

Kirouac Family Association Inc.

# Jack Kerouac's Breton Ancestor

Fifty years after Jack Kerouac's death, what do we know about his Breton ancestor?

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Here is a chronological list of the researchers as they came on board: Jacques Kirouac, founder of the *Kirouac Family Association* and the first person to take on the research; the late Abbe Gérard Lévesque (1915-2001), a descendant on his mother's side of Alexandre de Kervoach; the late Chanoine (Canon) Jean-Louis Le Floc'h (1920-2009), archivist for the Quimper diocese in Brittany; Claude Le Petit, a researcher from Vannes in Brittany who, between 1991 and 1996 at the request of the KFA, searched for *Maurice Louis LeBris, sieur de Kervoach*; Clément Kirouac, KFA president from 1994 to 2000, who spearheaded the research in 1996; and Patricia Dagier, genealogist from Quimper, who between 1996 and 1999, not only found the place of origin of our ancestor in Brittany, but also identified the Breton most likely to be Jack Kerouac's ancestor.

I also want to thank Mrs. Marie Lussier Timperley for editing the French text and translating it into English, and for her precious advice about the content. It is with great pleasure that we offer this digital document on the KFA website to everyone interested in the ancestor of all the Kirouac, Kérouac, Keroack, Kyrouac, Curwick, Breton, Burton, Kingston and Kirack families.

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*JACK KEROUAC'S BRETON ANCESTOR*  
*50 YEARS AFTER JACK'S DEATH (1922-1969)*  
*20 YEARS AFTER THE DISCOVERY OF THE BRETON ANCESTOR IN 1999*  
*WHAT WOULD JACK THINK TODAY?*

## JACK KEROUAC'S BRETON ANCESTOR

by François Kirouac  
Translated by Marie Lussier Timperley

### INTRODUCTION

It is general knowledge, and has been for many decades, that the Franco-American author, Jack Kerouac was ever so proud of his Breton roots. How many times he said, and even wrote, what his father used to repeat to him while growing up: "Ti-Jean, n'oublie pas que tu es Breton!" Jack, never forget that you are Breton! Jack never forgot nor did most descendants of the ancestor who, in the parish records on his wedding day, signed: *Maurice Louis Le Bris, sieur de Kervoach*. Before 1978, that was essentially all that was known about the Breton ancestor, the first one bearing that name to settle in New-France during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Just like Jack, every family bearing the name Kirouac (no matter how it was spelled) and many others bearing various family names as they were descended through maternal lines, according to the oral tradition believed that the ancestor was a Breton noble, lower nobility but noble nonetheless. Jack often wrote about it, even adding a twist to the story by making the ancestor a Baron ... who had gone to Quebec to help Montcalm fight Wolfe for the Valley of the St. Lawrence..."<sup>1</sup>.

That idea, like many others, came straight out of Jack's most fertile imagination in order to give his ancestor more importance. Eventually, he admitted that he had invented that glorious tale. He knew that the ancestor had died in 1736, over twenty years before the Battle of the Plains of Abraham! Anyway, it says a lot about Jack's knowledge and remarkable memory; nonetheless, his creativity served him well to express how proud he was of his Breton ancestor. Jack, like all those interested in this *sieur de Kervoach*, shared the same pride for this ancestor whom all thought "noble". At the time this was the general knowledge shared by most and it was so during over 250 years.

But what about today? What do we really know now about the Breton Ancestor? Do we know more than when Jack lived? To this question we can emphatically say "YES", a great deal more! If only he had lived to learn it too.

Jack died in 1969, nine years before a structured genealogical research was initiated after the **Kirouac Family Association** was created in 1978. This research enabled us to greatly further our knowledge of our Breton ancestor and learn about his activities in New-France.

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<sup>1</sup>Read in **Memory Babe**, Gerald Nicosia, University of California Press, Paperback edition, 1994, p. 22.

What did we know when we first started investigating in 1978? Simply that the first one bearing our surname to come to New France, according to his signature in the marriage register in the parish of Cap-Saint-Ignace, was: *Maurice-Louis Le Bris de Kerouac*<sup>2</sup> known as *Alexandre de Kerouac*, that he was originally from Brittany and that he was a merchant. Nevertheless, the myth making him a noble, referred to by Jack among others, was well ingrained in all his descendants, particularly since the publication in 1928 in the very official *Bulletin de recherches historiques du Canada*<sup>3</sup> of an *Étude sur l'Ancêtre des Kirouac*, a study about the Kirouacs' ancestor, written by Brother Lucien Serre, of the De LaSalle Congregation. Many Kirouac families had a copy of this study in their family papers and readily referred to it when talking about their ancestor's origin. Later in this document we will discuss the noble "myth" and why it endured so firmly and for so long.

## THE FIRST ONE IN NEW-FRANCE

The first document establishing the presence of a *Kervoach* in New-France is dated January 1727 when the ancestor signed as a witness at the marriage of one Gabriel Chartier and **Marie-Jeanne Coutance d'Argencour**<sup>4</sup>. Given that the Saint-Lawrence River was frozen solid through winter, the latest he would have arrived is at the end of the previous sailing season, autumn 1726. Before this signature was found, according to the family oral tradition, the ancestor was thought to have arrived in New-France in 1730. Hence the first great family gathering held in 1980 to mark the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ancestor's arrival in North-America.

In a 1732 document, it says he is a *voyageur*<sup>5</sup>, meaning a travelling fur trader. He was involved in trading pelts; it explains his presence in New-France. At the time, the *voyageurs* would carry the pelts from trading posts to warehouses in Quebec City, Trois-Rivières and Montreal. It seems his favourite territory was along the Côte-du-Sud, i.e., the St-Lawrence south-shore, between Quebec City and L'Isle-Verte. Successively, he was *voyageur, commerçant*<sup>6</sup> (also called *merchant*, a term still used in the twentieth century), even *négociant*<sup>7</sup> (negotiant). He was also very familiar

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<sup>2</sup>Later on, research proved that the name Keroack used to be written Kervoach. In New-France, priests and notaries wrote it in many different ways, like Kerouac for example. This last spelling caused some people, before us, to create a historical mistake, to be later explained in this document.

<sup>3</sup>Volume XXXIV, Lévis, May 1928, number 5, pp. 266-271. The Canadian Historical Research Bulletins were created in 1895 and published until 1968.

<sup>4</sup>BAnQ-Québec/CN301, S87, Fonds Cour supérieure, District judiciaire de Québec, Série Jean-Étienne Dubreuil ; microfilm 4M01-3031 ; BAnQ-Québec/CE301, S1, Fonds Cour supérieure, Quebec Judiciary District, Civil Court ; microfilm 4M00-0046. Note the spelling of the name. Further on, I will explain how names were used and exploited at the time of the ancestor.

<sup>5</sup>BAnQ-Québec/CE302, S1/Fonds Superior Court, Montmagny Judiciary District, Civil Archives; microfilm 4M00-0220, 28 February 1732. (BanQ = Bibliothèque & Archives nationales Québec)

<sup>6</sup>BAnQ-Rimouski/CE104, S3/Fonds Superior Court, Kamouraska Judiciary District, Civil Court, microfilm 4M00-0631, 6 March 1736.

<sup>7</sup>BAnQ-Québec/CC301, S1, D1299/Superior Court Archives, Quebec Judiciary District, Guardianship and Trusteeships, 28 June 1737.

with the Kamouraska region; a letter written in his own hand shows that he served as guide to the colony's police force<sup>8</sup>.

*Maurice Louis Le Bris, sieur de Kervoach*, known to one and all under the name of *Alexandre de Kervoach*, married Louise Bernier, a granddaughter of **Jacques Bernier, known as Jean de Paris**, the first Bernier to settle in New-France around 1650. The *de Kervoach* couple had three children, Alexandre, Jacques and Louis. Alexandre, the eldest son, is the ancestor of Jack Kerouac, the famous Franco-American author, and Louis, the youngest son, is the ancestor of the great botanist and scientist Brother Marie-Victorin, born Conrad Kirouac. As for Jacques, the middle son, according to our research, he died young without issue.

Before his marriage in 1732, we have no clue as to where *Alexandre de Kervoach* actually lived. We found documents showing his presence in Quebec City and at L'Isle-Verte as well as at places in between, but only once in Montreal, in March 1727. Whenever it is mentioned that he was present somewhere, it means that documents bearing his signature have been found; and one was even written by him; such documents were found in archives in Quebec City and in Montreal. As a *voyageur*, travelling fur trader, he was constantly on the move; it is likely that he did not have a fixed address also because he was not wealthy, so it seems.

From his marriage in 1732 until 1735, this first de Kervoach family in North America, lived at Cap-Saint-Ignace on the *Côte-du-Sud*, i.e., the St. Lawrence south-shore (northeast of Quebec City), in Louise Bernier's family, in the home of her mother, Geneviève Caron and Jacques Rodrigue, Louise's stepfather. After the birth of their third and last child in 1735, the family moved to Kamouraska, about forty-one miles northeast, always along the St. Lawrence River. The previous year, the couple had bought some land near Notre-Dame-du-Portage<sup>9</sup>, just over twenty miles east of Kamouraska. However, our ancestor never had time to develop it. We also ignore whether he intended to do so; as we will see later, he was trained as a notary, not quite what it takes to work the land. On top of this, Alexandre died a few months later on 5 March 1736<sup>10</sup> after being married only three and a half years. But Louise Bernier outlived him by over sixty years.

## THE ANCESTOR'S NAME AND NAMES

In some documents we read that our ancestor was known to one and all as *Alexandre de Kervoach*. So, how to explain why he used so many names when signing documents? For us, living in the 21st century, used to the strict accuracy of the digital age, is it any wonder that such casual haphazard attitude may look suspect, to say the least!

To explain and understand, we have to study what was done three hundred years ago. What was the general attitude as to use of family names and first names during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Brittany, France, and New-France? Then and now is day and night! By studying the mentality

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<sup>8</sup>BAnQ-Québec/R1, P40, P1-5, Fonds Gouverneurs, régime français. Governors Archives, French Regime.

<sup>9</sup>BAnQ-Rimouski/CN104, S45/Fonds Cour supérieure, District judiciaire de Kamouraska, Série Étienne Jeanneau, microfilm M01-0451. Superior Court Archives, Kamouraska Judiciary District.

<sup>10</sup>BAnQ-Rimouski/CE104, S3/Superior Court Archives, Kamouraska Judiciary District, Civil Court, microfilm 4M00-0631, 6 March 1736.

and attitude then, all comes clear today.

Jack wanted to discover the identity of his Breton ancestor, but, unfortunately, he died a decade before the research started. I like to think that he would have followed the whole process with great interest, every step of the way. All the documents found over the 35-year genealogical research were studied and analyzed, particularly by putting them back into their historical context resulting in rather fascinating conclusions.

Our ancestor married Louise Bernier in October 1732 under the name of *Maurice Louis Le Bris, sieur de Kervoach*. Although this is the name he signed in the parish register of Cap-Saint-Ignace (Quebec), he was known by one and all as *Alexandre de Kervoach* or, as many of his contemporaries liked to call him: *Alexandre Le Breton*<sup>11</sup>, referring to his country of origin. Before his marriage in 1732, in some deeds he signed *Alexandre Le Bihan*; one he signed *Hyacinthe Louis Allexandre de Kervoach Le Bihan*<sup>12</sup>. For six months after his marriage, he signed *Maurice Louis Le Bris de Kervoach* and, once simply, *Louis de Kervoach*. After that, he basically signed *Alexandre de Kervoach*. In case you are curious, you may like to know that Le Bris and Le Bihan are Celtic family names from Brittany; Le Bris means Le Breton; Le Bihan means Le Petit in French, or the short one in English! Nowadays, these four family names are still found in Brittany and Quebec and even in the USA.

At first, some researchers assumed that the Ancestor modified his signature in order to hide his true identity! This inference is rather absurd given that the ancestor knew very well that his own father was the only *Sieur de Kervoach* in Brittany and, that, at the time, he was the only one using this surname in New France. Nonetheless, the idea of deceit came out of Brittany at the moment when one *Urbain-François Le Bihan* had just been identified as the same one who was signing *Alexandre Le Bihan* or *Alexandre Le Breton* in New-France. So what is this all about? And where does it spring from?

In Breton archives, some documents were found about a legal proceeding<sup>13</sup> initiated by the father of *Urbain-François Le Bihan* against some members of one family pertaining to damage to the reputation of his son and his family. At a wedding reception where wine was readily available, some youth mocked the guest of honour, our ancestor, publicly accusing him of stealing a young woman's purse. Here one must know and remember that it is not the ancestor

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<sup>11</sup>See the Ordinance of Gilles Hocquart, New-France's Intendant (general administrator), of 4 December 1733 in which he asks the citizens to help Alexandre le Breton to find and arrest a thief who absconded from the Quebec City prison. (Reference BAnQ-Québec/E1, S1, P4351)

<sup>12</sup>Robert de Roquebrune, historian and author, wrote in details about the phenomenon of name changing. See chapter II of *Études onomastiques*, pages 21-33, FIDES, Montreal & Paris, 1966. Also read the article about it in the section entitled *History of Alexandre de Kervoach, the Ancestor and his family*, on the KFA website at: <https://irp.cdn-website.com/7bb0d2a7/files/uploaded/Alexandre%20de%20Kervoach%20or%20Maurice-Louis%20Le%20Bris%20de%20Kervoach.pdf>

<sup>13</sup>Lawsuit instigated by François Joachim Le Bihan, sieur de Kervoach, Royal Notary, on behalf of his son, Urbain François Le Bihan, who was still a minor then because majority was at 25 then. Criminal Procedure, Finistère Departmental Archives , 4B 401 1720.

who is being accused; quite the opposite -- it is his father who is instituting proceedings against the members of a family accusing them of dishonouring his own family. Hence, the idea of a possible deceit was the result of falsely interpreting the facts; or deliberately twisting the facts?

Nowadays, when a person uses various identities, dissimulation and dishonesty automatically come to mind. Nowadays, yes, but given that the Ancestor's story took place in 1720 at a time and in a society when *honour* was the superlative value, which is seldom the case today, well, it is fair and important to judge this story not according to today's values but considering the reality in the 1720s in order to draw the right conclusions.

The various peculiarities of the historical context were unfortunately completely overlooked in the two books published in Brittany in 1999 and 2009.<sup>14</sup> In 2009, while celebrations marking the fortieth anniversary of Jack Kerouac's death were in the news and fascinated by the discovery of the identity of the famous Franco-American author's Breton ancestor, some newspapers in Brittany turned Jack's ancestor into a person who had been entangled with the justice system!

Given that Jack Kerouac had been a delinquent most of his life, for members of the Beat Generation, or fans of the Beat author, this avenue presented a seductive way to make a parallel between Jack and his Breton ancestor. It is easy enough to extrapolate when disregarding the seven-generation gap between the two personages and, ignore the vastly different "worlds" in which they lived. Besides, this version of the facts totally contradicts what some documents later discovered in Brittany revealed.

Knowing how proud Jack was of his Breton ancestor, one may wonder if he would have appreciated such a parallel. It is permitted to doubt it.

More documents found in archives in Brittany prove clearly that our Breton ancestor was never sued by anyone and, as already stated, the opposite is true, his father sued another family<sup>15</sup> for attacking his son and the reputation of the family.

Now let us put back this conflict into its historical context. At the time, if any conflict arose between two people, and if one felt that one's honour was under attack, the automatic reaction was to attack the reputation of one's opponent because then *honour* was the optimum value, considered even more precious than fortune and even life. "For men, the most infamous injuries were those attacking their honesty; the most frequent insult, thus inflicting the greatest injury, was to be labelled a rascal or any of its synonyms: thief, rogue, knave, villain, varlet".<sup>16</sup>

Historians even determined that half of all "legal causes" brought to court then, were of this nature, and that most were normally resolved out of court sometimes by a small fine had, but

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<sup>14</sup>**Jack Kerouac, *Au bout de la route... la Bretagne***, Patricia Dagier, Hervé Quémener, éditions An Here, 1999 and **Jack Kerouac, *Breton d'Amérique***, Patricia Dagier, Hervé Quémener, éditions Le Télégramme, 2009.

<sup>15</sup>The ancestor was not yet of age as then in France, one was a minor until the age of 25, so the father initiated legal proceedings in his son's name.

<sup>16</sup>***Délinquants, juges et bourreaux en Nouvelle-France***, André Lachance, Libre Expression, 2011, p. 23. (Delinquents, judges and executioners in New-France)



mostly through friendly agreement<sup>17</sup>.

As for the “cause” concerning the family of Urbain-François Le Bihan, other documents found later on, clearly demonstrated that the antagonists in this matter were very soon reconciled, without any doubt whatsoever. Indeed, one of Urbain François's sister-in-law and one of his cousins accepted to become godmother and godfather to two of the family accused of attacking the honour of the young Le Bihan. Added to this, these two families belonged to very different social classes, and according to the period's criteria, for members of a higher class to accept to be godparent to someone of a lower class, was indeed to bestow an honour upon them. In other words, if one's presence honours another family, one must be honourable to do so.

Conclusion: in the present case, no reputation was damaged, not even slimly blemished.

Renowned historians like Marcel Trudel<sup>18</sup> and André Lachance<sup>19</sup> as well as Quebec writer Robert de Roquebrune<sup>20</sup>, in his book entitled *Les Canadiens d'autrefois*<sup>21</sup>, extensively wrote about the period and clearly established the context in which our ancestor lived. This enables us, among other things, to understand the reasons why our ancestor used a variety of names while living in New-France in the 18th century.

For example, when reading Robert de Roquebrune, we see clearly that it was normal for a son to use a family name different from his father's. Everyone wanted to be different from those preceding them, so it seems! They wanted to affirm their own personality, and this attitude contributed to creating distinct branches in the same family. People were known to change their Christian or family name, or both, for no other reason than wanting to stand out. For our ancestor, using Le Bris instead of Le Bihan was a way to differ from his family in Brittany.

When our ancestor lived, people could use whatever name they fancied being known by; it was no mistake or embarrassment. Some people modified their name or first name more than once in their lifetime without violating any rule, as there were no rules to be infringed yet. Not only was it permitted and tolerated, but it was even encouraged. Here in New-France the best example is that of the twelve sons of Baron Charles Le Moyne; each one added a different surname to their father's family name and became Le Moyne de . . . !

In France in 1794, during the French Revolution, the new government enacted a law forbidding

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<sup>17</sup>Idem, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup>See Marcel Trudel's chapter on: *Du « dit » au « de » : noblesse et roture en Nouvelle-France*, in his book entitled *Mythes et réalités dans l'histoire du Québec* ; Bibliothèque Québécoise, 2006.

<sup>19</sup>*Vivre à la ville en Nouvelle-France*, André Lachance, Libre Expression (Editor), 2004.

<sup>20</sup>Robert de Roquebrune, literary alias of Robert Laroque, born at L'Assomption, Quebec, Canada in 1889, died at Cowansville (Quebec) in 1978; writer, essayist, and journalist, researcher at the Public Archives of Canada (Ottawa, Ontario) and also Director of the Public Archives in France. (Source: Wikipedia)

<sup>21</sup>Chapter II, Études onomastiques, pages 21-33, FIDES, Montreal & Paris, 1966. Read my article about it on the KFA website at:

<http://kirouacfamilies.com/genealogie/Alexandre%20de%20Kervoach%20or%20Maurice-Louis%20Le%20Bris%20de%20Kervoach.pdf>

the use of a name other than the one received at birth! Here in Canada, it is only toward the end of the nineteenth century that a new law demanded that each citizen use only the family name given at birth. As for those who had a double family name linked by “dit” -- this was particularly common in Quebec -- “dit” meaning “known as” people had to choose one family name and drop the other.

Although it was common practice during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to be casual about names, it is unthinkable and untenable in our inflexible digital and computerized data era! Hence the importance of always studying facts within their historical context before coming to a conclusion and passing a judgment. Judging things out of context is too often done nowadays leading to unjust interpretation and damaging actions. We cannot change the past; therefore, rewriting history according to our own values is a no-no, what we can do is tell it as it was.

In the case of our Kirouac ancestor, one more pertinent question remains: If he had really wanted to hide himself, somewhat disappear in the crowd, would he have used *de Kervoach*, the one family name that linked him directly to his ancestral family property in Brittany?

## NOBILITY = THE MYTH

In Brother Lucien Serre's study about the Kirouac ancestor (see footnote #3), then, the ancestor of all the North American Kirouacs was falsely linked to the family of the *Marquis de Keroüartz* in Brittany. The slight similarity between the two names was only apparent when pronounced out loud. Let us point out that no one had ever checked any archives nor found any document proving such a link between the two families; besides, the *de Keroüartz* family always disavowed any link whatsoever with the Kirouacs and emphatically dismissed the Kirouacs' assumption.

Now we know that there was never any link between the two families and that the Kirouacs were never part of the nobility, but were upper middle-class, “bourgeois”. Again, documents hidden for generations were finally rediscovered at the end of the twentieth century proving without any doubt that our ancestor was of the upper middle-class but not a noble. Once more, the truth becomes clear and evident when facts are studied within their historical context.

My research allowed me to discover a land sale contract written by the ancestor in 1730 under privy seal for the Seigneur of L'Isle-Verte, whose property was located near Rivière-du-Loup<sup>22</sup>. Not knowing how to write, he asked his sons' friend to prepare the contract. This deed definitely proves that Alexandre de Kervoach had been trained as a notary. We came to that conclusion after studying the strict social criteria of the period: in France, nobles and aristocrats were never notaries. The ancestor was obviously well educated and as a notary, so he could not have been a “noble”. It is also interesting to note that although the land sale deed was written by our ancestor, afterwards it was deposited in the notarial archives of Abel Michon in Montmagny, who was an officially accredited notary in New-France.

Why would the ancestor's descendants believe that their ancestor belonged to the Breton nobility? Studying the historical context at the time enables us to answer that question. It has to

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<sup>22</sup>BAnQ-Québec/CN302, S29/ Fonds Cour supérieure, District judiciaire de Montmagny, Série Abel Michon, 18 février 1730. Superior Court. Montmagny Judiciary District. See *History, the ancestor and his family, sales deeds* on this website at: [http://familleskirouac.com/genealogie/vente/acte\\_de\\_vente.html](http://familleskirouac.com/genealogie/vente/acte_de_vente.html)

do with society three hundred years ago on both sides of the Atlantic. The famous historian Marcel Trudel (1917-2011)<sup>23</sup>, clearly described what was happening in New-France as well as in “Old” France.

According to Marcel Trudel, in New-France there were similarities between the nobles and the upper middle-class; but not so in France where the differences between these two social classes were obvious and unmistakable. In France, the nobles were living very comfortably from their estates' revenue whereas, the land in New-France could not generate enough revenue so the nobles turned to the very lucrative fur trading like the middle-class did. This explains why in New-France, the lines were somewhat blurred between nobles and upper middle-class while in France these two social classes remained strictly distinct and segregated.

So in New-France, nobles and bourgeois were relatively close, and a relationship between these two social classes existed. But not so in the Old Country! For example, on 2 January 1730, most likely at some New Year celebrations, Alexandre *de Kervoach* was mingling with the upper crust in Quebec City, in the home of the Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Léry, the French king's chief engineer in the colony. On that occasion, Alexandre was also introduced to the Governor of New-France, Charles de la Boische, marquis de Beauharnois<sup>24</sup>. Not bad for a newcomer not even thirty years old!

If Jack had lived a few more years and learned that, how proud he would have been of the excellent reputation enjoyed by his young Breton ancestor.

Our ancestor was one of many young French or English bourgeois, upper-middle-class lads who crossed the Atlantic dreaming of fortune in the New World. So, is it any surprise that, with a good education, ambition and great dreams, he met the Governor of New-France and the Intendant (General Administrator)? It is well known, meaning documented, that most of these young men “were involved in various degrees in the fur trade”<sup>25</sup>. If one wanted to climb the rungs of the fur trade commerce to become a merchant or broker, it was essential to nurture good relations with the colony's Governor and General Administrator.

Learning more about the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries historical context helps to understand why there was misunderstanding about our ancestor's social status. Indeed, contrary to the French custom, on this side of the Atlantic the nobles were allowed to do business to be involved in commerce; not only was it permitted but often it was financially vital.

Among the upper-middle class on both sides of the pond, there was a very popular and widespread fashion then. Society in general was besotted by nobility. In New-France just like in

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<sup>23</sup>Marcel Trudel's chapter on: *Du « dit » au « de » : noblesse et roture en Nouvelle-France, Mythes et réalités dans l'histoire du Québec*; Bibliothèque Québécoise, 2006. Read my article about it on the KFA website at: <http://kirouacfamilies.com/genealogie/Alexandre%20de%20Kervoach%20or%20Maurice-Louis%20Le%20Bris%20de%20Kervoach.pdf>

<sup>24</sup>BAnQ-Québec/R1, P40, P1-5/Fonds Gouverneurs, French Regime, 30 November 1733. You can see the French version of this letter at: <http://familleskirouac.com/genealogie/gouverneur/gouverneur.html>

<sup>25</sup>*Chercher fortune en Nouvelle-France*, Jean-Pierre Hardy, Libre Expression, 2007, p. 24. (Book published in French; title meaning: Seeking fortune in New-France).

France, the bourgeois liked to add a second name to their family name in order to give the impression of being noble. Our ancestor was very much a man of his time so, like a lot of people, he added the Breton toponym *de Kervoach* to his family name.

So, given the customs and ways of life in New-France, it was alright to give the impression of being of noble birth. He used a surname and a particle to look *noble*. In Brittany, his father was *Le Bihan, sieur de Kervoach*, and his two brothers, also notaries, were *Le Bihan, sieur du Levant*, and *Le Bihan, sieur du Rumen*; both had to chose a different surname because as long as their father lived, he was the only one allowed to use *de Kervoach*! But our ancestor, far away from home, used it in New-France.

Most likely our ancestor never denied belonging to Breton nobility, the impression he gave to those related to him or with whom he did business in New-France. This must certainly have helped keeping the oral tradition alive for over two centuries. On his wedding day, he gave his parents false names to make them look noble. Was he so keen to identify himself with the social class that held the top rung of society then? It is possible. Is it not how and why this error travelled through generations and reached us?

## FALSE FAMILY LINK WITH THE MARQUIS DE KEROÜARTZ

How was the false link with the family of the marquis de Keroüartz brought about? In my opinion, it came about simply because of the similarity of the two family names; however, not so much because of the spelling, *Kervoach* and *Keroüartz*, but more because of the similarity when spoken. In Quebec, the toponym *Kervoach*, is pronounced *Kerouac*, and resembles *Keroüartz*. At the time “u” and “v” were often interchangeable; this is true in many languages; besides in Breton “vo” in *Kervoach* is pronounced “ou”, (or “oo”, like 'too' in English) as in *Kerouac*, and in “Keroac”, the way previous generations wrote it and as we found it in Quebec church registers<sup>26</sup>. So, some people looked for the same spelling in Brittany or something similar. And one day, someone came across the name *de Keroüartz*, a noble family to boot! Imagine, nobles using a family name almost identical to ours! Loop the loop! Well, it seems to be so then. And ... someone established the false family link; but without checking any documents or archives!

To this day, we still ignore who created this fake link; however, we can trace it as far back as 1886. But we know very well who spread it. Brother Marie-Victorin's uncle, Jules-Adrien Kirouac, a priest who, while on a trip in Europe in 1892, went to the *Bibliothèque nationale*, i.e., France's National Archives in Paris, where he looked up the *de Keroüartz* family. Back in Quebec, he distributed this information to his nephews and nieces, including of course, Marie-Victorin, born Conrad Kirouac, who, in turn, passed on the info to his colleague, Brother Lucien Serre, who eventually wrote the noted study on the Kirouac ancestor, mentioned earlier in the present document and published in 1928 in an official Canadian historical research bulletin (see note #3). Consequently, the false link became a reference.

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<sup>26</sup>For the non-initiated, which we were all at the beginning of the search for our Ancestor, even for us the ancestor's signature looked like Kerouac. It is the first Breton researcher, Chanoine (Canon) Jean-Louis Le Floc'h, who told us that although pronounced “Kerouac” or “Keroac”, the name was written “Kervoach”.

## WHO WAS THIS ALEXANDRE DE KERVOACH ?

After 35 years of research, the precise identity of **Maurice-Louis Le Bris, sieur de Kervoach** known as **Alexandre de Kervoach**, ancestor of all the North American Kirouac, Kyrouac, Kérouac, Keroack, no matter how the descendants spell their family name today, has yet to be fully proven! Why this uncertainty?

We would like to be absolutely certain of the identity of our ancestor, but what is holding us back is the fact that in Brittany among the Le Bihan family identified as of our ancestor's family, no Alexandre nor Maurice nor Louis was ever found. Urbain-François Le Bihan never used any of these first names in Brittany, at least in the documents found so far. And on this side of the Atlantic, so far we have not found a single document signed including the first names Urbain or François. Thus for the moment, we cannot state more.

In addition, we must take into account that some other documents, discovered by the Breton genealogist Patricia Dagier, show the presence of one Urbain-François Le Bihan in Brittany in 1737, one year after Alexandre de Kervoach died in New-France. She explains this as a possible deception/fraud orchestrated by the family in order to keep in the Le Bihan family in Brittany, the inheritance that legally belonged to the ancestor's widow and her children as it is known that Urbain-François had indeed inherited from his mother's family, Catherine Bizien. This is a plausible and non-negligible explanation.

Yet, if one takes into account the custom then by which one could change one's first name and family name on a whim or to assert oneself, the possibility of the Breton Urbain-François Le Bihan being Alexandre de Kervoach in New-France is to be seriously considered. The two are likely one and the same person; however, among the Kirouacs some still hesitate to fully affirm the identity of our Breton ancestor.

For those interested in the Breton side of the research, the genealogist Patricia Dagier published a book in 2009 comprising all the documents found in the Breton archives<sup>27</sup> and her explanations for each one in a book entitled **Le véritable trésor de Clément Kirouac**. This book, Clément Kirouac's True Treasure, in French only, was legally deposited in the Quebec Archives and the Canadian Archives. Copies are available for consultation at some Quebec genealogical societies.

All readers and researchers wishing to know the detailed story of the 35-year research can buy the book<sup>28</sup> I wrote, which was published by the **Kirouac Family Association Inc.** at the occasion of the KFA's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013. The title of this compilation (not yet translated into English) is entitled: **L'Ancêtre des familles Kirouac en Amérique, son épouse et leurs fils**, The Ancestor of the Kirouacs of North-America, his Wife and Their Sons.

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<sup>27</sup>This book also comprises some of the documents found in Quebec by Clément Kirouac and myself.

<sup>28</sup>See the section **Publications** on the KFA website to read the introduction and how to buy the book at:

<http://kirouacfamilies.com/publications/index.html>

This book was officially deposited in the Quebec National Archives and the Canadian National Archives. It can also be consulted in some genealogical societies in the province of Quebec.

The book also includes a digital copy of the 256 documents found in Quebec as well as all the articles published on the subject by all the researchers between 1978 and 2013.

## CONCLUSION

After 35 years of research, this is where we stand and this is the knowledge we have acquired about our Breton ancestor, the ancestor that Jack Kerouac worshipped.

Had Jack lived another thirty years, I am convinced he would have been justly proud of his Breton Ancestor, like we all are, and delighted of the Breton young man who had so impressed his contemporaries, “that the whole parish attended his funeral and burial on 6 March 1736”.