

EARLY SETTLEMENTS AND EXPLORATIONS BY THE FRENCH – FATHER HENNEPIN, THE FIRST WHITE MAN THAT TROD THE ALLEGHENY VALLEY

The French were the first Europeans to make settlements on the St Lawrence river and along the Great Lakes. Quebec was founded by Sir Samuel Champlain in 1608, and in 1609, when Sir Henry Hudson was exploring the noble river which bears his name, Champlain ascended the Sorelle river, and discovered, embosomed between the Green Mountains, or “Verdmont,” as the chivalrous and poetic Frenchmen called them, and the Adirondaks, the beautiful sheet of water to which his name is indissolubly attached. In 1613 he found Montreal.

During the period elapsing between the year 1607 and 1664, the English, Dutch and Swedes alternately held possession of portions of the Atlantic coast, jealously watching one another, and often involved in bitter controversy, and not seldom in open battle, until, in the latter year, the English became the sole rulers, and maintained their rights until the era of the Revolution, when they in turn were compelled to yield to the growing power of their colonies and retire from the field.

The French movements, from the first settlement at Quebec and thence westward, were led by the Catholic missionaries. Le Caron, a Franciscan friar, who had been the companion and friend of Champlain, was the first to penetrate the western wilds, which he did in 1616, in a birch canoe, exploring Lake Huron and its tributaries.

Under the patronage of Louis XIII, the Jesuits took the advance, and began vigorously the work of Christianizing the savages in 1632. Inspired with a lofty and intense zeal for their religion, they boldly took their lives in their hands, and pushed into the unknown wilderness, bearing aloft the Cross, even to the western extremity of Lake Superior.

In 1634, three Jesuit missionaries, Brebeuf, Daniel and Lallemant planted a mission on the shores of the lake of the *Iroquois* (probably the modern lake Simcoe), and also established others along the eastern border of Lake Huron.

From a map published in 1660, it would appear that the French had, at that date, become quite familiar with the region from Niagara to the Head of Lake Superior, including considerable portions of Lake Michigan.

In 1641, Fathers Jogues and Raymbault embarked on the Penetanguishine Bay for the Sault St. Marie, where they arrived after a passage of seventeen days. A crowd of two thousand natives met them, and a great council was held. At this meeting the French first heard of many nations dwelling beyond the great lakes.

Father Raymbault died in the wilderness in 1642, while enthusiastically pursuing his discoveries. The same year, Jogues and Bressani were captured by the Indians and tortured, and in 1648 the mission which had been founded in St. Joseph was taken and destroyed, and Father Daniel slain. In 1649, the missions St. Louis and St. Ignatius were destroyed, and Fathers Brebeuf and Lallemant barbarously tortured by the same terrible and unrelenting enemy. Literally did those zealous missionaries of the Romish Church “take their lives in their hands.” And lay them a willing sacrifice on the altar of their faith.

It is stated by some writer that, in 1654, two fur-traders accompanied a band of *Ottawas* on a journey of five hundred leagues to the west. They were absent two years, and on their return brought with them fifty canoes and two hundred and fifty Indians to the French trading posts.

They related wonderful tales of the countries they had seen, and the various red nations they had visited, and described the lofty mountains and mighty rivers in glowing terms. A new impulse was given to the spirit of adventure, and scouts and traders swarmed the frontiers and explored the great lakes and adjacent country, and a party wintered in 1659-60 on the south shore of Lake Superior.

In 1660, Father Mesnard was sent out by the bishop of Quebec, and visited Lake Superior in October of that year. While crossing the Keeweenaw Point he was lost in the wilderness and never afterward heard from, though his cassock and breviary were found long afterwards among the *Sioux*.

A change was made in the government of New France in 1665. The company of the Hundred Associates, who had ruled it since 1632, resigned its charter. Tracy was made Viceroy, Courcelles, Governor, and Talon Intendent.* This was called the Government of the West Indies.

The Jesuit missions were taken under the care of the new government, and thenceforward became the leaders in the movement to Christianize the savages.

*The duties of the Intendent included a supervision of the policy, justice, and finance of the province.

In the same year (1665), Pierre Claude Allouez was sent out by way of the Ottawa river to the far west, via the Sault St. Marie and the south shore of Lake Superior, where he landed at the bay of Chegoimegon. Here he found the chief village of the *Chippewas*, and established a mission. He also made an alliance with them and the *Sacs*, *Foxes*, and *Illinois*, against the formidable *Iroquois*. Allouez, the next year (1666), visited the western end of the great lake, where he met the *Sioux*, and from them first learned of the Mississippi river, which they called "Messipi." From thence he returned to Quebec.

In 1668, Claude Dablon, and Jacques Marquette established the Mission at the Sault called St. Marie, and during the next five years Allouez, Dablon, and Marquette explored the region of Lake Superior on the south shore, and extending to Lake Michigan. They also established the missions of Chegoimegon, St. Marie, Mackinaw, and Green Bay.

The plan of exploring the Mississippi probably originated with Marquette. It was at once sanctioned by the Intendant, Talon, who was ambitious to extend the dominion of France over the whole West.

In 1670, Nicholas Perot was sent to the west to propose a congress of all the nations and tribes living in the vicinity of the lakes; and, in 1671, a great council was held at Sault St. Marie, at which the Cross was set up, and the nations of the great Northwest were taken into an alliance with much pomp and ceremony.

Various opinions were used regarding the course of the Mississippi. One was that it ran to the southeast into the Atlantic below Virginia, another that it flowed into the Gulf of Mexico, and the third that it discharged its mighty waters into the Gulf of California.

On the 13th of May, 1673, Marquette, Joliet, and five *voyageurs* embarked in two birch canoes at Mackinaw and enter Lake Michigan. The first nation they visited was the "*Folles-Avoines*," or nation of Wild Oats, since known as the *Menomonies*, living around the "Baie des Puans," or Green bay. These people, with whom Marquette was somewhat acquainted, endeavored to persuade the adventurers from visiting the Mississippi. They represented the Indians on the great river as being blood-thirsty and savage in the extreme, and the river itself as being inhabited by monsters which would devour them and their canoes together.±

Marquette thanked them for their advice, but declined to be guided by it. Passing through Green Bay, they ascended Fox river, dragging their canoes over the strong rapids, and visited the village, where they found living in harmony together tribes of the *Miamis*, *Mascoutens*,* and *Kikabeux*, or *Kikapoos*. Leaving this point on the 10th of June, they made the portage to the "*Ouisconsin*," and descended that stream to the Mississippi, which they entered on the 17th with a joy, as Marquette says, "which he could not express."†

Sailing down the Mississippi, the party reached the Des Moines river, and, according to some, visited an Indian village some two leagues up the stream. Here the people again tried to persuade them from prosecuting their voyage down the river. After a great feast and a dance, and a night passed with this hospitable people, they proceeded on their way, escorted by six hundred persons to their canoes. These people called themselves *Illinois*, or *Illini*. The name of their tribe was *Peruaca*, and their language a dialect of the *Algonquin*.

Leaving these savages, they proceeded down the river. Passing the wonderful rocks, which still excite the admiration of the traveler, they arrived at the mouth of another great river, the *Pekitanoni*, or Missouri of the present day. They noted the condition of its waters, which they described as "muddy, rushing, and noisy."

Passing the great rock,‡ they came to the *Ouabquskigon*, or Ohio. Marquette shows this river to be very small as compared with the *Illinois*. From the Ohio they passed as far down as the *Akamsca*, or Arkansas, where they came very near being destroyed by the natives; but they finally pacified them, and, on the 17th of July, they commenced their return voyage.

The party reached Green Bay in September without loss or injury, and reported their discoveries, which were among the most important of that age. Marquette afterwards returned to Illinois, and preached to the natives until 1675.

On the 18th of May of that year, while cruising up the eastern coast of Lake Michigan with a party of boatmen, he landed at the mouth of a stream putting into the lake from the east, since known as the river

± See legend of the great bird, the terrible "*Piusa*," that devoured men and was only overcome by the sacrifice of a brave young chief. The rocks above Alton, Illinois, have some rude representation of this monster.

*Prarie Indians

† Marquette's journal.

‡ The grand tower.

Marquette. He performed mass, and went a little apart to pray, and being gone longer than his companions deemed necessary, they went in search of him, and found him dead where he had knelt. They buried him in the sand.

While this distinguished adventurer was pursuing his labors, two other men, of a different stamp, were preparing to follow in his footsteps and make still further explorations, and if possible, more important discoveries. These were Chevalier Robert de la Salle and Louis Hennepin.

La Salle was a native of Rouen, in Normandy, where he was born about the year 1635. He renounced his inheritance by entering a seminary of the Jesuits, and was educated for the ministry. Obtaining his discharge, he embarked for Canada in 1667, to seek wealth by commerce, or fame by new discoveries in America. Like many intelligent men of his day, he became intensely interested in further discoveries in the new world, cherished a project of seeking, by way of Canada, a passage to China, and conceived the idea of exploring the passage to the great South Sea, which by many was then believed to exist. He communicated his ideas to the Governor-General, Count Fontenac, and desired his co-operation. The Governor at once fell in with his views, which were immensely strengthened by the reports brought back by Marquette and Joliet and advised La Salle to apply to the King of France on person, and gave him letters of introduction to the great Colbert, then Minister of Finance and Marine. Accordingly, in 1675, he returned to France, where he was warmly received by the king and nobility, and his ideas were at once listened to and every possible favor shown him.

He was made a Chevalier, and invested with the seigniorship of Fort Cataracouy, or Fontenac (now known as Kingston), upon condition that he would rebuild it, as he proposed, of stone.

Returning to Canada, he wrought diligently upon the fort until 1677, when he again visited France to report progress. He was received, as before, with favor, and, at the instance of Colbert and his son, the king granted him new letters patent and new privileges. On the 14th of July, 1678, he sailed from Rochelle, accompanied by thirty men, and with Tonti, an Italian, for his Lieutenant. They arrived at Quebec on the 13th of September, and after a few days' delay, proceeded to Fort Fontenac.

Father Louis Hennepin, a Franciscan friar, of the Recollect variety, was quietly working in Canada on La Salle's arrival. This remarkable man was born at Ath, Belgium, about the year 1640. After his entrance into the Franciscan order, his roving disposition was gratified by several tours through Europe, and in 1675 was sent to Canada. He preached for a while at Quebec, but his love for adventure seems to have greatly exceeded his taste for the Ministry. In 1676 he went to the Indian mission at Fort Frontenac, whence he started on a tour among the *Five Nations*. During this visit among the *Iroquois* he traveled extensively among the different tribes, both to obtain their favor and gain information of the unknown country. He traveled over portions of the headwaters of the "*la Belle Riviere*," as the French called the Allegheny and Ohio, and stopped at several Indian villages in this valley. He is, without doubt, the first white man who ever penetrated into these wilds and set foot upon the soil of the Allegheny valley. His solitary presence in this valley was about the year 1677, a little over two hundred years ago. He returned to Quebec early in 1678, and being a man of great ambition, much interested in the discoveries of the day, he was appointed by his religious superiors to accompany the expedition fitting out for La Salle.

Sending agents forward to prepare the Indians for his coming, and to open trade with them, La Salle himself embarked on the 18th of November, in a little brigantine of ten tons, to cross Lake Ontario. This was the first ship of European build that ever sailed upon this fresh-water sea. Contrary winds made the voyage long and troublesome, and a month was consumed in beating up the lake to the Niagara river. Near the mouth of the river the *Iroquois* had a village, and here La Salle constructed the first fortification, which afterwards grew into the famous Fort Niagara. On the 26th of January, 1679, the keel of the first vessel built on Lake Erie was laid at the mouth of Cayuga creek, on the American side, about six miles above the falls.

In the meantime La Salle had returned to Fort Frontenac, to forward supplies for his forthcoming vessel. The little barque on Lake Ontario was wrecked by carelessness, and a large amount of the supplies she carried was lost. In the 7th of August the new vessel was launched amid great rejoicings, and made ready to sail. She was about seventy tons burden.

La Salle christened his vessel the "Griffin," in honor of the arms of Count Frontenac. Passing across Lake Erie, and into the small lake, which they name St. Clair, they entered the broad waters of Lake Huron. Here they encountered heavy storms, as dreadful as those upon the ocean, and after a most

tempestuous passage they took refuge in the roadstead of *Michilimackinac* (Mackinaw), on the 27th of August. La Salle remained at this point until the middle of September, busy in founding a fort and constructing a trading-house, when he went forward upon the deep waters of Lake Michigan, and soon after cast anchor in Green Bay. Finding here a large quantity of furs and peltries, he determined to load his vessel and send her back to Niagara. On the 18th of September she went under charge of a pilot, while La Salle himself, with fourteen men, proceeded up Lake Michigan, leisurely examining its shores, and noting everything of interest. Tonti, who had been sent to look after stragglers, was to join him at the head of the lake. From the 19th of September to the 1st of November, the time was occupied in the voyage up this inland sea. On the last named day, La Salle arrived at the mouth of the river *Miamis*, now St. Joseph. Here he constructed a fort, and remained nearly a month waiting for tidings of his vessel; but hearing nothing he determined to push on before the winter should prevent him. On the 3rd of December, leaving ten men to garrison the fort, he started overland towards the head-waters of the Illinois, accompanied by three monks and twenty men. Ascending the St Joseph river, he crossed a short portage and reached the *The-a-ki-ki*, since corrupted into *Kankakee*. Embarking on this sluggish stream, they came shortly to the Illinois, and soon after found a village of the *Illinois* Indians, probably in the vicinity of the rocky bluffs, a few miles above the present city of La Salle, Illinois. They found it deserted, but the Indians had quite a quantity of maize stored here, and La Salle, being short of provisions, helped himself to what he required. Passing down the stream, the party on the 4th of January came to a lake, probably the Lake Peoria, as there is no other upon the stream. Here they found a great number of natives, who were gentle and kind, and La Salle determined to construct a fort. It stood on a rise of ground near the river, and was named *Creve-Coeur** (broken heart), most probably on account of the low spirits of the commander, from anxiety for his vessel and the uncertainty of the future. Possibly he had heard of the loss of the "Griffin," which occurred on her downward trip from Green Bay; most probably on Lake Huron. He remained at the Lake Peoria through the winter, but no good tidings came, and no supplies. His men were discontented, but the brave adventurer never gave up hope. He resolved to send a party on a voyage of exploration up the Mississippi, under the lead of Father Hennepin, and he himself would proceed on foot to Niagara and Frontenac to raise more means and enlist new men; while Tonti, his Lieutenant, should stay at the fort, which they were to strengthen in the mean time, and extend their intercourse with the Indians.

Hennepin started on his voyage on the last day of February, 1680, and La Salle soon after, with a few attendants, started on his perilous journey of twelve hundred miles by way of the Illinois river, the Miami, and Lakes Erie and Ontario, to Frontenac, which he finally reached in safety. He found his worst fears realized. The "Griffin" was lost, his agents had taken advantage of his absence, and his creditors had seized his goods. But he knew no such word as *fail*, and by the middle of summer he was again on his way with men and supplies for his band in Illinois. A sad disappointment awaited him. He found his fort deserted, and no tidings of Tonti and his men. During La Salle's absence the Indians had become jealous of the French, and they had been attacked and harassed even by the *Iroquois*, who came the long distance between the shores of Lake Ontario and the Illinois river to make war upon the more peaceable tribes dwelling on the prairies. Uncertain of any assistance from La Salle, and apprehensive of a general war with the savages, Tonti, in September, 1680, abandoned his position, and returned to the shores of the lakes. La Salle reached the post on the Illinois in December, 1680, or January, 1681. Again and bitterly disappointed, La Salle did not succumb, but resolved to return to Canada and start anew. This he did, and in June met his Lieutenant, Tonti, at Mackinaw.

Hennepin, in the meanwhile, had met with strange adventures. After leaving Creve-Coeur, he reached the Mississippi in seven days; but his way was so obstructed by ice that he was until the 11th of April reaching the Wisconsin line. Here he was taken prisoner by some northern Indians, who, however, treated him kindly and took him and his companions to the falls of St. Anthony, which they reached on the first of May. These falls Hennepin named in honor of his patron saint. Taking to the land, they traveled to the northwest, an estimated distance of two hundred miles, to the villages of the Sioux. Hennepin and his companions remained here for three months, treated very kindly by their captors. At the end of this time they met with a band of French, led by one Sieur de Luth,† who, in pursuit of game and trade, had penetrated to this country by way of Lake Superior. With his band Hennepin and his companions returned to the borders of civilized life in November, 1680, just after La Salle had gone back to the wilderness. Hennepin returned to France, where, in 1684, he published a narrative of his wonderful adventures.

* The site of the work is at present unknown.

† From this man undoubtedly comes the name Duluth.

In August, 1681, La Salle was again on his way up the lakes, and on the 3d of November we find him at the mouth of the St. Joseph, as confident as ever. Here he remained until the middle of December, getting ready for the trip down the Illinois. Instead of following his former route by way of the Kankakee, he took a new route by way of the Chicago River. The party consisted of twenty-three Frenchmen, eighteen Eastern Indians, ten Indian women, and three children, and traveled on foot, conveying their baggage on sleds. They left the present site of the great city of Chicago about the 5th of January, 1682, and on the 6th of February reached the Mississippi. On the 13th they proceeded on their voyage, and after various adventures, reached the mouth of the Mississippi upon the 6th of April, 1682. They examined the three great channels by which the river reaches the sea, and on the 9th of April erected a column, surmounted by a cross, and affixed the arms of France, with this inscription:

“LOUIS THE GREAT, KING OF FRANCE AND NAVARRE,
REIGNING APRIL 9, 1682

At this ceremony formal possession was taken of the great river and all the countries bordering upon it or its tributaries in the name of the King; the whole concluding the salutes and cries of *Vive la Roy*.

La Salle and his party now retraced their steps towards the north. They met with no serious trouble until they reached the Chickasaw Bluffs, where they erected a fort on their downward voyage, and named it the Prudhomme. Here La Salle was taken violently sick. Unable to proceed, he sent forward Tonti to communicate with Count Frontenac. La Salle himself reached the mouth of the St. Joseph the latter part of September. From that point he sent Father Zenobe with his dispatches to represent him at court, while he turned his attention to the fur trade and to the project of completing a fort which he named St. Louis, upon the Illinois river. The precise location of this work is unknown. It was said to be upon a rocky bluff, two hundred and fifty feet high, and only accessible upon one side. There are no bluffs of such a height on the Illinois river answering the description. It may have been on a rocky bluff above La Salle, where the rocks are perhaps one hundred feet in height.

Upon completion of this work La Salle again sailed for France, which he reached on the 13th of December, 1683. A new man, La Barre, had now succeeded Frontenac as Governor of Canada. This man was unfriendly toward La Salle, and this, with other untoward circumstances, no doubt led him to attempt the colonization of the Mississippi country by way of the mouth of the river. Notwithstanding many obstacles were in his path, he succeeded in obtaining the grant of a fleet from the king, and on the 24th of July, 1684, a fleet of twenty-four vessels sailed from Rochelle to America, four of which were designed for Louisiana, and carried a body of two hundred and eighty people, including the crews. Discord soon broke out between M. de Beaujeu and La Salle, and grew from bad to worse. On the 20th of December they reached the island of St. Domingo. During their stay here the fearful Southern fever broke out, and La Salle himself was at the brink of death. When he recovered he learned that the ship containing his supplies had been taken by the Spaniards. But the Chevalier bestirred himself and procured new supplies, and on the 20th of November the first of the fleet set sail for Louisiana, bearing La Salle and Joutel, the historian of the voyage. For a month they were knocking about in the Gulf, and when they finally approached the main land they found they had missed the river altogether. Getting out of patience, La Salle determined to land some of his men and search along the shore for the river.

Joutel was sent out with this party, which left on the 4th of February, and traveled eastward three days, when they came to a great stream which they could not cross. Here they made signals by building great fires, and on the 13th two of the vessels came in sight. The stream was sounded and the vessels were anchored under shelter. But again misfortune overtook La Salle, and the vessel which carried his provisions was wrecked by negligence, or purposely, and the bulk of the supplies were lost. At this juncture, M. de Beaujeu, his second in command, set sail and returned to France. La Salle now constructed a rude shelter from the timbers of his wrecked vessel, placed his people inside it, and set out to explore the surrounding country in hope of finding the Mississippi. He was, of course, disappointed; but found a stream, which he named Vaches, a good site for a fort. He at once removed his camp, and, after incredible exertions, constructed a fortification sufficient to protect them from the Indians. This fort was situated at Mataforda Bay, within the present limits of Texas, and was called By La Salle, Fort St. Louis.

Leaving Joutel to complete the work, with one hundred men, La Salle took the remainder of the company and embarked on the river, with the intention of proceeding as far up as he could. The savages soon became troublesome, and on the 14th of July, La Salle ordered Joutel to join him with his whole force. They had already lost several of their best men, and dangers threatened them on every side. It would seem

from the historian's account of the expedition that La Salle began to erect another fort, and also that he became morose and severe in his discipline, so much so as to get the ill will of many of his people. He finally resolved to advance into the country, but whether with the view of returning to Canada by way of Illinois, or only for the purpose of making further discoveries, Joutel leaves in doubt. Giving his last instructions, he left the fort on the 12th day of January, 1687, with a company of about a dozen men, including his brother, two nephews, Father Anastasius, a Franciscan friar, Joutel, and others, and moved northeastward, as is supposed, until the 17th of March, when some of his men, who had been cherishing revengeful feelings for some time, waylaid the Chevalier and shot him dead. They also slew one of his nephews and two of his servants.

This terrible deed occurred on the 20th of March, 1687, on a stream called Ceniz. The murderers quarreled among themselves and several of them were killed, and the whole expedition was eventually cut to pieces and dispersed by the savages, a few being taken prisoners and returned to their friends through the Spaniards, and by other means, in the course of several years afterwards.

In 1687 France was involved in a long and bloody war. The league of Augsburg was formed by the Princess of the Empire against Louis XIV, and England, Spain, Holland, Denmark, Sweden and Savoy took up arms, and Louis found himself battling with nearly the whole of Europe, and only Turkey for an ally. This war ended with the peace of Ryswick in 1697.

No material change took place in America, but the colonists were harassed and many of their people killed or carried captives to the Canadas. In 1688, the French possessions in North America included nearly the whole of the continent north of the St. Lawrence, and the entire valley of the Mississippi; and they had begun to establish a line of fortifications extending from Quebec to the mouth of the Mississippi, between which points they had three great lines of communication, to-wit: by way of Mackinaw, Green Bay, and the Wisconsin river; and by way of Lake Michigan, the Kankakee and Illinois rivers; and by way of Lake Erie, the Maumee and Wabash rivers, and were preparing to explore the Ohio as a fourth route.

At this time a census of New France showed a total population of eleven thousand two hundred and forty-nine Europeans. War again broke out in 1701, and extended over a period of twelve years, ending with the treaty of Utrecht in 1713. This also extended to the American colonies, and its close left everything as before, with the exception that Nova Scotia was captured in 1710. The boundaries between the French Possessions and the English colonies were left unsettled as ever, and no definite or settled condition of affairs was arrived at until another generation had passed over the stage.