FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of the newsletter covers a variety of topics, all somehow intertwined. There are several photos taken on a recent trip to Fort de Chartres and Prairie du Rocher in Illinois, showing how the history of the Pays des Illinois continues to be visible to anyone travelling through the region. The Renault land grant found on page 4 is the first official document of importance regarding the mining region of Missouri, and it was composed at Fort de Chartres. The excerpt from Henry Brackenridge’s *Views of Louisiana* helps us understand (through the point of view of an outsider, it must be stressed) what life was like for the early French settlers in the region on both sides of the Mississippi. Finally, the short book and website reviews in this issue focus on sources that also help us appreciate the history and the heritage of the French presence in the Illinois Country. Enjoy!

FORTHCOMING IN FUTURE ISSUES

More from Henry Brackenridge
« Viewing Old Mines » (Finding Old Mines videos)
The Old Mines Concession

Fort de Chartres

The early histories of Old Mines and Fort de Chartres are closely linked. The first Frenchmen who came to mine in Missouri were based near Fort de Chartres at St. Philippe (see the transcript of the original mining grant on p. 4). A striking feature at Fort de Chartres is the two plaques, one in English and one in French, just inside the main entrance. Below is the English inscription, while the photo to the left is of the French.

Fort de Chartres, seat of civil and military government in the Illinois Country for half a century was first completed in 1720. In 1753-1756 it was rebuilt of stone at a cost of 200,000 livres and became one of the strongest forts in North America and the key to the French defenses in what is now the United States. By the Treaty of Paris, 1763, France ceded the greater part of her North American possessions to Great Britain, but Fort de Chartres, the last post to be surrendered was occupied by a French garrison until 1766. Renamed Fort Cavendish, the fort was the seat of British government in the Illinois Country until 1772, when it was abandoned and destroyed. The state of Illinois purchased the site of Fort de Chartres and made it a state park in 1913.”
Images from Fort de Chartres

ABOVE LEFT: Sign commemorating Pierre Laclede’s time in Illinois prior to establishment of St. Louis.

ABOVE RIGHT: Welcome sign at Fort de Chartres historic site.

BELOW LEFT: Sign commemorating Ste. Anne’s church near Fort de Chartres.

BELOW RIGHT: Cemetery at Prairie du Rocher, which includes several graves moved from Ste. Anne’s church.

All photos taken by Will Thompson, August 2016
There are several remarkable accounts written by travelers to the Pays des Illinois in the years following the Louisiana Purchase, as the newly-acquired territory was explored, settled, and inventoried. Nicolas de Finiels’s *An Account of Upper Louisiana* (Translated by Carl Ekberg, and published by the University of Missouri Press in 1989) remains one of the more intriguing of these accounts, in particular for his descriptions of the French Creoles he encountered during his travels and the various communities in which they lived. Highly recommended for anyone interested in the early French settlers.

**FEATURED BOOK:**
Nicolas de Finiels

**FEATURED WEBSITE:**
Great River Road

The *Great River Road* is a website devoted to providing visitors with information about travelling along the Mississippi River. Of particular interest is the page devoted to the French Colonial Country to be found at: [http://www.greatriverroad.com/frchome.htm](http://www.greatriverroad.com/frchome.htm).

There is information regarding the French heritage each county in the region, as well as a detailed calendar of events, and a wealth of practical information for anyone visiting the area (accommodations, restaurants, shopping, etc.).

**UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST**
(Consult [www.oldmines.org/events.html](http://www.oldmines.org/events.html) for up-to-date information)

2016

December 31: Prairie du Rocher Guiannee at Fort de Chartres

December 31: Ste. Genevieve Guiannee

2017

February 4: King's Ball Honor Guard, Ste. Genevieve

April 22-23: Ecole de Soldat, Ste. Genevieve

June 3-4: Fort de Chartres Rendezvous

June 10: Ste. Genevieve French Festival

August 12-13: Jour de Fête, Ste. Genevieve

October 8: Annual Fête, Old Mines Area Historical Society

October: Center for French Colonial Studies annual meeting (dates TBA)

November 4-5: Fort de Chartres Winter Rendezvous
The Renault Land Grant

In the early 1720’s, Philippe Renault and a group of miners arrived in the Illinois Country with the aim of discovering and exploiting the mineral riches of the area. Although there were hopes for precious metals such as gold and silver, the miners largely had to content themselves with lead, itself a most useful commodity at the time. In 1723 Renault received a formal grant for mining rights on the west side of the Mississippi as well as for land near Fort de Chartres for a settlement for himself and his mining colleagues. Unfortunately the language of the grant is sufficiently vague as to leave one guessing at the exact location of the original mines in what is now Washington County, Missouri, but the document is critical for our understanding of the early history of the region around Old Mines. Below is the original French version (with its multiple spelling errors) as well as the first translation into English. Unfortunately the translator was unfamiliar with some of the French terminology, leading to further confusion about the actual location of the mines.

In the year one thousand seven hundred and twenty-three, the fourteenth of June, accordé à Mons. Renaut en franc a lieu pour faire ses establissemens sur les mines.

Une lieüe et demi de terrein de face sur le Petit Merrimac, dans la riviere de Merrimac, a l’endroit de la premiere branch qui conduit au cabanage, nommé le Cabanage la Menaudiere, sur six lieues de profondeur la riviere faisant le milieu du Rhumb de Vent et le Ruisseau au Plomb, jusqu’au le Sr. Renaut a son fourneau et de la droit à l’endroit nommé la Grande Mine.

Une lieue de face a Pimitey dans la riviere des Illinois, regardant à l’est et tenant au lac qui porte le nom du village et de l’autre aux cotes vis-à-vis le village a une demie lieue au dessus sur cinq lieues de profondeur le Rhumb de Vent suivant la riviere de Illinois, en descendant d’un coté et a montant par celle d’Areyog qui en fera le milieu dans le reste de la profondeur.

Deux lieues de terrein sur la mine apellé la mine de Mr. Lamothe, le face regardant le nord et la pririe de la dite mine faisant le point milieu de ses deux lieues.

Une lieue de face sur le Mississippi, a l’endroit apellé le Grand Marret, tenant d’un coté au sauvages Illinois establi au pres du Fort de Chartres, sur deux lieues de profondeur aux environs étant l’emplacement que lui à été accordé pour faire des vivres et en pouvoir fournir a toutes les habitations qu’il fera sur les mines. Le jour et an que dessus au Fort de Chartres.

BOIS BRIANT DESURSINS

I do hereby certify that the foregoing is truly translated from the copy of the record of Kaskaskias, certified by Robert Morrison, recorder, on the 3d of July, 1806.

M. P. LEDUC, C. B. of Commissioners, Dis. Lou.
Henry Brackenridge’s *Views of Louisiana*: an early portrayal of the French communities in Missouri

Henry Brackenridge’s *Views of Louisiana. Together with a Journal of a Voyage up the Missouri River, in 1811* was originally published in Pittsburgh (Cramer, Spear and Eichbaum) in 1814. Brackenridge was born in Pittsburgh, and was sent by his family to be educated in Ste. Genevieve, what appears to be an unusual decision for an American family at the time. *Views of Louisiana* includes one of the most detailed portrayals of the French communities in Missouri in the period prior to statehood. The following is an excerpt from book two of *Views of Louisiana*, Chapter VI, “Historical Character of the Ancient Inhabitants—Change of Government,” in which Brackenridge provides his perspective on the character of the French inhabitants of Missouri as he encountered them upon his return in the region in 1810. An earlier passage from this work was printed in the Summer 2016 newsletter, and future issues will feature more from Brackenridge, including detailed information about the lead mining activities of the time.

“What is somewhat strange, there were no domestic manufactures among them; the spinning wheel and the loom were alike unknown. So deficient were they in this respect, that although possessed of numerous herds, they were not even acquainted with the use of the churn, but made their butter by beating the cream in a bowl, or shaking it in a bottle.

Their amusements were cards, billiards, and dances: this last of course the favorite. The dances, were cotillions, reels, and sometimes the minuet. During the carnival, the balls follow in rapid succession. They have a variety of pleasing customs, connected with this amusement. Children have also their balls, and are taught a decorum and propriety of behavior, which is preserved through life. They have a certain ease and freedom of address, and are taught the secret of real politeness, self-denial; but which by the apes of French manners, is mistaken for an affected grimace of complaisant regard, and a profusion of bows, scrapes and professions.

Their language, every thing considered, is more pure than might be expected; their manner of lengthening the sound of words, although languid, and without the animation which the French generally possess, is by no means disagreeable. They have some new words, and others are in use, which in France have become obso-lete.

In their persons, they are well formed, of an agreeable pleasant countenance; indicating cheerfulness and serenity. Their dress was formerly extremely simple; the men wore a blanket coat, of coarse cloth or coating, with a cape behind, which could be drawn over the head; from which circumstance it was called a capote. They wore a blue handkerchief on their heads; but no hats, or shoes, or stockings; moccasins, or the Indian sandals, were used by both sexes. The dress of the females was likewise simple, and the variations of fashion, few: though they were dressed in a much better taste than the other sex. These manners will soon cease to exist, but in remembrance and description: every thing has changed. The American costume is generally introduced, amongst the first families, and amongst the young girls and young men universally. I never saw anywhere greater elegance of dress than at the balls of St. Louis. We still see a few of both sexes in their ancient habiliments: capots, moccasins, blue handkerchiefs on the head, a pipe in the mouth, and the hair tied up in a long queue. These people exhibit a striking difference when compared with the unconquerable pertinacity of the Pennsylvania Germans, who adhere so rigidly to the customs, manners, and language of their fathers. A few years have effected more change with the inhabitants of this territory than has been brought about amongst the Germans in fifty years.”

Visit us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/oldminesfrench.
What is Old Mines?

The Old Mines community, located in the north-east quadrant of Washington County, Missouri, is one of the oldest European settlements west of the Mississippi River. The area first attracted the attention of French explorers and settlers in the late 17th century due to its rich lead deposits (and the prospect of even more valuable minerals, which unfortunately proved to be untrue). Beginning in the 1720’s, lead mining in this area became an integral part of the economic activity of the “Pays des Illinois,” that region between the Great Lakes and present-day Louisiana that was settled by the French.

After the end of the French and Indian War, and towards the end of the 18th century, more and more French settlers migrated to the west side of the Mississippi River, and became involved in the fast-growing lead mining operations west of Ste. Genevieve. After the Louisiana Purchase, and once Missouri became a state, the community at Old Mines still remained very much a French community, largely isolated from the massive influx of English-speaking Americans.

Even into the 20th century the families in Old Mines continued to preserve their language and traditions. Only the forces of modernization could finally compel the community to change, as paved roads, improved communication, and compulsory education put an end to the isolation in which Old Mines had long remained. Lead was replaced by tiff (barite) as the mineral which contributed to the livelihood of the majority of families in the area, but it has been many years since any mining activity has taken place. Fewer and fewer people spoke French on a regular basis, at least not in public, with the last native speakers having disappeared.

Now in the 21st century, the Old Mines community continues to value its French legacy, with a variety of annual events celebrating nearly 300 years of the French presence in present-day Washington County. Although many of the descendants of the original settlers have created a diaspora that spreads across Missouri and the rest of the United States, interest in the collective heritage, in genealogy, and in the preservation of the cultural legacy remains strong. Hopefully this project (with its website, newsletter, and Facebook page) will make a positive contribution to the exchange of ideas and information about this fascinating aspect of American history.

The Old Mines French Project
Director: Dr. Will Thompson, The University of Memphis

Website: www.oldmines.org
email: oldminesmissouri@gmail.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/oldminesfrench

CONTRIBUTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS WELCOME!

Do you have an idea for an article for the newsletter? Something you would like to see included? If so, please do not hesitate to get in touch! (Contact information to the left.) The only requirement is that it should be of interest to anyone wanting to know more about Old Mines, its history, its families, its church, and its lasting legacy.