

## The Dandy-Horse of M. Lagrange

By Christophe Lagrange, Paris, France

**T**his subject is a little peculiar to me: speaking about a builder who bears the same name as I do: Sieur Lagrange.

Some of you know him through the works of our colleagues Keizo Kobayashi, Claude Reynaud, Jacques Seray, and also David Herlihy who all have mentioned his name in the history of the beginning of the bicycle.

This paper will start with some description of the journey he made on a summer day in 1818 between Beaune and Dijon, France, and the places where he executed some demonstrations. I will also expose various elements about him found when searching for a hypothetical descendant. Finally, we have the discovery of a model which could be attributed to him. So let's ride our "draisienne" and ... Forward!

France - Burgundy, summer, 1818: the name of Lagrange as the rider of a

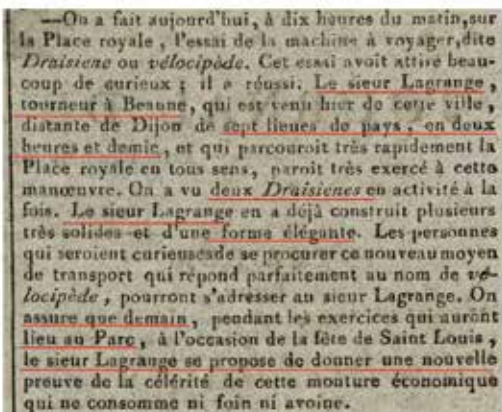


Figure 1. Journal de la Côte d'Or -25th August 1818.

draisienne (dandy-horse) is recorded in several newspapers such as: *Journal de Dijon et de la Côte-d'Or* (first article on August 25th, 1818),<sup>1</sup> *Journal de l'Ain*,<sup>2</sup> *Journal du Loiret*,<sup>3</sup> *Le Constitutionnel*,<sup>4</sup> and *Journal de Paris*.<sup>5</sup>

*Journal de la Côte-d'Or* was the first one to talk about Lagrange as Sieur Lagrange and what he did on August 23rd, 1818, and some days

following. [Figure 1]

*We made today, at ten o'clock in the morning, on the Place Royale, a test ride of the machine to travel, said draisiene or velocipede. This trial attracted many curious people, and it succeeded. Mr. Lagrange, a turner living in Beaune, who came yesterday from this city, which is in the country seven leagues distant from Dijon, in two and a half hours, and who rode very quickly in all directions around the Place Royale demonstrating much skill in this test ride. We saw two dandy-horses in service at the same*

*time. Mr. Lagrange has already built several very robust draisiens that are of a very elegant form. The people who were curious and interested to get themselves this new means of transportation which answers to the name of velocipede, can address Mr. Lagrange. We assure all that tomorrow, during the exercises which will take place in the Park on the occasion of the Saint-Louis, Mr. Lagrange promises to give a new proof of the speed of this economic machine which does not consume either hay or oats.*

Similar text appeared in the other newspapers mentioned above that were published a few days later, one week later, and about three weeks later.

This paper is organized as follows:

- In the first part we will learn who was Mr. Lagrange,
- next comes telling of the journey as well as the demonstrations which he made on the journey,
- and in the last part, I try to show that a dandy-horse made by Lagrange has survived into the 20th century.

### Who was M. Lagrange?

M. Lagrange's name was Bénigne François. He was born in 1792 in Nuits-Saint-Georges, 15 km north of Beaune and 25 km south of Dijon. (Note: Saint Bénigne is the patron saint of Burgundy, and the cathedral of Dijon is dedicated to him.)

M. Lagrange was a wood turner, and he settled down in Beaune where he was married in 1813 to Claudine Barriere (1797-1845) who was herself a wood turner's daughter. They had four children.<sup>6</sup> He worked at this job until 1828, and he would have had the



Figure 2. Map made by P-A Basset 1819 - National Library of France.

skills and the tools needed to build dandy-horses during this time. He was a son, a son-in-law, a brother, and a brother-in-law in a family of wood turners. In 1813, the married couple lived on the Grande rue in Beaune:<sup>7</sup> a street that leads directly to the road from Beaune to Dijon.

After 1831, Mr. Lagrange changed his profession and became first a wine trader, then a wine merchant, and then after being declared bankrupt in 1839, a clerk probably for a wine merchant. Taken ill in 1844, he was admitted to the Hospices de Beaune, where he died in 1846: he was 54 years-old.

From one of his direct descendants I learned that after he was established in the city, he bought a few houses in Beaune. However, the wine trade was not prosperous, and in 1839 he was declared bankrupt. His houses were sold by auction, and an inventory of his goods was drawn up. You might wonder: Was there still a dandy-horse? Unfortunately, there was no dandy-horse among his possessions at this time. Only his wood turner's tools were mentioned among his belongings.



Figure 3. Elevation along the road from Beaune to Dijon (Google map).

### The journey from Beaune to Dijon and the demonstrations

Let's go back to August 23rd, 1818. On a cloudy day, probably in the early morning, François and a companion left Beaune heading towards Dijon, a trip of two and a half hours for seven "lieues de pays" (leagues of country) which is about 39.5 km or for an average speed of 15.8 km/hour.<sup>8</sup> Note: One 'league of country', a measure of the Former Diet Ancien régime, in Burgundy represented a distance of 5.847 km meters.<sup>9</sup> Remember that the Baron von Drais was known to have travelled at an average speed of only 12.5 km/hour.

Let us go through the vineyards of Burgundy in following François and his companion: Beaune, near Aloxe-Corton, Nuits-Saint-Georges his home town (where there was a staging post), then Vosne-Romanée, Chambolle-Musigny, Gevrey-Chambertin (another staging post was in nearby La Baraque), before climbing from the coast of Marsannay-la-Côte and then going down into Dijon.

Looking for a road map that was published as close as possible to the event, I found one drawn by Paul-André Basset circa 1819 that showed a road identical to the current road RD 974. [Figure 2] A current representation of the route allows us to appreciate that it is not flat. [Figure 3]

Another map drawn up by Hocquart and revised by Simencourt in 1827 indicates the staging posts and the distances between each of them. The distance is expressed in "league of France",<sup>10</sup> and not in "league of Burgundy". Three leagues separated each of the staging posts between Beaune and Dijon: Beaune-Nuits (3.5), Nuits-La Baraque (3), La Baraque-Dijon (3) for a total of

9.5 leagues.

At that time, the road used was not "macadamized" since it was 20 years later when this process first appeared in France.

If this is the "Road from Beaune to Dijon" in

our story, the imperial road of 3rd class N 92" and the royal circular of July 10th, 1824, listed it as "Royal road of 3rd class N° 74",<sup>11</sup> Afterward it became main road RN 74 until its later downgrading to secondary road RD 974.

In the 18th century, these roads were maintained by the royal duties and supervised by civil engineers. The mode of construction of these ways is described in the Treaty of the construction of the ways by M. Gautier (3rd edition published in 1755). After the abolition of the duties, it was the roadmen working for

civil engineering firms who maintained the roads.

Let us return on August 24th, 1818: F. Lagrange and a companion (identity is uncertain) made their first demonstration of riding a draisine on the King's Square of Dijon (currently the Square of the Liberation) in front of many curious people. Was the second dandy-horse rider a guide for Lagrange on this ride which might have been one of the brothers or the brother-in-law, or some other fearless person who possessed a dandy-horse? [Figure 4]

On August 25th, 1818, Lagrange is again assisted by a second draisine rider with a demonstration in the Park of Colombière in Dijon. This was a period of the Restoration in France and Louis XVIII reigned. After the defeat of Waterloo, France was occupied by foreign armies, and in Burgundy, Austrian troops were in garrison, but they would leave the territory in the spring of 1819. On this date (August 25th, 1818) a festival was held to commemorate Saint Louis. Among the officials who were present there was a certain Marquis d' Agrain (remember this name).<sup>12</sup> After a military



Figure 4. King Square – Dijon – National Library of France.

review, there were many attractions at the fest of which the demonstration by Lagrange was one. The crowd was numerous: 18,000 people of Dijon and neighboring communities (at that time Dijon had a population of 22,000 inhabitants<sup>13</sup>). At night, a fireworks display was held in the centre of the Parc.

Carion's newspaper<sup>14</sup> (*le Journal de Carion*) also tells us a little more about Lagrange's dandy-horse including a short description. Vivant Carion was a former woodmaker and a former priest who had preferred to resume civil life after the Revolution. He got married and then became a printer and bookseller, and he was also one of the first journalists. Here is what he wrote two days after the last demonstration in the Park about the machine he saw and called "voiture" (car):

*A kind of trestle, where the pilot is sitting, hanging legs, on the front a kind of easel used as a point of support for the rider and to move the machine, a small wheel at the front and a bigger one for the rear one. To move the machine, you have to hit the ground with the feet.* [Figure 5]

### A dandy-horse made by Lagrange?

Does any dandy-horse made by Lagrange still exist? Would it be possible to identify such a machine? Kobayashi, Reynaud, and Seray have all written that some of the hobby-horses that have survived to the present time could have been made by Lagrange. I agree with these authorities, and I propose three

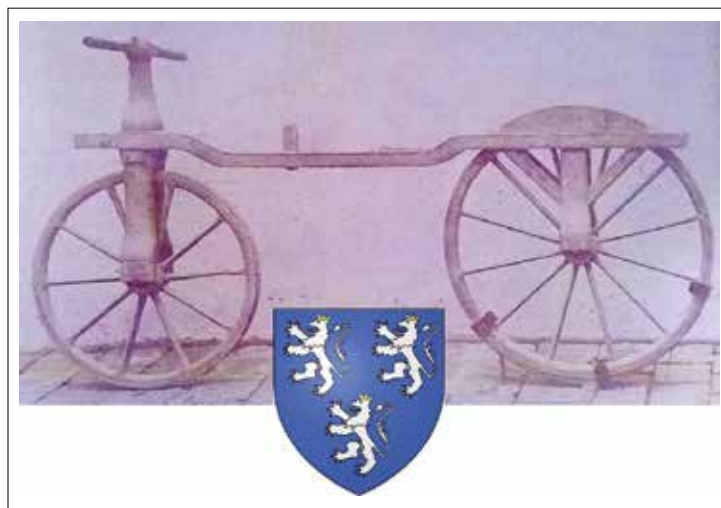
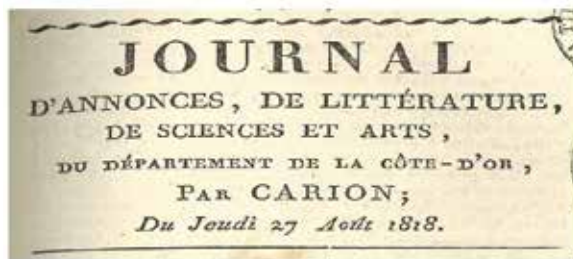


Figure 6. d'Agrain's draisienne – Library of travels and tourism Paris.



— Nous avons eu lundi dernier, sur la place royale, et hier au cours du Parc, pendant la fête, le spectacle de voitures allant fort vite, sans attelage, et conduites seulement par le voyageur qu'elles portent. Ces voitures sont composées d'une sorte de tréteau sur lequel l'amateur de course est assis, les jambes pendantes; sur le devant est une espèce de chevalet qui lui sert de point d'appui pour lui-même et en même temps de moyen pour pousser la machine; une petite roue est en avant, et une autre plus grande en arrière. Pour communiquer le mouvement à cette voiture, et pour le hâter lorsqu'il vient à se ralentir, on frappe du pied la terre. Cette machine marche en tout sens, d'après l'impulsion que lui donne son conducteur. Le fabricant de ces voitures est un tourneur de Branne, qui est venu, dit-on, de cette ville à Dijon en deux heures et demie, et qui conduit avec beaucoup de dextérité. On appelle cette machine une *Draisienne*, du nom de son inventeur, un M. Draisier, baron allemand, qui a cru faire fortune en nous amenant de la Germanie le pro-

Figure 5. *Journal de Carion* – 27th August 1818 – Archives of the city of Dijon.

possible candidates.

In 1906, during the 'Salon de l'automobile et du cycle' in Paris, there was a retrospective exhibition of the history of the cycle which showed the various evolutions of machines through time. Among these cycles, one of them was interesting for us. It was listed in the *Catalog of Salon*<sup>15</sup> as well as in the *Review of the Touring Club de France* (TCF)<sup>16</sup> in the following way:

### 1818 - Dandy-horse - Marquis d'Agrain

It was an obligation for the owners to indicate the year of the manufacturing of the machine, the name of the model and the owner's name.

#### [Figure 6]

The name d'Agrain reminded me of the caption of a Figure in the thesis of Keizo Kobayashi and one of the works of Claude Reynaud; *the so-called dandy-horse of the marquis of Agrain*.<sup>17</sup>

In 1818, it

was Charles de Pradier, Marquis of Agrain, second of the name, whose father had been first president of the chamber of the accounts of Dijon. As an artillery officer, he was present during the demonstration of August 25th, 1818, in the Park of Colombière and mentioned in the *Moniteur Universel* (national daily newspaper).

As for the model described by Carion, several parts seem to correspond to that made by Lagrange: namely, a small wheel in front, "handlebars", probably one piece of the saddle support. Also, a kind of mudguard can be seen upon the rear wheel.

Interestingly, there is a draisine known as 'Niepce's Draisienne – 1818' on display in the museum Nicéphore Niépce in Chalon-sur-Saône. This machine has a smaller wheel in front and also a kind of mudguard upon the rear wheel. This model looks like that

described by Carion as well as that of the Marquis d'Agrain as it has "handlebars", a saddle, and traces of a support on the front side. [Figure 7]

Kobayashi wrote in his thesis that François Lagrange would have been able to ride a dandy-horse from Beaune to Chalon, to meet Niépce and to sell him a dandy-horse, or to make one for him. Why not? At the beginning of this text, I indicated that François was a son, a son-in-law, a brother, and a brother-in-law of wood turners. One of his brothers named Claude Lagrange was established as a wood-turner in Chalon, and he would probably have been able to make such a machine.

And finally the third candidate: I have asked several museums in France about a dandy-horse made by Lagrange, and the museum of Compiègne answered by sending me a photo of one of the models they have in their collection. This one was given to the museum in 1931 by M. Paul Moppert, member of the TCF since 1928. He was living in Burgundy in the city of Nuits-Saint-George where Lagrange had been born. He thought that this dandy-horse had been made at the time of Louis-Philippe (ca. 1830) or in the Second Empire. Once again, the Compiègne draisine has a small wheel in front, handlebars, but no saddle as does the Marquis d'Agrain



Figure 7 : Niepce's draisienne – website of the Museum Niepce in Chalon sur Marne.

#### draisienne. [Figure 8]

You may think that these hypothesis are interesting or not, but I believe that at least one of these three dandy-horses was made by François Lagrange, probably the one which was exhibited in 1906 and which belonged to Marquis d' Agrain.

This route and François Lagrange's name were still quoted at the end of the 19th century, but also in the 20th century<sup>19</sup>.

In 1959, a book for school<sup>20</sup> mentions "the sporting achievement" realized by F. Lagrange.

In conclusion, I would like to end with a salute to the Tour de France 2017. A small part of the route of the 7th stage between Troyes and Nuits-Saint-Georges used the road fol-

lowed by François Lagrange 199 years earlier. It was between Gevrey-Chambertin and Vougeot, then between Corgoloin and Nuits-Saint-Georges, his birthtown. ●

#### Acknowledgments

- Francis Robin, who suggested this research to me,
- Raymond Henry, who convinced me to make this presentation and to write this paper,
- Mme. Fau, Curator of the museum of Compiègne,
- Mr. François, archivist of the Hospices de Beaune,
- Mrs. Dolat, archivist of the city of Beaune, and the
- People who work for the archives of city of Dijon.



Figure 8. The Draisienne at The National Museum of the Car and Tourism in Compiègne.

#### Particular Acknowledgments

- This presentation wouldn't have been possible without Mrs. Reviron's precious help. She is one of François Lagrange's descendants.
- Mr. Dumas de Mascarel, one of the Marquis d' Agrain's descendants, for his help with materials in the familial archives.
- Mrs. Shepherd who was very helpful for a correct English translation.
- And, of course, my wife and my son.

#### End notes

- 1 National Library of France. *Journal de la Côte-d'Or*, 1818. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb32797941g>. Accessed 01/15/2018.
- 2 2nd september 1818 – Archives of old newspapers Rhône Alpes
- 3 12th september 1818 – Aurélia website – Library of Orléans
- 4 28th August 1818
- 5 28th August 1818
- 6 François (1814-1814), Antoine (1816-1863), Eugénie (1820-1875), Philiberte (1822-1828)
- 7 Today, rue de Lorraine in Beaune.
- 8 From « les données météorologiques relevées » in the *Journal de Paris* which indicated cloudy weather.
- 9 « *Tableau des mesures les plus courantes en usage dans le pays beauinois* » – Archives of the City of Beaune.
- 10 One league of France was 4.444 m from the dictionary *Littre* in 1880.
- 11 Source: Google Books
- 12 *Journal de la Côte d'Or* September 29th 1818; *Moniteur Universel*, September 1818
- 13 Wikipedia about the city of Dijon
- 14 August 27th 1818 - Archives of the city of Dijon
- 15 Archives of Automobile Club de France (ACF) organizer of the 1906 salon.
- 16 Monthly review of TCF – December 1906 – National Library of France-Gallica
- 17 *Histoire du Vélocipède de Drais à Michaux 1817-1870* – Keizo Kobayashi; *L'ère de la draisienne en France 1818-1870* – Claude Reynaud
- 18 *La Presse* 1883; *le Figaro* 1885, *l'Intermédiaire des chercheurs et des curieux* 1885; *la Gazette Anecdote, Littéraire, Artistique et Bibliographique* 1890; *le Journal du Loiret* 1896
- 19 *Le Journal du Loiret* 1910, 1920, 1932
- 20 Documents pour la classe – Moyens audiovisuels - n°64, November 26th 1959.

#### Sources

- Keizo Kobayashi – *Histoire du Vélocipède de Drais à Michaux 1817-1870*
- Claude Reynaud – *L'ère de la Draisienne en France 1818-1870*
- Jacques Seray – *Deux Roues la Merveilleuse histoire d'une Machine Nommée Vélo*
- David Herlihy – *Bicycle, the History* - 2004
- Archives of the city of Dijon
- Archives départementales de la Côte d'Or
- Archives des Hospices de Beaune
- Museum de l'automobile et du tourisme de Compiègne
- National Library of France - Gallica
- Amaury Sport Organisation (ASO) – Tour de France