

Michigan Every Day

By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberly

November 7, 1707
First Execution in French Detroit

Not long after the settlement of Detroit, its founder, Antoine Laumet de la Mothe, sieur de Cadillac, was called back to Montreal. In Cadillac's absence, Etienne Benyard, sieur de Bourgmont was placed in charge. His administration proved to be a disaster. Bourgmont mismanaged the city so badly that he feared rebellion and retribution. He subsequently fled. Cadillac investigated the matter upon his return. He sent an officer and 15 men to hunt down Bourgmont and his fellow deserters to arrest them for disobeying military orders.

Bourgmont was thought to be engaged in a scandalous affair with a woman at a small settlement on Lake Erie where the deserters had fled, but when Cadillac's officer attempted to arrest Bourgmont and the others, only one man was found – an associate of Bourgmont named Bartellemy Pichon did La Roze. La Roze was tried before a tribunal that included Cadillac and was found guilty of desertion. His punishment was to be “a avoir la teste cassee jusque a se que mort sensitive,” or death by hanging. La Roze's execution was carried out on Nov. 7, 1707, the first execution to take place in Detroit.