Chapter 2

A COAT OF ARMS

# Guillemette Hebert/Guillaume Couillard

**Guillemette Hebert** was only 11 when her family made the months-long trip from Paris, France, to Canada. They landed at Tadoussac during the summer of 1617. Like her mother, Marie (Rollet) Hebert, Guillemette took a special interest in the Indian children who lived around the village of Quebec. She often was a godmother at their baptisms.

Guillemette married **Guillaume Couillard** on 26 Aug 1621 in Quebec. Couillard was a carpenter, seaman and caulker who had come to Canada with Samuel de Champlain in about 1613. Champlain and his brother-in-law, Eustache Boulle, were witnesses at the Couillard-Hebert wedding. The marriage is mentioned in the Archives of the Notre Dame of Quebec.[[1]](#endnote-1)1

**GUILLEMETTE HEBERT3**; (**LOUIS2** and MARIE ROLLET); b. 1606, Paris or Dieppe, France; m. Guillaume Couillard, 26 Aug 1621 in Quebec; d. October 1684, in Quebec; buried at Hotel Dieu, Quebec.[[2]](#endnote-2)2

**GUILLAUME COUILLARD DE LESPINAY;** (GUILLAUME and ELISABETH DeVESINS); b. 1591 or 1592 in Saint-Malo or St. Landry Parish, Paris, France; carpenter, seaman and caulker; became Canada's first nobleman when King Louis XIV granted him a coat of arms in 1654; d. 4 Mar 1663 in Quebec; buried at Hotel Dieu, Quebec.[[3]](#endnote-3)3

Children of this marriage are:

1. Louise Couillard; b. 30 Jan 1625 in Quebec; m. 3 Nov 1637 in Quebec to Oliver Tardif, an interpreter and head clerk of the Compagnie des Cent-Associes and judge of the court of the seigneury of Beaupre; d. 23 Nov 1642 (some sources say Nov 1641).

2. Marguerite Couillard; b. 8 Oct 1626 in Quebec; m. on 7 Oct 1637 at 11 years of age to Jean Nicolet, a nobleman, clerk and interpreter from Cherbourg, France, who arrived in Canada 1618; d. 20 Apr 1705.

3. Louis Couillard de Lespinay; b. 18 May 1629 in Quebec, bap. 18 May 1629; m. Genevieve des Prez; letters of nobility granted March 1668; an adventurous youth who formed an association with seven other young men to hunt seals, an occupation that entailed months of extreme hardship on the shores of the gulf[[4]](#endnote-4)4; d. 1678.

4. **ELIZABETH COUILLARD4**, born 9 Feb 1631; m. Jean Guyon 27 Nov 1645 in Quebec.

5. Marie Couillard; b. 28 Feb 1633 in Quebec; m. Francois Bisot 25 Oct 1648 in Quebec.

6. Guillaume Couillard; b. 16 Jan 1635 in Quebec; killed by Iroquois around Tadoussac (news of the event came to Quebec on 5 Oct 1662); Sieur of Des Chenes.

7. Madeleine-Marie Couillard; b. 9 Aug 1639 in Quebec; m. Jacque de la Lande 7 Sept 1675 in Quebec.

8. Nicolas Couillard, b. 6 Apr 1642 in Quebec; killed by Iroquois 24 Jun 1661; buried the next day in Quebec; sieur of Belleroche.

9. Charles Couillard; b. 10 May 1647 in Quebec; m. Marie Pasquier in 1668; became lord of Ilets and Beaumont.

10. Catherine-Gertrude Couillard; b. 21 Sept 1648 in Quebec; m. Charles Aubert.

When Louis Hebert died in 1627, **Guillemette Hebert** and her husband inherited half the estate. Guillaume Couillard became the head of the family because Hebert's son, Guillaume, was still a minor. The family continued to live in the Hebert home. Up to 1632, the house on the edge of the cliff was the only private home in Quebec. Farther along the edge was Champlain's wooden fort, and directly below it, on the shore, was the Habitation with the small Recollet chapel. The only other buildings in the settlement were the convents of the Recollet and Jesuit orders on the St. Charles River, a mile away beyond dense woods. The Jesuits had arrived in 1625.

The Habitation, a home for Catholic nuns in Quebec, is shown in a representation by C.W. Jefferys, of Gallery Canada. The Louis Hebert home was located on the cliff above the Habitation.

Guillemette and her mother were frequently alone on their property. Couillard was often on the St. Lawrence and Indians murdered the servant, Henri, whom the Heberts had brought from France, in 1627.

After the English captured Quebec in 1629, Guillemette opened her home to two Indian girls, Charite and Esperance. Champlain had hoped to take the girls and one other to France. When permission for the trip was denied, the girls asked to be sent to Mme. Couillard.

"They must have formed part of a cosmopolitan household, for it contained also Oliver Le Jeune, a negro boy from Madagascar brought up the river by the English, sold to Oliver Le Baillif, and given by him to the Couillard family. Guillemette and her mother arranged for his religious instruction and he was baptized in 1633. (It is unknown whether the boy was set free but when he was buried, he was listed as a servant rather than a slave. Slavery was not legalized in the New World until 13 April 1709.) By 1648 the Couillards had other servants and ten children, a lively (entries in the Journal des Jesuites would suggest even an unruly) ménage.

"At the marriage of the third daughter, Elisabeth, in November 1645, there were two violins in the chapel, a thing never before heard in Canada."[[5]](#endnote-5)5

One of the Couillard daughters, Marguerite, married Jean Nicolet when she was 11 years old on 7 Oct 1637. Nicolet, a clerk and interpreter from Cherbourg, France, had come to Canada in 1618. He was either the first or second white man to set foot in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Etienne Brule reported his own discoveries in 1616 when he returned to Quebec but some dispute them, saying he relied on reports from eastern tribes. If not Brule, Nicolet was the first in the U.P., reaching Sault Ste. Marie and then the south shore of the U.P. to Green Bay in 1634.6

In early July 1624, delegates from the Five Nations proposed a peace treaty and shortly thereafter 35 Iroquois canoes came down the Richelieu River to barter furs for the first time with the Frenchmen.[[6]](#endnote-6)7

A mission was established in Sault Ste. Marie in 1641. Nicolet had been sent by Champlain to live with the Algonquin Indians to learn their language and to search for a waterway to the west. Nicolet told of his discoveries when he returned to Quebec in 1635.

In the early 1660s, Iroquois killed Guillemette’s two sons, first Nicolas, age 20, then Guillaume, 27, and her nephew, Joseph Hebert.[[7]](#endnote-7)8

In January 1651, Madame Couillard sent two live hens to the Jesuit fathers for a New Year's gift. From the Jesuits the family received a stone calumet, an Indian peace pipe.[[8]](#endnote-8)9

A monument to Guillaume Couillard still exists in the city of Quebec today. (Source: Monuments commemoratifsde la ville de Quebec Web site)

Being rich in land, Guillemette and her husband made various gifts for charitable and religious purposes: to the church in 1652 and to the Hotel Dieu in 1655 and 1659. After her husband died in 1663, she sold to Bishop Laval in 1666 the Sault-au-Matelot on which to build a seminary. Her disposal of this valuable land caused dissension among the younger generation; the litigation begun by these prospective heirs continued generation after generation into the 20th century.[[9]](#endnote-9)10

Somewhat infirm, she withdrew to the convent of the Hotel Dieu, the Jesuit hospital. She spent her last years there as a boarder. In 1678, when her father's remains were re-interred, she had herself carried to the Recollet chapel to witness the ceremony.

She died in October 1684 at the age of 78 and was buried next to her husband in the chapel of the Hotel Dieu.

**Guillaume Couillard De Lespinay** came to Canada about 1613, according to Champlain, who spoke highly of him in 1628. Father Paul LeJeune in Jesuit Relations, a series of reports to the French king on the activities of his mission in Canada, said Champlain praised his "energy and excellent disposition." Guillaume was one of the first to settle permanently in Quebec.[[10]](#endnote-10)11 After the death of Louis Hebert in 1627, Guillaume took over the farming. That same year, Champlain granted him 100 acres of land, named Lespinay, bordering the St. Charles River to clear and seed. By 1632, he had cultivated nearly 20 acres and by 1639 owned a flour mill. On 8 July 1639, Huault de Montmagny appointed him a "clerk responsible for inspecting the sown lands and the food of the settlers of Quebec."[[11]](#endnote-11)12 Guillaume was the first person to make use of a plow, in 1628, and by 1643, he was making lime for the Compagnie des Cent-Associes. The French government had given the company (in English, the Hundred Associates) a monopoly in New France in 1627 to create a French empire in the New World. The company was to send from 200 to 300 settlers and enough clergy to meet their needs each year.

Hostilities broke out between England and France and the adventurer David Kirke and his brothers set out in 1628 on a semi-buccaneering expedition against French settlements in the New World.[[12]](#endnote-12)13 Champlain, alarmed by the approach of the English and the threat of famine at Quebec, decided to send someone to Tadoussac to repair and bring back a boat for the purpose of moving unessential people out. Couillard, the only man capable of carrying out this operation, "stubbornly refused to do it, despite his normal readiness to be of help. In dread of being slaughtered by the Indians 'he feared for his skin, and did not want to leave his wife, for fear of losing her.'"[[13]](#endnote-13)14

Three Kirke ships appeared in the St. Lawrence just in time to intercept a convoy carrying supplies and new settlers. The Kirke ships took Tadoussac and blockaded the river, depriving Quebec of supplies and reinforcements, just as Champlain had feared. David Kirke sent a letter to Champlain, warning that the fall of Quebec was inevitable. Courteously, he asked Champlain to surrender; Champlain refused. Kirke, loaded with supplies and prisoners, returned to England.

That winter, Champlain moved all but the Couillards and Madame Hebert into the fort, built less than a decade earlier. The colony was moved almost to starvation. With food supplies inadequate for a siege, Champlain ordered the daily ration reduced to a small supply of peas and "turkey corn," or Indian maize. The cellars of the Heberts and Couillards, which always yielded considerable grain and vegetables, could not feed so many hungry mouths. By the end of the winter, the settlers were gaunt; the children of the colony were thin and spiritless in their patched and ragged clothes.[[14]](#endnote-14)15

**Guillaume Couillard’s likeness has been found in several publications. This version was found on a Web page devoted to his genealogy.**

When the Kirke ships returned in July 1629, Champlain surrendered. He and all other officials were carried off to be transported to France. Couillard's family was the only complete family that agreed to live under the occupation. At Champlain's request, Louis Kirke sent a guard of soldiers to protect the house.[[15]](#endnote-15)16 Kirke promised them freedom to harvest their grain and trade with the Indians. The English even paid the family four livres for each of their beaver pelts.

The Kirke brothers' delay in capturing Quebec had been important. By the time the Kirkes returned to the New World, England and France had been at peace for three months.[[16]](#endnote-16)17 Champlain, hearing the news upon his return to France, protested. The French government brought diplomatic pressure to restore the colonies to France. The matter took three years to settle, and in 1632, Champlain returned to Quebec. He died in 1635.

In July 1632, Father Paul LeJeune visited the Couillards. He was the superior of the Jesuits sent to Quebec to take charge of the spiritual welfare of both French and Indian. LeJeune was personally responsible for the Jesuit Relations. In describing the Couillards, LeJeune wrote, "God is blessing them every day; he has given them very beautiful children, their cattle are in fine condition, and their land produces good grain. This is the only French family settled in Canada. They were seeking some way of returning to France; but having learned that the French were coming back to Kebec, they began to regain courage. When they saw our ships coming in with the white flags upon the masts, they knew not how to express their joy."[[17]](#endnote-17)18

LeJeune found Quebec in ashes. The English had burned not only most of the church buildings, but the settlement also. All that was left was the ruins of stone walls.

That winter, LeJeune described in his reports the method used by the settlers to get a daily ration of water. "As we have neither a spring nor a well," he wrote, "we are obliged to go for water every day to the river ... but to get to it, we must first break the ice with heavy blows from an axe; and after that we must wait until the sea comes up, for when the tide is low you cannot get water because of the thickness of the ice. We throw this water into a barrel, which is not far from a good fire; and yet we must be careful to break the layer of ice every morning, otherwise, in two nights, it would be one mass of ice, even if the barrel were full."[[18]](#endnote-18)19

The priest undertook the teaching of the Negro boy living with the Couillards and in May 1633, baptized the boy, whom he described as "contented."

After the French returned in 1632, Guillaume Couillard continued to work for the colony. He took part in the defense against the Iroquois, frequently piloted boats between Quebec and Tadoussac, and became churchwarden of the parish, after having given part of his land for the reconstruction of the church. Since he could not write, he used as his mark an original design that appears on several historical documents that have been preserved.

In December 1654, under Gov. Jean de Lauson's administration, King Louis XIV ennobled Guillaume, "on account of services rendered to the country of Canada." His coat of arms was "azure, a dove with wings outspread or, holding in its beak an olive branch proper," with the motto: "Dieu aide au premier colon,” or, God help the first colony. These letters of nobility were the first granted to a subject of a king in New France.[[19]](#endnote-19)20

The Armoiries de Guillaume Couillard: D’azur, a la colombe au vol etendu et verse d’or tenant en son bec un rambeau d’olivier de sinople. (Your Ancient Canadian Ties, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library)

Guillaume Couillard died in his house on 4 Mar 1663 and was buried in the chapel of the Hotel Dieu in recognition of the gifts made by him to that institution. The site of his house is marked by a cairn in an inside courtyard of the seminary. He is memorialized in a statue, the work of the sculptor Alfred Laliberte, near Louis Hebert's monument beside the city hall of Quebec.

1. Author unknown, *Your Ancient Canadian Ties*, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Mich. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. W. Stewart Wallace, Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. 1 (New York NY: Macmillan Co., 1945) 23 6-7 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. 1. W. Stewart Wallace, Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. 1 (New York, NY: Macmillan Co., 1945) 237. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. W. Stewart Wallace, Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. 1 (New York NY: Macmillan Co., 1945) 236-7 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid.

Gustave Lanctot, *A History of Canada* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963) P. 119. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. W. Stewart Wallace, Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 1 (New York NY: Macmillan Co., 1945) 236-7 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ed: Reuben Gold Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (Cleveland, Ohio: Burrows Brothers Company, 1896) Vol. 13, P. 113 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. W. Stewart Wallace, Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 1 (New York NY: Macmillan Co., 1945) 236-7 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Edgar McInnis, *Canada: A Political and Social History*, 3rd ed. (C. 1947, 1959; Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969) P. 35 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. W. Stewart Wallace, Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 1 (New York NY: Macmillan Co., 1945) 236-7 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Thomas B. Costain, *The White and the Gold: The French Regime in Canada* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1954) P. 117 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Ed: Reuben Gold Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (Cleveland, Ohio: Burrows Brothers Company, 1896) Vol. 2, P. 308 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Edgar McInnis, *Canada: A Political and Social History*, 3rd ed. (C. 1947, 1959; Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969) P. 36 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Cary F. Goulson, *The Infancy of New France: Seventh-Century Canada*, 1970 ed.: P. 144 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Ed: Reuben Gold Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (Cleveland, Ohio: Burrows Brothers Company, 1896) Vol. 2, P. 308 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. W. Stewart Wallace, Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. 1 (New York NY: Macmillan Co., 1945) Pgs. 236-7 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)