

## **Simon Amable Drouillard and Margaret Martin dit St. Jean**

Simon was born on March 3, 1734 in Montreal. His father was 27 and his mother 21. Simon was given the name of his grandfather who had been killed by the Iroquois outside Detroit six months earlier. He was baptized at St. Anne at Bout de Lisle which is on the island of Montreal. His godparents were Michel Breban and Marie Barbe Rapin. His father Jean Baptiste was a voyageur and military man. Around 1744, his father left the military and engaged in managing canoe trains with supplies and furs to and from Detroit. In 1749 when the population at Detroit was about 900. Simon accompanied his father and others in his family as they took advantage of the offer by the Governor of Canada of land and supplies to come to Detroit. Only 46 actually accepted this offer. They rewarded with 3 arpents of land on the south side of the Detroit River. Simon's brothers were Jean Jr., Francois, Joseph, Antoine, and Pierre. Simon took up the voyageur trade and also served as an Indian agent.

On August 29, 1757, Simon married Margaret Martin St. Jean in St. Joseph Church at Soulanges, Quebec. Witnesses to the marriage were Jean Baptiste Martin dit St. Jean Sr., Jean Baptiste Martin dit St. Jean Jr. and Françoise Bissonnette. A year later, a child was born who died at birth. Several children were born at Soulanges but in time Simon returned to Detroit with his wife as children after 1757 were all born at Detroit. In 1760-1763 Britain took command of the Detroit area and indeed all of Canada from the French as a result of France's defeat at the Plains of Abraham in 1759.

This was a difficult time for the French citizens of Canada. However, in time, the British smartly granted the French a good deal of religious and civil rights that was paid back in loyalty in the American Revolution as well as the War of 1812. The most troubling problem was on of land rights. Some of the French occupied land that they claimed to have bought from the natives or ceded to them by the French-Canadian or local government bodies. It appears the Drouillard's and the Campeau's were able to retain deeds to their lands. A number of records exist about the filing of affidavits and sworn testimonies concerning these families supporting their own or others claims.

Simon, and brothers Pierre and Joseph, owned slaves. It is said that traders in Detroit's early days used female Indian slaves as backcountry wives, both for companionship and as a way to ingratiate themselves with the women's relatives. This was a way to enhance their ability to do business with the Indians. Joseph Drouillard is recorded as presenting slaves as gifts to his daughters on their wedding days.

Simon and Margaret appear to have been faithful members of Assumption Church where he obtained possession of a pew from 1775-1781 purchased at auction for the price of forty francs per year. Margaret gave birth to twelve children over the course of their marriage.

In 1780 a petition was granted to the inhabitants of Petite Cote for a watermill to be built. Simon owned and operated this mill for 11 years. In time he sold it to Jean Baptiste Fere, with the stipulation that Fere would pay Drouillard 1200 pounds of flour per year as long as Margaret and he shall live. When one of them died, the payment would be reduced to 600 pounds for the remaining persons life. Historians looking at this sales agreement thought that Simon was a shrewd business

man based on the amount of grain he received over the life of this contract. A good deal has been written about the mills of Ontario and Simon's in particular as it is said to be the first such mill in the now province of Ontario, History Canada has documented the search for the site of this mill. It can be viewed at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wGmusB358o>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBS1FGq-Jfk>

In 1781 Simon served as an Indian agent for the British at the Council of the Northwest held at Chillicothe, Ohio. On a tax role in 1802 it showed that Simon continued as a loyal British subject after the American Revolutionary War.

Margaret would die on November 16, 1803. Records of St. Anne Church Detroit show her buried at its cemetery on November 18. Simon would marry Marie Françoise Meny on May 14, 1804 in Detroit. He was 70 years old and she was 60 and the daughter of Anthony Meny and Jane Seguin dit Laderout.

On June 11, 1805 a fire almost completely destroyed the city of Detroit including for a second time Ste. Anne's Church. Simon would die shortly after on July 26, 1805 at Detroit.

Simon's son Jean Baptiste would marry Elizabeth Labeau. Among their children Touissant Drouillard moved to the downriver area of Detroit that was sparsely inhabited. He purchased one of the ribbon farms near the mouth of what is now Ecorse Creek. It is said that his holdings ran from what is now the northern portion of Wyandotte through present day Lincoln Park. He is the ancestor of most of the Drouillard's in this area.

Louis, the son of Simon and Margaret married Mary Catherin Meloche. Their story is told in the Campeau/ Paulo section.

## Local Mills

1.

The French were the first Europeans to come to the LaSalle area, then known as La Petite Cote, or The Little Coast. That was in the 1600's, probably around 1671. Over the next 100 years, they gradually settled to form the oldest continuous white settlement in the province of Ontario. As the farms grew in size, and produced more grain, the French established the first grist mills in the area.

In 1702, for example, Antoine Laumet, Sieur de Lamothe Cadillac, talked about building a mill to grind the wheat sown that spring in the regions of Detroit. He was on the north side of the river, but there's no indication whether the mill was ever built. There is another reference, however, to a wind mill built on the Savoyard River on the Cass farm in 1709. It was said to have an annual income of 500 crowns. In 1720, a water mill was authorized for construction at what is now ] 2th and Fort Street, again on the American side of the river in what is now the city of Detroit.

There were 60 families in Petite Cote by 1768, and 100 families by 1775. By 1782, the number had increased to 117 families. One of those early families was that of Jean Thomas Pajot, who was granted 34 acres, or 14 hectares. The family came from Charles bourg, Quebec, and Pajot's descendants stayed to farm the same land over the centuries. The family was celebrated in 1985 for having farmed over 200 years in the same area on what is now Martin Lane. The Pajot farm is believed to be the oldest in Ontario.

The Pajot family came to Petite Cote in the mid 1600's, and was listed in the first census of 1768. By 1782, Pajot owned four cows, four oxen, two steers or heifers, 10 hogs, and 20 bushels of wheat. On his farm that summer, he'd sewn 16 bushels of wheat, and 11 bushels of oats. He had 6 arpents of Indian corn, or about five acres. He had 50 arpents of cleared land, three sons, five daughters, and one hired hand. He owned eight horses, twice the number of any of his neighbours.

The construction of grist mills throughout Ontario attracted more settlers, merchants and draftsmen. The mills were vital to economic expansion. It comes as no surprise then that one of the first -- if not the first grist mill in Ontario -- was built by Simon Amable Drouillard, (variously pronounced, and spelled Drouyard), the son of a well known fur trapper and voyageur. The family came from Lachine, Quebec, and settled in LaSalle in 1749. The Crown gave the family a deed for 100 acres of land on Turkey Creek, or Rivieres Aux Dindes. Theirs was a traditional rang settlement grant, a ribbon farm, or long strip of land running from the Detroit River, three arpents wide and 40 arpents in depth: an arpent being almost an acre. (.84625 acres, or .4 hectares.)



*Pajot Farm and historic plaque*

Drouillard constructed a log cabin with a bark roof on the property. It was a modest building about the size of a single car garage: ten feet wide by 12 feet long, with ceilings eight feet high. Each habitant received six hand tools, a kettle, two pair of shoes, eight pounds of gun powder, 24 pounds of lead, 1 tomahawk, a pair of leggings, a blanket, and enough seed for a year's planting. With that stake, Drouillard began to farm.

On July 1 st, 1780, Drouillard, on behalf of 27 other members of the community, petitioned officials at Fort Detroit to build a grist mill on his property, using Turkey Creek as its main source of power. Despite the relatively flat topography of Essex County, there were several attempts to harness springtime water power. The land is low lying, so Drouillard had to build a dam on Turkey Creek to build up enough water, or power, to run a mill efficiently, if only intermittently. The petition said that the mill was for the common good, and that it would be made of stone.

Mill sites were reserved to the government, so it was necessary to obtain permission for the development from Commandant, Major Arent Schuyler De Peyster: at Fort Detroit. De Peyster was encouraging the cultivation of ground to improve the condition of the post; so permission was granted to Drouillard. The Drouillard Mill was said to be 55 arpents back from the Detroit River.

The residents needed the mill for the agricultural crops that they produced in their rapidly growing settlement. Drouillard operated the mill for eleven years, before selling it in 1791 to J.B., or Jean Baptiste Fere, along with the equipment, house, buildings, and 332 acres, or 405 arpents of land. For a short time after, the mill was known as the Fere Mill, which stretched from the back of lots 37 to 47, which fronted the Detroit River.

Drouillard received payment for the mill in flour, rather than money, because of his concern about the British conquest, and its affect on cash. 1760 marked the end of the Seven Year's War between the French and English, and the French were afraid that things would change in the colony because of the British victory. So, Fere agreed to pay Drouillard 12 hundred pounds of flour per year to be delivered throughout the lifetime of Drouillard and his wife, Margaret. On the death of one, the payment would be reduced to 600 pounds of flour per year. Drouillard's wife lived until 1803, and Drouillard died two years later. It's estimated that he collected 15,600 pounds of flour during that time,



*Map of Fed's Mill with Fort Detroit in 1812. From an original drawing by a British Engineer  
Courtesy: Brian Dunnigan, Curator of Maps, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan*

which would have translated to the equivalent of \$5,183 for the mill.

A surveyor's map of 1790 marks two other mill sites. One was located closer to the present city of Windsor on La Ruisseau de la Vieille Reine, which means The Stream of the Old Queen, in reference to an important Huron woman who was encamped with her people in that area. The name was changed later to La Riviere a Gervais, in honour of Louis Gervais, a militia captain of the time. The river no longer exists. The mill site was described as being about a mile from the river mouth. The other mill was about four miles up La Riviere aux Canards, in an area to which loaded boats could go. There is no evidence, however, that either of these two sites were actually developed.

From "Grist For The Mill", Herb Colling March 2010

# HEIRS learns about local grist mill history

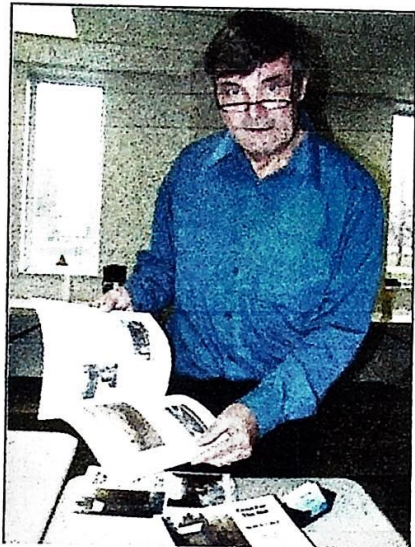
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by Sylene Argent

Grist mills were essential parts of any community during the pioneer area. Area author and former CBC radio reporter, Herb Colling, was happy to share the history of grist mills of Essex County with the members of the Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society last Thursday afternoon at the Harrow Arena.

One of the first grist mills in Ontario, Colling said, was established in the Turkey Creek area of LaSalle in the 1700s. The community the mill was located in was known as La Petite Cote at the time. Simon Amable Drouillard established the grist mill in 1780. Because of that rich history, LaSalle Council asked Colling to write a report concerning the area's mill history.

What was intended to be a report expanded into a 90 page book, which Colling titled "Grist for the Mill." The book is now for sale and will hopefully help fund either a replica grist mill within the area it once stood or a commemorative plaque. Colling said he would like to one day see the establishment of a working mill to give a sense of what it would have been like to make bread in those days.



"Grist for the Mill," Colling said, chronicles the local story as well as the history of grist mills in Ontario.

Simon Drouillard, Colling noted, was the son of a well-known fur trapper and voyageur, who was also one of the first Europeans to come to the area. The family came to the LaSalle area in 1749 as part of a government program to encourage settlement in Ontario. Drouillard's grist mill, Colling added, was also one of the first commercial-industrial enterprises in the province.

Jean Thomas Pajot, Colling continued, was another early settler. That family has the distinction of being one of the first to settle in the area of La Petite Cote. The Pajot farm is believed to be the oldest in Ontario – that was continuously owned and operated by the same family.

"There is a lot of history in this area. Unfortunately, a lot of it goes missing," Colling said.

Agricultural firsts in Ontario, Colling added, are significant because the settlers came from Europe where cities, farms, road, and grist mills were all common place. Much of the agricultural area had been farmed for decades. To develop forested Canada was a daunting task.

Through grist mills, the government of the day recognized "that providing the means to produce our daily bread would attract more settlers, more merchants...to this area to build the towns and communities that would stimulate economic expansions and development," Colling said. In many cases, he added, the grist mill was established first and the town established around it.

Drouillard went to Fort Detroit with a petition to build a grist mill in 1780. When he was granted permission to proceed, he built a log cabin on the back of his property, which was a narrow strip farm developed along the Detroit River. He then built the grist mill beside the cabin on the bank of Turkey Creek.

Another mill was built in La Petite Cote in 1804.

"LaSalle has an intriguing past when it comes to grist mills and the milling industry in Ontario," Colling said.

Colling has written four books, including Turning Points, which was about the Detroit Riots.

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