

# IV

## THE "NAIN ROUGE."

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A Legend of the Founding of Detroit.



OF strains of music mingled with sounds of revelry and joyous laughter issued from the banquet hall in the grand old castle of St. Louis, Quebec, on the evening of the 10th of March, 1701. Subdued, shaded lights bathed the room in mellow radiance, where, around a table resplendent with costly silver and sparkling glass, sat a gay party of French officers.

At the head was Hector Louis de Callieres, Governor of New France, and on his left the Intendant le Chevalier Bochart de Champigny. Amid the brilliant group were those bearing names

which stood high in la belle France—De Montigny, Le Gardeur, Le Moyne, Dagneaux Douville, De Tonty, Godfroy de Tonnancour, etc. The post of honor was occupied by Monsieur La Mothe Cadillac, Sieur de Douaguet and Mont Désert.

He had just returned from France, bringing with him from Count Pontchartrain, the Colonial Minister, a commission of Commandant, and the grant of a tract of land fifteen acres square, wherever on “le Détroit” he should see fit to locate a colony and build a fort.

Whilst they are toasting Cadillac in many a bumper, let us turn for a brief review of the eventful career of the founder of Detroit.

Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, son of Jean and Jeanne Malenfant, first saw light at Toulouse in 1661. At the age of 16 he entered the service, and became a Lieutenant at 21. He came to Quebec with his regiment, in which were many of the scions of noble houses. Here he met and wedded the beautiful Marie Thérèse Guyon, the daughter of an influential and wealthy bourgeois. Shortly afterwards the stern decree of war compelled him to leave his bride. He was sent to Acadia, where his bravery won him distinction and a commission from the French Government to make a report of the condition of the English colonies at that epoch. Count Frontenac in 1694 complimented Cadillac as

the most efficient and energetic officer at his disposal, by giving him the command of Fort Buade, Michillimackinac, a post he retained for five years. His treaties with the Indians displayed such thorough experience and ability that he was rewarded by the government with a concession of the Island of Mont Désert (now a watering place on the New England coast), also a grant of a tract on the main land near the River Pentagoet, called Douaguet, from whence he took his titles. He had several times passed through "The Strait," (Detroit River) and noted with his quick eye, the wonderful advantages it possessed. As a military post it would be a barrier to the wily Iroquois; to the English a gate, shutting them off from commerce with the Indians of the far West, and to France, the center of the fur trade in this section of the country. His earnest representations on the desirability of establishing a post on "le Détroit," added to his renown as an able soldier, had gained the consent of the Colonial Minister to his daring scheme.

Let us return to the festive dinner party, where the swiftly passing hours were enlivened by the sparkling repartees which flashed from lip to lip had the brilliant jeu d'esprit, which drew their inspiration from the rare, generous wine of the noted cellars of the castle.

Whilst merriment was at its height, a servant whispered something in the host's ear, and he, turning to the guests, said: "Messieurs, an old fortune-teller craves to enter; shall I bid her do so?" All were in that happy frame of mind eager for any diversion, and a full chorus of "Oui, Monsieur" was the response. One of the gentlemen proposed to change places so as to puzzle the old witch if she had heard anything from the servants. The party had barely changed when the door opened and the figure of an old woman entered.

So strange, so bizarre, was her appearance that a murmur of surprise greeted her. A woman of unusual height, a dark, swarthy complexion, restless, glittering eyes,—strangely fashioned garments yet in harmony with her face. Some one said "What is your name?" In a deep, sonorous voice, with a slight foreign accent, she answered, "They call me *Mère Minique, La Sorcière.*" On her left shoulder was perched a black, meagre cat. Half a dozen palms were stretched forth for her inspection; one after another she read. When she hesitated the cat would lick her ear, and the more superstitious thought it the devil giving information. Many were the lively sallies as she betrayed some marked peculiarity of the guest, and whisperings of amazement, as at times her

knowledge seemed almost supernatural. At last she came to La Mothe Cadillac, who, naturally skeptical, said, "Ma bonne Mère, see what you can tell for me of the future, I care not for the past."

Earnestly scanning his bold, energetic face, she took a brazen basin, into which she poured from a curiously carved silver vial, which she drew from her breast, a clear, heavy liquid like quicksilver, and holding La Mothe Cadillac's hand, gazed into the basin. "Sieur," she said, "yours is a strange destiny. A dangerous journey you will soon undertake; you will found a great city which one day will have more inhabitants than New France now possesses; many children will nestle around your fireside." She paused and Cadillac, thoroughly interested, bade her continue. "Mon Chevalier, I wish you had not commanded me to go on, for dark clouds are arising and I see dimly your star. The policy you intend pursuing in selling liquor to the savages, contrary to the advice of the Jesuits will cause you much trouble, and be the cause of your ruin. In years to come your colony will be the scene of strife and bloodshed, the Indians will be treacherous, the hated English will struggle for its possession, but under a new flag it will reach a height of prosperity which you never in your wildest dreams pictured.

You will bask in a sunnier climate, but France will claim your last sigh.”

“Shall my children inherit my possessions?” asked Cadillac, unconsciously giving utterance to the secret desire of his heart.

“Your future and theirs lie in your own hands, beware of undue ambition ; it will mar all your plans. Appease the Nain Rouge\* (Red Dwarf). Beware of offending him. Should you be thus unfortunate not a vestige of your inheritance will be given to your heirs. Your name will be scarcely known in the city you founded.”

All were deeply impressed by the prophecy of the sibyl, save him to whom it was addressed. Shortly afterwards the party separated and Cadillac amused his wife by giving her a humorous account of the old prophetess, but, to his amazement, she too, seemed to look upon the event as of grave import.

On the following day La Mothe Cadillac bade farewell to Quebec and left with his expedition of fifty soldiers and fifty artisans and voyageurs. Alphonse de Tonty, a relative of the Guyons, was his captain ; Dugué and Charconale his lieuten-

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\*The Nain Rouge was the demon of the Strait, and in the old traditions is described as most malignant, if offended, but capable of being appeased by flattery.

ants ; Jacob de Marsac, Sieur de L'Ommesprou his serjeant ; Francois and Jean Fafard his interpreters ; Father Constantin del Halle, a Recollet, and Father Vaillant, a Jesuit, the chaplains. La Mothe Cadillac was not fond of the Jesuits, as they were powerful and strongly opposed to the sale of brandy to the savages, this traffic being an immense source of revenue to the early colonists. The Jesuit was sent by the Governor at the solicitation of the Superior of the Jesuits, and was nicknamed by La Mothe Cadillac as "Monsieur de Trop."

Cadillac wished to go by way of Lake Erie, but the Governor decreed otherwise. They left the Lachine Rapids the 5th of June, the trees were just budding and game and fish furnished an abundance of food. In July they arrived at Georgian Bay, via the Grand River of the Ottawas, and coasting down the eastern shore of Lake Huron they reached, on the 20th, the river Ste. Claire and the old Fort St. Joseph, at the foot of Lake Huron abandoned by Duluth thirteen years before.

On the 24th of July, 1701, the head of the expedition rounded Belle Isle and soon landed at a little cove at the foot of the present Griswold street. The Ottawas and Hurons, whose villages were near, rushed down to welcome them, as did also a few French "coureurs des bois," who lived

here. Two of their names are still preserved ; Pierre Roy and Francois Pelletier.

On the following day, with great ceremony, pickets for a new fort on the site of an old stockade were erected and a store house built on the foundation of an abandoned one, previously constructed by the *coureurs des bois* for their winter supplies.

A salute was given from the guns brought for the new fort, which Cadillac christened Fort Pontchartrain.\* On the 26th, Ste. Anne's day, with clerical ceremony, the foundation of the first church west of the Alleghanies was laid. Soon the stockade, which enclosed about an acre, † was finished, and the streets of Ste. Anne and St. Louis laid out and lined with the barracks for the troops and with houses constructed of hewn logs. Detroit was founded, and its prospects for a successful colony bright.

The fortune-teller's prediction, or at least part of it, was verified.

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\* Royal sanction for this name was received by Cadillac a year later, July, 1702.

† An acre of ground at the foot of a hillock on the river bank.