

The Verendrye  
Overland Quest  
*of the*  
Pacific





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*Statue of La Verendrye on front of Parliament Building, Quebec, Canada*



## THE VERENDRYE EXPEDITIONS IN QUEST OF THE PACIFIC.

*By Grace Flandrau*

Almost two centuries ago a curious procession might have been seen making its way across the North Dakota prairies. It had started from a lonely fur trading post on the Assiniboine river, in what is now Canada, and followed as it traveled south, the valley of the Mouse. Its advent was of more than usual significance, for it marked the beginning of modern history in all the vast region stretching westward from the upper waters of the Mississippi. It was made up of some twenty-five Frenchmen and a host of Assiniboine Indians. Wolfish dogs dragged travois loaded with baggage and kindling wood for such camps as must be made far from growing timber. It was late autumn and the weather was cold. The Frenchmen wore leather garments and caps of fur; buffalo robes were wrapped about the half naked savages.

The leader of this expedition was one of the most knightly figures in the history of American exploration—Pierre Gaultier de la Varennes, and these were the first white men to set foot on the soil of North Dakota.

We are in the habit of considering the Northwestern part of the United States a new country, still only partly settled and offering exceptional opportunity because of its newness. So it is, in the sense of modern agricultural and industrial pursuits; but before that tide of immigration which, in the last decades of the past century began and still continues to pour into it, much of this country had witnessed the passage of a complete era of gripping human experience extending over more than a hundred years of time. This was the era of the explorer, missionary and fur trader.

A variety of motives was behind those early adventures. The leaders who braved the unknown wilder-

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nesses were true discoverers, for whom the mystery of what lay beyond the frontier held an irresistible charm. The ever present danger from savages, the constant struggle against torrential streams and over rough, untrodden trails, and the daily battle for food held no terrors to daunt them. They were content to venture forth, matching their skill and cunning against the elements, the wild animals, and the Indians with whom they had to contend for their very lives. But they could not venture far without a supply of goods for barter and necessary equipment, clothing, and firearms for their party. The financial means for supplying these needs came from two principal sources: one was the merchant class of the eastern Seaboard and Europe; the other was the Church. There was some Government aid, too, mostly by way of trading privileges in the country to be opened up. But whether backed by private capital, church or state, the adventurous fur traders and missionaries, who struggled side by side, were explorers and discoverers primarily, and upon their explorations and discoveries rests their fame, rather than on trade or spiritual conquest.

First the French, and later the English traders penetrated the trackless wilderness of what is now northwestern United States—the country west of the Great Lakes. To compensate for the expense and hazard of the commercial expeditions, there must be promise of large profits and quick returns, hence trade must be in articles of high value, and to make the venture possible at all, the goods to be transported must be light and manageable. Beaver, mink, fox, ermine, and other furs met these requirements. The abundance of supply along the countless lakes and streams, and the eagerness of the Indians for trinkets, beads, bright colored cloths and blankets, knives, guns, and other manufactured articles, not to mention whisky, for which an Indian would barter all he had or ever hoped to have, made the skins procurable at little cost.

As early as 1659, Radisson and Groseillers were along the upper Mississippi and some of its tributaries, speculating on the possibilities of the fur trade in the great region



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to the west of Lake Superior and Lake Michigan. As a result of their investigations in this region, as well as the country north of the Great Lakes and around Hudson Bay, they carried to France and then to England, a most enthusiastic account of the profits to be made. Through the influence of Prince Rupert, they finally succeeded in having two ships, the *Eaglet* and the *Nonsuch*, fitted out in 1668 to make a trial trip from England to Hudson's Bay. Although the *Eaglet* was disabled in a storm and had to turn back, the cargo of the *Nonsuch* was so valuable and profitable that King Charles II, in 1670, issued a charter to the "Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay," the first Governor being Prince Rupert. The Hudson's Bay Company is still in existence and often is referred to as being the oldest company in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Jean Nicolet had been exploring the Western shores of the Great Lakes twenty years before Radisson and Groseillers, but they were the first to push westerly as far as the Mississippi Valley. Following them shortly came Du Luth, Joliet, Le Seur and others lesser known. Along with these earliest traders, and sometimes preceding them, there came also those equally fearless spirits, Allouez, Hennepin, Marquette and the rest, devoting their lives to carrying the Christian faith to the Indians.

Travel in those early days was by canoe and trail, following watercourses almost entirely. It had not yet reached the prairies to any great extent. Portages or "carrys" were necessary around the steepest rapids and from the headwaters of one stream across the "height of land" to the headwaters of another. In this way canoe trips had been made up the St. Lawrence and the Hudson, and across the Great Lakes, or by the Ottawa river. It was known also, before the year 1700, that a feasible route existed westward from Lake Superior via the Kaministiquia river at least as far as Rainy Lake. Indeed, as early as 1689, a trading post had been established at the mouth of the Kaministiquia by Du Luth.

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<sup>1</sup> It is believed that this distinction belongs to the Mining Company of Great Copper Mountain of Sweden, whose charter is dated February 24, 1347.

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But by the end of the century, incessant warfare among the Indians, and the ruinous effect upon authorized trade of the illicit traffic in furs carried on by the *coureurs de bois*, caused this and other remote Western Posts to be abandoned.

It must not be forgotten that New France was at all times subject to the tyrannical domination of the French Court and affairs in the Colony fluctuated according to changing circumstances in Europe. France now became involved in the War of the Spanish Succession and her remote overseas empire underwent a period of complete neglect.

But with the termination of this war and the death of the brilliantly disastrous French king, an important change took place. At the court of the Regent who succeeded Louis XIV, the significance of this wide, savage, little known dependency was again recognized; especially the discovery of an overland route to the Pacific assumed acute importance in the eyes of the statesmen at Versailles.

In 1715 a plan was presented to the Regent for the accomplishment of this great purpose. Du Luth's post at the mouth of the Kaministiquia was to be reopened and two other posts, one on the Lake of the Christineaux (Crees)—now Lake of the Woods—and another on Lake Winnipeg, were to be established. Fur monopolies were to reward the men who built and maintained the posts, but a considerable sum of money was to be provided from the Royal Treasury for the actual expeditions which were to set out from these bases in search of the Western Sea.

This plan was only partially carried out. The Kaministiquia Post was rebuilt by a Canadian officer, the Lieutenant de la Noue, in 1717, and a few years later the Jesuit traveler and historian Charlevoix was sent down the Great Lakes and the Mississippi to seek all possible information as to overland routes to the Pacific.

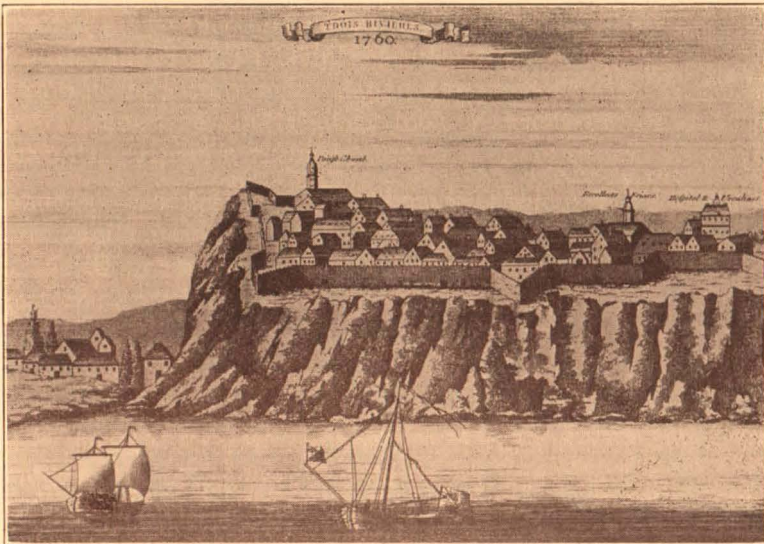
We are not concerned here with the interesting reports and recommendations made by Charlevoix. Although partially carried out, the resultant activities did not promote the western exploration.



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It often seems as if important achievements wait for the men especially fitted—one might almost say inspired or destined to bring them about. At any rate, no progress toward the discovery was made until a Canadian officer, the Sieur de la Verendrye, took up the quest with an ardent enthusiasm which was to endure for many years and meet without flagging many heart breaking difficulties.

Unlike most explorers of those early days who came from France and England seeking adventure in the New World, the Verendryes were natives of North America. About seventy miles above Quebec, the St. Maurice river flows into the St. Lawrence from the North. Near its mouth there are two islands which divide it into three channels. Here in 1617, a post was established and aptly called Three Rivers, and here in 1685, Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de la Verendrye, was born. His mother was the daughter of Pierre Boucher, Governor of Three Rivers and his father was René Gaultier de la Varennes, who succeeded to that office in 1688.



*Three Rivers, Canada, from an old sketch.*

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La Verendrye became a soldier when very young, having entered the army as a cadet at the age of twelve. He was engaged with the French Colonial troops in frontier warfare against the Indians and the English Colonists, but this command was transferred to France, and we find him, in 1707, fighting in Flanders. There he remained until 1711, a French soldier in the war of the Spanish Succession. That he saw desperate service is evidenced by the fact that he was so severely wounded as to be left for dead on the victorious battlefield at Malplaquet.

He married Marie-Anne Dandonneau at Three Rivers in 1712 and lived near there until 1726. During this time he engaged in trading along the St. Maurice river, and had charge, a part of the time, of the post at La Gabelle. From 1726 until 1731 he was in charge of a post on Lake Nipigon, north of Lake Superior. Many Indians from the far west came to this post to trade. Their accounts of the vast country beyond, the river flowing westward into a great lake of bad tasting water (the Pacific, or Great Salt Lake), fired him with zeal to undertake the much talked of discovery of an overland way to the Western Ocean. One of the Indians, Ochagach by name, gave a very particular account of the country and even made a map on birchbark showing the Great River of the West.

By the year 1729, Verendrye's plans had ripened and he made the long journey to Quebec to lay them before the Governor of New France, General Beauharnois. The latter received him with enthusiasm, approved his project and sent an urgent request to the court of Versailles for the necessary official sanction and for financial aid.

But conditions in France had changed. The Regency was at an end. Louis XV had come of age and he and his kingdom were ruled by the aged and parsimonious minister, Cardinal Fleury. France, moreover, was staggering under the crushing load of debt bequeathed by the wars and follies of the previous régimes. Still, the discovery of a highway to the sea, and the vast acquisition of territory consequent to such explorations, offered advantages not to be ignored. In view of this, the court granted to the Sieur de la Veren-



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drye its official permission to make the exploration at his own expense, and to take possession of all newly discovered territories in the name of the King. In return he was to be granted exclusive fur trading privileges in the countries visited.

Naturally, Verendrye's resources were not great enough to finance such an undertaking, but with this fur trading monopoly as a bait, he was able to secure the backing of certain Montreal merchants. They cared nothing for his route to the Pacific but from reports of the vast region into which he was going, they believed that these virgin hunting grounds would yield rich returns and were willing to advance the necessary funds.

The plan was to establish posts for trade with the Indians, and to send the peltries so obtained to Montreal each summer. That Verendrye regretted the necessity which obliged him to place the success of his mission at the mercy of these associates is apparent from his journal. He speaks of the arrangement with a misgiving which was only too well justified by events.

In the spring of 1731, the party set out by canoe from Montreal. It consisted of Verendrye, three of his four sons, his nephew, the Sieur de la Jemmeraye—a Canadian officer who had been stationed among the Sioux on Lake Pepin—and some fifty Canadian voyageurs. Verendrye chose a new and better route than that previously taken. It was known as the Grand Portage route, and followed Pigeon river, the great chain of lakes and Rainy river, along what is now the northern boundary of Minnesota for 300 miles; it became a regular thoroughfare for the fur companies and continued so for more than a century.

The Verendrye party remained in these regions for five years before undertaking their celebrated trips south and west into what is now United States territory. During this time important things were accomplished; fur trading posts were established and maintained far to westward of any previous settlement; Fort Pierre on Rainy Lake; Fort St. Charles on the Lake of the Woods; Fort Maurepas on

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Winnipeg, then known as Lake Bourbon; Fort La Reine where Portage la Prairie now is; Fort Rouge on the Red River of the North near the mouth of the Assiniboine, the present site of the City of Winnipeg; and two more remote posts, not long occupied and of disputed location; Fort Dauphin, probably on Lake Manitoba, and another on the Saskatchewan.

Meantime Verendrye did not lose sight of the political purpose of the expedition, which was to extend French influence with the Indians; or of his darling project to discover an overland way to the Pacific. He established and solidified relations with many tribes of Assiniboines and Crees and assiduously strove to gain from them further knowledge of the regions to the west, still entirely unknown to white men.

During these five years he encountered such hardship, disappointment and disaster as would have turned from the task any spirit less gallant than La Verendrye's. But to him the undertaking was not a task, it was a crusade—a passion which misfortune could not discourage or overcome. His partners failed time after time to send out the trade goods and supplies fatally essential to these lonely outposts plunged so deep in the wilderness; Verendrye's nephew, La Jemmeraye died on a journey from Maurepas to Fort St. Charles and his oldest son, Jean Baptiste was killed by the Sioux.

In 1736 a flotilla of three canoes had set out for Michilimackinac to obtain supplies for the destitute forts. Verendrye's son and the Jesuit missionary, Father Aulneau accompanied the expedition. When not more than 20 leagues from the fort the small band was ambushed by a Sioux war party and every member of the company was killed. Shortly before some of this tribe had been fired upon and killed by the Crees at Fort St. Charles and their people were taking the inevitable revenge. This hideous occurrence took place on an island in the Lake of the Woods, since known as Massacre Island. "I lost my son," Verendrye writes tersely, "the Reverend Father and all my Frenchmen, which I will regret all my life."



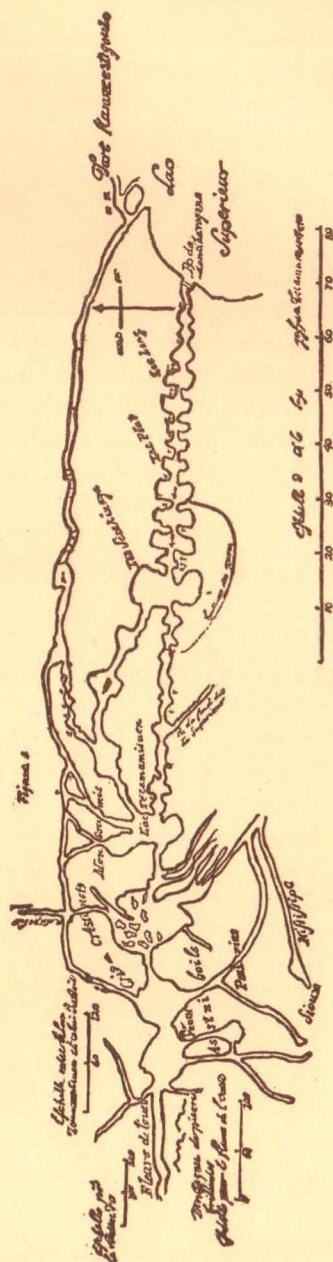
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In the autumn of 1738, Verendrye was able to undertake the first of those important journeys southward which he had contemplated with eagerness for some time. He had learned from the Indians of a certain people known as the "Mantannes" (Hidatsa), who lived on the Missouri and who, it was said, knew the way to the sea and would guide him to it.

In October with two of his sons and a party of twenty men, Verendrye set out to visit the Mandans. It was a year of protracted drought, and the streams were lower than usual. On this account practically the entire journey was made from Fort La Reine overland, following generally a southwesterly direction until a point was reached near the south bend of the Mouse river loop, not far from the present town of Verendrye, North Dakota. There Verendrye found the first Mandan village and from there he sent one of his sons and a Frenchman to other villages on the Missouri.

It is not difficult to imagine with what interest the Frenchmen observed this interesting people who differed so materially from any Indians they had known. Here was no temporary cluster of bark huts or leather lodges, but a permanent fortified village of solid dome-like huts built of mud, their roofs crowded with women and children amazed no doubt at these fabulous strangers from the north. Verendrye had been told that the Mandans were not Indians but a white race of unknown origin. He was disappointed to find this not to be true. He speaks of them, however, as "mixed black and white"; thought them shrewder and more prosperous than Indians he had known and was especially impressed by their superior fortifications "which are not Indian." And most significant of all, in the light of what has since developed, he found that they cultivated the soil and had lavish accumulations of corn, pumpkins and beans, great enough not only to provide for the needs of the community, but to be used as a medium of exchange with other tribes, "the money," he writes, "of the country." Verendrye's account of the Mandans, which is the earliest

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Carte tracée par le Sauvage Ochagach et autres, laquelle a été dressée dans les pays des Français et des Anglais dans le Fort St. Louis.

Map that Chief Ochagach drew on birch bark for Verendrye at post on Lake Nipigon



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we have and of particular interest for that reason, is appended to this narrative.

He remained among them for several weeks and in January (1739) returned to Fort La Reine leaving two men behind to learn the language and customs of this people. As usual, he found his posts beset with all manner of difficulties and as the season advanced was confronted with the usual failure of supplies. At last it became necessary for him to undertake once more the long journey by canoe to Montreal. He arrived in August, 1740, only to find that the incomprehensible envy and calumny which his efforts in behalf of New France had ever aroused, had culminated in a law suit. Action had been brought against his posts and accusations of greed and the dishonest use of his trading privileges to amass a private fortune had been sent to the French court. To this slander Verendrye merely replied: "If more than forty thousand livres of debt which are hanging over me are an advantage, I flatter myself with being very rich."

Beauharnois remained at all times La Verendrye's staunch friend and supporter and this loyalty was a great consolation to the brave adventurer who admits himself all but overwhelmed with grief at the bitter and unceasing attacks made upon him. He did not, however, turn for an instant from his self-appointed mission, although he had now made up his mind to send his sons on the forthcoming journey toward the Pacific, reserving for himself the arduous task of maintaining the posts they had established on this savage frontier.

At last in 1742 the long anticipated expedition toward the western sea was undertaken. Early in the summer of that year two of his sons, accompanied by only two Canadians, left Fort La Reine on the journey which has become of paramount importance in the annals of north-western explorations.

Their first objective was the Mandan village visited in 1738, where they expected to obtain guides. The party left Fort La Reine, followed Mouse river past the present town of Verendrye to the Missouri. The Mandans they found

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knew nothing of the sea, but they supplied the Frenchmen with two men who would conduct them westward to a tribe obscurely referred to as the Horse Indians (Cheyennes or possibly Aricaras)—a people who, it was believed, had knowledge of the Western Ocean.

The small party traveled for twenty-one days through a country untenanted except for the endless variety of game that pastured on the rich herbage of the plain and the clouds of water fowl that rose on whirring wings from lake and stream. Then they came upon the human occupants of this primeval land, and it was fortunate for the small and defenseless band of Frenchmen that these Indians had not yet learned the ways of white men. It is significant and interesting to compare the experience of the Verendryes with that of later expeditions. Without exception the numerous tribes they encountered received them with courtesy, kindness and often with rejoicing.

They passed from tribe to tribe seeking the information they required, but none could give it. At last they joined a vast horde of Bow Indians (probably of same racial stock as Horse Indians) who were marching westward to make war upon the Snakes. Of this disinterested helpfulness of these savages the travelers speak with special enthusiasm.

Just where the party went is uncertain. Possibly they followed the Missouri as far as the Great Falls or even to the Gate of the Mountains (near the present site of Wolf Creek on the Great Northern Railway). Some authorities believe that they kept on the bench between the Little Missouri and the Yellowstone, eventually reaching a point near Custer's battlefield; others, that they traveled no farther west than the Black Hills. In any event, on January 1, 1743, the brothers saw snow-clad peaks either of the Rockies, some eastern range of the Rocky Mountain system, or it may be merely of the Black Hills.

They desired eagerly to press on, feeling sure that just beyond the shining barrier they would at last look down upon the object of their long endeavor. But the war strategy of the Indians prevented them from proceeding.



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The Snakes were a dangerous foe and the Bows, finding the camps of the enemy deserted, feared they had circled to the rear and would fall upon the women and children of the attacking party who had been left some distance back.

In spite of the protests of their chief (whose loyal care of the Frenchmen is worthy of record) they retreated in disorder. The baffled explorers had no choice but to return. They proceeded eastward and finally reached the Missouri at what is now Fort Pierre, South Dakota. There on a high bluff overlooking the Missouri, the elder son, the Chevalier, relates that he buried a lead plate, and there, by remarkable good fortune, it was found. In February, 1913, a school girl discovered it half buried in the ground where it had lain almost exactly 170 years. On one side a formal Latin text had been engraved. From this inscription we learn that the tablet was prepared for an expedition to have been undertaken by the elder son the previous year, but which did not eventuate. The other side had not been inscribed in advance. It was to receive a memorandum when deposited. It is this legend, rudely traced, and very much misspelled, which is of greatest interest, and which has given antiquarians a delightful opportunity for irreconcilable controversy. In spite of differences of opinion as to the precise meaning of certain abbreviations, it is evident that the plate was handed on to the younger sons who conducted the expedition of 1742, and was deposited by them on the 30th of March, 1743.

M. Jusserand was French Ambassador in Washington at the time the plate was recovered. He was deeply interested and moved by this ancient record chance had so curiously brought to light. One of the inscriptions was in his own language; the gallant, far-off adventure recorded was the deed of his countrymen—the first identified white men to appear upon the primordial scene, the first trickle of the civilization which was to overflow and make its own a vast and important area of the country to which he was accredited. He submitted photographs of the plate to specialists in Paris who made one of the various interpretations of the obverse text.

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After depositing this tablet the explorers returned by way of the Mandan villages, thence down the Mouse River, past the present town of Verendrye to Fort La Reine.

The Verendryes, father and sons, have much claim to fame as pathfinders of the Northwest. They discovered the Red River of the North, the Assiniboine and Mouse rivers, and the Upper Missouri—that is, to say, the great plains country of northwestern Minnesota, Manitoba, North Dakota, northern South Dakota and, possibly, eastern Montana. They established a post (Fort La Reine) 500 miles farther west than any had been before. In their quest for a route to the Western Ocean, they went more than half the distance from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and it was fifty years later that MacKenzie pushed on across the remaining distance.

Great as were their achievements, more important still was their influence in hastening other explorations, as reports of their exploits spread among the trading posts and camps. The only recompense La Verendrye received from the Government which, at no expense to itself, had profited so greatly by his services, was the gift of the Order of St. Louis. This honor reached him shortly before his death in 1749 when he was about to set out once more for the far west. His sons were brazenly robbed, not only of the posts they had built, but of supplies with which they had stocked these posts, by the authorities who succeeded La Galessonière, the able and honest official who came into power for a short time after Beauharnois. All three sons were military officers. Pierre Gaultier, a lieutenant, was drowned off the coast of Cape Breton in 1761, when the *L'Auguste* was wrecked; François the Chevalier gave his life for New France at the siege of Quebec; Louis Joseph died in 1775.

It is interesting to follow the development which has taken place in the territory first explored by the Verendryes.

When the four young Frenchmen left the Mandan villages they entered a virgin land of incalculable possibilities. They had seen corn, pumpkins, beans and melons



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flowering under the rude implements of the Mandan women—a hoe made from the shoulder blade of an elk, and a pointed stick hardened by fire; they found rich prairies of waving grass furnishing sustenance to massive herds of buffalo, to deer and antelope and, pasturing on the highlands, they saw multitudes of elk and mountain sheep.

But they were Frenchmen; they gave little thought to this patent fertility, except as a means of sustenance in their eternal quest for new horizons. The history of the French in America is a history of exploration. The Anglo-Saxons were primarily settlers, the French were not, and in this failure they laid the foundation for their own elimination from the vast new world they were the first to penetrate.

Nor were the early adventurers alone in ignoring the potentialities of the rich lands stretching from the Mouse River and great western bend of the Missouri almost to the Rocky Mountains.

When the fur traders had cleared the streams of beaver and the plains of buffalo, the region that is now the Dakotas and Montana was regarded for the most part as a useless waste to be got over as quickly as possible in the rush to the Pacific. When the time came to build railroads, it was believed that they must be carried by heavy Government subsidies over territories from which they could derive little revenue. In fact from the time of the Verendryes to that of a very different pathfinder, James J. Hill—the builder of the last of the great pioneer roads—this view largely prevailed.

Mr. Hill was an Anglo-Saxon, not a Frenchman. He, too, was lured by distant horizons, but he was willing to proceed toward them slowly, sending deep roots into the soil as he advanced. Where crops had thriven under the rude culture of the Indian women, agriculture on a far greater scale, would flourish under the advanced methods of civilization; where buffalo, antelope and deer, elk and mountain sheep had found ample sustenance, the livestock of the pioneer would live and multiply. Mr. Hill proposed

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to blaze a new overland trail to the Pacific, but it was to advance scarcely more rapidly than the settlements which could support it.

It must be remembered that there was only left for him the most northerly route, the one least likely, in the unseeing eyes of his time, to support such an enterprise as he contemplated. Time has demonstrated the accuracy of his judgment. The Great Northern Railway, built without Government aid, both created and has been supported by the agricultural and stock raising communities of a country carelessly condemned as worthless. A vast and prosperous population has followed the shadowy footsteps of those early Frenchmen and the faith and practical sagacity of a great American.



JOURNALS OF THE LA VERENDRYE TRIPS TO THE  
MANDAN VILLAGES ON THE MISSOURI RIVER  
IN 1738-39 AND TO THE FOOTHILLS OF  
THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS IN 1742-43

INTRODUCTION

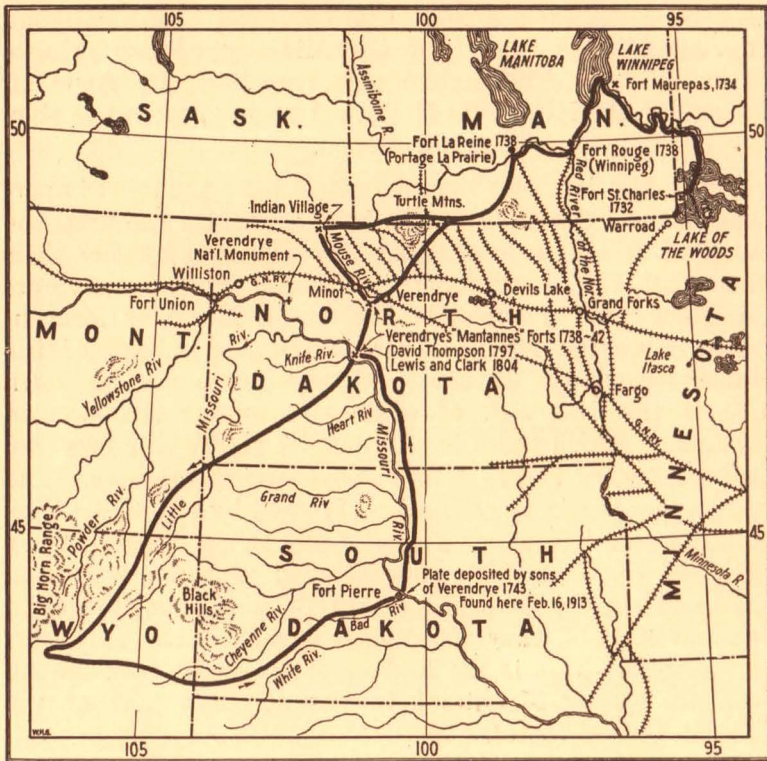
The first of these journals was translated from the French by Douglas Brymner, Archivist, and is reprinted by permission, from a Report on Canadian Archives, being an Appendix to Report of the Minister of Agriculture, Ottawa, 1889. The second was translated by Anne H. Blegen, of the Minnesota Historical Society, from the Margry Papers, hereinafter mentioned.

The two journeys here described were the most important of their efforts to reach the Pacific. On the first, the story of which is in the narrative written by the elder Verendrye, they came from the frontier trading post, Fort La Reine (now Portage la Prairie, in Manitoba), southwesterly up the Mouse River to the south bend of the Mouse River loop, thence southwesterly to the Missouri. This is the first visit of white men among the Mandan Indians of which there is any definite record and occurred sixty-six years before Lewis and Clark were there. The next was made in the winter of 1742-43 by two of Le Vèrendrye's sons, Chevalier Francois and Louis Joseph. They revisited the Mandans and continued southwesterly until they reached the foot hills of the Rockies from where, on January 1, 1743, they reported seeing snow covered peaks to the west. This is the first report of white men having seen the Rocky Mountains in the northern part of the present United states.

An accident to their astrolabe prevented the observation of latitude on this trip, so their exact course is not known, but fortunately a lead plate, which they buried March 30, 1743, was found in 1913 on the bank of the Missouri River at Fort Pierre, South Dakota. That discovery assisted greatly in clearing up the uncertainty of their route, although discrepancies in dates and distances render

## INTRODUCTION

it impossible to state positively whether their most westerly point was in southeastern Montana, northeastern Wyoming, or southwestern South Dakota.



*Map of approximate route of Verendrye and his sons*



JOURNAL OF THE FIRST EXPEDITION OF PIERRE  
GAULTIER, SIEUR DE LA VERENDRYE TO THE  
MANDAN VILLAGES ON THE MISSOURI

(Translation from the French by Douglas Brymner,  
Archivist)

Edited by Anne H. Blegen, Minnesota Historical Society

Journal in the form of a letter, from the 20th of July, 1738, date of my departure from Michilimakinak, to May 1739, sent to the Marquis de Beauharnois, Commander of the Military Order of St. Louis, Governor and Lieutenant General of the whole of New France, lands and country of Louisiana, by his very humble servant La Vèrendrye, lieutenant of a company of the detachment of the marine in Canada, commissioned by his orders for the discovery of the Western Sea.

I had the honor, Sir, last year to notify you of my departure from Michilimakinak in six canoes, twenty-two men, so fitted out as to be capable of making great speed. I reached the flat lands on the morning of the first of August, the twelfth day after leaving. I stopped there about three hours to speak to the Indians as your representative. I found there only the chief of the Gamanestigouya, a few old and a few young people. I had already known that they had all left to go among the Sioux. I caused to be assembled what men there were, made them a present of tobacco and wheat, which they value more than merchandise, which is given to them cheap. I began my speech by finding fault with them for going to war against the word they had given me last year when passing among them, to undertake nothing till my return; that I brought them your word that you were not for the present inclined to have war; that every one should keep quiet on his lands; that you had your reasons for this; you would have them warned if you required their services. I then communicated news about which they are very curious.

The chief answered me at once: My father, be not vexed with us; parties have been raised against our will. It is the Canard (Duck, Indian name of M. LaPlante) who wished

it, to tell the truth, speaking with fine presents from our father, which thou seest here with us. We did not wish to listen, expecting thy return; we are not children to have two words; thou hast been long with us; thou shouldst know us; we have always been attached to our father; we shall always be so. I encouraged them in these good dispositions, to listen after this only to chiefs entrusted with your orders, to hunt well in order to supply the wants of their families, that the French would bring your bounty to them upon their own land. I bade them adieu, wishing to take advantage of the good weather for the rest of the day.

I arrived on the 5th at Gamanestigouya.<sup>2</sup> I had your orders published and left a copy with the French who keep the fort, concerning that post and that of Tekamamihouenne, to be handed to M. de la Marque, who was to arrive there at an early day. I left on the morning of the 6th, and went to the Lake Tekamamihouenne.<sup>3</sup> On the 22nd of the present month I found a war chief, Monsony, with a small band, who was expecting me near the little strait on the lake. They begged me to camp early to give them the news. I did so and made them a present in your name, read to them the replies which you had had the goodness to make to their speeches to keep quiet for the present, to take good care of their lands, so that the French, who came from so long a distance to supply their wants, should always find the road open. The chief answered me: I thank thee, my father, for having had pity on us. I will carry the news to all our people, who are gone for wild rice; I will make them joyful at thy return and in relating to them the will of our father, with the words thou hast brought and the account which the old man has given me, as well of our father as of all he has seen below. Thou wilt find many people at thy Fort of Lake of the Woods<sup>4</sup>, all the chiefs expect thee. In finishing my speech to them, I recommended them to continue faithful to the French, not to forget your words, to hunt well, so as to satisfy the traders. He answered with

<sup>2</sup> Site of present Ft. William.

<sup>3</sup> Probably Dog Lake.

<sup>4</sup> Fort St. Charles.



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loud acclamations of gratitude, assuring me that he would never forget all that I had told him. I did my best to encourage him and went to Fort St. Charles, Lake of the Woods, on the 31st.<sup>5</sup>

I did not find Lacolle, chief of the Monsony; I sent to notify him. Wishing to speak to all the chiefs together, I deferred speaking to them till the 3rd of September, when I collected all the headmen in my room and made a present in your name to the three chiefs, Lacolle, Lamicoine and leChenail, all of whom I have several times spoken in my previous journals. I began by the answers to their speeches, which you had had the goodness to make, emphasizing strongly each paragraph, in order to make them understand the (kindness) you felt for them; that all (you) had allowed them was well assured to them, so long as they on their side should be obedient to your word. I knew that the old man whom I had brought with me, entrusted with their words, although with empty hands, had made a faithful report to them of the kindness (you) had shown him; he constantly sang your praises; that they had a good father, whom they should please by doing his will. Lacolle answered for all the others, that he did not cease to weep for my son and all the French men; that the lake was still red with their (blood), which called for vengeance, which he had not been able to take as he wished. It was not for them, people without intellect, to ask your reasons for keeping them quiet for the present; that they were obedient children; agreed to your will; would keep their lands as you ordered them, still hoping that you would obtain vengeance at some future time for the miserable stroke the Sioux had made on their lands. However, you were the master to punish or to pardon; that he thanked you in the name of all and prayed you to acknowledge them as your true children; that they would always be faithful to us; you ordered them to keep their lands; that was to their interest.

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<sup>5</sup> Of August, 1738.

We are indebted to Chas. E. De Land, President South Dakota Historical Society 1910-1913 for these explanations.

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Lamicoine gave profuse thanks for the great care I had had of his brother. It was from the old man whom I had brought with me that he had learned he would never see him more, begging me to assure you of his gratitude; that whilst he lived he would not forget the good you had done to his brother; that it would be for him and his to be always attached to the French; that my return had brought joy to all; that their joy would not be long continued, as according to what his brother had told him, I was going to winter a long way off; that he prayed me not to abandon them; if I wished to go far away from them, to leave one of my children; that he wished it was in his power to follow me; that he would do so heartily; that his brother and his nephew who expected to follow me, would take his place. I encouraged them to keep their word and to hunt well to supply the wants of their families; that if I was going further on; it was because it was your will; I wished to increase the number of your children; that I was leaving in my place my eldest son, who was adopted by their nation and would inform them of your words. The council ended with many thanks. I then thought of preparing to leave; had my son received as commandant in my absence, and had an order published. Taking the two others with me, I deferred leaving until the 11th of September, waiting for Mr. la Marque, to whom I had promised not to hasten so as to give him the opportunity of joining me, he having promised me at Michilimakinak to make haste, so that he might come with me in the autumn for the discovery of the Mandans, who were formerly called Ouachipouanne, according to the Monsony, Courtchouatte, Crees, Mandans: these are the names of the nation.

Seeing on the 10th of the month that he had not arrived, and everything being in good order, as well at the fort as for my departure, I left on the 11th, as I have already stated, hoping that he would join me soon to come with me. I arrived at Fort Marpas (Maurepas)<sup>6</sup> on the 22nd, where I had the arms examined, published your orders concerning the said post, gave a copy of it to Mr. Lari-

<sup>6</sup> At mouth of Winnipeg River.



vière, clerk to these gentlemen, and selected five of his men to come with me. As I had agreed, I left nine men with Mr. de Larivière. I went to the fork of the Asiliboiles (Assini-boine)<sup>7</sup> on the 24th, where I found ten Cree huts and two war chiefs, who expected me, with a quantity of meat, having been notified that I was coming. They begged me to agree to remain, to have the pleasure of seeing us and of giving us something to eat. I agreed, being happy to speak to them. I sent for the two chiefs to my tent. I knew that they went every year to the English; it had been reported to me that there was one who had received a belt from the English to play a bad trick on the French. I told the one who had been accused, everything that had been said of him. I had the honor of writing to you last year from Michilimakinak of the rumors current on the subject. He answered: My father, I know there are many envious men who speak against me; I have not been to the English for more than six years. I sent, indeed, during the last years that the French abandoned us, and it was necessary to have our wants supplied. Ask those who have been on my side, who are here, if they heard of any such accusation. I can assure thee the Englishman is quiet and does not speak of the French. They are liars who have set these rumors afloat. Thou wilt know the truth in time. So long as the French hold our lands here, we promise thee not to go elsewhere.

I made then a small present to encourage them to keep their word; I told them everything I had said to the others, your orders as well as the news. Our old man then gave a great account of his journey, which afforded them much pleasure. The chief whom I had accused said to me: My father, we thank thee that thou hast spoken well below to our father for us; we now know that he has had pity on us by sending to us Frenchmen on our lands to supply our wants; we will keep quiet as he desires; the Sioux should do the same; our hearts are still sick for thy son who came the first to build a fort on our lands; we loved him much; I have once already been at war to avenge him; I have destroyed

<sup>7</sup> Site of present city of Winnipeg.

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only ten huts, which is not enough to satisfy us; but now our father has ordered us to keep quiet; we shall do so. He then asked me where I intended to go; that the river Assiniboine was very low; that we ran the risk of making our canoes useless; that we were going among people who did not know how to kill the beaver, and covered themselves only with ox skins, which we did not need. They were a people without intelligence, who had never seen the French and could not know them.

I answered that I wished to go in the autumn among that nation of whites who had been so much spoken of; that I would ascend the river as far as I could to put myself in a position to make my journey according to your orders; that I wished to increase the number of your children, to teach the Assiniboinés to hunt and to give them intellect, and that next year I would go elsewhere. Thou dost run a great risk, my father, that the canoes will leave empty. There are many Assiniboinés, it is true, but they do not know how to hunt beavers; I wish that thou shouldst give them intelligence.

I left on the 26th. My old man asked me to remain a few days with the Crees, who urgently asked him to remain with them and that he would rejoin me shortly. As he had his vehicle I consented willingly, and recommended him to encourage these people to hunt well, to carry provisions to the French forts and to keep their word not to go to the English. He told me that he would speak to them as well as he could, and that he hoped I would be satisfied. I found the water very low, there having been no rain last summer. The river flows from the west, winding about greatly, wide, with a strong current and many sand bars; it is lined with fine woods on the banks and the prairies extend beyond sight, through whose extent are many cattle and deer. I chose to go by land, following the prairie; with the useless people in the canoes. The road is much shorter by the prairies; several points of the river are cut at once, and a straight road can be kept; game is along the river in great abundance.



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I had not marched long without meeting several Assiniboinés, who, having been warned that I was ascending their river, came to meet me. I still kept on my road, deferring to speak to them on their own lands. The company was increasing daily. I marched six days, making good use of the time. On the evening of the 2nd of October the Indians notified me that I could not ascend the river further, the water being too low; that my canoes could only pass the woods, provided all the people were at the portage<sup>8</sup> which goes to the Lake of the Prairies<sup>9</sup>, for this is the road of the Assiniboinés in going to the English.<sup>10</sup> Being here thou wilt stop everyone; thou wouldest go to the Mandans; thou art close to the road.

I consulted what we should do, believing that we were about sixty leagues from the fork by water and about thirty-five to forty by land, by taking the prairies. All present, seeing that we could not pass further and that we ran a great risk of damaging our canoes so that we could not leave, being in a place without resources for repairing them, having neither gum nor resin, felt that it was more suitable to remain in a place where there was plenty and which was on the road to go to the English, that we had reason to expect many people and all persons who certainly do not go to Fort Maurepas. I resolved on the morning of the 3rd to select an advantageous place to build a fort, which I made them begin immediately. I still hoped that M. de la Marque would come to join me. If I had gone higher up he would not have been able to find me. I spoke to the Assiniboinés while they were building energetically, I assembled them near my tent, made them a present in your name, of powder, ball, tobacco, axes, paring knives, awls, the whole much valued among those who are in great need of everything. They received me with great ceremony; many with tears in testimony of their joy in exchange for their griefs. I received them among the number of your children, giving them afterwards full instructions respecting your orders, repeating them several times

<sup>8</sup> Site of present city of Portage la Prairie.

<sup>9</sup> Lake Manitoba.

<sup>10</sup> At Hudson's Bay

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in order that they might comprehend. That appeared to give them great pleasure.

They thanked me greatly, promising to do wonders. I recommended them to inform the Assiniboinés of the Red River that there were Frenchmen among them; that the French would not abandon them; so long as they had intelligence they ought to know the kindness you had for them by sending them what they needed from such a distance; that their relative, the old man, whom I had brought with me, could tell them what had taken place with us daily. He, in truth, spared nothing to inform them and to teach them what it is to have to do with the French; all ended in great weeping and thanks. Some days later, I secured a guide whom, with others, I paid to accompany me on my search and to carry the baggage.

On the evening of the 9th, Mr. de la Marque with the Sieur Nolant, his brother, and eight men in two canoes arrived, which gave me much pleasure. I testified by gratitude to Mr. de la Marque for the trouble he had taken to bring us reinforcements; I questioned him if he had left many people at Fort St. Charles, Lake of the Woods, and whom he had left at [Fort] Maurepas. He answered me that he had left eight men at the first with two traders, having brought all the canoes he had, not because he hoped to be able to load them, since he had not been able to bring the heavy goods, but that he had promised he would join me, and did not wish to break his word; that I required people for my expedition, that he had brought them, without injury to himself, not requiring his people during the winter. I thanked him, telling him that if he joined our expedition he would be saved, himself and all his people, the expense until they returned. He told me he wished to share the expense. I answered that that could not be, it was enough for me that he supplied the men and himself without the necessity of sharing the expense, which I had already provided for. I gave him room, at his request, in my fort to build a house to lodge all his people.

On the return from our journey on the 15th of the



month, the fort and houses being completed, I thought of making everything ready for our departure. Mr. de la Marque told me he had brought Mr. de Louvière to the Fork with two canoes to build a fort there for the accommodation of the people of the Red River. I approved of it, if the Indians were notified. On the 16th I had the drum beat to arms, to pass every one in review and to select such as were necessary for my expedition. After the inspection of the arms, I published your orders regarding the post; I selected twenty men, ten of Mr. de la Marque's and ten of mine. I warned them to keep themselves in readiness for the 18th, gave them a pound of powder and twenty balls each, shoes, an axe, a kettle to be used on the journey; gave to each man, French and Indian, a four-pound bag of powder, sixty balls, two fathoms of tobacco; some small wares, more for present necessities than anything else, as awls, gun-flints, gun-screws and steels. I had put into a leather bag what I wanted for present use, that a wife of our guide carried for me, and all that was of use for myself, my servant and my slave carried. That settled, I had Sanschagrin received as commander in my absence, as a man of wise and prudent mind, who fills the office of sergeant. Taking my two children with me, I left him two soldiers and ten hired men as a guard for the fort, and then give him orders and instructions in writing of all he was to do during my absence.

On the 18th<sup>11</sup>, all being in good order in the fort, I made all our people set out, with orders to encamp not far off, and afterwards to leave with Mr. da la Marque about noon, encouraging the Indians whom I left at the fort to hunt cattle<sup>12</sup>, the beaver not being yet good, to furnish provisions to the French whom I left. Our small band consisted of 52 persons, twenty hired men, all good men, Mr. de la Marque, his brother, my two children, my servant and a slave, the rest Indians. The third day after leaving, a village of forty Assiniboine huts joined us, with the intention of speaking to me. The chief asked me to grant him the favor of remaining for the day, to have the pleasure of see-

<sup>11</sup> Of October.

<sup>12</sup> Buffalo.

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ing us and of showing their hospitality. Everything was ready for receiving us. I agreed, on the solicitation of our guide. I made him a small present of powder, and made the same statement to him as I had done to all the others. He testified much gratitude, promising wonders; that he would carry provisions to the French, and would hunt to the utmost, so as to supply their wants.

On the 21st we continued our route, as far as the first mountain<sup>13</sup>, twenty-six leagues distant from our fort, still to the south by south-west; from the first mountain to the second<sup>14</sup> west and by north-west, 24 leagues. From the point of the second mountain to go direct to the Mandans we must keep to the southwest. But we were obliged to do much more, as on a road which is two leagues in a straight line, we made three or four from our fort. It may have been a hundred and twenty leagues to the west south-west that our guide lengthened the road by from fifty to sixty leagues and a number of stops to which we were obliged to agree, making us spend the finest weather in autumn staying still, so that we took forty-six days to go a distance we should have done easily in sixteen or twenty days at the most. We had, perforce, to have patience; all that I could say to our guide to make him hasten was to no purpose. He made us take for the height of happiness twenty-two leagues of a road which was taking us off our route, to get to a village<sup>15</sup> of a hundred and two huts which he had gone to look for, and had brought us eight men, whom the chiefs of the village had sent to beg me to join them, that they were all inclined to accompany me to the Mandans, telling me that the Sioux often visited in that direction and that I had need of an escort. We had to make up our minds to go there.

We arrived there on the 18th of November, in the afternoon. A number of messengers had gone before us and we were received with great joy. They led us, Mr. de la

<sup>13</sup> Probably the Pembina Mountains.

<sup>14</sup> Turtle Mountains.

<sup>15</sup> This Indian village is supposed to have been on the west side of the Mouse River just south of the international boundary in North Dakota.



Marque, his brother and my children, into the hut of a young chief, where every one was ready to receive us. They made a great feast for us and for all our people, who did not want for a good appetite. On the 19th I assembled the chiefs and head men of the village in the hut where I was, I gave them a present in your name of powder, balls, knives, and tobacco, telling them that I received them into the number of your children; that if they had sense you promised not to abandon them; that the French were now established on their lands and would provide for all their wants; that they must hunt the beaver and keep to their lands; that you did not wish for war at present, desiring to make all the lands tranquil, so that all our children might live in peace, of whom I was increasing the number every day. I made the same recital to them that I had made to all the others. There was a great thankfulness, with many tears and ceremonies, by passing their hands over my head, taking me in your room and place as their father, and our Frenchmen as brothers by again passing their hands over our heads, all weeping. This ceremony ended, the orator said: We thank thee, my father, for so willingly taking the trouble to come to us; we are all going in thy company to the Mandans to bring thee to thy fort; we have sent four men to inform them who have just arrived and they report that the Mandans are greatly rejoicing at thy coming amongst them and are to come to meet thee. We have sent four other young men to bring them to the place we have selected for them; we will go there slowly, hunting on the way, to have fat on arriving there, to eat with the grain of which they always eat much, having seldom either meat or fat. I thanked them for their good will, and encouraged them to send us on quickly; that they could see as well as I, the very advanced season. Knowing that the Mandans had no supplies of fat, I had some purchased in the village, gave our people all that they wished to carry, and had the Indians carry some for us, for which I paid them; I warned our Frenchmen that I intended to spend part of the winter among the Mandans; that if they did not take a good load of fat, they must eat their wheat and beans with water.

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On the 20th, the whole village set out on the march to go the seventeen leagues where the meeting place for the Mandans had been chosen; every day they entertained us with the tale that the whites we were going to see were Frenchmen like ourselves, who said they were our descendants. All they told us gave us good hope of making a discovery which would deserve attention. Mr. de la Marque and I made plans from that which we believed to be true of what we heard, much of which we had to discount. I observed to Mr. de la Marque the good order in which the Assiniboines march to prevent surprise, marching always on the prairies, the hillsides and valleys from the first mountain, which did not make them fatigued by mounting and descending often in their march during the day. There are magnificent plains of three or four leagues. The march of the Assiniboines, especially when they are numerous, is in three columns, having scouts in front, on the sides (wings) and with a good rear guard, the old and lame march in the middle, forming the central column. I kept all the French together as much as possible. If the skirmishers' discovered herds of cattle<sup>16</sup> on the road, as often happens, they raise a cry which is soon returned by the rear guard, and all the most active men in the columns join the vanguard to hem in the cattle, of which they secure a number, and each takes what flesh he wants. Since that stops the march, the vanguard marks out the encampment which is not to be passed; the women and dogs carry all the baggage, the men are burdened only with their arms; they make the dogs even carry wood to make the fires, being often obliged to encamp in the open prairie, from which the clumps of wood may be had at a great distance.

On the morning of the 28th<sup>17</sup>, we arrived at the place selected for the meeting with the Mandans, who arrived towards evening—a chief, with thirty men and the four Assiniboines. The chief, after having from the top of a height considered for some time the extent of our village, which appeared of a good size, I had him brought to the hut

<sup>16</sup> Buffalo.

<sup>17</sup> November.



where I was, where a place had been prepared to receive him on one side of it. He came and placed himself near me; one of his people then, on his part, presented me with a gift of Indian corn in the ear, and of their tobacco in rolls, which is not good, as they do not know how to cure it like we. It is very like ours, with this difference, that it is not cultivated, and is cut green, everything being turned to account, the stalks and leaves together. I gave him some of mine, which he thought very good. I acknowledged that I was surprised, expecting to see different people from the other Indians, especially after the account given me. There is no difference from the Assiniboines; they are naked, covered only with a buffalo robe, worn carelessly without breech clout. I knew from that time that we had to make allowance for all that we had been told.

The chief spoke to me in Assiniboine, testifying the joy which I had given to all their nation by my arrival among them; that he begged me to accept them among the number of your children; that he wished afterwards to have to do only with us; that I might dispose of all he had; that he begged me to remain at his fort, that it was the nearest and smaller than the others, but well supplied with provisions; that there were six forts belonging to the same nation; that it was the only one not far from the river. He told me he had received two belts from me; that they had been shown to me on my arrival as they had always hoped to see me. I thanked him for all his civilities and offers, telling him that I had come from a long distance to form a friendship with them, and that I would speak to them so soon as I should have arrived at their fort. He immediately played us a trick; having examined our village on his arrival, as I have stated, judging that there would be a great many people, and if they all came to his fort, there must be a great consumption of grain, their custom being to feed liberally all who came among them, selling only what was to be taken away, he gave many thanks to the Assiniboines for having brought the French among them; that it could not have happened more opportunely; that the Sioux would not be long of arriving among them, having

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been warned, begging me, like the Assiniboines, to assist them, hoping much from our valour and courage. I was entrapped like the Assiniboines, with this difference, that the Assiniboines stood confounded, whilst I rejoiced, believing that I had found an opportunity to be avenged on that accursed nation. I promised him every assistance from myself and our Frenchmen should they come whilst we were with them, for which he thanked me. He was sent for to come to the feast and questioned respecting the Sioux.

The Assiniboines, numerous, strong and robust men, are not brave; they greatly fear the Sioux, whom they think to be braver. The Mandans know their weakness and profit by it, as opportunity arises. The council was held to discuss what should be done. The most decided opinion was that it was not necessary to go further than to warn me of the risk I was about to run if I wished to pursue our course. An old man rose firmly: Do not think that our father is a coward; I know him better than you; I have been with him ever since he left his fort; do not believe that the Sioux can frighten him or any of his people. What will he think of us? He has lengthened his road to join us, agreeing to our request to accompany him to the Mandans and to guide him back to his fort. He would have gone to-day if he had not listened to us, and you would think of abandoning him by letting him go alone, which cannot be. If we fear the Sioux let us leave our village here till our return; let every man able to march follow our father. All agreed in the old man's opinion; it was decided that only a few should remain to protect the women; all the rest would accompany me. I was notified of the result of the council; word was sent throughout the village to warn every one to be ready to march the day after tomorrow, the 30th of the month<sup>18</sup> thus making a little longer delay among the Mandans, who knew how to profit by it the sale of their grain, tobacco, peltry and painted plumes, which they know the Assiniboines greatly value, who had brought and now gave in exchange muskets, axes, kettles, powder, balls, knives and awls. They are much craftier in trade than the

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<sup>18</sup> November.



Assiniboines and others, who are constantly their dupes.

We left on the morning of the 30th, about 600 men, several women without children, the best walkers. On the evening of the third day of our march, about seven leagues from the first fort of the Mandans, I was informed that an Assiniboine had taken the bag from my slave on the road, under pretext of relieving him, and had returned to the village. My box, in which were my papers, and many things of use to me, were in the bag. I immediately engaged two young men to run after him, whom I paid, making them promise to bring the bag to the Mandans, where I would wait for them. They set out during the night, overtook the rascal, who had already decamped from the village, made him return everything and came back to their village to keep the whole, hoping to restore it to me on my return, not daring to come after me, being afraid of the Sioux. I saw myself deprived of many things which were of daily use. The orator gave notice that we must leave before four in the morning in order to arrive early at the fort. I found at a league and a half, about noon, near a small river, a number of people who had come to meet us had lighted fires, expecting us, and had brought coarse grain cooked and flour made into a paste, with pumpkins, to give all enough to eat. Two chiefs had made a place ready for me near the fire and presented me first with something to eat and to smoke. Mr. de la Marque arrived shortly after me. I asked him to sit near me and to eat whilst resting.

We remained fully two hours resting. We were warned that it was time to go. I made one of my children take the flag painted with the arms of France, and march at the front; and ordered the French to follow in ranks. The Sieur Nolant relieved my son in carrying the flag, each taking it in turn. The Mandans would not let me march, but offered to carry me, to which I had to consent, being requested by the Assiniboines, who told me I would displease them greatly if I refused.

At four acres from the fort, on a little hill, the old men of the fort, accompanied by a great number of the

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youth, were waiting to present me with the calumet and to show me the two belts I had sent them four or five years ago. They gave a seat to me and to Mr. de la Marque. I received their compliments, which related only to the joy they felt at our arrival. I ordered my son, the Chevalier, to make all our Frenchmen draw up in line, the flag four paces in front; all the Assiniboines who had muskets placed themselves in line like our Frenchmen. After compliments had been paid, I saluted the fort with three volleys. Many people had come to meet us, but nothing in comparison with what appeared on the ramparts and along the trenches. I marched in good order to the fort, into which I entered on the 3rd of December at four in the afternoon, escorted by all the French and Assiniboines. We were led into the hut of the head chief. It was certainly large, but not enough to hold all who wished to enter. The crowd was so great that they crushed one another, Assiniboines and Mandans. There was only the place where we were, Mr. de la Marque, his brother and my children, free of them. I asked that the crowd should retire, to leave our Frenchmen clear, and to put their baggage in a place of safety, telling them they had all time to see us. Everyone was put out, but I had been too late. The bag of goods had been stolen, in which were all my presents, through the fault of one of the hired men in whose care I had placed it before reaching the fort. He had unloaded on entering the hut without looking out for the bag, which he had put beside him in the great crowd. I felt rather confounded; my box lost, my bag of presents, which was very necessary for the place, and there were upwards of 300 livres inside.

The Assiniboines seemed greatly annoyed and at once made a strict but useless search. Their fort is full of caves, well suited for concealment. The chief of the Mandans appeared greatly moved at my loss, and said for my consolation that there were many rascals among them. He would do his utmost to discover something about it. Had I accepted the offer of the Assiniboines, I might have had it



found in a little time by force, but I preferred to lose it and to make peace about everything, as I wanted to spend a part of the winter with them to get a knowledge of the more distant country.

On the 4th I had the principal Mandans and Assiniboines assembled in the hut where I was. I gave them my present of powder and balls, telling them that I could give them nothing else; that they all knew that what I brought to give in presents had been carried off. I declared to them that I was inclined to remain some time to gain a knowledge of the country according to our orders, which I could not do in a day. The Mandans testified their joy, assuring me that I need not be afraid of fasting, that they had provisions in reserve, far more than were necessary for us, and that their whole fort was well supplied, that I might dispose of it being master among them. The elder of the Assiniboines, the orator of the village, said to me: My father, we have brought thee here; I do not doubt that thou mayest be well here; we flatter ourselves with bringing thee back to thy fort; thou art the master to do what thou shalt consider suitable; we will come to seek thee, so soon as thou shalt wish it. Speaking then to the Mandans: We are leaving our father; take great care of him and of all the French; learn to know them; they know how to do everything; he is a spirit; we love and fear him; do like us. We leave much grieved at the theft which has been committed on our father by entering among us; what can he think of us; we cannot deny that it is an unworthy thing. The Frenchman came to see us and you robbed him; we are pleased that our father should be good or it would not have passed in that way. I do not fear to tell you so; we could have found the bag had he wished it; there is still time if he will. I made him finish, as I saw the old man was getting heated.

One of the Mandan chiefs answered: Neither I, nor my people have any share in what you accuse us of; I do not answer for others; I am vexed enough; I have had every search made by my young men; I have nothing to reproach myself with. Who knows if it is not an Assiniboine?

## THE VERENDRYE EXPLORATIONS

There were some of both in the crowd; thou can'st answer for nothing. Be not uneasy as to what regards our father and all his people; he is here master as if he were at home. We beg him to number us among his children. This I did at once, by putting my hands on the head of each chief, which is the usual ceremony, answered by loud shouts of joy and thanks. I then said to the Assiniboinés: I am sending four Frenchmen to my fort to give my news there; I recommend you to get them to that place as soon as you can. I have left powder in the village and all that is necessary to have them brought. The council ended with loud thanks from both parties. As the Assiniboinés did not yet speak of leaving, although they had purchased all they were able to do, such as painted ox-robés, deer skin, dressed buck skin and ornamented furs and feathers, painted feathers, and peltry, wrought garters, circlets for head, girdles.

These people dress leather better than any of the other nations, and work in furs and feathers very tastefully, which the Assiniboinés are not capable of doing. They are cunning traders, cheating the Assiniboinés of all they may possess, such as muskets, powder, balls, kettles, axes, knives or awls. Seeing the great consumption of food daily by the Assiniboinés, and afraid that it would not last long, they set afloat a rumor that the Sioux were near and that several of their hunters had noticed them. The Assiniboinés fell into the trap and made up their minds quickly to decamp, not wishing to be obliged to fight. A Mandan chief let me understand by a sign that the rumor about the Sioux was to get rid of the Assiniboinés. The sixth, in the morning, they all left in great haste, believing the Sioux were near and fearing the road might be blocked up. The chief with whom I had lodged brought five men to remain with me, saying: My father, I still hope that you will join us for a little; I shall march slowly. Here are five of my young men whom I give thee to remain with thee and to guide thee when thou shalt wish to leave. I made him a small present to thank him, telling him that he knew that I had sense



DOUGLAS BRYMNER



*The inscription on the Verendrye tablet at Three Rivers and a translation*

En Cet Endroit  
Etait Situee La Maison  
Ou Naquit  
Le 17 Novembre 1685  
"Le Plus Illustre  
Des Trifluviens"  
Pierre Gaultier  
De Varennes  
Sieur De La Verandrye  
Le Decouvreur  
Des Montagnes Rocheuses  
Et De L'Ouest Canadien

In This Place  
Was Situated the House  
Where Was Born  
November 17th 1685  
"The Most Illustrious  
Of The Trifluviens"  
Pierre Gaultier  
De Varennes  
Sieur De La Verendrye  
The Discoverer  
Of The Rocky Mountains  
And Of Western Canada

## THE VERENDRYE EXPLORATIONS

and that I intended shortly to reward him for his attention. He left with great protestations of friendship.

I was notified shortly after that an interpreter whom I paid liberally to secure him had decamped in spite of all the offers which my son, the Chevalier, had made him, as he was going after an Assiniboine woman with whom he had fallen in love, but who would not remain with him. He was a young man of the Cree nation speaking good Assiniboine. As there were several Mandans who spoke it well enough, I made myself very well understood, as my son spoke Cree and the Cree interpreted into Assiniboine. But here was the height of misfortune, as we could only make ourselves understood by signs and demonstrations. If I had suspected my interpreter, who every day assured me he would always remain with me and never abandon me, I would have taken advantage of the time I had him with me to make the demands on the Mandans I wished to make. But flattering myself that I had a man on whom I could rely, I put off till after the departure of the Assiniboines.

All day I was greatly embarrassed; all that I wanted to know and the few questions I had put were asked in the evening after everyone had retired; such as, if there were many people along the river going down, and what nations; if the places at a distance were known. I was answered that there were five forts on the two banks of the river, belonging to their nation, much larger than that in which we were; that at a day's journey from the last of their forts were the Pananas, who had several forts; then the Pananis; that these two nations who held much of the country and had now been at war for four years, had always from all time been closely united and in alliance together; that he would tell me afterward the causes which had set them at variance. The Pananas and Pananis<sup>19</sup> made their forts like them. In summer they grew wheat and tobacco on the lower part of the river, which was very wide, land not being visible from one shore to the other; the water bad for drinking. All these lands are inhabited by whites<sup>20</sup> like us, who work in

<sup>19</sup> Perhaps Pawnees on the upper Platte River.

<sup>20</sup> The Spaniards on the lower Mississippi River.



iron. The word iron among all the nations here means all sorts of metals which they call iron; that they only marched on horseback, both for hunting and war; that these men could not be killed by arrow or musket, being covered with iron, but that by killing the horse the man could be caught easily, as he could not run; that he had a shield of iron very bright, fought with lances and sabres, with which he was very skillful; the women were never seen in the fields; their forts and houses were stone. I asked if there were fine woods, and if the prairie continued in heights and hollows. He answered that the wood was along the river in places and also on the prairies in islands; that the further down the more the hills increased; that many of them were only rocks of fine stone, especially along the river. I asked if it took long to go where the whites, the horsemen, were. I was answered that the Pananas and Pananis had horses like the whites; it would take a whole summer to make the journey, and that since they were at war with the Pananas the men would not undertake to go far, the roads being closed to them. That cattle were abundant on the prairies, far larger and fatter than those we had seen on their prairies; their coat white and of several colours. He showed us horns split in half, of a greenish colour which hold nearly three pints. In all the huts they have them in use as ladles, proving that they have killed many when the road was open. That was all I could learn even by chance, as I had relied on my interpreter, that I would have time to be thoroughly informed at leisure.

The sixth, after the Assiniboines left, I sent my son, the Chevalier, with Sieur Nolant, six Frenchmen and several Mandans to the nearest fort, which is on the bank of the river<sup>21</sup>. If well received they were to sleep there, to get the best information of the course of the river; who dwell there; if they are acquainted with the lower part, in accordance with what was told us; to learn all that could be ascertained by signs and demonstrations. After their

<sup>21</sup> This fort was on the east side of the Missouri River, one mile south of the mouth of the Little Knife in McLean County, North Dakota. (O. G. Libby, University of North Dakota.)

## THE VERENDRYE EXPLORATIONS

departure, Mr. de la Marque and I walked about to observe the size of their fort and their fortification. I decided to have the huts counted. It was found that there were a hundred and thirty of them. Several of our squares and huts resembled each other. Several of our Frenchmen wandered about; they found the street and squares very clean, the ramparts very level and broad; the palisade supported on cross-pieces morticed into posts of fifteen feet. At fifteen points doubled are green skins which are put for sheathing when required, fastened only above in the places needed, as in the bastion there are four at each curtain well flanked. The fort is built on a height in the open prairies with a ditch upwards of fifteen feet deep to eighteen feet wide. Their fort can only be gained by steps or posts which can be removed when threatened by an enemy. If all their forts are alike, they may be called impregnable to Indians. Their fortifications are not Indian.

This nation is mixed white and black. The women are fairly good-looking, especially the white, many with blonde and fair hair. Both men and women of this nation are industrious; their huts are large and spacious, separated into several apartments by thick planks; nothing is left lying about; all their baggage is in large bags hung on posts; their beds made like tombs surrounded by skins; all go to bed naked, men and women. These men are always naked, covered only with a buffalo robe; a great part of the women naked like the men, with this difference, that they wear a loose apron, about a hand breadth wide and a foot long, sewed to a girdle in front only; all the women have this kind of protection, although they have a petticoat which gives no constraint, they do not close the thighs; as is the case with other Indian women when they sit down. Several carry a kind of gown of very soft deer skin; there are many deer, they are very small. Their fort is full of caves, in which are stored such articles as grain, food, fat, dressed robes, bear skins. They are well supplied with these; it is the money of the country; the more they have of it the richer they believe themselves to be. They are fond of tatooing, but never more than half of the body is



tattooed, both of men and women. They make wicker work very neatly, flat and in baskets. They make use of earthen pots, which they use like many other nations for cooking their food. They are for the most part great eaters; are eager for feasts. They brought me every day more than twenty dishes of wheat, beans and pumpkins, all cooked. Mr. de la Marque, who did not hate feasts, went to them continually with my children. As I did not go to them, my share was sent to me. The men are stout and tall, generally very active, fairly good looking, with a good physiognomy and very affable. The women have not the Indian physiognomy. The men indulge in a sort of ball play on the squares and ramparts.

On the evening of the 7th, the Sieur Nolant and my son arrived, well satisfied with their journey, having been well received and strongly urged to remain longer. They reported to me the fort is on the bank of the river, as large again as this; the squares and streets very fine and clean; their palisade is in the best order and strength; the whole built in the same fashion as the one in which we were. From what they could hear, all their forts were alike; who saw one saw them all, with this difference, that some were much larger than others; that the last was the largest of all; that nearest to the Pananas the river appeared to flow, according to the compass, south-west by south. By signs given to them, the lower part may go to the sea to the south-west by west. They were often amused with broken talk; not being able to answer questions put to them, they answered something else, for want of understanding. The waters of their rivers come down with great rapidity, having many shoals. The water is not good for drinking, being brackish. We have constantly found from the last mountain almost all the marshes and ponds brackish, or sulphurous. What they could understand was, that on the lower part of the river there were men like us, who made cloth and linen, were very numerous, and had wars with a large part of the Indians. We saw that it was useless to question them, as they could not understand us.

We did not cease going to their feasts all the time we

## THE VERENDRYE EXPLORATIONS

were at their fort, but could not attend all those to which we were asked. We noticed that in the plain there were several small forts, of forty or fifty huts, built like the large ones, but no one was there at the time. They made us understand that they went there for the summer to work their fields and that there was a large reserve of grain in their cellars. This is all the information they could give on their journey. On the 8th of December I ordered my son to take the latitude which was forty-eight degrees, twelve minutes. On the evening of the 7th I had consulted with Mr. de la Marque as to the course we should take. Like myself, he knew that little remained with us for presents, which rendered it impossible for us to go further; the season too trying to be able to undertake anything, and above all, no interpreter nor any hope of getting one during the winter. We had every reason to fear that the roads would become impracticable in spring on account of the waters and with the risk of arriving too late for the setting out of our canoes; the powder I would have would not perhaps be enough to supply all our wants during the winter and with the small quantity of goods remaining we might find ourselves in a difficulty about all our people, having no longer anyone to guide us, as the Indians would only serve us so far as they were paid and that in advance, as they look on promises as a very small resource. On the other hand, that we had reason to apprehend setting out on a march in the worst season of the year. After having considered the whole, we decided that we must set out, leaving two men capable of learning the language in a short time, one in the fort in which we were and the other in the nearest fort, as being alone they could learn much more quickly and could consequently give all the information. Mr. de la Marque selected one of his hired men, a man of intelligence, whom he offered me as being one of the most capable, knowing how to write. I accepted him with pleasure and gave him my servant as the second, although he was very useful to me, and attached to my service, I preferred to deprive myself of him for the good he might



afterwards render, knowing his strong and quick intellect, with a good memory and facility in learning languages, very wise and fearing God. I gave them full instructions of all they had to do, and on his side, Mr. de la Marque promised to send to look after them next summer.

That ended, so far as regarded the two men whom I left, I notified our five Assiniboines, whom I made to understand that I wished to set out shortly, which gave them much joy. I showed them by signs, not being able to make myself understood otherwise, that it would be necessary for two of them to set out with two Frenchmen on the morning of the next day, that everything would be ready for them, so that they might go speedily to the village to warn them to expect us; that I would leave four days after them, so that I might prepare everything for the journey. I then informed the Mandans of my design, which appeared to give them much sorrow. I showed them the two Frenchmen whom I left in my place, recommending that they should be taken good care of. They gave me many thanks, with great protestations of friendship and fidelity. I then let them know that I would not abandon them. I asked the chief to give me meal for the journey. The news soon spread throughout the fort. On the morning of the 8th, I made two Frenchmen set out, guided by two Assiniboines, as I have already said, to go to warn the village of my departure. Wheat flour pounded for the journey was brought, much more than was necessary. I thanked them, giving them some needles which they greatly value. They would have loaded a hundred men for the journey; in a short time all hastened to bring me some. I made all our people take what they wished, which was done in a very short time.

Having provided for all that our people needed, I assembled the chiefs and principal Mandans, made them a present of powder, balls, and several trifles, which they greatly value, owing to their lack of them. I gave the head chief a flag, gave him a leaden plate, which I had ornamented with ribbon at the four corners. It was put into a box to be kept in perpetuity, in memory of my taking

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possession of their lands, which I did in the king's name. It will be preserved from father to son, better than if I had put it in the ground, where it would have run the risk of being stolen. I made them understand as well as I could, that I left them that mark in memory of the Frenchmen who had come upon their lands. I very much desired I could have made them understand, in order to tell them many things which might have been very useful to them and to us, which to my regret and to theirs I could not do. I had wrought with so much diligence, that on the evening of the eighth everything was ready for our departure, which I calculated to accomplish sooner than I had given notice of. During the night, between the 8th and 9th, I was taken ill, and in a very short time was very ill; I did not know what to think of it. I kept my bed for three days. Finding myself better on the fourth, I prepared to set out the next day. I gave the two men enough to defray their expenses liberally, and even to pay a guide, if need were to bring them to our fort; informed them once again of the cause which obliged me to leave them there. So soon as they could make themselves understood, they were to neglect nothing to learn what was this nation of whites, what metal they worked with; if there were any mines to their knowledge; what nations were above, going up the river; if they knew a height of land—in a word, to spare no pains to obtain all possible information respecting the country.

I set out, although ill, in the hope that it would be nothing and that I would recover at the village my box in which I had put some remedies. On the 13th of December, to the great regret of all the Mandans, a chief came to conduct us a league and a half's distance, whence I sent him back; he testified to me by great demonstrations the regret he felt at my departure, making a sign to me not to abandon him, but to return and that he would accompany us. I gave him a small present of powder, once more recommending the two Frenchmen whom I left with them. He made me a sign that he would take one to his own



house. I dismissed him after giving him many thanks. In the evening I noticed that we had only two Assiniboines with us. They made me understand that one had remained with our Frenchmen, not wishing to abandon them; that they would return only in summer with them. I arrived at the village on the 24th, still very ill. We had experienced excessive cold, which caused great delay.

My box was restored to me; nothing had been touched; they had been satisfied with the slave's bag, which was returned to me empty. Having rested a little, I reproached them for lying to me respecting the Mandans; that there was very little truth in all they had told me. They answered, that they had not pretended to speak of the Mandans, saying that they were like us, that they had intended to speak of that nation which is at the lower part of the river, who work in iron. An Assiniboine rose above the others, saying to me: This is the only one who can speak better to thee about it; thou hast not understood properly what was said to thee; I do not lie. Last summer I killed one who was covered with iron, as I have already said several times. If I had not killed the horse first, I could not have killed the man. I said to him: What hast thou brought of his spoil to show us that thou speakest the truth? As I wished to cut off his head, I noticed men on horseback, who were blocking the way, I escaped with difficulty; I kept nothing to carry off; I threw away everything I had even to my blanket, in my flight. What I say is true, and I will have it told to thee by others who were with me the following spring. They are not here now, but thou shalt see them. What I have said I repeat; the other side of the river cannot be seen; the water is salt; it is a country of mountains; a great extent between the mountains of fine land; many cattle, big and stout, white and of different colors, many stags and deer; I have seen their wheat fields, where no women are to be seen; what I tell thee is without deceit; thou wilt learn further of it afterwards.

I continued my journey after three days' rest. I reach-

## THE VERENDRYE EXPLORATIONS

ed the first mountain on the 9th of January, where we remained a long time. Mr. de la Marque made up his mind to go on, seeing me still very ill, in order to send me assistance. He arrived on the first of February; I arrived only on the 10th, greatly fatigued and very ill. I met the assistance he sent me at thirty-five leagues from the fort, which gave me great pleasure, having great need of it. I have never endured so much wretchedness in my life, from illness and fatigue, as in that journey. I found myself, after a fortnight's rest, a little restored. Mr. de la Marque waited my arrival to carry out his design of going to Fort Maurepas, having learned that there were no provisions there. I told him that I thought his presence would be very useful in his post. He determined to set out, asking me if he might leave his brother with a large party of hired men for provisions at my fort, flattering themselves that there was more hope there of seeing people. We were nearly starving, when fortunately two huts of Indians came, whom I stopped at the fort. They supplied us by their hunting moose and deer. We numbered forty-two persons in the fort, which means a large consumption of food. Mr. de la Marque left on the 16th of the month. I received news from him shortly after. He informed me that he dreaded a famine, not seeing Indians. We are now in the 16th of April and have not yet seen any one. I do not know how God preserves us.

I sent my son, the Chevalier, that morning, the 16th of April, with an Indian to go to make a search for the fort of Lake Winipigon<sup>22</sup>, and to take notice of the rivers which fall into it, especially the White River<sup>23</sup> (to which I intend to go on the return of our canoes), from the mine which is in the lake, and from that which is in the White River, from the outlet of the lake, to notice the turn of it, and endeavor to prevent the Indians from going to the English, by making them hope for our speedy arrival.

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<sup>22</sup> Lake Winnipeg.

<sup>23</sup> Saskatchewan.



I received a letter from Mr. de la Marque on the 23rd of April, which notified me that he had not yet had any of the Indians; that he has decided to go to find them in the great River Winipigon<sup>24</sup> where they are engaged in building their canoes.

I think he is leaving the post too early; the Indians might arrive from Red River after his departure. On the 22nd of the present month I learned from an Indian that a large band of Assiniboines had drawn up on the Lake of the Prairies who were working on their canoes to go to the English.

On the 24th I sent Sanschagrin with a hired man to bring them here so as to turn from going to the English.

On the 30th five Assiniboines arrived towards evening to let me know that a large number of people was coming; we have much need of them, having done nothing till now.

On the 3rd of May this great band was reduced to very few.

On the 10th, Mr. Nolant, despairing at no more coming, asked leave to set out, representing to me that there were no more provisions and that they could not remain longer. I did my best to induce him to have patience for some time yet, being much vexed that he should go empty.

Seeing him determined to set out, I gave him permission.

On the same day, the 10th, in the evening, fifteen Assiniboines arrived to notify us that there were sixty huts coming and that they had been told we had gone.

I sent them back with tobacco to hasten their coming. They arrived on the 18th and did their trading in a short time. These left. On the 20th, three men arrived to beg me to delay our departure, that thirty huts would arrive. I made them set out with speed, giving them tobacco to tell their people to hasten their coming.

I discovered these days a river flowing to the west

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<sup>24</sup> Winnipeg.

## THE VERENDRYE EXPLORATIONS

All the lakes and rivers of which I have had any knowledge go to Hudson's Bay, the Northern Sea, except the Mandan River<sup>25</sup>.

I will obtain complete knowledge of it this summer, either by myself or some person on my behalf.

I have deferred the departure of my canoes till the 28th of the month, waiting uselessly for the people to come; only a few arrived, all postponing their coming till summer.

They are so stupid that they think they will be waited for into the summer, and that there will always be time enough to carry off their beavers.

I promised them that as soon as my son and the two men arrived, whom I had left with the Mandans, I would depart from here as quickly as possible.

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<sup>25</sup> Verendrye believed he had found that the River of the Mandans (Missouri) was the highway to the "Western Sea."



JOURNAL OF THE VOYAGE MADE BY CHEVALIER  
DE LA VERENDRYE WITH ONE OF HIS  
BROTHERS IN SEARCH OF THE  
WESTERN SEA, ADDRESSED  
TO THE  
MARQUIS DE BEAUHARNOIS

Translated from the French, (Margry Papers)  
by Anne H. Blegen, Minnesota Historical Society

Sir:

I take the liberty of giving you an account of the voyage which I have made with one of my brothers and two Frenchmen sent by my father, honored by your orders to proceed to discover the Western Sea by way of the country of the *Mantanes* (Mandans) according to the accounts of the Indians.

We departed from Fort La Reine on April 29th<sup>26</sup> and reached the *Mantanes* on May 19th. We remained there until July 23rd, awaiting the *Gens des Chevaux*<sup>27</sup>, whom we were led to expect from day to day. Since the season was advancing and I absolutely refused to give up the expedition, I sought from among the *Mantanes* two men to guide us to the country of the *Gens des Chevaux*, in the hope of finding some village near the mountain or along our route; two offered their services willingly. We left without a moment's delay. We marched for twenty days west southwest, and this did not augur well as to our route; we encountered no human being, but many wild beasts. I noticed in several places soils of different colors, such as blue, a vermillion shade, meadow green, shining black, chalk white, and others the color of ochre. If I had foreseen at that time that I should not return through these regions, I would have taken some of each kind. I could not burden myself, knowing that I had a long journey to make. We arrived on August 11th at the mountain of the *Gens des Chevaux*. Since our guides did not wish to go further, we

<sup>26</sup> 1742.

<sup>27</sup> Horse Indians, probably Cheyennes, or possibly Aricaras. In general it may be said that there is much doubt as to the identity of the several Indian tribes mentioned in this narrative

## THE VERENDRYE EXPLORATIONS

set to work to construct a little house where we could await the first Indians who might happen to discover us; we lighted fires on all sides for signals, to attract attention, being thoroughly resolved to trust ourselves to the first tribes that might appear.

On September 10th only one *Mantane* remained with us; his comrade had departed ten days before to return to his people. I went or sent someone every day to explore the hills. On September 14th our scouts perceived a column of smoke south southwest of us.

I sent the Frenchman with our *Mantane*, and they found a village of the *Beaux Hommes*<sup>28</sup> who welcomed them. They (the Frenchman and the *Mantane*) made them (the *Beaux Hommes*) understand by signs that there were three more Frenchmen established nearby. The next day the chiefs sent some of their young men with our two men to fetch us. We went there on the 18th and we were welcomed with great demonstrations of joy.

Our *Mantane* asked my permission to depart, fearing a tribe which was an enemy of his own; I paid him liberally and gave him whatever was useful and necessary for him to return to his people, just as I had done before to his comrade.

We remained with the *Beaux Hommes* twenty-one days. I made them understand as best I could that we wished to be conducted to a village of the *Gens des Chevaux*. They replied that some of their youths would guide us as far as the first village which we might encounter. I made them several presents, with which they appeared to be very well satisfied.

We left them on November 9th. We were beginning to understand them well enough for our needs. Our guides led us south southwest.

On the second day we came upon a village of the tribe of the *Petits Renards* (Little Foxes)<sup>29</sup>, who showed great joy upon seeing us. After making them a number of

<sup>28</sup> Handsome Men, perhaps Crow Indians.

<sup>29</sup> These may have been a branch of the Cheyennes.



presents I had our guides tell them that I was seeking the *Gens des Chevaux* who, we hoped, would conduct us to the sea. The result of this was that the entire village marched with us, still following the same route. I felt, indeed, at the time that we could hope to find nothing but a known sea. On the second day of the march we encountered a populous village of the same tribe. They showed us great friendliness. I gave them a number of presents, which they looked upon as great novelties, and they seemed to me very grateful for them. They guided us to a village of the *Pioya*<sup>30</sup> which we reached on the fifteenth. We were very well received there. After proffering them some presents I proposed to them that they conduct us to some tribe on the route to the sea. We continued on our way to the south-west. On the 17th we encountered a populous village of the same nation. I presented them with some gifts. We all marched on together, keeping to the south, until the 19th, when we reached a village of the *Gens des Chevaux*. They were in a state of great desolation. There was nothing but weeping and howling, all their village having been destroyed by the *Gens du Serpent* (Snake Indians) and only a few members of their tribe having escaped. These Snake Indians are considered very brave. They are not satisfied in a campaign merely to destroy a village, according to the custom of all other Indians. They continue their warfare from spring to autumn, they are very numerous, and woe to those whom they meet on their way!

They are friendly to no tribe. We are told that in 1741 they had entirely destroyed seventeen villages, had killed all the old men and old women, and made slaves of the young women and had traded them at the seacoast for horses and merchandise.

It was of the *Gens des Chevaux* that I inquired for knowledge of the tribe which lived by the sea. They replied that no member of their tribe had ever been there, since the route was blocked by the Snake tribe; that, if we made a long detour, we might meet with some tribes

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<sup>30</sup> Perhaps a wandering band of the same tribe as the *Gens des Chevaux*.

along the way who traded with the white men at the sea. I persuaded the village, by means of gifts, to march with us to the country of the *Gens de l'Arc* (Bow Indians)<sup>38</sup>, the only tribe who, by dint of their bravery, do not fear the Snakes. They have even made themselves dreaded by the Snakes through the wisdom and good leadership of their chief. I was also made to hope that they would be able to give me some knowledge of the country along the sea, since they are friendly to the tribes that go there to trade.

After marching steadily toward the southwest, we encountered on November 18th a very populous village of the *Gens de la Belle-Riviere* (Belle River Indians). They gave us information about the *Gens de l'Arc*<sup>31</sup>, who were not far away. We marched on together to the southwest; on the 21st, we descried the village, which appeared very large to us. All the tribes of that country have a large number of horses, asses, and mules; these they use to carry their baggage and to take them on their hunting parties as well as on their expeditions.

When we arrived at the village, the chief led us to his lodge, treating us graciously and courteously, in a manner not at all characteristic of the Indians. He ordered that all our baggage be placed in his lodge, which was very large, and that great care be taken of our horses.

Up to that time we had been well received in all the villages through which we had passed, but all that was as nothing in comparison with the admirable behavior of the great chief of the Bow tribe, a man who was not at all covetous as the others had been, but always took very great care of all that belonged to us.

I became attached to this chief, who merited all our friendship. In a short time, due to the pains which he took to instruct me, I learned the language sufficiently well to make myself understood and to understand also what he said to me.

I asked him if his tribe knew the white men who lived by the sea and if they could guide us there. He replied:

<sup>31</sup> These tribes have not been identified, but may have been of the Cheyenne linguistic stock.



"We know them by what the prisoners of the Snake Indians, whom we are to join shortly, have told us of them. Do not be surprised if you see many villages joined with us. Messages urging them to meet us have been sent out in all directions. Every day you hear the war song chanted; that is not without purpose: we are going to march to the great mountains which are near the sea, to seek the Snakes there. Do not be afraid to come with us, you have nothing to fear, you will be able to see there the ocean for which you are searching."

He continued his speech as follows: "The French who are at the sea coast," he said, "are numerous; they have many slaves, whom they establish upon their lands by tribes; they have separate quarters, they marry among themselves, and they are not oppressed; the result is that they are happy with them (their masters) and they do not seek to run away. They raise a large number of horses and other animals, which they use to work on their lands. They have many leaders for their soldiers, and they have many also for prayer." He pronounced a few words in their language. I recognized that he was speaking Spanish, and what fully assured me of the fact was the account which he gave me of the massacre of the Spaniards who were seeking to discover the Missouri, of which I had heard before. All this dampened my ardor for the search of a known sea; nevertheless I should have liked very much to go there, if it had been feasible.

We continued to march, sometimes south southwest, sometimes northwest; our band was augmented continually by the addition of a number of villages of different tribes. On January 1st, 1743, we were in sight of the mountains. The number of the warriors exceeded two thousand; with their families they made a considerable band, advancing all the way through a magnificent prairie where animals are plentiful. At night there was singing and shouting, and they wept continually, begging us to accompany them to war. I resisted steadily saying that we were sent to pacify the land and not to stir it up.

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The chief of the Bow Indians repeated often that he was troubled on our account because of what all the tribes would think of us for hesitating to accompany them, and he asked us as a favor (since he was bound to the other Indians and could not go off with us until after their return from the war) to accompany him simply as spectators, not asking us to expose ourselves; the Snakes were our enemies as well as theirs and we must surely know that they had no friends.

We conferred among ourselves as to what we should do. We resolved to accompany them, because of the impossibility of coming to any other decision, in addition to my desire to see the ocean from the summit of the mountains. I acquainted the chief of the tribe with our decision and he seemed well satisfied with it. A grand council was then called to which they invited us, as was their custom. The harangues of members of each tribe were very long. The chief of the Bows explained them to me. Everything turned upon the measures which must be taken for the safety of their women and children during their absence and the manner in which they should approach their enemies. Then they turned to us, begging us not to abandon them. I made the reply to the chief of the Bows, who then repeated it to the entire assemblage, that the great chief of the French desired that all his children should live peacefully and had ordered us to carry peace to all nations, wishing to see the whole world calm and peaceful; that, knowing their anger to be aroused with good cause, I bowed my head in submission and we would accompany them, since they desired it so urgently, to aid them merely with advice, in case they required it. They thanked us effusively and went through long ceremonies with the calumet.

We continued to march on until January 8th. On the 9th we left the village. I left my brother to guard our baggage, which was in the lodge of the Bow chief. The larger part of the men were on horseback, advancing in good order. At last, on the twelfth day, we reached the mountains. They are for the most part thickly-wooded with all kinds of wood and appear very high.



After approaching the main part of the village of the Snake tribe, the scouts returned to inform us that they (the Snakes) had all fled in great haste and had abandoned their huts and a large part of their belongings. This report brought terror to everyone, for it was feared that the enemy, having discovered them, had gone to fall upon their villages and would reach them before they, themselves, could arrive to defend them. The chief of the Bows did what he could to persuade them to the contrary and to prevail upon them to continue. No one would listen to him. "It is very annoying," he told me, "to have brought you to this point and not be able to go further."

I was exceedingly vexed not to be able to ascend the mountains, as I had hoped to do. We determined therefore to return. We had come so far in good order, but the return was very different, each one going his own way. Our horses, although good, were very tired and had few opportunities to feed. I went in company with the chief of the Bows, while my two Frenchmen followed us. After having covered a considerable piece of ground I realized, without looking behind us, that they were missing. I told the Bow chief that I no longer saw my Frenchmen and he replied: "I will stop everyone who is in our band." I wheeled about at full speed and I discovered them at the tip of an island allowing their horses to feed. After joining them I perceived fifteen men approaching from the woods, covering themselves with their arrow quivers. There was one who was far ahead of the others, and we let them approach within half range of a rifle shot. Seeing that they were preparing to attack us, I thought it well to fire several shots at them, and this obliged them to retreat hastily, this weapon being much respected by all those tribes which do not have the use of it and whose arrow quivers cannot save them from the bullets. We remained there until night, when we started out, following our instincts as to direction, in the hope of finding traces of our Indians. The prairie through which we passed is dry and barren, and the hoof prints of the horses cannot be detected. We continued our journey at random, not knowing whether or not

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we were on the right track. We were among the first to reach the village of the Bow tribe, arriving finally on February 9th, the second day of our return journey.

The Bow chief had hastened off to try to stop the band which had been marching with us, but they were too frightened to linger in a region so near the enemy. He was very uneasy all that night; the next day he had us circled to stop us from going further. He continued to have his people search, but they were without success. Finally he reached the village, five days after us, more dead than alive from grief at not knowing what had become of us. The first bit of news that he had received was that we had fortunately arrived the evening before the bad weather had set in, two feet of snow having fallen accompanied by a terrible storm the day after our arrival. His grief turned into joy and he did not know how to show his gratitude.

It was very surprising that the Bow chief, with the help of several others, had scattered his band in search of us, in order to find us. Every day groups of them arrived at the village, very downcast, believing us to be lost. All the tribes had separated in order to find food more easily. We continued to proceed with the Bow tribe until the first day of March, keeping constantly east southeast.

I sent one of our Frenchmen with an Indian to the tribe of the *Gens de la Petite Cerise* (Little Cherry Indians), having learned that they were near. They spent ten days on the journey and brought us word inviting us to join them.

I communicated our plan to the Bow chief, who showed emotion on seeing us resolved to leave him. We were just as sorry to leave him because of the kind behavior which he had always shown us. To console him, I promised to come to visit him, on condition that he should settle near a small river which I pointed out to him, and build a fort and grow grain there.

He acquiesced in all that I proposed to him and begged me to leave again the following spring and join him as soon as I had seen my father at Fort La Reine. To relieve his



distress, I promised all that he asked, and presented him with everything that I thought might be useful to him.

Seeing that there was no likelihood of being conducted to the Spanish territory and having no doubt that my father was very uneasy about us, we determined to depart for Fort La Reine, and left the Bow tribe, to the great regret of all.

On March 15th we reached the tribe of the Little Cherry. They were returning from their winter quarters and they were two days' march from their fort, which is on the bank of the Missouri.

We reached their fort on the 19th and were received with great demonstrations of joy. I applied myself to learning their language and found it very easy. There was one man among them who had been brought up among the Spaniards and spoke their language as his native tongue. I questioned him often, and he told me all that had been related to me concerning them, that he had been baptized and had not forgotten his prayers. I asked him if it was easy to get there (to the Spanish country). He replied that it was very far and there were many dangers to be met on account of the Snake tribe, and that it took at least twenty days to make the trip on horseback.

I inquired about their commerce. He told me that they made articles of iron and carried on a large trade in buffalo skins and slaves, giving in exchange horses and merchandise, according as the Indians desired, but no guns or ammunition.

He informed me that three days' distance away from them there was a Frenchman who had settled there several years before. I should have gone to find him, if our horses had been in condition. I determined to write him and induce him to come to us, saying that we would wait for him until the end of March, since we were expecting to leave at the beginning of April to return to the *Mantanes* and thence to Fort La Reine, and that, if he should not come, he should at least send us news of himself.

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I placed upon a hillock near the fort a lead plaque with the arms and inscription of the king and formed a pyramid of stones for the general. I told the Indians, who had no knowledge of the lead plaque which I had placed in the ground, that I was setting up these stones in memory of our coming to their country. I should have liked very much to take the altitude at that place; but our astrolabe had been out of order since the beginning of our journey, the ring being broken.

Finding ourselves without news of our Frenchmen when the month of April came and being urged on by the guides whom I had engaged to conduct us to the *Mantanes*, and our horses being in good condition, I prepared to leave and offered several gifts to the chiefs of the tribe, who had always guarded us and treated us well while we were with them, as well as to a number of the most important of our good friends. I suggested to the chiefs that if, by chance, the Frenchman to whom I had written should come to their fort shortly after our departure, he could find us with the *Mantanes*, since we expected to remain there for a time. I should have been glad to get him away from among the Indians. I assured the chief of the tribe that I would take very great care of the three young men whom he gave us as guides, and that, although the *Mantanes* were their enemies, they would have nothing to fear while with us.

We departed on April 2nd, much lamented by the whole tribe. • They entreated us urgently to come to see them again. On the 9th, at mid-day, we came to a village of twenty-five lodges of the *Gens de la Flèche collée*, otherwise called Prairie Sioux. We passed along among the women and baggage. We stopped a very short time. They showed us great friendliness and pointed out to us the place where they were going to make their camp. We settled down for the night in sight of their village, expecting that some of them would come over to us, and we remained on our guard all the time. No one came.

The next day we continued on our route, sometimes north northeast and sometimes northwest, as far as the



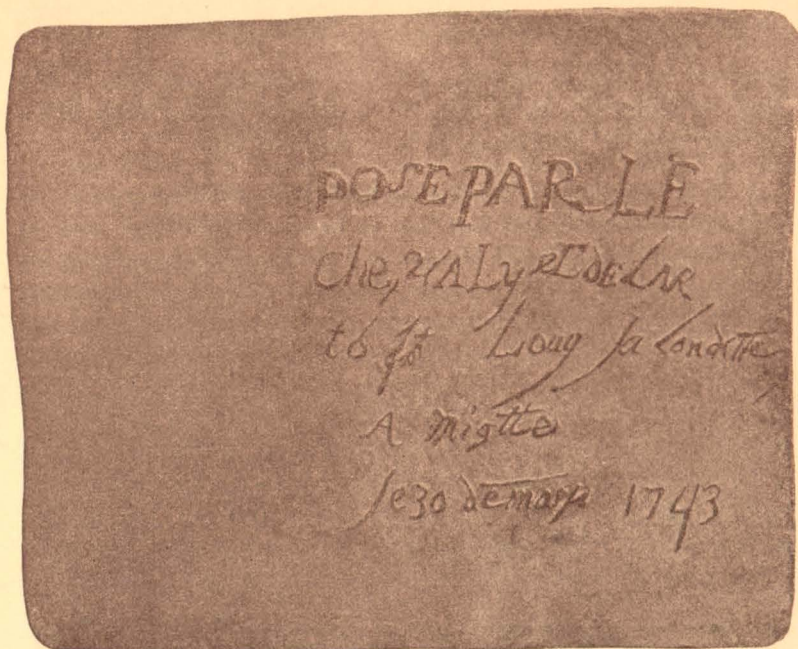
country of the *Mantanes*, without meeting anyone. We arrived there on May 18th. I sent our guides back after having settled with them to their satisfaction.

We intended to remain there fifteen or twenty days to rest ourselves and put our horses in good condition; but on the 26th day I learned that there were some *Assiniboëls* at Fort La Butte, who were about to leave for Fort La Reine. We got ready promptly to make use of the opportunity and to protect ourselves thereby from the danger of enemies. We went to Fort La Butte on the morning of the 27th; the *Assiniboëls* had just left. We had not let them know that we wished to go with them. Two *Mantanes* offered to come with us in order to see my father and learn the way to our fort. We hastened our pace a little and we joined the *Assiniboëls* at their camping ground; there were more than a hundred of them. We continued on our way together.

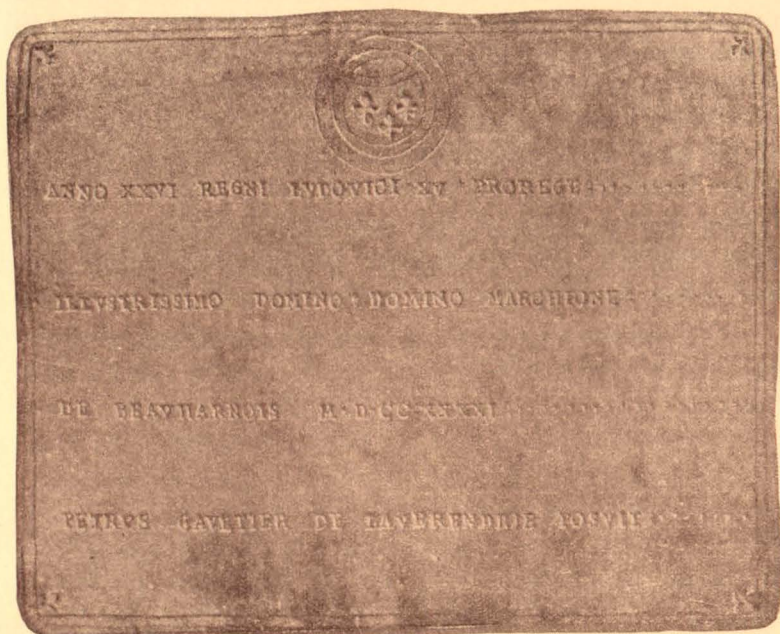
On the 31st our scouts perceived thirty Sioux ambushed on our route. We advanced upon them in a body. They were greatly surprised to see so many men and retreated in good order, occasionally making opposition to those who approached them too closely. They knew very well with whom they had to deal and thought the *Assiniboëls* to be cowards. As soon as they perceived us, all mounted on our horses, and noted that we were Frenchmen, they fled in great haste, not even stopping to look behind them. None of our men were killed but several were wounded. We do not know how many men they lost, except for one man who was found among us.

We arrived at the village near the mountain on June 2nd. As our horses were tired, we stopped to remain with the Indians of the village until the 20th. We procured a guide to conduct us to Fort La Reine, where we arrived on July 2nd, to the great satisfaction of my father, who was very uneasy about us as it had not been possible to send him any news of us since our departure, and also to our own great satisfaction, being past all difficulties, perils and dangers.

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Obverse Side



Reverse Side

Lead Tablet placed by Chevalier de la Verendrye near Pierre, South Dakota



NOTE: Ambassador M. Jusserand, in 1913, commenting upon the lead tablet mentioned in this journal, said:

"The text of the plate so wonderfully recovered has a little story to tell. As it was not easy to print a text on the way, during such difficult expeditions, people would start with ready-prepared ones. The Chevalier seems to have provided himself with one which had been made in view of his elder brother's before mentioned expedition of 1741. It bears, in fact, the name of the eldest of the La Verendryes the text stamped under the arms of France reading:

"'Anno XXVI Regni Ludovici XV—Prorege illustrissimo Domino, Domino Marchione de Beauharnois, MDCCXXXI—Petrus Gaultier de Laverendrie Posuit.'

"That is: 'In the twenty-sixth year of the reign of Louis XV., the most illustrious Lord, the Lord Marquis of Beauharnois being Viceroy, 1741, Peter Gaultier de Laverendrie placed this.'

"But the obverse of the plate, shows that it was really turned to use by the Chevalier and at the exact moment mentioned by him. Instead of the beautiful regular inscriptions engraved at home in Latin for the elder brother before he started, we have but a rough one, made as best they could, with the point of a knife, and certainly not by Verendrye himself. As the placing of the plate in the earth was done secretly, and he himself was probably staying, as usual, with the chief of the tribe he apparently gave orders to one of his followers to do the necessary work. That follower must have been one of the 'two Frenchmen' which he mentions without giving their names as having accompanied him. It was not his brother who is not named in the plate, and who, as we see in the journal, would sometimes be stationed at a different place. The author of the inscription was a man of little education who writes 'chevalier' with a y and a t: 'Chevalyet,' and who apparently performed his work in some hurry. So far as it can be read on the photograph which you had the kindness of sending me, the text is:

'Pose par le  
Chevalyet de Lave  
t b St (?) Louis la Londette  
A Miottee  
le 30 de Marse 1743'

"Louise or St. Louis la Londette and A. Miottee who sign as witnesses were undoubtedly the 'two Frenchmen' who had accompanied the Chevalier.

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"Everything about the plate tallies with everything in the journal; its authenticity cannot be doubted. As a reminder of the plucky attempt of ancestors, acting under the most trying difficulties the new-found relic has a truly sacred character, for Frenchmen and for Americans both."

Later he added the further observation:

"I can add but little to what I had written before concerning the La Verendrye family and the leaden plate so wonderfully discovered. I have, however, ascertained how the third line of the inscription in French should be interpreted. The first letters preceding the word Louis are an abbreviation for the christian name of Toussaint. The full name of the man mentioned in that line reads, therefore: Toussaint Louis la Londelle."

[South Dakota Historical Collections, Vol. VII, pp. 374, 378 (1914).]

The tablet was discovered at Fort Pierre, South Dakota, February 16, 1913, and, its historical importance being at once recognized, it became the subject of much study. The chief documents concerning the La Verendrye explorers, in Pierre Margry's valuable work, entitled: "*Decouvertes et Etablissements des Francais dans le Sud de l'Amerique Septentrionale, 1614, 1754,*" (Paris, Vol. VI, 1888), were critically examined, and the whole subject became the theme of debates and historical comments that were later published in the volume of the South Dakota Historical Collections above mentioned.





