The Department of the Marine And the Search for Masts on Île Saint-Jean

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En 1726, le ministre français de la marine amorçait une recherche pour trouver des mâts sur l'Ile-du-Prince-Edouard qui consistait à couper quelques 200 pins et à les expédier en France. L'historique de cette entreprise est présenté à partir des éléments déclencheurs qui ont amorcé le processus en 1726 jusqu'à l'inspection des mâts à Rochefort, France, en 1729, incluant la chronologie, la géographie, et les facteurs politiques et économiques. Ce projet d'exportation de mâts provenant de l'île est représentatif des événements et des circonstances qui se sont produits à une plus grande échelle ailleurs en Nouvelle-France, et comme ailleurs, ceci démontre que les représentants locaux étaient influencés par des forces politiques et économiques hors de leur contrôle.

In early August 1727 along the short *portage* that ran from the *rivière du nord-est* (now the Hillsborough River) to the *havre à l'anguille* (i.e. eel harbour, now Savage Harbour), the silence that usually held sway in the virgin forests of lie Saint-Jean, (Prince Edward Island today), was broken by the clear sharp sound of axes echoing through the trees. Then, after a moment of silence, a large pine tree came crashing to the ground.

These sounds, uncommon on Prince Edward Island at the time, came not from any of the island's few hundred French colonists felling trees to clear farmland or to get logs for a homestead.[1] They came instead from a small and rather unusual party made up of soldiers from the Port La-Joie garrison as well as some local civilians. They were acting in response to an order from the minister in charge of the department of the Marine at far-off Versailles in France. In doing so they were carrying out an activity new to the island: they were making a survey of large pine trees as potential masts for naval ships. If their report on the trees at Savage Harbour proved to be favourable then it might lead to *Ile* Saint-Jean becoming a major supplier of masts for the French navy.

[1] A census of 1728 gave a population count of297 persons plus 125 fishermen on the island (See A. H. Clark, *Three Centuries and the Island* (Toronto 1959), 28).

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The leader of this survey party was the senior military and administrative officer for the island, Jacques d'Espiet de Pensens, the commandant of the thirty-man garrison that had been posted to Port La-Joie in the previous year.[2] Pensens, now probably in his late fifties, had been transferred with some reluctance from the comparative comfort of Louisbourg to the small frontier post at Port La-Joie ("in a corner of the woods" as he described it),[3] when the administration of the island had once more became the direct responsibility of the government at île Royale [Cape Breton Island] after the short-lived seigneurial venture of the Count of Saint-Pierre's Company of Ile Saint-Jean.[4] Also present in the party was an official who had come across from Louisbourg, Sébastien Le Normant de Mézy, the 24 year old assistant to his father, Jacques Le Normant de Mézy, the *commissaire ordonnateur* of île Royale. After the governor the commissaire was the highest ranking official in the colonial hierarchy at Louisbourg, and as commissaire, the elder Mézy held the government purse-strings for both île Royale and île Saint-Jean with overall responsibility for all trade and related matters. He thus had a direct interest in this search for masts, which is probably why his son and second-in-command was in the party.[5] Apart from soldiers - who, we may presume, provided most of the physical labour - there were also three *accadiens,* who were to carry out the inspection, designated in the documents as *charpentiers* (translatable as either carpenters or shipwrights). One of these was the sixty-five year old Michel Haché Gallant of Port La-Joie, who seven years before had come over with some of his family from Beaubassin to settle as one of the first Acadian families on the island.[6]

Both Pensens and the elder Mézy, as well as die governor in Louisbourg, Joseph de Saint-Ovide, had a personal stake in the matter. Not only were they keen to demonstrate an appropriate zeal in carrying out their official duties, they must also have known that if the enterprise were successful, and the Marine did decide to draw masts for the French navy from île Saint-Jean, each of them could benefit personally, not only in terms of their careers, but also financially, from the various spin-offs, both on and under the table, that might occur. However, what Pensens, Mézy and Saint-Ovide did not know in the summer of 1727 was that all of their efforts would be brought to a sudden end two years later by a single sentence in a letter from the minister of the Marine, telling them not to send any more masts to France from

[2] M. M. Maude, "Espiet de Pensens, Jacques de", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography (DCB),* U (1969), 218-220.

[3] Saint-Ovide to the minister, 20 November 1726, Paris, Achives Nationale, Archives des Colonies (hereafter cited as AN), C"B, Vol. 8, fol. 56.

[4] For a detailed history of Prince Edward Island during the French period, see D. C. Harvey's *The French Regime in Prince Edward Island* (New Haven, 1926).

[5] One of the son's responsibilities was the inspection of soldiers on detached duty (James S. Pritchard, "Le Normant de Mézy, Sébastien-François-Ange,"*DCB* IV (1979), 465^68), which could have been an additional reason for his visit to the island.

[6] Affidavit of Pensens, Le Normant and Michel Haché dit Galan, 12 August 1727, AN, C"B, Vol. 9, fols. 48-48v. I calculate his age from data in Stephen A. White, *Dictionnaire Généalogique des Familles Acadiennes. Première Partie, 1636 à 1714,* H" (Moncton, 1999), 791.

île Saint-Jean.[7]

Despite the fact that it never really got beyond the exploratory stage, this first government-sponsored effort to exploit and export the timber resources of Prince Edward Island, is worthy of investigation for in miniature it represents events and circumstances that occurred on a larger scale elsewhere in Canada at various times during the French regime. And as elsewhere, it demonstrates that the local officials, on the island and at Louisbourg, were in the grip of political and economic forces outside of their control. But before we look in detail at this enterprise of the 1720s it is useful to know something of the background against which it was operating and in particular the importance to France of finding a source of masts for its naval ships.

In the eighteenth century masts were of vital strategic importance to the naval powers of western Europe. Every man-of-war had three masts, and in the largest ships each of these was made up of three separate "sticks" rising one on top of the other, plus fourteen smaller sticks were needed for the spars and yards. Collectively all of these sticks were called *mâture* in French, the smaller ones being termed *mâtéreaux}* The largest of these masts, the lower mainmast, ranged in size from forty inches in diameter and one hundred and twenty-three feet in length in a first rate ship-of-the-line, to twenty inches in diameter and seventy-two feet in a frigate.[9]

All of these masts and spars had to have particular properties: an exactly tapering straightness, a proper proportion of length to girth (the standard was three feet of length for every inch in diameter at the large end or "heel"), suppleness, strength and durability.[10] These in turn depended on properties of the tree from which it was cut: its species and age, the closeness of its grain, the amount of resin in the wood, and the absence of knots and of rot. From experience such properties had been found to vary with factors such as the country of origin (climate and soil were considered to be important), the forest structure (closed forests produced tall straight trees), the felling, handling and transport techniques,[11] the time that had passed since felling (with time the natural resins in the wood that gave durability evaporated),[12] and the storage conditions up to the time they were used for masts. (Protection from the weather was very important; to prevent drying out, some advocated storage in wet

[7] Minister to Mézy, 22 May 1729, AN, Series B, Vol. 53, fols. 606-607.

[8] P.-E. Littré, *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française* (Monte-Carlo, 1969).

[9] The value for a first-rate ship is from a French document of 1722, cited by Paul W. Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power 1660-1789* (Toronto, 1956), 12; the frigate value is for the Napoleonic period and comes from R. G. Albion, *Forests and Sea Power: The Timber Problem of the Royal Navy 1652-1862* (Harvard, 1926), 28. (See footnote 25 for a comparison of the French and English inch.)

[10] The properties that follow are based on Albion, *Forests and Sea Power,* 28-31 and Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 12-13, 113, 124-125, 135.

" See Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 124,127 for complaints about improper handling procedures for mast trees, and that Canadian masts were "badly sawn and ill-proportioned."

[12] Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 122 gives examples of mast quality deteriorating because of exposure during long waiting periods before being transported from Canada.

sand). Because they were vital to the survival of the ship, both in battle and in stormy seas, the naval boards of each of the European powers were very particular about the masts that they bought. Their purchasing agents and the inspectors in their own dockyards were rigorous in their assessments and this rigour was underpinned by an innate conservatism that favoured tried and tested suppliers and materials, which largely meant the east Baltic ports and especially Riga.[13]

Many years' experience had revealed that only certain tree species were acceptable for masts: the European pine *Pinus sylvestris,* long called "the Scotch fir" in the British Isles, was considered to be the best, and was the standard against which all other trees were judged.[14] Since the middle ages the main source of these pines had been the eastern Baltic ports, especially Riga and Danzig, and from 1715 also St. Petersburg, all of which lay at the mouths of rivers that led far into the hinterland of Russia and Poland. In the back forests of these countries generations of landowners and their woodcutters had been carefully selecting trees for sale to the main naval powers of Europe, and a complex commercial network, including merchant-houses of the main naval powers had developed in the ports to supply the demand.[15] These "northern" masts however did not come cheaply. A mast tree of the largest size in the port of Riga could cost more than 2000 *livres* or £100 in the money of the day, though the price dropped considerably as the diameter decreased by even a few inches.[16]

Trees capable of providing the larger mast sizes were scarce however, even in the Baltic market and they became more so as each decade went by. One solution developed in the dockyards was to make up the larger masts out of a number of smaller trees by shaping and joining together smaller pieces (often five or nine) around a central spindle, all bound tightly with iron hoops.[17] However such *mats d'assemblage* ("made-masts" to the English)

[13] Albion, *Forests and Sea Power,* 31 : "In the shipyards of France and Spain, as well as of England, Riga masts were preferred above all others for their quality."

[14] *Ibid.,* 30-31.

[15] *Ibid.,* 147; Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 135-157 - though on 165 he says that there was a virtual absence of French commercial houses in the north - instead the French navy sent its own agents (139).

[16] In a contract of 1750 supplying Baltic masts to the French navy at Brest, masts of 28 *palmes* diameter at the butt (32 English inches) were priced at 2970 *livres* each, 20*palmes* (22.8 inches) at 688 /., and \0*palmes* (11.4 inches) at 55 /. (James Pritchard, "Fir trees, financiers, and the French navy during the 1750s," *Canadian Journal of History,* XXJH (1988), 345). Albion, *Forests and Sea Power,* 29 gives costs in pounds in 1770: a stick of 36 inches and 36 yards cost £110; but prices fell significantly with the loss of a few inches (e.g. 33 inches - £56): "These were exorbitant prices, but the mainmast of a ship of the line came from a tree in ten thousand. " See also Joseph J. Malone, *Pine Trees and Politics: The Naval Stores and Forest Policy in Colonial New England 1691-1775* (London, 1964), (147) for a graph of the comparative prices to the Royal Navy of New England and Baltic masts between 1690 and 1775. Moore uses a conversion value of 20 *livres* to the pound sterling for the period 1735-1772 (Christopher Moore, "The other Louisbourg: trade and merchant enterprise in Ile Royale 1713-58," *Histoire Sociale - Social History,* XJJ (1979), 84), while Pritchard uses a value of 23 *livres* (James Pritchard, *Anatomy of a Naval Disaster* (Montreal and Kingston, 1995), xvi).

[17] Albion, *Forests and Sea Power,* 29; Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 12. For illustrations of made-masts see S. F. Manning, *New England Masts and the King's Broad Arrow* Maritime Monographs and Reports, No. 42 (1979), 9; and R. J. B. Knight, "New England forests and British seapower: Albion revised," American

were not considered as good as a single sound stick.[18] Also, for the smaller topmasts and spars, the cheaper Norway spruce *{Picea abies),* as well as North American spruces, were sometimes substituted for the more expensive pines.[19]

Apart from using trees from their own forests (limited in quantity, and from experience never as good as the northern masts), another solution open to France and England was to look to the vast forests of their colonies on the far side of the Atlantic where virgin stands of tall pines grew near the water's edge in much of New France and in northern New England. The North American red and white pines *(Pinus resinosa* and *Pinus strobus)* were tried early and found to be acceptable substitutes, especially the more resinous red, which could even exceed die European pine in quality.[20] However, the main problem in using these trees was the wide and dangerous ocean across which they had to be transported to the naval dockyards of Europe. This could have been circumvented by building the whole ship in the New World near the source of supply, but there were entrenched prejudices, as well as economic and infra-structural factors operating against this,[21] and the French navy only began to do so in a small way in the 1740s.[22]

The English navy had been getting some of its larger masts from North America as early as 1652, and thereafter, as a supplement to the Baltic supply, sticks of the largest sizes were shipped annually to England from New Hampshire and Maine, and after 1763 from Canada.[23] France on the other hand was much slower in utilising its North American mast resource. However, from 1669, when the department of the Marine was set up with

Neptune, 46(1986), 227.

[18] Though see the statement in William Falconer's *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine,* 1769, that a made-mast was "justly esteemed much stronger than one consisting of any single trunk, whose internal soundness may be very uncertain," quoted by Knight, "New England forests and British seapower," 223.

" Albion, *Forests and Sea Power,* 31.

[20] H. J. Elwes and A. H. Henry, *The Trees of Great Britain and Ireland,* VI (Edinburgh, 1910) 1142. Albion, *Forests and Sea Power,* 31 : "The soft and white wood of the white pine proved to be inferior in strength and durability to that of the *Pinus sylvestris* of Riga; however what white pine lacked in quality was counteracted by the fact that it could provide large sizes that made possible the use of a single stick for masts of the largest ships, with the added advantage mat they were lighter by one-fourth." Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 126, fn. 72 states "The French had the very same opinion of the comparative merits of the Canadian red and white pine as the British had later," citing as support a letter from the governor and intendant at Quebec (Vaudreuil and Begon to the minister, 2 November 1724, A N , C ' A , Vol. 46, fols. 11-13), in which the two species are compared to the white's disadvantage.

[21] See Albion, *Forests and Sea Power,* 244-246 for the English attitude and experience of colonial-built warships. Economic factors came into play because none of the North American oak species was considered as durable as European oak - oak was the principal wood used in the hull.

[22] Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 125, fn. 71. See also W. J. Eccles, *Canada under Louis XIV1663-1701* (Toronto, 1964), 53 for ship-building attempts in Canada in the 1660s and the economic factors discouraging it, and Dale Miquelon, *New France 1701-1744: "A Supplement to Europe "* (Toronto, 1987), 216-218 for the eighteenth century.

[23] Albion, *Forests and Sea Power,* 31. See also Knight, "New England forests and British seapower," 223-229; and Malone, *Pine Trees and Politics,* 47-56.

responsibility for the overseas empire and the navy (as well as for the ports of France), periodic attempts were made to explore the possibility of using North American pines. One of these was the venture that occurred on Ile Saint-Jean in the 1720s.

The first mention in the available records of the 1720s masting operation on Ile Saint-Jean occurs a year and a half before the survey at the top of the Hillsborough River in August 1727 described above. It is found in a letter of 18 December 1725 from the governor at Louisbourg, Joseph de Saint-Ovide, to the minister of the Marine at Versailles, the twenty-five year old Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, the Count of Maurepas.[24] Having just been given responsibility for Ile Saint-Jean, Saint-Ovide wrote that he was getting reports from people on the island that it had a significant mast resource, some of it, he said, at a place called *Trois Rivières* (the present-day Georgetown area). He also reported that about two years before, the Count of Saint-Pierre's Company had cut four hundred to five hundred mast trees on the island, "all," he has been told by the *charpentier* involved, "of red pine, from 50 to 75 feet in length and up to 24 inches in diameter."[25] Saint-Ovide added that if the minister should give the order "it will be easy to have enough masts brought down the river of Port La-Joie (i.e. the present Hillsborough River) to fill one or two vessels."

Crossing the Atlantic with Saint-Ovide's letter was another letter to the minister written three days later, from the man who was later to lead the 1727 survey party at the top of the Hillsborough River, Jacques de Pensens.[26] Having recently been appointed as commandant at Port La-Joie, and while still at Louisbourg planning his move to the island for the following year, he re-enforced Saint-Ovide's comments by saying that he knew the island to have a good supply of timber which could become a source of masts and building materials for the navy, and since, as he put it, "the King has a need for such timber," he offered to give all his attention in his new posting to the exploitation of this resource. To encourage the minister's approval, he added that the logging operations should attract Acadians to the island (meaning from the Fundy marshlands which the Treaty of Utrecht had transferred to British ownership thirteen years before), and he says that once they have come over to cut wood, they will be likely to stay on. Pensens was very aware that the enticement of the Acadians to French territory, where they might become producers of food for the recently established fortress town of Louisbourg, was an important element of government policy.

It was not however either Saint-Ovide's or Pensens' letters, that actually sparked the enterprise. Before these reached the Count of Maurepas another letter had arrived on the minister's desk. This had come from a merchant in La Rochelle, referred to in the correspondence as "Sieur Fleury." La Rochelle, a major commercial port on the Bay of Biscay, was the main departure and landing point for merchant ships sailing to and from New

[24] Saint-Ovide to the minister, 18 December 1725, AN, C"B, Vol. 7, fols. 200-203.

[25] The French inch *{pouce)* and foot *(pied)* of the eighteenth century were larger (by 6.3%) than the English inch and foot (e.g. see Bamford, Forests *andFrench Sea Power,* 11 and Pritchard, *Anatomy of a Naval Disaster,* xvi.)

[26] Pensens to the minister, 21 Dec. 1725, AN, C"B, Vol. 7, fols. 382-382v.

France, and this Sieur Fleury can only be Charles de Fleury Deschambault, a member of a Canadian merchant family, who had established himself in La Rochelle as a banker, merchant and ship-owner trading to Canada.[27] Significantly, Fleury had a direct connection with île Saint-Jean: he was one of the directors of the short-lived Company of île Saint-Jean.[28] Although the company had failed in the previous year, with the loss of money to all involved, Fleury had clearly not given up his hopes for the island. For in the letter that he had written to the minister, he claimed that "masts of any size and quantity" could be got from île Saint-Jean, that they were "of a better quality than those of Canada" (in the French period, and long after, "Canada" meant Quebec and the St. Lawrence), and that they would cost much less - he does not say why, but presumably one factor was the shorter trans-Atlantic journey from île Saint-Jean. It is unlikely that Charles Fleury had ever visited île Saint-Jean, and thus his comments on the island's timber stocks are likely to have been partly supposition, though what he says is in general agreement with the reports that the Company's agents on the island had sent back to France some five years earlier.[29] Fleury then added that there were some masts from the island already at La Rochelle that were available for inspection - presumably some of those cut two years before referred to in Saint-Ovide's letter of the previous December.[30]

In fact all of the above information comes not from Fleury's original letter, which is not in Canadian archival sources and may be lost, but from a letter that the Count of Maurepas sent to François de Beauharnois,[31] the Marine's intendant at the naval port of Rochefort, just eleven miles south of La Rochelle.[32] In the letter Maurepas directed the intendant to organise an inspection of Fleury's masts at La Rochelle.

After a short delay due to the illness of the mast inspector, on 6 April Beauharnois sent the inspector's report back to the minister at Versailles.[33] It contained bad news for Charles Fleury. The inspector had found the masts from île Saint-Jean to be "full of knots, of a wide-grain and dried out," all properties unacceptable for masts on French naval ships. All that Fleury could proffer by way of excuse, wrote Beauharnois in the letter, was that their

[27] R. Baudry, "Fleury-Deschambault, Jacques-Alexis," *DCB* JJ (1969), 223-24; A. Rodger, "Fleury de la Gorgendière, Joseph de," *DCB* **m** (1974), 216-218. See also Miquelon, *New France 1701-1744,* 126-127.

[28] A. Rodger, "Fleury de la Gorgendière," 216-218.

[29] Gotteville de Belile to the Council of the Marine, undated, but after August 1720, AN, C'A, Vol. 43, fols. 134-136; Denys de La Ronde to the minister, 6 November 1721, AN, C"B, Vol. 5, fols. 436-437v.

[30] However a letter of Maurepas to Saint-Ovide and Mézy, 28 May 1726, (AC, Series B, Vol. 49, fols. 698-699) says the masts at La Rochelle had been cut six years before (his source for this must have been Fleury), which if true would mean 1720, the first year of the Count of Saint Pierre's settlement.

[31] Minister to Beauharnois, 1 March 1726, National Archives of Canada (hereafter cited as NAC), Reel 12876, Vol. 107, 39.

[32] François de Beauharnois (or the Baron de Beauville - to give him his full title) was sixty years of age in 1726 and had been a protégé of Maurepas' father, the previous minister of the Marine. He also held the intendancy for the port of La Rochelle, and like Charles Fleury had Canadian experience: he had spent three years at Quebec (from 1702 to 1705) as the intendant of New France, the second highest post in the colonial government (see J.-C. Dubé, "Beauharnois de la Chaussaye, François de," *DCB* JJJ (1974), 51-54.

[33] Beauharnois to the minister, 6 April 1726, NAC, Reel 12879, Vol. 355, 37.

dryness was due to their having been cut some time before. However, Fleury did not give up. Not only does it appear that he prompted Beauharnois to recommend to the minister that Commissaire Mézy at Louisbourg be asked to obtain a new sample of *"quelques Pins et Epinettes rouges et blanches"* [a few pines and red and white spruces], (a recommendation approved by the minister in a return letter of 16 April to Beauharnois)[34] but he also sent a memorandum on the mast resource of the island directly to the minister himself.[35]

By 28 May when the Count of Maurepas dispatched his annual correspondence to his officials at Louisbourg, the minister was no longer asking that a small sample of trees be brought back to France for inspection, as suggested by Beauharnois. Rather, in a lengthy three page letter addressed jointly to the governor and the commissaire,[36] he directed Mézy to organise as soon as possible a detailed survey of the mast resource of Ile Saint-Jean using whatever experts he could find locally. As well, he requested that both Saint-Ovide and Pensens send him their own reports based on their personal observations during their visits to the island. It is evident from his letter that something more than Fleury's memorandum had led to the minister's directive: "the difficulty of getting masts from Canada, along with expenses that would increase the price considerably, will lead me to get them from Ile Saint-Jean." This can only be a reference to a costly masting operation that had been on-going along the St. Lawrence River since 1724.[37] To speed the process further the minister asked that Mézy also send him the estimates of any qualified persons at Louisbourg who might be interested in undertaking a full-scale masting contract. In an earlier letter to Beauharnois, Maurepas had also directed that soldiers from the detachment at Port La-Joie should be used for the cutting,[38] presumably to both speed the process and to reduce the cost.

It took some time for this directive to reach Louisbourg; it certainly had not arrived by 18 September 1726. In the meantime Jacques de Pensens and twenty-six soldiers had travelled to Ile Saint-Jean in June and had officially taken over the government of the island and its "capitol" of Port La-Joie.[39] At the same time Governor Saint-Ovide had also paid his first official visit to the island, when he had handed out muskets and other gifts to the Mi'kmaq, many of whom had come over from the mainland to meet him.[40]

At the end of the summer, in their letters to the Count of Maurepas, both Governor Saint-Ovide and Commissaire Mézy, still unaware of the directive from Maurepas on its way, re-enforced the comments of Saint-Ovide and Pensens of the previous December about the

[34] Minister to Beauharnois, 16 April 1726, NAC, Reel 12876, Vol. 107, 74.

[35] Fleury's memorandum is referred to both in Beauharnois' letter of 6 April 1726 to the minister and in the minister's letter of 28 May 1726 to Saint-Ovide and Mézy, but otherwise does not occur in Canadian archival sources.

[36] Minister to Saint-Ovide and Mézy, 28 May 1726, AC, Series B, Vol. 49, fols. 698-699.

[37] See: J.-N. Fauteux, *Essai sur I 'Industrie au Canada,* I (Québec, 1927), 200-210; and Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 123-124.

[38] Minister to Beauharnois, 16 April 1726, NAC, Reel 12876, Vol. 107, 74.

[39] Maude, "Espiet de Pensens, Jacques de", 218-220.

[40] B. Pothier,"Monbeton de Brouillon, *dit* Saint-Ovide, Joseph de", *DCB* **m** (1974), 454^157.

quality of the masts that might be obtained from île Saint-Jean. Mézy, relaying information received from Saint-Ovide on his summer visit, wrote on 14 August[41] "masts for topmasts of the largest vessels are of good quality and found in abundance on the island,"[42] and on 18 September Saint-Ovide himself, wrote that from his June visit he was "sure that abundant quantities of good masting will be found on the island."[43] He also said that he had "seen 300 logs that had been cut for the Company," meaning the defunct Company of île Saint-Jean. These may have been among the four hundred to five hundred that he had earlier reported cut by the Company, perhaps at the same time as the La Rochelle sample that had already been turned down by the naval inspector. Thus, with regard to the prospect of obtaining masts from île Saint-Jean all three men involved in its governance (Governor Saint-Ovide, Commissaire Mézy and Commandant Pensens) were singing from the same hymn-sheet, a rare occurrence, especially for Saint-Ovide and Mézy, who were often in bitter dispute over many matters.[44]

When the minister's letter of 28 May finally arrived at Louisbourg, some time after 18 September, it must have been greeted with great delight by all three officials. In response the governor and commissaire sent a joint letter to Maurepas on 28 November in which they added further excuses to that given earlier by Sieur Fleury for the failure of the inspection at La Rochelle the previous April:[45] "It is not surprising that [the masts]... were found to be of poor quality: they were from old spruce *[epinette]* (this conflicts with Saint-Ovide's letter of a year before in which he had said the Company's masts were all of red pine!),[46] cut from scrap material, which had been exposed for a long time to damage from the open air. This must not influence your opinion on the masts of pine that are abundant on île Saint-Jean - whose soil, a rich red sand, should produce fine and good mast material. We believe those found at the water's edge are more spongy and less impregnated with the gum that gives these masts their good quality, but those that will be obtained a little farther from the banks of rivers will be of a much better quality. All the Acadian *charpentiers* who have made use of them tell us of their marvels. ..." They then noted that in compliance with the minister's directive Mézy has already proceeded to consult possible contractors: "Monsieur de Mézy has spoken to several [of the Acadian *charpentiers].* The one who has made him the best proposal is ... named LeComte who offers to supply him with two hundred masts ... from 8 to 18 inches in diameter, ... half to be made up of masts of 12 inches or less, and half greater, up to 18 and 20 inches which could come to about 7000 *livres*. We will not use the masts cut down previously, most of which are worm-eaten, and anyway belong to the Company of Ile Saint-

[41] Mézy to the minister, 14 August 1726, AN, C"B, Vol. 8, fols. 87v-88.

[42] The topmast was the middle of the three sticks forming a mast [above the lower mast and below the topgallant mast (ed)]. Albion, *Forests and Sea Power,* 28, gives a diameter of 21 inches and a length of 23 yards for the main-topmast of a first rate ship at the close of the Napoleonic wars.

[43] Saint-Ovide to the minister, 18 September 1726, AN, C"B, Vol. 8, fols. 37v-38.

[44] T. A.Crowley, "Le Normant de Mézy, Jacques-Ange," *DCB* JH (1974), 386-389.

[45] Saint-Ovide and Mézy to the minister, 28 November 1726, AN, C"B, Vol. 8, fols. 10v-13.

[46] I suspect that the source of Saint-Ovide's change of mind on the species was Fleury's *mémoire,* a copy of which accompanied the 28 May directive from Maurepas.

Jean." The last comment presumably refers to the three hundred logs that Saint-Ovide had seen the previous June. Given the arrival of the order from France late in the year it is likely that LeComte the *charpentier* was a Louisbourg resident.[47]

Though 7000 *livres* would only have bought five or six of the largest masts in the Riga market,[48] it was a lot of money in the Marine's budget for Ile Royalle and would not have been allocated lightly.[49] And in fact in the minister's response to the proposed contract, written 10 June *1121,*[50] he was entirely concerned with the costs, querying whether the estimate included the cost of the delivery of the logs to a place where they could be embarked for France. He also attached a price-list asking that Mézy get the best deal possible and he required that the final contract not be signed until he had given his approval.

And so it was that in the following July and August[51] of 1727 we find the party led by Pensens and the younger Mézy examining pine trees at the top of the Hillsborough River along the *portage* to Savage Harbour. Our knowledge of that summer's activity comes from two reports written by Jacques de Pensens: the first is a sworn affidavit dated 12 August, the second a more general letter on the mast resource of the island that Pensens wrote to the Count of Maurepas the following November.

In the letter Pensens said that Savage Harbour - or *havre Cadocpichs* as he called it - had the finest masts on the island.[52] He also said that he had found a second harbour with fine mast trees: the *havre à I 'ours* (i.e. 'Bear Harbour') - a harbour that he said was full of sand bars, though with good steering a thirty ton vessel could be got in (Samuel Holland was to re-name it Murray Harbour in 1765).[53] However, he makes no mention of the pines at *Trois*

[47] In the census of île Saint-Jean of two years later (1728) a Louis Lecomte, *constructeur* is listed at *Port St. Pierre* (the main fishing settlement on the island, located just twelve km. east of the masting site) with his date of settlement given as 1728, while in a *rolles des habitants* of the same year a Louis LeComte is listed at *havre aux sauvages* (another name for *havre à l'anguille)* as *aMe. Charpentier* (master carpenter) with place of origin as Normandy - undoubtedly both of these records must refer to our contractor. Presumably he had moved to the island to carry out work connected with the mast contract. [Transcripts of both censuses are found in *Recensements de l'île Saint-Jean 1728-1758, IL* microfilm copy of which is in the University of Prince Edward Island, Robertson Library (HA747. P7)]. Ken Donovan, an historian with Parks Canada at Fortress Louisbourg, does not know of any Louis Lecomte at Louisbourg in the 1720s (personal communication to the author); however a Jacques Lecomte, a native of Grandville in Normandy, was active from 1730 onward as a master boat-builder at Louisbourg. He considers that the difference in the name does not rule out the possibility that they are one and the same person.

[48] Calculated using values given by Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 119.

[49] The Marine had allocated only 8000 *livres* a year to larger expeditions in the St. Lawrence - see Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 119. It should be noted that the whole government budget for île Royale in 1726 was 295,701 *livres,* 150,000 of which was allocated to the fortifications (Moore, "The other Louisbourg," 85). Thus 7000 *livres* would have comprised 4.8 per cent of the budget - a substantial amount for one small-scale project.

[50] Minister to Mézy, 10 June 1727, AC, Series B, Vol. 50, fols. 593v-594v.

[51] Saint-Ovide to the minister, 10 November 1727, AN, C"B, Vol. 9, fol. 52.

[52] Pensens to the minister, 20 November 1727, AN, C"B, Vol. 9, fols. 253v-257.

[53] Alan Rayburn, *Geographical Names of Prince Edward Island* (Ottawa, 1973), 90.

Rivières referred to two years before by Governor Saint-Ovide, and it would seem that he had not yet visited the western part of the island where five years later in 1732 he would report very fine pine stands at "Malpeck."[54] Pensens then turned to the detailed survey of the trees near Savage Harbour, saying that he was attaching the report of the three inspectors - this does not appear to survive in the records, unless it is actually the sworn affidavit[55] made at the site the previous summer which gives a detailed description of the trees and their location (see map on die following page).

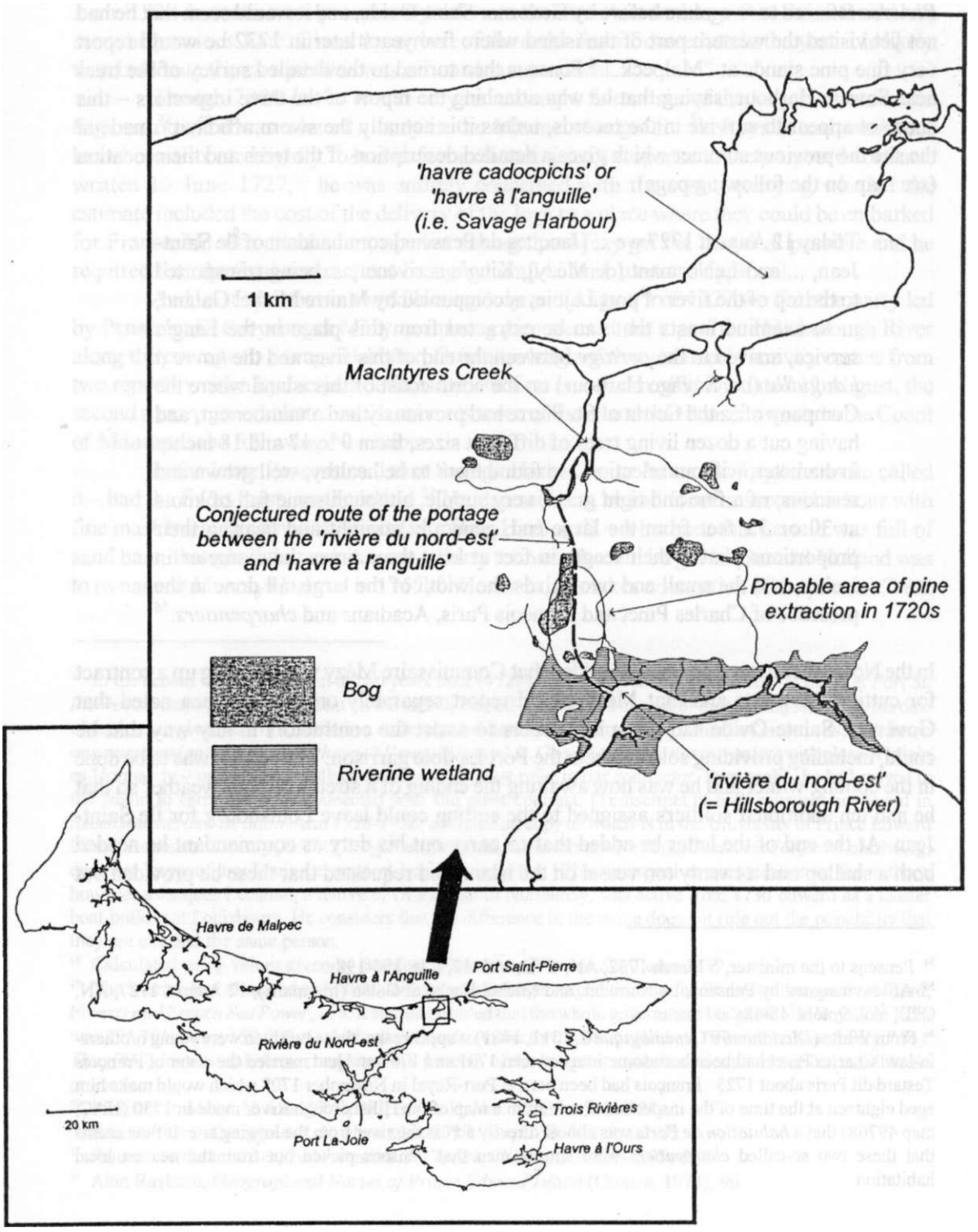
> Today 12 August 1727 we... [Jacques de Pensens] commandant of île Saint-Jean, ... and LeNormant [de Mézy], King's scrivener, ... being transported to the top of the river of port Lajoie, accompanied by Maitre Michel Galand, ... to examine masts that can be extracted from this place in the King's service, arrived in the *portage* between the end of this river and the *havre à l'anguille* (i.e. Savage Harbour) on the north coast of this island where the Company of... the Count of St. Pierre had previously had a number cut, and having cut a dozen living trees of different sizes, from 9 to 17 and 18 inches in diameter, without selection, we found them to be healthy, well grown and resinous, of a fine and tight grain, very supple, although some full of knots at 30 or 35 feet from the large end, generally straight and bearing their proportions, that is their length in feet at least three times the diameter in inches, and the small end two-thirds the width of the large, all done in the presence of Charles Pinet and François Paris, Acadians and *charpentiers,*[56]

In the November letter Pensens also added that Commissaire Mézy was drawing up a contract for cutting the masts and that Mézy would report separately on this. He then noted that Governor Sainte-Ovide had given him orders to assist the contractors in any way that he could, including providing soldiers from the Port La-Joie garrison. The cutting was to be done in the coming winter and he was now awaiting the ending of a stretch of poor weather so that he and ten additional soldiers assigned to the cutting could leave Louisbourg for île Saint-Jean. At the end of the letter he added that to carry out his duty as commandant he needed both a shallop and a twenty ton vessel on the island and requested that these be provided out

[54] Pensens to the minister, 5 March 1732, AN, C"B, Vol. 12, fols. 196-198v.

[55] Affidavit signed by Pensens, Le Normant, and Michel Haché di Galan (his mark), 12 August 1727, AN, C"B, Vol. 9, fols. 48^18v.

[56] From White *(Dictionnaire Généalogique* H, 1311,1481) it appears that these two men were young brothers-in-law. Charles Pinet had been born sometime between 1701 and 1703 and had married the sister of François Testard dit Paris about 1723. François had been bom at Port-Royal in November 1708 which would make him aged eighteen at the time of the inspection. I note from a map of the Hillsborough River made in 1730 (NAC, map 49768) that a *habitation de Paris* was almost directly across the river from the logging site. It thus seems that these two so-called *charpentiers* were simply men that Pensens picked out from the nearest local habitation.


'havre cadocpichs' or
'havre à l'anguille'
(i.e. Savage Harbour)
1 km
MacIntyres Creek
Conjectured route of the portage
between the 'rivière du nord-est'
and 'havre à l'anguille'
Probable area of pine
extraction in 1720s
Bog
Riverine wetland
'rivière du nord-est'
(= Hillsborough River)
Havre de Malpec
Havre à l'Anguille
Port Saint-Pierre
Rivière du Nord-est
Trois Rivières
20 km
Port La-Joie
Havre à l'Ours

of the royal accounts - among the reasons he gives is to enable him to assist the contractor in transporting the soldiers and their supplies to the logging sites.

The letter of Mézy to which Pensens refers appears to be that written on 11 December 1727[57] in which Mézy says that, in response to the minister's letter of the previous June, he encloses the new contract (no longer extant) with *"Maitre"* LeComte, now designated *"charpentier, constructeur et mateur"* (i.e. builder and mast-maker are now added to his previous skills). He says that it is not possible to send "the King's ship" into the river of Port La-Joie to the embarkation point as it is too shallow, and he has thus added a clause requiring LeComte to deliver the masts to Louisbourg at his own expense. He also adds that LeComte's estimates are in accordance with the minister's price list. It was presumably because he considered that the requirements stipulated in the minister's letter of 10 June 1727 had been fulfilled, that Mézy authorised the cutting to go ahead that winter, despite the fact that the Minister did not give the nod until the following June.[58]

The next records that we have that mention the enterprise are a full year later in October 1728. In the meantime in fulfilment of the contract Louis LeComte had had the mast trees cut near the top of the Hillsborough River and had transported them to Port La-Joie and thence to Louisbourg (we are not told how) where a good number of them were loaded onto the King's *flûte Le Dromadaire*,[59] However, the letters to the minister from Pensens and Mézy

[57] Mézy to the minister, 11 December 1727, AN, C"B, Vol. 9, fols. 113-114.

[58] Minister to Mézy, 23 June 1728, AC, Series B, Vol. 52, fols. 600-600v. In fact the minister in his annual correspondence with the governor in 1728 (minister to Saint-Ovide, 18 June 1728, *Ibid.* fols. 574v-575) was more concerned that ten additional soldiers had been posted to Port La-Joie for the mast operation without his permission, to which Saint-Ovide later replied (Saint-Ovide to the minister, 3 November 1728, AN, C"B, Vol. 20 *[sic],* fols. 42-42v) that he was only fulfilling the request of Mézy, and that the ten soldiers had anyway returned to Louisbourg at the beginning of May.

[59] A *flûte* was a cargo sailing vessel of heavy build with a flat bottom; it usually had a large port-hole in the stem to enable the loading of large pieces of timber (Gilles Proulx, *Between France and New France* (Toronto and Charlottetown, 1984), 18). See also Eccles, *Canada under Louis XIV,* 216-217 on the problems in obtaining and using *flûtes;* and Albion, *Forests and Sea Power,* 237-238 for the building and use of mast ships in the

Map of Prince Edward Island showing the site of the masting operation.

From Pensens' affidavit of August 1727 we know that the preliminary survey of that summer was "in the *portage"* running from the *rivière du Port La-Joie* (usually called the *rivière du nord-est* - i.e. the present Hillsborough River) to *havre à l'anguille* (also called *havre Cadocpichs* and *havre aux sauvages* - now Savage Harbour). This *portage,* which probably follows an earlier Mi'kmaq trail, is shown on two early maps of the period as running directly from the river to the present MacIntyres Creek. It seems that the full-scale logging operation of the following winter of 1727-1728 also occurred in this same area, and it appears to have also been the source of at least some of the four hundreed to five hundred masts taken earlier by the Company of île Saint-Jean.

that accompanied the masts back to France reveal that neither official was entirely confident in the quality of the shipment. Pensens' letter of 31 October 1728 is full of contradictions on the quality of the masts. "The masts are of very good quality. They are not perfect on account of many knots, which however I assure you are not bad. The small masts *[matereaux]* and spars are good, ... if they are found to be so at Rochefort, as I believe [they will be], it will be easy to obtain from Ile Saint-Jean the amount wanted.... If the masts are not as fine as they ought to be, [it is because] Sieur LeComte has not been able to get others because of the difficulty of getting them out of the woods [due to] several impassable bogs." He added that when tracks are cut into the sites, which he has already begun to do, they will in future be able to get out better material from farther inland. It is clear from his apologies-in-advance that he is trying to put the best face on defective materials.[60]

The letter of Commissaire Mézy reveals even less confidence.[61] He says that fifty-six of the masts were left on Ile Saint-Jean, (Pensens in his letter had said forty),[62] and that only a third of those brought to Louisbourg had been loaded onto *Le Dromadaire* - partly due to lack of space on the ship but also he says that some of them were not embarked because they were "very knotty." However, he then goes on to cite the testimony of four captains (presumably of merchant ships then at Louisbourg) who had been given five of the masts and had found them very good. They have told him, he says, that "knots in red pine are part of the body of the wood and do not weaken masts." He ends by saying that even if there are flaws in the wood, the low cost (6664 *livres* including the cost of 340 pine planks)[63] as well as their usefulness should be given consideration.

The records in the Marine indicate that *Le Dromadaire* arrived at Rochefort with the mast shipment some time before 18 January 1729.[64] Pensens' and Mézy's excuses were to carry little weight in the dockyards - the mast inspectors were not so willing to overlook what they viewed as serious flaws. On 8 March Intendant Beauharnois at Rochefort sent the minister the report on the shipment.[65] The masts, including the small masts and spars, were found to be "full of knots and the wood very dry," they thus "will not be of much use" in the dockyards. Over two months later, on 22 May, the Minister wrote the final letters on the matter to Louisbourg.[66] He requested that Mézy, as he put it, "refrain from sending any more

English colonies.

[60] Pensens to the minister, 31 October 1728, AN, C[11] B, Vol. 10, fols. 157-161v.

[61] Mézy to the minister, 14 November 1728, AN, C"B, Vol. 10, fols. 102-103.

[62] Pensens said that the forty masts were left due to lack of sufficient transport, Pensens to the minister, 31 October 1728, AN, C"B, Vol. 10, fols. 157-161v.

[63] The 340 planks and boards that were part of the shipment are referred to by Beauharnois, (to the minister, 8 March 1729, NAC, Reel C12879, Vol. 358, 18,) and by Maurepas (to Beauharnois, 29 March 1729, AN, Series B, Vol. 53, fol. 129).

[64] Minister to Beauharnois, 18 January 1729, AN, Series B, Vol. 53, fols. 109v.

[65] Beauharnois to the minister, 8 March, 1729, NAC, Reel C12879, Vol. 358, p. 18.

[66] Minister to Mézy, 22 May 1729, AN, Series B, Vol. 53, fols. 606-607; Minister to Pensens, 22 May 1729, *Ibid.* fols. 599-599v.

such masts." When this letter arrived at Louisbourg there must have been a great deal of disappointment for all of the local officials, and especially Jacques de Pensens, who had devoted considerable time and effort to the enterprise.

The immediate cause of the failure of the operation was that the quality of the masts in the 1728 shipment did not meet the high standards of the naval inspectors at Rochefort. The rejection of this single shipment, however, does not explain why the Marine failed to carry out any further surveys of the mast resource of Ile Saint-Jean. To understand the reason for this we have to put the island operation into a wider context. The 1728 shipment came at the tail-end of over sixty years of surveys and trials of Canadian masts by the department of the Marine that had begun in the 1660s when Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV's chief minister, had dispatched inspectors to survey Canadian forests. Over the years almost all of these surveys and shipments had ended in disappointment for the Marine, with no masts or sub-standard masts being delivered, and always at what the Marine considered to be a high cost.[67]

Especially relevant to the Ile Saint-Jean operation is the fact that it had the misfortune to follow directly upon one of the more costly and disappointing of these searches,[68] the one referred to obliquely by die minister in his 1726 letter to Mézy and Saint-Ovide:[69] for three years, from 1724 to 1727, a survey party had visited forests along the St. Lawrence all the way from the Bay of Chaleur and the Saguenay to the Richelieu River. The reports produced on the mast resource were generally favourable. However, the work of the survey was undermined when the masts that had been cut were considered so defective that they were not even embarked on a large *flûte* sent out to ship them to France in 1727. While the governor and intendant at Quebec tried to shift the blame from the trees to those doing the cutting, the Count of Maurepas, under pressure from the treasury to cut his budget[70] and exasperated by the costs involved - "16 thousand *livres* in pure loss" - notified the governor in 1728 that "His Majesty has given no indication that he intends to make other [grants for mast surveys] for a long time to come."[71] And it did indeed prove to be a long time - for apart from the shipment from île Saint-Jean later that year no further searches in New France for masts for the French navy were carried out by the Marine up to the loss of Canada in 1763.[72]

Since the British after 1763 were to successfully obtain good quality masts for their navy for over a century from many of the same areas available to the French, it would seem that the reason for the failure of the French government to exploit the forests of New France cannot in the end have been the quality of the timber available. Examination of the evidence rather indicates that it had more to do with what the Marine perceived as a high cost of the

[67] Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 113-128.

[68] Fauteux, *Essai sur I 'Industrie au Canada,* I, 200-210; Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 123-124.

[69] Minister to Saint-Ovide and Mézy, 28 May 1726, AN, Series B, Vol. 49, fols. 698-699.

[70] Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 125.

[71] *Ibid.,* 124. The date of the minister's letter was 14 May 1728 (Fauteux, *Essai sur I'Industrie au Canada,* 1,210, citing AC, Série B, Vol. 52-1, p. 56).

[72] Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 125.

operations in combination with their failure to deliver a reliable product.[73]

The cost of such enterprises was indeed high. Though the timber itself was free - it was already considered to be the property of the king - the costs of both its harvesting and transport were high because in most of the areas where the tall pines grew, there was no infrastructure of personnel and equipment to carry out the logging operations. This is especially true of Ile Saint-Jean which, as already noted, had a population of only a few hundred persons. Thus on the island, as at many of the mast sites elsewhere in New France, all stages of the enterprise had to be funded by the Marine from scratch - from the initial forest survey, to the felling and preparation of the trees, the transport to the embarkation point, and the loading onto ships.[74] In the île Saint-Jean operation, as we have seen, Pensens had made a request for both a shallop and a twenty ton vessel, in part to support the masting operation, and he had also said that he would have to cut trails to get at trees farther from the water's edge. On top of this, labour costs in New France,[75] and especially at Louisbourg,[76] were high in comparison with the home country, due to the small size of the skilled work force in the colony. And even the soldiers of the Port La-Joie garrison who had been put to work in the woods would have had to be paid by the contractor at the going rates.[77] Added to this was the cost of shipping the masts across the Atlantic. This often meant the costly chartering of merchant ships or assigning special naval *flûtes* - such as was *Le Dromadaire* for the île Saint-Jean shipment in 1728. Such shipping was not always readily available,[78] which meant that masts might lay about in the open air for several years before they could be shipped - as seems to have happened to the three hundred logs belonging to the Company of île Saint-Jean, as well as Sieur Fleury's masts at La Rochelle.

Given these costs (though they were in fact no higher than what would have had to be spent in obtaining masts in the Baltic market),[79] the Marine might have been satisfied if the financial outlay had resulted in the delivery of a reliable product. But the maxim "you get what you pay for" frequently did not apply to the Marine's masting operations in New France, for having paid out the money, the product that arrived at the dockyards at Rochefort often proved unusable, if it arrived at all.

If the Marine had analysed the reasons for their failure to exploit successfully the

[73] *Ibid.,* 125-26.
See Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 120 for some of the costs involved.

[75] *Ibid.,* 120.

[76] *Miquelon, New France 1701-1744,* 115.

[77] For the practice of paying soldiers at Louisbourg for non-Marine work see B. Adams, "The construction and occupation of the barracks of the King's Bastion, Louisbourg," Canadian Historic Sites Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History, No. 18 (Ottawa, 1978), 95.

[78] See Eccles, *Canada under Louis XIV,* 216-217 on the problems in obtaining and usingy7«tes to transport masts.

[79] For example, the amount allocated in the 1690s by the department of the Marine to the Canadian masting enterprise was 8000 *livres* a year - a sum that in the Riga market would have bought only six or seven of the larger masts (Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 119).

mast resource of New France, they might have realised, as we can certainly do from hindsight, that the solution was a considerable investment in the infrastructure needed to support such masting operations, as private British entrepreneurs were later to do.[80] And this leads us to the root of the problem: the department of the Marine simply did not have the finances to invest in the infrastructure needed to exploit the mast resource, and the reason for this lay with a level of government outside of the control of the Marine and its minister.

The ultimate cause of the failure of France to exploit the mast resource of its North American empire, can be traced to the military priorities of Louis **XrV** and his great grandson, Louis **XV,** who in succession occupied the throne of France for 131 years (1643-1774). Louis **XIV**'s political ambitions, and the wars in which it involved him, lay on the continent of Europe - the Hapsburg monarchies of Spain and Austria were viewed as the chief enemy. In these wars the navy was always considered of secondary importance to the army, and as a result it was chronically under-funded.[81] The navy got even shorter shrift after the accession of Louis **XV** in 1715, when, with a rising public debt, the finances of the Marine were squeezed even further.[82] Thus the various ministers of the Marine - and from 1723 to 1749 it was the Count of Maurepas[83] - were always trying to manage the diverse responsibilities of their department on a severely restricted budget. Except under Colbert in the 1660s, and after the accession of the more navy-friendly Louis **XVI** in 1774,[84] the Marine always had a funding problem. And it was this under-funding that played a key role in all the attempts to develop a mast supply in the New World. In the end, given the limited funds available, it was safer for the Marine to spend its mast budget in the Baltic market, where, even if the masts were more expensive, their quality was more certain.

Thus ultimately it was the wider strategic policy of the French government with regard to a perceived foreign enemy, based partly on the whims of the king in an absolute monarchy, that in the 1720s helped to save the pines of Savage Harbour and elsewhere on île Saint-Jean from the axes of the Marine. Whether Prince Edward Island, given its small size and the limited area of its pine forests, would have ever been able to supply a significant number of masts to the French navy is doubtful. And we will never know whether the rest of the island's pine resource would have fared any better with the mast inspectors at Rochefort

[80] Eccles, *Canada under Louis XIV, 2*16 writes: "Considering that [lumbering] was an infant industry, requiring considerable capital outlay, high initial costs were to be expected." But he makes no further comment. See Malone, *Pine Trees and Politics,* 47-56 for the high private investment required to participate in the New England export mast trade to England.

[81] Miquelon,jVe>f *France 1701-1744,*89. (See also J. S. McLennan, *Louisbourgfrom its Foundation toitsFall 1713-1758* (Halifax 1918), 295).

[82] Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 7. (See also James Pritchard, *Louis XVs Navy 1748-1762* (Kingston and Montreal, 1987) for the financial problems afflicting the French navy in the mid-eighteenth century.)

[83] [-] Artaud, "Maurepas, Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, Comte de," *Nouvelle Biographie Générale,* XXXTV (Paris, 1861), 401-402; Miquelon, *New France 1701-1744,* 90-91.

[84] Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power,* 4-5, 8-9.

than did the shipment of 1728.

In the end the impact of the operation on the island's timber resources was negligible. The felling appears to have been confined to a small area not far from the Hillsborough River along the *portage* to Savage Harbour (see the map on page 12). It had consisted of only a dozen pine trees in 1727, followed by two hundred or so in 1728, all of which appear to have been red pine.[85] We may thus presume that most of the pines near Savage Harbour were left standing. However, they were not to stand for long. Within fourteen years there were two major forest fires in the north-east of the island, in 1736 and 1742 - seemingly the most destructive in the island's history, and one or both of them burned through the area around Savage Harbour. We know this from Captain Samuel Holland's interim report of March 1765 on his mapping survey of the whole island. "About 24 years since there happened a fire that destroyed the greatest part of the timber: ... it ran ... to St. Peters, from thence to the North East River [i.e. the Hillsborough], along Savage Bay ... ; in many places [the area] affords a very extraordinary appearance, ... the burnt timber [looking] at a distance like lofty pillars or columnes."[86] And when it came to Holland listing the best sites on the island for mast timber he named only three places: "Three Rivers, Bear Harbour and Malpac". The Savage Harbour pines - "without an equal on the island" according to Pensens[87] - were clearly no more, or at most were among those trees visible from a distance as blackened pillars or columns.

[85] Mézy to the minister, 14 November 1728, AN, C"B, Vol. 10, fols. 102-103.

[86] Captain Samuel Holland to Lord Hillsborough, 4 March 1765, PEI Public Archives and Record Office, 2324/8A.

[87] Pensens to the minister, 20 November 1727, AN, C"B, Vol. 9, fols. 253v-257.