



# The Huguenot Society of America

Newsletter Summer 2011

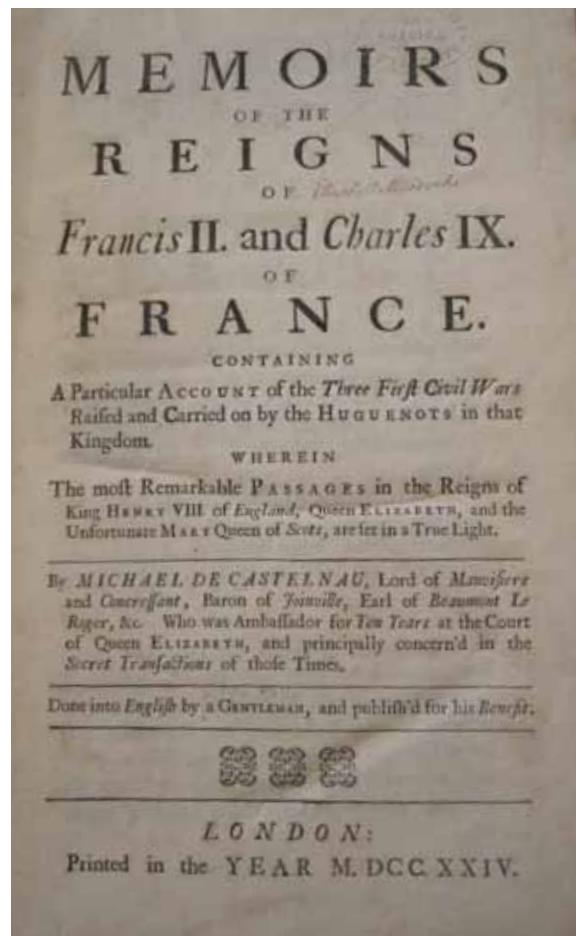
## Historical Account of the Term *Huguenot*

While examining the old and rare books in the Society's library, Executive Secretary Mary Bertschmann became intrigued by a leather-bound folio entitled *Memoirs of Michael de Castelnau, sieur de la Mauvissiere*. The tome is an abridged translation of the diaries of Castelnau (c. 1520–1592), giving a firsthand account of the reigns of Francis II and Charles IX of France and the first civil wars involving the Huguenots. The book was "done into English by a gentleman and publish'd for his benefit" in London in 1724.

In addition to the English translation, the Library has three volumes of the complete *Memoires* in French published in Paris in 1659 by M. J. Le Laboureur (Prior of Juvigny, Counselor and Almoner to the King of France) and dedicated to Marshal Castelnau, the author's grandson. In his preface Monsieur Laboureur states that "no man has given a more candid and exact account of the affairs of France from the year 1559 to 1570 ... most free of prejudice and respected by both the Reformers and the Royal Cabinet."

In Chapter VII of Book II, Lord Castelnau gives an explanation for calling the reformers *Huguenots*. During the siege of Amboise in 1560 it was said that the religious rebels were poor men not worth a *huguenot*, which was a small almost valueless coin (less than a *denier*) during the reign of Hugh Capet. Afterward, this term was used by way of ridicule, but it was bravely and nobly adopted by the reformers when they took up arms.

While many etymologies have been posited over the years, it is interesting to find an explanation that comes from a man who lived during France's religious wars.



When *Gentilis* delivered this Message to her Majesty and the Family of *Guise*, to whom he was particularly attached, they concluded, that the Prince was resolv'd to put himself at the Head of the *Protestants*, who have since been called *Huguenots* in France. This Name took its Rise from the Conspiracy of *Amboise*, for when the Petitioners fled at that Time for Fear, some of the Country-women said, That they were poor Fellows, not worth a *Huguenot*; which was a small Piece of Money, of less Value than a *Denier*, in the Time of *Hugo Capet*. From whence, by way of Ridicule, they were afterwards called *Huguenots*; which Title they likewise gave themselves, when they took up Arms; as we shall relate in its proper Place.

**TOP:** Title page of the English translation of Castelnau's memoirs, printed in 1724.

**ABOVE:** In Chapter VII of his memoirs, Castelnau gives a period explanation of the origin of the term *Huguenot*.

**LEFT:** The Society's new offices and library, located in New York City's General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen building since 2008.

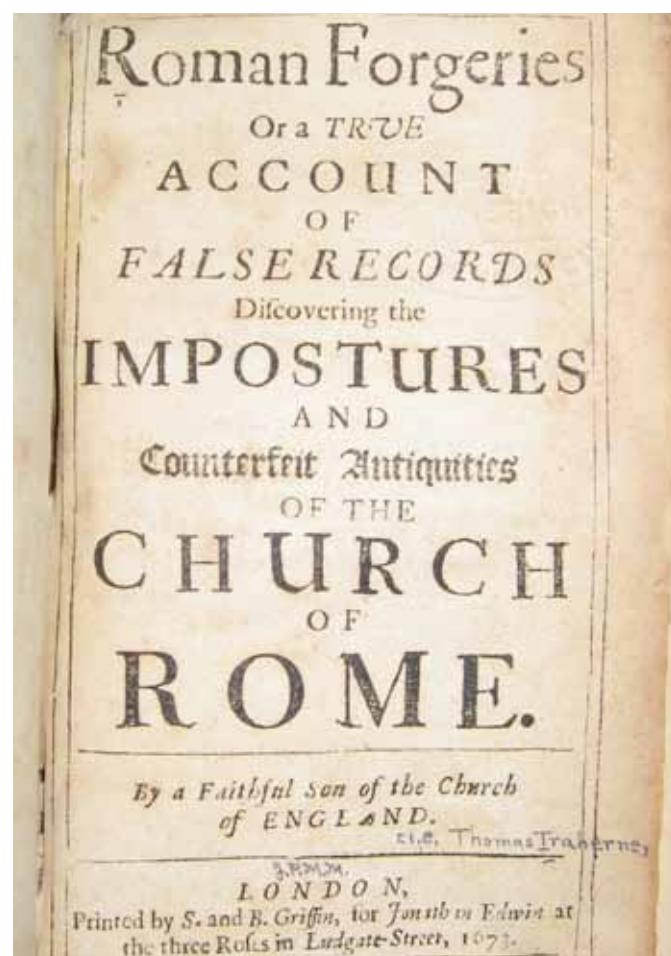
## Highlights from the Society's Library

*Roman Forgeries: Or a True Account of False Records Discovering the Impostures and Counterfeit Antiquities of the Church of Rome*

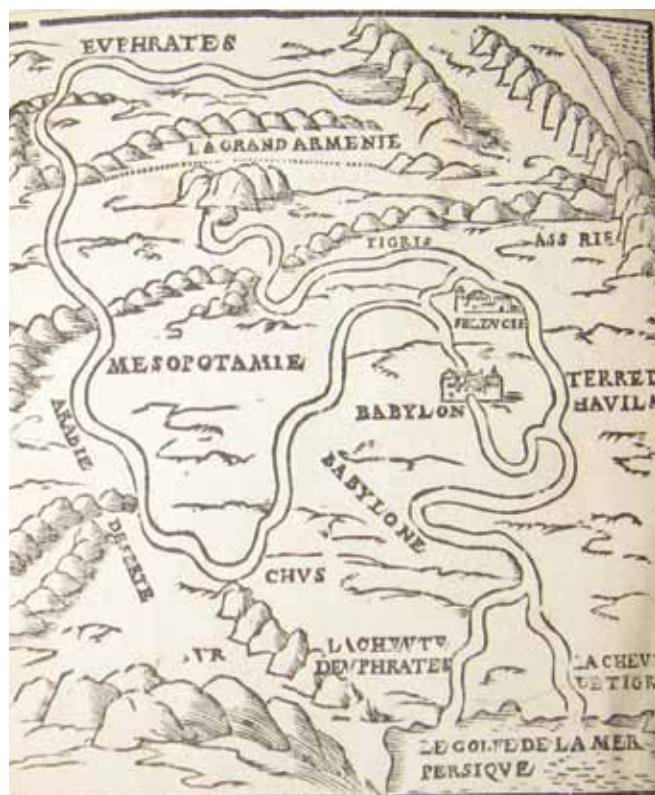
By a Faithful Son of the Church [Thomas Traherne],  
printed in London by S. and B. Griffin for Jonathan Edwin, Three Roses, Ludgate-Street, 1673.

This book, anonymously written by scholar and clergyman Thomas Traherne (1637–74), is dedicated to Sir Orlando Bridgeman, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal and Traherne's patron. The work resulted from an argument the author had with a friend's Roman Catholic cousin on the steps of the Bodleian Library—a debate that began over what defined a martyr to the Catholic Church and “devolved into contention over the issue of the ancient documents on which church authority purportedly rested.” The book focuses on various issues of doctrine, including papal authority, transubstantiation, purgatory, and the doctrine of merits. Traherne's main argument is that manuscripts housed at the Vatican have been “corrupted, misused, or suppressed” to fit the aims of the Catholic Church at any given time.

*Roman Forgeries* was donated to the Society's library by Miss Sara Devotion (who was admitted for membership in 1894). Her signature appears in the front of the book alongside two of her eighteenth-century forebears, former owners of the book.



Title page of Roman Forgeries, printed in 1673



One of several foldout maps in the 1567 Bible showing locations related to events mentioned in the text.

**French-language Bible (Geneva, 1567) *La Somme de tout ce que nous enseigne la saincte Escriture, assavoir, le Vieil & Nouveau Testament***

The text of this French-language Bible is based on an earlier translation by Pierre Robert Olivetan (1506–38), cousin of John Calvin. Known as the Olivetan or Neuchatel Bible (1535), it is said to be the first done directly from the original Hebrew and Greek and became the basis for all French Reformed versions well into the nineteenth century, including the Geneva edition of 1588. Each chapter of this Bible is introduced by commentary. Margin notes supply information on deviations from past texts and explanatory data. The Psalms, located at the back of the book, were translated by Renaissance poet Clement Marot and Théodore de Beze and set to music.

The printer of this Bible, François Estienne (b. 1540), was from the famed Estienne family, whose major impact on printing and scholarship was started in Paris by Henri Estienne (I), François's grandfather. While still a child, François was taken to Geneva by his Calvinist-leaning father, Robert—the most outstanding figure in the Renaissance book trade in France, having been appointed by King François I as Printer of Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, and the first to divide the Bible into numbered sections, or verses. François eventually opened a small printing establishment in Geneva, which he ran from 1562 to 1582. His output included popular religious texts: Bibles in Latin and French, testaments, Psalms, catechisms, and works by John Calvin.

## L'Église française du Saint-Esprit

Huguenot refugees in early New Amsterdam organized the French Reformed Church in 1628 to serve the colony's French-speaking community. The first church was built in 1688 and called l'Église française à la Nouvelle York. A second church replaced the first in 1704 at which time the church adopted the name *Saint-Esprit*. By 1802, elders and members voted unanimously to join the Episcopal Diocese of New York. Alfred Victor Wittmeyer, the church's fifth rector who presided over the congregation from 1879 to 1925, was one of the founders of the Huguenot Society of America in 1883 and served as its secretary and guiding light for fifteen years. He worked tirelessly to bring Americans of Huguenot descent together in order to foster in them an appreciation of their ancestors. The church's original records and its historical mission have survived for almost four hundred years. Now located at 109 East 60th Street in Manhattan, it remains a sanctuary for persons of diverse backgrounds who desire to worship in the French language. Since 1994, the Rev. Nigel J. Massey has served as rector of the church and as chaplain of the Huguenot Society.

The main Sunday service is held at 11:15 a.m. Services of music and prayers drawn from the French-Protestant tradition are offered throughout the year. On the Sunday closest to April 13th, the day that the Edict of Nantes was promulgated in 1598, Huguenot descendants gather with the congregation to worship as their ancestors did, to sing the hymns they sang, and to honor their forefathers. The Huguenot Sunday service has been performed at Saint-Esprit since 1934.

More information on services (including audio recordings of sermons), free French lessons (offered since 1884), and the Little French Church Players (a group of actors and theater buffs who read plays in French and English) can be found at Saint-Esprit's website, [www.stespritnyc.net](http://www.stespritnyc.net).

## Bastide Lantern Slides Discovered

The recent move to a new location in 2008 after eighty years at the New York Genealogical & Biographical Society building brought about the discovery of treasures in our library and archives. One of these was a 100-year-old wooden box containing sixty glass lantern slides, handcrafted and painted by French artist and humanitarian Samuel Bastide circa 1900, along with his original captions and presentation script in French. The lantern slides are an artistic record—combining etching, photographic techniques, and painting—of the persecution and exodus of the Huguenots of France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.

**RIGHT:** A detail of one of Bastide's lantern slides shows Huguenots escaping under shelter of night. The original caption reads: "The awful plot depopulated one quarter of France."

## News From Foreign Huguenot Societies

### *The Hidden Thread: Huguenot Families in Australia*

The Huguenot Society of Australia has published its first book, a fully indexed and illustrated record that includes a list of almost 500 known Huguenot families represented in Australia, along with their places of origin, their first country of refuge, the dates of their arrival, and the sources of information that verify their identity. For more information about the publication and to order, go to [members.optushome.com.au/ozhug/publications.html](http://members.optushome.com.au/ozhug/publications.html).

### Réunion Internationale des Descendants des Huguenots

This event, organized by Le Comité Protestant des Amitiés Françaises à l'Etranger (the World Huguenot Center) every three years, will take place September 3–9, 2012, in two regions of southern France of interest to the history French Protestantism. Information on the event can be found at [www.huguenots.fr](http://www.huguenots.fr).

### The Virtual Museum of French Protestantism

The Society for the History of French Protestantism was founded in 1852. Since 1854, it has amassed documents and published a quarterly bulletin to evoke the memory of the Huguenots. It is now posting online English translations of its sixteenth- and seventeenth-century material along with texts, images, video clips, and sound recordings that capture regional, ecclesiastical, social, and cultural phenomena of French Protestantism from the sixteenth century to present day. The virtual museum can be accessed at [www.museeprotestant.org](http://www.museeprotestant.org).

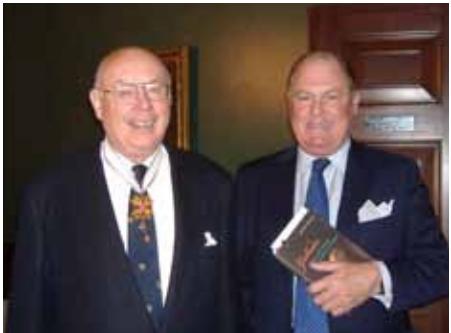
### The Huguenot Trail (Europe)

This sign-posted trail stretches from Le Poët-Laval in France and from the Waldensian Alps in Italy northward to Bad Karlshafen, Hesse in Germany, via Geneva. The trail, which will continue to be developed, is the result of a cooperative venture between France, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany. Details and maps are available at [www.surlespasdeshuguenots.eu](http://www.surlespasdeshuguenots.eu).



## Huguenot Society Annual Luncheon and Talk, December 4, 2010

Members and guests attended the Society's Annual Luncheon at the Union Club and enjoyed an excellent menu prepared by French chef Jean-Louis Dumonet, accompanied by fine French wines. The speaker Nicholas Dungan is the author of *Gallatin: America's Swiss Founding Father*, co-published by New York University Press and the Swiss Confederation. Dungan gave a compelling dissertation on Albert Gallatin (1761–1849), the Swiss-American founding father who became the Secretary of the Treasury under Thomas Jefferson. The author noted that Gallatin was mindful and proud of his Huguenot roots.



Henry C.B. Lindh, president, and Nicholas Dungan, guest speaker



Etienne Coffinier, Jane Fulton, and the Rev. Nigel J. Massey, chaplain



Jared Goss and Philip Reeser, vice president

## Annual Meeting of the Huguenot Society of America, April 14, 2011

At this year's Annual Meeting the speaker was John Steele Gordon, a noted historian who has written books on business and economic history. His talk opened with a comparison between genealogy and golf: "A triple bogey is the same as a hole in one, in the sense that finding a great scoundrel is quite as good as a great hero." Gordon spoke about the contrast of genealogy and history, saying that genealogy is a view of history "at street level" and proceeded to illustrate this sentiment with entertaining anecdotes of his many Huguenot ancestors.

## John Jay: A Family Affair, May 4, 2011

Council members of the Huguenot Society were invited as guests to a reception and program honoring John Jay (1745–1829), first Chief Justice of the United States and grandfather of the Society's first president. The event—sponsored by the Supreme Court Historical Society and the Historical Society of the Courts of the State of New York—was held at the Association of the City Bar of New York. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Supreme Court of the United States, and Hon. Judith S. Kaye, former Chief Judge of the State of New York, made the introductions. Walter Stahr, author of the highly acclaimed *John Jay: Founding Father*, gave the lecture. Each attendee received a book containing selections of Jay's letters, public papers, and excerpts from the biography.



John Jay (1745–1829)



Michael J. Burlingham represented the Society in the parade.

## New York City Flag Day Parade, June 14, 2011

At noon the New York City Flag Day Parade started at City Hall Park and proceeded south on Broadway to the ceremony stand at Pearl and Broad streets. Members of many historical and patriotic societies, in addition to color guards of the United States armed services and contingents of city agencies, marched in the parade and gathered at Fraunces Tavern after the program for a reception and lunch. The parade and ceremony celebrated the 234th anniversary of the adoption of the American flag by the Continental Congress in 1777. Council member Michael J. Burlingham carried the Society's banner, which has a Huguenot cross and pendant dove at its center surrounded by four fleurs-de-lis.