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## Pioneers and Pathfinders of New France

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It is the common belief in southern Indiana that the history of the state had its beginnings in that section. There was the earliest permanent settlement at Vincennes, and there at Vincennes was the first territorial capital. There the judges first met to administer the laws. In that section, too, was the first state capital at Corydon, the beautiful little town among the hills of Harrison County not far from the Ohio River. And there at Corydon assembled the first state convention which drew up our first state constitution. There first came the people from the south and southeast, from Kentucky, Virginia, the Carolinas and Tennessee, to settle our state; when the state capital was moved from Corydon to Indianapolis in 1825 it was located far north of the center of population. Of the thirteen organized counties that made the state in 1816 only Wayne at the end of a strip of territory along the Ohio border reached as far north as half way up the state. Nearly all of the population of 63,000 lived within a hundred miles of the Ohio River.

Yet the truth still remains that here, where we now meet, white civilization first penetrated into what is now the State of Indiana. Here, if we are to trace back our life story of discovery and exploration, the history of Indiana begins.

The annals of St. Joseph County reach farther back into our historical traditions than do those of any other county in the State; and your landscape, so far as we know, is the first in Indiana that was looked upon by the eye of the white man. That story has been preserved for us by one of your distinguished fellow citizens of former times, to whom Indiana will be under lasting obligations. I refer to Judge Timothy Howard, whom I had the honor to know, who with his co-workers in your Society has rendered such inestimable service to Indiana and her history.

I shall not "carry coals to Newcastle" by re-telling here any of the story of this region, so well told in Judge Howard's *History of St. Joseph County*. But here in this county you have, as we all know, both the St. Joe and the Kankakee. Here is the water shed—Summit Lake or LaSalle Lake, or whatever it may now be called—which separates the waters of the St. Lawrence from those of the Mississippi. Here were some of the scenes of those great pioneer discoverers and explorers of New France, which form the subject of my paper.

What I have to say tonight is not the result of any historical discovery nor the product of an original investigation on my part. My purpose is merely to recite again in simple words the old story of romance and adventure. It may seem like a story for children, but it is one suitable for children of a larger growth. It is a story that can not be too often told. Perhaps for lack of the telling our children do not know it at all, and in the loss of it they lose one of the most thrilling chapters of American history.

After Oglethorpe had settled Georgia in 1733, the English towns and settlements stretched for hundreds of miles along the Atlantic seaboard. But, so far, they had not passed the foothills of the Alleghenies. Beyond these mountains was an unknown land. There were great lakes and rivers, and forests, and fertile valleys, and rich meadows, and vast prairies, which the English had not explored nor attempted to settle.

While the English were settling the coast, was no one exploring these vast inland regions? Yes, the French were exploring them, and the story of their exploits is the ambitious theme of this paper.

In the days of Colbert, the great colonizing statesman of France, the French ambition was to connect by a line of forts the mouth of the St. Lawrence with the mouth of the Mississippi; and thus holding America by its two ends, establish a great inland empire for New France. The dream came to an end in the French disasters of the Seven Years War.

In carrying out their plan the French sent out explorers to learn about the country. They sent out fur traders to control the fur trade with the Indians. They sent out missionaries to convert the Indians and to win them over to help the French. The French had soldiers, too, who would build forts and induce the Indian warriors to help them against the English. The French knew that the English settlers would soon be coming over the mountains from the coast.

On the upper Ohio in a contest over a few miserable huts the final conflict between these two national forces began, which ended in the British empire in America. But I turn from this historic conflict and its outcome to the beginning of the French adventures, not those of Cartier and Champlain in lower Canada, but those of the later great French heroes in what was then the far west.

Let us notice first the adventures of Joliet and Marquette:

Louis Joliet was born in Quebec in 1645. He was the son of a wagonmaker. He was educated by the Jesuits to be a priest. But Joliet did not become a priest. Instead he became a fur trader. He was a bold, enterprising merchant who was ready for a voyage of discovery and adventure.

Jacques Marquette was born in France in 1637. As a young man he was very religious. He joined the Jesuits (Society of Jesus) and became a priest. He was sent as a missionary to Canada and in 1668 he was living among the Indians in a mission station at St. Ignace, Michigan. In six years he learned to speak six Indian languages.

Father Marquette was of a gentle nature, but he knew no fear. He was an heroic, unselfish man, full of missionary zeal and he was ready to give his life, if need be, for the sake of the Indian tribes.

Joliet received orders from Frontenac, the Governor of Canada, to go with Marquette on a voyage of discovery to see

if they could find the Mississippi River. In Indian, "Mississippi" means the "Father of Waters". The French had heard tales from the Indians about this great river so far away. They wished to find it for themselves.

On the 17th of May, 1673, these two bold leaders embarked with five other men in two birch canoes. They had a supply of smoked meat and Indian corn.

They went through the Strait of Mackinac along the north shore of Lake Michigan. Over on the Wisconsin side of the lake they came to the "Wild-rice" Indians. They told the Indians the object of their voyage. The Indians did all they could to persuade them to go no further. They said the banks of the Mississippi were inhabited by wild tribes who put every stranger to death; they would tomahawk all newcomers without cause. They said there was a demon in the river whose roar could be heard at a great distance and who would drown them in the deep waters. The waters were full of frightful monsters who would devour them and their canoes.

These stories did not make Marquette afraid. He gave the Indians his blessing, taught them a prayer, and bade them farewell.

Marquette and Joliet with their men continued their journey. They came into Green Bay and went up the Fox River. They dragged their canoes up the rapids and followed the windings of the river through tangles of wild rice.

They got two Indian guides to show them the way to the Wisconsin River. They came to the portage, the land which separates two rivers flowing in opposite directions. There they had to carry their canoes a mile and a half over the prairies and the swamps. Finally they launched their little boats on the Wisconsin.

Then they bade farewell to the waters that flowed into the St. Lawrence. Where now were they going? Would the Great River, if they found it, carry them to the Gulf of Mexico or to the Gulf of California? They did not know. They were in a vast wilderness where, it seemed, no other white men had ever been.

They glided down the beautiful Wisconsin River, past islands covered with trees, passing wonderful dells and rocks,

by forests and groves and prairies, by thickets and marshes and sand bars. Finally, "with a joy that I can not express," said Marquette, their canoes glided into the Mississippi.

Here was nothing but solitude. There was not a trace of a man. A big catfish almost upset Marquette's canoe. The buffalo appeared on the bank, grazing in great herds.

At night the explorers built their fire and had their supper of corn meal and deer meat. When they got ready for bed they crept under their canoes and slept beneath the stars.

For two weeks they journeyed without seeing a human being. Then they found footprints of men in the mud, then a well trodden path which they followed to an Indian village. They came so near without being seen that they could hear the voices of the Indians in their wigwams. Then they shouted to attract attention. The Indians came swarming out of their huts. What are we to suppose they thought of these strange white men who were so far from home and who looked so unlike themselves,—Marquette in his long black priestly robe and Joliet and the others in their buckskin hunting suits and fur caps? These Indians may never have seen white men before, and we may well believe that they were astonished.

Marquette lifted the Calumet, the symbol of peace. Four chieftains came forward to meet the strangers. They had peace pipes decorated with feathers. They stood before the Frenchmen without speaking a word. Marquette broke the silence and asked them who they were. "Illinois," a chieftain said, and offered the pipe of peace. They were among the Illinois tribe of Indians.

Then they all went to the village, followed by a throng of warriors, squaws, and papooses. The Big Chief welcomed them in a strange fashion. He stood stark naked at the door of his wigwam, holding up both hands as if to shield his eyes from the sun. "Frenchmen," he said, "how bright the sun shines when you come to visit us. See, our village awaits you, and you shall enter our wigwams in peace."

The Indians entertained their visitors. They fed them on buffalo meat and fish and Indian meal. They offered some dog meat, which the visitors refused.

After this visit the explorers went on down the Mississippi. After a little while they came to a torrent of rushing yellow mud that came sweeping into the calm blue Mississippi. The current of the new river was boiling and surging and carrying in its course logs and branches of uprooted trees. They were in the mouth of the great Missouri, which flowed for 2,000 miles from the great Northwest.

The travellers got safely by and they went on past the future site of St. Louis, past the mouth of the Ohio, on to the mouth of the Arkansas. They saw other Indian tribes upon the shores, some of them fierce and threatening. As they came near the mouth of the Arkansas they saw a cluster of wigwams on the west bank. When the Indians saw the strangers they began yelling their war-whoop, snatching their weapons and running to the shore. Several large wooden canoes filled with savages put out from the shore above and below our explorers to cut off their retreat. A swarm of head-long young warriors waded into the river; the current was too strong for them to come very near, but one of the warriors threw his war club at the Frenchmen. The Indians began to prepare their bows and arrows, but as Marquette continued to hold up the cross and the pipe of peace, the older chiefs called off the young fighters. The travellers did not dare to go further down the river for fear of hostile Indians and the Spaniards. They turned back for the homeward journey.

We may be sure they had a hard time paddling up the stream against the current. They turned into the Illinois river and made their way over a portage to Lake Michigan and then up to Green Bay. When they reached there, they had paddled their canoes over 2,500 miles. They had certainly made a wonderful and romantic voyage.

Joliet went to Quebec to give a report of their voyage. Good fortune had attended the travellers on their long exploration, but now the luck seemed to turn. At La Chine rapids, just above Montreal, Joliet's canoe was upset, two of his men and an Indian boy were drowned, his papers were lost, and Joliet barely escaped with his life. He said he had passed forty-two rapids on his long voyage and now his canoe had capsized when he was almost at home and the danger

seemed over. He had only his life left, but he said he was ready to offer that again in the service of discovery. Of such spirit were the stout hearts of the devoted explorers.

Marquette had grown ill on the homeward journey and from that illness he never fully recovered. He regained some strength and with two companions he started back to his old mission station at St. Ignace. He was able to go only part of the way. In Northern Michigan, on the shore of the great lake, on the site of Ludington, near where Old Mission now is, he died on May 19, 1677. His two companions dug a grave beside the hut and buried him. So lived and died a great priest and a great explorer, who loved his fellow men and who has left a great name in American history.

Let us now look to the story of LaSalle, the greatest hero of New France.

LaSalle was born in France in 1643. He was not a Jesuit, nor a fur-trader, nor a missionary. He was a great leader who loved wilderness exploration. He dreamed of a great empire for France in America, and he wanted his country to control the valley of the Mississippi.

On one of his journeys south from Lake Erie he discovered the Ohio. Soon after, he concluded that the Mississippi flowed into the Gulf of Mexico, not into the Gulf of California. He wanted to find its mouth to fortify it and guard it against both the English and the Spaniards.

To carry out these plans he and his men explored nearly half a continent, and his travels and labors reveal one of the most marvelous stories in American history.

One of the first things which LaSalle did was to build a large vessel above Niagara Falls, to navigate the Great Lakes. The carpenters and shipbuilders cut down great trees and set to work to build the ship. The Indians were astonished at the vast ribs of the wooden monster.

In the spring she was ready for launching. On her prow was carved a great image like a griffin, and *Griffen* became the name of the ship. Five small cannon looked out from the port holes. The cannon were fired and the French and Indians shouted in chorus as the Griffen glided into the Niagara River. You may well believe that the Indians were amazed.

Sail was set and the Griffen, coming out of the Niagara River, began to plow the waters of Lake Erie where sail had never been seen before. For three days they sailed over Lake Erie, then into the strait of Detroit. There the sailors saw wild turkeys and bears and herds of deer. They crossed Lake St. Clair, and then their eyes beheld Lake Huron spread out before them like a glassy sea.

The Griffen went through some furious storms and gales, and at times the sailors almost despaired of their lives. After a time they reached Mackinac and St. Ignace, where the French had mission stations.

LaSalle's party went on to Green Bay. There he sent the Griffen back to Ft. Niagara with a valuable cargo of furs, while he and fourteen men continued on the journey.

Hardships now came upon them. There were almost ceaseless storms; they were drenched and nearly starved. Every night the canoes had to be dragged up the steep banks of the lake while the waves and breakers dashed over them. Once in a lull in the storm they steered to a little island, made a fire of driftwood, crouched around it, and drew their blankets over their heads. There, pelted with sleet and rain, they remained in this miserable plight for two days. They ate some haws and wild berries, which made them sick. It certainly was not a pleasure excursion.

LaSalle and his party went around the southern end of Lake Michigan to the mouth of the St. Joseph. There he built a fort which he called the Miami.

Then he went up the St. Joseph to the site of South Bend, then over the portage to the Kankakee. The voyagers went down this sluggish stream along boundless prairies, gliding along almost on a level with the banks. They looked like men floating on the land.

LaSalle's men became discouraged. Some of them tried to kill him, putting poison in his food. Some of them deserted him, going off with the runners of the forests, *courers de bois*. These were French adventurers who had abandoned civilized life and who wandered from place to place through the woods, at times living with the Indians, marrying Indian squaws, and living in Indian fashion, or as outlaws in the wilderness.



With a few trusted men LaSalle went on to the Illinois River and down that stream to the point where Peoria now stands. Here he built another fort.

Here let us leave LaSalle for a time while we tell about two of the men who were with him. One of these was Tonty, the other was Father Louis Hennepin, a Franciscan priest.

Tonty was a faithful friend and follower of LaSalle. He was a brave soldier, with only one hand. He had lost the other hand in battle and he now wore an artificial hand of iron. For this reason he was called "Tonty, of the iron hand." He was a strong man and he could hit very hard with his iron hand. LaSalle depended very much upon Tonty.

Father Louis Hennepin was born about 1640. In his youth he heard old sailors tell stories of their travels. This increased his desire to visit distant countries. He was educated and became a priest. He was glad when his superiors sent him to Canada as a chaplain to join LaSalle on his expedition.

Hennepin often went ahead of the party to explore. Once in the beginning of this long journey he went as far as he could in his canoe up the Niagara River. He then climbed the steep ascent and pushed through the forest on a tour of inspection. He saw the furious river at the rapids raging below. Then in primeval solitude the great Niagara Falls burst upon his sight! Here before his gaze was one of the wonders of the world.

Was Hennepin the first white man who had ever seen those wonderful falls? We do not know. But we know that the falls were new to him and that the sight impressed him beyond measure. His description of Niagara Falls is the earliest known to exist. He said the Falls were 500 feet high. He was indeed greatly impressed, as they are only 160 feet high. Hennepin was a great explorer, but sometimes, like Caesar's scouts among the Helvetians and the Gauls, he reported for seen what he had not seen. Both the explorer and the historian have much need of imagination, but sometimes they allow their imaginations to run into riot and exaggeration. Perhaps Hennepin did this; some say he deliberately falsified his story.

While LaSalle and his party were stationed at the fort

near the site of Peoria, LaSalle sent Hennepin and two companions to explore the upper Mississippi. They went 600 miles up the great river. They killed buffalo and deer, and beavers and wild turkeys, and now and then a bear swimming in the river. One day Hennepin was daubing his canoe with pitch to keep it from leaking and the other men were cooking a turkey. Suddenly a fleet of Indian canoes came into view carrying a war party of 120 naked savages. They were out on the war-path to fight the Miamis. When they saw Hennepin and his men they raised a hideous war-whoop. They pushed their canoes to land, leaped ashore and quickly surrounded the astonished Frenchmen. They refused to smoke the pipe of peace and forced the explorers to row across the river, the Indians following behind with yells and howls that almost froze the blood in a man's veins.

When they came on shore the Indians were about to split open the heads of their prisoners with war clubs. Hennepin rushed to his canoe, brought some presents and gave the chief a hatchet with which to kill him. He then bowed his head in submission. This act took faith and courage, and it satisfied the Indians that the Frenchmen would do them no harm; so they spared the lives of their prisoners.

Then the Indians danced a medicine dance. Their bodies were painted from head to foot; their black, straight hair was oiled and decorated with red and white feathers.

These Indians were the Sioux or the Dakotah Indians. They compelled their prisoners to go with them far up into Minnesota. After journeying nineteen days they came to the site of St. Paul. There they hid their canoes and started out on foot across the prairies to their villages.

These Dakotahs were tall Indians and they could walk much faster than the Europeans. It was in the spring of the year, but in this northland there was frost at night. The marshes and ponds were glazed with ice which cut Hennepin's legs as he waded through. They swam the larger rivers and the cold current nearly froze Hennepin to death. As Hennepin was lagging behind, the Indians, in order to spur him on, built a prairie fire in the dry grass behind him. Then taking him by the hand they ran forward to escape the flames.

At times they were nearly starved. They were given only a small piece of smoked meat each day. When they reached the Indian villages they saw stakes driven in the ground with bundles of straw tied to them, and it seemed the Indians were preparing to burn their prisoners alive.

Such were some of the hardships of these daring pioneers and explorers.

Their lives were spared, but Hennepin and his two companions lived for eight months as prisoners among the Sioux. Finally they were released.

On the journey homeward Hennepin discovered the falls near St. Paul to which he gave the name of St. Anthony. Hennepin went back to Montreal through Wisconsin and Lake Huron. He returned to Europe and wrote an account of his journeys. He could tell as much as any living man about Indian life and customs. He died in 1701.

We left LaSalle near Peoria. There he left Tonty with most of the party while he started with five men back to Niagara. He wanted to get more supplies and to learn what had become of the Griffen, of which he had heard no word.

This was one of the hardest journeys ever made by white men in America. Much of the way they had to go on foot. The rain fell in floods. The men had to sleep on the wet ground and often had to go without food. They had to watch by night and march by day. They carried heavy loads, blankets, clothing, kettles, hatchets, guns, powder, lead, and skins for moccasins.

At times they waded to their waists in swamps and creeks. They struggled through thorns and brambles in the wilds of southern Michigan. Their clothes were drenched at night when they took them off and were frozen so stiff in the morning that they could not put them on without building a fire to thaw them out.

Finally LaSalle and his men came to the Detroit River, then to Lake Erie. There they built a canoe which brought them to Niagara. They had come 2,000 miles over a course beset with danger and obstruction.

LaSalle went on to Montreal. There he obtained supplies and started back. He had not gone far before two messengers

met him bearing a letter from Tonty. This letter contained the discouraging news that nearly all the men at the Peoria fort had deserted, that they had destroyed the fort and had stolen the stores of supplies.

LaSalle, with his few men, went on back over the long journey to Peoria, hoping to find and rescue Tonty. When he came to where the fort had been there was nothing but bleak desolation. Everything was gone. Only the howling of the wolves filled the air.

Was LaSalle downhearted? He certainly had enough to make him so. He had been betrayed and defeated and had suffered enough trials and disappointments to discourage the stoutest heart. But LaSalle was not dismayed. He bore up amid his difficulties, showing how great he was. He seemed to have a frame of iron, and an unconquerable mind.

He pushed on down the Illinois to its junction with the Mississippi. But with so small a force of men he could not go on down that river. He went back on a long journey to Fort Miami on the St. Joseph. There he learned that Tonty was at Mackinac. He went the whole length of Lake Michigan to find him, and there he heard from Tonty's own lips the long tale of disaster. "Any one else," said Tonty, "would have thrown up his hands and abandoned the enterprise. But far from this! With a firmness and constancy that never had its equal, I saw him more resolved than ever to continue his work and push forward his discovery."

Dunn, the historian of Indiana, says of LaSalle:

There was something almost touching the supernatural in the courage and resolution of LaSalle. At that rude fort on the bank of the St. Joseph, in the discomforts of a severe winter, hundreds of miles from the French settlements, his faithful Tonty carried captive, killed, or a fugitive, he knew not which, his remaining comrades disheartened, his colony swept from the face of the earth, his credit shattered, his means dissipated by disasters of flood and field, LaSalle calmly reconstructed his plans and prepared to renew his enterprise on a more extended basis.

LaSalle had caught his first glimpse of the Mississippi and he was determined to go on to reach its outlet. He and Tonty went back to Ft. Frontenac, Canada, for more supplies and then they were ready to begin all over again.

In the fall of 1681 the explorer was again on his way to the Illinois country. There were twenty-three Frenchmen and eighteen Indians, and the Indians insisted upon taking ten squaws and three children, making fifty-four in all. Some of these were a burden, not a help.

By the time they reached the lower end of Lake Michigan it was the dead of winter and the streams were frozen over. They made sledges and placed their canoes on them. This time they went up the "Checagou" River, as the Indians called it. Over the portage they passed to the Illinois River. They dragged their sleds over the frozen course of that river until they came to open water near Peoria.

Then launching their canoes they rowed and floated down the Illinois to the Mississippi. The ice was drifting down the Mississippi, so they had to remain in camp a week till the great river was safe for their canoes. Then they paddled and drifted downward past the mouth of the Missouri, by the place where St. Louis was afterwards built, and on down past the mouth of the Ohio. Like Marquette and Joliet, they were astonished at the muddy water of the Missouri, which spoiled the clear water of the Mississippi so they could not drink it.

Near Memphis they built another fort. Then they went on down past Vicksburg to New Orleans and then on to the Gulf (April 6, 1682). Here they erected a pillar and sang a hymn of the church. LaSalle had triumphed at last. After all his trials and tribulations he had discovered the mouth of the Mississippi.

LaSalle took possession of the country under the name of *Louisiana*, in honor of his King Louis XIV. He claimed for his king "all the nations, peoples, provinces, cities, towns, villages, mines, minerals, fisheries, streams and rivers," from the mouth of the Ohio to the sea, and on to the "River of Palms," or Rio Grande. You will see that this was a very large claim.

LaSalle was told by the Indians that they were the first Europeans that had ever gone up or down the Mississippi. In this we know they were mistaken, as DeSoto, a Spaniard, discovered the river 140 years before, and Marquette and Joliet had gone down, but not so far as LaSalle.

LaSalle returned safely to Quebec. Then he went to France. A few years later he embarked on another expedition. He wished to fortify the mouth of the Mississippi, and this time he sought to find it by way of the Gulf of Mexico.

Unluckily his ships went too far to the west and his party landed on the coast of Texas. From there they tried to reach the Mississippi overland, but in vain. LaSalle and some of his strongest followers struck out northward determined to reach the Great Lakes, where help might be found. They suffered hardships, their provisions ran low, and they were in constant danger of attack from hostile Indians. His men mutinied and on March 19, 1687, LaSalle was murdered by one of his own party. Here in the far Southwest, lost on the plains, LaSalle died at the age of forty-four—the greatest explorer of New France, whom Tonty called “One of the greatest men of his age.”

LaSalle's dream never came true. It was a great dream for the glory of France. But when LaSalle died there were twenty times as many people in the English colonies on the seaboard as there were in all New France. The French had some forts and soldiers, and brave explorers and fur traders and missionaries; but they had very few colonists and settlers. For this reason, the English overcame the French in the struggle for the Mississippi Valley.