Antoine Guerry Duclaud Papers, 1759-1794 (bulk 1771-1775): Finding Aid

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Antoine Guerry Duclaud was born around 1741 in La Rochefoucauld, France, to Pierre Guerry, sieur du Claud, and Marie Pintaud, and moved to the Netherlands as a young man. He served in the armed forces of the Dutch West India Company in West Africa from 1762 until 1771, when he deserted with the intention of traveling to the Dutch colony of Surinam to establish a plantation. On his way, Guerry Duclaud stopped in Guinea where he acquired twelve enslaved people, two of whom died on the transatlantic journey to Surinam. Guerry Duclaud settled in the coastal city of Paramaribo in 1771. Failing to become a planter, he went into business renting the labor of the enslaved Africans he brought with him. During this period, Surinam's maroon communities were regularly raiding plantations and posed a significant military threat to the Dutch colonial economy. Depressed by his poor financial prospects, Guerry Duclaud decided to return to Europe after his sisters informed him of the possibility of receiving a pardon for deserting. He sold his property, house, furniture, and enslaved laborers and returned to France in 1775. He later became a cloth merchant and married Marie Migeon with whom he had several daughters. He died in 1803.

Consists of correspondence, business and legal records, and other documents of Antoine Guerry Duclaud, a French officer employed by the Dutch West India Company who deserted and settled in Paramaribo in the Dutch colony of Surinam (now the independent Republic of Suriname) in 1771. The papers primarily document Guerry Duclaud's move to Surinam with the intention of starting a plantation, the establishment and furnishing of his residence there, his business renting the labor of enslaved Africans he brought from Guinea, and his return to Europe in 1775 after failing to make a profit in South America. This collection offers insights into Dutch trade, economic conditions, the institution of slavery, and resistance to slavery by maroon communities in Surinam in the 1770s.

Guerry Duclaud's letters home to his sisters in France describe his plans to establish himself as a planter in the Dutch colony of Surinam, as well as his many struggles and ultimate failure. He writes of family matters, acquaintances, money owed to various traders, and the costs involved with maintaining his business operations and financial affairs. The letters also provide a colonist's account of maroon uprisings in Surinam and the frequent violence between Dutch plantation owners and Maroons who had liberated themselves from slavery and regularly returned to attack plantations, assassinate plantation owners, and liberate enslaved laborers. Duclaud's letters relay the tense situation in detail, noting that each colonist's household was required to be armed in order to help patrol the colony; he also attributes many of his financial difficulties to the effects of the maroon insurgency on the colonial economy.

Other materials documenting Guerry Duclaud's time in Surinam include contracts, invoices, merchandise lists, receipts, promissory notes, accounts with Dutch merchants and traders, and other financial and legal documents, including materials related to his involvement in the slave trade. There is also a passport allowing Guerry Duclaud to return to Europe in 1775, as well as a journal and legal document related to his affairs in the 1780s and 1790s after his return to France.
Original groupings were maintained.

Access and Use

Access
Open for research.

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Acquisition and Appraisal

Provenance and Acquisition
Purchase, 2017 (AM 2018-37).

Appraisal
No materials were separated during 2017 processing.

Processing and Other Information

Encoding
This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit 2017-11-15T10:11-0500

Descriptive Rules Used
Finding aid content adheres to that prescribed by Describing Archives: A Content Standard.

Subject Headings

- Guerry Duclaud, Antoine.
- West-Indische Compagnie (Netherlands).
- Insurgency -- Suriname -- History -- 18th century -- Sources.
- Maroons -- Suriname -- History -- 18th century -- Sources.
- Plantations -- Suriname -- History -- 18th century -- Sources.
- Slave records -- Suriname -- 18th century -- Sources.
· Slave trade -- South America -- History -- 18th century -- Sources.
· Slavery -- Suriname -- History -- 18th century -- Sources.
· Slaveholders -- Suriname -- History -- 18th century -- Sources.
· Netherlands -- Commerce -- Africa, West -- History -- 18th century -- Sources.
· Netherlands -- Commerce -- Suriname -- History -- 18th century -- Sources.
· Suriname -- Economic conditions -- 18th century -- Sources.
· Suriname -- History -- To 1814 -- Sources.
· Accounts -- 18th century.
· Correspondence -- 18th century.
· Documents -- 18th century.
· Financial records -- 18th century.
· Black history
· European history
Contents List

Letters to Sisters, 1772-1775

Language(s) of Materials:

Description: Consists of six detailed letters from Antoine Guerry Duclaud to his three sisters, Marie Guerry, "Veuve Migeon," and Marie Guerry Duclaud, in La Rochefoucauld. The first two letters, written from Surinam in October 1772 and April 1773, describe Guerry Duclaud's travels to Surinam, his business renting the labor of the enslaved Africans he brought from Guinea, his tumultuous financial affairs and social life, as well as the frequent revolts of Maroons and enslaved laborers on colonial plantations in Surinam. His March 1774 letter was written after he had received a response from his family; having learned that he could receive a pardon for deserting, he describes his plans to return to Europe. The three 1775 letters, written after Guerry Duclaud's return to France, describe his travels as well as his plans to take the necessary steps to receive a pardon.

Surinam Residence Documents, 1772-1775

Description: Consists of expense lists, inventories, contracts, and legal documents regarding the transport of Guerry Duclaud's property from Europe to Surinam, expenses incurred from building and furnishing his residence in Surinam, and his efforts to dispose of his property there before returning to Europe.

Promissory Notes, 1774 June-1775 February

Language(s) of Materials:

Description: Consists of sixteen promissory notes issued by merchants and bankers of Surinam, payable at Amsterdam or The Hague. Most are printed forms completed by hand for sums ranging from 500 to 1600 florins. Includes a promissory note, dated June 1774, for 1375 florins issued by the "Wegloopers Comptoir" ("counter of runaways") as payment for the rental of enslaved persons.

Invoices and Merchandise Lists, bulk 1772-1775, 1761-1775

Description: These documents, which were originally sewn together into a bundle, consist primarily of invoices and merchandise lists for provisions imported from Amsterdam, including wine, canvas, clothing, glasses, and other materials. Of note is an earlier document concerning Guerry Duclaud's 1761 journey to Guinea, which lists members of his party who died (32), those who remained in Guinea (8 including himself), and those who returned to Europe (6).

Receipts for Transport and Rental of Enslaved Persons, 1771-1774

Description: Consists of two receipts, including one from Captain Ary van den Pot regarding a contract with Guerry Duclaud to transport twelve enslaved Africans, two of whom died on the voyage, from Guinea to Surinam (December
20, 1771); and another, written upon Guerry Duclaud's decision to return to France, canceling a contract for the rental of an enslaved man and woman to a ship's captain (December 6, 1774).

Passport, 1775 February 23

Language(s) of Materials: Box: B-001090

Description: Includes a passport document (with wax seal), signed by Jan Nepveu (1719-1779), then the Dutch colonial governor of Surinam, permitting Guerry Duclaud to return to Europe.

Accounts with Pierre Monier, 1775 June 13

Language(s) of Materials: Box: B-001090

Description: Consists of two manuscript documents listing Guerry Duclaud's accounts with Pierre Monier, a Dutch merchant in Amsterdam.

"Affaires étrangères de france, d'afrique, et d'amérique", 1759-1794

Language(s) of Materials: Box: B-001090

Description: Consists of a group of materials assembled under a cover sheet labeled "Affaires étrangères de france, d'afrique, et d'amérique," though the materials themselves reflect Guerry Duclaud's life both before and after his travels abroad. Included are a 1759 letter Guerry Duclaud sent to his father regarding his plans to leave Europe; a fifty-page manuscript journal kept from 1780 to 1794; and a 38-page manuscript act of procedure regarding a property dispute case in La Rochefoucauld involving Guerry Duclaud and Pierre Paintaud.