

■ A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE
ARCHIVES
— OF THE —
ANCIEN
REGIME



THE ARCHIVES DE L'ETAT DE NEUCHÂTEL

Documents from the Seigniorial Archives ready to be sorted.



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A Brief Guide to the Archives of the Ancien Régime



This guide presents, in a succinct and non-exhaustive form, the collections and series of archives pertaining to the ancien régime in Neuchâtel. It is formed of documents composed by the seigneurs of Neuchâtel, or received by them and by their Council, from their origins in 1143 to the revolution of 1848. Certain gaps can be explained by the fact that the sovereign of Neuchâtel resided far from the country beginning in the sixteenth century; others can be attributed to internal problems, including questions of succession which led to changes in magistrates, and the lukewarm devotion of the counselors in charge to their local duties. There remain, therefore, not more than a few collections/series of remarkable continuity, including the “Manuels du Conseil d’Etat,”¹ the volumes of receipts, and the inventories of assets.

■ F O R E X A M P L E | THE SEIGNIORIAL COLLECTION

Founding of the Abbey of Fontaine-André

AS H24 n°13

Lausanne, February 1143

Matile, George-Auguste. *Monuments de l'Histoire de Neuchâtel*. Neuchâtel: Imprimerie de James Attinger, 1844.

Egloff, Michel, et al. *Histoire du Pays de Neuchâtel de la Préhistoire au Moyen Age*. Hauterive: Editions Gilles Attinger, 1991.



This episcopal act is the oldest document in the Archives de l'Etat. Written by Guy de Maligny, Bishop of Lausanne, it confirms the founding of an abbey at Fontaine-André. Motivated by a desire to increase the number of “those who, with the burdens of the world cast aside, gladly escape the shipwreck to the placid and peaceful port of contemplation,” Guy verifies that “Dom Richard, abbot of Lac-de-Joux...cedes the place which is called Fontaine-André, together with its fields, pastures, and fisheries...to the charge and order of Dom Wachelm, the ecclesiastical Abbot of Cornol...that an abbot might be established in this place who will live with his brothers according to the second rule of blessed Augustine, under the guidance of the monastery of Cornol.”

In founding a monastery, the Bishop of Lausanne also needed to provide a foundation for both the necessary resources, human and financial, and the relationship that would exist between the new establishment and the larger body of the church. This required a certain amount of authority, which he makes apparent in this act according to the conventions of his time. Added to the default weight of the Bishop's direct orders are the signatures of several witnesses, all various ecclesiastics. To verify his identity is his seal, in which his name surrounds a figure of Christ enthroned. In the twelfth century, seals indicated a great deal of power, as their use was still primarily confined to the highest of authorities—kings and ecclesiastical administrators. Perhaps

most effective of all is the Bishop's use of religious authority which, accorded him by the merit of his ecclesiastical position, carries through the document from the initial cross to the concluding threat: “that nobody might dare to rashly disobey any of these [orders], we interpose a sentence of anathema.”

THE “ARCHIVES ANCIENNES”

THE SEIGNIORIAL ARCHIVES

ARCHIVES SEIGNEURIALES

(CODE: AS)

The “inventaire raisonné” of the Seigniorial Archives was begun between 1790 by Jean-François de Chambrier and finished in 1821². With the material acquired in 1813, the “inventaire” accounts for approximately 22578 documents in 605 groupings, subdivided into 25 alphabets. The fonds includes, in addition, the four-volume “Répertoire Générale.” This second catalog is divided into thirteen subdivisions and 88 chapters, each similarly subdivided into groupings following the original organization. These subdivisions respect a classification system begun in the seventeenth century.

- I (§ 1-19) The House of Neuchâtel and her allies.
- II (§ 20-30) The estates of the counts of Neuchâtel and the seigneurs of Arberg-Valangin.
- III (§ 31-37) Feudal relations (fiefs, suzerainty).
- IV (§ 38-39) Succession of the count and the sale of territories.
- V (§40) Domain and administration. This rather broad chapter is divided into alphabetical groupings.
- VI (§41-43) Borders between Neuchâtel and Valangin.
- VII (§44-47) Civil and criminal justice in the comté of Neuchâtel and the seigniority of Valangin.
- VIII (§48-60) International relations. Alliances with the Swiss cantons and various other powers.
- IX (§61-68) Administrative corps recognized by the sovereign.
- X (§69-80) Churches, monasteries, religious foundations and parishes.
- XI (§81-86) Individual acts concerning Neuchâtel, Valangin, the Franche-Comté, Vaud, Switzerland and elsewhere.
- XII (§87) Assorted documents listed in other inventories.
- XIII (§88) The Foundation of Henripolis, 1624-1629.

The fourteen volumes of the Répertoire Générale include a more or less complete cataloging of acts in French

and Latin; a fifteenth volume lists acts in German, and a sixteenth supplementary volume has been continued to the present day (letters A 26-S 27). A chronological card catalog of all the acts enables an additional way of exploring this considerable mass of documents.

“RECONNAISSANCES”³ AND “RENTIERS”⁴

RECONNAISSANCES DE BIENS ET RENTIERS

More than 900 volumes constitute these two important fonds. The “reconnaissances” allow one to take a snapshot, at a given time, of the state of goods, rent and financial conditions, in the form of “receipts.” They are approximately the ancestors of the modern cadastre and of fiscal taxation; the financial condition of each person determined the amount due, often in accordance with specific circumstances. Because these records were maintained over a long period of time, one can identify changes which occurred long after the decease of the commissioner who instituted them. After several years, changes (purchases, sales, exchanges, divisions, deaths of tenants) would have rendered these records unusable, if they had not been duplicated and followed by “rentiers,” lists which enable one to follow the evolution of goods and their possession almost exactly. The “rentiers-tenet” lists detail, in some instances not without a time lapse, the succession of tenants and the subdivision of lands, although often neither all of the tenants nor the dates of changes are indicated. Lists detail the total due for each tenant and, in the margins, exceptions for years in which the rent was acquitted (the “solvit”). During the 19th century, subscriptions and then the purchasing and abolition of the tithes system changed the situation little by little. One must take into account as well the “forains”⁵ who lived outside of fiscal jurisdiction, as well as shared zones.

Two summary inventories and a card catalog facilitate orientation among the volumes of reconnaissances and rentiers, but the transition between the two is not always easy due to various lacuna. The search for, and especially the identification of individuals is as difficult as the study of a parcel of land, rendered complex by subdivisions and regroupings.

The order of receipts which existed at the end of the 18th century has been maintained as a system of classification. The series of receipts and inventories deriving from each fiscal jurisdiction retain an internal organization. Other volumes, scrolls and notebooks, retrievable by card

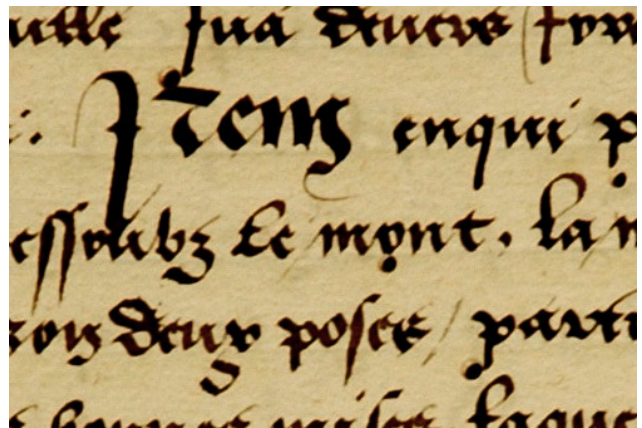
■ F O R E X A M P L E | RECONNAISSANCES

Dombresson

14RC-9

Dombresson, 1540 by Hory and Junod

ff. 1-5 table of contents; 6-437 records of the goods of 52 estates and 2 communities.



The entries in a reconnaissance take the form of oaths, in which each tenant confesses proprietorship of a portion of the seigneur's lands. Thus, in the first entry of Hory and Junod's reconnaissance of Dombresson, bourgeois Nicolet Cuche, "informed clearly of all his rights and reasons, not by force but by his certain, pure, frank and spontaneous will recognizes and publicly confesses..." to hold all of the "items" belonging to the Seigneur of Valangin listed below (see above).

Renconnaissances were important both because they determined the seigneur's income, and because they were so expensive that they could only be carried out perhaps once each generation. Thus, once a commissioner was hired, the job was executed and the information recorded carefully—no expense spared. First, entries were collected, person by person and parcel by parcel, and recorded as drafts in a notebook (see above, a notebook designed especially for travel). Only after the survey of an area was complete were they transferred into a more substantial form, such as the one by Hory and Junod. The illuminated border lends authority to the text by referencing the style of contemporary and historic religious books; the stern animated letters allow the testimony to speak with all the presence of an oral oath. Once completed, each entry was signed by both commissioners and the amount due was calculated.

catalog, can be found in the Seigniorial Archives or the fonds “Assorted Receipts.”

RECONNAISSANCES (CODE: RC)

Listed here, by date, are the principle inventories of goods available, and their corresponding territories:

Neuchâtel, 1336-1667.

La Côte (Corcelles, Cormondèche, Peseux, Auvonnier), 1339-1729.

Rocheport (the territory extending to Les Ponts and present-day La Chaux-du-Milieu), 1522-1697.

Le Landeron (Cornaux, Cressier, Enges, Lignières), 1338-1675; (moiteresses), 1720.

Thielle (Hauterive, La Coudre, St. Blaise, Marin, Cornaux, Wavre), 1338-1688.

Colombier (including records of diverse goods originating in Bevaix, the Val-de-Ruz and Auvonnier), 1339-1697.

Boudry (Cortailod, Bôle, Areuse), 1339-1709.

Bevaix (also including Cortailod and Boudry), 1339-1649.

Fontaine-André (the region between Neuchâtel and Cressier, as well as the territories in the Val-de-Ruz), 1421-1658.

The Val-de-Travers (from Couvet to Buttes and Saint-Sulpice), 1345-1736.

The priory of the Val-de-Travers (Môtiers, Boveresse and a part of the valley), 1569-1738.

The mountains of the Val-de-Travers (Les Bayards, Les Verrières, La Côte-aux-Fées, La Brévine), 1345-1658.

The seignory of Travers (Travers, Noiraigue, La Chaux-du-Milieu), 1345-1670.

Valangin (the Val-de-Ruz), 1350-1706.

The mountains of Valangin (Le Locle, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Les Brenets, La Sagne), 1350-1706), 1359-1666.

The seignory of Gorgier (present-day Béroche), 1456-1740.

Outside of the canton: some places south of the lake of Neuchâtel (1523) and the Val-de-Morteau (1560).

RENTIERS (COTE: RE)

The rentiers permit the reader to follow, until the 19th century, the evolution of land ownership and, not without gaps, the successive tenants; because the updating of these volumes was not frequent, the names of certain tenants were never recorded—the essential point was that the rent be paid by somebody. The introduction to the comprehensive list gives useful indications regarding the preparation of the of inventories of goods and

rentiers.

Generally, the oldest rentiers, having become useless, disappeared early on; the recipients did not make a habit of keeping their records until the onset of the 17th century—thus there are many regrettable and frustrating gaps. The existent rentiers, organized by receipt, were often subdivided by locality to facilitate the collection of censuses and tithes, and were used later on to coordinate the abolition of this system.

FISCAL MAPS

PLANS DES RECETTES

(CODE: PR)

The Archives de l'Etat does not house the fonds of cadastres (1870-1888) stored at the office of the cantonal surveyor and organized by the land registries of each district or commune. Contrarily, the Archives does store the maps drawn by the tax collectors of the 18th and 19th centuries for a better distribution of censuses and tithes in the principality. These volumes, generally in folio form, are quite varied in style and scale. Incomparable tools for the study of land distribution, the Fiscal Maps, costly to establish, exists principally for the vineyards, the Val-de-Ruz, a small part of the Val-de-Travers and the mountains situated in the what was once the jurisdiction of Rocheport. No maps were established for Le Locle or La Chaux-de-Fonds; in contrast, the villages in the Val-de-Travers are particularly well-documented in the Archives' fonds.

A summary inventory and a card catalog organized by group and locality facilitate orientation within the larger fonds. Some groups of personal property maps or works of civil engineering were added to this fonds.

RECORDS OF THE TITHE SYSTEM

CARNETS DE DIMES

(CODE: DI)

The classification system of this fonds was directly inspired by those of the series “Reconnaissances” and “Rentiers.” Thus, the notebooks of records pertaining to the tithe system are ordered by receipt, and then, internally, alphabetically.

This fonds conserves a fairly precise record of the yield of vineyards at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, until the revolution of 1848.

■ F O R E X A M P L E | FISCAL MAPS

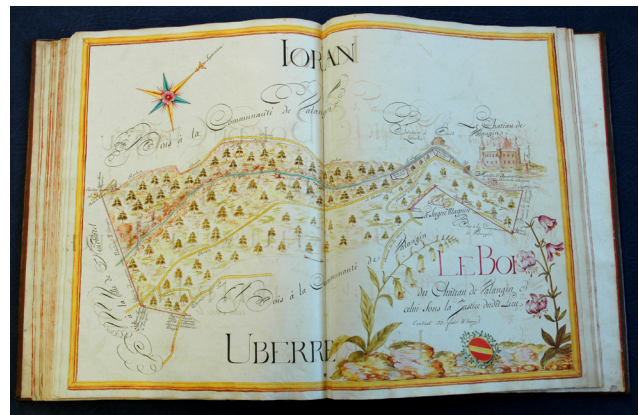
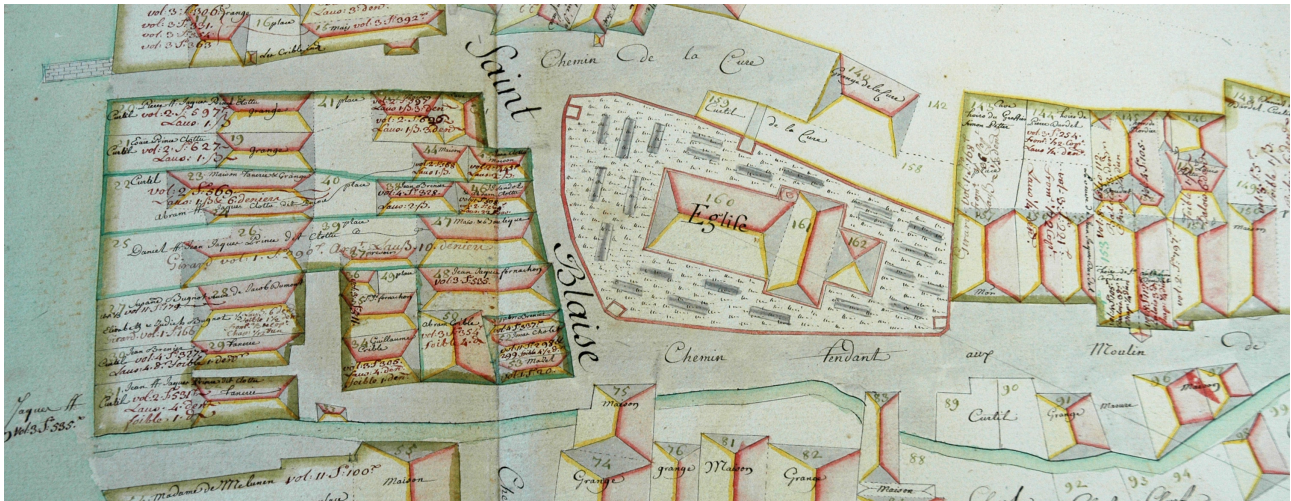
Maps of Thielle and Fontaine André

PR-13 plan n° 81

Neuchâtel, by Girard and Martenet

Henry, Philippe, et al. Histoire du Pays de Neuchâtel de la Réforme à 1815. Hauterive: Editions Gilles Attinger, 1991.

ff. 1-222 maps of Thielle and Fontaine André noting ownership and taxes.



The map above and below on the right, of the town St. Blaise and the surrounding fields, corresponds with the reconnaissances and rentiers used to calculate taxes. Marked on each parcel of land is the name of the owner, the size of his property, and the taxes he had to pay in nature or currency. Maps such as this one were created at the behest of the “receveur,” or tax collector, for the use of the department of receipts.

In the eighteenth century, most farmers owned very small parcels of land, the majority possessing less than 10 poses, and some not more than part of a house or a garden. Most of the houses shown here are accompanied by separate storage buildings for the grain harvested.

In addition to farming and animal husbandry, the canton profited from its forests. The illegal exploitation of wood was a constant source of conflict, since the only truly protected forests were those of the king. Testament to this protection are two volumes of lavishly decorated maps of the king’s forests, complete with trees and buildings, including the one here on the right, in which the cartographer depicted the chateau and mills of Valangin.

THE ABOLITION OF THE TITHE AND PROPERTY TAX SYSTEMS

RACHATS DE DIMES ET DE CENS

(CODE: RDC)

This fonds includes all of the documentation relating to the work accomplished by the “Repurchasing Commissions” established by law on March 22nd, 1849 “to buy back tithes, property taxes and other feudal payments” (Recueil des lois, vol. 2, p. 27-44). One can follow exactly the procedure undertaken for the occasion; especially valuable are the documents which speak to the state of agriculture in Neuchâtel in the last years of the Ancien Régime. The fonds also houses numerous documents and registers prior to 1849, including folders concerning the management of the tithe system in Coffrane from 1779 to 1830.

ASSORTED RECEIPTS

RECETTES DIVERSES

(CODE: RD)

More than 400 volumes make up the fonds Assorted Receipts, thus the name is somewhat less than apt; in addition to accounting books, it also contains a number of reconnaissances as well as several other volumes. Here one can find, contrary to every expectation, the Cartulaire of Montfaucon⁶ and the archives of the Chapter of the Collegiate Church of Neuchâtel.

The Archives have retained the obsolete cataloging system of the late 19th century, since it has been so often referenced in historical studies—thus a more logical reclassification is no longer possible. The study of this fonds has been made easy, however, by a card catalog, an inventory and the study published by Madeleine Bubloz⁷. The beginning and ending dates given in the list below do not take into account the sometimes important lacuna, especially during the sixteenth century when the comté was leased to the city of Neuchâtel. Other than the principle fonds of receipts, this list includes notable subdivisions and accounts.

Le Landeron, assorted accounts, 1357-1663.

Thielle, assorted accounts, 1360-1662.

Pont de Thielle, 1357-1491.

Neuchâtel, La Côte, Rochefort et Lugnorre, 1358-1499; specific accounts, 1492-1556.

Neuchâtel, the “ferme” (lease) of the comté of Neuchâtel, 1535-1542.

The “ferme” of the receipts of the Quatre-Mairies and of Thielle, 1569-1578.

Receipt of the Quatre-Mairies, 1579-1662

La Côte, assorted accounts, 1355 et 1372-1491.

Fisheries of Areuse and Auvernier, 1360-1491.

Colombier (after the purchase of the seignory) 1565-1662.

Boudry, 1361-1662; the tilery of Boudry, 1436-1484.

Gorgier (at the time of its seizure by the count of Neuchâtel) 1359-1372.

Vaumarcus (before its enfeoffment) 1356-1372.

The Val-de-Travers (Vautravers), 1360-1662.

Saint-Sulpice, 1436-1490.

Les Verrières, 1393-1489.

Boudevilliers, assorted accounts, 1377-1481.

Valangin, 1433-1662.

The mountains of Valangin, 1439-1661.

Fontaine-André (after secularization), 1539-1662.

The priory of the Val-de-Travers, 1509-1511, 1537, 1570, 1583-1662.

The wine cellar of Auvernier, 1588-1662.

The priory of Bevaix, 1643-1662.

Outside of the canton of Neuchâtel, several Swiss localities are also included in this fonds because of pacts or alliances with the counts of Neuchâtel: Oltigen, 1397-1401; Erlach, 1376-1383 and 1423-1459; Lugnorre, 1374-1484; Cudrefin, 1447-1457; Champvent, 1359-1373; Vugelles-la-Mothe, 1370-1372.

Because of their marriages with the heirs of noble families in neighboring Franche-Comté, the counts of Neuchâtel archived, in addition, accounts from various other territories: Champlitte and Rigney, 1455-1457 and 1440-1457; Champêtre, 1440-1442; Longecourt, 1444-1453; “Roue”, 1431; Vuillafans-le-Neuf, 1399-1491; Vercel, 1363-1490; Vennes (various accounts), 1399-1490; Morteau, 1360-1489; Bouclans, 1371-1374; Seurre, 1453-1460; La Mothe de Vaulgrenant, 1370-1373 et La Muire, 1371-1372.

The expenditures of the house of the count exist from 1359-1490; more general records pertaining to his estate, including records of expenditures on wines, dressmakers, masons, marshals, cobblers, grain and other amenities, extend from 1410 to 1491.

Also included in this series are receipts from “parties casuelles” (including those which normally escape ordinary records, 1568-1664 and 1688), the audit of the accounts of these “parties,” and the general receipts of the comté, from 1597-1662.

Eleven portfolios containing bound quittances of the 15th

■ F O R E X A M P L E | ASSORTED RECEIPTS

The Cartulaire de Montfaucon

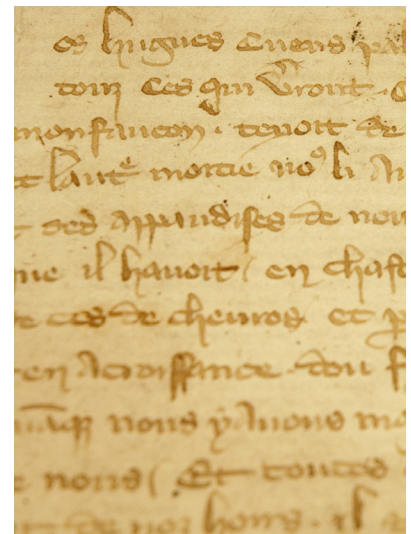
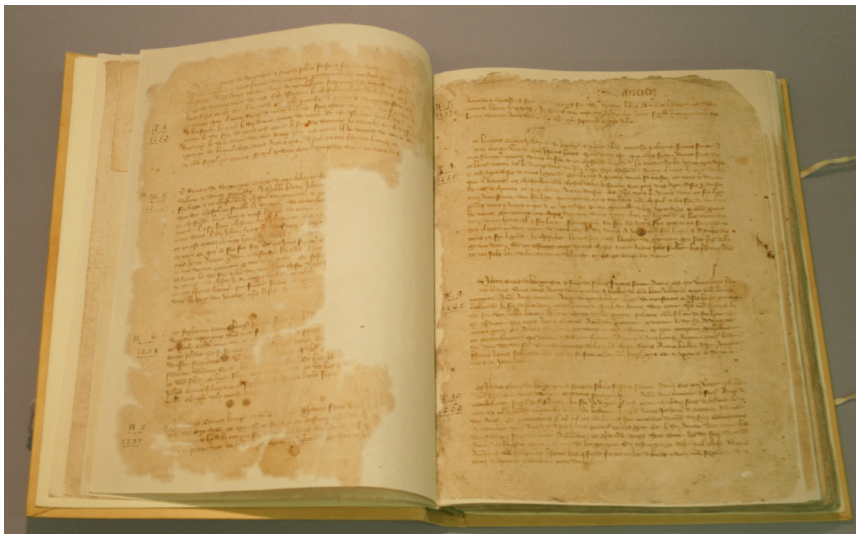
RD-220

Franche-Comté, 1315-18

De Tribolet, Maurice. *Positions de Thèses de l'Ecole des Chartes*. Paris: Edition Maurice de Tribolet, 1966.

“Chroniques des Chanoines de Neuchâtel.” Neuchâtel: La Société d’histoire, 1884.

ff. 1-122 443 copies of acts in French and Latin emulating from the Montfaucon family, organized by subject.



A cartulaire is a collection of copies of acts created at the time of their enactment or soon after. The Cartulaire de Montfaucon—copies of acts emulating from the Montfaucon family, ultimately powerful lords of Franche-Comté—arrived in Neuchâtel when Jeanne de Montfaucon married Louis de Neuchâtel, and remains homage to her family of shrewd tacticians. As Maurice de Tribolet postulates, in the mid thirteenth century, the self-sustaining feudal system was falling prey to the widespread excess of the lords, whose outstanding debts were beginning to endanger their security. When Amédée de Montfaucon became head of the family in 1229, he took advantage of this frailty to offer security in exchange for feudal loyalty to many of the fiefs. For instance, in one of his first acquisitions, seigneur Hugues de Châlon writes, “...nostres feaux Ameix, sires de Monfaucon, tenoit de nos en fyé et en chasement ligement la moitié d’Orbe et des appendises, et l’autre moitié nous li avons done en fyé lige et en chasement, si que il tient le tout d’Orbe et des appendises de nous ligement,” rather approximately, “To our faithful friends, Sires de Montfaucon, who already possess half of Orbe, we give the other half, so that he will hold all of Orbe and the surrounding territory” in exchange for Amédée’s chateaux at Besançon and Puy. Amédée used his expanded territory to join the new European trade economy and to retain his independence from the increasingly powerful French monarchy.

The Cartulaire is also witness to the organization and customs of the feudal Franche Comté. Among the many marriage contracts one finds that, among other restrictions, couples must have attained legal age, and that marriage contracts took place in front of the church. Contracts of inheritance give preference to the oldest son. And three acts testify to the role of the Seigneur as judge regarding homicide cases, such as the one in which a Philippe de Molans, suspected of the murder of an Etienne de Gonsans, is banished “outre la mer d’Angleterre, sanz revenir jusques vostre [Amédée’s] rapel,” “Across the sea of England, without returning until your [Amédée’s] recall.” A powerful lord’s command could extend even beyond the borders of his territory.

century, and six portfolios of additional accounts should also be noted.

In addition, the accounts of the treasury and additional receipts are included, bound in volumes from 1663 to 1813, in separate notebooks from 1814-1831, and volumes from 1832-1848. These accounts do not always span an entire year; from 1725 to 1806, notably, they stop at Trinity Sunday.

During the period from 1659-1848 the quittances which correspond to the accounts listed here were also conserved, thus they are more complete; separated into chapters, their numbers correspond with precision to those of the Accounts.

LOCAL JUDICIARY RECORDS

JUSTICES LOCALES

(CODE: JL)

This fonds offers a considerable amount of material of significant interest to economic and social historians. Of course, one must first take into account the many and sometimes inexplicable lacuna, due to the negligence of certain clerks as well as a number of fires and other contemporary destructive forces. Registries, packets, folders and notebooks were housed in central and local judiciary offices, where they became useless after the elaboration of the civil and penal codes replaced custom and earlier judicial practices. At the beginning of the 19th century there were no fewer than 22 civil jurisdictions, each headed by the a lord or mayor, who was assisted by judges called "châtelains," of whom the chief was the lieutenant mayor. The small jurisdictions were placed in the criminal domain of the larger communes: Le Landeron, Boudry, the Val-de-Travers, Thielle, Colombier, Vaumarcus, Gorgier et Valangin. Certain jurisdictions were dissolved and reunited with others in 1832. There was finally a matrimonial Court of Justice for the comté of Neuchâtel, the seignory of Valangin, and various seigniorial consistories⁸. For convenience this guide lists jurisdictions in alphabetical order (and not in the traditional order), followed by the beginning and ending dates of the documents available. The asterisk (*) denotes jurisdictions which have a repertory of existent fonds.

Bevaix, 1689-1831

Boudevilliers*, 1628-1807

Boudry, 1613-1848

Les Brenets*, 1703-1847

La Brévine, 1830-1848

La Chaux-de-Fonds*, 1657-1848

Colombier*, 1605-1832

Cortailod, 1554-1832

La Côte, 1583-1848

Gorgier*, 1598-1848

Consistoire seigneurial (Seigneurial Consistory), 1639-1693 ; 1787-1848

Le Landeron*, 1475-1848

Lignièrès, 1656-1848

Le Locle, 1561-1848

Neuchâtel, 1562-1848

Justice matrimoniale (Matrimonial Justice), 1441-1848

Les Ponts-de-Martel*, 1832-1848

Rochefort, 1612-1832

La Sagne, 1640-1848

Thielle/Saint-Blaise

Travers, 1624-1848

Valangin, 1555-1848

Valangin,

Consistoire seigneurial (Seigneurial Consistory), 1547-1848

Justice matrimoniale (Matrimonial Justice), 1700-1848

The Val-de-Travers, 1607-1848

Consistoire seigneurial (Seigneurial Consistory), 1733-1847

Vaumarcus*, 1772-1822

Consistoire seigneurial (Seigneurial Consistory), 1814-1828

Les Verrières, 1623-1848

THE ARCHIVES OF THE CHANCELLERY

MANUELS DU CONSEIL D'ETAT

(CODE: ICE)

This series is remarkable both for the breadth and richness of its documents, accumulated from the sixteenth century until the present day. Of course, the contents are not homogeneous; there exist some gaps, especially during the first hundred years, but on the whole the material makes accessible a large variety of material, thanks to the consistent competence of the Council under the Ancien Régime⁹.

The first volume (1514-1528) is a record, in German, of decisions taken by the Swiss bailiffs occupying Neuchâtel. Beginning with the second volume, which includes a very general table of contents, the fonds is concerned

■ F O R E X A M P L E | MANUELS DU CONSEIL D'ETAT

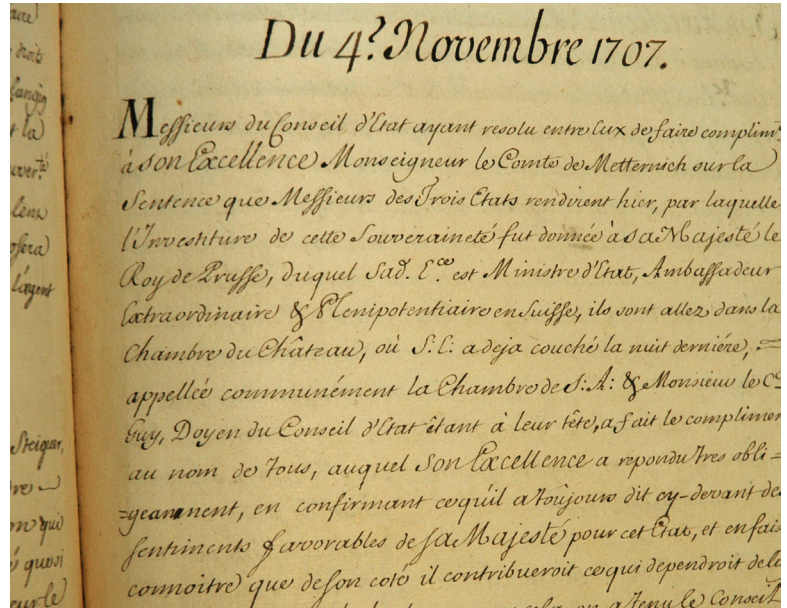
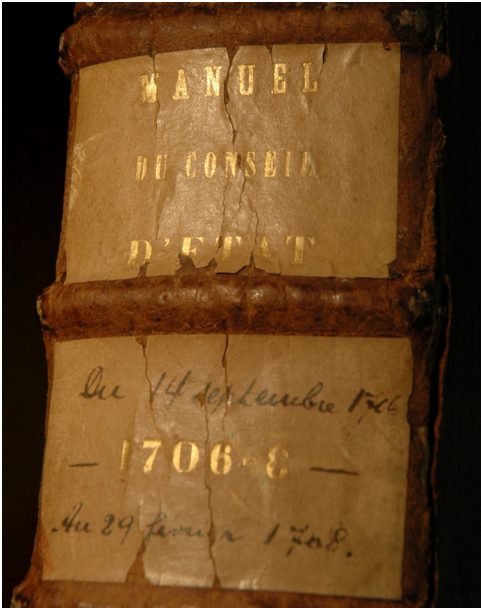
Manuel du Conseil d'Etat, 1706-1708

CP 33/50

Neuchâtel, Sept. 1706-Feb. 1708

pp. 1-583 records of the Conseil d'Etat.

Paper, pp. ii + 583 + ii



The Manuals of the Conseil d'Etat, although impressively uniform in appearance, are witness to the political proceedings of a sometimes turbulent state. This volume records, in June 1707, “la triste nouvelle de la mort de son Altesse Serenissime Madame nôtre Souveraine Princesse [Marie de Nemours], qui décéda Jeudy dernier seizième de ce mois à six heures du matin,” “the sad news of the death of her most serene Madame our Sovereign Princess [Marie de Nemours], who deceased Friday the sixteenth of this month at six o’clock in the morning.” Marie de Nemours (1625-1707) was the last of the ruling d’Orleans family, and after her death the task of finding a new monarch fell to the Tribunal des Trois-Etats.

The twelve members of the Trois-Etats found themselves both the representatives of a fiercely sovereign state and the object of tense international scrutiny. In the end they reasoned that, of the fifteen candidates, a long-distance monarch would intervene the least in their affairs, and so they chose Frederick I Hohenzollern. This process took four months, plenty of diplomatic intrigue and an official royal recognition of the Neuchâtel’s rights and liberties; the decision of the Trois Etats was finally read to the Prussian ambassador Count Metternich on November 3rd, after which, “Messieurs du Conseil d’Etat ayant resolu entre eux de faire compliment à son Excellence Monseigneur le Comte de Metternich sur la Sentence...par laquelle l’investiture de cette Souveraineté fut donnée à sa Majesté le Roy de Prusse...ils sont allez dans la Chambre du Château, où Son Excellence a déjà couché la nuit dernière...Monsieur le C[omte de] Guy...a fait le compliment au nom de tous, auquel Son Excellence a répondu très obligeamment...” “The Messieurs of the Conseil d’Etat, having resolved among themselves to congratulate His Excellence Monseigneur the Count of Metternich on the Sentence...by which the investiture of this Sovereignty was given to His Majesty the King of Prussia...went into the room of the château, where His Excellence had slept the night before...Monsieur le C. Guy...made the compliment in the name of all, after which His Excellence replied very obligingly...” Thus began the reign of the Kings of Prussia; the Manuals of the Conseil d’Etat continue as uniformly as ever.

with the “Deliberation of the Affairs of the Seignory of Neuchâtel” under the direction of the governor of the territory. The fonds continues with 214 volumes, recorded chronologically until February 29th, 1848, and bound in full leather.

To facilitate the usage of these manuals, which include contemporary analyses in the margins or added by the secretaries of the state, several magistrates summarized their contents in tables in the nineteenth century. At the beginning and end of each volume a table of keywords supplies the headings—unfortunately not always consistent—used to organize the contents internally.

THE TRIBUNAL DES TROIS-ETATS/ THE TRIBUNAL SOVEREIGN (CODES: 1LJ, 2LJ, 3LJ)

In these three series are the registers (70 volumes total) of the courts of appeals in the principality of Neuchâtel.

Emanating from the Audiences Générales of the count, itself derived from the “curia comitis,” the tribunal of the “Trois-Etats” originally brought together the clergy, the nobility, the bourgeoisie and the officers of the state. In the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, the importance and the competence of the Trois-Etats, or “Etats,” grew. In the middle of the 17th century, they came to encompass all of the judicial and legislative power of the old Audiences; their importance only increased afterwards, at least until 1707, when they came to represent the sovereignty of the state.

There were in fact two tribunals of the Trois-Etats in the principality, since starting in 1592 there also existed Etats of the comté of Valangin, inheritors of the defunct Audiences of the seigneur.

From 1834, these two courts of appeals formally made up only one body under the name of the Tribunal Sovereign, but they were separate in reality until 1848.

THE AUDIENCES GENERALES/ LEGISLATIVE CORPS (CODES: 4LJ, 5LJ)

These two series (54 and 58 volumes) contain the activity of the legislative assemblies instituted after the Restoration of 1814.

Created in 1816 under the name Audiences Générales, which was derived from an institution that disappeared

two centuries before, this legislative assembly was made of 48 representatives chosen by the prince, and 30 others elected by the people at the third level. The Audiences Générales voted on the laws drafted by the Conseil d’Etat and made suggestions regarding them, but could not really debate them or exercise much influence.

On June 22, 1831, a royal order disbanded the Audiences Générales, discredited already by its members’ inaction, and replaced it with the Corps Législatif. This new assembly, although elected only by the rich, signified real progress and the beginning of true separation of powers.

ACTS OF THE CHANCELLERY *ACTES DE CHANCELLERIE* (CODE: 1CHA)

This series of 39 volumes, continued through 1848, suffers particularly from a certain incoherence, due without doubt to the absence of any real chancellery; the record-keeping was left to the goodwill of the secretaries of the state and the successive chancellors. There are many lacuna, especially in the beginning of the series, as well as overlaps and a wide disparity in presentation; among these volumes are five notebooks found by chance during recent reclassifications.

The first registry contains acts mandated between 1419 and 1513; the second volume (1514-1526), contains acts originating from the bailiffs stationed in Neuchâtel by the Swiss cantons, in addition to private acts filed with the state. In general, the series consists of acts of chancellery: censuses, diplomas, dispensations, letters of exoneration, agreements; letters of naturalization, permission to assume bourgeois status, and legitimacy; grants of refuge, demands of “moiteresse”¹⁰, lists of rules, and diverse certificates issued by the Conseil d’Etat and the governor.

For the most part these registries are cataloged in contemporary or modern inventories.

OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE *CORRESPONDANCE OFFICIELLE* (CODE: COR)

LETTERS TO AND FROM THE SOVEREIGN *LES LETTRES DU ET AU SOUVERAIN*

The governor and the Conseil d’Etat were in reality simply representatives of the prince, which meant that most correspondences were more or less transmissions of orders or reports. For many years there was no

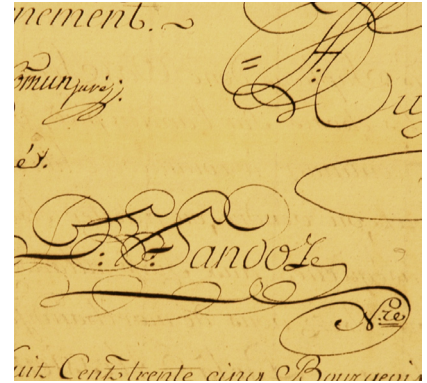
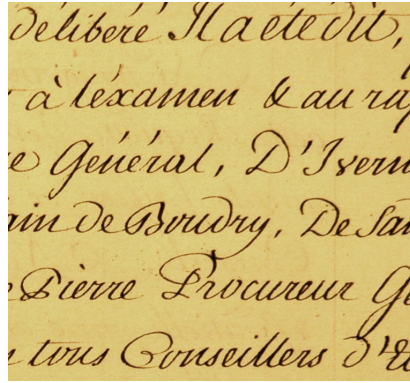
■ F O R E X A M P L E | THE “BLUE BOXES”

Série Etrangères: The Jews

35CB-16

Neuchâtel, 1782-1783

Five letters on Paper.



This exchange exemplifies the type of communication which occurred between citizens of Neuchâtel and the Conseil d'Etat. Written over the period of about one year, the series begins with a request by merchants regarding their Jewish competitors, that “Your Lordships will well wish to expel them completely from this country.” Reasons given include “...they go from house to house... if one is not extremely careful, they sell one thing for another, and always above the price, which is damaging for the people of this state...[and] the facility with which they are able to transport their goods across borders...gives them simultaneously the means to become smugglers: the thefts carried out by their domestics and peasant children...can thus never be discovered.”

On the same day that the letter was received, the Conseil d'Etat replied that it “confirms the preceding arrests which mandate the expulsion of Jews from this State, to be executed over the course of the month of July.” Then, in September came another order, that “despite orders given for the entire expulsion of Jews who reside in this country, there remain a large number who to this date have not obeyed...All Judiciary officers of this State are to inform all the jews in their jurisdiction to vacate this country without delay, telling them that...they must not leave anything behind, warning them to keep in mind a forceful execution of orders if they do not respond.”

This act was not instituted without protest. Soon a group of bourgeois of Valangin voiced a competing plea to the Conseil, that “[although] we do not intend to request in the course of this argument that the Jews be allowed to find in this country a home...[we hope] that they might come to sell us the merchandise which we need, and to buy the products of our industry.” In support of the Jews themselves, the bourgeois attested as well that “As to the rest, Messieurs, the jews with whom we have done business are well known, they are residents of Alsace, subjects of Her Very Christian Majesty and in possession of good certificates, and their behavior in our regard has always been positive.” “It has been decided,” replied the Conseil d'Etat, “that the Conseil will review the request of the suppliants with an examination and report by Messieurs Rougemont Commissaire Général, d'Ivernois Trésorier Général [etc]...all Conseillers d'Etat.”

In spite of all Jews remained a presence in Neuchâtel, as evidenced by the many rounds of letters—complaints, supports, reports and decisions—which follow in this series. Typically, a complaint rendered to the Conseil d'Etat received a response, positive or negative, and sometimes a following ordinance, as was the case here. Because this system of direct written communication produced equally direct results, much was invested in each letter and careful attention paid to its form and language. Thus the medium of the letter itself can often add social commentary to its contents: the scrawled and crowded signatures of the merchants, the regulated hand of the Conseil d'Etat's secretary, the wide margins and lavish curls of the bourgeois of Valangin—and the relative absence of any Jewish voices—all speak to the social context of the era.

fonds devoted specifically to correspondence with the sovereign: relevant documents were dispersed among the Seigniorial Archives until the commencement of this series¹¹.

In addition to these letters, 21 cartons contain the original letters written by the kings of Prussia and their ministers in Neuchâtel between 1707 and 1848; one carton contains documents surrounding the reign of Prince Berthier (1806-1813) and a single portfolio contains those pertaining to the époque of French princes (1664-1707). Some letters in this series have been lost or reclassified.

Beginning in 1751, the principle letters of the sovereign and his ministers, or received from them, were cataloged in two series: "Letters to His Majesty" (31 volumes) and "Letters from His Majesty" (20 volumes). Preceding this, some letters were cataloged in the Missives fonds (see: Missives).

MISSIVES

"Missives" here refer to the correspondences exchanged among Neuchâtel, the villages, neighboring countries, and, until 1751, the sovereign and his representatives. A series of 63 volumes includes the principle letters sent and received. The first volume, which also contains oaths, extends from May 1559 to April 1573. Beginning with second volume, the series extends from 1629 to March 1848, not without a few gaps. Inventories, more or less complete, facilitate the consultation of these volumes.

Other series not called strictly "missives" include

"Correspondence with Switzerland," 15 volumes (March 1814-December 1830).

"Letters from Switzerland," 69 volumes of bound letters and 35 volumes of translations (January 1831-November 1848).

Letters to Switzerland," 15 volumes of copies (January 1831-1850).

THE "BLUE BOXES"

LES SERIES DITES "CARTONS BLEUS"

(CODE: CB)

The "Blue Boxes" contain a considerable number of documents which were used primarily to substantiate decisions of the Conseil d'Etat during the Ancien Régime. A provisionary and rather arbitrary classification was begun after 1880, and taken up again in 1950. Many of the documents have been removed and placed with their

counterparts, and some series have been jumbled, fused with others or redistributed. Some of the most commonly used documents have been maintained in their original locations, so as to not complicate the research process.

The vast majority of the documents contained in the "blue boxes" date back to the époque of the Prussian kings, sovereigns of Neuchâtel (1707-1848); some are from the end of the 17th century, occasionally earlier, and, in one case, from the Treaty of Paris in 1857.

The principle series are listed below¹²

Abbatoirs et boucheries/Slaughterhouses and butcheries
Abri et vente/Abri and vente
Abzug/Abzug
Première Académie/the First academy
Actes du droit historique/Acts of historical right
Affaires judiciaires/Judicial affairs
Agriculture/Agriculture
Aides/Aid
Alignements des rues/Street alignment
Assistance/Assistance
Assurances/Insurance
Auberges et Cabarets/Hotels and Cabarets
Bâtiments/Buildings
Bétail/Livestock
Brevets et médailles de 1831/Certificates and medals of 1831
Cens et dîmes/Censes and tithes
Cérémonies/Ceremonies
Chancellerie/Chancellery
Chasse/Hunting
Commerce et industrie/Commerce and industry
Commissaire général/Commissioner General
Condition des sujets/Conditions of subjects
Conseil d'Etat/Conseil d'Etat
Contrôle des matières d'or et d'argent/Regulations of gold and silver
Cours d'eau, lacs, usines/Bodies of water, lakes, factories
Cultes/Religion
Décoration/Decoration
Décrets/Decrees
Domaines/Domains
Education (écoles)/Education (schools)
Emigrés et émigrations/ Emigrés and emigration
Etat civil/Etat Civil
Etrangers/Foreigners
Evénements
Fiefs/Fiefdoms

■ F O R E X A M P L E | THE NOTARY COLLECTION

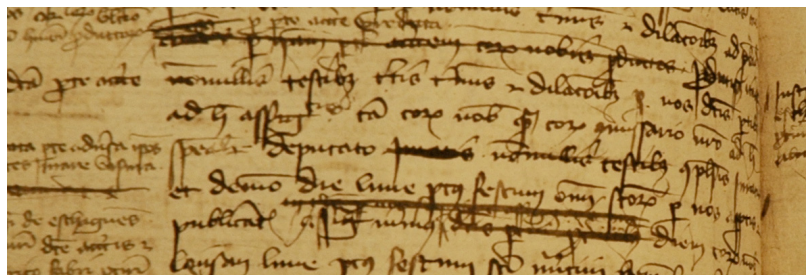
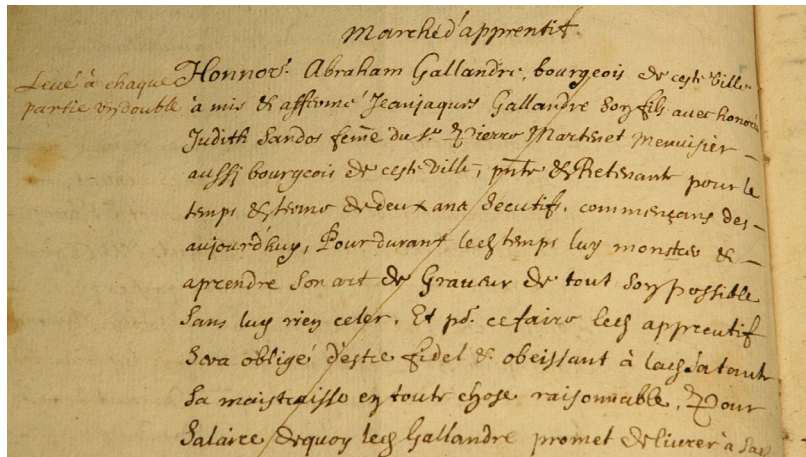
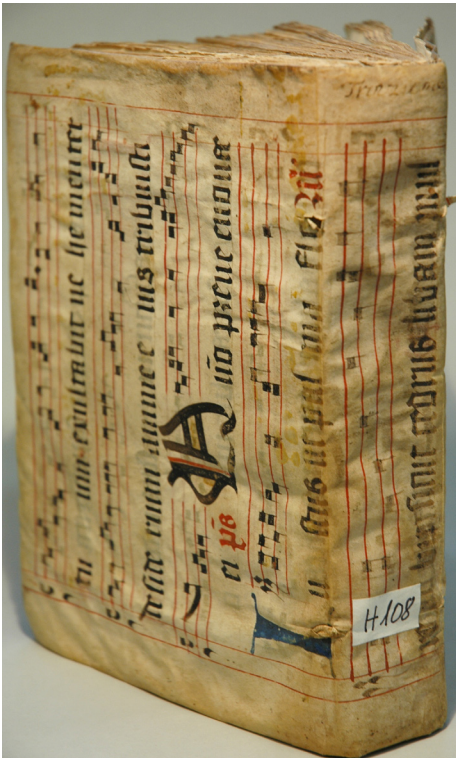
Minutaire of Nicolas Huguenaud

NOT-H108

Neuchâtel, Jan. 1665-Jan. 1667

Graber, Jean-Pierre. *Histoire du Notariat dans le Canton de Neuchâtel*. Zurich: Imprimerie M. Maier Schlieren, 1957, p. 181.

ff. 1-222 notary acts, mostly purchases, sales, exchanges, and various obligations.



Among a notary's many duties were contracts of apprenticeship. In this excerpt, father Abraham Gallandri, bourgeois of Neuchâtel, apprentices his son Jeanjaques, "...for the time and term of two consecutive years, commencing today, during which time [the master] will show him and teach him the art of engraving in everything possible without hiding anything; and to accomplish this, the apprentice must remain faithful and obedient to his master in all things reasonable."

Records such as this one are actually shortened versions of completed acts. When a client approached the notary, he first recorded the request in abbreviated form in a "minutaire," then, depending on its importance, copied an elongated version into a second "registre" before giving the final act to the parties involved. As the process was completed, the notary kept records in the margins of the minutaire as to whether the act had been "enregistrée," copied into a registre; "levée," given to the parties; or both; when all was considered complete the record was typically cancelled with a slash. In this case, because an act of apprenticeship fell into the less important category of "acts du temps," the act was "levée à chaque partie en double," given to each party, but cancelled without having been more securely registered. This fairly complex system, upheld by law, evolved from centuries of practice. If one compares Huguenaud's minutes with the unbound notes of Willième Mentha (1400-1429; see below right), whose records are the earliest preserved at the Archives, one finds that while the basic act-by-act structure remains the same, Huguenaud's more advanced page organization—a more consistent use of titles, marginal notes, and cancellation—reflects a society increasingly dependant on detailed, accurate written records and their preservation: Gallandri's father must have expected that, in case of any doubt, he could trust Huguenaud's document to be expediently retrieved and his son's fate assured.

Finances et recettes/Finances and receipts
 Foires/Fairs
 Forêts/Forests
 Francs sujets de Thielle/Franc subjects of Thielle
 Gendarmerie/Police
 Grâces/Pardons
 Illégitimes/Illegitimates
 Inclusion/Admittance
 Interdictions/Forbiddances
 Intérieur/Interior
 Jeune Allemagne/Jeune Allemagne
 Législation/Legislation
 Limites/Borders
 Lods/Lods
 Loteries/Lotteries
 Mandements/Orders
 Marchandises anglaises et denrées coloniales/English
 merchandise and colonial commodities
 Marquisat de Rothelin/the Marquisdom of Rothelin
 Militaire/Military (75 folders)
 Mines/Mines
 Monnaies/Money
 Noblesse/Nobility
 Nouvelle censière/New rent
 Offices/Offices
 Passeports/Passports
 Péages/Tolls
 Pêche/Fishing
 Poids et mesures/Weights and measures
 Points de coutume/Customary thresholds
 Police Centrale/The Central Police
 Police sanitaire/the Sanitary Police
 Postes/the Post
 Poudres/Powders
 Presse-publications/Publications
 Le Prince/the Prince
 Prisons/Prisons
 Ravitaillement/Supply Maintenance
 Relations extérieures/Exterior relations
 Routes/Transportation
 Sels/Salt
 Serments/Oaths
 Sociétés/Societies
 Successions/Successions
 Tavernage/Tavernage
 Testaments/Testaments
 Théâtre, spectacles/Theater
 Transferts immobiliers/Deed transfers
 Transports/Transportation
 Trésor et comptes/Treasury and accounts

Triangulation/Cartography
 Tribunal souverain/the Tribunal souverain
 Troubles de 1766-1788/Troubles of 1766-1788
 Tutelles/Legal guardians
 Vigne et vin/Vineyards and wine

THE “ÉTAT CIVIL”¹³ (CODE: EC)

For this fonds one must see the article by Léon Montadon¹⁴. It was only in the 16th century that the two first parish registers were retained in the manner of the modern état civil: in Cornaux, baptisms were first recorded in 1562, and in Neuchâtel in 1590. Generally the registries in this series start in the 17th century, not without gaps and imperfections; most often births and marriages were recorded at the back and the front of the same volume. Death registries are in general of a later date and less clear.

Since 1824, parishes have been under obligation to keep two copies of baptismal, marriage and death records. The secular état civil was introduced later by the Republic, on the 1st of February 1852 for marriages, and the 1st of March for births and deaths. Since January 1st, 1876, new, uniform registries were established for all of Switzerland. Family registries, kept in their communes of origin, were established in 1929.

In principal, the Archives de l'Etat possess all registries originating before 1824, and the duplicates after that year. The older records may be freely consulted; for those which are less than 120 years old, one must have the authorization of the “surveillance de l'état civil.” Apparent gaps can be explained by the creation of new offices, including the registries for the years 1824-1875 which can be found in the communes themselves, and not at the Archives de l'Etat.

THE ARCHIVES OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES

THE ARCHIVES OF THE BOURGEOISIE OF VALANGIN (CODE: 2BG)

In the seignory of Valangin, the ranks of the bourgeois, who elected their first “banneret” in 1352, came to encompass a great number of the inhabitants of the Val-de-Ruz, and then the present-day districts of Le Locle and La Chaux-de-Fonds; they intervened increasingly often in the affairs of the country after 1707, and ultimately were dissolved by the authorities of the Republic in 1852. Their archives were given to the state, including an inventory established in 1841 and an additional list.

The principle series in this fonds are registers of transcriptions (1643, 1687-1852) and 36 acts on parchment, beginning with the 1455 charter of “franchises,” to the authorization of the purchase of an orchard in which to hold assemblies in 1803; registries of funds (1697-1840), copies of letters (1722-1792), and the list of those accepted as bourgeois (1836). Georges Quinche analyzed and ordered the hundreds of these documents which fall between the 15th century (copies) and 1837; his work is organized mainly by the following titles: documents of the interregnum (1707), Anabaptists (1733-1745), the toll of Arberg (1710-1827), the “régie”, “vente” and “abri” (1766-1768), the French Revolution, the events of 1831, and the correspondences with the sovereigns (1582-1837). A summary inventory, created in 1841, has been maintained and updated.

ARCHIVES OF STATE AND SEMI-STATE INSTITUTIONS

THE NOTARY FONDS *NOTAIRES* (CODE: NOT)

The registries and acts of notaries were recorded from the beginning of the 15th century until laws governing their organization were established in 1872¹⁵, and at the Archives de l'Etat they occupy about 275 linear meters of shelving. There is great variety in the presentation of

this material, from simple notebooks to thick volumes, and every format in between. In order to tap some of the important historical material contained in these registers, one must consult the list of notaries who worked in each commune; they are listed by century, although the dates given hide gaps and do not suggest the importance of the events which occurred during a given period. Outside of the division between the notaries of the comté of Neuchâtel and those of the seignory of Valangin, nothing limited the jurisdiction of a notary; he could work very far from his home or, as was more common, in the center of his village (in Neuchâtel, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Le Locle, Couvet, Boudry, and Motiers). A summary inventory gives the names of every known notary, with some biographical information and an indication of existent volumes. Exceptions excluded, notaries did not establish indexes to their works; some repertories were organized by first name or by type of affair.

It is thus difficult to give an exhaustive description of what these volumes contain. Purchases, sales, exchanges and obligations are the most common. Also included are marriage contracts, testaments and partitions (sometimes in the volumes of “secret” acts), compacts, trade agreements and various contracts. The proportions according to which different types of acts were included or neglected vary according to the notary and the époque.

ASSORTED PUBLIC FONDS

UNBOUND MAPS *PLANS DETACHES* (CODE: PLA)

The Archives houses a series of just over 600 unbound maps, rolled and flat, which concern specific areas. Their classification divides them arbitrarily (in chronological order of their acquisition); a card catalog, organized by commune and by subject, compensates for this lack of logical arrangement. Dimensions, scale, support, format, age and subject vary from one piece to another. The oldest, a bird's-eye view dating from approximately 1583, stands in contrast to the maps drawn by the cartographers and topographers of the 19th century. Roads are the subjects most often treated, as well as waterways, forests, fields, vineyards, villages, properties, and even houses and borders.

FAMILIAL ARCHIVES

The Archives de l'Etat houses many fonds pertaining to families or significant personalities of the Ancien Régime. The two particularly important fonds described here belong to the state and can be freely consulted.

THE BERTHIER FONDS (CODE: F-BERTHIER)

This fonds consists of about 2000 documents concerning the country of Neuchâtel under the First Empire (1806-1813). Marketed by the heirs of Prince Alexandre Berthier, it was purchased and offered to the State by the Cantonal Historical Society and by a group of patrons in 1937. An inventory, written in 1895-96, subdivides the material into nine chapters: I, descriptions of the principality; II, the concession; III, the international situation; IV, military affairs; V and V bis, interior politics and expenses of the prince; VI, financial affairs; VII and VIII, the economic situation; IX, the intellectual, religious and moral climate.

THE D'ESTAVAYER FONDS (CODE: F-ESTAVAYER)

This rich fonds, acquired by the Archives in 1918, concerns the history of the cantons of Neuchâtel, Soleure and Fribourg. A summary inventory facilitates access to these documents, which were in grand disarray before their classification. The parchments are ordered chronologically in divisions according to the family concerned: Estavayer (589 numbers, 1264-1743), Greder (68 numbers, approximately 1564-1750), Praroman (69 numbers, 1334-1651), Vallier (20 numbers, 1306-1392) and various families (22 numbers, 1253-1783). Additional folders (250) organize documents (apportionments, accounts, familial administration, military affairs) among the same families, with the addition of Glutz, Sury, Setier and Machet; these folders also concern the affairs of Soleure, the Federal Diet, various Swiss cantons and, of course, Neuchâtel, because several members of the Vallier family served as governor of the principality. One can find important documents in particular regarding the vineyards of Cressier, and the tithe system of Oulens, Mollondin, Barberèche and their dependencies. Finally, some documents help reconstruct an inventory of the goods of the family de Rive, who succeeded the family Vaumarcus. The thin folders provide information regarding foreign states and the intellectual life of the 17th and 18th centuries. Inventories of goods and rent (55 numbers) deriving from the regions of Mollondin and Cressier or the various families mentioned fall between 1437 (a copy) and 1758.

Footnotes

¹ The manuals of the Conseil d'Etat, the state executive body.

² Alfred Schnegg, Jean-François de Chambrier et le classement des archives neuchâteloises, in the Musée neuchâtelois, 1977, p. 63-78.

³ Records of the land and worth of each property owner in a given area.

⁴ The updates which followed the less frequent reconnaissances.

⁵ The bourgeois who lived outside of the city.

⁶ Cartulaire de Montfaucon. Edition Maurice de Tribolet. Positions de thèses de l'Ecole des Chartes, Paris, 1966. – Chroniques des chanoines de Neuchâtel, new edition by the Société d'histoire, 1884.

⁷ Madeleine Bubloz, Les comptes seigneuriaux de la série Recettes diverses aux archives de l'Etat : milieu du XVI^e siècle-1662 (Institut d'histoire de l'Université de Neuchâtel, 1979).

⁸ For more information regarding the organization of the principality, see the "Exposé de la constitution de la principauté de Neuchâtel et Valangin dressé en 1806," publié par Maurice Tripet, Colombier, 1893.

⁹ For more on this subject, see Jean Courvoisier, the Musée neuchâtelois, 1980, p. 80.

¹⁰ The obligation to surrender half of one's yearly harvest as a lease for one's land.

¹¹ A number of letters were published by Janine Guibert: Un aspect du règne de Henri II de Longueville, Neuchâtel, 1972.

¹² French titles followed by English translations.

¹³ Birth, marriage and death records.

¹⁴ Léon Montadon, Les registres de l'état civil aux archives de l'Etat de Neuchâtel, dans Musée neuchâtelois, 1938, p. 31-42.

¹⁵ For more information on the notariat, see the thesis by Jean-Pierre Graber, Histoire du notariat dans le canton de Neuchâtel. Ses origines, son évolution, son organisation, Schlieren, 1957.

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