

A very exceptional wedding in Marlotte in 1810!

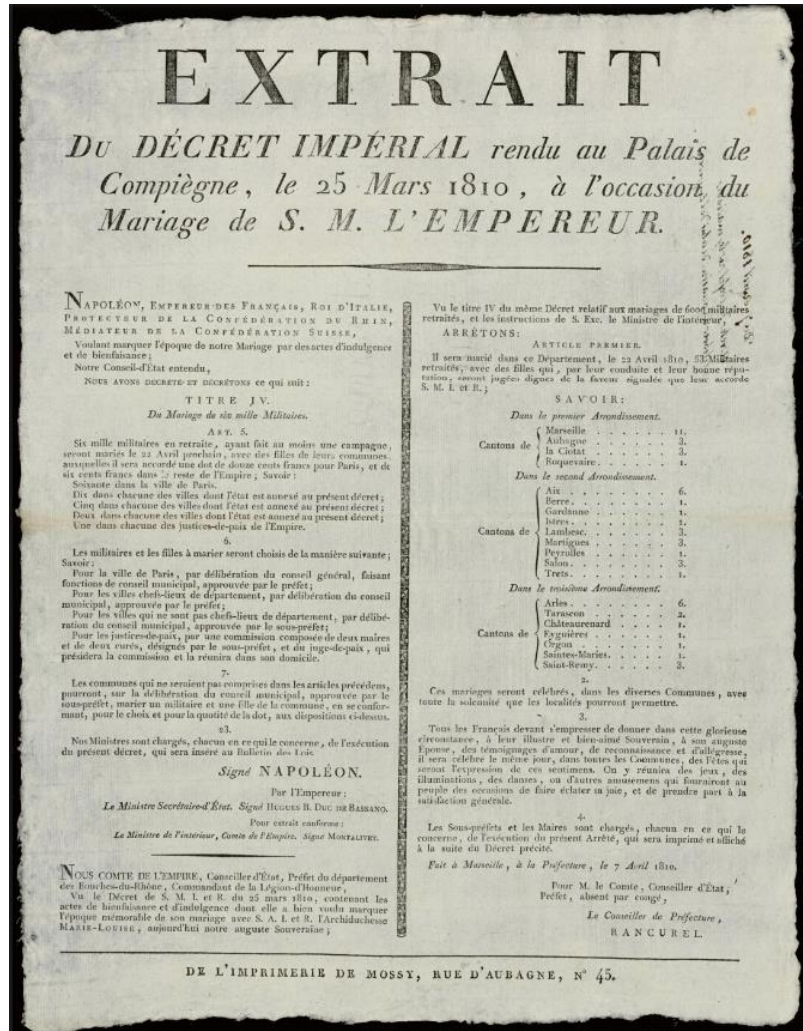
(A shorter version of this article was published by H. Froment in *Bulletin des Amis de Bourron-Marlotte*, n°7, June 1980)

Shortly after he pursued his territorial advance in Europe, Emperor Napoleon I also made personal decisions, including his remarriage with Marie-Louise of Austria on April 1 and 2, 1810. On this occasion, he wanted the whole of France to be associated with this great event and among several actions put in place, he decided to subsidize the union of 6,000 couples in the country! To this end, he issued a decree on March 25, 1810, which stipulated the scope of application.

One can read that the marriages will be celebrated on April 28, 1810, and that they will be celebrated *with all the solemnity that the localities will allow. All French people must hasten to give, in this glorious*

circumstance, testimonies of love, gratitude and joy to their illustrious and beloved sovereign, to his august Spouse. There will be celebrated on the same day, in all the communes, festivals which will be the expression of these feelings. There will be games, illuminations, dances, or other amusements which will provide the people with opportunities to burst forth their joy, and to take part in the general satisfaction.

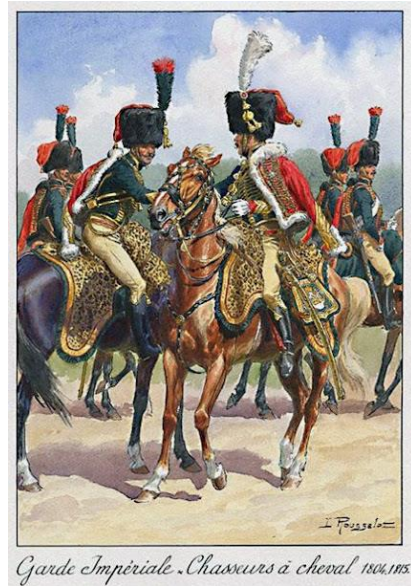
The extract from the above decree omits mentioning an element which will however most certainly have caught the attention of the newlyweds, namely a dowry of 600 francs¹ to be received from the state! The Municipal Council of Bourron, under the authority of the prefect, therefore undertakes the identification of a couple meeting the established criteria, the future groom having to have led at least one military campaign and having had irreproachable behavior, and the future bride having to be unmarried and enjoying *the best reputation*.



The choice of the lucky beneficiaries

After a very serious discussion at the Municipal Council, the choice fell on Jean Baptiste Chenoy and Marie Catherine Renoux. Jean Baptiste met the military criterion, being a former *Chasseur à Cheval of the Armies of His Majesty* and we can only assume that the exemplary nature of his service will have fully met the imperial expectation. He was born on January 17, 1782, in Bourron, in a family of winegrowers from father to son for a century already.

Marie Catherine Renoux, a native of Bourron-Marlotte, where she was born on January 25, 1783, also descended from several generations of winegrowers.



Garde Impériale. Chasseurs à cheval 1804.1815.

The big day

It is undeniable that March 28, 1810, has been an exceptional day for the small community of Bourron, most of whose inhabitants probably participating in the union of two of the children of the village! In fact, the uniqueness of the occasion was even shared with neighboring villages. Starting very early in the morning and ending late in the evening, the party was undoubtedly planned in every detail and, as a result, the event was appreciated by all! The most faithful account of it is certainly the minutes drawn up by the Municipal Council and signed by the Marquis de Montgon, mayor at the time, and which we faithfully reproduce below²:

Minutes of the party celebrated on Monday, April 23, 1810, by virtue of the imperial decree of March 25 and the deliberation of the special commission, confirmed by the prefect on the occasion of the marriage that took place on the said day between Jean-Baptiste Chenoy, a former soldier, and Marie Catherine Renoult, both from this commune. On the said day at five o'clock in the morning, the noise of the drums and the bell announced the beginning of the party and brought together at the Town Hall thirty-six men of the National Guard³ that we, the Mayor, had requested for this purpose; the appointment of the officer and two sergeants made, having formed them into a platoon, we sent them to Marlotte, a quarter of a league from Bourron, to escort the future spouses. They arrived at eight o'clock at the Town Hall, accompanied by the national guard, to the sound of the bell, drums and a violin. The marriage was celebrated and the six hundred francs promised by His Majesty the Emperor were advanced and given to the spouses. We made a speech relating to the circumstance and to make them feel how much they owed to the extreme kindness of the Emperor and Empress, and how such a dazzling distinction was made to honor them.

We then led them to the church in the same procession, where the priest in charge came to receive them in procession and to introduce them into the choir where chairs had been prepared for them; a great Mass was sung, followed by the Veni Creator. The religious marriage took place, the wedding veil held by us and by our assistant.



Le cortège du mariage. Aquarelle de Paul Kauffmann (1810).

On leaving the church and in the middle of a considerable crowd, who seemed to share their happiness, they were taken back to Marlotte by our assistant and with the same procession.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the dances began, [then] the races of young boys and girls, to whom prizes were distributed.

All the neighboring villages were gathered in Bourron and the liveliest joy presided over this festival, which took place in the most perfect order and during which bread and wine were distributed to all those who came forward. The party only ended at ten o'clock in the evening, and we can assure Mr. the Prefect that it was very enjoyable for its actors and spectators, and that all the expenses it incurred only amounted to the sum of one hundred and twenty-two francs, which we will take as you prescribed from the available funds of year 1810. Of all which we have drawn up the present report.

Second and final recognition of the Emperor

Marie Catherine died in Marlotte, on February 26, 1853. Her husband died on May 4, 1860, aged 78, at the *Hôtel Impérial des Invalides*, in Paris^{4 5}. His presence in this institution thus constituted the second imperial support, recognizing the involvement of Jean Baptiste Chenoy, child of Marlotte, in the Napoleonic wars!

1 - The exchange rate of the franc at the time is 2.40 Euros. For reference, a kilo of top-quality bread cost 30 cents and poultry about 50 cents.

2 - Archives of the town hall of Bourron-Marlotte - Municipal deliberation of April 24, 1810.

3 - The decree of November 12, 1806 reaffirmed the obligation of all French people aged 20 to 60 to perform service in the National Guard.

4 - Digitized archives of Paris - 7th arrondissement.

5 - Under the Empire -1st and 2nd-, the *Hôtel Impérial des Invalides* gained in importance and prestige, welcoming the many veterans of the Napoleonic Wars as "the dearest children of the Fatherland" and benefiting from the attachment of the emperor.
