



Signing of a declaration of intent on maritime heritage between France and the United States

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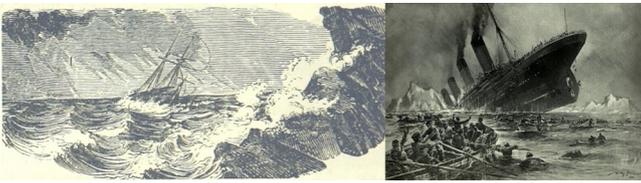
John Armor, Director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and Michel L'Hour, General Curator for underwater heritage, Director of the France's underwater Archaeology Researches Department of the Ministry of Culture (DRASSM) signed a joint statement on January 18, 2017 in Mount Vernon, Virginia. This declaration formalizes the solid cooperation existing between French and American scientific teams, established thanks to a rich common underwater cultural heritage and important new discoveries of wrecks engaging the joint history of our two countries.

Maritime heritage at the heart of the French-American history

French-American history is particularly rich for marine archaeology. In fact, the colonial history of America and then the independence of the United States involved an important French fleet off the American coasts and in the Great Lakes. As a marker of the involvement of the European countries in the slave trade, we find today wrecks all along the maritime routes of the triangular trade. Emblematic of the influence of French naval forces during the American War of Independence, in 1781 at the Battle of Yorktown, the fleet led by Rochambeau, played a decisive role in the victory of the American insurgents against the British. Later, and conversely, it was the involvement of the United States in the two world wars of the twentieth century that brought US shipwrecks along European coasts and more particularly in French territorial waters.

For more than 30 years, French and American archaeologist teams have been able to cooperate in researches and explorations of wrecks like *CSS Alabama*, *La Belle*, *Griffon* and *Bonhomme Richard*. These various wrecks bring new clarifications on key periods and constitute a valuable common heritage of French-American history. Therefore close cooperation between France and the United States is strongly sought.

The Titanic and the Jean Ribault's squadron: wrecks that revive the need for French-American cooperation



In the first half of 2016, American archaeologists specializing in maritime heritage alerted the French authorities on two issues: the potential dispersal of a collection of Titanic's objects and the possible discovery of the mythical wrecks of the fleet led by Jean Ribault in the 16th century.

The wreck of the Titanic, which sank in 1912, was discovered in 1985 by a Franco-British team. The excavations were then carried out in cooperation with a french team from IFREMER in favor of an American company which obtained the ownership of a collection of objects recovered from the wreck, provided that this collection would be not sold or dispersed but used for exhibitions. This company went bankrupt and liquidators now want to sell the collection of 1800 objects identified as the "French Titanic artifact collection".

Last May, off Cape Canaveral in Florida, Robert "Bobby" Pritchett, a treasure hunter, discovered three heavy bronze cannons, a large anchor and some ammunition. They are most probably elements of the fleet of ships of Captain Jean Ribault sent in 1565 by Charles IX. The sinking of this fleet and the failure of Jean Ribault's mission end the project of a French Florida. Therefore, the possible discovery of the remains of this fleet represents a major archaeological discovery: the scientific and historical interest of the site would be colossal for both European and American history.

These two files illustrate the strong desire of archaeologists on both sides of the Atlantic to work together on common projects. Following a similar document signed with Spain, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) indicated its willingness to sign a text that promote French-American collaboration with the objective of protecting common maritime heritage sites.

A Declaration of intent to protect marine heritage

A joint, non legally binding, declaration of intent has been established between the United States and France to facilitate and improve programs on common maritime heritage in both countries. The identification, protection, management and preservation of the resources and sites of this heritage are the priorities of this text which aims to facilitate exchanges between the various French and American partners. Points of contact will be appointed to coordinate the exchanges and, for each project, a team leader will be appointed to propose cooperation arrangements.

This declaration of intent will foster the exchanges of information, in particular through the sharing of historical documents from the archives available in each country. It also provides for joint archaeological researches on sites of shared interest and joint reporting. Finally, this text allows collaborative management for the preservation of maritime heritage, storage and conservation of objects. These cooperations can therefore take different forms: from the sharing of archive documents to joint excavations or the alert on unauthorized interventions.



Signature ceremony at Mount Vernon in the third edition of FACT-O

As part of the « French-American Climate Talks on Ocean » (FACT-O), a two days scientific workshop on [Marine Protected Areas and Maritime Heritage in Mount Vernon on January 18&19, 2017](#). On this occasion, a signing ceremony of the declaration of intent took place on January 18. Pernod Ricard USA, sponsor of the event, was represented by Patricia Ricard, President of the Paul Ricard Oceanographic Institute. She recalled the importance of the involvement of non-state actors for the protection of oceans. James P. Delgado, one of the leading specialists in marine archeology, now director of Marine Heritage at the NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, and who participated in several joint projects with France, recalled the deep links between

France and the United States: two countries "connected by the sea". He praised the excellent collaboration between French and American teams, indicating that more than 4,000 wrecks could be found in US marine sanctuaries, including numerous French wrecks.

For the French part, Michel l'Hour, General Curator for underwater heritage, Director of the France's underwater Archaeology Researches Department (DRASSM), signed the declaration of intent and reaffirmed his willingness to collaborate especially on the Jean Ribault's fleet near Cape Canaveral. For the American part, John Armor, director of the NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, signed the declaration.

Perspective

Cooperation between France and the United States for the protection of maritime heritage have two major scientific interests : for archeology, this is treasures for knowledge and for the understanding of the past, for biologists these sites are biodiversity reserves. Therefore, French-American cooperation on maritime heritage, strengthened by the signing of this declaration, is part of the wider ocean protection issue.