

Forgotten Fur Trader

Joseph Graveline and Exploration on the Upper Missouri River

Those not familiar with the journals of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, which document the explorers' journey through Louisiana Territory in 1804–1806, have likely never run across the name of Joseph Graveline. No biography of him exists, and, understandably, there is no portrait of this illiterate French Canadian. Recent research, however, has shed additional light on the career of the shadowy fur trader who played an important role in the territory's development. Graveline's knowledge of French, English, and native languages aided communication and diplomatic efforts between American Indian tribes and the white explorers who negotiated the upper reaches of the Missouri River during the early nineteenth century.¹

According to genealogies of the Graveline family, Joseph Baudreau dit Graveline was born near present-day Montreal, Canada, on 27 May

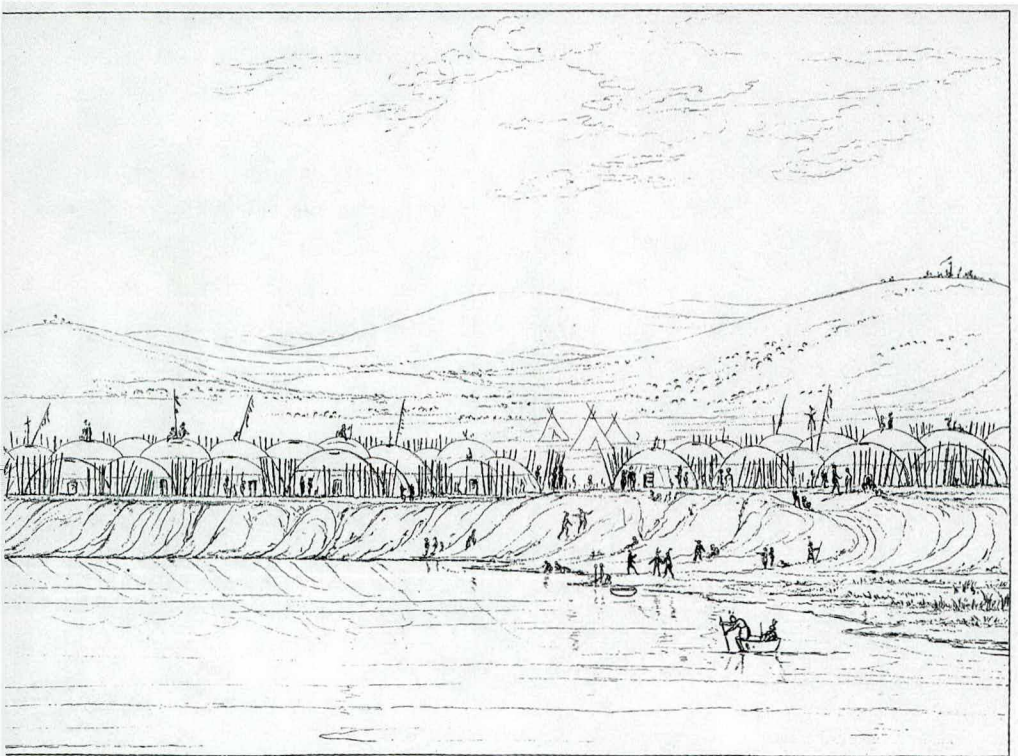
I am indebted to James A. Hanson of the Museum of the Fur Trade, Chadron, Nebraska, for translating numerous French documents, and to R. Bruce McMillan for his invaluable help in retrieving obscure data from the Internet.

1. Although his name is usually spelled "Gravelines" in secondary sources today, most primary documents bearing his name lack the final "s" or "es." There is no biography of Graveline in LeRoy R. Hafen, ed., *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West*, 10 vols. (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark, 1965–1972), and no significant notice of him appears on the Internet. Bernard DeVoto, in *The Course of Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1952), p. 449, alleges without documentation that Graveline was "from the Assiniboine River," but the Provincial Archives of Manitoba and the Hudson's Bay Company Archival Records in Winnipeg contain no notice of the man. Paul C. Graveline, who identified himself as a "distant cousin," wrote a brief article entitled "Joseph Gravelines and the Lewis and Clark Expedition," in *We Proceeded On* 3 (Oct. 1977): 6–7. That article would be reprinted by the American-French Genealogical Society's publication, *Je Me Souviens*, no less than three times, beginning in 1979. More recently, Clay Jenkinson wrote a brief piece about Graveline's association with the Arikara chief Too Né entitled "Joseph Gravelines," in *We Proceeded On* 44 (May 2018): 19.

1755, to François Baudreau dit Graveline and his wife, Marie Josette Duval. (In French, *dit* translates to “say,” but in this context it means “called.”) The trader’s real name, therefore, was Baudreau, but he chose to use the name Graveline. The name is shared by a commune in northern France a few miles southwest of Dunkirk, apparently the home of some of his forebears.²

The first substantial references to Graveline’s career as a fur trader appear in October 1804, with the arrival of the Lewis and Clark Expedition at the Arikara villages on the Missouri River. Accomplished agriculturists, the Arikaras resided in earth-covered lodges. The tribe had

2. Most of the birth, death, and marriage information related to Graveline in this study comes from *U.S., French Catholic Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1695–1954*, Montreal, Canada, ancestry.com, accessed 22 Oct. 2018.



George Catlin recorded this image of the Arikara village near the mouth of the Grand River while traveling on the Missouri River in 1833.

once counted several thousand members spread throughout thirty-two villages. At least three separate smallpox epidemics, the most recent having occurred in the early 1780s, however, had decimated their numbers. By the time Lewis and Clark arrived, the Arikaras occupied three large villages in the vicinity of present-day Mobridge, South Dakota. One of the villages was on Ashley Island, located below the mouth of the Grand River. The other two were situated on the west bank of the Missouri River, a few miles above the island.³

On the morning of 8 October, the Corps of Discovery camped on the riverbank above the island, and Captain Lewis went to the village to visit. During his absence, Captain Clark prepared for either a peaceful reception or for hostilities, instructing a group of French *engagés* (common laborers) to establish a camp and set a guard. Lewis soon returned with several Frenchmen in a pirogue, one of the long, narrow canoes used for transporting goods and people on the Missouri. According to Clark's journal, this group included "Mr. Gravelin a man well versed in the language of this nation [who] gave us Some information relative to the Countrey naton &c."⁴

One of the other Frenchmen in the pirogue was likely Pierre-Antoine Tabeau, Graveline's associate. In 1804, both men were working for trader Régis Loisel of Saint Louis, Missouri. The date of Graveline's arrival on the Upper Missouri is unknown, but his association with the Arikaras continued for much of his life. He had been absent from their villages for a time before the arrival of Lewis and Clark, likely residing among his other customers, the Mandans. He had returned to the Arikaras a month or so before the captains arrived.⁵

3. Clark, Jan. 1805, *The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, Vol. 3: *August 25–April 6, 1805*, ed. Gary E. Moulton and Thomas W. Dunlay (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), p. 400; Roy W. Meyer, *The Village Indians of the Upper Missouri: The Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), pp. 14, 28; Douglas R. Parks, "Arikara," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 13, pt. 1: *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), pp. 65–90.

4. Clark, 8 Oct. 1804, *Journals*, ed. Moulton and Dunlay, 3:152. Clark also calls him "Gravotine" and "Gravolin."

5. Annie Heloise Abel, ed., *Tabeau's Narrative of Loisel's Expedition to the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937), p. 138n109.

Lewis and Clark badly needed a knowledgeable interpreter at the Arikara villages. War and disease had so reduced their populations that ten previously separate bands had come together for mutual protection. Because each band had a distinct dialect, many Arikaras, as Tabeau claimed in 1796, did “not understand all the words of the others.” Tabeau explained that “no one can say that he knows the Ricara language; for it would be necessary that he should understand in ten different ways the greater number of the words.”⁶ Communication with the Arikaras therefore demanded an interpreter well versed in these dialects, making Graveline invaluable to Lewis and Clark. Without him and Tabeau, communication with the villagers would have been impossible. Graveline interpreted for the captains for the duration of their stay with the Arikaras, and both he and Tabeau provided the explorers with crucial geographical and ethnographic information.

The councils with the Arikara chiefs were peaceful and successful, and the Indians accepted with pleasure the gifts Lewis and Clark gave them. Here, however, the captains learned that the Arikaras were at war with the Mandans. Too Né, an Arikara chief, agreed to accompany the expedition to the Mandans in the hope that he and the captains could arrange a peace. Graveline also accompanied the Corps of Discovery on to the Mandans as an interpreter.⁷

Their visit with the Arikara villagers complete, the expedition continued up the Missouri as Too Né explained the significance of numerous Indian villages and landmarks along the way. Shortly after the party crossed into present-day North Dakota, they witnessed a remarkable sight. When a large group of pronghorn antelope began swimming west across the Missouri River, the Arikaras sprang to action and killed several of the most vulnerable animals. Walking on shore the next day with Clark and Graveline, Too Né told Clark—through Graveline—that the pronghorns were migrating from the plains to the Black Hills, where they would spend the winter before returning in the spring.⁸

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 125–26.

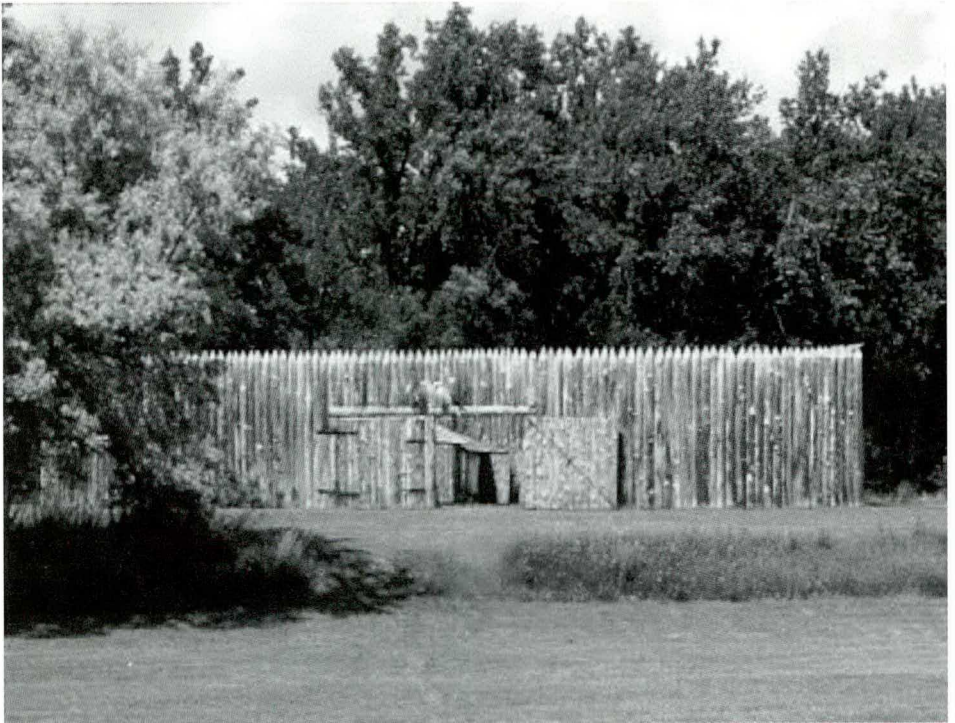
7. Too Né was perhaps better known as Arketarnarshar or Piaheto, though these are only two of the several spellings of the man’s name. He was also known as Eagle Feather and Whip-poor-will. Moulton and Dunlay, eds., *Journals*, 3:156n5.

8. Clark, 16, 17 Oct. 1804, *ibid.*, pp. 176–77, 179.

Near the mouth of the Cannonball River, the expedition met two of Graveline's trappers descending the river in a pirogue. The men had been trapping near the Mandans, who, they complained, had stolen some of their traps. They turned back and accompanied the Corps upriver, perhaps hoping that Graveline could convince his customers to return the stolen goods.⁹

The expedition reached the Mandans in late October 1804, and the men set about building their winter quarters, which they named Fort Mandan. Too Né did not remain at the fort for long. On 2 November, he accompanied a Mandan delegation back to the Arikaras to negotiate peace between the tribes. Graveline left the unfinished fort on 6 November to assist in the negotiations. He returned on 28 February the

9. Clark, 18 Oct. 1804, *ibid.*, pp. 181–82.



This modern-day replica of Fort Mandan, where Lewis and Clark spent the winter of 1804–1805, stands near Washburn, North Dakota.

following year, although Too Né remained with his people. Graveline carried letters from Tabeau to Lewis and Clark, telling them that the Arikaras had peaceful intentions towards the Mandans and expressing a wish to settle near them as protection from the Sioux.¹⁰

Graveline nearly assumed a larger role in the Lewis and Clark Expedition. On 14 March 1805, Sergeant John Ordway wrote in his journal that Toussaint Charbonneau had decided not to accompany the expedition on to the Pacific Ocean, and that his family had moved into a lodge outside Fort Mandan. “Mr Gravelleen,” Ordway continued, “has joined in his place.”¹¹ Charbonneau, however, changed his mind four days later. Graveline would not remain as an interpreter on the Corps of Discovery’s journey towards the Rocky Mountains, where he had no knowledge of the languages spoken. Instead, Charbonneau would travel west with Lewis and Clark, while his Shoshone wife, Sacajawea, served as their interpreter and guide.¹²

When the harsh winter of 1804–1805 was over at last, the expedition prepared to continue west. On 7 April 1805, the men loaded a keelboat with private correspondence, official reports, and “a number of articles” for President Thomas Jefferson and launched it back downriver. Corporal Richard Warfington commanded the vessel and Joseph Graveline was among the crew, tasked with accompanying Too Né to Washington, D.C. Lewis and Clark had urged several Upper Missouri tribal leaders to make the voyage to Washington, but only Too Né and the Mandan chief Sheheke-shote accepted the offer. On their departure from Fort Mandan, Lewis wrote that Graveline was “an honest discrete man and an excellent boat man . . . employed to conduct the barge as a pilot.”¹³ Graveline had undoubtedly honed his skills as a “boat man” in the course of his work as a fur trader, and while his level of fluency in

10. Clark, 6 Nov. 1804, 28 Feb. 1805, *ibid.*, pp. 230–31, 304.

11. Ordway, 14 Mar. 1805, *The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, Vol. 9: *The Journals of John Ordway, May 14, 1804–September 23, 1806, and Charles Floyd, May 14–August 18, 1804*, ed. Gary E. Moulton (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 121.

12. Ordway, 17 Mar., 22 July 1805, *ibid.*, pp. 122, 188.

13. Lewis, 7 Apr. 1805, *The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, Vol. 4: *April 7–July 27, 1805*, ed. Gary E. Moulton and Thomas W. Dunlay (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), p. 7.

English is unknown, he must have demonstrated enough proficiency to continue serving as an interpreter for the group returning east.

The keelboat stopped at the Arikara villages on the Grand River, taking on Pierre-Antoine Tabeau, his furs, and Too Né. They arrived in Saint Louis on 20 May, where they met General James A. Wilkinson, then governor of Louisiana Territory, and other local officials. Wilkinson was especially impressed by the chief. Too Né became ill during a seven-month layover in Saint Louis, and an expedition to return him home failed. When he recovered his health in December, Too Né and Graveline left Saint Louis, reaching Washington in February 1806.¹⁴

Too Né fell ill yet again while in Washington and died on 7 April.¹⁵ In a letter to the Arikaras, President Jefferson wrote, "We buried him among our own deceased friends & relatives, we shed many tears over his grave."¹⁶ A member of the British legation in Washington, Sir Augustus John Foster, provides a few details about his end: "Some days before his death," the Arikara chief "declared that he expected his fate, that he should have wished to expire among his friends at home, but it could not be helped and he requested his Pipe and Tomahawk might be buried with him."¹⁷ No account of his burial is recorded, although it may have resembled one of an Osage chief that took place in 1805. As Foster described this event, "The body was put into a wooden coffin and carried in a hackney carriage to the City burying ground, all the Indians following in procession. There were three vollies fired over the grave by a dozen of the marines; the Indians attending with great gravity but without uttering a word."¹⁸

14. Wilkinson to Jefferson, 23 Dec. 1805, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783–1854*, ed. Donald Jackson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), pp. 272–74. Too Né's activities in Washington are well documented in Christopher Steinke's definitive article, "'Here is my country': Too Né's Map of Lewis and Clark in the Great Plains," *William and Mary Quarterly* 71 (Oct. 2014): 589–611.

15. Dearborn to Wilkinson, 9 Apr. 1806, in *Letters*, ed. Jackson, p. 303.

16. Jefferson to the Arikaras, 11 Apr. 1806, *ibid.*, 306.

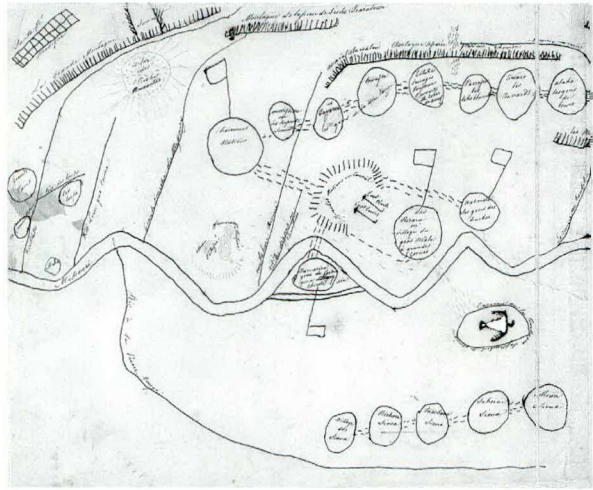
17. Dorothy Wollon and Margaret Kinard, "Sir Augustus J. Foster and 'The Wild Natives of the Woods,' 1805–1807," *William and Mary Quarterly* 9 (Apr. 1952): 207–8. Too Né was almost certainly buried in Washington, but the site has not been determined.

18. Wollon and Kinard, "Sir Augustus J. Foster," p. 205.



George Catlin depicted a later Arikara chief, Stan-au-pat (The Bloody Hand), when he traveled up the Missouri in 1833.

Too Né's map depicts important events in Arikara history along with major landmarks and Indian settlements throughout the West.

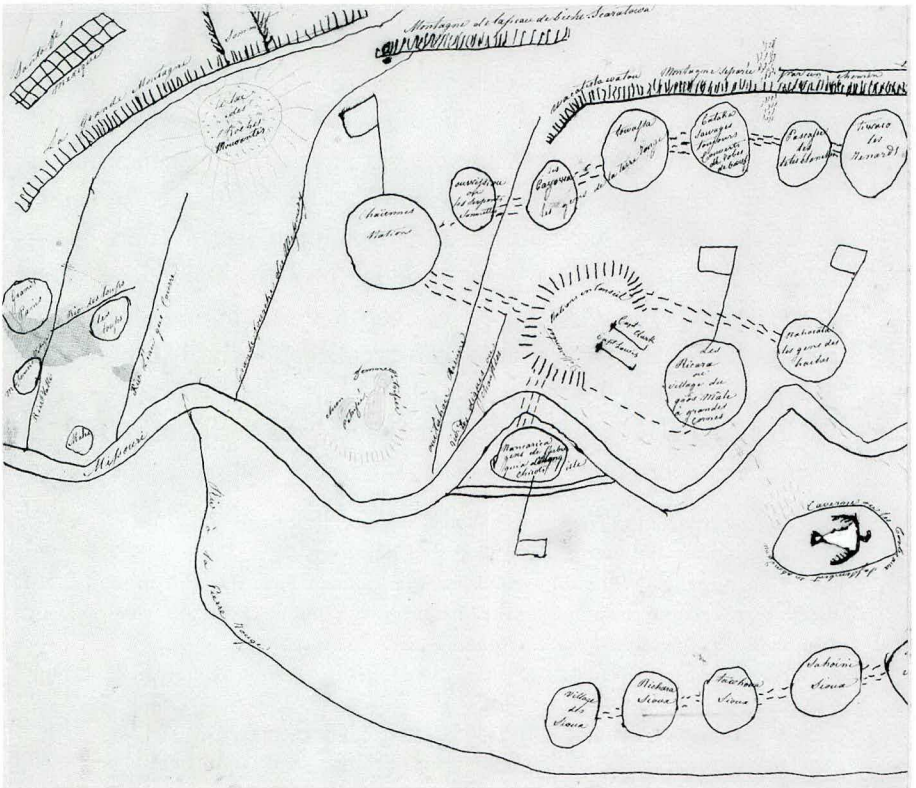
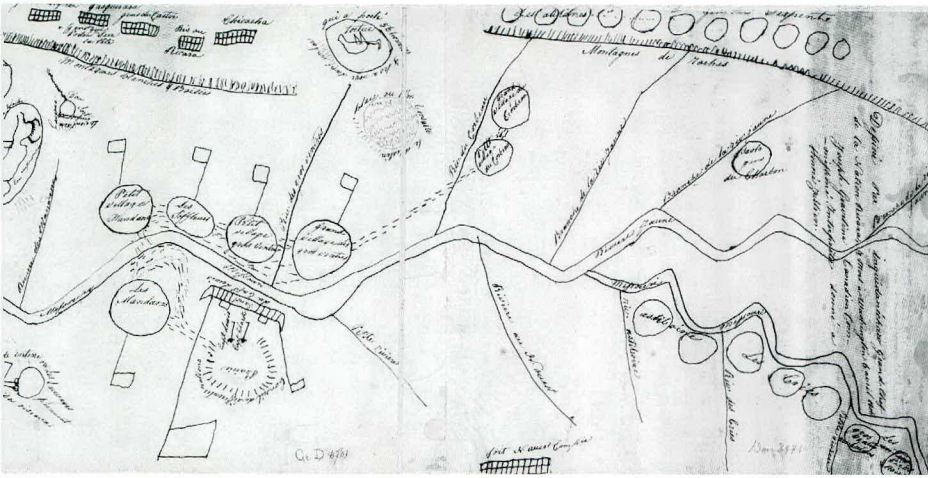


Sometime before the winter of 1805–1806, Too Né had prepared a detailed map of the Missouri River. It depicted Lewis and Clark in council with the Mandans, significant locales in Arikara history, and the locations of more than thirty Indian groups from Santa Fe to Canada. An unknown individual added names to the map's features in the French that Graveline provided from Too Né's dictation.¹⁹

Too Né's map took a curious path following his sojourn east, finding its way into the hands of Honoré Julien, Thomas Jefferson's French chef at the White House. How and why this transfer occurred is unknown. Jefferson likely gave the map to his chef, with whom he had become fast friends. Julien apparently passed it on to French diplomat Jean-Guillaume Hyde de Neuville, who visited Monticello in about 1822 and took it with him when he returned to France. In 1905, Hyde de Neuville's niece donated the map to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, where it remains. Revealing the remarkable range of Too Né's geographical knowledge, it is possibly the only surviving detailed map of the Missouri River and its surroundings created by an American Indian during this era.²⁰

19. Steinke, "Here is my country," p. 598.

20. Ibid., pp. 605, 606–9.



This detail from the left side of Too Né's map depicts Lewis and Clark meeting with the Arikaras.

Shortly after Too Né's death, Secretary of War Henry Dearborn decided to have Graveline carry the news of his passing along with Jefferson's letter of condolence to the Arikaras.²¹ As Dearborn explained to General Wilkinson, "It has been considered expedient, to have the interpreter, Gravline . . . sent, in a light boat, with a sober, discreet Sergeant & four faithful sober soldiers, up to the Ricara Nation, as soon as you can make the necessary arrangements." Graveline was to take with him Too Né's personal effects and some three hundred dollars in gifts for his relatives, along with "a few hundred dollars worth of Goods" for his personal trade.²²

Dearborn continued, "I have agreed with Graveline, to request you to assign a building, at the Cantonement,²³ left by the Troops, for his family to reside in during his absence, with the privilege of a piece of Ground for a garden." The secretary further instructed Wilkinson "to give him the pay of Three hundred and sixty five dollars a year after his voyage ends, as an Interpreter &c. for the Upper Missouri Indians; where he may, if he please, reside and carry on some trade with the Ricaras and Mandanes."²⁴ While this instance is the first mention of Graveline having a family, records show that he had married an Arikara woman in 1780. The couple had three children: Joseph (born about 1780), Rosalie (born January 1793), and Joseph (born about September 1795).²⁵ Save perhaps for the second Joseph, these children do not appear in any other source and may have remained with their mother in her river village.

Graveline left Washington for Saint Louis on 10 April 1806. Two days later, Pierre Chouteau, a prominent fur trader and merchant, wrote

21. Jefferson to the Arikaras, 11 Apr. 1806, *Letters*, ed. Jackson, p. 306.

22. Dearborn to Wilkinson, 9 Apr. 1806, *ibid.*, pp. 303–5.

23. General James Wilkinson established Cantonment Belle Fontaine in 1805, a few miles upstream from the mouth of the Missouri River. In 1810, the fort moved to higher ground. It was abandoned in 1826. Robert B. Roberts, *Encyclopedia of Historic Forts: The Military, Pioneer, and Trading Posts of the United States* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1988), pp. 453–54.

24. Dearborn to Wilkinson, 9 Apr. 1806, *Letters*, ed. Jackson, p. 304.

25. U.S., *French Catholic Church Records*, ancestry.com; Saint Louis Genealogical Society, "Earliest Registers of First Catholic Church in St. Louis," stlgs.org, accessed 22 Oct. 2018. The then-common practice of naming a child after an older sibling who had died may account for the two sons named Joseph.

General Wilkinson that the Indian Department would pay Graveline \$1.50 per day while he lived with the Arikaras.²⁶ Graveline obviously left a good impression on the officials he had met in the East.

After his arrival in Saint Louis, Graveline refused to take the boat Dearborn had given him to the Arikara villages. As Wilkinson reported, Graveline had concluded that the Teton Sioux would not let him pass and that he “could not insure his mission further than” the Omaha villages near present-day Sioux City, Iowa. The mission continued only when Pierre Dorion, a trapper and interpreter who had recently returned to Saint Louis after participating in peace talks between the Iowas and the Sioux, agreed to “land Graveline” at the Arikara villages. Dorion and Graveline left in explorer and trader John McClallen’s boat, and according to Wilkinson, the party was “far advanced towards the Mahas [Omahas]” as of 2 August. Wilkinson added that “one hundred and fifty dollars worth of merchandize have been furnished Dorion and Graveline for their expenses.”²⁷

Perhaps due to their delayed departure, Graveline and Dorion made it only as far as the Omaha villages before ice made river travel impossible, forcing them to spend the winter there. They resumed the journey upriver after the ice had broken up the following spring, traveling with Detroit-area trader Charles Courtin and his party, who had also wintered with the Omahas. They arrived at the Arikara village on Ashley Island on 3 June 1807.²⁸

Courtin detailed Graveline’s activities in a letter to Frederick Bates, secretary of the Louisiana Territory, after the expedition reached the Arikaras.²⁹ Bates forwarded Courtin’s letter, translated from the French,

26. Chouteau to Wilkinson, 12 Apr. 1806, *Before Lewis and Clark: Documents Illustrating the History of the Missouri, 1785–1804*, Vol. 2, ed. A. P. Nasatir (St. Louis: St. Louis Historical Documents Foundation, 1952), p. 771.

27. Wilkinson to Dearborn, 22 Aug. 1806, in James Wilkinson, *Burr’s Conspiracy Exposed and General Wilkinson Vindicated against the Slanders of His Enemies on That Important Occasion* (Washington, D.C.: By the Author, 1811), Appendix, pp. 44–45.

28. John C. Jackson, *By Honor and Right: How One Man Boldly Defined the Destiny of a Nation* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2010), pp. 127–28, 152.

29. Courtin to Bates, 22 June 1807, Letters Received by the Secretary of War, Registered Series, 1801–1860, Records of the Office of the Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives Microfilm Publication M221, Roll 3.

to the secretary of war. The letter states that shortly after the party landed, Left-Handed, a chief of the island village, invited Courtin to his lodge, where he went with Graveline. Left-Handed told Courtin that it was imperative for him to unload his boat quickly, for the Indians would plunder it. Indeed, when Courtin went to the river with Left-Handed, he found a chief named Elk's Tongue engaged in stealing the goods. Left-Handed ordered the remainder to be taken to his lodge, where they would be secure.³⁰

The next day, Graveline summoned the Arikaras to hear President Jefferson's message to the tribe. Courtin read the letter in French for Joseph Garreau, a local trader living in their villages, to translate into Arikara.³¹ The Arikaras reacted to the news of Too Né's death with hostility. They declared to the Americans that "there was no other liar but their father," meaning President Jefferson, and announced that, like the Sioux, they resolved to stop and plunder every boat that reached their villages. Furthermore, they would kill anyone who opposed them, "because the Americans were incapable of revenging themselves."³²

Even the Arikara chief Pocasse endorsed violence. He threatened to steal the rest of Courtin's goods unless he received a barrel of powder and several other items, a demand that Courtin could not resist under the circumstances. Courtin pleaded in his letter to Bates for American officials to send a force of one hundred men against the Arikaras "to prove [to] them that their father is not a liar."³³

Courtin gave a copy of the letter to trader Joseph Dickson, who landed at the village ten days after the Arikaras learned of Too Né's death. The Indians had immediately plundered Dickson's goods, and an Arikara who had stolen his gun fired at him and missed. Dickson nonetheless remained at the village until his sometime-partner Forest Hancock arrived with an invitation from the Mandans for the traders

30. Steinke "Here is my country," p. 607.

31. For Garreau, see W. Raymond Wood, "A Permanent Presence: The Family of Joseph Garreau and the Upper Missouri River Fur Trade," *South Dakota History* 43 (Summer 2013): 91-117.

32. Steinke, "Here is my country," p. 607.

33. Courtin to Bates, 22 June 1807.

to come and smoke with them. Dickson passed Courtin's letter on to Bates sometime before 2 August 1807.³⁴ No military force would confront the Arikaras for another decade and a half, however, and then only in response to their deadly June 1823 attack on William Henry Ashley's trading party at their villages.³⁵

Bates, in a letter to Dearborn, stated that Graveline submitted "an account of \$200 for unavoidable expenses incurred during the expedition."³⁶ Pierre Chouteau also wrote to Dearborn, claiming that Graveline had been "badly received" at the Arikara village but not specifying any incident.³⁷ Whether Graveline was verbally or physically mistreated is unclear. Courtin's letter lends no support to this claim.

Graveline would also contribute to an effort to take the Mandan chief Sheheke-shote back to his village. The chief and his family had traveled to Washington, D.C., along with Too Né in 1806, but his journey home would take years. In 1809, Meriwether Lewis, by then governor of the Upper Louisiana Territory, instructed Pierre Chouteau and Nathaniel Pryor, a former member of the Corps of Discovery, to lead a military expedition up the Missouri to return the chief. While traveling with Graveline and two other interpreters to the Mandan homeland in present-day western North Dakota, the Arikaras attacked the party and killed some of its members, forcing them to retreat to Saint Louis. Sheheke-shote would finally make it home a year later, though whether Graveline took part in that expedition is unclear.³⁸ In the meantime, he continued to act as an interpreter for the Arikaras and was among ten individuals listed as receiving a total of \$1,069.91 from William Clark's

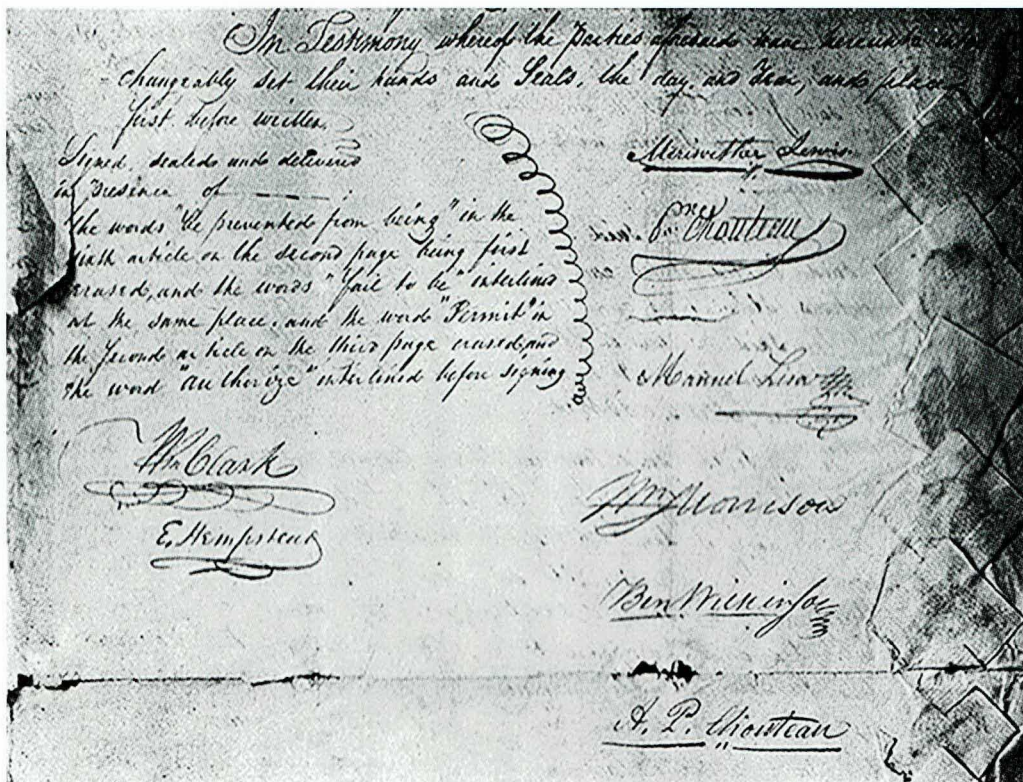
34. Frank H. Dickson, "Hard on the Heels of Lewis and Clark," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 26 (Jan. 1976): 14–25. This article is an enlargement of the biography of Dickson in Hafen, ed., *The Mountain Men*, Vol. 3, pp. 71–79. See also Jackson, *By Honor and Right*, pp. 152, 153n22, 197.

35. An excellent account of this event is William R. Nester, *The Arikara War: The First Plains Indian War, 1823* (Missoula, Mont.: Mountain Press, 2001).

36. Courtin to Bates, 22 June 1807.

37. Chouteau to Dearborn, 4 Aug. 1807, Box 6, Chouteau Family Collection, Missouri Historical Society Archives, St. Louis.

38. Pryor to Clark, 16 Oct. 1807, *Letters*, ed. Jackson, pp. 432–37; Lewis to Chouteau, 8 June 1809, *ibid.*, pp. 451–56.



These signatures finalized the 1809 agreement between Meriwether Lewis and representatives of the Missouri Fur Company, who had agreed to return Sheheke-shote to his village.

Indian Department for services to the United States for the period between 1 October and 31 December 1809.³⁹

Two years later, during the ascent of the Missouri River by Wilson Price Hunt's Overland Astorians, who sought to establish a post at the mouth of the Columbia River, a figure matching earlier descriptions of Graveline made a notable appearance. John Bradbury, a naturalist accompanying the Astorians, remarked on 12 June 1811 that after reaching the Arikaras they "met a canoe with two chiefs, and an interpreter, who is a Frenchman, and has lived with this tribe more than twenty

39. Specific quarterly Estimates of Expenditures of the Indian depart[ment] in Louisiana under the Agency of William Clark Commencing the 1st of October and ending the 31st of December 1809, National Archives Microfilm Publication M221, Roll 35.

years.”⁴⁰ He was married and had several children. Fellow naturalist Henri Marie Brackenridge, who accompanied a competing expedition with Manuel Lisa, remarked that the man with the two chiefs was “employed by the company,” meaning Lisa’s Missouri Fur Company.⁴¹ This man was not Graveline, however, but Joseph Garreau, who had been on the Upper Missouri as early as 1787 and, in 1812, was an interpreter for Lisa at Fort Manuel.⁴²

After Graveline returned to Missouri with Lewis and Clark’s keelboat in May 1805, he settled in Saint Ferdinand, a small town situated on the south side of the Missouri River about midway between Saint Charles and the river’s mouth, within the present-day city of Florissant. Here, aside from his various travels, he appears to have lived and worked for most of his remaining years. The community, according to an 1812 description by Major Amos Stoddard, contained “about sixty houses, most of them . . . situated on a rising ground, at the foot of which is a considerable stream of pure water, and on the opposite side is one of the most fertile and valuable prairies in the country.” At the time, its inhabitants were mostly Creoles and Canadians.⁴³

Founded in about 1787, Saint Ferdinand soon attracted a Catholic priest, and the community built a log church.⁴⁴ Contrary to what one might expect, this church’s records only complicate efforts to trace Graveline’s later life, as they indicate that another Joseph Graveline may have resided in the area. While the subject of this biography was with Lewis and Clark on the Upper Missouri, a man of the same name had a son, also named Joseph, in Saint Ferdinand on 9 June 1804.⁴⁵

40. John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of America, in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811* (Liverpool, Eng.: By the Author, 1817), p. 110.

41. Henry Marie Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana Together with a Journal* (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear & Richbaum, 1814), p. 245.

42. John C. Luttig, *Journal of a Fur-Trading Expedition on the Upper Missouri, 1812–1813*, ed. Stella M. Drumm (New York: Argosy-Antiquarian, 1964), p. 64n97.

43. Amos Stoddard, *Sketches: Historical and Descriptive of Louisiana* (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1812), pp. 219–20.

44. Gilbert J. Garraghan, *Saint Ferdinand de Florissant: The Story of an Ancient Parish* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1923), pp. 17–20, 82–83. Fire destroyed the church in 1836. *Ibid.*, p. 90n20.

45. U.S., *French Catholic Church Records*, ancestry.com.

Church records also indicate that in 1810, a seventeen-year-old woman named Suesanne, of the Snake (or Shoshone) nation and “belonging to Joseph Graveline,” died at his home and was buried in Saint Ferdinand.⁴⁶ The term “belonging to” implies that the young woman was Graveline’s slave. There is no way to verify whether this entry alludes to the Graveline discussed here, although Indian slavery was an accepted custom in Louisiana Territory at the time.⁴⁷

In Saint Ferdinand, on 23 April 1812, a fifty-seven-year-old Joseph Graveline married Rosalie Olivier, the daughter of Jean-Baptiste Olivier and Dorothé La Sonde of Kaskaskia. Church records are clear that this individual is the subject of this study, as they list his parents as François Graveline and his wife Marie Josette Duval of Canada. He may also have been the Joseph Graveline who was issued a license to trade with the Little Osage Indians on 5 September 1817 while living in what is now southwestern Missouri.⁴⁸

On 2 December 1818, Graveline sent President James Monroe a petition from Saint Louis asking for a land grant. He noted his services as an interpreter among the Indians and his trip to Washington, where “President Jefferson promised him a piece of Land in the [Louisiana] Territory.” Nothing had come of that promise, and now, being “old and infirm,” he asked that Monroe “request the Congress to grant to him a small vacant Island on the south shore of the Missouri Distant about three miles from the village of St. Ferdinand[,] which Island, though not fit for Cultivation, is good to raise Stock by which employment he means to get a living.” In return for the grant, “your Excellency will ever have the Grateful Prayers of a Destitute Family,” Graveline concluded. There were numerous small islands in the area, mostly between Saint

46. Ibid.

47. Indian slavery had been legal in New France since 1709, and French-Canadian settlers in the Illinois country had used Indian slaves since from the beginning. See Karl J. Ekberg, *Colonial Ste. Genevieve: An Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier* (Gerald, Mo.: Patrice Press, 1985), pp. 104–112.

48. U.S., *French Catholic Church Records*, ancestry.com; Frederick Bates, “List of Licenses to Trade with the Indians,” 1 Apr. 1818, in *Territorial Papers of the United States*, Vol. 15: *The Territory of Louisiana-Missouri, 1815-1821*, ed. Clarence Edwin Carter (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1951), p. 387.

To his Excellency James Monroe, President of
the United States of America. —

The petition of Joseph Graveline, respectfully
sheweth, That he has served the United States for some
considerable time as Interpreter for the Indians, That
During that time he went with a number of Indians to
Washington City, where his Excellency the then President
(Jefferson) promised him a piece of Land in this Territory
but, that not being willing to trouble the Government, he
endeavored to obtain some other resource for his support
in his old age, But now finding his endeavours fruitless
and being old & infirm, without means to support himself
or his family, he implores of your Excellency's goodness
(being his only & last resource) that you may be pleased to
request the Congress to grant to him a small vacant Island
on the South shore of the Missouri River about three miles
from the village of St. Ferdinand which Island, though
not fit for cultivation, is good to raise stock by which
employment he means to get a living. And your Excellency
will join have the grateful Prayers of a Destitute Family
of your Poor Petitioner — St. Louis 2^d Dec. 1818

Joseph ^{his} Graveline
mark

For his services & Reputation he refers your Excellency to
Governor Clark. —

Joseph Graveline's "x" appears near the bottom of the land-grant petition he submitted to President James Monroe in 1818.

Ferdinand and Saint Charles, and it is unclear which of them Graveline hoped to obtain. The petition was signed by a cross, “his mark.”⁴⁹ Nothing seems to have come of this plea. Finally, in 1824, the Missouri Supreme Court reviewed a case from the Saint Louis Circuit Court in which Graveline and his wife sought payment from Joseph LaBarge for land they had sold to him.⁵⁰

In 1825, a Joseph Graveline, Jr., owned 50.42 acres near the mouth of the Missouri River. It was plotted under Survey No. 160, as recorded by the office of the United States surveyor general, which documented earlier French and Spanish land claims. This narrow strip of land measuring one by sixty acres adjoined the Mississippi River and extended southwest to the Portage des Sioux Common.⁵¹ The identity of his father is not clear.

The fur trader and interpreter Joseph Graveline apparently died in Saint Ferdinand on 2 May 1837. Family genealogies accept this date as that of his death, but there is no record of the probate of his estate, nor its distribution to his wife Rosalie.⁵² If the date is correct, he had survived to the age of eighty-one in an era when the average life span was usually far less. Graveline almost certainly was buried in the old Saint Ferdinand Cemetery. Some families chose to move their relatives’ bodies to a new cemetery that opened in the early 1890s, but many burials were left unmarked in what is today called Spanish Land Grant Park in Florissant. Efforts to locate his gravesite have been fruitless, and he likely remains in one of the unmarked graves in the park.⁵³

49. Graveline to Monroe, 2 Dec. 1818, National Archives Microfilm Publication M221, Roll 81. See W. Raymond Wood, comp., *An Atlas of Early Maps of the American Midwest, Part 2* (Springfield: Illinois State Museum, Scientific Papers, Vol. 29, 2001), p. 12, plate 13a, for the 1798 map by Nicolas de Finiels that depicts the town.

50. *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined by the Supreme Court of the State of Missouri from 1821 to 1827*, Vol. 1, ed. and anno. Louis Houck (Belleville, Ill.: Kimball & Taylor, 1870), pp. 303–4.

51. *Missouri Digital Heritage, Land Patents, Land Records, 1777–1969*, vol. 5, p. 158, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City.

52. U.S., *French Catholic Church Records*, ancestry.com.

53. Archdiocese of St. Louis, “Parish Directory,” archstl.org/app/directory/parishes. For unmarked burials in the park, see Archaeological Research Center of St. Louis, Inc., Research Report No. 412A (St. Louis, 2006), and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “Spanish

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