

AN OLD WEDDING CONTRACT.

A ROMANCE OF A HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO—HOW THE EARLY SETTLERS OF THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY PLIGHTED THEIR TROTH.

From the St. Louis Journal.

The following marriage contract, copied from the original in French, was made at Fort Chartres in 1732, the same year in which Washington was born. Fort Chartres, of which no trace now remains, was located about fifty miles below where St. Louis now is, and on the Illinois shore. The document, of which a copy appears below, possesses an antiquarian interest in these Centennial times, showing as it does the marriage contracts of that day, drawn up according to the old French laws, with a minute particularity that would gratify a Philadelphia lawyer. The country of Upper Louisiana was then less known to the English-speaking provincials living east of the Alleghanies than most part of the globe. Fort Chartres was built twelve years before this marriage contract was made, by the French, to protect the inhabitants of the adjacent country from attacks during war. It was a quadrilateral, with four bastions built of limestone well cemented, each side measuring 340 feet. The walls were fifteen feet high and three feet thick. The barracks were of massive stone, surrounding a spacious square. There was a capacious magazine and two deep wells. The fort was repaired in 1750, and in 1772 was abandoned by the English in consequence of the encroachments of the Mississippi, it being located originally one mile and a half from the river. A channel was formed by the river breaking over its banks so near the fort that one side of it and two bastions were thrown down. At the period referred to in the document, it was the seat of gayety and politeness, visited by priests and military officers, bringing with them the education and manners of La Belle France. Kaskaskia, seven miles up the river of the same name, referred to in the document, was founded in 1672 by Marquette, was visited by La Salle, and was the seat of a Jesuit college as early as 1633. The ecclesiastical papers pertaining to Kaskaskia are now in the custody of Bishop Baltos, of Alton.

Father Jacques, now of Cahokia, who was a resident of Kaskaskia in 1860, states that then these papers were under his charge, and he mentions that he noticed among them a paper dated as early as 1635, containing a certificate of baptism. This was about the period that Father Allouez, the distinguished Jesuit missionary, resided there. The marriage document from which the subjoined is translated is a venerable sheet of dingy foolscap, discolored by age, having an indistinct effigy of the arms of France imprinted in the texture of the paper. The writing is as legible as the manuscripts of that age usually are. For the better understanding of the contract, it should be remembered that girls in that day were marriageable at twelve years of age and the nuptials postponed several years. The following is the quaint old marriage contract:

"On the 13th day of May, 1732, before us, notary in the Illinois, and the undersigned witnesses, appeared Mr. Pierre Grotton de St. Ange, officer of the troops detached from the marine serving in Louisiana, son of Sieur Robert Grotton de St. Ange, commandant in the Illinois, and Mme. Margaret Creine, his father and mother of the one part, and Marie Rose Tessier, daughter of the late Louis Tessier and Catharine Wabenaqueokoe, her father and mother of the other part, who by common accord and consent have made this agreement and convention of marriage, guided by the advice and counsel of their parents and friends here assembled in order to celebrate and solemnize before our mother, the holy church catholic, apostolic and Roman, as soon as it shall be advised by the aforesaid parents and friends, that is to say on the part of his friends Grotton du St. Ange his father, Mr. Robert Grotton Pierre du Bellerive, his brother Sieur Dutine, officer of the troops, and Sieur de St. Laurient; and on the part of Demoiselle Marie Rose Tessier, Mr. LaLande Le Jeune, her step-father; Mr. Lafatigue, her tutor, and Mr. Deucegentre, her assistant tutor. The aforesaid future spouses shall hold in community all goods movable and immovable, and acquisitions now held and to be acquired, according to the custom of the city, provost and viscompte of Paris, renouncing from now and forever, anything contrary thereto, even when the said future spouses shall make acquisitions in provinces governed by contrary customs, to which contrary customs they renounce the right to change the execution of the present contract. However, the future spouses shall not be held to pay the debts that either may have contracted before the future marriage, but such debts shall be paid out of the property of the one who shall have contracted them. The aforesaid future spouses acknowledge that the said future wife brings as her share the half of the effects hereto specified to be divided between her and her brother, Paul Tessier, descending from the estate of the late Louis Tessier and Catherine Wabenaqueokoe, their father and mother, to-wit: A tract of three arpents frontage, and with the usual depth, situated on the Prairie des Kaskaskas on the grand line; another tract of one arpen situated on the same line, and on the same prairie; one negro and one negress, four negro children, two girls and two boys; four Indian slaves, two men and two women, one of the men crippled; four children of the said slaves, two girls and two boys; five draft oxen, four cows, one house and horse-mill, with all appertaining thereto, situated in the village des Kaskas, two ox-carts on their wheels, two plows, and all belonging thereto, and generally the half of all the effects and utensils inscribed on the last inventory, all of which shall enter into the future community. In consideration of which, and for the great friendship he bears his future wife, the future husband grants her a dower and invests her with the sum of 1,500 livres to be taken out of the best property of the future husband, and to secure to her the said dower he has from now mortgaged all present and future possessions. The survivor of the future spouse will be entitled to 750 livres on the best of the personal and real property of the community. In consideration of the said future marriage and for the great and sincere friendship that the said future spouses bear to each other, they have made and they do make by these presents a mutual donation one to the other, to the survivor, all and every portion of the personal and real property now held, and to be acquired, which they hold at the time of either one first dying; the survivor to be put in good and sufficient possession by whomsoever shall have legal authority in case there is no issue of the future marriage. But if there shall be such issue at the death of one of the parties, then said donation to stand void and without effect.

To all the above the said parties have agreed, and drawn up the present writing, at Fort du Chartres, the same day and year as above."