

# Section 1

## The French Come to Louisiana

As you read, look for:

- early French explorers,
- the first settlements in Louisiana, and
- vocabulary term **colony**.

The French wanted to expand their trading area in the New World by finding a river that would take them to China or to the Indies. They talked of the *Northwest Passage*, that mysterious water route through the North American continent. In 1673, French fur trader Louis Joliet and Jesuit priest Father Marquette



Figure 17 Timeline: 1670–1740



1673 Joliet and Marquette explored upper Mississippi	1682 La Salle claimed Louisiana for France	1699 Iberville established Fort Maurepas	1712 Crozat became proprietor	1714 Natchitoches founded	1717 Company of the West became Louisiana proprietor	1718 New Orleans founded	1729 Natchez uprising	1736 Chickasaw War
1670 First settlement in South Carolina	1681 Philadelphia founded	1692 Witchcraft trials began in Salem, Massachusetts	1701 Cadillac founded Detroit	1713 Carolina divided into North and South Carolina	1729 Baltimore founded	1732 Benjamin Franklin published <i>Poor Richard's Almanac</i>	1740 The population of the thirteen British colonies reached 1.5 million	

# Connecting with U.S. History

## The Search for Trade Routes

Spices from China and beaver pelts from Canada triggered the contest to control North America. The powerful nations of Europe needed a shorter route to the spices and other exotic goods of the Far East. The explorers seeking this route found what they called the *New World* instead. When their ships delivered rich, new resources to the ports and palaces of England, Spain, and France, the race was on.

The rivalry expanded the struggle for military power and economic monopoly. At that time, the nations of Europe relied on an economic plan called mercantilism. As you learned in Chapter 3, under mercantilism a government expected its colonies to provide the raw materials the mother country needed for manufacturing *and* to serve as ready markets for the mother country's products.

This economic drive, plus their religious responsibilities, motivated the European rulers. Their struggle to control North America actually began on the Atlantic coast. The Spanish had established a colony at St. Augustine in 1565, and the English one at Jamestown in 1607.

The French established their first trading posts not on the Gulf Coast but in the cold Canadian north. They began trading with the local people for furs, including the beaver pelts that went to Europe to become fashionable hats. The hats became so popular that more and more furs were needed. This demand for Canadian furs provided the economic support that built New France (Canada).



**Map 23** North America, 1700

**Map Skill:** Which country controlled the interior of North America?

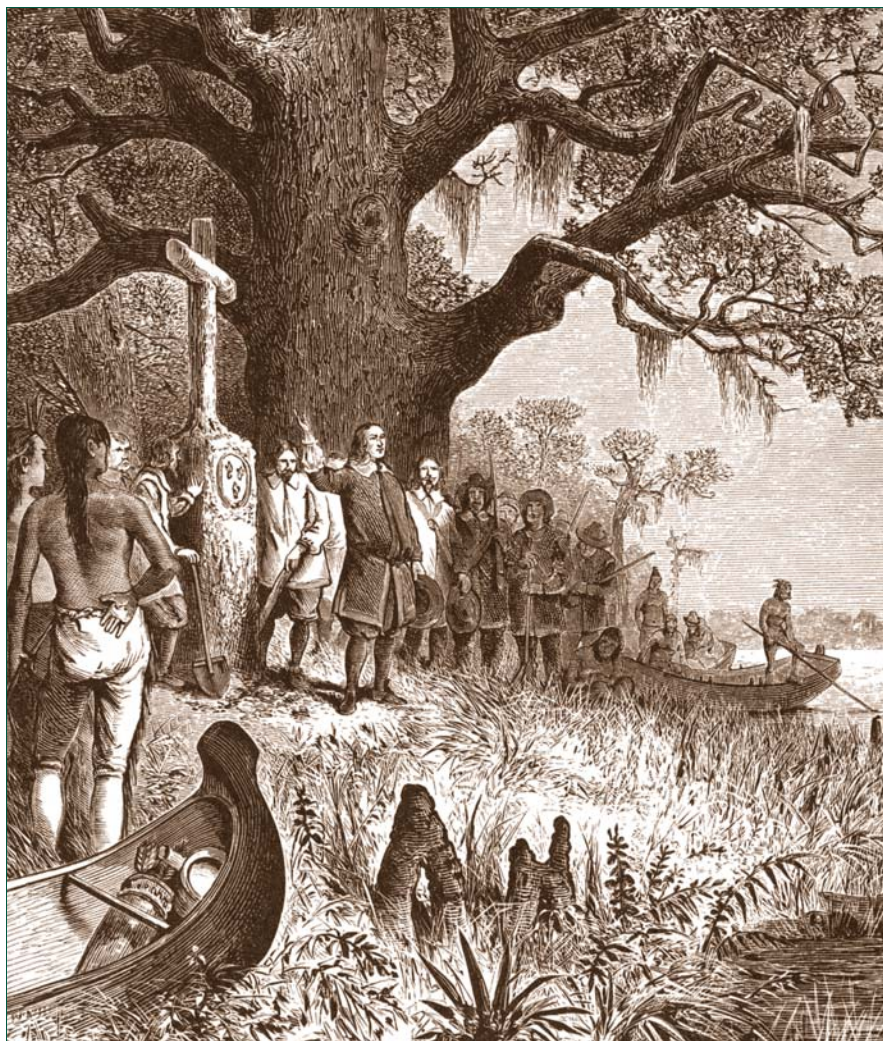
The Mississippi River and the Gulf Coast became the stage for the eighteenth-century struggle among the three European nations.

set out from Quebec to explore a great river that the Native Americans described. They thought the river might lead them across North America to Asia. In birchbark Indian canoes, the expedition paddled and floated down that river—the Mississippi. Indian food such as corn and dried buffalo meat nourished them on the trip.

The group made it as far down the Mississippi as the mouth of the Arkansas River. At a Quapaw Indian village, they learned that traveling further could be dangerous. The powerful tribes downriver could defend themselves with Spanish guns. Was there a Spanish fort somewhere to the south? Unwilling to risk an encounter with armed Indians or Spanish soldiers, the French exploring party returned north.

## Exploring the Mississippi

René Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle had long dreamed of finding a water route to China. The other Canadian traders laughed at him by calling his Canadian trading post LaChine (“China”). But La Salle’s goal and his hopes took him through years of delays until he was finally able to begin his journey.



**Above:** Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle (above) came to Canada from France and established a fur trading post near Montreal. **Left:** When La Salle learned of the exploration of Marquette and Joliet, he began his own adventure down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico in 1682. La Salle held a formal ceremony claiming the Mississippi Valley for France.



**Above:** La Salle's dream of finding a water route to China ended in 1687 when his men mutinied and murdered him.

His trip was made easier by his choice for his assistant, Henri de Tonti (TONE teh). A colorful character known for his bravery and courage, Tonti had lost a hand in battle. According to legend, he amputated the damaged arm himself. This story and his brave deeds earned him the respect of the Indians, who named him "Iron Hand."

La Salle set out from Canada with Tonti, soldiers, priests, and Indians with their families. They entered the upper Mississippi River in early February 1682. On April 9, they reached the mouth of the river. There, in a solemn and formal ceremony, La Salle claimed all the land drained by the Mississippi River for Louis XIV. He honored the French king by naming the land *Louisiana*, which means "Land of Louis." La Salle dressed in his ceremonial red coat trimmed with gold lace, which he had brought for the important event.

As part of the ceremony, a Catholic priest celebrated a mass with prayers and songs in Latin. Those words rang out from the natural levee in what is today Plaquemines Parish. The priest was with the group because one purpose of the trip was to spread the official religion of France.

Today the location is marked with a monument topped with a large wooden cross. The monument represents the large log cross La Salle placed on the spot. A brass plaque inscribed in French tells the story of La Salle and the Mississippi River.

Eager to continue his important mission, La Salle returned to France to report his discovery to King Louis XIV. The king rewarded him with a small fleet of ships and three hundred colonists and directed him to establish a new colony. (A **colony** is a group of people who settle in a distant land but who still keep their ties to their native land.)

La Salle's return trip was a failure. After sailing into the Gulf of Mexico, La Salle missed the mouth of the Mississippi River and ended up at Matagorda Bay in present-day Texas. The colonists were frightened and frustrated. Many had died at sea, and more died on the barren beach. La Salle then set out to lead the remaining colonists overland to Canada. The journey ended horribly when the men mutinied and murdered La Salle. La Salle's dreams had ended in a nightmare of disaster.

## Lagniappe

Henri de Tonti wore a metal artificial hand.

## The French Colony

La Salle did not establish a colony on the Gulf Coast. But his claim in the name of France set off a chain of events that led to the first French colony.

When the other European kings heard that France had claimed the Mississippi, they reacted strongly. France's claim was a threat to the New World colonies of Spain and Great Britain. The Spanish government built a fort on the Gulf of Mexico at Pensacola Bay to protect its claims. The British hoped to build a colony at the mouth of the Mississippi River.

When Louis XIV heard of these plans, he knew a French fort must be built to guard the Mississippi. A strong military leader with knowledge of North America was needed. The wilderness experience of French Canadian officers prepared them for this challenge. The king chose one of those commanders—Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville.

To join him, Iberville chose his younger brother, Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville. Although only eighteen, Bienville was an experienced and battle-scarred sailor. The two brothers would leave their names on the map and the history of Louisiana.



## Fort Maurepas

Iberville stopped for supplies at a French colony in the West Indies and then set sail for the Gulf of Mexico. Spanish soldiers had finished their fort at Pensacola Bay just months before the French arrived. When Iberville sailed into the Gulf of Mexico, he realized the Spanish held the best harbor near the Mississippi River.

Continuing westward, Iberville came upon islands near the coast of present-day Mississippi. He named one Ship Island because it provided a good harbor for their ships. They built a few primitive huts for a temporary camp; then they set out to find the mouth of the Mississippi. Iberville described the discovery in his journal: "March 3, Mardi Gras Day . . . I went up this river . . . two leagues and a half above the mouth it forks into three branches."

To make sure that this was the Mississippi, Iberville and Bienville questioned the local Indians. One chief told them of the "speaking bark" left by another Frenchman. Bienville offered a reward of an axe for the message. Soon, another chief brought him a letter Tonti had left for La Salle in 1685. La Salle never saw that letter because he never made it back to the Mississippi. But more than thirteen years later, the unclaimed letter spoke an encouraging message to the French explorers. They knew they had found the great Mississippi River.

The mouth of the river was a poor location for Iberville's fort. The Gulf Coast offered a better harbor for ships and seemed to have better land for a colony. There were plenty of trees on the coast to build the fort. The completed fort,

**Above:** Iberville was the son of a wealthy Canadian landowner. He became a war hero as a young man when he helped drive the British from Hudson Bay. He was chosen by King Louis XIV to carry out La Salle's dream of founding a French colony near the mouth of the Mississippi.



**Above:** Fort Maurepas has been reconstructed in Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

**The French name for English Turn is *Detour Anglais*.**

built near present-day Biloxi in Mississippi, was named Fort Maurepas (MOR eh PAH) to honor a French government official.

### A Struggling Colony

When the fort was finished, Iberville returned to France for more supplies, soldiers, and settlers. While he was gone, the little fort suffered from a food shortage and lack of supplies. The men were also afraid of an attack by the Chickasaw, who were allies of the British. The British colonies that had been established along the Atlantic coast threatened French efforts to claim and control the Mississippi River Valley.

While Iberville was in France, Bienville explored the river. On one trip, he met a twelve-gun British vessel coming up the river toward his much smaller boat. Claiming that he had many more troops in the area, Bienville informed the British captain that he controlled the river. He hinted that he would attack if the British did not leave peacefully. The British captain believed Bienville's bluff, turned around, and

### Lagniappe

Many locations in early Louisiana were named for French officials. For example, Lake Pontchartrain was named after the French Minister of Marine.

sailed away. Bienville's action drove the British away and protected the French claims on the Mississippi River. English Turn, south of New Orleans, is still marked on today's maps.

The local Indians were also a challenge to the French. In the beginning, the Indians shared their food and skills with the strangers. A young ship's carpenter later wrote about the music and dancing the two cultures shared. A young soldier had brought along a special possession, his violin. With his music, the soldiers taught the Indians to "figure dance." In return, the Indians invited the soldiers to learn their dances. Later, when the soldiers were starving, they were invited to live with the Indians.

In spite of this acceptance, the French treated the Indians as conquered people. They took Indians as slaves and started conflicts between tribes. The French believed that if the Indian tribes fought each other, they would not join together against the French.

### Other Forts

The incident at English Turn convinced Iberville that the French needed a fort on the Mississippi River. He chose a spot fifty-four miles above the mouth of the river to build Fort Mississippi. Iberville placed his brother Bienville in charge of the fort.

Fort Maurepas, the French headquarters, also needed to be moved. The first site for Fort Maurepas had flooded, and the sandy soil was useless for growing crops. Problems often developed with the first sites selected, and the forts were relocated several times during these early years.

The new fort, Fort Louis, was located to keep the English out of Mobile Bay. The fort later became the city of Mobile, Alabama. Henri de Tonti, who had returned to Louisiana to help with the new colony, commanded Fort Louis until his death from yellow fever in 1704.

### Leadership

After setting up the new fort at Mobile, Iberville went back to France again. While he was there, a war broke out in Europe and Iberville was required to return to military duty. This war had the full attention of the French government,



## Map 24 French Explorers

**Map Skill:** Which of these explorers explored along the Red River?

**The French name for Fort Mississippi was Fort de la Boulaye.**



**Above:** This painting of Fort Louis shows the fort as it might have appeared in the early 1700s.

and Iberville's request for colonists and supplies for Louisiana was ignored. The war created hard times in France and an even more dismal life in the Louisiana colony. French supply ships sailed to places involved in the war effort. Abandoned, the colony was left without proper defense or adequate supplies at a time when it was still very shaky.

Iberville never did return to the colony. In 1702, he left Europe for Louisiana but died in Havana from yellow fever. In 1701, young Bienville became the leader of the colony. The colony was so weak that Bienville had to obtain food from the French colony

in the West Indies and even from the Spanish at Pensacola.

These two leaders of early Louisiana faced criticism. After Iberville's death, he was investigated for making money for himself from war supplies. Dissatisfied officials and priests passed along complaints against Bienville to France. Other colonists supported Bienville and blamed the problems on those who opposed him.

The colonial officials quarreled throughout the French period. The confusing structure of the government caused many of those conflicts. Two officials shared the authority over the colony. The governor was in charge of the military and the general management of the colony. The business manager, called the *commissary commissioner*, was in charge of the budget and parts of the judicial system. These two officials were expected to check on each other and report any problems to France.

## Check for Understanding ✓

1. Why was a priest with La Salle?
2. What did the king do when La Salle reported his discovery?
3. What is the present-day location of the first French fort?
4. What are two problems the early colony faced?
5. What was the relationship between the French and the Indians?
6. How did the structure of colonial government cause conflicts?