



FRENCH CREOLE CORRIDOR

Mid-Mississippi River Valley



Les Amis'
Self-Guided Tour

Les Amis

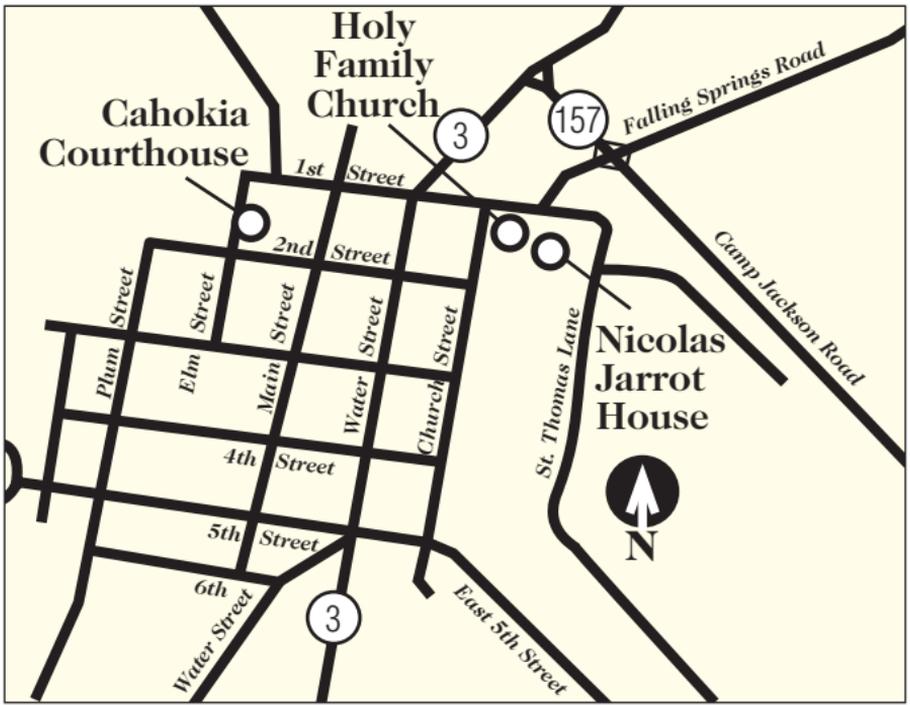
(The Friends), an organization dedicated to the preservation of this region's historic creole culture, invites you to experience an important part of America's colonial history. On your adventure you will discover that Colonial America was not defined exclusively by thirteen colonies and historic Eastern centers such as Williamsburg, Boston, and Philadelphia. In the same year that Williamsburg, Virginia, was founded, 1699, French missionary priests from Quebec founded Cahokia, Illinois, just across the Mississippi River from what would become St. Louis some 65 years later.

Outlined here is a very fast glimpse during a one-day tour of the historic French Creole Corridor on both sides of the Mississippi River departing from St. Louis. Dividing this trip into two day segments, one for the Illinois bank and the second for the Missouri side, is highly recommended. Sites listed in the tint boxes are suggested for visitation only if two days are available. Abundant overnight accommodations exist in Ste. Genevieve's numerous historic B&Bs, hotels and motels, in addition to a variety of restaurants and nearby wineries. The Ste. Genevieve Welcome Center, 800-373-7007, provides tourist information. Some sites are closed on holidays and in winter months. Before visiting, please check days/hours open and wheelchair accessibility; phone numbers for each site are provided below.

Prepare yourself for a historical ride into a universe that is very close to us, yet at the same time, is so buried by the dust of time and the wrecking ball of modern development as to be almost invisible except to the practiced eye. In the eighteenth century, this universe consisted of roughly 1,000 square miles of the Mississippi River Valley, from St. Louis and Cahokia on the upriver end to Kaskaskia and Ste. Genevieve downriver. This region today provides the best introduction to French colonial life available anywhere—anywhere—in the United States.

This exotic universe was a world of French civilization: French in language, French in place names and proper names, French in its Gallic version of the Roman Catholic religion, French in its farming practices, French in its laws, French in its marriage and inheritance customs, French in its habits of thinking, and, for many decades, French in government.

Both Indians and Africans, as slaves and as free persons, made this French civilization different than any that had ever existed back home in France. This civilization is most accurately referred to as French Creole, meaning fundamentally French but born, or produced, in the Mississippi River Valley. This appellation "French Creole" may refer to persons, such as the Chouteau brothers of St. Louis, or it may refer to things, such as the extraordinary vertical-log buildings that may be seen in Cahokia and Ste. Genevieve.



Holy Family Church, Cahokia, Illinois

116 Church Street

Approaching Cahokia one will notice that many of the main thoroughfares are oriented in a northwest-southeast alignment. This alignment in fact corresponds to the orientation of the agricultural fields in colonial Cahokia, and the streets are therefore themselves artifacts dating back three hundred years. The same is true of the streets in St. Louis that adjoin Tower Grove Park, the distances between which can still be measured in ancient French units of measure, *arpents* and *toises*.



The vertical-log church, dating from 1787-99, is a building of exceptional importance, for it is a unique survival. Numbers of residential structures have survived but all other churches and other public buildings from 18th century Illinois and Missouri have disappeared. The previous church was a similar wooden structure, which decayed rapidly after the resident pastor abandoned his post and returned to France in 1763, after the end of the French and Indian War and the cession of the area to Great Britain. The crumbling remains of the old church burned in 1783. That same year the American Revolution ended and Cahokia became part of the young United States.

A letter from the *marguilliers* (church wardens) of the parish to the Seminary of Quebec, dated June 6, 1787, reveals that the parishioners had decided to construct a new

NICOLAS JARROT HOUSE, 124 E. First Street

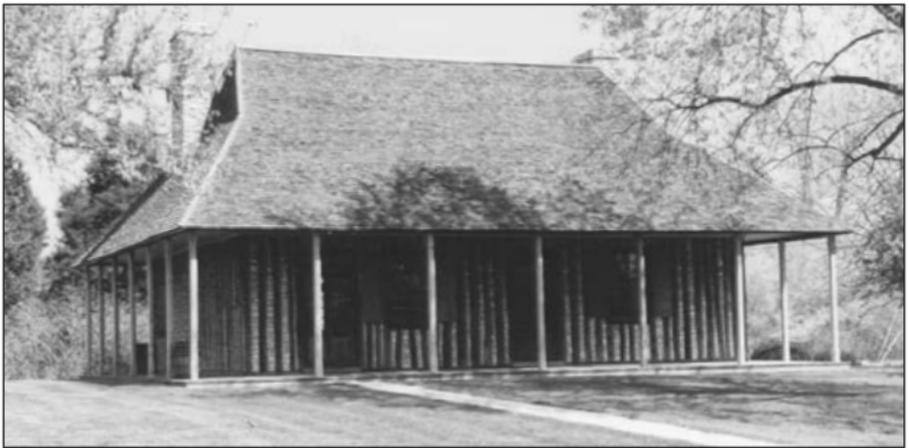


Nicolas Jarrot was a French immigrant who successfully sought his fortune in the Mississippi Valley. Arriving in Cahokia in the late eighteenth century, about 1810 he completed this large house near the Cahokia church, choosing to erect his home out of bricks (an unusual building material in the area at that date) and in the Federal style then popular on the American east coast. Unlike many French Creoles in the region, Jarrot was determined to adapt himself quickly to American ways, and he welcomed Lewis and Clark to Illinois in December 1803. After a number of vicissitudes, the Jarrot house was acquired and faithfully restored by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency in the late 20th century. The house, just east of the church, can be visited by appointment only, 618-332-1782.

church. Completed in 1799, this is the church we see today, built of dressed black walnut logs, erected in the familiar *poteaux-sur-sol* style that prevailed in the region. For greater strength and stability, the walls slope in slightly toward the top, and the vertical timbers are braced by occasional timbers set into the walls at a slant, providing the strength of a triangle. The church was carefully restored in 1949; the 250th- anniversary of the foundation of the parish, and coincidentally the 150th anniversary of the completion of the church structure. The building's footprint is the form of a latin cross, with two shallow transepts where the nave joins the sanctuary. The church continues to be used for religious purposes, although a newer and larger modern parish church now stands nearby. It is generally kept locked, and arrangements to visit it must be made with the rectory (618-337-4548) or the Cahokia Court House (618-332-1782).

Cahokia Court House, Illinois State Historic Site

107 Elm Street



Cahokia Courthouse State Historic Site

This vertical-log building was used for local government and court purposes in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, but it was originally built and used as a residence by François Saucier, a prominent early resident in about 1744. The second wife of St. Louisan Pierre Chouteau was a Saucier, revealing the social ties that connected both sides of the Mississippi during colonial times. Because of various demolitions and reconstructions it is doubtful that very much remains of the original structure. However, the building is situated on its original site and its outward appearance is much the same as it was in the 18th century.

The building now contains a small museum with interesting exhibits about colonial life. Local artifacts and archaeological discoveries from the neighborhood are on display. Ask the superintendent to see the slide show, which provides an excellent introduction to the entire French Creole Corridor. Parking and restrooms are available at the Visitor Center at 2nd and Elm. Open year-round, 618-332-1782.

DEPART CAHOKIA DRIVING PAST BOISMENUE HOUSE IN PRAIRIE DU PONT

From Cahokia Courthouse, go back to Hwy. 3, go south (right) to stoplight and turn right onto Water St. (at gas station). Follow Water St. 1.8 miles past the Martin-Boismenue House in Prairie du Pont.

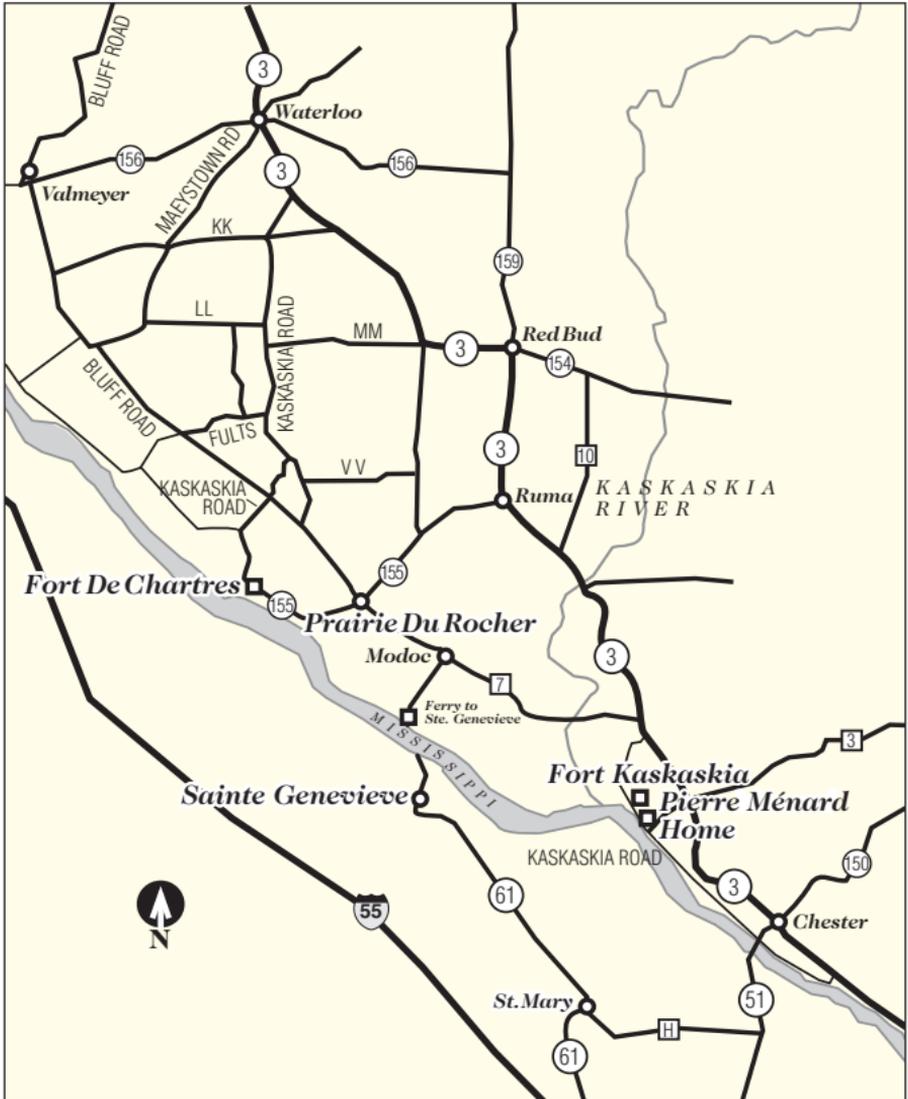
MARTIN-BOISMENUE HOUSE,



This small *poteaux-sur-sol* structure was built about 1788 by Pierre Martin from Quebec, and later occupied by the Boismenue family. The house stands in an area known as *Prairie du Pont* (prairie of the bridge). Its name now inelegantly shortened to “Dupo,” this community originated as an agricultural satellite to neighboring Cahokia. The Boismenue House was identified as a colonial vertical-log structure of major historical importance only when its demolition had begun in the latter 20th century. The structure as it now stands provides a good idea of the simple, but graceful, life style of people in this 18th century agricultural community. Other than the Cahokia Court House, it is the only immediately recognizable vertical-log residential structure that survives in the Cahokia region. (By appointment only, 618-332-1782).

Continue on across the railroad tracks and then turn left. Go 2/10 miles and turn right at stoplight onto 50/3 255 South. Go 1.5 miles and merge left onto 255 south. Stay on 255 South for 3.3 miles and exit at Columbia/Route 3 South (left lane).

At the first stoplight, turn right onto Sand Bank Rd. Follow for 1/2 mile then turn left onto Bluff Rd. which you will stay on for about 30 miles as it winds through farmland. Note that at



the town of old Valmeyer, Bluff Rd. intersects State Route 156, where you will turn left, go 1/2 mile and then turn right (at Mitchell St.) back onto Bluff Rd. (sign to Prairie du Rocher). Continue on Bluff Rd. for about 15 miles, until you reach Kaskaskia Road where you turn right. Take Kaskaskia Rd. 1.7 miles through the bottoms until the road dead-ends at Stringtown Rd. Turn left and follow road 3 miles to Fort de Chartres.

All the while, you have descended from the bluffs onto the broad floodplain of the Mississippi River. Notice the extensive rich plowlands. These were one of the chief assets of the French settlers in the region, and the rich alluvial soil has now been producing bountiful harvests of grain (originally wheat and maize, with soybeans now added) every year for three hundred years, except on those occasions when the flooding Mississippi has destroyed the crops.

Fort de Chartres, Illinois State Historic Site

Illinois 155 four miles west of Prairie du Rocher

In 1717 the French royal government detached the Illinois settlements from Canada and incorporated them into Louisiana. The following year, New Orleans was founded (named after the Duke of Orleans) and soldiers and officials ascended the Mississippi River in *bateaux* to establish a military presence and a local government in Illinois. France wished to connect its Gulf Coast settlements with those in the St. Lawrence Valley, as well as encourage grain production in what was called the Illinois Country (*le pays des Illinois*). The French administrators chose to erect their fort and establish their political capital some 16 miles up the Mississippi from Kaskaskia, the largest settlement in the region.



The first three forts de Chartres (named after the Duke of Chartres, brother to the Duke of Orleans) were small, palisaded structures, but in preparation for the French and Indian War (1756-1763) Louis XV's government invested heavily in an imposing stone fort, begun in 1753. The powder magazine is the oldest surviving non-Indian structure in the entire Midwest. Considered the finest fort in western America, de Chartres comprised the main defense of several villages along the



Fort de Chartres' powder magazine

Mississippi River, including Ste. Anne, or *Nouvelle Chartres*, which grew up outside the fort and included soldiers and their families, as well as gunsmiths and other artisans to serve the fort.

After 1763 most of the French living on the east side of the Mississippi, now under detested British rule, moved to Spanish territory on the west side of the river. In 1765, the last French commandant at Fort de Chartres, Capt. St. Ange de Bellerive, moved his command and soldiers across the river and settled upstream in the newly founded city, St. Louis, named for the good King Louis IX.

Fort de Chartres was briefly occupied by the British after the French and Indian War, but they soon abandoned it and the fort fell into ruins. The state of Illinois has rebuilt (on the original stone foundations) parts of the complex to provide a



good idea of how it would have looked in 1765. Twice a year Fort de Chartres comes to vibrant life with the *rendezvous* held each spring and autumn. On these occasions, a tent village of reenactors, displays by artisans, music and dance groups, and soldiers in meticulously recreated 18th century uniforms take us back to colonial times. Open year-round, 618-284-7230.

DEPART FORT DE CHARTRES FOR PRAIRIE DU ROCHER

Turn right and follow the road (Illinois Hwy. 155) for 5 miles to Prairie du Rocher.

Prairie du Rocher Illinois

This charming village, located southeast of Fort de Chartres, was originally an agricultural satellite of the fort. Less dependent on the fort than Ste. Anne, Prairie du Rocher survived the exodus of French settlers to the Missouri side of the river in the later 18th century. A French visitor opined in 1798 that Prairie du Rocher was the most purely French community in the entire Mississippi River Valley. A considerable number of its present inhabitants are descendants of the 18th century settlers and continue proudly to bear their French surnames. The elegant “Creole House” maintains the graceful lines of Creole architecture in the Mississippi Valley, although it was constructed in the early nineteenth century after the region had become American.

Leaving Prairie du Rocher along the Bluff Road, one notices the dramatic overhanging limestone cliffs. In prehistoric times, these cliffs provided living space for native Indian tribes whose lives have been documented by archeologists. In modern times, local farmers use the natural rock shelters for storing farm equipment and hay, just as Creole farmers did in the eighteenth century.

Pierre Ménard House

Illinois State Historic Site

Devastating floods during the 19th century destroyed virtually all of old French Kaskaskia. But the very best survived. Pierre Ménard, an immigrant from Canada, had had enough foresight to build across the Kaskaskia River on higher ground. The Ménard House, built in the early 1800s of vertical logs, is one the great historic treasures of the region. The flooding that destroyed the town also changed the channels of the rivers, so that it is the Mississippi River, not the Kaskaskia, which is now visible from the front gallery of the Ménard House. The Ménard House has been restored by the State of Illinois and today provides a glimpse of the elegance and comfort enjoyed by the most prosperous Creoles at the end of the colonial era. (618-859-3031)



Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

KASKASKIA was originally settled in 1703 by members of the Kaskaskia Indian tribe, French traders, and French missionaries, many of the traders having had Indian wives. Soon significant numbers of African slaves were imported to perform agricultural labor, although French slavery was less barbarous than that in the American South. At the time of the American Revolution, Kaskaskia was the largest settlement in the entire Midwest, and George Rogers Clark (older brother to William) seized the British-held town, with help from the French Creole residents,

in 1778. During the colonial era, *bateaux* and *pirogues* loaded with barrels of flour descended the Mississippi from Kaskaskia to supply the residents of New Orleans with the essential ingredient for their *baguettes* and *beignets*, without which life in the capital of Louisiana would have faltered. When Illinois entered the Union in 1818, Kaskaskia served as the first state capital. The Colonial settlement no longer exists.

Fort Kaskaskia State Park

Illinois State Historic Site

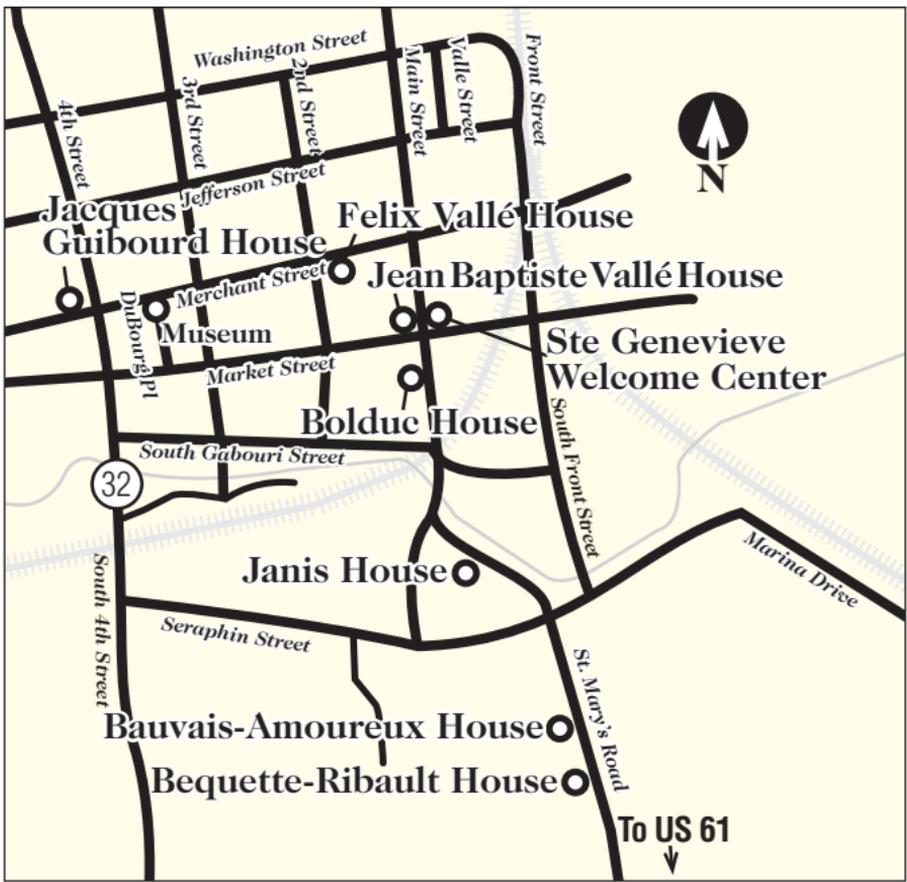
On the bluff high above the Ménard House are the remains of Fort Kaskaskia. This fortification, planned by Louis XV's government to protect Kaskaskia, was never completed. But the site is fascinating and instructive.

It provides a superb overview of the Mississippi River Valley, and, if one looks carefully, the precise outlines of the planned fort are apparent—the four corner bastions, the exterior walls, the main gates, and the gun emplacements. In good weather, this is an excellent picnic site with sheltered tables and incomparable views. (618-859-3741)

DEPART FROM CHESTER BRIDGE FOR STE. GENEVIEVE

Crossing the Mississippi River at Chester, Illinois, one immediately notices the rich agricultural fields. The fertile soil of the Mississippi's floodplain drew French settlers to the west side of the river by mid-eighteenth century. The river today is a sharp political boundary, separating Illinois from Missouri, but it is important to note that in colonial times the river did not divide but rather united. That is, the Mississippi was the geographic element that bound together the French Creole communities on both sides of the river, uniting them as one social, political, and cultural entity.

From the Chester Bridge, follow Route 51, turning right on County Road H to St. Mary, Missouri. Approaching St. Mary, turn right on US Highway 61 (north). Proceeding northward on U.S. Highway 61 from St. Mary's toward Ste. Genevieve, the vast agricultural fields located between the highway and the Mississippi River have been plowed and planted every single spring since 1750. This array of plowlands was traditionally referred to as *le Grand Champ*, the Big Field, which was surrounded by a huge circumferential fenceline. The Old Town of Ste. Genevieve was situated across these plowlands on the west bank of the Mississippi River.



Sainte Genevieve Missouri

Ste. Genevieve contains the largest number of French Creole buildings of vertical-log construction in the United States — more than New Orleans, more than Mobile, more than Natchitoches; indeed, more than all these other locations thrown together. Only in Ste. Genevieve can one form some idea of the appearance of the 18th century villages of the French Creole Corridor. Pioneer settlers from Kaskaskia moved westward across the Mississippi to found Ste. Genevieve circa 1750. They did this to exploit the rich agricultural lands that surrounded the new village and to have better access to the lead mines located further west. Old Ste. Genevieve was devastated by a huge flood in 1785, and over the next 10 years its inhabitants relocated about 3 miles further north, to a site at the north edge of the Big Field, where they found higher ground to protect their community from the ravages of the river.

Approach Ste. Genevieve by turning right off Highway 61 onto St. Mary's Road. This historic roadway connected the Old Town of Ste. Genevieve to the nucleus of the New Town at the end of the colonial era. Proceeding toward the center of town look carefully at the French Creole structures to the left: First, at 389 St. Mary's Road the Dorlac House, then the Bequette-Ribault House, the Bauvais-Amoureux House, and the Nicolas Janis House — excellent examples of the two basic types of vertical-log architecture that characterized the region — *poteaux-en-terre* and *poteaux-sur-sol*, posts in the ground and posts on a sill.

Bauvais-Amoureux House

Missouri State Historic Site

327 St. Mary Road



The Bauvais-Amoureux House was built by Jean-Baptiste St. Gemme Bauvais, Jr. in 1792. The large Bauvais family, originally French Canadian, had been long established at Kaskaskia. After the American Revolution, however, when chaos descended on the east side of the Mississippi, members of the Bauvais family moved to Ste. Genevieve on the west side of the river. There, a francophone population with a Spanish colonial government lived in relative peace and tranquility, while frontier Americans lived recklessly on the other side of the river.

The Amoureux property is a Missouri State Historic Site also supported by Les Amis, a St. Louis-based organization devoted to preserving the French Creole heritage in the region. The house itself is of the *poteaux-en-terre* variety, the exterior walls being of rot-resistant red cedar planted directly in the earth. Les Amis commissioned a meticulously constructed diorama depicting Ste. Genevieve as it was in 1832. This remarkable exhibit demonstrates how colonial living habits (including vertical-log houses and fenced residential properties) persisted well on into the nineteenth century, as did the French language. (Call 573-883-7102 for tours)



Bequette-Ribault House

Before turning right and crossing Gabourri Creek, you will pass the ca. 1790 Nicolas Janis House (later known as Green Tree Tavern) which is undergoing a private restoration. Proceed northward to the intersection of Main



Janis House – Green Tree Tavern

and Market Streets. In colonial times these streets were called *La Grand Rue* (Big Street) and *Rue à l'Eglise* (Church

FELIX VALLÉ HOUSE STATE HISTORIC SITE

198 Merchant Street, built in 1818 by Jewish francophone merchant Jacob Philipson, became the home of Felix and Odile Pratte Vallé, members of one of Ste. Genevieve's premier colonial families. This important Federal-style limestone building features the authentically restocked mercantile store of the historic trading firm, Ménard & Vallé. The business association of Vallé and Pierre Ménard from Kaskaskia, Illinois, reveals how French-speaking families maintained relationships across the Mississippi River even after the river had become a political boundary. The family's living quarters display beautiful early Empire furnishings with original mantels and interior trim. A back porch staircase leads to second floor bedrooms. The charming garden features original brick and frame outbuildings. The stone Felix Vallé house is just a block away from the house built by his father, Jean Baptiste Vallé, at the corner of Main and Market. Open year round, 573-883-7102.

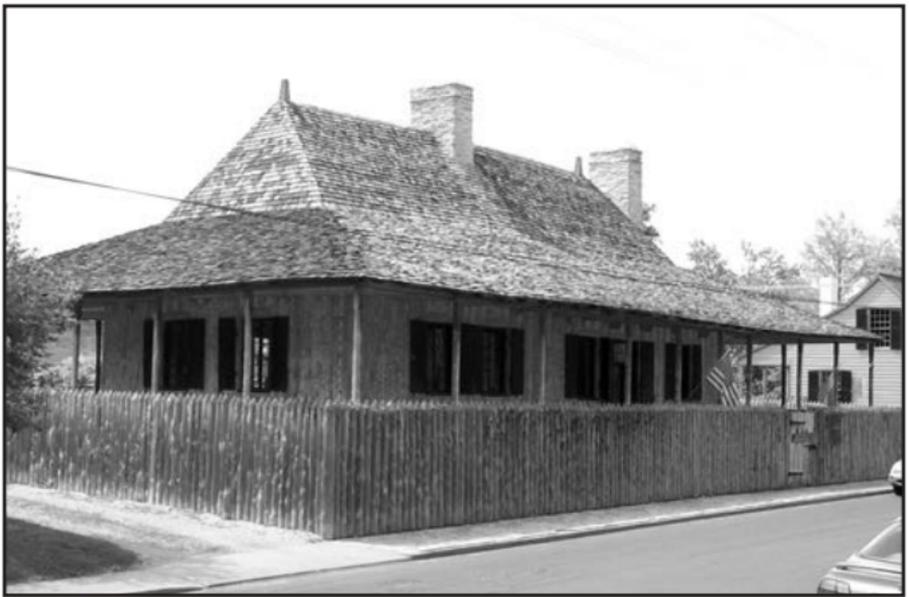


Street) and were the only ones in town identified with specific names. This intersection was the very heart (the soul was the parish church located westward up Church Street) of Ste. Genevieve at the end of the colonial era, and well into the nineteenth century, as evidenced by the two spectacular residences located nearby—the Bolduc House and the Jean-Baptiste Vallé House. Everyone of importance in late colonial Ste. Genevieve lived virtually within hailing distance of this intersection.

Louis Bolduc House

Sainte Genevieve, Missouri

123 S. Main Street



Missouri Department of Natural Resources

The Louis Bolduc House, owned and operated by the National Society of Colonial Dames of America in the state of Missouri, is one of the historic treasures of colonial America. Louis Bolduc and his second wife, Marie Courtois, had this *poteau-sur-sol* residence built in the early 1790s as they abandoned the Old Town of Ste. Genevieve. This house fronted directly on the *Grand Rue*, European style, and once occupied a full French acre (*arpent*) square during the colonial period. The entire property was enclosed with a palisaded fence of stakes (*pieux*) made of rot-resistant cedar. For the vertical log walls of the house, however, oak served well given the fact that these logs, unlike those in the fence, did not penetrate the ground but rested on wooden sills atop a stone foundation. Despite the fact that the lot upon which the historic Bolduc House now stands is of diminished size, the modern visitor to the site gains a clear sense of residential spatial relationships during the colonial era: a large, semi-rural, enclosed compound that, in addition to the main residence, would have included a stable, slave quarters, a poultry house, and a bee-hive style bake oven. Open year-round, 573-883-3105.

Other Sainte Genevieve Historic Attractions

THE JEAN-BAPTISTE VALLÉ HOUSE (1794) at Main and Market once boasted a formal French geometric garden that was the first such landscape to be developed west of the Mississippi River during the colonial era. It imitated, in miniature, the gardens at Versailles, and conveyed the same French sense of good order and agreeable proportions. Vion Papin Schram, a descendent of French settlers in the region, meticulously maintained this garden for many years before her death in 2003. Louis Bolduc and Jean-Baptiste Vallé were two of the wealthiest men in town at the end of the colonial era. The marriage of Jean-Baptiste Vallé to Jeanne Barbeau of Prairie du Rocher is a good example of the essential integrity of the cultural unity on both sides of the river. This marriage took place in the bride's hometown, but the couple settled in Ste. Genevieve, both leading extraordinarily long and productive lives. Their respective tombstones, inscribed in the French language they spoke until their deaths in mid-nineteenth century, dominate the town's historic cemetery (the oldest in Missouri) located at 5th and Merchant.

THE JACQUES GUIBOURD HOUSE, 4th and Merchant, is an important National Register property constructed in 1806 for Jacques Jean Rene Guibourd de Luzinai, an educated native of France. Recognized for its authentic *poteaux-sur-sol* (posts on a sill) construction, the home features an elegant collection of French antiques, lovely gardens and a gift shop. Visitors can enter the large attic to see the massive hand-hewn and numbered Norman truss system. Located just off the city square, only 1/2 block from the Church of Ste. Genevieve and Memorial Cemetery. Open year-round, 573-883-7544.

THE STE. GENEVIEVE MUSEUM contains varied collections of local memorabilia. Items of interest include: prehistoric and historic Indian relics, old documents and Spanish land grants, artifacts from Missouri's first industry (the Saline Creek salt works), and a scale model of the Mississippi River Railroad transfer boat, "The Ste. Genevieve." Located just off the square, at Merchant Street and DuBourg Place. Open year-round, 573-883-3461.

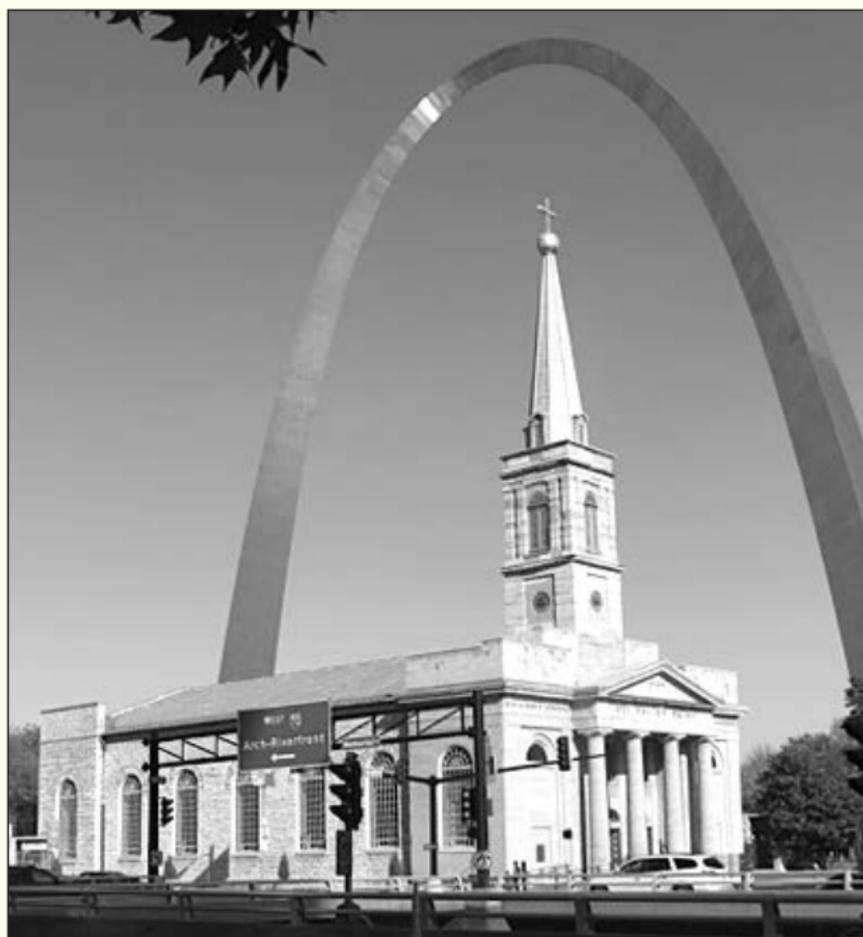
A visit to the Ste. Genevieve Welcome Center at Main and Market Streets provides exhibits, maps and walking tours to a number of other historic houses. Open year-round, 800-373-7007.

Other Creole Sites in Missouri

BASILICA OF ST. LOUIS, KING OF FRANCE

(the 'Old Cathedral')

St. Louis, Missouri, 209 Walnut Street



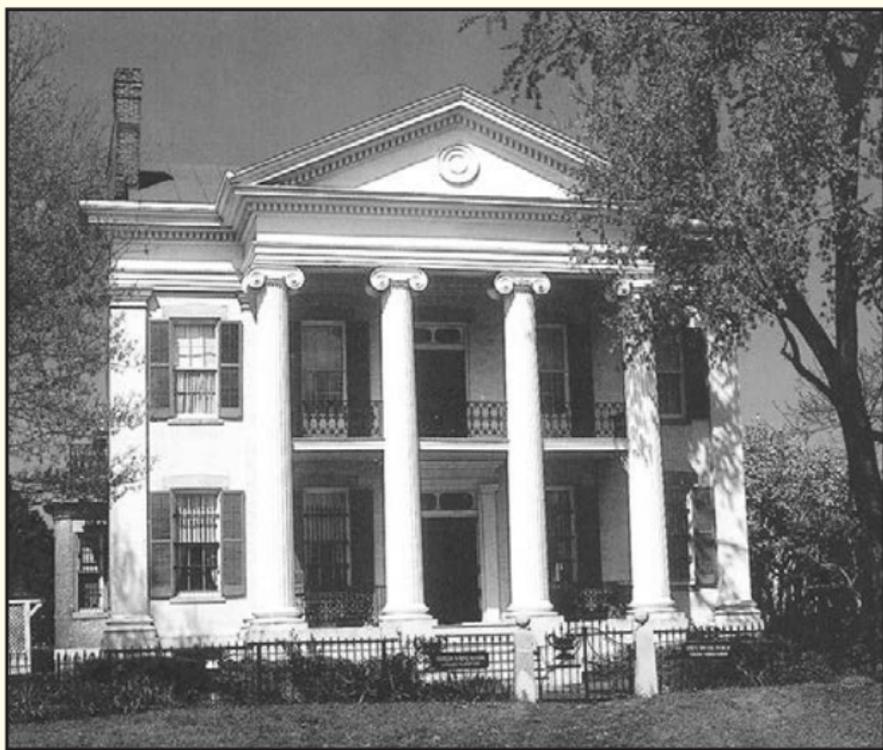
Once the vibrant capital of Upper Louisiana, St. Louis lost all trace of its earliest French heritage in the name of 19th century progress. The buildings that survive today along the Creole Corridor have thus become indispensable to understanding the vanished architecture of colonial St. Louis. The grounds of the Gateway Arch now cover the site of the original French village (founded in 1764); the only land not claimed by the Arch is one block that has been reserved for a Catholic church since the 18th century. Look for the street sign *Rue de l'Église* (Church Street) showing the location of one of the original streets laid out and named by the founders of St. Louis.

French-born Pierre Laclède Liguest (1729 -1778) selected the site of St. Louis, high on a bluff safe from floodwaters. Laclède and his assistant, thirteen year old Auguste Chouteau, became the founders of a powerful dynasty of the future city. Laclède represented New Orleans merchants that held the exclusive rights to trade with Indian tribes west of the Mississippi River. The trading outpost quickly emerged as the preeminent center of French fur trading, and after 1765, the village swelled with settlers from the east side of the river escaping from British rule.

Both the village and the Catholic church were named in honor of St. Louis IX of France, the good ‘Crusader King’ who was the patron saint of the then-ruling King Louis XV. The church of vertical-log construction that once stood in the Old Cathedral block resembled the rare example, Holy Family Church (1787), surviving in Cahokia, Illinois. When the Americans took possession of St. Louis in 1804 most of the French Creole town, in fact, was built up in vertical-log architecture. Today, the Midwest’s only examples of vertical log can be visited in Ste. Genevieve and other sites along the Creole Corridor in Missouri and Illinois.

Before construction of the present stone church began in 1831, St. Louis lacked a place of worship befitting its commercial success and cultural standing among older cities such as New Orleans and Baltimore that boasted fine

*CHATILLON-DEMENIL HOUSE, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI
(3352 DeMenil Place)*



Chatillon-DeMenil House

The Chatillon-DeMenil House, though built long after the colonial period, is perhaps St. Louis’s most important historic property with authentic descent from early French St. Louis, representing a continuum of the French familial presence in the city. Significantly, the house remains the city’s premier residential example in Greek Revival, a style once popular with affluent Creole St. Louisans for its high style American look that also paid homage to the French legacy of galleried mansions.

neoclassical Catholic cathedrals in brick and stone. When completed, the St. Louis church presented an impressive face to the growing Protestant element in the city. It was by far the most costly and ambitious civic building in the city at that time, and one of the most notable neoclassical churches then in the country. Designed by George Morton and Joseph Laveille of St. Louis, the building features a monumental Doric portico of local limestone. Note the biblical inscriptions in French above the west door and on the outer wall of the façade. Large windows amply light the interior that is richly appointed with colonnades and marble sculpture; look for the large painting of the coronation of King Louis IX, a gift to the church from the King of France in 1818. Open daily (314-231-3250).

The oldest part of the house (1850) began as the two-story brick home of Henry Chatillon and his wife Odile Delor Lux. Both were grandchildren of Clement Delor de Treget, an officer in the French marines at Fort de Chartres, Illinois, and founder of the 18th century village of Carondelet (annexed later to St. Louis) where the Chatillons were raised. After guiding Francis Parkman on a journey to the American West, Henry became immortalized in the historian's classic book *The Oregon Trail* (1849). Inside the house, a haunting painting (attributed to Charles Wimar) depicts the death of Bear Robe, Chatillon's first wife, the daughter of an Oglala Sioux chief and the mother of Chatillon's only offspring.

The spectacular Greek Revival additions (1863, east porch; 1874, west porch) to the Chatillon house were constructed by Nicolas Nicolas DeMenil (his family in France used the surname "Nicolas"). Trained as a physician/pharmacist in Paris, Dr. DeMenil came from a family of vintners in Lorraine. His wife, Emilie Sophie Chouteau of Creole aristocracy, was a direct descendant of St. Louis's powerful, founding Chouteau family. The house remained the family home of their son, Alexander (1849-1928), a prominent lawyer, author, literary critic, civic leader, and lifelong advocate for St. Louis's French heritage. Elegantly furnished, the house includes heirlooms of the Chouteau and DeMenil families. Feb.- Dec. (314-771-5828; demenil.org).

FLORISSANT, MISSOURI.



Auguste Aubuchon House

The unusually fertile soil of the Florissant Valley, a few miles north of St. Louis, began to attract French farming families from both sides of the Mississippi River. By 1787, an agricultural village had formed surrounded by plowlands and by communal land reserved for pasture and firewood. The Spanish called the town St. Ferdinand in honor of their king and saint, but the French aptly named it Florissant (flourishing) owing to the harvests of Creole planters whose surplus became known as “the granary of St. Louis.”

The town grid was laid out with streets that today retain their original names of Catholic saints reflecting the faith of the community. Unlike buildings in other Creole Corridor towns, many early homes in Florissant were constructed of logs laid up horizontally, described in local documents as of *pieces-sur-pieces*, and *en boulin*. This type of log architecture had roots in 18th century French Canada and was related to the horizontal-log cabin widely built by Anglo-Americans that streamed into Missouri in the late 18th/early 19th centuries. Considered a local “jewel” of French Creole design, 1002 Rue St. Denis (early 19th century) was built by Auguste Aubuchon whose father, Joseph Aubuchon (born in Kaskaskia, IL) came to Florissant ca. 1798 and built 657 Jefferson, the only known local example of upright logs (*potEAU-sur-sole*) that is extant. For other historic properties contact: 314-921-7055; www.historicflorissant.com

Old St. Ferdinand Church and Shrine (Rue St. Francois at St. Charles Street) forms an impressive block of brick Federal style buildings that brought Florissant into the mainstream of American classicism. Replacing an 18th century log building, the church (1821) is flanked by the rectory (1840), and on the north by the convent and school wing built in 1819 for the French-American saint, Philippine Duchesne, and her pioneering Sisters of the Sacred Heart, the first American branch of the order, founded in Paris in 1800. Daily tours by appointment only: 314-837-2210; www.oldstferdinandshrine.com.

Just outside Florissant at 1896 S. Florissant Road one can view walls of walnut logs laid horizontally inside the ca. 1790 house, *Taille de Noyer* (cut walnut trees), so named in the 18th century. Open Sundays only: 314-524-1100.

ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI.



Frenchtown

Tradition holds that the city of St. Charles on the north bank of the Missouri River had its start in 1769 when French Canadian *voyageur* Louis Blanchette, called *Le Chasseur* (the hunter), settled there with his Pawnee/Osage wife and *métis* children. Later, Blanchette became the official commandant of *Les Petites Cotes* (little hills), the name first given to the riverfront village, framed by rolling hills.

The location of St. Charles a few miles west of the confluence of the Missouri and the Mississippi aided early Creole commerce in fur trapping and trading on the upper Missouri, a waterway famed for Lewis and Clark's expedition that embarked from St. Charles in 1804. Typical French fields once adjacent to St. Charles produced the usual crops of maize, wheat, and tobacco. Blanchette's 18th century settlement of log architecture soon disappeared, however, as American ways of life and building in brick and stone overtook the south end of the town.

The gateway to today's "Frenchtown" neighborhood was created in 1827 when the French parish abandoned its old log church (now reconstructed at its original site near S. Main and Jackson) and moved onto a hillside on N. Second near Decatur Street. The present Church of St. Charles Borromeo (1916) is the third built by the parish in Frenchtown. The large brick Convent/Academy of the Sacred Heart erected on the grounds (1834-1850s) expanded the Florissant work in female education started by French-born Ste. Philippine Duchesne who spent her last

years in the Frenchtown convent and was laid to rest there. Just north of this campus along N. Third and N. Fourth Streets one can find streetscapes that evoke a 19th century Creole neighborhood. Houses of brick and frame with characteristic French galleried fronts and high basements intermingle with American-styled homes built by local families of French descent.

OLD MINES, MISSOURI.



The rich deposits of lead in the area of Old Mines in southeast Missouri were known first to Native Americans before the arrival in 1720 of Philippe Francois Renault, a forge master from northern France. On a large tract granted in 1723, Renault successfully worked sizable quantities of lead at Old Mines. By mid-18th century a small Creole mining hamlet had formed.

Notable landmarks in Old Mines visible from Highway 21 include the ca. 1820 vertical-log home of French emigrant Etienne LaMarque and his wife Marie Louise Bolduc, granddaughter of the builder of Ste. Genevieve's Bolduc House. The LaMarque's held large interests in lead and land, and were great benefactors to their local Catholic church. The present brick St. Joachim Church (1828) of striking Federal style is set on extensive grounds that include an 1850 frame parish schoolhouse, and an interesting cemetery featuring the LaMarque stone monuments and some 200 old iron crosses marking many Creole graves.

Isolated from water and rail transportation routes, the Old Mines area sustained a distinct French cultural enclave noted for its Missouri French dialect that as late as the 1930s was the primary language spoken by families. Many descendants still remain in the area and bear the French names of their ancestors. Old Mines Area Historical Society sponsors the annual *Fete de l'Automne* in October, and the French Heritage Seminar in spring. Plans are underway for creating a French mining village of historic log buildings recovered from the area. www.omahs.weebly.com.



This tour has been a journey through an environment that early French colonists called home—the mighty Mississippi River itself, the rich agricultural floodplains on either side of the river, and the forested bluffs and hills overlooking it all. This environment helped to create a distinctive society, unique in shape and character. The Creole citizens of the colonial Upper Louisiana were tough in body and mind, fundamentally at peace with their homes on the River. They had come to terms with their environment and by dint of effort had established the first permanent European settlements in the Middle Mississippi Valley. The surviving buildings, land patterns, and cultural traditions associated with these settlers provide the observant tourist access to the deepest roots of Western civilization (French in this case) in the American Midwest and Upper South.

Les Amis invites you to participate in its extensive calendar of programs, field trips, historic tours and social events. For membership information, please visit our web site at les-amis.org.

Please direct any questions to:

*Les Amis
c/o Missouri History Museum
P.O. Box 11940
St. Louis, MO 63112-0040*

*314-454-3160
info@les-amis.org*





FRENCH CREOLE CORRIDOR

Mid-Mississippi River Valley