

Report of the Fort Saint Pierre Tercentenary Planning Board

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Frederick L. Briuer Ph. D

The Vicksburg Municipal Fort St. Pierre Tercentenary Planning Board was appointed by Mayor George Flagg a little over a year ago. We are charged with developing and implementing programs and events in celebration of the Tercentenary anniversary of the establishment of French Fort St. Pierre (also known as Ft. St. Claud or Yazoo Post) in northern Warren County in the year 1719. Other communities have also held such celebrations, such as Biloxi, Mobile and Natchez. New Orleans is having their Tercentenary this year and Baton Rouge will have theirs in 2021.

One of the first things we did was to improve the protection of our National Historic Landmark (one of only two French and Indian period sites designated as National Historic Landmarks in Mississippi). The area where the site is located is notorious for site vandalism and looting. We wanted to make certain the site would be better protected and still be there in 2019. A subcommittee of site surveillance volunteers, most from the Redwood area, were provided with detailed property maps, air photos, copies of the Mississippi Antiquities Act and explicit guidance from Sheriff Martin Pace on how and who to report observed criminal activity on site. Our site surveillance effort is fully coordinated with all appropriate law enforcement agencies including Warren County Sheriff's Department, Mississippi Department of Transportation, and Mississippi Highway Patrol and the Mississippi Fish and Game law enforcement officers. There exists between these agencies an agreement to coordinate efforts in the event one or more should be unable to respond.

Allow me to digress for a moment and share with you something that happened to us that could be useful to others attempting to protect significant archaeological resources in their communities. When our planning board first briefed our County Sheriff, seeking his support for dealing with the deplorable dumping of trash, old furniture and even dead animals and other illegal activity at our National Historic Landmark site, we were stunned by his taking the position that he and his deputies had no jurisdiction on state owned property and could do nothing about the deplorable, reeking mess. With the assistance of our two State Legislators and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, they were able to get a legal opinion about this jurisdiction issue from a Mississippi State Attorney. It is the policy of the State Attorney General's office not to respond to written requests for legal interpretations from private citizens. As state Legislators however, they have direct access to a State Attorney's legal opinion. That opinion was clear that the Mississippi Antiquities Act requires all law enforcement agencies to enforce the provisions of the law regarding specific prohibition of artifact collecting, digging, metal detecting and other activities on state land without the express permission of the state land owning agency. Our state Legislator with this legal opinion in hand was able to convince our Sheriff of the required enforcement provision. Even though the Mississippi Antiquities Act is an obscure law that too few are aware of, it is

clearly intended to be complied with. The owner of two private parcels of land at Ft. St. Pierre has invited our site surveillance volunteers to report to him illegal activity on his land. He will in turn, as the owner notify the Warren County Sheriff.

Our Planning Board emphasizes the designation of Fort St. Pierre as a National Historic Landmark. This is one step above sites determined to be eligible for inclusion on the National Register. Fort St. Pierre was a critical link between French Gulf colonies and the huge geographic area of New France in the Midwest, northern U.S. and Canada. Northern Warren county was a buffer between traditional Indian enemies. The French aligned Choctaw and Tunica were pitted against the English aligned Chickasaw and other tribes. Fort St. Pierre was a critical link in this contested region. The archaeological remains at Fort St. Pierre are relatively well preserved compared to other French and Indian period sites that have been subject to three hundred years of development and extensive ground disturbance. It has been estimated that perhaps only fifty percent of the site has been excavated.

The main goal of our planning board is to implement celebratory events and efforts to increase awareness of the historic and archaeological research potential as well as the public appreciation value of the National Historic Landmark as a place to visit and learn about the Indian, French and War Between the States components of the site. We will be attempting to put Fort St. Pierre on the map. It is disappointing how few people today in Warren County are even aware of the French and Indian episode of their history. There are three operative words describing our goals: protection ,preservation and interpretation.

Some examples for raising the awareness of Fort St. Pierre include:

A series of power point presentations offered to the public, (seven in the last eighteen months) more on the calendar.

A series of brief newspaper articles telling the Ft. St. Pierre story a bite at a time. Articles have been published about the goals of the Planning Board and the Indian period before the French arrival in Warren county.

Future articles will tell the story of the missionaries, the failed colony attempt and the Mississippi speculative bubble, The military function of the fort, the trading function and the massacre and what happened following the massacre. A final article is planned for describing the War Between the States component at the National Historic Landmark.

We are scheduling a speakers bureau at the Southern Cultural Heritage Center of select scholars to give lectures on their respective research. These at present include Doctors Ian Brown, Lisa Marie Malischke and James Barnett.

Our goal is to apply for matching fund grants for putting up a metal, green, magnolia sign and other historic signs on both northbound and southbound highway 61 as well as on-site outdoor interpretive exhibits telling the story of the National Historic Landmark.

We plan to formally request that highway three between the intersection of highway 61 at Redwood north to Haynes bluff be designated Lt. Dumont de Montigny commemorative highway.

Exhibits of information and artifacts are planned for local museums in Vicksburg and other public places such as the MDOT Visitors Center and public library.

Efforts are underway for on-site improvements to make the National Historic Landmark a better place for public visitation. Volunteer effort as well a grant to be submitted by the Warren County Board of Supervisors from the Department of Environmental Quality is being considered to thoroughly clean up the site.

Also under consideration is our attempt to get the Mississippi Orchestra to perform music in celebration of the Tercentenary at the Vicksburg National Military Park outdoor concert in 2019.

Contact has been made with the National Park Service Southeastern Archaeological Center requesting an erosion evaluation of the site. It is critical to know to what extent erosion threatens the site.

Dr. Lisa Marie Malischke and her students are planning future historic and archaeological research at Fort St. Pierre. Dr. Malischke is in a unique position to write a synthesis of all research that describes the Fort St. Pierre story. Such a publication will fill the void of literature available to the public.

Web page and Go Fund Me option to raise matching funds for grants.