

THE VALUE OF FRENCH CURRENCY IN THE 17th & 18th CENTURIES

Sometimes, when researching one of our ancestors, leafing through a history book, an old manuscript, be it a notarized contract a will or an inventory, one is faced with sums of French Currency the value of which we do not understand: livres, écus, sols, etc.. To shed some light on this problem, here is a list of some currencies, popular at the time:

Denier
Sous or Sol
Livre or Franc
ECU, silver currency
Louis, gold currency

The equivalence of these currencies is as follows:

12 deniers equals 1 Sous or Sol
1 Livre (Franc) equals 20 Sous or Sols
1 ECU is worth 3 Livres
1 Louis is worth 20 Livres
1 Pistole is worth 10 Livres

The first settlers being very poor, had brought very little money with them, which was soon exhausted. In 1663, there was no coinage left in the country. To compensate for this lack of ready cash, people began to use the beaver as cash money: it was sold for 4 francs a pound, the skin only. One could exchange beaver pelts at all stores of the 'Company'.

With the arrival of soldiers in 1665, coins clinked anew. But there still was not enough, because the pieces did not stay in circulation. They continued to negotiate using beaver pelts. In 1669, they added wheat which was worth 4 pounds a minot. And then, in 1674, it was the turn of the moose skins, worth about 3 pounds.

In the year 1685, De Meulles established "card money" Here is a brief history: in 1674, the King had ordered that all accounts, purchases and payments, had to be settled in hard cash. To top it off, in 1684, he sent soldiers to the country and ordered them to be supported, but he had forgotten their pay ... That's when De Meulles had the idea of "card money", and he actually put into circulation. The system worked as follows: they used regular playing cards, each card bore the seal of the Intendant, his signature and that of Treasurer. First, a full card was worth 4 Livres, half a card was worth 2 Livres, and a quarter of a card, fifteen Sous. 'Card money' was exchanged for hard cash as soon as one could do so and the nullified card was destroyed. This currency was very popular in the country until 1717.

Each had his own livelihood and was paid according to his function. Thus, in 1653, a

surgeon would earn annually 150 to 100 Livres; a joiner, 100 Livres; a carpenter, 75 to 100 Livres; a armorer/ worker, 100 Livres; a gunsmith/locksmith, 80 Livres; a locksmith, 75 Livres; a gunmaker/basic 75 Livres; a bricklayer, 80 Livres; a cobbler, 60 Livres; a tailor, 60 Livres.

What could you buy with this money? In 1709, a horse sold for 40 Livres, and a beautiful beast, up to 100 Livres. Also in 1709, a cow was worth 50 Livres; a sheep, 5 Livres; a average pig from 150 to 200 pounds - 15 Livres.

Skins and furs were a vital element of subsistence for the colonizers. In 1715, for example, the raw skin of an elk was worth 10 Livres; that of the bear, otter and raccoon: 5 Livres; the skin of bear cub, 2 ½ Livres, the wolf, 2 Livres; the martin, 45 sols; fox, 35 sols.

In the early eighteenth century, around 1710, the major commodities were selling at about the following price: salted butter, 10 sols; fresh butter, 15 sols, water melon, 3 to 6 sols; big melons 15 to 20 sols, the cheese on the Island of Orleans, a small, thin, round pieces and four pieces to the pound, 30 sols a dozen. And to cook all these ingredients, a stove cost 100 Livres.

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