Notes and Documents

THE COLONIAL RECORDS COLLECTION
OF THE CENTER FOR LOUISIANA STUDIES

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The University of Southwestern Louisiana established the Center for Louisiana Studies in 1973 to stimulate research in, and to expand the public's knowledge of, the Pelican State's rich cultural and historical legacy. In order to achieve this ambitious goal, the Center absorbed the USL History Series of original, monographic studies (established in 1970); launched a continuing special publications and architecture series; and assumed editorial responsibilities for three major Louisiana journals, Louisiana History, Recue de Louisiane,1 and the Attakapas Gazette. In addition, the Center for Louisiana Studies has established an exhibit series on Louisiana subjects, organized popular lectures on historical topics, presented dramatic readings to lay audiences, filmed historical programs for presentation to school children, and last, but certainly not least, built special research collections. Indeed, these special collections have provided the very foundation for the Center's numerous ongoing research projects and publications.

The Colonial Records Collection (hereinafter CRC) is the largest of the Center for Louisiana Studies' special collections. Established in 1967 by Glenn R. Conrad, the Center's present director, the CRC currently contains more primary-source materials on the French experience in North America than any other United States depository. Drawn from various French and Spanish colonial archives, the British Museum and Public Records Office, and various state and parochial depositories, the CRC's holdings focus upon the history of the Mississippi Valley, but also include extensive materials on New France, Acadia, Île Royale, and the French Antilles. Because of its scope and importance, the CRC has gained national

1 Publication of the Recue de Louisiane was suspended in 1982.
and international recognition and annually attracts historians and anthropologists from throughout the United States, Canada, and France.

The CRC is divided into the French Colonial and Spanish Colonial sections. The former includes microfilmed copies of approximately 1,000,000 manuscript pages in France’s Archives Nationales. The most frequently used portion of the collection is a forty-six-reel section filmed in mid-twentieth century by the Library of Congress. These reels contain most of the multi-archival materials listed in Mrs. Nancy M. Miller Surrey’s Calendar of Manuscripts in Paris Archives and Libraries Relating to the History of the Mississippi Valley to 1803, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1926). The microfilmed materials were arranged chronologically and consist of documents which the Library of Congress representatives deemed nationally significant.

Because the Library of Congress’ selective filming policies excluded many items of local and regional interest, and particularly those relating to the area encompassed by the present state boundaries, Conrad, in August 1967, initiated talks with other Gulf Coast archivists and representatives of the Library of Congress regarding the need for filling these rather substantial archival gaps. The negotiations ultimately led to the establishment of a microfilming consortium in early 1968, and the resulting microfilming project was soon initiated in the Archives Nationales.

This cooperative venture quickly reaped dividends, and, in 1970, the CRC acquired the fifty-four component volumes of the C13# subseries of the Archives des Colonies. This subseries, containing the general correspondence of Louisiana’s French colonial personnel, represents a comprehensive filming of all extant materials, but, unlike the chronological organization of the earlier project at the Library of Congress, the colony’s official correspondence was arranged by volume and sequential folio numbers.

Acquisition of the C13# subseries was followed, in 1975, by the purchase of thirty-three reels of maritime materials from various French depositories. Two of these reels represent a comprehensive filming of three volumes of the Archives Nationales’ Etat Civil Section. These materials, drawn from volumes 412, 464, and 465 of the G# subseries, contain most of the extant documentation regarding German immigration to Louisiana under John Law’s proprietary regime. An additional reel is drawn from Le Dépot des Fortifications des Colonies and includes Louisiana Memoirs 1–137, devoted primarily to French military campaigns against Mississippi Valley Indians. This reel, however, also contains memoranda on the Natchez Massacre of 1729 and the colony’s territorial limits in 1758.

Fully twenty-five reels of this portion of the CRC’s maritime section is drawn from the Louisiana materials in the 3J# and 4J# subseries of the Archives de la Marine. The subseries 4J# materials consist largely of ships’ logs
which have been calendared in Etienne Taillemite’s *Inventaire des Archives de la Marine: Service Hydrographique, Sous-Série 4JJ* (Paris, 1963); the subseries 3JJ materials, which occupy only one microfilm reel, on the other hand, cover a broad variety of topics, ranging from La Salle’s act of possession at the mouth of the Mississippi River (April, 1682) to a memoir by Colonial Prefect Pierre-Clément Laussat on the navigability of the Mississippi River’s mouths (1803). The 3JJ documents unfortunately are not calendared, but location of individual documents is nevertheless facilitated by a crude table of contents, typed by the microfilmer, and inserted at the very beginning of the reel.

The final item in the maritime section is one reel of material, drawn from the Archives Nationales, Section d’Outre Mer, Etats-Unis. While devoted primarily to early nineteenth-century Franco-American diplomacy, the Section Outre-Mer documents include a large subdivision on the effects of the British blockade on the French Antilles in 1814–1815.

The foregoing, miscellaneous collection represents the CRC’s last major acquisition as a member of the filming consortium. This is not to say, however, that its arrival signalled the end of the Center’s archival acquisitions program. On the contrary, though the Center has subsequently ordered only specific items from French depositories, such as the Denis-Nicolas Foucault dossier from the Archives de la Bastille and all extant materials on eighteenth-century Alsatian emigration to French Louisiana in the B3 subseries of the Archives de la Marine, the Center for Louisiana Studies intensified its efforts to expand its French colonial holdings.

Building upon its broadly based core collections, the Center launched, in the early 1970s, a major exchange program with other French-colonial depositories in North America. From the Centre d’Études Acadiennes at the Université de Moncton (N.B.), for example, the CRC purchased negative copies of the C11ª, C11ª, and C11ª subseries in the Archives des Colonies. The C11ª section, containing general correspondence from New France, includes 126 volumes of material on 132 reels. The C11ª subseries, on the other hand, containing general correspondence from Île Royale (present-day Cape Breton Island) and, to a lesser extent, Île St-Jean (modern-day Prince Edward Island), consists of 38 volumes of material on an equal number of 35mm reels. Finally, Subseries C11ª consists of volumes 1–10, containing the general correspondence of Acadia’s French administrators.

The Canadian materials were supplemented by the B series (Ordres du roi) of the Archives des Colonies, comprising 149 volumes on 212 reels. This extensive collection, also acquired from the Centre d’Études Acadiennes, consists of ministerial directives to colonial administrators throughout North America. Of particular interest to Louisiana historians are the numerous,
highly detailed (though unfortunately hastily copied) official memoranda which outline French colonial policy for the Mississippi Valley.

Other items pertaining to Mississippi Valley history were purchased from the Library of Congress' microfilm collection, including miscellaneous materials from the Archives Étrangères and volumes 241–243 of the F3 subs- 
series (Moreau de St-Méry Collection) of the Archives Nationales. These volumes consist primarily of Louisiana Superior Council minutes for the period 1714–1765, but interspersed between the minute books are miscellaneous items, including Louis Andry's instructions for settling the first large group of Acadian immigrants along Bayou Teche.

The Archives Étrangères materials, on the other hand, include volumes 1–3 and 6–9 of the Mémoires et Documents Series, Amérique Subseries. This six-reel section of the CRC consists of a series of memoirs on Louisiana's significance (or, more correctly, insignificance) to France's imperial designs in eighteenth-century North America.

Finally, in the mid-1970s, the CRC acquired from McGill University four reels of Collection La Rochelle material. These materials, drawn from the Archives départementales de la Charente-Maritime, are a storehouse of information for the commercial histories of New France and Louisiana. Reel 1, for example, contains Les Papiers de la famille Denys de Bonnaventure concernant le Canada, while the second reel devotes an entire section to the booty taken in Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville's illustrious Nevis campaign and the twelve-year judicial battle over the spoils. In addition, Reel 3, last section of the Collection La Rochelle pertaining to French North America, contains scores of items pertaining to the Canadian fur trade, Franco-English treaty negotiations (1761), La Rochelle's involvement in the lucrative slave trade (1763–1766), supplies furnished by St-Domingue to other French sugar islands (1720–1760), and the names and tonnage of La Rochelle vessels bound for North America (1736–1737, 1750, 1777).

Acquisition of the Collection La Rochelle marked an important watershed in the development of the CRC. Hereafter, acquisition of European materials pertaining to the French in North America was geared entirely to French or French colonial depositories. After incorporating the La Rochelle materials into the CRC, however, the Center for Louisiana Studies began to pursue different avenues in its search for archival materials. Of particular interest were historically significant resources not readily accessible to Louisiana scholars. With this objective in mind, the Center recently acquired from the Illinois State Archives a fourteen-reel (16mm) microfilm collection of the Kaskasia Civil Records. These materials, dating from 1708–1773, offer new insights into the settlement of the Upper Mississippi Valley. In addition, since 1976, the Center has maintained an important acquisition program in Seville, Spain.
The CRC's interest in Spanish archival materials stems from the fact that, though France relinquished de jure control of the Mississippi Valley through the Treaty of Paris (1763), France's socio-cultural legacy has persisted in Louisiana to the present. Indeed, Spain lacked the necessary resources to hispanicize the colony's francophone population and hence, with the exception of New Orleans, local commandants were consistently French; legal and personal business was transacted in French; and the region's distinctive francophone culture endured.

The cultural and demographic dominance of the French in rural Spanish Louisiana is vividly reflected in the plethora of late eighteenth-century census reports embodied in legajos 2529 through 2689 of the Audiencia de Santo Domingo Papers, a 140-reel collection which the CRC acquired from Spain's Archivo General de Indias. Though the Santo Domingo papers deal primarily with administrative affairs on a colonial level, many documents pertain to matters of purely local interest.

The Santo Domingo papers are complemented by numerous other local materials. Rural settlement patterns in Spanish Louisiana, for example, are detailed in the Pintado Papers, a four-reel collection of land records. The activities of these frontier settlers are documented in minute detail by the commandants' reports of the Papeles Procedentes de Cuba. Often writing at least semi-weekly, and, in crises, on a daily basis, the commandants recorded all facets of human interaction, but particularly petty judicial disputes, local Indian affairs, policing the local slave population, smuggling, the fur trade, the difficulty of maintaining internal improvements, settlement patterns, frontier morality, and the role of the Catholic church in frontier society.

Because of their obvious historical importance, the commandants' reports were the first materials to be filmed by the CRC at Seville's Archivo General de Indias. In accordance with Center directives, the reports were arranged alphabetically by post and chronologically within each subdivision. Once organized, the materials were paginated and sent to the National Microfilm Institute at Madrid for duplication. Because of the collection's enormity and the tedium of organizing the reports, which were in a sorry state of disarray, this microfilming project, comprising legajos 188A-221B, was not completed until late 1978.

Following completion of the first phase of microfilming in the Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, the CRC turned its attention to the Spanish colonial administrators' papers. Unlike the commandants' reports, Louisiana's official correspondence emanated exclusively from New Orleans, the colonial capital.

1 The CRC's Santo Domingo Collection includes the following legajos: 2529-2540, 2542-2571, 2575-2583, 2585-2590, 2594-2601, 2604-2626, 2628-2634, 2637-2652, 2654-2657, 2660-2662, 2664-2670, 2672-2674, 2676-2679, 2684, 2686-2689.
nial capital. As a consequence, correspondence of the Spanish governors, intendants, and lesser administrative officers has been arranged by author in descending order of bureaucratic rank. As in the commandants' reports, however, materials within each subdivision are arranged chronologically. Thus organized, the official correspondence is being filmed systematically, and, at present, the CRC has received a comprehensive collection of gubernatorial and intendants' reports for the years 1766–1771 and 1785. These materials treat extensively Spain's initially tenuous hold on Louisiana (1766–68); the events leading the first North American independence movement against a European power, the New Orleans Rebellion of 1768; and Acadian immigration. Other administrative materials, acquired from Bancroft Library at the University of California, consist of Governor Carondelet's personal papers dating from his gubernatorial career in the twilight years of Spanish rule (1792–1797).

These governmental materials are complemented by Spanish judicial records. Local judicial authority was vested in the commandants, and petty judicial decisions are recorded in their reports. The deliberations of the Cabildo (1770–1803) can be found in reels three and four of the Legislative Papers Section of the American microfilm series, Records of the States of the United States of America.

After launching the second phase of the Spanish-colonial acquisitions program, the Center for Louisiana Studies acquired a small collection of Florida materials relating to the history of the Mississippi Valley. Some of these archival materials were purchased from the British Museum, including volume 4 of the Haldeman-Gage letterbooks (add. 21,665) for the period 1758–1777 (1 reel); Returns of His Majesty's Forces, Vol. 1, 1768–1769 (1 reel); and a manuscript, written by Louisianian Athanaze Demézières, entitled, in translation, "Information Regarding the Provinces of Texas and Louisiana," ca. 1770 (1 reel). The Center also acquired six reels of microfilm from the British Public Record Office, Colonial Office Papers, Class 5. Shipping Returns and Original Papers for West Florida, Vols. 573–590. While devoted primarily to mundane administrative affairs for the two decades of English rule in West Florida, the collection contains considerable information concerning the New Orleans Rebellion of 1768. Finally, the Center for Louisiana Studies purchased from the East Florida Section of the Library of Congress' Manuscripts Division one reel of microfilm entitled "Papers on Louisiana, Appalache and the Indians (1784–1816)."

While its ongoing European acquisitions programs, such as the British, Spanish, and French Colonial Records projects, were underway in the 1970s, the professional staff of the Center for Louisiana Studies was busily

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engaged in a large-scale, intrastate microfilming program. Unlike many states which have centralized records depositories, all local, colonial, civil and criminal records in the Pelican State are stored in the parish courthouses. Yet, despite archival decentralization, numerous fires, floods, hurricanes, and other natural disasters, a surprisingly large body of colonial materials remain in the local courthouses.

In the mid-twentieth century, however, the parishes' colonial records faced a new and stern challenge from the officials ostensibly charged with their preservation. Faced with chronic space shortages, strapped by inadequate budgets continuously eroded by inflation and thus unable to rent additional storage space, the parish clerks of court generally viewed their "non-working records" as a burden and hence made only half-hearted efforts to ensure their continued use by future generations. Indeed, it was not uncommon for parish clerks to place their colonial records in leaky attics or dank basements, thereby accelerating the deterioration of the increasingly brittle documents.

In response to the very real threat of destruction to colonial Louisiana's local governmental archives, the Center for Louisiana Studies initiated a far-ranging project to preserve on microfilm all extant colonial materials in the parochial archives. To date, the following colonial materials have been incorporated into the CRC: Ascension Parish Original Acts (1770–1803), 5 reels; Assumption Parish Original Acts (1786–1806), 1 reel; Avoyelles Parish, Indices to Original Acts (1786–1803), 3 reels; East Baton Rouge Parish Spanish Colonial Records (1782–1810), 8 reels; Iberville Parish Original Acts, Galveztown Original Acts, and Marriage Records (1770–1804), 2 reels; St. Charles Parish Original Acts (1740–1803), 13 reels; St. James Parish Original Acts (1782–1787), 11 reels; St. John the Baptist Parish Original Acts (1753–1803), 11 reels; and Orleans Parish Notarial Archives, Jean-Baptiste Garic and Pierre Pedesleaux Papers, 1764–1805 (47 reels).

Local civil and ecclesiastical administration went hand-in-hand in the colonial period, particularly under the Spanish regime, and, because the church records complement the secular archives, the CRC has made every effort to acquire microfilm copies of all extant Louisiana colonial church registers. Hence, the Center's Colonial Records Collection now includes the Records of the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas (1576–1803), a twelve-reel collection purchased from Notre Dame University. Other, one-reel acquisitions include the colonial registers of Notre Dame Catholic Church, Mobile, Alabama (1704–1764); St. Francis Catholic Church, Natchitoches, Louisiana (1729–1792); St. Gabriel Catholic Church, St. Gabriel, Louisiana (1773–1859); and St. Landry Catholic Church, Opelousas, Louisiana (1770–1803).

The ecclesiastical collection represents the last chapter of the CRC's ef-
orts to preserve all documentary evidence of Louisiana's colonial experience. In seventeen years of existence, the CRC has emerged, by the late 1970s, as one of the largest French and Spanish colonial depositories in the country. Much, however, remains to be done; the parochial and Spanish-colonial projects, for example, are far from complete. Nevertheless, from the new documentary evidence amassed by the CRC, a new, more complete picture of Mississippi Valley history has emerged, and that historical panorama can only now be set to canvas.