



Hélène's World: Hélène Desportes of Seventeenth-Century Quebec

Susan McNelley

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Hélène Desportes, born in 1620, was the first child of French parents to be born in Quebec and to survive. For nine years, she lived in Samuel de Champlain's Habitation. In 1629, the little settlement was captured by the English. Hélène, along with the majority of the other French settlers, was put on an English ship and taken to France. She returned to Quebec in 1634 and spent the remainder of her life in the little colony. She was married twice, had fifteen children, and seventy grandchildren. No portrait of Hélène exists. There are no memoirs, no diaries, nor any letters to guide the biographer. Nevertheless, there are public records and other primary sources from which we are able to piece together her life. This, then, is her remarkable story, set against the backdrop of France's efforts to establish a colony in the New World along the banks of the St. Lawrence River.

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