

***St. Germain dit Gauthier House
Boilvin and Fifth Streets
Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin***

The St. Germain *dit* Gauthier house is located in the former Main Village of Prairie du Chien. It is constructed of hewn logs set horizontally and joined at the corners by dovetails. Within its structural details are several elements consistent with a method of French-Canadian construction called *piece sur piece a que d'aronde*. The house is constructed of hewn logs set horizontally and joined at the corners by dovetails. Also, the length of the house is a multiple of thirteen feet and the hewn logs are on average five inches wide. When the house was constructed, there were no trees on the prairie and only small openings of oak or sugar maple trees were present on the bluffs, so timber for a house had to be located along the Wisconsin, Yellow or Chippewa Rivers. After the trees were cut, the logs were hand hewn on site. To indicate the order in which the logs were to be set at the house site, Roman numerals were notched at one end of the log. There are Roman numerals present at the corners on the timbers of the St. Germain *dit* Gauthier House.¹

The history of the structure also confirms that the St. Germain *dit* Gauthier house is an example of the French-Canadian cultural heritage of Wisconsin and the upper Mississippi River valley.

The St. Germain *dit* Gauthier house was constructed on Main Village Lot No. 7 as delineated in the 1820 Isaac Lee map of Prairie du Chien. Main Village Lot No. 7 was confirmed to Jean Baptiste Caron as he and others had occupied the lot since 1790.² Jean Baptiste Caron came to Prairie du Chien from Montreal in the employ of Berthelot and Rolette Company. Caron engaged to work as a *milieu* for two years. The *milieu* was the voyageur who sat in the middle of the canoe to paddle. But Caron was skilled, so he could also be asked to work in his occupation of *tailleur* (a gentleman's tailor). By 1802, Caron had formed his own trading firm, J. Baptiste Caron and Company.³

The next occupant of Main Village Lot No. 7 was Guillaume St. Germain. He was from Yamaska, Province of Quebec. Caron also signed an agreement to work in the fur trade. He engaged to work for Forsyth, Richardson & Company at Michilimackinac for three years.⁴ At the end of his engagement, St. Germain remained in the *pays d'en haut* (upper country). According to family tradition, he moved to Green Bay. There he married Madelaine Brunet, the daughter of Pierre Brunet and Menominee woman.⁵ They traveled westward, arriving at Prairie du Chien about 1825. They acquired Main Village Lot No. 7 when Caron relocated to work in the Missouri River fur trade.

Three generations of the St. Germain *dit* Gauthier family occupied the house and property. Guillaume and Madelaine had two daughters, Madelaine and Pauline. Madelaine married Oliver Cherrier. Pauline married Joseph Rousseau. Both couples lived and raised their families in Prairie du Chien.⁶

Madelaine died before 1880, and Guillaume continued to live in the house with a grand-daughter, Harriet Gardepie, until 1890. By that date, the Dousman family owned the property that surrounded the house. Nina Dousman wished to acquire the land on which the house stood, so the property was sold to Nina Dousman McBride. Mrs. McBride first rented and then sold the house to Charles Gremore.

Charles Gremore purchased the house, and he moved the house in 1900. He relocated the house upon Lot 1, Block 11, Main Village of Prairie du Chien (part of the original Main Village Lot No. 14).

George Coorough purchased the house and property from Charles Gremore in 1902. The house stayed in the Coorough family until 1978. Merilla Coorough was the last person to live in the house. The house was purchased by the City of Prairie du Chien as part of the relocation of the residents of the Prairie du Chien 4th Ward in the 1980s. The St. Germain *dit* Gauthier/Coorough house was one of three homes that were not demolished or relocated as part of the relocation accomplished by the Corps of Engineers and US Department of Housing and Urban Development.⁷

¹ Dennis M. Au, *Architectural Analysis and Preservation Recommendations: St. Germain dit Gauthier House*, manuscript, April 1990

² *American State Papers: Public Lands*, vol. 4, (Washington: Duff Green, 1834), 873.

³ Voyageur Contracts Database, www.shsb.mb.ca/en/Voyageurs_database. Manuscript collection, Clarke Historical Library, Mount Pleasant, Michigan.

⁴ Voyageur Contracts Database, www.shsb.mb.ca/en/Voyageurs_database.

⁵ Ste. Anne, Detroit, *Registres 1810-1831*, ancestry.com.

⁶ *1850 US Federal Census*, Wisconsin, Crawford County, Prairie du Chien, ancenstry.com.

⁷ Crawford County Register of Deeds, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. Interview with Merilla Coorough.