

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)

Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 1

French and Indians of the Illinois River was written by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873) who collected tales from English and French speaking settlers and traders or their descendants. This early accounting gives some creditability to the stories, although as noted by other early historians, errors can be evident. Here I make some notes of interest from this book as they pertain to the Maillet family. I am attempting to put together the lines to discover just who are my Mayotte (Maillet) ancestors. To do so, I am learning about the early families and local history. There are so few of them in this area of the Cahokia and St. Louis that surely one of them must be my ancestral line.

Regardless of whether or not this is my Mayotte ancestral line, the Illinois Indians are my line and this is their history. Some of my ancestors could have been at these events, but I will never know.

In **1669, Father Jacques Marquette** gained experience with the Indians and six different Indian dialects, the language, at Lake Huron and Sault de Sainte Marie near Lake Superior.

In **1669, LaSalle (Robert Cavalier, born 1643)** built a vessel on Niagara River and named it the Griffin. Father Hennepin preached to the Indians from the deck of the Griffin. In LaSalle's party was an Italian officer named **Tonti** and three Jesuit priests, Louis Hennepin, Gabriel Rebourde, and Zenobe Membre. The Griffin made a trip into Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair, returning to Mackinaw. Then it started back to Niagara but was never heard of afterwards. LaSalle believe the crew stole furs and pelts and then burned the vessel. There are other theories about the vessel.

On May 17, **1673**, Louis **Joliet** (government officer) and **Father Jacques Marquette** (a Jesuit priest), 5 oarsmen, and 2 Indian interpreters began journey down Mississippi River.

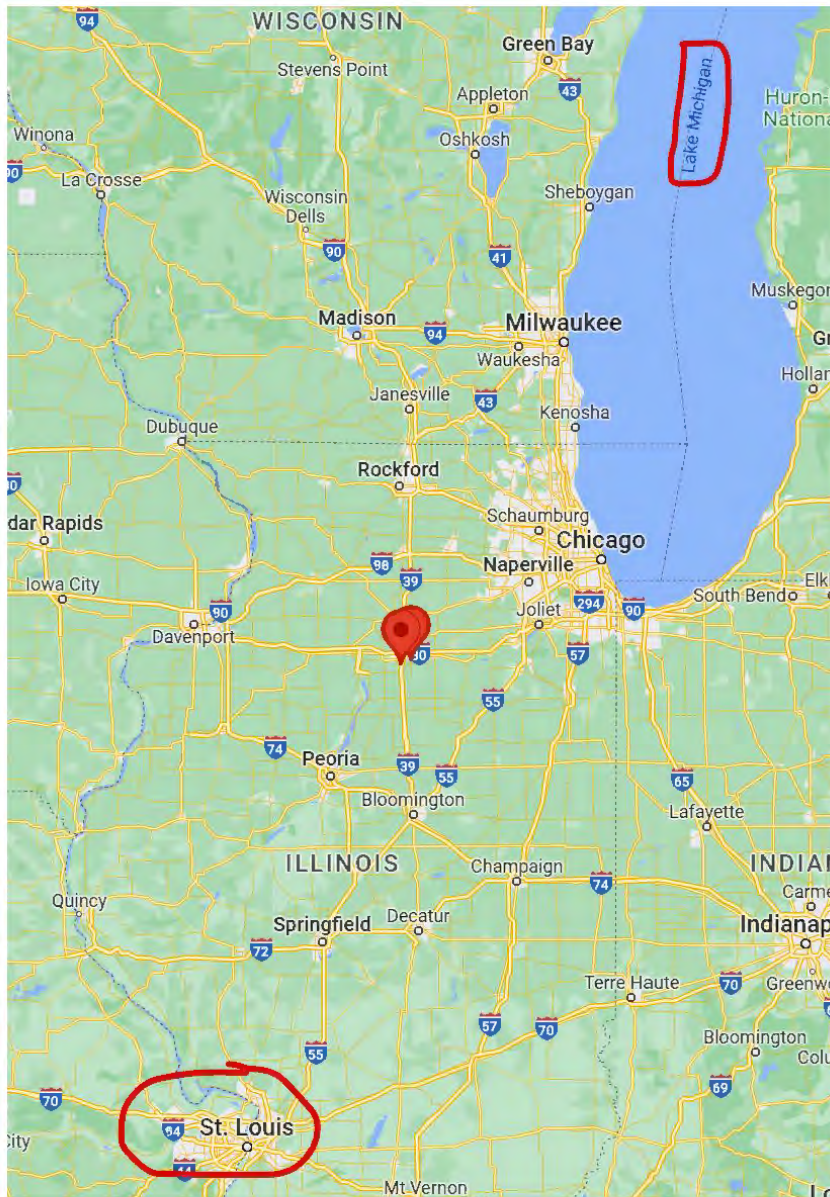
French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)
Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 2



This is a map of their trip down the Mississippi, back up, and up the Illinois River.

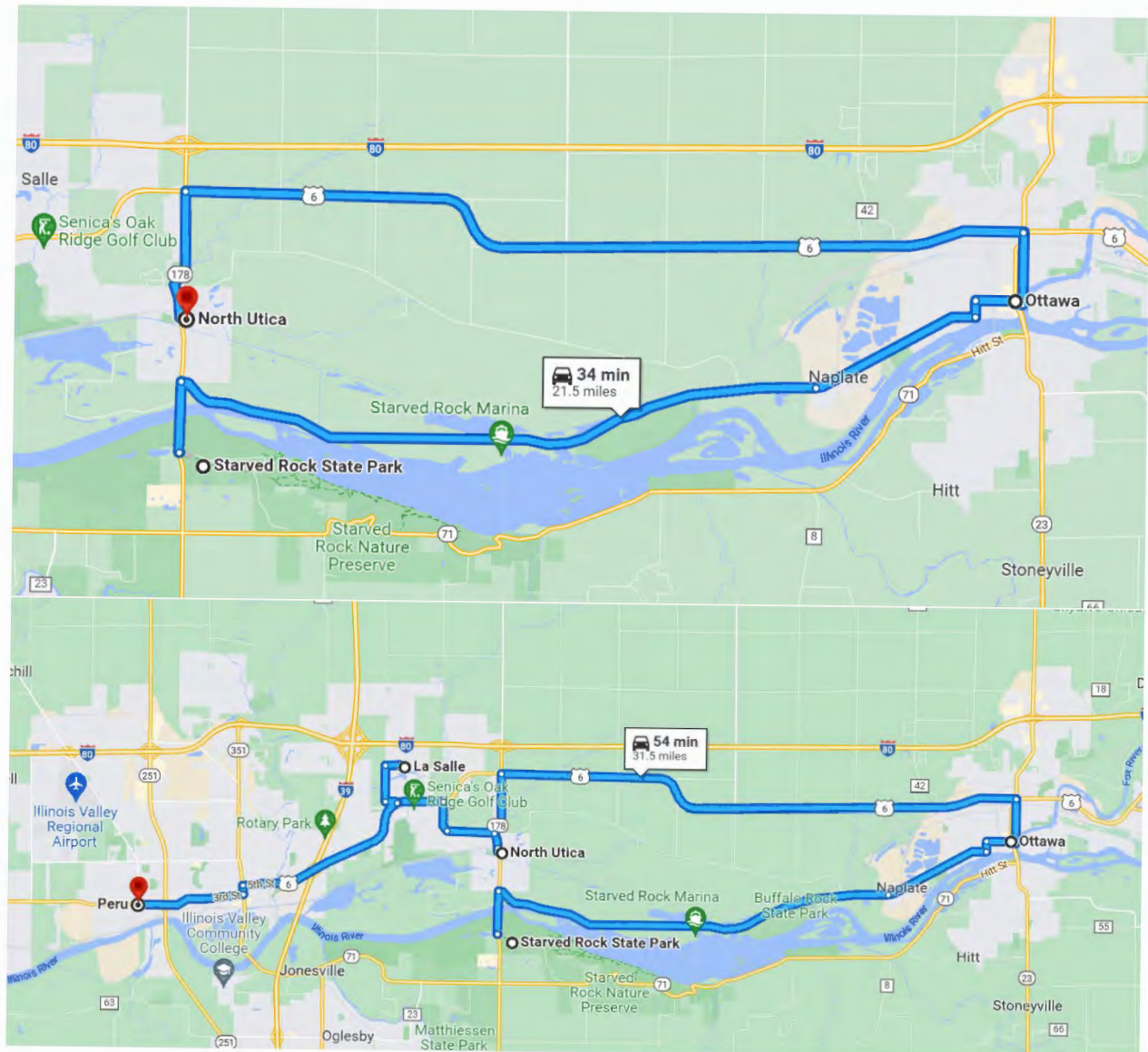
In September **1673**, they arrived at **LaVantum**, near present site of **Utica, Illinois**; Joliet took possession "in the name of and by the authority of the most high Christian King of France, Louis XIV." The enemy of the Illinois Indians was the Iroquois and Joliet promised to protect them. Marquette converted many. Some believe LaVantum was near Buffalo Rock or Little Vermillion, but the conclusive decision is Utica.

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)
Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 3



On return, near **Lake Michigan** at the mouth of the **Chicago River**, they separated. Joliet took 3 to Canada to make a report. Marquette took 2 to Green Bay to convert more Indians. Joliet near the rapids of the St. Lawrence River near Montreal upset his canoe and his journal and valuables were lost.

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)
Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 4

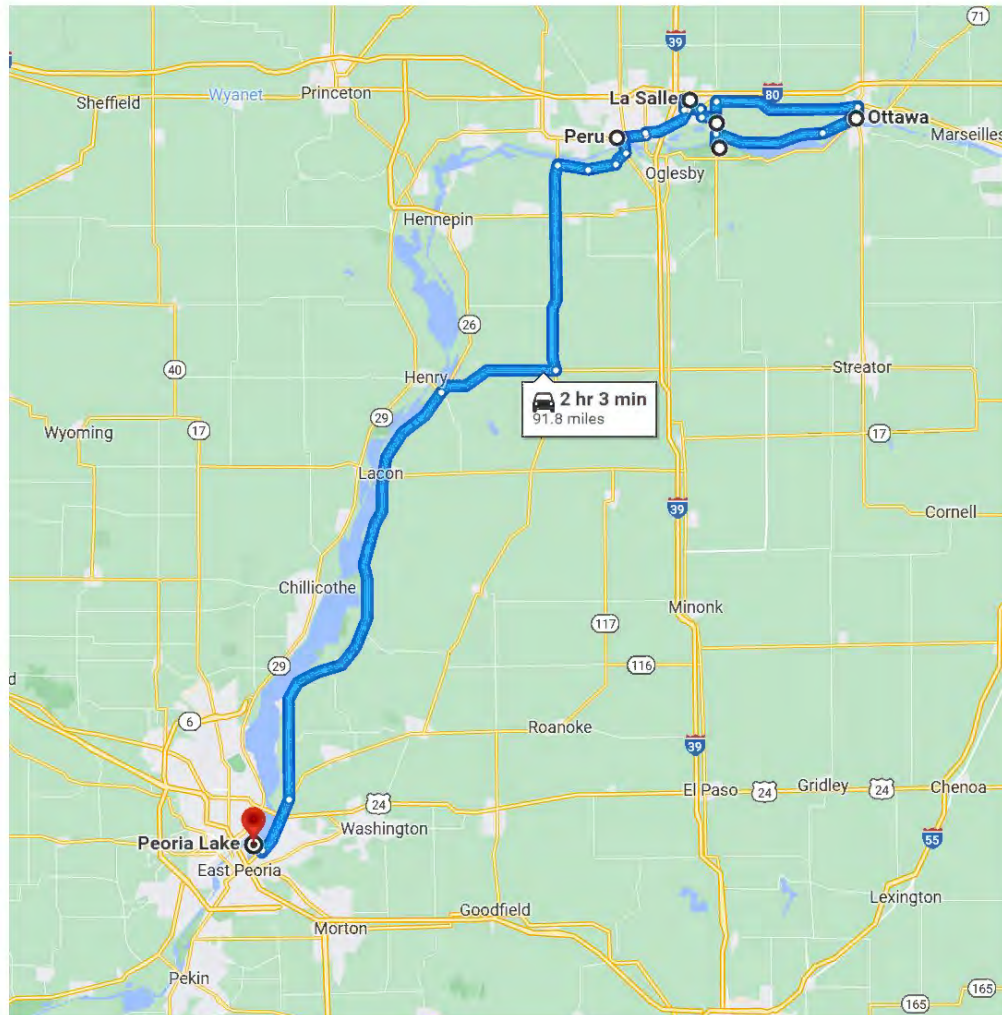


Starved Rock became a noted landmark to French explorers and was called **LeRocher**. It is 8 miles below **Ottawa**. **LaSalle** built a fort on its summit. **LaSalle** and **Peru** are flourishing cities.

The Illinois Indians were of the Algonquin family and consisted of 5 distinct bands. First 3 had villages bearing their name which are familiar today. The last 2 were near Peoria Lake.

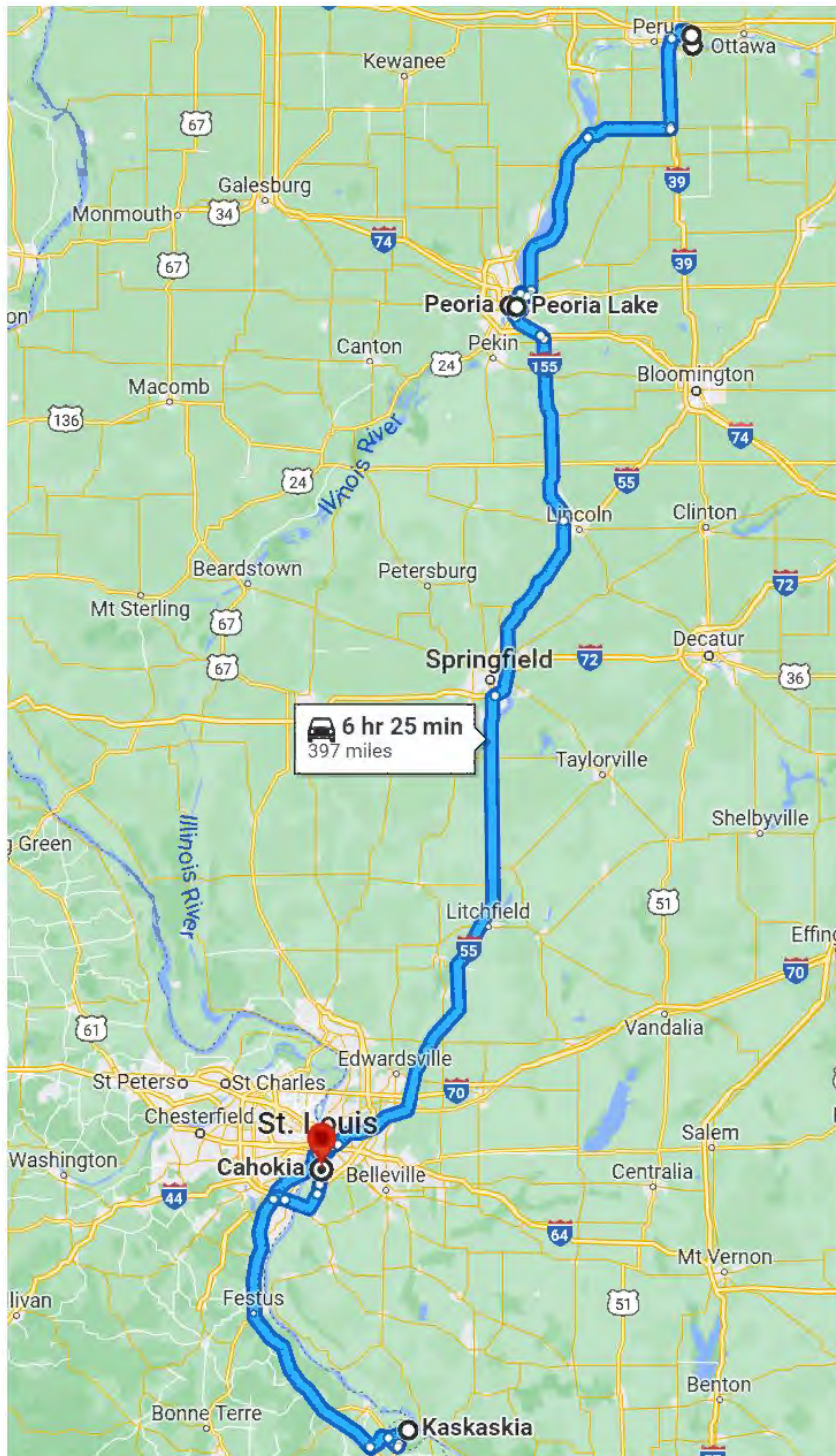
1. Kaskaskias,
2. Cahokias;
3. Peorias;
4. Tamaroas;
5. Mickgamies.

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)
Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 5



This map shows the relationship of Starved Rock and Utica to Peoria.

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)
Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 6



This map adds Cahokia across from St. Louis and Kaskaskia further south.

The Illinois Indians were not warlike people, but they would war to defend others encroaching upon their rights. The Iroquois from the east would raid and destroy their

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)

Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 7

villages, killing squaws and papposes, carrying away pelts and furs to sell to French and English traders. The Iroquois had guns and the Illinois only bows and arrows. Frequent raids reduced the numbers of the Illinois Indians.

In the fall of **1674**, Marquette was on his way back to Chicago, although his real destination was to the Kaskaskia Indians living near what is now Utica. Marquette had bad health and wintered in Chicago before arriving in LaVantum (Utica). Chassagoac was the head chief who Marquette had baptized the year before. The Indians called Jesus Christ "**the great French Manito**." The Catholic Church that was built was called The Immaculate Conception, which was the same name Marquette had called the Mississippi River the year before. After Easter Marquette got back in his canoe and left. Traveling around the head of Lake Michigan, Marquette died near the mouth of the St. Joseph River. Three years after his death, Mackinaw Indians traveled to Lake Michigan, opened the grave, and took up his remains, taking them to the chapel in St. Ignace.

In November **1678**, **LaSalle** left Mackinaw in four canoes accompanied by 14 people. Lake Michigan's gale winds were rough. When they reached the mouth of St. Joseph River, they waited for **Henri de Tonti** (1649-1704) to arrive with his party of 35 people in canoes. He traveled to the head waters of Kankakee where after an alarming disappearance and return of LaSalle, they floated downstream to the Illinois river to LaVantum (Utica). The town was deserted they having gone on a winter hunt. Soon was New Year, **1680**, and Father Hennepin placed an alter in the woods for worship.

Seven years after (in **1680**) Joliet and Marquette discovered the upper Mississippi, **LaSalle** (Robert Cavalier) obtained a patent from the king of France authorizing him to explore and take possession of the country west of the great lakes.

On **January 3, 1680**, Indians of a village near Peoria Lake were surprised to see 8 canoes filled with armed men opposite their town. Amid the panic, LaSalle sprang to shore and presented them the calumet (token of friendship) and Father Hennepin soothed the children's fears. The French pitched their tent in the Indian village and remained for some days, but fearing treachery of the Indians, left for greater security. A fort was built and called **Creve Coeur Fort**, which in French means "broken heart." The exact location is not known but thought to be 3 miles below the outlet of the lake.

On **February 1, 1680**, Father Hennepin and 2 companions left the fort on a voyage of discovery to the mouth of the Illinois River and up the Mississippi River to the falls of St.

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)

Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 8

Anthony where he was made a prisoner by the Indians for several months, later making it to the safety of Canada. He returned to France and published a book about his travels.

In the **Spring 1680**, LaSalle returned to Canada for more men and supplies leaving Tonti in command of the fort. The men deserted Tonti returning to Lake Michigan, leaving only Tonti, Father Gabriel and Father Zenobe, and 3 soldiers, who went up the river as far as LaVantum. The abandoned Creve Coeur Fort was never occupied again. On his return LaSalle stopped at **Starved Rock** as a natural fortress and stopped to visit it, giving the first account given in history. From Canada LaSalle wrote Tonti commands to fortify this rock as it was more desirable than Fort Creve Coeur. Circumstances prevented Tonti from obeying and **Fort St. Louis** at Starved Rock was not built until **1682**.

In **August 1680**, the Iroquois were marching against the town of LaVantum (Utica). Tonti was caught by the hair of his head and a tomahawk was raised to split his skull, but a friendly chief caught the savage's arm, and his life was spared. The older Indians unable to bear arms, and the squaws and papposes, were taken down river by canoe about 3 leagues to a large marshy island and left with 60 warriors for their protection. This island is situated between the river and Lake Depue. There were only about 500 warriors at LaVantum with Chief Chassagoac because a large number had gone to Cahokia for a religious feast. These warriors at Cahokia met the enemy by ambush near Vermilion. The Iroquois fled from the field. Tonti attempted to mediate with Iroquois warriors collected around him in a threatening manner. He was stabbed once and then a chief seeing he was a white man stopped the assault. In the end the Illinois whose force was inferior were overpowered and driven from the field. The remnant fled to the town where the Iroquois attacked, setting fire to lodges and fortifications. The few who escaped with their lives went down river. Upon victory, the Iroquois bound prisoners by hand and foot, and commenced torturing them to reveal the hiding place of their squaws and papposes. The Iroquois headed down river and discovered them and all of them were slain because the 60 warriors left to guard them fled on the approach of the enemy. The next day the torture continued, and Tonti and the two priests as prisoners themselves were engaged in baptizing the victims. Two days later the French were set at liberty. When stopped to repair a canoe Father Gabriel went missing and it was ascertained that he was taken prisoner by Indians.

In **November 1680**, LaSalle returned with 12 companions from Canada. Their eyes directed to Starved Rock they expected to find Tonti within his fortification. Two miles downriver they were surprised to find that the great town of the west had disappeared.

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)
Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 9

The scene was horrifying. They traveled down river and found the remains of the squaws and papposes.

In 1721, 39 years after Fort St. Louis was built, Charlevoix, a Jesuit priest, visited and wrote journals. It is believed that **Fort St. Louis** was built on Buffalo Rock, but traditions and historical accounts make it evident that it stood on **Starved Rock**. **Fort St. Louis, Rock Fort**, and **LeRocher** are the same place. Fort St. Louis was on the south side of the river and Buffalo Rock was on the north side. Le Fort des Miames was at Buffalo Rock. Charlevoix said LaSalle built a fort at LeRocher.

In the fall of **1682**, LaSalle with about 40 soldiers started to build a fort at **Starved Rock**. The **fort was named St. Louis or Rock Fort**. Father Zenobe dedicated it. Six thousand Indians had returned. Emigrants from Canada came and settled near the fort engaged in trading with the Indians. Some married the squaws. The colony was named Louisiana in honor of the king of France. A trading post was established at Cahokia.

In **1684**, LaSalle left Tonti in command and returned to Canada and then sailed to France. He sailed 3 ships of emigrants to the Gulf of Mexico for the purpose of establishing a colony at the mouth of the Mississippi River. The enterprise failed and **LaSalle was assassinated** by some of his own men. LaSalle's colony at Fort St. Louis continued to grow under the command of Tonti and LaFrost for 18 years.

In **1686**, about 2,000 Iroquois attacked LaVantum (Utica), which was in the plains of Fort St. Louis, and 50 French soldiers and 100 Indian allies put the besiegers to flight. Those in the town had fled to the fort and when the Iroquois arrived, they found not one living soul. The Iroquois attacked the fort and held it siege for six days. When at close range, guns killed many and the Iroquois fled. The Iroquois never were seen in the vicinity afterwards and never did they make another raid.

In **1687**, Tonti and 50 French soldier and 200 Illinois warriors went to Canada to join the army for victory in an expedition against the Indians south of Lake Ontario. Tonti and his allies returned to Illinois accompanied by a number of emigrant families.

In **1684**, LaBarre, Governor of Canada, sent Captain DeBougis to Fort St. Louis to take command from Tonti. A few months later DeBougis realized he had taken command without authority and gave it back to Tonti. Captain **Richard Pilette** made an appearance at the garrison indicating authorization to take command, but Tonti denied the power indicating that the fort was private property being built and maintained by LaSalle, so

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)
Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 10

Pilette and 18 Frenchmen built a fort at Buffalo Rock. Pilette married a squaw and raised a family. One of his grandson's, **Louis Pilette**, was a claimant for the land on which Peoria is built. His granddaughter, **Hypolite Pilette**, is in possession of Father Buche's manuscript which gives a story of searching for gold.

On September 14, **1688**, LaSalle's brother, Father Cavelier, a Jesuit priest, and 5 companions made it up the Mississippi to Fort St. Louis. Tonti was absent on a mission of peace in Winnebago country, so Cavelier was received by lieutenant Bellefountain. Upon Tonti's return, Cavelier concealed his brother's death and used his brother's name to take Tonti to Quebec and on to France.

The Illinois were divided into clans named of animals. A warrior was not allowed to take a wife of his own clan. The chieftainship was hereditary, but not always in a direct line. The son of the chief's daughter is always preferred. Chiefs were buried in a favorite spot and a mound was raised over them. The Illinois believed in a great spirit called Manito that lived in the skies and governed the heaven and earth. Smaller spirits resided in rocks or caves and would appear in the form of a fairy or big bird, or rabbit or fawn. Warriors would paint their faces, cover their heads with elk or coon skin, and fast for two days and nights praying to Manito until a spirit appeared. Whatever form the good spirit manifested itself (i.e., bird, animal), an idol was always carried. Each warrior put his protector, called Totem, in a medicine bag carried by the priest or the medicine man. Demons were called 'Barses.' Although taught by the priests otherwise, the Indians held to their belief that after death they would be conducted by a good spirit to the happy hunting grounds to join their friends who had gone before them. The Illinois would decorate themselves with crosses and tokens of Christianity to represent their religion and dried fingers of their enemy to represent their patriotism.

In **1702**, Tonti was disgraced by the power of the governor claiming that trading on Lake Michigan forfeited his rights and Fort St. Louis was taken possession of by Canada. Tonti joined D'Iberville on the lower Mississippi where he stayed for 16 years.

In **1711**, Father Marest, a Jesuit priest from Canada, preached to the Indians at Cahokia.

In **1714**, the great chief Chassagoac fell dead while standing at the entrance of his abode at LaVantum. All attended his Christian burial.

In **1718**, in bad health, Tonti employed two Indians to take him to Fort St. Louis. News traveled and French, half-breeds, and Indians came to see him. Tonti died at Fort St. Louis.

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)
Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 11

In **1718**, Captain LaMott was in command of the fort which has turned toward unscrupulous marriages and relations. Jero was chief who burned all the buildings to the ground, **destroying Fort St. Louis**, which had stood 36 years. The colony broke up, the traders returned to Canada, other settled in Cahokia, and a great number settled near Peoria Lake.

LaVantum (Utica) had a bottom prairie in **1751-1768** and neighboring Indian villages would come here to raise corn. The French occupied this place for 33 years and lived in the town with the Indians. There was a lake about 9 leagues west of the great bend in the Illinois River called Lake Weno where the Indians went each winter to collect furs.

In **1756**, Captain Stirling commanded at Kaskaskia and sent message to Peoria to notify them that they were under **British rule**.

In **1761**, **Robert Maillet**, a trader from Peoria, built a dwelling 1 1/2 miles below the town near the outlet of a lake.

LA VILLE DE MAILLET.

In the summer of 1761, Robert Maillet, a trader of Peoria, built a dwelling one mile and a half below the town, near the outlet of the lake, and moved his family thither. Here the land rises gradually from the water's edge until it reaches the high prairie in the rear, forming a beautiful sloping plateau, unequalled by any spot on the Illinois river. This locality for a town was considered preferable to the old one, the ground being dryer, the water better, and it was considered more healthy, consequently, others came and built houses by the side of Maillet's. The inhabitants gradually deserted the old town for the new one, and within a few years the latter became a place of great importance. No French lived in the old town after the year 1764, but for many years it remained an Indian village, and the houses vacated by the French, were occupied by the natives until they rotted down.

The new town took the name of La Ville de Maillet (that is Maillet's village), after its proprietor, and was in existence fifty-one years. A fort

136 FRENCH AND INDIANS OF ILLINOIS RIVER.

was built on high ground, overlooking the lake on one side, and the sloping prairie on the other. This fort consisted of two large block-houses, surrounded by earthworks and palisades, with an open gateway to the south next to the town, and was only intended as a place of retreat in case of trouble with the Indians. The fort was never occupied except a short time by Robert Maillet, who used one of the block-houses for a dwelling, and the other for the sale of goods. Some years afterwards, Maillet left the fort for a more desirable place of residence and trade, and it remained vacant for many years, the enclosure within the stockades being used by the citizens in common for a cow-yard.

In 1820 Hypolite Maillet, in testifying in the United States Court, in a suit brought on French claims, said that he was forty-five years old, and was born in a stockade fort which stood near the southern extremity of Peoria Lake.

In the winter of 1788, a large party of Indians came to Peoria for the purpose of trade, and in accordance with their former practice, took quarters in the old fort. They purchased a cask of brandy for the purpose of having a spree. All got drunk, had a war dance, and during their revelry set the block-houses on fire and burned them down.

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)
Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 14

From Wikipedia: The settlement became legally British in 1763 after the French & Indian War but remained French in practice. By 1778 the village had become part of the territory of the new United States, and George Rogers Clark appointed Maillet as military commander. Maillet established a new village, 1.5 miles south of the old one. It later became known as "La Ville de Maillet" and was on the present-day site of downtown Peoria. The new village was considered to be better situated, and by 1796 or 1797, all the inhabitants of the old village had moved to the new.

From **1763 to 1766, Pontiac (Ottawa leader)** lead the Indians in an armed struggle against the British. It followed the British victory in the French and Indian War, the American front of the Seven Years' War. Ottawa hunters and Pontiac had been killing buffalo about 8 leagues west of LaVantum (Utica). The Illinois warriors attacked them, and most were slain. Pontiac was wounded but escaped. The Pottawatomie and Ottawa would send war parties to the Illinois country to destroy and kill and then the Illinois would retaliate. This continued for a long time. An Indian counsel was called for peace near the present site of Joliet. **Kineboo**, the head chief of the Illinois, **stabbed Pontiac in the heart and killed him**. In avenging Pontiac's death, the **Illinois Indians were annihilated**. The allies against the British, the Pottawattamie of Michigan, Miamis, and Kickapoos, combined forces to be the most formidable Indian army ever collected in the west. They attacked villages along the Illinois River. About 10,000 were left (of which 2,000 were warriors) at LaVantum (Utica). At the end of summer, they were attacked over and over. During a rain, the Illinois crossed the river and ascended Starved Rock. The remnant was about 1,200 (of which 300 were warriors). There was a bloody battle on Starved Rock. After 12 days on the rock, they began to starve. Allied forces ascended the rock and killed all who had survived the famine. One warrior survived who was half-breed with the French name of La Bell whose descendants live near Prairie du Rocher.

166 FRENCH AND INDIANS OF ILLINOIS RIVER.

A GHASTLY SPECTACLE.

A few days after the destruction of the Illinois Indians, a party of traders from Peoria, among whom were Robert Maillet and Felix La Pance, while on their return from Canada with three canoes loaded with goods, stopped at the scene of the late tragedy. As they approached Starved Rock, which at that time was called Le Rocher, they noticed a cloud of buzzards hovering over it, and at the same time they were greeted with a sickening odor. On landing from their canoes and ascending the rock, they found the steep, rocky pathway leading thereto stained with blood,

A GHASTLY SPECTACLE.

167

and among the stunted cedars that grew on the cliff were lodged many human bodies, partly devoured by birds of prey. But on reaching the summit of Le Rocher, they were horrified to find it covered with dead bodies, all in an advanced state of decomposition. Here were aged chiefs, with silvered locks, lying by the side of young warriors, whose long raven black hair partly concealed their ghastly and distorted features. Here, too, were squaws and pappooses, the aged grandmother and the young maiden, with here and there an infant, still clasped in its mother's arms.

his escape

According to history, about one thousand Illinoisians, but known as Kaskaskia Indians, were living in the south part of the State as late as 1802. The Indians at the south appear to have taken no part in the war, and the destruction of the tribe applied only to those along the Illinois river.

168 FRENCH AND INDIANS OF ILLINOIS RIVER.

Some had died from thirst and starvation, others by the tomahawk or war-club; of the latter a pool of clotted blood was seen at their side. All the dead, without regard to age or sex, had been scalped, and their remains, divested of clothing, were lying here and there on the rock. These swollen and distorted remains were hideous to look upon, and the stench from them so offensive that the traders hastened down from the rock and continued on their way down the river.

On reaching La Vantum, a short distance below Le Rocher, the traders met with a still greater surprise, and for a time were almost ready to believe what they saw was all delusion instead of a reality. The great town of the west had disappeared; not a lodge, camping tent, nor one human being could be seen; all was desolate, silent and lonely. The ground where the town had stood was strewn with dead bodies, and a pack of hungry wolves were feeding upon their hideous repast.

Five months before, these traders, while on their way to Canada, stopped at La Vantum for a number of days in order to trade with the Indians. At that time the inhabitants of the town—about five thousand in number—were in full enjoyment of life, but now their dead bodies lay mouldering on the ground, food for wolves and

buzzards. Maillet and La Pance had bought of these people two canoe loads of furs and pelts, which were to be paid in goods on their return from Canada. The goods were now here to make payment, according to contract, but alas the creditors had all gone to their long home.

The smell from hundreds of putrified and partly consumed remains, was so offensive that the traders remained only a short time, and with sadness they turned away from this scene of horror. Again boarding their canoes they passed down the river to Peoria, conveying thither to their friends the sad tidings.

In 1765, a part of French from Peoria believed a story about gold being buried at the fort, but no gold was found. This story of gold is also among Indian traditions and a party of Pottawatomie from Western Kansas came to search for it.

MANUSCRIPT OF FATHER BUCHE.

183

This old manuscript is now in the hands of Hypolite Pilette, who lives on the American Bottom, between Cahokia and Prairie du Rocher. It consists of twenty-three pages, closely written, on large sheets, and from age the paper is yellow and ink faded. This manuscript is in the French language, dated La Ville de Maillet (now Peoria), A. D. 1770, and was written by Jacques Buche, a Catholic priest.

The writer speaks only of things that came under his own observation, and relates many remarkable incidents which are worth preserving. Some of these statements differ from the traditions of others, but nevertheless are not improbable, as they carry with them an air of truth.

Father Buche's manuscript forms a connecting link of history between the time of La Salle and the destruction of Peoria, and from its pages many of the incidents narrated in this book have been taken. It speaks of the destruction of La Vantum, and the perishing of the remnant of the Illinois Indians on Starved Rock.

It also gives an account of digging for gold within the stockades of Fort St. Louis, the pitfalls of which are now plain to be seen.

Father Buche speaks of visiting an Indian village, fifteen leagues north of Peoria, where he remained

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)
Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 20

On **July 4, 1776**, the Declaration of Independence was executed, and the United States of America was born.

1778-1779 During the **Revolutionary War**, George Rogers Clark led the Illinois campaign (aka Northwestern campaign) to seize control of several British posts in the Illinois Country of the Province of Quebec, in what are now Illinois and Indiana in the Midwestern United States. The campaign is the best-known action of the western theater of the war and the source of Clark's reputation as an early American military hero.

In **1778**, General Clark conquered Illinois and took possession of the settlements at **Kaskaskia** and **Cahokia**. Clark sent 2 French Creoles in a canoe to Peoria to notify people that they were no longer under British rule, but citizens of the United States. The inhabitants were French half-breeds and Indians, and no one could speak English.

In **1805**, a party from Kaskaskia learned that a large amount of gold had been buried at Fort St. Louis and went to search for it. They did not know the location of the fort and instead found Buffalo fort. South is a cliff known as Devils' Nose which connects to a bluff from an old Indian legend called Maiden's Leap.

GOVERNOR EDWARDS MEETING THE POTTAWATOMIE CHIEFS.

During the winter of 1811-12, the Indians at the different villages along the river, heard that preparations were being made by Governor Edwards to send an army against them in the spring. On hearing of this intended invasion by the troops, they were much alarmed, and the chiefs and principal warriors met in council at Senachwine's village, to agree on plans for the future, but no definite conclusion was arrived at. Many

198 FRENCH AND INDIANS OF ILLINOIS RIVER.

of the chiefs went to Peoria to consult with their friends, the French, and to procure their assistance in averting the evil which threatened them. Captain J. B. Maillet consented to go to Kaskaskia and see Governor Edwards, and pledge to him their intentions of peace and friendship. On arriving at the seat of government the Governor proposed to meet the chiefs in council at Cahokia, in the latter part of April, and there settle all misunderstandings. At the time appointed a large delegation of chiefs, among whom were Black Partridge, Senachwine and Gomo, in their canoes arrived at Cahokia.

The council was held in a little grove of timber on the bank of Cahokia creek, above the town and was attended by a large collection of people, some of whom are still living, and to them I am indebted for some facts relating to it.*

Black Partridge made a speech in the council, and while holding aloft a silver medal which he wore suspended from his neck, said: "This token

* While at Cahokia a short time ago, the place of holding this council was pointed out to me by an old man, who in his boyhood days, sixty-two years before, attended it. He described Black Partridge, Senachwine, and other chiefs, who it appears made a lasting impression upon his then youthful mind. In this little grove where the council was held, is a large burr oak tree, which looks as though it might have stood here for many centuries. At the root of this tree, said the old man, Pontiac (or the Indian who passed for such) was sitting, when a warrior came up behind him and split his head open with a tomahawk.

About two months after the events above narrated, Black Partridge learned that Lieutenant Helm, the husband of the woman whose life he had saved, was still a prisoner among the Indians at a village on the Kankakee river. On receiving this intelligence he boarded a canoe and went to Peoria to consult with his friends in relation

War of 1812 I found the below story regarding the burning of Peoria by Captain Craig Thomas, under Governor Edwards of the Illinois Territory owned by America, fascinating, so I am putting the whole story here. It is so brutal to destroy the whole town of village of La Ville de Maillet and to leave the women and children in a desolate town to fend for themselves. However, most importantly, I find it interesting how the Jean Baptiste Maillet, and possibly any family he would have had, could have relocated to Cahokia where my ancestors were from. Although we saw that he visited Cahokia from time to time, this would have been reason for him to live there and take up a bride that could be my ancestors. On the east side of the lake at Peoria, Black Partridge's village was destroyed.

In **1813**, American soldiers built Fort Clark on the ruins of the old French village of La Ville de Maillet.

BLACK PARTRIDGE.

207

to the Lieutenant's ransom. Captain J. B. Maillet, Antoine Des Champs and Thomas Forsyth, were consulted, and it was agreed by them that Black Partridge should go immediately to the Indian village and purchase the release of Lieutenant Helm. Presents were furnished by the three traders as a ransom for the prisoner, with a written order on General Clark, Indian agent at St. Louis for an additional one hundred dollars on his arrival there.

Black Partridge being provided with presents, and accompanied by a half-breed from Peoria, mounted their ponies and started on their mission of mercy. On arriving at the Indian village, they found Lieutenant Helm closely guarded by his captors, and suffering from a wound which he received at the massacre. When the old chief entered the lodge, Lieutenant Helm threw his arms around his neck and cried like a child. He knew that Black Partridge had rescued his wife, and saved the life of his father-in-law (John Kinzie) with his family, and in him he saw a prospect of his own rescue.*

*The wife of Lieutenant Helm was a step-daughter of John Kinzie, an Indian trader, who came to Chicago in 1804. Kinzie was a half-brother of Thomas Forsyth, of Peoria, and father-in-law of Mrs. Kinzie, who published a book on the early history of Chicago.

The wife of Captain Heald was a sister of Captain Wells; the latter was raised among the Indians, adopted their dress, customs and language, and lost his life at the Chicago massacre.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FRENCH AT PEORIA REGARDED AS ENEMIES.

While the inhabitants of Peoria were quietly pursuing their daily avocation of farming, hunting and trading with the Indians, being as they supposed at peace with all the world, a plot was laid for their destruction. Being located in the midst of a wilderness country, two hundred miles from the nearest American settlement, and having but little intercourse with the civilized world, they would not have known that war between the United States and Great Britain existed if they had not learned the fact from the neighboring Indians.

Although the French at Peoria had lived within the jurisdiction of the United States government for thirty-four years, they had never taken the oath of allegiance, acknowledged its power, nor paid tax to its support. They were a foreign people, speaking a different language, with habits and customs peculiar to themselves, and all their

THE FRENCH REGARDED AS ENEMIES. 213

trade and intercourse was with the French citizens of Canada.

The residents of Peoria had taken no part in the war, as it was afterwards proven, but nevertheless they were charged with assisting the Indians by supplying them with arms. Report said that they were bringing munitions of war from Canada, and selling them to the Indians to enable these savages to make raids on the frontier settlements. It was also alleged that they had sent five horses over to the Sac village, near Rock Island, to pack lead for the Indians, and this lead was paid for in goods furnished by Peoria merchants. But the most damaging of all the evil reports in circulation, and which caused the greatest feeling of resentment among the people, was that of cattle stealing. It being reported and believed by people everywhere that Captain John Baptiste Maillet, the chief military man of Peoria, with a number of followers had been stealing cattle from the Wood river settlement, in Madison county, to feed the Indian army then collected at Gomo's village. These reports were afterwards shown to be false, and instead of Captain Maillet being a cattle thief, as reported, he was rewarded by an act of Congress for his loyalty to the United States government.

The evil reports in circulation about the French

BURNING OF PEORIA.

215

engaged in saying mass, they were startled by the report of a cannon. The congregation, partly through fright and partly by curiosity, ran out of the church, when they discovered four armed boats in the lake under full sail. On coming opposite the town, the boats rounded to and landed at the wharf. Father Racine came down from the pulpit, and in his long black robe, with his bald head uncovered, started for the landing, followed by all his congregation, men, women and children. Here they were met by Captain Craig and some of his men, who had landed from the boats. Thomas Forsyth, who spoke English, inquired of the commanding officer, Captain Craig, the object of his mission, but he evaded answering the question, and in return demanded of the citizens a supply of meat and vegetables for his men, which were furnished them.

The soldiers landed from the boats and scattered through the town in search of plunder, and committed many depredations on the people. They broke open the store of Felix Fontain, in which Antoine LeClair was a clerk, and took therefrom two casks of wine, and drank their contents. Many of the soldiers got drunk, forced their way into dwellings, insulting women, carrying off eatables, blankets, and everything which they took a fancy to. It was long after dark before

214 FRENCH AND INDIANS OF ILLINOIS RIVER.

at Peoria were generally believed, and Governor Edwards, supposing they were true, called for volunteers in order to send an armed force against them. About two hundred men responded to the call, who were placed under the command of Captain Craig, and rendezvoused at Shawneetown. Four keel-boats were prepared, with rifle ball proof planking, mounted with cannon, and filled with armed soldiers. These boats left Shawneetown early in October, and arrived at Peoria on the 5th of November. The inhabitants of Peoria were much surprised to see four armed boats land at their wharf, as no large craft had ever reached that place before.

The following account of the arrival of these boats, and the burning of Peoria, are principally taken from the statements of Antoine LeClair and Hypolite Pilette, who were present, the latter being a boy at the time. LeClair was a half-breed, and acquired much celebrity in after life as the proprietor of Davenport, Iowa. Pilette is now living on the American Bottom, near Prairie de Rocher, and to whom previous reference has been made.

BURNING OF PEORIA.

On Sunday morning, November 5th, 1812, as the people of Peoria were assembled at church,

BURNING OF PEORIA.

215

engaged in saying mass, they were startled by the report of a cannon. The congregation, partly through fright and partly by curiosity, ran out of the church, when they discovered four armed boats in the lake under full sail. On coming opposite the town, the boats rounded to and landed at the wharf. Father Racine came down from the pulpit, and in his long black robe, with his bald head uncovered, started for the landing, followed by all his congregation, men, women and children. Here they were met by Captain Craig and some of his men, who had landed from the boats. Thomas Forsyth, who spoke English, inquired of the commanding officer, Captain Craig, the object of his mission, but he evaded answering the question, and in return demanded of the citizens a supply of meat and vegetables for his men, which were furnished them.

The soldiers landed from the boats and scattered through the town in search of plunder, and committed many depredations on the people. They broke open the store of Felix Fontain, in which Antoine LeClair was a clerk, and took therefrom two casks of wine, and drank their contents. Many of the soldiers got drunk, forced their way into dwellings, insulting women, carrying off eatables, blankets, and everything which they took a fancy to. It was long after dark before

216 FRENCH AND INDIANS OF ILLINOIS RIVER.

Captain Craig succeeded in getting his drunken disorderly crew on board, when the boats were pushed off from shore to prevent further depredations on the citizens. The boats lay at anchor off in the lake in order to prevent the soldiers from again visiting the town, as well as a precaution against an attack from the Indians.

During the night a high wind arose, and to escape the waves in the lake the boats raised their anchors and dropped down into the channel of the river, about one-half mile below the town, where they remained until morning. About daylight, eight or ten guns were fired in quick succession in the thick river timber close to the boats. Captain Craig thinking that they were attacked by Indians, ordered the boats to push out into the channel of the river, while the cannons were brought to bear and several shots fired into the timber in order to dislodge the supposed Indians.

About daybreak on the morning of the supposed attack on the boats, a party of French at the village, consisting of eight or ten in number, went out in the river timber to shoot some beeves. The cattle being mixed with buffalo would live during the winter without feeding and became partly wild, so they were frequently hunted down in the woods the same as deer.

218 FRENCH AND INDIANS OF ILLINOIS RIVER.

Quebec, was burned. The wind-mill, which stood on the bank of the lake and filled with grain and flour belonging to the citizens, was burned, as well as stables, stock-yards, corn-cribs, &c.

Felix Fontain, Michael LaCroix, Antoine Des Champs and Thomas Forsyth, all of whom were traders, with their stores filled with goods, which was consumed by the flames. An old man named Benit, formerly a trader, who had saved a large amount of gold by the toil of half a century, which he had laid away for old age. This gold was secreted in his dwelling, but finding it on fire he rushed in to save his treasure, and perished in the flames, and his bones were found among the ashes on the following spring by a party of hunters who visited Peoria. Mrs. LaCroix, a lady of refinement and of great personal attraction, who in after years became the wife of Governor Reynolds, being alone with four small children when her house was set on fire, appealed to the soldiers to save the clothes of herself and little ones, but her appeal was in vain, and with her children only she escaped from the burning building.

There is an incident connected with the burning of Peoria which to some extent explains the barbarous conduct of the soldiers, and somewhat palliates this offense against humanity. About

218 FRENCH AND INDIANS OF ILLINOIS RIVER.

Quebec, was burned. The wind-mill, which stood on the bank of the lake and filled with grain and flour belonging to the citizens, was burned, as well as stables, stock-yards, corn-cribs, &c.

Felix Fontain, Michael LaCroix, Antoine Des Champs and Thomas Forsyth, all of whom were traders, with their stores filled with goods, which was consumed by the flames. An old man named Benit, formerly a trader, who had saved a large amount of gold by the toil of half a century, which he had laid away for old age. This gold was secreted in his dwelling, but finding it on fire he rushed in to save his treasure, and perished in the flames, and his bones were found among the ashes on the following spring by a party of hunters who visited Peoria. Mrs. LaCroix, a lady of refinement and of great personal attraction, who in after years became the wife of Governor Reynolds, being alone with four small children when her house was set on fire, appealed to the soldiers to save the clothes of herself and little ones, but her appeal was in vain, and with her children only she escaped from the burning building.

There is an incident connected with the burning of Peoria which to some extent explains the barbarous conduct of the soldiers, and somewhat palliates this offense against humanity. About

BURNING OF PEORIA.

219

two months before Peoria was burned, General Howard, then stationed at Portage du Sioux, sent one of his soldiers, a young half-breed named Snipkins, to Peoria, in order to ascertain if the French were assisting the Indians in carrying on a war against the settlements, as had been reported. This messenger, by courtesy, was called Howard's express, but in fact was a spy, learning all he could from the citizens without letting his business be known. This young scapegrace, instead of returning to the army and reporting the true state of affairs, according to orders, became enamored with a girl and prolonged his stay until the arrival of Captain Craig. And to escape punishment for disobeying orders, he reported to the troops under Captain Craig that he was detained by the people of Peoria against his will, being a prisoner in their hands, which was afterwards shown to be false. If this messenger had returned to the army, and reported as he was ordered to do, Craig's expedition would have been abandoned, and the destruction of Peoria averted.

A short time before Peoria was burned, Thomas Forsyth was appointed a government agent, but this appointment was kept a secret by the department at Washington, as it was thought, if known, it would lessen his influence with the Indians, and probably prejudice his townsmen

220 FRENCH AND INDIANS OF ILLINOIS RIVER.

against him. When Forsyth was made a prisoner he showed his commission under the United States seal to Captain Craig, but the incredulous captain pronounced it a forgery.

When the destruction of Peoria was completed, the boats started down the river on their return homeward, carrying with them all the men as prisoners of war. Two miles below the present site of Alton, in the thick river timber, these prisoners were set at liberty, without tents, provisions, or means of returning to their families.

The women and children having been left at the burned town without food or shelter, were therefore in a suffering condition, and without assistance they could not be relieved from their helpless situation. It was now late in the fall, the sky overcast with gray clouds, and the cold November winds howled through the forest trees. With high winds were squalls of snow, and the roaring and lashing of waves in the lake caused mothers to draw their infants closer to their bosoms to protect them from the inclement weather. To these destitute helpless beings all was dark and cheerless; the lamentations of mothers and cries of children were heard far away, and touched the heart of a sympathizing friend, although a savage. While in the midst of trouble they discovered a lone Indian walking

BURNING OF PEORIA.

221

leisurely along the beach of the lake, and with a firm step approaching them. He carried a rifle on his shoulder, a tomahawk and scalping knife in his belt, and his face was painted in many colors. Notwithstanding he was disguised by paint, they recognized in the approaching Indian Gomo, a friendly chief, who had a village where Chilli-cothe now stands.

On the approach of Captain Craig's forces, the inhabitants of Gomo's village fled from their homes and secreted themselves in a thick grove of timber a few miles west of the river. But Gomo, with two of his warriors, remained in the heavy timber near the lake watching the movements of the soldiers, and when the boats departed down the river they came forth from their hiding place to assist their friends in distress. Gomo and his warriors furnished provisions and shelter for the destitute women and children, and provided them canoes (those belonging to the French having been destroyed by the soldiers,) to descend the river. When supplied with an outfit for the journey, the women with their little one started down the river, camping each night on its banks, without tents or shelter from the cold night air. After many days of hardship and exposure, drenched by rain and suffering from cold, they reached Cahokia, where they were provided for

ZZZ FRENCH AND INDIANS OF ILLINOIS RIVER.


by their countrymen, and afterwards joined by their husbands and fathers.

It has been stated that Captain Craig took the women and children on the boats with the men, and set them all at liberty on the east bank of the Mississippi river. But this is incorrect, as the report applied to a few families only. The family of Thomas Forsyth, and perhaps one or two others were taken on the boats, but I am informed by Rene LaCroix and Hypolite Pilette, who were present, (being boys at the time,) that the families to which they belonged, with many others, went down the river to Cahokia in bark canoes furnished by the Indian chief Gomo, as previously stated.

Captain Craig has been greatly villified for burning Peoria, but it must be recollected that he acted under the orders of Governor Edwards, who approved of his conduct, and afterwards appointed him to an important office.

It appears Governor Edwards was misled by false reports, which caused him to make war on innocent people, and therefore should not be censured for doing that which he believed, at the time, to be his duty.

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)
Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 39

A MAP OF PEORIA, or La Ville De Maillet.		R. Belonge	
<p><i>From EDWARD COLES' Report to the Secretary of the Treasury of the U. S. Nov. 10 1820</i></p> 		Antoine Grand Bois	
		A. Burbonne	L. Pennenneau A. Burbonne
		A. Deschamps	Hypolite Millete
		Louis P. Pilette	Felix Fontaine
			L. P. Pilette Felix Fonaine
		Tho's Forsyth 300 ft. square	Tho's Forsyth 300 ft. square
		Jaques Mette	Jaques Mette
		Simon Rei	Francis Buche
Charles La Belle	out-lot or field of 8 acres	P. Lavassieur dit Chamberlain	Louis Bisson
		Ferry, or Hudson Street.	Michael La Croix
		Charles La Belle	P. Lavassieur dit Chamberlain
		Joseph Coudier	L. Pennenneau
Hypolite Maillet	out-lot or field of 5½ ac's	Hypolite Maillet	
		Hypolite Maillet	
		M. Le Claire	Francis Racine
			Antonie Le Claire
Francis Racine jr.	out-lot or field of 3 or 4 arpens		Tho's Lushy Antone Le Claire
			Francis Racine jr.
			Baptiste Raboin L. Pennenneau Simon Bertrand Antoine Lapeigne John B. Blondeau
Simon Roi out-lot or field of six arpens			Francis Dupre
		Simon Roi	Simon Roi
		Antoine Roi	Antoine Roi
Francis Racine sen	field of 20 arpens		

** Fort Clark is at, or near this point, foot of what is now called Liberty St. This village it is said contained about 70 dwellings.*

French and Indians of the Illinois River by Nehemiah Matson (1816-1873)
Summary by Cheryl Rutledge-Brennecke | June 2022 | Page 40

This diagram-map from S. DeWitt Drown's "Peoria Directory for 1844" shows the layout and land-ownership of the old French-American village of La Ville de Maillet (Peoria) in 1812, just before it was destroyed by Illinois militia during the War of 1812. Many of the residents were slain in the attack, but some escaped while most survivors were taken prisoner and carried down to Alton, Ill.