

COLONY OF THE ILLINOI.

H. W. BECKWITH TELLS OF ITS EARLY FINANCES AND ROMANCES.

Reported Riches of the New World and John Law's Bubble of Speculation—Real and Fictitious Values of the American Possessions—The Straits Through Which the First Colonists Passed—Life and Customs of the Quebec Traders.

LOUIS XIV. had tried for twelve years and failed to plant a self-sustaining colony on the delta of the Mississippi. And now, by letters patent, dated Sept. 14, 1712, he turned over to Anthony Crozat all of Louisiana from the English Carolinas (west) to Spanish Mexico; also the River St. Louis, before called Mississippi, from the edge of the sea (gulf) as far north as the Illinois (country), together with the Rivers St. Philip and Jerome, before called the Missouri, and the Ouabache (Wabash), and all the countries, inland lakes, and rivers that drain directly or indirectly that part of the River St. Louis mentioned. The grant included all the "commerce" of this vast region, except that of the "beaver trade," a monopoly long held by associates in or operating from Canada.

"All mines or mineral veins to be searched for or found through the whole extent of the country" named were granted "in perpetuity" to M. Crozat and those claiming under him; conditioned on their payment of a royalty of "one-fifth of all the gold and silver and 10 per cent of the output of all other minerals." And added to these concessions was that of a yearly ship to the "coast of Guinea to trade for (or steal) blacks and sell them (as slaves) to the colonists of Louisiana."

At the time M. Crozat, famed as well for his skill in government finance as for his knowledge of maritime commerce, wore the title of "Marquis du Chatelet" and held the complex position of "the King's Chancellor, Secretary of his Household, Crown, and Revenue." He was conservative, and "so far as depended on him, his plans for the new colony were wisely formed." He sent there "only robust, industrious people. Some of them were poor families but of good morals; and such, indeed, were the only settlers that succeeded." He tried, too, in good faith, and would have established a paying commerce with Old and New Mexico if Spain had not closed her seaports to his ships and her inland trade to his hardy river voyagers.

Stories of Rich Mines Sent Home. Still, as at home in France, many were in no mood to drudge for riches, especially when an easier, though delusive, way was shown them. Of this eager nature was Sieur de la Motte Caulliac, already noted as founder of Detroit. He came later to Louisiana as its Governor and as an open partner of M. Crozat's venture. Shortly after Lieut. Claude Charles du Tiscent of Canada came down the Mississippi and thence across to Mobile to enter M. Crozat's services. He brought with him two mineral specimens given to him by the Indians (Canadians) as having been taken from mines near Kaskaskia. On having the samples assayed, Gov. de la Motte found they contained a great deal of silver and decided to visit the mines privately.

After coming to the Illinois settlement he asked those who had given M. Tiscent the mineral to be shown the mine, and was told they had said all this to the officer "in mere jest." They then advised the Governor that the specimens "came from Mexico." Soon after the Governor went to explore the "mines," some fourteen leagues (southwest of Kaskaskia) in the interior, to the west of the Mississippi river. After a ten months' absence he returned to Mobile with his suite, including in his daughter, a hardy girl, who braved the fatigues of the journey in an open canoe, exposed to all sorts of weather, and traversing a region then occupied only by wild animals and savages.

Notwithstanding the fact as narrated it was announced (at Mobile) that the silver mine had been discovered in the Illinois country, from whence the Governor had come. However, his visit west of the river did yield a lasting result, for there in the present Madison County, Mo., and some thirty miles southwest of St. Genevieve, his men uncovered an extensive vein of lead, known ever since as "mine la Motte" in honor of his name. It has been worked ever since under varying fortunes. After a long conflict the title to the plant, four leagues in extent, was confirmed by the act of Congress of 1821 to the Beauvais, Pratte, and La Valle, all ancient French families, at "The Illinois."

The same month of his return to Mobile M. de la Motte sailed for France. Later his associate, M. Crozat, after a five years' effort, during which he received no aid at home and was even opposed by those whom he found in Louisiana, "humbly prayed to be (and was) allowed to resign it."

John Law's Financial Bubble. At this time a bold, more reckless financier, John Law, was conducting a bank in Paris under royal favor. From the beginning it seemed his ardent desire to form a company and then unite his bank with plans to handle the public revenues and all the foreign trade monopolies. The errors of his theory were threefold—a trinity of delusion in finance. In brief, he held, firstly, that "abundance of money was the cause (instead of the result) of prosperity; secondly, that with the prospective resources of a country or an enterprise in hand as a basis for its credit, the bank could give its paper money all the efficiency and value of specie; thirdly, that "as the prosperity of a country depended upon the amount of money circulating, its volume could be increased at pleasure."

Louisiana having been cast aside, he at once planned to become M. Crozat's successor. Much had been said and was still being said of the fertility and magnificence of this new country, its abundant products and its precious metals. Taking advantage of this popular belief M. Law formulated a scheme to join "the commerce of Louisiana with the fur trade of Canada." Louis XIV. having died, well ripened in years, the Duke of Orleans, as Regent for the boy King, Louis XV., readily gave to M. Law all he asked. Letters patent accordingly were issued late in August, 1717, granting to M. Law and his associates, under the name of "The Western Company," all of Louisiana, with its lands, customs, ports, havens, rights, etc., with all their exclusive commerce, domestic as well as foreign. To these was added a like monopoly in traffic in "all the beaver (pelts), fat as well as dry, for which the people of Canada had until then traded." This had always been the chief as well as the best trade of that larger province of New France. In addition was given the right to establish judicial courts, levy troops, equip war vessels, build forts, and to grant lands, either by the foot in town lots or by leagues for titled estates, in the wilderness. And many holdings of the present day along the Mississippi from St. Louis to New Orleans have their origin in M. Law's "company." The Regent also gave the latter all the "forts, warehouses, houses, cannon, arms, powder, brigantines, boats, canoes, and all other effects" made or acquired by M. Crozat in the earlier enterprise.

The charter was to run for a period of twenty-five years, carrying with it many powers of absolute sovereignty. And, thus endowed, this trade combine took for its coat of arms and royal seal the image of a river god leaning on a cornucopia, or horn of plenty.

along or near the Mississippi." Then there were the wild lands of Louisiana, worth and later sold for 30,000 livres the square league, and also the Indian trade. France was broadcast with "cartoons showing the arrival of the French at the mouth of that great river, where the savages with their squaws eagerly rushed to meet their new masters." And on the border of these pictures it was told in words that "gold, silver, copper, lead, and quicksilver were so common that the savages of Louisiana, ignorant of their value, eagerly bartered these metals for knives, saupans, brooches, little mirrors, or even a glass of brandy."

Under these conditions three of the Western company's ships, the Dauphin, Neptune, and Vigilant, anchored at Dauphin Island, near Mobile Bay, Feb. 9, 1718, with men and supplies. These vessels were followed on March 6 by the Marie and the Duchesse de Noulles with more officers, troops, and settlers—in all "more than 500 persons." M. Law's balloon had quickly begun to fill. Until this time there were only 700 French settlers in Lower Louisiana, who, for the most part, "greatly neglected to till the land," being content to rove at will in consort or trade with the savages of the country. It had long been a purpose of the more far-seeing court advisers to break this evil at once, to plant fixed settlements on the rich soil of the Mississippi, and demand that it be tilled. M. Law's company assumed this task, and these new arrivals were to



EARLY PICTURE OF QUEBEC ABOUT 1700

occupy lands granted along that river for the purpose. The Duchesse also brought a valuable package to Gov. M. de Bienville. Among its contents was his own promotion, as "Commandant in Chief" of all Louisiana, with its Illinois annex for the Western company. It also contained a commission, for Diron d'Artauguet (brother of the Marquis then in Louisiana) as Captain of a company of soldiers going to the Illinois. The bearer of these papers was M. de Boisbriand, already "the King's Lieutenant (Governor) of the province." He was made "Knight of the Order of St. Louis and (the Western company's) Governor at the Illinois" before he sailed from France. As an ensign of the marine he was in M. d'Iberville's naval assaults on Newfoundland in 1685, and as an early settler of Louisiana was a Major in 1690 in command of M. d'Iberville's colony at Old Biloxi.

Like many others noted in the earlier annals of the Central West, M. de Boisbriand was a French native of Canada. He was of the Gue family, having a title and the fief, or land grant, of Boisbriand (brierwood) near Quebec. He was baptized as Peter. By descent of title comes his name, Peter and Gue de Boisbriand, with a pardonable vanity usual with those thus favored he signed his name using his title. Its more pertinent prefix has been studied out because he was the second Governor of the Illinois, Henry de Tonty having been the first under the old seal of Robert Cavalier, Sieur de la Salle.

Old French-American Customs. French efforts to plant their feudal system along the great lakes and the Mississippi have left many pitfalls for the student and given a breath of charming romance to our history. Parents in Canada were prolific, and received a bounty for large families of children. Le Moyne d'Iberville, for instance, was one of the eleven brothers all in public service, and two of whom used the name Bienville. These families of quality were also allied by marriage, and their children, their lands, and their names would have made a grand army compared with the mere stately array of kith and kin in the play of "Pinafore."

Agreeable to custom, they rarely signed their Christian or surnames, while others refer to them by their titles. The fact is, they have come down to us as a people so closely connected with past events that it is better they should live on as they will in history. Early in October, 1718, M. de Boisbriand set out for the Illinois, going up the Mississippi, with an armada consisting of one hundred soldiers and a number of officers. Among the latter were Capt. Dixon and his younger brother, Lieut. Peter d'Artauguet, famed in later annals of the Illinois. Passing Fort Rosalie, built a short time before by M. de Tiscent on the present site of Natchez, he took his first and a valued aid in their enterprise. And while the canoes with paddles, poles, and tow lines toil in slow progress up the turbid river, it is well to note a few of the adventures by which this daring man won his titles.

Career of Tiscent. Tiscent was born in Paris, and, although of affluent parents, he early set his heart on a soldier's life in foreign countries. Being too short, even for the French standard of military height, he was obliged to go as body servant to an officer of the noted Carignan Regiment, who brought him to Quebec. While living there he became known to a dealer in Indian supplies, who was so taken with the generous, polite ways of the little fellow that the trader said to him one day:

"You are bright and active. I have goods to dispose of and believe you would do so well as a trader that you would soon make enough money to go back to your parents." Tiscent replied that it would be well enough, but that as he was without means he would find it difficult to go into trade with savages. "Do not wait on that account," said the

merchant. "I will advance you some goods, and I do it for you freely because I think you are both honest and willing." A canoe was well filled, and Tiscent set out on a long voyage in company with an old trader. The latter understood the language of the natives to whom they were going, and while on the way to them he taught their dialect to Tiscent, who proved to be a quick scholar. The two traders finally arrived among the savages with whom they were to deal, only to find that, after all their hardships, other traders had been there before them. Badly put out but not faint-hearted they resolved to push still further on to a tribe of the same savages to whom, as yet, no Frenchman had ever penetrated. Thinking they would make a better barter in the use of only signs, the traders agreed to pretend they did not know the language of these people. On arriving among them, the adventurers, on making signs that they had come to trade, were well received and given a lodge in which to live and store their merchandise.

Tiscent's Adventure with Indians. It is well to note here that Du Tiscent, when an infant, had suffered an illness which caused his hair to fall out except in one spot. It was his habit to shave this spot in order to better wear his wig. And it so happened he had shaved his head the very morning of his coming to these Indians. The next day being pleasant the Frenchmen

spread their goods upon mats in their lodge and went over to the lodge of the chief, where many of his people were already gathered. By signs they invited the Indians to come and see what was to be bartered for their beaver. They went, and when they saw the beautiful and curious goods they talked aloud with one another, thinking the traders did not know what they said, as they had never seen the French before. Said one of the strangers will not wait; we have no beaver skins now, and it is too late in the season to go and hunt for any." Then one savage said to the others: "If there is no other way to get these goods we will scalp the owners, throw their bodies into the river, and then we will have everything." At this Du Tiscent, who had watched and listened closely, told his comrade to take his arms, and repack the merchandise. Then facing the savages he said to them in their own language: "You want my hair, do you?" With that he tore off his wig and threw it down at their feet, saying: "There is my hair! Take it whoever of you that dares!" Transformed in an instant, bald and dejected, the savages looked at him in utter amazement, and trembling with fear as if a thunder bolt had fallen in their midst, speech failed them for half an hour. The work of repacking the goods went on, Du Tiscent breaking the silence now and then with the remark: "There is my scalp, take it, anyone who wants to envy me will. Finally the chief, relenting, said: "We thought you were men like us, but we now know plainly that you are muh-e-doo-g (spirits). Seeing that you can take off your own hair when you like, we see that you are spirits, so go away and leave us alone. Do not come with us. I will go and get my people to bring you all the robes and peltries they have."

Mr. Du Tiscent then replaced his wig on his head, and when the savages saw its curls again cling about his head and neck, as if by the same magic, he became frightened. "We will leave tomorrow," said Du Tiscent, firmly. "As our presence seems to give you offense." The village was quickly stripped of its beaver-made garments and beddings, not for trade, but as gifts to appease the anger of the strangers. However, the savages did accept presents—many "knives, awls, glass beads, small mirrors, and some trinkets, with which they were delighted, having never seen the like before." At this price they were only too glad to get rid of these "spirits from Canada." And the ranger could not sufficiently praise Du Tiscent, who was at this time only 17 years old, for his boldness and ready wit in saving their lives.

"He told these Indians later that they were wrong in trying to injure him, that he had only come to make an alliance with them, that if they feared he would burn up the water in their lakes and rivers, and set their forests on fire. With this remark he poured some brandy in a pot and set it on fire. Ignorant of the properties of the liquor, they were awed at the result. Then, to show them how the timber could be destroyed he took his sun glass, or pocket lens, which, with flint and steel, were in common use before matches took their place, and set fire to a rotten tree. With these examples before them the savages, believing Du Tiscent could do anything he pleased, set him away with an escort, so that none should do him any harm.

Promoted for His Cunning. He returned to Quebec with a far greater profit than if he had bartered all the merchandise, for it is to be called that robes of the kind given to them are made of the finest quality of beaver, worth double the value of pelts of usual commerce. The news of Tiscent's adventures soon spread from street gossip to the citadel of the Governor. The latter summoned him and he confirmed all that had happened. The Governor thereupon decided that Tiscent was deserving of a promotion, and a letter was sent to the Court of France. It sought the Lieutenant's commission. We next hear of him in 1690 conducting a number of families from Canada up Lake Erie and the Maumee River, thence down the Wabash, Ohio, and Mississippi to d'Iberville's infant colony at Mobile Bay. Later, and in a case where he was required, he set out from Mobile Bay on foot and, trusting to his wits for sustenance, made his journey to Canada. His skill in woodcraft and canoe life; his knowledge of the savages, their ways, moods, language, and dialects, together with his great bravery and endurance, were the reasons why he was now assigned to go with M. de Boisbriand to the Illinois.

Reaching the north line of the present Randolph County, Ill., early in 1710, the colony of canoes, the name is plural to indicate the several charters of its owner, were put to work building a fort and other structures. The progress must have been tedious, for it was not until Feb. 20 of the next year that Gov. Bienville (at Mobile) received letters from the Governor of Canada, saying he had finally established the first Western company, now united by M. Law with that of the East Indies under the name of "the India company," in its mandate of Oct. 31, 1720, ordered that the post be called Fort Chartres. The name is plural to indicate the several charters of its owner. The exact location of Fort Chartres is now unknown. But its vicinity is fixed by Father Pierre Francois Xavier Charlevoix, the keen-eyed traveler and later historian of New France who, coming by the lakes, the Kankakee, and Illinois Rivers, landed in the neighborhood less than two years after the fort was begun. In the journal of his canoe trip from Montreal, thence on to and down the Mississippi, Charlevoix says he "arrived next day (Oct. 12, 1721) at the Kaskaskias (mission) at 9 in the morning. The Jesuits had here a fine mission which has been lately divided, the most populous of which is on the side of the Mississippi, where the Jesuits, Fathers (Joseph F.) Boulanger and De Kerben, are in charge of spiritual af-

fairs. Half a league lower down is the Fort de Chartres, half a musket shot from the shore, and in command of M. de Boisbriand, who represents the company to which the place belongs. All the space between the two places (i. e., the mission and the fort) begins to be settled with French. Known later and in its better days as the Parish of Saint Ann and Village of Fort Chartres, it had lengthened into a straggling lane of wood-fronted, and whitewashed cottages nestling in the flowerbeds of picketed gardens. And assuming caste from the civil and military households here governing the Illinois, the occupants of these lowly dwellings reflected the courtly manners of high life at Paris. As compared with snow and mild and the long, sunny days far more in number. What marvel, then, that comes from Quebec and Montreal willingly endured a "long canoe voyage in a country which they looked upon as a terrestrial paradise?" Among these accessions at Fort Chartres was Mme. du Tiscent, who was as stately and tall as her husband was free and dumpy. She long ruled the social affairs of the neighborhood, while the Captain managed those of the savages. They had two sons, both of whom were in military service here, one of whom was captured March 24, 1736, in an attack on the Chickasaws and by them bound to a stake and burned to death.

Charlevoix's journal tells us that "four leagues further (more south than east, across the neck of the American bottom) was a large village of French, mostly all Canadians." He might have added that this was old Kaskaskia, occupied in the main by common folks, many of mixed Indian blood, "voyagers, woodmen, trappers, and resident traders, some of them having lived there for more than twenty years. Communication with Outside World. The French of early times were not so cut off from the outside world as might be imagined. A well worn Indian trail which led easterly, thence along the ridge that divides the water of the Mississippi from that of the Wabash, crossing the Vermilion near Danville, thence on to Oulatenon, then up the Wabash Valley to the Maumee at Fort Wayne, and down the last named river, and thence on to Detroit, was a ready overland route. It was lined with relays of runners, as shown in the old wood cut reproduced in the TRIBUNE. Provided with a little currency and the present prospect of the future capital of this vast and fine country. The 200 persons sent there to prepare for it had thought of nothing else than to shelter themselves (the best they could) while waiting for the plat."

Of all the dire wreckage from there to Fort Chartres naught survives except at Baton Rouge, Natchez, and Vicksburg. The and New Orleans, in other hands and under a different inspiration, have grown into marts with the growth of that lower section of our great continental valley. But the paralysis and infamy of M. Law's financial theories remained with it until long after it had ceased to be the domain of France. Indeed and aside from exploration, Indian affairs and struggles for first settlement, a history of French Louisiana might be reduced to a monograph on the folly of and the futile shifts to bolster up a debased paper currency and its harm to every private and public interest. Like Canada, the Illinois fared better. If not all within it had ready access to the colder latitudes of the beaver. While the fur of this animal found a ready market in every mart of Europe its supply was always growing less. Its value was reckoned on the coin basis. From the time of the first settlement of Canada, wages, goods, and supplies were measured from hard money back into beaver pelts at so much per pound, according as they graded fat or lean, green or dry. They were nearly the same as legal tender. And with them the traders stocked their stores with merchandise and carried on the inland commerce of their day.

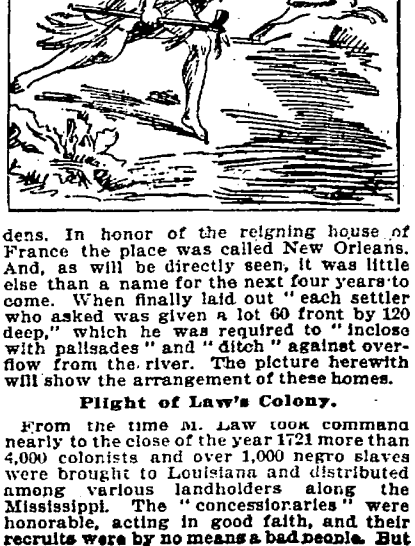


THE BEAVER - A STANDARD OF VALUE IN BARTER FROM AN OLD FRENCH PRINT

this fleet express was rarely delayed or harmed. While at every wayside village the swiftest footed were eager to go, there is no reference to any conspiracy to obstruct these primitive mails.

The late ex-Gov. John Reynolds, speaking of this old trail leading to the lower Wabash, quaintly says: "It was the Applian Way of Illinois in ancient times. It is yet (in 1852) visible in many places between Kaskaskia and Vincennes." His error is in saying it led from Oulatenon to Vincennes, instead of from the former place across the Illinois prairies along the water divide, as the writer has stated above.

To return to affairs down the Mississippi, in October, 1718, some ninety miles up from the gulf, and along the crescent of a great bend, was a belt of rising land that merged itself first in a swamp and then into the shallow reach of Lake Pontchartrain. Before M. de Boisbriand started to the Illinois Gov. M. de Bienville, though long familiar with the spot, visited it again; and now, having authority, selected it as the site for the future capital of Louisiana. Its more elevated plain, once a buffalo pasture, was situated by several French families from the Illinois, and now the Governor decided to lay out his city over their fields and gar-



INDIAN RELAY RUNNER LIMITED MAIL BETWEEN DETROIT AND THE ILLINOIS FROM AN OLD FRENCH PRINT

M. Law's emigrants were mainly women of the street and vagabonds forced on vessels and sent over here. They were morally and physically unfit to "people these solitudes." Besides this he brought about 2,000 peasants, subjects of a petty German Prince, on private account with which to settle his "Grand Duchy," of twelve square miles, situated thirty miles above the mouth of the Arkansas.

Within the period named the shares of the company were quoted at 15,000 francs, or thirty-six times their original price. No one stopped to ask what was the foundation of this enormous wealth, nor reflected that mere paper had no value except as it represented realities. Except a cautious few, nearly everybody seemed to think with Law that all wealth was in money and that paper could as well take its place. With that time, too, came the end of all this wild delusion, leaving 2,698,400,000 francs in government notes, the only money allowed in use, and it at a discount of 60 per cent. Gold, its supposed enemy, had been driven out by a series of severe penalties.

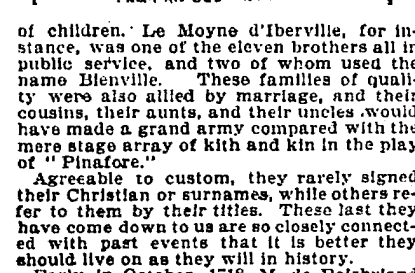
"Dupes of the mistake concerning the gold and silver mines in the Illinois country, many families transferred their fortunes there. Those who remained found instead a fertile soil; and one of the finest climates in the world." So says a later writer. But while Father Charlevoix was there, late in 1721, M. La Renaudiere (the company's mining engineer) still flattered himself that he would find silver. Passing down the river, his father was pained to "see the sad ruins of M. Law's grant, of which the company (by reversion) was then the proprietor. "Reaching New Orleans and writing of the fabled stories current in Paris before he left in 1720, he says:

Real Condition of New Orleans. "At the same time houses with the five-parched which the newspapers credited it with some two years ago, are reduced at present to 100 barracks ranged in no great order, to a big warehouse built of wood, to two or three houses that would not adorn a French hamlet, to the half of a sorry store-house, which was no sooner loaded to the lord of the place than he was turned out to occupy a tent; when such is the present prospect of the future capital of this vast and fine country.

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TOWN LOT - DIVIDED INTO FLOWER AND VEGETABLE GARDENS - FROM AN OLD FRENCH PRINT

of children. Le Moyne d'Iberville, for instance, was one of the eleven brothers all in public service, and two of whom used the name Bienville. These families of quality were also allied by marriage, and their children, their lands, and their names would have made a grand army compared with the mere stately array of kith and kin in the play of "Pinafore."

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