

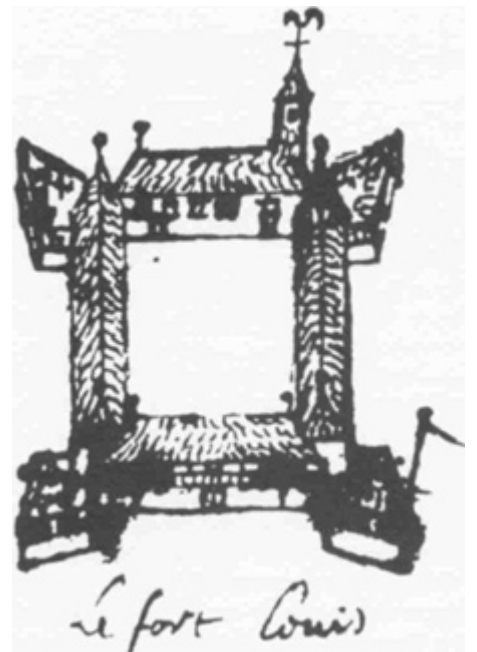
The Old Mobile Mobile Project Newsletter

Issue 15

Fall 1997

Port Dauphin

In the waning days of 1701 Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville established a port for his colony of Louisiana at the southeastern end of Isle Massacre, so named for the pile of human bones observed during his first visit to the island in 1699. A few days later, the French colonists rowed north to their new townsite, which they called Mobile after the native peoples living in the immediate vicinity. Apart from a few missionaries and traders living among the villages of various southeastern Indians, the occupants of these two settlements — Port Dauphin and what we now refer to as Old Mobile — comprised the whole of French Louisiana for nearly a decade. Although French mapmakers grandiosely claimed vast expanses of the midcontinent at the turn of the 18th century, the reality on the ground consisted of a few hundred French and Canadian colonists whose very survival remained in doubt. Understanding the story of those colonists, and their evolving relations with the original Indian occupants of the north-central Gulf coast, has been the goal of our research since 1989. Following years of intensive excavations at the Old Mobile site, most recently our research has led us to Port Dauphin, on what came to be called Dauphin Island.



This barrier island lies at the mouth of Mobile Bay, and about a 50-mile row from Old Mobile. Natural obstacles blocked the passage of large ships into the upper bay, so the colonists counted themselves fortunate to have found a serviceable harbor behind a sand spit on the south side of the island. The distance between port and town, however, remained a hardship for the colonists, and contributed to the decision in 1711 to relocate the town to its present site at the head of the bay, only half as far from Dauphin Island.

At first the port had few occupants, usually just a few guards at the warehouse, but eventually some families moved there — partly to escape the scrutiny of contentious neighbors at Old Mobile and partly for the opportunities that this coastal location offered for private trade with passing vessels. By 1710 the little community that had grown around the anchorage attracted the unwelcome attention of a Jamaican pirate crew, who pillaged the islanders' homes. Soon afterwards a wooden fort was erected just west of the settlement to protect the harbor from future assaults.

Port Dauphin's heyday was the second decade of the century, when as many as 20 homes lined the village's single street.

(continued on next page)

Bird's-eye view of Port Dauphin, circa 1718, depicting the fort (upper left) and the village (courtesy of the Library of Congress).



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Beginning with a devastating hurricane that struck the island in 1717 and blocked the roadstead, the village experienced a gradual decline in population, which accelerated in the early 1720s as the colony shifted attention westward to New Biloxi and New Orleans. A last flurry of activity occurred during the war with Spain, between 1719 and 1722, when the island served as a staging area for French troops, colonial militia, and their Indian allies attacking Pensacola. By 1724 or 1725, the village was virtually deserted.

Archaeological investigations began at the fort site (1MB61), portions of which were excavated by Read Stowe of the University of South Alabama in the 1970s and by **George Shorter** (then a graduate student at Louisiana State University and now a research associate at the Center for Archaeological Studies) in 1992-1993. This year, for the first time, excavations have occurred within the Port Dauphin village site (1MB221).

Due to the timely assistance and cooperation of the site's landowners, officials of the Town of Dauphin Island, members of the Dauphin Island Foundation, and a grant from the Alabama Cultural Resources Preservation Trust Fund (administered by the Alabama Historical Commission), we have been able to excavate an entire house site within the village. This particular structure seems to have been occupied between about 1715 and 1725. The recovered artifacts include all sorts of types and styles never previously found at Old Mobile or any other site in the area, so they should provide many months of challenging analysis and study. The collection looks domestic in nature, but an abundance of wine glass fragments and some other finds hint that the building may have functioned as a tavern for a time. In striking contrast to the paucity of religious items found at Old Mobile are the metal crosses and rosary beads recovered from the Port Dauphin structure. And the discovery of brass ornaments that apparently came from horse tack offers an intriguing challenge to the historical record, which includes no mention of horses on the island in French times.

As fascinating as the Port Dauphin excavations have been, they nearly met with disaster midway through the dig. The site has been hidden for most of its 285-year existence beneath 3 feet of dune sand. We removed that protective layer by hand this spring and had been carefully excavating the upper zones of the site, piece-plotting the artifacts as we worked down to the level of the structure's floor. Just as excavation began to reveal the floor plan of the building, buried beneath clay bousillage that once covered the walls and chimney, on the 7th of June the island received 15 inches of rain — not an unusual occurrence for the Mobile area in late spring, but enough to raise the island's watertable and bring digging to a halt. Normally we use pumps to lower the watertable, but this proved impracticable in the beach sand, since unexcavated parts of the site periphery would have to have been sacrificed as sumps. So we waited.

Summer rains continued through July, up until the arrival of Hurricane Danny, which remained stationary over Mobile Bay and inundated the island with a nearly unbelievable 42 inches of rain on July 25-27. Excavations were finally resumed after Labor Day and the house floor plan mapped at last. The site has witnessed many such storms, but the more immediate threat comes from private home development. With a second grant from the Alabama Cultural Resources Preservation Trust Fund we hope to identify other French colonial sites, as well as British colonial and Civil War-era sites, on the island before they are lost to development.

Recent Grants

The Alabama Historical Commission has awarded the Center for Archaeological Studies, here at the University of South Alabama, four grants for research on topics related to French colonists in the Mobile area. In the spring, as mentioned in the last newsletter, we received funding to study the early 19th-century potters of Mobile Bay's Eastern Shore, some of whom brought European potting methods with them when they immigrated to Baldwin County. At the same time, we also obtained a grant to conduct excavations at the critically important site of Port Dauphin, already discussed in this issue of the newsletter. The two latest grants include funds for a thorough archaeological survey of Dauphin Island, and for excavations at the Augustin Rochon plantation in the rapidly growing modern community of Spanish Fort. on the Eastern Shore.

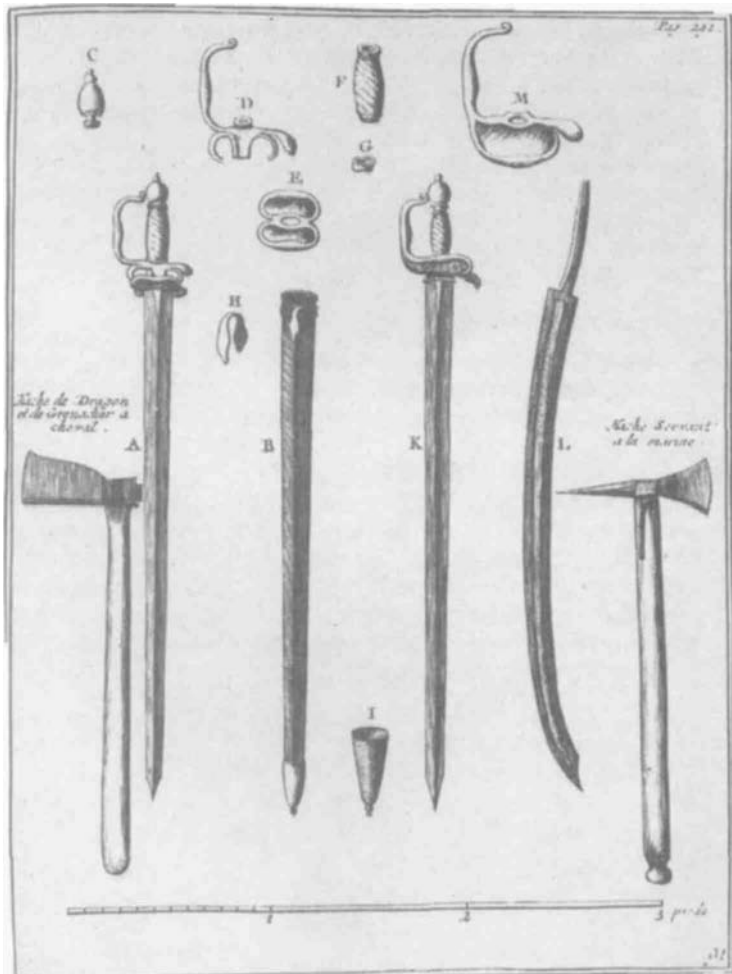
These grants come from Alabama's **Cultural Resources Preservation Trust Fund**, derived from interest accumulating from the investment of fines and penalties paid to the state several years ago by a gas pipeline company that destroyed some archaeological sites during a construction project. Alabama is extremely fortunate to have such a fund; most states do not have a preservation grants program, and federal funds for historic preservation are now practically unobtainable. The **Cultural Resources Preservation Trust Fund** has supported all kinds of projects to save and study historic buildings and archaeological sites throughout the state, many of which would have been lost without the providential intercessions made possible by these grants.

There is one "catch" to these grants; they require cash matches. So far the University and private donors have contributed nearly \$22,000 of the \$61,626 needed to fully fund these four worthwhile projects. All of these projects focus on locations that are undergoing rapid growth. In fact, private homes are scheduled to be built on both of the excavation sites. This is the only opportunity we will have to acquire the knowledge and the artifacts from these sites. Future generations are bound to marvel at the destructiveness of our times. But we need not accept all these losses. We can still make a difference! If you are able to help match these grants with a tax-deductible contribution made payable to the "University of South Alabama," please send it, c/o Greg Waselkov, to Archaeology HUMB 34. University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL 36688.

1998 Calendar

The 14th edition of the interesting bilingual calendar, **Les Francais d'Amerique/French in America**, is now available. The 1998 edition features 13 color photographs, some 50 historical anniversaries and many cultural events relating to French contributions to the history and civilization of North America.

You can obtain the calendar for \$6.50 (plus \$1.50 for postage and handling) from Marie-Reine Mikesell, 1155 E. 56th Street, Chicago, IL 60637-1530. Checks should be made payable to: French in America Calendar - 1998.



(A) Infantry sword. (B) scabbard. (C) pommel. (D) knuckle or bow guard and quillon. (E) counterguard. (F) wire-wrapped or cast grip. (G) ferrule, (H) scabbard clip. (I) scabbard tip. (K) cavalry saber. (L) grenadier's saber. (M) saber knuckle guard; and a dragoon's hatchet (left) and naval boarding axe (right) (*Memoires d'Artillerie*. by Surirey de Saint-Remy. Pierre Mortier Amsterdam, 1702, p. 292)

Educational Outreach in Archaeology at the University of South Alabama

One of our staff at the Center (or Archaeological Studies, Ashley Dumas, has organized several programs to inform the public about our line of work. In **"We Dig Archaeology!"** (part of **Science at South**), 10 young students (6th-9th graders) spent four of their summer afternoons learning the basics of archaeological science. The response was enthusiastic. Restoring broken ceramic vessels seemed to compare favorably with the stinky brews concocted earlier each day in the **"Creating with Chemistry"** program next door.

Ms. Dumas, along with educator Anne Dalton and historian Charlotte Hood, also coordinated **Project Archaeology** for school teachers (Grades 4-7). As part of the inservice training offered by the College of Education at the University of South Alabama, **Project Archaeology** offered 12 teachers lesson plans that integrate archaeology into the curriculum. Based on **Intrigue of the Past**, a teacher's activity guide developed by archaeologists with the Bureau of Land Management, this two-day training session also included a tour of the archaeology lab, current information on archaeology in Alabama, and Native American Indian insights from Ms. Patsy Hanvey, a very talented Cherokee potter. We expect to offer both programs again in the near future. For more information, call Ashley Dumas at (334) 460-7976.

Bibliophile's Corner

French colonial topics have once again inspired writers across the continent, with a number of publications emanating from Michigan State University Press. **Essays In French Colonial History**, edited by A. J. B. Johnston (Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 270 pages, 1997; \$35.95), is the new vehicle for proceedings of the French Colonial Historical Society. This volume includes papers originally presented at the society's 1995 meeting at Louisbourg and Sydney, Nova Scotia. Among the 17 contributions are "Compagnonnage in Eighteenth-Century New France," by Leslie Choquette and "Adieu pour cette annee: Seasonably and Time in New France," by Jane E. Harrison, to mention just two of the more intriguing articles.

Joseph L. Peyser has translated and edited two volumes, **Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre: Officer, Gentleman, Entrepreneur** (Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 275 pages, 1996; \$39.95), on the private trade carried on by French colonial officers stationed at western outposts, and **On the Eve of the Conquest: The Chevalier de Raymond's Critique of New France in 1754** (Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 220 pages, in press; \$39.95). The latter explores Raymond's year as commandant of the Miami post (at modern Fort Wayne, Indiana) in 1749-1750, and the controversy generated by his critical report to the French court on the state of New France.

Also scheduled for release this fall or winter is **New Faces of the Fur Trade**, edited by Jo-Anne Fiske, Susan Sleeper Smith, and William Wicken (Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 265 pages, in press: \$39.95), with selected papers from the 7th North American Fur Trade Conference held at Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1995. Volumes of Fur Trade Conference proceedings have always included provocative and substantive papers of lasting value. This one promises new insights from the fields of social and gender history.

Carl A. Brasseaux's fine book, **The Founding of New Acadia: The Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana, 1765-1803** (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 229 pages, 1996; \$12.95), has been reissued in paperback, as has James Axtell's **The Indians' New South: Cultural Change In the Colonial Southeast** (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 120 pages, 1997; \$9.95), with a survey of European-Indian relations in the colonies of Spanish Florida, English South Carolina, and French Louisiana.

Military enthusiasts will enjoy Rene Chartrand and Eugene Leleievre's well-illustrated booklet, **Lou's XV's Army (2): French Infantry** (Men-at-Arms Series 302; Osprey Military, London, 48 pages, 1996; ISBN 1-85532-625-6). For this and many other books and reproduction 18th-century accoutrements, contact Jerry and Debra Burchell at Nouvelle Chartres, PO Box 366, Prairie du Rocher, IL 62277-0366; (618)284-7111.

From Canada come two important and eminently readable volumes. Marcel Trudel's latest contribution to a series on New France — **Histoire de la Nouvelle-France, IV: la seigneurie de la Compagnie des Indes occidentales, 1663-1674** (Editions Fides, Montreal, 894 pages, 1997; ISBN 2-7621-1868-9). According to my correspondent, archaeologist Marc Lavoie, Trudel has written an excellent and very detailed treatment of those twelve years. Trudel also wrote the previous three volumes, which appeared in print between 1963 and 1983. The last volume in the series (by Guy Fregault, **Histoire de la Nouvelle-France, IX: la guerre de la conquete, 1754-1760**, Editions Fides, Montreal, 514 pp., 1955; ISBN 0-7755-0182-4) was the first to appear in print, so four remain to be written to complete this monumental work.

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Upcoming French Colonial Events

The second weekend in October poses a dilemma for those of us within driving distance of two French colonial events. The **Fort Maurepas Society** will host a French colonial living history reenactment at the off-site replica of the fort in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Beginning with a French arms drill at 5:30 PM on Friday, October 10th, reenactors and tort staff will entertain and educate visitors until noon Sunday with musket volley and cannon firing demonstrations, as well as a visit by Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville (Dr. James Smith, University of Southern Mississippi - Long Beach Campus), at 4:00 PM Saturday. Fort Maurepas can be reached from Interstate 10 by taking exit 50 through the city of Ocean Springs to the beach (the fort will be on your right).

The **Center for French Colonial Studies** holds its 1997 Annual Meeting and Conference in Monroe, Michigan at Monroe County Community College on Saturday, October 11. Scheduled speakers include (among others) Dennis Au on "Surviving Architecture and Artifacts of the River Raisin Community," Joseph Peyser on Captain Charles de Raymond's observations on "the brandy trade, smuggling, Indian relations, and the mores of French colonial officials" throughout New France in 1754; Peter Haltord on "Language of the Frontier French;" and Marcel Beneteau, who will perform some "Songs of the Detroit River Region." A Saturday evening French-theme banquet and Sunday morning tours of the River Raisin

Battlefield and the Navarre-Anderson Trading Post conclude the conference. For further information, call Marge Wilhauk at (573)883-7171 or the Monroe Museum at (313)243-7137.

In the distant future, the French Colonial Historical Society plans to hold their 1999 annual meeting at the Hotel Monteleone in the French Quarter of New Orleans on June 2-5, to be organized by this writer and several southeastern colleagues. This promises to be a memorable meeting, the first in New Orleans for the society, and an opportunity for Gulf coast residents to attend a consistently excellent program of informative speakers and entertaining evening diversions.

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Finally, Cornelius Jaenen has edited a collection of 92 extracts from documents and published accounts in ***The French Regime In the Upper Country of Canada During the Seventeenth Century*** (Ontario Series XVI; The Champlain Society, Toronto, 303 pages, 1996: ISBN 0-9693425-7-8). The contents range widely, from Jacques Cartier's disclosure of the Ottawa River route to the interior in 1535, to La Salle's last will and testament of 1681, to La Mothe Cadillac's views on the Western Sea, ca. 1700. Without denying in any way this volume's stature as a reference work, readers will undoubtedly find it well-suited to pleasurable browsing on those winter evenings devoted to quiet contemplation before a warm fire.

