Etienne Véniard de Bourgmont's *Exact Description of Louisiana*

Date: 1714
Author: Bourgmont, Etienne Véniard de
Genre: report; diary

"Some leagues further up, on the left side as you ascend, is the great Missouris River, so famed for its swiftness. Its water is always muddy, and especially in spring, making the Missicipi turbid for 400 leagues."

Summary Overview

Etienne Véniard de Bourgmont's *Exact Description of Louisiana* is one of two unsigned reports—the first was *Route to be Followed for Ascending the Missouri River*—that the explorer wrote based on his personal diary following journeys up the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, undertaken in 1713 or 1714. Bourgmont's *Exact Description* was one of the first detailed accounts of the immense territory contained within what would pass to the United States in the following century as the Louisiana Purchase. Bourgmont enumerated and located American Indian tribes, noted their disposition toward the French occupiers of Louisiana, and listed resources for possible commercial exploitation.

Bourgmontembarked on the expedition and compiled information at the behest of his commander in New France, Antoine Laumet, Sieur de LaMothe Cadillac, who was governor of Louisiana at the time. Several years after his journey, Bourgmont was recommended for the Cross of Saint Louis in recognition for his service to France.

Defining Moment

In the 1660s, under pressure from the British in the north at Hudson's Bay, and in the south from colonies along the Atlantic coast, the French began moving outward from bases at Montreal and Quebec in their colony of New France. They sent traders, missionaries, and explorers into the North American interior to find profitable natural resources, convert Indians to Roman Catholicism, and search for the Northwest Passage, a route connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans that had been sought after for centuries. By the early 1680s, explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle had descended to the mouth of the Mississippi River and claimed the entire river basin for France. The new territory of Louisiana (named for King Louis XIV of France), extended the domain of New France from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico and as far west as the Rocky Mountains, encompassing one-third of the land area within the borders of the current United States.

By the early eighteenth century, the French had established missions and forts at the northern and southern ends of the territory. In Upper Louisiana, mission-based settlements were founded along the Mississippi River at Cahokia (1696) and Kaskaskia (1703), and defensive posts were built at strategic locations, such as Fort Pontchartrain at Detroit (1701). In Lower Louisiana, the Le Moyne brothers (Sieur d'Iberville and Sieur de Bienville) built Fort Maurepas (1699) in present-day Mississippi and Fort Louis (1702) at Mobile in present-day Alabama, which served for a time as capital of

Louisiana. Token contingents of soldiers helped anchor each of the missions and military outposts.

Between the northern and southern extremes of Louisiana, however, lay vast areas where no Europeans lived and indigenous peoples dominated. The entire area of Louisiana, particularly the uninhabited middle portion, was vulnerable to encroachments from other European powers, which, like the French, were battling for control of North America. Moving from their colonies to the east, west, and south of New France, the British and the Spanish continually probed the uncharted territory, seeking the same things as the French colonists: natural resources and American Indian allies.

With limited manpower and financing available to consolidate claims and deflect rivals, the French desperately needed an accurate, current picture of the terrain and the diplomatic situation that prevailed in the land they possessed. Detailed data was necessary in order to concentrate efforts on areas that showed the most promise in terms of commercial potential and the disposition of indigenous populations toward working in concert with French colonizers. To obtain that vital information, Louisiana governor Cadillac commissioned Bourgmont to undertake a journey up the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers.

Author Biography

Etienne Véniard de Bourgmont was born in 1679 in Cerisy-Belle- Étoile, Normandy, France. He was the son of surgeon Charles de Véniard. In 1698, Bourgmont was arrested for poaching on the grounds of the local monastery. He fled the country, leaving his relatives to settle the debt. He surfaced in New France in 1702 as a soldier on an expedition to the Ouabache River in the American Midwest.

Bourgmont lived among Americans Indians as a fur trader for the military. Promoted to ensign (sublieutenant), in 1706 he was put in command at Fort Pontchartrain, the site of the future city of Detroit, Michigan. He fended off an Ottawa attack but was criticized because a French missionary was killed in the battle. Facing disciplinary action, Bourgmont deserted with several other soldiers.

Bourgmont lived as a fugitive for several years, trading illegally with tribes around Lake Erie. In 1712 he returned to Pontchartrain to fight in the Fox Wars, armed conflicts between Fox Indians and French settlers. The following year he became attached to a Missouri tribal chief's daughter, fathered a son by her, and lived with the Illinois confederation of tribes at the Kaskaskia mission. Jesuit missionaries, scandalized, wrote to the French authorities about his behavior, and a warrant was issued for Bourgmont's arrest. He fled to the distant French outpost of Fort Louis in Mobile Bay (in present-day Alabama).

In 1713 and 1714, Bourgmont explored and reported on the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers for Louisiana governor Cadillac. In 1719, new Louisiana commander Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville sent Bourgmont as an ambassador to form alliances with the American Indians of Illinois country. He returned to Mobile Bay in time to participate in military actions against the Spanish in Pensacola (in present-day Florida).

In 1720, Bourgmont and his Indian son sailed for France, where he collected a significant amount of military back pay, was commissioned a captain, and was granted a parcel of land in Louisiana as Sieur de Bourgmont (or Bourgmond). The following year, before returning to America, he married Jacqueline Bouvet des Bordeaux. Named commandant of the Missouri River, he built Fort d'Orleans in 1723. The following year he explored the Great Plains and negotiated peace with several Indian tribes.

Bourgmont returned to France in 1725, accompanied by numerous chiefs and his Indian wife (whom he called "La Sauvagesse") and son. After touring the country, the chiefs and La Sauvagesse returned to America. Bourgmont, elevated to the nobility, stayed in France with his legal wife and retired from service. He died in 1734.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

On the right as one ascends higher is the Ouabache River where, 2 leagues up, at the left as you ascend, was Fort Jucherot, built in 1702 upon a great height. I was there when it was built. From the said Ouabache to Fort Louis is reckoned at 350 leagues. Into the Ouabache empty 5 rivers, the first of which is about 10 leagues along on the right as you go up. The fork comes from the direction of Carolina, the Chaoüasnons are settled there, which gives the river its name. The Caskinaupau are also settled there, other tribes, who killed 6 of our Frenchmen in 1702. On the same side higher up is the river of the Caskinaupau who formerly lived there. There are to our knowledge 2 tribes, of whom the one is called Taumgaria and the other Charaki. Those are all we know of on this river. It goes also in the direction of the English. Higher up on the same side is the river of the Accanssa, who formerly lived there and who have abandoned their village. This river also goes in the direction of the English. These are the most charming lands of the world. There are prairies 15 and 20 leagues long, quantities of apples and wild plums and similar fruits . . ., full of wild beasts. On the left as you go up is the river of the Maskoutins, where I settled with them for 18 months to trade in skins and furs, but they have abandoned it, having been destroyed by the French two years ago. Higher up on the right as you go up is the White River, named by the Miami or Amigami. Higher up on the same side is another river, which we named, when we passed there, rivière aux dindes (i.e. turkey river), [which], in Miami, is Pilesouessipi. Near this place is a quantity of slate. There is also a great rock near this place on the same side where we noticed some verdigris . . . across the rock. It is near this place that a Miami chief named Scipion Quiapita told us that he had found the piece of copper that he gave to M. de Juchau that year. On the left side higher up is the Red River, called Aur Monicipi by the Miami. There are not tribes at all on these small rivers. Higher up is the river called Kuetepikono, where in my time were settled the Miamis, with whom I traded in furs. They constituted 5 villages, the first [was] Ouyatanon, the 2d Pianguichia, the 3d Pepikokia, the 4th Chatechakangoya, and the 5th Miamia. From this place to Fort Jucherot is reckoned at 130 to 140 leagues. These are all the tribes that occupied this river in my time. But it would be impossible to speak too high of this river with respect to its abundance of beasts, game, fruits, roots, and pot-herbs.

Continuing up the Missicipi for 40 leagues higher to the right as you go up, 2 leagues up a little river, the tribe of the Kaskassia are settled, a tribe who are friends and allies of the French. This village is composed of about 400 men, very good people. There are 2 Jesuit missionaries who settled there a long time ago. The greatest part are Christians and married in the face of the Church. They have a very pretty church, there are about 20 French *voyageurs* who settled there and married Indian women. They built a windmill there, they grow wheat and have inspired the Indians to grow some, from which they find much pleasure in eating French bread. This country is like [that of] the Ouabache in its beauty. The Indians also grow some tobacco which they twist into cylinders, according to their habit. This little mission and colony has a very fine appearance, on the edge of a prairie. They have some lead mines from which they take more than they need for their customary use. There are found also in all these regions from the Ouabache to Kaskassia some bits from copper mines, almost all pure, although without locating the mine exactly. This always gives reason to believe that there are some copper mines there. There is also to be found along the course of the Missicipi some rock crystal, but I do not know the exact spot. From the Kaskassias to Fort Louis is reckoned at 400 leagues.

20 leagues higher up, on the same side, the Thamaroys are settled on a height. They constitute about 50 cabins, they are allies and friends of the French and are similar in everything to the Kaskassias, their allies, being both Illinois. All these countries are very fertile, and [have] a very good climate.

Some leagues further up, on the left side as you ascend, is the great Missouris River, so famed for its swiftness. Its water is always muddy, and especially in spring, making the Missicipi turbid for 400 leagues, and 20 leagues more towards the sea in spring at the time of the flood waters.

The first river is 30 leagues along on the left side as you go up, called the Ausages River on account of the tribe which lives there, who bear the same name. This river leads to about 40 leagues from the Cadaudakious, a tribe of almost the same sort. This Missouris River runs to the north and the northwest. I shall not give a description of

this river. I will only tell which tribes occupy its banks, to my knowledge. There are the Missouris . . ., who are allies of the French. All their trade is in furs. They are not very numerous, they are of very good blood and are more alert than any other tribe. From all the Missouris River can be gotten furs of every kind, very fine and good, as the climate there is very cold. Higher up is found another river which flows into the Missouris, called the Ecanzé River, on which there is a tribe of the same name, allies and friends of the French. Their trade is in furs. These are the most beautiful countries and the most beautiful pieces of land in the world. The prairies there are like seas and full of wild beasts, especially buffalo, cows, hinds and stags, which are there in numbers that stagger the imagination. They almost always hunt with bow and arrow. They have very fine horses and are very good horsemen.

Higher up is found the wide river called by the French and by the Indians the Nibraskier, which branch runs to the northwest and to the westnorthwest. 10 leagues further along it are the Maquetantata, a tribe allied with and friendly to the French. They are on the bank of a small river whose water is salty and from which they make salt. All the trade of these Indians is in furs. There follow, as you go up the salt river, 25 leagues farther up the Panis, well populated, alert, and good horsemen. The French know them and see them sometimes. They all use the bow and arrow. 20 leagues higher are the Panimahas, whom the French also see sometimes. They comprise 9 villages, and are numerous, handsome and well-built. They are on the left as you ascend, and worship the Sun. Nothing but furs is to be gotten from all these places. This tribe has trade relations with the Spanish, who, they say, are very rich in mines in these regions, a fact which they make known in their talk. The Padoucas are also in these regions, another tribe who are their allies. This is all the information I have been able to get about this river.

Let us continue to ascend the Missouris. 100 leagues higher up, on the left, is a tribe called Ayowest or Rakodé by their neighbors and the French. All their trade is in furs. 100 leagues further up the Missouris divides into two forks, that on the right as well as that on the left is called by the Indians Nidejaudegé, which the French translate as Smoky River, because the sand blows like smoke and makes the water of the river all white and muddy. It is very rapid and dreadful at the time of the flood waters. . . . At the separation of this river is a village called the Mahas, [who are] white and blonde, like Europeans. It is the most beautiful tribe of all the continents. They live without warring on their neighbors. They are rovers, sometimes on one side of the river, and sometimes on the other. 80 leagues along the said river are the Padoccas, a tribe with whom the French have as yet no acquaintance. Higher up on the left are found 2 villages called Aricaras. Their trade is in furs, like the other Indians. They have seen the French and know them. Higher up on the said river are 40 Caricara villages, which are ranged on both sides of the river. They are very numerous and are in the most beautiful countries to be seen for their fertility. This is all I can say about this river.

Let us redescend all these rivers, to rejoin the Missicipi. On the right as you go up is the river of the Illinois, going to the Peauria. . . . Their trade is in furs. They are Illinois, allies and friends of the French. They have among them some Jesuit missionaries. Following the Missicipi, on the left, higher up, is the river of the Wisconssins, by which one goes to the Outagamis and Miskouakis, allies of the French. One can go by this route to Canada. Their trade is in furs. They are rather evil and it is not too good to trust them. At this point one reaches Lake Michigan which communicates with all the other lakes.

Let us descend again to follow the Missicipi to its source, a stretch in which there are no tribes except the Scyous, who are very numerous, allies and in trade with the French. They trade in beaver and all sorts of furs, which are beautiful and good and great in numbers. These are the most beautiful of all the countries of which we have been speaking. This tribe is rather difficult to manage. . . . There are falls at this place, called the Falls of St. Anthony, of prodigious height, into which a number of lakes discharge, which is the source and origin of the Missicipi. From this place to Fort Louis on the Mobile is reckoned at 900 leagues without falls or rapids, navigable throughout . . . .

Here is what can be gotten from each particular place, in my opinion:

At Mobile, Dauphin Island and its environs, some rosins, some tar, boards, cask wood, building timber, chinaroot, which is a sudorific . . ., sassafras, other drugs for medicines, some small masts and yards for ships. Tobacco can be grown there, and, in my opinion, two cuttings of indigo a year. I believe that one could grow rice and silk as in Carolina. . . . I assure that there is no lack of

mulberry trees, the only question is whether they are of a good species. One can get there quantities of deer skins, some buffalo skins and some bear skins. In these regions is also found some salt-peter, from which powder is made . . . . I have seen it tried. I do not know precisely where it is mined.

Here is what I think can be gotten from the colony of the Natteche, a quantity of tobacco, of silk, as there are many mulberry trees there, of boards if they are suitable, I believe that wheat will grow well there, as the soil is good, at least one would think so, quantities of deer skins, some buffalo skins and bear skins. Rice can also be grown there, since it can be grown in Carolina.

Here is what can be gotten from the Ouabache, from the upper Missouris, from the Illinois River and from the upper Missicipi, to wit, buffalo skins and cow skins, their wool, if it is good for anything, and their hair, stag skins, skins of hinds, skins of roebuck, skins of bears, beaver, otter, marten, wild cat, lynx, wood otter, fox of all kinds, wild cats. Also to be had are tallow, nuts, if they are good for anything, copper if one can find the mine, since there is certainly some there. There are also a number of lead mines, which are very numerous in the neighborhood of the Caskassias. . . . Many people claim that much silver is to be found there. The Indians also have a number of dyes which could be of some use. One will also be able to find there some plants and drugs for medicine, which the Indians use very successfully. All Ouabache, the country of the Caskassia, will furnish as much wheat as is wished, and a great business can be made of it, by inspiring all the Indians to grow it to meet their needs.

This is all I can tell about all these countries, and I do not believe that I have been ed astray from the truth in anything, and if any one disputes it, it is from lack of knowledge. . . . If one wants to settle these countries, it is necessary to place plenty of people there, without which it is impossible to succeed.

GLOSSARY

china-root: *Smilax China*, a plant of Asian origin used in herbal medicine to treat skin diseases and other ailments

hind: an obsolete name for a female deer; the male of the species was called a hart

indigo: *Indigofera tinctoria*; a shrub cultivated for its leaves, which produce dark-blue indigo dye

league: an obsolete, non-standardized unit of measurement, defined as the distance a person could walk in an hour, usually understood as about three miles

livre: a former French currency of various values that existed from the time of Charlemagne, when it equaled a pound of silver; the franc replaced the livre in 1795

Ouabache: a French interpretation of the Miami Indian term *Wahbahshiki* (bright or white) for the Wabash River

portage: the practice of taking a boat and its cargo out of a body of water for transportation by land to avoid obstacles, such as rapids or waterfalls

pot-herbs: plants with green, edible leaves that can be eaten raw or used (often tied in small bunches) in cooking

rock crystal: pure quartz, a common transparent or translucent mineral occurring in various colors

sudorific: a substance that causes or induces sweat

verdigris: a greenish substance found on the surface of minerals produced by the chemical reaction of air or water, which indicates the presence of copper

voyageur: a government-licensed fur trader in New France and elsewhere in French America; illegal, unlicensed fur traders were called *coureurs des bois* (runners of the woods)

Document Analysis

Despite Bourgmont's nonconformist lifestyle and military record, he took a serious approach to his exploratory responsibilities. Though he occasionally revealed his opinions on the progress and prospects of colonization in Louisiana, the bulk of his report was based not on speculation or rumor, but on firsthand observations. Through his matter-of-fact, occasionally colorful narration, Bourgmont served as one of colonial America's earliest travel writers.

The full title of Bourgmont's document outlines the task at hand: *Exact Description of Louisiana, of its Harbours, Lands and Rivers, and Names of the Tribes Which Occupy It, and the Commerce and Advantages to be Derived Therefrom for the Establishment of a Colony*. The author prefaces his remarks with his observations about the advantages and disadvantages of his starting point, Dauphin Island (formerly known as Massacre Island because of the number of Indian skeletons found there), a harbor some twenty miles from Fort Louis on Mobile Bay capable of sheltering numerous ships.

The opening comments are historically invaluable. While his document is undated, Bourgmont provides internal evidence that helps narrow the period of time in which the exploration must have occurred and been recorded. For example, Bourgmont notes that Dauphin Island contained no fort when he saw it. Cedar stake fortifications were erected there late in 1715, so this fixes the time of his exploration prior to that date.

Bourgmont lists the tribal names, populations, and characteristics of the American Indians living along the lower Mississippi River and its tributaries. His recommendation may be presumed to have been in whole or in part responsible for the 1714 establishment of a major trading post at Natchez (in present-day Mississippi) and the construction of Fort Rosalie two years later.

The document features numerous points of environmental interest, particularly in the early stages of the narration. Bourgmont writes of the Indians' cultivation of tobacco, also noting the "quantities of apples and wild plums and similar fruits" to be found in the prairies. Although he goes into more detail later in the report regarding the natural resources specific to each tribe and region along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, Bourgmont concludes his early remarks with the statement "it would be impossible to speak too high" of the area's "abundance of beasts, game, fruits, roots, and pot-herbs."

One unfortunate omission in Bourgmont's narration is information about the number and nature of his companions on the journey. Nor is there a record of whether they packed all the necessary supplies or traded as needed with Indians they encountered.

The ascent of the upper Mississippi and the Missouri

After paddling nearly one thousand miles from his starting point, Bourgmont's expedition arrived at the Ouabache (Wabash) River. This was territory familiar to the author from a decade earlier, when he was a soldier and fur trader living among the Maskoutin and Kaskaskia tribes. Bourgmont fondly reminisces about his days in the area and demonstrates that he bears no grudge against the priests who precipitated the legal action that caused him to flee to Mobile Bay. His mention of Fort Jucherot agrees with historical fact: Bourgmont was indeed among the military party that built a tannery and a defensive position to protect it on the river, and he did live for eighteen months among the Indians, trading in furs to supply the facility.

With an eye to commercial potential, Bourgmont remarks in passing on the presence of natural resources for possible exploitation. He mentions such minerals as slate (useful in roofing and flooring, as whetstones, blackboards and tombstones), rock crystal (used in the production of abrasives, ceramics, jewelry, and other items), and copper (a versatile metal with many applications by itself or as an alloy).

Bourgmont subsequently turned off the Mississippi in the vicinity of present-day St. Louis, Missouri, and became one of the first Europeans to travel for a distance on the Missouri River—North America's longest river at more than 2,300 miles—and to explore some of its major tributaries. As he had done on the Mississippi, Bourgmont records American Indian tribes he has encountered, describing their attitudes toward the French. He praises the Missouri Indians as being "of very good blood," noting that they "are more alert than any other tribe." This preference is not surprising, given that Bourgmont had lived among them for many years, observed their customs, and fathered a child by the daughter of a Missouri tribal chief.

While it is difficult to know exactly how far Bourgmont penetrated along the Missouri, there are clues that help trace part of his journey. He certainly passed the Osage (Ausages), Kansas (Ecanzé) and Platte (then called Nebraska or Nibraskier) rivers. Bourgmont's language grows murky in describing the end of his route,

but given the distance involved, he apparently reached the spot where the Missouri forks in South Dakota, with one branch heading north and the other west. It is unclear which fork he followed from that point, but since he was supposed to search for a passage to the coast, it may be presumed he took the westernmost waterway. If so, he may have gone as far as modern-day eastern Wyoming, via the Belle Fourche or Cheyenne rivers.

Many of the American Indian tribes Bourgmont names have been identified. However, their presence along the Missouri River is of little assistance in recreating the explorer's path in *Exact Description*, since most were nomadic or seminomadic peoples who moved across the Great Plains in search of buffalo and other game. The Maquetantatas (Otos), Panis and Panimahas (Pawnees), Ayowests (Iowas), Mahas (Omahas), and Aricaras/Caricaras (Arikaras) are all known to have ranged hundreds of miles in the American Midwest.

The identification of the Padouca/Padocca tribe is more problematic, and the name has been variously attributed to the Apache and Comanche peoples. Bourgmont mentions that the Padoucas were allied with the Spanish. However, during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Apaches and Spanish were often on hostile terms. Furthermore, by the early 1700s the Apaches had been driven from the Great Plains into the Southwest by their traditional enemies, the Comanches—who are thus the most likely candidates to be the Padoucas of the text.

Bourgmont ends his narration with a brief summary of the natural resources that present the most potential for exploitation in each of the areas he has explored. Some of his suggestions (tobacco cultivation, buffalo hunting, wheat farming, and mining) were later followed, especially by later waves of colonists. Bourgmont's closing remark—"If one wants to settle these countries, it is necessary to place plenty of people there, without which it is impossible to succeed"—could have served as the rallying cry for the successive colonizers spreading west to the Pacific.

Bourgmont's Expedition

Bourgmont's *Exact Description* and *Route to be Followed* (which included the earliest documented naming of the Missouri River) had a lasting impact on continental exploration. In 1719 French cartographer Guillaume Delisle used Bourgmont's twin accounts to create the first maps that filled in many of the blanks in colonists' understanding of North American geography. The information Bourgmont provided proved invaluable to numerous northwestern explorations conducted by French Canadian fur traders before the end of the eighteenth century. The accumulated data in turn served as the basis for the intelligence collected to help guide the 1803–4 Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery along the Missouri during their journey to the Pacific Ocean.

Though important for pioneering chronicles of discovery and first contact between American Indians and Europeans in the American heartland, Bourgmont's 1713–14 reports actually pale in comparison, to the written account of the expedition he led a decade later, which was posthumously published in 1757.

In 1723, Bourgmont built Fort d'Orleans on the Missouri River at the junction of the Grand River near present-day Brunswick, in north-central Missouri. The post was intended to solidify trade arrangements with local inhabitants and to discourage Spanish incursions into the area. The following year, Bourgmont was sent from Fort d'Orleans as king's envoy (complete with a supply of French flags to present as gifts in proof of agreements) to further strengthen trade by forming alliances with American Indian tribes along the Missouri River. The four-month land-and-water expedition, which included large contingents of friendly Missouri and Osage Indians to assist in interpreting and encouraging treaties, journeyed as far as the western boundaries of the present state of Kansas. The expedition resulted in trade agreements between the French and numerous tribes, including the Illinois, Pawnee, Oto, Kansa, Omaha, Iowa, and Padouca tribes.

The entire expedition was recorded on a day-by-day basis. The *Journal* gave the names of participants (down to the expedition leader's servant and the troop's drummer boy), provided weather reports, noted Bourgmont's debilitating bouts of fever, and included anthropologically interesting descriptions of the habits and culture of the indigenous peoples (such as the observation that the Padoucas practiced polygamy.)

Upon returning to Fort d'Orleans in November 1724, Bourgmont traveled down the Mississippi with chiefs from the new Indian allies, and in company with his Indian wife and son, sailed with them to France. The American Indian chiefs were presented at the court of King Louis XV, where they caused a sensation. They performed tribal dances at Paris operas and theaters, hunted deer with bows and arrows in the royal forests, and were clothed in the finery of the day. Before she

returned home with the other Indians, Bourgmont's Indian wife, "La Sauvagesse," was baptized and married at Notre Dame Cathedral to a French sergeant serving under Bourgmont.

The military, political, and commercial links that Bourgmont had forged between the American Indian tribes and the French were considered so strong that the explorer was able to remain in his homeland with his French wife, never again to return to the colonies. Furthermore, Fort d'Orleans was afterward deemed unnecessary. In 1726, just two years after the military post was established, the last soldiers marched away. The fort was offered to French missionaries, but they too declined to occupy the facility, so it was abandoned and left to return to nature. Despite several archaeological excursions, the exact location of Fort d'Orleans—the first European outpost on the Missouri River—remains unknown.

Essential Themes

One of the more remarkable aspects of Bourgmont's life and work was the rehabilitation of his reputation in the latter half of his career. A criminal, adventurer, deserter, and outlaw in his youth, he managed to contribute greatly to French colonial efforts in the Louisiana district of New France. His time spent living among the Indian tribes of the Midwest proved particularly useful later in communicating with tribes he encountered during his expeditions along the Missouri River. His intimate knowledge of American Indian traditions, customs, and rituals undoubtedly helped him form working relationships with the indigenous peoples so vital to colonial trade in the eighteenth century.

Likewise, it is to the credit of the French colonial government that they forgave Bourgmont's youthful indiscretions and recognized his valuable contributions by according him promotions, increased responsibilities, honors, and financial remunerations in his later years. Though the French colonization of the New World ultimately failed, France's influence is still felt in many ways, from the architecture of New Orleans (founded in 1718) to the French Canadian culture of the province of Quebec.

A significant part of Bourgmont's enduring legacy to US history was his use of Indian nomenclature. The explorer was the first European to systematically record the names of the territories and waterways of the occupying tribes as he heard them.

Jack Ewing

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LESSON PLAN: **French and Spanish Colonization in the Americas**

Students analyze Bourgmont's writings and changes in French-Spanish relations, as well as begin to research changes in French perceptions and dealings with Native Americans

Learning Objectives

Read narratives imaginatively; identify the literal affect of Bourgmont's words; compare and contrast France's and Spain's presence in America; analyze the effect on American Indian societies of long-term interaction with European explorers and settlers

Materials: Etienne Veniard de Bourgmont's *Exact Description of Lousianna*; Excerpt, "Continuing up the Missicipi for 40 leagues higher…"; *The Jesuit Relations* Vol. 44, Ch. XX: "Of the Fresh Hopes for Progress"

Overview Questions

What do Bourgmont's observations in *Exact Description* reveal about him and America's potential? What details in Bourgmont's account allow historians and later explorers to trace his actual journey? How were Bourgmont's actions intended to influence Spanish claims in America? How do American Indian lives seem different in *Exact Description* than they do in *The Jesuit Relations*?

Step 1: Comprehension Questions

How might Bourgmont's personal motives have affected his writing? How might his prose have shaped his contemporary readers and later explorers' perspectives of America?

- **Activity:** Review Bourgmont's reputation prior to his 1713 explorations. Discuss how his circumstances might have affected his journeys and reporting. Have students select and read particularly expressive passages. Discuss the effect of the quality of such passages on his readers.

Step 2: Comprehension Questions

What are the modern names and meanings of the proper and common nouns that Bourgmont uses in his account? How do these words guide later explorers and then historians?

- **Activity:** Have students create a chart listing both geographically significant words (league, place names, American Indian groups) in *Exact Description* and our contemporary names for those words. Discuss how these words help historians. Contrast how they challenged later explorers.

Step 3: Context Questions

How did French-Spanish relations affect Bourgmont's journeys and actions? In turn, how did Bourgmont's journeys and actions affect French-Spanish relations?

- **Activity:** Have students identify passages in Bourgmont's actual words and in the ending summary that apply specifically to French-Spanish relations. From secondary sources, have students list how Bourgmont's career advanced France's hope for colonization in America versus Spanish hopes.

Step 4: Exploration Questions

What was the general nature of Bourgmont's relationship with American Indians? How is this similar to Jesuit-American Indian relationships in the seventeenth century? How is it different?

- **Activity:** Elsewhere Bourgmont had written, "For me with the Indians nothing is impossible." Ask students how his tone in *Exact Description* underscores this belief. Compare this to Jesuit perceptions of their relationship with the Iroquois nation.

Step 5: Response Paper

Word length and additional requirements set by Instructor. Students answer the research question in the Overview Questions. Students state a thesis and use as evidence passages from the primary source document as well as support from supplemental materials assigned in the lesson.