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# COOK-WITTER REPORT

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## Jarrot Mansion: Illinois' Grande Madame

**W**hen Frenchman Nicholas Jarrot came to America around 1791, possibly to escape the French Revolution, he landed in Baltimore, Maryland. This would prove beneficial to the then non-existent state of Illinois much later.

His Baltimore visit ultimately gave our state an architectural and historical gem -- the Jarrot Mansion in Cahokia, a National Historic Landmark which is owned by the State of Illinois and overseen by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

Jarrot must have admired Baltimore's modern architecture -- the newly fashionable Federal style homes and buildings, marked by their clean, symmetrical, elegant design which originated in England. This design became closely associated with our new country's pride and growth. When it was time for this future entrepreneur to build his family Mansion years later, he bucked local tradition and used the grander Federal style.

After traveling to different American cities, Jarrot landed in the French village of Cahokia in 1793. During those pre-statehood days, Cahokia was booming, even though it was surrounded by frontier. That frontier was the Northwest Territory and Cahokia was the seat of its government.

It was the perfect place at the perfect time for a man with ambition, like Jarrot. He traded with Native Americans, owned a store and several mills, and became an attorney, judge and captain of the territorial militia. And he bought land -- lots of land, eventually

owning around 25,000 acres, including part of Cahokia Mounds.

### The Lewis and Clark Connection

Jarrot was such a prominent person that in 1803, when U.S. President Thomas Jefferson sent Meriweather Lewis and William Clark to this region to explore it, they first met with two men: John Hay, clerk of the court and postmaster, and Nicholas Jarrot. "They were seeking out these men for assistance,"

says Molly McKenzie, site manager of the Jarrot Mansion. "They needed an introduction and translation services to meet with the French-speaking lieutenant governor in St. Louis, to establish the groundwork to get into the Louisiana Territory and begin their expedition up the Missouri River."

The day after their arrival, they went with Jarrot and Hay to meet Lt. Gov. Carlos de Lassus, who oversaw the French territory that included the Mis-

souri River. De Lassus told them he couldn't let them into the territory until the Louisiana Purchase was signed by the French and United States governments, and advised them to wait at Cahokia. "Remember, Lewis and Clark's was a military expedition, so it wouldn't have been looked upon favorably if the governor had let a military expedition of a foreign power into his territory," McKenzie says.

Jarrot offered Lewis and Clark his land at the mouth of the Wood River as a camp for their men.



*The Jarrot Mansion circa 1894. (Photo courtesy of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency)*

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### The Jarrot Mansion...

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There they established “Camp Dubois,” which means “with river.” Meanwhile, “our historic site and the National Park Service believe that Lewis stayed with Jarrot from December, 1803 through March, 1804, until the Louisiana Purchase treaty was concluded,” McKenzie says. (The expedition began two months later, on May 14, 1804.)

Lewis wouldn’t have stayed in the existing Jarrot Mansion, since it wasn’t built until later. He would have stayed in what was probably Jarrot’s first home in Cahokia, a typical, timber, post-on-sill building with a steep roof.

After the expedition, William Clark became governor of the Missouri Territory and was stationed at St. Louis, where he married and had a family. “There’s every reason to believe Clark and Jarrot maintained a social relationship as the leading entrepreneurial families in the region,” McKenzie adds.

### The Mansion

Not long after Jarrot had arrived in Cahokia, he married a French-Canadian woman, Marie Barbau, who died during childbirth. His second wife, another French-Canadian woman named Julie Vital Beauvais, bore Jarrot six more children and outlived him by 55 years. (She lived to be 95.) A burgeoning family needs a big home, so Jarrot built what became known as the Jarrot Mansion between 1807 and 1810, across the street from his first, timber home where Lewis had stayed.

The brick Mansion was highly unusual for the area, which was full of simpler post-on-sill buildings. Not only did it take years to finish, but it took lots of workmen, many of whom Jarrot sued.

“There were roughly 36 lawsuits over the construction of the house,” according to McKenzie. “Jarrot was a litigious man. I think that speaks volumes to the relationships between the capitalists and the laborers of the time, the migration of laborers through the area, and the exploitation of that labor.

“Disputes got very personal at times,” she adds. Jarrot sued his master carpenter, also an attorney at the courthouse like Jarrot, who lived with Jarrot while working on his Mansion. Most court cases were resolved through mediation and arbitration, according to McKenzie. “Remember, at that time, on the territorial frontier, you’re only one step away from resolving everything with your fists in the streets!” she chuckles. “At least there was a court to sort it out.”

Today, the Mansion is the oldest, standing brick building west of Ohio, according to McKenzie. “The



*The interior of the Jarrot Mansion present day. (Photo courtesy of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency)*

Mansion is a demonstration of the far-reaching influence and extent to which the Federal style was transported and reinterpreted,” said the U.S. Department of Interior when designating the Mansion a National Landmark. “It’s an early, rare, and extant (still existing) example of the Federal style, seated in a region that was detached as a territorial wilderness.” A jewel in the wild, so to speak.

She’s a tough jewel, too. Not only did the Mansion survive three severe earthquakes shortly after it was built (which required immediate repairs), it also withstood at least five floods over nearly 200 years. And it has almost all of its original features.

Those features, some of which have become “character-defining imperfections,” are part of the Mansion’s charm, McKenzie says. “If you want to take a building that’s 200 years old and make it look like it’s new, you have to remove what’s old and replace it with a reproduction of what it was like new. Then you destroy the house in order to fabricate an appearance. We work to make people appreciate the house as it is...”

The Mansion’s “character-defining imperfections,” as McKenzie calls them, include a bumpy floor. “The pine floor, especially in the ballroom, looks like a topographical map because it’s worn down around the hardest part of the pine, which are the knots in the wood,” she says. “People who visited the house 16 to 18 years ago will remember that floor.”

The doorways and some windows aren’t square anymore from 200 years of settlement. There are plaster imperfections and places where visitors can

see the original wallpaper. Leaving all of this intact, let's "the house tell its story, and that's something visitors really appreciate," McKenzie says.

### Visiting the Mansion

The Jarrot Mansion is open to the public by appointment only, or during two days this year. The Mansion will be open from 2 - 5pm on Saturday, February 17, 2007 and from noon to 4pm on Saturday,

September 8, 2007. There is no admission fee and no reservations are necessary, unless you're bringing a large group. The Mansion is located at 124 East First Street in Cahokia.

For more information or to make an appointment to see the Mansion, call Molly McKenzie, site manager, at: 618/332-1782.



## Becoming a State Historic Site

The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) is the state agency responsible for overseeing historic sites in Illinois. It also administers all state and federal historic preservation and incentive programs in the state, including the National Register of Historic Places.

With a history as rich and expansive as Illinois', selecting historic sites for state acquisition must be an interesting and sometimes challenging process. We asked IHPA Director Robert J. Coomer how it works:

**Q:** How are historic sites in Illinois chosen for preservation, i.e. what is the process?

**A:** Acquiring historic sites is typically the result of action by the Governor or General Assembly. We have added ten historic sites in the past 25 years, all of which were the result of initiatives by the Governor or legislators. Operational support for these state sites is provided as part of the state's annual budget. When an inquiry is made about the state acquiring a site, the IHPA evaluates a site based on several criteria. A primary consideration is the history associated with the site - does it have local, regional or state significance? Sites with local or regional significance are most often managed by private, municipal or county entities.

**Q:** Has the state's process of acquiring historic sites changed over time?

**A:** There has been no change in the procedure for sites becoming state historic sites. IHPA has a history matrix system which identifies subject and time period with regard to Illinois' history. The matrix identifies what is currently being addressed with existing historic sites and also determines which portions of Illinois' history are not well represented

in our system. When asked, I tell those interested that our priorities are to add sites that relate history currently not available at any of our existing sites. However, I also stress that we need a commitment of staff and operational funds in order to successfully acquire additional sites.

**Q:** How many historic sites does the IHPA oversee in Illinois?

**A:** IHPA has responsibility for 63 historic sites and memorials located throughout Illinois. We currently have staff at 22 of those sites, and many of the remaining sites operate as a satellite of staffed sites. Thanks to an initiative started by Governor Rod Blagojevich two years ago, we have been able to re-open many of our staffed sites seven days per week during the spring through Labor Day tourist season, something we will continue this year.

**Q:** Can you tell us some sites that the state is currently considering purchasing for preservation?

**A:** We have frequent offers to give or sell sites to the state to be managed as state historic sites. We always caution those making such offers that without additional staff and operational funds, we would be unable to operate or preserve these additional sites. Any proposed new site needs to have a commitment of staff and an annual operating budget, plus any funding for needed construction or rehabilitation work, to ensure its preservation and the quality of its operation and public programming. Although we are not actively seeking to add new sites because of budgetary concerns, I believe the influence of agriculture and mining on the state's history are not well represented in the current IHPA system. Both are important parts of our heritage and their stories deserve to be told.



## WELCOME to the new members of Illinois' General Assembly, congressional delegation, and state offices!

Illinois State Treasurer Alexander Giannoulas, – (D)

Congressman Peter J. Roskam – (R, Congressional District #6)

Congressman Phil Hare – (D, Congressional District #17)

Senator Willie Delgado – (D, District #2)

Senator Michael Noland - (D, District #22)

Senator Matt Murphy - (R, District #27)

Senator Michael Bond - (D, District #31)

Senator Dan Kotowski - (D, District #33)

Senator Linda Holmes – (D, District #42)

Senator David Koehler – (D, District #46)

Senator Randall “Randy” Hultgren – (R, District #48)

Senator Michael W. Frerichs - (D, District #52)

Rep. Luis Arroyo - (D, District #3)

Rep. Esther Golar - (D, District #6)

Rep. La Shawn K. Ford – (D, District #8)

Rep. Gregory Harris - (D, District #13)

Rep. Lisa Hernandez – (D, District #24)

Rep. Elga L. Jefferies - (D, District #26)

Rep. Al Riley –(D, District #38)

Rep. Fred Crespo – (D, District #44)

Rep. Franco Coladipietro – (R, District #45)

Rep. Dennis M. Reboletti - (R, District #46)

Rep. Sandy Cole - (R, District #62)

Rep. Jim Durkin - (R, District #82)

Rep. Jil Tracy - (R, District #93)

Rep. Mike Fortner - (R, District #95)

## Transitions

Former Deputy Governor **Bradley Tusk** resigned from his post in December. Governor Rod Blagojevich named two Deputy Governors to replace him: **Sheila Nix**, his former senior advisor and deputy campaign manager, and **Louanner Peters**, his former deputy chief of staff for social services and deputy campaign manager.

**Lon Monk**, Governor Blagojevich's former Chief of Staff, left his position. **John Harris** was named to replace him.

Former Secretary of the Senate **Linda Hawker** retired in January, 2007 after holding that position for 20 years. She was the first woman in Illinois to serve as Senate Secretary. **Deb Shipley** is the new Secretary.

Also in January, Governor Blagojevich appointed **John Filan**, his former budget director, as Chief Operating Officer. **Ginger Ostro**, former Deputy Director for the governor, has replaced Filan as the new budget director.

**DeShana Forney** became the Executive Director of the Illinois Housing Development Authority in mid-January. Before that she was Governor Rod Blagojevich's Director of Public Safety. Forney's predecessor was **Kelly King Dibble**, who is now with Northern Trust Corporation in Chicago.

Former Illinois Department of Transportation Secretary **Timothy W. Martin** resigned in late January. He had held the post since 2003. **Milt Sees**, IDOT's former Director of Highways, is acting Secretary.

