



THE PAINTING

CHAPTERS OF ARKANSAS HISTORY • A PUBLICATION OF HISTORIC ARKANSAS MUSEUM

THE MYSTERIES OF DON JOSEPH, COMMANDANT OF ARKANSAS POST

Chapter One

The painting doesn't seem mysterious at all. It's probably a couple of hundred years old. It shows a man in fine clothing that looks like a military uniform. He appears to be an important European or maybe an American sometime during the colonial period.

But the more we come to know about the man in the portrait and the more we know about where he lived, the more questions we have. He was Captain Joseph Bernard Valliere d'Hauterive, and he was the commandant, or "judge" of Arkansas Post from March of 1787 until July of 1790.

Chapter Two

His name appears to be French, and he was born in Grenoble, in the Dauphine province of France. Since the "de" in a person's name often indicated nobility, was this man a nobleman? Not necessarily, it seems. Some of the men who became leaders in the colonies took on such titles that never would have been given to them back in France.

Is d'Hauterive part of the man's name? Not really. It names the place



It is easy to glance at this portrait then move on. What if you stop, look, ask questions? You could find yourself back in time, at a Post called Arkansas, visiting with fur traders. Quapaw Indians and travelers just off a boat from New Orleans. Read on!

where the person came from. If this man were a nobleman, we might think his family governed the place, or even owned it.

Literally, d'Hauterive could mean "high banks," or "high shore." The city

of Grenoble sits in a valley high in the Alps, and it has two rivers passing through it. Could that be a clue to such a title?

If this man came from an important family, why would he leave his own country to live and work in a wilderness across the sea? Perhaps it was because he was the "second son" of his father. The oldest son usually inherited the family property, and the second or third son would have to make his own way. Such men often went into military service.

Joseph was a second son, but his older brother also came to the city called New Orleans in the French colony of Louisiana. Both of the young men may have been looking for fortune and status that their family wouldn't have had back home in France.

Chapter Three

But was Arkansas Post really a French colony? It was when Joseph came to this country, but Spain took control in 1766. How could a Frenchman be a Spanish officer in an outpost owned by Spain? Joseph simply joined the

(continued on page 4)





HOW TO BUILD AN EMPIRE WITH FUR

Imagine the court of Tsar Peter the Great of Russia. We've all seen pictures of great palaces, fine coaches, and servants by the dozens. Where do you suppose Peter got all the money it took to live that way? For the answer, go to a globe and find Siberia. That's the huge, eastern region that stretches from Russia all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Much of it is open country with forests, plains, mountains and rivers. And much of it is very, very cold.

A hundred years before Peter came to power, Russian rulers were sending people to open up Siberia. They knew it promised great wealth. The wealth wasn't gold, or timber, or farmland. It was fur. The wealth of the Russian Empire was built on the fur of sable, fox, ermine, and beaver.



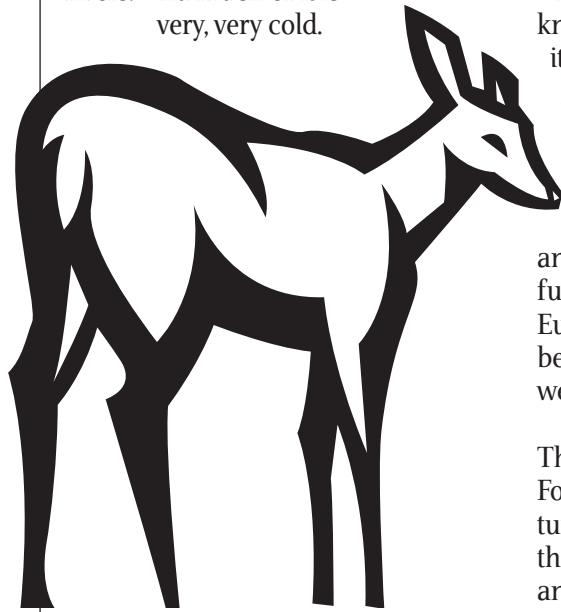
where it brought good prices. In the mid-1700s, the Quapaw may have brought in as many as 1500 gallons of bear oil per year.

The French, English, Spanish, and the Americans looked at western North America in just the same way. They knew that fur was abundant there, as it was in Siberia. They were eager to get to it.

Arkansas Post, like other settlements in the late 1600s, started out as a trading post for hunters and trappers with plans to trade in fur. Some of the hunters were European, with the French being the best known. Some, like the Quapaw, were Native American.

Later on, people in the region began to get meat from cattle and other sources. The post still shipped meat, but fur became important. By the end of the 1700s, the Osage were bringing in fur, just like French and the Quapaw hunters and trappers.

John Treat wrote about the fur trade with the Osage and the Quapaw during that time. He was the man who would be in charge of the post after it was part of America. Here are some of his yearly figures for the Osage:



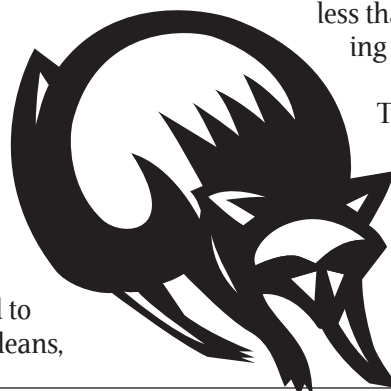
- Deer Skins – 40,000 Pounds
- Raccoon Pelts – 12,000
- Bears – 500
- Beavers – 2,500 to 3,000
- Otters – 300

Then a surprising thing happened. For the first hundred years or so, meat turned out to be more important in the region than fur was. New Orleans and other American coastal cities were growing, and they needed more and more fresh meat. Deer and bear meat were in great demand. Fur was important, but meat was even more important.

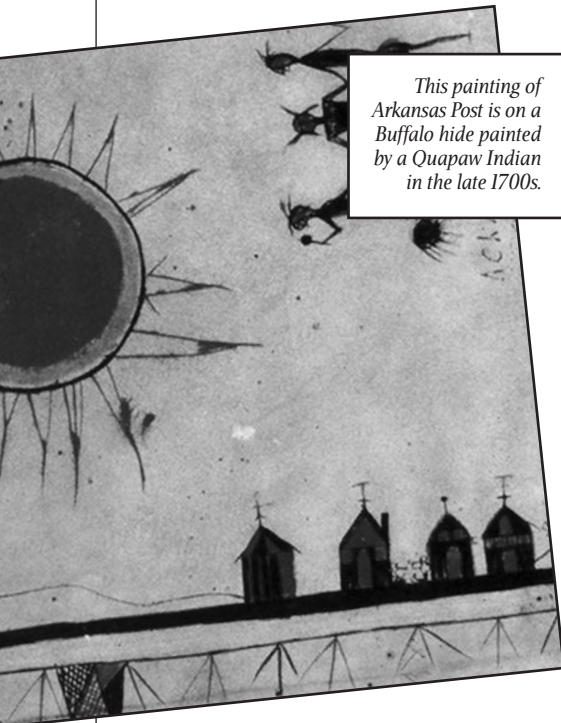
Another important animal product was bear oil. People used bear oil for cooking and for spreading like butter. They also used it in lamps.

Farmers were growing crops near Arkansas Post by that time, but fur was worth more than crops. Treat said that Osage trade in fur and skin was worth around \$18,000 to \$19,000 each year. Farmers' crops were worth less than \$5,000 each year during the same period.

The Quapaw produced good bear oil. They brought it to the post sewn up in deerskins and traded it for clothing, rifles, knives, and other goods. The traders at the post shipped the oil to markets in New Orleans,



Treat took charge of the post after America bought the territory from France in 1803. He also tried to take control of the fur business. He established a



This painting of Arkansas Post is on a Buffalo hide painted by a Quapaw Indian in the late 1700s.



...OR NOT!?

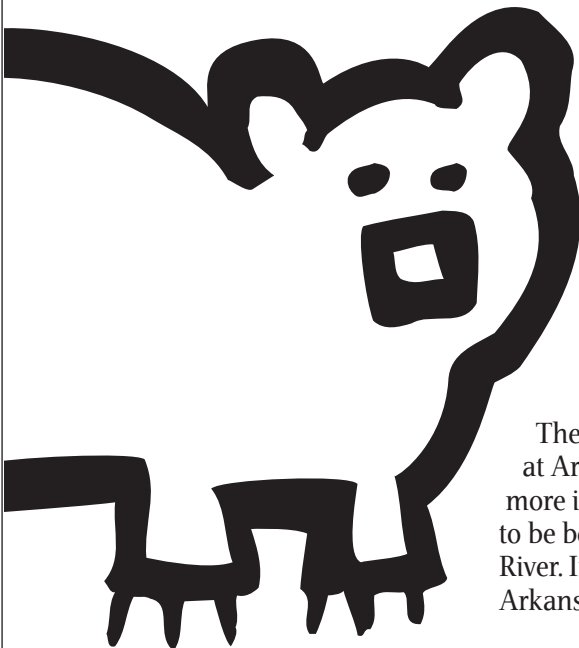
fur “factory” for the American government. For several reasons, the government factory wasn’t really successful.

First, other licensed “factors” were already there. These were businessmen who had been at the post during French and Spanish rule. They knew how to handle the furs and skins and they had done business with the same buyers for several years.

The new American operation had its troubles. Treat and his workers didn’t always do a good job of handling furs. Sometimes their bundles of skins weren’t wrapped properly. That would allow worms to get into the bundles and ruin the skins. The buyers preferred skins from other factors.

Second, illegal hunters and trappers took some of the fur trade in the area. This had always been a problem. British hunters weren’t supposed to be hunting in the area in 1776 because it was French territory. Still, British hunters were said to have taken up to 16,000 deer skins from the nearby forests during that year.

Finally, buyers didn’t think fur from



Factories at Arkansas Post?

Why was the place where fur was traded at Arkansas Post called a “factory?” Was it because furs were processed, packaged and shipped there and that the whole operation looked like a factory? Do you think it was a factory like the ones we know of today, where people make different kinds of products?

One meaning for the word “factor” isn’t used very much these days. The word can mean “an agent, someone who represents another.” It can also mean “one who buys and sells on commission.” It could be that the person operating the fur trading post

was that kind of a “factor.” He was buying and selling, perhaps while representing other buyers in larger cities.

What do you think?



Arkansas was as good as fur from the Northwest. Fur trade opened up in Oregon, Washington, and western Canada around the time Treat started his factory. Arkansas fur began to lose its value in the markets.

The reason is interesting, but simple. It is colder in the Northwest than it is in Arkansas. Fur-bearing animals grow thicker, richer coats in cold country than in warm country. The Northwest was America’s Siberia. John Jacob Astor, America’s first millionaire, made his fortune trading for fur in that region.

The fur trade began to slow down at Arkansas Post. Farming became more important, and farming seemed to be better farther up the Arkansas River. In 1820, the lawmakers of the Arkansas Territory decided to move

its capital to Little Rock.

Arkansas Post was a hunter’s trading post. It became less important as hunting became less important. The Osage, Quapaw, French, and American hunters began to fade from the woods around the mouth of the Arkansas River. The Post of Arkansas faded away as well.

Note: Much of the Information for this piece came from Colonial Arkansas 1686- 1804, by Morris S. Arnold, from The Arkansas Post Story, by Roger E. Coleman, and from East of the Sun, by Benson Bobrick. Another very important source of information was Eric Leonard, Ranger at Arkansas Post National Memorial.





MYSTERIES

(continued from page 1)

Spanish army so his career as an officer in the government of the new, wild territory could continue.

At least it seems clear that Joseph Valliere was a military man. He appears to be wearing an officer's uniform and he is called "Captain." In fact, he was the commander of the small garrison of soldiers at Arkansas Post. But that was not his only duty. In such a small place, he had to do the work of several people.

Chapter Four

What was the community like where this man lived? Arkansas Post was a tiny place. Not long before Valliere took over, it was reported that only fifteen families lived there. Other people such as hunters and traders came and went. The number of soldiers at the post ranged from fifteen to fifty over the years. Valliere almost surely had fewer than fifty.

The soldiers were there to try to protect the little town from such groups as the Osage and the British. Still, there was no separate police force, so they had to do that job as well. Who was Chief of Police? Valliere was, of course.

There was no court, but people still got into arguments that had to be settled. Valliere served as a judge. People bought and sold land and other property, and someone had to keep such public records. Sometimes there were priests at the post and sometimes there were none. If a couple wanted to get married, someone had to record it. Who do you suppose kept the public records?

Chapter Five

Under Valliere's leadership, the post began to grow. A few years later the number of people would reach about 400. He worked hard to attract settlers. That means he was a kind of one-man Chamber of Commerce for the town. He did all he could to help fur traders and farmers, because almost everyone there made a living from those activities. What other occupations might have been practiced at Arkansas Post?

In Valliere's time the village had two main streets. Nobody knows for sure how many buildings were there. We can assume there was a stockade, a barracks for the soldiers, and a house where the commandant lived and worked.

Three years after Valliere left someone counted about thirty houses, and most of those probably stood while he was commandant. Do you think there were warehouses, inns, and stores?

Anything that couldn't be found or built nearby had to be brought in from other towns far away. If someone were building a house at Arkansas Post, what would they have had to order from some other place?

Most of the goods that were brought in came from New Orleans. Without good roads and wagons, the trip to New Orleans meant traveling on the rivers. A boat could start at Arkansas Post and travel down the Arkansas River into the Mississippi River and usually arrive in New Orleans in a week or more in normal weather. When the rivers were too high or too low, nobody knew how long a trip would take.

The problem came with the trip back to Arkansas Post. That could take six or seven weeks or even longer. The trip upstream could be made in a keelboat with oars.

Pots and pans, guns and knives, and coffee and spices all were brought in from New Orleans. Silverware, pewter candlesticks, boots, and fine dresses were great luxuries since they had to be brought in. Books, ink, and writing paper were rare. Do you think many of the people who lived at Arkansas Post could write?

Chapter Six

Weeks or even months might pass without any word from the outside world. During those times everyone looked to Valliere for safety, law, government, and information. Even with a wife and children, it seems that he must have felt lonely during those times.

Do you suppose Valliere longed for New Orleans or Paris or Grenoble? Or was he happy being in charge of a tiny outpost in the North American wilderness? Did he think of himself as a Frenchman, or a Spanish officer? Did it ever occur to him that he was living in a place that might become a whole new country?

What did Captain Joseph Bernard Valliere d'Hauterive mean for you to see when you looked at his portrait more than two hundred years after he posed for it?

Contributing writer:
Charley Sandage

Contributing photographer:
Bill Branch

Designer:
Jann Greenland of Greenland Creative, Inc.



200 East Third St.
Little Rock, AR 72201-1608
(501)324-9351
TDD (501) 324-9811
www.arkansashistory.com

Historic Arkansas Museum is a historic site museum, interpreting the territorial and early statehood periods of Arkansas, and Arkansas's creative legacy.



A museum of the Department
of Arkansas Heritage

Accredited by the American
Association of Museums

The museum opens its doors daily for tours of one of the state's oldest neighborhoods.

For information about field trips to Historic Arkansas, call (501) 324-9351 or e-mail the education staff at: reservations@arkansashistory.com.