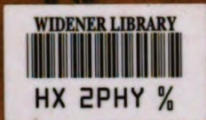


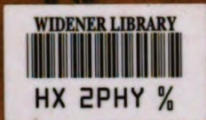
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THE REAL SAINT-DENIS.

LESTER G. BUGBEE.

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THE REAL SAINT-DENIS.

LESTER G. BUGBEE.

In a paper read before the midwinter meeting of the Association and published in the January Quarterly, Rev. Edmond J. P. Schmitt questions Yoakum's accuracy in using the name Juchereau* as applied to that Saint-Denis who figured in the early history of Louisiana and Texas. He also points out the error of John Henry Brown's statement that Saint-Denis was killed by the Natchez Indians in 1728.†

Some of our Texas historians have perhaps committed a much graver fault in embellishing their pages with the interesting adventures of this hero-trader than has been indicated by Father Schmitt. It is highly probable that the story of Saint-Denis as recorded in many of our histories is, in most particulars, nothing more than one of those pretty myths that find their way into history so easily and hold their places in the popular mind so tenaciously. It is the purpose of the following article to point out some of the errors that have crept into this story, to indicate the chief sources from which we must reconstruct the true narrative, and to call attention to the real importance of Saint-Denis in the history of Texas. What is here written, however, is in no sense to be considered final; some of the most important sources of information have been beyond my reach, and from them, no doubt, much is yet to be learned; indeed, it is not improbable that a study of other sources will develop errors in what I have said in this paper.

* Most of the authorities are agreed that Saint-Denis' first name was Louis; Le Page du Pratz calls him Luchereau; Margry writes it Louis Juchereau. Father Schmitt is undoubtedly correct in saying that the Saint-Denis of Louisiana and Texas must not be confused with the Juchereau de Saint-Denis who played a part in the history of Canada; they are both mentioned in the same sentence in Margry's *Découvertes et établissements des Français dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amérique septentrionale*, vol. V, p. 426.

† Edmond J. P. Schmitt, *Who was Juchereau de Saint-Denis?* the Quarterly, January, 1898, pp. 204-206.

The first mention which I have been able to find of Saint-Denis occurs in the *Historical Journal of the Establishment of the French in Louisiana*,* which is one of our chief sources of information relative to the early history of that province. The entry in the *Journal*, referring to March, 1700, reads as follows: "On the 22d M. de Bienville set out with M. de Saint-Denys and twenty Canadians and Indians to visit the Yatase nation, on the Red river, and watch the Spaniards."† This journey of reconnoissance seems to have been a short one, as Bienville was again at Biloxi within a month. Two months later, May 29, 1700, Saint-Denis was once more sent out "to explore the country in the Red river, and to watch the Spaniards."‡ From 1700 to 1705, he is mentioned three times by the *Journal* as acting in various capacities.||

From Pénicaut's *Relation*§ we learn further that Saint-Denis

* The authorship of the *Journal historique de l'établissement des Français à la Louisiane* is not known; Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History of America*, vol. V, p. 63, says that it "is founded largely upon the journals of Le Sueur and La Harpe, though it is evident that the author had other sources of information. Within its pages may be found a record of all the expeditions dispatched by the colony to the Red River region and to the coast of Texas. The work of compilation was done by a clear-headed methodical man." A translation into English of a part of the work may be found in B. F. French's *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, vol. III. My references are all to this translation. The *Journal* is also published in full in vol. IV of Pierre Margry's *Découvertes et établissements*.

† *Historical Journal*, in B. F. French's *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, vol. III, p. 18.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

|| *Ibid.*, pp. 28; 30, 31; 32, 33.

§ Pénicaut was at the fort on the Mississippi where Saint-Denis commanded when orders came to abandon it; he was also one of the party who accompanied Saint-Denis on his first trip to Mexico. His *Relation* must be used with caution, as he was fond of embellishing it with a good story; dates, and such facts as he acquired at second-hand can not be trusted. The work has been published in volume V of Pierre Margry's *Découvertes et établissements*. Part of it has also been translated into English by B. F. French in his *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, second series; my references are to the original in Margry.

was in command of a fort on the Mississippi from 1702 to 1705,¹ that the fort was abandoned by order of the governor in the latter year,² that Saint-Denis then returned to Mobile and soon after retired from service and took up his residence at Biloxi,³ where he remained till Lamothe Cadillac arrived in Louisiana in 1713.⁴

In the year following occurred the journey to which so much of romance has since become attached. According to the common account, this journey was undertaken for the purpose of establishing commercial relations with Mexico. John Henry Brown states that Saint-Denis reached San Juan Bautista in August, 1714, fell in love with the commandant's daughter, and soon became her accepted suitor. Gasparde de Anaya, the governor of Coahuila, also a suitor for the hand of the fair Maria, had Saint-Denis seized and threw him into prison. An offer of release on condition of renouncing the lady's hand was rejected by the Canadian "with scorn." In the meantime Anaya pressed his suit with Maria, demanding her promise to marry him and threatening to put her lover to death in case of her refusal. In reply to this threat she bade the messenger tell the governor that, if he had Saint-Denis executed, "by my own hand or that of a trusted friend, a dagger shall be planted in his cowardly heart." At the end of some six months the viceroy interfered, Saint-Denis was released, received with favor at court, and even offered high rank in the Spanish army; but proffered favors could not make Saint-Denis "forget his mission or his fidelity to the woman who had saved him." While waiting for a reply from the king of Spain upon the business which had brought him to Mexico, he returned to San Juan where he found the Indians "abroad in arms." He "pursued them alone," and such was the persuasive power of his eloquence that he had little difficulty in putting down the insurrection. "The young Castilian beauty was his reward." After two years' delay, an unfavorable reply of the king to his propositions finally reached him

¹ Pénicaud's *Relation* in Margry's *Découvertes et établissements*, vol. V, pp. 425, 431, 439, 459.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 459, 460.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 460.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 476, 495. Pénicaud says Lamothe Cadillac arrived in 1712, an error of a year.

and he returned to Mobile. On a second trip to Mexico, he had all his goods seized and was again imprisoned. Once more the heroine came to the rescue, her influence aroused her relatives, secured the forcible release of her husband, and compelled the viceroy to pay for the misappropriated goods.*

* John Henry Brown, *History of Texas*, vol. I, pp. 13-18. It is interesting to speculate on the origin of this story. It is told by Charles Gayarré in his *The Poetry, or the Romance of the History of Louisiana*, and it is probably from this source that it has made its way into Texas history. Yoakum refers to both Gayarré and Le Page du Pratz, but he is indebted to the former for the greater and least trustworthy part of the narrative. Gayarré's *The Poetry, or the Romance of the History of Louisiana* must be carefully distinguished from his second and third series of lectures on the history of Louisiana. These works appeared originally as three distinct series of lectures, but, bound together, they make up that author's four-volume *History of Louisiana*. The first series of these lectures, *The Poetry, or the Romance of the History of Louisiana*, which contains the story of Saint-Denis substantially as related above, is avowedly unhistorical; Gayarré confesses (*History of Louisiana*, vol. II, Preface), that he was gamboling with his imagination in these lectures, and that he looked upon the series "at the time as *nugae seriae*, to which I attached no more importance than a child does to the soap bubbles which he puffs through the tube of the tiny reed, picked up by him for the amusement of the passing hour." (*History of Louisiana*, vol. II, Preface.) He claims that the second series of lectures, *Louisiana; Its History as a French Colony*, is at least founded on facts; the third series, the last three volumes of the *History of Louisiana*, is reliable, and is the work on which the author's reputation rests.

I quote below two passages from Gayarré's version of this story in order to furnish an example of the heroic style of this part of his work, and at the same time afford, in a small way, a basis for comparison with Brown's account. Referring to Anaya's offer of release to Saint-Denis, Brown is content to say that the proposition was rejected "with scorn." This is too tame for Gayarré, who puts it thus: *How swelled the loyal heart of the captive at this base proposal! He vouchsafed no answer, but he gave his oppressor such a look as made him stagger back and retreat with as much precipitation as if the hand of immediate punishment had been lifted up against him.* (Vol. I, p. 170.) Again, compare the reply of Maria to the proposal of Anaya as given above with the following as recorded by Gayarré: "Tell Anaya that I can not marry him as long as St. Denis lives, because St. Denis I love; and tell him that if St. Denis dies this little Moorish dagger, which was my mother's gift, shall be planted, either by myself or my agent's hand, in

It is not my purpose to say caustic things about the writers of Texas history. Mr. Brown's book, from which the above account is taken, is, in very many respects, a most excellent and creditable production. Nor is he the only author that has accepted this pleasing story of love and adventure. It is to be found, with more or less variation in the works of Yoakum,¹ Kennedy,² Mrs. Pennybacker,³ and perhaps others. Suffice it to say that the story has little or no foundation in fact, and even what little truth there is in it has been distorted almost beyond recognition by these accounts. A more serious criticism is that the real importance of Saint-Denis' mission to Mexico has been obscured, indeed totally neglected, in an attempt to capture the imagination with the details of an heroic incident. It is difficult to find moderate terms in which to express one's condemnation of the methods of investi-

the middle of his dastardly heart, wherever he may be." This was said with a gentle voice, with a calm mien, as if it had been an ordinary message, but with such a gleam in the eye as is nowhere to be seen except in Spain's or Arabia's daughters. The words, the look, and the tone, were minutely reported to Anaya, and he paused. (Vol. I, p. 171.) I hope that some one may be able to prove that our historians did not accept as serious such an account as this.

But where did Gayarré get the story? Very probably it is an elaboration of the account given by Pénicaut in his *Relation*, which I have already mentioned. Pénicaut, so far as I know, is the only contemporary authority that introduces the Governor of Coahuila into the narrative, or calls the commandant at San Juan by the name of Vilesca (not Villescás, as Gayarré has it, nor Villesecas as it occurs in Brown). Many of the particulars of the long story of Saint-Denis' adventures in Mexico told by Pénicaut are repeated by Gayarré in almost the same language and, I believe, are to be found nowhere else. Suffice it to say that Pénicaut is our least reliable authority for this portion of the story, and even he does not say a word about the rivalry between Saint-Denis and the Governor of Coahuila. That portion of the story, and consequently most of the romance, is probably an invention, pure and simple, of Charles Gayarré. That Brown drew his account from Gayarré and not from Pénicaut is evident from the fact that he copied the romantic details added by Gayarré, which do not appear in the *Relation*.

¹Yoakum, *History of Texas*, vol. I, pp. 47-50.

²Kennedy, *Texas*, vol. I, pp. 218, 219.

³Mrs. Pennybacker, *A New History of Texas*, revised edition, pp. 22-24 and note.

gation that have allowed such a tale to become a part of our serious history.

In the reconstruction of this chapter in our early history we must, of course, depend upon the accounts left us by the contemporaries of Saint-Denis. Besides the *Historical Journal* and Pénicaut's *Relation* which I have already mentioned, the most important of these from the French point of view are the memoirs of Dumont,¹ Charlevoix' *Nouvelle France*,² and the *Histoire de la Louisiane* of Le Page du Pratz. The last mentioned, who lived in Louisiana from 1718 to 1734 and who used the memoirs of Saint-Denis in compiling his work,³ is probably our best authority on this incident. A very important Spanish authority which I have used in the preparation of this paper is the *Testimonio de un Parecer*, a summary of events in Texas from the time of La Salle to 1744, at which date the document was written. The author evidently had access to reliable reports concerning Saint-Denis and it will be seen that the Spanish account substantially confirms the French.⁴

According to Le Page du Pratz, the immediate occasion of the journey of Saint-Denis to Mexico was a letter which reached the French governor from a Spanish ecclesiastic, Ydalgo (commonly written Hidalgo) by name, in which the father asked the aid of the French in establishing a mission among the Assinais (or Cenís) Indians.⁵ This seems to have been precisely the opportunity which the governor was seeking. It will be remembered that in 1712 Louisiana had passed under the control of Anthony Crozat, who looked upon it merely as a commercial establishment and cared little for the claim which France held to the great territory of Texas.

¹ Dumont, a French officer, was stationed in Louisiana during at least the last years covered by this paper. The full title of his work is *Mémoires historiques sur la Louisiane*; I have had access only to the translation of a part of the work in vol. V of B. F. French's *Historical Collections of Louisiana*.

² I have not had access to this work.

³ Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, vol. I, p. 178.

⁴ It has been printed in Spanish in Yoakum's *History of Texas*, vol. I, Appendix, pp. 381-402.

⁵ Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, vol. I, p. 10.

If the trade of Louisiana could be increased by winking at the Spanish occupation of Texas, Crozat's governor was ready to be seized with impenetrable blindness in that direction. He believed a Spanish mission in what is now eastern Texas would be of great commercial advantage to the French, particularly in the matter of furnishing Louisiana with horses, cattle, and silver;* hence Saint-Denis was despatched to Mexico to assist the Spaniards in making the establishment in Texas on the condition that the trade of the country should be opened to the French.† Accompanied by ten men, he finally reached the presidio San Juan, near the Rio Grande.‡ The commandant of this post, Don Diegue (Domingo

**Ibid.*, p. 11.

†*Ibid.*, p. 11.

‡The *Historical Journal* (French's *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, vol. III, pp. 43, 46) says that Saint-Denis was sent to Texas to learn all he could concerning the Spanish missions in that country. Nothing is said about trade. After satisfying himself that there were no Spaniards among any of the tribes that lay between the French settlements and the Assinaïis, he returned to the Natchez on the Mississippi. Five Canadians joined him, and he again entered Texas. At the village of the Assinaïis his party was increased by the addition of twenty Indians of that tribe, who accompanied him to San Juan.

According to the *Testimonio de un Parecer* (Yoakum, vol. I, Appendix, p. 390), Saint-Denis was sent to Texas to purchase live stock from the missions which he expected to find somewhere in that country. Disappointed in this, he sent back most of his men and continued the journey to San Juan with three companions.

Pénicaud (in Margry's *Découvertes et établissements*, vol. V, pp. 494-500), who was one of the party, states that Saint-Denis was engaged by Lamothe Cadillac to go to Mexico and attempt to open commercial relations with the Spanish; he set out with a quantity of goods and twenty-two men; a halt was made among the Natchitoches and ten men were left to hold a post established there; the Assinaïis furnished guides and after nearly two months of travel from Natchitoches, the party reached San Juan.

According to the statement made by Saint-Denis on his arrival at San Juan, the substance of which is given by Margry (*Découvertes et établissements*, vol. VI, p. 218), twenty-one of his men returned to Mobile from the Assinaïis, and he was attended on the rest of his journey by only three Frenchmen and twenty-five Indians.

We learn from an extract from a letter written by Lamothe Cadillac (Margry, *Découvertes et établissements*, vol. VI, p. 197) that Saint-Denis told the viceroy "conformably with his instructions that his gov-

or Diego) Raimond¹ (or Ramon), evidently regarded his mission with favor; but as the Spanish law forbade the intrusion of foreigners, he detained Saint-Denis while a messenger set out for Mexico to ask permission for the Canadian to present himself at the viceroy's court.²

In the meantime Saint-Denis succeeded in winning his way into the affections of the family at the presidio. A widowed daughter of the commandant is said to have called into exercise her match-making skill, and before Saint-Denis left San Juan he was engaged to the granddaughter³ of Don Diego, the niece of the match-maker.

The desired permission to proceed to Mexico was at last received, and he found himself in that city on the 5th of June, 1715. The viceroy Linares is represented as very favorably inclined towards the French, though there was a strong party in Mexico that cherished bitter feelings against their old enemy. It may be that Linares was really disposed to favor the scheme of the Canadian, or it may be that his professions were only pretended in order to secure the inactivity and even gain the help of the French,—at any rate, according to Le Page du Pratz, an agreement was soon reached that Saint-Denis should assist the Spaniards in establishing missions in Texas, and the promise was held out that commercial privileges would then be granted to the French.⁴

ernor had sent him with twenty-five men to Father Hidalgo" to buy cattle, and, not finding the padre, he had continued his journey to Mexico.

Le Page du Pratz is, I think, the only authority who mentions the letter from Hidalgo to the governor of Louisiana. Le Page du Pratz probably reflects Saint-Denis' own version of the story, so we should be cautious about accepting the motives attributed to Lamothe Cadillac, with whom Saint-Denis was not always in harmony.

¹ Not Villescás or Villesecas, according to the common story.

² Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, vol. I, pp. 12, 13.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 14. The *Historical Journal* (French's *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, vol. III, p. 46) and the *Testimonio de un Parecer* (Yoakum, vol. I, p. 391) say that this lady was the niece of the commandant. Brown (*History of Texas*, vol. I, p. 13) calls her the commandant's daughter.

⁴ Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, vol. I, pp. 14, 15. The *Testimonio de un Parecer* (Yoakum, vol. I, p. 391) says nothing of the promises made to Saint-Denis.

On his return to San Juan the marriage with the granddaughter of Don Ramon was celebrated, and soon after Saint-Denis joined the Spanish expedition which had for its object the occupation of Texas. On reaching the country of the Assinais, the Indians were called together, and Saint-Denis, who had great influence among them, exhorted them to receive the Spaniards and to treat them well.¹ On August 25, 1716, he was again at Mobile.²

In this way the group of missions between the Trinity river and Natchitoches came into existence with the acquiescence of the French. There is no trace in this story as told by the contemporary French chroniclers, except Pénicaut, of anything but the best of treatment. Certainly there is not a word about imprisonment, and the governor of Coahuila³ is not even mentioned.

The governor of Louisiana was "charmed" with the success of Saint-Denis' mission, in spite of the fact that it involved the tacit abandonment of French claims to the country west of the Red river. He proposed to Saint-Denis to return to Mexico at once, this time with goods. But goods were not easily obtained. The warehouses of Crozat were well filled and he was growing every day more discouraged because of the difficulty of disposing of them. Yet on this occasion Saint-Denis' application was declined by Crozat's agents, and even the interference of the governor could not open the stores to him. Probably such a venture was regarded as too hazardous. Finally, in October, 1716, some two months after Saint-Denis' return from Mexico, a company was formed of the most substantial men in the colony, and the agents of Crozat agreed to advance merchandise to the amount of 60,000 livres.⁴

The commercial privileges which perhaps had been half promised by the viceroy had not yet been extended to the French, and

¹ Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, vol. I, pp. 16, 17.

² *Historical Journal* (French's *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, vol. III, p. 47.)

³ Martin de Alarcon, not Gaspardo de Anaya, was governor of Coahuila during the years covered by this story. (Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas*, vol. I, p. 604.)

⁴ Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, vol. I, pp. 17, 18. The amount of goods and the dates are taken from the *Historical Journal* (French's *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, vol. III, p. 47).

Spanish law forbade even the entrance of a foreigner into Mexico. Any goods introduced in the manner here proposed were, of course, contraband and subject to seizure. The harsher term which we apply to such an act as the French traders contemplated is smuggling. The character of this second trip is, to some extent, cleared up by the significant fact that the goods were made to appear as belonging wholly to Saint-Denis.* He probably depended upon his connection with the family of a Spanish officer and the favor with which he was regarded by the viceroy to protect him in the violation of the law. It is very probable, too, that he sought to quiet suspicion by spreading the report that he had returned to enter the service of Spain, and that the goods which he brought with him were his personal effects.† This supposition at least clears up many of the difficulties, and it is not at all inconsistent with the character of the man; we learn from Lamothe Cadillac that Saint-Denis "was not very zealous in the service of the king" of France,‡ and Bancroft declares that he was paid by the Spanish government for lending his aid in establishing the missions in Texas.||

The winter of 1716 was passed by the traders among the Assinai Indians and the following March found them again on the road for San Juan, Saint-Denis probably going on in advance.§ It seems that a disagreement occurred among the members of the company while at San Juan, perhaps as to the price which should be paid the Spanish officials as hush money, and the secret as to the ownership of the goods leaked out. As a result, confiscation

*Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, vol. I, p. 19.

Saint-Denis opposed the organization of this company, particularly when he learned that some of its members proposed to make the trip with him. He insisted that these members be instructed to make it appear that they were his employees and that the goods belonged to him alone. The *Historical Journal* does not mention this.

† *Testimonio de un Parecer*, Yoakum, vol. I, p. 391.

‡ Letter from Lamothe Cadillac in Margry's *Découvertes et établissements*, vol. VI, p. 197.

|| *North Mexican States and Texas*, vol. I, p. 611.

§ The *Historical Journal*, (French's *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, vol. III, p. 49) states that Saint-Denis reached the presidio in advance of the company, lost his goods by seizure, and had already set out for Mexico when the rest of the party arrived. The dates in the various accounts do not agree.

was imminent, and it is not unlikely that some of the goods were actually seized. To prevent total loss, Saint-Denis hurried on to Mexico to secure the intervention of his friend the viceroy.*

But affairs went ill for the trader. The friendly viceroy had been superseded by one whose attitude, says Le Page du Pratz, was as hostile as that of Linares was favorable. Priestly jealousy had also raised up an enemy in the person of Padre Olivarez, who is represented as jealous of the ecclesiastics who had successfully made the establishments in Texas under the protection of Saint-Denis.† Don Martin de Alarcon, the governor of Coahuila and Texas, was also unfriendly, and reported that Saint-Denis had entered the province without the proper passport and had brought goods with him which were not wholly his own.‡ Circumstances thus combined to wreck the hopes of the Canadian. He was arrested and imprisoned as a suspicious character. Most of his goods, which had been sent on to Mexico by Don Ramon, were seized as contraband, and it seems that he lost all but a bare sufficiency to satisfy certain expenses of justice.|| He was kept in prison some two months, and when released was ordered to remain within the limits of the city; nine months more elapsed, and he finally succeeded, after forcibly dispossessing a Spaniard of his horse, in effecting his escape. He passed by San Juan, but stopped only to clandestinely visit his wife in the garden of the fort, and arrived safe in Louisiana on April 2, 1719.§

*Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, vol. I, p. 19.

The *Historical Journal* and the *Testimonio de un Parecer* do not mention these details.

†Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, vol. I, p. 20.

‡*Historical Journal*, in French's *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, vol. III, p. 63. Of course, even if the goods belonged wholly to Saint-Denis, their introduction would still be illegal, unless he was really removing, with permission, to enter Spanish service.

||According to the *Historical Journal*, he obtained the release of his goods, but lost the proceeds through the faithlessness of a friend, who squandered the money entrusted to him.

§Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, vol. I, pp. 20, 21. The *Historical Journal* says he was aided in making his escape by the relatives of his wife. There is no foundation for the story that his wife accompanied him from San Juan to Louisiana. She was sent to him later.

There are few incidents in the early history of Texas which have a greater importance than the one that I have sketched above. An impartial observer living in the first years of the eighteenth century would have found the greatest difficulty in forecasting the future of the extensive, but then unoccupied, domain which we now call Texas. Its situation made it the logical battle ground of the French and Spanish in America. Both claimed it and both had made ineffectual attempts to occupy it. The important feature, then, of this journey of Saint-Denis, even more interesting and certainly more essential in determining the destiny of Texas than the stage-like declamation of Doña Maria, is the good understanding that was seemingly established between the French and the Spanish, and the acquiescence of the former in the founding of the Spanish missions almost at their very door.

We have seen from the above sketch that commercial ideas were then dominant in the government of Louisiana; both Spanish and French sources agree that Saint-Denis warmly advocated the planting of the Spanish missions near the French settlements—indeed, it is not improbable that he was sent to Mexico for the express purpose of re-introducing the friars into Texas; we have seen that the Governor of Louisiana was “charmed” with the result of the first trip, and we further learn from Le Page du Pratz that a little later Saint-Denis was made a Knight of St. Louis in recognition of and as a reward for his services. The meaning of all this seems to be that the business-like Crozat cared little for the French claim to Texas, and willingly relinquished it in return for the prospect of a friendly trade with Mexico through the Spanish missions. On the other hand the Spaniards were made to realize the danger which might arise from the proximity of the settlements in Louisiana, and so took immediate steps to secure the country to Red river. The year 1715, says Yoakum, “may be considered the year of missions in Texas.” The occupation was permanent; San Antonio and other posts which were founded on this occasion were never afterwards abandoned.

However charitably we may be inclined to view the matter, we must severely criticise certain of our Texas historians for beclouding this really important episode with a mass of romantic details, and for failing to point out the true bearing of Saint-Denis’ jour-

ney to Mexico upon the final destiny of Texas. Yoakum especially should not have gone astray in this matter, as he seems to have had access to reliable sources of information in both Spanish and French; indeed, he is often on the point of assigning to Saint-Denis his true place in our history, but the brilliant fiction of Gayarré, in the end, proved too fascinating to be omitted; after reading many pages of interesting matter, truth mingled with fiction, we close Yoakum with an uncomfortable feeling that Saint-Denis' importance consists in his having laid out the San Antonio Road.*

In censuring the historians of Texas for accepting this story on insufficient evidence and for failing to interpret correctly the larger movement of events during these years, an honorable exception should be made of the work of H. H. Bancroft. The materials used by this author so far as concerns the story of Saint-Denis were mostly Spanish, including a number of documents which have never been printed. The facts derived by Bancroft from the Spanish sources are substantially in accord with the statements of the French writers whom I have followed in this article. There is no imprisonment of Saint-Denis on his first visit; his love affair is indeed mentioned, but it is not given more importance than is accorded to the occupation of Texas by the Spanish; we learn from Bancroft, too, that the Spanish authorities were aroused to a better realization of the value of Texas and to a clearer understanding of the danger that threatened from Louisiana, and, in consequence, at once bestirred themselves to take possession of the country. Bancroft also agrees with the French account that Saint-Denis' arrest occurred on his second trip and for the reason that the Spanish officials had grown suspicious of his intentions.†

It must be a matter of keen regret to all who feel an interest in such questions as this that the State of Texas has as yet shown little interest in collecting the sources of our early history. Documents in Mexico, in Spain, and in France must be copied and made

* Yoakum, *History of Texas*, vol. I, pp. 47-52; 65-66. Mrs. Pennybacker (*A New History of Texas*, Revised Edition, p. 24) seems to arrive at the same conclusion.

† H. H. Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas*, vol. I, pp. 609-614.

accessible to Texas writers before this period can be satisfactorily understood and explained. Other states have spent large sums in procuring historical data from the archives of the European countries. The State of Texas, the University of Texas, and the Historical Association of Texas can not with impunity long shirk this duty, which the world demands and expects of them. If one questions the importance of such matters he has but to look into our histories and read the story of Saint-Denis. Even the children in our schools are taught the pretty tale of love and adventure and leave the subject without knowing that they have been studying an event which materially influenced the ultimate destiny of the State in which they live,—which, in a great measure, decided that Texas should be Spanish and not French, that the boundary between the United States and Mexico should be the Sabine and not the Rio Grande. Fictions of adventure and of heroic and manly deeds are good things for children, and even for mature men, to read and enjoy; but they should not be read in text-books of history. The story of Saint-Denis is but one of a large number of such fictions that have embedded themselves in our serious histories where one expects to find scholarly investigation and accurate statement. They can be weeded out only by bringing together and making accessible the books and documents from which we must derive our information of the Spanish period of our history.

The documentary sources relative to the subject of Saint-Denis seem to be especially abundant. I have already mentioned at some length Dumont's memoirs, Pénicaut's *Relation*, Le Page du Pratz's *Histoire de la Louisiane*, the *Historical Journal of the Establishment of the French in Louisiana*, and some others; these are contemporary French accounts; they are by no means all the French sources on this subject, but, so far as I know, they are the most important. The Spanish accounts relative to this period are also particularly abundant. The *Testimonio de un Parecer* has been mentioned. The sworn statement which Saint-Denis made on his arrival at San Juan as to the object of his journey now probably reposes in the archives of the Mexican Republic. The minutes of the *junta de guerra* of Dec. 2, 1716, held to discuss questions as to the defence of Texas which Saint-Denis' appearance had aroused, rests in the repository; this document covers several manuscript

pages and is styled by Bancroft "the best narrative extant of Texan annals from 1789."* The account of the return of Saint-Denis to Texas accompanied by the Spanish friars and soldiers, and of the actual occupation of the country by the Spanish, is contained in the voluminous official report of Don Ramon who commanded the troops on that occasion. The same story is told from the ecclesiastical point of view in the works of the padre Espinosa who was one of the friars in charge of founding the missions among the Texas Indians. The works of this friar have been published, but I doubt if there exists to-day in the entire State of Texas a single copy of any one of the three volumes which he wrote. ^{Furtive} ~~actual point of view in the works of the padre Espinosa who was~~ search among the church archives at Querétaro and Zacatecas may unearth reports that will throw much new light on this subject. Saint-Denis' *Declaracion*, the minutes of the *junta de guerra*, and Don Ramon's report have, I believe, never been published.

It is not my purpose here to follow the history of Saint-Denis beyond his return to Louisiana in 1719. This can be done successfully and in detail only when more of the sources are available than I have at hand. I may be pardoned, however, for calling attention to another conspicuous error which has become a part of at least two of our histories of Texas. At the time of the great Natchez uprising against the French in 1728, it seems that Saint-Denis was in command of a small garrison at Natchitoches. During the progress of the war the Indians sent a force to destroy this post and dispose of one of their most dreaded enemies. They attempted to gain entrance into the fort under pretence of restoring a captive woman, but their intentions were suspected and admission to the fort denied them. They then burned the captive before the eyes of the French, constructed some kind of fortification, and began a siege. I compare below in parallel columns the account of the fight that followed as given by Brown's History of Texas and the story of the same incident as told in Dumont's memoirs.

* Bancroft, *North Mexican States and Texas*, vol. I, p. 613. 1789 is evidently a misprint for 1689.

BROWN.

St. Denis hastily sent messengers to his friendly Indians, and with twenty men from the fort at once made a furious attack upon the Natchez. At the first onslaught all his men but eight were killed. For two hours he fought against desperate odds, hoping that reinforcements would arrive. "He was seen," says an historian of the time, "springing like a lion among the crowd of warriors, forcing them back. He looked like an angel of vengeance accomplishing his work of destruction, invincible himself in the terrible fray. He fell at last hit by three bullets in his head and two arrows in his breast." There were but two survivors. The Natchez ceased firing and retired.†

DUMONT.

They [the friendly Natchitoches who came to aid St. Denis] reached the fort, and were brought in by night, and the commandant [Saint-Denis] having armed them, sallied out at the head of his troops the next morning at daybreak, entered the Natchez intrenchment and fell upon them sword in hand. Many were killed; the rest awakened by the noise, fled, but were pursued with muskets, and after killing about sixty of the savages, the commandant returned to his fort in triumph, without having had a single man wounded, giving the survivors liberty to return to their village and tell what reception they got at Natchitoches.*

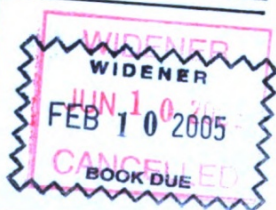
* *History of Louisiana, translated from the Historical Memoirs of M. Dumont*, in B. F. French's *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, vol. V, pp. 97, 98.

† John Henry Brown, *History of Texas*, vol. I, pp. 18, 19. Who was the "historian of the time" referred to by Brown? Certainly it was not one of the contemporary writers whose journals have been published in *French's Historical Collections of Louisiana*, or in Margry's *Découvertes et établissements*. Le Page du Pratz gives substantially the same version as Dumont. Bancroft, who was familiar with the Spanish sources, evidently knew nothing of the version given by Brown, or else regarded it as untrue. It is not found in Gayarré or Yoakum. Rev. Edmond J. P. Schmitt (*Who was Juchereau de Saint Denis?* the *Quarterly*, January, 1898, p. 206) calls attention to this error of Brown's, and mentions a letter that was written by Saint-Denis in 1735, some six years after the above described attack on Natchitoches.

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