

# *News from Old Mines*

The Newsletter of the Old Mines French Project  
No. 18, Fall 2023

## From the Editor

### 300 Years of the French Presence in Old Mines

Two events this year have been the culmination, in a way, of much of the work that has been dedicated to this project for more than a decade. In June 2023 the Old Mines community celebrated the 300th anniversary of the land grant issued to Philippe Renault, the first legal document referring to the land on which Old Mines stands today. As part of that celebration, Will Thompson (editor of this newsletter), Kent Bone (a local resident and great historian of Old Mines) and Brian Hawkins (a folklorist and filmmaker) curated an exhibit in the old Lamarque schoolhouse on the grounds of St. Joachim Catholic Church (see photos below). The exhibit covered various aspects of Old Mines history, from the early French presence to the establishment of the parish to the stories of the residents of the community.

On September 10, the exhibit was re-installed and featured as part of the annual St. Joachim fall festival (or picnic, as many locals refer to it), providing even more people with the opportunity to learn about the fascinating history of Old Mines and how it came to exist. After the two main events, the exhibit was toured by the students at St. Joachim Catholic School, many of whom are undoubtedly descendants of some the early settlers of Old Mines.

This newsletter is largely dedicated to photos from the celebrations, but even more has happened over the course of calendar year 2023 that will be of interest to the readers of this newsletter, and shows that our understanding of history is ever-evolving as we are exposed to new information and meet others with similar interests who are able to share what they know.



## Images from the 300th Anniversary of Old Mines

Below: the history exhibit in the Lamarque schoolhouse



Left: Banner inside St. Joachim Catholic Church.

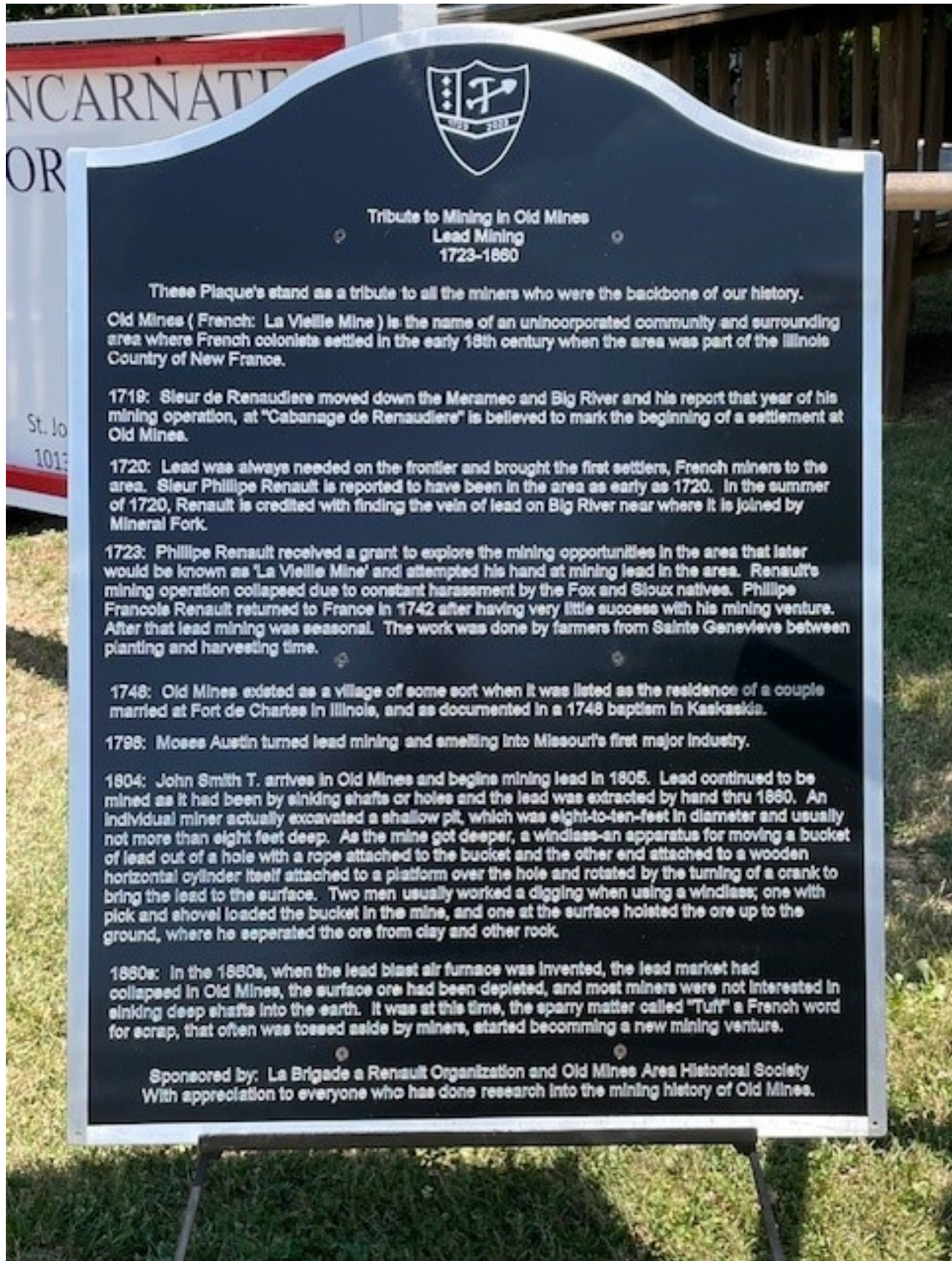
\*\*\*

Right: André Gladu, who made a documentary in 1977 about Old Mines titled *C'est pu comme ça* anymore, came back to Old Mines for a special showing of the documentary in the church, with many in attendance related to the people interviewed by Gladu. Here he is being introduced by Brian Hawkins, who was instrumental in organizing this special event.



## More Images from the Old Mines 300th Anniversary

The images on this page and the following page are of two plaques that were on display outside the church, and which focus on lead and tiff mining in Old Mines. Thank you to the organizations that sponsored the creation of these great additions to the community's historical record.





Tribute to Mining in Old Mines  
Tuff Mining  
1850-1979

**1850's:** Tuff mining had begun as early as the 1850's in Washington County. As the need for lead decreased, a byproduct of the lead mining, which was previously discarded during the mining for the more valuable and desirable lead, but was a unique mineral in itself named barite was originally named by the French as "Tuff", meaning Scrap. As technology discovered uses for the "Tuff" actual name Barite, which was a hard, white chalky ore, the hand mining of "Tuff" or more locally called "tuff" evolved as a new mining opportunity.

**1870:** Barite "tuff", locally called "tuff", becomes an important resource, largely due to its use in the petroleum industry. Mining for "tuff", as barite is called locally, continued to replace lead digging in the Old Mines region. Research indicates, around 1874 mining for "tuff", replaces lead mining in the Old Mines region. It could be extracted manually from near-surface deposits in small operations much the same as lead had been for generations. The mining of Tuff in this manner with pick and shovel continued to be popular thru the 1930's.

**1890:** Tuff Mining was the main mining being done around the Old Mines area. It was discovered that Washington County just south of Richwoods had the richest barite deposits in Missouri. The colorful days of the "Tuff Diggings" in Washington County earned it the title of "Barite Capital of the World".

**1924:** Mechanized mining came into existence about 1924. During the mid-1920s the Eagle-Pilcher Company and the National Pigments and Chemical Company built the first permanent barite washing plants in the Old Mines area.

**1926:** One of Tuff's (Barite's), most important use's, discovered around 1926, was used as a weighing agent in drilling oil wells through mud.

**1929:** During the Great Depression and recession (1929-1938), the washer plants closed, and all barite mining returned to being done by hand again.

**1940:** In the 1940's, the mechanization of barite mining returned to a larger scale than it had ever been while hand mining regressed. Power shovels dipped the ore out of the earth and loaded it onto trucks, hauled it to washer plants, which were portable or permanent. The ore was dumped into hoppers, which fed it to a crusher. Tuff Mills were mechanical where the Tuff was separated from the dirt and rocks. Although barely harder than a fingernail, barite will not dissolve in water and is so dense that it sinks through mud and is impervious to radiation. It is the chalky substance in the "barium milkshake" used to diagnose digestive problems, and an ingredient in concrete and important to oil drilling. Ultimately the Missouri Tuff mining companies dug up 13 million tons, and after the war found bigger deposits overseas.

**1950:** In the 1950's Tuff mining changed and became commercialized with equipment and tuff mills starting up in the area.

**1961:** The Dog Patch mine was built.

**1970's:** Tuff mills and mining continued in the Old Mines area into the 1970's. The last known local Tuff Mill closed in the 1970's.

Sponsored by La Brigade a Renault Organization and the Old Mines Area Historical Society  
With Appreciation to everyone who has done research into the mining history of Old Mines

## Upcoming Events

(By no means intended to be an exhaustive list; readers should check each source regarding event status.)

December 31, Guillannee, Ste. Genevieve and Fort de Chartres

February 3, King's Ball, Ste. Genevieve

April 6, French Heritage Seminar, Old Mines

April 8, Total Solar Eclipse!

April 13: French Heritage Festival, Ste. Genevieve

June 1-2, Fort de Chartres Rendezvous

August 9-10, Jour de Fête, Ste. Genevieve

September 8?, Fall Festival, St. Joachim Catholic Church

September 14, St. Genevieve History Conference

October 6, Fête de l'Automne, Old Mines

## Recent Books of Interest

Compiled by Will Thompson

- Bernier, Marc-André; Clorinda Donato ; Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, dir. [Jesuit Accounts of the Colonial Americas. Intercultural Transfers, Intellectual Disputes, and Textualities.](#) Reprint. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022.
- Brasseaux, Ryan A. [French North America in the Shadow of the Conquest.](#) New York: Routledge, 2021.
- Charlevoix, Pierre de. [The Jesuit Pierre-François Xavier de Charlevoix's \(1682-1761\) "Journal of a Voyage in North America": An Annotated Translation.](#) Translated and edited by Micah True. Leiden: Brill, 2019.
- Christie, Nancy ; Michael Gauvreau, Matthew Gerber, eds. [Voices in the Legal Archives in the French Colonial World: "The King is Listening".](#) New York: Taylor and Francis, 2020.
- DeJean, Joan. [Mutinous Women: How French Convicts Became Founding Mothers on the Gulf Coast.](#) New York: Basic Books, 2022.
- Jones, Linda Carol. [Language Encounters on the French Colonial Mississippi.](#) Minneapolis: Open Textbook Library, 2023.
- Lazer, Daniel Robert. [Listening to the Fur Trade. Soundways and Music in the British North American Fur Trade 1760-1840.](#) Montréal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022.
- Le Hir, Marie-Pierre. [French Immigrants and Pioneers in the Making of America.](#) Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2022.
- Lemire, Beverly; Laura Peers; Anne Whitelaw, dir. [Object Lives and Global Histories in Northern North America. Material Culture in Motion, c. 1780-1980.](#) Montréal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021.
- Morrissey, Robert. [People of the Ecotone: Environment and Indigenous Power at the Center of Early America.](#) Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022.
- Steiner, Benjamin. [Building the French Empire, 1600-1800: Colonialism and Material Culture.](#) Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020.
- Walczynski, Mark. [Jolliet and Marquette : A New History of the 1673 Expedition.](#) Champaign: 3 Fields Books, an imprint of the University of Illinois Press, 2023.

## What's New from Old Mines?!

If celebrating the tricentennial of the Renault land grant that led to the founding of Old Mines was not enough, two other remarkable occurrences in 2023 made this an even more eventful year for the history of the community!

Early in 2023, Will Thompson, editor of this newsletter, was contacted by a descendant of Philippe Renault, who informed him that the family archives still to this day hold some of Renault's correspondence and other papers. The family had apparently not paid much attention to these materials until recently, when someone with an interest in history finally started looking through them to see what they contained. It is not unlikely that these papers have survived due to the fact that early in the 19th century Renault's descendants attempted to lay their claim to the land grants that Renault had received, and may have used these papers as evidence supporting their claim. For whatever reason they have survived, and this is remarkable for those of us interested in the history of Old Mines. Hopefully future newsletters will include some of these papers and correspondence, of which Will Thompson has been able to see digital versions, as well as an article written by Renault's descendant about these papers and Renault's adventures along the Mississippi River.

Equally interesting has been the discovery of a letter written by Renault that Jennifer Hopkins, secretary of the St. Joachim Catholic Church parish council, was able to find through an online auction site, and an image of which she has shared with Will Thompson, who is working to translate the letter (not an easy task, given the state of the letter and some issues with the digital image), and hopefully that will be featured in an upcoming newsletter as well. The letter was written by Renault in 1719 when he was in Santo Domingo (today's Haiti) where the ship on which he travelled from France to the new world had stopped. The letter is written to his father. One can only imagine how long it would take for this letter to make its way back across the Atlantic and from the port to his father's home on the other side of France!

If these two revelations tell us anything, it's that the history of a community, culture, or person is never truly complete. There will always be more to add to the story, and more ways to interpret what we know and how we perceive it. Much more to come in 2024!

## French Place Names in the United States

If you are interested in the origins of the many French place names in the United States, you may be interested in another project by the editor of this newsletter, who has begun compiling a list of such places: <http://frenchplacenames.weebly.com>.

### The Old Mines French Project

Director, Newsletter Editor: Dr. Will Thompson, University of Memphis

Website: [www.oldmines.org](http://www.oldmines.org)

email: [oldminesmissouri@gmail.com](mailto:oldminesmissouri@gmail.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/oldminesfrench](http://www.facebook.com/oldminesfrench)