For God, the memory of my dad & Tony Skifton; & for my mom Rose, my son Matt & future spouse & offspring: Jayme Class (our memory of her parents) our family/friends, generally; my sponsors (Bernard McGarty, Tom & Joy Marcou, Dan & Vicki Marcou, & Argentina & Ignacio Peterson), subjects, counselors, archivists, & technicians.

"Take a course in good water and air; and in the eternal youth of Nature you may renew your own."—John Muir, UW alum & founder Sierra Club, who lived in UW’s very 1st building, then-dorm North Hall, which became UW PolSci bldg., where DvJM was clerk-typist 1978-79 for what became Lafollette School of Public Affairs.

"You really don’t know your character until you experience some adversity."—Trans. From a 1926 Collection of Ancient Chinese Proverbs.

"You’ve got to be in it to win it."—Spike Lee.

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime."—Mark Twain.

"Find a story that means something to you."—Master Portrait Photographer Annie Liebovitz.

"I hope there are days when your coffee tastes like magic, your playlist makes you dance, strangers make you smile, and the night sky touches your soul. I hope there are days when you fall in love with being alive."—Brooke Hampton.

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime."—Mark Twain.

"When you walk through the doors of America’s libraries, you’re walking through the portals of freedom."—David McCullough.

Along with having helped conceive a great son (Matt), DvJM has authored 167 books, 1,250+ shorter, non-fiction published writings, 15 plays, hundreds of poems, & hundreds of thousands of photos he’s taken, making David Joseph Marcou Wisconsin’s most prolific author.
Among hundreds of sources consulted since 2012 for these two articles, included are these key online sources:

- http://www.libraryguides.missouri.edu/davidmarcou
- http://www.newadvent.org/catholic/09690a.htm

Summary Caption Credit:

All pics in SA82 were taken by David Joseph Marcou (except the Joliet-Marquette memorial plaque photo in Chicago—anonymous—my brother Dan J. Marcou’s photo of the Louis Joliet statue in Joliet, Ill., 2018 – Vicki Marcou’s photo of Dan & granddaughter Anya by Marquette-Joliet marker, Portage, WI, 2018; plus Joliet statue by Canadian Parliament; Fr. Marquette statue, Marquette U.; artwork of Fr. Marquette saying Mass for Louis Joliet & Native Americans, anon.; Marquette-Joliet historical marker at Prairrie du Chien, anon.; 1st published map of their big discovery, in Fr. Marquette’s Journal, 1681, Thevenot; & Joliet’s “lost” map of 1674, thumbnail version of 1st firsthand map of the Mississippi River, created by Louis Joliet, colorized by respected historical writers/artists Pat & Lisa Middleton); besides Western WI, other pics are from these areas too: Missouri Group of Authors at cafe w/ Prof. Charles N. Davis wearing “G” cap (The Four L-R: Daryl Moen, Brian Brooks, George Kennedy, & Don Ranly, all 4 being teachers of DVJM at Mizzou); Paul’s Club seen from alley, Madison, WI, ca. 1980; Washington, DC (incl. sunrise on Capitol Bldg.); Arlington, VA (cherry blossoms); countryside near/in Chicago (incl. trio of power towers & Sears-Willis Tower in city); Philadelphia (power tower); Pha, Golden Egg Roll waits, LaX, 11-30-18; Hannibal grain elevators juxtaposed w/Delta Queen riverboat paddlewheel (DVJM4MissouriLifeMag); Filipino golf course; Tiger & Diego; Tom & Joy Marcou’s cats, VA; Gryffie, Robyn & Dustin’s dog, LaX; old wagon wheel & white porch (Louis Joliet’s dad was a wheelwright); David W. Johns next to Big Indian Statue, 2018; Charlie Freiberg in his Badger cap at FB game, Madison, 9-8-18; Harry McLivaine empowers my watch–plus blonde Lindsay by display case, & brunette Sarah by desk, Harry’s aides at Crescent Jvrs.; Frank seated on steps by Fayze’s Cafe, ’18; Police investigate stabbing death of Virgil Stewart, 1-2-19; Hallie, our waitress at Margarita’s Mexican Restaurant, 1-11-19; 19 pics from State Archives Top Award event, LaXPL, featuring Anita T. Doering, her staff (painted & not-pictured), her husband and son, Kelly Krieg-Sigman Library Director in 1890s gear, Peter Gottlieben then-State Archivist, & UW-L Prof. Bruce Mouser, 10-17-10; Jim Hobart, Ph.D., sitting in cafe with beard, glasses, & no cap; Martin, sitting in library back entryway; Chandler, PearlStBks clerk standing in striped dress; Lester Olson, Battle of the Bulge vet, ca. Christmastime, 2012; Sue Schuermann, Mizzou J-School Library Specialist 2; Prof. Roger Gafke, Mizzou; Arvid & Mary (of Inuit Ancestry) Homuth, Minneapolis Bus Station, ca. 2002, Picture Post hero Bert Hardy, UK, ’81 (DVJM4BrNPG); St. Mother Teresa, Anyang Kor, 1-27-85; Pearl St. Bks. 20th Anniv. front-window, incl. 2 books DVJM directed-edited – Spirit of LaCrosse & Spirit of Wisconsin, 1-11-19; Cafe group (L-R: John Medinger, Kerry Hruska, Joe Kotnour, & DVJM, 1-11-19); ducks & riverboat in fog at dawn by Miss. River, LaX, Big Indian Statue, sunset, sculpture Anthony Zimmerhal, LaX, ca. 1960, 9-8-18.

The Original North American Corps of Discovery: Louis Joliet, Leader and Owner, & Fr. Marquette, Chaplain & Journalist


Author’s Note 1: Louis Joliet’s family name is spelled a couple ways here; I generally spell it “Jolliet”; traditional French is often “Jolliet”, though. Father (French “Pere”) Marquette’s Christian name “Jacques” in French, means “James” in English.

Author’s Note 2: The Age of Discovery, or Age of Exploration, refers to the search for a simplified water route around the Earth; it began at outset of the 15th century and lasted until about the start of the 19th century. After Christopher Columbus landed in the Americas in 1492, and Ferdinand Magellan’s crew circumnavigated the globe in 1519-1521, there was still no direct-water route discovered yet from the East Coast of North America to the Pacific Ocean. The first great expedition in that regard was Louis Joliet-Fr. Jacques Marquette’s Expedition of 1673. (Lewis and Clark’s expedition of 1804-1806, with its team known since as the Corps of Discovery, attempted the same thing, but via the Missouri River, east to west, not the Mississippi, north to south. President Jefferson’s purchase of the Louisiana Territory made him curious as to what the territory was like between the US East and West Coasts.) A water-route had already been found from Eastern Canada via the Great Lakes, & the French government hoped Joliet and Marquette would prove the Mississippi River flowed directly to the Pacific Ocean. Since the Panama Canal wouldn’t be built until the early 20th century, they hoped there was an easier way to find the Pacific than to sail around the tip of South America.

Joliet, as in Louis Joliet, states the Canadian Encyclopedia, was “The first significant Canadian-born explorer[,] Louis Jolliet achieved international fame in his lifetime as the first non-Aboriginal person, together with Jacques Marquette [b. in France], to travel and map along the Mississippi River. Jolliet also explored and mapped the Lake Superior regions, the area between the Saguenay River and Hudson Bay, and part of the Labrador coast.” After both men had been thinking about embarking on an expedition into today’s Mississippi River Valley region, Joliet and Marquette came together. A translation of the Jesuit Fr. Dahlon’s notes from his interview of Joliet in 1674 states: “Two years ago, Monsieur the count de Frontenac, our governor, and Monsieur Talon, then our intendant, decided that it was important to undertake the discovery of the Southern
Sea [Pacific Ocean, though it actually turned out to be Gulf of Mexico], after having accomplished that of the [Great] Lakes; and, above all, to ascertain into what sea falls the great river [Mississippi, or in Ottawa language, “beautiful waters”], about which the Savages relate so much…. For this purpose, they could not have selected a person endowed with better qualities than…Sieur [Louis] Jolliet, who has traveled much in that region, and has acquitted himself…with all the ability that could be desired.” Fr. Marquette’s Journal states: “These Gentlemen [Frontenac and Talon] appointed [in 1673] for this undertaking Sieur Joliet, whom they considered fit for so great an enterprise, and they were well pleased that Father Marquette should be of the Party [too].”

The French priest had worked at La Pointe, near present-day Ashland, WI, on Lake Superior, and heard of a “Great River” from the Huron and Illinois Indians, but then most of the missionaries in North America had heard of it (Spanish explorer Hernando Desoto was the first European recognized to have seen the Mississippi, when he and his group reached it at an as-yet undetermined southerly point on May 8, 1541); it’s said Marquette asked his superiors if he could be matched with someone to lead. But other accounts say Joliet was asked by intendant (government leader) Talon about an expedition to the Great River; unable to get funding from the government, Joliet formed a commercial group of his own to fund the trip; Fr. Marquette was chosen chaplain.

Joliet, then, “made it a reality”, as one historian wrote, and led the original North American Corps of Discovery, plunging deep into the central-interior of then-Native American-only lands in North America. Joliet was among the very first famous North America-born explorers of this continent’s interior. The French-Canadian wilderness-expert/entrepreneur and the French priest-missionary/journalist, beat the (later-terms US) Americans to the punch!

The Discovery-Corps’ 7-man team (possibly including some of Joliet’s commercial group & soon-after-start two Indian guides, making nine people in their canoes) departed St. Ignace (in Michigan now) on May 17, 1673 and sailed to Green Bay. The team then portaged from the Fox River to the Wisconsin River on June 14, 1673, near present-day city Portage, in Columbia Co., Wis. Joliet-Marquette were sent on behalf of the French King “to explore the terra incognita west of the Fox River of Green Bay”, after France’s Jean Nicolet had landed at Green Bay in 1634, leader of the first known non-Aboriginals in Wisconsin. Louis Joliet had been at Sault-St.-Marie in 1671 when French official Simon-François Daumont de Saint-Lusson and explorer-translator Nicholas Perot claimed the western territories for French King Louis XIV.

Fr. Marquette wrote in-journal, the choice of Joliet to lead the Mississippi River expedition was ‘not mistaken, for he is a young man born in this country, who possesses all the qualities…desired for such an undertaking. He has experience and knows the languages spoken in the country of the Outaoues[Ottawa; Marquette knew some of the languages Joliet knew, but not those of the Ottawa], where he has passed several years. He possesses Tact and prudence,…the chief qualities necessary for the success of a voyage as dangerous as it is difficult. Finally, he has the Courage to dare nothing when everything is to be feared. Consequently, he has fulfilled the expectations entertained for him…’

Their team traveled south after discovering the Upper Mississippi River at today’s Prairie du Chien, Wis., on June 17, 1673, then canoed to the Missouri River’s mouth, which Joliet wrote: “was in full flood… I never saw anything more terrific, a tangle of entire trees from the mouth of the Pekistanou [Missouri] with such impetuosity that one could not attempt to cross it without great danger. The commotion was such that the water was made muddy by it and could not clear itself.” The team didn’t explore beyond that mouth, nor linger. Instead, they headed south on the Mississippi. Southerly, they’d also passed today’s Iowa (including the mouth of the Iowa River), Illinois, and to be sure, Missouri, seeing huge cat-fish, birds of new types, fruits, grains, bison, prairie-lands, mountains, and tall trees, and soon met the Akamsea Indians of Arkansas, where they found a “calumet” (peace-pipe) useful.

Marquette wrote: “In the evening, the elders held a secret council, in regard to the design entertained by some to break our heads and rob us; but the Chief put a stop to all these plots. After sending for us, he dined the calumet... as a token of our entire safety; and, to relieve us of all fear, he made me a present of it./ Monsieur Jolliet and I held another Council, to deliberate [for they knew they had 2-3 more days’ journey to the basin of the Gulf of Mexico at the latitude of 31 degrees 60 minutes; they were then at 33 degrees 40 minutes; it’s fairly certain Joliet was responsible for use of compass and sextant then, as he’d be throughout his adult life] whether we should push on, or remain content with the discovery which we had made. After… considering that we were [not on course to reach the Pacific, and] that we exposed ourselves to the risk of losing the results of this voyage, of which we could give no information if we proceeded to [br]ing ourselves into the hands of the Spaniards who, without doubt, would at least have detained us as captives... we saw very plainly that we were not in a condition to resist Savages allied to the Europeans, who were numerous, and expert in firing guns, and who continually infested the lower part of the river. Finally, we had obtained all the information that could be desired in regard to this discovery. All these reasons induced us to decide upon Returning [north].”

The team turned back at the Arkansas River’s mouth on July 16, 1673. While coming-going, Joliet and Marquette also became first non-Aboriginals to travel along the Illinois River, the Des Plaines River, and the sites of future metropolises St. Louis and Chicago, camping nearby. While canoeing down the Mississippi to begin, one account says an Illinois chief gave them a calumet later used with the Akamsea; Marquette’s Journal states, though, they took part in the calumet ceremony in today’s Arkansas with a peace-pipe given to them by the Akamsea chief, implying that was the first calumet they received.

Fr. Marquette’s rough-sketch map shows Lac Des Illinois (Lake Michigan today); from the Indian village of Kaskasia, Joliet and Marquette were escorted to that lake, via the later-named Chicago Portage, by an Illinois chief (he may have been the same chief who gifted Joliet with his 10-year-old son to be a servant to be educated; the boy perished soon in a rapids accident though, with Joliet’s papers and two men) and young braves, and were pleased to reach it, whence it seemed easy-enough to find their way back to the start. In fact, the native Americans had been friendly-enough all along their journey, perhaps since the explorers had no warlike aims themselves. They had found canoeing much slower going north on the Mississippi though, against the current, theoretically putting them in greater danger heading back than heading south on it, because they would have been longer on the river. They took the northeasterly short-cut. The duo eventually came close to today’s Milwaukee and partied company at De Pere ca. Sept. 30, 1673, near Green Bay, where Fr. Marquette would convert Native Americans. Joliet moved northwesterly.

In addition to all the sights the duo saw, journaled, and charted along the Mississippi River as the first whites in those areas, what they heard was equally important – i.e., about the Mississippi River’s basin in “Louisiana”, which resulted nine years later in explorer Robert de LaSalle’s claiming the Louisiana Territory as a French colony and naming it after Louis XIV. In a cultural side-note, though both secular and religious authorities in French-Canadian culture wanted to spread the influence of France and the Catholic Church to Native Americans, and though we have few of Joliet’s writings, I don’t recall reading the word “savages” in Joliet’s official pronouncements, but Fr. Marquette and the Jesuits used that word fairly often. It
could be considered, even then, a pejorative word, though the idea of the “noble savage” (at least a bit positive) did develop among some people as time passed.

In winter 1673-74, Joliet stayed at Michillimackinac (today’s Mackinac Island) or Sault-St.-Marie (sources vary), where he wrote and then copied his journal and maps. Homeward, Joliet’s canoe soon capsized in perilous Lachine rapids near Montreal & his paperwork originals perished, along with two voyageurs and an Illinois Indian chief’s 10-year-old son (whom Joliet called “diligent”, “obedient”, “quick-witted”). He always considered his own surviving then a miracle; if he wouldn’t have survived that capsizing, he wouldn’t have fathered any offspring. Perhaps suspicious, perhaps not, a fire in the Jesuit cabin he’d wintered in, apparently destroyed Joliet’s copies. (When commenting later for the government, Joliet would write eloquently; “All these native peoples, fruits, birds, and animals occupy a country more beautiful than France.”—Letter from Louis Joliet 10-10-1674 to Msgr. De Laval.)

Meanwhile post-journey, Fr. Marquette developed dysentery and died May 19, 1675 at age 37 near today’s Ludington, Mich. (his apparent later-found and dis-interred remains were re-buried at St. Ignace), but his journal—which would be published unedited and untranslated by Thevenot in 1681 at the behest of Fr. Dablon, with a map credited to Marquette and engraved by Liebaux that’s been questioned by scholars regarding the “Marquette Map Hoax Thesis” with little or no mention there of Joliet’s possibly having influenced any map-creations; LJ was even better-trained in map-making than Marquette and likely contributed a lot to any rough-maps made by Marquette. Jesuits over-time have idealized their explorer-priest, endowing him with almost super-human powers, including superb map-making skills, which it’s doubtful he possessed. The French priest did have key talents, though, which the expedition put to use. After languishing in archives nearly two centuries, his journal was edited and published by Dr. Shea in 1853 (the St. Marie version). Marquette’s Journal remains the earliest eye-witness account by non-Aboriginals of what is now called the US Heartland. (That Louis Joliet, an ancestor of mine according to very respected archives, lost his own 1st-hand documentation of that expedition hasn’t prevented your author from documenting my own voluminous works the past half-century, although I don’t generally keep a journal, but do write a lot about as well as photograph my subjects, with accurate details at every opportunity, including about my personal history.)

For his own stellar work and his own re-constructed memories of his journal and maps, Joliet (adding D’Anticosti to Joliet) was given the Canadian island of Anticosti and others by Louis XIV (Sun King); Wikipedia states it was the world’s largest privately-held island then. Louis Joliet married 19-year-old Canadian Claire-Francoise Byssot de la Valtrie in 1675. Early in life he’d studied for the priesthood, but left seminary in 1667 at ca. age 22 to visit France. He was later appointed Hydrographer to the King.

Jim Sulski noted just one of the original North American Corps of Discovery’s accomplishments, in a 1997 Chicago Tribune story, “Who’s on First? Joliet, Marquette”: “In many ways, the names Marquette and Joliet are synonymous with Chicago. And they should be, says Russell Lewis, then-director of collections and research for the Chicago Historical Society. “They were the first European settlers to see Chicago and understand that this was a place that had a future… By their understanding and vision of what Chicago could be, they opened the doors for more of the French to come here. If they had said ‘Forget it; Chicago is nothing,’ perhaps nobody would have come here.”

Monsieur Louis Joliet funded, organized, and directed the Joliet-Marquette expedition to and from the Mississippi River, “making it a reality”, as a historian states—enlisting 5 canoeists/voyageurs to accompany him and chaplain/journalist Fr. Marquette; Joliet directed navigation, procured supplies, conversed in Indian languages, kept a log, made maps, collected rarities, etc. For two centuries post-journey, Louis Joliet was the most famous Canadian name in Europe, wrote a Jesuit historian around the time of WWII. Eventually, the Joliet Squadron of cadets at the Royal Military College Saint-Jean in Quebec Province was named in his honor, as was the Louis Joliet Rose. In Joliet, IL, named for him, there is also a junior college named for him, plus numerous high schools and streets in North America. In addition, a cruise ship sailing out of Quebec City is named in his honor. And don’t forget “Joliet” Jake, John Belushi’s comic, singing character in the Blue Brothers. Regarding Fr. Marquette, many cities, streets, parks, rivers, counties, and a hotel in Peoria are named for him plus a famous Jesuit college in Milwaukee, Marquette University, which has a very good School of Journalism. Both men have had statues erected in their honor, and paintings painted. And intrigue continues about what had been in Joliet’s own logbook and maps, and how much he contributed to Fr. Marquette’s paperwork.

That Louis Joliet lost his own documents, shouldn’t detract from his fame as leader of the Original North American Corps of Discovery into the present-day US Heartland; he was also a successful fur trader and family man who often was organist at Quebec Cathedral and a university professor, plus the first person to scientifically chart North Labrador’s coastline as Royal Hydrographer and to detail the lives of his trading (natives’ whale and seal oils for his cod, etc.) partners then, the Inuit tribe. Joliet declined an offer from English Hudson Bay Gov. Charles Bayly in 1679 (the English appreciated explorers) to work for him, but knew “if the English are left in this [Hudson] bay they will make themselves masters of all the trade in Canada.” (The Joliet family knew the English could be difficult at times; e.g., Louis’s wife and mother-in-law were imprisoned briefly by them.) Canada is still a British Commonwealth member in 2019.

Thank you, Fr. Marquette, for your journal, maps, & counsel; and thank you, Grandfather Louis, for leading your Corps of Discovery when and where North Americans and others needed your resources and resourcefulness most, as you did your best work.

The Perfect Height of Trees: From Joliet-Marquette to Marcou in Wisconsin

by David Joseph Marcou, Author & Copyright-holder 2013, 2019. "These are your people!"—A La Crosse Public Librarian speaking to DuJM, Autumn 2012. “For me I cannot ever be at ease/With trees that grow no higher than one’s knees/Or too tall trees that splinter in a freeze/ But here we have the perfect height of trees."—Calvin Trillin.

Modern history sometimes mimics early history. Though currently known evidence of Europeans in “Wisconsin” didn’t occur until the 17th century, insights continue to be gained by many in the Badger State, as by Native Americans learning about the area ten thousand years before the first non-Aboriginals landed in today’s Door Co. Viewing recent aerial photos of the Yamaska River (partway between Montreal and Quebec) and the Black River at western Wisconsin’s La Crosse, the images suggest why French-Canadians migrated to that city’s French Island ca. 1850 from the Yamaska area; they resembled each other. At French Island, sloughs, swamps, sandbars, and woods abounded, apt for hunting, fishing, and in places after clearing, farming.

Early family recollections say the paternal ancestors of the David Ambrose Marcou Jr. (wife: Rose Brunner-Muskat Marcou, of Swiss-Austrian/German ancestry) (focal) Family, were not in the first wave of French-Canadians on French Island (which included the Goyettes and Jolivettes), but arrived starting soon after. La Crosse-founder Nathan Myrick had arrived at Prairie Lacrosse in 1841, opening a trading post. Today’s city is along
the confluence of three rivers on the west--Mississippi, La Crosse, and Black. East are bluffs--including Granddad’s Bluff. Many of the first French-Americans here lived on French Island, across Black River, northwest side of La Crosse, with fewer Marcous in Onalaska just-north of La Crosse, and some in south La Crosse where the old country club stands, Ed Marcou told me via phone in Jan. 2013; Ed was 90 when I spoke with him then, an amateur historian, relative, and retired staffer for St. Louis Cardinals’ and Milwaukee Brewers’ baseball. (I spoke with Ed via phone again 1-17-19. His memory was still sharp. He said his great-grandfather was Gideon Marcou, who apparently was a brother of my great-grandfather, John Marcou. John’s son David A. Marcou Sr. was my paternal grandfather. Ed remembers delivering bottles of milk to my Marcou grandparents’ grocery story on Rose St. in La Crosse, ca. 1940s.)

The focal family’s direct-line Marcoux ancestors came from Normandy, Fr., migrating to the three-rivers region between Montreal and Quebec. The earliest direct ancestors traceable so far, including maternal, are Jacques Boucher (b.1547 at Chartres, Fr.) and wife, Francoise Paigne Boucher (b.1552 at Chartres). Earliest direct-line Marcoux-born traceable ancestor was Thomas Marcoux, b.ca.1695 in Avranches, Normandy, Fr. Thomas married Francoise Abraham of Normandy and their son Jean Marcoux was born there ca. 1722. National Archives & Library of Quebec records state Jean married Marie-Madeleine Joliet-D’Anticosti Marcoux, daughter of Charles Joliet D’Anticosti; Jean and Marie’s son Jean-Baptiste Marcoux was born ca. Sept. 1, 1754 in Quebec. Marie was granddaughter of Louis Joliet D’Anticosti. Jean-Baptiste (m.Marguerite Lafond) had son Joseph, who married Genevieve Niquet; the couple were also direct-progenitors of my parents’ family, with Genevieve migrating to La Crosse after Joseph’s death, ca. 1868.

When a La Crosse Public Librarian and I checked a Canada census for ca. 1800, she suddenly said, “These are your people!”, Joseph and Genevieve. They were the pivotal couple in my research, drawing early and later strands of the Joliet-Marcou family together in two North American nations, proving the Jean Marcoux who married Marie-Madeleine was in the direct-line (with M-M) to me and my son. An often-used male given name in my family’s Marcou descent was Jean-Baptiste (John the Baptist). Genevieve’s migration coincided with her own son Jean-Baptiste Marcoux Sr.’s, et. al. Genevieve Niquet Marcoux died in 1872 at La Crosse, age 93. (An archivist in the same public library pointed out there may even be a blood link between the Marquette family, as in Fr. Marquette’s general family, and our immediate-family Marcous, but I’ve not seen that proof yet.)

The name “Marcou” comes from French “Marcwulf” or “Marculf” (“=border wolf”); some early Marcouxes lived in southeast France (a small-town is named for them) near the Italian border; and eastern France near the Swiss border; plus Normandy. The name’s first-half may derive from Mars, Roman god of war/agriculture, and/or from Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor famed for Stoicism. It may also have derived from St. Mark. Notable people with the name include the French St. Marcou, ca. 500 AD, who cured a French King of the then-dreaded skin disease scrofula. Kings of France for centuries continued the tradition of processing from north to a St. Marcou memorial after being crowned at Rheims, even when St. Joan d’Arc (1412-1431) led France’s army and Charles VII was crowned King. St. Marcou’s name was given to an island near Normandy’s coast fought over by Brits and French in 1795.

Jules Marcou, 19th-century Swiss-French immigrant, created the first reliable geologic map of the U.S. and did the first fully scientific study of Lake Superior, taught at Zurich and Harvard universities, and wrote a biography of his mentor/colleague evolutionist Louis Agassiz, whom he assisted in founding the Museum of Comparative Zoology in Massachusetts. My brother Dan Marcou said by viewing the family coat of arms, an ancestor/s likely fought in crusades to the Holy Land ca.1100 AD, for there’s a cross in a warrior’s helmet on it, plus lilies for loyalty (a noted French author is Lily Marcou).

My younger brother Dan, an author of histories like me, noted Canadian father/son Pierre Sr. & Pierre Jr. Marcou (not in our direct-line, but related) were key in defeating Gen. Montgomery, who was killed in the final invasion of Canada by the US Army on Dec. 31st, 1775 (17 counties are named for that US general). The Marcous were both militia-officers, but because of their heroism in that battle (Quebec), both were offered regular officer status in the British Army; Pierre Jr. accepted the new status and fought in what would become the United States; Pierre Sr. turned down that status, operated a store, then became a colonel in the Canadian militia. Pierre Jr. served in the British Army stateside, and later became a trader, who bartered with the Inuit tribe of Labrador. Neither Pierre left much wealth to their widows; the two Pierre Marcous hadn’t been cautious enough to earn many profits from their courage and hard work, but their lives touched many fellow Canadians nonetheless.

Upon first-arrival in La Crosse, many Marcous and Marcos may have spelled their names Marcoux. But soon, many in the group decided their surname would be easier to spell by deleting a letter/s. One branch became Marcou, another Marco; a third retained Marcoux, but there’s some ambivalence on records then. There may also have been the rarer Marcoe and Marcu. Daniel J. Marcou – third son of David A. Marcou Jr. and Rose C. Muskat Marcou–ex-director of training for La Crosse’s Police Dept., a Wis. SWAT Officer of the Year in 2005, and now well-known crime writer and workshop presenter, escorted your author to photograph French Island Cemetery ca.1994, where key early relatives are buried. Matriarch Genevieve’s inscribed marker was then, and maybe still is, there. Francois or Frank Marcou–born in 1822 and brother of Jean Baptiste Marcoux Sr., who was married to Mathilde Richman Marcou, Jean herself having been born in 1829 in the Quebec-Montreal area and who migrated to La Crosse–served in the Civil War and is also buried in French Island Cemetery. Some of our direct-line ancestors arrived on the banks of the Black River, near where Clinton St. Bridge is now (where in 1992, I photographed Bill Clinton’s rally), camped there until a hard-freeze, then crossed to the island. A bridge or two would be built, so crossings didn’t have to be made by skiff or team ferry in warmer weather or by walking on ice, skiing on snow, or on horse in frozen weather.

Walter Marcou, David A. Sr.’s brother, served in WWI. Other relatives have served in the military, one being Matt, my son. Though Genevieve may not have been an ancestor for all “Marcouxes” here, she was an ancestor for my family, and her husband/direct-line ancestor Joseph Marcoux was a direct descendant of Louis Joliet D’Anticosti. David Sr.’s dad John (Jean-Baptiste Marcoux Jr.), married to former Detroit-resident Margret Brossard Marcou until her death in 1924, transferred his farm to Walter late in life. The farm would be sold twice, yielding part of City Airport. John lived on-farm after transfer, but hurt his back. Walter’s wife, Myrtle, then asked John to move; he was living with daughter Tillie LaFleur on Wood St. when he passed in 1936.

David A. Marcou Jr.–my dad and youngest of Margaret, Jim, Rosemary, Alice, & David A. Jr., children of David A. Sr. (b. on French Island Aug. 28, 1890) and Agnes M. Fitzgerald Marcou (b.to James and Mary Cowan-Fitzgerald’s farm-family ca.1888 in Juneau Co.)– would marry Rose C. Muskat Marcou, mother of their seven children; she was David A. Jr.’s wife 65 years (his d. Mar. 2015) and daughter of Roman A. Stricker Muskat and Ida R. Brunner Muskat, born in Dane Co., Wis., ca. 1900, also with seven kids – Sr. Monica, Ray, Joe, Rose, Larry, Zita, & Kathy. Roman raised
bees, crops, chickens, show roosters; the latter won first place awards regularly in NYC, including at Madison Square Garden. David A. Marcou Sr. worked in and owned meat markets/grocery stores, including one in Mondovi my dad was born in in 1931; during WWII David Sr. went into corrals and shot bulls for Black Market sales. Both grandfathers drove cars in Wisconsin and beyond; their wives worked hard too, including alongside husbands and offspring.

Added notables with same family surnames are writer F. Scott Fitzgerald; singer Ella Fitzgerald; actor Barry Fitzgerald; footballer Larry Fitzgerald; WPT journalist Angela Fitzgerald; Barron Co., Wis. Sheriff Chris Fitzgerald (Jayme Closs case); journalists Lee and Claudia Cowan; golfer Steve Stricker; Protestant theologian Emil Brunner; film producer Lisa Muskat, and musician Tamir Muskat.

David A. Marcou Jr. and Rose C.M. Marcou married Valentine’s Day, 1950, at St. James Church. There was a blizzard then, which kept Rose’s parents from being there, though they attended the reception. At-reception were 100 guests, including African-American barbershop owners Mr. & Mrs. Orby Moss. The Marcous honeymooned in Chicago and Milwaukee; your author was born Nov. 25, 1950, maybe conceived in one of those two big cities.

After living in an apartment above David A. Sr. and Agnes’s grocery (Marcous’ Market), 732 Rose St., until 1954, David A. Jr. and Rose moved to 1720 Prospect St. (also on north side), where the couple lived 60 years. All seven kids attended grade school (1-8) at St. James School. The four boys graduated Aquinas HS; the three younger girls graduated Logan HS, with the youngest, Mary Katherine, being valedictorian of Logan ‘81, first class at LHS’s new campus. David A. Jr. was a meat-cutter/meat-manager before retiring ca. 2009. In 1987, he had open-heart surgery; a few years later, his colon cancer was removed. Despite his early drinking in bars two nights/week nearly all-night, Rose resolutely prompted him to work daily on-time. He even crossed a picket line at Boulevard IGA Foods in the 1960s, telling union-leaders from Chicago he had seven children and a wife to feed.

After 2-3 jobs including in nursing at St. Francis Hospital, Rose worked 30 years as a medical records administrator for Bethany-Lutheran Nursing Home System. She was chief aide to B-L Director Florence Kahler, whose husband, Irv, was City fire chief and president of the Wis. Assoc. of Fire Chiefs. The Marcou kids worked for pay, and earned good school-grades too. Each received a small allowance for helping at home. The boys were also paper-carriers, plus helped at Marcous’ Market ($2/week and all the snacks we could eat). Also, Mary worked at Hollywood Theatre; Diane and Lynn, Dairy Queen.

We “kids” are now travelers/explorers and community-leaders. Third-oldest Dan, a Madison Area Technical College alum, much-decorated former policeman, and notable writer; and this article’s writer David Joseph Marcou, Wisconsin’s most-prolific author and UW, UIowa, and UM-Columbia alum, who lived/worked in journalism in England and South Korea and has taken street and travel photos, etc., 40 years, are mentioned; Dennis, a UW Law School alum, is City municipal judge (1998-2019/present); and Tom served in USAF many years, then worked with wife Joy for top federal civil service employees, “retiring” to Texas real-estate development. Eldest daughter Diane M. Skifton is a civilian police employee nearing 30 years for LPD. Lynn Marcou works full-time for La Crosse Co. as a social services specialist and part-time for Duluth Trading. Mary Marcou Temp is an accountant for Mathy Construction. Marcou offspring all have offspring too, including Native American, European (French, Irish, German, Swiss-Austrian), Canadian, African, & Korean bloodlines. Though our family has had setbacks—including Diane’s son Tony, who was among 11 college-age men drowning here 1997-2014, and the disappearance of ancestor-explorer Louis Joliet himself, who likely drowned near Anticosti Island in 1700—we keep on keeping on. One thinks of the height of good trees, not perfect to some in every way perhaps, but “perfect” to us and to those closest to us.

There’s an iron bridge built in 1931 (my parents’ birth-year) over Canada’s Yamaska River whose top resembles the top of the bridge over the Mississippi in La Crosse built in 2004. The bridges signify linkage, unity. Our family is united far more than we are divided; a lot of that esprit de corps comes from our ancestors and the upbringing they’ve helped instill in us. Despite our competitive natures, we still love each other a great deal. Hopefully, we will always love each other, no matter where we live and work. My mom, Rose Caroline Muskat Marcou just let me know this year’s birthday for her, 1-18-19, was her 88th. She said Dr. Rowley, I believe, drove out near their farm in a snowstorm and couldn’t go any further for her birth, so mom’s dad, Roman, took a team of hores with a sleigh to retrieve him for the delivery. In those days, you had to be very resourceful to survive. It’s like ancestor Louis Joliet and Fr. Jacques Marquette had to be when they navigated the Mississippi — very resourceful. We all have learned that early on, thankfully. And to those who aren’t in the Joliet-Marcou line directly, thank you for partnering up with us to do the tough job of living in hardy fashion, decently in our lives.

Pere Marquette and Sieur Jolliet

In 1673, Louis Jolliet, Canadian fur-trader and explorer, and Father Jacques Marquette, French Jesuit Missionary, with five French Canadian boatmen, were the first white men to enter the upper Mississippi River.

Indians directed them to the Great River via the Fox-Wisconsin waterway from the present site of Green Bay to Prairie du Chien. The Frenchmen entered the Mississippi River June 17, 1673.

Descending the river until July 16, the explorers turned back at the Arkansas River because they anticipated possible danger ahead from the Spanish and Indians. Returning North, the expedition pioneered what is now the Illinois - Des Plaines - Chicago River passage to Lake Michigan.

Marquette and Jolliet were back at the mouth of the Fox River by the end of September. The trip had taken them over 2,000 miles through country never before seen by white men.

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