

**Elizabeth Lachenal Arieu
(1774-1844)**

Elizabeth Lachenal Arieu was born into a well-to-do free Catholic family of color in Haiti. Her decision to come to the United States was undoubtedly the result of the Haitian Revolution. It is not known what her circumstances were at the time she arrived in Baltimore in the late-1790s. Was she still under the protection of her parents or had she married? Did she arrive alone or was she in the company of other family members? Did she arrive with any means to start her life over or was she destitute? We do know that she was educated, most likely having attended one of Haiti's private Catholic female academies. The early records of St. Peter's pro-Cathedral provide us with some pieces to the puzzle of this period in her life. A marriage record at St. Peter's establishes that she had arrived in Baltimore by 1799 at the latest. In this record, her maiden name is listed as Lachenal and described her and her husband, Charles Arieu (d. c. 1812), as free people of color from St. Domingue, now Haiti. The baptismal record for their first child, Gabriel August, born one year later noted that she was also called St. Macarie, which helps to identify her in an earlier record, where she was listed with her future husband as godparents to a child born to a free woman of color one week prior to their marriage. There was a St. Macarie family in Baltimore during this period, but it is not known if she had a tie to this family. In the following years, there will be baptismal records for two other sons born to Charles and Elizabeth: John James in 1803 and John Elias in 1806. Gabriel will die before he reaches his second birthday. It is unclear if one or both of her surviving children will live to adulthood.

Her husband's family appears to have arrived in Baltimore by 1796. Charles, whose nickname was Adonis, arrived with at least one sibling, Gabriel, a planter from St. Domingue, who brought with him several enslaved people, one of whom had obtained his freedom in 1796. After arriving in Baltimore, Gabriel opened a bakery, which he operated for several years. City directories from the era provide two addresses for the business over the period 1799-1801 and place it in the vicinity of the harbor. Gabriel then disappears from the records. It is not known if he remained in Baltimore, left the area, or died. Charles' circumstances at the time of his arrival in Baltimore are not known. Did he have a profession? Had he been employed on the family's plantation in Haiti? How did he support himself after arriving in the city and during the early years of his marriage to Elizabeth? One enslaved person has been identified in his household. A woman named Hortense who bore two daughters over the period 1803-1806. Were there others?

At some point after her marriage to Charles, Elizabeth, who preferred Zabeth, became known as Madame Charles or Zabeth Charles, perhaps to distinguish herself from the Gabriel Arieu branch of the family. Although members of her community might have known this was an abbreviated version of her full name, the dropping of the Arieu surname did generate some confusion in succeeding years over whether these were the names of two distinct people or one and the same person. When reviewing surviving records, she is nearly always listed under the names Madame Charles or Zabeth Charles, but she is on occasion listed as Madame Arieu. Spelling variations of both her maiden and married names and the note that she was also known as St. Macarie, further complicated efforts to locate her in the records. For a person who was to play such an important

role in Baltimore's Haitian refugee community, the multiple names she is listed under resulted in her contributions being misattributed or overlooked until recently.

By 1803, it is clear that Charles followed his brother's example, or perhaps took over his brother's business. Entries found in an account book for St. Mary's Seminary over that year, refer to him as the new baker who, in one instance, had been advanced the necessary funds to purchase 12 barrels of flour, suggesting that he was known to the Sulpician Fathers, who operated the seminary, if they were willing to loan him money. Charles is listed in the tax records for Baltimore City through 1812, when he disappears from both civil and church records. It is not known what happened to him. Did he fall victim to an outbreak of yellow fever or cholera, did he leave the area in search of employment, or did he return to Haiti? We know that Zabeth did not remarry, leaving open the possibility that Charles did not die. Regardless, Zabeth will assume responsibility of providing for herself and her young family.

Zabeth will also become more involved in the activities of St. Mary's Seminary Chapel, spiritual home to Baltimore's Haitian refugee community. Zabeth's name is listed as performing her Easter duties at the chapel beginning in 1809 and enrolling in one of its confraternities by 1812. Her relationship with the French Sulpician Fathers, who had established both St. Mary's Seminary (1791) and a special ministry to the Haitian refugee community, appears to have begun before the chapel records begin. Entries in the account book maintained by the treasurer for the seminary, Rev. Jean Tessier, have entries related to Zabeth's assistance in raising and distributing alms to poor members of Baltimore's black community and in the sale of religious books and items. Entries regarding both activities continue through 1830, revealing her commitment to performing good works and evangelization. These records also reveal her involvement at the hospital Rev. Tessier had founded for poor members of Baltimore's black community. Some entries suggest that Zabeth may have even been involved in operating the hospital for Rev. Tessier. Working by her side was a young widow, Fanny Montpensier, who was hired by Zabeth to work as a domestic in her home. It is likely that Zabeth and Fanny knew each other through the seminary chapel and that Zabeth felt compassion for Fanny, who, like herself, was now on her own and having to support herself. It is apparent through the records that Zabeth and Fanny's relationship went beyond that of employer and employee. Fanny worked alongside Zabeth in her charitable activities and was undoubtedly influenced by Zabeth's example, who had shown herself to be a strong, independent woman of great faith and resolve. Neither woman remarried and they remained close even after Fanny left Zabeth's employ. The relationships Zabeth formed at the seminary chapel in many ways would shape the rest of her life, first by introducing her to a community of women, who like herself, were deeply committed to their Catholic faith and in search of opportunities to live out this faith more fully. For Zabeth, this was expressed through her commitment to working with the poor and supporting the Oblate Sisters of Providence, a religious community founded by a group of women from the chapel.

The records regarding Zabeth's two surviving sons are scant. Entries found in the records of the Sulpician Fathers establish that an Elie/Ely Arieu was active in the faith community at St. Mary's Seminary Chapel and that he made the decision to return to Haiti in December 1840 with his wife, children, and a woman named Therese. It is not known if Elie/Ely was Zabeth and Charles'

youngest son or the child of another member of the Arieu family. Therese's identity is also unknown. Was she a family member or an enslaved woman? Is it a coincidence that Zabeth moved into the convent of the Oblate Sisters of Providence around this time? What prompted this move? Was she no longer able to live independently for health or financial reasons? Mention of Zabeth in the correspondence of Fanny Montpensier during this last period of her life suggests the former.

Among the papers Zabeth brought with her to the convent was a financial journal of Marie Magdeleine Sanite L'Houmeau containing records for the bakery she operated in Baltimore over the period 1808-1815. The exact nature of Sanite's relationship to the Arieu family is not known, but she was listed as godparent to Charles and Zabeth's first child, Gabriel, suggesting they were known to each other, be it through family or friendship. Both Zabeth and Sanite were active members of the faith community at St. Mary's Seminary Chapel, which undoubtedly deepened their bond. Zabeth's possession of Sanite's financial journal suggests that perhaps this relationship extended beyond friendship and into business affairs.

Zabeth remained with the Oblate Sisters for the last four years of her life. Living with this community, whose members she had known for thirty years and for whom she had made so many sacrifices to support, must have brought her great comfort. A gap in the records of the community denies us details on her last days or cause of death. Mention of her demise was found in the records of the Sulpician Fathers, where it was noted that she died on May 8, 1844, at the age of 70, and was buried in the Old Cathedral Cemetery.

The power of Elizabeth Arieu's witness still speaks to us nearly 200 years later. A woman who had known loss and overcome many challenges, it is clear that Zabeth drew strength from her faith. A faith that gave her the confidence to hold her own in a world that discriminated against women and people of color and a faith that impelled her to assist those in material and spiritual need.