

1966

## A Footnote on Rene Laudionniere

Charles E. Bennett

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Bennett, Charles E. (1966) "A Footnote on Rene Laudionniere," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 45 : No. 3 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol45/iss3/7>

## A FOOTNOTE ON RENE LAUDONNIERE

by CHARLES E. BENNETT

THE FORT CAROLINE NATIONAL MEMORIAL, a facility of the National park Service near Jacksonville, includes the reconstructed sixteenth century fort and an interpretive museum, the latter containing priceless American and European artifacts. Fort Caroline, established by the French in 1564 under the leadership of Rene Laudonniere, was then the only European settlement in the territory which is now the United States. It was conquered in 1565 by Spanish forces under Pedro Menendez d'Aviles, who founded Saint Augustine, the country's oldest city.<sup>1</sup>

For the past century it has been assumed that the only existing signature of Laudonniere was a receipt signed by him in 1573, now on display at the Fort Caroline Museum. Scholars and researchers believed that a 1572 contract, under which Laudonniere agreed to undertake another American voyage, had been destroyed by fire. The Marquis de Goulaine, in the *Bulletin de La Section de Geographie, Comite des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques*, described his search and concluded that only the 1573 signature had survived.<sup>2</sup>

Salome Mandel of Paris, writer and student of history, recently discovered the original 1572 contract in the Charente-Maritime Archives, La Rochelle, France. The Fort Caroline National Memorial Museum has received a copy of the 1572 signature, and an examination by scholars shows that the Laudonniere signature on the document is authentic.

Miss Mandel also fixed definitely the date of Laudonniere's death. Biographies of Laudonniere have either omitted any date or have suggested 1582. Miss Mandel visited the place where he was last known to reside and there in the archives of the city

1. Charles E. Bennett, *Laudonniere and Fort Caroline* (Gainesville, 1964).
2. Marquis de Goulaine, *Bulletin de La Section de Geographie, Comite des Historiques et Scientifiques*, LXIII (Paris, 1953), 67.

of Saint-Germain-en-Laye found the following sixteenth century death certificate:

Le 24 juillet 1574, mourut M. le Capitaine  
Laudonniere et fut inhumé le lendemain.<sup>3</sup>

The Marquis de Goulaine's article discusses Laudonniere's ancestry and describes the ancient seat of the Goulaine family. The article suggests that Laudonniere may have been the son of Jean de Goulaine VI and his wife, whose name before marriage was Helene du Chaffault. If this is correct, then Jean de Goulaine VII, an ardent Protestant, was Rene Laudonniere's brother. It is not known why Laudonniere used the name of the family holdings as his last name instead of Goulaine, although this was not an unusual practice in those days.

The Goulaine family's chateau was destroyed in 1794. As Samuel de Goulaine described it in 1655, it contained the usual plantation appurtenances - pond, forests, vineyards, gardens, dove cotes, farmlands, and farm manufacturies. Gravestones from its chapel are preserved today in the archaeological museum at Nantes, France; and two ancient stone pillars still mark the spot where the chateau stood.

Actually Laudonniere's connection with the Goulaine family has not been firmly proved and rests on circumstantial evidence, even though the link is highly probable. The two signatures are simply "R Laudonniere"; although, as the Marquis de Goulaine points out, others claim to have seen supposedly-lost Laudonniere signatures with the Goulaine name included.

If there is a scarcity of detail about Laudonniere's background, there is a larger, more important puzzle as to the purpose, destination, and collapse of the planned French expedition which was to sail from La Rochelle in 1573. Conceivably, Laudonniere's contract for a commercial voyage at about the same time and from the same port was a cover for his participation in the large expeditionary force, the story of which is reported in Charles de la Ronciere, *Histoire de La Marine Francaise*.<sup>4</sup>

3. Death notice, No. 118s de Annee 1574, Registre des Acts de Deces, Department de Seine-et-Oise, Ville de Saint-Germain-en-Laye, official transcript in the possession of the author.

4. Charles de la Ronciere, *Histoire de La Marine Francaise*, IV (Paris, 1910), 122.

