

D'Iberville

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D'IBERVILLE. AN ABSTRACT OF HIS MEMORIAL ON THE COUNTRY OF THE MISSISSIPPI.*

* From the "Materials for Minnesota History" published by the Society, 1856.

This memorial is in manuscript, in the archives of Government, at Paris. It was written in 1702, and is a valuable document on the nations and country of the Mississippi. At the solicitation of the Secretary, the authorities granted a copy of the document, for the use of the Historical Society, with the request that it be not published word for word.

D'Iberville the author, was a man of great reputation, and the son-in-law of Le Sueur , the discoverer of the Minnesota river. Like Perrot , he was a native of Canada. There are some families that appear destined for public life, red to one of these the subject of this sketch belonged. His father was influential, and gave to the world eleven sons, all of whom "acted well their part." One was a Captain of Marine, and was wounded in the attack of the English on Quebec, in 1690; a second bore the same rank, and was killed by the English in Carolina; a third was killed by the Iroquois; a fourth was Commandant at Rochester; a fifth met a brother's fate among the Iroquois; a sixth was Governor of Cayenne; a seventh was an officer of Marine; an eighth, a Captain of Infantry, was killed in Louisiana; a ninth died at Biloxi; a tenth was, like the subject of the article, Governor of Louisiana.

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The writer of the memorial had distinguished himself in naval conflicts in Hudson's Bay, and by order of the government set sail from France with a fleet, in 1698, to found the colony of Louisiana. Leaving his brothers in command, he chiefly occupied his time in traversing the ocean, and bringing supplies to the colony. In 1699 he had returned to the colony a second time, bringing Le Sueur with a company of workmen, to explore the

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supposed copper mines on the tributary of the Mankahto. On the 10th of February, 1702, Le Sueur returned from the Mankahto to the Gulf of Mexico, and found D'iberville absent. On the 18th of March he again arrived from France, with supplies and after spending a few weeks, he again set sail for the old country, Le Sueur accompanying him.

The manuscript of which we propose to give an abstract, was completed on board of the ship on the 20th day of June, and was no doubt, in part, the labor of LE SUEUR whose acquaintance with the Indian nations had been so extensive. The title of the manuscript is "Memorial of M. D'iberville upon the country of the Mississippi, the Mobile and its environs, their rivers, inhabitants and the commerce which could be carried on in less than five or six years in settling it."

NOTICE OF CHOCTAWS, ETC.

"The fort of the Mobile is about 31° 3# North; between the Mississippi and the Mobile at 33° 45# are the Choctaws, ten leagues West of the river, composed of 3800 or 4000 families—still N. N. E., 45 leagues are the Chicachas (Chickasaws) in latitude 35° 20# composed of 2000 families. The Mobillens and Chohomes are near the fort, and number 350 families. "* * * * *

Speaking of the river Wabash as the Ohio was then called, the Governor remarks:

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THE RIVER OHIO.

"The river Wabash as far as I know, for more than one hundred and twenty miles is not inhabited. I wish to possess it and have it occupied by the Illinois, who will hunt buffalo, deer, and similar animals which swarm the environs. Where the Illinois now are, they are of no service, being unwilling any longer to carry on the beaver trade. Some people may say as I have heard it said, that they can hunt buffalo, in their own country, but I do not

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think it would be possible. If they hunt on Wabash (Ohio) it will be easy to transport the hides and tallow.”

MASCOUTENS, KIKAPOUS, MIAMIS.

“The Illinois having removed We could cause it to be occupied by the Mascoutens and Kikapous. This would bring four hundred and fifty men upon the rivers which empty into the Illinois and Mississippi. They now only hunt the beaver which they sell at the Bay of the Puans (Green Bay) and in the country of the Illinois.

The Miamis *who have left the banks of the Mississippi* , and gone to Chicago on account of the beaver, and those who are at Ortithipicatony, and at the St. Joseph, could readily remove to the Illinois, *where they would join one hundred of their nation who are still at Ouisconsin on the Mississippi* . * * * * *

“The Miamis, Mauscoutens, and Kikapous, who were formerly on the Mississippi, placed upon the Illinois or lower down, will, withdraw from Canada yearly a commerce of fifteen thousand livres. The Illinois ten thousand, and the Sioux thirty thousand yearly. If Canada did not desire to trade with the Fox tribe, they would return to the Mississippi, and that would take away from the Canadian trade, ten thousand yearly.

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NOTICE OF THE SIOUX.

“If the Sioux remain in their own country they are useless to us, being too distant. We could have no commerce with them, except that of the beaver. M. Le Sueur , *who goes to France to give an account of this country* , is the proper person to make these movements. He estimates the Sioux at four thousand families, who could settle upon the Missouri.”

MAHAS, OTTOES, IOWAYS.

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He has spoken to me of another, which he calls the Mahas, composed of more than twelve hundred families, the Ayooues (Ioways) and the Octootatas, their neighbors, are about three hundred families. They occupy the lands between the Mississippi and the Missouri, about one hundred leagues from the Illinois. These savages do not know the use of arms, and a descent might be made upon them in a river, which is beyond the Wabash on the West" * * *

ASSINIBOIN, CNISTINEAUX.

"The Assinibouel, Quenistinos, and people of the north, who are upon the rivers which fall into the Mississippi, and trade at Fort Nelson (Hudson Bay) are about four hundred men. We could prevent their going there if we wish."

VALUE OF INDIAN COMMERCE.

"In four or five years we can establish a commerce with these savages of sixty or eighty thousand buffalo skins; more than one hundred deer skins, which will produce, delivered in France, more than two million four hundred thousand livres yearly. One might obtain for a buffalo skin four or five pounds of wool, which sells for twenty sous, two pounds of horse hair at ten sous. Besides, from smaller peltries, two hundred thousand livres can be made yearly."

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SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DOMESTICATION OF THE TRIBES.

"The savage tribes located in the places I have marked out, make it necessary to establish three posts on the Mississippi. One at the Arkansas, another at the Wabash, (Ohio,) and the third at the Missouri. At each post it would be proper to have an officer with a detachment of ten soldiers, with a sergeant and corporal. All Frenchmen should be

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allowed to settle there with their families, and trade with the Indians, and they might establish tanneries for properly dressing the buffalo and deer skins for transportation.

No Frenchman shall be allowed to follow the Indians on their hunts, as it tends to keep them hunters as is seen in Canada, and when they are in the woods they do not desire to become tillers of the soil.” * * * * *

“I have said nothing in this memoir of which I have not personal knowledge or the most reliable sources. The most of what I propose is founded upon personal reflection, in relation to what might be done for the defence and advancement of the colony. * * * * It will be absolutely necessary that the king should define the limits of this country, in relation to the government of Canada. It is impossible that the commandant of the Mississippi should have a report of those who inhabit the rivers that fall into the Mississippi, and principally those of the river Illinois.

“The Canadians intimate to the savages that they ought not to listen to us, but to the Governor of Canada, who always speaks to them with large presents; that the Governor of the Mississippi is mean, and never sends them anything. This is true, and what I cannot do. It is imprudent to accustom the savages to be spoken to by presents, for with so many, it would cost the king more than 344 the revenue derived from the trade. When they come to us, it will be necessary to bring them in subjection, make them no presents, and compel them to do what we wish, as if they were Frenchmen.

“The Spaniards have divided the Indians into parties on this point, and we can do the same. When one nation does wrong we can cease to trade with them, and threaten to draw down the hostility of other Indians. We rectify the difficulty by having missionaries, who will bring them into obedience secretly.

“The Illinois and Mascoutens have detained the French canoes they find upon the Mississippi, saying that the Governors of Canada have given them permission. I do not

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know whether this is so, but if true, it follows that we have not the liberty to send any one on the Mississippi.

“M. Le Sueur would have been taken if he had not been the strongest. Only one of the canoes he sent to the Sioux was plundered.” * * * * *