The Father of the Louisiana Territory

If you’ve been along the Mississippi River, you might’ve stepped right where I once explored. Bonjour mes-amis! I am Rene-Robert Cavelier de La Salle. I am, or rather was a great explorer of the mid-1600s (sixteen hundreds).

I was born on November 22, 1643 in Rouen, France. My parents, Catherine Gesset and Jean Cavelier were rich merchants. My parents sent me to Jesuit schools, they taught me to read, write, and I studied to become a priest. But at seventeen years old I felt the great need of adventure. But I choose to take my vows anyway. At twenty-two I needed more argent (are-eh-jon) or money and my dad died so I couldn’t ask him to lend any, so my mother, brothers and sister helped me out. It wasn’t enough to make a real living, but it helped me to keep a steady lifestyle. But then I heard about exploring and settling in New France, or know now as Canada. So during the spring of 1666 I set off to New France.

In the same year I made it to Montreal. At that time, that was a French avant-poste or outpost. I saw in the middle of the city was a stone fort call Mont-Royal, in-fact I think that’s how the city got its name! I think I saw wooden houses, a hospital, and a church too. My population estimate is probably about three-hundred, much less than Rouen. I remember meeting priests, merchants, fur-traders, and Indians with the same goal I had, to make a living. The small population quickly thinned even more into groups. There were religious orders coming as missionaries, merchants finding New France as a budgeting growth, but I was more fascinated in the exploring of the new land. Though, we needed to be careful of Iroquois of the New York area. They already disliked us, French, because of Samuel Champlain. He had helped their enemies, the Hurons. But I didn’t really care about the dangers.

I got land about eight miles away, which is now known as Lachine. It was a defenseless place, but a good place for fur traders. I owned about four-hundred acres for myself and rented smaller lots to fur traders. In order for them to use the lot, they had to cut down pine and lurch trees with only axes. After, they built small wooden houses. It wasn’t a great place for crops but we hunted animals like deer and moose.

Later I left Lachine to go exploring in the forest. A fellow explorer Nicolas Fitzroy told me that I was dressed wrong for those wild forests.

“Vos vêtements ne sont pas très appropriés pour explorer les forêts,” or “Your clothes aren’t suitable for exploring the forest,” he implied.

“Excuse me?” I asked.

“Well, some of the fabric is too soft and may tear easy,” he suggested.

“Then maybe I’ll make or get clothes that I can wear while roaming the woods,” I replied.

So I settled for leather shoes and leggings. In the winter, I wore homemade snowshoes I made myself , mittens ,wool scarf to keep my mouth warm, and I turned beaver skin into a hat to cover my ears. During the summer I coated myself in bear grease so mosquitoes and flies wouldn’t bite me.