

Statement of Mayor Paul Hassler, Mayor of Ste. Genevieve Missouri
before the Subcommittee on Federal Lands,
House Committee on Natural Resources, U.S. House of Representatives,
in support of
H. R. 2888 the Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park Establishment Act
November 15, 2017

Chairman McClintock, ranking member Hanabusa, members of the Subcommittee – thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the legislation to establish the Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park as a unit of the National Park Service, to be located in the City of Ste. Genevieve, the first permanent settlement in what is now the great state of Missouri, originally founded by French colonists seeking trade and new opportunity on the western banks of the Mississippi River more than 275 years ago.

The citizens, community leaders and friends of Ste. Genevieve have demonstrated a long standing commitment to historic preservation, cultivating an appreciation and respect for the accomplishments, cultural traditions and architectural legacies of the visionary merchants, traders, farmers and builders who settled there in the 1700's and subsequent immigrants from many countries and cultures.

The French Colonial architectural assets that have been preserved and restored in Ste. Genevieve are unique and impressive structures, rare examples of the French 'vertical log' style of building with upright timbers set into the ground or on a sill. Many of these historic French buildings predate the Louisiana Purchase and the Grand Champ "shomp", the French Colonial agricultural fields, predate the American Revolution and are still in use today as prime agricultural lands. Mixed in among the French buildings are equally historic examples of German American, British American and many other early pioneers who brought their preferred building methods, cultures and cuisines to the territory even before Missouri was founded as a state.

The significance of the French vertical log architecture prompted the 1959 Advisory Board on National Park, Historic Sites, and Buildings and Monuments to designate the city of Ste. Genevieve as a National Historic Landmark District, making it one of the country's first NHL Districts approved by the Secretary of the Interior in 1960. This designation occurred six years before the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 was created. Ste. Genevieve's Historic District contains 29 types of architecture; with some

78% of these buildings listed as contributing significantly to the district's heritage. Several of these historic buildings are operated as historic tour sites by dedicated organizations including the Felix Valle State Historic Site/Missouri State Parks, the National Society of the Colonial Dames in the State of Missouri, the Foundation for Restoration of Ste. Genevieve and the Friends of the Ste. Genevieve Museum Learning Center, which will be expanding in 2018.

Ste. Genevieve's significance as a tourism destination encompasses more than the historic sites and museums. It includes more than 25 locally owned shops, art galleries and many award-winning restaurants, bed-and-breakfast inns, wineries and microbreweries – and even a Tiger Sanctuary. The state of Missouri currently estimates 80,000 tourists visit Ste. Genevieve annually, a figure which has grown steadily over the past five years. If this legislation passes, a conservative estimate would indicate an additional 20,000 visitors to our destination as a result of a National Historical Park Site. All of the surrounding businesses stand to benefit from that increased economic activity.

The importance of this legislation for an economic standpoint is easy to understand. The other vision for this designation and the resulting National Historical Park Site, would be the increase in guidance, resources, planning and interpretation that the NPS would bring as our new partners. Sharing the story of this picturesque village with its French Colonial past and its 'creole' mixture of many cultures is relevant to our future and a proud part of our heritage.

I encourage the committee members to consider passing this legislation without changes, and to work with your colleagues in the Senate to make the Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park a reality, so that future generations can understand and appreciate an important part of the early exploration and settlement of our nation.

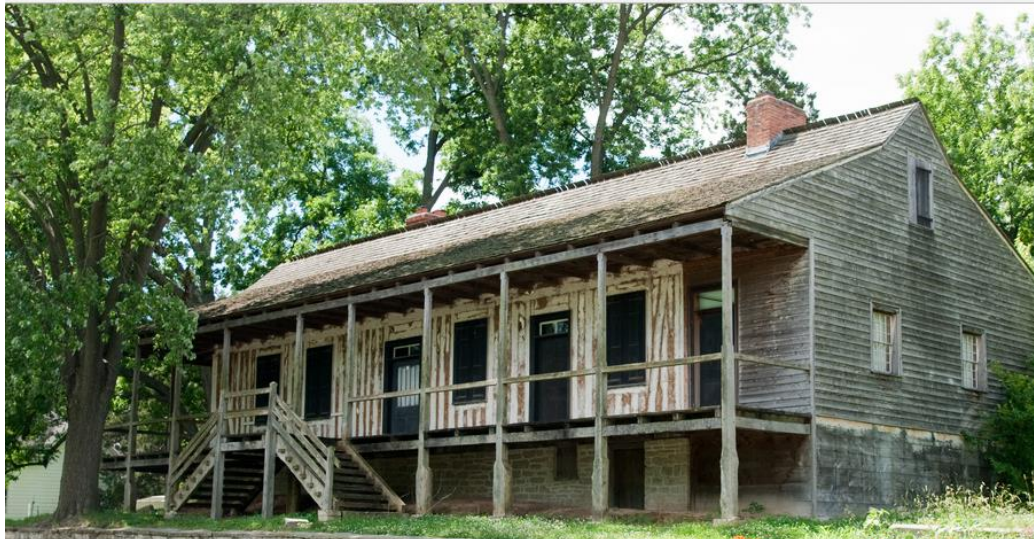
Finally, on behalf of the residents of Ste. Genevieve and the other members of the delegation that came with me today, let me extend an open invitation to the members of this committee to visit and experience Ste. Genevieve. Located only one hour South of St. Louis, blessed with a rich history and a bright future, Ste. Genevieve is truly a gem along the Mississippi River.

The community of Ste. Genevieve would like to thank Representative Jason Smith for sponsoring the legislation and the National Park Service for their report that studied and recommended Ste. Genevieve's historic district for this designation. We look forward to working in collaboration with the NPS leadership as we strive to preserve, interpret, present and enhance the cultural resources of Ste. Genevieve as part of a thriving and

sustainable community, and to connect people to these resources through recreation, tourism and education to an even greater degree in the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

The 1790 Green Tree Taven, recently acquired by a public-private partnership by the Missouri State Parks and 'Les Amis', is an iconic example of the French "vertical log" architecture that has been painstakingly preserved in Ste. Genevieve. This site will be open for touring in 2018.



The interior of the historic Jacques Guibourd House, a French vertical log historic site owned and interpreted by the Foundation for Restoration of Ste. Genevieve, was build circa 1806.



A French Colonial dance demonstration at the Felix Valle State Historic Site, operated by the Missouri State Parks system.



The view of the back porch, or gallerie, at the Louis Bolduc historic site, operated by New France: the Other Colonial America, owned by the National Society of the Colonial Dames in the State of Missouri.



All images courtesy of the Missouri Department of Tourism image gallery for Ste. Genevieve.