

Notes and Documents

The *Baleine* Brides: A Missing Ship's Roll for Louisiana, 1721

Contributed by BRUCE ARDOIN*

On 8 January 1721, a small French flute anchored off the Gulf Coast near Mobile Bay with a cargo that has often been romanticized by writers of Louisiana's colonial history. The contemporary carpenter André Pénicaut wrote in his memoirs:

Sister Gertrude, one of the officers of the Hôpital-Général de la Salpêtrière of Paris, had also come on this ship, with eighty-eight girls from this hospital, all brought up in this house from infancy. Under Sister Gertrude's chaperonage, they had come to be married in the country; and each one had her *dot* [dowry], which consisted of two suits of clothing, two skirts and petticoats, six laced bodices, six chemises, six headdresses, and all other necessary accessories, with which they were well provided so they could be married as quickly as possible in legitimate wedlock. This merchandise was soon distributed, so great was the dearth of it in the country; and if Sister Gertrude had brought ten times as much of it, she would have found a market for it in a short time.¹

Pénicaut appears to have exercised a bit of literary license, if official reports are to be believed. Three months after the girls arrived, Governor Jean Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville wrote from Biloxi (the colony's seat of government), with noticeably less enthusiasm:

Eighty-eight girls arrived by *La Baleine*. Since the 4th of March, nineteen have been married off. . . . Sister Gertrude is ill-natured, she rules sourly and capriciously, and has been guilty of a prank, which has cost her the respect of the girls themselves. . . . [She] has been sent away.²

Bienville's subsequent report of 25 June suggests that he was even less thrilled than before to have his colonial government in the marriage-broker business:

Thirty-one girls have been married off between the 24th of April and the 25th of June. All were those sent on *La Baleine*. Several were given to sailors who asked insistently for them. These could scarcely have been married off to good residents. Nevertheless they were granted to the sailors only on the express condition that they should settle in the colony.³

No contemporary writers apparently bothered to identify any of the individual females who made up the "merchandise" of the *Baleine*. Moreover, all

previously known ship rolls for this period of Louisiana's history have been printed in various publications over the past several decades, and the roll of the *Baleine* has not appeared among them. This contributor to the NGS *Quarterly* has been fortunate enough to find what appears to be an effective substitute—misbound into a volume of passenger lists of ships leaving Nantes “for the colonies” between 1789 and 1822. Students of Louisiana genealogy will find many familiar names among the number that follow:

Names of the girls from the Maison de St. Louis,
of the Salpêtrière, who have been remitted
to the Sieurs De Lage and Betouzet, Constabulary Guards
on 12 June 1720, to be conducted to Painbeuf
where they are to embark for Louisiana.
[F⁵b:54, Archives Nationales, Paris, France]⁴

[Name]	[Age]	[Name]	[Age]
Bled, Maric	20	Du Bis, Catherine Barbe	22
Masson, Marguerite	21	Bocquet, Marie	22
Le Roy, Marie Louise	20	Dumont, Thoinon	21
Follet, Madeleine	25	Blegnot, Marie Jeanne	17
Morline, Geneviève	18	Penard, Jacqueline	25
Mercier, Marie Madeleine	16	Richard, Marie Louise	16
Heriot, Margueritte Claude	18	Nayon, Marie Anne	25
Maroy, Marie Françoise	17	Lange, Anne	18
Laté, Melanye	18	Le Jeune, Marie Marguerite	16
Fetique, Marie Anne	13	Mavre, Geneviève	15
François, Marie	22	Madou, Jeanne	15
Le Noble, Jeanne	15	Foucault, Marie Anne	17
Huly, Thoinette	26	Daudessot, Marie Anne	28
Godefroy, Marie Jeanne	22	Le Grand, Marie Jeanne	20
Claircatoire, Marie	20	La Pleine, Marie	19
Jelain, Marie Jeanne	24	Couturier, Charlotte	12
Charlotte, Marie Anne	20	Le Brun, Marie	17
Le Comte, Barbe	13	Brière, Hélène	14
Le Mire, Louise	16	Chevet, Jeanne	15
Boulogne, Madeleine	19	Foucaut, Marie Catherine	18
Grandval, Gabriel[le]	20	Beganies, Marguerite	15
Blanchard, Catherine	18	Vigernon, Anne	30
Boyer, Geneviève	25	Menu, Catherine	28
Muguet, Marie Françoise	19	Vaillet, Perrette	18
Gento, Anthoinette	18	Bloy, Agnes	18
Melier, Catherine	18	Duvet, Marguerite	17
Lembajoye, Marie	18	Giraudon, Marie Anne	21
Le Moine, Marie Claude	18	Girard, Angelique	22
Belanger, Margueritte	26	Florant, Marie Angelique	23
Denis, Margueritte	23	Villeroy, Marie	17
Goneau dite Rose, Marie Anne	26	Hubert, Jeanne ⁵	18
Le Tillier, Marie Louise ⁵	17	Aleume dite Voillot, Denise	18
Leveille, Marie Thérèse	18	Clavier, Elizabeth	17
Rabu, Françoise	25	Savary, Françoise	20
Vollery, Louise	17	Girard, Elizabeth	17
Lese, Louise Benedic	18	Paule, Catherine	23
Legain, Louise	23	Cordier, Marie Madeleine	21
Billard, Geneviève	17	Laurent, Marie Catherine	17

Burel, Marthe	21	Hubert, Catherine	22
Bady, Catherine	20	Desrost, Geneviève	25
Dubuisson, Marie Gabriel	18	Gauzalau, Catherine	19
Garnier, Marie Geneviève	16	Chevalier, Catherine	14
Kenel, Marie	18	Maisonnette, Thérèse	20
Manny, Anne	19	Jamart, Marie Anne	16
De Launay, Elisabeth	18		
88			
8			
<hr/> 96			

We the undersigned constabulary guards recognize that the girls named in the present statement have been remitted to our care, to be conducted to Painbeuf, where we are to remit them to the captain of the flûte *La Baleine*, on which the girls are to be embarked; and we are to report to the Company of the Indies for our discharge and recognizance by the captain that the said girls have been remitted to him. Done at Paris, 12 June 1720.

[signed] Delage Betouzet

NOTES AND REFERENCES

*17 Rue Le Verrier, 75006 Paris, France.

1. André Pénicaud, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet: Being the Pénicaud Narrative of French Adventure in Louisiana*, Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams, trans. and ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953), 249–50. Pénicaud's editor offers an additional note for the consideration of researchers:

“La Salpêtrière . . . was in the eighteenth century a house of detention whose very name could terrify women addicted to social foibles. . . . [Its inmates sent on the *Baleine*] are not the so-called *cassette* girls, who came to Louisiana in 1728, although these girls are similarly provided. There is a great contrast in the provenience of the two shipments. These girls, Pénicaud says, had been brought up in La Salpêtrière from infancy. They must have been the abandoned children—orphans or illegitimates—of prostitutes or ‘kept’ women who had been inmates in that house of correction.”

2. Bienville et Delorme, Biloxi, 25 April 1721, A.G., A¹2592, f. 108, Archives Nationales, Paris.

3. Bienville et Delorme, Biloxi, 24 June 1721, A.G. A¹ 2592, f. 111 v, Archives Nationales. Reference is made here indirectly to the several other ships between 1718 and 1720 which brought prospective brides (or female deportees—their individual situations varied) to the colony. Bienville's correspondence suggests that he did hold the *demoiselles* of the *Baleine* in somewhat higher regard than some of their predecessors.

4. The original list contains only one column of names. For space considerations, this published list appears in double columns. To maintain the original order of the list, the reader should read across the page (i.e.: Marie Bled, Catherine Barbe du Bis, Marguerite Masson, Marie Bocquet, etc.).

5. It appears that Jeanne Hubert's name was added to replace that of Marie Louise Le Tillier, whose name is crossed off. The name Marie Louise Le Tillier/Tellier is one of several on the foregoing list whose names also appear on the roll of the ship *Mutine*, which supposedly left France in December 1719 carrying an earlier load of female deportees. See A.C., F⁵b, 37; and Col. B, 42 bis. fol. 207, Archives Nationales.