Historical sketch of "Louisiana" and the Louisiana purchase

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OF

"LOUISIANA"
AND THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE

BY

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WITH A STATEMENT OF OTHER
ACQUISITIONS

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LOUISIANA PURCHASE PROGRESS MAPS OF THE UNITED STATES.

INTRODUCTION.

A series of five maps of the United States showing the original Louisiana and the changes in its boundary during the 137 years between 1682, the date of La Salle's discovery, and 1819, the date of the purchase of Florida, formed an interesting part of the exhibit of the General Land Office at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition held at St. Louis, Mo., in 1904. Differences of opinion have prevailed as to the extent of Louisiana as purchased from France. It is believed that these are due, first, to a misconception of the scope of La Salle's discovery and proclamation, and, second, to a misunderstanding of the real significance of the political acts of the United States, between 1803 and 1819, affecting that part of La Salle's Louisiana which extended along the Gulf coast east of the Mississippi River. It is submitted, as to the former, that the "Louisiana Purchase" of 1803 did not include territory beyond the limits of the original Louisiana, and, as to the latter, that all Spanish doubts as to ownership were resolved and permanently settled by the political acts of the United States following the purchase from France, but antedating the purchase of Florida from Spain. It is believed, also, that a true picture of the extent and location of La Salle's Louisiana is shown upon map No. 1. This picture greatly assists one to understand the phrase "the whole of Louisiana" which was used in subsequent treaties of cession.

In the brief discussion of each map which follows no effort has been made to harmonize the conflicting views held and heretofore published by numerous writers upon the subject of Louisiana or the "Louisiana Purchase." These views are as diverse as their authorship is numerous. This is not surprising when it is understood that the common effort has been aimed at solving the questions of territorial limits of Louisiana, as this province passed from one State to another, without first attempting to fix the original limits of the territory thus transferred. To this fact, probably, more than any other, may the failure to reach a common conclusion be attributed.
The greater colored area shown upon this map is based upon the discoveries of La Salle and his proclamation made at the mouth of the Mississippi River on April 9, 1682. This proclamation was made in the presence of the entire party, under arms, who chanted the Te Deum, the Exaudiat, and the Domine salvum fac Regem. After a salute of firearms and cries of "Vive le Roi," La Salle erected a column, and while standing near it said in a loud voice:

In the name of the most high, mighty, invincible, and victorious prince, Louis the Great, by the grace of God, King of France and of Navarre, fourteenth of that name, this ninth day of April, one thousand six hundred and eighty-two, I, in virtue of the commission of His Majesty which I hold in my hand, and which may be seen by all whom it may concern, have taken, and do now take, in the name of His Majesty and of his successors to the crown, possession of this country of Louisiana, the seas, harbors, ports, bays, adjacent straits, and all the nations, people, provinces, cities, towns, villages, mines, minerals, fisheries, streams, and rivers comprised in the extent of said Louisiana, from the mouth of the great river St. Louis on the eastern side, otherwise called Ohio, Aligin, Sipore, or Chukagona, and this with the consent of the Chaanomons, Chickasaws, and other people dwelling therein, with whom we have made alliance; as also along the river Colbert, or Mississippi, and rivers which discharge themselves therein, from its source, beyond the country of the Kious or Nadooucassons, and this with their consent, and with the consent of the Motantes, Illinois, Mesiganais, Natchez, Korose, which are the most considerable nations dwelling therein, with whom also we have made alliance, either by ourselves or by others in our behalf, as far as its mouth by the sea, or Gulf of Mexico, about the twenty-seventh degree of the elevation of the North Pole and also to the mouth of the river of Palms; upon the assurance which we have received from all those nations that we are the first Europeans who have descended or ascended the said river Colbert; hereby protesting against all who may in future undertake to invade any or all of these countries, people, or lands, above described, to the prejudice of the rights of His Majesty, acquired by the consent of the nations herein named. Of which, and all that can be needed, I hereby take to witness those who hear me and demand an act of the notary as required by law.¹

Title to French territory in the Mississippi Valley and along the Gulf of Mexico was based upon this voyage and proclamation of La Salle. These acts of La Salle were, in fact, the foundation of French ownership, and have been so considered by all nations since 1682. The Louisiana thus claimed embraced two areas of contiguous territory—first, the territory drained by the Mississippi River, with all of its tributaries, and second, the territory between the Mississippi River and the River Palms. The wording of the proclamation is simple and direct, and its meaning seems incapable of distortion or of being misunderstood. It appears evident that La Salle had no information of territory beyond the sources of the Mis-

¹ This translation of La Salle's proclamation is taken from Spark's Life of La Salle, published at Boston, Mass., 1844. Francis Parkman's translation of the proclamation, in his "Discovery of the Great West," 1869 (Boston: Little, Brown & Co.), agrees with the above, except that he omitted the names of the treaty tribes, but refers to such omissions in a footnote, pp. 282, 383, and says: "A copy of the original of the Process Verbal (the proclamation) is before me. It bears the name of Jacques de la Metairie, notary of Pruentes, who was one of the party." Translations in whole or in part of the proclamation of La Salle, by numerous other authors have been examined by the writer, but in no essential particular did any of these translations differ from those of Sparks or Parkman quoted or referred to above.
Lousiana Purchase Progress Maps.

Mississippi River and its tributaries to the west, or, if he knew of such territory, he purposely excluded any claim to it for France. The western boundary of the original Louisiana is therefore traced along the summit of the watershed which defines the drainage basin of the Mississippi in that region, viz., around the headwaters both of the Red River and the Arkansas with their tributaries, and the Missouri River with all of its great tributaries from the west and southwest to the present northern United States boundary.

In the effort made to locate the western boundary of La Salle's Louisiana many untenable claims have been put forth by geographers. In one of these claims the province was carried far beyond the drainage basin of the Mississippi River; in fact, across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific coast in the Northwest. In another, it is assumed that because France at one time claimed the Gulf coast to St. Bernard (now Matagorda) Bay, by reason of La Salle's later discoveries, this territory should be added to the original Louisiana. A third, while rejecting the Pacific coast extension, selected the Rio Grande as the southwestern boundary, but, lacking in courage of conviction, published maps restricting the limits on the west by the Spanish-American compromise line of 1819. The great majority of geographers now reject the Pacific coast extension, but there remains a disposition to include the Rio Grande country. A careful study of available historical data reveals claims of France at one time extending only to the divide between the Colorado River and the Rio Grande at another time to the Rio Grande itself and with spiritual jurisdiction to the Pacific coast. In the negotiations with France for the purchase of Louisiana, Napoleon, Talleyrand, and Marbois admitted great obscurity as to boundaries and declared their inability to throw any light upon the subject. The negotiations incident to the treaty of 1819 and the maps showing the claims of the United States and Spain at the time seem to show that, for diplomatic reasons probably, the United States claimed the territory to the Rio Grande. Spain declared this claim preposterous and fixed the equally absurd ninety-third degree of longitude as her eastern and our western limit. While the compromise line was not agreed to as fixing the western limits of the Louisiana purchase from France by the United States, but rather as definitely establishing a boundary between Spanish and American territory west of the Mississippi River, it is perhaps significant that in its beginning east of the Texas territory in question, and in its course northwesterly to the forty-second parallel, this boundary approximated the location of the true Louisiana boundary of La Salle. It is believed the claim for the Rio Grande limit is untenable, for the several reasons that the southern Texas country was a later discovery, and the reasons offered for its union with Louisiana are unconvincing and insufficient; its area was indefinite and its boundaries unknown;
it was never made a part of La Salle's Louisiana; doubt as to American title was strong enough to insure a ready acceptance of the contention of Spain as to her ownership of this portion of the Gulf coast in 1819, and this acceptance was in marked contrast to the vigorous policy pursued in the Perdido River boundary contention, where American ownership by virtue of the "purchase" was declared and maintained by the Government of the United States. On the other hand, there is room for but one interpretation of the limits of "Louisiana" as proclaimed by La Salle. It is the line defining the drainage basin of the Mississippi River on the west, and this line is therefore adopted as the "Louisiana Purchase" boundary through the present State of Texas. No available fact warrants the acceptance of the Spanish-American boundary of 1819, established 16 years after the purchase of Louisiana, as the boundary of this territory.

It has been held that the Province of Louisiana as proclaimed by La Salle should be enlarged on the north by the addition of the territory south of the forty-ninth parallel and west of the headwaters of the Mississippi River; that is to say, by the drainage basin of the Red River of the North. It is certain that this territory was not in La Salle's Louisiana, and it is even doubtful that it ever really belonged to France. It is universally conceded that the powers signatory to the treaty of Utrecht in 1713, in the belief that the headwaters of the Mississippi River were north of the forty-ninth parallel, intended to confirm France in the possession, not of territory beyond the Mississippi drainage, but of Mississippi Valley territory which was proclaimed "Louisiana" by La Salle 31 years before. But French ownership, even if conceded, by virtue of the treaty of Utrecht, would be unimportant, for such concession would in no degree support the contention that the Red River Basin formed a part of Louisiana. All of the French territory to the north of La Salle's Louisiana, of whatever extent east or west of the Great Lakes, was transferred to Great Britain in 1763, and no French claim to any part of it has appeared since that time.

The origin of American title to the district north and west of the headwaters of the Mississippi River and south of the forty-ninth parallel may be found in the treaties between the United States and Great Britain of 1783 and 1817, the former defining territorial limits at the close of the Revolutionary War, and the latter fixing the forty-ninth parallel as the north boundary of the United States between the Lake of the Woods and the Rocky Mountains. France having parted with the district affected by these treaties long prior to their negotiation by the powers interested, was wholly indifferent to the transfers of the territory made thereby. The drainage basin of the Red River of the North is therefore excluded from the territory of Louisiana purchased from France in 1803.