

## Madame Montour (1667-1752) Canadian First Nation Interpreter Extraordinaire

This month's inspirational interpreter from the past comes to you thanks to a colleague in Canada, **Marie-Christine Payette**, who suggested this amazing interpreter! Isabelle Montour, more commonly referred to as Madame Montour, was born in Canada in approximately 1667, to a French father and an Algonquin mother. She spoke not only her parents' tongues of French and Algonquin, but learned English, German, and Iroquois as well. She became a legendary interpreter who often interpreted between Native Americans and Europeans.

Through her work as an interpreter, she met an Oneida chief, Carandowana, and married him. She continued working as an interpreter after she was married and had children. One interesting part of her legacy is that her son, [Andrew Montour](#) also became an important interpreter, as did his son [John Montour](#).

Her husband was killed in 1720 in a raid, and she is reported to have died in 1753. Madame Montour was one of the few females to be deemed influential and significant during this time period, thanks to her work as an interpreter. Those interested in learning more about Madame Montour's story should check out this biography devoted to her life, called [Madame Montour and the Fur Trade](#) / *Madame Montour et son temps* by Simone Vincens



*Mother-and-Son Interpreters: Depiction of Madame Montour and her Son Andrew by John Buxton (via [Bucknell University](#))*

## Hear Katherine

Catherine Montour, more commonly referred to as Madame Montour, was born at Three Rivers, Canada in 1667. Her father, Pierre Couc was a Frenchman and her mother was an Algonquin. During the early 1700's her family spent most of their time at Forts Mackinac and Detroit involved in Indian trade and in 1709, while accompanying her brother Louis to Albany for trade, Louis was killed. Alone in New York, Madame Montour found employment as an interpreter for Governor Robert Hunter. Through her work she became acquainted with the Oneida chief, Carandowana, who eventually became her husband. When chief Shikellamy came to Shamokin in 1727, Carandowana, Madame Montour, and their children traveled with him and she continued serving as an interpreter during that time. After Carandowana was killed in an Indian raid in 1729 Madame Montour spent her time traveling back and forth between Shamokin and present day Montoursville, where her son Andrew and her niece French Margaret lived. She is reported to have died in 1753.

Madame Montour was one of the few Shamokin females to be deemed influential and significant. A creative and independent woman, she spoke English, German, Algonquin, Iroquois, and French; however, because she was illiterate in all of these languages she was forced to sign all public documents with an "X". Many Pennsylvanians believed that her parents were French, that her father was a governor of Canada, and that she had been captured and raised by the Indians. Though this does not seem to be true, Madame Montour played into this myth, allowing it to circulate and become popular. Her eccentric character and her services as an interpreter mark her as unique among most females of her day.

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[http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/environmental\\_center/sunbury/website/MadameMontour.shtml](http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/environmental_center/sunbury/website/MadameMontour.shtml)