

# Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

## Life and Customs in the French Villages of the Old Illinois Country (1763-1939)

J. M. Carrière

Volume 18, numéro 1, 1939

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300185ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/300185ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

### ISSN

0317-0594 (imprimé)

1712-9095 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

Carrière, J. M. (1939). Life and Customs in the French Villages of the Old Illinois Country (1763-1939). *Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association / Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle de la Société historique du Canada*, 18(1), 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.7202/300185ar>

## LIFE AND CUSTOMS IN THE FRENCH VILLAGES OF THE OLD ILLINOIS COUNTRY (1763-1939)<sup>1</sup>

By J. M. CARRIÈRE  
Northwestern University

On August 24, 1765, Captain Thomas Stirling<sup>2</sup> left Fort Pitt with a detachment of about one hundred men of the Forty-second or Black Watch Regiment to occupy the Illinois country.<sup>3</sup> He reached Fort de Chartres,<sup>4</sup> the administrative headquarters of the region, on October 9, and the next day Louis St. Ange de Bellerive<sup>5</sup> and his garrison were formally relieved, and left for St. Louis,<sup>6</sup> which had been founded the year before. Thus, on October 10, 1765, British occupation of the last of the French posts in the West became a reality.<sup>7</sup> More than two years had elapsed since the ratifi-

<sup>1</sup>Accounts of the life and customs in Illinois under the French régime will be found in Clarence W. Alvord, "The country of the Illinois" (*The Illinois country, 1673-1818*, Centennial history of Illinois, Springfield, Ill., I, 1920, 190-224), hereafter cited as Alvord, *The Illinois country*; Joseph Wallace, "General description of the French colonists" (*Illinois and Louisiana under French rule*, Cincinnati, 1893, 404-16).

<sup>2</sup>Concerning Captain Thomas Stirling, see *Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 1898); *Documents relative to the colonial history of the State of New York* (Albany, 1856), VII, 786, n. 1; Clarence E. Carter, *Great Britain and the Illinois country, 1763-1774* (Washington, 1910), 46-53.

<sup>3</sup>Forts Niagara, Venango, Sanduski, Miami, Detroit, Ouiatanon, St. Joseph, Michillimakinac, and others in the interior, had been occupied by the British as early as 1760. However, between 1763 and October, 1765, they made nine different attempts before they succeeded in reaching the Illinois country, where the Indians, under the leadership of Pontiac, refused to recognize British supremacy in the West. The history of these expeditions is told in detail in Clarence W. Alvord and Clarence E. Carter, *The critical period, 1763-1765* (Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, X, British series, I, Springfield, Ill., 1915); hereafter cited as Alvord and Carter, *The critical period*. For a shorter treatment one may consult Alvord, *The Illinois country*, 259-85; Carter, "Occupation of the Illinois country" (*Great Britain and the Illinois country*, 27-45); Joseph H. Schlarman, "From Stirling to Clark" (*From Quebec to New Orleans*, Belleville, Ill., 1929, 423-51).

<sup>4</sup>The reader interested in the history of Fort de Chartres, for almost two generations the stronghold of French power in the upper Louisiana Valley, will find the following studies very useful: Gertrude Corrigan, "The two hundredth anniversary of Fort de Chartres" (*Illinois Catholic historical review*, II, April, 1920, 474-88); Edward G. Mason, "Illinois in the eighteenth century. I. Old Fort de Chartres" (*Chapters from Illinois history*, Chicago, 1901, 212-49); Schlarman, "Fort de Chartres," "Barthelmy de Makarty—The new Fort de Chartres" (*From Quebec to New Orleans*, 190-8; 292-8); J. F. Snyder, "The armament of Fort de Chartres" (*Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society*, IX, 219-31; hereafter cited as *Tr. Ill. Sta. Hist. Soc.*); Joseph Wallace, "Fort de Chartres: Its origin, growth and decline" (*Tr. Ill. Sta. Hist. Soc.*, VIII, 105-17). For contemporary descriptions of the fort, see Newton D. Mereness, "Journal of Captain Harry Gordon, 1766" (*Travels in the American colonies*, New York, 1916, 472-4); Captain Philip Pittman, *The state of the European settlements on the Mississippi* (An exact reprint of the original edition. London, 1770; edited, with introduction, notes, and index, by Frank Heywood Hodder; Cleveland, 1906), 88-90; hereafter cited as Pittman, *Mississippi settlements*.

<sup>5</sup>Walter B. Douglas, "The Sieurs de St. Ange" (*Tr. Ill. Sta. Hist. Soc.*, XIV, 135-46).

<sup>6</sup>Wallace, *Illinois and Louisiana under French rule*, 385.

<sup>7</sup>See the official minutes of the cession of Fort de Chartres dated October 10, 1765, and signed by Commandant St. Ange and Attorney-General Lefebvre for the French and by Captain Stirling and Commissary Rumsey for the English (Alvord and Carter, *The new régime, 1765-1767*, Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, XI, British series, II, Springfield, Ill., 1916, 91-101; hereafter cited as Alvord and Carter, *The new régime*).

cation of the Treaty of Paris on February 10, 1763. The region to which Captain Stirling was bringing British rule consisted of the five villages of Kaskaskia, Prairie du Rocher, Nouvelle-Chartres, Saint-Philippe, and Cahokia. These establishments, settled mostly by Canadians between 1699 and 1755,<sup>8</sup> were situated along the eastern bank of the Mississippi in what is now known as the American Bottom, a seventy-five mile strip of fertile alluvial land<sup>9</sup> beginning at a point opposite present-day St. Louis and stretching southward.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, upon learning about the irretrievable loss of New France, most of the French civil and military leaders of Illinois relinquished their posts at least a year before the arrival of the British troops of occupation.<sup>11</sup> The country even lost all of its clergy, except for one priest, old and feeble Father Meurin<sup>12</sup> of the Society of Jesus, who was so touched by the devotion of his Indian charges that he rejoined them from New Orleans. As a result of that general exodus, the British officials found the civil and religious administration of Illinois completely disorganized when they reached Fort de Chartres in 1765.<sup>13</sup> The resident military com-

<sup>8</sup>Charlevoix, who visited the region in October, 1721, speaks of Kaskaskia as a big village settled by "French, almost all Canadians" (*Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France*, Paris, 1744, III, 394). In his trip to the Illinois country in the 1720's, Le Page du Pratz observed that three-fourths of the inhabitants were Canadians. See *Histoire de la Louisiane* (Paris, 1758), II, 296. The investigations made by Alvord concerning the origins of the Cahokia families enumerated in the census of 1787 prove conclusively that practically all of them had come from Canada. See *Cahokia records, 1778-1790* (Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, II, Virginia series, I, Springfield, Ill., 1907), 624-32; hereafter cited as Alvord, *Cahokia records*.

<sup>9</sup>Since the end of the seventeenth century, the Illinois country has been known among the French as the "Paradis Terrestre." The author has heard in Cahokia and in Prairie du Rocher some of the older descendants of the early Canadian pioneers use the term with pride in speaking about the American Bottom.

<sup>10</sup>Additional information on the location of these villages may be found in Alvord, *Cahokia records*, xv-xvi; Alvord and Carter, *The critical period*, xxx-xxxii. A good map of the region, based on that published by Collot in his *Voyage dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (Paris, 1796), can be consulted in Alvord, *Cahokia records*. For eighteenth-century descriptions, see "Aubry's account of the Illinois country, 1763" (Alvord and Carter, *The critical period*, 4-5); "Jennings' journal, March 8, 1776-April 6, 1766" (Alvord and Carter, *The new régime*, 107-11), Stirling to Gage, Oct. 18, 1765; *ibid.*, 124-7, Stirling to Gage, Dec. 15, 1765; Thomas Hutchins, *A topographical description of Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and North Carolina* (London, 1778; Hicks ed., Cleveland, 1904), 107-9; Mereness, "Journal of Captain Harry Gordon, 1766" (*Travels*, 471-7); Pittman, *Mississippi settlements*, 84-93.

<sup>11</sup>Neyon de Villiers, who was then commanding officer in Illinois, expected the British to occupy the country during the winter of 1763-4. This failed to materialize and the Indians, stirred up by Pontiac, became more and more threatening. Annoyed at the situation, Neyon de Villiers sailed down the Mississippi to New Orleans on June 15, 1764. He was accompanied by sixty soldiers and eighty of the French inhabitants. St. Ange, formerly commander at Poste Vincennes, succeeded him at Fort de Chartres (Carter, *Great Britain and the Illinois country*, 35-6).

<sup>12</sup>Father Charles H. Metzger, S. J., has written a good biographical sketch of Father Meurin. See "Sébastien Louis Meurin" (*Illinois Catholic historical review*, III, 241-59). Father Meurin was the only priest in the Illinois country until the arrival of Father Pierre Gibault in 1768.

<sup>13</sup>According to Alvord and Carter (*The critical period*, xx), the only civil officials Stirling found in Illinois in 1765 were Joseph Labuxière, clerk and notary public, and Joseph Lefebvre, who acted as judge, attorney-general, and guardian of the royal warehouse. Upon the evacuation of the fort by the French garrison, both established themselves in St. Louis. The correspondence exchanged between Father Meurin and Bishop Briand, his ecclesiastical superior in Quebec, gives us a vivid description of

mander was therefore compelled to assume civil duties, a step which did not have the sanction of British law.<sup>14</sup> Army officers inexperienced in civil administration proved incompetent. Lieutenant-Colonels John Reed<sup>15</sup> and John Wilkins,<sup>16</sup> who were in command at Fort de Chartres practically all the time from the beginning of the summer of 1766 until the spring of 1772, were more interested in deriving financial gain from their offices than in providing the population with an honest and efficient administration. Clarence W. Alvord, the noted Illinois historian, tells us that both charged outrageous fees for issuing writs and similar documents, even demanding exorbitant sums for receiving oaths of allegiance.<sup>17</sup>

A number of enterprising inhabitants of Kaskaskia and the surrounding villages crossed the river and settled in Spanish territory in order to escape British rule.<sup>18</sup> The Spanish régime and institutions were quite compatible with the spirit and traditions of the French inhabitants, as the Spaniards maintained French laws in their new territory, which had been ceded to them by France a few years before. The two Illinois villages of Nouvelle-Chartres and Saint-Philippe, which had respectively forty and sixteen families in 1760, were already deserted when Captain Philip Pittman visited the region about 1766.<sup>19</sup> In the meanwhile, the threat of an attack by the American colonists was becoming more and more imminent every day. The French who had not passed over to the western bank of the Mississippi were subjected to intense anti-British propaganda by local merchants coming from the Eastern States. To make matters worse, time

---

religious conditions in Illinois at the beginning of the British rule. See Alvord and Carter, *The new régime*, 521-9, 558-65, 568-9, 587-91; Alvord and Carter, *Trade and politics, 1767-1769* (Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, XVI, British series, III, Springfield, Ill., 1921), 529-35; 548-57.

<sup>14</sup>Alvord, *The Illinois country*, 264; Alvord, *The Mississippi Valley in British politics* (Cleveland, 1917), II, 197. The most thorough treatment of this aspect of British rule will be found in Carter, "Status of the Illinois country" (*Great Britain and the Illinois country*, 13-26).

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 55-61.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 64-76; *Historical magazine*, VIII, Aug., 1864, 258; *Documents relative to the colonial history of the State of New York* (Albany, 1857), VIII, 185.

<sup>17</sup>Alvord, *The Illinois country*, 266.

<sup>18</sup>Although they were not supposed to move to the Spanish side of the Mississippi until they had obtained the necessary authorization from the British commandant, a large number of French inhabitants during night took the ferries across to Ste. Genevieve and St. Louis. "Many of them coming from over the other side brought with them not only all they possessed that was movable, but in many cases even dismantled their houses and took along the doors and windows, planking, in fact everything that could be moved, leaving but the logs and the chimneys" (Frederick J. Billon, *Annals of St. Louis*, 2 vols., St. Louis, 1886, 1888; quoted by John Rothensteiner, "Kaskaskia—Father Benedict Roux," *Illinois Catholic historical review*, I, April, 1919, 201), Commandant Dabbadie of New Orleans wrote in 1764 that the latest census showed a population of about 1,400 inhabitants in Illinois. See Alvord and Carter, *The critical period*, 209, D'Abbadie to the Minister, Jan. 10, 1764. According to Lieutenant Fraser, there were about 2,000 white persons on the British side of the Mississippi in the summer of 1765. See *ibid.*, 492, Fraser to Gage, May 15, 1765. Pittman, who was stationed in Illinois some time between 1765 and 1767, also estimated the population of the region at approximately "2000, of all ages and sexes" (*Mississippi settlements*, 102). However, the census of 1767 sets the population of Illinois at about only 1,000 (Alvord and Carter, *The new régime*, 469). This is undoubtedly the most reliable of all the figures given up to this point.

<sup>19</sup>Pittman, *Mississippi settlements*, 88 ff., 91. The information given by Pittman is corroborated by Mereness, "Journal of Captain Harry Gordon, 1766" (*Travels*, 472 ff.).

passed and the authorities neglected to accede to the popular demand for civil courts.<sup>20</sup> Philippe François de Rastel, Chevalier de Rocheblave,<sup>21</sup> a former French officer who had become commander of Ste. Genevieve in Spanish territory about 1766, threw in his lot with the British administration some time in the seventies and was appointed commandant of the Illinois country in 1776. He knew that he was surrounded by French and British sympathizing with the Americans. The officers of the militia in Kaskaskia and Cahokia spoke openly of receiving without opposition any rebellious troops which might be sent against them.<sup>22</sup> Rocheblave begged Governor Carleton for help to cope with this critical situation.<sup>23</sup> He soon realized that reinforcements would not be forthcoming and stoically awaited the fatal arrival of the colonial soldiers, an event which he expected to take place at any time. Ironically enough, when George Rogers Clark and his "Long Knives" entered Kaskaskia during the evening of July 4, 1778, they found him asleep in his bed.<sup>24</sup> The Illinois country had been wrested from the British without the firing of a single shot.<sup>25</sup>

The new régime began under the most favourable auspices and raised great hopes in the hearts of the French. Clark assured the Canadian priest, Father Pierre Gibault,<sup>26</sup> that the Americans had no intentions of interfering with the people's form of worship,<sup>27</sup> and later informed the inhabitants that France had signed a treaty of alliance with the colonists.<sup>28</sup> The French villages rallied at once to the defence of the American cause and contributed

<sup>20</sup>See Carter, "The struggle for a civil government" (*Great Britain and the Illinois country*, 145-63).

<sup>21</sup>George E. Mason, "British Illinois: Philippe François de Rastel, Chevalier de Rocheblave" (*Chicago Historical Society, Collections*, IV, 1890, 360-81), and "Rocheblave papers" (*ibid.*, 382-419); Alvord "Introduction" (*Cahokia records*, xxv-xlvi).

<sup>22</sup>The text of Rocheblave's request for aid is to found in Mason, "Rocheblave papers," 416-17.

<sup>23</sup>Alvord, *The Illinois country*, 321-2.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>25</sup>The career of George Rogers Clark and the story of his winning of the North-West is told by himself in James, *Clark papers*, 114-54, Letter to Mason, Nov. 19, 1779 and "Memoir, 1773-1779" (*ibid.*, 208-32). See also Alvord, *The Illinois country*, 323-57; Temple Bodley, *George Rogers Clark: His life and public services* (Boston and New York, 1926); J. P. Dunn, "The Hannibal of the West" (*Indiana: A redemption from slavery*, Boston and New York, 1891, 131-76); William H. English, *Conquest of the country northwest of the River Ohio, 1778-1783, and life of Gen. George Rogers Clark*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis and Kansas City, 1897); James, "Introduction" (*Clark papers*), and *Life of George Rogers Clark* (Chicago, 1928); Frederick Palmer, *Clark of the Ohio* (New York, 1929); Schlarman, *From Quebec to New Orleans*, 491-556.

<sup>26</sup>Alvord, "Father Pierre Gibault and the submission of Post Vincennes, 1778" (*American historical review*, XIV, 544-7); Alvord, "The oath of Vincennes" (*Tr. Ill. Sta. Hist. Soc.*, XII, 270-6); J. P. Dunn, "Father Gibault: The patriot priest of the Northwest" (*Tr. Ill. Sta. Hist. Soc.*, X, 15-34); John Rothensteiner, "Father Pierre Gibault, the patriot priest" (*History of the Archdiocese of St. Louis*, St. Louis, 1928, I, 132-9); Joseph J. Thompson, "Illinois' first citizen, Pierre Gibault" (*Ill. Catholic historical review*, I, July, 1918, 79-94; Oct., 1918, 234-48; Jan., 1919, 380-7; April, 1919, 484-94; II, July, 1919, 85-94; VIII, July, 1925, 3-28; Oct., 1925, 99-105).

<sup>27</sup>James, *Clark papers*, 121, Clark to Mason, Nov. 19, 1779.

<sup>28</sup>The treaty of alliance between France and the United States was signed on February 6, 1778. Patrick Henry, Governor of Virginia, the state under whose auspices the conquest of the North-West was accomplished, wrote to Clark on December 15, of the same year: "I send you a Copy of the French Alliance and some other papers, by seeing which the people will be pleased, and attached to our Cause" (James, *Clark papers*, 87).

to it generously in men, money, and provisions.<sup>29</sup> Father Gibault pledged his entire personal fortune to aid Clark and used his influence to induce his flock to renounce their allegiance to the British flag,<sup>30</sup> incurring thereby the displeasure of his ecclesiastical superior, Mgr Briand.<sup>31</sup> Out of one hundred and seventy men who left Kaskaskia on February 5, 1779, to recapture Vincennes, almost half of them belonged to the French militia.<sup>32</sup> There was such perfect harmony and mutual understanding between the local population and the colonial troops that when this little army was about to leave on its famous expedition, Father Gibault granted a general absolution to all its members at the request of George Rogers Clark.<sup>33</sup> This enthusiasm did not last, however. Disappointment and unrest soon developed among the quiet and peace-loving French, particularly in Kaskaskia. The official records<sup>34</sup> present us with a very gloomy picture of the conditions which prevailed in that village in the 1780's. The great esteem which the French had for Clark was equalled only by the utter contempt in which they held the undisciplined soldiery, the unscrupulous merchants and land speculators who plagued the land. It was not long before these simple peasants discovered that they were no match for the aggressive backwoodsmen from Virginia and Kentucky. The situation bordered on anarchy in Kaskaskia, where civil courts proved a poor protection against the greed and rapacity of a garrison left to its own devices and compelled to plunder in order to live.<sup>35</sup> In a letter written to Bishop Briand on June 6, 1786, Father Gibault

<sup>29</sup>Alvord, *Kaskaskia records, 1778-1790* (Springfield, Ill., 1909), 116, and James, *Clark papers*, 360-1, List of contributors, made by Patrick Kennedy, Assistant Commissary, Aug. 31, 1779.

<sup>30</sup>Father Gibault advanced the Americans 7,800 livres in goods in addition to using his personal prestige and influence to win the French to the new régime. The paramount importance of the role which he played during those critical times was recognized by the American authorities. In the instructions sent to Clark on December 12, 1778, the Virginia Council referred to "Mr Gibault, the Priest (to whom this Country owes many Thanks for his Zeal and Services)" (James, *Clark papers*, 80). On December 15, of the same year, Patrick Henry wrote to Clark: "I beg you will present my Compliments to Mr. Gibault and Doctor Lafong and thank them for their good Services to the State" (*ibid.*, 87). Yet the patriotic priest was never reimbursed as much as a cent of the money which he had lent the Americans in their hour of need. In 1790, he petitioned Governor St. Clair for some compensation in the form of a small grant of land in the village of Cahokia. See *American state papers: Public lands* (Washington, 1834), II, 14, 15-16. Father Gibault's request was transmitted to Congress, but no action was ever taken on it.

<sup>31</sup>Rothensteiner, "Father Pierre Gibault," 132-9. For Gibault's answer to the accusation of sedition directed against him, see Alvord, *Kaskaskia records*, 541-2, Father Gibault to the Bishop of Quebec, June 6, 1786, and also, *ibid.*, 50-1, Jean Bte. Laffont to George R. Clark, Aug. 7, 1778.

<sup>32</sup>Célestin-Pierre Cambiaire in his book *Le Rôle de la France dans l'expansion des Etats-Unis* (Paris, 1935), 43-63, attempts to show that approximately half of the soldiers who captured Vincennes were French. A careful study of the available evidence gives some credence to his thesis. Cambiaire overlooked, however, an interesting passage in a contemporary document: "Our party was 130 strong when the attack was made on the fort about 60 of which was [*sic*] French volunteers from the villages on the Massipia who behaved very well and spirited" (James, *Clark papers*, 345, John Rogers to Jonathan Clark, July 7, 1779). John Rogers was a cousin of Georges Rogers Clark (*ibid.*, 139, n. 1).

<sup>33</sup>"We were conducted out of the Town by the Inhabitants; and Mr Jeboth the Priest, who after a very suitable Discourse to the purpose, gave us all Absolution . . ." (James, *Clark papers*, 139, Clark to Mason, Nov. 19, 1779; *ibid.*, 269).

<sup>34</sup>Alvord, *Kaskaskia records, 1778-1790* (Springfield, Ill., 1909), xlix, 681 pp.

<sup>35</sup>Alvord, "The country of the Illinois" (*The Illinois country*, 329-57), and "The period of the city states" (*ibid.*, 358-78); Alvord, "Introduction" (*Cahokia records*);

describes the injustice, the violence, the poverty, and the wantonness which prevailed in that unfortunate village.<sup>36</sup> In their longing for order and stability, most of the French leaders and many of their followers went to live in Spanish territory. To mention only a few of the leaders, Antoine, Jean Baptiste and Vital Bauvais, François Carbonneaux, Gabriel Cerré, the elder Charlevilles, François Corset, Father Pierre Gibault, Charles Gratiot, Dr. Jean-Baptiste Laffont, Pierre Langlois, Jacques Lasource, Father Jacobin Le Dru, Timothé de Monbreun, and Father Paul de Saint-Pierre, all left Illinois for the Missouri communities of Ste. Genevieve and St. Louis.<sup>37</sup> When Clark reached Kaskaskia in 1778, it had approximately five hundred inhabitants.<sup>38</sup> In 1787, it had only one hundred and ninety-one male residents.<sup>39</sup> Between the years 1787 and 1790, which marked the most troubled period in the history of the village, the French population was further depleted and reached the low figure of forty-four heads of families.<sup>40</sup> The other two villages of the region, Prairie du Rocher and Cahokia, escaped most of this crisis. Prairie du Rocher was a very small settlement devoted almost entirely to agriculture. It found, moreover, a firm leader in Captain Jean Baptiste Barbau.<sup>41</sup> As for Cahokia, it was not garrisoned after 1780 and had only three or four English-speaking inhabitants until 1790.<sup>42</sup> Its population was therefore more homogeneous and better disciplined than that of Kaskaskia.<sup>43</sup> It even enjoyed great prosperity since it developed into a very active fur-trading centre about that time.<sup>44</sup>

It is a simple matter to reconstruct the intimate life of that village during the early days of American rule. The minutes of the court of Cahokia from October 29, 1778, to April 1, 1790, were published in 1907 by Clarence W. Alvord under the title *Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library*, vol. II, *Virginia series*, vol. I, *Cahokia records, 1778-1790*.<sup>45</sup> This volume constitutes a precious source of information not only on the administrative machinery of the village, but also on the business transactions, the

Alvord, "Introduction" (*Kaskaskia records*); James, "Finances and government" (*Clark papers*, xcvi-cvi). As can be seen upon perusing the *Kaskaskia records*, the inhabitants complained repeatedly about the spirit of brigandage of the soldiers, the exactions of the officials, and the failure of the courts to maintain discipline. In order to realize the intense dissatisfaction of the French between 1779 and 1790, one has only to read their letters of protest to the local magistrates and officials and the numerous petitions for redress which they sent to Congress. See particularly the following documents: 1779, 88-93, 136-40, 140-2; 1780, 183, 189-92, 207-9; 1781, 233-40; 1782, 284-91; 1783, 329-40, 340-4; 1784, 362-8, 369; 1786, 381-2; 1787, 447-8; 1788, 454-62, 462-5, 466-8, 475-9, 491-3; 1789, 509-11.

<sup>36</sup>Alvord, *Kaskaskia records*, 543 ff.

<sup>37</sup>Alvord, *Cahokia records*, cxliv.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>39</sup>Alvord, "Census of Kaskaskia, 1787" (*Kaskaskia records*, 414-19). The severe flood of 1785, "l'année des grandes eaux," also took a considerable toll of inhabitants, who went over to Ste Genevieve. See Louis Houcks, *A history of Missouri* (St. Louis, 1908), I, 351, and Perrin du Lac, *Voyage dans les deux Louisianes* (Paris, 1805), 171.

<sup>40</sup>Edward G. Mason (ed.), "Early Illinois citizens" (*Early Chicago and Illinois*, Chicago Historical Society, Collections, IV, 209).

<sup>41</sup>For Captain Barbau's opinion on the state of lawlessness in Kaskaskia, see Alvord, *Kaskaskia records*, 398.

<sup>42</sup>Alvord, *The Illinois country*, 376.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>44</sup>John Reynolds, *Pioneer history of Illinois* (Belleville, Ill., 1852), 102 ff.

<sup>45</sup>Springfield, Ill., 1907, clvi-663 pp. + one map.

gossip, the quarrels, and even the scandals which must have provided the loquacious Creole with an inexhaustible source of prattle. Nobody seems to have taken full advantage of these documents which throw a vivid light on so many details of everyday life in the West and the end of the eighteenth century.

We learn from them that the court arrogated to itself dictatorial powers, whenever it felt it imperative for the general welfare of the community. In 1782, Jean Baptiste LaCroix, a local merchant, was granted a permit to trade with the Indians who might come to his house. It was understood, however, that all meats, tallow, bear's oil, and deer-skins which he received in trade, after keeping a provision for himself, were to be sold at a price set by the court to any inhabitant of Cahokia who presented himself within twenty-four hours after the departure of the Indians. At the expiration of this time limit, LaCroix could sell to outsiders.<sup>46</sup> Is not such a procedure on the part of the court strangely similar to that of modern governmental price-fixing agencies? The court also anticipated twentieth-century moratoria on private debts. On October 1, 1785, the magistrates assembled, and, after careful deliberation on the unhappy conditions of the time, when there were neither crops nor money, they decreed that no creditor should have any debtor's property sold except at a fair price set by arbitrators and appraisers. If this arrangement did not satisfy the creditor, he then had to allow the debtor more time with the stipulation that the latter pay interest.<sup>47</sup>

The Cahokia records constitute a most interesting collection of *faits divers* such as one might read today in a small town newspaper. These unimportant items allow us, however, to probe much deeper into the popular mind than the more impressive events of formal history. On August 25, 1780, François Saucier sued Ignace Chatigny, who had made abusive remarks about the court and had said that all magistrates were fools. The defendant admitted having made the slanderous remark, but added that he had not meant it to be repeated. Nevertheless, he was condemned to spend a week in jail and to pay a fine of 50 *livres* to the church.<sup>48</sup> Nine years later, François Saucier was no longer a plaintiff but a defendant. While intoxicated, he had insulted several persons by challenging them and using improper expressions. The magistrates sentenced him to twenty-four hours' confinement in prison and to a fine of six *piastres* to be paid to the church.<sup>49</sup>

Trivial incidents such as the following help us also to reconstruct the intricate mosaic of contemporary life. In 1780, Baptiste Saucier's pigs entered Louis Pillet's field and ate some of his wheat. Saucier was ordered to give the plaintiff six *minots* of wheat, the quantity which the pigs were supposed to have eaten.<sup>50</sup> The same year, on November 16, Pierre Martin asked that the pig which Charles LaCroix had taken in the Prairie du Pont and shut up at his house be returned to him.<sup>51</sup> In 1782, Jean Baptiste LaCroix complained that Charles Lefevre had broken three of his axes while mending them. After a careful investigation, referees reported that the axes were worth nothing and should not be paid for.<sup>52</sup>

It seems that, with the coming of the Americans, Cahokia was not entirely devoid of quarrelsome elements, for in 1788 Robert Jones com-

<sup>46</sup>Alvord, *Cahokia records*, 125-7.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 202-3.      <sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 64-5.      <sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 396-9.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 46-7.      <sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 76-7.      <sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 108-11.



plained that Samuel Morris, who owed him some money, had maimed him. Morris claimed, however, that Jones had begun the trouble by throwing at him a rock weighing four or five pounds and which would have killed him if it had struck him. Morris added that, in order to protect his life, he had been obliged to go into a house. When he came out, they caught hold of each other. Jones held him by the hair and stuck his thumb in his mouth. The pain became unbearable and Morris had to bite his enemy's thumb. The court dismissed the case and condemned each party to pay his share of the costs.<sup>53</sup>

Some of the things which happened in that little frontier village had a really humorous touch. For instance, in January, 1782, Isaac Levy, a merchant by profession and a doctor by avocation, sued Michel Buteau for a sum of 400 *livres* in payment of medical care which he had given the defendant. Buteau answered that he was not cured, but only relieved from his ailment. Thereupon the court instructed the pseudo-doctor to continue treating his patient until complete recovery.<sup>54</sup> A few weeks later, Levy accused Buteau of not following his prescriptions. The sick man had received sixty pills; he was to take seven the first day, and then increase the number by one each succeeding day until all were used up. But instead of taking the pills, according to the doctor, the patient allowed the children to scatter them about the house. The defendant told the court in all seriousness that he had taken all the pills, but that, since they had not cured him as quickly as he had wished, he had exhausted the whole supply in two days. The magistrates were incredulous and sentenced him to pay Levy the 400 *livres* promised him at the beginning of the treatment.<sup>55</sup>

Such were the common people of Cahokia. There was nothing heroic or inspiring about them, but in spite of their frailties they were a pretty fair lot. We find among them no confirmed criminals, and few, if any, great sinners. Their magistrates, men of little learning but of sound sense, were benevolent and yet firm in their administration of justice. They showed unstinted devotion to their office and, contrary to what happened in less fortunate Kaskaskia, their community enjoyed prosperity and contentment.<sup>56</sup>

As for Kaskaskia, its prolonged period of storm and stress came to an end only when Arthur St. Clair, recently appointed governor of the territory west of the River Ohio, reached the Illinois country in 1790. The village never did recover the peace and the serenity which it had once enjoyed before the British and the American régimes. Its later career was a very checkered one, marked by only a short period of prosperity. It was a very dismal place in the last years of the eighteenth century. The French botanist, André Michaux, who visited it in 1795, painted for us a depressing picture of the poverty into which it had fallen at that time. ". . . Nothing is to be seen but houses in ruins and abandoned," he wrote.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 332-5.    <sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 112-15.    <sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 118-19.

<sup>56</sup>Alvord, *The Illinois country*, 378.

<sup>57</sup>"Travels into Kentucky, 1793-1796" (*Early western travels, 1748-1846*, edited with notes, introductions, index, etc., by Reuben Gold Thwaites, III, Cleveland, 1904, 70; hereafter cited as *Early western travels*). Michaux's diary contains the following interesting item about the population of the various settlements in Illinois at the end of the eighteenth century: "Sunday the 20th . . . [1795]. Kaskaskia 45 families; Prairie du Rocher from 22 to 24 families. St. Philippe 3 American families. Fort de Chartres in ruins, Kaskias [Cahokia] 120 families. Americans at Corne de Cerf and at Bellefontaine 35 families. St. Louis flourishing . . ." (*ibid.*, 71).

About 1800, its population consisted of only forty-five families. According to Reynolds, a contemporary, these were all French, except for seven or eight.<sup>58</sup> Then, between 1810 and 1820, the town enjoyed a period of great activity. It became the rallying centre of thousands of emigrants to the West, who made it their temporary headquarters.<sup>59</sup> It had the honour of being the capital of the territory of Illinois from 1812 to 1818 and also of the state from 1818 to 1820. At that time, its most illustrious citizen was Pierre Ménard, who was born in Saint-Antoine, a little village in the region of Montreal, and settled in Illinois in 1790, after spending a few years in Vincennes, Indiana. Ménard had the honour of being the first Lieutenant-Governor of the state (1818-22). His brilliant career revived for a while the prestige of the French.<sup>60</sup> He lived in Kaskaskia until his death in 1844, and some of his direct descendants are still to be found near Fort Gage, Illinois.<sup>61</sup> By 1820, other towns came into existence and Kaskaskia slipped back into obscurity. Its history from the beginning of the third decade of the nineteenth century can be sketched in a brief paragraph. General Lafayette visited the village in 1825 and spoke with Creoles, who long remembered this occasion as the most remarkable event of their lives.<sup>62</sup> In 1834, Sisters of the Visitation from Georgetown, D.C., established Ménard Academy, transferred, incidentally, to St. Louis in 1844.<sup>63</sup> In 1838, the whole south-west angle of the church, built in 1753,<sup>64</sup> crumbled during High Mass without, however, causing any casualties. The building was torn down the same year and replaced by a large brick one.<sup>65</sup> The great flood of 1844 brought havoc and destruction to this locality. In 1849, the seat of Randolph County was transferred from Kaskaskia to Chester, situated a few miles away. Except for the flood of 1857, no event worthy of record seems to have taken place until 1881, when the Mississippi cut through the mainland to merge with the Kaskaskia River, obliterated most of the site of the village, and formed an island. Whatever was left of Kaskaskia at that time was washed away by subsequent floods about 1900.<sup>66</sup> A few years previous to that date, the parish seat had to be

<sup>58</sup>Reynolds, *My own times* (Belleville, Ill., 1855), 33.

<sup>59</sup>*Combined history of Randolph, Monroe and Perry Counties* (Philadelphia, 1883), 307; E. J. Montague, *A directory, business mirror, historical sketch of Randolph County* (Alton, Ill., 1859), 47-8; Stuart Brown, "Old Kaskaskia days and ways" (*Tr. Ill. Sta. Hist. Soc.*, X, 139).

<sup>60</sup>H. S. Baker, "The first Lieutenant-Governor of Illinois: An address" (*Early Chicago and Illinois, Chicago Historical Society, Collections, IV, Edward G. Mason, ed.*, 1890, 149-61); Edward G. Mason, "Pierre Ménard, the first Lieutenant-Governor of Illinois" (Fergus historical series, no. 34, 1890, 17-24); Edward G. Mason, "Pierre Ménard papers" (*ibid.*, 25-43), and also: *Early Chicago and Illinois* (Chicago Historical Society, Collections, IV, 162-80); William S. Merrill, "Pierre Ménard of Illinois" (*Mid-America*, XIV, July, 1932, 15-38); John Reynolds, *Pioneer history of Illinois* (Belleville, Ill., 1852), 242-6; Joseph Tassé, "Pierre Ménard" (*Les Canadiens de l'Ouest*, Montreal, 1878, II, 55-72).

<sup>61</sup>Letter from A. L. Ottesen, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Randolph County, Chester, Ill., May 16, 1939.

<sup>62</sup>A. Levasseur, *Lafayette en Amérique en 1824 et 1825, ou Journal de son voyage aux États-Unis* (Paris, 1829), II, 292-5.

<sup>63</sup>Helen Troesch, "The first convent in Illinois" (*Illinois Catholic historical review*, I, Jan., 1919, 351-71).

<sup>64</sup>For a description of the old church, see Edmund Flagg, "The far west: or, A tour beyond the mountains, 1836-1837" (*Early western travels*, XXVII, Cleveland, 1906, II, 62-4; hereafter cited as Flagg, "The far west").

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, II, 33, n. 6.

<sup>66</sup>J. H. Burnham, "Destruction of Kaskaskia by the Mississippi River" (*Tr. Ill. Sta. Hist. Soc.*, XX, 1914, 95-112).

transferred to the newly formed island, where a church was built in 1894 on a spot called New Kaskaskia.<sup>67</sup> The old commons land, a grant of about 12,000 acres given to the Parish of the Immaculate Conception of Kaskaskia by the King of France in the early eighteenth century, was divided into lots and sold by the state in 1911. The proceeds from the investment of the fund thus created are used for the support of the schools on Kaskaskia Island.<sup>68</sup>

Coming back to the other two French settlements of the region, we find that Cahokia had lost its old prestige about 1820 with the decline of the local fur trade. It is now a small village which does not even have a post-office.<sup>69</sup> As for Prairie du Rocher, formerly the least important of the French communities of Illinois, it has today a population of approximately five hundred inhabitants, or twice as many as Cahokia.

It is impossible to study the destinies of those three small colonies after 1790 without attempting to find out what became of their French inhabitants. With the administrative organization of the West as established by the Ordinance of 1787 and carried out in 1790,<sup>70</sup> the Creoles disappeared from the political scene. The French-speaking citizens of southern Illinois who held county or state offices during the last years of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth did not descend from the old families. Pierre Ménard, from Kaskaskia, Jean De Moulin,<sup>71</sup> Charles Gratiot,<sup>72</sup> Nicolas Jarrot,<sup>73</sup> John Hay,<sup>74</sup> and Jean-François Perrey,<sup>75</sup> from Cahokia, were born either in France, in Switzerland, in Canada, or in the Eastern States. Yet the Creoles did not merge at once with their neighbours, but remained as a distinct ethnic group. In 1819, the Philadelphia doctor, Richard Lee Mason, travelling to Kaskaskia, pointed out that French was the common language of the region and even found many persons who could not speak English at all.<sup>76</sup> The Scotsman James Stuart visited Cahokia in April, 1830, and wrote three years later: "The people still speak French. They lead an indolent life in this fine climate. They can support themselves by working two or three days in the week. They dance and fiddle during the rest of it."<sup>77</sup> The early American writer, Edmund Flagg, spent some time in southern Illinois in 1836. He informs us in his book, *The Far West*, that the people still spoke French there. Some of the older inhabitants continued to wear the *capot* or blanket-coat. The moccasins, instead of shoes, the blue handkerchief as headdress, and the long queue had not yet entirely disappeared.<sup>78</sup> Flagg

<sup>67</sup>The old church bell cast in France in 1741 is still to be seen in the church at New Kaskaskia, but it is no longer in use. Other relics of old Kaskaskia have been given to St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri (Letter from the Rev. Chas. G. Frankovich, Pastor of the Parish of the Immaculate Conception of New Kaskaskia, May 21, 1939).

<sup>68</sup>Letter from A. L. Otteson, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Randolph County, Chester, Ill., May 16, 1939. In 1900 Kaskaskia had a population of 177 inhabitants. See Pittman, *Mississippi settlements*, 84, n. 2.

<sup>69</sup>Cahokia is now on United States Rural Mail Route no. 1, East St. Louis, Ill.

<sup>70</sup>Jay A. Barrett, *Evolution of the Ordinance of 1787, with an account of the earlier plans for the government of the Northwestern Territory* (New York, 1891).

<sup>71</sup>Reynolds, *Pioneer history of Illinois*, 173-5.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 255-9. <sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 175-9. <sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 188-93. <sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 240-2.

<sup>76</sup>*Narrative of Richard Lee Mason in the pioneer West, 1819* (New York, 1915), 53 ff.

<sup>77</sup>James Stuart, *Three years in North America* (Edinburgh, 1833, ed. 2, revised), II, 314. The first edition of this book was also published in 1833.

<sup>78</sup>Flagg, "The far west," II, 55-6; Reynolds, *My own times*, 63.

adds: "Their chief *amusement* ever has been, and, probably, ever will be, the *Dance*, in which all, even from the least to the greatest, bond and free, unite."<sup>79</sup> The remark that Creoles were light of heart and nimble of feet is one that recurs almost invariably in the writings of contemporaries who came into contact with them during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup> In 1841, Lewis Foulke Thomas wrote that nine-tenths of Cahokia's population was French.<sup>81</sup> Over half of the names listed for Prairie du Rocher in Montague's *Directory of Randolph County*, published in 1859, are French.<sup>82</sup> Still more revealing is the fact that French sermons were preached until a late date. In Prairie du Rocher they were abandoned only in 1889,<sup>83</sup> while in Cahokia, the last priest to use French in church was Father Berbenbrok, pastor of that parish from 1903 to 1912.<sup>84</sup>

Naturally, French continued to be spoken for some time even after it was no longer used in church. In July of 1935 and 1936 and during the Christmas vacation of 1935, I visited the American Bottom with the purpose of ascertaining whether some vestiges of French still existed in that region. In Cahokia, in Prairie du Rocher, and on Kaskaskia Island, I met at least a score of older persons who were still conversant with the language of their Canadian ancestors and welcomed the opportunity to speak it. In Prairie du Rocher several inhabitants between the ages of forty and forty-five, no longer fluent in French, told me that they had not spoken a word of English until they began to attend grade school. This proves conclusively that in Cahokia and Prairie du Rocher French disappeared from fairly common usage only at the beginning of the present century.

On my trips to southern Illinois, it was my good fortune to spend much of my time in Prairie du Rocher, one of the most historic spots of the region on account of its proximity to the ruins of Fort de Chartres, only three miles away. The village was founded about 1733.<sup>85</sup> Its population is mixed today, but Allards, Aubuchons, Barbeaus, Bienvenues, Blais, Boyers, Doirons, Duclos, Godères, Lachances, Lachapelles, Langlois, Leclercs, Louviers, Michauds, Noëls, Pouparts, Roberts, and Roys, descendants of the early pioneers, still live there. The farmers still own the commons, an extensive tract of grazing land which was given to their ancestors by Louis

<sup>79</sup>Flagg, "The far west," II, 56.

<sup>80</sup>See, for example, the interesting remarks made by Reynolds, *My own times*, 62-3, and *Pioneer history of Illinois*, 52.

<sup>81</sup>*The valley of the Mississippi illustrated in a series of views*, edited by Lewis Foulke Thomas, painted and lithographed by J. C. Wild; accompanied with historical descriptions, published monthly . . . (St. Louis, 1841), 103.

<sup>82</sup>Montague, *A directory . . . of Randolph County*, 193-5.

<sup>83</sup>Letter from Captain Noah C. Duclos, Prairie du Rocher, Ill., Feb. 17, 1939. Captain Duclos, who is very much interested in local lore, was given this information by the older inhabitants of the village.

<sup>84</sup>Letter from the Rev. Father J. A. H. Mueller, Parish Priest of Cahokia, May 17, 1939.

<sup>85</sup>On September 1, 1721, the Mississippi Company assigned Boisbriant, then the officer in command at Fort de Chartres, a grant of land a square league on the site where now stands Prairie du Rocher. At some unknown date, but previous to 1734, Boisbriant transferred his rights to his nephew, Jean Ste-Thérèse Langlois, an officer of the troops, who established a village upon this grant. As a chapel of ease to Ste. Anne's Church of Fort de Chartres was built at Prairie du Rocher in 1733, the foundation of the village goes back to at least that date. See *American state papers, Public lands* (Washington, 1834), II, 183. For additional information on the early history of Prairie du Rocher, see Montague, *A directory . . . of Randolph County*, 60-7.

XV in 1743. Some of the older residents, particularly Messrs Frank Louvier, Michel Duclos, and Alexis Palmier, gave me some interesting information on the history of their village. They spoke wistfully about old-time customs, the Christmas *réveillon*, the *Guillonnée* carolling on New Year's Eve,<sup>86</sup> the gay family reunions on New Year's Day, the King's Balls,<sup>87</sup> the Pancake Supper on Shrove Tuesday and the burlesque serenading of the *Charivari*.<sup>88</sup> They still remembered the day when one sang old French folk-songs to while away the time during winter and heard sermons in French on Sundays. I shall never forget a delightful Christmas Eve spent at the home of Captain Noah C. Duclos, who had also invited for the occasion his father, Mr. Michel Duclos, Mr. Frank Louvier, and the two Pascahels, father and son, descendants of slaves brought to the Illinois country in the eighteenth century.<sup>89</sup> We spoke an archaic and picturesque variety of French and sang old folk-songs in that language. The classical song of the natives is *La Guillonnée*. The custom itself of *La Guillonnée*, or *Guignolée* as it is called in Canada,<sup>90</sup> one of the most interesting brought to the New World by the French pioneers, has survived to this day in Prairie du Rocher. On every New Year's Eve, a group of men and youths spend the whole evening going from house to house. When they enter a house, their leader strikes up the first verses of the lively carol of *La Guillonnée*. As soon as the song is over, the host serves drinks and cakes.<sup>91</sup>

The village of Cahokia, founded in 1699 and therefore the oldest community in Illinois, is located six miles south-east of St. Louis and has two hundred and forty-seven inhabitants according to the latest available statistics. As it is in the midst of a rich agricultural district, the parish itself is much more considerable than one might infer from the small population of the village. As one enters its elegant rock church, erected in 1889, and looks at the cards on the pews, one is struck by the number of French names: Chartrand, De Lorme, Didier, Godin, Jérôme, Julien, Lacroix, La Motte, Lemieux, Nadeau, Plouffe, Touranjau, etc.<sup>92</sup> Next

<sup>86</sup>Reynolds describes the age-old custom of the *Gionée* (*sic*) as it was celebrated at the beginning of the nineteenth century. See *Pioneer history of Illinois*, 52. The *Guillonnée* was until a very recent date probably the most popular of all songs in the old French establishments of Ste. Genevieve and Old Mines, Mo., and Vincennes, Ind. The reader interested in the history of the *Guillonnée* in Missouri may consult Joseph M. Carrière, *Tales from the French folk-lore of Missouri* (Northwestern University studies in the humanities, no. I, Evanston and Chicago, 1937), 6-7, Ward A. Dorrance, *The survival of French in the old Sainte Genevieve district* (University of Missouri studies, X, April, 1935, 121-2).

<sup>87</sup>Reynolds, *Pioneer history of Illinois*, 52-3.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 145-6.

<sup>89</sup>Mr. Michel Duclos, Mr. Frank Louvier, and Mr. Pascahel, Sr., have all died since 1936. The last survivors of the generation acquainted with the days when the community had a distinctly French flavour are fast disappearing. In another ten or fifteen years none will be left.

<sup>90</sup>The *Guillonnée* used to be very popular in Canada, where it was known as *La Guignolée*. See Ernest Gagnon, *Chansons populaires du Canada* (deuxième éd., Québec, 1880), and E.-Z. Massicotte, *Bulletin des recherches historiques*, XXVIII, Dec., 1922, 364-8.

<sup>91</sup>Song and custom were in great danger of being forgotten in Prairie du Rocher a few years ago, but they have been given a surcease of life, thanks to the solicitude of Captain Noah C. Duclos, who has succeeded in making the celebration of the *Guillonnée* an affair of community-wide interest as it used to be in the old days.

<sup>92</sup>In 1914 there were one hundred and seven families in the parish of Cahokia; of these seventy-five were of French extraction. See Frederick Beuckman, *History of the Diocese of Belleville* (Belleville, Ill., 1914), 7. In a letter dated May 16,

to this imposing building stands the old church begun in 1789 and finished in 1799.<sup>93</sup>

After the powder magazine of Fort de Chartres, constructed in 1755, and the ancient Court House of Cahokia,<sup>94</sup> which goes back to 1795, it is probably the oldest building in the American North-West. The treasures of the parish include a missal printed in 1668, a monstrance wrought in France in 1717, a set of candlesticks and a bell from the early part of the eighteenth century. The monstrance and a chalice acquired in the early days of the parish were taken from the sacristy, on May 24, 1838, by Tom Terrien, a half-witted farmer. With these sacred vessels and a large German Bible, which he mistook for a Latin missal, Terrien attempted to offer mass for himself and his family the next morning. Later in the day, as he feared detection, he threw the monstrance and the chalice far out into Lake Pittsburg, near which his house stood. The monstrance alone was recovered.<sup>95</sup>

During my sojourns in Cahokia, I met several "old-timers" who spoke melancholically of the distant days when game was plentiful and people were gay and carefree. At the other end of the American Bottom, some sixty-five miles from St. Louis, I found the few French living today on Kaskaskia Island an insignificant minority submerged among the descendants of German immigrants. Victims of absentee ownership, the French of Kaskaskia Island are rather unambitious. But as they live on some of the richest land in the state, they can satisfy their frugal needs without undue strain. They live in the past. The days of Pierre Ménard and the old village which used to be on the mainland are still very much present with them.<sup>96</sup>

The history of Cahokia, Prairie du Rocher, and Kaskaskia represents a remarkable phenomenon. Since many of the more ambitious inhabitants left their native villages to seek their fortune elsewhere, the French population of southern Illinois probably never rose above fifteen hundred.<sup>97</sup> Unnoticed and forgotten by their neighbours of Anglo-Saxon and German stocks, the descendants of the early Canadian pioneers continued to cling to their language and traditions for four generations after the beginning of American rule. Some of their folk, transplanted to the isolation of the Missouri Ozarks at the end of the eighteenth century, and at the beginning of the nineteenth, have shown an almost incredible atavistic persistence. In Old Mines, a small community of the Missouri hinterland, they have preserved

1939, the Rev. J. A. H. Mueller wrote to the author that today 47 per cent, or approximately half of his congregation have a French family background and that 85 per cent of these belong to mixed families.

<sup>93</sup>Robert Hynes, "The old church at Cahokia" (*Illinois Catholic historical review*, I, April, 1919, 459-63).

<sup>94</sup>This building stood for years in Jackson Park in Chicago, to which place it had been removed. It has been taken back to Cahokia a few months ago.

<sup>95</sup>Beuckman, *History of the Diocese of Belleville*, 7.

<sup>96</sup>Charles Neely, *Tales and songs of southern Illinois*, edited with a foreword by John Webster Spargo (Menasha, Wis., 1938), 4.

<sup>97</sup>"It is doubtful if there were more than fifteen hundred people of French descent in Illinois in 1818 and practically all of these belonged to the habitant class" (Solon J. Buck, *Illinois in 1818*, Illinois centennial publication, introductory volume, Springfield, Ill., 1917, 93-4). With the expansion of the western trade, the opening of other sections of the state, and the development of the mining industry in Missouri early in the nineteenth century, the French population of Illinois did not increase, but remained stationary at best.

the ingrained provincialism of Old-World peasants until the last ten or fifteen years.<sup>98</sup> All these facts indicate clearly that the last grey shades of the twilight of the French survival in Illinois were to be seen in the first years of the twentieth century and not during the period of 1810-20, as historians often tell us. Although the French of the Illinois country have now been finally integrated into the general pattern of American life, the role which they played in the development of the North-West has not been forgotten. The foundation last year of the Cahokia Historical Society, whose main project is the complete restoration of the village as it stood in the heyday of its prosperity,<sup>99</sup> proves eloquently that the present generation is not unmindful of the labours and the sacrifices of the early pioneers.

<sup>98</sup>It is not generally known that six hundred families of French extraction live in the region of Old Mines—still commonly called *La Vieille Mine* by the natives—a small village in the foothills of the Missouri Ozarks, some sixty-five miles south of St. Louis. These people, who call themselves *Créoles*, descend from Illinois pioneers who migrated to the western bank of the Mississippi towards the end of the French régime, at the time of the British rule in Illinois and later at the beginning of the American régime. At the end of the eighteenth century and during the first decades of the nineteenth, many settled in the rich mining districts of the Missouri lead belt. Until fifteen or twenty years ago, the Creoles of Old Mines had had very little contact with the outside world. They clung to the language and customs of their ancestors, so that, in the years 1934, 1935, and 1936, it was possible for the writer to study their dialect and to collect seventy-three folk-tales, which local *conteurs* told him in their "thorny" but picturesque French. See Carrière, *Tales from the French folk-lore of Missouri*, and his studies, "La Survivance de l'esprit français dans l'ancien pays des Illinois" (*Deuxième Congrès de la Langue Française au Canada, Mémoires*, Québec, 1938, III, 96-101), and "Creole dialect of Missouri" (*American speech*, XIV, April, 1939, 109-19); Dorrance, *The survival of French in the old Sainte Genevieve district*; William M. Miller, "Missouri's 'Paw-Paw' French" (*French review*, III, Jan., 1930, 174-8).

<sup>99</sup>"News and comment" (*Illinois State historical review*, XXXI, Sept., 1938, 372). In this connection, one should call the attention of the reader to the valuable work of historical interest which has been done by the Division of State Parks of Illinois. For instance, in the American Bottom, the home of Pierre Ménard, near Fort Gage, and the powder magazine, the main gates, the foundations of the outer walls and of the buildings of Fort de Chartres have been restored and are preserved as precious relics of the history of the region.