

"proved to be French records written during the years 1720 and 1790. These number 2,950, according to the count of the committee appointed by the commissioners of Randolph county to make an inventory of the documents before sending them to the University of Illinois for my further study. Since many of the documents contain enclosures, not counted by the committee, their number is probably nearer 3,500.

"Since the seat of government in Illinois was removed in 1772 by the British commandant from Fort de Chartres to Kaskaskia, at which time the archives were removed, we have in this collection papers drawn up both at the fort and at Kaskaskia. From 1772 until the year 1848 these papers remained in the latter town, when they were removed to Chester, that city having become the county seat of Randolph county. For many years the older papers, including the French ones, remained in the dry goods boxes in which they had been brought from Kaskaskia. They stood for about ten years in an aisle of the court house and then were placed upon the landing place of the staircase. Here they remained until about the year 1878, when the deputy circuit clerk tied them in the packages and placed them where they were found last summer. This disposal of the old French documents was soon forgotten, for when Mr. Mason appeared in Chester the next year, he was informed that all had been destroyed except the record book of John Todd, which, he says, was found in a receptacle for fuel in the county clerk's office.

"You will naturally be interested in learning what proportion of the old Kaskaskia records have been preserved. For making such an estimate there exists data of two kinds, neither of which will give exact results, but which will yield us some idea how great the loss has been. There is in "Record A" of the Recorder's office in Belleville a copy of a receipt given by the first territorial recorder of St. Clair County, William St. Clair, to François Charbonneaux of the Virginia Court of Kaskaskia for documents deposited by the latter in the archives of the recorder of the newly founded territory. The receipt is dated at Kaskaskia, June 12, 1790. In it St. Clair describes six record books all of them more or less mutilated and four bundles of papers entitled "Papier Terrier" and 1,308 bills of sale.

"Unfortunately St. Clair limited himself to the external description of the record books without describing their contents. At Chester there were found three registers, but, since hard usage during the last century has left the books in a worse condition than when delivered to the United States Government, I have been able to identify only one among those described by St. Clair. Whether the other two are remains of the books of his receipts I have no means of telling. Of the four bundles of "Papier Terrier," which were lists of the land holdings on the royal domain drawn up in the fourth decade of the eighteenth century, only a few sheets have been preserved. Judging from the number of sales in the collection it is probable that very few have been lost.

"The second date made it possible to estimate the number of documents that were originally deposited in the archives of Illinois during the eighteenth century, from which we may judge what proportion has been preserved. One of the books of record found in Chester is a series of indices of notarial acts drawn up at different periods. The earliest list is alphabetical and covers the years from 1720 to 1756: but since, many pages have been lost from the indices of the earliest notaries in Illinois, we must base our estimate upon that of Barrois for the years 1737 to 1756, which has been preserved in its entirety. He has indexed for these years 2,089 instruments, either redacted by himself or deposited in his bureau by others. This gives an average of 106 a year. Since very few acts were drawn up in 1720 and 1721, I shall reckon from the year 1722. If the average of 106 was maintained from 1722 to 1790 there were 7,208 notarial acts redacted during those years.

"Two serious objections may be made to this estimate. The years from 1737 to 1756 were the most prosperous in the history of the eighteenth century, so that such a high average for this kind of act could not have been maintained throughout the period. The second objection is that the index includes only notarial acts and leaves out court records, depositions, papers drawn up by other officials, letters of instruction, official correspondence, etc. Possibly these two errors may approximately offset each other, but I believe my total is too small, rather than the reverse.