

481 SEHUT, TERTULIAN

Bookseller

Henrico County

Apparently a bookseller in Henrico County in 1700 & 1701.

The name of Tertulian Sehut was recorded in a 1701 probate inventory as someone whose estate included an extensive collection of books and unbound sheets, so indicating that he was at least a distributor of print materials in Virginia, if not actually a seller and/or binder of books. That function was evidently a part of Sehut's role as an early leader of the French settlement of Manakin Town on the James.

French Protestants, termed Huguenots, found themselves persecuted in their homeland after Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in October 1685. That proclamation brought an end to ninety years of toleration for the realm's Protestant minority and compelled them to either renounce their faith or flee the country for refuge in a Protestant land. Accordingly, many Huguenots landed in England. In 1698, a proposal was offered to the Board of Trade to resettle some of these refugees in North America; after rejecting a site on Apalachee Bay in West Florida, the Lords Commissioners agreed to a recommendation by Virginian William Byrd I, then in London, to relocate 100 Huguenot families to the Old Dominion. When the group arrived at Hampton Roads in July 1700, Gov. Francis Nicholson granted them a site above the falls of the James on the southern bank (then Henrico County, now Goochland) that had served as a village for the Monacan peoples, in order to populate a territory that was in dispute with the displaced natives and North Carolina colonists on the then western margin of the colony. The result was Manakin Town.

Sehut was one of those arrivals. He was a prosperous goldsmith, and so was one of the Protestant merchants who financed their removal. One modern source describes him as an "owner" of the *Mary and Anne*, which accompanied the *Peter and Anthony* to Virginia; but an account of the crossing describes the captain of the *Mary and Anne* as an abusive man, and so Sehut was evidently not his supervisor, as he would have been if a true owner. Once in the colony, the group was subjected to the "seasoning" experienced by all new settlers in the Chesapeake, as well as the privation resulting from the inability of an urban group to produce enough food to subsist over the ensuing winter, especially when dissension began to run rife in the fall of 1700, after a second group of Huguenot refugees arrived. Sehut did not survive that winter. As a result, the formal leaders of the community – Charles de Saily and Olivier de la Muce – wrote to the Henrico County Court in late January 1701 asking how to proceed with the settlement of his estate and the placement of his orphaned son, Peter, and another young boy then in Sehut's care. That letter initiated the probate process that has given us the spare record of Sehut's ties to a nascent Virginia print trade thirty years before a printing press appeared in Williamsburg.

But more interestingly, that note also suggests that Sehut was a part of an abortive plan to start a printing office at Manakin Town, as the boy in his charge was a "son to Mr. Rogers, printer to ... Elector of Brandenburg, who, designing to Come over, ... did Intrust this boy unto the s'd Gold Smith." Frederick III, the Elector of Brandenburg (1657-1713) – who would claim the title of King of Prussia that same year as Frederick I – had already been involved in

colonization efforts in West Africa in an attempt to resettle the Huguenot refugees that had flooded his realm, and was about to support the resettlement of radical German Pietists to Pennsylvania in an attempt to stabilize the religious climate of his enlarged kingdom. That his court printer was then "designing to Come over" to Virginia implies that Frederick was supportive of the Board of Trade's effort as a solution to his Huguenot problem as well, and that Rogers was willing to assist, making both patron and client hidden participants in the Virginia project. This scenario is purely speculative, of course, as supporting evidence has not been found elsewhere; but such fits with the venture's initial purpose to build an urban center in Virginia for an already urban populace. That plan, however, failed when those new settlers dispersed across the colony's interior, seeking better opportunities than the ones offered to them in the divided settlement of Manakin Town. Lacking a suitable urban setting after Sehut's death, it seems that any plan for establishing a press office died with him.

NB: Contemporaneous records report various spelling of his surname, apparently based on varying pronunciations. The census of settlers ordered by Nicholson states that "Tertulien Sehult" arrived with his wife and two children ("*et sa femme et deux enfants*"). Yet the wife of "Tertulien Seheult" was arrested in Valenciennes, a Protestant stronghold on the border with the Netherlands, and imprisoned in the Bastille months after he had left for Virginia. Meanwhile, English-language court documents record his name as Sehut or Sehaul. Thus, this Index adopts the spelling associated with the Henrico County Court probate inventory that reveals his apparent ties to print-distribution in the colony, even as that usage is not the recognized French one.

Personal Data

Born: ca. 1670 In France.

Died: In Jan. 1701 Manakin Town, Henrico County, Virginia.

Children: One orphan son named Peter.

Sources: "Books in Colonial Virginia," *VMHB* (1903); Brock, *Documents Relating to the Huguenot Immigration to Virginia*; Lambert, *Protestant International and the Huguenot Migration to Virginia*.