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## FRIDAY'S FILE

**Edward  
Husar**



### Professor debunks Marquette, Joliet discovery of river

**C**arl J. Weber is taking one of the Mississippi River's most esteemed legends and poking it right in the eye.

Weber is a professor of history and humanities at DeVry University in Addison. His subject involves the exploration of the Mississippi in 1673-74 by Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet.

For generations, history books have said Marquette and Joliet were the first Europeans to see and map the Mississippi.

Weber has serious doubts about this. In particular, he contends some hand-drawn maps and narratives attributed to Marquette were fabricated sometime after Marquette died in 1675.

Even more shocking, Weber is convinced Marquette didn't even accompany Joliet on the landmark journey. He believes Marquette's participation was concocted by a cadre of Jesuits to add credence to the claim that Jesuits reached the Mississippi before anybody else, including rival explorer Robert de LaSalle.

Weber lays out his arguments on his Web site ([www.carljweber.com](http://www.carljweber.com)), and he'll talk about his theories during the Conference on Illinois History Oct. 12 in Springfield, hosted by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

In an interview, Weber noted some of the earliest doubts about the legitimacy of Marquette's narratives and maps were raised decades ago by a prominent Quincy College historian,

Father Francis Borgia Steck.

Using material not studied by historians previously, Steck concluded in the late 1920s that one narrative purportedly written by Marquette was probably authored by a Jesuit superior who interviewed Joliet in 1674.

In later years, Steck came to believe Marquette perhaps didn't even make the journey down the Mississippi — a view unpopular with those who hold Marquette in high esteem for his heroic explorations of the New World.

Weber discovered Steck's theories eight years ago while researching LaSalle's explorations. That's when he also learned about the Ellington Stone — a limestone slab found north of Quincy in 1905. The stone, bearing the date 1671, has been the subject of much conjecture. Some speculate it was left by LaSalle as proof he discovered the Mississippi two years before the Marquette-Joliet expedition.

While studying two controversial maps attributed to Marquette, Weber noticed something about Marquette's "autograph map," which surfaced in 1844 in a pile of Jesuit documents. "Before that, there had been one map that was thought to be the 'real' Marquette map (published in 1681), but it got kicked to the curb when this new one emerged," Weber said.

The autograph map not only depicted the Mississippi as Marquette supposedly found it in 1673, but it also showed the Illinois River's contour with uncanny precision. Weber found this odd, since there's no evidence Marquette had any map-making training.

Weber reviewed about 80 other vintage maps and found none before 1813 with the approximate contour of the Illinois River. He concluded the autograph map "was too accurately drawn for its time" and must be a forgery made sometime after 1813.

Weber presented his findings to the Chicago Map Society. Several members supported his theory that the autograph map is a fake "cobbled together by the Jesuits so they could claim they were here first."

Weber realizes this may offend people who revere Marquette's place in history. But he just wants the truth to come out — whatever that truth might be.

Friday's File is a weekly column by Herald-Whig staff writers. Edward Husar can be reached by e-mail at [ehusar@whig.com](mailto:ehusar@whig.com), or by calling (217) 221-3378.