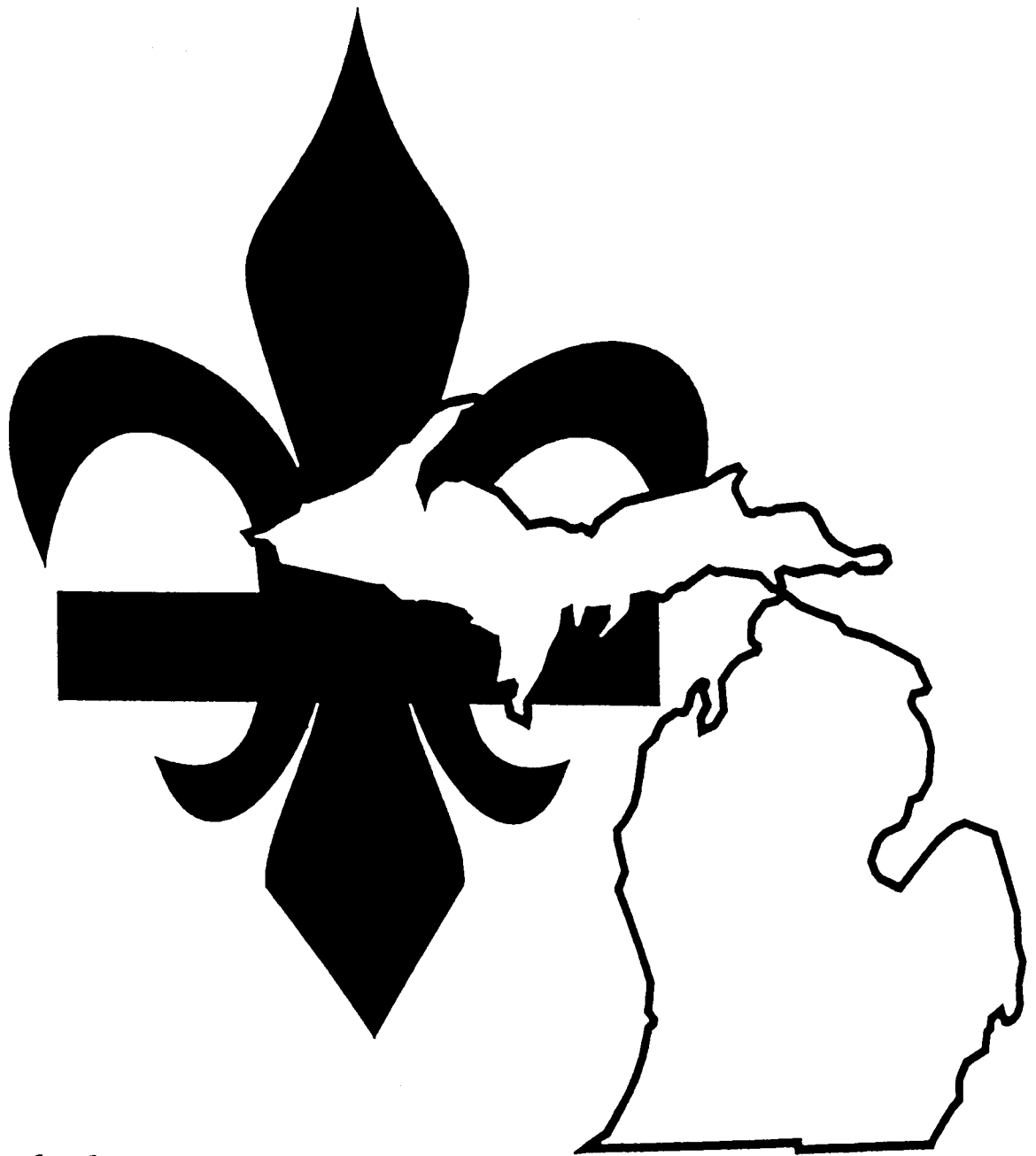


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**Charlotte Cadotte: The Vivacious Wife
of the Fur Trader Séraphin Lacombe**

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*We had a visit from M^r Lacombe & his wife. The latter
remain'd untill about 12 oclock at night dancing.*

Tracing women throughout most of history is problematic. While the actions of their fathers, husbands, brothers, uncles, and cousins are often well-recorded, their lives are often left in the shadows. Finding them named alongside the men in their lives is the best we can hope for when researching many women. But occasionally, we get startling and insightful glimpses of them in original records.¹

In the case of vital and notarial records in French Canada, we are fortunate that a certain amount of information about women is usually mentioned, such as their maiden name, age, place of residence, whether they were practicing midwives, *etc.* Nevertheless, we still get more detail on men than women even in the province of Québec. In the case of women on the frontier, there is even less information available, particularly if that woman is a Native American or a *Métis*.²

The *Métis* are people of mixed European and Native American ancestry.³ In most, but not all, cases a *Métis* is the descendant of a French father and a Native American mother. They are a people who are the product of the fur trade that brought these two cultures together. Their social world is one that exists between Native American and European cultures. *Métis* women played a crucial part in the fur trade. Besides handling all the domestic chores, these women were interpreters and liaisons for their fur trader husbands with their Native relatives.

This article will trace a *Métis* woman, Charlotte Cadotte, to learn something of her life based on the facts uncovered about her and the men in her life. In particular, we will learn if she can be identified as the dancing woman in a fur trader's diary at Rainy Lake, Ontario, in 1805. Like so many other women in the wilderness, Charlotte was instrumental to her husband's success in the fur trade. Moreover, she was a member of the prominent fur trading family, the Cadottes, which played an important role in the Lake Superior fur trade since the 1760s. Her father Jean Baptiste Cadotte and her half-brothers, brothers,

¹ This article was written with the guidance and assistance of several people. In particular, I want to thank the late David A. Armour, Heather Armstrong, Christie Carlson, Betty Ann Jack, James P. Lalone, Barbara LeTarte, Jean Morrison, Mary Ann Saint Antoine, Dominique Ritchot, Theresa M. Schenck, and Craig Wright. Lastly, I want to thank all my other cousins who have shared Cadotte information with me over several decades.

² Despite the lack of genealogical detail about *Métis* women, several fine historical works have been done examining the important role *Métis* woman played in the fur trade: Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1980); Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); and Sylvia Van Kirk, "*Many Tender Ties*," *Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg, MB: Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd., 1980).

³ Some people prefer to use "*Métis*" for the people of mixed European and Native ancestry of Western Canada who have been recognized as an aboriginal people by the Canadian government and to use "*métis*" for all others of mixed ancestry. During the lifetime of the people discussed in this paper in the Great Lakes region, they would have not have self-identified as *Métis*, but rather as *Sauteurs*, *Bois Brûlés* (burnt wood), *Chicots* (stumps), or even French. Jennifer S. H. Brown, "*Métis*," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, (accessed on 10 May 2015) at <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/en/article/metis>. I prefer to use *Métis* for all people of mixed European and Native ancestry and will do so in this paper.

uncles, and cousins were all involved in the fur trade.⁴ She fit neatly into a nexus of relationships all centered on the fur trade. Séraphin Lacombe, who was probably not a Native speaker, was indeed lucky to attract her attention and to form a relationship with her.

Unfortunately, many historians get the facts regarding the Cadottes wrong. Assigning children and grandchildren to Jean Baptiste Cadotte has become somewhat of a cottage industry among some *Métis* genealogists and fur trade historians. The problem is that there are a lot of Cadottes with the same given names, involved in the fur trade, and operating in the same period and locations. The *Centre du patrimoine's* database of *voyageurs* reveals 75 contracts signed by various members of the Cadotte family to engage in the fur trade.⁵ In particular, the names Alexis, Augustin, Charles, Jean Baptiste, Joseph, and Michel appear often. It seems like every male Cadotte was born with a paddle in his hands and sooner or later joined the fur trade and traveled out west. While many Cadottes in the Great Lakes area do indeed descend from Jean Baptiste Cadotte of Sault Ste. Marie, many others descend from his uncles or brothers. Furthermore, I suspect some who bear the surname Cadotte might not be descendants, but adopted the surname through marriage or as a form of fictive kinship practices common among Native Americans.⁶ Due to the limited records on the frontier, it is rarely clear how many Cadottes are actually descended from Jean Baptiste Cadotte versus one of his relatives. This article will demonstrate that Charlotte Cadotte was the daughter of Jean Baptiste Cadotte. Along the way, I will document her mother, siblings, husbands, children, and a few other Cadottes incidental to her story. The focus is on Charlotte and her immediate family context and not to clearly identify all of the frontier Cadottes.⁷

Glimpses in a Diary

In the diary of Hugh Faries, a fur trader stationed at Rainy Lake (*Lac la Pluie*) on the modern-day Minnesota-Ontario border at what is now Fort Frances, Ontario, there are several curious entries about a Mrs. Lacombe:

Sunday 31 March 1805: "In the evening had a visit from the X. Y. people & M^{rs} Lacombe. they danced till near 12 o'clock."⁸

⁴ For basic information about Charlotte's father and his important role in the fur trade see David A. Armour, "CADOT, JEAN-BAPTISTE," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography [DCB]*, vol. 5, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–ongoing, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/cadot_jean_baptiste_5E.html (accessed 10 Nov. 2014).

⁵ *Centre du patrimoine, Voyageurs Database*, <http://voyageurs.shsb.mb.ca/fr/search.aspx> (accessed 17 Nov. 2012).

⁶ Guy M. Burnham, *The Lake Superior Country in History and Story* (Ashland, WI: Ashland Daily Press, 1930), 118. Fictive kinship is an anthropological term meaning that a family relationship has been created between people not based on consanguinity or affinity. These relationships were often created to facilitate fur trade activities and gift exchanges. Cary Miller, *Ogimaag: Anishinaabeg Leadership, 1760-1845* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2010), 16, 32, and 100.

⁷ To learn more about the Cadottes it is best to consult the works of Theresa M. Schenck. She is a tenacious researcher and has done an excellent job grounding her Cadotte findings in original documents. Theresa M. Schenck, "The Cadots: The First Family of Sault Ste. Marie," *Michigan History* 72 (March/April 1988): 36-43; "The Cadottes: Five Generations of Fur Traders on Lake Superior," in *The Fur Trade Revisited: Selected Papers of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference, Mackinac Island, Michigan, 1991, 189-198*, ed. by Jennifer S. H. Brown, W. J. Eccles, and Donald P. Heldman (East Lansing and Mackinac Island, Michigan: Michigan State University Press and Mackinac State Historic Parks, 1994); and "Who Owns Sault Ste. Marie?," *Michigan Historical Review* 28 (Spring 2002): 109-120.

⁸ Charles M. Gates, ed., *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest: Being the Narrative of Peter Pond and the Diaries of John MacDonnell, Archibald N. McLeod, Hugh Faries, and Thomas Connor* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society, 1965), 234-235. Generally, this diary is ascribed to Hugh Faries, but it is possible that Thomas McMurray, who also clerked at Rainy Lake for the NWC at the same time, was the author of it.

Thursday, 18 April 1805: "In the evening, M^r Lacombe's wife arrived from below making Sugar. She brought me 2 Small Sturgeons, that the Seiners sent me by her."⁹

Sunday 28 April 1805: "In the evening, the X. Y. men and Madame Lacombe paid us a visit. they danced untill near 12 oclock."¹⁰

Sunday 12 May 1805: "We had a visit from M^r Lacombe & his wife. the latter remain'd untill about 12 oclock at night dancing."¹¹

Nowhere in the diary or the editor's notes are Mr. and Mrs. Lacombe identified. These passages are of interest because Charlotte Cadotte was the wife of François Séraphin Trullier *dit* Lacombe, usually known as Séraphin Lacombe. Her husband was a clerk in the fur trade. Could the Mrs. Lacombe, mentioned in the Faries dairy as dancing late into the night, be the same person as Charlotte Cadotte? To answer this question it will be necessary to demonstrate whether or not Séraphin Lacombe and Charlotte Cadotte could have been at Rainy Lake in 1805.

The Fur Trade at Rainy Lake

In 1804 there were two neighboring fur trade posts at Rainy Lake on the north side of Rainy River. One post was operated by the famous and much larger North West Company (NWC) above the falls where Mr. Faries worked.¹² The other post was run by the competing Sir Alexander MacKenzie and Company, also known as the New North West Company, but more commonly referred to as the XY Company (XYC) because of the markings on their bales of trade goods.¹³ The XYC post was down stream below the falls and nearer to Rainy Lake and was under the charge of Mr. Lacombe.¹⁴

The Rainy Lake area was an important location in the fur trade.¹⁵ It was here that the men from the far northern posts would rendezvous with the supply canoes from Montréal to exchange the pelts they had collected over the winter for more trade goods. Most of the winterers traveled to Grand Portage,

⁹ Gates, *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*, 237. A seine is a net with floats used for fishing and seiners deploy such nets.

¹⁰ Gates, *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*, 238.

¹¹ Gates, *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*, 240.

¹² Gates, *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*, 191. For comprehensive, but outdated histories of the NWC see Marjorie Wilkins Campbell, *The North West Company* (Toronto: The Macmillan Co. of Canada, Ltd., 1957), and Gordon Charles Davidson, *The North West Company* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1918). For transcriptions of documents relating to the NWC see W. Stewart Wallace, ed. *Documents Relating to the North West Company* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934). His appendix "A Biographical Dictionary of Nor'Westers," 425-505, is particularly helpful in sorting out people who had dealings with the Cadottes.

¹³ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 124. Russell Anthony Pendergast, "The XY Company 1798 to 1804," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Ottawa, 1957, available at <http://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/21256/1/DC53623.PDF> (accessed 25 Nov. 2014), 31-33.

¹⁴ Gates, *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*, 191. Barbara Huck, *Exploring the Fur Trade Routes of North America: Discover the Highways that Opened a Continent* (Winnipeg, MT: Heartland, 2000), 146-147. The XYC post was located near 145 Third St. W. in modern-day Fort Frances, Ontario, while the NWC post was at the end of Keating Ave. in West Fort Frances. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) built its post at the XYC location in 1818 and the NWC post was abandoned after the merger with the HBC in 1821. "A Fort Frances Tour—Discover the History," <http://museum.fort-frances.com/tour> (accessed 28 October 2012).

¹⁵ For excellent background information on Rainy Lake and its role in the fur trade see Ted Catton and Marcia Montgomery, *Special History: The Environment and the Fur Trade Experience in Voyageurs National Park, 1730-1870* (Missoula, Montana: National Park Service, Midwest Region, 2000), available at http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/voya/futr/index.htm (accessed 28 October 2012).

Minnesota, or after 1801 Fort William (now Thunder Bay), Ontario. But those from the extremely remote posts on Lake Athabasca and beyond appreciated the shorter round trip to Rainy Lake. They were in a race against nature and had to return before the ice formed on the rivers. Rainy Lake also became an important site for the repair of canoes. Birch bark and other natural supplies were collected in the area for these repairs. Lastly, wild rice and other foodstuffs were collected in the area for the consumption of the traders and their *voyageurs*. Given the importance of Rainy Lake, it is understandable that the XYC would build a post there.

The XYC would have a short but fascinating history.¹⁶ The XYC was started in 1798 when the firm of Forsyth, Richardson, and Company joined with several other parties to form the New North West Company. After his famous transcontinental journey to the Pacific Ocean in 1793, Sir Alexander MacKenzie grew frustrated as a partner of the well-established NWC. In 1799 he left the NWC and in 1802 he became the leading partner in the XYC. For the next several years there was fierce competition between the NWC and the XYC in the lands north and west of Lake Superior. Eventually, the wisdom of merging and ceasing the destructive competition prevailed and the XYC became part of the NWC on 5 November 1804. The NWC and XYC employees at Rainy Lake did not get the news of the merger until 12 January 1805.¹⁷

Before the merger, there was tension between the NWC and XYC employees. According to Pendergast:

The techniques of competition or opposition developed during the struggle of the XY and North West Companies could be listed as follows: The constant watching among traders of the rival companies, the increased use of liquor in the trade, the use of physical violence, and the hiring of extra men at higher wages. These operations were characterized by openly manifested bitterness.¹⁸

Despite many examples of socializing between the NWC and XYC people at Rainy Lake mentioned in Faries' dairy, even before announcement of the merger, Séraphin was not shy when it came to the practice of fur trade skulduggery according to the complaints of his NWC rivals.¹⁹ Charlotte's half-brothers, Jean Baptiste Cadotte, *filz*, and Michel Cadotte, *le grand*, both were involved in the NWC.²⁰ Jean Baptiste had started working for the NWC in 1795 trading in Minnesota and had been a partner of the company from 1802 to 1803 when he was removed for intoxication.²¹ At the time Charlotte was at Rainy Lake, Michel had a contract with the NWC to trade in northern Wisconsin.²² One wonders if any hard feelings were caused in the family because of the bitter and occasionally violent competition between the NWC and the XYC.

With the merger there was no longer a need for two teams of employees at Rainy Lake. Mr. Lacombe and his wife stayed on until at least 12 May 1805, that evening Mrs. Lacombe danced until midnight. There is no Lacombe listed among the XYC men retained by the NWC.²³ It appears safe to assume that Mr. and Mrs. Lacombe departed Rainy Lake in the spring of 1805. But where did they go?

¹⁶ For a history of the XYC see Pendergast, "The XY Company 1798 to 1804," *passim*.

¹⁷ Gates, *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*, 191 and 225.

¹⁸ Pendergast, "The XY Company 1798 to 1804," 74.

¹⁹ Gates, *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*, 208, 212, 231-232.

²⁰ To differentiate father from son, I use the French *père* and *filz*, rather than the English Sr. and Jr. The Ojibwa called Michel *Kichemeshane* (Big Michael), hence, the French *le grand*.

²¹ Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 90-91, 171, and 183-184.

²² Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 176-178.

²³ "List des 'bourgeois,' commis, engagés, et 'voyageurs' de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, après la fusion de 1804" in L. R. Masson, *Les bourgeois de la compagnie du Nord-Ouest*, 2 vols. (New York: Antiquarian Press Ltd., 1960), 1:395-413.

Charlotte Cadotte at L'Assomption

From the parish register of St-Pierre du Portage, L'Assomption, Québec, we learn that Charlotte Cadotte and her husband, Séraphin Trullier *dit* Lacombe, moved there in 1805. Séraphin's brother, Jacques Trullier *dit* Lacombe, was a resident of L'Assomption and a successful businessman, militia officer, and politician.²⁴ In addition, Charlotte had many Cadotte cousins living in the town.²⁵

Charlotte and Séraphin are first mentioned in the parish register of L'Assomption on 5 January 1803 when their five-year-old eldest daughter and her namesake, Charlotte, was baptized. Séraphin is noted in this entry as being absent at the time of the baptism, but it would appear that Charlotte too was absent.²⁶ How did little Charlotte arrive in L'Assomption? Did her parents bring her on a visit and leave her there with relatives? Or was she brought to the town by one of her *voyageur* relatives? Whatever the means of her transportation to L'Assomption, she died without her parents on 25 May 1805 in nearby Boucherville, the ancestral home of her father.²⁷

Charlotte and Séraphin do not appear again in L'Assomption parish register until 23 August 1805 when their sons, Séraphin and Jean Baptiste, were baptized.²⁸ Séraphin signed the parish register on this occasion, and it is certain that Charlotte was with him. Curiously, their daughter Marie Anne, who was older than her brothers, as if an afterthought, was not baptized until 23 December 1805, the same day her mother Charlotte was baptized and her parents are married.²⁹

This chronology means that between the night of the party on 12 May 1805 and the first mention in the parish register on 23 August 1805 – just 3 months and 11 days – the family would have had to travel over a one thousand five hundred and thirty-five kilometers (or over nine hundred fifty-four miles) in a canoe. Is this possible? It took an average of six weeks to travel from Fort William to Montréal.³⁰ To this you would have to add fourteen days for the trip from Rainy Lake to Fort William and an additional few days

²⁴ Martin Rochefort, "TRULLIER, Lacombe, JACQUES," in *DCB*, vol. 6, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/trullier_jacques_6E.html (accessed 10 November 2014).

²⁵ Christian Roy, *Histoire de L'Assomption* (L'Assomption, QC: Privately printed, 1967), 304-305 and 320. These Cadotte cousins were the descendants of Charles and Mathurin Cadot, the sons of Mathurin Cadot and Catherine Durand, and thus uncles of Jean Baptiste Cadotte, *père*, the father of Charlotte Cadotte.

²⁶ L'Assomption Parish Register, 1783-1805, <http://familysearch.org> (accessed 28 October 2012), image 572. The godparents were Jacques Trullier *dit* Lacombe, her uncle, and Marguerite Périnault *dite* Lamarche, the wife of her Uncle Antoine Trullier *dit* Lacombe. It is unlikely that Charlotte would have been at L'Assomption on 5 Jan. 1803 for the baptism of her eldest daughter and then appear at Rainy Lake in just two months and eight days later to give birth to her son Séraphin on 13 Mar. 1805. Winter travel – given the transportation available to her – over this distance while pregnant is extremely unlikely. Therefore, she was most likely with her husband back in the Upper Country.

²⁷ Boucherville Parish Register, Drouin Institute, <http://www.genealogiequebec.com>, image d1p_1148b1303.jpg, f. 7v (accessed 5 December 2012). She must have been living with people who did not know her well as they had her conditionally baptized on the 20th not knowing she had already been baptized in 1803.

²⁸ L'Assomption Parish Register, 1783-1805, <http://familysearch.org> (accessed 28 October 2012), image 661. On the baptism record of these sons it is interesting to note that their mother is described as the illegitimate wife of Séraphin Lacombe, but someone has gone back and scraped the paper to remove the "il" from illegitimate and redrawn the "l" to make it legitimate. This was probably done retroactive to Charlotte's marriage to Séraphin on 23 December 1805. All of Charlotte's children, including those born after she moved to L'Assomption, are mentioned on the genealogical table accompanying this article.

²⁹ L'Assomption Parish Register, 1783-1805, <http://familysearch.org> (accessed 28 October 2012), image 672.

³⁰ Letter from Jean Morrison, Supervisor, Library & Research Services, Old Fort William, to John P. DuLong, 20 September 1988.

to go from Montréal to L'Assomption. The trip could be faster if it was an express canoe without cargo. In either case, Charlotte and Séraphin had more than enough time to make it from Rainy Lake to L'Assomption if they left soon after the last mention of them in the Faries diary. Whether in a single express canoe or part of a canoe brigade Charlotte would have been much occupied caring for three young children. The youngest child was only five months old and the eldest four years old.

Charlotte and Séraphin, like any other respectable French-Canadian couple, before their wedding had a marriage contract drawn up by Louis Raymond, the notary, on 23 December 1805, their wedding day, at L'Assomption.³¹ Among the witnesses for the groom were Jacques Lacombe, his brother, and Angélique Lacombe, his niece. For the bride her witnesses to the contract included Vincent St-Germain and Angélique St-Germain. St-Germain had been active in the fur trade.³² The marriage contract is similar to many others of the period. There is no *dot* from the bride's parents; but the groom does give a *douaire*, widow's rights, of 300 *livres* to the bride in case he predeceases her, and there is a *préciput*, payable to either spouse at the death of the other, of 150 *livres*.³³ An additional clause recognized Séraphin, Jean Baptiste, and Marie Anne as the children of Séraphin Trullier *dit* Lacombe, thus insuring they could inherit his property. The last noticeable thing about this contract is that the groom and all the witnesses signed, some with elaborate signatures; only the bride marked the document with a cross.

Although the marriage contract and parish marriage record fail to mention her parents, her adult baptism records that she is a "*filie de feu Jean Baptiste Cadot vivant Marchand et d'une sauvagesse de la Nation des Sauteurs*" [daughter of the late Jean Baptiste Cadot while living a merchant and of a female Native of the Saulteaux Nation]. In most of the documents relating to Charlotte and her family, their tribal affiliation is noted as Saulteaux. This is the French term used to identify the Ojibwa who lived adjacent to the rapids of the St. Mary's River between Lake Superior and Lake Huron and eventually applied to the Ojibwa living on the plains.³⁴ Sault Ste. Marie, *Bawating* (the place of the rapids) was a popular meeting place for the Ojibwa because of the abundant fishing.³⁵ Most of the Charlotte's siblings and half-siblings, if they were not born there, certainly spent most of their youth at Sault Ste. Marie.

Séraphin and Charlotte lived in a diverse social world, a middle ground where people from Ojibwa, French, English, and Scottish cultures came together in pursuit of the fur trade.³⁶ A feature of this cultural blending was the taking of a Native wife by the white fur traders. Their union was a *mariage à la façon du pays*, literally to be married in the fashion of the country; that is, married according to local Native custom. For some whites these marriages were purely a convenience and held no meaning. However,

³¹ Louis Raymond, notary, Marriage Contract of Séraphin Lacombe and Marie Charlotte Cadotte, 23 December 1805, L'Assomption, *Archives nationales du Québec à Montréal*, photocopy in the possession of the author, transcribed and translated by Paul Lavoie. It is interesting to note that Laurent Leroux signed the marriage contract and the parish registry marriage entry as a witness. He and Jacques Trullier *dit* Lacombe were partners and had a monopoly on supplying the NWC with colorful *ceintures fléchées*, distinctive arrow design sashes worn by French Canadians and particularly *voyageurs*. Pierre Dufour, "LEROUX, LAURENT," in *DCB*, vol. 8, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/leroux_laurent_8E.html (accessed 10 November 2014), and "TRULLIER, dit Lacombe, JACQUES," *DCB*.

³² Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 496-497.

³³ For an explanation of the technical terms found in marriage contracts please see: Suzanne Boivin Sommerville, "Marriage Contract in New France according to *La Coutume de Paris* / The Custom of Paris," *Michigan's Habitant Heritage* 26, no. 3 (July 2005): 135-138, available at http://habitantheritage.org/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/Suzanne_MarriageContract.25164252.pdf.

³⁴ "Saulteaux," <http://www.reference.com/browse/Saulteaux> (accessed 10 December 2012).

³⁵ David McNab, *Circles of Time Aboriginal Land Rights and Resistance in Ontario*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), 137.

³⁶ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), *passim*, introduces the theme of the middle ground.

others took their country wives to be their true spouses. Some would have their marriages legitimized, usually by the Catholic Church, at the first opportunity. However, other men would abandon their Native wives. Eventually, as *Métis* women became more available and were preferred over Native American women, the practice of country marriages became more stable and permanent.³⁷ Only a few men would bring their Native and *Métis* wives back to the East. Most of these men were wealthy *Bourgeois* of English and Scottish ancestry. For the common French-Canadian fur trader with a Native wife and family, the more likely choice for keeping a family together was for him to remain in the West. The relocation of the Lacombe family is what makes Charlotte's case so interesting. Her French-Canadian fur trade clerk husband – not poor, but not wealthy either – brought her and their children back to Québec.

While Charlotte is clearly identified as the daughter of Jean Baptiste Cadotte and a Saulteau woman in her adult baptism, her placement in the Cadotte family is not established by this information alone. This is because there were several men with the name Jean Baptiste Cadotte and at least one other with a Native wife,³⁸ who could be her father.

How do we know that she was the daughter of Jean Baptiste Cadotte, the famous fur trader, and his second wife, whom he married in the fashion of the country?

The answer to this question can be found in a court case that went all the way to the United States Supreme Court. Louis XV had granted a *co-seigneurie* at Sault Ste. Marie to Louis Legardeur de Repentigny and Louis de Bonne de Missègle on 18 October 1750.³⁹ De Bonne never visited the site and Repentigny stayed only a short period before leaving for the Seven Years' War and he never returned. Jean Baptiste Cadotte, who was initially an employee of Repentigny, remained at Sault Ste. Marie and eventually received a title to his land from his Ojibwa neighbors.⁴⁰ Years later, in 1863, the heirs of de Repentigny and de Bonne sued to reclaim their property rights in the Federal District Court at Detroit. The case eventually made it to the Supreme Court. In 1867, the heirs to Repentigny and de Bonne lost the case because they failed to prove that either *co-seigneur* properly took up their occupancy of the *seigneurie*. As a result of this extensive court case, testimony was collected from several relatives of Jean Baptiste Cadotte and was preserved.⁴¹ This testimony adds much to our knowledge of Jean Baptiste Cadotte, his second family, and Charlotte's place in it.

³⁷ Silvia Van Kirk, "The Custom of the Country," in *Essays on Western History: In Honor of Lewis Gwynne Thomas*, 49-68, edited by Lewis H. Thomas (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 1976), 57.

³⁸ Jean Baptiste Cadot of L'Assomption, son of Charles Cadot and Denise Germain, married Marie Anne, a Saulteau, at Oka on 24 October 1776. Oka Parish Register, Drouin Institute, <http://www.genealogiequebec.com>, (accessed 25 December 2012).

³⁹ Marjorie Cahn Brazer, "Feudalism on the Frontier," *Michigan History* 69, no. 3 (May/June 1985): 32-39. Jean-Marie Leblanc, "BONNE DE MISSEGLE, LOUIS DE," in *DCB*, vol. 3, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/bonne_de_missegle_louis_de_3E.html (accessed 10 November 2014) and Étienne Taillemite, "LEGARDEUR DE REPENTIGNY, LOUIS," in *DCB*, vol. 4, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/legardeur_de_repentigny_louis_4E.html (accessed 10 November 2014).

⁴⁰ Schenck, "Who Owns Sault Ste. Marie?" 109 and 111-112.

⁴¹ The best source for information on this court case is Jacob M. Howard Papers, 1860-1864, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, ms. ZR2, "United States vs. Repentigny et al.," hereinafter Howard Papers. Also see, U. S. Supreme Court, *The United States, Appellants, vs. Repentigny et al., The Supreme Court of the United States, no. 332, On Appeal from the Circuit Court of the United States for the Eastern District of Michigan* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, no date, [ca. 1860-1864]). A copy of this printed report is in the Howard Papers at the Burton Historical Collection. The relatives who testified were Marie Archange (Cadotte) Gournoe, the daughter of Jean Baptiste Cadotte, *fils*, and Jeanette Piquette; her husband Louis Gournoe; François Xavier Biron, the son-in-law of Michel Cadotte, *le petit*, the nephew of Jean Baptiste Cadotte, *père*; and Joachim La Rivière, the son-in-law of Jean Baptiste Cadotte, *père*.

For the purposes of documenting the parentage of Charlotte Cadotte, the most interesting testimony comes indirectly from a deposition, through William Badgley of Montréal, Judge of the Superior Court for Lower Canada, from Joachim La Rivière, the husband of Marie Cadotte. La Rivière's testimony, with my corrections and clarifications in square brackets, follows:

Copy of deposition of Hon. Wm Badgley taken under the Commission dated September 11th 1862.

To the seventeenth cross-interrogatory he says:

I have already stated in my answer to the direct inty [interrogatory] all that I know or have heard respecting said Cadotte except what I have recently learn [*sic*] from a son in law of his, with whom I have spoken, one Joseph Lariviere [Joachim La Rivière], living at the parish of L'Assomption, at a Considerable distance from this city, who is blind and infirm of body and unable to be brought to Montreal for examination under this Commission – he states himself to be 80 years of age, but is of sound mind and memory: he was a voyageur from the age of 16, and went up to the Indian Countries with the fur Company, and often stopped at the said Sault Ste Marie in passing to Lake Superior. At the age of 25 or 26 he married Marie, a natural daughter of said Jean-Baptiste Cadotte; he never saw the said Jean-Baptiste, but knew his three sons, Jean-Baptiste, Michel, called the gros or big [*grand*] Michel, and Augustin: – there were two natural daughters, the younger one of whom, Marie, he married. The elder, Angelique [Charlotte], married a Canadian voyageur of the name of [Séraphin] Lacombe, who brought her down to his parish of Achigan, in the Seignory of Lachigan belonging to the de Repentigny family where, upon his death, she again married one Peltier [Jean Baptiste Pelletier], and survived him, leaving a son now living: – Marie the second daughter, had been previously married to one John [Warren] Dease a fur trader in those Countries, upon whose death, soon after their marriage [according to the custom of the country], she came to Achigan, to her sister where Lariviere married her.

Lariviere knew from what he heard from his wife and sister-in-law, and from the sons of said Jean-Baptiste that he had a house and a large piece of land at Sault Ste Marie, that he had gone up there with the first french troops, and had Settled there. That he took a farm and raised corn, oats and potatoes: he made and trafficked in large quantities of maple Suger, and also traded in furs and peltries:

Jean-Baptiste had been twice married, at least had two wives: by the first [Athanasie] he had the said three sons, with two daughters, who died young. By the second [Catherine] he had Angelique [Charlotte] and Marie. His second wife [Catherine], after his death, married a Voyageur, [Louis] Ducharme [*dit*] Nez rouge (Red nose).

Gros [*grand*] Michel's children are now settled at Calumet Island, in the Ottawa River.⁴²

Although there are mistakes in La Rivière's testimony, for instance mistakenly calling Charlotte by the name Angélique and a shaky chronology, he clearly demonstrates the existence of a second family for Jean Baptiste Cadotte. Considering that La Rivière was an old man struggling to remember facts from

⁴² Howard Papers, 137, 211-212. U. S. Supreme Court, *The United States, Appellants, vs. Repentigny et al.*, 222-223. Marguerite Cadotte, the daughter of Michel Cadotte, *le grand*, and the wife of Leon St-Germain, permanently settled at Calumet Island and her brother Jean Baptiste Cadotte, *le gros*, also lived there for a period. Letter from Theresa M. Schenck to John P. DuLong, 21 Sept. 1988.

decades ago, he did a reasonably good job. After the death of Séraphin in 1817,⁴³ Charlotte remarried Jean Baptiste Pelletier in 17 January 1820.⁴⁴ And in 1819 her mother, Catherine, appears in the L'Assomption parish register as the wife of Louis Ducharme, to have her daughter, Thérèse, baptized with Charlotte standing in as the godmother.⁴⁵ La Rivière is also correct when he brings attention to the relationship between his wife Marie and John Warren Dease.⁴⁶ Lastly, he was accurate in stating that some of the children died young.⁴⁷ La Rivière's testimony verifies the existence of a second family for Jean Baptiste Cadotte and provides several clues that are verified in the L'Assomption parish register and elsewhere.

It is interesting to note that Jean Baptiste Cadotte apparently held the children of his first marriage to Athanasie, legitimized by a wedding in the Catholic Church at Michilimackinac on 28 October 1756,⁴⁸ in higher regard than his children from his second union who would be regarded as illegitimate back in Québec. The children of the first cohort were all baptized at Michilimackinac,⁴⁹ and sent to Montréal, where the two oldest boys were educated.⁵⁰ His legitimate sons were brought into his business, and he willed his property to them.⁵¹ The children of the second cohort are less favored, receiving none of these benefits, and they are barely mentioned in the records. If it were not for the testimony of La Rivière and the L'Assomption parish register, the existence of this second family would not be easily established.⁵²

Why did Jean Baptiste Cadotte fail to legitimize this second marriage? The lack of a regularly stationed priest at Mackinac or Sault Ste. Marie could be the reason he did not wed Catherine or have her children baptized. However, Fr. Gabriel Richard visited Sault Ste. Marie in 1799 and complained to Bishop Carroll that there were several Frenchmen with Native wives. While the refusal of the men to wed their "country wives" might be a factor, Fr. Richard also regretted that he could not in good conscience legitimize these unions when the Native women lacked a fundamental understanding of the sacrament of

⁴³ L'Assomption Parish Register, Family History Library (FHL) microfilm 1018242, burial no. 72, f. 103v. L'Assomption Parish Register, Drouin Institute, <http://www.genealogiequebec.com>, image d1p_01070045.jpg, burial no. 59, f. 2v (accessed 1 December 2012).

⁴⁴ L'Assomption Parish Register, FHL microfilm 1018242, marriage no. 6, f. 54v. This marriage record is very faded and extremely difficult to read from the microfilm. A clearer copy is found on L'Assomption Parish Register, Drouin Institute, <http://www.genealogiequebec.com>, image d1p_01070139.jpg, f. 2r (accessed 1 December 2012).

⁴⁵ L'Assomption Parish Register, FHL microfilm no. 1018242, baptism no. 72, f. 37r.

⁴⁶ Will of John Warren Dease, 22 February 1829, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, reference D36/6 ff. 3-6, photocopy in possession of author, f. 3r, this mentions his wife Mary Cadotte.

⁴⁷ Marie-Renée Cadotte died 9 Aug. 1786, Montréal, Notre Dame Parish Register, 1782-1795, f. 22v, <http://familysearch.org>, image 307 (accessed 28 Nov. 2012); Charlotte Cadotte died 16 June 1768, Montréal, Notre Dame Parish Register, 1767-1781, f. 75r, <http://familysearch.org>, image 890 (accessed 28 November 2012); and Joseph-Marie Cadotte died 1 Jan. 1773, Montréal, Notre Dame Parish Register, 1767-1781, f. 38r, <http://familysearch.org>, image 314 (accessed 28 November 2012).

⁴⁸ *Mackinac Register 1695-1888*, CD-ROM (Mackinac Island, Michigan: Ste. Anne's Church, n. d.), hereinafter *Mackinac Register*, marriages, 1725-1821, f. 19.

⁴⁹ Marie Renée Cadotte, bp. 15 Oct. 1756, *Mackinac Register*, baptisms, 1695-1823, f. 45; Charlotte Cadotte, baptized 22 May 1760, f. 55; Jean Baptiste Cadotte, *fils*, baptized 29 June 1762, f. 61; Michel Cadotte, *le grand*, baptized 31 August 1764, f. 66; and Joseph Marie Cadotte, baptized 29 July 1768, f. 68.

⁵⁰ Schenck, "The Cadots," 39. Letter from J. Bruno Harel, *Les Prêtres de St-Sulpice*, to John P. DuLong, 19 November 1981.

⁵¹ *American State Papers, Public Lands* (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1860), 5:260.

⁵² François Xavier Biron does mention that there was a son Joseph from another woman or wife of Jean Baptiste Cadotte. Howard Papers, 72. And Marie-Archange (Cadotte) Gournoe implied there was a second wife when she refers to Athanasie (Astasia) as the first wife of Jean Baptiste Cadotte. *Ibid.*, 87.

marriage.⁵³ Was Catherine numbered among these Native women Fr. Richard considered too uninformed about Catholic dogma to wed? Alternatively, was Jean Baptiste Cadotte simply satisfied with being married according to the fashion of the country? Clearly, some men married to Native American women thought that a formal church or civil marriage was unnecessary.⁵⁴ Or is this simply a case that he just did not want to be bothered with the formality? Lastly, we have to consider that it might have been Catherine's wish not to be wed in a Catholic ceremony.

Despite this legitimacy gulf between the children of the first and second wives, there are still some ties between them:

- We know that when Jean Baptiste Cadotte, *fil*s, joined the NWC on 2 September 1795 he arranged for his father and his father's family to receive wheat and flour at Detroit prices.⁵⁵ His half-siblings would be in his father's household in 1795.
- A Joseph Cadotte identifies himself as a brother-in-law of Janette Piquette, the widow of Jean Baptiste Cadotte, *fil*s, in a testimony regarding her land claim at Sault Ste. Marie on 8 July 1823.⁵⁶
- On 15 July 1824, Michel Cadotte, *le grand*, paid off the debt that Augustin Cadotte – his half-brother who was living on Mackinac Island – owed to Michael Dousman.⁵⁷
- Séraphin Lacombe, the son of Charlotte, eventually returned to Lake Superior and settled at La Pointe near his half-uncle, Michel Cadotte, *le grand*.⁵⁸

There were probably many other unrecorded points of contact between the children of Cadotte's first and second marriages, but they have been lost to time.

Unequivocally, Charlotte Cadotte was the daughter of Jean Baptiste Cadotte and an Ojibwa woman named Catherine. But was she the Mrs. Lacombe at Rainy Lake who was so fond of dancing?

⁵³ Frank B. Woodford and Albert Hyma, *Gabriel Richard: Frontier Ambassador* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1958), 40-41. The shortness of his visit to Sault Ste. Marie did not permit educating them sufficiently. George Paré, *The Catholic Church in Detroit, 1701-1888* (Detroit: The Gabriel Richard Press, 1951), 284.

⁵⁴ Jacqueline Peterson, "Prelude to Red River: A Social Portrait of the Great Lakes *Métis*," *Ethnohistory* 25, no. 1 (Winter 1978): 41-67. Discusses the pressure placed on settlers at Green Bay, Wisconsin, to officially marry their Native and mixed-blood women and how some, like the prominent fur trader John Lawe, resisted and considered their country marriage sufficient and valid. Many fur traders were satisfied that their country marriages were binding. Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 52.

⁵⁵ Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 90-91.

⁵⁶ *American State Papers, Public Lands* (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1860), 5:262.

⁵⁷ Augustin Cadotte Probate Packet, no. 24, 1826, Probate Court, Mackinac County, Michigan.

⁵⁸ Séraphin Lacombe, *fil*s, often appears as a godfather at baptisms in the La Pointe parish register starting in 1835 and ending just a few days before his death in 1840. John L. Schade, "Baptismal Records 1835-1887, kept at Lapointe and Bayfield Indian Missions, by Iraneus Frederic Baraga," *Lost in Canada?*: part 1, 16 (Summer 1992): 183; part 4, 17 (Summer 1994): 118. The Lacombes and Cadottes have other points of contact. A François Lacombe, the son of René Trullier *dit* Lacombe, and the first cousin of Séraphin Lacombe, stood as a witness at the marriage of Jean Baptiste Cadotte, *fil*s, and Jeanette Piquette at Oka on 15 June 1808 Oka Parish Register, L'Annonciation-de-la-Bienheureuse-Vierge-Marie, 1808, f. 5r. <http://ancestry.com>, image 5 (accessed 28 Nov. 2012). And François' father, René was a witness at Michilimackinac in 1756 at the wedding of Jean Baptiste Cadotte, *père*, and Athanasie.

Séraphin Trullier *dit* Lacombe at the XYC Rainy Lake Post

Now that the particulars of Charlotte's life are laid out and her parentage established, it is necessary to return to Rainy Lake to see if she was there in 1805. Actually, to be precise, because records of women in the fur trade can be so sparse, we have to see if her husband Séraphin was there and if Charlotte could have been with him. Ideally, we need a document that says the XYC hired François Séraphin Trullier *dit* Lacombe to be the wintering clerk at the Rainy Lake. However, such a document does not exist, or at least I have been unable to find it. What we have instead are a series of clues, that I believe point conclusively to Séraphin Lacombe, the husband of Charlotte Cadotte, as being the Mr. Lacombe observed at Rainy Lake in 1805.

The following points, outlining the fur trade career of Séraphin Lacombe, supports the idea that he is the same person as the Mr. Lacombe in Faries' diary, and that consequently, his wife, Charlotte Cadotte, must be the Mrs. Lacombe in the diary:

- Séraphin was a fur trader. His first job was as a *voyageur* and clerk, as he was literate, for Todd, McGill, & Co.⁵⁹ He signed a contract to work for them for two years on 2 March 1792 and to go to any place they direct him.⁶⁰ In turn, he was to be paid 1,000 *livres* on his return to Montréal. In addition, he was paid an advance of 30 *livres* and some miscellaneous supplies. Todd, McGill & Co. was heavily involved in the fur trade south and west of Lake Superior. It is most likely that Séraphin came to work first in that region of the fur trade. He must have subsequently been lured to the northwest fur trade.
- Furthermore, Todd, McGill, & Co. had dealings with Jean Baptiste Cadotte, Séraphin's future father-in-law. Besides being involved with the NWC, they were one of the backers of the short-lived, 1785-1788, General Company of Lake Superior and the South, otherwise known as the *Société générale de Michilimackinac*. This company was formed to work the area that would remain part of the United States. Cadotte was one of the members of this company that traded in Wisconsin and Illinois.⁶¹ The former connection of his employers with the Cadottes and their mutual concentration on the fur trade southwest of Lake Superior might be factors in how Séraphin first encountered the Cadottes and met Charlotte.
- A few weeks after signing his *voyageur* contract, Séraphin Lacombe had two other documents drawn up by the notary François Racicot. The first was a sale, dated 26 April

⁵⁹ This firm was created around the mid-1770s by Isaac Todd and James McGill. Although the firm interacted with the NWC and Todd had been one of the original NWC partners, their firm did not become NWC shareholders until 14 September 1792 and left the NWC several years later. Since 1781 Todd and McGill concentrated on the southwest trade. Todd did play a role in encouraging the merger of the XYC and NWC in 1804. Wallace, *Documented Relating to the North West Company*, 467 and 503. J. I. Cooper, "McGILL, JAMES," in *DCB*, vol. 5, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mcgill_james_5E.html (accessed 10 November 2014) and Myron Momryk, "TODD, ISAAC," in *DCB*, vol. 5, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/todd_isaac_5E.html (accessed 10 November 2014).

⁶⁰ Louis Chaboillez, notary, Engagement of Séraphin Lacombe to Todd McGill, 2 March 1792, Montréal, *Archives nationales du Québec à Montréal*, photocopy in the author's possession, transcribed and translated by Paul Lavoie.

⁶¹ Louise Phelps Kellogg, *The British Régime in Wisconsin and the Northwest* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1935), 197-198. Jean Baptiste Perrault, "Narrative of the Travels and Adventures of a Merchant Voyageur in the Savage Territories of Northern America Leaving Montreal the 28th of May 1783 (to 1820)," ed. by John Sharpless Fox, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 37 (1909-1910): 536-537. Schenck, "The Cadots," 41. Wayne E. Stevens, "The Organization of the British Fur Trade, 1760-1800," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 3 (1916): 200-201.

1792 at Boucherville,⁶² in which he sells his interest in a farm near St-Sulpice, in the *Seigneurie* of Varennes, commonly called Belle Rivière, to his elder brother Jacques Trullier *dit* Lacombe for 3,000 *livres*, with a thousand paid now and the rest to be paid in five years with no interest. The second document was a testament done the same date and place.⁶³ In it he requests that three hundred low Masses be said for the rest of his soul and that of his father and mother. He bequeaths his property to his brothers Jacques and Antoine Trullier *dit* Lacombe. Clearly, he was resolved to be gone for some time in *le pays d'en haut*, the upper country of the Great Lakes, probably well beyond the two-year contract he had signed.

- Faries makes clear that Mr. Lacombe is married and first mentions a wife on 31 March 1805.⁶⁴ We know, given the ages for their children recorded in their baptisms, that Séraphin and Charlotte were cohabitating by at least 1798.⁶⁵ The XYC frowned upon the marriage of its employees to Native or *Métis* wives. Séraphin and Charlotte would have been an exception to this XYC policy.⁶⁶
- Thomas Verchères, another XYC clerk, mentions in his journal that he made "... the acquaintance of the clerk, Lacombe, a cousin of the Lacombe family of my native parish..." at Rainy Lake in 1803. His home parish was Boucherville, the birthplace of Séraphin Lacombe.⁶⁷
- On several occasions between 26 August 1799 and 29 September 1804, the XYC paid a Mr. F. Lacombe or Lacomble for bark and gum collected at "the lake."⁶⁸ These materials would be used to build and repair the canoes vital to the fur trade.
- On 30 November 1801, paid "By John Ogilvy & co. for amount of the note of hand ... to

⁶² François Racicot, Sale by Séraphin Lacombe to Jacques Lacombe, his brother, 28 April 1792, Boucherville, *Archives nationales du Québec à Montréal*, photocopy in the author's possession, transcribed and translated by Paul Lavoie.

⁶³ François Racicot, Testament of Séraphin Lacombe, 28 April 1792, Boucherville, *Archives nationales du Québec à Montréal*, photocopy in the author's possession, transcribed and translated by Paul Lavoie.

⁶⁴ Gates, *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*, 234-235.

⁶⁵ Their eldest daughter, Charlotte, was born *ca.* 1798 according to her baptism 5 Jan. 1803, L'Assomption Parish Register, FHL microfilm 1018242, marriage no. 6, f. 54v.

⁶⁶ Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 93 and 266 n. 75. This policy had a demographic impact. A census of the northwest population dated 1805, indicates that 33.8 percent of the NWC population were women and only 7.1 percent of the XYC were women. Elliott Coues, ed. *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and David Thompson, 1799-1814*, 3 vols. (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1897), 1:282. The same holds true for children: they were 52.2 percent of the NWC population and only 5.7 percent of the XYC. The NWC was also concerned with limiting the growing number of dependents. In 1806, the NWC tried to deal with this issue with a resolution to forbid their men from taking Native wives. Brown, *Strangers in Blood*, 96-97. It is likely that this negative attitude towards country unions may account for why Séraphin was not kept on as an employee after the 1804 XYC merger with the NWC.

⁶⁷ Thomas Verchères, *War on the Detroit: The Chronicles of Thomas Verchères de Boucherville and the Capitulation by an Ohio Volunteer*, ed. by Milo Milton Quaife (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, R. R. Donnelley & Sons Co., 1940), 12-13.

⁶⁸ Alexander MacKenzie and Co., Records, 1798-1839, Minnesota Historical Society, Microfilm M60, hereinafter Mackenzie & Co. Papers, M60, reel 2, item no. 10, 26 August 1799, 30 November 1799, 28 September 1803, and reel 3, item 10, two entries for 30 September 1803, and 29 September 1804. The mention of a lake in this context is frustrating. Does the scribe mean Rainy Lake? There are thousands of lakes in Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ontario. The fact that this person is being paid for furnishing bark and gum appears to associate the mentioned lake with Rainy Lake where Indians constructed and repaired canoes on the south shore of the lake. Grace Lee Nute, *The Voyageur*, reprint ed. (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society, 1955), 24.

Seraphin LaComble 1218.”⁶⁹

- On 8 October 1802, “To paid Sundries continued ... D. Rousseau for the following mens AMc's ... Seraph La Combe 60.”⁷⁰
- On 30 September 1802, the XYC paid “Our Note to Seraphin La Combe 3410.4.”⁷¹
- At Grand Portage on 1 July 1804 an inventory of goods to be sent to Lac La Pluie was drawn up. At the end of the inventory is the comment: “3 Equipments for Messrs LaComble, Monk & Vienne, , £20.”⁷²
- On 6 August 1805, “To paid the following Men Balance of Wages Viz. ... Sera. La Comble 180.”⁷³
- On 15 November 1805, “To paid the following Men Bal. of Wages Viz. ... Ser: La Comble 5920.10.”⁷⁴
- On his 23 December 1805 marriage record, Séraphin Lacombe is called a “*marchand voyageur*” and not just a simple *voyageur*.⁷⁵ All the records on which he was asked to sign he did so and was obviously literate and could have served as a clerk in charge of a post like Rainy Lake.
- Lastly, a Seraphim Lacombe is found on a list of mixed-bloods applying for treaty money dated 7 September 1839 at La Pointe. He was born at Rainy Lake and 36 years old in 1839, which would make his birth year 1803.⁷⁶ His particulars make him a match for the eldest son of Séraphin and Charlotte.

If one takes into account the variant spelling of Lacombe for Lacombe and that the F. stands for François, which was part of Séraphin's full name, then it looks like the XYC records refer to François Séraphin Trullier *dit* Lacombe, the husband of Charlotte Cadotte.

In sum, there is no other Lacombe involved in the fur trade at this particular time and place who fits the same set of facts. Specifically, according to the online *Programme de recherché en démographie historique* (PRDH) database, there were no other Séraphin Lacombe born before 1800.⁷⁷ Therefore, it is certain that the Mr. Lacombe in Faries' diary is the Séraphin Lacombe who was paid substantial sums by the XYC, and consequently Charlotte was the Mrs. Lacombe who danced until midnight.

⁶⁹ MacKenzie & Co. Papers, Reel 2, item no. 10. Ogilvy was one of the XYC partners.

⁷⁰ MacKenzie & Co. Papers, Reel 2, item no. 10. AMc is perhaps an abbreviation for Alexander MacKenzie and Company.

⁷¹ MacKenzie & Co. Papers, Reel 2, item no. 10.

⁷² MacKenzie & Co. Papers, Reel 2, item no. 5.

⁷³ MacKenzie & Co. Papers, Reel 3, item no. 11.

⁷⁴ MacKenzie & Co. Papers, Reel 3, item no. 11.

⁷⁵ L'Assomption Parish Register, civil copy, Archives nationales du Québec à Montréal, mariage no. 21, ff. 30r-30v.

⁷⁶ Schenck, *All Our Relations: Chippewa Mixed-Bloods and the Treaty of 1837* (Madison, Wisconsin: The Centre for Rupert's Land Studies at the Univ. of Winnipeg and Amik Press, 2010), 82.

⁷⁷ The PRDH database is available by subscription at <http://www.genealogie.umontreal.ca/en> (accessed 31 December 2012).

A Woman of the Fur Trade

Like many other *Métis* wives, Charlotte Cadotte would have played an important role in her husband's fur trade career. As the daughter and half-sister of the famous Cadotte fur traders, with important family ties to at least one Ojibwa chief, she would have been a valuable asset to Séraphin Lacombe.⁷⁸ She was a natural liaison between two social worlds. She probably would have spoken French and Ojibwa. She would know both cultures well. She would know the ins and outs of the fur trade. And, like many other *Métis* women, she would have been ready, willing, and able to step in and manage aspects of her husband's business when necessary.

The main difference between Charlotte and so many other Native and *Métis* women is that she was not abandoned by her husband when he returned to Québec.⁷⁹ She eventually was transformed from a wilderness dweller to the resident of a small Québec village. Even at L'Assomption she would have been able to keep up ties with her fur-trade relatives. Her brother Joseph Cadotte visited her in 1807;⁸⁰ her sister Marie Cadotte, another woman of the fur trade, remarried at L'Assomption;⁸¹ and she had many Cadotte and Lacombe relatives engaged in the fur trade coming and going from L'Assomption to the west. Furthermore, her son, Séraphin Lacombe, *fiils*, would return to Lake Superior, to work with her half-brother, Michel Cadotte, *le grand*, at La Pointe.

Charlotte was a vivacious woman of great stamina. She travelled hundreds of miles to join her husband against XYC policy. She undoubtedly prepared the family meals and engaged in numerous domestic chores in her wilderness home including making maple sugar, repairing fishing nets, gathering wild rice and birch bark, and making and mending snow shoes, moccasins, and other items of clothing – all the while caring for her children and husband. She would have been a comfort to her husband on the long winter nights and the teacher and guide to her children. She gave birth on the frontier without medical assistance. She made the daunting trip from Rainy Lake to L'Assomption with her children in a canoe. She did all this and was able to dance through the night! Even in her strength and vibrancy, she was probably no different from many other *Métis* and Native women who are not even mentioned in passing in some fur trader's journal. She appears amazing to us because of the glimpses we have of her in a diary and other scattered records.

One wonders whether – in her declining years at L'Assomption – Charlotte cherished her memories of the *pays-d'en-haut* with her friends and relatives and whether she ever dreamt of returning just one more time to dance to the music of the fiddler under the northern lights.

⁷⁸ In 1839, Séraphin Lacombe, *fiils*, testified that: “He and his wife are both related to Bresche [*sic*]: a celebrated chief of Sandy Lake.” This implies that he is related to this Ojibwa chief through his maternal grandmother Catherine. Schenck, *All Our Relations*, 83. Bresche would be *Kah-dah-wah-be-day*, *Ka-dow-aub-e-da*, *Katawabeda*, or *Katawabidi*. The French called him *Brèche* or *Brèchedent* (gap-toothed) and the English knew him as Broken Tooth. He was of the Loon Clan.

⁷⁹ Most men, especially the bourgeois, did not take their country wives with them when they returned to the east. Some “turned off” their marriage by insuring that another man would take over in his place. Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 49-51.

⁸⁰ Joseph Cadotte was baptized 30 Mar. 1807, L'Assomption Parish Register, FHL microfilm no. 1018242, baptism no. 42, f. 30r.

⁸¹ Marie Cadotte remarried Joachim La Rivière on 19 Nov. 1822, L'Assomption Parish Register, FHL microfilm no. 1018242, marriage no. 39, f. 119v.

