It is believed that Jean Gourville (1625-1703) was the grandfather of Marie Martha de Gourville. Jean Gourville was a celebrated French financier, writer, ambassador (to Brunswick, Germany), and traveler. He is the author of *Memories* in two volumes. They contain interesting references to William III of the Netherlands. It is believed that Jean Herault de Gourville is an early ancestor on the maternal side of the Breard family, one of the founding families of Monroe.

**A Financier of the Seventeenth Century**

Jean Herault, Sire of Gourville, was a respected financier. He was born at Rochefoucauld, France, July 11, 1625. His mother became a widow at an early age. She taught him to write and sent him to a financier at Angouleme. Here he was trained in business philosophies by Jean Dominique Cassini. Francois, Duke de La Rochefoucauld, author of *Maximes*, was impressed by the intelligence of the young Gourville. Rochefoucauld made Gourville his secretary and sent him to Flanders. During the war of the “Fronde,” a political movement to oppose the court and Cardinal Mazarin and the rebellions (1648-53), Gourville
was helpful to the Duke of Rochefoucauld. He also assisted the Prince of Conde. Gourville possessed the means, skills, and talents to side-step and solve political entanglements. He was helpful in procuring monies for the Prince of Conde, even though he was doing illegal acts to acquire funds. For example, he had asked once for a ransom from a postmaster and borrowed funds from the proceeds of a receipt book. These practices were common during these times. However, it did not take Gourville long to repair the damage and the funds were restored.

When the Duke of Rochefoucauld became discouraged from fighting the Royal Court, he appointed Gourville to become his negotiator. In this capacity, Gourville responded professionally. As a result, Judge Mazarin ruled that Gourville was the appropriate person and the only one able to forge a peace between the Prince of Conde and the Duke of Rochefoucauld.

The success of these negotiations made Gourville famous. Becoming well respected, he was named to a high staff post to the army of Catalogne. Then Gourville returned to Paris in 1655. The Cardinal of Paris felt threatened by Gourville because of his great influence with the king and other important members of the court and French society. Thus Gourville was arrested and placed in the Bastille. He proved his innocence to the Cardinal of Paris and was released six months later.

Next, he was appointed by the Minister of Affairs to become an assistant to Superintendent Nicholas Fouquet. Fouquet appointed him to be the tax collector to the region of Guyenne. Being skilled in mathematics at this post, he soon acquired a fortune of 1,500,000 francs. Gourville began to bribe French officials to attain specific goals. However, he was soon discovered. He fled to Holland and later to England. There he was well received by Saint-Evermont, Hamilton, Buckingham, and other Lords whom he knew earlier in France.

After six weeks in London, he went to Brussels, rented a modern hotel, and sponsored social events attracting several dignitaries. Next, he visited Breda in 1666 during the congressional session. This visit was beneficial to his career. He received recommendations from the Princes of Brunswick and Hanover, which put him in good graces with the French.

The King of France was fully informed of Gourville’s actions and the Crown refused permission for Gourville to return to France. Nevertheless, Gourville returned secretly to Paris in 1668. At this time he had an audience with Jean Baptiste Colbert, minister to King Louis XIV, with whom he was not in favor. Eight-hundred thousand francs was requested of Gourville in order for him to
become a free man. Gourville used his negotiating skills to lower
the price to 600,000 francs and insisted that he simply did not have
the funds requested. Gourville asked that he be allowed to go to
Spain to borrow the money from the King of Spain. Upon his return
to France, he paid part of the 600,000 francs and pledged to pay
the rest in installments. Gourville did a respectable job of collecting
monies from Spain on a regular basis. Thus the royal court cleared
him completely.

Gourville spent the last years of
his life in tranquility among friends
including “Boileau,” Madame de
Sevigne, de Thianges, et de Coulanges.
According to Sevigne, he was a good
man dedicated to his friends and also
to the Royal Court. He was bedridden
because of an ailment to his leg (prob-
ably the gout) at which time he wrote
his Memoirs (not yet translated into
English) in four and a half months. He
described his life in great detail so that
people fell in love with his philosophy
of kindness and humanity.

Gourville died in Paris in 1703 at
the age of sixty-eight. He founded a
hospice care facility in Rochefoucauld
and left a goodly sum for the poor
of that city in his Last Will and Tes-
tament.

His Memoirs contain his adventures from 1642 to 1678. His writ-
ings were published by Miss de la Bussiere in 1742. His stories con-
tain many interesting anecdotes. The great French writer Voltaire
himself has used some of his Memoirs said Madame de Sevigne. She
also said his book was charming and written from the heart. It was
said that he could have ruled the world with his charms. He even
described his enemies with great compassion and beautiful traits.

Needless to say, Gourville was one of the more interesting figures
during Louis XIV’s reign.

Several paragraphs above were translated from the French by
Peter Elias of Monroe. Elias taught French in Lebanon and later in
France. Published d’apres Quenot, Statistiques du departement de
la Charente Communique par M. Baren, Taponnat Etudes Locales
Juillet 1921. Some historical facts are added by the author.
Chronological Synopsis of Jean Herault de Gourville

1. He marries a daughter of Francois, Duc de LaRochefoucauld, the Prince de Marcillac.
2. He is now a trusty servant of the Prince de Marcillac.
3. He assists in the escape of the Princess of Conde.
4. He attempts to rescue the Conde from Vincennes.
5. He is employed by the queen to negotiate with the Conde.
6. Gourville is involved in making a treaty with the Prince of Conti.
7. As a result, he receives an appointment as commissary-general to the French Army at Catalonia. But in 1665, he spends six months in the Bastille.
8. He attempts to capture De Retz.
9. Gourville assists in the Conde’s journey to Chatellon.
10. He is named by Mazarin to bring about the surrender of Bordeaux.
11. He now works as an assistant to Nicholas Fouquet, who is the Superintendent of Finance.
12. Gourville is paid to forge signatures to accounts.
13. During the early days of Louis XIV reign it was legal for
those in high offices to make as much money as possible, but this was to change.

14. He is named to the two Generalities of Guienne, which is approved by Mazarin. He receives 20 percent of the collections making 30,000 livres yearly.

15. Gourville suggests to N. Fouquet to bribe the Prince de Coigneut with 2,000 crowns.

16. Fouquet falls from favor with the crown and the other financiers are prosecuted. Fouquet and Gourville get death sentences.

17. Gourville leaves France, and a portrait of him is burned in effigy (1663). His response to his servant is “at least they could have used a better likeness of me.” He goes to Holland, London, and Germany and actually is spying for the crown.

18. In 1671, he arranges to repay to the Crown 600,000 of the 800,000 livres of his debt through a loan from the Spanish king. He procures a reversal of his death sentence. He is acceptable to Mazarin.

19. He provides money to Madame Fouquet during the sentence of her husband Nicholas.

20. He also provides money to Nicholas Fouquet’s son, the Count of Vaux.

21. Gourville is immensely wealthy. He owns a hotel in Paris. He increases his wealth through gambling. He plays poker with King Louis XIV.

22. At the apex of his career, he becomes a financier to the crown and is made ambassador to Brunswick, Germany.

23. He is a follower of Madame de Sevigne.

24. Eight hundred pages of his Memoires, concludes his life in 1703.


The Gourville-Breard Connection

Many of the Breards have always exhibited a keen interest in their surname. But the Gourville name came into focus lately when several members of the family commented that the street name “Gouville” in Monroe is in error and that it should be changed properly to Gourville.
The Gourville name has always held a fascination for me. The spark was my viewing of the oil portrait of Marie Martha de Gourville Breard. (See a copy of her portrait in this book.)


The Gourville name is first recorded in Breard family history when the Marquise Marie Martha de Gourville (1729-72) marries the Marquis Nicholas Marceline de Breard in 1753. Marie Martha then moves from Normandy, France, to Rochefort, France. Nicholas (1715-85) serves in the French Navy under Louis XV and is treasurer of the colonies at Rochefort.

There is an extract of the Baptismal Register of the Royal Parish of St. Louis, Rochefort, France in the Aunes diocese of La Rochelle. For the year 1762, page 22 shows that Marie Martha de Gourville Breard is the mother of a child named Jean Louis Alexandre de Breard. Jean Louis Alexandre later becomes one of the founding fathers of Ft. Miro, now Monroe, LA. The baptismal document is signed May 7, 1789. Marie Martha de Gourville’s grandfather was Sieur Jean Herault de Gourville (1625-1703), pronounced (goor-vel). Jean Gourville was a celebrated French financier, writer, ambassador, and traveler born at La Rochefoucauld, Verteuil. The Gourvilles and Breards were financiers to the kings of France.

Gourville began life at Verteuil as a valet de chambre in the La Rochefoucauld household. François, duc de La Rouchefoucauld, Prince de Marcillac (1613-80), was a good friend and mentor to Gourville.

De Gourville was a follower of Madame de Sévigné, (1625-96), Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, the Marquise de Sévigné. Gourville was influenced in his writing by Madame Sévigné and by his friend François, duc de La Rouchefoucauld who was famous for his Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes Morales, published in 1665. Other followers of Madame de Sévigné were writers, playwrights, scientists, philosophers, wits, and literary figures of that day. Authors, commenting on Madame Sévigné, were Will and A. Durant, D. L. Carr, R. Alding, and Arthur Tilley.

Jean Hérault de Gourville died in 1703 leaving his Memories, which were commended by Madame de Sévigné. She said his work was written with simplicity and made in parts agreeable reading. His two volumes, eight hundred pages long, contain interesting references to William III of the Netherlands. I have acquired copies of the two volumes. They are in French and have not been translated into English.

According to Charles A. Sainte-Beuve (1804-69), a French literary
critic and keeper of the Mazarin Library, Gourville “was a writer and something of an adventurer.” Sainte-Beuve compares Gourville to *Gil Blas*.

As La Rouchefoucauld began to develop his *Maximes*, Gourville followed him to the wars and rose by his adroitness, resource, wit, and good humor to a position of importance. As a negotiator, Gourville was acceptable to Cardinal Mazarin (1602-61) and the princes in the troubles of the middle seventeenth century.

Gourville’s aptitude for finance won the favor of Nicolas Fouquet (q.v.) who was the superintendent of finance (1653-63) for Louis XIV. Fouquet gained his position because of his support of Cardinal Mazarin during the Fronde. Nicolas Fouquet (1619-80) was also known as the Marquis de Belle Isle and by other titles which he bought.

Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-83) was chief minister to Louis XIV, and Colbert suspected Fouquet of stealing from the crown. Nicolas Fouquet made a serious mistake by inviting the young Louis and the queen mother to a gala at Nicolas’ Chateau, Vaux-le Vicomte. The event was filled with music, laughter, dancing, artists, playwrights, the French Court, and all the “upper crusts” of the day not to mention gourmet food and drink; it was complete! Fouquet’s cost was 120,000 livres!

Because of the grand party, the king realized Fouquet was “stealing beyond his station.” At the splendid party the king said to Fouquet: “I shall never again, Sir, venture to invite you to visit me; you would find yourself inconvenienced.” This cutting remark caused Fouquet to turn pale.

Fouquet was brought down in disgrace and Gourville followed. Both were sent into exile in 1664. They spent time in the Netherlands and visited London. But Louis was still jealous of the splendor and wealth of Fouquet. Fouquet and Gourville were ordered back to Paris. Fouquet was sentenced to life in prison. Papers found in Fouquet’s chateau convicted him. Thus he spent sixteen years in the Fortress at Piñerol in Piedmont. Some authors speculate that Fouquet was “The Man in the Iron Mask.”

Gourville fared much better. Obviously, his sins were not too great. He was tried and found not guilty. He regained the favors of the crown and those in power—Duc de La Rochefoucauld, Mazarin, and the House of Conde.

At this time, nothing in Europe could compare to the magnificence of Fouquet’s Vaux. King Louis XIV was mortified by the party and the display of wealth. It actually caused the king to build Versailles. It must be remembered that Fouquet had the key to the entire treasury of France. The fête also caused an investigation of
his house at Mande, where the discovery of his financial papers led to his conviction.

Even Colbert (1619-83), chief minister for Louis XIV, showed great respect for Gourville’s financial wizardry and negotiating expertise. Gourville traveled widely for the crown’s account throughout Europe. He was appointed ambassador to Brunswick, Germany. Sieur Jean Herault de Gourville had come a long way from being a valet de chambre in the La Rochefoucauld house to the ambassador of Brunswick. Author J. L. Carr states that “a daughter of François, duc de LaRochefoucauld married a footman named Gourville and thus sacrificed her position in society.” Perhaps the success of Jean Herald de Gourville helped to raise her status in French Society.

Here are Louisiana sources, letters, and interviews which tend to confirm the Gourville-Breard connection.


There are no Gouville names appearing in the Ouachita Parish records. On the other hand, there are numerous Gourville listings.

On today’s map of Normandy, there is a small village of Gourville. R. G. Breard of Monroe, Louisiana, 82nd Airborne, WWII, remembers the village of Gourville.

At a recent dedication of the National WWII Museum in New Orleans, a U.S. Infantryman was awarded the Medal of Honor for participation in a skirmish near the village of Gourville, France.
Official records, including land transactions, confirm the spelling of the Gourville name. (See Deed 0-31, 12/24/1831). This document deals with the sale of 66 arpents of land to Frank P. Stubbs by Armand Gourville Breard, Monroe, Louisiana. As mentioned previously, other court house records confirm the name of Gourville.

Armand Gourville Breard’s gravestone in St. Matthew Cemetery, on the corner of 11th Street and Breard Street, clearly spells out Gourville. See the tombstone in the Breard plot for more information and confirmation; (A. Gourville Breard, 1811-83).

The Gourville name has been passed along by four generations of the family, Armand Gourville Breard, Daniel Armand Breard Sr., Robert M. Breard Sr., and John Marceline Breard Sr.

Two speeches, one by Laurence Kent Breard Sr. and another by Mary Edith Breard Hayes given in Monroe, acknowledged the Breard-Gourville connection. Also two unpublished works, one by Sylvester Q. Breard Sr., and another by S. Q. Breard Jr. “A Walk with Grandpa,” and “Rochefort to the Ouachita,” respectively, confirm the Gourville spelling.

In the 1930s, Dr. J. Robinson of Shreveport backs up the spelling of Gourville in correspondence with D. A. Breard Sr., again tracking the Breard-Gourville family connection.

The News-Star, August 8, 1933 observed D. A. Breard Sr.’s birthday in an article covering his ninetieth celebration. Gourville was again spelled correctly.

Breard, Filhiol, and Betin are family names that coincide with ownership of land in the vicinity of the Loop Road and U.S. Route 165 was labeled “Breard” on the old Ouachita Parish maps. Alexander Breard wrote a letter to Felipe Enrique Neri, Baron de Bastrop in August 1803. It confirms de Bastrop’s ownership of six toises (an early French land measurement) on either side of Bayou DeSiard, which the Breards later owned.

During World War I my grandfather, Daniel Armand Breard Sr., wrote to Dr. J. M. Robinson of Shreveport. “My son, Ernest R. Breard, and nephew, Ben Breard saw a tombstone at Châttillon Sur Seine, France, dated 1703, with the name Joseph La Moine de Gourville on same.”

The note brought the following response from Dr. Robinson to my grandfather: “The Chevalier Joseph Francois Breville de Breard, a brother of Alexander Breard, left Ft. Miro to settle on the Red River, either in Natchitoches or Red River Parishes. He took with him a large oil painting of Nicholas Marceline de Breard. The same was lost in a fire of the plantation home. However, a miniature oil painting of the marquis was saved from the fire.” According to
Dr. Robinson, this miniature may be in the possession of descendants of Breville de Breard in Shreveport today.

The miniature companion piece of Marie Martha de Gourville Breard was lost in the fire. However, the large oil painting of the marquise is in the hands of the Barringer family in Monroe. It is in need of restoration. It is possible that this painting was handed down by Pauline Breard, the eldest daughter of Alexander and Charlotte Racine Breard.

A reproduction oil portrait of Marie Martha de Gourville Breard was done by a prominent New Orleans artist, Jean Despujols (1886-1965). This painting is in possession of the descendants of Daniel Alexander Breard, the first. The Snellings family proudly displays this striking work. Jean Despujols made Shreveport his home for many years. He is buried at Greenwood Cemetery, Shreveport, Louisiana. He was educated in France and Italy and was an acclaimed artist in his native France.