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The La Salle Odyssey

One Story Told by Seven Texas Museums

In early February of 1686 a small French ship, the *Belle*, went down in the murky waters of Matagorda Bay on the Texas Gulf Coast. With the ship went a famous explorer's dreams and a king's ambition to expand his empire in the New World.

The La Salle Odyssey, a series of exhibits in seven museums, tells the story of this ill-fated expedition and the remarkable discovery and excavation of the *Belle* and Fort St. Louis 300 years later.

- 1** **Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History**
1900 N. Chaparral St., Corpus Christi
www.ccmuseum.com • 361/826-4650
- 2** **Texas Maritime Museum**
1202 Navigation Circle, Rockport
www.texasmaritimemuseum.org • 361/729-1271
- 3** **Texana Museum**
403 N. Wells, Edna
361/782-5431
- 4** **Calhoun County Museum**
301 S. Ann St., Port Lavaca
www.calhouncountymuseum.org
361/553-4689
- 5** **Museum of the Coastal Bend**
Victoria College
2200 E. Red River, Victoria
www.museumofthecoastalbend.org • 361/582-2511
- 6** **Matagorda County Museum**
2100 Ave. F, Bay City
www.matagordacountymuseum.org
979/245-7502
- 7** **La Petite Belle Homeport and Palacios Area Historical Museum**
Commerce St., Palacios
www.palaciosmuseum.org • 361/972-3960

Visit all the museums of the La Salle Odyssey to get the complete story.

Not just any ship, the *Belle* belonged to Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, leader of an expedition for France's Louis XIV. It contained all his remaining supplies. Ultimately, the expedition would end in disaster and the deaths of almost everyone involved, including La Salle himself.

Each of the museums in the La Salle Odyssey explores part of the saga, and each contains artifacts never before seen by the public.



1 Birth of an expedition

As part of Louis XIV's plan to enlarge his territory in North America, La Salle's four ships set sail for the New World in 1684. This

exhibit includes displays about the unusual design of the *Belle* and the skill of the shipwrights who built her.

Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History, Corpus Christi



2 Daily life on board the Belle

La Salle sailed too far southwest and missed his intended destination, the mouth of the Mississippi River. This exhibit explores

the science, art and mystery of navigation in La Salle's time, and also offers a unique glimpse into crew members' lives. Among the items on display are a scale model of the *Belle*, sailors' personal belongings and 17th-century medical instruments.

Texas Maritime Museum, Rockport



Excavation of the Belle at the bottom of Matagorda Bay.



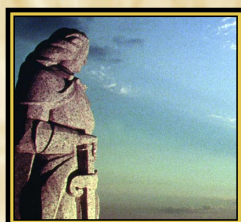
3 The Native Americans who watched the French come ashore

When La Salle landed near Matagorda Bay in today's Texas, the

Karankawa people of the Gulf Coast were there to meet him. The French brought glass beads, brass bells, jewelry and axes as trade items.

However, the French-Indian relationship would soon turn deadly.

Texana Museum, Edna



4 The clash of empires in 17th-century North America

Cannon balls, gun flints and personal effects of French and Spanish

colonists are among the artifacts that attest to the struggle between Spain and France for power in the New World.

Calhoun County Museum, Port Lavaca



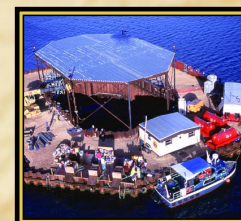
5 La Salle's doomed colony on the Texas coast

La Salle built a small settlement near Matagorda Bay called Fort St. Louis.

By 1689, Karankawas had

killed or captured the last of the settlers, and La Salle's own men had murdered him. This museum's exhibit includes eight cannons that defended the colony, a settler's journal and exhibits about the Texas Historical Commission's excavation of Fort St. Louis.

Museum of the Coastal Bend, Victoria



6 The extraordinary excavation that uncovered the Belle

Texas Historical Commission archeologists discovered the *Belle*

shipwreck in 1995 and excavated it from the bottom of Matagorda Bay inside a giant cofferdam. On display in this museum are a diorama of part of the excavation and artifacts from the ship, including a bronze cannon and navigational instruments.

Matagorda County Museum, Bay City



7 A fully functioning, seagoing replica of the Belle

Built to half-scale, *La Petite Belle* serves as the La Salle Odyssey's traveling ambas-

sador, bringing the fascinating story to every port she visits. Near her homeport is a museum exhibit about the crucial role the community of Palacios played in the discovery and recovery of the *Belle*.

La Petite Belle, homeport in Palacios and Palacios Area Historical Museum, Palacios