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Fragment of Col. Auguste
Chouteau's Narrative of the
Settlement of St. Louis

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F R A G M E N T

OF

COL. AUGUSTE CHOUTEAU'S

NARRATIVE OF THE

Settlement of St. Louis.

A LITERAL TRANSLATION FROM THE ORIGINAL FRENCH MS.,
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JOURNAL.

In the year 1762, M. D'Abadie, at that time Director General and Commandant of Louisiana, granted to a Company the exclusive trade with the savages of the Missouri, and all the nations residing west of the Mississippi, for the term of eight years. This company was formed under the name of M. Laclède Liguette, Antoine Moxan and Company. Immediately after the terms and conditions were signed with the French Government, they took measures to import from Europe all the merchandise necessary to sustain, on a large scale, their commerce, which they proposed to extend as much as possible. While waiting for the arrival of the goods which they had ordered in Europe, they formed a considerable armament, at the head of which was placed M. Laclède Liguette, known as a man of great merit, capable, from his experience, of conducting with skill and prudence, the interests of the company. He left New Orleans the 3rd of August, 1763, and arrived in Illinois the 3rd November following.

Observe, that all the establishments which the French had on the left bank of the Mississippi, were ceded to the English by the treaty of 1762, and that upon the right bank, which remained to the French, there was only the small village of Ste. Genevieve, in which M. De Laclède could not find a house capable of containing one-fourth of his merchandise. M. De Neyon, Commandant of Fort de Chartres, learning the embarrassment of M. de Laclède, sent an officer to him, to tell him that he could offer him a place for his goods, until the English should come to take possession. Necessity made him accept this generous offer of M. De Neyon. He left Ste. Genevieve, and arrived at Fort Chartres on the 3rd of November, 1763, where he disembarked all his goods, and prepared immediately all the supplies for the different nations. After all the business of the trade was done, he occupied himself with the means of forming an establishment suitable for his commerce, Ste. Genevieve not suiting him, because of its distance from the Missouri, and its insalubrious situation. These reasons decided him to seek a more advantageous site. In consequence, he set out from the Fort de Chartres in the month of December, took with him a young man in his confidence, and examined all the ground from the Fort de Chartres to the Missouri. He was delighted to see the situation (where St. Louis at present stands;) he did not hesitate a moment to form there the establishment that he proposed. Besides the beauty of the site, he found there all the advantages that one could desire to found a settlement which might become very considerable hereafter. After having exam-

ined all thoroughly, he fixed upon the place where he wished to form his settlement, marked with his own hand some trees, and said to Chouteau, "You will come here as soon as navigation opens, and will cause this place to be cleared, in order to form our settlement after the plan that I shall give you." We set out immediately afterwards, to return to Fort de Chartres, where he said, with enthusiasm, to Monsieur De Neyon, and to his officers, that he had found a situation where he was going to form a settlement, which might become, hereafter, one of the finest cities of America—so many advantages were embraced in this site, by its locality and its central position, for forming settlements. He was occupied the rest of the winter in procuring all things necessary for the settlement—men, provisions, tools, &c.

Navigation being open in the early part of February, he fitted out a boat, in which he put thirty men,—nearly all mechanics,—and he gave the charge of it to Chouteau, and said to him: "You will proceed and land at the place where we marked the trees; you will commence to have the place cleared, and build a large shed to contain the provisions and the tools, and some small cabins, to lodge the men. I give you two men on whom you can depend, who will aid you very much; and I will rejoin you before long." I arrived at the place designated on the 14th of March, and, on the morning of the next day, I put the men to work. They commenced the shed, which was built in a short time, and the little cabins for the men were built in the vicinity. In the early part of April, Laclède arrived among us. He occupied himself with his settlement, fixed the place where he wished to build his house, laid a plan of the village which he wished to found, (and he named it Saint Louis, in honor of Louis XV, whose subject he expected to remain, for a long time;—he never imagined he was a subject of the King of Spain;) and ordered me to follow the plan exactly, because he could not remain any longer with us. He was obliged to proceed to Fort de Chartres, to remove the goods that he had in the fort, before the arrival of the English, who were expected every day to take possession of it. I followed, to the best of my ability, his plan, and used the utmost diligence to accelerate the building of the house.

Whilst we were all very much occupied with this work, there arrived among us, in the month of all the tribe of the Missouri,—men, women and children; and although they did not appear to have any evil intentions towards us, they were not the less a heavy charge on us, from their continual demands for provisions, and from their thefts of our tools,—telling us, always, that they wished to form a village around the house we intended building, of which it would be the centre. All this talk disturbed me very much, and made me resolve to send for Monsieur de Laclède,—and what still more strongly determined me to do so, was, that there had come from Caos* some people to settle in the new village, but who left it again for fear of the Missouri, who numbered about one hundred and fifty warriors, while we were only thirty or thirty-five. But I should say that this tribe never appeared to have any hostile intentions whatever. Monsieur de Laclède arrived, and immediately the Chief of the Missouri came to see him, in order to hold a council. The result of the council was that they were worthy of pity; that

* Cahokia.

they were like the ducks and the bustards, who sought open water in order to rest, and procure an easy subsistence; that they did not find any place more suitable, in their opinion, than the place where they were. Upon that, they said many things, which amounted always to this, that they desired to settle where they were. The council ended, Monsieur Laclede postponed, until the following day, his reply to them. The council again assembled, and, after much vague preliminary talk, Monsieur de Laclede spoke to them with his usual firmness: "You told me, yesterday, that you were like the ducks and the bustards, who traveled until they found a fine country, where there was beautiful open water, that they might rest there, and obtain an easy living; and that you, the Missouris, who were worthy of pity, resembled them, because you traveled like them to find a place to settle yourselves, and that you did not find any one more suitable than that where you are at present; that you wished to form a village around my house, where we should live together in the greatest friendship. I will reply to you in a few words, and I will say, that if you followed the example of the ducks and the bustards in settling yourselves, you followed bad guides, who have no foresight; because if they had any, they would not put themselves into open water, so that the eagles and birds of prey could discover them easily, which would never happen to them if they were in a woody place, and covered with brush. You Missouris, you will not be eaten by eagles; but these men who have waged war against you for a long time past, who are in great numbers against you, who are few, will kill your warriors, because they will offer resistance, and will make your women and children slaves. Behold what will happen to you, for wishing to follow, as you say, the course of the ducks and bustards, rather than the advice of men of experience. You women, who are here present, and who listen to me, go, tenderly caress your children—give them food in plenty; also, to your aged parents,—press them closely in your arms,—lavish upon them all the evidences of the tenderest affection, until the fatal moment which shall separate you from them—and that moment is not far distant, if your men persist in their intention to settle here. I warn you, as a good Father, that there are six or seven hundred warriors at Fort de Chartres, who are there to make war against the English,—which occupies them fully at this moment, for they turn all their attention below Fort Chartres, from whence they expect the English,—but if they learn you are here, beyond the least doubt, they will come to destroy you. See now, warriors, if it be not prudent on your part to leave here at once, rather than to remain to be massacred, your wives and children torn to pieces, and their limbs thrown to dogs and to birds of prey. Recollect, I speak to you as a good Father; reflect well upon what I have just told you, and give me your answer this evening. I cannot give you any longer time, for I must return to Fort de Chartres."

In the evening, the whole nation, men, women and children, came to Monsieur de Laclede, and told him that they had opened their ears wide to his discourse, and that they would follow, in all things, his advice: and they prayed him to have pity upon the women and children, and give them provisions, and a little powder and some balls for the men, that they might hunt while going up the Missouri, and defend themselves, if they were attacked. Monsieur de

Laclede told them that he would have pity on them, and detained them till the next day. He could not give them anything that day, for he had not enough corn, which he was obliged to send to Caos for. As soon as he had received it, he gave them a large quantity,—some powder, balls and knives, and some cloth; and the day after, all the Missouris went away, to go up the Missouri and return to their ancient village,—having remained here fifteen days, in the course of which I had the cellar of the house, which we were to build, dug by the women and children. I gave them, in payment, vermilion, awls and verdigris. They dug the largest part of it, and carried the earth in wooden platters and baskets, which they bore upon their heads.

Monsieur de Laclede, after giving the orders which he thought necessary, for the works of a settlement, left, a few days after the savages, for Fort de Chartres. Those persons who had fled to Caos on the coming of the savages, returned as soon as they knew that they had gone away, and commenced building their houses, or, to speak more correctly, their cabins, and entered their lands, agreeable to the lines of the lots which I had drawn, following the plan which Monsieur de Laclede had left with me.

Monsieur de Neyon de Villiers, who governed Upper Louisiana, under the name of Illinois, had orders from the Governor-General of the province, to evacuate the whole left bank of the Mississippi, which had been ceded to the English by the treaty of Versailles. In consequence of these orders, he caused to be withdrawn the garrisons of Fort des Pees, upon the Illinois River, that of Fort Marsiaque, on the Belle Riviere; the post of Vincennes, upon the Wabash, where commanded Monsieur de St. Ange de Bellerive; and, although the Fort des Causes was in Missouri, he brought down the little garrison of this post,—and even an officer whom he had sent to build a fort on the Osage River, near a village of the tribe of the same name. As soon as he had collected all the troops at Fort de Chartres, he ordered Monsieur de St. Ange to remain there with forty men, one captain and two lieutenants, to deliver up the fort to the English, who were expected every day, and he himself prepared to go down the river on the 10th of July, 1764, with the remainder of his troops, and all the employees of the government, and a large part of the inhabitants of the villages of Fort de Chartres and Prairie du Rocher, for whom he promised to obtain free grants of land, near New Orleans, for the sacrifices they were making of their property, in order to go and settle in Lower Louisiana, under the French government, rather than to remain under the dominion of the English, who were heretics, &c. But the real motive of Monsieur de Neyon was, to take with him a numerous train, and to descend the Mississippi in triumph, to make the government believe that all these people followed him for the great esteem which they had for his person; thereby to gain the confidence of the authorities, in order to obtain a place that he had in view. But when he learned, on arriving at New Orleans, that the country was ceded to Spain, he determined to return to Europe. He forgot all the promises that he had made to these poor, credulous people, who remained upon the strand without knowing where to lay their heads, and the government troubled themselves but little about them, because they knew that the colony would soon change masters. So that these unfortunate people, who had abandoned the little pro-

perty which they possessed in Illinois, to go and live under the French government, found themselves completely disappointed in their hopes. Some of them, in order to live, went with their families to Opelousas, others to Atakapas, where, however, they could not carry, on account of the want of facilities for transportation, the materials which they had brought down with them; and they were obliged to give them for almost nothing, in order to procure a little maize and rice. Those who, having some means, returned to Illinois, were very happy to find there Monsieur de Laclède, who aided them in a great many ways, and observed to them, that if they had been willing to follow his advice, as others had done, who had not wished to follow their evil destiny, they would not now be in the unpleasant situation in which they found themselves.

Monsieur de Laclède, penetrating the motives which actuated Monsieur de Neyon, did all in his power to hinder them from going down, which he did without any interested view, but through humanity, telling them that the English government was not so terrible as they wished to make them believe; that, for his part, he had a much more favorable opinion of it. However, if, in consequence of false prejudice, they did not wish to remain under this government, he would recommend them to go up to his new settlement, and he would facilitate for them the means of getting there with their effects; and, as for their animals, it was very easy to conduct them by land, since the journey was only nineteen leagues by a good road. Several families accepted these offers, and obtained immediately the wagons and the necessary harness to proceed to St. Louis, and there he aided them in settling, and ordered me to assign them lands, according to the plan that he had made, which I did as exactly as possible. As I have already observed, that immediately upon the departure of the tribe of the Missouri, the inhabitants* who had fled to Caos had returned, and, with those of Fort de Chartres, commenced to give some permanence to St. Louis.

After the departure of Monsieur de Neyon, which took place the 10th of July, 1764, and the emigration of its inhabitants to St. Louis, the village of Fort de Chartres remained totally deserted, except the garrison of the fort, and some government employees, who also lived in the fort, because in the village, a part of the houses had been demolished by the owners, who took the boards, the windows and door frames, and everything else they could transport, to the places where they intended to settle. In the course of the winter of 1764-5, the savages of the north of this country knew that the English were fitting out an expedition at New Orleans, to take possession of the Illinois country. These savages, desiring to oppose this, set out for Fort de Chartres, to the number of four hundred men, having at their head the famous Pontiac, of the Ottawa nation, who had absolute authority over these tribes, because he had commanded them in the capture of many forts occupied by the English, against whom he waged a cruel war, since the peace of 1762. He said that he fought to avenge the French; but, in truth, it was through a

* A. Joseph Tayon, Roger Tayon, Dechene, Beauchamps, Morceran, Joseph Bequet, Andre Bequet, Gabriel Dodier, Baptiste Marligue, Lemoine Marligue, Beaugenou, Cotte, Pichet, Hervieux, Bacune, Francois Delin, La Garrosse, Kierseraux, Gregoire Kierseraux, Alexis Picard, Antoine Pothier, Th. Labrosse, Labrosse, Louis Chancellier, Chancellier, Gamache, Ride, Roi, Layoie, Le Grain.

disposition for robbery and plunder. Upon his arrival near Fort de Chartres, he encamped his people at a short distance, and obliged the Peorias and Mechiquamici (who had their village a league from the fort,) to take up arms with them, if the case should require it. The Illinois not appearing very well disposed to do so, he said to them: "If you hesitate one moment, I will destroy you, like the fire which passes through a prairie; open wide your ears, and remember it is Pontiac who speaks." From this moment, the Illinois appeared to make part of the coalition,—I believe, because they could not do otherwise. After various arrangements, Pontiac went to see Monsieur de St. Ange, and took with him the braves of his party. On seeing him, he said: "My father, for a long time I and my warriors have determined to give you our hand, and to smoke together our pipe of peace,—recalling to each other all the campaigns that we have made together against the savages, and those dogs of English."

M. de St. Ange de Bellerive was a Canadian, and an old officer, who had served from his tenderest youth against the savages, whereby he had gained much reputation, especially after the defeat of the army at Chiquachas, where he was present under the command of M. Prudomme. M. Prudomme was a brave officer, who had fought in Europe, and wished to follow the same tactics in fighting the savages. M. de Bellerive having made some observations to him, upon the manner of conducting this war, these representations appeared to offend M. Prudomme, and he determined to follow his European principles in the attack of the fort of the Chiquachas, which was in a large prairie, surrounded by strong stakes and well embanked, and in which there were about eight hundred warriors, well armed, and generally good shots with the rifle. They were well informed of this fact, by some French prisoners whom the Chiquachas had taken, and who had escaped. In spite of this knowledge of the situation of this fort, M. Prudomme wished to take it by assault; and, in consequence, placed his troops, and ordered the attack. M. Bellerive said to him, at that time, that, considering the situation of the fort, he looked upon the taking it by main force as impossible; that it would be better to await the arrival of the artillery, which was in the reserve camp on the Mississippi; and that, while awaiting its arrival, they could invest the fort, and, by this means, be assured of complete success; that, otherwise, they ran the risk of a disastrous defeat. The Canadian officers, who had come from Canada with M. Bellerive, and had joined M. Prudomme with a detachment of whites and savages, approved the plan of M. Bellerive, while the officers from France, who had come up from New Orleans with M. Prudomme, were of his opinion. After many words on one side and the other, M. Prudomme addressed M. de Bellerive, and said to him, with a proud and haughty air: "Monsieur, when we are afraid of the wolf, we don't go in the woods." M. Bellerive said to him: "This is not the time to answer you. I will only say, that I have no fear of bullets, but rather of being thought ignorant of the method of attacking a fort; and of losing the two thousand men who are under our command, without the hope of saving even a feeble remnant.—The contrary would happen if we waited for our artillery. You are determined to attack and take the fort without artillery. Very well!—Let us march!!" When the Indian chiefs, who were present at the departure of the two leaders, saw M. Bellerive marching upon the fort,

they ran to him, took him by the hand, and said: "Bellerive, stop; where are you going? Do you not see that it is impossible to take the fort without cannon, and that if you persist in trying to take it you will be killed, and, afterwards, your army will be totally massacred? Believe us, give up this assault, recall your men that you led from Canada, and let alone this mad chief, who will be killed, with all who follow him. You say that he is a brave, and that you must follow him; that if you do not do so, you would be branded as a coward. No, Bellerive, you will never pass for such. Who is it that does not know you, all the campaigns that you have made, and in which you have been always successful? Who does not recollect, that it was you who reduced the Sac and Fox Nations? All these campaigns have gained you the esteem of the whites and the red men; they will always regard you as a brave; so believe us. Remain, and dispose of all those who came with you from Canada, in such a way as to save those who will not be killed in the attack upon the fort." M. Bellerive gave them his hand, and said, "I hope, my brothers, that you will act in the affair which is about to take place, like true braves, as you have always done. See, the chief is advancing; I must follow him; farewell." He rejoined M. Prudomme, and said to him, "Now is the moment that will decide which of us was wrong; assuredly, it will be neither you nor I who will be able to decide the question, but those who will survive us. Recollect, if you have any orders to give, if I am not before you I shall be beside you." They advanced upon the fort with firmness, and all the little army did the same, following the example of their chiefs, who had given the order to cut down the stakes, with axes; but when they were within half gun-shot distance, they received a discharge from the besieged, which killed the two chiefs, many officers, and a great number of soldiers. At the second discharge, they again killed a great many; and, at the third discharge, which was the most murderous, the besiegers retired in disorder, without having wounded a single man.—How could they have done so, since they fought against strong stakes and earth works? The besieged, perceiving the rout of the besiegers, made a sortie, and massacred all whom they could overtake, pursuing them with a fierceness which is only known to barbarians. Happily, night came, and enabled several to escape, and regain the reserve camp. At day-break, the savages followed upon the path of the fugitives; they had dogs that discovered the wounded in the thickets, and, as soon as found, they were cut in pieces. All this day was passed in seeking them, and those who had strayed from the road. There perished, in the attack on the fort and in the rout, nine hundred men. The savages who were not engaged, and who gained the reserve camp, were there told, that there was no doubt that the army would be defeated. Upon this intelligence, the officer in command doubled his guards, and sent a detachment forward on the road to reconnoitre. They met several officers and soldiers, of whom the greatest part were wounded, who confirmed the news of the destruction of the army, cursing, in the most expressive terms, the conduct of M. Prudomme, and his obstinacy in not being willing to follow the wise counsel of M. Bellerive, who allowed himself to be killed for a point of honor,—very untimely held under such circumstances.

The commander of the camp sent, during four days, strong detachments to meet those who had escaped from the massacre. At the end of this time, not seeing any one, and afraid of being attacked himself, he caused to be embarked all the artillery and the other articles that were there. The regular troops descended to New Orleans, with the material of the army; the militia and savages took the road towards Canada, from whence they had come, and nothing remained in this camp, which retains, to this day, the name of l'Ecore a Prudomme.

I take up again my Journal, which I had stopped until this time, in order to show the reason why the savages had so much respect for M. de St. Ange de Bellerive, brother of the one who was killed at Chicquachas, and who had himself often engaged in warfare, in company with these savages, in which he had gained their confidence by his bravery.