Philipe DuBois & Fils Watchmakers

Customers, Suppliers and Bankers

1759 - 1824

Richard Watkins

The Company

Although the watchmaking company *Philipe DuBois & Fils* is neither famous nor well known, it deserves recognition for three reasons. First, the company manufactured and sold watches continuously for nearly a quarter of a millennium, probably longer than any other Swiss watchmaker, starting in the 1750s and finally closing its doors at the beginning of the 21st century. Second, it was owned and run by the family throughout its existence, and the heads of the company were all descendants of the founder Philipe DuBois (1738-1808). And third, the company always operated from the same, small building, erected in 1684 on the Grande rue in Le Locle, Switzerland, the *Maison DuBois*.

The Documents

The Maison DuBois houses a large number of documents covering the whole period of the company's existence. Of special interest is that this collection includes hand-written account books and inventories dating back to 1720. Unfortunately many records have been destroyed, but there remains an important collected of early documents of two types:

(a) **Account books**: These use double entry accounting on facing pairs of pages and each page pair has a single number. I use the suffixes *a* and *b* to denote the left and right pages respectively.

There are 8 account books which have a total of 2,306 double pages.

(b) **Inventories**: These use normal page numbering.

There are 2 bound books of inventories and two groups of loose inventories.

Using my notation, these documents are:

Book 1: 1758 - 1762

Title: Grand Livre D'horlogerie pour sour Philipe du Bois & Soeur Du Locle

90 double pages with covers and complete. 35 x 21 x 2 cm.

Primarily a purchases journal covering 1758 - 1762.

Book 2: 1764 - 1777

Title: No. 1 Grand Livre Pour Philipe DuBois Commence Au Locle Le Premier Avril 1764

233 double pages followed by a single right page (outstanding debts?). With covers and complete. 44 x 32 x 6 cm.

Sales journal with purchases covering 1764 - 1777 with three later dates: 1779, 1784 and 1786.

Book 3: 1770-1785

Title: *DB No. 4*

285 double pages

Page numbers 43b and 44a do not exist (a numbering error). The right hand page for 43a is numbered 44b. Page numbers 117a and 117b do not exist (misnumbering). Pages numbered 283b to 286b (4 leaves) are disbound. The book is probably complete. Without covers. 49 x 36 x 8 cm.

Book 4: 1788-1807

Title: Grand Livre Philipe DuBois No. 5 1788 1807

115 used double pages, many blank leaves, 2 leaves (3 pages) headed "Sortie de ce Livre. Perdu et Douteux" (summary of outstanding debts). 49 x 36 x 8

Pages 41a, 41b missing; 43b, 44a missing (but probably misnumbering), page 47b blank

Book 5: 1788-1794:

Title: Grande Livre A No 1 Pour Philipe DuBois et Fils

467 used double pages, 2 blank leaves, 1 leaf with the left side headed "Sortie de ce Livre. Perdu et Douteux" (summary of outstanding debts?), and the title above repeated upside-down on the last leaf.

The book is missing 2 leaves (pages 1b/2a and 2b/3a). With covers. 49 x 39 x 14.

Book 6: 1795-1801

Title: Grande Livre B No. 2 Pour Philipe DuBois et Fils

340 used double pages, many blank leaves. 48 x 37 x 10

Pages 155a, 155b, 238b and 239a missing (misnumbering). Page numbers 160a and 160b occur twice.

Some later dates to 1815.

Book 7: 1801-1807

Title: Grande Livre C No. 3 Pour Philipe DuBois, Philipe Henry DuBois, Charles DuBois, Jules DuBois, Henry François L'Hardy

352 double pages. 48 x 37 x 10. Page 128 has a pasted-in addendum that was not photographed. Page numbers 202a and 202b occur twice. Page numbers 302a and 302b occur twice.

Book 8: 1807 - 1824

Title: Grande Livre No. 4

424 double pages, 2 blank leaves. 55 x 39 x 14. The bottom half of page 203a was accidentally not photographed.

Inventory Book 1: 1765-1801

Title: Inventaires de Philippe DuBois fils de Moïse de 1765 à 1801.

Bound book of 417 numbered pages and 11 unnumbered pages followed by many blank pages. Containing inventories for:

1765, 11 Juin, pp 1-11	1767, 2 Janvier, pp 13-70	1769, 5 Janvier, pp 71-122
1771, 1 Janvier, pp 123-175	1773, 2 Janvier, pp 177-217	1774, 20 Decembre, pp 219-255
1776, 13 Decembre, pp 257-299	1778, 14 Decembre, pp 301-333	1780, 9 Decembre, pp 335-368
1782, 9 Decembre, pp 369-406	1785, 19 Decembre, pp 407-416	1787, pp 417
1790, 4 Janvier, 1 page	1792, 10 Janvier, 1 page	1794, Decembre, 1 page
1796, 1 Janvier, 1 page	1797, 2 Janvier, 1 page	1798, 9 Janvier, 1 page
1799, 8 Janvier, 1 page	1800, 2 Janvier, 1 page	1801, 1 Fevrier, 1 page

Inventory Book 2: 1785-1794

Book of 177 pages. The first page is the *acte de fondation* for the new company. Containing inventories for:

1785, 19 Decembre, pp 1-30	1787, 17 Decembre, pp 31-79	1789, 14 Decembre, pp 81-133
1791, 23 Decembre, pp 135-171	1794, 26 Decembre, pp 1-6	

Loose Inventories: 1720 to 1759

Inventories exist for 1720, 1722, 1728, 1730, 1733, 1735, 1737, 1739, 1741, 1743, 1745, 1747, 1749, 1751, 1752, 1755, and 1757. Only the following are included here:

Inventory 1733: Lists 2 montres de poche for £60.

Inventory 1741: Lists 1 montre de poche for £39.

Inventory 1743: Lists 3 montres de poche for £90.

Inventory 1745: Lists 1 montres de poche for £60 and a pendule for £54.

Inventory 1747: Lists 1 pendule for £54 and 1 montre de poche for £80.

Inventory 1757: January 1757. 27 pages, signed Moyse DuBois. Pages 1 - 21 cover drapery. Page 22 lists 1 montre £24, 1 montre £36, 1 mouvement £50-8, 1 pendule £54. Page 26 is a summary page and lists 1 montre de poche and pendules with no details (referring to page 22?).

Inventory 1759: 22 January 1759. Pages 1-28 are drapery, buttons and other items. Pages 29 - 30 are horology which list 19 watches, 21 movements, 1 gold case, £61 fourniture and £110 fourniture *chez mes ouvriers*.

The insert transfers assets to Philipe and Esabeau Dubois, marking the formation of Philipe DuBois et Soeur, the watchmaking enterprise.

Loose Inventories: 1798-1823

1798: 3 January. 82 pages.

1801a: 30 January 1801. 98 pages.

1801b: January 1801 6 pages. Part only.

1802a: 31 December. 107 pages. Marked "incomplete" on cover, 2 pages numbered 55

1802b: 31 December 84 pages.

1804 No. 2: 31 December. 136 pages.

1807: 31 January. 114 pages.

1809: 7 August. 96 pages.

1812: 1 January. 97 pages.

1816: 12 January. 121 pages.

1819: 30 January. 61 pages.

1821: 4 January. 67 pages.

1823: 11 January. 71 pages.

The Photographs

In 2012 I visited Le Locle and took photographs of the above inventories and account books, covering the period from from 1759 to 1824, and a few photographs of earlier inventories. There are **4,619** photographs of account book pages and **1,820** photographs of inventory pages; a total of **6,439** photographs.

Because these photographs had to be taken in less than three weeks, it was impossible to use the equipment necessary to produce high quality photographs. Instead I was forced to use a small, hand-held camera and auto-focus. As a result the photographs vary from bad to fair. They are adequate for research, but many are not suitable for publication.

The photographs, which occupy about 27 GB, are available if needed. They are raw photographs that have not been edited.

The Data Base

Contents

To assist accessing the information in the photographs, I have constructed a database of **names**.

There are two types of names:

(a) **People**: These names are of individuals, partnerships, companies, etc. The data base includes an entry for nearly every occurrence of these names that appears in the inventories and account books.

 If a name occurs more than once on a page, then there is only one entry in the data base.

 A few occurrences of names of the DuBois family have been omitted, and some names may have been missed accidentally.

(b) **Locations**: The inventories contain some entries where stock (watches, materials, etc.) was held in places outside of Le Locle Switzerland. These entries are important, and so I have included these names (of towns and countries) in the data base.

The database has **24,769** entries.

For every name entry, the database provides, where given:

(1) **Name**.

 (1a) Prefix (such as *soeur*).

 (1b) Given names or initials for people.

 (1c) Suffix (such as *& Co*).

 (1d) Occupation.

 (1e) Location.

(2) Relationship (customer, supplier, financial transactions).

 (2a) Notes (what was supplied or bought, or other information).

(3) Source book and page number.

(4) Dates of the transactions.

(5) Main entry flag.

Main and Sub Entries: Account books

The structure of the account books enable us to recognise two types of entry:

(a) **Main entries**: Each group of entries is headed by the name of a person (or group of people) who dealt directly with the company DuBois & Fils. These main entries include some or all of the additional information *1a* to *1e* listed above and are marked by the main entry flag.

 There are **5,013** of these main entries in the data base.

(b) **Sub-entries**: Each main entry then has one or more sub-entries. These are dated, individual transactions.

 These sub-entries define the relationship between the main-entry person and DuBois & Fils: customer, supplier or financial.

 The sub-entries for purchasers and suppliers usually provide some indication of the items in the transactions. However, there are a large number of other sub-entries which I have classified as financial transactions. In these there are the names of third parties who were intermediaries between DuBois & Fils and the person specified in the corresponding main entry.

 Many sub-entries are vague, and whether the main entry refers to a customer, a supplier, or a financer is sometimes not clear.

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There are **10,764** of these sub-entries.

Understanding these sub-entries will require some research in the future.

Main and Sub Entries: Inventories

In contrast, the inventories are snapshots of the stock and assets of the company at a particular date. However, names frequently appear in them and they are also classified:

(a) **Main entries**: As noted above, there are entries in the inventories which I have flagged as main entries, where stock (watches, materials, etc.) was held in places outside of Le Locle Switzerland. Some of these entries occupy several pages.

These entries often specify the name of a person or company, but many specify only the town or country.

There are **863** of these main entries in the data base.

(b) **Other entries**: The inventories include many names. For example, there are lists of outstanding debtors and there are the names of workers who had stock in their houses.

There are **8,129** of these entries.

Searching the Data Base

Such a large data base is only useful if it can be searched, but inevitably there are some problems. They are:

(a) **Errors and omissions**: It is inevitable that errors have occurred while entering such a large amount of data. To try to minimise these errors, I have checked most names and locations, but this will not have found all errors, in particular accidental omissions of information.

Also, a few entries may have been missed and a few entries have been excluded (these are internal transactions where the company was dealing with family members).

(b) **Hand-writing and spelling**: Over the 68 years covered by the documents, a number of people entered the data, and the quality of their hand-writing varies. So there is often doubt in deciding how to interpret entries, and it is likely that I have spelt some words incorrectly. Most important is that some letters are ambiguous and it has been hard to interpret the spelling of the names of people; for example, it is often difficult to distinguish between l and t. As a result there are 216 names flagged with question marks.

However, when a name appears in several entries, nearly always it has been possible to compare them and decide on the correct spelling.

Other names are consistent, but may not be obvious; for example, Venice is always spelt Venise and London always spelt Londres. However, New York is spelt in some strange ways!

(c) **Inconsistencies**: The spelling of names and locations often varies over time, which creates problems when searching the data base. Many of these do not create serious problems, but some do. For example, one location is spelt Ambulant, Ambulent, Embulant and Embulent in different entries.

One problem is the spelling of names with multiple words; for example *De Fay* and *Defay* are both used in the books, as are *Gros Claude* and *Grosclaude*. Where possible I have standardised the spelling to make searching easier, but often this was not possible.

(d) **Ambiguities**: There are some problems with interpreting sub-entries, and occasionally main entries. The most important is when two or more names appear on the same line. For example, there are a number of records which refer to *Cini & Tarro Ricca*, but it is not clear if there is one family name *Ricca* and two given names, *Cini* and *Tarro*, or if there are two different family names *Cini* and *Ricca*, or if there are

two different family names *Cini* and *Tarro Ricca*! In this case cross checking led me to the decision that there are two different family names *Cini* and *Tarro Ricca*, and the data base uses this interpretation. But one entry refers to Jean Ricca, and so this may not be correct.

Another problem occurs with more than one name in a sub-entry. Does the entry refer to a single entity (a partnership) or are there two separate entries written on one line? In some cases it is impossible to decide, so I have assumed a partnership and created a single entry in the data-base. This has the unfortunate consequence that some names are "hidden".

Similar problems occur with given names.

The consequence is that searching involves some imagination.

Data Base Format

Application

The data base has been created using **FileMaker Pro***, and the following notes refer to this format.*

The data base is crude, but adequate. It contains five drop-down lists to assist searching:

(a) Prefix: An incomplete list, but including the most common prefixes:

Greffier, Sieur, Freres, Monsieur, Messieurs, Madame, Mademoiselle, Conseiller, Veuve, Soeurs, Justicier, Receveur, Lieutenant, Capitaine

(b) Occupation: An incomplete list of occupations, but including the most common occupations:

horloger, maitre horloger, negociant, banquier, marchand, marchand horloger, graveur, emailleur, monteur de boette, cadracturier, orfevre, pendulier, feseur d'outil, feseur de ressorts, feseur de limes, guillocheur, justicier, marchand bijoutier, marchand de fournitures

(c) Source: A complete list of the documents in the data base.

(d) Relationship: A complete list of relationships:

Customer, Supplier, Financial transactions, Internal company transactions.

(e) Notes: An incomplete list of notes. This field is used for various additional information. The most important use is to describe the type of transaction and the following are included:

Purchases and sales: marchandise, horlogerie, mouvements, montres, boettes.

Financial: payé, remis, effet, billet, assignation, traite.

Other: ordre, envoy, fraix, voiture.

However, this field has been used for other purposes, mainly to flag transactions of interest to me, and these entries have not been deleted.

The data base also contains a *Flag* field which can be used to mark entries for later examination.

Distinct Names and Locations

In addition to scripts for sorting, I have provided four scripts to assist with searching:

(a) **Show Distinct Locations**: This script displays a list of all distinct locations, a total of **1,149**. It displays a list of locations and the number of times the locations occur in the data base.

There are actually fewer than 1,148 unique locations. For example, several locations have different spellings, some are flagged by question marks, and a few include street addresses.

(b) **Show Distinct Names** script: This script produces a list of all distinct names, a total of **4,759**. It displays a list of names and the number of times the names occur in the data base.

Again, there are actually fewer than 4,759 unique names.

(c) **Find Distinct Locations** script: This script generates the list of distinct locations. This need not be used, unless the data base is changed.

(d) **Find Distinct Names** script: This script generates the list of distinct names. Again, this need not be used, unless the data base is changed.

Alternative formats

In addition to the FileMaker Pro data base, the information is provided in three Excel files: The complete data base (24770 rows with all fields) and two separate files listing the distinct names and distinct locations.

The data can be provided in other simple-file formats for importing into another data base application. If you would prefer a different format then please email me: books@watkinsr.id.au