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**La Salle Claims the Mississippi II**

**Lead: On April 9, 1682, French explorer Rene-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, after sailing most of the length of the Mississippi, claimed the entire River Valley for France. He named the region Louisiana, for his monarch, Louis XIV.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: La Salle was born in Rouen, France, in 1643. He was intelligent and curious, educated by Jesuit priests. He planned to enter the priesthood, but a great sense of**

**adventure pulled him elsewhere and at 24 he set out for New France, the French Colony in North America.**

**He was ambitious and with land granted to him on the St. Lawrence River near in Montreal, La Salle entered the fur trade. He learned native languages, traditions and survival skills. Over the next fifteen years he gradually explored the regions Great Lakes and Illinois and Ohio Rivers. Originally, like so many Europeans, he was obsessed with finding a “northwest passage” to Asia, but when that proved an intractable problem, he concentrated on expanding French settlements and trading posts and ultimately extending French control over the**

**interior of North America.**

**The government of King Louis XIV granted La Salle permission to explore the western fringes of the Empire and in February 1682 La Salle and a party of about 40 to 50 Frenchmen and Indians began to sail south from the upper waters of the Mississippi in canoes.**

**Two months later La Salle reached the Gulf of Mexico, the first European to navigate the entire Mississippi River. Three years later he returned to the Gulf Coast in an ill-fated French expedition to establish a colony at the mouth of the great river. It was an ill-fated expedition, plagued by one disaster after another –**

**sickness, a lost vessel and finally - a miscalculation.**

**La Salle missed the mouth of the Mississippi and landed instead 500 miles to the west in Matagorda Bay on the present-day Texas Gulf Coast. Two years later, in 1687, after several failed tries to find his lost Mississippi River, La Salle was murdered by his own men. His last remaining ship, the *Belle*, was discovered in Matagorda Bay in 1995.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

## Resources

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<<http://tsl.state.tx.us/treasures/giants/lasalle-01.html>>.**

**Roberts, David. “Sieur de La Salle’s Fateful Landfall. (explorer Rene-Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle).” *Smithsonian* April 1997: 40-6+.**

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