



Above: Bienville was the younger brother of Iberville. He was the founder of New Orleans.

A Royal Colony Again

As you read, look for:

- problems faced by the royal colony,
- the different groups of colonists that came to French Louisiana, and
- vocabulary term **casket girls**.

In 1732, Louisiana once more became a royal colony. France would hold on to the colony for another thirty troublesome years.

Bienville Returns

When the king took control, Bienville was once again appointed governor of Louisiana. Many colonists were glad to see him return because of his experience with the Indians. The Natchez uprising had created fear of and resentment toward the Indians. Bienville's first task was to calm the settlers and restore his ties with the

Indians. He also faced other challenges.

A thriving agriculture was important for success. But a shortage of livestock—farm animals such as horses, cows, pigs, chickens, and oxen—created hardships for everyone. The cows, pigs, and chickens provided much-needed food. The oxen and horses were needed for farm work, pulling the plows and carts. But what use was a team of oxen if the colonist had no plow? Even when good tools came from France, the prices were often too high for the people to buy them.

Another serious problem was the inadequate supply of money. This kept the economy from developing much beyond the barter system. The colonists had not yet developed a stable cash crop, although some tobacco and indigo were being grown. The colonists continued to try to export forest products. But there were few ships available to transport goods, and those that were available charged high shipping rates.

As a result, the colonists usually had to rely on barter and warehouse credit. When goods were not available in the warehouse, the colonists were given credit to use when another shipment came from France.

Bienville struggled to ease the difficulties in the colony. He rationed the food supplies when necessary and pleaded with France for more supplies and soldiers.

War with the Chickasaw

The biggest problem Bienville faced was keeping peace between the colonists and the Indians. Even before the Europeans came, relations between the tribes were not always peaceful. Some of the hostilities were long-standing; others were more recent. Both the French and the British used these conflicts to pit one tribe against another for their own benefit. Each group struggled over the land and trade rights.

The European traders had changed the Indians' way of life. The older chiefs saw the danger of European trade goods. Tattooed Serpent, a chief of the Natchez, remarked, "Before the arrival of the French, we lived like men who could be satisfied with what they have . . . now we are like slaves who are not allowed to do as they please."

The Choctaw generally preferred the French, although British trade goods were of better quality and were delivered more dependably. The Choctaw chiefs sometimes played one colony against another for the benefit of their people.

However, the Choctaw ties with the French had been weakened by Governor Perier. He had insisted on the right to select chiefs, awarding them medals as he tried to gain allies. These "medal chiefs" were not always the tribal leaders and had no real power. By dealing only with the chiefs he selected, Governor Perier had disrupted the tribal ways.

Another large tribe, the Chickasaw, occupied the important heart of the Mississippi Valley. They were trading partners and allies with the British and enemies of the French and the Choctaw. The French became alarmed when the Chickasaw appeared to be making peace with their former enemies, the Choctaw.

Below: Alexandre de Batz painted this Choctaw family in the 1730s. Notice the warriors have scalps hanging from their spears. The French paid the Choctaw for Chickasaw scalps.





Above: Pierre Francois de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil, was appointed governor of the Louisiana colony at the age of thirty-nine.

If the Choctaw became trading partners with the British, France's colony would be threatened.

When Bienville returned as governor, he was ordered to defeat the Chickasaw or sign a peace treaty. He demanded respect from the Indians, using tactics that had been successful in earlier conflicts. The Chickasaw had given refuge to some of the Natchez, and Bienville demanded that they be turned over to the French.

When the Chickasaw refused, a war began that dragged on for several years. The British supplied the Chickasaw with weapons, and the French paid the Choctaw for Chickasaw scalps. After several defeats, Bienville believed the Chickasaw War was a failure. Discouraged, he retired as governor in 1742. Bienville had lost the war, many friends, and his confidence.

A Different Kind of Governor

In 1742, the French government sent Pierre Francois de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil to Louisiana as the next governor. Louisiana offered this new governor the opportunity to prove his leadership. He hoped to become governor of Canada, as his father had been. His kindness and dignity calmed some of the internal conflicts in the colony.

Cooperation among the colonists was important because Indian conflicts continued. The new governor used his troops to halt Indian raids on settlements up and down the Mississippi River. After a major assault on the Chickasaw, Vaudreuil worked out a peace agreement.

With the Indian threat reduced, the colony grew more prosperous, and living conditions improved in New Orleans. As governor, Vaudreuil established formal ceremonies and parties that copied the social life of the French palace of Versailles. His wife traveled the muddy streets of New Orleans in a four-horse carriage. He is even credited with having the first Louisiana Mardi Gras ball. As a compliment to his style, he was called "The Grand Marquis." His reception welcoming the next governor included fountains of wine and a fireworks show.

The Last French Years

In 1752, Vaudreuil achieved his dream of becoming governor of Canada. Louis Billouart, Chevalier de Kerlerrec (KAIR la rek) was appointed governor of the colony because of his strong military reputation. Those skills were needed to protect Louisiana from the British. When Kerlerrec took office, the tensions between the French and the British were increasing, and the stage for the French and Indian War was being set. The colony's defenses had to be strengthened.

Unfortunately, like other governors before him, Kerlerrec got caught up in squabbles with the other government official in the colony, the commissary commissioner. Kerlerrec was a blunt military man who found these arguments petty and annoying. The constant friction and the complaints sent to France

interfered with the new governor's efforts and slowed the colony's progress. It must have frustrated this military commander to be required to share control of the colony. He quickly tired of his post and requested permission to leave. However, he remained as governor until 1762, when the colony was given to Spain.

Life in the Colony

Life in French colonial Louisiana began as a struggle in a wilderness. But even in this challenging environment, people began to adapt their lifestyle to fit their location. The people faced daily hardships but also added some of the elements of culture that helped improve their lives.

The People

Many of the early explorers and promoters were hardy French Canadians. The free-spirited woodsmen or *coureur-de-bois* ("woods runner" in French) came and went from the colony, preferring their independent lifestyle to settling down in the colony.

The early French colonists lacked the skills and drive needed to survive in the harsh environment. Many were more interested in looking for gold and silver than in making a home and life for themselves in the New World. It took the hardy German farmers to save the colony. And it was the labor of the African slaves that led to the colony's economic growth.

Even the soldiers were considered the rejects of the army by their own leaders. On the other hand, their pay was low, and they often did not have enough food or clothing.

Women were scarce in the colony, and their absence made the colony more unstable. At various times during the French colonial period, young women were sent to the colony. In 1712, Madame Cadillac chaperoned a group of girls sent to Louisiana to become brides of the settlers.

After 1727, the Ursuline nuns cared for new arrivals at their convent in New Orleans until they were married. The best known of this group were the **casket girls** who came in 1728. The young women received that title because each girl brought her trousseau, or household goods, in a casket, or barrel-like chest. Some of the other women who came from France brought nothing but a bad reputation. These were women from the streets of Paris, who were shipped to the colony to get them out of France.

Religion

The official religion of France, and the Louisiana colony, was Roman Catholic. The church was supported by the government. The church and the French government provided nuns and priests for the colony. Some of the early priests lived among the Indians as missionaries. The nuns and priests established the only schools.



Above: The French Canadian *coureur-de-bois* usually traded with the Native Americans, often illegally.

Lagniappe

In 1744, the population of Louisiana by official census was more than 3,000 whites, 800 soldiers, and 2,000 slaves.

Mardi Gras and other church holidays were celebrated from the early days of the colony. The priests and nuns thought the people focused more on the celebration than the religious ceremony. They reported that the people were not very devout and did not attend church regularly.



Above: Eglise de St. Francois is the reconstructed church at Fort St. Jean Baptiste in Natchitoches.

Lagniappe

Families rented their pews in the church, and everyone was required to contribute to the church.

Lifestyles

The population of Louisiana was between 6,000 and 7,000 when France gave up the colony. The people lived in New Orleans and along the Mississippi above the town. Settlements also had been established in Pointe Coupee and Natchitoches.

Entertainment in New Orleans included card playing and gambling in taverns and coffee houses. Dances were held regularly. The people attended social events, even though it meant walking through muddy streets in their elegant clothing.

The colony included a few elegant homes with high ceilings and glass window panes. They were furnished with fine upholstered furniture, gold mirrors, and silver tableware.

Only a few people in the colony lived this well. Most colonists lived in houses made of logs or brick between posts. A mixture of mud and moss or deer hair was used to fill in the cracks. The French name for this mixture is *bousillage*. The windows had shutters but no glass. These houses had simple furniture, sometimes made by the homeowner. Instead of silver, the eating utensils were pewter.

Most people wore clothing made from imported cloth. Only the wealthy wore the elegant clothing imported from France. No one made their own cloth until after the Acadian women came.

The people knew almost nothing about the diseases that threatened their lives, and the treatment was sometimes as bad as the illness. Yellow fever, smallpox, and other diseases killed many of the colonists. A sailor, Jean Louis, left money in his will to provide a hospital for New Orleans. This is the beginning of Louisiana's charity hospitals.

Success or Failure

Was the French colony of Louisiana a success or a failure? Did the colony do as well as it could have under the regulations of France? Did the hurricanes, mosquitoes, heat, and humidity overwhelm the colonists? Or, as so many historians have suggested, were the first colonists such a poor choice that they must be held responsible for the weaknesses of the colony? Did the leaders of



the colony seek to benefit the colony or did too many of them try to make profits for themselves?

Finding the right people for the colony was not the only challenge. The French colonial government suffered greatly from decisions made in France. These included trade restrictions and the lack of adequate funding and supplies. Every policy decision about Louisiana was made by those who had never seen the colony. No policy makers—Louis XIV, the royal advisors, Antoine Crozat, or John Law—ever ventured across the Atlantic to see the vast land they called Louisiana.

Above: The second Ursuline Convent, built in 1748-1753, is the only surviving building from the French Colonial period. Today it houses the archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. What three challenges did Bienville face when he returned to the colony as governor?
2. Why did the French want the Chickasaw and the Choctaw to remain enemies?
3. Why was Governor Vaudreuil called “the Grand Marquis”?
4. Why did Governor Kerlerec need to strengthen the colony’s defenses?
5. Name three groups of people who were colonists.
6. Describe the houses lived in by most of the colonists.