

WHO ARE THE PARENTS OF FRANCOIS BISETTE?

By Cathy (Lemoine) Sturgell

When I began my genealogical quest in 1986, genealogical resources were limited and often required a very time consuming & expensive process to pursue. There were no computers and few (if any) published sacramental records. There was no Internet and, therefore, little ability to find and share facts unless you were lucky enough to meet a fellow genealogist at a library or courthouse. Like many others following a passion for their family history, I recorded the facts as I discovered them with the hope that I could, eventually, verify each one. That verification process continues to this day and, in the case of one Pointe Coupee ancestor, has led me to conclude that his ancestry was likely not as originally believed.

Like many with early ties to Pointe Coupee and Avoyelles parishes, I am directly descended from Francois Bisette (aka: Bizette/Bissette/Biset/Bizet) and his wife, Marie Claude Champagne *dit* Louis. In the late 1980s, I purchased a wonderful book published in 1983 entitled "*The History of Pointe Coupee*" and used a brief history of the Bisette family found in the book as my first source for determining the parentage of Francois Bisette. When the book was published, very little was known about Francois prior to his marriage to Marie Claude in 1752. However, a passionate genealogist by the name of Pauline Bizette Brandy used all resources available at that time to determine that Francois was believed to be the son of Paul Daniel Bisette and Marie Charlotte Judique (aka: Judic) and, until recently, there was no reason to think otherwise.

Several months ago, however, someone called to my attention a fact I had long-ago recorded yet forgotten – that Francois' 1780 Pointe Coupee burial record indicated he was 60 years of age at the time of death placing his year of birth at approximately 1720. Although the age of an individual documented on old records is often found to be inaccurate, this age discrepancy appeared to dramatically conflict by an unusually wide margin with the 1732 marriage date of Paul Daniel Bizet (surname spelling per the records of Montréal) and Marie Charlotte Judique *dit* Recontre. This piqued my curiosity and a closer inspection also reminded me that Marie Charlotte was born in 1712 and would have only been 8 years of age in 1720. Something was obviously amiss.

These facts sent me on a quest to re-examine the parentage of Francois Bisette to determine if they were actually Paul Daniel Bizet and Marie Charlotte Judique *dit* Recontre as believed. I began my quest by searching the sacramental records of Notre Dame in Montréal now available on-line via FamilySearch.org.

Paul Bizet and Marie Charlotte Judique *dit* Recontre married there in 1732. Between the time of their marriage on 21 April 1732 and Paul Bizet's death in 1750, the couple produced 12 known children. Since Francois married in Louisiana in 1752, it is unlikely (at best) that he was born any later than 1735. However, Paul and Marie Charlotte produced their first 3 children by the end of 1736 and none of those were Francois. Also, due to the timing of these three births,

it would have been almost impossible to have had another (undiscovered) child in this timeframe. Of the first three children born to this couple, only the first was a male. His name was Joseph but the discovery of his death at the age of one month eliminated any possibility that Joseph and Francois were one-in-the-same.

I then began to look at the possibility that Francois could have been the child of Paul Daniel Bizet and a previous wife. Paul Daniel was married three times and his 1732 marriage to Marie Charlotte Judique was Bizet's third marriage. He married his first wife, Angelique Guerin, on 20 January 1716 in Montréal when Paul was only 18. Due to his young age, it was highly unlikely that Paul had married, had a child (Francois) and become a widower prior to this marriage to Guerin and this seemed to be supported by the fact that Paul was not listed as a widower on the 1716 marriage record. I did, however, search the records of Montréal from approximately 1714 thru 1716 to ensure that there were no other marriage/baptismal records associated with Paul Daniel Bizet and, as expected, nothing was located.

Angelique Guerin died on 10 January 1730. During their marriage, she had given birth to eight children – two of whom died at a young age. Only one was not baptized at Montréal. A 1732 tutorship document names the remaining six minor children from this first marriage; Francois was not included. This was significant because Francois would have been a minor at the time of Angelique Guerin's death if he was, indeed, a child of Paul Daniel Bizet's first marriage and would, therefore, have been listed on this important document.

Paul Daniel Bizet's 2nd marriage took place on 19 June 1730 – only six months after the death of Angelique. This marriage, also recorded at Montréal, was to Marie Anne Goguet. The marriage record indicated that Paul was the widower of Angelique Guerin. This marriage was short-lived, however, because Marie died on 25 September 1730 and was buried the following day at Notre Dame. The couple had been married slightly more than three months.

Less than two years later, Paul Daniel Bizet married Marie Charlotte Judique *dit* Recontre.

At this point in my search, I examined records associated with the tutorship of the Bizet-Judique children dated after the death of Paul Daniel Bizet on 16 September 1750 as well as after the death of Marie Charlotte Judique on 15 August 1755. Neither of these made any mention of Francois.

A search of Rene Jette's "*Dictionnaire généalogique des familles du Québec*" indicated that this was the only Bizet/Bisette family in Quebec Province in the 1730 timeframe. There was a Besset/Bessette surname found in the area at this time but nothing was found to link this family to Francois. On the other hand, Cyprien Tanguay wrote in his "*Dictionnaire Généalogique Des Familles Canadiennes*" that there were two 'Paul Bizets' and that both were the sons of Jean & Catherine Quenneville. He also indicated that each 'Paul Bizet' was married twice - one to Angelique Guerin and Marie Anne Goguet and the other to Marie Anne Gagne and Marie Charlotte Judique. *Was it possible that there were two 'Paul' Bizets and that another son of Jean and Catherine Quenneville named Paul was actually the father of Francois?* Upon close

inspection of multiple documents including legal documents available via the PISTARD database (*Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec*), the three marriage records of Paul Bizet and marriage records of some of his children from his first and third marriage, it became obvious to me that the same Paul Bizet who married Angelique Guerin also married Goguet and Judique and that Marie Anne Goguet and Marie Anne Gagne were one-in-the-same. For instance, in the 1732 marriage document of Paul and Marie Charlotte, Paul was not listed as a widower but a witness to the marriage was Joseph Guerin, *'beau-frere'* (brother-in-law) of Paul Bizet. Joseph Guerin was the brother of Paul's first wife, Angelique. Joseph had also signed Paul's 1730 marriage record to Marie Anne Goguet but Joseph Guerin was listed as Paul's *'frere'* (brother). This same 1730 marriage was also witnessed by Guillaume Robidou who was listed as a brother-in-law. Robidou was the spouse of Angelique Guerin's sister, Marie Françoise, and was, therefore, Paul Bizet's brother-in-law from his first marriage. Another 1730 document was found in which Goguet's name appeared to be overwritten on top of Gagne's name. The evidence found in these documents and others made it quite obvious that Tanguay was incorrect in his theory that Jean Bizet and Catherine Quenneville had two sons by the name of Paul.

Tanguay also made the claim that a 'Paul Bizet' was married to Angelique le Conte. There is a 'Jean Baptiste Bizet' who married Charlotte Hagenier in Montréal in 1747 and this marriage record shows the parents of Jean Baptiste as Paul Bizet (deceased at the time of this 1747 marriage) and Angelique le Conte. This 1747 marriage record is the likely source from which Tanguay obtained the info about this couple. I have not yet identified this Paul Bizet but we do know that the Paul Bizet who married Marie Charlotte Judique in 1732 did not die until 1750 (confirmed). *Does this, once again, indicate the presence of another 'Paul Bizet' or is it possible that the priest wrote or was given the wrong names for the parents of Jean Baptiste Bizet on the 1747 marriage document?* A search of reliable sources has not yet provided any proof that a couple by the name of Paul Bizet and Angelique le Conte existed in Quebec Province thereby lending credence to the theory that the parents of Jean Baptiste Bizet were incorrectly identified in the 1747 marriage record or they did not live in the Province. (In case you're wondering if Angelique le Conte could have been the same person as Angelique Guerin, Bizet's first wife, keep in mind that there are six children listed on Guerin/Bizet's 1732 tutorship papers. Jean Baptiste is not one of them and it does not appear that the couple had a child by that name.)

At this point, having found nothing in the records of Montréal to tie François to the family of Paul Daniel Bizet and Marie Charlotte Judique *dit* Recontre, I turned my attention to the records of Louisiana for clues in determining François' parentage. The marriage of François and Marie Claude Champagne *dit* Louis was recorded at Saint Charles Borromeo in St. Charles Parish on 14 November 1752. A synopsis of the marriage record is provided in "*Archdiocese of New Orleans Sacramental Records, Volume II, 1751-1771*", Page 23, and is as follows:

"François Biset (Bizet) (Paul and Marie Françoise ___), native of Morel, Diocese of Quebec, m. Claudine Louis (Estien and Marie Jeanne Delleblet), native of New Orleans, Nov. 14 1752, w. Ambros (Ambroise) Heidell (Heidel), Philiphe Sohn, Jacob Klomp, Parisien, Andre Bourgois"; Record: SCB, B1, 71

Two things immediately stood out as indications that we were very possibly on the wrong track regarding the parentage of Francois Bisette. In this document, he stated that his mother was “Marie Françoise [o]”. According to the legend found in the book (and confirmed by a member of the Archdiocese of New Orleans Archives staff), the “[o]” after the name of Francois’ mother indicates that the data was omitted on the original record and was not simply indecipherable. Although not positive proof either way, I found this to be an especially interesting clue. Would Francois Bisette have not known the correct first/middle name of his mother (who was still living at the time of Francois’ 1752 marriage) and would he also be unaware of her surname? This seems unlikely. On the other hand, we do know that no record has been found of a marriage of Paul Bizet – the same man who married Marie Charlotte Judique and presumed to be the father of Francois – to someone by the name of Marie Françoise nor was Marie Charlotte referred to by the name of Marie Françoise on any record I have located.

At the same time, the 1752 marriage record of Francois and Marie Claude Champagne indicates that he was from ‘Morel, Diocese of Quebec’. Although there is no town in Canada with the name of ‘Morel’, I was able to find a ‘Morell’ on present-day Prince Edward Island. Prince Edward Island was originally called ‘Île Saint-Jean’ and it is known that the community of Morell was named for a Frenchman, Jean Francois Morel, who settled the area in 1720-21. *Could this have been the location in which Francois lived prior to settlement in Louisiana and is it possible that this settlement was known amongst the locals by the name of Morell (or Morel) in the very early 1750s (even though I have not yet found an early map with this name on it)?* It is also known that there were a number of immigrants from the west coast of France living in an early settlement named Havre Saint Pierre on the northern side of the island very near to the location of the Morell. By 1751, Havre Saint Pierre was one of the most populated places on the island and considered to be the ‘commercial capital’. Could Francois have been one of these immigrants?

Île Saint-Jean also played an important role during the battles between the Acadians and British in the 1740s/1750s. There were several squirmishes there prior to 1750 and there were also French troops on the island. *Could Francois have been one of these troops?* If Francois was, indeed, born c1720, it is very possible that he was old enough to have been a member of the military in the 1740s. Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to locate any records from the late 1740s and very early 1750s which lists the name of residents and soldiers on the island.

[In an interesting side note, Natalia Belting’s “Kaskaskia under the French Regime” mentions a ‘Pol Biset’ in the 1752 Prairie du Rocher (Illinois) census. Could this be a reference to Francois as he made his way to Louisiana? Or could it be a reference to Jean Baptiste Bizet (born 1705), son of Jean Bizet and Catherine-Louise Legros? (Jean married Legros in 1703 after the death of Catherine Quenneville.) Jean Baptiste Bizet was the half-brother of Paul Daniel Bizet and Rene Jette’s book indicates that Jean Baptiste ‘engagé Ouest’ (engaged West) in 1726.]

I also contacted the St. Charles Parish Clerk of Court with the hope that they could find record of a marriage contract between Francois and Marie Claude Champagne *dit* Louis. This would

have been one of the few documents that might have provided parental information for the couple. Their marriage contract index, however, listed no such record for this couple.

In a final attempt to locate parental information in the records of Louisiana, I began looking at the possibility that the baptismal records of Francois' children might contain the names of their grandparents. I contacted representatives of both the Archdiocese of New Orleans and Diocese of Baton Rouge who confirmed that, if grandparents were listed on the baptismal records of the children of Francois and Marie Claude, they would have been listed in the sacramental book series published by each of the two Catholic dioceses. Unfortunately, this information is not found on any of the baptismal records of the children of Francois Bisette and Marie Claude Champagne *dit* Louis indicating that it simply does not exist.

At this point, I've reached a roadblock in determining Francois' parents and have found no conclusive data to tie Francois Bisette to the Paul Bizet who married Angelique Guerin, Marie Anne Goguet and Marie Charlotte Judique *dit* Recontre. Hopefully, as additional resources become available, something new will come to light to guide us toward the answer to this mystery. Until that time, I consider it unsolved.