French Louisiana

Chapter Preview

People

Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville; Alonso Álvarez de Pineda; Sieur de Sauvole; Antoine Crozat; Antoine de la Mothe, Sieur de Cadillac; Louis Juchereau de St. Denis; John Law; Étienne de Périer; Pierre François de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil; Louis Billouart, Chevalier de Kerlerec

Places

Fort St. Louis, Matagorda Bay; Ship Island; Fort Maurepas; English Turn; Fort Mississippi; Fort Louis, Mobile Bay; Fort St. Jean Baptiste (Natchitoches); Poste du Rapides (Alexandria)

Terms

mouth, commandant, commissary-commissioner, proprietorship, indigo, calumet, joint-stock company, Mississippi Bubble, concession, casket girls, Code Noir

Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne was born in Montreal, in today's Canada, in 1680. He was the twelfth born in a family that had thirteen children in all. Like his father and his brothers, Jean-Baptiste had a title that indicated he had high social status. He inherited the title, Sieur de Bienville, at the age of ten when an older brother died. Many of Bienville's brothers distinguished themselves in the French military service. Following that family tradition, Bienville entered the navy at age twelve. By age seventeen he had taken part in many military engagements. In some of them he fought alongside his older brother, Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville.

In 1698, Iberville asked Bienville to join him on a voyage to France. King Louis XIV had decided to establish a settlement on the lands La Salle had claimed for France and named Louisiana in 1682. After receiving instructions from the king, the brothers left France and began the journey to Louisiana. Iberville commanded a fleet of four ships with about two hundred men on board. After stopping in the Caribbean to resupply, the brothers and their crew arrived off the Gulf Coast in January 1699.

Internet Activity

Vocabulary Matching

Iberville returned to France three times in the colony's earliest years. During his third trip, France declared war and Iberville was ordered to defend French colonies in the Caribbean. He died of yellow fever in 1706 while in Havana, Cuba. His death left the Louisiana colony's future uncertain.

After his brother's death, Bienville became the leader of Louisiana. He played a leading and sometimes controversial role in the first four decades of the colony's existence. He was the founder of New Orleans and is remembered as the Father of Louisiana.

Bienville had both successes and failures as a leader, but many of the colony's problems were beyond his control. Sometimes problems arose because France, England, and Spain were competing to establish colonies. Other difficulties were caused by a lack of support and supplies, or they came in the form of warfare between the colonists and Native American tribes.

In this chapter, you will learn about the early exploration and settlement of Louisiana, the administrative schemes France tried in hopes of making the colony an economic success, and the various people who made up the founding generation of the Louisiana colony.

Background: Map of *Amerique Septentrionale* (North America) from 1650. **Above Right:** This statue of Bienville, the Father of Louisiana, is located in the State Capitol.

Signs of the Times

Literature

Robinson Crusoe (1719), *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), and *Aesop's Fables* were popular books for parents to read to their children. The most widely read book among colonists was the Bible.

Music

Two of the most prominent musicians of the Baroque period were Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel. Both composers were born in Germany in 1685, the year La Salle mistakenly landed his fleet at Matagorda Bay. Bach completed his Brandenburg Concertos in 1721, the same year the Mississippi Bubble burst. Handel composed his beloved oratorio *Messiah* in 1742, while Bienville was officially the governor of Louisiana.

Science and Inventions

In 1705, English astronomer Edward Halley used Isaac Newton's laws of motion to predict the return of the comet that was later named for him. Halley's Comet has returned every 75-76 years, just as predicted. It is due to come around again in 2061.

Frenchman Denis Papin invented the first steam engine in 1707.

Kings of France

During the time of French exploration and settlement of Louisiana, France was ruled by kings named Louis. Louis XIV, at age 4, succeeded his father Louis XIII to the throne of France in 1643 and was king for 72 years—longer than any European king in history. He outlived both his son and grandson, so his great-grandson Louis XV succeeded him when Louis XIV died in 1715.

Enlightened Thinking

The eighteenth century was the time of the Enlightenment, a period in Europe when many writers and thinkers began to question established beliefs like the authority of kings or the church in favor of reason and scientific proof. The idea gradually developed that everyone was of equal value and had equal rights. These beliefs influenced the writers of our Declaration of Independence.

Royal Fashion

Louis XIV was known for the splendor of his clothing and shoes. Louis favored high heels, which, in turn, made them very popular among both men and women at that time. In 1701, artist Hyacinthe Rigaud painted a portrait of Louis in his coronation costume, which included furs, silk stockings, and red high heels. The king liked the portrait so much he requested a second copy be made.

Timeline
1680-1760

Antoine de la Mothe, Sieur de Cadillac, established Detroit - **1701**

Iberville died of yellow fever in Havana, Cuba - **1706**

English colonies North and South Carolina became separate colonies - **1710**

King Louis XIV died; Duke of Orleans became regent for Louis XV - **1715**

George Washington was born in the English colony of Virginia - **1732**

Georgia, the last of the 13 English colonies, was founded - **1732**

Captain Vitus Bering, sailing for Russia, discovered Alaska - **1741**

1680

1682 - La Salle reached mouth of Mississippi River; claimed Louisiana for France

1687 - La Salle was ambushed and murdered by his men

1689 - Spanish located the site of the long-abandoned Fort St. Louis near Matagorda Bay

1699 - Iberville arrived on the Gulf Coast; established a temporary settlement at Ship Island Iberville reached the mouth of the Mississippi River; named the location Point Mardi Gras

1699 - French built Fort Maurepas on the Gulf Coast; Iberville returned to France, leaving Sauvole in charge

1699 - Bienville rebuffed English ship at English Turn on the Mississippi River

1700

1700 - Iberville and Bienville selected a site for Fort Mississippi

1701 - Sauvole died; Bienville assumed command of Louisiana colony

1701 - Louisiana capital moved to Fort Louis on Mobile Bay

1712 - Antoine Crozat accepted proprietorship of Louisiana

1713 - Cadillac became the first official governor of Louisiana

1714 - Fort St. Jean Baptiste (Natchitoches) established

1716 - First slaves arrived in colony

1717 - Crozat's proprietorship ended; company era began

1718 - John Law created the Company of the Indies

1718 - Bienville founded New Orleans

1719 - First large shipments of African slaves arrived

1720

1721 - Mississippi Bubble burst

1722 - Baton Rouge established

1723 - Hurricane devastated New Orleans

1723 - Poste du Rapides (Alexandria) established

1724 - Bienville recalled to France; stayed 7 years

1727 - Ursuline nuns arrived to work in a hospital and educate girls

1728 - Casket girls arrived

1729 - Natchez uprising

1731 - Louisiana returned to control of king

1732 - Bienville became official governor of Louisiana

1736 - Chickasaw War

1740 - Bienville signed peace treaty with Chickasaw

1740

1743 - Bienville resigned as governor; departed for France

1743 - Marquis de Vaudreuil became governor

1753 - Louis Billouart, Chevalier de Kerlerec, became governor

**1760**

Section 1

Exploration and Early Settlements

As you read, look for

▶ triumph and tragedy for French explorer La Salle;

▶ exploration and settlement by brothers Iberville and Bienville;

▶ relocation of the main settlement from Fort Maurepas to Mobile Bay;

▶ Bienville's challenges after his brother's death;

▶ terms: mouth, commandant, commissary-commissioner.

a-z GLOSSARY

The first Europeans to see and travel across the lands that became Louisiana were Spaniards. In 1519, Alonso Álvarez de Pineda led an expedition to map the southeastern coast of North America where it borders the Gulf of Mexico. Twenty years later, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto led six hundred men on an expedition across most of the states that make up the modern South. When de Soto died of fever along the banks of the Mississippi River in 1542, the surviving members of his expedition sailed down the river and returned to Spanish territory in Mexico. Their detailed reports of what they saw created little interest on the part of the Spanish, whose priority was finding gold and silver. Since de Soto's expedition found none, Spanish interest in the region declined.
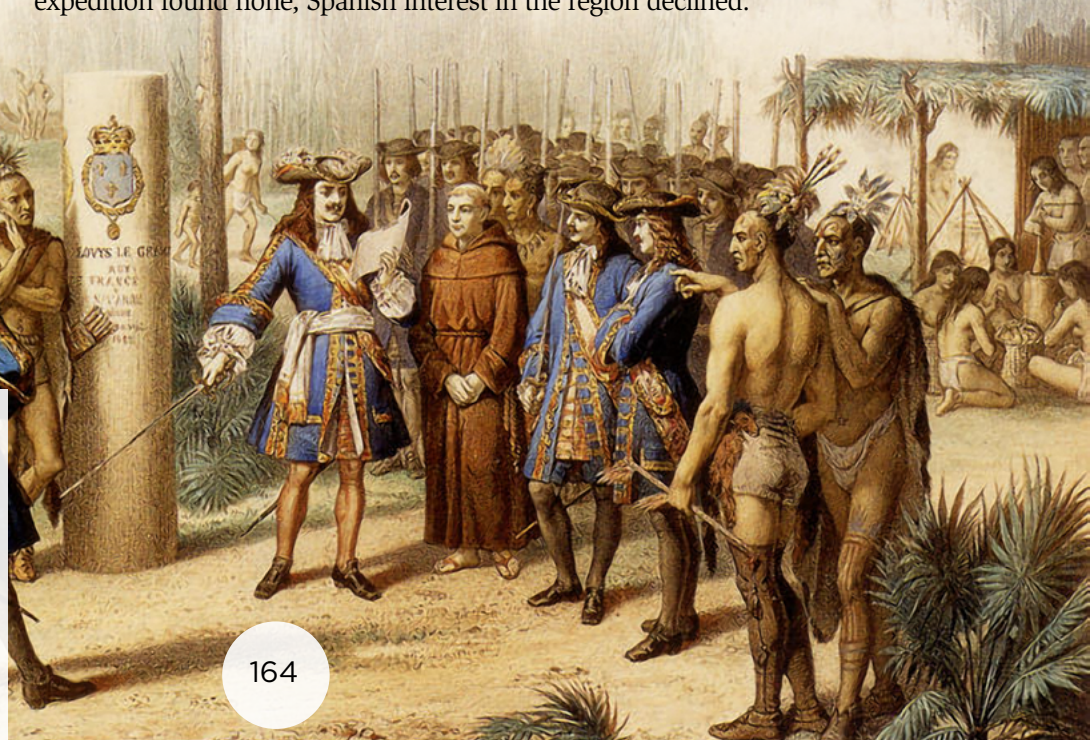
Above: An engraving of René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle. **Right:** Lithograph showing La Salle "taking possession of Louisiana and the River Mississippi in the name of Louis XIV." Both of these artworks were created in the nineteenth century.

La Salle's Return and Death

The first French explorers to arrive in Louisiana were led by René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle. He hoped to locate a trade route that would connect French territory in Canada with trade routes to Asia. He did not achieve that goal, but La Salle did make it to the **mouth** (the place where a stream enters a larger body of water) of the great river now called the Mississippi. On April 9, 1682, La Salle claimed the surrounding region for France and named it Louisiana in honor of his king, Louis XIV. A small celebration accompanied the event and included a religious service with prayers and songs sung in Latin. La Salle placed a large log on the spot to mark where the claim had been made official. Today that site, located in modern-day Plaquemines Parish, is marked by a monument that tells the story of the colony's origins.

La Salle returned to France, where he received royal sponsorship for establishing a permanent settlement in Louisiana. He was given a small fleet of ships, and three hundred settlers accompanied him on his return journey. Unfortunately, La Salle's second expedition ended in failure. For unknown reasons, but probably due to errors in navigation, La Salle and his crew failed to locate the entrance to the Mississippi River. Instead, the fleet sailed all the way to Texas and came ashore at Matagorda Bay, where La Salle established a temporary base he called Fort St. Louis.

He then set out on foot to try to locate the river. During that difficult journey, some of La Salle's men became angry and planned to kill him. They carried out their plan by ambushing and murdering him on March 19, 1687. Only a handful of the people who accompanied La Salle on his second expedition survived. In 1689, the Spanish, who were concerned about rumors of a French settlement in territory they claimed, located the site of Fort St. Louis. The fort had long been abandoned. The few survivors the Spanish found were orphaned French children who had been taken in by local Native American tribes.

LaSalle's Ship

Lagniappe

In 1996, one of La Salle's sunken ships, *La Belle*, was discovered in Matagorda Bay, about halfway between today's cities of Galveston and Corpus Christi, Texas. An excavation produced the hull of the ship, cannons, glass beads, bells, pottery, and even the skeleton of a crew member. From 1999 to 2002, archaeologists excavated Fort St. Louis and found cannons, musket balls, gun flints, pottery, coins, and many other items.

Iberville and Bienville

Twelve years passed between the time of La Salle's death and the next attempt to establish a Louisiana colony. The French were finally driven to action by the fear that their two most serious rivals, England and Spain, would establish permanent settlements near the Mississippi River before they did. Those concerns were justified. Spain had already begun to establish a fort and settlement at Pensacola Bay. Louis XIV gave royal support for the settlement of Louisiana to Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, in 1698.

Iberville's Initial Voyage

Iberville, accompanied by his brother Bienville, commanded a fleet of four ships that left France in October 1698. After a stop for supplies in the Caribbean, Iberville and his men arrived on the Gulf Coast and landed briefly near Pensacola in January 1699. Sailing westward along the coast, Iberville established a temporary settlement on an island off the coast of Biloxi Bay in today's state of Mississippi, which he named Ship Island. Iberville then set off to find the Mississippi River.

Using information provided by Native Americans, Iberville and his men reached the mouth of the Mississippi River on March 2, 1699. The following day, Iberville named the location of their first camp Point Mardi Gras, because they reached it on the date of that Catholic holiday. Iberville and his men then explored the river as far as modern-day Pointe Coupee Parish before splitting into two groups and returning to Ship Island by two separate routes.

MAP 6.1

North America, 1700

Map Skill: What do the nine cities/forts in French territory have in common?

Legend:
- British territory
- French territory
- Spanish territory

Iberville and the Mississippi River

Iberville's Explorations

Right: These views of West and East Ship Island before and after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 show how exposed these low-lying islands are to storms.

Henri de Tonti

Henri de Tonti was born in Italy about 1650 but moved with his family to France as a child. He entered the French military in his teens and lost one of his hands in an explosion during a naval battle. Tonti replaced the hand with an iron hook, which earned him the nickname the "Iron Hand." Tonti traveled to New France in 1678 with René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, and was also with him on the voyage down the Mississippi in 1682. When La Salle returned to France, Tonti stayed and continued exploring the lower Mississippi valley. Before leaving Louisiana, Tonti left a letter for La Salle with a tribe near the Mississippi River. La Salle never returned to Louisiana, but the letter was given to Bienville in 1699 during the initial French expeditions to explore the river. The letter provided proof to Iberville and Bienville that this was the river La Salle had found and the area he had named Louisiana. Later, Tonti himself returned to the Gulf Coast. He assisted Bienville in the early years of colonial settlement and was effective at maintaining good relationships with Native American tribes. He died of yellow fever near Mobile in 1704.
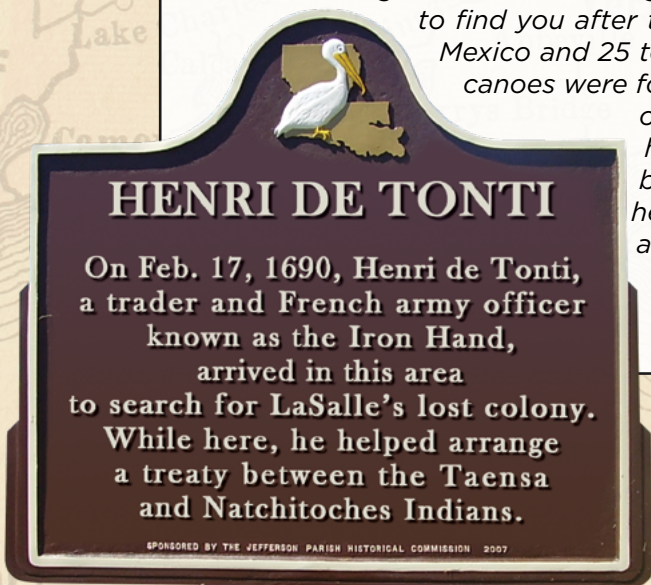
The following is a translation of part of the letter Tonti left for La Salle:

Dear Sir:

When I found that the post on which you set up the arms of the King had been knocked down by driftwood, I had others erected on this side, about 7 leagues above the sea; and I left a letter in a tree close by, in a hole on the back side, with a notice above it. The Quynypyssa having danced the calumet for me, I left this letter with them, to assure you of my very humble respects and to let you know that, acting on information I received at the fort—that you had lost a vessel and that Indians had looted your goods and you were fighting with them—upon this information I came downriver with twenty-five Frenchmen, five Chaouenois and five Illynoys. All the nations have danced the calumet for me. These are people that have feared us in the extreme since you destroyed this village. I shall end by telling you that I am greatly grieved that we are going back, having suffered the misfortune of failing to find you after two canoes skirted the coast for 30 leagues toward Mexico and 25 toward the Florida Cape. For want of fresh water the canoes were forced to turn back. Although we have heard no news of you and have seen no signs of you, I am not without hope that God will give you marked success in your business and your undertaking. This I wish with all my heart. You do not have a more faithful servant than I, and I am giving up everything to look for you...

Now that you have read his letter, what evidence do you have that Tonti was La Salle's "faithful servant"?

HENRI DE TONTI

On Feb. 17, 1690, Henri de Tonti, a trader and French army officer known as the Iron Hand, arrived in this area to search for LaSalle's lost colony. While here, he helped arrange a treaty between the Taensa and Natchitoches Indians.

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Left: This historical marker is located in Natchitoches Parish.
Above: Henri de Tonti.

The Founding of Fort Maurepas

Although the French were determined to control the mouth of the Mississippi River, Iberville decided that the nearby Gulf Coast was a more promising place to locate his first settlement. The French began building a fortification near the site of present-day Ocean Springs, Mississippi. They named the settlement Fort Maurepas in honor of the Comte de Maurepas, who served as secretary of state to the king of France. Seventy soldiers and twelve cannons were stationed at the fort.

In May 1699, Iberville returned to France. He planned to bring back supplies and additional settlers. He particularly hoped to return with some French women because all of the members of the first expedition were men. He left a lieutenant named Sieur de Sauvole in charge at Fort Maurepas.

Bienville's Explorations

In his brother's absence, Bienville continued to explore the river and its surroundings. He encountered many Native Americans and began to learn their languages. He also unexpectedly encountered an English ship sailing up the Mississippi River in August 1699. Bienville suspected that the English were there to scout sites for a possible settlement. Because he knew this was a threat to French plans, he acted boldly in response. Bienville told the English that France had already claimed the river and the surrounding regions, and he ordered them to depart. He also told them that there was a large fleet of French ships and troops nearby who were ready to attack if the English did not follow his orders. Bienville was bluffing, so he was very lucky that the English believed him and sailed back downriver and out into the Gulf of Mexico. The spot on the river where this event took place was named English Turn in honor of Bienville's success. The event convinced Bienville that the French had to build a fort on the banks of the river to protect the French claim. When Iberville returned in January of 1700, he and Bienville settled on a location fifty-four miles above the mouth of the river and named it Fort Mississippi.

Lagniappe

Bienville was only eighteen years old when he reached the Gulf Coast. His brother, Iberville, was thirty-seven.

Fort Maurepas

Bienville

Below: Visitors to Ocean Springs, Mississippi, can tour this reconstruction of Fort Maurepas.

The Move to Mobile Bay

Iberville returned to France for a second time in May 1700, leaving Sauvole in charge once again. When Sauvole died of fever in the summer of 1701, Bienville took command of the Louisiana colony. When Iberville returned with supplies and another group of settlers in early 1702, he made Bienville's authority over the colony official. Iberville and Bienville also joined forces to move the main settlement from Fort Maurepas to a new and more favorable site. The soil around Fort Maurepas had proved too sandy for farming, and the site had flooded more than once. The brothers situated the second Louisiana settlement near Mobile Bay in today's state of Alabama. After overseeing the construction of a settlement named Fort Louis, Iberville returned to France a third and final time in March 1702. He never returned to Louisiana. While he was in France, the country declared war and Iberville was drafted into military service. He was ordered to the Caribbean to protect French colonies. While in Havana, Cuba, Iberville contracted yellow fever and died.

Above: Fort Maurepas Park has been built on the site of the French fort established in 1699 by Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville.

Map legend:
- La Salle, 1682
- Tonti, 1688–1689
- Iberville, 1699
- Iberville, 1700
- Bienville, 1700
- St. Denis, 1714–1716

MAP 6.2
French Explorers

Map Skill: Which of the explorers included on the map traveled the furthest west?

Administrative Challenges

When Bienville learned of his brother's death, he assumed responsibility for the Louisiana colony. Bienville had his hands full securing enough food and supplies for the colonists. Because the soil around the first settlements was not productive, the colony was dependent on food supplied by France. Those shipments were irregular and rarely had enough supplies to keep the colonists well fed. Very often the colonists relied on friendly Indians who would sell a part of their crops in exchange for trade goods. Those trade goods were important, not only to buy food, but also because the Native Americans considered them to be an indication of good will. When the French did not bring them annual gifts, the native people considered this a sign of hostility. Bienville worked hard to maintain peaceful relations with neighboring tribes. One way he did this was by learning their customs as well as their languages. He also sent settlers to live with different tribes for periods of time so they, too, could communicate skillfully with the native people.

Keeping peace within the settlement also proved to be a challenge. Many of the colonists complained about Bienville's leadership. Some of them put their complaints into detailed letters they sent back to France. The way France organized the colony's governance contributed to these disagreements. After Iberville's death, the French court gave Bienville the title of **commandant** (officer in command). He felt slighted because he was not named governor, but the title of commandant did give him control over military and civilian affairs. However, the colony's economic affairs were controlled by a separate **commissary-commissioner** (business manager). This division of governing authority resulted in near-constant disagreements throughout the French colonial period.

Bienville and the first commissary-commissioner who was sent to Louisiana fought constantly. An influential priest made the situation even worse when he joined forces with the business manager and wrote detailed letters questioning Bienville's leadership. These events led to an investigation of Bienville, who had to devote precious time and energy to defending himself. After a new commissary-commissioner arrived to hear the evidence, Bienville was cleared of wrongdoing. He remained as commandant until a new governor was appointed in 1713. Bienville remained on the scene, but many other men also entered the colony's leadership struggles at this time.

Top: This Alexandre de Batz painting is called *Images of Savages of Several Nations at New Orleans*, 1735.
Middle: Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville. **Bottom:** Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: mouth, commandant, commissary-commissioner.
2. Why is a certain location on the Mississippi River known as "English Turn"?
3. In what ways did Bienville try to maintain peaceful relations with the Native Americans?

Section 2

Governing from Afar

As you read, look for

▶ the failure of mercantilism in the colony of Louisiana;

▶ successes and failures of Antoine Crozat's proprietorship;

▶ how the company era produced a ruinous stock bubble;

▶ the restoration of royal rule, and the final days of Bienville in Louisiana;

▶ terms: **proprietorship, indigo, calumet, joint-stock company, Mississippi Bubble.**

a-z GLOSSARY

Louisiana's origins were based on the search for a new trade route to the East, perhaps to China or India, which the French hoped would lead to riches. When that did not turn out to be the case, France did not give up the dream of making Louisiana a colony that could contribute to their national wealth. At this time, European powers that established colonies in the New World implemented the economic system called mercantilism. Mercantilist theory required that the colonies of a given nation trade only with the mother country. The colony's role in the economic system was to provide valuable raw materials back to the founding nation. Ideally, the European nations hoped to find precious metals like gold and silver. Failing this, they hoped to profit from the raw materials they found. In Louisiana, the earliest and most profitable raw materials shipped back to France included timber and animal pelts. Despite these exports, the Louisiana colony was not making a profit. The crown decided to try something new.

Attempts to Make the Louisiana Colony Profitable

Below: Louis XIV, King of France, ruled from a magnificent palace near Paris called Versailles.

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Cadillac

Proprietorship

France was experiencing severe economic problems because of high royal expenditures and years of warfare with Spain and England. The Louisiana colony quickly became a financial burden rather than a profit-making enterprise. Even so, the French knew they needed to maintain the Louisiana claim to keep the English and Spanish from establishing colonies there. King Louis XIV settled on the idea of a **proprietorship** (the system of letting an individual businessman take control of the colony in the hopes that he could make it profitable). The arrangement offered a contract to one person who assumed responsibility for the colony. In return for economic control and a large portion of any profits he could make, the proprietor agreed to send settlers to Louisiana, provide supplies for the colony, and make certain that French laws were enacted and observed.

A French nobleman named Antoine Crozat agreed to accept the proprietorship of Louisiana in late 1712. Crozat had no intention of going to Louisiana himself. Instead, he appointed a colonial governor who he believed had the ability to make Louisiana profitable. His choice was an experienced colonial administrator named Antoine de la Mothe, Sieur de Cadillac. Cadillac had migrated from France to Canada in the hopes of making his fortune. He served in the French army at several colonial outposts and established a city he named Detroit in 1701.

Bienville transferred authority to Cadillac in 1713 and turned his attention to military affairs. Cadillac had many successes as the first person to officially hold the title of governor of Louisiana. The expansion of settlements to different parts of the colony is his most lasting contribution. By this time, the main Louisiana settlement had shifted from Fort Louis to the nearby site of present-day Mobile, Alabama. But Cadillac thought settlement should be expanded further upriver and in the direction of Spanish settlements to the west.

Above: Antoine de la Mothe, Sieur de Cadillac. **Right:** Artist Hyacinthe Rigaud painted this portrait of Louis XIV wearing his coronation robes.

St. Denis and the Founding of Natchitoches

Cadillac ordered a colonist named Louis Juchereau de St. Denis to establish an outpost on the banks of the Red River. In 1714, St. Denis established Fort St. Jean Baptiste, which became the city of Natchitoches, named for a nearby Caddo tribe. Under the system of mercantilism, it was technically illegal for French settlers to trade with the Spanish, but the realities of receiving so few supplies actually encouraged it. St. Denis organized an expedition into nearby Spanish territory in the hopes of establishing informal trading relationships with Spanish outposts. St. Denis had numerous adventures while in Spanish territory. At one point he was jailed. At another point the Spanish *viceroy* (the governor of a country or province who represents the king) in Mexico City ordered him to accompany a Spanish expedition to build forts along the border between Louisiana and Texas. St. Denis even married the granddaughter of a Spanish commandant.

In the course of his adventures, St. Denis established a trading relationship with Spanish outposts. The Spanish had horses and cattle to trade. The French offered supplies like guns, ammunition, knives, and medicine in return. The Spanish could pay for these items with silver, which the French greatly desired. This kind of irregular trade became a common feature of life in remote outposts like Natchitoches. It made some people like St. Denis quite wealthy. Illegal trade also began to take hold in the colony's main settlements in Biloxi and Mobile, although it was harder to accomplish there. When New Orleans was founded in 1718, it too became a site of extensive illegal trade.

Below: Monument to French colonial explorer Louis Juchereau de St. Denis in Natchitoches. **Bottom:** This reconstruction of Fort St. Jean Baptiste is located on Cane River Lake a few hundred yards from the original fort site. The reconstruction is based on original plans and extensive research in Louisiana, Canada, and France. The builders used local materials and many eighteenth-century construction methods.

LOUIS JUCHEREAU
DE ST. DENIS
1676 - 1744
In 1700 explored & established
trade with Natchitoches Indians
voyaging on Red River. In 1714
built a garrisoned post to repel
Spanish. Promoted trade,
Married in 1716

Natchitoches

FEATURE

Natchitoches: The Oldest City in Louisiana

Have you ever wondered which city in Louisiana is the oldest? The answer is Natchitoches (pronounced Nak'-uh-tish), which celebrated its 300th birthday in 2014!

Louis Juchereau de St. Denis founded Natchitoches in 1714 as a trade outpost. Due to its good location on the Red River, Natchitoches became an important trade and farming center, surrounded by plantations. When the Louisiana Purchase was made in 1803, Natchitoches was the oldest city included in the territory.

Today, Natchitoches is famous for more than just being the oldest city in Louisiana. Several movies have been filmed there including The Horse Soldiers (1959) and, most famously, Steel Magnolias (1989). There is even a Walk of Honor in Natchitoches that has marble fleurs-de-lis in the sidewalk to commemorate famous movie stars, athletes, and other people who have had a significant impact on the city. In addition to being a popular location for movies, Natchitoches hosts a famous Christmas festival every year that includes over 300,000 lights!

If you visit Natchitoches today, there are plenty of opportunities to explore the city's history. In fact, there is a replica of the 1732 French Fort St. Jean Baptiste, which will give you a look at how French soldiers lived during the colonial period. Natchitoches itself is one of only two National Landmark Historic Districts in Louisiana.

Natchitoches is known as the "Bed and Breakfast Capital of Louisiana." There are over thirty-five bed and breakfast homes where you can stay while visiting the Landmark District, shopping, and eating the city's famous meat pies! After viewing the French-style architecture in the city, you can visit the Cane River Creole National Historical Park. Two large plantations, Oakland Plantation and Magnolia Plantation, are a part of the park and open to visitors. What do you think would be the most interesting thing to do in Natchitoches?

🔗 Red River

🔗 Cane River

Problems in the Colony

The growth of illegal trade was not Cadillac's main problem. In fact, in some cases, as with St. Denis, he quietly encouraged it. Yet he also continued to seek legal ways to make the colony profitable. Cadillac was the first to promote the cultivation of tobacco and **indigo** (a plant that is used to make blue dye). He hoped he could sell indigo back to France for profit. He and his first commissary-commissioner also encouraged the colonists to establish small farms to increase the supply of locally produced food. Many colonists were willing to take grants of land, but most of them had no agricultural experience and had little success as farmers.

At first, Cadillac made efforts to work well with his business manager and with Bienville. Over time, however, intense infighting developed among the men. Many of these disagreements were caused by the overlapping areas of authority each man claimed. Cadillac also had a reputation for being blunt and lacking tact. Unlike Bienville, who had gone to great effort to learn native languages and customs, Cadillac considered the Indians his inferiors. Whether he meant to or not, he often insulted or offended tribal leaders. On one occasion, his refusal to smoke the **calumet** (a ceremonial pipe) caused great offense. The Native Americans interpreted Cadillac's refusal not only as a sign of disrespect but also as an insult that was so serious it could lead to war.

As with Bienville before him, colonists and other leaders wrote numerous letters of complaint back to France. In 1716, Crozat brought Cadillac back to France and sent a second governor to replace him, but he served less than a year before Crozat surrendered the unprofitable colony back to the crown.

Crozat's opportunity to rid himself of the colony arose when Louis XIV died in 1715. The great-grandson who would become Louis XV was only five years old at the time. Until he could perform his royal duties, an advisory council called the regency ruled for him. The Duke of Orleans led the regency council. When Crozat asked to be relieved of his proprietorship, the regency and colonial council agreed. In late 1717, Crozat's five-year proprietorship ended, and France was left looking for yet another way to administer Louisiana.
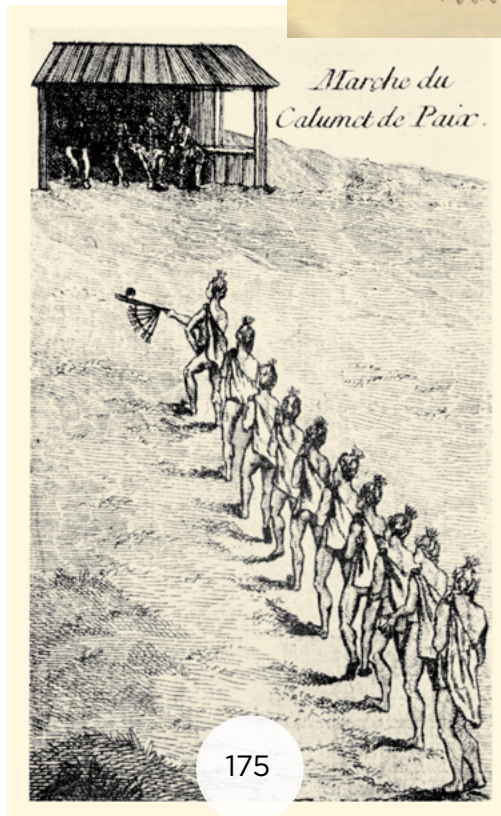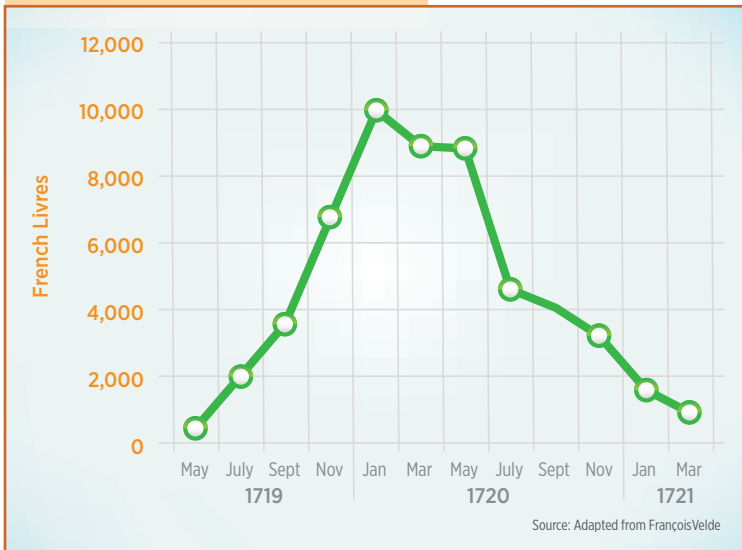

Top and Middle: The indigo plant. **Bottom:** This Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz drawing shows the *March of the Calumet of Peace.*

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The Company Era

Crozat's financial losses in Louisiana were well known, and the regency had difficulty finding a single proprietor willing to risk his fortune. Instead, the crown, in conjunction with a financier named John Law, devised a joint-stock company to take control of Louisiana. A **joint-stock company** was an early form of the modern corporation in which many people invested by buying stock. John Law was a Scotsman who had settled in France and had impressed the Duke of Orleans with his financial knowledge. The regency gave him permission to organize the first Bank of France in 1716. The following year, Law created the Company of the West to take charge of the Louisiana colony. By 1718, Law had created a second company named the Company of the Indies. Many people just called it the Mississippi Company. This new company absorbed the Company of the West and, in the process, took responsibility for Louisiana.

A Bursting Bubble

Law planned to get the funds to develop Louisiana by selling shares in these joint-stock companies. In its early years, the Company of the Indies generated large profits, and many people wanted to invest. Their reasons for doing so had little to do with Louisiana itself. The desire to get rich quick created a *mania* (excessive enthusiasm) for buying shares in the company. The price of the shares began to rise along with the number of investors. The rapid rise in the value of the company's stocks created a nickname for the process. It was called the **Mississippi Bubble**. As long as that bubble of investors continued to expand, profits rose. Early investors made very large profits. But as expenses in Louisiana grew, it became hard to maintain profits for the company's stockholders. By 1720, it became difficult just to pay back initial investments. Rumors of financial difficulties grew, and worried investors began to demand payments in cash. John Law and others had to admit that the company did not have the funds on hand to pay its investors, let alone to continue investing so heavily in the development of Louisiana. Stock prices began to fall *precipitously* (steeply). By the end of 1721, shares in the Company of the Indies were all but worthless. In others words, the Mississippi Bubble had burst. Many investors, including John Law himself, lost their personal fortunes. Law had to flee France in disgrace, and Louisiana's reputation suffered.

Figure 6.1
Mississippi Company Share Price

The price for each share of Mississippi Company stock rose rapidly in 1719. What was the cost in January 1720? What was the value one year later? How might investors react to this situation?

Source: Adapted from François Velde

Top: John Law. **Right:** Philippe, Duke of Orleans, Regent of Louis XV.

The Founding of New Orleans

The Company of the Indies was reorganized after Law's failure and remained in charge of the colony throughout the 1720s. During those years, the population of Louisiana grew slowly, and important developments took place. In 1718, Law and others had allowed Bienville to fulfill one of his dreams and establish a city on the banks of the Mississippi River. Bienville believed that in time it would become a bustling city and thriving port. Bienville named the city New Orleans in honor of the Duke of Orleans. Despite Bienville's grand dreams, the first months and years of the city's existence were difficult. In 1723, a great hurricane destroyed the city's crops and most of its buildings.

Though its progress was slow, New Orleans eventually became the thriving, wealthy city Bienville hoped. He, however, did not fare so well in the short term. The same kind of bureaucratic infighting that had existed in the early years continued. Accusations of mismanagement resulted in Bienville's recall to France in 1724. He would remain in France for the next seven years defending his actions.

Territorial Expansion

In Bienville's absence, the territory continued to expand. The company had established an outpost in 1722 called Baton Rouge. The following year, company employees began developing a post on the Red River named Poste du Rapides. In time it would become the city of Alexandria. Territorial expansion was a sign of progress, but it also created further tensions with Native Americans.

As we learned in Chapter 5, French attempts to order the Natchez off their land so company officers could turn the area into a tobacco plantation resulted in the Natchez uprising of 1729. Although the Natchez succeeded in their surprise attack on the colonists, their victory was brief. In the next two years, French soldiers pursued and defeated the remaining Natchez. The fear created by the Natchez massacre of settlers led many people to abandon their land claims and return to the safety of New Orleans.

Ten years after the Mississippi Bubble burst, the Company of the Indies returned the colony to the control of the king in 1731.

Lagniappe

Bienville's choice of a location for his city in the crescent (bend) of the Mississippi River gave New Orleans one of its nicknames, the "Crescent City."

Below: Plan (Map) of New Orleans dated 1722.

PLAN DE LA NOUVELLE ORLEANS
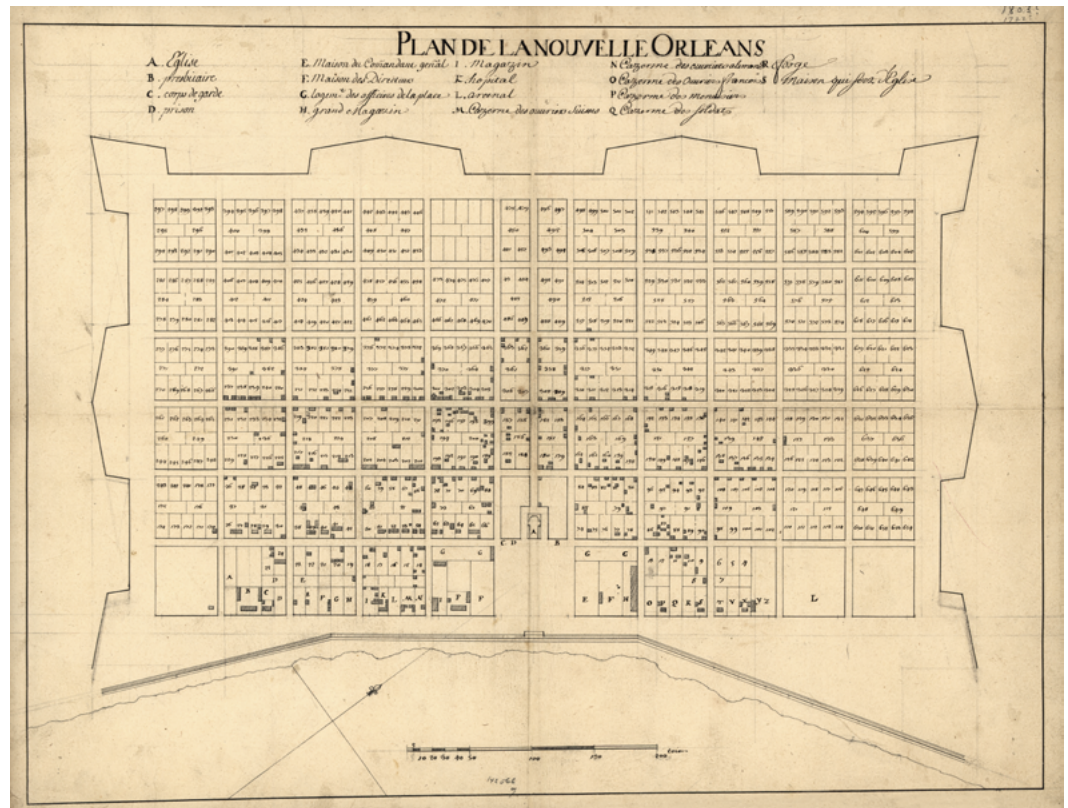
The Final Years of French Colonial Rule

Louis XV had been crowned king in 1722 at the age of twelve, but he had a series of advisers who continued to help him rule France. In 1732, Louis XV and his advisers asked Bienville to return to Louisiana once more—this time as the colony's official governor. Bienville saw this as a way to finally redeem his reputation. Louis XV and others saw Bienville as a good choice because of his first-hand knowledge of Louisiana and his expertise in dealing with the native people.

The Natchez uprising led to open warfare and damaged the colony's economic prospects. It had also upset alliances between the French and other tribes. For many years, the Choctaw had been allies of the French, but Governor Étienne de Périer, whose actions had started the Natchez uprising, had also upset the alliance with the Choctaw. Périer had named men he liked as tribal chiefs, and the tribe's real leaders did not like his interference. Bienville sought to improve the relationship between French settlers and the Choctaw on his return.

Trouble with the Chickasaw

The Choctaw had long been enemies of the Chickasaw, who were allies and trading partners with the English. The English and French, who were long-time rivals, tried to control the relationship between the Choctaw and Chickasaw each to their own advantage. The French knew that, if the Choctaw became allies with the Chickasaw, their loyalty could shift to the English. Additionally, the Chickasaw had taken in the few Natchez survivors who had escaped being killed or captured by the French.

Bienville demanded the return of the Natchez to the French. When the Chickasaw refused, Bienville began a military campaign against them. The French paid the Choctaw to fight the Chickasaw. The English entered the conflict on the side of the Chickasaw by giving them weapons and supplies. The French conducted military campaigns against the Chickasaw for several years with very little success. By 1740, Bienville signed a peace treaty with the Chickasaw, but neither side had achieved a clear victory.

Bienville's Final Departure

Bienville's only official term as governor of the colony ended without glory or the improvement of his reputation. At his own request, the French appointed a new governor, and Bienville departed Louisiana for France in 1743. Despite all the difficulties of his final years in the colony, Bienville certainly deserved the title Father of Louisiana. His older brother Iberville deserves the credit for leading the expedition that began the colony's first settlements. It was Bienville, however, who guided the colony in its most difficult early years, maintained a leadership role often without reward, and succeeded in founding New Orleans.

Natchez Uprising

Conflict with the Chickasaw

Above: Hyacinthe Rigaud painted Louis XV in his coronation robes in 1730, some eight years after he was crowned king in 1722 at age twelve.

The End of an Era

Two more governors oversaw the final years of French royal control. Pierre François de Rigaud, better known as the Marquis de Vaudreuil, was the governor who arrived to replace Bienville in 1743. During his nine-year *tenure* (term of office), Vaudreuil oversaw a peace settlement with the Chickasaw. Although New Orleans was still a rough frontier city, Vaudreuil and his wife tried to bring some of the lifestyle and glamour of Paris to the city. Madame Vaudreuil wore the latest French fashions, and the couple gave elaborate parties and balls that featured fine food, French wines, and French music and dancing. When Vaudreuil received the appointment to become governor of Canada in 1752, he arranged a grand party for the new governor of Louisiana.

Unlike Vaudreuil, Louis Billouart, Chevalier de Kerlerec, the final governor of the French period, was appointed because of his experience as a military leader. This was important because the final years of France's dominance of Louisiana were overshadowed by growing tensions with England. Kerlerec's main priority was to strengthen the defenses of the colony before open warfare broke out between the French and English in North America. As with all other governors before him, Kerlerec had problems managing the colony. Kerlerec even requested to be relieved of his governorship. Despite those requests, he remained governor of Louisiana until a new power took control of the colony in the 1760s.

During the colony's final years under French control, France went to war with England and, as in the past, was often unable or unwilling to provide enough goods and supplies to the colony. The colony had become a drain on the royal treasury, and life for the people in Louisiana continued to be hard. The economic system of mercantilism was a failure in Louisiana and what replaced it, from the French perspective, was probably even worse. Without regular supplies from France, the colonists had to find other ways to get the goods they needed. Just as St. Denis had done forty years earlier, French colonists resorted to trading with Spanish and, when necessary, even with English traders. This established a pattern of ignoring official orders from France when those orders did not meet the colonists' needs. Some historians have even called Louisiana a *rogue* (wayward, unlawful) colony because of this pattern of illegal trade and ignoring dictates from France.

Above: Louis Billouart, Chevalier de Kerlerec.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: proprietorship, indigo, joint-stock company.
2. Why did the Mississippi Bubble expand and then burst?
3. When was New Orleans founded, by whom, and for whom was it named?

Section 3

The Founding Generation

As you read, look for

▶ **the various groups who settled colonial Louisiana;**

▶ **the origin of the term "Creole";**

▶ **successes and failures of the founding generation;**

▶ **terms: concession, casket girls, Code Noir.**

a–z
GLOSSARY

Letter about Life in the Louisiana Colony

Convincing people to settle in Louisiana turned out to be extremely difficult. *Mortality* (death) rates for colonists were very high, and after the scandal of the Mississippi Bubble, many people blamed Louisiana for their financial losses. The numbers of Europeans who settled in Louisiana was quite small—remaining in the hundreds until the 1720s. Ultimately, a mixture of people from places in Africa, Germany, and the Caribbean joined with French colonists to create a diverse population.

The Diversity of Colonists

Louisiana's first French settlers were the members of Iberville's expedition. The group that arrived in 1699 was made up entirely of men. It included officers, soldiers, sailors, Canadians who had accompanied Iberville, pirates who joined the expedition when it stopped in the Caribbean to resupply, and a small group of laborers and cabin boys. The officers had the highest social rank, but no matter their social status, all of those first arrivals faced great difficulties in trying to establish the colony. The men were often hungry, and many died.

The colonial settlements grew slowly in the first years. By 1708, there were fewer than three hundred colonists. Many of those were in the settlements against their will, including about eighty Native Americans whom the French had bought or captured to use as an enslaved work force. By this time, there were also twenty-eight women and twenty-five children, but single men still far outnumbered families.

Below: *The Trapper and his Family* by Charles Deas.
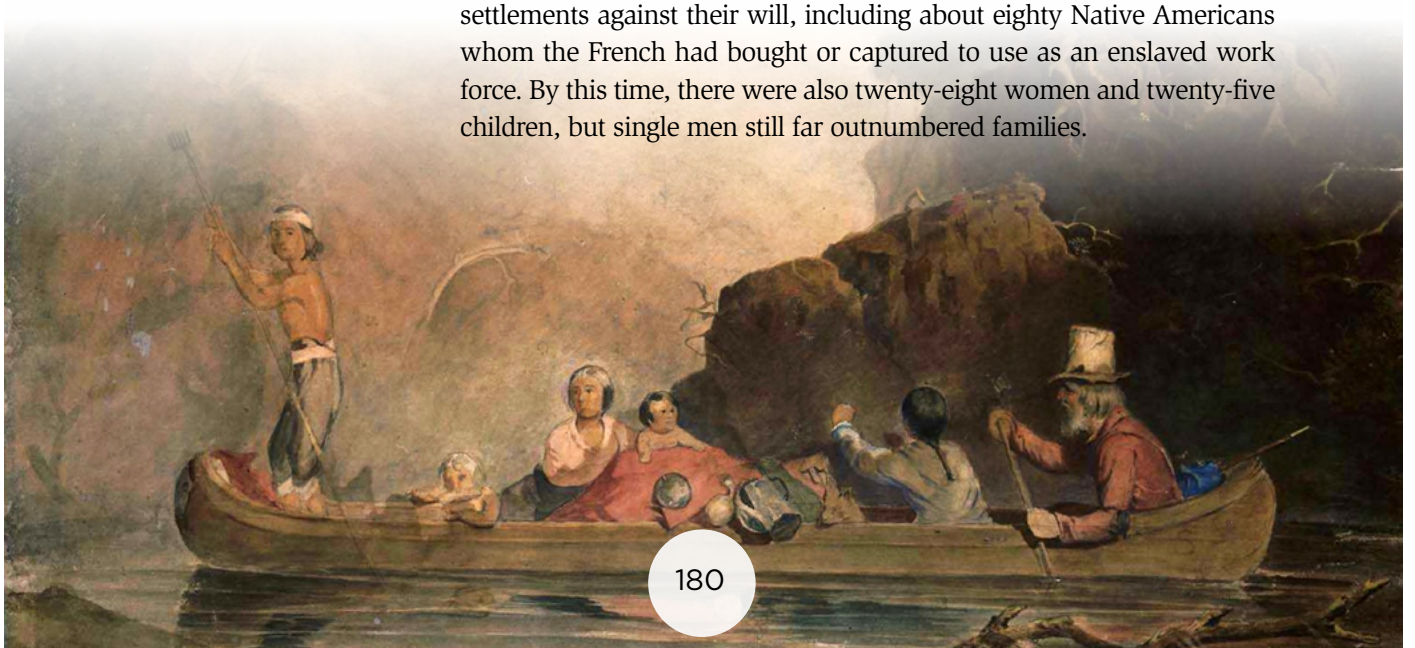
The French refused to count another group of men as regular settlers. They were the hunters and fur trappers who came and went at will. Many of them were from Canada and spent most of the year in the wilderness, often living among Native Americans. They generally came into the settlements only to trade their furs and buy supplies. The French called them *coureurs de bois*, which literally means "runners of the woods." The men who engaged in the same activities but who were willing to register with French officials were referred to as *voyageurs*. They, too, spent most of their time away and not in the settlements doing the day-to-day work of building a colony.

Proprietor Crozat had agreed to send thousands of settlers, but when the Company of the West took control in 1717, the population had only reached about five hundred. One of the promises John Law made was that he would increase the number of settlers by ten thousand. Law did not achieve this goal, but in the years between 1717 and 1721, more than seven thousand colonists were sent to Louisiana.

Their jobs and descriptions varied. Many of them were employees of the king or of the Company of the Indies. These colonists were often skilled laborers who could make maps or draw plans for the cities John Law planned to build. Other settlers came to work on the land. Some of them were offered **concessions** (grants of land). The concessionaires—people who agreed to take these lands and clear them for food and cash crops—needed workers to accomplish these goals. Concessionaires offered contracts to laborers called *engagés* (indentured servants). An engagé signed a contract agreeing to work for a concessionaire for a certain number of years in exchange for passage to Louisiana. Their lives were often hard, and many of them died before they could finish their periods of indenture.

John Law undertook one extremely controversial practice in order to send settlers to Louisiana. This involved sending people who were prisoners in France. Some of them were violent criminals, but others were simply homeless or in debt, both of which were crimes in France at this time. Whatever their crime, this group of settlers were called *forçats* because they were forced to come to Louisiana. Many *forçats* escaped before leaving France or died of disease while traveling to or shortly after arriving in the colony. Those who survived had very few useful skills. Colonial officials complained bitterly back to France about this practice, one writing, "What can one expect from a bunch of vagabonds and wrongdoers?" Sending *forçats* to Louisiana was also controversial in France. Some people took advantage of this forced migration to try to get rid of troublesome relatives. The practice stopped after just a few years.

Above: *The Voyageurs* by Charles Deas.

Lagniappe

The German Coast is often called by its French name, Côte des Allemands (Coast of the Germans). There is also a Lac (Lake) des Allemands and a Bayou des Allemands. The community of Des Allemands, home of the Louisiana Catfish Festival, has been designated the Catfish Capital of the Universe.

Lagniappe

The Ursuline Academy in New Orleans, founded in 1727 by the Ursuline nuns, is both the oldest continuously operating school for girls and the oldest Catholic school in the United States.
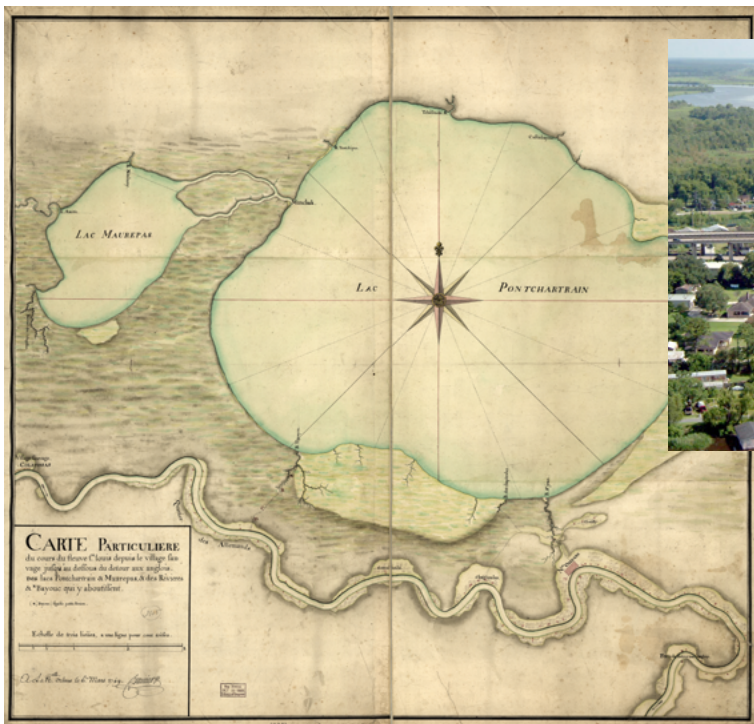
⊙ Creole Culture

Left: The German Coast is located west of Lake Pontchartrain. **Right:** Views of Bayou des Allemands.

John Law did oversee the arrival of several hundred productive colonists who came to Louisiana to flee warfare in their homelands. This group of Germans settled in areas outside New Orleans, particularly on the western end of Lake Pontchartrain in an area that was named the German Coast. These settlers used their agricultural experience to establish small farms. Their produce, which they carried to New Orleans to sell and trade, was a critical source of food in that city's early years.

By 1726, there were about two thousand people in the colony listed as citizens, but getting marriageable women to come to the rough outposts in Louisiana still proved difficult. The company engaged a group of Ursuline nuns to come in 1727 to work in a hospital and to teach. You read about one of them, Marie Madeleine Hachard, in the introduction to Chapter 2. The company also sent a small number of young, marriageable girls from France in 1728. The company gave each girl a small trunk filled with clothing and the kinds of goods needed to establish a household. Their trunks were called cassettes or caskets, so these young women were called *filles à la cassette* or **casket girls**.

Native Americans often escaped their French masters and did not prove to be the ideal work force colonial leaders had hoped. The colony needed another supply of laborers, and this led to the arrival of the first groups of Africans in 1716. Between 1719 and 1721, several large shipments of Africans arrived. Many of the people who were captured and then sold into slavery came from the west coast of Africa. Many of them had agricultural skills, including knowledge of how to grow rice. After the arrival of the Africans, rice came to be an important food source in the colony. By 1724, enslaved Africans had become the colony's main source of laborers. In that year, Bienville established a **Code Noir**, or Black Code. This set of laws regulated the behavior of slaves and laid out rules for their masters.

The Rise of Creole Culture

These were the people who made up the founding generation of Louisiana. Whenever a child was born in the colony, that person was called a Creole. The Creole generation grew slowly but steadily. By the time French control of Louisiana came to an end, the population had grown to between six thousand and seven thousand people, many of them Creoles—people born in Louisiana. It would be this generation of Louisiana Creoles who would interact with Louisiana's second colonial master, Spain.

The French colonial period had its share of successes and failures. Although there were administrative failures and economic losses, in just over sixty years the French had begun to settle the vast territorial claim of Louisiana. Despite severe difficulties in the first two decades, small numbers of settlers survived, built homes, and began families. Some like St. Denis established thriving farms or trading operations and began to prosper. France did not profit in the way a few individuals did, but the first generation of free people born in the Louisiana colony saw themselves as culturally French. The establishment of a durable French cultural identity in Louisiana was an important French success. When the colony was given to Spain, the people's loyalty to France led to protests among many members of Louisiana's founding generation. It is to that set of events and to the period of Spanish colonial rule that we turn next.

Lagniappe

Although greatly favoring the masters, Bienville's Code Noir did provide some protections for slaves. It prohibited the separation of husbands and wives and the separation of children under fourteen from their mothers.
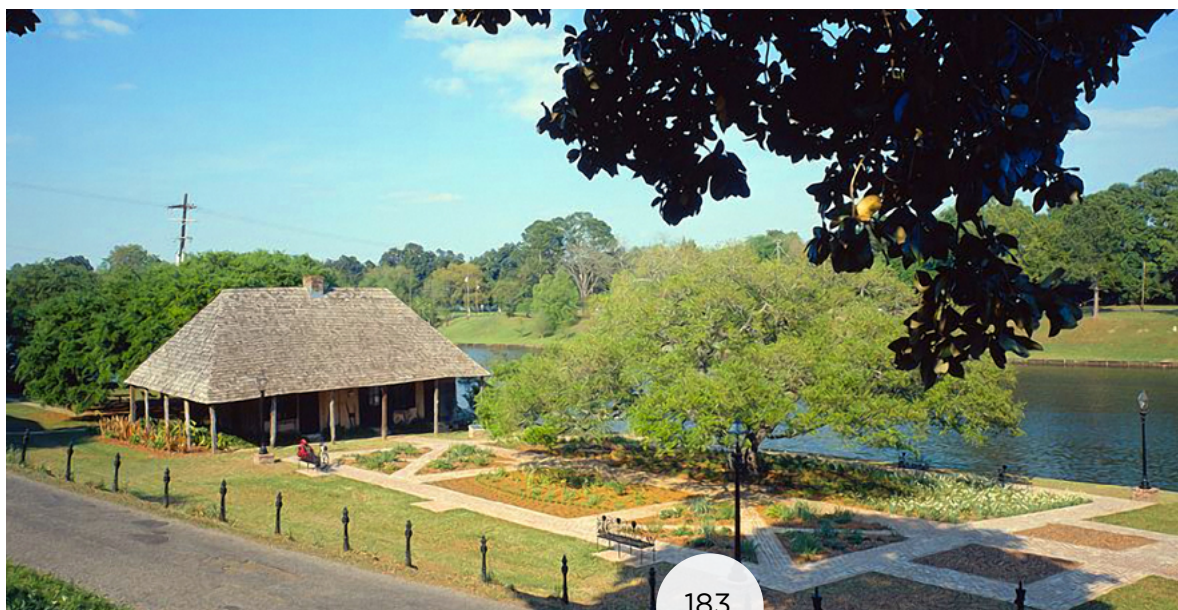
Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: concession, casket girls, Code Noir.
2. Who were the forçats, and why was their relocation to Louisiana controversial?
3. What useful agricultural skill did slaves bring with them from Africa?

Early Settlers of St. Landry Parish

Who Am I?

Below: Roque House in Natchitoches is a fine example of French Creole architecture.

Chapter Review

Chapter Summary

Section 1: Exploration and Early Settlements

- The first French explorers in Louisiana were led by René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle. On April 9, 1682, at the mouth of the Mississippi River, La Salle claimed the region for France and named it in honor of his king, Louis XIV.

- La Salle's second expedition to Louisiana ended in failure. He had planned to establish a permanent settlement, but through errors in navigation, the expedition failed to locate the Mississippi River. La Salle's crew eventually mutinied against him, and La Salle was murdered.

- In 1698, Louis XIV gave support for the settlement of Louisiana to Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville. Iberville, accompanied by his brother, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, arrived on the Gulf Coast with four ships. Iberville built Fort Maurepas, in present-day Mississippi, as a first fortified settlement.

- In response to an English threat, Iberville and Bienville built Fort Mississippi 54 miles above the mouth of the Mississippi River.

- Iberville died of yellow fever while in Cuba, and Bienville took charge of the Louisiana colony. He faced many challenges including securing food and keeping peace within the colony. When Bienville's leadership was questioned by some of the colonists, he was investigated, but cleared of any wrongdoing.

Section 2: Governing from Afar

- European powers believed that the purpose of their colonies was to provide wealth from precious metals or raw materials. Louisiana became a financial burden for France, so they turned it into a proprietorship in which a businessman took control of the colony.

- Under Antoine Crozat's proprietorship, Antoine de la Mothe, Sieur de Cadillac, became governor of Louisiana. Under his leadership, settlements such as Fort St. Jean Baptiste were built in different parts of the colony.

- Although the mercantilist economic system prohibited colonists from trading with other nations, French settlers began to trade illegally with the Spanish for much-needed goods.

- Various difficulties in the colony and a lack of profit led Crozat to return Louisiana to the crown in 1717. Control of Louisiana was then given to John Law's Company of the West (later Company of the Indies). The company was initially successful, but eventually failed causing many investors to lose their personal fortunes in the Mississippi Bubble.

- The Louisiana colony was slowly growing with the founding of New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Poste du Rapides (Alexandria). Tensions with Native Americans led to fighting between the French (with the assistance of the Choctaw) and the Chickasaw (with the assistance of the English).

- In 1731, control of the Louisiana colony returned to the crown again. The next year, Bienville was asked to return to the colony as governor. He would serve in this capacity until his return to France in 1743.

- The final French governors of Louisiana were Pierre François de Rigaud, the Marquis de Vaudreuil, who attempted to bring glamour to the territory, and Louis Billouart, Chevalier de Kerlerec, who prepared the territory for war with the English.

- War between France and England left the colonists without needed goods and supplies. The colony was not profitable and life in Louisiana was difficult. Colonists often ignored the orders of French officials when they did not meet the colonists' needs, earning Louisiana the title of a rogue colony.

Section 3: The Founding Generation

- The early settlers in Louisiana were from diverse places including Africa, the Caribbean, France, and Germany.

- The population of the Louisiana colony grew very slowly. Several groups settled in Louisiana's challenging environment including concessionaires, *engagés*, and the controversial *forçats*.

- To increase the labor force in Louisiana, African slaves were imported to the territory beginning in 1716. They brought with them valuable knowledge about growing rice.

- One of the legacies of French control of Louisiana was the establishment of a strong French culture carried on by a generation born in Louisiana known as Creoles.

Activities for Learning

Understanding the Facts

1. What was the goal of René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, when he first explored Louisiana?

2. Who was Louisiana named after?

3. Which two European rivals posed a threat to France's claim of Louisiana?

4. What was the name of the first fortified French settlement in the Louisiana colony?

5. What was the name of the second Louisiana settlement? Where was it located?

6. Which two French officials often disagreed during the French colonial period in Louisiana?

7. What were the two profitable raw materials shipped back to France?

8. What did King Louis XIV decide to do with Louisiana because it was a financial burden?

9. What French outpost was established on the banks of the Red River in 1714? What city did this outpost become?

10. What was the name of the joint-stock company, originally created by John Law, which was put in charge of the Louisiana colony?

11. Why is New Orleans referred to as the "Crescent City"?

12. Who is deserving of the title "Father of Louisiana"?

13. What was the occupation of the "runners of the woods"?

14. Why did the Company of the Indies engage the Ursuline nuns to come to Louisiana?

15. By the time French control came to an end, what was the population of Louisiana?

Developing Critical Thinking

1. Why did Iberville and his brother Bienville decide to build a fort on the banks of the Mississippi River?

2. How was Bienville able to successfully maintain peaceful relations with the Native Americans?

Writing across the Curriculum

You are King Louis XIV and you have decided the Louisiana colony has become too costly to the royal treasury. Create a handbill (a small printed advertisement) offering the Louisiana colony to any skilled proprietor who might apply. In this handbill, be sure to include a description of the Louisiana colony, such as its location, settlements, fortifications, settlers, population, and its goods and products. Also include a list of responsibilities of the proprietor.

Exploring Louisiana on the Internet

Go to www.knowla.org/entry/627/ and read the article titled "Creoles." List five facts that you learned about this term from reading the article.

Building 21st-Century Skills: Primary Sources

A primary source is an eyewitness (first-hand) account or record of an event. Primary sources include interviews, journals, legal documents, letters, and news articles. Historians use primary source evidence to reconstruct past events. Read an excerpt from the Code Noir and answer the questions that follow:

> Article XVIII: We forbid slaves from selling sugar cane...at the risk of a whipping for the slaves.

> Article XXXIII: The slave who has struck his master in the face or has drawn blood...shall be punished by death.

> Article XLII: The masters may also, when they believe that their slaves so deserve, chain them and have them beaten with rods or straps.

1. Who is being regulated by the code?

2. What types of behavior are subject to punishment?

3. What types of punishment can be inflicted for violating the code?

4. What does this code suggest about slavery in the Louisiana colony?

Chapter Review

Fort St. Jean Baptiste in Natchitoches.