

French in the Americas



Dumont de Montigny. *Mémoire de Lxx Dxx officier ingénieur...* 1747. Ayer MS 257 Plate 17.

The Newberry's holdings relating to the French in the Americas range from the accounts of the sixteenth-century explorers to marriage records for Quebec from the mid-twentieth century. The Newberry's extensive collections of manuscript and printed maps, travel literature, mission histories, and genealogical records demonstrate the crucial role played by the French in the cultural evolution of the Western hemisphere from the early 1500s onwards. These collections are complemented by strong holdings in French history and culture, which provide further opportunity for research in the transatlantic context.

Many, although not all, of these holdings are found in the Edward E. Ayer Collection. The Ayer collection is rich in printed and manuscript accounts of the discovery, exploration and settlement of the Americas, with a particular focus on Indian-European contacts. The Ayer collection contains more than 130,000 volumes and 1,350 single manuscripts and manuscript collections dating from the seventeenth through the twentieth century. In addition, there are numerous photographs and original works of art.

Additional titles relating to the history of the French in the Americas are found in the Everett D. Graff Collection. The Graff collection comprises some 10,000 books and manuscripts, many of them extremely rare, most dealing with the exploration and settlement of the trans-Mississippi West in the nineteenth century.

The following descriptions illustrate some of the many opportunities for research on the French in the Americas:

Missions/Jesuit Relations

The Newberry has a complete collection of early printed letters from Jesuit missionaries throughout New France and beyond from the late sixteenth century to the late nineteenth century.

Travel Writings/Fur Trade

Both Ayer and Graff collections include first editions of most of the printed French travel accounts from North America from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century, as well as

translations into other European languages. The holdings also include fur traders' accounts from the nineteenth century, and eighteenth and nineteenth-century travel accounts in the Caribbean, and subsequent twentieth-century editions of these earlier works.

Colonial History

The Newberry has an abundance of primary source material documenting the British, French, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies and the interaction of Europeans with native peoples. The manuscripts and printed works cover many facets of the colonial period, the westward movement of Europeans, and the settlement of new regions, including:

- French colonial administration and provincial politics
- Treaty negotiations
- Colonial wars
- Land speculation and boundary disputes
- Indian society, culture, language and religion
- Indian social, economic and legal status
- Captivities and frontier conflicts

French Louisiana and the Caribbean

Accounts of French Louisiana and the Caribbean are well represented in the collections; these range from LaSalle's exploration of the Mississippi to trade with West Florida and the West Indies, from genealogy of the Acadian parishes of New Orleans to documents from the posts at Nacodoches.

France in the Southern Hemisphere

The Newberry holds materials documenting the French presence in Latin and South America from the earliest period, including Villegaignon's Protestant settlement in Brazil. A few examples will illustrate: Charlevoix on the history of Paraguay and the Jesuit reductions, Pelleprat on Jesuits in Guiana as linguists and missionaries, and many accounts of travel through the isthmus of Panama and the early attempts at building a canal.

Natural Science and Early Anthropology

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries France was a leader in the natural sciences and early anthropology of the Americas and, through the Academy of Sciences and others, the main place of publication of travel accounts, missions, language studies and geography for this area of the world. The Newberry holds significant examples, such as Frezier on botanical and physical observations in South America and La Condamine on Peru and astronomical observation.

Genealogy

The Newberry's Local and Family History collection is strong for Canadian research. Significant French Canadian materials include:

- Census schedules for the province of Quebec from 1831 to 1901
- Loiselle Card index to Marriages in the Province of Quebec and adjacent areas
- Many compendia, local histories and bibliographies

- Resources specific to tracing Acadian family history

Maps and History of Cartography

The Newberry holds some 300,000 maps issued separately and within larger works, including more than 300 atlases published in France between the early sixteenth and late twentieth centuries. Landmarks in the history of French cartography of the Americas are found in the Ayer and Graff collections, including the works of Samuel de Champlain, Nicholas Sanson, Jacques Bellin, and Pierre F.X. de Charlevoix. Among these are the first printed map of all of the Great Lakes (Ayer 133 .S22c 1656) and early printed maps of the French empire in Canada (Ayer *121 .C6 1632) and the United States (Graff +*2504).

Printed maps are complemented by about 500 manuscript maps in the Ayer Collection. The Cartes Marines document French colonial interests worldwide in the early eighteenth century in over 100 sheets (Ayer *MS map 30). Other highlights include a variant of Marquette's map of the upper Mississippi (Ayer *MS Map 47) and several hundred tracings of maps relating to the history of the French marine.