

THE HIGH LIGHTS OF ARKANSAS HISTORY

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649027729

The High Lights of Arkansas History by Dallas T. Herndon

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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DALLAS T. HERNDON

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OF ARKANSAS
HISTORY**



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BY
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SECOND EDITION

Second Special Edition Printed for Distribution

By

ARKANSAS HISTORY COMMISSION

Ms 29538.11.6

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MAY 1968

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WHY?

There is in the history of the State of Arkansas no want of the sort of material which makes for a flavor of individuality. In the choice of things chosen for this narration of events—chosen and arranged to tell the story of the growth of enterprise and what not wrought in Arkansas in the space of nearly four centuries since the time of DeSoto—the aim has been to choose those things which have made the history of Arkansas different—which give it its flavor of interest quite its own. But last, and first also—first as the motive for “playing up” the “high lights” of the history of Arkansas like street lights, hung one at every street corner, that those who pass may see the way plainly—the story of Arkansas is told here step by step, one thing at a time and everything in the order of its doing, each so that any who should like such a work may have by him a handy manual of the really significant facts concerning the history of the State.

HIGH LIGHTS OF ARKANSAS HISTORY

1541-1921

HERNANDO DE SOTO (1541).

The first white men entered what is now the State of Arkansas June 18, 1541. Charles V, King of Spain, commissioned Hernando de Soto, 1538, governor of Cuba and general of Florida. DeSoto landed in Florida May 31, 1539, near where the city of Tampa now stands, with a military force of a thousand men. He had been commissioned by the king to explore Florida, as then the whole Mainland of North America was called. After due preparation the expedition set out for the interior. During the next two years, from the middle of 1539 until June, 1541, they traveled more than a thousand miles, through the present States of Florida, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. Like the other early Spanish explorers, DeSoto's first aim was to discover mines of gold and silver, whence no great care was taken, perhaps, to write out a proper journal of the expedition. Luis Hernandez de Biedma, one of the party with DeSoto, kept a brief diary. A Portuguese adventurer, who signed himself "A gentleman of Elvas," also of the party, wrote a narrative of his adventures. From these two accounts, as the principal sources of information, the route of DeSoto in his wandering east of the Mississippi has been traced with tolerable accuracy. That he crossed the Mississippi River on June 18, 1541, is certain. But the exact point at which he crossed is in doubt. And equally uncertain, for the most part, are the course and extent of his wandering after he had crossed the great river. The weight of evidence seems to favor, as the most likely place of crossing, the site of the present city of Memphis. It is certain that the expedition penetrated far into the interior of Arkansas. Sometime during the fall of 1541 the explorers discovered "a lake of very hot and somewhat brackish water"; of which says the "Gentleman of Elvas," the horses drank so much "that it swelled their bellies." Thus it is practically certain that they were then at the now famous Hot Springs. The winter of 1541-1542, from November to March, they spent in

winter quarters at a point on the Ouachita River, near the southeast corner of Ouachita County, Arkansas. DeSoto died May 21, 1542, near the mouth of Red River in the present State of Louisiana.

JACQUES MARQUETTE *and* LOUIS JOLIET (1673).

After DeSoto, the next white men who visited any part of the country now within the State of Arkansas were the Frenchmen, Jacques Marquette, a Jesuit missionary, and Louis Joliet, a fur trader and explorer. Some time prior to 1665 Marquette was sent by the Jesuits as a missionary to the Indians about the Great Lakes. Having heard from the Indians stories of a great river to the westward, he laid the matter before the governor of Canada, who gave Marquette permission to fit out, "at his own expense," an expedition to go in search of the river. Marquette and Joliet, accompanied by five boatmen, set out from Michilimackinac May 13, 1673, in two large canoes. From Lake Michigan they entered Green Bay, ascended the Fox River for a space, crossed over to the Wisconsin River and floated down to the Mississippi, which they reached June 17, 1673. Continuing down stream, they arrived, early in July, at a native village where an old Indian told them that "the next great village" was "called Arkansia." "We embarked," says Marquette in his journal, "early the next morning with our interpreters and ten Indians who went before us in a canoe. Having arrived about half a league from Arkansia, we saw two canoes coming toward us." The explorers were kindly received and treated as friendly visitors. They rested in the village, perhaps two or three days, when, on July 17, (1673), they left to return to their homes. Passing up the Illinois River, they traveled thence by land over to Chicago River, which they descended to Lake Michigan. Marquette died May 18, 1675, at a mission situated near the site of the town of Ludington, Michigan.

ROBERT CAVELIER, SIEUR DE LA SALLE (1682).

LaSalle, on his voyage from Canada down the Mississippi, went ashore at the mouth of the Arkansas River March 12, 1682. King Louis XIV, of France, had granted him "letters

patent" on May 12, 1678, authorizing him to continue the explorations of Marquette and Joliet, to find "a port for the king's ships in the gulf of Mexico, discover the western parts of New France, and find a way to penetrate Mexico." Accompanied by Henri de Tonti, his lieutenant, Jacques de la Metarie, a notary, Jean Michel, a surgeon, Zenobe Membre, a missionary, and a number of Frenchmen "bearing arms," LaSalle set out from Michilimackinac early in the spring of 1682. Thence to the mouth of the Arkansas the party followed closely the route of Marquette and Joliet westward and down the Mississippi. They went ashore at the Chickasaw Bluffs and sent out a hunting party to procure game for food. Pierre Prudhomme, one of the hunters, having lost himself in the woods, was found only after a search of nine days. LaSalle then built a small fort there, called it Fort Prudhomme, and left the lost hunter in command. LaMetarie, the notary, says in his journal, "On the 12th of March we arrived at the Kapaha village of Arkansa." They visited several other Quapaw villages in the vicinity, made friends of the Indians, who, through their chief, acknowledged that the country belonged to the King of France. After resting several days, the explorers proceeded on their way down the Mississippi.

LOUISIANA, PROVINCE OF FRANCE (1682.)

LaSalle, having arrived at the mouth of the Mississippi, there, on high ground situated a short distance up the river, erected a cross bearing the arms of France and the following inscription: "Louis de Grand, Roi de France et de Navarre Reque; Neuvieme April, 1682." By dint of this act, France laid claim, from April 9, 1682, to "all the country drained by the great river and its tributaries." At the same time, LaSalle called the whole region Louisiana, in honor of Louis, the King. Thus the present State of Arkansas become part of Louisiana and a French possession.

HENRI DE TONTI, FOUNDER OF THE FIRST SETTLEMENT IN ARKANSAS (1686.)

LaSalle, in 1682, after his discovery of the mouth of the Mississippi, returned to Canada and sailed thence to France, whither he went to bring out to Louisiana a party of colonists.