





indicated that the person owned land in New France. Often “dit names” were given to describe an individual for his characteristics and his personality. Slowly over time the family name dropped and the “dit name” remained as the family name. These name changes make genealogical searches of French Canadian names extremely difficult.

The “dit name” of “La Force” is interesting in that if Pierre Pepin had been merely physically strong he would have taken a “dit name” of “*le fort*.” However, “La Force” implies strength of personality. It was written that Pierre Pepin dit La Force was a strong leader among the Indians and that the eldest son, Michel Pepin dit La Force, carried on this tradition, was a King’s Storekeeper, was reliable, spoke a number of Iroquois languages, and was able to incite the Iroquois to war. He was also known for his active work in making sure France would take North America. His brother, Francois, had an Iroquois name of “*Ginghissway*”, was French storekeeper at Fort Carillon, participated in the De Regaud expedition to Fort William Henry, and died leading 300 Iroquois against Rogers’ Rangers at the Battle of Pointe au fer. Another brother, Rene Hypolite, as captain of the schooner *Iraquoise*, participated in defending Fort Niagara at the siege and was known as a brave man. But it would be Michel’s comment on the destiny of France that would alarm George Washington and lead him to convince Governor Dinwiddie to raise a small militia and return to the Ohio River Valley to remove the French from the area. The events that follow are history and La Force and Carlyle would be involved.

In 1753 John Carlyle finished the construction of his house in Alexandria and moved in with his first wife Sarah Fairfax, who then gave birth to their third child. In 1753, in New France, Ange de Menneville, the Marquis Duquesne, Governor of Canada, ordered an expedition with the direct purpose of challenging the appearance of English traders in the Ohio wilderness. As early as 1747, a group of mainly Virginia businessmen had formed the Ohio Company of Virginia and were active in the Ohio Valley. To counter this activity from the Virginia traders, the French built three forts: La Presentation, Presque Isle, and Le Boeuf. The Ohio Wilderness, to the French, would be an important link in a chain of forts from Louisbourg to Quebec, onto New York, and down through Illinois and concluding at New Orleans. These three forts were to show strength to the Indians in the area, to entice them away from the British with new trade goods that would be coming in through these forts, as well as provide food and supplies for French troops. The area of the Ohio Wilderness was the weakest link in this chain of French forts.

In 1754, John Carlyle was in Alexandria, carefully

following events and news on the Ohio Wilderness where he had made investments. In 1755, he hosted Major General Edward Braddock, and was working as King’s Commissary to the Braddock campaign. He wrote in his letters of various events of the time. His letters described the fear that the English had of the French and the Indians. The French, with the incitement of the Iroquois, were attacking English settlers’ homes, brutally massacring families, and capturing children to replace lost family members from previous wars. As King’s Storekeepers at Fort Niagara (Ticonderoga), Pierre Pepin dit La Force and Michel Pepin dit La Force would have been knowledgeable of these events as news traveled quickly to the trading center of the fort, the Commissary. Skilled in Native American languages, they would have been able to speak with warriors and scouts who could recount first hand information. As the French King Louis XVth’s subjects they would see an imperative to carry out the strategy of Montcalm and Vaudreuil to hem in the English east of the Mississippi and to conduct active trade in the Ohio Valley. In turning to genealogical documentation we have learned some details.

We can now clearly state that it is Michel Pepin dit La Force who was captured at the Jumonville Glen attack. On November 25, 1744 Michel married Agathe Limoges. Then a letter from Michel to Agathe gave her power of attorney to release a large sum of money to Louis de la Corne. While we do not know who Louis de la Corne was, we gain a small piece of information on French life in New France in that women had power of attorney through their husbands. These activities also place Michel at an age where he would be young enough to carry out active assignments in the rough country of the Ohio valley. Finally, in *Memoirs on the Late War in North America Between France and England* by Captain Pierre Pouchot, a member of King Louis XVth’s Royal Engineers, a definitive reference is made to Michel Pepin dit La Force’s capture at Jumonville Glen:

King Louis XV of France

*Michel, eldest of the three La Forces, was involved in the earliest clashes with the English He was captured in 1754 during the Jumonville affair and remained in enemy hands, his exchange frustrated by the dispute over the Violation of the Fort William Henry capitulation.*





In the capitulation of Fort William Henry, agreement was made with the French to allow safe quarter to those surrendering the fort. This did not occur, as Iroquois warriors, furious at their inability to collect war booty, attacked and massacred those leaving the fort. Montcalm came much later onto the scene, only to note how difficult it was to work with the Iroquois in curtailing their bloodlust. Some historians believe that Montcalm knew the French were outnumbered by the English and stood by to let the massacre occur. It must be noted that the Native Americans fighting for the French were considered independent of French command. They fought alongside the French and were divided in their loyalty between the British and the French. In a rich and detailed account of the French surrender at Fort Niagara of 1758 by Pouchot, insight into the knowledge and understanding of the Iroquois kings, their concern for their warriors, their own sense of the French and Indian War was provided. In this surrender, Pouchot succeeded in providing safe quarter to those who survived the siege and were present at the surrender by giving important advice to his men on how to behave toward the Iroquois warriors, by asking the Iroquois to leave the battle, by agreeing to protect the Iroquois women and children present at the fort, and by promising the Iroquois Chief that he would not kill those few warriors who stay to fight for the English. Pouchot forgave the Iroquois for betraying their “father”, the French King they called “Onontio,” and gave them wampum. The Iroquois King tells Pouchot that their land is being taken by the British and the French and that they are dead men.

Captain Pouchot in his memoirs spoke favorably of Michel Pepin dit La Force and it was Michel’s brother, Rene Hypolite, who was present at the siege with his warship *Iraquoise* and ordered by Pouchot to bombard the English. Because Pierre Pepin dit La Force was elderly, it is probably Michel who followed in his father’s footsteps and became the King’s Commissary as well as interpreter to the Indians. When Governor Dinwiddie sent the young George Washington to the Ohio Wilderness to demand that the French vacate the land, he met Michel Pepin dit La Force. After leaving Wills Creek in Maryland, Washington traveled on with Jacob Van Braam, a Dutch interpreter, and Christopher Gist, an experienced backwoodsmen. Upon arriving at Fort Venango, the French Captain Joncaire invited the young Virginia militia major to dine with him and a few of his men, among them La Force. At this dinner, George Washington noted that after copious amounts of wine, “They told me, That it was their absolute Defign to take Pofeffion of the Ohio, and by G—they would do it.” The quotes from these journals were used by Paul Truax to track the family’s lineage and confirm details on Michel

Fort Niagara, today.



Pepin dit La Force. A number of characteristics noted in George Washington’s journals are central to his identification, such as his large physical size, youth and vigor, language ability with the English and the Iroquois, scouting skills, and respect from reputable commanders and leadership of the Iroquois.

The next morning Washington prepared to leave Venango to go to Fort Le Boeuf to meet with the General Officer, Sieur Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, and wrote “*That Monfieur La Force, Commiffary of the French Stores, and three other soldiers came over to accompany us up.*” At this time, the commanding officer of the French *troupes* in the Ohio River Valley was Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, an elderly and experienced French military officer from an old French Canadian family. Legardeur was an officer, a gentleman, and an entrepreneur. His experience with Indians as well as his extensive work and travels in North America made him one of the most knowledgeable individuals in working, trading, and fighting with Indians.

We learn of La Force’s skills with Indians and the value it brought to the French effort in a letter from Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre to Governor Duquesne:

*The News that I Found out concerning Virginia made me decide to send La force to the Theya8ouindeoguin River to be certain about The Englishman’s movements. He learned on his trip from various Indians coming back From War that they were to take the portage of the Great Mountain which is About thirty leagues (about 73 miles) distant from the Ohio River. I have absolutely no doubt that the wear and tear that they had to Undergo will delay their arrival here until quite late in the month of March”*

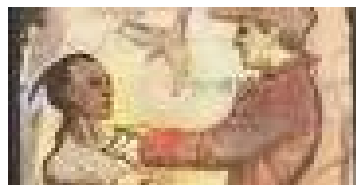
And in another letter, Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre stated, “*Monsieur La force will make you more keenly*



aware, Sir, than I am able to Explain by this Letter, of the sad Situation to which we have been reduced.” La Force is mentioned in more letters as tension rises between England and France. This tension would reach its peak at Jumonville Glen where an attack would ignite the entire French and Indian War. It is this historic event that will bring together Michel Pepin dit La Force and John Carlyle, as well as other individuals and shape these individual’s lives, linking them in history with George Washington, Governor Dinwiddie, and a poor translation.

Upon receiving Washington’s report from the Fort Le Boeuf encounter, and watchful of French activity, Robert Dinwiddie established a small regiment, with the newly-promoted Lieutenant Colonel George Washington, and Colonel Joshua Fry as commander. The commander of the French forces at Fort Duquesne at this time was Captain Claude-Pierre Pecaudy, siegneur de Contrecoeur. On 25 May 1754, Washington and his men reached the Great Meadows. Needing reinforcements, Colonel Joshua Fry left Winchester with two companies under the command of Captain Robert Stobo, a fellow Scotsman and friend of Governor Dinwiddie. Captain Stobo’s life would become entwined with Michel Pepin dit La Force’s life. On 27 May 1754, the Seneca Chief, named “Tanacharison,” or “Half King,” reported a French contingent near Great Meadows. Washington and a small detachment headed out after 10:00 p.m. in darkness and rain. What followed has been much discussed by historians, and Fred Anderson, in *Crucible of War*, provides new information on the events that follow. In a final account of the attack and massacre at Jumonville Glen, the mystery of what actually occurred is revealed in a report by Contrecoeur to Duquesne. An English deserter, or Catholic Iroquois, named Denis Karninguen gave a detailed account which Lieutenant Joseph-Gaspard Chaussegros de Lery, commandant at Fort Presque Isle, transcribed before sending to Montreal:

*He reports [...] That Monsieur de Jumonville had been killed by an English detachment which surprised him. [T]hat the officer had gone out to communicate his orders to the English commander [...] [N]otwithstanding the discharge of musket fire that the latter [Washington] had made upon him, he intended to read it [the summons Jumonville carried] and had withdrawn himself to his people, whom he had [previously] ordered to fire upon the French[, T]hat Monsiuer de Jumonville having been wounded and having fallen[,] Thanninhison [Tanaghriison], a savage, came up to him and had said, Thou art not yet dead, my father, and struck several hatchet blows with which he killed him. That Monsieur Drouillon, ensign and second in command to Monsieur de Jumonville,*



Tanacharison, the Seneca Chief. National Park Service.

*had been taken (captive) with all of the detachment, which was thirty men. [...] Messieurs de Boucherville and Du Sable, cadets, and La force, commissary, were among the number of prisoners [T]hat there were between ten and twelve Canadians killed and that the prisoners had been carried to the city of Virginia [Williamsburg].*

George Washington gave his own cursory account of the attack, and noted that “*Mons’r La force, who your Honour has often heard me speak of as a bold Enterprising Man, and a person of great subtlty and cunning*” had been captured. Washington continued to insist that the French were on a spy mission. In a letter dated 25 July 1754, from Governor Duquesne to the Commander on the Ohio, Captain Pierre Contrecoeur another perspective is revealed:

*I implore you to get some trustworthy savages who can be used as spies. I have been told that you had with you a man named La Force, who is invaluable and untiring in discovering what he is asked to. I do not see how you can put your trust in better hands for savages are still savages, especially in a place where the English used to be.*

Shortly after the attack, Washington wrote to Dinwiddie and further described La Force:

*Besides, looseing La Force, I really think, w’d tend more to our disservice, than 50 other Men, as he is a Person whose active Spirit, leads him into all parlys, and brought him acquainted with all parts, add to this a perfect use of the Indian Tongue, and g’t influence with the Indians. He Ingeniously enough confess’d, that as soon as he saw the Commission and Instructions that he believ’d and then said he expected some such tendency, tho’ he pretends to say he does not believe the Commander had any other but a good design.*

Washington then wrote that he had arranged to have the prisoners escorted to Williamsburg:

*Mr. La Force [...] beg to be recommend to your Honour’s notice, and I have promis’d they shall meet with all the fafor that’s due to Imprison’d officer’s: I have shew’d all respect I co’d to them here, and have given some necessary cloathing, by which I have disfurnish’d myself, for having brought no more than two or three Shirts from Will’s C’k that we might be light I was ill provided to furnish them.*

The English had attacked at 7:00 a.m. as the French were



preparing breakfast and many were without proper clothing.

It was then on the way to Williamsburg prison that Michel Pepin dit La Force met John Carlyle. During this escort Washington made no mention of the need to provide English interpreters for La Force. He described La Force as telling “*Smooth Stories.*” We do not know the exact circumstances under which Carlyle met La Force, nor do we have documentation as to where La Force stayed. In a letter from John Carlyle to George Carlyle dated 3 July 1754, Carlyle, noted that La Force was a King’s Commissary like him and that La Force told him some interesting information about his language abilities. (We know that La Force spoke English as John Carlyle did not speak French.)

*Also the other Colonys Yett have done Nothing his Majesty order three Independent Company from New York & Charles Town, to Aid our New Levys Who are All Arrived with us, the Virginia Regiment is got out To The Ohio, & the 28 May had an Ingagement (a party of ours of 40 men & Comd. By Coll. Washington Meet A party of French of 35 Comanded by Monr. De Jamunville & We had So much the Advantage that with the Loss of one man only We Killd 14& Took 21 prisoners among the first was the Comander & Amongt the Last was 2 Officers & 2 Cadetts one of the Officers named Laforce is A man of Great Consequence, he is My Brother Commissary of Stores for the French Army & Speaks 14 Indian Langs (as he told me himself).*

While Michel Pepin dit La Force made his way to Williamsburg prison, French forces led by Louis Coulons Ecuyer, Sieur de Villiers de Jumonville—the half-brother of Joseph Coulon de Villiers de Jumonville who was killed at Jumonville Glen—attacked George Washington and his small, ill-equipped militia at Fort Necessity. The French forces defeated Washington and his militia and



Battle at Jumonville Glen, Virtual War Museum.

offered a surrender. In signing the document of his surrender, George Washington admitted to the assassination of the Ensign Jumonville. As was the custom of the time, one side offered an officer to be prisoner for the side that surrendered. This officer would be sent to Quebec and held as a prisoner until a captured officer from the other side was released. In this case it was two men, Captain Stobo and Jacob Van Braam, a Dutchman and the translator of the French surrender document that went to Quebec in exchange for Michel Pepin dit La Force. While Stobo stayed in Fort Duquesne, he smuggled out important information including a comment about La Force: “*La Force is greatly wanted here, no scouting now, he certainly must have been an extraordinary man amongst them – he’s so regretted and wished for.*” Stobo stayed in Quebec and, while a prisoner, was brought to trial for spying because of the note he smuggled from Fort Duquesne. He had become so popular with the French women, that he was acquitted. He made an exciting escape to later finish his life in poverty in England. Van Braam was noted as being present at the surrender of Quebec. Governor Dinwiddie refused to release La Force until much later in 1760.

Michel spent a considerable amount of time in jail in Williamsburg. While in prison there, he wrote to George Washington requesting his quick release and some clothing. He then escaped, but was apprehended by a Virginia backwoodsman when he asked for directions to Fort Duquesne. He was returned to Williamsburg prison and put into leg irons and chained to the stone. Another controversy followed Michel Pepin dit La Force in 1760 when he returned to Montreal at the end of the French and Indian War. Michel was making his way to Canada with Pouchot’s party in 1759 when, near Saratoga on November 29, General Amherst “*stopd Mons La Force whom Capt Wheelock had sent until I can learn whether Mr. Van Braham may be exchanged for him.*” No exchange arrangements had been made by the time of the capitulation of Montreal, and Michel probably returned home only in the autumn of 1760. Although we do not see more references to La Force in Carlyle’s letters after the Jumonville Glen attack, it is interesting that Carlyle refers to La Force as “*my Brother Commissary.*” While this reference may merely reveal that Carlyle felt a kinship to La Force in his profession as King’s Commissary, the reference is intriguing and remains a mystery.

Learning about ancestors and their role in historic events can be exciting and frustrating at times. When two seemingly distant individuals from two separate cultures, speaking two different languages, come



together by the mere force of fate, a new twist on history and its meaning can be appreciated. While it still remains a mystery whether Michel Pepin dit La Force stayed in the Alexandria jail and where John Carlyle met and spoke with him, John Carlyle's letters can be appreciated in that they bring us closer to understanding events that occurred at the time before and after the Jumonville attack. A glimpse of the French and Indian War from the French perspective sheds new light on the role the French and Indians played in fighting against England, one of the most powerful empires at the time. The new documents were translated from the French and one only can guess how many more oral histories from families and translations of documents and letters, could describe history at this time.

#### Sources:

Melanie La Force would like to thank her brother, Norman Charles La Force, for all of his efforts in researching the La Force family lines. It was he who worked to find the notary documents needing translation from French to English and who put her in touch with Mr. Paul Truax. A true historian at heart, Norman reviewed this article and humbly answered that credit must be given to Mr. Paul Truax for his work. All efforts to properly give credit where due were made in the writing of this article. The following sources were used to put this article together:

- ◆ Alberts, C. Robert. *The Most Extraordinary Adventures of Major Robert Stobo*. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston, 1965.
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- ◆ Pouchot, Pierre. *Memoirs on the Late War in North America Between France and England*. Translated by Michael Cardy. Edited by Brian Leigh Dunnigan. Old Fort Niagara Association, Inc., Youngstown, New York, 1994.
- ◆ Truax, Paul W. *La Force Descendants In North America*. Paul W. Truax, Vermont Built, Inc., Publications, Hinesburg, Vermont, March 2001.

#### Thank You!

A special thank you is extended to Melanie La Force and her brother, Norman La Force, for sharing this insightful research with the Carlyle House. Since we

focus on the British side of the French & Indian War, it is enlightening to see a little about the French side of the war as well.

#### French & Indian War Events

2007 is the second year of the French & Indian War Commemoration. Some important events this summer:

- ◆ 18th-Century Market Fair, Fort Fredrick. April 26-29. <http://www.friendsoffortfrederick.org/>
- ◆ Fort Ticonderoga's Grand Encampment, June 30– July 1. [www.fort-ticonderoga.org](http://www.fort-ticonderoga.org)
- ◆ Old Fort Niagara Encampment, July 6-8. <https://oldfortniagara.org/>
- ◆ Battle of Bushy Run, August 4-5. <http://www.bushyrunbattlefield.com/Tours.html>

Click on any of the highlighted links for more details.

#### Library Update

Keep your eyes open for several new volumes on our library shelves:

- ◆ *Architectural Treasures of Early America*, Vols. 1, 2, 4, 8-10. National Historical Society, 1987.
- ◆ Beckerdite, Luke. *American Furniture 2006*. Chipstone Foundation, 2006.
- ◆ Del Mar, Alexander. *History of Money in America*. 1899. Omni Press, 1997.
- ◆ *The George Washington Collection: Fine and Decorative Arts at Mount Vernon*. MVLA, 2006.
- ◆ Lossing, Benson J. *George Washington's Mount Vernon*. 1870. Random House, 2001.
- ◆ Schama, Simon. *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves, and the American Revolution*. New York: Ecco, 2006.