

1700-1818: The Frontier Of Faith

The Frenchman lay in a sickbed in a makeshift hut, accompanied by his two assistants, each bundled in buffalorobes they had acquired days earlier from Illinois warriors. In the hut also were two French trappers who had heard of Father Marquette's illness. They had walked almost fifty miles to bring the priest blueberries and corn, such was the esteem they had for this man.

Father Jacques Marquette was ill and near exhaustion after years of unrelenting labor. His hut was surrounded by wilderness and virgin forests a thousand miles in every direction. He himself had trekked through much of it, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and falling in love with the Illinois peoples. He had joined the Society of Jesus at the age of 17 and had come to the New World at 29. Now, at 37 years old, after years of vigorous adventures in the name of the Gospel—once canoeing 2,700 miles with the explorer Joliet—Marquette died on May 18, 1675.

It was pioneers such as Marquette who introduced the European world, and the Catholic faith, to the people of these great forests and plains of middle America. French men and women explored and settled this region, made peace with its native Americans, hunted its forests, fished its rivers, tamed its fields and founded its cities. Among these cities was the Gateway to the West, St. Louis.

The settlement of St. Louis was founded on three pillars: commerce, foreign land agreements and faith in God. When France lost the Seven Years War (French and Indian War, 1756—1763), she lost her American empire. East of the Mississippi the territory went to the enemy, the British Empire. Lands west of the great river were secretly given to Catholic Spain.

The commercial explorer Pierre Laclede Liguist and his companions did not know of these treaties when they traveled north to found a trading settlement near the confluence of the Mississippi and the Missouri rivers in late summer of 1764. Passing the French settlement at Ste. Genevieve on the west bank of the river, the Laclede party overwintered at Fort Chartres, an imposing bastion of French military might in the region. A mild winter allowed Laclede and his 13-year-old assistant, Auguste Chouteau, to explore north, find the confluence and search out the perfect site for a city. They discovered a fine landing which gave way to gentle rises and protection against flooding. These rises opened to meadows and fields which could grow grain and staples. In the spring of 1764, Laclede named his settlement St. Louis, the patron of his king, Louis XV, and the model of all Catholic monarchs since the middle ages.

The village grew to over 500 residents as many French settlers east of the Mississippi feared the British and expected to be expelled as their Acadian brethren had been. In a previous war, the British rounded up the whole population of what became Nova Scotia and shipped hundreds of Frenchmen off to southern Louisiana. As the treaty demanded the abandonment of Fort Chartres, the French of Illinois decided to move to the west bank of the Mississippi rather than become victims of British policy. Thus St. Louis grew rapidly to become the premier settlement of Upper Louisiana, as the territory was called.

Each year fine stone houses were added to the city, a clear sign of prosperity. Fur trade and trade in manufactured items were vigorous. South of St. Louis two valuable commodities were exploited: salt from Saline Creek, near Ste. Genevieve and lead mining around Farmington and Old Mines.

This prosperity was almost snuffed out during the War for American Independence. Pierre Laclede had died in 1778 during a trip to New Orleans. Despite a series of kindly Spanish governors, St. Louis was under the leadership of a particularly inept one in 1780 when a British-Indian expedition attacked the city. Governor De Leyba had done nothing to protect the village. Residents, at their own expense, had built a palisade on the western side of the town. Some men had gone off to join the Americans under George Rogers Clark to attack Vincennes in Indiana. Others went about such peaceful pursuits as strawberry picking and tending the fields.

Suddenly, the day after the feast of Corpus Christi, Indians poured into the wheat fields of what is now Fairgrounds Park. One settler, Jean Marie Cardinal, was slain, leaving his Pawnee wife a widow to raise their eight children. Others were struck down. In the struggle Julian Roy managed to fire his pistol, shooting a pursuing Indian in the jaw. Filled with remorse, the settler turned and ran to the Indian helping to heal the wound. In return the Indian helped Roy across the battlefield and to the safety of the city wall.

In the end, the attack failed. The British and Indians withdrew to their stronghold at Fort Michilimackinac in present-day Michigan. The British strategy to destroy French influence in the upper Mississippi came to nought.

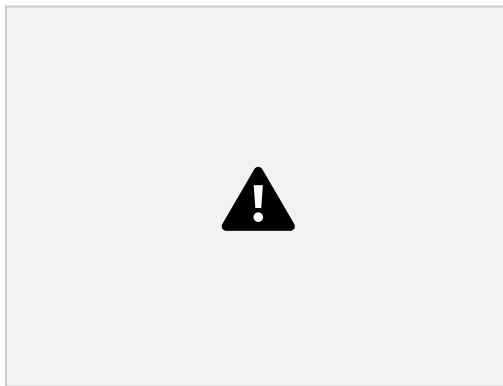
Indeed, their earlier attempt was foiled by the pastor of Ste. Genevieve Parish. In 1778, the British had planted a garrison at Kaskaskia, some 70 miles south of St. Louis. On July Fourth it was confronted by an American force under Georges Rogers Clark. While both sides glared at the other, the balance of force would fall to whoever could persuade the French residents to join their cause.

Word of the confrontation came to Father Pierre Gibault. He canoed the eight miles to Kaskaskia, tolled the bell at Immaculate Conception Church and assembled the people. Speaking on behalf of the American cause, in French to the French farmers, he carried the day. The British fled to Vincennes. It was the American expedition against Vincennes in 1780 which made St. Louis vulnerable to attack. Father Gibault accompanied Clark on that campaign and so earned a British price on his head. Later the priest returned to Ste. Genevieve serving as pastor until 1784, riding a horse up and down the Mississippi banks bringing the sacraments to all in need. It is said he was never without his pistols.

For a decade after the War for American Independence, the lands west of the Mississippi remained in Spanish hands while lands east of the great river were given to the newly formed United States of America. In church matters, the west, including St. Louis, was under the authority of the Bishop of Havana, Cuba, and the east came under the direction of newly appointed "Prefect Apostolic," later Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore. Both sides of the river suffered from a shortage of priests. After the American victory at Yorktown, aided by a French army and fleet, a French chaplain, Father Paul de St. Pierre, volunteered his services to the western lands. Another, a hot-head named Father Pierre Huet de la Valiniere also came to Illinois after he wore out his welcome in Quebec and, after a brief stay in Baltimore, was encouraged to leave that city also. In Illinois he continued his rowdy ways by picking fights with

settlers and attacking Father St. Pierre. In disgust, Father St. Pierre moved to Ste. Genevieve when Gibault moved to New Madrid, Missouri.

In 1789 a revolution broke out in France. Much of the violence was targeted at the Catholic Church. While many sisters, brothers, priests and even bishops died in the persecution, many others fled for their lives. Bardstown, Kentucky, received its first bishop, Joseph Flaget, in 1792 and New Orleans, Louisiana became a diocese in 1795. Upper Louisiana got an Irish priest who had studied in Spain, Father James Maxwell. It was a perfect fit. Father Maxwell was ruggedly built like the pioneers of the area. He spoke Spanish, an advantage in dealing with government officials, and he had a winning way about him that made everyone a friend. The Church in the region seemed destined to grow quietly along with the gradual development of commerce and trade. But, once again, European events intervened.



Mass book, Old Cathedral Museum

After 10 years of chaos and war, revolutionary France evolved into the empire of Napoleon I. The conqueror's boundless ambitions included a renewed French empire in the Western Hemisphere. In a rush of events, he convinced the Spanish to give the Louisiana Territories back to France. Everything hinged on using the Caribbean island of Haiti as a staging area. Napoleon fought and lost a bloody war against the black freedom fighter, Toussaint L'Ouverture. The emperor gave up the idea of empire and offered the whole territory to the United States. In 1803, the United States bought the Louisiana Territory for a mere \$15 million and, overnight, doubled in size...and so did Bishop John Carroll's diocese.

If this story seems confusing to modern readers, it was just as confusing to those who lived through the events. Many residents who settled the St. Louis area under the royal white flag of France had become used to the red and gold flag of Spain only to find themselves sold away to the tri-colored flag of Napoleonic France and then traded away again to the Stars and Stripes of the United States.

In 1808, Baltimore became the first city elevated to the rank of archdiocese. In 1812, Louisiana joined the Union as a state. It was time for stable and energetic leadership in the West. Archbishop Carroll proposed as bishop of the new

lands Louis William Valentine DuBourg, a native of Santo Domingo who was educated in France. He was a Sulpician priest and founder of St. Mary's College in Baltimore.

Archbishop Carroll knew DuBourg was qualified for the job. He spoke both French and English. His previous service showed his organizational abilities, but his skills would be put to the test in dealing with the lay trustees of New Orleans and a Franciscan, Fray Antonio, who was their idol.

DuBourg's position in New Orleans was weakened at first because the Napoleonic Wars and the arrest of Pope Pius VII kept him from being ordained a bishop. Some priests in New Orleans challenged his authority. Fray Antonio, living in the Cathedral rectory, plotted with prominent citizens, against DuBourg. Finally, in 1815, DuBourg left for France and later Rome where he was ordained as bishop. His return to his diocese took a year and a half. During that time he recruited priests and sisters to join his diocese. Some he sent to New Orleans and others to St. Louis. He himself did not return to New Orleans, but rather landed in Baltimore to take a land route westward to the Ohio River. His entourage floated the Ohio to the Mississippi. He then made his way north, visiting Apple Creek, Perryville and Ste. Genevieve. On January 5, 1818, Bishop DuBourg entered St. Louis to the cheers of more than 2,000 of its citizens. A new era for the Church and for the city had arrived.