

Serendipitous DNA Discovery Uncovers Rusty Petitjean's Hidden Native Ancestry
 By Marie Rundquist with Deadra Doucet Bourke, Administrators
 Acadian Amerindian Ancestry DNA Project
 November 1, 2020

“...when Rusty’s mtDNA test results came back I was absolutely stunned ...”

Pais des Illinois (Illinois Country) in 1717 French map

Indian Princess
 She was the daughter of Captain Jean Francois Tisserant de Moncharvaux, Chevalier of St. Louis and Captain of Marines, Commandant at the poste of Arkansas. De Moncharvaux first married in Quebec, June 3, 1721, Marie Therese L'Archeveque and had four children. His second wife, Marie Agnes du Chassin, he wed at the Fort of Kaskaskia in 1737. Elizabeth, Marie Anne (wife of Dr. Francois Robin of the Opelousas poste), and Pierre Julien were the children of this second marriage. Marie Agnes du Chassin was the granddaughter of Michel Philippe and Marie Rouensa, an Indian princess (b.1677 - d. June 25, 1725), daughter of Rouensa, Chief of the Kaskaskias. Captain de Vidrine and his family lived in the "Grand Prairie of Opelousas" in the "Quartier dit Baton Rouge" — many of the old



“Serendipitous Newspaper Clipping”

Fr. Jason Vidrine

“Rusty” Petitjean

If the Acadian Amerindian Ancestry DNA project were to have one, single, underlying characteristic to which we owe our most spectacular and unexpected DNA discoveries, it would have to be “serendipity.” The Merriam Webster Online Dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com) defines serendipity as “the faculty or phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for.” “Serendipity” perfectly describes how Rusty Petitjean discovered his earliest Native ancestry only after his mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) test results came in. Elmo E. “Rusty” Petitjean was born to Elmo E. Petitjean and Melba Marie Breaux in 1959 and was raised in Rayne, Louisiana. Rusty received a Degree in Pharmacy from Northeast Louisiana University (Now ULM), and later a Master in Business Administration from University of Phoenix. In addition to numerous hobbies and activities, genealogy takes up a large percentage of his time.

Deadra Doucet Bourke, co-administrator of the Acadian Amerindian Ancestry DNA project explained how Rusty’s serendipitous DNA discovery came about:

“I was talking to a group of Sonnier men encouraging them to join us in our project’s Y chromosome DNA haplogroup study. We were looking for a split in the Sonnier / Dugas lineage that we believe may have happened a few generations ago in Louisiana and are seeking Sonnier men to help us with our research.”

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"Rusty Petitjean introduced himself to the group as the grandson of Sophie Sonnier Petitjean and asked if his DNA results would help us.

"I responded, "Every test helps us.

"At the time Rusty asked about DNA testing, I had no idea who his ancestors were other than through his grandmother Sophie. So, when Rusty's mtDNA test results came back I was absolutely stunned to learn he belonged to a Native mtDNA haplogroup C4c1.

"I asked Rusty if he knew of his Native ancestry (through his mother's line) before testing.

"Rusty, who was as shocked as I was, said he had no idea!"

While Deadra was able to explain to Rusty how his C4c1 mtDNA test results pointed to an earliest Native American grandmother ancestry¹, she had yet to formulate a theory that explained how his Native family line had come to be. Rusty had shared his genealogical research, but true to her own, personal methodology, Deadra chose to trace Rusty's matrilineal ancestry, from mother-to-mother, independently. This way, she could identify and document each matrilineal (mother-line) ancestor without bias.

Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) is transmitted unchanged from a mother to her children, having been passed down, from mother-to-mother over many generations, from her earliest, documented matrilineal ancestor. Those who have the same matrilineal grandmother, traced from mother-to-mother, belong to the same mtDNA haplogroup. Because of its "staying power," with mtDNA passing from one generation to the next unchanged, mtDNA is an excellent tool for genealogists who wish to trace and verify a matrilineal line to an earliest grandmother – going back to the 17th century, for example. MtDNA is also a strict taskmistress: for if the mtDNA test results of one descendant of a particular grandmother are to be considered reliable, the mtDNA test results of all matrilineal descendants of that grandmother must match – exactly!

From experience with genetic genealogy projects, Deadra knew her work would be examined with a fine-toothed comb as others sought to prove, or disprove, their own connections to Rusty Petitjean's Native line. Deadra knew that she would need to document her research carefully, sourcing marriage, birth, and death records stored in parish registers, county courthouses, and online databases. Only after Deadra had traced Rusty's matrilineal ancestry back to the 1700s, did Deadra consider Rusty's family research, and shares her observations:

"Rusty did a fantastic job of documenting his lines and I found exactly what he had set forth in his ancestry. His genealogy stopped with Marie Agnes duChassin, daughter of Nicolas Michel duChassin & Agnes Etienne dite Philippe. I queried local newspapers and came across an article about the Vidrine family. The author of the article, Rev. Fr. Jason Vidrine, stated the Vidrines were descendants of Marie "Ouacanteous" Rouensa -- Rusty's probable ancestor - who was the daughter of Chief Francois-Xavier "Mamenthouensa" Rouensa.

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“Fr. Jason Vidrine is a native of Ville Platte, LA and Priest of the Diocese of Lafayette, LA. He has researched the history of the Vidrine Family for nearly twenty years and traveled numerous times to the places of origin of the Védrines Family in France and the former Louisiana Territory, working especially to develop the Family Tree of all who descend from Jean Baptiste Lapaise de Védrines and Elisabeth de Moncharvaux. He published the book La Famille de Vidrine at 275 Years in 2019. He has also created the www.vidrinefamily.com website and La Famille de Vidrine Facebook group, as well as organized the Vidrine Family Reunion held each Fall along with relatives who generously volunteer to assist.

“Fr. Vidrine relied upon the work of Jesuit Fr. Jacques Gravier for descriptions of Marie Rouensa’s historic life among the Illini Indians where she served as an instructor, an interpreter, a gifted story-teller, an advisor, and a spiritual counselor for her family and community – as missionaries, fur-traders, and settlers came into Illinois. Married twice, Marie Rouensa’s life as an early Catholic convert was not without drama, and she is famous for having defied her father in refusing (initially) her first marriage to Michael Accault, a “coureur de bois,” a French term used to describe a fur-trader who worked independently, without official permits and licenses. Marie Rouensa later came to accept the marriage and then, after her first husband passed, she remarried, this time to another French trader, Michael Philippe.

“My heart pounded in my chest. If our research proved correct, the self-same “Marie “Ouacanteous” Rouensa was Rusty’s earliest Native grandmother! Marie Rouensa was a revered historical figure of her time -- an icon! Hardly able to contain my excitement, I forwarded Fr. Vidrine’s article to Rusty. I felt compelled to gather all the family history I could find about Chief Rouensa. To add to all I learned from reading Fr. Vidrine’s research, I searched online newspapers for mention of Chief Rouensa family lines. According to several reports, quite a few of Avoyelles Parish, Pointe Coupee Parish and St. Landry Parish descendants come from this line. Due to the extensive research that exists about the life, history, and genealogy of Marie Rouensa, I feel we have the groundwork necessary to add any new lines that may show up through either the genealogical record or mtDNA testing.”

Important to Rusty’s mtDNA discovery, and his Native lineage, is his matrilineal ancestry, traced from mother-to-mother:

1. Elmo Emile "Rusty" Petitjean, Jr.
2. Melba (C4c1) Breau/Elmo Emile Petitjean, Sr.
3. Amenthe (C4c1) Schexnayder/Dieu Donne Breau
4. Justine Amelie (C4c1) Dekerlegand/Benjamin Michel Schexnayder
5. Justine (C4c1) Robin/Louis Alcide Dekerlegand
6. Eleonore (C4c1) Stelly/Francois Napoleon Robin
7. Francoise Josephine (C4c1) Robin/Michel Baptiste Stelly
8. Marianne (C4c1) deMonchervau/Dr. Francois Robin (he had 3 wives)
9. Marie Agnes (C4c1) duChassin/Captain Francois Tiserant deMonchervau
10. Agnes (C4c1) Etienne dite Philippe/Nicolas Michel duChassin (Four (C4c1) daughters born to this union) Agnes in a second union with Surgeon Rene

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11. Roy of Quebec had at least one daughter Elizabeth (C4c1) Roy, who is responsible for the Gauthier line descending from C4c1.
12. Marie (C4c1) "Ouacanteous" Rouensa/Captain Michel Etienne dit Phillipe.
13. "Marie (C4c1) Rouensa was married twice. 1st marriage was with a well-known French fur trader named Michel or Michael Aco/Accault, two sons were born from this union. In her second marriage with Michel Etienne Phillipe, eight children were born with at least 3 females.
14. Marie Jeanne (C4c1) Kaskaskia Native/Chief Francois-Xavier "Mamenthouensa" Rouensa.

References:

- (1) SWLR up to 1750,
- (2) Dioceses of BR Records,
- (3) Diocese of N.O. Records,
- (5) Newspaper article,
- (6) Rusty Petitjean's family pedigree,
- (7) "Certain Surprises in Research about Vidrine Family History" by Rev. Fr. Jason Vidrine
<http://vidrinefamily.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Surprises-in-Research-about-Vidrine-Family-History.pdf>
- (8) "Kaskaskia under the French regime" by Belting, Natalia Maree, 1915-
<https://archive.org/details/kaskaskiaunderfr00belt>
- (9) Descendants of Francois Xavier Mementouensa "Chief Rouensa."
Published 2004 by Harry James Moreau in [Baton Rouge?]
- (10) <http://louisianalineage.com/Rouensa.htm>
- (11) <https://randolphsociety.org/2020/02/21/marie-rouensa-inducted-into-the-randolph-society/>
- (12) Quebec, Canada, Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1695-1954 for Marie Rouensa burial

To date, Rusty Petitjean is the only documented matrilineal descendant of Marie Rouensa who has had an mtDNA test and achieved the C4c1 mtDNA test result. The C4c1 mtDNA haplogroup is also found among the Chippewa (Ojibwe), the Sioux and other tribal communities in the United States and Canada. Through Rusty Petitjean's C4c1 mtDNA haplogroup finding, referenced here: <https://www.familytreedna.com/public/AcadianAmerIndian?iframe=mtresults> Marie Rouensa's Native line, originally out of Quebec, adds to Louisiana's diverse heritage.

The Acadian Amerindian Ancestry DNA Project invites matrilineal descendants of Marie Rouensa, traced from mother-to-mother from Marie to the present generation, to have a full mitochondrial sequence DNA test with the Acadian Amerindian Ancestry DNA project. Please visit the Acadian Amerindian Ancestry DNA Project for more information: <https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/acadian-amerindian/about/background>

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ⁱ Hooshar Kashani B, Perego UA, Olivieri A, Angerhofer N, Gandini F, Carossa V, Lancioni H, Semino O, Woodward SR, Achilli A, Torroni A. Mitochondrial haplogroup C4c: a rare lineage entering America through the ice-free corridor? *Am J Phys Anthropol.* 2012 Jan;147(1):35-9. doi: 10.1002/ajpa.21614. Epub 2011 Oct 24. PMID: 22024980.