

Kateri (Catherine) Tekakwitha
(Gah-deh-lee Deh-gah-quee-tah)¹
Her Connection to Inhabitants of *Le Détroit du Lac Érié* through
Some of the First Miracles Described as Obtained through her Intercession

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On 21 October 2012, Pope Benedict XVI will canonize as a saint in the Roman Catholic Church **Kateri**, baptized as **Catherine, Tekakwitha**, celebrated worldwide as the Flower of the Algonquins and the Lily of the Mohawks and the St. Lawrence River. From her birth in 1656 to a Catholic Algonquin mother and an Iroquois father among the Mohawk Iroquois in what is the present-day State of New York, to her death 16 April 1680 near what became Kahnawaké, Québec, Canada, her life and her faith inspired her Native American and European contemporaries and strengthened countless individuals in the generations that followed. I learned of her when I was ten years old in my first visit to her shrine at what was then called Caughnawaga (Sault-Saint-Louis), where I obtained the small plastic envelope, on the left, labeled “Terre du tombeau de Kateri Tekakwitha,” earth from the grave of Kateri Tekakwitha, and this Holy Card:

The Holy Card also has a sealed section containing earth from Kateri’s grave, marked by the circle near the base of the cross on the right side. I was told so many years ago that earth like this had been one of the instruments through which Kateri had, with God’s grace, answered the prayers of those who sought her intercession in their afflictions, both spiritual and physical. I have kept these sacramental items close to me ever since. It would be years, though, before I read the accounts of the miracles that occurred in New France just after her death as described by Kateri’s contemporaries, Fathers **Cholenec**, **Chauchetière**, and **Rémy**.² More years would pass before I realized that some of the individuals who believed Kateri had interceded with God for them have connections to the early inhabitants of Detroit because they have descendants and relatives who settled at *Le Détroit* or who, themselves, lived in the area for a while. As there is and will be much available for you to learn about the life of **Saint Kateri Tekakwitha** in the media and on the internet³ as her canonization takes place, my intent in this short article is to identify a few of those individuals. I offer it to honor her for the inspiration and courage her life has given me. Perhaps, through the names or the sources cited, you, too, can find a connection to her.



Let me say at the outset that the three priests who chronicled the miraculous events after Kateri’s death report that they were incredulous and skeptical, at first. The sheer number of unexplainable but observable phenomena following prayers to Kateri convinced them they must report what they had seen with their own eyes. The very first healing attributed to Kateri occurred in January 1681, nine months after her death. As described by Father Cholenec,⁴ **Claude Caron**, apparently on the verge of dying, was visited by Father Chauchetière.⁵ As this latter

¹ Identified as the Iroquois pronunciation of her name on the program for a Memorial of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, July 14, 2012 (her Feast Day), Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament: Archdiocese of Detroit, Detroit, Michigan.

² The main sources for Kateri’s life that were written by her contemporaries are **Père Claude Chauchetière**, S. J., *Vie de la Bienheureuse Catherine Te-gakouita dite à présent la sainte Iroquoise* (1696). **Père Pierre Cholenec**, S. J., *La vie de Catherine Tegakouita Première Vierge Iroquoise*. Manuscrit conservé par les Hospitalières de Saint Augustin à Québec. Lettre publiée dans *Lettres édifiantes*. Paris, 1717. **Père Pierre Rémy**, Sulpician, *Certificat des miracles faits en sa paroisse de Lachine par l’intercession de la B. Catherine Tegakouita*, 1696, summarized in Édouard Lecompte, *Catherine Tekakwitha: le lis des bords de la Mohawk et du St-Laurent (1656-1680)* (Montréal, Québec: Imprimerie du Messager, 1927), read at <http://www.ourroots.ca/e/>. Translations are mine.

³ See Norm Léveillé, “A Litany to my Cousin,” for his imagined account at <http://www.kateritekakwitha.org/kateri/>

⁴ Cholenec is available in French at

<http://web.archive.org/web/20110725120822/http://www.thelifeofkateritekakwitha.net/fr/pc/chapitres.html>

⁵ Chauchetière is available in French at

priest had met the claims being made about Kateri's sanctity with some doubt, he decided to use Claude Caron's wretched condition as a test of her powers, "to see with certainty whether she was as influential in Heaven as rumors suggested." He went first to her burial place⁶ to pray and then to visit Caron, who was in agony from violent pain in his upper body. Father Chauchetière let him hold the crucifix that Kateri had embraced in her arms when she died. They prayed together, and Caron promised to visit Kateri's grave if he recovered. By the next day, he was well. Previously a doctor from Montréal had visited Caron and left in desperation to get medicine to soothe what he believed to be the fatal agony Caron was experiencing; but, on his return the day after the prayers to Kateri, he was "astonished to see the sick man perfectly healed and seated next to the fireplace, eating and drinking. ... The doctor declared that he had never before seen a man cured from this illness."

Claude Caron had married **Marie Madeleine Varennes** in France before the end of 1670. The couple had ten children, among them **Marie Louise Caron**, wife of **Jean Baptiste Tessier dit Lavigne**, whose daughter **Marie Louise Tessier dite Lavigne** married **Paul Dumouchel**. Their son **Paul Dumouchel** married **Jeanne Chapoton** on 26 January 1726 at Ste. Anne du Détroit. Another child of Claude Caron, **Louis Caron**, married **Marie Louise Leclerc**. Their son **Louis Vital Caron** wed **Marie Madeleine Goyau dite Lagarde** 22 November 1773 at *L'Assomption* (Windsor). Yet another son of Claude Caron, **Vital Caron**, who voyaged to Fort Pontchartrain in 1707, married **Marie Perthuis dite LaJanvry**. Their son **Vital Caron** married **Madeleine Pruneau** 20 July 1735 at Ste. Anne du Détroit. And daughter **Jeanne Caron** married **Pierre Meloche**. Jeanne Caron's daughter **Catherine Meloche** united with **Jean Baptiste Sappé dit Pouligni** 21 August 1752 at Ste. Anne du Détroit.⁷

Another miracle attributed to Kateri, called **Catherine** in this and the following accounts, and again reported by Father Cholenec, deserves to be quoted at length:



When **René Cuellèrier [Cuillerier]** lived near the mission at **Lachine**, he heard tell about Catherine and the miracles she wrought while he was at **La Prairie** for his work. He was the first to introduce devotion to Catherine at Lachine [Father Rémy's parish]. Later, his wife, **Marie Luco [Lucos]**, who was suffering enormously while giving birth, appealed to Catherine, promising to go to thank her at her grave if the birth was accomplished without further harm. This woman fell into a calm sleep during which she delivered her child without trouble and she woke to the cries of the child she had just brought into the world.... Some time later, they went to thank Catherine because she had heard their prayers. This event brought Catherine to the attention of the mission at Lachine because she had touched many persons with healings so astonishing that she began to be known under the name of "la Bonne Catherine," [Good Catherine] as good people always called her.

René Cuillerier and **Marie Lucos** had sixteen children, nine of whom married. The baby born after prayers to Catherine is not precisely identified but could have been **Lambert Cuillerier** in 1682, who was in the original convoy to found Detroit in 1701 and who was also healed through prayers to Catherine when he was two years old.⁸ Marie Lucos's son **Jean Cuillerier** married **Marie Catherine Trottier dite DesRuisseaux**, and their son **Jean Baptiste Cuillerier dit Beaubien** wed **Marie Anne Lotman dite Barrois** 26 January 1742 at Ste. Anne du Détroit. Another of Marie Lucos's sons, **Antoine Cuillerier**, married **Marie Angélique Girard** in 1722; and their daughter **Josèphe** wed **Thomas Claude Gouin** 3 January 1742 at Ste. Anne du Détroit. Yet another daughter of Antoine

<http://web.archive.org/web/20110725121614/http://www.thelifeofkateritekakwitha.net/fr/cc/chapitres.htm>

⁶ According to articles at <http://tekakwitha.info/>, "Her burial place in the cemetery from Thursday April 18, 1680 to 1684 is [marked] across from the Church of Sainte Catherine d'Alexandrie at 5365 Marie-Victorin, Ville Sainte-Catherine (Québec)." "In 1684, Catherine Tekakwitha was removed from the cemetery, where a little monument had been placed to her a year before, and brought into the church. The transfer was accomplished during the night and was in the presence of the most devout persons. She was the first in the Americas to be given this honour." The map shows Montréal and vicinity in 1919 with Caughnawaga and La Prairie south of Montréal and Lachine.

⁷ Details about the individuals cited are from PRDH certificates at www.genealogy.umontreal.ca. Names are standardized per Jetté. All connections cannot possibly be identified in this brief article.

⁸ See 1701 plaque on FCHSM website. From an English translation of Father Rémy's 30 March 1696 letter, see <http://tekakwitha.info/>. This site also has English translations of Chauchetière and Cholenec.

Cuillerier, **Marie Anne Cuillerier**, also married at Ste. Anne du Détroit, to **Pierre Chesne dit Labutte** 6 February 1750. Marie Lucos's daughter **Catherine Cuillerier** married **Joseph Leduc** in 1687 and their grandson **François Leduc dit Persil** (Joseph Leduc and Marie Andrée Anne Hurtubise) married **Marie Angélique Fauvel dite Bigras** (Jacques Fauvel dit Bigras and Marie Angélique Clement dite Larivière and Chambly) 3 February 1754 at Ste. Anne du Détroit. François Leduc dit Persil was the first *bedeau*, sexton or verger, for the church of Ste. Anne du Détroit built in 1755, serving Father Simple Bocquet for many years, as cited in several religious acts in the registers of Ste. Anne du Détroit.

Others whose relatives have ties with Detroit include **Marie Cécire**, daughter of **Claude Cécire** and **Marie Léger**, born in 1678, who, at the age of 18 (her age is given in the source), in late June of 1695, was laboring painfully to give birth to her first child by husband **François Roy** (Jean and Françoise Bouet). She sent word to Father Rémy at Lachine to have a Mass said. He agreed; but at the same time he asked her to wear a reliquary, a small container for sacred relics, filled with earth from the burial place of Catherine and ashes from her clothing that he had burnt. These were physical substances connected with her that he used often, sometimes asking the supplicant to drink them dissolved in water. When Marie Cécire put the reliquary around her neck and invoked Catherine, her pain disappeared. Six days later, again "sick to death," she was advised to say a novena to Catherine and, on each day of the nine days of prayer, to drink water containing the two substances. This cured her.⁹ The church registers at Lachine record the baptism of her first child, **Marie Françoise Roy**, 8 July 1695. She would grow up to marry **Guillaume Parent** in Lachine in 1720. Her brother **Jean Cécire** and his wife, **Marguerite Charlotte Girard**, had three children who married in Detroit: **Julie Cécire** to **Charles Nicolas Rimbault** 10 February 1751; **Marie Anne Cécire** to **Pierre Sarrazin dit Dépeltau** 21 May 1750; and **Joseph Cécire** to **Marie Irène Trottier** 9 April 1771.

Even more families with ties to Detroit gave thanks for what they truly believed was the intercession of Catherine in their needs, including, in the Cardinal family in 1693, **Michelle Garnier**, wife of **Simon Cardinal**, who as "a woman of sixty-four years old, when attacked with a fever that reduced her to the last extremity" in 1693 became healthy again.¹⁰ Her son, Jacques, was buried in the church of Ste. Anne du Détroit 18 May 1724. Michelle Garnier is the grandmother of **Jacques Cardinal** who married **Jeanne Duguay** in 1682. Jacques was buried inside the church of Ste. Anne du Détroit, about 77 years old, 21 September 1763. Jeanne Duguay's daughter **Jeanne Cardinal** married at Ste. Anne du Détroit to **Laurent Parent** 27 July 1734, and she was buried 3 November 1780 at L'Assomption de la Pointe de Montréal. Her daughter **Marie Jeanne Parent** on 8 September 1755 at Ste. Anne du Détroit married **François Gaudet [Godé dit Marentette]**. Jeanne Duguay's son **Jean Baptiste Cardinal** wed **Marie Anne Mallet** at Detroit in 1755; and son **Nicolas Joseph Cardinal** united with **Marie Josèphe Girard** 1 January 1761 at **Fort Vincennes** but was buried at Vincennes 24 August 1789.¹¹ Daughter **Barbe Elisabeth Cardinal** married **Claude Dudevoir dit Lachine** in 1719 in Montréal and lived for awhile at Detroit; their daughter **Barb Dudevoir dite Lachine** married **François Roy** (Pierre and Marguerite OuabanKiKoué) at an unknown location and daughter **Marie Josèphe Dudevoir** united with **Laurent Eustache Gamelin dit Châteaueux** before 23 July 1741, also at an unknown location, although Eustache Gamelin died at Detroit 7 March 1771.¹² Miracles were also recorded for members of the family of Jacques Cardinal's brother, **Pierre Cardinal** (Simon and Michelle Garnier) and **Marie Matou** (Philippe and Marguerite Doucinet),¹³ as well as the family of **Madeleine Bourgerie**, born 1652, who married **Jean Beaune** in 1667:

In 1684, Madeleine Bougerie [Bourgerie], a woman then thirty-two years old, suffered from a loss or flow of blood for several months and without finding any relief. Her neighbour, named **Michelle Perrin**, advised her to have recourse to Catherine Tekakwitha. Accordingly she promised to have a mass said through her intercession at the church of **Saint Francis Xavier** at the Sault, where Catherine's body lies [in 1684]. During that time she was relieved and finally was entirely cured of the flow of blood. Afterwards she fulfilled her vow.¹⁴

⁹ From Father Rémy's 1696 letters, as summarized in Lecompte, 267.

¹⁰ From an English translation of Father Rémy's 12 March 1696 letter, see <http://tekakwitha.info/>

¹¹ His brother, Joseph Cardinal, who never married, was buried in Detroit 12 June 1789; they are two distinct brothers, as Gail Moreau-DesHarnais has demonstrated. See footnote 24, *MHH*, April 2011, 32.

¹² See Gail Moreau-DesHarnais's series of articles "People Buried from Ste. Anne de Detroit" in *MHH*, 2010-2100, for burials cited in this paragraph.

¹³ From an English translation of Father 24 March 1696 letter, see <http://tekakwitha.info/>

¹⁴ From an English translation of Father 12 March 1696 letter, see <http://tekakwitha.info/>

Daughter **Marie Anne Beaune**, wife of **Francois Lory** in 1698, after she had been widowed, was hired 18 April 1707, for three years at 80 *livres* a year, to be a servant of Cadillac at Fort Pontchartrain;¹⁵ she remarried 12 June 1710 to **Martin Cirier** at the fort. Father Rémy also reported miraculous phenomena in the family of **Francois Brunet dit Bourbonnais** and **Barbe Beauvais**.

In 1688, **Barbe Brunet [Francois Brunet dit Bourbonnais & Barbe Beauvais]**, aged thirteen [born 1675 in Montréal], had been ill for two months of the tertian fever, which had gone into the double tertian. No remedy was found to reduce the fever, which had emaciated her until she was like a skeleton. Thus unable either to stand up [or], take remedies and food, she was ready to die, and was given up by the doctor. Then she was told to have recourse to Catherine Tekakwitha. In fact she promised to have a novena made at the tomb and to go there to offer her devotions. Two days later she began to feel better, her fever left her and she recovered her health.¹⁶

Barbe Brunet married **Georges Brault dit Pomainville** in 1696. He was in two early convoys to Detroit. Her brother, François Brunet, served in an early convoy to Detroit and later to Michilimackinac. Barbe Brunet remarried to **Martial Dumoulineuf** in 1716. Her second husband may have been one of the soldiers who took the message to Governor Vaudreuil that the Ottawa at Fort Pontchartrain had attacked the Miami in June of 1706.¹⁷ Barbe Brunet's brother **Jean Brunet** and **Élisabeth Deshayes dite Didier** married in **Kaskaskia** and two of their daughters were married there, **Cecile Brunet** to **Toussaint Loisel** in 1724 and **Elisabeth Brunet** in 1723 to **Charles Delaunay**.

Father Rémy described many additional events he witnessed that were considered replies to prayers to Kateri:

In 1683, in the month of April, **Madeleine Moisan [Moison]**, daughter of **Nicolas & Jeanne Vallée**, and wife of **Charles Ptolomée** in 1677], a woman of twenty years old, went astray in the forest. After having walked for half a day through the forests, savannas, marshes without recognizing what part of the island she was in, she heard the sound of the falls of Saint Louis in the distance, and recalling several miracles that she had heard were granted by God through the intercession of Catherine Tekakwitha, whose body was buried on the shore of a little river,¹⁸ she made a vow and promised to have a mass said. A little while later she found herself in an open place opposite Sault Saint Louis, two leagues from the place where she had gone astray. The next day she fulfilled her vow by having the mass said, which she had promised the day before.

In 1693, this same woman was nursing her baby when she developed a trouble in her left breast that prevented her from nursing her child. Remembering that three years before she had been afflicted in the same way and that the surgeons had treated her at the hospital for three months, she could not decide to put herself in the hands of the surgeons again. She came to tell me of her affliction. I advised her to commend herself to Catherine Tekakwitha and to say the Our Father in her honour nine times a day for nine days. At the end of the novena she found herself perfectly cured without having taken neither any remedy nor placing anything on her breast.¹⁹

Madeleine Moisan remarried to **Louis Fortier**. About August 1695, their son **Louis Fortier**, age thirteen, suffered from a mortal illness that medicine and the doctors in Montréal could not cure. Once Catherine was called upon, he became better, and Father Rémy reported in 1696, "Since then he has been well."²⁰ In addition, Father Rémy wrote to Father Cholenec: "In 1696, last February, the eldest daughter of [this same woman, Madeleine Moisan], **Angélique Colmé [Ptolomée]**, aged seventeen [born 1679], had a sort of cancer of her mouth and came to ask me for a

¹⁵ Photocopy of the hiring contract. The Cirier couple left Detroit after their marriage.

¹⁶ From an English translation of Father Rémy's 24 March 1696 letter, see <http://tekakwitha.info/>

¹⁷ See my article in "The Other Women and Early Detroit, Part 2," *MHH*, Vol. 23, #1 (January 2002), 23-28.

¹⁸ According to articles at <http://tekakwitha.info/>, the Mission Saint François-Xavier du Sault (Sault Saint-Louis) moved several times. In 1696, it relocated to Kanatakwenké (near the rapids, to the mouth of the Suzanne River). In 1716, it moved to Kahnawaké (on the rapids). "Father Pierre Cholenec, who was one of [Kateri's] confessors, was the Superior of the mission when it moved to Kahnawake in 1716." Kateri's relics accompanied each relocation.

¹⁹ From an English translation of Father Rémy's 24 March 1696 letter, see <http://tekakwitha.info/>

²⁰ From an English translation of Father Rémy's 24 March 1696 letter, see <http://tekakwitha.info/>

remedy.”²¹ She was healed. She did not die until 1744, buried in the cemetery of Ste. Anne du Détroit as “Angélique Dalomée *veuve de* [widow] Robert, about 65 years [no date remains, but the next act is 7 June 1744].”²² **Angélique Ptolomée** and **Pierre Robert**, whom she married in 1698, not only have many descendants and relatives; they resided and had children at Fort Pontchartrain, including daughter **Marie Louise Robert dite Fontaine**, who married at Detroit **François Pelletier dit Antaya** 27 March 1718. Daughter **Marie Madeleine Pelletier dite Antaya** on 1 February 1728 united with **Joseph Marcheteau dit Desnoyers**. Marie Louise Robert’s daughter **Marie Angelique Pelletier** also married at Detroit to **Antoine Campeau** on 4 January 1736; their Campeau children married there: **Catherine Campeau** to **Jean Baptiste Couture** 25 October 1762 and **Therese Campeau** to **Ambroise Riopel** on 24 November 1766. **Marie Angelique Pelletier dite Antaya** remarried to **Étienne Benoît dit Livernois** 24 January 1760 at Ste. Anne du Détroit. Marie Louise Robert *dite* Fontaine also married again, to **Louis Campeau** 7 January 1725 at Ste. Anne du Détroit; their Campeau children were joined in matrimony there: **Marie Therese Campeau** to **Charles André Barthe**; **Jacques Campeau** to **Marie Catherine Ménard**; and **Simon Campeau** to **Catherine Veronique Bourdeau**. Though space does not permit naming all of them, people without a specific connection to Detroit who are named in the sources also received special favors by petitioning Kateri / Catherine or may have known her.²³ I encourage you to check for yourself.

Other individuals who later lived at Fort Pontchartrain were also healed through the intercession of Kateri. Father Cholenec reports that while **François Legantier sieur de Rané**, husband of **Barb Loisel**, was commandant at the fort at Lachine in December 1695, *sieur de Rané* jumped into the river to retrieve a boat that had come loose. The icy water provoked serious intestinal pain and vomiting. Father Rémy administered Extreme Unction (Last Rites) but also counseled him to appeal to Catherine and to promise to have a Mass said at the mission where she had been buried and to recite a novena. A doctor having arrived by this time, Father Rémy gave him some of the earth and ashes to be mixed into the medicine he had brought to be taken each day of the novena. At the end of the nine days, *Sieur Rané* was healed. Both he and Madame Rané then visited Catherine’s tomb, as they had promised, taking with them all of their parishioners to give glory to “la Bonne Catherine.”²⁴ *Sieur de Rané* was buried at Detroit in 1710.

Early in 1695, in February, everyone thought that **Marie Anne Picoté de Belestre**, Madame Tonty, wife of Alphonse Tonty, was on the verge of death in Montréal. She later traveled to Fort Pontchartrain in 1701 with Madame Cadillac. Father Cholenec describes the experience of her healing and its aftermath:

Father Chauchetière was sent for to hear her confession and to ask her to take a little of the earth from the grave of Catherine. She was cured suddenly in the presence of Father François Dollier de Casson, who was the superior of the priests of the Séminaire de Saint Sulpice [at Montréal] and also the *Grand Vicaire* of Bishop Saint-Vallier. Father Chauchetière said that this healing resulted in the universal wish of all people [who knew about Catherine] to be permitted to honor this Native American as a saint.

On 21 October 2012, 317 years later, the wish of the inhabitants of New France, European and Native American alike, will be formally granted.²⁵ British dramatist George Bernard Shaw, in his play *St. Joan*, has an archbishop proclaim: “A miracle is an event which creates faith. That is the purpose and nature of miracles. Frauds deceive. An event which creates faith does not deceive; therefore it is not a fraud, but a miracle.” The life of **Saint Kateri Tekakwitha** inspired and continues to inspire not only faith but also courage and hope, and it can be considered a miracle in itself.

²¹ From an English translation of Father Rémy’s 12 March 1696 letter, see <http://tekakwitha.info/>

²² As cited by Gail Moreau-DesHarnais, “People Buried from Ste. Anne de Detroit,” *MHH*, Vol. 31, #2, April 2010.

²³ Kateri’s mother was baptized at Trois-Rivières among the Algonquin led by Charles Pachirini sometime before Kateri’s birth in 1656. My Algonquin ancestress Marie Mité8ameg8k8é married Pierre Couc *dit* Lafleur de Cognac at Trois-Rivières in 1657 with Charles Pachirini acting as one of the witnesses. I like to think Kateri’s Algonquin mother knew Marie and Pierre, even if it is impossible to establish any kinship with certainty.

²⁴ Lecompte, 270-71.

²⁵ For a modern miracle attributed to Kateri, see “A Boy, An Injury, A Recovery, A Miracle?” by Barbara Bradley Hagerty, April 22, 2011, at <http://www.npr.org/2011/04/22/135121360/a-boy-an-injury-a-recovery-a-miracle>



Painting of Kateri Tekakwitha by Father Chauchetière, *circa* 1682-1693, public domain. See <http://tekakwitha.info/articles/portrait-of-catherine.php> for a discussion of the evolution of the painting and interpretation of the details in the painting