

Desmier

Family History Newsletter

December 1996

Issue No. 4

Editors Note

Thankfully I've managed to get this newsletter out a bit quicker than the last one. Christmas always seems to be a good deadline to aim for to get things done by particularly something like this newsletter which is aimed at bringing family members closer together. Anyhow a very happy Christmas and New Year to everyone.

In this edition of the newsletter I have concentrated on providing some background information on our Desmier ancestors that lived in France. All the credit for the research that has provided this information must go to Michel Maumon. I have mentioned Michel before in the newsletter. Although he does not have any Desmier ancestors he has been kind enough to spend many hours researching the family on our behalf. Furthermore, as my command of French is very weak to say the least he always writes to me in English. As you can see from the descendant chart that I have included in the newsletter he has been very successful in extending the family tree for us.

It was back in 1990 when, knowing from information passed onto me by Doug Desmier (newsletter 3), that Charles Julien (who went to Pondicherry as an Assistant Surgeon) was born in Niort that I found the addresses of several people with the "Desmier" surname in Niort and wrote to them. None of the replies in themselves proved fruitful as the people that I had written to were not interested in family history, however, one person, Dominique Desmier, passed my request for information onto Michel who was a work colleague of hers and also a member of the local genealogical society "Genea 79". Since that time Michel has researched and transcribed a large number of baptism, marriage and death records that relate either directly or indirectly to our line of the Desmiers as well as photographing many extracts from the records for me.

I have been translating the extracts that Michel has sent me and it is apparent that the standard of record keeping was much higher in France than it was in England at that time. For example, in a marriage contract the maiden names of the mothers of the couple and the names of any previous spouses are recorded. Also the names and relationship to the couple of all witnesses were recorded. That has made it a bit easier to be able to identify brothers and sisters to anyone directly related to our line of the family. Michel has told me that he is trying to find out if he can trace any people in France who have some ancestry in common with us.

Rick Desmier

THE LINK BETWEEN FRANCE AND INDIA

We don't know when Charles Julien Desmier left Niort for Pondicherry, or even if he went directly to Pondicherry. What we are sure of is that on 21st February 1786 at the age of 28 he married Marie Dominique DaCosta aged 15 at the Church of Our Lady of the Angels in Pondicherry. At the time of his marriage Charles was Assistant Surgeon at the King's Hospital in Pondicherry. The marriage record also informs us that he was born in Niort, then in the Province of Poitou and was the son of Jean Philippe Desmier and Henriette Guillon.



*Church of Our Lady of the Angels - Pondicherry
(postcard from Robert Gibbs)*

Pondicherry was originally established as a trading colony by the French in 1683. The original village was tended so well by the French that the Indians called it Phulcherry meaning flower town. The word was corrupted by the French to Pondichéry and by the English to Pondicherry.

Over the next hundred years it was to go through a very unsettled time being captured by the Dutch in 1693, returned to French rule in 1697, captured again, this time by the British, in 1761, returned back to French rule in 1765 and then recaptured once more by the British in 1778.

In 1785 Pondicherry was again restored to the French. It may well be

that Charles was sent out as part of a recolonising force soon after the French regained possession of the colony and that he got married to Marie quite soon after his arrival.

From 1785 to 1790 there were no less than 6 Governors appointed to Pondicherry, hardly conducive to administrative efficiency. Back in France about 1790 the French revolution was beginning. News of the revolution received a mixed reception in Pondicherry. Residents blamed their hardships on the administration in France but at the same time they were concerned for their future. A revolution of sorts occurred in Pondicherry that resulted in the forming of a General Assembly under the leadership of the Administrator of the new Compagnie des Indes to present their grievances to the National Assembly in Paris. Their main grievances were freedom of commerce and a desire for increased military and political power at the regional level. The revolution in Pondicherry did not share the same level of lawlessness and anarchy as back in France. Also they did not carry the revolutionary principles of equality and fraternity to the extent of admitting Indian inhabitants in to the General Assembly. The revolution was confined to French citizens.

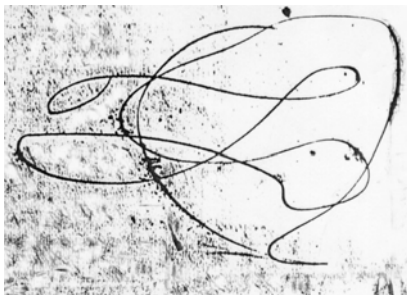
In 1793 war broke out yet again between France and England. In August the British attacked Pondicherry and it wasn't long before the town was surrendered over to the

British to prevent inevitable further destruction as the French were hopelessly outnumbered. The personal liberty of the citizens and property rights was assured as part of the terms of surrender.

In an English census in 1793 there were 823 Europeans in the town including women and children. (it would be good if we could see if Charles and any of his children were listed on this).

The French possessions in India were restored to them in 1816 as a result of a Paris peace treaty, and Pondicherry was to remain in French possession until 1954 when, along with the other French possessions of Karikal Mahé and Yanam (Yanaon), it came under the administration of the Indian Government.

It is possible that Charles and his family moved into British India to live and work soon after 1793, however, as we cannot find any record of the whereabouts of his burial it is difficult to say exactly when and in which generation the family became anglicised. Many of the Pondicherry records have been microfilmed by the Mormon church but I have been unable to find out much more than the information I have related here in respect of baptism of his children.



Right:

A translation of the marriage record of Charles Julien Desmier to Marie DaCosta in Pondicherry.

Above:

Charles' signature on the marriage record. (scanned from a photocopy printed from a microfilm of the original record).

Marriage of Sr Charles Julien Desmier and Marie Dominique Dacosta

Today 21st February 1785 I have to certify to have given the nuptial Benediction in the parochial church of Notre Dame des Anges Pondicherry to **Sr Julien Charles Desmier**, Assistant Surgeon at the Hospital of the King in this town, son of **Sr Jean Philippe Desmier** and of Damoiselle **Henriette Guillon**, the father and mother native of Niort, Poitou diocese of Poitiers aged 28 years and of Damoiselle **Marie Dominique Dacosta** daughter of **Sr Dacosta** company clerk, Office of Funds and of Dame **Marie Rose Larive**, the father and mother natives of Pondicherry age of 15 years and after the publication of three banns on the 12th, the 16th and the 19th of the month and it has been found without any impeachment. The witnesses were Mr Paul Donzon surgeon major of the Hospital of the King at Pondicherry native of Toulouse in Languedoc, Jean Pierre Desonne employed in the Kings Hospital native of Paris St Sulphice parish, Jean Daumain, native of St Pourcain in Bourlonnais diocese of Autun, director of the Hospital of this town, Jean Robert Lefebvre clerk of the court of registry native of Gennesses diocese of Paris who have signed with me and the husband and wife

Signed

CJD - (Charles Julien Desmier); marie dominique Dacosta; Lefebvre; Dacosta; larive dacosta; Desonne and others

NIORT

Niort is a regional centre with a population of about 60, approximately 250 miles south west of Paris in the Department of Deux Sevres. Immediately to the west of the town is the tourist area known as the Marais Poitevin or Venise Verte (Green Venice). Deux Sevres means two rivers and Niort is located on the river Niortaise. As you

might expect with the accent of the area on its greenness and the rivers, the area was and still is agriculturally very productive. When our ancestors were alive it was an area noted for the of manufacture of leather goods such as riding breeches and gloves and many of the family were connected with this work.

BEFORE CHARLES JULIEN

Charles Julien was born in 1757 and christened at the Church of Our Lady in Niort. He was the fifth of seven children that are shown on the attached descendant chart (2nd generation from the right). His father, Jean Philippe Desmier was a Perruquier, a person who made wigs, which in those days were very fashionable with the upper classes. The professions of barber, wigmaker and bather were in those days quite respected professions. Jean was a Master Perruquier and a member of the professional guild which set the standards of the profession and restricted the number of people who could practice the profession in the town. Membership of the Guild could be passed on to other family members. This appears to be how Jean obtained his position as his father René (1688 - 1743) was also a Master Perruquier (*stated on the marriage transcript for his first son Jacques René*). It is probably not too surprising to learn that the brother of Jean's mother, Jacques Taschet, was also a member of the guild.

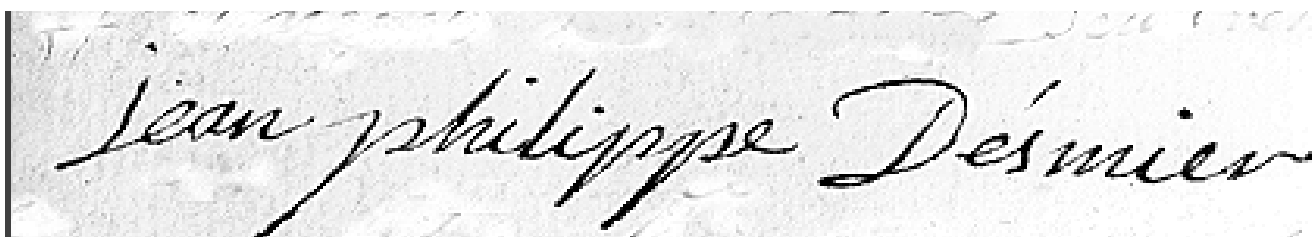
As yet the marriage transcript for the parents of Charles Julien (Jean Philippe and Henriette Guillon) has proved elusive. Michel has searched the records for both of the two parishes in Niort, however, the record could not be found. It is likely that Henriette came from another parish and the marriage took place there.

From the records available we have discovered that Jean Philippe died not long after the birth of Charles as there were two more children (both daughters) born to the couple before Henriette married again in 1762 when Charles was only 5 years old. His stepfather was an assistant Perruquier. Henriette was 37 years old but her

second husband was only 23 at the time of their marriage. Henriette had given birth to seven children that we know of and six of these were still alive at the time of her second marriage and are listed as witnesses. (*There is some confusion here, as well as being listed as a witness I also have a record of the death of Charles Francois at the age of 18 months in 1753, perhaps there was another son born who was given the same names*).

It is interesting to note that the father of Charles' step-father was a surgeon major of the marines (*details on the marriage transcript between his son and Henriette*). Perhaps this is the family connection that led to Charles serving his apprenticeship as a surgeon and travelling to Pondichery? in those days barbers and surgeons were closely related or common professions.

As well as the information on the attached chart we have some information on three previous generations. The father of René was François Charles Desmier who was baptised in 1662 and was a Master Panisier which, I believe, was a type of baker. François signed his name as Frans on his marriage record and his wife Anne could also sign her name. The ancestors for the previous two generations were both also named François which probably takes us back to about 1620, however we do not have much in the way of details about these people other than to say that they were both married in the Parish of St André in the town of Niort.



The signature of Jean Philippe Desmier Copied from a record of a meeting of the community of Master Perruquiers of Niort 15 June 1750



A view of modern day Niort - le Pont des Arts

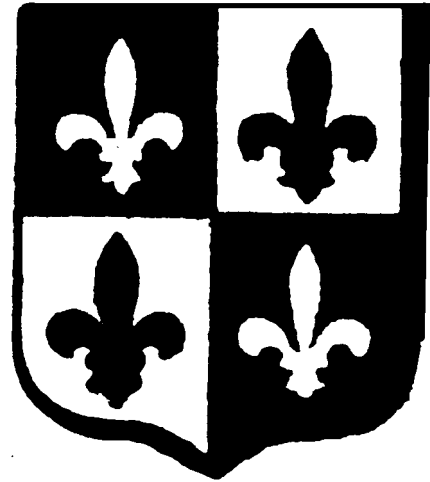
A ROYAL CONNECTION?

In the villages near Niort there are many small chateaux open to the public. One at Olbreuse about 10 miles south of Niort was owned by Alexander Desmier. His daughter Eléonore Desmier married a German prince and their daughter, Sophie Dorothée, married George William of Brunswick who later became George I of England. She is referred to locally as the Grandmother of Europe as the English Royal family and many of the Emperors of Germany and Russia and the Duke of Orleans are descended from her. The chateau at Olbreuse is now a small private museum.

This is the royal connection that is referred to in the "Family Name History" printouts that are available for the Desmier name from stalls occasionally set up in

shopping centres. The story of Sophie makes very interesting reading. Their marriage was dissolved before George became King of England but they had two children, one eventually to become George II. the other Sophie, became Queen of Prussia and mother of Frederick the great. When George went over to England to take the throne Sophie was sent into Exile at Ahlden Castle in Germany and forbidden ever to see her children again. The book "Sophie Dorothea" by Ruth Jordan (Constable & Co London , 1971) describes her story and is readily available through libraries

Is there a connection with our family? At this stage I have to say probably not, at least not in the last 300 years or so. Although a rare name in the English speaking world Desmier is quite common in west and south western France. There are 7 listings in the Niort section of the telephone directory alone. Any volunteers to write to those wider afield to see if they have an interest in their family history?



Above: The Coat of Arms of Alexander Desmier. The colours are Argent (silver) and Azure (blue)

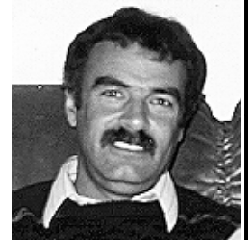
NEWS CLIPS

- ◆ I had a letter from Mike Desmier in Cincinnati, Ohio USA recently (a grandson of Bertram, northern clan). He wrote that his cousin Glenville Desmier was to be married on 27th July 1996 in the US. Mike's father, Joseph from Melbourne, Australia; Glenville's father, Leonard and mother, Gwen from Hubli, India; and their fathers' brothers Ronald and Cyril and sister Iris from London were all going to be there for the wedding. I hope the day went well - how about a group photo for the next issue of the newsletter?
- ◆ Robert Gibbs returned safely from his two month trip to East Africa. Whilst there he tried to find out something about the Desmier's that went to Kenya from India to work on the railways but could not unearth any new information.
- ◆ Those of you that have access to the internet might like to look at a new home page that has been created for those that have an interest in researching British ancestry in India. It can be found at: <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~clday/>
- ◆ Still on the internet, I am now in contact with quite a few people who get this newsletter through email. If you would like electronic copies of any photos or text that I have, or better still can email me a contribution or photo to publish in the newsletter please let me know
- ◆ If this newsletter reached you with a California postmark it is because my daughter, Ros, posted it for me. She has just finished her Uni course in Civil & Environmental Engineering and is having a holiday in California and in January going to the UK to look for work

This newsletter is edited by Rick Desmier. I intend to produce a new edition every six months or so, depending upon contributions. If you have any articles, news or comments for future copies please send them to me at:

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If you have a relative who did not receive a copy of this newsletter and you think that they would like their own copy please let me know.