

THE WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL MAGAZINE

VOL. 37

FALL-WINTER, 1954-5

Nos. 3 AND 4

THE FRENCH ADVANCE INTO THE OHIO COUNTRY*

DONALD H. KENT

IN Western Pennsylvania there is little need to explain why the coming of the French to the Ohio is important in history, for its significance is self-evident in the country which was immediately affected. The conflict between the French and the British over the Ohio valley marked the entrance of western Pennsylvania into the full light of history, as a stage where events took place affecting the whole civilized world. This valley was the seedbed where a great war germinated, the war which was known in Europe as the Seven Years' War, and in America as the French and Indian War. East of the mountains, it might be necessary to emphasize that the French thrust for the Ohio marked a turning point in the history of Pennsylvania as a whole, since it brought an end to the long period of peaceful development, but here that point need only be mentioned. Therefore, it may be interesting to approach the subject of the French advance to the Ohio from another angle—the significance of the new French source materials, the Contrecoeur Papers. What do they contribute to our knowledge about the French advance into the Ohio country?

The French expeditions of 1753 and 1754 are well-known elements of early western Pennsylvania history. There is nothing new about the fact that these expeditions took place, and the new sources can add nothing whatever to the historical certainties that a French army came in 1753 to build Fort Presque Isle at the present site of

*An address given at a meeting of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania on December 15, 1954. Mr. Kent is associate state historian, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg.—Ed.

Erie, and Fort Le Boeuf at what is now Waterford; and that the French advanced down to the Ohio in 1754 and built Fort Duquesne at the Forks where Pittsburgh's Point Park is now located. The general outlines of the story of the coming of the French have never been difficult to determine. Many years ago, the great historian Francis Parkman was able to present this story in general terms about as well as it can be done today—or even better, since Parkman was a great literary craftsman as well as historian.

On the very first page of *Montcalm and Wolfe*, his work dealing with the French and Indian War, Parkman showed that he fully appreciated the importance of the French advance to the Ohio, for he said, "The strife that armed all the civilized world began here." In this striking and oft-quoted sentence he was obviously referring to events in the Ohio country. He described the opening shots of this strife as "a volley from the hunting-pieces of a few backwoodsmen, commanded by a Virginian youth, George Washington."¹ And Washington's expedition was the first armed effort of the British to oppose the French occupation of the Ohio.

With such an opening statement, it might logically be expected that the French expeditions to the Ohio in 1753 and 1754 would loom up as major episodes in Parkman's narrative, for it was these expeditions which led up to Washington's encounter with the French. But what do we actually find in the pages of *Montcalm and Wolfe*? There are about seven pages covering the expedition of 1753, six pages on Washington's mission to Fort Le Boeuf late in that year, and about nineteen pages on the expedition down the Allegheny in 1754—most of these concerned primarily with Washington's Fort Necessity campaign. It may be somewhat inaccurate to measure emphasis by counting pages, but at least in terms of the space devoted to them the two French expeditions seem to be minor episodes, side-issues, rather than major links in the chain of events which led to the French and Indian War.

If Parkman passed over the two Ohio expeditions briefly, it was not that he intended to minimize their importance. The New England school of historians has often been accused of playing down events in American history which occurred outside of New England, but that

1 Francis Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe*, 1:1.

charge cannot be fairly made here. Parkman actually did not have the sources from which to write a fuller account. Roughly speaking, all that he had for the French campaigns were the letters from the French Governors of Canada to the government in Paris, reporting in very general terms on the progress of the Ohio expeditions.² Historians cannot write detailed history from sources which are general; they cannot make bricks without straw—that is, without a mass of details and particulars from which to compare and select. Since Parkman's sources were general, he had to limit himself to generalities when he wrote of these two expeditions.

When fuller sources were available, he used them extensively, as in his narrative of Céloron's expedition to the Ohio in 1749. This was only a preliminary, passing expedition to strengthen the French claims, but Parkman devoted to it more than twice the space that he gave to the expedition of 1753; and the reason is a very simple one: he had the source material for a fuller story. He had both Céloron's journal and the journal of his chaplain, Father Bonnecamps, and from them he derived an abundance of data for his chapter on Céloron's expedition.

Today, the historian of the beginnings of western Pennsylvania is much better supplied with sources than Parkman was. A wealth of new source material has come to light since Parkman's time, for both the French and British side of the conflict of the Ohio. The outstanding new British sources may be represented by a few examples which quickly come to mind: *The George Mercer Papers Relating to the Ohio Company of Virginia*, edited by Mrs. Lois Mulkearn, and published by the University of Pittsburgh Press this year; *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, eleven huge volumes published by the State of New York since 1921; and, of course, *The Papers of Henry Bouquet*, which the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission has been publishing.

Among the new French sources, perhaps the most important group is the Contrecoeur Papers, which were brought into the open and made generally available only two years ago, through an international coop-

² Like most general statements, this must be qualified: Parkman also had Pouchot's *Memoire* (published in 1781) and the *Memoire* for Pean (1763).

erative project of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the Archives of the Seminary of Quebec, where these Papers were preserved.

This Contrecoeur project was more or less of an accident. In 1948 I went to Ottawa to look for Bouquet letters in the Public Archives of Canada, more material for *The Papers of Henry Bouquet*. As so often happens, in a search for something else, a reference to this French source material turned up in a list of the collections of the Archives of the Seminary of Quebec at Laval University. This typewritten list which had been made several years before by the noted French Canadian scholar, Marius Barbeau, implied the existence of an amazing run of correspondence, actual letters and papers of French commanders in the Ohio country. As soon as my task in Ottawa could be finished, I hastened to Quebec to see this material.

It more than came up to expectations. Even at first glance through the folders, the Contrecoeur Papers obviously were a mine of new information about the French side of the French and Indian War in western Pennsylvania. Material of interest for the Ohio campaigns runs from 1752 when Captain Contrecoeur became commander of Fort Niagara, the key point for the movement of men and supplies to the Ohio. It continues through 1754 and 1755 when Contrecoeur built and commanded Fort Duquesne. It includes correspondence of all the commanders and chief officers during that period, with many letters of instruction from the French Governors and other officials. There are papers dealing with the building of the French forts, even accounts of expenditures in building Fort Duquesne. Letters tell about their troubles over discipline and desertion and disease, and about their difficulties in moving men and supplies over the long five-hundred-mile journey from Montreal. Where before the course of events could be viewed only in a general way, the Contrecoeur Papers brought the events into sharp focus, with names and dates and incidents as reported by men in the field.

When it came to getting this material for actual use, however, difficulties appeared. The authorities at Laval University were friendly and hospitable, and permitted lists and notes to be made. But they hoped some day to publish the material themselves, and were reluctant to permit extensive copying of these sources. This was not unknown

material, merely difficult to get at, and time-consuming to read. A few American researchers had come to Quebec before, to examine the collection and take notes. Some significant items must have reached Douglas Southall Freeman, for his biography of *George Washington* has a few references to these Papers. At Quebec they also mentioned a Pittsburgh lady who had been there. Mrs. Lois Mulkearn, of the Darlington Memorial Library of the University of Pittsburgh, had obtained photostatic copies of a number of important documents for the University.

That was a noteworthy and valuable beginning, but it seemed imperative to do more, to microfilm the entire collections so that it could be translated, studied, digested, and assimilated in Pennsylvania. When I returned to Harrisburg with report, list, and notes to bear witness to the importance of these sources, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission quickly agreed that steps should be taken to make the Contrecoeur Papers available in Pennsylvania. With the Commission's full authorization, Dr. S. K. Stevens, the State Historian, entered into a long period of negotiations with the officials of Laval University. After almost a year, an acceptable formula was reached; Dr. Stevens went to Quebec and signed a cooperative agreement with Father Arthur Maheux, Archivist of the Seminary, on March 8, 1949.

This agreement permitted the Commission to microfilm the Contrecoeur Papers immediately, but the film was to be restricted—it could be used only for the research work of the Commission. In return, the Commission was to help and subsidize the Archives of the Seminary in editing and publishing a selection of the more important Papers—in French, of course. This was an ideal solution, for French scholars in Quebec could do a much better job of transcribing the French material, much of which has atrocious spelling and handwriting.

When the finished book was edited by Fernand Grenier and published in Quebec in November 1952, under the auspices of the Commission,³ the rich treasure of the Contrecoeur Papers became available to scholars who could read French.

But that, of course, was only a beginning. The next thing was to go to work on this material, and extract from it the facts which would

3 Fernand Grenier, ed., *Papiers Contrecoeur at autres documents concernant le conflit anglo-français sur l'Ohio de 1745 a 1756* (Quebec, Les Presses Universitaires Laval, 1952).

be of interest to historically-minded people in Pennsylvania. Now it would be possible to put more flesh on the bare bones of the general outline of events which were already well known. Now it would be possible to tell about these events from the viewpoint of the Frenchmen who participated in them. That was the objective of *The French Invasion of Western Pennsylvania, 1753*,⁴ which covered only the first year.

That fuller story of the French advance into the Ohio country, which is revealed in the Contrecoeur Papers, cannot be given here, but some of the interesting highlights can be presented.

In the middle years of the 18th century, French empire-builders began to feel that their colonies of Canada and Louisiana must be linked together by the Ohio River, if they were to be secure and self-sustaining. At the same time, the British colonies, especially Pennsylvania and Virginia, were growing conscious of the Ohio country as a natural area for their expansion by trade and settlement. Both the British and the French sent traders and agents to the Ohio, to compete for the furs and the good will of its Indian inhabitants. But the French soon realized that such peaceful measures would not be enough to win them control of the Belle Rivière, as they called the Allegheny and Ohio rivers together. French Canada could not send out enough traders nor supply enough trade goods at low enough prices, to counterbalance the activities of the British traders. To establish really effective control of the Ohio, and to prevent the British from becoming its masters, the French had to send out a military expedition to occupy the territory, by building and garrisoning forts at points which would control the valley.

Such an expedition was planned by the Marquis Duquesne, who became Governor of New France in 1752. He prepared to send out an army during the spring and summer of 1753, and to build three or four forts. One of these forts was to be built at Logstown, the Indian village and trading center, some eighteen miles down the Ohio from the present site of Pittsburgh; originally the French had no idea of fortifying The Point.

French Canada had great difficulty in raising and equipping an army of more than two thousand men for this Ohio expedition. The

⁴ Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1954.

Intendant Bigot, who was the business head of the Canadian government, had a hard time scraping enough provisions together for this campaign at a time when crops had been short in Canada. In the end, Bigot made up the difference by buying flour and corn from New England; supplies purchased from the northern British colonies made it possible for the French to carry out this threat to the interests of the middle British colonies. No wonder that the French talked as they did about the internal corruption and divisions of the British colonies, and felt certain of success in spite of their apparent disadvantage!

It must be remembered that the French were making a great gamble against very heavy odds, in making this move into the Ohio. France was then indisputably the wealthiest and most powerful nation in Europe, but Canada was a weak and poor colony. Her population was about 55,000, while Pennsylvania had about 200,000—and Pennnavy would make it difficult for France to send any help to her colony. Governor Duquesne and his advisers realized that speed was essential. If the French army could move quickly and build forts before the British could, then the Ohio provoked the British and war came, then the British colony of Pennsylvania was only one of thirteen British colonies. If the French expedition could gather forces to oppose them, then the British would be faced with an accomplished fact. If there were no British forces on the Ohio, then there would be no openly hostile action—and war might be avoided. It all depended on how rapidly the French could move to occupy the Ohio. Governor Duquesne drew up a careful schedule of what was to be done in the year 1753; it called for the occupation of the Ohio valley in that one year.

The first step in Governor Duquesne's plans to seize the Ohio was to have Captain Contrecoeur get ready at Fort Niagara for the passage of the army, by improving the road around Niagara Falls, and by building storehouses for the supplies and provisions. The second step was to send out an advance party to prepare the way for the main army by establishing a "beachhead" on the shore of Lake Erie. This advance party set out from Montreal on the first of February, 1753, under the command of a young officer, Boishébert, who was only twenty-four years old. About the middle of April, this detachment landed at what is now Barcelona Harbor, near Westfield, New York. In the meantime, the Governor learned from a trader about the harbor of Presque Isle and the

portage from there to Le Boeuf Creek, and decided that this route would be better than the Chautauqua route which Céloron had followed in 1749. As a result, the advance party packed up and moved thirty miles farther, landing at Presque Isle about the third of May. Here they began to build Fort Presque Isle, the first establishment on the site of Erie, and the first fort in western Pennsylvania.

Early in June, the elderly commander, Captain Pierre Paul Marin, arrived with a larger force to complete the fort, and to prepare for the advance southward. Marin was a tough and cranky old veteran of many an assignment to wilderness posts in Acadia and on Lake Michigan. Governor Duquesne once accused him of having been "born with a hatchet in your hand and with a flour sack for a diaper,"⁵ a clever way of expressing his experience in dealing with the Indians both in warfare and in trading. The old commander proceeded with great care and precaution. He transformed the Old Indian path from Presque Isle to Le Boeuf Creek into a military road, with bridges across the streams and a storehouse at a halfway point. Over this road moved the men and supplies and equipment to the point on Le Boeuf Creek which was the head of canoe navigation for that part of the French Creek-Allegheny River-Ohio River system. At this point he began to build Fort Le Boeuf on July 12, 1753, at what is now the village of Waterford. The day before, he wrote, "I am going tomorrow to the end of the portage to have ovens and a forge built there, and to erect the stockade."⁶ The order of mention is significant—first, cooking facilities; second, the smithy for shoeing horses and repairing tools; and, finally, measures for defence. As early as that, food came first in western Pennsylvania. This shows how smoothly the expedition was proceeding, without any fear of opposition from the British or from the Indians.

Fort Le Boeuf was built as the base for the French advance down the Allegheny to the Ohio and to Logstown—where Marin planned to build the third fort, which was to be named Fort Duquesne in honor of the Governor.

If Marin had been able to continue his advance southward in 1753,

⁵ Duquesne to Marin, July 22, 1753, Archives du Séminaire de Québec, 5:62:8.

⁶ Marin to Contrecoeur, July 11, 1753, Archives du Séminaire de Québec. V-V, 1:64.

and to carry out all that the Governor had planned for that year, it seems likely that Fort Duquesne would have been built at Logstown in the vicinity of present-day Ambridge, for his orders instructed him to build it there. But that year the French could advance no farther than Fort Le Boeuf. A dry spell made the stream too shallow to float their canoes, and disease broke out among the exhausted troops. The attitude of the Indians also gave some alarm to the French. The Half-King, leader of the Iroquois in the area about Logstown, came to Presque Isle early in September, and warned the French not to invade his country. The combined factors of dry weather, disease, and the threat of Indian hostility halted the campaign for that year. Instead of the Ohio country, the French had occupied only its northern gateway. In the fall, most of the men were sent back to Canada to recover their health and strength. Marin, himself, frustrated and ailing, died at Fort Le Boeuf on October 29, and the Governor wrote that the old officer had preferred to die on the field of battle rather than return to Montreal for medical care. Probably he also feared disgrace. The French had not encountered a British army, but they had suffered a severe check, a defeat, in not being able to occupy the Ohio valley in 1753. Nature itself had defeated the French, by the great distances to be covered, by the natural obstacles to be overcome, and by the diseases which broke out among the weary soldiers. But of this the British knew nothing. They did not know what the French had planned to do, and so they did not know that they had fallen short of their goal. This serious delay to the French plans gave the British time to act, to send a protest against the French occupation of the Ohio, and to send out at least a token force, so that the French could no longer claim that they were entering territory where there was no official British establishment. The delay also gave the French time to reconsider the location for their third fort.

Governor Duquesne was not on the ground, he could not see for himself the advantages of the Forks of the Ohio as the site for a fort, as could the young Virginian who passed that way in November on a mission which was the first British effort to oppose the French advance. George Washington was carrying a notice of trespass from Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia to the French commander at Fort Le Boeuf, a letter ordering the French to leave British territory. On the way, Washington had his eyes open for useful information, and he noted of the

future site of Pittsburgh that it was "extremely well situated for a Fort."⁷ Washington delivered his summons to Marin's successor, Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, and returned to Virginia with the expected reply that the French refused to move out. But he also took back the first direct evidence about the French operations and intentions, noted in his journal which Governor Dinwiddie ordered to be published.

Washington's recommendation of the Forks as the site for a fort undoubtedly influenced the location of the Virginia fort which was begun there in March, 1754, and Pittsburgh rightfully regards the day of his visit, November 23, as its Location Day. But Washington's comment had nothing to do with Governor Duquesne's choice of location for his fort; the Governor of New France was receiving similar advice from other quarters, and it is reflected in his letters to Contrecoeur, whom he transferred from Fort Niagara late in December, 1753, to take over the command in the Ohio country from Legardeur de Saint-Pierre.⁸ At that time, the Governor repeated his earlier instructions to build Fort Duquesne at Logstown, but a month later he was obviously beginning to change his mind. In his letter of January 27 to Contrecoeur, Logstown (which the French called Chiniqué now appears only as an optional site. The Governor told the commander, "Hasten your advance and go build Fort Duquesne at Chiniqué or thereabouts, wherever the place seems to you most advantageous."⁹ Captain Contrecoeur could now use his judgment about another location, if it seemed more suitable for the fort.

But the Governor said more. He actually suggested another location, in these words: "If it is true that there is a river six leagues this side of Chiniqué which they say is the usual route of the English who come from Philadelphia, you will place the fort at that spot to bar their passage and block their trade." The Governor had heard, too, that lumber for building a fort was plentiful near this place, while Logstown was "almost devoid of wood."¹⁰ The decision to locate Fort Duquesne at the Point stems from this letter of January 27.

⁷ Fitzpatrick, ed., *Diaries of George Washington*, 1:44.

⁸ Duquesne to Contrecoeur, December 25, 1753, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 89-91.

⁹ Duquesne to Contrecoeur, January 27, 1754, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 92-96.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Sometime in last December, 1753, Legardeur de Saint-Pierre had sent a French officer named La Chauvignerie with thirty men to establish an advance post at Logstown. It was very similar to the advance party which Boishebert had led the previous spring to begin Fort Presque Isle. The men were to cut and gather timber for Fort Duquesne, so that construction could be started as soon as the main army arrived.

La Chauvignerie reached Logstown on January 16 when—as he wrote—“The Indians showed me a place where I could set up a cabin to shelter myself and my detachment from the cold.”¹¹ Later, with some difficulty he persuaded the Indians to let him build a little entrenchment.¹² This was, technically, the first French fortification on the Ohio. In a letter to the government in Paris, Governor Duquesne pointed to it as evidence that the French had had a fort on the Ohio before the English;¹³ but to make his argument more convincing, he moved the date back several months—another indication that the sources in the Governors’ reports to Paris are not always to be trusted.

La Chauvignerie quickly realized that it would be difficult to build Fort Duquesne at Logstown. He complained that “the scarcity of wood in this place exposes us all to the harshness of the weather,” and he added that “there is not a single piece of wood worth sawing in this region.”¹⁴ Logstown must have used up all the trees for miles around for firewood and cabins, so that its name was now a contradiction—there were no logs at Logstown. It would be better to find another site for Fort Duquesne, and what could be better than the location Governor Duquesne had already suggested at the Forks of the Ohio?

Events soon turned the attention of the French in that direction. Late in February, an old Indian named Dejiquequé told La Chauvignerie that an English force was due to arrive at the Forks of the Ohio

¹¹ La Chauvignerie to Saint-Pierre, February 10, 1754, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 99-101.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Duquesne to the Minister, October 12, 1754, in Stevens and Kent, eds., *Wilderness Chronicles of Northwestern Pennsylvania*, 82-83 (Harrisburg, 1941).

¹⁴ La Chauvignerie to Saint-Pierre, February 10, 1754, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 99-101.

about the first of March.¹⁵ He reported that they numbered one thousand men, an exaggeration which would have greatly surprised William Trent, who actually had only thirty or forty workmen. In accordance with George Washington's recommendation, this little Virginia detachment led by Trent was going to build a small fort at the Forks of the Ohio. On March 6, La Chauvignerie sent Saint-Blin and La Force "to make a thorough examination of the establishment which the English are making. . . ." To cover up their real objective, he sent with them two well-known traders, the Baby brothers, to make it appear that they came only to trade. On March 7, the four Frenchmen came to a Delaware Indian village, where they hoped to find canoes to cross the river. But the village was deserted, and the best they could do was to cross to an island opposite the place where the English were building. La Chauvignerie reported, "They noticed a building there which was almost finished, and which is to serve as a storehouse."¹⁶ Saint-Blin said, "Because of the distance, I could not tell in what manner they were constructing their fort, since it was still only marked out, according to the Indians' report."¹⁷

After this inspection from a distance, the French scouts went along the river bank to a point opposite the Rock, McKees Rocks, where there was a trader's house. Saint-Blin yelled for a canoe, and three men soon paddled across the Ohio to get them—two Englishmen and one French deserter from the Illinois country, "who was very much surprised to see Frenchmen arriving among the English."¹⁸ At the trader's house they learned more news about the English, that they had built a storehouse ten leagues up the Monongahela, and that they expected to get six cannon. The Frenchmen hastened back to Logstown with this bad news, and Saint-Blin wrote Contrecoeur that "things [are] looking very bad for us, if a lot of Frenchmen do not appear on the Belle Rivière

15 La Chauvignerie to Saint-Pierre, February 26, 1754 in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 104-105.

16 La Chauvignerie to Contrecoeur, March 11, 1754, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 106-107.

17 Saint-Blin to Contrecoeur, March 11, 1754, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 107-109.

18 La Chauvignerie to Contrecoeur, March 11, 1754, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 106-107.

News about the English fort made Governor Duquesne anxious, too, when he heard about it a month later. On April 15 he wrote promptly.¹⁹

ing Contrecoeur to "hasten to interrupt and even destroy their work from the start," and not let the British consolidate their position on the Ohio.²⁰

Even as the Governor wrote this message, Captain Contrecoeur and his army had almost completed their voyage down the Allegheny River, after a period of busy preparation in February and March. Fort Le Boeuf had been a center of great activity in those early spring months. Boats and canoes had to be made ready for the voyage. Supplies had to be brought there over the military road from Fort Presque Isle; and, somehow or other, enough soldiers for the campaign had to be gathered there. That wasn't easy in the early spring, before navigation opened on the St. Lawrence and the Lakes. Governor Duquesne sent a picked detachment of men by land from Montreal, along the northern shore of Lake Ontario. This detachment, commanded by the Chevalier Francois Lemercier, reached Fort Le Boeuf on March 20.²¹ With this force, and by stripping Fort Presque Isle and Fort Le Boeuf down to garrisons of eighteen to twelve men, the Governor hoped that Contrecoeur could enter the Ohio country "with a full 600 men whose appearance will make a more vivid impression than if this detachment were composed of twice the sort who were commanded last year."²²

Captain Claude Pierre Pécaudy de Contrecoeur was not especially happy about his transfer from Fort Niagara to replace the ailing Legardeur de Saint-Pierre as commander of the Ohio expedition. He wasn't very well himself—his nephew Péan refers to some sort of skin ailment which afflicted him.²³ Contrecoeur had a great estate almost two leagues square near Montreal, which had been in the family since

19 Saint-Blin to Contrecoeur, March 11, 1754, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 107-109.

20 Duquesne to Contrecoeur, April 15, 1754, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 113-116.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Duquesne to Contrecoeur, January 27, 1754, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 92-96.

23 Péan to Contrecoeur, April 3, 1754, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 111-112.

1672,²⁴ and he wanted to go back and look after it, after two years' service at Fort Niagara. He had had his wife and daughters to look after him at that fort, but he could not take them with him on a military campaign. But on the basis of experience, Contrecoeur was the man for the job, for this man of forty-eighty had been a key figure in the Ohio campaigns from the very beginning. He had been second in command to Céloron in 1749 when that preliminary expedition passed through the Ohio country to assert French claims,²⁵ and he was familiar with every detail of Marin's operations in 1753. His rank and station matched the importance of his assignment, for his title of nobility dated from 1686, when Louis XIV ennobled his grandfather, a captain in the Carignan regiment.²⁶

Since his very title carried with it the duty to serve his King, Captain Contrecoeur could not refuse the Governor. When Lemer cier came with the reinforcements in March, and Legardeur de Saint-Pierre set off on his return trip to Niagara and Montreal, Contrecoeur sent him with an affectionate farewell letter to Madame Contrecoeur, which concluded in the time-honored manner of soldiers' letters, "Good-bye, my dear. Please do not worry and be sure that I shall take care of myself in every way. I hug you and my dear children a thousand times. Your good husband, CONTRECOEUR." As a final touch, there is a little postscript, "I have received all the letters from my children."²⁷

It could be argued that this letter should not have been included in the published *Contrecoeur Papers*. It has no direct bearing on historical events, but it does show something of the character of the founder of Fort Duquesne, who may be regarded as one of the founders of Pittsburgh.

The letter was finally included on the grounds that since it was dated from Fort Le Boeuf on March 19, 1754, it helped to establish the approximate time when Contrecoeur and his army set off on their

24 Fernand Grenier, ed., *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 378 note 2.

25 Céloron's Journal, translated by A. A. Lambing, in C. B. Galbreath, ed., *Expedition of Céloron to the Ohio Country*, 14 (Columbus, Ohio, 1921).

26 Order of the Conseil Souverain to enregister the letter of nobility of Contrecoeur, December 12, 1686, Archives du Séminaire de Québec, V-V, 3:194.

27 Contrecoeur to his wife, March 19, 1754, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 110-111.

advance southward. A letter from a man named Muler on March 29 said that Contrecoeur had gone down the Rivière aux Boeufs (French Creek), and that Lemer cier was about to embark with the rear guard.²⁸ It was within this ten-day period that the French forces got into motion for their descent to the Ohio.

Lemer cier joined forces with Contrecoeur at Venango, the former trading post of John Fraser at the mouth of French Creek. Captain Philippe Thomas de Joncaire had taken over this British trading post in the summer of 1753, and Fraser's cabins and storehouses had served as a base for the French expedition. Sometimes it is said that Fort Machault, the French fort at present-day Franklin, was built at this time, but actually it was built in 1755.²⁹ It was the last of the French forts to be built in the Ohio country.

In the early days of April, the little army embarked at Venango, and moved down the Allegheny in hundreds of canoes and pirogues. On April 16, Contrecoeur approached the unfinished Virginia fort at the Forks of the Ohio, and by threat of using force he compelled it to surrender. Then he built Fort Duquesne where the Virginians had begun. He made use of their materials and half-finished buildings in the structure of the greater fort, so that William Trent and his Virginians may be said to have begun Fort Duquesne. Even the French Governor might have admitted this, for he expressed his pleasure that Contrecoeur had "found a good supply of stakes and beams, because the English are good judges of wood and excel in workmanship." But the Governor was especially glad that Contrecoeur had taken the fort "without firing a shot" and that "nothing occurred which would resemble an act of hostility."³⁰ No one had yet invented the term "cold war," but it was already being practiced.

The French had now succeeded in occupying the most important strategic point for controlling the Ohio valley, but they had failed to do it soon enough to avoid a "brush" with the British. The French may

28 Muler's letter is mentioned in Duquesne to Contrecoeur, May 9, 1754, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 123-124.

29 See La Chauvignerie to Contrecoeur, June 9, 1755 in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 357.

30 Duquesne to Contrecoeur, May 11, 1754, in *Papiers Contrecoeur*, 125.

have fired no shots in capturing the Virginia fort at the Forks, but their high-handed action did make the Virginians very angry—angry enough to shoot. While the French were descending the Allegheny in April, Virginia troops under George Washington were starting toward the Ohio, to come to the aid of their fort. They had not gone far when news came of its capture. Washington went forward even then, but hesitated when it appeared that the French might be too strong for him. While he was in this frame of mind, and even fearing French attack, the Half-King sent him word that a party of Frenchmen were lurking nearby in a hidden place. Washington and his men marched through a rainy night to join the Half-King and his Indians in an attack on this French detachment, the morning of May 28, 1754. The French leader, Jumonville, and several of his men, were killed, and the rest were captured, except for one who escaped at the start of the fighting. Actually, Jumonville's force was only a little scouting party of some thirty men, and the engagement lasted only a quarter of an hour, but the first shots of the French and Indian War were fired in this little skirmish in a rocky ravine in the eastern slope of Laurel Hill, a few miles east of Uniontown. Returning to Parkman's words, "Here began the strife that armed all the civilized world."

Such was the momentous consequence of the French advance into the Ohio country, and of the building of Fort Duquesne.

The other important events which followed, the French expedition which besieged Washington in Fort Necessity and compelled him to surrender on July 4, 1754; Braddock's expedition against Fort Duquesne, which ended in his defeat on July 9, 1755: these are well-known episodes in the series of events which led to war. Braddock's defeat strengthened the British determination to drive the French from the Ohio country, and the local struggle in western Pennsylvania spread out into a worldwide conflict. After that, it was merely a matter of time until the superior strength of Britain and her colonies could be brought to bear on the French in the Ohio valley. In 1758 General John Forbes came against Fort Duquesne, and the French fled up the Allegheny River to the forts in northwestern Pennsylvania. In 1759 Sir William Johnson captured Fort Niagara and cut off supplies from these forts, so that the French had to burn them and flee to Detroit. When the French

burned and abandoned Fort Presque Isle in August, 1759,³¹ it marked the final failure of a great attempt to build an empire. France not only lost the Ohio valley; she also lost Canada and all her colonies on the North American continent. The war which began in the Ohio country decided that America north of the Gulf of Mexico was to be English-speaking, except for the French Canadians. Under free British institutions, this people developed into a vital element of the new Canadian nation. That process of development, of adaptation to representative government and to the future Canada, may be seen beginning even with Contrecoeur. A few months before his death in 1775, Captain Contrecoeur was sworn in as a member of the first Legislative Council of the British Province of Quebec.

31 Hugh Mercer to Bouquet, August 16, 1759, in *Wilderness Chronicles*, 166.