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THE WATERY WORLD: THE COUNTRY OF THE ILLINOIS, 1699 – 1778

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## **Abstract**

The Watery World, an environmental study, challenges traditional histories of Illinois that present the natural environment in 1778 as untouched, virgin land. Occupied by the French since 1699, Illinois lands had been depleted of furbearing animals, deforested, and rigorously hunted. An exodus of French and Illinois Indians after 1763 encouraged a partial recovery of the environment; yet there were permanent losses, such as oak-hickory savannas and bison. Changes in the tri-partite habitat of French Illinois – floodplain, talus and bluffs, and upland till plain – also contributed to an escalation of inter-tribal conflicts. Northern Fox, Sauk, Potawatomi, and Sioux, as well as eastern bands of Miami and the Missouri Osage, competed for the resources of the Illinois prairies. The radical depopulation of Illinois tribes over the eighteenth century has been studied in the context of European contact, yet change to the natural environment has not been emphasized. This study argues that environmental degradation played a role in the decline of the Illinois subtribes and was also a factor in European occupation. The experience of the British particularly, who arrived to claim Illinois after the Treaty of Paris in 1763, was impacted by soil exhaustion, flooding and resultant fevers, the exodus of peoples, and deforestation. The massive influx of American settlers after 1778, when George Rogers Clark captured British Illinois, rapidly led to new environmental controls and surveys. The watery world of the Illinois Country saw an even more significant period of ditching, drainage, and aggressive agriculture. Illinois Indian lands were alienated; fencing laws replaced old French communal codes; and enormous

grants of land were made along the rivers. The effect on the ecology of the Illinois Country was profound. This study examines the role of water in the settlements and livelihoods of Illinois Indians, French, British, and at the very end, Americans. It invokes the rich riverine, aquatic environment of the mid Mississippi River basin in the eighteenth century and documents its changes as important historical determinants.



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## Introduction

*The Watery World* is an environmental history of a small, fertile niche along a great river. The French colonial settlements of southern Illinois lay right at an imaginary hinge point: here the Mississippi bows slightly to the west below the Big Rivers confluence of the Illinois and Missouri. Flooded and replenished for thousands of years, the black, fecund earth along a sixty mile stretch of floodplain became a theater for the historic meetings of many peoples. Each group who migrated and farmed there – middle and late Mississippian Indians, historic Illinois Indians, the French, the British, and finally, the Americans – changed and were changed themselves by proximal relations of riverine earth and water. This study is anchored right in the fertile mud of that insular ecosystem. Between 1699 and 1778, a peculiar, localized history evolved. The Europeans who arrived there were representatives of continental and international events and policies; their very coming – their deposition on the eastern shores of the Mississippi through ventures in exploration and trade – brought the “outside” into the Illinois. Yet inside the Illinois Country already lay a mobile, interactive world of diverse indigenous peoples. They were responding to distant events and catalysts within a wideflung kinship and alliance system of their own. In truth, there never was, or only once was, very long ago in distant geologic time, a primeval, virgin Illinois. The power of European narratives, of European languages, the passionate evocation of the beauty of the Illinois, has created an enduring fable: pristine wilderness. In the “untouched” Illinois nestled an extraordinary, virile flora and fauna, a panoramic abundance often catalogued by first time observers from floating river craft.



Yet even this view has become further textured over the centuries. As the fable goes, the Indian tribes who lived in the Illinois Country did not perceive its potential and cared little about its yield until the French arrived in 1699 to instruct them.<sup>1</sup> The French alone among Europeans understood the country and inhabitants along the great river. They brought Old World peasant folkways and developed (primarily) illiterate, jovial relations with Indians that included much intermarriage, human contact, communication, and trade. Yet the French maintained a pronounced geographic isolation. Scant population growth and erratic influx of French settlers bespoke a failure to develop the rich Illinois lands. In 1765, following the cession of the Illinois after the Seven Years War, the British arrived. They came as political machinators and commercial marketers and stirred up trouble, disrupting the French-Indian allegiances and prosperous – if desultory – trade-agricultural world. Focused on political and economic control, heavy-handed with French and Indians alike, and unprepared for distant frontier living, the British over ten years spurred an emptying-out of the Illinois. The French migrated to the Missouri lands while the Illinois Indians shrank away to impoverished remnants. Once more, a group of incoming people failed to correctly perceive or utilize the resources of the Illinois. Into the vacuum created by the British evacuation in 1775 – into a waiting land – poured American settlers. Finally the wild prairie and forest mosaic of the Illinois came of age. The right people had tenure.

A progression of local and regional histories of these diverse peoples has produced this narrative. In 2001, for instance, the state of Illinois reprinted a commissioned 1978 study by Richard Jensen, *Illinois: A History*. Jensen states that the French left no more impact on the land than place names. The fable of slight human impact before American settlement is

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of historical myth-making surrounding Indians and their relationship to the environment, see Shepard Krech, *Ecological Indian: myth and history* (1999).

enduring. This study seeks to take that fable apart, to discover and analyze exactly how prehistoric and historic Indians, French, and British peoples found ways to live on a sixty-mile stretch of water-dominated land. Their “failures” are construed here along two axes: what happened to their numbers, and why – the ebb and flow of population – and how did their ways of using natural resources contribute to those changes? In the last twenty years, other fine historical studies have begun to examine these questions. In particular, the work of Carl J. Ekberg and a host of archeologists, stimulated by the pioneering work of Margaret Kimball Brown in the 1980’s, have focused right on the French and Indian settlements. Ekberg has studied French colonial St. Genevieve across the Mississippi River as well as the agricultural practices of the French on the eastern shores. Archeologists have striven to determine locations of early Illinois Indian hunting camps and villages.<sup>2</sup> Central questions involve the degree of contact between the Illinois tribes and the early French, the impact of European trade goods, and patterns of Indian movement. The dramatic drop in Illinois Indian population over the eighteenth century has attracted the interest of population geographers and anthropologists. In 1956, Emily Blasingham published “The Depopulation of the Illinois Indians,” a two-part study of variables that may have impacted the precipitous decline of the

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<sup>2</sup> See the work of Carl J. Ekberg, *Colonial Ste. Genevieve: An Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier* (1985); *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (2000); and *Francois Valle and his world: Upper Louisiana before Louis and Clark* (2002). Margaret Kimball Brown’s important 1979 dissertation, *Cultural Transformations Among the Illinois: An Application of a Systems Model*, has been published by Michigan State University, and she has subsequently, with Lawrie Cena Dean, collated, translated, and published a critical collection of French notarial records from the first half of the eighteenth century. See *The Village of Chartres in Colonial Illinois 1720 - 1765* (1977); see also Brown and Dean as co-authors of *The French Colony in the mid-Mississippi Valley* (1995). In addition to Brown’s study of change and acculturation among the Illinois Indians, two other collections of archaeological work are particularly important: *Calumet & Fleur-de-Lys: Archaeology of Indian and French Contact in the Midcontinent*, edited by John A. Walthall and Thomas E. Emerson (1992), and *French Colonial Archaeology: The Illinois Country and the Western Great Lakes*, edited by John A. Walthall (1991). See also Charles J. Bareis and James M. Porter, *American Bottom Archaeology: A summary of the FAI-270 Project Contribution to the Culture History of the Mississippi River Valley* (1984).

Illinois at mid-century.<sup>3</sup> Almost forty years later, Joseph Zitomersky's dense study of Indian-European demographics in French Illinois appeared, *French Americans-Native Americans in Eighteenth-Century French Colonial Louisiana: The Population Geography of the Illinois Indians, 1670s-1760s* (1994). These works provide the first important attempts at reconstructing a fragmented, often poorly-documented story of decimation and eradication in a complex frontier habitat.

Each history in its own way selects a specific group to follow, and while some interactions of groups are explored, these studies remain curiously incomplete: they take at face value the accounts of the Illinois land. The environment is treated as a backdrop for the stories of the people. Carl Ekberg does the best job of addressing differences in settlement and agriculture in each of the French villages along the Mississippi, pointing out the more saturate, watery lands of the Cahokia area to the north and highlighting the wheat-growing successes of Kaskaskia to the south. Yet in Ekberg's careful analysis of French agricultural practices, the Illinois Indians have a limited role. They remain for the most part domiciled in their villages near the French communal lands. A similar restriction occurs in the best studies of the Illinois Indians themselves, Wayne C. Temple's *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country: Historic Tribes* (1958) and two very different sources, Raymond Hauser's 1973 dissertation, "The Ethnohistory of the Illinois Indian Tribe, 1673 –1832," and Joseph Jablow's descriptive study of Indian movement and habitation, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana: Illinois, Kickapoo, and Potawatomi Indians* (1974). These superlative early works still fail to recreate the ways that Illinois Indians were daily involved with the French and the British, the ways that all those peoples were using the land and resources of the Illinois

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<sup>3</sup> See Emily J. Blasingham, "The Depopulation of the Illinois Indians, Part I," *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 3(3) Summer, 1956, and Part II, *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 3 (4), Autumn, 1956.

Country. The reason for this elision has to do with the persistence of the American success story narrative: the breaking of the prairies, the tapping of the dramatic agricultural potential of the American Bottom. The GLO (Government Land Office) surveyor has appeared in the record as almost a kind of folk hero; it is in the early years of the nineteenth century that the story begins to be told about human interaction with the Illinois land itself.

This study argues that important environmental changes in the Illinois Country were engendered not only by the Americans but also by the French and their relationship to both the riverine land and the Indians; and that the Illinois Indians in their particularized locale were caught in a matrix of forces based on resource competition among a variety of peoples. To reconstruct the eighteenth century environment, an inter-disciplinary approach has been used, culling longitudinal studies in botany, ecology, geology, and soil science. The cross-disciplinary fields of ethnohistory, anthropology, and archaeology have been critically important in reconstructing changes in the lives of Indians, French, and British. Another approach has been to make much more extensive use of French notarial records that contain invaluable property descriptions. These legal documents offer clues to how land was used but also, how it was perceived. To this point, historians have used the notarial documents to learn about inheritance practices and French material culture through estate listings. These records can also map out the floodplain settlements and establish patterns and changes.

The history of the Illinois land and the history of the Illinois Indians are inextricable from each other. Therefore, this study has two purposes. First, it retells the history of European occupation of what would become the American Bottom in terms of human relationships to and effect on land. The saturated, often-flooded plain to which the French came to begin farming shaped specific kinds of trade and settlement history. At the village of Chartres and

Fort Chartres, previously-farmed Indian plots lying in scattered profusion over the bottomlands, as well as continual access to water routes, created a burgeoning agricultural and trade center. Farther north, at Cahokia, despite a one hundred square mile grant, French agriculture failed to develop; the land was marshy and full of seeps. Over the course of the eighteenth century, French and Indians changed the sixty mile riverine world that had previously known intermittent and migratory occupations (save the long-lived prehistoric Indian city at Cahokia). How a shared European-Indian history altered the environment is a corollary theme to the French settlement studies and leads to a different interpretation of the 1760's and 1770's in the Illinois Country.

A second purpose is to tease out the role of the Illinois Indians in each of the two case studies of French settlement and to continue to tell the story of these Indians across the eighteenth century. While there is little information to reconstruct the ways Indian perception and use of land changed, histories to date have concentrated on Indian movements and the archaeology of village sites. There has been little analysis of relationships among Illinois subtribes and also between the Illinois and other Indian nations historically occupying the area, especially the Miami, Potawatomi, and Osage. Close re-examination of French and British accounts can highlight survival strategies of the Illinois in a significantly changed natural environment. The Illinois Country sequesters a history of two broad human cultures intersecting in a powerful riverine habitat. Likewise, the Mississippi floodplain supporting five French and three Indian villages across eighty years was immediately affected by the ways these populations met each other. Yet most of this interaction can be characterized as a culture of opportunism that left no enduring records. This is also true for the land itself. The fecund nature of the floodplain allowed for rapid successional growth and return to some

presettlement characteristics once large numbers of people left the Illinois Country, as happened in the 1760's. When the Americans surveyed the land in the early 1800's, they described traces of both permanent change engendered by French and Indian occupation – and a natural recovery process.

The story here opens in 1699, when French Seminarian missionaries from Quebec established the Holy Family Mission at Cahokia. French religious had been living and working among the Kaskaskia Indians at Starved Rock, near Peoria, prior to 1699. In truth, since the early contact years of the 1670's, there had been a consistent outreach to the Illinois Country, a southward thrust that included the mission in Chicago. This study begins, however, with the French and Indians in the Cahokia area, a distinctive, watery ecosystem home to millions of waterfowl that had long relied on the Mississippi River. This riverine section of the Illinois Country was so saturated that it was described by eighteenth-century observers as “glinting with hundreds of tiny mirrors.”<sup>4</sup> Eight chapters describe the intricate patterns of French-Indian-British experience with each other and with the plants, animals, water and land of the Illinois. As such, *The Watery World* is a localized history, replete with small human dramas, with recreated visual pictures of the eighteenth century environment, and with narratives of life: of ascending trumpeter swans, of raspy cord grasses taller than a rider on horseback, of green-headed flies driving buffalo north, of French ponies trained to swim. It is above all a study of mobility, not only the ebb and flow of peoples in and out of the Illinois, but the ebb and flow of the Mississippi River and its tributaries. As such, it

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<sup>4</sup> See also “The Journal of Lieutenant Eddington, or the Surgeon,” in the autumn of 1765; Eddington mentions “the millions of waterfowl” in “the little Lakes and Marshes everywhere that water is to be found.” See this journal in *Broadswords and Bayonets: The Journals of the Expedition Under the Command of Captain Thomas Stirling*, edited by Robert G. Carroon (The Society of Colonial Wars in Illinois, 1984), p. 94.

embraces an irony: for the Illinois Country, perhaps alone in the geography of the Old Northwest, did not experience endemic Indian-white violence nor did the generous prairies ever support a flotsam-jetsam Indian population, recombining, resettling, then fragmenting and moving elsewhere (French-Fox Indian hostilities do characterize the area until 1732 and intermittently, beyond, but there were no massacres of the Illinois French).

Before Marquette and Joliet sailed down the Mississippi into the Illinois Country in 1673, the land between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi, identified by Richard White as “*le pays d’en haut*,” was characterized by daily migration of peoples. In the Ohio Valley, refugee camps of relocated Indians began to dot maps by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Responding to continental forces, trade and war pressures from the north and east, a variety of peoples, both European and Indian, were on the move. From the east into the Ohio Valley and all along the northern Great Lakes corridors, relocation and re-establishment characterized the years before the French penetrated into the Illinois and for many years after as well. Reading any of the primary sources available for French or British, for example, one is struck by just how quickly an outpost could be established, or, as historical geographers put it, implanted. The French Fort Crevecoeur, for instance, erected in 1680 “on a low hill between two ravines on the Illinois River near the present site of Peoria,” was built and then destroyed by La Salle within a short period of time. Up went the double palisade of logs “enclosing two cabins,” and a fort emerged from the rich oak savanna along the river.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Indian groups could load entire villages and haul them via dogs and travois, and later, with horses, relocating to new areas when their hunting grounds were exhausted or invaded, or when they became angry with European policies. The Miami

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<sup>5</sup> Betty I. Madden, *Art, Crafts, and Architecture in Early Illinois* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), p. 17.

Indians' permanent relocation from the Detroit area down into the Wabash River lands of Indiana in the 1740's is a good example of such a change.

In *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650 -1815* (1991), Richard White describes the devastating effect of Iroquoian violence on a host of lesser and greater tribes with a haunting image: "Like a knife scouring a pane of glass, warfare apparently far more brutal than any known previously among these peoples etched the first fine dangerous lines across the region in the 1640s." In addition to epidemics of disease, the Iroquois attacks had "fallen like hammer blows across the length and breadth of the lands bordering the Great Lakes...."<sup>6</sup> Under pressure from these attacks, and also in response to competition for game and furs, the Shawnee and Delaware Indians were moving into the Ohio Valley. From the Great Lakes area, bands of northern Fox, Sauk, Potawatomi, Winnebago, and Ojibway were periodically raiding south into the Illinois lands. The names of these tribes show up so frequently in French dispatches that it becomes easy to think of them as perpetual, hardened adversaries. Sensitive studies of both the Fox and the Potawatomi by R. David Edmunds reveal a different tale.<sup>7</sup> The Fox, termed by the French the Renards or Outagamies, and self-designated the Mesquakie, "people of the red earth," shared many cultural similarities with the Illinois Indians. Like the Illinois, they were trapped geographically between the push of Europeans from the east and the formidable Sioux tribes to the west. The Fox had been driven into east-central Wisconsin not by the Iroquois but by the Ojibway; in their new homeland, they lived at the extreme terminus of the flow of French trade goods. Protection of their food and fur supplies in the narrow Wisconsin portage

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<sup>6</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650 -1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> See R. David Edmunds and Joseph L. Peyser, *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); see also Edmunds, *The Potawatomi, Keepers of the Fire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978).



corridor – beginning to be crossed and recrossed by laden French trade canoes seeking markets with the Illinois, the Missouri tribes, and the Sioux – engendered fifty years of what became known as The Fox Wars. The Illinois Indians’ hunting trips north onto the prairies where buffalo herds migrated also placed them in competition with the Fox. While one reference alone states that Fox-Illinois hostility stemmed from the Fox belief that Illinois Indians were killing female beaver, forbidden within the Fox cosmology, it is far more likely that these tribes were being squeezed inside an increasingly small geographic area.

The Teton Sioux at this time were also in transition. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, they were moving constantly on foot (even in 1812 the French trader Antoine Tabeau would characterize them as “always wandering” and “the wandering nations.”) Teton and Yanktonai Sioux appeared “on the edges of the Great Plains” by 1800.<sup>8</sup> Beginning to obtain horses from the Trans-Mississippi Arikara tribe, the Sioux moved steadily westward toward the Black Hills. Their progress was intermittent and punctuated with violent defensive raids to keep other tribes from hunting and trapping in the rich fur lands of the northern Mississippi River Valley. Even the French eventually feared to encounter Sioux in the northern wilderness. French voyageurs and *coureur du bois* discovered that they could use the Saskatchewan River, a northern trade route, to bypass the volatile Sioux country.<sup>9</sup>

Sioux and Fox-Sauk allied raids on the Illinois nation began to be commonplace by the second half of the seventeenth century, and one historian, Eric Hinderaker, calls the Illinois

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<sup>8</sup> See Richard White’s analysis of the importance of Sioux migration in “The Winning of the West: the Expansion of the Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Journal of American History*, Vol. 65 (2) (Sept., 1978).

<sup>9</sup> W.J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier 1534 – 1760* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), p. 149.

at the time of French contact a “beleaguered people.”<sup>10</sup> It is true that when Marquette and Joliet met the first Illinois Indians, a band of re-located Peoria living in present-day Iowa, those Indians were in retreat from the Iroquois. Other phrases Hinderaker employs to describe the Illinois Indians include “fractured social world,” “disintegrating confederacies,” and “bewildering array of peoples.” He feels similarly about the French in the Illinois: “French colonists had indeed already settled in the Illinois country, but the communities they helped to create were disorderly, and the alliances they forged were unreliable and unpredictable.”<sup>11</sup> While both Richard White and Hinderaker have provided invaluable studies of Indian mobility and allegiances, setting those patterns within the framework of international empire jockeying, one must ask the question, “unreliable and unpredictable compared to what?” There had never been a community of intermingled European-Indian population that endured with stability, reliability, and predictability on the North American continent (possible contenders are the French Acadian-Mi’kmaq Indian relationship and joint tenure in Nova Scotia, and the French-Illinois Indian communities along the Mississippi). Hinderaker’s study of the Illinois Country makes the same statements about its value as almost all other political and empire studies previously:

If France controlled the Illinois Country, it gained a strong, unified American empire; if not, it was left with two small colonies (one oppressively hot, the other unbearably cold) separated by a thousand miles of potentially hostile terrain. In addition to its strategic importance, the Illinois country was also singularly attractive as a center of settlement.<sup>12</sup>

The “strategic importance” of the Illinois Country was at first largely cartographic. During the negotiations that produced the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, concluding the lengthy and

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<sup>10</sup> Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673 – 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Hinderaker, p. 92.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

costly War of the Spanish Succession, a series of what French Canadian historian Dale Miquelon calls “horse-trading” deals emerged. France ceded to England Newfoundland, the Hudson’s Bay area, and Acadia, using the imprecise phrasing, “with its ancient boundaries.” As French Acadia was transferred to Britain and French treaty-makers concentrated on maritime holdings that would preserve their fishing rights, Miquelon points out that inland territorial claims “received scant attention.” Using a plethora of inaccurate maps, whose “flat, creamy surfaces” and “beckoning spaces” allowed the formation of “notional boundaries,” treaty makers carved up the North American continent. During the Utrecht negotiations, for instance, the British tried to project their sovereignty straight across the map to the Mississippi River. Maps created the illusion of vast, empty territory. In turn, the French way of perceiving empire was “an abstraction, a construction based on theory, dispatches, books, and maps...”<sup>13</sup> Of key importance in the Treaty of Utrecht was a clause that allowed both French and British equal commercial privileges with the “far Indians,” and France had to recognize the British-Iroquois trade covenant.<sup>14</sup> This concession would prove to be the catalyst to the slowly-building, slowly-brewing Seven Years War that would erupt in the Ohio Valley in 1754 - 1755. “Equal commercial privileges” encouraged a strenuous, increasingly desperate – and often vile – competition for Indian trade. The two ancient rivals of France and England used time-honored tactics to gain control of the western fur trade. France garrisoned the rivers with outposts while Britain sent in packtrain traders overland.

Yet as historian William Eccles has pointed out, the threat posed to the French North American empire in the commercial privileges concession “did not become real” for nearly

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<sup>13</sup> See Dale Miquelon, “Envisioning the French Empire: Utrecht, 1711-1713,” *French Historical Studies* Vol. 24 (4) (Autumn 2001), pp. 653 – 677.

<sup>14</sup> W.J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier*, p. 141.

forty years.<sup>15</sup> The Long Peace in the Ohio Valley proceeding the outbreak of the Seven Years War resulted from the behavior of the British toward the western Indian tribes. For a long time, British preferred to concentrate on the illegal fur trade in the Oswego-Albany arena of New York.<sup>16</sup> Out in the distant Illinois, the French and Indians were left alone to work out their own ways of living in a diverse ecosystem that received only one shipment a year of trade goods, via the return French convoy from New Orleans.

Although *The Watery World* is set within the ambit of international rivalries and trade wars, and although the French and British military personnel in the Illinois Country wrote many letters revealing an astute awareness of those conflicts, the policies with which the country was governed seemed to have little direct effect upon the lives of most people there. They went on hunting, farming, tanning skins, sending produce convoys to New Orleans, manufacturing bear oil, shipping furs and peltries north to Montreal, gathering walnuts and pecans, chopping down white oak and mulberry, then red cedar, building river craft, and trading horses. The French and the four Illinois Indian subtribes – the Peoria, Cahokia-Tamaroa, Mechigamea, and Kaskaskia – lived in relative isolation. When the area was invaded, for warfare remained endemic between the Illinois and the Fox, Sauk, Potawatomi and Sioux, the peoples who were invaded or attacked did not leave. At times various Illinois tribes went to live across the Mississippi or south, with the Arkansas Quawpaw; but they always returned. To the east, the Grand Prairie of Illinois rolled away, a 151 mile expanse of tall, often virulently hot and abrasive grasses thick with flies and mosquitoes, dotted only here and there with oak-hickory groves. In that prairie-woodland mosaic no refugee Indian

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<sup>15</sup> W. J. Eccles, *France in America* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972), p. 109.

<sup>16</sup> For a key analysis of this illegal trade and its impact on the French-British international struggle, see Jean Lunn, "The Illegal Fur Trade Out of New France, 1713 –1760," *Canadian Historical Association Annual Report*, 1939.

villages grew up, despite frequent descriptions by Europeans of the vast game reserves there. The “republics” of refugee Indian nations, coalescing in the Ohio Valley as tribal remnants and dislocations engendered a sustained wandering – these republics did not form on the prairies.<sup>17</sup>

The waterways of the mid Mississippi Valley conducted French and Indians alike north to the trading posts of Michilimackinac, Green Bay, and Detroit, or south to New Orleans. From time to time Chickasaw Indians from the south attempted to invade the Illinois, hostile to the French, who competed in their deerskin trade with the British in the southern territories. Yet no permanent changes in the French or Indian settlements seem to have occurred, with the single exception of a 1752 catastrophic raid on the Illinois villages. The 180-canoe flotilla that descended the Mississippi to wipe out the Mechigamia settlement near Fort Chartres held a combined force of Fox, Potawatomi, and Sioux, determined to avenge a series of raids the Illinois had made on Fox and Sioux hunters. The Illinois Indian loss of life in this raid was never redeemed. As such, this attack stands out across the entire eighteenth century as the most violent episode in the French settlement history in the middle Mississippi Valley.

Despite these casualties and the persistently low numbers of French settlers, the people who came to the Illinois by and large stayed there. Such is the character of the Illinois that even after the Jesuits were expelled in 1763, at least one priest found it impossible to stay away. Father Meurin, aging yet passionate, returned and begged to be allowed to minister to his French and Indian parishioners. He was permitted to stay only if he became a Capuchin priest. He did so, continuing to live near the Mississippi River, crossing and recrossing it until his death. The Illinois Indian tribes who greeted the incoming French missionaries at the

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<sup>17</sup> See Richard White’s discussion of Indian “republicanism” and “republics” in Chapter Five, “Republicans and Rebels,” in *The Middle Ground*.

turn of the century in 1700 were still living along the sixty-mile riverine strip when the Americans arrived in 1778. Their numbers were greatly reduced, but they were there. Similarly, although large numbers of French did migrate to Spanish “Luisiana” across the Mississippi, taking with them their slaves and their devotion to Catholicism, many early sources attest that it was the wealthier people who left. The poorer French, the hunting and trapping population, as well as tradesmen and entrepreneurs, stayed on. Cahokia especially became an almost entirely French village in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Finally, even soldiers who entered the Illinois under the command of George Rogers Clark in 1778 returned to purchase title to land and farm. The persistence of these peoples tells a story of love for a particular land, one virtually unexpressed in extant documents.

While the insular Illinois Country endured – the farthest, the most distant outpost of the French empire and then of the British – and while the peoples there had to adjust to political regime changes, the land they depended on was also changing. Against the backdrop of a larger international drama, the competition between France and England for control of Indian trade, the Illinois Country between Cahokia and Kaskaskia was depleted of fur-bearing mammals, especially deer, and in large part deforested. Channel changes and flooding of the Mississippi River ruined agricultural fields and undermined the limestone walls of Fort Chartres. *The Watery World* describes how human history in the area was affected by these forces, including both imperial and small, local Indian histories. Chapters Two and Three present individual case studies of French settlement patterns, the first at Cahokia and the second in the Fort Chartres area. Differences in the earth itself – moisture level especially – resulted in two different trajectories of trade and agriculture, which in turn affected European-Indian relationships. Chapter Three especially examines land use patterns among

the proto-historic and historic Indian tribes, addressing the long-held and pernicious belief that French settlers arrived into virgin land and that their agricultural successes were due to alluvial fertility. Chapter Four describes the evolution of the trade matrix at Fort Chartres and the way the Mechigamea Indians living near the fort became key players in the provisioning trade. That role provided them with a way to survive the changes in larger European trade practices, in which their own early role as middlemen was eliminated. As Eric Hinderaker has pointed out, the system of rivers in the Ohio Valley and its western Illinois terminus created new trade and commercial relationships, the means by which a temporary resurrection of autonomy became possible for myriad small Indian tribes. The network of streams, creeks, and rivers in the Illinois Country created a particular kind of outpost and frontier community. Opportunities for fluid river trade drew in many Indian nations. Waterways and river travel established a far-flung contact system, an arterial trade world on both sides of the Mississippi that the Spanish and the British found impossible to control. The decade of greatest prosperity for both French and Indians in the Illinois was the 1740's. By the 1750's, the penetration of British packtrains and traders, the Scots-Irish enterprise out of Pennsylvania into the Ohio Valley, began to erode the Long Peace. Chapter Five is a short examination of how the ominous build-up to the Seven Years War affected the Illinois settlements. In particular, the rag-tag refugee and trade center of Pickawillany across the Grand Prairie, dominated by the Miami-British trade coalition, created serious tensions; the Illinois and Miami Indians shared many blood ties yet were allied to two different international powers. Both the French and Indians in the single explosive year of 1752 were attacked by Indian tribes seeking to gain security and power.

Two years later, the Seven Years War broke out. Chapter Six begins with a brief overview of how that war affected the Illinois Country. While no skirmishes or battles took place there, French military policy took the form of expeditionary supply forces sent out from Fort Chartres into the Ohio Valley. The cession of trade convoys by the end of the war severely stressed both the French and Indians in the area. Significant population shifts had emptied out the farming lands. Chapter Six also looks at the interaction of the arriving British in 1765 with impoverished and at times, even starving French and Indian populations. It was during the British tenancy that the buffalo herds of the Illinois began to be decimated. With the changes in the provisioning trade, Illinois Indians lost the means to compete with the powerful tribes across the Mississippi. The Osage in particular entered the resurgent deerskin trade with a vengeance, monopolizing the trade to a large extent because they were horse rich. Chapter Seven examines the role of the horse in the deerskin trade. Without horses, Illinois Indians could not compete. They found another means of survival under British rule: the peddling of information. Chapter Eight, titled “Land of Rumor,” describes the experiences of all three populations, French, Illinois Indians, and the British in the Illinois Country across one decade: 1768 – 1778. While some tentative re-knitting of old trade relationships began under British merchants, the hostility of northern Indian tribes to the British after Pontiac’s War – and by extension, to the Illinois Indians who were depending on the British – prevented any enduring prosperity or renaissance of Indian populations. The world these people were all living in was beginning to be seriously depleted of animals, birds, and trees. Traces of those losses remain tantalizing in the record, a mixed report of “abundance” juxtaposed against stories of burning fort pickets for fuel and the trading of French rum for meat. Illinois Indians were selling their land to Anglo-American speculators



in exchange for horses and flour. It was only toward the end of the 1770's that French traders began to establish new enterprises at Cahokia, for instance, and a fresh trade in French ponies developed. The study of the watery world ends with the arrival of the Americans into the Illinois in 1778. They found a recovering landscape nonetheless permanently changed through losses of some animal populations and old-growth oaks. Then, under the aggressive agriculture of the settler wave from Kentucky lands, the Illinois earth began to dry out. The installation of ceramic drainage tiles in the nineteenth century became the last step in the two hundred year process of converting a complicated ecosystem. From a lush, arboreal-prairie land, drenched with so much water it was seen through a shimmering lens by the first Europeans, the Illinois today is packed with monocultural fields that are only sometimes, down on the floodplain, glinting with that old, insidious moisture.

In two areas, this study has been strictly delimited. The first concerns the Kaskaskia Indians. The experience of the Kaskaskia under the tutelage of the Jesuits is distinct and viewed by many (church historians in particular) as "the successful one." Such a view is clearly articulated in Mary Borgias Palm's *The Jesuit Missions of the Illinois Country 1673-1763* (1931), a meticulously-researched and valuable published dissertation. Palm used French documents in the original, including many letters and memoirs from Canadian archives, and she included even a separate coda on the Kaskaskia Indian Mission. Especially after 1703, when the Kaskaskia relocated to the southern Illinois Country from the Starved Rock-Peoria area, they readily adopted European agricultural and religious practices, embracing wheat and maize farming, draft animals, the wheeled French plow, hogs, chickens, and Catholicism. Their story has been told by historians and archaeologists, especially in Palm, but also in Natalia Belting's *Kaskaskia Under the French Regime* (1975)

and Carl J. Ekberg's critically-important study of French agriculture. The historical journal literature also contains some good studies of the Kaskaskia Indians.<sup>18</sup> Because they were the most successfully-converted tribe at the French Jesuit missions, there are many more extant church records of them, with references to marriages, baptisms, deaths, and witness roles. Jesuit priests left detailed accounts of ministering to the Kaskaskia. Europeans arriving at the French settlements almost always commented on their village, the largest, most thriving Illinois Indian settlement. Many left approving remarks about the progressive civilization of the Kaskaskia. While the Kaskaskia continued to maintain their winter and summer hunts, also living in traditional woven cattail lodges, their primary relationship with the land across the eighteenth century is documented as agricultural. Carl J. Ekberg's discussion of French agriculture and land tenure at French Kaskaskia is one of the most extensive in *French Roots in the Illinois Country*.<sup>19</sup>

In comparison, so little is known about or has been written about the Mechigamea that they are often referred to as "the mysterious Mechigamea." The history of the Cahokia and the French on the earliest 1699 grant is also extremely sketchy, limited to the letters of the Seminarian priests who attempted an agricultural base there. For an environmental historian, establishing the nature of the *first* European-Indian-land relationships is the most important. Patterns were set, animosities and allegiances arising predictably out of land use and control and resultant changes in the environment; cultural differences were sometimes forged into cultural similarities by the exigencies of survival. While studies of the Kaskaskia and their agriculture are important, the dominant symbol linking the rest of the Illinois nations with the

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<sup>18</sup> For instance, see Robert M. Owens' "Jean Baptiste Ducoigne, the Kaskaskias, and the Limits of Thomas Jefferson's Friendship," *Journal of Illinois History*, Volume 5 (2), Summer, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Carl Ekberg's study of the French colonies along the Mississippi as well as his early work on St. Genevieve across the river in Missouri are the first histories to document differing settlement trajectories for each of the five French villages.

French, the British, and the riverine environment is not an amber spring wheat stalk but a pelt. This study therefore omits the Kaskaskia Indians and French Kaskaskia as a chapter.

Secondly, unlike other environmental histories which include all populations using a given land, this study does not investigate the slave population of French and Indian Illinois. The numbers of African slaves in the settlements were at first small, growing from an initial population of around 200 brought in by the miner-entrepreneur Philip Renault in 1724 to furnish labor for mining schemes. Most of these slaves ended up on Kaskaskia wheat farms. Their increase across fifty years brought their numbers at Kaskaskia to nearly 300, while the total white population at Kaskaskia was just above 600 (from a census conducted by the British in 1766); these slaves remained concentrated in the southernmost part of the French settlements. The French and Indians themselves also used Indian slaves, identified as *panis*, a term which may relate to the tribal designation *Padoucah* (Apache or Comanche) – the southwestern plains tribes from whom Missouri Indians in particular obtained slaves in raids and warfare.<sup>20</sup> These Indian slaves, often arriving in the Illinois settlements as small children, remain some of the most shadowy, lost figures in the historical human occupancy of the area. Traces of them in documents are extremely rare. Names of both African and Indian slaves do appear in church records, especially in the early decades of the 1720's and 1730's. Slaves are listed in property inventories for French estates and willed away as property; during the French exodus in the early 1760's, many slaves crossed the river into Missouri, where their descendants, still enslaved, became central to the bloody conflict in that state one hundred years later. French slavery has been best documented by both Carl Ekberg and

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<sup>20</sup> An exciting new study of the Indian slave trade of the Southwest establishes how common the regional captivity trade was, resulting in massive movements of people and concomitant exchanges of trade and material culture. See James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002).

Winstanley Briggs, whose 1985 dissertation, “The Lost Colony: Les Pays des Illinois,” as well as a subsequent article on French Illinois and slavery furnish good numbers and explanations for the slave as a social member.<sup>21</sup> Ekberg has done exemplary work with the slave and free black population of Ste. Genevieve in the 1790’s, where artisanal and trade records can trace their ascendancy. There is scant evidence relating to slaves on the eastern shore as fur trappers and hunters, or slaves interacting with Indian populations. The opaqueness of French church and notarial records, the unbendable, unchanging legal forms and language, and finally, the very low literacy level of the French population obscure fundamental relationships: slave to Indian, slave to land and river. This elision becomes even more distressing when placed next to other environmental histories of colonial cultures, such as Timothy Silver’s 1990 study, *A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in the South Atlantic Forests, 1500 – 1800* or Daniel J. Usner’s important riverine trade analysis, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: the Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1763* (1992). *The Watery World* acknowledges the presence of slaves without even being able to detail whether they routinely used the Mississippi River to supplement the French diet with channel catfish or turtles, both of which were exploited by hungry British soldiers in the 1760’s. The questions posed by Timothy Silver in his introduction in general guide this study: “How did these humans alter their environment? How did their environment change them? How did they change each other?”<sup>22</sup> Yet for African slaves in the Illinois Country, the answers to most of these questions remain buried.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Winstanley Briggs, “Slavery in French Colonial Illinois,” *Chicago History* 18 (Winter 1989 – 90) as well as “Les Pays des Illinois,” *The William & Mary Quarterly* 3<sup>rd</sup> Serial, Vol. 47 (1), January, 1990.

<sup>22</sup> Timothy Silver, *A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in the South Atlantic Forests, 1500 – 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 6. Silver’s study owes a debt to two landmark works of environmental history that document in unsentimental and rigorous ways Indian impact on land: William Cronon’s *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England* (1983),

It is only in the last twenty years that rivers have begun to generate riparian studies among environmental and economic historians. With few exceptions, these studies have been focused on the colonial and antebellum South. Rivers shape human history in ways distinct from other settlement narratives; transportation patterns, agricultural potential, Native American populations, as well as alluvial soils and floodplain inundation have combined to produce individuated regional river histories. Because rivers have been vital irrigants of the first successful agricultural crops produced by Europeans, the studies of human and river histories tend to have been in the North American South and Middle Atlantic. Jack Temple Kirby's *Poquosin: A Study of Rural Landscape Ecology* (1995) and Mart Stewart's 'What Nature Suffers To Groe: Life, Labor, and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1500 – 1800,' (1990) are two of the best studies of colonial river environments and human efforts to extract a living from them. Other historians have sketched out the historical determinants of land and soil in studies of broader social institutions. One of the clearest of these is Phillip Morgan's *Slave Counterpoint* (2000), in which Morgan builds contrasting white-slave societies that arise from two dictating soils: the wheat country of the Chesapeake riverine matrix and the inundated, soupy, rice country Carolina lowlands. Despite a relative geographic adjacency, humans lived differently on these lands, he argues. Their patterns of foraging, sustenance, family life, their housing, clothing, pastimes, the relationships between slaves and masters and even the circadian rhythms of daily living were stamped by water and earth. *Slave Counterpoint* is not recognized as an environmental history, yet its opening chapters clearly make the same arguments that other environmental historians of American history have been

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and Richard White's *Land Use, Environment, and Social Change; the shaping of Island County, Washington* (1980).

<sup>23</sup> Charles J. Balesi includes a chapter on African slaves in the Illinois in *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America 1673 – 1818* (1991).

making. The recovery of lived experience of the past, no matter who was living it, should include an understanding and recognition of the natural world as a shaping force.

Only recently has the Mississippi River become attractive to historians interested in cultural and social histories developing in unique ways beside a long, snaking waterway densely peopled with aboriginals. The challenge of this study has been to write a history that is both narrow and wide. Questions relating to repeated use of land in key locations, to fluctuation in animal and bird populations, and to the movement of rivers and people on rivers are explored in the context of external forces of empire and war. What happened one day in the Illinois of the eighteenth century is as important as what happened there over the sweep of time in the eighteenth century. *The Watery World* is a history of the people on the ground, to borrow a phrase from Geoffrey Plank's study of French Acadia, *An Unsettled Conquest: the British Campaign against the peoples of Acadia* (2001). It is also a study of the ground itself. In the signifying of land formations and settlements with joint Indian-French place names, in the way the French and Algonquin languages combined to inscribe a small area with familiarity and recognition, and in the shared culture of both the horse and the boat, the Indians and the French of the Illinois occupied a common landscape for eighty years. Their lives were what they were, neither failed experiments nor disorderly and indefinite fragments of larger empires. They changed the land they lived on, and were in turn changed by it, and therein lies a tale.

## The Watery World: Illinois Country Ecology

Along the Mississippi River in the eighteenth century, sandhill cranes rose ponderously from a morass of shore vegetation, scrub willow and bulrushes trembling with clouds of biting insects. At times of flood, backwater sloughs trapped catfish described in the late 1790's as "monstrous" and of "uncommon size."<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, especially at high water, water moccasin ribboned palely around submerged trunks, churning against the current. At times of low water, in the hot mid-summer seasons, sounds carried: terrapins hitting the current in splashing waves from half-submerged logs, or the startled liftoff of waterfowl – teal, swans, and pelicans – through the heavy air. These water birds, "such as are seen in the sea-coast colonies, [were] in the greatest variety and abundance."<sup>2</sup> Yet this aquatic world was not the lower bayou country of southern Louisiana but the Illinois Country far to the north, the stretch of fecund, alluvial river plain along the Mississippi that would eventually be known as part of the American Bottom.<sup>3</sup> This land was transformed through settlement processes into a high-yielding agricultural basin claimed by vigorous row crops. Beginning in the 1880's, a system of drainage ditches, levees, and subsoil tile subdued and managed the

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Imlay, *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (London: J. Debrett, 1797), p. 504; see also letter from Major Butricke at Fort Chartres, 1768, describing catfish of 100 pounds or more he encountered in the lower Ohio River, printed in Theodore Calvin Pease, *Illinois Historical Collections*, Vol. 29, *Illinois on the Eve of the Seven Years War* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1940), p. 409.

<sup>2</sup>Imlay, *A Topographical Description*, p. 504.

<sup>3</sup> Although the terms "Illinois Country" and "the Illinois" are used interchangeably by French, British, and American writers across the eighteenth century, the clearest definition of the geographic area is provided by the British Lieutenant Eddington in 1765: "The Country of the Illinoise is very extensive, comprehending all the Country on the East Side of the Mississippi from about thirty leagues above the mouth of the Ohio to a considerable distance above the mouth of the Illinoise River junction with the Mississippi. The name of Illinoise applies to all the Country on both sides of the Illinoise River and E. of the Mississippi almost to the bottom of Lake Michigan, the latter formerly the Illinoise Lake." See "Journal of Lt. Eddington or the Surgeon," in Robert Carroon, ed., *Broadswords & Bayonets: The Journals of the expedition under the command of Captain Thomas Stirling of the 42<sup>nd</sup> regiment of Foot, Royal Highland Regiment (The Black Watch) to occupy Fort Chartres in the Illinois Country, August 1765 to January 1766* (The Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Illinois, 1984), p. 89.

water. Today, Illinois is part of the bread basket of the Midwest. Across her rolling, central prairies march hybrid corn species, shoulder to shoulder in immense waves. Down on the floodplain of the Mississippi, between Kaskaskia and Cahokia, the corn continues, coating the old French common fields, filling in the soil to the last inch between the levees and the river bluffs with a virile green. At mid-eighteenth century, however, this land inhabited by successive waves of humans across eight thousand years and most recently, by French colonists, was a watery world.

Crescent lakes formed by the cut-through action of the Mississippi, marshlands, and sloughs filled with standing water released significant amounts of moisture into the atmosphere. The first histories of St. Clair, Randolph, and Monroe Counties, early formed from the Illinois Territory in the 1780's and 90's, are filled with references to lakes. The upland regions contained sloughs of "hundreds of acres in extent."<sup>4</sup> An account of the "great hurricane" of 1805 describes how the winds sucked all the water from a portion of the Mississippi and "the lakes in the American Bottom."<sup>5</sup> While some sloughs and marshes were wet year-round, the hot, sometimes arid summers of the Illinois Country more often produced a drying-out effect. Historical atlases refer to "periodical marshes" appearing after severe rains on the upland inundated the sandy soil.<sup>6</sup> In these initial counties, early mills erected by American settlers after 1785 were known as "wet-weather" mills, suspending operation after the summer droughts.<sup>7</sup> In 1804, when surveyors working to lay Thomas Jefferson's rectilinear imprint on the Illinois Country began marking off range and section on

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<sup>4</sup>Brink, McDonough and Co., *History of St. Clair County* (Philadelphia: 1881), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup>J.L. McDonough & Co., *The Combined History of Randolph, Monroe and Perry Counties, Illinois*, (Philadelphia: 1883), p. 82.

<sup>6</sup>Brink, McDonough, and Co., *An Illustrated Historical Atlas Map of Monroe County* (Philadelphia: 1875), p. 11.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11



the upland and central prairies of the Illinois Territory, they left descriptions of the land. “A very large portion of this land is prairie – and it is a fact yielded by all observers, that the interior or middle regions of the larger prairies are always low and covered with lakes and ponds of water....”<sup>8</sup>

The hydrologic cycle here must have been remarkable. As late as mid-nineteenth century, there are accounts of torrential rainstorms on the upland ridge country that sent waterfalls bursting from the rocky faces of the bluffs.<sup>9</sup> In the 1790’s, the British traveler Gilbert Imlay described the pocking and channeling of the limestone bluffs. These bluffs, he wrote, “are from 100 to 130 feet high, divided in several places by deep cavities, through which many small rivulets pass before they fall into the Mississippi.”<sup>10</sup> One spectacular waterfall in what would become St. Clair County was early used by French missionaries for communal baptism of Indians. Christened “L’eau Tomb” by the French, it later became “Falling Springs” for the Americans.<sup>11</sup> The water table on both the upland and river plain was much higher than that of today, yielding a rich tributary system of creeks and streams; in addition, the quality of natural springs and wells is described in early historical accounts as “cool, sweet, generally hard water.” The first American upland settlements in the 1780’s clustered near the large, clear, gushing spring the French named La Belle Fontaine; although they did not settle there, the French knew of these higher country springs, for they named both the spring and its surrounding open land: the Prairie of Apacois. This word may have been borrowed from the Illinois Indians, who, according to the Frenchman Deliette in 1678, called the reeds used to cover their cabins “apacoya.” The Prairie of Apacois may thus have had a

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<sup>8</sup>American State Papers: Public Lands, Vol. 5, p. 168.

<sup>9</sup>History of Monroe County, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup>Gilbert Imlay, *A Topographical Description*, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup>History of St. Clair County, p. 31.

marshy area where cattails and bullrushes once grew.<sup>12</sup> So important was La Belle Fontaine spring to American settlement that by 1800, a third of the 960 recorded settlers in the area lived in its vicinity.<sup>13</sup> Wells on the upland were sunk from ten to eighty feet, and the nineteenth century geographer who recorded these observations perceived that the water was “inexhaustible.”<sup>14</sup>

The rough quadrilateral of southern Illinois enclosed by the Mississippi, Wabash, and Ohio Rivers was often a saturated country.<sup>15</sup> Bisected also by the Kaskaskia River, it was interspersed with semi-mesic prairies where undulant, higher ground allowed for better drainage and thus, for intermittent burning of the vegetation by humans. The first history of St. Clair County estimated that the relative proportion of “open and woodland is as six to one.”<sup>16</sup> It is likely that the “open” described in such accounts included a number of hill prairies, a particular kind of small prairie found only on the south or southwestward slopes of hills. This may account for the use of the word “dotted” in early descriptions of the uplands of Randolph and Monroe Counties. Early settlers also wrote and spoke of “oak openings” and “barrens” in terms that at times seem synonymous.<sup>17</sup> Larger, more level openings such as the Twelve Mile or Horse Prairie attracted bands of wild horses or were used by the

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<sup>12</sup>Kaskaskia Manuscripts, 82:8:5:1 and 82: 7:9:1; Pierre Deliette, “Memoir of De Gannes Concerning the Illinois Country,” in T. C. Pease, *The French Foundations 1680-1693* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1934) p. 340.

<sup>13</sup>Census of 1800, St. Clair County, Illinois Territory, cited in John W. Allen, *It Happened in Southern Illinois* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1968), p. 349.

<sup>14</sup>*Monroe County History*, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup>For the concept of an enclosing quadrilateral, see Edward Countryman, “Indians, the Colonial Order, and the Social Significance of the American Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. 53 (2), April, 1996, pp. 342 – 362.

<sup>16</sup>*History of St. Clair County*, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup>See J. White, “How the Terms *Savanna*, *Barrens*, and *Oak Openings* Were Used in Early Illinois,” in J.S. Fralish et al., *Living in the Edge: Proceedings of the North American Conference on Savannas and Barrens*, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois, October 15-16, 1994 (Great Lakes National Program Office: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1994), pp. 25-63.

French for the grazing of black cattle.<sup>18</sup> These level mesic prairies often became the “periodical marshes” in wet seasons. The Illinois Country in the late eighteenth century was a diverse and changeable ecosystem.

Yet the first histories, valuable as they are, record the area one hundred years after the period addressed in this study. It is striking that travelers’ accounts and military correspondence of the French, British and Americans – who criss-crossed the Illinois Country between 1763 and the 1790’s – mention the presence of water almost always in extremes. The major floods of the Mississippi, those inundated years of 1725, 1772, and 1785, are dramatically recorded. The flood of 1785, “the greatest of the last century,” forced the French of Kaskaskia and Cahokia up to bluffs and swept away the western walls of stone Fort Chartres near Prairie du Rocher. To the French, 1785 was “the year of the great waters.”<sup>19</sup> Accounts abound of George Rogers Clark’s 1779 march to Vincennes, when he and his men waded thigh, waist, and shoulder-deep in icy water much of the way. Yet little appears in routine military and political correspondence about the role of water in this common riverine world. The action of the Mississippi, fed not only by swollen tributary flow from the Missouri but by consistent hydrologic cycles of great rains and waterfalls, routinely affected the lives of humans. In 1765, for instance, notarial records for Kaskaskia list a “sale at public auction of a house and two arpent lot at New Chartres, soon to be washed away by the Mississippi.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Major Butricke letter, September 15, 1768, in Clarence Alvord and Clarence Carter, *Trade and Politics 1767 – 1769* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1921), p. 411; Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), p. 82.

<sup>19</sup> *History of Randolph, Monroe, and Perry Counties, Illinois*, p. 75; E.W. Gould, *Gould’s History of River Navigation* (Saint Louis: Nixon-Jones Printing Co., 1889), p. 246.

<sup>20</sup> Kaskaskia MS, 65:6:29:1.

Water affected health, travel, roads, soil fertility and annual yields. From early American settlement records are accounts of the “sickening” of the water in wells, even on the upland ridges. Drought was as real to these communities as flood. Despite glowing affidavits to the deeper well water in the Illinois Country, early geographers also speak of “indifferent water...obtained from shallow wells and stagnant pools” and “air...laden with malaria from the decay of the exuberant growth of vegetation.”<sup>21</sup> Great fevers often raged through the floodplain. Father Gibault, arriving in Illinois Country in the fall of 1768, became almost immediately ill with a fever which plagued him on and off until 1770.<sup>22</sup> Earlier, in 1752, the French commander Macarty Mactigue wrote of the inadvisability of building barracks next to the ramparts of a fort on the Kaskaskia River: “...since they would be quite unsanitary due to the humidity of the ground, which would make them dungeons rather than barracks, and would cause much sickness.”<sup>23</sup> In times of low water or ice plating on the river surfaces, keelboats and military supply flotilla could not progress smoothly up rivers, and the fluctuant nature of the major rivers used for such transport – the Mississippi, Kaskaskia, Ohio, and Wabash – specifically affected the outcome of military operations in the Illinois Country. After a tedious and exhausting cordelling of his military keelboats between the mouth of the Ohio River and Kaskaskia, for instance, Major Butricke, on his way to Fort Chartres in 1768 wrote, “...the Navigation so much interrupted by great quantities of trees that falls with the Banks of the River and drives with fluds [sic] in the springs, that we many times Rowd for 3 and four hours and did not gain one mile....this I think was the most dangerous and fatiguing

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<sup>21</sup>Brink 1881, cited in Robert Mazrim, *Now Quite Out of Society*” *Archaeology and Frontier Illinois* (Illinois Department of Transportation, 2002), p. 55.

<sup>22</sup>Father Meurin to Bishop Briand, June 14, 1769, cited in Joseph P. Donnelly, *Pierre Gibault, Missionary 1737-1802* (Chicago, Illinois: Loyola University Press, 1971), p. 42.

<sup>23</sup>Macarty and Buchet to Vaudreuil, January 15, 1752, in Theodore Calvin Pease, *Illinois on the Eve of the Seven Years War 1747-1755* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1940), p. 424.

journey I ever made....”<sup>24</sup> Sixteen years earlier, the French commandant at Fort Chartres had similar complaints about the Kaskaskia River: “From this day to the seventh, when I reached the mouth of the Kaskaskia, I had some boats fail every day. As the water was extremely low I was obliged to unload all the cargo at the mouth of that river.”<sup>25</sup> Yet traveler accounts, military journals, and political correspondence concerning settlement often stress only the positives: soil fertility, the open parkland of the (burned-off) upland prairies, the diversity of plants and animals, and the beauty of the land. In 1698 Father Hennepin inaugurated a long line of glowing impressionistic accounts of the Illinois Country by writing: “The Country beyond those Hills is so fine and pleasant, that according to the Account I have had, one might justly call it the *Delight of America*.”<sup>26</sup>

These were ancient glacial lands, scoured by ice, rock, water, and wind, molded by a giant river in a diverse floodplain. The Mississippi in fact had occupied at least one other valley, a wide bed to the southwest of its present course. Ninety percent of Illinois was covered by glaciers in the late Pleistocene; the effect of so much “funneled” water pouring into the glacier-scoured depressions during withdrawal and melting created an enormous embayment there.<sup>27</sup> Drainage from the Missouri and Illinois Rivers in this American Bottom creates a wide basin of converging waters from a significant portion of North America. The Mississippi itself continues to scour, dredge, and mold the lands around it. The “excavating power” of this river, built up on both banks by extensive comminuted materials, makes it dynamic and changeable, violently capricious in the era before hydrologic

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<sup>24</sup>Major Butricke to Barnley, September 15, 1768, in Alvord and Carter, *Trade & Politics* p. 411.

<sup>25</sup> Macarty to Vaudreuil, January 20, 1752, in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 432-433.

<sup>26</sup>Father Louis Hennepin, *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America*, Vol. I, ed. by Reuben Gold Thwaites (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903), p. 186.

<sup>27</sup>Edward B. Jelks, Carl J. Ekberg, and Terrance C. Martin, *Excavations at the Laurens Site: probable location of Fort de Chartres I* (Springfield: Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, 1989) p. 15; Charles J. Bareis and James W. Porter, *American Bottom Archaeology: A Summary of the FAI-270 Project Contribution to the Culture History of the Mississippi River Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 3.

engineering and flood control.<sup>28</sup> The first geologic studies of the Mississippi documented that in flood, it could cover thirty miles, its “ordinary channel marked by an outline of woods.”<sup>29</sup> Sedimentation studies conducted in the early twentieth century found that at times of high water, the Mississippi between St. Genevieve, Missouri, and Cape Girardeau could “roll cobbles and boulders as big as a man’s head along the bottom of the main channel.”<sup>30</sup> Writers describing the river silt deposited on the lowlands after the spring “overflows” of the Mississippi have continuously made comparisons to the Nile. Gilbert Imlay saw the “slime which annual floods of the Mississippi leave on the surface of adjacent shores” as being comparable to the Nile, “which leaves a similar manure.”<sup>31</sup> An early geographer wrote that as the Mississippi recedes, it “leaves behind in the bottom lands, a sediment as fine and fertilizing as the Nile mud.”<sup>32</sup> American settlers in the early nineteenth century noted that at times, the level of silt and spring mud left by receding waters could be marked at ten feet on the cottonwood trunks of the floodplain. These references to the Nile, to manure and fertilization, probably reflected an understanding of the replenishment processes of the floods; yet they were also likely referring to smell. During the great Mississippi flood of the late twentieth century, 1993, the “overflow” waters rose to create silver-surfaced lakes behind levees and sandbagged walls around Prairie du Rocher. Descending from the bluffs, anyone approaching the half-submerged town met the smell before seeing the water: decaying vegetation and organic remains – sometimes farm animals as well as many small, drowned mammal species – rotting in the trapped runoff.

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<sup>28</sup> Alvin G. Lugn, *Sedimentation in the Mississippi River Between Davenport, Iowa, and Cairo, Illinois* (Rock Island, Illinois: The Augustana Library Publications, 1927), p. 83; J.W. Foster, *The Mississippi Valley: Its Physical Geography* (Chicago: S.C. Griggs and Company, 1869), p. 9; see also discussion of river “dynamism” in Jelks, Ekberg, and Martin, *Excavations at the Laurens Site*, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Foster, *The Mississippi Valley*, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Lugn, *Sedimentation*, p. 83.

<sup>31</sup> Imlay, *Topographical Descriptions*, p. 405.

<sup>32</sup> Foster, *The Mississippi Valley*, p. 8.

Yet the Illinois Country was not defined solely by the Mississippi, great trade artery that it was. Eighteenth century observers of the Ohio and Wabash Rivers have also testified to the overflow appearance of flooded lands. Near the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi, in Massac County, in fact, the land was known as the Black Bottoms, a “den of ponds and swamps.”<sup>33</sup> Advancing into the Illinois Country in 1765, Captain Thomas Stirling noted that the land on either side of the Ohio River was “full of aquaticks.”<sup>34</sup> In 1788, General Harmar wrote to the Secretary of War that “from Fort Massac to the mouth of the Ohio, and from thence about twenty miles up the Mississippi, the country overflows, and is by no means habitable.”<sup>35</sup> Gilbert Imlay noted that the land at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi had been built up about “twenty feet higher than the common surface of these rivers,” yet the spring floods were “so considerable” as to “overflow the country for a week, as far inland as several miles.”<sup>36</sup> As late as 1816, a traveler to the Wabash Country wrote, “In times of high water, it is one of the most difficult countries to travel through I ever saw. I have known it for more than four weeks at one time that no person could get away from Union Prairie without swimming his horse, or going in a boat.”<sup>37</sup> A pattern emerges in reading these kinds of comments about the Illinois Country: the contrast between low and high ground, between

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<sup>33</sup> Glenn J. Speed, *Ghost Towns of Southern Illinois* (Royalton, Illinois: 1977), p. 131; see also Victor Collot’s observations on the Illinois side of the Ohio River and the Black Bottoms, in 1796. Collot wrote that his party “perceived nothing but a vast extent of low and swampy ground.” In *A Journey to 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 Protected Line of Frontiers and General Limits*, Vol.1 (Firenze: O. Lange, 1924) p. 190).

<sup>34</sup> Captain Thomas Stirling, in *Broadswords and Bayonets: The Journals of the expedition under the command of Captain Thomas Stirling*, edited by Robert G. Carroon (The Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Illinois, 1984), p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> General Harmar to the Secretary of War, January 10, 1788, cited in *St. Clair Papers*, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> Imlay, *A Topographical Description*, p. 499.

<sup>37</sup> *Thomas’ Travels in the West*, cited in William Hayden English, *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio 1777-1783: and life of General George Rogers Clark* (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Co., 1896, 1985), p.. 302.

wet and dry seasons. The action of glaciers and abrading rivers chopped the earth into a configuration of uplands and river bottom that very early created a dual subsistence pattern.

This pattern was determined by the marching back of highly-differentiated land and water habitats. The American Bottom drifts downward toward the Mississippi in a three-part succession. The uplands, or till plain, often described in accounts as “rolling,” was laid over bedrock by the shoveling edge of the glaciers. The loess here is glacier outwash. When Europeans settled the area, they found it intermittently forested by Southern hardwoods, stands of oak and hickory varieties often standing “fair and apart” from each other in sunny oak forests, bespeaking a long-standing practice of prairie burning that created a park-like atmosphere.<sup>38</sup> The presence of so many oaks was incredible natural bounty for white tail deer, who gorge on acorns each fall; oaks would also play a part in the roaming hog herds encouraged by the early French and later by the Americans, those drifts of half-wild pigs who feasted on the acorn mast of these shadowed oak forests. Till plain ran to the edge of limestone bluffs. These bluffs are most dramatic between Alton, Illinois, and the mouth of the Illinois River; yet, especially between Prairie du Rocher and Kaskaskia in Randolph County, they also jut straight up in a rocky escarpment. It is an absolutely vertical and dramatic rise, contributing a strong sense of isolation and seclusion to the villages on the floodplain. Most important, these bluffs function as a severe demarcation between the lowlands and the uplands.

The top of the bluffs holds mature plains. The French of Prairie du Rocher who settled on the floodplain below drove their livestock up to these plains, choosing to locate their grazing lands on top of the bluffs after an original common grazing lands along the Mississippi

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<sup>38</sup>See “A Fire-Dominated Landscape,” in J. White, *A Survey of Native Vegetation in the Big Rivers Blufflands of Calhoun, Greene, and Jersey Counties with Recommendations for Protection, Restoration, and Management*, (Urbana, Illinois: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, 2001), p. 19.



proved inadequate. The initial commons was on a marsh called the Marais Gossiaux. So wet was this area, the floodplain between Cahokia and Kaskaskia, that the French farming lands, those longlot strips so ubiquitous to French settlements everywhere in North America, were run in long arpents straight back to the base of the bluffs. The historian of French agriculture in the American Bottom, Carl J. Ekberg, describes “significant portions” of the plowland there as “wasteland” occupied by “coppices, ponds, and marshes.”<sup>39</sup> The initial French settlements, depicted in a 1734 map by Ignace-Francoise Broutin, engineer, lay wholly on the river floodplain, and no settlements appear on the bluffs. The road, however, that connected these necklace villages ran on the floodplain at the base of the bluffs (and still does) between Prairie du Rocher and Kaskaskia. It rises to the bluff level between Fort Chartres and Cahokia near the present-day village of Fults.<sup>40</sup> This road follows a natural declivity in the bluffs identified in the late eighteenth century as “Le Grande Passe.”<sup>41</sup> It is significant that the road rises through “le grande passe” just here: the flooding around the Fort Chartres area was extensive and relentless. Settlement, agriculture, and transportation adapted to the amount of water in a flux and flow environment.

The social and political history of the period between 1699 and the 1780’s constitutes a small segment of interaction and occupation in the American Bottom. These years saw arrivals of different groups intent on invasive and opportunistic uses of resources. For over sixty years, the French occupied five small villages and drew from the Illinois lands an agrarian gold: French wheat. They also harvested a glut of furs. The British control of the

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<sup>39</sup> Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 79-80.

<sup>40</sup> Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 79.

<sup>41</sup> See map labeled “Carte de la Pays des Illinois ca. 1752, in Winstanley Briggs, “The Forgotten Colony: Le Pays des Illinois”, (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1985), p. 88. Briggs’ map is a composite based on the U.S. Geological Survey of 1956 and the Nicolas de Finiels 1797 map, “La Louisiane Superieure”).

Illinois Country, lasting for only ten years, followed by the period of Virginian Anarchy (a term used conveniently by Clarence Alvord), blew apart an intricately-functioning natural economy already in the process of change. That world had been built by humans who had learned to glean from three different natural environments, and whose patterns of mobility effectively linked those environments through food production, trade, hunting, and the gathering of aquatic and upland resources. These humans were first a series of prehistoric aboriginal groups, followed by the Illinois Confederate Tribes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and last, the Illinoisian French. With the entrance of the occupying British, environmental change, always ongoing, accelerated. As just one instance, archaeological analysis of latrine pit remains at Fort Chartres, dating from the British occupation, reveals the presence of great numbers (a marked increase) of red-eared turtle or “slider” shells. Also found were remains indicating the “importance of domesticated animals” as well as white-tailed deer.<sup>42</sup> Clearly the British were attempting to hold onto the diet they were familiar with, including, possibly, turtle soup! The effect of the British occupation on the French and the Indians in the American Bottom is the content of later chapters.

At the same time, it is important to establish the connections between how Indians used and imprinted land and how the incoming French (after 1699) may have profited from those patterns. Humans living in the American Bottom from the Late Woodland and emergent Mississippian cultures onward (circa 400 A.D) utilized its tri-part ecological divisions. On the loess hill-prairies of the bluffs grew spurge and stiff bedstraw, adapted by Indians as medicinal herbs.<sup>43</sup> Archaeological excavations of numerous American Bottom sites have

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<sup>42</sup>Jelks, Ekberg, and Martin, *Excavations at the Laurens Site*, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup>Jelks, Ekberg, and Martin, *Excavations*, p. 19.

revealed a “broad tool inventory” including projectile points, knives, scrapers, gouges, gravers, choppers, anvilstones, metates, and celts.<sup>44</sup> Archaeologists posit that possibly, Indians occupied the uplands on a year-round basis by the beginning of the Mississippian phase (circa 1000 AD). They were growing tobacco and later, maize. The broad tool inventory, along with faunal remains, suggests a strong diversity in diet and subsistence patterns. Upland sites reveal the importance of deer, turkey, and grouse. Such upland bird species, especially, thrive in open, grassy environments.

Ecologists have identified the “maintenance and possible enlargement” of prairie lands through the practice of annual or periodic burning.<sup>45</sup> The burning of prairies by both Indians and early white settlers is documented in accounts ranging from Father Hennepin (1683) and Father Vivier (1750) – who both wrote about the burning practices of Illinois Indians specifically – to explicit descriptions of mid-nineteenth century agricultural fires set by settlers on prairie margins.<sup>46</sup> There is a vast literature on the role of burning in environmental change. Central debates no longer revolve around indigenous firing practices as evidence of complex agricultural adaptation. The questions concern the degree of change perpetuated by routine prairie and woodland burnings, and how the tongues of black prairie extruding into the upland woodlands in, for instance, the Illinois Country, may or may not have been “created” by aboriginal practices. Some of the earliest accounts by white observers of prairie burning occur only a few miles from the American Bottom. For instance, in 1796, Victor Collot, a French spy sent to America after the French Revolution, traveled on the Prairie du Rocher-Cahokia Road. He observed a grassy meadow, known in later years as the

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<sup>44</sup> Barreis and Porter, eds., *American Bottom Archaeology*, p. 132.

<sup>45</sup> Omer C. Stewart, *Forgotten Fires: Native Americans and the Transient Wilderness* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), p. 126.

<sup>46</sup> See Stewart’s discussion, *Forgotten Fires*, pp. 118-119.

Stormont property, that had clearly been recently burned: “The singular aspect of this country can be attributed only to a custom among the Indians of setting fires every autumn to the grass and dead leaves of the forests.”<sup>47</sup> Another observer, the Philadelphia businessman George Hunter, wrote that the trees on the Stormont property “...were chiefly Oaks whose growths [sic] have been repeatedly stunted by the annual burning of the long grass and weeds as they got dry at the end of the year.”<sup>48</sup> Although by that year, 1796, American settlement of the upland prairies on the bluffs above the old French colonies had proceeded apace, spurred on by the 1795 Treaty of Greenville, Indians were still burning land. That they had done so as well across the years of French occupation is a strong conclusion. Omer Stewart’s insistence that fire was a “multipurpose tool” has import for historical studies. Why and how were Indians in the protohistoric and historic periods using fire? Leaving aside the use of fire in agriculture, some interesting trends can be identified.

Evidence of aboriginal burning of hill prairies on these bluffs has suggested to some researchers that they were used as lookout points.<sup>49</sup> Surely anyone who has ever stood on the bluffs above old Fort Gage at Kaskaskia can attest to the view. The Mississippi Valley lies below with a consummate clarity: the river in its sinuous curves could be assessed immediately for the presence of any kind of approaching bateaux, canoe, or keelboat. Smoke rising from even a single campfire deep in the floodplain forests would be visible. Ecologists today researching the changes in ridgetop prairies use early accounts spread over three centuries to trace the changes in the land. In discussing the view described by Timothy Flint in 1818, for instance, nature preservationists comment on Flint’s “long clear view from atop

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<sup>47</sup> Victor Collot, *A Journey in North America*, Vol. 1, p. 244.

<sup>48</sup> J.F. McDermott, ed., *The Western Journals of Dr. George Hunter, 1796-1805* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, 1963), p. 30. I am indebted to John White, Ecological Services, Urbana, Illinois, for bringing these observations to my attention.

<sup>49</sup> Kenneth R. Robertson, et al, “Fifty Years of Change in Illinois Hill Prairies” *Erigenia* 14, 1995, p. 48.

the Dividing Ridge of Calhoun County” (farther north, above the American Bottom, near the confluence of the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers). Flint’s account “suggests he was standing in a ridgetop prairie,” and “that it seems quite likely that people had long set fire to this ridge to clear the vegetation as a precaution against surprise and ambush....”<sup>50</sup>

In addition, the burning of prairie lands was a way to manage game, either in creating the best possible habitat or to make it possible to hunt certain species more easily. Such burning practices have a direct bearing on food supply. In 1712, Father Gabriel Marest wrote a lengthy letter to a fellow Jesuit, Father Germon. He described his return to the Illinois Missions after a trip up to Michilimackinac. His small party had traveled – as usual – by way of the portage between the St. Joseph River and the Kankakee (the *Huakika*), followed by a navigation down the Illinois, past the Peoria Mission. As his canoe approached the lower Illinois River, he wrote: “At last we perceived our own dear welcome Country; the wild oxen and the herds of deer were roving along the bank of the river, and from the canoe we shot some, now and then, which served for our repasts.”<sup>51</sup> These herds of bison and deer were “roving” on a river floodplain. The transition that Marest observed, between the lower Illinois River Country and Michilimackinac, may have reflected an environment manipulated by fire. In 1863, in an article published in the *American Journal of Science*, Henry Engelmann wrote that forests were “invading Illinois prairies...since regular burning had stopped.”<sup>52</sup> Engelmann identified the motivations for burning as follows: “to facilitate hunting, to kill insects and snakes, to remove dry stalks, and to secure better pasture.”<sup>53</sup> It is

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<sup>50</sup>John White, *A Survey of Native Vegetation in the Big Rivers Blufflands of Calhoun, Greene, and Jersey Counties with Recommendations for Protection, Restoration, and Management* (Urbana, Illinois: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, 2001), p. 22.

<sup>51</sup> Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Vol. LXVI (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Company, 1900), p. 287.

<sup>52</sup> Engelmann, cited in Stewart, *Forgotten Fires* p. 119.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

likely that list is in order of priority. The roving herds of 1712, healthy and abundant, that allowed canoe parties to select a choice animal for a repast – such options had disappeared by the mid 1760's. As explained later in this study, by the time of the War of 1812, the bison herds were gone.

The few remaining loess hill prairies in Illinois may very well function as the “last living windows” of the original prairie biome, and thus are invaluable to scientists and historians.<sup>54</sup> Such small, isolated hill prairies, one near Fults in Randolph County (the American Bottom), nonetheless reveal a striking diversity of plants. Steeply sloped and difficult to reach, these hill prairies lie at the very edge of the river bluffs. While they may have been used for grazing, it is more likely that the French drove their black cattle farther back to richer prairie commons. There, cows and “half-wild” French ponies fed on the little and big blue-stem grasses as well as purple prairie clover that formed the most frequently-occurring ground covers.<sup>55</sup> Most important, these mature bluff and tiny hill prairies can be distinguished from wet or mesic prairies lying farther inland. Indians and French knew the difference. For instance, species of wild indigo and wild quinine (Feverfew) are “conspicuous” for their absence in hill prairies but occur in mesic prairies.<sup>56</sup> These are medicinal and cottage industry plants. That American settlers also distinguished hill prairies is seen in the other names given them: bluff prairies and goat prairies.<sup>57</sup> Even small hill prairies, however, are liable to contain a wide variety of flora.<sup>58</sup> Assessment projects carried out by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources have produced careful and exhaustive studies of remnant

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<sup>54</sup> Robertson et al, “Fifty Years of Change,” p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> Robertson et al, “Fifty Years of Change,” p. 46.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Robertson et al, “Fifty Years of Change,” p. 41.

<sup>58</sup> Mark W. Schwartz et al, “The Biogeography of and Habitat Loss on Hill Prairies,” in *Conservation in Highly Fragmented Landscapes* (New York: Chapman and Hall, 1997), p. 279.

prairie communities. One such study, the Kaskaskia River Area Assessment, identifies an extraordinary species density in small prairie remnants, typically five to six acres. Such areas may contain as many as 100 to 130 species of vascular plants.<sup>59</sup> Over and over, botanists and ecologists studying the American Bottom stress its ecological diversity.<sup>60</sup> Such diversity contributed in similar ways to both Indian and French resource use and habitat.

Finally, the floodplain itself is also differentiated. Botanists distinguish two types of forest on the lowlands: the Floodplain Forest and the Lowland-Depressional Forest. Floodplain forests occur where flooding often and strikingly alters the shorelines of rivers. Here grow the water-loving cottonwood, sycamore, hackberry, and elm.<sup>61</sup> Elm was important to Mississippi Valley Indians, who removed entire sheets of bark and treated it like plywood to construct canoes and sometimes, houses.<sup>62</sup> The French also constructed bark canoes, but preferred birch, thus pinpointing the point of origin for such canoes – farther north than the Illinois Country. (These lighter birch canoes were known as “north canoes”). Although Indians and French shared resource use of tree bark to cover light river craft, such overlap seems to have occurred in initial contact years of French settlement, between 1700 and 1720. Rapidly, the French began to prefer the larger, sturdier pirogue, or hollowed-out boat, which, in the Illinois Country, was usually made of a single black walnut or cottonwood. Like the Indians, they also used buffalo skins stretched over willow frames: the bullboat. Light, strapped-together boats made only of cane were called *cajeu* and used for quick river crossings, such as the back-and-forth traffic between Kaskaskia in the Illinois Country and

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<sup>59</sup> *Kaskaskia River Area Assessment*, Volume 3: Living Resources, 2000, p. 53.

<sup>60</sup> Remnant or relict studies can function as fairly legitimate predictors of eighteenth century environments. Personal communication, John White, Ecological Services, Urbana, Illinois, December 5, 2003.

<sup>61</sup> Jelks, Ekberg, and Martin, *Excavations at the Laurens Site*, p. 19.

<sup>62</sup> Dan Hechenberger, Nipundikan Organization, personal communication, January 27, 2004.

St. Genevieve across the Mississippi.<sup>63</sup> Willow was an important tree for both Indians and French, as its light, pliable branches could be easily woven. Unlike elm, which would die once large sheets of bark were removed, especially if the bark had completely girdled the tree, willows grow quickly. They take fast root in newly-formed sand bars to create miniature islands from year to year. These are the water-logged and insect-filled trees that hang over the soggy marshlands along the river shores. It took the firmer soils farther inland to attract beech and hickory. Also along the shorelines grew an abundance of cattails and bulrushes, both used by Illinois Indians in the construction of woven mats. Such mats had multiple uses, both functional (laid over frames for dwellings) and symbolic, as a form of communication. References to Indian mats are consistent in the letters of French military personnel engaged in negotiations. In 1752, Commander Macarty at Fort Chartres described an Indian chief's actions: "Then he told me that five days ago he had sent back two mats of the Piankeshaw who wished to attack here, telling them to leave these lands quiet...."<sup>64</sup>

Lowland-Depressional Forests supported more oak, hickory and sweet gum as well as red and silver maples. Because these soils typically contained clay, they did not drain as well, and "ponding" occurred among these trees. In marshes flourished the roots and tubers that could be gathered for diet supplementation, including the yellow water lily root (the *macoupin*), wild sweet potatoes, Indian turnips, arrowleaves, and cattails.<sup>65</sup> Fruits were also plentiful: the indigenous pawpaw and persimmon, wild grapes, elderberries, gooseberries, blackberries and strawberries. The aquatic environment of the lowlands furnished a wide

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<sup>63</sup> N.M. Miller Surrey, *The Commerce of Louisiana During the French Regime: 1699-1763* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), p. 59; Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 276; Nicolas de Finiels, *An Account of Upper Louisiana*, ed. by Carl J. Ekberg and William E. Foley, transl. By Carl J. Ekberg (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), p. 100, and n., 193.

<sup>64</sup> Macarty to Vaudreuil, January, 1752, in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 452.

<sup>65</sup> Jelks, Ekberg, and Martin, *Excavations at the Laurens Site*, p. 20.



variety of fish, mussels, turtles, and waterfowl. Lowland forests attracted fur-bearing terrestrial animals, such as deer, elk, opossum, raccoon, foxes, wolves, and tree squirrels – but these species were more common in the forested uplands, and gave rise to hunting trips. Initially, however, commons left intact on the floodplain furnished wood for fuel and small game for consumption. A description of Cahokia commonland in the 1720's, scattered in various places across the Mississippi lowlands, indicates that these commons were places for “pasturing livestock, gathering wood, and doubtless for hunting rabbits, squirrels, and prairie chickens.”<sup>66</sup> Clearing of the lowland scrub vegetation, such as hazel, over the course of the nearly seventy-year French occupation gradually resulted in the park-like lands that travelers described rhapsodically in the late eighteenth century. Hunting for meat began to require trips up to the bluffs or across the Mississippi. The bison herds of the prairie uplands were pursued so extensively by Indians and French that by the late 1760's, French hunting parties were ranging down into Kentucky. By 1814, the herds were gone.<sup>67</sup>

While the French settlers along the Mississippi became productive agriculturists, they also adapted to a diverse and fluctuant environment. That they knew the topography and geography of the floodplain and the upland till plain is evidenced in French place names scattered across the American Bottom – and in their footpaths and roads. Commander Macarty at Fort Chartres mentions “the trail in the woods du Rocher” in an account of an Indian ambush in 1752.<sup>68</sup> (The original letter, in French, capitalizes the name of this trail). The same letter refers to the blufflands above the villages as “the heights.”<sup>69</sup> Much of the intrigue among Indian tribes, French, and British that characterizes the decades of the 1750's

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<sup>66</sup> Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 60.

<sup>67</sup> George Morgan to Baynton and Wharton, Dec. 10, 1767, George Morgan Letters Book, in Alvord and Carter, *Trade & Politics*, p. 132; Jelks, Ekberg, and Martin, *Excavation at the Laurens Site*, p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> Macarty to Vaudreuil, January 20, 1752, in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 443.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 448.

and 1760's takes place in geographic interaction between the heights and the floodplain. The French used prairies for grazing and running their horses and built what Daniel Usner has called an "exchange economy" of trade and travel to both Indian villages and across the prairies to Vincennes on the Wabash and north to Peoria on the Illinois.<sup>70</sup> Yet by using the rivers running into the Mississippi from the east – the Illinois and the Kaskaskia, the Ohio further south – as well as footpath and trail approaches down over the bluffs, the French in the five riverine settlements along the Mississippi were mobile people. After the founding of St. Louis in 1764, the traffic back and forth across the Mississippi increased. There had always been river crossings between Kaskaskia and St. Genevieve in present-day Missouri, a French community built around lead mining, salt works, and wheat. The burgeoning fur trade center of St. Louis provided other incentives for people to cross the river. Well before the influx of independent fur traders in the 1760's (often described as an onslaught by contemporary writers), the French were using their rivers in casual, opportunistic ways. In 1737, for example, a French woman from the Illinois Country, the Widow Lefevre, pushed off in a canoe with trade merchandise, headed for the Iowa River on a fur-trading expedition.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the evidence of a well-traveled and precisely-named environment, Canadian French, British, and American accounts of the Illinois French consistently stress their disinterest in "pushing out" into the open bluff country, their lack of ambition, their unhurried, peasant world, epitomized by long, indolent summers playing cards in the

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<sup>70</sup> See Daniel J. Usner, Jr., *Settlers, Indians, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); for a discussion of the nature of game and Indian trails as appropriated by the French, see N.M. Miller Surrey, *The Commerce*, pp. 82-87. Surrey has established the principal horse and footpath routes used by the French. The prairie trails, despite being laid over buffalo traces at times wide enough for two wagons side by side, were cut so deeply into the sod, and were so often inundated, that "not during the French period, nor for many years afterward, was it possible to traverse this route with a cart." *The Commerce*, p. 86-87.

<sup>71</sup> Kaskaskia MS, 37:10:9:1, also cited in Briggs, *The Forgotten Colony*, p. 169.

shadows of their veranda porches.<sup>72</sup> In 1761, for instance, a Frenchman at Kaskaskia, Joseph Labuxierre, petitioned the commandant Neyon de Villiers for a grant of land at La Belle Fontaine on the uplands. While the land was granted, actual French settlement there seems never to have occurred.<sup>73</sup> These images of the “unambitious” and “simplistic” French help to cement a view of the inhabitants as hugging the shores of their watery world and staying there. In fact, as evidenced especially by the Kaskaskia Manuscript records of land sales and exchanges, as well as the notarial records of Fort Chartres, the French were mobile and enterprising. They established extractive industries such as lead mining and saltworks; they built windmills and grain mills. Most especially, they developed an array of specialized river craft (“batteaux”) for fur trade and downriver trade with New Orleans; and they became master builders, joiners, roofers, and coopers.<sup>74</sup> Yet despite the sense of enclosure and isolation created by the massive limestone bluffs, this busy, interknit world of surplus wheat marketing, livestock sales, construction, and hunting was not self-sustaining. The agents to the outside world were numerous and diverse peoples, drawn from Canadian voyageurs and traders, at least ten Indian tribes, New Orleans merchant firms and factors, Philadelphia merchant firms, land company scouts, frontier hunters of all nationalities, and the Catholic priest network between French Illinois and Quebec. In the last two decades, historians have enthusiastically explored and characterized the diverse nature of frontier zone populations, while “new” military histories have appeared focusing on “social relations within colonies...and placing war more realistically within this larger context of political and

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<sup>72</sup> *History of Randolph, Monroe, and St. Clair Counties*, p. 59.

<sup>73</sup> Kaskaskia MS, 61:12:23:1.

<sup>74</sup> Kaskaskia Manuscripts; see also Ekberg, *French Roots*, Appendix: Grist Mills and River Craft.

economic change.”<sup>75</sup> The approach of this study is to continue that focus while acknowledging the natural environment as a historical determinant in the course of empire.

Later chapters will describe the processes through which this complex, watery ecosystem and natural trade economy were destroyed. One small incident in 1767 will illustrate conflict in the particular environmental frontier examined here. During the British occupation, Commander Reed fined a French woman in Kaskaskia 250 livres for selling a pint of rum in exchange “for a piece of meat from an Indian.” The author of the letter, the agent George Morgan writing to his employers Baynton and Wharton in Philadelphia, expresses outrage; it is clear he considered this transaction to be normative and everyday and the fine tyrannical. Morgan points out that the woman had not had any meat for several days.<sup>76</sup> Why was an Indian peddling a piece of meat normative? Why was the woman in need of meat? Why was the fine imposed? And how did actions such as those of Colonel Reed – as well as the British soldiers in the villages and British policies regarding settlement as a whole – introduce artificial and disruptive constraints to the fluid upper Mississippi River frontier? Most importantly, how did the French themselves contribute to these disruptive processes?

It is important to take into account the reality of the French Illinoisian way of life, dictated by the watery world they inhabited and built on existing patterns of land use. The physical environment of the Illinois Country in the last half of the eighteenth century can help to clarify themes of conquest, adjustment, political and social upheaval, vacillating loyalties, and relations among diverse groups of Europeans, French Creoles, and Indians. How human beings, both French and Indians, had adapted to living in a dual world of aquatic resources and upland prairies, affected aspects of political adjustment as diverse as religious orientation

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<sup>75</sup> Usner, *Indians, Settlers, & Slaves*, p. 219.

<sup>76</sup> George Morgan Letter Book, December 6, 1767, cited in Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, p. 130.

or trade loyalty. The presence of the Spanish across the Mississippi (in possession by 1769), the entrance of the British into the Illinois Country (1765) and the Americans (after 1778), disturbed in specific ways the patterns of resource usage, trade, and livelihood among an increasingly diverse population. The chaotic adjustments that make up the record of these decades were intimately woven with the changes in the way inhabitants – the French and the Indians – were interacting with the land on which they lived.

### **French Illinois: Patterns of Settlement: Cahokia, 1699 - 1733**

In the lush, saturate lands immediately south of the Big Rivers confluence – the Illinois, the Mississippi, and the Missouri – Cahokia and Tamaroa Indians had been living on and off since Marquette and Joliet glided by in 1673; they had occupied the lands along the Illinois River long before that, emigrating as Algonquian-speaking peoples from the southern Michigan area perhaps early in the sixteenth century. This was their country, gashed with openings of black, fertile earth and glimmering with water that ebbed and flowed in response to both climate and the action of rivers. Many peoples, prehistoric and protohistoric, had moved in and out of this rich, alluvial confluence area. While occupancy of the land may have been continuous across several thousand years, it is not certain at all that one culture gave rise to the next. Archaeologists had assumed recovered material culture would be “linked directly” to prehistoric sites, but studies beginning in the 1980’s have found that “rarely was it possible to establish the desired connection.”<sup>1</sup> Both Caddoan and Siouyan peoples may have moved through the area. The mounds of prehistoric Cahokia, counted by Henry Brackenridge in 1811 as numbering over 150, and the immense terraced Monks Mound rising dramatically from the floodplain, dominated the environment. Trails and paths criss-crossed the earth as animals and peoples, at least since 1000 A.D., moved around the earthworks. It is not clear how the mounds were used by groups of people who moved into the Big Rivers Area after the decline of Cahokia. Many American settlers, for instance, saw the earthworks as natural features of the land, and earlier protohistoric Indians may have

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<sup>1</sup> See Thomas E. Emerson and James A. Brown, “The Late Prehistory and Protohistory of Illinois,” in *Calumet & Fleur-de-Lys: Archaeology of Indian and French Contact in the Midcontinent* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), p. 104.

done so as well.<sup>2</sup> Monks Mound in particular, named for a trappist monk community occupying it in the 1830's, is depicted in most archaeological reconstructions as having steep sets of steps and terraces. A strong inference is that people living in or moving through the area would have climbed this monument. Men and women reaching the top of Monks Mound could watch the setting sun turn pools of standing water, ponds, and the Mississippi itself blood-red. Against such a backdrop, they watched the skies roar and tremble with immense flocks of waterfowl – likely in the millions; in the case of migrating passenger pigeons, the estimates are in the billions.

Much has been written of the sky-darkening migrations of the extinct passenger pigeon, *Ectopistes migratorius*. Larger than mourning doves, slate gray with cherry-red breasts, these birds settled into trees along the Mississippi in such numbers that they snapped off limbs and bowed saplings to the ground. They provided food for hundreds of species of life along the river: their eggs, droppings, carcasses, and live bodies fed a range of organisms from voracious soil bacterias to humans. Archaeological work at the Modoc Rock Shelter in the American Bottom has established that prehistoric Indians simply clubbed sleeping pigeons out of the trees at night, where they thudded thickly to earth.<sup>3</sup> Passenger pigeon migration was directly linked to bountiful acorn harvests. In 1737, the botanist John Bartram noted,

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<sup>2</sup> See Robert L. Hall's discussion of Cahokia earthworks, "The Cahokia Site and Its People," in *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South*, Robert F. Townsend, editor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). The origin and decline of Cahokia moundbuilder civilization continue to be of high interest to scholars. Robert L. Hall has argued elsewhere that "...the post-Mississippian decline in the north Mississippi valley was not so much a cultural death as a transition to a mode of adaptation allowing settlements in new areas of the prairies." See Hall, *Archaeology of the Soul: North American Indian Belief and Ritual* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), p. 153. Other good overviews of the prehistoric-historic puzzle arising from Cahokia culture include Thomas E. Emerson, *Cahokia and the Archaeology of Power* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1997), especially Chapter 3, "The Cultural-Historical Contexts." See also the essays by Robert L. Hall, "Cahokia Identity and Interaction Models of Cahokian Mississippian," and R. Barry Lewis, "The Early Mississippian Period in the Confluence Region and Its Northern Relationships," in *Cahokia and the Hinterlands: Middle Mississippian Cultures of the Midwest*, edited by Thomas E. Emerson and R. Barry Lewis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> See "The Hunter Returns," *Illinois: Man and Resources, Past and Present: A Guide to the Exhibits in the Museummobile* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Museum, n.d.).

“The pigeons always frequent the most fruitfull part of the Country; there being the greatest variety of Vegetables produced for their Support.”<sup>4</sup> The appearance of these birds along the Mississippi floodplain, termed a “large-scale phenomenon” covering hundreds of thousands of acres, would have affected the environment – its “patch dynamics, nutrient status, and habitat diversity.” One naturalist believes the birds altered light regimens and microclimates wherever they settled in to feed.<sup>5</sup>

Similar bounty would have been present in the Cahokia area: there, waterfowl replenished the earth and its life forms. While the numbers and variety of waterbirds in the eighteenth century cannot be accurately assessed, the migration and mobility of many life forms, including human, formed a complex, interactive ecosystem. Cahokia-Tamaroa Indians were included in these natural processes as hunters and gatherers. However, they were also activists. Their maize farming techniques, a keenly selective agriculture, had already changed the earth of the floodplain. These protohistoric Indians were a mobile people, using the rivers and tributaries to reach hunting areas or to visit; the Cahokia, for example, often visited the Peoria along the Illinois River. Indians also decamped and moved up to the blufftop prairies on seasonal hunts. The availability of myriad waterways and superior, straight-trunked walnut and cottonwood for dugouts insured travel. It was not only the lower Mississippi bayou country that gave rise to aquatic cultures. The inland waterways of the middle Mississippi Valley created a moving human panoply, a rich social network whose true scope is perhaps yet unrealized. From as early as 800 A.D., Woodland Indians were migrating seasonally. Archaeology of early sites in west-central Illinois, for example, has shown abandonment of farm sites that “coincide with the peak periods of waterfowl

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<sup>4</sup> John Bartram, cited in Chuck Williams, “Lessons from Pigeon,” *Natural Areas Journal*, Vol. 22 (3), 2002, p. 179.

<sup>5</sup> Chuck Williams, “Lessons from Pigeon,” p. 179.



migrations.”<sup>6</sup> The numbers of waterfowl on the Cahokia grant, long attracted by aquatic plants in a saturated earth, helped to determine the experience of the first French settlers in the floodplain area. Cahokia Indian spiritual fidelity to waterfowl, as well as the problems created by wet soils, shaped the settlement narrative here.

The lives of prehistoric and historic Indians were filled with coming and going, and that habit persisted after the arrival of the French in 1699. While the Cahokia readily adapted some European practices, especially the raising of hogs and the use of iron farming implements, their relations with the Seminarian missionaries on the Cahokia grant remained tense. Agriculture developed very slowly here; the Indians had no economic role as provisioners of Europeans, and the French themselves did not settle the area as the early missionaries had anticipated. Uneven ratios of people, Europeans to Indians, and a lackluster farming record, created a climate of dissatisfaction. The wet, marshy earth – more wet, more marshy than the bottomlands farther south – can be accounted a major factor in the early settlement history of the confluence area. Cahokia was a wet place. While the extensive agriculture of the moundbuilders may have created firmer earth during their tenure, by the time the French arrived one hundred and fifty years later, the streams, creeks, rigolets, and marshes were brimming.

In 1698-99, French Catholic missionaries descended the Illinois River into the area known today in Illinois as Big Rivers. The waters of the Mississippi, the Illinois, and the Missouri meet in a commingling of colors and flow rates. Pouring into the Mississippi from the west and east are rivers that redefine its character right at this point, where the Missouri churns a

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<sup>6</sup> Patrick J. Munson, Paul W. Parmalee, and Richard A. Yarnell, “Subsistence Ecology of Scovill, a Terminal Middle Woodland Village,” *American Antiquity*, Vol. 36 (4), 1971, p. 430.

muddy froth. Father Zenobius Membre, a member of La Salle's expedition, created this most succinct word picture in 1682: "Six leagues lower down, [we] found the Ozage River [the Missouri], coming in from the west. It is full as large as the River Colbert [the Mississippi] into which it empties troubling it so...but pours in so much mud that, from its mouth the water of the great river, whose bed is also slimy, is more like clear mud than river water."<sup>7</sup> In contrast, the Illinois River is usually described in first-impression accounts as calm or peaceful. Macoupin Creek, descending from the east across present-day Macoupin, Jersey, and Greene Counties, is the largest tributary into the Illinois in the region; farther down the western border of the state, Piasa Creek empties into the Mississippi above present-day Alton. This major confluence area saw continuous human occupation for at least eight thousand years. Archaeologists have found that consistently, the faunal and floral remains excavated from the (prehistoric) Mississippian Indian sites here are aquatic.<sup>8</sup> The rivers were feeding the people.

The Big Rivers area also includes the north end of the American Bottom where the Cahokia and Tamaroa tribes lived and where the French Seminarians established their first mission.<sup>9</sup> Naturalists today describe this part of the Illinois Country as a mosaic of rivers, bottoms, bluffs, broken lands and plains.<sup>10</sup> The Cahokia area is located to the south only about thirty miles and still part of the region. Descriptions of the land here by journeying French in the late seventeenth century characterize it as lush, variegated, and filled with water – "the valley between...a Marshey Ground." In 1698 such observers as Louis

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<sup>7</sup> Zenobius Membre, collected in J.G. Shea, *Discovery and Exploration of the Mississippi Valley* (New York: J.S. Redfield, 1852), cited in John White, *Big Rivers Area Assessment: Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Big Rivers Area, Vol. 5* (Springfield: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, 2000), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Charles J. Bareis and James W. Porter, *American Bottom Archaeology: A summary of the FAI-270 Project Contribution to the Culture History of the Mississippi River Valley* (Urbana; University of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 185.

<sup>9</sup> John White, *Big Rivers*, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> John White, *Big Rivers*, p. ix.

Hennepin and St. Cosme found striking land forms, “ridges of mountains,” and great meadows “cover’d with an infinite number of wild Bulls [bison].”<sup>11</sup> St. Cosme, arriving with the first party of Seminarian missionaries, wrote of the Illinois River: “During that time we had an abundance of provisions for no one need fast on that river so great is the quantity of game of all kinds: Swans, Bustards [geese], Ducks.”<sup>12</sup> It is significant that St. Cosme speaks of “that time.” It was winter on the Illinois River below Peoria: the waters were plated with ice. The bark canoes used by the party were too fragile to withstand the capricious movement of sharp, jagged floes, and so they waited out the freezing weeks. Yet “during that time” swans, geese, and ducks flocked in abundance on the Illinois. Through such suggestive clues, the slight, offhand words of a missionary in 1698, the Big Rivers area emerges as a country of birds.

It is the presence of swans especially which reveals the intensity of birds, especially waterfowl. Illinois has lost resident populations of trumpeter swans, *Cygnus buccinator*, extirpated from the state by the 1880’s. But swans have an ancient history in the Illinois Country. Trumpeters “likely wintered casually on the major rivers of southern Illinois.”<sup>13</sup> Swan bones have been found in archaeological digs at Cahokia, as many as 375 specimens, and along the Fox River, they show up in layers dating from the Pleistocene.<sup>14</sup> Mature trumpeter swans have a wingspread of eight to ten feet. Thus a single wing would have perhaps been just slightly less tall than the average Indian man. Trumpeters are heavy, snow-white birds whose call sounds like the note of a French horn. In their slow, ungainly

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<sup>11</sup> Louis Hennepin and R.G. Thwaites, editor *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903), cited in John White, *Big Rivers*, p. 23-24.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Francoise Busson de St. Cosme, in M.M. Quaife, editor, *The Development of Chicago, 1674-1914* (Chicago: Caxton Club, 1916), cited in John White, *Big Rivers*, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> H. David Bolen, *The Birds of Illinois* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

lift-offs, their wings ply and churn the surface of the water; they fly among the slowest of any of the North American waterfowl.<sup>15</sup> A flock of “wing-loading” trumpeter swans ascending to flight on the Illinois River would be no insignificant event; and those swans were intermixed with snow geese, Canada geese, migrant grebes of several varieties, bitterns, herons, egrets, wood ducks, teal, mallards, wigeons, pintails and cranes. Each bird has a distinctive call; en masse they would have produced a cacophony, particularly in the areas of the Illinois River where immense, rocky bluffs trap and magnify sound. Not all of these water birds were resident in the winter in the Big Rivers area; some were summer breeders or merely passers-through. But the Mississippi River is one of the great fly-ways of the world. As late as the year 1955, “after [at least] 75 years of intensive hunting and drastic destruction of habitat,” observers counted as many as six million mallards alone in the Illinois River migratory corridor.<sup>16</sup> And just as ethnohistorical studies of the eastern and northern Woodland Indians have linked their spiritual and self-created identities to fur-bearing animals, what little is known about Illinois Indian tribes links them to this kingdom of birds.<sup>17</sup>

The journal of the Frenchman Deliette who encountered and lived among the Peoria before 1700 (and continued as a resident trader in the area well past 1700) is the single most authoritative source on the Illinois Indians.<sup>18</sup> Most of what is known about these tribes as they were living when they met the French comes from a period of time between 1673 and 1700. Such information describes the Peoria and the Kaskaskia, dwelling then on the northern Illinois River at the Mission of the Immaculate Conception (Starved Rock). For

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<sup>15</sup> Paul A. Johnsgard, *Waterfowl of North America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Patrick J. Munson, et al, “Subsistence Ecology,” p. 415.

<sup>17</sup> On woodland and subarctic Indian identification with fur-bearing mammals, see Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relations and the Fur Trade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>18</sup> For a good sketch of Deliette, see Judith A. Franke, *French Peoria and the Illinois Country 1673-1846* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Museum Society, 1995), p. 28-31.

smaller tribes such as the Cahokia, Tamaroa, and the Mechigamea, very little is known at all. Because these five tribes had become the dominant members of the Illinois Confederacy, however, and especially because of the geographic proximity of the Cahokia and Peoria, it is possible to use accounts of the Peoria as careful representations.<sup>19</sup> The Peoria and Kaskaskia lived in seasonal subsistence patterns. Winter and summer hunts were separated by a spring planting season beginning in March, when maize was hilled in previously readied plots. Observers noticed that the women prepared to plant corn by first gathering firewood, as they would not have time or energy to undertake this once they began to work in the fields.<sup>20</sup> The verb in use here, “gathering,” stems directly from the anthropological usage of “hunter-gatherer,” and unfortunately, can imply that women walked around the land picking up limbs, small branches, and twigs. Such ease of gathering can only occur in areas heavily timbered with a thriving understory of young trees and brushy growth. However, the habitat of the American Bottom was managed by fire. Annual burning off of the underbrush and small tree growth – usually in the autumn – directly shaped the many tallgrass prairies so in evidence when the French arrived.<sup>21</sup>

Some evidence exists about the difficulty of obtaining firewood. In 1698 one of the *engages* hired to accompany the Seminarians down to the Cahokia area, M. De la Source, observed of the Tamaroa tribe encamped at the Cahokia area: “There are as many people at the Tamarois as at Kebeq.” At the time there were about 300 Tamaroa cabins. Later in the same year, St. Cosme observed that the Tamaroa had moved to an island in the Mississippi

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Callender, “Illinois,” in William C. Sturtevant, *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), p. 674.

<sup>20</sup> Callender, “Illinois,” in *The Handbook*, p. 674.

<sup>21</sup> See discussion of a fire-managed environment in Chapter One.

“to get wood more easily....”<sup>22</sup> The initial populations of the five Illinois tribes at the time of French settlement in 1700 range from estimates of 5400 people up at Peoria to 2000 people at the Cahokia-Tamaroa village. Historians estimating the numbers of people in Indian villages use the formula of 20 people to a cabin, based on estimates that four warriors lived in each cabin, and that each warrior would represent a family population of five individuals.<sup>23</sup> The Indian settlement with the same number of people “as at Kebeq” would require considerable outlays of firewood. Even at one fire per cabin or lodge, the need for wood fuel would have been high. Some archaeologists have estimated that early housing practices of the Illinois Indians may have included “large cabins of the vaulted [roof] type” erected on low mounds (two feet high) to avoid ground flooding. These larger cabins had four fires, “with one or two families at a fire.”<sup>24</sup> Given the numbers of fires to supply, Indian women may well have had to use axes to chop off limbs and fell smaller trees such as mulberry. In 1678, Deliette described Peoria women “...run[ning], each with an axe, into the woods to cut poles and peel bark for their summer hunting cabins.”<sup>25</sup> By 1691, however, the Peoria had relocated down the Illinois River from Starved Rock to Lake Pimeteoui due to “depletion of firewood in the area.”<sup>26</sup> The Seminarian priests mentioned the usefulness of the heavily-forested islands in the Mississippi. Father Mercier described the Island of the Holy Family as being “completely covered with a forest of full-grown trees, good for building purposes and

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<sup>22</sup> Letters of M. De la Source and St. Cosme, both cited in J.H. Schlarman, *From Quebec to New Orleans: the Story of the French in America* (Belleville, Illinois: Beuchler Publishing Company, 1929), p. 141.

<sup>23</sup> See Joseph Zitomersky, *French Americans-Native Americans in Eighteenth-Century French Colonial Louisiana: The Population Geography of the Illinois Indians, 1670s–1760’s* (Sweden: Lund University Press, 1994), p. 203; for formulas on estimating populations, see p. 219.

<sup>24</sup> Thorne Deuel, *American Indian Ways of Life: An Interpretation of the Archaeology of Illinois and Adjoining Areas* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Museum, 1958), p. 46

<sup>25</sup> Pierre Deliette, “De Gannes Memoir,” p. 308.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Callender, “Illinois,” in Sturtevant, *Handbook*, p. 678.

firewood, especially a great deal of poplar, few walnut-trees, and mulberry-trees....”<sup>27</sup> The prize heating wood, evidenced by ash pit remains, was hickory. But hickory and oak are not consistent floodplain varieties; in general, they like sunny, open, and well-drained upland soils. Seminarian letters from the Cahokia grant in the early 1730’s indicate the priests were hauling white oak from the top of the bluffs.<sup>28</sup> Like the Indian tribes who had long utilized the three-part geography of the American Bottom lands, the French eventually learned to take wood from the mature trees of the upland till plain.

After gathering firewood, the Illinois Indian women planted maize, beans, squash and melons (melon was an introduced plant, observed by Deliette among the Peoria as early as 1678<sup>29</sup>). The hunts for buffalo were launched from camps set up on the edges of the prairie, right at the timber margin, or along streams and rivers. In winter, Indians erected portable sapling-frame lodges covered in woven cattail mats. Winter camps tended to be tightly clustered, perhaps for warmth. The only known winter camp site of the Illinois to be excavated archaeologically is along the Illinois River near Naples – Woman Chief’s Camp. Ash pits at this camp have yielded carbonized hickory bark; faunal remains recovered were “elements from bison, cottontail, beaver, muskrat, domestic dog, black bear, raccoon, white-tailed deer, turkey, waterfowl, turtle, fish, and mussels.” Floral remains were “hickory, little barley, maize, and common bean.”<sup>30</sup> A second pit excavated and carbon-dated to a somewhat later time period, possibly 1706 (after the French Cahokia settlement) includes

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<sup>27</sup> Fathers Mercier and Courier, April 12, 1735, cited in Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 282.

<sup>28</sup> See Letter from Father Mercier, April 12, 1735, op.cit. Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 283.

<sup>29</sup> Pierre Deliette, “De Gannes Memoir,” p. 345; see also Marquette’s references (1673-77) to melons “which are excellent, especially those which have red seeds,” in the Memorial, “Of the Character of the Illinois, of their Habits and Customs,” in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Vol. 59 (Cleveland: The Burrows Bros. Company, 1900), p. 129.

<sup>30</sup> John A. Walthall, F. Terry Norris, and Barbara D. Stafford, “Woman Chief’s Village: An Illini Winter Hunting Camp,” in *Calumet & Fleur de Lys: Archaeology of Indian and French Contact in the Midcontinent* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), p. 137.

among the faunal remains evidence of pig.<sup>31</sup> While at summer and winter camps, Illinois Indians hunted initially on foot, organizing communally. They surrounded a herd and drove the buffalo into ambush where the rest of the hunting party waited. Deliette, who recorded these details, participated in a summer hunt in which 1,200 buffalo were killed, as well as “deer, bears, turkeys, lynxes, and mountain lions.”<sup>32</sup> This number of animals was taken over a period of approximately five weeks. While 1,200 buffalo seems high for humans hunting on foot, Deliette also records that on a single hunting day, Indians killed 120 animals, culling them from a “great herd” and running them down. The hunters used both firearms and bow and arrow on this hunt; Deliette states they shot off “an extraordinary number of arrows,” after which “a great number of buffalo remained on the ground.”<sup>33</sup> In the period of time before the Illinois Indians obtained horses, they relied on their speed on foot. Baron La Hontan, writing a “Discourse on the Savages of North America” in 1689 observed, “The Illinese, the Oumamis, and the Outagamins: with some adjacent nations are of an indifferent size, and run like Greyhounds...presuming that in case of a discovery, they can easily save themselves by their good Heels.”<sup>34</sup> Deliette also admired the Illinois as being “trained runners” and described them, too, as having “lynx-eyes.”<sup>35</sup>

Summer villages of the Illinois were “strung out” along the river banks and could contain many lodges; observers have counted 300 to 351 at different times before 1700. Summer lodges were covered with lighter bark sheets (elm) to admit air and light. Yet before either summer or winter camps were set up, Illinois Indians launched a month of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Pierre Deliette, “De Gannes Memoir,” p. 312.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>34</sup> La Hontan, *New Voyages to North America*, Vol. II, 4 and 77, cited in J. Nick Perrin, *Perrin's History of Illinois* (1906), p. 45.

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Deliette, “De Gannes Memoir,” p. 319.



raiding and warfare in February. It is here, in their warfare rituals, that the connection with the immense natural bird population of the Mississippi floodplain can be found. Birds were part of the rituals of war; the Illinois “emphasized birds as the emblems of supernatural power.”<sup>36</sup> Warriors chose a personal bird or birds and collected their skins in a “colored reed mat.”<sup>37</sup> Before departing for the raid, warriors participated in night-long rituals in which the birdskins were displayed. This was to ensure the cooperation and aid of their personal bird spirits. Deliette mentions the warriors “pay[ing] homage, according to their custom, to their birds.”<sup>38</sup> Later, during the raid itself, “...warriors gave the cries of their birds.” Captives brought back to the Illinois camps sang their death chants while holding long sticks “containing the feathers of birds killed by the raiders.”<sup>39</sup> Thus the metaphor of the bird of prey was woven into the chronology of war raids.

Descriptions of Illinois Indians by modern writers employ the terms “semipermanent villages,” “seminomadic lifestyle,” or “subsistence based on farming, hunting, and gathering.” The circannual rhythms of these Indians involved a coming and going between river bottom summer camps, upland winter camps, bison herds roaming on the larger prairies further inland, enemy Indian camps to the north and south, as well as across the Mississippi into the lands of the Missouri and Osage. The Mechigamea “continuously journeyed” as far down the Mississippi as Arkansas and the Quapaw tribes.<sup>40</sup> The world of the Illinois Indians, before the French arrived and during the French occupation, was a traveling world. In a 1750 letter written by Father Vivier at the Kaskaskia mission, he states that the Kaskaskia were continuing to hunt seasonally. “From the beginning of October to the middle of March, they

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<sup>36</sup> Callender, “Illinois,” in *The Handbook*, p. 676.

<sup>37</sup> For a description of the making of these dyed reed mats, see Pierre Deliette, “De Gannes Memoir,” p. 375.

<sup>38</sup> Pierre Deliette, “De Gannes Memoir,” p. 376.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Callender, “Illinois,” in Sturtevant, *Handbook*, p. 676-677.

<sup>40</sup> John A. Walthall, “Aboriginal Pottery and the Eighteenth-Century Illini,” in *Calumet & Fleur-de-Lys*, p. 170.

hunt at a distance of forty to fifty leagues from their village; and, in the middle of March, they return to their village. Then the women sow the maize.”<sup>41</sup> In 1750, the Kaskaskia had been living in a permanent village near the French for almost thirty years. They had learned to use the French plow, the charrue, and were considered to be the most highly Christianized of any of the Indian tribes.<sup>42</sup> Yet they still kept to the rhythms of their hunts; they still decamped in masse. Despite the five French settlements devoted to agriculture, lead mining, and milling, the traditions of the Illinois Indians and trade relations among tribes and with the French and British created a highly mobile environment. The movement of people across the American Bottom was continuous. In their subsistence patterns, Indians occupying the American Bottom were migrants and summer/winter residents themselves. They were part of a diverse ecosystem dominated by prodigious numbers of migrating and resident waterfowl. The topography of this area was also highly attractive to scavengers and birds of prey like the bluff-loving turkey vultures, river-loving bald eagles, red-shouldered and red-tailed hawks, and many species of owls. It is not too remarkable that birds should have become spiritually important to the Indians who lived and moved with them.

Into this structured world built around migratory patterns arrived a group of Jesuit and Seminarian Catholic missionaries. They found an animistic cosmology based on the reading of extremely specific, unmistakable, and dependable signs and codes from the natural world; Catholic missionaries sought to replace this with a hierarchical faith in which the concepts of

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<sup>41</sup> Letter from Father Vivier, 1750, cited in Walthall, “Aboriginal Pottery,” p. 161.

<sup>42</sup> See letter from Andre Penicaut discussing the Kaskaskian use of plows as early as 1711, in *Relation de Penicaut* in P. Margry, *Memoires et Documents*, V, 448-493.

“the unknown” and “the unknowable” reigned supreme.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps the least-explored aspect of Catholic conversion efforts among American Indians has to do with the role of knowledge, not belief, in both Indian religions and Catholic Christianity. Yet the story of the French missionaries in the Illinois Country is not only about religion, about the introduction of an alien theology; it is also about property. Property came to play a central role in the French Catholic penetration into Indian lands. Jesuit and Seminarian possessions, whether sacred or secular, were sources of keen interest to Indians. More than movable property, however, mission lands came to stand as symbols for French presence. The presence was permanent and agricultural as well as spiritual. Catholic missionaries to the Illinois Country – Seminarian as well as Jesuit – methodically developed and improved their holdings as corollary activities to converting the Illinois Indian tribes. Research has established that it was at the southernmost colony of Kaskaskia that a *donne* on a Jesuit mission first cultivated wheat in 1718.<sup>44</sup> Sixty miles north in Cahokia, the Seminarians developed an extensive grant; their letters reveal excited plans for the establishment of grist mills, water mills, forts, and farms for incoming Canadian settlers. The letters of the Jesuit missionaries and of the Seminarians over time, from 1699 through to the Seven Years War, reveal a shift away from the priority of converting Indians to the priority of establishing French colonies with centrally-located chapels and churches and enough priests to minister to French souls. Of the five French settlements on the Mississippi, two are particularly instructive as case studies. Cahokia, settled in 1699, and the village of Chartres, growing up in the prairie next to Fort

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<sup>43</sup> Carolyn Merchant has explored the conflicts, congruencies, and changes in Indian and settler belief systems and relations to nature in *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science* in New England (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

<sup>44</sup>See Carl J. Ekberg’s discussion of wheat in the Illinois Country, in *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 173; Mary Borgias Palm also overviews French wheat in “The First Illinois Wheat,” *Mid-America* 13 (July 1930), p. 72-73.

Chartres, offer avenues for comparative analysis that can trace differing profiles of land and resource usage and hence, different patterns of interaction with Indian tribes as well.

The natural and human environments of these two settlements determined trajectories of settlement growth. It has been all too easy to lump the French settlements together; they were different. In Cahokia, the river bluffs ran to the northeast fifty arpents (about one and a half miles) away from the settlement residences, and the French concession meandered across sixteen square leagues of soggy land occupied intermittently by Cahokia, Tamaroa, and Peoria Indians. The river bluffs on the Cahokia grant are not uniformly “clifty” – that is, there are gentle, intermittent slopes towards the higher ridge ground. Access to the Cahokia concession from the upland till plain is easier and likely facilitated human traffic. In addition, the Cahokia grant contained the great Cahokia mounds, a land form entirely anthropogenic (humanly-derived); the mounds distinguish the Cahokia lands from all other French grants along the Mississippi. At Chartres, severe, vertical bluffs protected the village within walking distance; French and Indian settlement and interaction took place in a sheltered land cove lying between the Mississippi River and the limestone bluffs, and the only Indians living in the vicinity were a small group of “domiciled” Mechigamea (also spelled Metchigamea or Michigamea) who occupied a village a league and a half north of the fort.<sup>45</sup> The contrasting development of Cahokia and Chartres is marked. At each place, differing habitats and settling populations combined to create distinct frontier worlds, separated by only thirty miles.

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<sup>45</sup> Dan Hechenberger, “The Metchigamea Tribe,” *M’Skutewe Awandiangwi*, 1(2), p. 1; Wayne Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country: Historic Tribes* (Springfield, Illinois: Department of Registration and Education, 1958), p. 41, 45-46.

In the Illinois Country, in the early years after the establishment of the Cahokia mission, 1699, letters and records detail competition between the Jesuits and the Seminary of the Foreign Missions for control of mission property and neophytes. Seminarians ended up in Cahokia, and their experiences with Cahokia-Tamaroa Indians in an often-flooded ecosystem stand in counterpoint to the Jesuit experiences farther south. Exceptionally large territories in New France – and myriad Indian groups who occupied those territories – were assigned to missionaries in proclamations as sweeping as La Salle’s 1682 claiming ceremony on “the river Colbert” (the Mississippi). Then, on a “dry place” above the confluence of the river and the sea (Gulf of Mexico), La Salle devised a column and a cross for implantation. Although La Salle is often credited with being first in the claiming of land in North America, he was only following in a long line of such rituals. Eleven years earlier, this ceremony had also been enacted near Sault St. Marie, Michigan, on a “slight eminence.” There, the Seigneur de Saint-Lusson erected a cross and a cedar post bearing the French coat of arms. He lifted a piece of earth four times, shaking it dramatically in the four cardinal directions, claiming loudly, “In the name of the Most High and Most Mighty and Most Redoubtable Monarch Louis the Fourteenth...we take possession...*Vive le Roi!*” Saint-Lusson instructed the masses of brilliantly-attired Indians from fourteen tribes to also shout “*Vive le Roi!*”<sup>46</sup>

La Salle’s ceremony on the lower Mississippi seems to have been quieter but much more precise. He declaimed before the assembled French soldiers and explorers that they

...by virtue of the commission of his Majesty...have taken, and do now take...possession of Louisiana, the seas, harbors, ports, bays, adjacent straits; and all the nations, people, provinces, cities, towns, villages, mines, minerals, fisheries, streams, and rivers...from the mouth of the great river St. Louis, on the eastern side, otherwise called the Ohio, Alighin,

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<sup>46</sup> Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 47. For a discussion of English, Spanish, and French claiming ceremonies and how they differed in practice and meaning, see Patricia Seed, “Taking Possession and Reading Texts: Establishing the Authority of Overseas Empires,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. 49 (1992), 183-209.

Sipore, or Chukagone...as also along the river Colbert, or Mississippi, and rivers which discharge themselves therein...”<sup>47</sup>

La Salle’s claim left out no possible geography or resource. The French Catholic officials in Montreal and Paris also manipulated immense tracts of North America. Indian tribes of the interior were viewed as comparable resources to land itself, both as potential converts to Catholicism and as fur-gatherers for the monarchy. In the late seventeenth century, officials in New France began issuing letters-patent for the opening of the Illinois Country. A recounting of the arrival of Jesuits missionaries along the Mississippi River, however, must begin with a historical error. The failure of Bishop Monsignor St. Vallier, second Bishop of Quebec, to distinguish between land and peoples in a series of letters-patent created a jurisdictional confusion in the Illinois Country that would still be ongoing as late as the 1790’s, when lawsuits over property rights were finally settled. In 1690, Bishop St. Vallier gave a commission to the Jesuits to “preach the Gospel to the Ottawa, Miami, Sioux, and Illinois Indians.” Then in 1698 he gave permission for another Catholic group, the Seminarists of Quebec (the Seminary of Foreign Missions) to penetrate the Illinois Country for the purpose of setting up missions on either side of the Mississippi: “*en deca et au dela du Mississippi*.”<sup>48</sup> In both cases, these grants, directly conflicting as they were, bespoke a rather naive – or untutored – sense of the numbers of peoples and the leagues of land involved. Between 1699 and 1703, then, both the Seminarists and the Jesuits, charged with evangelizing the Illinois Indians, journeyed down the Illinois River past Lake Pimiteoui (Peoria) to the lands of the Tamaroa Indians near Cahokia. Henri de Tonti, usually described as a “soldier of fortune,” had recommended to the Bishop that the Tamaroa Indians were

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<sup>47</sup>cited in Henry Brown, *The History of Illinois from Its First Discovery and Settlement to the Present Time* (New York: J. Winchester, New World Press, 1844), p. 132-133.

<sup>48</sup>Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 131.

likely candidates for conversion. One of the first actions of the Seminarians was the baptism of a son born to a French soldier, La Violette, and an Indian mother, Catherine Ekipakinoua, with Henri de Tonti standing in as godfather. The baptism took place in La Violette's small cabin and was recorded in the old parish registers of the Immaculate Conception of Kaskaskia. In November of 1698, when the cabin Mass and baptism occurred, the Kaskaskia mission was located north of Cahokia, on the Illinois River at Fort Pimiteoui (Peoria). In a "Memoir Concernant le Pays Illinois," the author describes Peoria as being populated by six of the eight Illinois nations living in two hundred and sixty cabins, with a "fighting population" of nearly eight hundred warriors.<sup>49</sup> The baptism of the La Violette son at the Kaskaskia Mission introduced the Seminarians to the kinds of relationships already flourishing in the Illinois country.

These members of the *Seminaire des Missions Etrangeres*, described as "a new group of Frenchmen," included M. Francois Jolliet de Montigny, M. Jean Francois Buisson de St. Cosme, M. Antoin Davion, Deacon Thaumur de la Source (a donne helping the priests), and Brother Alexander. The men were addressed as "Monsignor" rather than "Pere," (Father) as was the custom with Jesuit priests.<sup>50</sup> In addition, although guided down the Illinois River to the Cahokia site by the knowledgeable Henri de Tonti himself, it is clear that these Seminarians were just in the process of learning about the Illinois Indians. In two important ways, the arriving Seminarians differed from the Jesuits who also claimed the right to mission territory in Illinois. These differences reflect powerful psychological conceptualizations that had developed in Jesuit understanding of Indians over the nearly

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<sup>49</sup>Mary Borgias Palm, *The Jesuit Missions of the Illinois Country 1673-1763* (Cleveland, Ohio: Saint Louis University, 1931), pp. 24 and 80-81.

<sup>50</sup>Dan Hechenberger, "Towards Understanding the Illinewek View of the French at Cahokia," *Journal of the St. Clair County Historical Society* 5 (9), p. 15, 39.

seventy years they had been laboring in North America. The differences also shaped patterns of Jesuit-Indian interaction in the Illinois Country.

The first difference is linguistic. None of the Seminarians spoke any of the Illinewek Algonquin language, used by all the tribes. These tribes originally numbered as many as seventeen and included the five most consistently appearing in French-Indian relations of the eighteenth century: the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Cahokia, Tamaroa, and Mechigamea. Father Marest would describe the Seminarians, using the term “gentlemen”: “As these Gentlemen did not know the Illinois language, we gave them a collection of prayers, and the translation of the catechism....”<sup>51</sup> Those prayers were the result of months and years of painstaking work by Father Allouez at the Eastern Great Lakes missions in the seventeenth century. Father Allouez was unusually gifted and persevering in gathering and recording Algonquin, but he also typifies the Jesuit commitment to learning Native languages. The Jesuits had early seen that their own training in classical languages and conversion rhetoric made their learning Indian tongues much more “efficient” than teaching Indians French as a means to introduce Catholic Christianity.<sup>52</sup> This policy of learning Indian languages differs from earlier efforts of the Recollect friars before 1620, who thought that Indians should be forced to learn French; predictably, this policy resulted in very little lasting transmission of Christianity.<sup>53</sup> Many Jesuit fathers produced long word lists, grammars, initial Algonquian-French dictionaries, hymnals and prayer books. Father Gravier, who lived and worked among the Kaskaskian Illinois in the 1690’s, compiled a hand-written dictionary of

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<sup>51</sup>Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor, *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Vol. 65 (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Company, 1900) p. 85. See also Hechenberger’s discussion, “Towards an Illinewek,” p. 22.

<sup>52</sup>See the excellent discussion of Jesuit linguistic efforts in Tracy Leavelle, ““Bad Things” and “Good Hearts”: Mediation, Meaning, and the Language of Illinois Christianity,” forthcoming.

<sup>53</sup>Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada’s “Heroic Age” Reconsidered* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1985), p. 201.



thousands of words. His fellow priest, Father Marest, was able to learn Illini Algonquin after only four or five months of rigorous study. However, some Jesuits found the Indian languages exceptionally difficult. In 1723, Father Sebastien Rasles (Rale), posted to the Illinois Country, wrote an extensive account of his language struggles. Rale had striven to learn Huron, for he found that when a person understood Huron, “he [could] in less than three months make himself understood by the five Illinois tribes.” Huron was “the most majestic, and at the same time, the most difficult, of all Savage tongues.” Rale used a grammar composed by Father Chaumont but felt that “a Missionary is fortunate if he can, even with this aid, express himself elegantly in that language after ten years of constant study.”<sup>54</sup>

Facility in the Illini languages was connected intimately with a second important principle of Jesuit work: constant presence among the tribes, even to the point of accompanying them on winter hunts, trading trips, and difficult journeys from village to village across the prairies. This peripatetic commitment demonstrates certain reversals in Jesuit policy regarding clerical proximity to Indians. Although they may have initially conceived of permanent missions, early Jesuits began to accompany Indians on travels as part of their conversion strategy. In a mid-seventeenth century document forming part of the Jesuit Relations, “Instructions to Fathers who are to be sent among the Hurons,” priests were told, “Be quick to take your place in the canoe, to disembark with haste and to draw up your habit to prevent it becoming wet.” Missionaries shared Indian cabins or crude shelters at night, suffering from scorched feet and smoke inhalation. These early accounts are full of references to hunger. Sometimes priests were forced to chew old mooseskins for sustenance.

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<sup>54</sup>Tracy Leavelle, “Bad Things and “Good Hearts”; letter from Father Sebastien Rasles, October 12, 1723, in *The Indians of North America*, ed. by Edna Kenton, from “*The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*,” Vol. Two (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Company, 1927), pp. 364-365.

Father Rale described his hunger as “the most cruel torture,” and mentioned the only resource in times of lack of game: “a sort of leaf which the savages call *Kenghessanach* and the French *Tripes des Roches*... [like] chervil, of which they have the shape except that they are much larger. They are served either boiled or roasted; in this latter manner I have eaten them, and they are less distasteful than in the former.”<sup>55</sup> Priests took with them a bag which contained articles for the Holy Communion, but also, an assortment of small gift items: needles, fishhooks, glass trinkets. Instructions to these early priests stressed the “embellishment” of religious ceremonies. Priests were to use decorations like “leaves, bouquets, garlands, and brightly-colored materials” to attract Indian eyes and keep them interested.<sup>56</sup>

Gradually, for a variety of reasons, Jesuits laboring in New France set up permanent mission complexes and ventured out to nearby villages on short trips to preach, evangelize, and minister. Jesuits felt that they could make more progress with Huron converts by encouraging them to remain isolated from other French, especially *coureur du bois*, whose lives were rife with the two excesses most detested by priests: drink and licentiousness. Teams of preaching missionaries fanned out from the mission into nearby native towns. Jesuits continued to maintain their policy of “keep[ing] the Indians separate from the French and teaching them in their own language.”<sup>57</sup> When the fur trade pushed west into the upper Mississippi Valley, the Jesuits followed the furs. And they brought with them an ingrained idea about permanent mission settlements attracting “domiciled” Indians who would live near to but separate from the French.

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<sup>55</sup> Raymond Douville and Jacques Casanova, *Daily Life in Early Canada*, translated by Carola Congreve (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1968), p. 108-109; letter from Father Sebastien Rasles, in *The Indians*, p. 370.

<sup>56</sup> Douville and Casanova, *Early Life*, p. 111.

<sup>57</sup> Trigger, *Natives*, p. 293; see also discussion in Palm, *Jesuit Missions*, p. 96.

The Illinois Country, though, would challenge these conceptions in dramatic ways: its sheer size, its daunting remoteness. By the time the Jesuits and Seminarians left Canada, missions clustered along the St. Lawrence, where there had been Jesuit activity for almost seventy years. Resident priests and Seminarians were used to Indian villages on either side of the “great river road,” and they comfortably traveled the settlement chain of Tadoussac, Quebec, Trois Rivières, and Ville-Marie (Montreal). This geographic clustering and tightness of human settlement, both Indian and French, fostered the kind of mission life Jesuits had learned to believe was effective. A map prepared by the Illinois organization Nipundikan clearly shows the difference in size and population density between the St. Lawrence area and the sweep of land to the west. Here lay immense, variegated land, a rich mosaic of tallgrass prairie, riparian forest, blufflands, ravines, and barrens. This variety spanned the North American continent between Fort Pontchartrain (Detroit), built in 1701, and the southernmost (transient) settlement in the Illinois Country, the Juchereau Tannery established between 1702 and 1705 near the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. When in 1699 the French priests sailed down the Illinois River past the late seventeenth-century fort of Pimiteoui (and also past short-lived forts such as St. Louis and Crevecoeur), there were no French settlements or missions; an assortment of Illinois tribes – perhaps as many as eight distinct nations – lived and roamed along the Illinois, Mississippi, and Kaskaskia Rivers. Above Pimiteoui (Peoria) lived the Fox, Sauk, and Potawatomi; to the east lived Kickapoo and Miami Indians such as the Wea and Piankeshaw. The Jesuits soon realized that the Illinois Country would demand of them an intense mobility. As late as the 1780, letters from the Jesuit Pierre Gibault discuss the exhaustive demands of his traveling, although Gibault was covering territory to minister to French inhabitants by that time. The

theme of distance is instinct in the Jesuit letters from the Illinois Country. Nicolas de Finiels, who explored Upper Louisiana in the late 1790's, wrote about the travels from Quebec and Montreal of traders and priests: "You must comprehend the geography of North America to comprehend such a journey."<sup>58</sup>

In 1712, Father Gabriel Marest, writing from the (relocated) Kaskaskia Mission, sent an extensive account to Father Barthelemy Germon, a professor at Orleans, France. This letter is not only about the country, Indian groups, missions, spiritual ministries, problems and procedures in conversion activities; it is also Father Marest's testament to the Jesuit missionary's exhausting and painful peripatetic life. The extremes of distance and weather, the physical punishment inflicted on toiling, dedicated missionaries, and their looping trips across prairies, down spring-flooded rivers and up ice-bound rivers – such accounts stand forth conspicuously. "These journeys which we are compelled to take from time to time – either to follow the Savages, or for other reasons important to the well-being of our Missions –are extremely difficult."<sup>59</sup> Marest describes the death of Father Binneteau, who had gone on the summer hunt with the Illinois Indians ("our Savages,"). Father Binneteau struggled through intense July heat, "sometimes ...in danger of smothering amid the grass, which was extremely high; sometimes he suffered extremely from thirst...these hardships brought upon him a violent sickness, from which he expired in my arms."<sup>60</sup> In the same letter is an account of the death of Father Bergier at the Tamaroa Mission. Father Bergier expired suddenly from a lingering fever. As soon as he was dead, his enemies, the Indian charlatans (medicine men), gathered around the cross he had erected, dancing and breaking the cross "into a

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<sup>58</sup>Nicolas de Finiels, *An Account of Upper Louisiana*, ed. by Carl J. Ekberg and William E. Foley, transl. by Carl J. Ekberg (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), p. 99

<sup>59</sup>See Marest letter, 1712, *Jesuit Relations*, Vol. 65, p. 253.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*

thousand pieces.” Father Marest describes the Tamaroa Mission as follows: “About twenty-five leagues from here [the mission on the Kaskaskia River, established in 1703] is the village of the *Tamarouas*. This is a mission which was first entrusted to Father Pinet...this Father had as his successor Monsieur Bergier, a Priest from the Seminary of the Missions etrangeres.”<sup>61</sup> Thus priests from the Jesuit Order and the Quebec Seminary were serving the needs of the Tamaroa Mission, speaking in both French and Algonquian. Yet it is clearly the Jesuits who are traveling, embarking on lengthy and life-threatening trips down the Mississippi in pirogues or northward across the prairies on ancient trails. An account of the Holy Family Mission at Cahokia stresses the permanency of the Seminarians there: “There is no reason to suppose that the site of the mission was ever shifted. The present old mission church of the Holy Family, Cahokia, built in 1775, certainly stands on the site of the mission of 1737. And the church of 1737, with the same certainty, stood on the site of the Tamarois village and first mission church of 1699.”<sup>62</sup>

This description of the permanency of the Cahokia mission stands in counterpoint to all other French missions and churches in the Illinois Country. At the French villages of St. Philippe, Prairie du Rocher, Chartres, and Kaskaskia, the Jesuit churches disintegrated, were moved, rebuilt, were occupied by farm animals, stood roofless, and became barracks for British soldiers and then Virginian (American) despots. Even the 1735 satellite mission established by the Seminarians at the River L’Abbe, headed by Father Mercier, was abandoned in 1752 as the Cahokia Indians fled south, away from Fox attacks. The stability of the Holy Family Mission at Cahokia can perhaps be explained by the work of the Seminarians, who stayed put, preferring to minister to the incoming French settlers who

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<sup>61</sup> Op. Cit., 257.

<sup>62</sup>Schlarman, *From Quebec to New Orleans*, p. 141.

began to arrive and till land around the mission sites. In 1702, the General of the Jesuits, in concert with the French monarchy and a host of consulting bishops, directed the Jesuits at the Cahokia Mission to give up their claim to the area in favor of the Seminarians. Father Pinet then left and crossed the Mississippi River to the re-located Kaskaskia Mission, joining two other Jesuit priests in their work there.<sup>63</sup> The Seminarians stayed on. By the 1720's, "Holy Family Mission/Parish became permanently associated with the Cahokia, who had become the dominant Native population there."<sup>64</sup> The settling of the Cahokia area can provide a case study that emphasizes how incoming peoples – the twin groups of Jesuits and Seminarians – interacted with both indigenous peoples (Cahokia, Tamaroa, and Peoria tribes) and a distinct environment. Just as archaeologists have stressed differences in frontier outposts that reflect proximities to Indian nations, availability of certain game and plants for specific diets, and access to rivers, the same analysis holds true for French settlements occurring across only sixty miles.<sup>65</sup>

Cahokia rapidly became a fur trading entrepot, advantaged by its location near the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri (and across from the future village of St. Louis). Patterns of land and resource use began to develop in the area: farming (although limited), fur trading, and the commercial services necessary to sustain a fluctuating population of river traders, voyageurs for hire, and the permanent mission populations. The furs passing through Cahokia in the early decades were not primarily beaver. The beaver of the Illinois country

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<sup>63</sup> Dan Hechenberger, "The Cahokia Tribe," in *M'Skutewe Awandiangi* Vol. 3, p. 1

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> For a good discussion of outpost distinctions revealed by archaeological analysis, see Dean L. Anderson, "Variability in Trade at Eighteenth-Century French Outposts," in John A. Walthall, *French Colonial Archaeology: The Illinois Country and the Western Great Lakes* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Robert Mazrim, "Now Quite Out of Society," *Archaeology and Frontier Illinois: Essays and Excavation Reports by Robert Mazrim* (Illinois Transportation Archaeological Research Program, 2002); see also Henry M. Majors, *Fort Ouiatanon and the Wabash River 1700-1824* (1970), unpublished manuscript, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

were very light, “almost a straw color,” with thin fur of little value. However, other peltries were shipped down the Mississippi to New Orleans “in great quantities.” By 1720, officials of the Company of the Indies in Illinois were even planning to ship large numbers of buffalo skins from the Wabash country.<sup>66</sup> Although some historians have posited that arriving French settlers to Cahokia inaugurated a “thriving agriculture,” there are suggestions that this was not the case.<sup>67</sup> On a 1735 map prepared by Father Superieur Jean-Baptiste Mercier, the Cahokia lands reveal longlot holdings, a “cluster of arable fields.”<sup>68</sup> Two points about this map and census interpretation are important, not only for establishing comparisons between Cahokia and the other French settlements, but because they highlight the importance of a specific environment in determining the kind of community which would develop, in this case, a transportation-trade nucleus with the largest, most enduring Catholic mission settlement in the Illinois Country to anchor it.

First, several historians have drawn a distinction between the activities of Jesuits and the activities of the Seminarians. Joseph Schlarman’s 1929 study of New France asserts that the missionaries were characterized by a “restless craving” for exploration, that they too often felt “the lure of the forest.” Footnote evidence for this, however, reveals remarks leveled at Seminarians, by Seminarian authorities, in the very earliest years at Cahokia. Seminarian authorities thought that several of the original missionaries, including St. Cosme and Davion, “loved too much to roam about and make new discoveries.”<sup>69</sup> The Seminarians may have been directed, therefore, to remain more centralized and to develop their property holdings.

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<sup>66</sup> N.M. Miller Surrey, “The Fur Trade of Louisiana,” in *The Commerce*, p. 345.

<sup>67</sup> Carl J. Ekberg, for instance, believes that the presence of seven French inhabitants on a 1723 census of Cahokia reveals that “Cahokia was in the process of becoming an agricultural community” (Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 58.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 142; footnote references the Taschereau MS, *Mission du Seminaire de Quebec chez les Tamarois*, in the Quebec Seminary Archives.

Carl Ekberg points out that the Jesuits demonstrated a much stronger “proselytizing ambition.”<sup>70</sup> Neither historian is weighing the importance of the Jesuits’ language facility and consequent comfort level among outlying Indian villages. For whatever reasons, however, the Seminarians began assiduously to develop their vast holdings at Cahokia; in the early 1720’s, they held a tract of land encompassing a full sixteen square leagues (approximately 100 square miles)! In 1722, French commanders in the Illinois Country, Broisbriant and des Ursins, representing the Company of the Indies, granted the Seminarians this extensive tract. The Seminarian concession was “unique in the Illinois Country,” and held within it all forms of French settlement, including military garrison, mission house, both French village and Indian (Cahokia-Tamaroa) village, and agricultural lands.<sup>71</sup> While an exceptionally large concession incorporating a variety of land features, Cahokia shares in common with St. Philippe and Prairie du Rocher the extension of its lands up to the top of the bluffs. St. Philippe, in fact, was a tiny, marshy settlement on a concession described as “one league river frontage and two leagues inland.” The present-day bluff village of Renault is still located on the southeast corner of the original Renault tract that contained St. Philippe.<sup>72</sup> However, all the farmed longlots ended at the bluffs, a consistent practice in the St., Lawrence River Valley, the Illinois Country, and in the lower Mississippi Valley above New Orleans: longlots were run from one specific land formation to another.<sup>73</sup> The giant limestone bluffs, topped with scrub trees in summit profusion, provided a natural demarcation. From the sheltering rock walls of the bluffline on Mercier’s map, the Cahokia

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<sup>70</sup> Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 55.

<sup>71</sup> Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 58.

<sup>72</sup> Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 207.

<sup>73</sup> This practice of extending longlots from geographical features has its origins in medieval France, described by Marc Bloch in *Les Caracteres Origineux de l’histoire Rurale de France* and further discussed in Carl Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 9.



concession drifted toward the Mississippi River across approximately fifty arpents. It did so in a series of bogs, marshes, and saturated wetlands. On the Mercier map, goose-egg shaped droplets dot the land, identified as “marais” (swamp). This reality is all too evident in the distribution of Cahokian commonlands, and, along with the Seminarian dedication to permanency, must be accounted a factor in Cahokia’s small population and lesser agricultural status. Seminarian missionaries, frustrated by the lack of French settlers and subsequent agricultural development, often frustrated as well by their lack of success in converting Indians, especially the proud and recalcitrant Peoria, began to think about mills.

At French settlements such as Chartres, Prairie du Rocher, and St. Genevieve (in Missouri), the commons were apportioned in large tracts. Le Grande Champ at St. Genevieve, in fact, is such an extensive, alluvial spread that it may still be viewed today from the high land above it. Cahokia’s commons were scattered in bits and pieces. Carl Ekberg identifies several of these in his study of French farming practices in the Illinois Country:

..in a low-lying area of less fertile land across the Riviere du Pont, lay one area of the Cahokia commons. This was called “Prairie des Buttes,” prairie of the bluffs, for it lay between the Mississippi and the bluffline. Other parts of the commons lay in other low-lying areas along the Mississippi: one was located on the Isle de la St. Famille, which was separated from the left riverbank by a slough; another was located between Cahokia Creek and the Mississippi.<sup>74</sup>

The French mission and Indian villages at Cahokia lay in an area fingered with lakes, small streams, tributaries, and inlets to the Mississippi. The Prairie du Pont river or creek was especially fluctuant. As described in an early history of southern Illinois, it “...rises just a couple of miles west of Belleville, flows west through the bluffs and makes its way across the alluvial plain, occupying a new bed every few years.”<sup>75</sup> The presence of so many small

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<sup>74</sup> Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 60.

<sup>75</sup> George Washington Smith, *A History of Southern Illinois: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People, and its Principal Interests* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1912), p. 535.

feeder streams would likely result in the ecological phenomenon known as “backflooding.” When the great rivers were at flood stage, overflow waters would pour into the tributaries, over the banks, and into the already sodden earth. When Yankee settlers first encountered the French living around the Detroit area, they coined the term “Muskrat Frenchmen,” for these people who “lived almost in the water of [their] favorite stream or marsh.”<sup>76</sup> Such a sense of the French would cling to them, reinforced by settlement patterns in watery areas like Cahokia.<sup>77</sup> Agriculture was not developing at the rate it was farther down the French coast, especially at Kaskaskia, located “on an alluvial plain that ultimately proved to be superb for cereal-grain production.”<sup>78</sup> The tiny settlement of St. Philippe, about seven miles north of Fort Chartres, was also described as marshy or swampy; it is sometimes referred to as “St. Philippe de Grand Marais.”<sup>79</sup> Some habitants at St. Philippe did negotiate wheat-supplying contracts; the La Croix family entered into what has been called a “small agribusiness” of wheat production and supply in the 1730’s, as did the original owner of the St. Philippe concession, Philippe Renault. These records seem somewhat exceptional, however, in St. Philippe’s history.<sup>80</sup> La Croix and Renault very likely owned the largest number of arpents at St. Philippe. In 1765, the arriving British commander Thomas Stirling would describe St. Philippe as having “some good farms.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collection*, Vol. 1 (Lansing: W.S. George & Co., 1877), p. 352.

<sup>77</sup> For a good discussion of the wet ground in the Cahokia Mounds area during the pre and proto-historic eras, see Rinita A. Dalan et al, *Envisioning Cahokia: A Landscape Perspective* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), especially pp. 81-84. The authors note that even the “General Land Office notes of 1810 describe the land in the vicinity of the mound groups... (prairie and Mississippi Bottom) as “wet.”

<sup>78</sup> Carl Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 172; see also Ekberg on visitors’ comments about the fine quality of wheat grown at Kaskaskia in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, p. 191.

<sup>79</sup> See Margaret Kimball Brown and Lawrie Cena Dean, *The Village of Chartres in Colonial Illinois 1720 – 1765* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, Inc., 1977), Document K-118 (H768), p. 463.

<sup>80</sup> Carl Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 217-218.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Stirling, “Stirling’s Personal Journal of the Expedition: General Accounts of British Attempts to Occupy the Illinois Country,” in Robert G. Carroon, ed., *Broadswords & Bayonets* (Illinois: The Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Illinois, 1984), p. 91.

Given the greater agricultural success of the more southern French settlements – Prairie du Rocher, Kaskaskia, and St. Genevieve across the river, Cahokia and St. Philippe were noteworthy as two settlements of greater commercial and trade activity. Both maize and wheat suffer in wet soils where the roots easily rot. The aboriginal transition to maize and tobacco-growing has been documented archaeologically as occurring up on the high ground above the American Bottom floodplain.<sup>82</sup> The import of ground saturation for Cahokia lies in its failure to attract French settlers, and therefore, its growth as a trade rather than agricultural center. As with all the French settlements, there were good years for wheat and maize and bad, but French settlers were slow to arrive in Cahokia, despite a conventional interpretation that the Seminarians developed their large holdings and ministered “chiefly to the French settlers.”<sup>83</sup> In the first thirty years of settlement, the number of French settlers never approached that at Kaskaskia, sixty miles to the south. In 1700, there were only seven French inhabitants at Cahokia. The 1732 census does not include the numbers of French inhabitants there but does list African slaves and domestic animals, both in such small numbers as to imply little growth in French settlement. In 1732, Kaskaskia had 102 slaves, St. Anne de Fort Chartres, 37, St. Philippe, 22, and Cahokia, 4.<sup>84</sup> This is clear evidence of a lack of agricultural growth. In 1731, the priest at the Seminarian Cahokia Mission, Father (Monsignor) Mercier, began to purchase land from the Indians in an effort to lure French immigrants down to the Illinois Country.<sup>85</sup> The Seminarians were in contact with the

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<sup>82</sup> See discussion of maize-growing on the uplands after 1000 A.D. in Chapter One.

<sup>83</sup> Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 148.

<sup>84</sup> Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 206. See also Carl J. Ekberg’s discussion of this census in *French Roots*, p. 58.

<sup>85</sup> John A. Walthall and Elizabeth D. Benchley, *The River L’Abbe Mission: A French Colonial Church for the Cahokia Illini at Monk’s Mound* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, 1987), p. 1; see also Father Mercier’s letter, April 12, 1735, to the Quebec Seminary, printed in its entirety in Schlarman, *From Quebec*, pp. 280-284. This letter is important in that it specifically describes land and climate constraints at the Cahokia mission, including annual flux and flow of water (creating problems in the building of mills), drainage of water, location of arable land, and location of bluff forests of white walnut whose wood “is very clear.” This

Cahokia and Tamaroa tribes yet still felt themselves to be isolated. Father Mercier exclaims wistfully, “If only twenty families would come down from Canada...more than two hundred habitants could be wonderfully placed.” This view was perhaps colored by an exceptional wheat harvest that year, 1732; Mercier described it as “3500 bundles of the best wheat in the world.”<sup>86</sup> By 1743, however, he was complaining to Vaudreuil, Governor of Louisiana, “We do not grind enough grain to pay the miller...”<sup>87</sup>

Father Mercier was full of plans for how the Cahokia Mission could be developed, especially in the building of mills. The granting of land in French North America carried an implicit responsibility for development, for the improvements which would lure other settlers and foster agriculture and industries that would in time repay the crown. Such responsibilities were also felt by priests, who were “nothing more than the undertakers of the settlement of a territory.”<sup>88</sup> The 1735 letter by Fathers Mercier and Courier is interesting because their development ideas clearly focus on discussions of water and mills. The letter contains at least ten specific references to mills, the placing of mills, the problems of high and low water, the seasonal droughts:

The *rivier du pont* [river of the bridge] also issues from a swamp and flows quite gently into the mississippi, almost directly across from the former village of the Kaskaskias. The mississippi never backwaters it to such an extent that it would not turn a mill a short distance above the place where a bridge is indicated. It is the cost of the dam and the lack of water in the long droughts which have kept us from building one there rather than in the hills.<sup>89</sup>

Father Mercier also compares the efforts of the Seminarians in building mills to the efforts of the Jesuits sixty miles to the south, in Kaskaskia. Priests at both establishments obviously

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walnut was used for the construction of the new mission house (see Father Mercier letter of May 25, 1732, in Schlarman, p. 288). The fact that it was timber hauled down from the bluffs suggests depletion of the wood reserves on the floodplain of the Cahokia grant, despite a low French settler population. It may reflect the need for fuel of the Cahokia-Tamaroa Indians whose village was nearby on the grant.

<sup>86</sup> Mercier letter, August 3, 1732, cited in Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 290.

<sup>87</sup> Mercier letter, April 20, 1743, cited in Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 284.

<sup>88</sup> Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 280.

<sup>89</sup> Fathers Mercier and Courier, letter of April 12, 1735, cited in Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 280.

knew what the others were doing. Kaskaskia, however, was shipping rich wheat harvests to New Orleans as the principal supplier in annual convoys beginning in the 1720's.<sup>90</sup> By 1732, Kaskaskia had fourteen gristmills whereas St. Philippe had only two.<sup>91</sup> Also at Kaskaskia, the Kaskaskian Indians had moved two leagues north of the settlement, relocated by the incoming French commander Broisbriant in 1721. They lived on a prairie which became named for them.<sup>92</sup> Unless Kaskaskian Indians journeyed to French Kaskaskia, they were out of sight of the French residents. At Cahokia, the village of the Tamaroa was located near to both the Mission of the Holy Family (on the Isle de la Famille in the Mississippi) and the Mississippi shore; Father Mercier's 1735 letter clearly states this adjacency. In simple terms, what this meant for the French living near the mission on the Cahokia grant was daily sight of Indians. The Peoria tribe to the north frequently came to stay with the Cahokia and Tamaroa Indians; they especially did so under pressure from Fox raids.<sup>93</sup> Historians have speculated that as the French priests acquired more land from the Illinois tribes near Cahokia, Indians reacted with hostility. The so-called Cahokia "revolt" is credited to Cahokian dissatisfaction with incursions of the French onto their hunting and agricultural grounds. This explanation – that white settlement invaded and disturbed hunting territories of Indians – so often appears in historical interpretations that it must be both questioned and expanded.

On the Cahokia grant that included much watery ground and a series of named marshes, it is likely as well that the amount of prairie in these bottomlands was as high as fifty per

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<sup>90</sup> See "The Trade of the Illinois Country" in N.M. Miller Surrey, *The Commerce of Louisiana During the French Regime: 1699-1763* (1916), p. 288.

<sup>91</sup> Carl Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 266.

<sup>92</sup> Palm, *Jesuit Missions*, p. 49; Natalia Maree Belting, *Kaskaskia Under the French Regime* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1975), p. 58.

<sup>93</sup> Dan Hechenberger, "The Peoria Tribe," in *M'Skutewe Awandiangwi* 1(3), 1998, p. 1; see also the August 3, 1732 letter from Father Mercier, printed in Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 290.

cent.<sup>94</sup> The references to prairies in letters from Seminarians (as well as the named prairies, both small and large, occurring around Fort Chartres and the Village of Chartres), support this conclusion. Thick with indigenous grasses growing as high as a man's head, obscuring and obstructing riders on horses, filled with noxious insects and a humid, choking heat in high summer, these tallgrass prairies were not the home of myriad animal populations capable of providing a sustained protein base for Indian populations as high as 2000.<sup>95</sup>

Tallgrass prairies and wetlands attract small mammals and birds like rabbits, prairie chickens, squirrels, and mice, all of which were hunted and consumed by both Indians and French. The roving herds of deer and bison on the floodplain described by seventeenth century French rapidly disappeared as a consistent food source. From the time of the permanent French settlements, a major protein source for Indians and frequently, for French themselves, came from buffalo tenderloins, carried back to villages by Indians in massive packs after days of smoking and drying on the prairie uplands.<sup>96</sup> Pork became important as well, especially for the inhabitants of agricultural communities like the village of Chartres and Kaskaskia. Notarial records as early as 1724 detailing land and home sales and transfers for the village of Chartres mention hogs; in 1726 hams "of fifteen or sixteen pounds in weight" were listed as part of a selling price.<sup>97</sup>

Although the Illinois Indians living in "domiciled" villages were still going on summer and winter hunts, their more permanent occupation of lands would have accelerated environmental change. The abundant waterfowl described by Hennepin and St. Cosme in 1698 were sharing the Cahokia grant not only with Indian villages experiencing many

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<sup>94</sup> Personal communication, John White, Ecological Services, Urbana, Illinois, February, 2004.

<sup>95</sup> See Table 4, Illinois Indian locales: 1699-1700 in Joseph Zitomersky, *French Americans-Native Americans*, p. 203.

<sup>96</sup> See letter from Father Binneteau in 1699, cited in Edna Kenton, *The Jesuit Relations*, p. 326-327.

<sup>97</sup> Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, Doc. K-25 (H173), p. 359.

changes of population but with a large French mission complex; the Seminarians were involved with land-clearing, millbuilding, and orchard-planting. Gradually across thirty years, despite the lesser French population, the Cahokia grant become a peopled world. The impression of human activity at Cahokia is strong, conveyed by a sense of arrival, departure, of the coming and going of tribes and traders. Its location near the confluence area of Big Rivers attracted the down-river trade traffic. While there is little direct evidence of a severe decline in resident and migratory bird populations on the Cahokia grant, archaeologists who have excavated an eighteenth century French colonial site called the Cahokia Wedge site have found a lacunae in faunal remains: very low numbers of waterfowl. “Although ducks, shorebirds, and marsh birds would have been especially abundant along the floodplain during their spring and fall migration, these species are underrepresented at the Cahokia Wedge site.”<sup>98</sup> Additional findings from this site indicate low numbers of domestic animals in comparison with other French sites in the Illinois Country; however, trumpeter swan wing bones were represented, as well as large blue catfish.<sup>99</sup> The lead archaeologist, Terrance J. Martin, speculates that the Cahokia French consumption pattern was more similar to Indian consumption patterns – a “selective procure[ment] of local resources on a seasonal basis in a pattern resembling Native American adaptation.”<sup>100</sup> Questions can be raised about what this may have meant – did the French settlers simply prefer certain sources of protein, or was the waterfowl population being affected by the mobility and trade culture around Cahokia?

The Cahokia Indians, like the Peoria to the north, had used bird populations in ritualistic and adornment practices. The trumpeter swan, for instance, becomes flightless during the

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<sup>98</sup> Terrance J. Martin, “Animal Remains From the Cahokia Wedge Site,” in Bonnie L. Gums, *Archaeology at French Colonial Cahokia* (Springfield: Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, 1988), p. 230.

<sup>99</sup> Terrance J. Martin, “Animal Remains,” p. 233.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

molting season over the summer.<sup>101</sup> At this time, they can be captured without need of weapons. Swansdown and swanskin, cut from a mature trumpeter swan, would furnish a delicately warm clothing layer and glorious feathers. The same can be inferred for an extinct species, the Carolina paroquet (parakeet), whose long, brilliant green feathers were seen sailing among and drooping from river trees in the American Bottom. Deliette's description of the calumet he saw among the Peoria in 1678 is specific for the incorporation of feathers: "...this calumet is made in the form of a hatchet...it has a very long handle, from which are hung several feathers painted red, yellow, and black, brought together in the form of a fan. This handle is moreover covered with the skins of ducks' necks."<sup>102</sup> Additional descriptions of the calumet of the Illinois Indians are found in the Jesuit Relations: "It is ornamented with the heads and necks of various birds, whose plumage is very beautiful. To these they also add large feathers – red, green, and other colors – wherewith the whole is adorned. They have a great regard for it...."<sup>103</sup> In addition to the role of birds, birdskins, and bird spirits in raiding and cosmology, birds were important in Indian adornment. The few representations of Illinois Indians drawn from the eighteenth century show them brilliantly adorned with feathers. The men have rippling sprays of upright feathers on their (roached) hair. Illinois men wore a long, pendant hair ornament suspended from the crown of the head with a woven thong. A photograph of such an ornament, collected before 1845, shows "wrapped quillwork as well as hair and feather pendants."<sup>104</sup> In a rare 1735 painting of Illinois Indians taken to New Orleans, the chief is shown standing with his hand on the head of a crane.<sup>105</sup> Later

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<sup>101</sup> H. David Bolen, *The Birds of Illinois*, p. 20.

<sup>102</sup> Pierre Deliette, "De Gannes Memoir," p. 391.

<sup>103</sup> *Jesuit Relations*, Vol. 59, p. 131, cited in Thorne Deuel, *American Indian*, p. 48, n.

<sup>104</sup> See photograph and caption in Callender, "Illinois," in *The Handbook*, p. 675.

<sup>105</sup> See reproduction of this painting in Callender, "Illinois," in *The Handbook*, p. 677.



portraits of Peoria men executed by George Catlin in the 1830's also reveal masses of feathers used in original ways, although these Peoria were living in Kansas at the time.<sup>106</sup>

By the 1730's, the Cahokia grant was almost certainly a more altered habitat. Indians living adjacent to the French faced issues of deforestation (affecting both firewood availability and bird populations); availability of small game; and possible soil exhaustion on overworked and constantly-used Indian plots.<sup>107</sup> Accounts of bird populations on the Mississippi River below Cahokia continued, however. In 1751 the Frenchman Bossu wrote a description of the St. Francis River in present-day Arkansas. Bossu was an officer in the party ascending the Mississippi, led by the incoming Commander Macarty. He observed the (undisturbed ) bird populations near the mouth of the St. Francis, an unsettled area: "The game is so plentiful...that when we stopped for the night on its shores [the St. Francis], it was impossible to sleep, because of the multitude of swans, cranes, geese, bustards, and ducks...."<sup>108</sup> In 1765 the British commander Thomas Stirling described the Illinois Country as containing "...millions of waterfowl...."<sup>109</sup> Stirling listed waterfowl species and even described the adornment of the calumet with waterfowl feathers. However, Stirling's destination was Fort Chartres, and there is little direct evidence that he journeyed on up to Cahokia, an additional forty miles. His journal account of Cahokia contains virtually no description, merely enumerated information.<sup>110</sup> In general, except for strong impressions of

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<sup>106</sup> Several of George Catlin's paintings of the Peoria appear in Callender, "Illinois," in *The Handbook*, p. 679.

<sup>107</sup> Archaeologists posit that the abandonment in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of the American Bottom by the Middle-Mississippian agrarian culture was likely due to this very factor: soil exhaustion on constantly-worked plots, expressed as "localized environmental degradation caused by an overexploitation of the resources." For a discussion of this point, see Thomas E. Emerson and James A. Brown, "The Late Prehistory and Protohistory of Illinois," in *Calumet & Fleur-de-Lys*, p. 97.

<sup>108</sup> Bossu, cited in Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 293.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas Stirling, in Carroon, *Broadswords & Bayonets*, p. 94.

<sup>110</sup> Stirling writes only five short sentences about Cahokia, mentioning that "It contains betwixt sixty and seventy houses and has a Church." He furnishes no description of the land or habitat. See Thomas Stirling in Carroon, *Broadswords & Bayonets*, p. 90.

Kaskaskia as a resplendent agricultural community, observers tended to gloss the entire Illinois Country as one environment.

It is not possible to compare the numbers of waterfowl observed in the 1790's with the original bird populations in the Big Rivers area at the time the French arrived. Such values must be taken from descriptions such as this one by Father Marest in 1712: "We find here, especially, multitudes of swans, cranes, bustards [geese] and ducks; the wild oats, which grow freely on the plains, fatten them to such a degree that they very often die, their own fat suffocating them. Turkeys are likewise found here in abundance...."<sup>111</sup> In November of 1750, Father Vivier described the environment along the Mississippi River well below Kaskaskia, specifically mentioning "a prodigious number of ducks...of bustards, geese, swans, snipe." When he writes of the French settlements, perhaps specifically Kaskaskia where he was working, he mentions only the abundant game, "ox" and "deer." He does not write of birds. Yet in another letter he does mention waterfowl. The pattern is tentative.<sup>112</sup>

However, changes in the natural habitat of the Cahokia, changes that may have affected waterfowl populations, comprise only one possible factor in events leading to the Cahokia revolt of the early 1730's. The Cahokia and Peoria Indians were also proving difficult spiritual subjects. There is evidence from the letters of Father Mercier in 1732 that successful conversion of the Cahokia and especially, the Peoria, was eluding priests. The Peoria, often described as "arch-traditional," in fact were perceived as impediments to the conversion of

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<sup>111</sup> Father Marest letter of 1712, in Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor, *The Jesuit Relations*, Vol. 66.

<sup>112</sup> Letter from Father Vivier, November 17, 1750, in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, Vol. 69, p. 209 (for lower Mississippi); see p. 219 for French settlements in the Illinois Country. Also see William Cronon on perceptions left by Europeans and on ways to estimate or reconstruct animal and bird populations, in *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), pp. 6-8. Cronon discusses "...those awkward situations in which an ecological change which undoubtedly must have been occurring in the colonial period has left little or no historical evidence at all."

the more tractable Cahokia.<sup>113</sup> By the early 1730's, the relations between the French settling around the Cahokia mission and the Cahokia and Peoria Indians worsened. The dynamic of population must be accorded a role in escalating tensions. An important study by Joseph Zitomersky focusing on the population geography of the Illinois Indians stresses "patterns of mutually supportive relationships that existed between Indian and colonial groups."<sup>114</sup> Zitomersky believes that Indians had a state-sanctioned role as food suppliers. "Our own work suggests that in the Illinois country... the food producers were often the Illinois Indians themselves, whose productivity may have increased through the mills and draft animals which the French introduced into their settlements...."<sup>115</sup> The ratio of Illinois Indians living on the Cahokia grant to the actual numbers of French creates questions about that food supplier role. Conventional interpretations stressing Indian hostility over invasion of traditional life ways and subsistence patterns overlook hostility created by inadequate and vacillating opportunities for trade. Where there are high and growing numbers of incoming colonists in a frontier region, the role of Indians as initial food suppliers is important. When the number of inhabitants is small enough to rapidly develop a self-sustaining economic world, as on the Cahokia grant, the shift in relations of power and dependence between colonists and Indians is ominous. The irritation the Cahokia felt when French pigs and cattle roamed into their fields was perhaps exacerbated by the reality that this livestock was owned by only eleven Frenchmen. In 1732, the estimated village population for the Cahokia Indians was 1480.<sup>116</sup> Although there would have been some French soldiers, French voyageurs and

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<sup>113</sup> See letter of Father Mercier to M. Lyon of Quebec Seminary, August 3, 1732, printed in Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 290. Mercier exclaims, "If only the Peoria were away from here! – they will leave this fall – we could have some hopes of doing something with several Kahos [Cahokia Indians]."

<sup>114</sup> Joseph Zitomersky, *French Americans-Native Americans*, p. 17.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>116</sup> See Table 29, Illinois Indian estimated village populations, in Zitomersky, *French-Americans-Native Americans*, p. 321.

traders, and other Europeans at the Cahokia settlement from time to time, the difference between French and Indian population on this grant is striking. No other Illinois tribes supported the Cahokia in their so-called “revolt.” The explanation for this is not political but demographic and economic. Other Illinois tribes had too much to lose. In the Kaskaskian village, sixty miles to the south, Indians produced maize and wheat and had a thriving French population downriver to sell it to; because of the garrison of soldiers at Fort Chartres, they also furnished game for the troops. Kaskaskian chiefs even journeyed up to Cahokia to try to restore order and security between the French and the Cahokia.<sup>117</sup>

In May of 1733, resident priests and several inhabitants of the French village “fled at night” after a warning that the Cahokia might rise up and massacre them.<sup>118</sup> Such fears had been exacerbated by the 1729 Natchez Revolt on the lower Mississippi. In the environs of Fort Rosalie, the Natchez Indians laid careful plans to entrap French settlers. Using what one historian has called “a familiar pattern of frontier exchange,” the Natchez welcomed French visitors with tribute and promises of food and furs. They then massacred “145 men, 36 women, and 56 children, and captured nearly 300 Negro slaves in addition to some 50 white women and children.”<sup>119</sup> The story of the Natchez Revolt has particular parallels with the French Illinois settlement history in Cahokia. Like the declining numbers of the Illinois Indians to the north, the Natchez had been decimated by contagious diseases and compressed by French land grants. From initial population estimates of perhaps 3500 before the advent of the French, the Natchez numbered barely half that, scattered among five villages.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Mary Borgias Palm, *The Jesuit Missions*, p. 71.

<sup>118</sup> Walthall and Benchley, *The River L'Abbe Mission*, p. 8.

<sup>119</sup> Daniel H. Usner, Jr. *Indians, Settlers, & Slaves*, p. 72; see the account of the massacre in the letter from Father le Petit, Missionary, to Father d'Avaugour, Procurator of the Missions in North America, July, 1730, in *The Indians*, ed. by Edna Kenton, pp. 439-440.

<sup>120</sup> Daniel H. Usner, Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, p. 66.

Father Le Petit reported in 1730 that “In former times the Nation of the Natchez was very large. It counted sixty villages and eight hundred suns or Princes; now it is reduced to six little Villages and eleven Suns.”<sup>121</sup> Also like the Natchez, the Illinois used livestock and food-theft raids against white settlers as a prime weapon. In 1722, in a single week, the Natchez “killed eleven cattle...and stole three horses, sixteen pigs, six quarts of flour, fifty quarts of corn, fifty quarts of potatoes, and forty quarts of beans.”<sup>122</sup> The French in Illinois had heard all about the Natchez revolt and the bloody massacre of innocent French men, women and children. The restiveness of the Cahokia and their depredations against livestock seemed harbingers of disaster. In 1733, the commandant at Fort Chartres, St. Ange, wrote to France to request additional troops, mentioning “the wrong which they [the Cahokia] have done the *inhabitants* [settlers] by killing their animals.”<sup>123</sup> In 1732, a letter from Father Mercier refers to the “trouble we have had with them [the Cahokia].”<sup>124</sup> As a result of the (bloodless) Cahokia Revolt in the early 1730’s, the French insisted on the tribe removing from the French mission area. The Cahokia eventually settled near the Cahokia mounds, specifically the great terraced Monks Mound, nine miles away from the French. There the River L’Abbe mission was established for their benefit, and the French assisted the Cahokia in the plowing of fresh fields for their corn.<sup>125</sup> In addition, the new Commander D’Artaguiette posted French soldiers to the small French fort at Cahokia and issued a punitive message to the Cahokia: they would receive no French presents until “they repair

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<sup>121</sup> Letter from Father Le Petit, in *The Indians*, ed. by Edna Kenton, p. 430.

<sup>122</sup> See documents in the Mississippi Provincial Archives, French Documents: “Narrative of the Hostilities Committed by the Natchez Against the Concession of St. Catherine, October 21, November 4, 1722,” cited in Usner, p. 67.

<sup>123</sup> St. Ange, cited in Walthall and Benchley, *The River L’Abbe Mission*, p. 9.

<sup>124</sup> Walthall and Benchley, *The River L’Abbe Mission*, p. 8.

<sup>125</sup> Walthall and Benchley, *The River L’Abbe Mission*, p. 10.

the wrongs which they have done.”<sup>126</sup> Estimated population figures for the Illinois Indian tribes between 1723 and 1733 reveal a dramatic drop in the population of the Cahokia village: from 1800 to 473. The sharp drop after 1732 can perhaps be explained by the relocation of some Cahokia to the River L’Abbe Mission; yet by comparison, the Kaskaskia in their village to the south fell only from 1000 to 930.<sup>127</sup>

While the Cahokia had been attacked repeatedly by the northern raiding Fox prior to the Fox defeat of 1730, the drop in population cannot be explained just through tribal warfare. Other theories advanced for population decline among the Illinois include monogamy introduced by Christianity, thus affecting the birth rate; epidemics; and the use made of Illinois Indians by the French who recruited them for military campaigns.<sup>128</sup> The Cahokia and Peoria had contributed large numbers of warriors to the French campaign against the Fox Indians in 1730. St. Ange, the French commander from Fort Chartres, appeared at the battle site – the Grand Prairie of north-central Illinois – with “one hundred French and four hundred Indians.”<sup>129</sup> In 1736, Indians from the Illinois Confederacy would march south under D’Artaguiette in an ill-fated expedition against the Chickasaw; and by the 1740’s, Illinois Indians were participating in French-directed raids against English settlements in the Ohio Valley.<sup>130</sup> Indian losses in these expeditions are not concretely known. In addressing the

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> See Table 29, Illinois Indian estimated village populations, in Zitomersky, p. 321.

<sup>128</sup> For an in-depth discussion of these factors, see Emily J. Blasingham, “The Depopulation of the Illinois Indians Part II,” *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1956, p. 386- 396.

<sup>129</sup> Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 215; for a detailed account of the slaughter of the Fox Indians on the Illinois Grand Prairie, see R. David Edmunds and Joseph L. Peyser, *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), especially, pp. 138-157 for careful reconstruction of the Fox-French battle on September 8-9, 1730.

<sup>130</sup> For the Chickasaw Wars, see the account of the orders to D’Artaguiette to “raise as many men as he could – soldiers, Canadians, French, and Illinois Indians,” in Schlarman, *From Quebec*, p. 273; see p. 277 for an account of the second campaign in 1739 in which Illinois Indians also fought; also see Blasingham, “The Depopulation,” p. 378-379. For raids against English settlements, see Blasingham, p. 379; for continuing French use of Illinois (“Mississippi”) Indians in raids against western Pennsylvania through the 1740’s, see *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania*, Vol. 5 (Harrisburg: Theo Penn and Co., 1855), p. 1-5.

radical drop in population of Indians living in traditional village sites on the Cahokia grant, Joseph Zitomersky suggests that the Cahokia eventually embraced out-migration to the north, back into the region of the Peoria on the Illinois River. The northward movement of the Cahokia Indians is actually accounted a factor in the relative stability of the Peoria tribe between 1733 and 1763.<sup>131</sup> After 1733, it was the French-Indian nuclei of Kaskaskia and Fort Chartres that attained importance militarily and agriculturally. Significantly, following the relocation of the Cahokia, the French colonial population at the mission settlement of Cahokia grew from 11 to 113 individuals.<sup>132</sup>

The history of the French Catholic efforts in the Illinois Country can be seen as a stream of small, localized and initial successes at long-lasting ministries like Cahokia and Kaskaskia and at on-the-spot encounters out in Indian villages. Such history is punctuated with thefts, depredations, regression of Indian converts, and the destruction of property. In 1752, for instance, in an interrogation of a Piankeshaw chief, Le Loup, Commander Macarty at Fort Chartres mentions the “stealing of the sacred vessels.” He writes, “Nor was he [the Miami who stole the vessels] the sole culprit since the booty had been distributed among several cabins of Illinois.”<sup>133</sup> By the early 1750’s, the French at Fort Chartres were desperately trying to keep the loyalty of the Illinois Indians as tensions escalated toward the Seven Years War. French-Indian interaction had shifted along a trajectory that had begun with the Indians’ proposed conversion to Catholicism and French ways, then to their peaceful co-habitation with the French on French concessions; then to their removal to independent villages two to six leagues distant from the French; and finally, to an international political struggle in which the Illinois tribes were traded with, used as intermittent food suppliers,

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<sup>131</sup> Joseph Zitomersky, *French-Americans-Native-Americans*, p. 353.

<sup>132</sup> Zitomersky, p. 351.

<sup>133</sup> Macarty to Vaudreuil, January 1752, in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 451.

gifted, proselytized, and eventually denied French aid relative to their loyalty. This record is clearest on the Cahokia grant. Yet such a narrative was also accompanied by changes in the ecosystem in which permanency of settlement created new ways of relating to land and habitat. In the village of Chartres, near the French bastion of Fort Chartres, a different tale unfolds between 1721 and 1752. Despite little documentary evidence available for the Illinois tribe living near the fort, the Mechigamea, the survival of the Chartres notarial records and archaeological data allow a reconstruction that may be contrasted with what happened on the Cahokia grant.



## **French Illinois: Patterns of Settlement: Chartres, 1720 - 1752**

One of the tragic mysteries of the French discovery of the Mississippi occurred when the canoe of Louis Joliet capsized on his return trip to Quebec in 1674. Joliet was likely “the most expert map maker” in New France at that time; he had visited France and may have spent time in cartographic workshops learning the use of the astrolabe. With his training and careful documentation, he and Father Marquette charted over one thousand miles of the Mississippi, and Joliet may well have noted in detail the area that would become the heart of the French settlements in southern Illinois. The loss of all of Joliet’s notes, journals, sketches, and maps in the Ottawa River capsizement may well be one of the accidents of history that changed history.<sup>1</sup> The locating of French Fort Chartres across from what would become the St. Louis area was not based on informed cartography, and the question remains: why did the French seeking to establish a garrison in the Illinois Country build the first (wooden) Fort Chartres exactly where they did?<sup>2</sup>

Today, high levees running parallel to the Mississippi have created a quarter mile swamp between the levee and the Illinois shore; in addition to dense vegetation and standing water, the levee itself obstructs any view of the floodplain from the river. But in the year 1718, when the French arrived to establish a fort midway between New Orleans and their Wisconsin outposts, the bottomland would have rolled back from the shore, as much as fifty percent open prairie. When Fort Chartres was constructed and fledgling agriculture begun

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<sup>1</sup> Betty L. Madden, *Art, Crafts, and Architecture in Early Illinois* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> In at least two other periods of the eighteenth century, French administrators argued for the location of Fort Chartres at Kaskaskia and at Cahokia. Both areas were seen as more advantageous due to river confluences. The Fort Chartres location lay on a level prairie between the Kaskaskia River, seventeen miles to the south, and the Big Rivers area to the north.

around it, the prairie-woodland mosaic was a fire-managed environment sculpted by Indians for centuries. Both prehistoric and historic Indians had identified specific soils with highest fertility. Contrary to sweeping European accounts, the earth here was not uniformly alluvial and rich. Indian farmers had carefully located patches of exceptionally fertile, black soil. The success of agriculture in the Chartres area led directly to a flourishing trade matrix and involved the Mechigamea tribe especially as provisioners. Located between the wheat-farming settlement of Kaskaskia to the south and the large, watery Cahokia grant to the north, the villages of Chartres, Prairie du Rocher, and St. Philippe drew Indians from all directions, including the Missouri lands across the Mississippi. French censuses give numbers for French inhabitants, African and Indian slaves, and for Illinois Indians living in these locations and in their own, sequestered villages; and all traditional histories of the area stress the small number of persons, the lack of burgeoning growth. But these French farmers and military and their slaves, both black and Indian (*panis*) were like islands in a river of human traffic whose power and flow never got into official censuses. The success story of agriculture here, usually credited to annual flooding of the Mississippi and to the French, must begin with human perception, selection, and management practices much older than those of the relocating French. The Chartres settlement fit into a continuum of human occupancy. The prairies of the bottomlands and the oak-hickory savanna on the upland till plain were both products of perhaps millennia of human burning practices. That careful management, in addition to a selective agriculture, had built upon and enlarged a tri-partite ecosystem of great richness. In virtually all European accounts, however, the fertility of the earth is accounted a product of “nature.”

Reconstructions and accounts describe the arrival of the Company of the Indies in 1718, the granting of concessions to habitants, military elite, and Jesuits, and the building of a small wooden fort surrounded by palings in 1720. A typical description appears in Mary Borgias Palm, *The Jesuit Missions of the Illinois Country*: “He [De Boisbriant] chose a site near the east bank of the Mississippi on flat alluvial bottom land, sixteen miles above Kaskaskia.”<sup>3</sup> Relying on company correspondence, letters to New France and the governor, and on impressions and journals kept by the French in the 1720’s, historians tell the story of Fort Chartres and the village of Chartres in the same way. Pierre DuGue Sieur de Boisbriant apparently sailed up the Mississippi from the mouth of the Kaskaskia, or traveled seventeen miles overland across wet, bottomland prairies before deciding on the spot.

Although the mission at Cahokia had been founded in 1699, until the 1718 arrival of “young” Boisbriant (he was 47 at the time), French Illinois had no fort, no government, and no official French presence other than the Seminarians and Jesuits.<sup>4</sup> Lieutenant De Boisbriant, described as a “young French Canadian officer... the King’s military representative in Louisiana,” reached the Kaskaskia mission in December, 1718, where he stayed for eighteen months.<sup>5</sup> De Boisbriant was to find and select a site for a French fort which would “command the movements up and down through the Mississippi Valley.”<sup>6</sup> It is clear that the building of Fort Chartres was conceived within the ambit of French empire in the North America. At least one historian has posited that the incessant raids of the Fox “as

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Borgias Palm, *The Jesuit Missions of the Illinois Country 1673 –1763* (Cleveland, Ohio: Saint Louis University, 1931), p. 50.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Ekberg points this out in *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> George W. Smith, *History of Illinois and Her People Vol. I* (Chicago: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1927), p. 118-119. See also Palm, *The Jesuit Missions*, p. 50-51. Boisbriant or Boisbriand was Commandant in the Illinois Country between 1719 – 1724. A French-Canadian from Montreal, he is described as “very popular with the Indians because he knew Indian languages and had an interest in their welfare.” See the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. II (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).

<sup>6</sup> George W. Smith, *History of Illinois*, p. 119.

far south as Fort Chartres” necessitated “keep[ing] a garrison there in order to protect Michigamea [an Indian village] which was one half league north of the fort.”<sup>7</sup> While this may have been an ancillary consideration, De Boisbriant established a firm military presence in upper Louisiana under the auspices of the Company of the Indies (also known as the Company of the West). He rowed up the Mississippi from New Orleans in a canoe flotilla. In his ten craft were packed “government officials, workingmen and a hundred troops.”<sup>8</sup> Arriving at the confluence of the Kaskaskia and the Mississippi Rivers, he found at the mission a conglomerate of French farmers, voyageurs, and both Kaskaskia and Mechigamea Indians. De Boisbriant set about reorganizing this settlement. He first built a fort, and then about the same time, he divided the Kaskaskia mission population into three groups, effectively purifying the French settlement. He relocated the Kaskaskia Indians north onto the upland plains above French Kaskaskia and the Mechigamea Indians north of the new fort. Peoples who had been living together in such proximity as to encourage Indian-French marriages and births were wholly separated; the Mechigamea village would lie eighteen miles away.

The same frontier population mosaic existed at Cahokia as at Kaskaskia: French missionaries, French farmers (although many fewer in number), travelers and traders – and at least three Indian tribes. The question of why De Boisbriant acted to divide the Kaskaskia and the Mechigamia from the French at Kaskaskia has never been answered clearly.

According to Father Charlevoix, who passed through Kaskaskia in 1721, “...it was thought

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<sup>7</sup> See discussion by Wayne C. Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country: Historic Tribes* (Springfield: Illinois State Museum, 1958), p. 41. Temple bases this point on documents in the Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion, III, 514.

<sup>8</sup> Palm, p. 49.

proper to form two villages of savages instead of one.”<sup>9</sup> A possible explanation may lie in the presence of the Jesuits, who quickly built a small house in the Mechigamea village. Perhaps Jesuit missionaries discerned the need to minister to tribes exclusively; if so, this suggests the tempering and shaping of Jesuit interaction with specific Illinois Indian tribes – a pattern evident in their translation and linguistic work. The long-term Jesuit preference for separating resident Indian tribes from French populations may also have been a factor.<sup>10</sup> One clear result of proximate Indian and French populations was the blending of French and Indian families. Limited records exist from the 1720’s for St. Anne’s Parish Church, founded to serve the population of the village of Chartres near the new fort. Between 1721 and 1726 – the only years records survive until 1743 – priests recorded marriages, baptisms, births, and the names of godparents on 29 occasions. In eight of these entries, an Indian woman is listed as the wife, mother, baptismal recipient, or godparent. Sometimes the women are identified as “an Illinois,” or “a free Padoucah;” in other cases, the word Indian is used, as in this poignant entry: “This same year 1721...was born a daughter of Brigitte, an Indian girl, known as “The Lame One”; the father is unknown.”<sup>11</sup> In three of the records, the actual name is recorded, as in the 1725 marriage of Jean Baptiste Lalande and Catherine 8abana Kie8e.<sup>12</sup> This evidence is for the village of Chartres after the French were separated from the Mechigamea and Kaskaskia. Despite distances, French soldiers (especially) were continuing to form long-lasting liaisons with Indian women. On the Cahokia grant, the Seminarians did not seek to divide the Tamaroa from the Cahokia, although priests were

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<sup>9</sup> Charlevoix, cited in Palm, p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> Carl J. Ekberg argues that De Boisbriant was concerned about the effect of brandy on the Kaskaskia Indians and wanted to remove them from the “ready supply of spiritous liquors” in French Kaskaskia. See Ekberg, *Francois Valle and his world: Upper Louisiana before Louis and Clark* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000) p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Kimball Brown and Lawrie Cena Dean, *The Village of Chartres in Colonial Illinois 1720 – 1765* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1977) Record D-2, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, Record D-9, p. 11.

relieved when the visiting Peoria returned north to the Illinois River. Perhaps the very low numbers of resident French did not produce the number of French-Indian liaisons – or the level of administrative concern – as happened farther south. The combined military, economic, and religious vision of France for colonies in the Illinois Country found its most synthetic expression south of Cahokia.

Soon after arriving in Kaskaskia, De Boisbriant set out to select a fort site. From descriptions of property bought and sold in the village of Chartres, growing up in the prairie next to the fort, certain features of the original terrain can be gleaned. There was a fairly substantial ash grove lying between the site of the fort and the Mississippi River; a small feeder inlet of the Mississippi which became the Coulee Deneau ran to the northwest, becoming a convenient separator of the French lands from those of the Mechigamea Indians; the bottomlands held a considerable number of red mulberry trees that soon proved excellent wood for the posts and palings used by the French to surround their homes and lots; and the land between French Kaskaskia and the newly-erected fort likely contained tallgrass prairie (meadows), marshes, and stands or groves of elm, hackberry, cottonwood, and sycamore.<sup>13</sup> The early Government Land Office (GLO) survey plats “consistently recorded pecan trees on the floodplain,” while back towards the bluffs on the denser soils were towering, old-growth walnut, oak and hickory, the important fuel and construction woods for both the Indians and

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<sup>13</sup> The evidence for the ash grove is taken from notarial records (property descriptions) in the Village of Chartres record collection in Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, for the years 1724-1765. This ash grove, noted at times as “the hill of the ash grove” or “the ash grove by the coulee” appears in property descriptions for the entire period of the French Regime, with the first mention occurring in 1726 (record K-23, H169, p. 357 in Brown and Dean); as late as 1761 property is inventoried as running from “the ash grove” (see record E-295, H424, p. 734 in Brown and Dean). The ash grove functioned as a western property marker, along with the Mississippi River and “the prairie of the Mechigamea Indians.” The significance of this ash grove being left untouched as a fuel source will be discussed in the next chapter.

French.<sup>14</sup> The marshes, occurring near the ponds closer to the bluffs, were filled with prairie cordgrass, also known as Slough Grass or Ripgut for its sharp-toothed leaves.<sup>15</sup> Because of the coarseness of cordgrass, forage animals will only eat it in the spring; however, in the floodplain near Fort Chartres, cordgrass would have furnished dense protective cover for waterfowl nests; it was also used for thatching and occasionally, for fuel. Waving in the humid air in pure, gray-green stands as high as ten feet, cordgrass would have defined the marshy areas. Clearer lands in the bottomland mosaic – the true prairies, the broad and coveted ‘meadows’ of the French – had almost certainly been managed by fire.

Yet the prairie was not uniform. Some of the land supported a dense shrub growth, such as hazel, which grew into coppices and thickets. Other areas had been burned clean of vegetation. Still others held the mixed grasses of the true prairie – big bluestem, Indian, and switchgrass, growing in clumps with deep root systems. Prairie plants such as the tough, rhizomatous leadplant bound the earth (it was leadplant which so resisted the early wooden plows of the white upland farmers and which was only effectively uprooted by the large, wheeled, iron plow<sup>16</sup>). The grasses dried out in late summer and were easy to burn. The smoky pall of smoldering, summer-dried grasses continued to be an observable phenomenon as late as 1803, when William Clark on his way to the Missouri River with the Corps of Discovery tried to take a reading with his sextant. He recorded the dimness of the air at the

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<sup>14</sup> Enumeration of trees in the American Bottom in the area around the first Fort Chartres is given in Edward B. Jelks, Carl J. Ekberg, and Terrance J. Martin, *Excavations at the Laurens Site: Probable Location of Fort de Chartres I* (Springfield: Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, 1989), p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid; see also discussion of cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata/Michauxiana*) on early Illinois river floodplains in Homer C. Sampson, “An Ecological Survey of the Prairie Vegetation of Illinois,” *Bulletin of the Illinois Laboratory of Natural History* 13(16), 1921, pp. 523-577; Lewis M. Turner, “Grassland in the Floodplain of Illinois Rivers,” *American Midland Naturalist* 15, 1934, pp. 770-780, especially p. 778.

<sup>16</sup> Gordon G. Whitney, *From Coastal Wilderness to Fruited Plain: A History of Environmental Change in Temperate North America from 1500 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 255. Whitney also points out that under the pressure of livestock grazing, prairie leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*) was one of the significant “decreasers” (see p. 258). French livestock would thus have assisted in the conversion of the tallgrass prairies.

mouth of the Kaskaskia River on November 28: “This morning being very smoky prevents my being as accurate as I would wish.”<sup>17</sup>

The site of the three future Fort Chartres was watery, but not as lake-filled and stream-crossed as the Cahokia grant. Flowing across the land selected by De Boisbriant in 1719 was the east-west stream that eventually became known as Prairie du Rocher Creek. Notarial records indicate the building of mills on or near this stream; and its course down from the bluffs – much more vigorous in 1720 than the deeply-eroded, sluggish trickle visible today – was likely the route that cattle initially followed up to the common grazing lands on the till plain. Whether De Boisbriant surveyed this area by water or by land in 1719, he would have been struck by the evenness of the earth on the site that eventually held the first fort. One imagines the soldiers in canoes and pirogues approaching the eastern shore of the Mississippi and noting a large island lying parallel to the banks, land likely detached from the original shore through a cut-off action of the river. Although there are no descriptions of this island, it was probably heavily wooded, as was the Isle of the Holy Family where the Seminarians settled at Cahokia; it would have offered protection for a landing.<sup>18</sup> De Boisbriant was likely able to gaze straight back from the river, through scattered, old-growth cottonwoods standing upon the floodplain. There he may have noted a level, recently-burned, and relatively vegetation-free meadow (prairie). Archaeological excavations of the Laurens Site, the first wooden fort built by the French, have located it approximately one half to one mile inland from the river shoreline near a small stream, perhaps the Coulee Deneau of later accounts.<sup>19</sup>

The Mississippi ran calmly here. On still, humid summer days, it stretched tight as a

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<sup>17</sup> William Clark, *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition August 30, 1803 – August 24, 1804* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 117.

<sup>18</sup> Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, preface, p. ix.

<sup>19</sup> See map of Laurens site and its relation to the third stone Fort Chartres, yet standing (rebuilt) on its original location, in Jelks et al, *Excavations at the Laurens Site*, p. 17.



drumskin to the western shore. In the distance De Boisbriant and his men would have noted the great rocky cliffs offering protection from surprise attack. Were there signs on that initial exploring mission that De Boisbriant's men would construct the first fort Chartres on Illinois Indian village sites?

Anecdotal, undocumented evidence presented in one early Illinois history suggests that the first fort was built on the site of an old fur warehouse or "blockhouse," the crude storage facility erected by the French merchant Crozat, who had held developmental rights to the Illinois Country prior to 1718, when his venture failed.<sup>20</sup> Observations made in 1927 noted "fine forest trees all along the ridge of alluvial land where the old fort stood," suggesting that the site was indeed on higher ground. Behind this ridge lay a "bayou of considerable width...extending parallel to the foot of the bluffs some two or three miles."<sup>21</sup> A footpath, likely an Indian trail, may have run along the base of the bluffs to the Kaskaskia settlement. This trail would expand through use to become the Chemin du Roi, rising to the top of the bluffs beyond Fort Chartres and running all the way on the uplands to Cahokia. Thus the site Boisbriant selected was already impacted and altered by human occupation. If he were drawn to build on ground revealing evidence of a prior structure, then it is also true that Crozat – if he did build a warehouse here – may have been drawn to land imprinted through many generations of human use. The significance of this for French agriculture around Fort Chartres is often overlooked. Equally important are the pacific nature and downriver trading history of the Mechigamea Indians.

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<sup>20</sup> See George W. Smith, *History of Illinois*, p. 120: "Tradition insists that there was a sort of warehouse or blockhouse at this place..." For the most detailed account of the Crozat venture and the subsequent involvement of the Scottish speculator John Law, see Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana, Vol Two: Years of Transition, 1715-1717*, transl. by Brian Pearce (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993 (1958), pp. 38-49. Giraud presents Crozat in a more favorable light, stressing his realism and business acumen about the necessity of support and fortification in the Louisiana colonies.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

## The Fort Chartres Prairies

One of the most strikingly consistent themes in all early accounts of the American Bottom, especially in the lands lying between Fort Chartres and Kaskaskia, is the fertility of the soil, also sometimes conflated with ease of working the soil. From Father Louis Hennepin in 1698 (who appended Joliet's observations of 1674 to his own account) to Timothy Flint in 1828, observers have written of the soils of the Illinois country often in near-hyperbolic terms. Hennepin (citing Joliet) felt that "Those who shall settle themselves there, need not be oblig'd, as we are here, to bestow Ten Years labour for felling down the Trees, and grubbing up the land...for the Ground is ready for the Plough in that fortunate Country...."<sup>22</sup> The French observer Le Page du Pratz at mid-eighteenth century said of the French at the Illinois, "...they grow wheat, rye, and other like grain, for the sowing of which you need only to turn the earth in the slightest manner...."<sup>23</sup> A remarkable observation also came from the British soldier Robert Kirk, ascending the Mississippi in 1765: "The Indians who are badly skilled in agriculture, will from one bushel which they sow, have an increase of at least one hundred."<sup>24</sup> In 1812, the observer Timothy Flint maintained that "Parts of this tract have been in cultivation with the exhausting crop of maize 100 years, without producing apparently the slightest exhaustion of the soil. No description will convey an adequate idea of

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<sup>22</sup> Louis Hennepin and R.G. Thwaites, editor, *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903) cited in John White, *Early Accounts*, p. 27. See also Louis Hennepin, *A Description of Louisiana*, transl. by John Gilmeary Shea (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), p. 150: "...we are convinced that the soil is capable of producing all kinds of fruits, herbs, and grain, and in greater abundance than the best lands of Europe."

<sup>23</sup> Le Page du Pratz, *A History of Louisiana, or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina: Containing a Description of the Countries that lye on both Sides of the River Mississippi: With An Account of the Settlements, Inhabitants, Soil, Climate, and Products*, Vol. II (London: T. Becket and P.A. De Hondt, 1763), p. 302.

<sup>24</sup> *Through So Many Dangers: The Memoirs and Adventures of Robert Kirk, Late of the Royal Highland Regiment*, edited by Ian McCulloch and Timothy Todish (New York: Purple Mountain Press, 2004), p. 104.

the power of vegetation....”<sup>25</sup> He further described the area as a “plain of exhaustless fertility.”<sup>26</sup> These early observers were no doubt thinking of the worn-out soils of Europe as they viewed the rich black alluvial floodplain along the Mississippi. So black was the earth, in fact, that Hennepin noted “it looks as if it had been already manur’d.”<sup>27</sup> Even historians writing about the Illinois colonies have accepted these views. For instance, the historian of French Louisiana, Marcel Giraud, wrote in 1958, “The soil, flat and fertile, could produce crops without preliminary clearance.”<sup>28</sup> Yet it is misleading to view the soils of all the French settlements as the same.

By 1723, only four years after the construction of Fort Chartres was begun, Diron D’Artaguiette made an inspection journey for the Company of the Indies. He writes of the French settlement area in general, “This soil is very rich and fertile. It has never yet failed to produce anything which is planted in it.”<sup>29</sup> In describing the relationships of dwellings in the Fort Chartres area, D’Artaguiette mentions a church outside the fort and “some dwellings a half league lower down on the same side as well as half a league above.”<sup>30</sup> The French farmers around the fort produced a more “diffuse” and strung-out settlement pattern than at Kaskaskia.<sup>31</sup> There may have been good reasons for that. By 1723, the land around the fort had been granted to French settlers and soldiers, homes had been constructed, and agriculture was underway. Notarial records from the Parish of St. Anne’s, adjacent to the fort, confirm this. By 1724, a house “situated about fifteen feet from the wake” [of the Mississippi River]

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<sup>25</sup> Timothy Flint, *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States, or the Mississippi Valley*, Vol. II (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1970 (1828)), p. 118.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Louis Hennepin and R.G. Thwaites, *A New Discovery*, cited in John White, *Early Accounts*, p. 24.

<sup>28</sup> Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, Vol. Two, p. 459.

<sup>29</sup> *Journal of Diron D’Artaguiette*, in Newton Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies* (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1961), p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> *Journal of Diron D’Artaguiette*, in Mereness, p. 69.

<sup>31</sup> This perception comes from Carl J. Ekberg’s analysis of land grants in *French Roots*, p. 79.

and about to be carried off, was inventoried for its heirs. Located on two arpents of land that began at the shore of the river, this property by 1724 already supported eight hogs, twenty hens and twenty chicks.<sup>32</sup> Home and lot sales in the vicinity of the fort for the years 1724-25 specify “uncultivated lands” and “the crop,” or payment of “seven hundred pounds of flour” as an asking price. One property in 1725 sold for “a canoe of cotton wood...and further four hundred pounds of flour.”<sup>33</sup> The earliest extant notarial document from the Fort Chartres area is possibly from 1718-1719. Extensively damaged, it appears to be an agreement for a tenant to rent out and farm a tract of land near a “Fort.” The lease period is for three years, and expected returns are such that the rent is listed as “thirty-six minots of wheat” and “forty minots of maize.”<sup>34</sup> While there is no direct account of agriculture in the prairie lands around Fort Chartres, De Boisbriant’s 1720 description of taking up the prairie at the Kaskaskia settlement is illuminating: “...clearing of the land is easy with Negroes. The prairie sod is taken up with a mattock, after which the land is easy to work. Several inhabitants plow it with one horse.”<sup>35</sup>

The historian of French agriculture in the American Bottom, Carl J. Ekberg, points out that the mattock [pinoche] could not have been that exceptionally easy to use, since some observers at Kaskaskia noted that only a “quarter league of fields are being cultivated.”<sup>36</sup> The slight evidence for early agricultural practices around Fort Chartres suggests the planting of wheat and maize occurred fairly rapidly. One key aspect is that despite the mention of cleared land, crops, flour, and domestic animals in the notarial records, it is unlikely there

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<sup>32</sup> See Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, Record K-6 (H145), p. 341-342.

<sup>33</sup> See records K-7 (H146), K-10 (H161) and K-11 (H163) in Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, p. 345-347.

<sup>34</sup> See record K-341, in Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, p. 806.

<sup>35</sup> Memorial of De Boisbriant, cited in Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 177.

<sup>36</sup> Monsieur Lallement, cited in Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 177.

were African slaves in the Chartres area until after the arrival of Philippe Renault in 1722-23. Renault, a Parisian banker who led a contingent of miners and the first Caribbean slaves to the Illinois country to establish lead-mining, received a land grant from De Boisbriant in 1723. This concession became the small, marshy settlement of St. Philippe.<sup>37</sup> Without slave labor to clear densely-rooted prairie lands around Fort Chartres, agriculture should have been fledgling for at least the first few years. In addition, a severe flood of the Mississippi River in 1722, exacerbated by a violent hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico, created much feverish sickness all along the river. In New Orleans, a “malignant fever carried off scores of inhabitants,” while to the north in the Illinois Country, the flood also caused “fever and sickness.”<sup>38</sup> Yet despite the absence of slaves in the initial years and this epidemic, the land around Fort Chartres was being improved: crops were in. One inference is that the French were plowing on previously farmed lands. The “strung out” nature of the French longlot farms suggests a discretionary selection of land that looked the easiest to put under cultivation. The mosaic of land around the fort, with some arpents fully plowed and producing intermixed with scrub land and woods, is reminiscent of protohistoric Indian farming practices. Productive maize fields lay scattered among abandoned, exhausted fields in a calculated rotation.<sup>39</sup>

French farming practices in the bottomlands offer clues to the early success of cereal-grain agriculture. The French plow, the heavy, wheeled charrue, was in use at Kaskaskia by

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<sup>37</sup> Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> J.H. Schlarman, *From Quebec to New Orleans: The Story of the French in America* (Belleville, Illinois: The Buechler Publishing Company, 1930), p. 209-210.

<sup>39</sup> The mosaic pattern of maize fields interspersed with “many abandoned fields” in alluvial canebrakes has been specifically documented in historical description for the southeastern Indians: Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Shawnee. See William I. Woods, “Maize Agriculture and the Late Prehistoric: A Characterization of Settlement Location Strategies,” in *Emergent Horticultural Economies of the Eastern Woodlands*, ed. William F. Keegan, Center for Archaeological Investigations, Occasional Paper No. 7 (Southern Illinois University, 1987), p.277.

1711, because Andrew Penicaut remarked on its use by the Kaskaskia Indians.<sup>40</sup> Even in the embryonic agricultural settlement growing up around Fort Chartres, the charrue and a few oxen would have been necessary. Such was the value of oxen on these earliest grants that a lease agreement lays out specific terms for recompense should an ox die by any means but “war or lightning.”<sup>41</sup> Descriptions of the French working their land emphasize the holdover of Old World peasant and French Canadian practices. One archaeologist specializing in French Kaskaskia has characterized French farming tools as “primitive.”<sup>42</sup> Both the charrue and the harrow were made of wood, the harrow an improvement over the first scratch plows, antlers or limbs from trees dragged over the ground upside down to break up the heavy surface clods. Harrows manufactured at the Illinois were likely made of seasoned hickory, the hardest wood. Historians and archaeologists have drawn connections between the French Illinois farming implements and those in use for centuries in early modern Europe.<sup>43</sup> Canadian historians have linked the charrue to the kind of soil found in northwest France, “deep and wet...requiring a heavy, wheeled plough that could ridge the fields for drainage and expose the soil for drying.”<sup>44</sup> The charrue had a fixed moldboard that created a ridged field – “a rise of one foot in a width of about nine, providing an element of drainage.”<sup>45</sup>

The natural ridging created by the charrue in the soil of Illinois bottomlands contributed to the success of French agriculture there, but it was not the only factor. Nor is the periodic flooding and enrichment of the fields by the Mississippi to answer for how quickly the area

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<sup>40</sup>J.H.Schlarman, *From Quebec to New Orleans*, p. 155.

<sup>41</sup> See record K-341 in Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, p. 807.

<sup>42</sup> Natalia Maree Belting, *Kaskaskia Under the French Regime* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1975), p. 53

<sup>43</sup> See illustrations of French farming tools in Belting, p. 55, drawn from Louis Liger, *La nouvelle maison rustique, ou, Économie generale de tous les biens de campagne : la maniere de les entretenir & de les multiplier* (A Paris: Chez la veuve Prudhomme..., 1736).

<sup>44</sup>Dale Miquelon, *New France: 1701–1744* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), p. 200, cited in R.F. Neill, *The End of National Policy: Very Long Run Economic Factors in Canadian Economic Development* (Prince Edward Island: University of Prince Edward Island, 2004).

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

around Fort Chartres yielded surplus crops – an explanation offered by virtually all observers. Archaeologists and geologists specializing in Indian subsistence have discussed Indian farming practices from the Middle Mississippian (approximately 1000 – 1300 A.D.) onward in terms of a highly selective and informed agriculture. Because Indian groups farming the bottomlands as part of a subsistence mosaic used only hand tools to work the soil, they increased their crop yields by other means. Three of the most important were the creation of ridges for drainage, field rotation and a combination of outfield-infield agriculture, and expert knowledge of kinds of soils. Archaeology of the American Bottom focusing on the botanical record identifies “commonalities...as well as much variability” in the kinds of crops grown by prehistoric and protohistoric Indians. The diversity alone of cultigens routinely planted by Mississippian peoples suggests that soils and growing conditions in this single strip of alluvial soil in the American Bottom encouraged experimentation. Site explorations have identified “a myriad of domesticated and semi-domesticated crops.” Such a list includes maize, common bean, squash, gourd, sunflower, sumpweed, tobacco, and many small starchy seeds such as chenopod, maygrass, erect knotweed, and little barley. Grain amaranth may also have been included as a late-introduced cultigen.<sup>46</sup> These crops were cultivated and harvested on specifically-selected soils, with preference given to a rare soil type identified as Wakeland: “Only one soil series, Wakeland silt loam, was found to exhibit all the essential requirements and it was present only in isolated patches.” Wakeland is but one of twelve kinds of soils identified as occurring in the

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<sup>46</sup> Neal H. Lopinot, “Spatial and Temporal Variability in Mississippian Subsistence: The Archaeobotanical Record,” in *Late Prehistoric Agriculture: Observations from the Midwest, Studies in Illinois Archaeology No. 8*, ed. by William I. Woods (Springfield: Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, 1992), p. 46.

American Bottom, with varying combinations of certain critical variables: texture, chemical reaction, nutrient content, and drainage – including flooding and high water tables.<sup>47</sup>

While archaeologists have completed most site studies in the northern area of the American Bottom, similar conditions for placement of large Indian fields occur in the Fort Chartres area. Indian agriculturists selected rich bottomland soils for their fields, and they practiced outfield-infield agriculture, in which field selection and development “was not automatic.” The best soils were not contiguous and actually, have been characterized by archaeologists as “circumscribed.”<sup>48</sup> It is important to recognize the highly selective quality of Indian agriculture, because historic accounts imply that all soils in the bottomlands were fertile and accessible, scarcely needing to be turned over. In actuality, the indications are strong for a consistently careful selection and improvement of scattered fields. Indian farmers mixed ashes into their cleared earth; they practiced field rotation; and they lived in villages on the higher ridges of sandy soil back from the floodplain. Infield gardens surrounded their farmsteads, while large, dispersed, carefully-identified and chosen fields were worked as common land for crops. Most important, however, was the continuous use of such discretely-selected land: “Historic [Indian] farmers in the Midwest realized quite early that crops grew better within areas of prehistoric occupation sites.”<sup>49</sup> Researchers have found indications that prehistoric farmers also had learned to recognize “culturally enriched soils.”<sup>50</sup>

Despite the abandonment of the fields in the American Bottom area by late Mississippian Indians – a confirmed out-migration to upland fields by 1550 likely caused by erosion, soil

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<sup>47</sup> William I. Woods, “Maize Agriculture,” p. 283.

<sup>48</sup> William I. Woods, “Maize Agriculture,” p. 280.

<sup>49</sup> William I. Woods, “Maize Agriculture,” p. 281.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



exhaustion, and deforestation – evidence exists that historic Indians re-occupied the Fort Chartres area. A detailed 1697 map by Louis de la Porte de Louvigny, based on a memoir and accounts of explorations to the Illinois Country, shows two Tamaroa Indian villages side by side in the area of the future Fort Chartres. Mechigamea Indians were shown living in a village across the Mississippi.<sup>51</sup> It is likely that Tamaroa and perhaps, Mechigamea Indians, were farming maize fields in the Fort Chartres area floodplain. Longterm human occupation of the Chartres floodplain would result in culturally-enriched soils there, soils containing chemicals like lime and salt from butchering, food preparation and disposal, human waste, calcium from burial of animals and humans, sharpening flakes, and ashes and carbonized wood from fires. The first successful effort to locate the original Fort Chartres, for instance, was made by a soil scientist who identified increased levels of calcium, phosphorous, and hydronium in the perimeters of the original fort site. A patch of inland earth yielded distinct evidence of human occupancy; this particular human structure had existed for only five years before being abandoned and rebuilt. Yet significant soil changes had occurred, traces clear enough to be identified 270 years later!<sup>52</sup>

What are the implications for soil selection and enrichment on the Fort Chartres concession? Arriving French settlers in 1719-1720, whose first priority was the building of a wooden fort and chapel, would have found it onerous and probably, dangerously physically debilitating to have worked and improved earth on which no domestic crops had ever been grown. A description of using a wooden breaking plow on freshly-cleared land in western Indiana, taken from oral interviews with pioneers who used such plows, reveals a formidable

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<sup>51</sup>Sara Jones Tucker, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, Vol. 2, Scientific Papers, Illinois State Museum, Part 1, Atlas (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Museum, 1942 and 1975), Plate XIV.

<sup>52</sup>William I. Woods, "Soil Chemical Investigations in Illinois Archaeology: Two Example Studies," *American Chemical Society*, 1984, p. 70.

toll on both animals and humans. Witnesses from the early nineteenth century describe the opening of never-before-cultivated earth with a team of powerful horses, Clydesdales and Percherons. Despite the straining strength of these enormous draft animals, the team “could only pull a plow once acrossed the field before they needed to rest.”<sup>53</sup> The ease with which the French farmers around Fort Chartres with a single team of oxen (or often, a single animal) could put a considerable amount of common field land into cultivation within the first few years is suggestive. These farmers were employing oxen, “fastened together by the horns, by means of a flat piece of wood, not as later on yokes was customary with the English.”<sup>54</sup> French farmers, drawing on a European tradition, likely used the hard, durable heartwood of hop hornbeam to fashion these yokes. Varieties of hop hornbeam were so preferred in Europe that the wood acquired the name “yoke-elm.” Hop hornbeam was used in French Canada for sled runners and tool handles of all kinds. Master carpenters of the Illinois Country, working at first out of French Kaskaskia and then the fort by 1726 knew the value and use of a variety of woods; notarial records specify, for instance, “planks” and “boards” of white oak or walnut as portions of selling prices.<sup>55</sup> A 1726 contract for building a barn specifies the frame to be built “of walnut, of sassafras, or of mulberry.”<sup>56</sup> Naturally abundant in the Illinois Country, the small hop hornbeam was also a source of food for white-tailed deer, who peeled off its feathery bark; the drooping clusters of hop hornbeam

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<sup>53</sup>Merle C. Rummel, *The Four Mile* (Boston, Indiana, 1998), n.p.

<sup>54</sup> *Glimpses of Prairie du Rocher, Its Past and Present 1722-1942* (Belleville, Illinois: Buechler Printing Co., 1942), p. 4; Natalia Belting, *Kaskaskia Under the French Regime*, p. 54; see also discussion of French oxen and charrues in Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots*, pp. 178-180. Ekberg contrasts the English and American views of French agriculture as “defective” or “non-progressive” with the actual tillage habits using oxen teams, charrues, and common lands. Evidence exists from estate inventories of the French settlers that “virtually every substantial habitant in the Illinois Country owned a team of oxen and a charrue.” (p. 179).

<sup>55</sup>See, for instance, record K-380 in Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, p. 851- 852.

<sup>56</sup>Record K-404 in Brown and Dean, p. 884.

seeds furnished winter food for ruffed grouse and gray squirrels.<sup>57</sup> As the French population grew, settlers began to draw upon the diverse resources of the bottomlands and also, the upland till plain, hauling some of their wood from “the hills.” Before switching to shingling, they thatched their barns with “straw” (likely dried cordgrass), burned shagbark hickory for fuel, and planed “sawn boards” of red mulberry for posts, pickets, and palings, hop hornbeam for tool handles and yokes, and most often, cottonwood and walnut for river craft and furniture. Diron D’Artaguiette noted in 1723 that the “wood of the mulberry tree lasts for thirty years in the ground, without rotting.”<sup>58</sup> One important result of early wheat and maize yields was expansion into artisanal crafts, the building of horse and windmills – and increased hunting and trapping forays.

It is true that the alluvial silt of the floodplain was enriched through annual flooding downstream from the mud-laden Missouri; but that uni-causal explanation of French agricultural success obscures an intricate history. Indians who had the eye for the best soils, who worked the black, heavy, redolent silt in ragged-edged fields, may also have been using their unfenced and unprotected lands as a form of bait. Field margins drifted into the understory of tangled brush and woods. From that adjacency streamed small mammal populations eager for grain.<sup>59</sup> Indians hunted the margins, gleaning mice, rabbits, squirrels, and voles. They had made calculated decisions to embed maize fields in a fringe of timber margin and woods – leading to a European perception of haphazard, random usage. In subtle and often oblique ways, the prehistoric and historic Indian cultures of the bottomlands were working the ecological system. Even when settlement spread up onto the bluffs and upland

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<sup>57</sup> Robert H. Mohlenbrock, *Forest Trees of Illinois* (Department of Conservation, Division of Forestry: State of Illinois, 1975), p. 101; see also Thomas D. Morgan, “Tree of the Month: Hop Hornbeam” in *The Prairie Falcon* Vol. 31 (4), December 2002.

<sup>58</sup> *Journal of Diron D’Artaguiette*, in Mereness, *Travels*, p. 74.

<sup>59</sup> Neal H. Lopinot, “Spatial and Temporal Variability,” p. 53.

till plains, those settlements, while “never as numerous as in the American Bottom,” continued to be “strongly correlated with Wakeland soils.”<sup>60</sup>

The deliberate, patchwork field mosaic of the Chartres floodplain, then, initially attracted French farmers in certain patterns. Increases in population resulted in the clearing of more land, the use of common fields, the drying out of wet surface soils, and a different kind of selective use of resources. At least one ecologist has made connections between the hop hornbeam and beaver colonies.<sup>61</sup> Scores of songbird populations feasted annually on red mulberry fruit. Environmental studies of colonial resource use in the eastern seaboard often focus on the theme of over-exploitation and wanton waste, of the impact of sheer abundance on incoming Europeans whose pinched lives in cities or on exhausted rural lands drove them west.<sup>62</sup> These themes are tied to other themes of the “unstoppable tide” of settlement. Because the numbers of French along the Mississippi floodplain remained low, historians have not focused on immediate and ongoing changes in the tripartite ecosystem of their world.<sup>63</sup> However, ecology also describes the introduction of new species and invasives as well as the depletion and extirpation of native ones. These twin processes were set in motion with the arrival in the Illinois of livestock, particularly, hogs.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> William I. Woods and George R. Holley, “Upland Mississippian Settlement in the American Bottom Region,” in *Cahokia and the Hinterlands: Middle Mississippian Cultures of the Midwest*, ed. by Thomas E. Emerson and R. Barry Lewis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 60.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas D. Morgan, “Tree of the Month: Hop Hornbeam,” in *The Prairie Falcon*.

<sup>62</sup> Such themes are especially prevalent in William Cronon, *Changes in the Land* (1983), and Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: nature, gender, and science in New England* (1989).

<sup>63</sup> A comparison of the population of French Louisbourg and the entire Illinois Country in 1752 shows a striking disparity: Louisbourg “was occupied by 1,500 military personnel, 674 fishermen, 437 engages and other servants, and 1,349 residents.” The Illinois Country claimed “151 soldiers, 670 habitants or farmers, 401 black slaves, and 133 native Indian slaves.” In David Keene, “Fort de Chartres: Archaeology in the Illinois Country,” *French Colonial Archaeology: The Illinois Country and the Western Great Lakes*, ed. by John Walthall (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 38.

<sup>64</sup> There is a strong literature on the introduction of European swine to New World locales. Important works include two studies by Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900 – 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), and *Germs, Seeds, & Animals: Studies in Ecological History* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994). Crosby points out the high adaptability of omnivorous hogs and

Domestic pigs may have arrived in the Illinois via Catholic missions as early as the 1690's (the missions on the Illinois River, for instance). In 1712, Father Marest described Indians raising chickens and pigs at the Kaskaskia Mission.<sup>65</sup> Hogs, chickens, and horned cattle naturally migrated to the Chartres establishment, and by 1725 hogs are showing up in notarial records. One property included "three pigsties fenced with posts and thatched...four sows, eighteen medium pigs, twenty hens and roosters...."<sup>66</sup> Another entry, also in 1725, included "22 pigs, half male and half female" and "40 hens."<sup>67</sup> Evidence taken from the listing of animals on French censuses shows that swine "multiplied faster than any other animals." Between 1732 and 1752 for French Illinois as a whole, they increased from 563 to 1682.<sup>68</sup> These counts do not include hogs raised by Indians. It is likely that before maize (Indian corn) production became steady enough to ensure a supplemental food base, hogs were turned loose to forage in the floodplain. (Indians who owned hogs probably rarely fed them with reserves of corn but let them forage). Hogs particularly consumed amaranth (pigweed), wild onions, the water lily root called *macoupin*, and perhaps "some varieties of root plants that all but disappeared from the Illinois country."<sup>69</sup> The variety in hog diet – and the abundance – was certainly a factor in hog fertility. Hogs also ate many varieties of acorns and nuts raining down from old-growth, prolifically-producing trees. The natural oils in the abundant nuts of the southern Illinois region, especially sweet pignut hickory, were

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states, "The impact of the animals the Europeans brought with them to the Americas transformed whole ecosystems." See *Germes, Seeds, & Animals*, p. 55. See also William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), pp. 135 – 137. Both Crosby and Cronon term hogs the "weed animals" for their reproductive and disseminating behaviors.

<sup>65</sup> See Marest letter in *Jesuit Relations*, Vol. 66, p. 257, cited in John A. Walthall et al, "Woman Chief's Village: An Illini Winter Hunting Camp," in *Calumet & Fleur-de-Lys: Archaeology of Indian and French Contact in the Midcontinent* ed. by John A. Walthall and Thomas E. Emerson (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), p. 145.

<sup>66</sup> See Record K-376 in Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, p. 846.

<sup>67</sup> Record K-388, Brown and Dean, p. 868.

<sup>68</sup> Numbers of swine provided in Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots*, p. 206-207.

<sup>69</sup> Raymond Hauser, "The Ethnohistory of the Illinois Indian Tribe, 1673-1832," Ph.D. dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1973 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1973), p. 99.

prized by Indians, French, and hogs alike. These oils imparted to freshly-butchered and smoked hog meat a memorable, oily sweetness. Yet ripe nuts coat the ground only during a precise interval each year. The lure of milky, developing corn ears over an entire growing season was much greater.

To keep animals out of their fields, the French in the Chartres area resorted to fencing in a long riverine strip of common pasture land that also included some wooded areas.

Eventually, once the population grew large enough, fences and gates were built around the arable fields. After the harvests, the gates were opened and animals permitted in to graze the stubble.<sup>70</sup> French owners of livestock used both ear-cropping and branding as a way to identify their animals.<sup>71</sup> There is no evidence for what Mechigamea Indians living close to Fort Chartres did with their livestock. Since they were occupying a shoreline grant that included a prairie named for them, their pigs may have been permitted to roam freely.

Unlike the documented history of colonist-Indian conflict over roaming animals on the eastern seaboard, there is no clear record of continuing French-Indian squabbles over food resources for foraging livestock or animals invading and destroying planted fields. One reason for this is French adherence to the *Coutume de Paris*, the operant legal system transported from France. The *Coutume* was not often changed by exigencies in the New World. No new laws, rulings, or court-established precedents could easily evolve in a colonial outpost, thus leaving a record for future examination but also, allowing groups of peoples to change the social and legal structure – most especially, Indians. Early English laws in the Virginia colony, for example, stated that “Any Englishman taking up land near Indian fields must help build fences around the fields to protect Indian crops from the

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<sup>70</sup> Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots*, pp. 80-81 and 206-207.

<sup>71</sup> Ekberg, p. 208.

settlers' hogs and cattle." Such rulings facilitated the adaptation of hogs by Virginia Indian tribes; by the 1660's, the Weacock, Meherrin, and Nottoway Indians were all raising hogs, and by 1692, the Nottoway were selling them.<sup>72</sup> Other studies of Narragansett Indians, for example, pinpoint "heated conflicts." Still, one historian believes that not all Indians readily adapted the hog: "Indians had never before seen the fecund and destructive beasts that now trampled and ate their crops." The Shawomets and Pawtuxents began fencing their corn fields, but hogs took to the woods. This activity may have functioned as a "dynamic force of territorial expansion" in the eastern seaboard as hogs "funneled out in advance of [growing] English colonies."<sup>73</sup> The tri-partite environment of floodplain, bluffs, and upland prairies of the Illinois, however, did not allow hogs, either French or Indian, to "funnel out" expansively. Nor could Indians use an existing legal system to protect their fields.

The trouble on the Cahokia grant with French livestock, contributing to the "Cahokia revolt" in the early 1730's, is revealed in letters of the Seminarian priests.<sup>74</sup> In those instances, French livestock invaded Indian land. Indian animals mingling with domesticated French stock or foraging in French fields comprises a different pattern, one not well-documented.<sup>75</sup> Oblique references to friction do occur, however. In 1733, the colonizer and governor of Louisiana, Jean Baptiste le Moyne, the Sieur de Bienville, wrote of the French-Indian relations in Louisiana as a whole that proximity of Indian villages to French villages

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<sup>72</sup> Lewis R. Binford, "An Ethnohistory of the Nottoway, Meherrin, and Weacock Indians of Southeastern Virginia," *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 14 (3/4), Summer, 1967, pp. 146, 163, and 178.

<sup>73</sup> See this interesting conclusion in Joshua Micah Marshall, "A Melancholy People": Anglo-Indian Relations in Early Warwick, Rhode Island 1642 – 1675," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 68 (3), September, 1995, pp. 407- 409.

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter Two for an overview of the Cahokia revolt.

<sup>75</sup> For a careful study of escalating friction between eastern colonists and Indians over livestock, an escalation that led to King Philip's War in 1676, see Virginia DeJohn Anderson, "King Philip's Herds: Indians, Colonists, and the Problem of Livestock in Early New England," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., Vol. 51 (4), October, 1994, pp. 601– 624." See also Anderson's recent study of colonial livestock, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

“often causes dangerous disputes.”<sup>76</sup> In the 1750’s, Commander Macarty at Fort Chartres makes reference to Indians killing French pigs and horned cattle “from time to time.”<sup>77</sup> The French living at Chartres complained much more vocally about Indian dogs. In the early 1750’s, the traveler Bossu told some departing Mechigamea and Cahokia Indians, “It is good you are leaving. Consider the damage that the dogs of your village have done to the livestock belonging to the French settlers.” Bossu mentions that hungry dogs killed livestock during food shortages and describes the “dogs of the Illinois,” as “half wolf.”<sup>78</sup> A few years later when Bossu was visiting the Peoria, he shared a feast with them that included “maple sap, persimmon bread, bear paws, beaver tails....” as well as “dog, corn meal, and maple syrup.”<sup>79</sup> Indians raised dogs – used primarily as feast meat – as a form of livestock. French perceptions that Indians killed and ate dogs when provisions were low, in an opportunistic and random fashion, is probably incorrect. Yet dogs and hogs did apparently roam freely in many areas of the floodplain, while black horned cattle and horses grazed on common land on both the floodplain and up on the bluffs. The grazing of Kaskaskia cattle and horses on islands and a peninsula in the Mississippi echoes the Eastern seaboard practice of “hogreeves,” where hogs were let loose on islands and “reeves [reefs].”<sup>80</sup> The ability of hogs to “go feral” in a short period of time contributed to the problems with resource exploitation in the bottomlands. While Indians and French alike prized hogs because of their independence, hog behavior in the wild seriously impacted the environment. Descriptions of feral hogs from observations made as early as 1830 include large herds of animals acting in

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<sup>76</sup> Bienville, “Louisiana,” May 15, 1733, *Mississippi Provincial Archives*, Vol. I (Jackson, Mississippi: Press of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1927), p. 201. Also see Raymond Hauser, “The Ethnohistory of the Illinois Indians,” pp. 263-264.

<sup>77</sup> Macarty to Vaudreuil, January, 1752, in Pease, *Illinois on The Eve*, p. 451.

<sup>78</sup> Bossu, *Travels*, p. 81 and 81, n. 9, cited in Raymond Hauser, “The Ethnohistory of the Illinois Indian Tribe,” p. 264.

<sup>79</sup> Bossu, *Travels*, p. 108, cited in Hauser, “The Ethnohistory,” p. 116.

<sup>80</sup> See Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire*, p. 160.



concert to “shake down” hazel nuts; some animals climbed and bent trees, breaking them. Hogs also left deep, rutted trails in the earth: “The hazel thickets on the prairies were often threaded by numerous trails....” In cold months, hogs created large nests from fallen oak leaves, seemingly preferring the oldest, broadest-leaved trees. High mounds of piled, sleeping animals lay under a blanket of oak leaves actually fetched by a series of hogs each carrying a mouthful. The churning, pawing, and rooting activity in building these oak-leaf nests, described as “twenty inches high and twelve to twenty feet across,” disturbed the root systems of trees.<sup>81</sup> Finally, hog consumption of acorns and other mast deprived oak trees of their reproductive means. The loss of future oak trees to voracious hog appetite is discussed particularly in studies of the disappearance of white oak, *Quercus alba*, the most prevalent and successful oak of presettlement Illinois.<sup>82</sup>

Livestock depleted natural vegetation; yet in a reverse process, French and especially, American landowners spread rich grazing grasses like *Poa pratensis* (bluegrass), timothy, and tall and meadow fescue. The French wheat strains were also new to the area, introduced by Jesuits at Kaskaskia in the early 1700’s. These processes resulted in ecological shifts that may not have shown up as observable changes for years. For instance, waterfowl, land bird, and white deer populations were affected by changes in native vegetation. The abundance and variety of native floodplain plants developed as a result of alluvial flooding, of having to spread into disturbed and marginal habitats. To combat annual, relentless inundation with mud, these varieties compensated through the production of immense amounts of seed.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See E.W. Hilgard, *Botanical Features of the Prairies of Illinois in Ante-Railroad Days*, manuscript on file at the Illinois Historical Survey, no date, pp. 19-20.

<sup>82</sup> See especially Marc D. Abrams, “Where Has All the White Oak Gone?” *Bioscience*, Vol. 53 (10), October, 2003.

<sup>83</sup> Frances B. King, *Plants, People, and Paleoecology*, Scientific Papers Volume XX (Springfield: Illinois State Museum, 1994), p. 29.

The preference of migrating waterfowl for the Mississippi flyway was partially built around the copious, heavily-laden seedheads. Rich, stem-clustered, so bursting with seeds they dragged low to the muddy earth, stands of common arrowhead or smartweed fed the “millions of waterfowl” described so consistently by observers along the Mississippi.<sup>84</sup>

Bird and small mammal populations would have been affected as well when the floodplain began to become firmer and drier, and when new species less bountiful and productive began to creep into the grazed and mown wetlands. Land not under cultivation in the floodplain was often wet in a distinctive way: full of appearing and disappearing springs, seeps, sinkholes, and mud puddles. Earth could glisten and then dry out rapidly under conditions often described as “droughty.” Land birds also depend in some instances on a high moisture content of soils, a level correlated with areas of standing water. In the bottomlands of Arkansas, forming with Illinois the Mississippi Alluvial Valley (MAV), moist forest habitats and soils have been shown to support high numbers of insects and invertebrate species.<sup>85</sup> These form significant percentages of some songbird diets, especially warblers, whose food source was reduced when bottomlands began to dry out. Conversely, when white-tailed deer learned to browse corn and other row crops, foraging in the wider and wider cropland margins, their overall body weight probably increased. Deer become larger, sometimes considerably larger, “where agricultural crops add significant amounts of nutrients to their diets.” White-tailed deer spend more time feeding than in any other activity, and they would have eventually begun to incorporate seasonal crop availability into

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<sup>84</sup> John White, personal communication, May 17, 2004.

<sup>85</sup> Winston P. Smith et al, “A Comparison of Breeding Bird Communities and Habitat Features Between Old-Growth and Second-Growth Bottomland Hardwood Forests,” in *Bottomland Hardwoods of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley: Characteristics and Management of Natural Function, Structure, and Composition*, General Technical Report SRS-42 (Fayetteville, Arkansas: United State Department of Agriculture, 2001), p. 78.

their forage patterns.<sup>86</sup> There are implications of this (gradual) increase in size for the deerskin trade, for deer agility and migration, and for deer reproduction. Thus, despite the low numbers of French and Indians living along the floodplain in the first fifty years of the eighteenth century, they had begun a process of measurable ecological change. And although such change is instinct in any environment, the shifts in the floodplain ecology were ones that would facilitate the massive wave of American settlement post 1790. In the lands around Fort Chartres, French and Indian men and women set trajectories of resource use that would eventually impact all peoples in the decades of keenest political unrest.

On initial grants of land, two-to-four arpents, located in dispersed areas around the fort, French farmers began to produce grain. The first convoy to New Orleans loaded with wheat and produce left the Illinois Country in 1721, although most of the grain likely came from the Kaskaskia grant. The wheat was apparently noted as “being of a very fine quality.” Convoys arrived in 1725 and 1729 as well, with the 1729 convoy reflecting a bumper crop year. Large shipments of wheat and salted meat were soon supplying the lower Louisiana colonies.<sup>87</sup> French farmers were but the latest in a long line of agriculturists who had discovered the fecundity of certain soils of the floodplain. The importance of early agricultural success in the Illinois Country is twofold: first, the record stands in stark contrast to other attempted French settlements on the lower Mississippi; secondly, crop productivity in turn drew more people to the area, much more rapidly than had occurred on the Cahokia grant twenty years before. The presence of a fort with two companies of soldiers provided a local market for wheat, Indian corn, and garden produce. Networks of supply and demand began to grow

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<sup>86</sup> Winston P. Smith and Patrick A. Zollner, “Seasonal Habitat Distribution of Swamp Rabbits, White-Tailed Deer, and Small Mammals in Old Growth And Managed Bottomland Hardwood Forests,” in *Bottomland Hardwoods of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley*, p. 94.

<sup>87</sup> Nancy M. Miller Surrey, *The Commerce of Louisiana During the French Regime: 1699-1763* (New York: 1916), p. 289.

naturally out of cultigen surplus. The connection between successful agriculture and its corollary – burgeoning trade – is clearly demonstrated in the settlement pattern around Fort Chartres. This connection has been recognized by Canadian historians of the French fur trade, who have written of the deeply-entwined relationship between agriculture and trade.<sup>88</sup> The relationship has not always been emphasized in the Illinois Country, where French farmers have been studied as one specific socio-economic group and French traders, voyageurs, and coureur de bois as another. But the two livelihoods were inextricably meshed. Interestingly, an amateur local historian in the mid-nineteenth century suggested this same connection: “A post established at Kaskaskia, was the means of creating a lively trade in deer, buffalo, and bear meat, which were purchased for the transportation to New Orleans and Mobile. This also stimulated the erection of Mills for the manufacture of flour....”<sup>89</sup> By the late 1740’s, some traders and voyageurs had established permanent farming bases in the French communities. An inventory of a trader/voyageur who died in 1747 describes both porcelain and glass trade goods for Indians and “1486 livres of wheat.”<sup>90</sup>

Such a reciprocity did not occur in French settlements to the south of the Illinois. Historians who have examined the dismal record of the attempted French agricultural settlement at Arkansas Post on the Arkansas River sketch a poignant picture of the decimation of the French there. The Company of the Indies under the speculator John Law had recruited and sent groups of French and Germans to lower Louisiana (the same company

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<sup>88</sup> See for instance, D.W. Moodie, “Agriculture and the Fur Trade,” in *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference*, ed. by Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

<sup>89</sup> E.J. Montague, “The History of Randolph County, Illinois, Including Old Kaskaskia Island,” 1859, copied by Elisabeth Pinkerton Leighty (Sparta, Illinois, 1948), p. 10.

<sup>90</sup> Inventory of Andre Chaverneau, Kaskaskia Mss. 47:9:30:1, cited in Margaret Kimball Brown, *The Voyageur in the Illinois Country: The Fur Trade’s Professional Boatman in Mid America*, Center for French Colonial Studies Extended Publication Series Number 3 (Naperville, Illinois: Center for French Colonial Studies, 2002), p. 26.

was administering the upper Illinois). In late summer, 1721, as many as eighty French *engages* (indentured servants) arrived to settle a small piece of open land called Little Prairie, located 27 miles inland from the Mississippi on the Arkansas River.<sup>91</sup> Here was the site of an abandoned French trading post. Just as had happened two years earlier in the Chartres settlement of Illinois, incoming French settlers chose land that showed traces of European impact; some initial clearing of land had apparently already begun. This area of Arkansas, fed by two major rivers but far enough inland to avoid the relentless flooding of the Mississippi, would have been a morass of rampant vegetation, including some varieties of trees that had become flood-adapted: water tupelo, water hickory, and water oak, for example.<sup>92</sup> These hardwood forests of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley supported “truly vast volumes of high-quality timber” punctuated by some open prairie land.<sup>93</sup> The prairies, however, may not have been the same type as those found in southern Illinois. Arkansas in particular has “Pleistocene sand dune barrens that [were once] endemic to the Mississippi Alluvial Plain....”<sup>94</sup> Such barrens are not the same as grassland prairies managed through burning and would not have supported agriculture as easily. Yet early observers, most especially the General Land Office surveyors of the early nineteenth century, often named all open, grassy areas “prairies.” Perhaps the land the French tilled at Little Prairie along the Arkansas River had not been opened to agriculture before, or had been unsuccessfully tilled and then abandoned hundreds of years before. There is no clear way to know. The habitat of this area, however, would have been a factor in French colonization.

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<sup>91</sup> Morris S. Arnold, *Unequal Laws Unto a Savage Race: European Legal Traditions in Arkansas, 1686-1836* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1985), p. 5.

<sup>92</sup> See Paul B. Hamel et al, “Chainsaws, Canebrakes, and Cotton Fields: Sober Thoughts on Silviculture for Songbirds in Bottomland Forests,” in *Bottomland Hardwoods of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley*, Table 1, page 99.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>94</sup> Tom Foti, Chief Ecologist, Arkansas Heritage Association, personal communication, May 4, 2004.

At a more southern latitude than the Illinois Country, insect and animal populations would have differed: tortuous clouds of mosquitoes and biting flies shimmered in willow thickets and hummed in stands of giant cane. Alligators may have hunted in the steaming swamplands. (Audubon recorded alligators at the mouth of the Arkansas River in 1810). In 1673 Marquette noted of the Arkansas Indians (Quapaw), “They do not know what a beaver is.”<sup>95</sup> French accounts of the first contact with the Quapaw stress their usual attire as near nudity in the humid Mississippi country as the river plunged south; Quapaw women wore a single deerskin around their waist, while Quapaw men wore nothing.<sup>96</sup> The intense heat of these river lowlands was likely a factor in failed attempts at agriculture. Between 1727 and 1729, for instance, a priest assisting Father Paul du Poisson at the Quapaw Mission died of sunstroke.<sup>97</sup>

Both Morris S. Arnold, who produced a study of European law in colonial Arkansas, and the French historian Giraud have documented the miserable lives and fate of the first French settlers at Arkansas Post. Of the 80 who arrived, only 50 remained by the following spring, with a single surviving woman.<sup>98</sup> Father Charlevoix, touring the Little Prairie in 1722, called the French there “*triste debris*.” They were living in twenty rude cabins, had cleared only three arpents of land, and had produced “an insignificant harvest.”<sup>99</sup> The French response was to release 20 of the *engages* from service and give them their own land to cultivate in wheat and corn. The ability to raise grain was now seen as critical, since no French supply

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<sup>95</sup> Journal of Pierre Marquette, cited in John Upton Terrell, *American Indian Almanac* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1961), p. 234.

<sup>96</sup> W. David Baird, *The Quapaws* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989), p. 14; For the best account of initial Quapaw-French encounters before 1700, see Morris Arnold, *The Rumble of a Distant Drum: the Quapaws and the Old World Newcomers, 1673-1804* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000).

<sup>97</sup> Samuel D. Dickinson, “Shamans, Priests, Preachers, and Pilgrims at Arkansas Post,” in *Arkansas Before the Americans*, ed. by Hester A. Davis (Arkansas Archaeology Survey Research Series No. 40, 1991), p. 98.

<sup>98</sup> Morris S. Arnold, *Unequal Laws*, p. 8-9.

<sup>99</sup> Father Charlevoix, *Journal D’Un Voyage Fait Par Ordre Du Roi Dans L’Amerique Septentrionale* (1744), cited in Morris Arnold, *Unequal Laws*, p. 8-9.

ships were sailing up the Mississippi. A year later, the population was down to 30, with no surviving women.<sup>100</sup> The settlement also suffered flooding from the Arkansas River, but the floods were not annual and did not require immediate protective measures.

From the beginning, efforts to make the Arkansas Post settlement “a stable agricultural community” had completely failed. The Louisiana census of 1726 reported that “the *habitants* were poor and lived only from the Indians’ hunting.”<sup>101</sup> By 1746, only twelve French families lived at Arkansas Post, engaging in hunting, curing meat, and trading tallow and bear oil.<sup>102</sup> This pattern of falling into trade with Indian villagers living near French outposts and forts is confirmed by Daniel Usner in his study of lower Mississippi trade networks: “Under continuing neglect from France, the inhabitants of the lower Mississippi Valley were left to their own designs.”<sup>103</sup> Those designs were based exclusively on livelihood and seemingly did not involve much participation in the fur trade. Survival and subsistence determined how Arkansas French settlers, unable to support themselves with agriculture, would interact with Indians in their area.<sup>104</sup> The trouble between the French and Indians on the lower Mississippi comprises a clear and escalating record, best explored in Daniel Usner’s study of a deteriorating economic system pressured from the east by English deerskin hunters and traders. For a variety of complex reasons, the Indian tribes of the lower Mississippi Valley – with the exception of the strongly French-allied Tunica and Quapaw –

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Morris Arnold, *Unequal Laws*, p. 34.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Daniel H. Usner, Jr. *Indians, Settlers, & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 81.

<sup>104</sup> Morris Arnold in his study of colonial Arkansas has stated, “It is safe to conclude that there were never more than eight or ten real farmers at any one time at the Post in the colonial period.... Although the state of the agricultural art, and the number of people engaged in it, certainly increased during the last decade of the eighteenth century, John Treat, writing from the Post in 1805, notes even at that late date that ‘agriculture here is yet in its infancy....’” See *Colonial Arkansas, 1686-1804: a social and cultural history* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991), p. 61.

created a dangerous environment on the Mississippi River for Europeans. One of those complex factors has to do with the absence of agricultural surplus and its core relationship to successful and equitable trade.



## The Trade Matrix at Fort Chartres

The first and second Fort de Chartres, both log structures eventually rotted away by the riverine earth, attracted large numbers of people – French inhabitants and soldiers, diverse Indians, and trappers and traders from New Orleans and Canada. Historians and archaeologists have been drawn to the fort and its history, especially to the third fort: the grandest and costliest French garrison in western North America.<sup>1</sup> By the time this third fort was constructed in the early 1750's, of giant limestone blocks hewn from the bluffs, Fort Chartres (usually shortened from Fort de Chartres) was dominating the French settlements as the mercantile and military center. Indian villages, especially those closest to the fort, the two Mechigamea settlements, appear in accounts and on maps, but only in reference to location and population. In most accounts, the domiciled Indians of French Illinois simply lived in adjacency. Yet an investigation of the fort-trade matrix reveals an evolution of relationships and connections in which Illinois Indians were pivotal. In addition to becoming major suppliers in the provisioning trade, Mechigamea Indians especially may have played a role in trade relations with Indian nations across the Mississippi. Those tribes, the Osage, Missouri, Ponca, Otoe, and Omaha, were visiting Fort Chartres by 1724 and likely, well before. The ease of river travel and the way the many streams of the upper Mississippi Valley watershed could ferry canoemen straight to Fort Chartres created a riverine trade

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Walter J. Saucier and Katherine Wagner Spineke, "Francois Saucier, Engineer of Fort de Chartres, Illinois," in *Frenchmen and French Ways in the Mississippi Valley*, ed. by John Francis McDermott (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969). See also David Keene, "Fort de Chartres: Archaeology in the Illinois Country," in John A. Walthall, editor, *French Colonial Archaeology: The Illinois Country and the Western Great Lakes* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991). Keene makes the distinction between Fort Chartres and the large French "fortress" at Louisbourg, in which the town itself was enclosed by the fort walls. In the Illinois, settlements grew up outside the fort. The actual size of Fort Chartres was about six acres. The historical fascination with this fort has even found its way into popular literature. See James F. Keefe, "The Inventory of Fort Des Chartres," in *Muzzleloader*, Volume XVIII, No. 6, January/February 1992, p. 45-46.

world perhaps equaled only by the French and Indian trade nexus in the Great Lakes and Canadian subarctic.

If a bountiful agriculture around the fort and south to Kaskaskia grew from a blend of factors, including Indian farming practices, alluvial flooding, and French animal husbandry, the same kind of analysis holds true for the growth of trade here. Historians like Richard White have emphasized the importance of French-Indian alliances built on gifts, trade privileges, and political-judicial sanctions.<sup>2</sup> The natural environment of French-Indian Illinois was also critical, in that water routes allowed for the meetings of many diverse tribes. The French river settlements nestled in an imaginary intersection at the point where Eastern Woodland, Great Lakes, and Plains Indian cultures began to shade into each other and overlap. Illinois Indians, riverine people, were related through trade and marriage alliances to the Miami across the Grand Prairie in Indiana – a nation who never became canoemen. The Osage of the Missouri highlands across the Mississippi to the west were consummate horsemen and horse traders. The Fort Chartres matrix attracted Indians who traveled by horse, by boat, and on foot; the differing life ways of these tribes would have created demands for specific material trade items, thus shaping a complex mercantile hub that influenced European settlements as far away as New Orleans and Montreal.

In the middle of a vigorous traffic in opportunistic trade, legal and illegal trade, fur, hide, and provisioning trade, the Mechigamea Indians adapted to become suppliers of oil and meat. Domiciled and living separately in their villages – and continually described that way in French and European travel accounts – these Indians did not stay isolated. Their level of

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<sup>2</sup> See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650 – 1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

daily interaction with French people and with other arriving Indians was likely very high.<sup>3</sup> New ways are needed to detect their traces in a landscape where maps, notarial records, and French correspondence routinely establish separatism. Today, although Fort Chartres has been fully restored, a roadside plaque marks the site of St. Anne's chapel in the long-gone village of Chartres, and Prairie du Rocher retains French homes and iron crosses in the cemetery, no marker exists to identify the probable site of the Mechigamea villages. This is a fairly striking omission when compared to the amount of information available on the prehistoric Cahokia moundbuilders, barely thirty miles to the north. Research suggests that the Mechigamea were in fact a critical factor in the success of Fort Chartres. While their population continued to decline precipitously over the eighteenth century, Mechigamea are often identified in French correspondence – the “mechy” – and are specifically denoted as allies of the British at Fort Chartres in the late 1760's. The ways the Mechigamea used the natural resources of the upper Mississippi Valley and their traces in the eighteenth-century local topography establish them as far more present in the history of this area than traditional documents reveal.

One of the most valuable and incisive overviews of the trade networks among the Indians and French in the Illinois Country appears in the journal of Diron D'Artaguiette in 1722-23.

D'Artaguiette noted the three Illinois Indian villages located next to French settlements. The

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<sup>3</sup> One of the best descriptions of the proximal relations of the Indians and French in the Illinois Country is found in Natalia Belting's article, “The Native American as Myth and Fact,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Vol. LXIX(2), May, 1976, pp. 119 –126. Belting states that “Indian alliances were ...essential to its [New France's] economy.” Indians were “the hunters and trappers, the harvesters, and the tanners of the pelts.” See Belting, p. 122. This view can be contrasted with Raymond Hauser's, who believes the French “did deliberately destroy Illinois self-sufficiency...in order to secure the cooperation of the tribe in French colonial ventures.” He cites La Salle as writing, “So long as it can be contrived to keep them dependent on us, they may be readily held to their duty....” See Hauser, “The Illinois Indian Tribe: From Autonomy and Self-Sufficiency to Dependency and Depopulation,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Vol. LXIX(2), May 1976, p. 135. La Salle did not establish the entire colonial policy for New France, and his initial perceptions should not be taken as a template for the following century. The reciprocity of French-Indian trade, advantaging both sides, is a more realistic assessment.

Illinois, he writes, "...are scattered about in three villages – the Cascakias, the Mekchiquamias and the Cahokias"<sup>4</sup> He gives population estimates for two of the three villages – the Kaskaskia "about 200 warriors," and the Mechigamea, also "about 200 warriors."<sup>5</sup> Of the Cahokia he gives no specific number; yet he judges the entire Illinois nation to be "at present not more than 700 warriors."<sup>6</sup> (As noted in Chapter Two, historians interpret a single warrior as representing five persons). Between 1699 and D'Artaquiette's observations in 1722-23, a pattern of human interaction became established among resident French, French soldiers, Jesuit priests, resident Indians in villages, traders and suppliers journeying downriver from Canada and upriver from fledgling New Orleans, and constantly appearing members of many other tribes – Missouri, Wea, Miami, Potawatomi, and the Peoria from up on the Illinois River above Cahokia. D'Artaquiette perceived that the French settlers had rapidly become middlemen in the provision trade between French troops stationed at Fort Chartres and the Indians who both lived in the area and who passed through. D'Artaquiette's perceptions are so concise that they deserve to be fully stated here:

The trade of the inhabitants of the Illinois, who are Canadians, French, or discharged soldiers, consists in selling their wheat and other products to the company [Company of the Indies] for the subsistence of the troops, in exchange for merchandise (which they are obliged to fetch from New Orleans) which they trade to the Indians for quarters of buffalo, bear oil, and other meats, which serve them for food or which they sell in exchange for merchandise. They also trade in skins, such as beaver, buck and deer, buffalo and bear skins, and other peltries, which they get very cheap from the Indians, and which they sell at a very high price to the traders who come down from Canada every spring and autumn, and who give them merchandise in exchange. For it is not necessary for them to rely upon having their needs supplied from New Orleans, whence very few convoys come, and even when they do come they bring so few merchandizes that they are not nearly sufficient to pay a part of the debts which the company is obliged to incur every year.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Journal of Diron D'Artaquiette, in *Travels in the American Colonies*, ed. Newton D. Mereness, p. 71.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 68-70.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> Journal of Diron D'Artaquiette, in Newton Mereness, *Travels*, p. 70-71.

In this description, the interesting and undifferentiated phrase “which serve them for food or which they sell in exchange for merchandise” raises an important question: to whom were “the inhabitants of the Illinois” selling the “buffalo quarters, bear oil, and other meats”? Since they were getting “merchandise” in return, the implication is that they sold salt meat and bear oil downriver or to members of the French garrison with access to the official *magasin*. D’Artaguiette clearly states that inhabitants sold maize to the soldiers; his journal entry for June 9 is the single line, “Our boat set out from here to go to the Cascaskias to load with maize for the subsistence of the troops.”<sup>8</sup> The *magasin* (warehouse) at Fort Chartres became central to the French settlements in terms of amount and variety of merchandise stored and dispersed and its general social role. Originally the *magasin* serving the Company of the Indies, the fort warehouse continued its role as supplier when the Company of the Indies returned the French colonies to royal charter in 1731. A study of the role of the *magasin* in the French communities of the floodplain concludes “...the *magasin* early on became a collecting depot for export items [and]...the *magasin* soon became a buyer as well as consignee-agent and forwarder.”<sup>9</sup> The Fort Chartres *magasin* served the villages of Chartres, St. Anne’s, St. Philippe, Prairie du Rocher, and, seven leagues south, Kaskaskia.<sup>10</sup>

D’Artaguiette’s perceptions about the trade relations among diverse groups in the Illinois Country are all the more compelling given the incessant warfare between the Fox and the Illinois Indians, despite a French-negotiated truce in 1716. The truce did not last, leading to the historic defeat of the Fox by the French in 1730, for which some estimates place the

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<sup>8</sup> Journal of Diron D’Artaguiette, in Mereness, *Travels*, p. 82.

<sup>9</sup> Winstanley Briggs, “The Forgotten Colony: Le Pays d’Illinois”, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1985, p. 249.

<sup>10</sup> See Briggs’ discussion of the *magasin* in “The Forgotten Colony,” pp. 249-251.

number of massacred Fox at 1,000 or 1200.<sup>11</sup> Even after this defeat, the Fox continued to attack the Illinois and the Illinois sporadically killed Fox hunters they encountered, especially in the forested area along the Illinois River. Prior to both the Iroquois penetration into the northern Illinois Country and the evolving relations with the French, the Illinois and Miami Indians had participated in what Margaret Kimball Brown terms “mourning war.” Eric Hinderaker best summarizes this style of attack: “The most familiar form of war in the Illinois country was a mourning war, a localized, limited, and personal style of warfare that was intended to exact revenge for an earlier death.” Both Brown and Hinderaker stress that mourning war had a ritualized element.<sup>12</sup> However, the localized nature of the mourning war disintegrated when Fox hunters moving south and Illinois hunters moving north on seasonal hunts both became dependent on the prairies of northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. Into these areas buffalo were accustomed to migrate in the summer to escape the torment of green-headed flies and other deer flies. Competition for peltries and European trade, often cited as driving the Fox-Illinois warfare, was complicated by a hunting war involving buffalo. The size of these Illinois herds never approached that of the western Great Plains herds.<sup>13</sup> Nor did the Fox and the Illinois have horses during the time they were first observed hunting on the prairies. In fact, R. David Edmunds’ depiction of the Fox lifeways, the hunting-gathering-horticultural subsistence mosaic, is indistinguishable from descriptions of the Illinois subsistence style: “Large numbers of waterfowl were taken on a seasonal basis, and during the summer Fox hunting parties left their villages to travel to the prairies of

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<sup>11</sup> Wayne C. Temple, *Indian Villages*, p. 42. For defeat of the Fox on Grand Prairie, see Chapter Two, n. 122.

<sup>12</sup> Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673 – 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 12-13. See also Margaret Kimball Brown, *Cultural Transformations Among the Illinois: An Application of a Systems Model* (East Lansing, Michigan: Publications of the Museum, Michigan State University, 1979), pp. 244-245.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter Six for a discussion of Illinois buffalo.

Illinois or Iowa where they killed buffalo.”<sup>14</sup> The nature of the Fox-Illinois animosity changed over the course of the eighteenth-century as the Illinois became domiciled Indians and the Fox did not. Many factors enter into the periodic outbreaks of violence between these two tribes. In 1719, for example, a party of hunting Illinois surprised a camp of mixed Fox, Kickapoo, and Mascouten near Rock River, Illinois. They killed twenty people, including some women and children, and took at least twenty prisoners back to Illinois.<sup>15</sup> Such raids, already beyond the scope of the “mourning war,” escalated right up until the Fox defeat in 1730, and continued beyond it. Each time a significant number of persons died, the event became encapsulated in the oral history of the tribe and was recounted in an additive and vehement litany. In 1724, Mechigamea and Kaskaskia Indian chiefs “recited to White Cat [a traveling chief down from Michilimackinac] a list of [Fox] attacks and killings perpetuated over the years at every one of the Illinois villages.”<sup>16</sup>

In 1752, the Cahokia were driven permanently from their mission settlement on the River L’Abbe near Monks Mound, south to the Fort Chartres area, by an attack of Fox, Sauk, Potawatomi, and Sioux.<sup>17</sup> This war party had also wiped out the Mechigamea village near the fort. Fox raided the Kaskaskia Indians steadily through the 1760’s and 1770’s. As late as 1778, George Rogers Clark was negotiating yet another treaty with the Fox at Cahokia to bring about a cessation of Fox-Sauk-Illinois hostilities and raids. The Fox-Illinois conflict can thus be documented as spanning the same time period as the French occupation of the

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<sup>14</sup> See R. David Edmunds and Joseph Peyser, *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), pp. 33-35.

<sup>15</sup> Edmunds and Peyser, *The Fox Wars*, p. 93.

<sup>16</sup> Cited from *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 16, p. 456-61, in Jablow, *Indians*, p. 164.

<sup>17</sup> John A. Walthall and Elizabeth D. Benchley, *The River L’Abbe Mission: A French Colonial Church for the Cahokia Illini on Monks Mound* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, 1987), p. 11-12. See also Raymond Hauser, “The Fox Raid of 1752: Defensive Warfare and the Decline of the Illinois Indian Tribe,” *Illinois Historical Journal*, Vol. 86, 1993, pp. 210–224.

Illinois Country.<sup>18</sup> Yet this brief official history does not begin to document the spiking, retaliatory, ambush-laden nature of the Fox-Illinois relations across the eighteenth century. The river systems played an important role in haphazard and unplanned attacks, and in cases where French traders happened to be accompanying Illinois Indians on upriver forays, they were often killed. The threat of a Renard (Fox) attack on Fort Chartres in 1723 caused the soldiers to “cut down the large bushes and other things which would favor an approach to Fort Chartres.”<sup>19</sup>

Yet despite Fox raids on their fields and on Indian villages, the French continued to trade with Indians on both sides of the Mississippi. Middlemen French farmers were receptive to the Indian provisioning trade. At the settlement around Fort Chartres, they encouraged – and were drawn into themselves – hunting and trapping trips across the Mississippi River into the Missouri and Osage country, a practice bitterly resented by the Fox. Using the rivers that made western Illinois so accessible and also, such a natural point of departure for lands north, west, and south, Illinois Indians allied with French voyageurs drew upon an abundant natural wilderness storehouse. French officials in New Orleans had clearly perceived the possibilities of the Missouri lands as early as 1719. In that year, the Council of Commerce meeting on Dauphine Island awarded gifts to two groups of Indian chiefs in the hopes of establishing amicable trade relations with them. Two chiefs were “Kaskaskias who have come down here to sing the calumet,” but the other were “four chiefs of the Missouri.” The Kaskaskia Indians received a greater abundance of gifts, including eight dozen large knives and “two hundred and ten pounds of powder.” The Missouri chiefs received six dozen large

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<sup>18</sup> Wayne C. Temple, *Indian Villages*, p. 95-96.

<sup>19</sup> Journal of Diron D’Artaguiette, in Mereness, *Travels*, p. 78; for Fox depredations and ambushes of Indians and French, see Joseph Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana: Illinois, Kickapoo, and Potawatomi Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974), p. 164-166.



knives and “two hundred pounds of powder.”<sup>20</sup> Hunting and trapping merchandise weighed large in these early gift inventories. The council directed the gifts to be dispersed among the “warriors of their villages.”<sup>21</sup>

Studies of extant Indian gift lists in the decade before the Seven Years War – for both the French and British – indicate blurred distinctions in the meaning of merchandise. Gifts were to impart a “civilizing influence,” yet at the same time, gifts of munitions, war paint, scalping knives, and even cutlasses appear to have promoted tribal warfare as well as Indian-white hostilities.<sup>22</sup> Given the amount of fervent writing in early French memorials about the rich possibilities of the Illinois and Missouri lands, it is more likely that these 1719 gifts were meant to encourage large-scale hunting and trapping. In fact, the scale of fur harvesting from the upper Mississippi Valley continued to be staggering clear through the 1740’s. A peltry inventory of a single trader/trapper from 1745, for example, contained “1156 cats large and small” and “1160 bear large and small,” as well as otter, 134 foxskins, wolf, beaver and five packets of deerskins.<sup>23</sup> These were the halcyon days of French-Indian interaction: an inaugural period in which gifts encouraged the development of a trade matrix at a new fort. Almost thirty years later, in 1747, Governor Vaudreuil of New Orleans would write threatening letters about withholding gifts to the Illinois, “if they continue to remain inactive and give us the sole proofs of their friendship, promises to behave better to us in the future.”<sup>24</sup> In the same letter, Vaudreuil says of the Quapaw in Arkansas that he had “trouble

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<sup>20</sup> Minutes of the Council of Commerce Assembled at Dauphine Island on the Thirteenth of September, 1719, in *Mississippi Provincial Archives*, 3, pp. 260-261.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> See Wilbur R. Jacobs, *Diplomacy and Indian Gifts: Anglo-French Rivalry Along the Ohio and Northwest Frontiers, 1748-1763* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1950), pp. 55-57.

<sup>23</sup> See inventory of Louis Bienvenu dit Delisle in Margaret Kimball Brown, *The Voyageur in the Illinois Country: The Fur Trade Professional Boatman in Mid America*, Center for French Colonial Studies Extended Publication Series Number 3 (Naperville, Illinois: Center for French Colonial Studies, 2002), p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Vaudreuil to Maurepas, March 15, 1747, in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 9-10.

stirring them out of their lethargy.”<sup>25</sup> The theme of Indian service to the French via a highly industrious fur-collecting commitment remains clear in the letters of French officials all the way through to the collapse of the regime.

It didn't take long for Indians across the Mississippi to note the possibilities of a mid-continent trade warehouse. In late May of 1723, D'Artaguiette reported the arrival at Fort Chartres of four Missouri Indians. The fort these Indians were visiting was not the imposing, wide-winged limestone structure with an impressive enceinte and ornate gate (constructed in the early 1750's as the third Fort Chartres). Surrounded by crude palings already decaying in the soggy earth, the 1723 Fort Chartres was a log rectangle, smoke-stained and palisaded, with two bastions at diagonal corners.<sup>26</sup> Two other bastions may have been added to a second fort. On the scaffolding of each bastion was a bell, and the bastions themselves eventually held a prison, a henhouse, and a stable.<sup>27</sup> The strikingly level lands around the fort would have enabled arriving visitors to take in the extent of French settlement: scattered houses made of “pickets,” partially-cleared land in black gashes of seeded earth, and unfenced, foraging domestic animals. Archaeological investigations at this first Fort Chartres site confirm high numbers of domesticated and large-mammal bones, a trend supported by documents describing the early florescence of agriculture and cattle-and-pig husbandry; bison bones are also well-represented.<sup>28</sup> Despite the presence of numerous wooden structures, pigs and chickens, garden plots and grain outfields, the Fort Chartres

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Jelks, Ekberg, and Martin, *Excavations at the Laurens Site*, p. 112

<sup>27</sup> David Keene, “Fort de Chartres: Archaeology in the Illinois Country,” in *French Colonial Archaeology: The Illinois Country and the Western Great Lakes*, ed. by John Walthall (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991) p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> See table of Selected Vertebrate Remains in Jelks, Ekberg, and Martin, *Excavations*, p. 106. The excavations of faunal remains at the Laurens site contrast with those discovered at the more remote Ouiatenon post on the Wabash. The French diet at Ouiatenon reflected a higher incidence of wild game.

prairies in 1723 would have still been very wet. The French had encountered spring flooding of streams and the Coulee Deneau. In addition, the great marsh overflowed as rains and river saturated the floodplain. Notarial records from years later indicate the building of ditches into natural runs to direct the “discharge” from the marsh toward the river.<sup>29</sup> Myriad ponds of all sizes dotted the land, forming overnight in small depressions and dry runs as the water table rose unchecked. On brimming surfaces were already breeding the malarial-laden mosquitoes. Retreating spring floodwaters – an annual inundation that all who lived along the river would get used to – laid down a shining, tacky surface and filled the air with alluvial stench. Fort Chartres, the future pride of the French Empire in North America, sat on a plain of black mud.

Nonetheless, the fort and its surroundings impressed Indian tribes living, especially, to the west and north. In 1723, the Missouri Indians who came to pay their respects would have encountered a significantly altered landscape, where only four years before browsing deer brushed through tallgrass prairies and the wide marsh near the cliffs was raucous with nesting waterfowl. Word was out among the Missouri tribes about change, about settlement and a permanent trade center. The Missouri Indians had evidently come to open up trade relations with the French, for on June 6, they re-crossed the Mississippi “accompanied by Frenchmen who were going among them...to trade in horses and to buy skins.”<sup>30</sup> By 1725, the lure of the Missouri lands was consistently drawing French and Indians across the river. Reports to France in 1725 by French observers Longuiel and Begon mentioned Kickapoo and Fox attacks on the French themselves: “...the latter tribe [Fox] say they will not allow the French

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, see Record K-206, (H223) for a 1755 description of a property on Royal Street in the village of Chartres, bounded “...on the other [side] by the run used as a discharge of the marsh.” In Margaret Kimball Brown and Lawrie Cena Dean, *The Village of Chartres in Colonial Illinois 1720 – 1765* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1977), p. 594.

<sup>30</sup> Journal of Diron D’Artaguette, cited in Joseph Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana*, p.161.

to pass to go to the Scioux, because the trade the French would do with them would greatly reduce that which they do there themselves.” Longueil adds that “the Renards and Scioux, acting in concert, have attacked the French who are settled among the Illinois, and that both tribes are so enraged with the Illinois that it is impossible to make them stop.”<sup>31</sup>

The spread of French hunting and fur-gathering efforts across the Mississippi into the plentiful game country of the Missouri is clearly indicated in commercial records. In 1724 the Osage Indians had sent a message to French authorities in Louisiana that they had amassed a quantity of peltry, including much beaver, that they wished to trade for French merchandise.<sup>32</sup> The Illinois colonies lay directly across from the Osage lands; and the garrison of Fort Chartres was stocked with both merchandise and gifts for Indians willing to trade with and stay loyal to the French (such loyalty often meant serving in French armies attacking other tribes and British outposts). In 1735, for example, despite renewed hostilities between the Fox and the Illinois, French traders were able to purchase from the Sioux “100,000 beautiful beaver skins.”<sup>33</sup> Approximately nine years later, at the outbreak of King George’s War, such was the lure of the deerskin and peltry trade that one estimate put 1,600 Frenchmen “engaged in it.” Commercial figures from the Archives Nationales, Colonies, Paris, transcribed in the Public Records Office of Jackson, Mississippi, indicate a “large

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<sup>31</sup> Pierre Margry, *Decouvertes et Etablissements des Francais dans l’Ouest et dans la Sud de L’Amerique Septentrionale (1616-1754)*, English Translation, Vol. 6, p. 548, cited in Joseph Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana : Illinois, Kickapoo, and Potawatomi Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974), p. 166.

<sup>32</sup> Nancy M. Miller Surrey, *The Commerce of Louisiana During the French Regime: 1699- 1763* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), p. 347, citing Pierre Margry, *Decouvertes et Etablissements des Francois dans l’Ouest et dans le Sud de l’Amerique Septentriole* (Paris, 1879-1888), vol. vi, p. 427.

<sup>33</sup> Nancy N. Miller Surrey, *The Commerce of Louisiana*, p. 354.

number” of furs going down the Mississippi to New Orleans each year; in 1745, the value was given as 9,621 livres.<sup>34</sup>

While agricultural studies such as those of Carl Ekberg have stressed the production of cereal grains and the shipping of surplus wheat and flour south to New Orleans, neither Ekberg’s studies nor analyses based on French government economic figures and regulations take into account the clandestine activities of individuals in a fluid frontier trade environment. For such a system to have developed early – in the first decade of French occupation – there must have been many opportunities for exchange among French and Indians. In the first years of the Chartres settlement, in 1727, for instance, a series of notarial records details an inquiry into a trading mission carried out by the Sieur Poudret into the Pawnee and Osage territory across the Mississippi. In an inquiry that spanned two months, a man – likely a voyageur -- Poudret hired to accompany him, Jean Jacques Desmanets, gave a deposition about Poudret’s activities. There was evidently some question about whether Poudret’s words to the Osage had incited them to make war on the Pawnee. As revealed in the long, tangled narrative involving the stealing of Indian slaves and Spanish trade horses, Poudret’s dealings with these Trans-Mississippi Indians took him into three different camps: the Missouri, the Osage, and the Pawnee.<sup>35</sup> The efforts of the French to keep peace among the warring tribes in order to facilitate their own trading success were often ineffectual. Desmanets’ testimony, for example, indicates how Poudret’s diplomacy was received: “We told them [the Pawnee]

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<sup>34</sup> See discussion in Surrey, *The Commerce*, p. 360. The ANC records do not clearly differentiate the source of the peltries – from the upper Missouri Country across from French Illinois, from the Arkansas tribes, or from the lower Mississippi Valley. Earlier records do make this distinction, as noted by Miller Surrey in drawing from the Archives, Bibliotheque du Department des Affaires Etrangeres, Paris. See the list of furs obtained from lower Mississippi tribes, p. 348. The Abikas tribe alone furnished 8,000 skins.

<sup>35</sup> See notarial record K-411 in Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, 891-895.

to live in peace with the Osage and other nations, that this was the word of the French chief. But they replied that they had eaten the Osage and that they would always eat them.”<sup>36</sup>

Through the formal establishment of Fort Chartres, France sought to control French-Indian trade in the Illinois Country. The Provincial Council in Illinois, the governing body authorized by the Company of the Indies, had instructed French traders and military going into the Missouri country not to interfere in the traffic in Paducah (Apache) slaves or horses. The Missouri tribes involved in these trades might become “alienated” and begin to sell peltries to Fox Indians or rogue British traders.<sup>37</sup> Official accounts of expeditions, or notarial depositions such as that of the Poudret trip, detail only isolated cases. Other kinds of records provide interesting measures of the degree of casual, opportunistic trade contact between French and Indians developing out of the Chartres trade matrix. Ten years later in 1736, for instance, a Frenchman living at Fort Michilimackinac compiled a “census of Indian tribes.” While French censuses were usually taken by arriving military commanders or by officially-appointed engineers and cartographers, this time the numbers of tribal warriors, ranging from Kickapoo and Mascouten to the Illinois Confederacy, were based on the on-site estimates of French voyageurs and fur trappers.<sup>38</sup> There were enough Frenchmen present in Indian villages to take head counts. One historian studying the contracts drawn up among French-Canadian voyageurs and employers, as well as the numbers of *billets* (due bills) for trade goods has concluded, “By 1736 French traders were regularly ascending the Missouri...

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<sup>36</sup> Declaration of Jean Jacques Desmanets, in notarial record K-411, Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, p. 893.

<sup>37</sup> See the detailed account of the expedition of Veniard de Bourgmont in 1723-24 into the Missouri Country for the purposes of establishing the short-lived Fort d’Orleans, in Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, V, transl. by Brian Pearce (Louisiana State University Press, 1987), pp. 445-455.

<sup>38</sup> Census is in the *New York Colonial Documents* 9: 1055-1057, cited in Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana*, p. 188.

between February and November, 1737, four pairs of French traders planned to ascend the Missouri to trade.”<sup>39</sup>

The river systems in which major waterways drained into the Mississippi from the east and west left the trappers and traders of French Illinois uniquely poised: once on the rivers and streams, they became fundamentally unaccountable. In light bark canoes or heavier pirogue designed to ferry specific weights and amounts of furs and goods, trappers, hunters, and seasonal traders could fan out over hundreds of miles of feeder streams, smaller rivers, many unnamed and appearing on no maps until the late eighteenth century.<sup>40</sup> Both the Company of the Indies and the French government sought to regulate trade activity through the licensing of traders, the leasing out of fur posts, and gifts dispensed from Fort Chartres and other forts to secure and monitor tribal loyalties.<sup>41</sup> Yet the slippery, highly-opportunistic trading world of riverine traffic remained impossible to monitor. Surviving narratives of escapes from Indian attacks on the river – contained mainly in the detailed letters of Commander Macarty at Fort Chartres – often describe how French traders, slaves, and Illinois Indians hid in bulrushes, laid low on islands, crawled through canebrakes, secreted their canoes in tangled willow copses. The river offered concealment and escape but it also played a strangely undefined role as a boundary. Part of the amorphous nature of

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<sup>39</sup> Theresa J. Piazza, “The Kaskaskia Manuscripts: French Traders in the Missouri Valley Before Lewis and Clark,” *The Missouri Archaeologist* Vol. 53, December, 1992, pp. 20-21.

<sup>40</sup> For example, see note 1 in a document entitled, “Proposed Colony in the Illinois,” in Theodore C. Pease, *Illinois on The Eve of the Seven Years War*, Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Vol. 29 (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1940), p. 135. This 1749 plan detailed a French colony on the Wabash (the Ohio), an idea resurfacing across the 1750’s and 1760’s as a strategic benefit but never acted upon. The plan contains river designations such as “the Green, Bon Secours, and Michecaco Rivers.” As explained by Pease, on a 1755 map, the ‘Michecaco’ was noted as a tributary of the Illinois River; Pease identified it as possibly “Crooked Creek, Spoon River, Copperas Creek, or Kickapoo Creek.”

<sup>41</sup> The best discussion of French efforts to regulate the Canadian fur trade is still Louise Phelps Kellogg, *French Regime in Wisconsin and the Northwest* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1925), especially her chapter, “Changes in Fur Trade Methods.” As Kellogg points out, “The licensed traders also were but a few of those who trafficked in the wilderness” (p. 366). Margaret Kimball Brown also discusses the leasing of Missouri posts and the use of the conge (trading permit) in *The Voyageur in the Illinois Country*.

the trade west and north of Fort Chartres had to do with the unspecified nature of the Illinois Country. The official boundaries between French Canada and French Louisiana were never crisply set out anywhere. After it was made part of the province of Louisiana in 1731, the Illinois Country was thought to extend to “the headwaters of the Mississippi.”<sup>42</sup> Although this was disputed by both French Canada and Louisiana, French Canadians, French Illinoisans, and myriad Indians continued to hunt, trap, and trade on the tributaries and inlets of the Mississippi River System, indicating a generally-held belief that trade law and trade boundaries were unenforceable.

River trade was facilitated by the presence of master boatbuilders at the French villages of Kaskaskia and Chartres. The deep, sturdy pirogues hewn of whole cottonwood trees or sometimes, black walnut, were used for the New Orleans convoy. Private individuals as well as the French government contracted for such craft, and commercial agreements provide official specifications and descriptions.<sup>43</sup> Yet these few surviving records barely sketch in the outlines of river transport. A 1726 estate inventory in the Chartres notarial records includes “Half of one Indian pirogue of walnut,” suggesting the Indians were also builders of river craft, and that some French traded for or otherwise obtained these boats.<sup>44</sup> Analysis of contracts for voyageurs has shown that some Illinois Indians signed on as voyageurs for the French, including one Penchirois, “said to be from the Xavier mission located on the Mechigamea reserve.”<sup>45</sup> Voyageurs are identified in some contracts as “upriver,” yet the historian who has analyzed these contracts in depth, Margaret Kimball Brown, indicates how

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<sup>42</sup> Louise Kellogg provides a concise overview of the claims of various French governors in both Louisiana and Canada, especially, the Memorial of Vaudreuil in 1748, in Kellogg, *French Regime*, pp. 371-373.

<sup>43</sup> See the thorough discussion of river *voiture* (craft) in Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots*, Appendix, pp.273-279; for analysis of contracts for the building of river craft, see Margaret Kimball Brown, *The Voyageur*, pp. 8-11.

<sup>44</sup> See Record K-416 in Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, p. 901.

<sup>45</sup> Contained in the Kaskaskia Mss., 1743, cited in Margaret Kimball Brown, *The Voyageur*, p. 8.



entwined the official network of traders/voyageurs was: their names form an “interconnected network” which turn up “repeatedly in different associations.”<sup>46</sup> Brown points out that it is impossible to know just how many persons ever participated in the river trade; the only specific indication lies in the 1732 census that lists “transients who come and go, about fifty men.”<sup>47</sup> And of course, French inventories of furs held by successfully-returning traders do not detail how those furs were obtained. Behind entries like “448 livres of beaver in five packets,” or “120 livres of dry beaver at 30 sols the livre,” there may have been a complicated trading history involving Indians from as many as ten upriver tribes.<sup>48</sup> These packets of furs and hundreds of cat and bearskins represent a drainage harvest of a formidable amount of land; and they may have been obtained in a myriad of casual trade transactions ranging from the exchange of a single raccoon skin that would net a “small knife for a woman” to a man’s ruffled shirt priced at “2 Bucks or 2 middleing D[eer] or 2 otters or 7 raccoons.”<sup>49</sup>

The number of light, easily-carried canoes on the feeder streams and rivers of the Upper Mississippi Valley – the unofficial record – was likely legion. While most interpretations of the Ojibway word for the Mississippi settle on “father of waters” or “great river,” at least one river historian believes the real meaning to be closer to “river of waters from all sides.”<sup>50</sup> The French as well as the Indians had grasped this. In 1749, after the end of King George’s War, a curious document appeared called “Instructions for the Exploration of Louisiana.” An objective, even scientific assessment of the entire Mississippi River Valley was to be

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<sup>46</sup> Margaret Kimball Brown, *The Voyageur*, p. 24.

<sup>47</sup> Brown, p. 28.

<sup>48</sup> See lists of furs obtained in 1747 and 1745, respectively, in Brown, p. 21.

<sup>49</sup> These exchange rates are for the year 1765, listed on a “Schedule of equivalents for barter of goods and skins,” cited in Margaret Kimball Brown, *Cultural Transformations Among the Illinois: An Application of a Systems Model* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University, 1979), p. 250.

<sup>50</sup> E.W. Gould, *Fifty Years on the Mississippi, or Gould’s History of River Navigation* (Saint Louis: Nixon-Jones Printing Co., 1889), p. 28.

undertaken by “M. Riday, known as Bosseron.” Bosseron’s instructions are extremely precise. In the area of the Illinois,

It must be exactly stated how many leagues the rivers will carry canoes without a portage, and above the portages how many leagues farther can one carry them. What is thought to be the place at which they rise; do they come from various lakes, marshes, or prairies, and if in their origin they are considerable; what the relation is between the Bountiful river, otherwise called the Ohio, and the other rivers that empty into it or which border it, as well as the Illinois or the Mississippi.<sup>51</sup>

All aspects of Bosseron’s instructions stress the riverine geography of the French Empire south of the Great Lakes, revealing some realistic understanding of the French and Indian trade networks. Bosseron was also to undertake an anthropological assessment of Indian tribes living in the lands drained by the rivers. The trade behaviors of these Indians were of particular importance, along with their propensities for alcohol, their populations, and curiously, the exact numbers of men and women in tribal estimates. The fruits of this expedition, if it ever took place, are not recorded. Included among a host of documents from the period before the Seven Years War, this set of instructions says a great deal about the role of water and river transport in the French Empire along the Mississippi.

An additional factor in the growth of such riverine exchange contacts was the long cultural trading history of the Mechigamea Indians, living in a village only a mile north of Fort Chartres. It is important to factor in the skilled trade history of these Indians, because as one archaeologist/historian of the French fur trade in the central subarctic (Hudson Bay region) has noted, “...Indians [were] shrewd consumers who knew how to take full advantage of the economic opportunities offered to them.” Studies of Indians as consumers in the eighteenth century have shown discriminating trade behaviors of a complexity far beyond the earliest European-Indian contact patterns, in which, for instance, all Jesuit priests

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<sup>51</sup> “Instructions for Exploration of Louisiana,” in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 5.

ventured into the Canadian wilderness with supplies of “small trinkets.”<sup>52</sup> While historians have been able to reconstruct trading patterns of northern Indians, good evidence for trade behaviors of the Illinois Indians is not manifest across the French regime. And because of the distressingly real, deleterious effects of French brandy on Illinois tribes, historians have sometimes concentrated on the problems of the illicit liquor exchange and glossed the role of the provisioning trade. An emphasis on agriculture as the best measure of industriousness has also contributed to perceptions of Indians living near the fort as dependent and opportunistic.<sup>53</sup> It is clear from a 1726 memorial written by the Sieur de Bienville that Indians in the Illinois Country were molding the kind of trade that developed there. Bienville noted that

the voyageurs of Canada formerly obtained from them [the Illinois] a large number of beaver [and] raccoon skins and skins of deer, bears and of buffaloes, but for six or seven years the French have been obliging them to devote themselves to producing [bear] oil, tallow and meat for which they trade with them.<sup>54</sup>

Bienville perceived that it was the French who were “obliging” the Illinois Indians to furnish a specific kind of trade; this is an oblique way of saying that Illinois Indians learned to furnish the provisional items that would net them the kind of trade goods they wanted.

The history of the French wheat convoys leaving Kaskaskia each spring – the multitude of embarking pirogues, heavy with concentrated grain, furs, skins, salted meat and oils – inscribes a cultural as well as economic upriver ritual. This emphasis obscures the reality of

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<sup>52</sup> See Arthur J. Ray’s important study, “Indians as Consumers in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 267. Northern Canadian Indians rejected any substandard kettle or cooking pot, and would assess the iron or copper quality of kettles minutely; an equal scrutiny was given to knives. There is no reason to think that Illinois Indians could not shape the nature of their trade with the French in similar ways.

<sup>53</sup> For instance, Carl Ekberg in his introduction to *Francois Valle and his world* describes the 1719 Kaskaskia Indians as already “alcohol-ravaged.” See Carl J. Ekberg, *Francois Valle and his world: Upper Louisiana Before Louis and Clark* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Memorial of Bienville, in *Mississippi Provincial Archives* 3, p. 533-534.

hundreds of such riverine trading voyages each year by Indians, French voyageurs, and even some enterprising women. By 1741, the governor of Louisiana was noting the arrival in New Orleans of “a rather large quantity of peltries....” Some of the furs had come from the Missouri Indians and other Indians “west of the Mississippi.”<sup>55</sup> Although many different tribes relied on the Mississippi, from the Sioux near the Falls of St. Anthony all the way down to the Alibamon and the Taensas near the Gulf, the French at mid-continent had particularly observed the Illinois Indians. In 1729, one M. Perier declared in a letter that the “Illini were masters of the Mississippi River and must be kept from joining the English.”<sup>56</sup> And this broad, sinuous, chimerical river was especially important to the Mechigamea Indians.

The Mechigamea emerge in the history of French Illinois as one of the most interesting and little-studied tribes; there is a dearth of documentary history concerning them, but archaeological evidence and their historical associations with the Quapaw in Arkansas suggest a strongly riverine people. In reviewing the French-Indian interaction across approximately seventy years, on a strip of riparian land sixty miles long, one fact stands out: among the four Illinois Confederacy tribes, the Mechigamea avoided open conflict with the French. They lived the closest to them, a mile above the village of Chartres; yet, unlike the events at the Cahokia grant, in which the Cahokia-Tamaroa were removed to a village nine miles away after a bloodless “revolt,” the Mechigamea stayed in their village in fairly intimate contact with French inhabitants and the fort. By 1721, in fact, it seems there were actually two Mechigamea villages above Fort Chartres, strung out along the river bank.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Letter in *Wisconsin Historical Collections* 17, p. 336, cited by Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana*, p. 191.

<sup>56</sup> Perier letter of August 15, 1729, in Chicago Historical Society, cited in Wayne C. Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, p. 41.

<sup>57</sup> Dan Hechenberger, “The Metchigamea Tribe,” in *M'Skutewe Awandiangwi*, Nipundikan, 1997, Vol. 1:2, p. 1.

Archaeological studies (site digs) have not been conducted at these former villages, due to their being entirely on private land. Researchers, however, have analyzed surface finds and especially, ceramic shard collections turned up through cultivation. Pottery and glazed earthenware, incised geometries and concentric swirls distinctive to lower river tribes like the Tunica and Natchez reveal an extensive trading history. Mechigamea ceramic vessel use – and the poignant, scattered overlay of French faience plates, platter shards, and pitchers – bespeak a process of acculturation and change. At certain key points of transition in kinds of pottery sought, traded for, and used, it is possible to infer shifts in trade and subsistence behaviors. These trade patterns in turn were linked to the French settlements on the lower river, to French mercantilism and trade policies, and to seemingly peripheral developments such as animal husbandry on an island peninsula between Kaskaskia and Fort Chartres.<sup>58</sup> While ceramics were “traded widely among Indian groups occupying the Mississippi Valley region from 1680 to 1750,” after that date, aboriginal ceramic vessels were no longer in use.<sup>59</sup> The Mechigamea had shifted early on, possibly by 1719, into the provision trade.

Before contact with the French became fairly steady, after 1680, the Mechigamea had been middleman traders for the Quapaw Indian tribes of northeast Arkansas and possibly, as many as nine other tribes living along the Arkansas River before 1700. They likely had a summer village near the present-day Arkansas town of Pocahontas along the Black River. The Grigsby site, investigated in 1988 by the Arkansas Archaeological Survey, is believed to

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<sup>58</sup> This livestock “peninsula” was noted by Nicolas de Finiels in the 1790’s. Here the French bred and contained their sturdy ponies, an intermixed breed of some Arabian and French stock, possibly some mustang. One early history of the Prairie du Rocher area calls these horses “point ponies,” perhaps referring to the peninsular point where they were grazed. The peninsula made stealing these horses very difficult; their naturally-increasing numbers lessened the need for Indian horses procured from the Trans-Mississippi tribes, thereby affecting a trade network that had existed since before 1700. For “point ponies,” see E.J. Montague, “The History of Randolph County, Illinois, Including Old Kaskaskia Island,” p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> John A. Walthall, “Aboriginal Pottery and the Eighteenth-Century Illini,” in *Calumet & Fleur-de-Lys: Archaeology of Indian and French Contact in the Midcontinent* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), p. 169.

be the Mechigamea village written in on two separate maps by Joliet and Marquette.<sup>60</sup> At this central location, accessible through the river systems, the Mechigamea came to secure ceramics in the distinctive Quapaw tradition, characterized by the so-called Quapaw Swirl, as well as horses obtained from the Spanish and driven overland towards the Mississippi. Arabian horses were herded along a (possibly) paleo-historic trail winding northeast between San Antonio and St. Louis. In return for horses and pottery, the Mechigamea were the purveyors of prized French trade goods, readily-available in the proto-historic period and certainly in rich metallic flow across the Great Lakes region between 1610-70.<sup>61</sup> The trading loop regularly brought the Mechigamea downstream in a host of transport craft extensive enough to move entire villages.

This role changed dramatically when the French settled the Illinois Country. While some artistic re-creations of Mechigamea villages show women engaged in agriculture, such as pounding corn or flailing grain, it is more likely that a prime activity in the Chartres riverine villages of this Illinois tribe was the making of bear oil. Omnivorous black bears ranged thick along the Mississippi River and its woodlands, eating constantly as they moved across miles of terrain, following white deer herds, fish runs in inland streams, insect and grub populations, and seasonal berries and nuts. The shooting of shoreline black bears, including mothers and cubs, by Europeans in river craft is documented many times, especially before 1720. Europeans rapidly developed a taste for bear oil; it was “claimed by some to be quite

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<sup>60</sup> Sarah Jones Tucker, *Indian Villages of the Illinois*, Plates IV and V; for discussion of Grigsby site artifacts and the profile of the Mechigamea in the 1670's, see Dan F. Morse, “The Seventeenth-Century Michigamea Village Location in Arkansas,” in *Calumet & Fleur-de-Lys*, pp. 55-74.

<sup>61</sup> Dan F. Morse, “The Seventeenth-Century Michigamea,” in *Calumet & Fleur-de-Lys*, p. 62; John A. Walthall et al, “Woman Chief’s Village: An Illini Winter Hunting Camp,” in *Calumet & Fleur-de-Lys*, emphasize the importance of knives: “Knives were among the earliest and most demanded trade goods brought into the Illinois Country.” Walthall inventories trade goods from 1688 as containing twenty-three dozen case knives of standard size, three dozen case knives of large size, and six dozen clasp knives (citing Pease and Werner, 1934).

as good for salads as the best grade of the latter [olive oil].”<sup>62</sup> Fats and oils were not arriving at French settlements with any regularity at all; especially in the early years, the supply ships from the Company of the Indies were erratic, sparse, and sometimes lost at sea. Animal fat from game became an important source of calories and was also necessary in the care of guns and the few metal implements available in the Illinois Country. Indians living south of the Illinois were observed at mid century making a “deer of oil,” using an entire, peeled-off deerskin with orifices plugged with a lime and salt paste to hold rendered bear oil.<sup>63</sup> Choctaw Indians used deer heads with plugged orifices as containers. The deer of oil, filled heads, and filled bladders were treated as units of exchange in the trade. In Alabama, southern Indians even managed natural “bear ranges” devoted to the increase of black bear populations; one such range lay near the Chattahoochee River.<sup>64</sup> Indians themselves prohibited villages and hunting in these areas. In the French bear oil trade, Indian hunters obtained much of the meat and oil along the St. Francis River in northern Arkansas; Arkansas Indians could furnish as much as 3,000 pots of oil annually.<sup>65</sup> It was with the Arkansas Indians that the Mechigamea had sustained trade and living contacts. The St. Francis River and the Black River, summer camp to the Mechigamia, are both in the same northeastern quadrant of Arkansas.

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<sup>62</sup> Nancy N. M. Surrey, *The Commerce of Louisiana*, p. 262.

<sup>63</sup> Le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana, or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina: Containing a Description of the Countries that lye on both Sides of the River Mississippi: With An Account of the Settlements, Inhabitants, Soil, Climate, and Products*, Vol. II (London: T. Becket and P.A. De Hondt, 1763), p. 62.

<sup>64</sup> Herbert B. Battle, “The Domestic Use of Oil Among the Southern Aborigines,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (April-May 1922), p. 173. See also the discussion of bear oil use and its connection with deer population in Ian W. Brown, “Certain Aspects of French-Indian Interaction in Lower Louisiane,” in *Calumet & Fleur-de-Lys*, p. 21, and Daniel J. Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, p. 206.

<sup>65</sup> Surrey, p. 262. See also Margaret Kimball Brown, *The Voyageur in the Illinois Country*, p. 5, n. 5, and p. 21, for an overview of the meaning of the term “pot” in conjunction with the shipping of both bear oil and brandy. A Canadian half gallon “was a *pot* or *quarte*, equal to 63.4 ounces.” Brown indicates that a barrel would hold twenty pots (about ten gallons).

It is likely the Mechigamea were drawn into the bear oil trade through their Quapaw connections, although it may also have been the other way around. In 1740, a free black in the Illinois, Jacques Duverger, also a surgeon and trader, “acquired 150 pots of bear oil.” Surviving records include a contract with another voyageur to transport the pots of oil south to New Orleans.<sup>66</sup> How did Duverger “acquire” the substantial number of 150 pots of bear oil? While in rare instances, a very fat black bear might be rendered to produce as much as 120 pots of oil, this was likely not a common outcome.<sup>67</sup> The misleading aspect of surviving trade and commercial records is the way they commodify large amounts of organic trade material to suggest a single source. Bear oil, like salted meat, smoked buffalo tongue, hides, furs, and smaller peltries, was a trade item of incremental as well as gross value. A French trapper/trader or an Indian could exchange one pot or 100 pots, and such transactions could occur literally anywhere – on river banks, at midstream from canoe to pirogue, between mounted hunting parties on the bluffs of the Missouri River, at the mouth of the Illinois River in the shade of the towering rock formations there, on an island south of Kaskaskia – or at Fort Chartres. Contracts with voyageurs to accompany traders on hunting expeditions were usually made in late summer, for the party to leave in the fall. In particular, autumn bear were fat from their summer feeding and produced the greatest amount of oil.<sup>68</sup> Yet the sheer amount of oil being convoyed downriver to New Orleans suggests strongly that many Indians were regular producers, and that they traded oil in both small and large amounts.

The oil production process highlights the connection between bear and deer. To kill a black bear and butcher it using heavy knives; to boil the meat down in large kettles, rendering the fat slowly through hours of tended wood fires kept at a steady heat; to procure

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<sup>66</sup> Kaskaskia Mss., 1740, cited in Margaret Kimball Brown, *The Voyageur*, p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Statistic of 120 pots from one bear cited in Brown, p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> Margaret Kimball Brown, *The Voyageur*, p. 12.



a freshly-killed deer and skillfully butcher it to keep the skin entire and uncut, or skin and boil a deer skull, then fill and caulk orifices – this process required the joint handling of both bear and deer and an established work site. The size of both mammals, black bear and deer, and the cauldrons necessary to render the oil as a commodity make it unlikely that Indians could produce good quality bear oil in an opportunistic fashion. It also mandates the use of large kettles. Indian demand for both iron and copper kettles remained consistently high in the Illinois Country. The French government had taken on an increasingly active role in provisioning, transporting, selling, and dispersing goods as part of a mercantile economic system; that system depended on the fur trade, in which peltries flowed both north and south, and on the sale of surplus wheat to the New Orleans colony, in which foodstuffs flowed south. Surviving in the Macarty Correspondence collection at Huntington Library is a single undated Government indent for supplies sent to the Illinois country by convoy up the Mississippi. Best estimates at dating this manifest would place it in 1751 or 1752.<sup>69</sup> Lists of goods are identified for various parties: “For the Indians,” “For the French in Payment for Jobs,” “For the Barracks,” “For the Hospital,” “For the Magasin,” and “For the Office.” This inventory is revealing of trade trends, both sanctioned and perhaps, unsanctioned. At a time when the number of French troops defending the Illinois Country was not over 300, the goods designated “For the Barracks,” include “50 large cooking pots for the troops.” On February 1, 1752, French Commander Macarty Mactigue wrote to Antoine-Louis Rouille, Comte de Jouy and Minister of the Marine in Paris: “I have three hundred men of troops to keep three or four hundred leagues of country.”<sup>70</sup> However, at the time Macarty wrote, the soldiers were not living in a fort but with the townspeople in French Kaskaskia. Plans were

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<sup>69</sup> Manifest is cited in Briggs, “The Forgotten Colony,” p. 373-374.

<sup>70</sup> Macarty to Rouille, February 1, 1752, in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 481.

underway for the building of a new fort on either the Kaskaskia River or farther inland from the existent Fort Chartres; the second wooden fort, erected between 1725-1728, was so decayed it could not lodge or support a garrison of troops. Macarty hoped that construction could be completed on the barracks by 1753: “We have lodged the soldiers in the houses of the townspeople, who are paying for the lodging....”<sup>71</sup> The fifty iron cooking pots shipped up from New Orleans may not have ended up in the new barracks at all. An inventory of the material goods at Fort Chartres, conducted by both the French and the British in 1765, reveals less than ten iron kettles scattered throughout the various structures of the fort.<sup>72</sup>

This trade manifest also profiles Indian trade good preference. In the list of goods designated “For the Indians,” appears an entry for “400 pounds of copper cauldrons, all sizes, like those in Canada.”<sup>73</sup> This entry for cauldrons is one of the largest on the list of trade and gift items for Indians. Anthropological and archaeological studies have consistently stressed the high preference of Indians in many North American locations for iron and especially, brass and copper cooking pots.<sup>74</sup> Excavations at Osage village sites in Missouri, for example, reveal that “nearly all the brass artifacts represent secondary use by the Indians, and were made of scrap from brass kettles.”<sup>75</sup> A comparison of goods traded to the Illinois Indians at three different points in time – 1688, 1710, and 1765 – shows the escalation in demand for pots. In 1710 Father Marest writing from the Cahokia Mission did not include

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<sup>71</sup> Macarty and Buchet to Vaudreuil, January 15, 1752, in Pease, p. 426.

<sup>72</sup> “Inventory of the Goods at Fort De Chartres,” in Clarence W. Alvord and Clarence Carter, *The New Regime 1765–1767* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1916), pp. 102–104.

<sup>73</sup> See Manifest in Briggs, *The Forgotten Colony*, pp. 374–377.

<sup>74</sup> For instance, see Bruce Trigger’s discussion of seventeenth century Huron trade good preferences, p. 209–210, and also, Indians’ re-use of broken iron implements and artifacts through metal and iron re-working, p. 216, in Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada’s “Heroic Age” Reconsidered* (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1985); for discussion of the archaeology of trade goods in the Middle Historic Period, 1670–1760, see George Irving Quimby, *Indian Culture and European Trade Goods* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), pp. 71–72. Quimby posits that pieces of iron kettles may have been detached and used as hoes. For Illinois Indians’ gradual conversion to brass kettles, see discussion by John Walthall, “Aboriginal Pottery and the Eighteenth-Century Illini,” in *Calumet & Fleur-de-Lys*, p. 168.

<sup>75</sup> Theresa J. Piazza, “The Kaskaskia Manuscripts,” p. 26.

any requests for pots on his list of requested items. By 1765, entries appear on trade lists for “brass kettles as they weigh at the rate of 1 lb. Beaver a pound” and “tin or camp kettles of a Gallon 1 Bever or 1 Buck and Doe.”<sup>76</sup> In that year, 1765, Captain Thomas Stirling described an incident on the Ohio River on his way to the Illinois country. One of his party tried to buy a kettle from a Mingo woman; she insisted on 25 buckskins and eventually got the equivalent in rum, for which she immediately traded and received 20 buckskins. Stirling thought the kettle “old” but noted that the woman effectively sold it for “about four guineas & a half.”<sup>77</sup> The shift into the provision trade is also highlighted archaeologically. Sites along the Mississippi River, such as the Waterman Site, the Mechigamea Village occupied between 1753-1765, reveal an equal concentration in ornamental goods – glass beads and tinkling cones, for instance – and artifacts connected with hunting: brass projectile points, flint knives, iron fleshers, gun flints.<sup>78</sup> European and ceramic vessel shards are also prevalent. Of some significance in this later Mechigamea site is the relative scarcity of agricultural implements. The record can be read as a story of shifting subsistence activities.

Once French trade goods became available on the lower river – after the settlement of New Orleans – the Mechigamea’s role as middleman traders collapsed. They abandoned their permanent village in Arkansas, and although they made trips up and down the Mississippi to visit and hunt, they substituted a trade in foodstuffs and furs for the pottery-horse-slave-French merchandise trade of the proto-historic period. Their role as hunters and meat/oil

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<sup>76</sup> These trade lists are furnished by Margaret Kimball Brown in her study, “Cultural Transformation Among the Illinois,” pp. 149-150. Brown selected items on the lists for inclusion. Father Marest’s list appears in *Jesuit Relations*, Vol. 66.

<sup>77</sup> *Broadswords and Bayonets: The Journals of the expedition under the command of Captain Thomas Stirling of the 42<sup>nd</sup> regiment of Foot, Royal Highland Regiment (The Black Watch) to occupy Fort Chartres in the Illinois Country, August, 1765 to January 1766*. Ed. by Robert G. Carroon (Illinois: The Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Illinois, 1984), p. 26.

<sup>78</sup> See inventory comparison of Zimmerman, Waterman, and Guebert sites in Margaret Kimball Brown, “Cultural Transformation,” p. 251.

procurers may have affected their subsistence agriculture as well. One indication of this in the Chartres notarial records is a gradual increase in sales of Mechigamea Indian land to the French, land granted to them by De Boisbriant in 1719. In this year, the French had been expressly forbidden to settle on and farm lands given to the Mechigamea. A Jesuit, Father de Ville, had even traveled “to Mobile to confer with Governor Bienville....” Records of the Company of the Indies show the missionaries requesting that the French be kept out of Indian villages. This proximity is phrased as “the French living *pesle mesle* with the Indians.”<sup>79</sup> The Company complied by giving the Mechigamea their own grant. However, since the edges of some French grants abutted the edges of the Mechigamea prairie, there soon began to be haggling over the addition of small bits of Mechigamea land. As early as 1724 one Charles Naut, a Frenchman married to an Indian woman, began farming land in the prairie of the Mechigamea. The Indians enlisted the help of Father de Kereben to plead their cause, but Naut was not stopped. The historian of the Jesuit missions in Illinois, Mary Borgias Palm, points out that the Mechigamea grant yet existed in the early 1800’s, described in the first surveys by Americans: “The tract of land laid down in the plat, bounded by the Coule de Nau, the Mississippi, and the lower line of St. Phillipe’s, was reserved for the Mechigamea Indians...and was never conceded away, either by the French or English government.”<sup>80</sup>

However much the Mechigamea resented Charles Naut’s incursions into their prairie, they eventually began to use their land as a source of revenue. In 1737, for instance, a notarial record refers to the sale of land owned by Jean Francois Becquet and his wife, Marianne Fafart, to Hubert Finet. This piece of land, “one arpent of land in front, the depth being not

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<sup>79</sup> Mary Borgias Palm, *Jesuit Missions*, p. 54. *Pesle mesle* is the origin of the English phrase “pell mell.” According to the etymology listed in *the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 2004, it is probably a reduplication of *mesle*, the imperative of *mesler*, to mix.

<sup>80</sup> *American State Papers, Public Lands*, 2, p. 186, cited in Palm, *Jesuit Missions*, p. 55.

defined,” had originally been purchased from “Joachim the Indian,” making it clear the land lay “in the prairie of said Metchigamia Indians.” The entry endeavors to clarify the terms of the sale and refers also to earlier transactions in which Mechigamia sold land: “as long as the Indians do not take it back by some caprice as the other land sold by them to other settlers.”<sup>81</sup> In 1741 mention is made of land acquired from “one Chikagou Chief of the Indians,” “situate in the low part of the prairie Mitchikamia.”<sup>82</sup>

Four years later another record presents a petition by some Chartres villagers to acquire four arpents of land through a concession rather than a sale. An Indian “with pretension to be the heir” claimed ownership of the land. The Indian is fully identified in the record as Etienne Miaching8ia, “son of Joachim, formerly a chief of the Moinguenas [an early, small, and quickly-absorbed Illinois tribe].” One revealing point about this petition is the reason stated by the commissioners for granting the land to the French and not permitting Miaching8ia to sell it: “the land is abandoned a number of years.” Four arpents of untilled and “abandoned” land sitting next to their own farms may have grated on French landowners.<sup>83</sup> They continued to acquire very small pieces of the Mechigamia prairie. In 1746, Chief Chigagou again sold land, this time “a parcel measuring 220 paces...situate in the prairie of the Metchigamea.” For these 220 paces, he received 200 livres.<sup>84</sup> While French landowners were neatening out the corners of their grants by edging into the Mechigamea common fields, it is also true that the Mechigamea were using this land as a commodity to raise cash.

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<sup>81</sup> See Record K-87 (H698) in Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, p. 425.

<sup>82</sup> Record K-136 (H760) in Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, p. 485.

<sup>83</sup> Record K-171 (H74) in Brown and Dean, p. 532.

<sup>84</sup> Record K-181 (H1018) in Brown and Dean, p. 547.

The loss of agricultural land may not have seemed a problem to them, given their declining numbers. The estimated population for their village fell from 1000 in 1723 to only 295 in 1752.<sup>85</sup> For this decline, historians have proposed factors of disease, alcohol, nutritional changes, subsistence shifts, and especially in the case of the Illinois Indians and the French, the recruitment of warriors for European wars.<sup>86</sup> (To this list for the Mechigamea must be added a decimating attack on their village by the Fox, Sauk, and Sioux in 1752). Concrete factors such as subsistence and food resource changes and natural environment degradation become part of more abstract and complex variables; causal relationships likely existed among all kinds of change encountered by Indians across the eighteenth century.<sup>87</sup> The much lower numbers of the Mechigamea – and their willingness to sell their land – can be understood also in terms of acreage productivity. According to studies of maize farming by the Iroquois and Eastern Woodland Indians, "Most investigators feel an acre of corn could support anywhere from one to five individuals." An early English observer and explorer, Martin Pring, noted that "each Indian family cultivated an acre of ground."<sup>88</sup> The Public Lands survey states that the Mechigamea grant eventually spanned 50 arpents, an amount of land which would just about support an Indian village population of 300 (an arpent is equal to approximately .84 English acres). As a broad generalization, the declining numbers of Mechigamea may have also paralleled the erosion of their land, despite the statement in

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<sup>85</sup> Joseph Zitomersky, *French Americans--Native Americans in Eighteenth-Century French Colonial Louisiana: The Population Geography of the Illinois Indians, 1670s-1760s* (Sweden: Lund University Press, 1994.), p. 321.

<sup>86</sup> See Chapter Two, page 35, n. 21, on Emily Blasingham's analysis of population decline among the Illinois Indians.

<sup>87</sup> Margaret Kimball Brown has confirmed these interdependencies by isolating 18 variables. She notes, "...it may be that the size of settlement is not an independent variable, but has causal relationships with subsistence movement and political flexibility. Size of settlement, therefore, could be considered a variable at a lower level, an indicator...." Margaret Kimball Brown, "Cultural Transformation," p. 248.

<sup>88</sup> Martin Pring (1625) cited in Gordon G. Whitney, *From Coastal Wilderness to Fruited Plain: A History of Environmental Change in Temperate North America from 1500 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Whitney, p. 102. See Whitney's excellent discussion of Indian agricultural practices, pp. 100-107.

*Public Lands* that the grant was never “conceded away.” It was, however, sold away. Yet the Mechigamea were not affected in a vacuum. On the eve of the Seven Years War in Illinois and on through the 1760’s, both these Indians and the French villages in the Chartres area were losing people.

By the 1750’s, records are describing the selling (and abandonment) of entire French farmsteads in the village of St. Philippe’s. Located north of the Mechigamea village and the fort, St. Philippe’s suffered from marshy earth and periodic inundation. Records detail the washing away of farmsteads there by the Mississippi. Property descriptions of sold and abandoned farms consistently refer to land owned “in the prairie of the Mechigamea,” making it clear that the Indians continued to own the land that lay between “the coulee and the river.”<sup>89</sup> Over the years, however, they had sold pieces of their land in the prairie to French farmers. A re-created map, the Common Fields and Villages of Chartres, circa 1752, clearly shows the “Mitchegamia Village” lying northwest, across the Coulee Deneau. This village may or may not represent the new village the Indians constructed in 1752, after their original village was decimated in a Fox attack. The land to the northeast of the village is not labeled “the prairie of the Mechigamia.”<sup>90</sup> Yet bounded by the great river and a coulee, the “Indian prairie” continued to support Mechigamea, French farmers from St. Phillippe, and, after 1752, some itinerant Peoria.

All across their concessions in the bottomland, the French labeled natural land formations. Some refer to surnames, such as the Prairie Chassin or the Plains of Lafabut. Others seem to identify peoples – “the Butte of the Cherakee” or historical events, as in Prairie L’Heurt (Meadow of the Clash). One inlet of the Mississippi is often called “the Rigolet.” These

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<sup>89</sup> See record K-203 (H246) in Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, p. 587.

<sup>90</sup> Map appears in Winstanley Briggs, “The Forgotten Colony,” p. 91.

French language terms appear to mean different things in different places and times; “the Rigolet” also shows up in writing about Cahokia from the nineteenth century, identified by one amateur historian as “The little stream known as Cahokia Creek.”<sup>91</sup> In the eighteenth century Fort Chartres area, the coulees Deneau and Rigolet and the ash grove, early described in notarial records, perhaps functioned as a means of demarcation between the French and Indian villages. A grove of untouched ash trees suggests this. For the French and likely the Mechigamea, firewood was becoming a premium by the 1750’s. The correspondence of Commander Macarty at Fort Chartres makes reference to the lack of fuel and wood along the Kaskaskia River by 1752.<sup>92</sup> Wood is noted as being “hailed” for lumber and construction, and property inventories from as early as 1741 begin to assert that sellers of homes will be taking with them their boards, door sills, window sills, and fences.<sup>93</sup> It is surprising, therefore, that the ash grove appears so consistently in the records across forty years: “the hill of the ash grove,” “from the ash grove to the hills,” or “the coulee of the ash grove.” Both white and green ash are trees of the Illinois bottomlands.<sup>94</sup> Ash is a fairly hard wood and burns with a btu of 20 per cord; this number places it seventh out of 16 on a list of practical fuelwoods. (Shagbark hickory burns with the highest btu – 24.6 – while basswood and aspen burn at only 12.6 and 12.5). Additionally, white ash is recorded as having a high ease of splitting (as opposed to oak, beech, or elm, for instance, which are very hard to

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<sup>91</sup> J. Nick Perrin, *The Jewel of Cahokia* (Belleville, Illinois: Belleville Advocate Printing Co., 1936), p. 5. The *Grand Dictionnaire Francais-Anglais*, 1864, defines a “rigole” as “a trench, a little ditch or furrow, drain, gutter, (for water to pass in).” This definition seems to suggest a manmade waterway; both naturally occurring feeder streams and constructed “rigoles” criss-crossed French lands.

<sup>92</sup> See Macarty to Vaudreuil, March 27, 1752, in Theodore C. Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 557.

<sup>93</sup> See notarial records K-128 (H568) and K-314 (H483) in Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, pp. 475 and 762. Wood use for the posts surrounding all French buildings, even henhouses, was very high. For example, in 1725 in a house sale contract, the seller agreed to furnish the buyer with “six hundred posts to fence said lot.” See Record K-14 (H154), p. 349. These posts were initially red mulberry; by the 1750’s, a stated preference for cedar posts begins to appear in the records. One inference is the exhaustion of red mulberry in the bottomlands.

<sup>94</sup> Robert H. Mohlenbrock, *Forest Trees of Illinois* (Southern Illinois University, 1975), pp. 73 and 76.



split).<sup>95</sup> To the north of the Illinois settlements, the Fox Indians used the bark of white ash, *Fraxinus americana*, in an infusion to relieve skin ailments such as sores and itching; such knowledge may have been available to Illinois Indians as well.<sup>96</sup> These qualities of ash would have been attractive to both the French and Indians.

The presence of the grove is distinctive in the records. The Mechigamea Prairie was sold off; the settlement of Chartres gradually filled in the lands around the fort; and its sister settlement, Prairie du Rocher, established by a nephew of De Boisbriant on a generous grant in 1718, also attracted many French. Yet the ash grove apparently was not cut down – or utilized to an extent that it could not re-seed itself – by any of these peoples living in three French villages, a fort, and two Indian villages. The heavy-crowned, golden-leaved autumn trees of a mature ash grove would have made a striking natural boundary. Despite the arguments from the French historian Giraud that the Mechigamea Indians resented being isolated and separated in their riverine villages, the actual geography of the French settlements suggests that natural markers like groves and coulees (feeder streams) were comfortably used by both peoples.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps the ash grove and the Coulee Deneau somewhat prevented the intermixing of roaming livestock from both villages.<sup>98</sup> A winding path designated in the notarial records as “the path to the Mechy village,” led northwest across the Coulee Deneau to the Mechigamea. There, along the river banks, these trading peoples moored many river craft. They also had likely imparted their knowledge of the Missouri-Arkansas lands across the Mississippi to the French. Their ties with the Quapaw, for instance, are particularly important because the Quapaw were a Siouyan-speaking tribe

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<sup>95</sup> Gordon G. Whitney, *From Coastal Wilderness*, p. 212.

<sup>96</sup> Frances B. King, *Plants, People, and Paleoecology: Biotic Communities and Aboriginal Plant Usage in Illinois*, Scientific Papers, Vol. XX (Springfield: Illinois State Museum, 1984), p. 135.

<sup>97</sup> See Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, V, p. 465.

<sup>98</sup> See Chapter Three, pages 111 -115, for discussion of livestock foraging.

related to the Osage, Kansa, Omaha, and Ponca.<sup>99</sup> Through the Mechigamea, knowledge of Trans-Mississippi geography, trading options with other tribes, and possibly, other Indian languages, would have been available to the French attracted to the fur-and-provisioning trade. There is some evidence in the letters of Commander Macarty from Fort Chartres in 1752 that the Mechigamea maintained a particularly close connection with the Missouri Great Osage. It was to the Mechigamea that the Osage “gave much in horses and peltries.” Macarty felt that the Illinois Indians (the Mechigamea and Kaskaskia) tried to get the Osage “to come closer to the French.”<sup>100</sup> The population growth of the Chartres area (permanent and peripatetic) can be linked to the twin acceleration of agriculture and skin/meat trade. This in turn was due at least as much to the proximity of particular Indian tribes – prehistoric and historic – as to the presence of the fort.

The decades between the setting up of the Mechigamea village and its destruction by a party of Fox, Sauk, and Sioux in 1752 saw exchange, barter, and trade networks between the French and the Mechigamea and the French and the Trans-Mississippi Indians become enmeshed in the livelihoods of both peoples. Although the Jesuits had abandoned their mission and chapel at the village in 1735 after the death of the resident priest, Father Guymonneau, the Mechigamea were ministered to by the priest at the fort.<sup>101</sup> The contact with the French through the institutions of trade and religion affected native Indian crafts and shifted the emphasis. By 1750, none of the Illinois tribes was producing any pottery of their own, preferring to trade downriver with the Arkansas and Natchez Indians for ceramic vessels and with the French for blue-and-white patterned faience. Along the shores of the Mississippi, in a village established for over thirty years, Mechigamea Indians ate domestic

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<sup>99</sup>Dan Hechenberger, “The Metchigamea Tribe,” p. 1.

<sup>100</sup> Macarty to Vaudreuil, September, 1752, in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 680.

<sup>101</sup> Mary Borgias Palm, *Jesuit Missions of the Illinois Country*, p. 56.

dog on French faience plates. Their homes, lodges of cattail mats draped over willow frames, dotted a long, rambling shoreline clearing. While they farmed some maize fields in their eastern prairie, keeping to rituals of March planting before the summer hunt, they also likely manufactured bear oil. On the path that wound over the coulee and through the ash grove, they passed daily to the village of Chartres and were often at the fort. A good many of them continued in the Catholic faith as “praying Indians.” Mechigamea daughters lived with Frenchmen, in sanctioned marriages and in unmarried liaisons, and bore them children.<sup>102</sup>

One of the distinctive patterns in French documents from the Chartres area is how often Indians are mentioned, how much a part of life on the floodplain they were: they appear in reference to trade interactions, land sales, visits to the fort, church sacraments, and casual wilderness encounters. They frequently came as messengers taking letters between priests, the Jesuits down in Kaskaskia, the Seminarians up in Cahokia; they also carried warnings, information, and requests to the fort from both priests and resident military in other villages. Their roles as emissaries and spokesmen for many tribes, including subtribes bound by kinship and alliances to the north and east, brought them to Fort Chartres almost daily by the late 1740's. We find them detailed in the French language of 250 years ago, these domiciled Indians of the Illinois: the *mechy*, the *peor*, the *cohos*, and the *cusquskia*. Coming and going, members of these individual tribes would have been distinctly known, traveling on the Chemin du Roi south to Kaskaskia or north to Cahokia. Given the small numbers of both the Mechigamea and the French villagers of Chartres, it is likely these people knew each other by face and name. In particular, the absence of all mention of Indian women in French records, save fleeting and oblique reference to female Indian slaves, is a frustrating lacunae

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<sup>102</sup> For a thorough study of French-Indian liaisons along the Mississippi and the resultant kinship network, see Tanis C. Thorne, *The Many Hands of My Relations: French and Indians on the Lower Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996).

for historians. Yet familiarity and daily interaction do not translate into harmonies of adjustment and loyalty. By the early 1750's the trade matrix at Fort Chartres was severely threatened, pressured from the East through a Miami-British trade alliance and from the North by a resurgence of Fox-Sauk hostilities. Population pressure on natural resources was also playing a role. Governor Vaudreuil in New Orleans cautioned the incoming Commander Macarty Mactigue that "the garrison of the Illinois has frequent opportunities to get into bad ways...." These bad ways apparently involved the soldier "of bad character" [selling] "his flour for drink."<sup>103</sup> The convergence of these factors in the fall of 1751 and on through 1752 resulted in an explosive year in the Illinois Country.

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<sup>103</sup> Order of Command For Macarty, 1751, in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 315.

## French and Indian Counterpoint: 1751 – 1752

The history of the Illinois Country has been told in strands, with historians concentrating on single populations.<sup>1</sup> Primary accounts for much of this history include a reliance on the observations of passers-through. Many travelers toured through the Illinois, from Charlevoix and Andre Penicaut in 1721, followed by Bossu at mid-century, the British military, engineers, and merchants in the 1760's, to Victor Collot and Nicolas de Finiels in the 1790's; the records of Lewis and Clark begin in 1804. One clear pattern emerges from these accounts, repeated in popular histories: the French are frequently treated as a single population. Most ingrained in the American observations of the early nineteenth century, the French of the Illinois were indolent and childlike people, who danced away their cares and played cards on their shaded porches in the sultry summer months; French voyageurs often engaged in heavy betting on a game called "loo."<sup>2</sup> Language describing French villagers, from mid-century on, often includes the words "merry," or "simple." Illustrations in a 1976 special edition of the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* offer "Summer Evening in a French Village," a pencil sketch depicting heel-kicking French, metis, and a group of watching Indians encircling a seated fiddler.

British and Americans alike were also contemptuous of French agricultural efforts. Carl J. Ekberg cites many instances of American disdain for French agriculture, in which the habitant farmers are labeled "non-progressive," "stationary and retrograding," or

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance, Mary Borgias Palm on the Jesuits; Carl J. Ekberg on the French merchants and farmers; Wayne C. Temple on Indians and their villages; Margaret Kimball Brown on the Illinois Indians in particular and Brown and Lawrie Cena Dean on French culture and the role of the voyageur; Reginald Horsman, Clarence Carter, and Clarence Alvord on the British occupation; Theodore Calvin Pease on the French regime; Abraham Nasatir on the Spanish in the Illinois; and Clarence Alvord on the "Virginia Anarchy" of the earliest American influx.

<sup>2</sup> *History of St. Clair County*, Brink, McDonough and Co., editors (Philadelphia, 1881), p. 59.

“defective.”<sup>3</sup> In general, as the eighteenth century progressed, these characterizations of the French and also, of the “degraded” Illinois, become more pervasive in the literature.<sup>4</sup> It is easy to forget the remarkable proposals of early French officials in the 1730’s that French soldiers stationed in the Illinois “learn more about the tribe’s [Illinois Indians’] farming practices” in hopes that these soldiers would stay on in the area after their tour of duty.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, studies of the French military, the colonial population posted to the remote Illinois and trying to advance their careers, stress the industriousness, labor, “efforts,” and service to the crown of these faithful officers.<sup>6</sup> In these studies, at least, there is a marked difference in characterizations of French military and French subjects. To weave all of these population strands together in a single narrative for the course of the French Regime is daunting, yet it is critical to emphasize that a myriad of populations was meeting every day in the Illinois Country, especially in the vicinity of Fort Chartres, and that their interactions forged a potent – if shadowy – history.

How did the people actually living along the Mississippi – who had lived there for many generations – perceive and react to the events detailed by historians? In a single year there, for instance, two violent attacks occurred, one on the French villagers and one on the Illinois Indians. The French Commander, Macarty Mactigue, spent six months unraveling a

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<sup>3</sup> See this discussion on pages 180–181 in Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, D’Abbadie, the last governor of French Louisiana, writing in 1764: “The savages of the different posts of the Illinois are reduced today to a very small number; war and tafia have almost destroyed them.” Cited in Joseph Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana: Illinois, Kickapoo, and Potawatomi Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1974), p. 237.

<sup>5</sup> Bienville to Maurepas, May 18, 1733, in *Mississippi Provincial Archives*, III, p. 614, cited in Raymond Hauser, “An Ethnohistory of the Illinois Indian Tribe, 1673–1832,” unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1973, p. 108. Copy available at the Illinois Historical Survey in Urbana-Champaign.

<sup>6</sup> A good discussion of the French population which examines these contrasts and provides texture is Walter J. Saucier and Katherine Wagner Spineke, “Francois Saucier, Engineer of Fort de Chartres, Illinois,” in *Frenchmen and French Ways in the Mississippi Valley*, edited by John Francis McDermott (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969). See also the detailed analysis of French society and social rank in Winstanley Briggs, “The Forgotten Colony: Le Pays d’ Illinois,” unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1985.

complicated Indian conspiracy. In that same year, French and Indian farmers faced a devastating drought.<sup>7</sup> Despite the effect on French wheat, the French military was asked to oversee the first shipments of supplies and foodstuffs to other French forts, especially Detroit.<sup>8</sup> This pattern – of military supply convoys leaving Fort Chartres to provision French forces to the east – would be the hallmark of Illinois French participation in the Seven Years War. Meanwhile, emigration from Canada was continuing: also in 1752 Commander Macarty received a petition from a Kaskaskia habitant who wished to settle his Canadian stepsons in the area but had not enough land left to apportion out.<sup>9</sup> Finally, among the ordinary French people living around the fort, the buying and selling of property continued. People arrived and people left. The rhythms of an agrarian community strongly meshed with natural cycles of autumnal yield and fur harvesting can provide a counterpoint to the dramatic events that make their way into the histories. There is so little extant evidence of what the French – or Indian – people thought of the changes in their lives. An examination of a single year can illuminate the experience of many diverse peoples in the Illinois, a year in the ominous shadow of an approaching war.

The conflicts of 1752 signify an escalation in inter-tribal friction. While the analysis of these conflicts here is primarily political, by 1752, the Illinois Country was beginning to show evidence of fur and wood depletion, as well as thinning of game animals used for food. Histories detailing the 1752 Fox attack often use phrases like “traditional enmity” or “age-old hostility.” There was certainly this; yet the presence of a British trade center in the Wabash River country, an intrusion far into traditional French territory, was creating not just new

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<sup>7</sup> Carl J. Ekberg, *Colonial Ste. Genevieve: An Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier* (Gerald, Missouri: The Patrice Press, 1985), p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Clarence W. Alvord, *The Centennial History of Illinois*, Volume I (Springfield: Illinois Centennial Commission, 1920), p. 238.

<sup>9</sup> Ekberg, *Colonial Ste. Genevieve*, p. 21.

opportunity for trade; at Pickawillany, the Miami-British coalition offering generous, good-quality trade goods was acting as a stimulus on Indians who previously may not have hunted aggressively in the fur trade.<sup>10</sup> In 1750 Governor Hamilton of Pennsylvania noted the movement of eastern Indians into the Wabash lands: “...Numbers of the Six Nations have of late left their old Habitations and settled on the Branches of [the] Mississippi, and are become more numerous there than in the Countries they left.” Hamilton felt that “these Refugees,” the “Shawonese and the Delawares, with their new Allies the Owendaets [Wyandots] and Twightwees [Miami], make a Body of Fifteen Hundred if not Two Thousand Men....”<sup>11</sup> What game reserves were feeding these newly-arrived Indians?

There is also evidence that the lure of British trade goods reached across the prairies to Illinois. Some Illinois Indians had tried out the British market at Pickawillany. Parties of hunting Kaskaskia, for instance, were far out on the north-central prairie when they were approached by pro-British Miami Indians. Peoria Indians had begun to cross the Mississippi into the fur-laden Missouri lands. Traditional analyses of Indians in the fur trade sometimes imply that Europeans simply tapped into ongoing patterns of hunting and trapping. In the Illinois Country in the 1750's, European markets engendered competitive hunting among tribes in a corridor of prairie and timbered river lands that was already thinned out. While Richard White attributes a “wave of murders and attacks” on French traders in these years to Indian frustration with French supply, the outbreak of violence may also have had another cause. The geographic criss-crossing of tribes, factions, and remnant hunting parties who

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<sup>10</sup> See Richard White's analysis of Indian discontent with the amount and quality of French trade goods at the end of King George's War (1744- 1748). White states that “By 1745, there were serious shortages of trade goods in the West.” *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650 – 1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 199.

<sup>11</sup> Hamilton to Clinton, September 20, 1750, in “An Anthropological Report on the Piankeshaw Indians, Docket 99 (part of Consolidated Docket No. 315, Dr. Dorothy Libby),” in Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.



were using the Grand Prairies increased because of the market polarity of Pickawillany and Fort Chartres.<sup>12</sup> The following narrative takes the intrigue to the local level, right to the ground of the Chartres community.

In mid January of 1751, on the frozen ground of the floodplain, a group of Frenchmen stood looking at a property in need of considerable work. Described as “a house of posts stuck in the ground,” with outbuildings “badly-constructed,” the little homestead crouched low to the earth. It had no upper story. While almost fenced clear round, this property in the village of Chartres appears to have had little appeal. It sold for just 200 livres, payable in “bills, bonds, or flour.” The owner was a billiard-keeper in Kaskaskia, selling his small, indifferent house to a resident of St. Philippe du Grand Marais.<sup>13</sup> A few months later, some Canadian heirs in the village of Chartres sold off an arpent of ground “nearly covered over with marshes and ditches.”<sup>14</sup> While the French were selling and trading property, Illinois Indians were becoming increasingly anxious. As the winter progressed and the Mississippi lay plated with ice, a group of Peoria visited Fort Chartres with worries. They told Commander Macarty they feared an attack by their northern enemies, the Fox and Sioux. The Illinois had carried out a successful raid against these tribes earlier, killing seven important members of both the Fox and the Sioux. The Sioux later stated to a group of voyageurs that they were out to avenge the death of their “great chiefs.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground*, p. 200. Note also Governor Vaudreuil reporting in 1748 that “some Shawnees” were “settled at the forks of the Wabash” in part “because of quarrels with other Indian groups.” Vaudreuil cited in “An Anthropological Report on the Piankeshaw Indians, Dockett 99.”

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Kimball Brown and Lawrie Cena Dean, *The Village of Chartres in Colonial Illinois 1720 – 1765* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1977), Record K191 (H878), pp. 565-566.

<sup>14</sup> Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, Record K-193 (H861), p. 569.

<sup>15</sup> Letters of Commander Macarty Mactigue, cited in Joseph Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana: Illinois, Kickapoo, and Potawatomi Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1974), pp. 216-217. For the most comprehensive treatment of the vendetta between the Illinois and the northern tribes at this time, see Raymond

From that time in early 1751 until almost the same time a year later, no property changed hands in the French villages; and the Indian villages lay in an uneasy peace. The summer passed without incident, a strange, unnerving time in which escalating rumors reached the fort of Fox raids from the north and anti-French activities to the east, among the Miami. The Cahokia and some Peoria moved south to live at the Mechigamea villages for protection. French farmers continued to tend their wheat and maize fields. In the fall, the land slowly began to yield its natural fruit and nut bounty.

As equinoctial winds began to blow, the oaks most common on the floodplain, black and bur oak, rained down an immense acorn crop. While black oak acorns are the least palatable to animals, foraging hogs and some venturesome deer would eagerly seek out bur oak acorns. However, the main nut harvesters were human. It was on the floodplain of the Illinois Country that pecan, persimmon, and mulberry grew most profusely.<sup>16</sup> Nut yields for the floodplain forest have been estimated at 2,207 bushels per square mile for hickory and 3,395 bushels per square mile for pecan. On islands in the Mississippi, pecan harvest could amount to 14,000 bushels of nuts.<sup>17</sup> It is likely that both French and Illinois Indians were harvesting these nuts, especially, perhaps, the Mechigamea, who lived close to the shore in two villages. Their familiarity with the river and its food yield was documented in the early 1700's. The "walnut-tree" dugout of the Illinois Indian was described by both Father Charlevoix and Deliette, who noted that there were as many as three dugouts in each cabin.<sup>18</sup> Narrow, swift and deep, these whole-tree craft could circle around nut-laden islands, moving easily under

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Hauser, "The Fox Raid of 1752: Defensive Warfare and the Decline of the Illinois Indian Tribe," *Illinois Historical Journal*, Vol. 86, 1993, pp. 210 – 224.

<sup>16</sup> April Allison Zawacki, *Early Vegetation of Lower Illinois Valley; a study of the distribution of floral resources with reference to prehistoric cultural-ecological adaptations* (Springfield, Illinois, 1969), p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> See Table 32, "Estimated Minimum Annual Nut Yields (In Bushels) Per Square Mile," in Zawacki, *Early Vegetation*, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> Charlevoix, *Voyage*, II, p. 238 and Deliette, "Memoir," p. 340, cited in Raymond Hauser, "An Ethnohistory of the Illinois Indian Tribe," p. 148.

the thickety overhang of willow and elm. Black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) and pecan (*Carya illinoensis*) were profuse producers of nuts, but the black walnut giants of the bottomlands were coveted for the making of river craft. Walnut wood does not warp or shrink; it holds its shape with a tensile strength and never splinters. The longer it is touched by human hands, the more smooth, soft, and glossy the wood becomes. Such qualities must have been perceived very rapidly by settlers, for the first colonists in Virginia were shipping it to England as early as 1610. The wood of these early walnut harvests, taken from virgin hardwood stands, was heavy, dark, and straight-grained. Illinois Indians looked for another characteristic of floodplain walnut: these trees could reach heights of 150 feet, and often, the first 50 feet shot straight to the sky without branching. Standing in the deep, fertile, loamy soils of the river margins, mature black walnut trees would appear as dugouts upended to a trained eye.<sup>19</sup> The French rapidly learned the advantages of walnut as well, for early building contracts in notarial records specify that barns and furniture be built of “walnut or sassafras.” They chose walnut and oak for construction, but entrepreneuring French also sold pecans in New Orleans, thus competing with the Illinois Indians as traditional harvesters.

In addition to natural nut and fruit crops, Indians and French alike were harvesting squash and beans from their summer gardens; the French had planted and dried peas as well. The air held a slightly smoky quality from the smokehouses where hams were curing, from the village tanneries, and from the burning of the tallgrass prairies. On the bluff talus, as well as the edgy fringe of forest clinging to the uplands, white walnut (butternut) and black walnut formed groves of ragged yellow-green. Here and there among them, sassafras flashed crimson, and liquidambar (sweet gum) spread its wine-colored, star-shaped leaves. The

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<sup>19</sup> Donald Culross Peattie, *A Natural History of Trees of Eastern and Central North America* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1968), pp. 122- 123.

autumn foliage of the bluff crown was not dramatic, yet the deciduous trees clinging intermittently among hill prairies slowly lost the virile green of deep summer. An amber pall set in, streaked here and there by dark green cedars. And overhead, the southern migration of waterfowl was common: the skies rang with cries and calls of trumpeter swans, snow geese, Canada geese, and migrant grebes, as well as booming bitterns and many varieties of duck.

On December 8, 1751, the Jesuits would normally have been celebrating the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary with a special Mass. Whether this Mass was actually held is not known, for the evening before, the French villages were attacked by a group of Miami Indians and a few Kaskaskia, acting under the orders of the pro-British chieftain, La Desmoiselle. In a happenstance of ironic timing, the new French commander, Macarty Mactigue, arrived to assume his command of the Illinois Country on December 8 as well.<sup>20</sup> As his convoy reached Kaskaskia, he stepped out into a crowd of distraught townspeople, many from Prairie du Rocher. When Macarty debarked, he was fatigued; the rivers were low and had been difficult to ascend. As the boatmen and soldiers alternately hauled and rowed the heavy pirogues up the Mississippi toward the French settlements, Macarty certainly was not expecting to find the inhabitants in a high state of alarm, only one day past an attack in which a soldier lay scalped and Miami and Piankeshaw Indians, boarding in French homes, had planned to murder their hosts. Macarty no sooner set foot on the landing at Kaskaskia before he had to organize pursuit militia to fan out through the bottomlands. “On the ninth I ordered a detachment of a hundred men,” he wrote to Governor Vaudreuil, “both regulars

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<sup>20</sup> Jean Jacques Macarty Mactigue was born in France “to a family of Irish military refugees.” He entered the French Marines and rose through the ranks to become senior captain of the New Orleans colony by 1749. He was appointed to succeed the Chevalier de Bertet as Commander of the Illinois in 1749 and served France during the Seven Years War in Illinois. See William P. McCarthy, “The Chevalier Macarty Mactigue,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Vol. LXI (1) Spring, 1968, pp. 41 – 57.

and militia, to give chase, counting on capturing those of the Indians who were wounded.”<sup>21</sup> The day of the attack, two of Macarty’s boats had landed in an advance guard. It is not clear from Macarty’s account if the soldiers in these boats participated in the initial exchange of fire with escaping Indians, but Macarty reports that in the fray, “five Indians were killed and four made prisoners, including Le Loup, chief of the Piankeshaw, another Indian from his village, and two domiciled Illinois.”<sup>22</sup> Despite the efforts of the mounted pursuit parties, these Indian prisoners would comprise the entirety of the captured conspirators. Le Loup, however, was no mean catch.

Originally a Kickapoo who had become a chief of the Piankeshaw, Le Loup has been described as a “French partisan.”<sup>23</sup> His record in the 1740’s and 1750’s reveals him to have been, like many of the Indian leaders of the Illinois Country, caught in the commercial and military rivalry between the French and the English, using the web of kinship and chiefdom allegiances to negotiate for the best outcome in myriad, unpredictable circumstances. Although his people lived along the Vermillion River in eastern Illinois – across the Grand Prairie -- Le Loup was connected to the Illinois Indians living along the Mississippi. He was one of a group of alliance chiefs circulating around the arch-plotter in the conspiracy of December 7: La Demoiselle, also known as Memeskia or Old Briton.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Macarty to Vaudreuil, January, 1752, in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*; for description of the difficulty ascending the rivers, see 432-433; for events of December 7, see p. 435. Pierre Rigaud de Vaudreuil became governor of Louisiana in 1742 and then of Canada in 1755. He was the son of the more famous Vaudreuil, Philippe de Rigaud de Vaudreuil, “chevalier and marquis, musketeer, commander of the troops, naval captain, Governor of Montreal, and Governor-general of New France” between 1703 and 1725. Vaudreuil’s 23 years sojourn as an early eighteenth-century governor saw the French Louisiana proprietary colony founded and struggling; the proper placement of the Illinois Country was debated hotly under his regime and finally awarded to Louisiana. See the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. II (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).

<sup>22</sup> Macarty to Vaudreuil, in Pease, p. 435.

<sup>23</sup> See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes Region 1650 – 1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 229.

<sup>24</sup> See account of La Demoiselle under different names in Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 182. At least one historian, Fred Anderson, discusses the

La Demoiselle's rise to power as a Miami chief (he was likely born a Piankeshaw) reflects the internal splintering and factionalism within the Miami tribe, a complex history involving the consistent mobility and relocation of tribes living in the Detroit area. Decisions to move tribal villages to more advantageous locations did not simply reflect a state of "dependent clientism," as argued by some historians of the 1980's.<sup>25</sup> Reports in 1750, for instance, indicate an epidemic along the Wabash near Ouiatenon, where many Piankeshaw had died. They had set fire to their own village "to drive away the bad air," and blamed the French, saying it was "the bad medicine the French had thrown them which had made them die."<sup>26</sup> The turnover in French Canadian leadership between 1747 and 1755 was also a factor in Miami disaffection. As the English began to press into the backcountry of Pennsylvania and the Ohio Valley, winning tribal loyalties with rich trade goods and lavish presents, four French governors in succession attempted to implement a sterner policy than the old, familiar gifting-and-negotiating rituals best described by Richard White in *The Middle Ground*. The new policy has been characterized as one of "humilia[tion], subjection...and naked force."<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the aspect of humiliation most rankled with the Miami. A visit to Quebec by the Piankeshaw tribe, led by L'Enfant, ended badly. L'Enfant "had said everywhere that they wanted to throw him into the sea at Quebec; that he and all those who had gone down with him had been ill-received...."<sup>28</sup> This story, that "M. the general at Quebec" wished to have the Piankeshaw visitors thrown into sea, crops up often in L'Enfant's narratives explaining

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activities of La Demoiselle solely as Memeskia. See Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), p. 25-29.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance, Francis Jennings, *Empire of Fortune: Crowns, Colonies and Tribes in the Seven Years War in America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), p. 50.

<sup>26</sup> Reports to Raymond, March-April, 1750, in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 174-175.

<sup>27</sup> Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths*, p. 182.

<sup>28</sup> Reports to Raymond, in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 176.

why he rejected the French.<sup>29</sup> Counterbalanced against gossipy personal tales such as these were eye-witness reports flowing in from the upper Ohio Valley describing the winding trains of heavily-laden English pack horses – “forty or fifty horse loads of goods” – reaching the Upper Miami River in the vicinity where the Ottawa, Potawatomi, Detroit tribes, and the Miami wintered.<sup>30</sup> One historian writing about the thirty years following the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 has called the North Americans frontiers places of “aggressive instability.”<sup>31</sup> It’s a succinct summation of a country of rapidly shifting alliances. L’Enfant, for instance, has been characterized with the nebulous phrase, “His loyalty [to the French] was vouched for at times.”<sup>32</sup>

La Demoiselle, however, remained vociferously and steadily anti-French. His sending of conspiratorial wampum belts and mats to the Illinois Country to promote warfare against the French settlements drew upon a kinship alliance with the Kaskaskia Indians. Their chief Rouensa was brother to La Mouche Noir, a leading pro-Miami alliance chief; the followers of La Mouche Noir lay among both the Wea and Piankeshaw, Miami tribes.<sup>33</sup> While early in the eighteenth century the Miami had sought the protection and trade advantages of the French at Detroit, by the late 1740’s they had changed allegiance.<sup>34</sup> As the territorial competition for the rich North American fur and trade hegemony mounted between France and Britain, leaders such as La Demoiselle, La Mouche Noir, and Le Loup watched. They rapidly learned to exploit factions and allegiances to secure their own power.

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<sup>29</sup> See additional account in Pease, p. 173.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>31</sup> Ian K. Steel, *Warpaths*, p. 165.

<sup>32</sup> Theodore C. Pease, Reports to Raymond in *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 173, n. 1.

<sup>33</sup> See Richard White’s discussion of kinship loyalties and political alliances among the lower Great Lakes tribes, a pattern he calls “intermarried leadership,” in *The Middle Ground*, p. 212-213.

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, account by La Motte Cadillac of September 25, 1702, in which eighteen Miami came to the fort at Detroit “on behalf of their tribe, to ask me for lands and to beg the savages who are there to approve of their coming to settle there and joining them.” In *Cadillac Papers*, Portfolio 127, Document 45, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections* Vol. 33 (Lansing: Robert Smith Printing Co.), 1904, p. 138.

During the foiled attack on the French at Kaskaskia and Prairie du Rocher on December 7, 1751, the Miami and Piankeshaw Indians slipped down to the floodplain settlements on foot from the top of the bluffs. The trees would have been stripped of leaves, making night vision clearer and footing surer. In the course of interrogations carried out by Commander Macarty, Indian prisoners stated they had come to the French settlements specifically to acquire pirogues from the Kaskaskia Indians; they were preparing to sail south down the Mississippi against the Chickasaw.<sup>35</sup> This seems to have been a ruse; yet it was the means by which a group of Indians arriving from the eastern Illinois Country – the home of the “revolted” Miami tribes – passed into the French towns and apparently succeeded in boarding with some of the inhabitants. In a later letter written by Governor Vaudreuil to Rouille (the Comte de Jouy), he states that the Indians comprised “...a party of thirty-three men from the village of the Piankeshaw and the Vermillion...”<sup>36</sup> In reviewing the plot, Vaudreuil also reflects, “It has been established that all the tribes of the Wabash with the exception of the Kickapoo and the Mascoutens had entered into it, and all arrangements had been made by La Demoiselle...the Illinois even appeared to be in on the plot...”<sup>37</sup> Some of the Indians pilfered small items and clothing from their hosts, as the interpreter Dodie, called out to examine the body of a slain Indian, recognized items from his own home: “He found a flint and steel which the Indian had stolen from his house. His bullets which had been made some days since came from the magazine; he had a capot which had been stolen from a boy...and various other trifles.”<sup>38</sup> Indians boarding with the French in select homes around the settlements were apparently to have risen up and killed the villagers; yet the fact that

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<sup>35</sup> See Le Loup’s statement to Macarty in Macarty to Vaudreuil, January, 1752, in Pease, p. 455.

<sup>36</sup> Vaudreuil to Rouille, April 8, 1752, in Pease, p. 572.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 574-575.

<sup>38</sup> Macarty to Vaudreuil, January, 1752, in Pease, p. 434.



individual Indians felt compelled to steal confuses the picture somewhat. Le Loup's eventual explanation for what happened in the villages the night of December 7 was that "it is not you, my father, who slays me; it is my young men."<sup>39</sup> The angry young men of the Piankeshaw and Miami tribes become characterized in the correspondence of Macarty as "the madmen among you."<sup>40</sup> Le Loup himself espoused this heartily: "Are madmen lacking in any of the tribes? I do not know who these were."<sup>41</sup> This explanation for the perfidy of some Miami remains a good part of the rationale for the conspiracy: younger, more volatile braves (such as L'Enfant) were recruited and inflamed by La Demoiselle's propaganda and threats, while older, steadier chiefs warned them against hurting the French.

The involvement of some Illinois Indians in this plot has been indicated, but the overall tribal allegiance of the Kaskaskia, Mechigamea, Cahokia, and Peoria does not appear in question. During Macarty's investigation, which lasted over the winter months of 1752, the story came out that La Demoiselle's agents and minions had approached various Illinois tribes at their winter camps and tried every method imaginable to detach them from the French. Such methods included direct threats. Macarty reports that Chareragoue, "an Illinois of the Kaskaskia," recounted the arrival in the Indians' winter camp at Prairie de l'Orme of two minions of La Demoiselle, bearing English blankets and a wampum belt. The messengers spoke: "This signifies the blood we wish to shed. These are the words of the great chief of the English who is preparing to attack the French with ten tribes, his allies. And you Illinois, do you begin to go in search of that meat; and if you do not bring it, we will

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<sup>39</sup> Le Loup's statement appears in Macarty to Vaudreuil, January, 1752, in Pease, p. 438.

<sup>40</sup> See Macarty to Vaudreuil, January, 1752, in Pease, p. 447.

<sup>41</sup> Le Loup, cited in Macarty to Vaudreuil, January, 1752, in Pease, p. 455.

begin on you. We are a thousand men with a great chief who spares no one.”<sup>42</sup> Likely that phrase, “we will begin on you,” caused unease at the winter camp. However, representatives of the Kaskaskia and Cahokia swore to Commander Macarty that they had rejected the English blanket: “It was a brown blanket, striped with seven red ribbons which they threw down at my feet. They said they had been last spring to the English because it was said that goods were cheap there...they would not go to the English again and thought no more of them; they had French hearts and the French were their own blood.” The Kaskaskia chief Thomas stated moreover that “the evil message that was reported to you, merely passed by our village....”<sup>43</sup> On January 12, twenty-one Peoria, “all chiefs or children of chiefs,” marched down from the Illinois River to Fort Chartres to swear their allegiance to the French, which they called “an ancient alliance.”<sup>44</sup>

References to ties by blood and to old alliances were real: the Illinois Indian tribes had been intermarrying with the French along the Mississippi since before 1700. When the Catholic Seminarian missionaries arrived at the Indian villages along the Illinois River in 1698, their first religious act was the baptism of a son born to a French soldier, La Violette, and an Indian woman, Catherine Ekipakinoua.<sup>45</sup> Parish registers at Kaskaskia and Fort Chartres attest to both French-Indian marriages and baptisms; in the early years especially, 1720 – 1730, Indian women are appearing as godparents.<sup>46</sup> Thus the Illinois Indians were caught between two kinds of blood alliances: their daughters had married French soldiers and traders for over fifty years and had borne their children; but they themselves shared

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<sup>42</sup> Words of Chereragoue, reported by Macarty, Macarty to Vaudreuil, January, 1752, in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 436.

<sup>43</sup> Reported in Macarty to Vaudreuil, January, 1752, in Pease, p. 449.

<sup>44</sup> Macarty to Vaudreuil, January, 1752, in Pease, p. 453.

<sup>45</sup> Mary Borgias Palm, *The Jesuit Missions of the Illinois Country 1673-1763* (Cleveland, Ohio: Saint Louis University, 1931), p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> See the parish records of St. Anne's in Margaret Kimball Brown and Lawrie Cena Dean, *The Village of Chartres in Colonial Illinois 1720 – 1765* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, Inc., 1977), p. 3 – 20.

kinship and chieftain ties with the pro-English or “revolted” Miami across the Grand Prairie. In a letter of September 25, 1751, almost three months before the attack on the French settlements, La Jonquiere, governor-general of New France, wrote to Rouille about the activities of La Mouche Noir and La Demoiselle: “The English continue their devices to engage the tribes to strike the French...La Mouche Noir has two of his brothers who are chiefs of the domiciled Kaskaskia at Fort Chartres.”<sup>47</sup> French leaders feared English infiltration and influence along the kinship network that bound tribes diverse as the militant Kickapoo and the farming, pacific Kaskaskia.

Through the early winter months of 1752 Macarty interrogated Le Loup. The fort was visited by bands of Peoria and Kaskaskia who asked for the Piankeshaw’s release; Le Loup remained in chains. In January there arrived from New Orleans a French surgeon, Michel Gourdeau, who bought property in the town of Chartres from Joseph Buchet, “Principal Scrivener of the Commissary Marine.” Master Surgeon Gourdeau acquired a mature, choice property: “a house with...a yard, well, garden, fence and buildings and conveniences.”<sup>48</sup> The property was bounded to the rear by the glacis of Fort Chartres. Perhaps the new surgeon was planning to minister to the French troops. In April of 1752, one Michel Lejeune sold a tract in St. Philippe. The property and its buildings stood next to the King’s Road (Le Chemin du Roi), the ancient road winding across the floodplain from Kaskaskia, rising through Le Grand Passe to the bluffs, and continuing across the ridge prairies to Cahokia.<sup>49</sup> As property continued to change hands, French farmers drove their oxen out to the common fields, hitched them to the two-wheeled plows (charrues) that later American settlers would call

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<sup>47</sup> La Jonquiere to Rouille, September 25, 1751, in Pease, p. 366-367.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Kimball Brown and Lawrie Cena Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, Record K-195 (H851), pp. 572 - 573.

<sup>49</sup> Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, Record K-196 (H236), p.574.

“bare-footed carts,” and began to plow the black, winter-wet soil, still chilly as it was turned up to the sun.<sup>50</sup> In May, as the rising sap in the great trees of the floodplain turned the prairies a bright yellow-green – especially noticeable in the venerable cottonwoods, green before any other trees – the Mechigamea and Cahokia began to sow their fields. They had agreed to farm communally that spring, “...in the fear of being attacked by the Foxes in reprisal....”<sup>51</sup> Neither a year of anxious alertness nor communal farming saved them.

On June 1, 1752, a party of four or five hundred northern Indians – Fox, Sauk, Sioux, Potawatomi, Winnebago, and Menominee – sailed down the Mississippi to the shores of the Mechigamea villages.<sup>52</sup> As Le Loup spoke once again with Commander Macarty at Fort Chartres, denying any plot to kill the French, northern Indian raiders set fire to at least twelve Mechigamea cabins and then stormed the fields where Mechigamea, Cahokia, and some Peoria were working. They “killed or captured seventy people, men, women, and children...and scattered about the limbs of the dead.”<sup>53</sup> They may have taken captive as many as forty Illinois. On the recently sown fields, hilly with carefully-planted corn, lay the severed arms, legs, and heads of the Illinois, rolling in the furrows. Perhaps Commander Macarty walked through the ash grove and north along the Mississippi to personally view the carnage, breathing the smoldering air of burning mat lodges and human flesh. The number of Indians killed or taken prisoner was much larger than the number of French injured or Indians killed in the fray of the preceding fall, when the Miami had attacked the French villages. Yet no mounted French troops left in hot pursuit of the enemy; no call to arms was

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<sup>50</sup> Brink, McDonough, and Co., *History of St. Clair County* (Philadelphia: Brink, McDonough, and Co., 1881), p. 31.

<sup>51</sup> Macarty Mactigue, cited in Joseph Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana*, p. 216.

<sup>52</sup> *M'Skutewe Awandiangwi, Nipundikan* puts the date of the attack as June 6 and the number of attackers at 1,000. See “The Metchigamea Tribe,” Vol. #1, 1997.

<sup>53</sup> Macarty Mactigue, cited in Jablow, p. 216.

sounded. As the Cahokia “bewailed their relatives,” the devastated Indians regrouped in a band north of the fort. They would construct a new village about a quarter mile from Fort Chartres, “on a ridge in the midst of an open meadow.”<sup>54</sup> Raymond Hauser points out that the French government did eventually make efforts to arrange for the release of the Indian captives, who were scattered among the different tribes of the attacking alliance. Over the course of two years, nine captives were repatriated to the Illinois Country.<sup>55</sup> However, at the time of the raid itself, French soldiers were outfitting themselves to march on La Desmoiselle’s trading town of Pickawillany.<sup>56</sup> This effort, as well as the impending war with the British, overshadowed the tragedy of the Illinois. That same June in 1752, French and allied Indians would burn Pickawillany to the ground.<sup>57</sup> Soon after, Le Loup would be released from irons.

In July of 1752, an orphan, Etienne Gouremont, came of age in the small village of St. Philippe. His guardian, Joseph Barron, agreed to let Etienne sell an inherited property, a house that had belonged to Etienne’s father. The home, “one frame house de colomage built on sills,” sat on a concession stretching back to the Mississippi. It was going to ruin since Etienne was not living in it but with the Barron family. Etienne received two payments for his property: one hundred francs “in flour, good and marketable on the day of All Saints next,” as well as one hundred livres to be paid on All Saints Day, 1753. He left Fort Chartres with his guardian after making the sale “verbally,” and declaring “that they do not know how

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<sup>54</sup> Description of the site is taken from Bossu, *Travels in the Interior of North America*, and Margaret Kimball Brown, “The Search for the Michigamea Indian Village,” *Outdoor Illinois*, March, 1972, cited in Hauser, “The Fox Raid,” p. 220.

<sup>55</sup> Hauser, “The Fox Raid,” p. 218. Hauser presents an argument for the complicity of Commander Macarty in the attack on the Illinois villages. His evidence is extremely circumstantial and ignores the year-long efforts of Macarty to keep peace in the Illinois Country by interrogating rather than executing Le Loup.

<sup>56</sup> Macarty, cited in Jablow, p. 217.

<sup>57</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground*, pp. 230–231. See also the account by Commander Macarty in Macarty to Vaudreuil, September 2, 1752, *Illinois on the Eve*, pp. 680–681.

to write.”<sup>58</sup> They returned to St. Philippe along the Chemin du Roi. To the south, the village of St. Philippe abutted “the prairie of the Mechigamea.” Somewhere on that prairie in 1753, the Illinois Indians established the new village that would be known to archaeologists as the Waterman Site. Conspicuous from this site, among all excavated Mechigamea village sites, are iron knives, European ceramic and glass vessels – and gun parts and flints.<sup>59</sup> Very few agricultural tools or tool parts have ever surfaced from Waterman. There are no antler digging tools or scapula hoes, although some iron hoes have been found. In addition to suggesting a shift from agriculture to hunting and trading economy, the Waterman Site may tell a story of increasing focus on protection and defense. When the British arrived in the Illinois Country twelve years later, they found 650 warriors left in the Illinois Confederacy: the Kaskaskia had 150 warriors and the Cahokia and Mechigamea, 40 warriors each.<sup>60</sup>

In the year 1679, the French explorer Tonty noted in “his book printed in Paris,” the territory claimed to be have been conquered by the Iroquois Indians. The “Irocois,” he wrote, had taken possession of virtually all the land in the Great Lakes area, and had elsewhere “...conquered the Miamihas and the Illinois, Chavanoues [Shawnee] three great Nations as far as the River Meschacebe.”<sup>61</sup> In less than one hundred years, the great nation of the Illinois was already endangered. From this point on, their history is a narrative of mere survival.

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<sup>58</sup> Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, Record K-197 (H237), pp. 574-575.

<sup>59</sup> See “Comparative Table 6: Native Materials and Technology,” in Margaret Kimball Brown, *Cultural Transformations Among the Illinois: An Application of a Systems Model* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University, 1979), p. 251.

<sup>60</sup> See “Table 2: Population Figures for the Illinois,” in Margaret Kimball Brown, *Cultural Transformations*, p. 232.

<sup>61</sup> See “Coxe’s Account of the Activities of the English in the Mississippi Valley in the Seventeenth Century, A Memorial by Dr. Daniel Cox,” in Clarence Walworth Alvord and Lee Bidgood, *The First Explorations of the Trans-Allegheny Region by the Virginians 1650–1674* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1912), p. 233.

## The British in the Illinois Before 1770

### Prologue: Provisioning a War

Another triad of Big River confluences became important to the French during the Seven Years War. The “forks of the Mississippi” at the confluence of the Ohio, and, approximately 36 miles east, the mouth of the Tennessee River, created both danger and opportunity for river transport. The long dip of the Tennessee, or Cherakee River as it was known at the time, a curving spoon shape to the south, sheltered clusters of Indian riverine villages. Chickasaw and Cherokee settlements dotted the banks of the Little and Big Tennessee Rivers. Using these water routes that linked into the Savannah and hence to Charles Town, these tribes had established a comfortable deerskin trade with the British. Contact between the earliest English to penetrate this region and southern mountain-river tribes had begun at about the same time as contact between the French and the Illinois Indians. In 1673 a few English explorers reached Cherokee villages on the Tennessee and were amazed to find them “already familiar with firearms.” Cherokee were using sixty flintlock muskets obtained through trade with Spanish Florida.<sup>1</sup> Ancient ties are sturdy ties. The consistently British-allied tribes south of the Ohio used their intimacy with that watershed to harass the French by water. A romanticized description of this activity occurs in an early Tennessee history: “In their high mountains flanked by rivers, the Cherokees defended the eastern bastion, and from it swept down the Tennessee in their pirogues, to harry the Illinois country.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Donald E. Worcester and Thomas F. Schilz, “The Spread of Firearms Among the Indians on the Anglo-French Frontier,” *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 8(2) (Spring, 1984), p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Davidson, *The Tennessee: The Old River: Frontier to Secession, A Facsimile Edition of Volume 1* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1946), p. 96.

Using the broad, pacific Ohio to ascend towards Fort Duquesne, French supply convoys sent out from Illinois had to pass the mouth of the Tennessee River. Cherokee warriors and some Chickasaw easily ambushed the slow-moving, laden bateaux, and French military became convinced that one day, the British themselves would be firing from the wooded banks of the ‘Cherakae,’ using the Tennessee River system to reach the Illinois Country. In 1757, under the command of Captain Charles Philip Aubry, they accordingly built Fort Massac, originally Fort Ascension, on a spit of land on the Illinois side, “just below the mouth of the Tennessee.” The earliest history of this area states that the site was the old French Juchereau buffalo hide tannery, where a “trading post, fortlet, and mission” had once stood.<sup>3</sup> Construction was hasty and based on lumber to hand instead of the much more durable oak growing on the uplands. Soldiers split water-loving cottonwoods and willows to construct a typical small, bastioned fort. Predictably, within three years, Fort Massac was rotting.<sup>4</sup>

Despite French fears of a combined Anglo-Indian invasion up the Tennessee, none transpired. Indians acting alone did attack the French at this strategic point, however. In autumn of 1757, a large band of Cherokees converged on Fort Massac; the Cherokee are recorded as being put “totally to flight” by the garrison and its artillery.<sup>5</sup> Cherokee attacks on the French near Fort Massac occurred more frequently during the early years of the war and before the official outbreak, as Illinois grain convoys were supplying inland forts beginning

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<sup>3</sup> O.J. Page, *History of Massac County, Illinois with Life Sketches and Portraits, Part One – Historical* (Massac County, 1900), p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Norman W. Caldwell, “Fort Massac During the French and Indian War,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Vol. XLIII (2) (Summer, 1950), p. 105 and 112, n.58. See also John B. Fortier, “New Light on Fort Massac,” in John Francis McDermott, *Frenchmen and French Ways in the Mississippi Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> See John A. Walthall, “French Colonial Fort Massac: Architecture and Ceramic Patterning,” in John A. Walthall, editor, *French Colonial Archaeology: The Illinois Country and the Western Great Lakes* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 45.



in 1753. A total of fifteen men and two officers died near Fort Massac between 1756 and 1758.<sup>6</sup> These men were casualties of the great Seven Years War that engulfed most of North America above the Ohio River and which was fought out as well in Europe. However, the Fort Massac deaths represent the closest the Seven Years War actually came to the Illinois Country. The war drained men and supplies *out* of the Illinois, with “the grain crop...a most important asset to the French.” One historian who has studied Fort Massac before the fall of Fort Duquesne in 1758 concludes, “...the support and maintenance of the Ohio country came to depend almost entirely upon the conveyance of Illinois flour and other provisions up the Ohio River.”<sup>7</sup> Fort Chartres participated in the war most dramatically at its very outset, when a contingent of French Illinois soldiers ascended the Ohio to engage George Washington at Fort Necessity.<sup>8</sup>

During the war years, there is little evidence of what the Illinois Indians were doing. Some “Indian intelligence” enclosed in “letters from William Johnson to Jeffrey Amherst, February 12, 1761,” described French efforts to influence the Illinois “to go to war with the [recently-disaffected] Cherokee against the British.”<sup>9</sup> These efforts were unsuccessful. In 1763 Captain Aubry wrote “An Account of the Illinois Country,” a document intended for the incoming British officer Arthur Loftus. Aubry’s account mentions the subtribes of the Illinois, especially the Kaskaskia, whom he characterized as “100 Warriors, but they are Idle and very drunken.” Aubry felt there might be 100 French inhabitants left near Fort Chartres

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<sup>6</sup>Caldwell, “Fort Massac,” p. 107, n30, citing Kelerec Memorandum, Dec. 12, 1758.

<sup>7</sup> Caldwell, “Fort Massac,” p. 104. See the thorough account of French Illinois expeditions and the few battles in which French Illinois soldiers fought in Clarence Alvord, *The Illinois Country 1673 –1818* (Springfield: Illinois Centennial Commission, 1920), pp. 238 – 245.

<sup>8</sup> See Margaret Kimball Brown and Lawrie Cena Dean, *The French Colony in the Mid-Mississippi Valley* (Carbondale, Illinois: American Kestrel Books, 1995), “French and Indian War,” pp. 21-22; see Also Clarence Alvord, *The Illinois Country*, pp. 238-239.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Norman Caldwell, “Fort Massac,” p. 113, n61.

and the “Indians which are called Metchis,” who numbered about “Forty Warriors.”<sup>10</sup> Given the amount of foodstuffs shipped out of the Illinois Country during the war, it is likely that at least some of the Illinois were involved in the supply effort. Explicit mention of “fats” as an item sent east on the convoys suggests bear oil; as many as fifteen bateaux carried flour, “biscuit, maize, fats and bacon, tobacco, salt, and lead.”<sup>11</sup> Supply shipments stopped after the fall of Fort Duquesne in 1758; and after the surrender of the French at Montreal in 1760, the Illinois began to experience a trickling out of people. Both French and Indians were leaving for the Missouri lands across the river. Changes in the environment played a role in the political shifts in the Illinois. These changes were well underway by the time the land passed to British rule.

**“It seems to be a crazy tottering situation at present....”<sup>12</sup>**

While important histories of the British in Illinois have all stressed this attrition of peoples, there is little analysis of environmental factors affecting the British experience.<sup>13</sup> The floodplain of Fort Chartres was in a depleted state in the fall of 1765 when British troops finally arrived. In 1750, Father Vivier at Kaskaskia had pointed out that it was “usually necessary to go one or two leagues to find deer, and seven-eight to find oxen [buffalo].”<sup>14</sup> Fifteen years later, the emptying out of the Illinois Country was proceeding apace with both

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<sup>10</sup> “Aubry’s Account of the Illinois Country, 1763,” in Clarence Alvord and Clarence Carter, *The Critical Period 1773-1765* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1915), p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Norman Caldwell, “Fort Massac,” p. 104.

<sup>12</sup> The Official Journal Kept by Lt. Eddington or the Surgeon,” in *Broadswords and Bayonets: The journals of the expedition under the command of Captain Thomas Stirling of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Foot, Royal Highland Regiment (The Black Watch) to occupy Fort Chartres in the Illinois Country, August 1765 to January 1766*, edited by Robert G. Carroon (Illinois: The Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Illinois, 1984), p. 91.

<sup>13</sup> The major histories of Illinois under the British regime are by Clarence Alvord, Clarence Carter, and Reginald Horsman.

<sup>14</sup> Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Vol. 69 (Cleveland: The Burrow Brothers Company, 1900), p. 145. A French league is equal to approximately two and half miles.

fur-bearing animal and human numbers significantly lower. The gold of the Illinois – its wheat and maize harvests – depended on human labor. In 1763, the French government had expelled the Jesuits from its colonies, a reflection of the European hostility towards that order. The leaving of the Jesuits from the Kaskaskia mission dissolved a rich agricultural base including forges, wind and horse mills, wine presses, orchards, and a considerable contingent of slaves.<sup>15</sup> Prior to this date, the French military had continued to demand the wheat harvest, packing milled flour in barrels for the long spring journey up the Ohio. At the same time, supply convoys from New Orleans had stopped during the war. The result was a string of decaying settlements in which a previously vigorous, integrated foodstuff production system had ground to a halt. This was the riverine world to which British soldiers finally came in 1765 to occupy newly-ceded lands; their ten-year stay in the Illinois was impacted by a matrix of factors: a severe shortage of food, depopulation of both French and Indians, the flooding of the Mississippi and subsequent waves of illness, deforestation and wood scarcity, and the effect of buffalo migration and later, the intense competition for buffalo meat by French and British hunters. These factors must be accorded a prime role in the experience of the common British foot soldier at Fort Chartres, most of whom arrived with preconceived ideas.

The enthusiastic endorsement in many travel and military accounts of the Illinois, some of which at least was hyperbolic, may have created an unrealistic sense of the place in British minds. British preparing to occupy Illinois may have conflated Edenic landscape with opportunity and the pastoral signature of French Illinois with plenitude. The perception of the Illinois as a fertile breadbasket was circulating in New Orleans for years before the British

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<sup>15</sup> See the detailed account of the Jesuit expulsion in Mary Borgias Palm, *The Jesuit Missions of the Illinois Country 1673 –1763* (Cleveland, Ohio: Saint Louis University, 1931).

occupation there.<sup>16</sup> Although by the early 1760's, the Illinois was so depleted of manpower that it was sustaining only itself, the perception of abundance up in the Illinois Country was deeply ingrained. Only official letters and dispatches remain to detail the British view of country they won, but in the taverns of New Orleans, along the great city levee already notorious for its "bad influences," British soldiers mingled with French inhabitants as well as French soldiers leaving from the Illinois. The stories were circulating: rich country, black earth, vast herds of game, and murderous Indians. A study of British expectations running aground on Illinois reality starts with changes in the natural world the British would encounter in 1765.

As tensions increased in the Illinois before the outbreak of war in 1756, and as the war itself changed patterns of movement between the Illinois and the Ohio Valley, the earth itself was also changing. Dynamic shifts in the course of the Mississippi River worked oppositionally to the drying out of some parts of the bottomland. Wheat and corn crops, plowing, harvesting, and the grazing of animals had reduced the luxuriant, often rotting vegetative cover of the land. The steaming, rank-smelling floodplain grasses had protected a shimmering, watery surface. Without this heavy green blanket, the earth could be seared by steady sun. In addition, deforestation, the stripping of forested areas that had formed the patchy, mosaic quality so consistently described by observers, had likely created both drying and erosion. Hints of these processes can be found in notarial land records.

In addition to the shifts in the course of the river and its effect on the village of Chartres, there is some evidence that French fields were beginning to show evidence of soil exhaustion. French farmers did not consistently enrich their land with manure, except

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<sup>16</sup> See the discussion in Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), pp. 223-225. Ekberg documents the reality of war-stressed New Orleans: a city desperate for foodstuffs from the Illinois, which were scant or unavailable.

through the process called *l'abandon*, the turning out of domestic animals onto harvested fields.<sup>17</sup> Neither did French farmers practice crop rotation, even with well-known soil enhancers like clover.<sup>18</sup> The repeated inundations at mid-century may also have contributed to changes in the soil. At least one British observer wrote in 1766 that “the soil in the Illinois Settlements is not so good as at any place of the places I have already Named owing perhaps to the Quantity of Sand mix’t with it by the Mississippi....”<sup>19</sup> By the time the 1763 Treaty of Paris altered the political face of the Illinois Country, the natural economy had been eroding for at least ten years. In addition to the interruption of trade and consumer goods throughout the Seven Years War, the sixty miles of riverine French settlement had also experienced soil exhaustion, flooding, sickness, deforestation, declining Indian populations (directly affecting the provisioning trade), and changes in hunting, involving new and exploitative patterns. The eighteenth century environment provides a record of these processes, reflecting to the incoming British a strange world of potential wealth in a depauperate land.

The first and most important change in the Illinois can again be traced to the action of water. In 1751, the owner of land in the parish of St. Anne’s adjoining Fort Chartres petitioned to auction off one of his arpents. The Canadian heir to this property had discovered that “a piece of ground of one arpent in front by the depth hereafter designated, being nearly covered over with marshes and ditches; the expense of the fences which it

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<sup>17</sup> For *l'abandon*, see Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots*, pp. 115-118.

<sup>18</sup> See Carl J. Ekberg’s discussion of possible soil exhaustion on the eastern shores of the Mississippi in *Colonial Ste. Genevieve: An Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier* (Gerald, Missouri: The Patrice Press, 1985), p. 20. Ekberg also points out the subdivision of large French farms through filial inheritance. French Canadians were beginning to emigrate to the Illinois, often sons and daughters from previous marriages. One petitioner to the French Commander Macarty in 1752 mentions “the large number of children [near Kaskaskia].” See Ekberg, p. 21. Macarty also uses the French word, “*fatiguee*” (exhausted) to describe the French farm lands. However, such observations must be kept in the context of the year 1752, when a major drought stressed the area.

<sup>19</sup> Fraser to Haldimand, May 4, 1766, in Clarence Alvord and Clarence Carter, *The New Regime 1765-1767* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1916), p. 227.

would be necessary to keep up and to build would be greater than the worth of the land....”<sup>20</sup>

Buried in notarial records, this entry presages the years to come before the British arrived in 1765, debarking from batteaux into a land being re-defined by water. The last entry in the Chartres notarial records, June 29, 1765, describes the posting at auction, on the gates of the church after high mass, of a property in the village: “...said house situated in the territory of New Chartres near the Fort and the river, falling to ruins by the falling down of the bank, and of which if left where it is, would certainly be washed away by the Mississippi.”<sup>21</sup> Because of the general moisture level in the soils of the Chartres plains, wooden houses there lasted only twenty years.<sup>22</sup> And close by, to the south, the settlement of Prairie du Rocher was built of lime and stone houses, perhaps a conscious choice of the inhabitants, who had moved their town to the sheltering base of the cliffs after a serious flood.<sup>23</sup> The French had learned to replace their posts and palings, to use limestone from the cliffs, to move dwellings inland – yet they still contended with the Mississippi. One historian who has made comparative studies between original French grants in 1722 and 1734 and the American Public Lands surveys of the early nineteenth century concludes, “Mississippi floods annually lessened the acreage of the original grants...by 1760, the French who had been given land in 1722 or as late as 1734 had lost more than half of it to the new river channel.”<sup>24</sup>

In 1785, known as “Annee des Grandes Eaux,” or “the Year of the Great Waters,” the entire bottomland stood under so much water that men rowed boats up and down the floating

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<sup>20</sup> Margaret Kimball Brown and Lawrie Cena Dean, *The Village of Chartres in Colonial Illinois 1720 – 1765* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1977), Record K-193 (H861), p. 569.

<sup>21</sup> Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, record K-340 (H523), p. 804.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Kimball Brown and Lawrie Cena Dean, *The French Colony in the Mid-Mississippi Valley* (Carbondale, Illinois: American Kestrel Books, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> T.P. Fadler, “Memoirs of a French Village: A Chronicle of Old Prairie du Rocher 1722 - 1972” (self-published manuscript, 1972), p. 17. Copy in Illinois Historical Survey.

<sup>24</sup> Natalia Belting, *Kaskaskia Under the French Regime* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1975), p. 53.

prairies. The Mississippi rose “twenty feet above the known highest water marks.”<sup>25</sup> There is some suggestion of a similar flood in the 1740’s. Perhaps this flood initiated a change in the river’s course: the west wall of Fort Chartres, the impressive limestone walls built by the French engineer Saucier under the direction of Commander Macarty in the early 1750’s, was threatened and eventually undermined by the river while the British were in Illinois. In 1766, Captain Harry Gordon visited the fort with an assistant British engineer and wrote a considerable description of its incipient collapse. He also furnished specific suggestions on how to prevent the erosion, including, “driving a Number of Button Wood short stakes in the Slope, which immediately take root, and [get] together floating Trees and any Thing else of that Kind the Floods bring down...”<sup>26</sup> Gordon had a low opinion of the French efforts to save the fort. He mentions that they had “fascined and piled the banks, but the Torrent soon got Passage behind them.”<sup>27</sup> Button Wood trees are sycamores, rarely mentioned in any of the accounts of the trees growing in the French bottomlands. While water-loving and sprouting often in large numbers along streams, sycamores do not seem to have been preferred by the French. The British may have been introducing the idea of using sycamore seedlings in flood control.

The Mississippi River was moving inland at a rapid pace, however. In 1765, Captain Philip Pittman, arriving in the Illinois Country with Major Farmar, described the Mississippi as lying “next to the Fort...continuing falling in.” A sandbank rising from the thickety shore shallows had become an “island of willows.”<sup>28</sup> Pittman made a distinction between the two

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<sup>25</sup>See account by August Chouteau before Theodore Hunt, Recorder of Land Titles, April 18, 1825, in John McDermott, *Early Histories of St. Louis* (St. Louis: St. Louis Historical Documents Foundation, 1952), p. 92.

<sup>26</sup> See “Captain Gordon’s Journal,” August 20, 1766, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 298.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Philip Pittman, *The Present State of European Settlements on the Mississippi* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1906), p. 88.

villages of Prairie du Rocher and Chartres. Prairie du Rocher, he wrote, was a “small village” of twelve houses, whose inhabitants were “very industrious.” They had “every kind of stock.”<sup>29</sup> The village of Chartres near the fort, however, once prosperous with 40 families, was “abandoned to the west side of the river except for three or four poor families.”<sup>30</sup> As early as 1752, Commander Macarty at Chartres had written to Governor Vaudreuil in New Orleans, “We need inhabitants here, and each inhabitant is a soldier who costs the king nothing. This country lacks strength, and it is not so well settled ...the children don’t replace their fathers as one sees from the abandoned farms.”<sup>31</sup> Captain Gordon sent his plan to buttress the banks near the fort with “Button Wood stakes” to the British engineers, but he also despaired in his journal of organizing a work detail for the fort. “The Sickly State of the Troops did not allow of getting any Number to work during my stay, nor was the Water low enough or the Heats abated to make much work otherwise advisable.”<sup>32</sup>

Fever and sickness along humid river bottoms, intensifying as temperatures and water levels rose farther south, comprise a familiar theme in settlement history on the eastern and southern coasts and in the major river valleys of the North American interior. Both malaria and yellow fever are vector-born diseases spread through the bite of infected mosquitoes. Three species especially infest watery places in Illinois, *Aedes vexans*, *Anopheles quadrimaculus*, and *Culex pipiens*; the latter is a dangerous carrier of St Louis encephalitis, while *Anopheles* carries malaria.<sup>33</sup> The life cycle of some species of floodplain mosquitoes

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<sup>29</sup> Pittman, *The Present State*, p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> Pittman, *The Present State*, p. 90.

<sup>31</sup> Macarty to Vaudreuil, January, 1752, in Theodore C. Pease, *Illinois on the Eve of the Seven Years War* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1940), pp. 468-469.

<sup>32</sup> Op. Cit. “Journal of Captain Gordon,” p. 298-299.

<sup>33</sup> For a good discussion of the differences among these species, see Craig Vetter, “Bloodsucker Zen,” in *Chicago Wilderness*, Spring, 2004, Vol. VII (3), p. 17.



reveals an adaptive dependence on intermittent flooding.<sup>34</sup> *Aedes vexans* is a widespread pest mosquito, a floodplain insect laying its eggs on soil often subject to inundation, but on soil that is at the time of ovipositing, “neither water-logged nor flooded.”<sup>35</sup> The eggs will hatch when inundated by flood waters, due to a particular bacterial action in the waters surrounding the raft of eggs. Such action can occur only at times of flood or very high water. On the upper Mississippi, serious flooding was much less common than in the lower river delta. There, both the French and the Spanish civil governments enacted rigorous laws requiring land owners to build and maintain a levee system to protect the riverine fields from annual floods.<sup>36</sup> The first levees appeared near New Orleans in 1731.<sup>37</sup> No such laws were required for the Illinois colony, although the Mississippi flooded severely at least once a decade.

The references to fever and sickness in the American Bottom suggest that newly-arrived men and women were contracting malaria and additional “malignant” fevers such as forms of encephalitis.<sup>38</sup> But not everyone who arrived fell ill with fever. The intermittent quality of “sickening” across the American Bottom settlements suggests a possible connection with the life cycle of *Aedes vexans* or *Anopheles deluvialis*. These mosquitoes seek and prefer a specific riverine environment in which sporadic flooding over the previous high water mark triggers egg-hatching. Field entomologists have vividly described the bottomlands of the Mississippi in Illinois, most especially the mercurial quality in which the floating in of debris

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<sup>34</sup> Truls Jensen, Paul E. Kaiser, and Donald R. Barnard, “Adaptation to Intermittently Flooded Swamps by *Anopheles quadrimaculus* Species C1 (Diptera Culicidae),” *Environmental Entomology*, 23(5), 1994, p. 1150. This study describes the ovipositing and hatching behavior of a species of mosquito in Florida; however, many species of floodplain mosquitoes inhabit river valleys in North America, including the Upper Mississippi.

<sup>35</sup> William R. Horsfall, Robert J. Novak, and Forrest L. Johnson, “*Aedes vexans* as a Flood-plain Mosquito,” *Environmental Entomology*, Vol. 4, No. 5, October, 1975, p. 675.

<sup>36</sup> Helmut Blume, *The German Coast During the Colonial Era, 1722-1803* (Geographisches Institut der Universität Kiel, Germany, 1956). Translated and edited by Ellen C. Merrill (Destrehan, Louisiana: The German-Acadian Coast Historical and Genealogical Society, 1990), p. 79.

<sup>37</sup> *Rivers of North America*, edited by Michael P. Dineen et al (Waukesha, Wisconsin: Outdoor World, 1973), pp. 43-44.

<sup>38</sup> Claudia M. O'Malley, “*Aedes Vexans* (Meigen): An Old Foe,” *Proceedings of the N.J. Mosquito Control Association*, 1990, pp. 90-95.

and upstream flood detritus creates sandy, decaying islands.<sup>39</sup> Such a morass was observed in 1766 by Lieutenant Eddington, who described the woody banks of the Mississippi as “...full of Cane, brambles, bullrushes, and underbrush so that it’s very difficult to make one’s way through them.”<sup>40</sup> Almost eighty years later in 1842, Charles Dickens, touring the American Bottom, described a similar environment: “... though the soil is very rich in this place, few people can exist in such a deadly atmosphere...On either side of the track, if it deserve the name, was the thick “bush,” and everywhere was stagnant, slimy, rotten, filthy water.”<sup>41</sup> It is just such an environment that attracts female floodplain mosquitoes. Despite eye-witness accounts of saturation, the best evidence that the French and Indians along the Mississippi were not contending with *yearly* floods lies in the way they fenced their animals along the river banks. In interviews with early American settlers in the old French bottomlands, prior to 1813, for example, witnesses attested that “horses ran in large droves in the canebrakes along the Mississippi River.”<sup>42</sup> When Captain Stirling’s party arrived at the mouth of the Kaskaskia River on October 10, 1765, Lt. Eddington recorded that they could see “the Horses and Cattle of the Village of Kuskusquias galloping about and some basking in the Sun on the opposite bank of the river.”<sup>43</sup> As in the early days of the first and second Fort Chartres, the rivers, both the Mississippi and the Kaskaskia, were still providing one half of a natural fence line, and animals were not considered at risk from constant flooding.

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<sup>39</sup> See Horsfall et al, “*Aedes vexans*,” p. 675.

<sup>40</sup> “The Official Journal Kept by Lt. Eddington or the Surgeon,” in *Broadswords and Bayonets*, p. 77.

<sup>41</sup> Charles Dickens, cited in William I. Woods, “Changes in the Landscape of the American Bottom – A.D. 1000 to Now,” Paper presented in a Roundtable Symposium: *Changes in the Landscape: The Lower Valley and Elsewhere – A.D. 1000 to Now* at the Joint Meetings of the Southern Archaeological Conference and the Midwest Archaeological Conference, Lexington, Kentucky, November 11, 1984.

<sup>42</sup> Nehemiah Matson, *Pioneers of Illinois containing a series of sketches that occurred previous to 1813* (Chicago: Knight and Leonard, Printers, 1882), p. 114.

<sup>43</sup> “Journal of Lt. Eddington,” in *Broadswords & Bayonets*, p. 79.

The historical accounts of French Illinois contain a mixed record of elegiac endorsement of “healthful” climate and references to virulent fevers. As late as 1790 the first Territorial Governor of the Old Northwest, Arthur St. Clair, wrote in a report on the Illinois Country to President Washington, “...the situation is high, the air pure and healthy, and the soil good....”<sup>44</sup> Yet sixteen years earlier, in 1774, the French Canadian trader Charles Gratiot wrote to his father that the Illinois Country was “[a] part of Louisiana, an extremely hot and feverish country –”<sup>45</sup> The intermittent nature of upriver flooding and subsequent anopheles hatchings help to explain these contradictions across the eighteenth century. The correlation between the high water advance of the Mississippi and the sickening of British soldiers after 1764 is suggestive. In the year 1766 many persons arriving to the floodplain were stricken with illness. Captain Harry Gordon’s journal states that on September 8, while preparing “to descend the Mississippi...I was seized with a Fever which continued with Unremitting Violence until the 16<sup>th</sup> at Night.”<sup>46</sup> George Croghan writing from Fort Chartres a few days later, on September 10, admitted, “I have been so ill this fortnight past that I have not been able to write...As I am reduced in Sickness, I shall be obliged to go round by New Orleans, as I’m not able to ride a Cross the Country to Fort Pitt.”<sup>47</sup> Along with problems of food supply, nutritional deficiency, and trade shifts caused by French and Indian populations crossing the river to the French settlements on the Spanish side, outbreaks of debilitating fevers were part of the British experience in Illinois.

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<sup>44</sup> *The Arthur St. Clair Papers*, Vol. 2, cited in John White, *Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Big Rivers Area* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, 2000), p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> See “A business venture at Cahokia: The Letters of Charles Gratiot, 1778-1779,” in John McDermott, editor, *Old Cahokia*, cited in White, *Early Accounts*, p. 37.

<sup>46</sup> “Journal of Captain Gordon,” in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 301.

<sup>47</sup> Croghan, cited in “Journal of Captain Harry Gordon,” in Newton D. Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1916), p. 478, n. 1.

An irony in the timing of the British arrival concerns the polar forces of riverine destruction and economic development. Despite references in records and correspondence to inundation, erosion, and the washing away of farms, notarial descriptions also reveal a steady maturation of property. French farms auctioned off in the 1750's and 1760's, abandoned, or sold to members of the French marine garrisoned at Chartres are extensively delineated and inventoried. These properties are replete with many wooden structures, including pigeon coops, windmills, smokehouses, hen houses, barns, and horsemills. Their crops and gardens are specified, including fruit trees or orchards.<sup>48</sup> The Kaskaskia Manuscripts detail the sale of a large farm at St. Philippe in 1759 "...consisting of a stone house, barn, stable, a horse mill, a water mill, a saw mill, livestock, 1 slave, 3 arpents of land in the village of St. Philippe, and all furnishings."<sup>49</sup> At Prairie du Rocher in 1760, there occurred a sale at public auction "of a house, its outbuildings and ½ square arpent lot, a tannery on ½ an arpent with a mill and 160 tanned hides of buckskin, bear and other hides."<sup>50</sup> Property was changing hands across the decade before the French gave up their claim to Illinois. Small numbers of arpents – usually three or four – were being sold, auctioned or abandoned, and on these arpents stood the structures of an interdependent trade world – horse and water mills, tanneries, and forges. At the same time, the references in notarial and commercial records to the presence of water are difficult to ignore. Watery earth no longer farmed or grazed would invite the return of

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<sup>48</sup> In 1763 a traveler, "Mr. Hamburg," observed that the French settlements in the Illinois "...Produces Some fruit: Apples, Pears, Quinses, and Peaches. The land is low And the Mississippi [sic] Gennerally over flows in June; the Excessive Heat that followeth afterwards occasioneth the fevers to Be Very frequent." See "Minutes of Mr. Hamburg's Journal," 1763, in Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies*, p. 364. French orchards at Detroit were described by the British as containing "several hundred of fruit trees." Their apple varieties included Detroit Red and Pomme de Neige. Information gathered anecdotally from "old people" suggests these fruit trees were originally obtained from Montreal, and before that, from Normandy and Provence. See *Michigan Pioneer & Historical Collections*, Vol. 1 (Lansing: W.S. George & Co., Printers and Binders, 1877), p. 355.

<sup>49</sup> Kaskaskia Manuscripts 59:12:17:1

<sup>50</sup> Kaskaskia Manuscripts, 60: 1:13:1

some pre-settlement features. By the 1790's, when the French spy Victor Collot toured the bottomlands, a natural recovery process was evident.

South of Prairie du Rocher, between the village and Kaskaskia, lay broad, rich southern meadows repeatedly remarked on by the arriving British in the mid 1760's. The surgeon traveling with Captain Stirling's detachment of the Black Watch Regiment wrote in 1765, "From this Village [Kaskaskia] there is a good Waggon Road to Fort Chartres, distant eighteen miles, at least two thirds of which is through natural meadows without a single Tree in them, and fine long Grass in them and little runs or brooks here and there intersecting them."<sup>51</sup> Thirty years later the "natural meadows," maintained for years through autumnal burning and especially, the grazing of livestock, evinced a rampant transformation. Collot noted that the "vegetation along Kaskaskia Road is so luxuriant a man on horseback is covered." He mentions grasses 21 feet high.<sup>52</sup> At Fort Chartres, he noted foundational ruins as lying half a mile from the long-deserted village of Chartres, the old town site "covered with wild herbs."<sup>53</sup> Between the fort ruin and St. Philippe, seven miles to the north, "space is intersected with woods, with natural meadow, and some marshes, which render St. Philips unhealthy."<sup>54</sup> Up at Cahokia, crossing the Meadow of the Bridge, Collot wrote, "The whole of this space is intersected with large ponds, some of which are three or four miles long, and are broad: these stagnant waters occasion, by their exhalation, many fevers, and on this

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<sup>51</sup> See "The Official Journal Kept by Lt. Eddington or the Surgeon," in *Broadswords & Bayonets*, p. 90.

<sup>52</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* (Firenze, Italy: O. Lange, 1924), Vol. 1, p. 239-240.

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

<sup>54</sup> Victor Collot, *A Journey*, 241.

account, the Meadow of the Bridge is very little peopled, the greater part of the inhabitants having gone over to the Spanish side.”<sup>55</sup>

Historians have usually interpreted the abandonment of the French settlements by 1765 as an exodus west across the river, fueled by fear of British rule. The inhabitants were certainly still leaving when the British arrived; Captain Thomas Stirling, the first commander to successfully reach the Illinois and oversee the changing of international flags at the fort, despaired of his ability to keep the French there. He wrote to Commander Thomas Gage in December, 1765, “This settlement, has been declining Since the Commencement of the War, and when it was Ceded to us, many Familys went away for fear of the English....” Later in the same letter he describes the stealth of this leaving: “I wrote your Excellency that few or none had given their names, to go away, which made me hope they intended staying, but...many of them drove off their Cattle in the night and carried off their Effects and grain, which I did everything in my power to prevent....”<sup>56</sup> An early history of Randolph County states that “most of the Metis population {half-breed}” crossed to Missouri with the Mechigamea in 1765.<sup>57</sup> Yet the consistent sales and auctioning of property in the French settlements during the 1750’s suggest that other forces may have been at play, connected to resource exhaustion. The British officer who succeeded Stirling at Fort Chartres, Lieutenant Fraser, wrote to General Haldimand in May of 1766 that he was having trouble determining the number of French inhabitants at the Illinois, “as they are going & coming Constantly to & from the Indian Nations, as others are from New Orleans to the Illinois....”<sup>58</sup> To the British, the Illinois was a world in flux.

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<sup>55</sup> Victor Collot, *A Journey*, 242.

<sup>56</sup> Stirling to Gage, December 15, 1765, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 125.

<sup>57</sup> Glenn J. Speed, *Ghost Towns of Southern Illinois* (Royalton, Illinois: Glenn J. Speed, 1977), p. 172-173.

<sup>58</sup> Fraser to Haldimand, May 4, 1766, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 231.

In particular, two sets of conflicting information form strong themes during the British occupancy of Illinois. While incoming British accounts are uniformly glowing and admiring of the fertility of the Illinois Country – its beauty, the animal, bird, and fish plenitude – the records, letters and the behavior of British soldiers suggest that they were hungry, remaining outside the provisioning trade. A second discrepant theme is connected to British perceptions of the Illinois Indians. Fears of Indian unrest, of plots, hostility, of the French stirring up the Indians to attack Fort Chartres are rife in the initial British accounts. But where exactly were the Indians? The Mechigamea and the Peoria had left the Chartres area in 1765, following many of the French across the river to Spanish Louisiana. The numbers of remaining Illinois, either at Kaskaskia or up at Cahokia, were very small. In 1763, Captain Charles Aubry, reflecting on his sojourn in the Illinois in 1757, wrote that at Kaskaskia, there were one hundred warriors; near Fort Chartres were about fifty Mechigamea, and north, up at Cahokia, were “sixty fighting men.”<sup>59</sup> Despite these low numbers, British feared the Illinois kinship and networking systems, especially with tribes to the north and east. Their recent experiences in the Seven Years War, but more especially, with Pontiac’s War in 1763, predisposed them to great wariness, although they also perceived impoverishment and degradation of the Indians.<sup>60</sup> That impoverishment, most consistently blamed on alcohol (French rum and brandy), economic dependency, and radical shifts in the amount and variety of subsistence activities, is also linked to the decay of the Chartres trade matrix. Philip Pittman perceived that trade was still thriving in the Illinois, despite the cessation of the wheat convoys: “In the late wars New Orleans and the lower

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<sup>59</sup> Numbers from Aubry are given in Joseph Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana: Illinois, Kickapoo, and Potawatomi Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974), p. 236.

<sup>60</sup> For the best recent treatment of British-Indian relations before and during Pontiac’s War, see Gregory Evans Dowd, *War Under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nation, & the British Empire* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); see especially pp. 168-173, “The Struggle for Illinois.”

parts of Louisiana were supplied with flour...and other provisions from this country; at present, its commerce is mostly confined to peltry and furs, which are got in traffic from the Indians....”<sup>61</sup> Yet the provisioning trade is not mentioned. The importance of foodstuff exchange in a frontier environment cannot be overestimated. The French commander over at Vincennes alluded to the consequences of disappearing Indians in 1752 when he wrote, “But what most disquiets me is that we have no more Indians at the post, which induces some of our inhabitants to leave the place as they can only live by trade with the Indians.”<sup>62</sup> By December of 1765, Lieutenant Fraser was writing to General Gage from Fort Chartres, “The Indians have also left our side, and gone to the Spanish side....”<sup>63</sup> The disintegration of the Chartres trade matrix across the 1750’s and 1760’s may well have contributed to the French exodus.

**“I am now in great distress for Want of Provisions”<sup>64</sup>**

The first five years of British experience in the Illinois were marked by hunger, illness, privation, and frictive encounters with disparate groups of Indians. In August of 1765, the British made the first successful attempt to occupy and command the Illinois Country. Almost two years earlier, in November of 1763, General Thomas Gage had succeeded Jeffrey Amherst as commander in chief of the British Army in America. Gage was convinced that “an early occupation of the western posts was essential.” He believed such occupations would “interrupt” or “cut off” communications between French and Indians in

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<sup>61</sup> Philip Pittman, *The Present State*, p. 97.

<sup>62</sup> St. Ange to Vaudreuil, February, 1752, in Pease, *Illinois on the Eve*, p. 485.

<sup>63</sup> Fraser to Gage, December 16, 1765, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 131.

<sup>64</sup> Major Farmar of the 34<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot, to British Secretary of War Barrington, March 19, 1766, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 191.



the wilderness.<sup>65</sup> A close study of Gage's letters over the course of the next few years reveals an exasperated education as he came to realize the extent and depth of those French-Indian communications. Prior to the commissioning of Captain Thomas Stirling and his Black Watch Regiment company, the British had sent Major Arthur Loftus up from New Orleans, the Indian agent George Croghan down the Ohio, and Lieutenant Alexander Fraser also out to Fort Chartres. All three attempts failed, specifically due to Indian conflict. Major Loftus' expedition was attacked 240 miles above New Orleans on the Mississippi by "hostile Indians." The first descriptions of those Indians identify them as Quapaw and Tunica, but later, in Loftus' exculpatory letters to Gage, he details the tribes as "Ofogoula, Choctaw, Avoyelles, and Tunica," all strongly French allied.<sup>66</sup> In a deposition, Indian chiefs of these tribes blamed the British for a smallpox epidemic brought into New Orleans: "They have caused nearly all our children to die." The Indians said that the French, "...our brothers, have never given us any disease." When Major Loftus tried to explain that the British were not going to claim and settle the Illinois but only to advantage Indian tribes by setting up trading posts, the Indian chiefs were not deceived. One asked, "Do the lands of the Illinois belong to them more than others?"<sup>67</sup>

Arthur Loftus did not attempt to re-ascend the Mississippi.<sup>68</sup> When George Croghan optimistically set out for Fort Chartres, Kickapoo and Mascouten Indians captured him on the Ohio and came near to burning him at the stake; he managed to talk his way free, with the

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<sup>65</sup> Clarence Carter, *Great Britain and the Illinois Country 1763-1774* (Washington: The American Historical Association, 1910), p. 31.

<sup>66</sup> Loftus to Gage, April 9, 1764, in Clarence Alvord and Clarence Carter, *The Critical Period 1763-1765* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1915), p. 230.

<sup>67</sup> See Deposition of Indians in Alvord and Carter, *The Critical Period*, pp. 235-236.

<sup>68</sup> Bradley Gericke, "'To the Distant Illinois Country: The Stirling Expedition to Fort de Chartres, 1765,'" *Journal of Illinois History*, Vol. 2(2), 1999, p. 89; see also the introduction in Clarence Alvord and Clarence Carter, eds., *The Critical Period, 1763-1765*, (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1915), pp. xvii-lvii.

fortuitous (and ironic) intervention of Pontiac.<sup>69</sup> Lieutenant Alexander Fraser reached Fort Chartres but stayed only two weeks, finding himself harassed and threatened by Illinois Indians in the area.<sup>70</sup> When Captain Stirling was commissioned to try a fourth time, the British, older and wiser, sent him out upon the rivers with a considerable detachment of men. Lieutenant Eddington's journal opens with a dramatic scene of embarkation:

Down the Ohio to the Country of the Illinoise moved the Detachment of the 42 Regt. It consisted of one Captain, three Lieutenants, one Surgeon, four Sergts., four Corporals, two Drumrs, and ninetytwo Privates, one Bombadier and four mattsos of the Artillery, two Indian Interpreters and twelve Indian Warriors of the Six Nations and the Delawares. They had with them three months provisions, six thousand cartridges, two kegs of powder, one of ball, another of flints & c. They set off from Fort Pitt August the 24<sup>th</sup> 1765 in seven large & one small Battoe, in order to take possession of the Country of the Illinoise, situated on the East side of the Mississippi, about five Hundred Leagues above N. Orleans.<sup>71</sup>

The party arrived at Fort Chartres on October 9. Both the journals kept by Captain Thomas Stirling and Eddington record the number of animals shot at, killed for food and sport, or "dispatched" along the Ohio and the Mississippi. Often multiple numbers of animals are noted, such as Eddington's remark that, while descending the Mississippi on the return trip, Chickasaw hunters saw no Buffalo but "killed 5 or 6 large Bears."<sup>72</sup> Stirling himself had a narrow escape with a black bear ("He was a monstrous creature. I had him

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<sup>69</sup> See Croghan's own account of this capture and release in "Croghan's Journal," June 8, 1765, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 30-31. Croghan identifies the Indian attackers as "Kickapers and Musquatimes." Alvord and Carter's footnote may erroneously identify the "Musquatimes" as Foxes (Mesquatchie); it is more likely, that far south to the Ohio River, that they were Mascoutens.

<sup>70</sup> Fraser's "treatment" by the Illinois Indians is variously described. George Croghan mentions "an Account of the bad reception & ill treatment M. Frazier & M. Sinnott met with on their Arrival there." See Croghan's journal entry for June 15, 1765, in *The New Regime*, p. 40. Captain Harry Gordon writing to William Johnson on August 10 of the same year is more specific: "...we had the accounts of Lieut. Fraser being taken out of the Commandants House at Fort Chartres by the Indians and delivered to Pondiac. His party was sent down the Mississippi..." See Gordon to Johnson, August 10, 1765, in *The New Regime*, p. 67.

<sup>71</sup> "Journal Kept by Lt. Eddington or the Surgeon," in *Broadswords & Bayonets*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>72</sup> "Journal," p. 97.

skinned. He measured above 6 feet long.”<sup>73</sup>) Other entries mention female bears with cubs; white-tailed deer, buffalo crossing rivers singly or in herds; and multitudes of birds. Some of Stirling’s men were apparently encountering pelicans for the first time, for Eddington describes them, writing of “an innumerable quantity of large white fowls. We shot some of them...” He precisely observed and recorded features of the birds, saying that upon picking one up, they “found it to be a Species of Pelican. The plumage is entirely white, only the Tips of the Wings excepted, which are jett black.” In nearly medical terms he mentions the pouch, “a skinny, membranous substance....”<sup>74</sup> Stirling recounts that upon first catching sight of the pelicans in the evening along the Ohio, “we perceived what at first many of the men said was a regt. of french drawn up on the Beach. I confess, it was very like it, as they were all white except the principal feathers of the wings, which were grey, & our sharp sighted soldiers did not know what to make of them.”<sup>75</sup>

Mistaking pelicans for French soldiers is an indication of the anticipatory mindset of these British soldiers: fresh from the Seven Years War, dispatched to a farflung outpost wholly settled and commanded by French, British foot soldiers and artillery alike may have expected to find French troops arrayed in full uniform.<sup>76</sup> The reality of life in French Illinois – the abandonment of farms, the cessation of grain convoys, the draining away of manpower and Indians over the course of the war, and the subsequent reduction in grain production all played a role in depleting the settlements. As they embarked for the Illinois, the British did not focus on the material state of the colony but on its capacity for loyalty, on the tenor of the

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<sup>73</sup> “Journal of Captain Thomas Stirling,” in *Broadswords & Bayonets*, p. 37.

<sup>74</sup> “Journal Kept by Lt. Eddington,” p. 67.

<sup>75</sup> “Journal of Captain Thomas Stirling,” p. 37.

<sup>76</sup> See the excellent overview of the military operations of the Black Watch Regiment in Gericke, “To the Distant Illinois Country.” The Black Watch “participated in the assault on Fort Ticonderoga in 1758 and was present at the capture of Montreal in 1760.” The Black Watch also fought in Pontiac’s War in 1764. See Gericke, p. 91.

Indian temperament, and on the smoothness of the political-military transition. In their introduction to *The New Regime 1765-1767*, Alvord and Carter note that “the large supply of provisions which the colony had produced in former years seems to have decreased; at any rate it fell short of the expectations of the officers.”<sup>77</sup> On the journey down the Ohio and up the Mississippi, the soldiers were prepared for French “resistance” and Indian ambush. Stirling devised meticulous plans for night watches and the formation of attack lines should the convoy be fired on while in midstream: “...the men to jump ashore, form in one file at 2 yards from each other, cover themselves under the bank or the nearest tree till the whole was landed. Then the Enemy to be vigorously pushed with bayonets.”<sup>78</sup>

Such precautions were wise, given the failed history of British penetration into the newly-ceded French lands and the “difficulties” encountered with various Indian nations all along the rivers. The possibility of violence is the consistent theme in British correspondence. Despite the fact that the attempts to reach Fort Chartres all involved conflict with different groups of Indians – as diverse as the lower Mississippi tribes like the Ofogoula and the Tunica or the Peoria up in Illinois – British writers often lumped Indians in broad categories geographically. Indians frequently emerge in correspondence as a single adversarial population to be watched, cajoled, bought off, and fought. General Gage wrote in 1765 that “...our Differences with the Western Indians begin to subside very fast.”<sup>79</sup> A few weeks earlier, however, he names specific tribes and organizes them along a spectrum of hostility: “The Indians in General find Belief, as fast as the French can invent storys, but the

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<sup>77</sup> Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. xii.

<sup>78</sup> “The Journal of Captain Stirling,” in *Broadswords & Bayonets*, p. 28. For British frontier military strategies, one that reassesses the long held view that British soldiers were ill-suited to wilderness combat, often taken unawares by agile Indians and frontiersmen, see Peter E. Russell, “Redcoats in the Wilderness: the British Officer and Irregular Warfare in Europe and America, 1740-1760,” *The William & Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup>. Ser. Vol. 35, No. 4, October 1978, p 629-652..

<sup>79</sup> Gage to Conway, September 23, 1765, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 85.

Pouteatamies [Potawatomi] of St. Joseph, and a Tribe of Chippewas of Saguinam, appear the most forward and ready to commit Hostilities.”<sup>80</sup>

Historians agree that the British “...suffered from a general lack of credible firsthand information about the land and people of the Illinois country.”<sup>81</sup> In the absence of any real history detailing the near century of interaction between the French and Indians, the British usually interpreted Indian loyalty to the French as a result of either French machinations or of French cultural degradation. They did not often credit the ancient alliances between the French and the Indians, concretely formalized in ritual and artifact. Without focusing on early French sovereignty, General Gage brought himself to acknowledge the superiority of French trade as a product of years of interaction: “...of all the Systems of Indian Commerce which have ever come within my Knowledge, I have found none equal to that adopted by the French; which a long Experience proved to be a good one.”<sup>82</sup>

In some cases, that “long Experience” was based on specific agreements with western tribes. In 1760-61, as his regiment retreated south to the Illinois Country after the British had taken Fort Detroit, the French commander Captain La Chapelle was shown a skin inscribed with the signature of La Salle. It was a hard, frozen December as La Chapelle’s militia unit made its weary way “with shoes and uniforms in a very bad state” past St. Joseph and down the Illinois River. Unexpectedly, they were aided “by the Indians of the region” (likely the Peoria). The Indian chief brought out a skin roll still bearing La Salle’s seal of wax, although the imprint had worn off. “We, Cavalier de Salle, representing his Majesty, the King of France, declare in his name a fair and perpetual alliance with the Nation of the Illinois.

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<sup>80</sup> Gage to Halifax, August 10, 1765, in *The New Regime*, p. 69.

<sup>81</sup> Bradley Gericke, “To the Distant Illinois,” p. 81.

<sup>82</sup> General Gage to Lord Shelburne, February 22, 1767, cited in Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies*, p. 484.

Cavalier de la Salle.” La Salle had visited the Peoria on the Illinois about 1689. On the strength of this seventy year old skin document, the Indians of the Illinois furnished the French snowshoes, sledges, ten dogs, and fifty Indian guides to see them to Fort Chartres.<sup>83</sup> Yet British letter writers and diarists during the British occupation of Illinois speak almost uniformly of French wiles, of present-day intrigues in which Indians were “influenced.” Lieutenant Eddington, for instance, writes as if it were a certainty that the French in New Orleans were “spirit[ing] up the Savages against us” out of fear that when the British took over Fort Chartres, they would “in time beat them out of the Indian Trade.”<sup>84</sup> The invisible, seditious, and mysterious ways of the French out in the wilderness, mingling with Indians in their villages, speaking their languages, calling on a long shared trade history – such ways seemed an ubiquitous and formidable threat. In 1767 William Johnson wrote to General Gage about an incident in West Florida: “The French were doubtless at the bottom of the Affair in West Florida, as they are of all other disturbances on the Continent.”<sup>85</sup>

Despite these concerns, in none of the letters exchanged among British officials prior to Stirling’s expedition is there a mention of potential problems of supply, of the decay of the provisioning trade, or of food shortages. It is a striking omission in the flurry of letters.<sup>86</sup> The immense distance of the French settlements from the supply warehouses in Philadelphia – the firm of Baynton, Morgan, and Wharton – is mentioned obliquely, almost as a curiosity.

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<sup>83</sup> Louise Kellogg, “La Chapelle’s Remarkable Retreat through the Mississippi Valley, 1760-61,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 22 (1), June, 1935, pp. 63-81.

<sup>84</sup> “Journal of Lt. Eddington,” in *Broadswords & Bayonets*, p. 102.

<sup>85</sup> Johnson to Gage, January 15, 1767, in *The New Regime*, p. 483.

<sup>86</sup> See, for instance, the letters between Lieutenant Fraser and George Croghan, or those between General Thomas Gage and Sir William Johnson, 1765-1767, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime, 1765-1767*, (1916). Croghan is focused on fur trade profits and the possibilities of securing peace with the western Indians to promote that trade; Gage writes of nefarious activities of the French in stirring up trouble with the Indians against the British (a recurrent and vehement theme in Gage’s letters particularly); he also discusses the effect of Pontiac’s War and new trade regulations. It isn’t until the actual possession of Fort Chartres by Captain Stirling that letters explicitly about provisions, stores, and supplies begin to appear. The urgent tone of many of these letters suggests the occupying British were surprised and dismayed to find a depleted country.

In 1770, General Haldimand wrote to General Gage, “What a strange Project is this of settling a new country by passing over such a number of leagues of land, as yet uncultivated, from the present inhabited frontier to the Mississippi!”<sup>87</sup> Exactly how the incoming British soldiers viewed the French settlements in 1763 is an interesting question. At least one scholar believes the soldiers expected to find an empty country with a few “tenuous hamlets clinging precariously to the edge of known civilization.”<sup>88</sup> Had this been the case, it is likely Stirling’s expedition might have taken more provisions. They carried but a three months’ supply of pork, beef, and flour.<sup>89</sup> There is also the general British view of the French in North America, both the French Canadians and the Illinoisians. In some ways, the British administering the vast northwest interior came to conflate perceptions of the wilderness with its occupants.<sup>90</sup> One historian writes that the British officials “almost immediately came to despise and distrust the still numerous French Canadians still living at Detroit, Vincennes, Fort Chartres, Michilimackinac, Green Bay....”<sup>91</sup> British correspondence is full of characterizations of the interior French; they are lazy, licentious, “Indianized” and “vagabond.” General Gage emerges as one of the most passionate attackers. According to Gage, out in the “wilderness” the French “lived a lazy kind of Indian life...almost as wild as the Savages themselves....”<sup>92</sup> He felt the French were “as near as wild as the Country they

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<sup>87</sup> Haldimand to Gage, May 16, 1770, in Thomas Gage Papers, British Museum Additional Mss., 21664:148 and 21665:289, photostats in the Illinois Historical Survey.

<sup>88</sup> Bradley T. Gericke, “To the Distant Illinois,” p. 82.

<sup>89</sup> “Journal of Captain Thomas Stirling,” in *Broadswords and Bayonets*, p. 26; see also the discussion of provisions in Gericke, pp. 91-92.

<sup>90</sup> For the best treatment of the British and the concept of “wilderness” as a distinct geopolitical and geospatial concept creating its own set of policies, see Jack M. Sosin, *Whitehall and the Wilderness: the Middle West in British colonial policy, 1760–1775* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961).

<sup>91</sup> See Kerry A. Trask, “To Cast Out the Devils: British Ideology and the French Canadians of the Northwest Interior, 1760–1774,” *American Review of Canadian Studies*, XV (3), 1985, p. 249. Kerry demonstrates the power of an entrenched ideology in shaping a national policy.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Gage to Jeffrey Amherst, March 26, 1762, cited in Trask, “To Cast Out the Devils,” p. 254.

go in, or the People they deal with, and by far more vicious and wicked.”<sup>93</sup> The Indian trader and sometimes agent George Croghan expressed contempt for the French living at Detroit, writing in his journal that they were a “...lazy idle people, depending chiefly on the savages for subsistence...whose customs and manners they have wholly adopted.”<sup>94</sup> Given these beliefs, particularly about the level of French industry and agriculture, it is puzzling why the British attempting to occupy French Illinois did not advance upon the rivers realistically prepared to exist in a far-flung country without a strong supply system.

Yet food was certainly on the minds of the men in Stirling’s expedition. On the way down the Ohio and up the Mississippi, Stirling and Eddington both discuss the plenitude – or absence – of game. While Eddington uses the phrase “abounds with” consistently to describe a wide variety of game, fish, and birds, conspicuous among both accounts is the focus on buffalo. In early September, 26 days from Pittsburgh on the Ohio River, Stirling notes how “shy” the buffalo are on the shores, how Indian hunters’ “frequent attempts to fire on them” was causing some delay. He speculates that the buffalo have become shy due to the “Shawnese “[Shawnee Indians] “continually hunting them thereabouts.”<sup>95</sup> On October first, having entered the mouth of the Mississippi, he complains again about the elusiveness of buffalo. “We saw a great many Buffaloe Tracks. However, as the French are continually hunting from the Mouth of the Ohio upwards, they are very shy....”<sup>96</sup> Attempts to explain buffalo scarcity involved pointing a finger at Indian and French hunters. British observers did not evidently think in terms of buffalo migrations.

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<sup>93</sup> Thomas Gage to Lord Shelburne, February 22, 1767, cited in Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies*, p. 462.

<sup>94</sup> “Journal of George Croghan,” cited in *Michigan Pioneer & Historical Collections*, Volume 3, p. 14.

<sup>95</sup> “Journal of Captain Thomas Stirling,” in *Broadswords & Bayonets*, p. 60.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.



Interviews with late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century pioneers of Illinois, Anglo-Americans who settled the upcountry above the French prior to 1813, reveal a specific buffalo migration pattern. “On account of the green-headed flies the buffalo would leave the Wabash Country and range west and north of the Illinois River during the summer months.”<sup>97</sup> The migration of Illinois buffalo seems to have been a result of many factors, including heat, insects, movement to escape snow, movement toward better forage, and proximity to water.<sup>98</sup> As early as 1680, Louis Hennepin was describing the “movement” of “wild cattle or bulls,” saying that they “change country according to the seasons.” Hennepin apparently was implying that migration functioned as an adaptive insurance against extirpation by humans.<sup>99</sup> The movement of buffalo helps to explain contradictions in historical accounts: some observers claim “the prairie westward for miles in extent was frequently blackened.”<sup>100</sup> Marquette and Joliet used precise numbers to describe early bison herds in 1673: 400-500 animals.<sup>101</sup> However, another French missionary, Sebastien Rasle, wrote of bison along the Illinois River in 1690 as being of “countless numbers.” He estimated 4,000 to 5,000 animals on the prairies, “as far as the eye can reach.”<sup>102</sup> Estimates are often contradictory. Careful accounts of Illinois bison pinpoint small, enumerated herds. Other descriptions refer to herds blackening the land until the earth looked like “one black robe.”<sup>103</sup> Such vivid, blanketing images have much greater resonance in the buffalo biology and culture of the nineteenth century Great Plains. There, the Trans-Mississippi West bison

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<sup>97</sup> Nehemiah Matson, *Pioneers of Illinois*, p. 145.

<sup>98</sup> J. Dewey Soper, “History, range, and home life of the northern bison,” *Ecological Monographs* 11, 1941, p. 384.

<sup>99</sup> John White, *A Review of the American Bison in Illinois, with an Emphasis on Historical Accounts* (Urbana, Illinois: The Nature Conservancy, 1996), p. 14.

<sup>100</sup> Nehemiah Matson, *Pioneers of Illinois*, p. 145.

<sup>101</sup> Counts by Marquette and Joliet given in White, *A Review*, p. 8.

<sup>102</sup> Sebastien Rasle cited in White, *A Review*, p. 9.

<sup>103</sup> This famous phrase appears in many articles and accounts of buffalo on both sides of the Mississippi. A recent example is in the 1997-1998 *Marysville, Kansas, Tourism Guide*, p. 34.

herds multiplied to extraordinary numbers. One nineteenth century biologist studying buffalo concluded that while the numbers of Illinois animals may have seemed “considerable to dwellers east of the Mississippi,” in reality they were “mere stragglers from the innumerable mass” out on the western Great Plains.<sup>104</sup>

From the early decades of French settlement, buffalo were more plentiful north of the Mississippi bottomlands. They are described as being “commonly seen along the Illinois River...and very scarce along the lower Mississippi River in Illinois.” Some historians credit this disparity to French hunting of buffalo.<sup>105</sup> Although Father Vivier in the 1750’s wrote that bison “abound everywhere,” and although Lieutenant Alexander Fraser in 1766 also observed “vast Numbers of Buffaloe,” by the late 1760’s, there was a noted scarcity of animals along the Mississippi River in southern Illinois.<sup>106</sup> By the time of the British occupation, the location of the “vast” buffalo herds seems to have shifted. Observers were describing, in the area of the Wabash River across the Grand Prairie, “vast numbers of Buffaloe & Deer And every other species of Game common in that country.” Lieutenant Fraser wrote of “extraordinary large and frequent herds” near the confluence of the Ohio and the Wabash.<sup>107</sup> Comparative perceptions are important in accounting for observers’ beliefs that the herds were “vast.” Almost all European accounts as well as Anglo-Americans’ from the Illinois Country use the language of enormity and inexhaustible abundance to describe

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<sup>104</sup> See the comprehensive discussion of buffalo on the eastern and western plains by Frank Gilbert Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in its Wild State*, Second Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970). Roe cites William Hornaday on buffalo numbers, p. 256. For the most recent and convincing ecological analysis of the disappearance of the Great Plains buffalo, see Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: an Environmental History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Isenberg argues for a matrix of factors arising from both cultural and ecological encounters between Great Plains Indians and Europeans. I am indebted to Dr. David Stradling for emphasizing to me the importance of Isenberg’s work.

<sup>105</sup> For instance, see John White’s conclusions in *A Review*, p. 10.

<sup>106</sup> Vivier and Fraser cited in White, *A Review*, p. 11.

<sup>107</sup> Alexander Fraser, cited in White, p. 11.

wildlife.<sup>108</sup> Their prior experiences should be taken into account. For instance, Father Sebastien Rasle, who described buffalo herds of “four and five thousand” along the Illinois River, was also ministering to the Abenaki Indians in the northern New England area, in what is now Maine. In a 1723 letter to his brother, Rasle describes a northern land stripped of game: “...for ten years they have no longer either elks or deer. Bears and beavers have become very scarce. They seldom have any food but Indian corn, beans and squashes.”<sup>109</sup> It is in this same letter that he recalls the buffalo herds he saw in 1690 along the Illinois. After the environment of northern New England, beginning to be scoured of game and fur-bearing mammals through at least seventy years of French and Indian hunting, Father Rasle may have felt the Illinois Country to have been almost preternaturally abundant.

Differing accounts of buffalo in Illinois may reflect the likelihood that buffalo moved to different locations seasonally. Research on biting flies, *Tabanidae*, strongly supports this. Deer and horse flies, including some species of the “green headed flies” mentioned by early pioneers, inflict torment and genuine wounds on buffalo. Grazing herds whose tails move in switching unison often reveal palm-size patches of bloody, hairless flesh, to which *Tabanidae* are drawn not only for bloodmeals but to deposit larvae. In this sense *Tabanidae* may be understood not just as a pest but as a form of seasonal predator. Many species lay eggs right on the edges of trail vegetation, constructing a larval ambush. The flies have evolved particularly to prey on large herbivores; they are drawn to contrasts in color, especially large dark shapes against a lighter background of green, and also to exhaled

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<sup>108</sup> For the best initial discussion of perceptions of inexhaustible abundance in the New World, see William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), especially chapter 3, “Seasons of Want and Plenty,” pp. 34-53.

<sup>109</sup> Father Sebastien Rale [Rasle] to his brother, October 12, 1723, letter printed in Edna Kenton, *The Indians of North America*, Volume Two (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Company, 1927), p. 384.

carbon dioxide.<sup>110</sup> In 1816 the surveyor Henry Allyn, working along the Illinois River and east to the Grand Prairie, described an attack by a “large green fly” on his horses. He felt this insect was “numerous as the locusts of Egypt & as voracious...their bite was severe: in less than a second after lighting, the blood would fly, & run down their sides in streams.” Allyn saw that after his party entered upon the prairie, “the flies rose from the grass in myriads, & formed a perfect cloud around our horses, which began to pitch, rear, & snort.”<sup>111</sup>

In addition to the famous wallowing, in which buffalo coated themselves with mud to create a dried, protective earthen husk, buffalo in Illinois used migration. Tabanidae also commonly lay their eggs in watery places, often on the edges of streams, bogs, and marshes.<sup>112</sup> The hatching flies tend to stay out of large open areas because of wind.<sup>113</sup> Buffalo migrated to areas that were freer of bogs and marshes, standing water, and sloughs, and to places that were more open and windy. In addition, buffalo, as grazing herbivores, were strongly attracted to recently-burned areas because of more tender and nutritious fresh growth.<sup>114</sup> Now, as during the eighteenth century, buffalo most favor “grama, buffalo, wheat, blue, blue-joint, June, dropseed, and windmill” grasses, most of which are native to

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<sup>110</sup> L.L. Pechuman, Donald W. Webb, and H.J. Taskey, *The Diptera or True Flies of Illinois I. Tabanidae*, Illinois Natural History Bulletin Volume 33, Article 1 (Champaign, Illinois: State of Illinois Department of Energy and Natural Resources, 1983), p. 11.

<sup>111</sup> H. Allyn and J.A. Smeltzer, *Henry Allyn, Autobiography* (Portland, Oregon: Jean Allyn Smeltzer, 1974), cited in John White, *Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Big Rivers Area* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, 2000), p. 67.

<sup>112</sup> See John Burger, “Yellowstone’s Insect Vampires,” *Yellowstone Science*, Vol. 4, Number 4, p. 14. This article corroborates the movement of buffalo to escape biting flies in Yellowstone National Park. See also P.D. Taylor and S.M. Smith, “Activities and physiological states of male and female *Tabanus sackeni*,” *Medical Veterinary Entomology*, 3, 1989, pp. 203-212.

<sup>113</sup> L.L. Pechuman et al, “*The Diptera*,” p. 11.

<sup>114</sup> Forrest Rose, “Ring in the Old: Study of tree rings brings perspective to human life,” *Focus* 21, Spring, 1999, p. 15, for discussion about the setting of fires by Native Americans and pioneers to foster growth for forage. See also Said A. Damhoureyeh and David C. Hartnett, “Effects of Bison and Cattle on Growth, Reproduction, and Abundance of Five Tallgrass Prairie Forbs,” *American Journal of Botany* 84 (12), 1997, 1719-1728.

the Illinois tallgrass prairies.<sup>115</sup> Much of the evidence for aboriginal burning of prairies in Illinois is taken from central and northern prairies. The clustering of buffalo herds in the northern half of the Illinois Country, especially between the Illinois and the Wabash, can thus perhaps be understood as a specific migratory response to avoid *Tabanidae* and perhaps find a greener, sweeter graze. The early nineteenth-century observer James Hall wrote of the buffalo “tracts” or traces across the Grand Prairie of Illinois that the animals moved to higher ground to escape “prairie flies” in summer. In winter, they sought the margins of “large rivers,” where they could browse on giant cane, *Arundinaria gigantea*, an evergreen.<sup>116</sup> Early accounts of Anglo-Americans settling along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers stress that in winter, they turned their stock into the tangled stands of cane, often the only forage the animals had over the cold months. Some of this “cane” may actually have been stout scrubbing rush, *Equisetum hyemale robustum*. In 1803 Lewis and Clark noted scrubbing rush while ascending the Mississippi above the Ohio, where “the banks appear to abound with the sand or scrubbing rush, it grows much thicker, and arises to a much greater height in the bottoms of this river than I ever observed it elsewhere.” William Clark felt the rush was “agreeable food for both cattle and horses.”<sup>117</sup> Buffalo would also browse on *Equisetum* and would move towards the rivers to find it. Andrew Isenberg points out that on the Great Plains, buffalo migration was both complex (a biological-reproductive behavior) and unpredictable; he describes this phenomenon as “the fluidity of bison aggregation,” connecting it to migratory and hunting patterns of Indians who became nomadic in pursuit of

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<sup>115</sup> Tom McHugh, *The Time of the Buffalo* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 150.

<sup>116</sup> James Hall, *Notes on the Western States, Containing Descriptive Sketches of their Soil, Climate, Resources, and Scenery* (Philadelphia: Harrison Hall, 1838), pp. 110-111.

<sup>117</sup> *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition August 30, 1803 – August 24, 1804* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 102.

herds. Judging from contradictory historical accounts in the Illinois Country, the migration of Illinois buffalo may also have been as erratic.<sup>118</sup>

The relevance of buffalo migratory patterns to the history of the Illinois Country in the 1760's lies in the British difficulties in procuring food; this in turn stems from the disintegration of the provisioning trade at Fort Chartres. British attempted to understand the scarcity of buffalo by accusing French hunters of profligate slaughter. In 1769 a British officer described the French as "destroy[ing] immense Number of Buffaloes."<sup>119</sup> French hunting parties were ranging south towards the Kentucky lands, pursuing the herds who often sought the salt deposits in those areas.<sup>120</sup> These hunting forays supplied the lucrative New Orleans buffalo market. British officials perceived that the French were hunting "as regularly as the Savages."<sup>121</sup> Another officer at Fort Chartres wrote at the same time that fourteen Chickasaw Indians "were of great Service in Hunting; & Had it not been for the Buffaloe Meat, they & some others Hunters supplied us with, the Expedition must have failed, being about five Weeks short of provisions."<sup>122</sup> The procuring and selling rhythms of the original trade matrix at the fort had been meshed into Indian summer and winter hunts and, in the case of black bear, into patterns of animal hibernation as well. French and Indians alike used domestic animals to supplement seasonal hunts. The depletion of human beings from the French settlements, prior to and during the British occupation, reconfigured hunting to some extent. The lapsing of agriculture was also a piece of this reconfiguration. In 1768,

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<sup>118</sup> Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, p. 66 – 68.

<sup>119</sup> Cited in White, *A Review*, p. 12.

<sup>120</sup> See John A. Jakle, "The American Bison and the Human Occupance of the Ohio Valley," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 112 (4), August, 1968, especially Fig. 1, p. 300. Jakle identifies salt licks on either side of the Ohio River and probable buffalo traces connecting these sites. Jakle also asserts that "the woodland bison developed a compelling appetite for salt which stimulated seasonal movement from the valley's Prairie feeding grounds to the salt licks" (see p. 302).

<sup>121</sup> Stirling to Gage, December 15, 1765, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 125.

<sup>122</sup> Farmar to Stuart, December 16, 1765, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 128.

Father Meurin, returning voluntarily to the Illinois after the Jesuit Order had been expelled, wrote that he was ministering to twenty people at Prairie du Rocher and “four men at St. Philip....”<sup>123</sup> This was probably not enough of an agricultural work force to put in a healthy wheat crop.

The effect of uncertain meat supplies caused British officials to hire hunters who would travel long distances on horseback to locate buffalo herds. The British used Indians and occasionally, French inhabitants, but they also began to send out commissioned hunters from the fort’s supply firm. In addition, French inhabitants found they could sell foodstuffs to the hungry soldiers at “very dear” prices. General Gage wrote to the British commander at Fort Chartres in 1767, “The provision purchased at the Illinois is excessive dear....” He compares the food prices with those in the Fort Pitt area: “It comes much heavier at the Illinois, at the rate you purchase it from the Inhabitants.”<sup>124</sup> British soldiers may have been procuring their own food as well. Latrine pit excavations dating from the British occupation of Fort Chartres (renamed Fort Cavendish) reveal large numbers of domestic animal bones as well as red-eared turtle carapaces (“sliders”).<sup>125</sup> The number of these turtle shells coinciding with the British at Fort Chartres suggests that soldiers were privately setting turtle traps in the river; it wouldn’t have been difficult, since the Mississippi was washing up around the western wall. In the fall of 1768 a British letter-writer from Fort Chartres mentioned that “the Turtle is commonly of 30 lb. Weight...they are Reckoned to be near as good as those taken at sea for soup.”<sup>126</sup> This pattern likely developed as a result of a severe food shortage shortly after the

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<sup>123</sup> John Rothensteiner, *History of the Archdiocese of St. Louis in the Various Stages of Development from A.D. 1673 to A.D. 1928* Volume I (St. Louis: Catholic Historical Society, 1923), p. 126.

<sup>124</sup> Gage to Reed, July 15, 1767, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, pp. 584-585.

<sup>125</sup> Edward B. Jelks, Carl J. Ekberg, and Terrance C. Martin, *Excavations at the Laurens Site: probable location of Fort de Chartres I* (Springfield: Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, 1989), p. 10.

<sup>126</sup> Butricke to Barnsley, September 15, 1768, in Clarence Alvord and Clarence Carter, *Trade and Politics 1767-1769* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1921), p. 409.

British occupation. The second British officer to command at the fort, Major Farmar, wrote to Secretary of War Barrington in March of 1766, "I am now in great distress for Want of Provisions especially for Flour. I don't know how I shall be able to keep Possession of the Garrison until a Supply arrives. The Soldiers are frequently three or four days without anything but Bread and Indian Corn; as the Country cannot afford sufficient Meat for the daily Consumption of the Troops."<sup>127</sup> This country that could not "afford sufficient meat" had been described only five months before by Lieutenant Eddington as "abound[ing] with incredible quantities of all kinds of Game. Particularly Buffalows, Elks, Deer of various kinds, Bears, Opposums, Raccoons, which are very common...Turkies are everywhere..."<sup>128</sup> The months between the arrival of Stirling's expedition and the rather frantic letters of Major Farmar in the spring contain a history of British, French, and Indian interaction that suggests the Chartres trade matrix had dissolved. It also suggests that the British soldiers, perhaps those especially of Captain Stirling's Black Watch, were not trained as hunters.

The leaving of Illinois Indian tribes from the vicinity of the fort has not been credited historically as a factor in the difficulty of British experience in the Illinois Country. These Indians, most especially the Mechigamea, were middlemen in a fluid, evolved, food procurement system. While food exchange also drew in French hunters, it depended on the very large meat hauls obtained by Indians on their winter and summer hunts. One factor enabling Indians to return to the Chartres area with heavy packs of smoked tenderloins, haunches, buffalo tongues, rendered fat, and hides was the presence of women on the hunts. Early observers of the Miami tribe, for instance, mention how critical the women were to the

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<sup>127</sup> Farmar to Barrington, March 19, 1766, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 191.

<sup>128</sup> "Journal of Lt. Eddington," in *Broadwords & Bayonets*, pp. 93-94.



seasonal hunts, how they were able to pack exceptionally heavy loads of meat on their backs and to run with these loads for long distances. The Illinois Indian villages decamped en masse to the prairies for the hunts, and all individuals were employed in the production of the salted, smoked buffalo and other game.<sup>129</sup> With the radical reduction in Indian village population – most tragically for the Mechigamea and Cahokia in 1752, when as many as 90 men, women, and children were killed in the Fox raid – the nature of seasonal hunts must have changed. Late in 1765, Major Farmar wrote to Gage suggesting that the “great Numbers” of Indians assembling at Fort Chartres in February, March, April, and May had been used to being supplied by the French “with double what we allow the Soldiers...and also Meat.” Farmar stresses that the supply of “meat” going to Indians “entirely depends upon the Success the Hunters have in killing Buffalo, which is the Principal Maintenance of this Country.”<sup>130</sup> From this letter it seems clear that Indian groups living near the fort and perhaps at some distance from it were obtaining food supplies and were no longer the suppliers themselves.

However, the hunts were still in evidence in 1768 among the Peoria to the north, for the Fort Chartres Commissary for the firm of Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan recorded that “Black Dog, a Chief of the Piorias” had appeared at the fort twice, once in winter and once in spring. In the winter, Black Dog revealed that his people had just returned from the winter hunt. In the spring, “a great part of his Nation” were “going out on their summe[r] Hunt on the Grand Prairies to Provide Meat for their Old Men.”<sup>131</sup> There is no mention that the

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<sup>129</sup> James Scott, *A history of the Illinois Nation of Indians from their discovery to the present day* (Notes from Meetings, Streator Historical Society, 1973), p. 10 – 11. Manuscript in the Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>130</sup> Farmar to Gage, December 16-19, 1765, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 133.

<sup>131</sup> Account of Commissary Edward Cole and Captain Gordon Forbes, cited in Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana*, p. 263.

Peoria were routinely supplying Fort Chartres. Of additional interest here is the location of the summer hunt: on the Grand Prairie of northern Illinois, where the habitual migratory movement of buffalo left hard, rutted paths so broad two carriages could travel abreast. During the tenure of Colonel Reed at Fort Chartres in 1767, he fined a French woman in Kaskaskia 250 livres for trading a pint of rum to “an Indian” for a “piece of Meat.” She had “been without any for several days before.”<sup>132</sup> Such incidents suggest that Indians were continuing to trade foodstuffs with the French, and that the French themselves may have been experiencing food shortages. In letters during these initial years, British observers often mention small groups of Illinois Indians “coming to the fort to Trade” and to receive presents, but the details of what they brought to trade are missing. Although the Philadelphia firm of Baynton, Morgan, and Wharton began to supply Fort Chartres by the end of 1766, the difficulty in procuring meat continued. French hunters were in competition with the hunters sent out by the firm. These French hunters (not all from the Illinois settlements) were sending salted and smoked buffalo tongues and tenderloins down to New Orleans, engaged in a high-profit convoy trade that offered them the same geographical market as their grain shipments earlier in the century. There is little evidence they were selling meat to the British at the fort. The British company hunters preferred to camp near the Ohio and the Wabash while the French tended to stay farther west and south into the Kentucky lands. The

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<sup>132</sup> George Morgan to Baynton and Wharton, December 10, 1767, George Morgan Letter Book, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 130. The fine imposed was in reference to the trading or selling of alcohol to an Indian. In 1765, the British issued a set of “Orders for the Regulation of Trade” from their headquarters in New York. These general regulations were to apply to all trade. Traders bringing “spiritous liquors” to a fort or post were to store them, labeled, in the forts until the transactions were completed. No liquors were to be sold to Indians in or near posts or forts, but after the completion of trade, traders could carry the liquor “two leagues away” and deliver it to Indians. It is not clear from George Morgan’s letter where the trading of the pint of rum for the meat took place. See “Orders for the Regulation of Trade,” January 16, 1765, in Alvord and Carter, *The Critical Period*, p. 400.

commissary George Morgan at the fort was responsible for organizing his firm's hunters. Morgan's letters refer to this part of his duties as "Our Buffalo Adventure."

This adventure most seriously impacted buffalo in southern Illinois. On one highly successful hunt during the late summer and early fall of 1767, the company's hunters along the Ohio River "...killed upwards of seven hundred Buffalo." Morgan notes that at the same time, there were "twenty large Perriogues employed in the same Trade on the Ohio from New Orleans."<sup>133</sup> Those pirogues contained French hunters. It is not hard to visualize the scene: British hunters skinning, butchering and rendering the "tallow" from a massive buffalo kill spread out on the open prairies of the Ohio River banks, leaving the earth saturated with blood, carcasses and entrails. Out on the Ohio, at least twenty large boats fully manned with French hunters rowed past like circling vultures. Overhead would have drifted real vultures, and hidden in the underbrush and timber margin additional consumers would have lain in wait: the carnivorous predators – most especially the then-populous wolves – and carrion eaters of the natural world. Thickets trembled with patient ravens, while small mammals, many concealed in the earth itself, sniffed an air so redolent with fresh blood the smell would have carried for miles.<sup>134</sup>

While these birds and animals were rich benefactors of southern Illinois buffalo hunts in the late 1760's, one historian has described the British and French attack on southern-ranging

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<sup>133</sup> Morgan's correspondence cited in Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana*, p. 260-261.

<sup>134</sup> For a contrasting view of the economy and skill of the Great Plains Indians in butchering buffalo, especially the complete use made of the animal, see "Indians as Consumers," in Tom McHugh, *The Time of the Buffalo*, p. 83-109. White hunters typically left much more of the animal. Eventually, the attraction of wolves to the halfway-butchered carcasses ("the stench of rotting buffalo") began to be a problem for Anglo-American settlers; the wolves then also attacked domestic stock. See Stephen Aron, "Pigs and Hunters: "Rights in the Woods" on the Trans-Appalachian Frontier," in *Contact Points: Amerian Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750 –1830*, edited by Andrew R.L. Cayton and Fredrika J. Teute (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 197.

bison (migrating south as winter approached) as a “virtual pincers movement.”<sup>135</sup> This hunting competition hastened the extirpation of buffalo from Illinois. Over time, the firm of Baynton, Morgan and Wharton invested “30,000 pounds in the enterprise [supplying the Illinois], employing over 300 boatmen.”<sup>136</sup> Yet the British still perceived that the French were “thinning” the herds. George Morgan, complaining to his employers Baynton and Wharton in 1767, wrote that “the great Number of French Hunters that are procuring Meat up the Ohio for New Orleans...have so thinn’d the Buffalo....” Morgan felt that if measures were not taken to stop the hunting, “it will in a short Time be difficult to supply even Fort Chartres with Meat from thence.” To safeguard their scouting on the Ohio River through pro-British Cherokee territory, French hunters were even using a ruse of “wear[ing] English Colours ....”<sup>137</sup> Of some significance is the date of this letter – written in winter, when buffalo herds would likely have been ranging to the south. However, only a year later, another British observer journeying down the Ohio toward the Illinois Country described the presence of buffalo herds up to 100 animals: “We killed so many Buffalos that We commonly served out one a day to Each Company, & they Commonly Weigh’d from 4 to 600 lbs.”<sup>138</sup>

The continual competition between British and French hunters in the Ohio Valley and the Illinois provided a counterpoint to another kind of interaction: the competition for Indian loyalty. On the morning of October 10, 1765, the detachment of the Black Watch Regiment under Captain Stirling assembled formally to relieve the French officers at the gate of Fort

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<sup>135</sup> Joseph Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana*, p. 261.

<sup>136</sup> Clarence Alvord, *The Mississippi Valley in British Politics: A Study of the Trade, Land Speculation, and Experiments in Imperialism Culminating in the American Revolution*, Volume I (Cleveland: The Arthur Clark Company, 1917), p. 301.

<sup>137</sup> Morgan to Baynton and Wharton, December 10, 1767 (George Morgan Letter Book), in Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, p. 132.

<sup>138</sup> Butricke to Barnsley, September 15, 1768, in Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, p. 409.

Chartres. Lieutenant Eddington described the French Guard: "...compos'd of old Men looking like Invalids without any sort of uniform. Most of them had on Jackets of different colours and slouch'd Hats, and their Arms seem'd to be old and in very indifferent order."<sup>139</sup> There were 20 men under "Monsieur St. Ange," who insisted that the British should strike the French Flag.<sup>140</sup> St. Ange would never himself lower the "Pavilion Francais."<sup>141</sup> In a private letter Lieutenant Eddingstone [Eddington] commented, "The French Troops we relieved here might be called anything but Soldiers, in Short I defy the best drol comick to represent them at Drury Lane."<sup>142</sup> Eddington also had little praise for the fort itself. The buildings and Barracks were very dirty, he wrote, and "Very long weeds several feet high were growing all over the Square and round the wall."<sup>143</sup> The official inventory of Fort Chartres, conducted by Captain Stirling, lists many items "of bad quality," "bad," or "damaged."<sup>144</sup> Through these brief impressions can be glimpsed an impoverished country whose material goods had been compromised by seven years of war and not replenished through trade, whose labor force could no longer care for the great limestone fort. The striking of the Fleur-de-Lys and the raising of the St. George took place in a brief, emotional ceremony at the gates of the fort (Lt. Eddington describes the "great Chagrin" of the "Honest Old Veterans" assembled under St. Ange<sup>145</sup>). Located well outside the fort, at a distance of "quarant toises" sat a structure listed by Captain Stirling in his inventory as a "Pent House for

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<sup>139</sup> "Journal of Lt. Eddington," in *Broadswords & Bayonets*, p. 83.

<sup>140</sup> Captain Louis St. Ange de Bellerive was at the time of the French surrender 60 years old. He had served in the French armies in Canada and the Illinois for about forty years. After surrendering Fort Chartres, he and his men crossed the Mississippi to St. Louis. See James F. Keefe, "The Inventory of Fort Des Chartres," in *Muzzleloader*, Volume XVIII (6), January/February 1992, p. 45-46.

<sup>141</sup> "Journal of Captain Thomas Stirling," in *Broadswords & Bayonets*, p. 45.

<sup>142</sup> Letter from Lt. Eddingstone, October 16, 1765, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 106.

<sup>143</sup> "Journal of Lt. Eddington," p. 84.

<sup>144</sup> See "Inventory of the Goods at Fort De Chartres," in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p.102-104.

<sup>145</sup> "Journal of Lt. Eddington," p. 83.

the use of Savages.” The French version gives this structure as a “Hangard.”<sup>146</sup> In this stone building had often been retained Indian guests as well as prisoners since the completion of the fort in 1754. No written accounts mention the presence of a single Indian at the cession of the fort. Yet the implicit statement of the Hangard, its mute witnessing of the shift of empire, and its presence outside the walls of the fort summon the Indians. Although ostensibly not present that October day, their influence on the French and British was the single strongest factor determining the relations between the two in the Illinois Country.

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<sup>146</sup> See “Cession of Fort de Chartres, October 10, 1765,” in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 100.

## Across the River: The Missouri Lands, 1765 - 1775

The Illinois Indians living near the French villages along the Mississippi were in a niche location between powerful adversaries to the north and also to the south. Competition for peltries and buffalo in the upper Mississippi Valley made them enemies of the Fox, Sauk, and Sioux nations; to the south, the Chickasaw and Cherokee, long allied with the British, resented any infringement into their deerskin trade.<sup>1</sup> The Illinois have been studied in two broad patterns: as warring tribes beleaguered through decades of guerrilla attacks – from traditional, long-documented adversaries – and as tribes faithfully allied with the French. Historians have not paid enough attention to how relations with traditional Illinois allies – such as the Osage – may have shifted over the course of the eighteenth century. Indian groups could maintain superficial loyalties to each other while jockeying for the best positions as new European powers took over the Mississippi River trade. These relations were further complicated by a visibly changing environment. Comparative studies of the west and east bank Indians can reveal much about economic factors, especially about the differing roles of horses, wood overexploitation and deforestation, and the hunting of white tail deer in diverse landscapes.

If the evolved, domiciled villages of the Illinois were in a “unique” relation with the French villages, as is often attested, then other unique factors were also at play in the Missouri lands.<sup>2</sup> One of those was the sheer, unequaled abundance of oak varieties in the

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<sup>1</sup> One of the best overviews of these southern Indians and their allegiances is found in Daniel J. Usner, *Indians, Settlers & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: the Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1992). See particularly the chapter, “The Indian Alliance Network of a Marginal European Colony,” pp. 77 – 100.

<sup>2</sup> For this pervasive concept, note Lord Shelburne writing to the Lords of Trade in 1767 that the goal of his western policy was to create a situation in which “those Savages, who are hemmed in by our settlements on both sides, must ... become domiciliated, & reconciled to our Laws and Manners.” The concept of the “passive,

Ozark highlands. The presence of Bur Oak, especially, helped to form the oak openings and savannas where deer often grazed; the Bur Oak root system is so extensive – creating a belled circumference as wide as the tree crown itself – that these oaks create open land between them, being in a sense, their own competitors.<sup>3</sup> Bur Oaks can be pivotal and even relentless in afforestation. One botanist has concluded that “some ecologists believe that the only thing that prevented the Bur Oak from making forest states out of everything east of the Missouri was the constant firing of the region by the Indians in their hunting drives.”<sup>4</sup> Bur Oak forests provided immense quantities of acorns, but almost as important, “deer could be hunted through these groves on horseback.”<sup>5</sup> While Bur Oak was also ubiquitous in Illinois, the French had selectively chosen it for home, fence, barn, and furniture construction. The presence of so much unlogged oak in Missouri – an oak hegemony – may have played a role in the economic history of the area. The story of the Osage ascendancy post 1763 is tied to a particular, diverse natural environment. In the same time period, the story of the Illinois Indians is tied to the east-bank topography and altered floodplain of the Illinois Country. These tribes were living in contiguous lands and were frequently in contact. Yet one nation was increasing its population and power while the other was continuing to lose so many

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domiciled Indian” living next to Europeans was one the British admired about the French arrangement. See Shelburne in Clarence Alvord and Clarence Carter, *Trade and Politics 1767 – 1769* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1921), p. 80; Carl J. Ekberg has written that “Hostile Indians seem to have been a major reason why the center of the French Illinois Country developed on the east bank rather than the west bank of the Mississippi.” See *Colonial Ste. Genevieve: An Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier* (Gerald, Missouri: The Patrice Press, 1985), p. 7. See also Wayne C. Temple: “The Kaskaskia, however, became quite docile under the rule of the French...” *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country: Historic Tribes* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Museum, 1958), p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> See this discussion in Donald Culross Peattie, *A Natural History of Trees of Eastern and Central North America* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1968), pp. 213 – 218.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Culross Peattie, *A Natural History*, p. 215.

<sup>5</sup> Peattie, p. 214.



people that “the Kaskaskia in 1796 numbered only eight or ten men.”<sup>6</sup> The natural environment played a significant role in these divergent histories.

By the late 1760’s so many people were using the western rivers that they began to function as well-known, reliable roads. For the western Indians, the rivers had always been arterial, vital routes that linked them in all directions to kin, allies, and trade fairs. Europeans on these waterways established the names of the rivers on maps; and maps as well as trade drew an increasing number of people embarking upon the river routes for the first time. The transport system evolving in the mid-eighteenth century connected the Great Lakes, especially Lake Michigan, via the conduit south using the Chicago, Des Plaines, and Illinois Rivers to reach the Mississippi. The eastern banks of that widening river were channeled with the intrushing Rock, Illinois, Wood, and Kaskaskia Rivers, all draining the Illinois watershed. On the western bank, the Des Moines, Missouri, Osage, and Meramec fed the slowly-swelling Mississippi well above the Ohio confluence. There, two immense rivers created a striated intersection into which swirled canoes, pirogues, batteaux, and flatboats, often carried sideways out into a current variously described as “raging,” “gentle,” “heavy,” “troubling,” or “noisy.” In 1790, an anonymous cartographer noted, “The River Mississippi has a smooth, heavy current...the Missouri has its Sources either in, or passes thro, some inexhaustible body of white clay....” The writer mentions the commingling of the Missouri’s “whiteness” with the Mississippi so that the newly-blended river was ribboned with opaque streaks “even after the Ohio enters it with several other rivers....”<sup>7</sup> Perceptions of color, of alternating streams of turbid blue, brown, white, and red characterize historical accounts of the Mississippi as it gathered waters from both sides. In 1678 Father Marquette had penned

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<sup>6</sup> Wayne C. Temple, *Indian Villages*, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in John White, *Big Rivers Area Assessment, Volume 5: Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Big Rivers Area* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, 2000), p. 42.

the earliest description of the high, clifty land near the confluence of the Mississippi and “Ouaboukigou” (a word that became the Wabash, often used by the French for the Ohio River). He perceived “A sticky earth is found there, of three different colors – purple, violet, and Red. The water in which the latter is washed assumes a bloody tinge.” Father Marquette noted that if he smeared this red earth on a paddle, it “was dyed with its color, so deeply that the water could not wash it away during the 15 days while I used it for paddling.”<sup>8</sup>

Born on those variegated streams were other streams: a continuous flow of information about sightings, incursions, illegal trading, ambushes, war parties, skirmishes, “foreign Indians,” Indians in canoe flotillas, hunting parties silhouetted on the bluffs, trading post operations, and the activities of a host of human beings from at least twenty Indian nations and three international empires. In 1762, by the secret Treaty of Fontainebleau, France had ceded to Spain its western holdings in Louisiana. While the British reached the Illinois two years after the Treaty of Paris, the Spanish did not officially arrive in the St. Louis area until 1770.<sup>9</sup> Before the appearance in the Missouri lands of the first Spanish lieutenant-governor, Don Pedro Piernas, the British had initiated “an exchange of notes” with Spanish authorities. Such “notes” resulted in decrees that forbade Spanish subjects to cross the Mississippi into British territory and British traders to enter “Upper Luisiana” via the same riverine route.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Father Pierre Marquette, cited in Reuben Gold Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in North America 1610 – 1791* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1954), p. 359 – 360.

<sup>9</sup> John Francis Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier 1513 – 1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1963), p. 194. Bannon has used the term “Quasi-Borderland” to describe the Spanish province of “Luisiana.” Valuable in this work is the comprehensive bibliography of work on Spanish America, especially those works listed for “The Illinois Country” and “The Spaniards in Upper Louisiana.” See also *New Spain and the Anglo-American West: Historical Contributions presented to Herbert Eugene Bolton* (Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Lancaster Press, Inc., 1932), especially the essay in Volume I, “American Penetration into Spanish Louisiana,” by Lawrence Kinnaird. The best overview of the middle-Mississippi Valley international rivalries is still Abraham P. Nasatir’s lengthy introduction to the collection of documents in *Before Lewis and Clark* (St. Louis, 1952). Nasatir remains the authority on the Upper Mississippi Valley in Spanish Louisiana.

<sup>10</sup> A. P. Nasatir, “The Anglo-Spanish Frontier in the Illinois Country During the American Revolution, 1779 – 1783,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Vol. XXI (3), October, 1928, p. 292.

During these polite negotiations, French Catholics on the eastern shores crossed the Mississippi at night, taking their slaves and poling even their cattle across, to re-settle in St. Genevieve and the new fur center of St. Louis. Due to channel changes in the Mississippi River, crossing to the western shore would not have required much effort; the waters were lapping at the streets of Chartres (see Chapter Six). An early history of St. Louis describes the river in relation to the infant town:

The slope of the hills on the river-side was covered by a growth of heavy timber...which terminated in a point on the very margin of the river...the Mississippi was very deep, but a great deal narrower than it is now, as it is stated by the old inhabitants that persons could converse with each other across it, without effort.<sup>11</sup>

While this account somewhat stretches the imagination, it is true that the river in the 1760's afforded an ease of crossing in most seasons. There are even accounts of American citizens walking across the frozen Mississippi, and one particular story relates a celebrated, long-remembered horse race down the center of the rock-hard river between an "Illinois" horse and a "Missouri" horse.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the Mississippi and its tributaries in the Illinois Country were unsurpassed as conduits of information. The "distant Illinois" of Captain Thomas Stirling's expedition may have been distant, but it was not trackless wilderness punctuated with isolated smoke plumes. Indian tribes had engaged in periodic riverine migrations and relocations for most of the eighteenth century. French trappers and voyageurs descended the Mississippi from the Falls of St. Anthony, converging on the trade matrix at Fort Chartres. Tediously rowing and corbelling upriver from New Orleans, French Creole and recently-emigrated traders and merchants stopped at early settlements like Natchez, Baton Rouge, Arkansas Post, and the bluff outpost of latter-day Memphis. From the Great

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<sup>11</sup> J.N. Nicollet, "Sketch of the Early History of St. Louis," in John Francis McDermott, editor, *The Early Histories of St. Louis* (St. Louis: St. Louis Historical Documents Foundation, 1952), p. 136.

<sup>12</sup> Brink, McDonough, and Co., *History of St. Clair County* (Philadelphia: 1881), p. 59.

Lakes streamed trappers, traders, and Indians using the portage at St. Joseph near the Kankakee to reach the Illinois River and descend to the heart of the Illinois Country.

Historical records can only hint at the amount of traffic on the rivers in the decades preceding the American Revolution. Figures available at mid-century from Montreal, listing the number of *conges* (trade licenses) granted to voyageurs as well as the number of men and canoes engaged in the trade down the Mississippi give some indication of the numbers of legally-sanctioned traders.<sup>13</sup>

|      |                  |           |                               |
|------|------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| 1740 | 32 <i>conges</i> | 57 canoes | 336 men engaged               |
| 1743 | 54 <i>conges</i> | 68 canoes | 417 men engaged               |
| 1750 |                  | 74 canoes | 419 men engaged <sup>14</sup> |

The number of unlicensed French traders and trappers was almost certainly greater. One study of the French trading posts above the American Bottom, those “farflung” bluff and high hill country outposts of French Wisconsin, summarizes the human traffic on the rivers: “They came and went without record.”<sup>15</sup> While no thorough historical investigation exists into the flow of men in an illegal riverine trade on the upper Mississippi and Missouri, there is evidence, especially from the increasingly hostile interactions of the Missouri and Osage Indians and the French, that unlicensed and unscrupulous traders were cheating their suppliers.<sup>16</sup> The pattern escalated as a result of war. At the end of King George’s War (1744

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<sup>13</sup> *Conge* is defined in the *Mississippi Provincial Archives* as “a technical term referring to permits to trade directly with the Indians for fur, which were granted by the governor of Canada.” See MVP, Vol. 4 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1927), p. 248.

<sup>14</sup> This data selected from a table in Norman W. Caldwell, *The French in the Mississippi Valley 1740 – 1750* (Urbana, Illinois: The University of Illinois Press, 1941), doctoral dissertation in the Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois. See Table on page 60.

<sup>15</sup> Glenn T. Trewartha, “A Second Epoch of Destructive Occupance in the Driftless Hill Land (1760 – 1832: Period of British, Spanish, and Early American Control),” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 30 (2), June, 1940, p. 109.

<sup>16</sup> For the best study of the illegal fur trade in Canada and New York, see Jean Lunn, “The Illegal Fur Trade Out of New France, 1713 – 1760,” *Canadian Historical Association Annual Report*, 1939, pp. 61–76. Lunn states

–1748), tantalizingly higher prices for beaver lured French Canadian voyageurs across the Mississippi. Although estimates in the 1740's and 1750's of Missouri and Osage Indian tribe populations were quite low – at 500 “men” and fewer – there was yet “much trouble” between Indians and especially, unlicensed French traders. These traders were often found murdered on the banks of rivers.<sup>17</sup> A “Memoir Upon the State of the Colony of Louisiana in 1746” noted “...as long as the beavers are at a high price, the voyageurs redouble their industry to encourage the Indians to winter in beaver country....”<sup>18</sup> This practice, of French traders following Indians into rich fur country, distinguished the French fur harvesting from the British.

The British initially planned to set up scattered posts and trading sites throughout their new holdings in the western lands. There are repeated references in British correspondence to the necessity of building forts at the mouths of the Illinois and the Wabash or Ohio.<sup>19</sup> Yet even these proposed forts (which never materialized) would have required Indians to travel fair distances to trade. Although Indians in the seventeenth century had been used to canoeing down the rivers of the subarctic region to reach the early posts like Tadoussac, Quebec, and Trois Rivières, by the 1760's, the competition for Indian trade had crafted a comfortable system for Indians of French traders readily available in their own villages and hunting grounds. One historian has commented that the proposed British system of setting

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that “in the early years of the period...some estimates placed the annual export at roughly a half or two-thirds of the total quality of beaver produced in Canada each year...” See Lunn, p. 65. Her interesting conclusion, unexplored in subsequent scholarship, is that the illegal fur trade between Montreal and Albany dictated the course of empire. “Had the trade with Montreal been cut off, Albany must have tried much earlier and much more vigorously than it did to establish direct relations with the Indians in the west.” See Lunn, p. 76.

<sup>17</sup> Norman W. Caldwell, *The French*, p. 74.

<sup>18</sup> See Norman W. Caldwell, *The French*, pp. 60 – 61.

<sup>19</sup> See for instance, General Gage's discussion of the ideas put forth by Captain Harry Gordon: “...to erect Posts on the Rivers Ohio and Illinois near their Junction with the Mississippi, in order to prevent all Furrs and Skins from coming into the River from the Eastern Branches...” in Gage to Shelburne, February 22, 1767, in Newton D. Mereness, *Travels in the American Colonies* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1916), p. 459.

up a handful of forts was “running contrary to customs a hundred years old.”<sup>20</sup> Ironically, however, it was the presence of French Canadian traders and trappers in the Indian camps and villages that created animosity. Abuses of trade by “coureur du bois” resulted in the murder of French traders during and after the Seven Years War.<sup>21</sup>

After the British arrived in the Illinois, British traders “poured into” the Great Lakes region and fanned out into the Upper Mississippi.<sup>22</sup> Their numbers eventually caused General Gage to change his mind about the efficacy of building forts at the mouths of the Illinois and Ohio Rivers. The British policy of controlling all trade through forts and outposts would be futile since the Indian tribes were “so numerous.” Skilled traders and Indians long used to the river systems and character could silently skiff by the forts at night.<sup>23</sup> Gage felt that regulation of traders was necessary, via a system of strict licenses and trading rules. Yet just as French and British hunters competed for buffalo on the Grand Prairies, subjects from both countries – as well as Spanish emigrating north – were thronging on the rivers and crossing into the Missouri lands in a drive to reach the fur basin of the Trans-Mississippi West. As French and Indians migrated across the Mississippi to Spanish Louisiana in the 1760’s, new French settlements on the western banks of the Mississippi began to appear. St. Louis, Vide-Poche, and Carondelet grew upriver from the earlier,

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<sup>20</sup> Clarence Alvord, *The Mississippi Valley in British Politics: A Study of the Trade, Land Speculation, and Experiments in Imperialism Culminating in the American Revolution*, Volume I (Cleveland: The Arthur Clark Company, 1917), p. 296.

<sup>21</sup> See detailed analysis of French-Indian trade relations in Theresa J. Piazza, “The Kaskaskia Manuscripts: French Traders in the Missouri Valley Before Lewis and Clark,” *The Missouri Archaeologist*, Volume 53, December, 1992, pp. 1-42. Animosity persisted into the French settlement phase as well (and under the Spanish regime). Also see local treatments such as Kathleen Brotherton, “Osage occasionally killed early French settlers,” *River Hills Traveler*, January/February, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Alvord, *The Mississippi Valley*, p. 300.

<sup>23</sup> Alvord, *The Mississippi Valley*, pp 307-308.

southernmost French village of St. Genevieve.<sup>24</sup> With the exception of St. Genevieve, an early lead-mining, saltworks, and agricultural village, these new settlements were wholly thriving on the fur trade. French and Spanish trappers were pushing west and then north, up the Missouri River, meeting descending Indian nations who had transferred their activities from Fort Chartres to St. Louis. Studies of the Osage Indians, especially, indicate an aggressive adaptation to the fur market economy across the 1760's and 1770's, resulting in what one historian has termed the "prairie hegemony" of the Osage.<sup>25</sup> In 1757, the Osage marketed 8,000 pounds of bear and deerskins; by 1773, they were producing 22,000 pounds.<sup>26</sup> The ascendancy of the Missouri Osage, both Little and Great bands, is an important factor in understanding the experience of the British and the eastern Mississippi Indians. And that ascendancy had much to do with the reality of Osage population: they remained "numerically strong" in their forested Ozark highlands, rarely experiencing the decimation of disease which periodically swept across the open prairies of the Illinois country.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> For a concise overview of these towns, see the account by J.N. Nicollet, "Sketch of the Early History of St. Louis," in John Francis McDermott, *Early Histories of St. Louis* (St. Louis: St. Louis Historical Documents Foundation, 1952) pp. 131 – 148. For St. Genevieve and its relation to the French settlements on the eastern side of the river, see Carl J. Ekberg, *Colonial Ste. Genevieve: An Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier* (Gerald, Missouri: The Patrice Press, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> Willard Hughes Rollings conducted the standard ethnohistorical study of the Osage in his 1983 dissertation, "Prairie Hegemony: An Ethnohistorical Study of the Osage, From Early Times to 1840." Unpublished bound copies of this study are in many libraries. As Richard White persuasively argues in "The Winning of the West: the Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," Rollings attributes the rise of the Osage and their control of the interior Missouri lands through raids and warfare as a direct expression of competition for natural resources. The Osage south of the Missouri River were the most powerful and feared tribe, mirroring the aggressive activities of the Sioux north of the Missouri. See Richard White's discussion in *The Journal of American History* 65 (September 1978), pp. 319-343.

<sup>26</sup> Willard Hughes Rollings, "Prairie Hegemony: An Ethnohistorical Study of the Osage, From Early Times to 1840," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1983, p. 214.

<sup>27</sup> Rollings, "Prairie Hegemony," p. 203. The Missouri Indians, in contrast, did evidently suffer from smallpox epidemics. See Berlin Basil Chapman, *Oto and Missouri Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1974), pp. 6-7.

Historically, because of the great natural demarcation of the Mississippi River, studies of the fur trade have tended to separate patterns of fur and hide harvesting. The natural riverine boundary may have created an artificial historical boundary. The opening up of the Missouri River trade lands under the Spanish regime seems to inaugurate a distinct era in fur trade history: the narrative celebrates the Chouteau brothers of St. Louis, their eventual monopoly of trade privileges with the Osage, even to the extent of building a fort among them, and the evolution of the Missouri River trade under such Spanish traders as Manuel Lisa in the 1790's. Yet the commercial success and military strength of the Osage placed increasing resource pressure on the tribes of the Illinois country to the east. Treating the Illinois bands as Indians "left behind" in the trade obscures the effect of inter-tribal competition on European political experience in the Illinois Country. Historians have often interpreted the disintegration of Indian life and subsequent violence against incoming white settlers as territorial defense of ancestral grounds.<sup>28</sup> Some of the roots of that violence, however, which took its last form in the guerrilla raids of the Grand Prairie Kickapoo before the War of 1812, are found in the changing, destabilized relations between the smaller bands of east-bank Mississippi River Indians and the ascendant Osage.

**"...Osage make themselves masters of all the hunting country...."<sup>29</sup>**

The Osage were able to use both types of trade, legal and illegal, in a skillful interplay with a wide swath of international populations. Some semi-sedentary bands of Osage lived in "close proximity" to French and Spanish settlements in Spanish Missouri, trading with

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<sup>28</sup> For example, see the chapters entitled "Defenders of the Manitou" and "A War of Extirpation" by John Mack Faragher in *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (1986).

<sup>29</sup> Log of Galiot La Fleche, Spanish commander at Arkansas Post, in Nasastir Papers, Chapter 4, p. 119, cited in Rollings, p. 216.



licensed traders in New Madrid, St. Genevieve, Saint Charles, and Saint Louis. Other Osage, ignoring Spanish trade rules forbidding traffic in Indian slaves, livestock, or munitions, continued to trade with unlicensed and illegal traders in the interior Missouri lands. As early as 1768, the Osage had signaled their defiance to the Spanish in a symbolic gesture: only four days after the opening of Fort Carlos III at the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, a party of Osage and Missouri Indians arrived and planted a British flag on the river bank. This incensed the Spanish soldiers and “caused them to rise up in arms.”<sup>30</sup> Such bravado would characterize most of the Osage policy toward Europeans of three nations. Continuing to seek illegal traders clustering thickly along the Arkansas River to the south, Osage established a “lucrative market” in several directions.<sup>31</sup> One historian of the Osage concludes that “it is clear that by the 1770’s the Osage dominated the fur trade of Saint Louis and Spanish Illinois.” Preferring to trade in deerskins, the Osage were supplying as much as 64 percent of the total market in the deerskin trade, including 98 percent of the trade in untanned deerskins. They may have supplied as much as 88 percent of bearskins.<sup>32</sup> In April of 1778 the commandant of Spanish Arkansas, Balthazar DeVilliers, wrote to Bernardo de Galvez, Governor of Louisiana, that the fur trade of the Osage was “the most lucrative and the most interesting of the Illinois.”<sup>33</sup>

Comparisons of the Osage and the Illinois tribes in the decades following 1763 can help to complicate plastic and facile interpretations of the Illinois as a degraded people. The gradual “winking out” of two of the four remaining tribes has been documented, especially in the demographic studies of Emily Blasingham (the Kaskaskia and the Peoria live today in

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<sup>30</sup> A. P. Nasatir, “The Anglo-Spanish Frontier,” p. 293.

<sup>31</sup> See discussion of the Osage trade patterns under the Spanish in Rollings, pp. 213-214.

<sup>32</sup> Rollings, “Prairie Hegemony,” p. 215.

<sup>33</sup> DeVilliers to Galvez, April 25, 1778, cited in Rollings, p. 215.

Oklahoma with the Weas and Piankeshaws, removed there after a treaty in 1832 – and “all use the collective name *Peoria*.”<sup>34</sup>). Characterizations of the very-reduced Illinois as non-competitive, eroded culturally by European contact, and desperately dependent on gifts and trade goods have arisen from the biased perceptions of European observers in the eighteenth century. A comment by Colonel Wilkins at Fort Chartres in 1771 is typical; he considered the Mechigamia “a weak and poor Nation....”<sup>35</sup> Earlier, in 1765, Captain Philip Pittman had described the Illinois as “resid[ing] near the English settlements in this country, where they have built their huts. They are a poor, debauched, and dastardly people.”<sup>36</sup> Such interpretations ignore the importance of two environmental factors promoting the rise of the Osage and limiting the Illinois Indians: continuous access to horses and a variegated, diverse hunting territory. Such territory had not been touched by the force of deforestation when the deerskin trade accelerated after 1763. Many timber margins and prairie-woodland edge habitats comprised a landscape mosaic in Missouri. Rich oak-hickory highlands opened gradually to riverine prairies – the prime domain of the white-tailed deer. These edge, or ecotonal, habitats “generated by Indian-set fires” as well as the natural openings created by large fallen trees shaped a land characterized as “open woodlands, closed forests, and edge habitats.”<sup>37</sup> In these habitats, pre-settlement deer populations were likely maintained at two per square kilometer, held steady through selective hunting and natural predation. An “explosion” of deer populations eventually occurred in the historic period, where “deer

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<sup>34</sup> Robert M. Owens, “Jean Baptiste Ducoigne, the Kaskaskias, and the Limits of Thomas Jefferson’s Friendship,” *Journal of Illinois History*, Vol. 5:2, Summer, 2002, p. 136, n67.

<sup>35</sup> Wilkins cited in Joseph Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1974), p. 275.

<sup>36</sup> Captain Philip Pittman, *The Present State of European Settlements on the Mississippi, With a Geographical Description of that River illustrated by Plans and Draughts* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906 (1770)), p. 97.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon G. Whitney, *From Coastal Wilderness to Fruited Plain: A History of Environmental Change in Temperate North America from 1500 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 119.

densities in excess of eight to ten deer per square kilometer,” are connected with the elimination of deer predators through the fur trade and bounty-hunting.<sup>38</sup> An additional factor actually promoting the increase in deer population is inter-tribal hostility. While armed, mounted parties of Indians could pass attractive deer targets on the way to planned attacks, taking animals opportunistically was a danger. Any animal remains would attract vultures, which often warned enemy tribes.<sup>39</sup> The two activities – hunting and warfare – were carefully regulated and governed by clear sets of cultural rituals. Between 1770 and 1800, Indian tribes like the Osage were almost constantly involved in resource-driven hostilities with many other tribes to the south of the Missouri River. Although their deer hunting did seriously deplete white tail populations, the broader, long-term picture of deer populations across centuries suggests great shifts fostered by disruptive patterns of both fur trading and warfare.<sup>40</sup> What happened historically in the adaptive ascendancy of the Osage – and what didn’t happen across the Mississippi River with the Illinois tribes – is the result of many human and environmental factors. Two of these are the deer and the horse.

The account left by Commander Macarty of the arrival of Mechigamia, Cahokia and Peoria Indians at Fort Chartres in 1752 contains one of the only descriptions in which the mode of travel of Illinois Indians is documented. A week after a decimating attack by the Fox Indians (see Chapter Five), the Indians received a (false) report of a second Fox attack. They abandoned their villages and converged on the fort for safety. “All the men, women, and children of the three Illinois villages reached here early in the morning, having walked

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<sup>38</sup> Gordon G. Whitney, *From Coastal Wilderness*, p. 313.

<sup>39</sup> Personal communication, Thomas D. Morgan, September 19, 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Richard White discusses the interplay of hunting and warfare in controlling deer populations among the Choctaw in *Roots of Dependency: subsistence, environment, and social change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

all night in a continual rain....”<sup>41</sup> The three villages mentioned here are the two villages of the Mechigamea and the Cahokia village, all north of Fort Chartres. Only the settlement of the Kaskaskia Indians lay to the south. The Cahokia, in fact, lived at least thirty miles to the north. Why weren’t these Indians, traveling at night through the rain, desperate for the protection of the fort, using horses? While all their animals may have been stolen in the Fox raid, those attacking Indians had converged on the Illinois Indian villages by canoe (see account of this raid in Chapter Five). Stealing an entire horse herd would have been difficult. So few accounts of the Illinois Indians mention them on horseback that a general historical sense of the Mechigamea and Cahokia especially, implies a people conducting their lives and daily activities on foot. Paths leading to their villages inscribe a landscape of pedestrian traffic; and except in deepest winter, when the river bottoms lay silent under scarves of heavy mist and ice plates shimmered from bank to bank, the rivers provided a constant transport. Summer and winter hunts would have required horses, and Commander Macarty states specifically that the Mechigamea “traded horses” with the Missouri tribes. But accounts of horses in the Illinois settlements, post 1750, usually link the animals to the French, the “sturdy French ponies,” the “point ponies.” The De Gannes Memoir of the early eighteenth century, describing the Peoria Indians, states they obtained horses from the Pawnee and Wichita Indians to use for buffalo hunts. The horses came branded on their hind quarters and were called *canatis*.<sup>42</sup> French accounts of the Mechigamea village located north of Fort Chartres, along the river, mention Indian livestock “running” there. One of the early memorials of Bienville, describing his plans to build “the strongest establishment that we

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<sup>41</sup> Commander Macarty writing in *Illinois On the Eve of the Seven Years War*, Illinois Historical Collections 29, p. 657, cited in Joseph Jablow, *Indians*, p. 217.

<sup>42</sup> Pierre Deliette, “Memoir of De Gannes Concerning the Illinois Country,” in T. C. Pease, *The French Foundations 1680-1693* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1934) p. 389.

can...in the western part of this colony [Spanish borderlands]" mentions obtaining "a quantity of horses...from the Indians of the upper part of this river [the Mississippi]." <sup>43</sup> It is not clear which Indian tribes he had in mind, but at that time, the 1720's and 1730's, the upper Mississippi Valley Indians were obviously seen as sources for horses. The decimation of the Illinois in the Chickasaw Campaign and the Fox Wars likely changed this and perhaps affected their horse populations as well. By 1752, Commander Macarty was identifying the Osage as the source of Illinois Indian horses. <sup>44</sup> Although horses would provide natural increase if well cared for, the grazing lands of the domiciled Illinois Indians were circumscribed by ancient French grants. The edges of the "Mechigamea Prairie," for instance, north of Fort Chartres, abutted the French village of St. Philippe. Indian horses may have been overworked in hunting and packing meat; and as also occurred with the Osage, exhausted mares did not foal. Replenishing horses through raiding did not seem to have been a pattern in the Illinois Country. Over sixty years, the Illinois Indians had gradually relinquished their role as tribal raiders. By the time of the British occupation, the horse reserves of the Illinois Indians could never have equaled those of the Osage.

Most Indian tribes were trading with each other, or raiding, to obtain horses. While the Kaskaskia Indians had been the most successful agriculturally, and are documented in the French Regime as having livestock and horses, the other Illinois tribes seem to have "crossed the river" to obtain their horses. Buying or trading for horses via the old Spanish trade networks that criss-crossed the Plains Indians' territory would involve swimming or transporting the animals across inland Missouri territory rivers and across the Mississippi,

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<sup>43</sup> See Memorial of Bienville, *Mississippi Provincial Archives*, Vol. 3, p. 315.

<sup>44</sup> Commander Macarty, cited in Raymond Hauser, "The Ethnohistory of the Illinois Indian Tribe," unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1973, p. 149. Copies are available at the Illinois Historical Survey and the Newberry Library.

that chimerical, unpredictable waterway. Efforts of the French to float horses and cattle downriver to supply such military efforts as the Chickasaw Campaign in the 1730's had sometimes been disastrous. Mention of capsizement and drowned animals occurs in letters. In 1719, a trader obtained at least fourteen horses from the Osage, but lost six horses and a colt while crossing a stream.<sup>45</sup> Preparing for his Chickasaw Campaign of 1739, Bienville bought 77 yoke of oxen and 80 horses from the Illinois colonies but documents that 30 horses "were lost" or perished on the way to Arkansas Post.<sup>46</sup> Water levels in the eighteenth century were significantly higher; in heavy rain, streams and rivers rose dangerously. In the inland Ozark highlands especially were streams and springs dissecting the slopes, creating an erosional landscape of "poor and rugged hills," through which waterways ran with "devious courses." Hydrographic studies of stream rise and flash flooding in the Ozarks have found valleys "...without the semblance of a stream in the evening [holding] torrents the next morning which a man on horseback could not ford." As also occurring in the Illinois Country, natural springs were profuse: in one Ozark county alone were counted 2,400 "living springs."<sup>47</sup> Yet the Illinois Country has never been described as "rugged." The sheer limestone bluffs which separate the floodplain from the upland prairies constitute the steepest rise. In St. Clair County, the highest point of land is Turkey Hill, overlooking a "vast stretch of prairie and valley, 20 – 30 miles."<sup>48</sup> A country of prairies and plains, punctuated with oak-hickory savannahs, the Illinois has no steep gradients (excepting the river bluffs) and no mountainous terrain. And at the time the deerskin trade was becoming important in the

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<sup>45</sup> Nancy M. Miller Surrey, *The Commerce of Louisiana During the French Regime, 1699-1763* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1916), p. 302.

<sup>46</sup> See Bienville's "Deliberations of the council of war" in *Mississippi Provincial Archives*, Vol. 1, p. 428.

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of water and flooding in the Ozark Highlands, see Carl O. Sauer, *The Geography of the Ozark Highland of Missouri* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1920), pp. 49 – 52.

<sup>48</sup> Brink, McDonough and Co., *History of St. Clair County* (Philadelphia: 1881), p. 30-31.

Missouri lands, the Illinois lived on the “English” side of the river. The Mississippi was an international boundary that eventually became policed and patrolled by the Spanish.<sup>49</sup> The Osage, even in their traditional village sites along the Missouri, faced few transportation or boundary issues. They could trade (or raid) with tribes to the Southwest without crossing a clear international border. They claimed and roamed the land on both sides of the Missouri River and would have known ideal fording spots.

The Osage were in fact historically placed to participate in the lucrative trade networks to the Spanish Southwest; they almost certainly had horses by 1693. An Osage tribal legend describes the first encounter of Osage with the horse. When a party of mounted Kiowa materialized out of an alkali dust cloud on the plains, Osage ran screaming and weeping in terror from the “mystery dogs.”<sup>50</sup> Southern Plains Indians had begun to integrate the horse into their hunting and warring some time after 1600, with the Santa Fe becoming the center of the distribution. More tribes became “horse Indians” after 1630; in 1680, the spread of the horse was greatly accelerated by the Pueblo Revolt, in which many thousands of animals, including horses, were seized and traded to the East.<sup>51</sup> However, the use of the horse among specific tribes in the southern Great Plains indicates a mixed record of adaptation. The Frenchman Du Tisne found 300 horses among the Pawnee in 1719, yet in 1724, Kansas Indians accompanying the French explorer Bourgmont up the Missouri River used no horses and “300 dogs” to pull travois.<sup>52</sup> The uneven history of horse adaptation suggests a larger, more complex issue: anthropologists and historians have concentrated on cultural diffusion

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<sup>49</sup> See A.P. Nasatir, *Spanish War Vessels on the Mississippi, 1792 – 1796* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

<sup>50</sup> John Joseph Mathews, *The Osage: Children of the Middle Waters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), p. 129.

<sup>51</sup> See important work by Francis Haines, “Where Did the Plains Indians Get Their Horses?” *American Anthropologist*, New Series XL (1), Jan-March, 1938, p.22; and “The Northward Spread of Horses Among the Plains Indians,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series XL (3), July-Sept., 1938, p. 431.

<sup>52</sup> Francis Haines, “The Northward Spread,” p. 432-433.

theories and ignored environmental and ecological constraints governing the spread and size of horse herds.<sup>53</sup> Earlier work by historians like John C. Ewers identified two broad groupings of “horse-rich” southern Plains Indians; the first one included the Kiowa, Comanche, Kiowa-Apache, and the Osage.<sup>54</sup> Analyses of horses and weather, tying horse herd size to a winter severity index and the mean growing season have revealed striking patterns: tribes with the means to provide winter grazing for horse herds during the Little Ice Age, 1550 – 1850 AD, were tribes who became characterized as “horse rich.”<sup>55</sup>

Caring for horses was directly connected to the yield of the land. The aboriginal horse had a relatively small body size; its live weight ranged from 273 to 409 kilograms.<sup>56</sup> Even so, these horses needed to consume a great deal of forage. Providing that forage in winter was extremely labor-intensive for tribes living in areas of bitter cold. Eastern plains Indians along the Missouri River are described as having to cut down cottonwood trees, haul them to village or camp, thaw them by fires, and then cut or peel off the bark for horses.<sup>57</sup> Meager diet of horses affected reproductive capacity as well, leading to limited natural increase. Such tribes, known as “horse-poor,” resorted to horse raiding and stealing as the means of keeping up their horse herds. The Plains Indians, including the Osage, were living in regions “characterized by adjacent yet markedly different environmental settings.” Horse-poor tribes, like some of the southern Siouan groups from South Dakota, led repeated raids against the horse-rich Pawnee of Nebraska territory.<sup>58</sup> The nature of the land was not uniform.

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<sup>53</sup> See Alan J. Osborn, “Ecological Aspects of Equestrian Adaptations in Aboriginal North America,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 85, No. 3, Sept., 1983, pp. 563 – 591.

<sup>54</sup> See John C. Ewers, “The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture: with comparative material from other Western tribes,” *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin No. 159* (1955), and “Were the Blackfoot Rich in Horses?” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 45 (4) Part I (Oct.-Dec., 1943), pp. 602 – 610.

<sup>55</sup> Alan J. Osborn, “Ecological Aspects,” p. 569.

<sup>56</sup> Osborn, p. 586.

<sup>57</sup> Osborn, p. 567.

<sup>58</sup> Osborn, p. 584.



Varying degrees of herbage, browse, grasslands, and trees created adjacent regions in which the numbers of Indian horses also varied. Among the Pawnee, for example, horses did much better when browsing on western buffalo grass, a nutrient-rich forage. The tallgrass prairies that comprised some of the eastern Pawnee range were not as nutritive.<sup>59</sup> The Osage, living in their mixed-habitat lands, would have found it easier to procure horse forage than Plains Indians felling stands of frozen cottonwoods along iced-over streams. An early twentieth-century historian described Osage homelands:

Over the high plateau of the Ozarks and in the deep valleys cut through these plateaux by water they reigned as masters. On the banks of the pellucid streams meandering through the narrow villages, overhung by fragrant trees, with a background border of abrupt and picturesque hills or perpendicular cliffs, they raised their lodges....<sup>60</sup>

This poetic description does reveal, nonetheless, the mosaic of environments in the Osage range and suggests a natural diversity in diet for horses. Despite being less nutritious, tallgrass prairie forage in particular may have been easier to procure in the winter than shortgrass forage.

While the Osage could likely feed their horse herds, there is evidence that they did not tend them or have much interest in breeding mares for natural increase. Observers in the Spanish regime remarked that Osage “ran ragged” their mares, and few foaled.<sup>61</sup> This may have been due to raids from the north by the horse-poor Sioux and to the Osage’s accelerating interest in the deerskin trade. One historian of the Osage has commented that “the Osage domain had been patrolled by them like a great game refuge.”<sup>62</sup> The maintenance of that refuge became increasingly defensive as Osage experienced trade and

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<sup>59</sup> See Richard White, “The Cultural Landscape of the Pawnees,” in Rita Napier, ed., *Kansas and the West: New Perspectives* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003) pp. 68–70.

<sup>60</sup> Louis Houck, cited in Gilbert C. Din and A.P. Nasatir, *The Imperial Osages: Spanish-Indian Diplomacy in the Mississippi Valley* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Din and Nasatir, *The Imperial*, p. 23.

<sup>62</sup> John Joseph Mathews, *The Osages*, p. 515.

warfare pressures from the north and the east. They themselves became consummate horse-raiders, but more often of European herds. In the late 1790's, at the height of the trouble between the Osage and the Spanish and French, Nicolas de Finiels left a vivid account of their horse-stealing methods. He observed that they "disdained to flee upon the animals' backs," but rather, ran behind the startled horses, "spurring them on with their own speed," until all were beyond pursuit.<sup>63</sup> The predation of the Osage on the hunting, trapping, and living of both European and Indians has been well-documented. A significant aspect of their horse acquisition is the connection to deer hunting. The horse made possible a consummate mastery of the deerskin trade.

Studies of southern tribes like the Choctaw have identified this same intimate relation between horse and deer. One historian who has studied the horse in the Choctaw culture concludes, "Indeed, the incorporation of horses into the Choctaw culture is virtually inseparable from the deerskin trade...."<sup>64</sup> Like the horse in the Choctaw territory, Osage horses allowed hunters to reach more distant areas, seeking the edges of the Ozark forests, to the west where hardwoods shaded down to the Osage plains. The disturbed edges of woodlands, ragged and intermittently opening to meadows, contained the highest deer numbers. Patterns of hunting among southern Indians include women riding horses back to a hunting/butchering site and "processing by hand," or tanning, the deerskins.<sup>65</sup> This process involves more than just scraping a stretched hide. The tanning of a single skin is a labor-intensive effort that takes approximately nine hours per skin. In addition to scraping, tanning has multiple stages that include the use of animal brains (almost always freshly-killed deer

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<sup>63</sup> Nicolas de Finiels, *An Account of Upper Louisiana*, edited by Carl J. Ekberg and William Foley (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), p. 90.

<sup>64</sup> James Taylor Carson, "Horses and the Economy and Culture of the Choctaw Indians, 1690 – 1840," *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 41, No. 3, Summer, 1995, p. 497.

<sup>65</sup> Carson, p. 497-498.

brains) as a medium to coat the de-fleshed skin; once whitened with smeared brains, the thickly-coated skin would have been kneaded and stretched by hand, then carefully smoked.<sup>66</sup> Given the extraordinary number of deer skins brought out of the Missouri highlands by the Osage, it is likely the woodlands contained deer processing or tanning camps, set into clearings much as logging camps developed in the heart of the timber regions to the south, or as the Mechigamea and Quapaw processed bear oil earlier in the century. One indication that the Osage women were heavily drawn into the preparation of deerskins is a significant change in traditional diet. Archaeologists studying the effects of the fur trade on Osage culture have found that they apparently abandoned the gathering and consumption of nuts at the same time as their ascendancy into the deerskin trade. Nut gathering and the extraction of nutmeats and oils was probably the work of Osage women, who also planted and tended crops. Osage traditionally consumed pecans, acorns, black walnuts, and hazelnuts.<sup>67</sup> The mortar and pestle pounding and the boiling of the crushed nuts (especially in the case of walnut and hickory) consumed much time and effort.<sup>68</sup> Archaeological studies also document a decline in maize agriculture concomitant to the increase in hunting and raiding.<sup>69</sup> Eventually, perhaps, even the hand processing and tanning of deerskins took more time than the Osage could spare. Figures from the late eighteenth century indicate the Osage more and more preferred to bring in packs of untanned skins. While well-tanned deerskins –

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<sup>66</sup> For the most detailed description of the hand-tanning process, see John and Geri McPherson, "Brain Tan Buckskin," *Primitive Wilderness & Survival Skills* (Randolph, Kansas: Prairie Wolf, 1993), pp. 10 – 57.

<sup>67</sup> Willard Rollings, "Prairie Hegemony," p. 177; also Carl H. Chapman and Eleanor F. Chapman, *Indians and Archaeology of Missouri*, Missouri Handbook No. 6 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1964), pp. 107-109. For Osage women tanning skins, see Chapman, p. 105.

<sup>68</sup> For an excellent discussion of the processing of nuts, see Paul S. Gardener, "The Ecological Structure and Behavioral Implications of Mast Exploitation Strategies," in Kristen J. Gremillion, ed., *People, Plants, and Landscapes: Studies in Paleoethnobotany* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1997), especially p. 165.

<sup>69</sup> See Andrea A. Hunter and Deborah M Pearsall, "Paleoethnobotany of the Osage and Missouri Indians: Analysis of Plant Remains from Historic Village Sites," *The Missouri Archaeologist*, Vol. 47 (December 1986), pp. 173 – 196, especially p. 184 and 194.

soft as chamois, pliant, reddish brown – could be folded and stacked into compact packs, even the thicker, stiffer raw skins were transportable on horses. Trained horses could pick their way along forest ridge trails. Osage may have utilized a network of old trade routes that were themselves initially game trails. Deer, for instance, tend to return to the same areas in winter, clustering in “yards” chosen for their shelter from wind and snow. The yarding of deer would have created firm trails on the litter-packed forest floors. Horses would have etched those trails even deeper. The onslaught of mounted Osage hunters pushed deer populations farther west and north. After the 1790’s, the deerskin trade began a downswing, brought on by overhunting.<sup>70</sup> During the “prairie hegemony” of the Osage, however, the horse and the deer combined in a twenty-year period of staggering deerskin extraction. One historian has used the phrase “robber economy” to characterize the fur and peltry trade of the Mississippi and Missouri lands.<sup>71</sup>

Across the river among the Illinois Indians, a robber economy in deerskin trade had been possible only during the years when the woodlands of the floodplain and upland bluffs could support herds of deer. Such herds had been described much earlier in the century as “vast” and “roving.” While archaeological site studies of both the French and Indian villages have consistently revealed the presence of deer bones, domesticated animal remains also appear, in increasing numbers among the French and especially among the earliest Anglo-American settlers in the 1790’s.<sup>72</sup> Some limited evidence of the Illinois Indian trapping and hunting harvests pinpoints the concentration more on furbearing mammals such as bobcat, bear, wolf,

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<sup>70</sup> James Taylor Carson, “Horses and the Economy,” p. 499.

<sup>71</sup> Glenn T. Trewartha, “A Second Epoch,” p. 109.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Mazrim, editor, *Now Quite Out of Society: Archaeology and Frontier Illinois*. Illinois Transportation Archaeological Research Program Transportation Archaeological Bulletins No. 1 (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois, 2002), p. 151.

and fox, as well as otter, muskrat, mink, marten, and fisher.<sup>73</sup> The enormous deerskin hauls taking place across the river were not replicated in the Illinois Country after 1763. In 1769 Colonel Wilkins at Fort Chartres wrote [somewhat ambiguously] that “Peltries here are abundant, but inferior to those of the Mississippi, the Major Part being Deer Skins.” He also noted that the “Missouri is better peopled than the Mississippi.”<sup>74</sup> Due to the remaining French in the Illinois colonies ranging to the south and trading with the Indians there for deer skins, Colonel Wilkins also felt “The Nation of the Illinois Indians with our French subjects are jealous at the Cherokees and Chickasaws.”<sup>75</sup> General Gage himself saw that the trade potential of the Illinois was uncertain: “Some Trade has been carried on there, not very great, and it is a doubt, whether the Adventurers in the Trade will not fail....”<sup>76</sup>

One reason was likely the deforestation of the Illinois. French occupied lands, since 1699, had mandated a steady use of wood for heating and cooking; as with the Illinois Indians, the preferred tree was hickory. While most accounts maintain that Illinois Indians constructed traditional homes of bent saplings and woven cattail mats, one history does specify that in 1732, a tribe of Mechigamea built a “village of log cabins” near Fort Chartres.<sup>77</sup> French settlers preferred what has become known as French Creole architecture. Seventy years of house and barn construction in which all property was surrounded by upright pickets and posts had resulted in premium prices being paid for rot-resistant woods like red cedar. In St. Genevieve by 1790, for instance, eastern red cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*, a prime post wood,

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<sup>73</sup> See, for instance, the itemized list of fur equivalents in Matthew Clarkson’s Diary, August 6, 1766 – August 16, 1767, in Clarence W. Alvord and Clarence Carter Carter, *The New Regime, 1765 – 1767* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1916), p. 361.

<sup>74</sup> Wilkins to Barrington, December 5, 1769, in Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, p. 633.

<sup>75</sup> Wilkins to Gage, January 2, 1769, in Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, p. 483.

<sup>76</sup> Gage to Hillsborough, June 16, 1768, in Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, p. 317.

<sup>77</sup> Glenn J. Speed, *Ghost Towns of Southern Illinois* (Royalton, Illinois: Glenn J. Speed, 1977), p. 172.

was selling for three times the amount of oak.<sup>78</sup> Red cedar is the common native pioneer tree of old fields and previously cleared or burned lands; it also furnishes food for deer who browse it heavily in the winter months. (Some ecologists and botanists classify red cedar as a native invasive species, so quickly does it seed and spread; however, in French Missouri and Illinois, it wasn't spreading quickly enough to keep up with the demand for cedar posts). French builders also exploited another tree routinely. The shingle oak, *Quercus imbricaria*, provided thousands – perhaps hundreds of thousands – of shingles for French houses. In addition to using prairie cord grass as thatch, French carpenters employed the frow to split the shingle oak into thin, overlapping sheets.<sup>79</sup> A typical entry in the Chartres notarial records, 1763, reads, “...one old house, built of pickets, covered with shingles, situate in New Chartres near the Mississippi River....”<sup>80</sup> A record from 1764 is even more precise in detailing the number of wooden structures on the property: “...one horse mill built of posts...one barn covered with straw [thatch]...one stable built of pickets, and the lot belonging to said buildings, enclosed all around with posts...and the shingles, posts, and pickets which are on said lot....”<sup>81</sup> One of the earliest mentions of these “posts” occurs in a Kaskaskia manuscript from 1723. A house built in Kaskaskia is described as having “Posts in the ground, 30’ x 20’, floored, and with three doors and a gallerie.”<sup>82</sup>

In addition, repeated references in the notarial records to “hauling” wood in for construction suggest that French workers were mining the oak stands on top of the bluffs, especially, perhaps, white oak. While the French did not build the standard frontier log

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<sup>78</sup> Carl J. Ekberg, *Colonial Ste. Genevieve: An Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier* (Gerald, Missouri: The Patrice Press, 1985), p. 286.

<sup>79</sup> *Native Tree Guide* (Shaw Arboretum of the Missouri Botanical Garden, 1987), p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, Record K-330 (H496), p. 785.

<sup>81</sup> Brown and Dean, *The Village of Chartres*, Record K-338 (H504), p. 800.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in Jay D. Edwards, “The Origins of the Louisiana Creole Cottage,” *French and Germans in the Mississippi Valley: Landscape and Cultural Traditions*, ed. by Michael Roark (Cape Girardeau, Missouri: Center for Regional History and Cultural Heritage, 1988), p. 28.

cabin, preferring vertical-post construction in which “pickets” were placed in the ground or embedded in a horizontal sill, log cabin construction provides a good measure of wood use. A standard cabin “typically required about 80 logs in addition to the wood for the roof.”<sup>83</sup> French notarial records of contracts for home construction are often specific that their homes be built of walnut or oak. Observers of French homes up in the Prairie Du Chien area of Wisconsin area also mention that the houses were wrapped in bark sheets – cedar, elm or black ash – although this practice has not been documented for Illinois.<sup>84</sup> Due to French extraction of key tree species from upland groves, by the 1780’s, arriving Anglo-American settlers on the ridge prairies may have been resorting to using woodlots (stream margin timber) at a distance from their farms. Finally, soil analysis from the northern American Bottom, including an alluvial fan between the Cahokia Mounds and the bluffs, has revealed a “zone of laminated sediments.” These soils show what is termed a “renewed instability” that began with “forest clearance activities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.”<sup>85</sup>

Across the Mississippi, miles of forest, a blend of deciduous and conifer, coated the unglaciated southern Missouri hills. The lush trees of the Missouri Ozark lands, dominated by an oak-hickory overstory raining down delectable acorns for deer, likely had no parallel by the 1770’s in the Illinois. And in some areas, those miles of forest contained superlative stands of pure oak. Studies conducted in the early twentieth century still found that “the upland forests are composed almost exclusively of oaks, constituting one of the largest areas of oak forest and one of the least mixed stands of oak to be found in the country.” The same

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<sup>83</sup> Gordon G. Whitney, *From Coastal Wilderness*, p. 146.

<sup>84</sup> Mary Antoine de Julio, “Prairie Du Chien and the Rediscovery of Its French Log Houses,” *French and Germans in the Mississippi Valley*, p. 101. Descriptions of the earliest American cabins on the upland, however, mention the use of basswood bark (linden tree) as an indoor insulation, along with “pelts of raccoon, opossum, and wolf.” See *History of St. Clair County*, pp. 56 – 57.

<sup>85</sup> William I. Woods, “Population nucleation, intensive agriculture, and environmental degradation: The Cahokia example,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 21 (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), p. 155.

study found an “extraordinary number of species” of oak.<sup>86</sup> The presence of unusually concentrated oak varieties in the Missouri may well have contributed to its deer population. Surveys of white tail deer diet in timbered regions of America have found that as much as one third of deer diet in the fall is acorns. The high fat and carbohydrate content of acorns rapidly builds up deer reserves for the winter. In times of “acorn abundance,” deer may eat so many acorns that the mast comprises “close to 80%” of their diet.<sup>87</sup> Scientists who have used Government Land Office records (the GLO survey) to reconstruct the “presettlement floodplain landscape” along the Illinois and Mississippi rivers have found that perhaps 56% of the floodplain was forested; however, those records, drawn from the selection of witness trees by surveyors, were set down in the decades following 1800. At that time, the abandonment of French Illinois had begun to be reversed by the influx of American settlers. Forty years of untended tree growth on the floodplain and uplands would have seen the beginnings of successional resurgence of woodland. By the 1780’s, the prairies and cut over timber were only beginning a recovery process.<sup>88</sup> In addition, this succession would not involve a resurgence of slow-growing, fire-resistant oaks. A study of forest regeneration in southern Illinois, using the same interval – approximately 43 years of abandoned lands – established that the first pioneers into old, burned and cleared fields were sweetgum and sugar maple.<sup>89</sup>

The southern tip forests of Illinois, the swampy cypress country north of the Ohio River as well as the wide swath of hardwood known today as Shawnee National Forest, were far

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<sup>86</sup> See Carl O. Sauer, *The Geography*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>87</sup> See “White-Tailed Deer: Seasonal Use of Forage Classes” in Studies of the Cross Timbers Region of Oklahoma and Texas: <http://www.noble.org/Ag/wildlife/DeerFoods/habitatReq4.html>

<sup>88</sup> See John C. Nelson, Anjela Redmond, and Richard E. Sparks, “Impacts of Settlement on Floodplain Vegetation at the Confluence of the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers, *Transactions of the Illinois State Academy of Science*, Vol. 87 (3) and (4), 1994.

<sup>89</sup> See William Ashby and George T. Weaver, “Forest Regeneration on Two Fields in Southwestern Illinois,” *American Midland Naturalist* Vol. 84 (1), July, 1970, pp. 90 – 104.



enough away from the Illinois Indian villages to make aggressive deer hunting impractical. Researchers attempting to pinpoint the hunting grounds of the Illinois during the British period have located the Kaskaskia “...out upon a Prairie hunting about one hundred Miles from the village of Kaskaskia.” The historian compiling these records comments that during the winter of 1770-71, at least, the Illinois were hunting “at too great a distance from Fort Chartres to make trading visits.”<sup>90</sup> There is also evidence that the Kaskaskia occasionally hunted across the Mississippi. An entry in the logs of Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan records the Kaskaskia as receiving presents at Fort Chartres: “They begged, that as they had brought a Considerable Share of their Trade to this Side, they might receive Sincere Marks of our Friendship for them.”<sup>91</sup> Early in Colonel Wilkins’ tenure at Fort Chartres, in 1769, his journal of transactions with Indians shows interactions “almost exclusively” with the four Illinois Indian groups, who came “regularly” to trade and receive the small gifts by which the old Indian traditions of gifting and honoring were meagerly maintained.<sup>92</sup> The Wilkins log, and other, scattered references in the correspondence of the British in the Illinois Country, compile a picture of the Illinois tribes continuing to use the central magnet of Fort Chartres as their base. The “out and back” movement of their hunts and their regular appearance at the great limestone gates suggest that the British storehouse and Indian trade policies were gradually replacing the familiar French liaisons, despite the Indians’ initial resistance. Colonel Wilkins wrote grandiose estimates to General Gage of what might be possible in trade revenues from the Illinois. He felt that the upper Illinois River country was too uninhabited by Indians to bring in much trade, but that if motivated, the Peoria, Kaskaskia,

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<sup>90</sup> Joseph Jablow, *Indians*, p. 273.

<sup>91</sup> Cited in Joseph Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana*, p. 264.

<sup>92</sup> Jablow, p. 267.

and Cahokia “might furnish 3 or 400 packs P[er] Annum.”<sup>93</sup> It is not clear what peltries or skins would comprise these packs. To place the number of 3-400 packs in perspective, one observer of the deerskin trade to the south, in Augusta, Georgia, between 1783 and 1799, felt that the export “has never been less than 240,000 skins.” In the first decade of the nineteenth century, Choctaw and Chickasaw nations alone sent 105,039 pounds of deerskins to New Orleans.<sup>94</sup> Deerskins probably averaged about one and half pounds each, and typical packhorse loads were 150 to 200 pounds.<sup>95</sup> Colonel Wilkins’ estimate for the Illinois was therefore an improbable 40,000 pounds of skins! Across the river in Missouri, the Osage were increasing their deerskin packloads to a high of 22,000 pounds per year. It seems clear that the Illinois Indians were not competing in the deerskin trade. The oak-hickory woodlands were likely compromised; and there were no dense miles of sheltering woods for horse thieves to fade into with contraband animals. A few tribes had stolen horses from the garrison of Fort Chartres in the first year of British occupation, but they returned the animals during a negotiation with George Croghan in 1766.<sup>96</sup> The traditional location of floodplain Illinois Indian villages placed the Indians between two populations: the burgeoning European settlements across the Mississippi, and the Ohio Valley and Wabash River tribes criss-crossing the prairies to the east. In the late eighteenth century, these Indians were caught in the peculiar nature of their land: not prairie enough to promote the rapid replenishing of buffalo herds; not canopied forest enough to maintain the forest-meadow

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<sup>93</sup> Report by Colonel Wilkins, December, 1769, cited in Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana*, p. 267.

<sup>94</sup> Charles E. Hanson, Jr. “The Southern Trade: A Slightly Different Story,” *The Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly*, Vol. 221(1), 1986, p. 3. For a good general overview of the southern deerskin trade, see Daniel H. Usner, “The deerskin trade in French Louisiana,” *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society*, Vol. 10, 1984, pp. 75-93.

<sup>95</sup> Charles E. Hanson, Jr., “The Southern Trade,” pp. 2-3.

<sup>96</sup> Croghan to Johnson, September 10, 1766, in Alvord and Carter, *The New Regime*, p. 374.

mosaic preferred by white tails; and finally, ribboned by so many waterways that humans were almost ubiquitous by 1770.

Other tribes emulated the patterns of trade modeled by the Osage, of engaging in legal activities close to the monitoring eye of the Spanish authorities in the settlements and trading on the instant with any opportunistic individual in the interior. During the decades of the 1760's and 1770's, for instance, the Missouri Indian tribe "became familiar," and "had got in the habit of spending their summers with the French." The (greatly-reduced) Missouri camped outside St. Louis where Missouri women found work in the building and construction trades of the new settlement.<sup>97</sup> This "custom," of Indian tribes migrating to the St. Louis area to camp and trade, began to pull in the more aggressive, northwestern tribes as well. Eventually even the Sacs [Sauk] and the Fox used the market center of St. Louis to "trade away their maple-sugar, their pecans, etc."<sup>98</sup> This riverine activity was developing directly across the Mississippi River from British Illinois, reflecting a commercial, population, and resource shift to a dynamic new center. The effect on the Indian populations of the true Illinois Country was to increase their dissatisfaction with British rule, heighten their anxiety about their livelihood and future, and create a different kind of traffic around Fort Chartres: purveyors of furs also became purveyors of information. Tribal "unrest" and potential inter-tribal war are the dominant themes of the British occupation of the Illinois. One early historian of the St. Louis area asserts that the Illinois Indians "never crossed the river."<sup>99</sup> While this is a generalization and clearly erroneous, as some Peoria especially did "cross the river" to establish a permanent camp south of St. Louis, the perception that the

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<sup>97</sup> This description of the coming and goings of tribes around St. Louis is taken from Joseph N. Nicollet, "Sketch of the Early History of St. Louis," p. 146.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Joseph N. Nicollet, "Sketch of the Early History," p. 146.

trade life of the Illinois Country was vitalized through the Missouri Indian tribes and not the Illinois is likely accurate. By January of 1769, French merchants living in Spanish St. Louis had presented a “Petition of the Merchants of St. Louis to Captain Rui to be Allowed to Trade on the Missouri.”<sup>100</sup> The merchants state that they “also have presented the same memorials to Monsieur Saint Ange in regard to what concerns the district of the Misisipi, where it is absolutely necessary to send traders for the tranquillity of the tribes....”<sup>101</sup>

Merchants perceived Indians as competitors for European trade. With St. Louis merchants beginning to send traders both east and west, the sixty-mile stretch of Mississippi River to which the French had come marveling in 1699 was probably never again empty of craft, flowing wide and open, glinting with undisturbed light. And on this tide of human expansion spread all too easily a mixture of true, false, and hyperbolic news.

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<sup>100</sup> See this document in Louis Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri*, Volume One (Chicago, Illinois: R.R. Donnelly & Sons Company, 1909), p. 37.

<sup>101</sup> “Petition of the Merchants,” in Louis Houck, *The Spanish Regime*, p. 38.

### **Land of Rumor: British, French, and Indian Illinois, 1765 – 1778**

Across the early 1770's, relations among indigenous Indians, visiting and raiding tribes, old French families, and British military and merchants can be glimpsed as authentic and human. The record is neither one of constant friction nor harmonious prosperity but a mixture. Especially by the early 1770's, there were signs that some British living near Fort Chartres were finding life in the Illinois worth planning a future around. Brief mention in some accounts and letters concerning the Kaskaskia and Mechigamea "who are our friends" indicates that the pejorative dismissals of the Illinois subtribes found in all initial British accounts were being tempered by proximity. Yet the ten years of British occupancy saw increasing pressures on the old French settlements by dissatisfied tribes to the north and south. The impact of Pontiac's War lasted through the early 1770's as anti-British tribes blamed the Illinois not only for learning to live in peaceful adjacency with the British but also for the murder of Pontiac in 1769. The years of British sojourn were filled with gossip, talk, and rumor about incipient events and upriver and downriver news.

Yet it would be a mistake to analyze the unrest in the Illinois Country only from a political standpoint. Underlying the sporadic violence – the attacks on French and British traders, random raids on settlements – can be found a story of disintegrating livelihoods. While the overall argument of this study has emphasized the ecological shifts engendered through French-Indian interaction across eighty years, not all human privations can be laid at the door of environmental degradation. The erosion of ancient subsistence patterns, patterns which yielded dependable harvests through labor-intensive activity, is also part of the story. During the British years in the Illinois, the disruptive presence of the Potawatomi (and raids

by the St. Joseph Potawatomi especially) became much more pronounced. These Indians had once lived in a broad loop extending from southern Wisconsin around the tip of Lake Michigan and on up into the Great Lakes Country. In that area, they were harvesters of wild rice. A curious lacunae in any accounts of early Illinois – French, British, or American – is mention of this rich, sustaining grain. British at Fort Chartres, in fact, ate rice shipped up from New Orleans, white, polished rice from the Carolinas or the bayou lowlands of Louisiana.

In his study of the Potawatomi, R. David Edmunds points out that Potawatomi women particularly harvested wild rice as part of their traditional food supply.<sup>1</sup> Early anthropological studies of Great Lakes Indians mention two centers of rice harvesting activity, one along the southern shores of Lake Superior and one in the Fox River Valley. This area is in northern Illinois and today runs north-south across the Wisconsin state line. There, “Menomini, Potawatomi, Sauk and Fox, Mascoutin, Miami, and Kikapu” harvested *Zizania aquatica*. The late nineteenth-century anthropologist who studied the history of these tribes felt “undoubtedly the prime cause of the location of Indian villages was the great crop of wild rice to be obtained in each place....”<sup>2</sup> Parts of the Fox River were so densely choked with wild rice that “passages for boats had to be cut through it.” This grain, also called Indian, water, wild oats, and marsh rye, played multiple roles in Indian subsistence. Wild rice attracted “vast numbers of water fowl,” and in addition, because of the height of

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<sup>1</sup> See Edmunds, *The Potawatomi: Keepers of the Fire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978). H. Clyde Wilson, “A New Interpretation of the Wild Rice District of Wisconsin,” disagrees that Potawatomi were rice harvesters, but his evidence is taken almost wholly from the early *Jesuit Relations*. See his analysis in *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 58 (6), December, 1956, pp. 1059 – 1064.

<sup>2</sup> See Gardener P. Stickney, “Indian Use of Wild Rice,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. IX (4), April, 1906, p. 155-122. See page 121 for quotes above.

the stalks, sometimes nine or ten feet, rice also served as a ready-made blind for waterfowl hunters.<sup>3</sup>

*Zizania aquatica* did not disappear from the northern Illinois country until the twentieth century. An 1870 survey of Lake and McHenry Counties, for example, found “The larger lakes, in many instances, are themselves widely margined with a growth of wild rice....” In 1875, an observer near the Chain of Lakes district of Illinois saw “Wild rice from four to twelve feet high.” Naturalists and botanists have “mapped wild rice in a total of eight of the 11 counties in the Fox valley,” and although rice was later seriously impacted by drainage projects, carp foraging, and water pollution, it was still abundant and available to Indian tribes in Illinois in the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Since Spanish records of gifts and provisions distributed to Indian tribes appearing in Spanish St. Louis do mention the Potawatomi, questions can be asked about tribes willing to travel fair distances and ford large rivers to obtain food. The abandonment of rice harvesting occurred in the context of an intensely accelerating market economy in skins and peltries. In the Canadian north, among the Ojibway, wild rice had been traded to French fur traders for well over one hundred years. After peltries, *Zizania aquatica* was “the most desired item” in the northern fur trade. Although subject to changing value, due to the fluctuations in rice harvests, a bushel of *folle avoine*, wild rice, equaled a mature beaver pelt in value.<sup>5</sup> The history of Indian tribes living in Illinois reveals that while environmental change did exert both discrete and keen pressures on Indians, and while competition for natural resources may

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<sup>3</sup> Gardener P. Stickney, “Indian Use,” p. 115 – 120.

<sup>4</sup> These descriptive accounts are taken from John White, *Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Fox River Area* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, 2000), p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Quaal, *Wild Plant Uses (Both Past and Present)* (Deer River, Minnesota: White Oak Society, 1995), pp. 26 and 5. See also mention of both Fox and Potawatomi as rice harvesters in Thomas Vennum, Jr., *Wild Rice and the Ojibway People* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988).

have driven inter-tribal warfare prehistorically and historically, in some cases, Indian nations had let go of reliable survival mechanisms. Wild rice, however, is dependent on precise environmental factors. If heavy spring flooding occurs, not enough oxygen will reach the seeds to promote germination.<sup>6</sup> Although little evidence is available for eighteenth-century rice growth on the Fox River, a suggestive point concerns the building of mills there. The Fox River was, in fact, “the most dammed stream in Illinois.” These earliest dams, some perhaps in place by the late 1780’s, were constructed of brush, earth, logs and stones; their number may have changed the water levels on the Fox, impacting rice.<sup>7</sup> When looking for explanations for the marked shifts in Indian lifeways, such as those especially evident in the splintered Potawatomi, both environmental change and external economic stimuli (market economy) have worked together. Richard White has poignantly characterized such shifts with the phrase, “the roots of dependency.”<sup>8</sup>

On one level, a theme of the last ten years of this study – which saw the most interaction among disparate peoples – is food procurement. The British at Fort Chartres were laying stores by; the French were peddling foodstuffs to the garrison and to Indians, and vice versa; Indians were also traveling to Spanish forts to obtain food; Fox and Potawatomi raiders were attacking French and British hunters anywhere they found them on the Grand Prairie; and the river systems were being used at night to carry on an extensive illicit trade. Captain Forbes detailed this practice back in 1768, when he wrote to General Gage, “...the Subjects on our side may send Peltry over the River in the Night, and have French goods in return. The

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<sup>6</sup> See *Wild Rice*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, September, 1987, n. p.

<sup>7</sup> John White, *Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Fox River Area*, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> See Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: subsistence, environment, and social change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).



reason for this contraband trade is, that the French Goods are 30 p'Cent cheaper...."<sup>9</sup> The use of the Illinois rivers by French traders continued to be seen as an outrage by the British. Colonel Wilkins wrote to the British Secretary of War, "...the French still carry away all the Trade...they go up our rivers...."<sup>10</sup> The final chapter of the Illinois in the years before the Americans arrived describes the behavior of peoples in extreme transition. The British had just begun to put down tenuous roots when the American Revolution broke out. Against the backdrop of yet another war, the Illinois Country continued to be exploited by many peoples – and in some cases, animals – looking for any means to survive. Such a reality must be placed next to the tenacious refrain in all early Illinois histories – one that has subtly influenced even later historians: "[In 1796] the [Illinois] country was in a state of almost primeval simplicity."<sup>11</sup>

Three years after the British first wintered in the Illinois, meagerly parceling out their scant provisions, hunting in a desultory way, buying random items of foodstuffs from the remaining French, the memory of "starving" was still fresh. George Morgan, the representative of the Philadelphia merchant firm Wharton, Baynton, and Morgan, made sure he was set for the winter of 1768:

However there will be no Danger of Starving for I have now two Years Provisions in the House consisting of Salt Petred Gammons, Rounds of Beef, Buffaloe Tongues, Vennison & Bears Hams...So that I am not in Quite the Same Situation that poor honest Jennings Used to be formerly – When his Letters were fill'd with his Fears of Starving &c.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Information on the State of Commerce in the Illinois Country given by Captain Forbes 34<sup>th</sup> Regiment," enclosed in a January 6, 1769 letter to General Gage, in Clarence Alvord and Clarence Carter, *Trade and Politics 1767 – 1769* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1921), p. 382.

<sup>10</sup> Wilkins to Barrington, Secretary of War, December 5, 1769, in Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, p. 632.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Clinton Boggess, *The Settlement of Illinois, 1778 – 1830* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, Collection No. 5, 1908), p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> George Morgan to his wife, after Sept. 5, 1768, in Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, pp. 480 – 481.

In addition to the above list of smoked and salt petered meats, Morgan had eleven nesting hens “with 13 Eggs each” and more than two hundred couples of pigeons in a “Pidgeon House built in the Shape of Parson Smiths Folly.” He owned six cows and had put in fifteen acres of Indian Corn “& expect to have fifty if no Accidents happens to my Horses or Oxen.”<sup>13</sup> While working at Fort Chartres, Morgan was still able to build up what he referred to as his “plantation.” He had constructed a small log house and hired a “New England Man” to build a new barn, stables, and fences. His “negroe Boy” cooked a dish of rice pudding almost daily; Morgan had grown quite fond of this, taking it with a glass of wine. While enjoying such commodities as rice and Madeira shipped up from New Orleans, Morgan was clearly putting in his acres of corn on pre-worked and plowed French farmland available around the fort (he mentions no ground-breaking activity); he and his helper could easily sow the long ribbon arpents formerly belonging to the French of the village of Chartres. His animals were likely initially housed in the solid French barns, built of sassafras or oak, and pastured in the fenced common grounds. When he was not caring for his stock or hanging up venison and bear haunches in French smokehouses, Morgan walked to the fort. There, every day, he received an uneven flow of peltries from Indians and French traders and dispensed in return a wide variety of goods. He kept track of what passed from hand to hand. In July of 1768 he told his partners, “The Red Strouds, Kettles, Wire, and Guns I must have...of the following Tin Ware you cannot easily send too much – Nests of Kettles, Milk & Pudding Pans sorted small, Candle Sticks – Brass Iron & Tin...Pewter Basons.” He was also begging for shipments of shoes. “I have not now a single Pair of Mens or Womens Shoes left...the Demand for them is very excessive.”<sup>14</sup> Earlier in the spring, the Fort Chartres commissary

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 481 – 482.

<sup>14</sup> George Morgan to Baynton and Wharton, July 20, 1768, in *Trade and Politics*, pp. 359 – 361.

Edward Cole had documented a brisk trade in Breech Clouts. Coats, petticoats, match coats, shirts, “gartering,” Indian ribbon, and Leggings were also sold daily.<sup>15</sup>

Patterns of consumption and especially, the escalating demand for clothing items, suggest that Indian, French and British peoples were all depending on the storehouse. Although the British occupied Illinois for only ten years, they were there long enough to experience resistance, acceptance, and even a measure of prosperous engagement among the interactions of diverse peoples of the Illinois. This tenuously-growing social world of trade relationships would be dissolved through invasions of northern Indians whose relationships to the British and to the tribes of the Illinois Confederacy had been permanently changed by Pontiac’s War. The gathering momentum of the American colonial revolt was also a factor in the unrest of the 1770’s. Age-old hostilities and newly-engendered ones prevented a frontier synthesis of peoples and cultures. For George Morgan in 1768, however, the future looked promising, exemplified in his own storehouse of foodstuffs.

In the great central yard of Fort Chartres, on any given day that summer, would be found traders’ horses strapped with merchandise, Indian horses piled with packs of peltries, and hunters’ horses returning weighted with huge, darkly-stained leather bags. Following spotty trails of blood, dogs skulked along the chalk-white walls, darting out among groups of French formed into militia and drilling under British command, black slaves sent on errands to the fort, Indians on foot or arriving on glistening, dripping horses, as when the Osage crossed the Mississippi in “a large party of warriors.”<sup>16</sup> In the high heat and humidity of the August floodplain, British soldiers’ wives originally from Yorkshire or Providence toiled in

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<sup>15</sup> See Account of Philadelphia Merchants in *Trade and Politics*, pp. 391 – 408.

<sup>16</sup> Account of Philadelphia Merchants, p. 406.

from their houses in the former French village of Chartres.<sup>17</sup> They would likely have met French women from Prairie du Rocher, comfortably peddling garden produce, long used to the heavy, saturated air and immune to the “miasmatic” diseases that were plaguing British arrivals. The empty country to which Captain Stirling had come three years ago, occupying a fort overgrown with weeds and filthy from neglect, was re-establishing itself. The many letters sent out from Fort Chartres by British men writing their wives as well as commissary and military correspondence sketch a busy world. Despite General Gage’s dim view of the potential of the Illinois, in the year 1768, the human traffic there was considerable.

The British in the Illinois Country most aware of trade and hunting patterns were merchants. Although British military commanded at Fort Chartres, it was the merchant firm representative and the commissary, the keeper of storehouse goods, that Indians most often sought. On a day to day basis, these men became skilled assessors of the number and quality of furs passing through the gates of the fort. They recognized and knew personally a great number of Indians, members of diverse tribes who converged from all four directions. It is in the letters of merchants and their representatives that Indians are most often named as individuals. In his diary, Matthew Clarkson wrote on December 23, 1766: “Another party of Osages came to the fort, about fifteen in number. Tawanaheh the chief. Shakewah, an old man who interpreted into the Illinois language. Saheshinga, another Indian.”<sup>18</sup> British military correspondence rarely names individual Indians unless they were chiefs, but the commercial men in British Illinois traded with individual people. After only a year or two or living out at Fort Chartres, some British writers often identified Indians. Because so many

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<sup>17</sup> George Morgan mentions, for instance, that his “New England man” hoped to send for his wife back in Providence. See George Morgan’s letter to his wife in *Trade and Politics*, pp. 480-481.

<sup>18</sup>“Clarkson’s Diary, August 6, 1766 – April 16, 1767,” in Clarence Alvord and Clarence Carter, *The New Regime 1765 – 1767* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1916), p. 359.

French of the riverine settlements were illiterate, they left scant accounts and letters of their daily lives. Yet over the course of the sixty-six year French and Indian history there, how many Mechigamea, Cahokia, and Peoria could have entered the historical record as named people? The fleeting proper names in British letters provide some of the only recognition of Indians as named persons – tribal members who may not have had status as chiefs.<sup>19</sup> Among these Indians visiting Fort Chartres it is likely there was an increasing number of mixed blood men and women. The British acknowledged this to some extent. General Haldimand wrote to General Gage in 1770, “If any French do come to us, it will be from the Illinois where they are half-Indians....”<sup>20</sup> Yet it was commercial men who had the most intimate dealings with Indians; they admitted the realities of Indian - French trade loyalties and the deep, decades-old ties Illinois Indians especially had to French families.<sup>21</sup> In 1767, Baynton and Wharton were writing to Lauchlin Maclean, Lord Shelburne’s private secretary, about the state of affairs in the Illinois. “The Influence of the French is so great, with the Numerous Tribes of Indians, in the Country, That They have engrossed the greatest Part of the Trade and Thereby, France is enabled to interfere with the British Nation....” In the same letter, the merchants inform Maclean, “with the utmost Concern...That the greatest Discontent and Jealousy, Now prevail Among the Western Nations.” The merchants had “certain

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<sup>19</sup> More Kaskaskia Indians are identified through the French regime than any other group. The Rouensa family had early been important in helping Kaskaskia Indians to accept Catholicism. Later, members of the French Canadian Ducoigne and Rouensa families married and produced an important metis chief named Jean Baptiste Ducoigne. See Robert M. Owens, “Jean Baptiste Ducoigne, the Kaskaskias, and the Limits of Thomas Jefferson’s Friendship,” *Journal of Illinois History* Vol. 5, No. 2 (Summer, 2002), p. 112.

<sup>20</sup> Haldimand to Gage, May 16, 1770, British Museum Additional Manuscripts 21664:148 and 21665:289, Photostats at the Illinois Historical Survey.

<sup>21</sup> For a good study of the way the fur trade post or fort functioned as a social institution in a mixed-blood community, see Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Missouri Valley 1650–1862* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984). For the earliest sound appraisal along these lines, see Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Character and Influence of the Indian Trade in Wisconsin: A Study of the Trading Post as an Institution*, ed. by David Harry Miller and William W. Savage, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), originally published in 1891. Turner concludes, “The history of commerce is the history of the intercommunication of peoples.” See p. 85.

Intelligence” concerning twelve tribes meeting at the “Shawanese Town.” There they would “determine On Measures, To do Themselves Justice, for Injurys They have received, from the Kings Subjects.”<sup>22</sup>

Tracing the origins of such reports, of the “intelligence” making its way to Fort Chartres, is often impossible. British writers only sometimes identify the source of their information. By its frequency, however, and given that the Illinois Indians were the tribes most consistently at the fort, an inference can be made about sources. In 1768, the commissary at Fort Chartres, Edward Cole, wrote a lengthy “Account of Philadelphia Merchants.” Some of this manuscript has unfortunately been burned, but partial entries indicate that Cole and Captain Gordon Forbes were attempting to track down sources of rumor. In listing the merchandise dispersed as gifts to various Indian tribes, Cole writes, “To Two Partys of the Vermillion and Kaskaskia Indians, who came [MS. Burned] the Black Fly, in Consequence of a Message sent to them by me to [inquire] into the Truth of a report which was spread abroad that they had rec[eived] a Belt to Strike their Fathers the English.”<sup>23</sup> The merchant report in its entirety is an invaluable reflection of the numbers and nations of Indians who came to the fort to impart information and receive gifts. “Piorias,” “Missouris,” “Kaskaskias and other Indians living at and around [MS. Burned]” “Piorias at Pain Court [St. Louis],” “the Chief of the Osage,” “Seven Chiefs of the Putawatomes,” “a Chief of the Arcanzas,” “Pondiac and His Attendants,” as well as “Sundry Chiefs and Partys of Ottaways and Chippaways” – all passed under the limestone arch of Fort Chartres, and Edward Cole dispersed appreciative gifts to the amount of six hundred one pounds, ten shillings.<sup>24</sup> From

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<sup>22</sup> Baynton and Wharton to Maclean, October 9, 1767, in *Trade and Politics*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>23</sup> See the Account of Philadelphia Merchants in Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, p. 405.

<sup>24</sup> Account of the Philadelphia Merchants, p. 408. In his study of the British in the Illinois, Clarence Carter provides the figure of “more than six thousand pounds sterling” for the “Indian expense alone” at Fort Chartres

the Osage west across the Mississippi, the Arkansas nations to the south, the Potawatomis and Chippewa to the north, and Pontiac from the northeast – tribes converged on a fort slipping slowly into a bend of a giant river. All peoples arriving at the fort would have seen and heard the Mississippi and a good many would have been on it or in it. In addition to the horse traffic, there would have been many river craft gently bobbing along the shoreline: hollowed-out pirogues of cottonwood, lighter bark canoes, cane rafts, and rough log ferries. The Illinois tribes living closest to the fort, the Mechigamea (and sometimes the Cahokia and Peoria) would have taken footpaths to the gates. Edward Cole and the military commander, Captain Forbes, extracted promises of trade fidelity from all these arriving Indian nations. Especially vocal about wanting to support the English in the burgeoning competition were the Osage, who were already pushing south to the Arkansas River to reach unlicensed French and Spanish traders. A year later, in 1768, General Gage wrote a frustrated account, a “Complaint of the Settlers and Traders from the Spanish Side of the Mississippi, who go up the Rivers Illinois, Ohio, and Oubache, to Trade with the Indians in His Majesty’s Territorys, and to hunt upon their Lands.” Gage believed these “Spanish side” traders – who were just as likely to have been French as Spanish – encouraged “Mischief” as well as illicit trade, desiring the Indians to “keep their Hatchets ready to strike.”<sup>25</sup>

The belief that contraband traders were also war mongers is clear in British correspondence. French and Spanish traders were thought to act with the design of an international conspiracy, agents in a vast trade war brewing in all directions. Yet the British themselves were key participants in such intrigues. Colonel Wilkins, for instance, on his arrival in the Illinois in 1768, likely sent “a Gentleman to be depended on” over to scout out

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between September 1766 and September 1767. See Carter, *Great Britain and the Illinois Country 1763 – 1774* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971 (1910)), p. 95.

<sup>25</sup> Gage to Shelburne, April 24, 1768, in Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, p. 267.

the Spanish fort being built at the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri. “This Gentleman was so curious as to measure the Fort several times.” Those specific measurements are included in the letter sent to General Gage, as well as exact counts of the numbers of Spanish soldiers stationed at the fort.<sup>26</sup> Probably Illinois Indians crossing into Missouri lands, such as the Peoria who occasionally hunted there, also provided the British in the Illinois with information about the Spanish trade. Yet it was the French who continued to interact most often with the Illinois. The English language was heard consistently for the first time in the Illinois Country during the Seven Years War. French had been spoken there since 1699 and had become the language of trade, a Creole patois containing a vibrant blend of native vocabulary, old French Canadian, and place names arising from joint usage of the land. Many Illinois Indians understood it, and in return, quite a few French could speak some Algonquian. In May of 1768, Peoria Indians reported to a Frenchman in “Caho” (Cahokia) that Potawatomi Indians were plotting against the British. “They immediately gave intelligence to...Monsieur Longvall, who could speak their language.”<sup>27</sup>

In maintaining trade and affective loyalties to the French under British rule, the Illinois Indians were able to influence the course of occupation even before some expeditions arrived in the Mississippi bottomlands. One of the early signs was the downriver flow of ominous tidings about how Indians would receive the first British to arrive in their country. In 1765, while Major Farmar was organizing his expedition to relieve Captain Stirling up at Fort Chartres, he was plagued with desertions of his troops. Down the long, populated stretch of the Mississippi to New Orleans ran accounts, canoe to village, village to pirogue, pirogue to sandbar camp, of the angry native inhabitants of the Illinois Country, resentful of the

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<sup>26</sup> Wilkins to Gage, September 13, 1768, in Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, pp. 388-389.

<sup>27</sup> Jennings Journal, May 5 – May 10, 1768, in *Trade and Politics*, p. 275.



incoming British and ready to ambush the soldiers of His Britannic Majesty. In 1764, the last French governor, D'Abbadie, wrote of the Illinois Country, "The news which M. de Villiers sends me is very disquieting to him: the savages are visiting him in companies of twenty and thirty, and it is necessary that he give them something or run the risk of their threats."<sup>28</sup> Yet a year before, in 1763, the British at Fort Detroit complained that "these Indians by abandoning this country make it scarce worth our possessing for the Multiplicity of Animals in these parts makes it a most valuable mine and you know they are best calculated for working it."<sup>29</sup> References in the correspondence of the French and the British, prior to their final occupation of the Illinois, reflect this peculiar theme: the absence of Indians, both as fur providers and as suppliers of provisions, but also, paradoxically, their continued threat. By February of 1765 the Minister at New Orleans was receiving letters such as this one: "M. St. Ange informs me...that if there is not sent to him some prompt succor from New Orleans, his feeble garrison and the inhabitants of the Illinois will be exposed to the furor of the savages, who, driven to desperation because they are abandoned and because they are given nothing, would be capable of proceeding to the most terrible extremities."<sup>30</sup>

The (potential) "furor of the savages" was likely perceived by the common British foot soldiers stationed in New Orleans as equal to the ferocity of Indians in the Ohio Valley during the Seven Years War. British Indian captives who lived to tell of Indian treatment of prisoners spread gruesome accounts. For instance, although captured early, in 1755, Colonel James Smith watched as a dozen injured prisoners were burned at the stake beside the Allegheny River. In the same year, Mary Jemison, captured at 13, saw "heads, arms, legs,

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<sup>28</sup> Journal of D'Abbadie, February, 1764, in Clarence Alvord, *The Critical Period 1763 – 1765* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1915), pp. 170 – 171.

<sup>29</sup> Montessoro to Bassett, November 2, 1763, Detroit, in Clarence Alvord, *The Critical Period*, p. 535.

<sup>30</sup> Aubry to the Minister of New Orleans, February 4, 1765, in Alvord, *The Critical Period*, p. 434.

and other fragments of the bodies of some white people who had just been burned.” She recounted that it “was like pork...hanging on a pole.”<sup>31</sup> By the time the British arrived in New Orleans and sat waiting for the provisioning of their transport, these stories would have been circulating for at least ten years. In 1769 the French priest Father Gibault wrote to his superior in Quebec, justifying his being armed “with my gun and two pistols.” Father Gibault is credited with a romantic imagination by his biographers, but he was drawing on history when he wrote of fending off an attack by an Indian, “...a miserable barbarian who seeks only to gratify his barbarism, who only wants my scalp, who would as soon take my hair as that of my horse, or who would slowly burn me alive just for the pleasure of seeing me suffer, who would make me eat my own flesh after having roasted some part of my body....”<sup>32</sup> Gibault feared ambush by fierce Indians of the Grand Prairie, such as the Kickapoo or the Miami.

The truth of the Illinois Country, however, was that except for the foiled plot of 1752, in which Miami Indians and a few Kaskaskias fired on some French villagers, no Illinois Indian tribe had ever directly attacked the French villages, the fort, or Frenchmen in their fields (ambush by the Fox was common earlier in the century). The “furor of the savages” was a haunting invocation of other times and places, other Indian-European frontiers. Conflation of Indian practices – merging the Ohio and Mississippi Valley Indians as similar populations – seems to have been likely. Major Farmar and his officers wrote in a memorial that it was necessary to “...find some means to prevent all desertions in the future.” Farmar blamed the proximity of New Orleans for desertions, calling it an “asylum...where [deserters] find

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<sup>31</sup> These examples appear in John A. Jakle, *Images of the Ohio Valley: A Historical Geography of Travel, 1740 – 1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 74.

<sup>32</sup> Gibault to Briand, October, 1769, in *Trade and Politics*, p. 622.

encouragement from ill-disposed people....”<sup>33</sup> Even after the occupation of the Illinois, British soldiers often deserted. In 1768, General Gage was still noting that 41 deserters from “Louisiana” had been sent to “the Grenadoes.”<sup>34</sup> Earlier, in 1765, Major Fraser wrote to General Gage about the reception of his men up in the Illinois Country: “My men...were very ill-treated every Day by such Indians as were Drunk, and were destitute of Clothing, etc.” Likely fearing worse to follow the “ill treatment,” Fraser sent his men away while the Indians “were at a Council at Fort Chartres.”<sup>35</sup>

That ambiguous adverb, “away,” obscures the destination of Fraser’s men, the destination of most people leaving the Illinois country in a hurry: New Orleans, easily and quickly reached on the steady, south-running river currents. River news traveled fast, and it was born on the river systems by all peoples. Communication spread from east to west as well as north to south. In the summer of 1765, for instance, General Gage wrote to William Penn about his concerns over a “large convoy of goods [that went] from New Orleans to Illinois in February.” Gage felt it was necessary to open trade back at Fort Pitt as soon as possible, and to “give notice of it,” to the Indians of the Ohio. If the Ohio Valley tribes were to learn of the goods convoy in the Illinois, especially if trade were postponed at Fort Pitt, “the Indians will soon discover where supplies are to be had, and we shall drive them again into the Arms of the French.”<sup>36</sup> The location of Fort Pitt at the confluence of three rivers, and especially its connections to the Ohio, assured that Indian tribes would discover trade commodity surpluses and deficits quickly.

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<sup>33</sup> See the copy of the “Memorial of Major Farmar and the Officers of the Thirty-Fourth Regiment of Infantry of his Britannic Majesty, who had been commanded to take possession of the Illinois via the Mississippi River,” in Alvord and Carter, *The Critical Period*, p. 498-499.

<sup>34</sup> Gage to Hillsborough, August 17, 1768, in *Trade and Politics*, p. 377. The French also had difficulty with desertions. The Kaskaskia Records detail “criminal proceedings” against ten French soldiers in 1753. See Kaskaskia MS 53:11:28:2.

<sup>35</sup> Fraser to Gage, May 26, 1765, in Alvord and Carter, *The Critical Period*, p. 515.

<sup>36</sup> Gage to Penn, June 16, 1765, *The Critical Period*, p. 518-519.

A riverine relay system connected the eastern and western tribes; the ease of river travel also allowed for networks of Indian alliances. At an Indian Council in New Orleans in February of 1765, a Shawnee chief named Charlot Kaske (Cornstalk or Corn Cob) told French authorities, “Here is a belt with five branches...it contains the names of forty-seven villages, the inhabitants of which wish to die attached to the French, defending their land to the last drop of their blood.” While the French governor D’Abbadie tried to dissuade the Shawnee from attacking the English, an Illinois Indian chief identified as “Levacher” also spoke. He took out “a little round piece of skin to which were attached 60 porcelain beads.” According to the eye witness who wrote of the moment, the beads represented the number of nations to which Levacher and the Illinois were allied.<sup>37</sup> This visual symbol of alliance – a skin world rimmed with sixty porcelain nations – helps to explain the importance of the Illinois Indians both to other tribes and to the Europeans. With some of the smallest numbers of people by 1765, the four Illinois tribes were nonetheless wooed by Pontiac, sought out by the Osage from across the Missouri, and identified by the British in their correspondence as key players in the contraband French fur trade.

The Shawnee and Illinois chiefs had traveled to New Orleans to see “their father who lives at the warm town.” Levacher stated that he came “from the Illinois to see if it were true that the country had been ceded to the English.”<sup>38</sup> These Indian chiefs returned to their lands bearing news, and that news spread to the villages and nations with whom they were allied. The back and forth exchange of both accurate information and rumor created a different kind of matrix for the British at Fort Chartres. Levacher, for instance, interpreted the British injunction against the sale of gunpowder as “they wish that we starve.” He declared

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<sup>37</sup> Indian Council of February 24, 1765, in *The Critical Period*, p. 450.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

passionately that “we [the Illinois tribes] shall not be embarrassed, having bows and arrows, and if there is no wood, we should find rushes.”<sup>39</sup> Despite nearly seventy years of access to French firearms, the Illinois chief still affirmed the use of bow and arrow among his people. Such sentiments certainly were re-expressed back in the villages of the Illinois. Their kinship connections, especially to the eastern Illinois bands of Miami, Wea, Piankeshaw, and Mascouten ensured the spread of such suspicions. Into this land of rumor arrived the British. The eastern shore Indians, finding that the fur trade was shifting into the rich Missouri lands across the river, experiencing the dissolution of their old provisioning trade relations with Europeans, at risk through the 1760’s and 1770’s from attacks by northern allied bands of Sauk, Fox, Potawatomi, and some Sioux, used the resource of information to survive in the English-controlled lands of the Illinois. Survival was centered directly on the British storehouse and artillery at Fort Chartres. It was maintained indirectly through relationships with the remaining French in the Illinois Country. Yet even this explanation is too simple. The loyalty of the Mechigamea, for instance, to the French still located near the fort and at Prairie du Rocher – peoples who had lived near each other on adjacent lands since 1720 – was concomitant with an imposed political loyalty to the British. The two allegiances were very different emotionally and arose out of two opposite historical tracks. An aborted attack of Potawatomi on the French and British living outside the fort in May of 1768 illustrates this complex relationship.

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<sup>39</sup>Indian Council of February 24, 1765, in Clarence Alvord, *The Critical Period*, p. 451.

**“The alarm word King George was made known to all the inhabitants....”<sup>40</sup>**

Kaskaskia was “the most populous village” left in old French Illinois, with mere scatterings of French at Prairie du Rocher, St. Philip and Cahokia. In 1752, Kaskaskia had 58 French males, while Prairie du Rocher had 10 men and Cahokia 18. Thirty-one Indian men and 44 Indian women lived at Kaskaskia; Prairie du Rocher had only five Indian inhabitants.<sup>41</sup> By 1769, Father Meurin described Prairie du Rocher as “a little village of twenty-four souls, including two inhabitants who are at Fort Chartres one league distant.”<sup>42</sup> The French village of Chartres, whose construction and property sales furnished so many rich notarial records, was abandoned in 1765; some British soldiers and their families were living in the old settlement between the fort and Prairie du Rocher. From the bluffs stretched bottomland prairie, partially-cleared by French farmers, dotted with copses of hazel and small, ragged stands of fruit trees planted by the people of Chartres. Many of the farms remained abandoned, however. St. Philippe, which in 1765 had ten or twelve French houses and a church, was almost completely emptied; all inhabitants “but one” crossed to the Spanish side.<sup>43</sup> Up at Cahokia, the land was as vacant: Father Gibault left a description of French Cahokia, written in 1768 to Bishop Briand in Quebec. Gibault was arguing to be posted at Kaskaskia rather than at Cahokia. He characterizes Cahokia as a place

...small and distant from all others, that mission formerly so flourishing is nothing any more, not a slave; the mills are in ruins, the milldams have been carried away by the waters, barns have fallen, the orchard for lack of a fence has been destroyed by animals, which have eaten the bark off the trees clear to the sap....<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Journal of John Jennings, May 8, 1768, in Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, p. 276.

<sup>41</sup> Recensement General Du Pais Des Illinois 1752 in Margaret Cross Norton, editor, *Illinois Census Returns, 1810, 1818* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1935), pp. xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>42</sup> Meurin to Briand, June 14, 1769, in *Trade and Politics*, p. 550.

<sup>43</sup> See Paul L. Stevens, “One of the Most Beautiful Regions of the World”: Paul Des Ruisseaux’s *Memoire of the Wabash-Illinois Country in 1777*,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 83 (4), 1987, p. 378, n. 30.

<sup>44</sup> Gibault to Briand, October, 1769, in *Trade and Politics*, p. 615.

Gibault makes no mention of the Cahokia Indians, nor the Peoria who sometimes lived with them. Yet to the south, the Mechigamea continued to occupy a village “three quarters of a mile distant” from Fort Chartres, north along the river. Back toward the bluffs perhaps two miles, nestled under the protective rise of sheer limestone and granite, lay the tiny village of Prairie du Rocher. As such, it was the closest French village to the Mechigamea. Fleeting references in British letters describe the land around the fort as “wide and open,” or coated with immensely tall grasses (cord grass and big bluestem, or turkey foot). In May, however, those grasses would just have begun to grow again, making the approach of attacking Indians quite visible.

Between May 5 and May 10, according to the terse entries in the journal of John Jennings, Potawatomi Indians launched an attack on a place identified by John Jennings as “the village.” It is not entirely clear whether this refers to the British occupying the old Chartres site or to Prairie du Rocher. Mention of “the church” makes it more likely to have been Prairie du Rocher, since St. Anne’s chapel near the fort was long abandoned and St. Joseph’s church in Prairie du Rocher, with its adjacent cemetery, was the place of worship. Jennings’ account begins with Peoria Indians meeting sixty Potawatomi while hunting; the Potawatomi told the Peoria “they were going to attack the English.” The location of this exchange of information was likely somewhere along the Illinois River, between its confluence with the Mississippi and the northeast turn into the Kankakee. Potawatomi had settled in the Kankakee valley and ranged south to hunt and meet (illegal) Spanish traders. The Peoria immediately relayed the news of the impending attack to the British, using the intermediary of an Algonquian-speaking Frenchman at Cahokia. Jennings recounts that “Centinels were placed at the Avenues of the Village” and night patrols organized. The French and British

inhabitants were “muster’d together and armed.” Despite these precautions, a British soldier and his wife were kidnapped by Potawatomis right out of the village. Immediately twenty soldiers and “a party of the Mitchigamie, who are our friends,” went in pursuit. Across the next few days, Jennings records even more elaborate precautions. Double sentinels were placed at the village avenues, and the alarm cry of “King George!” given as the warning. Hearing this, all inhabitants were to repair “armed” to the Rendezvous site. Through the night several times the alarm was given, as sentinels saw strange Indians “creeping close” or “advancing.” Eventually, the Kaskaskia Indians also set out in pursuit of the Potawatomi war party, while “the Guards and Centinels continu[ed] in the Village both Night, & day.” At noon on May 9 again “the drums beat to Arms...” as a relay system sent news of an approaching party of Indians on the Mississippi. The Kaskaskia Chief Tomera and his warriors went to determine who was coming. At the Mechigamea village they met some Chippewa men and women crossing from St. Louis. These Indians were immediately suspected of being spies and the guard maintained around the village. After May 10, however, there seems to have been no further alarm.<sup>45</sup>

While both the Mechigamea and Kaskaskia are described as defending “the village,” this five-day tale illustrates more than political loyalty. The Illinois Indians had been habitually attacked by the Potawatomi, often allied with the Fox and Sauk (see Chapter Five for the combined Potawatomi-Fox raid on the Mechigamea and Cahokia villages, 1752). However, the Potawatomi were a splintered tribe by the 1760’s, with two major factions divided geographically and politically. The Potawatomi living around Fort Detroit had made peace with the British after Pontiac’s War while the “St. Joseph Potawatomi” maintained a bitter

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<sup>45</sup> See the account of this intrigue in Jennings’ Journal, May 5-May 10, 1768, printed in *Trade and Politics*, pp 275 – 278.



hostility to them. By the late 1760's, "St. Joseph Potawatomi" had become a cluster term describing bands of Indians living everywhere but Detroit and led mostly by younger men. While the Potawatomi at the French St. Joseph mission had a long history of occupying the area, most of the original dissenting Potawatomi had dispersed south into the Illinois Kankakee River Valley.<sup>46</sup> There they were able to participate in illegal trade with Spanish and French using the waterways of Illinois to penetrate deep into the north-central area. Early accounts of the land south of the Detroit area identify it as exceptionally wet and marshy, also a riverine world traced with many waterways and the timbered shorelines of great lakes. Southern Michigan, in fact, was a land of salt springs and abundant "salt brine." Studies have estimated that Michigan's reserves of salt "are so immense they could supply the world's needs for thousands of years."<sup>47</sup> Despite these deposits, which Indians knew about and used, salt was so expensive up at Detroit that "very little, if any, meat was salted for sale."<sup>48</sup> Salt was also available to the south, along the Illinois River, on the east bank above the mouth of the Vermillion. These saline deposits were described in 1773 as "two salt ponds 100 yards in circumference...water is stagnant and of a yellowish colour; but the French and natives make good salt from it."<sup>49</sup> Salt deposits were strategically placed between the northwestern Potawatomi and the Mississippi, providing a means of preserving

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<sup>46</sup> See George Pare, "The St. Joseph Mission" *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* Vol. 17 (1), June, 1930, pp. 24-54. Pare concludes that when Charlevoix visited the St. Joseph area in 1721, the mission was "in all likelihood" on a site that had been occupied by French and Indians since 1693. Charlevoix found a Potawatomi village on one side of the St. Joseph River and a Miami village on the other. A 1725 map drawn by the chief engineer of New France also notes the presence of the Potawatomi village on the St. Joseph River. See Joseph L. Peyser's introduction to *On the Eve of the Conquest: The Chevalier de Raymond's Critique of New France in 1754* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997), p. 41, n. 38.

<sup>47</sup> Information on salt taken from Willis F. Dunbar, *Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 413.

<sup>48</sup> *Michigan Pioneer & Historical Collections*, Vol. 1 (Lansing: W.S. George & Co., Printers and Binders, 1877), p. 102.

<sup>49</sup> Patrick Kennedy, cited in Raymond Hauser, "An Ethnohistory of the Illinois Indian Tribe, 1673 – 1832," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1973, p. 97. This dissertation is available at the Illinois Historical Survey in Urbana-Champaign.

meat and game and perhaps allowing the independence of the tribal factions from the main Potawatomi around Detroit. One account of the activities of a French priest along the Illinois River near Peoria makes note of his participation in a buffalo hunt with “the Indians north of Peoria.”<sup>50</sup> It is not known who these Indians were, but the Grand Prairie of Illinois was clearly a theater for the meeting of many peoples, including the French, not all of whom had crossed the river.

The French around Detroit and south near St. Joseph maintained similar cultural traditions to the French in the Illinois. They built houses of oak and cedar and marked off their property with “pickets of red cedar” ten to twelve feet high. Incoming American settlers often mentioned the orchards of apples and cherries. An account from 1837 describes some of the red cedar posts still standing in Detroit.<sup>51</sup> Thus the natural and cultural landscape of French Illinois would have felt very familiar to Potawatomi raiders in 1768: marshy earth interspersed with some stands of thick timber, a landscape mosaic including improved agricultural lands, and dwellings displaying the familiar closely-set pickets. Potawatomi approaching on horses would have been at home wending their way through the wet prairies and inundated floodplain of the Mississippi in May. These western Potawatomi had relocated to the Kankakee area, another river system, one in which they were more available to both Spanish and French and northern tribes like the Fox and Sauk. Along the Kankakee they were reinforced in their belief that the British should be driven from the Illinois. One

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<sup>50</sup> Nehemiah Matson, *Pioneers of Illinois containing a series of sketches that occurred previous to 1813* (Chicago: Knight and Leonard, Printers, 1882), pp. 178 – 179.

<sup>51</sup> *Michigan Pioneer & Historical Collections*, Vol. 1, p. 358.

historian has described the clashes between St. Joseph Potawatomi and the British in the late 1760's as "the western-Potawatomi-British feud."<sup>52</sup>

The feud took the predominant form of guerrilla attacks on British traders. The raid on the Chartres area was but one incident in a long chain of attacks. The ubiquitous George Croghan in his role of Indian agent met with the Potawatomi at Detroit in 1767 but achieved little. The Potawatomi living around the St. Joseph River area of Michigan and south into Illinois "bragged" that they "would not Suffer an English Man to come near their Place."<sup>53</sup> These Illinois Potawatomi remained loyal to Pontiac's vision of western lands emptied of British and restored to the Indians who had lived there, despite the ancient inter-tribal warfare that characterized relationships among the tribes of the Upper Mississippi River Valley.<sup>54</sup>

During Pontiac's efforts to unite the western tribes, the Illinois Indians, assisted by the French, had been supplying him with ammunition and supplies. Their anti-British sentiments and loyalty to Onontio, the French father, mirrored the feelings of the St. Joseph Potawatomi. At least one historian believes this activity – most especially the supplying of ammunition to Pontiac – prompted the British to occupy the Illinois earlier than they had planned.<sup>55</sup> When the Illinois Indians appeared to have capitulated under British rule and to have traitorously

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<sup>52</sup> See R. David Edmunds, *The Potawatomis: Keepers of the Fire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), p. 97, but especially the chapter titled "Serving Two Fathers," which discusses the factions in the Potawatomi. Elders of the Potawatomi offered the same explanations for violence and intrigue as did the Illinois Indians in accounting for the 1752 conspiracy (see Chapter Five). Older chiefs claimed they could not control younger, intemperate men. This generational issue is also treated in Richard White's analysis of the Miami in *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 210–214.

<sup>53</sup> See this account in Edmunds, *The Potawatomis*, p. 98.

<sup>54</sup> See Gregory Evans Dowd, "The French King Wakes Up in Detroit: 'Pontiac's War' in Rumor and History," *Ethnohistory* Vol. 37(3), Summer, 1990, pp. 254–278. Dowd analyzes the role of rumor in Pontiac's War, arguing that Indians' use of rumor concerning the return of the French King represented a deliberate Indian tactic of trying to influence the French. A historian who believes western tribes tried to "reshape the diplomatic role of the British from an ineffective elder brother to a new father figure" is Jon William Parmeter, "Pontiac's War: Forging New Links in the Anglo-Iroquois Covenant Chain 1758–1766," *Ethnohistory* Vol. 44 (4), Autumn, 1997, pp. 617–654. See p. 637 for quote.

<sup>55</sup> See Clarence Carter, *Great Britain and the Illinois Country 1763–1774* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971 (1910)), p. 35.

abandoned the good fight, the Potawatomi were fiercely retaliatory. Somewhat astonishing in this tale of political anger and betrayal is the great disparity in numbers between the Potawatomi, the Sauk, the Fox – and the Illinois. The Fox Indians, in fact, had experienced a resurgence of population during the post 1763 fur trade years.<sup>56</sup> Between 1700 and 1763, however, the number of Illinois Indians fell from 6000 to 2000. Some historians believe this number is too conservative, with one estimate placing the loss of Illinois at over 90% of their pre-contact numbers.<sup>57</sup> The Potawatomi numbers remained higher; the Detroit Potawatomi, who supported Henry Hamilton's "western warfare" plan during the American Revolution, were able to contribute at least one hundred warriors to the one thousand mixed-nation force Hamilton sent south to raid Kentucky in 1777.<sup>58</sup> In 1778, George Morgan estimated the Potawatomi at Detroit as having "400 men."<sup>59</sup> Despite population differences, northern Illinois and Michigan tribes saw the greatly-reduced Illinois as traditional enemies to be "cut off."<sup>60</sup> However, the two groups of Potawatomi continued to be perceived differently by most Europeans. Back in 1769, the St. Joseph Potawatomi were listed on a "Report of the Various Indian Tribes Receiving Presents in the District of Ylinoa or Illinois, 1769." In addition to the four Illinois tribes – the "Kaskaskia, Kaokias, Peorias, and Metchigamia" – the roster, prepared by the outgoing French commander St. Ange for the incoming Spanish,

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<sup>56</sup> See Jeanne Kay, "The Fur Trade and Native American Population Growth," *Ethnohistory* 31(4), Autumn, 1984, pp. 265 – 287. Note especially the population growth charts on p. 273; the Fox show a steady resurgence following a low in numbers during the Fox Wars of the 1730's. By 1800, they may have numbered between 1500 and 2,000.

<sup>57</sup> See Helen Hornbeck Tanner, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, Chapter 8, note 4, p. 42, cited in Charles J. Balesi, *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America 1673 – 1818* (Chicago: Alliance Francais Chicago, 1992), p. 243. John K. White, believes the drop was even more significant: "By the mid 1700's a century of continual warfare had reduced the Illinois by 90%." See White's article, "Illinois," in the *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, Fred E. Howe, editor (New York: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1996).

<sup>58</sup> Edmunds, *The Potawatomi*, p. 100.

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Joseph Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana: Illinois, Kickapoo, and Potawatomi Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1974) p. 283.

<sup>60</sup> This phrase seems to have been used by Black Dog, a Peoria chief, to Commander Wilkins. The Kaskaskias also may have used it in referring to a rumor of nations coming in "150 Canoes who have long since threaten'd to Cutt off the nations of the Illinois..." Both instances appear in Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana*, p. 269.

identifies “Puotuatami” “of the river of San Joseph and that of Ylinnese.” St. Ange wrote at the end of this report, “I certify the tribes here above expressed are the same ones who are accustomed to come here to get presents.”<sup>61</sup> It is important to keep careful track of the timing of these reports and activities. The Potawatomi raid on the Chartres area occurred in May of 1768; a year later in May of 1769 both the Illinois and the Potawatomi are identified as habitually receiving presents from the French; in a similar document prepared in 1777, both the Potawatomi and the “Peorias and Kaskaskias” are listed as receiving presents from the Spanish.<sup>62</sup> In this last report, the St. Joseph Potawatomi are counted as having 150 warriors while the two tribes of the Illinois combined have 100 (the Mechigamea and the Cahokia are not mentioned).

Despite the fact that both nations – the Illinois and Potawatomi of St. Joseph – were using the resources of the French and Spanish, great heated feeling seethed under these international pseudo-alliances. In addition to cultural patterns of retaliation, tribes experiencing dislocation and the breakdown of internal leadership structures often projected their feelings of vulnerability onto lesser tribes, blaming them for displaying opportunistic allegiances. One study of the Potawatomi in this period points out that each tribal faction or society “harbored within its limits variant opinions and alternative adaptations” arising from distinctive histories of interaction with Europeans and with other Indian nations.<sup>63</sup> Within one hundred years, in fact, the Potawatomi had reversed their patterns of trade and cultural allegiance with the Illinois Indians. They had initially adopted the calumet ceremony from

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<sup>61</sup> See “Report of the Various Indian Tribes Receiving Presents in the District of Ylinoia or Illinois, 1769,” in Louis Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri*, Volume I (Chicago: R.R. Donnelly & Sons Company, 1909), p. 44.

<sup>62</sup> See “Report of the Indian Tribes Who Receive Presents At St. Louis, Dated November 15, 1777” in Houck, *The Spanish Regime*, pp. 141 – 148.

<sup>63</sup> James A Clifton, *The Prairie People: Continuity and Change in Potawatomi Indian Culture, 1665 – 1965* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), p. 132.

the Illinois after 1667, as they traded to the south; they incorporated this important pipe stem and bowl ritual into their own practices as an act of closure to an inter-tribal compact or agreement.<sup>64</sup> Also like the Illinois, the Potawatomi in the first half of the eighteenth century were dominated by the Fox Wars and Fox raids. The Fox considered the Potawatomi “their most desperate enemies,” and Potawatomi joined the massive French and Indian force which nearly exterminated the Fox on the Grand Prairie in the early 1730’s. Fighting beside them were Illinois Indians.<sup>65</sup> Less than twenty-five years later the Illinois had taken the place of the Fox as those most desperate enemies, and the Fox and Potawatomi were allied. In this shifting, unstable world of recombining allegiances, the kind of anger fueled by acts of perceived betrayal could be completely disproportionate to the incident. In 1751, for example, the Potawatomi became incensed over the death of a fractious chief named La Grue (The Crane). He was killed in a northern Peoria village along the Illinois River as Potawatomi passed through the area. Documents establish that La Grue was in fact “a notorious trouble-maker and started the dispute,” yet the Potawatomi could not forget the incident. The tradition of retaliation among the Potawatomi was documented as early as 1677 when Father Allouez, the successor to Father Marquette, stayed with “Poueteouatamis” near Green Bay. He described a “bear war” that erupted in which the Potawatomi killed over 500 bears in retaliation for the death of a single Potawatomi brave who was mauled.<sup>66</sup>

The Potawatomi were no different from other Great Lakes and prairie Indian tribes in preserving deep patterns of retaliatory warfare. In addition to the many historical and anthropological studies establishing tribal warfare as a constant, archaeological evidence has

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<sup>64</sup> James A. Clifton, *The Prairie People*, p. 124.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>66</sup> Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Volume LX (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Co., 1900), p. 153.

revealed striking evidence of murderous assault in the Oneota culture, the prehistoric Indian group occupying the Illinois in the centuries before the French descent of the rivers. Studies of fractures in interred skeletons found in one Oneota burial site in west-central Illinois, circa 1300, suggest not only surprise attack but repeated attacks. Of 264 burials, 43 partial or complete skeletons indicated violent death. Archaeologists conclude that “lethal trauma...is unambiguous” at this grave site: numerous skull fractures were caused by the wielding of stone-ground celts, and mutilation was present as well, including scalping and decapitation. Many remains show evidence of old injuries.<sup>67</sup> Although the connection between the Oneota culture and the historic Indian tribes is uncertain, the tradition of small-scale attacks among localized tribes did persist. The earliest recorder of Illinois Indian culture, the Frenchman Deliette who stayed with the Peoria around 1700, describes flamboyant rituals of warring and attack on other nations, especially the northern Fox and Sauk. One historian characterizes the Fox-Illinois “vendetta” as “bitter and of long duration.” The lodges of the Fox proudly displayed many “Cahokia and Kaskaskia scalps.” In one 1730 Illinois Indian ambush of Fox prisoners, three women were killed and fifteen Fox taken prisoner.<sup>68</sup> Even after the defeat of the Fox on the Grand Prairie in 1730, the Illinois conducted retaliatory raids north along the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers, especially on isolated Fox hunters. Yet by the time of the British occupation, the Illinois were more consistently focused on survival, on food and clothing procurement, than on resource-driven warfare. Perhaps their nearly seventy-year interaction with Europeans in intimate quarters, as the domiciled Indians of the French villages, had changed them. Yet despite shifts that may have occurred within their own

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<sup>67</sup>George R. Milner, Eve Anderson, and Virginia G. Smith, “Warfare in Late Prehistoric West-Central Illinois,” *American Antiquity*, Vol. 56 (4), October, 1991, pp. 582 – 583.

<sup>68</sup>R. David Edmunds and Joseph L. Peyser, *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), pp. 163 – 164.

culture, the Peoria certainly understood the Potawatomi retaliatory tradition to be vital. After the death of La Grue, they sent gifts to his family, but La Grue's relatives and kinsmen remained focused on revenge. The Peoria even sent a message to the Potawatomi:

Why do you disturb the earth for a fool who has been killed? What is your reason for coming to such extremes? Some of our people who were married in your villages have been killed there and we have never taken up arms to revenge ourselves. Moreover, if you attack us we will avenge ourselves; the earth will be disturbed and the roads will be closed through your fault.<sup>69</sup>

Such pleas were to no avail. Revenge for La Grue's death took the form of the catastrophic raid on the Mechigamea village in 1752. The memory of that raid – the scattered, hacked-off limbs of men, women, and children macerating in their riverine corn fields – was yet searingly vivid. The Illinois aligned themselves with the ruling power who could best protect them from northern enemies. They used a skillful, swift relay system of reporting information to keep themselves safe. The fact that today at least two of the Illinois tribes survive in Oklahoma is testament to the way these Indians read and used the political system of the late eighteenth century, at a time when their own livelihood was highly compromised through environmental degradation and the influx of many peoples. One way of reading the historical record has invited interpretations of dependency and weakness. This is most strongly expressed in analyses of the way the Illinois behaved at the time of Pontiac's murder in 1769.

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<sup>69</sup> Reported by La Jonquiere to the French minister, September 25, 1751, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, XVIII, p. 89, cited in Edmunds, *The Potawatomi*, p. 49.



**“There came to Fort Chartres ...a party of the Peoria from Kahokie with the greatest Apprehensions of that nation soon being Struck by many other Nations....”<sup>70</sup>**

On April 20, 1769, a Peoria Indian stabbed Pontiac to death in Cahokia, possibly in the Indian village near Cahokia, “au Millieu du Village des Kahoquias.” At least one historian interprets this attack as an act of vengeance: months earlier, Pontiac himself had stabbed Black Dog, the great Peoria chief. Pontiac’s murderer was a grandson of Black Dog.<sup>71</sup> The death of La Grue in the Peoria village back in 1751 was much less significant compared to the death of Pontiac at the hands of a Peoria warrior in 1769. A bitter international war had been fought in the interim. Land had changed hands and had been changed itself through British occupancy: the influx of soldiers, traders, merchandise convoys, and new Indian tribes inscribed the abandoned French lands with new trails, paths, landing places, and roads. Pontiac’s vision had temporarily united western Indian nations; yet that war was driven by a fiery purpose and passionate cause that burned intensely and briefly, succeeding only at first through the Indian traditional warfare tactic of swift, surprise attack.<sup>72</sup> Siege warfare requiring steady flows of ammunition, powder and foodstuffs to attacking nations asked too much of the Indian supply systems of the old Northwest. After Pontiac negotiated a peace with the British, he was instrumental in stopping further violence at the time the British arrived in the Illinois. On at least two occasions, he prevented the murder of British envoys: once in the case of Lieutenant Fraser at Fort Chartres and once in the case of George Croghan, held captive along the Ohio River. Historians have commented on the waste and

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<sup>70</sup> Cited in Joseph Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana: Illinois, Kickapoo, and Potawatomi Indians* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974), p. 274.

<sup>71</sup> Gregory Evans Dowd, *War Under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian-Nations, and the British Empire* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 249.

<sup>72</sup> See Gregory Evans Dowd, *War Under Heaven*, for an interpretation of Pontiac’s War as a struggle for political definition and status in the new British territory.

ignominy of Pontiac's death outside a trading post on the muddy streets of Cahokia.<sup>73</sup> To the Illinois Indians, waste and ignominy were the least concerns: they were extremely alarmed. The log of Colonel Wilkins in command at Fort Chartres documents that the Peoria arrived in May, barely a month after Pontiac's murder, "in 30 canoes by water & a large party by land." Wilkins tried to reassure the Peoria and asked them to return, but they refused.<sup>74</sup> Four chiefs negotiated with Wilkins to obtain British protection. They eventually settled with the Mechigamea in their village, yet five Illinois Indians were scalped between the fort and the Indian village.<sup>75</sup> In July, in the middle of a storm of rumors that angry northern tribes were massing against the Illinois, the Cahokia arrived, "[leaving] their village of Kehakie to Settle here with the Peories & Mitches...." The tribes worked together to fortify a village with a stockade "on a rising Ground in full Sight (& within Canon Shot) of the Fort...."<sup>76</sup> Rumors of attacks and retaliation for the death of Pontiac continued from 1769 through the early 1770's. The messaging fervor created a swirl of "rumors and misinformation" that "drifted down the Mississippi to New Orleans."<sup>77</sup> Sporadic raiding by Potawatomi against the Illinois British and Indian settlements also continued, although there was no definitive attack on the Illinois Indians. This reality underscores the way the Illinois were focusing on survival and had managed to insure it. In 1773 - 1774, when the British Indian commissioner Sir William

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<sup>73</sup> See, for instance, Francis Parkman, "Thus basely perished this champion of a ruined race," in *The Conspiracy of Pontiac and the Indian War After the Conquest of Canada*, Vol. II (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1917), p. 329; Howard Peckham in *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1947) describes the Peoria as having "a reputation for ambush and assassination as a policy of foreign relations, with the bully's surprise and outraged cry when they were drubbed for their cowardly attacks." See Peckham, p. 310.

<sup>74</sup> Gregory Evans Dowd believes that Wilkins refused the Peoria admittance to Fort Chartres. See Dowd, *War Under Heaven*, p. 261.

<sup>75</sup> See Wilkin's accounts in Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana*, p. 268.

<sup>76</sup> Wilkins, cited in Jablow, p. 269.

<sup>77</sup> Gregory Evans Dowd, *War Under Heaven*, p. 172.

Johnson attempted to negotiate an inter-tribal peace among the western nations, the Illinois did not attend the conference but sent a reply through a Shawnee chief. He brought

a Message from the three Illinois Indian Nations called the Kaskaskeys...they cou'd not comply with their desire to come to their Country, on account of the nations about them being in continual war with some Nation, or other who they must always be in dread of being struck by, and therefore cou'd not leave their Families exposed to them.<sup>78</sup>

During these early years of the 1770's, the Illinois country was perceived by all who lived in it as unstable and dangerous. In command at Fort Chartres, Colonel Wilkins, who has entered history as "the notorious Colonel Wilkins" for his financial intrigues and high-handedness with commercial traders and French alike, perceived the vulnerability of the Illinois Indians. One historian grudgingly admits that Wilkins "had a way with the Indians that they liked."<sup>79</sup> In addition to sometimes dispensing gifts more liberally than the British policies at the time permitted, Wilkins took seriously the information given to him by the Illinois. In 1769, three Kaskaskia chiefs came to the fort –Baptiste, Tomeroy, and Laudeviet. They told Wilkins, "express[ing] strong fear," that the Chickasaw Indians intended to "cut them off." Wilkins successfully calmed the Kaskaskia and invited them to "settle under the protection of the English."<sup>80</sup> In 1771, Wilkins' log between April 19 and 27 details the arrival 20 young Chickasaw braves at Fort Chartres, who came "as if to avoid being seen." Wilkins' efforts to keep animosities from breaking out between these Chickasaw and the Illinois Indians were really quite extraordinary. He housed the Chickasaw in a room inside the fort instead of in the "savage house" that stood outside the gates; he listened patiently to their concerns. The Indians privately expressed to the Colonel "their hatred of the Illinois."

<sup>78</sup> This message appears in its entirety in Joseph Jablow, *Indians of Illinois and Indiana*, p. 279.

<sup>79</sup> Colton Storm, "The Notorious Colonel Wilkins," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Vol. XL, March, 1947, p. 17.

<sup>80</sup> Log of Colonel Wilkins, cited in Storm, "The Notorious," p. 20.

Wilkins knew of a Chickasaw “that had long been married in this Country to a Woman of the Peoria,” and he invited this man to the fort to negotiate a peace agreement. Colonel Wilkins spent the 22, 23, 24, and 25 of April “in Counsil with parties of the nations of the Illinois, Chickasaws, and Shawanes.” In a complicated negotiation, Wilkins offered presents to the Chickasaw that included brass bells and Jews harps, powder, lead, clothing, and knives, and sent them south to their villages.<sup>81</sup> Despite being recalled by the British in 1772 for financial mismanagement, Colonel Wilkins protected the Illinois Indians from both their northern and southern enemies. Part of his success may simply have been the magnitude of Fort Chartres, its imposing size and range of canon atop the limestone walls. Those walls were being undermined by the Mississippi, however, and in 1772, the British abandoned the fort. They moved south to Kaskaskia, occupying the old Jesuit mission grounds and house, also built of stone.<sup>82</sup> This new location they named Fort Gage. It was from Fort Gage in April of 1773 that Captain Hugh Lord wrote to General Gage about his namesake fort: “The Indians have also been unavoidable, great numbers of Indians of different Nations being almost continually here.”<sup>83</sup> General Haldimand also reported to General Gage in 1773, “I enclose herewith a copy of a letter that I received from the Illinois...you see, sir, that disorder is increasing every day....”<sup>84</sup> It is not known whether the Peoria, Cahokia, and Mechigamea were among those Indians massing near Fort Gage or whether they continued to live near the abandoned and destroyed Fort Chartres. It is clear, however, that they used two other means to insure their survival: they sold off more land, and they migrated south into Arkansas (the

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<sup>81</sup> See this section of Wilkins’ journal printed in Colton Storm, “The Notorious,” p. 20. The original “Journal of Transactions and Presents Given to the Indians from 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 1768, to March 12, 1772,” is preserved among the General Gage papers in the William Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

<sup>82</sup> Clarence Carter, *Great Britain and the Illinois Country 1763 – 1774*, p. 156.

<sup>83</sup> Captain Lord to General Gage, April 9, 1773, in British Museum Additional Manuscripts 21664:148 and 21665:289. Photostats at the Illinois Historical Survey.

<sup>84</sup> Haldimand to Gage, October 5, 1773, in British Museum Additional Manuscripts (see above).

Kaskaskia) and west to the St. Louis area (the Peoria). For a time, they were much farther away from Potawatomi and Fox raiders.<sup>85</sup>

In the early 1770's, members of newly-formed land companies that had grown out of merchant involvement in British Illinois acquired land from the Illinois Indians. In his introduction to "The Illinois-Wabash Land Company," Clarence Alvord begins, "Trade and land speculation! The story of these activities contain the history of the early exploration and colonization of western America."<sup>86</sup> With this ringing exhortation, Alvord's analysis underscores the zeal and determination of eastern land speculators – and his admiration for their efforts. The original deed of sale is preserved, carefully drawn up as a legal document and notarized in Kaskaskia in 1773; in it appears the list of goods the Illinois obtained for selling two large tracts of land to William Murray, representative of the Illinois-Wabash Land Company (these sales were subsequently declared illegal by General Gage and also never acknowledged by any American court, despite repeated efforts of the investors to that end). The merchandise, the price of their land, tells a revealing story of the Illinois nations on the eve of the American Revolution. In exchange for two rich tracts, "one on the Illinois River and one on the Ohio,"<sup>87</sup> the Illinois asked for the following:

Two hundred and Sixty Strouds, Two hundred and fifty Blankets, Three hundred and fifty Shirts, One hundred and fifty pairs of Stroud and half thicke Stockings, One hundred and fifty Stroud Breech Cloaths, Five hundred pounds of Gun Powder, Four thousand pounds of Lead – Thirty pounds of Vermillion, Two thousand gun flints, Two hundred pounds of brass kettles, One Groce [gross] of knives, Two hundred pounds of

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<sup>85</sup> See account of this migration in Stanley Faye, "Illinois Indians on the Lower Mississippi, 1771 –1781," *Illinois State Historical Society*, Vol. 35 (1942), pp. 56 – 72. The Kaskaskia sought refuge among the Quapaw and tried to establish a fur trading niche in the Spanish empire. One group of Kaskaskia even took furs all the way to the British settlements in South Carolina. See Faye, p. 60.

<sup>86</sup> Clarence W. Alvord, "The Illinois-Wabash Land Company Manuscript," (Chicago: Cyrus H. McCormick, 1915), p. 9. See also Jack M. Sosin, *The Revolutionary Frontier 1763 –1783* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), pp. 31 – 38, for a detailed account of the operations of British land speculators, including members of the British army.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Tobacco, Three Dozen gilt looking glasses, One groce of gun worms [?], Two groce of awls, One Groce of fire Steels, Sixteen dozen of gartering, Ten thousand pounds of flour, Five hundred bushels Indian corn, Twelve horses, Twelve horned Cattle, Twenty Bushels Salt, and Twenty Guns.<sup>88</sup>

Conspicuous for its absence on this list is rum or “eau-de-vie,” as the French traders referred to it. The British were certainly dispensing alcohol to Indians, for George Morgan even wrote a proposal to build a distillery in Illinois to accommodate the brisk trade in it.<sup>89</sup> In 1768, Lieutenant Fraser had observed of the Illinois Indians that “nothing can equal their passion for drunkenness, but that of the French Inhabitants...”<sup>90</sup> While the effect of alcohol on the Illinois is clearly documented, in the early 1770’s, the goods they asked as the price of their land did not include it. The appearance of horses as part of the price implies they needed them. Even more telling is the inclusion of flour and Indian corn, suggesting they were no longer raising enough crops. And last, the Illinois acquired two tons of lead for the making of bullets.

Across the three decades prior to the arrival of the Americans under George Rogers Clark, but especially, after the British moved into the Illinois, relations among all groups of peoples were unstable. One historian has perceptively summarized pre-Revolutionary Illinois as “thirty-odd years of temporary ends and makeshift means...a period of expediency, with the course of events influenced by forces beyond the control of any government.”<sup>91</sup> Raids into the areas by northern tribes increased as word spread of the impending conflict between Britain and her colonies. A letter sent to Commander Rocheblave from Cahokia in 1777

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<sup>88</sup> See Alvord, “The Illinois-Wabash Land Manuscript,” unnumbered page of facsimile in longhand.

<sup>89</sup> Colton Storm discusses this petition to General Gage, titled “Some Reasons Why the Distillation of Spirits from Grain Ought to Be Encouraged at the Illinois.” See Storm, “The Notorious,” p. 19.

<sup>90</sup> Fraser to Haldimand, cited in McDermott, “French Settlers and Settlements in the Illinois Country,” *The French, The Indians, and George Rogers Clark in the Illinois Country: Proceedings of an Indiana American Revolution Bicentennial Symposium* (Indianapolis Historical Society, 1977), p. 12.

<sup>91</sup> See James A. Clifton, *The Prairie People*, p. 131.

tersely outlines the level of unrest: “There have been...two Frenchmen killed near St. Joseph while coming from St. Joseph, and by the Pottawatomies. Also Mr. Chartranc had a finger cut off by the Renards. Four traders have abandoned their house, and all their effects in the country along the river of the Illinois.” The same writer adds later, “...both the Pottawatomies and the Renards say that they wish St. Joseph ravaged and destroyed. There is nothing but war on every side.”<sup>92</sup>

The Illinois Country was also re-organizing itself along new lines of trade and livelihood. Some French families who had crossed the river to live in Spanish Missouri had returned to British Illinois. In 1777, a Frenchman from Vincennes, Paul Des Ruisseaux, traveled through the old French settlements. He found that tiny St. Philippe, once almost completely abandoned, had eight or ten houses re-occupied by *Canadiens*.<sup>93</sup> However, the young French men of the region were more drawn to hunting and trading than to agriculture, as Philip Pittman observed in the late 1760’s.<sup>94</sup> While the oldest French families at Prairie du Rocher continued to raise stock and farm, Cahokia had become almost entirely a trade center, fortuitously located almost directly across the Mississippi from burgeoning Spanish St. Louis. Cahokia was a long, straggling, ragged village with a “great deal of poultry” but infrequent and poorly-tended crops. The Cahokia “fort,” wrote Pittman, was only a small house standing in the middle of the village. “It was formerly enclosed with high palisades, but these were torn down and burnt.”<sup>95</sup> (It is likely the palisades were used as fuel).

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<sup>92</sup> Richard McCarty to Rocheblave, February 6, 1777, in Edward G. Mason, editor, *Early Chicago and Illinois* (Chicago: Fergus Printing Company, 1890), p. 384.

<sup>93</sup> Paul Des Ruisseaux, “Memoire of the Wabash-Illinois Country in 1777,” in Paul L. Stevens, “One of the Most Beautiful,” p. 378.

<sup>94</sup> “...most of the young men rather chuse to hunt and trade amongst the Indians, than apply [themselves] to agriculture or become handicrafts [men]...” Captain Philip Pittman, cited in McDermott, “French Settlers,” p. 11.

<sup>95</sup> See McDermott, “French Settlers,” p. 10.

Independent French traders, including those traveling up the Mississippi from New Orleans and the young hunters of the French settlements, became interested in trading south towards the Ohio River, serving the needs of the Shawnee who had moved farther west. Convoys of wheat, corn and trade goods left the Kaskaskia area for the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi; business was often conducted on river islands.<sup>96</sup> Fur trade on the eastern shores of the Mississippi began to list toward a localized market economy in which Indians and French alike exchanged one or two furs and peltries to secure goods as needed. The old pattern of tribes converging at the end of summer and winter hunts with large packs of furs and pelts was disintegrating into patterns of individual Indians trading single furs for rum or gunpowder. The *Kaskaskia Records* contain an account of an Indian visiting the wife of the British commander at Kaskaskia, M. de Rocheblave, and throwing two beaver skins at her feet. He then demanded *eaudevie*, which she refused him.<sup>97</sup>

This incident is documented in a lengthy court of inquiry conducted by the British only one year before George Rogers Clark surprised the sleeping village of Kaskaskia and the Illinois Country changed hands again. A close reading of this inquiry reveals persistent patterns of old loyalties in a maelstrom year. M. de Rocheblave, a Frenchman commanding for the British, was accused of treason by an Anglo-American merchant with whom he had a long-standing feud. A central charge involved a large party of Fox and Sauk Indians – perhaps as many as six hundred – who were approaching Kaskaskia, apparently with the goal of eradicating thirty Illinois Indians who had taken refuge in the town. Rocheblave asked some French inhabitants to take a British flag out to meet the Indians, a visual symbol of

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<sup>96</sup> See this Ohio River trade mentioned as “common” in a document titled “Defense of Thomas Bentley, August 1, 1777,” in Clarence Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records 1778 – 1790* (Springfield, Illinois: The Illinois State Historical Library, 1909), p. 13.

<sup>97</sup> See Clarence Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records*, p. 30.



British military presence. Somehow, en route to the prairies where the Fox were massed, the British flag became a French flag. Rocheblave denied he had sent a French flag. During the inquiry, the French inhabitants confessed they were “burdened by the weight of the said flag,” so they had substituted a “white towel” attached to a pole. The lighter flag would allow them “to pass more easily through the woods.”<sup>98</sup>

Although Rocheblave was exonerated, the important point about the Fox not attacking Kaskaskia seems to have been missed in the inquiry. However they perceived the white towel on the pole, at that moment, the Fox were deterred. We don’t know what passed between the Fox-Sauk Indians and a few residents of Kaskaskia who staggered out of the woods at the edge of the prairie, hoisting what was clearly a French flag. The French dissatisfaction with British rule would lead to French support during the invasion of George Rogers Clark in 1778, seen by all historians who write of the bloodless takeover as a critical factor. In turn, the French may have been instrumental in persuading Indians to accept American rule.<sup>99</sup> Before the American invasion, Commander Rocheblave confessed himself to be “a little crazed,” as he was forced to imprison young men in Kaskaskia “every day.” These young French men demanded first that he follow English law and then “the very next day demand the old French laws which have always been followed.”<sup>100</sup> In July of 1778, one month before being taken prisoner by George Rogers Clark, Rocheblave was writing letters of alarm from Fort Gage, begging the British to send “at once a body of troops here...we are on the eve of seeing here a numerous band of brigands.” He mentions as well the difficulty

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<sup>98</sup> See the detailed account of this incident in *Kaskaskia Records*, pp. 18 – 40.

<sup>99</sup> See Jack M. Sosin, *The Revolutionary Frontier*, p. 118. Sosin mentions a wealthy French merchant in Cahokia, Godfrey de Linctot, who was “invaluable in winning over the neighboring Indians.”

<sup>100</sup> Rocheblave to Lieut.-Gov. Hamilton, May 5, 1777, in Mason, *Early Chicago*, p. 391.

in controlling Indians, although they are “in general well enough disposed.”<sup>101</sup> By “the Indians,” Rocheblave may have been specifically referring to the Kaskaskia and the Mechigamea, although many Indian nations continued to visit Fort Gage.

The British had withdrawn their garrison from the Illinois in 1774 -1775 after rebelling eastern colonists invaded Quebec. Captain Hugh Lord was recalled; the British who had marched in under Captain Stirling in 1765 marched out in 1775. The evacuation of Fort Gage left Commander Rocheblave, in his own words, “in charge without troops, without money, without resources.”<sup>102</sup> From that point until August of 1778, when the Illinois Country became part of the state of Virginia, the land lay in an uneasy limbo. Land speculators and dreamers planned colonies and settlements with names like Charlottina, Vandalia, and New Wales – ephemeral, paper settlements in which happy, orderly subjects would live an elegiac life. Indian nations would be “controlled,” relegated to a buffer zone where animal, fish, and bird resources would replenish themselves forever. Funneling out of the limitless reservoir would be a steady stream of peltries enriching the British crown. Of all the unrealistic conceptions that fueled British dreams for the management of western lands, lack of ecological understanding was perhaps the most trenchant – and has been the least explored by scholars. In the eighteenth-century view of the frontier, it was possible to carve out tracts of land, even millions of acres in extent, surround those tracts with enforced barriers, and isolate animal and plant populations into perpetuity. The intimate and intricate relationships of adjacent ecosystems, the myriad processes in which reciprocal exchanges contribute to sustainability – these relationships were unacknowledged in the thinking of even the most

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<sup>101</sup> Rocheblave to Carleton, July 4, 1778, in Mason, *Early Chicago*, pp. 416-417.

<sup>102</sup> Rocheblave to Lord George Germaine, February 28, 1778, in Mason, *Early Chicago*, p. 407. Jack M. Sosin describes the Illinois Country after the withdrawal of British troops as a “military vacuum.” See Sosin, *The Revolutionary Frontier*, p. 117.

advanced geographers of the time. As a wolf lopes out of its territory, crossing from one environment to another, its coat may be filled with seeds. Those seeds are shaken off, take root and grow, and a fringe of nutrient-rich northern dropseed appears to feed both deer and mice many leagues away. Territories and ranges are imbricated and fluid and depend on animal – and human – movement. The encapsulated Indian buffer zone, part of the vision the British were fighting to preserve in the American Revolution, was a chimera. In the real world, on the banks of the Mississippi, the old French and Indian villages of Kaskaskia, Prairie du Rocher, St. Philippe, and Cahokia hung tenuously on.

## Epilogue

Despite the persistent narrative of the Illinois as untouched virgin land, on the eve of the American takeover, both the Illinois Indians and the French were already living in an environment depleted of fur-bearing animals and the kinds of trees many of those animals depended on. In addition, introduced vegetation was thriving. On the cleared lands in the floodplain, the French had put in significant numbers of fruit trees. Early accounts mention apple and pear trees that “in proportion to the population were numerous.”<sup>1</sup> While Indian agriculture was limited to the acreage granted tribes around their villages, changes in Indian subsistence overall affected the land in other ways. Indians had long burned sections of prairie to create a mosaic environment attractive to specific types of game: wild turkey, upland ruffed grouse and quail – and deer. Nut groves may have been tended on bluff tops, and the burning of prairie vegetation insured the survival of stands of fire-resistant, sun-loving oaks as well and eliminated fire-sensitive trees like red cedar and sugar maple. By the 1790’s, Indians living in the tri-partite ecosystem of what would become the American Bottom were no longer routinely involved with maintaining through burning. Seasonal patterns of planting had been disturbed. Indians living in villages near old Fort Chartres and new Fort Gage were not clearing more land, and there is little evidence of Indian agriculture in these years. With the phasing out of autumnal burning, the invasion of woody species from the prairie-woodland edge proceeded apace. Incoming American accounts of the prairies mention that the native blue joint (likely big blue stem) grew to the height of a man’s head on horseback. Accounts also describe “reeds, cane, foxtail, millet, and broom or beard

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<sup>1</sup> J.L. McDonough & Co., *Combined History of Randolph, Monroe, and Perry Counties, Illinois* (Philadelphia: J.L. McDonough & Co., 1882), p. 89.

grass, as well as over thirty kinds of elm and some “giant” cottonwoods.”<sup>2</sup> The land held sloughs “hundred of miles in extent,” as well prairies which were rapidly named by white settlers: Prairie Tamaroa, Twelve Mile Prairie, Looking Glass Prairie and Horse Prairie.<sup>3</sup> Horse Prairie lay between the Kaskaskia River and Horse Creek. In this fertile expanse of grassland, “herds of wild horses” grazed and multiplied, breeding from original stock that had escaped from French settlements. These horses became prized hunting animals, for they were capable of bursts of speed and had an “additional vigor and toughness.” One early history states that a French pony was “a proverb for endurance.”<sup>4</sup> Up at Cahokia a horse trade developed in which the French were selling large numbers of horses to Indians, an ironic inversion of the old trade patterns of the early eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

Eventually the burning of the thick prairie grasses was taken over by white hunters. William Faux left a vivid account of these grasses and of their burning in southern Illinois in 1819:

*...the Indian summer...is caused by millions of acres, for thousands of miles around being in a wide-spreading, flaming, blazing, smoking fire, rising up through the wood and prairie, hill and dale, to the tops of low shrubs and high trees, which are kindled by the coarse, thick, long prairie grass...these fires seem to have originated with the native tribes, and are now perpetuated by the White Hunters, who by these means start, disturb, and pen up the game, and destroy the dens of both man and beast, and all this with impunity.*<sup>6</sup>

American hunters and settlers began to appear in the early 1780's even before the Northwest Territories were officially opened for land purchase. The earliest American arrivals came in 1780, a colony of settlers to the Kaskaskia area, lured by a “favorable report of the Illinois

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<sup>2</sup> Brink, McDonough and Co., *History of St. Clair County* (Philadelphia, 1881), p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> *History of St. Clair County*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>4</sup> *Combined History of Randolph, Monroe, and Perry Counties, Illinois*, p. 67 and 64.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>6</sup> William Faux, cited in John White, *Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Big Rivers Area* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, 2000), p. 53.

Country” spread by the soldiers in George Rogers Clark’s expedition.<sup>7</sup> In 1779, the county-lieutenant of the newly-created Virginia Territory, Colonel John Todd, had issued a proclamation forbidding “new settlements upon the flat lands of said rivers, or within one league of said lands” (Mississippi, Ohio, Illinois, and Wabash Rivers).<sup>8</sup> Directive had come from the new American government that French land claims must be legally decided and the original French farms surveyed. In issuing the injunction against settling the “flat lands of the rivers,” Colonel Todd was acknowledging the tremendous alluvial potential of riverine earth and perhaps as well, noting the lure of those friable lands already cleared by both prehistoric and historic Indians and the French. When they settled along the Kaskaskia River, these earliest Americans were clearly ignoring Todd’s proclamation. They rapidly imprinted the land with a different set of cultural traditions, one focused on surveying, fencing, and using even small tributary streams to send produce to market.<sup>9</sup> Around La Belle Fontaine spring on the uplands, settlement initially began along the old Cahokia-Kaskaskia Road, the Chemin du Roi of the French. This settlement was called New Design, and in 1787, the first recorded white child of English parentage was born in a log structure there.<sup>10</sup> These upland settlers shared in common with the remaining French a dependence on the white *capot* or blanket coat; they were also typically barefoot or wore moccasins. In the absence of leather, they made horse collars plaited from maize husks sewn together. Their cabins had ceilings covered with pelts – raccoon, opossum, and wolf.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *History of Randolph, Monroe, and Perry Counties*, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> “Proclamation of John Todd, June 14, 1779,” in *History of Randolph, Perry, and Monroe Counties*, p. 93.

<sup>9</sup> *History of St. Clair County*, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> John W. Allen, *It Happened in Southern Illinois* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1968), p. 348-349.

<sup>11</sup> *History of St. Clair County*, pp. 56 – 59.

The mention of wolf pelts being used as cabin insulation is one of the last references to the wolf as a useful animal, outside its role in the fur trade. Modern studies of the intricate ecological relationships among deer, moose, wolves, and forests have indisputably established the importance of wolf predation on large herbivores.<sup>12</sup> In the absence of deer herds, wolf packs will prey on livestock and possibly, on people. This pattern surfaced in the Illinois Country in the eighteenth century and accelerated into the nineteenth. Father Gibault making his first visit across the prairies to Vincennes wrote to Bishop Briand, “I have been told the story of some deaths which certainly cannot be heard without drawing tears; this portion of your flock is terribly a prey to the wolves....”<sup>13</sup> Before the depletion of deer herds and their own numbers through the fur trade, gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) sought the edge habitats where deer ranges overlapped. Ironically, these edge habitats, the stream margins and prairie-savanna transition zones, became the prized settlement corridors for incoming American settlers. Research on settlement patterns in northeastern Missouri, for instance, establishes that over and over, settlers chose the ecotonal prairie, or edge habitat, “the preferred prairie type for early frontier agriculturists.” Such areas were transition zones that provided access to a variety of trees for cabin and barn construction, water, pasture for stock, small game for food, and soil that was “sparsely timbered.” Geographers call these early settled strips of ecotonal habitat “staging areas.”<sup>14</sup> From these transition zones, settlers made forays out into woodlands and sent their stock to graze. While most hogs were permitted to

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<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, L. David Mech, *The Wolf: The Ecology and Behavior of an Endangered Species* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981); K. Kunkel and D.H. Pletscher, “Species-specific population dynamics of cervids in a multipredator system,” *Journal of Wildlife Management*, Vol. 63 (4) 1999, pp. 1082–1093; E. Post et al, “Ecosystem consequences of wolf behavioral response to climate,” *Nature*, Vol. 401(6756) 1999, pp. 905–907.

<sup>13</sup> See Gibault to Briand, February 15, 1769, in Alvord and Carter, *Trade and Politics*, p. 504.

<sup>14</sup> Robert E. Warren and Michael J. O’Brien, “A Model of Frontier Settlement,” in *Grassland, Forest, and Historical Settlement: An Analysis of Dynamics in Northeast Missouri* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), p. 48.

range freely on the uplands in Illinois, settlers tried to protect their other animals with fences. Yet the graceful worm fence, the sloping rail border so easily constructed by American settlers and brought with them as part of the southern hearth culture, never kept out a hunting wolf.

Wolf hunting and eating patterns in the wild are tied to a capacity to live a feast or famine existence. Consummate stalkers and long-distance travelers, wolves are naturalized to find and digest enormous amounts of meat at one time. They need to eat an average of five to ten pounds of meat a day but may consume up to eighteen pounds. Nor are wolves usually wasteful predators. They eat the heart, lungs, liver, and “other internal organs;” they crush bones to extract marrow and sometimes eat hair and hooves.<sup>15</sup> Their attacks on livestock would not have been opportunistic but strategies for survival. Wolf hunting territories are marked by scent and droppings, and such territories overlap and shift seasonally, what Barry Lopez, in comparing hunting territories of Pawnee and Omaha Indians to wolf territories, has called an “ebb and flow” of boundaries.<sup>16</sup> While such historians as Carl Ekberg have written movingly of the eradication of French communal agriculture under American property laws, those same laws imposed a territorial rigidity on deer and wolf ranges equally as destructive.

The ebb and flow of natural boundaries stopped. Fencing, ditching, and timber removal overrode sensitive animal responses to a variety of earth and climate factors, including seasonal fluctuation in water. The loose, changing, adaptive habitat of the Illinois watery world, characterized by natural movement of rivers, streams, animals, and Indians, entered another phase of alteration under American rule. New species of plants, insects, fish, birds, and even some mammals would appear even as others disappeared. Yet the means by which

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<sup>15</sup> Barry Holstun Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978), p. 54.

<sup>16</sup> Lopez, *Of Wolves*, p. 65.



these species arrived was no longer so often tied to the fluctuation of water, nor was it gradual. The dynamic influx was tied much more directly to human real estate: who bought and sold, which persons and how many entered the habitat.<sup>17</sup>

Under American rule, many of the entering persons were aggressive eradicators of animals. By the early 1800's, Randolph County Commissioner Records describe payment for wolf bounties. On one day in session, June 5, 1804, the court accepted five wolf scalps, two grown wolf carcasses, and seven wolf scalps again.<sup>18</sup> Prairie du Rocher and Kaskaskia are in Randolph County; the wolves taken there in 1804 were preying on American livestock. The attractiveness of the cash wolf bounty, coupled with ridding the area of predators, took precedence over the value of a wolf fur in trade. The bounty system was a direct cause of extirpation and extinction of wolf sub-species and fueled the two hundred year old conflict that Barry Lopez has termed "the wolf war in North America."<sup>19</sup> Today seven wolf sub-species are completely gone – including the Great Plains wolf and the Texas gray wolf; both the northern and southern Rocky Mountain sub-species of wolves are extinct.<sup>20</sup> In the areas of old French Illinois and Missouri, the wolf war had its roots in the deerskin and fur trade. The emptying out of the "vast" deer herds of early accounts left wolves, as predators of large mammals, without much recourse.<sup>21</sup> Elk were also disappearing by the time of the American occupation. The delectable, amniotic smell of newborn calves, colts, and lambs drew hungry wolves to early American homesteads. By 1818, Gershom Flagg, a settler in Madison

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<sup>17</sup> See similar conclusions and findings in Alan Burdick, "The Truth About Invasive Species," *Discover*, Vol. 26 (5), May 2005, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> *Randolph County, Illinois, Commissioners' Court Records, 1802 - 1807* (published by Wanda Warkins Allers and Eileen Lynch Gochanour, April, 1996), pp. 57 – 59. Copy at the Illinois Historical Survey.

<sup>19</sup> Barry Holstun Lopez, *Of Wolves*, p. 194.

<sup>20</sup> Barry Holstun Lopez, *Of Wolves*, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> For wolf diet and habits, see J. Knox Jones, Jr., et al, *Guide to Mammals of the Plains States* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), p. 258.

County just above the French settlements, noted, “Sheep will do very well here if they can be kept from the Wolves but this cannot well be done in the newsettled parts the wolves are so very numerous.” Flag also mentioned that wolves were killing sows and their newborn shoats if “the sows are not shut up til the pigs are a few weeks old.”<sup>22</sup> While letters and accounts from the 1780’s and 1790’s continue to mention the availability of deer and buffalo in Illinois, these references must be carefully weighed into the total picture of imbalanced animal populations. The 1804 Wood River Journals of Lewis and Clark, for instance, describe the killing of deer not as members of vast herds but as one or two animals. An entry for January 29, 1804, reads, “Shields Killed a Deer Today.” Other entries describe two deer killed, or one deer and one turkey. Ten hunters took five deer on January 30, the largest number recorded.<sup>23</sup> Such entries are in contrast to the references to “roving deer herds” and the “vast” or “immeasurable” numbers of animals, both deer and buffalo, consistently mentioned by observers before 1770.

In the growth of wolf predation on livestock, two forces were in operation: long-disturbed mammal populations, especially deer, and the substitution of domestic animals for those deer. Also likely long disturbed – well before the first American settler applied for a land title – was the Illinois Indian sense of the cosmological world as knit together in a series of processes. Barry Lopez has described this circle of processes in his seminal work on wolves and Native Americans, *Of Wolves and Men* (1978):

When, for example, the Indian left his buffalo kill, he called out to the magpies and others to come and eat. The dead buffalo nourished the grasses, the grasses in turn fed the elk and provided the mouse with straw for a nest; the mouse, for his part, instructed the Indian in magic; and the Indian called on his magic to kill buffalo.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Gershom Flagg, cited in John White, *Early Accounts*, p. 78.

<sup>23</sup> *The Field Notes of Captain William Clark, 1803 – 1805*, cited in John White, *Early Accounts*, p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> Barry Holstun Lopez, *Of Wolves*, p.104.

Anthropologists interviewing members of surviving Kickapoo in Oklahoma have also documented a cosmology of “reciprocal processes.”<sup>25</sup> Yet overlapping the Kickapoo cosmology since the middle of the eighteenth century was a vigorous association with Europeans and their trade world. One historian has commented that Kickapoo “old ways” included a “strong connection with European culture.”<sup>26</sup> The Illinois connection with the European trade world – not to mention the influence of French Catholicism – goes back to 1699 when the Seminarians floated down the Illinois River to establish the Holy Family Mission at Cahokia.

When George Rogers Clark entered Kaskaskia in 1778, the Illinois had lived through nearly eighty years of close contact with Europeans and trade culture. They had adapted their subsistence in response to rising and falling levels of game as well as climate extremes of drought and flood. One year might bring more agriculture, then perhaps a year of longer and farther winter and summer hunts; one year, in response to rising prices in the French fur exchange, they might exploit the northern Mississippi watershed for small fur-bearing mammals; another year they might hunt more buffalo.<sup>27</sup> By the 1770’s, the French in the Illinois were doing the same thing, refocusing trade to the south among the newly-opened markets with Ohio River Indians. Trade also flourished to the north, out of Cahokia. In 1774 Charles Gratiot established a “grand depot for Indian trade at Cahokia.” Between 1780 and 1800, Cahokia became known as the residence of “many north-western Indian traders.” It was also the most wholly French of all the east-bank settlements. One early account claims

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<sup>25</sup> Dillingham, “The Oklahoma Kickapoo,” cited in John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 21.

<sup>26</sup> Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> See Jeanne Kay’s discussion of the adaptations of Wisconsin Indians to changes in the fur trade, “Wisconsin Indian Hunting Patterns,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 69 (3), September, 1979, pp. 402–418. Kay finds that “Indian use of wildlife reflected the price of pelts, species’ fertility, and the varying distribution of wildlife habitats.”

that before 1788, there were only two non-French residents in the town.<sup>28</sup> In 1778, exchanging furs at Michilimackinac, Charles Gratiot was able to trade for five canoe loads of store merchandise valued at “four thousand pounds.” An inventory from his store suggests a new, ornamental style in clothing. Gratiot carried flowered flannels, Irish linens, printed calico, black knitted breeches, hats with piping, gold and silver lace, “silver, rose, red, black, yellow, green, and flowered ribbands,” artificial flowers, and satin shoes.<sup>29</sup> French traders, Illinois Indians, other Indian nations from the north and east, Anglo-Americans, and occasional Spanish as well as the French families living in Cahokia would have traded for these clothing items. Other goods for sale included combs “for curling hair,” razors, and eye glasses.<sup>30</sup> This emphasis on gentility and decoration is markedly different from the lists of British trade goods shipped out to Fort Chartres ten years before. The year of the Gratiot inventory is also the year that the Illinois Country changed hands, passing to American rule. Clearly cultural and social shifts engendered by sheer population growth were already underway.

The story has been told of a sudden, invasive, and catalytic change through American settlement. In the rapid influx of American settlers and in the confiscation of Indian lands through the aggressive treaty policies of Thomas Jefferson, political and social change were certainly intensified. The oldest extant assessment of lands in Randolph County, 1808, indicates that 435,800 acres were “in the possession of individuals.” These enormous grants numbered as many as 34,000, 24,800, 15,200, or 12,600 acres. The largest grant was for 130,400 acres. In comparison, the typical French grant, a 2 by 50 arpent farm, “measured out

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<sup>28</sup> *History of St. Clair County*, p. 45.

<sup>29</sup> Letters of Charles Gratiot, cited in John Francis McDermott, editor, *Old Cahokia: A Narrative and Documents Illustrating the First Century of Its History* (St. Louis: The St. Louis Historical Documents Foundation, 1949), p. 193.

<sup>30</sup> McDermott, p. 193.

to something like 130 acres.”<sup>31</sup> Only small portions of the American grants were “in fields,” and those fields are recorded as being “around Kaskaskia and Prairie du Rocher.”<sup>32</sup> Clearly some of these fields were the old French wheat lands, black, fertile earth that itself had supported human beings since at least 1000 AD. The emptying out of the Illinois Country after 1763 as well as heightened internal conflicts among tribes and between Europeans and Indians allowed the land to begin a recovery process. Portions of prairie especially were rebounding, with tallgrass vegetation becoming rampant; however, the gradual cessation of burning by Indians was encouraging the growth of fire-sensitive trees and creating a weedy understory. The look of the watery world was changing.

When the unwieldy and imprecise surveying system of metes and bounds passed into the Jeffersonian rectilinear survey, edges of grants and property lines tightened up. Instinct in this survey system was an expectation of control and eradication of animal and plant populations, an expectation that at least had the merit of realism. Surveying and settlement are intrusive processes; in the first nineteenth century histories of the area, animal and bird populations were inventoried ruthlessly. One section of a geographical assessment was even specifically titled, “These Birds Should Be Exterminated.” Yet the alteration in the Mississippi floodplain environment had been ongoing at least since 1699, and the peoples who lived the longest on that land – the Illinois Indians and the French – had endured strong processes of disintegration and deracination. Neither the British nor the Americans ever experienced the loss of a powerfully fecund riverine environment in which succeeding generations of their own people had been born.

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<sup>31</sup> Taken from the U.S. GLO Survey notes between 1804 - 1810 and cited by Winstanley Briggs, “Les Pays des Illinois,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. 47(1), January, 1990, p. 38.

<sup>32</sup> See “Extract from the Assessment of 1808,” *History of Randolph, Monroe, and Perry Counties*, p. 98.

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