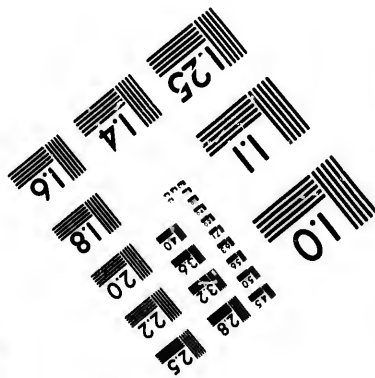
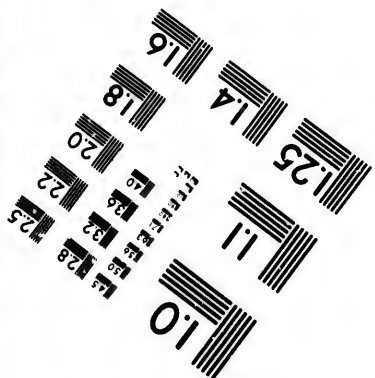
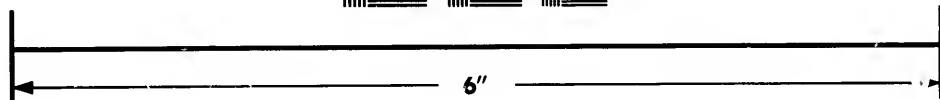
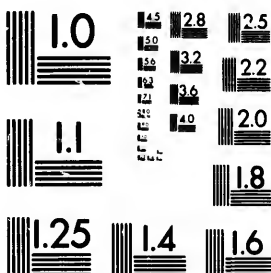


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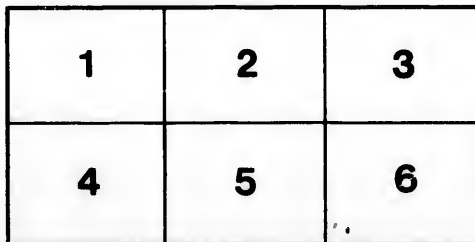
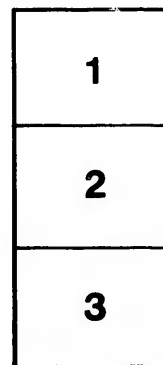
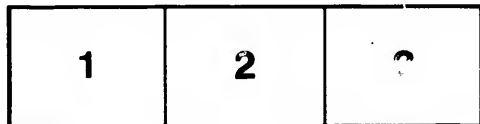
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FROM THE TRANSACTIONS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CANADA

SECOND SERIES—1898-99

VOLUME IV

SECTION II

ENGLISH LITERATURE, HISTORY, ARCHÆOLOGY, ETC.

THE KING'S SHIP "L'ORIGINAL"

SUNK AT QUEBEC, 1750

By F. C. WÜRTELE

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SECTION II., 1898.

[67]

TRANS. R. S. C.

V.—*The King's Ship, "L'Original," sunk at Quebec, 1750.*

By FRED. C. WÜRTELE, Quebec.

(Communicated by Dr. George Stewart, F.R.G.S., and read May 25, 1898.)

"What manner of craft was the king's ship, 'L'Original,' and where did she hail from?" were the questions asked when her bones were being removed in 1878, from the bottom of the St. Lawrence opposite Capo Diamond, and various were the surmises and conjectures of the antiquaries of the old Rock City. But the details of the accident and her dimensions remained in obscurity as dark as the depths in which she rested for one hundred and twenty-eight years. The archives of the Department of Marine at Paris furnished the manuscripts relating to this interesting item of early Canadian history now related for the first time. According to these records, shipbuilding was a Quebec industry in 1666, and from that period it steadily expanded both under French and British rule until the zenith was reached in 1864, when 105 vessels were launched that year at Quebec; since then that noble industry gradually declined.

But to return to the records of the last century, where it relates that in 1724 the Intendants of New France repeatedly recommended to the Minister of Marine at Paris, that shipbuilding should be encouraged by the home government, also that it would be advantageous to build vessels of war and transports at Quebec; which recommendation the government accepted, for in September, 1731, M. Hocquart, the Intendant, sent home the plans of a prospective 500 ton transport. It is also recorded that Le Sieur Levasseur reported on the progress made, up to the 11th October, 1740, on a 500 ton storeship then on the stocks, which was launched on 4th June, 1742, and was called "Le Canada," with Le Sieur Beauvais as captain. M. Hocquart reported in January, 1731, the loss of the ship "Beauharnois," wrecked at Isle aux Coudres, which was built at Quebec the previous year. The next king's vessel recorded is "Le Caribou," whose keel was laid in September, 1742, and launched in May, 1744. In the fall of that year another one, "Le Castor," was begun and launched in May, 1745, Le Sieur Du Bois was her captain. As soon as the shipyard, called the king's yard, situated at the western end of the "Cul de Sac," under Cape Diamond, was clear, work was begun on a 22 gun frigate called "St. Laurent."

The keel of "L'Original" was laid about the fall of 1748, for in September, 1749, M. de La Jonquière, the Governor of Canada, made an inspection of her and sent a report to M. de Maurepas. She was launched on the 2nd September, 1750, and from the following letters and reports to

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M. Rouillé, Comte de Jouy,¹ the Minister of Marine, it is clear that the accident which occurred was due to the mistakes of the builder in making the ways too short and placing them too high, thereby causing her back to be broken when taking the water; besides the launching arrangements were faulty, instead of hanging her anchors to the catheads ready to be dropped at the proper moment after she floated on an even keel, a complication of anchors and ropes attached to her were placed in the river, which caused her to run on a reef.

The report on the explorations at Lake Champlain, Rivière aux Sables and the River Senarac, evidently the River Saranac which flows into Lake Champlain near Plattsburg in the State of New York, is interesting and shows that the timber used in building these vessels was not altogether procured in the immediate vicinity of Quebec but was brought from a distance.

The iron work and iron knees were doubtless manufactured at the St. Maurice forges behind Three Rivers, but the rigging, chains, anchors and sails came from France.

The following are translations of the manuscripts before mentioned, and reading between the lines, the petty jealousies and bickerings between the Governor and Intendant are apparent, and all the high officials in great tribulation over the wreck.

From the Marquis de La Jonquière, Governor of Canada, to the Minister of Marine at Paris:

QUEBEC, 17th September, 1750.

MY LORD:

M. Bigot and I having the honour in our joint letter to report to you, on the sad loss of the vessel "L'Original," I do not think it necessary to enter afresh into the details of this subject. It only remains for me to have the honour to tell you that this accident is the more annoying because I could not prevent it. Indeed M. de La Villeléon, the prospective commander of the said vessel, and the Sieur de Cery, captain of the port, being at my house, agreed together that it would be best to put a kedg anchor and chain on board the said vessel before launching, and besides that we would fasten chains and hawsers to the cables of the anchors which had been cast far out in the river, to moor the vessel to when she would be launched, it being essential to take these precautions to have two resources to fall back upon instead of one in case of need. This arrangement was proposed to M. Levasseur, the builder, who would not consent to have the anchor placed on the catheads of the said vessel, because he said that in launching it might do mischief. As this builder has never rendered me an account of his work, and my instructions do not authorize

¹ The old fort at Toronto, on whose site a monument now stands as a memento of that time, was called Fort Rouillé after Antoine Louis Rouillé, Comte de Jouy, and built in 1749.

me to give him orders, nor to inquire into the building, I did not deem it my duty to take upon myself to order him to execute the said arrangement, as I could not do more than recommend it. Besides, on leaving the court, I offered to M. de Maurepas to supervise the building and to send him a report also on the quality of the wood, but he made no reply. This proves to me that this builder is only accountable and takes orders for his work from the Intendant, and that the court does not intend that I should encroach upon his functions. You have not even, my Lord, honoured me with an answer to my letter of 3rd of September, 1749, in which I had the honour to give you a report of a visit that I made to the said vessel.

Last year upon my arrival, I brought it to the notice of the said Sieur Levasseur, in the presence of Count de la Galissonière, that he had not made the slip, on which he had built his vessel, long enough, there being only twenty-nine feet from the stern post to the end of the slip to which at highest tide the water hardly reached; that would make a great fall for the vessel when she would be balanced at the end of the ways. I renewed these observations to Sieur Levasseur. M. de la Villelón joined in these representations and all this determined him to lengthen it by building a forward slip of twenty-two feet on piles. In spite of that the vessel made a considerable jump, and I am persuaded that she broke her back, because the running ways broke in half when the vessel was on the balance on the end of the said forward slip of which there were three pieces broken. The cradle and the other half of the running ways remained on the slip on which the vessel had been built. I am of opinion, my Lord, that the stocks were too high, that they ought to extend to between wind and water at low tide, and that, consequently the said stocks should be drawn back as far as possible to the mountain and to lower it by at least four feet at the end of the wharf.

I would accord due justice to M. de la Villelón. He is a very zealous and experienced officer; he took all possible care, as also did all his officers, whether in hastening the work on the vessel or after she was stranded in trying to raise her. This is a ruinous undertaking for him, being obliged to feed his staff in a country where provisions are at such exorbitant prices.

I am, with very profound respect, my Lord,

Your very humble and very obedient servant,

DE LA JONQUIÈRE.

The following is a joint letter to the Minister from the Governor and M. Bigot, the Intendant, giving the details of the accident:

QUEBEC, 1st October, 1750.

MY LORD:

It is with great pain that we have the honour to inform you of the loss of the king's ship "L'Orignal." She was launched on the 2nd Sep-

tember last ; we had taken the precaution to moor two large anchors in the middle of the river where we had decided to anchor her, and the ends of these cables were fastened to a lighter, on which we tied three small hawsers spliced together, having the other end on board of the vessel, to direct her in launching. As the flood tide was still strong enough, although it had begun to ebb and it was carrying away these hawsers there were placed two large boats to sustain them for fear these anchors might be lost, which caused the master of the vessel to take several turns of the hawser round a log on the edge of the wharf, in order to keep it taut for fear it might strain the vessel ; this having thrown out three side keys she started sooner than was intended, thus getting considerable way on, broke the hawser which was fastened on board and to the log, the master not having time to cast off these turns taken round it. Besides these precautions which had been taken, a kedge anchor and chain had been placed in a boat to take to the vessel as soon as she was launched, but the current and a slight wind made her go faster than it could be rowed, so that the vessel was reached only after she had run on a reef above Cape Diamond. We all hastened out to her, my Lord, with all the boats and canoes in the harbour, to try and get her off, but the tide having already lowered a foot, although the stream was still running up in the middle of the river, all our efforts were useless. You may rest assured, my Lord, that all possible measures were tried but in vain.

We resumed work at the afternoon's flood tide ; at half-tide we perceived that she was stove in and filling with water ; we returned at dawn the next day and tried all practicable means to get her off, but always without success:

At low water in the afternoon, we saw that the damage was so great, the stern post and keel being separated more than twelve feet, that we decided to convene a board of construction for the next day, and a copy of their proceedings is appended.

We wished to see if it were possible to raise her and take her to some good place for repairs. For that purpose the captain of the port, with some skilled sailors were sent to search for such a place, even within two leagues from there. They reported to us that the shore was fringed on all sides with large rocks over which, even at full tide, there would not be water enough to pass, and you will see by the results of the council, that she was condemned to be broken up for want of pontoons and necessary apparatus.

We have the honour to be, with profound respect,

My Lord, your very humble and obedient servants,

DE LA JONQUIÈRE.

BIGOT.

The following seems to be the report of the committee and signed by Bigot alone, although the last paragraph leaves the impression that another signature was intended :

QUEBEC, 2nd October, 1750.

MY LORD,

M. de la Jonquière and myself have jointly had the honour of rendering you an account of the loss of the "L'Original," which I feel more deeply than I can express. Thus there will be no necessity of repeating to you the manner in which she was lost.

We had taken all the precautions which appeared expedient to place her in safety after the launch, which did not succeed, because of the imprudence of the harbour master in faking several turns of the vessel's hawser round a log on shore. This hawser passed over the vessel and was attached to the cables anchored out in the stream, and although it was held up by two boats, the tide dragged it. The master expected to unloose these coils before she started but had no time, she having unfortunately forced out three of the side keys which held her. Neither the officers nor M. de la Jonquière himself nor I perceived these coils of rope round the log.

This loss would not have happened if the builder had allowed a cable and anchor to be placed on board before launching. He pretended that it would give the vessel a list which might cause an accident.

She was completely finished, even to the smallest details of the officers' cabins, and also painted.

I have saved the greater portion of the knees, dead eyes and rigging chains, a quantity of bolts, all the joiner's work which not being damaged would answer for another vessel. Her capstans, pumps, and stern gallery which being made of iron was as light as, if not lighter than, wood and took less room. I am persuaded that if it had been at Brest, the same description of gallery would have been placed on the vessels being built there.

M. Levasseur has assured me that the iron knees can be used on the "Algonquin," likewise the rigging chains and dead eyes; these latter were made too strong for the "L'Original."

I as well as M. de la Jonquière did indeed think it advisable to have a vessel constructed on the same model as the latter, in order to utilize her rigging, sails, cables, anchors and all that could be saved from her; but the builder has represented to me the loss there would be on the wood prepared for the "Algonquin," that besides, the best part of the wood which is farthest from the heart, would have to be taken off, that the planking which was already sawn the proper thickness would have to be reduced with the axe, that the labour on all these alterations would be very costly and that moreover the material of the "L'Original" could in a great measure be used on the "Algonquin."

All these reasons, my Lord, have induced me to follow the king's orders for building the "Algonquin" and to propose to you to have another vessel built of the same dimensions as "L'Original," and use her rigging, sails, chains and anchors, employing the oak which was discovered last winter on a height of land, and which I had examined this summer by a master carpenter in order to ascertain how much there is of it. He has made a report thereon which is attached. The quality of this wood might be tested (the wood hitherto used having been taken from swamps), and if it was shown, by the short life of the ships, to be no better than the other, we would cease to employ it.

If you do not approve of this proposition, I will send you all this outfit by the king's ships, if you will have the goodness to give the captains orders to take it.

When the "L'Original" was lannehed, the jump she was obliged to make in coming off the ways, although an extension of thirty feet had been added to them, was so great that she broke the running ways and six supports. The pitch was seen forced out of the seams with smoke and squirted more than ten feet. The shock was extremely violent, and those on board assert that she bent some four feet and the water came in at once. To prevent a like shock to the "Algonquin," I have drawn the stocks back thirty-three feet, having to excavate in the rock to get this space, in order that the vessel, having farther to run, the slip would be lower at the water's edge, besides I have lowered the stocks from four and a half to five feet in rear, which will give me nearly eleven feet at the water's edge. Thus the slip which was fourteen feet in height at low tide will not be more than three, causing the water to reach the vessel on the stocks.

M. de la Jonquière is of the same opinion, and I consulted him before having this work done. We expected that the "L'Original" would suffer from this jump. The builder alone thought differently, but he acknowledged his error and readily set himself to lower the stocks.

We have the honour to be with profound respect, my Lord,

Your most humble and obedient servants,

Bigot.

NOTE ON THE MS.—"Not signed by Jonquière."

Official report of a visit to the oak woods at the River Senaranac :

We the undersigned overseers maintained by the king, and carpenters in his service, having by the Intendant's order proceeded to Lake Champlain to explore and inspect the oak trees at the River au Sables and vicinity. Arriving at the said River au Sables, we found an Indian who claimed to be able to find a fine pine grove, so we got him to guide us to it. We ascended the river one day's march without finding anything but small cypress trees of no value. Next day we returned to the

river's mouth, and up it again on the north side about a league and a half in depth. We found an oak region of fine appearance on the heights. We followed the said tract of land and found it led to large swamps adjoining the lake. The next day we went up the river about half a league further and found another oak region which led us to the River au Sables. After that we visited the River Senaranc; we found all round the hills an oak region of fine appearance. We also explored the river "Du Rocher" where we found a few oak trees of very bad and nearly all of doubtful appearance.

In this visit to the rivers au Sables and Senaranc one might find enough timber to cut for two vessels of sixty guns at least. We have marked some of the trees, not having marked all because of there being so many.

Done at Lake Champlain on the last day of August, 1750.

JOSEPH CORNIX,
PIERRE HUBERT.

After dismantling "L'Original," even to her masts, it would appear that probably efforts were made to raise her, by patching the holes, and thus an extremely high tide floated her off the reef and drifting away some distance, while sinking at the same time, touched bottom in about ninety feet of water, some four hundred yards out, opposite to where is now Allans, Rae & Company's wharf, lying fore and aft across the river, bow pointing to Quebec shore and listed over to the southwest.

As this wreck or "anchor nest" had become an obstruction to navigation, by reason of the number of anchors caught and lost in it, the Quebec Harbour Commissioners in 1878 decided on its removal, and the contract for blowing her up was given to Messrs. Nobel & Co., of Ardeer, Scotland, the celebrated manufacturers of explosives, through their Quebec agents, at whose disposal the commissioners placed their powerful "lifting barge" under command of Captain Claude Giguère,¹ an experienced operator in all kinds of wrecking work and raising of sunken timber.

He found by sounding with a long pole, that the sand had accumulated level over her deck on the southwest side, leaving the northeast or lower side clear to the keel; the sand bank rising again a few feet from her to a height of some twenty feet or more, like a snowdrift, all of which was corroborated by the diver at his first descent.

Owing to the strength of the swift current, diving work could only be performed for about one hour at slack water, that is at the top of high and bottom of low tide. The mode of removing her was by exploding, with electric battery, charges of from 100 to 150 pounds, and less when necessary, of dynamite under her keel and where needed. Before exploding the large charges, the barge, which was always anchored fore and aft

¹ Captain Giguère died on 24th April in 1894.

directly over the wreck, buoyed one chain, slipped it and was towed with the stream away to the extreme end of the other, thus getting clear of the explosion, and afterwards was towed back to her former position. A boat was always ready manned to gather up the fish brought up by the explosion, thus keeping the dinner table on board well supplied with fine "bar" fish or striped bass and other denizens of the deep.

A jointed pole over ninety feet long by three inches in diameter now came into operation. This pole had at its end a long sharp spear with a strong eye on its socket to which was attached a rope whose other end was fastened on board the barge. Soundings were made with the pole and when wood was struck the spear was driven deeper by blows of a large mallet. If the log could be moved it was raised by hauling on the rope run over a pulley; if too heavy, the spear pole was pulled out of its socket and at slack water the diver placed chains round the log and the powerful derrick soon had it on deck, through the well in the centre of the barge.

The largest piece of her side that was raised measured 22 by 70 feet; it was hauled up close under the bottom of the barge, which was towed away at high tide dropping it in shoal water, where at low tide it was broken up.

As the work was begun rather late in the summer it had to be completed the following year, when it was found that the sand had levelled up considerably, but a great deal of timber had still to be raised. Early one October morning in 1879, the writer then being the superintendent of the explosive operations, fired the last shot, bringing up a large piece of square timber with a cleat attached to it by two spikes; this cleat is in the library of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec.

From its long immersion the oak was quite black, and many handsome mementos in the shape of furniture, walking sticks, &c., &c., were made from it, but when dry it became brittle, its strength seemed to have been soaked away, it was also saturated with sand, thereby becoming a grievance to the carpenter, spoiling his band saws and tools, to say nothing of running across an iron spike or bolt. This wood is now very scarce.

From his observations of the timbers that were raised, Captain Giguère gave a clear description of the build and dimensions of "L'Original." She was built of oak and about 175 feet long by 40 feet beam, this latter being proved by oaken beams 40 feet long by 15 to 16 inches square raised intact; the former by sounding with the long spear pole.

From examination of the largest portion that was raised whole, it would appear that she had two decks, but much broken and torn up by the ships' anchors catching therein, but the pieces showed they were of red pine.

The planking and ceiling were all of oak; between decks the ceiling was laid on diagonally and to four feet below was close seamed; below

these four feet down to the bilge and from bilge to keelson the ceiling was three inches apart, forming air blocks.

The beams were fastened to the sides by iron knees placed, not as usual underneath, but on the side of the beam and twisted to pass under it and down the side of the vessel. These knees had each an iron support welded at each end across the angle making them triangular in shape; they were made at the St. Maurice forges and were ornamented with rough chisellings; three of them are still in the stores of the Quebec Harbour Commissioners.

The lower beams were supported by four pieces making two thicknesses of wood, shaped the same as her timbers, placed on the ceiling to strengthen the sides, and were bolted through both ceiling and planking with one and one quarter inch iron bolts four feet long. Very few treenails were used, and a great portion of the bolting was not through, but by large headed spikes, twelve to fourteen inches in length, driven from outside and inside.

On what lines and model she was built it was impossible to determine, as at that depth of water all was utter darkness; but from her dimensions she must have been nearer to one thousand tons than five hundred tons burthen and intended for a transport or store ship, there being no ports for guns in her sides.

Twenty-five anchors from thirty-five hundred weight down, with chains attached were taken out of her; some of the chains were broken, others cut and some had been unshackled.

