



Photo courtesy Gilcrease Museum

such as corn, beans, squash, and tobacco. Farming villages were scattered along many of the rivers in the area.

THE WHITE MAN COMETH.

How can one explain the curious place names of the Tulsa District region? In the rough land of the cowboy and Indian, why do rivers bear such elegant names as Grand, Verdigris, Illinois, Poteau, San Bois, and Fourche Maline?

Those old-world French names derive from a twist of fate about the time William Penn was founding Pennsylvania, 1680, when Spain was losing a centuries-long battle for dominance of the central and lower Mississippi Valley.

In search of riches, Spain's Francisco Coronado and Hernando DeSoto had wandered through the area in 1540 and claimed ownership for Spain. But LaSalle challenged that claim. And in 1682 he won, asserting title for France and assuring a succession of French-derived names throughout the area.

It is also no accident that the rivers, particularly, bear French names. From their earliest entrance into this continent, the French preferred using rivers and waterways as highways for their explorations and commercial travel. Others might hack their way by trail through forest and mountain, but French explorers made their entrance into the Tulsa District region by water. Indeed, as early as 1719, Jean-Baptiste B'enard entered present-day Oklahoma via the Red River.

B'enard traveled cross-country to the Arkansas River. Here, according to Historian William Settle, the explorer came upon a "rendezvous with 7,000 Indians of the Wichita Confederacy . . . (where) he was told that the Acansa (Arkansas) was their river."⁸ (At a ratio of 7,000 Indians to one French explorer, one can assume that B'enard conceded the point.)

Other French explorers came upstream into Oklahoma to trade for pelts, traveling in pirogues, canoes hollowed from cottonwood trees, and occasionally various types of keelboats.

In 1803, for three cents an acre and reasons that had to do with his political and economic distress, Napoleon sold to the United States the great province of Louisiana. The boundaries were as uncertain as Napoleon's logic and were then known only to encompass more than 800 million acres covering the western half of the Mississippi Valley, running vaguely off to the Rockies. With that \$15 million purchase and the 1848 treaty after the Mexican War, the lands that now comprise the Tulsa District came into the American Republic.

A RED ISLAND IN A WHITE SEA.

Before the Louisiana Purchase, a vast region encompassing northeastern Oklahoma, northern Arkansas, southwestern Missouri, and southeastern Kansas was considered the domain of the aggressive and warlike Osage Indians.⁹