



# **Lives of Fort de Chartres: Commandants, Soldiers, and Civilians in French Illinois, 1720-1770 (Shawnee Books)**

*David MacDonald*

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Fort de Chartres, built in 1719-1720 in the heart of what would become the American Midwest, embodied French colonial power for half a century. *Lives of Fort de Chartres*, by David MacDonald, details the French colonial experience in Illinois from 1720 to 1770 through vivid depictions of the places, people, and events around the fort and its neighboring villages.

In the first section, MacDonald explores the fascinating history of French Illinois and the role of Fort de Chartres in this history, focusing on native peoples, settlers, slaves, soldiers, villages, trade routes, military administration, and the decline of French rule in Illinois. The second section profiles the fort's twelve distinctive and often colorful commandants, who also served as administrative heads of French Illinois. These men's strong personalities served them well when dealing simultaneously with troops, civilians, and Indians and their multifaceted cultures. In the third section, MacDonald presents ten thought-provoking biographies of people whose lives intersected with Fort de Chartres in various ways, from a Kaskaskia Indian woman known as "the Mother of French Illinois" to an ill-fated chicken thief and a European aristocrat. Subjects treated in the book include French-Native American relations, the fur trade, early Illinois agriculture, and tensions among different religious orders. Together, the biographies and historical narrative in the volume illuminate the challenges that shaped the French colonies in America.

The site of Fort de Chartres, recognized as a National Historic Landmark in 1966, still exists today as a testament to the ways in which French, British, Spanish, and American histories have intertwined. Both informative and entertaining, *Lives of Fort de Chartres* contributes to a more complete understanding of the French colonial experience in the Midwest and portrays a vital and vigorous community well worth our appreciation.

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