

COUNTERFEITING IN NEW FRANCE DURING THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR

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JUDICIAL ARCHIVES

When societies keep records of the events and individuals within their history, they typically tell tales of monarchs and nobles and of their grand deeds and accomplishments. Rarely do they explore the lives of the common people, of their stories and opinions and language. However, judicial archives allow these narratives to be told since they follow the trials of ordinary individuals. As their voices are recorded, these archives are a unique opportunity to understand their mindsets, opinions, customs, and stories. Everyday speech from the past has almost disappeared and as such the direct transcriptions in judicial archives are a vital part of history. The glimpses of the past they offer reveal a multitude of information that would have been otherwise lost. Their role in understanding a society in the midst of war also cannot be understated.

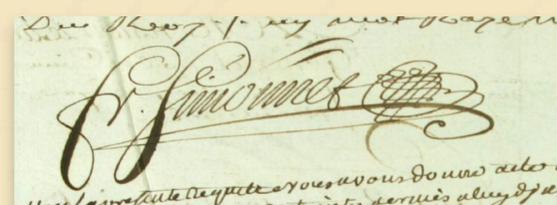
The analyzed trials took place in New France during the Seven Years' War, a chaotic and violent period which resulted in New France being ceded to Great Britain. This war disrupted everyday life and affected everybody, as can be seen in the testimonies of the accused soldiers. One of them, Jacques Leduc, forged a uniform certificate and an accompanying letter to prove its veracity out of desperation – he'd previously been denied the uniform he needed without a clear reason and felt he had no choice but resort to counterfeiting the forms. His resulting death-by-hanging sentence also testifies to the violence and harsh punishments often meted out during wartimes in an effort to prevent other crimes. Without judicial archives, this seemingly insignificant story would not have been recorded and the beliefs and voices of the people involved would have been lost. The other trials are also rich in information about the common people.

PARAPHS

In certain handwriting-based records, authors, clerks, and scribes could develop special flourishes to add after their signature to identify themselves and prevent forgery. This was the case in New France, where distinguished literate individuals often used paraphs. They varied very much, from a few scribbles to elaborate geometrical designs, as seen in the example below. The image shows the signature of François Simonnet, who was the substitute Crown Prosecutor in both 1758 trials and had a very large and elaborate paraph.

These special signatures were also sometimes used in place of an actual signature. It saved both time and space, which could be precious on a medium which allowed no mistakes or additions, like ink and paper. Simonnet's paraph was inscribed below a side-note in the second trial, indicating that he was its author. In the third trial, royal notary Danré de Blanz'y's signature was on the bottom of most pages alongside his short paraph, but the paraph itself was also atop nearly every page as it numbered them.

An interesting thing to note in the second trial is that the accused soldier, Jacques Leduc dit Bellefleur, has a paraph, which is quite uncommon for people of his rank. His literacy was already noteworthy, so the fact that he developed a paraph, which was usually only done by significant individuals, was remarkable. The trial never revealed a reason for this unusual addition.



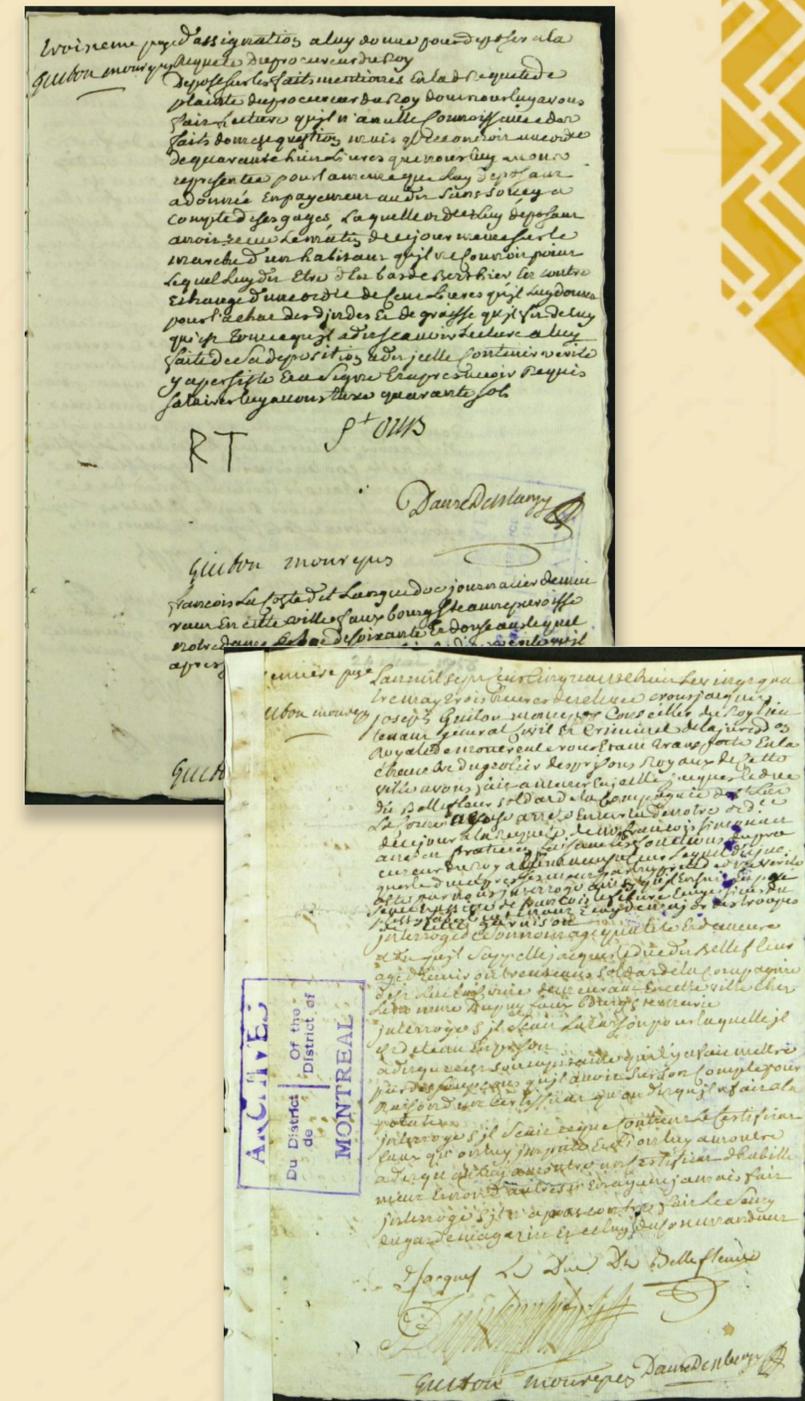
STORIES OF SOLDIERS

The transcribed trials documented the court cases of four military men, all of whom were accused of counterfeiting documents to either obtain money or items they would not have otherwise been able to gain. These trials were all held in the court of Montreal during the 1750s.

The first trial tells the story of Jean Sorel and Jean-Hubert Ruel, soldiers in the Company of Lacorne, who are accused of counterfeiting an "ordonnance" which was worth 48 Livres. It offers accounts of these men's lives as they related to the interrogation and also provided information through the witnesses.

The second trial is quite interesting. This trial is, as most are, quite formulaic and repetitive. The typical forms and processes are followed and recorded, witnesses are selected and called, and the accused is interrogated. However, near the end of the trial an interrogation of the accused soldier, Jacques Leduc, is incredibly revealing about the values and beliefs of common people in his context. He states that he was "not a man which asks for his uniform twice,"¹ and when the interrogators ask him whether he knew that counterfeiting was a crime he answered that "one didn't need a candle to see that."² These are Leduc's own voice and cultural beliefs shining through the legal jargon and formulas. These are the types of voices that are preserved through judicial archives.

The third trial is that of sergeant Jacques Leveque, accused of counterfeiting 1000 Livres, and it delves into many records, including financials. For instance, when Leveque talks about paying back debts, the interrogators question why someone with his salary would possess so much money, a question which still remains interesting.



CASE FILES
Trial 1: TL4 S1 D5961
Trial 2: TL4 S1 D6218
Trial 3: TL5 D1929

1. Original: "quil n'eft pas homme a demander deux fois son habillement"
2. Original: "ql ne faut pas de Chandelle pour voir cela"