

# French Ships' Logs Now at Clayton

by Donald E. Pusch



Recently, the Friends acquired for Clayton Library microfilm of the Library of Congress's Louisiana Colonial Records Project (discussed elsewhere in this newsletter). A significant portion of that microfilm contains seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French ships' logs from the archival sub-series Marine 4 JJ (*Journaux de bord*), part of the holdings of the French Archives nationales. The entire Marine 4 JJ collection contains thousands of ships' logs; however, the Library of Congress's copying program selected for filming only those thought to be of the most interest for the history of the French and Spanish provinces of Louisiana and the United States, about 245 logs spanning the period 1669 to 1793. These include voyages from France to various destinations in North America, including Quebec, Ile Royale (the French colony that encompassed present-day Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island), Acadia (parts of present-day Nova Scotia and New Brunswick), New England, Newfoundland, the Louisiana-Mississippi Gulf Coast, Florida, and various Caribbean islands including Saint Domingue, Martinique, Sainte Croix, Jamaica, Antigua, Guadeloupe, and Grenada.

A survey of the Marine 4 JJ microfilm in this collection shows that it includes some 70 logs of ships traveling to the Louisiana-Mississippi coast, 47 to Acadia and Ile Royale, 34 to Quebec, and over 90 to various locations in the Caribbean. There are even a small number of logs for voyages to such places as New York, Delaware, Portsmouth (New Hampshire), and Nantucket. In general, the voyages covered in these logs begin and end at ports in France; however, there are some for voyages between various French colonies or for one-way voyages between the colonies and France. Some logs describe "round-robin" voyages from France to several different colonial destinations, and there are a few logs of ships engaged in the slave trade between the coast of Africa and Louisiana or the various French colonies of the Caribbean.

Ships logs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have never been considered important sources for genealogical data, and they certainly do not contain anything akin to vital records. Their significance lies in the fact that they are first-hand narratives, narratives that not only include navigational data but also information about what took place during the voyage. One finds in these logs many bits of information about the places the ship visited, events observed, the people onboard, or the various people who may have come in contact with the ship. A good example of this is the log of the King's transport ship *Rhinocéros*, which arrived at New Orleans in July 1752. On the passage between the mouth of the Mississippi River and the city, the ship's log records the various habitations encountered along the river, including those of Danois, Robert, Laloire, the Faissante brothers, and Governor Vaudreuil. During the period when the *Rhinocéros* was moored on the New Orleans waterfront, the log records the names of other ships and their captains coming and going from the port. Another example is the log of the King's transport ship *Fortune*, which visited New Orleans in the fall of 1758. We find recorded there the debarkation of the newly arrived *ordonnateur* (chief financial officer) Vincent de Rochemore and his wife. Also mentioned in the log is the port captain, Jacques Livaudais, and one of the local river pilots, Louis Roquigny, both of whom worked with the *Fortune's* captain in getting the ship lightered sufficient to sail through East Pass near the Balize pilot station.

Although passenger lists are rarely encountered in these logs, one will occasionally find in them listings referred to as *états majeurs*, rosters of the naval officers serving onboard the ship and, if any were present, the officers of troop detachments being transported on the ship. This is the case, for example, with

the 1749 log of the *Atalante* (4 JJ 22, journal 66), the 1788 log of the *Poulette* (4 JJ 26, journal 102), and the 1788 log of the *Truite* (4 JJ 19, journal 83).

Not all of the items in the Marine 4 JJ collection are true ships' logs. For whatever reason, this sub-series also includes a few private journals, ones that focus on observed events and not on navigational matters. The best example of this is Bénard de La Harpe's journal (Marine 4 JJ 14, journal 15), which contains La Harpe's observations on the colony of Louisiana made during an intended voyage to Matagorda Bay (then called Saint Bernard Bay) on the Texas coast in 1721. This journal, which is the original source for many subsequently published versions, can now be directly accessed at Clayton Library in the original French!\* Another example of these type journals is that of Le Sueur (Marine 4 JJ 14, journal 4). In the form of a letter, Le Sueur's journal records observations made during an excursion up the Mississippi River, ca. 1700.

Also found in this sub-series are the logs of several important voyages of discovery and early exploration. Foremost among these are the two of d'Iberville: the first for a voyage from Léogâne (a seaport near Port au Prince, Haiti) to a point near modern-day Biloxi, Mississippi in 1698 (Marine 4 JJ 14, journal 3); and the second for a voyage from Cap Français (Cape Haïtien, Haiti) to the Mississippi and into the interior of Louisiana in 1700 (Marine 4 JJ 14, journal 4).

As mentioned previously, there are also logs of slave ships in the sub-series. One such log (Marine 4 JJ 15, journal 21) is for the ship *Courrier de Bourbon* of Lorient, which, in June and July of 1723, picked up several hundred slaves at two locations along the coast of Senegal and then transported them, via Saint Domingue, to Biloxi and New Orleans. Another example is the log (Marine 4 JJ 16, journal 35) for the slave ship *Galathée*, which chronicles a horrifying voyage that took place in 1728–1729. In October 1728, the *Galathée* took onboard 400 enslaved Africans at the infamous slave station on the island of Gorée off the coast of Senegal. Sickness set in among both the slaves and the crew before the ship reached Saint Domingue and took a terrible toll on the Africans during the trek from Saint Domingue to Louisiana. Each day the log records one, two, sometime three or four slaves dying and being thrown into the sea. By the time the *Galathée* reached the Balize pilot station on 18 January 1729, some 127 Africans had died. Thirteen more died during the ship's ascent of the river to New Orleans. This log also names many of the crew members who died and contains a list of replacement sailors taken onboard in Saint Domingue.

There are very few finding aids for the Marine 4 JJ logs of the Louisiana Colonial Records Project, and no comprehensive indexes exist. The principal aid for using the collection is George Bourgin and Étienne Taillemite, *Inventaire des Archives de la Marine, Service hydrographique, sous-séries 4 JJ (Journaux de bord)* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1963). This work, available at Clayton, contains a listing of all the logs in the Marine 4 JJ sub-series, those filmed as part of the Louisiana Colonial Records Project as well as all others. In general, entries in the *Inventaire* include the name of the ship, the name of the captain, the place of embarkation, the destination(s), and the year date(s) of the voyage. If the log or journal was created under the authority of someone other than the captain (for example, another of the ship's officers), that information is included, if known. The names of the ships and the captains are indexed in the back of the text. To augment the *Inventaire*, Clayton Library Friends has prepared a notebook finding aid that gives the microfilm reel number reference for each of the logs. Look for this on the finding aids shelf in the microprint area on the second floor of the library.

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\* Clayton also owns an annotated English translation of this journal. Jean-Baptiste Bénard de la Harpe, *Journal historique de l'établissement des français à la Louisiane* [Historical Journal of the Settlement of the French in Louisiana], Glenn R. Conrad, ed., Virginia Koenig and Joan Cain, trans., USL History Series, vol. 3 (Lafayette: USL, 1971). (076.3 L 185 LA)