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**Beyond Borders:  
Mental Mapping and the French River World in North America, 1763-1805**

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**Beyond Borders: Mental Mapping and the French River World in North America, 1763-1805**

**By:**

**Robert Englebert**

**Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the PhD degree in History**

**University of Ottawa**

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*Your file* *Votre référence*  
ISBN: 978-0-494-65996-0  
*Our file* *Notre référence*  
ISBN: 978-0-494-65996-0

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## Abstract

Title: Beyond Borders: Mental Mapping and the French River World in North America, 1763-1805

Author: Robert Englebert

Supervisor: Dr. Nicole St-Onge

Submitted: January 27, 2010

This study begins with the Treaty of Paris in 1763. The cession of French territories in North America redrew the geopolitical landscape. However, this dissertation argues that geopolitical change was not representative of, nor did it immediately alter, existing social and economic realities. The French Empire in North America had come to an end, but a sizable French-speaking population remained in both the St. Lawrence and Mississippi Valleys, and throughout the Great Lakes region. Over the next forty years, as the British, Spanish, and Americans carved up the former French territories, they were forced to confront the French-speaking population in the heart of North America. In the midst of regular geopolitical upheaval and instability, I posit that French socio-economic connections continued to tie French-speaking regions together to form a French river world. More specifically, this dissertation examines socio-economic continuity in the portion of the French river world between the St. Lawrence and middle Mississippi Valleys from 1763 to 1803. Early migration patterns saw *Canadiens* from the St. Lawrence Valley marry into established French-speaking families in the middle Mississippi Valley in the 1740s. These migration and marriage patterns continued after 1763. They helped connect seemingly disparate French-speaking regions together and kept a broader geographical understanding of French North America at the forefront of living memory. Merchants like Gabriel Cerré traveled back and forth between the two regions, setting up extended networks of communication and exchange through strategic

marriage alliances designed to facilitate trade. However, merchants did more than simply conduct trade, as they also helped people to handle their personal affairs over long distances. Nowhere was this more visible than in the frequent use of third party representation to handle family succession rights. Merchants and voyageurs became cultural conduits through which French-speaking families stayed connected. Thus, the French river world was both imagined and real, as a product of the lived experiences of merchants and voyageurs and the imaginings of those they represented. Both combined to form a socially constructed mental map, which was mutable and fluid. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, the socio-economic linkages that had helped maintain the French river world slowly began to degrade. Access to British markets and capital, which had initially helped reinforce the commercial networks of the French river world, ultimately undermined long-term social cohesion. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 ushered in a new era as waves of American migration radically changed the demographic composition of the middle Mississippi Valley. Yet, even as French bourgeois in places like St. Louis shifted their attention towards the construction of mid-America the networks of the French river world were slow to fade. The American Fur Company hired over one thousand *Canadien* voyageurs out of Montreal for voyages to St. Louis and the limits of Missouri fur trade, keeping elements of the French river world afloat until the 1830s.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC Doctoral Grant), the John Carter Brown Library (JCBL Fellowship), the Center for French Colonial Studies (Carl J. Ekberg Grant), the Ontario Ministry of Education (OGS), the Voyageur Database Project (University of Ottawa/Métis National Council), the History Department at the University of Ottawa, and the Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University of Ottawa for providing generous funding and support throughout my doctoral degree.

Many archivists, curators and academics provided helpful insights and inspiration for this work. In particular I would like to thank Emily Lyons and Jim Baker for helping me during my first visits to Ste. Genevieve and Chester; Ken Bone for sharing his views on Old Mines and French Missouri culture; Jack Greene and Kenneth Banks for taking time to discuss my ideas and research; Robert Morrissey, Guillaume Teasdale and Dale Miquelon for their insights on French colonial history in North America; and Brenda Macdougall, Heather Devine and Carolyn Podruchny for their insights on Métis, fur trade and voyageur history.

My dissertation supervisor, Dr. Nicole St-Onge, was instrumental in guiding me through the rigors of academic research and writing. She encouraged me to ask big questions and to push my research beyond my initial expectations. Her many 'suggestions' helped create opportunities to further and share my research. More important, however, was her support, patience and counsel to assist me in bringing years of research and writing to fruition. I am truly thankful to have had such wonderful guidance throughout my doctoral studies. In addition to my supervisor, I would like to thank Dr. Richard Connors and Dr. Micheline Lessard. They reminded me to read broadly and to think of the larger British imperial and French colonial contexts. I would also like to thank my new colleagues in the History Department at the University of Saskatchewan for their patience and support during the final stages of my doctoral studies.

My friends have had an enormous influence on my work. To the University of Ottawa crew of Jamie Trepanier, Tim Foran, Katherine Magee-Labelle, James McKillip, Kenneth Sheppard, Amy Gill, Daniel Macfarlane and Julia Morris. Though most of us have now scattered and left the University of Ottawa, I want you to know that your friendship and support helped immeasurably throughout my doctoral studies and pushed me to be a better academic. Numerous friends outside of academia also helped offer support during my doctoral studies, including Cathia Badière, Kirk Tysick, George Cummings, and Georgia Fakiolas. In particular I would like to thank Derek Rumpf and Molly McCoubrey for their support through all the ups and downs.

To my parents, Michael and Donna, and my sister Joanna. You have made this possible more than you know. From reading drafts to answering late night phone calls you saw me through everything and encouraged me to do what I love and reach for the stars. Thank you.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction: The French River World: Mental Mapping and a World Without Borders</b>	<b>1</b>
- National Paradigms, Mobility, and Storied Endings	8
- New Directions	23
- Contextualizing the French River World	25
- Mental Mapping and a Culture of Mobility	26
- Geography of the French River World	31
- Conclusion	36
<b>Chapter 1: Continuity and Change: Marriage, Family, and Community</b>	<b>38</b>
- Discovery and False Starts in the Illinois Country	42
- The French River World is Born	46
- The Aftermath of 1763	50
- <i>Canadiens</i> and the Illinois Country	54
- Patterns of Inter-marriage and Migration	63
- Fluid Boundaries and Métissage	69
- Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion	74
- Conclusion	83
<b>Chapter 2: Gabriel Cerré: A French River World Merchant</b>	<b>87</b>
- Gabriel Cerré: A Perfect Test Case?	89
- The Making of a Merchant	96
- <i>Canadien</i> , Montreal, Illinois or St. Louis Merchant	107
- The Cerré Family: Networks of Communication and Exchange	110
- Cerré Family Correspondence	113
- Conclusion	123
<b>Chapter 3: Politics, Commerce, and Law: Maintaining Social Cohesion</b>	<b>125</b>
- Shifting Politics and Commerce	132
- Quebec and the <i>Pays d'en Haut</i>	134
- The Illinois Country	144
- Spanish Upper Louisiana	154
- Commerce	158
- Social Cohesion	163
- Conclusion	174
<b>Chapter 4: Reflections in the Mirror: French Travel Narratives and the French River World</b>	<b>176</b>
- The Historical Legacy of <i>Canadiens</i>	179
- Collot and the <i>Canadiens</i>	182
- Intellectual and Literary Traditions	197
- Nicolas de Finiels and the French Inhabitants	201
- Volney: French and American	212
- Conclusion	218
<b>Conclusion: Transition and New Beginnings</b>	<b>222</b>
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>236</b>

<b>Appendix C</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>Appendix D</b>	<b>239</b>
<b>Appendix E</b>	<b>243</b>
<b>Appendix F</b>	<b>248</b>
<b>Appendix G</b>	<b>252</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>254</b>

### Maps

<b>Map 1: French river world in the heart of North America</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Map 2: Voyageur Contract Destinations and Routes</b>	<b>143</b>

### Figures

<b>Figure 1: Percentage of Illinois Country Marriages with at least one spouse from Canada, 1755-1805</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Figure 2: Illinois Country Marriages per town with at least one spouse from Canada, 1755-1803</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Figure 3: Vincennes Marriages with at least one spouse from Canada, 1756-1786</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Figure 4: Cahokia Marriages with at least one spouse from Canada, 1756-1805</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Figure 5: Prairie du Rocher Marriages with at least one spouse from Canada, 1765-1799</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Figure 6: Kaskaskia Marriages with at least one spouse from Canada, 1755-1798</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Figure 7: Kaskaskia Manuscript Marriages with at least one spouse from Canada, 1757-1794</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Figure 8: Sample of marriages involving at least one spouse from Canada in the Illinois Country, 1756-1787</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Figure 9: Joseph Séré and Marie Madeleine Picard Family Tree</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Figure 10: Toussaint-Hyacinthe Séré and Marie-Louise Hurtubise Family Tree</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Figure 11: Gabriel Cerré</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Figure 12: Jean Gabriel Cerré Family Tree</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Figure 13: Suppliers and Voyageurs listed in Auguste and Pierre Chouteau's Account with Andrew Todd 1794-1795</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>Figure 14: Sketch of a flat bottom boat</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>Figure 15: French Habitation</b>	<b>194</b>

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## Introduction

### The French River World: Mental Mapping and a World Without Borders

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The heritage of continental displacement shifted the compass points of French Canada to places outside Quebec's borders. Are we then considering a homeland that does not exist or no longer exists? That makes no sense for a people without borders.

Christian Morissonneau<sup>1</sup>

On 10 April 1801, Antoine and Augustin Robidoux from the parish of St-Constant entered into a contract with James and Andrew McGill & Co. of Montreal. Like thousands of other *Canadiens* who were hired to work in the fur trade during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, they marked an X on their contracts under the watchful eye of a prominent Montreal notary, Louis Chaboillez. However, unlike many of their fellow voyageurs who paddled to Grand Portage, Lake Winnipeg, and the wilds of the old Northwest, their expedition was destined for the Mecca of the southern fur trade at St. Louis on the Mississippi River.<sup>2</sup> The Robidoux had been hired with nineteen other voyageurs to complete the first part of the voyage by traveling in two birch bark canoes from Montreal to Michilimackinac. Montreal had become a northern nexus of the fur trade due in part to both an infusion of capital from Scottish merchants after 1763, and its river access to the

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Morissonneau, "The 'Ungovernable' People: French-Canadian Mobility and Identity," in *French America: Mobility, Identity, and Minority Experience Across the Continent*, ed. Dean R. Louder and Eric Waddell (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 28.

<sup>2</sup> The winterers' contracts all say that they are going to either the dependencies of the Illinois Country or the dependencies of the American South. In a wider search of contracts for the Illinois Country or South, the voyageurs in question were headed to Kaskaskia, St. Louis, the Missouri, or New Orleans. Nicole St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs: Understanding the Background to the Métis Nation and Métis Homeland—Voyageur Contract Database Project," University of Ottawa and the Saint-Boniface Historical Society, 2002–2009. The Voyageur Contract Database Project has collected approximately 30,000 voyageur fur trade contracts signed primarily Montreal between 1750 and 1830. The original copies of the contracts are on microfilm at the Quebec National Archives (BANQ) and the St-Boniface Historical Society in Manitoba. The contracts have been digitized in a comprehensive database. It is currently the largest organized collection of fur trade contracts.

interior of North America. The rise of Montreal as a central hub of the transcontinental fur trade put pressure on other fur trading centers and their outfitters.<sup>3</sup> The Hudson's Bay Company out of York factory rose to the challenge set by the Montreal traders and competed for dominance of the interior trade routes.<sup>4</sup> Other fur trading centers, such as Albany, New York, were forced to fall back on local and regional trade.<sup>5</sup> Despite Montreal's place as a fur-trading capital, the task of putting together expeditions was fraught with difficulties. Mounting an expedition could take anywhere from a few weeks to several months, depending on the availability of men and supplies.<sup>6</sup>

After signing their contracts in Montreal, the Robidoux and the rest of the men slowly trickled into camp at Lachine, where they awaited the launch of the expedition. Antoine received an advance of 55 livres 5 sols, and Augustin was likewise advanced 78 livres 19 sols.<sup>7</sup> As was the custom, they received a portion of their advances upon signing their contracts, with the remainder paid at the time of departure. Costs could accumulate quickly in the early days of organizing an expedition. The notary had to be paid for his legal services, advances outlined in the voyageur contracts needed to be honoured, and the rent

---

<sup>3</sup> E. E. Rich, *Montreal and the Fur Trade* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966).

<sup>4</sup> The fur trade has an extensive historiography, but most studies in Canada begin with a few base texts such as Harold Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956); Frits Pannekoek, *The Fur Trade and Western Canadian Society, 1670–1870*, vol. 43, Canadian Historical Association Historical Booklet (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1987); and Rich, *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857*.

<sup>5</sup> Dale Miquelon, "The Baby Family in the Trade of Canada, 1750–1820" (master's thesis, Carleton, 1966), 162.

<sup>6</sup> Missouri Historical Society (MHS), Papers of the St. Louis Fur Trade, Part 1: The Chouteau Collection, 1752–1925, Microfilm Reel 3 of 40, 00032. In 1801, James and Andrew McGill wrote to Auguste Chouteau, explaining that winterers were scarce and demanding high wages. The difficulty of putting together expeditions continued up until 1821. See Robert Englebert, "Diverging Identities and Converging Interests: Corporate Competition, Desertion, and Voyageur Agency, 1815–1818," *Manitoba History* 55 (2007): 19–20.

<sup>7</sup> St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs."

and living costs of the men had to be met while they awaited the launch. And then there was still the question of supplies.

The foodstuffs bought for the 1801 expedition included biscuits, lard, peas, bread, and rum. McGill & Co. purchased two canoes and basic supplies, such as extra bark for repairs, a couple of hatchets, two sails, baskets, and pots and pans.<sup>8</sup> Each voyageur was also given personal supplies in accordance with his contract. For example, Antoine and Augustin were both given a three-point blanket, three *aunes* of cotton, a pair of shoes, and a portage harness.<sup>9</sup> Not all supplies were distributed equally. The expedition guide was given extra food and rum, and was paid more than twice as much as lowly middle paddlers (*milieu*). As young and relatively inexperienced voyageurs, Antoine and Augustin were hired to work as *milieu* for a paltry 165 and 170 livres, respectively. The two men would have been expected to paddle for hours on end, do all the heavy lifting during portages, and help set up and clean up camp. The men hired as bowsmen (*devant*), steersmen (*gouvernail*), or winterers (*hivernant*) had fewer onerous chores and were paid two or three times as much as a *milieu*. Such was life for men at the bottom of the voyageur hierarchy.<sup>10</sup> Antoine made several more trips to Michilimackinac and nearby St-Joseph's Island, but appears to have never risen

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<sup>8</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 3 of 40, 00074.

<sup>9</sup> St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs." Blankets were measured in points of thickness. Three-point blankets were common for voyageurs, but the number of points could vary depending on the expedition and availability of goods. Aunes was a French unit of measurement, believed to be approximately 1188.45 millimeters. René Just Haüy, *Instruction abrégée sur les mesures déduites de la grandeur de la terre, uniformes pour toute la république, et sur ses calculs relatifs à leur division décimale* (Paris: l'Imprimerie de Malassis le jeune, 1794).

<sup>10</sup> Carolyn Podruchny, "Baptizing Novices: Ritual Moments among French Canadian Voyageurs in the Montreal Fur Trade, 1780–1821," *Canadian Historical Review* 83 (2002): 175–181; Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 121–123.

above the rank of *milieu*. Augustin, on the other hand, rose to become a *devant* on subsequent trips to Michilimackinac and Chicago.<sup>11</sup>

While the Robidoux and the rest of the men plied the river route from Montreal to Michilimackinac, a larger boat of supplies followed a more southerly route through the Great Lakes, with a stop in Sandwhich or Detroit.<sup>12</sup> The boat contained goods and merchandise such as guns, textiles, military shoes, and dishware. Men, goods, correspondence, and travelers followed the rivers and navigated both the northern and southern shores of the Great Lakes as part of an expanding network of communication and exchange that encompassed the fur trade.

Antoine and Augustin were neither the first nor the last of the Robidoux family to enter the trade and travel along the rivers and lakes of North America. Indeed, the Robidoux family was well known in the fur trade.<sup>13</sup> What makes Antoine and Augustin's voyage to Michilmackinac in 1801 noteworthy is the way in which it connected them to the southern fur trade and, more specifically, to another branch of the Robidoux family in St. Louis.

Although James and Andrew McGill & Co. had organized the expedition from Montreal, the entire venture had been undertaken at the behest of fur baron Auguste Chouteau of St. Louis. Chouteau had hired McGill & Co. to send merchandise and men to Michilimackinac, along with a few winterers sent further south into the dependencies of the Illinois Country and the South. McGill & Co. was to receive payment in peltries the following year in Montreal. At least a few of the men would have been aware of who had

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<sup>11</sup> St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs."

<sup>12</sup> The river route involved going up the Ottawa and Mattawa Rivers to Lake Nipissing, and then following the French River to Georgian Bay, and across the northern shore of Lake Huron to Michilimackinac.

<sup>13</sup> Eighty-one Robidoux contracts exist in the voyageur database, with forty-four dated between 1763 and end of 1803. St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs."

hired them, as Auguste Chouteau's name is cited in some of the winterers' contracts, which were read out loud by the notary to the voyageurs.<sup>14</sup> Antoine and Augustin Robidoux did not venture south with the winterers, but instead returned to Montreal in accordance with their contracts. Were the two men aware that they had kin connections in St. Louis and Detroit, or were they unwittingly drawn into a complex web of kinship and commerce that made up a French river world in the heart of North America? In 1801, Ignace Chatigny from New Madrid on the Mississippi wrote to Augustin Robidoux to tell him that he had just returned to the Illinois Country, and that he intended restart a joint lawsuit that he and Auguste had previously let lapse.<sup>15</sup> While far from conclusive, it would appear that the Robidoux brothers had ongoing business in the southern fur trade.

Thirty years earlier, before Antoine and Augustin had signed their contracts together on that spring day in 1801, other members of the Robidoux family had ventured south.<sup>16</sup> Joseph Robidoux and his son Joseph-Marie left for St. Louis in 1770.<sup>17</sup> They voyaged across the Great Lakes, from Michilimackinac to the Chicago portage and on to St. Louis. Joseph Sr. passed away the following year, leaving his estate to his son, who was joined shortly thereafter in St. Louis by one of his sisters and his mother.<sup>18</sup> However, not all of Joseph-Marie's family came to St. Louis. Three of his sisters married in or near Montreal,

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<sup>14</sup> St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs."

<sup>15</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 3 of 40, 00086.

<sup>16</sup> The branch of the Robidoux family from which Antoine and Augustin came clustered around several parishes on Montreal's southern shore—St. Constant, Laprairie, and St. Jean-François Régis.

<sup>17</sup> Heather Devine, *The People Who Own Themselves: Aboriginal Ethnogenesis in a Canadian Family, 1600–1900* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), 67; Hugh M. Lewis, *Robidoux Chronicles: French-Indian Ethnoculture of the Trans-Mississippi West* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2004), 12. Devine and Lewis provide two of the most detailed accounts of the Robidoux family, but additional material is found in Tanis Thorne, *The Many Hands of My Relations: French and Indians on the Lower Missouri* (St. Louis: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 89, 125, 127.

<sup>18</sup> The 1776 St. Louis census shows the presence of Joseph Marie, his mother Marie Anne, and his sister Marie Josephhe. Robert Parkin, "1776 St. Louis Census," St. Louis Genealogical Society, <<http://www.stlgs.org/DBgovernmentCensus1776.htm>> (7 June 2009).

while two other sisters married in Detroit. Joseph–Marie established himself as a trader and carved out a place in the Missouri trade, shipping furs to both New Orleans and Montreal. He eventually became seriously indebted to his southern supplier, Cavelier, Son & Co., and for a couple years became the topic of frequent complaints in letters from Cavelier in New Orleans to Auguste Chouteau in St. Louis. On several occasions, Cavelier requested that Chouteau help secure repayment from Joseph Marie, but with little success.<sup>19</sup>

By 1803, Joseph–Marie’s eyes had begun to fail, and his son, Joseph Jr., took over most of the family business. That year, Joseph Jr. made the trip up to Michilimackinac to meet with his father’s business associate, David Mitchell, to secure merchandise from Montreal.<sup>20</sup> Joseph Jr. had not been born in Canada, but had aunts in Detroit and Montreal, and his father’s business connections linked him to the Montreal fur trade. In 1804, Joseph Jr. received goods from noted Michilimackinac middle–man David Mitchell, including playing cards, powdered tobacco, chocolate, tea, spirits, and sugar.<sup>21</sup> The following year, Joseph Jr. gave Mitchell instructions to ship the Robidoux furs to England for sale at auction in London.<sup>22</sup> Joseph’s past linked him to Canada in the northeast, even as his future and opportunities in the fur trade drew him further west and to the south. Joseph Jr. and his brothers began to spend more and more time pushing out along the Missouri River and down the Santa Fe Trail. Heather Devine has demonstrated the complex kinship networks of the

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<sup>19</sup> Lewis, *Robidoux Chronicles*, 32. Lewis discussed how Cavelier, Son & Co. contacted Chouteau in 1802. By 1805, the matter was still not settled. Cavelier sent another letter, upset that Robidoux had paid Chouteau, but that none of the money had been sent to New Orleans to cover Robidoux’s outstanding debts. MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm 4 of 40, 00913.

<sup>20</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 4 of 40, 00052. David Mitchell was a well–known physician and middle–man trader at Michilimackinac and St. Joseph’s Island. See David A. Armour, “David Mitchell,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, University of Toronto/Université Laval, <[http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=3033&&PHPSESSID=jpjpv5026etcr99ncd0mgtp8s2](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=3033&&PHPSESSID=jpjpv5026etcr99ncd0mgtp8s2)> (5 June 2009).

<sup>21</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 4 of 40, 00543. The goods listed were only a few of the large assortment of goods on the invoice.

<sup>22</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 4 of 40, 01071.

Robidoux brothers, who married into local French-speaking families in St. Louis while taking on Native wives *à la façon du pays* and fathering mixed-blood children in the Blacksnake Hills of northwestern Missouri during the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup>

When Joseph-Marie passed away in 1809, the direct family link between Montreal and St. Louis was broken but hardly forgotten. Joseph Jr. maintained connections with the north through business associates like Auguste Chouteau, the same man who had hired the fur trade expedition from Montreal in 1801 involving Antoine and Augustin Robidoux. A generation and a half apart, but derived from a common lineage, some members of the Robidoux family looked southwest from Montreal, while others looked northeast from St. Louis. They were all part of the same French river world, bound together by networks of kinship, communication, and exchange. The bonds that tied this world together were at times explicitly overt, but could also be subtle and implicit, and were simultaneously familial and commercial. Thus, Heather Devine appropriately refers to the Robidoux family as “Marriage as Business.”<sup>24</sup> When marriages are viewed largely as strategic alliances, the inseparability of family and commerce becomes all too apparent. As routes of the fur trade fanned out across the continent, and, by extension, across the Atlantic, family and commerce served to connect seemingly disparate communities together to maintain an informal empire. The result was a French river world that maintained a remarkable level of cohesion between 1763 and 1803.

The Robidoux family mirrored the experience of hundreds of French-speaking families and thousands of individuals. Examining these lives, I found myself stretching well-entrenched geographical and historical understandings of French North America in the

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<sup>23</sup> Devine, *The People Who Own Themselves*, 68–69.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

second half of the eighteenth century. This dissertation, therefore, provides a sketch of the French river world by examining the lines of continuity and the processes that tied French-speaking peoples together in North America between 1763 and 1803. More specifically, it investigates the maintenance of social and economic exchange between the St. Lawrence Valley and the middle Mississippi Valley, and looks beyond the geopolitical in order to examine the more fluid boundaries of what Morissonneau describes as “a people without borders.”

This preliminary foray into what I call the French river world, which will be explained in detail throughout this introductory chapter, is not intended to be hegemonic or to replace existing paradigms entirely. Rather, it is designed to fill a historiographical void, a means of capturing a culture of mobility, the way that people operated irrespective of geopolitical boundaries, and the historical importance of the spaces in between points on a map.<sup>25</sup> This work offers only one piece of a much larger puzzle, and therefore provides only limited and cursory discussions of topics such as slavery, métissage, sedentary agriculture, and American geopolitics.

### **National Paradigms, Mobility, and Storied Endings**

While most historical inquiry focuses on change, this dissertation examines social and economic continuity. Inspired by the works of Jonathan Clark and Allan Greer, this study seeks to understand continuity in the face of change.<sup>26</sup> However, following this line of

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<sup>25</sup> Patricia Fummerton, *The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), xiv, 73.

<sup>26</sup> Clarke’s *Ancien Régime* thesis shows the longevity of religious state structures throughout the eighteenth century, even in the midst of societal readjustment and the rise of the British fiscal–military state. J.C.D. Clark, *English Society, 1688–1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Greer’s work on

historical inquiry requires moving beyond several well-entrenched and interconnected historiographical roadblocks. The first and most salient of these is the pervasiveness of contemporary national borders in historical discourse. The rise of the nation-state and subsequent advent of national histories have served to limit the lines of historical inquiry and reinforce national borders.<sup>27</sup> The Canada-U.S. border has influenced historical discourse in both countries, and has resulted in national historical paradigms designed to explain how these nations came to be. Moreover, in trying to explain these national histories, the border has directed attention away from history on a north-south axis, in favour of histories that run east to west. Thus, the Canada-U.S. border has become a “Glass Curtain,” where both sides see and acknowledge each other, but do not venture to the other side.<sup>28</sup> Add to the mix Whig interpretations of British and Anglo-American exceptionalism that help reinforce these national paradigms, and one has a potentially toxic historiographical cocktail.<sup>29</sup>

In English Canada, the works of Harold A. Innis and Donald Creighton helped set the foundation for a Canadian national historical paradigm. The Canadian staple thesis, put forward by Innis, has influenced Canadian historiography for over half a century. He argued that the exploitation of certain staple commodities—fish, fur, timber, wheat, and minerals—

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three parishes in Quebec shows the remarkable continuity of feudal structures in Quebec well into the nineteenth century. Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant : Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740–1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

<sup>27</sup> Bethel Saler and Carolyn Podruchny’s recent historiographical essay provides an excellent example of how fur trade historians have been constricted by national paradigms. Saler and Podruchny, “Glass Curtains and Storied Landscapes: Fur Trade Historiography in Canada and the United States,” in *Bridging National Borders*, ed. Andrew Graybill and Benjamin Johnson (Duke University Press, in press).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1931). Whig history has come to represent highly judgemental interpretations of history that assume an inevitable progressive march towards enlightenment. This highly teleological interpretation of history favours historical victors, such as the British over the French in North America, and presents events as both inevitable and exceptional.

was the salient feature of Canadian history. Moreover, the economic determinants of geography and staple commodities not only helped shape Canada's borders, but were central to the creation of the Canadian state.<sup>30</sup> Innis's focus on economic history put commodities at the center of the story of national development—a radical departure from the constitutional/political narratives that had dominated Canadian history prior to the 1930s. The fur trade, in particular, held a place of prominence in his early work, resulting in his imposing and venerated book, *The Fur Trade in Canada*. In this study, Innis made one commodity—the beaver—his main actor, explaining that,

The History of Canada has been profoundly influenced by the habits of an animal which very fittingly occupies a prominent place on her coat of arms. The beaver (*Castor canadensis* Kuhl) was of dominant importance in the beginnings of the Canadian fur trade. It is impossible to understand the characteristic developments of the trade or of Canadian history without some knowledge of its life and habits.<sup>31</sup>

The economics of the early fur trade, in Innis's interpretation, defined Canadian northwestern expansion. The progressive depletion of the beaver stock required traders to move further and further west, even while markets for their pelts lay across the Atlantic, in London and Paris. Although Innis acknowledged the southern fur trade and the increasing number of pelts sent to Montreal via Michlimackinac and Detroit, the American connection was barely mentioned. After all, the story of the fur trade was the story of Canada, and that lay in Montreal, Hudson's Bay, the Canadian or pre-Cambrian shield, the flatlands of the prairies, and the forests of the Athabasca.<sup>32</sup>

Innis's work, born of the early years of the Great Depression, ushered in a new historiographical wave, and the new economic history of the 1930s resonated with other

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<sup>30</sup> Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 383–402.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 185–188.

historians who promptly took up the charge. Inspired by Innis, Donald Creighton's study, *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence*, became a pillar of the Laurentian School, which similarly sought an economic framework to explain Canada's past. However, unlike Innis, whose main focus was commodities, Creighton's work placed the St. Lawrence River itself at the center of the story.<sup>33</sup> With access to the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Great Lakes to the west, the St. Lawrence became the determining factor in the creation of Canada and its western expansion. Geographical and environmental determinism permeated this interpretation and left little room for human agency. British exceptionalism dominated Creighton's work, but only insofar as to explain how the British had taken advantage of the St. Lawrence River Valley in a way that the French had not. Although Creighton acknowledged southern connections to the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, he portrayed these links as products of commerce that were dominated by the British after 1763. Moreover, he argued that the American Revolution and the peace of 1783 severed these southern commercial ties.<sup>34</sup> Both Innis's and Creighton's visions of Canadian history ran east to west, even while connected to transatlantic European markets.<sup>35</sup> They helped encapsulate a national paradigm defined and constrained by an artificially imposed forty-ninth parallel

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<sup>33</sup> Carl Berger details the influence that Innis had on Creighton and their different formative educational backgrounds, writing styles, and use of geography and landscape. Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing since 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 211–213.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>35</sup> Although *The Fur Trade in Canada* cites Frederick Jackson Turner's work on the frontier, Innis and Creighton undermine the exceptionalism of the American frontiersman by tying western exploitation with transatlantic trade and commerce. However, both Innis and Creighton keep the progressive opening of the west that, in many ways, remains quite similar to Turner's conception. See Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920); J.M.S. Careless, "Frontierism, Metropolitanism, and Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* 35, no. 1 (1954): 1–21.

writ large.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, the historical importance of commercial and social exchange along a north–south axis has been largely neglected, for it fails to fit within a neatly defined national discourse.<sup>37</sup>

In Quebec historiography, the question of social and economic continuity in French North America after 1763 has been largely obscured by the contentious debate surrounding the effects of the British Conquest.<sup>38</sup> Few events have left their mark so indelibly as those surrounding the Seven Years' War and the fall of New France. Catherine Desbarats and Allen Greer argue that the British Conquest continues to have a profound effect on French-speaking Quebec's historical consciousness: "Like other historical mythologies, they [1755 and 1759] are called upon to illuminate current national issues and to explain who we are and who were and not."<sup>39</sup> The Plains of Abraham (1759), the final surrender of the French in Montreal (1760), and the Treaty of Paris (1763) have been jointly interpreted as a fundamental historical fissure.

Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, Maurice Séguin, Michel Brunet, and Guy Frégault portrayed the conquest as the final break between Quebec and France, one that prematurely ended the development of the colony and resulted in the subjugation of Quebec to Britain.<sup>40</sup> This "decapitation thesis" also served to sever Quebec from the rest of French

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<sup>36</sup> The forty–ninth parallel is a commonly accepted term used to describe the Canada–U.S. border, even though most of the border east of Manitoba lies further to the south.

<sup>37</sup> Saler and Podruchny, "Glass Curtains and Storied Landscapes."

<sup>38</sup> One of the best introductions to the debate surrounding the British Conquest continues to be Dale Miquelon, *Society and Conquest: The Debate on the Bourgeoisie and Social Change in French Canada, 1700–1850* (Vancouver: Copp Clark, 1977).

<sup>39</sup> Catherine Desbarats and Allan Greer, "The Seven Years' War in Canadian History and Memory," in *Cultures in Conflict: The Seven Years' War in North America*, ed. Warren R. Hofstra (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2007), 146.

<sup>40</sup> Michel Brunet, *French Canada and the Early Decades of British Rule, 1760–1791*, vol. 13, The Canadian Historical Association Booklets (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1963); Michel Brunet, *Les Canadiens après la Conquête, 1759–1775* (Montréal: Fides, 1969); Guy Frégault, *Canada: The War of the Conquest*, trans., Margaret M. Cameron (Toronto: Oxford University Press,

North America by virtue of producing a nationalist interpretation that focused almost exclusively on history within the political boundaries of contemporary Quebec. The result was the creation of national meta-narratives where larger French North America became part of the historical legacy of New France, but had little or no place in Quebec's history beyond 1763.<sup>41</sup>

The Université de Montréal became the cradle of this Quebec nationalist school, marking a radical departure from the larger pan French-Canadian history that Lionel Groulx had espoused in the years leading up to the end of Second World War.<sup>42</sup> The more inclusive framework of *la nation canadienne* gave way as the study of Quebec history folded in on itself and began to operate within a national paradigm. This historiographical shift paralleled socio-political events in Canada, as the full force of the Quiet Revolution was felt in Quebec by the 1950s and 1960s, followed by the rise of a Quebec nationalist movement and a general fracturing of pan French-Canadian identity into provincial associations.<sup>43</sup>

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1969); Maurice Séguin, *La nation canadienne et l'agriculture, 1760-1850: essai d'histoire économique* (Trois-Rivières: Éditions Boréal Express, 1970).

<sup>41</sup> When historians have looked beyond Quebec's borders, it has been primarily in reference to the nineteenth century mass exodus of Quebecois to New England and, more recently, the twentieth century migration to Florida. Studies looking at the maintenance of ties between the St. Lawrence Valley and the Middle Mississippi Valley between 1763 and 1803 are noticeably absent. Thomas Wien recently wrote on the disjunction between New France history (pre-1763) and French-Canadian North America (1865-1930), with an undefined gap in between. Wien, "Introduction: Nouvelle-France – Amérique Française," in *De Québec à l'Amérique Française histoire et mémoire: textes choisis du deuxième colloque de la commission franco-québécoise sur les lieux de mémoire communs*, ed. Thomas Wien, Cécile Vidal, and Yves Frenette (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006), 4, 15.

<sup>42</sup> This change in the Montreal School is more striking when one considers that Abbé Lionel Groulx had served as senior scholar and mentor at the Université de Montréal to Frégault, Séguin, and Brunet. Ronald Rudin shows the changes within the Montreal School in his chapter, "The Maître and His Successors: The Montreal Approach." Rudin, *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 93-128.

<sup>43</sup> The interplay of politics, history, and memory in Quebec has recently been addressed by Jocelyn Létourneau, who argues that "the unavoidable and indispensable place of the intellectual is at the heart of the complex and delicate relationship between knowledge and politics, a relationship fraught

At the same time as the Montreal School of Quebec history was establishing itself, another group of historians—notably Marcel Trudel, Fernand Ouellet, and Jean Hamelin—at the Université Laval in Quebec City were beginning to make their mark. Heavily influenced by the *Annales* approach to history, they focused on a series of socio-economic factors over the *longue durée* that attempted to refute the decapitation thesis.<sup>44</sup> However, the Montreal and Laval schools were both focused on using history to explain the causes for Québécois lower socio-economic standing vis-à-vis English Canada in the 1950s and 1960s. While the Montreal School blamed the disaster of the conquest, the treachery of British merchants, and abandonment by France for contemporary societal inequalities, the Laval historians, and Ouellet in particular, placed the burden of responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the Québécois themselves.<sup>45</sup> Yet, the underlying tenet of both interpretations was a belief in the unique historical experience of French Canadians that produced a sense of tragic exceptionalism. These historical ideas remain remarkably well entrenched. Recent work on the collective memory of Québécois led Jocelyn Létourneau to question, “Are Quebecers eternally in mourning or trying to escape from the injunction to remember—‘Je me souviens’ (I remember)—that defines their relationship to the world?”<sup>46</sup>

Looking to distance themselves from both the Montreal and Laval Schools, Quebec historians of the 1970s and 1980s revised the premise of Quebec’s historical distinctiveness

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with tensions.” Létourneau, *A History for the Future: Rewriting Memory and Identity in Quebec* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), xiv.

<sup>44</sup> It would be unfair to portray the Laval School as simply reactionary, as the focus of their work continued well into the 1970s and 1980s and found a steady following among historians outside of Quebec. Rudin, *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec*, 168. For the major early works of the Laval School see Jean Hamelin, *Économie et société en Nouvelle-France* (Québec: Presses universitaires Laval, 1960); Fernand Ouellet, *Histoire économique et sociale du Québec, 1760–1850: structures et conjoncture* (Montréal: Fides, 1971); and Marcel Trudel, *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France* (Montréal: Fides, 1955).

<sup>45</sup> Rudin, *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec*, 93.

<sup>46</sup> Létourneau, *A History for the Future*, 9.

in favour of historical normalcy. However, the whiggish and progressive tendency to use the past to explain the present continued under this new veil, as did the dominance of nationally driven history.<sup>47</sup> Jean-Marie Fecteau argues that historical scholarship in Quebec since the end of the Second World War has overwhelmingly stayed within national boundaries.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Fecteau notes that the revisionists have been equally responsible for the limited national or provincial scope of recent historical inquiry.

Fort simple: depuis au moins une génération, sous l'impulsion des historiens «révisionnistes», l'immense majorité des historiens québécois (excluant évidemment les spécialistes d'histoire non canadienne) ont concentré leurs travaux sur *l'espace québécois*, suivant en cela une redéfinition majeure de l'espace principal de référence d'une vaste majorité d'intellectuels québécois, voire de la population en général, espace de référence auparavant ouvert aux horizons géographiquement plus vastes de l'«Amérique» catholique et française.<sup>49</sup>

Some historians, however, questioned the basic assumptions regarding the geography and continuity of French North America following the British Conquest, notably Dale Miquelon and José Igartua. Miquelon's unpublished master's thesis on the Baby family went furthest in showing the continued links with trading centers like Detroit.<sup>50</sup> José Igartua's investigation of the Montreal merchants following the British Conquest later reopened the question of what happened to older French trade networks.<sup>51</sup> Yet, while both these authors are cited regularly, their works did not prompt a new flurry of historical scholarship. Thus, I

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<sup>47</sup> Rudin, *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Jean-Marie Fecteau, "Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle... une «autre» histoire du Québec?," *Canadian Issues / Thèmes Canadiens: Quelle histoire pour quel avenir? Whose History for Whose Future?* Fall / Automne (2008): 15.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Miquelon, "The Baby Family in the Trade of Canada, 1750–1820."

<sup>51</sup> José E. Igartua, "A Change in Climate: The Conquest and the 'Marchands' of Montreal," *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* (1974).

would argue that the British Conquest continues to serve as an artificial breaking point between French North America's historical legacy and Quebec national history.

French–Canadian historians were not the only ones to interpret the British Conquest as the dividing line between larger French North American history and Quebec history. Others were quick to acknowledge the break between Quebec and other francophone regions. For example, Hilda Neatby argued that “the French Empire was dissolved [in 1763]; the fragile lines which had united Quebec and New Orleans were severed, and forever.”<sup>52</sup> The result of this historiographical divide has meant that Canadian scholars have largely ignored territories to the southwest of Quebec, specifically the Illinois Country. French scholar Cécile Vidal recently noted that “bien que l’histoire du Pays des Illinois se rattache à celle de la vallée du Saint–Laurent, les historiens canadiens se sont peu intéressés à cette région périphérique.”<sup>53</sup> American historian Jay Gitlin offered a somewhat harsher assessment of the way that larger French networks in the heart of North America have been studied.

Balkanized by local historians of the Midwest, ignored by French colonial historians interested primarily in imperial policymaking, and out of view from Canadian historians who tend to focus either on the colonial St. Lawrence Valley or modern Quebec, these French merchants from Detroit to New Orleans have not been seen as a coherent or a relevant group.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Hilda Neatby, *Quebec: The Revolutionary Age, 1760–1791*, vol. 6, The Canadian Centenary Series, ed. W.L. Morton and D.G. Creighton (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1966), 2.

<sup>53</sup> Cécile Vidal, “Le Pays des Illinois, six villages français au coeur de l’Amérique du Nord, 1699–1765,” in *De Québec à l’Amérique Française histoire et mémoire: textes choisis du deuxième colloque de la commission franco–québécoise sur les lieux de mémoire communs*, ed. Thomas Wien, Cécile Vidal, and Yves Frenette (Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2006), 127.

<sup>54</sup> Jay Gitlin, “Negotiating the Course of Empire: The French Bourgeois Frontier and the Emergence of Mid–America, 1763–1863” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2002), 19.

American scholars have been equally prone to operate within a national paradigm. Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis set the early tone for the western progression of American settlers and the process of Americanization.<sup>55</sup> Infused with a heavy dose of American exceptionalism, Turner's work became the foundation for early histories of the Illinois Country, including Clarence Alvord's seminal work on the region. Commissioned by Illinois Centennial Commission, Alvord's work focused on the history of the region as it pertained to both state and national development. The north-south connection that Alvord used to establish the Illinois Country in the early part of his work was only a temporary measure, and was swept away by the winds of American western expansion. Alvord's depiction of the Illinois Country in 1783 and 1787 appears as if it could have been pulled straight from the pages of Turner's work:

Momentous events were now taking place. The roaring of the advancing tide of the Americans was already heard west of the Alleghenies, and with inexorable force the waves of individualism were to inundate the wilderness. For the use of the pioneers of a new west, there had been evolved an organism of territorial government that was adjusted to the needs of a people loving personal independence and spurning external control. The imperialism of the Ordinance of 1787 was an imperialism of individual liberty and of local self determination. Whatever were the forces that called it into being, this new instrument of western expansion was framed by men of democratic ideals and was the palladium of freedom carried by Americans in their rush across the valley of the Mississippi.<sup>56</sup>

By the 1960s, the importance of the Frontier Thesis in the heart of North America was being questioned, most notably by John Francis McDermott, who attacked Turner directly. McDermott argued that Turner had downplayed the importance of business, and

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<sup>55</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Clarence W. Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673-1818*, vol. 1 of *The Sesquicentennial History of Illinois* (1920; reprint, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 397.

used the merchant brothers Auguste and Pierre Chouteau to show the commercial connections between St. Louis, Philadelphia, Montreal, and New Orleans.<sup>57</sup> Despite McDermott's acknowledgment of these larger commercial links, most of the historiography of the Illinois Country continued to be encapsulated within an American national narrative. Joseph Zitomersky, an American working as a French colonial historian in France, has expressed amazement at the ubiquitous nature of contemporary geopolitics in history and the persistence of national borders in French colonial history.<sup>58</sup>

American historians have traditionally dealt with the post-1763 period within the confines of politically defined boundaries, studying the British, Spanish, and American territories in North America as separate entities.<sup>59</sup> Over the last twenty-five years, new interpretations have reunited the histories of the east and west sides of the Mississippi, erasing the imaginary line that had separated the French of Spanish Upper Louisiana from those of the British and American Illinois Country and Ohio Valley.<sup>60</sup> However, the forty-ninth parallel has remained remarkably well entrenched. Eric Hinderaker argues that after 1763, French fur trade merchants of the Ohio and Middle Mississippi Valleys chose to deal

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<sup>57</sup> John Francis McDermott, "The Frontier Re-Examined," in *The Frontier Re-Examined*, ed. John Francis McDermott (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 11.

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Zitomersky, "Ville, état, implantation et société en Louisiane Française: la variante «Mississippienne» du modèle colonial français en Amérique du Nord," in *Colonies, territoires, sociétés: l'enjeu français*, ed. Alain Saussol and Joseph Zitomersky (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 23.

<sup>59</sup> There are, of course exceptions, to this, such as the works of Charles J. Balesi, W. J. Eccles, and, more recently, Gilles Havard and Cécile Vidal. However, these works focus primarily on the geopolitical history of the French Empire, portraying the period after 1763 as one of decline after conquest. Balesi, *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America, 1673-1818*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Alliance Française, 2000); Eccles, *The French in North America, 1500-1783*, revised ed. (Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1998); and Havard and Vidal, *Histoire de l'Amérique Française* (France: Flammarion, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the best historiographical essay on the Illinois Country is the recent work of Cécile Vidal, who highlights the rise in the 1980s of historians Margaret K. Brown, Carl Ekberg, and Winstanley Briggs. See Briggs, "The Forgotten Colony: Le Pays des Illinois" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1985); Brown, "La colonisation française de l'Illinois: une réévaluation," *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française* 39, no. 4 (1986); Ekberg, *Coloinal Ste. Genevieve, an Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier* (Gerald, Missouri: Patrice Press, 1985); and Vidal, "Le Pays des Illinois."

primarily with New Orleans to the south, rather than Montreal to the north.<sup>61</sup> Carl J. Ekberg has focused on the grain and flour trade to New Orleans rather than northern trade networks.<sup>62</sup> Even Jay Gitlin, whose recent dissertation argues that the story of the French bourgeois in the heart of North America after 1763 lay on a north–south axis, does so specifically to reintegrate this story into the American national grand narrative.<sup>63</sup>

### *Mobility*

The second historiographical roadblock is an overemphasis on sedentary agricultural settlement at the expense of long–distance commerce and mobility. Prior to 1763, towns on the Mississippi river, like Cahokia, Kaskaskia, and Ste. Geneviève, acted as critical junctions between Montreal to the north and New Orleans to the south.<sup>64</sup> And yet, the mobility inherent in this interpretation is largely lost after 1763. In some cases, this has been taken to an extreme. For example, Daniel Royot has recently argued that by the end of the eighteenth century, “Mobility was uncommon among the former Canadian colonists who preferred to gather around churches and remained clannish. They tilled long fields as in manorial France while keeping farm implements that were those of their ancestors.”<sup>65</sup> Extreme to be sure, yet even in wider French colonial historiography, the mobility of the fur trade has been drawn into an unfortunate binary with sedentary agriculture. This binary has been remarkably difficult to shake, even in the more nuanced Canadian and American

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<sup>61</sup> Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 177.

<sup>62</sup> Ekberg, *Colonial Ste. Genevieve*, 126–176.

<sup>63</sup> Gitlin, “Negotiating the Course of Empire,” 3.

<sup>64</sup> Vidal, “Le Pays Des Illinois,” 126.

<sup>65</sup> Daniel Royot, *Divided Loyalties in a Doomed Empire: The French in the West from New France to the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 215.

historical discourses. For example, Colin Coates acknowledges the importance of the fur trade, while simultaneously setting up a framework that makes it antithetical to agriculture.

Despite the importance of the fur trade, the vast majority focused on agriculture and seigneuries, while the small number of fur traders provided a vision of landscape fated to decrease over time. Agrarian landscapes would be the first and only complete revolution in the St. Lawrence Valley.<sup>66</sup>

Erik Hinderaker's view of overlapping empires of commerce, land, and liberty allow these forms to co-exist. However, the progressive hierarchy of these three forms of empire makes the mobile commerce of the fur trade seem like a well-entrenched but archaic leftover, one challenged by concepts of a landed empire and largely swept away by an empire of liberty.<sup>67</sup> Part of the problem appears to lie in the close association between the fur trade and mobility. While they undoubtedly overlapped, the decline of the fur trade did not necessarily mean an end to a culture of mobility. Rather, it forced a reorientation of mobile networks of communication and exchange. Christian Morissonneau argues that the mobility of the *coureurs de bois* and *voyageurs* became the defining feature of French-Canadian identity, even as the networks that supported this culture of mobility took on other forms.<sup>68</sup>

Given the close association of the fur trade with mobility, it seems odd that the networks of communication and exchange between the St. Lawrence and middle Mississippi Valleys after 1763 have been marginalized in historical discourse. After all, the fur trade between St. Louis and Montreal continued until 1830.<sup>69</sup> Upon closer investigation, the binary of fur trade mobility versus sedentary agriculture in the middle Mississippi Valley during the second half of the eighteenth century fails to appropriately define the region. Ste.

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<sup>66</sup> Colin Coates, *The Metamorphoses of Landscape and Community in Early Quebec* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>67</sup> Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*.

<sup>68</sup> Morissonneau, "The 'Ungovernable' People," 15-32.

<sup>69</sup> St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs."

Geneviève became a major grain producer and exporter at the same time that St. Louis became an important fur trade center. French-speaking inhabitants of the Illinois Country could and did engage in both agriculture and the fur trade. Indeed, the two were rarely mutually exclusive.<sup>70</sup>

Increasingly, a different binary of the Illinois Country has developed between agricultural links with the south and fur trade connections with the north. This is highly problematic because such clear-cut distinctions mask a larger culture of mobility and the varieties of commercial interaction that took place. The fur trade was never exclusively a northern venture, as furs were also shipped south to New Orleans. Moreover, the fur trade was never solely about furs. Imperial goods from Britain and France were crucial, not only for trade with native peoples, but also for local exchange economies. And to further complicate things, regional trade muddied the waters of what seemed to be a clear historical discourse.<sup>71</sup>

While Ekberg has focused on the New Orleans grain trade and sedentary agriculture along the Mississippi as the defining features of the Illinois Country, this study concentrates on the mobility along the commercial networks of the fur trade and kinship connections.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Within a Canadian context, Thomas Wien argues that the historiographical chasm between agriculture and the fur trade has obscured the interrelation between these two “lifestyles,” which saw many enter the fur trade in the hopes of generating enough income to buy land or supplement an existing agricultural holding. Wien, “Familles paysannes et marché de l’engagement pour le commerce des fourrures au Canada au XVIII siècle,” in *Famille et marché XVe–XXe siècles*, ed. Christian Dessureault, John A. Dickinson, and Joseph Goy (Québec: Septentrion, 2003), 167–179.

<sup>71</sup> While Daniel H. Usner downplays the importance of the grain trade between Upper and Lower Louisiana, his work illustrates the importance of local and regional trade. Usner, *American Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley: Social and Economic Histories* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press: 1998).

<sup>72</sup> Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998). Cécile Vidal has also worked extensively on the grain trade between the Illinois Country and Louisiana, albeit during the French regime. See Vidal, “Antoine Bienvenu, Illinois Planter and Mississippi Trader: The Structure of Exchange between

While acknowledging the importance of agriculture and the far-reaching networks of communication and exchange that included New Orleans, this study examines the other side of the binary, and shows how the merchants, voyageurs, and families who traveled between the St. Lawrence and the middle Mississippi Valleys after 1763 tied together a French river world, which stretched as far northwest as the Athabasca and as far southwest as New Mexico.

### *Storied Endings and Tragic Dénouement*

The final historiographical roadblock with which this dissertation contends is the somewhat inescapable influence of hindsight. Broader interpretations of the French in North America, including such notable historians as William Eccles and Charles Balesi, tend to portray the post-1763 period as one of inevitable decline following the British conquest of French territories.<sup>73</sup> The end date for studies of French North America vary between 1763, 1783, and 1803, but the story is consistently one of decline or tragic *dénouement*. Old themes of backward French peasants and American exceptionalism continue to play a role in the tragic *dénouement* of French North America. For example, Royot's depiction of the end of French rule in the heart of North America is reminiscent of a previous era of historical scholarship.

Although the West was changing, the French in the Mississippi Valley still worked and lived as if in the remote past, unmindful of the American settlers engulfing the lands around them. The French lacked the bustle and energy of the small-

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Lower and Upper Louisiana," in *French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World*, ed. Bradley G. Bond (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 111–133.

<sup>73</sup> Balesi, *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America*; Eccles, *The French in North America*.

propertied frontiersmen, and were considered as suspect hedonists by sneering Americans who resented their levity.<sup>74</sup>

It appears that Francis Parkman's depictions of backward French settlers and Turner's Frontier Thesis continue to hold some sway. Fortunately, new interpretations have emerged to challenge the old view of French decline and the rise of America. Gitlin's incorporation of the French merchants into the American grand narrative, while constrained by a national paradigm, provides a far more positive depiction of French North America that allows for individual agency and initiative.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, Havard and Vidal's co-authored book, *l'Histoire de l'Amérique Française*, not only provides a long-overdue new grand narrative for French North America, but also features an impressively balanced concluding chapter that discusses the continued French influence after 1763.<sup>76</sup> This study continues in this new vein by highlighting both French agency and influence after 1763. While many French inhabitants in North America understood the geopolitical changes that were happening around them between 1763 and 1803, they were far from resigned to quietly disappear.

### **New Directions**

The story of the French in the post-Conquest period has largely been one of tragic dénouement, renewal, and adaptation within the creation and expansion of the American nation-state, or of subjugation and survival within a Canadian national narrative. None of these interpretations captures the great continuity of French social and commercial interaction across the newly formed but weakly enforced territorial borders between 1763 and 1803. There are, however, studies that have moved in other directions. Focusing

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<sup>74</sup> Royot, *Divided Loyalties in a Doomed Empire*, 215. Royot cites Francis Parkman in his bibliography, but does not have Turner despite evoking images of the Frontier Thesis.

<sup>75</sup> Gitlin, "Negotiating the Course of Empire."

<sup>76</sup> Havard and Vidal, *Histoire de l'Amérique Française*, 671–719.

primarily on fur trade and métis history, they have explored kinship networks. Susan Sleeper-Smith's study of Catholic kinship groups and Heather Devine's exploration of the extensive métis genealogy of the Desjarlais family have revealed peoples who were part of a vibrant northern trade, who exported furs and imported British goods.<sup>77</sup> Hundreds of French traders, for example, arrived each year at Michilimackinac to trade pelts and goods in a Great Lakes trade dominated by Indian women and their French husbands.<sup>78</sup> Between 1763 and 1803, approximately one thousand fur trade contracts were signed in Montreal by voyageurs bound for the *Pays d'en Haut*, the Illinois Country, and the Mississippi. An additional six hundred contracts were signed for expeditions headed for Detroit, and another twenty-five hundred were destined for Michilimackinac.<sup>79</sup> In his 1803 report to the Spanish governor at New Orleans, Nicolas de Finiels complained at length about the lure of the fur trade on the Mississippi and its continued connection with the north.<sup>80</sup> He argued that traders would "ascend the Illinois River and trade at Michilimackinac for merchandise that arrives every year from Canada."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Devine, *The People Who Own Themselves*; Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

<sup>78</sup> Colin G. Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 128–129.

<sup>79</sup> St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs."

<sup>80</sup> Nicolas de Finiels, *An Account of Upper Louisiana*, ed. Carl J. Ekberg and William Foley, trans., Carl J. Ekberg (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 86. De Finiels was a Frenchman employed by the governor of Louisiana, Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, to work as an engineer and surveyor.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

### Contextualizing the French River World<sup>82</sup>

The French empire in North America came to an abrupt end with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763.<sup>83</sup> With the “Scratch of a Pen,” as Parkman and, more recently, Colin G. Calloway have put it, the map of North America was drastically altered.<sup>84</sup> New France and the Illinois Country on the east side of the Mississippi river became British territory, while the Spanish took possession of the west side of the Mississippi and New Orleans. These were the first in a series of changes that dramatically transformed North America’s geopolitical landscape between 1763 and 1803. The *Royal Proclamation* (1763), the *Quebec Act* (1774), the American Revolution (1776–1783), the *Jay Treaty* (1795), and the Louisiana Purchase (1803) meant a constant redrawing of, and attempts to control territorial boundaries. However, as Calloway notes, “Imperial politics did not always or immediately alter existing social realities. On the peripheries of empire, many of the same people continued business as usual.”<sup>85</sup>

The social reality on the ground was slow to change and French settlements continued much as they had before, tied together by a commercial system of merchants and traders travelling along the waterways of North America to form a French river world. For an entire generation, the Spanish, British, and Anglo–American presence in the heart of North America remained modest. However, by the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804, the territories west of the Mississippi had begun to enter the mainstream of American

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<sup>82</sup> This sections as well as several other sections in chapters one and two were recently published as an article. However, most have undergone revision since publication. See Robert Englebert, “Merchant Representatives and the French River World, 1763-1803” *Michigan Historical Review* 34, no. 1 (Spring, 2008): 63-82.

<sup>83</sup> Despite keeping Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint Lucia, and briefly regaining Louisiana prior to its purchase by the Americans in 1803, France ceased to be an imperial power in North America after 1763.

<sup>84</sup> Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen*, xi.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

consciousness, ushering in a new era of American western expansion. The expedition served as a precursor to the tide of western migration that eventually flooded the interior of North America.<sup>86</sup> Despite these changes, the French river world was notably resilient, adapting and changing as needed. Many of the social and commercial links that defined the French river world persisted well into the 1830s, buoyed by the hundreds of *Canadien* voyageurs hired by the American Fur Company of St. Louis.<sup>87</sup> It took nearly a century for the French river world to come apart, suggesting a remarkable continuity of social and commercial exchange on the ground, and making it arguably far more resilient than the official geopolitical French Empire in North America had ever been.

### **Mental Mapping and a Culture of Mobility**

French merchants and voyageurs crossed these newly formed boundaries between 1763 and 1803, not only maintaining, but also expanding a well-established system of commercial and social exchange in North America. They travelled on the major waterways of the continent, acting as cultural conduits for the maintenance of an informal French commercial empire held together by kinship, commerce, and religion. Consequently, French merchants and those whom they represented developed an understanding that transcended borders.

The end product was a mental map where a culture of mobility formed and maintained a very real trans-national community.<sup>88</sup> This was not simply a theoretical

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<sup>86</sup> Clarence W. Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 397; Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country*, 251.

<sup>87</sup> Nicole St-Onge, SSHRC Standard Grant, 2007–2010. “Trade, Travel and Tradition: St. Lawrence Valley Engagés to the American Fur Company, 1818–1840.” In collaboration with William Swagerty (University of the Pacific, CA).

<sup>88</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1996), 5–7.

construct, but rather a geographical concept rooted in a tangible reality defined by the lived experience of the merchants, voyageurs, and families who plied these rivers. Gordon Sayre argues that these experiences meant that French inhabitants and explorers “knew the landscape as a waterscape, a lacy network of rivers and lakes connected by portages.”<sup>89</sup> The goods that merchants and voyageurs transported, the peoples they encountered, and the communities and individuals they represented were manifestations of a larger collective understanding. The Chicago Portage, the settlement at Detroit, and the trading post at Michilimackinac—to name a few—became crucial transit points in a collectively conceived French river world, where the waterways of North America acted as the lifeblood that tied individuals, families, and communities together. Nowhere was this more evident than in the complex forms of communication and representation that defined both family and community, uniting both the abstract perception of space and place and the tangible lived experience of mobility.

### *Mental Mapping*

A mental map is an amorphous and nebulous concept at best. Why, then, explore something so difficult to define, categorize, and demonstrate clearly? Because mental mapping sits at the confluence of a number of streams of historical inquiry regarding empire, cartography, identity, culture, and sense of place. In order to define mental mapping, one must necessarily engage with historical and cultural geography. Seen as history’s epistemological twin, geography has provided an accepted and recognized (although at times

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<sup>89</sup> Gordon M. Sayre, *Les Sauvages Américains: Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 113–114.

only grudgingly so) role in how we view the past.<sup>90</sup> Part of the difficulty lies in the nature of mental mapping and how it relates to traditional cartography. In his examination of cartographic discourse, J.B. Harley argues that,

Maps are never value-free images; except in the narrowest Euclidean sense they are not in themselves either true or false. Both in the selectivity of their content and in their signs and styles of representation, maps are a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations.<sup>91</sup>

However, mental maps are not bound by the same rules as those produced through traditional cartography. This is largely due to the fact that traditional maps are static. In other words, the cultural values associated with images on a map may change over time, yet the images themselves remain the same. While images and text on a map can be edited and altered to some degree, for the most part they are static depictions bound to their chronological date of creation. Any significant change to the map requires a newly crafted document.

Mental maps are not nearly as constrained. Mental mapping is the product of lived experience and contact with others and how this affects the perception of place and space.<sup>92</sup> Peter Gould and Rodney White have described mental maps as “the perception that people have of places, and the mental images that are formed from filtered information flows.”<sup>93</sup> One’s mental images are likely to be reshaped as lived experience, and contact with others

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<sup>90</sup> Alan R. H. Baker, “Reflections on the Relations of Historical Geography and the *Annales* School of History,” in *Explorations in Historical Geography: Interpretative Essays*, ed. Alan R. H. Baker and Derek Gregory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 4.

<sup>91</sup> J. B. Harley, “Maps, Knowledge, and Power,” in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 278.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Gould and Rodney White, *Mental Maps* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1974), 17.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

changes one's relationship with the world around oneself. Thus, mental maps are inherently mutable. Moreover, because each person's lived experience is unique, so too is each person's mental map, meaning that mental maps are also amorphous. And yet, despite the individualism of mental maps and their infinite dimensions, a larger collective mental map can be discerned from certain commonalities. By focusing on common experiences in relation to landscape, and resulting from mobility, communication, and exchange, it is possible to set rough markers and fluid boundaries for the mental map of a population or cultural group.<sup>94</sup> Still, this type of categorizing has to be approached with caution. As Gould and White have appropriately warned, the process of homomorphic mapping—the transformation of many maps into one—necessarily carries the risk of creating a model, of becoming nothing more than “an abstraction, simplification, and compression of reality.”<sup>95</sup> Therefore, a collective mental map, such as the French river world, is necessarily an incomplete composite, offering insights, but no definitive structure. The fluid concept of mental mapping is dynamically intertwined with the equally ill-defined concept of culture.<sup>96</sup>

Another complication in the process of mental mapping is the relationship that mental maps have with colonialism and post-colonial theory. J.B. Harley argues that maps were tools of the state that contained privileged knowledge, and were sources of power and

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<sup>94</sup> This can be seen as a much broader version of Fritz Steele's definition for a sense of place. Steele, *The Sense of Place* (Boston: CBI Publishing Company, 1981), 12, 63, 65. Also see Howard Becker, “Forms of Population Movement: Prolegomena to a Study of Mental Mobility,” *Social Forces* 9, no. 3 (1931): 352–356; Susan Clayton, “Environmental Identity: A Conceptual and Operational Definition,” in *Identity and the Natural Environment*, ed. Susan Clayton and Susan Opatow (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 46; Paul Cloke, Chris Philo, and David Sadler, *Approaching Human Geography: An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Debates* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), 160; and Carolyn Podruchny, “Writing, Ritual, and Folklore: Imagining the Cultural Geography of Voyageurs,” in *Method and Meaning in Canadian Environmental History*, ed. Alan MacEachern and William J. Turkel (Toronto: Nelson, 2009), 61.

<sup>95</sup> Gould and White, *Mental Maps*, 52.

<sup>96</sup> Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 13–14.

“weapons of imperialism.”<sup>97</sup> This form and expression of power was not always overtly articulated, and was often much more subtle in its pervasiveness. If “maps are preeminently a language of power, not protest,”<sup>98</sup> then mental maps would seemingly be the other side of the binary, the protest and bottom-up reaction to traditional cartography’s language of power. However, mental maps do not fit as neatly as this. They may emanate from the bottom, but they are not immune to top-down influences. A collective mental map is specialized knowledge that includes and excludes certain people from a particular worldview. As with traditional maps, a collective mental map can serve to control space, facilitate the geographical expansion of social systems, and affect the creation and maintenance of cultural hegemony, albeit outside a state structure. Therefore mental maps can be a simultaneous discourse of both power and protest. Moreover, map-making is both a conscious and unconscious process, whereas collective mental mapping is almost exclusively an unconscious process.

Gould and White’s work on mental maps dealt with subjects in a contemporary context, where a series of questions could be given and the answers calculated mathematically to create a mental map. However, within a historical context, where questioning living subjects is not possible, an alternative methodology is required. This study proposes to use quantitative data, such as legal and commercial records, and empirical evidence of correspondence and journals to construct the collective mental map of the

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<sup>97</sup> Harley, “Maps, Knowledge, and Power,” 279–282. Also see Cole Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 1 (2004): 175.

<sup>98</sup> Harley, “Maps, Knowledge, and Power,” 301.

French river world.<sup>99</sup> At the same time, it accepts the incompleteness of this collective mental map due to an equally incomplete data set.

### Geography of the French River World

Travelers to the heart of North America at the end of the eighteenth and start of the nineteenth century were aware of the geography of the interior of the continent and commented on the how regions were tied together by lakes and rivers. Nicolas Jacquemin wrote of a Louisiana territory hemmed in by the Gulf of Mexico, the Carolinas, New Mexico, Canada, and the lands of the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>100</sup> He noted that this vast territory was tied together by waterways, writing "les rivières se communiquent presque toutes les unes aux autres, soit par des lacs, soit par les canaux naturels; ce qui peut beaucoup faciliter la navigation, & être dans la suite d'un grand avantage au commerce."<sup>101</sup> Louis Dubroca gave a similar description of a vast Louisiana territory tied together by rivers, which he felt favoured communication and commerce with Canada.<sup>102</sup> François Marie Perrin du Lac saw the control of the Mississippi River as crucial to controlling the interior of the continent, writing,

The Mississippi, navigable to an extent of eight hundred leagues, is indisputably one of the finest rivers in North America. The numerous rivers which flow into it, render its proprietor the sole possessor of all the commerce of the North–West part of this continent. By means of the Ohio, the inhabitants receive the products of the Western provinces of the United States; by the Illinois to Canada; and by the

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<sup>99</sup> Marie Price and Martin Lewis, "The Reinvention of Cultural Geography," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 83, no. 1 (1993): 1, 12.

<sup>100</sup> Nicolas Jacquemin, *Mémoire sur la Louisiane, contenant la description du sol et des productions de cette île, et les moyens de la rendre florissante en peu de tems; avec un vocabulaire et un abrégé de la grammaire de la langue des sauvages* (Paris: J.M. Eberhard, 1803): 2.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>102</sup> Louis Dubroca, *L'Itinéraire des français dans la Louisiane*, (Paris: Fuchs, 1802): 26, 82.

Missouri, there is no doubt but that they may penetrate as far as the countries of the Pacific ocean.<sup>103</sup>

Perrin du Lac argued that New Orleans was the key to controlling the Mississippi River and justified this view by explaining that it took only three months to reach Prairie du Chien from New Orleans, while the route from Montreal was generally four to five months long.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, Perrin du Lac reasoned that the advantage of New Orleans rested in the fact that “the merchants who come from Quebec and Montreal to this depôt, are subjected to much trouble, delay, and expence, as their boats must be loaded and unloaded thirty–six times, and carried, as well as the merchandise, on the men’s shoulders to different distances.”<sup>105</sup> The number of portages had been mentioned several years earlier in Victor Collot’s writing when he had traveled through the heart of North America. Collot commented on how, in addition to the thirty–six portages from Montreal to Michilimackinac, another seventy–two portages were required to reach Lake Winnipeg.<sup>106</sup> Collot argued that by comparison the voyage from New Orleans to Lake Winnipeg required only one twelve–mile portage.<sup>107</sup>

Collot’s interest in the fur trade was rooted in the possibility of a renewed French empire in the heart of North America; a sentiment echoed in the travel writings of the other ex–patriot Frenchmen who voyaged through the heart of the continent in the late eighteenth

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<sup>103</sup> M. Perrin du Lac, *Travels through the two Louisianas and among the Savage Nations of the Missouri; also, in the United States, along the Ohio, and the adjacent provinces, in 1801, 1802, & 1803* (London: Richard Phillips, 1807): 43.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>106</sup> For an early map detailing many of the Ottawa River and Great Lakes portages see Clairborne A. Skinner, *The Upper Country: French Enterprise in the Colonial Great Lakes* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 38.

<sup>107</sup> Victor Collot, *A Journey in North America, Containing a Survey of the Countries Watered by the Mississippi, Ohio, Missouri, and Other Affluing Rivers; with Exact Observations on the Course and Soundings of These Rivers; and on the Towns, Villages, Hamlets, and Farms of That Part of the New World; Followed by Philosophical, Political, Military and Commercial Remarks, and by a Projected Line of Frontiers and General Limits*, trans., an unknown Englishman under the supervision of the author (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1826), 2: 186–89.

and early nineteenth century. These travelers all understood the larger imperial implications of commercial domination of the interior, but it is less certain how well they understood the social ramifications of these long-distance trade networks. Collot and Perrin du Lac's comments comparing the Montreal and New Orleans trade routes to the Northwest coincided with a period of intense competition for the Mandan trade on the Upper Missouri River during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. By 1796 the Hudson's Bay Company was operating out of Brandon House and was making trips down the nearby Souris River and overland to the upper Missouri River.<sup>108</sup> The Hudson's Bay Company competed with the Northwest Company and traders from Spanish Upper Louisiana for control of the Mandan trade.<sup>109</sup> The region that encompassed the Souris and upper Missouri Rivers may have been a hotly contested piece of fur trade and imperial real estate, but it was at the periphery of the French river world. The expansion of the fur trade on the Upper Missouri, throughout the Northwest, as well as down the Santa Fe trail, helped push the fluid boundaries of the French river world and fuelled much of the mobility that characterized the French in the heart of North America. However, the largest concentration of French settlement and the most important commercial corridors continued to run through the Great Lakes region and along the St. Lawrence and Mississippi Rivers.

Canoe brigades paddled up the Ottawa, Mattawa and French Rivers into Georgian Bay and Lake Huron.<sup>110</sup> As the eighteenth century progressed more and more *bateaux*

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<sup>108</sup> John C. Jackson, "Brandon House and the Manitoba Connection," *North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains* 49, no. 1 (Winter, 1982): 11-19.

<sup>109</sup> John A. Alwin, "Pelts, Provisions & Perceptions: The Hudson's Bay Company Mandan Indian Trade, 1795-1812," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 29, no. 3 (July, 1979): 19-22.

<sup>110</sup> Eric W. Morse, *Fur Trade Canoe Routes of Canada / Then and Now* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969): 48-70.

travelled up the St. Lawrence River into Lakes Ontario and Erie.<sup>111</sup> In 1796, Collot explained that even though the portages on the Ottawa River made the voyage much more difficult fur-trading companies preferred that route because they could more accurately time the voyage.<sup>112</sup> By comparison, *bateaux* on the Great Lakes had to contend with changing winds that could hasten a voyage or delay it by several weeks. Winter ice locked up the port at Quebec city meaning that there was only a small window of opportunity in the autumn from when the furs arrived to when they were shipped off across the Atlantic. Delays meant that bundles of furs were either sold at auction in Montreal or were left to sit unsold until the port opened in the spring. Bundles of furs that sat in storage over the winter, however, ran the risk of spoiling in the cold and damp conditions. But it was not just furs that were transported on these river routes. Canoes and *bateaux* also transported supplies and trade goods into the interior. Some of these supplies were destined for the fur trade, but many were goods sent to the communities of the Illinois Country, with everything from shoes, cloth and silverware to paintings and vaccines. (see Appendix A) Passenger travel was also a regular feature of these river routes, as *Canadiens* flowed into the Illinois Country throughout the eighteenth century.

Several of the river routes were major transportation corridors for both the fur trade and the French river world. Detroit and Michilimackinac served as two of the largest transportation and trading hubs in the Great Lakes. Goods and furs were repackaged, and voyageur crews rested and were reorganized for subsequent legs of voyages. From Detroit, southbound canoes continued along the Miami and Wabash Rivers to the trading villages of Ouiatenon and Vincennes. From there, they went downstream to the Ohio River until they

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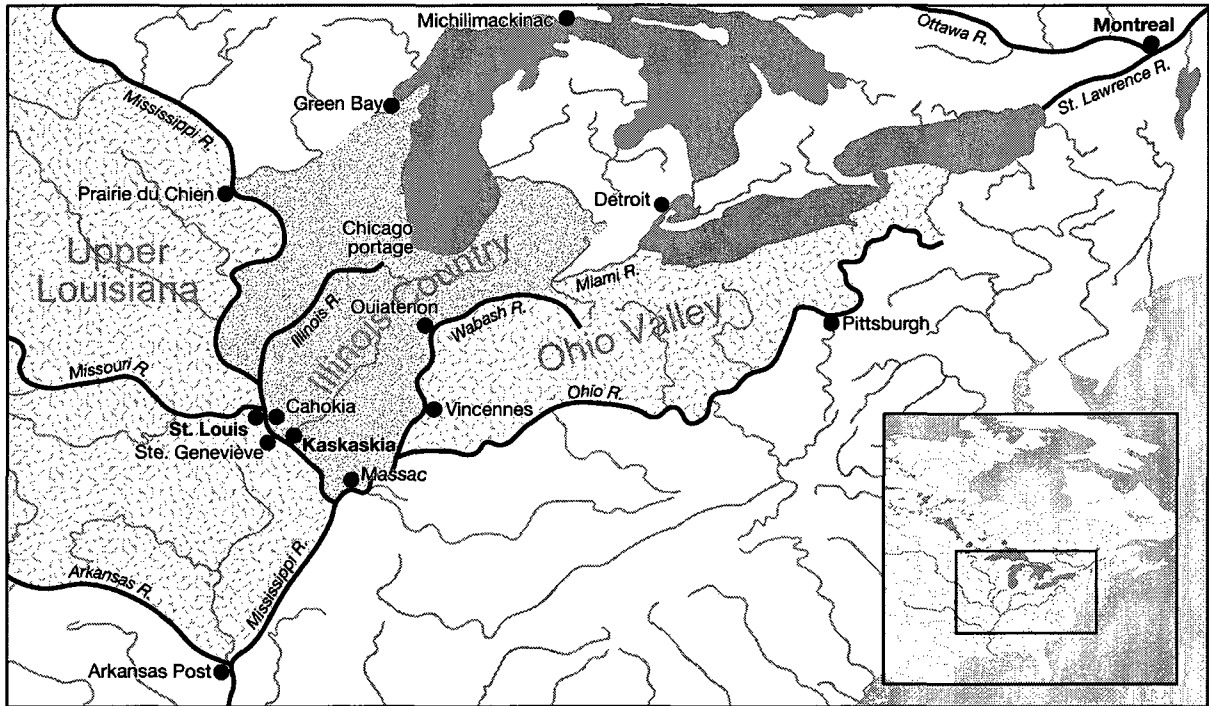
<sup>111</sup> *Bateaux* could vary in size and style from sailboats on the lakes to large rafts for river travel.

<sup>112</sup> Victor Collot, *A Journey in North America*, 2:186.

reached the Mississippi. At the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers a decision was made to either go upstream to the villages of the middle Mississippi Valley, such as Kaskaskia, Cahokia, Ste. Geneviève and St. Louis, or to go downriver to Arkansas Post and New Orleans. As expeditions and supplies travelled south of the Great Lakes, they were often transferred into *bateaux* or *pirogues*.<sup>113</sup> Some of the southbound brigades headed from Michilimackinac to Green Bay and then traveled on the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers to Prairie du Chien on the upper Mississippi River. However, the majority of Michilimackinac trade went the length of Lake Michigan to the Chicago and St. Joseph portages and down the Illinois River to the villages of the middle Mississippi Valley. The geographical contours of the French river world changed throughout the eighteenth century. The upper Ohio River became more closely associated with American trans-Appalachian trade, which included the Ohio Valley and an emerging Kentucky region south of the Ohio River. By the start of the nineteenth century, some of the trade that had gone to Detroit and Michilimackinac was being sent to nearby British posts at Sandwich and St. Joseph's Island. These changes reflected the geopolitical reality of a growing American presence in the interior and an emerging border between America and British North America on the Great Lakes. Despite these changes, river travel between the St. Lawrence and the middle Mississippi Valleys continued and the social and trade networks of the French river world proved remarkably resilient.

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<sup>113</sup> Pirogues were large hollowed out trees used for river travel in the south where birch bark was hard to find and where shallow rivers with protruding tree roots necessitated more durable watercraft.



Map 1. French river world in the heart of North America

### Conclusion

The following pages illustrate the French river world through a series of four case studies. Chapter one focuses on the establishment of the French river world through an examination of historical demography in the Illinois Country and the importance of migration and marriage patterns. More specifically, it looks at how *Canadiens* continued to migrate to the Illinois Country and marry into established French-speaking families. These marriage alliances helped tie individuals and communities together over vast distances and kept larger understandings of French North America at the forefront of living memory. Chapter two examines the case of prominent *Canadien* merchant Gabriel Cerré and his family. It looks at how the Cerré family used several marriage alliances to help set the foundation for a complex network of communication and exchange between the St. Lawrence and Mississippi. Moreover, it shows how family and business intertwined and how

mobile networks of communication and exchange became the supporting structures of the French river world. Chapter three delves more broadly into mobile networks of communication and exchange and looks at merchant representatives and how they used commercial and legal structures as ways of tying regions together. It does this through an examination of how third-party legal representation was used to help individuals conduct long-distance family business. In doing so, merchants and voyageurs became cultural conduits that helped maintain the French river world.

Chapter four marks a bit of a departure from events on the ground by examining outsider understandings of the French river world. It explores the travel narratives of French émigrés from France who visited the heart of North America during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These writers' ethnographic depictions of French-speaking inhabitants in the heart of North America were full of contradictions produced by attempts to categorize and explain a complex French river world. Through an analysis of the contradictory depictions of French-speaking peoples in the heart of North America these travel narratives reveal salient features of the French river world, from the living memory of a *Canadien* historical legacy to the importance of mobility and trade. Finally, this study concludes with a look at the French river world at the start of nineteenth century. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 did not immediately wash away the lines of socio-economic continuity that defined the French river world. However, merchants like fur baron Auguste Chouteau increasingly saw a future where the language of commerce was English and where new opportunities lay in the emerging American Midwest. This did not spell an abrupt end to the French river world, but rather ushered in a period of transition that lasted until at least the 1830s.

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 Chapter One

 Continuity and Change: Marriage, Family, and Community
 

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**Je Suis Des Bords De l'Ohio**<sup>114</sup>

Je suis des bords de l'Ohio  
 J'ai le courage pour noblesse.  
 Ma vie est d'être dans mon vaisseau et  
 de le guider avec adress'.  
 Ma vie est la chasse et la pêche.  
 Enfin, je suis né sauvagess'  
 Tou ratatou ratatoué (Bis)  
 J'ai le courage pour noblesse et ma prouesse. (Bis)

**Dans l'Mississippi**<sup>115</sup>

Dans l'Mississippi, y a des sauvagesses. (Bis)  
 Des souliers brodés,  
 Des mitasses rouges,  
 Des poudramiskis,  
 Pour bacaouiner.

Like the steady rhythm of a drum, lengthy tales of adventures on the Ohio and the Mississippi Rivers were sung aloud by French-speaking voyageurs to keep time as their paddles sliced through the waters of North America. Voyageur songs depicted a romanticized past and present, frequently incorporating different aspects of the voyageur experience. During the mid-nineteenth century European travelers began to record many of these songs, as they listened with a certain fascination and transcribed the variety of Old World medieval fables and descriptions of New World landscapes, hardships, animals, and peoples.<sup>116</sup> It is perhaps not all that surprising to see that the

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<sup>114</sup> Marius Barbeau, "Voyageur Songs of the Missouri," *Missouri Historical Society Bulletin* 10, no. 3 (April, 1954): 345.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>116</sup> Carolyn Podruchny details the secondary accounts of paddling songs from the 1820s to the 1840s, as well as songs found in the Ermatinger Collection at Library and Archives Canada. Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur*

two songs—*Je suis des bords de l'Ohio* and *Dans l'Mississippi*—focus on the aboriginal peoples of the interior, and more specifically native women. The songs reflect the historical demographic reality of native interaction and intermarriage that defined the French river world in the heart of North America. However, voyageur songs are deceiving because they appear to provide a static representation. Written down by interested travelers in the nineteenth century and studied by academics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, these snapshots belie the mutable nature of voyageur songs as an oral tradition.<sup>117</sup>

The organic nature of voyageur songs meant frequent adaptation and substitution. For example, the song *Aux Illinois* makes reference to three girls, one of who seduced and broke the hearts of many mariners. For a region that had been historically defined by the Wabash, Illinois, and Mississippi Rivers, the song's failure to mention river travel seems a glaring omission. The mighty rivers, their tributaries, and the voyageurs and *coureurs de bois* who frequented them are nowhere to be found. In fact, everything in the song *Aux Illinois* points to an oceanic mariner song that changed over time to take place in the Illinois Country.<sup>118</sup> Other songs, such as *Le Voyage*, which likens long voyages to marriage and speaks of the hardships of traveling, could easily have been used to describe both oceanic or river voyages.<sup>119</sup> While a few songs recount very specific events and voyageur experiences, such as the legend of Jean Cadieux on

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*Trade* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 86–92. Several alternative references to voyageur songs can also be found in Grace Lee Nute, *The Voyageur's Highway* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1941; reprint, 2002), 50–52. I would like to thank Daniel Laxer, doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto, whose current work on voyageur songs has led me to question the methodological limits of songs in historical discourse.

<sup>117</sup> Annette Chrétien, “Fresh Tracks in Dead Air’: Mediating Contemporary Metis Identities through Music and Storytelling” (Ph.D. diss., York University, 2005), 9–11.

<sup>118</sup> Barbeau, “Voyageur Songs of the Missouri,” 337–338.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

the Ottawa River, voyageur songs were, and remain, for the most part, enigmatic.<sup>120</sup> Songs may have blended Old World fables with New World details, but there is rarely much indication as to when that change occurred or what it meant. The aforementioned songs are a case in point. The songs that refer to native women do not indicate whether there was an ebb and flow to native–newcomer relations, or whether intermarriage, the roles of natives (especially native women) changed over time. However, these songs do show the power of oral traditions to reveal cultural elements, and they serve as a testament to the salience of living memory. Voyageurs and boatmen remembered the important role of native women as guides, wives, and cultural bridges for entering into native communities.<sup>121</sup> Voyageur songs ensured that the heart and essence of certain memories survived, even if some details and timelines faded or were omitted over time. Similarly, family histories and genealogies provide insight into the demographic and cultural realities of the French river world in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Much in the same way that songs tied voyageurs and boatmen to a romanticized and often elusive past, bonds of marriage and family storytelling kept understandings of a larger French river world at the forefront of living memory well into the nineteenth century. In 1848, Louise–Amélie Panet Berczy of Montreal wrote a remarkably detailed family history based on stories that her mother had told her in 1825.<sup>122</sup> Amélie’s mother, Marie–Anne Cerré, was born in the Illinois Country, and was the daughter of the prominent transplanted *Canadien* merchant Gabriel Cerré. Marie–Anne returned to

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 339; Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 87.

<sup>121</sup> Jay Gitlin, “Negotiating the Course of Empire: The French Bourgeois Frontier and the Emergence of Mid–America, 1763–1863” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2002), 20.

<sup>122</sup> Marthe Faribault–Beauregard, ed. *La vie aux Illinois au XVIIIe siècle: souvenirs inédits de Marie–Anne Cerré, un voyage de Montréal à Kamouraska en 1840* (Montreal: Archiv–Histo Inc., 1987).

Montreal for her education and subsequently married into the influential Panet family. Recounting her mother's stories, Amélie provided a vivid account of her grandfather's voyages to the *Pays d'en Haut*, his life in the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana, and her mother's eventual return to Montreal. She touched on the differences and similarities between the two regions, discussing themes ranging from aboriginal peoples and slavery to education and religion. Amélie wrote to capture on paper the memories derived from her own personal experience, and to create a permanent record of the stories that her mother had told her. She was not unlike the first chroniclers of voyageur songs, creating a static, immutable account from an oral tradition. Amélie explained her motivation for writing about her family:

Everything is soon forgotten, but especially so the facts that are not prominent. I thought that being the eldest among my brother and sisters, and being consequently closer to our common origins, I had certain memories thereof, of which they were unaware or to which they had given scant attention and which might interest some of my relations who will come after me. For it is rather a natural desire of the human heart to appreciate going back a bit to one's source. I shall therefore set down in the following lines, without any fuss, all that I know about it, as closely as I can recall.<sup>123</sup>

While Amélie conveyed the importance of family history, she also expressed concern about the reliability of leaving such histories to oral traditions, which were subject to the limits and vagaries of memory.<sup>124</sup> And yet, it was those oral traditions and living memories that connected Amélie to the French river world, even as the family ties to the south became increasingly strained and distant by the mid-nineteenth century. The

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>124</sup> Amélie's writings coincide with the slow but gradual growth of literacy among wealthy *Canadiens*, which may partially explain the privileged place of written family histories over oral traditions.

regions of the Ohio Valley, Illinois Country, and Upper Louisiana were still part of her mental map, although increasingly a component solely of her family's past.

How were the ties between the middle Mississippi Valley and St. Lawrence Valley maintained between 1763 and 1803? More importantly, what kept these connections at the forefront of living memory? This chapter examines the historical demography of the French river world by exploring marriage, family, and community. In-migration and marriage patterns from the 1740s until the early 1800s were instrumental in maintaining the French river world. Marriage brought outsiders into the communities of the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana. In some cases, these outsiders already had family or cultural connections to these communities. Historian and genealogist Heather Devine argues that marriage ties between the St. Lawrence and Middle Mississippi Valley continued to make the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana markedly *Canadien*.<sup>125</sup> However, marriage also brought new peoples into these communities, sometimes cementing old alliances and occasionally creating new ones.

### **Discovery and False Starts in the Illinois Country**

The creation and establishment of the French river world was a long and arduous process. In 1673, Louis Joliette and Jacques Marquette set out from the Great Lakes mission of St-Ignace on an expedition to explore the interior of the continent. The merchant and missionary sought the large waterway of the Mississippi, which had been

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<sup>125</sup> Heather Devine, "A Fur Trade Diaspora: Canadien Merchant Families in St. Louis after the British Conquest" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Winnipeg, MB, 2004).

mentioned regularly by Native traders arriving at Montreal.<sup>126</sup> Following the route to Green Bay that had been previously explored by Jean Nicolet, they reached the Mississippi after nearly a month's voyage. Joliette and Marquette's travels down the Mississippi took them as far as the Arkansas River, then returned north via the Illinois River and the Chicago portage. The voyage was an endless succession of encounters with aboriginal peoples, including the Illinois and Arkansas.<sup>127</sup> Defined by commerce and the missionary impulse, the expedition was a successful first step in a strategic push westward made at the behest of New France's intendant, Jean Talon.<sup>128</sup> However, it was nearly thirty years before French settlement of any significance took root on the fertile banks of the Middle Mississippi Valley.

In 1682, Robert Cavelier de La Salle furthered French exploration of the Mississippi Valley by traveling downriver to its mouth at the Gulf of Mexico. Still, the prospect of securing colonial control over the vast lands through which the "Great Water" flowed proved exceedingly difficult. As historian Clarence Alvord noted, "The empire had thus been staked out by Jolliet and La Salle; France had now to protect its claim from all comers."<sup>129</sup> French state support for its fledgling colony in the Illinois Country failed to match its colonial ambitions, which were ultimately overshadowed by France's concerns and aspirations in Europe.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, colonial directives sent from the Minister of the Marine compounded the problem by seemingly supporting western

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<sup>126</sup> Charles J. Balesi, *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America, 1673–1818*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Alliance Française, 2000), 7.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–14. Balesi argues that the French were familiar with oral accounts of waterways west and southwest of Sault Ste. Marie, and hoped that the western territories would hem in the British colonies in North America.

<sup>129</sup> Clarence W. Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 88.

<sup>130</sup> James Pritchard, *In Search of Empire: The French in the Americas, 1670–1730* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 420–422.

expansion of the posts, while trying to limit western colonial settlement.<sup>131</sup> Thus, the heavy burden of colonial development fell largely on the shoulders of individuals whose personal ambitions and immediate practical concerns became the driving forces behind events on the ground.<sup>132</sup> With the aid of his most trusted officer, Henri de Tonty, La Salle prepared for the establishment of a French colony in the Illinois Country, building Fort St. Louis at Starved Rock on the Illinois River in 1682.<sup>133</sup>

The location on the Illinois River was regarded as strategic from both a military and commercial perspective. Concerns of Iroquois attacks coupled with the need to maintain the flow of incoming European commercial trade goods created an awkward balancing act, although early settlement showed some promise.<sup>134</sup> Trade was the initial impetus for the Frenchmen who followed La Salle into the North American interior, with as many as eight hundred *coureurs de bois* in the West by 1680.<sup>135</sup> La Salle made the first French land grants in the Illinois Country at Fort St. Louis, and it was not long before marriages with native women—*a la façon du pays*—were taking place. The number of French traders continued to grow, but there were still relatively few settlers at

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<sup>131</sup> W. J. Eccles, *The French in North America, 1500–1783*, rev. ed. (Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1998), 92–99. Eccles describes the seemingly contradictory policies of Colbert, who approved La Salle's request to establish posts in the Mississippi Valley, yet concurrently issued edicts to restrict the French-speaking population to the St. Lawrence Valley. Faced with an increasing number of *coureurs de bois*, Colbert changed the French policy in 1681 to a licensing system, hoping to regulate the flow into the Illinois Country.

<sup>132</sup> Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 420–422.

<sup>133</sup> It is important to note that much like Intendant Talon and Governor Frontenac, La Salle stood to benefit personally from the establishment of western trading forts. Although La Salle granted land around Fort St. Louis, the personal success of his endeavours in the Illinois Country rested largely on his ability to maintain a monopoly on trade. This earned him and Frontenac numerous enemies among *Canadien* merchants, who took control of the northern trade and established Michilimackinac as a major Great Lakes trading center in the 1680s.

<sup>134</sup> Trade with aboriginal peoples was necessary for the maintenance of regional alliances and to ensure control of the fur trade.

<sup>135</sup> Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 104.

Fort St. Louis, and those Frenchmen who did settle were surrounded by as many as twenty thousand natives.<sup>136</sup>

Despite increasing numbers of traders, initial hopes for significant colonial settlement were dealt a blow due to the changing political landscape in Quebec. Governor Frontenac's battle with the merchants in Quebec—in part over La Salle's trade monopoly in the Illinois Country—resulted in the governor's eventual recall, thus removing La Salle's strongest supporter. Frontenac's successor, Antoine le Febvre de la Barre, sided with La Salle's competition, who coveted the rich fur trade of the Illinois Country and worked to break La Salle's monopoly in the interior.<sup>137</sup> This political and commercial changing of the guard made little difference to the Iroquois, who posed a very real threat to both the Illinois and the French alike. De la Barre's inept handling of the Iroquois threat coupled with meager French reinforcements created an explosive situation that saw the Iroquois lay siege to Fort St. Louis and boldly attack farms right up to the outskirts of Montreal. French trade goods continued to make their way into the Illinois Country through Michilimackinac and the furs still flowed out to Montreal, but the lack of stability in the Great Lakes region and Illinois Country precluded steady settlement. It was only after the Peace of 1701 that the process of building the French river world began in earnest.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 88–89.

<sup>137</sup> Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 90–91. In 1683, Chevalier de Baugy was sent by governor de la Barre to assume command of the Illinois Country from La Salle, with additional orders for Tonti to surrender Fort St. Louis to the new commanding officer.

<sup>138</sup> Gilles Havard, *The Great Peace of Montreal of 1701: French–Native Diplomacy in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott (Montreal and Kingston, ON: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2001), 179.

### The French River World is Born

The turn of the eighteenth century ushered in a period of renewed colonial settlement throughout the Illinois Country, the Mississippi Valley, and the larger French river world in North America. Settlements and missions were founded from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, including Cahokia (1699), Biloxi, Dauphin Island, and Mobile Bay (by 1700), Detroit (1701), and Kaskaskia (1703). Carl J. Ekberg argues that the Illinois Country underwent a critical transformation between 1700 and 1750, predominantly due to the establishment of sedentary agriculture, which took hold between 1700 and 1730.<sup>139</sup> Cahokia and Kaskaskia were founded as missions by Seminarians and Jesuits, who were arguably just as, if not more, focused on the conversion of Indians as they were on keeping French souls in the good graces of the Church.<sup>140</sup> When Father Marest founded Kaskaskia in 1703, he had already been working as a missionary to the Kaskaskian Indians, and had accompanied them during their series of relocations from La Salle's Fort St. Louis.<sup>141</sup> The settlement grew slowly and is best understood "as a settlement of traders, priests, and Indians."<sup>142</sup>

While few parish records have been found for the period prior to the 1720s, most of the Frenchmen who helped found Kaskaskia were *Canadien* traders.<sup>143</sup> By 1717, the Illinois Country, which had been under Canadian jurisdiction, officially became a part of

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<sup>139</sup> Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 2, 33, 109. Margaret Kimball Brown argues that French settlement quickly became agriculturally based, with convoys of 100,000 pounds of flour being sent from the Illinois Country to New Orleans. Kimball Brown, "La colonisation française de l'Illinois: une réévaluation," *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française* 39, no. 4 (1986): 586.

<sup>140</sup> Robert Michael Morrissey, "Bottomlands and Borderlands: Empires and Identities in the Illinois Countr, 1673–1785" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2006), 88–144.

<sup>141</sup> Natalia Maree Belting, *Kaskaskia Under the French Regime* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1948), 10.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 23, 38.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

the Louisiana colony.<sup>144</sup> The Company of the West, and later the Royal Indies Company, governed Louisiana until 1731, when it became a royal colony under direct control of the French Crown.<sup>145</sup> Debates over whose jurisdiction the Illinois Country belonged to—Canada or Louisiana—quickly sprang up as the respective governors played tug-of-war for colonial authority.<sup>146</sup> Although, the Illinois Country ultimately remained under the official auspices of colonial Louisiana, its importance to both the north and south persisted. The Illinois Country was both Louisiana’s breadbasket and Canada’s fur trading hinterland, and its growing population reflected influences from both the north and the south. A steady influx of *Canadiens* continued, but they were increasingly joined by Louisiana Creoles, French from France, imported black slaves from Africa who arrived via the sugar islands and New Orleans, and aboriginal peoples from throughout the heart of North America.<sup>147</sup>

In her exhaustive doctoral dissertation, *Les Implantations Françaises au Pays des Illinois au XVIIIe Siècle (1699–1765)*, Cécile Vidal produced one of the most detailed studies to date of the historical demography of the Illinois Country under the French regime. Her detailed study of five censuses (1723, 1726, 1732, 1737, 1752)

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<sup>144</sup> Private interests had been the main driving force behind the development of Louisiana prior to 1717.

<sup>145</sup> In 1717, Scottish financier John Law founded the Company of the West (*Compagnie d’Occident*, also called the *Compagnie du Mississippi*) and was given a royal patent to all of Louisiana, including the Illinois Country. The Company of the West was later absorbed into the Royal Indies Company (*Compagnie des Indes*), which retained control of Louisiana until 1731. Following a Natchez uprising in 1729 that killed approximately 250 colonists, direct control of the colony reverted to French crown. New Orleans was founded in 1718. Winstanley Briggs, “Le Pays Des Illinois,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1990): 33; Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country*, 37, 119; Gilles Havard and Cécile Vidal, *Histoire De L’amérique Française* (France: Flammarion, 2003), 120–133.

<sup>146</sup> Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 169–170, 191.

<sup>147</sup> Cécile Vidal, “Les implantations française au Pays des Illinois au XVIIIe siècle, 1699–1765” (Ph.D. diss., École des Hautes Études en Science Sociales (EHESS) Centre d’Études Nord–Américaines (CENA), 1995), 232.

showed a steady increase in the population of the Illinois Country during the French regime. Between 1723 and 1732, the population doubled to 653, and again to 1385 between 1737 and 1752.<sup>148</sup> This included not only the white French-speaking population, but also black and Indian slaves, who, by 1752, made up approximately forty-three percent of the population in the Illinois Country.<sup>149</sup> Slavery was undoubtedly an important component of the demographic composition of the Illinois Country during the French regime and continued on both sides of the Mississippi River well after 1763.<sup>150</sup> Guillaume Teasdale concludes that “the Illinois Country can therefore be described as a ‘society with slaves,’ if not a ‘slave society.’”<sup>151</sup> However, despite an increasing number of African slaves from the south and Indian slaves from throughout the interior of North America, *Canadien* emigration to the Illinois Country

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 240–241. Vidal’s work is the most extensive look at census data for the French regime, and the numbers differ from other sources. For example, Margaret Kimball Brown estimated that in 1752 the population of the Illinois Country was 2000. Kimball Brown and Lawrie Cena Dean, *The French Colony in the Mid-Mississippi Valley* (Carbondale, IL: Kestrel Books, 1995), 11. The highest estimate for the region from 1752 census data is 3000. Rénald Lessard, Jacques Mathieu, and Lina Gouger, “Peuplement Colonisateur au Pays des Illinois,” in *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society, Ste. Genevieve 1986*, ed. Philip P. Boucher and Serge Courville (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 59.

<sup>149</sup> Vidal, “Les implantations française au Pays des Illinois au XVIIIe siècle,” 243. Carl Ekberg’s numbers for black and Indian slaves are quite similar to Vidal’s—within roughly a single percentage point—for the 1732 census. Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women: Native Slavery in the Illinois Country* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 41–42. For more detailed works on slavery in the Illinois Country, see Winstanley Briggs, “Slavery in French Colonial Illinois,” *Chicago History* 18, no. 4 (1989–90): 61–81; Carl J. Ekberg, “Black Slavery in Illinois, 1720–1765,” *Western Illinois Regional Studies* 12, no. 1 (1989): 5–19; Brett Rushforth, “Slavery, the Fox Wars, and the Limits of Alliance,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2006): 53–80; Cécile Vidal, “Africains et européens au Pays des Illinois durant la période française, 1699–1765,” *French Colonial History* 3 (2003): 51–68.

<sup>150</sup> Ekberg argues that black slaves may have made up as much as forty-two percent of the population of the town of Ste. Genevieve in 1779. Ekberg, *François Vallé and His World: Upper Louisiana before Lewis and Clark* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 162.

<sup>151</sup> Guillaume Teasdale, “A Colony with Slaves: The Detroit River Region French Canadian Settlements, 1730s–1820s,” unpublished (Toronto: York University, 2006), 2. Also see Vidal, “Les implantations française au Pays des Illinois au XVIIIe siècle”, 243.

persisted as a salient feature of population growth.<sup>152</sup> That *Canadien* emigration co-existed with waves of free relocation and forced displacement from the south demonstrates the complex demographic reality of the Illinois Country that began under the French regime and continued well after 1763.

In 1752, *Canadiens* were the single largest group in the French-speaking villages of the Illinois Country.<sup>153</sup> They had come from Canada to the region in three successive waves (1699–1718, 1719–1732, 1733–1752), and each wave had its own distinct characteristics.<sup>154</sup> The first two saw high levels of intermarriage with the local native inhabitants and of out-migration by those who simply passed through or chose to move elsewhere after a short stay.<sup>155</sup> However, the third period showed an increasingly stable population. Most of the *Canadiens* who came to the French villages of the Illinois Country were single men who married into the established French-speaking families. Most newcomers were drawn by work and opportunity, but family connections increasingly influenced migration patterns. In the words of Cécile Vidal, “En revanche, si, durant la première période, les Canadiens étaient seulement liés par des métiers et des origines géographiques communes, ensuite les relations familiales jouèrent un rôle important dans leur mouvements migratoires.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> The native population that surrounded the villages still outnumbered the French-speaking population of the Illinois Country.

<sup>153</sup> Winstanley Briggs argues that *Canadiens* were fifty-eight percent of the population, although substantiating this claim is exceedingly difficult. Still, *Canadiens* do appear to have been the single largest group of emigrants to the French villages. Briggs, “Le Pays des Illinois,” 38.

<sup>154</sup> Jacques Mathieu, Pauline Therrien-Fortier, and Rénald Lessard, “Mobilité et sédentarité: stratégies familiales en Nouvelle-France,” *Recherches Sociographiques* 28, no. 2–3 (1987): 223.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.* The attrition rate between 1726 and 1732 was as much as thirty-five percent for *Canadiens* and forty-five percent for Frenchmen and those of unknown origins. Mathieu et al. indicate that while some of this was due to deaths in the communities, most was from out-migration.

<sup>156</sup> Vidal, “Les implantations française au Pays des Illinois au XVIIIe siècle,” 261.

Census data provide insights into these demographic trends, but it also has a tendency to create a false sense of security. The Illinois censuses under the French regime, even when screened for errors and duplications, reflect an incomplete picture because they often missed mobile segments of the population.<sup>157</sup>

Echappe certainement aux dénombrements une grande partie du personnel de la traite des fourrures. Beaucoup de voyageurs et engagés étaient originaires du Canada où la plupart avaient leur résidence principale et où ils devaient être recensés. Mais ils revenaient régulièrement et séjournèrent une bonne partie de l'année aux Illinois. Ils jouaient un rôle important dans la vie économique en apportant des marchandises, en se logeant sur place pendant plusieurs mois et en se louant pour les moissons.<sup>158</sup>

This elusive, but substantial transient population of *Canadien* voyageurs, fur traders, and boatmen meant that the Illinois censuses under the French regime almost certainly underestimated the number of *Canadiens* in the Illinois Country and the important northern connections that they helped to maintain.

### The Aftermath of 1763

When the British forces arrived at Fort de Chartres in 1765, there was already a steady stream of French-speaking inhabitants leaving British Illinois on the east side of the Mississippi for Spanish Upper Louisiana on the west side of the river. Several newly founded towns joined Ste. Geneviève—previously the only French village on the west side of the Mississippi in the Illinois Country—including St. Louis, which was founded

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 238. The migration and displacement of aboriginal peoples in the heart of North America had a marked effect on the French-speaking communities of both the Illinois Country and the Ohio Valley. Colin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 332.

<sup>158</sup> Vidal, "Les implantations française au Pays des Illinois au XVIIIe siècle," 238.

opposite Cahokia in 1764.<sup>159</sup> The 1771 Upper Louisiana census indicated rapid growth for both Ste. Geneviève and St. Louis after 1764.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, a modern reconstructed census for St. Louis in 1776 provided a conservative estimate of 1,297 men, women, and children, not including any slaves or free blacks.<sup>161</sup> St. Louis soon overtook Ste. Geneviève as the largest town in the middle Mississippi Valley.<sup>162</sup> St. Louis developed strong connections with Canada because the town was primarily a fur-trading center. The town's militia roll for 1779 indicated that 139 of 217 men had been born in Canada.<sup>163</sup> If St. Louis was predisposed to look northward due to its focus on the fur trade, Ste. Geneviève appears at first glance to have been the polar opposite by virtue of its agricultural economy. And yet, Ste. Geneviève also had a substantial *Canadien* population. Men born in Canada made up the single largest group in the Ste. Geneviève militia. The second largest group was men born in the Illinois Country, many of whom had *Canadien* roots.<sup>164</sup> This would appear to confirm an important *Canadien* presence in Upper Louisiana, rooted in families moving across the river from British Illinois Country and continued emigration from Canada.

Rapid population growth in St. Louis and Ste. Geneviève, and the emergence of smaller towns like Cape Girardeau, New Madrid, St. Charles, and Florissant, have been portrayed as part of the continued outmigration of French-speaking families from British and later American Illinois Country. Notwithstanding the fact that the river was

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<sup>159</sup> Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country*, 194.

<sup>160</sup> Frederick Hodes has questioned the conservative estimate of this census, which showed a white population of several hundred in each community. Hodes, *Beyond the Frontier: A History of St. Louis to 1821* (Tucson, AZ: Patrice Press, 2004), 132.

<sup>161</sup> Robert Parkin, "1776 St. Louis Census," *St. Louis Genealogical Society*, <<http://www.stlgs.org/DBgovernmentCensus1776.htm>> (accessed 7 June 2009).

<sup>162</sup> Ekberg, *François Vallé and His World*, 54.

<sup>163</sup> Hodes, *Beyond the Frontier*, 132–133.

<sup>164</sup> Ekberg, *François Vallé and His World*, 56–58.

easily and frequently crossed for business and pleasure, and that the region should be seen as a whole and not two separate halves, little work has been done that focuses on demographic trends on the east side of the Mississippi. The only censuses taken in the Illinois Country under the British regime were for Kaskaskia and Vincennes in 1767. The Kaskaskia census indicated approximately 600 predominantly French-speaking white inhabitants, down nearly 200 from 1752.<sup>165</sup> Some towns like Chartres completely disappeared, but there continued to be a large French-speaking population in Cahokia, Prairie du Rocher, and Kaskaskia.<sup>166</sup> Cahokia in particular benefitted from its position across the river from a growing St. Louis. The French-speaking population faced challenges and difficulties with the transition to British and, later, American imperial control, yet they retained a remarkable level of autonomy.

Legal cases and business transactions continued to be overseen by French notaries. Most of the French-speaking population was largely illiterate, and so French notaries held a position of power and prestige within their communities. In 1781, Jacques La Source and Richard Winston fought over the appointment of Antoine Labuxière Jr. to the position of notary at Kaskaskia.<sup>167</sup> Winston accused La Source of despotic practices in attempting to control the position of notary.<sup>168</sup> Although this dispute was probably fueled by personal rivalry and philosophical differences over legal protocols and structures, it also illustrates the continuing importance of French notaries.

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<sup>165</sup> Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country*, 155; Vidal, "Les Implantations Française au Pays des Illinois au XVIIIe Siècle," 241.

<sup>166</sup> Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country*, 74.

<sup>167</sup> Kaskaskia Manuscripts (KM), Fifth Circuit Court's Office, Randolph County Courthouse, Chester, Illinois, 81:8:17:1. The Kaskaskia Manuscripts are catalogued by year (two digits only), month, day, and sequence in the total number of transactions recorded that day. The microfilm collection uses the same catalogue. Future references to this collection will be listed as KM, followed by catalogue numbers.

<sup>168</sup> KM, 81:8:30:1.

They controlled legal and commercial interactions between French inhabitants, both locally and abroad.

During the 1780s and 1790s, when American-style courts with elected magistrates were slowly being established in the Illinois Country, notaries continued to be influential, often acting as clerks for the new courts while continuing their duties as notaries. In the short term, alterations to the formal legal structure did little to change actual French dominance. The new courts were conducted in French, and French-speaking merchants held a majority of influential positions.<sup>169</sup> An attempt to anglicize the court at Kaskaskia in the late 1780s was met with fierce resistance, leading to a decision by the citizens of Kaskaskia to have only French-speaking magistrates on the court.<sup>170</sup> Despite the growing Anglo-American presence in the Illinois Country a French-speaking majority could not be ignored. On the fringes of empire, local French-speaking inhabitants continued to exert a considerable level of control and autonomy.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> KM, 82:9:22:1.

<sup>170</sup> KM, 87:1:1:1, 87:5:18:1, 87:7:7:1, 87:7:8:1.

<sup>171</sup> Morrissey, "Bottomlands and Borderlands," 5. There were approximately 97 American men in the Illinois Country in 1787. Meanwhile, the census of Kaskaskia showed a total of 185 French-speaking heads of households. "List of Americans in Illinois, 7 September 1787," in Clarence W. Alvord, ed., *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790*, vol. 5 of *Collections of the Illinois Historical Library (Virginia Series, Vol. 2)* (Springfield, IL: Illinois Historical Society, 1909), 421-423; "Census of Kaskaskia, 1787," in Alvord, ed. *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790*, 414-418.

### *Canadiens and the Illinois Country*<sup>172</sup>

Numerous types of documentation exist to provide insight into migration patterns, but marriage contracts provide one of the best means of tracking individuals and families over time and space. The initial disadvantage of looking at marriage contracts is that they provide only a single point in time—when and where the couple married. Marriage contracts usually indicated where the bride and groom were from, their parents, the witnesses, and the wealth that the couple brought into the marriage. The contracts do not reveal what happened before or after the wedding. However, by tying several marriage contracts together over a couple generations, migration patterns can be tracked, even if the events between the documented points in time remain a mystery.<sup>173</sup> By tracing marriages, it is possible to capture a glimpse of migration patterns and locate individuals who would otherwise be absent from the historical narrative.<sup>174</sup> The marriage contracts for the British and American Illinois Country demonstrate that *Canadiens* continued to marry into the Illinois Country in large enough numbers to continue to connect families and communities, and to keep Canada at the forefront of living memory.

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<sup>172</sup> The research for this section involved cross-referencing the marriage records in the Kaskaskia Manuscripts, Marthe Faribault–Beauregard’s two volume set *La Population Française des Forts Français de l’Amérique*, and the Université de Montréal’s database “Programme de Recherche en Démographie Historique,” hereafter referred to simply as PRDH. Names frequently show up with multiple spellings, so I have chosen to go with the PRDH spellings in most cases because of that database’s extensive work on standardizing French–Canadian surnames. However, in the few instances where the name is well known and recognized in the historiography of the Illinois Country, the name given in the Kaskaskia Manuscripts and secondary literature are employed.

<sup>173</sup> Bruno Ramirez and Jean Lemarre, “Du Québec vers les États–Unis: l’étude des lieux d’origine,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 38, no. 3 (1985): 414. Also see Bruno Ramirez and Yves Otis, *La Ruée vers le Sud: Migrations du Canada vers les États–Unis, 1840–1930* (Montréal: Boreal, 2003).

<sup>174</sup> Leslie Choquette, *Frenchmen into Peasants: Modernity and Tradition in the Peopling of French Canada* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 1.

Many of the marriage contracts for the Illinois Country after 1763 make reference to Canada, Quebec, and Montreal. Occasionally, both individuals getting married were from Canada, such as the 1770 marriage between Louis–Joseph Migneau, from the parish of St. Pierre de la Rivière du Sud, and Marie–Louise Gibault, from the parish of St. François du Lac.<sup>175</sup> In this case, not only were both spouses from Canada, but Marie–Louise’s mother and brother – both originally from Canada – were also at the wedding.<sup>176</sup> Often, however, only one spouse would be from Canada, such as Louis Doré, a thirty–three year old from the parish of St. Augustin, south of Quebec City, who married Catherine Tangué from Prairie du Rocher in 1786.<sup>177</sup>

Marriage contracts also provided detailed family information regarding the spouses’ parents and former marriages. For example, on 26 May 1770, Joseph Fortin dit Bellefontaine from the parish of l’Islet in Canada, son of Julien Fortin dit Bellefontaine and Elisabeth Caron of Bonsecours in Canada, married Marie–Rose Desvignets, widow of Jacques Ladéroute dit Séguin, and daughter of Nicolas Tuillier dit Desvignets Cuillier and of Dorotheé Mercier of Kaskaskia.<sup>178</sup> Of particular note in this contract is that not only were the groom’s parents from Canada, but the late husband of the bride came from a known voyageur family from Canada, Séguin dit Ladéroute, whose descendants can be

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<sup>175</sup> Marthe Faribault–Beauregard, *La Population Française des Forts d’Amérique, XVIIe Siècle* (Montréal: Bergeron, 1982–84), 2:95. KM 70:9:11:1; PRDH Couple 46869, Couple 11810, Couple 19648. Louis Joseph was born in Montmagny, but the family had also firmly established itself in the nearby parish of St. Pierre de la Rivière du Sud by the 1740s. I have used Gibault, the spelling used in the Kaskaskia Manuscripts, instead of Gibeau because Pierre Gibault was a well–known priest serving the parish of the Immaculate Conception at Kaskaskia.

<sup>176</sup> KM 70:9:11:1.

<sup>177</sup> Faribault–Beauregard, *La population française des forts d’Amérique, XVII–XVIIIe siècles*, 2:263–264. KM 86:11:5:1; PRDH Couple 63648, Family 14335, Couple 44403, Family 19036.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:89. KM 70:5:26:1; PRDH Family 46679, Individual 105472, Individual 99067, Individual 13152, Individual 38847, Individual 28031, Individual 28249. Devignets shows up regularly as Devegnois in the Kaskaskia Manuscripts.

found throughout North America.<sup>179</sup> Jacques Séguin had originally come to the Illinois Country from Detroit with his brother Pierre, and both married in Kaskaskia.<sup>180</sup>

Individual examples and family histories provide a window into what was a much larger demographic trend. *Canadiens* continued to flow into the Illinois Country after 1763 and married into established French families.<sup>181</sup> Any examination of marriages of the French-speaking population in the interior of North America necessarily begins with Marthe Faribault-Beauregard's seminal two-volume study, *La population des forts Français d'Amérique*. Although far from all-encompassing—Upper Louisiana was not included—Faribault-Beauregard's work is still the most comprehensive catalogue of baptisms, marriages, and burials for the French-speaking population of the Great Lakes and Middle Mississippi Valley.<sup>182</sup>

An examination of marriages from 1755 to 1805 provides evidence of the continued pattern of migration from Canada and the linkages created through marriage.<sup>183</sup> Looking at the marriages listed for Vincennes, Cahokia, Kaskaskia, and Prairie du Rocher, a larger pattern of continued migration and marriage becomes evident. According to Faribault-Beauregard's work, between 1755 and 1805 there were

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<sup>179</sup> Although the name shows up regularly as Ladéroute dit Séguin, Séguin is the original name from France, and Ladéroute is the “nickname.”

<sup>180</sup> Faribault-Beauregard, *La population française des forts d'Amérique*, 2:99.

<sup>181</sup> Gitlin, “Negotiating the Course of Empire,” 41.

<sup>182</sup> Because of numerous errors and omissions, Faribault-Beauregard's work should be regarded only as a starting point, albeit an invaluable tool when cross-referenced.

<sup>183</sup> This examination of Marthe Faribault-Beauregard's work does not constitute a fully comprehensive study of all marriages for the Illinois Country between 1755 and 1805, but rather a sizeable sample from which to begin investigating larger demographic trends. Faribault-Beauregard collected information from a variety of archival collections, including the Kaskaskia Manuscripts and the Perrin Collection. New advances in technology, including powerful online databases, such as the Projet de Recherche en Démographie Historique (PRDH) out of the University of Montreal, Parchemin at the Quebec National Archives, and the Voyageur Database Project at the University of Ottawa, allow easy cross-referencing of population studies material found in multiple archives.

approximately 383 marriages in the four towns. Of these, 129 marriages involved at least one spouse born in Canada. Historians have generally described continued *Canadien* migration to the Illinois Country as a slow but steady trickle, and, indeed, this was hardly a large-scale immigration. However, considering the sizeable exodus of the French-speaking population to Upper Louisiana, the larger implication of these marriages is that they formed a significant percentage of all marriages in the Illinois Country. Not all who married in the Illinois Country stayed, but most remained in the region regardless of which side of the Mississippi they ultimately chose.

Approximately thirty-four percent of all marriages between 1755 and 1805 listed at least one spouse who was born in Canada. Moreover, there was only a thirteen percentage-point spread between the highest and lowest degree of incidence, with Vincennes and Cahokia showing thirty-seven percent and twenty-four percent, respectively, of marriages with at least one spouse born in Canada. Vincennes had the fewest number of marriages, but the highest rate involving at least one spouse from Canada. If Vincennes is excluded and one looks only at the remaining three communities, which were all situated on Mississippi River a short distance from each other, then the spread drops to five points, ranging from twenty-four to twenty-nine percent. According to official marriage records, at least one-quarter of marriages in the French towns on the east side of the Mississippi involved a spouse who had been born in Canada.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> This does not include those who married *à la façon du pays*. Some marriages were conducted after a period of cohabitation because there were so few priests in the Illinois Country after 1763 and the expulsion of the Jesuits.

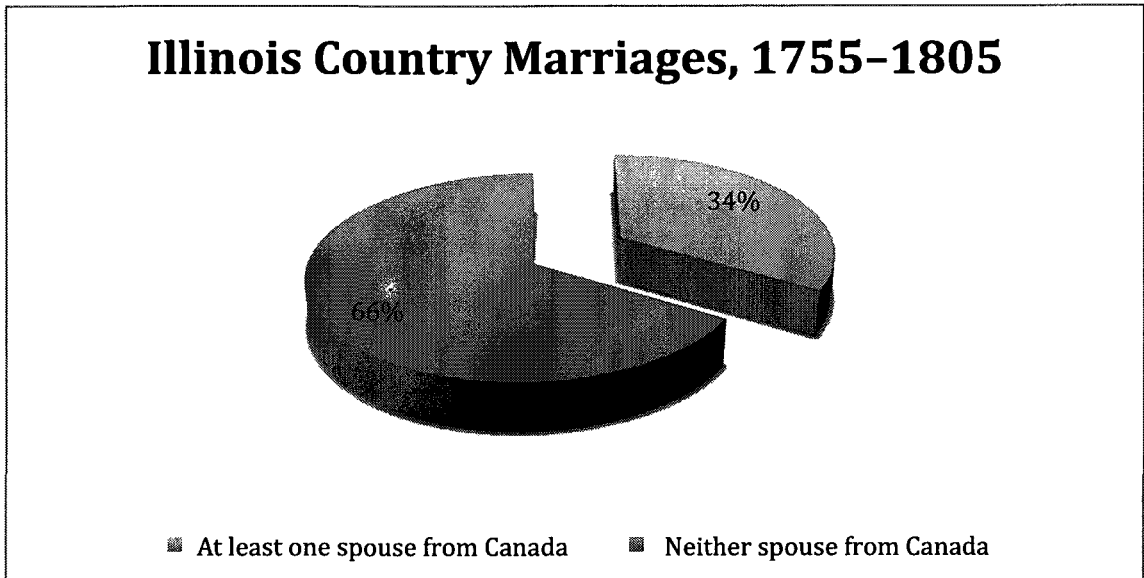


Figure 1. Percentage of Illinois Country Marriages with at least one spouse from Canada, 1755-1805

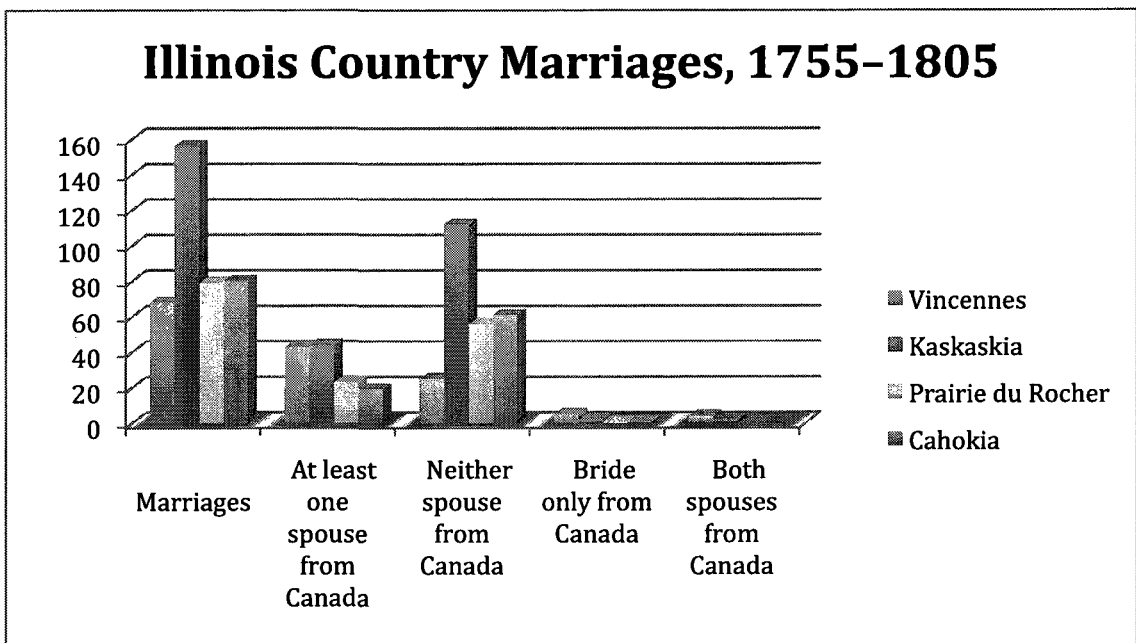


Figure 2. Illinois Country Marriages per town with at least one spouse from Canada, 1755-1803

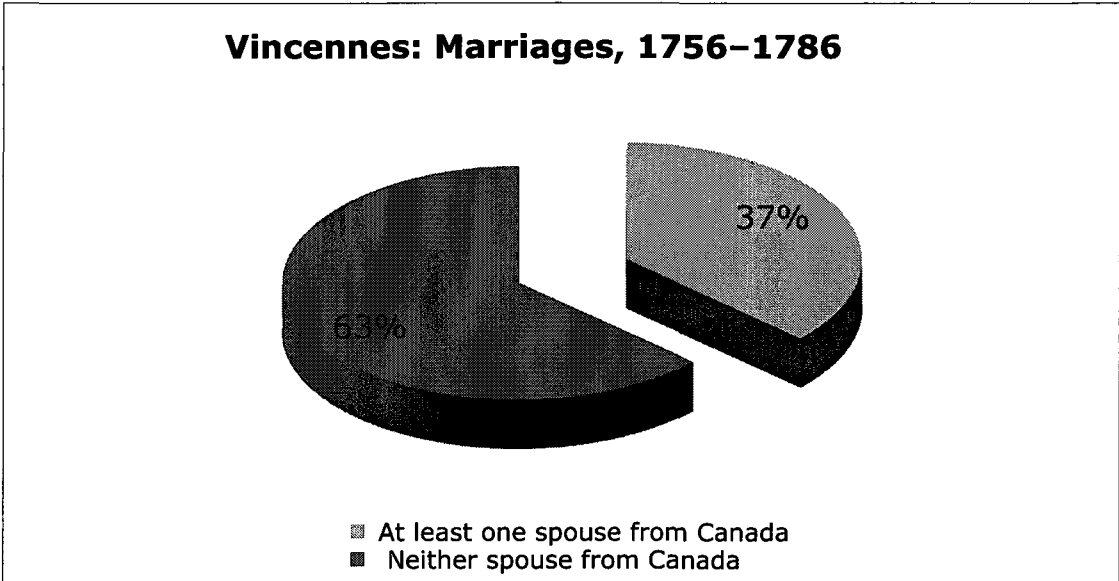


Figure 3. Vincennes Marriages with at least one spouse from Canada, 1756–1786



Figure 4. Cahokia: Marriages with at least one spouse from Canada, 1756–1805

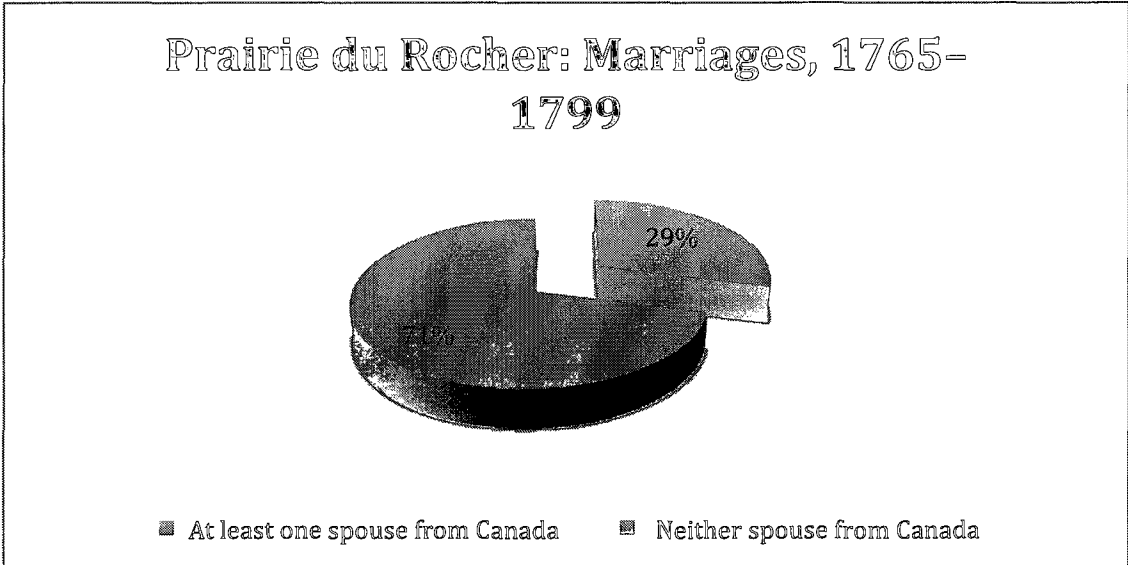


Figure 5. Prairie du Rocher Marriages with at least one spouse from Canada, 1765-1799

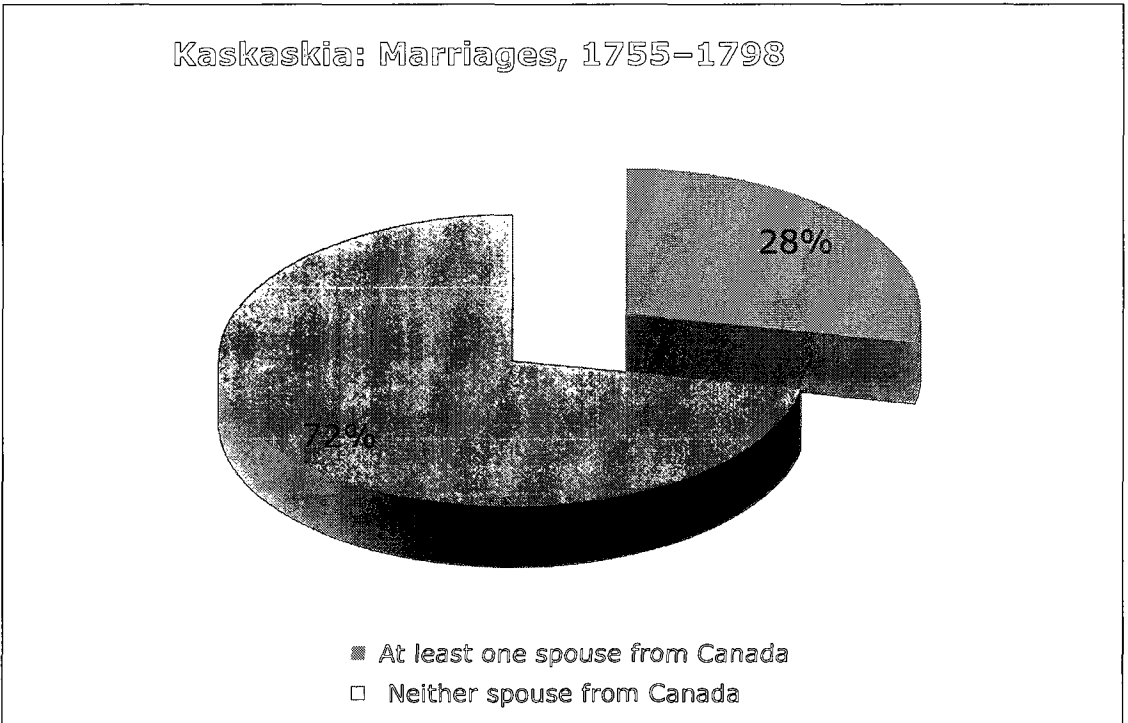


Figure 6. Kaskaskia Marriages with at least one spouse from Canada, 1755-1798

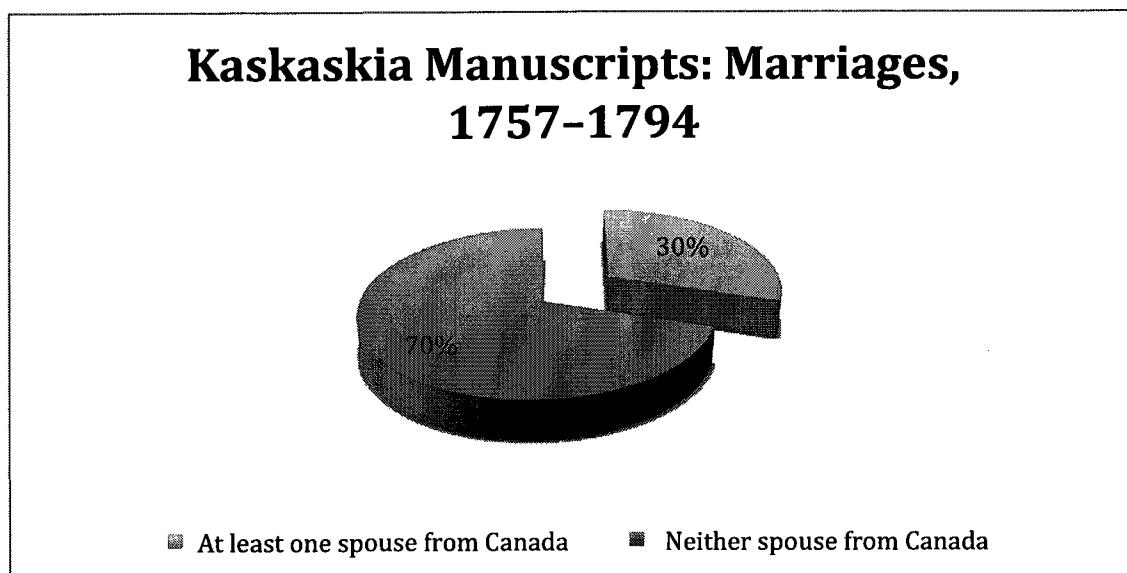


Figure 7. Kaskaskia Manuscript Marriages with at least one spouse from Canada, 1757-1794

The chronological distribution of the marriages is equally revealing. In Kaskaskia, the frequency of *Canadiens* marrying into the region remained fairly constant, with a steady flow of *Canadiens* marrying in the town both before and after 1763. However, in the 1770s and 1780s there was a sizeable increase in marriages involving at least one spouse born in Canada.

Looking at marriage contracts for the 1780s in Kaskaskia, it becomes clear that many of those getting married could only have come to the Mississippi after 1763. For example, Jean-Baptiste Sedilot dit Montreuil, from the parish of Les Cèdres near Montreal, was thirty-two when he married seventeen-year-old Françoise Thomur dit La Source on 5 May 1782 in Kaskaskia.<sup>185</sup> In other words, Jean-Baptiste would have been thirteen-years old when the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1763. Similarly, Jean-

<sup>185</sup> Faribault-Beaugard, *La population française des forts d'Amérique*, 2:95. KM 82:5:5:1; PRDH Couple 58466, Couple 26851, Family 26851, Individual 141826, Couple 58467. Jean-Baptiste Montreuil was actually born in the parish of Ste. Anne de Bellevue, but the rest of the family was born in Les Cèdres. Although the index cards from the Kaskaskia Manuscripts indicate that Jean-Baptiste was twenty-six years old, the baptismal record in PRDH clearly indicates that he was thirty-two when he married.

Baptiste Guiont, a twenty-three-year-old trader from Canada, married Catherine Camp at Kaskaskia in 1785, and would have come to the Illinois Country after the fall of New France.<sup>186</sup> However, there were exceptions to this rule, most notably in cases involving a second or third marriage. Joseph Blais from Berthier en Bas married twice in the Illinois Country. In 1772, he married Thérèse Gilbert. This was Gilbert's second marriage to a *Canadien*. She had married Jacques Bouteiller of l'Ange Gardien in 1765, and then married Blais only months after her first husband's death. After Thérèse Gilbert passed away, Blais married Marie Renaud dit Leveille in 1783. But, at forty-two years of age, Joseph Blais would still have had to come to the Illinois Country before the age of twenty-two in order to experience the heart of North America in the last few years under the French Regime.<sup>187</sup>

Although most marriage contracts do not state why or how the groom came to the Mississippi, there are occasional references to him being a trader or voyageur, such as the contract of Joseph Baugi, voyageur from Beauport, in the diocese of Quebec, who married Catherine Berthelot in Kaskaskia on 17 August 1778.<sup>188</sup> What is striking about these marriage contracts is that they depict a Mississippi Valley that was still very French, if not *Canadien*, and where direct marriage connections kept Canada at the forefront of living memory. By the late 1780s, the overwhelming majority of *Canadiens* who married into French families in the Illinois Country were born after 1763. The late

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<sup>186</sup> KM 85:8:3:1. Catherine Camp was the daughter of the protestant minister at Kaskaskia, reflecting a more common trend of intermarriage between the French-speaking population and British and Anglo-Americans throughout the 1770s and 1780s.

<sup>187</sup> Faribault-Beauregard, *La population française des forts d'Amérique*, 2:261. KM 83:7:24:1; PRDH Couple 59837, Couple 48418, Family 18607, Family 42253, Individual 489, Individual 92868, Family 17486. Blais was also spelled Blay.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 78. KM 78:8:17:1; PRDH Family 54588, Individual 52336, Family 21376, Individual 103315, Family 36445, Individual 65998, Individual 151162, Family 12507. Baugis was also spelled Baugi and Baugy.

1780s serves as a demarcation line between the living memory of life under the *ancien régime* and the continuity of migration and marriage after the fall of New France.

### **Patterns of Intermarriage and Migration**

It was not uncommon to see family members, siblings, parents, children, nieces, nephews, and cousins move together or follow each other in relocating to the Illinois Country. Occasionally parents and children moved together, such as the Levasseur family from Quebec City. Stanislas Levasseur married Marie-Françoise Deloeil in Quebec City in 1756 and had four boys and one daughter. By the 1780s, the couple had relocated to Kaskaskia, where Stanislas was working as a master joiner.<sup>189</sup> At least two of the five Levasseur children, Nicolas-Simeon and Marie-Charlotte, joined their parents in the Illinois Country, and both later married into prominent French families—Bienvenu Delisle and St-Gemme Beauvais, respectively—of the region.

In a few rare cases, women made the journey south on their own if they were already set to be married or were joining relatives. Most, however, relocated with a sibling or parent. Marie-Marguerite Dupuy married Joachim Demolier dit Biernais in Montreal in 1765, but the marriage did not last long. By the early 1770s, she was a widow and had relocated with her brother to Kaskaskia. Marie-Marguerite married her second husband, Jean-Baptiste Louis Bardet dit Lapierre, himself a transplanted *Canadian* from Montreal, in Kaskaskia in 1772. Marie-Marguerite's brother, Joseph-

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 78, 266. KM 82:1:29:1, 84:1:18:1; PRDH Family 32961, Individual 99879, Individual 93031.

Marie Dupuy, joined a well-established Illinois Country family by marrying Françoise Crely at Kaskaskia in 1774.<sup>190</sup>

Although entire families and some women did relocate from Canada to the Illinois Country, the dominant pattern was of *Canadien* men marrying into established French-speaking families of the Illinois Country.<sup>191</sup> This pattern perpetuated itself over several generations, creating a solid patrilineal connection to the St. Lawrence River Valley while maintaining a matrilineal foundation in the Illinois Country.<sup>192</sup> The example of the Degagne family is illustrative. Jacques Degagne and Marguerite Jousset were married in Montreal in 1717 and settled in Ste. Anne de Bellevue. At least two of their four children who survived past infancy, Marie-Catherine and Jean-Baptiste, married in the Illinois Country. In 1743, Marie-Catherine married Joseph-Marie Mercier, a *Canadien* widower whose first marriage had taken place in Montreal eight years earlier. Jean-Baptiste, married Marie-Louise Hulin in 1745, and had three daughters. All three were born in the Illinois Country, and all three married *Canadien*

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 78, 88. KM 72:9:13:1; PRDH Family 21103, Family 7311, Individual 169084, Couple 42554, Couple 48692.

<sup>191</sup> Gitlin, "Negotiating the Course of Empire," 41.

<sup>192</sup> This type of territorial expansion can be seen as an extension of marriage patterns in the St. Lawrence Valley, albeit on a much larger geographical scale. Serge Courville, "Espace, territoire et culture en Nouvelle-France: une vision géographique," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 37, no. 3 (1983): 424. Guillaume Aubert, "'the Blood of France': Race and Purity of Blood in the French Atlantic World," *William and Mary Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2004): 13–15. Aubert's article examines early discourses centered on blood and mixed race progeny. His use of French *notions mésalliance*, and the partial remedy of allowing noble men to marry women of lower rank without diluting the bloodlines, is particularly salient here. Could this be applied to *Canadien* marriages into the Illinois Country as a means of maintaining a *Canadien* character of the region? Since *Canadien* men generally married into established French-speaking families in the Illinois Country, the importance of bloodlines should at the very least be considered.

men between 1763 and 1768.<sup>193</sup> One daughter in particular, Dorothee Degagne, married for a second time in 1777, again taking a *Canadien* husband.<sup>194</sup>

Marriage patterns in the Illinois Country demonstrate that a significant number of *Canadiens* continued to marry into the region after the fall of New France.<sup>195</sup> A sample of these marriages provides a first clue as to how the seemingly disparate regions (Canada and the middle Mississippi Valley) were able to remain at the forefront of living memory and become part of a collective mental map of the French river world (See Figure 8). It would be an exaggeration to depict the Illinois Country in the second half of the eighteenth century as uniquely *Canadien*, but the continued migration of *Canadiens* did reinforce the French presence in the region and helped inform structures and social mores. As Jay Gitlin notes, “In the absence of French state interests, these new arrivals, as individuals, reinforced the existing francophone cultural and economic patterns of the region, even as British and Anglo–American settlers began to move into the area.”<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Jean–Baptiste appears to have married again in 1767, this time in Cahokia to a French woman from France. However, this could not be confirmed through cross–referencing. KM 67:5:10:1.

<sup>194</sup> For information on the Degagne family, see Faribault–Beauregard, *La population française des forts d’Amérique*, 2:86, 99. KM 63:2:10:1, 67:5:10:1, 68:5:15:1, 73:5:3:1, 77:1:18:1; PRDH Family 11291, Couple 24263, Couple 19597, Couple 24262, Family 86741, Family 43022, Family 18085, Couple 52996, Family 25273, Family 16031, Couple 40531.

<sup>195</sup> Gitlin, “Negotiating the Course of Empire,” 58.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

## Canada -&gt; Illinois Country: Marriage Sample 1756-1787

Groom Last Name	Groom First Name	Groom Place of Birth	GR DOB	Bride Last Name	Bride First Name	Bride Place of Birth	BR DOB	Marriage Location	Marriage Date
Racine	Jean Baptiste Francois Pierre	Québec	1719-07-05	Dudevoir Lachine	Anne Jeanne	Montréal	1724-08-24	Fort Vincennes	1756-11-23
Perthuis Laine	Pierre	Montréal	1715-08-02	Vaudry Beaudry	Marie Madeleine	St-Anne-de-Détroit	1720-11-11	Fort Vincennes	1757-01-03
Trottier Desruisseaux Ride	Francois Louis	Grondines Boucherville	1730-01-19	Rognon Laroché	Marie Louise	St-Croix (Lobinière)	1736-09-09	Cahokia	1758-01-10
Duguay Duplessis Lecompte	Maurice Joseph Jacques	Trois-Rivières	1728-10-16	Desnoyer	Veronique	St-Laurent	1741-05-08	Fort de Chartres	1759-02-05
Lecompte	Marie Anne	St-Anne-de-Belleveue	1729-09-21	Laudeman Barros	Catherine			Fort de Chartres	1760-06-13
Magnan	Etienne	St-Anne-de-Belleveue	1730-02-03	Loisy	Marie Therese			Fort de Chartres	1760-06-18
Jusseume St-Pierre Lemieux	Paul Claude	Neuville	1723-08-14	Allard	Catherine			Fort de Chartres	1761-01-27
Disy	Michel Marie	Cap-St-Ignace	1721-12-24	Laroché	Marie Marthe			Fort St-Philippe des Arkansas	1762-02-08
Girard	Augustin	Montréal	1731-05-03	Turpin Sandrille	Therese	Fort de Chartres	1726-03-09	Kaskaskia	1762-09-14
Bouteiller	Jacques	Cap-St-Ignace	1736-11-16	Degagne	Marguerite			Kaskaskia	1763-07-21
Royer Marchaisau Desnoyers Badayac Laplante	Augustin Louis Alexis	St-Jean, I.O. St-Laurent	1731-10-19	Dudevoir Lachine	Sarbe	Montréal	1720-03-21	Fort Vincennes	1763-08-23
		St-Laurent	1729-09-22	Marcheteau Desnoyer	Elisabeth	Fort de Chartres	Before 1745	Fort de Chartres	1764-06-05
		L'Ange-Gardien	1736	Gilbert	Therese			St-Joseph-de-la-Prairie-du-Rocher	1765-02-05
		Yamaska	1733-03-11	Degagne Paris	Dorothee Veronique			Kaskaskia St-Louis, Missouri	1765-11-25 1766-11-07
			1735-09-30	Veronneau	Therese			Kaskaskia	1767-05-18

Figure 8. Sample of marriages involving at least one spouse from Canada in the Illinois Country, 1756–1787.

## Canada --&gt; Illinois Country: Marriage Sample 1756-1787

Groom Last Name	Groom First Name	Groom Place of Birth	GR DOB	Bride Last Name	Bride First Name	Bride Place of Birth	BR DOB	Marriage Location	Marriage Date
Tanguay Lanavette	Joseph Marie	St-Valier	1739-10-23	Gilbert Sempour	Catherine	St-Joseph-de-la-Prairie-du-Rocher	1767-05-21	St-Joseph-de-la-Prairie-du-Rocher	1767-05-21
Denis Lapierre	Francois Marie	St-Valier	1737-05-06	Degagne	Marie	Kaskaskia	1766-05-16	Kaskaskia	1766-05-16
Gendron	Jean Baptiste	St-Francois-de-la-riviere-du-sud	1734-03-30	Jandt Lachapelle	Marie	Kaskaskia	1770-01-30	Kaskaskia	1770-01-30
Fortin Bellefontaine	Joseph	L'Islet	1740-07-24	Tullier Desvignets Cullier	Marie Rose	Kaskaskia	1770-05-29	Kaskaskia	1770-05-29
Migneault Chatillon Aubin Langlois	Louis Joseph Clement	Montmagny	1735-07-16	Gibeau Poitevin Poupart Lafleur	Marie Louise	St-Francois-du-Lac	1751-01-27	Kaskaskia	1770-09-11
Blais	Joseph Marie	Berthier-en-Bas	1741-03-02	Poupart Lafleur	Therese	Cahokia	1771-04-16	Cahokia	1771-04-16
Marcheau Desnoyers Racine	Louis (Father) Athanase	Montréal	1711-02-02	Motivier	Therese	St-Joseph-de-la-Prairie-du-Rocher	1772-03-19	St-Joseph-de-la-Prairie-du-Rocher	1772-03-19
Bardet Lapierre	Jean Baptiste Louis	Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré	1734-03-09	Messeger	Marie Anne	St-Louis, Missoun	1772-07-03	St-Louis, Missoun	1772-07-03
Dupuy	Joseph Marie	Montréal	1745-09-05	Dupuy	Catherine	Kaskaskia	1772-08-12	Kaskaskia	1772-08-12
Cusson	Antoine	Laprairie	1750-01-10	Crelly	Marie Marguerite	Laprairie	1744-12-02	Kaskaskia	1772-09-17
Gagne	Antoine	Pointe-aux-Trembles	1750-05	Tupin	Francoise	Kaskaskia	1774-05-13	Kaskaskia	1774-05-13
Lefebvre St-Jean	Charles	Cap-St-Ignace	1749-03-13	Degagne	Madelaide	Kaskaskia	1774-09-04	Kaskaskia	1774-09-04
		Montréal	1750-05	Nicol	Dorothee	Kaskaskia	1777-01-19	Kaskaskia	1777-01-19
		Montréal	1751-07-25		Marie Francoise	Kaskaskia	1778-05-09	Kaskaskia	1778-05-09

Figure 8. Continued.

## Canada --&gt; Illinois Country: Marriage Sample 1756-1767

Groom Last Name	Groom First Name	Groom Place of Birth	GR DOB	Bride Last Name	Bride First Name	Bride Place of Birth	BR DOB	Marriage Location	Marriage Date
Baugis	Joseph	Beauport	1752-04-13	Duguay Duplessis	Marie Louise			Kaskaskia	1778-08-18
Theimen	Joseph Hyacinthe	St-Vallier	1735-09-04	Brown Devev	Elisabeth			St-Joseph-de-la-Prairie-du-Rocher	1779-09-28
Beauvais St-Gemme	Antoine			Levasseur	Marie Charlotte	Québec	1762-02-26	Kaskaskia	1780-11-20
Sedlot	Jean Baptiste	Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue	1749-11-24	Thaumur Lascourc	Francoise			Kaskaskia	1782-05-06
Henault	Nicolas	Berthier-en-Haut	1751-03-15	Beauvais	Helene			St-Joseph-de-la-Prairie-du-Rocher	1783-03-29
Latreniere Canada	Nicolas Simeon	Québec	1760-02-08	Bienvenu Delisle	Therese			St-Joseph-de-la-Prairie-du-Rocher	1784-01-09
Levasseur	Louis	St-Augustin	1743-04-19	Tanguay Lanavette	Catherine			St-Joseph-de-la-Prairie-du-Rocher	1786-11-06
Dore	Jean Baptiste	Sorel	1763-04-15	Bienvenu Delisle	Marie			Kaskaskia	1787-07-30

Figure 8. Continued.

### Fluid Boundaries and Métissage

Mobility, relocation, and intermarriage had a profound effect on the French river world and its population. It is virtually impossible to examine these historical demographic trends without addressing the issue of métissage and related questions concerning cultural and ethnic identity in the Illinois Country. Did cultural fissures occur as peoples intermarried and had children? If so, what effect did this have?<sup>197</sup> There had been a substantial aboriginal population in the middle Mississippi Valley prior to the arrival of the French. However, war, disease, and native–newcomer commercial interests dramatically changed the composition of the region. *Canadien* migration to the Illinois Country paralleled a sustained trend of intermarriage with the native inhabitants. In 1874, Nehemiah Matson wrote of the legacy of French–Indian relations.

The beautiful country between the Wabash and Mississippi rivers, now within the boundaries of the Sucker State, was once occupied by the powerful tribe of Illinois Indians .... The French came and lived among them, introducing a new religion with arts of civilization, and between the races harmony and friendship prevailed.<sup>198</sup>

While the language and many of the conclusions are dated, Matson’s writing is a reminder that intermarriage and intermixing were prominent features of the Illinois Country from first contact until well into the nineteenth century. Yet, what was its effect? The processes of métissage were complex and uneven, taking place in different ways throughout the French river world at different times.

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<sup>197</sup> Gérard Bouchard, “Sur la dynamique culturelle des régions de peuplement,” *Canadian Historical Review* 67, no. 4 (1986): 475.

<sup>198</sup> Nehemiah Matson, *French and Indians of the Illinois River* (Princeton, Ill: Republican Job Printing Establishment, 1874), ii.

Intermarriage between French traders and natives was common in the early days of settlement in the Illinois Country. Perhaps the best-known account of intermarriage was that of Michel Accault, one of La Salle's companions, and Marie Rouensa, daughter of a Kaskaskian chief. She had two sons before being widowed, but later remarried, this time to a captain of the militia at Kaskaskia. Many native women like Rouensa married *Canadien* and French men, and stayed in the French town when Indian Kaskaskia was established at a separate location in 1719.<sup>199</sup> Carl Ekberg's portrayal of Marie Rouensa was of a Kaskaskian woman who had completely integrated into a French Catholic world. She had decidedly converted to Catholicism, disinherited her son for taking a native wife, and outlined that her possessions were to be distributed according to the laws of the Custom of Paris after her death.<sup>200</sup> Indeed, Ekberg's interpretation leaves little room for syncretism of any kind.<sup>201</sup>

Despite the illusion of two separate spheres (French and Indian), mixed marriages continued to take place in the Illinois Country. French administrators were concerned about the consequences of intermixing, and so the clergy attempted to rationalize intermarriage by explaining that intermarriage would result in Frenchification and by arguing that *métis* children grew up and married into French families.<sup>202</sup> In the story of the French in the heart of North America, the *métis* question revolves largely around the extent to which they were distinct, French, or Native. This was not just about intermarriage and a mixed heritage population, but about broader interpretations regarding the history and nature of French-native interaction.

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<sup>199</sup> Carl J. Ekberg, "Marie Rouensa—8cate8a and the Foundations of French Illinois," *Illinois Historical Journal* 84, no. 3 (1991): 153.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 154–156.

<sup>201</sup> Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women*, 37.

<sup>202</sup> Aubert, "'the Blood of France,'" 43–44.

Any such discussion necessarily begins with Richard White. White's *The Middle Ground* has stood for over fifteen years as the benchmark of scholarship on French–native interaction in the heart of North America, based on creative misunderstandings and cultural accommodations.<sup>203</sup> White argued that the middle ground was a process of invention, where peoples, both French and Indian, forged new ways of interacting with each other.<sup>204</sup> As Robert Morrissey has recently described it,

Indians and European peoples brought hugely different expectations, agendas, cultures, and languages to the encounter, all of which combined to make the frontier a confused and conflicted space. Yet this confusion was productive in its own right, as *misunderstanding* was generative of something new – the shared meanings of a new and improvised culture on the middle ground.<sup>205</sup>

White's work has proven to be remarkably poignant and enduring, although recent scholarship has begun to re-examine some of White's assertions.<sup>206</sup> For example, Brett Rushforth's work on the Fox Wars argues that French–native diplomacy was defined by power dynamics, where native peoples (the French Algonquian allies) had a great deal of agency, and, at times, forced the French into uncomfortable accommodations.<sup>207</sup> Others, such as Gilles Havard, have re-emphasized French colonial claims and the process of conquest in the Great Lakes region of the *Pays d'en Haut*.<sup>208</sup> Both native agency and the processes of colonialism survived the British Conquest, not only in the

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<sup>203</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, MA and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Richard White, "Creative Misunderstandings and New Understandings," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (January 2006): 9–14.

<sup>204</sup> White, *The Middle Ground*, 50–51.

<sup>205</sup> Morrissey, "Bottomlands and Borderlands," 146–147.

<sup>206</sup> Catherine Desbarats, "Following *the Middle Ground*," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (January 2006): 84.

<sup>207</sup> Rushforth, "Slavery, the Fox Wars, and the Limits of Alliance."

<sup>208</sup> Gilles Havard, *Empire et métissage: Indiens et Français dans le Pays d'en Haut 1660–1715* (Sillery, QC: Septentrion, 2003).

Great Lakes, but throughout the Illinois Country as well. More recently, Robert Morrissey re-examined the concept of creative misunderstandings, arguing that some Jesuits became so well versed in the Illinois language that they could reasonably be said to have acquired genuine understandings of the Illinois.<sup>209</sup> Morrissey argues that although these real understandings assisted with Christianization efforts, they did not help create a middle ground; to the contrary, they inadvertently created borders.<sup>210</sup>

In the increasingly muddy waters of historiographical re-interpretation, one begins to question where the *métis* fit into the French river world. Were people of mixed heritage able to cross the borders constructed by real understandings and effectively navigate between colonial processes and native agency? If so, it would place them historically in an important position in the heart of North America and reaffirm the somewhat battered middle ground. Jacqueline Peterson certainly argues as much in her portrayal of the development of a largely cohesive *métis* population in the Great Lakes region.<sup>211</sup> However, Jay Gitlin has questioned this assertion, arguing that *métis* self-identification has been overemphasized, and that “the borrowing of cultural traits did not necessarily signal, in this case, the abandonment of a French or Creole identity or even the beginning of a *métis* identity. After all, bridges can mark boundaries just as effectively a moats.”<sup>212</sup> A more nuanced view comes from Keith Widder, who uses *métis* extensively to support French continuity at Michilimackinac after 1760. He argues that “an amalgam of *métis* and French-Canadians made up the group at Mackinac commonly called ‘French’ who continued to use the French language for a least another

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<sup>209</sup> Morrissey, “Bottomlands and Borderlands,” 145–150.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>211</sup> Jacqueline Peterson, “Prelude to Red River: A Social Portrait of the Great Lakes Metis,” *Ethnohistory* 25, no. 1 (1978): 46.

<sup>212</sup> Gitlin, “Negotiating the Course of Empire,” 10, 13.

century. The *métis* played the vital role in perpetuating French customs and practices at Mackinac and the surrounding region after 1760.”<sup>213</sup> This excerpt from Widder illustrates one of the difficulties involved in trying to define people of mixed French–native heritage. In one line Widder uses “*métis*,” and then in the next he writes “the *métis*.” This has a subtle but important connotation. The former refers to people of mixed heritage and the latter a cohesive self-identifying people of mixed heritage. Even though Widder uses a lower-case “m” to distinguish these people from today’s politically recognized Métis Nation in Canada, his work underscores the difficulty of categorizing a people and defining their identity.

People of French–native mixed heritage or *métis* were undoubtedly part of the French river world, and yet we continue to struggle to define those connections and boundaries. Perhaps the problem lies in the fact that these boundaries were often fluid and mutable. Heather Devine has shown that by the late eighteenth century an entanglement of kinship networks reflected the increasingly heterogeneous nature of the middle Mississippi Valley.<sup>214</sup> Some *métis* identified with their mixed heritage, yet also simultaneously identified with Catholic kinship networks as they operated within French commercial and social structure.<sup>215</sup> Moreover, Thanis Thorne has given multiple points of intersection that tied peoples and communities together in the Illinois Country, including “a common language, the market economy in agriculture foodstuffs and furs,

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<sup>213</sup> Keith R. Widder, “The Persistence of French–Canadian Ways at Mackinac after 1760,” in *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society, Mackinac Island 1990*, ed. Patricia Galloway (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992), 45. Also see Keith R. Widder, “After the Conquest: Michilimackinac, a Borderland in Transition, 1760–1763,” *Michigan Historical Review* 34, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>214</sup> Heather Devine, *The People Who Own Themselves: Aboriginal Ethnogenesis in a Canadian Family, 1600–1900* (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2004), 63, 68, 72.

<sup>215</sup> Susan Sleeper–Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

Catholic religious practices and beliefs, a hierarchical system, patrilineal family forms, and an allegiance to the mother country, France.”<sup>216</sup> In essence, the lack of rigidity was a defining feature of the French river world. It allowed *Canadien* migration patterns to co-exist with processes of métissage, a growing mixed population, and alternative marriage patterns and kinship structures.

### Processes of Inclusion and Exclusion

Most who married into the Illinois Country between 1763 and 1803 were *Canadien*, French from France, Louisiana Creole, métis, or Indian, but an increasingly important group of English, Scottish, and Anglo-American traders also married into the Illinois Country and larger French river world. Shortly after the French surrender at Montreal in 1760, Scottish and English merchants began arriving in Canada. Some of these individuals saw the advantages of marrying into French families and tapping into their experience in the fur trade and relations with the native peoples. Just as French men had married native women, English and Scottish men married French women to enter commercial kinship networks.<sup>217</sup> For example, Montreal trader William Grant used his business associate and brother-in-law Claude Laframboise to assist in fur trade and other business dealings with Auguste Chouteau at Michilimackinac.<sup>218</sup> James McGill married Charlotte Guillimin in Montreal in 1776. Even though McGill was

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<sup>216</sup> Tanis Thorne, *The Many Hands of My Relations: French and Indians on the Lower Missouri* (St. Louis: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 66.

<sup>217</sup> See Jennifer Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980); Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670–1870* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd., 1980); Sylvia Van Kirk, “Women in Between: Indian Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada,” *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* (1977): 30–47.

<sup>218</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00221.

reasonably well established by the mid-1770s, the advantages of marrying Charlotte, a widowed *Canadien* from a prominent trading family, could not have been lost on him.<sup>219</sup> Similar processes happened throughout the French river world, although to varying degrees. In the Illinois Country, the first few Anglo-American merchants to arrive were quickly absorbed by the French community through marriage with French women.<sup>220</sup>

Marrying into a French family was a convenient way to access a commercial system based on kinship and rooted in the French communities of North America. However, there were responsibilities and codes of conduct associated with these unions. While many of these responsibilities may never have been put to paper or even spoken, to ignore them was to risk alienation from one's French spouse, her extended French family, and the French community at large. Nowhere was this more evident than in the case of one English merchant.

Thomas Bentley came to the Illinois Country from London via west Florida and the Mississippi in 1776.<sup>221</sup> Clarence Alvord's account of Bentley portrays him as a scoundrel who defrauded the French inhabitants of the region and played both sides during the American Revolution.<sup>222</sup> Bentley was arrested in 1777 during a trip to Michilimackinac for providing supplies to the Americans and for allegedly meeting with Linn's expedition at the mouth of the Ohio River.<sup>223</sup> He was imprisoned in Canada for two years, during which time he hired Pierre Prévost of the parish of Ste. Genevieve in Montreal to manage his canoes and fur trading operations in the Illinois Country. While

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<sup>219</sup> Stanley Brice Frost, *James McGill of Montreal* (Montreal and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 50–51.

<sup>220</sup> Balesi, *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America*, 306.

<sup>221</sup> David G. Thompson, "Thomas Bentley and the American Revolution in Illinois," *Illinois Historical Journal* 83, no. 1 (1990): 3.

<sup>222</sup> Alvord, ed. *Kaskaskia Records, 1778–1790*, xvi–xxv.

<sup>223</sup> Thompson, "Thomas Bentley," 5.

Bentley was detained in Canada, his wife, Marguerite Beauvais, represented him. She assisted in the renewal of the contract of Pierre Prévost, who subsequently acted as her agent in the Illinois Country. Marguerite also managed the family finances and represented Bentley in court in Kaskaskia.

This form of representation was commonplace throughout the French river world, where the necessities of commerce resulted in regular and prolonged absence by the men of the communities, and the adoption by their wives of many responsibilities otherwise reserved for men. As Susan C. Boyle explains in her study of the women of Ste. Geneviève in the eighteenth century, “The prolonged absences of their menfolk gave wives additional power and ample opportunity to function as deputy husbands, protecting their own interests and those of their families.”<sup>224</sup> Thus, it is no surprise that women could and did exercise a great deal of power. Mariane Briant, acting under a power of attorney from her husband, Jacques François Conand, was able to set up an apprenticeship for her twenty-year-old son, Jean-Baptiste Conand, exchange land and houses with other Kaskaskian residents, and even contract out her power of attorney to others in the community to act as her agent.<sup>225</sup> Similarly, Antoine Bienvenu Jr. gave his wife, Thérèse Peltié dit Antaya, a power of attorney to act on his behalf in all legal and financial matters.<sup>226</sup>

Boyle argues that it was predominantly older women who initiated legal proceedings and held power in the community.<sup>227</sup> If this were the case, one can only imagine the difficult situation that Marguerite Beauvais encountered as a very young and

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<sup>224</sup> Susan C. Boyle, “Did She Generally Decide? Women in Ste. Genevieve, 1750–1805,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1987): 785.

<sup>225</sup> KM 81:4:3:1, 83:9:8:1, 86:8:14:2.

<sup>226</sup> KM 83:5:20:1.

<sup>227</sup> Boyle, “Did She Generally Decide?,” 779.

recently married woman, thrust into a position of power and responsibility due to her husband's incarceration in Canada. Both Marguerite Beauvais and Pierre Prévost had difficulty protecting Thomas Bentley's financial interests. They failed to win court cases regarding debts owed to merchant Elie Beaugard of New Orleans and wages owed to voyageurs who had worked under Prévost.<sup>228</sup> Was this a reflection of a young and inexperienced wife and her agent, or the case of Bentley's immoral business practices come home to roost? Whatever the case, it was a serious financial blow for Bentley, who returned home in a foul mood in 1780.

Upon his escape and return to Kaskaskia, Thomas Bentley allegedly kicked in the door, verbally assaulted Marguerite, and threw her out of the house. David G. Thompson speculates that Marguerite Beauvais and Pierre Prévost may have had an affair, although it is uncertain how often Prévost would have been present given his own responsibilities.<sup>229</sup> Bentley, however, was convinced of her infidelity. In an 1780 letter written to his enemies, the French-speaking inhabitants of Kaskaskia, he referred to her as a prostitute "who lived publicly in violation of all laws human and divine."<sup>230</sup> After his death, Bentley's friend and agent John Dodge referred to Beauvais' supposedly whorish conduct in the legal battle that ensued over Bentley's estate.<sup>231</sup> Was Bentley's alleged reaction due to her supposed infidelity or the decline in his profits during his absence? David G. Thompson states that neither of these interpretations are conclusive. In fact, there is nothing to support the validity of Marguerite Beauvais' complaint of abuse by her husband except for her petition to the court. However, after the alleged

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<sup>228</sup> KM 79:6:9:1, 79:9:27:1, 79:9:27:2, 79:9:27:3, 79:9:28:2, 79:11:3:1.

<sup>229</sup> Thompson, "Thomas Bentley," 10.

<sup>230</sup> "Thomas Bentley to His Enemies, 5 September 1780," in Alvord, ed. *Kaskaskia Records, 1778–1790*, 203–205.

<sup>231</sup> KM 87:2:7:1, 87:4:21:1, 87:4:23:2, 87:5:22:1, 87:5:30:1, 87:5:30:2.

incident of Bentley throwing Marguerite out of the house, the court refused to hear Bentley's cases to collect on notes owed to him. This was such an extreme measure that it stands out by virtue of its striking singularity.

Because notary Carbonneaux refused to take record of the petitions that Bentley sent to the court, Bentley took his case directly to the governor of Virginia.<sup>232</sup> The Kaskaskian residents were quick to respond, sending a complaint against Bentley and his associates to Virginia's governor.<sup>233</sup> The couriers on behalf of the *habitants* of Kaskaskia were Richard McCarty and Bentley's former agent in the Illinois Country, Pierre Prévost.<sup>234</sup> The document that they carried contained the signatures of the most prominent members of the community, including Marguerite's family members, Antoine Beauvais and Jean-Baptiste Beauvais, with further instructions to take the case before Congress if necessary.<sup>235</sup> Regardless of the validity of Marguerite's claim of abuse, Bentley had alienated his wife and essentially broken his connection to both the French community of Kaskaskia and the French river world. In doing so, he lost the support of his former associate Daniel Murray and his old ally Richard Winston.<sup>236</sup> Writing to his enemies in 1780, he referred to his exclusion from, and contempt for, the French river world, stating, "I know that it is a crime for a damned Englishman to attempt to stay among you; Irishmen suit you better; they are equal to you in perfidy, as for lying, flattering, and drinking tafia they can do it as well as any of you."<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> KM 81:1:31:1, 81:2:18:1.

<sup>233</sup> KM 81:5:5:1.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Thompson, "Thomas Bentley," 11.

<sup>237</sup> "Thomas Bentley to His Enemies," 5 September 1780, in Alvord, ed. *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790*, 203-205.

Thomas Bentley has usually been analyzed in the context of the American Revolution and the controversy over his alleged assistance in supplying the American cause. His fierce rivalries with the British crown agent in the Illinois Country, Philippe François de Rastel, chevalier de Rocheblave, and merchant Gabriel Cerré have dominated the narrative. However, the importance of his marriage to a member of the prominent Beauvais family has been remarkably underplayed. David G. Thompson is correct in depicting Thomas Bentley as both scoundrel and victim.<sup>238</sup> His marriage to Marguerite Beauvais in 1776 followed the standard practice of English merchants marrying into French families to gain access to a continental trade network built on kinship and commerce with natives. Not only did wives represent their husbands when they were absent, they also acted as a bridge between the British and Anglo–American worlds and the French river world.<sup>239</sup> This form of representation gave women a great deal of agency. Thomas Bentley was a victim of his inability to understand or adhere to the informal codes of conduct and responsibilities associated with his union to Marguerite Beauvais and her role as his representative in the French river world.

The case of Thomas Bentley was not the only instance where alleged adultery led to separation or divorce. In 1777, Frenchman Pierre–François Devolsey filed a petition for divorce with the lieutenant governor at St. Louis, Francisco Cruzat.<sup>240</sup> Devolsey, himself a government official with connections in New Orleans and France, laid out a detailed sequence of events that precipitated his petition. Professing his honourable and

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<sup>238</sup> Thompson, “Thomas Bentley,” 3.

<sup>239</sup> This builds off of the work of Sylvia Van Kirk, placing French women in the “in between role” instead of native women. Sylvia Van Kirk, “Women in Between: Indian Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review Historical Papers* (1977): 30–47.

<sup>240</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 1 of 40, 00172.

good intentions and outlining his undying support and love for his wife during their twenty years of marriage, Devolsey explained how he was betrayed, not once but twice, by Elisabeth de Villiers. Approximately five years earlier, Elisabeth had informed her husband that she was leaving on a voyage to New Orleans to seek out her father. It was only later that Devolsey learned that his wife had only traveled a short distance to nearby Ste. Geneviève, where she spent nine months living with a Mr. Carpentier. There is no indication as to how Devolsey learned of his wife's infidelity, but this initial breach of trust—not to mention the marriage contract—did not end the marriage. Instead, Devolsey relied on help of Lieutenant Governor Pedro Joseph Piernas and the local priest, Father Valentin.

Piernas and Valentin were able to secure assurances from Elisabeth that she would abandon her wicked ways and take up her responsibilities as a good wife, and for a while life in the Devolsey household returned to normal. Devolsey stated that he had forgiven Elisabeth and had practically forgotten his wife's previous transgressions when he left for New Orleans and France in order to settle some business. Upon his return, Devolsey discovered that his wife had engaged in a torrid affair with René Kiercerau. Moreover, due to Elisabeth's indiscretion, the affair had ballooned into a public scandal that prompted her and Kiercerau to flee St. Louis for the east side of the Mississippi. Adding insult to injury, Elisabeth had also ransacked the Devolsey home, taking almost everything with her across the river. When Devolsey returned, he found his property barren, his house empty, and the cupboards bare.<sup>241</sup>

Numerous witnesses came forward and testified on behalf of Devolsey, not only to establish the good will and fine character of the plaintiff, but also to comment on the

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<sup>241</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Reel 1 of 40, 00204.

state of his household, property, and goods. One witness, Paul Guitard, gave a detailed account of the condition of Devolsey's household and property. Guitard was well positioned to give such an account, for he had worked on the Devolsey's lands as a labourer and had seen the estate before Devolsey's departure for New Orleans and France. Among the items included in Guitard's testimony was an abundance of wheat, flour, and corn, as well as four bulls, three cows, one calf, thirty to forty large pigs, and a rooster. The house was described as having been nicely furnished, and that roughly eight months after Devolsey's departure Elisabeth had cleared out the house and left for the east side of the river.

Despite the seemingly overwhelming evidence against Elisabeth de Villiers, Devolsey's petition did not move quickly, and he was forced to reissue his petition to the new lieutenant governor, Fernando de Leyba, in 1779.<sup>242</sup> However, de Leyba quickly answered the petition, giving Elisabeth twenty days to answer the charges. De Leyba subsequently sent a letter to Mr. Trotier, judge and captain of the militia at Cahokia on the other side of the river, informing him of the charges and requesting that Elisabeth be informed immediately.<sup>243</sup> Unfortunately, this is where the trail ends—no further documentation has yet come to light regarding the outcome of the case, and the best one can do is to speculate as to its conclusion. One can only surmise that Devolsey would have, at the very least, been awarded the divorce he sought, given the overwhelming testimonial evidence. However, central to his petition was not only a divorce, but also a motion to completely exclude Elisabeth de Villiers from her share in their joint estate

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<sup>242</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Reel 1 of 40, 00223.

<sup>243</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Reel 1 of 40, 00223, 00227. The name shows up as Trotier in this document, however, the name also shows up as Trottier in other documents.

through the dissolution of the marriage contract, as property and inheritance rights were ultimately at stake in such proceedings.

Marriage in the Church was a contract under God, but in accordance with French civil law of the *Coutume de Paris*, the community of goods, dowry, and succession rights were negotiated through a local notary to create a marriage contract. Both contracts were meant to be permanent, but there were cases when marriages failed and where couples separated.<sup>244</sup> Official notarial records provide a glimpse into these accounts from a legal and contractual standpoint, although they offer no indication as to how widespread separation and divorce was.

The legal cases that do present themselves, such as those of Bentley and Devolsey, often center on adultery and focused on the wife as the perpetrator of infidelity. This was a harsh double standard, given that many men, particularly those involved in the fur trade, were known to have taken second wives in native villages. Such was the complex system of marriage alliances in the French river world. Marriage was a salient component of building bridges between communities. Just as *Canadiens* married natives *à la façon du pays*, so too did British men marry into French-speaking families, Frenchmen into *Canadian* families, and so forth. Kinship networks based on mobile networks of communication and exchange meant that marriages could reinforce existing ties or allow outsiders to enter a community. But the cases of Thomas Bentley and Pierre-François Devolsey show how different the circumstances could be. Was Devolsey treated more favourably because he was from France, or was he simply better

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<sup>244</sup> Margaret Kimball Brown, *History as They Lived It: A Social History of Prairie Du Rocher, Ill.* (Tuscon, AZ: Patrice Press, 2005), 192. Brown details several separations, including one case where the wife returned to her sister's house in Prairie du Rocher, and another where the wife left her husband for an Indian slave.

liked? Did legal structures on opposing sides of the Mississippi have an effect on the outcome of the cases? Bentley never actually filed for divorce, whereas Devolsey formally requested that his marriage contract be nullified. Processes of inclusion and exclusion were complex and varied, but when marriages dissolved it meant a reorganization of kinship networks and one's place within, and relationship to, the French river world.

### Conclusion

The continued migration of *Canadiens* from Canada was consistent with a longstanding tradition of resettlement in French North America that became a strategic part of family planning and organization. Demographic pressures, personal aspirations, soil degradation, and a plethora of other factors meant that large families regularly saw some of its members leave. While this could be as simple as marrying and moving to a nearby parish, it frequently involved leaving as an indentured worker to go further afield by voyaging to the *Pays d'en Haut*, the Illinois Country, or Upper and Lower Louisiana. Within the family unit, both sedentary and mobile lifestyles were deeply interconnected.<sup>245</sup> Oftentimes, family members relocated to join a brother, father, cousin, or spouse who had found success. This harmonized view of mobility and sedentarism provides a stark contrast to the binary first produced by civic and religious authorities in New France, and was later absorbed and reproduced in much of the historiography.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Colin Coates, *The Metamorphoses of Landscape and Community in Early Quebec* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 55.

<sup>246</sup> Choquette, *Frenchmen into Peasants*, 1, 27.

At the heart of the conflict was the question of class, or, more appropriately, those who held power of authority to exert control over the designs of society and its identity, and those who seemingly did not. Christian Morissonneau poignantly observes that a tradition of antiauthoritarianism has historically permeated the culture of mobility in French Canada, which defined itself vis-à-vis the political and religious elite who promoted sedentary agricultural settlement.<sup>247</sup> Jacques Mathieu, Pauline Therrien-Fortier, and Rénaud Lessard explain that this process resulted in the perception of two diametrically opposed pioneers, with two social orders and two value systems.<sup>248</sup> They go on to argue that these two worldviews were represented by farmers and fur traders, stating that, “L’agriculteur attaché au sol et à la famille s’est trouvé confronté au coureur de bois, cet eternal absent tourné vers les grands espaces.”<sup>249</sup>

The powerful mythology of the mobility–sedentarism binary was already well entrenched by the mid–nineteenth century. Louise–Amélie Panet Berczy wrote from Dailleboust, Quebec in 1848 about the odd character of her grandfather, Gabriel Cerré, who had resettled in the Illinois Country as a fur trade merchant. Amélie’s description of her grandfather emphasized the perceived differences between a settled life of farming and the mobile life of trade and adventure away from home. She explained, “His character was quite particular and very different from that of the rest of the family. He was presumably not constituted to be happy in the stable, down-to-earth life of a

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<sup>247</sup> Christian Morissonneau, “The ‘Ungovernable’ People: French–Canadian Mobility and Identity,” in *French America: Mobility, Identity, and Minority Experience across the Continent*, ed. Dean R. Louder and Eric Waddell (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 18, 22–23.

<sup>248</sup> Mathieu, Therrien–Fortier, and Lessard, “Mobilité et sédentarité: stratégies familiales en Nouvelle–France,” 211.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

simple habitant.”<sup>250</sup> Amélie attributed her grandfather’s desire to leave the St. Lawrence Valley to his own personal aspirations for seeking adventure and fortune. Thus, Amélie displayed her belief that personal force of spirit, not family strategy, was the primary impetus for departing and living what she judged to be an alternative lifestyle. Determined to show the distinctive character of her grandfather, she recounted word for word his justification for leaving the St. Lawrence Valley that had supposedly been given to Amélie’s mother: “*Ah, my daughter, he cried, what a fate to spend one’s life tailing along behind one’s livestock!*”<sup>251</sup>

Amélie’s account of her grandfather’s relocation to the Illinois Country is not necessarily negative. If anything, it casts Gabriel Cerré in a favourable light, depicting farming as the work of the masses and the fur trade as the purview of exceptional and entrepreneurial men. However, a closer look at the Cerré family reveals a much more integrated relationship between mobility and sedentarism.<sup>252</sup> Gabriel’s brother Antoine was also involved in the fur trade, even if he did not permanently relocate. Moreover, all of Gabriel’s siblings married into fur-trading families and two of his nephews eventually moved to Upper Louisiana. Finally, Cerré’s youngest brother continued to live as an *habitant* in their parish of birth, côte St. Paul. As Jacques Mathieu and his colleagues have appropriately noted in their broad survey of mobility and sedentarism in New France, “la distance entre cet agriculteur ancré au sol et cet aventurier aux horizons

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<sup>250</sup> Faribault–Beauregard, ed. *La vie aux Illinois au XVIIIe siècle*, 5.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>252</sup> Thomas Wien argues that the historiographical chasm between agriculture and the fur trade has obscured the interrelation between these two lifestyles, which saw many enter the fur trade in the hopes of generating enough income to buy land or supplement an existing agricultural holding. Wien, “Familles paysannes et marché de l’engagement pour le commerce des fourrures au Canada au XVIIIe siècle,” in *Famille et Marché XVe–XXe siècles*, ed. Christian Dessureault, John A. Dickinson, and Joseph Goy (Québec: Septentrion, 2003), 167–179.

infinis n'est pas si grande."<sup>253</sup> The historical demography of the Illinois Country between 1763 and 1803 was characterized by a longstanding French tradition of relocation and settlement, immigration, and intermarriage.<sup>254</sup> These patterns helped set the foundation for the French river world, and helped maintain its fluid geographical and ethnic character. However, intermarriage alone did not ensure the survival and growth of the French river world. If migration and intermarriage helped set the foundation, it was merchants and their families—those who continued to ply the river routes—who maintained the commercial and social networks. And so it is to one merchant and his family that this study now turns.

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<sup>253</sup> Mathieu, Therrien–Fortier, and Lessard, “Mobilité et sédentarité: stratégies familiales en Nouvelle–France,” 211.

<sup>254</sup> Choquette, *Frenchmen into Peasants*, 128.

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## Chapter Two

### Gabriel Cerré: A French River World Merchant

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There are many Canadians in the Illinois Country, and many of them arrived there thanks to the indefatigable spirit of Monsieur [Gabriel] Cerré in traveling to Canada, his native land. Age has never prevented him from making these difficult trips. The winter that I spent in St. Louis, I saw him arrive on foot from Detroit with two or three Indians, who would not have been able to endure the fatigue and bitter cold of such a trip without him.

Nicolas de Finiels<sup>255</sup>

Nicolas de Finiels' heroic account of Gabriel Cerré was written in 1803, only two years before the influential merchant's death at the age of seventy-one. As romantically appealing as de Finiels' portrayal may be, it is almost certain that Cerré, at his advanced age, welcomed the help of his native travel companions. During his twilight years, Gabriel Cerré was conscious of both his frailty and mortality. He wrote to his daughter Marie-Anne in August 1802 from the trading post of Michilimackinac, and complained about the difficulties of old age and his hope of seeing her one last time in Montreal.<sup>256</sup> Yet, there was some truth to the remarkable force of spirit about which de Finiels wrote. Gabriel Cerré continued to make trips north right up to the end of his life, traveling to Michilimackinac in 1802 and Niagara in 1804.<sup>257</sup> For a man who was so clearly defined by his lifelong voyages between the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi

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<sup>255</sup> Nicolas de Finiels, *An Account of Upper Louisiana*, ed. Carl J. Ekberg and William Foley, trans., Carl J. Ekberg (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 66.

<sup>256</sup> Archives de l'Université de Montréal, Collection Louis-François-George Baby 1601-1924 (hereafter Baby Collection), P0058, U2534, Microfilm (mf) 4408, Cerré à Mme P.L. Panet, Michilimackinac, 12 August 1802. Gabriel Cerré's daughter Marie-Anne is referred to as Manon in regular correspondence.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, Baby Collection, P0058, U2535, mf 4409, Cerré à Mme P.L. Panet, Niagara, 20 May 1804.

rivers, it seems only fitting that his last living act was a return voyage from Montreal. Traveling without stopping, he was able to make it as far as Ste. Geneviève in Upper Louisiana before succumbing to pneumonia. When Gabriel Cerré passed away at two in the morning on 3 April 1805, he left behind family, friends and associates, and a legacy that spanned the North American continent, from Quebec City to New Orleans.<sup>258</sup>

The life of this *Canadien* merchant and his family provides a window into how the French river world operated, illustrating the processes through which commercial, social, and kinship networks intertwined and overlapped.<sup>259</sup> While geopolitical events were undoubtedly influential, the role of family in the creation and maintenance of community should not be understated. Yves Frenette has emphasized the importance of family as a socializing agent that helped link regions under the larger umbrella of French North America.<sup>260</sup> Expanding upon Frenette's interpretation, this chapter endeavours to examine the Cerré family, its geographical spread, marriage alliances, and the salience of mobility in maintaining a continental system of communication and exchange.

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<sup>258</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2535, mf 4409, Cerré à Mme P.L. Panet, Niagara, 20 May 1804. While this letter does not indicate where Gabriel Cerré was wintering, it does provide a detailed account of the last days of his life, his illness, and the time and date of his death.

<sup>259</sup> Cécile Vidal's study of Antoine Bienvenu illustrated the development of grain trade linkages that tied together the Illinois Country and Louisiana. This chapter does not attempt to refute the importance of that grain trade. Just as Vidal used the example of Bienvenu to expose the importance of southern commercial and social links during the early period of New France and Louisiana, this chapter uses Gabriel Cerré to illuminate the importance of northern links after the fall of New France. Cécile Vidal, "Antoine Bienvenu, Illinois Planter and Mississippi Trader: The Structure of Exchange between Lower and Upper Louisiana," in *French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World*, ed. Bradley G. Bond (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 111–133.

<sup>260</sup> Yves Frenette, *Brève histoire des canadiens français* (Montreal: Boréal, 1998), 92–93. Although Yves Frenette primarily deals with the 1840–1918 period and cross-border connections with New England, his observation on how family assisted to create a new spatial conception of French Canada is useful for understanding the role that family played in connecting the St. Lawrence and Middle Mississippi Valleys to produce a larger world view of the French river world.

### Gabriel Cerré: A Perfect Test Case?

Gabriel Cerré is deceptively perfect as a case subject. In many respects he epitomized the French river world between 1763 and 1805. He arrived in the Illinois Country prior to the fall of New France and died in Upper Louisiana shortly after the region had become American territory. Cerré's time in the Mississippi Valley spanned a period of shifting nationality.

He came as a Frenchman to a French country. He became by turns a British subject, a citizen of Virginia, a Spanish subject, a subject of the French Empire, and an American citizen. He administered the laws as a Virginian judge, and made laws as a Spanish syndic.<sup>261</sup>

And yet, despite the changes in colonial authority, Cerré continued to make frequent trips north to Montreal, often bringing other *Canadiens* back with him to the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana.<sup>262</sup> As a result of his frequent voyages to Montreal, Detroit, Michilimackinac, Peoria, Chicago, and New Orleans, this merchant-representative helped tie together French-speaking communities.<sup>263</sup> However, Gabriel Cerré can hardly be regarded as the prototypical *habitant-voyageur*.

Gabriel Cerré worked closely with other merchants and traders, hired voyageurs for fur trade expeditions, and represented numerous families throughout the French river world. His ability to read and write differentiated him from most of the French-speaking inhabitants with whom he came in contact. This gave Cerré a distinct advantage over the illiterate masses. Those who could only sign their name with an X

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<sup>261</sup> Walter B. Douglas, "Jean Gabriel Cerre—a Sketch," *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society for the year 1903* 9 (1904): 275. Also see Julius T. Muench, "Jean Gabriel Cerré," *Missouri Historical Society Collections* 2 (1903): 58–76.

<sup>262</sup> Douglas, "Jean Gabriel Cerre—a Sketch," 283, 285.

<sup>263</sup> I use the term merchant-representative because of Cerré's frequent work representing others through a power of attorney to handle both business and family affairs abroad while on his travels throughout the French river world.

depended on literate merchants like Cerré or local notaries to assist in managing business and personal affairs, and to have correspondence and legal documents read out loud. Carl J. Ekberg notes that literacy became a staple of the commercial elite in Upper Louisiana as the eighteenth century drew to a close.<sup>264</sup> In his examination of François Vallé—another prominent *Canadien* merchant—who settled in Ste. Geneviève of Upper Louisiana, Ekberg argues that the illiterate Vallé would have been hard-pressed to compete with the new wave of literate merchants had he lived beyond 1783. Moreover, Ekberg portrays a changing landscape where literate merchants such as Gabriel Cerré, Auguste and Pierre Chouteau, Jacques Clamorgan, Charles Gratiot, and others used their fortunes to build personal libraries.<sup>265</sup> This luxury represented a new level of decadence available only to the educated and wealthy, and served to widen and entrench a chasm between the commercial elite and the masses.<sup>266</sup>

Gabriel Cerré's library was part of the estate inventory made after his wife passed away in 1800.<sup>267</sup> The Cerré library contained eighteen titles, encompassing more than seventy volumes. There is no indication how much reading Cerré did, but most of the books appear to have been largely instructional, including *Le Parfait Négociant*, *Instructions des jardiniers*, *Pratique civil & militaire*, and a French–Latin dictionary. There were also several books on voyages and history, including the voyages of James

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<sup>264</sup> Carl J. Ekberg, *François Vallé and His World: Upper Louisiana before Lewis and Clark* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 283.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 283–284.

<sup>266</sup> Jay Gitlin, “Old Wine in New Bottles: French Merchants and the Emergence of the American Midwest, 1795–1835,” in *Proceedings of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Meetings of the French Colonial Historical Society*, ed. Philip Boucher (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 37. Gitlin focuses on the rise of a wealthy group of French bourgeois who took part in, and indeed benefitted from, the development of mid–America.

<sup>267</sup> The inventory itself was actually taken in 1802, and Cerré passed away in 1805. John Francis McDermott, *Private Libraries in Creole Saint Louis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1938), 71–74.

Cook and several world maps. Instructional manuals and journals or tales of voyages must have had some resonance with a man like Cerré, who traveled frequently, interacted with a wide assortment of people, and was involved in both business and politics. There were also several religious texts, such as a history of the Jewish people, a volume of ecclesiastical history, and a book of Christian teachings. All the titles were in French, although it is possible that Cerré's six-volume set of *Don Quixote* was in Spanish. It was an impressive collection for its day in St. Louis, and for one of the wealthiest men of his generation.<sup>268</sup> However, his son-in-law, Auguste Chouteau, arguably the richest man of the succeeding generation in St. Louis, had a library of one hundred and seventy titles and over six hundred volumes.<sup>269</sup>

Chouteau inherited some of his collection from Cerré, and so a portion of the library contained instructional manuals and tales of voyages, but the collection as a whole was quite different. Chouteau's library contained works by Francis Bacon, Daniel Defoe, René Descartes, Denis Diderot, David Hume, John Locke, Montesquieu, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire. It is difficult to discern whether the books were seen more as a status symbol and how well versed Chouteau actually was in political philosophy. The English titles were all French translations, for Chouteau was not known to have spoken much English. However, he did understand the importance of a good education, sending his son to Montreal so that he could enter what Chouteau called "good society." Literacy in both English and French were central to Chouteau's understanding of good society, and his views mirrored a more general trend in St. Louis,

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<sup>268</sup> The only library collection in the region that was notably bigger than Cerré's belonged to Frenchman Pierre Laclède, who had helped found St. Louis in 1764 with his stepson Auguste Chouteau. *Ibid.*, 26–43.

<sup>269</sup> Auguste Chouteau's library was inventoried, along with the rest of his estate, after he passed away in 1826. *Ibid.*, 128–166.

where the written word became increasingly associated with the merchant class. By the end of the eighteenth century, books had become a prized possession of the wealthy and a sign of respectability.<sup>270</sup> Similar to gardens in France and paintings of imperial material wealth in Holland, libraries were a salient feature of a created social hierarchy in St. Louis.<sup>271</sup> Moreover, because there was no publishing industry in the middle Mississippi Valley, books had to be imported, and became synonymous with other rare objects and imported commodities. Displaying one's library was to show ownership of rare objects from afar, just as Dutch paintings of imperial goods had been displays of imperial wealth and appropriation. As books became a sign of material success in St. Louis, a market developed for them, fueled by high demand from middling and wealthy merchants eager to solidify their place in society. In 1778, Pierre Laclède's library—by far the largest at the time—was sold off to sixteen individual buyers, including his stepson, Auguste Chouteau.<sup>272</sup> If Gabriel Cerré's library was representative of his place in St. Louisan society, it was only fitting that after his death his books were split between his son and two sons-in-law to help secure their place in society.<sup>273</sup> While

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<sup>270</sup> Woodruff D. Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability 1600–1800* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 26. Smith focuses mostly on food and drink commodities in Britain. However, books in St. Louis were no less a part of the making of respectability and civility than imported foodstuffs or textiles.

<sup>271</sup> Chandra Mukerji, "Reading and Writing with Nature: A Materialist Approach to French Formal Gardens," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 456; Simon Schama, "Perishable Commodities: Dutch Still-Life Painting and the 'Empire of Things'," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 479. Possession of books, gardens, and paintings all had their different purposes. For instance, Schama argues that the paintings offer a tempered display of imperial wealth, and Mukerji focuses on the redefinition of nature. Yet the underlying motive of displaying status, respectability, and civility remains as a common thread.

<sup>272</sup> McDermott, *Private Libraries in Creole Saint Louis*, vii.

<sup>273</sup> J.M. Carrière, "Life and Customs in the French Villages of the Old Illinois Country, 1736–1939," *Canadian Historical Association Historical Reports* (1939): 34–47. Carrière's social hierarchy of the Illinois Country continues to be used in the historiography. He presented a well-

small by later standards, Gabriel Cerré's library was another reminder that he was far from common.

Gabriel Cerré's great success as a merchant is as much troublesome as it is convenient for studying the history of the French river world. Because of his esteemed position as one of the richest men in Kaskaskia, and later St. Louis, his name graces many of the historical documents for the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana. He was the largest grain producer in St. Louis, and by 1791 owned more slaves than anyone in Upper Louisiana.<sup>274</sup> In addition to Cerré's involvement in the grain trade, he was an active merchant in the fur trade, sending pelts to Montreal and Quebec City en route to London. Gabriel Cerré's involvement in both the grain and fur trades illustrates how commercial networks were rarely closed systems or mutually exclusive. During his life, Cerré was an *habitant*, a voyageur, a merchant, a judge, and a legal representative for numerous people throughout the French river world. So it comes as no surprise that he invested in a variety of trades and built up a diverse financial portfolio. The geographical spread of Cerré's commercial activities makes him an ideal lens through which to view the French river world. However, the size and diversity of his investments and financial portfolio meant that Gabriel Cerré was anything but common. Only a small number of influential French-speaking merchants amassed comparable wealth through such a geographically vast commercial network.<sup>275</sup>

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stratified three-tier system with missionaries, officers, and merchants at the top, and native people and black slaves on the bottom. Libraries show the changing nature of hierarchy and social order, and that this three-tiered approach is in need of some revision.

<sup>274</sup> Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 155.

<sup>275</sup> Other notable merchants of the Middle Mississippi Valley included Charles Gratiot, Auguste Chouteau, Pierre Ménard, and François Vallé. Most were involved in the fur trade to Montreal, although not all show up in studies on the Montreal fur trade. See José E. Igartua, "The

Much of the historiography has focused on Gabriel Cerré's commercial and political influence, paying specific attention to his ability to switch political allegiances.<sup>276</sup> For example, Cerré was an ally and strong supporter of an agent named Rocheblave, who operated as the British representative in the Illinois Country until his capture by American rebels.<sup>277</sup> When the Americans took possession of the Illinois Country, General Clark actively courted Cerré due to his influence in the region. Just as pressing for Clark was Cerré's access to resources and supplies, which were badly needed to defend the American garrison.<sup>278</sup> Cerré stayed in Kaskaskia at first, working with Clark and the Americans. However, he soon found that his commercial interests in the southern fur trade, combined with the cloud of uncertainty and instability brought on by American occupation, made relocation to St. Louis highly appealing.<sup>279</sup> Cerré developed a good working relationship with the lieutenant governor in St. Louis and corresponded with the Spanish governor in New Orleans.<sup>280</sup> As a successful grain producer, fur trader, and merchant-representative, Gabriel Cerré successfully navigated the treacherous waters of political change en route to becoming one of the richest men in the middle Mississippi Valley.

Gabriel Cerré's literacy, wealth, and political influence only accentuated the difference in stature between himself and the average *habitant-voyageur*. Therefore, he

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Merchants and Negociants of Montreal, 1750–1775: A Study in Socio-Economic History” (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1974).

<sup>276</sup> Clarence W. Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 327; Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country*, 158–159.

<sup>277</sup> Charles J. Balesi, *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America, 1673–1818*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Alliance Française, 2000), 295. Rocheblave's full name was Philippe François de Rastel de Rocheblave.

<sup>278</sup> Frederick A. Hodes, *Beyond the Frontier: A History of St. Louis to 1821* (Tucson, AZ: Patrice Press, 2004), 182.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>280</sup> MHS, Cerré Papers 1787–1846, B1/f2, ALS Manuel Gayoso de Lemos to Gabriel Cerré, 25 April 1798.

cannot reasonably be used as a proxy for most French-speaking inhabitants of the French river world. How, then, can Gabriel Cerré and his family provide insight into the French river world? David Hancock argues that a combination of statistical analysis and biographical narrative can provide valuable insights into power relations and colonial systems and structures.<sup>281</sup> His study of London merchants and overseas trade during the eighteenth century reveals the mutual influence of the British Empire's center and its periphery on each other through a reciprocal flow of wealth, ideas, and cultural constructs.<sup>282</sup> Similarly, a study of Gabriel Cerré and his family helps to expose the colonial networks and structures that helped tie together a multitude of centers and peripheries, albeit across colonial geopolitical boundaries.

The Treaty of Paris in 1763 resulted in a formal break between the French colonial peripheries in North America and the French metropolitan center. Paris, Bordeaux, and La Rochelle were replaced by new metropolitan centers in Britain. Concurrent with these changes was the establishment of new centers and peripheries within the French river world. St. Louis, which was founded in 1764, quickly became both a center and a periphery. It was a center for fur trading and commercial activities, and a gateway to the western fur trade that exerted enormous influence from the Missouri to the Arkansas River Valleys. Yet, even as towns like St. Louis, Ste. Geneviève, and Kaskaskia developed as centers within their regions, they continued to be peripheries to larger French-speaking centers like Montreal and New Orleans. A biographical sketch of Gabriel Cerré and his family reveals the intimate relationship

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<sup>281</sup> David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735–1785* (Cambridge, MA and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 37, 320.

between the rise of merchant families and the creation and maintenance of networks of trade, communication, and cultural exchange, which all ultimately came to define the French river world.

### The Making of a Merchant

Gabriel Cerré was born 12 August 1734 on the island of Montreal to Joseph Serré and Marie–Madeleine Picard.<sup>283</sup> The fourth of seven children, he grew up with his siblings in côte St. Paul, close to the traditional launching point for fur trade expeditions from the southern tip of Montreal.<sup>284</sup> While little is known of his education and upbringing, his proximity to the vibrant fur trade out of Lachine seems to have provided ample opportunity for a young *Canadien* looking to make something of himself.

Gabriel Cerré was hired as a voyageur in June 1753 on a one–year contract to winter in Michilimackinac.<sup>285</sup> Merchant–voyageur Raymond Quesnel paid the nineteen–year–old two hundred livres for his services, after which Cerré was stated to be free and clear of his contract.<sup>286</sup> Gabriel Cerré appears to have avoided the fate of many

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<sup>283</sup> PRDH, Baptism 146075 (baptismal record for Jean Gabriel Serre). Gabriel Cerré’s full name was Jean–Gabriel Serré. However, most of the primary and secondary sources refer to him simply as Gabriel Cerré. There is no indication as to when the spelling of the family name was changed, but there are a variety of spellings used for the family, including Serré, Seré, Séré, and Ceré. Into the eighteenth century, the Cerré spelling appeared more consistently, especially among Gabriel Cerré’s siblings and children.

<sup>284</sup> Joseph–Marie Cerré was the first–born son, but died as an infant at nine months. As such, Gabriel Cerré was the eldest son and would have figured prominently in a family succession in accordance with the Custom of Paris. PRDH, Burial 150745.

<sup>285</sup> The contract is dated 17 June 1753, although the expedition itself would have meant that Cerré wintered at Michilimackinac in 1754. Nicole St–Onge, “Tracing the Voyageurs: Understanding the Background to the Métis Nation and Métis Homeland—Voyageur Contract Database Project,”

<sup>286</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, G. Hodiesne (1740–1764), 17 June 1753; St–Onge, “Tracing the Voyageurs.” Quesnel was an important outfitter out of Montreal and was considered by historian José Igartua to be part of a core group of Montreal merchants who operated in the fur

of his fellow voyageurs, who often remained in debt to their merchant–voyageur master at the end of their contracts. Consequently, Cerré does not appear to have needed to take up another contract in the trade in order to cover existing debts. However, if this was the case, it was due more to hard work and good fortune than pre-existing wealth.

There was a clear differentiation between Cerré as a voyageur and his master Quesnel as a merchant–voyageur. While the term voyageur had been synonymous with being a merchant in the early days of New France, it gradually evolved to mean simply an *engagé* or indentured servant. The low wage paid to Cerré further supports the fact that he was hired as a young labourer, receiving pay consistent with that of a lowly *milieu*.<sup>287</sup> Whatever his upbringing, education, or family wealth, Gabriel Cerré began his career at the bottom of the fur trade labour structure.<sup>288</sup>

Cerré's younger brother, Antoine, soon joined him in the fur trade, signing contracts for expeditions to Michilimackinac in 1756 and 1758.<sup>289</sup> This was hardly surprising, as the fur trade was often a family affair that involved an intricate web of brothers, cousins, and in-laws. While there is little evidence that Gabriel's father Joseph had any major involvement in the fur trade, his children overwhelmingly married into fur-trading families.<sup>290</sup> Gabriel married into the prominent Giard family of Kaskaskia, and siblings Antoine, Marie–Angélique, and Toussaint–Hyacinthe all married into the

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trade between 1750 and 1775. Igartua, "The Merchants of Montreal at the Conquest: Socio–Economic Profile," *Histoire Sociale* 8, no. 16 (1975): 292.

<sup>287</sup> St–Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs."

<sup>288</sup> Little is known of Gabriel Cerré's upbringing and education.

<sup>289</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, F. Simonnet (1737–1778), 17 June 1756; *Ibid.*, 7 June 1758.

<sup>290</sup> Igartua, "The Merchants of Montreal at the Conquest," 292. I have yet to find a voyageur contract for Joseph Cerré, nor does he appear in José Igartua's extensive list of Montreal merchants.

Hurtubise family, a well-known family of Montreal traders and outfitters.<sup>291</sup> The fur trade also crossed a generational divide, drawing children and grandchildren into commercial and kinship networks that spanned the interior of the continent. Of the three Cerré brothers, only Gabriel stayed in the interior, settling in Kaskaskia of the Illinois Country before later relocating to St. Louis.<sup>292</sup> However, two of Gabriel Cerré's nephews came to Upper Louisiana. The nephews in question were the two eldest sons of Gabriel's youngest brother, Toussaint-Hyacinthe, who elected to stay in côte St. Paul.<sup>293</sup> The eldest son, Toussaint, married into the Roy family of St. Charles in 1796, while the second oldest, Pierre-Amable, settled in St. Louis and married Céleste Dugué in 1793.<sup>294</sup> Given the close family ties, it is perhaps not that surprising that Pierre-Amable's son was named Gabriel, after his influential great uncle.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 292. Cyprien Tanguay, "Dictionnaire généalogique des familles canadiennes," *Bibliothèque et archives nationales du Québec* <<http://bibnum2.banq.qc.ca/bna/dicoGenealogie>> (accessed 11 May 2008); BANQ, *Greffes de Notaires*, G. Hodiesne (1740–1764), 12 May 1761; BANQ, *Greffes de Notaires*, F. Simonnet (1737–1778), 2 January 1767.

<sup>292</sup> The Cerré brothers referred to here are Gabriel, Antoine, and Toussaint-Hyacinthe.

<sup>293</sup> Toussaint-Hyacinthe was described in legal documents as an *habitant* from côte St. Paul, and by 1780 was leasing out land. BANQ, *Greffes de Notaires*, A. Foucher (1774–1780), 28 September 1780.

<sup>294</sup> Tanguay, "Dictionnaire généalogique des familles canadiennes."

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

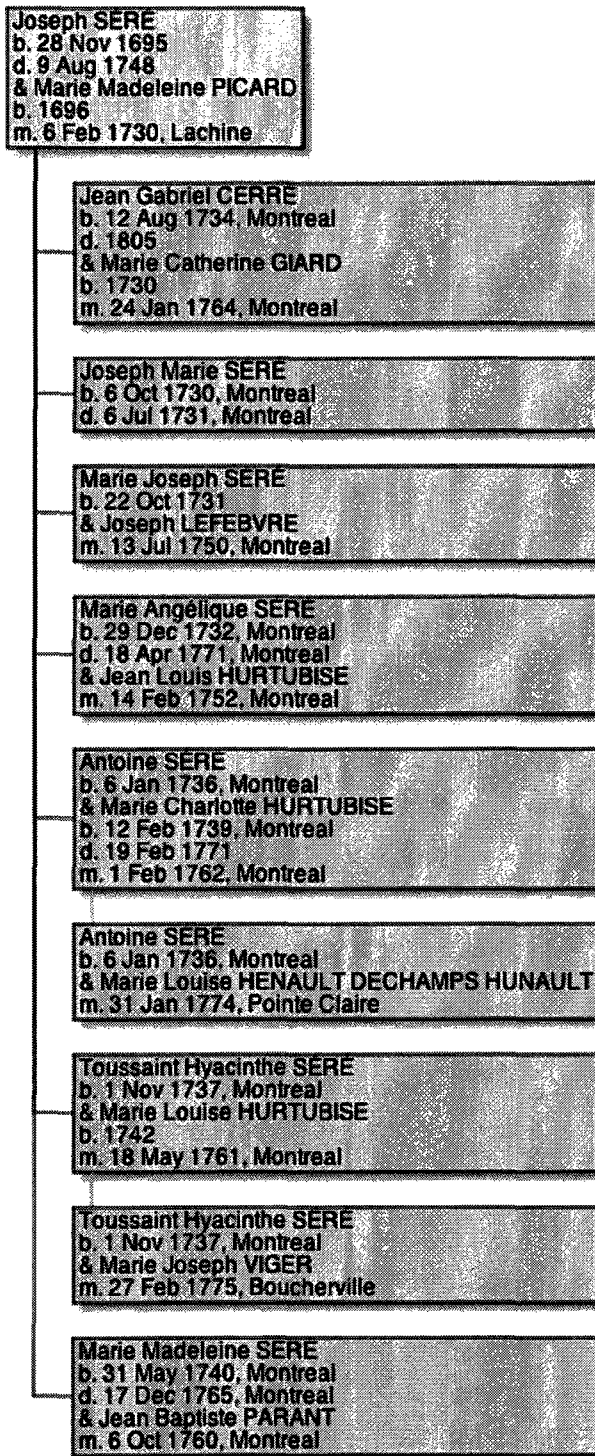


Figure 9. Joseph Séré and Marie Madeleine Picard Family Tree

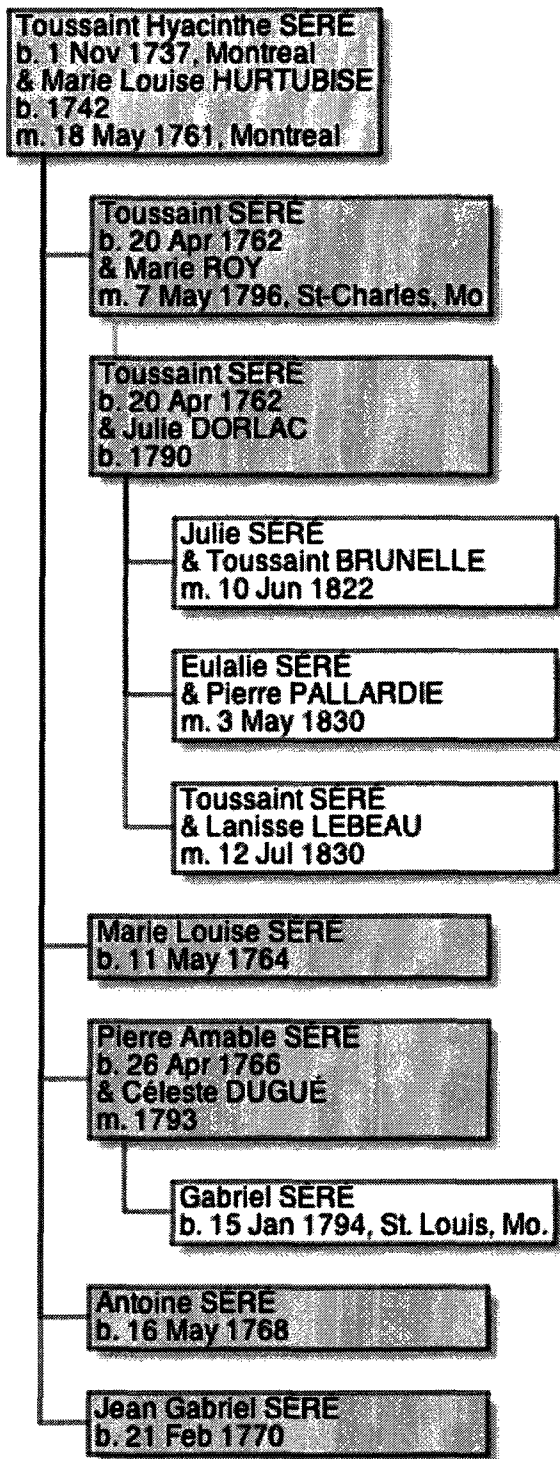


Figure 10. Toussaint-Hyacinthe Séré and Marie-Louise Hurtubise Family Tree

These cross-generational connections through the commercial networks of the fur trade continued to bind families over vast regions. The motivation for going into the fur trade, leaving the St. Lawrence Valley, and eventually settling in the Illinois Country or Upper Louisiana undoubtedly varied from individual to individual. It seems reasonable that Toussaint and Pierre-Amable joined their successful uncle in St. Louis to benefit from his wealth and stature in Upper Louisiana. However, the fact that both Gabriel Cerré and his nephew Toussaint were the eldest sons of their respective generations leads one to question the conventional wisdom and assumption that demographic pressures in the St. Lawrence Valley were the impetus for younger sons and brothers joining the fur trade and relocating to new lands.<sup>296</sup> The relatively equal distribution of land through family successions may have spurred some younger sons and brothers to relinquish their land rights in order to ensure that family fields remained large enough for successful farming, but this was surely not a uniform practice. For the Cerré family, it was the older brothers who entered the fur trade while the youngest worked the family land.<sup>297</sup> As early as 1760, goods and parcels of land began to change hands in the Cerré family. Slowly, the landed wealth of the family in côte St. Paul was consolidated through transfers to the youngest Cerré brother, Toussaint-Hyacinthe. This started in 1761 with a transfer of goods from the family matriarch, Marie-Madeleine Picard, and was followed by two land transfers from Gabriel Cerré in 1767.<sup>298</sup> Gabriel

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<sup>296</sup> Heather Devine, *The People Who Own Themselves: Aboriginal Ethnogenesis in a Canadian Family, 1600–1900* (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2004), 58; Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740–1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 227.

<sup>297</sup> Toussaint-Hyacinthe Serré hired Jean-Baptiste Préjean to work as a labourer on the land in côte St. Paul in 1762. BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, G. Hodiesne (1740–1764), 7 February 1762.

<sup>298</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, G. Hodiesne (1740–1764), 8 December 1761; BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, P. Panet de Méru (1755–1778), 31 July 1767.

Cerré's early ventures into the fur trade ostensibly made him financially secure enough to forfeit his share of the family lands. Moreover, his connections to the Giard family through his wife Catherine brought added financial stability. So, in 1769 Gabriel Cerré began leasing out land that he inherited from his father-in-law at Fort de Chartres in the Illinois Country.<sup>299</sup> It was not uncommon for *Canadiens* to sell or transfer their land rights back home in Canada after they became established in the Illinois Country. This practice continued well into the late eighteenth century, as reflected by the steady flow of *Canadiens* who continued to migrate to the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana. The sale or transfer of land rarely meant that all social and economic connections were being severed, but rather that the *Canadien* in question had become financially secure enough to remove the safety net that family lands provided.<sup>300</sup>

Cerré established himself commercially in Kaskaskia as early as 1755, and soon after was hiring voyageurs back in Montreal for expeditions to the Illinois Country.<sup>301</sup> In 1767, he entered into partnership with France-born merchant Jean Orillat, who had married into a *Canadien* family and was an active outfitter in the Montreal fur trade.<sup>302</sup> More importantly, Orillat had developed connections with trading houses in London. Cerré agreed to send his peltries via Michilimackinac to Orillat in Montreal, and in

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<sup>299</sup> KM 69:06:12:1.

<sup>300</sup> If keeping farms intact was a priority for *Canadien* families, then it should come as no surprise that older siblings could not gain access to their lands or inheritances early and were more willing strike out on their own. It is also important to note that transferring land holdings did not necessarily mean a complete repudiation of one's inheritance.

<sup>301</sup> Hodes, *Beyond the Frontier*, 210. Donald Chaput, "Jean-Grabriel Cerré," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, <[http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=2318&interval=25&&PHPSESSID=hc03ukb6dg0adv5qibvir22qk5](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=2318&interval=25&&PHPSESSID=hc03ukb6dg0adv5qibvir22qk5)> (accessed 21 May 2008). BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, P. Panet de Méru (1755-1778), 15 August 1767.

<sup>302</sup> For a more detailed account of Jean Orillat, see: José E. Igartua, "Jean Orillat," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, <[http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=2098&interval=25&&PHPSESSID=5sgt9ideh603ipuu09afc2hp92](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=2098&interval=25&&PHPSESSID=5sgt9ideh603ipuu09afc2hp92)> (accessed 21 May 2008); Igartua, "The Merchants of Montreal at the Conquest: Socio-Economic Profile," 286-287, 292.

return Orillat assumed a double responsibility. First, the outfitter agreed to send goods to Cerré at Michilimackinac and assumed the financial responsibility for the canoes and labour that carried them. Second, Orillat was charged with ensuring that the furs were transferred to the trading house of Brook Watson and Gregory Olive, for sale in London. Watson and Olive was one of the largest trading houses in London with trade interests in Canada. The agreement between Orillat and Cerré illustrates how French-speaking merchants operated between the Illinois Country and Montreal, and how they worked together to tap into British overseas commercial networks.

The integration of British transatlantic commerce into the *Canadien* fur trade was a major readjustment for a trade that had experienced numerous disruptions and changes since the beginning of the Seven Years' War. For example, the British had frequently intercepted and captured French ships out of La Rochelle during the war. This caused havoc for *Canadien* merchants who depended on French trading supplies and access to European markets.<sup>303</sup> As the war drew to a close, the prospect of reopening the western fur trade under the British flag was dampened by the ill-fated mobilization of Indian nations under Pontiac's leadership in 1763.<sup>304</sup> The French had officially surrendered at Montreal, but the native peoples in the heart of North America had not, and they were still a force to be reckoned with.<sup>305</sup> As the native peoples sought French support, the French-speaking inhabitants of the Illinois Country were caught between the prospect of reopening trade under new British commercial networks and the uncertainty of war. Despite these difficulties, Gabriel Cerré managed to carve out a successful career during

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<sup>303</sup> Igartua, "The Merchants and Negociants of Montreal," 32–33.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>305</sup> Colin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 350–351.

these years by trading with Montreal via the Ohio–Wabash–Maumee portage route.<sup>306</sup> This gives credence to the assertion made by historian José Igartua, that the picture of a stagnating fur trade in the early years of British rule has been somewhat exaggerated.<sup>307</sup> When London loosened regulations regarding the fur trade in 1768, Cerré was well positioned to take full advantage. And while there is no evidence that his partnership with Orillat reaped significant rewards, Cerré continued to hire voyageurs and send expeditions back and forth between the St. Lawrence and Mississippi Valleys.<sup>308</sup>

The young merchant quickly found a new Montreal outfitter in Ignace Bourassa, who, as early as 1771, provided him with merchandise in exchange for peltries.<sup>309</sup> By the mid-1780s, Gabriel Cerré had worked for, or in partnership with, many of Montreal's influential *Canadien* merchant families, including the Quesnel, Orillat, Bourassa, Barsalou, Dejean, Augé, Guy, Langlois, and Lacroix families. From a lowly voyageur earning two hundred livres per year, to a merchant borrowing heavily to send merchandise to the Illinois Country, Cerré had succeeded in carving out a successful career at a time when *Canadien* merchants were supposedly being pushed out of the fur trade.<sup>310</sup> His ability to take advantage of old *Canadien* trade and kinship networks while adjusting to the new imperial realities of British commercial integration had undoubtedly put him in good stead. Twenty years after starting out on that first wintering expedition to Michilimackinac, Gabriel Cerré had arrived as a prominent merchant.

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<sup>306</sup> Hodes, *Beyond the Frontier*, 210.

<sup>307</sup> Igartua, "The Merchants and Negociants of Montreal," 77, 147.

<sup>308</sup> Igartua, "The Merchants of Montreal at the Conquest," 287.

<sup>309</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, S. Sanguinet Fils (1764–1768), 23 May 1771.

<sup>310</sup> Starting in 1767, Gabriel Cerré began borrowing extensively on the accounts of Montreal merchants. He borrowed 7690 livres in merchandise from Jean Orillat, and 3396 livres in merchandise and money from Pierre Duclavet. In 1771, he borrowed 24357 shelins from Ignace Bourassa for his commerce. BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, S. Sanguinet Fils (1764–1786), 23 May 1771; *Ibid.*, P. Panet de Méru (1755–1778), 24 August 1767; *Ibid.*, 24 August 1767.

Gabriel Cerré's success raises a number of questions. Was Cerré part of a larger restructuring of the fur trade, in which young entrepreneurial *Canadiens* bridged the gap between the *Canadien* old guard and the incoming British—more specifically, Scottish—merchants? If so, did this represent a geographical shift in *Canadien* commercial influence? Cerré's career alone does not in and of itself answer these questions, but it does serve as a call to begin a re-investigation of *Canadien* merchants after the fall of New France. Financial return (i.e., profit) and monetary investment have too often been used as the standard for judging success and influence in the fur trade. While this approach has its merits, it does not necessarily indicate how the networks of communication and exchange were maintained, who maintained them, and the influence that such networks had on a social and cultural level. Gabriel Cerré's success was built largely on mobile networks of communication and exchange that tied together a multitude of seemingly disparate French speaking communities. Gabriel Cerré's life and career can be seen as emblematic of the system of communication and exchange that helped form and maintain the French river world.

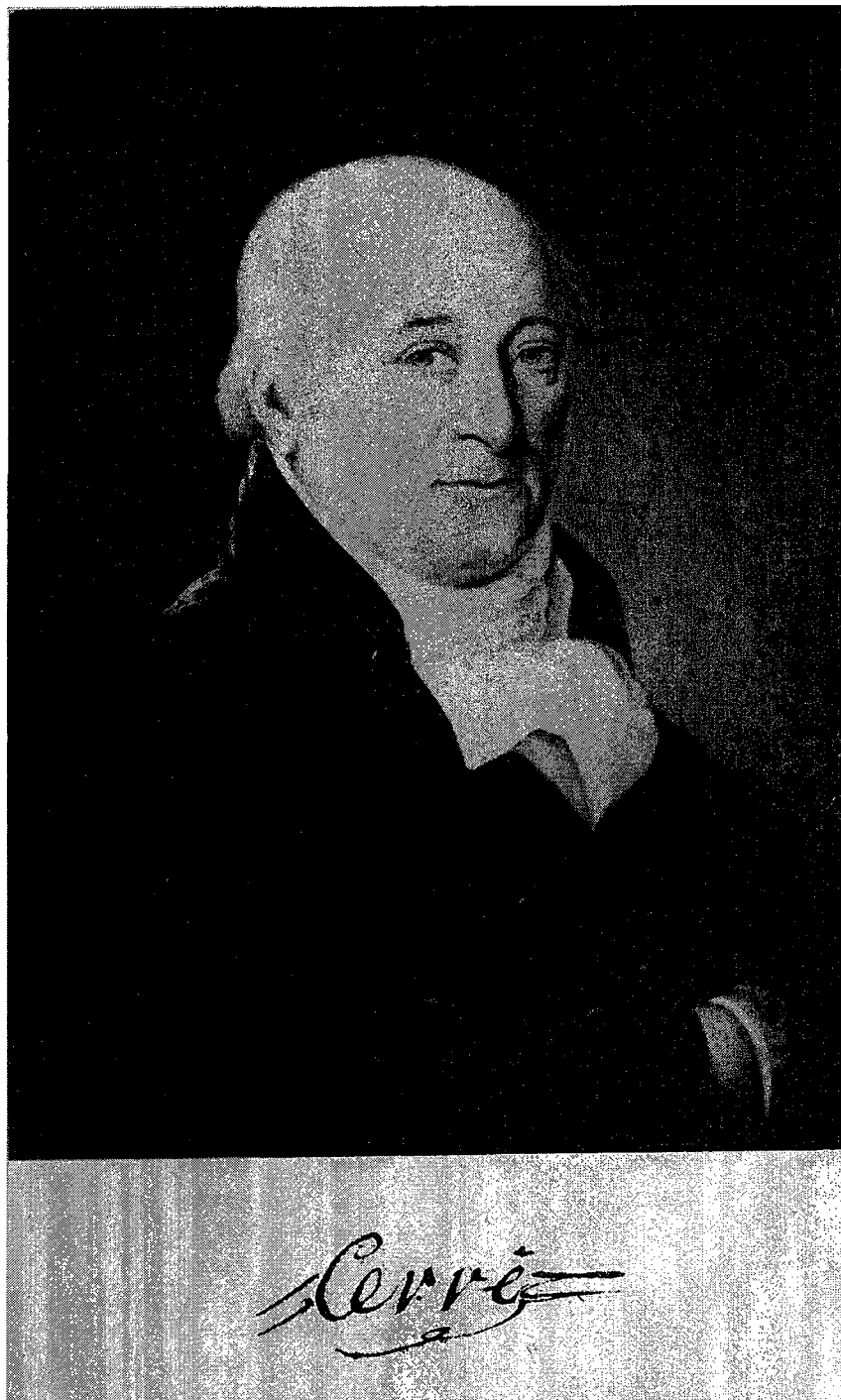


Figure 11. Gabriel Cerré<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> From a painting in the possession of V. C. Turner, Esq., of St. Louis, Missouri, in Alvord, ed. *Kaskaskia Records, 1778–1790*.

### ***Canadien, Montreal, Illinois, or St. Louis Merchant?***

Frequent travel between Montreal and the Illinois Country meant that Gabriel Cerré spent almost as much time away on expeditions as he did at home. The location of his primary residence changed several times throughout his life, and so one could debate whether he was a *Canadien* merchant, an Illinois merchant, or a St. Louis merchant? Moreover, he was described using a multitude of different titles, such as *négociant*, *négociant-voyageur*, and *marchand-voyageur*. In 1767, Cerré was listed as a merchant living in the Illinois Country.<sup>312</sup> In 1771, he was referred to as a *négociant-voyageur* living in the Illinois Country.<sup>313</sup> A year later, he was described as both a *marchand-voyageur* from Montreal and a *négociant* from the Illinois Country.<sup>314</sup> In 1773, Cerré appeared in business and legal documents as a *marchand-voyageur* normally living in the Illinois Country, but also as a *bourgeois-voyageur* from Montreal.<sup>315</sup> The title that Gabriel Cerré was given depended largely on the notary drafting the legal document. After 1775, however, he was usually referred to as a merchant from the Illinois Country, with additional references, after 1783, to being a merchant-trader of St. Louis.<sup>316</sup>

It is worth questioning the importance of these titles and the limited role, if any, that they played in how Gabriel Cerré has been viewed. The descriptions of French-

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<sup>312</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, P. Panet de Méru (1755–1778), 5 August 1767; Ibid., 24 August 1767.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 22 May 1771.

<sup>314</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, P. Mézières (1755–1778), 12 October 1772; A. Robin (1760–1808), 26 October 1772.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., P. Mézières (1758–1786), 18 March 1773; Ibid., A. Foucher (1774–1780), 5 April 1773.

<sup>316</sup> KM 83:5:17:1; BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, Fonds Drouin (1700–1800), 9 September 1786.

speaking peoples of the French river world as *habitants*, *voyageurs*, or *commerçants* helped differentiate between farmers, fur trade labourers, and merchants. Yet the rigid boundaries assigned to these titles has more often been the product of categorization, which is inherently a part of the process of historical interpretation. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the debate surrounding Louise Dechêne's seminal work, *Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVIIe siècle*. Thomas Wien best summarizes the debate:

Au centre des discussions, la clé de voûte du livre: le dualisme. Point de convergence de toutes les permanences de cette société, la cloison que séparait campagnes et villes, habitants et marchands, était-elle aussi peu permeable, aussi durable que semblait penser Dechêne? La réponse, vingt ans après, est négative.<sup>317</sup>

The nuanced and somewhat messy overlap that existed between these categories in their contemporary context tells a different story. For example, a fellow merchant operating in Upper Louisiana, Charles Gratiot, appeared in the 1771 Census as an *habitant*, even though he was engaged largely in commerce as a merchant. Cerré himself was a large grain producer in St. Louis, but was never referred to as an *habitant*. Moreover, these titles were rarely self-ascribed, but rather given by third parties, such as notaries or census administrators. Gabriel Cerré never referred to himself as a *négociant* or *marchand-voyageur*, or any of a number of other titles used to describe his position and function in society. Perhaps the exact terminology is less important than the broader picture provided. There is no doubt that Cerré was heavily engaged in commerce, and thus, broadly speaking, a merchant. However, as opposed to providing a static and

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<sup>317</sup> Thomas Wien, "Introduction: habitants, marchands, historiens," in *Vingt ans après, Habitants et Marchands: lectures de l'histoire des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles canadiens*, ed. Sylvie Dépatie et al. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 9.

resolute picture of Cerré, the titles used to describe him form a loose composite of occasionally contradictory information that depicted a man in motion.

Cerré spent a large portion of his time traveling between Montreal and the Illinois Country. This was especially the case early in his career, when barely a year went by without voyaging between the two locales. Despite marrying Catherine Giard at Kaskaskia in 1764, his son was born and baptized at Montreal in 1773, demonstrating that mobility and travel were, at times, family affairs.<sup>318</sup> It is hardly surprising, then, that many of the documents refer to Cerré as being both a Montreal and an Illinois merchant early in his career. As Cerré grew older, he continued to make annual voyages of various lengths, but his trips to Montreal became more infrequent, settling instead for Michilimackinac, Detroit, or Niagara. In part, this was due Cerré's advancing age, although he maintained that it was his business interests at these crucial commercial transit points that kept him from Montreal. However, there were two other crucial factors that often deterred him from making the full voyage to Montreal.

First, there was the difficulty of managing his affairs in the Illinois Country. As Cerré became more and more influential in Kaskaskia, he accumulated a plethora of personal and community responsibilities that tied him to the town. At times his absence caused difficulties and interfered with his responsibilities. For example, in 1770 Gabriel Cerré was in Canada while the estate of the late François Mercier was being settled. Executor François Trotier attempted to represent the absent Cerré, who was listed as an heir to the estate. Unfortunately, Trotier was operating without a proper power of attorney from Cerré, and was forced to delay a final settlement until the merchant

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<sup>318</sup> PRDH, Baptism 615401.

returned to Kaskaskia.<sup>319</sup> The estate remained unsettled until 1772, when the legal battle with the deceased's brother Joseph reached a climax. Joseph accused Gabriel Cerré of illegally detaining him in prison, and argued that Cerré had no legal claim to the estate. Moreover, Joseph petitioned the court to delay another Cerré voyage.<sup>320</sup> The legal dispute aside, this case illustrates the frequency with which Cerré came and went, as well as the difficulties it caused.

Second, as Cerré grew older and had children, they entered into the same commercial networks, and used the merchant's associates as mail carriers, shippers, and receivers. The Cerré children all married strategically into a number of important French-speaking merchant families in both Montreal and St. Louis. A reliable and secure network of communication and exchange, with family members and associates placed throughout the network, meant that the need to travel from the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana to Montreal became less pressing.

### ***The Cerré Family: Networks of Communication and Exchange***

Gabriel Cerré's children all married into influential trading families. Cerré's eldest daughter, Marie-Anne (Manon), married Pierre-Louis Panet in Montreal in 1781.<sup>321</sup> Panet had followed his father into the legal profession and was already a lawyer and practicing notary by the time he married Marie-Anne. He worked in Montreal until 1783, then moved Quebec City, where he worked first as a notary and then as a court clerk. Panet returned to Montreal in the mid-1790s and by his death in

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<sup>319</sup> KM 70:11:24:1.

<sup>320</sup> KM 72:6:13:1.

<sup>321</sup> PRDH, Family 41114.

1812 had been a lawyer, notary, seigneur, office holder, politician, and judge.<sup>322</sup> The union between the Cerré and Panet families reveals how the intricate web of merchants played strongly in marriage alliances. It was no coincidence that P.L. Panet's father had spent twenty years working as a notary for Gabriel Cerré's former partner Jean Orillat.<sup>323</sup> Parents played an important role in setting up marriage alliances, and, short of controlling the process outright, exerted enormous influence over such decisions.<sup>324</sup> In a letter to Marie-Anne in 1782, Cerré expressed his approval of the union, conveying his and his wife's blessings: "rien ne ma fait plus de plaisir que d'apprendre cette nouvelle et le choix que tu as fais."<sup>325</sup> The marriage alliance must have appeared most sensible, as it was undoubtedly designed to maintain ties between Montreal and St. Louis.<sup>326</sup>

The marriages of Cerré's daughters proved instrumental in drawing together influential families from throughout the French river world. Not to be outdone by her older sister, Marie-Thérèse married Auguste Chouteau in St. Louis in 1786, binding together two of the most influential families of Upper Louisiana. Auguste Chouteau was a Louisiana Creole from New Orleans who accompanied his stepfather, Pierre Laclède-Liguest, upriver and founded St. Louis in 1764.<sup>327</sup> Barely fourteen years old at the time of his arrival in the Middle Mississippi Valley, Chouteau was at the beginning of a career as a merchant that would make him one of the wealthiest men in Upper

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<sup>322</sup> André Morel, "Pierre-Louis Panet," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, <[http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=2595&interval=20&&PHPSESSID=jmkgunfjq6r3ml8dfup95av914](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=2595&interval=20&&PHPSESSID=jmkgunfjq6r3ml8dfup95av914)> (accessed 21 May 2008).

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>324</sup> Lorraine Gadoury, *La famille dans son intimité: échanges épistolaires au sein de l'élite canadienne du XVIIIe siècle* (Montreal: Éditions Hurtubise, 1998), 77.

<sup>325</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2522, mf 4405, Cerré to Mme P.L. Panet, 28 May 1782.

<sup>326</sup> Hodes, *Beyond the Frontier*, 211.

<sup>327</sup> Shriley Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark: The Story of the Chouteaus, the French Dynasty That Ruled America's Frontier* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Girroux, 2004), 36.

Louisiana. His involvement in the Osage fur trade was central to his growing fortune, and required him to deal extensively with both Montreal and Louisiana merchants.<sup>328</sup> The marriage alliance between the Chouteau and Cerré families proved mutually beneficial. It offered Chouteau increased access to the Montreal fur trade, and in return provided Cerré with commercial connections in New Orleans. However, kinship networks went beyond simple business transactions, as both Gabriel Cerré and Auguste Chouteau sent their sons to stay with the Panet family in Montreal while the boys received a formal education.

Cerré's youngest daughter married a French officer, Antoine–Pierre Soulard, who had taken refuge in America in the wake of the French Revolution.<sup>329</sup> Soulard worked as a merchant and surveyor in St. Louis. Finally, Cerré's only son, Pascal–Leon, married Louise–Thérèse Lamy–Barrois of St. Louis in 1797, although he appears to have been off on voyages almost as much as his father. Pascal's education in Montreal seemingly had a lasting effect on him. As late as 1836, he continued to correspond with the Panet–Cerré family in Montreal, sending a letter to his nieces and nephews.<sup>330</sup> Moreover, it was Henri Chouteau, the second youngest son of the late fur baron Auguste, who brought the letter to Montreal for Pascal. Thus, the networks of communication and exchange that Gabriel Cerré established early in his career remained intact well after his death, due in large part to the kinship connections that he and his children made through marriage alliances.

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<sup>328</sup> John Francis McDermott, "Auguste Chouteau: First Citizen of Upper Louisiana," in *Frenchmen and French Ways in the Mississippi Valley*, ed. John Francis McDermott (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 5.

<sup>329</sup> Hodes, *Beyond the Frontier*, 211.

<sup>330</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2536, mf 4409, Cerré to the heirs of P.L. Panet, 6 January 1836.

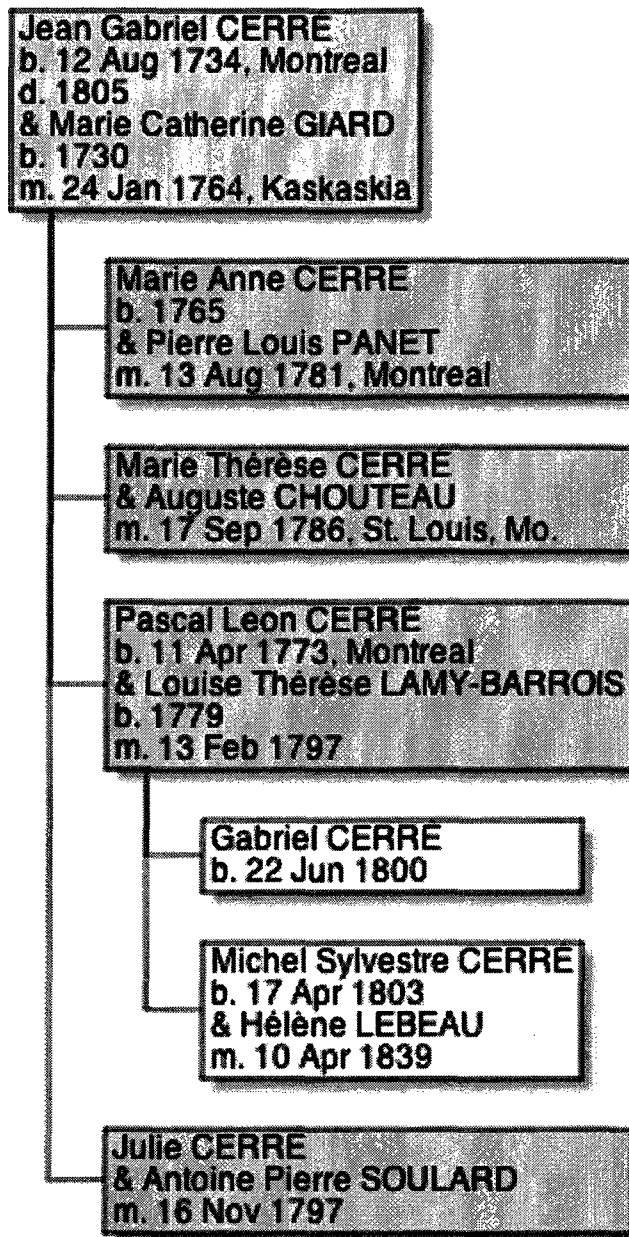


Figure 12. Jean Gabriel Cerré Family tree

### Cerré Family Correspondence

The Cerré family took full advantage of the networks of communication and exchange, producing a wealth of written correspondence. Between 1781 and 1806, at least fifty-one letters traveled back and forth between the St. Lawrence and Mississippi

watersheds.<sup>331</sup> In the French river world, where the vast majority of French-speaking peoples were illiterate, such a large body of written correspondence was an exception rather than the rule. However, the correspondence provides insight into the links that tied individuals and families together when separated over long distances.<sup>332</sup> The letters reveal how networks of communication and exchange functioned. The chronological spread of the correspondence was evenly distributed, indicating that the flow of information and goods was remarkably stable from one year to the next. During the period 1793–1806, letters were written and delivered on an annual basis, with the lone exception of 1803. Moreover, letters frequently mentioned additional correspondence and news obtained from friends and associates traveling between the St. Lawrence and Mississippi. Consequently, the flow of information about loved ones and business interests was accessible even in the absence of actual letters.

It was common to receive family correspondence via merchants, traders, and associates who plied the river routes. In a letter sent to Panet in Quebec City in 1785, Cerré confirmed receipt of his son-in-law's two previous letters, which had been delivered by two men named Campion and Desgrosellier.<sup>333</sup> Étienne–Charles Campion was a Montreal merchant who spent most of his time at Michilimackinac and partook in both the northwest and southern fur trade.<sup>334</sup> Moreover, Campion regularly supplied

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<sup>331</sup> The letters in question are family correspondence and do not include letters or papers relating exclusively to business or legal matters, which were sent back and forth with greater regularity.

<sup>332</sup> Gadoury, *La famille dans son intimité*, 59.

<sup>333</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2524, mf 4405–06, Cerré to P.L. Panet, 24 June 1785.

<sup>334</sup> If one digs further, the connections to an intricate network of merchants becomes more revealing. Campion joined William Grant in the late 1780s (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of marriages for the Grant–Laframboise union) to form Grant, Campion and Company, which operated out of Michilimackinac and acquired one of the forty–six shares in the North West Company in 1795. In Collaboration, “Étienne–Charles Campion,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, <<http://www.biographi.ca/009004–119.01–>

merchandise to Cerré's old ally, Philippe-François de Rastel de Rocheblave, who was, by the mid-1780s, residing in Montreal and trading with Detroit.<sup>335</sup> Rocheblave, however, was more than just an old ally; he was also a Cerré family friend who frequently traveled south to conduct business.<sup>336</sup> In a letter written in 1788 from Pascal Cerré to his sister in Quebec City, he lamented not having an opportunity to see Rocheblave, who he mentioned was staying approximately eighty kilometers from St. Louis.<sup>337</sup> Desgrosellier on the other hand was a trader who worked as one of Cerré's agents. Gabriel Cerré detailed in his letter how Desgrosellier had continued on to New Orleans to conduct business, thereby exposing the full continental scope of the Cerré's commercial network.<sup>338</sup>

The Cerré family updated each other on important marriage alliances involving prominent French-speaking families. In August 1794, Pascal wrote to his sister in Canada from Michilimackinac, where he detailed a number of high profile marriages involving the Saucier, Cadet, and Labaddie families.<sup>339</sup> The marriages in question indirectly connected those families to the Cerré family through the Chouteau family. The family correspondence also reflected the changing dynamic of the fur trade and the integration of English and Scottish merchants into French families and networks of trade. For example, merchants Andrew Todd, Myers Michaels, and Mr. Lyle helped

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e.php?&id\_nbr=1793&interval=20&&PHPSESSID=jmcgunfjq6r3ml8dfup95av914> (accessed 6 February 2008).

<sup>335</sup> Pierre Dufour and Marc Ouellet, "Pierre de Rastel, de Rocheblave," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, <[http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=3628&interval=20&&PHPSESSID=jmcgunfjq6r3ml8dfup95av914](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=3628&interval=20&&PHPSESSID=jmcgunfjq6r3ml8dfup95av914)> (accessed 6 February 2008).

<sup>336</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2524, mf 4405-06, Cerré to P.L. Panet, 24 June 1785.

<sup>337</sup> Pascal mentions in the letter that Philippe Rocheblave was twenty *lieues* away. The *Petit Robert Dictionary* states that a *lieue* was approximately four kilometers. Baby Collection, P0058, U2552, mf 4413, P.L. Cerré to Mde P.L. Panet, 30 April 1788.

<sup>338</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2524, mf 4405-06, Cerré to P.L. Panet, 24 June 1785.

<sup>339</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2554, mf 4414, P.L. Cerré to Mme P.L. Panet, 5 August 1794.

transport news and correspondence for the family. Cerré family correspondence may have been the product of individual kinship connections, but it also exposed how a larger network of kinship and commerce tied together French-speaking families and English- and French-speaking merchants alike throughout the French river world.

*The seasonality of correspondence*

Centers of exchange were crucial for the even flow of communication and goods. These centers served as transfer points where letters and merchandise could change hands from an incoming to an outgoing brigade, or serve as rest stops for those continuing on. While less than half the Cerré family correspondence cites which river route was taken, it is possible to ascertain that at least ten of the fifty-one letters went through Michilimackinac. This is hardly surprising given that Michilimackinac was a major hub for the fur trade. By comparison, the Detroit route, which often included stops at Vincennes and Niagara, was used five times. Only one letter made reference to going through Philadelphia on horseback. For the Cerré family, and likely for many other families of the French river world, the canoe river routes of the fur trade doubled as a postal service.

Although correspondence and information flowed regularly between the St. Lawrence and Mississippi Valleys, it was bound by the same constraints as the fur trade river routes. Consequently, postal service between the two river valleys was seasonal. Canoes and *pirogues* of the fur trade traveled the waterways of the continent from early spring to the fall, but communication came to an abrupt halt during the winter months.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Jane E. Harrison, “‘Adieu Pour Cette Année’: Seasonality and Time in New France,” in *Essays in French Colonial History: Proceedings of the 21st Annual Meeting of the French*

Forty–five of the fifty–one Cerré family letters were dated from the beginning of April to the end of September, and while the dates on the letters were not necessarily synonymous with the departure dates for the expeditions that carried them, many made reference to being written in haste in order to make the next courier.

The high season for expeditions meant that there were usually several opportunities to send correspondence between April and September. For example, in early June 1793, Julie Cerré–Soulard of St. Louis wrote to her sister Marie–Anne in Canada, complaining that she wanted to send a few small gifts, but that Mr. Quesnel was leaving with her father’s canoes and that she could not get things together in time.<sup>341</sup> Two weeks later, Julie sent another letter to her sister that indicated that she had enclosed a ring with the letter.<sup>342</sup> While Julie’s first letter was sent with her father’s canoes, there was no reference regarding who brought the second letter. The two–week interval between letters suggests multiple expeditions and a high level of traffic on these river routes, along with the frequency with which correspondence was being sent and received during high season.

Conversely, winters represented a period of extended silence. Families often worried about their loved ones, and waited eagerly for the first news and correspondence that came with the melting snows and the first signs of spring. News and letters during the winter months were so rare that Pascal wrote to his sister in June 1799 to express his

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*Colonial Historical Society*, ed. A.J.B. Johnston (East Lansing, MI.: Michigan State University Press, 1997), 98.

<sup>341</sup> There was no indication as to whether or not this is Raymond Quesnel who hired Cerré as a voyageur, or one of Quesnel’s family members. Baby Collection, P0058, U2550, mf 4413, Dame Cerré–Soulard to Mde P.L. Panet, 3 June 1793.

<sup>342</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2551, mf 4413, Dame Cerré–Soulard to Mde P.L. Panet, 18 June 1793.

shock at receiving Marie–Anne’s letter in the dead of winter.<sup>343</sup> The letter he wrote in response to his sibling in Montreal conveyed a joyful, if somewhat astonished tone: “Rien ne ma plus surpris que votre letter du 23 Septembre d’autant plus que je l’ai reçu au milieu de l’hivers, moment, ou je ne my attendoit certainement point.”<sup>344</sup> In her study of seasonality and time in New France, Jane Harrison argues, “For them, the seasonal rhythm of communications was ‘normal’ in the more profound sense that they assumed and accepted that much of their lives would be seasonally structured.”<sup>345</sup> Regular seasonal postal service became a fixture in the lives of the Cerré family, and they referred regularly to couriers. In fact, written correspondence had become so commonplace that when Marie–Thérèse Cerré–Chouteau wrote of her father’s death in 1805, she mentioned to Marie–Anne that she was sending the letter by “la poste qui part dans ce moment.”<sup>346</sup>

### *Peoples and goods*

The normalcy of seasonal correspondence in the interior reflected the stability and security of the networks of communication and exchange, as well as the remarkable faith that people had that their loved ones, goods, letters, and news would safely reach their destinations. In part, the stability of these networks can be seen in the movement of people throughout the French river world. Merchants and hearty voyageurs were not the only people to travel the rivers of North America. Women and children also

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<sup>343</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2555, mf 4414, P.L. Cerré to Mme P.L. Panet, 19 June 1799.

<sup>344</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2555, mf 4414, P.L. Cerré to Mme P.L. Panet, 19 June 1799.

<sup>345</sup> Harrison, “‘Adieu Pour Cette Année’,” 95.

<sup>346</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2540, mf 4410, Dame Cerré–Chouteau to Mde P.L. Panet, 25 April 1805. Although there was a Post Master in American territory by 1805, most correspondence continued to travel on the river routes with canoe brigades in the hands of merchants and friends.

frequented these river routes, although the regularity with which they did so was often connected to family wealth and connections in the fur trade. Marie–Anne Cerré–Panet made at least two documented voyages to St. Louis to visit her family, and children were sent to Montreal and New Orleans to receive an education. Women and Children moved along the commercial river routes under the watchful eye and care of merchants and traders who acted as their escorts. The mobile networks of communication and exchange moved people much in the same manner as furs, merchandise, letters, and gifts, resting at trading centers like Michilimackinac and transferring the passenger from one escort to another. In 1804, Marie–Thérèse Cerré–Chouteau wrote to her sister in Montreal about the delay in sending her eldest son there for his education, and mentioned that Mr. Lyle would bring him up the following year.<sup>347</sup> When it was time for her son to return to St. Louis, Marie–Thérèse wrote to her brother–in–law to ask him to send Aristide back with George Gillespie to Michilimackinac, where their cousin Toussaint would bring him the rest of the way.<sup>348</sup> The integration of correspondence and trade ultimately facilitated the transport of people.

Because this chapter highlights the movement of people and correspondence, it is easy to lose sight that trade was the underlying impetus for the river routes. Trade formed the backbone of a commercial system that doubled as a social network of communication and exchange, something that was reflected in Cerré family correspondence. For example, in 1801 Gabriel Cerré wrote to his son–in–law, P.L. Panet, to convey his approval that his furs had been taken to London and that his agent,

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<sup>347</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2538, mf 4410, Dame Cerré–Chouteau to Mde P.L. Panet, 21 June 1800.

<sup>348</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2541, mf 4410, Dame Cerré–Chouteau to Mde P.L. Panet, 28 February 1806.

Mr. Leprohon, had been able to negotiate a good deal with Parquer and Girard.<sup>349</sup> Such commercial correspondence through kinship networks was crucial for disseminating vital information regarding the fur trade and keeping abreast of larger transatlantic commerce. This separation between trade and personal use, however, was an artificial division.

Passengers, personal correspondence, and goods routinely accompanied the furs and agricultural products that traveled up and down river. Merchandise and goods were not only for trading with natives, but also for personal use. In the case of the Cerré family, goods and gifts were shipped regularly to loved ones. In 1804, Marie-Thérèse received a portrait of her sister and nephew that had been sent from Montreal. She responded by noting her desire to send a similar portrait in return, but explained that she would have to wait for a painter to come to St. Louis. The town at the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers may have been a major fur-trading center, but it was still a part of the periphery, and lacked the services available in big city centers like Montreal. Still, Marie-Thérèse, pinning her hopes on the large number of people who used the river routes, was optimistic that a painter would come.<sup>350</sup> Services may have been somewhat limited in St. Louis, but there was no shortage of gifts and goods that were sent to family back in Montreal and Quebec City. Relatives in St. Louis could usually be counted upon to send tobacco, grain, and pecans to Marie-Anne in Canada.<sup>351</sup> In 1794, Pascal wrote to his sister in Canada to explain that pecans were in short supply that year and that their father had only been able to send one barrel with Mr.

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<sup>349</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2533, mf 4408, Cerré to P.L. Panet, 29 August 1801.

<sup>350</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2539, mf 4410, Dame Cerré-Chouteau to Mde P.L. Panet, 9 June 1804.

<sup>351</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2545, mf 4412, Dame Cerré-Soulard to Mde P.L. Panet, 23 September 1796.

Leprohon.<sup>352</sup> Five years later, Pascal again wrote to Marie–Anne to explain that a late spring had made a shipment of ripe tobacco impossible, and that he had sent tobacco seed instead.<sup>353</sup> In both cases, Pascal wrote to explain alterations to normal shipments of personal goods, underscoring the regular movement of what can best be described as luxury items. Rings, portraits, personal goods, and consumables were undoubtedly the purview of the commercial elite and their families. Cerré family correspondence exposes this particular facet of the French river world by implying the regularity with which these items circulated and the deep faith in the reliability of networks of communication and exchange.

### *Imperial politics*

Networks of communication were crucial for metropolitan centers attempting to administer colonial projects. The marriage of state and commerce made for convenient bedfellows. The state required regular and reliable information about the peripheries, and merchants paid careful attention to state decisions for their possible effects on business. Kenneth Banks argues that during the French regime, “The Marine availed itself of the great web of mercantile ship movements to keep informed of colonial events.”<sup>354</sup> Commerce was the engine that drove colonial communication, from transatlantic shipping to the river routes of North America, but agents of the state were not the only ones interested in colonial events. Following the fall of New France, French–speaking families on the peripheries remained remarkably well informed of

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<sup>352</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2554, mf 4414, P.L. Cerré to Mme P.L. Panet, 5 August 1794.

<sup>353</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2555, mf 4414, P.L. Cerré to Mme P.L. Panet, 19 June 1799.

<sup>354</sup> Kenneth J. Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713–1763* (Montreal & Kingston, ON: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2002), 171.

colonial events, even in the absence of the French state apparatus. The Cerré family was well aware of events in Europe and North America and shared news with family through correspondence. In 1794, Pascal wrote to his brother-in-law in Canada to express his concerns that the effects of the lawlessness brought on by the French Revolution were being felt as far away as the Illinois Country. Pascal complained that the Illinois Country was full of brigands and robbers, and compared it to the lawlessness that he believed was gripping France.<sup>355</sup> Later that same year, Gabriel Cerré wrote to Marie-Anne in Canada, and mentioned rumours that war that was supposedly coming to America.<sup>356</sup> The following year, he wrote again to his daughter, to inform her that news from abroad indicated that Europe was in complete disarray and that everyone was hoping for peace.<sup>357</sup> By 1797, Gabriel Cerré openly mentioned in a letter sent to his son-in-law in Montreal that he had heard whispers and speculation that France might regain possession of Spanish Louisiana.<sup>358</sup> The accuracy of the information in the letters is perhaps less important than the fact that larger colonial events were seen as important topics of discussion, and that the networks of communication and exchange ensured that such news was effectively spread throughout the French river world. The Cerré family and French-speaking inhabitants of the French river world did not live in a vacuum. The same commercial networks of communication and exchange that helped maintain kinship networks, send family correspondence, and keep track of business, also served to prepare those on the periphery for impending changes to the colonial political landscape.

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<sup>355</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2553, mf 4414, P.L. Cerré to P.L. Panet, 16 March 1794.

<sup>356</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2526, mf 4406, Cerré to Mme P.L. Paent, 13 June 1794.

<sup>357</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2527, mf 4406, Cerré to Mme P.L. Panet, 11 April 1795.

<sup>358</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2529, mf 4407, Cerré to \_\_\_\_\_ P.L. Panet, 2 April 1797.

## Conclusion

The story of Gabriel Cerré and his family is a success story. Beginning as a voyageur on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, he became one of the richest merchants in Upper Louisiana, in the process building a formidable kinship and commercial network that tied together individuals and families throughout the French river world. Marriage alliances solidified and expanded commercial connections, while stable networks of communication and exchange were exploited to maintain those alliances. However, this was hardly an easy process. Despite the consistency with which correspondence was sent and received, river expeditions were still dangerous. In a 1794 letter to his sister, for example, Gabriel's son, Pascal, recounted how he had crashed his canoe and gotten his cargo wet.<sup>359</sup> As Gabriel Cerré grew older, his family worried about the physical demands of his frequent voyages.<sup>360</sup> These were dangerous transit routes and there was nothing easy about maintaining kinship and commercial interests abroad. Despite having all the advantages of literacy, wealth, family, friends, and associates, Gabriel Cerré struggled to keep on top of his business interests throughout the French river world. As the Cerré children prepared for the succession of property and goods, Julie Cerré-Soulard expressed concern that her father's holdings, including property and slaves, were in disorder from Canada to New Orleans.<sup>361</sup>

Yet the success of the Cerré family is secondary to what their life stories reveal about the French river world. The experiences of Gabriel Cerré and his family help reveal the interconnectedness of the French river world, from colonial politics and

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<sup>359</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2554, mf 4414, P.L. Cerré to Mme P.L. Panet, 5 August 1794.

<sup>360</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2546, mf 4412, Dame Cerré-Soulard to Mde P.L. Panet, 30 May 1797.

<sup>361</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2547, mf 4412, Dame Cerré-Soulard to Mde P.L. Panet, 28 June 1801.

commercial ventures, to family kinship networks and systems of communication. Moreover, the story of the Cerré family underscores the salience of mobility in the French river world. Dale Miquelon argues that two distinct historiographies have developed in relation to early merchants in Canada, one looking east and the other west.<sup>362</sup> However, the life of Gabriel Cerré exemplified a system of trade and communication that simultaneously looked east and west, as well as south. In William Foley's study of Missouri, he stresses that "extended family alliances promoted social stability and cohesiveness, and they were equally good for business."<sup>363</sup> Gabriel Cerré and his family provide a rich case study for understanding how merchants and their families created this social stability and cohesiveness over a large geographical expanse.

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<sup>362</sup> Dale Miquelon, "The Merchant in the History of the 'First Canada'," in *Vingt ans après, Habitants et Marchands: lectures de l'histoire des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles canadiens*, ed. Sylvie Dépatie et al. (Montreal and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 59.

<sup>363</sup> William E. Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 105–106.

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## Chapter Three

### Politics, Commerce, and Law: Maintaining Social Cohesion

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When the country was surrendered to the English by the treaty of peace, that nation was seen to respect and put in force all acts of justice passed under the French government. Since now we are in the power of the United States, it will be seen that this power maintains in all their force the laws and usages which have existed under the two preceding governments. The conquering powers have the right to add to the country, which they have conquered, the laws which are their own; but not to annul those which were in force before.

Joseph Labuxière<sup>364</sup>

In February 1787, Augustin Dubuque presented a petition to the court clerk at Cahokia to secure the property rights to a stone house and lot, along with a separate parcel of land that had been sold within the boundaries of the parish of Ste. Famille (Cahokia) in 1765.<sup>365</sup> Dubuque was a trader from Canada and made the petition on behalf of Montreal lawyer Valentin Jautard, who had given him a power of attorney.<sup>366</sup> The petition included the above excerpt, which outlined the difficulties of maintaining legal continuity in light of twenty years of geopolitical change in the heart of North America. Transferring legal authority from one person to another via power of attorney was one of the primary means of trying to control commercial and legal activities over time and space. However, the commercial and legal spheres never operated in isolation.

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<sup>364</sup> “Clerk’s Record, 19 February 1787,” in Clarence W. Alvord, ed. *Cahokia Records, 1778–1790*, vol. 2, Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library (Virginia Series, Vol. 1) (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1907), 495–505. All subsequent citations for Clerk’s Record and Court Record are from Alvord, *Cahokia Records, 1778–1790*.

<sup>365</sup> Clerk’s Record, 19 February 1787, 496–505.

<sup>366</sup> Clerk’s Record, 1 March 1787, 504–509.

These processes were integral to society and helped maintain social cohesion in the French river world.

The Dubuque family was well known throughout the French river world. Augustin's father had worked as a voyageur, first on expeditions to Sioux territory in the 1730s and then traded at Michilimackinac in the early 1740s.<sup>367</sup> Augustin, the eldest son, followed his father into the trade as a supplier, and made frequent voyages from Montreal to Michilimackinac, and on to the Illinois Country. Augustin's youngest brother, Julien, also entered the trade, first at Michilimackinac and Prairie du Chien, before involving himself in lead mining. He settled near what became the town that would later bear his name, Dubuque, Iowa.<sup>368</sup> Although there is some speculation regarding Julien's first marriage, it appears that he married twice, first to an Indian woman, and then to a métis woman.<sup>369</sup>

Augustin, on the other hand, married a *Canadien* woman, Archange Pratte, at Montreal in 1778.<sup>370</sup> Augustin and Julien's marriages both created kinship networks and business opportunities. Augustin's brother-in-law, Jean-Baptiste Pratte, had relocated from Montreal to the middle Mississippi Valley and quickly established himself as one of the notable merchants at Ste. Geneviève.<sup>371</sup> Pratte was not only one of the largest

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<sup>367</sup> Nicole St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs: Understanding the Background to the Métis Nation and Métis Homeland—Voyageur Contract Database Project," University of Ottawa and the Saint-Boniface Historical Society, 2002–2009, PRDH Family 7050.

<sup>368</sup> St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs," PRDH Family 24158.

<sup>369</sup> Lucy Elderveld Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers: Indians, Métis, and Mining in the Western Great Lakes, 1737–1832* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 84–87.

<sup>370</sup> St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs," PRDH Family 54736.

<sup>371</sup> St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs," PRDH Family 19812.

slave holders and agricultural producers of the region, he was also one of only two merchants from Ste. Geneviève to hold a substantial share in the Missouri fur trade.<sup>372</sup>

In addition to his wife's connections to Upper Louisiana, Augustin Dubuque had a cousin who had relocated to the Illinois Country. Jean-Baptiste Dubuque was the commandant at Cahokia and a member of the court. Jean-Baptiste and Augustin certainly must have known that they shared the same grandfather, but there is no indication from the records as to what type of relationship they had.<sup>373</sup> In January of 1787, Augustin appeared before his cousin at the record office of the court at Cahokia to take an oath of allegiance and become a subject of the United States of America.<sup>374</sup> He brought with him the power of attorney and a petition on behalf of Jautard.

Within months, Augustin was embroiled in several lawsuits as both defendant and plaintiff.<sup>375</sup> In April, Augustin sued Tom Brady for 1203 livres in merchandise that he had supplied to the American Brady.<sup>376</sup> The court ruled in Augustin's favour, instructing Brady to pay immediately. The court also decreed that Dubuque was entitled to seize and sell Brady's property if he was unable to pay, provided that it did not interfere with the privileges of Brady's wife, Marie Larchevêque, and those of their children.<sup>377</sup> There is no mention in the historical record whether Dubuque was successful in collecting Brady's debt before dying later that year.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Carl J. Ekberg, *Coloinal Ste. Genevieve, an Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier* (Gerald, Missouri: Patrice Press, 1985), 43, 133, 173; Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 156.

<sup>373</sup> St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs"; PRDH Individual 16671, Family 21939.

<sup>374</sup> Court Record, 14 January 1787, 264-267.

<sup>375</sup> Court Record, 2 April 1787, 276-279.

<sup>376</sup> Court Record, 2 April 1787, 275-277; Court Record, 1 May 1787, 283; Court Record, 1 May 1787, 282-285.

<sup>377</sup> The children were from Marie's first marriage with Charles Le Boeuf dit Laflamme. After her first husband died, she did not split the estate. Although the records do not specify, Tom

On 8 November 1778, Augustin Dubuque died in a thunderous explosion at the house of Pierre Lafleur.<sup>379</sup> A keg of Dubuque's gunpowder had ignited, blowing up the house and injuring Lafleur, his wife, and Tom Brady. Despite these dramatic events, there are few references that detail what happened that fateful day. Yet the death of Augustin Dubuque offers valuable insights not because of what happened to him, but rather because of how his estate was settled after his death. The settlement of the Dubuque estate took more than two years and provides a glimpse into how law and commerce worked to maintain social cohesion in the French river world.

When Augustin Dubuque died, he left behind a number of creditors, including those at Michilimackinac and in Canada. It was left to the court at Cahokia to establish the procedure for settling the estate. The court determined that all local debts in the Illinois Country would be paid first, followed by those of a few preferred creditors from Canada and Michilimackinac. The remaining creditors would make appeals to an appointed syndic who would settle any outstanding accounts if there was anything left of the estate.<sup>380</sup>

Only days after the explosion, Jean-Baptiste Lacroix, under a power of attorney from Pierre Lafleur and Tom Brady, sued the Dubuque estate for damages. The court awarded Lafleur 1600 livres for his house, and instructed him to provide a sworn statement concerning damaged and lost goods. Brady was awarded ten livres per day for

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Brady is often listed as Thomas R. Brady, a native of Pennsylvania. However, his marriage contract with Marie Lachevêque indicates that he was from New England. Mehemia Matson, *Pioneers of Illinois Containing a Series of Sketches Relating to Events That Occurred Previous to 1813* (Chicago: Knight and Leonard, 1882), 119; Alvord, ed., *Cahokia Records*, 626.

<sup>378</sup> Augustin Dubuque died later that year, and his executor would have brought legal action against Brady had there been any outstanding debts.

<sup>379</sup> Alvord, ed., *Cahokia Records, 1778–1790*, 310.

<sup>380</sup> Court Record, 1 December 1787, 310–313.

two months and the costs of the clothing that he was wearing at the time of the explosion. Finally, the court determined that the Dubuque estate would pay the medical expenses for Lafleur, his wife, and Brady.<sup>381</sup>

Creditors quickly lined up to collect on the Dubuque estate. Lieutenant Governor Cruzat wrote from St. Louis only days after Dubuque's death to ensure that creditors from Spanish Upper Louisiana would be among the initial claimants from the Illinois Country. He wrote to the magistrate of the court, "I am persuaded that the creditors of this bank will enjoy the same rights in this estate as the creditors who are on your bank etc."<sup>382</sup> In most cases, merchants from Montreal and Michilimackinac did not make their way down to Cahokia, but were represented by other merchants and traders through a power of attorney, much in the same way that Dubuque had represented Jautard. In December 1788, Antoine Rielhe presented his power of attorney to the court at Cahokia to collect debts owed to Pierre Gamelin, a well-known Montreal wholesale merchant with connections in London.<sup>383</sup>

It was not long before several merchants were embroiled in a battle for the position of preferred creditor, including influential Montreal and Michilimackinac merchant Isidore Lacroix, who made the voyage to Cahokia to represent himself and fellow merchant Mr. Gigon. In 1788, Lacroix presented his petition to the court to be considered a preferred creditor. On the authority of a court order Lacroix had seized

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<sup>381</sup> Court Record, 12 November 1787, 308–311.

<sup>382</sup> Clerk's Record, 10 March 1788, 514–515.

<sup>383</sup> Pierre Gamelin supplied mostly *Canadien* traders with British supplies from London merchants Davis and Sharp, John and Robert Barclay, Aymare Mavit and Daniel Vialars, and Ogier Renaud and Company. Raymond Dumais, "Pierre-Joseph Gamelin," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, University of Toronto/Université Laval, <[http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=1898&interval=25&&PHPSESSID=3em8liev72v6npeco6h3g5bjt5](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=1898&interval=25&&PHPSESSID=3em8liev72v6npeco6h3g5bjt5)> (5 June 2009).

some of Dubuque's goods the day of the explosion in 1787. The court made Lacroix a preferred creditor and decreed that he was owed 4699 livres 6 sols 6 deniers, including 175 livres 6 sols as a commission for managing business for Dubuque in Canada.<sup>384</sup> However, Rielhe successfully petitioned against Lacroix's status as preferred creditor and argued that Gigon's claim should be dismissed entirely. A year after granting Lacroix preferred creditor status the court rescinded the decision and informed the merchant that he would have to present his claims to the syndic like the rest of the creditors from Michilimackinac and Canada.<sup>385</sup>

To further complicate matters, in May 1789 another merchant from Canada, François Huberdeau, requested that the court consider him preferred creditor on the Dubuque estate. Huberdeau had come from Canada seeking his share of the estate of his late brother, Jean-Baptiste, who had died in the Illinois Country. His other brother, Simon, had apparently transferred François's share to Augustin in order to be sent back to Canada. There were, however, two problems. First, Augustin died before he could return to Canada and pay François Huberdeau. Second, the agreement had been drawn up on the other side of the river in St. Louis, in another political and legal jurisdiction.

Dubuque's wife had offered to pay François Huberdeau 852 livres in Canada if he could provide a legal statement of what was owed him from his brother's estate, but he refused and instead traveled to Cahokia to make his claim. Rielhe and Lacroix both protested against Huberdeau's claim. The protest was joined by another merchant from Canada, Pierre de Rocheblave, son of former British representative in the Illinois

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<sup>384</sup> Court Record, 7 May 1788, 322–327.

<sup>385</sup> Court Record, 6 April 1789, 372–373; Court Record, 6 May 1789, 378–381.

Country, François de Rocheblave. In the end, despite heavy resistance from the other creditors, the court at Cahokia granted Huberdeau preferred status.<sup>386</sup>

Huberdeau was not the only one trying to secure an inheritance. The court at Cahokia was particularly careful to protect the interests of Dubuque's wife, who was in Montreal at the time of his death. After all, according to the *Coutume de Paris*, Archange Pratte was entitled to her share of the estate.<sup>387</sup> In 1788, the executor of the estate, notary Labuxière, informed Jean-Baptiste Pratte in Ste. Geneviève that he had sent a letter to Archange via the Illinois River and Detroit, advising her to send a power of attorney to Jean-Baptiste so that he could help settle the estate. Labuxière also asked Jean-Baptiste to send over a black slave and her daughter who belonged to Dubuque to be inventoried with the estate.<sup>388</sup> The following year, merchant Jacques Clamorgan appeared in front of the court at Cahokia. He represented Jean-Baptiste Pratte, operating under a power of attorney from Archange Pratte to file suit for her share of the estate. Clamorgan presented a copy of the notarized Dubuque-Pratte marriage contract from Montreal that outlined her dowry and the community of goods.<sup>389</sup>

The case of Augustin Dubuque was complicated and messy, but far from unusual. Geopolitics, legal procedure, and family life all intersected as processes of legal representation in commercial and family affairs were used to maintain social cohesion. This chapter examines the changing geopolitical landscape, its effect on commerce, and the legal and commercial processes that maintained the French river world.

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<sup>386</sup> Court Record, 6 May 1789, 374–379.

<sup>387</sup> Court Record, 1 December 1787, 311–313.

<sup>388</sup> Clerk's Record, 10 March 1788, 512–515.

<sup>389</sup> Court Record, 6 April 1789, 370–373.

### Shifting Politics and Commerce

The French river world may have operated irrespective of geopolitical boundaries, but it was not immune to the effects of geopolitical events. Politics and commerce were closely intertwined, and events in North America and Europe came to bear on the fluid boundaries and methods of interaction that held together the French river world. The effects of the Seven Years' War were felt from Quebec to New Orleans. British victory did more than simply redraw the map of North America. The inclusion of new territories and peoples into the British Empire helped foster a new set of relationships. Nowhere was this more evident than in the fur trade, where colonial commercial interests were generally at odds with British imperial efforts to control the North American interior after 1760.<sup>390</sup>

Merchants at Montreal and Michilimackinac sought freer trade at the western posts, while British officials attempted to regulate and control the fur trade. However, no sooner had the ink settled on the Treaty of Paris in 1763 than Britain was confronted with the financial realities of conquest. Burdened by a crippling national debt of 133 million pounds sterling, administrators were torn between the costly military measures of imperial control and the growing necessity of revenue creation.<sup>391</sup> Adding to these difficulties was Britain's limited capacity to draw revenue from its North American colonies.

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<sup>390</sup> Peter Marshall, "The Government of the Quebec Fur Trade: An Imperial Dilemma, 1761–1775," in *Le Castor Fait Tout: Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1985*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger, Toby Morantz, and Louise Dechêne (Montreal: Lake St. Louis Historical Society, 1987), 123, 128.

<sup>391</sup> John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 114–115; Marshall, "The Government of the Quebec Fur Trade," 125, 142.

A long process of political centralization and bureaucratic reform had given rise to a strong British fiscal–military state, which was defined by its ability to effectively and efficiently collect tax revenues at home. The lead–up to the American War of Independence exposed the fact that British imperial powers of taxation were far more limited on the other side of the Atlantic.<sup>392</sup> As John Brewer insightfully notes, “if the wars of the mid–eighteenth century demonstrated the full power and capacity of the British fiscal–military state, the American War revealed its limitations.”<sup>393</sup> Fiscal concerns did not prevent Britain from putting down a formidable force of native allies in 1763 and 1764 at the western posts, but it most certainly affected the allocation of imperial resources thereafter. Consequently, British imperial authority in the territories of the interior remained tenuous at best.

Running parallel with the emerging fiscal crisis was a debate on how to incorporate newly acquired territories into the empire. Territorial gains made during the Seven Years’ War brought numerous peoples under British rule, including French–speaking Catholics in North America, Spanish–speaking Catholics in Minorca, and the ethnically diverse peoples of eastern India.<sup>394</sup> In response to this growing multi–ethnic dimension, administrators were forced to re–conceptualize the British Empire and the nature of imperial authority. The reformulation of empire was the beginning of a

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<sup>392</sup> Brewer explains that Spain, France, and Britain all implemented fiscal reforms following the Seven Years’ War in light of escalating costs of military confrontation and growing national debts. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, 175–178.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>394</sup> P. J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America C.1750–1783* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 119.

process that ultimately led to the consolidation of imperial authority in India as it was being contested in America.<sup>395</sup>

In North America, Native and French-speaking inhabitants occupied the lands that were ceded under the Treaty of Paris, and British policy makers struggled to adjust to this new post-1763 imperial reality. While Britain had long put forward claims to Canada and its hinterland, it was ill-prepared for the addition of sixty to seventy thousand French-speaking Catholics into what had been a predominantly Protestant and English-speaking empire.<sup>396</sup> The question became how to accommodate these new British subjects—at least in the short term—while upholding the rights of free Englishmen.<sup>397</sup> The Royal Proclamation (1763) and the Quebec Act (1774) reflected attempts to strike a balance between the two goals.

### **Quebec and the *Pays d'en Haut***

The Royal Proclamation introduced British law to the new province of Quebec, and instituted the same political restrictions that Catholics faced in Britain. In principle, it was a complete repudiation of the religious and legal accommodations made under the Articles of Capitulation and the Treaty of Paris. In practice, however, Governors Murray and Carleton tempered the terms of the Royal Proclamation, at times ignoring them completely, in order to govern peacefully an overwhelmingly French-speaking and Catholic province. Many of the incoming British merchants were particularly concerned

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 85, 379.

<sup>396</sup> Philip Lawson, "A Perspective on British History and the Treatment of Quebec," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 3, no. 3 (1990): 262.

<sup>397</sup> Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires*, 187, 204–206.

over delays in establishing an elected representative assembly.<sup>398</sup> The political exclusion of Catholics outlined under the Proclamation meant that an assembly would have been overwhelmingly British, Protestant, and thus dominated by the province's English-speaking minority.<sup>399</sup> This has often been depicted as the beginning of the English–French divide in Canada, with British Governors Murray and Carleton mediating between a French–Canadian majority and an aggressive British minority.<sup>400</sup>

Elements of this early English–French rivalry spilled over into the fur trade. Despite sharing many common goals, the newly arrived British merchants and the established *Canadien* merchants did not always see eye-to-eye and early complaints could and did split merchants along linguistic and religious lines. A group of recently arrived British merchants complained to Governor Murray in 1765 that fur trade licenses had been granted preferentially in favour of the established *Canadien* merchants. This matter was serious enough that Murray wrote back the following year and agreed to have a trusted individual oversee the process of granting licenses in Montreal. Moreover, the governor assured the British merchants that he would sign all the licenses personally, but stopped short of granting licenses of more than one year.<sup>401</sup>

Murray and the British merchants had a contentious relationship at best, one dating back to the early days of the military regime in Canada, which had sowed the seeds of animosity between the military and the merchants. In late 1764, relations

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<sup>398</sup> Garth Stevenson, *Parallel Paths: The Development of Nationalism in Ireland and Quebec* (Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2006), 52.

<sup>399</sup> Peter H. Russel, *Constitutional Odyssey: Can Canadians Become a Sovereign People?*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 13; Stevenson, *Parallel Paths*, 42, 52.

<sup>400</sup> The use of term French–Canadian in this context appears to be more appropriate in the context of the Canadian national understandings of English–French rivalry.

<sup>401</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U8971, mf 5839–5840, James Murray to Merchants of Montreal, Quebec, 5 April 1766.

between the British merchants and the military in Montreal boiled over, leading to a vicious attack on leading British merchant Thomas Walker. Murray's handling of the Walker affair in 1765, combined with the early grievances of British merchants, carried enough weight to prompt the governor's recall to Britain the following year to answer charges.<sup>402</sup> Many of the accusations revolved around Murray's perceived preferential treatment of the French-speaking Catholic population in Quebec.

Although Murray was eventually cleared of all charges, the rhetoric of upholding the rights of British subjects—meaning English-speaking Protestants—continued to swirl. For example, Thomas Walker continued to operate in the fur trade under the special protection of Henry Seymore Conway, the Secretary of State for the Southern Department. In 1766, Conway wrote to Michilimackinac to ensure that Walker was granted “every Countenance & Protection in the pursuit of His Trade and Business which as a British Subject He is entitled to.”<sup>403</sup> Yet for all the talk of British rights, the picture on the ground was far more complicated. Factions in Quebec were not purely drawn along ethnic lines.<sup>404</sup> As the rhetoric of upholding British rights increased the British merchants became fragmented. By the time Thomas Walker's case against his assailants concluded in 1767, he represented only a small and radical segment of the

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<sup>402</sup> G. P. Browne, “James Murray,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, University of Toronto/Université Laval, <[http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?id\\_nbr=2085&&PHPSESSID=3em8liev72v6npeco6h3g5bjt5](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?id_nbr=2085&&PHPSESSID=3em8liev72v6npeco6h3g5bjt5)> (5 June 2009).

<sup>403</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2940, mf 4508, H.S. Conway to Governor of Michilimackinac, St-James, 27 March 1766.

<sup>404</sup> Browne, “James Murray.”

British merchants.<sup>405</sup> The idea of diametrically opposed camps of British and *Canadien* merchants is therefore highly misleading.

When it came to commerce, the newly arrived British and the established *Canadien* merchants found considerable common ground. The Proclamation had severed Canada—renamed the province of Quebec—from its historic hinterland of the *Pays d'en Haut* and the Illinois Country, and both British and *Canadien* merchants were concerned about the jurisdictional and regulatory changes regarding the fur trade. A new system of trading posts, licenses, and inspectors was implemented to control traders, merchants, and voyageurs heading out from Montreal. British merchants initially favoured the new regulations, but soon found them as restricting as did their *Canadien* counterparts.

Although licenses permitted traders and merchants to send expeditions of voyageurs to the western posts, it quickly became apparent that those who wintered among the Natives, legally or otherwise, could easily undercut merchants who waited at the posts. In 1765, a group of merchants at Michilimackinac petitioned to winter away from the posts in what became a regular trend of *Canadien* and British merchants who sought to evade regulatory control in the fur trade.<sup>406</sup>

Despite the regulations, the newly created territorial boundary between the province of Quebec and Indian Territory remained remarkably porous, as colonial officials enforced the dictates of the trade at key transit points and posts. Patrols on key waterways seized merchandise and confiscated furs from time to time. However, the fact that there are few accounts of such seizures suggest that there were either very few

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<sup>405</sup> Lewis H. Thomas, "Thomas Walker," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, University of Toronto/Université Laval, <[http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=2204&&PHPSESSID=3em8liev72v6npeco6h3g5bjt5](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=2204&&PHPSESSID=3em8liev72v6npeco6h3g5bjt5)> (5 June 2009).

<sup>406</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, G1/40, mf 1633, Address to Captain Wm. Howard by the Traders at Michilimackinac asking permission to winter among the Indians, Michilimackinac, 5 July 1765.

patrols or that they met with limited success. There are scant references to how much contraband was seized and it is exceedingly difficult to estimate the number of *coureurs du bois* in the interior of North America during the second half of the eighteenth century. However, those who carried licenses appear to have faced few obstacles from authorities when crossing from one territory to another.

The boundary change itself was not as much a problem for the merchants as was the resulting personal rivalries and competing jurisdictional powers that it created.<sup>407</sup> Governors Murray and Carleton may have been responsible for issuing fur trade licenses in Quebec, but it was Sir William Johnson, the superintendent of Indian Affairs, who held much of the authority over the fur trade at the western posts. To further complicate matters, General Thomas Gage, the commander-in-chief of the British forces in North America, funded the Department of Indian Affairs, thus blurring the lines of imperial authority over the fur trade.

In the absence of clear authority in the fur trade, letters of protest were often sent to two or three officials. For example, the Montreal merchants sent letters to both Murray and Johnson in 1766 to express their concerns regarding overregulation of the trade.<sup>408</sup> Merchants also petitioned the commandants of the various posts. It was force by numbers, and when the merchants banded together they were difficult to ignore. In

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<sup>407</sup> Philip Lawson, *The Imperial Challenge: Quebec and Britain in the Age of the American Revolution* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 95.

<sup>408</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, G1/43, mf 1636, Memorial from the Merchants of Montreal to the Governor and His Majesty's Council relating to trade in the Upper Country with 52 names, Montreal, 30 March 1766; Baby Collection, P0058, U6065, mf 5331, William Johnson to Traders of Montreal, Johnson Hall, 20 February 1766. The term "Montreal merchants" has normally referred to a cohesive group of British merchants. While occasional divisions occurred along religious and linguistic lines, use of the term Montreal merchants in this study simply refers to fur trade merchants who operated out of Montreal, irrespective of cultural or ethnic differences.

1766, the merchants at Michilimackinac petitioned Commandant Robert Rogers to such great effect that he agreed to meet with them twice weekly to hear their proposals and grievances.<sup>409</sup> Both the Montreal merchants and those at the western posts were particularly concerned that Britain might grant monopoly control over the Great Lakes and southern fur trade. Such concerns were certainly well founded given both France and Britain's history of granting monopolies to private interests and chartered companies.<sup>410</sup>

When William Grant purchased La Baye & Co., Sir William Johnson was forced to respond to complaints that the purchase might result in a fur trade monopoly in the interior. Johnson attempted to reassure the merchants that no such monopoly was in the works: "I have little doubt that he will prevent a Grant which however agreeable to the French Constitution is not so consistent with ours, especially when it affects a Commerce which His Majesty intends shall be free & open to all his Subjects."<sup>411</sup> There was a certain irony in Johnson's comments, for while he spoke of the French being pre-disposed to favour monopoly rule, the *Canadien* merchants were as adamant as their British counterparts in pushing for free and open trade.

In 1767, a mixed group of British and *Canadien* merchants sent a petition to Governor Carleton, requesting a loosening of licenses for trade beyond the western posts.<sup>412</sup> That same year, merchants operating out of Michilimackinac sent a letter to

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<sup>409</sup> LAC, MG24, L3, Vol. 4, 2399–2400, Michilimackinac, 1766–08–14.

<sup>410</sup> One needs only to look to the Hudson's Bay Company, the East India Company, and the Company of One Hundred Associates to see examples of monopolies on trade and colonial development.

<sup>411</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U6065, mf 5331, William Johnson to Traders of Montreal, Johnson Hall, 20 February 1766.

<sup>412</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, G1/46, mf 1637–1638, The Merchants to G. Carleton regarding trade beyond the Posts, Montreal, 2 April 1767.

William Grant and Richard Dobie in Montreal. They sought the support of merchants in Montreal and Quebec City for a free trade plan in the fur trade to be forwarded through the appropriate channels to the Lords of Trade. With the exception of a few British merchants, like Isaac Todd, James McGill, and Benjamin Frobisher, the signatures out of Michilimackinac were overwhelmingly those of *Canadien* merchants.<sup>413</sup>

Dale Miquelon argues that *Canadien* merchants continued, almost uninterrupted, in the fur trade, transferring their French financial holdings to London or Canada until 1789.<sup>414</sup> Moreover, Miquelon shows that *Canadien* merchants did not lose ground immediately, but rather continued to invest heavily in the fur trade at Montreal until 1774, after which British investment in the trade began to dominate.<sup>415</sup> It did not take long for furs from *Canadien* traders to begin flowing to London instead of La Rochelle and Bordeaux. Those without London connections used intermediaries to ship the furs, such as René Thuillier Lacombe, who shipped his peltries to London in 1766 with the help of well-known merchant Étienne Augé.<sup>416</sup>

Many well-known *Canadien* merchant families continued to be active in the fur trade throughout the 1760s. Some, like the Chaboillez family, operated out of Montreal, but a growing number of *Canadien* merchant families concentrated on being intermediary traders at supply and transit points such as Michilimackinac and Detroit.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, G1/48, mf 1638, Letter from the Traders to William Grant and Richard Dobie approving the plan of Major Rogers with 30 signatures, Michilimackinac, 30 June 1767.

<sup>414</sup> Dale Miquelon, "The Baby Family in the Trade of Canada, 1750–1820" (master's thesis, Carleton, 1966), 37–40.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> Baby Collection, G1/44, mf 1637, Quittance par René Thuillier Lacombe à Étienne Augé pour transaction de fourrures envoyées à Londres, Montréal, 7 août 1766; Ibid., 38.

<sup>417</sup> Baby Collection, G1/49, mf 3352, Quittance par Marie-Anne Chevalier, veuve de Charles Chaboillez, et son fils Pierre Chaboillez à Ignace Bourassa pour vente de fourrures, Montréal, 31

For example, Jacques Baby dit Dupéron, a member of a prominent Quebec City family, was operating out of Detroit by the late 1760s. In 1769, Jacques had eighty-two bundles of furs shipped to Montreal using voyageurs hired by François Baby & Co. at Montreal.<sup>418</sup> *Canadien* merchants at Michilimackinac and Detroit formed company partnerships with British merchants and traders and married into Native and British kinship networks. Michilimackinac counted nearly two thousand *Canadien* and métis traders, merchants, and voyageurs, compared with only a couple hundred British merchants and soldiers.<sup>419</sup> British traders hired *Canadiens* as guides and voyageurs. In September 1761, British trader Alexander Henry hired Étienne Campion to assist with mounting an expedition to Michilimackinac.<sup>420</sup> By the 1780s, Campion was one of the leading merchants at Michilimackinac involved in the southern fur trade. He later joined William Grant to form Grant, Campion & Co., which competed in the northwest fur trade and also acted as an important intermediary supplier and shipper for merchants in the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana and Montreal.<sup>421</sup>

The Montreal and Great Lakes fur trade continued to expand despite the changes (see Map 2). British investment capital rose and the number of voyageurs hired in the trade increased significantly from a few hundred to over a thousand per year by the end of the eighteenth century (see Appendix C). In the Montreal–northwest trade voyageurs

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mai 1768; Baby Collection, G1/52, mf 1640, Contrat pour livraison de castor sec par Pierre Martel à M. de la Corne St–Luc, Montreal, 26 novembre 1771.

<sup>418</sup> Baby Collection, G1/50, mf 1639, Geo. Turnbull. Passport to Michel Roy, Baptiste Ayot, Joseph Migneron and others with 82 packs of peltry, belonging to Mr. Duperon Baby, to pass to Montreal, Detroit, July 1769; St–Onge, “Tracing the Voyageurs.”

<sup>419</sup> Keith R. Widder, “After the Conquest: Michilimackinac, a Borderland in Transition, 1760–1763,” *Michigan Historical Review* 34, no. 1 (2008): 48.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>421</sup> In Collaboration, “Étienne–Charles Campion,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, University of Toronto/Université Laval, <[http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=1793&&PHPSESSID=3em8liev72v6npeco6h3g5bjt5](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=1793&&PHPSESSID=3em8liev72v6npeco6h3g5bjt5)> (5 June 2006). His residence remained in Montreal.

were overwhelmingly *Canadien* and their masters British. As Dale Miquelon notes, “The Canadian merchant, faced with new suppliers, markets and modes of selling, and the British merchant, engaging for the first time in a trade with its own peculiar environment and methods, were each required to make important adjustments.”<sup>422</sup>

While British investment literally monopolized the opening of the trade northwest of the Great Lakes, *Canadien* merchants, traders, and voyageurs still largely controlled the southern fur trade. A history of French settlement, continued in-migration, and long-established networks of communication and exchange meant that Cerré, Chouteau, Pothier, Baby, and Rocheblave were only a few of the many French, Louisiana Creole, and *Canadien* families drawn to the southern fur trade. British capital combined with French-speaking merchants and traders to grow the southern fur trade at the same time that the northwest fur trade was expanding.

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<sup>422</sup> Miquelon, “The Baby Family in the Trade of Canada,” 76.



Map 2. Voyageur Contract Destinations and Routes

### The Illinois Country

Quebec and the Indian Territory received a considerable amount of attention from British authorities despite the paltry resources allocated to help govern them. The villages of the Illinois Country, on the other hand, were mostly forgotten. Some of the historic Illinois Country became part the new Indian Territory, and posts like Vincennes that were caught in between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi felt these geopolitical changes acutely.<sup>423</sup> However, most French-speaking inhabitants in the heart of North America congregated in the villages of the Illinois Country located along the Mississippi between the Ohio and Illinois rivers. These villages made up the largest zone of French settlement in North America outside the St. Lawrence Valley and Lower Louisiana in 1763.<sup>424</sup> And yet, as Reginald Horsman explained, “From 1763 until it was lost twenty years later, the Illinois country was for the most part neglected by the British government.”<sup>425</sup>

It took nearly two years for the British to finally claim their possessions in the middle Mississippi Valley. When British troops under Captain Thomas Stirling arrived at Fort de Chartres in 1765, they found Louis St. Ange de Bellerive still governing over the French-speaking population as if nothing had changed.<sup>426</sup> In actual fact, very little

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<sup>423</sup> Tangi Villerbu, “Pouvoir, religion et société en des temps indécis: Vincennes, 1763–1795,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 62, no. 2 (2008): 186–188.

<sup>424</sup> There had been a sizeable French-speaking population in Acadia, but large numbers of them had been deported in 1755.

<sup>425</sup> Reginald Horsman, “Great Britain and the Illinois Country in the Era of the American Revolution,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 69, no. 2 (1976): 100.

<sup>426</sup> Neyon de Villiers recalled St. Ange de Bellerive from Vincennes in 1764 and ordered him to assume command and wait for the British at Fort de Chartres. De Villiers and most of the French troops then left for New Orleans. Charles J. Balesi, *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America, 1673–1818*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Alliance Française, 2000), 276.

had changed. “The proclamation of 1763, which had definitively extended the laws of England to the new provinces of Quebec and east and west Florida, made no similar provision for the West.”<sup>427</sup> Thus, French law continued to reign despite British possession of the region. General Thomas Gage’s proclamation to the inhabitants of the Illinois, which Stirling delivered in 1765, made no mention of the rule of British law, the creation of a civil government, or the maintenance of a military regime. It simply reiterated the protections afforded by the Treaty of Paris signed in 1763, such as freedom of religion, the right to relocate, and provisions for an oath of allegiance.<sup>428</sup> With no clear directives for the governance of the French villages, the Illinois Country became a *de facto* military regime.

Notaries and captains of the militia had been pillars of legal and civil authority under the French regime, and continued to exercise considerable influence under British rule. However, Stirling was concerned with what he saw as a lack of legal recourse in the Illinois Country. He appointed Jean-Baptiste Lagrange to handle disputes, with appeals directed to the commandant.<sup>429</sup> This system might have worked had there been any stability in the commanding ranks, but the highest position of British authority in the Illinois Country was a revolving door. Major Robert Farmar replaced Captain Stirling as commandant in late 1765, only to be succeeded the following year by Lieutenant Colonel John Reed. Between 1765 and 1768, the Illinois Country experienced no less than four changes in command.

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<sup>427</sup> Clarence Edwin Carter, *Great Britain and the Illinois Country 1763–1774* (1910; reprint, Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 23.

<sup>428</sup> Clarence W. Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 265; Carter, *Great Britain and the Illinois Country*, 17, 24.

<sup>429</sup> Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 265.

Most of the early commandants demonstrated various degrees of contempt for the French inhabitants they governed. Major Farmar criticized their drinking habits, comparing the French to the Natives in their daily drunkenness.<sup>430</sup> Yet despite the complaints of many commandants, British policy was fairly lenient. This changed with the administration of Colonel Wilkins, who was perhaps the most controversial British commandant of the Illinois Country.<sup>431</sup> He instituted a series of pro-British policies, such as granting lands to British and Anglo-American merchants. Moreover, Wilkins consistently aided the British and Anglo-American merchants in retrieving real and questionable debts from French-speaking merchants.<sup>432</sup>

On the question of legal apparatus in the Illinois Country, Wilkins set up a civil court to uphold English law in December 1768. The court initially consisted of four English-speaking and two French-speaking judges. However, less than a year after its inception, all the judges save one were French-speaking. The lone English-speaking judge was George Morgan, a Philadelphia trader who sided with the French-speaking inhabitants in a power struggle against Wilkins over the autonomy of the court. The commandant responded in kind by refusing to issue writs and by abolishing the court less than two years after it was established.<sup>433</sup> The failed experiment made it apparent that while colonial authority rested with the British commandant, it was anything but absolute and far from uncontested. The French-speaking inhabitants still made up a majority in the villages and held considerable influence. Still, Wilkins's policies made for a long three years for the French-speaking inhabitants of the Illinois Country.

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<sup>430</sup> Balesi, *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America*, 283.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>432</sup> Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 266.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 266–268. Alvord's description of Wilkins and the court controversy is still the best secondary account available.

When charges by his own officers resulted in Wilkins's recall in 1772, his departure once again plunged the future of the colony into uncertainty. Major Isaac Hamilton took command for several weeks in 1773 before Captain Hugh Lord took over. Captain Lord was the antithesis of Wilkins, and was bent on policies of accommodation. It was a welcome, if short, respite from the hardships endured under Wilkins. However, changes in British imperial policy were once again about to redraw the map of North America. The Quebec Act of 1774 politically reunited the Illinois Country and Canada for the first time since the days of New France in 1717.

As early as January 1775, proposals for the creation of a civil government in the Illinois Country were laid down for the creation of a court and a resident lieutenant governor at Kaskaskia who would answer to the governor of Quebec.<sup>434</sup> However, the lead-up to, and outbreak of, the American Revolution threw these plans into disarray. Even before the intended civil government was announced, British troops and the commandant were ordered to abandon Fort Gage, the seat of imperial authority in the Illinois Country. In the wake of the Revolution, the British Illinois Country was left in the hands Philippe-François Rastel de Rocheblave.

Rocheblave was a Frenchman who had immigrated to Canada under the French regime, fought against the British, married in Kaskaskia, and served as the first commandant of Ste. Geneviève in Spanish Upper Louisiana. He returned to Kaskaskia by 1773, and became a loyal British subject in the Illinois Country. Margaret Kimball Brown argues, "The villagers had little respect for Rocheblave,"<sup>435</sup> while Charles Balesi states that "for all the evidence, he appeared to have been an effective official although

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<sup>434</sup> Carter, *Great Britain and the Illinois Country*, 162.

totally without means.”<sup>436</sup> The Frenchman’s frequent change of allegiance makes it difficult to depict him as either hero or villain, and perhaps he was neither. Carl Ekberg writes, “Rocheblave cherished no flag and was willing to serve any sovereign that suited his interests.”<sup>437</sup> This was certainly the opinion Rocheblave’s enemies, who openly questioned his allegiance to Britain. Daniel Murray, acting on behalf of Patrick Kennedy, Thomas Bentley, and other unnamed merchants from Kaskaskia, petitioned Governor Carleton in 1777 over the perceived injustices suffered at the hands of Rocheblave. Bentley in particular was quick to point out that Rocheblave had taken the Spanish oath of allegiance and therefore could not be trusted.<sup>438</sup>

If pure self-interest was truly Rocheblave’s motivation, then it seems odd that he would stay at Kaskaskia as the British representative despite being given no military support and limited resources. Rocheblave was the administrator of a region that was essentially defenseless, yet he showed commitment to the British cause. In late October 1776, Governor Carleton wrote to Rocheblave to thank him for sending information regarding rebel movements.<sup>439</sup> The Frenchman continued to send letters to British military leaders with information on the movement of British troops and American rebels right up to the fall of the Illinois Country.<sup>440</sup> As the war progressed, it must have become increasingly evident to Rocheblave, who had fought in a losing cause for the French during the Seven Years’ War, that the British hold on the Illinois Country was

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<sup>436</sup> Margaret Kimball Brown, *History as They Lived It: A Social History of Prairie Du Rocher, Ill.* (Tuscon: Patrice Press, 2005), 169; Balesi, *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America*, 287.

<sup>437</sup> Ekberg, *Coloinal Ste. Genevieve, an Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier*, 338.

<sup>438</sup> LAC, MG21 Add. MSS 21661–21892. Haldimand Papers, microfilm H–1738, p2, Illinois, 10 April 1777, Kaskaskia, Signed T. Bentley.

<sup>439</sup> KM 76:10:28:1.

<sup>440</sup> LAC, MG21 Add, MSS 21661–21892. Haldimand Papers, microfilm H–1451, p115. Letter signed Henry Hamilton, 8 August 1778.

tenuous at best. In 1778, the Americans, under General George Rogers Clark captured Rocheblave and took possession of the Illinois Country uncontested.

Rocheblave was sent to Virginia, but found his way back to British territory in 1780, eventually making his way to Montreal. His loyalty to the British cause proved far more enduring, and he maintained his primary residence in Canada until his death in 1802. Rocheblave also became active in politics and sat in the Lower Canadian House of Assembly throughout the 1790s.<sup>441</sup> Still, Rocheblave continued to have a stake in the ceded territories to the south. His military and political career tends to overshadow the fact that family and commerce ranked above national allegiance, as it did for many in the Illinois Country. As Donal Chaput explains in his examination of the variability of French and *Canadien* reactions to the Revolution, “On the North American continent, then, during the Revolution, Frenchmen acted in their own interests, as was to be expected.”<sup>442</sup>

As early as 1761, Rocheblave was involved in trade between Montreal and Detroit, and continued to have business interests in Detroit, handled by his son Pierre, into the 1780s.<sup>443</sup> Family and business kept him connected to the Illinois Country long after the Revolution. He maintained friendships with some of the leading merchants of the region, such as Gabriel Cerré, and some traders still owed him money.<sup>444</sup> Rocheblave also had a number of family obligations in the Illinois Country. He had

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<sup>441</sup> Pierre Dufour and Marc Ouellet, “Pierre de Rastel de Rocheblave,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, University of Toronto/Université Laval, <[http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=3628&&PHPSESSID=3em8liev72v6npeco6h3g5bjt5](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=3628&&PHPSESSID=3em8liev72v6npeco6h3g5bjt5)> (5 June 2009).

<sup>442</sup> Donald Chaput, “Treason or Loyalty? Frontier French in the American Revolution,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 71, no. 4 (1978): 251.

<sup>443</sup> KM 61:8:27:1, 63:9:16:1, 75:8:7:1; Dufour and Ouellet, “Pierre de Rastel de Rocheblave.”

<sup>444</sup> KM 89:9:20:1, 90:6:27:1, 90:7:4:1.

married into a French-speaking family in the Illinois Country and his son had been born at Kaskaskia. In 1774, he agreed to care for two of his nieces at Kaskaskia, who were still minors, following the death of their parents.<sup>445</sup> When the Americans expropriated goods belonging to the girls five years later, his nieces' guardian, Nicolas Caillot dit Lachanse, granted Rocheblave a power of attorney to provide documentation and seek compensation for the goods.<sup>446</sup> The power of attorney acknowledged that the Americans were detaining Rocheblave in Williamsburg, Virginia, but was nevertheless signed and marked by notary Carbonneaux, Lachance, and three witnesses, showing remarkable confidence that Rocheblave would continue to uphold his personal and financial obligations. Rocheblave's personal and business affairs kept his attention focused on the South until the 1790s.

Like many French inhabitants of the Illinois Country, Rocheblave's family and financial interests were intertwined, and he balanced these with the changing geopolitical landscape. There were, of course, some French-speaking inhabitants who were ardent republicans and supported the American cause, such as Pierre Menard, a transplanted *Canadien* merchant. But, overwhelmingly, the French-speaking inhabitants of the Illinois Country concerned themselves with family and commerce and waited to see whether the new American regime would endure.

The American Illinois Country offered little more stability than the British, at least from a geopolitical perspective. The Illinois Country became part of Virginia Territory for four years (1778–1782), followed by eight years of U.S. Congressional jurisdiction (1783–1790). In 1790, the Illinois Country was finally granted a civil

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<sup>445</sup> KM 74:3:9:1.

<sup>446</sup> KM 79:8:11:1.

government as outlined in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. The Ordinance created a vast territory from the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers to the Great Lakes border with British North America. The French villages of the Illinois Country on the Mississippi River were quickly separated from this vast territory under newly created St. Clair Country in 1790, which was further subdivided in 1795 to include Randolph County.<sup>447</sup> Much of the rest of the Illinois Country became Indiana Territory in 1800, with its capital at the old French post of Vincennes. When the region was redrawn again in 1809 to include Illinois Territory, Kaskaskia was chosen as its first capital, despite its relative decline by the start of the nineteenth century.

From a geopolitical perspective, the American period ushered in more changes than the French and British periods combined, and yet much remained the same. The *Coutume de Paris* continued to be used as the legal system with varying degrees of effectiveness throughout the Illinois Country. For example, when the Illinois Country was part of Virginia Territory, it was divided into three judicial districts but with directives to continue to use the old French laws.<sup>448</sup> As Margaret Kimball Brown notes, “Despite all the changes in governments, no laws had replaced the *Coutume de Paris*.”<sup>449</sup> Things remained relatively unchanged until 1790, when the court system was completely overhauled in favour of American style courts.

The changes did not affect all the towns along the Mississippi evenly. Kaskaskia, for one, underwent a great deal of disruption. Its court never functioned as smoothly as the one at Cahokia, and there were disputes between a small band of

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<sup>447</sup> Although she focuses mostly on Prairie du Rocher, Margaret Kimball Brown provides one of the best detailed accounts regarding the geopolitical changes in the Illinois Country. Brown, *History as They Lived It*, 169–199.

<sup>448</sup> Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 335–336.

<sup>449</sup> Brown, *History as They Lived It*, 191.

American merchants and the French-speaking inhabitants. These disputes reached a head in 1784, when Kaskaskia became a virtual city-state under the tyrannical rule of John Dodge.<sup>450</sup> Clarence Alvord describes how the American held the town hostage, literally at the barrel of a cannon: “Dodge seized the old French fort on the bluff—now incorrectly called Fort Gage—fortified it with building material and two cannons from the Jesuit building known as Fort Clark, and defied what was left of the civil government of Kaskaskia.”<sup>451</sup>

In 1784, John Dodge sent a petition to Congress to address the situation in the Illinois Country. He insisted that his actions were in response to injustices experienced under military rule and requested that Congress send someone to establish a constitution and civil government. Nineteen French inhabitants signed Dodge’s petition, but only nine were able to sign their names, and of these only four were prominent merchants.<sup>452</sup> This was in stark contrast to the petition that François Carbonneaux sent later that year on behalf of the inhabitants of Kaskaskia, where he professed to speak for four hundred families. Carbonneaux explained the difficulties that the people of the region faced.

That many ill disposed Persons have taken Refuge in their Country—That Population is daily encreasing—That their Property is invaded and arrested from them by the Hands of daring Intruders and that Violences are frequently

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<sup>450</sup> Clarence Alvord describes the period between 1783 and 1790 as the period of city states, referring to the lack of Congressional attention paid to the region and the autonomy with which French towns operated. Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 363. The image of Dodge as a tyrant comes from Father de la Valinière’s depiction of the man and his conduct in correspondence sent to Congress in 1787. “Father de la Valinière writes of John Dodge, August 25, 1787,” in Clarence W. Alvord, ed. *Kaskaskia Records, 1778–1790*, 424–428. Information Concerning Illinois, 1787, in Alvord, ed. *Kaskaskia Records, 1778–1790*, 429–431.

<sup>451</sup> Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 362.

<sup>452</sup> “Memorial to Congress by the Faction of John Dodge,” in Alvord, ed. *Kaskaskia Records, 1778–1790*, 362–368.

committed in various Ways, against their Persons, and against the Persons and Properties of the Natives.<sup>453</sup>

This situation lasted for two years, until 1786, when petitions on behalf of most of the French-speaking inhabitants were once again sent to Congress. Towns like Cahokia and Prairie du Rocher, by comparison, experienced considerably less turmoil.

The constantly changing geopolitical landscape of the Illinois Country goes some way to explaining why and how commerce continued to flow as it did. Both Britain and America invested minimal military and financial resources and thus failed to exert effective imperial control over the region. The resulting political instability in the Illinois Country was characterized by continually changing borders and jurisdictions, and a revolving door of colonial administrators. Weak imperial authority meant that Britain and America were ineffective at managing their trade interests.

Prior to 1778, Britain saw control of New Orleans as key to gaining control of the Mississippi and Missouri trade.<sup>454</sup> However, between 1763 and 1774, British revenues from the fur trade in the Illinois Country decreased, despite a considerable number of *Canadien* merchants working in the trade. After 1774, trade flowed much more steadily from the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana to Canada. The continued in-migration of *Canadiens* into the middle Mississippi Valley, the kinship and commercial networks of communication and exchange established by merchants like Gabriel Cerré and their families, and the growing difficulty of procuring cheap merchandise and supplies from New Orleans all favoured the primacy of Montreal in the Illinois and trans-Mississippi fur trade.

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<sup>453</sup> “Memorial of François Carbonneaux to Congress, December 8, 1784,” in Alvord, ed. *Kaskaskia Records, 1778–1790*, 369.

<sup>454</sup> Horsman, “Great Britain and the Illinois Country,” 101.

When the Americans took control of the Illinois Country, they were confronted with similar logistical realities to those that the British had faced. It was much cheaper for Illinois merchants to trade with British outfits in the north or Spanish companies in the south than with American interests in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.<sup>455</sup> After returning from the Illinois Country in 1787, Joseph Parker wrote to Arthur St. Clair and explained how American traders were having trouble competing in the Illinois Country fur trade because of competition from British suppliers who shipped goods through American territory to Spanish Upper Louisiana.<sup>456</sup>

### Spanish Upper Louisiana

In the dying days of the Seven Years' War, France transferred the territories west of the Mississippi and New Orleans to Spain under the Treaty of Fontainebleau (1762). The agreement blocked British access to the trans-Mississippi west, but saddled Spain with the administrative and military responsibilities of overseeing an immense new territorial possession.<sup>457</sup> Much like Britain, Spain was slow to take possession of their new colony and did not arrive in St. Louis until the summer of 1767. Almost immediately, Captain Don Francisco Ríu initiated preferential policies, highlighted by restriction of the Missouri River trade to the exclusive use of Spanish officers.

In 1768, the French-speaking inhabitants, who represented the overwhelming majority of the population in the colony of Upper Louisiana, protested against the new regulations. Ríu quickly gave in and loosened the restrictions, but the damage had been

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<sup>455</sup> Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 285.

<sup>456</sup> "Joseph Parker to President St. Clair, New York, October 2, 1787," in Alvord, ed. *Kaskaskia Records, 1778–1790*, 410–411.

<sup>457</sup> John Francis Bannon, "The Spaniards and the Illinois Country 1762–1800," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 69, no. 2 (1976): 113–114.

done and he was subsequently removed in favour of Don Pedro Piernas, who took over as lieutenant governor in 1769. However, the more pressing demands of an uprising at New Orleans redirected focus away from Upper Louisiana. In 1768, the French-speaking population in New Orleans rose up against Governor Ulloa, sending him and his wife back to Spain. The next year, Spanish General Don Alexandro O'Reilly arrived to put down the revolt and restore order.<sup>458</sup> Piernas was quickly recalled to assist the general.

The Spanish may have taken possession of Upper Louisiana, but they were hardly in a position to administer it effectively. The former French commandant in the Illinois Country, St. Ange, remained the chief administrator of Spanish Upper Louisiana until 1770, when Piernas was finally able to return to St. Louis.<sup>459</sup> The installation of a Spanish lieutenant governor and commandant for Upper Louisiana made little discernable difference. As William Foley and David Rice state, "More than three decades of Spanish occupation would do little to alter St. Louis's distinctive French character."<sup>460</sup>

Similar to the British, who were concerned with trade flowing from the Illinois Country to New Orleans, the Spanish focused much of their attention on the traders operating out of Michilimackinac, Prairie du Chien, and Detroit. Spanish authorities were not the only ones who attempted to halt illegal trading by merchants from British and American territory. In 1773, a group under the command of Pierre Laclède Liguist confiscated the furs of Jean-Marie Ducharme, who was operating under a British

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>459</sup> William E. Foley and David Rice, *The First Chouteaus: River Barons of Early St. Louis* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 13–15.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 15.

license.<sup>461</sup> Laclède had come up from New Orleans and founded St. Louis in 1764. His commercial networks were in New Orleans with partner Gilbert Antoine de St. Maxent. They had come from France in the 1740s and 50s and formed Maxent, Laclède and Company. Maxent handled the importation of supplies from France to New Orleans and the exportation of furs, while Laclède occupied himself with the fur trade from the Arkansas to the Missouri Rivers, and the shipments of furs to New Orleans. Laclède was a Frenchman, but saw Ducharme as his competition. Thus, in some instances commercial interests trumped language and ethnicity, even if they were central to the creation and maintenance of many of the French commercial networks in the heart of North America. It is ironic that Laclède's stepson, Auguste Chouteau, would later covet that which Laclède was trying to repel by taking advantage of his marriage alliance with Gabriel Cerré's daughter, Marie-Thérèse, to exploit the northern trade networks.

The American Revolution gave Spanish colonial administrators immediate cause for concern. At the outbreak of the Revolution, colonial leaders were quick to make claims to lands in the interior of North America, but Congress assured Spain that it had no designs on its North American colonies.<sup>462</sup> This, however, did little to alleviate the concerns of Spanish colonial authorities who feared that a potential naval blockade of New Orleans would inevitably lead traders north to Canada for their supplies.<sup>463</sup> By 1779, the effects of imperial conflict and the American Revolution were being felt along the Mississippi. Goods were difficult to come by at New Orleans, prompting Lieutenant Governor Leyba to express concerns to his superiors that the shortage of supplies would

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<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>462</sup> Norman A. Graebner, "The Illinois Country and the Treaty of Paris of 1783," *Illinois Historical Journal* 78, no. 1 (1985): 5.

<sup>463</sup> Paul Chrisler Phillips, *The West in the Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (1913; reprint, Urbana, IL: Univeristy of Illinois, 1967), 19–20.

redirect trade to the British in the north.<sup>464</sup> At the end of the American Revolution in 1783, many of St. Louis's most prominent merchants were already doing business with merchants at Michilimackinac, Montreal, and London.<sup>465</sup>

Auguste Chouteau was at the forefront of this transition. By 1775, Laclède had fallen on hard times, and was working off debts owed to Maxent.<sup>466</sup> Chouteau began shipping furs under his own name and held the largest share of the Osage fur trade by the time Laclède passed away in 1778 on a return voyage from New Orleans.<sup>467</sup> Spanish Governor Francisco Luis Hector Carondelet later granted Chouteau a complete monopoly over the Osage trade between 1794 and 1800.<sup>468</sup> Chouteau began sending furs north to Montreal, and both the Spanish and Americans did little to stop it.<sup>469</sup>

The French Revolution and war in Europe during the 1790s only amplified concerns regarding trade supplies and access to European markets.<sup>470</sup> Merchants overwhelmingly chose to send their peltries to Britain rather than face the uncertainty and risk of shipping directly to Europe's continental ports. Moreover, two treaties signed in the 1790s, the Jay Treaty (1794) and the Treaty of San Lorenzo (1795), had a limited effect on the fur trade in North America.<sup>471</sup> The Jay Treaty was intended to govern trade and solidify the American-British boundary on the Great Lakes, while the

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<sup>464</sup> Foley and Rice, *The First Chouteaus*, 26.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>466</sup> Shirley Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark: The Story of the Chouteaus, the French Dynasty That Ruled America's Frontier* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Girroux, 2004), 72–75.

<sup>467</sup> Laclède died just before arriving at Arkansas Post. *Ibid.*, 75; Foley and Rice, *The First Chouteaus*, 21.

<sup>468</sup> John Francis McDermott, "Auguste Chouteau: First Citizen of Upper Louisiana," in *Frenchmen and French Ways in the Mississippi Valley*, ed. John Francis McDermott (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 5.

<sup>469</sup> Frederick A. Hodes, *Beyond the Frontier: A History of St. Louis to 1821* (Tuscon: Patrice Press, 2004), 159.

<sup>470</sup> Foley and Rice, *The First Chouteaus*, 72.

<sup>471</sup> The Jay Treaty was signed in 1794, but not put into effect until 1796. The Treaty of San Lorenzo was signed in 1795, but not ratified in the United States until 1796.

Treaty of San Lorenzo resulted in free navigation of the Mississippi. In theory, both should have favoured American trade, but little changed.<sup>472</sup> Some peltries still flowed to New Orleans, but the northern routes to Montreal increasingly dominated the trade.<sup>473</sup>

### Commerce

Auguste Chouteau continued to send large numbers of furs to Montreal between 1795 and 1805, using mostly voyageurs hired by British trading firms like Todd, McGill & Co. Auguste and his half-brother Pierre traded extensively with a variety of merchants and used several British and *Canadien* firms and traders to handle operations at Michilimackinac and Montreal. They regularly used British merchant Andrew Todd before his death in 1796, and then transferred their trading operations to Andrew's uncle, Isaac Todd.<sup>474</sup> The individuals or companies working for Chouteau were responsible for dealing with numerous traders, voyageurs, suppliers, creditors, and debtors. Auguste and Pierre Chouteau's account with Andrew Todd for 1794 and 1795 shows that the St. Louis merchants used a variety of suppliers.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> Paul Chrisler Phillips argues that after the treaty of San Lorenzo, American trade increased, but it certainly did not overtake *Canadien* and British trade in the short term. As stated above, the Jay Treaty was supposed to regulate the border on the Great Lakes between British North America and the United States, more specifically to govern trade across the border. However, despite provisions to prevent arms from crossing the border, merchants continued to send guns and gunpowder as trade commodities from British to American territory. Paul Chrisler Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, vol. 2 (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 122–124, 215.

<sup>473</sup> Through an examination of the import records from London, La Rochelle, and Rouen, Eccles argues that Montreal had achieved dominance as the primary fur trade center in North America by the first half of the eighteenth century through an examination of the import records from London, La Rochelle, and Rouen. W. J. Eccles, "The Fur Trade and Eighteenth-Century Imperialism," *William and Mary Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1983): 351.

<sup>474</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 1 of 40, 00908

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, 00778.

Name	Type	Name	Type
Mr. Loisel	Merchant	Myer Michaels	Merchant
Michel Grenière	Merchant	Seymore McDonell	Merchant
LaPistole	Merchant	Joseph l'Espérance	Voyageur
Mr. Bugnion	Merchant	Pierre St. Denis	Voyageur
Mr. Baradonne	Merchant	Pierre Maurice	Voyageur
François Lajeunesse	Merchant	Antoine l'Hyvernois	Voyageur
Mr. Bleakley	Merchant	Pierre Samson	Voyageur
Mr. Arundel	Merchant	Paul Lesage	Voyageur
Jacques Chaurette	Merchant	Jean-Baptiste Rielle	Voyageur
Antoine Martin	Merchant	Antoine Desjarlais	Voyageur
Jean-Baptiste Tabeau	Merchant	Laviolette	Voyageur
Collet	Merchant	Todd, McGill & Co.	Company

Figure 13. Suppliers and Voyageurs listed in Auguste and Pierre Chouteau's Account with Andrew Todd 1794–1795<sup>476</sup>

Andrew Todd settled accounts with various merchants and assumed the costs of supplies, which he then billed to Chouteau (See Figure 13). In 1795, supplies included two new canoes, two sails, sixty pounds of lard, twelve *minots* of wheat, four-and-a-half pounds of sugar, and one pound of tobacco, to name a few. Some furs sent to Montreal were used to offset the costs of expeditions and supplies and to pay off debts, while the remainder was shipped to England for auction. Public auctions at coffee houses became the main venue for selling furs to Montreal's most prominent merchants. There are occasional references to *habitants* buying furs, which points to a broader local market, but there is little indication whether these purchases took place at coffee houses or some other location.<sup>477</sup>

Success in the fur trade depended on numerous individuals, the availability of supplies, good weather, access to capital and credit, and, most importantly, good prices

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

<sup>477</sup> In letter addressed to Auguste Chouteau in 1804, Josiah Bleakley discussed the difficulties experienced that year in selling buffalo robes to the *habitants* due to a poor harvest. MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 4 of 40, 00602.

in European markets.<sup>478</sup> When any of these broke down it caused severe disruption to the trade, delayed revenues for merchants, and resulted in higher interest rates on debts owed to suppliers, forcing some companies and partnerships to fold and individuals to declare bankruptcy. Returning fur trade expeditions had a short window of several weeks during the late summer and early fall to ship peltries from the port at Quebec City to London. The later in the year that one shipped, the higher the insurance costs became due to changing weather patterns, storms, and the increased risk of launching trans-Atlantic voyages through the ice forming on the St. Lawrence in early winter.<sup>479</sup>

In 1800, low water levels on the Ottawa River delayed Chouteau's canoes, and by the time they arrived at Montreal the prospect of shipping the peltries at a profit proved untenable.<sup>480</sup> Faced with prohibitive insurance rates, Isaac Todd had a choice between selling them at Montreal, storing Chouteau's furs in Montreal—risking their ruin or devaluation over the long winter—or sending them across the Atlantic at a loss. In March 1804, John Askin and Richard Pattinson wrote to Auguste Chouteau from Montreal, giving a full account of his deerskins that had been sold in London the previous year. However, they also informed Chouteau that only the first sixty-four bundles had been sent because the remaining bundles arrived too late. Askin and Pattinson consulted with Gabriel Cerré and Philippe Leprohon, and then sold the rest of the furs in Montreal.<sup>481</sup> In September later that same year, Josiah Bleakley wrote to Auguste Chouteau to inform him that accounts from the previous year's sales in London

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<sup>478</sup> Montreal merchants regularly updated Auguste Chouteau regarding prices in London and which furs were selling well. MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00339.

<sup>479</sup> Ice became a major obstacle in the fall for ships trying to leave the port at Quebec City. When winter set in, the port was completely enclosed in ice, preventing transatlantic shipping.

<sup>480</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00852.

<sup>481</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 4 of 40, 00316.

still had not been entirely collected. After discussing matters with one of Chouteau's agents, Myer Michaels, they decided that it would be less risky and in Chouteau's best interest to sell his furs in Montreal instead.<sup>482</sup> Pattinson and Bleakley were both supplying Chouteau in 1804 and made pitches to secure a commitment from the St. Louis merchant to supply him with British goods.<sup>483</sup> However, Chouteau was careful not to tie his business too closely to any one firm or individual. In 1805, he purchased goods from London through Montreal merchant George Gillespie.<sup>484</sup>

Between 1795 and 1805, Chouteau used Andrew Todd and Co., Grant, Campion and Co., Grant, Laframboise and Co., Todd, McGill and Co., Richard Pattinson and Co., and an assortment of individual traders to procure supplies and sell his furs. The diversification and distribution of Chouteau's trade interests epitomized the fur trade of the second half of the eighteenth century, which was in constant flux. Partnerships were formed and broken with remarkable regularity as companies merged and dissolved.<sup>485</sup> Thus, holding a diverse portfolio with numerous firms and traders was a way to attempt to protect trade interests.

Despite efforts by merchants like Chouteau to avoid having all their eggs in one basket, there were simply too many variables to mitigate risk in the fur trade completely. A simple case of a bad year of hunting or low prices in Europe could easily put a fur trade merchant in the red, even if only temporarily. For example, Auguste Chouteau's

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<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 00602.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., 00625, 00652.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid., 00853.

<sup>485</sup> By the start of the nineteenth century, a number of large companies began to squeeze out the smaller partnerships. The XY and Northwest Company merged in 1804 to compete with the Hudson's Bay Company in the northwest fur trade, and the New Michichilimackinac Company was established in 1806 to protect the interests of Montreal merchants in the Great Lakes trade. Finally, the American Fur Company was formed in 1808 and quickly gained a monopoly on the Missouri fur trade.

account with Andrew Todd for 1794–1795 showed that he had run a year–over–year deficit of 57,189 livres.<sup>486</sup> Profits from sales in London took over a year to turn up on the books in Montreal or St. Louis, and London suppliers similarly had to wait on transatlantic shipments to arrive in order to get paid. Merchants were usually given a year or more to pay for supplies and services. However, creditors could and did lose patience when payments were delayed. When Chouteau's account with London supplier Schneider and Company went unpaid for several years, it prompted the firm to inform Chouteau that while they still held him in good esteem, they were turning the account over to American merchant John Jacob Astor for collection in North America.<sup>487</sup>

Astor, a German immigrant to the United States, operated in the American fur trade out of New York. He began making trips to Montreal in 1788 in order to purchase furs for shipment to Britain.<sup>488</sup> Astor bought a portion of Chouteau's furs at Montreal in the autumn of 1799 and wrote directly to the St. Louis merchant from New York in January 1800. Astor complained to Chouteau that his frequent trips to Montreal were costly and tied up three months of his time each year. The New York merchant proposed that Chouteau ship his furs directly to New York in return for supplies from Britain at better prices than those procured at Montreal.<sup>489</sup> However, the St. Louis fur baron was not yet ready to make the jump from Montreal to New York. Transplanted *Canadien* merchant Charles Gratiot was more than eager to join Astor, suggesting that he could handle the St. Louis side of the business. However, no partnership was

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<sup>486</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 1 of 40, 00778.

<sup>487</sup> Foley and Rice, *The First Chouteaus*, 83. According to a receipt on the back of a note dated in 1803, Chouteau eventually paid Astor. MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00263.

<sup>488</sup> David Sievert Lavender, *The Fist in the Wilderness* (1964; reprint, Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>489</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00563.

formally struck between the two. According to Paul Chrisler Phillips, “Astor did not continue negotiations with Gratiot, for without Chouteau, the prospects for success were dim.”<sup>490</sup> Chouteau refused Astor, who was left with little choice but to continue traveling to Canada. It is not clear whether Astor had received word of Chouteau’s refusal to do business by the fall of 1800 when he purchased 1,955 pounds of Chouteau’s beaver pelts at auction in Montreal.<sup>491</sup> The French and British connections that tied St. Louis and Montreal together proved remarkably durable. Even after Astor formed the American Fur Company in 1808 and began operating in the Missouri trade in 1817 through agent Ramsay Crooks, the company continued to hire its voyageurs and launch expeditions from Montreal.<sup>492</sup>

### Social Cohesion

Most business was conducted through extended kinship networks. In the absence of a direct family connection, a business or personal association with a family became crucial. Montreal merchant Toussaint Pothier sent several letters in 1779 to prominent trader François Baby of Quebec City, requesting assistance in obtaining a southern trading license.<sup>493</sup> Pothier used his personal relationship with François Baby’s brother, Jacques Baby dit Dupéron of Detroit, to encourage François to help him.<sup>494</sup> He generously offered to bring to Detroit the flour that François Baby’s brother had

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<sup>490</sup> Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 243.

<sup>491</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00846.

<sup>492</sup> Nicole St-Onge, SSHRC Standard Grant, 2007–2010. “Trade, Travel and Tradition: St. Lawrence Valley Engagés to the American Fur Company, 1818–1840.” In collaboration with William Swagerty (University of the Pacific, CA).

<sup>493</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U10077, mf 5909, Toussaint Pothier à François Baby, Montréal, 13 septembre 1779; Baby Collection, P0058, U/10078, mf 5909, Toussaint Pothier à François Baby, l’Assomption, 26 septembre 1779.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

requested if he were awarded a license.<sup>495</sup> A month later, Pothier was granted the trading license. The cost for Baby's assistance was a six-year old black horse of good quality, bought for eighty piastres.<sup>496</sup> This was a considerable sum for a horse worth ten piastres, but, according to Pothier, it was a steal compared with the sellers' original asking price of one hundred piastres. Pothier undoubtedly saw the hefty price and high quality of the horse as a way of remaining in the good graces of an influential merchant in Quebec and his family in Detroit.

Staying in the good graces of merchants who traveled between the St. Lawrence and Mississippi was crucial as they did much more than simply help organize fur trade expeditions. They assisted individuals in the management of their personal affairs by representing them as needed in various locations throughout the French river world. Gabriel Cerré was the epitome of the middleman merchant, spending most of his time traveling between the St. Lawrence and Mississippi Valleys. Originally from Montreal, he settled in Kaskaskia before moving across the river into Spanish territory, where he operated out of St. Louis on the west side of the Mississippi.<sup>497</sup> He regularly conducted business in British and American territory, making frequent trips to Kaskaskia on the east side of the Mississippi and Montreal on the St. Lawrence. Cerré used his kinship ties to the Chouteau family of St. Louis and the Panet family of Montreal and Quebec City to facilitate business transactions and handle the affairs of numerous French-speaking inhabitants. As one of Kaskaskia's richest citizens, and later as one of St. Louis' most prominent traders, his signature graced many of the notarial documents of

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<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U10079, mf 5909, Toussaint Pothier à François Baby, l'Assomption, 21 octobre 1779.

<sup>497</sup> Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673–1818*, 346.

the region. However, it was his frequent position as power of attorney that best illustrates the crucial role that he and other merchants played in maintaining the French river world.

In 1767, Pierre Lacroix dit Roberge from St. Pierre les Becquets made a trip to Montreal to give power of attorney to Gabriel Cerré to help settle the estate of his recently departed brother, Jean-Baptiste.<sup>498</sup> The Roberge family had already been in the St. Lawrence Valley for over a hundred years. Around the middle of the seventeenth century, Pierre Lacroix dit Roberge made the journey from Normandy and established himself in Canada on the Île d'Orléans.<sup>499</sup> Pierre's second marriage to Marie LeFrançois in 1684 produced seven children who eventually left the island and its nearby parishes to relocate to the parishes of St. Joseph de Beauce, Beauport, Québec, Neuville, and Boucherville.<sup>500</sup> One of the seven children, Jean-Baptiste, married Marie-Angélique Faucher dit Chateauvert in 1722 and settled in the parish of Neuville, where they had two boys and two girls.<sup>501</sup> Pierre, the second son, married in Neuville, but established himself further upriver in the Parish of St. Pierre les Becquets. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Roberge family had developed family connections throughout much of the St. Lawrence River Valley as they moved upriver over several generations. However, the family was ill equipped to handle family affairs beyond the St. Lawrence, and required intermediaries to assist them.

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<sup>498</sup> BANQ, Greffes des Notaires, P. Panet de Méru (1755–1778), 5 August 1767.

<sup>499</sup> PRDH Individual 65264. Although it is listed in PRDH that the last name is Lacroix Roberge, other documents make it likely that the name was Roberge dit Lacroix. I have chosen to use the PRDH standard.

<sup>500</sup> PRDH Family 5419.

<sup>501</sup> PRDH Family 13915.

Pierre gave the power of attorney to Cerré on behalf of himself, his remaining siblings Marie–Madeleine and Marie–Félicité, and their families. All three siblings were illiterate and, regardless of the circumstances, would have needed some assistance in settling their brother's estate. However, the fact that Jean–Baptiste died on the Mississippi River posed particular difficulties for the family. The late Jean–Baptiste had been involved in the southern fur trade, making trips to the Illinois Country and Louisiana. Money owed to him had to be collected from as far away as New Orleans to cover debts owed in Montreal to merchant Jean Orillat.<sup>502</sup> Pierre and his sisters relied on Cerré to settle the accounts and handle the estate of their late brother because the merchant had the necessary business and personal contacts throughout the French river world. It is not clear whether Cerré went to New Orleans himself or hired one of his many contacts to represent his interests as power of attorney, but what is certain is that this process took several years.<sup>503</sup>

In 1771, Cerré finally rendered an account of the succession of Jean–Baptiste Lacroix dit Roberge. It appears likely that Gabriel Cerré had had extensive business dealings with the late Jean–Baptiste, as he was paid half the recovered 3560 livres. Costs for a voyage to New Orleans, debts owed to Jean Orillat in Montreal, and an advance that had already been paid out to the family were also deducted from the account. There were also furs in New Orleans that had not yet been sold, and Cerré decided that these would not be included in the succession until they could be auctioned off. For Gabriel Cerré and Jean Orillat, this was largely about tying up loose ends in the

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<sup>502</sup> BANQ, Greffes des Notaires, P. Panet de Méru (1755–1778), 22 May 1771.

<sup>503</sup> The account indicated that money was paid for a man to travel to New Orleans, but there is no indication if this was for someone to accompany Gabriel Cerré or if this was a man hired by Cerré to collect moneys owing on the account of Jean–Baptiste Roberge in New Orleans. BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, P. Panet de Méru (1755–1778), 22 May 1771.

fur trade, but for the Roberge family the power of attorney given to Cerré was about managing succession rights and handling family affairs over long distances.

Business and personal affairs were rarely mutually exclusive, and giving a merchant a power of attorney often combined a crucial legal–financial responsibility with larger familial obligations. Many of these agreements were local in nature, such as Marie Vincesne’s request in 1778 that Cerré be given power of attorney to handle the inheritance of her two children in Kaskaskia.<sup>504</sup> However, as we have seen with the case of the Roberge family, Cerré and other merchants frequently represented people throughout the French river world. In 1771, Gabriel Cerré represented Nicolas Barsalou to settle family business with his father, Jean–Baptiste Barsalou, in Montreal. Nicolas had established himself in the Illinois Country, marrying Marie–Madeleine Lepage dit Lefrançois at Cahokia in 1768. By using Cerré as his power of attorney, he could handle family business in Montreal without having to make the return voyage.<sup>505</sup> Similarly, in 1772 Cerré acted as power of attorney for Jean–Baptiste Hubert dit Lacroix in Montreal. Jean–Baptiste had married into the Aubuchon dit l’Espérance family at Cahokia around the same time that his father back in Canada passed away. Cerré presented the power of attorney documentation to Jean–Baptiste’s brother Jacques in order to represent Jean–Baptiste’s interests in the family succession.<sup>506</sup> In 1783, Cerré was given power of attorney for three Kaskaskian residents to help settle the estates of deceased family

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<sup>504</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 1 of 40, 00178.

<sup>505</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, P. Panet de Méru (1755–1778), 6 March 1771; BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, P. Mézières (1755–1778), 12 October 1772.

<sup>506</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, A. Robin (1760–1808), 26 October 1772; PRDH Family 19662, Individual 92592, Individual 92591.

members back in Canada.<sup>507</sup> He represented Geneviève Chavallié and Jean-Baptiste Montureur in Montreal, as well as Jacques Bauche dit Moransy on the Ile d'Orléans.<sup>508</sup>

The terms of service for a power of attorney could vary from individual to individual, but *habitants* usually paid for these services. The payment could be anything from land or slaves to travel costs and a percentage of the settled estate. Representing people throughout the French river world was a valuable and marketable service. This legal form of representation was rooted in French civil law and customs based on the *Coutume de Paris*, but it was also fundamentally based on unwritten and broadly understood legal conventions of the French river world.<sup>509</sup> None of the individuals represented by Cerré in 1783 signed their contracts. Instead, they followed the standard practice of illiterate community members by marking an X on the contracts, agreeing to the terms, and granting powers of attorney after having had the contract read to them aloud.<sup>510</sup> This highlights a crucial element underlying this form of representation. As noted earlier, most inhabitants of the French river world were illiterate, with the exception of a small group of merchants, clergymen, and civic officials. Yet they participated actively in this system of legal representation, showing remarkable faith in the power of contracts that they could not read and trust in the people who transported them.

Handling one's personal affairs over long distances required an intricate network of communication and mutual understanding. Many individuals could be involved in a single transaction. Take, for instance, the case of Michel Antaya of Kaskaskia. His

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<sup>507</sup> KM 83:4:15:1, 83:5:30:1, 83:6:23:1.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid.

<sup>509</sup> Stuart Banner, "Written Law and Unwritten Norms in Colonial St. Louis," *Law and History Review* 14, no. 1 (1996): 53.

<sup>510</sup> KM 83:4:15:1, 83:5:30:1, 83:6:23:1.

father, voyageur Jacques Antaya, represented him while collecting a note for two hundred livres from *Canadien* merchant Joseph Hyrague. Hyrague himself was acting on behalf of François Cathara of Kaskaskia, and the debt was paid and certified by Notary Monforton at Michilimackinac in 1778.<sup>511</sup>

Given the difficulties and constraints of distance and geography, it was sometimes necessary to subcontract the power of attorney to other individuals, in essence creating an extremely complex form of third-party representation. In July 1788, Michel Voyer signed a document in St. Louis that gave Gabriel Cerré power of attorney to handle the estate of Voyer's recently departed parents back in Quebec City.<sup>512</sup> Charged with this responsibility, Cerré contracted out the task two months later in Chicago to his Montreal agent, Jean-Philippe Leprohon.<sup>513</sup> By November, the power of attorney originally given to Cerré had changed hands once again, this time in Montreal, where Leprohon contracted it out to Pierre-Louis Panet, Cerré's son-in-law, who had important family connections in Quebec City.<sup>514</sup> In December 1789, approximately one-and-a-half years from the date that Michel Voyer signed his original power of attorney with Cerré, the process had come full circle, as he received a letter from said merchant detailing the settlement of his family's estate.<sup>515</sup> The cases of Michel Antaya and Michel Voyer illustrate a complex and highly integrated system of social and economic interaction involving vast distances and numerous individuals, where

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<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, 78:11:26:1

<sup>512</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, E48, mf 1605-1606, Procuration de Michel Voyer à Gabriel Cerré au sujet de la succession de ses père et mère, St-Louis (Ill.), 23 juillet 1788.

<sup>513</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, E50, mf 1605-1606, Substitution de procuration par Gabriel Cerré à Jean Philippe Leprohon, 3 septembre 1788.

<sup>514</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, E52, mf 1605-1606, Substitution de procuration par Jean Philippe Leprohon à Pierre Louis Panet, 17 novembre 1788.

<sup>515</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2525, mf 4406, Cerré à Michel Voyer, St-Louis (Ill.), 6 décembre 1789.

commercial and kin connections were woven together under widely understood conventions of legal representation to maintain the fabric of French North America.

This sophisticated network, however, did not always run smoothly. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, Louis Pouliot died in the Illinois Country.<sup>516</sup> In July of 1774, Louis's father, Pierre Pouliot, gave power of attorney to transplanted *Canadien* merchant Joseph-Marie Papin dit Lachance in order to settle his late son's affairs in the Illinois Country.<sup>517</sup> Without any children to inherit his estate, Louis's wealth was initially set to go to his father as sole inheritor. However, Pierre passed away only a few months after granting the power of attorney, complicating matters slightly.<sup>518</sup> A new arrangement was drawn up to have the settled account remanded to Louis's younger brother, Nicolas, and for the estate to be divided twelve ways among his remaining siblings.<sup>519</sup> Settling the Pouliot account depended on numerous individuals. Although Joseph-Marie Papin dit Lachance had been contracted with the power of attorney, it was Gabriel Cerré who traveled to Canada where he transferred the account to his son-in-law and lawyer, Pierre-Louis Panet. Finally, Panet oversaw the final transfer to the Pouliot family in Quebec City.

Transferring power of attorney was a regular practice, and a necessary one. It ensured that even if the merchant contracted to act as the power of attorney was unable to make the voyage himself, he could use his commercial and kin networks to settle accounts and remit a final account of the estate. While these processes were complex

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<sup>516</sup> It is likely that Louis died in 1774, the same year that the power of attorney was signed, but there is no confirmation of this. BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, J.-A. Panet (1772-1786), 30 March 1784.

<sup>517</sup> Although the power of attorney was documented and signed in St. Louis, there is no indication that Pierre Pouliot was there to sign it.

<sup>518</sup> PRDH Individual 73886, Family 86783.

<sup>519</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, J.-A. Panet (1772-1786), 30 March 1784.

and often took years to sort out—it took ten years to settle the Pouliot account and the heirs to receive their inheritance—it also meant that families could conduct business throughout the French river world with a fairly high degree of confidence that family wealth would not be completely lost if a child, sibling, spouse, or parent passed away far from the rest of the family. Thus, even those family members who had not traveled throughout the French river world were drawn in by networks of communication and exchange that facilitated the maintenance of family ties, succession rights, and family wealth.

Despite the regularity that powers of attorney were used and transferred throughout the French river world, confirming one's claims to a deceased family member's estate could still be challenging. Such was the case for Marguerite Bizet of Canada, who had given power of attorney to Gabriel Cerré in order to claim a share of the estate of her late brother Guillaume Bizet in St. Louis.<sup>520</sup> The Bizet family was the product of Paul–Daniel Bizet's three marriages and eleven children. Guillaume's half-brother, and youngest of the Bizet children, Charles paid for the funeral expenses in St. Louis in 1773, but was not involved in making claims for his fellow siblings on the estate.<sup>521</sup>

Instead, Guillaume's siblings used Cerré to represent them while the estate was being settled.<sup>522</sup> For example, in March 1773 Marie–Anne, Marie–Louise, and Catherine Bizet joined their respective husbands Jacques Leduc, Jean–Baptiste Flamand, and Jean–Baptiste Biron in contracting a joint power of attorney with Cerré regarding

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<sup>520</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 1 of 40, 00078.

<sup>521</sup> KM 76:1:12:1; PRDH Family 18047; MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 1 of 40, 00075.

<sup>522</sup> PRDH Individual 80141, Family 12199, Individual 30128, Family 18047, Family 32346.

their brother's estate.<sup>523</sup> Two months later, Angélique Bizet and her husband Joseph Tessier gave Cerré power of attorney in Montreal.<sup>524</sup> In 1775, a new power of attorney was arranged with Cerré, again for Angélique and Joseph, but this time including Angélique's sister Marguerite.<sup>525</sup> Marguerite was not only seeking what was owed to her from her brother's estate, but also an additional 1200 livres that was allegedly still owed to her from the estate of their late father, Paul-Daniel Bizet. The executor of Guillaume Bizet's estate, Laclède Ligest, challenged Marguerite's claim in 1775. He argued that an old letter from the late Guillaume was the only evidence brought forward and was insufficient to prove such a claim.<sup>526</sup> There was no indication of how Cerré was supposed to establish that the claim was well founded, and one can imagine that obtaining and transporting documentation over vast distances was both difficult and costly. In August 1776, Marie-Anne, Louise, Catherine, and their husbands ceded their succession rights in Montreal in front of Gabriel Cerré, followed one month later by Angélique and Marguerite.<sup>527</sup>

Louis Baby encountered a similar problem to that of Marguerite Bizet while using letters to make claims on an estate. Legal processes were widely adhered to and it was exceedingly difficult to proceed with settling an estate if the heirs were not present or improperly represented. Consequently, family estates sometimes remained unsettled for months and even years as the executor waited for an heir or their representative with

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<sup>523</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, P. Panet de Méru (1755–1778), Montreal, 29 March 1773.

<sup>524</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, A. Foucher (1774–1780), Montreal, 17 May 1773.

<sup>525</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, A. Foucher (1774–1780), Montreal, 9 May 1775.

<sup>526</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 1 of 40, 00078.

<sup>527</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, A. Foucher (1774–1780), Montreal, 20 August 1776; BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, A. Foucher (1774–1780), Montreal, 2 September 1776.

a power of attorney to return from abroad.<sup>528</sup> A frustrated Louis Baby wrote from Arkansas Post to Auguste Chouteau in 1794 to explain the difficulties that he had encountered over the previous two years in trying to ensure that his share of his uncle's estate was transferred to his mother.<sup>529</sup> After being informed that letters were not sufficient to conduct this business, he requested and received the legal forms from Joseph Perrault of Montreal and asked Chouteau to name someone trustworthy to handle this task for him.<sup>530</sup> Louis Baby also requested that Chouteau collect several notes that were owed to Baby, and asked Chouteau to procure passage to Arkansas for Baby's mother if she so wished it.<sup>531</sup> Family responsibilities and commercial interests were rarely mutually exclusive.

While powers of attorney were routinely granted to represent the interests of individuals or groups when someone died and family estates needed to be settled, they were also used for a variety of other functions. For example, they were also used when individuals wished to relinquish or sell off succession rights and property after emigrating from Canada. In 1772, Gabriel Cerré sold Joseph–Antoine Crevier dit St. François's seigneurial rights for him in Montreal. Joseph–Antoine was the only son of the Joseph Crevier and stood to become the seigneur of St. François. Joseph–Antoine sold his seigneurial rights back to his father through Cerré.<sup>532</sup> This was quite similar to what Cerré had done when he relinquished his succession rights to family lands in Canada after moving to the Illinois Country.

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<sup>528</sup> KM 70:11:24:1.

<sup>529</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 1 of 40, 00752.

<sup>530</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 1 of 40, 00752, Arkansas, 27 May 1794.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> BANQ, Greffes de Notaires, A. Robin (1760–1808), 28 October 1772; PRDH Family 38215, Individual 161773. Joseph senior died four years later in 1776.

### Conclusion

Although this chapter focused on connections between the Middle Mississippi and St. Lawrence Valleys, these forms of representation went well beyond this single corridor. For example, they allowed Mme Trépanier of New Orleans and Antoine Pillet dit La Sonde of the Appelloussas to be represented in Kaskaskia in order to settle their family estates.<sup>533</sup> The French river world did not conform to the geopolitical boundaries envisaged by colonial administrators, and yet too often expressions of a culture of mobility have been overshadowed. Should we find it odd to discover that in 1774 Philippe La Chenay and his wife Marguerite Texier of Kaskaskia requested that Gabriel Cerré have masses said for them in Montreal after their deaths?<sup>534</sup> Perhaps, given these vast continental networks, it is not all that surprising that in 1779 Auguste Chouteau of St. Louis sent a gift of six marten and one black fox furs from Hudson Bay to the wife of Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, the governor of Louisiana in New Orleans.<sup>535</sup> In a French river world where mobility was a salient feature, these examples stand out, not because of their exceptionalism, but rather because of their normalcy.

Third-party legal representation was not exclusive to French-speaking inhabitants in North America. British and Anglo Americans frequently used powers of attorney to settle business and personal affairs. However, in the absence of geopolitical stability in the heart of North America, legal representation proved crucial to maintaining social cohesion in the French river world. It protected family and commercial interests over a large geographical expanse, providing a security blanket for

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<sup>533</sup> KM 74:6:12:1, 74:10:31:1.

<sup>534</sup> KM 75:8:2:1.

<sup>535</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 000330.

those who relocated from Canada. Networks of communication and exchange created and maintained by merchants and voyageurs proved to be the backbone of this system and made legal representation over long distances possible. The result was that merchants became social conduits, tying together individuals from throughout the French river world. Through these legal processes, entire families in Canada were able to come in contact with the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana without ever actually going there. Likewise, individuals who had emigrated from Canada were able to maintain contact with family and friends without having to return. The result was a collective mental map, born of both the lived experience of merchants and voyageurs and the people they represented throughout the French river world.

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## Chapter Four

### Reflections in the Mirror: French Travel Narratives and the French River World

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Thus far, this study has dealt primarily with events on the ground, which is to say the day-to-day activities of French-speaking inhabitants, merchants, and voyageurs. It has examined how merchants and voyageurs tied together vast territories, representing peoples and transporting goods, in order to maintain a French river world in the North American interior. This chapter examines narratives created by travelers from France who visited the interior during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. More specifically, it examines travel narratives produced by three Frenchmen, Victor Collot, Nicolas de Finiels, and Constantin François de Chasseboeuf Comte de Volney.<sup>536</sup> Their travel journals, reports, and surveys provide valuable contemporary observations on the geography, commerce, peoples, and history of the French river world.

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<sup>536</sup> Although I examined over twenty travel narratives produced between 1763 and 1805, these three were chosen because they provided the most detailed ethnographies of the French-speaking population in the heart of North America. Many of the reports and surveys provided only a cursory discussion of the peoples of North America and focused more on botany. Others dealt primarily with the Ohio Valley, the thirteen colonies, or specifically Lower Louisiana. The notable absence to my list of three is Perrin du Lac, whose travel account has been questioned and is generally thought to be a partial copy of the writings of Jean-Baptiste Truteau and Jacques d'Église (see W. Raymond Wood, *Prologue to Lewis and Clark: The Mackay and Evans Expedition* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 82). Paul Des Ruisseaux also wrote a short mémoire of the Illinois Country, but he was a transplanted *Canadien* who eventually settled at Kaskaskia. See Paul L. Stevens, "'One of the Most Beautiful Regions of the World': Paul Des Ruisseaux's Mémoire of the Wabash-Illinois Country in 1777," *Indiana Magazine of History* 83, no. 4 (1987). For further information on travelers in the Ohio Valley, see Martin Galvin, "French Travelers in the Ohio Valley, 1788-92," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 59, no. 4 (1976).

This chapter focuses on the ethnographic element of the travel journals, reports, and surveys as they pertain to the French-speaking inhabitants in the heart of North America. Writing about *moeurs étrangères* was a long-standing tradition in French travel literature and the travel narratives examined in this chapter were no exception.<sup>537</sup> As outsiders, Frenchmen from France openly sought to classify and define the “other,” dedicating entire sections of their narratives to the manners, customs, and social behaviours of the established French-speaking communities in the heart of North America. Edward Watts argues that there was an important difference between the French-speaking inhabitants of North America and the travelers and surveyors who came from France. He suggests that many of the continental French writers lacked formal ties to this French river world, and were separated from it politically and ideologically by the events of the French Revolution of 1789.<sup>538</sup> As such, they perceived the established French-speaking population as a pre-1763 French holdover in the heart of North America.

According to Watts, French travel writers and surveyors produced a standard discourse similar to those of antebellum American writers. Yet the French travel narratives written at the end of the eighteenth and start of the nineteenth centuries were different from their American counterparts in that they showed a certain nostalgia for a lost empire and a desire to understand people who were still thought of as being loyal to

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<sup>537</sup> Wendelin Guentner, “Aspects génériques du récit de voyage français: l’utile dulci,” *Australian Journal of French Studies* 32, no. 2 (1995): 137; Gordon M. Sayre, *Les Sauvages Américains: Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 114.

<sup>538</sup> Edward Watts, *In This Remote Country: French Colonial Culture in the Anglo-American Imagination, 1780–1860* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 15.

the *fleur de lis*.<sup>539</sup> This is part of what drew me to these narratives—they were about French-speaking peoples who were in one sense familiar, yet also foreign.

In an era of post-colonial historical writing, one can question the usefulness of these travel narratives as historical sources because of their outsider perspective.<sup>540</sup> However, it is precisely because these journals provide an outsider perspective that I regard them as not only useful, but also crucial to this study. Their value is not in their ability to depict real events or truth, but rather in the construction of the narratives themselves and what they reflect. Hayden White argues that a narrativizing discourse involves the removal of the narrator so that events appear to tell themselves, thereby providing an air of objectivity.<sup>541</sup> These French travel narratives most definitely fit the description of a narrativizing discourse. However, as White also notes, “Where, in any account of reality, narrativity is present, we can be sure that morality or a moralizing impulse is present too.”<sup>542</sup> What, then, do we do when this moralizing lacks any immediately discernable consistency? Or, perhaps more importantly, how do we interpret conflicts and contradictions in the narratives that may arise from this moralizing process?

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, French travel narratives regarding the American interior rarely described a cohesive French-speaking population. Rather, they commented on numerous French-speaking peoples, including *Canadiens*, métis, Louisiana Creoles, Acadians, non-descript French-speaking

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<sup>539</sup> Durand Echeverria, *Mirage in the West: A History of the French Image of American Society to 1815* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 192.

<sup>540</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>541</sup> Hayden White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 7–8.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

inhabitants, and newly arrived French from France. Each narrative embodied a wide-ranging series of overlapping characteristics and produced a seemingly endless set of commonalities and contradictions. The two most common categories in the narratives were *Canadiens* and non-descript French-speaking inhabitants. This chapter argues that the contradictions found in ethnographic depictions of *Canadiens* and non-descript French-speaking inhabitants were, in fact, reflective of French travelers' efforts to understand the French river world.<sup>543</sup> These travel narratives act not only as a tacit acknowledgement of the French river world, but also reveal salient features of that world when juxtaposed with the events on the ground that were discussed in the first three chapters.

### The Historical Legacy of *Canadiens*

The term *Canadien* appeared intermittently in various travel narratives regarding the Illinois Country, the Ohio Valley, and Upper Louisiana. In many of these narratives, the *Canadiens* embodied a set of values, a way of life, and a specific history. Volney's work, *Tableau du Climat et du Sol des Etats Unis d'Amérique*, depicted a *Canadien* who sought liberation and freedom by regularly mixing with aboriginal peoples.<sup>544</sup> In Volney's narrative, an American, Mr. Wells, informed him that Americans looked down

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<sup>543</sup> Similarly, French émigrés wrote narratives about the United States at the end of the eighteenth and start of the nineteenth centuries that were highly contradictory and combined ideas of progress and retrogression, economic success and moral and intellectual failure. See Echeverria, *Mirage in the West*, 190–91. For an overview of how French views of the United States changed throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see François Furet, "De L'homme Sauvage À L'homme Historique: L'expérience Américaine Dans La Culture Française," *Annales* 33, no. 4 (1978).

<sup>544</sup> C.-F. Volney, *Tableau du climat et du sol des Etats-Unis d'Amérique, suivi d'éclaircissemens sur la Floride, sur la colonie française au Scioto, sur quelques colonies canadiennes et sur les sauvages* (Paris: Courcier, 1803), 1: 448. Volney recounted that he was unable to find a *Canadien* interpreter and so used Mr. Wells. According to Volney, Mr. Wells had been raised by the *sauvages* since the age of thirteen and had learned many of their dialects.

on this type of mixing.<sup>545</sup> The theme of the *Canadien* as being connected to aboriginals recurred frequently in the travel narratives. Louis Dubroca argued that the *Canadiens* had saved the native inhabitants of Upper Louisiana from the Iroquois, and that the strong contemporary relationship between French and aboriginal peoples was produced through years of peaceful coexistence in Canada.<sup>546</sup> He reasoned that this historical precedent was the impetus for intermarriage with natives, writing, “L’habitude qu’ils avoient prise au Canada de vivre avec des sauvages, les engagea à épouser sans peine les filles des Arkansas, et ces alliances eurent les suites les plus heureuses.”<sup>547</sup> While the French-speaking population of the French river world was diverse, it was still largely made up of *Canadiens*, either newly arrived from the St. Lawrence Valley or at most a generation or two removed. This fact was not lost on the French travelers, who attempted to reflect this history in their narratives to varying degrees of success. In 1802, Berquin Duvallon described an Illinois Country settlement that had been established more than fifty years earlier by what he described as “une peuplade de Français Canadiens.”<sup>548</sup> Similarly, Dubroca commented on how, historically, the colonists of the Louisiana territory had been made up of a combination of military figures and strong and robust men from Canada.<sup>549</sup> Nicholas de Finiels also made a point to mention the many *Canadiens* he encountered in the Illinois Country. Although seemingly under the mistaken impression that Louisiana was established before *Canadiens* came to the

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<sup>545</sup> Volney, *Tableau du climat et du sol des Etats-Unis d’Amérique*, 1: 448.

<sup>546</sup> Louis Dubroca, *L’itinéraire des français dans la Louisiane* (Paris: Fuchs, 1802), 78. When Dubroca refers to a history of peaceful co-existence in Canada he is primarily referring to alliances with the Huron and Algonquian-speaking peoples.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

<sup>548</sup> Berquin Duvallon, *Vue de la colonie espagnole du Mississippi, ou des provinces de Louisiane et Floride occidentale en l’année 1802* (Paris: l’Imprimerie Expéditive, 1803), 61.

<sup>549</sup> Dubroca, 83.

Illinois Country, de Finiels recounted a *Canadien* migration of *engagés*, brought to the region by merchants such as Gabriel Cerré.<sup>550</sup> What de Finiels described was the continuing migration of *Canadiens* to the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana during the second half of the eighteenth century.

In de Finiels' *An Account of Upper Louisiana*, the *Canadiens* had come to dominate the cultural landscape of the Illinois Country.<sup>551</sup> De Finiels described them as possessing "gentle and steady dispositions" and a widespread reputation for telling tall tales.

They lie easily, but rather for fun than to deceive; this they owe to the Canadians who have settled among them. These fellows' penchant for tall stories is so well known in Louisiana that everything that seems dubious or imaginary is referred to as Canadian.<sup>552</sup>

Moreover, de Finiels explained how the customs and language of these lovable tricksters had had a marked effect on Upper and Lower Louisiana by merging with native idioms.<sup>553</sup> However, in most of the travel narratives *Canadien* influence on the cultural landscape of the interior was depicted primarily as an antecedent to contemporary events. *Canadiens* were depicted as being part of a specific history that lay within living memory for these French travelers. Anything *Canadien* was seen as a leftover, a reminder of a failed French imperial project in North America, and yet, in many ways, it was still an ill-defined element of the contemporary cultural make-up of the interior. Although Nicholas de Finiels mentioned several times how the Illinois Country had been exclusively *Canadien*, he made sure to clarify that the arrival of Americans by the late

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<sup>550</sup> Nicolas de Finiels, *An Account of Upper Louisiana*, ed. Carl J. Ekberg and William Foley, trans., Carl J. Ekberg (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 108, 66.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*, 66, 116.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

1790s had changed the cultural complexion of the region.<sup>554</sup> De Finiels saw the *Canadiens* as an integral part of a historical golden age for the Illinois region that still lay within memory, albeit one that was degraded and fading.<sup>555</sup>

### Collot and the *Canadiens*

Victor Collot's two-volume journal, written in 1796, provides one of the most detailed accounts about *Canadiens* in the heart of North America, and, more than any other journal, refers to them not only as a historical legacy, but also as part of the contemporary landscape.<sup>556</sup> Having served early in his career under Marshal Rochambeau during the American Revolutionary War, Collot was appointed governor of Guadeloupe and administered the colony until it fell to the English in 1794.<sup>557</sup> Collot fled and sought refuge in the United States, only to find himself entangled in a legal controversy.<sup>558</sup> An angry American merchant sued for damages regarding the loss of his ship at the hands of the Frenchman when he had been governor. Collot made bail on the condition of remaining in the United States until the matter was settled. Faced with the prospect of a lengthy stay in America, the Frenchman decided to embark on a voyage to

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<sup>554</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>556</sup> His full name was Georges Henri Victor Collot.

<sup>557</sup> Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau was the commander of the French Armée du Nord during the American Revolution. The British occupied Guadeloupe briefly in 1794 before returning it to the French.

<sup>558</sup> Collot's journal refers to a lawsuit concerning his part in the confiscation of an American vessel while governor of Guadeloupe. Neil Hamilton, "A French Spy in America," *American History* 34, no. 3 (1999): 24. According to George W. Kyte, the lawsuit was dragged out by Collot's refusal to testify in the case. George W. Kyte, "A Spy on the Western Waters: The Military Intelligence Mission of General Collot in 1796," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 34, no. 3 (1947): 430, note 10.

survey the American western territories for his native France.<sup>559</sup> Collot's ten-month journey was a fascinating voyage of discovery and intrigue that caught the attention of colonial officials throughout North America.<sup>560</sup>

Colonial competition for dominance of the interior of North America created a volatile atmosphere where rumours ran rampant and colonial administrators attempted to control the flow of information and movement of peoples. The futility of these efforts were quickly apparent to local colonial administrators who did not have the means to exert effective control over such large territories, where the simple act of crossing a river meant crossing an international boundary.<sup>561</sup> This is not to suggest that the French residents of these regions were ignorant of the repercussions brought about by changes in colonial rule and the newly established invisible lines that separated colonial jurisdictions. They were extremely well informed and conscious of the potential long-term implications of these changes. Many French-speaking colonists consciously left one jurisdiction for another, and they were adept at manipulating and using new regulations to their advantage.<sup>562</sup> The result was that people frequently traveled between territories with impunity. This was, in part, because the commercial and personal interests of local colonial administrators in the interior of the continent often took precedent over difficult-to-impose official colonial policy.

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<sup>559</sup> The French minister plenipotentiary to the United States, Mr. Pierre A. Adet, asked Collot to conduct a survey for the French Republic, which detailed the political, military, and commercial state of the western part of the American continent. Kyte, "A Spy on the Western Waters," 430–431.

<sup>560</sup> There has been surprisingly little work done on the journals of Victor Collot, and the few articles that have been written focus almost exclusively on his role as a French spy rather than his ethnographic depictions. Hamilton; Kyte.

<sup>561</sup> See the Chapter 3 for a more in-depth discussion of geopolitics in the heart of North America.

<sup>562</sup> Stevens, "'One of the Most Beautiful Regions of the World'," 361.

Throughout Collot's travels, rumours swirled that the British, Spanish, and Americans all sought to arrest him. Despite his best efforts to evade capture, he was eventually detained in New Orleans by Spanish authorities. When one examines Collot's work, it quickly becomes apparent why his survey would have been of value to colonial authorities. His travel journal, published in two large volumes, provides one of the most detailed accounts of the Ohio Valley, the Illinois Country, the Missouri, and both Upper and Lower Louisiana. Not only did he survey the geography and natural landscape of these regions, he also gave an in-depth commentary on the peoples, commerce, and politics stretching from Pittsburgh to New Orleans. He produced maps of key waterways and drew sketches of natives, colonial homes, and boats, all of which were later published as an atlas that accompanied his journal.<sup>563</sup> The result was one of the most detailed accounts of the interior of late eighteenth century North America, building off the work of earlier travelers and surveyors such as Thomas Hutchins and paving the way for the work of fellow Frenchman Nicholas de Finiels.<sup>564</sup> For colonial powers that were seeking to establish new alliances with locals, solidify old partnerships, plan military incursions, build new strategic defenses, and dominate commerce, the prospect of obtaining Collot's survey must have been tantalizing.

Unlike the Anglo-American engineer and surveyor Hutchins, who gave the French population in the heart of North America short shrift in his journal, Collot placed

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<sup>563</sup> Kyte, "A Spy on the Western Waters." 431, 433. French officer Joseph Warin accompanied Collot and died near the end of the voyage. Although he is not given any credit, it is possible that Warin helped produce some of the early maps and sketches that eventually made up Collot's atlas.

<sup>564</sup> Despite acknowledging Collot, Charles J. Balesi has argued that Volney and de Finiels were the two most important travelers to the heart of North America. I would suggest, however, that Collot's account is at least comparable, if not one of the most important ethnographies of the region. Charles J. Balesi, *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America, 1673-1818*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Alliance Française, 2000), 313.

the French population, and the *Canadiens* in particular, at the heart of his story.<sup>565</sup> Collot's voyage started in Pittsburgh, near the former French site of Fort Duquesne. He hired two *Canadiens* and three Americans for a journey that went down the Ohio River, up the Mississippi to the Missouri River, and then back down the Mississippi to New Orleans. The Americans he hired were never mentioned again throughout the extensive five hundred pages of text, but his *Canadien* rowers and guides were cited frequently throughout his travels.<sup>566</sup>

The *Canadiens* were described as the most skilled navigators and paddlers of canoes, flat-bottomed boats, and pirogues. Moreover, they were depicted as depositories of indigenous knowledge, which allowed them to read the natural landscape and survive the perils of the wilderness.<sup>567</sup> For example, twice Collot commented on the *Canadiens*' ability to predict storms. While navigating the Ohio River, he made reference to a

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<sup>565</sup> Thomas Hutchins traveled into the heart of North America between 1764 and 1775. The French were barely mentioned in his survey, except where he provided short descriptions of the towns of Vincennes, Ouiatenon, and St. Louis. While other French towns were mentioned, there were few details regarding the inhabitants. This was a stark contrast to Collot, who used Hutchins' maps for his voyage, but also provided remarkably detailed accounts of the French-speaking population.

<sup>566</sup> Edward Watts argues that many British and early Anglo-American travel narratives incorrectly labelled *métis* as *Canadien*. In most cases there is no way to accurately ascertain whether all Collot's *Canadiens* were directly or a generation or two removed from the St. Lawrence Valley, or whether they were *métis* (i.e., the product of French-Aboriginal unions). However, given the importance of Canada and *Canadiens* as part of a historical legacy of the Illinois Country, there appears to be a solid understanding on the part of Collot and other Frenchmen that *Canadien* meant some type of connection with the St. Lawrence Valley. Watts, *In This Remote Country*, 136.

<sup>567</sup> *Canadiens* and French-speaking inhabitants were described in French travel narratives as being akin to Indians because of a historical legacy of French-Indian interaction. This chapter only discusses the ways in which *Canadiens* were holders of indigenous knowledge in the eyes of French travelers and surveyors. This analysis does not purport to define what indigenous knowledge actually is (whether that is even possible), or whether *Canadiens* were actually holders of this knowledge, but rather to discuss the ways in which *Canadiens* were depicted and the significance of that representation.

*Canadien* prediction of what seemed more like a hurricane than a simple tempest. In his typically romanticized style, he wrote,

In the evening the weather was stormy; the moon appeared pale, with rays diverging like the tail of a peacock. The Canadians predicted a tempest; and about midnight we were awakened by so violent a storm, that it was with difficulty we could fasten our boat so as to prevent it from striking on the banks.<sup>568</sup>

This knowledge of the natural world made the *Canadiens* indispensable guides. Because they were valued for their skills as boatmen, Collot selected them to guide a small canoe in pursuit of a bear that was trying to cross the Ohio River. He explained that not only did they have the most expertise, they also had a well-founded reputation for successfully navigating the dangers of such a hunt, for confronting a bear mid-river could easily end with the canoe overturned. In Collot's harrowing account, the bear—injured and bleeding—managed to pass under the canoe, but having lost too much blood was unable to overturn it.

Even though the *Canadiens* had been unable to prevent the bear from passing under the canoe, Collot's view of them as boatmen remained undiminished, and he continued to use them as the standard by which all other boatmen were judged. For example, the notoriously strong currents at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers were described specifically in relation to the *Canadiens*' abilities. The currents were "so strong that we proceeded scarcely more than a mile in two hours; and this with such difficulty, that the best Canadian rower could not handle his oar more than a

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<sup>568</sup> Victor Collot, *A Journey in North America, Containing a Survey of the Countries Watered by the Mississippi, Ohio, Missouri, and Other Affluing Rivers; with Exact Observations on the Course and Soundings of These Rivers; and on the Towns, Villages, Hamlets, and Farms of That Part of the New World; Followed by Philosophical, Political, Military and Commercial Remarks, and by a Projected Line of Frontiers and General Limits*, trans., an unknown Englishman under the supervision of the author (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1826), 1: 165.

quarter of an hour without resting.”<sup>569</sup> When Collot reached the Mississippi, he dismissed the better part of his entourage, but increased his contingent of *Canadiens* to four. While heading downriver, he again extolled the quality of the *Canadien* boatmen in his discussion of the Mississippi River. The river could be perilous for an inexperienced boatman, with its winding labyrinth of hidden tree roots, small enclaves, and shifting riverbanks. Collot explained, “From these circumstances, the navigation of this river is reckoned dangerous, although it is very seldom that any such accidents happen to boats manned by Canadians.”<sup>570</sup> According to the former governor, the *Canadiens* were not only the best boatmen, but they also helped reduce the inherent dangers associated with travel through the heart of North America.

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<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 212.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 137–138.

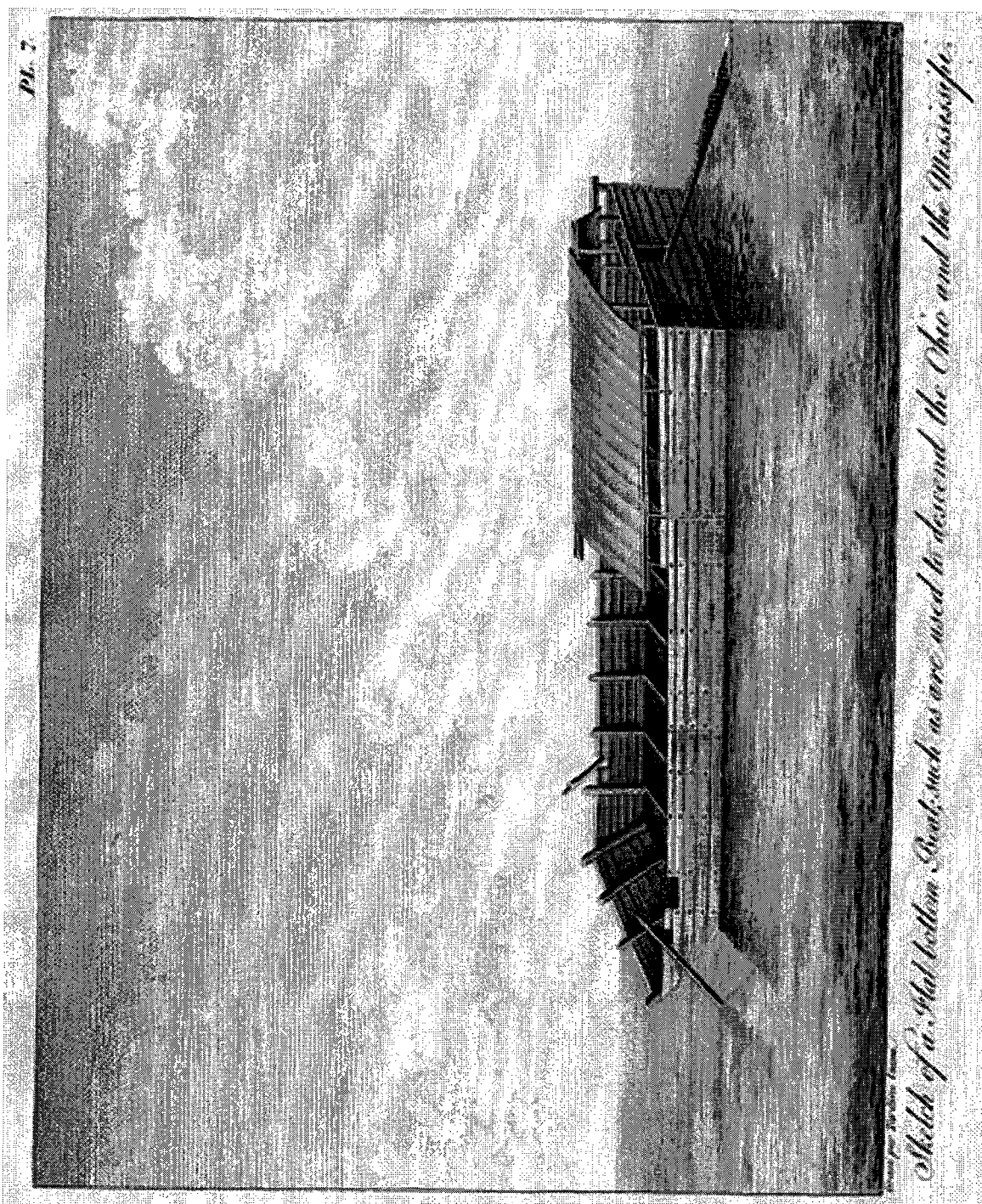


Figure 14. Sketch of flat bottom boat - courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library<sup>571</sup>

<sup>571</sup> Collot, *A Journey in North America*, Atlas, Plate 7.

The natural wilderness of the interior indiscriminately and mercilessly offered up dangers to travelers. However, it also provided endless resources, potential riches and bounty, and all the necessary provisions to sustain those who knew where to look for them. In Collot's narrative, the *Canadiens*' intimate knowledge of the natural landscape of the French river world went hand-in-hand with their skills as navigators and boatmen. He made repeated reference to place names given to him by his *Canadien* guides, remarking that some places were not even on his charts, yet the *Canadiens* were familiar with them.<sup>572</sup> He was also impressed with the *Canadiens*' ability to locate food sources. Aside from helping with bear and deer hunting, Collot recounted with a certain fascination how his guides were able to find turtle eggs from rubbings in the sand.<sup>573</sup>

While Collot's narrative did not define the *Canadiens* in relation to the processes of intermarriage and *métissage*, the skills and knowledge of Collot's *Canadien* guides made them akin to Indians as holders of indigenous knowledge. That they were defined in the narrative by their mobility and involvement in the fur trade placed the *Canadiens* outside of a colonial ideal based on land possession. Historically linked to Canada and the St. Lawrence Valley, the *Canadiens* were depicted as being mostly nomadic, traversing the continent as guides, hunters, boatmen, and fur traders. They could do this precisely because of their knowledge of the natural landscape and close relationship with the aboriginal peoples.

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid., 1: 161–162, 214, 269.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., 2: 54–55.

*Canadiens as people who tied together regions*

Collot never overtly tackled the question of the *Canadiens*' homeland, but his writing suggests that he saw them as a people at home throughout the interior of the continent. He first hired *Canadien* guides in Pittsburgh and used them for the remainder of his voyage, ending in New Orleans. While Collot planned to send his American guides back to Philadelphia or New York, he specifically outlined at the beginning of his journal that he would send the *Canadiens* back to the Illinois Country at the end of his voyage. Was this a tacit acknowledgment of a wider French-speaking river world inhabited by *Canadiens*? If so, it came from his attempt to document the region and his deep-seeded sense of patriotism framed within a context of imperial rivalries and aspirations. Collot saw the potential of harnessing *Canadiens* to serve imperial interests. He had, after all, been charged with surveying the interior of the continent to determine the feasibility of recapturing the former French colonies for a resurgent France. To this end, the *Canadiens* were seen as a necessity for restoring glory to a defunct French empire in North America. At home in the Illinois Country, the territories of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, and beyond, the *Canadiens* were viewed as having a vast geographical influence and close relations to numerous aboriginal nations. For an outsider such as Collot, the *Canadiens* were constructed as new Indians, defined by their "otherness." However, an important distinction was that they spoke French and were depicted as still having loyalties to their distant and historic homeland in France. Moreover, they were seen as dominating a commercial system that Collot saw as imperative to controlling the heart of North America, the fur trade. These important qualifiers made the *Canadiens* a strategic bridge between worlds. In discussing English

involvement in the fur trade, Collot explained how the *Canadiens* were central to any aspirations that France had in the North American interior:

The English companies employ Englishmen neither as agents, traders, nor soldiers; but Canadians only, whose decided attachment for their nation is so well known, that it is become proverbial to say, that, under the government and rule of the English, they never cease to call themselves Frenchmen. They never see a Frenchman without emotion; and if the French or merchants of Louisiana engaged in the fur trade, they would easily draw off the Canadians from the English Companies. Although the English merchants are now in possession of Louisiana, the French merchants may still reap considerable advantages from this honorable attachment of the Canadians.<sup>574</sup>

Mobility was the salient feature that connected the *Canadiens* to the fur trade, the aboriginal peoples, and the larger French river world. Collot cited both *Canadiens* and Indians who traveled vast distances to bring news from Canada to the Illinois country and Upper Louisiana. For example, Collot encountered two *Canadiens* in the Illinois Country who had arrived from Quebec with news of an impending British expedition to capture Upper Louisiana.<sup>575</sup> The former governor relied heavily on the *Canadiens* for guidance on travel conditions and assistance in devising a strategy to avoid capture by colonial authorities. When the expedition reached the Mississippi River, the *Canadiens* advised Collot that a northern route was no longer viable, as the seasonal conditions would force him to winter at Michilimackinac or Detroit, where the authorities would easily capture him.<sup>576</sup>

The usefulness of the *Canadiens* and Collot's dependence was perhaps the primary reason why his depiction of them was so positive. The same could not be said of

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<sup>574</sup> Ibid., 2:194.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid., 2: 12.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 2: 2.

his general descriptions of the French-speaking inhabitants of French river world. There were a few towns in the northern parts of the Ohio Valley and Illinois Country, such as Peoria, where Collot mentioned *Canadien* families, but for the most part village inhabitants were simply referred to as French.<sup>577</sup> This discrepancy is striking given that the vast majority of inhabitants in French-speaking towns of the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana were, in fact, *Canadiens*. Most were born in Canada (or were at most a generation or two removed) and they almost always maintained a degree of communication and contact with Canada through merchants and voyageurs. Whereas the *Canadiens* were depicted as strong, helpful, hard working, industrious, and holders of useful indigenous knowledge, the French inhabitants of the Illinois country were described as ignorant, superstitious, and obstinate. Moreover, the French inhabitants were seen as having adopted only the most negative cultural traits from their aboriginal neighbours, despite the fact that they appeared to do similar work as the *Canadians*, as traffickers, adventurers, hunters, and rowers.

In domestic life, their characters and dispositions are similar to those of the Indians with whom they live; indolent, careless, and addicted to drunkenness, they cultivate little or no ground, speak a French jargon, and have forgotten the division of time and months. If they are asked at what time such an event took place, they answer, “in the time of the great waters, of the strawberries, of the maïze, of potatoes:” if they are advised to change any practice which is evidently wrong, or if observations are made to them respecting the amelioration of agriculture, or the augmentation of any branch of commerce, the only answer they give is this: “It is the custom; our fathers did so: I have done well; my children will do the same.”<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> Collot described Peoria as being inhabited by fifteen *Canadien* families. *Ibid.*, 1: 269.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 232–233.

The discrepancies in Collot's narrative were largely qualitative. There was no indication as to what established one as a *Canadien* and the other as a French inhabitant. Both appeared to engage in many of the same types of work, to be highly mobile, to have a common and intertwined ancestry, and to have a close relationship with aboriginal peoples. Yet one was described as wretched, while the other was useful and even heroic.<sup>579</sup>

In addition to his general observations, Collot provided detailed descriptions of specific towns and their French-speaking inhabitants, producing a series of highly contradictory sub-narratives. As was the case with other travel accounts, Collot focused heavily on economics, or, more specifically, the primary occupations of French-speaking inhabitants. Concepts of work, leisure, and mobility played heavily in these sub-narratives, if somewhat inconsistently.

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<sup>579</sup> Olive Patricia Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984), 80–84. Dickason explains the old European uses of the term “Wild Men” and “Noble Savage” in early French colonialism, and there are definite links between that terminology and the way that *Canadiens* were depicted by French travel writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

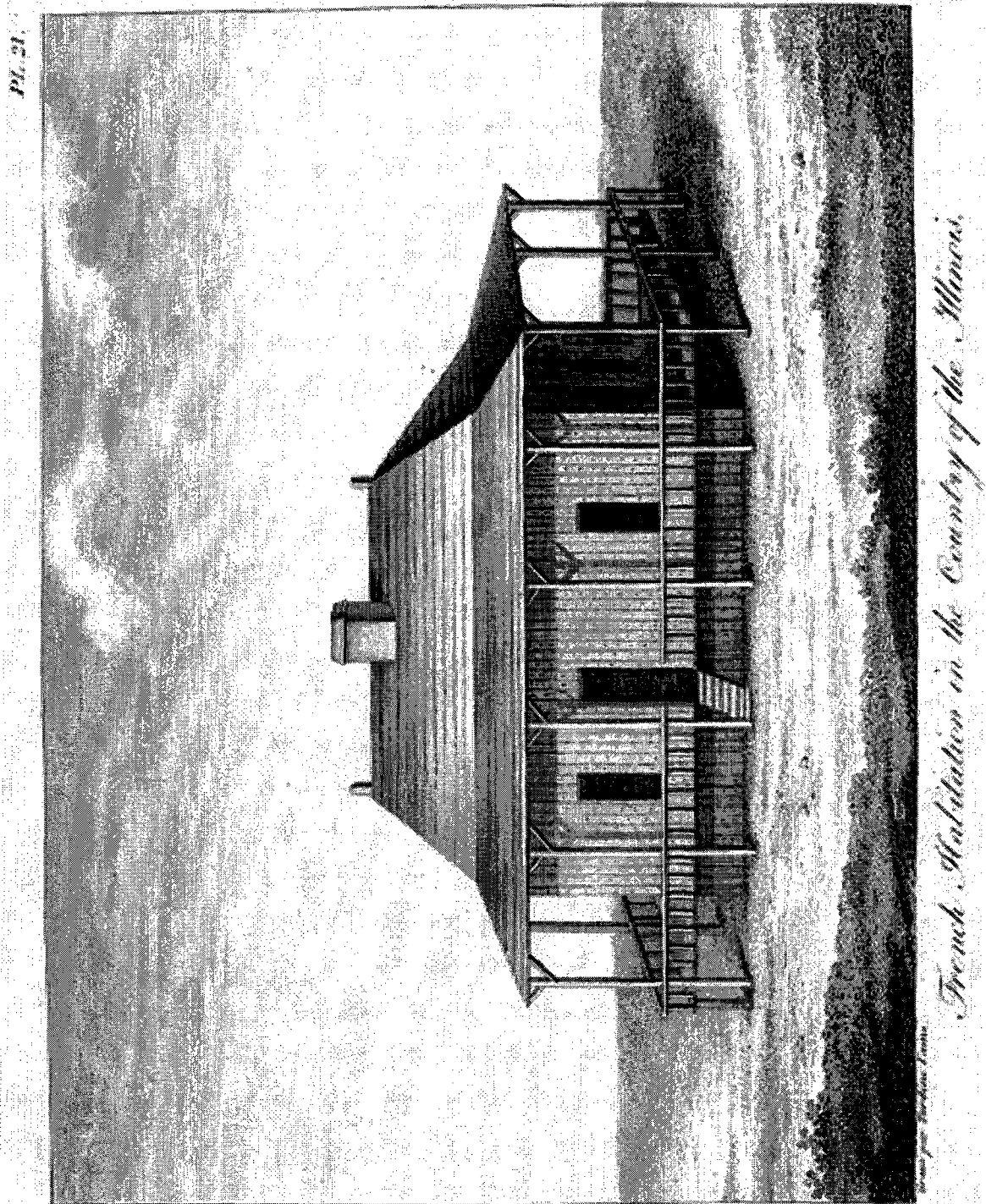


Figure 15. French Habitation - courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library<sup>580</sup>

<sup>580</sup> Collot, *A Journey in North America*, Atlas, Plate 21.

*Concepts of work*

The dichotomy of mobility versus a sedentary agricultural existence formed a regular theme in Collot's writing. For example, the small village of Ouiatenon on the Wabash River was described as having ten or twelve families who hunted and traded, but engaged in little farming.<sup>581</sup> St. Charles was painted as the last vestige of civilization before entering the wilderness along the Missouri River, but, more notably, the French-speaking families living in the town were harshly criticized for being hunters and traders.<sup>582</sup> The lack of sedentary agriculture was seen as highly problematic, and Collot went to great lengths to explain how this detracted from the primary goal of colonial development. He argued that the abundance of fish and game, trading with the natives, and the French-speaking inhabitants' preoccupation with going on long expeditions all limited agricultural production.<sup>583</sup> This was particularly the case for St. Charles, which

contains about an hundred or an hundred and twenty ill-constructed houses: the inhabitants do not till the ground, though it be extremely fertile; their ordinary occupations are hunting and trading with the Indians; a few hire themselves out as rowers; and it would be difficult to find a collection of individuals more ignorant, stupid, ugly, and miserable. Such are the sad effects of extreme poverty, with its train of cares and evils, that it destroys not only the beauty of the person but even the intellectual powers, and blunts all those feelings of delicacy and sensibility which belong to a state of ease, and the advantages of a good education.<sup>584</sup>

Tying agriculture to common sense, intelligence, and prosperity ultimately constructed a notion of modernity based on a sedentary lifestyle. Thus, Collot's narrative

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<sup>581</sup> Collot, *A Journey in North America*, 1: 180.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 252.

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 162.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 277.

underscored the obvious contradiction between the useful—but mobile—*Canadien* and the lazy and backward French-speaking inhabitant. However, Collot's view of the lazy and backward French-speaking inhabitant was hardly consistent. For towns like St. Charles, poverty and backwardness were tied directly to an unwillingness to engage in sedentary agriculture. Towns such as Ste. Geneviève, with strong agricultural production, escaped harsh criticism, but so too did St. Louis, a town founded on, and primarily engaged in, the most mobile of commercial ventures, the fur trade. Collot argued that the nearly six hundred inhabitants of St. Louis were less degenerate than the French-speaking inhabitants living across the river in the American Illinois Country, and that the town was mostly made up of labourers and merchants.<sup>585</sup> Collot did not critique the lifestyle of the inhabitants of St. Louis, but rather took issue with the policies of the Spanish colonial administration, arguing that they favoured a select group of merchants, thereby strangling the prosperity of an otherwise loyal French-speaking population.<sup>586</sup> Undoubtedly, the importance of St. Louis as a central hub for the fur trade and control of the interior of the continent influenced Collot's assessment, but his description of the community's residents also highlights the inconsistencies and contradictions in his narrative.

Collot's work reflected a conflict between a colonial ideal that favoured a sedentary lifestyle based on agricultural production, and a growing imperial logistical reality, where mobility, indigenous knowledge, and dominance of the fur trade were imperative for control of the North American interior. Collot's writing provides a

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<sup>585</sup> Ibid., 1: 247. Degeneration is a common theme in Collot and de Finiels' narratives, but this view of the Illinois French as degenerate may be rooted in the fact that Anglo-American immigrants had begun to flow into the American Illinois Country, whereas Spanish Upper Louisiana never experienced a similar influx of Spanish settlers.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., 1: 247.

window into his struggle to define a complex French river world and its inhabitants, an attempt to find a balance between the world as he wished it to be, and the world as experienced it.

### Intellectual and Literary Traditions

Several themes found in Collot's writing permeate the narratives of other travelers and surveyors, such as Nicolas de Finiels and Comte de Volney. Many of these writers had either met or read each other's work, and as French émigrés in America they shared a cultural, political, and intellectual heritage.<sup>587</sup> Carl J. Ekberg and William E. Foley argue that both Collot and de Finiels spent time in Philadelphia, where there was a vibrant French expatriate community.<sup>588</sup> These French émigrés were at times divided by political ideology but united by their common exile in America, where the intellectual currents of the Enlightenment and the American and French Revolutions mixed.<sup>589</sup>

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<sup>587</sup> Collot, for example, makes repeated reference to Thomas Hutchins' survey.

<sup>588</sup> Balesi, *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America*, 315; de Finiels, *An Account of Upper Louisiana*, 15. Approximately 25,000 French émigrés arrived in the United States between 1789 and 1793. For more information on French émigrés in America see: Echeverria, *Mirage in the West*; Hélène Fouré-Selter, *Souvenirs français en Amérique* (Boston and New York: Ginn and Company, 1940); François Furstenberg, "US and French Atlantic Connections: The Case of French Emigrés in Philadelphia, C. 1789–1803," (paper presented at a joint seminar of the McNeil Center for Early American History and the Program in Early American Economy and Society, 2005), <<http://www.librarycompany.org/Economics/PDF%20Files/furstenberg.pdf>> (15 August 2009); Darrell Meadows, "Engineering Exile: Social Networks and the French Atlantic Community, 1789–1809," *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 1 (2000); Catherine T. C. Spaeth, "America in the French Imagination: The French Settlers of Asylum, Pennsylvania, and Their Perceptions of 1790s America," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 38, no. 2 (2008); Jean Vidalenc, *Les émigrés français, 1789–1825* (Caen: Association des publications de la Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de l'Université de Caen, 1963); Arnold Whitridge, "French Émigrés in Philadelphia," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 44, no. 2 (1968).

<sup>589</sup> François Furstenberg has recently questioned how cohesive this émigré community was, arguing that social class and political orientation divided the French community in Philadelphia. However, there is a general consensus in the literature that these French émigrés knew of and

Collot, de Finiels, and Volney brought this cultural and intellectual baggage with them on their travels. The highly contradictory and romanticized descriptions in their travel narratives speak to larger intellectual debates regarding the natures of man, society, work, and leisure.

It is perhaps not all that surprising that French travel literature itself was undergoing an important transformation that ran concurrent with these larger debates over the nature of man and society. The *raison d'être* of French travel literature was increasingly called into question throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the primary objective of travel literature was being renegotiated. At issue was the balance between the usefulness of travel accounts and the act of reading for leisure. Early French travel literature was often compared to fiction and used largely for leisure.<sup>590</sup> This was particularly the case for sixteenth and seventeenth century travel literature that dealt with *moeurs étrangères*. However, during the eighteenth century, this formula began to change with the rise of the philosopher traveler. Increasingly, travel accounts developed a more instructive quality. The leisurely act of reading fantastic stories evolved into an introspective intellectual voyage, where the reader learned about him or herself through reading about foreign lands and peoples.<sup>591</sup>

Wendelin Guentner argues that the pleasure derived from travel literature in the late eighteenth century was largely the result of an internal personal dialogue experienced by the reader as he or she followed the written voyage.<sup>592</sup> So, on the one hand travel literature's usefulness to the reader had more to do with the personal

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could hardly avoid each other in Philadelphia. Furstenberg, "US and French Atlantic Connections," 3.

<sup>590</sup> Guentner, "Aspects génériques du récit de voyage français," 131.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*

exploration of the reader's *mentalité* than with the actual content of the work. Yet, one could argue that travel literature was not only about the internal dialogue of the reader, but also about the dissemination of practical knowledge. The narratives of Collot and de Finiels were, after all, primarily surveys of vast geographical regions prepared for colonial officials. De Finiels' work was not published for a salon audience, and Collot's work only appeared posthumously, in 1826. However, Collot was involved in the preparatory work for publication and oversaw the translation of his journals prior to his death.

Colonial reports and surveys found a ready audience throughout Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, just as the Church-sanctioned *Relations* had done in previous centuries. The *Relations* were religious travel accounts, letters, and journals that focused on contact with native peoples in foreign lands, and were initially intended as reports for religious authorities in Europe. However, they gained a wide readership among the literate classes during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One of the best known of these collections, the *Jesuit Relations*, was edited and then published extensively.<sup>593</sup> The correlation between the *Relations* and the French travel accounts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is striking, for they both sought to describe peoples and explain the "Other." While the impetus for the creation of their narratives may have differed, both straddled the line between useful knowledge and fantastic storytelling. For example, Collot's narrative and atlas were printed for public consumption well after his death. The publisher indicated that a small print run of 300 French copies and 100 English copies was ordered in 1826 in order to ensure that the

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<sup>593</sup> Allan Greer, ed., *The Jesuit Relations: Natives and Missionaries in Seventeenth-Century North America* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000): 14.

publication would retain a high sale value.<sup>594</sup> Therefore, Collot's two-volume set can be viewed as both a tool for French colonial officials in Paris, and a luxury piece for leisurely consumption that was rooted in the tradition of travel literature.

Attempting to separate the objective of writing a travel account and the purpose of publishing it is complicated. Volney was as a product of the Enlightenment and had had met the likes of Voltaire, Diderot, and Benjamin Franklin. While he published for a salon audience in Europe, contemporary political considerations were omnipresent. Volney's voyage through the interior of North America relied heavily on the support of his friend Benjamin Franklin and letters of recommendation from Thomas Jefferson.<sup>595</sup> While not directly intended for colonial administrators, Volney's *Tableau du climat et du sol des Etats-Unis d'Amerique* reads much the same as the surveys of Collot and de Finiels, and was published in 1803, at a time when France dominated Europe and was looking across the Atlantic with renewed colonial ambition.<sup>596</sup> The writers of these travel narratives were products of their societies and worked within the framework of evolving literary and intellectual traditions. These traditions cannot be completely separated from the practical contemporary considerations of colonial and national politics, which certainly motivated many authors looking at the heart of North America at the end of the eighteenth and start of the nineteenth centuries. This does not negate the

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<sup>594</sup> Collot, *A Journey in North America*, 1: ii.

<sup>595</sup> Gilbert Chinard, *Volney et l'Amérique d'après des documents inédits et sa correspondance avec Jefferson* (Baltimore and Paris: Johns Hopkins Press and Les Presses universitaires de France, 1923).

<sup>596</sup> It is worth asking how much editing was done to these journals prior to publication. Collot's and Volney's works were published in the early nineteenth century, but de Finiels' report remained in virtual obscurity until it was translated and published by Carl Ekberg and William Foley in 1989. Yet, in comparing the three, they are remarkably consistent in both style and content.

importance of these narratives, but rather acts as a reminder of the diverse influences at play in their construction.

### **Nicolas de Finiels and the French Inhabitants**

The French-speaking people most frequently mentioned in these travel accounts were non-descript French inhabitants of the interior of North America. Lacking any formal name, they were described in a variety of ways. In 1803, Nicolas de Finiels produced a detailed account of French-speaking inhabitants of the interior of North America. De Finiels was a former French military officer who immigrated to the United States around the time of the French Revolution and, on the recommendation of Victor Collot, was appointed by the French revolutionary government to survey the fortifications at St. Louis.<sup>597</sup> His depictions of the French-speaking inhabitants in Upper Louisiana and the Illinois Country borrowed heavily from Rousseau's proto-romantic writings.<sup>598</sup> At first glance, de Finiels appears to have concluded that nature, modesty, equality, simplicity, and naïvety were positive, while artificiality, pretension, social distinction, and luxury were negative.<sup>599</sup> Upon closer examination, however, it becomes apparent that his narrative does not lend itself to such perfect binaries—the complex world that he encountered defied easy categorization. As he described the world around him, categories became blurred and judgments nuanced. For example, while education was regarded as important, possessing too much of it was seen as detrimental.<sup>600</sup> While

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<sup>597</sup> Nicolas de Finiels was initially commissioned by the Spanish to survey the fortifications at St. Louis in 1797, and was then later commissioned to survey St. Louis and all of Upper Louisiana for the French in 1803.

<sup>598</sup> de Finiels, *An Account of Upper Louisiana*, 13.

<sup>599</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.*

de Finiels viewed nature in a positive light, his views of open wilderness were not nearly as glowing. Much like Collot's narrative, the hierarchies and gradients of judgment in de Finiels' narrative ultimately creates contradictory depictions of the French-speaking inhabitants. While de Finiels' depictions were a reflection of his understandings of European intellectual debates regarding human nature and the natural world, the debates were often played out through his discussion of specific themes, such as work, leisure, and mobility.

Just as Victor Collot defined the French-speaking inhabitants in relation to their occupations, concepts of work and leisure were salient features of Nicolas de Finiels' survey of Upper Louisiana. More specifically, sedentary agriculture and mobile commerce were central to de Finiels' work. Like Collot, he praised the largely agricultural town of Ste. Geneviève: "I cannot leave Ste. Genevieve without rendering homage to its residents, a tribute, I should hope, that every visitor will pay them for a long time to come."<sup>601</sup> He argued that the inhabitants of this agricultural settlement had been "[s]educed by the charms of that primitive and natural simplicity, sufficiently tempered by moral and religious principles."<sup>602</sup> Out of this natural simplicity flowed a communal existence, where all inhabitants, regardless of blood relations, lived an interconnected existence. Ste. Geneviève represented de Finiels' intellectual ideal—a world that was misunderstood by the hierarchical societies of Europe, and where simplicity was valued and enjoyed by what he called the "children of nature."<sup>603</sup> Was it just a coincidence that de Finiels' most glowing appraisal was saved for the town that developed a reputation as the breadbasket of Upper Louisiana?

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<sup>601</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

Most towns and villages did not fare nearly as well in his narrative. St. Louis was described as a town founded purely on the commercial interests of the fur trade, and was depicted quite differently from Ste. Geneviève. Although it was the largest settlement in Upper Louisiana and the primary residence of the lieutenant governor, de Finiels critiqued the lack of military planning that went into the town and denounced its apparent lack of agriculture.<sup>604</sup> He noted that St. Louis' primary purpose was as a central hub for voyageurs on their way to Michilimackinac to the north or the Missouri fur trade to the west.<sup>605</sup> With no central market and only small private gardens, de Finiels portrayed the town as being completely dependent on outsiders. He complained that the town had too few cattle and was at the mercy of native hunters to supply its subsistence needs throughout the winter.<sup>606</sup> When hunting failed to provide for the town, the residents' last vestige of hope was a well-stocked chicken coop, stored vegetables from the family garden, or fasting.<sup>607</sup> De Finiels argued that town nicknames, such as *Pain Cour* (St. Louis) and *Misère* (Ste. Geneviève), were representative of the harsh conditions and struggles of early settlement. However, these nicknames were slowly disappearing from public consciousness due to a recent rise in prosperity. Yet his depiction of St. Louis painted a picture of a town continuing to struggle to meet its basic subsistence needs. This was contrary to the glowing example of Ste. Geneviève, which epitomized de Finiels' colonial ideal. Nicolas de Finiels' St. Louis was a town where impassable streets were reduced to a muddy bog by the rain, and where, true to its nickname, bread was always in short supply.

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

Nicolas de Finiels' description of St. Louis contradicts his vision of growing prosperity in Upper Louisiana. Adding to this contradiction was the theme of degeneration that permeated his account of St. Louis. The French engineer commented, "Although there is a noticeable difference in the moral character of the residents of St. Louis and those of Ste. Genevieve, you nevertheless still discover in the former the imprint of their native simplicity, and you can still easily detect traces of the good nature that they inherited from their forefathers."<sup>608</sup> What appears to be a positive depiction of the inhabitants of St. Louis was in fact a damning assessment of a people who were losing their best qualities and slowly degenerating into a state of backwardness. Ste. Geneviève may have moved beyond the misery that de Finiels felt characterized its early history, but St. Louis was headed in the opposite direction.

De Finiels never explicitly indicated what caused this slow degeneration, but it is clear that the inhabitants of St. Louis were losing the characteristics that had made them children of nature. It seems an inherent contradiction that this fall from grace should be tied to a lack of agricultural production. After all, native simplicity would appear to be the very antithesis of sedentary agricultural development. Yet de Finiels' harshest critiques of the French-speaking inhabitants of St. Louis were always framed using agricultural production and raising livestock as standards. He argued that the local French-speaking inhabitants struggled with the hard work and attention needed to raise the sheep that had recently been introduced into the region, and that the swine fattened in the old French feedlots were inferior to those raised on the American side of the Mississippi.<sup>609</sup> In his comparison of the recently arrived Americans in St. Louis and the

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<sup>608</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid., 64.

well-established French-speaking inhabitants, de Finiels portrayed the Americans as masters of agriculture and industry. He noted that “[t]hey grasped the advantages that they might derive from the natural indolence of the native *habitants*, and their industry has already opened avenues of business that indolence had precluded.”<sup>610</sup> The Americans, in de Finiels’ account, were never depicted as having the same native simplicity that he so valued and equated with the town of Ste. Geneviève. Rather, it was their industry and use of modern agricultural methods that made the Americans superior to the French-speaking inhabitants in St. Louis. Ste. Geneviève was known for its strong agricultural production, but de Finiels made no mention of modern agricultural techniques. This appears to be rather contradictory, as de Finiels presents two separate ideals, both linked to agriculture but in very different ways. The French-speaking inhabitants of St. Louis seem to have fallen somewhere in between these two ideals. They failed to meet the lofty standard of native simplicity that de Finiels associated with the agricultural village of Ste. Geneviève, yet also fell short of the perceived modern agricultural prowess of the Americans. Still, the French engineer provided a glimmer of hope by referring to a glorious past of native simplicity.

Perhaps the difficulty of defining St. Louis lay in its success as a town based primarily on the fur trade. As the largest settlement of the region and the central hub for fur-trading activities in Upper Louisiana and the Illinois Country, St. Louis was a successful example of how agriculture was not the only path to prosperity. This reality appears to have tempered an otherwise harsh critique of St. Louis. The same could not be said for his scathing assessment of smaller villages that depended on hunting and fur

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<sup>610</sup> Ibid., 65.

trading. De Finiels harshly criticized the French-speaking inhabitants of the small village of Carondelet, located south of St. Louis on the Des Pères River, complaining,

They are naturally lazy, and necessity alone forces them into the fields. Older folks take care of the agriculture; the younger men are busy making trips to New Orleans, up the Missouri, to Michilimackinac, and sometimes up the Ohio to Pittsburgh. They prefer to endure three consecutive months of hard work in order to pass eight or nine months in sloth, rather than as youths take up a vocation that would lead more surely to success, but whose permanence would leave little time to idle away, to doze in indolence and sloth.<sup>611</sup>

Central to de Finiels' critique was that the French inhabitants refused to willingly engage in sedentary agriculture and continued to leave for extended periods of time on fur trading expeditions. De Finiels' discussion of these expeditions reveals how mobility was a salient feature of the French river world, and how honour, prestige, respect, and one's place in society were tied to these voyages. For men in particular, the respect garnered on such travels was closely bound to understandings of masculinity and rights of passage:

They prefer to gain their livelihoods hunting, which flatters their pride with its independence, or in rowing as hired laborers [*engagés*] on trading or commercial *bateaux*. This is arduous work, harder than any known occupation. But for a long time it has been associated with a certain point of honor, which makes it attractive to the youth and entices the children of even the best families to prefer it to other occupations.<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*, 108–109. As Ekberg and Foley explain, de Finiels used the term French Creole in the traditional sense, meaning those of European parents, but born in colonial Louisiana. While de Finiels' narrative regarding the Illinois Country was less accurate than that for Upper Louisiana, it is important to remember that the argument being made here has less to do with the accuracy of his depiction, but rather how his narrative fits into a broader discourse regarding mobility and the French river world.

Moreover, in his more general description of French inhabitants de Finiels explained that “[i]n order to be respected, you must acquire the reputation of being a good boatman; to be a man you must have made three expeditions, paddle in hand—one to New Orleans, one to Michilimackinac, and one up either the Missouri or the Ohio.”<sup>613</sup> These examples not only show the importance of mobility, but they also depict a complex social system that bears a striking resemblance to the rights of passage and hierarchies that developed in the northwest Canadian fur trade. Carolyn Podruchny has argued that the process of mock baptism became a frequently used right of passage for French–Canadian voyageurs who traveled to the Northwest, where the length of the voyage, position in the canoe, and act of wintering in the interior became salient features in establishing one’s masculinity and defining one’s identity.<sup>614</sup> It is worth mentioning that this type of behaviour was not exclusively a French phenomenon. For example, the largely Scottish membership of the Northwest Company fur trade elite had to prove themselves by wintering in the interior if they hoped to enter the prestigious fraternity known as the Beaver Club.<sup>615</sup> However, de Finiels’ narrative does appear to reveal a cultural ethos of mobility that was shared throughout the French river world, from Montreal and the Canadian northwest to Pittsburgh, Michilimackinac, Detroit, St. Louis, and New Orleans to the south.

Mobility was regarded as a great threat to the social fabric and natural simplicity that formed de Finiels’ ideal society. He argued that these expeditions, while incredibly physically taxing, were nevertheless seasonal ventures that encouraged laziness the

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<sup>613</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>614</sup> Podruchny, “Baptizing Novices: Ritual Moments among French Canadian Voyageurs in the Montreal Fur Trade, 1780–1821,” 165–195.

<sup>615</sup> Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 144–145.

remainder of the year. In his account of the “French Creoles” of the Illinois Country, he noted that “whenever they are not working, they spend their time lazing and loafing.”<sup>616</sup> Such idle behaviour was part of a larger French colonial discourse that portrayed the French inhabitants of the interior of North America as backward. For example, in 1790, Sergeant–Major Roux gave a scathing account of the French–speaking inhabitants of the Illinois and Ohio Valleys, complaining that the people’s love of leisure and contempt for luxury meant that they grew only enough for subsistence.<sup>617</sup> According to Roux’s narrative, the end result of such complacency was a population consumed by their love of the alcoholic beverage *taffia* who were resigned to living in decrepit conditions barely fit for livestock.<sup>618</sup> Roux’s account was a propaganda piece designed to dissuade his fellow citizens back in France from moving to the failed settlement of the Scioto Land Company in the Ohio Valley, but it nonetheless provided a vivid depiction of backward French–speaking inhabitants. The backward French–speaking inhabitant became a common, if somewhat ill–defined theme in French travel accounts of the interior of North America at the end of the eighteenth and start of the nineteenth centuries. Nicolas de Finiels echoed Roux’s sentiments. While describing lead mining and farming along the Meramec River, a frustrated de Finiels lamented the use of old techniques and lackluster results, arguing that this backwardness was the result of a lazy and self–satisfied population that saw no reason to improve that which nature had given.<sup>619</sup>

The concept of industrial backwardness proved to be remarkably resilient, finding its way into historical accounts written at the start of the twentieth century. For

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<sup>616</sup> de Finiels, *An Account of Upper Louisiana*, 108.

<sup>617</sup> Sergeant–Major Roux, *Le nouveau Mississippi, ou les dangers d’habiter les bords du Scioto, par un patriote voyageur* (Paris: Jacob–Sion, 1790), 18.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid. *Taffia* was rum that was imported from New Orleans.

<sup>619</sup> de Finiels, *An Account of Upper Louisiana*, 48.

example, in an examination of industry among the French of the Illinois Country, I. Lippincott argued that the French inhabitants' obsession with a mobile fur trade, despite early success and prosperity, became a source of great weakness.<sup>620</sup> He reasoned that the fur trade ultimately detracted from agriculture, for crops were neglected in favour of the quick financial gain that long distance expeditions brought. While Lippincott explored salt, lead, maple sugar, tobacco, and wine production, his depiction of French agriculture in the Illinois Country showed a backward peasantry using only the crudest of instruments and failing to compete with their Anglo–American neighbours.

De Finiels mirrored Collot's earlier depiction of an established French–speaking population that was largely backward in its modes of production and lifestyle, and like Collot he likened them to the native inhabitants. Nicolas de Finiels applauded intermarriage when it civilized the native peoples, but conversely he deplored the same intermixing when it appeared to drag the French into savagery. However, under the right circumstances and with the proper balance, the native simplicity that de Finiels sought could be found by “going native.” By stepping back into nature, he argued, the French–speaking inhabitants “[t]hus proceeded the retro–march of the customs and character of the inhabitants of Upper Louisiana after they settled there. They shed old vices and clothed themselves in new virtues, and in appearing to degenerate they made giant steps toward achieving happiness.”<sup>621</sup> This altered *mentalité* was accompanied by a physical transformation. De Finiels argued that the close proximity of French and Native villages was indicative of a trade–based reciprocal arrangement between the two communities. Furs and European goods frequently changed hands in a complex and intricate system of

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<sup>620</sup> I. Lippincott, “Industry among the French in the Illinois Country,” *Journal of Political Economy* 18, no. 2 (1910): 125–128.

<sup>621</sup> de Finiels, de Finiels, *An Account of Upper Louisiana*, 111.

commodity exchange that bound the French-speaking inhabitants and the various aboriginal nations of the region together. De Finiels explained that this relationship encouraged the French-speaking inhabitants of the interior of North America to adopt an aboriginal style of dress. Donning furs and skins in the winter for warmth while hunting and replacing European shoes with moccasins became the physical manifestation of a larger process of becoming Indian.<sup>622</sup> Through this physical transformation, de Finiels argued that the French-speaking inhabitants were regressing and returning to a natural state. As the French in the heart of North America became more native, they grew closer to de Finiels' native simplicity. And yet, at the same time, their regression separated them from newly arrived Frenchmen from France.

As de Finiels attempted to make sense of the different French villages and their inhabitants, he compared and contrasted them with not only the aboriginal nations, but also peoples from around the world. This was particularly true of de Finiels' description of the town of St. Charles. Much like Collot, de Finiels depicted the town and its people as the last vestige of civilization along the Missouri River. However, while Collot was implicit in the way he transformed *Canadiens* and French-speaking inhabitants, de Finiels explicitly made the St. Charles residents into new Indians.

Its residents, more hunters than farmers, in no way participate in the civilization that exists in St. Louis. They are nearly savages, and several of them scarcely understand French. Too indolent for the effort it would require to pull themselves out of this condition, they nevertheless endure the most difficult hardships in pursuit of wild game, which often leads them into the mountains. They overcome the difficulties of the Missouri and of the Mississippi with a courage and ardor that is astonishing when you have seen them pass entire days in a lassitude that could be called softness were it accompanied by any

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<sup>622</sup> Ibid., 112.

of the trappings of luxury. Their slow, sedate pace around their village reminds one of Asiatics burdened with their climate's heat. You might consider them weak, but when necessary they are capable of the most strenuous efforts. If they were darker complected, if they were less kindly, you might mistake them for Indians. They have adopted all of their habits without possessing any of their cruelty.<sup>623</sup>

In some cases, French-speaking inhabitants or *Canadiens* who dressed like aboriginals or acted as negotiators, intermediaries, and translators were automatically described as Indian or métis. For instance, Nicolas de Finiels described the founder of Cape Girardot, Louis Lorimier, as the son of a white man and a Shawnee woman. De Finiels came to this conclusion based largely on the fact that Lorimier had helped set up several nearby Shawnee and Delaware villages, spoke the languages, and dressed in both European and Indian attire.<sup>624</sup> Yet most of the historical evidence indicates that Lorimier was, in fact, a transplanted *Canadien*, born in the St. Lawrence Valley, who had engaged in the fur trade, married a Shawnee woman, and helped negotiate the relocation of the Shawnee and Delaware to Upper Louisiana.<sup>625</sup> Lorimier's correspondence and journal entries during these negotiations reveal a man who was concerned about the security of the west bank of the Mississippi and saw the relocation of the Shawnee and Delaware as instrumental to helping secure the region.<sup>626</sup> They also show a man who was comfortable dealing with French administrators, wrote well in French, and who, at

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<sup>623</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 34–36.

<sup>625</sup> Louis Lorimier, "Journal of Lorimier during the Threatened Genet Invasion of Louisiana, 1793–1795," in *The Spanish Regime In Missouri: A Collection of Papers and Documents Relating to Upper Louisiana within the Present Limits of Missouri during the Dominion of Spain, from the Archives of the Indies at Seville*, ed., Louis Houck (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons, 1909) 2: 59–99.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

times, became frustrated with the aboriginal peoples with whom he dealt.<sup>627</sup> There is no way of telling whether Lorimier considered himself French, *Canadien*, or *métis*, but his own writing paints a very different picture than that of de Finiels. In looking at de Finiels' depictions of French-speaking inhabitants, it would appear that he, like Victor Collot, had many of the same difficulties understanding the French river world, at times contradicting himself in an attempt to bring structure to that which he encountered.

### **Volney: French and American**

Via a series of comparisons, Victor Collot and Nicolas de Finiels tried to make sense of the peoples they encountered. Similarly, Constantin François de Chasseboeuf Comte de Volney used comparison to explain the world around him. Volney, a product of the Enlightenment, traveled extensively and published his travel journals for the salons of Europe.<sup>628</sup> Volney had been thrown in prison in 1793 during the Reign of Terror in France, and upon his release came to America on a fact-finding tour. Arnold Whitridge notes that Volney was a sociological traveler who came to America to study the young republic, and that he “differed from most of his compatriots in that he was not seeking refuge from the guillotine.”<sup>629</sup> Fluent in both English and French, he spent most of his voyage in the American colonies and traveled on the Ohio and Wabash Rivers in 1796. He compared the French-speaking inhabitants of the Illinois Country to the small, but growing number of Americans who flowed into the region at the end of the eighteenth century. Volney also compared the well-established French-speaking inhabitants of the Illinois Country to the newly established and struggling French émigré

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<sup>627</sup> Ibid.

<sup>628</sup> Furstenberg, “Us and French Atlantic Connections,” 5.

<sup>629</sup> Whitridge, “French Émigrés in Philadelphia,” 293.

community of Gallipolis in the Ohio Valley. As he traveled into the Ohio Valley and the Illinois Country, Volney was struck by the contrast between the Americans he encountered and the well-established French-speaking population. This was particularly the case at Vincennes on the Wabash River, where he noted the physical differences between the two groups.

Le lendemain de mon arrivée, il y avait audience des juges du canton: je m'y rendis pour fair mes observations sur le physique et le moral des habitans rassemblés: dès mon rentrée, je fus frappe de voir l'auditoire partagé en deux races d'hommes totalement diverses de visage et d'habitude de corps: les uns ayant les cheveux blonds ou châains, le teint fleuri, la figure pleine et le corps d'un embonpoint qui annonçait la santé et l'aissance; les autres ayant le visage très maigre, le peau have et tannée, et tout le corps comme exténué de jeûne, sans parler des vêtemens qui annonçaient la pauvreté. Je reconnus bientôt que ces derniers étaient les Colons français établis depuis environ soixante ans dans ce lieu, tandis que les premiers étaient des Colons américains qui, depuis quatre à six ans seulement, y avaient acheté des terres qu'ils cultivaient. Les Français, à la reserve de trios ou quatre, ne savaient point l'anglais: les Américains, presque en totalité, ne savaient guère plus de français.<sup>630</sup>

The Americans were portrayed as healthy and wealthy while the French were depicted as weak and poor.<sup>631</sup> For Volney, the French-speaking inhabitants, whom he felt had been established in the region for at least sixty years, had fallen into backwardness compared to the Americans, whom he claimed had only been in the region for roughly six years. While the Americans had purchased land and begun to cultivate it, Volney described how the French-speaking inhabitants had been

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<sup>630</sup> Volney, *Tableau du climat et du sol des Etats-Unis d'Amérique*, 1: 396.

<sup>631</sup> Volney may have given a glowing view of the Americans in comparison to the established French-speaking inhabitants, but like many French émigré writers he also described how American prosperity had brought cultural degeneration, especially compared to France. Echeverria, *Mirage in the West*, 197.

preoccupied with marrying native women and creating alliances with the surrounding aboriginal nations.<sup>632</sup> Like Collot and de Finiels, Volney contrasted an ideal of agricultural settlement with the mobile lifestyle of trade and commerce. However, more than Collot and de Finiels, he argued that the French-speaking inhabitants had chosen to live like aboriginal peoples instead of Americans, stating, “ces Colons ont été conduits par la nature des choses à préférer une vie tour-à-tour agitée et dissipée, indolente et oiseuse, comme celle des sauvages, à la vie sédentaire, active et patiente des laboureurs anglo-Américains.”<sup>633</sup>

Volney reasoned that the heart of the issue was the domestic lives of the respective groups. He argued that Americans of English or German descent made farming their top priority, and recounted how American lives consisted of waking up early and working all day to complete their long-term plan of agricultural settlement. On the other hand, Volney stated that the French-speaking inhabitants were governed by their passions, with no long-term plans or assessment of risk. “J’ai cru m’apercevoir dans mes voyages aux États-Unis, que les Français n’ont pas la même aptitude à y former des établissements agricoles, que les immigrants d’Angleterre, d’Irlande et d’Allemagne.”<sup>634</sup> For Volney, the typical French-speaking inhabitant in the heart of North America woke up and argued with his wife about what to do that day. The two spent their time complaining and arguing, never agreeing. The Frenchman concluded that the quieter and more settled domestic life of the Americans was the key to their industry.<sup>635</sup>

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<sup>632</sup> Volney, *Tableau du climat et du sol des Etats-Unis d’Amérique*, 1: 398.

<sup>633</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 404; Watts, *In This Remote Country*, 59.

<sup>634</sup> Volney, *Tableau du climat et du sol des Etats-Unis d’Amérique*, 1: 392.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 412–415.

There is little doubt that American complaints about the French-speaking inhabitants coloured Volney's narrative. The Americans in the Ohio Valley denounced the French-speaking inhabitants as savages in both appearance and custom, who preferred hunting and long voyages to agriculture, and rarely planned ahead by storing provisions for the next season. Furthermore, the Americans argued that French women were deficient in their chores and could not even make butter, while the men rarely smoked their pork, were unable to make beer, and lacked the necessary skills for effective farming.<sup>636</sup> His description of towns in Upper Louisiana, such as St. Louis, depicted a miserable backwater marred in poverty and constrained by widespread apathy.<sup>637</sup> The Americans were not yet as populous in the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana as they had become in the Ohio Valley, but Volney appears to have projected his experiences between the Ohio and Wabash Rivers onto the landscape of the Mississippi River.<sup>638</sup>

Volney also compared the French-speaking inhabitants at Vincennes to the recently arrived French at Gallipolis. The Scioto Land Company had sold tracts of land at Gallipolis in the Ohio Valley to French families in France during the early 1790s. For those seeking to leave revolutionary France, the settlement was seen as an opportunity

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<sup>636</sup> Ibid., 1: 402.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid., 1: 403.

<sup>638</sup> It is not entirely clear how much of Volney's description of the middle Mississippi Valley was first-hand. Charles Balesi is convinced that it was an eyewitness account, but the general nature of the description, along with detailed information regarding the numbers of households in each town is reminiscent of Collot's second-hand information regarding the number of Indian warriors on the Missouri. The numbers that Collot provided make that part of his journal look like an authentic first-hand account. In fact, it was one of the few parts of his journals that were based purely on second-hand information. One may wonder whether the same was true for Volney and his descriptions of the towns of the middle Mississippi Valley. That Volney dedicated more attention to Vincennes and Gallipolis than the few short pages for all the towns of the middle Mississippi Valley is quite striking. This especially so when one considers that towns like Ste. Geneviève, St. Louis, Cahokia, and even the declining Kaskaskia were still larger than Vincennes. Balesi, *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America*, 315.

for starting anew in America.<sup>639</sup> Other French ventures of this sort sprang up, such as Castorland in New York and Asylum in Pennsylvania, and all were pitched as idyllic locations to prosper. The propaganda helped create a preconceived notion of a utopia in the American wilderness, something that underplayed the struggles of frontier life.<sup>640</sup> Settlers at Gallipolis found nothing resembling the idyllic pictures painted by the Scioto Land Company brochures and pamphlets. In fact, the entire venture was a colossal failure. The Scioto Land Company was little more than a real estate scam and French families that relocated to Gallipolis were left to fend for themselves in a foreign land, with little American support and surrounded by aboriginal nations with whom they had no history of peaceful relations.<sup>641</sup> Gallipolis was on the verge of collapse by the time Volney visited in 1796, a sad and broken community.

Arnold Whitridge argues that Volney felt that the settlement at Gallipolis failed because the French lacked a pioneering spirit and were too sophisticated and social for frontier life.<sup>642</sup> However, Whitridge makes no mention of the fact that Volney's discussion of Gallipolis was in comparison to the well-established French-speaking inhabitants at Vincennes. Volney's assertion that the French were unable to compete with the Americans referred to the French-speaking inhabitants found at Vincennes and throughout the Illinois Country, not the recently arrived French from France. Indeed, Volney argued that it was only with the help of the newly arrived French that the

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<sup>639</sup> Over 25,000 refugees from France and San Domingo came to the United States during the early 1790s. Most settled in the major American cities along the Atlantic seaboard, but new settlements further inland at Gallipolis, Castorland, and Asylum also attracted French settlers. Spaeth, "America in the French Imagination," 248.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>641</sup> François Furstenberg describes a corrupt company that sold 120,000 acres of Ohio Valley land to over 1,000 French settlers in the early 1790s. Furstenberg, "Us and French Atlantic Connections," 24.

<sup>642</sup> Whitridge, "French Émigrés in Philadelphia," 294–295.

French-speaking inhabitants of the Illinois Country would be able to compete against the Americans.<sup>643</sup>

In his comparison of the recently arrived poor and destitute French at Gallipolis and the well-established French-speaking trading population, Volney made an explicit distinction between pre- and post-French Revolutionary populations. The French-speaking inhabitants of Vincennes were said to have a *méantalité* reminiscent of the period of Louis XIV and XV, dominated by Old World feudalism and marked by weaker levels of personal fortitude and industry.<sup>644</sup> The Scioto Land Company settlers, however, were children of the French Revolution and propagators of liberty and peace.<sup>645</sup> Volney lamented the difficult circumstances that the French found at Gallipolis and argued that if they had only been sent to the older French settlements on the Wabash and Mississippi Rivers, they would have been able to repel threats from the Americans and aboriginals.<sup>646</sup> Volney was quite clear that these post-revolutionary French would have helped the French-speaking inhabitants of the region put aside their Old World *mentalité* and become new children of the Revolution. Volney turned failed newcomers into potential heroic saviours as he sought to find a balance between the failed colony at Gallipolis and his intellectual ideal of post-revolutionary French republicans.

Volney's narrative highlights a regular theme found in many French travel narratives at the end of the eighteenth century, that of the distinction between pre- and post-French Revolutionary populations. Volney was surprised when he encountered the French-speaking inhabitants at Vincennes and found that their speech was not as close

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<sup>643</sup> Volney, *Tableau du climat et du sol des Etats-Unis d'Amérique*, 1: 420.

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>645</sup> Echeverria, *Mirage in the West*, 192.

<sup>646</sup> Volney, *Tableau du climat et du sol des Etats-Unis d'Amérique*, 1: 420.

to a French *patois* as he had been led to believe.<sup>647</sup> Moreover, he noted that much of the French spoken at Vincennes still contained military words and expressions, which he believed was a holdover from historical links with Canada and the Carignan–Salières regiment that had been stationed there.<sup>648</sup> Even though Volney depicted the French-speaking inhabitants as backward and savage, there was still an acknowledgement of a *Canadien* past that made these inhabitants a distant French “other.” They could, in essence, be saved and pulled from their backwardness through interaction with post-revolutionary French settlers. However, Volney would not be present to bear witness to the eventual dissolution of Gallipolis or the mass American migration into the Illinois Country at the turn of the nineteenth century. Like Victor Collot, Volney was accused of being a French spy and forced to leave the United States in 1798. Much like Collot and de Finiels, Volney’s narrative produced a complex set of contradictions borne of the intellectual challenges of trying to understand and depict the French in the heart of North America.

### Conclusion

Writing travel narratives was a complex process of classification that combined intellectual traditions and currents with actual experiences. The authors of these narratives were all learned men and products of the Enlightenment. As such, they brought to their work their understandings of political philosophy, the nature of man, and modernity. Anglo–American writers wrote in the wake of the American Revolution and were influenced by Lockean political ideals and English concepts of land tenure.

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<sup>647</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 401.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*

Similarly, Frenchmen drew from the ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau and the French Revolution. In Philadelphia, Anglo–American and French intellectual traditions co–existed, as men like Collot, de Finiels, and Volney mixed with Americans and other French émigrés. When these men wrote about their travels, they brought with them a melting pot of intellectual baggage. Their writing was framed in a narrative form that borrowed heavily from longstanding traditions of French travel literature, including the *récit de voyage* and *relations*. Yet, when these authors came face–to–face with French–speaking peoples in the heart of North America, what they found were communities that failed to match their intellectual understanding of the world. Their lived experiences and those of the French–speaking inhabitants whom they witnessed and chronicled tested many of their lofty intellectual ideals and accepted norms. The result was travel narratives that effectively constructed the French in the heart of North America as an exotic “other,” where themes of race, ethnicity, settlement, mobility, backwardness, and modernity played out in a series of seemingly endless contradictions.

The contradictions found in the travel narratives were undoubtedly the product of centrifugal forces, where literary and intellectual traditions were employed to capture a very complicated social reality. Travel narratives and reports followed a variety of loosely bound narrative structures that could easily be digested by state officials and learned men and women throughout Europe. The intellectual currents of the Enlightenment, coupled with the republican ideals of the American and French Revolutions, had to conform to accepted narrative structures, but at the same time they were challenged by a complex cultural hodgepodge that defied categorization. The perception of a perilous unbridled wilderness was a reflection of the natural dangers that newcomers faced while traveling the waterways of the continent. The French–speaking

peoples they encountered were characterized in highly contradictory terms, as hard working, lazy, free, uncivilized, useful, degenerate, virtuous, happy, miserable, heroic, and wretched. However, despite the inherent contradictions in the narratives, most travelers viewed the *Canadiens* and French-speaking inhabitants of the interior as possessing an intimate knowledge of the natural landscape that made up the French river world. The inhabitants mixed with the natives, or at the very least enjoyed a special relationship with them. Consequently, they became holders of indigenous knowledge and were transformed into new Indians. These French-speaking Indians were useful when they served imperial interests, and backward and savage when they failed to meet the colonial expectations of sedentary agricultural settlement. For the French travelers and surveyors of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the French-speaking peoples in the heart of North America were constructed as a kinder, gentler, more familiar “other,” one whom they hoped would help rebuild the French empire in North America.

Darrel Meadows argues that, in the wake of the French and Haitian revolutions, French social networks proved instrumental in forming and maintaining a French Atlantic community of exiles.<sup>649</sup> Collot, de Finiels, and Volney would all have come in contact with these exiles during their time in Philadelphia. Meadows notes that this group was “forged through trade, migration, and other forms of travel in the eighteenth century.”<sup>650</sup> Not surprisingly, these elements were also salient features of the French river world in the heart of North America. When one examines the French travel narratives of this period, depictions of *Canadiens* and French-speaking inhabitants

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<sup>649</sup> Meadows, “Engineering Exile,” 70.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid.

reveal these features. Confronted with the historical legacy and continued contemporary importance of *Canadiens* in the heart of North America, French émigré writers tried to understand a French river world defined by continued in-migration, mobility and trade, as well as a world that was in many ways the antithesis of their colonial ideal. Therefore, French travel narratives produced a series of internal contradictions that implicitly acknowledged these salient aspects that manifested themselves as a largely ill-defined and amorphous “other,” the French river world.

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### Conclusion: Transition and New Beginnings

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The start of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of a transitional period for the French river world. The mobile networks of communication and exchange that had helped grow and maintain the French river world were slowly changing and adjusting to new geopolitical realities. In particular, the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 marked the opening of the trans-Mississippi west and ushered in a new era defined by American expansion and western migration. Yet the ties that bound French-speaking families and communities together proved remarkably durable. Elements of the French river world remained in full force until well into the nineteenth century and French-speaking inhabitants in the heart of North America used established networks to assist with the transition to American rule.<sup>651</sup> Some of the prominent French-speaking merchants like Pierre and Auguste Chouteau were able to make the adjustments necessary to remain at the forefront of opening and developing the American Midwest.<sup>652</sup> Although there are numerous examples, the education of Auguste Chouteau's son, Aristide, is particularly illustrative of the ways in which kinship and

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<sup>651</sup> Gitlin, "Old Wine in New Bottles," 37.

<sup>652</sup> Jay Gitlin, *The Bourgeois Frontier: French Towns, French Traders & American Expansion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 47–67.

mobile networks of communication and exchange were used to navigate a changing French river world.

Education and instruction in the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana was approached in a variety of different ways. A large portion of the French-speaking population was illiterate, and yet literacy became increasingly important throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. There are few references regarding teachers in the heart of North America, with the exception of the well-documented case of Jean-Baptiste Trudeau. Trudeau taught in St. Louis when he was not taking part in expeditions down the Missouri River. Some children were home schooled in reading, writing, and arithmetic, however, parents with the means to do so sent their children away to New Orleans, Montreal or France for their studies.

When fur baron Auguste Chouteau contemplated where to send his son for a formal education, New Orleans merited little consideration. Rather the debate was between an education in France and one in Canada. Montreal proved an ideal location given his kinship connections to the Panet family through his sister-in-law. Marie-Anne Cerré-Panet wrote to Chouteau in 1797 expressing her excitement at the prospect of meeting her young nephew for the first time and opening her home to him.<sup>653</sup> By 1800, Chouteau had made his decision and wrote a letter to his sister-in-law's husband Pierre-Louis Panet.<sup>654</sup> Chouteau and Panet corresponded regularly throughout Aristide's stay in Montreal, often addressing each other as brother-in-law. The term brother-in-law

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<sup>653</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00006.

<sup>654</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00634.

was a tacit acknowledgment of the kinship connection between Chouteau and Panet through their marriage ties to the Cerré family.<sup>655</sup>

Auguste Chouteau had specific reasons for sending his son to Montreal, which included learning English and the formal instruction of proper etiquette. For over forty years the lingua franca in the heart of North America had been French. As the language of commerce, French had helped bridge the initial gap between Aboriginal peoples of the trans-Appalachian and Mississippi wests and British trans-Atlantic trade. When French-speaking merchants from Canada to the middle-Mississippi Valley initially began sending furs to London in exchange for British imperial goods, the new imperial ties that developed helped stabilize the French river world. French networks of communication and exchange were bolstered by an influx of British capital, and business alliances were made with British merchants, who often corresponded in French and even married into prominent French-speaking families. However, these same British connections, which were crucial in the short term for maintaining the French river world, slowly changed it from the inside out.

Chouteau and Panet saw first hand the changes taking place in the world of commerce and were determined to ensure that Aristide was well prepared for what awaited him. Chouteau wrote to Panet in May of 1805, stating “As the English language even now begins to be, and some day will become, absolutely necessary here, I desire that he learn it and that he perfect himself in it. It is an expedient that will always be open to him, and besides even at present it is almost in general the language of

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<sup>655</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary (OED): The brother of one’s husband or wife; the husband of one’s sister. Sometimes extended to the husband of one’s wife’s sister. More recently, the extension to the husband of one’s wife’s sister appears to have been dropped. The usage here could reflect a wider societal acceptance of these extended kinship connections.

commerce.”<sup>656</sup> At least as important as learning English was making sure that Aristide was given an opportunity to learn how to conduct himself as a proper gentleman in order to function and succeed in what Chouteau referred to as “good society.”<sup>657</sup> Chouteau was convinced that Aristide could not get a suitable education in St. Louis and that the only option was to send the boy away. Chouteau’s decision reflected the growing importance of a formal education among the emerging French bourgeoisie in the heart of North America. Pierre–Louis Panet agreed with Auguste Chouteau and noted that the British paid particular attention to one’s education and standing in society.<sup>658</sup> If French merchants had been less concerned about education in the past, they were becoming increasingly concious of it by the start of the nineteenth century.

Before Aristide arrived in Montreal his parents expressed concern that he had become too wild and unruly, but remained cautiously optimistic that their boy’s education would take hold.<sup>659</sup> Panet warned Chouteau that Aristide should stay in Montreal as long as necessary for his education, reminding him of Pascal Cerré, who had left Montreal and quit school prematurely.

But there must be time enough to effect this, because I flatter myself that you will not make the same mistake as Mr. Cerré, my [father–in–law], who was in too much of a hurry in taking away his son from me, so that he was unable to take advantage of the good beginning he had, and his education remained incomplete, and instead of being placed in a situation where he would have learned work, he even lost his taste for work, and he could not flatter himself that he would hold in society the rank he should have received there. The consequences of this could

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<sup>656</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00634.

<sup>657</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00634.

<sup>658</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00706.

<sup>659</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00634; Baby Collection, P0058, U2538, mf 4409–4410.

be fatal for him when he will not longer have the support of his parents, which may some day happen.<sup>660</sup>

Panet's comments not only reveal how important a formal education had become, but also how kin and commercial networks of the French river world were fundamental for procuring an education and developing the necessary contacts to make one's way in the world. Chouteau left the details of Aristide's schooling to Panet, but indicated that his agent John Lyle would see that his son's educational and personal expenses were met.<sup>661</sup>

The young Aristide Chouteau initially boarded at an English school, spending only Sundays at the Panet household. Pierre-Louis Panet kept Chouteau updated on his son's conduct and educational progress and informed him in 1803 that Aristide was learning English, but was not yet sufficiently fluent to move on to Latin.<sup>662</sup> Of course, such correspondence was frequently littered with news regarding business ventures. Aristide may have been the first order of business in many of Panet's letters to Chouteau, but commercial interests were never far behind. In the same letter that discussed Aristide's progress in English Panet relayed news from England regarding the successful sale of furs at higher than anticipated prices. Panet was cautiously optimistic, but warned that the potential for renewed hostilities between England and France could be detrimental to trade.<sup>663</sup> France had retaken possession of Louisiana and news of the Louisiana Purchase, signed only days earlier, had not yet reached the shores of North

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<sup>660</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00706. Although the translation of the document says brother-in-law, the original French document looks much more like father-in-law. Taking into account Pascal's dates of birth and marriage, as well as the dates for the birth of his children, it seems highly unlikely that his children were educated in Montreal before Aristide went to stay with the Panet family.

<sup>661</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 2 of 40, 00634.

<sup>662</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 3 of 40, 00913.

<sup>663</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 3 of 40, 00913.

America. Panet was convinced that the fate of North America rested in the old imperial rivalry between England and France.<sup>664</sup>

The Louisiana Purchase alleviated concerns about French–English relations, but had little discernable effect – at least in the short term – on the flow of information and goods between St. Louis and Montreal. The following year, Panet commented on the geo–political shake–up in his correspondence with Chouteau, and asked his brother–in–law how he liked the unexpected change. Panet observed that the American course would serve Chouteau’s business interests better than that of the French, who he felt had made unrealistic promises in search of colonial support.<sup>665</sup> Meanwhile, the young Aristide improved his English skills considerably and began to learn Latin. He continued to spend his free time at the Panet household, and was going to begin learning to draw and paint like his cousin Mélanie. Pierre–Louis Panet noted, “We will have him take a one–hour lesson daily of an art that can only add to the qualities of a well raised man and which can occupy him agreeably all his life in his moments of leisure.”<sup>666</sup>

Up until 1804, it appeared as if Aristide was on the path to becoming a well–bred young man with skills that would afford him every opportunity for success in the world as a commercial gentleman. However, Aristide appears to have had some trouble adjusting to life in Montreal. As early as 1802, Aristide displayed signs that he was homesick. He wrote a letter in rudimentary English asking his father to send him moccasins with porcupine quills and a bow and quiver. These were not just personal items, but also objects that had sentimental meaning for the boy and tied him to his life

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<sup>664</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 3 of 40, 00913. 1803–05–09, and the Louisiana Purchase was signed April 30, 1803. France had retaken possession of Louisiana in 1800, although they did little to change the administration of the colony.

<sup>665</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 4 of 40, 00399.

<sup>666</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 4 of 40, 00399.

back in St. Louis. Over time, his conduct increasingly became a topic of family correspondence. Aristide was accustomed to few responsibilities and restraints in St. Louis and rebelled against the confinement of his boarding school by running away on numerous occasions. At first Panet thought the problem could be solved by having Aristide go to day school. However, when Aristide was presented with this option he ran away for three days, hiding out at a cousin's house until he was brought back to Panet. The headmaster at Aristide's school refused to take him back and so Panet was left with little option but to either place the boy in a seminary or send him to a school of lesser quality. Panet then had the unenviable task of explaining Aristide's misconduct to Chouteau. He recounted events in a detailed letter, which also included an account of another incident where Aristide had stolen a pair of skates. The initial reason for placing Aristide at an English boarding school was for him to learn English, which he had done quite well, however, his rebellious ways made discipline a higher priority. Panet enrolled Aristide in a seminary, explaining, "The religious sentiments inculcated there contribute the more to hold them to their duty, which is a means almost entirely neglected in the English schools."<sup>667</sup>

Panet explained later that things had gotten out of hand because Chouteau had split the responsibility of caring for Aristide between several people. Panet argued that this created some confusion over who was responsible for the boy and led to moments when each thought that Aristide was with one of the other guardians. Although this plan did not work as well as Chouteau had hoped, it does underscore the fact that he relied not only on his extended kin, but also on British agents and partners to help care for his

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<sup>667</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 4 of 40, 00687.

son.<sup>668</sup> It represented both the continued importance of the networks of communication and exchange that held the French river world together and the changing nature of those networks.

Panet had several serious talks with Aristide, but the young man's behaviour continued to be a topic of some importance in family correspondence over the next year.<sup>669</sup> By the end of 1805 things reached a head when the seminary refused to continue to teach the young Chouteau. Panet was embarrassed and running out of options and reluctantly sent a letter to Auguste Chouteau informing him that he was going to send Aristide back to St. Louis.<sup>670</sup> In early 1806, instructions were sent to have Aristide put in the care of George Gillespie and sent to Michilimackinac, where Aristide's cousin Toussaint Cerré was to meet him and bring him home to St. Louis.<sup>671</sup>

Aristide may have been sent back to St. Louis, but the importance kin and commercial linkages persisted. The case of Aristide Chouteau did not mark the end of the French river world, but rather the beginning of a transitional period. The French maintained old commercial ties while looking for new opportunities. Jay Gitlin explains "they were learning valuable lessons in the fine art of managing the transition from imperial authority to republican sovereignty, one West to the other."<sup>672</sup> Patterns of migration and intermarriage had kept *Canadiens* flowing into the Illinois Country and Upper Louisiana throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. This helped keep broader notions of French North America at the forefront of living memory. Concurrent to these migration patterns, merchants created vast networks of communication and

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<sup>668</sup> Ibid. The document mentions Mr. Myer, which is most likely Myer Michaels.

<sup>669</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 4 of 40, 00900.

<sup>670</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Microfilm Reel 4 of 40, 01111.

<sup>671</sup> Baby Collection, P0058, U2541, mf 4410.

<sup>672</sup> Gitlin, *The Bourgeois Frontier*, 45.

exchange along the rivers from the St. Lawrence to the Mississippi, tying individuals, families and communities together. The inability of imperial powers to exert effective control over the territories in the heart of North America allowed merchants, voyageurs and travelers to cross weakly enforced geo-political boundaries with relative impunity. Merchants transported goods, letters and people, and acted as third party representatives for those trying to conduct long distance trade and family business. This was the creation and maintenance of a culture of mobility that resulted in a collective mental map of the French river world. Travelers to the heart of North America struggled to make sense of the cultural ramifications of these mobile networks of communication and exchange, and yet they almost uniformly touched on the salient features that made up the French river world in their writing.

In 2004, Stephen J. Greenblatt noted "the phenomenon of mobility is acknowledged in passing, of course, but as the exception to the rule or as its more or less violent disruption."<sup>673</sup> However, he went on to ask, "what if mobility were understood to be the constitutive condition of culture, not its disruption?"<sup>674</sup> Mobility was indeed the foundational element of the French river world and it was ultimately the solidification of geo-political boundaries that proved disruptive to the culture of mobility and the larger geographical sense of place. Correspondence was increasingly filtered through a postmaster; geo-political boundaries and tariffs on trade in the Great Lakes were more consistently enforced; and new migration patterns developed, both for *Canadiens* and Americans. And yet even in the emerging American Midwest links with Canada continued to play out into 1830s as the American Fur Company hired over one

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<sup>673</sup> Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility* [PDF] (2004 [cited 18 October 2007 [www.fas.harvard.edu/curriculum-review/essays\\_pdf/Stephen\\_J\\_Greenblatt.pdf](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/curriculum-review/essays_pdf/Stephen_J_Greenblatt.pdf)]).

<sup>674</sup> *Ibid.*

thousand *Canadien* voyageurs out of Montreal to travel to St. Louis and the limits of the Missouri fur trade. The French river world between 1763 and 1803 had been a world beyond borders, where a culture of mobility and mental mapping had been instrumental for the maintenance of social cohesion. However, as that world changed, French-speaking inhabitants in the heart of North America made use of the pre-existing structures of the French river world in order to adapt. This was not an ending, but a transition and new beginning; one that saw the French in the heart of North America well positioned to forge a new place in the creation of the American Midwest.

**Appendices**

Appendix A. List of Articles of Exchange, fitted for the commerce of the Western States, of Upper and Lower Louisiana, and the fur trade with the Indians.<sup>675</sup>

Western States	Observations
<p>Wines</p> <p>Teneriffe and Fayal. Lisbon, in quarts. Spanish, ditto. Malaga, of an inferior quality, ditto. French and Spanish brandies. Holland gin, in casks, long bottles, and chests.</p> <p align="center">Arms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheap cutlasses.</li> <li>• Long-barrelled guns for hunting and military uses.</li> <li>• A few carabines.</li> <li>• Large pistols.</li> <li>• Brass two and three-pounders.</li> </ul> <p align="center">Dry Goods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coarse blankets.</li> <li>• A few fine.</li> <li>• Woollen goods for clothing.</li> <li>• Ginghams.</li> <li>• Cloths from fifty sous to nine livres the ell; a few from fourteen to forty-two livres.</li> <li>• Printed cotton goods, from thirty sous to three livres the ell.</li> <li>• Common woollen carpets.</li> <li>• Thread and worsted stockings, from twenty sous to four livres the pair.</li> <li>• Very coarse muslins.</li> <li>• A few black, white, blue and quaker colored taffetas.</li> <li>• Black and colored silk handkerchiefs for cravats.</li> <li>• Ditto, for shawls.</li> <li>• Cotton shawls.</li> </ul>	<p>No French wines, unless sent as a sample.</p> <p>Small parcels of Madeira.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Called <i>briquets</i>.</li> <li>• Known by the name of Tull's fusils of Bordeaux.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chiefly blue, grey, and quaker colors.</li> <li>• Some pieces of the first quality might be added by way of specimen.</li> <li>• For curtains and pillows.</li> <li>• Figured borders; a few fashionable</li> </ul>

<sup>675</sup> Collot, *A Journey in North America*, 2: 201.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assortment of common ribband.</li> <li>• Assortment of tape.</li> <li>• Assortment of black velvet ribband.</li> <li>• Assortment of silk and cotton thread.</li> <li>• Cloth lining.</li> <li>• A few pieces of black satin.</li>   <li>• Cloth for shirts.</li>   <li>• Cloth of Bretagne.</li> <li>• Black, violet and olive colored velveret.</li> <li>• Velvets for collars or breeches.</li> <li>• Black, grey, and a few white silk stockings.</li> <li>• Cambrics, from four to twelve livres the ell.</li> <li>• Lawns, from four to twelve livres the ell.</li> <li>• Men's and weomen's gloves.</li> <li>• Black lace, from seven sols to four livres.</li> <li>• Oiled cloths of different colours.</li>   <li>• Straw hats.</li> <li>• Cutlery of every sort.</li>   <li>• A few fashionable dresses.</li> <li>• Women's shoes.</li> <li>• Cheap clocks.</li> <li>• Silver watches, from thirty to forty-eight livres.</li> <li>• A few gold watches, from five to six louis.</li> <li>• Silver tea-spoons.</li> <li>• Shoe-buckles.</li> <li>• Tea equipage.</li>   <li>• Common china, English form.</li> <li>• Looking glasses, from eight inches to twenty-two.</li> <li>• Window glass.</li> </ul>	<p>samples.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common, for breeches and women's gowns.</li> <li>• It is doubtful whether we can furnish as cheap as Ireland; Irish shirts may be had at three livres.</li>   <li>• Colored, but large; a few white.</li>   <li>• Of different patterns, to cover tables; it is doubtful if we can furnish as cheap as Germany.</li> <li>• Taking care to export only such as are equal to the English; unfortunately we have few, especially at low prices.</li>   <li>• Very light, English fashion.</li> <li>• Thin patterns and cheap.</li> <li>• Common; I fear we cannot furnish them so cheap as England.</li> <li>• Same price as England.</li> <li>• Mahogany frames, slightly gilt.</li>   <li>• In great quantity, six inches by</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few common ditto.</li> <li>• Damask table cloth.</li> <li>• White paper.</li>   <li>• A few cheap prints.</li> <li>• Mercery of every kind.</li> <li>• Jewellery, rings, and ear-rings.</li> <li>• Shirt pins, wrist buttons, at the lowest prices.</li> </ul>	<p>eight, or eight by ten.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nine by seven, English measure.</li> <li>• Low rate, and large patterns.</li> <li>• And every article for counting houses</li> </ul>
<b>Upper and Lower Louisiana</b>	<b>Observations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In general the same articles as for the Western States, to which may be added a few articles of luxury, such as fashionable dresses, household furniture, etc. but at low prices.</li> <li>• Ladies' fashionable shoes.</li> <li>• Ladies' colored silk and cotton stockings, with embroidered clocks.</li> <li>• Elegant silk and cotton shawls.</li> <li>• Fine paper for rooms.</li> <li>• Ladies' parasols.</li> <li>• Fine shirtings and sheetings.</li> <li>• Good cambricks and lawns.</li> <li>• A few light coaches ad cabriolets.</li>   <li>• Great coats of linen and oiled taffety.</li> <li>• French wines of every price and quality, both in casks and bottles.</li> <li>• N.B. As the Americans have a direct commerce with India, they can furnish all the produce of the Indian manufactories 25 per cent. cheaper than the Europeans.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For Lower Louisiana only.</li>   <li>• These carriages ought to be constructed for hot climates; that is, with open tops, etc.</li>   <li>• Note. With respect to Upper Louisiana, nothing costly; nearly the same articles as for the Western States.</li> </ul>
<b>For the Fur Trade</b>	<b>Observations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Red and blue woollen cloths.</li> <li>• Large red coats, worsted lace.</li> <li>• Coarse hats, bound with worsted lace, and covered with showy feathers.</li> <li>• London muskets.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• But small quantities of the blue.</li>   <li>• Those of Tull, made at Bordeaux, might be substituted; these are</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carabines, of the form we have specified.</li> <li>• White powder-horns.</li> <li>• Powder and balls.</li> <li>• Shells.</li> <li>• Drinking cups of china or bone.</li> <li>• Blue goblets.</li> <li>• Small drinking cups, colored blue, black, and white.</li> <li>• Assortments of brass wires.</li> <li>• Framed looking grasses.</li> <li>• Horse-bells of various sizes.</li> <li>• Copper rings and ear-rings.</li> <li>• Box combs.</li> <li>• Awls and steels.</li> <li>• Gun-drawers.</li> <li>• Gun-flints.</li> <li>• Black silk handkerchiefs.</li> <li>• Square blue cotton handkerchiefs.</li> <li>• Large Indian three-cornered overlids</li> <li>• Ready made shirts.</li>   <li>• Copper saucepans of all sizes.</li> <li>• Pick-axes, hatchets, and large nails.</li> <li>• Tomahawks.</li> <li>• Spears in form of a half pike.</li> <li>• Short sabres.</li> <li>• Large an small scalping knives with sheaths.</li> <li>• Vermillion.</li> <li>• Silver and metal Medals.</li> </ul>	<p>preferable, but not much in use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This kind of overlid is lost in our manufactories.</li> <li>• Few white, but plenty of colored; the more chequered and variegated, the better.</li>   <li>• These medals serve as presents for the chiefs. It ought to be observed, that they should have only one figure upon them; for when an Indian sees more, he will not accept the medal: <i>I have but one heart</i>, he tells you, <i>I can not love more than one person!</i></li> </ul>
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Appendix B. Voyageur Fur–Trade Contracts – Destinations.<sup>676</sup>

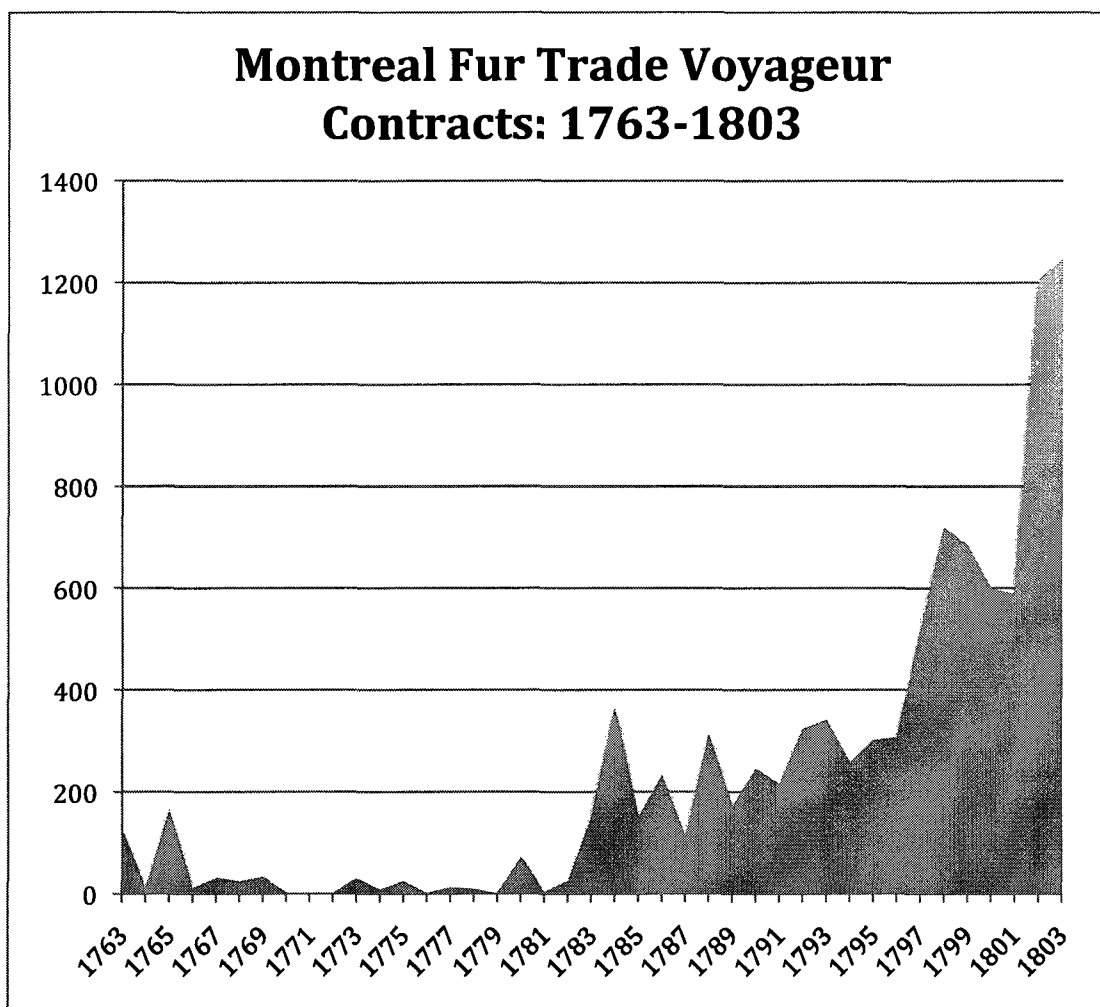
<b>Destination (regions &amp; points)</b>	<b>Contracts (1763–1803)</b>
Athabasca	55
Detroit	564
Fort des Prairies	69
Grand Portage	1607
Green Bay	30
Illinois Country	181
Lac La Pluie (Rainy Lake)	581
Michilimackinac	2569
Mississippi	403
Missouri	605 (1804–1815)
Niagara	215
Nipigon	234
North	962
Northwest	763
Pays d'en Haut	118
South	249
Temiscaming	535
<b>Total:</b>	<b>9740</b>

These represent only the contracts that were signed in Montreal. They do not include contracts signed at Michilimackinac, Quebec City, Detroit, and St. Louis. Some of these contracts are redundant in that they list more than one destination. Michilimackinac was a major transit and trading center for both the northwest and southern fur trade, whereas Grand Portage serviced primarily the northwest trade. Destinations such as Mississippi and South had to go through Detroit, Michilimackinac, the *Pays d'en Haut*, and the Illinois Country. Approximately 200 contracts headed for the southern fur trade (Mississippi, Illinois Country, South) specified that they were traveling via Michilimackinac. Only 12 contracts indicated that they were heading to Grand Portage and destinations in the southern fur trade.

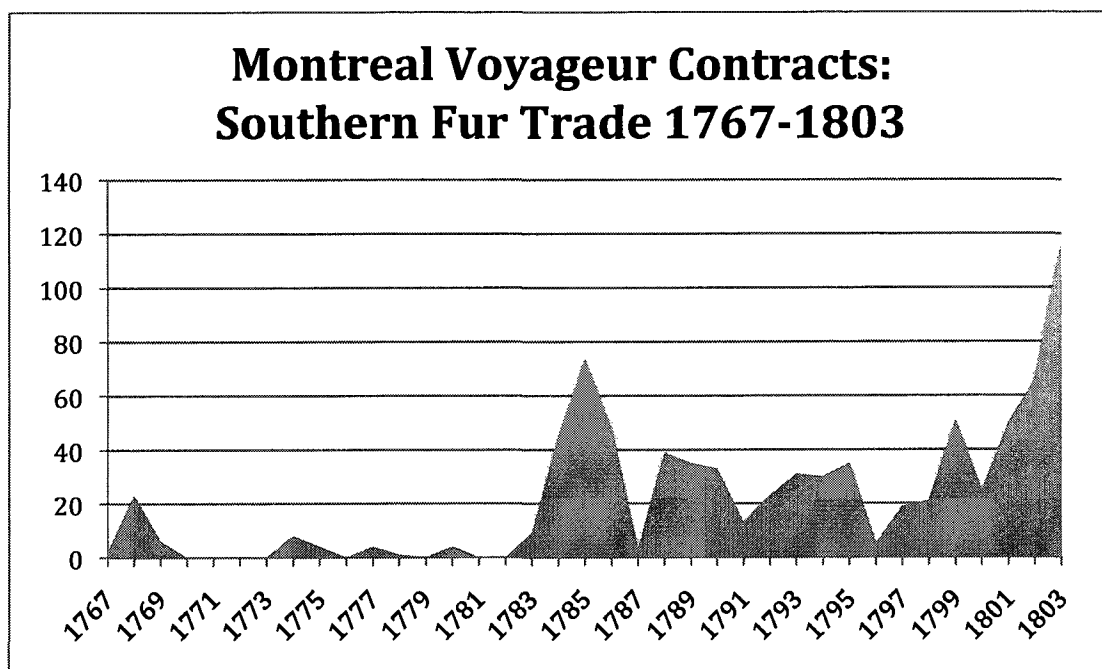
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<sup>676</sup> Nicole St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs: Understanding the Background to the Métis Nation and Métis Homeland—Voyageur Contract Database Project," University of Ottawa and the Saint-Boniface Historical Society, 2002–2009. The Voyageur Contract Database Project has collected approximately 30,000 voyageur fur trade contracts signed primarily in Montreal between 1750 and 1830. The original copies of the contracts are on microfilm at the Quebec National Archives (BANQ) and the St-Boniface Historical Society in Manitoba. The contracts have been digitized in a comprehensive database. It is currently the largest organized collection of fur trade contracts.

Appendix C. Year by year breakdown of voyageur fur-trade contracts.<sup>677</sup>



<sup>677</sup> St-Onge, "Tracing the Voyageurs."



## Appendix D. Inventory of Auguste Chouteau's furs sold at Montreal, 1796–1800.

Sale of Auguste Chouteau's furs at Montreal from a shipment of 86 bundles made by Andrew Todd to Montreal in 1796.<sup>678</sup>

Buyer	Quantity	Fur	Price (livres)	Total (livres)
Todd, McGill & Co.	300	Deer	5.10.00	1650.00.00
Todd, McGill & Co.	300	Deer	5.10.00	1650.00.00
Todd, McGill & Co.	300	Deer	5.04.00	1560.00.00
Todd, McGill & Co.	300	Deer	5.10.00	1650.00.00
Todd, McGill & Co.	300	Deer	5.10.00	1650.00.00
Todd, McGill & Co.	300	Deer	3.09.00	1035.00.00
Todd, McGill & Co.	400	Deer	3.11.00	1420.00.00
Richard Dobie	157	Beaver	9.00.00	1413.00.00
Richard Dobie	175	Beaver	9.00.00	1575.00.00
Richard Dobie	170	Beaver	9.04.00	1564.00.00
Richard Dobie	162	Beaver	9.04.00	1490.08.00
Richard Dobie	159	Beaver	9.04.00	1462.16.00
Todd, McGill & Co.	150	Beaver	9.02.00	1365.00.00
John KcKindlay	113	Otter	27.00.00	3051.00.00
Richard Dobie	142	Otter	15.05.00	2165.10.00
John McGill	54	Bear Cub	3.00.00	162.00.00
Todd, McGill & Co.	68	Bear Cub	10.00.00	680.00.00
John McGill	94	Bear	17.05.00	1621.10.00
Todd, McGill & Co.	146	Bear	28.05.00	4124.10.00
John McGill	92 + 28	Fox + Small Fox	4.08.00	528.00.00
John McKindlay	632	Cat	3.11.00	1927.12.00
John McKindlay	601	Cat	3.00.00	1803.00.00
John McKindlay	180	Cat	1.00.00	180.00.00
John McGill	101	Linx	4.14.00	474.14.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>5424</b>			<b>37953.00.00</b>

<sup>678</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Reel 1 of 40, 00908.

Sale of August Chouteau's furs sold at Montreal from a shipment of 82 bundles made by Grant, Campion and Company to Montreal in 1797.<sup>679</sup>

Buyer	Quantity	Fur	Price (livres)	Total (livres)
D. David	368	Beaver	7.06.00	2686.08.00
Alexander Henry	766	Beaver	8.08.00	6434.08.00
Richard Dobie	836	Beaver	7.00.00	5852.00.00
John McKindlay	61	Bear	22.05.00	1357.05.00
Richard Dobie	60	Bear	15.05.00	915.00.00
Forsyth & Co.	25	Bear	24.10.00	612.10.00
Richard Dobie	56	Bear Cub	10.05.00	574.00.00
Richard Dobie	56	Bear Cub	6.00.00	336.00.00
Richard Dobie	47	Bear	15.00.00	705.00.00
Richard Dobie	52	Bear	3.00.00	156.00.00
Richard Dobie	190	Otter	24.15.00	4602.10.00
Richard Dobie	22	Fox	4.05.00	93.10.00
J. Mons	7	Wolf	2.05.00	15.15.00
Richard Dobie	250	Deer	5.06.00	1325.00.00
Richard Dobie	251	Deer	5.06.00	1330.06.00
Richard Dobie	260	Deer	5.00.00	1300.00.00
Richard Dobie	250	Deer	3.02.00	775.00.00
Richard Dobie	156	Deer	3.00.00	468.00.00
Richard Dobie	160	Deer	8.08.00	1344.00.00
Richard Dobie	707	Cat	1.16.00	1272.12.00
Richard Dobie	500	Cat	2.10.00	1250.00.00
Robertson	672	Cat	0.11.00	369.12.00
Robertson	35	Linx	4.15.00	166.05.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>5787</b>			<b>33941.01.00</b>

<sup>679</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Reel 2 of 40, 00085.

Sale of August Chouteau's furs sold at Montreal from a shipment of 40 bundles made by William Grant and Claude Laframboise to Montreal in 1799.<sup>680</sup>

Buyer	Quantity	Fur	Price (livres)	Total (livres)
Richard Dobie	84	Bear	28.15.00	2415.00.00
Richard Dobie	500	Beaver	10.14.00	6901.10.00
John Jacob Astor	173	Cat	1.19.00	337.07.00
Claude Laframboise	306	Deer	4.08.00	1346.08.00
Claude Laframboise	359	Deer	5.02.00	1830.08.00
Claude Laframboise	68	Bear	12.00.00	816.00.00
Claude Laframboise	152	Deer	1.10.00	228.00.00
Claude Laframboise	120	Otter	29.00.00	3480.00.00
Claude Laframboise	343	Cat	2.12.00	891.16.00
(no name – August)	57	Summer Cat	0.08.00	22.16.00
(no name – 11 Sept)	17	Bear	14.00.00	238.00.00
(no name – 11 Sept)	20	Deer	4.00.00	80.00.00
(no name – 12 Sept)	12	Bear	14.00.00	168.00.00
(no name – 12 Sept)	2	Bear Cub	7.00.00	14.00.00
(no name – 31 Oct)	16	Bear	5.05	84.00.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>2229</b>			<b>18853.05</b>

Sale of August Chouteau's furs at Montreal from a shipment of 32 bundles, 1 October 1800.<sup>681</sup>

Buyer	Quantity	Fur	Price (livres)	Total (livres)
P. Bulinquet	346	Beaver	7.04.00	2491.04.00
Blackwood	394	Beaver	7.04.00	3002.08.00
John Jacob Astor	394	Beaver	9.00.00	3546.00.00
John Jacob Astor	376	Beaver	9.02.00	3421.12.00
John Jacob Astor	385	Beaver	9.04.00	3542.00.00
John Jacob Astor	390	Beaver	9.00.00	3510.00.00
John Jacob Astor	204	Beaver	9.18.00	2019.12.00
John Jacob Astor	206	Beaver	9.18.00	2039.08.00
J. & A. McGill	90	Otter	24.00.00	2160.00.00
J. & A. McGill	90	Otter	24.00.00	2160.00.00
Hall	38	Bear	22.10.00	825.00.00
Hall	38	Bear	30.05.00	1149.10.00
J. & A. McGill	268	Deer	3.00.00	804.00.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>3219</b>			<b>30670.14.00</b>

<sup>680</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Reel 2 of 40, 00275.

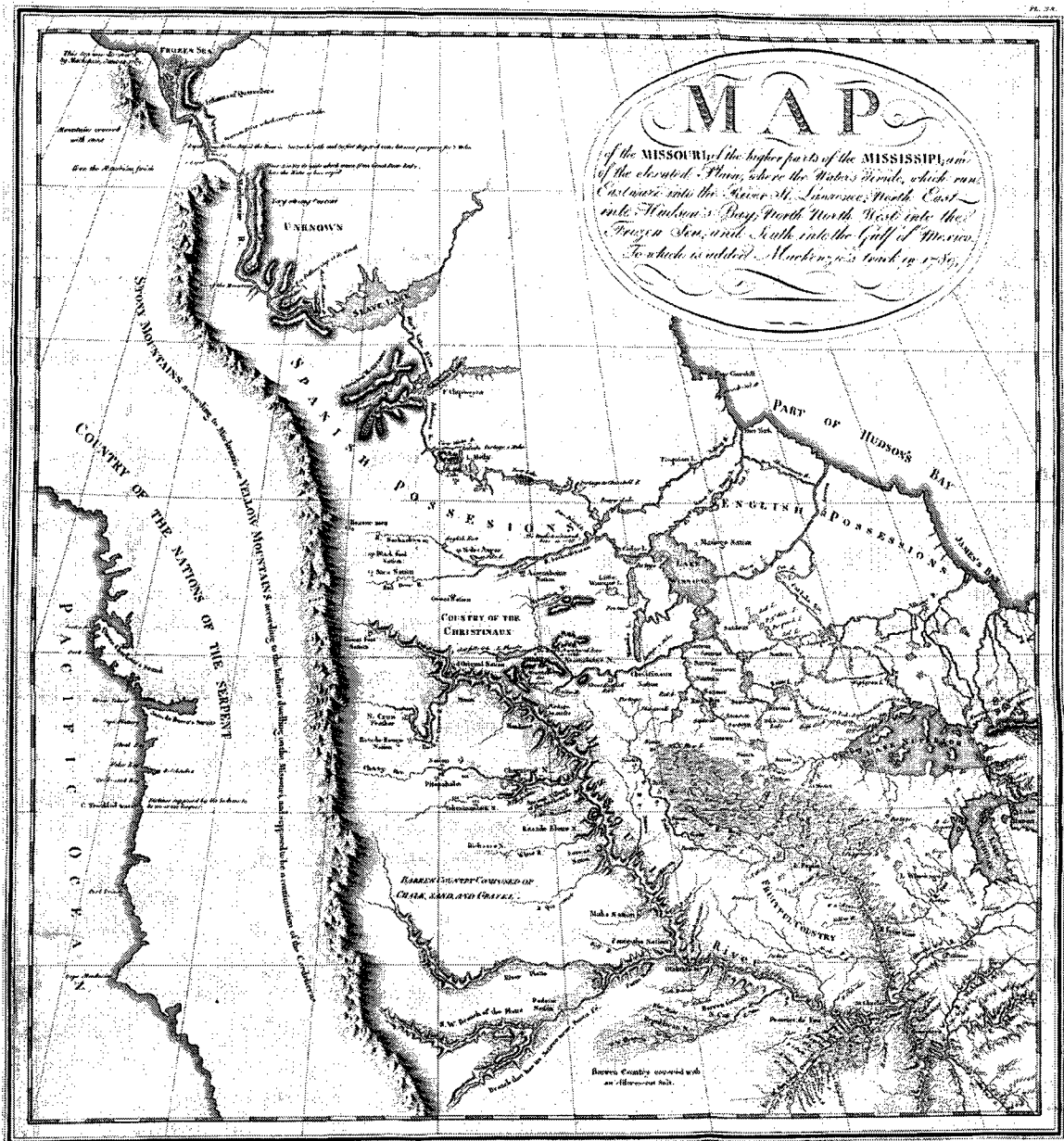
<sup>681</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Reel 2 of 40, 00846.

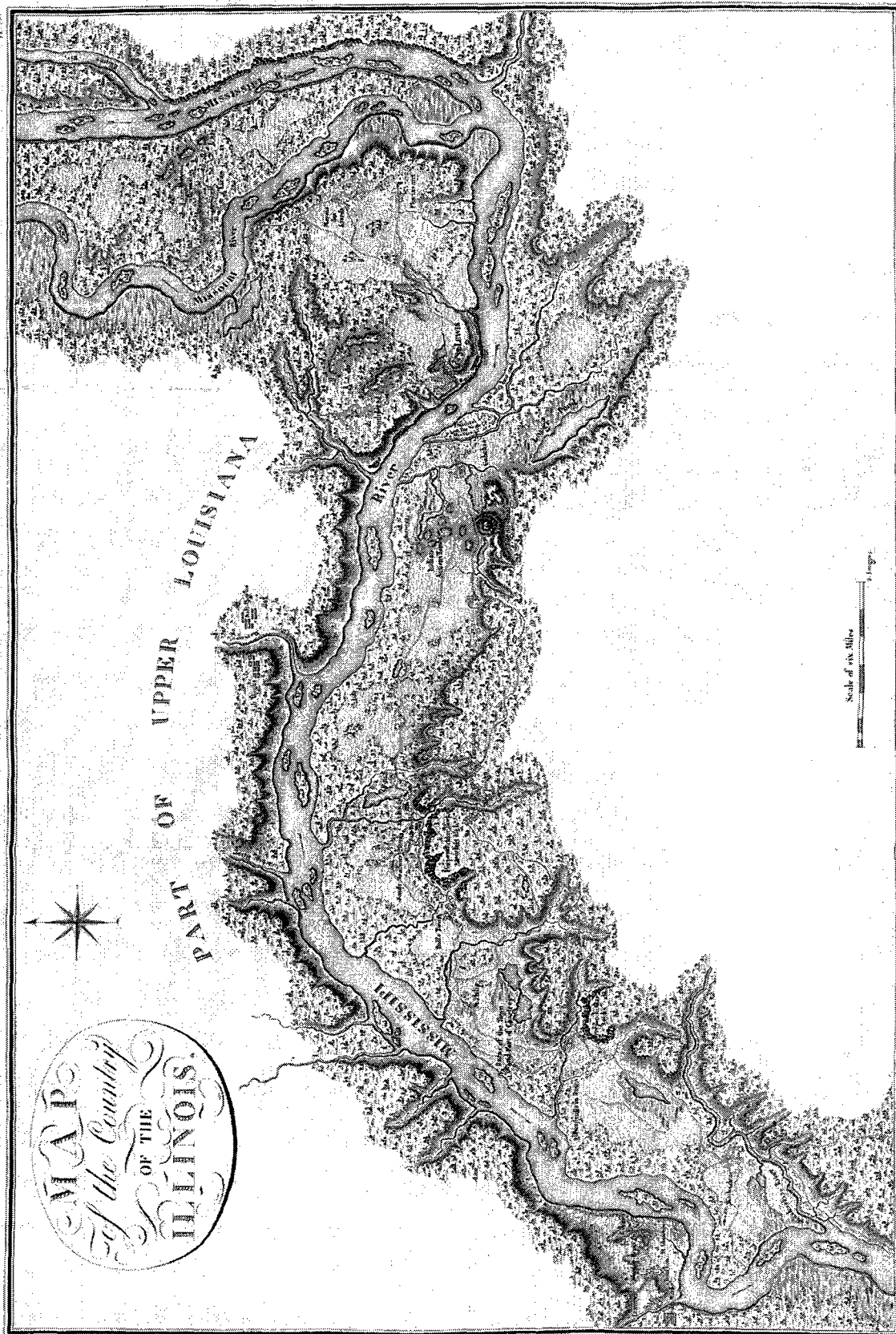
Sale of August Chouteau's furs at Montreal from a shipment of 25 bundles, 30 October 1800.<sup>682</sup>

<b>Buyer</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Fur</b>	<b>Price (livres)</b>	<b>Total (livres)</b>
Isaac Todd	159	Beaver	6.00.00	954.00.00
J. & A. McGill	132	Beaver	7.00.00	924.00.00
J. Swan	157	Beaver	7.12.00	1193.04.00
J. Swan	158	Beaver	9.00.00	1422.00.00
Sandford	151	Beaver	9.00.00	1359.00.00
J. Swan	152	Beaver	7.14.00	1170.08.00
J. Swan	164	Beaver	9	1476.00.00
J. & A. McGill	271	Beaver	3.16.00	741.00.00
Isaac Todd	283	Beaver	3.02.00	874.06.00
Isaac Todd	47	Bear	21.00.00	987.00.00
J. & A. McGill	55	Bear	7.00.00	385.00.00
J. & A. McGill	136	Deer	2.00.00	272.00.00
Isaac Todd	6	Otter	6.00.00	36.00.00
Harvey	31	Covering Bear	1.12.00	49.12.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1902</b>			<b>11843.10</b>

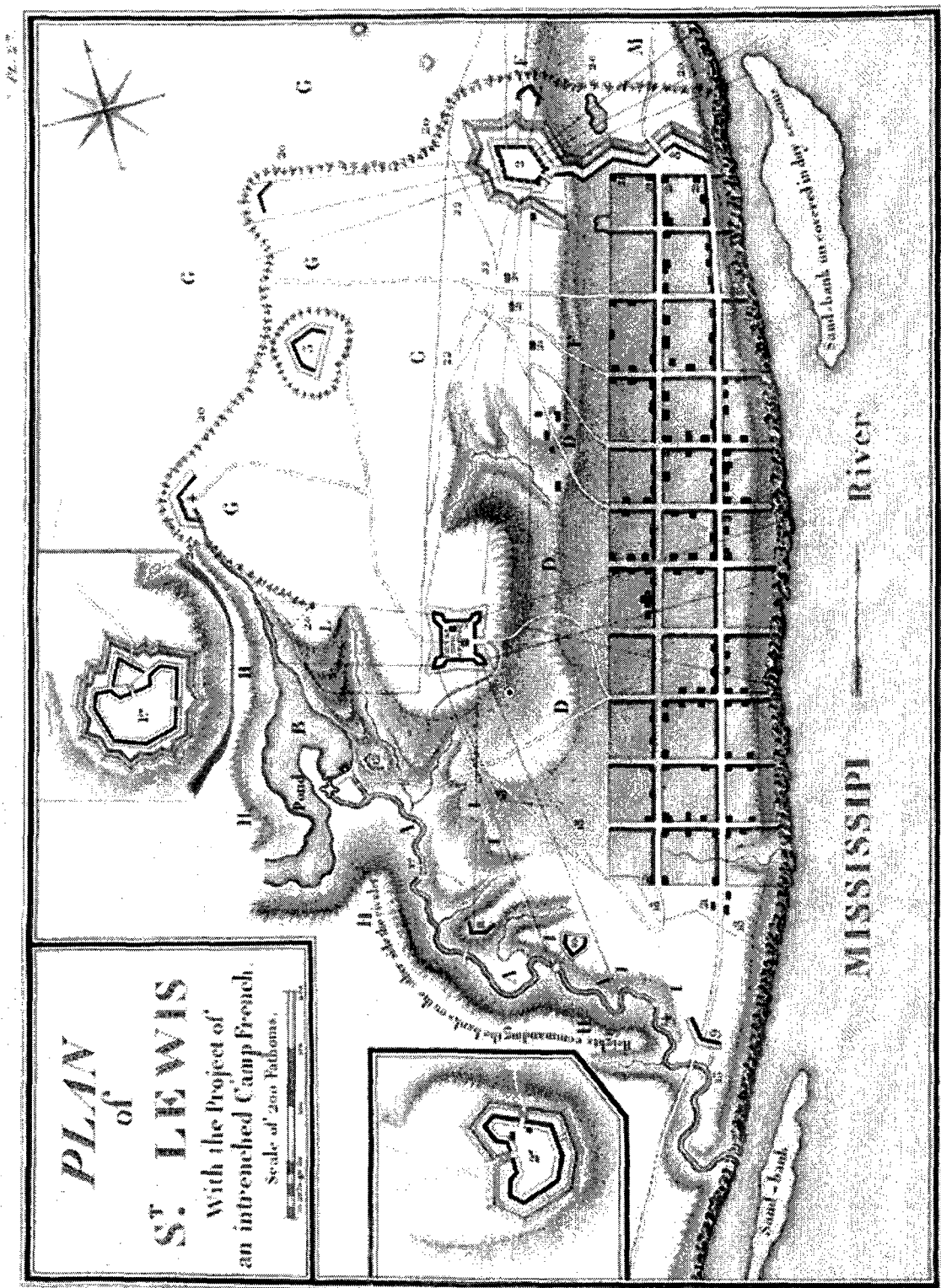
Beaver pelts were measured by weight (lbs), while all other furs were measured per pelt.

<sup>682</sup> MHS, The Chouteau Collection, Reel 2 of 40, 00846.

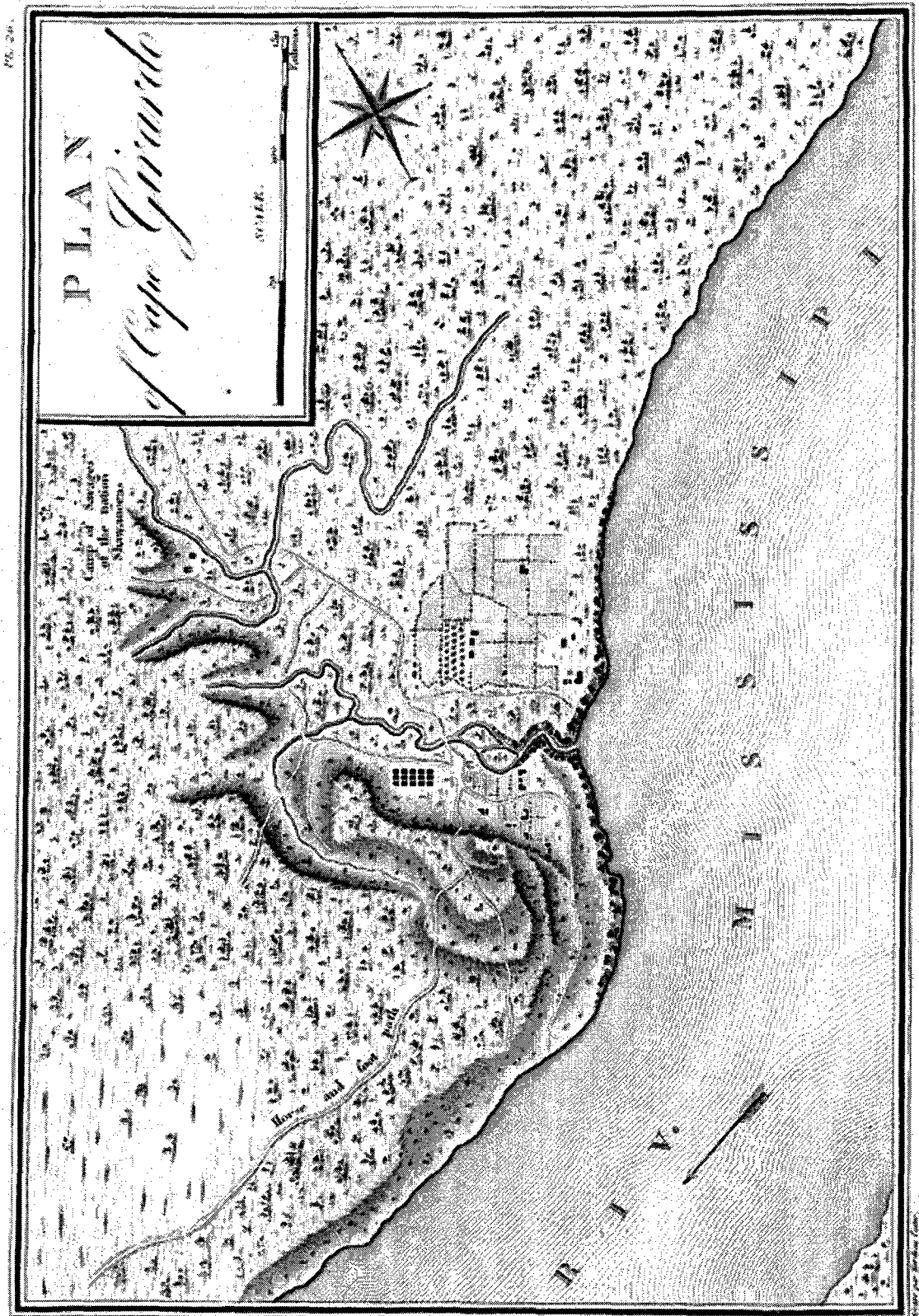
Appendix E: Maps.<sup>683</sup>Collot, *A Journey in North America*, Atlas, Plate 1.<sup>683</sup> All maps courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library.



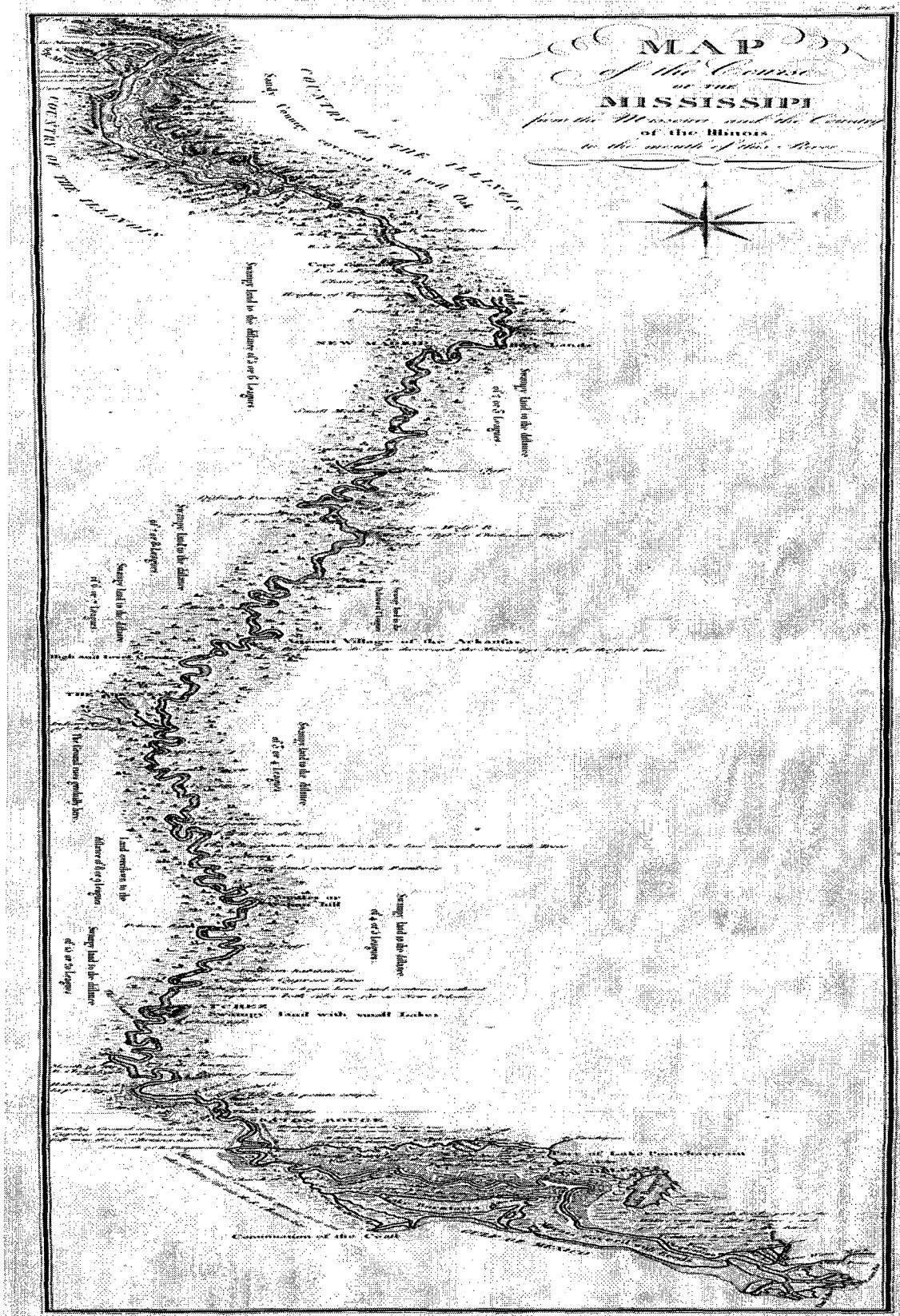
Collot, *A Journey in North America*, Atlas, Plate 28.



Collot, *A Journey in North America*, Atlas, Plate 27.



Collot, *A Journey in North America*, Atlas, Plate 26.



Collot, *A Journey in North America*, Atlas, Plate 25.

## Appendix G. Cerré Family Correspondence

## Cerré Family Correspondence (Baby Collection)

Source:	Letter (S)	Direction	Via	Letter ©	Interval	Brought By
UofM, P0058, U2522, mf 4405	14 Aug 1781	Mtl -> St.L.		Oct 1781	2 months	
UofM, P0058, U2522, mf 4405	26 Aug 1781	Mtl -> St.L.				
UofM, P0058, U2522, mf 4405	28 May 1782*	St.L. -> Mtl				
UofM, P0058, U2523, mf 4405	21 May 1783	Mtl -> St.L.				
UofM, P0058, U2523, mf 4405	25 Oct 1783*	St.L. -> Mtl				
UofM, P0058, U2549, mf 4413	28 Jun 1784*	St.L. -> QC				
UofM, P0058, U2524, mf 4405-06	24 Jun 1785*	St.L. -> QC				
UofM, P0058, U2552, mf 4413	30 Apr 1788*	St.L. -> QC	Mich			Mr. Quesnel
UofM, P0058, U2550, mf 4413	03 Jun 1793*	St.L. -> QC				
UofM, P0058, U2551, mf 4413	18 Jun 1793*	St.L. -> Can				
UofM, P0058, U2553, mf 4414	16 Mar 1794*	St.L. -> QC	Det			
UofM, P0058, U2526, mf 4406	13 Jun 1794*	St.L. -> QC	Mich			
UofM, P0058, U2554, mf 4414	27 Apr 1794	QC -> St.L.	Det	26 Aug 1794?	4 months	
UofM, P0058, U2554, mf 4414	Mar 1794	Det -> QC	Det			
UofM, P0058, U2554, mf 4414	05 Aug 1794*	Mich -> QC				
UofM, P0058, U2527, mf 4406	11 Aug 1795*	St.L. -> QC				
UofM, P0058, U2544, mf 4411	15 Jun 1795	QC -> St.L.				Gabriel Cerré
UofM, P0058, U2544, mf 4411	15 Jul 1795	QC -> St.L.				Gabriel Cerré
UofM, P0058, U2544, mf 4411	Aug 1795	St.L. -> QC				
UofM, P0058, U2544, mf 4411	18 Nov 1795*	St.L. -> QC				
UofM, P0058, U2528, mf 4407	05 May 1796*	St.L. -> Mtl				
UofM, P0058, U2528, mf 4407	05 May 1796*	St.L. -> Mtl				
UofM, P0058, U2528, mf 4407	05 May 1796*	St.L. -> Mtl				
UofM, P0058, U2545, mf 4412	23 Sep 1796*	St.L. -> Mtl				Mr. Todd
UofM, P0058, U2529, mf 4407	17 Nov 1796	Mtl -> St.L.				
UofM, P0058, U2529, mf 4407	02 Apr 1797*	St.L. -> Mtl				
UofM, P0058, U2546, mf 4412	30 May 1797*	St.L. -> Mtl	Mich			Gabriel Cerré
UofM, P0058, U2555, mf 4414	23 Sep 1798	Mtl -> St.L.		Winter		
UofM, P0058, U2555, mf 4414	19 Jun 1799*	St.L. -> Mtl				
UofM, P0058, U2530, mf 4407	12 May 1799	Mtl -> St.L.				
UofM, P0058, U2530, mf 4407	23 Aug 1799*	Mich -> Mtl				
UofM, P0058, U2531, mf 4407	24 Aug 1799*	Mich -> Mtl				



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