

The Old Mobile Project Newsletter

Issue 4

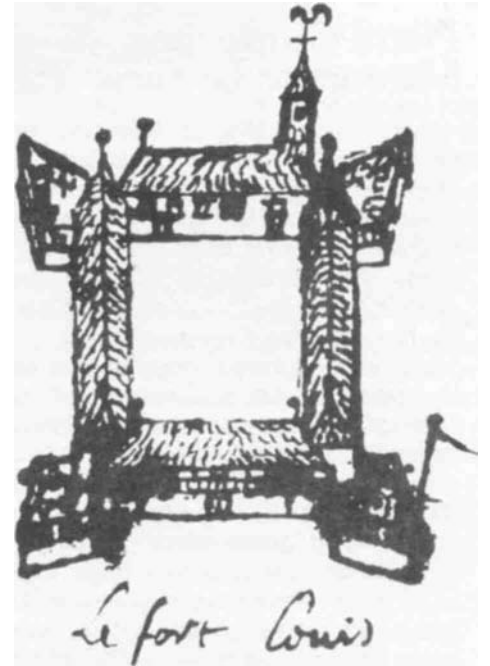
Winter 1991

Excavations and Survey Continue at Old Mobile

The University of South Alabama research team has just completed excavations of the blacksmith's forge site located this spring, a discovery reported in the last newsletter. The building measured only about 16 by 20 feet and was situated on the far western edge of Old Mobile, the capital of the French Louisiana colony from 1702 until 1711. Judging from the small sizes and quantity of brick fragments that remained from the forge, the building's structural materials (bricks, roof tiles, and perhaps the wooden framework) probably were salvaged for reuse elsewhere - maybe when the town moved to its present location in 1711. On the other hand, considerable amounts of scrap iron and iron slag, along with an abundance of charcoal and coal, still remained at the site. Metallurgical analysis of the slag should reveal whether the French colonists produced iron from local ores or simply recycled broken tools.

Because this site apparently lies beyond the limits of the town depicted on the 1702 and 1705 maps, we do not know who worked here. But it was not too far from the Seminary, where missionaries from Quebec worked at converting Indian refugees who had fled to the French colony to escape English-led slave raids. So this blacksmith's shop may have been part of the mission complex.

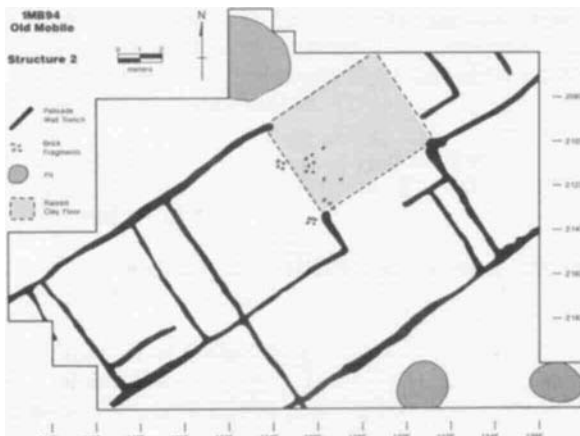
Every new excavation at Old Mobile leads to some new discovery, something that we did not anticipate from the



historical record. For instance, the maze of footing trenches for palisade-type fences surrounding the blacksmith's shop was quite unexpected. Last year's excavation at the Canadian voyageur's house revealed a single fenced enclosure, presumably a garden or animal pen, similar to enclosures seen in early 18th-century drawings of New Orleans and Port Dauphin, but nothing as complex as the intricate network of fences around the blacksmith's shop. Special analysis of the soil and pollen from these areas should yield some clues about what was being enclosed - animals or crops.

The systematic survey of the Old Mobile site continues, with about 20% of the site mapped and 4,508 shovel tests dug so far. At each point on our archaeological site grid (denoted on the ground by flags set at four-meter intervals and marked with north-south and east-west coordinates), a small hole is dug and the soil sifted to obtain an artifact sample. Artifact distributions across the surveyed portion of the site are then studied to determine the locations of French buildings. We have tentatively identified the sites of 19 structures (further scrutiny of the artifact maps is underway, so the final total may differ).

A major goal of the survey is to eventually produce an archaeological map of Old Mobile that can be overlaid on the 1702 and 1705 historic maps. Town lots assigned to particular individuals on the early maps could then be correlated with archaeological house sites on the ground. Although we are still several months from a definitive overlay, some conclusions can be drawn from the survey information. The eastern portion of Old Mobile seems to have suffered some loss due to river erosion. Unfortunately, this includes the site of Fort Louis, which appears to have fallen into the Mobile River many years ago. Test excavations at several possible fort locations failed to turn up any trace of this very important structure. On the other hand, the building sites that have been found are generally well-preserved. Excavations have just begun at a very large concentration of artifacts that may represent the biggest structure found to date. Out of one shovel test at this site came a nearly complete wine glass, among the finest French artifacts yet recovered.



Archaeological Plan View of the Blacksmith's Forge Site and Associated Fenced Enclosures

Pierre-Charles and Marguerite Le Sueur

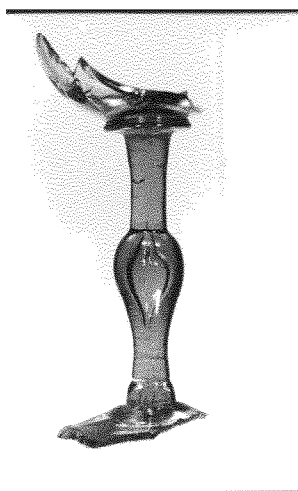
Born around 1657 in Pas-de-Calais, Pierre-Charles Le Sueur had come to Quebec and married Iberville's cousin, Marguerite Messier, in 1690. During the previous decade he had been among the first Canadians trading for beaver pelts with the Sioux and Chippewa in the upper Mississippi Valley, where he soon learned of potentially valuable copper and lead deposits. In 1699 he formed the "Compagnie des Sioux," recruited a group of indentured servants, and sailed with Iberville to Louisiana. Le Sueur and his men ascended the Mississippi in a felucca and two canoes to what is now central Minnesota and built Fort L'Huilier.

In February 1702 Le Sueur arrived at Isle Massacre (Dauphin Island) with "two thousand hundred weight of blue and green earth" from his mines and four hundred pounds of beaver pelts. In the end, the multi-hued soils proved worthless, and LeSueur's trade in beaver violated a Canadian monopoly. But his heavily-laden canoes may have carried another resource even more valuable to the young colony - catlinite, the soft red stone from which calumet pipes were made. Calumets were widely used by many Indian societies, as well as by French colonists, in an elaborate greeting ritual designed to avert hostilities when meeting strangers, potential enemies, in the wilderness. For French colonists, who found themselves outnumbered 50 to 1 by native Americans, the value of the calumet ceremony is suggested by the abundance of catlinite at Old Mobile. Pieces of whittled, sawn, and drilled catlinite (unfinished calumets that broke during

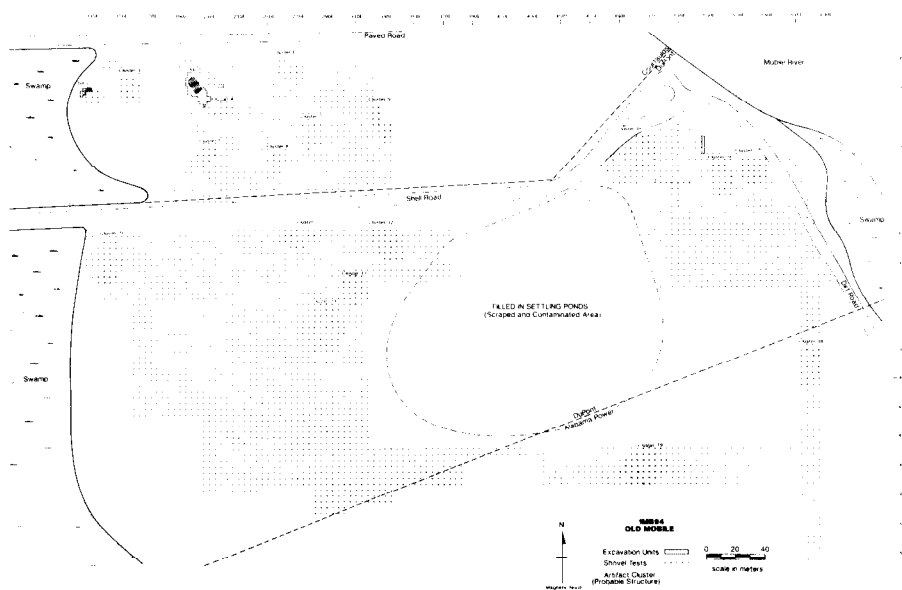
manufacture) have now been excavated from four structures at Old Mobile. Since the only sources of catlinite are a few outcrops in Minnesota, Le Sueur may very possibly have obtained some of the rare stone during his stay at Fort L'Huilier. That he knew of the catlinite source is indicated in a list of western Sioux bands Le Sueur compiled on December 12, 1700, just before his descent of the Mississippi. The last village mentioned is "Hinhanetons - village of the red stone quarry."

Le Sueur returned to France with Iberville in 1702. Two years later he sailed for Louisiana on the *Pelican*, contracted yellow fever, and died in Havana. His family, meanwhile, had already begun the long, arduous journey overland from Montreal. Marguerite's brother and one of her daughters died along the way, but a son and two daughters survived the ordeal. The widow Le Sueur and her children took up residence at Old Mobile in the house built for her late husband.

The lives of these and other French colonists are chronicled in Jay Higginbotham's book, *Old Mobile: Fort Louis de la Louisiana, 1702-1711*, soon to be reprinted in paperback by the University of Alabama Press. Two interesting first-hand accounts of life in the early Louisiana colony are *Fleur de Lys and Calumet: Being the Penicaut Narrative of French Adventure in Louisiana*, translated and edited by Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams (University of Alabama Press, 1988) and *The Historical Journal of the Establishment of the French in Louisiana*, by Dumont dit Montigny, translated and edited by Joan Cain, Virginia Koenig, and Glenn R. Conrad (Center for Louisiana Studies, Lafayette, Louisiana, 1971).



French wine glass fragment



Tentatively identified house locations discovered during the 1990 systematic shovel testing survey at Old Mobile.

Major Contributions by the State of Alabama, Courtaulds and DuPont

Several major financial contributions have recently been made to the Old Mobile Archaeology Project, enabling the fieldwork underway at the site to proceed at a rapid pace.

The Alabama State Legislature has allocated \$150,000 for archaeological research at Old Mobile, to be administered by the Alabama Historical Commission. Representatives Taylor Harper and Mary Zoghby were instrumental in obtaining this funding. Archaeology is a labor-intensive activity, requiring large amounts of staff time to properly excavate, preserve, and study fragile, centuries-old artifacts. These state funds are paying the salaries of the field supervisor and six other field and laboratory workers, as well as providing the field vehicle for the project.

The Friends of Old Mobile Formally Organized

The Friends of Old Mobile is now an officially chartered non-profit organization and all memberships are tax-deductible. *The Friends* are issuing a quarterly bulletin to inform members of their activities and meetings. These highly motivated individuals, who share a common desire to support and promote the Old Mobile Project, invite you to join *The Friends*. Committees are forming to assist with publicity, public education, obtaining special grants, and genealogical research to identify descendants of Old Mobile colonists. All members will continue to receive this newsletter.

Become a Friend of Old Mobile

Current archaeological investigations at the site of Old Mobile depend on community support. This year we must raise an additional \$20,000 to match funds available from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Join **The Friends of Old Mobile** and help us learn more about colonial life along the northern Gulf coast. A variety of membership type are available:

Individual (\$25)

Family (\$40)

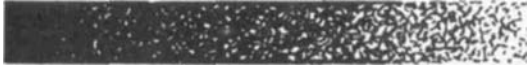
Institutional (\$100)

Benefactor (\$500)

Patron (\$1,000).

All memberships are tax-deductible. Please direct all correspondence to:

The Friends of Old Mobile
P O. Box 6685
Mobile, Alabama 36660



Two important corporate supporters of the project have also made substantial contributions recently. Much of the current survey and excavations at Old Mobile have occurred on land owned by Courtauld's Fibers, Inc., a rayon manufacturing company. Brian Fulleylove, president of Courtauld's presented \$5,000 to the Old Mobile Project on behalf of his company. For this contribution, as well as for the unflagging goodwill and support of all the Courtauld's employees, the project staff is most grateful. Another generous gift of \$2,500 has been donated by Plant Manager Ronald Burger on behalf of DuPont de Nemours E.I. & Co., owner of a large segment of the Old Mobile site. Both Courtauld's and DuPont have enforced security and controlled access to this fragile archaeological site.

Mobile-Quebec City Archaeological Exchange

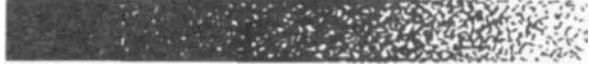
In June 1989, following a series of informal contacts between the Quebec Provincial Office in Atlanta and various Mobilians who expressed an interest in initiating cultural and economic exchanges between the two cities, a committee was formed to implement these plans, using each city's centuries-old carnival traditions as a primary catalyst. One recent exchange - organized by Dr. Bernard Quinn, committee co-chairman - brought three Canadian archaeologists to Mobile, to visit the excavations at Old Mobile and to meet American archaeologists participating in a symposium on "French Colonial Archaeology in the Southeast."

Dr. Marcel Moussette (professor at Laval University and director of excavations at the first palace of the royal intendant in Quebec City), Dr. Reginald Auger (a specialist in European-Indian contact sites), and Dominique Lalande (who is digging Basque whaling sites in the St. Lawrence estuary) spent several days in Mobile during November. Next February, several members of the Old Mobile Project staff will visit Moussette and his colleagues in Quebec City and continue this very beneficial exchange of information. The February trip is part of another committee project, a five-day tour to the Quebec Winter Carnival; all interested individuals are encouraged to join us. Contact Dr. Bernard J. Quinn (Department of Foreign Languages, University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL 36688) for further details.

For those who would like to read more about the Old Mobile Project, the Fall 1990 issue of the *Gulf Coast Historical Review* includes an article on "Archaeology at Old Mobile, 1702-1711" by Greg Waselkov, archaeological project director and editor of this newsletter.

*The Friends of Old Mobile Are Pleased
to Welcome the Following New Members:*

Mr. & Mrs. Charles L. Cook, Mobile, AL
Mr. & Mrs. Lyman F. Holland, Mobile, AL
Mr. Douglas B. Kearley, Mobile, AL
Dr. R. O. Laffre, Mobile, AL
The Rev'd E. J. Michel LaRoque, Mobile, AL
Mr. Augustine Meaher, Jr., Mobile, AL
Mr. Robert Meaher, Mobile, AL



Mr. Pitt T. Manor, Jr., Montgomery, AL
Mr. & Mrs. William J. McAleer, Mobile, AL
Ms. Lee McCoy, Mobile, AL
Mr. Gary F. Mason, Alexandria, VA
Dr. & Mrs. Ralph B. Pfeiffer, Jr., Mobile, AL
Mr. Earl Wert, Mobile, AL
Forrest & Helen Wilson, Mobile, AL

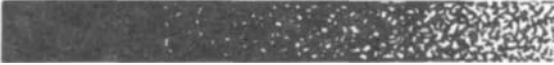
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