TONTI’S LETTER

Directions: In 1685, Henri de Tonti left a letter for La Salle with one of the Indian tribes living along the Mississippi. La Salle never retrieved the letter, but Bienville did in 1699. Read the following excerpt from that letter and then answer the questions that follow.

Dear Sir:

When I found that the post on which you set up the arms of the King had been knocked down by driftwood, I had others erected on this side, about 7 leagues above the sea; and I left a letter in a tree close by, in a hole on the back side, with a notice above it. The Quumypyssa having danced the calumet for me, I left this letter with them, to assure you of my very humble respects and to let you know that, acting on information I received at the fort — that you had lost a vessel and that Indians had looted your goods and you were fighting with them — upon this information I came downriver with twenty-five Frenchmen, five Chaouenos and five Illynoys. All the nations have danced the calumet for me. These are people that have feared us in the extreme since you destroyed this village. I shall end by telling you that I am greatly grieved that we are going back, having suffered the misfortune of failing to find you after two canoes skirted the coast for 30 leagues toward Mexico and 25 toward the Florida Cape. For want of fresh water the canoes were forced to turn back. Although we have heard no news of you and have seen no signs of you, I am not without hope that God will give you marked success in your business and your undertaking. This I wish with all my heart. You do not have a more faithful servant than I, and I am giving up everything to look for you.

Source: Iberville’s Gulf Journals, translated and edited by Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams (University, Ala.: The University of Alabama Press).

1. What news did Tonti hear that sent him looking for La Salle?

2. How many people were with Tonti when he went to look for La Salle?

3. How far along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico did Tonti’s party travel as they looked for La Salle?

4. Tonti says he is La Salle’s “faithful servant.” How did he prove this?

5. What did he mean by “dance the calumet?”