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CONTRABAND TRADE BETWEEN LOUISIANA AND NEW MEXICO IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By HENRI FOLMER

THE STRICT regulations of the trade with the Indies necessarily forced merchants—Spanish as well as foreign—to search for ways to evade the monopolistic policies of the Casa de Contratación and the regulations concerning the entry of goods into New Spain. C. H. Haring has, in a very fine study,¹ dealt with the many methods which were employed, in Spain and in the New World, to increase trade and profits by evading the regulations as to ports of entry, licenses, duties, and monopolies.

This contraband trade by way of ships was very important to the colonies. Goods were scarce and when brought in on the Spanish fleet—after payment of all the export and import duties, the taxes levied for the expenses of the fleet, etc.,—prices were exorbitant. No wonder, therefore, that the colonists rather welcomed the contraband trade. This was particularly the case in those provinces which were situated at considerable distances from Vera Cruz. Not only had the goods to bear the expenses mentioned here, but an additional cost was the transportation of the articles from the coast or the capital to the interior.

It is easy to imagine how rare and expensive goods must have been in the outlying provinces like New Mexico, Texas, and others. Situated as they were, far from the coast, and

1. C. H. Haring, *Trade and Navigation between Spain and the Indies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918).

without skilled native or Spanish labor, merchandise was almost totally lacking, and even the scant supply was of very poor quality.

The proximity of Louisiana, after the occupation by the French of the Mississippi valley, was therefore a natural threat to the monopolies of the Spanish crown.

In spite of the wilderness which separated the Spanish northeast frontier from Louisiana and the wild tribes who roamed across the Great Plains, French traders were very much attracted toward contraband trade with New Spain. Goods were plentiful and reasonably priced in the French colony, and transportation by water from Biloxi or New Orleans made distribution easy and inexpensive, compared with the slow mule train which left Mexico City once a year for the north.

The first man actually to establish contact between Louisiana and New Spain was Juchereau de St. Denis.²

Crozat had sent instructions to his newly appointed governor, La Mothe-Cadillac, to open trade with the Spaniards of New Spain. It was well known that Mexico abounded in silver and was extremely poor in merchandise. Le Page du Pratz, who traveled in Louisiana, writes an interesting story on this subject, which illustrates very well the current ideas the French possessed on the possibilities of trade with the Spaniards, and explains the eagerness of the French traders to open this commerce. This account is translated here in the belief that it explains the reasons

2. On St. Denis cf.: B. F. French, *Historical Collections of Louisiana and Florida* (new series; New York: Sabin and Sons, 1869), pp. 84-133; A. McFarland Davis, in Justin Winsor, *History of America* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1889), V, 25 ff; Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de La Louisiane* (Paris: 1758), I, 1-24; C. W. Hackett, *Pichardo's Treatise on the Limits of Louisiana and Texas* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1931), I, 218-225; Pierre Margry, *Découvertes et Etablissements des Français dans l'Ouest et dans le Sud de l'Amérique Septentrionale* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1879), VI, 193-238; E. J. P. Schmitt, "Sieur Louis de Saint Denis" in *The Quarterly of The Texas State Historical Association*, I, No. 3 (January, 1898); C. C. Shelby, "St. Denis' second Expedition to the Rio Grande, 1716-1719" in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXVII, No. 3 (January, 1924); H. H. Bancroft, *History of the North Mexican States and Texas* (San Francisco, 1886), I, 609-629.

which inspired the French to search for the Santa Fé Trail. Le Page du Pratz says that he obtained the story from a French trader.³

"One day," he told me, "I went with two pack mules, loaded with merchandise, to the first cabin I saw to inquire about the route which I should take. I saw standing in the door a tall man, quite brown of complexion and hair, and a black moustache, which he twisted more than twenty times before I was close enough to him to ask him the road; he was barefooted and the only garment he had was a pair of trousers of which the legs fell down on his heels;⁴ his shirt, made of two skins, had no color, neither did his trousers. I can but say that they were very dirty. He covered his head with a handkerchief of similar color and dirt.

"After having greeted him politely, I asked him the road I wanted to take; he returned me my greetings with all the earnestness of a Spaniard, and without answering my question: Do you have there, he asked me, merchandise which deserves to be seen? . . .

"As I brought the first pack inside I saw a woman, crouched to make fire; hearing my greetings, she lowered her veil to answer me and to look at me; she was able to see me easily because of the holes and tears, the same as I could look at her, in spite of the apparent obstacle which hid her face. She was pretty and a graceful smile made me judge that my arrival did not displease her. She had but her veil on her head, and the only garment, a corsage and a skirt, which were sewn together; the corsage was so torn that her breasts were entirely visible, with no sign of a chemise. It was not long before I saw two worthy offspring of this illustrious family who might be eight to ten years old and were dressed in the style of our first father when he was made by the hands of the Creator.

"I had hardly unpacked a load when I saw an oilcloth, which had served as packing material, be-

3. Le Page du Pratz, *op. cit.*, II, 273-78. It is quite possible that Le Page du Pratz got this account from St. Denis himself.

4. Long trousers were considered a sign of poverty.

ing washed with a sponge; this was the tablecloth on which a wooden dish, made by the Indians, was placed; this dish was filled with a dozen ears of roasted corn and immediately the master invited me to dinner: as I had walked, I needed the rest; the lady offered me a wooden stool, which obliged one of the children to stand, because there were only four. I ate with appetite this frugal meal, drinking water out of a calabash; I knew that the Spaniards are proud and I doubted if this one would accept money for my meal; I wanted to compensate him with a present; I drew from my pocket a small bottle of brandy; I gave a drink to the husband, I offered one to the woman who refused it.

"Afterwards I showed my merchandise. He bought from me two pieces of linen from Brittany, which are six ells apiece; two pieces of *Platille* of the same length; this was for the lady, because their chemises are not visible;⁵ this linen is not appropriate to show, it is so thin that when a Negress wears it, her black skin is visible. They wear them nevertheless when they can obtain it and then every place where a needle can pass is embroidered with blue thread. I sold this Spaniard also a pair of red silk embroidered stockings and a piece of lace for the woman. When it was time to pay me, he made me enter the bedroom, because I saw two beds on the floor, made of boards, cut with a hatchet. One of the beds was without doubt for the father and mother, the other one for the children; I noticed also, hanging on the wall, a doublet, a pair of trousers of green velvet, and an embroidered shirt, which seemed to have been white; this shirt covered a sword, of which I saw the scabbard. There was near there a small trunk, which was without doubt the wardrobe of the Lady, the clothes of the children seem to serve them as a pillow.

"Finally, the strong box was opened; there was a pile of about five or six hundred dollars in a corner of the box, covered with a large deer skin; my money was counted on a large bench which was right near. I thanked the Spaniard and left with-

5. Reference to Spanish way of dressing, in contrast with the French.

out regrets this Castle of Bourzillage and covered with grass.

"'Heavens!' I said to myself, 'if we are not better housed than the Spaniards when we settle here, at least we are better dressed; and without wearing velvet on Sunday, we have the body properly clad; and if we do not have dollars, we have instead a good life; we have wheat, meat from the hunt and the poultry yard; we have fish and vegetables in abundance; the poorest inhabitants in our colonies have all these commodities, which to my mind is better than starving to death beside a pile of dollars.'"

This is the story which the settler of Louisiana told me; he found the same thing in many other places of which he told me; but what I have just told must be enough to prove the extreme difference between the Spanish settlements and those of our Colony.

No wonder that such tales encouraged the French to search for a route leading to these chests, filled with silver dollars.

La Mothe-Cadillac sent Saint Denis, or, as he is called, Juchereau de St. Denis, to Mexico to open this lucrative trade. The first expedition to Mexico was made in 1714. With an amount of merchandise valued at 10,000 livres, St. Denis left Mobile, accompanied by twenty men and in the possession of a passport to the Spanish governor. Traveling in canoes, the party ascended the Mississippi, then the Red River to the village of Natchitoches. In exchange for presents, the Indians helped them to construct two houses in the Indian village. After a sojourn of six weeks with the Natchitoches, St. Denis went farther, on August 23d, taking with him twelve Frenchmen, fifteen Tanicas, and an equal number of Natchitoches Indians, leaving ten of his men to guard his goods stored in the village of the Natchitoches. After forty-five days of travel, St. Denis reached the Rio Grande at the post of St. John the Baptist. The Spanish commander of this post, Captain Ramón, kept the French party in custody and advised the viceroy of the arrival of the French intruders. St. Denis, while staying at Don

Ramón's house, fell under the charm of his host's niece, Doña María, whom he later married. The viceroy, the Duke de Linares, ordered St. Denis to be sent to Mexico City, where he arrived on June 5, 1715. The viceroy received him well and sent him to conduct nine missionaries among the Indian tribes of Texas.⁶

Returning to his beloved Doña María on the Rio Grande, he married her and took her to Mobile, where he arrived on August 24, 1716.

Having given an account of his journey to La Mothe-Cadillac, St. Denis proposed to Messrs. Graveline, de Léry, de la Fresnière, Beaulieu frères and Derbanne, all Canadians, to become his associates in a second expedition to Mexico.⁷ They bought 43,200 livres worth of merchandise on credit and St. Denis left Mobile on October 10, 1716, with two-thirds of the merchandise. Graveline, La Fresnière and Beaulieu followed later with the other third of the goods.

On December 24th St. Denis reached the Assinai Indians, where he waited for his partners. On the 6th of April, 1717, he reached the post of his wife's uncle. Captain Ramón found it necessary to keep the merchandise of his niece's husband and to inform the viceroy of the renewed intrusion of the French traders. St. Denis left on April 15th for Mexico to obtain a release of his goods, but here he was imprisoned. He was kept in prison till December, 1717, when he was allowed to move freely within the city. Having succeeded in freeing his goods, he had them sold at a large profit in the province of New Leon. St. Denis must have been a gay prisoner, because Bénard de la Harpe writes in his journal⁸ that he spent all his money in Mexico. After a while he got in trouble with the authorities and, on the verge of being

6. It is interesting to observe that St. Denis served the Spanish interests as much as the French, in the occupation of Texas. Anyhow the Spaniards employed him to establish missions in Texas. Cf. R. C. Clark, "Louis Juchereau de Saint-Denis and the Re-establishment of the Tejas Missions" in *The Quarterly of The Texas State Historical Association*, VI, No. 1 (July, 1902).

7. Margry, *Découvertes*, VI, 200 ff.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 202. Cf. also: V. A. Robles, *Coahuila y Texas en la Epoca Colonial* (Mexico, D. F.: Editorial Cultura, 1938) pp. 425-441.

arrested again, he escaped on September 5, 1718, arriving at Isle Dauphine in March, 1719.

His associates, in the meantime, had left Natchitoches on November 22, 1716,⁹ reaching the village of the Assinai two months later. Here, they found Spanish missionaries established, under the protection of a captain and twenty-five soldiers. On March 22, 1717, the French left the Assinai for the Rio Grande, accompanied by their pack mules and a Spanish muleteer. On their journey a band of sixty mounted Apaches attacked them, but seeing that the French showed no intention of fleeing, they left the traders and attacked the pack train which was following, taking twenty-three mules, the muleteer, and a mulatto woman, with them. On April 21st the traders reached the Rio Grande at the Presidio del Norte, composed of two missions, the mission of St. Jean de Baptiste and of St. Bernard. This was the same post where St. Denis arrived previously. Here again, the missions were under the protection of a Spanish garrison, under the command of Don Ramón, Madame St. Denis' uncle.

While staying here the French learned about the end of La Salle's expedition on the coast. The traders sold the remainder of their goods at a considerable profit during the summer, through the missionaries, in order to avoid confiscation, and leaving the Presidio del Norte on September 1st, the party reached the Isle Dauphine on October 26th.

The entry of St. Denis and his associates alarmed the Spanish authorities, as is evident from the following letter:

Copy of a letter¹⁰ from Mexico of the twentieth of September, 1715, which arrived by way of water to Corogne on the twenty-first of May, written to Mr. Gallut, formerly treasurer of the Viceroy of Mexico, by one of his friends who is now in the service of the viceroy.

I sent you a copy of the account of the entrance of the French which I made to his excellency Mon-

9. Margry, *Découvertes*, VI, 202-11.

10. Archives Nat. Colonies, C 11, 36:415. A copy of this letter is in the possession of the Library of Congress.

sig. the Duke De Linares, Viceroy of Mexico, which account he sent signed by me to the King of Spain. These French come from Mobile to the interior of the country. On the map you will note the proximity of Canada to New Mexico and the other Spanish territories by the routes which are marked on it. This, the laws of the Recompilation of the Indies did not foresee because no one dreamed that the two nations were so close to each other as to start fighting one with another, even in the new world. This obliged the Viceroy to send missionaries, a captain and twenty-five soldiers to this place, which you will see marked as Asinay or the Texans, with the intention apparently to prevent the transportation of merchandise from Mobile into the interior of the country. After the arrival of the fleet, it is his intention to lay also a garrison in the Bay du St. Esprit, through which place the Texans, who are at a distance of only forty leagues, will receive help.

But in my opinion, instead of halting the trade, this will build the deepest foundations for an encouragement of the commerce. In Mobile there are no mules nor pack horses, neither enough men easily to pass through so many Indian tribes, living along the 280 leagues of the regular route from Mobile.

It will not be difficult to transport the merchandise to the Bay du St. Esprit where these very Spaniards can sell the goods into the interior.

Also the distance from Natchitoches, which belongs to the French, to the Texans is but forty miles. In the same fashion, the governors can from there distribute the goods to their friends in the interior.

This will happen when, by placing armed forces in these places, the French can sell their goods with less danger from the Indians.

Mexico has no other trade but with the interior and will lose through the trade with Mobile. The entry duties at Cadiz and at Vera Cruz, the revenue of the alcavales, of the fifth, and those of the export duties of the Kingdom, and also at Cadiz, will be avoided.

This will allow the French to sell fifty per cent

cheaper. Furthermore the proximity of the Canadian borders and of Mobile, which are united by the Mississippi will some day be the cause of great trouble between the two crowns if the frontiers are not defined by two Commissaries of the two parties.

Already the French from Illinois and of Montreal have passed the Missouri River and even the mountains which ought to determine the possessions of the two crowns. Without [a definition of the frontiers] soon the two countries will be confused in the knowledge of their territory. I believe that you should call the attention of the French Court to this fact because from here we have sent to the Court of Spain a memorandum, signed by me, in order that his Catholic Majesty may supply the remedies which are necessarily asked for by such considerable inconveniences as the confusion of frontiers and trade. It is certain that the trade of Spain will be ruined with the importation from the North of French goods.

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[Another Chapter in the Same Letter:]

The frontiers between the French and the Spaniards on this continent ask for a speedy settlement. The establishment of a post on the Bay du Saint Esprit by Spain could create a battlefield between the two nations, because the Canadians, who are here, tell me that this bay belongs to the French, owing to the fact that formerly it belonged to Mr. de la Salle, commanding three ships of His Very Christian Majesty, sent there for this discovery and that it was abandoned only because of delay in succor from France.

In 1719 Bénard de la Harpe established a trading post at the Nassonites with the object of opening a profitable commerce with the Spaniards. To this effect, de la Harpe wrote to the Franciscan Father Marsillo, of the mission of the Assinais, and proposed, on the advice of the Spanish priest at the Adayes Mission, to open trade relations between the French and the Fathers.¹¹ The Spanish missionaries

11. Margry, *Découvertes*, VI, 267 ff.

were to receive a commission of five per cent on the total of the sales.

In 1720 a Spanish military expedition, led by Pedro de Villasur, went out to locate the French traders in the neighborhood of the northeastern frontier, in order to destroy their posts and take the French back to New Mexico.¹²

Instead of finding any French traders, the Spaniards met Pawnee Indians and their allies, who attacked them at dawn and killed almost the entire force. A few escaped to tell the tale of sorrow to the settlers of Santa Fé and Taos, while Father Juan Mínguez, the priest accompanying the Spaniards, was taken alive by the Indians, and brought back to their village. Here he was held a prisoner, and was requested to show the Indians how to ride a horse.¹³ However, no sooner had this priest mounted the captured horse than he sped away on it, thus escaping.

In 1723 and 1724 orders were issued by the Spanish king forbidding trade with foreigners, when it appeared that settlers from New Mexico had bought \$12,000 worth of merchandise from the French and that an illicit trade was conducted with the merchants of Louisiana.¹⁴

It does not seem likely that the French traders brought their merchandise to Taos or Santa Fé or that the Spaniards ever came to the Mississippi, but it is quite probable that the goods were introduced by way of the different trading posts the French possessed in Texas, like the one de la

12. On Villasur's expedition, cf. H. Folmer, "French Expansion towards New Mexico in the Eighteenth Century" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Dept. of History, University of Denver, 1939), pp. 84-92.

13. Cf. A letter from Lallemand to the Compagnie des Indes, Archives Services Hydrographiques (Paris: Cartes et Plans), Vol. II5x, No. 29. A MS. copy of this letter is in the possession of the Library of Congress. It is not known whether he reached New Mexico. He is said to have been the first minister at Albuquerque (1706); in 1708 he was baptizing at Taos; in 1713 he was at Santa Fé; but the author was unable to find his name again after 1720. Nevertheless the French sources seem to show that Father Mínguez was not killed at the Platte river. For some of the conflicting statements, cf. R. E. Twitchell, *The Spanish Archives of New Mexico* (Cedar Rapids 1914), II, 170-174.

14. H. H. Bancroft, *History of Arizona and New Mexico* (San Francisco: The History Co., 1889), pp. 238-9; A. B. Thomas, *After Coronado* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), pp. 245 ff.

Harpe built at the Nassonites, or of the settlement on the Arkansas. Whatever the trail was along which the goods travelled, in 1723 Governor Bustamante allowed the settlers of New Mexico to buy from Gentiles coming to Taos or Pecos.¹⁵ Of the testimonies taken by Governor Bustamante in 1723 during his investigation of illegal trading between French Louisiana and New Mexico,¹⁶ not a single one admits this trade. Reproduced here is the letter of the viceroy to the governor of New Mexico, translated by Professor Thomas and edited in his book, *After Coronado*.¹⁷

Investigation of Illegal Trading between French Louisiana and New Mexico, 1723.

Orders for Council of War, Santa Fé, April 19, 1724.

Edict. Villa of Santa Fé, the nineteenth of April, 1724. General Don Juan Domingo de Bustamante, governor and captain-general of this kingdom and the provinces of New Mexico for his majesty, having received on the tenth of the said month a letter from his excellency, the Marqués de Casa Fuerte, viceroy, governor and captain-general of New Spain, dated the twenty-third of October of last year, inserted it in this decree, as follows:

Letter. By a royal dispatch of the tenth of May of this year his majesty is pleased to inform me of the fact that the Spaniards of this region have been buying from the French in the colony of Louisiana merchandise to the amount of twelve thousand pesos, and on this information his majesty orders me to proceed to punish most severely those who may be found guilty of this illicit commerce. In consequence of this intelligence, I notify you to make an investigation of those persons who may have done this in contravention of royal orders. Put them on trial and secure them (if you prove the fact), exerting the greatest energy and vigilance in preventing by every possible means and effort any illegal trading with the French that

15. Bancroft, *op. cit.*, pp. 238-9.

16. Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-56.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 245-6.

may have been introduced. For although this may have been thought to be very improbable on account of the distance and the uninhabited state of both regions, which makes the transportation of anything almost impossible, nevertheless it behooves you to be very vigilant to prevent this crime (whether it exists or whether it is planned), and I advise you that any omission that may be made in the execution of this command will constitute a serious charge. You are to send me advices as to the reception of this letter and of what you may do by reason thereof. I pray God to preserve you many years. México, October 23, 1723. To Señor Don Juan Domingo de Bustamante.

Governor Bustamante informed the viceroy by a letter of April 30, 1727, that the French had settled at El Cuartelejo and on the Rio de Chinali, proposing an expedition to find out about these French settlements, but nothing was done.¹⁸ This may have been some rumor in connection with de Bourgmond's expedition in 1724 to the Padoucas.

Captain Amos Stoddard, in his *Sketches of Louisiana*,¹⁹ says:

While Louisiana was in the hands of France, some of the French traders from the upper Mississippi transported a quantity of merchandise by way of the Arkansas to the Mexican mountains, where they erected a temporary store and opened a trade with the Indians and likewise with the Spaniards of north Mexico. The Spanish traders at or near Santa Fé, deeming this an infringement of their privileged rights, procured the imprisonment of the Mississippi adventurers, and the seizure of their effects; and demanded punishment and confiscation. The cause was ultimately decided at Havana. The prisoners were liberated and their property restored on the ground that the store in question, (situated on the east side of the summit of the mountains, and

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 256-60.

19. Amos Stoddard, *Sketches, Historical and Descriptive of Louisiana* (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1812), p. 147.

below the source of the Arkansas) was within the boundaries of Louisiana.

Unfortunately Captain Stoddard does not give any further information about this event, and it is not known in what year this happened.

The defeat of Villasur in 1720 was reported to the French by the Indians. The French Company of the Indies became seriously alarmed, and feared a return of the Spaniards, even an invasion of the Illinois country. The Company therefore sent de Bourgmond,²⁰ a *coureur de bois*, in 1723 to the Missouri to construct a post. This fortified trading post was garrisoned and was intended to keep the Spaniards out of this region and to serve as a base from which goods were to be shipped to New Mexico.

The route from the Mississippi to New Mexico was unknown, but de Bourgmond knew the Missouri country. While serving as an officer in the army in Canada, he had followed an Indian love to her tribe and lived for many years in the Missouri village.

De Bourgmond was also instructed to find a trail to New Mexico across the wilderness and to open trade with the Spaniards. In 1724, this Frenchman set out, with a small group of soldiers and some Indians, on his journey towards New Spain, which he did not reach because of illness. It was not until 1739 that a group of eight Frenchmen finally discovered a route between the Mississippi Valley and New Mexico.²¹ While crossing a river, their packtrain of horses with all their merchandise had been lost, and the Mallet brothers and their companions reached Santa Fé without any goods to trade. They intended to open commerce between that town and New Orleans and remained in the capital

20. On Etienne Veniard de Bourgmond, cf. H. Folmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-198. On Fort Orleans cf. G. J. Garraghan, *Chapters in Frontier History*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1934) pp. 91-93; same author, "Fort Orleans of the Missouri," *The Missouri Historical Review*, XXXV, (April 1941), 373-384; M. de Villiers, *La Découverte du Missouri et L'Histoire du Fort d'Orléans* (Paris, 1925).

21. On the Mallet expedition, cf. H. Folmer, "The Mallet Expedition of 1739 through Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado to Santa Fé," *The Colorado Magazine*, XVI, No. 5 (Sept., 1939).

of New Mexico for almost a year, waiting for a reply from the viceroy in Mexico City. They brought back with them a letter²² from the vicar of Santa Fé which throws an interesting light on the contraband trade, showing that the Spanish colonists welcomed it:

Project of trade relations between Louisiana and Santa Fé.

Copy of a letter, addressed to Father Beaubois by Father Sant Iago de Rebal, vicar and ecclesiastical judge in New Mexico.

Upon this occasion, I write to you, Sir, concerning nine Frenchmen who came from New France, called Pierre and Paul brothers, La Rose, Phillippe, Bellecourt, Petit Jean, Galliere and Moreau, who have told me of their plan to introduce a trade in these provinces, which at the present time does not possess any, but, if one would allow them to execute their plan, one could easily overcome this obstacle, because we are not farther away than 200 leagues from a very rich mine, abounding in silver, called Chiquagua, where the inhabitants of this country often go to trade, and if they saw a possibility of using what they could get there, this would encourage them to exploit several mines, which they have. As these Frenchmen spoke about your Reverence and of the good credit you possess in the province and city of New Orleans, I write to you in Spanish and not in Latin, in order not to disturb you, and to inquire about the state of your health, which I hope to be perfect and wishing you prosperity, offering you my service. I occupy here the place of vicar and ecclesiastical judge in this kingdom. My Reverend Father, these Frenchmen made me understand that I could ask you for the merchandise which I need in order to provide for the needs of my family and that I could obtain it easily through your good office, because of the credit you possess among your people. I therefore profit without delay from this occasion to ask you to procure me the amount of the list herewith

22. Translated from Margry, *Découvertes*, VI, 464 ff. On Father "Santiago Royal," the correct name of this ecclesiastic, cf. NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW, XV (Jan. 1940), 93.

included and to send it to me, if possible, informing me of the price in silver or reals, which I will pay as an honest man and as soon as I can. In spite of the fact that I live in a kingdom where money flows but little, what I gain with my chaplainship is paid to me in silver, or reals, which I could save, but for the future I have four thousand Piasters at Chiquagua, which I will have sent over after receiving the answer of your Reverence, and we will know whereupon we can count, on condition that I am satisfied with the merchandise from your country; but, according to what has been told me, I presume that I shall be. Fearing to trouble you, I am the servant of Your Reverence.

It is known that the voyage of the Mallet brothers was followed by a number of other expeditions from Louisiana, but the Spanish authorities confiscated the goods of the traders, and even imprisoned them.²³ A number of these cases are still waiting for a careful investigation.

The success of Pierre and Paul Mallet in 1739 raised new hopes for the trade with New Mexico, particularly since the return voyage along the lower Arkansas had proven to be much shorter and easier than along the Missouri and across the Plains.

After a vain attempt in 1741 by the Mallet brothers to return to Santa Fé, the route to New Mexico became a well-known trail for the packtrains from Louisiana. The Santa Fé trail became a reality in the 1740's and 1750's and the officials in New Orleans dreamt of an everlasting stream of merchandise from Louisiana into New Spain and a return current of silver from Mexico to the strongboxes of the Louisiana settlers.

In fact, these dreams were even partially realized. In spite of the distances, in spite of the Indian dangers and the uncertainty in regard to the policy of the Spanish authorities, the contraband trade took on large proportions.

The Mallet brothers had shown the way, and from the

23. H. E. Bolton, *Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1915), pp. 67 ff.

early forties pack trains crossed the wilderness each year into the Spanish provinces. The post at Natchitoches and the route of the Arkansas River were the trail whereby French goods entered New Spain.

The Spanish priests and the governors themselves were as much engaged in this illicit trade as the tradesmen. As can be seen from the letter of de la Harpe to the Spanish priests across the border at the Nassonites, and the letter of Father Roybal given to the Mallet brothers inviting the priests to trade French merchandise for Spanish silver, the French traders were welcomed by the Spanish colonists. Yet, it was contraband and against the interest of the Spanish monopoly, and (as already noted) royal orders were issued in the early twenties prohibiting the trade between New Mexico and Louisiana, and re-affirming the closing of the Spanish border to foreign goods.

Soon the traders were to learn the dangers attached to their business, when trade in contraband with New Spain became a popular occupation of the Louisiana settlers. It seems that this contraband trade took on such proportions that many of the settlers abandoned their plantations and turned towards the more profitable profession of a smuggler.

Probably one of the first Frenchmen whose arrest has been recorded was that of Jacques Velo, [Belleau or Bel-lot?] who, in June, 1744, came to the pueblo of Pecos. When the governor of New Mexico learned of the arrival of this French trader, he sent a sergeant with two soldiers to conduct him to Santa Fé, as will be seen in the Spanish report below. Twitchell mentions this Santiago Velo in his work, *The Spanish Archives of New Mexico*. The following passages are quoted therefrom:²⁴

456-Velo, Santiago. June 1, 1744. Judicial proceedings in the matter of the inquiry as to Santiago Velo, a Frenchman. Velo states that he is a French-

24. R. E. Twitchell, *The Spanish Archives of New Mexico* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1914), II, 214. On this entire contraband trade cf. the work of A. B. Thomas, *The Plains Indians and New Mexico 1751-1778* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1940).

man of Tours, France, a soldier in Illinois and had come to New Mexico. Sent to the viceroy. 2f.

In 1748, the governor of New Mexico, Codallos y Rabal, mentioned this Velo again in a letter to the viceroy. Quoting again from Twitchell's translation:²⁵

Likewise I give account to your Excellency that in the month of June, of the year 1744, a Frenchman by the name of Santiago Velo, penetrated this kingdom and arrived at the Pueblo of Our Lady of the Porciuncula of Pecos. As soon as I received the news, I despatched the sargent and two soldiers to bring him to me in this Town (Santa Fé) where I took his declaration. And without the knowledge of any person I forwarded that declaration to the Most Excellent Sir Count of Fuenclara, your excellency's predecessor, (as viceroy of Mexico) along with the judicial procedures duly had thereon. Of this Frenchman's whereabouts I have had no further information, save what was given me by the Captain of the Royal Garrison at El Paso, on the Rio del Norte (Rio Grande) whose receipt I hold, acknowledging having sent him to the Governor of New Biscay.

In 1748, a Comanche Indian reported to the Spanish authorities at Taos that French traders had been in his village to buy mules in exchange for firearms. The possession of firearms by the Indians always caused much alarm among the Spaniards, and it is therefore quite natural that such reports as the above mentioned one were immediately sent to the governor and to the viceroy. From the English text by R. E. Twitchell, a sample of the Spanish correspondence on this matter follows:²⁶

499 Letter from Fr. Antonio Duran de Armijo.
"Sir Governor and Captain General—My Lord.

I report to your lordship how this day and date seven Cumanches entered this Pueblo among them the Captain Panfilo. They tell me they have come

25. R. E. Twitchell, *op. cit.*, I, 149.

26. *Ibid.*, I, 148.

in quest of tobacco, that their village is composed of a hundred lodges, pitched on the Jicarilla river, where they are tanning (buffalo) hides, so as to come in and barter as soon as the snow shall decrease in the mountains. This is what they tell me. There is nothing else to report to your Lordship, whom our Lord preserve for many years.

Taos, Feb. 27, 1748. I kiss the hand of your Lordship. Your humble servant. Antonio Duran de Armijo.

Since the above was written one Cumanche of the seven who have come, has related to me in the house of Alonzito that 33 Frenchmen have come to their village and sold them plenty of muskets in exchange for mules; that as soon as this trade was made, the Frenchmen departed for their own country, and that only two remain in the village to come in with the Cumanches when they come hither to Barter."

In 1749, three other Frenchmen visited the Taos fair. They were brought to the governor at Santa Fé, Tomás Vélez Cachupin, by his lieutenant, Bernardo de Bustamante. The governor lodged the French traders in his palace and questioned them carefully. Professor Bolton, who had access to the document relating to this interrogation, quotes:²⁷

I asked each of the strangers his name, marital status, religion, residence, his route in coming, the country and tribes passed through, the names, location, and condition of the French settlements, their relations with the Indians, the extent and nature of the fur trade, whether the French had mines and numerous other items of interest to the Frontier Spanish authorities.

The Frenchmen were examined several times. Their names were Louis Febvre, Pierre Satren and Joseph Michel Riballo. Febvre was twenty-nine years old, a creole of New Orleans, and a tailor and barber by profession. When serv-

27. H. E. Bolton, "French Intrusions into New Mexico, 1749-1752," *The Pacific Ocean in History*, ed. H. M. Stephens and H. E. Bolton (New York: Macmillan, 1917), p. 393. (Much of the information concerning these three French traders was obtained from this article.) Cf. also Bolton, *Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century*, p. 67.

ing in the army at New Orleans he had deserted to Canada and had come to Taos by way of the Arkansas. Pierre Satren was forty-two years old and a native of Quebec. His profession was that of a soldier and carpenter. Satren had deserted from the Arkansas post. Riballo was twenty-four years of age and born in Illinois. He was also a carpenter and a soldier and had deserted from the Arkansas post with Pierre Satren. All declared themselves to be Catholics and bachelors and were unable to write. Apparently they had heard from a member of the Mallet party about New Mexico, which had made them decide to desert the French service and come to New Spain. According to them the peace between the Jumanos and the Comanches made it possible to travel across their territories in safety. The three men had started from an Indian village on the Arkansas, west of the post, in the fall of 1748. Ascending the Arkansas River, they reached some Jumano villages, with whom the French traded regularly. Some Jumano Indians guided the three travelers to the Comanches, a distance of one hundred and fifty leagues. Here the three deserters stayed for a time, hunting with their Comanche hosts. In the spring of 1749 these same Comanches conducted them to Taos.

On June 19th of the same year, Governor Tomàs Vélez Cachupin wrote to the viceroy a report of the intrusion of these three Frenchmen. He had set the three to work in his capital. The two carpenters worked at the palace and Louis Febvre exercised his profession as barber and surgeon. Professor Bolton quotes an interesting passage from this report which he translated, reproduced herewith:²⁸

Since there is a lack of members of these professions in this villa and in the other settlements of the realm . . . it would seem to be very advantageous that they should remain and settle in it, because of their skill in their callings, for they can teach some of the many boys here who are vagrant and given to laziness. It is very lamentable that the resident who now is employed as barber and blood-

28. Bolton, "French Intrusions into New Mexico," *op. cit.*, p. 395.

letter is so old that he would pass for seventy years of age; as for a tailor, there is no one who knows the trade directly. These are the three trades of the Frenchman named Luis. And resident carpenter there is none, for the structure of the houses, and repeated reports which I have from the majority of the inhabitants, manifest the lack of carpenters suffered in the province.

Governor Vélez Cachupin consequently asked the viceroy to grant permission to the three Frenchmen to remain in New Mexico. The authorities in Mexico City, however, were not so easily convinced. The auditor general de guerra, the Marqués of Altamira, demanded further questioning of the three foreign intruders, but he advised that the Frenchmen be allowed to remain in Santa Fé. On March 5, 1750, new declarations were taken by Governor Tomàs Vélez Cachupin. It seems that these additional manifestations satisfied the Spanish authorities.

Professor Bolton, who had access also to the Spanish manuscripts dealing with these intruders, mentions the arrival of Felipe de Sandoval²⁹ in Santa Fé early in 1750. Sandoval was a Spaniard and had been captured in 1742 by the English, who kept him a prisoner for two years at Jamaica. From there he escaped on a French ship and on reaching Mobile he left for New Orleans. Finally he became a hunter at the post of the Arkansas. It was while at the Arkansas Post that he met members of the Mallet expedition, who told him about Santa Fé. Apparently this awakened his desire to rejoin his countrymen, because in the fall of 1749 he left the Arkansas Post for New Mexico, accompanied by six companions, one of whom was a German. The party ascended the Arkansas River in canoes. At the Jumano village, they saw a French flag flying over the lodges. Here, Sandoval witnessed Jumanos devouring two captives. After a sojourn of three weeks with these Indians, Sandoval's party continued its route, accompanied by twelve

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 396 ff.

Indians. Yet Sandoval and his companions separated and he had to return alone to the Jumanos, where he found a Comanche. This Comanche guided Sandoval to the Comanche village. Here he received the visit of twenty Jumanos and two French traders. The latter decided to accompany Sandoval to Santa Fé and sent their Jumano escort back. After a journey of ten days and guided by a Comanche slave trader, they reached Taos, from where they were sent to the governor at Santa Fé to explain their presence.

Late in 1750, a party of four French traders entered New Mexico and after being questioned they were sent to the interior. The author found reference to these travelers in an archive at Santa Fé which begins:³⁰

Itemized memorandum of the goods which were held in my house, brought into this kingdom by the four Frenchmen of whom I notified the Señor Governor and Captain General don Thomàs Vélez Cachupin at the Royal Presidio of el Paso on the first of December 1750. And in view of my report the said governor orders me to send on the other two Frenchmen, and the squadron corporal Juan Benavides has received the said goods in order to transport and deliver them [at el Paso], and they are as follows . . .

Evidently Lieut. Bernardo de Bustamante y Tagle at Santa Fé had already sent two of the Frenchmen to El Paso. When the seized goods arrived there (with the other two prisoners), their value was appraised. Then by public crier they were offered for sale and were bought in by Don Bernardo de Miera Pacheco for 420 pesos 6 reales; and this money was used to pay the costs of getting the prisoners to Mexico City.

Unfortunately this document does not name the Frenchmen, and one receives the impression that the merchandise which these French traders brought was of more interest to the Spanish border authorities than were its owners. But probably they were the four Frenchmen from New

30. Twitchell, *op. cit.*, II, 229, title 514.

Orleans who are said to have entered New Mexico in 1751, coming by way of the Missouri.³¹

In 1752, Jean Chapuis and Louis Feuilli reached the mission of Pecos, waving a French flag.³² They were guided by Apaches after they crossed the Gallinas River. These two traders led a pack train of nine horses, laden with merchandise. The goods were deposited by Father Juan Joseph Toledo in the convent of the mission and he informed the governor of the arrival of the two Frenchmen, who were conducted with their goods to Santa Fé. On August 9th the two traders were examined, Louis Febvre serving as interpreter. Jean Chapuis was forty-eight years old and born in France. He was a trader from Canada. While at Fort Chartres he obtained a license from the commander, Benoit de St. Clair, to go to New Mexico to trade. According to the Spanish documents³³ St. Clair gave him a French flag, which apparently was the same one he used on his arrival at the Pecos mission. Louis Feuilli had been an interpreter for eight years at the post of the Kansas Indians.

The expedition had left the Kansas Indians about the middle of March, 1752, and was then composed of ten or eleven Frenchmen. Eight or nine of them, however, returned, for fear of the Comanches, long before reaching the Spanish border, and only Chapuis and Feuilli reached New Mexico. Chapuis proposed to Governor Vélez Cachupin the opening of trade between the Missouri and New Mexico. He suggested transporting the goods up the Missouri by canoes and from there by pack horses across the Plains to Santa Fé. Because of the danger caused by the Comanches, he even suggested an escort of fifty or sixty soldiers for each caravan.

It seems that the French ignored completely the fact that foreign trade was forbidden in the Spanish colonies and

31. Bolton, *op. cit.*, p. 400.

32. Professor Bolton speaks of a white flag. Probably Father Toledo did not know that the French flag of that time was white. A. B. Thomas has given a complete account of the arrest of the two Frenchmen with a list of the confiscated merchandise in his book *The Plains Indians and New Mexico*, pp. 21-25 and 82-110.

33. *Ibid.*

were under the impression that the payment of custom duties was all that was necessary to legalize this commerce with New Spain.

The governor would not allow Chapuis and Feuilli even to return to Louisiana. Their goods were confiscated and sold at an auction and the proceeds of the sale were kept by the Spaniards to pay for the expenses occasioned by the arrest of the two Frenchmen.

Chapuis and Feuilli were sent to Mexico City and thrown in jail. The bureaucratic machine at the capital was slow and many months passed before the two unlucky traders were released, only to be sent to Spain for further examination of their case. The posts along the Texas border as well as those on the New Mexico frontier received strict orders to arrest any French trader who might try to break through the Royal Monopoly, and not to release them under any pretext, but to send them into the interior. One of the first victims of this decision to halt the French trade on the border was Joseph Blancpain, a French trader operating in 1754 among the Orcoquiza Indians with two other Frenchmen, George Elias and Antoine de la Fars, and two negro servants.³⁴

The entire party was taken in custody by the Spaniards and their goods were confiscated and divided among the captors. The unlucky Blancpain, who must have been a merchant of some importance, was taken to Mexico City and imprisoned there. There he died in prison in 1755. His companions were deported to Spain.

A royal order was issued, threatening any French trader caught on Spanish territory with deportation to South America. The French governor, Kerlérec, protested against the arrest of Blancpain who, he claimed, was captured on French territory. In spite of the severe ordinance and the death of Blancpain in prison, the French continued to trade within the Spanish claim.

34. Cf. Bolton, "Spanish Activities on the Lower Trinity River," *The South-western Historical Quarterly*, XVI, 4 (April, 1913), pp. 339 ff.

In the summer of 1755 four mounted Frenchmen had been seen at El Orcoquisac. At the same time a certain Massé and the priest Disdier asked permission from the Spanish governor of Texas, Barrios, to settle at El Orcoquisac. This was refused, however, by the viceroy, who feared the French might occupy this eastern borderland. In 1759, again a group of French traders had to be expelled and others were reported trading on the Brazos River.

There can be no doubt that the policy of the Spanish officials had a discouraging effect on this illicit border trade. Yet one can well believe that the routes from Louisiana to Santa Fé were well known during the 1740's and the 1750's, and that contraband passed the frontier in considerable quantity. The cases where French traders were arrested and their goods confiscated show the dangers attached to this trade, but it must be admitted that without doubt many pack trains passed the border without being reported to Mexico City.

When France ceded Louisiana to Spain this contraband trade ceased automatically. The port of entry was now at the seacoast and Louisiana became as poor in merchandise as New Spain had been before. The road between Louisiana and New Mexico soon was forgotten and the two provinces were almost as far apart as ever before. Thirty years after the cession of Louisiana to Spain the overland trail was so little used that the viceroy of Mexico found it necessary to order a search for a road connecting New Mexico with the Missouri. The governor of New Mexico, in obedience to the order from the viceroy, called on a Frenchman, Pierre Vial, who had established himself in that province and who apparently was more enterprising than the Spanish settlers. Very probably Pierre Vial was one of the last representatives of the old French "coureurs de bois," and had continued the tradition of his countrymen of the middle of the century. The Spanish authorities commissioned him to re-establish the old Trail, along which the pack trains laden with French merchandise had crossed the wilderness half

a century before. Louis Houck has reproduced the reports on this expedition,³⁵ which are mentioned in this study only to illustrate how little the overland route was known after France abandoned Louisiana.

It is not possible to read of Vial's journey without feeling a note of sadness. The wilderness had been left to itself for more than a quarter of a century. Instead of an expedition like the one led by de Bourgmond in 1724, marching through Indian villages with "beating drum and flying colors," one sees now a few individual travelers, received by savages without any respect or friendship and barely escaping death. There are no great celebrations to receive the white men with honors and banquets. France had abandoned America and the Indians. Its name was slowly forgotten. The Santa Fé Trail was still used occasionally by a few Indian scouts, Frenchmen in the service of Spain, but the Trans-Mississippi West was no longer safe for the white trader as it had been in the 1740's and the 1750's under French influence. Mr. Lansing B. Bloom of the University of New Mexico has given an excellent account of the activities of some of these late French Indian scouts in New Mexico in his article on one of them, Jacques d'Eglise.³⁶ The dream of a French empire reaching from the St. Lawrence to the mouth of the Mississippi and from the Alleghenies to the Western Sea however had faded into a forgotten past. The Indians of the Plains were left to themselves and their eternal wars, unchecked in their destruction of each other by French authority but more ferocious since the French taught them the use of firearms, until the few remnants of roaming bands were destroyed or tamed by the Americans in the nineteenth century. The Santa Fé Trail was later re-established by the American trader, who conquered the Trans-Mississippi West for the white man a second time. Railroads

35. Louis Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri* (Chicago: Donelley & Sons Co., 1909), I, 350 ff.

36. L. B. Bloom, "The Death of Jacques d'Eglise," *THE NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW*, II, (Oct., 1927) 369-379.

and highways now bind New Mexico and the Mississippi Valley together into one economic and cultural unit of which the French trader of the eighteenth century was the pioneer and the originator.

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