

Adventures on the American Frontier

BRAVE MEN OF EARLY TEXAS

Part Two
La Salle's Dream
of a New Settlement



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The quiet of the wilderness around the mouth of the Mississippi River was broken by a new sound one day in April of 1682.

Boom! Boom! Boom! About twenty big guns were fired, re-loaded, and fired again and again. Before the echo of the last boom died, human voices rose in a shout: "Long live the king!"



The men who had caused this disturbance were gathered around a tall column that they had set into the ground. It was on a rise of land on the Mississippi River delta. Their leader, Robert Cavelier de La Salle, stood with his plumed hat in his hand and his head bowed as the men sang a hymn of praise. After years of struggle, La Salle's dream of reaching the mouth of the Mississippi River had come true. He and his men had journeyed south from the French settlements around the Great Lakes, down



the Illinois River to the Mississippi, and all the way to the great river's mouth.

La Salle raised his eyes to the tall column on which were carved words that claimed this land, and all of the land of the river delta, for France. He named the area Louisiana, after his king, Louis XIV.

The men dug again into the loose, rich, black soil. They placed a great cross into the hole they had dug and piled the earth back around its base. The cross was to thank God for their safe arrival.

They buried a heavy lead plate then and sang a hymn. Afterward they shouted again, “Long live the king!” France, far across the ocean, now claimed almost all of the land between the Appalachian Mountains in the east and the Rocky Mountains in the west. This included much of the land that Spanish explorers were saying belonged to Spain instead.

La Salle turned to his good friend from Italy who had traveled with him, Tonti of the Iron Hand, so nicknamed because of



the hook he wore after losing his hand in a battle while fighting for the French. "We'll be back," La Salle told him, "and we'll build a great French city to guard the mouth of the Mississippi River."

It was two years before La Salle could get back to try to build that city. In April of 1684, three wooden ships, carrying about a hundred soldiers and a hundred other people to start a colony, entered the Gulf of Mexico. They had left France with four ships but had lost one to Spanish attackers.