

News from Old Mines

The Newsletter of the Old Mines French Project

No. 3, Spring 2016

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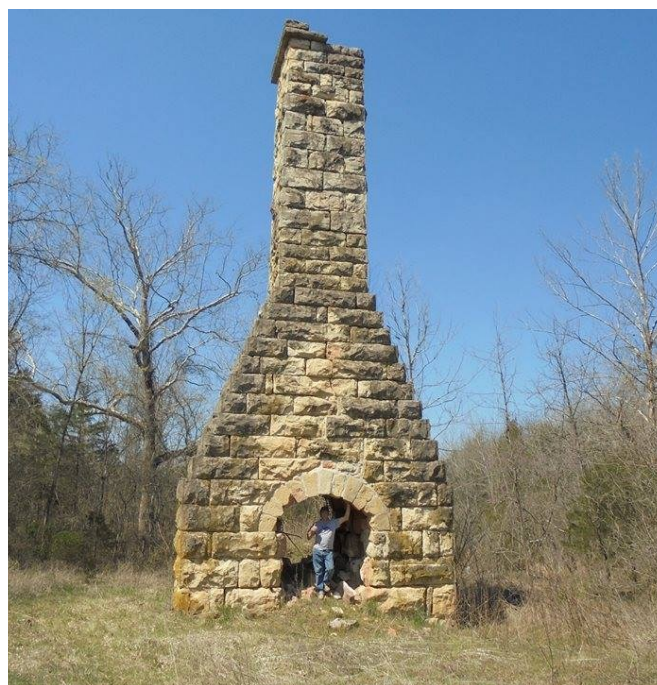
FROM THE EDITOR

I hope you enjoy this issue of *News from Old Mines*. It's a challenge to decide what to include in each issue, given the rich history of Old Mines and the French communities of the region. Hopefully the mixture of images, historical articles, book reviews, genealogical information, word etymology, etc. will ensure that every issue contains something of interest to those of you who have subscribed. Feedback is more than welcome. Thank you!

Will Thompson

TWO VIEWS OF THE MURPHY SMELTER

The image on the left, courtesy of Kent Bone, was taken this year. The image on the right is from the Library of Congress, and identifies the structure as the chimney of the Cannon Creek Mine Smelter. Unfortunately the black and white image is not dated, but was part of a project called the Historic American Building Survey, and is possibly from 1936. The lead smelter itself dates from approximately 1848, and produced more than a million pounds of lead. What remains of the smelter is now just off Hwy 21 southwest of Washington State Park.



WHAT'S NEW IN OLD MINES?

Each newsletter features a list of new materials (books, articles, videos, websites) that are relevant to the study of Old Mines and the French history and heritage of the region around it. Here's the most recent list of books and articles that are either new publications or have just been discovered or reported. All of the works listed above will also appear in the Bibliography on the [Old Mines French website](#).

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- Skinner, Claiborne A. *The Upper Country: French Enterprise in the Colonial Great Lakes*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.
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Old Mines History: Original Documents

Old Mines description in *American State Papers*
8th Congress, 2nd session, no. 103

Description of the Lead Mines in Upper Louisiana
Communicated to Congress November 8, 1804, authored by Moses Austin

Editor's introduction: The text below is an excerpt from a document composed by Moses Austin, whose name is well-known to those familiar with the history of Washington County, Missouri. In 1804 he was commissioned, it appears, by Amos Stoddard, the first civil commandant of Upper Louisiana after the Louisiana purchase, who himself had received a request from Meriwether Lewis, President Jefferson's aide, for a description of the lead mines in what is now Missouri. The United States having acquired a territory of massive size, there was a sudden need for an accounting of the resources to be found and exploited in these new lands. Austin's text provides a detailed account of "the manner in which the mines have been wrought," descriptions of the communities to be found in the region, including Mine à Burton (now Potosi), Mine Ranault, Mine à la Mott [Lamotte], among others, as well as information about lead production at the various mines.

3. Old Mines, so called from being discovered many years before the Mine à Burton. It is said the old mines were opened and wrought by Mr. Ranault, about the year 1726, at the time he explored this country for the famous Law and Company. It is situated five miles northeast of the Mine à Burton, on the discovery of which it was abandoned, mineral being found in great abundance at the new mines. The old mines remained in this situation until February, 1802, when fifteen French families made a settlement near the mines, and have formed a village, since which the mines have been opened, and the last year produced three hundred and sixty thousand pounds weight of mineral of an excellent quality, not inferior to the best produced at the Mine à Burton. A gold colored fossil, similar to that found at the Mine à Burton, is also connected with the mineral taken from this mine.

The prospect of obtaining immense quantities of mineral from the old mines, is at present very flattering, and there is not the least doubt of their being equally extensive as the Mine à Burton. The present workings, with the old, include about one hundred acres of land. The mines are elevated, and may be easily drained to the depth of a hundred feet.

In the year 1799, a grant for four hundred acres of land was obtained, and surveyed in 1800, but includes no part of the workings; therefore, the mine, with the adjacent lands, excepting that concession, may be considered as public property. No smelting furnace has as yet been erected at this place, except a French one, most the mineral being transported to the Mine à Burton to be smelted. The greatest number of hands employed at the old mines, at any one time since the late establishment, has not exceeded twenty-five or thirty, and those only for a few months. It is not improbable that the space between the old mines and the Mine à Burton may produce mineral in as great abundance as either of the mines. The Fouche Ranault is navigable within seven miles of this mine.

4. Mine Ranault, situated six miles north of the Mine à Burton, on a creek of the same name. Little can be said relative to this mine, it not having been wrought for more than seventy years; but, from information, and the extent of the diggings, a large quantity of mineral was drawn from it. It was discovered and opened by Mr. Ranault, about the year 1724-5, with an expectation of finding silver ore. The country near the mine is hilly and broken. It is supposed that Ranault's concession, granted by the King of France, if ever it should be brought forward, will comprehend the mine. The mineral drawn from these mines is of a good quality, generally found in limestone rock, in regular veins, and is said to be inexhaustible. I know of no reason why they have been so long neglected, unless I attribute it to the discovery of mines nearer the settlements, and the small number of workmen to carry them on. As they are within ten miles of navigation, by the Fouche Ranault, great expectations of their utility to the public may justly be entertained.

The Use of Hand-Forged Iron Crosses as Cemetery Markers

By Kent Bone

Part II*

In the older cemeteries of this continent can sometimes be found ancient hand forged iron crosses. Although visible from the road, they often go unnoticed by travelers and the locals. They stand like a forest of trees, silent memorials to ancestors buried there. Many are leaning, have fallen over, or have parts missing due to time, neglect, or vandalism. There is often a depression in the ground in front of the cross or head stone. This depression was caused by the collapse of a rotting, wooden coffin, reminding us of the reality of death in the days before embalming, steel coffins, and concrete vaults.

The cross is one of the most ancient and universal symbols known to man. It was a religious symbol in its various forms to the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Chinese and many peoples of the ancient world. In the time of the Roman Empire it came to represent crucifixion, one of the most horrible forms of execution of its day. Eventually the symbolism of the cross to one of hope, and salvation, in fact a sacred symbol. The two most common cross types of European Christianity are the Latin and the Greek cross. The upright of the Latin cross is taller than its crossbar. The upright and cross bar of the Greek cross are of equal length. The crosses discussed here are of the Latin type.

It was during the Middle Ages, the time of the Crusades and the advent of heraldry that cross types exploded into hundreds of types. At that time a cross, boldly displayed on armor or a flag, was the simplest means of communicating who you were to troops on the battlefield. These cross types were often named and registered. For example, the pointed end is known as the Cross Urdée. Seven centuries later, and an ocean away, many of these same designs were being hammered out by hundreds of *forgerons* of different cultural and national origins, in isolated villages across North America. Somehow these medieval motifs had been passed down through generations of blacksmiths,

The iron cross isn't a New World Development born of necessity in isolated, overseas colonies, nor a sign of poverty. They are a cultural phenomenon, transplanted to North America by Europeans, who in spite of their diversity, shared a common religious history, rooted in Catholicism and Chivalric Heraldry dating back to the time of the Crusaders. One of the most interesting observations here is the variety of end motifs and other decorative embellishments, which served several purposes. Some are structural and some are simply, *pretty*.

While the idea of visiting cemeteries and studying these iron crosses may seem like a morbid fascination with death to some, in reality it is the craftsmanship and art of the living that we discover in the Blacksmiths labor. As with any occupation, some were more devoted or talented with their art work. Although the custom of using hand forged iron crosses as grave markers may be continent wide, it seems to be limited to certain ethnic and religious populations (Spanish, French & German Catholics) and historical periods. In regions where they do exist the locals may not be aware of just how unique they are.

During the Colonial Period, with the exception of lead, much metal stock was imported from Europe making it scarce and expensive. The wrought crosses of the *forgeron*, hammered out at in each village should not be confused with the cast iron, ornate crosses made of molten iron poured into molds at distant foundries of St. Louis or Chicago. There are none at Old Mines but I have seen them mixed among forged crosses at some of the German settlements.

Les *forgerons*-blacksmiths were very important people in their respective villages. They were not the simple man who shod horses as portrayed in movies. They also made the hand tools necessary to civilization and in an age when one didn't go buy a new pick or shovel just because it was dull, they sharpened them. Door hinges, hasps, nails, wagon parts, candle holders, chandeliers were a few of the products they made. By heating the metal in his forge and using a variety of tools, the blacksmith cut and rolled metal on his anvil to create a diversity of designs. As a result, these *croix en fer* vary from two pieces of lapped, square ended stock, to multiple, ornate pieces.

In Québec, ancestral home of many Illinois-Missouri Créoles, there were *les artisans spécialisés*, artists in iron work. In the book *L'Artisan Forgeron* which deals with the Quebecois blacksmith and his art, there are some very ornate iron crosses dating from the 1700s. There were probably some iron crosses in Upper Louisiana at that time but it would be difficult to document the age of most. There is an iron cross on the steeple of the 1799 *L'Eglise de la Sainte Famille* at Cahokia, Illinois. Does it possibly date from the earlier church?

The blacksmiths probably didn't make the iron stock they worked with. It came from foundries via the traditional trade routes of the time. For the inhabitants of Washington County, there was an iron smelter in adjacent Crawford County and iron mines south in Iron County. According to Eli Robart of Fountain Farm, by 1900 the stock was coming from Chicago via railroad to the depot at nearby Cadet.

*Part one of this article was published in the Fall 2015 issue of *News from Old Mines*.

FEATURED BOOK:
Lives of Fort de Chartres

If you are interested in the early history of the Pays des Illinois and how it was administered, David MacDonald's *Lives of Fort de Chartres: Commandants, Soldiers and Civilians in French Illinois, 1720-1770* is an excellent introduction to the subject. The book is obviously the result of extensive and meticulous research, yet is definitely accessible to even the casual reader interested in the region's history. The introduction alone is a superb synthesis of the early history of the Illinois country and aspects of daily life under the French régime.

Each of the short biographical chapters can be read independently. All of the French commandants of Fort de Chartres are profiled, as well as a selection of early residents of the area, including Marie Rouensa and Étienne de Vénard de Bourgmont.

The book, published in 2016, is available from Southern Illinois University Press.

FEATURED WEBSITE:
St. Joachim Church Bulletin

The **St. Joachim Catholic Church** weekly bulletin is a great source of information about what is happening currently in the Old Mines community. Appearing every week, the bulletin lists upcoming events, including (perhaps most importantly!) the annual Fall Festival, which takes place on the second Sunday of September, and almost all of the events are in support of the local community. Often there is a need for volunteers to contribute time, manpower, and resources to help out the community.

Whether you are a practicing Catholic or not, you may want to take a look at the bulletin on a regular basis to find out what is happening in Old Mines. Perhaps you will find an event that interests you, and motivates you to pay a visit (if you are not already in the area). The bulletin can be found on the St. Joachim website at: www.stjoachim.org.

Upcoming Events

May 14: [Landmark Day](#) at Bolduc House Museum, Ste. Genevieve

May 18-21: [French Colonial Historical Society](#) Annual Meeting, Ottawa

May 21-22: Brigade A Renault May Rendez-vous, Old Mines

June 4-5: Fort de Chartres [Rendez-vous](#)

June 11: [Ste. Genevieve French Heritage Festival](#)

July 4: [Liberty Bell of the West Celebration](#), Kaskaskia

August 13-14: [Ste. Genevieve Jour de Fête](#)

September 11: [St. Joachim Fall Festival](#)

September 29-October 1: [Center for French Colonial Studies](#) conference, Ste. Genevieve

October 1-2: [Fort de Chartres French and Indian War Encampment](#)

October 2: [Fête de l'automne](#), Fertile

November 5-6: [Fort de Chartres Winter Encampment](#)

December 31: Prairie du Rocher Guiannee at Fort de Chartres

December 31: Ste. Genevieve [Guiannee](#)

Kent Bone, The Use of Hand-Forged Iron Crosses (continued from page 4)

The majority of cemetery crosses are made of a standard, stock, flat iron, which varies in width from one and a half to three inch, quarter inch thick stock. A few are made of tire iron, which is round on one side and was bent around wooden wheels, to form a tire. (from Middle English tyre) The crosses are on average two to four feet tall. On the grave of a WW II veteran, blacksmith is a cross six foot tall. I have a feeling he made for his own grave.

In the lead mining district, a hole was drilled in a block of limestone, the cross set in the hole, and molten lead poured in to secure it. Lead was abundant and the livelihood of most of the Créole *habitants* of Washington and St François Counties.

The crosses are of three types. In Washington County MO, they are constructed of a single upright and a single crossbar which was lapped with two rivets holding them together. At cemeteries in the neighboring counties two other methods are used as well which may have been a way to use up short pieces of scrap. The upright can two pieces of stock, welded to a single crossbar, or two pieces of crossbar butted to a single upright. On the back is a fourth short piece which connects the two short sections, overlapping the long piece of metal. This strengthens an otherwise weak butt weld. At places such as Zell, there is ornate scrollwork attached to the crosses. More recently crosses have been made of stainless steel square stock, concrete reinforcing rods, and four pieces of one inch galvanized water pipes connected with a tee, and capped with a screw on finial.

With improved transportation of the late 19th century, stone markers became cheaper, yet iron crosses hung on well into the 20th century as grave markers. It was custom, more than cost and availability which accounts for the continued use of these crosses. But ultimately I believe, it was the decline of the blacksmith that forced people to abandon the custom. In a lot of cases this resulted in graves being left unmarked.

At first I only looked at French ethnic settlements for these crosses but found them in German settled areas. Much to my surprise I discovered that the Germans were using the same end designs as the French who predated them by a century. It didn't make sense that the Germans would not have their own designs. After looking at a book on Heraldry, it became apparent that both groups owned the designs, as a result of a shared European Catholic heritage. A question that needs to be answered is: do the protestant French and Germans use the iron cross as cemetery markers?

To date I have found forged crosses from the St. Laurent River Valley of Eastern Canada, a Metis town in Saskatchewan, eastern Missouri and western Illinois, and the Cajun and Creole towns of Louisiana. I have reports of these crosses in Iowa, North Dakota, Texas, Wisconsin, the Kankakee Valley of Illinois, Nova Scotia, Austria, Germany and France. According to Zimelli the polychrome wrought iron cross is found in cemeteries throughout Germany and Austria.

Philippe François Renault



The image to the left is supposedly a caricature of Philippe François Renault (or Renaut, or Renaud), who was the first Frenchman with a legal grant to conduct mining operations west of the Mississippi river. Born in northern France, Renault arrived in Illinois in the early 1720's with a team of miners, and settled in a town of his own creation, St. Philippe, near Fort de Chartres. Although the mining operation directed by Renault was never a huge success, he did remain the area for many years, returning to France in the early 1740's.

Renault's legacy (at least that of his name) is reflected in the Brigade à Renault, as well as the Fourche à Renault creek and Arnault branch, both in Washington County.



Visit us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/oldminesfrench.

“Pawpaw”

The term pawpaw is frequently used to describe both the descendants and the language of the French who settled in Old Mines, although. As many will know already, the term comes from the pawpaw fruit that is found abundantly in North America. The word may have derived from papaya, and in spite of the fact that this etymology is not fully documented, it certainly does seem like a logical origin. When the term came to refer to the French community and why is not known, but it certainly is a colorful aspect of the area's history.



THE FAMILIES OF OLD MINES

Images from the new cemetery at St. Joachim Catholic Church (part II)

ROBART TORRENCE LACHANCE
RODERIQUE OSIA THEBEAU
GOLDEN PRICE POLIETTE
BARTON FARRELL BROWN
DONEY HOPKINS COURTOIS
COURTWAY KETCHUMMER X
MISSEY WHALEY PAUL
CARTER FENWICK MERCILLE
MASSIE RHODES FAMILY
ANSELMAN RECAR THE BO
PULE O CLAPP PRUITT
ECKHOFF POLHEMUS
DALY RUNDEL BOURBON

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.