

LES FILLES *du Roi*

The King's Daughters

1667, the birth of a new civilization along the St. Lawrence, seen through the eyes of one of hundreds of women sent to populate the eastern land of North America, one of the so-called Filles du Roi, a King's Daughter, Marguerite Cardillon.

Most French-Canadians are descendent from 800 of these women sent to what is now Québec, Trois-Rivières, Montréal, Hudson's Bay, Nova Scotia, areas of Newfoundland and south to Louisiana. Housewifery isn't often considered a job of hard labour, but the lives of many of les filles du roi were very difficult. Wives were often pregnant from their early twenties well in to their forties, some giving birth to a dozen children, suffering emotional and physical stress with miscarriages, infant death and the chance of dying themselves during labour.

They were called daughters as King Louis XIV provided the women with passage, a dowry upon marriage and a trousseau containing some clothes, a comb and sewing supplies – cloth, needles, scissors. And a knife.

The women were selected in France and then given the choice to participate in the scheme. If they agreed they were afforded the unique option of choosing who they married when they arrived in New France. A novel concept as most marriages were arranged at the time. Although, is it considered lucky to have a choice between two uncertain fates?

Once les filles du roi arrived at the mainland the ship that carried the women made stops along the St. Lawrence at outposts, ending their voyage in Montréal. Where to depart though? How to know if there were kinder, better men and prospects further along? Most of the women were married within half a year of landing.

But before les filles du roi were chosen, before they went on their journey, before they became wives and mothers, first the women were individuals with histories of their own. In their homeland these women were subject to harsh circumstances where compassion and access to the privileges of wealthier people was rare. Becoming an explorer of sorts was perhaps the best or worst thing that may happen to them.

Cast of Characters

Protagonist

Marguerite Cardillon

Fallen from a well-to-do family in the north east of France. Orphaned at aged nine when she lost her mother Françoise, a midwife, to the heinous accusation of being a werewolf, boiled alive and flayed. Marguerite's father never remarried and slid into depression. He soon lost all of their wealth through a string of horrible and dubious businesses. Marguerite was sold away into child marriage at the age of 14 but when that man was killed in a misguided duel she wasn't left with much. She was fortunate to have benefactors in the old friends of her father's. For a time they helped her find work, learn to read from a wealth of books on all manner of topics, write and think for herself.

She spent a decade working as a lady's companion to the wife of a patron of publishing. This connection afforded Marguerite the chance to become published under a pseudonym. But this providential life soon ended when her old friends died during an epidemic. Then during a family autumn stay in Paris her employer discovered that one of her sons has fallen in love with Marguerite and had Marguerite thrown into the Salpêtrière, a sanatorium for destitute women in Paris. When Marguerite saw no alternative she took the chance to start a new life in an unknown land.

Love Interests

Tumas

A log driver, a strapping man who says he'll be gone a lot. He's built a log home on cleared land and teaches Marguerite how to use a musket for protection. When work calls, Tumas is gone for stretches at a time. He recommends she live in the settlement fort when he's away, something he kindly arranges and pays for. He dies on the job while Marguerite's pregnant with their first child.

Sanson

A physician who Marguerite chooses because he does not say very much of babies or homesteads. He is quiet, measured and interested in new studies. He encourages her radical views of what it can mean to be a woman. The two meet in Montréal and wed according to his Protestant faith.

Allies

Snipe

A Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) woman who is trying to get one of her daughters back from the Catholic school run by Marie de L'Incarnation. Snipe is married to a French man. They have three daughters and a son, all métis. Snipe and Marguerite form an bond as they work together as indispensable 'go-betweens', negotiating compromises and trade for a variety of people aiding communication between their respective cultures. The youngest daughter of Snipe goes on to become Madame Montour a métis diplomat and translator.

Isabelle Aubert

A 16-year-old les filles du roi who Marguerite first met at the Salpêtrière. The two became friends there after they discovered they're originally from the same part of France. The small but familiar bond gave them comfort in such a cold, sordid place. Marguerite feels a sense of duty to this young girl and wishes to protect her. Isabelle sticks with Marguerite and becomes her pseudo little sister and nanny to the child born from Tumas. Once in Montréal, Isabelle becomes a student of Marie de L'Incarnation and struggles with some of her teachings, finding that they clash with things she has been taught by Marguerite.

Antagonists

Marie de L'Incarnation

An Ursuline nun of the French order who is crucial for spreading Catholicism across New France. Earlier in life she was named Marie Guyart and was married, but now she is the founder of the religious order of the Ursulines in Canada. She is a mystic and a writer. Marie de L'Incarnation sets up the Notre Dame congregation in Montréal and claims there is sorcery and witchcraft afoot in the new world. She establishes a school for French and Indigenous girls, some say the first school for girls in the Americas, where she attempts to convert her Indigenous pupils to Catholicism and require they speak French and dress in the French style - another way of saying she wanted to strip them of their

own culture. She hand-picked two dozen filles du roi from the Salpêtrière as potential filles, including Marguerite. She writes of sorcery, bad happenings occurring with the arrival of new colonists by ship, she hears disturbing voices in the air and sees a fiery canoe in the sky. She claims an earthquake that occurred during her first year in New France was a bad omen that explains the deadly epidemics that sweep through the land.

Ferrant Toussaint

When Marguerite's father reneged on a business deal with Ferrant during Marguerite's childhood, Ferrant reacted very, very poorly to say the least. To get back at Marguerite's father he accused Marguerite's mother of being a werewolf. He doubled down when given the option to retract his accusation. Instead he recommended to local clergy, who he had his own business dealings with, that she be tried and if found guilty, killed. Many years later he has become a very successful businessman in New France, mainly managing the trade of furs for a large company. And when you thought Ferrant couldn't be more evil - he has begun earning money by selling Indigenous slaves to French families.

Olivier

A troubling man who converts to Catholicism during his voyage to New France. Once landed he continues his trade as a miller. Olivier has been nothing but a pest to Isabelle and Marguerite during the Atlantic voyage. He grows violent when Isabelle declines his marriage proposal on arriving to port. Olivier begins to stalk Isabelle and claims she is possessed after she protects herself when he corners her one night. Isabelle cuts him with the knife that was given to her as part of her trousseau.

Jean Talon

French statesman and the first intendant of New France whose job was to encourage greater economic independence in the region, steering away solely from the fur trade to brewing, textile manufacturing and lumbering. His support of immigration and population growth of New France made him a champion of the social experiment that was les filles du roi. Jean and his social and professional circle have several slaves and servants, Indigenous among them, captured by Native allies of the colony and sold to the French. When his efforts mostly fail he eventually returns to France and becomes count d'Orsainville.

LES FILLES *du Roi*

Created by
Ashley Matt
TV/Streaming series
Series one: 8 x 50 episodes

Series one arc

Having to choose from a long list of bad options Marguerite, a French woman in her early twenties, decides to set out to New France towards a dangerous and uncertain future with only a handful of items given to her and her fellow 'sisters' by King Louis XIV. She becomes a filles du roi.

There is a drive in Marguerite that comes from a place much deeper than wanting a new start. She has a person she needs to confront, a person she wants to see suffer as much as she has. By way of gossip in the Salpêtrière where Marguerite found herself after a series of rungs on the social ladder were cut from under her, Marguerite hears a name she has not heard in a long while.

Ferrant Toussaint. The man responsible for the accusation, trial and tortuous death of Marguerite's mother, he is apparently thriving in New France. Ferrant is now a top man at a newly founded trading company and when Marie de L'Incarnation comes looking for young blood to serve as wives and mothers in the new land, "single, smart, strong, in good health and having good morals, able to produce a certificate of good conduct signed by their priest or a judge from their hometown", Marguerite leaps at the chance to put to rest a burning anger in her stomach and attempt to fill the hole in her heart.

At the first port of call Marguerite marries Tumas and has a baby, but soon loses her first husband when he dies, as many do in dangerous trades. She sells what she can and makes the journey with Isabelle, the girl who is like a sister to her, further south west to Montréal where she hopes there will be more chance of work.

She doesn't expect to fall in love, but she finds comfort in the kindness of Sanson and with practicality in mind thinks she will have better prospects if she marries again. In Montréal she meets Snipe when Isabelle is recruited to join Marie de L'Incarnation's school. Thanks to Snipe's connections and the women's savvy nature, Marguerite and Snipe take on the role of 'go-betweens' and find themselves being paid to translate vital deals and calm tensions between different tribes and trade companies.

Montréal is a small community at the time so it doesn't take long for Marguerite to find Ferrant, she is a smart woman and manages to infiltrate his social circle. While Marguerite grapples with her emotions of how, and even if she can, confront Ferrant, Isabelle, the one true friend she has, is put in immediate danger. Olivier is back. He has somehow tracked them down and Isabelle doesn't escape his grasp this time.

Marguerite is a talented, knowledgeable and educated woman so it's not long before she ruffles the feathers of some who would rather not see her succeed. She is an easy target for accusations of black magic. With the opening of Marie de L'Incarnation's school, the budding Catholic Notre Dame congregation and Marie's writings, the nun's followers are easily led to hysteria. When Marguerite and Snipe disrupt the business of a purchase of an Indigenous slave into a French family sold by Ferrant, a horrible echo of history befalls Marguerite. Ferrant convinces the powerful family that Marguerite's mother was possessed by a wolf and that Marguerite herself must also be touched by the devil.

Tone and Mood

A historical drama, *Les Filles du Roi* can be compared to *The Great* with its wry and witty anti-historical view. *Filles* follows an era which was leaving the renaissance behind and making way for the enlightenment. *Filles* is parallel to *Peaky Blinders* for its sharp use of modern music and the gritty, dirty, smoky atmosphere -- an unwelcoming environment where young people are forced to carve out a life for themselves amid constant threat of danger from internal and external forces. Further to that, there are elements of psychological horror as seen in *The Terror*. Could werewolves and witches really be at play, did spirits follow the colonist or are there evil forces hiding in the dense forests of the Americas? *Filles* tells fictionalized stories of real French women who made the journey to North America and dramatizes key historical figures from France and French-speaking parts of North America.



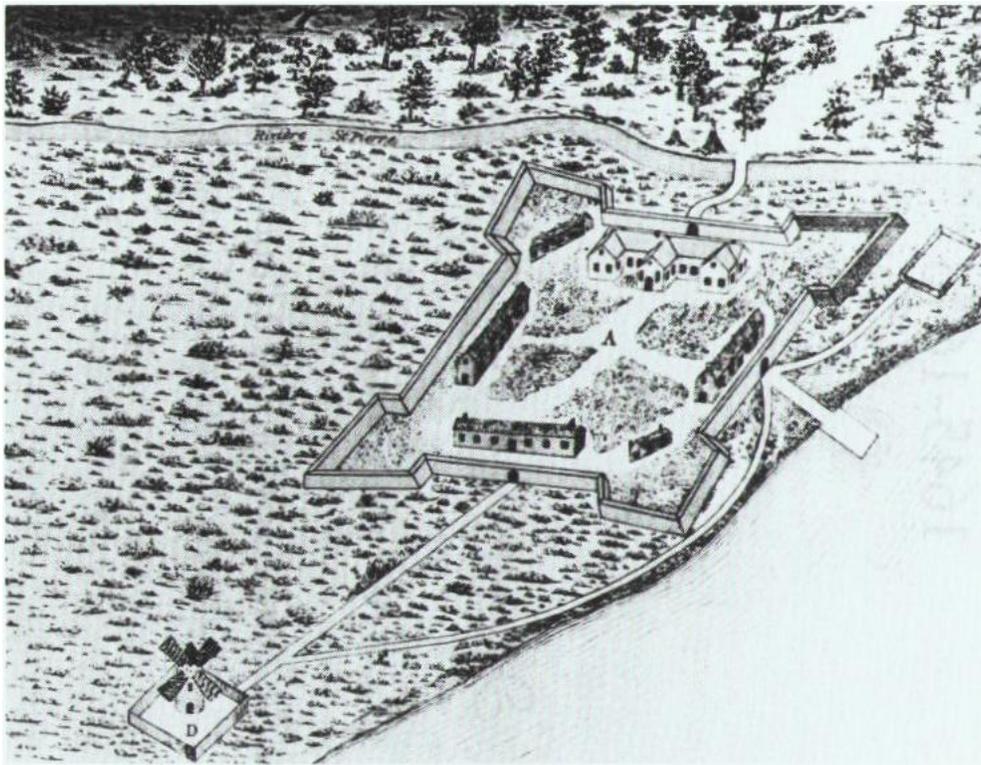
Filles du roi mural by Annie Hamel on a wall of the Saint-Gabriel school in Pointe-St-Charles, Montréal (© The French-Canadian Genealogist 2018).



Summit of the Fools by Oliver Ryan Visual Developer and Illustrator Paris, France



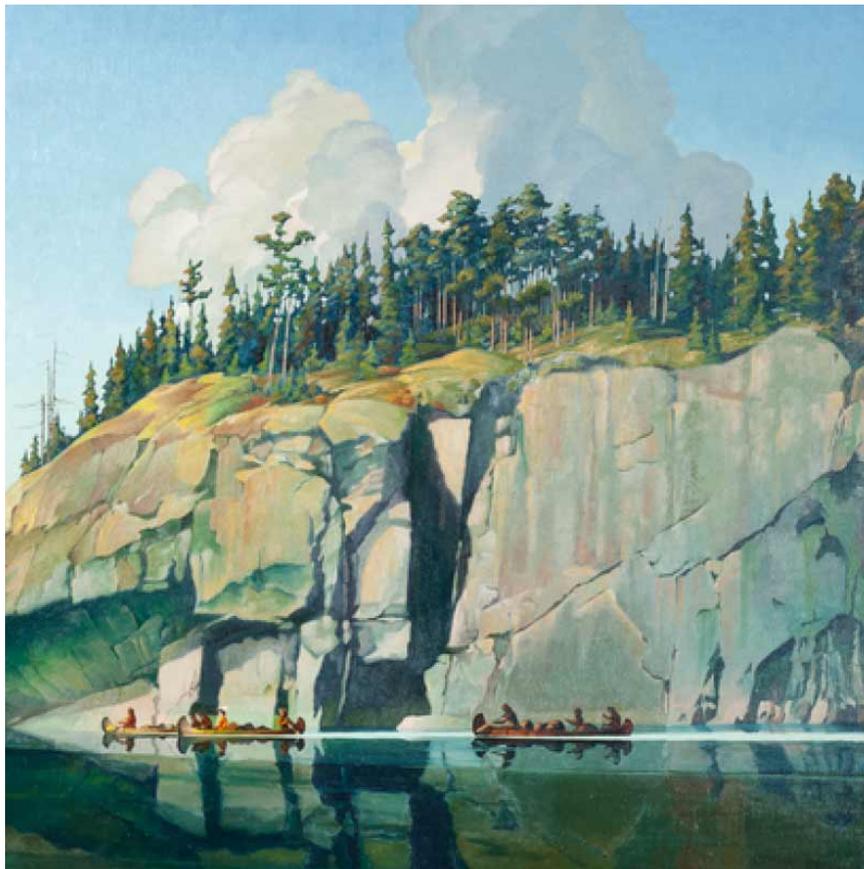
Docteur Pinel liberating women from their chains by Tony Robert-Fleury, 1805. Depiction of life at the Salpêtrière more than a century after les filles du roi left for New France.



Fort Ville-Marie in operation from 1642 to 1688 in Montreal.



A type of settlement les filles du roi would encounter before choosing a husband, building a home on forested land in harsh weather and going on to give birth and raise an average of 6 children.



The kind of environment the French settlers would traverse for trading in furs.



The life that awaits les filles du roi -- but add half a dozen children and a husband.



Fairytales and day dreams. Was Marguerite Cardillon's mother really a werewolf?
Midsummer night's dream by Jakub Rozalski