



## Henri Joutel's 1687 visit to Arkansas Post



*"Being come to a River, that was between us and the Village, and looking over to the further Side, we discover'd a great Cross, and at a small Distance from it, a House, built after the French Fashion. It is hard to express the Joy conceiv'd on both Sides; ours was unspeakable, for having at last found, what we had so earnestly desired...."*

- Henri Joutel, 1687

In 1687, a year after the first Arkansas Post was established adjacent to the Quapaw village of Osotouy, the Post was described for the first time by European visitors. Following La Salle's death on the Texas coast, six survivors of his expedition set out for the Illinois country. Guided by American Indians, they found the tiny Arkansas Post in July of 1687, the only European settlement in the vast wilderness they traversed. Overjoyed at the sight of fellow Frenchmen, Joutel's account of the first Arkansas Post provides an excellent description of the small trading post that was the first European settlement in the Lower Mississippi River valley.

### Arriving at Arkansas Post, July 1687

We set out again to come to the Village, and by the Way, met with very pleasant Woods, in which, there were Abundance of stately Cedars. Being come to a River, that was between us and the Village, and looking over to the further Side, we discover'd a great Cross, and at a small Distance from it, a House, built after the French Fashion.

It is easy to imagine what inward Joy we conceiv'd at the Sight of that Emblem of our Salvation. We knelt down, lifting up our Hands and Eyes to Heaven, to return Thanks to the Divine Goodness, for having conducted us so happily; for we made no Question of finding French on the other side of the River, and of their being Catholics, since they had Crosses.

In short, having halted some Time on the Bank of that River, we spy'd several Canoes making towards us, and two Men cloath'd, coming out of the House we had discover'd, who, the Moment they saw us, fir'd each of them a Shot to salute us. An Indian being Chief of the Village, who was with them, had done so before, and we were not backward in returning their Salute, by discharging all our Pieces.

When we had pass'd the river, and were all come together, we soon knew each other to be French men. Those we found were the Sieurs *Couture Charpantier* and *de Launay*, both of them of Roan [Rouen] whom Monsieur *de Tonty*, Governor of Fort St. Lewis among the Islinois, had left at that Post, when he went down the Mississippi to look after Monsr. de la Sale; and the Nation we were then with, was call'd *Accancea* [Arkansas].

It is hard to express the Joy conceiv'd on both Sides; ours was unspeakable, for having at last found, what we had so earnestly desired, and that the Hopes of returning to our dear Country was in some Measure assured by that happy Discovery. The others were pleased to see such Persons as might bring them News of that Commander, from whom they expected the Performance of what he had promis'd them; but the Account we gave them of Monsr. de la Sale's unfortunate Death, was so afflicting, that it drew Tears from them, and the dismal History of his Troubles and Disasters render'd them almost inconsolable.

We were conducted to the House, whither all our Baggage was honestly carry'd by the Indians. There was a very great Throng of those People, both Men and Women, which being over, we came to the Relation of the particular Circumstances of our Stories. Ours was deliver'd by Monsieur Cavelier, whom we honour'd as our Chief, for being Brother to him, who had been so.

We were inform'd by them, that they had been Six, sent by Monsr. Tonty, when he return'd from the Voyage he had made down the Colbert or Mississippi River, pursuant to the Orders sent him by the late Monsr. de la Sale, at his departure from France, and that the said Sieur Tonty had commanded them to build the aforesaid House. That having never since receiv'd any News from the said Monsr. de la Sale, Four of them were gone back to Monsr. Tonty at the Fort of the Islinois.

### For Further Information

For more information on this and other topics, please contact the park:  
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To learn more about Henri Joutel, La Salle's explorations and the first Arkansas Post, consult these sources:

Arnold, Morris S. *Colonial Arkansas, 1686 - 1804: A Social and Cultural History*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991.

Joutel, Henri, 1640?- 1735; edited and with an introduction by William C. Foster ; translated by Johanna S. Warren. *The La Salle expedition to Texas : the journal of Henri Joutel, 1684- 1687*. Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1998.