Arie French Presents at Phi Alpha Theta

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Dr. Julia Gossard and undergraduate Arie French teamed up for the CHaSS summer research mentorship to study women brought to North America under the auspices of the French crown. Ranging in age from sixteen to thirty-seven, these 837 filles du roi, or “King’s Daughters,” were given new dresses, a dowry, a few kitchen items, and instructions to find a husband and have children. For Arie French and Julia Gossard, the driving question of their summer research was, “Did filles du roi really produce children?”

Relying on his own language skills, a French dictionary, and Google translate, Arie first translated census records from French to English, categorized all the information, loaded it into an excel sheet, and then ran the statistical analysis. As to the question of marriage and children, the findings were unequivocal: ninety-eight percent of filles du roi were married within three months of their arrival in New France. The other two percent married within one year. In total, these women gave birth to 4,438 children. Twenty percent of the women had more than ten children. One woman, Marie Bouquet, gave birth to eighteen children in twenty-two years.

These initial findings provided both Dr. Gossard and Arie French with a starting point for conference papers. Arie presented “Expanding Coverture (and Canada)” at the Phi Alpha Theta National Convention in New Orleans, focusing specifically on thirteen filles du roi from Dieppe, France.

He investigated whether these women were ultimately targeted by the crown and sent away because of their religion. For her part, Dr. Gossard presented “Filles du Roi: Reproductive Vessels of New France” at Beyond 150, the inaugural Canadian History Twitter Conference, highlighting the ways the French crown monetized marriage and birth, and used children to populate their empire. Some of the research will also appear in Dr. Gossard’s upcoming book, Coercing Children: State-Building and Social Reform in the 18th-Century French World, due out in 2019.

Both Arie and Dr. Gossard say the experience was a tremendous success, one they would love to repeat. The experience provided Dr. Gossard a rare opportunity to blend her two passions of research and teaching. “As a student,” Arie says, “the research process is often filtered through a class, but here there was no filter. It’s just really cool to work with professors in this way.”