Hello Dr. Bouchard

I am conducting research for a paper I'm preparing on two bronze French sundials unearthed in Wisconsin in 1902 and 1903, respectively. Despite their age and historical importance, they remain largely unknown, even among Wisconsin historians. I wondered if I could enlist your assistance for additional information about them. The first sundial was unearthed on the east shore of Green Bay in 1902 by a collector named Frank Duchateau. It is now in the collection of the Neville Museum at Green Bay. Some images of it are attached. It was found near the present-day location of Red Banks, which was the site of a 17th century stockaded Indian village and was also the site of two of the 17th century Jesuit missions.

However, I believe the Duchateau sundial is not 17th century. It is a Butterfield type pocket sundial crafted by Pierre Le Maire at Paris, according to its engraving. It has locations of major forts around New France, along with their latitudes. It is one of only three other New France sundials of this type of which I am aware.

I understand that one is at the Adler Planetarium in Chicago. The other, at the Stewart Museum in Montreal, was the subject of an excellent article that you wrote. I believe the Duchateau sundial, which is very similar to the one at the Stewart Museum, was one of those made by the French government and given to French officers stationed in New France between 1751 and 1759 (per the notation found in the case of the Stewart sundial).

I would like to get your opinion of the age of the Duchateau sundial and I would also like to know if your papers (Les cadrans solaires en Nouvelle-France and La collection des cadrans solaires du Musée Stewart de Montréal) are available in English. Despite four years of study, my French is still very rudimentary.

I believe that the Duchateau sundial, which has a missing piece on its underside, was probably lost when Fort LaBaye passed from French to British hands in 1761. It may have been collected by the local Indians when the fort was abandoned or it may have been lost when the garrison abandoned the fort.

The second sundial was unearthed near Portage, Wisconsin on the historic Fox-Wisconsin waterway that connects the waters of Lake Michigan with the Mississippi River system. It was found on the banks of the Fox River by a local resident named James Kirwin while digging for fishing worms near the site of the early fur trade era portage between the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers. The Kirwin sundial (see attached image) is of a type I know little about. A news account from the time of its discovery states that it bore a "clear inscription" of the date 1606 on the back, but I find this date unlikely. Wisconsin was first visited by Jean Nicolet about 1634 and really saw no substantive French presence until the
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At least, a discovery of September, 1903, seems to point to the fact that this locality had been visited by traders or Jesuits. At the time mentioned, James Kirwin, of Portage, while digging along the banks of the river, uncovered a sundial similar to the one found near Green Bay in the previous year and which Secretary Reuben G. Thwaites, of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, says “may have belonged to some fur trader or missionary.”

“So it seems to me,” says Turner, “the most reasonable theory that the Mascoutens village first visited by Dablon in 1670 was but one of the smaller outlying ones, and that the main village where Allouez established a mission two years later, which was visited by Marquette in 1673, was where he located it, three leagues from the portage.

“If we may conclude then that such was the fact, we find there every condition referred to by Marquette. He says: ‘As we approached the Mashkoutens, the Fire Nation, I had the curiosity to drink the mineral waters of the river which is not far from the town.’”

1660s. The back of the sundial was also reportedly inscribed as having been made in Paris. Unfortunately, the Kirwin sundial has disappeared. I suspect it remained in the possession of the Kirwin family and we have undertaken genealogical research to locate living descendents in hope of relocating it.

I would welcome any information you could provide about the sundial’s likely age or maker. I have seen one other like it, but there was little information accompanying it. I would be happy to provide additional information about these unusual sundials and I’d be pleased to share my paper with you when it is completed. Kind regards,

Brendon Baillod

* NdeR:
L’article dont fait mention M. Baillod, Les cadrans solaires en Nouvelle-France, a paru dans la revue Cap-aux-Diamants, et peut être consulté, en ligne, sur notre site:

http://cadrans_solaires.scg.ulaval.ca/v08-08-04/pdf/cs-cap-o-diamants.pdf

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