

An enigmatic tomb at the church of Bourron-Marlotte



Funerary stele on the church wall

As was the custom at the time, burials of the village's deceased were mostly carried out around the church, or inside the church for the wealthier parishioners.¹ However, on June 23, 1844, the mayor of Bourron and his municipal team decided to purchase land for the new cemetery, which became available in November of the same year (this is the older section of the current cemetery). The graves were then gradually transferred to this new place of remembrance, while drainage work was carried out around the church. Only the tombs of the *Montgon* family remained, before being finally relocated to the "new" cemetery on June 17, 1854.²

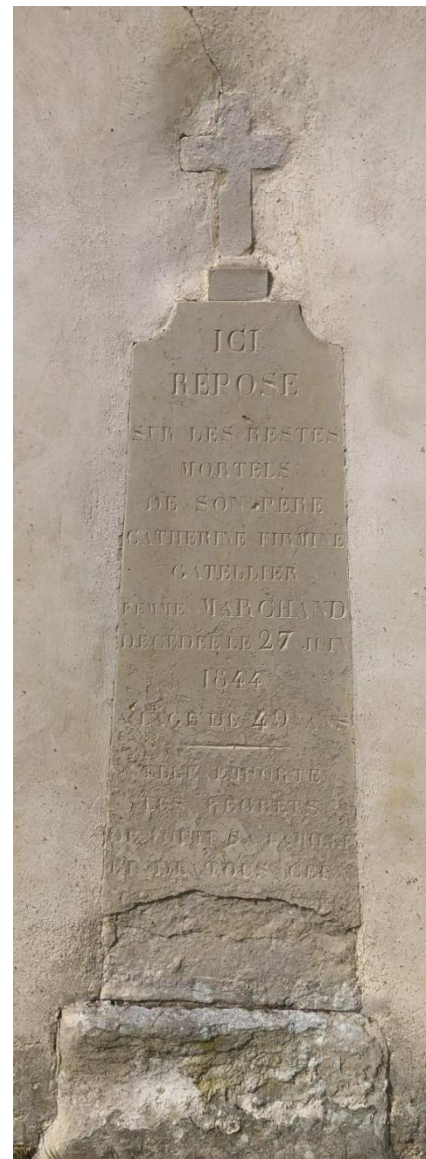
It is therefore surprising to see today a single funerary stele embedded in the wall of the church's apse, suggesting a burial that was preserved from the events mentioned above.

Moreover, and surprisingly, the inscriptions remaining on this stele are still very legible and can be translated as:

HERE LIES
Upon the mortal remains of her father
Catherine Firmine GATELLIER
wife of MARCHAND
Died on June 27, 1844, at the age of 49

She is mourned by her entire family and all those
(illegible)

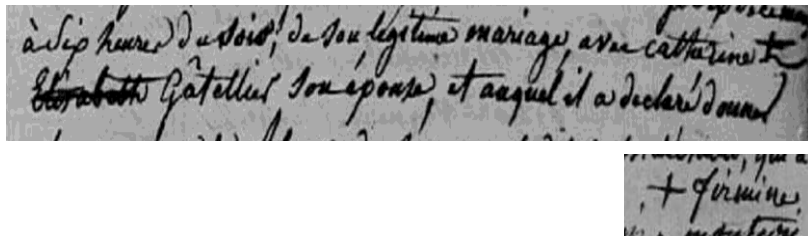
Who was Catherine Gatellier? Why was her tomb preserved around the church? Does the quality of the inscriptions suggest that they were re-engraved relatively recently?



Catherine Firmine Gatellier

She was born on September 11, 1794 (25 Fructidor, republican year II) in Bourron. Her father, Louis Gatellier, was a winegrower.

On February 4, 1823, she married in Bourron Jacques Joseph Marchand, a 27-year-old farmer from Marlotte. A son named Alexandre Joseph was born to them on October 26 of that same year. It is interesting to note that in the corresponding birth certificate, the mother's first name appears as "Catherine Elisabeth," where "Elisabeth" is crossed out and replaced with "Firmine."



On June 20, 1844, "Firmine Elisabeth died at 7:00 PM at her home in Marlotte." Genealogical notes from the Marchand family³ provide information on the context of this death: "In 1844, a fire that started in the market cart stored under the gate burned down all the buildings along the street, when the insurance had not been renewed: our grandmother, Firmine Gatellier, woken in the middle of the night, experienced a shock that contributed to her death."

The three civil registration records list the first name "Firmine Elisabeth," but there is little doubt that this refers to the "Catherine Firmine" mentioned on the church memorial stone. Indeed, there is no record of the birth of another Gatellier child in June 1794 in the Bourron registers, nor of another death under that name in June 1844. As suggested on their child's birth certificate, "Catherine" was probably the deceased's given name. A transcription error during a possible re-engraving of the memorial stone could also explain the discrepancy between the engraved date of death (June 27) and the date recorded in the Bourron civil registry (June 20).

Moreover, if we believe the inscription on the funerary stele, Firmine Elisabeth would rest alongside her father, Louis Gatellier, who died on February 11, 1825, in Bourron.

Catherine Gatellier, the mayor's wife

As we saw earlier, in 1823, Catherine Gatellier married Jacques Joseph Marchand, then a farmer. He became mayor of the town in 1837, at the age of 40, and held this position until 1846. At that time, Jacques Marchand and his wife lived at 158, rue du Général Leclerc. A few years later, he returned to the position of deputy mayor, from January 1852 to July 1854. The document mentioned above provides additional information on Jacques Joseph Marchand's participation to the municipal council: "On June 27, 1844, his son Joseph-Alexandre drew a lottery ticket and got a bad number, which required him to buy it back. Overwhelmed, Jacques-Joseph resigned as mayor;

we find him again as deputy mayor in 1852, when Baron de Brandois was mayor. (Baron de Brandois reportedly only accepted the mayoralty on the condition that Mr. Marchand be his deputy.)"

In the context of this article, it is worth noting that it was during Jacques Marchand's term as mayor that the decision was made to acquire land to relocate the municipal burial ground from the church to the current cemetery. Coincidentally, this decision was made three days after his wife's death... Could Jacques Marchand's role as mayor, and then as a town councilor in the years that followed, have influenced the decision not to relocate his wife's grave?

1 - *Personnalités artistiques ou apparentées, inhumées au « vieux cimetière » de Bourron-Marlotte* par F. Cantonnet, Bulletin des Amis de Bourron-Marlotte n°54, 2012.

2 – Web site of *Amis de Bourron-Marlotte* : <https://amisdebourronmarlotte.fr/sujet/un-pan-dhistoire-au-cimetiere-de-bourron-marlotte-les-familles-varennnes-et-montgon/>

3 – *Genealogy notes for the Marchand family* by Paul Joseph Alexandre Marchand; published in 1917 by printing Co. Henri Bouloy, Nemours.