The name of Josephine (Odile) St. George

by Conrad W. Terrill, Sept. 2008

If you look at the records concerning Benjamin Nadow and Josephine St. George (see "Records History - Benj Nadow and Jos St George - 1.pdf") it's all very confusing. What was Benjamin's wife's name? You will see "Josephine," "Mary," and a bewildering variety of variants of "Odile." Were Josephine, Mary and Odile the same person? Did Benjamin have more than one wife?

The answers to these questions, as supported by what I present below, are definite. Benjamin Nadow had only one wife (at least, until 1880—we don't know much about Josephine after that), who was the mother of all of his children. She had a French Canadian name, the name with which she grew up, and an "Americanized" (U.S./English) name that she took on after several years of living in the U.S. We think her French Canadian name was Marie Odile Laporte dit St. George. But it's possible that there was a "Josephe" in there; and "Odile" was sometimes spelled "Adile" by educated French Canadians; so perhaps her name was Marie Josephe Adile Laporte dit St. George. Does this seem long? It isn't any longer than the names of many other French Canadians of that time. Her U.S. name was of course Josephine St. George. The spelling of names was not considered terribly important back then. You spelled a name the way it sounded to you, and that was good enough. If you were educated then you had examples to go by. If you were not educated then the results could be completely chaotic, as they were in the case of Odile St. George.

What I present below is a list of the names for Josephine as given in records. Most of the records concern the births, baptisms, marriages, deaths or burials of her children. Some are U.S. Census records. On the left are the names of her children, in order of birth, so this is a chronologic list, extending from 1846 to 1880. The census records have been inserted in the chronologically correct places. On the right are the names as given in the records, with the year of the record in parentheses, appended by a B, an M or a D to indicate whether the record was of a birth/baptism, a marriage, or a death.

Maxim, b. ~1845   Adelia St. George and Odile St. George (1846B), Mary (1866M)
Benj. Jr., b. ~1846 Josephine (1899D)
Adaline, b. ~1848 Mary (1866M)
 (1850 census)   Ordeel
Eli, b. ~1850   (no record)
 (1852 marriage)   Odille St. George
Edward, b. ~1852   Odell(?) (1873M), Olive (1877M)
Francis, b. 1854   Audile St. George (1909D), Josephine (1877M)
Felix, b. 1855   Odowine St. George (1855B)
Charles, b. 1856   Odie St. George (1856B), Josephine St. George (1866D)
(male), b. 1858   (no record)
 (1860 census)   Mary
Mary, b. 1860   Woodin (1860B), Polly (1877M)[1]
George, b. ~1863   Odile St. George (1941D), Josephine (1882M)
Delia, b. 1866   Josephine (1866B), Josephine (1869D)
Theodore, b. 1868 Josephine St. George (1868B), Josephine (1889M), Odell St. George (1933D)
 (1870 census)   Josephine
Emma, b. 1871   Josephine (1872D)
Emma J., b. 1874   Josephine (1874B)
 (1880 census)   Josephine

1. *"Polly" is a common nickname for Mary. Daughter Mary's birth record name is "Apollin, and she was well-known as "Polly." (Are "Apollin" and "Mary" are somehow equivalent?)*

You can see in the results that "Josephine," "Mary," and "Odile" are interpersed. Since "Josephine" is named as the mother of Benjamin Jr. (b. ~1846) and of Emma J. (b. 1874), it's evident that the same woman was the mother of all of the children. (It's obvious that she was the mother of Maxim too.) The variations of "Odile" nearly defy credibility. It appears that Mary/Odile took on the name Josephine in the early- or mid-1860's.