

## CHAPTER VI

### LA SALLE

It was in the year of 1673 that Marquette with a company of six ascended the Illinois and Kankakee rivers and from the headwaters of the last-named stream they crossed over the portage and thence down the St. Joseph River. Crossing the lake, they headed for Green Bay, where the French post was located. Six years later Robert Cavalier, *Sieur de la Salle*, with a view of discovering the Mississippi River, launched his boat and set sail from Canada. He had nearly thirty men on board with him. Among that happy band of explorers were *Henri de Tonti*, *Hennepin* and *Sieur de la Motte*, who passed down the Kankakee River along the northwestern border of Starke County, stopping over night on the banks of that stream in section 13, township 34 north, range 3 west, or where section 13 was afterwards surveyed out. That would be near where the Davis schoolhouse now stands, about one mile south of where Davis Station is located. Upon that camp ground La Salle left the evidence of his camp behind him. What a journey, what a lonesome trip, no one to meet on the way, a howling wilderness and an impassable swamp on either side of that river for miles. Winding through that sluggish, crooked stream, they finally reached the Illinois River after several days of hardship, but La Salle did not reach the mouth of the great river which he sought, returning East in the next year (1680). La Salle was not discouraged, for in 1681, one year later, he increased the number of his men and started on his westward tour and in the year 1682 he was fortunate in reaching the object of his search (the Mississippi River). Taking possession of the country in the name of France, he named it Louisiana. In 1711 they organized a Catholic mission.

Traders and trappers penetrated the Calumet and Kankakee country, and thus had a slight introduction into our Kankakee River country. I have often thought that had the Kankakee River been dredged and straightened at the time La Salle made his voyage down that stream, how much more comfortable and quicker he could have made the trip. It must have been a desolate looking country at that time. How wonderful it is that men will risk their lives, their health and their means to try to accomplish something! But this we find to be a universal thing, for people, white, colored, red race, or what not, are always looking for something or some place beyond their observation and unknown to them. LaSalle was no exception to this rule, and while

not successful in his first attempt he would make another effort, just like our people of today with pluck and courage.

Christopher Columbus would never have discovered the Western Continent had he not been possessed of that brave and noble heart to look for something unseen, something that he believed did exist but beyond the eyes of man to discover, without the full determination to venture out and meet those hardships incident to such a voyage. As we have said before, the Kankakee swamps must have been very uninviting to LaSalle and companions at the time he went down the Kankakee River. They had to stop often and cut out and remove limbs and tree tops before they could proceed down the river and the bends were so acute that they would almost lose their course, as they would sometimes appear to be going in a northeasterly direction, just the opposite course from which they were to go. If Uncle John Davis were living today he could give you a pretty good idea of the old camp ground where LaSalle camped. As I have already mentioned, about the time LaSalle sailed or rowed his boats along our county line, game was very plentiful and they captured many a wild fowl and took from beneath their boats many of the choice fish from the Kankakee River. Deer was as plentiful as our cattle is today, and it was an easy matter to kill one when occasion required it, venison being one of the chief articles of diet. How we would relish some now if we could obtain it—fresh as they did.

The British took possession of all this part of the state in or about the year 1759 or 1760, though they made slow progress, as the Indians stood firm with the French. In the year 1783 the treaty between the republic just organized as the United States and Great Britain made the western boundary of the United States at the Mississippi River.

William H. Harrison was appointed governor of the Territory of Indiana May 13, 1800; on the 14th of May, John Gibson was appointed secretary, and one week later William Clark, John Griffin and Henry Vanderburg became judges of the territory by appointment. A few days after General Harrison landed in Vincennes, which was about the first of 1801, he convened court.

It was several years after this that the white man became a permanent citizen of the northwestern part of the state, a part out of which Starke County was organized, but, as before stated, this county was not surveyed until 1833-35.

A poem was published some years ago by Hubert M. Skinner in the Northwestern Sportsman called the "Song of the Old Sac Trail," which paralleled the Kankakee River, the northwestern line of Starke County:

My course I take by marge of lake  
Or river gently flowing,  
Where footsteps light in rapid flight  
May find their surest going.

I hold my way through forest gray,  
Beneath their rustling arches,  
And on I pass through prairie grass,  
To guide the silent marches.

In single file, through mile on mile,  
The braves their chieftains follow,  
By night or day they keep their way,  
They wind round hill and hollow.  
From sun to sun I guide them on,  
The men of bow and quiver,  
And on I pass through prairie grass,  
As flows the living river.

Where waters gleam I ford the stream;  
And where the land is broken  
My way I grope down rocky slope  
By many a friendly token.  
The shrubs and vines, the oaks and pines,  
The lonely firs and larches,  
I leave, and pass through prairie grass,  
To guide the silent marches.

To charts unknown in books unshown,  
I am no lane or by-way,  
Complete with me from sea to sea  
The continental highway.  
I guide the guest from East to West,  
From West to East deliver;  
For on I pass through prairie grass,  
As flows the living river.

The bivouac leaves embers black  
Amid the fern and clover,  
And prints of feet the searchers greet,  
To tell of journeys over.  
The sun beats hot, I reckon not  
How sear its splendor parches,  
I onward pass through prairie grass,  
To guide the silent marches.

The red man's God prepared the sod,  
And to his children gave it,  
His wrath is shown in every zone,  
Against the men who brave it.

The righteous be, who follow me,  
And praise the Heavenly Giver,  
While on I pass through prairie grass,  
As flows the living river.

After the Pottawatomie tribe abandoned their claims in 1832 their authority relaxed, and after taking up their abode beyond the Mississippi their main thought seemed to be to live upon their allowance given them by the Government of the United States.