

SAINT-BARTHÉLEMY

History and Genealogy of an Island



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Saint-Barthélemy,
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Acknowledgments

After spending thirty years on Saint-Barthélemy, an island that gave me a wife and three children, it was time to give something back. This book is like a big thank you to this small piece of tough and rocky land surrounded by water, where people have done everything possible to survive since it was settled there nearly four hundred years ago.

It was “grand-mère à Flamands,” “Marie à Pia,” who gave me the desire to understand whom I was dealing with in daily life and to comprehend all those subtle or glaring differences between one neighborhood and another. The accents, the intonations, the faces, the names – everything tells the story of the island.

“Marie à Pia” could decipher a face, a voice, an accent, an expression, and tell you without error which neighborhood a person came from, and who their grandparents, brothers, and sisters were. She probably wasn’t the only one capable of such feats, but she mastered her subject. It was like a testimony from the past, passed down from generation to generation, an unwritten history, a litany recited flawlessly ; sitting on the steps of her tiny house, running her hand over her face to hide her laughter, amused by my ignorance, her eyes sparkling under the brim of her straw hat that she had made herself. She could have filled out genealogical trees without batting an eye, complete with nicknames and sometimes even a story to go with them.

Secondly, I owe this desire to my father-in-law as well. He knew everyone in town, leeward, or windward. He would tirelessly repeat, with barely a hint of impatience, who this or that person was, even though he had already introduced them to me just a few days earlier. The “islands next door” held no secrets for him either, and he mastered English, Papiamentu, Dutch, Island English, and other languages as well. He held all the keys to this island culture of the Caribbean.

These two persons, by themselves, embody the essence of this book. It is the story of the colonists – from France, England, Ireland, and elsewhere – the story of the destruction of the world before the arrival of the Europeans, as well as the story of the slaves, brought there by force, who, from island to island, century to

century, created the tremendous genetic and cultural melting pot of the Caribbean that we know today, and of which Saint-Barthélemy is undeniably a part.

Marie Gréaux is the story of the first inhabitants of Saint-Barthélemy, all of them, including the slaves. Charly Barnes represents the story of English, Irish, or Scottish colonists from Saba, Barbados, or Antigua, the Dutch from Aruba, and the Amerindians from the coasts of Venezuela. It's the great West Indian cosmogony, the heritage of my children.

To discuss the genealogy or history of the island of Saint-Barthélemy, one must also draw on the surrounding islands. Everything is connected, intertwined, and mixed. It is a spatial-temporal puzzle of four hundred years that needs to be reassembled through the documents that can be found.

It is the great strength of Deveau, the pioneer, not only of the genealogy but also of the history of our island, to have understood all the connections and sought answers in the right places. His small booklet, published in 1972, is the first history book of our island. He sought out everything and nearly found it all, with school notebooks and pencils. An incredible feat at a time when there were neither computers nor the internet. He must have spent days, months, in archive rooms compiling information. A work that is not appreciated at its true value. It's so easy nowadays (almost) that we cannot imagine how he managed to succeed. Thank you to him !

Like everyone else, I had started working on direct family genealogy. Then I realized that I needed to create a tree for all the inhabitants, sometimes even including people who had lived on other islands, because everyone crosses paths, here or there. It's the only way to achieve something meaningful.

The research is ongoing, and there are still many things to discover and stories to tell.

The book tries to follow a chronology of our island's settlement. It is a compilation of articles published on the Saint Barth Islander blog over the last five years, so there is sometimes repeated or contradictory information from one article to another.

I also owe a lot to Madame Arlette Patrigeon-Magras for her trust, generosity, help, and encouragement throughout this research.

Thank you to Anne, Felix, and Elie for their valuable insights into Gustavia, their memory of a time they did not even know, passed down by their grandparents, and which they know how to pass on in turn.

Thank you to Fredrik Thomasson for his help and his enormous work on the archives of our island,

Thank you to Will Johnson of Saba for his inspiration,

Thank you to Tani and Michelle for all those moments of sharing experiences as a family,

Thanks also to all the “elders” of the taxi stand, Justin, Roland, Belmont, Mimile, Germain, JC, Jean, Célestin, Roman, and all the others, with whom I have shared so many years on the docks, and who helped me better understand Saint-Barthélemy, to better grasp its delicate textures.

Thank you to Amelie for her valuable advice in writing these articles.

Brief Chronological Summary of the History of Saint-Barthélemy

The history of the colonization of the Caribbean is violent, and throughout its history, our small island has not escaped it.

After their arrival on the island of Saint Christophe, French and English buccaneers had to fight against the Spanish. The latter, though not properly settled on the islands of the Lesser Antilles, sought to defend access to their colonies in the Greater Antilles and protect the return route to Spain for their ships laden with riches. The French and English buccaneers, who became colonists, also allied to eliminate the indigenous Carib people and keep the island of Saint Christophe for themselves, before eventually fighting among themselves.

The interspersing of islands across the Caribbean Basin, belonging to the English, French, or Dutch, did not help matters. Each nation wanted a larger share, and the neighbor's portion always seemed more tempting. Until the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the battles between these nations seemed endless in the region.

The few inhabitants who arrived on our island from 1659 (there had already been settlement attempts, one in 1629 and another in 1648) would be the first to engage in these incessant wars. The Second Anglo-Dutch War from 1665 to 1667 would impact the lives of these early settlers, disrupting communication and supply lines with Saint Christophe and Martinique. The French, allied with the United Provinces, saw their navies conquering and then losing each other's islands. Life on an already challenging island like ours must have been even more difficult. The French retook the English half of Saint Christophe but were forced to return it at the end of the war. There are no available details on the population during this period, and we must wait until 1671 to get the first census, the oldest existing for Saint-Barthélemy. It recorded a total of 336 inhabitants, including 85 housemasters and 47 married women, 96 children, 15 white artisans, 44 white servants, and a total of 46 enslaved people.

The inhabitants of small islands like Saint-Barthélemy and Saint Martin were engaged in subsistence farming and livestock, exporting their surplus to Saint

Christophe. They also practiced smuggling. It was on these islands that commercial exchanges prohibited by European governments, who wanted to maintain exclusivity with their colonies, took place.

In 1681, the first nominative census of our island was recorded. This document lists the names of the inhabitants, their marital status, and whether they had children. This document is the cornerstone of the genealogical history of Saint-Barthélemy, and we will often refer to it, as well as to the one prepared for Saint Martin in 1682. Many names mentioned in these two documents will disappear quickly, while others will persist for some time and even, for some, become integrated into the family trees of our island, including :

- For Saint-Barthélemy : Briard or Bréard, Copieux, Fauretel or Fauvrel, Heude, Hode, Legrand, Mutrel, Predeau, Tardieu, and Vittet, and others still found today, Aubin, Bernier, Bray (I believe it should read Brin), and Gréaux.
- For Saint Martin : we find Aubin, Briard or Bréard, De Laroche, Heno or Esnaud, Gourdain, Heude, Houet, Jacques, Laborde, Lanoé, Legrand, Morfy, Pimont, Soulevant, and Taureau.

In 1688, the Nine Years' War began in Europe, a conflict that soon spread to the Antilles, pitting the French against the English allied with the Dutch. Saint-Barthélemy and Saint Martin suffered greatly during this conflict, and, as we will see later, the populations were uprooted repeatedly. The censuses of our island then indicated :

- For 1687, 90 men, 88 boys, 61 women, and 115 girls ;
- For 1688, 57 men, 117 boys, 60 women, and 108 girls ;
- For 1689, 75 armed men and 12 disabled men (we were at war, and only combatants were counted).

In July 1689, the French recaptured Saint Christophe, but the English occupied it again entirely in June 1690, until 1697. Around 1690 (we will revisit this census), there were 4 armed men and 98 unarmed men. It was around this time, perhaps even a little earlier, that the Lédée, Laplace, and Questel families arrived in Saint-Barthélemy, and Devezien and Mahieu or Mathieu for Saint Martin. It can be considered that most of these inhabitants had transited through Saint Kitts before arriving in the northern islands.

The previous conflict had barely ended in 1697 when Europe was again shaken by the War of Spanish Succession, which lasted until the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. France lost Saint Kitts again in July 1702. There was no census for the northern islands in 1699. In 1700, there were only 17 armed men and 14 armed boys, 13 women, 15 marriageable girls, 26 children, and 5 slaves. The impact of this conflict, which emptied the island of its inhabitants, is evident. There is no further census until 1730.

Saint Christophe officially became English in 1713, further distancing the northern islands from the rest of the French colonies.

It was in 1724 that the parish registers for Saint-Barthélemy began ; if there were any before, they do not seem to have survived. Around this time, the surnames Berry, Borniche, Brémont, Cartier, Chaumont, Magras, Mayer, Berry, and Serge appeared, some only briefly.

In 1730, the island was inhabited by 47 armed men and boys, 25 married women, 7 widows, 16 marriageable girls, 91 children, 6 disabled men, and 129 enslaved people. In 1731, there were 53 armed men, 18 marriageable boys, 5 invalids, 30 married women, 14 marriageable girls, 83 children, and 138 slaves. In 1732, there were 33 men, 31 women, 7 widows, 85 boys, 55 girls, and 154 slaves. In these latest censuses, the number of inhabitants is in clear decline, but the number of enslaved people is now very high.

The period is probably calmer until 1740 when the War of Austrian Succession began, lasting eight years, followed in 1756 by the Seven Years' War. It was during this troubled time that Pierre Danet arrived. The populations were once again the great losers during these conflicts, which forced many to exile to other islands. There is also no census until 1765. It was around 1764 that some of the exiles returned to our island, and the surnames Leblanc, Giraud, Olive, Dilly, Duzant, and Vantre appeared in Saint-Barthélemy. Until 1785, the number of inhabitants remained very low.

1785 was a pivotal year in the history of our island, as it was at that moment that Sweden took over its government following a treaty signed with France in 1784. When the Swedes settled on our island, it was in the area then called “Le Carénage.” They took advantage of the commercial weakening of Saint Eustatius after the English Admiral Rodney's attack in 1781 and attracted wealthy merchants who came to establish their trading houses here. The

proclamation of the Free Port, as well as the capture of Saint Eustatius by the French in 1795, facilitated this settlement, and “Le Carénage,” which became Gustavia, was transformed into a vast warehouse. Goods were imported from Europe, America, or other islands, and then exported back to those same places.

The first Swedish census at the beginning of 1785 recorded 749 inhabitants, including 73 married men, 72 women, 89 young men, 92 marriageable girls, 132 children, 10 free people of color, and 281 slaves. The December 1785 census recorded a total of 950 inhabitants, including 408 slaves. Trade would benefit from the consequences of the Napoleonic Wars, the conflict between Americans and English from 1812, and the Hispano-American Wars of Independence. The population increased and peaked at 5,763 inhabitants in 1815 before starting to decline along with commercial activity.

From 1785 and throughout the Swedish period, new names appeared, such as Passerat, Tesserot, Dalché, Drouillard, Querrard, Déravin, Turbé, Blanchard, Garrin, Chapelain, Sibilly, Meissonnier, Moron, Tackline, Vianis, Gumbs, Rosey, Cagan, as well as many others, originating from Saba, Saint Martin, Guadeloupe, and elsewhere.

We will now study these populations.