

K.L.

CHAPTER IX. 9.

THE FIRST FRENCH POST IN KANSAS.

A small military and trading post --called Fort Cavagnial* in the later period of its history, but not in the earlier--, built by the French government in the decade preceding 1736, was the first fort established within the limits of the present state of Kansas by people of European extraction; and except Port Orleans, it was the earliest in the Missouri valley.

*Pronounced Gät-vän-yäl.

The ruins of "a small fort, built by the French on an elevation" were noticed by the expedition of Lewis and Clark in 1804, on the Missouri river, a little above the upper end of "Bear Medicine island" and near the site of a former Kansas Indian village.

The island has since become known as Kickapoo island, and the village and fort sites were on the right or Kansas side of the ~~xi~~ river, near the present town of Kickapoo, Kansas.

In a valley, between two high points of land, had been the Kansas Indian village; and on an elevation, about a mile in the rear of the village, had been the fort.

The situation of the fort could be recognized in 1804 "by some remains of chimneys and the general outline of the fortification."

*The remains of the fortification were pointed out to members of Major Long's western expedition in 1819; but Dr. James' account gives no description of the ruins as they appeared at that time, ~~and there~~ nor any indication that they were visited ~~at that time~~ by any of ~~Major~~ Long's party. — F. W. C.

find hole

as well as by the fine spring which supplied it with water"; but no visible trace of the Indian village was then preserved. It is, indeed, by no means unlikely that the village was small, and consisted merely of a portion of the Kansas nation, brought down by one or two partisans about the time of the building of the fort, and ~~there~~ established there, from the ancient upper and main village above Independence creek (then known as Petite Rivière des Kansas), for the purpose of ~~the~~ trade and perhaps in the hope of greater security from their ancient enemies, ~~the Pawnees~~. Such moving of their so-called "permanent" ~~earth~~ lodges, or rather, removal to new ones in more convenient locations, has been no uncommon occurrence in the history of the Kansas and the closely cognate Osages; and in 1830, for example, a century later, American Chief's and Hard Chief's bands of the Kansas moved to Mission creek and built villages there because Frederick Chouteau was about to build there

a trading post. If this was the origin and nature of the lower Kansas village, or Village of the Fort, the question of its permanency depended upon the unforeknowable length of occupancy of the fort itself; and ^{in face of such uncertainty on the part of their builders} the Indian lodges of the village ~~may well~~ may well have been of less substantial materials* and construction, and their remains ⁿ have been of more ephemeral character than the earth lodges of the upper village.

Footnote
Ch. p. 128

Perrin du Lac, who ascended this part of the Missouri river in 1802, called it thirty-five miles from the mouth of the Kansas to the site of the lower ancient village of the Kansas, ^{Indians} and twenty-two miles thence to the upper; ^{or main one} others have called it forty to the lower; Lewis and Clark made it thirty-seven to the lower and twenty-eight ^{thence} to the upper, from which Brackenridge (1811) differed only by adding a mile to the upper distance; and it may here be noted that most of the estimates (which range from fifty-seven to sixty-six miles for the combined distance) agree sufficiently well with the distance of twenty-four French ^{voyageurs} leagues (from the mouth of the Kansas river), which is said to have given to the upper

village its name of "Village of the Twenty-four".

The exact year in which the little French post of the lower Kansas Indian village was first built, is not known. Fort Orleans, which had been built by the Company of the Indies lower down on the river, at the villages of the Missouries and Little Osages, had been abandoned, as unprofitable, in or not long after 1727.* After its aban-

Footnote

*See account of Fort Orleans.

donment, there seems to have been no further effort on the part of the Company to maintain a post on the Missouri river; and in 1732 the Company surrendered to the crown of France all of its charter privileges, and its operations were ended. It was probably soon after this, — in 1733, '4, or '5, — that the little fort in the country of the Kansas was established; and, weak and defective as it was, it seems to have been built, and in its earlier years occupied, wholly as an establishment of the crown of France, rather than as one of government and concessionary joint occupancy.

D'Anville's map of the "Partie supérieure de la Louisiane", which was drawn in 1732 and was a far more than ordinarily accurate piece of cartographical draughting for that time, shows Independence creek, under its old name of "Petite Rivière des Kansez", and the ^{main or upper} village of the Kansas nation, labeled "Kansez", just above the mouth of the creek, where Lewis and Clark found its ruins in 1804; but this map shows no other village of the Kansas ^{main} on Missouri river, and no fort on the river, except the "Fort d'Orleans abandonné". Both the lower village of the Kansas and the fort that was built

~~the following century~~
there, seem to belong only to later annals; and they can hardly date farther back than 1733.

Though differing from many earlier and later French posts in being of and for the government interests only, this little first post of the Kansas was still like them, no doubt, and like our own Fort Clark* of the following century the United States Osage factory on the Missouri, below the Big Blue, in combining the functions of military fort and Indian trading post; for it was the policy of the French crown to cultivate as far as possible, the good graces of the various frontier Indian tribes and to keep them friendly toward France and toward one another. In maintaining these latter conditions, it had, even at that early day, been necessary to give some government attention to the institution of slavery; and restraint of the Indian slave trade had, indeed, probably been one of the duties required of the commandant and garrison of Fort Orleans when that fort was established, the attention of the French government having then recently been called to the dissensions that were being sown among the border tribes by the practice, indulged in by many of the irresponsible French hunters and traders, of buying Indian slaves and encouraging the capture of the same by one tribe from another.

Footnote

Footnote

"In 1741", says Margry in the Origines Françaises*, "the French were

*Vol. VI, Introduction, p. V.
reestablished on the river [Missouri] for the purpose of curbing again the traffic in Indian slaves".

To conduct trade with the Indians, to act as a sort of court between them and individual traders or hunters with whom they might have differences, to restrain the Indian slave trade, to prevent hostilities, as far as possible, between the tribes, and in general to promote their good will toward France, while keeping up a show of France's claim to the great stretch of wilderness that separated her own frontier settlements from those of Spain; were probably, then, the purposes of its building and the functions that were exercised by the little new post among the Kansas,—so long, at least, as it remained purely a government institution; which was from its founding, until 1745.

Prior to 1745, the post seems not to have been completed to a size as large as originally planned. The name of the post, in this first period of its existence, is unknown. Like the "Post of the Arkansas," "Post of the Nassonites," and some others, it may have been a name derived simply from the nation ~~at~~ at which the fort was established. ~~But~~ as will be shown later, it was probably not until the beginning of 1745, when the fort was completed or enlarged, that the name "Fort

Cavagnial" was given to it.

Aside from the inference of its smallness and incompleteness prior to 1745, drawn from the conditions specified in that year (as recited below), in granting the DeCruisseau monopoly, the only advices we have concerning this post or its affairs, in this early period of its history, relate to 1736 and 1741. The item of 1741 has already been noted; and from ~~the same source~~ Margry's Origines again we gather that this post was in existence, and presumably occupied by a small garrison, during 1736, since a footnote in Volume VI of that work (p.448) indicates that the only surviving son of the Sieur de St. Ange was then its commandant.

This commandant's brother (whose name is supposed to have been Pierre Grosion de St. Ange) was killed in the latter part of May, 1736, in the disastrous defeat of the French by the Chickasaws in which D'Artaguet, Governor of the Illinois, together with the young and gallant Sieur de Vincennes* and the Jesuit Senat, also lost their

Footnote

*Jean Baptiste Bissot, Sieur de Vinsennes; reputed nephew or brother-in-law of Joliet; in the Miami country from 1704. (Harper's Enc.U.S. Hist.)

lives; and in the month following, the Sieur de St. Ange requested for his remaining son, commandant of the post on the Missouri, the lieutenancy made vacant by the death of Vinsennes.*

Footnote

*Whether Louis St. Ange de Bellerive was given this lieutenancy when it was thus requested for him, or at some later time, the present writer is not informed; but he was holding it thirteen years later, since, in a document of June 4, 1749, reproduced on page 83 of Albach's Annals of the West, he is referred to as "Lieutenant of a detached company of Marine, Commandant of Post Vincennes".

This commandant was no other than Louis St. Ange de Bellerive, the same who in 1724, in capacity of Major, had accompanied the Commandant Sieur de Bourgmont's memorable expedition from Fort Orleans (of which post the father of young St. Ange had ~~been~~ ~~been~~ been left as temporary commandant in the absence of De Bourgmont) to the Village of the Twenty-four, and thence, with his Indian allies, across the Plains by way of the Kansas river to the great village of the Padoucas in what is now western Kansas; and the same St. Ange who was the last French commandant of the Illinois, the agent who, for ~~France~~ ^{Port Chartres}, turned over, to the British Captain Sterling and his Highlanders on the 10th of October, 1765, withdrawing his garrison then across the Mississippi river to St. Louis, where he became the first Commandant of the Post of St. Louis, and afterward took a prominent part in the affairs of the village until his death there, December 6th, 1774.

Whether under St. Ange de Bellerive or some one else as commandant after 1736, that a garrison was maintained at the Post of the Kansas in the interval between that year and 1745, and for some years thereafter, and how the post probably came to be given, in 1745, the name "Port Cavagnial", will appear from what follows.

In 1743, ~~by the same ship~~ ^{by the same ship,} on or before May 10th, there came to Louisiana from France, two passengers who may briefly claim our attention.

One of these was Pierre François, Marquis de Vaudreuil Cavagnial, who bore a commission as governor of the colony, succeeding to Bienville, on the latter's final retirement from that office and return to France. Cavagnial was born in Quebec in 1698, his father being Louis Philippe de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil, governor of Canada from 1703 until his death in 1725. ^{himself} Cavagnial was destined ^{after having been} governor of Louisiana for about ten years, ^{to go} ^{in 1753, to there} ~~and to Canada,~~ and ^{became,} in 1755, the last French governor of that province. He died in France ⁱⁿ 1764.

The other was Debruisseau ^(or, Débruisseau or de Ruisseau), better known later at Port Chartres and the young village of St. Louis, as "Judge Lefebvre". Of him, Billon* gives the following biographical sketch:

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under Brant.
Tomp. 30.

"Joseph Lefebvre, D'Inglebert Débruisseau, was a native of France, and came to Louisiana with his wife and infant son in 1743, with the new governor-general, De Vaudreuil. In 1744 he came up from New Orleans with a license from the governor granting him the exclusive privilege of the Indian trade in the upper country, or Illinois district, for five years, and settled at Port Chartres, where in after years he officiated as judge of that district. Judge Lefebvre was among the first in 1765 to come to this side, and in conjunction with Joseph Labusciera, were the two parties that first assumed to set the civil government of St. Louis in operation, while awaiting the arrival of the Spanish officials to take possession of the country. He received from Laclède in 1765 a verbal grant of the north half of block No. 11, where he built a small house of posts at the southeast corner of Main and Locust.

"When the system of Livre Terriens, or "Land Books" was commenced in April, 1766, Lefebvre was associated with Capt. St. Ange in the grants of lots and lands; this position he filled for a few months and was then appointed by Acting Governor St. Ange to the office of the king's military store-keeper. He died on April 3, 1767, one of the earliest deaths in the new village of less than two years existence".

As to the concession granted to ^{Lefebvre} ~~Debruisseau~~, Gayarre says, "Unfortunately, the Marquis of Vaudreuil marked the beginning of his administration by following the old nefarious custom of granting

Foot-note

* Mangry writes that ^{not} ~~not~~ name "Sieur de Ruisseau".

* Louisiana, Third Ser. Lect., (N.Y., 1852) p.23.

monopolies. On the 8th of August, [1744,] he conceded to a man named Déruiſseau, the exclusive right of trading in all the country watered by the Missouri, and the streams falling into that river. This privilege was for a term a little exceeding five years, beginning on the 1st of January, 1745, to terminate on the 20th of May, 1750. To this grant, several conditions were annexed, among which were these:— Déruiſseau bound himself to finish the fort established on the Missouri territory, to keep in it a sufficient stock of merchandise to satisfy the wants of the Indians, to maintain, at his own expense, the several Indian tribes of that district in a state of amity among themselves and with the French, to supply the garrison of the fort with the necessary means of subsistence, to pay ~~him~~ to its commander an annual bounty of one hundred pistoles, and to transport to the fort, without charge, all the provisions and effects of that commander".

"In rendering ^{an} account of what he had done," De Vaudreuil said, in a despatch of the 6th of December, that one of his reasons for granting to Déruiſseau the monopoly of trade in the Illinois district, was to deprive the colonists in that region of all means of carrying on any kind of commerce with the Indians, and thus to force them into the cultivation of the soil."

There is every reason to believe that ~~he~~ ^{Lafabvre} ~~made~~ good use of his privilege: that he put the fort in shape, as the terms of his contract required, building such additional ^{small} quarters and store-rooms in it, or defence about it, as the government had originally planned for it and as his business called for; that he named ~~the fort~~ ^{it,} thus augmented, ^{"Fort Cavagnial" after his friend the governor} ~~the fort~~ ^{Cavagnial,} the Marquis de Vaudreuil, who had granted him the concession; that he stocked it with the necessary Indian goods and supplies for the support of the garrison; and that he conducted the trade from 1745 to 1750, — the full period of his concession. During ~~that~~ ^{that} period he probably lived, ~~as~~ after the custom of such traders, part of each year with his family at Fort Chartres, and part of it at Fort Cavagnial.

That Fort Cavagnial was maintained as a garrisoned post for a considerable number of years after the expiration of ~~Déruiſseau's~~ ^{Lafabvre's} concession, we shall presently see. Whether this was by the government alone or by the latter in connection with ~~Déruiſseau~~ ^{Lafabvre} or some other Indian trader, we do not know; but if the trade proved profitable, it may be that ~~Déruiſseau~~ ^{Lafabvre} found some way of continuing it, by arrangement with the Marquis, so long as the latter remained governor.

^{Somewhat} if not, later under his successor, ^{From the latter, however, 1762, a concession similar to that which} ~~he~~ ^{had enjoyed in the '40's, was obtained by Maxent, Barthelemy & Co, which must have} ~~been~~ ^{prepared} ~~by~~ ^{and five} ~~the~~ ^{years} ~~later,~~ ^{later,} he ~~communicated~~ ^{communicated}

India Trade on the Missouri; if he had not previously given it up.

a memoire ~~written~~ on the nations of the Missouri valley. It is interesting to know, from this memoire, that, so late as 1758 at least, the Missouri nation was still living "on the banks of the Missouri" where they were found by Bourgmont and other French voyageurs and explorers about the beginning of the eighteenth century, (their great and ^{practically} ~~irreparable~~ exterminative disaster at the hands of the Sacs and their allies, not yet having befallen them); and that the Little Osages were then still living near them, only about a league from the river and distant some forty leagues from the Grand Osages. But that, in the memoire, which here ^{more} especially interests us, is the information that at least as late as 1758, Fort Cavagnal was still ~~maintained~~ maintained as a garrisoned French post among the Kansas Indians.

*From Fort de Chartres - F.W.C. (Edwards)

"In 1758 the Chevalier de Kerlerec communicated a memoire on those nations domiciled on the Missouri. This river, said he, discharged itself on the left, in ascending, at 20 leagues from ~~the~~ Port de Chartres (Illinois). At ~~the~~ 30 leagues after that, is found the ~~river~~ River of the Gasconade; at 10 leagues thence, that of the Osages. After having ascended 140 leagues, the Grand Osages and the Kansas were met with. In continuing to ascend the Missouri, the nation of this name is found ^{on the left,} at forty leagues*, established on the banks of

Foot-note

*The narrative here goes back, from the Grand Osages and Kansas, to the mouth of Gasconade river, ~~and~~ as the initial point from which this distance ~~is reckoned~~ to the Missouri village is reckoned. The Grand Osages were of course found on the Osage branch of the Missouri ~~river~~. this river. The Missouries were 150 men. The Little Osages were at about a league in the interior and at 40 leagues from the Grand Osages by land, and at ~~the~~ 100 leagues from Port de Chartres. They were very friendly with the Ioways and the Otoes.

Foot-note

"At 150 leagues ~~above~~ further up [than Port de Chartres], were the
*Through some misunderstanding or slip of the pen, ~~the words~~ ~~plus haut~~ on the part of Kerlerec in writing his memoire, or on the part of Margry in preparing his abstract from it, the words "plus haut" have been introduced in such a manner as to imply that the Kansas lived 150 leagues above the Missouries; whereas, for this 150 leagues, Port de Chartres was the real point ~~as~~ reckoned, ^{as} shown by the distance "140 leagues" previously given as an approximate common distance of Kansas and Grand Osages from Port de Chartres. The D'Anville maps of North America (1746) and of Upper Louisiana (1732), among other and less accurate maps of the eighteenth century, (which, however, agree with these, generally, well enough on this point), agree with those of our own time, in making the distance from the site of Port de Chartres ~~in~~ (which is near the village of Prairie du Rocher, ~~XXXXXX~~ and 15 or 16 miles northwest of Kaskaskia, Illinois) to that of the old Missouri village (in present Saline county, Missouri) about twice the distance from the latter to the sites of the old villages of the Kansas nation (which latter were on the ~~east~~ ~~side~~ of the Missouri, just below the lower and just above the upper limit of present Atchison county).

Kansas, where was Port Cavagnal, which consisted ^{of an} exterior ~~of an~~ wall of picket-posts [a stockade] inclosing ^{some} ~~some~~ poor cabins or quarters*. The officer who commanded there had seven or eight gar-

Foot-note

*"Un entourage de pieux ~~et renfermait~~ et renfermait quelques mauvaises cabanes ou loges".