

**Essai de solution du problème philologique  
proposé en l'année 1823 par la  
commission de l'Institut de France, 1823  
1823  
Mss.410.D92.1**

American Philosophical Society  
105 South Fifth Street  
Philadelphia, PA, 19106  
215-440-3400  
[manuscripts@amphilsoc.org](mailto:manuscripts@amphilsoc.org)

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	American Philosophical Society
<b>Creator</b>	Du Ponceau , Peter Stephen, 1760-1844
<b>Title</b>	Essai de solution du problème philologique proposé en l'année 1823 par la commission de l'Institut de France, 1823
<b>Date</b>	1823
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<b>Location</b>	LH-MV-E-8
<b>Language</b>	French
<b>Container</b>	1
<b>Abstract</b>	The commission of the Institut de France was charged with offering a prize on linguistics, under the will of Count Volney. Formerly, this essay was thought to have been by Baron Nicolas Massias (1764-1848), who won the Volney prize in 1828. However, the note that the volume was shipped from New York precludes that.

## Background note

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Peter Stephen Du Ponceau was a lawyer, author, and philologist.

## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

American Philosophical Society

## Provenance

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### Acquisition Information

Presented by the Du Ponceau estate, 1844 (6799).

## Indexing Terms

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### Corporate Name(s)

- Institut de France.

### Genre(s)

- Foreign Language
- Language Material
- Manuscript Essays

### Personal Name(s)

- Massias, Nicolas, baron, 1764-1848
- Volney, C.-F., (Constantin François), 1757-1820

### Subject(s)

- Beyond Early America
- Language and Linguistics

- Linguistics.
- Philology.

## Other Descriptive Information

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The Essai de Solution ... is part of the Stephen Du Ponceau Collection. The collection as a whole has a wide array of material, although it is particularly strong in of Native American language material from the nineteenth century. This essay was likely submitted for the Volney Prize in linguistics and reflects Du Ponceau's interests in language more generally.

The following summarizes the Du Ponceau Collection more generally.

As a leading linguist of the era, the Du Ponceau's collection has three portions that relate to language. The first is a large volume of 73 Indian languages for both South and North American Indians (497 In2). The second is a nine volume set of notes on philology that focuses on Native American languages but includes notes on range of other language groups, such as the language of Polynesians and Greeks (410 D92). The notes also make numerous observations about Native American customs, practices, and beliefs. The third portion of linguistic material is a dictionary of terms relating to the sea and seafaring (359.03 D92).

Although Du Ponceau is most well-known today for his work in Native American linguistics, the Du Ponceau Collection includes a significant amount of correspondence from Du Ponceau's legal career in the nineteenth century (B D92p). As a practicing lawyer often working on trade issues, his correspondence also includes large collection of business news and legal affairs happening in Philadelphia. Most of these documents are from cases Du Ponceau worked on, and many of these cases involve international trade and merchant concerns. One of the more interesting case files includes a brief on whether or not the family of a mariner lost at sea can recover lost wages.

Du Ponceau was well-connected and some of his correspondence involves research on American Indians, language, and other intellectual endeavors (410.D92.1). He corresponded with many individuals throughout the U.S. and fellow members of the American Philosophical Society, sometimes as official APS business.

The APS collection also has a commonplace book of DuPonceau, which includes interesting notes on colonial Pennsylvania history and especially William Penn's legacy (B 92c). Written in 1820, the notes can lend insight into the public and historical memory in early nineteenth century Philadelphia.

Some of his correspondence also involves his attempt to acquire documents from prominent Philadelphians so that the APS could publish a complete history of Pennsylvania. In addition to Du Ponceau's own efforts, Deborah Norris Logan corresponded with Du Ponceau about her own attempt to write a history of Pennsylvania. The Deborah Logan correspondence also touches upon women's roles in the early republic, with Logan writing that she felt uneasy publishing something in her name "before the publick" because of her "sex and station."