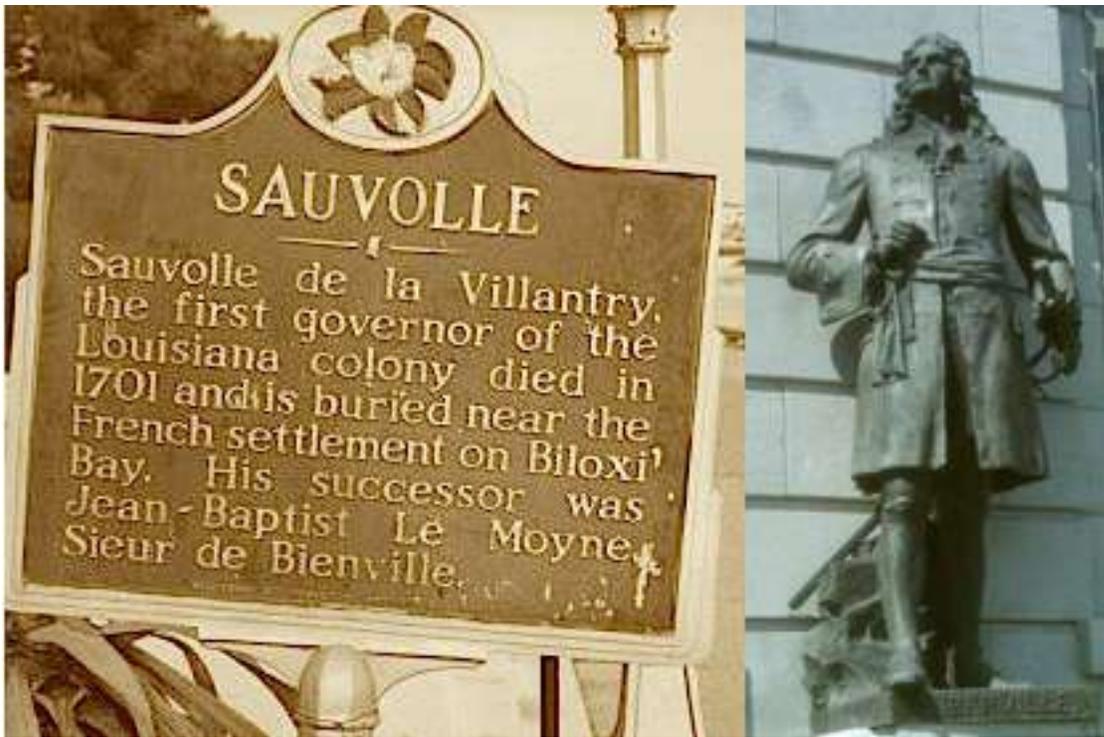


Sauvolle, Man of Mystery

The Sieur de Sauvolle (c. 1671 – 1701), explorer and commander, first governor of the French colony of Louisiana, was indeed a man of mystery. First of all, we do not even know his first name; and, as for his surname, it has been spelled either *Sauvole* (with one *l*) or *Sauvolle* (with two). Although born in France, his date of birth and his parentage is unknown. Sauvolle served as the acting governor of Louisiana from May 2, 1699, until his death on August 22, 1701. Also, there is no painting, sketch or image left behind to give us an idea about his appearance.



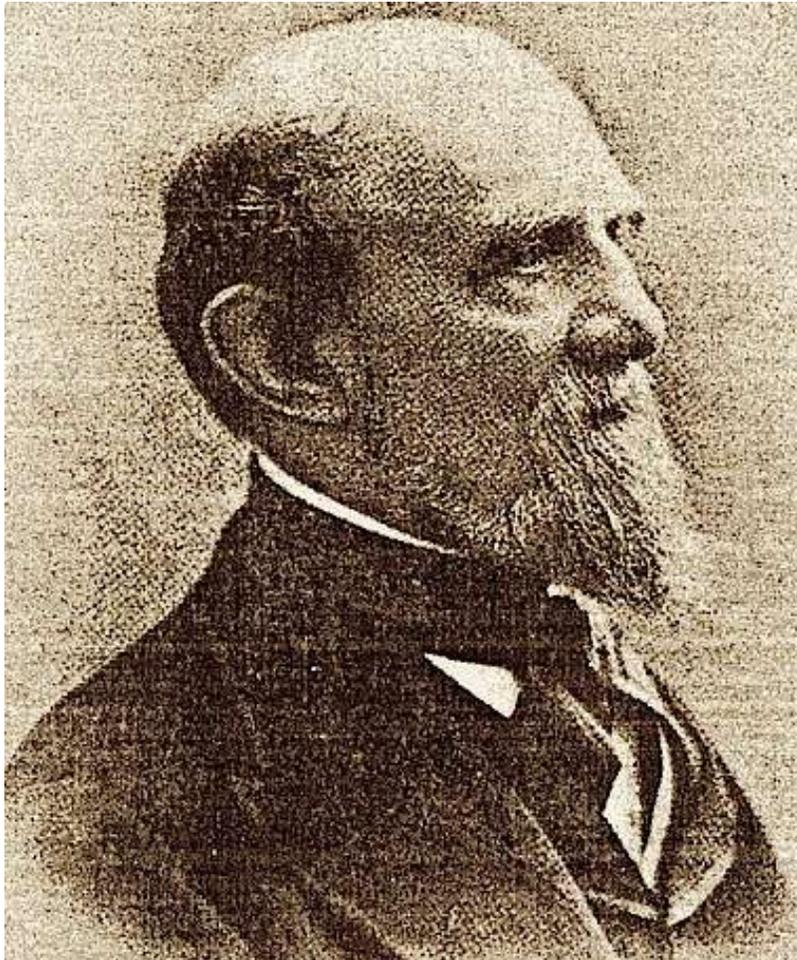
*Sauvolle Historic Marker
in Mississippi*

*Statue of Iberville
at Québec*

The journal he left behind, however, entitled *The Journal of Sauvole: Historical Journal of the Establishment of the French in Louisiana*, provides us with one of the first observations concerning France's early days in colonial Louisiana.

Another mysterious component of Sauvolle's life is the confusion about his lineage. Some historians claimed that his first name was *Antoine*, or alternately *François-Marie*, or that his title was the *sieur de la*

Villantry, or that he was a sibling of Iberville and Bienville. For years, prominent Louisiana historians such as François Xavier Martin, Charles Gayarré and Alcée Fortier have all perpetuated this mistaken assumption that Sauvolle was a brother of Iberville and Bienville. Historian and columnist Charles "Pie" Dufour opined that "no man has caused as much confusion among Louisiana historians" than our mystery man. Gayarré even created a pitiful scene of mourning with Iberville "bathed in tears" at the grave of his "brother," an event in no way supported by fact.



*Charles Étienne Arthur Gayarré, Louisiana historian
(January 9, 1805 – February 11, 1895)*

In that regard, "Pie" described historian Gayarré as "a strange combination of a flamboyant romancer in the best (or worst) 19th century tradition and at the same time was a pioneer in modern historical research and writing. At times his narrative becomes

maudlin – as well as inaccurate – and at others he is an authoritative, highly readable trail-blazer in Louisiana history.”

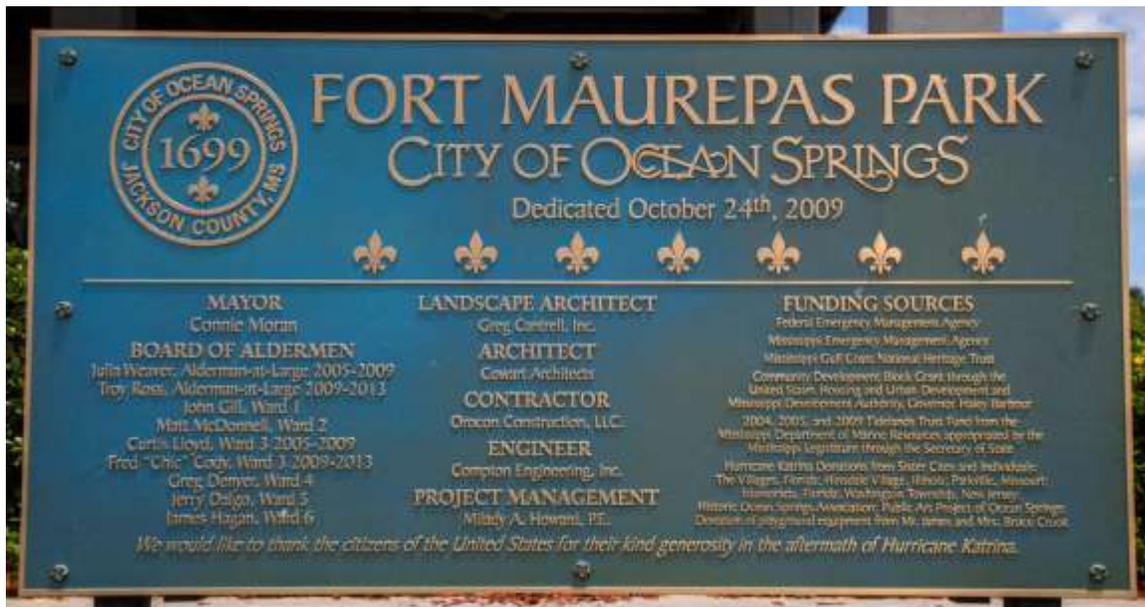


Ocean Springs, site of Fort Maurepas, the Louisiana colony's first settlement, commanded by Sauvolle

To reiterate, there is absolutely no evidence to support the assumption that Sauvolle was a Le Moyne or a brother of Iberville and Bienville. It is known, however, that, in 1699, Sauvolle served in the dual role of ship's ensign, as well as lieutenant in Bellecourt's company of marines. He was aboard Iberville's frigate, *La Marin*, as a member of the first expedition to Louisiana and accompanied the Le Moyne brothers, Iberville and Bienville, on their expeditions along the Mississippi and Alabama coasts and joined Iberville in his ascent of the Mississippi River. Sauvolle was also placed in command of the expedition when Iberville set out to investigate the Manchac-Amite-Lake Pontchartrain route to the Gulf of Mexico, March 24, 1699. The following month, Iberville founded the Louisiana colony's first settlement in April 1699, and called it Fort Maurepas to honor Louis Phélypeaux, comte de Maurepas (who became the comte de Pontchartrain in 1699). Later known as Old Biloxi, it was established at present-day Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Under Iberville's direction, the fort was completed on May 1, 1699, and on the following day Sauvolle was appointed commander of the new Fort Maurepas. Iberville sailed for France on May 4, leaving Sauvolle as the territory's first governor with Bienville as lieutenant.

Altogether about 100 people were left under their command while Iberville was away.

Since Sauvolle kept a journal, we actually have some knowledge of what he actually did accomplish as governor. From the local Indian tribes, he received emissaries and fostered friendly relations with them. Of an exploratory nature, he organized and dispatched numerous expeditions along the Gulf coast and into the interior. He also strengthened the fortifications of the fledgling colony as best he could and dealt with the chronic food shortages experienced by his small garrison on the Mississippi coast.



Yellow fever was also a problem, which took the life of Louisiana's first governor on August 22, 1701. Despite this and other challenges, the colony survived, and the stage was set for Bienville to assume command. He began the first of four terms as governor, the first being 1701-1713.

Upon Iberville's final return to Louisiana in 1702, he ordered his younger brother to supervise the construction of a post on Dauphin Island and another at Mobile (Fort Louis). Although he was Iberville's brother, Bienville truly earned his appointment as governor. While Iberville was away, Bienville commanded a number of exploratory expeditions along the bayous, rivers and lakes in the lower Mississippi valley. And on one of these, he persuaded an English captain to turn the other way at a point on the Mississippi River later called "English Turn." In Iberville's own journal, he wrote, "My brother sent two men

to tell him to immediately leave the country, which was in the possession of the king, and that, if he did not leave, he would force him to.”



Louis Phélypeaux, comte de Maurepas (1687), comte de Pontchartrain (1699), namesake of Fort Maurepas, first settlement in the Louisiana colony at Ocean Springs, Mississippi

Iberville also succumbed to yellow fever, in Havana, Cuba, on July 9, 1706. He was only 44 years of age.

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New Orleans Nostalgia
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