

Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

The Background of Louis Buade, Comte de Frontenac

W. J. Eccles

Volume 33, Number 1, 1954

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300358ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/300358ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (print)

1712-9095 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Eccles, W. J. (1954). The Background of Louis Buade, Comte de Frontenac.
Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association / Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada, 33(1), 20–27.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/300358ar>

THE BACKGROUND OF LOUIS BUADE, COMTE DE FRONTENAC

W. J. ECCLES
University of Manitoba

LITTLE IS known of the early career of Louis Buade, comte de Frontenac. His grandfather, Antoine de Buade, had been a companion of Henri IV and an associate of the vicomte de Turenne, father of the famous soldier.¹ After serving as the King's personal equerry for several years, Antoine de Buade was appointed governor of St. Germain-en-Laye and *premier maître d'hôtel du Roi*.² In 1619 he was made a *chevalier* of the order of St. Esprit.³ He was reputed to be insatiably avaricious;⁴ he is known to have engaged in commercial transactions⁵ and to have acquired the barony of Paluau in the Indre valley from Claude Brachat, by the time honoured method of foreclosing the mortgage.⁶ Thus he was able to bequeath a considerable estate to his sons.⁷

Antoine de Buade's influential position at the Court is evidenced by the fact that the connétable de Montmorency and Mademoiselle de Vendôme stood as godfather and godmother to his son Henri,⁸ who eventually entered the army and obtained the rank of *maître de camp* of the régiment de Navarre.⁹ Antoine, with great perspicacity, later arranged a marriage between his son Henri and Anne Phelypeaux, a daughter of the very influential Pontchartrain family, her father and uncle both being *secrétaires d'état*.¹⁰ When, in 1620, they had a son, it was Louis XIII who stood as the child's godfather and gave it his own name.¹¹ Thus Louis Buade, comte de Frontenac et de Paluau, grandson of one *secrétaire d'état*, grandnephew of another and godson of the King, began life under quite auspicious circumstances.

He apparently received as good an education as the times afforded; for several years he attended the same college as the abbé Tronson who

¹ *Mémoires du Vicomte de Turenne*, publiés pour la Société de l'Histoire de France par le Comte Baguenault de Puchesse. Paris, 1901, pp. 132-133, 203-204.

² *Mémoires de St. Simon*, edited by A. de Boislisle. (41 vols., Paris, 1879) VI, 166, n. 5.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Collection Morel de Thoisy, vol. CVII, fol. 381-383, Factum pour Messire Antoine de Buade Sieur de Frontenac, Premier Maître d'Hotel du Roy, Demandeur au principal et en saisie, et incidemment Défendeur. Contre Ishau Baptiste Cezar Cenamy et Compagnons, Défendeurs et Demandeurs en Requête de mainlevée.

⁶ Châteauroux, Departmental Archives, Indre et Loire. Series E, dossier II, no. 2. Titres de Propriétés de la seigneurie de Paluau. Sezie (sic) faite sur Claude Brachat adjudgée par le parlement à Antoine de Buade 78.000 livres quatre vingt unc. 19 janvier 1606 (parchemin).

⁷ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fo. Factum 2505. Extrait des registres des Parlement. Homologation de contrat passé entre Louis de Buade-Frontenac comte de Palluau, et ses créanciers. 12 décembre 1664.

⁸ *Mémoires de St. Simon*, XIV, 268-271, 270, n. 3.

⁹ *Ibid.* (In his thesis, *Le comte de Frontenac*, Henri Lorin erroneously states that Henri Buade's son, Louis, the future governor of New France, was maître de camp of the régiment de Navarre.)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, VI, 166, n. 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, VI, 166, n. 3.

later became superior of the Messieurs de St. Sulpice.¹² But for a person of his background only two careers were open, the church or the army. He chose the latter and by the age of twenty-three he had obtained the rank of colonel of the *régiment de Normandie*.¹³ It was while serving with this regiment at the siege of Orbitello in 1646 that he was severely wounded, one arm being crippled for life.¹⁴ Shortly afterwards he was made a *maréchal de camp*.¹⁵

At the time of the Fronde Frontenac was serving as a *garde* to Monsieur, the King's brother,¹⁶ and he was already noted for his extravagance.¹⁷ In her memoirs, Mademoiselle de Montpensier — la grande Mademoiselle — comments on his expensive tastes and his colossal vanity. After spending a few days at Frontenac's château at l'Île Savary, which she describes as being "assez joli pour une homme comme lui",¹⁸ she commented on the plans he had made for the embellishment of the château, remarking, "Il faudroit être surintendant (de finances) pour les executer."¹⁹ On another occasion she depicts him as affecting to hold a court at St. Fargeau, one of the royal châteaux where she resided, and of his expecting to be treated as a *grand seigneur* by all who came to dine with him, this being a pretence which she found utterly ridiculous.²⁰

It is not surprising, therefore, that by 1648 he was over 66,000 *livres* in debt.²¹ To remedy this situation he secretly married the only daughter of a wealthy *maître de requêtes*, who upon discovering that he had Frontenac for a son-in-law, refused to countenance the marriage and disinherited his daughter.²² Worse still, by means of legal redtape

¹² Paris. Archives Nationale, Series C11A, XIII, 267, Frontenac à de Lagny, Quebec, 2 November 1695.

¹³ M. Pinard, *Chronologique Historique-Militaire*, (Paris, 1763) VI, 216-217.

¹⁴ *Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France*, IX-1 (Paris, 1860) IX-1, 353, Journal d'Olivier Lefèvre D'Ormesson.

¹⁵ Vincennes, Ministère de la Guerre, Series A, XCVI, Brévet du Maréchal de Camp pour le Comte de Frontenac, 16 August 1646.

¹⁶ Paris, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Series France, Mémoires et Documents, MDXCI, 358, Sr. Frucher au comte de Chavigny, Paris, 30 April 1649.

¹⁷ Mémoires de Mademoiselle de Montpensier, edited by A. Cheruel, (4 vols., Paris, 1858) II, 279, III, 16-17. (This château, located mid-way between Loches and Châteauroux on the Indre river, which at this point is only some twenty feet wide, was built in 1234 by Jean Savary. Frontenac inherited it from his uncle, Roger Buade, abbé d'Angles, who had purchased it in 1624 from Paul Couhé de Lusignan. With its four heavy square towers, its moat and drawbridge, it has a distinctly mediaeval appearance. In the summer of 1952 the exterior of the château was still in excellent condition, but the interior was a shambles. For a good many years it has been used for storing grain, cattle feed, farm implements, and for stabling horses; pigs and poultry inhabit its moat and cellars. In 1945 a French infantry regiment was quartered in the château for some months. The usual consequences of military occupation are very apparent).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 279.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 16-17.

²¹ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fo. Factum 2505. Extrait des registres de Parlement. Homologation de contrat passé entre Louis de Buade-Frontenac comte de Palluau, et ses créanciers. 12 décembre 1664.

²² Paris, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Series France, Mémoires et Documents, vol. MDXCVI, 349-350. De Neufville à Chavigny, Paris, 25 April 1649.

he tied up the sizable fortune left his daughter by her mother and prevented Frontenac touching any part of it.²³

Frontenac then joined the entourage of Gaston d'Orléans, who had the reputation of being the most treacherous man in France, and Madame Frontenac obtained the position of lady in waiting to Gaston's daughter, Mademoiselle de Montpensier. When Gaston was not engaged in plots against the King and betraying his fellow conspirators, he indulged his predilection by scheming to deprive his daughter of the lands left her by Henri IV.²⁴ It was not long before la Grande Mademoiselle discovered that the Frontenacs were intriguing against her in her father's interests.²⁵ Madame Frontenac was promptly dismissed from her post.²⁶

The Frontenacs then took up residence in their Paris house in the rue des Tournelles²⁷ and when Mademoiselle de Montpensier was reinstated at the Court,²⁸ they went out of their way to cause her as much petty annoyance as they could, so much so that Mademoiselle tried to have them barred from the Court, but without success owing to the intervention of Gaston d'Orléans.²⁹ Eventually, their continued annoyance of Mademoiselle became so flagrant that Mazarin had to intervene and appeal to the Queen Mother to put a stop to it.³⁰

By this time Frontenac was in dire financial straits. In 1653 he had been obliged to relinquish his colonelcy of the régiment de Normandie.³¹ He and his wife were living well beyond their means, borrowing money and running up bills on all sides, and by 1664 their debts amounted to something over 325,878 *livres*, plus 17,530 *livres* 16 *sols* 10 *deniers* in accrued interest.³² Needless to say, Frontenac's creditors were pressing him hard but he was singularly adept at fending off their demands. Finally, in September 1664, after lengthy discussions with one group of his creditors, a contract was drawn up whereby they agreed not to dun him during the ensuing four years so that he could arrange his affairs and dispose of his properties at reasonable figures rather than throw them all on the market at once. He agreed to pay 11,268 *livres* 9 *sols* 2 *deniers* a year interest and that the amounts realized on the sale of his assets would be used for no other purpose than the discharging of his debts, all of which were to be settled in full within four years. Frontenac also pledged himself that he would not, under any circumstances, obtain "Lettres d'Etat et de

²³ *Ibid.*, 367-368, De Neuville à Chavigny, (Paris) 12 May 1649: MDXCII, 42-43, Frontenac à Chavigny, Paris, 26 July 1649: 284, Chavigny à de Neuville, 20 June 1650: 292-293, De Neuville à Chavigny, Paris, 28 June 1650: 341-342, De Neuville à (Chavigny), Paris, 25 September 1650.

²⁴ *Mémoires de Mademoiselle de Montpensier*, II, 423, III, 16-17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 423, III, 16-17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 83-84.

²⁷ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fo. Factum 2505. Extrait des Registres de Parlement.

²⁸ Mademoiselle de Montpensier had been exiled from the Court for taking too active a part in the Fronde on behalf of Condé and the anti-Mazarin faction.

²⁹ *Mémoires de Mademoiselle de Montpensier*, III, chapters 31, 32, *passim*.

³⁰ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Mélanges Colbert, LIIA, 200, Mazarin à la Reine, Calais, 23 August 1658.

³¹ *Historique des corps des troupes de l'armée*, (Paris, Ministère de la Guerre, 1900) 19.

³² Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fo. Factum 2505. Extrait des Registres de Parlement.

répit" in order to break the terms of the agreement. On December 12th, 1664, this notarial contract was homologated by the Parlement de Paris.³³

However, despite his having received such accommodating terms, Frontenac completely dishonoured them. He made no attempt to realize on his assets in order to repay the principal of his debts, nor did he pay his creditors a single *denier* of the interest.³⁴ As one of this long suffering group later phrased it: "On luy a acordé des delais de toutes sortes de trois et de quatre années durant lesquels on s'incommodoit pour l'accomoder et pour luy donner le loisir de mettre a ses affaires, et il a tousjours manquées aux paroles qu'il avoit données de telles sortes qu'on ne pouvait plus s'y fier."³⁵

Some eight months later Frontenac left for Crete to join the Venetian forces defending the island against the Turks. Parkman states that a Venetian embassy, in pleading for aid in Crete, "offered to place their own troops under French command, and they asked Turenne to name a general officer equal to the task. Frontenac had the signal honour of being chosen by the first soldier of Europe for this arduous and most difficult position. He went accordingly. The result increased his reputation for ability and courage. . . ."³⁶

In making this statement Parkman was greatly misled. There is no evidence that the Venetians offered to place their own troops under French command; Frontenac was not chosen by Turenne for any such mythical position³⁷ and his actions in Crete certainly did not enhance his reputation in any way.

The French forces were under the separate command of the duc de Navailles³⁸ and Frontenac, although he sailed with them, was not a member of this army for he had somehow obtained the post of Lieutenant-General with the Venetian forces commanded by Captain-General Francesco Morosini. The Venetians already had one French officer, the marquis de St. André Montbrun, serving on their general staff;³⁹ why they accepted the services of another is not clear, unless it was that Louis XIV insisted on it in order the better to keep a close check on the Venetian high command. Subsequent events might lead one to suspect that this was perhaps the case. Nor is it at all clear why Frontenac was chosen. There is always the possibility that he was regarded as the best man available, but his influence at the Court

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Mélanges Colbert, CDIX, 294-295, M. Verjus à Colbert, Cologne, 21 May 1672.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Francis Parkman, *Count Frontenac and New France under Louis XIV.* (Works, Frontenac Edition, Toronto, 1899) VIII, 13.

³⁷ Turenne's only connection with Frontenac's appointment was to make certain suggestions as to changes which Frontenac desired made in the terms of his commission. Later, in his defence before the Doge and Senate of Venice, Frontenac made much of the fact that Turenne had written these suggested changes in his own hand in the margin of the commission. Had Turenne selected Frontenac for the post it is inconceivable, under the circumstances, that Frontenac would not have laid great stress on this point in his defence. But he did not make any such claim.

³⁸ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Français, XMMMMCLXV, Relation de Candie: Ernest Lavisse, *Histoire de France*, VII-2, 301.

³⁹ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Nouvelles Acquisitions, XXMMCXLIV, 300-305, Le Roy de la Potherye au comte de Maurepas, (December 1698).

was sufficient to obtain him the post, of which he certainly stood in dire need. One of his erstwhile friends, the comte de Crécy, French ambassador at Cologne, later remarked that Frontenac had obtained the commission purely in order to evade his creditors.⁴⁰

But whatever the reason for his appointment, immediately upon receipt of his commission he demanded that the terms of service be altered.⁴¹ The commission was couched in the usual rather general terms, but one of its clauses stated that Frontenac would hold the rank of Lieutenant-General and be subordinate to the *Representants Venetiens*, the marquis de St. André Montbrun and the officers holding the rank of general.⁴² Frontenac objected strenuously to this; and here he received the support of Turenne. He demanded that he be treated as subordinate only to the *Representants Venetiens* and the marquis de St. André, and that he be given his own separate command. He also demanded that his two aides-de-camp be put on the Venetian establishment and a fully manned barque placed at his disposal to transport his supplies. The Venetian ambassador in Paris sent these demands to the Senate but Frontenac did not wait for the revisions to be made; he left for Crete armed only with a letter from the ambassador to the general in command of the Venetian forces stating that the revision had been requested and asking this general to honour them.⁴³

However, Francesco Morosini was not at all impressed by this letter and even less so by Frontenac. Troops from many European nations were serving under his command and Frontenac wasted no time in quarreling with the other general officers. He became highly incensed when Morosini refused to order the comte de Valdeck and his troops to obey his commands; he was even more enraged when Morosini excluded him from the council of war. Eventually he was granted access to the meetings of this council, whereupon he immediately became embroiled in a squabble with another general, monsieur de Spar, as to who was to have precedence.⁴⁴

At this time relations between the French and Venetian forces were far from cordial. The campaign was not going well and recriminations between the allies grew more bitter.⁴⁵ Finally, after being severely mauled by the Turks, the French decided to withdraw their forces from the island, leaving the Venetians no recourse but to ask for terms.⁴⁶ A few days before the French withdrew, a meeting of the principal Venetian officers was held at the headquarters of one of their commanders, General Bataille. At this meeting the assembled officers

⁴⁰ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Mélanges Colbert, CDIX, 294-295, Verjus à Colbert, Cologne, 21 May 1672.

⁴¹ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Nouvelles Acquisitions, XXMMCXLIV, 300-305, Le Roy de la Potherye au comte de Maurepas, (December 1698).

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Collection Morel de Thoisy, DII, 143-149, Plainte et Justification de Mr. le comte de frontenac au Doge et Senat de Venice contre Mr. le Capitaine Generale Morosini commandant dans cette isle. 1669.

⁴⁵ Ernest Lavisse, *Histoire de France*, VII-2, 301.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* (When Louis XIV learned that his troops had quit the island he promptly ordered that when they arrived at Toulon they were immediately to re-embark and return to Crete, this time under the command of the maréchal de Bellefonds. The Venetians capitulated before this could be effected).

expressed their feelings very forcibly on the subject. Some harsh phrases were uttered and General Bataille was reputed to have said that it would be more correct to say that the French were fleeing from the field rather than withdrawing.

Word of this somehow reached the ears of the intendant of the French army and at a joint council of war held three days later, he accused General Bataille of having insulted the honour of the French army. He threatened to report this, and other incidents of a like nature which had been brought to his attention, to Louis XIV who, he claimed, would most assuredly demand satisfaction from the Venetian Senate. The incident was eventually smoothed over, but it was quite obvious that someone who had been at the earlier council of war had carried these tales to the intendant. Captain-General Morosini became convinced that this person was Frontenac.

Shortly afterwards, when Frontenac put in a request for a payment of two or three hundred *pistoles* on his salary, he was curtly informed that the Captain-General had ordered not only that he was to be paid only a mere two hundred *piastres*, but also that his two aides-de-camp were to be stricken off the establishment. This dismayed Frontenac, particularly since none of the other officers of field rank had been deprived of their aides-de-camp. He immediately went to the Captain-General's headquarters and, according to his version of events, politely requested Morosini to revise his orders in these matters. But Morosini refused to do anything of the sort and dismissed Frontenac's request out of hand.

Messieurs de Spar and Kiemansueck and several other officers entered the room at this point and in front of them Frontenac complained at being treated in such a shabby fashion. Morosini sharply retorted that far from that being the case he had received much better treatment than he deserved and accused him point blank of having betrayed the secrecy of the council of war to the intendant. Frontenac denied this vehemently and was brusquely ordered out of the room by Morosini. Frontenac replied that he would leave in his own good time, then beat a hasty retreat to escape being forcibly ejected by Morosini's guards. A few hours later he was relieved of his military duties and the following day he received his dismissal from the Venetian forces. He left the island the following morning.⁴⁷

Five months later, on February 7th, 1670, Frontenac made an appearance, with considerable éclat, before the Doge and Senate of the Republic to answer the charges brought against him by Morosini. In so appearing he apparently had three main objects in view; to justify his actions in Crete; to obtain payment of the four hundred and fifty *ducats* a month salary mentioned in his original commission; and to be retained in the Venetian service. In his defence he presented a lengthy memoir narrating all that had transpired in Crete between Morosini and himself. Much of it consists of an attack on Morosini's military abilities and an extolment of his own; but in answer to what appears to have been the principal charge against him, namely, that he had reported General Bataille's remarks to the intendant of the French

⁴⁷ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Collection Morel de Thoisy, DII, 143-149, *Plainte et Justification de Mr. le comte de frontenac au Doge et Senat de Venice contre Mr. le Capitaine Generale Morosini commandant dans cette isle. 1669.*

forces, he asserted that the intendent had been informed of what had been said at this council meeting before he, Frontenac, had even left the chamber, thus it could not have been he who had betrayed the secrecy of the council.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, the reception which this defence received from the Doge and Senate is not known. However, there was at this time a group in Venice who were extremely critical of Morosini, claiming that he had "obtained his procuratorship in an irregular manner and that he had been guilty of corrupt practices in Candia."⁴⁹ These charges were debated in the Senate and it may be that Frontenac's criticisms of Morosini formed part of this organized attempt to discredit the Captain-General. If this were so then it proved to be a most signal failure. As one historian puts it "the Great Council marked its appreciation of the movement and of the great man, whose character it was intended to traduce, when it acquitted Morosini by a majority amounting to a censure of his accusers."⁵⁰ In the light of this, it does not seem likely that Frontenac received a very sympathetic reception from the Doge and Senate, and from purely negative evidence it does not appear that Frontenac was reinstated in the Venetian service.

Nothing is known of Frontenac's activities during the next three years, except that his creditors finally succeeded in seizing his properties.⁵¹ However, they were soon frustrated once more when, in the spring of 1672, Frontenac's friends obtained for him the post of governor of New France.⁵² Although in 1664 he had solemnly pledged himself not to do so, he now obtained *Lettres du Conseil d'Etat* lifting the seizure that had been placed on his properties and deferring his legal obligation to repay his debts.⁵³ The comte de Crécy, who had loaned Frontenac 6,300 *livres* fourteen years earlier⁵⁴ and was now being hard pressed by his own creditors, protested strongly to Colbert at this injustice, stating:

... je dois sur le sujet de ses debtes luy rendre ce témoignage que jamais créanciers n'ont eu plus de bonne foy de douceur et d'honnesté envers un debiteur n'y a plus mal répondu, ou plus tot n'en a plus abusé . . . Il fit en partie par sa propre autorité en allant en Candie il y a deux ans ce qu'il fait aujourd'hui par un arrest du Conseil d'Etat, et il prit des lors comme il prend maintenant tous les moiens pour achever de se ruiner soy mesme en ruinant ses créanciers et en les frustant de ce qu'il leur doit.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ W. Carew Hazlitt, *The Venetian Republic; its Rise, its Growth, and its Fall*, 421-1797. (2 vols., London, 1900) II, 270.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 270, 280-281.

⁵¹ Châteauroux, Departmental Archives, Indre-et-Loire, Series E, dossier 13, Chartiers du Comté de Palluau. Extrait des Registres du Conseil d'Etat, 23 February 1678.

⁵² *Mémoires de St. Simon*, XIV, 268-271.

⁵³ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Mélanges Colbert, CDIX, 294-295, M. Verjus au Ministre, Cologne, 21 May 1672: Châteauroux, Departmental Archives, Indre-et-Loire, Series E, dossier 13, Chartiers du Comté de Palluau. Extrait des Registres du Conseil d'Etat, 23 February 1678.

⁵⁴ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Series fo. Factum 2505, Extrait des registres de parlement. Homologation de contrat passé entre Louis Buade, comte de Palluau et ses créanciers. 12 December 1664.

⁵⁵ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Mélanges Colbert, CDIX, 294-295, M. Verjus au Ministre, Cologne, 21 May 1672.

No social stigma, however, was attached to Frontenac's bankrupt condition; nor were the means he used to defraud his creditors looked at askance, except by those whom he had defrauded. In fact, the comte de Cr cy, outraged though he was by Frontenac's actions, two years later himself obtained an *Arr t du Conseil d'Etat* to prevent his own creditors from seizing certain of his properties.⁵⁶

This, then, was the background of the man selected to govern Canada. By quitting France, Frontenac had found a temporary solution to his most pressing problems, but he could not rid himself of those traits in his character which were the basic cause of his difficulties.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Paris, Biblioth que Nationale, M langes Colbert, CDXVII, 353, M. Verjus au Ministre, Berlin, 20 February 1674.

⁵⁷ The second part of this paper, as presented to the Association, will appear as an article in the *Canadian Historical Review*, March, 1955.