

A Louisiana Poet-Historian: Dumont *dit* Montigny

The poem entitled "L'Etablissement de la Louisiane" was first published in 1931 in the *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris*.¹ The editor, Baron Marc de Villiers du Terrage, prefaced its publication with a biography of the poet-historian² after having gathered up his data from the *Mémoires Historiques*, from the poem itself, and from letters or reports in the French Archives. Biographical information concerning the poet-historian is rather scanty even with the three above-mentioned sources, but when one turns to the *Mémoire* of Dumont, used by Le Mascrier in the composition of the *Mémoires Historiques sur la Louisiane*,³ all haziness and obscurity disappear, for Dumont *dit* Montigny cannot be accused of reticence in all that concerns himself or his personal affairs.

The manuscript used by Le Mascrier found its way to Chicago; it is in the Newberry Library, Ayer Collection, and from it are taken the details that follow. It is a thick volume of 443 pages, all in the handwriting of Dumont. Preceding the manuscript is the title,⁴ the preface, and at the end an index and a list of the Indian tribes "known to the author—Dumont—who are in the Island (*sic*) of North America," all on a different kind of paper and in a different script from the body of the manuscript. The ideas expressed in the preface are undoubtedly Dumont's, but the spelling has been improved and the contents edited. Twelve water color maps and plans and eleven drawings are inserted. The dedicatory epistle is addressed to the Duke of Belle Isle, whose coat of arms is on the first page. The manuscript was composed in the last months of 1747.

In the dedicatory epistle, Dumont tells the reason for sending this bulky manuscript to the Duke: "Although the poem

¹ *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris* (hereafter quoted as *JSAP*), Vol. XXIII, 1931, 273 ff. Extracts had been published by de Villiers, *ibid.*, Vol. XI, 1914-1919, 35 ff.

² Of the three contemporary historians for the Louisiana colonial period, Charlevoix and Le Page du Pratz are given the space of an article in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, but Dumont is not mentioned.

³ Published in Paris, 1753, 2 volumes.

⁴ *Mémoire de L-D- officier Ingenieur contenant Les Evenemens qui se sont passés à la Louisiana depuis 1715 jusqu'à present. Ainsi que ses remarques sur les moeurs, usages et forces des diverses nations de L'Amerique Septentrionale et de ses productions.*

which I took the liberty to send you contains here and there the results of several years of observations made in Louisiana, yet as a work in verse can only give Your Highness a sketchy idea, I thought it was my duty and that I owed as a token of gratitude toward you to send it in prose. I have, of course, lengthened it and made it as clear as I could, in order, my Lord, that nothing be hidden of what took place in that far away country, where Your Highness and Your Highness' associates have as many as four prosperous concessions. You will also see the misfortunes and hardships I underwent there. Briefly, it is a French Robinson who is casting himself at Your Highness' feet, and who will make a general confession of his whole life from 1715 until this year 1747."

Beside the poem in the *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal* published by de Villiers, there is another autograph copy of the same poem in the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. It has 4,414 lines as compared with the 4,692 of the Paris copy. The dedicatory epistle in both these copies is thirty lines long, but the name of the addressee in the Washington autograph has been rendered illegible by pen strokes through the letters.⁵ The folded map, a pen and ink drawing, at the beginning of the poem is a variant of the *Carte de la Province de la Louisiane, autrefois Le Missisipy*, in the French Archives.⁶

Jean François Benjamin Dumont was born in Paris, July 31, 1696.⁷ His father was an *avocat au Parlement de Paris*.⁸ Some

⁵ The Pross Catalogue, Paris, 1872, n. iv, entered this manuscript: 2013. *Louisiane. Histoire de la Louisiane, poème en quatre chants, dédié à M. le Garde des Sceaux, par M. Dumont de Montigny, lieutenant réformé. S. l. n. d. (vers 1736)*. The water mark of the paper is 1742. The coat of arms is not that of d'Aguesseau, keeper of the seal at that date.

⁶ Archives du Service Hydrographique, 138 bis, 1-17. For this map, cf. R. Thomassy, *Géologie pratique de la Louisiane*, New Orleans, 1860, 217.

⁷ In his marriage contract, April 20, 1730, the name given is: "François Benjamin Dumont, dit Montigny, lieutenant Réformé, fils du Sr. Jacques du Mont avocat au Parlement de Paris, et de françoise le Mare, native de Paris paroisse St. Come . . ." *Premier Registre de Mariages de la Paroisse St. Louis de la Nouvelle Orleans*, 199. Marie Françoise Dumont Demontigny was baptized on November 23, 1731, she is said to be the daughter of "Sr. Jean François Benjamin Dumont de Montigny." He signed the baptismal register: "J. B. F. Dumont Demontigny." The petition to the Superior Council, April 7, 1730, is signed "Dumont Demontigny," that of May 4, 1737, "Demontigny." The dedicatory epistle of the Washington autograph has "Dumont Demontigny," that of the manuscript in the Ayer Collection, "J. Dumont." It seems that he changed his nickname, *dit*, into a title of nobility. Self-ennobling was not uncommon in colonial Louisiana, cf. *Archives des Colonies* (hereafter quoted as AC) C 13A, 28:189.

⁸ Cf. Dunbar Rowland, *Mississippi Provincial Archives* (hereafter quoted as MPA) II, 650, note.

of his brothers became lawyers, others churchmen. The historian, the youngest son, went to college⁹ and became a soldier. He had, he tells us, a *penchant* for the military life. He was first garrisoned in Verdun (1714), but less than a year later, M. Dumont Sr. obtained an order from M. Le Blanc, then Secretary of War, to send his son to foreign parts. He went to Rochefort where he entered the *gardes-marines*. His first campaign was on the *Victoire*, which left for Canada, July 21, 1715. The crew, ill with scurvy when landing in Quebec, September 12, was sent to the citadel to recuperate, while Dumont went to the Hotel Dieu. He remained more than two years in Quebec, and became cadet in the gunners company, but "I was never on duty owing to my weak health." At the Hotel Dieu "I spent my time drawing, embroidering antependiums, writing mottoes in fancy letters. . . . I was invited everywhere, thanks to the poetry I wrote and the little songs I composed." He caught a dangerous illness, of which "anybody else would have died." Although the last prayers had been recited over him, he says he cured himself. This cure narrated with all sorts of realistic details is as fantastic as the other self-cures described in subsequent illnesses.

Letters from France told him that a commission as officer was being sent to him, but he was home-sick and he wanted to leave. Thanks to Bishop Saint-Vallier, the Sisters of the Hotel Dieu, and the influence of other people, he was allowed to return to France. He left Canada, November 12, on the *Cheval Marin*, and landed at La Rochelle in the middle of December, 1717. Dumont's tribulations and misfortunes were just beginning. First he was accused of smuggling and only escaped the consequences of such conduct when the custom officer, who had been a clerk of his father's, recognized him. He had written to his father that he was waiting for orders. He expected an answer by Christmas time, and since no word came he was resolved to go to Paris, when a courier arrived with a letter from his father ordering him to stay in La Rochelle and specifying the house in which he was to lodge. This exile lasted more than two years.

He informs us that in February, 1719, he "received from his family two commissions to serve in the troops of the Company of the Indies, then beginning the colonization of the Mississippi, called since Louisiana." One was a commission of second lieutenant, with fifty livres monthly pay; the other, that of second

⁹ He quotes Virgil in the poem and in the *Mémoire*.

engineer with twenty-five livres monthly pay. He was to serve under Sieur Perier, who was being sent to Louisiana as engineer-in-chief. Dumont was put in charge of the prisoners sent to the colony, a total cargo of five hundred, three hundred of whom were deserters, "the other two hundred were younger sons of good families whom their parents were sending to that country, under the plea that it was to make their fortune, but in reality to get rid of them. I was one of their number, although honored with a commission of officer." Two vessels of the Company of the Indies, the *Union* and the *Marie*, were ready to leave for Mississippi, "a country said to be full of gold and silver; it was or was supposed to be another Perú, our fortune was all but made." While waiting for the ships to sail, he learned of the death of his father, and that it was one of his brothers who was working on his behalf and who had obtained the officer commissions for him.

They sailed May 26.¹⁰ At Cap Français, they met Champmeslin's convoy, and in August, 1719, they landed at Dauphine Island. The description of the island in Dumont's *Mémoire* is much more detailed than that found in the book. Le Mascrier's cutting is not easily explained.

Dumont took part in the attack of Pensacola, and was ordered to draw a plan of the town and of the fort. He then returned to Dauphine Island, and it was while he was here that an incident took place that was to affect his whole career in Louisiana. It was the custom for the officers of the guard to take supper at the house of the commandant, Bienville. In the course of the evening, Bienville remarked that he had heard Dumont had been in Quebec, and he made inquiries about various people whom the officer might have met in Canada. The commandant was obviously trying to find out what manner of man Dumont was; he wanted to know in what capacity he had gone there, and whether he had not been sent as a *trente-six mois*. "This question rather shocked me, but what could I do? he was a superior officer. I let that pass. He, however, questioned me again and asked whether I had met one Le M—[Le Moyne?]. I answered that I knew him, but that I did not think this acquaintance was very honorable for me." "And why is this?" said he. "Because, I answered, he is a drunkard, unworthy to mix with

¹⁰ His name is among the passengers who embarked on the *Marie*, AC, G. 1. 464.

honest men." Bienville rose: "Sir, I am very much obliged to you for the good qualities you are attributing to a relative of mine." The man about whom Dumont had spoken so disparagingly, he learned later, was Bienville's uncle. Our historian then proceeded to make matters worse; for, rising as Bienville had done, he quotes himself thus: "I said to the commandant to please excuse me. . . . I did not know that the man was one of his relatives, and that, by the manner he had asked me about him, I had been led to believe that he had been his lackey. Thereupon I left and I have not been able to win back his esteem, in spite of all I did."

While reviewing the troops, some time after this incident, Bienville inquired about the family of his subordinate officers. Dumont did not like this, he tells us in his *Mémoire*, because he thought there was a catch somewhere. When his turn came, he answered that his father was a farmer. Bienville wrote this information to France. A letter of the Company of the Indies corrected the commandant with regard to the identity of Dumont's father. Bienville reproached the officer for having deceived him. "Not at all," said the wag, "my father is a farmer, but his land is paper, his pen his plough and his fingers his cattle." He adds that people laughed at the joke. From what is known of Bienville's character it is clear that this was the end of Dumont. The historian took his revenge in his *Mémoire* and in the "poem"; he accuses Bienville of lacking courage, which is rather ridiculous, of not knowing how to handle the Indians, which is still more ridiculous, of lack of interest in the welfare of the colony. As the "poem" progresses, from one canto to another, the calumnies against Bienville grow more monstrous. This has been noticed by de Villiers.¹¹ The same is true with respect to the *Mémoire* wherein the historian never misses a chance to belittle, revile, and slander the "Father of Louisiana."

In 1720, orders came from France to start a new settlement, New Biloxi. Dumont affirms that he was sent to draw the plan. M. de Valdeterre was in New Biloxi, and there, we are told, had enemies because he was too clever. Dumont seems to have been afflicted with hero worship with regard to this officer. When M. de Valdeterre asked to go back to France, Dumont also asked to leave. They left together on the *Mutine*.

Now that he was in France, Dumont finds himself at a loss

¹¹ JSAP, Vol. XXIII, 1931, 283, 355.

to know why he had come back,¹² "unless it was to be with my dear captain, M. de Valdeterre. He only remained two weeks in Lorient. He took his leave, embraced me, and went to Paris. I never saw nor heard from him since." Dumont was worried over how his brother would feel about his return. Sérigny, who had also come back from Louisiana, had brought a list of officers' names with remarks concerning their conduct. The notations about Dumont were not very flattering. The historian tells us that the Secretary of War ordered an agent of Law, M. de Ricqueby (Rickaby), to hear the officer's defense, who, of course, thoroughly vindicated himself. However that be, he was to go back to Louisiana. This did not suit Dumont, who wanted to go to Paris. Behind his roundabout explanations, it is clear that he was being watched, and that had he tried to go to the capital, he would have been arrested before he was able to travel far from Lorient. This lasted until a commission as half-pay lieutenant arrived from Paris. His garrison was to be Port Louis. Six weeks later, he received a commission as lieutenant in the troops of the Company of the Indies in Louisiana, and one as half-pay lieutenant in the troops maintained by the Arkansas *cessionnaires*. "I received at the same time a royal warrant authorizing me to leave my garrison of Port Louis to go and serve in Louisiana, but I was not to be considered as having left His Majesty's service, and I would not lose my rank in the company of infantry. That decided me to go back whence I had come."¹³

He left on the *Charente*. On board the ship were German settlers destined for the Law concession. A contagious disease broke out;¹⁴ the losses were so fearful that the ship had to go back to Lorient. Dumont caught the disease after landing, but he survived. He was still convalescing when he embarked on the *Portefaix*. He gives a minute description of his fellow passengers, of the German emigrants whose plight was the saddest of all, as they lacked the most indispensable necessities of life. In Louisiana he found Old Biloxi (Ocean Springs) much changed. He had hardly landed when he ran into more trouble with Bienville. When the *cessionnaires* dispersed, Dumont went with

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, 276.

¹³ De Villiers, *ibid.*, quotes from the documents in the Archives du Ministère de la Guerre.

¹⁴ Scurvy, according to M. Le Conte, "Les Allemands à la Louisiane au XVIII^e siècle," *JSAP*, Vol. XVI, 1924, 6 f.

them. His party left the Coast for the Yazoo post in November, 1721, "by way of Lake Pontchartrain, since then called Lake St. Louis [?]. We rowed up a small river, called here a bayou, for two leagues. Here was a landing with a few warehouses. There were only three settlers at this place: on the right bank of the bayou going up was a Canadian, called Joseph Girardy, his wife, his children and a few Indian slaves. On the left bank, Sieur Lavigne and his family, he has a good plantation; and Sieur Dugué, a bachelor.¹⁵ We stopped at the latter's house. One hundred steps farther, as I said before, are several warehouses for the merchandises sent from New Biloxi to this new settlement, which they intended to start, one league from Bayou St. John, near the St. Louis River . . ." The portage from the bayou to the Mississippi was laborious; harder still was the hauling of the boats "from the bayou to this post known as New Orleans, and then to the beautiful St. Louis River. This took us a few days. We reloaded our boats, and after the soldiers had embarked, we left this wretched little hovel of a village (*petit bicoq*), where there were then only four or five scattered houses belonging to a few settlers."¹⁶

The convoy reached its destination in the first days of 1722. Half the garrison of the Yazoo post was dead, "the air or the water disagreed with them."¹⁷ Dumont was commissioned to draw the plan of the fort. He had just begun, when La Harpe arrived with orders "from the Company of the Indies to find that topaz (*sic*) rock, which some flatterer had told the Directors was somewhere on the Zotooûis or Arkansas River . . ."

¹⁵ Cf. map facing page 134 of the Ayer manuscript.

¹⁶ This unflattering description of New Orleans at the end of 1721 is illustrated in the poem by an ugly little sketch, reproduced in *JSAP*, Vol. XI, 1914-1919, 48, in Vol. XXIII, 1931, 304. Charlevoix, who passed through New Orleans a few months later, January, 1722, is not much more generous. He speaks of about one hundred barracks and of "deux ou trois maisons qui ne paroient pas un village de France." *Histoire et Description Générale de la Nouvelle-France*, Paris, 1744, III, 430; quite a difference with the "huit cents maisons, fort logeables et commodes," spoken of by the Chevalier de Bonrepos, in his *Description du Mississipi . . . écrite de Mississipi en France à Mlle D.*, Paris-Rouen, 1720, 44. There is another sketch of New Orleans, just as unflattering as that of Dumont, in the *Archives du Service Hydrographique*, C 4044, n. 65bis, (photostat in the Library of Congress), but of an earlier date, probably 1718. There is a wide difference between these realistic sketches and those circulated in Paris at that time, for instance, that in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, 8826 bis, "Plan de la Nouvelle Orléans" (photostat in the Ayer Collection).

¹⁷ Cf. Charlevoix, *ibid.*, 414; Bénard de la Harpe, *Journal Historique de l'Établissement des Français à la Louisiane*, Nouvelle-Orléans, 1831, 310.

Now, La Harpe needed a surveyor. "In New Orleans, he only found engineers, who, as the saying goes, had put on airs; they thought they were kings, and they did not dare to leave the town which was then being built. I was the one chosen to accompany the explorer." This voyage was not to the liking of Dumont, who much preferred building forts. So disgusted was he with this assignment that he will not bother his reader with the details of the expedition, he grumbles. "We went 375 leagues up the [Arkansas] River, although in the North South direction we only travelled 120 leagues. Because the waters were too low, we were forced to leave our boats and travel 142 leagues by land." Owing to lack of food and the grumbling of the members of the expedition, they were obliged to retrace their steps to the place where they had left their boats and thence to the Arkansas villages.¹⁸ At the Yazoo post the engineer found that the fort was not much farther advanced than when he left. He was put in charge, and, naturally, in a few weeks the work made much progress. Famine was stalking the fort in the summer of 1722. The annalist fell ill as a result of the hardships undergone during the La Harpe expedition, he says. He cured himself, however, this time by drinking the juice of boiled tobacco, and, feeling better, was granted leave to go to New Orleans.

The description of New Orleans in the Ayer manuscript differs considerably from that found in the *Mémoires Historiques*. Le Mascrier added details which describe the town as it was later, not as Dumont saw it in the last days of 1722 or in the beginning of 1723.¹⁹ In New Orleans Dumont found that his commission had been cancelled by the Superior Council, and that he was a cadet in the company of Richebourg. The only effect of his protests was a sojourn in the New Orleans jail, the first one in that city, called then "la boîte à Pajoux" and this the

¹⁸ Cf. Bénard de la Harpe, *ibid.*, 314. There is another mention of Dumont in an unpublished document entitled: "Anonyme mémoire sur les ressources et les moyens d'établir solidement la partie de la Louisiane qui reste à la France," AC, C 13A, 43:357-364. This document was written by La Harpe in the first months of 1763; he speaks of his voyage up the Arkansas River, and said: "Le Sr. de Montigny, lieutenant d'infanterie, qui était avec moi trouva dans un ruisseau quelques grains d'or de peu de valeur, ainsi qu'il en est fait mention dans la relation du Mississipi, imprimée en 1753." Cf. *Mémoires Historiques sur la Louisiane*, I, 72; II, 71. Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, Paris, 1758, 310-311, has a few sarcastic remarks about Dumont's skill as an engineer.

¹⁹ Dumont's description tallies with the plan of New Orleans dated January, 1723. Cf. "Plan de la ville de la Nouvelle Orléans . . .," Ayer Collection, Cartes marines, No. 81.

ex-officer fully describes. While preparations for the expedition against the Natchez were being made, "I defeated my enemies," he records triumphantly. This victory was attendant upon the arrival of Messrs. de la Chaise and du Sauvoy. The latter, says Dumont, "was delighted to find me in New Orleans." He was asked by the *commissaire* about the 'general,' that is, Bienville. As might be suspected the commandant was not spared. "I told him in a few words how I had been treated." Some idea of what those "few words" were, may be gleaned from the letter which the other *commissaire*, M. de la Chaise, sent to Paris.²⁰

Dumont was promised redress, but things did not go as smoothly as he anticipated. His petition had to be presented to the Superior Council, the members of which, as is well known, were opposed to the two *commissaires*. The only reason prompting the Council to cancel his commission, we are told, was that he was always drunk.²¹ He says he showed how untrue the accusation was, and was finally reinstated. Shortly after, du Sauvoy fell ill, and in five days was dead, but "before his death, he recommended me to M. de la Chaise, who always made me feel he did not forget such a recommendation."

Dumont's position, however, was irregular, for he was supposed to be at the Yazoo post. He left, October 12, with the punitive expedition against the Natchez, and he was at his post at the end of December, 1723. The commandant was Petit de Livilliers. M. de Grave, the former commandant, had been recalled to New Orleans by M. de la Chaise to answer the "numerous complaints against his *omopole*."²² De Livilliers was also delighted to see Dumont. Our officer settled down, he tended his garden, practiced drawing, wrote, and "once in a while drilled the troops." This peace and happiness did not last very long. Bienville was pursuing him with hatred unabated, and he sees a proof of this hatred in his recall to New Orleans.

²⁰ Cf. the letter of de la Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, September 6, 1723, AC, C 13A, 7:36-36v., printed in *MPA*, II, 294 ff.

²¹ "Parce que je vivais dans la crapule." From certain passages of the poem, de Villiers had surmised that Dumont's troubles were partly caused by his fondness for wine. Cf. *JSAP*, Vol. XXIII, 1931, 280. The Superior Council had written to Paris: "Le Sr. Dumont de Montigny, Lt. refé; a esté fait soldat estant indigne d'estre offer," AC, C 13A, 6:399v. The Company of the Indies had approved this action of the Council. Cf. *Ordre de casse du Sr. Dumont de Montigny*, AC, B 43:355-356.

²² Cf. "Journal du 1er Septembre 1722 jusqu'au 10 Septembre 1723, par M. Diron (d'Artaguet) à la Nouvelle Orléans," *Archives du Service Hydrographique*, 672: n. 13, under the date July 19, 1723.

Dumont and the Mississippi River found themselves once more at odds, for the second time he fell into it, and as he could not swim, the result bordered on the tragic for him. To avert the peril he prayed aloud, sang the litanies of the Blessed Virgin, compared himself to the prophet Jonas, to St. Paul "shipwrecked in Malta," and after many misadventures landed in Baton Rouge. This near tragedy was caused by the hurricane that devastated the colony.²³ He arrived in New Orleans on August 11. A ship, the *Profond*, was ready to leave. He asked and was granted leave to return to France. The ship set sail from Biloxi, September 22. "On October 31, at dawn, we sighted land. But as we drew nearer, we failed to recognize it. Finally, to our deep regret, we realized that we were near Ship Island, two leagues from Biloxi, whence we had left on the 22nd of last month." This was, affirms Dumont, because the captain of the ship, M. Amelot, was in partnership with De Lorme. They did not want the other members of the Superior Council, who were travelling on the *Profond*, to know how much money De Lorme had deposited with a Spanish banker in Havana. Dumont and many other passengers, thoroughly disgusted with this unlooked for excursion, returned to New Orleans, which was precisely what Messrs. De Lorme and Amelot wanted.

Dumont was offered a job as supervisor on the plantation of Francis Dugué, near Bayou St. John, and he bitterly comments on his decadence: from a commissioned officer of His Majesty to a manager of a private plantation! Naturally, Dumont was the cause of untold profits which thereafter accrued to his employer. In November, he went as manager to the La Garde plantation *au Pascagoula*. While he was making a fortune for his second employer the *Bellone* sank. It is regrettable that he could not husband his own affairs as well as he says he husbanded other people's. He notes the departure of Bienville on the *Gironde*, and adds that the commandant was "lucky to reach France without mishaps."

In the interim between the departure of Bienville and the arrival of Perier, Boisbriand governed the colony. Dumont, who

²³ The hurricane mentioned by Dumont does not seem to have done as much damage as that of September 12-13, 1722. See Diron's Journal under these two dates, and the letter of Leblond de la Tour to the Directors of the Company of the Indies of September 13, 1722, "sur le houragan arrivé à la Louisiane, et l'Estat ou il a mis la Nouvelle Orleans," AC, C 13A, 6:339-340v.

had returned from Pascagoula to Dugué's plantation and thence to New Orleans, praises the new governor. This encomium may be partially due to the fact that Boisbriand ordered the officer's salary for the past 19 months to be paid him.²⁴ It seems that his commission had not been cancelled, and that his name was still on the list of officers. He was equipping himself with the money when Perier arrived. In prose or in verse, Dumont exhausts superlatives in praise of Perier.²⁵ The new governor sent him to Natchez, where he seems to have arrived in the latter part of 1727. Dumont's account of the conditions at Natchez is very important. He gives details about this settlement previous to the massacre of 1729, which are found nowhere else, and which Le Mascrier omitted. In February, 1728, the notorious Dechepare arrived to take command of the post. Dumont's host, Jean Roussin, became one of the first victims of the new régime. He was involved in a law suit with Longpré, a friend of Dechepare, and not unnaturally, Roussin lost his case. Dumont took up the cudgels for his host. "I appealed to Cesar, that is, to that celebrated Louisiana Solomon. I think my reader understand that I mean that courageous, just, equitable Perier."

Dumont wrote a brief. He compared himself to Daniel the prophet, to Cesar,—Cesars seem to have been aplenty in Louisiana—who was both a soldier and a Roman senator. Roussin went to New Orleans with the precious brief. The sentence was reversed. Dumont's host returned with letters from the New Orleans Cesar, Perier, congratulating the Natchez Cesar. All would have been for the best, but Dechepare had to be notified.

²⁴ This account does not quite tally with that of the official documents. On June 11, 1725, Dumont signed the procès-verbal of the deliberation of the Council in New Orleans. He had been given one year's pay in advance to begin July 1 of that year "attendu qu'il monte au poste des Natchez et qu'il ne lui sera rien payé d'ici un an." The money had been advanced "pour le mettre en état d'aller à son poste," AC, C 13A, 9:151. There is some reason to believe that he went to Natchez that year. Cf. the letter of Father Raphael to Raguet, December 26, 1729, AC, C 13A, 10:50v. It is hard to see how it should take him two years, from the departure of Bienville until the arrival of Perier, to "equip himself."

²⁵ His praise of Perier would have been less fervid had he seen the information sent to the Company of the Indies by the governor. In the "Etat des officiers en pied qui doivent commander les 8 compagnies d'infanterie entretenues à la Louisiane . . ." dated Paris, October 28, 1729, AC, B 43:815, next to Dumont's name is the following note: "La Compagnie (of the Indies) s'est souvenue qu'elle a déjà cassé cet officier, ensuite rétabli, et que depuis, M. Perier a mandé qu'il était indigne du caractère d'officier. Si cela est, il faut le casser; si au contraire, il s'est corrigé, on le fera monter à la place de sous-lieutenant qui est vacante. C'est sur quoi la Compagnie attend la réponse de M. Perier."

The only redress Roussin got, the New Orleans decision notwithstanding, was to be clapped in jail. Dumont reproached Dechepare. The net result of this meddling was that the man in jail was set free and Dumont took his place.²⁶ He managed to escape and fled to New Orleans, where he arrived January 19, 1729. One man was surprised at seeing the Natchez Cesar, namely, the New Orleans Solomon, who asked him how it came to pass that he had left his post without orders. Dumont was told that he was not to leave the house where he was lodging in New Orleans. But other people came from Natchez, complaining of Dechepare and confirming the story of Dumont. Daniel was released, but was told by Perier to remain in New Orleans because Sieur Dechepare was coming.

They appeared before the Superior Council, Dumont as plaintiff, Dechepare as defendant. "His defense was weak, his arguments poor. He was severely reprimanded, but was nevertheless allowed to return to his post. Alas! I did not know I was a prophet when I said: 'Gentlemen, you are sending Dechepare back to Natchez, there will be either a revolt of the settlers, or some other great calamity.'" Whether Dumont said this matters little. More important are the details he is giving about Dechepare's activities in New Orleans, among many that of the purchase of slaves for beginning a plantation at Natchez. Dumont was advised by Perier to become a planter. He was given a tract of land, ten leagues from New Orleans, down the River²⁷ and one year's pay was advanced to him by Perier.²⁸ "I was exempt from military duty, the governor explaining that it was to give me more time to attend to my plantation." This new venture was begun in September, 1729.

Dumont was then absent from Natchez at the time of the massacre, yet his account must be given consideration, for he later married a woman whose husband was killed by the In-

²⁶ Cf. Bossu, *Nouveaux voyages aux Indes Occidentales*, Paris, 1768, I, 55.

²⁷ A sketch of this plantation is in the Ayer manuscript, facing page 213.

²⁸ In the meeting of the directors of the Company of the Indies, June 4, 1729, it was decided to "approve that the (Superior) Council of Louisiana should pay to Sieurs de Montigny and Joutzen, half-pay lieutenants of infantry, each one year's salary in advance, once for all, and to have delivered to each a few negroes on the conditions laid down for the inhabitants, by means of which the Company will be discharged of the maintenance of these two officers," AC, C 13A, 11:348, printed in *MPA*, II, 652.

dians. There were rumors in Louisiana that Dechepare was not the only one who should be blamed for the tragedy.²⁹ Dumont, an enthusiastic admirer of the New Orleans Solomon, would not say all he knew or heard. It is impossible not to notice the analyst's reticence in this section of the narrative. Dechepare went back to Natchez with a clean bill. "He was no sooner there than, believing himself a king, he projected to begin a magnificent plantation . . . he cast his eyes on the land belonging to the Indians . . . and notified the Natchez chief that the great French chief, that is, M. Perier, wanted his land to build a great warehouse, and that it was necessary that he and all the Savages, his subjects, abandon their homes and find some other spot. To show that it was by order of M. Perier that he was taking this land, he had a Mission Cross³⁰ erected in the middle of the land belonging to the Indians of that village."

Le Mascrier followed closely the narrative of the manuscript for all that pertains to the massacre itself.³¹ The account of the two expeditions against the Natchez is then given, but it does not seem that Dumont participated in either.³² This conclusion is arrived at by comparing this account with that of the first expedition against the Chickasaws. Dumont took part in the latter as a militia man; very minute details are given about the march and the battle, whereas with regard to the Natchez expeditions, the account is vague, and comparatively speaking, consists in a mere outline. It may be safely assumed that had

²⁹ Cf. Jean Delanglez, "The Natchez Massacre and Governor Perier," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XVII, 1934, 636-638.

³⁰ This "Croix de Mission" is seen in the plan of Natchez facing page 224 of the Ayer Collection manuscript; the cross is absent from his other plans of Natchez. Cf. *JSAP*, Vol. XXIII, 1931, 317; *Bibliothèque Nationale*, n. 3-n. 13; *Mémoires Historiques sur la Louisiane*, II, 64.

³¹ Le Mascrier, *Mémoires Historiques sur la Louisiane*, II, 144, lowered the number of the victims. More than seven hundred, he says; which is still more than double the number of people killed. In the manuscript, Dumont had: "en moins de deux heures il y eut plus de quinze cents personnes de tuées et massacrées."

³² Dumont was in New Orleans, April 4, 1730. That day, he presented a petition to the Superior Council to evict one Nicolas D'arrel dit Francoeur from a house belonging to the petitioner, for: "Depuis une année il est et demeuré Grátis, et Comme le Suppliant setoit Reservé un endroit pour Refuge Lorsqu'il viendrait a La ville Le dit francoeur voulant chasser le Suppliant D'un bien qui luy appartient et Comme il est endroit luy Meme De Le faire Sortir De Son chef de peur Cependant De Dispute. Il vous plaise Messieurs De permettre au Suppliant de Le faire signifier par droit et justice de sortir . . ." The permit was granted by Dausseville. Dumont's marriage was only two weeks off, and he probably wanted to lodge in his house when he came to New Orleans from his plantation to see his fiancée.

Dumont been a member of either of the Natchez expeditions, in any capacity whatever, he was not the man to refrain from saying so, and he would likely have added that if they had listened to him the outcome would have been different.

He gives as the reason for the retrocession of the colony to the King, the losses incurred by the Company of the Indies. He had special reasons for being indignant with the Company. The massacre of 1729 should be laid at its door, because the Directors had given the command of the Natchez post to an empty-headed fellow; because there were only twenty soldiers in the fort;³³ and because the Directors had looked first and foremost to their own profits rather than to the safety of the settlers. The Company had advanced money to the French women who had been spared by the Indians, but this money had now to be restored. Dumont had married, in 1730, one of these widows,³⁴ the wife of the settler in whose house he had lodged while at Natchez. "I offered my person and my plantation. She accepted. With the permission of M. Perier we were married. Since I had been her guest and had not repaid her for all her kindnesses to me, I thought I could do nothing better to settle that account than to become her husband."

It is known that after the retrocession of the colony to the King, Bienville was sent to Louisiana to iron out the difficulties, chastise the Indians, and reorganize the colony badly shaken by the administration of the New Orleans Solomon-Cesar. This was bad news for Dumont. He narrates how Macarty went to insult Perier the night Bienville landed.³⁵ He notes that when the new governor reached New Orleans, "the air was filled with the shouts of joy and allegress³⁶ of a population excited by the partisans of the general, that is, the Canadians." He compares at great length the administration of Perier with that of Bienville, all to the

³³ The garrison numbered twenty-four soldiers, exclusive of the officers. AC, C 13A, 12:57.

³⁴ She was "Marie Baron, fille de Jacques Baron, Bourgeois de Mortain et de Marie Le Gras, ses père et mère, veuve de Jean Roussin décédée (sic) aux Natchez . . ." *Premier Registre de Mariages de la Paroisse de St. Louis de la Nouvelle Orleans*, 199. The first list of the victims of the massacre, AC, C 13A, 12:57 v., has "Jean Roussin et son enfant"; the second, AC, G. 1. 464, does not mention the child. The first list is printed in MPA, I, 122 ff.; the second in *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. I, 1917, 127 ff. For the relation between those two lists and their discrepancies, cf. *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XVII, 1934, 632-34.

³⁵ Cf. letter of Perier to Maurepas, March 6, 1733, AC, C 13A, 16:201-201v.

³⁶ Cf. letter of Salmon to Maurepas, March 6, 1733, AC, C 13A, 17:76.

advantage of the former, and speaks of the gradual abandonment of the plantations along the River,³⁷ because Bienville was not interested in the welfare of the colony: "He spent a year and a half doing nothing. He probably needed a rest after the hardships of his voyage."

This bitterness was due to another misfortune of the historian. In September, 1732, he went to the Balize to sell the tobacco he had grown on his plantation. On his return, he and one of his neighbors picked up oysters they intended to sell in New Orleans. They landed to spend the night. The following morning, on rising, he found his canoe, for reasons unknown and unexplained, at the bottom of the River. He had lost everything. This was only the beginning of his bad luck. When he came near his plantation, he learned that "the barn stocked with provisions for the winter was burned to the ground together with a small 'laboratory' in which were my papers, my commissions, my works. My wife and two slaves with great difficulty prevented the house from catching fire." In the face of this disaster he went to New Orleans to ask for help, "but there was no longer that protector of the people who ruled the colony, that kind and courageous Perier; the new governor did not even sympathize with me." Bienville sent Dumont back to his plantation, telling him to do the best he could. "I was thus forced, like many others before me, to abandon my plantation, sell my slaves, buy a house and a piece of land in the capital. From being a farmer I became a bourgeois."

This was at the end of 1733 or at the beginning of 1734. There is an abrupt transition from the latter year to 1736: "At the end of February (1736) companies of soldiers had been recruited and were ready to leave with the expedition against the Chickasaws. I did not wish people to say that I stayed home as a good-for-nothing, while so many good men were leaving for the war. I volunteered as cadet in the bourgeois company of Sieur St. Martin, formerly keeper of the King's warehouse, now retired." This expedition is narrated at great length, and generally speaking, the dates, the strength of the army, the order of march, the halting places are accurately given. The battle before the Chickasaw village is minutely described.³⁸ Homely de-

³⁷ Dumont, in the legend of his map of the lower course of the Mississippi, *Archives du Service Hydrographique*, C 4044, n. 48-49, points out as many as thirty-seven plantations thus abandoned.

³⁸ Cf. the two sketches "Campement de l'armée à Tombeche," facing

tails, such as an erstwhile farmer or a private would be interested in recording, abound. Dumont naturally gives himself the *beau rôle*. He blames Father Baudouin for the rashness of the attack. Bienville's first idea was to wait for Dartaguet and to join forces with the Illinois commandant, "but," says Dumont, "when Father Baudouin, Jesuit, who was our chaplain, told him that the village in sight was that of the revolted Chickasaws, that it would be time enough to join the Illinois army after we had taken the fort and the village in which provisions would be found; and furthermore, that this village could be used as our warehouse, Bienville believed him,"³⁹ and gave the order to attack May 26, 1736. "It was 10.00 am. when we launched against the enemy, and it was 3.00 pm. when we returned to our camp."

While the army was thus resting, a group of six Indians from "another Chickasaw village came waving a calumet and a letter which they were bringing to our general, who, loaded with new laurels added to his old ones, refused to receive these deputies or to ascertain whence this letter came." He ordered the Choctaws to kill the party; the Chickasaws defended themselves and tore up the letter. The retreat is then described, not omitting the horrible episode of the Swiss soldier buried alive, which Le Mascrier thought better to leave out of his version.⁴⁰ "When we arrived in Mobile, we found out that our blustering had cost the life of Dartaguet . . . who, according to the orders received from our general to be near the Chickasaw village on May the 10th at the latest, was there at that time." Bienville's army, Dumont reminds his reader, was not far from Tombigbee, having left this post on May 5. "Dartaguet camped for ten days before the village waiting for Bienville. He had with him only eighty Frenchmen and between three and four hundred Indians. A council of war was held and it was decided to attack. The French were victorious, when Dartaguet was wounded, and the Illinois Indians thinking him dead fled. Forty-one men, including the Jesuit chaplain, were taken prisoners. . . . Contrary to the custom of the Indians the prisoners were led into the fort without being insulted, for the Indians of this village looked upon these Frenchmen as an infallible means to make

page 256 of the Ayer Collection manuscript, and "Campement de l'armée françoise devant un village des ennemis, les Chicachas, le 26 de Mai, 1736," facing page 263.

³⁹ See how this is narrated in the poem, *JSAP*, Vol. XXIII, 1931, 344.

⁴⁰ Cf. *JSAP*, Vol. XXIII, 1931, 352.

peace with us. When our general attacked one of their villages, they asked Dartaguet to write a letter with the view of making peace with us. It was the party bringing that letter which our general ordered the Choctaws to cut down."

Owing to the kindness of one of the Chickasaws, one of the prisoners, a sergeant, was allowed to escape, but he returned to the Chickasaw village, hid himself and saw the forty prisoners, Dartaguet included, burned at the stake.

This romantic account is false from beginning to end. Dumont wanted to cast the odium for Dartaguet's death on Bienville. Commenting on the account of this episode as found in the poem, de Villiers remarked: "The disaster of the Dartaguet expedition has been differently narrated, but Dumont's version seems, by far, to be the most inaccurate of them all."⁴¹ The historian is still more inaccurate in prose than in verse. Dartaguet and his unfortunate companions had been dead two months when Bienville attacked the Chickasaw village. The prisoner who escaped, who was not a sergeant, saw a part of the tragedy, in March not in May. This episode has been discussed elsewhere, the contradictions contained in Dumont's version need not be pointed out here.⁴²

In March, 1737, Dumont was in New Orleans eking out a living by tending his garden and hiring his slaves to other planters. Having much leisure, he helped people who had law suits, writing briefs in which he asserts he quoted ordinances, rulings of the courts, and so forth, astonishing everybody with his profound knowledge of law. So successful was he in showing up the members of the Superior Council that they were afraid of him and told him to desist. "Finally, tired of staying in a country such as this, I resolved to go to France." Permission to leave was granted with great difficulty, for he must first pay his debts.⁴³ He left New Orleans on the *Somme*,⁴⁴ June 27, 1737, and arrived in Rochefort, August 17.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 354, note 1.

⁴² Jean Delanglez, *The French Jesuits in Lower Louisiana*, New Orleans, 1935, 300-314.

⁴³ Among these debts, he owed the King "La quantité de trente quart de ris qu'il devoit Remettre en Son magasin en 1735 et alors le ris ne Valant dans le public qu'un ecu le quart" whereas today "le ris Vaut six francs." He maintains that he would not have had to pay for that rice in 1735, for he had worked for the government—he had painted "le grand canot du Roy au Bayou St. Jean"—which work is very different from that done in New Orleans, since he was obliged to hire a negro "a vingt sols par jour." He is expecting from the justice of the Councillors, "qu'il sera

From Rochefort he went with his family to Verneuil, where his wife had been born, and after a short stay, they all proceeded to Paris, "my dear birthplace, from which I had been absent for twenty-eight years." His brother introduced him to Michel de la Jonchère, to the Marshall of Belle Isle, and to the Marshall d'Asfeldt. These gentlemen asked about their Louisiana plantations, and Dumont says he told them the truth. He then paid a visit to the offices of the Company of the Indies. There he was received by M. Fulvy, who told Dumont he was sorry the officer stayed in Louisiana after the Company had given it up. He was offered service in the Company of the Indies in India and accepted the offer. A week later, he returned to the Company's offices, bowed to M. Fulvy and said he was ready to go to India. He was asked whether he was the brother of M. D— [Dumont], lawyer. Dumont said he had that honor. "I am very sorry, but there is no hope for you. Your brother just won a lawsuit against the Company. He must be well off, he will help you."

Dumont, it will be recalled, was still a half-pay lieutenant at Port Louis;⁴⁵ for when he went to Louisiana, he did not lose his rank nor was he supposed to leave the King's service, and he hied himself from Paris for his garrison in May, 1739. His misadventures at Port Louis bear no relation to his account of Louisiana, except that they show that the historian had a genius for antagonizing people, and a unique capacity for getting into trouble. In 1741, he heard about the second expedition against the Chickasaws. He recounts the story after his own fashion, interspersing it with bitter comments on Bienville's character and courage. Dumont grows eloquent in places in his indictment of his enemy. The relation of this second expedition against the Chickasaws was given him, in Port Louis, "by Reverend Jesuit Fathers on their way to Pondichery, so that if it contains falsehoods, these should not be imputed to me."

par ses peines et travaux quitte à quitte avec le Roy." *Archives of the Superior Council*, New Orleans, May 4, 1737, 8,248. Cf. *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. V, 1923, 399.

⁴⁴ Dumont's name is found among those of the passengers of the *Somme*, AC, F 5b, 34, where Salmon notes that this ship left New Orleans, June 15, 1737. Salmon wrote the following remarks next to Dumont's name: "Il est fils de M. Dumont de Montigny avocat au conseil. Il était lieutenant au service de la Compagnie et fut cassé comme mauvais sujet. Il a depuis épousé une veuve d'habitant tué aux Natchez. Il est misérable et à charge de la colonie. A demandé son passage pour aller recueillir son bien en France."

⁴⁵ Cf. *JSAP*, Vol. XXIII, 1931, 282.

In December, 1744, he got an adjutant commission. He was soon in trouble with the governor of the town and with his brother officers. Old Louisiana debts turned up and added to his worries. Life would be unbearable, he reflects, were it not for the appointment of his son⁴⁶ as supernumerary officer on one of the ships of the Company of the Indies. He ends this part of his *Mémoire* with wishing himself tranquil peace for the year 1748.

"As I promised to speak of the country where I resided, of the advantages and profits that can be derived therefrom," time has now come to redeem that promise. The bulk of volume one of the *Mémoires Historiques sur la Louisiane* is taken from this section of the manuscript. Sometimes the printed text follows closely that of the manuscript, sometimes Le Mascrier left out whole sections. Realistic details are omitted, omitted also are the dithyrambic praises of Perier the Warrior and the attacks on Bienville, whose Indian policy comes up for censure. Dumont had an Indian policy, that of the strong arm. He adds more marvelous details to the already incredible odyssey of St. Denis as told by Pénicant, etc. Dumont says that he learned since he left Louisiana that Vaudreuil had been made governor: "I do not for one moment doubt that he will make a better governor than his compatriot (Bienville), who learned all he ever knew from the savage Choctaws."

What precedes is only a small part of the many interesting details found in Dumont's *Mémoire*. Many of these details may appear trivial, but they reflect the thoughts of the settlers, they indicate their reaction to the events that took place around them and they unite to make a better, more concrete picture of the Louisiana colonial life. The *Mémoires Historiques sur la Louisiane* has been an important work for all those interested in the history of Louisiana. To have the complete text on which Le Mascrier composed the two-volume account would be much more gratifying to students, but the length of this manuscript will probably preclude its ever being published in full. One can only wish that one day some historian may be commissioned by a state historical society of the Mississippi valley to edit the manuscript as Le Mascrier should have edited it. Dumont was still alive in 1754.⁴⁷ The date of his passing is unknown.

Jean Delanglez

⁴⁶ Born January 2, 1733, *ibid.*, 281.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 283.