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A 16th Century French Manuscript Bearing the Only Known Signature of Rene Laudonniere

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De A. Theuet, Liure VIII. 663
PARAOVSTI SATOVRIONA, ROY DE LA
Floride. Chapitre. 150.



A Floride est assés celebrée par les Historiés, qui ont descrit les singularités d'icelle, prenās mire sur la fleur, qu'elle porte en son frôt, qui, estant toujours verde & espanouye, à acquis à ceste contrée le nom de Floride. Laquelle fut descouuerte en l'année mil cinq cens & douze, par vn Espagnol, nommé Iean Ponce de Leon, lequel, recherchant vne fontaine de Iouence, descouurit la terre ferme de Floride, qui est vne pointe de terre, à la semblance de l'Italie, entrant en mer plus de cent lieues: &

Nom & descouuerte de la Floride, & en quelle estimation elle est.

A 16th CENTURY FRENCH MANUSCRIPT BEARING THE ONLY KNOWN SIGNATURE OF RENE LAUDONNIERE

Translated and annotated by CHARLES E. BENNETT

The Fort Caroline National Memorial at Jacksonville, Florida, has been for several years assembling for ultimate display at its museum various objects illustrative of the methods of navigation used by the explorers and settlers of the 16th century. I have been assisting in this search, and as a by product of it we recently discovered and purchased by private donations the only known signature of Rene Laudonniere, the French Governor of Fort Caroline. Under this man's leadership the permanent settlement of what is now the United States was begun. A map dealer in England (Maggs Brothers) told us about the manuscript and sold it to us.

Fort Caroline inspired the later English settlements to the north, and required the Spanish to protect by conquest and settlement at St. Augustine Spain's claim to the area. Laudonniere went back to France after the French defeat in 1565 and lived in retirement on his estates. France granted him a pension of 200 livres tournois a year as a retired naval captain in the Western Fleet.

The manuscript which has just come to light and which is now on display at the museum is a signed acknowledgment for the sum of 50 livres tournois, being Laudonniere's salary for the first quarter of the year 1573. It is a vellum document, entirely in handwriting and is endorsed on its back side. Curiously, this installment of pension for the first quarter of 1573 was not paid until November! There is also acknowledged in this manuscript the prior payment of 8 livres tournois on account.

One livre tournois means one pound of silver minted at Tours, France. I have translated the document as follows:

"8. Monsieur Laudonniere, regular Captain of the Western Fleet, declares to have received in cash from Monsieur Guillaume Le Beau, Treasurer of France, the sum of fifty livres tournois.

"Our Treasurer has advanced from the allowance of the Fleet Captain for the months January . . . in the present year

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one thousand five hundred and seventy-three, at the rate of two hundred livres tournois per year, the sum of 8 livres tournois which we have withheld and duly paid from the money due, quit and quittance, signed, subscribed, etc. In witness whereof we have signed with our own hand . . . day of November one thousand five hundred and seventy-three.

R. Laudonniere”

[endorsement] “By way of receipt for the sum of fifty livres tournois out of my budget, The Captain of the Western Fleet, for the quarter January, February, and March 1573.

to Capt. Laudonniere
city
January 1573”

AND
RECEIVED

Handwritten text, likely a receipt or ledger entry, written in cursive script. The text is oriented vertically on the page. It includes several lines of text, some of which are partially obscured by a large dark stain at the top of the page. The text appears to be a record of a transaction or receipt, possibly related to the 'AND RECEIVED' header.

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