

# Ste. Genevieve

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park  
Missouri



ILLUSTRATION OF STE. GENEVIEVE AT ORIGINAL LOCATION ON THE BANKS OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER. PAINTED IN 1924 BY OSCAR E. BERNINGHAUS (1874–1952). ©MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park is the newest organization in Ste. Genevieve dedicated to preserving the history of the oldest European settlement in Missouri. Ste. Genevieve, located in the Mid-Mississippi River Valley, was established by 1750 and is rich in Franco-American history and Creole culture. Visitors will see vertical-log buildings and discover the history of the area including American Indian and French settlement, American Indian and African enslavement and freedom, and westward migration in the United States.

## Le Grand Champ

For thousands of years, people were drawn to the rich soils along the Mississippi River. Each time the river floods, it deposits nutrients into the soil, making floodplains excellent places to grow crops. Remnants of mounds built by Indigenous societies still remain in the large agricultural field near Ste. Genevieve.

French-Canadian migrants chose this area in the 1730s because of the 7,000-acre floodplain that they called *Le Grand Champ*, or the Big Field, also known as Common Field. *Le Grand Champ* was divided into long strips of plow land. Each strip was owned by individuals in the community to tend.

Some families who owned sections of the field and who helped build Ste. Genevieve include Vallé, Deguire, Aubuchon, Bolduc, Bequette, and Bauvais. They grew wheat, corn, and other crops to ship down river on canoes, pirogues, and bateaux to towns like New Orleans.

Rivers like the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio allowed French-Canadians to travel into the interior of North America. There were, however, people already living in these areas. The French formed relationships with Indigenous people like the Illinois, Missouri, Kaskaskia, Shawnee, and Osage to build trading posts and villages along the Mississippi River.

## Jean-Baptiste Vallé

Although Ste. Genevieve was established as a French community, France ceded land west of the Mississippi River to Spain from 1763–1800. Instead of sending officials to the town, the Spanish king and governors appointed a local resident as “commandant” to oversee the administration of colonized areas. Brothers François II and Jean-Baptiste Vallé served as commandant for Ste. Genevieve.

François II served from 1794 until he died in 1804, leaving his brother Jean-Baptiste Vallé in charge. After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the town became part of the United States. Jean-Baptiste oversaw the transition of Ste. Genevieve from a French community to a new U. S. town in 1804. Much of that political and civic activity occurred at his home.

The Vallés remained a prominent family, acquiring wealth through a saltworks business, a merchant trading firm, and lead mining. Jean-Baptiste’s legacy continued through his son Felix who ran the Menard and Valle trading post.



Jean-Baptiste Vallé House and garden, built circa 1794.  
NPS PHOTO

The estate originally included housing for enslaved people, a summer kitchen, barn, and other outbuildings that no longer exist in addition to a vegetable and herb garden. A grape arbor still stands alongside the rose garden. Formal rose gardens were established to display wealth and mimic aristocratic properties in France. The garden is open for visitors, sunrise to sunset.

