

## Chapter 4 - Charles and Marie Set Sail from La Rochelle

**Time Span: 1749-1749**

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*(Note to the Reader: This is the first draft of a chapter that will be part of an upcoming book with a working title of **A Violette History**. The authors welcome comments, criticism, corrections, or additions to the text during its draft review period. Address comments directly using the emails above or through the feedback link at the web site for the Violette Family Association – [www.VioletteFamily.org](http://www.VioletteFamily.org).)*

Once again we find Charles and Marie and their children – Alexis (age 16) and François (age 5) – on the move, this time from La Rochelle. Son Elie had been born in Saintes in 1743 but died in 1746 while the family lived in Rochefort. Daughter Marie was born and died in Rochefort in 1747. We don't think they actually moved to La Rochelle, but it was the port from which they left France in June 1749. Charles was taking his family to settle and work in Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island in what is now Nova Scotia, and we know that the convoy going to Louisbourg embarked from La Rochelle.

### **What gave rise for the move from France to the New World?**

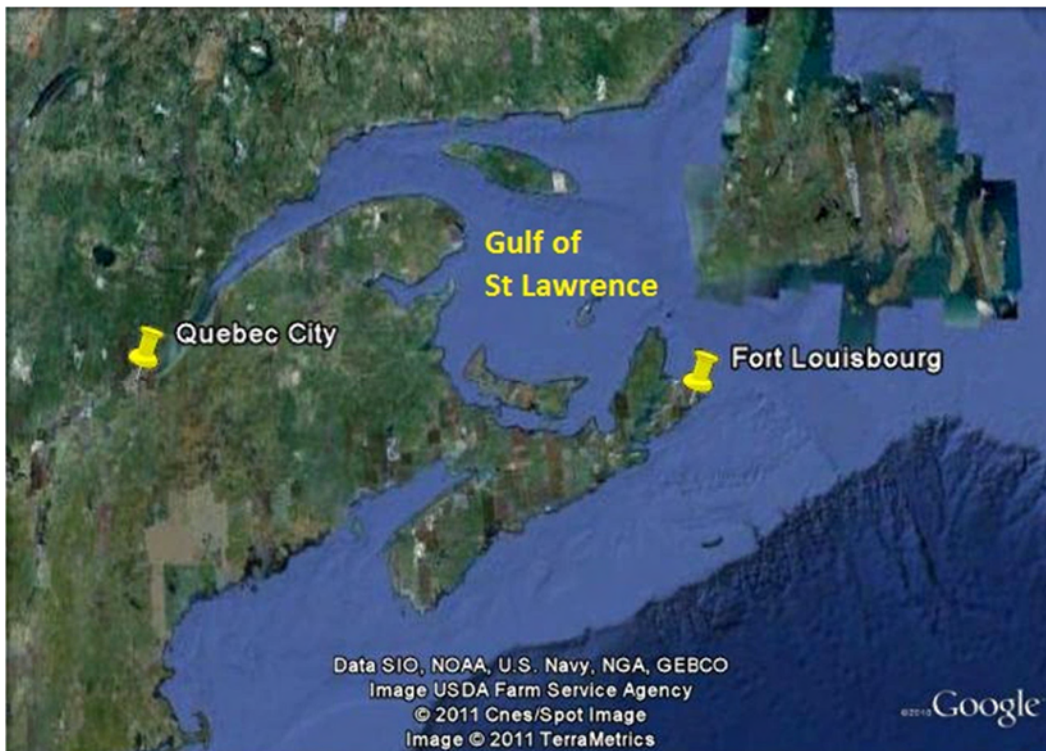
Here was a young family, married eight years, with two young boys (Elie had recently died), taking the big step to leave the country of their birth and cross the ocean to a new world. True, they would not be pioneering because Louisbourg had been developed for 36 years but it was still an outpost and without the history of commerce and development in their home area of Poitou-Charente. Poitou-Charente had had much agriculture and viticulture for many years and life there had already established its own rhythm. The paths were worn and the patterns known. Was Charles having trouble finding work as a roofer and needed to move? Certainly there was going to be a lot of roofing and other construction employment in Louisbourg because Louisbourg had just undergone a military siege and bombardment and much needed to be rebuilt. Or did Charles have an itch to travel somewhere he had never been? He had already moved from Villejésus to Saintes and then to Rochefort, and we don't know why he made those moves. But those moves were very small compared with crossing the Atlantic to a new world! Did he want to establish his own roofing business (which we know he would do in Louisbourg) but could not break into the competition in France? Or was it just the lure of the financial reward the King was offering for people to move to Louisbourg? No records have been found to give us clues to why the move, but the move was to be pivotal for those of us who came after!

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We think that it was events transpiring in North America that gave an opportunity for Charles and his family to come to the New World and an impetus to do so, rather than any situation in France.

Hostilities between France and England had been on and off in North America since 1689 with alternating periods of peace and war, and some of this played itself out in La Rochelle as well as in the New World. The city had changed hands between the French and English several times during the French Wars of Religion. During the Reformation, in 1568, La Rochelle became a center for the Huguenots and the city declared itself an Independent Reformed Republic. This led to numerous conflicts with the Catholic central government of France. After several Huguenot revolts Louis XIV in 1685 revoked the Edict of Nantes which had given the Huguenots some religious freedom. Many Huguenots emigrated, mostly to England.

Meanwhile across the ocean France had controlled the northern coast of North America since the days of Jacques Cartier in 1534. In 1710 France lost most of the territory from Newfoundland to present-day Maine in a war against England. The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 gave to France all of British North America plus all the islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, which included Cape Breton Island (Ile Royale). Cape Breton Island and Fort Louisbourg became a sentinel in the gateway of the St. Lawrence, through which passed much traffic for the interior of northern North America. Map 1 shows the relationship of Louisbourg to the whole Gulf of St. Lawrence.



**Map 1: Louisbourg Guards the Entry to the St. Lawrence River**

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All commerce for the interior of the continent passed through this opening and to protect its holdings (Québec City, for example) it was important for France to protect this entry. (Ref; Louisbourg by J.S. McLennan P.2) So, in 1713 France decided to build a significant fortress at Louisbourg.

In 1744 war again resumed between England and France and in 1745, Louisbourg fell to the English. In 1748 the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle gave Cape Breton and Louisbourg back to the French, and France then decided to strengthen the garrison and improve fortifications at Louisbourg.

This new construction is what gave Charles the opportunity to come to the New World. He and his wife Marie David and sons Alexis and François set sail from La Rochelle with the new governor, in a flotilla that included the man-of-war ships Tigre and Intrepide and the frigate Anemone. These protected a convoy of transports carrying 500 troops and civilian inhabitants that set sail on June 29, 1749 and landed at Louisbourg on July 23, 1749, a relatively quick crossing. The French king, Louis XV, encouraged people who had lived in Louisbourg before to return and he offered the sum of 150 pounds to French citizens who would emigrate to settle in Louisbourg to establish a stronger French presence. Most likely he also wanted people to raise crops and livestock locally to help support the garrison, for it was long and costly to haul provisions from France.

### ***How much was that 150-pound grant worth?***

The French pound, or livre, varied in size and value over the years but we can estimate its value during the period when Charles and Marie lived by doing some comparisons. No direct calculation is possible but we can take maybe three approaches to arriving at an estimate.

1. Since the livre had a gold basis we might use the value of gold for comparison purposes. In 1726, under Louis XV's minister Cardinal Fleury, a system of monetary stability was put in place that established, among other things, that the French Louis D'Or gold coin was worth 24 French livres (pounds). (Ref: French livre, From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia) During the reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV the weight of the Louis D'Or was set at 6.75 grams, though under Louis XVI it was increased to a weight of 7.6490 g, a fineness of 0.917, and gold content of 0.2255 troy oz. (Ref: *Louis d'or*, From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia) The percentage of gold in the d'or of Louis XIII and Louis XIV was not established, so we don't really know its gold content. But if we assume it was the same as for the d'or of Louis XVI then one Louis d'or in Charles and Marie's time probably had 0.199 troy oz. of gold. So, 150 pounds (livres) was probably worth about 6.25 Louis d'ors, with a weight of approximately 42.2 grams, or 1.24 troy ounces. At today's prices (Feb 2011) a troy ounce of gold is worth roughly \$1,400 so Charles and Marie would have been given a grant of approximately \$1,750 to move to Louisbourg.
2. Another approach is to compare the sum with what people were paid at the time. From the records of A. & S. Dufour in Madawaska from 1848 we can see that day laborer wages were 2 shillings, 6 pence per day and that river drivers (workers

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who moved logs downriver) made the same. For eight days work that would be 1 pound. By that measure, the 100 pounds would be equivalent to 800 days' labor. Recognize, of course, that the monetary units for that merchant were British pounds. In an account about some New Englanders captured and sold to the French in Quebec in 1752 the price of £200 was said to be equivalent to about \$1,540 today, so £150 would be approximately \$1,155.

3. Another comparison can be made by considering the value of Charles' property in Louisbourg a few years later. Briefly, Charles was forced to file bankruptcy in 1751 and the total value of his furniture and effects was appraised at approximately £328.84. So the £150 grant to relocate was equivalent to about one-half of the cost of setting up a household in the new country! We might assume that they were able to bring at least some of their personal belongings (but not furniture and household items) with them, though. (*More about Charles' bankruptcy in later chapters.*)

### Where is La Rochelle? What was the town like?

La Rochelle is in the same present-day Region as Rochefort, Saintes, and Villejésus - Poitou-Charente – and in the Charente-Maritime Department. Located on the coast and about 20 miles northwest of Rochefort, its location is shown in Map 2. Map 3 shows La Rochelle in Poitou-Charentes along with Rochefort, Saintes, and Villejésus. Map 4 shows an aerial view of the La Rochelle area today.

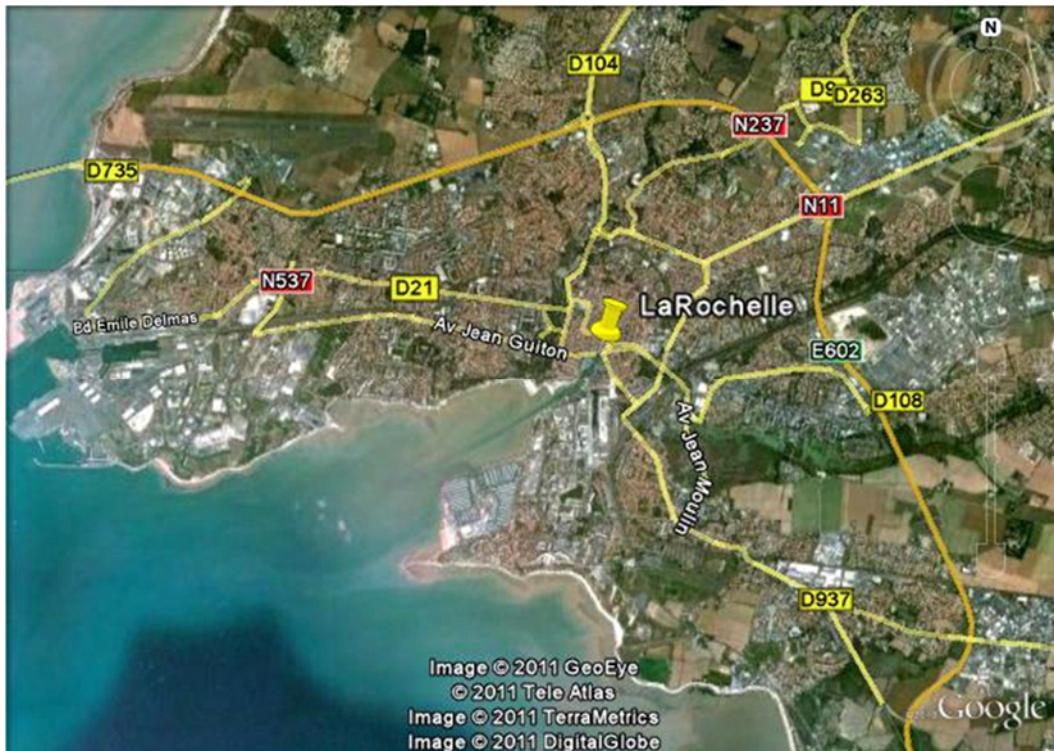


**Map 2: La Rochelle, France**

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Map 3: La Rochelle, Rochefort, Saintes, and Villejésus, Poitou-Charentes, France



Map 4: Aerial View of La Rochelle Today

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The area of La Rochelle was occupied in antiquity by Gaul tribes then by the Romans. The Romans developed salt production at La Rochelle through evaporation of sea water and exported wine production from the region throughout the Roman Empire.

La Rochelle is a seaport on the Bay of Biscay, part of the Atlantic Ocean, and the port has existed since at least the sixth century. Because La Rochelle is located more to the west than other ports it saved several days sailing for the western Atlantic and its important fishing grounds, so La Rochelle was a popular port during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, La Rochelle was an important port connecting the east Atlantic with the west Atlantic both under British rule (1154 to 1224, 1360 to 1372, 1560s to 1685) and French rule thereafter. Until the 15th century, La Rochelle was to be the largest French harbor on the Atlantic coast, dealing mainly in wine, salt, and cheese. La Rochelle became very active in triangular trade with the New World, dealing in the slave trade with Africa, sugar trade with plantations of the Antilles, and fur trade with Canada (French or British North America). (Ref: *La Rochelle*, From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

So it was from La Rochelle that the fleet assembled and embarked for the Gulf of St Lawrence in 1749, for La Rochelle had had a continued connection with the New World. See Map 5. Map 5 shows the relationship between La Rochelle and Louisbourg.



**Map 5: La Rochelle to Louisbourg**