The Last Days of the Cabildo | The United States Buys a Back Yard

1803

March  Pierre Laussat arrives as Napoleon's colonial prefect, but will not take over until November
May  Official word of the retrocession finally announced in Louisiana
November  Laussat takes possession of Louisiana for France
December  Wm. C.C. Claiborne and General Wilkinson take possession of Louisiana for the United States

Each month below shows events in Louisiana on the left side and related events elsewhere on the right side. Additional, undated events follow. Use your browser's Find command to locate specific names or places.

**Leaders**

Spanish Officials:
*Alcaldes Ordinarios*
- Primer - Pablo Lanusse
- Segundo - Francisco Meriult

*Sindico Procurador General*
- Salomon Prevost

*Mayordomo de Proprios*
- Juan de Castañedo.

(Juan Bautiste Labatut (Francisco Duplessy?) elected first, rejected when he wanted higher fees for the office.

*Juan Ventura Morales* serves as *Intendant* from

**Milestones**

**DEATHS**

**BIRTHS**

Isaac Johnson

**ARRIVALS**

William Charles Cole Claiborne

Pierre Clément de Laussat

James Lyon
1801 until the end of the Spanish Era in November 1803.

Pierre ClÈment de Laussat

William Charles Cole Claiborne

General James Wilkinson

January 1803

An official looking hand bill showing hostility toward the United States is posted in New Orleans. Acting Consul William Hullings is asked by the U. S. government to investigate the reasoning and origin behind the closure of the Port of New Orleans. Also what preparations are being made for the arrival of French officials?

Late in the month the Intendant, Juan Ventura Morales, is firm, the deposit is not restored. Many ships are waiting in the river to resume commerce at the port of New Orleans.

Mississippi Territory:

As 1803 opens pressure is on the young governor of the Mississippi Territory, William Charles Cole Claiborne, to use his militia to reopen the port of New Orleans by taking possession.

Also this month:

Letters of William C. C. Claiborne

February 1803

Mississippi Territory:

Late in the month William Charles Cole Claiborne receives a letter from Secretary of State Madison that acknowledges Claiborne's letter saying that the Intendant had acted without orders from Madrid and without governor Salcedo's approval. The president passes it on to Congress and has appointed James Monroe Minister Plenipotentiary and Extraordinary to France. Included is a letter to the Intendant from the Spanish Minister to the United States which Claiborne passes on to William Hullings.
March 1803

March 26, 1803

Pierre Clément de Laussat (1756-1835), 47, arrives as Napoleon's Colonial Prefect to reclaim Louisiana for France.

Laussat summons all militia officers to his lodging to declare by yea or nay whether they intended to remain in the service of Spain.

Soon after the retrocession to France is formally announced three ship loads of slaves quickly arrive in the colony, which is starved for labor. Although most of the planters wanted to keep the slave trade open it closed again after the U. S assumed control of Louisiana.

With the arrival of Laussat the Cabildo expected forty-five hundred French troops to arrive to take possession of the colony. To prevent speculation, hoarding and inflation in its free market system for supplying beef it sought bids to supply beef for the troops. Getting none, it accepted an unfavorable offer from Pedro Heno and Francisco Laudon. The troops never appeared because France had already sold Louisiana to the United States. The council canceled the contract and allowed meat to be sold to residents tax free.

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<tr>
<th>Mississippi Territory:</th>
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<td>Early in March Governor Claiborne receives a proclamation by Intendant Juan Ventura Morales. The port of New Orleans is partially open.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Claiborne writes to William Hullings that he is still in the dark in respect to the power and intentions of the Spanish Intendant Morales. Many vessels are lying opposite from New Orleans, waiting for return cargoes.</td>
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<td>Later in the month he receives news from Madison that the French ambassador to the U. S. has been asked not to follow the example of the Intendant in closing the port. The ambassador has written a letter on this matter, dispatched from Baltimore, to Laussat. Several French Officers have arrived at New Orleans and information on the sailing of a fleet with the French Army is received, but Claiborne does not give credit to this rumor. Daniel Clark has returned from Europe and is in Natchez.</td>
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As he plans factories for the Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians, Claiborne begins to worry about free navigation of certain rivers falling to the Bay of Mexico from territories of the United States and passing through the dominions of his Catholic Majesty, in particular, Florida.

April 1803

Laussat is met by Hullings who is acting as the unofficial American consul. Hullings sends

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<td>Napoleon may have communicated his</td>
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[Top of page]
dispatches to Secretary of State Madison which say that Laussat denies that the order to close the port last year was a French decision. Laussat does not recognize any consuls in New Orleans at this time and declares that he expects a large number of French troops to arrive soon.

### May 1803

In the Spring of 1803 Casa Calvo returns to New Orleans having been appointed to act as joint commissioner with Salcedo in turning over the province of Louisiana to France. On May 18, 1803 Salcedo and Casa-Calvo issue a joint proclamation informing the inhabitants of Louisiana about the retrocession. Eight days later they send a copy of the royal order authorizing the transfer to the Cabildo. The formal transfer awaits the arrival of French General Claude Perrin Victor, but he never arrives because the war has resumed in Europe.

### Paris, France:

Although the document is dated April 30, 1803 it is not officially signed until after it is translated and copied on May 3rd.

### Europe:

May, 1803; Peace of Amiens ends, brings British interference back to Napoleon’s world.

### June 1803

Hispanola:

In April most of the coastal cities are still under French control.

May, 1803; Peace of Amiens ends, brings British interference back.
### July 1803

**Washington City, District of Columbia:** On July 16 President Jefferson calls for an extra session of Congress in October to consider the purchase of Louisiana.

### August 1803

Laussat hears nothing official about the sale of Louisiana to the U. S. until August, although rumors had reached New York and Washington months previously.

### September 1803

September 8

**Daniel Clark** to James Madison, Secretary of State:
The old fortifications around New Orleans are going fast to ruins and it would be proper to throw the works into the ditches and thereby get rid of the stagnant waters which occasion disease.

### October 1803

**Washington City, District of Columbia:** The U. S. Congress meets for a special session on October 17 to debate and ratify the Louisiana question. On October 31 President Thomas Jefferson approves the bill that Congress had forwarded to him authorizing representatives to take possession of Louisiana. He designates William Charles Cole Claiborne and General James Wilkinson as commissioners and authorizes the use of army and naval forces to maintain the new possession.

**Hispanola:**

October, 1803; Dessalines occupies heights above Port-Au-Prince, giving French troops...
eight days to evacuate on condition that they leave the city's fortifications intact. First LeClerc's remaining soldiers are evacuated, followed by civilians in confusion. Fleeing whites cannot chose the time or means of departure, taking the first opportunity and what wealth they can carry.

**November 1803**

**Word of the purchase of Louisiana by the United States reaches New Orleans.** It is met rush of emotions by everyone in the city. The Spanish talk of resistance, the French Creoles express a variety of feelings about allegiance to France. Daniel Clark, with the approval of Laussat, forms a civil guard, headed by his friend Joseph Bellechasse to keep peace among the populace. At New Orleans the works around the city are neglected, but forts on the lake and at Plaquemines are strong and regular and may demand heavy cannon.

November 18, 1803 the municipal council - the Spanish Cabildo meets for the last time. The administration of Governor Salcedo ends with the transfer of the colony to Laussat. Wilkinson has arrives in New Orleans on the 25th of November and moves on to Ft. Adams, possibly after confiring with Spanish officials.

November 30, 1803; Laussat accepts possession of Louisiana from Spain in a retrocession ceremony at noon. The same day he abolishes the Cabildo and replaces it with a municipality patterned along French republican lines. He also places Charity Hospital under municipal control, which the Cabildo had attempted for 25 years. The councillors will complete an inventory and prepare their records for the new administration by December 10.

**Mississippi Territory:**

As soon as word reaches Governor Claiborne about the ratification of the purchase and his appointment as a commissioner of the transfer he begins a flurry of preparations and correspondence. He forwards a letter from Madison to Daniel Clark to address concerns about resistance from the Spanish. He notes Clark's has a frosty rapport with Laussat, but Clark must balance the feelings of French and Spanish Creoles.

Claiborne writes to Treasury Secretary Gallatin asking for advice on handling money during the transfer and particularly the duties on imports and exports. Claiborne does not wait for Wilkinson, who stops in New Orleans on his way to Natchez. The governor orders the army at Fort Adams to prepare to March and tries vainly to stir the militia of the territory, which is ill-prepared.

**Hispanola:**

The last Frenchmen leave Le Cap for Cuba, many on British ships. The British, while at war with France hope that troops and planters will be able to return to Saint-Domingue to put down the slave administration. Late 1803 produces the greatest emigration from Saint-Domingue, with most going to Santiago Cuba. Many planters will take up coffee and sugar planting in the eastern provinces of Cuba, establishing a solid French speaking community for the next few years. One account places 27,000 refugees in eastern Cuba in 1804.
November 30, 1803; Jean Etienne de BorÈ (1741-1820) becomes the first Mayor of N.O. 1803-1804. Sugar was first granulated in commercial quantities on his plantation in 1795. Other early mayors are Joseph Roffignac, August Macarty, Nicolas Girod, James J. Mather, William Freret, John Watkins, and Denis Prieur.

Other officials during the administration of de BorÈ include assistants Destrahan and Suave; recording secretary - Pierre Derbigny; asst. recording secretary - J.B.M de la Hogue; Treasurer - N. Labatut; Commissioner General of Police - Pierre Achilles Riviere (Rivery); Commissioner of the Third District Caraby and Landreau, Sr.; Commissioner of the Fourth District - Lois Lioteau and P. Profit

The transfer of power is completed but Casa Calvo remains in New Orleans where he spends a considerable portion of his time encouraging the belief that Louisiana was to be re-ceded to Spain.

During Laussat's twenty-one-day rule the planters obtain the reinstitution of the Code Noir but many Spanish laws continued even after new legal codes of 1806 and 1808.

December 1803

A printer with all the necessary apparatus arrives in New Orleans from Natchez. Claiborne understands the importance at this time of keeping the new citizens informed of the intentions of their new government.

December 13
The Union or New Orleans Advertiser and Price Current is established by James Lyon and Company.

December 20, 1803; Pierre Clement de Laussat represents France in the formal transfer of Louisiana to the United States. William C. C.

Mississippi Territory:
To expedite the delivery of troops and their support Claiborne impresses a civilian schooner at Natchez Landing. A French officer, Loudais, arrives at Natchez with original papers with orders on Laussat's conduct of the transfer of Louisiana. It all but removes the pressure to prepare for battle. Wilkinson arrives on the 4th of December. Many of the troops, including volunteers from Tennessee will not arrive in time, but Claiborne will use what militia he has on hand. They are inadequately clothed and Claiborne will furnish clothes and blankets from public stores at Fort
Claiborne and General James Wilkinson are commissioners overseeing the transfer. The Cabildo’s Sala Capitular is the site of the finalizing of the Louisiana Purchase. The Florida parishes remain Spanish District of West Florida until 1810. Claiborne's official title at this time is Governor of the Mississippi Territory, Exercising the Powers of Governor Intendant of the Province of Louisiana. On the night of the 20th he sends a dispatch to Madison that Louisiana is now in the hands of the United States. Claiborne encloses copies of the proclamation and a short address to the citizens of Louisiana. Pierre Clement de Laussat has tried to bring him up to date on changes in the last thirty days, but the Frenchman's interest is only temporary. In one of his first acts Claiborne separates forever the office of Notary Public from the office of auctioneer. Spirituous Liquors are not to be sold to privates or non-commissioned officers without written permission from a commissioned officer. The militia is not well organized. A difficult decision must be made about two companies of people of color. On the 29th Claiborne issues regulations on shipping and the port.

Other events in Louisiana:

A plan of New Orleans by John L. Boqueta de Woiseri is based on the 1798 Trudeau plan. The itenerate artist also renders a perspective view of New Orleans from the house of Bernard Marigny showing the levee and

Other events in the world this year which influence Louisiana:

In 1803 Spanish troops in New Madrid capture Samuel Mason and his band of river pirates and send them to New Orleans. Governor Salcedo sends them...
the city as it was at this time.

In 1803 the governor and the Cabildo again wrestle with the problem of street grading and sidewalk repair, but finally pass it off to the new American administration. Some streets were partially paved with bricks or tiles but only near the sidewalks. On most streets, nearly impassible with holes and ruts, vehicles needed wheels six to eight inches wide to avoid sinking.

In 1803 **Sindico Procurador General** Prevost declares the available flour supply was small, old and wormy. The reason being the suspension of right of deposit for the Americans by Intendant **Juan Ventura Morales** and **Salcedo** order to end importation from the United States. The Cabildo manages to convince Morales to exempt foodstuffs.

In 1803 the Cabildo arrests and deports Dr. Paul Alliot, a refugee from St. Domingue who has been practicing medicine without a back upriver to Natchez to be tried in the Mississippi Territory since they are mostly Americans, who had committed crimes on American soil.

After the Louisiana Purchase the archives of the Spanish colony of Louisiana are moved successively to Mobile, Pensacola and Cuba and finally to the Archive of the Indies in Seville, Spain. **North America:**

Secession is threatened by New York and Massachusetts who claim the purchase of Louisiana is unconstitutional. Ohio becomes the 17th state of the union. Eli Whitney's cotton gin will boost the production of cotton throughout the south. The first icebox is developed in Maryland. Dupont produces gunpowder on the Brandywine River in Delaware. Fort Dearborn, the beginnings of Chicago is built by U. S. troops on Lake Michigan and Buffalo, New York is laid out on Lake Erie. Slave importation resumes in South Carolina. War in Europe increases demand for American farm crops. John James Audubon leaves Nantes, France for Philadelphia.

**Europe:**
license. An *alcalde ordinario* authorizes breaking down his door and dragging him off to jail.

Governor **William C. C. Claiborne** selects **Etienne de BorÈ** to be the first Mayor of New Orleans under American administration.

New Orleans has made many advances as the Spanish era closes. Industries include sawmills, distilleries, cordage factories, cotton mills, sugar refineries and a small rice mill. The biggest employer outside the government is the port, requiring stevedores, dock workers, and carters. Some ships are built here.

In 1803 the population of New Orleans is 50% French Creole and 25% Spanish.

Longwood Plantation house is built by Madame Marianne Decoux. The rear section of the house was added in 1835. Today London bankers Baring Brothers help finance the U.S. purchase of Louisiana helping, Napoleon's foreign minister Tallyrand finance the war against Great Britain which resumes in May. Robert Emmet, who leads an aborted revolution in Ireland is captured and hanged by the British. Inventor Robert Fulton, in France working on a submarine, assembles a small steam ship. The plague kills 150,000 in Constantinople. English officer Henry Shrapnel develops the weapon that bears his name. Morphine is derived from opium in Germany. Walter Scott; Schiller; Beethoven in Vienna.
it is a private residence. Larkin Edwards, is the first settler near what is Shreveport today.

Go to the year 1804