

# When Postal History Rhymes with History or...of the Importance of Reading Our Mail!

By Grégoire Teyssier

I am sure that everyone, like me, opens stampless mail and the letters they acquire to discover what is hidden inside. But sometimes, especially when one is at a dealer's table, time is often short. Unless a sufficiently important indicium is evident (a note on the front, a recipient's name, or a special destination, for example), very often one does not take the trouble or the time to open the letter and to read its contents (if, indeed, there is content obviously!).

However, this is what should be done constantly. As a proof, the letter (Figure 1) which I am pleased to share with you today.

At first glance, this letter which I recently acquired, offers nothing very interesting and I would even say that it is very ordinary. It was sent postage due from Marseilles, in the south of France (handwritten at top left by the sender – not an official postmark) taxed 4 (sols) to Antibes (for 20 to 40 lieues<sup>1</sup>). The

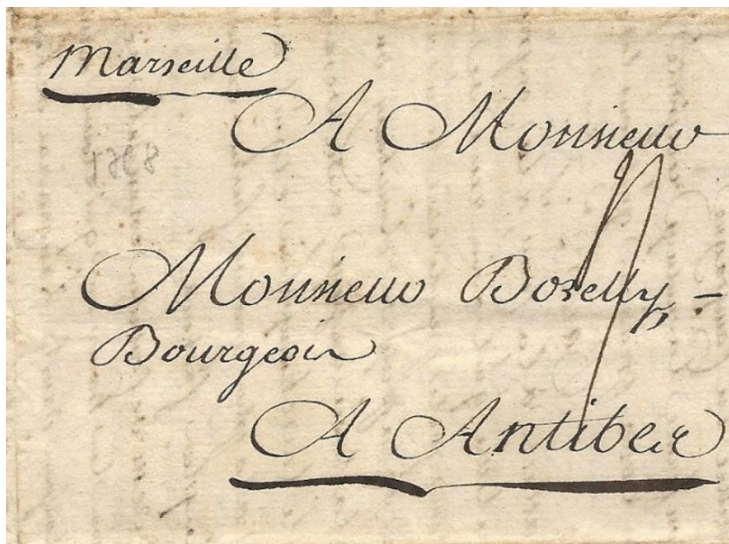


Figure 1: simple letter from Marseilles to Antibes.

*attention*  
 Sommaire de la capitulation de Louisbourg  
 Londres 18. Août 1758.  
 Les Capts. Loyauxs ambass. sont arrivés ce matin portant  
 l'annonce de la prise de Louisbourg. cette place a capitulé  
 le 26. juillet aux conditions suivantes  
 1. La garnison consistant en 3031. hommes et 2606. hommes  
 tant malades que sains et off. de marine prisonniers  
 de guerre  
 2. L'artillerie munition et provisions des Isles de Cap  
 Breton et de St. Jean et leur dépendance livrés aux Com.  
 Anglois  
 3. Ordre aux troupes de St. Jean et leur dépendance  
 de se rendre abords des V. de guerre que l'Amiral leur enverra  
 pour les recevoir  
 4. La flotte Dauphine livrée aux troupes Angloises le 27.  
 au matin ainsi que la garnison et tous ceux qui ont profité  
 de la trêve pour des transports de l'Angletune  
 5. Les malades et blessés soignés comme ceux de St. M. B.  
 6. Les marchands et Com. qui n'ont point pris les armes  
 renvoyés en France par l'Amiral  
 Il y avoit dans la place 221. pièces de canon et 188. mitres  
 et quantité de munition, de guerre et de bouche de la  
 marine sur terre  
 Le Bateau de 11. canons  
 Le Capricieux 71.  
 Le Capricieux 61.  
 Le Célebre 61.  
 Le Dieu saint 61. pris

Figure 2: the contents of the enclosed letter.

recipient's name (Monsieur Bozelly) appears not to be famous and nothing pushes the reader to open the letter and read its contents. And yet! When you take the time to read it, it reveals a whole other story!

This “ordinary” letter, written in French, is in fact a news report (the ancestor of the news reports of our current news agencies). It contains, among others news, a summary of the recent capture of the Fortress of

Louisbourg, exactly 23 days after the event (the time the news crosses the Atlantic).

The fall of the Fortress of Louisbourg was a military takeover of such importance that it presages the beginning of the end of New-France.

Here, therefore, for the benefit of all, the translation of this piece of our history and how the story was reported at the time (Figures 2 & 3).

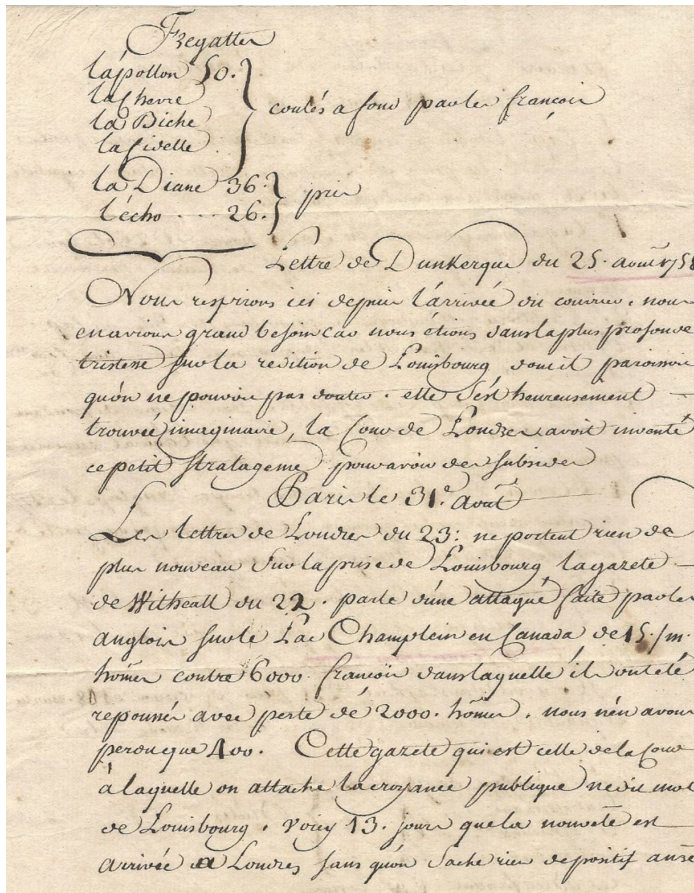


Figure 3: the contents of the enclosed letter, continued.

## News<sup>2</sup>

Summary of the Surrender of Louisbourg  
London, August 23, 1758

Captains Edgcumbe (and) Amherst arrived this morning bringing the news of the taking of Louisbourg. This place surrendered July 26 under the following conditions:

The garrison is composed of 3031 men and 2606 men both seamen and soldiers and Navy officers

prisoners of war;

The artillery, ammunitions and provisions of the Isles of Cape Breton and St-Jean and their dependencies delivered to the English Commander;

Order to the troops at Isle St-Jean and its dependencies to go on board the war ships sent by the Admiral to receive them;

The Porte [Gate] Dauphine delivered to the English troops on the morning of the 27th as well as the Garrison and all those who bore arms



to be transported to Great Britain;  
 The sick and injured treated as those of His  
 Britannic Majesty;  
 The merchants and clerks who did not bear arms  
 to be sent to France by the Admiral.  
 There was in the place 221 guns and 18 [it can  
 be read as 38 as well] mortars and a quantity of  
 war ammunitions and food [?] and the following  
 ships:

<i>Le Prudent</i> of 74 guns	Burned Prize
<i>L'Entreprenant</i> of 74 guns	
<i>Le Capricieux</i> of 64 guns	
<i>Le Célèbre</i> of 64 guns	
<i>Le Bienfaisant</i> of 64 guns	
<i>L'Apollon</i> of 50 guns	Sunk by the French
<i>La Chèvre</i> of 50 guns	
<i>La Biche</i> of 50 guns	
<i>La Fidèle</i> of 50 guns	
<i>La Diane</i> of 36 guns	Prize
<i>L'Écho</i> of 26 guns	

The letter continues with the following:

Letter from Dunkirk, August 25, 1758

*We breath better since the arrival of the mail.  
 We had great need of it since we were deeply sad  
 since the surrender of Louisbourg, and it seemed  
 that we now could not doubt it. Happily, we  
 thought it to be a fantasy. The court in London  
 had invented this little scheme to get subsidies.*

Paris, August 31

The letter from London of the 23<sup>rd</sup> brings  
 nothing new on the capture of Louisbourg;  
 the Whitehall Gazette of the 22<sup>nd</sup> speaks  
 of an attack made by the English on Lake  
 Champlain in Canada of 15,000 men against

6,000 French in which they were repulsed  
 with a loss of 2,000 men; We have lost  
 only 400. This Gazette, which is that of the  
 Court, has wide support but says nothing of  
 Louisbourg. It's been 13 days since the news  
 arrived in London without anyone knowing  
 anything more ...

In conclusion, from a philatelic / postal  
 history point of view, this letter has little  
 interest, however, on the historical plane, it  
 becomes of immense significance, proof, if  
 any, that it is essential for us, collectors, to  
 always read our mail!

### Historical Notes on Louisbourg

[Source: Wikipedia]

The fortress of Louisbourg is located on  
 the island of Cape Breton at the entrance  
 of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It was built  
 in 1713 by the French Crown in order to  
 impose its rights on the fishing banks of  
 Newfoundland. Subsequently, it acquired  
 great military importance by allowing  
 the control of the entry of the Gulf and  
 therefore the access to New France. It  
 was captured during the War of Austrian  
 Succession in 1745 by an attack mounted  
 from New England, but returned to France  
 in 1748 against the city of Madras in India,  
 which the French had seized in 1746. The  
 1758 siege of Louisbourg is an episode of  
 the Seven Years' War and of the War of  
 the Conquest, during which the English  
 forces besieged the French settlement of  
 Louisbourg on Île Royale in New France.  
 The siege takes place between June 8 and  
 July 26, 1758. It mobilizes considerable  
 means in both camps and ends with the  
 surrender of the Fortress and the capture  
 of the garrison. This was the first major  
 defeat of France in North America during  
 this conflict. Most of the soldiers and sailors



Figure 4: "The Surrender of Louisbourg."<sup>5</sup>

were members of the *Compagnies franches de la Marine*. In the 1740s there were eight free companies of 70 men each, but there were other detachments elsewhere on the island, notably in Port-Dauphin and Port-Toulouse. After 1750, there were 24 companies in the city of 50 men each. Beginning in 1755, Louisbourg received a battalion of 520 men from the Burgundy regiment, another 520 men from the Artois regiment, and just before the siege of 1758 a battalion of 680 men from the Cambis Regiment. In 1758, the garrison had almost 3,500 soldiers, as their number had increased appreciably that year. In 1758, the British returned to the assault with even more means. On June 2, a fleet of 22 ships, 15 frigates and 120 cargo vessels under the command of Admiral Edward Boscawen arrived off Cape Breton Island with 14,000 troops on board. On the French side, the Royal Navy, which struggles with half the

size of the Navy (60 vessels and 30 frigates against 120 vessels and 75 frigates).

#### Footnotes and References:

1. Rate of 1st January 1704 (Déclaration royale du 8 décembre 1703) - (1 lieue = 4,45 km); single letter = 1/4 oz. or less.
2. As any other historical account of the time, there are some historical errors in this letter. These are mainly in the listing of the ship's guns and the disposition of the vessels. Other sources indicated different information. [ed.]
3. Captain (later Admiral of the Blue) Edward Edgcumbe, 1st Earl of Mount Edgcumbe (1720-1795).
4. Captain (later Admiral) John Amherst (1718-1778). He was a younger brother of Field Marshall Jeffrey Amherst, 1st Baron Amherst (1717-1797) who led the British troops in the Capture of New France.
5. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. Digital Collections, accessed Nov 5, 2018. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-f487-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

