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RELATION
DE LA
NOUVELLE
FRANCE, DE SES
TERRES, NATVREL DV
Pais, & de ses Habitans,

ITĒM,

Du voyage des Peres Iesuites auldies
contrées, & de ce qu'ils y ont faict
iusques à leur prinse par
les Anglois.

FAICTE

Par le P. PIERRE BIARD, Grenoblois
de la Compagnie de IESVS.

Domus prof Paris Soc Jesu



A LYON,
Chez LOVYS MUGVET, en
ruë Merciere.

M. DCXVI.

Auec Priuilege du Roy.



Father Pierre Biard wrote letters to his superiors in Paris, giving an account of his work in New France. This is the title page from a 1614 edition of the Jesuit Relations. *Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France*

Land of Lies: The Role of Deception at Saint Sauveur

By Tim Garrity

Introduction

French Jesuits founded their mission of Saint Sauveur on the coast of Maine in 1613, only to see it destroyed within a few weeks by a company of English raiders led by Captain Samuel Argall from the Jamestown Settlement in Virginia. The destruction of Saint Sauveur put a temporary end to French designs for southern Acadia.

There are earlier accounts of European adventures by that coast, but few are so detailed as the records of Saint Sauveur. The correspondence of an eyewitness, Father Pierre Biard, can be compared to that of contemporaries like Marc Lescarbot and others, so that stories of Saint Sauveur are based on extensive records of early seventeenth-century events in the region.

Biard tells of struggles for power and place among factions of French, English, and Indians. His narrative shifts dramatically at several points when one party attempts to deceive another. His story includes at least four moments when a deception was deployed and caused a change in the direction of events.

At the first juncture, one party beguiles another into changing its travel plans. At the second, one party deceives another by pretending an enemy is a friend. At the third, one party hides evidence of another's innocence. At a fourth, conflicting claims of innocence and blame make it clear that someone is lying but we

cannot know whom. The reader is often uncertain if anyone is telling the truth. An atmosphere of menace and lawlessness pervades the text.

Saint Sauveur was planted in a borderland, one of the places Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett described as "ambiguous and often-unstable realms."¹ French merchants, primarily Huguenots, were based at Port Royal in present-day Nova Scotia. There, they hoped to establish a commercial foothold for New France. To stave off bankruptcy, the merchants had undertaken business commitments that kept them under a common yoke with French Jesuit missionaries. The parties held each other in mutual contempt, their ancient religious quarrels renewed daily as in a bad marriage. They shared a mutual enemy, Englishmen from Virginia's Jamestown settlement, who were jealous of both French factions and determined to dislodge any French foothold in North America.

Among the Indians, the Souriquois, whose territory lay east of the St. Croix, were led by the eminent sakom, Membertou. The Etchemins, who dwelled to the western side of the borderland, between the Kennebec and the St. Croix, were led by Bashabes, whose home was on the banks of the Penobscot River near modern-day Bangor. Another Etchemin band, led by the sakom Asticou, maintained a base on Mount Desert Island. Historian Daniel Thorp contends that Asticou may have been a rival to Bashabes' leadership and their power struggle had a material effect on the events that transpired at St. Sauveur. Rivalries among Souriquois and Etchemins and their internal factions were as consequential as competition among groups of French and English.



This Carte de Nouvelle France by Henri Chatelain, published in 1719, shows Souriquois in Nova Scotia and Etchemins in present-day Maine. Courtesy of the Osher Map Library, University of Southern Maine

Into this unstable realm, deception added a sense of peril. In the Acadian borderland, a lie could kill as effectively as hunger, exposure, disease, or violence. Deception added uncertainty to tense encounters and destabilized the positions of rival factions. The philosopher Sissela Bok might classify the moral implications of deception at Saint Sauveur as "lies in a crisis," where "survival alone counts; moral considerations are nearly obliterated."² At Saint Sauveur, power and vulnerability were in tenuous balance. The deployment of a lie could tip the scales in favor of the liar and mean disaster for the duped.

The First Deception: Sick unto Death

In 1603, King Henri IV granted a commission to Pierre Dugua, the Sieur de Monts, that gave him a trading monopoly and authority over "the coasts, lands and confines of Acadia, Canada and other places in New France."³ In 1606, de Monts granted to Jean de Biencourt de Poutrincourt the region around Port Royal, in present-day Nova Scotia, with the understanding that he would colonize it and make it a center for fishing and fur trading. The Port Royal colony soon fell into financial distress and, out of necessity, Poutrincourt accepted an infusion of cash from the Marquise de Guercheville, a woman of wealth and prominence in the royal court. De Guercheville's largesse came with the condition that Jesuit clergy, including Father Pierre Biard and Father Énemond Massé, go to Port Royal to convert Indians to the Catholic faith.⁴ From the start, bitter arguments divided

the Jesuits and Poutrincourt's primarily Protestant company, and in consequence, De Guercheville funded yet another expedition to remove the Jesuits from Port Royal and found a mission of Saint Sauveur in southern Acadia in present-day Maine. The Jesuits left Port Royal aboard the *Jonas* and two smaller vessels in the summer of 1613.

After days of feeling their way along the coast through heavy fog, the travelers emerged from the murk to find themselves on the eastern side of Mount Desert Island, a place Harald Prins and Bunny McBride have called "Asticou's Island Domain."⁵ They had originally intended to go farther on to Kadesquit, where Bashabes ruled, a place on the Penobscot River that would have afforded them access to the vast forest and waterways of present-day Maine.⁶ At Mount Desert Island, the travelers asked Indians they encountered to point the way towards their destination. The Indians responded, "Why don't you stay here with us, who have as good and beautiful a place as Kadesquit?" Also, they said, "It is necessary that you come, since Asticou, our Sagamore, is sick unto death; and if you do not come he will die without baptism, and will not go to heaven. You will be the cause of it, for he himself wishes very much to be baptized."⁷

This argument, which the Indians had learned from and now turned back on the French, was sufficient to persuade Biard to visit Asticou. An urgent call for the baptism of their sakom was a powerful lure for the Etchemin to cast before the Biard's company. The esteemed Membertou had been baptized in 1610 along with twenty members of his family, who took for baptismal names those of members of the French court. After Membertou's example, many Indians demanded baptism for themselves and their families. Had they been refused, Marc Lescarbot reported, "They would have felt themselves scorned."⁸

Upon arriving at the sakom's abode, Biard discovered that Asticou was not in danger of dying but merely had a cold. Nevertheless, Biard's visit to Asticou's encampment also persuaded him that Mount Desert Island had many favorable qualities and would indeed be a good location for his mission. The French made the fateful decision to set up Saint Sauveur nearby. Biard described Saint Sauveur as "a beautiful hill, rising gently from the sea, its sides bathed by two springs; the land is cleared for twenty or twenty-five acres, and in some places is covered with grass almost as high as a man." Located near the mouth of the Pentegoet (today's Penobscot River), the site had a southern exposure and a fine, deep harbor.⁹

Perhaps the beauty of the place caused the missionaries to let down their guard. The military commander of the expedition, René Le Coq de La Saussaye, was unwary of a potential English attack. He decided that the company of forty-eight Frenchmen should pour their energies into planting crops rather than constructing a fort, a judgment that they would come to regret.

As the French were gardening at Saint Sauveur, a company of Englishmen was fishing in the Gulf of Maine aboard the *Treasurer*, a ship captained by Samuel Argall from Virginia's Jamestown settlement. Though their primary mission was to obtain food for the colony, they also had orders to drive from the coast any Frenchmen they found. Somewhere near Penobscot Bay, an Indian informed Argall that the French had set up their mission at nearby Mount Desert Island.

The Second Deception: Friend or Foe?

The second deception took one of two forms. The first possibility is that Argall pretended to be a friend of the French and tricked an Indian who was trying to be helpful into giving him directions to Saint Sauveur. The second possibility

is that an Indian feigned to think that French and English were friends, but deliberately set the English against the French to drive the French out.

Biard, and most historians who have relied on his account, suggested that the Indians were ignorant of the enmity between French and English. Biard says that Indians who encountered the English party supposed, "they were French people looking for us."¹⁰ In Francis Parkman's telling, Argall played along and assured the Indians that the French "were his friends, and that he longed to see them."¹¹

Historian Daniel Thorp suggests otherwise. He presents "an alternative scenario that few historians have considered: that the Indian informant knew exactly what he was doing when he sent the English to Saint Sauveur and that he did so in the hope that Argall would expel the French and restore the area to Indian control."¹² Thorp points to the considerable power and agency wielded by Indians in the early years of contact, before "Europeans and their germs established themselves in greater numbers."¹³

The balance of power among native factions was disturbed by the arrival of the French in the land of the Souriquois at Port Royal, the growing alignment of English and Etchemins west of the St. John River, and the planting of Saint Sauveur near Mount Desert Island.¹⁴ In any case, the encounter between Argall and Indians who guided him to the French outpost proved fatal to the mission.

Equipped with the knowledge of its location and lack of defenses, Argall's company pounced on Saint Sauveur. "They

prepared their weapons," Biard wrote, "and under full sail, and with decks cleared for action, entered directly into our harbor."¹⁵

The heavily armed *Treasurer* attacked the French ashore and aboard the Jonas, which was unprepared for battle, anchored and immobile, with sails arrayed as sun canopies, and crew scattered among the gardens and forest. The lay brother Gilbert du Thet was mortally wounded while attempting to fire back at the English attackers, and thus became the first Jesuit martyr in the New World. Two other Frenchmen went into the water and were shot or drowned, while others fled into the forest.¹⁶

The Third Deception: Sleight of Hand

At this point, a third deception occurs, one that hinges on deliberate physical sleight of hand. As the English rummaged through French supplies and belongings, Argall opened Saussaye's trunk and surreptitiously removed his commissions, the documents signed by the King of France that authorized the French presence at Saint Sauveur. Biard wrote, "the shrewd and cunning Englishman seized his trunks, skillfully picked the locks, and, having found therein our commissions and royal patents, took possession of them then, putting everything back in its place, each article just as he had found it, nicely fastened the trunks again."¹⁷

When Saussaye came down from his hiding place in the woods and placed himself at Argall's mercy, the English commander demanded to see the commissions, knowing all the time

that the documents were in his pocket. When Saussaye was unable to produce them, Argall feigned outrage, declaring, "You are Outlaws and Pirates, every one of you, and merit death."¹⁸ Then, Biard tells us, Argall "set his soldiers to plundering."¹⁹

Fifteen Frenchmen escaped Saint Sauveur in one small boat and Argall permitted fifteen others to leave in another. Both boats encountered French fishing vessels off the coast of Nova Scotia and aboard them the refugees made their way back to France.²⁰ Argall took fifteen others to Virginia, where they faced the wrath of Jamestown's Governor Dale, who, Biard wrote, "Talked about nothing but ropes and gallows, and of having every one of us hanged."²¹

Just when the situation looked most dire, Argall came to the defense of the French, saving them from execution by acknowledging at last to Governor Dale that he had stolen the commissions from Saussaye's trunk. Presented with evidence that the French presence was in fact authorized by their sovereign, Dale spared their lives. He decreed, however, that the Jesuits should return to New France in the company of Argall, who would complete the destruction of Saint Sauveur, and move on to the French settlements at St. Croix and Port Royal and wipe them out too.²²

The Fourth Deception: Conflicting Testimony

Here we come to the fourth deception — and another band of Frenchmen struggling to establish a base at Port Royal. These were the traders, antagonists of their Jesuit countrymen, and ignorant of Argall's approach and his mission of destruction. Argall needed a guide to direct him to the French settlements and ordered Biard to provide this service. Biard insists that he refused Argall's demand, testifying that he withstood such threats and that it was a captured Indian who the English forced into serving as a guide.²³



Sissela Bok is an ethicist who has written extensively on the topic of lying. She wrote, "Deceit and violence — these are the two forms of deliberate assault on human beings." *Courtesy Harvard University*

From Poutrincourt, the leader of the destroyed Port Royal settlement, we have a very different account. Poutrincourt accused Biard of serving as Argall's guide so he could exact revenge upon his French rivals.²⁴ After Argall's attack, Poutrincourt returned from France to Port Royal to find, "our building burned, the Royal arms and my own broken down, [and] all our cattle carried off."²⁵ We are left to decide if Biard was lying or if Poutrincourt accused him falsely. We cannot know which is true.

Land of Lies

The French mission at Saint Sauveur was planted in a land of lies and swiftly came to an end. I cannot prove that deception occurred at a greater rate at Saint Sauveur than at any other time or place. It is very difficult to calculate comparative rates of lying, Sissela Bok tells us, "given the proportion of lies

that are never uncovered, the shady regions of half-truths, self-deception, and hypocrisy, and the motives for those most embroiled in lies to undercut all efforts to probe their attitudes."²⁶

Certainly in our own time there is a struggle, as Salman Rushdie says, between "things that are so," and, "things that are not so." Our borderland is the internet, a "parallel universe," according to Rushdie, "in which important information and total garbage coexist, side by side, with, apparently, the same levels of authority, making it harder than ever for people to tell them apart."²⁷

A culture where deception is rampant poses a threat to the well-being of humans in any society. "Deceit and violence," writes Bok, "are the two forms of deliberate assault on human beings."²⁸ Four centuries ago, deception destabilized relationships and added to mortality at Saint Sauveur. The Acadian borderland was a place, in the early years of contact, when factions of French, English, and Indians deployed deception as a weapon in their fight for survival.



Marc Bloch (1886–1944) Historian and organizer of French Resistance. *Courtesy of Centre d'histoire de la résistance et de la déportation, (in Lyon, France)*

Tim Garrity served as executive director of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society from 2010 to 2019. Presently, he is the organization's historian and editor of Chebacco.

Acknowledgments:

Dedicated to Marc Bloch, the eminent French historian who endured defeat in 1940 as an army officer and who, after the fall of France, was fired from his teaching job because he was a Jew. Bloch joined the resistance in Lyon, where he coordinated military intelligence operations and edited an underground newspaper. He was captured and murdered by the Nazis a few days after D-Day, "un martyr de la résistance." A comrade wrote that Marc Bloch "died without for a single moment doubting that the dawn would break."²⁹ In accord with his wishes, his gravestone is inscribed, "Dilexi veritatem," "I have loved the truth."

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2. Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 111.
3. George MacBeath, "Dugua de Monts (Du Gua, de Mons), Pierre," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 1, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, accessed March 13, 2019, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/du_gua_de_monts_pierre_1E.html.
4. In collaboration with Huia Ryder, "Biencourt de Pourtincourt et de Saint-Just, Jean de," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 1 (Toronto, U of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), accessed March 13, 2019, <http://www.biographi.ca/>.
5. Harald Prins and Bunnie McBride, *Asticou's Island Domain*, vol. 1 (Bar Harbor: Acadia National Park, 2007), 99.
6. Saint Sauveur was planted on or near Mount Desert Island but its precise location cannot be known. See Tim Garrity, "Real and Imagined France in Acadia National Park," *Chebacco* 18 (2017): 100–121.
7. Pierre Biard, "Relation of New France, of Its Lands, Nature of the Country, and of Its Inhabitants," 1616, in Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* 73 (Burrows Brothers: Cleveland, 1896–1901), 3: 269, hereafter JR.

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15. *JR*, vol. 2: 253–255.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *JR*, vol. 4: 9.
18. *JR*, vol. 4: 11.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *JR*, vol. 4: 21–23.
21. *JR*, vol. 4: 33.
22. *JR*, vol. 4: 35.
23. *JR*, vol. 2: 267.
24. Lescarbot, 66–67.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Bok, *Lying*, xxvii.
27. Salman Rushdie, "Truth, Lies, and Literature," *New Yorker*, May 31, 2018. Accessed October 21, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/truth-lies-and-literature?reload=true>
28. Bok, 54.
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