



The Man with the Iron Hand

John Carl Parish

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John Carl Parish (1881 – 1939) was an American historian of American history. "The Man with the Iron Hand" is an account of Henri de Tonty and the coming of the French into the Mississippi valley.

The author writes in the preface: "THE purpose of this book is to present in readable narrative form, yet with strict accuracy, some of the events which attended the coming of the French explorers into the Mississippi Valley, and to deal with these events as much as possible from the standpoint of the Indians whose country the white men entered. In other words, an effort has been made to place the reader in the position and environment of the native inhabitants in order that he may witness the coming of the whites through the eyes and minds of the Indians instead of viewing from the outside the exploration, by men of his own kind, of an unknown land peopled by a strange and vaguely understood race.

"For the sake of preserving the standpoint of the Great Valley, the story of explorations is centered about Henry de Tonty — the "Man with the Iron Hand" — who, unlike his leader La Salle, remained in the valley of the Mississippi and in close relations with its inhabitants for a quarter of a century.

This book is not in any sense fiction. It has been written directly from the original sources and from the best information available upon the life of the Indian at the time of the arrival of the whites. The sources consist mainly of the letters and relations of Father Marquette and other Jesuits, of Joliet and La Salle and Tonty, and the writings of the various friars, priests, and soldiers who accompanied them. A few fragments are accessible in manuscript form only; but the most important material has been compiled, edited, and published by Pierre Margry, John Gilmary Shea, B. F. French, Reuben Gold Thwaites, and others."

In the summer of 1678, Tonty journeyed with René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, who recognized him as an able associate. La Salle left Tonty to hold Fort Crèvecoeur in Illinois, while La Salle returned to Ontario.

In the spring of 1682, Tonty journeyed with La Salle on his descent of the Mississippi River. Tonty's letters and journals are valuable source materials on these explorations.

When La Salle returned to France in 1683, he left Tonty behind to hold Fort Saint Louis on the Illinois River. He was to relinquish this control for a period to Louis-Henri de Baugy, under the orders of Frontenac. Three years later, he learned from remnants of La Salle's ill-fated Texas settlement that La Salle was attempting to ascend the Mississippi River. De Tonti proceeded south on his own in an attempt to meet La Salle on his ascent. He failed to find La Salle and made it to the Gulf of Mexico before turning back. He left several men near the mouth of the Arkansas River to establish a trading post there on land granted to him by La Salle for his service. This location would become the historical Arkansas Post, the first permanent European settlement in the lower Mississippi region.

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