

## Montréal's Holy Family Militia of 1663

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In 1663, the French colony on Montréal Island had a precarious existence in the New World. Long, bitterly cold winters were certainly a factor. However, it was hostile Natives that proved to be the most challenging threat. Established just 20 years earlier, in 1642, the colony had a generally good relationship with the Hurons and Algonquins, their Indigenous neighbors north of the St-Lawrence River. It was a different story with the Iroquois tribes south of the river. The first assault from Iroquois warriors came in the spring of 1643, less than a year after Montréal's founding.<sup>1</sup>



*Le Patriote* by Henri Julien, 1904. PD-US

There continued to be sporadic episodes of violence against French colonists. Warriors from each of the Five Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, that is Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Mohawk, and Oneida, had attacked the French settlements at one time or another, massacring many French settlers. The Iroquois were sworn enemies of the Hurons who, along with the Algonquin tribes, had allied themselves with the French. The Iroquois were also competing with the French for access to the pelts of the *pays d'en haut*, that is, the high country around the Great Lakes. They were interested in capturing this trade for the English market in Albany, New York and so they did what they could to disrupt the trade. Native war parties came in groups of five, fifteen, fifty, or one hundred and more. They hid all day in tall grasses and behind trees, watching their prey and waiting for an opportune moment to strike. As suddenly as they attacked, they retreated.<sup>2</sup>

Over the years, the Royal authorities and private entities in France had sent small contingents of soldiers, numbering between ten and fifty men, to the settlement. However, there were never enough soldiers to provide adequate protection for the colony, and so, habitants were required to take part in their own defense.

On January 27, 1663, Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve, the governor of Montréal, issued an ordinance for the formation of the Holy Family Militia (Militia of the Sainte-Famille) to provide additional protection for Ville-Marie.<sup>3</sup> He specified that the militia was to consist of seven-man

squadrons headed by a corporal of the squadron's choosing. The directive was read the next day at Sunday Mass in the chapel on the grounds of the Hotel-Dieu and posted on the door afterwards, as was customary. Zacharie Dupuis, major of the garrison of Montréal, was given charge of carrying out the order and accordingly, on February 1, he presented the governor with a list of 139 able-bodied settlers, divided into twenty squadrons, each headed by a corporal as directed by Maisonneuve.<sup>4</sup> Given that Montréal had a population of about 500 inhabitants in 1663, including some 100 families, virtually all fit and healthy men signed up for the militia.<sup>5</sup>

The militiamen engaged the enemy in the ongoing assaults on the French *habitants* from Iroquois warriors, but they especially proved their worth after the arrival of the Carignan-Salières Regiment. These troops were sent two years later by Louis XIV, the twenty-two-year-old French monarch, finally responding to the pleas of the French settlers for military protection.<sup>6</sup>

On June 17 and 19 of the summer of 1665, ships carrying the first four regimental companies arrived in the harbor at Québec. The Marquis de Tracy, commander-in-chief of the troops, appeared with another four companies at the end of the month. On August 18 or 19, eight more companies landed. Daniel de Rémy de Courcelle, newly appointed governor of New France, came with the last of the regiment in early September. Altogether, there were twenty-four companies with fifty men plus their officers in each company for a total of twelve hundred men.<sup>7</sup>

Because of their poor health and the lateness of arrival, Tracy waited until the following year to send an expedition deep into enemy territory. The regiment conducted a total of three military campaigns in 1666. The militiamen from Montréal would prove vital in the campaigns to subdue the Iroquois.<sup>8</sup>

Governor Courcelle was eager to quell the enemy. In an ill-advised move, he and his men set off from Québec on January 9, 1666, in the dead of winter with between five and six hundred men under his command. One hundred were *habitants* and volunteers from New France, including seventy Montréalers under the direction of Charles Le Moyne. Governor Courcelle and the Marquis de Tracy were recent arrivals in the New World. They were unfamiliar with the weather, the terrain, the use of snowshoes, and Iroquois tactics. The regimental men were clumsy on snowshoes and not used to carrying heavy packs across frozen rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds. They were cold, wet, hungry, and exhausted. On top of all that, they got lost and never reached the Iroquois villages. Algonquin allies, intended to have been their guides, failed to make an appearance. There was no engagement with the enemy. The men, forced to turn back, reached Québec on March 17. Courcelle's expedition was judged to be a complete failure. Hundreds had died from exposure and lack of provisions.<sup>9</sup>

Governor Courcelle recognized the superior fighting skills of the Montréalers, who had endured over twenty years of attacks beginning in 1643. These Montréalers soon stood out due to their ability to survive in the wilderness and in their knowledge of the tactics employed by the Iroquois

against their neighbors. They could move swiftly through the countryside using snowshoes in winter and canoes when the rivers and lakes were free of ice. In all three expeditions conducted between January and September 1666, the Marquis de Tracy relied heavily on the French settlers, particularly those from Montréal. He placed them at the vanguard of their advance. They brought up the rear during retreat. They were speedier and more ready to confront their wily assailants.<sup>10</sup>

In July of 1666, Captain Pierre de Saurel led three hundred men, including thirty sturdy Montréalers, into Mohawk country to confront the enemy and free captured Frenchmen. No pitched battles were fought. Instead, Saurel met a Mohawk chief who sued for peace. Convinced of the chief's sincerity, Saurel abandoned his plans to attack the Iroquois.<sup>11</sup>

The Marquis de Tracy, however, was not convinced the Iroquois were interested in peace. He was unyielding in his determination to move forward with his original plans. On September 14, he left Québec with a force of six hundred regulars and as many militiamen, including 110 men who came from Montréal under the command of Charles Le Moyne and Pierre Picoté de Bélestre. One hundred Huron and Algonquin allies joined the French.<sup>12</sup>

The expedition crossed Lake Champlain in canoes and flat-bottomed boats. From there they proceeded south into Iroquois country. It was a grueling march through forests and across streams, packing firearms and provisions. Frequent downpours of rain and scant rations hindered progress. Eventually, they reached four Mohawk villages, only to find settlements abandoned in the face of the French advance. Although no actual battles with the Iroquois were fought, the army seized everything of value. Then they burned the lodges and the crops. They made sure that there was nothing left for the Mohawks, successfully ensuring the subdual of the Iroquois for close to twenty years.<sup>13</sup>

The men from Montréal had been invaluable in the suppression of the Iroquois threat. Unfortunately, excluding their leaders, the names of these locals who took part in the campaigns in 1666 are lost to history. The list of men who served in the Militia Saint-Famille is important because it provides the names of the settler-soldiers from Montréal who undoubtedly fought alongside the Carignan-Salières Regiment in subduing the Iroquois in 1666.<sup>14</sup>

In 1669, following the departure of the Carignan-Salières Regiment for the mother country, Louis XIV directed the governor of New France to form a militia for the protection of the colony. All able-bodied habitants in every parish and district in the country who were between the ages of fifteen and sixty were organized into militia companies. Participation in the militia was voluntary but regarded by most as an obligation.<sup>15</sup> The militiamen of Montréal Island would continue to serve in the defense of New France.

**Montréal's Holy Family Militia of 1663**

Table listing Squadrons and Militiamen

The names of the men who made up each of the seven-man squadrons are listed in *Mémoires et documents relatifs à l'histoire du Canada*, published by La Société Historique de Montréal. (Montréal: Duvernay, Frères, 1860), 135-140. The names are spelled as listed in this source.

<b>Squadron</b>	<b>Militia Members</b>
One	<b>Jean de Lavigne, Caporal</b> Mathurin Roullié; Robert Pibroy; Jullien Averty dit Langevin; Thomas Monnier, Isaac Nafrechou; Michel Guibert
Two	<b>Urbain Bodereau dit Graveline, Caporal</b> Jean Aubin; Pierre de Vauchy; Jean Guerrier; Jacques Hordequin; Claude Marcaut; Louis de Laporte
Three	<b>Pierre Bonnefons, Caporal</b> Pierre Gadoys; André Fils; Jean Baptiste Gadoys René Langevin; François Carl; Antoine Lafontaine
Four	<b>Gabriel Lesel dit Leclos, Caporal</b> Maurice Averty dit Leger; François Leber; Michel Morreau; Jean Cadieu; Pierre Richomme; Pierre Malet
Five	<b>Jean Gasteau, Caporal</b> Estienne de Saintes; André Trajot; Barthelemy Vibreau Pierre Coisnay; Guillaume Halier; René Piron dit Lecarme
Six	<b>Gilbert Barbier, Caporal</b> Estienne Trudeau; Jean Desroches; Nicolas Godé Paul Benoist; Pierre Paipin; François Bailly
Seven	<b>Pierre Raguideau dit St. Germain, Caporal</b> Teclé Cornelius; Anthoine Beaudet; Pierre Desautels dit Lapointe Jean Baudouin; Honoré Langloys dit Lachapelle; Jean de Niau
Eight	<b>Claude Robutel, Caporal</b> Robert LeCavelier dit Deslauriers; Benigne Basset; Jean Gervaise Urbain Tessier dit LaVigne; Jacques LeBer; Charles LeMoyne
Nine	<b>Jacques Mousnier, Caporal</b> Jacques Roulleau; Estienne Champo; François Tardinet Anthoine Brunet; François Leboulanger; Robert de Nuermann, hollandais
Ten	<b>Jacques Testard dit Laforest, Caporal</b> Charles Testard; Jacques Millots; Laurent Archambault Jacques Dufresne; André Charly dit St. Ange; Pierre Dagenets dit Lespine
Eleven	<b>Jacques LeMoyne, Caporal</b> Jean Quentin; Jullien Blois ou Benoist; Grégoire Simon Laurent Glory; Michel André dit St. Michel; Guillaume Grenet
Twelve	<b>Louis Preudhomme, Caporal</b> Henry Perrin; Hugues Picard dit Lafortune; Louis Chevallier; Jean Descary Jacques Beauvais dit Ste. Jamme; Jacques Mousseaux dit Laviolette

Thirteen	<b>Mathurin Goyet dit Laviollette, Caporal</b> Jean Leduc; François Roisnay; Pierre Gagnier Guillaume Estienne; Pierre Pigeon; Laurent Bory
Fourteen	<b>Le Sieur De Saily, Caporal</b> Gilles Lauzon; Guillaume Gendron; Jean Chevallier Anthoine Courtemanche; Pierre Tessier; Pierre Saulnier
Fifteen	<b>Pierre de Lugerat dit Desmoulins, Caporal</b> Jean Lemercher dit Laroche; Simon Galbrun; Michel Parroissien Mathurin Langevin dit Lacroix; Pierre Chicouane; Anthoine Renault
Sixteen	<b>Honoré Dansny dit le Touranjo, Caporal</b> Mathurin Thibaudeau; Jean Renouil; Charles Ptolomel Mathurin Jouanneau; Michel Theodore dit Gilles; Jean Seelier
Seventeen	<b>Nicolas Hubert dit Lacroix, Caporal</b> Pierre Lorrain; Louis Loisel; Marin Jannot dit Lachapelle Mathurin Lorion; Jean Chapperon; Nicolas Milet dit Le Beauceron
Eighteen	<b>Jean Cicot, Caporal</b> Mathurin Jousset; Jacques Beauchamp; Elie Beaujean Fiacre Ducharno; Simon Cardinal
Nineteen	<b>Jean Valliquet, Caporal</b> Urbain Geté; Jacques De la porte; Pierre Gaudin Simon Desprez; René Fillastreau; Louis Guerestin
Twenty	<b>Descoulombiers, Caporal</b> Brossard; Bouvier; Leger Hebert; Lavallé, Pierre Charon; René Fezeret

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the founding of Montréal and the challenges faced by the women and men who settled there in the seventeenth century, see Susan McNelley, *The Women of Ville-Marie: Pioneers of Seventeenth-Century Montréal* (Monterey, CA: Etta Heritage Press, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France*. Ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites. (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Co, 1897; Creighton University Web. Accessed 2018-2021) XLVI: 205-207, XLIX:159; François Dollier de Casson, *A History of Montréal 1640-1672*. Trans. and Ed. Ralph Flenley. (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1928. Internet Archive. Accessed 18 Mar. 2020), 297.

<sup>3</sup> Mémoires et documents relatifs à l'histoire du Canada. (Montréal: Duvernay, Frères, 1860. Google Books Web. 18 Nov 2021), 135. This ordinance of Maisonneuve, including the list of men in the militia, was found in the archives of Montréal and published by La Société Historique de Montréal.

<sup>4</sup> Marie-Claire Daveluy, “Chomeday de Maisonneuve, Paul de.” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*(Canada: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003. Web. Accessed 8 Mar 2019). William Henry Atherton, *Montréal, 1535-1914: Under the French Régime, 1535-1760*. Vol. I. (Montréal: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1914; *Google Books*. Web. Accessed 7 July 2018), 181. The Holy Family Militia apparently replaced the Military Confraternity of sixty-two able-bodied men that Maisonneuve had established about 1654. At that time, Governor Maisonneuve organized a military confraternity of sixty-three highly regarded men whom he called “Soldiers of the Blessed Virgin.” The men in this select company served as an honor guard for the governor and acted as sentinels in the village, ever on the lookout for hostile Iroquois. (Morin, *Annales*, 78-79; Atherton, *Montréal Under the French Régime*, 118-119.



<sup>5</sup> In the census taken in New France in 1666, Montréal had a population of 659. There were 111 families in the enumeration (Louise Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth Century Montreal*. Trans. Liana Vardi. (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press. 1992), 18, Appendix Two; Table A.

<sup>6</sup> *Jesuit Relations*, ed. Thwaites, XLIX, 161-165. The Carignan-Salières Regiment was the first unit of regular French troops to come to New France and the only complete Regiment sent to the colony during French rule (Trudel, *Introduction to New France*, 160).

<sup>7</sup> *Jesuit Relations*, ed. Thwaites, XLIX, 159, 163; Atherton, *Montréal Under the French Régime*, 192; Marcel Trudel, *Introduction to New France* (Rhode Island: Quintin Publications, 1997), 160.

<sup>8</sup> Dollier de Casson, *History of Montréal*, 300-305.

<sup>9</sup> Dollier de Casson, *History of Montréal*, 303; *Jesuit Relations*, ed. Thwaites, L:181-183; Jack Verney, *The Good Regiment: The Carignan-Salières Regiment in Canada, 1665-1668* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 37-53. The *Jesuit Relations* cites "over sixty" casualties. However, Verney cites François de Tapie de Monteil, who was a part of the winter campaign and had recorded that "on this expedition which we undertook in the month of January we lost four hundred men who dropped dead from cold while on the march" (45).

<sup>10</sup> Dollier de Casson, *History of Montréal*, 303; Verney, *The Good Regiment*, 37-53.

<sup>11</sup> *Jesuit Relations*, ed. Thwaites, L:139; Dollier de Casson, *History of Montréal*, 300-305.

<sup>12</sup> Dollier de Casson, *History of Montréal*, 300-305; *Jesuit Relations*, ed. Thwaites, L:139

<sup>13</sup> Atherton, *Montréal Under the French Régime*, 195; Léopold Lamontagne, "Prouville de Tracy, Alexandre de," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. (Canada: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003. Accessed June 30, 2020); Pelletier, "Saurel, Pierre de," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Canada: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003. Accessed June 30, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> The list of men serving in the militia was discovered in the archives of Montréal. Men who had died or otherwise become infirm in the two years following the organization of the Militia Sainte-Famille in 1663 would obviously not have served with the Carignan-Salières Regiment.

<sup>15</sup> Eccles, *The French in North America*, 76-77; Atherton, *Montréal Under the French Régime*, 395. The militiamen received food, clothing, a blanket, and gunpowder, but nothing more in the way of compensation.