Jean Charles De Pradel in French Colonial Louisiana, 1714-1764

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JEAN CHARLES DE PRADEL IN FRENCH COLONIAL LOUISIANA,
1714-1764

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

by
Patricia Dillon Woods
A.B., Saint Louis University, 1970
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MANUSCRIPT THESES

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Jean Charles de Pradel, a younger son of a provincial robe family of Limousin, France, resided in Louisiana for most of the period the colony was under French control. De Pradel's initial encounter with Louisiana was in 1714 when he was assigned to the colony on his first tour of duty in the military. At that time, Louisiana was struggling for its existence against the natural enemies of disease, famine and starvation as well as against the growing threats of conflict with the Spanish in near-by Pensacola and from the English to the north. This colony on the Mississippi offered little prospect to the Ensign de Pradel for a brilliant military career or for fortune.

Unable to obtain a new commission while on leave in France in 1720, de Pradel returned to Louisiana in late 1721 or 1722, determined to make the fortune which the law of Old Regime France had denied him. In the face of impossible conditions for survival much less for profit, de Pradel became a successful entrepreneur on a frontier. He began working toward his fortune, first as a trader at military posts, then as a businessman in New Orleans, and finally, as a landed gentleman who sold his lumber, indigo and wax produced from his land to France and the Islands. By his
death in 1764, Louisiana was in a financial crisis stemming from the moratorium declared on the colony's letters of exchange, causing the collapse of de Pradel's fortune.

The chief sources consulted in the research of this thesis were A. Baillardel and A. Prioult's compilation of de Pradel's Letters, *Le Chevalier de Pradel, Vie d'un Colon en Louisiane au XVIII Siècle*, manuscript documents from the Archives des Colonies, Dunbar Rowland and Albert Sanders, editors, *Mississippi Provincial Archives*, published documents of government correspondence.
CHAPTER I

THE FIRST YEARS IN LOUISIANA

In 1714, Jean Charles de Pradel, a new ensign of the regiment of the marine of France, received his military assignment to Louisiana.¹ The third son of an old and very distinguished provincial robe family in Old Regime France, Jean Charles had been forced to seek a position in the military.² From a family with a tradition of outstanding

¹December 12, 1714. Versailles. Minister Cariture, Royal College. Regarding the place of ensign in Louisiana for Pradel, Archives des Colonies, B 36:320. (Microfilm copy in University of Southwestern Louisiana Library, Lafayette, Louisiana.) Hereinafter cited as AC.

²In eighteenth century France, the droit d'ainesse of the law of Paris described inheritance laws for noble families. The eldest son, according to the Coutumes de Paris, had a legal right to as much as two-thirds of the family's lands and offices or as little as one-half, depending on the number of children (Marcel Marion, Dictionnaire des institutiones de la France aux XVII et XVIII siècles [Paris, 1923], s.v., "Ainesse (Droit d'), "Legitime."). This custom of primogeniture was a vestige of feudal times when a fief, being legally indivisible, passed from the father to the eldest son (Marc Bloch, Feudal Society, trans. by L. A. Manyon [Chicago, 1961], II, 203-204; 385. Carl Stephenson, Medieval Feudalism [New York, 1942], 23-25). The future of the younger children of noble families was therefore determined almost at birth. The convent or a good marriage provided places for the daughters. The Church was also a traditional slot for younger sons. Wealthy abbeys and powerful bishoprics were well within the grasp of older noble families (Norman Ravitch, Sword and Mitre [The Hague, 1966], 80. Ravitch gives an example of the children of the dukes
members of the military, it was hoped that this generation of the La Maze would also produce a distinguished soldier in the young ensign. Yet, upon receiving his orders for Louisiana, the Ensign de Pradel must have had some misgivings about the chances of his achieving a magnificent career in that desolate colony on the Mississippi.

Although a settlement had been established in Louisiana in 1699, the first fifteen years of the colony's existence was nearly fatal. Facing the impossible geographic and climatic conditions of the storms, swamps and torrid temperatures of the Gulf Coast, the first colonists experienced a series of disastrous crop failures which had resulted in an uninterrupted starving time and a great dependence on the mother country for food supplies. Preoccupied as the government was with war and famine at home in the first years of the eighteenth century, the Ministry of the Marine was unable to answer the colony's pleas for

of Rochesfavauld and how the lands and offices were partitioned). With no right to offices or land ownership, the remaining sons sought their fortune in the military (Robert Forster, "The Provincial Noble: A Reappraisal," American Historical Review, LVIII [1963], 688). Operating as a kind of safety valve, the military determined a social position for these extra sons. Whether described as bands of roving, mercenary medieval knights, or pillaging soldiers in the Thirty Years War, these younger sons lived the military life that the rigid, social structure of the Old Regime had defined for them.

help more than sporadically. As a result, Louisiana's first leaders, the Le Moyne brothers, Iberville and Bienville, had sought native Indian and even Spanish aid to secure the colony's survival.

As discouraging as crop failures and lack of supplies were to the civilian colonists, the general state of apathy and distress was even greater for the soldiers. Morale was especially low among the troops and desertion was high. In the midst of this "mutinous sort," Jean Charles de Pradel, a well-educated member of the French aristocracy, would emerge as an outstanding, reliable and loyal soldier.

As competition for empire among the French, Spanish and English increased in the eighteenth century, Louisiana assumed a greater importance in the eyes of these powers. The Spanish, first of all, became concerned about the strategic interruption in the littoral between Pensacola and Mexico which Louisiana represented. The initial rapport between the Spanish at Pensacola and the French at Fort Louis broke down when, in 1710, the French declared that both banks of the Mobile River belonged to them. To strain

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4 Marcel Giraud, "France and Louisiana in the Early Eighteenth Century," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXVI (1949-50), 665. In the first decade of the eighteenth century, there were several disastrous harvests followed by terrible famines in France which greatly affected the supplies sent to the colony in these years.

5 D'Artaguiette to Pontchartrain, February 12, 1710, Dunbar Rowland and Albert Sanders (eds.), Mississippi Provincial Archives (2 vols., Jackson, 1927-32), II, 52. Hereinafter cited as MPA. When De Guzman, the governor of Pensacola, visited Dauphin Island in 1710, he informed the
relations further, the Indians along the coast preferred the French to the Spanish because of the red men's more extensive trade relations with the French. Other sources of conflict also existed between the Spanish and the Louisianians. Deserters from the French colony were given asylum by the Spanish who refused to cooperate in returning the men to the colony. Finally, the commercial understanding between Louisiana and the Spanish seemed to lessen when the Spanish began to capture French ships en route from Martinique to Louisiana. These differences culminated during a minor war between the two powers in Europe with the capture of Pensacola by the French in 1719, a victory which was undone with the return of Pensacola to the Spanish in 1722.

A more difficult and complex situation, however, was that involving the French and the English and the Indians. Describing the relations among these three in 1712, Diron French leaders that the Spanish governing jurisdiction extended from Florida to old Vera Cruz. His orders at that time were to maintain such a position at all costs.

6 Marcel Giraud, Historie de la Louisiane Française, Règne de Louis XIV 1699-1713 (Paris, 1953), I, 181-82. This friendliness of the Indians with the French was a blow to the Spanish as the Apalaches, their special converts to Christianity, had joined the Choctaws and the Taouochas as allies of the French.

7 Ibid., 183-84; Marcel Giraud, Histoire de la Louisiane Française, Années de Transition 1715-1717 (Paris, 1958), II, 181. Crozat also found the Spanish traders at Natchitoches up the Red River as unreliable as the sea-traders.
D'Artaguiette, the Commissary-Commissioner for the colony, wrote:

. . . The English are the neighbors who are most to be feared, although we shall laugh at them when they come only by land. We have Indians to oppose Indians that they can bring from Virginia, from Pennsylvania and from Carolina. They can do so only by spending a great deal. It is more to be feared that they may win over our nations by means of presents in the straitened conditions in which this colony has been for several years for they give theirs [Indians] a hundred times more [gifts] than we [give ours].

As long as the French were able to retain the Indians' support, it would indeed be possible for them to stop any English offensive. But, gradually, it was learned that the English were making increasing efforts to win over Louisiana's Indian allies. The failure of ships to arrive from France with suitable trade goods was straining Indian relations. This shortage of merchandise in the face of growing English competition with the natives would plague the Louisiana government until the colony's cession to Spain in 1762. The English were convinced that the French were

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8 D'Artaguiette to Pontchartrain, May 12, 1712, MPA, II, 64. Bienville had never liked the idea that gifts and trinkets were the bases of friendship with the Indians, but accepted the fact that it was an established and trusted custom among the Indians which had to be respected. Bienville to Pontchartrain, July 28, 1706, ibid., 24.

9 Even when the colony was again under royal auspices from 1732 on, there never seemed to be enough presents for the Indians. In 1743, Salmon and Bienville requested shoe buckles, earrings, and ribbons, all English style for the Alabamons (Salmon and Bienville to Minister Hzeur, February 7, 1743, AC, C 13, 28:7-7v). A year later, the new governor, Vaudreuil, wrote that though the most recent gifts to the Indians were successful, more were needed (Vaudreuil to the
trying to dominate the interior tribes in order to oppose the advance of Englishmen along the frontier from Canada to the Florida peninsula. The French, on the other hand, believed that the English were determined to drive them from Louisiana by allying themselves with all the Indians.10

Realizing Louisiana's importance, but unable to help the colony in her desperate situation, as early as 1710, Jérôme Phélypeaux, Comte de Pontchartrain, the French Minister of the Marine, had tried to find a private company to sponsor the colony so that it would not have to be abandoned. The problem was temporarily solved when, in 1712, Antoine Crozat, a wealthy financier, agreed to support the colony. Crozat hoped to gain from his colony riches as great as those which the Spanish had obtained from the Mexican mines.

While desirous of finding rich mineral deposits in his colony, Crozat also expected to profit from trade throughout the Gulf region. Louisiana was in an excellent position to trade all over the Gulf as well as with the inland posts. The latest reports from the colony were encouraging: Havana was only four good sailing days from

10Giraud, Histoire de la Louisiane Française, II, 168.
Fort Louis at Mobile, and Vera Cruz was only eight.\textsuperscript{11}
Through the efforts of Bienville in securing provisions for the struggling colony in its first years, a slender trade between Louisiana and the Spanish and French islands had developed. Realistically assessing the colony's own lack of trade goods, Bienville requested that the French merchants sail directly to Louisiana without stopping in the Spanish ports. Should this be done, Louisiana would become the warehouse of European goods for the Gulf region, in addition to having the products so necessary for her own trade.\textsuperscript{11, 12}

The leaders also realized that there were a few items from Louisiana that the Windward Islands and the Spanish colonies would buy. These were mainly timber and furs. As early as 1710, D'Artaguiette proposed building tanneries to dress and treat animal skins as well as sawmills to manufacture boards and planks for this market.\textsuperscript{13} In exchange for these products, Louisiana received sugar, tobacco, cocoa, molasses and other

\textsuperscript{11}Memoir of D'Artaguiette to Pontchartrain on Louisiana, May 12, 1712, MPA, II, 63.

\textsuperscript{12}D'Artaguiette to Pontchartrain, August 18, 1708, ibid., 34. The following is a list of items which were sent to Vera Cruz to be traded for supplies: 1 hogshead with 208 pieces of fine linen and one piece of Rouen linen of 62 ells (an ell = 27"), 1 bundle of broad Brittany linen of 320-1/2 ells in 88 pieces in long ells, 1 bundle of 74 pieces of narrow Brittany linen of 372 ells, 1 bundle of 237 ells of Rouen linen, 7634 pounds of flax and square Biscay iron, 550 pounds of steel, 1 box of black Pontardement lace. Bienville and D'Artaguiette to Pontchartrain, February 23, 1711, ibid., III, 157.

\textsuperscript{13}D'Artaguiette to Pontchartrain, June 20, 1710, ibid., II, 57.
island products. Though small in quantity, the skins and lumber provided struggling Louisiana with a source of income and thereby contributed to her survival.

One day Louisiana would have other products for exchange among which would be tobacco, cotton, pitch and tar. Indigo would, however, become the colony's most highly valued export and a source of Ensign de Pradel's own fortune. Reports of the possibility of producing indigo in Louisiana had been sent to the Ministry of the Marine in the colony's first years. Indigo was found growing wild in the woods, needing, it was believed little, if any extensive cultivation. It was not, however, the wild plant found in Louisiana which was successfully cultivated. Rather it was plants grown from seed imported from the West Indies from which was developed the highly profitable production of indigo. Even with the right seed and further knowledge of the cultivation of the crop, the shortage of slave labor was to hinder the development of indigo greatly. Furthermore, even though the Louisiana plants produced a better dye than those of the Islands, the costs of production in Louisiana

14 Duclos to Pontchartrain, 1713, ibid., 81.

15 Memoir on Louisiana by Mandeville, April 27, 1701, ibid., 50; Tivas de Gauville to Pontchartrain, June, 1712, ibid., 69-70.

16 Duclos to Pontchartrain, October, 1713, ibid., 101-102; Minutes of the Superior Council, January 7, 1723, ibid., 285-86; Bénard de la Harpe, Journal historique de l'établissement des Français à la Louisiane (New Orleans, 1833), 342-45.
discouraged widespread interest in its cultivation in the early years. Eventually, however, slave labor would be acquired and colonists, such as de Pradel, would succeed as indigo planters.  

When de Pradel arrived in Louisiana in 1714, not only was indigo not yet being cultivated, but all agriculture was still in a very rudimentary state of development. If only the number of farmer-colonists and supplies could be increased, it was argued, success could be had. This does

17 With the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, ending the War of the Austrian Succession, as well as the disruption of trade, there was a renewed interest in raising indigo in Louisiana (John Clark, New Orleans, 1718-1812, An Economic History [Baton Rouge, 1971], 55). An even greater stimulant to the whole Louisiana production of indigo was the bounty of 6p/100 placed on indigo by the British government in 1747 to encourage the production of the crop in Carolina. As a matter of fact, it was greatly feared by Maurepas that smuggling would result because of the bounty. Such fraud would not only impair French trade (indigo had become increasingly important in French commerce), but could be ruinous to the island colonies and to Louisiana (Maurepas to Vaudreuil and Michel, January 2, 1749. Concerning the bounty on indigo placed by the English Parliament on the indigo from the colonies, AC., C 13, 34: 5-6v; Minister to Dulevier, December 18, 1750, AC., B 93: 311.)

The extent of the smuggling from Louisiana, if any, is not known. Since contraband trade had always existed among colonies, it is quite likely that such smuggling occurred in Louisiana. The high price of 9 lv a pound on the French market in 1744 had declined to 5 lv a pound by 1750 (Clark, New Orleans, 56), which would certainly have encouraged such illegal trading. Indigo production had surpassed that of tobacco by 1750, serving as an excellent source of revenue for Louisiana (Michel to the Minister, January 22, 1750, AC., C 13, 34:297ff). Yet, indigo cultivation and production was a costly process. Therefore, any possible supplement to the cost of the high overhead would probably have been pursued.

18 Tivas de Gauville to Pontchartrain, June, 1712, MPA, II, 68.
not mean to imply that no efforts were being made to develop the land. As early as 1706 Bienville had been optimistic enough to believe that the colony could feed itself within a year if everyone cultivated a little land. Complaints of poor, marshy soil in the Fort Louis area and a lack of equipment and animals for plowing were valid; yet, there had been some individuals, such as a M. De Muy, who already in 1709 had managed to raise tobacco, barley, rye, oats, flax and even some wheat. But De Muy was the exception. The other colonists' efforts at wheat growing, for example, had failed completely because of fogs which "burnt" the crop. In 1711, the Mobile River had flooded, wiping out the entire crop of Indian corn, forcing many colonists to move from Mobile to Dauphin Island. As a result of such disasters, it was impossible to raise even small farm animals, such as pigs and chickens, because there was nothing to feed them.

Perhaps, Louisiana's debilitating climate explains

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19 Bienville to Pontchartrain, July 18, 1706, ibid., 24.

20 Memoir on Louisiana by Mandeville, April 27, 1709, ibid., 50-51.

21 D'Artuguiette to Pontchartrain, June 20, 1710 at Fort Louis, ibid., 89. "I had never seen such finer wheat than that that was at Biloxi on the lower part of the Mississippi. Ten days before it was mature some fogs came up that made it completely wither away in such a way that it will be all that one can do to gather six minots (a minot-1.11 bushels) where there was prospect of getting more than one hundred. . . ."

22 Bienville to Pontchartrain, October 27, 1711, ibid., 158-59.
the apathy and lack of industry among the first colonists. These people were not used to the hot, humid, near tropical weather of the Gulf Coast summers. In addition to the heat, there were rains and squalls which brought mosquitoes and other disease-carrying insects whose countless swarms were another source of discomfort and sickness. When a large number of new colonists arrived in 1718, there was an outbreak of malaria and dysentery, the first diseases which attacked new arrivals to Louisiana. It is also possible that yellow fever was introduced into the colony from the West Indies at this time. The mosquitoes and other insects and the brackish water at Fort Biloxi created conditions that produced widespread disease and a high mortality rate. Although there was still a shortage of medical supplies, and many of the medicines which were being brought from France were ineffective, the colony still had a larger medical staff than the English colonies. Suggestions were made that doctors trained in botany be sent to the colony to develop some "simple remedies" from the native vegetation.

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23John Duffy, History of Medicine in Louisiana (Baton Rouge, 1958), I, 11.

24Hubert to the Council, October 26, 1717, MPA, II, 240. "... At least two chests are needed with the precautions to send only remedies that are useful for attacks of fever, scurvey, inflammation of the chest, dysentery and little for other diseases. Many [medicines] were rather useless. Of those that were sent many were damaged."

A few did come, but, understandably, in view of the impossible conditions at Biloxi and Dauphin Island, most of the physicians who came to Louisiana soon requested a transfer.

Peopling Louisiana had been a problem from its first days. By 1712, there were only 27 families in the colony, and of these, only four were farming the land. In that year, D'Artaguiette had even discussed the possibility of inviting the near 1,200 French pirates in the Caribbean area to settle in Louisiana. The Company of the West under John Law faced the same problem when it assumed control of the colony in 1717. Although Bénard de la Harpe, the traveler-historian, writing in the eighteenth century, records that there were 700 people in the colony when the Law company took over, this figure is open to question. Pierre Le Maire, a missionary, maintains that there were only 40 families, and the calculations of the military population of the colony, made by Marcel Giraud, the distinguished French historian, suggest that the colony had only 300 people. Despite the increased amount of propaganda published in France on the "El Dorado of the Mississippi," only a very few Frenchmen seemed interested in migrating to the colony.

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26 D'Artaguiette to Pontchartrain, September 8, 1712, MPA, II, 73.
27 Ibid.
28 La Harpe, Journal historique, 139.
29 Giraud, Histoire de la Louisiane Française, II, 121.
When there was almost no response to Law's appeals for colonization, a new tactic to obtain immigrants for the colony was tried with the adaption of a system of forced migration. The cities of Old Regime France were teeming with countless vagabonds, prostitutes, journeymen and homeless children. At the time, it seemed as though France was saturated with these undesirables. It was concluded that Louisiana, needing people, would be the most obvious asylum for these misfits. In 1719, the Paris poor houses, Biceité, Pitié, Hôpital Général and Enfants Trouvés, were opened to the Company of the West. Among the 4,000 people "chosen" by the company for passage to Louisiana were criminals, salt and tobacco smugglers, prostitutes and thieves. Of the many hundreds who came to La Rochelle to await passage, countless died from hunger and starvation before embarkation while many others died at sea. Of those who did survive the voyage to the colony, very few were skilled or trained in any honest trade. Since most of them were members of the urban proletariat, they particularly brought little in the

30 James D. Hardy, Jr., "The Transportation of Convicts to Colonial Louisiana," Louisiana History, VII (Summer, 1966), 207-22. See this article for a complete and detailed discussion of this effort at colonization.

31 The ships' passenger lists contained the following descriptions of the new colonists: "Wayward, pickpocket, imprisoned several times for theft; vagabond, wayward; wayward thief; a most dangerous vagabond; a confirmed rascal, among the most dangerous." Pierre Heinrich, Louisiana under the Company of the Indies, 129. A typescript translation from the French as a WPA project.
way of needed agricultural skills to the colony. Already struggling with the pestilence and disease indigenous to the area, Louisiana did not need this plague of useless people.

There was already in Louisiana a local government to oversee this unruly horde of people when they arrived. The government in the colony under both the Company of the West and the Company of the Indies remained similar in form to that under the Crozat regime. The first government of Louisiana was military, a purely civil government not being established until 1713 with the arrival of the Crozat administrators. By a decree of the King of December 23, 1712, the Superior Council of Louisiana was created, "... to judge in last resort during the space of three years ... all law suits and disputes, criminal as well as civil, commenced and intended among the subjects of the said province and without costs." For New France, and Louisiana as well, both the civil and the criminal law were known through ordinances, edicts and decrees of the King, as well as that defined in the *Coutumes de Paris*. Having little legislative power, the Superior Council of Louisiana generally dealt only

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33 Ibid., 75. In 1627, Richelieu had initiated the council as a form of imperial government for New France. England and the Netherlands as well as France had established these councils in the New World, primarily judicial in nature, administering justice under the same laws the king's subjects knew everywhere. Ibid., 80-82.
with legal and administrative matters. Since the **Coutumes de Paris** required a notary for drawing up and signing wills, property deeds and marriage and business contracts, the registry work of a notary became very much a part of the work of the Superior Council.

In Louisiana, the Superior Council consisted of six councillors, a Procurer of the King, a **commissaire-ordonnateur** or intendant, and a recorder and secretary.\(^{34}\)

According to Dumont de Montigny, the traveler-historian, writing in the eighteenth century: "... the cases are judged there without Procurators, without lawyers and as a result, without expenses to the parties' hearing...; it is sufficient to say in their favor that they give justice to everyone with the most perfect equality. ..."\(^{35}\)

34. Ibid., 87. "The Superior Council established in the country of Louisiana by our Edict of the month of September, 1716, shall be composed and consist at the beginning of the directors of the said Company who are in the said place of our Commandant General, in the said place, of two of our lieutenants, of three other Councillors, of an Attorney General and a clerk..."; Dumont de Montigny, *Memoires Historiques sur la Louisiane* (Paris, 1753), II, 52.


Mr. Hardy has suggested that this greater opportunity for justice in Louisiana was due to the lack of a really powerful, wealthy class of people in the colony. To a certain extent this is true in that there was little money or goods for survival much less for bribery. Though Louisiana would never have a large dominating wealthy class, there were a number of wealthy planters in the New Orleans area in 1763 when the colony was ceded to Spain. Of interest is the description of the Council in the early 1760's when there was a large moneyed class: "Every man has a right to plead his own cause before them [the Superior Council],
Although this is a somewhat exaggerated appraisal, there was some truth to it. Old Regime France was notorious for the inefficiency in its judicial processes, with years spent trying and completing cases, ultimately at a terrible expense to those involved. This meant that the peasant or artisan had little opportunity to seek litigation in the courts of France. In Louisiana, however, all of the colonists had, in theory, free access to the court of the Superior Council. It can be concluded, therefore, that the Louisiana government, although technically under royal edict and decree, was in reality closer to the people and their needs than was the government in France. Unfortunately, the records of the Superior Council have yet to be extensively examined. Yet, on the basis of what is known of its activities, the Superior Council adapted itself quite well to the primitive conditions which existed in colonial Louisiana.

Among the citizens of the colony who had dealings with the Superior Council were the soldiers like Jean de Pradel. Although there are no letters of Jean de Pradel describing his first years in the colony, through reports and information about the military in general, certain

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either verbally or by written petition; and the evidences called on by each party attend the examination of the council. In a court like this, eloquence or great abilities cannot support injustice or confound truth." Philip Pittman, The Present State of European Settlement on the Mississippi (repr. Cleveland, 1906), 44.

assumptions about his military life in Louisiana in his first years can be made. As an ensign, de Pradel would have fared somewhat better than the regular soldier. At the beginning of the Crozat regime, the ensign's salary was 40 livres a month, while a regular soldier's pay was 9 livres. Concerning the rations, clothing and shelter provided for military personnel, it is not clear who is included in the category "soldier" referred to in reports. However, if the rations of the ordinary soldier were supposed to be 40 lbs. of flour, 30 lbs. of beef or 15 lbs. of raw bacon and one lb. of salt per month, those for an ensign would undoubtedly have been greater. And with only the captain and the lieutenant ranking above him in his company, de Pradel would have been among the first to receive rations every month regardless of food shortages. Military personnel, and officers in particular, were frequently involved in

37 Duclos to Pontchartrain, October, 1713, MPA, II, 84-86.
38 Ibid., 124.
39 To be sure a shortage in supplies existed, Bénard de la Harpe records: "In the month of January, 1714, the Justine, a ship of 200 tons perished with its cargo. . . . It was carrying to the colony 24,000 pounds of food supplies and merchandise. . . ." (La Harpe, Journal historique, 115). Along with the loss of the rations, the promised clothes for the year had also perished (Duclos to Pontchartrain, October, 1713, MPA, II, 146; Duclose to Pontchartrain, December 25, 1715, ibid., III, 206). By 1716, Cadillac, the governor, was blaming the growing number of desertions on the bad food, which had been reduced to "salted beef and rotten pork and beef." (Minutes of the Naval Council, August 29, 1716, containing Cadillac's report of February 7, 1716, ibid., 216.)
graft, especially in the sale of foodstuffs, during the colony's first years. Although there is no documentary evidence that de Pradel participated in these activities in his first years, he does refer to the "sins of his youth" in his letters of later years. A participant in petty theft he may have been, but even though desertion was commonplace among the French colonial troops, as a member of the French aristocracy, loyal to his post, a deserter de Pradel would never be. Even with the terrible life Louisiana offered to the military, Jean would serve and obey.

A native of Uzerche, France, a small town in the Limousin area, Jean Charles de Pradel was a son of Jacques de Pradel, Sieur de la Maze and Gille-Paule de Maledent. The de la Maze family had lived in the area for a long time. The family's public servants included many generals and bishops. Its servant in 1692, the year of Jean Charles' birth, was his father who had held the office of lieutenant-général of the bailliage in 1670 in the Uzerche area of Limousin. Several years later, in 1683, he had received the subdélégué position of the intendant of Limoges, followed by a lifetime appointment as mayor of Uzerche. The importance of these offices held by Jacques de Pradel indicates the local prominence of the family.40

The local importance and stature of the family had aided in increasing the de Pradel fortune. The marriage of

40Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 22-26.
Daniel de Pradel in 1654 to a Roffignac, the wealthiest family in the area, only enhanced the family's mounting wealth and influence. The de Pradels had always been excellent landlords and had derived great profit from their holdings. Indeed, the de Pradel family could be included among the capable and innovative eighteenth century French provincial nobility which Robert Forster describes in The Nobility of Toulouse.

There had always been numerous offspring in each generation of the de Pradels. Jacques de Pradel's seven children were in keeping with the tradition. Although the third and the sixth children died at early ages, the five others lived to adulthood. The daughters, Marie and Marguerite, married well, as dutiful daughters should, into the local nobility. The sons, all educated at College St. Michel in Paris, fulfilled the social positions that Old Regime society had defined for them. The eldest son, Charles de Pradel, Sieur de la Maze, born c. 1684, inherited his father's lands and titles. He would become controller-général of the Chancellery of the Cour des Aides of Montaubon. The second son, Joseph, entered the priesthood, and from the age of seventeen had ecclesiastical benefices at La Besse, Ligonnat, and finally at Magoutieres, the most

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41 Ibid., 24.

because he was a younger son in Old Regime France, without lands or offices in any capacity, Jean Charles de Pradel was destined for a military career and had only to decide which branch of the service to enter. After completing more than ten years of study at College St. Michel in Paris, Jean Charles joined the regiment of the marine. His choice was undoubtedly influenced by his uncle, Jean de Malecent, Viguier de Roussillion, who had begun his military career in the regiment of the marine and had fought brilliantly in the recent War of the Spanish Succession. Perhaps, his nephew, with a similar beginning would also have an outstanding military career.

The first six years of Jean's career in Louisiana gave little, if any, indication of a future of military greatness. At the end of this time, he left Louisiana for France on leave, needing a rest and a change. But, as his letters to his family indicate, on going home he was also looking for another military assignment, not really wanting to return to Louisiana. He had witnessed a great deal in his first tour of duty having lived through both the Crozat and the Law regimes. The lack of organization and disorder which he had found, though promoting distress and famine for the majority, had provided a base for de Pradel's future

43Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 25-27.
44Ibid., 28-29. 45Ibid., 36.
ventures. While realizing that the doors to money and fortune were closed to him in France, Jean, quite probably, foresaw more than most the opportunities to be had in Louisiana. Sharper and brighter than the majority of his contemporaries in the colony, he had been aware of the factional strife in Louisiana and had shrewdly aligned himself with the more powerful group. He was, perhaps, quite conscious of the fact that frontier Louisiana, with its unstratified society and unprecedented way of life, offered him the possibility of becoming wealthy in this virgin land, something impossible for him to achieve in France.
CHAPTER II

THE EMERGING ENTREPRENEUR

After a short visit with his family in Uzerche on his return from Louisiana, Jean de Pradel went to Paris early in 1721 seeking a more prestigious military position than his present assignment. Despite John Law's current propaganda campaign, de Pradel was convinced that Louisiana's days were numbered and that his fortune should be sought elsewhere. "The Company is still quite uncertain which makes my destiny also very uncertain," he wrote his father in March, 1721.¹ Neither family name nor connection, however, aided him in seeking his transfer. Because of Law's financial schemes which had greatly inflated the French economy, advancement in any capacity was difficult at this time.² As a result,

¹Jean de Pradel to his father Jacques de Pradel, March 28, 1721 in A. Baillardel and A. Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, Vie d'un Colon Français en Louisiane au XVIII Siècle (Paris, 1928), 37.

Jean made further comment about his future to his father, "... if I could go to the Indies with the same position that I have, there would be room to hope for some fortune. I am not counting on this last, however, though I am exploring all possibilities so that I cannot blame myself... ."

²Jean de Pradel to his father Jacques de Pradel, April 1, 1721, ibid., 40. Jean himself believed that Law's Mississippi bubble would soon break. "... I was correct
the young officer failed to obtain a new commission. He awaited his departure for Louisiana with great humiliation, having to rely still on money from home to live.\(^3\)

Jean de Pradel probably returned to Louisiana in late 1721 or early 1722. There is a record of his participation in a military detail in the colony in the early summer of 1722. At that time, Captain de Pradel along with other soldiers, Duloubois, La Harpe, Renard, Montigny, de Bellile, St.-Esteberi, and de Marey were commissioned to pursue a company of Swiss soldiers which had been sent over in the Law period and had deserted to Havana. The seventeen-day detail proved unsuccessful, having to return without the deserters, for the Spanish refused them entrance to the port.\(^4\)

Even with the progress made on the building of New Orleans at this time, the desperate conditions of the soldiers, prompting their desertion, continued. As in previous periods, the lack of provisions and the exorbitant prices for those goods which could be bought were major causes of desertion. The current price for an egg was 10 s, to remark to you that the summons for the suppression of the Company of the Indies was not publicized, that it is not yet at all, and it will continue still until it will have paid its debts, which is what they are currently working on. . . ."  

\(^3\)Jean de Pradel to his father Jacques de Pradel, March 28, 1721, ibid., 37. His father sent him more than 200 liv during his stay in Paris.

for a pot of milk 40 s, for a handful of peas 3 lv, for a single piece of smoked beef 20 to 25 lv. A terrible hurricane in September, 1722 had not helped the food shortage. Bénard de la Harpe estimated a loss of 8,000 quarts of the rice crop, as well as much of the corn and bean crop, due to the storm. Le Blond de La Tour, a Company engineer, also reported the crop loss, the food shortage and the fear of starvation in the colony. To further the military's difficulty, the Superior Council, at a meeting in May, 1723,

5 Minutes of the Superior Council, May, 1723, Dunbar Rowland and Albert Sanders (eds.), Mississippi Provincial Archives (3 vols.; Jackson, 1927-32), III, 347. Hereinafter cited as MPA.

A sergeant's pay at New Orleans, Biloxi and Mobile was 20 lv, 14 s a month, which did not include a 3 lv deduction for clothes; a corporal and drummer were paid 14 lv, 19 s, 6 d a month, from which was deducted 2 lv, 5 s for clothes. This is an incredibly low pay considering the terrible cost of provisions.

A brief explanation regarding the value of a livre in France in the eighteenth century should be given at this time. The value of a franc in the eighteenth century was ten times that of a franc in 1914, when the French abandoned the gold standard. Today in France, prices are often quoted in "old francs." If, for example, a price of 10,000 francs is quoted, what is really meant is 100 new francs. With inflation, the exchange rate is about five francs to the dollar. Therefore, an item costing 100 new francs is worth about $20 or $2,000 in eighteenth century France. To be sure, prices were inflated in the colony of Louisiana. However, it can be concluded that the value of a livre in the colony was at least 100 times the value of a franc today.


7 Le Blond de la Tour to the commissionaires at New Orleans, September 13, 1722, Archives des Colonies, C 12, 6: 339-40v. (Microfilm copy in University of Southwestern Louisiana Library, Lafayette, Louisiana.) Hereinafter cited as AC.
discussed the possibility of cutting the soldiers' pay. The current salaries were more than the 1718 ordinance of the Company of the Indies had stipulated. Yet, the Council was sympathetic with the soldiers' plight. It was reported:

... they [the soldiers] are not lodged at all; that the majority sleep in the open air and are bitten by mosquitoes, when they are not on guard duty; that the Company does not supply them with any equipment such as beds, mattresses, and blankets; that they cannot work for private persons or for the Company at the ordinary work because of the small number of men; for the whole of two months they have had nothing but bread. . . .

Even as a captain, de Pradel did not escape the housing problem. Receiving 90 lv a month in salary, a captain paid as much as 40 to 50 lv for rent every month.

Since the cost of living was so high, even military officers had to supplement their incomes. A common way of doing so was by engaging in trade. The key to entering trade, however, lay in the ability to obtain goods from the Company store or warehouse. According to Jacques de la Chaise, a company commissaire, "They [the captains] must therefore engage in trade and for that purpose get goods from the warehouse [the Company store], but M. de Bienville sells them only to those whom he pleases. . . ."

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8 Minutes of the Superior Council, May, 1723, MPA, III, 347.

9 Ibid., 350-51. Should there have been any surprise that the Swiss left for Havana?

10 La Chaise to the Directors of the Company, September, 1723, ibid., II, 317-18.

11 Ibid.
de Pradel's leave, he had been praised and recommended for promotion by Bienville; it would, therefore, be logical to conclude that the Captain would have had little difficulty in obtaining trade goods. If de Pradel were able to secure goods through Bienville or from some civilians, in view of the scarcity of saleable merchandise, he would be certain of making a profit.

Indeed, there is record of de Pradel's organizing a company whose precise nature is not known at New Orleans as early as October, 1722. As a matter of fact, he had been engaged in trading ventures at least as early as 1719, because in that year he had been arrested and had had his goods confiscated for engaging in illegal activities.

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12 Dossier du Chevalier de Pradel, conservé aux Archives de la Marine de France, reel 1148, 15. (Microfilm copy in Howard Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.) Hereinafter cited as Dossier du Chevalier de Pradel.


15 Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 33. Jean de Pradel was aligned with the Bienville faction in his first years. As a matter of fact, his recommendation for promotion made by Bienville was probably made in
Although a member of the French nobility, he was free to pursue commercial goals in Louisiana without loss of title or privilege. Measures had been taken by the French government in the seventeenth century to encourage migration of members of the nobility to the colonies. By the decrees of March, 1642 and July, 1657, the aristocracy were permitted to engage in trade in the colonies and at the same time to retain their noble status.16

New Orleans in 1724 was an excellent place for a member of the nobility to pursue fortune or profit. Although prices on goods had been set by the Superior Council the previous spring in an effort to curb the exorbitant prices of supplies,17 the hurricane mentioned above and the failure of the local peddlers ignored these prices for the list was posted on the following occasions:

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17 Minutes of the Superior Council, April 21, 1722, MPA, II, 272.

The following is a list of prices in the colony at that time: buffalo meat, 8 s a pound, French meat, 10 s a pound, a quarter of a deer, 4 lv. eggs, 50 s a dozen, brandy, 3 lv a pot, red wine, 30 s a pot, white wine 20 s a pot. Despite the threat of confiscation of goods and a fine of 100 lv, the local peddlers ignored these prices for the list was posted on the following occasions.
of ships to arrive had promoted an increase in speculation. By September, 1723, La Chaise reported, "frauds and excessive profits" continued.¹⁸ Not only was there a shortage because of failure of ships to arrive, but much of the merchandise which did arrive was in bad condition, in part, at least, because it had been poorly packed.¹⁹

In 1724 de Pradel was put in command of a military detail with orders to go to the lower Missouri River to erect a fort; before leaving, however, he bought a black slave for 1500 livres from one M. Delorme, a Company director, and Extract from the Minutes of the Administrative Council, July 17, 1722, MPA, III, 326. It should be recalled here that the soldiers were often paid in supplies due to the lack of specie, and that de Pradel, being a captain, would have had more supplies of his own. Perhaps, too, he kept some of his company's rations as well.

¹⁸La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, September, 1723, ibid., 326.
"... At present brandy is sold for 30 livres a pot (the fixed price for the said amount was 3 livres), bacon at 3 livres a pound and everything else in proportion, and we cannot learn absolutely who these dealers are. Those who complain of them are unwilling to inform on them. Their reason is that next time they won't get any more."

¹⁹Memoir from the Council of Louisiana to the Council of the Company of the Indies, April 23, 1725, ibid., 459.
There were only enough supplies for one-third of the colonists. The Council had requested more aid less than six months before. "... The scarcity of flour and of beverages that has arisen because you did not send us any ships has caused part of our people to perish. ..." Committee of Louisiana to the Directors of the Company, November 8, 1724, ibid., 404.
That he could commit himself for such a sum before departure on military assignment seems to indicate several things. First of all, de Pradel's credit must have been good to permit him to make such a large commitment prior to going on a mission filled with the possibility of great danger and even death. Indeed, his business affairs in New Orleans must have begun to take shape. Secondly, his "buying now and paying later" was very much akin to the credit situation on other frontiers at this time. As a member of the French nobility, he may have considered himself above having to meet immediate payment. On the other hand, frontier Louisiana certainly provided the conditions for the widespread use of credit. There was little if any specie in the colony at the time, and very few people had anything substantial to offer for collateral. Either de Pradel must have been very persuasive in dealing with M. Delorme, or he had a supply of goods to offer as collateral for his purchase.

De Pradel's slave became the subject of a controversy which was brought before the Superior Council for settlement. It seems that Delorme, the man from whom de Pradel bought the slave, had acquired the chattel from one Sieur

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Desbrosses, a former warehouse guard, employed by the Company of the Indies. Desbrosses, without authorization, had advanced one Sieur Couturier 565 livres 15 sous and 3 deniers worth of merchandise from the store. The Company therefore made Descrosses responsible for the payment of this debt, and when the payment was not forthcoming, Delorme confiscated a Negro slave of Desbrosses', valued at 660 livres, to compensate for the money owed. It was this slave that Delorme had sold to de Pradel for 1500 livres. It was argued before the Superior Council on Desbrosses' behalf that Couturier was owed the value of the goods by the Company and Desbrosses was merely repaying him, and that Delorme, therefore, had had no cause to reseize the slave. Devoid of the formality and rigid precedent of judicial processes which existed in France at that time, the Superior Council in frontier Louisiana was expeditious in disposing of the problem. The case was introduced before the Council on August 4, 1725 and was settled within five days with de Pradel being given the slave. Whether de Pradel knew that the slave was

21"Records of the Superior Council," August 4, 1725 in the Black Books for the summer of 1725. In addition to the Cruzat calendar in the Louisiana Historical Quarterly, there are the "Black Books" in the Louisiana State Museum Library in New Orleans, Louisiana. These are an index to the full Superior Council records, bound in black looseleaf notebooks. Somewhat more complete than the Cruzat calendar, the Black Books are marred by some misdating, misfiling and poor translation. See also "Records of the Superior Council," LHQ, II (July, 1919), 342.

confiscated property is difficult to say. Probably he did.

Well before the Superior Council made its decision, de Pradel had left New Orleans with his slave for the Missouri country. There, two hundred miles above the Missouri's mouth, the French were building a fort in order to support the efforts to make friends with the Osage Indians and establish trade relations with them. Having been trained in Paris in military defense construction and having supervised the construction of some fortifications in Natchitoches in 1720, the services of Captain de Pradel were no doubt needed to direct the completion of Fort Orleans. Although it was completed, the expense involved in maintaining the post prompted suggestions of its abandonment even before the end of 1724. About the same time, rumors began to rise regarding the activities of increased numbers of Englishmen along the Ohio. It was soon realized that the Illinois post at Fort Chartres on the Mississippi was of greater strategic importance than the fort on the Missouri, and in addition, Fort Chartres was self-supporting. As a matter of fact, the Illinois country had been supplying the lower part of the colony with food for


24 Jean de Pradel to his father Jacques de Pradel, April 2, 1721, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 40; December 19, 1722. AC., B 43: 269v.

several years. 26

Although the evidence is not clear, Captain de Pradel was apparently made commandant of Fort Chartres in late 1724 or 1725. 27 During his first tour of duty in Louisiana, de Pradel had served at Fort Chartres under Pierre Dugué de Boisbriant, the first major-commandant of the Illinois country. It is quite possible that while at Fort Chartres de Pradel again engaged in trading schemes in competition with the colonists and voyageurs of the area. By the fall of 1725, the Council had received reports from the Illinois country "... that there has been a sort of revolt on the part of the inhabitants because the commandant of the post had unadvisedly had one of their fellow citizens arrested. ..." 28 The details of the incident are not known. However, there had been reports earlier in the year of the colonists' and voyageurs' complaints about the commanding officer who forbade their trade with the Indians. 29


It has been suggested that de Pradel served a short time between the command of Du Tisné in 1724 and Deslottes in 1725-29 as he is not mentioned in the Surrey Calendar of Commandants of the Illinois.


29 Minutes of the Superior Council, January 27, 1725, ibid, 483.
Since barter was the means of trade in the Louisiana interior at this time, de Pradel, as commanding officer, would have had access to the dry goods and liquors that could be traded not only to the Indians for their beeswax, furs and bear's oil, but also to the colonists for their wheat, flour and salt. Though it is true that the Captain could have dealt in a variety of foodstuffs, he probably sold mostly liquor.

While de Pradel was serving at Fort Chartres in 1725, the Company of the Indies took a census in the colony. It showed that Jean de Pradel owned some valuable property, his declared possessions including 1 master [engage?], 2 Negro slaves, 3 cows and one horse. One of the slaves, as we have seen, was worth 1500 lv, with the value of the other one probably at least 1000 lv, the price of a black slave in the Illinois country at this time. The exact value of a

32 Surrey, The Commerce of Louisiana, 246. The value of a Negro slave in 1722 was about 1000 lv or 800 lv, if paid for in lead, most of which was located in the Illinois country where de Pradel was stationed. Captain de Pradel, as a slaveowner, would have been in a minority at this time. Furthermore, Bienville writes in his memoir on Louisiana, "there are not fifteen inhabitants who have more than twenty of them slaves and more than three-fourths of the inhabitants have none at all. At the Illinois, there are one hundred and fifty inhabitants who have only ninety negroe workmen among them. . . . " Bienville's Memoir on Louisiana, 1726, MPA, III, 426.
cow is difficult to determine. La Chaise had said in 1723 that the colonists would pay 500 to 600 livres in copper money for a cow.\(^{33}\) La Harpe's statistics, though not the most reliable, record that there were 1,100 cows in the colony in 1724.\(^{34}\) Whatever, its value in money or goods, a bête à corne was a highly desirable piece of property to own in Louisiana's first days. The records regarding the value of a horse are even more scarce. Most of the horses in the Illinois area of Louisiana were obtained from the Osage Indians who had initially bargained for the animals with the Spanish. There is record of a trader in 1719 who exchanged 3 muskets, powder, knives and trinkets with the Indians on the upper Missouri River for 2 horses and a mule.\(^{35}\) Again, to determine the cost of a horse in 1726 is difficult to do. La Harpe gives a figure of 200 such animals in the colony in 1724, which must have been an estimate on his part.\(^{36}\) But, that there were few horses and that they had great value in eighteenth century Louisiana cannot be doubted. According to the "official record" that the 1726 Louisiana census must have been, Captain de Pradel owned some important pieces of property.

On completing his tour of duty at Fort Chartres, Jean

\(^{33}\)La Chaise to the Directors of the Company, September, 1723, MPA, II, 312.

\(^{34}\)La Harpe, _Journal historique_, 375.

\(^{35}\)Surrey, _The Commerce of Louisiana_, 301.

\(^{36}\)La Harpe, _Journal historique_, 375.
de Pradel returned to New Orleans and left for France in the spring of 1727, probably in the month of May, on the ship the **Baleine**.\(^{37}\) There is evidence that he stayed in Limousin with his family until July of the following year. He signed a cancellation of a debt of 300 lv with a M. Viladard on September 28, 1727. In December of that year in Uzerche, he became godfather at the baptism of his brother's son, Jean de la Maze. On July 28, 1728, he received 800 lv from his older brother, Charles, as part of his father's estate.\(^{38}\) On the same day, Charles also advanced him money to buy five Negro slaves.\(^{39}\)

When Captain de Pradel returned to Louisiana in 1728, the scene in the New Orleans area did not present as dismal a prospect as it had in previous years. Despite the failure of Law's company and the distress the colony still knew from time to time, there had been an increase in population because of the Company's efforts. Many of the colonists were German farmers whose success in agricultural ventures had increased the hope for the colony's existence on more than a mere subsistence level. In 1727, the population of New Orleans included 729 free people, 65 indentured servants, 127 Negroes and 17 Indian slaves. In the surrounding areas there were about 600 settlers along with 1,434 Negroes and

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\(^{37}\) Terisse de Ternan to Rossard, May 21, 1727, BAILARDEL and PRIOULT, *Le Chevalier de Pradel*, 44.

\(^{38}\) *Ibid.*, 45.

\(^{39}\) *Ibid.*
Governor Périer and La Chaise reported that year "...everything appears tranquil to us now. Those who were opposed to its [Louisiana's] establishment are themselves asking permission to settle down. Almost all the officers are taking lands and they regard the past as a great mistake which they have made in not having thought of it [settling down]. This will be the true way to be tranquil..." Life in Louisiana seemed to be becoming more stable, and the future more certain.

When Jean de Pradel wrote his brother in October, 1729 that he planned to return to France by 1733 "in style" never to leave, his investments and commercial enterprises were rapidly growing. Soon after his return to Louisiana de Pradel began to invest in land and slaves and to grow crops. With funds he borrowed from his brother Charles, as noted above, he bought five Negroes giving him a total of seven slaves. He also purchased some land in New Orleans as well as a tract of land, probably ten arpents, five miles

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40 Le Baron Marc de Villiers, Histoire de la Fondation de la Nouvelle Orleans, 1717-1722 (Paris, 1917), 121.

41 Périer and La Chaise to the Directors of the Company, November 2, 1721, MPA, II, 552-53.

42 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, October 4, 1729, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 58.

43 Dossier du Chevalier de Pradel, reel 1148.
from the city. On the latter property he was growing rice and corn to feed both himself and his seven slaves. Producing his own food would be much more economical than having to buy Company goods. Any production above his own needs could probably be sold, for there was a demand for these grains in the local trade. How successful de Pradel's farming ventures were is not known. Despite Governor Périer's report to Maurepas, the Minister of the Marine, of August 15, 1729, concerning the loss of the crop that year, de Pradel was optimistic about his own harvest of rice and corn. It was quite an accomplishment to grow anything at all in the area around New Orleans. The land was low and swampy. It was covered with as much as nine inches

44 In explaining to Charles, his brother, the purchase of this land and its cultivation, de Pradel revealed something of the struggles of a military officer in French colonial Louisiana. "Until now, I did not have a residence," he wrote in September, 1729, "so that when they had a detail to do, I was usually sent; all these changes of the post were upsetting my business affairs. . . ."

45 Périer to Maurepas, August 15, 1729, MPA, III, 657.

46 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, September 1, 1729, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 50. Exactly where this tract of land was is not known. In the "Recensement" at New Orleans, there is record of one Jean de Pradel who owned ten arpents of land on the river, a little above the city. This land had been purchased from a Sieur Prévost ("Recensement," 329. There is no date on the record of this transaction.) These ten arpents were probably de Pradel's land located five miles from New Orleans. There is record of a Sieur Prévost, a bookkeeper, described by Périer in 1729 as wanting to give up everything and retire, being disenchanted with the colony and the Company (Périer and La Chaise to the Directors of the Company, August 26, 1729, MPA, II, 665). It is quite possible, though not certain, that he was the same Prévost who sold de Pradel the land.
of water at times, and the thick cane undergrowth had to be cleared before any crops could be planted, "... and it is not without very hard work that one succeeds. . . ." In addition to engaging in farming operations on his land, by the end of September, 1729, de Pradel was making plans to begin the production of lumber in the following month. He estimated that from the timber on his land he could make 100,000 barrel staves at 140 livres a thousand, "... killing two birds with one stone because my land as well will be cleared by this means." There was a great demand for wood products in both the Windward Islands and France at that time, and, consequently, even the Company was supporting the timber industry. De Pradel's farming and timber producing activities worked well together, for using his slaves in the off-season to cut the woods, he was realizing the maximum benefit from his property. De Pradel's ability to exploit his labor and land resources efficiently is not surprising; his family had done the same thing for years in Limousin. There the labor had been performed by métayers instead of Negro slaves.

49 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, September 22, 1729, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 55.
The unusual aspect of Jean Charles de Pradel's enterprises was his success in strictly commercial ventures. His "shopkeeper" mentality and general business sense was certainly not in the tradition of an Old Regime noble family. But the Louisiana frontier did not know social stratification or class tradition. There he was free to make the most of any opportunities which might present themselves.

In the uninhibited, competitive conditions which prevailed in that frontier environment, de Pradel had a substantial advantage over most of his potential competition. For the majority of the colonists were ex-convicts and other undesirable elements who had never known wealth or the disappointment of being deprived of it as had de Pradel. Unlike him they were not motivated to seek to make a fortune.

De Pradel began his new commercial ventures by asking his brother Charles for a loan of 2,000 livres to open up a shop in town. He was moved to get into the retail business in the hope of making a great profit. He requested from Charles not only money at this time, but also cheese, wine and lace for military cornets and ladies' hats, items which would probably sell for a handsome sum in Louisiana. Until 1727 private individuals had been barred from engaging in trade in the colony. In that year, however, the Company

51 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, September 1, 1729, *Baillard et Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel*, 51.

52 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, September 1, 1729 and September 22, 1729, *ibid.*, 51-55.
of the Indies permitted the opening of stores which were not under government or Company control. De Pradel had reason to expect success in his business undertakings, because he was no longer the inexperienced military trader of ten years before. He had learned from his experiences in his business ventures of his first days. Furthermore, having spent a good deal of time around French ports, waiting for passage to the colony, he had probably observed the operations of port commerce. He understood such things as marine insurance. His knowledgeable explanation to his brother Charles of the workings of commercial enterprise and the chances taken in trade indicate de Pradel's own development into a truly competitive homme d'affaires, "... you risk nothing when you want something. . . ." 

In addition to opening a general merchandise store, de Pradel collaborated with Nicholas Chauvin de la Frenière in financing a cabaret in New Orleans. La Frenière was a wise choice for a partner. He was already known for his financial successes as a landlord and would, therefore, undoubtedly prove to be a respectable backer for the business. Together the two men purchased more than 300 lv of wine and liquor. It will be recalled that Captain de Pradel had already experienced a degree of success from a similar

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53 Surrey, The Commerce of Louisiana, 278.

54 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, September 22, 1729, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 51.
undertaking in the Illinois country. He had great hopes for his cabaret in New Orleans, which was to be run by the same woman who had helped him in the Fort Chartres area. Exactly what his relationship with this bonne servante was on a personal level cannot definitely be said. Of course, much could be speculated concerning the relationship since the military on Louisiana's frontier had reputations for loose-living and low morals. Perhaps de Pradel was typical of these troops. In a letter to his brother, Charles, dated September, 1729, Jean declared "...you are discrete enough to keep your mouth closed on certain matters that are not necessary for everybody to know." But whether this statement referred to revelations which de Pradel made to his brother concerning his past personal conduct is not known.

The New Orleans liquor business was apparently as profitable in the eighteenth century as it is today, but by 1726 the Superior Council was taking steps to regulate it. In that year, it passed a decree forbidding wineshops to operate during church services on Sunday. A year later, it was declared illegal to sell liquor to slaves. Previous efforts had been made to set prices, and in May, 1728, the following measures were fixed: 110 pots constituted a hogshead of red wine, "guildive" and vinegar, a hogshead of white wine contained 100 pots, and 150 pots composed a hogshead of

55Ibid. All of the information in the paragraph is contained in this letter from Jean to his brother Charles.
brandy. Whether these decrees were abided by the de Pradel operation is difficult to say. The fact that continued decrees were issued and measures were taken to regulate the liquor trade even after the colony was ceded back to the crown in the 1730's indicates that few if any obeyed the laws, but most seemed to have profited. The following is an excellent assessment of the liquor trade at that time in the colony: "The liquor business of Louisiana, as is the case in most frontier communities, had many representatives, most of whom were doing well. . . ." The fact that someone in New Orleans had made 50,000 livres in the three years prior to de Pradel's entering the business must have encouraged the Captain to pursue his fortune in the liquor traffic.

Although there was apparently a large profit to be made from the liquor trade in New Orleans, Jean de Pradel entered still another business enterprise in establishing a wooden shoe manufacturing operation. This undertaking indicates his increasing business cleverness in providing needed skilled labor, at a profit, on the Louisiana frontier.

56 Surrey, The Commerce of Louisiana, 272ff.
57 Ibid.
58 Memoir of Charles Le Gac, Director of the Company of the Indies in Louisiana, 1718-1721, 73. A typescript translation of the French manuscript, in the Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, a WPA project in Louisiana; Surrey, The Commerce of Louisiana, 272-73.
59 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, September 22, 1729, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 53-55.
While he was in France in 1727, there had been conversations among the colonists and Company directors concerning the need of sabotmakers. Governor Périer and La Chaise wrote the Company in November of that year, "We believe that if we had here two shoemakers who would make us wooden shoes for our negroes and those of the inhabitants that would greatly protect the feet of these poor wretches. You might send us some." Apparently, the request was ignored by the Company, or none of the colonists wanted to sponsor such indentured servants. By August of 1729, however, the Company received word from the colony that one Sieur de Pradel had written to France to have two wooden shoemakers sent. In fact, it was not until the end of September that de Pradel asked his brother to help him in this matter. By April of the following year, Charles de la Maze had arranged passage for two engagés, the Monique (or Manique) brothers, Jean and Pierre, for Louisiana, to serve as shoemakers. The following is a list of the expenses de Pradel's brother incurred in making the preparations for their trip:

60 Périer and La Chaise to the Directors, November 2, 1727, MPA, II, 560. The point was also made that the Negroes wore out too many leather shoes. Extract from letters of the Company of the Indies to the Council of Louisiana, dated from 1719-1729, MPA, II, 26.

61 Périer and La Chaise to the Directors, August 26, 1729, ibid., 675.

62 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, September 22, 1729, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 55.
1 horse to carry their tools and belongings 33 lv
their tools 12 lv
2 pair of boots 6 lv
2 linen jackets and 2 pair of leggings 2 lv
the processing and papers for their contracts 7 lv 8 s
cost of their trip and lodgings 40 lv
$100 \text{ lv} 12 \text{ s}$

Apparently, Charles' confidence in his younger brother's money-making schemes was growing, judging by the alacrity with which he responded to Jean's request. De Pradel received word that the sabotiers were on their way by June of 1730.64

To appreciate the money to be made from the manufacture of wooden shoes is to realize that by 1731 there were 3,395 Negroes in the province.65 There are no figures as to the price of a pair of wooden shoes or the amount of money that Jean de Pradel made. However, given the fact that the largest plantations were in the New Orleans area having, no doubt, the majority of Louisiana's slaves, it would follow that de Pradel had an excellent opportunity to do well. Whether profitable or not, the business terminated in 1733 when the Monique brothers' three-year term of service had elapsed.66

63 Baillaridel and Prioult, *ibid.*, 81.
64 *Ibid.*
66 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, January 25, 1733, Baillaridel and Prioult, *Le Chevalier de Pradel*, 120.
Although it would seem that de Pradel may have acquired the Midas touch by this time, he, like businessmen on all frontiers, had to deal with the difficulties stemming from a specie shortage. In eighteenth century Louisiana, this problem was indeed an ever-pressing one. The royal edict of December, 1716, granting 150,000 marcs of copper money in 12 and 6 denier pieces for the American colonies, was a step toward boosting specie in Louisiana. By March, 1717, the new money was to be circulating in Louisiana. But, when the government stopped minting the copper coins a few years later, there was still little if any copper tender in the colony. Repeated requests for more currency seemed to fall on deaf ears.

Since there was difficulty keeping the French copper money in the colony, efforts were made to retain the Spanish silver coin which had filtered into Louisiana. The problem with the Spanish silver currency was dealt with more directly. There was difficulty retaining this specie because the Spanish were receiving 7 liv 10 s for one piastre in Martinique and Saint Dominique, while the rate of exchange in Louisiana was only 4 liv for each piastre. By the edict of March 12, 1723, however, Louisiana was given an

67 Surrey, The Commerce of Louisiana, 108-11; Minutes of the Superior Council of Louisiana, April 21, 1722, MPA, II, 271; Regulations issued at Fort Louis, Biloxi, May 1, 1722, ibid., III, 323; Périer and La Chaise to the Company of the Indies, April 22, 1727, MPA, II, 538.
equal status with the islands with the decreeing of a uniform exchange rate in all the colonies of 7 lv 10 s for a Spanish piastre. In Louisiana's traditional, unreliable response to such matters, it was reported that the piastre was exchanged for as little as 1 lv 10 s under the Superior Council's regulations and for as much as 25 lv on the black market. Perhaps, the silver continued to leave the colony because of this great fluctuation in the rate of exchange.

In the face of a chronic shortage of specie, the Superior Council had authorized the issuance of paper currency. When the copper money had disappeared in 1727, for example, 50,000 lv of notes had been issued locally, signed by La Chaise. This measure only resulted in increased speculation as well as forgery of the notes. When it was discovered that one Maisonneuve had forged about 1,000 lv, the notes were cancelled and new ones issued. In the hope of lessening the chance of forgery, the signatures of five


In a series of edicts in 1724, the pistolles and piastres were reevaluated for the Realm, as well as for the French Empire, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>1 piastre</th>
<th>1 pistolle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 26, 1724</td>
<td>28 lv from 30 lv</td>
<td>7 lv from 7 lv 10 s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2, 1724</td>
<td>22 lv from 28 lv</td>
<td>5 lv from 7 lv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 30, 1724</td>
<td>18 lv from 22 lv</td>
<td>4 lv 10 s from 5 lv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
persons were placed on the new notes.\textsuperscript{70}

The various kinds of money circulating in the colony and the fluctuating notes of exchange must have caused many problems in the business affairs of de Pradel. In his commercial transactions, he quotes prices in both pistolles, the Spanish currency, and in French livres and crowns. Whether de Pradel had the actual Spanish and French specie for all of these transactions is impossible to know. A system of notes on merchandise at the warehouse was widely used in the transactions of local business. In his first business undertakings in the Illinois country while on military detail, de Pradel probably employed a similar method of doing business. In his overseas transactions, de Pradel, like other merchants, used bills of exchange in settling for his purchase of goods.

All in all, by the end of the 1720's, de Pradel had become a successful businessman despite all the uncertainties which one had to face in engaging in entrepreneurial activities in a frontier community.

\textsuperscript{70} Périer and La Chaise to the Directors of the Company, July 31, 1728, MPA, II, 577-79.
CHAPTER III

THE SOLDIER BECOMES A SETTLER

Though Jean de Pradel knew the beginnings of financial success and security in the 1720's, Louisiana was still very much a frontier and was to remain so for some time. Her inhabitants, including Jean de Pradel, continued to struggle with the frontier problems of Indians, starvation, disease, financial instability and personality conflict. That de Pradel not only survived these challenging years but continued to prosper is an indication of his determination to have his fortune.

In 1729, while Louisiana was still under the proprietorship of the Company of the Indies, occurred an Indian uprising which affected de Pradel's fortune. On November 28, 1729 the Natchez Indians attacked the French settlement at Fort Rosalie, near present-day Natchez, Mississippi, massacring nearly 200 settlers. The event was a terrible

1Jean de Pradel to his mother, December 6, 1729, A. Baillardel and A. Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, Vie d'un Colon Francais en Louisiane au XVIII Siecle (Paris, 1928), 65; John Delanglez, "The Natchez Massacre and Governor Périer," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XVII (1934), 631-41. The French had always prided themselves on their success in Indian relations. Their reputation for fairness and better treatment of the natives than the English was
shock to everyone including de Pradel who suffered a substantial business loss as a result of the massacre. He had not only had an agent at Fort Rosalie with 2400 lv of merchandise to sell, but he also had letters of credit valued at more than 3000 lv from many of the dead victims. These reversals were indeed most costly and discouraging.

Such losses would now be more important to de Pradel than before because he had taken on the responsibility of a wife. In the spring of 1730, he had married Alexandrine de la Chaise, the daughter of Jacques de la Chaise, a former Company official. Alexandrine was indeed quite a catch, the daughter of an influential and wealthy colonial official. Jean wrote his mother in March, 1720 that "... he [La Chaise] had sent from France, two months before his death, a very loveable daughter whom he had offered me and whom I had accepted." Alexandrine's name and inheritance would no doubt aid de Pradel's efforts for future fortune.

widely known. The Le Moyne brothers from the first days of Louisiana had realized the importance of Indian alliances from their Canadian experiences. As a consequence, the attack and ensuing massacre at Fort Rosalie by the Natchez Indians in November, 1729, came as a shock to everyone. The Natchez were the most civilized of all the Indians that the French had known in Louisiana, having extended friendship to the Europeans from the very beginning (Pierre de Charleviox, S.J., Journal historique d'un Voyage par ordre du roi dans l'amerique septentrionale [Paris, 1744], II, 414-20; Dumont de Montigny, Memoires historiques sur la Louisiane [Paris, 1753], I, 158-60).

2 Jean de Pradel to his mother, March 22, 1730, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 73.

3 Ibid., 74.

4 Ibid.
By the fall of 1730, Jean de Pradel had returned to France with his new bride, desirous of a position that would require permanent residence in the country. However, failure to secure such a position prompted his decision to transport a new stock of goods to the colony for a store he planned to open next to his house in New Orleans in addition to his cabaret.

Yet, obtaining the goods necessary for such operations proved difficult indeed. The expenses of a new baby born in February, 1731, followed by his wife's illness were costly to de Pradel. Unfortunately, he had relied on a M. Fouques, his purchasing agent in France, to save some of his money sent in his letters of exchange. However, Fouques had proceeded to spend the entire 1000 crowns on merchandise, deducting 2 per cent for commission, leaving de Pradel with no cash. Realizing that the greater loss would be to sell the intended colonial goods in France, Jean wrote Charles de la Maze for a loan of 2000 lv, believing that "... I must leave with honor, without being obliged to sell my furniture, that which I brought from Louisiana, as well as those things that M. Fouques has bought." Trying to reassure his brother that he had tried everything, Jean mentioned efforts made to borrow from the Company and had even contemplated

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5 Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 82.

6 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, March 8, 1731, ibid., 95.
using his wife's inheritance. Considering that de Pradel's business affairs were not at all in the family tradition, Charles was probably somewhat hesitant about sending the money. Of course, it could have been the slowness of the mail which prompted the delay in response to this call of distress. About three weeks later, Jean wrote a second letter, pleading for assistance, describing their desperate situation. He even sent word that he was a good risk, for his liquor business was doing quite well at that time.

Eventually, the money arrived from Charles, as well as payments on some past debts owed the desperate colonist.

Besides the goods which he purchased with funds borrowed from his brother, de Pradel took some merchandise for his new store out on consignment. The loss entailed in shipping such goods as these was great in the eighteenth century, "A merchant from here [Rochefort] is giving me fourteen casks of wine," writes de Pradel to Charles, "from which I should have half of the profit, a risk which one runs due to leakage and souring of the goods at sea. Another one is giving me 6000 livres of merchandise under the same conditions. ..." To realize the risks involved in such shipping transactions as de Pradel obviously did, and

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7 Ibid.
8 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, March 28, 1731, ibid., 87.
9 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, end of April, 1731, ibid., 95.
subsequently to carry them out seems to indicate determination as well as confidence. Considering de Pradel's lack of liquid assets at this time, it is surprising that he was able to secure the above goods. On the other hand, according to his estimations, he had property worth 20,000 livres in Louisiana which he could offer as collateral in addition to his wife's inheritance.\textsuperscript{10} Despite his repeated comments of his desire to live in France and efforts to seek a position there, by 1731, he had a small fortune in Louisiana and apparently planned to continue to work toward amassing even more wealth.

By the middle of May, 1731, de Pradel and his wife were ready to return to Louisiana. Apparently Frenchmen needed permission to leave France for the colonies for de Pradel wrote Maurepas, the current Minister of the Marine, for the necessary permission for himself and his wife.\textsuperscript{11} They had decided to leave the baby, Alexandrine, in France with M. Pacot, an administrator of the Company. Though the de Pradels would presumably have the best of shipboard accommodations, the three- to four-month voyage would still be difficult, perhaps even fatal, for an infant. Life might even be more hazardous in Louisiana for de Pradel wrote:

\ldots as the well-being of our colony is scarcely certain and that it could well be destroyed by a second revolt of other Indian nations who live

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11} Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, May 8, 1731, \textit{ibid.}, 98.
there, I make these reflections which do not frighten me at all and which should not upset the family either. However, in the worst event, I ask you to see to the education of my little girl and I am content on this provision because I am counting on your good heart and those of our family.  

What motivated de Pradel to return to Louisiana in the face of possible danger cannot definitely be known, but it must have been the desire for "the economic betterment," which Ray Allen Billington describes as the "most compelling attraction of the frontier." Furthermore, despite the danger and the uncertainties of life in that relatively primitive environment, Louisiana was de Pradel's home. Even after thirty years, the colony was still a place where there were few restrictions on the manner in which one might seek...

12Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, June 20, 1731, ibid., 108.

The Natchez attack of 1729 began a series of French campaigns which were to last throughout the next decade. When Bienville returned to Louisiana as governor, he found that much of the Indian problem was due to Périer and the Company's neglect in supplying the savages with presents (Dunbar Rowland and Albert Sanders, eds.), Mississippi Provincial Archives [3 vols., Jackson, 1927-32], I, 193. Hereinafter cited as MPA). In his report on the Indians a year after his return, Bienville was dismayed at the loss of prestige of the French among the Indians. The Chickasaws were firm allies of the English and the Choctaws, formerly wholly reliable allies, were now leaning toward the English. Not only these two tribes, but also the nations up the river of the Alabamas, the Mobiles and the Tehamas, were leaning toward English alliance. Throughout the report, Bienville emphasizes that in the case of nearly every tribe, relations had broken down because there had been no merchandise to trade to the natives (ibid., 194-204).

13Ray Allen Billington, America's Frontier Heritage (New York, 1966), 27.
to better himself economically. Free from the regulation and stricture of the Old World, Louisiana offered an opportunity to the Chevalier de Pradel for the social and financial importance he could never know in France.

Immediately upon de Pradel's return to Louisiana in the fall of 1731, he received a military assignment for the Natchez country\textsuperscript{14} as commandant of Fort Rosalie. He held that position until October of 1732.\textsuperscript{15}

While he was on military assignment in the Natchez country, de Pradel's friend, Governor Périer was replaced by Bienville. Bienville, it will be recalled, had been governor of the colony from 1717 to 1724 and had been relieved of his duties because of reports made by the commissionaires charging him with misappropriations of the Company's goods. To this time, de Pradel had always aligned himself with the dominant side in the factional strife which had from the beginning characterized the colony's government. Whether de Pradel's actions had been intentional or not is difficult to say. Nevertheless, de Pradel had profited from this policy or practice. It will be recalled that Bienville had recommended him for promotion in 1719. However, in marrying Alexandrine de la Chaise, de Pradel had joined the opponents of the Bienville regime. For it was Jacques de la Chaise,

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{14}Baillardel and Prioult, \textit{Le Chevalier de Pradel}, 116. Money had been sent to M. Pacot from the Natchez post for de Pradel's child's expenses.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{15}Salmon's report to the minister, March 24, 1732, \textit{ibid.}, 117.}
Alexandrine's father, who had led the movement to have Bienville dismissed in 1724. As chief auditor of the Company's books, La Chaise had undoubtedly uncovered the evidence upon which the commissionaires had based their demand for Bienville's removal from the governorship in 1724. De Pradel realized his unenviable position, writing Charles in early 1733 before Bienville's arrival, "... I did not have room to wish that he [Bienville] was my governor by the poor reception that he gave me in Paris on my last trip, and I could only attribute this to the fact that I had married the daughter of his most cruel enemy and who was the cause of his recall. . . ."¹⁶

Despite his confidence that his military accomplishments would offset any hostile feelings which Bienville might have for him because of his marriage,¹⁷ the first months of Bienville's rule were difficult for de Pradel. The Captain was unable to avoid seeing the Governor even had he wished to do so. For on his arrival in the colony in February, Bienville proceeded to strip the governor's house of all of Périé's furnishings, delivering them to de Pradel's house to be sold at auction.¹⁸ At that time de Pradel wrote, "... I have only seen M. Bienville two times;

¹⁶Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, January 25, 1733, ibid., 118.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, March 8, 1733, ibid., 127.
I have not had to complain about his reception: I, however, am on guard with him. . . ."  

Apparently, relations between de Pradel and the Bienville government improved little by that summer. When Captain de Pradel refused to go on military detail to the Illinois country in 1733, pleading sickness, Bienville and Salmon, his assistant, sent bitter reports to Maurepas, the Minister of the Marine:

You must realize, Monsieur, that it is a question here of a habitual sickness that he had had for fifteen years and which did not prevent him from going in past years. It seems that this officer only wanted to go to the Illinois to take part in the distribution of wine and brandy that we have made by preference to the officers on detail and that for this end the particular interest that he has had with M. Périer in a shop where everything is sold under his name in retail prices, has taken precedence over his military duties and made him forget his obligations to serve the King.

Obviously, the new administration was not pleased with Captain de Pradel.

Whether or not Bienville's criticism of de Pradel is justified is difficult to say. De Pradel may very well have been too ill to go on military assignment. He had been writing his mother about his "flux" for several years. It is not known if this infirmity was dysentery or typhoid. John Duffy, the historian of medicine, believes that the fever and flux of the first Louisiana colonists was probably

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19 Ibid.

20 Bienville to Maurepas, September 30, 1733, ibid., 135.

21 Jean de Pradel to his mother, September 1, 1729, ibid., 48.
typhoid. Having been in Louisiana with its poor living conditions and bad climate for nearly twenty years, it is not surprising that Jean de Pradel should have had some such ailment. For a time following his return to the colony in 1731, de Pradel was having so much stomach trouble that he subsisted on only rice asserting that he could digest nothing else. Though he had assured his mother in 1730 that he was used to the discomfort of the "flux," the ailment seems to have worsened after his return to Louisiana in 1731. He placed special blame for his bad health on the heat of the New Orleans area declaring in 1733 "... [New Orleans] is destroying my health. ...".

Whether because of chronic illness or for other reasons, de Pradel's military career was languishing. In March of 1733, he complained bitterly about his failure to be promoted, "... I find that I am the oldest officer and the first captain today; however, there are three of them, although my cadets, who have been promoted to major, and I have been forgotten. ...". He attributes his unhappy

22 John Duffy, History of Medicine in Louisiana (Baton Rouge, 1958), I, 10.
23 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, January 25, 1733. Baillardel and Priout, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 119.
24 Jean de Pradel to his mother, March 22, 1730, ibid., 75.
25 Jean de Pradel to his mother, January 25, 1733, ibid., 122.
26 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, March 8, 1733, ibid., 125.
situation to the fact that the families of these young men had paid officials to grant them promotions. If it was money that was needed to obtain a promotion for de Pradel, his brother, Charles, was in a position to provide it had he wished to do so. So determined was the Captain not to go on detail that he wrote to Maurepas himself, describing his poor health in addition to his length of service, difficult service in the colony. He also refers to the commendations he received from both Boisbriant and Bienville in 1718 and 1719, which indicate his past meritorious record.²⁷ That it was de Pradel's unimpressive performance as an officer, or even dereliction of duty, that held him back is suggested by the fact of his absence from Fort Rosalie at the time of the massacre in 1729 as well as his refusal to go out on detail in 1733.

It was not unlikely that de Pradel was not succeeding as a soldier because he was devoting most of his time and energy to his mercantile interests. Not only did he have his store and cabaret in New Orleans, but in addition to these, he had business in the Illinois country as well.²⁸ That these were proving to be quite prosperous is evidenced by de Pradel's own statement in January, 1733, that his

²⁷Jean de Pradel to Maurepas, August 6, 1733, ibid., 131-33.

²⁸Jean de Pradel to his mother, March 22, 1730, ibid., 73.
fortune amounted to 20,000 crowns or 60,000 livres. Since his return from France in 1731, he had purchased a house from M. Prat, his brother-in-law, and some slaves to assist one Ceirat, the manager of his store. Furthermore, de Pradel paid Ceirat five per cent of the gross sales regardless of whether there was any net profit or not. Anticipating even greater volume of business, Jean asked Charles for " . . . at least 10,000 crowns in hard cash and not paper money. . . ." With the assumption of the government of the colony by the Crown, de Pradel anticipated that it would replace the useless paper card money, bills of exchange and warehouse receipts with French crowns and Spanish piastres.

In addition to his entrepreneurial activities, it is assumed that the Sieur de Pradel still owned his ten arpents of land along the Mississippi River. It can be assumed that he farmed his land using some of his slaves. According to the 1731 census, de Pradel had six Negro slaves. The number of slaves which de Pradel owned varied from time to time for he occasionally bought and sold these chattels.

29 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, January 25, 1733, ibid., 133.
30 Ibid., 119.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
Although de Pradel was prospering in Louisiana in the early 1730's, the colony was still in rather desperate straits,

... Every kind of provision is lacking, and we are on the verge of dying of hunger... The colonists are obliged to send their negroes into the woods to gather cane seed to keep them from perishing... we have seen no money for six months. The salaries of the officers have not been paid. All work has ceased; this puts a number of laborers out of work. ... \(^{35}\)

Part of the problem had stemmed from the hurricane which had ravaged the colony the preceding August and had ruined many of the crops ready for harvest. It seemed that the colony would never be victorious in its battle with nature, whether in the form of epidemics which decimated the population, or endless rains which occurred at harvest times, ruining the crops, or destructive tropical storms.

Despite the natural disasters, the French people and the government continued efforts to develop the colony and the city of New Orleans. A great deal of progress was made in Bienville's administration beginning in 1733. As in all new communities, an important factor limiting progress was the lack of labor especially for public works. In an effort to deal with this problem, in 1728, the Superior Council had decreed a corvée duty for the colonists, the thirty days each year to be worked by Negro slaves, if so desired, rather than by the citizens themselves. \(^{36}\) But the colonists were


\(^{36}\)Périer and La Chaise to the Directors of the Company, August 18, 1728, \textit{ibid.}, II, 589.
not always diligent in performing this legally required work.\textsuperscript{37} Governor Pérrier had begun construction of a moat around the city in 1730 after the Natchez massacre at Fort Rosalie. The project proved to be a total failure because there were not enough Negroes for this corveé work and the whites managed to avoid it. The beginnings of a ditch that were made to carry off the water were washed out by the heavy rains which fell in the flat, marshy country in the New Orleans area.\textsuperscript{38, 39} All of the inhabitants were required to dig ditches from one to two feet in width and one and one-half feet deep in front of their houses. They were also required to build bridges over the ditches.\textsuperscript{39} Because many of the inhabitants were too poor to bear the expense of these bridges, they were built from funds raised by a tax of 5 s per Negro in the New Orleans area. The first bridges were built of wood and rotted in less than a year. Then Dubreuil, the commissioner of public works, offered to provide bricks for the bridges. His offer was accepted, but the bridges were never built.\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{flushright}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{37}Ibid., 590.
  \item \textsuperscript{38}King to Bienville and Salmon, February 2, 1732, \textit{ibid.}, III, 562. The original plan called for the ditches to be 65 feet wide and two feet deep. Bienville to Salmon, May 12, 1733, \textit{ibid.}, 594.
  \item \textsuperscript{39}King to Bienville and Salmon, February 2, 1732, \textit{ibid.}, 563-64.
  \item \textsuperscript{40}Nancy Miller Surrey, \textit{The Commerce of Louisiana during the French Regime} (New York, 1916), 94. It was calculated that 116 such bridges were needed.
\end{itemize}
\end{flushright}
Everyone who owned property along the Mississippi River had other duties besides building drainage ditches and bridges. He was required to build and maintain a levee six feet wide and not less than two feet high in front of his property. He also had to clear sixty-six feet of land from the river inland. On the cleared property, eight toise (forty-eight feet) from the water and twenty-two feet apart, he had to place landing posts at twelve-foot intervals for boats to hitch to.  

While individual landowners were required to make certain improvements on their property, some facilities were developed as public projects. One of the most important of these built in the late 1730's was a canal which was two miles above New Orleans and was to serve as a connection to various small streams which ultimately led to Barataria Bay. Although the difficulties encountered in completing this project, especially with the need to remove a very large number of cypress trees which were enormous, when it was finished, Debreuil had to admit that the canal made commerce and communication much easier.


42 Memoir by Dubreuil, June 28, 1740, Archives des Colonies, C 13, 25: 272-73. (Microfilm copy in University of Southwestern Louisiana Library, Lafayette, Louisiana.) Hereinafter cited as AC. In 1722, there had been a great deal of flooding in New Orleans. At different times, there was as much as four feet of water in the houses. As a consequence, much disease and sickness resulted. It was
While efforts were made to promote the development of the colony through the construction of internal improvements, such as canals, the land system generally discouraged settlement in the colony. The policy of land grants in Louisiana had known a confused history from the beginning. On first examination, it would seem that the initial concessions were held under feudal terms. However, the expression "seigneurial rights and duties" does not necessarily mean a strictly feudal relationship. As a matter of fact, the term feudal was not used until late in the eighteenth century. If it is understood that military obligations are necessary in the traditional contract, the royal edict of October 12, 1716 makes it plain that no such obligations accompanied land grants. References in this edict to "... all Seigneurial rights and duties if any (such) shall be established hereafter in the said country of Louisiana ..." may have left the option open for military obligations, but such duties had not been established in 1716.

decided at that time that a levee was needed. Along with the plan for the levee were those for the canal.


44 "The Edict of Louis XV of October 12, 1716, Relating to Grants of Land in the Colony and on Dauphin Island and Regulating Future land Grants in Louisiana," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XIV (July, 1931), 348. Hereinafter cited as LHQ.

45 Ibid.
By 1728, most of the land on both sides of the river for a good distance north and south of New Orleans had been tied up in two concessions of 1719 and 1722 which had been granted by the Company of the Indies to Bienville. Bienville had broken these two tracts up into smaller ones and granted them to settlers subject to certain feudal rentes and corvée labor obligations. In 1725, Bienville was dismissed as governor, and in 1728 the king nullified all concessions which had been granted along the Mississippi up to that time. All of the land in the former Bienville concessions was thus available for reassignment. In reorganizing the lands along the Mississippi River below Bayou Manchac, the King decreed in the Edict of 1728 that all grants be:

... of two or three arpents front by sixty in depth to different families laborers and soldiers who would wish to settle there: this provision having as its chief object to create and multiply plantations on both sides of the River above as well as below New Orleans in order to be able to gather when necessary sufficient numbers of men to defend the entrance of the Colony on the sea side.48

Whether the ten arpents of land which de Pradel purchased from Prevost sometime in the 1720's were under the Edict of 1728 is not known. That they were is suggested by


47Ibid. (October, 1927), 540-61. There are nine documents concerning Bienville's land grants to concessioners. In each one not only is the amount of rent per arpent named, but also a specified number of corvée days.

de Pradel's statement of 1729 to his brother, "I have bought some land two leagues [about five miles] from New Orleans, as I have marked for you, and this because the intention of the Company is that the officers who are settled here are in the lower area of the river around New Orleans are not at all disturbed for detail. . . ." ⁴⁹ As a consequence, at the time the colony was ceded back to the Crown, it would seem that de Pradel and others like him held their land much in the frontier tradition of freehold subject to military obligations. Though the Edict of 1716 alludes to possible land speculation, ". . . they [the colonists] have demanded extensive grants only with the design to sell a part . . . ." ⁵⁰ there is little evidence that it was extensively practiced.

It was hoped that when the Crown assumed direct control of the colony that greater efforts to increase its population would be made to this end. Bienville suggested that the members of the military who were up for discharge should be encouraged to remain in Louisiana. They would be the ideal colonists, being used to the difficult conditions of the colony. However, there was little hope that the soldiers would stay unless they received a year's pay with which to get started in civilian life as was the custom in

⁴⁹Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, September 1, 1729, Baillaridel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 50.

⁵⁰"The Edict of Louis XV of October 12, 1717 . . . .," LHQ, XIV (July, 1931), 346.
Canada at that time.\textsuperscript{51} No doubt, many of de Pradel's military cohorts were among this group of potential colonists.

For Captain de Pradel, there was little if any question of his leaving the colony after 1733. By then, as was related earlier, he owned a substantial amount of property in Louisiana and was actively engaged in a variety of enterprises. In October, 1735, he sold a house and two lots.\textsuperscript{52} The records do not specify where this property was located. Several months later, he purchased a house and three lots on Saint Louis Street for 1400 liv.\textsuperscript{53} Perhaps, he was expanding his business, and was acquiring more space. After all, New Orleans was settling down with people desirous of the European merchandise he had to sell.

Although there is little doubt that de Pradel was amassing a small fortune, perhaps more than he had ever counted on from his entrepreneurial activities, he still lacked that large landed estate required for a "gentleman."

De Pradel acted to supply this deficiency in his holdings. In the late summer of 1736, there is record of his interest in a vacant estate which was up for auction in

\textsuperscript{51} Bienville and Salmon to Maurepas, May 12, 1733, MPA, III, 588.

\textsuperscript{52} H. H. Cruzat (ed.), "Records of the Superior Council of Louisiana," LHQ, VIII (January, 1925), 143. This calendar of the Superior Council records, edited by H. H. Cruzat and G. Lugano, was a continuing project of the Louisiana Historical Quarterly, portions appearing in every issue from 1917 through January, 1943.

\textsuperscript{53} "Records of the Superior Council," ibid. (April, 1925), 280.
the New Orleans area. Though there are no details of any of the proceedings, he probably did not invest in this piece of property, as less than two months later de Pradel and a Sieur Guillaume de Lange bought "Montplaisir" for 80,000 livres, the plantation which belonged to former Governor Périer, located across the river from New Orleans. The sale included all the "... negroes, negresses and young negroes, also horned cattle, sheep and horses..." The Périers, old friends of the de Pradels, were then living in Brest, France, where the specified six payments for the property were to be paid. The plantation had at one time belonged to the Company of the Indies, but had been bought by Périer. It had been a tobacco plantation until January, 1724, at which time production had ceased for unknown reasons. By June, 1736, de Pradel and de Lange were in possession of the property, and there was a great celebration: "... Ceremonies involved the breaking of a branch of a tree, kindling fire and eating and drinking in the main house..." At last Jean Charles de Pradel had become a large landowner in his own right.

Merely owning land in Louisiana, however, did not...
necessarily insure the financial future success which de Pradel and others like him were striving toward, for labor force to work the land was also needed. As early as 1706-1708, the colonists had requested Negroes for help in clearing the land.\textsuperscript{58} Initial attempts in developing an Indian slave-labor force had proved fruitless, the natives deserting to their tribes at the first opportunity.\textsuperscript{59} By 1712, there were only 10 black slaves in the colony.\textsuperscript{60} Though Crozat had the right to bring one cargo ship of Negroes every year to the colony, it was not until 1719 under the proprietorship of the Company of the Indies that the slave trade really began to develop.

In July, 1718, the Company of the West had been in touch with a Captain Herpin, a well-known slave-dealer, and instructed him to look for blacks on the coast of Guinea, Juda (coast of Nigeria or Camerorn), Cabolahou, and Jacques Jacques at Cape St. Appalonie. He was to negotiate for four

\textsuperscript{58}Bienville to Pontchartrain, July 28, 1706, \textit{MPA}, II, 23; King Louis XIV to De Muy, June 30, 1707, \textit{ibid.}, III, 253; Robert (a colonist) to Pontchartrain, November 26, 1708, \textit{ibid.}, II, 45-46.

\textsuperscript{59}Bienville to Pontchartrain, July 28, 1706, \textit{ibid.}, II, 23. Even in the early years, Bienville was quite aware of the need to keep the Chickasaws and the Choctaws as Indian allies. Surrey gives the following statistics for the number of Indian slaves held by the colonists at different times: 1708, 80 Indian slaves were in the Mobile Valley; 1721, 110; 1725, 37; along the Mississippi River and around New Orleans: 1721, 118; 1727, 73; 1731, 47. Surrey, \textit{The Commerce of Louisiana}, 226-30.

\textsuperscript{60}Surrey, \textit{ibid.}, 231.
hundred Negroes between the ages of eight and thirty who were in good health. After obtaining his cargo, Herpin was to sail to America as quickly as possible to avoid as much as possible, the shipboard sickness as well as the starvation, which accompanied long ocean voyages.\(^61\) Herpin's ship, the \textit{Aurora}, arrived in the colony in June, 1719 with its cargo of blacks. La Harpe records that there were 500 Negroes\(^62\) aboard the vessel, while Le Gac sets the figure at 400.\(^63\) Needless to say, not all of the first slaves brought to Louisiana by Herpin remained there. Due to unfavorable winds, the ships were unable to go beyond Dauphin Island, and although a few slaves were left there, a large number were taken to Pensacola.\(^64\) In 1721, a cargo of 1,312 blacks arrived; it was the largest number ever brought to the colony. By 1732, of the nearly 7,000 black slaves which had been imported to the colony, only 3,395 survived.\(^65\)

The high mortality rate does not necessarily mean that the slaves were ill treated or overworked. It must be

\(^{61}\)"Letter from the Western Company to Herpin, July 4, 1718," \textit{LHQ}, XIV (April, 1931), 172-74.


\(^{64}\)Ibid.

\(^{65}\)Surrey, \textit{The Commerce of Louisiana}, 232, 245.
realized that the conditions aboard the ships bringing them to Louisiana were terrible, with many of the slaves contracting disease en route and dying. Upon arrival here, most of the slaves were sold at auction. Before the sale, surgeons examined the slaves. They found yaws to be the most common disease of the blacks imported from Guinea; but they also diagnosed scurvy and cholera as afflictions of the slaves.66

At the auction, all of the colonists interested in buying slaves were given a number to be matched with the number on a slave. The buyers were classified into two groups: the older settlers, those who had lived in the colony for more than two years, and the newer colonists, with less than two years' time in the colony. The older colonists, in purchasing the chattels, were given credit for one year on half the price of the slave, while the newer colonists had two years credit allotted them.67 The price of a black slave was set at 600 lv in 1722, increasing as the years passed.68 In 1729, de Pradel, a member of the older group of colonists, remarked that he had bought two Negroes and hoped to finish paying for them with the

67Surrey, The Commerce of Louisiana, 98.
following year's harvest.  

That the slaves in French Louisiana were generally well treated is recounted by Dumont de Montigny, the traveler-historian. Beginning work at dawn, the slaves were given a break in the morning for breakfast. At eleven o'clock, the slaves quit work at which time they went to their master's house for their main meal. Having avoided the hottest heat of the day, they returned to work at two in the afternoon and continued until sunset. Some of the slaves had the weekends free, when they worked for other colonists who did not own slaves. Although the blacks' work at landclearing and in the cultivation of tobacco, cotton and indigo were their greatest assets, the slaves were also apprenticed as skilled laborers to help supply the labor shortage that Louisiana knew in these early pioneering years.

The legal position of slaves in Louisiana was formally fixed by the Code Noir or Black Code published in

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69 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, September 1, 1729, Baillardei and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 52.

70 Dumont, Memoires historiques, II, 241-42.

71 Ibid., 243.


73 Memoir of Le Gac, 70; Périer to La Chaise, November 3, 1728, MPA, II, 599.
1724. Under this code the slave, to be sure, was still considered property that could be and was, in fact, quite readily bought and sold. However, included in the Black Code were numerous articles designed to guard the general welfare of the slave. Masters were, for example, forbidden to mutilate or kill their slaves (Art. 39); slave families were to be kept together (Art. 43); the slaves had a right to complain to the Procurer General if they were not fed and clothed by their master (Art. 20); in the case of sickness or old age, their master was obliged to continue housing and feeding his slaves (Art. 21). Of course, there were a number of limitations on the slaves' freedom of movement and activity: they could not bear arms (Art. 12); they were forbidden to meet in groups after dark (Art. 13); they could not sell goods at the market without the express permission of their master (Art. 15); the theft by slaves of horses and other domestic animals was punishable by death (Art. 29); the theft of vegetables, peas or beans, was punishable by whipping or branding (Art. 30). Protections such as these contained in the Black Code of Louisiana were unknown to slaves in the English colonies at this time.


75 Marcel Giraud, "Tendances humitaires à la fin du règne de Louis XIV," Revue Historique, CCIX (April-June, 1953), 231. Such an attitude was most indicative of the era among other Christian colonial people. The Quakers were an exception.
The Black Code and other matters affecting slaves were of great concern to de Pradel for by the 1740's he must have owned a substantial number of slaves. In 1744, one of his slaves, named Jupiter, got into difficulties and the manner in which Jupiter's case was handled illustrates the application of the Black Code. On February 2, 1744, a M. Prevost, an agent of the Company of the Indies, reported to the Superior Council that notes in the amount of 7680 livres had been stolen. He named as a prime suspect de Pradel's slave, Jupiter. In the course of several weeks Jupiter and several suspects, including a cooper, St. Pierre, a slave named Jean and a Negress named Marianne were questioned. When the interrogation was completed, Jupiter was charged not only with the theft of notes from the King's warehouse but also with goods taken from a Sieur de Launay's home. Jupiter had, in the meantime, run away, but de Pradel had him pursued and he was caught and brought back to the city for prosecution. Complying with Article 31 of the Black Code, de Pradel had his slave handed over to the authorities. Even though Jupiter was a mere black slave, great care was taken to examine his position. The court's interrogation of the accused, as well as others, was carried on for a period of nine days, before he was formally charged.

76"Records of the Superior Council," LHO, XII October, 1929), 658.

77 Ibid., 663-66.

78 Ibid., 668.

79"Le Code Noir," 84.
and placed on trial and the court did not hand down its final decision until nine days after the trial began. Jupiter was found guilty, and he was ordered to be appraised as part of the process of fixing the amount of reparations to be paid his victims. Apparently, his value was fixed at 2,000 lv. The terms of the final settlement of the case are not known. Six months after Jupiter's conviction, the matter had not been completely terminated.

On initial examination of this case, it would seem that the black man had not been treated fairly. Yet, the idea of criminal justice among the French must be understood. The judicial process in criminal cases in French Louisiana regardless of the formality of the procedure, actually rested on two premises: one, the man was guilty of the stated crime and ought to be punished severely; or two, he was the type of person obviously guilty of some crime and ought to be punished severely. As a slave, Jupiter may have fit in with the second group. But there had been witnesses and a trial, putting him, therefore, in the first category. It is not known what were de Pradel's relationships with Prevost and de Launay, the plaintiffs. However,

80 "Records of the Superior Council," LHQ, XII (October, 1927), 663-64.
81 "Records of the Superior Council," ibid., XIII (January, 1930), 123.
82 Ibid., 157.
the Chevalier's prompt action, according to his March 2
testimony, of his efforts to find the slave is of interest.
That he abandoned ". . . the culprit to public justice . . .
requesting only that he [Jupiter] be appraised so that the
amount of the theft be raised and justice done . . ."\(^8^4^\) was
certainly the testimony of a conscientious citizen. Perhaps
Jupiter's guilt was beyond doubt. On the other hand, at
Jupiter's capture, there were only seven piastres in Spanish
money and 37 lv in colonial cards on his person,\(^8^5^\) an amount
considerably less than the original 7,000 lv reported stolen.
Probably, Jupiter was guilty; but, the possibility of his
having been the victim of past grudges could also have been
a factor.

It is likely that Jean de Pradel was not very popular
in the colony primarily because of his remarkable success
with his business affairs. He was aware of his unpopularity
for as early as January, 1733 he wrote his brother,
"The profit which I have made by the trade that I have with
Ceirat has only brought me a number of enemies for no other
reason than jealousy. . . ."\(^8^6^\) It may well be that it was
not his success alone that accounted for de Pradel's
unpopularity but also the way that he achieved it. For the

\(^8^4^\)"Records of the Superior Council," LHQ, XII
(October, 1929), 668.

\(^8^5^\)Ibid.

\(^8^6^\)Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, January 25,
1733, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 121.
evidence suggests that he was a shrewd, even ruthless businessman who, while in making his investments, was also determined in securing all that was due him. At one time, for example, he had agreed to buy a Negress, Marianne, from one Captain Mathieu, but then had tried to back out of the deal by declaring that the said agreement had been idle talk. De Pradel was sued by Mathieu for breach of contract, but the records do not show the final decision in this matter. Of interest, however, is the report of the death of a slave several months later, a Marianne, aged 50 years who "had been ailing with a chronic infirmity." Obviously, de Pradel had sensed that something had been wrong with the deal and had tried to get out of it.

Jean de Pradel also pursued those who owed him money. In one instance, on April 24, 1737, he sued Dumot de Montigny for the payment of a debt and by May 4 received the 80 livres Dumont owed him. Several months later, de Pradel and eight other men filed suit against a man's estate shortly after he died. The case was settled when the court ordered the deceased's property to be applied to the payment of his debts before the family could claim anything.

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87 "Records of the Superior Council," LHQ, IX (January, 1923), 125; ibid., 139-40.
88 Ibid. (April, 1923), 301.
89 "Records of the Superior Council," LHQ, IX (January, 1926), 125; ibid., 131-33.
90 Ibid. VI (October, 1923), 673; ibid., 677.
Perhaps, the greatest stir that de Pradel created in pursuing what was owed him involved the Succession of Jacques de la Chaise, his father-in-law. The complications involved in the affair can well be imagined if one considers the animosity the Bienville-Salmon faction must have had for the La Chaise heirs. No doubt the government did little to help, but instead, tried to hinder the process of ironing out the difficulties in this matter. Apparently, de Pradel anticipated such difficulties, for in October, 1734 he tried to have Salmon, Raguet and several other judges on the Council removed from the case, charging that they were prejudiced against the interests of the La Chaise heirs. According to Salmon, the Chevalier's efforts failed, and he was reprimanded. Nevertheless, by January of the following year, de Pradel presented the case before the Superior Council for Madame de la Chaise. Part of the problem in settling La Chaise's estate resulted from the sale of some of La Chaise's lands after his death which the family now wanted returned. The property had been purchased by Sieur François Lemelle. In 1735, Lemelle's money was returned to him, and for some reason (the document is not clear) the sale was declared null and void. Apparently,

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91 Salmon to Maurepas, October 26, 1734, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 137.
93 "Records of the Superior Council," LHQ, VIII (April, 1925), 275.
Lemelle had not wanted to give the land up for the case was not settled for three years. The sale of the land was in 1738 finally and officially declared null and void, the heirs being permitted to take possession of it as soon as the reimbursement took place.\(^\text{94}\) In all of the proceedings, de Pradel acted as spokesman for the family, pressing the La Chaise case to his own advantage as well as the family's.

With the arrival of Governor Vaudreuil in 1743, Louisiana began her only era of relatively significant prosperity. Indeed, the colony seemed at last to begin assuming a definite identity. Along with the colony's growing stability, Jean Charles de Pradel was emerging as a leading citizen. No longer the petty trader of his first military years, the respectable Chevalier was now obeying the law, even at the expense of a valuable piece of property, his slave, Jupiter. Though probably not well liked, Jean de Pradel was no doubt admired for his consistent perseverance and success in increasing and maintaining his fortune.

\(^{94}\text{Ibid., IX (October, 1926), 712.}\)
CHAPTER IV

A GENTLEMAN IN LOUISIANA

In the years preceding 1750 to 1764, the last era of French possession of the colony of Louisiana, de Pradel had been mainly concerned with agricultural activities. In September, 1750, John Charles de Pradel borrowed 6000 lv from his brother Charles to complete payments on the Périer plantation, "Montplaisir,"¹ which he had purchased in 1736. With this final transaction de Pradel had at last realized fully his fortune as a landed lord.

One of the most profitable crops which de Pradel raised at "Montplaisir" was indigo. It is not known just

¹Louboey to Maurepas, June 3, 1739, Dunbar Rowland and Albert Sanders (eds.), Mississippi Provincial Archives (3 vols.; Jackson, 1927-32), I, 399-400; Minister to Salmon, October 29, 1742, Archives des Colonies, B 74: 672. (Microfilm copy in University of Southwestern Louisiana Library, Lafayette, Louisiana.) Hereinafter cited as AC.

As conscientious as he was about securing money owed him de Pradel himself was negligent in repaying his own debts. By 1742, de Pradel and de Lange had apparently paid the Périers little if any of the 85,000 lv for "Montplaisir."

In October of that year, the Minister of the Marine wrote to Salmon, an old enemy of de Pradel, to see to it that de Pradel and de Lange paid their remaining part of the debt of 70,000 to 80,000 lv at 4 per cent. They had from January, 1744 to July, 1745 to meet the note, sending letters of exchange every three months.
when he decided to begin its cultivation. He no doubt had examined the possibilities of making a large profit on it by the English bounty in 1747, but it is quite probable that he had already begun cultivating the crop by that date. The first definite evidence of de Pradel's producing indigo is to be found in a letter of exchange to France of May, 1751 for 24,240 livres. It included five barrels of indigo weighing 1,635 pounds at 4 livres 10 sous a pound.²

It was not until 1754, however, that de Pradel began to organize his indigo venture on a large scale. To do so he needed more slaves to clear additional land. Apparently, he had some contacts in the West Indies through which he obtained slaves, for he mentioned having bought a slave from a ship's captain of Saint-Dominique in 1754 for 1200 livres; although the usual price was 1500 livres.³ Although the exact number of slaves he owned in the 1750's is not known, as was noted earlier, he had acquired several in the Périer transaction in addition to those whom he already had. He needed at least 12 more Negroes for land clearing operations regardless of their price.⁴ In the spring of the following

²Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, May 24, 1751, A. Baillardel and A. Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, Vie d'un Colon Français en Louisiane au XVIII siècle (Paris, 1928), 178.

³Jean de Pradel to his brother Abbé de la Maze, February 6, 1754, ibid., 231; Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, May 23, 1754, ibid., 235.

⁴Jean de Pradel to his brother Abbé de la Maze, February 6, 1754, ibid., 231.
year, the Chevalier was negotiating a slave deal involving 20 Negroes and was hopeful of clearing 50 arpents of new land for indigo cultivation with this labor force. Estimating a possible harvest of 4,000 pounds, he believed that he could sell the indigo for 7 or 8 livres a pound at top price, or for 5 livres at least.\(^5\) By November of 1755, he was supervising the construction of six indigo factories, the work being performed by a number of slaves from the 23 he had recently purchased.\(^6\) With a labor force of at least 23, de Pradel was indeed capable of developing his indigo plans on a large scale. Whether he had planned to sell his indigo to the English is not known. The outbreak of the Seven Years War in 1756 between France and England probably had some effect on his plans. Perhaps the loss of contraband trade with Carolina prompted his outburst against maritime insurers in wartime. The insurance rates in wartime could run as high as 50 per cent. He did not enjoy the prospect of paying such a high price for protection of his projected harvest of 6,000 pounds of indigo. De Pradel wrote of those men who increased marine insurance: "I regard this occupation of the insurer as that of a gambler at the Lansquenet, he can make his fortune if he is lucky, but the majority are

\(^5\) Jean de Pradel to his brothers Charles and the Abbé de la Maze, April 10, 1755, ibid., 254-55.

\(^6\) Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, November 30, 1755, ibid., 271-72.
made bankrupt. . . . "  

Indigo was not the only source of Jean de Pradel's income from his land. On the first arpents which he had acquired, de Pradel had cut wood for sale as early as 1729. The chief markets for his lumber at that time were Saint-Dominique and Martinique. The trade between New Orleans and the Islands had grown to such an extent in the early 1750's, that de Pradel could independently arrange his own trade negotiations. At one time, his lumber must have been his chief source of revenue. So thriving had the business been that in 1751 he had built on his property a canal 5 feet deep, 10 feet wide and 60 arpents long for transporting the cypress wood across his property. But by 1753, de Pradel had a surplus of lumber. He claimed that the English and the Canadians were now underselling the Louisianians in the Islands. Although his boards 22 feet long and 7 to 8 inches wide were in demand, selling for 8 s a foot, because of the English and Canadian competition, he did not cut any trees the following year. It is quite possible that de Pradel was not as shrewd a lumberman in the face of competition as he had been in his other ventures. His reports that the lumber business was bad is not necessarily an indication of a

7Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, April 5, 1756, ibid., 278-79.

8Jean de Pradel to Abbé de la Maze, November 20, 1753, ibid., 222; Jean de Pradel to his brothers, April 29, 1753, ibid., 210; Michel to the Minister, January 18, 1752, AC., C 13, 36: 228v.
general decline in the colony's trade, but perhaps his own.9 His comment that there were 12 sawmills in the New Orleans area indicates that indeed there was active competition in the area.10

When Louisiana came under the direct control of the French government in 1731, indigo was not the only agricultural product which it promoted. Dr. Prat, the colony's leading physician and a botanist as well, was asked to investigate the possibilities for the development of a wax-bearing plant. Both Dumont de Montigny and Le Page de Pratz had reported finding some wild wax-bearing trees in the colony.11 Among Dr. Prat's discoveries were that such a "wax-growing" operation could be conducted 300 days a year by infirm Negroes and even children and that the best months for planting the trees were October, November and December.12 By 1752, the following was reported by Du Breuil to the minister:

9Nancy M. Surrey, The Commerce of Louisiana during the French Regime, 1699-1763 (New York, 1916), 170. By the end of 1754, 180,000 liv of trade was carried on between Louisiana and the Islands in lumber.

10Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, April 10, 1755, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 255.


12Memoir on the wax-bearing shrub in Louisiana, April 5, 1742, AC., C 13, 27: 13ff; Dr. Prat's memoir on establishing plantations of wax-bearing shrubs, AC., C 13, 28: 184ff.
The cultivation of the wax tree has succeeded admirably. Mr. Du Breuil alone has made six thousand pounds of wax. Others have obtained handsome results in proportion to their forces; some went to the seashore, where the wax tree grows wild, in order to use it in its natural state. It is the only luminary used here by the inhabitants and it is exported to the other posts of America and France. . . .13

Jean de Pradel was very much involved in the wax business by 1751. Although a hurricane in 1751 had destroyed much of the crop and many of the trees, the following year's crop was most successful. Not only did de Pradel send 50 pounds of yellow and green candles to his brother, the Abbé de la Maze,14 but he also sold 500 pounds of wax to a Countess Marville.15 With the more than 1,000 crowns of profits from the crop of 1751, he planted several thousand more trees to replace those damaged by the 1750 hurricane.16 The year 1753 brought by far de Pradel's most successful harvest. By November 28, he had made 4,000 lv on candles sold and was currently making between 150-160 pounds of wax a day. This would mean that he would have made more than 10,000 pounds by the end of February at the termination of

13De Breuil to the Minister, September 30, 1752, AC., C 13, 36: 325v; Charles Gayarré, "Historical Notes on the Commerce and Agriculture of Louisiana, 1720-66," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, II (July, 1919), 289. Hereinafter cited as LHQ.

14Jean de Pradel to his brothers, May 24, 1751, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 182.

15Jean de Pradel to his brothers, April 2, 1752, ibid., 188.

16Ibid.
the harvest. Of interest is de Pradel's report that the wax trees were doing poorly in April, 1755. Perhaps, these trees only produced sizable amounts of grain for wax every other year, as 1750, 1752 and 1754 were bad years for de Pradel while the odd years were sufficiently good.

In addition to indigo, lumber and wax, de Pradel's fruit and vegetables provided a very important and dependable source of revenue. Of particular interest are the artichokes that he successfully raised for market in the capital. Having attained the seeds for the plants from Rochefort, France the preceding year, by March of 1753 he was selling two or three dozen artichokes a day at 6 s 3 d apiece. Despite his growing enthusiasm for his indigo venture, de Pradel believed the cultivation of his vegetables should be continued. After 1756, with the advent of high insurance rates in shipping because of the war, he realized from the sale of goods, such as vegetables, on the domestic market, a steady annual source of income.

As intent as de Pradel seemed on making a livre in every kind of enterprise, so also was he determined to display his wealth. He began the construction of his

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17 Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, November 28, 1753, ibid., 228-29.
18 Jean de Pradel to his brothers, April 29, 1753, ibid., 213; Jean de Pradel to his brothers, April 5, 1756, ibid., 282. Three years later the artichokes were still selling at the same price.
19 Jean de Pradel to his brothers, April 5, 1756, ibid., 277.
plantation house, "Montplaisir," some time in 1750. Having known the colony for more than forty years, having struggled with the elements of the Louisiana wilderness, having survived despite chronic illness, the Chevalier de Pradel took great pride in the erection of this splendid house.

The building's exterior resembled that of many of the contemporary, large dwellings, having galleries around the entire structure which were painted white. There was an impressive tile and concrete staircase descending from the front door of the house into a fan-shaped garden, located directly across the river from the Place d'Armes or present-day Jackson Square. The house's original dimensions were 116 feet by 48 feet with a 90-foot wing which contained a dining area, offices, kitchen, laundry room and wax factory.

However, despite his pride in his great house, as its construction continued, de Pradel came to regard the undertaking as sheer folly on his part, for it was proving to be more expensive and larger than he had originally planned. The cost of building was unexpectedly high even though de Pradel had his own abundant supply of bricks, lumber and shingles because the labor shortage in New Orleans had inflated the workers' wages. In 1752, he complained that the laborers were demanding 30 piastres a month in addition

20 Jean de Pradel to his brothers, May 24, 1751, ibid., 181-83.
21 Ibid.
to their food. De Pradel's slaves would not be used for most tasks because they were unskilled in that kind of work. He did manage, however, to have his six indigo factories built using his slaves instead of hired help. He was proud of having by this means saved 5 lv and food per day that he would have had to pay hired laborers.

When the furnishings for de Pradel's house are considered, the cost of labor to build it seems to be of relatively minor consequence. Among the rugs, marble tables, mirrors, paintings, that were ordered, the particular items for his great hall or salon bear special attention. The room was 26 feet by about 24 feet with ceilings of 14 feet. It contained four large casement windows. Two large doors, five feet wide and nine and one-half feet high, beautifully varnished, opened into the room. There were four marble pedestal tables along with a six-foot sofa and velvet arm chairs in this room. All of the furnishings had been purchased by a M. Moré, de Pradel's purchasing agent in France. Though de Pradel complains about Moré's negligence

22Jean de Pradel to his brothers, September 25, 1752, ibid., 194. Although he struggled with this expense of labor throughout the construction of his house, he managed at one point to secure a French carpenter for 90 lv a month instead of local men who charged 150 lv a month in addition to food. Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, February 6, 1754, ibid., 271-72.

23Jean de Pradel to his brother Charles, November 30, 1755, ibid., 271-72.

24Jean de Pradel to his brother Abbé de la Maze, November 20, 1753, ibid., 220-21.
when some glass and ironwork arrived from France in poor condition,25 all was forgiven when his nine feet by five feet, oak-framed mirror arrived in perfect shape.26 The total cost of the furnishings was more than 14,000 livres. Governor Kerlerec compared the house to that of a fermier général's in Paris.27

Governor Kerlerec had not greatly exaggerated his description of the house. With its varnished floors, finished ceilings, magnificent draperies and costly furnishings, "Montplaisir" must have been quite a showpiece. Jean Charles no doubt relished describing the magnificence of his home to his brothers in France, reminding them that he too had wealth and status in his own right. Although probably no one in New Orleans had a finer house, de Pradel was not the wealthiest man in the city; two men, De Noyan, the King's lieutenant in New Orleans, and Joseph Villars Du Breuil, apparently had larger business operations and plantations.28

So wealthy was de Pradel in 1755 that all three of his daughters were being educated in France. Although the Ursuline sisters had a school in New Orleans at this time, it was mainly for orphan children and the daughters of the

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25Jean de Pradel to his brothers, September 25, 1752, ibid., 195.
26Jean de Pradel to Abbé de la Maze, March 1, 1753, ibid., 208.
27Jean de Pradel to his brothers, April 10, 1755, ibid., 253.
poorer colonists. No doubt, de Pradel believed his daughters deserved better, and so he sent them to France to be educated. Alexandrine, the eldest, it will be recalled, had been left in France in the care of M. and Mme Pacot in 1731 when she was only four months old. Madame Cailly, one of the child's great aunts on her mother's side, had placed Alexandrine in an Ursuline convent at Quimberly, France when she reached school age. Jeanne-Henriette, the second daughter, had been sent to France in 1751 and Marie-Louise, the youngest child, in 1753. The girls at the convent school were the offspring of the de Kemborg, Le Flo, de Quelen, De Ploeue, du Fay, De Kentu, de Boisgunel, du Balderu, and de Lescart families, who were members of the nobility and wealthy bourgeoisie of Brittany. The de Pradel girls' father undoubtedly sent them to France to be educated in the hope of marrying into wealthy families. However, with the construction of "Montplaisir" and other investments in indigo cultivation and slaves, the possibilities of their having sizable dowries rapidly decreased, and by 1755 their father was making plans for their return to Louisiana, hoping to make marriages for them with the eligible New Orleans gentry.

29 Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 146-48.
30 Ibid., 151; 156.
31 Ibid., 150-51.
32 Jean de Pradel to his brothers, April 5, 1755, ibid., 256.
At an initial appraisal, an eighteenth century convent education would not seem expensive. The annual fees for room and board were 150 lv per student at Quimberly convent in the 1750's. However, since the de Pradel girls were not destined for the religious life, they along with the other wealthy girls had a governess to see to their needs. A Madame de Kerusoret stayed with Alexandrine, Jeanne-Henriette and Marie-Louise from 1752 to 1761, arranging for their music lessons and buying their clothes. Despite their convent surroundings, the Chevalier's daughters had the luxuries that wealthy young girls desired. Costly items such as taffeta and linen yard goods, ruffled caps, gloves, stockings, hoop-skirts, were listed among the girls' clothing expenses. When Marie-Louise, the youngest daughter, was sent to France in 1752, more than 500 lv was spent on her wardrobe alone that year. The competition that young girls have among one another, in addition to the fact that M. Morin and Mme Cailly were spending someone else's money, steadily increased de Pradel's expenses for his daughters' "éducation." Although he confided to the Abbé de la Maze the extravagance of his daughters, he also admitted

33Ibid., 150-51. 34Ibid., 151.
35Mme de Kerusoret to Mme Morin de la Chaise, June 20, 1753, ibid., 161.
36"List of Marie-Louise de Pradel's travel expenses" made by M. Moré, December 15, 1752, ibid., 157.
that he could refuse them nothing.\textsuperscript{37} Taking advantage of their father's generosity, as well as his agents' freedom with his money, they succeeded by 1756 in securing more than 1700 lv in watches and jewelry from a Paris merchant.\textsuperscript{38}

Very much a part of the eighteenth century convent education were music lessons. Alexandrine and Jeanne-Henriette de Pradel, of course, had to pursue this study. In the winter of 1752\textsuperscript{39}, they purchased their first sheet music for about 38 lv.\textsuperscript{39} From all reports, Jeanne-Henriette was the most gifted and conscientious musician of the three. However, all of them must have had more than a passing interest in music as they spent more than 100 lv on sheet music and lessons the following year.\textsuperscript{40}

De Pradel's daughters' expenses were minor when compared to those of his son Charles. Having been sent to France in 1751 to pursue his military career, the eighteen-year-old Charles was assigned to the navy company stationed at Toulon.\textsuperscript{41} Within a short period of time, Charles was in the thick of the wild, dissipated world of port-city living.

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{37}]Jean de Pradel to the Abbé de la Maze, March 1, 1753, \textit{ibid}., 206.
\item[\textsuperscript{38}]De la Mouche to the Abbé de la Maze, March 27, 1756, \textit{ibid}., 171-72.
\item[\textsuperscript{39}]Pierre Moulin to the Abbé de la Maze, April 23, 1752, \textit{ibid}., 153.
\item[\textsuperscript{40}]Pierre Moulin to the Abbé de la Maze, December 18 and 19, 1753, \textit{ibid}., 162-63.
\item[\textsuperscript{41}]Jean de Pradel to his brothers, April 2, 1752, \textit{ibid}., 188.
\end{itemize}
M. Moré, de Pradel's agent, had been given strict instructions that Charles' allowance was to be no more than 1200 livres a year. But de Pradel soon learned that Moré was advancing the young ensign money in addition to fulfilling ridiculous requests for such items as 12 new shirts at a time. By the spring of 1753, Charles had not only overspent his allowance, but had also borrowed money from M. Duvergé, a friend of his father's, to pay off gambling debts. Obviously, the wonderfully free life of the military, devoid of any parental supervision, was too much for the young de Pradel to handle.

In September, 1754, the prodigal son returned to New Orleans on military leave. During his two-year and nine-month stay in France, he had spent more than 12,000 livres. Charles obviously lacked his father's serious appreciation of the value of money, fulfilling his role as the spoiled, playboy son of a wealthy planter. His reckless, wasteful life would continue until his death in January, 1764, at which time he would leave numerous debts which had to be paid by his uncles. The payment of these debts would prove difficult given Louisiana's collapsing financial situation.

42Jean de Pradel to his brothers, September 25, 1752, ibid., 199.
43Charles de Pradel, the son of Jean de Pradel, to his cousin, Jean de la Maze, May 16, 1753, ibid., 215-16.
44Jean de Pradel to his brothers, April 10, 1755, ibid., 252.
The colony's money problems had never really been solved. Specie, both Franch and Spanish, had continually left the colony. By 1750, there was no local tender at all, the card money having been eliminated in 1744. Michel, the ordonnateur, issued more than 300,000 liv in treasury notes that year in an effort to provide a colonial currency. But, as always, no one was really certain as to its value and stability. There must have been some strength in this latest currency, however, for de Pradel mentioned in 1753, the ease in obtaining letters of exchange at that time. These letters had been the means by which money was sent to France and to the other colonies in commercial transactions. Bills of exchange were drawn by the treasurer of the colony on the treasury of France where they were eventually redeemed. The redemption period varied. In the 1750's according to Jean de Pradel, it was about a year.

The shaky financial situation of Louisiana came to a head with the outbreak of the Seven Years War, bringing with it the suspension of payments on the letters of exchange. This precipitated the monetary collapse of the colony and of Jean Charles de Pradel. A series of arrêts or orders in Council, concerning the suspension of payment on the letters

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45 Clark, New Orleans, 123.
46 Jean de Pradel to his brothers, April 29, 1753, ibid., 212.
47 Jean de Pradel to the Abbé de la Maze, November 20, 1753, ibid., 218; Jean de Pradel to his brothers, July 6, 1754, ibid., 240.
of exchange were issued by the King between 1759 and 1763. According to the Arrêt of July 15, 1763, for example, all of the bills of exchange from the American colonies and the Windward Islands from the years 1755-1758 would be paid up in 1764 on the following schedule: the bills from 1755 would be redeemed in January; those from 1756 in April; those from 1757 in July and August; those from 1758 in September, October, November and December. It was also declared at this time that the bills of exchange negotiated in 1759 would be completely canceled.�48 Even though the Treaty of Paris had been signed in February, at which time the part of Louisiana east of the Mississippi was ceded to England, the western part having been ceded to Spain in the Treaty of Fontainebleau the year before, apparently, the French government was trying to increase public confidence in promising to meet these payments. It was not until 1769 and 1770, however, that all the payments were met.�49

A number of de Pradel's bills of exchange were affected by the arrêts of 1759 and 1763. There are, for example,  

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49 Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 299.
records of his having issued such bills in 1757 and 1759.\textsuperscript{50}

Exactly when these letters were met by the government or by his family is not known. Although there is no record of bills issued for that purpose, de Pradel's three daughters were still in the Quimberly convent in this period, and he would have had to pay for their room and board.

The war period was marked not only by the cancellation of bills of exchange but also by rampant inflation in Louisiana. In 1758, Rochemore, the ordonnateur, had reported that there were in circulation about 1.8 million lv of the 1750 currency issue in addition to 1.4 million lv in letters of exchange. He had proposed to retire all of the colonial currency, to increase the value of the letters of exchange and to issue new card money, suggestions which were ignored.\textsuperscript{51} To guard against this growing depreciation in finances, de Pradel made improvements on his property. Writing to the Abbé de la Maze in 1763, the Chevalier believed that

\ldots The best thing to do is to get rid of it [currency]. I have used those which I had in 1759 partly for livestock, and to improve my land and finally to buy a beautiful farm near town where I

\textsuperscript{50}There is record of 5,000 lv bill made in January, 1757, followed by several in November of the same year of 2,000 lv, 900 lv, 2,000 lv and 1,000 lv. "Bills of Exchange for January, 1757, November, 1757" for 2,000 lv, 900 lv, 2,000 lv, 1,000 lv, Reel 1148, "Dossier du Chevalier de Pradel." In addition to these, the Abbé de la Maze records having received two letters in 1759 valued at 33,500 lv, two bills which would never be redeemed if the 1763 arrêt were enforced. Baillardel and Prioult, \textit{Le Chevalier de Pradel}, 286.

\textsuperscript{51}Clark, \textit{New Orleans}, 124.
have put fifty animals, sheep or ewes, some poultry and a housekeeper with some negro gardeners of which there are three...52

Despite his best efforts, de Pradel's financial situation worsened throughout the war. As late as September, 1763, however, he was able to get hold of 31,000 liv in money for his son Charles' marriage and inheritance.53 Six months later, a general moratorium on the negotiation of the letters of exchange struck de Pradel very hard. Well aware of his own and the colony's precarious financial position, he began making arrangements to compensate for possible losses due to the failure of the redemption of the letters of exchange. In March of 1764, he even suggested the possibility of selling land, slaves and even furniture, if necessary, to meet payment of the bills.54

In the midst of this financial crisis, on March 28, 1764, Jean de Pradel died.55 His death may have been hastened by personal tragedy. The worries and business reversals of the last few years had probably aided in his

52 Jean de Pradel to the Abbé de la Maze, October 29, 1763, ibid., 305.


54 Jean de Pradel to the Abbé de la Maze, March 14, 1764, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 319-20.

55 Mme Alexandrine de Pradel to the Abbé de la Maze, April 8, 1764, Baillardel and Prioult, Le Chevalier de Pradel, 321.
decline in addition to the death of two of his children, Alexandrine in August, 1761 and Charles in January, 1764. Yet, the Chevalier de Pradel had lived a full life and he had achieved his fortune in the face of the most difficult conditions. That he lost it in the end was due to events beyond his control.

56 Mme Morin de la Chaise to the Abbé de la Maze, August 2, 1761, ibid., 291; "Records of the Superior Council," the Black Books, January 12, 1764. In addition to the Cruzat calendar in the Louisiana Historical Quarterly, there are the "Black Books" in the Louisiana State Museum Library in New Orleans, Louisiana.
CONCLUSION

To say that Jean Charles de Pradel's frontier experience in Louisiana completely affected his "cultural baggage," would not be completely correct. He was a member of the French aristocracy when he received his orders for Louisiana in 1714 and retained this identification with the nobility of France until his death in 1764 in spite of his fifty years spent encountering the Louisiana wilderness. Determined to exhibit this status of high birth, the Chevalier de Pradel lived his life to amass a fortune which culminated with the construction of "Montplaisir." That he was not the "new man" produced by the frontier is evidenced by his continued association with France and his efforts to copy the French example of a gentleman while on the Louisiana frontier.

This consciousness of de Pradel of his noble birth, however, does not mean that he was totally unaffected by his frontier environment. It is quite obvious that he took advantage of the various opportunities to increase his wealth, whether by exploitation of his land, or by his initiation of commercial enterprises in a new community. As a matter of fact, Jean de Pradel is most indicative of the "man on the make" on a frontier who, because of the freedom
which a wilderness offers from precedent and regulation of established societies, attains wealth and status which the traditional "old world" societies deny him. The entrepreneurial means through which he achieved his status as a gentleman in eighteenth century Louisiana were indeed quite alien to his aristocratic background. In this sense, de Pradel was a "new man."

With his "baggage" consisting of the elements of aristocratic birth and of the ingenuity of a "new man," Jean de Pradel experienced the frontier, an engagement or encounter with an unstructured environment from which much could be created. If the frontier is seen as an existential situation, that is, as an experience totally devoid of pre-existent tradition and precedents, such that the creation of a new existence, of a new sense of self, of a new person, occurs with each event lived through, Jean Charles de Pradel and other frontiersmen can be described as existentialists who dealt with and reacted to an existential experience, the frontier.
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