

— Fort L’Huillier —

The first Frenchman known to have come to Blue Earth County was Pierre Charles Le Sueur. A valiant French explorer, LeSueur had come to Minnesota as early as 1683 and had spent several years hunting and trading among the Dakotah (Sioux). He met a Dakotah (Sioux) medicine man, who carried with him a small piece of greenish-blue earth. The clay was highly prized by the Indians and it was used as a pigment to paint themselves. They believed it possessed the power to protect them from their enemies.

This blue-green clay interested LeSueur, as he believed it to contain copper. He persuaded the medicine man to let him have a piece of the blue earth. The medicine man told him the clay could be found on the Mahkato River (Blue Earth River), about a mile above the mouth of the St. Henry River (LeSueur River). Whether LeSueur personally inspected the bed of clay and selected a sample himself is not certain.

LeSueur returned to France with the sample of the clay in 1696. He had it assayed by one of the king’s chemists by the name of L’Huillier, who confirmed the clay contained copper. LeSueur secured the royal commission to mine the blue-green clay. It was nearly four years before LeSueur was able to return to mine the valley.

In April 1700, Le Sueur prepared to return to Minnesota along with nineteen men, a shallop (small sailing and rowing vessel) and two canoes. They began their journey near Biloxi, Mississippi at the mouth of the Mississippi River, a journey that took them until September to arrive at St. Anthony Falls. By this time the expedition numbered twenty-eight persons. Among his crew was the ship’s carpenter,