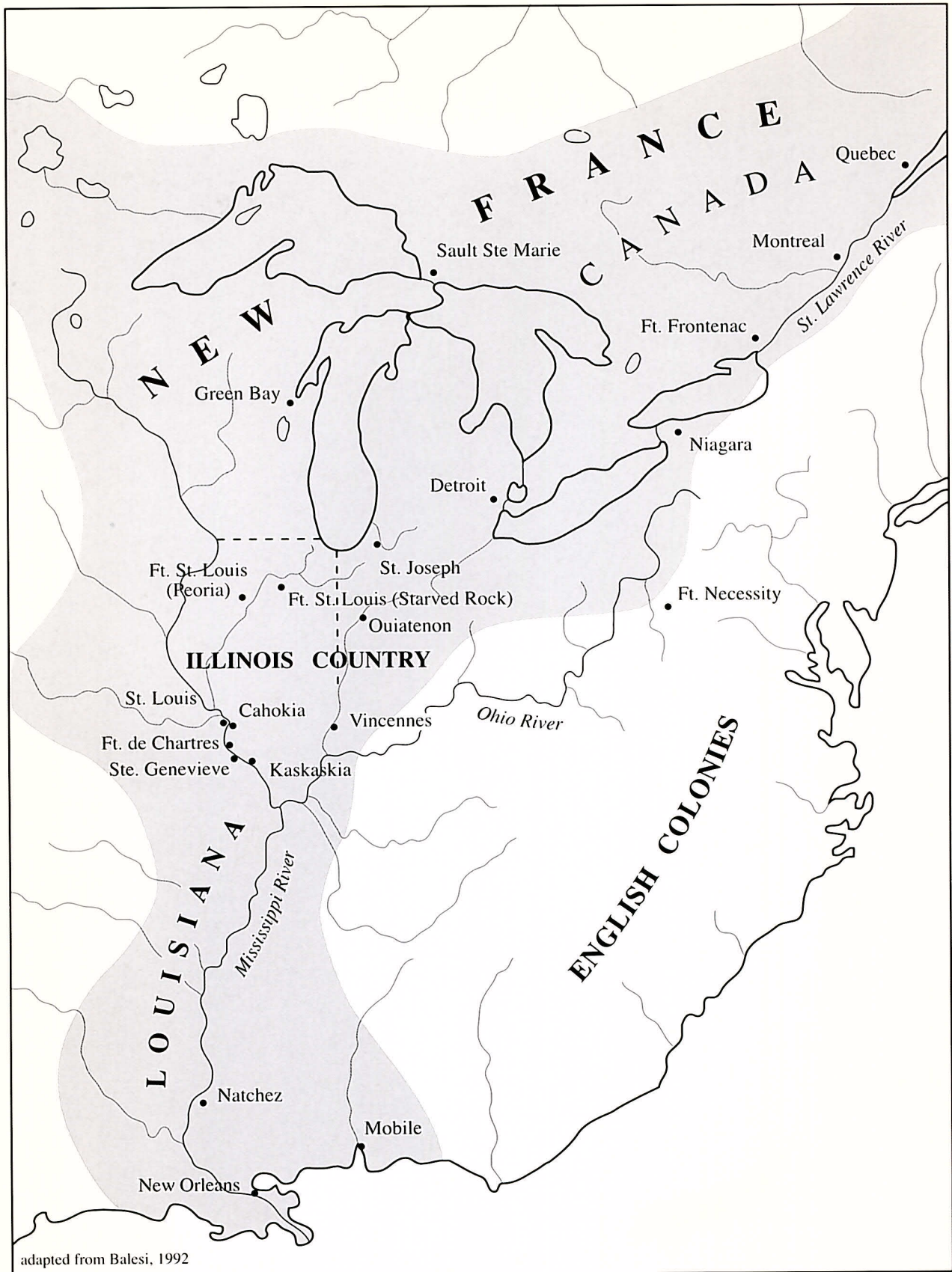


The French Colony in the Mid-Mississippi Valley



Margaret Kimball Brown
Lawrie Cena Dean



adapted from Balesi, 1992

The Illinois Country and New France.

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Preface

What were the French communities like in the eighteenth century? For a brief look, come with us in imagination to the village of Kaskaskia in the 1740s. Here we find dusty, wide streets, lined with stockade-like fences, above which appear the steeply pitched roofs of houses. Opening a gate in one of these fences reveals a house of heavy upright log construction with a paneled front door and deeply-set casement windows. The path to the door is lined with flowers and herbs, in the spring the orchard at one side of the yard would be in bloom.

Inside the house are two large rooms with fireplaces and off these, smaller bedrooms. The main room, where most of the daily activities are carried out, is furnished with carved walnut chests, a vast armoire, a sideboard, tables and armchairs. Linen curtains hang at the two small windows and on the white-washed wall is a mirror.

If our imaginary visit coincided with one of the frequent balls, we might see the lady of the house dressed in her best gown of striped pink and white taffeta and red high-heeled shoes. Her husband might be wearing a green coat, vest and breeches, studded with silver buttons, all having been imported from France on the last convoy.

Does this sound like the frontier? Certainly, it is not the picture received from the accounts of the later American pioneers. But French colonial life was quite different from that of the later immigrants; by the time of our imaginary visit to Kaskaskia, the French had been settled in the area for over a generation.


Where did they come from? Why did they settle here? To answer these questions we must turn back to the late seventeenth century.

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Exploration and Early Settlement

 *Le Pays des Illinois*, the country of the Illinois, referred to the land occupied by the Illinois Indians, the Illiniwek, in the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century, this had become a governmental designation as well. The country of the Illinois was the upper part of the French colony of Louisiana.

The Illinois Country included at least part of the present states of Illinois, Missouri, Iowa and Indiana. The military and civil center of government was Fort de Chartres. Its jurisdiction extended from the Kansas River on the west to the Ouabache [Wabash] on the east and to the Arkansas on the south. The northern reach was not as well defined, but as the post at Peoria was garrisoned from Fort de Chartres, it apparently was included.

The Illinois Country was explored first by Canadian voyageurs; these were licensed traders looking for furs, especially for beaver, to send back to France. Not only were furs worn for warmth, but the beaver pelts were used in making felt for fashionable men's hats. Rather than catching the fur-bearing animals themselves, the voyageurs traded with the Indians, exchanging axes, knives, kettles, beads and other items for furs. How early in the seventeenth century the voyageurs came into the Illinois Country is not known as most were illiterate and left no record of their travels.

The trade potential attracted explorers who sought to find a waterway south to the sea; such a passage would ease the transportation problems. In 1672, Sieur Louis Jolliet formed an expedition to explore south of the Great Lakes for that waterway. Jolliet took with him five men and a Jesuit priest, Fr. Jacques Marquette.

Their travels took them across Lake Michigan, through present Wisconsin and down the Mississippi River. On the journey, probably within the present state of Iowa, they encountered a village of Peoria

On June 17, 1673, explorer Louis Jolliet and Father Jacques Marquette entered the Mississippi River, traveled its length to the Arkansas River and returned to their base at Mackinac, via the Illinois River and Lake Michigan.

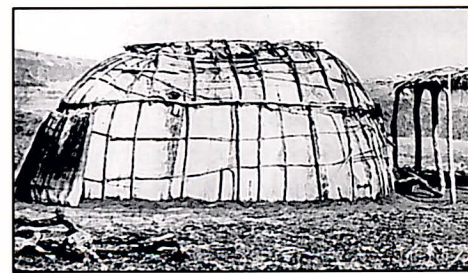


Re-enactor in typical dress of the voyageurs.

Indians, part of the Illiniwek or Illinois nation. Jolliet and Marquette continued down the Mississippi as far as Arkansas, then, satisfied that they had found the route to the sea, began the trip back. At the juncture of the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers, they turned aside to investigate this passage back to the lakes.

On the river in northern Illinois, opposite the elevation known later as Starved Rock, they found a village of the Kaskaskia Illinois. Here, Fr. Marquette founded the mission of the Immaculate Conception, the first mission in the Illinois Country.

Fr. Marquette returned to the infant mission for a short time in 1675, but died during his return trip to Canada. In 1678, Fr. Claude Allouez came to continue the work of the mission. By then, the village had grown and contained seven groups of the Illinois tribe, including the Peoria. Fr. Allouez counted 351 "cabins" spread out along the water's edge. Those cabins were large oval structures made from a framework of saplings bent over and fastened at the top to form a rounded roof. Woven reed mats and bark then covered the frame. These huts varied in length from 12 to 60 feet, and the larger ones might house twenty or more residents. The total population of this village is estimated to have been 5700, larger than the young French settlement of Quebec was at this time.



Bark lodge.

The parish that developed from the mission of the Immaculate Conception is still in existence today, over 300 years later, but it is located in southern Illinois in the heart of the old French colony on Kaskaskia Island near Chester, Illinois. How did it move down there? For that, we have to trace further the movements of the Illinois Indians.

Trade was the bond between the Illinois and the French. The lives of the Indians and the voyageurs were much alike; they both moved great distances in their activities. The traders traveled from Montreal to Illinois; the Indians went from winter camps to their summer villages along the rivers, and on war parties, slave-capturing expeditions and buffalo hunts far to the west.

Although the French government was anxious to encourage settlement in order to strengthen its claim to the central valley, the voyageurs who plied the waters of the Illinois River were not interested in colonization. Governmental wishes had little effect, but a woman's determination succeeded where officials had failed.

The woman was Marie Aranipinchicoue, the seventeen-year-old daughter of Rouensa, a Kaskaskia chief. Her father wanted her to marry a Frenchman, Michel Accault, or Ako as it is generally written. A voyageur for many years, Ako had traveled with La Salle and had accompanied Fr. Hennepin on his trip up the Mississippi and into captivity with the Sioux. Fr. Gravier, who was now in charge of the mission, said disparagingly that Ako was famous in the Illinois for his debaucheries.

Marie, a devout Christian, refused to marry Ako. Days of strife followed her decision. Her angry father stripped her of all her ornaments and drove her out of his cabin. Marie took shelter with other Christians while her father tried to turn the Indians against the priest whom he suspected, wrongly as it happened, of having influenced Marie's decision.

Finally, Marie decided to marry Ako with the hope of reforming him and of converting her parents to the God she worshipped. Such was Marie's character and religious fervour that she succeeded shortly in both endeavors. Ako became an upright citizen, saying to the priest that he hardly recognized



Kaskaskia Indian. Man Who Tracks, by George Catlin.

himself anymore. Chief Rouensa and his fifteen-member family embraced the new religion and the majority of the Kaskaskia soon followed their chief's example and were baptized. The conversion of this large group of the Illinois greatly increased the size of the mission and gave an impetus to settlement.

Shortly after the Ako union, other French and Indian marriages took place. Jacques La Violette, who also had been with La Salle, married Catherine Ekopakineoua, Louis Delauney married Catherine Rouecanga and Antoine Baillarjon married Domitilde Choupingoua.

The Illinois Indians are described as being tall and well-built, and the women must have been determined as well as attractive to get their voyageur husbands to become more settled and domestic. These Frenchmen and their wives, with the other Christian Indians, formed the nucleus from which the French colony developed.

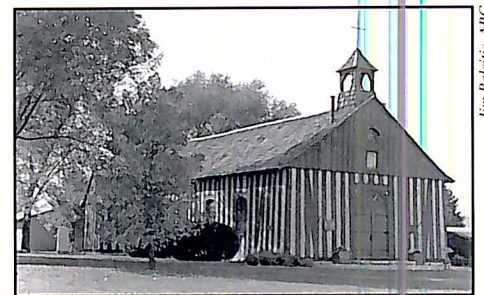
The baptismal records for the Mission of the Immaculate Conception still exist in part and record the birth of a son, Pierre, to Marie Rouensa and Michel Ako in 1695. In the same year Catherine Delauney and Catherine La Violette also gave birth to sons. Acting as godfather on at least one occasion was Henri de Tonti (of the iron hand), La Salle's former lieutenant.

Few records exist for the following years.

Father Gravier left the community, now located at Peoria Lakes, and did not return until 1700. When he arrived, he found that the Kaskaskia were about to leave for a proposed colony of John Law's on the Mississippi. Father Gravier hoped to stop his Kaskaskia from joining the colony and they did halt their journey south near the present site of St. Louis, Missouri on the River Des Peres. It is from this settlement that the river today still bears the name Des Peres [of the Fathers].


The French families also moved downriver to the new Kaskaskia village. In 1700, little Pierre Ako, only five years old, was sent to Quebec to receive his education. Michel Ako died, and Marie Rouensa remarried. Her new husband, Michel Philippe, had received a grant of land in Mobile and probably came upriver on a trading voyage, but he chose to remain with the Kaskaskia village rather than take his new family back to Mobile. Across the Mississippi River from Des Peres, in Illinois, was a settlement of Cahokia and Tamaroa Indians. In 1699, the mission of the Holy Family had been established at this Illinois Indian village by priests of the Seminary of the Foreign Missions. Some of the Tamaroa Indians joined the Des Peres village, and the number of French continued to increase also.

Not all the Frenchmen were in residence at one time, however, for they were busy coming and going on the river in trade. Despite the newly arrived French immigrants, the settlement on the River des Peres remained an Indian village with Indian cabins and gardens, not a colonial settlement laid out in European fashion, but this shortly was to change.



Holy Family Church, Cahokia, Illinois.

Founding of the French Communities

 Fearing attacks from the Sioux Indians at the River Des Peres, on the west side of the Mississippi, the village migrated again in the spring of 1703, moving downriver to a peninsula between the Mississippi River and a tributary, the Metchigamia River, named for yet another group of Illinois Indians. This stream is now known as the Kaskaskia River from the later arrivals. Here the mission of the Immaculate Conception became a parish, and a church was built.

The village gradually acquired a larger French contingent. From where did these new settlers come? Initially, most of the newcomers were from Canada, but as settlers in the Gulf region became dissatisfied with conditions there, or sought new opportunities, they too moved up to the Illinois.

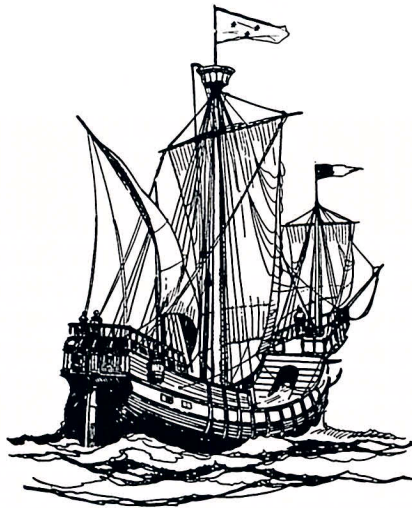
Although the descriptions sent back to France tend to be exaggerated, there is no doubt that the young colony was attractive compared to war-torn France, to the humid Gulf Coast, or as an escape from the long severe winters of Canada.

The ladies even venture to make this long and painful voyage from Canada, in order to end their days in a Country which the Canadians look upon as a terrestrial paradise.

This country where they are settled is one of the most beautiful in all of Louisiana and the best for the fertility of the soil. They grow wheat as fine as that in France, and all types of vegetables, root crops and herbs. There are also all kinds of fruit with very good flavor. They have in the prairies many animals such as oxen and cows.

A number of the new French immigrants married Indian women despite the increasing opposition by the government to such marriages. The priests approved of these unions, maintaining that the women were

Cahokia 1699, Kaskaskia 1703,
St. Philippe, Chartres,
Prairie du Rocher early 1720s,
Ste. Genevieve 1750s,
St. Louis 1763.



both virtuous and industrious. There were few marriageable French women in Louisiana; most of the women in Mobile and New Orleans were already wives of colonists. To alleviate this shortage, the government proposed to ship marriageable girls from France to Louisiana.

In 1704 the vessel "Pelican" made port on the Gulf Coast in Louisiana with a cargo of girls from a convent orphanage, most of whom were promptly married. Jean Brunet dit Bourbonnais and his wife, Elisabeth Deshayes, a Pelican girl, soon came up to Illinois, where they would spend their long life together. But girls continued in short supply until those born in the New World reached marriageable age. Nicolas Michel Chassin, the royal storekeeper at Fort de Chartres, wrote back to France a complaint on his single state:

You see, Sir, that the only thing I now lack in order to make a strong establishment in Louisiana is a certain article of furniture that one often repents of having got and which I shall do without like the others until — the company sends us some girls who have at least some appearance of virtue. If by chance there should be some girl with whom you are acquainted who would be willing to make this journey for love of me, I should be very much obliged to her and I should certainly do my best to give her evidence of my gratitude for it.

No girl from France volunteered, but Monsieur Chassin in 1722 married Agnes Philippe, the 16-year-old daughter of Marie Rouensa and Michel Philippe.

Among the French who moved into the Illinois we find names that still exist in Illinois and Missouri today: Bienvenu, Dirousse, Duclos, Roy, Gilbert, Aubuchon, Robert, Barbeau. Many of the men had nicknames, like Jean Brunet *dit* [called] Bourbonnais. Sometimes, these names related to the area from where the man came: Blouit *dit* Le Breton, De Fosse *dit* Le Normand, and Joseph Quebado *dit* L'Espagnol [the Spaniard]. Some were probably from physical characteristics: Charle Helie *dit* Gros [big] and Jean Chabot *dit* Petit [little]; some may have been professions: Antoine Gilbert *dit* Rotisseur [roasting cook] and Henri Belmont *dit* Boulanger [baker].

The reasons for other names are obscure; they may have referred to interests, characteristic behavior or some event in the person's life: Leonard Billeron *dit* La Fatigue [the tired one]; Antoine Ple *dit* La Plume [the feather or pen]; Francois Hennet *dit* Sanschagrín [without regret]; Louis Baudrau *dit* Va De Bon Coeur [goes with good spirit]; and Francois Cecire *dit* Bontemps [good times].

Sometimes the “dit” became used instead of the original surname for a branch of the family, as today La Chance and La Rose exist as surnames in Ste. Genevieve and other areas. The early settlers from whom they probably are descended were, however, named Nicolas Cailott *dit* La Chance and Andre De Guire *dit* La Rose.

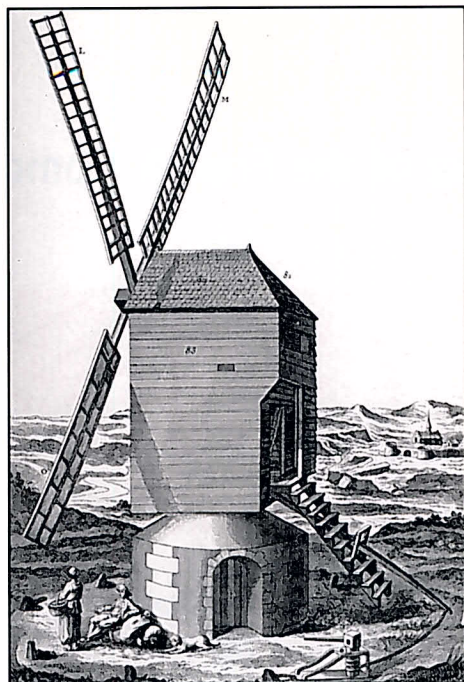
Not all the Canadians in the Illinois were settled and well-behaved colonists. The voyageurs led a hard and lonely life in the wilderness and trouble was apt to result when they came to a village where wine and women were available. The priests were disturbed by this and by the bad example thus set for the Indians, and complained to the governor. In 1711, a sergeant and a group of soldiers were sent up from the Gulf coast to Kaskaskia to arrest and discipline the offenders, but the Canadians escaped into the woods. From the pen of a soldier, Penicaut, we have a brief description of the village at this time.

Penicaut was most impressed by the church which had three chapels, a baptismal font and a bell with which to summon the faithful to services. Both the French and the Kaskaskia Indians were farming the land, and oxen, cows, sheep, pigs and chickens were fairly plentiful. Flour was the important agricultural produce of the area. Wheat grew well here, which it did not do in the moist Gulf region.

Ils ont, proche leur village, trois moulin pour moudre leurs grains, savoir: un moulin a vent, appartenant aux RR.PP Jesuites, qui est fort employe part les habitans, et deux autres moulins a cheval, que les Illinois possedent en propre.



Bread oven.



French windmill.

[translation] They have near their village three mills for grinding their grain, namely a windmill belonging to the Jesuit fathers, which is mainly used by the colonists, and two others, horsemills, which the Illinois Indians themselves own.

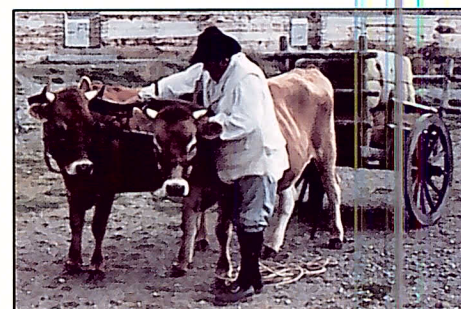
The voyageurs continued to create problems, and in 1718, the Company of the Indies, which had the trading concession from the Crown, posted officers and soldiers to the Illinois Country with orders to establish a fort, to bring order to the country and to protect it from Indian attack. Pierre Dugue de Boisbriant, a cousin of Bienville, governor of Louisiana, was the commanding officer. He and his contingent of sixty-eight soldiers, *engages* [hired workers] and convicts came up river in January of 1718 to Kaskaskia, the population of which included both Kaskaskia and Metchigamia Indians and the French settlers.

Friction existed between the French *habitants* and the Indian community, due in part to the casual attitude of the Indians about confining their animals. The French resented the damage done by pigs in the fields and the depredations of dogs on their poultry.

The priests also decried the influence of the voyageurs on the Indian women and felt the Indians would keep the faith better at a greater distance from the French. Boisbriant attempted to solve these problems by dividing the community into three parts. The French remained at the original location, the Kaskaskia moved six miles up the Kaskaskia River, and the Metchigamia removed sixteen miles up the Mississippi to a reserve established for them (probably the first Indian reserve in the United States).

Boisbriant's other mission was to construct a fort to serve as a military post for protection of the inhabitants and as the seat of military and civil government in the Illinois Country. Fort de Chartres was completed about 1720 and named in honor of the Duc de Chartres, son of the regent of France.

How was the location of Fort de Chartres selected? The reasons for Boisbriant's choice are not clear. Fort de Chartres is sixteen miles upstream from Kaskaskia, which was then the only sizable settlement in the Illinois Country. Several possible explanations for its location can be advanced. Much of the land between Kaskaskia and the fort was marshy and heavily wooded, the vicinity of the fort may have been the only place where prairie reached the bank of the Mississippi. An island existed in the river near the fort, providing shelter and a good landing for boats. The site may also have been convenient for ferrying workers to and from the lead mines which were on the Missouri side of the river around Potosi and Old Mines. However, as extant documents do not give a specific reasons for the location of the fort, we are left to speculate.



Habitant.

LOUIS XV - 1715-1774

Economy and Trade

LOUIS XIV 1643 + 1715



In 1711, the monopoly for trade in Louisiana was granted by the King to a Monsieur Antoine Crozat, who shortly thereafter found his expenses greater than his profits, and in 1717, the concession was transferred to John Law's Company of the West. As part of Law's attempt to revitalize the French economy, Law founded a bank and his Company of the West absorbed a number of other trading concessions to become known as the Company of the Indies.

Vast speculation in the new company occurred, eventually causing its shares to become overinflated, bringing about the collapse of the bank in 1721. The Company of the Indies survived, but hopes for the development of Louisiana were dimmed.

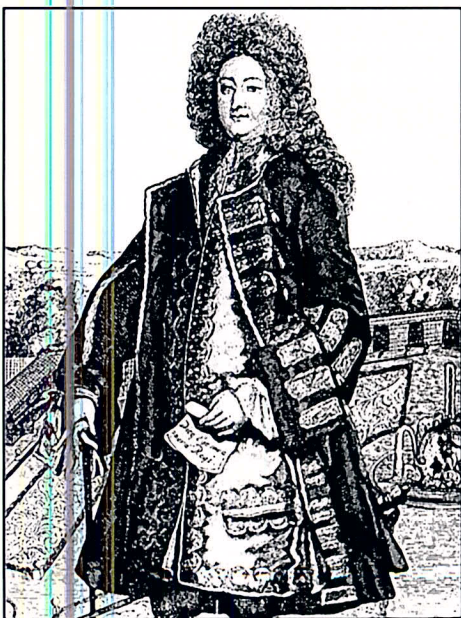
The Company of the Indies, in return for a monopoly on trade, had certain obligations to the Crown. It was to bring over colonists, increase agriculture, import slaves and search for mines. Exploring for minerals, particularly gold and silver, was an impor-

The voyageurs from the Illinois, for whom we were beginning to fear, have at last arrived today loaded with some flour, tallow, hams, bear grease, and furs...

tant goal; it was hoped that the lead mines would produce, not only lead, but silver as well. The mines were located on the west side of the river in present Missouri and most of the miners and slaves needed for working the mines lived there.

In 1731, the Company of the Indies reported that it had built forts, supplied the garrisons for them, cleared land and even built a city (New Orleans). But having gone to this great expense, it had experienced serious reversals due in part to an uprising by the Natchez Indians in 1729. The Company requested and received permission to return the colony to the jurisdiction of the King, and so it remained until the end of the French regime in 1763.

Trade in the Illinois Country was based mainly on agricultural products. The rich bottomlands were highly productive: corn [maize], wheat and rye flourished there. Flour production was extensive. The mills



John Law.

Het Grote Tafereel, etc.



Joseph Arr. Maclean

"Evening Bivouac on the Missouri," Karl Bodmer, 1809-1893.

"Those boats are from Canada in the Batteaux form and wide in perportion to their length. Their length about 30 feet and the width 8 feet & pointed bow and stern, flat bottom and rowing six ores only..."

William Clark, Saturday, 20th Sepr. 1806

were all privately owned and included watermills, horsemills and windmills for grinding flour, and bolting mills for the production of white flour. The bread consumed in the area was white bread and not, as is sometimes assumed, bread made from coarsely ground whole meal. Many thousands of pounds of white flour were shipped annually from the Illinois to New Orleans—50,000 to 100,000 pounds in a single convoy. In addition to the flour, loads of onions, hams, dried peas, salted buffalo tongues, bear oil, salt, hides and furs were sent down river.

These goods were carried in convoys of *bateaux*, large flat-bottomed boats, which were constructed in Illinois. In 1746, Jean Baptiste Aubuchon, a boat builder of Kaskaskia, made an agreement with Andre Roy and Jacques Gaudefois, traders from Detroit, saying that he would construct two *bateaux*. Each *bateau* was to have a burthen of 17,000 *livres*, not including the men and supplies. [A *livre* is about the same weight as a pound; the value of the *livre* varied from province to province in France at this time.]

“It is understood that if they carry more, so much the better for the Sieurs Roy and Gaudefroy and if they carry less the said Aubuchon will make reparation to them according to the damages they suffer.”

The *bateaux* were to be delivered at the port of Kaskaskia in January complete with oars, seats, and rudders, caulked and ready to sail. Roy and Gaudefois promised to supply the nails, the iron work for the rudder, the tow and pitch for caulking. The contractor was to supply the rest.

Also used for transport were *pirogues*, hollowed out tree trunks. The *pirogues* were constructed from giant timbers and were said to be large enough to carry forty or fifty men.

Official convoys from the Illinois made two round trips to New Orleans each year for trading and obtaining supplies. Private individuals also traveled the river with trade materials. The downstream trip was fairly swift, taking two to three weeks, but the return trip against the current of the river was three to four months. Public notice was given prior to the departure of the convoy, alerting anyone who might want to ship goods down river.

On fais a scavoir a tous ceux qui veulent descendre a la mer et faire descendre leurs effets dans les bateaux du Roy de se rendre lundy sixieme may au fort de Chartre pour presenter leur memoire des effets quilz auront a embarquer dans les dits bateau a Messieurs de La Buissoniere et La loere Flaucour..

[translation] Notice to everyone who wishes to go down to the sea and to send their goods in the boats of the King, to appear by Monday the sixth of May at Fort de Chartres to give an account of the goods which will be sent in the said boats to Mr. de la Buissoniere and De La Loere Flaucour..

Voyageurs were hired to man the boats; part of their compensation was the right to carry merchandise to be traded for their own profit. One of these contracts is given below.

On the twenty-sixth of December, one thousand seven hundred and thirty-one, before us, the notary in the Illinois, and the undersigned witness has appeared Mr. Robilliard, habitant at Fort de Chartres, who by these presents has contracted and contracts to Louis Thomas, also a habitant to descend to and return from New Orleans in his pirogue to perform during the course of the voyage everything that the said Robilliard can do for the profit and utility of the said Louis Thomas. In payment and wages for which, the said Thomas promises to give and pay to the said Robilliard the sum of two hundred livres in copper coin or in money current at the said place of New Orleans and he further promises to give passage in his pirogue for eight hams and upon the return trip for the merchandise which shall come from his wages, and to feed the said Robilliard during the course of the said voyage.

The choice of a leader for the convoy was made by the governor of the province of New Orleans as a mark of special privilege and favor. Many of the officers and soldiers who accompanied the convoy brought goods back up to the Illinois for their own profit, giving rise to frequent complaints that personal goods received preferential treatment and that military supplies destined for the

Royal Storehouse were left behind on the pretext of lack of space.

...the person privileged begins by filled all the bateaux intended for the convoy with his goods or with those which the merchants furnish him so space is hardly to be found to load the goods of the king. To do this I was obliged to furnish a fourth bateau on the departure of the last convoy. Otherwise the King's goods would have remained here.

Misuse of goods destined for the Royal Storehouse was also common. A certain Monsieur Tonty while in charge of a convoy one autumn, had brandy drawn from two casks which were part of the cargo. Then he ordered two men to replace the missing brandy with water.

They remonstrated with him to the effect that it would be better to leave the casks broached rather than to fill them with water, to which the said Sieur de Tonty replied that it would be thought that the water had been added either onboard ship or in the storehouses of the company.

An official complained about still another convoy commander.

Everyone assures us that he and his detachment have been continuously drunk during the whole voyage. That will doubtless cause a generous leakage in the liquors which I had loaded on the king's account.

Nevertheless, these convoys were vital to the survival of lower Louisiana, which was unable to produce an adequate food supply for its colonists. New Orleans was largely dependent upon supplies from France or from the Illinois Country because wheat could not be grown to maturity in its climate. An explanation of the Illinois colony's importance for New Orleans was given to the Company of the Indies in these words:

If war prevented you from having the sea free, this post alone could bring assistance in flour, meat and other things necessary to life to all the country that is situated on the banks of the Mississippi.

Often, it was only the arrival of a convoy that kept famine from devastating lower Louisiana.

The voyageurs from the Illinois, for whom we were beginning to fear, have at last arrived today loaded with some flour, tallow, hams, bear grease, and furs... this slight assistance will not fail to give some relief to the lower part of the colony which was lacking in every provision.

Travel up and down the Mississippi was not without peril. The river itself was dangerous; travelers speak of an overnight rise in the water level of four to eight feet. There were also the hazards of currents and of snags—trees just below the surface of the water that might catch and overturn a boat. And the mosquitoes, everyone agreed, were the worst hazard of all.

Although most of the Indians who lived along the river were nominally friendly, during periods of warfare, such as the Natchez War in 1729, voyageurs were massacred enroute. Also the Chickasaws, who were affiliated with the British and thus hostile to the French, might make forays into the region at any time.

Convoys were uncomfortable at best and deadly at their worst. Often a person planning such a trip made his will before leaving Illinois as did the Sieur Franchomme.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen. If it does not please God that I might return from the voyage I am going to undertake, I pray to Him with all my soul that He may be merciful to me and grant me pardon and remission of my sins. I ask, in this case, that my wife have prayers said to God for the repose of my soul, and that she bear herself in such wise as shall render her equally estimable in the sight of God and of man...

Since I owe the Company on my own account for clothing, I shall ask my wife to sell my clothes for wheat to pay the debt. The only debt I believe I have, other than that owed the Company is sixty livres of flour to Monsieur Bassee, innkeeper in New Orleans. I beg my wife to pay it. Monsieur de Laloeer owes me fifty-seven livres. We owe to Pierre Bourdon and to Baillarjon each



18th century French coins.

two hundred livres in beaver which is not recorded anywhere else.

The Illinois Country was not only an agricultural base, but a trading depot as well. Goods shipped up from New Orleans were transferred from the Illinois base to other posts; from Fort de Chartres they went to Vincennes, Cahokia and Peoria. Those combined military and trading posts were garrisoned from Fort de Chartres also. Kaskaskia and Fort de Chartres were the starting points for trade up the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio Rivers and centers for trading companies. The company agents, after stocking up on provisions and trade goods, went out to posts among the Osage, Fox or other Indian tribes.

It was in the winter of 1763 that the New Orleans firm of Maxent, Laclède and Company received the trading rights along the Upper Missouri. Pierre Laclède Liguist arrived at Fort de Chartres in November and wintered there, purchasing a house from Jean Girardin, a private in the troops of the Marine. Using this as his base, he searched for a good location for his trading post. An elevated site near the confluence of three great rivers, the Mississippi, Missouri and Illinois, was selected and became the post and then the village of St. Louis.

Prices varied greatly from post to post with the cost of imported items climbing rapidly as the distance upriver increased. It was necessary always in contracts to specify the price in terms of location: flour at Illinois prices, brandy at port prices, or beaver at Ouiatenon prices, for example [near Lafayette, Indiana].

Coins were always extremely scarce, as both copper and silver coins flowed back to France to pay debts there and were hard to keep in the colony. A variety of methods was used to circumvent this problem: card money [playing cards countersigned by of-

ficials to represent a certain amount of money], bills of exchange, treasury notes and other paper currency.

IOUs were often used in lieu of cash. If Provencal held a note indicating that Lesperance owed him 1000 livres, then Provencal might use this note to pay a debt to Jean Prunet. The collection of the debt then fell on Prunet's shoulders. Such notes were negotiable currency, and when one was lost or mislaid, it was necessary to cancel it in writing.

Payment in kind or by merchandise was particularly common in the early years of the colony.

Said Dutrou promises to pay to said Finet the sum of 200 livres in merchandise at the store price, payable at Christmas next.

Even houses and land were sold for merchandise when money was scarce.

I the undersigned confess to have sold, ceded and conveyed unto Antoine Francois Pelle dit La Plume, one house with its lot and enclosures...for the quantity of one hundred and thirty walnut boards...


...the quantity of two thousand livres of flour and three hundred livres of bacon for a house and lot...

Although the colony always had within itself the resources for survival, items such as cloth, iron, guns, gunpowder, medicines, and goods to use in trade with the Indians were imported. Luxuries also came from abroad: women's high-heeled shoes, sugar, ivory billiard balls, books, coffee and brandy. Glassware, tableware and crockery were all imported, as were the iron and brass kettles for cooking.



Earthenware bowl and red glazed pot belonging to Mrs. Ruth Gilster, Chester.

Land and Village

 Concessions of land were made to individuals by the King or his representative. Philippe Renault, a partner in the Company operating mines, in addition to mining land, was given a large concession north of Fort de Chartres to grow food for his enterprise. He in turn, granted parcels of land from his concession to new arrivals, and the settlement was known as St. Philippe after his patron saint. This location was destroyed by the river in the early nineteenth century.



Philippe Renault caricature.

Very large grants also were made to several other individuals, including Lieutenant Pierre Melique, Nicolas Chassin and Boisbriant, the commandant. These large grants were split up rapidly through further concessions being made by the grantees to new colonists. The land grants were generally one or two arpents [an arpent is about 192 linear feet] by 50 arpents in depth, extending in long, narrow strips from the Mississippi River to the bluffs at the edge of the river valley. Near the water's edge were lots where the *habitants* built their houses, farming the land further back from the river.

Although the American surveyors were to lay out the rest of the land in township

...a house for the said Lefevre twenty-one feet in length by sixteen feet in width of posts of mulberry or walnut and seven feet high to the beams.

squares in 1809, the long, narrow grants made over 270 years ago still show on the modern plat maps.

In Canada when a large tract of land was granted to an individual, he became the *seigneur* [or lord] of the *seignior* [concession]. As part of the agreement of concession, the *seigneur* was obliged to grant most of these lands to other settlers in exchange for *cens et rentes* [tax and rent] and for three or four days of work per year for him on his lands. The *seigneur* was the only one allowed to own a flour mill, and all the inhabitants had to bring their wheat to his mill to be ground. In the Illinois Country, this system was not enforced. The land granted by the commandant or from one of the large concessions, was given in fee simple; that is, the land was owned outright with no obligations of work or rent due to anyone.

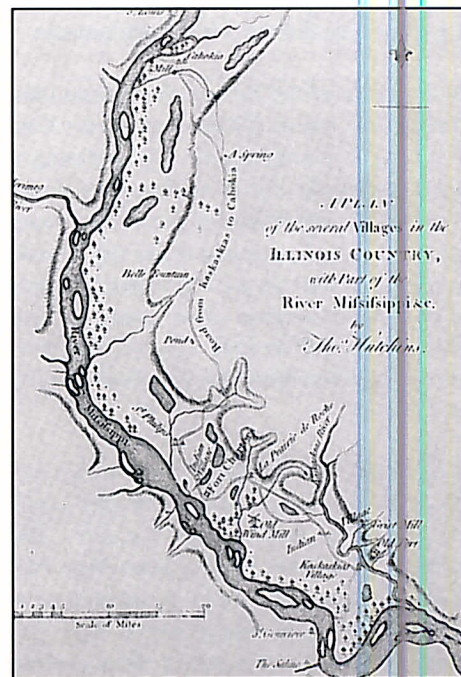
There are references to the concession of Ste. Therese Langloisiere as a *seignior*, the area now the village of Prairie du Rocher, and to the concession of St. Philippe as the *seignior* of Renault. However, sales of the granted lands there going from one individual to another bear such statements as the following:

The land is of the domain of the St. Philippe concession and has charged towards it the taxes, rent or dues, but the said vendor cannot tell the amount of these having paid nothing up to this day.

A typical individual concession reads as follows:

The Provincial Council—on the request made to us by Jacques Catherine to grant him land to settle upon, we in virtue of the powers granted to us by the Royal Indies Company have granted to the said Jacques Catherine one arpent of land by fifty in depth, running SW 1/4S, the depth NE 1/4N bounding on one side the land of Hebert the younger, on the other to the commons of Fort de Chartres...on the condition that he shall settle there and improve the land. Failing this the said land shall be reunited to the Domain of the said Company after a year and a day, at Fort de Chartres this 2nd of May, 1724.

These concessions and settlements developed into small villages. There were seven French villages founded during the French regime: Cahokia, around the Indian Mission there; Kaskaskia; Prairie du Rocher; St.



Map of the French colonial area by Thomas Hutchins, 1771.

Philippe; the village around Fort de Chartres, which had various names; Ste. Genevieve, established sometime in the 1750s and St. Louis, developed in the mid-1760s.

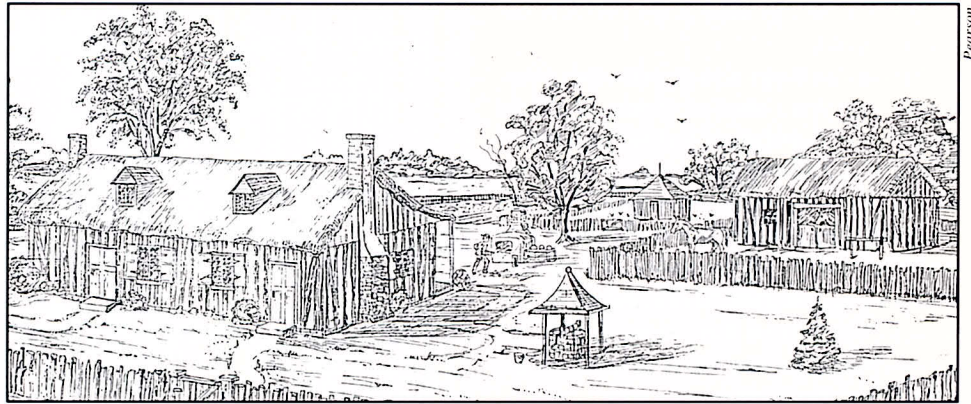
In their plan, structures and organization, the villages in the Illinois reflected those of France.

Just as the English settlers on the seaboard brought with them their English household goods and their English institutions...so these French of the Mississippi Valley transplanted from the heart of France their homes with their utensils and ornaments and the village community in which they and their ancestors had lived.

The villages were the areas of concentrated settlement, but many houses were strung out along the roads that connected each settled knot with the next. Travel by land was common between settlements; roads ran from Kaskaskia to Prairie du Rocher and the Fort, on to St. Philippe and up onto the bluffs and north to Cahokia. Other roads ran from Ste. Genevieve into the mining areas. In addition to horses, light carriages are mentioned in the inventories. Carts and sledges were pulled by oxen along these roads too.

The villages were laid out in lots that were separated by the main roads and cross streets. These lots were either one arpent or 25 toises square [a linear arpent was about 192 feet and a toise was 6.39 feet]. Most houses were constructed of upright posts with *bousillage* [clay mixed with straw] filled in between the posts. The houses might be *poteaux en terre* [posts set directly into the ground], or *poteaux en solle* [posts placed on a wooden sill]. Mulberry was the most commonly used wood because of its ability to withstand dampness, but the life expectancy of a wooden house in the bottomlands was only about twenty years. Buildings were constructed also *piece en piece* [squared logs laid horizontally]. Stone houses and barns were constructed with limestone quarried from the nearby bluffs.

Renault built a large stone building, probably a combination residence and office, which is described in later land transactions.



Typical French village of the 18th century. Drawing by Gordon Peckham.

...une maison de pierre couverte en bardeau avec quatre cheminées appelée la concession des mines située au village de St. Philippe du Grand Marais sus paroisse de Ste. Anne. La dite maison composée de quatre chambres, les cloisons de planches et garnis de planches haut et bas...

[translation] A stone house with a shingled roof and four chimneys, called the concession of the mines located in the village of St. Philippe du Grand Marais [of the big swamp] in the parish of Ste. Anne. The said house has four rooms with board partitions and is floored upstairs and down.

The average house was about sixteen by twenty-five feet in size, and contained two main rooms, partitioned off sleeping areas, and had two doors and windows. The roofs were supported by massive trusses pegged into place and were steeply pitched. The roofs were covered with thatch, or more commonly, with wooden shingles. The loft might be floored to serve as additional sleeping rooms or storage space.

Depending on the size of the house, there would be one or two fireplaces. Most chimneys were constructed of stone, but a few were made of clay laid over a framework of sticks. The latter were more apt to catch fire, although there are surprisingly few references in the records to fires. Many houses had a *galerie* or porch on two or all four sides and a small cellar for storage. The eighteenth century houses remaining in Ste. Genevieve still show many of these architectural details.

A contract describes the details of construction for one house:

...a house for the said Lefevre twenty-one feet in length by sixteen feet in width of posts of mulberry or walnut and seven feet high to the beams...double beams of four and a half inches thick by eight wide; one door on one of the long walls and two windows; the door to be two feet two inches wide and five feet four inches high; the windows two feet wide and three and a half high... the said house to be plastered...

In 1723, the storehouse of the Company of the Indies, located in the first Fort de Chartres, had a central hallway walled with whitewashed tongue-and-groove boards and two offices on each side. The exterior had folding doors, and there were shuttered casement windows. In 1727, a new Commandant's residence was built; measuring fifty-five by thirty feet, it had a central hallway with a store room at the back. On each side of the hall was an apartment with two rooms and a kitchen. Each apartment contained a walnut cupboard with double doors, walnut side board, dresser, kneading trough, tables with folding leaves and chairs.

The interior walls of houses were whitewashed and sometimes paneled and plastered. The furnishings might include drop-leaf tables, chairs, armchairs, chests, sideboards, cupboards, etc.

A bedstead with curtains was an important piece of furniture. The marriage contract often specified its ownership in the event of the death of one of the couple. Furniture was made of walnut, so plentiful lo-

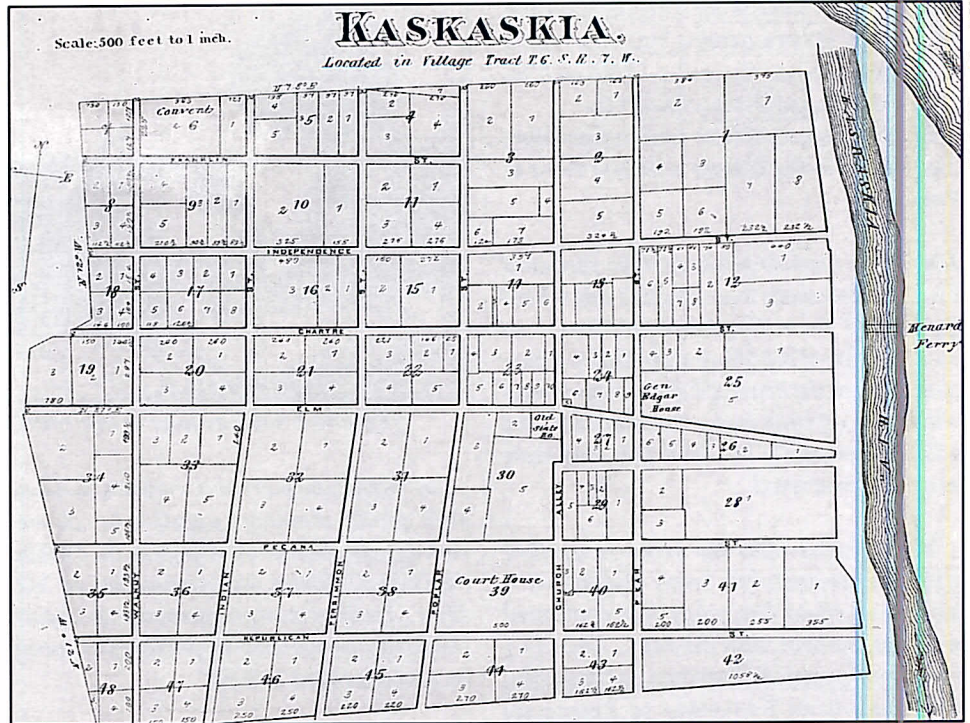
cally that even pig troughs are noted as being of walnut!

Private dwellings also served other functions; they were used as shops, boarding houses or inns and many had billiard rooms. Billiards apparently was a very popular entertainment. An extra room attached to the main building would house the billiard table and equipment. An inventory of a billiard lists both large and small balls; the game was quite different from that played today. An ivory billiard ball was found in archaeological work at Kaskaskia.

The lots were fenced with posts and within the fence beside the house was a garden, which provided most of the family's vegetables. The lot also might contain a well, pigeon house, stable and hen house. On the lot would be the bread oven too, a domed structure about six feet long and three feet wide, made of puddled clay laid over a wooden framework and fired to a cement-like hardness. Large barns were built on the village lot or on nearby farming strips; sixty by forty feet was a common size for a barn.

Each village had its own church. The parish of the Immaculate Conception was at Kaskaskia of course; the parish of Ste. Anne was at the village of Fort de Chartres with chapels at Prairie du Rocher [St. Joseph's] and St. Philippe [the Visitation]. Holy Family mission remained at Cahokia and St. Joachim's was at Ste. Genevieve. The first church in St. Louis, dedicated to St. Louis, was constructed in 1770.

Specifications exist for a proposed stone church to be constructed at Kaskaskia in 1740. The church was to be seventy-two feet long by forty-six feet wide with a semi-circular apse twenty-six feet in diameter. The church was to be lighted by ten windows in each long wall and to have a main door fifteen feet high and eight feet broad. The church of Ste. Anne at the Fort de Chartres village was a simple frame construction, post on sill, fifty by thirty feet in size with walls eleven feet high. The churches each elected churchwardens to regulate the affairs of the vestry and certain aspects of the community's social life.




Plat of Kaskaskia, 1875.



Early Ste. Genevieve mural at Missouri Capitol in Jefferson City, Missouri.

Population and Government

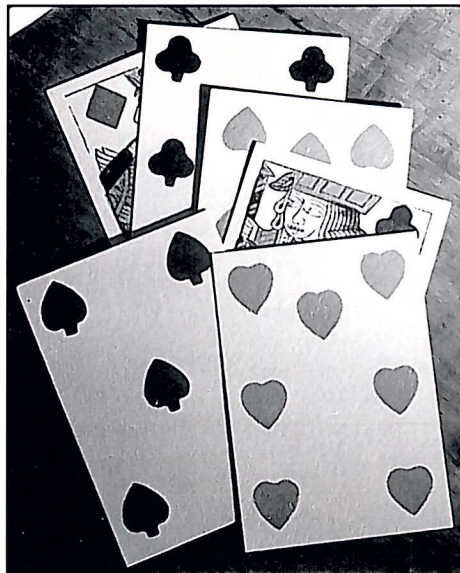
 The colony never grew very large; a census taken in 1723 by Diron D'Artagette, the Inspector General, gives the total number of persons at Fort de Chartres, Kaskaskia and Cahokia as 334. This figure does not include the garrison at Fort de Chartres, numbering around seventy persons at the time, but only the *habitants* and resident traders. In 1732, Fort de Chartres, Kaskaskia and St. Philippe are listed as having 388 inhabitants, and by 1752, the population had risen to about 2000. These figures again omit the garrison, which generally numbered between 200 and 300 men in the later period.

In their Royal Charter, the Company of the Indies was directed to encourage immigration in order to increase the productivity of Louisiana, but the yearly quota of immigrants set in the charter was never met. Why was this rich and productive area so underpopulated? The French government had little interest in colonization as a goal in itself. Due to the long series of wars in Europe, France was depopulated and needed her citizens at home for farming and for the armies. Louisiana was viewed as a potential source of wealth for the homeland, as Mexico was to Spain, an alluring prospect to a government impoverished by wars, extravagance and inflation. But when gold and silver were not found in Louisiana, official interest in the province faded.

However, the colony's strategic importance in preventing British or Spanish encroachment into the interior of the continent, and the contributions of its agricultural production were recognized.

If only the strength and solidity of settlements are considered, the decision should be to people Louisiana on the upper river. It should draw its chief strength and its principal resources from the Post of the Illinois...[which] seems placed where it can

In 1732 Fort de Chartres, Kaskaskia, and St. Philippe are listed as having 388 inhabitants and by 1752 the population had risen to about 2000.



French playing cards.

always, despite all the navies in the world, export grain and meat.

The Illinois Country was potentially a major power center for the French, available for building a French empire in North America that could dominate the entire upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes regions. Had this potential been realized, the relative strengths of France and Britain in the New World would have been greatly altered.

The Illinois colony did possess a status different from other posts in Louisiana, not

only because of its ideal position to control the important central valley, but also because it was one of the few settlements that remained consistently inhabited and stable throughout the French regime. Its unique position was recognized in 1722 by the formation of a Provincial Council to govern the Illinois Country. In 1716, the King had established a Superior Council in New Orleans as the governmental body regulating all military and civil matters in Louisiana.

The first Provincial Council of the Illinois consisted of four members: Boisbriant as first lieutenant of the King, commanding in the Illinois and serving as Judge; Marc Antoine de la Loire des Ursins, principal clerk of the Company of the Indies and first councilor; Nicolas Michel Chassin (remember him?), Keeper of the Royal Storehouse and second councilor; Andre Perillau as clerk for the court and secretary of the Council. Additional members were appointed to the Council to hear criminal cases.

The cases that came before the Provincial Council were varied and the few that survive contain interesting vignettes of the life in the colony. A certain Claude Chetivau appeared before the Council twice, once for attempted desertion, at which time the following description of his background and appearance is given:

...we went to the prisons of Fort de Chartres where we found a man about five feet four inches tall with curly gray hair, gray beard, gray eyes and an aquiline nose.... We have asked him his name, that of his father and mother, the place of his birth, his age, his trade and his religion. He replied his name was Claude Chetivau, son of Nicolas Chetivau and Antoinette Lagruy, native of Soissons, diocese of the said place, fifty-five years of age, cook by trade and of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman faith.

He was found guilty of attempting to desert. His sentence? He was ordered to stay! He did so and promptly got into more difficulties; he was accused of cheating at cards. Jacques Brochard claimed that the deck of cards used in a game won by Chetivau was marked, and he accused Chetivau of defrauding him of 600 livres and wanted restitution and damages. Chetivau's defense was that Brochard marked the cards after the game was done, and the debt was paid.

Thus it is a frivolous pretext on the part of the said Brochard in order to gain restitu-

tion of his loss, to allege after the fact that the deck of cards, which he has in his possession and could easily have falsified or cut however he wished, was indeed falsified or cut by said Chetivau, which the said Chetivau formally denies. And if such reasoning is allowed, the said Brochard would have an unfair advantage; that is, when he wins as he often does, he may keep silent and when he loses, he will not have to pay.

The final disposition of the case is not given. Chetivau brought several witnesses in his favor, and he may have won his case. Guillaume Liberge witnessed and later

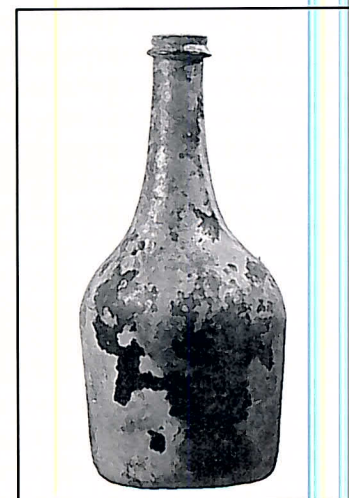
testified in court about a fight at the house of Daniel Richard in Kaskaskia. Taunts were exchanged between Richard and a man named Catin; they cursed and ripped each other's shirts. Still fighting, they tumbled into another room where another Richard, nicknamed the Parisian, was sitting. Liberge said he tried to calm the dispute by offering a shirt to replace Catin's torn garment. Snubbed by the combatants, Liberge retired to the kitchen to smoke his pipe in peace. Shortly thereafter, he heard both men shouting they were being murdered. He paused to get a candle, and upon trying to enter the room found Richard the Parisian with an axe in his hand, blocking the door and threatening to break his head if he came any further. However, Liberge did eventually succeed in separating Catin and Daniel Richard who were still grappling with each other. The two Richards left and Liberge tended to Catin who was wounded in the back by an axe blow.

Both Richards were put on trial for the disturbance, and each accused the other of striking the blow from which Catin eventually died. Before his death, Catin told the surgeon, Rene Roy, and also the Royal Attorney, Joseph Buchet, that Daniel Richard was the one who struck him. After many witnesses were interviewed, the case was finally settled. Both Richards were fined 100 sous, to be given to the poor of the parish.



French Colonial Infantry (Compagnies Franches de la Marine) in North America and the West Indies, circa 1740-1763.

Company of Military Historians, 1972



Brandy bottle.

Margaret Kimball Brown

Life in the Community



The French villages in the Illinois had ways to meet other social and legal needs that were not served by the Provincial Council or the church. Among the other officials was a *huissier* [bailiff], one at Kaskaskia and one at Fort de Chartres, whose duties were to serve summons, bring in miscreants and to read “*in a loud and audible voice*” at the church door after Mass any important decrees or announcements of public auctions. Another official, called a syndic, was elected to enforce the ordinances concerning the commons and other decisions made by the occasional assemblies of the settlers.

The commons and common fields attached to each village were used by all settlers for grazing their cattle and horses. Ordinances were passed giving the date when cattle were to be allowed into the common fields to graze and when they had to be removed to allow for planting. Each land owner whose property adjoined the commons was responsible for maintaining his section of fence, and this needed frequent enforcement.

An important figure in the busy, litigious life of the settlers was the notary. He was called on to write marriage contracts, wills, estate inventories and settlements, acknowledgments of debt, payments of debt, sales of real estate, sales of slaves, contracts for business and trade, building contracts and specifications, and numerous other documents. The notary was often clerk of court also and kept transcripts of the proceedings, taking depositions and recording the testimony of witnesses and the decisions rendered by the court. It was a full-time profession combining elements of present-day lawyer, county clerk, court stenographer and notary public. The notary collected fees for his work and kept a copy in his files of each document he executed. These files, later turned over to the British, have given us most

...a woman's outfit of striped satin lined with taffeta, rose colored, with one pair of silk hose, shoes, socks, and mitts...



Jerry Burchell

Re-enactor portraying a French blacksmith.

of our knowledge of life in French Illinois and are the source of many of the quotations in this book.

No government official was directly responsible for social welfare, that is, to see to the needs of the indigent, the elderly, orphans or widows. However, this was managed through other legal mechanisms within the community. Children were placed in the care of an administrator and guardian, who was responsible for managing the minors' property until they were of age. Legal majority was not attained until twenty-five years of age, except through a special emancipation petition.

Widows generally remarried quickly and the new husband would agree in the marriage contract to take responsibility for the children of the previous marriage.

The relationship as a baptismal godparent held a responsibility for orphaned children. Jean Baptiste Becquet and his wife agreed to take the orphaned Pierre Texier, Becquet's godson to live with them to teach him Becquet's trade of locksmithing.

Many of the elderly, when they found the burden of farming too much for them, arranged to make a donation of their goods and lands to a relative or friend, who would in exchange agree to care for them until their deaths. In 1751, Jean Brunet *dit* Bourbonnais and his wife Elisabeth made a gift of their house, lot and goods to Pierre Aubuchon, their daughter Elisabeth's husband. They also forgave the rest of the debt owed them by Aubuchon for a house he had purchased from them. Aubuchon promised to care for them and maintain them for the remainder of their lives.

In 1742, Antoine Ple *dit* La Plume, another early settler, donated to Louis de La Margue de Marin and his wife, all his property, consisting of a house, slave, livestock and furniture upon the condition that they maintain him for the rest of his life, give him 100 *livres* a year spending money and at his death, pay his funeral expenses.

What care and maintenance involved is detailed more fully in another such donation. Nicolas Boyer and his wife Dorothee Olivier agreed to care for her parents, Jean and Marthe Olivier, for the rest of their lives in return for donation of all their property. The Oliviers will be given:

A house or a room appropriate for the lodging of two venerable persons, well-heated, snug and sheltered from rain and bad weather. If they are obliged to have their meals and housekeeping separately, they will

be allowed to keep all the furniture, pots, pans and kettles included in the donation. They will be furnished for each year with:

1500 livres of good, sound, true and merchantable flour (for whose storage they are responsible)

- 30 cords of fire wood
- 5 fat pigs
- 4 cartloads of maize
- 2 minots [a dry measure] of salt
- 1/2 livre of pepper
- 2 minots of peas
- 1 minot of beans
- 30 pots of bear oil
- 30 livres of suet
- 1/2 livre of candle wick
- 25 livres of good smoking tobacco

the sum of 200 livres to buy clothing and linens for their personal use during the course of the year, coverings for their bed, which consist in this country of tanned buffalo robes, to be replaced as necessary. The grantees promise to have their clothing and linen washed and cleaned as necessary and to furnish generally all they will need both in health and in sickness, medicines, surgeon's visits, meat and poultry for broths and consommés, and people to nurse them and after the death of each of them, to have them interred.

Illegitimate children, by order to the Provincial Council, were supported by the father, as indicated by one case:

To Monsieur the judge in the Illinois Jacques Bernard dit St. Jacques humbly petitions you saying that his wife has had a child with one Pierre Hulin during his absence at the port, which causes him great distress. He has resource to you, Monsieur, to beg you most humbly to do him justice in this event and that it may please you to order the said Pierre Hulin to take charge of his child...and that the said Pierre Hulin be condemned to pay for the feeding of the child from his birth to the present. With the scandal he has created which reflects both on the church and the said St. Jacques, and that the said Pierre Hulin may be condemned to pay all expenses, damages and interest.



Re-enactors portraying French women in garden.

There was no unemployment problem however, for there was always enough work to go around. Agricultural workers were needed to work the farm land and to clear and prepare new land for production. Trade demanded strong, tireless men to paddle the boats and to haul heavy packs across portages. Agriculture and trade were the major occupations of the villagers and every *habitant* had a large garden to produce food for the table and for winter needs.

Other more specialized trades and occupations were present such as roofer, carpenter, cabinet maker, gunsmith, blacksmith, tailor, innkeeper, baker, laundress, shop keeper, cooper, cartwright, sawyer, mason, boat builder, vintner, and brewer. There was even a schoolmaster, one Francois Cottin, who paid Pierre Aubuchon for an arpent of land by contracting for two years to teach one of his children to read and write. In the deed, Cottin agrees to "push the child as far as she is able to learn, to give him two lessons a day according to the custom of masters of this art, with assiduity and vigilance..." The use of both the feminine and masculine pronouns in the document leaves it uncertain whether the child was a girl or boy.

Books are mentioned in a few household inventories and some inhabitants were edu-



Re-enactor at 18th century lathe.

cated as demonstrated by their handwriting or signatures. Others laboriously wrote or printed their names and probably could write little else. Many could not write at all and made an "X" on their contracts. Some of