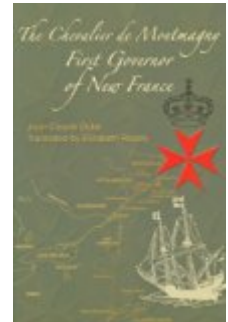


Jean-Claude Dubé. *The Chevalier de Montmagny: First Governor of New France*. French America Collection. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2005. 381 pp. \$35.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-7766-0559-3.



Reviewed by Carl Kramer

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Charles Huault de Montmagny was the last of seven children born to Antoinette du Drac and Charles I. Huault, he was baptized on March 11, 1601, in Saint Paul in Paris, and by September 1610 his father was dead. Member of the secret religious order, the Order of Malta, and later the first governor of New France, Montmagny has an important place in both French and Canadian history. Since few records of his early life or his family survive, historian Jean-Claude Dubé, the author of this biography which is translated from French, relies mostly on notarial records as well as on Paul Le Jeune's *Jesuit Relations* to present an outline of Montmagny's life prior to, during, and after his tenure as the governor of New France.[1]

Feeling pressure from his family, Montmagny initially pursued a religious vocation. At La Flèche, he was educated by the Jesuits, the best teachers of the day. Learning languages, especially Latin and Greek, was standard to complement religious education. While in college, he met Le Jeune, a religious figure and author of the first *Jesuit Relations*, who helped him train in philosophy from 1615 to 1618 and later became his close

supporter on the other side of the Atlantic. As superior of the Jesuits and representing the religious authority in the colony, Le Jeune was the one who later welcomed the new governor to Quebec in June 1636.

On March 7, 1622, as a young man, Montmagny and his brother Louis went to the priory inn of the Temple in Paris. Louis, already a member of the Order of Malta (an order that traced its heritage back to the crusaders), went to request admission for his brother. During the inquisition, the first of several steps for admission to the Order of Malta, an inquiry was made into the antiquity of the nobility of the Huault de Montmagny lineage. Four people unrelated to the family all swore that the family lineage was noble and ancient. Next, Louis presented titles that were meant to prove beyond a doubt that the nobility of their paternal and maternal sides was more than one hundred years old. These documents, some authentic and some false, were acts of fealty and homage, noble successions, provisions of office, and noble services. Along with an examination of the seigneurie of Montmagny, once this proof was

submitted to confirm the antiquity of family nobility, Montmagny passed the first step. On clearing the inquisition, prospective members passed their novitiate, which included three caravans on behalf of the order. Montmagny went on these caravans between Paris and Malta from August 1622 to October 1623, and he filled his time from October 1623 to June 1636 with more caravans for the order. Montmagny continued in the service of the Order of Malta for the rest of his life, even during his time as governor of New France.

Montmagny was named the first governor of New France possibly as early as 1635. He entered the St. Lawrence corridor at the end of May 1636. The population along its banks was concentrated in mainly two areas: Quebec and Trois-Rivières. Quebec's population was a mere 200 inhabitants, the population of Trois-Rivières was about 50, and the whole population of New France numbered about 320. By far the most frequent users of the St. Lawrence River and the largest population group in the area were nomadic natives who traversed the river on canoes or small boats. Recognizing that the First Nations were the largest population group, Montmagny sought closer relations with the Huron. In 1622, Samuel de Champlain had obtained a peace with the Huron's enemy, the Iroquois, but by the time Montmagny arrived that peace was broken. Montmagny strengthened his predecessor's alliance with the Huron by periodically sending Jesuit missionaries to Christianize them. Because of its alliance with the Huron, New France suffered frequent attacks by the Iroquois. In 1639, the Iroquois became a much more formidable enemy when the Dutch from Fort Orange began trading arquebuses in exchange for beaver pelts. Champlain's policy to not sell or trade firearms with the natives put the Huron at a severe military disadvantage. Emboldened by Dutch support and their new weapons, the Iroquois formally declared war in 1641. At Trois-Rivières, Montmagny held meetings with Iroquois representatives, during which he was able to persuade

them into a temporary peace out of necessity, since his military forces were limited.

Montmagny's last three years in New France, from 1646 to 1648, were difficult. At the end of June 1646, the Mohawk tribe sent presents to other Iroquois tribes to strengthen their alliances and seek a common strategy: the ruin of the French colony and their allies. This was a sudden reversal of the peace that Montmagny had worked hard for two years to achieve. Unfortunately, the French were not aware of this sudden change. This spelled disaster for a party of missionaries who left Trois-Rivières on September 24. On reaching the village, the two Frenchmen were "stripped, beaten with heavy blows of fists and sticks" (p. 183). They were spared the agony of the fire, being told: "Have courage, we will strike you with the hatchet and set your heads on palings ... so that when we capture your brothers they may still see you" (p. 184). Negotiations for peace were still possible in 1646 but they were unthinkable by 1647.

The year 1647 marked the beginning of the systematic destruction and dispersal of "Huron" by the Iroquois. One by one, Huron villages fell to different Iroquois tribes with the remainder of the Huron who could escape seeking refuge with other bands of that tribe. Powerless to stop the attacks because of his meager supplies and men, Montmagny was forced to watch and intervene when Iroquois were close enough to his bases. At the beginning of 1648, the remaining Huron made a real attempt to make peace with the Iroquois. The central nations of the Iroquois (the Oneida, Onondaga, and Cayuga) lent an ear, but the Mohawk and Seneca remained steadfast against peace. They even killed six Huron ambassadors who came to Onondaga to talk peace. One Huron ambassador was so disgusted by this treachery that he killed himself on his way back to "Huron." To finally alleviate attacks on the Huron, Montmagny sent a canoe manned by a soldier and two natives to escort them to Montreal to trade.

Montmagny went there to meet them, exchange presents, and make speeches to strengthen their alliance. A few days later, Montmagny's replacement, Louis d'Ailleboust, arrived in Quebec.

On Montmagny's return to France, he found a very different political climate, having been gone for twelve years. After he returned, less than one year went by before he found himself in the service of the grand master of the Order of Malta. Montmagny's task was to represent the grand master personally in the Antilles by conducting a preliminary inquiry before the purchase of the island and by bringing the island's lieutenant general, Philippe de Lonvilliers de Poincy, entirely in line with the order's interests. After 1652, Montmagny spent his remaining five years as lieutenant on the island.

Dubé paints a valuable picture of the first governor of New France in his well-written, well-balanced, and well-researched book. To write the book, the author waded through many accounts of Montmagny that had been made up over the years, and reconciled the truth versus the fiction. Much of the fake information even dated from the period of Montmagny's life when he and his brother joined the Order of Malta. As noted above, to join the order, the family had to prove that its nobility was ancient, but in reality, their family nobility was not as old as the order required. Dubé clarifies many of these misconceptions and fabrications of the family lineage, which has been repeated many times in writings on the family.

The book can be divided succinctly into three main sections: a brief genealogy of the Huault family, Montmagny's time as governor of New France, and his work for the Order of Malta in the Antilles. The longest section, which deals with Montmagny's service in New France, provides a description of New France circa 1636, covers his relationship with natives, and includes information about the internal government. In the introduction to each section, Dubé presents a detailed

analysis of the events surrounding the time in which that portion of the book took place. To present these introductions, the author uses numerous sources from Canada and France. Especially evident in his discussion of Montmagny's family history and the Order of Malta, the author creatively uses probate listings in wills, intertwined with the few existing family writings, to present a sense of the social status of the family. When describing various family members, he discusses different royal and governmental offices held in France, and to assist the reader in identifying the duties of the office, Dubé provides a glossary.

Montmagny's tenure as the governor of New France depended on the success or failure of his dealings with natives. Dubé places Montmagny in between the Huron and Iroquois struggle to dominate the fur trade. Without much help from France, Montmagny was powerless to assist the Huron. His strength showed more in the different peace agreements he successfully concluded with the Iroquois. Additionally, Montmagny held fast to the spiritual mission of New France by continually sending Jesuit missionaries into "Huron" to teach about Christianity and set up missions.

The author relies on the *Jesuit Relations* as his predominant source for the section on New France. Since the purpose of *Jesuit Relations* was to bring more Christians from France to New France and to motivate the French government to send more troops and supplies, the use of these books is problematic. These books may, in parts, be accurate, but their motivations could be a strong reason for them to be sensationalized for the people back home. Perhaps also problematic for some readers may be the author's technique of "road-mapping" before every section. For some, this can be an annoyance, while for others, it may be helpful to focus on the main point the author attempts to make in that section.

The Chevalier de Montmagny presents an interesting analysis of the first governor of Canada.

Dubé presents his research into the governor's adventures in a way that allows the reader to be absorbed in the period. The reader is transported through seventeenth-century France via the Huault family, and then smoothly transitioned to New France with the newly installed governor. Throughout the book, Dubé discusses the Order of Malta, a secret religious society that Montmagny served throughout his lifetime. This book will prove an interesting read to people of a variety of backgrounds. For the genealogist, this book presents an in-depth multigenerational examination of life in seventeenth-century France, bringing to life the Huault family. Professors and students of New France history will find this book invaluable because it describes in great detail the life of the first governor. On further reading, they will find that this book vividly describes the harsh realities of life faced by anyone living in New France during this period.

Note

[1]. Paul Le Jeune. *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France, en l'année 1633 envoyée au R. P. Barth. Iacquinot, provincial de la Compagnie de Jesus en la province de France par le P. Paul Le Jeune de la mesme compagnie, supérieur de la résidence de Kebec* (Paris: Chez Sebastien Cramoisy, 1634).

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