perrin married Jacques Larrivée *dit* Delisle at Lachine. In February 1698, their son Louis was born. He was followed by Marie-Josephe in 1700 and Philippe in 1702. Like Barbe's brothers and so many others at Lachine, Jacques Larrivée was involved at least to some extent in the fur trade. A portage path had been created between Ville-

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<sup>8</sup> Thierry Pierre Lorrain had been taken captive by the Iroquois about 1691. At the time he was married to Marie Mathon Labrie and had two young daughters. After his release he returned to his wife, with whom he had eight more children (PRDH family records, linked to scanned parish records at Genealogy Québec; Lamarche, "*Les Victimes*").

<sup>9</sup> Marie-Anne Thierry's baptism record, dated July 27, 1694, states that the child was born out of wedlock (*fille naturelle*) on November 1, 1692, in the "chez Onontagues," or Onondagas, one of the Five Iroquois Nations.

<sup>10</sup> On their church burial record is the notation: "Tue par les iroquois au matin, une demi-heure apres le soleil leve, en alland chercher son ble."

Marie and Lachine, circumventing the Sault Saint-Louis (Lachine Rapids) on the Saint Lawrence River. Lachine was the starting point for river voyages carrying trade goods to the High Country.<sup>11</sup>

By 1704, the family had moved to Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, a little community at the western tip of the Island of Montréal. Barbe Perrin maintained a connection with the First Nations people in the vicinity, standing up as godmother to three children of the Nepissingue and Mississauga Nations in 1705. In 1711, she served as godmother to two more Indigenous children. Perhaps she was honoring her own daughter who had remained with the Iroquois.

There is no record of Barbe's death and burial. The last time Barbe appears in parish or court records was in September 1713, when she is called as a witness in a criminal case involving François Lamoureux *dit* Saint-Germain, who was accused of selling alcohol to two Algonquin Natives.<sup>12</sup> She had a total of eight children with three different men. Three died in early childhood, five grew to adulthood and at least three of these married. Jacques Larrivée died on July 22, 1732, in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue and was buried the next day in the presence of his son Philippe.

### **Notes on the Children of Barbe Perrin**

**André Huguet** was born at Lachine on October 14, 1683. There is no further record of this child. It is assumed that the child was taken captive with his mother in the Lachine Massacre and died in captivity.

**Anne-Françoise Huguet** was born at Lachine on January 6, 1686 and was three when she was taken captive in the Lachine Massacre of 1689. Her mother was released in the summer of 1694, but eight-year-old Anne-Françoise stayed with her Indigenous family. On March 5, 1697, Barbe Perrin appeared before the courts requesting the appointment of a guardian to protect her daughter's interests in the estate of the child's deceased father, René Huguet.<sup>13</sup> On the document, Françoise is listed as "still a slave of the Iroquois." Françoise does not appear again in the church and civil records of New France; presumably she remained with her Iroquois family for the rest of her life.

**René Huguet** was born at Lachine on September 19, 1688. He was not quite four months old when he died and was buried on January 15, 1689.

**Marie-Anne Laurin** was born in an Iroquois village in upper New York state where her mother was being held captive.<sup>14</sup> Her father was Thierry Pierre Laurin, another French captive. She was thirty when she married Nicolas Morand *dit* Lagrandeur. This couple had four children, all sons. Two died in infancy. Marie-Anne died on November 24, 1773, and was buried at Boucherville.

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<sup>11</sup> Jacques Larrivée is named on a contract, dated June 7, 1695, for the transportation of goods to the country of the Ottawas (Fisher, *Répertoire des engagements pour L'Ouest*, 20).

<sup>12</sup> BAnQ record # TL4, S1, D1483.

<sup>13</sup> BAnQ, Fonds Juridiction royale de Montréal, "Tutelle de l'enfant mineur, encore esclave chez les Iroquois, de feu René Huguet..." dated March 5, 1697. Record No. TL4, S1, D200.

<sup>14</sup> On her baptism record at Lachine, dated July 27, 1694, Marie-Anne's name is given as Anne Thierry, daughter of Pierre Thierry *dit* Le Lorain.

**Jean Laurin** was born in Montréal on December 13, 1694, six months after his mother returned from captivity, but sadly died and was interred the next day. His father was also Thierry Pierre Laurin.

**Louis Larrivee dit Delisle** was born at Lachine on February 20, 1698. The church records of New France contain only his baptism record. However, fifteen-year-old Louis appears as a witness, along with his parents, in the criminal case against François Lamoureux dit Saint-Germain in the fall of 1713. He apparently grew to adulthood and followed his father in the fur trade business. Louis Delisle was engaged by Charles Desjardin to make a trip to Michilimackinac on June 11, 1734. In May and June 1743, he signed contracts to go to the trading post of the Illinois Peoples and to the post at Detroit.<sup>15</sup>

**Marie-Joséph Larrivé**e was born in Lachine on March 22, 1700. She never married and died in Montréal at the age of twenty-seven.

**Philippe Larrivé dit Delisle** was born in Lachine on June 5, 1702. He married Marie-Anne Normand in Montréal on November 26, 1727. By 1729 they were living in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue where they raised their family of eight children. This family was particularly fortunate in that all of their children grew to adulthood and married. By 1756, some of the children had moved to Les Cèdres. Four of the children married there, and four of the children (not the same four) married into the Henault dit Deschamps family. Philippe died on February 28, 1768, in Les Cèdres.

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<sup>15</sup> Fisher, *Répertoire des engagements pour L'Ouest*, 255, 528, 531. 548, 549, 552.