RIVIÈRE AUX RATS CANOE ROUTE

HIVERNAGE — The Indians and Métis were familiar with this region many years before the white man came to establish his permanent settlement. Here in the dense woodland along La Rivière aux Rats they found the requisites for survival during the harsh prairie winter; an abundance of game, fish and plenty of fuelwood. An 1805 document of La Compagnie du Nord-Ouest gives the following census of people living along this river:

Indians:
men 70;
women 90,
children 150.

Whites:
Men 25,
women 7,
children 10.

Also mentioned is that none of the women were of white race.

DESCRIPTION OF THE 140 MILE SEVEN DAY VOYAGE — The Rivière aux Rats canoe trip starts at La Montagne de Cyprès and ends in Saint Boniface at the site of the old Broadway Bridge just south of the present Provencher Bridge. The recommended time of the year for doing the one week voyage is between the end of spring break-up and the end of May. This trip has much to offer in many respects. Waterfowl is plentiful on the more tranquil sections of the little river; mallard ducks being the most common. At many places beavers are busy at construction and wild mink are often seen but muskrats are a rarity. However on such a trip interest should not be limited to nature alone, for beauty is not restricted to a single subject and such values as folklore, traditions and history also deserve attention. The appreciation of these values enables the canoeist to enjoy a more profound experience, be it paddling in calm waters, rushing through rapids or sitting by a humble camp-fire after sundown.

FIRST DAY — From the starting point to provincial trunk highway No 12. The winding stream has many log jams, the banks being well treed with elm, oak and spruce. The water is clear, revealing the hard sand river bottom. During the summer months this part would be impossible.

SECOND DAY — From highway No. 12 to Provincial Road No.208. This portion can be used all summer long for short weekend trips. The channel is wide and deep with numerous campsites in the tall, thick forest. The immediate area along the river banks is somewhat more elevated than the surrounding terrain and well landscaped by nature. Some distance beyond the long grass, tamarack stands are seen. Later in the day a few farms start appearing and the canoeist passes under a municipal bridge. Then for several hours the river passes through swamps and clusters of willows, eventually giving way to bushland. Before arriving at Provincial Road 208, there are a few short stretches of fast water.

THIRD DAY — Provincial Road 208 to Provincial Road 216. Much of the day is spent canoeing through swamp with the exception of a few high places where farms are situated. this area is known locally as "Les Ormes." At the west of this low country, fast water begins and there is much evidence of beaver activity from here on. Numerous rapids are encountered for the rest of the day, none of them treacherous, but they can be tricky and it is worthwhile at certain places to beach the canoe and check around the bends ahead.

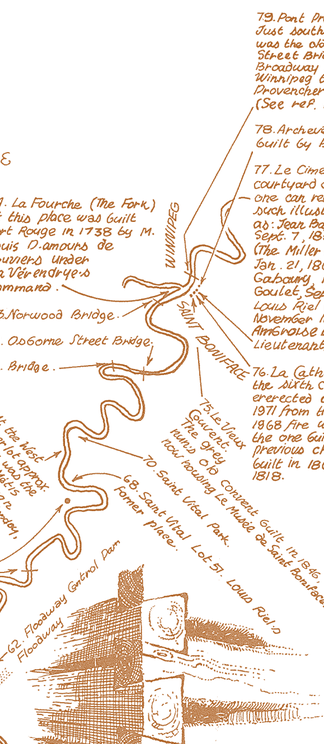
FOURTH DAY — Provincial Road 216 to La Rochelle. From here to Réservoir Saint Malo the river abounds in fast waters and rapids and there are many portages to be made. In this area the stream is descending the ancient beaches of Lake Agassiz and at places has channel cut deeply into this country of "La Petite Montagne." The entrance into the reservoir gives one the feeling of travelling through an old beaver flooding and seems to be a popular place for waterfowl. Le Parc Récréatif Provincial Saint Malo is located at the north-west corner of the réservoir just above the dam. The last stretch of fast water and rapids is that from the bottom of the dam to the No. 59 highway bridge. A short distance downstream is La Rochelle.

FIFTH DAY — La Rochelle to Otterburne. Farmland and dense forest is the usual. Water is slow flowing from here to Saint Boniface.

SIXTH DAY — Otterburne to Saint Norbert. The canoeist follows the Rivière aux Rats to its mouth then continues down the Rivière Rouge.

SEVENTH DAY — Saint Norbert to the end of the voyage near pont Provencher.

NOTE — There is approximately 400 feet difference in elevation from starting point to the final point of the voyage.



79. Pont Provencher. Just south of this bridge was the old Broadway Street Bridge, linking Broadway Street in Winnipeg to Avenue Provencher in Saint Boniface. (See ref. note.)

78. Archevêché 1864, built by Bishop Taché

77. Le Cimetière. In the courtyard of the Cathédrale one can read on tombstones such illustrious names as: Jean Baptist Lagimodière, Sept. 7, 1855; Louis Riel (The Miller of the Seine), Jan. 21, 1864; Marie-Anne Gaboury, 1875; Elzéar Goulet, Sept 13, 1870; Louis Riel (Métis leader), November 16, 1885; Ambroise D. Lepine (Riel's Lieutenant), June 8, 1923

76. La Cathédrale. This is the fifth church erected on this site in 1971 from the ruins of the 1968 fire which destroyed the one built in 1908. The previous churches were built in 1863, 1839, 1825 & 1818.

75. Le Vieux Couvent. The grey nunnery now housing the Musée de Saint Boniface

74. La Fourche (The Fork) at this place was built Fort Rouge in 1738 by M. Louis D'amours de Louvrens under La Vérendrye's Command.

73. Norwood Bridge.

72. Osborne Street Bridge.

71. Bridge.

70. Saint Vital Park. Former place.

69. Lot 13. At the West end of this waterfront area a mile away was the site where the Métis stopped the Dominion Land Surveyors on Monday, October 11th 1869.

68. Saint Vital. Lot 51. Louis Riel's Farm.

67. A University of Manitoba

67. Highway No. 100

66. Cameron Monk Monastery. This Monastery at Cerisault France in 1098.

65. Historic site. Chapelle de Bon Secours. Constructed by Father Richot. The above of Mary over the altar was made by a local nun of the time in papier mache.

64. La Barrière. Here on November 1st 1869 the Métis "barred" the road to the envoys of the Canadian Government on their way to Fort Garry to extend a new Government.

63. Historic site. Commemorating the first Commander of the region, Métis Métis Alexis Lafrance who defied the Métis at the time of the rebellion. Also the location where the Métis hoisted the Union Jack and proclaimed a Provisional Government.

62. Floodway Control Dam

61. HOWDEN

60. Formed in 1936. The ferry in operation here is the only one on the Red River.

59. Red Rock H.Y. Hinge Transformation station of the Red River Development 1962. "Flooded here in 1916 and 1962 to the depth of 12' Drift timber, deposited by flood waters."

58. Mouth of Rivière aux Rats

57. Ford (See ref. notes)

56. Bridge. Provincial Road 200. (Chemin Sainte Marie).

55. Mouth of Rivière aux Marais

54. Bridge. Provincial Road No 206. going to Sainte Agathe.

53. Piers in the river.

52. Canadian Pacific Railway bridge. This railway also known as the Pembina Branch and Soo Line, was officially opened December 3rd 1878. It is believed that the Countess of Dufferin pulled the Ceremonial train on that day and stopped at Rivière aux Rats at 10 minutes past 10 a.m. to refuel with water and firewood. This line was also Manitoba's first railroad.

51. Vehicle bridge

50. Winnipeg Bible College. Formerly La Maison Saint Joseph and College Saint Joseph.

49. Rapids. At this place a stone dam was built by the railroad to keep a water reserve for refueling the steam locomotives.

48. Municipal bridges

47. Mouth of Joubert Creek (Rivière la Fourche). Palliser's map of 1865 called it "Little Fat River."

46. Carey Road (Provincial Road 205)

45. Municipal bridge. For the next few miles the river banks are well furnished with trees and many good camping sites.

44. Right. Bur Oak 35" diameter at breast height.

43. Raisin Bleu Sauvage (Wild Grapes) See ref. note.

37. At the east end of the bridge on the north side of the road was the site of la Fromagerie Coopérative de Saint Pierre Sud.

36. Municipal bridge.

35. Le Grand Canal, excavated in 1902-03 to drain the large muskeg west of the river.

34a. 2½ miles east from junction of Highways 59 and 23, are the remains of a lime kiln, supposedly to have been used at one time by Louis Riel (the Father) and miller of the Seine.

34. East of the river on Lot 84 was the old site of La Bonderie et Cie. Established in 1887 this plant produced canned butter and condensed milk. The products were exported to Japan, Brazil and Australia. The Company was in operation only for a few years.

33. Summer cottages and man made dam portage on left side.

28. P.F.R.A. dam (1958). Portage on the right side 150 paces.

27. Saint Malo Provincial Recreational Area.

26. Beginning of Saint Malo Réservoir. Looks very much like an old beaver flooding.

25. Road landing which used to be a river crossing before the flooding for reservoir.

32. At left, Lot 19. The 200 acre homestead year where Louis Malo settled with his family in 1877. A log house, 18' x 20' was built. (See ref. note)

31. Highway 59 bridge. This highway was known before as the King Edward Highway.

30. On the left Grotte de Saint Malo Pilgrimages started here in 1896. Since then, an annual pilgrimage is held here every summer.

29. For a mile downstream is the last stretch of fast water on this trip. Watch for stones.

24. Rapids. Portage 200 paces on bulldozed trail at left.

23. Rapids. Portage 200 paces on the right side. High banks and good camping places.

22. Bridge & Provincial Road 216

21. Rapids. Portage on left side 60 paces.

20. Bridge with small rapids underneath.

19. Rapids. Portage on left side - 300 paces.

18. Rapids. Portage on left side - 300 paces.

17. Rapids. Portage on right side - 200 paces.

16. Rapids. Portage on left side - 60 paces.

15. Bridge. Fast water

14. Municipal bridge. Pavement ended. Portage on left end of bridge over gravel road.

13. Wide shallow channel. Small rapids. Portage at left end of bridge over Municipal road.

12. Narrow river marsh. Beaver dams and lodges in this district, and fast waters.

11. The area here is known as "La Muskeg des Ormes." In the past, grazing grounds & haymaking. Ground extended here in 1910. Grounds existed such that the blaze was region almost impractical for dry autumn. Since then, fire and continue their devouring challenge on the muskeg.

10. Farm buildings & bridge.

9. Corduroy bridge.

8. Good camping places.

7. From Provincial Road 208 down for a mile or so are the last chances of getting a decent camping location; beyond is open grassy marsh.

6. Fast water, a number of bridges are passed before reaching Provincial Road 208.

5. Municipal bridge

4. End of heavy forested region, pastoral sloughs are seen on the north side of the river. (Outardes) Canada Geese are spotted here.

3. Left, mouth of the Sand River, a short distance ahead is Highway No.12 bridge and a few miles further downstream are good camping places.

2. Winding channel with plenty of debris between reference no. 1 and 3. On the left side is Highway No.12 and Prov. Road 402 junction.

1. Place of departure. 4½ miles past the bridge going south on highway No.12. At this point, a trail going north leads to the river.

Bridge

MONTAGNE AUX CYPRÈS

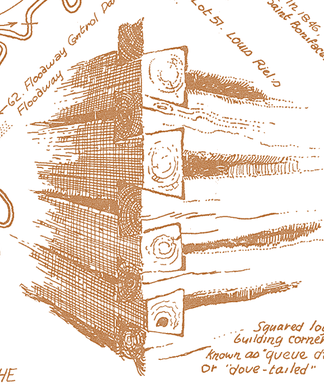
CARRICK

C.N.R.

SANDILANDS PROVINCIAL FOREST

LA DRAVE (LOG DRIVE) (No 79). The last important log drive was the unsuccessfull one of 1905; prior to that Epinette Rouge (Tamarack) was cut in the eastern swamps from Leo Ormes to La petite montagne. The logs were cut and prepared in eight foot lengths then swamped to the river. When the spring water conditions were right, a cageu (raft) was made and set afloat at the tail-end of the drive; at front two draveurs would lead, undoing log jams or blocking the passage at places where the river overflowed its banks. This was done with the aid of two long poles approximately 30 feet in length and kept at the head for this purpose. At sundown the fleet was jammed and the men would walk back to the cageu and join the rest of the crew for supper. The cooking was simple but filling. It consisted of "Grillades de lard salé" (slices of salted pork), beans, galette de métis (bannock), syrup and tea. The cageu was made of good size cedar logs and measured 12x14 feet; half of the surface was covered with rough planks and carried a tin stove, hay covered bunks, grub box, etc. A tent was set over this living portion and eventually crew, cageu and logs would reach the Rivière Rouge. At this point the logs were set in booms for the rest of the trip which ended at the old Broadway Street bridge connecting to Avenue Provencher in Saint Boniface. At this place the logs were loaded on wagons and hauled to Winnipeg to be used for street paving. One would never imagine that the old wooden paved section of Main Street from the Royal Alexandra Hotel to the corner of McDermot Avenue came from the Tamarack swamps of the upper Rivière aux Rats.

OLD HOUSE (No 40) One of the three still standing pioneer houses of the district was built by Louis De Rivière in 1876 on section 16, constructed of tamarack logs (Epinette Rouge) measuring an average of 6" X 8". The outside is covered with vertical cedar shiplap and the inside is diagonally lined with willow sticks covered with a clay mixture common to the time known as "terre blanche." The terre blanche was applied in a thick paste mixture of clay, hay and water. The place to gather this clay was on the ridge, locally known as "La Petite Montagne" situated approximately a mile and a half east of the house. Every autumn was the time of "Bouzillage" when everyone made sure their houses and farm buildings were well patched up. A short distance north of De Rivière's house is Gabriel Lafournaise's house; built of oak logs in 1872 on lot no. 38.



Squared log building corner detail known as "queue d'aronde" or "dove-tailed"

"La Vielle Maison" of De Rivière as seen from the river.

LOUIS MALO (No.32). In 1877 on Lot no. 91, he was the first to homestead in Saint Malo, a place name which is alleged to owe its origin to him. Skilled at woodworking, he built numerous carts, sleighs and home furnishing, some of which are still to be seen in museums.

An original "armoire" made by Louis Malo, now on display in the Musée de Saint Boniface

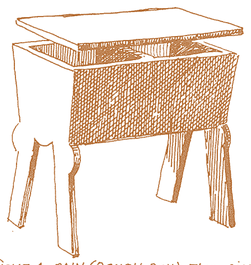
Typical "Terre blanche" plastered interior wall weathered over the years revealing the original willow stick lath.

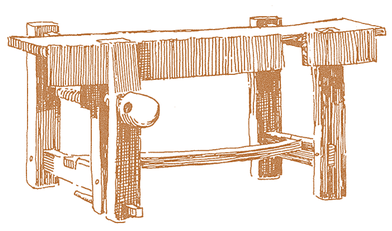
Logs were held together by wooden pins measuring about 1½" in diameter and 3" long driven into pre-drilled holes at intervals varying from 4 to 6 feet with extra pins around window and door openings.

LE SIROP D'ÉRABLE (MAPLE SYRUP) Worthy of mention is maple syrup making, carried out by local people from time to time in maple stands along the river. However, owing to the frequently erratic spring break-up and the type of maple growing here, it was not possible to produce the syrup in quantity and quality of that found in Eastern Canada.

When spring thaw started, maples were notched 1" deep on the sunny side, a chalumeau (spout) introduced and a pail attached, larger trees affording several pails. The sap was collected every day and brought to the house where it was poured into a boiler on the kitchen stove. The making of Manitoba syrup demanded much more water than its eastern counterpart due to the lower sugar content of the sap, the final product having a dark colour. As late as 1969 this rational delicacy was made in Saint Pierre and used on the breakfast table.

ÉRABLE DES PLAINES
MANITOBA MAPLE
ACER NEGUNDO





HÛCHE A PAIN (DOUGH BOX) This piece of furniture was found in most of the "Colons" (settlers) homes. It was used primarily to knead the dough with the inverted cover being used as a "planche à pain" (bread board). In Manitoba, a "most complete collection of "huche à pain" can be found in the Musée de Saint Boniface.

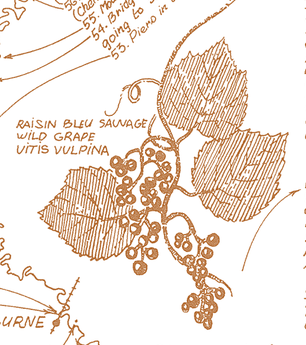
ÉTABLI & ÉTAU (WORK BENCH AND VICE) Dating back six generations it originated at Saint François Xavier and was brought to la Rivière aux Rats sometime in the 1870's. It is entirely made of wood including the vice screw, being held rigid by means of mortise and tenon joints with wooden pegs. Originally used to construct "charrettes de la Rivière Rouge (Red River Ox Carts) it is now in a private collection.

CUISINE CANADIENNE
Many of the settlers in the area originated from le Bas Canada (Lower Canada) bringing their tradition with them. A part of this tradition is the cuisine.

VIN DE RAISIN SAUVAGE (WILD GRAPE WINE) (No.43) Ferment one gallon of wild grapes, one gallon of water and 3 lbs. sugar for sixty days in a crock with dust cover. For the first forty days stir every two days to aid fermentation, but avoid stirring the bottom so as not to disturb the sediment.

Let the mash rest for the remaining twenty days then siphon the wine into bottles. The bottles should be filled right up; tie the corks and set the bottles horizontally on a shelf.

RAISIN BLEU SAUVAGE
WILD GRAPE
VITIS VULPINA



SOUPE AUX POIS (PEA SOUP) Add a pint of yellow peas to 2 quarts of water and boil until the peas start to split then add the following:

2 tablespoons salt
1 turnip, finely diced
1 small parsnip, finely diced
1 sliced onion
½ clove of garlic

Bring back to a slow boil again for possibly 2 hours until the soup is yellow, then add a handfull of bread crumbs, boil about fifteen minutes longer and the soup is ready to be served.

TOURTIÈRES - Grind 5 lbs. of fresh pork and add the following:

5 sliced onions
2 diced cloves of garlic
1 teaspoon pepper
1 teaspoon ground cloves
2 cups water
2½ tablespoons dry parsley
2½ teaspoons salt

Mix together in a saucepan and cook without cover, stirring occasionally until the meat is done. Remove from the stove, mix in 1 cup of bread crumbs and let cool. Pour the preparation into a pie crust, cover with pastry and bake at 500F until crust is brown.

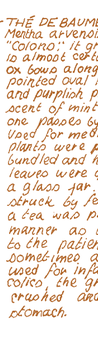
NOTE: "La Tourtière" is mostly a Christmas time dish.

RAGOÛT DE PATTES - Cut 3 lbs. of pigs feet into pieces, roll into a mixture of the following ingredients:

1 teaspoon coarse salt
½ teaspoon pepper
½ teaspoon cinnamon
¼ teaspoon cloves
⅛ teaspoon nutmeg

Melt two tablespoons of fat in a cauldron pan and brown the prepared pigs feet until they are a dark brown colour. Add five cups of lukewarm water and one cup of fried onions, cover and let simmer until the meat is tender in about two hours.

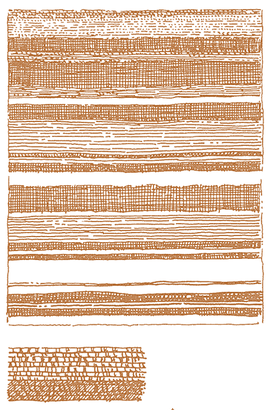
TIRE A LA MÉLASSE - Mix together 4 cups of molasses, one tablespoon of vinegar and one tablespoon of butter. Boil the mixture until the "tire" gets hard when tried in water, then pour into a buttered pie plate. Let cool and stretch with the hands. At times the "tire" was too soft & it was hardened in snow or by putting snow under the plate. Using scissors cut into chunks 1" long and wrap in wax paper.



THÉ DE BAUME (WILD MINT TEA) Mentha arvensis L. Much respected by the "Colons", it grows in wet lands and is almost certain to be found in the many ox bows along the river. It has pointed oval leaves growing in pairs and purplish pink flowers. A strong scent of mint can be detected when one passes by a patch of them. Used for medicinal purposes, the plants were picked in their entirety, bundled and hung to dry. The dry leaves were ground and stored in a glass jar. When someone was struck by fever or upset stomach, a tea was prepared in the same manner as domestic tea and served to the patient, sugar being sometimes added. It was also used for infants suffering from colics, the green leaves being crushed and applied to the child's stomach.

BABICHE - Moose or Cowhide is soaked in a mixture consisting of 10 gallons of soft water, 2 gallons of hydrated lime and 2 gallons of hardwood ashes. The skin is soaked for three hours, removed from the solution, stretched and let to drain. This operation is repeated a total of four times the first day, three times the second and once each day thereafter until the hair in the thickest part starts to loosen. It was then rinsed in clear water, the hair scraped off and the skin dried. La babiche had many uses, including the making of laces, snow shoe interlacing, etc.

LA CATALOGNE - Was used in the early days of the settlements as bed spreads or rugs on the cold wooden floors. Nowadays being so rare, one can be considered privileged to have one as a wall decoration. It was made with used textile, old shirts, dresses or what not, first taken apart and ironed, then cut into strips varying in width according to the quality of material, it was then woven into a yarn. Some "Catalogne" were very colourful and attractive with their arrangement of different coloured bands, although their primary purpose was a practical one.



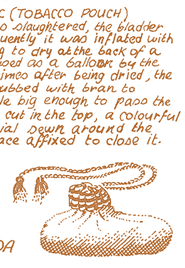
NAVET DE PRAIRIE (PRAIRIE-TURNIP) Ranralea occidentalis Growing in the "Clairière" (Clearings) of "La Petite Montagne" it was well known to the Indians and Métis as a good source of food, the black skinned root being eaten after it was peeled.

TABAC DU PAYS (LOCAL TOBACCO) Many old timers took pride in growing tobacco for their own personal use, while others preferred to buy tobacco at the "marchand général" the tobacco being imported "en feuilles" (in leaves) from the east.

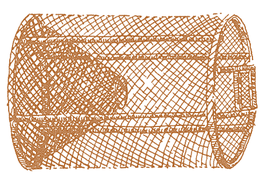
Some of the popular "Tabac Canayen" brands of the day were "Le Grand Rouge, Le Pti Rouge, Le Parfum d'Italie" and "Le Roue Queene."

HACHOIR À TABAC
TOBACCO CHOPPING-KNIFE

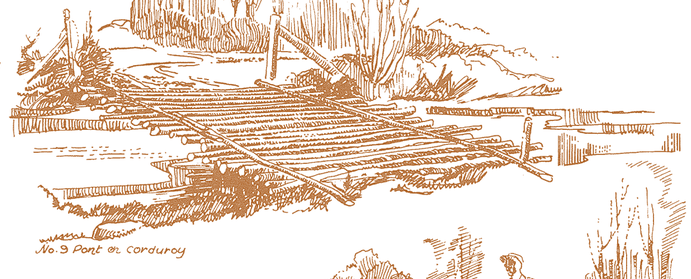
BLAGUE À TABAC (TOBACCO POUCH) When a pig was slaughtered, the bladder was saved. Frequently it was inflated with a pipestem, hung to dry at the back of a cookstove and used as a balloon by the children. Other times after being dried, the bladder was rubbed with bran to soften it. A hole big enough to pass the hand was then cut in the top, a colourful band of material sewn around the border and a lace affixed to close it.



VARVEAU (FISH TRAP) The most popular type is made with old buggy wheel rims, four wooden poles, chicken wire & hay wire. The trap is rolled into the river channel and the "braconnier" (poacher) usually pays it a visit in the early morning to get fish for lunch, the favorite species being "le doré" (pickerel) and "le brochet" (jackfish).



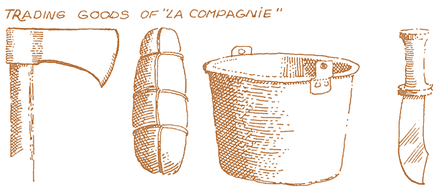
LA SAINTE CATHERINE - The 25th of November, being the feast day of the Saint in question, it was a time for celebration by the children, each bringing to school in their lunch pails some "tire" which was prepared the previous Sunday or the eve of Ste. Catherine's day. Each family prepared the "tire" a little differently and consequently there were usually as many varieties of this treat as there were families. The end of the afternoon saw the observance of a little feast in the small school house so common in those days, as the children exchanged candies. If the children had been good, the teacher would add a special treat, so it was not unusual to have extremely well behave classes during the few days preceding the 25 of November.



No.9 Pont en corduroy

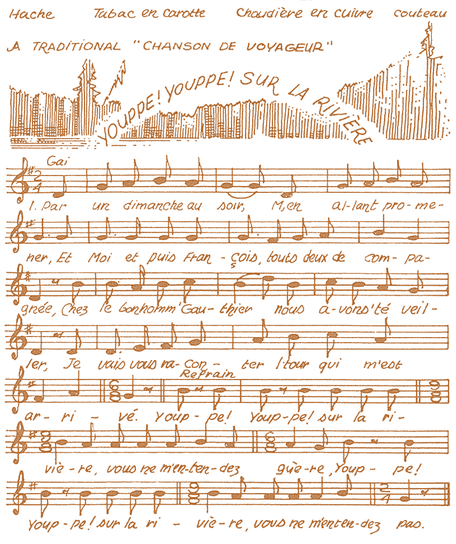
No.34a. Fourneau à Chaux at La Rochelle. Lot 82

TRADING GOODS OF "LA COMPAGNIE"



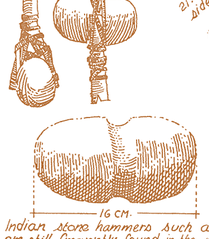
Hache — Tabac en carotte — Chaudière en cuivre — couteau

A TRADITIONAL "CHANSON DE VOYAGEUR"



FORT CHABOILLEZ 1796 (No 57) At the mouth of the river a fort was built by Charles Jean Baptist Chaboillez (the father). This gentleman of la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest spent the winter of 1796-97 at this site and then was on the Rivière Rouge and Assiniboine off and on until 1805 or later. He died in Montreal in 1808 and was succeeded in the C.N.O. (N.W.C.) by a son Charles. David Thompson who passed by the mouth of the river while travelling south on la Rivière Rouge wrote on Friday, March 9th, 1798 that Chaboillez's houses were located one sixth of a mile up the Rivière aux Rats in latitude 49°33' 58" N., Thompson's map of Western British North America dated 1843, shows Rat Brook (Rivière aux Rats) and the N.W. Company Post situated on the north bank of the river.

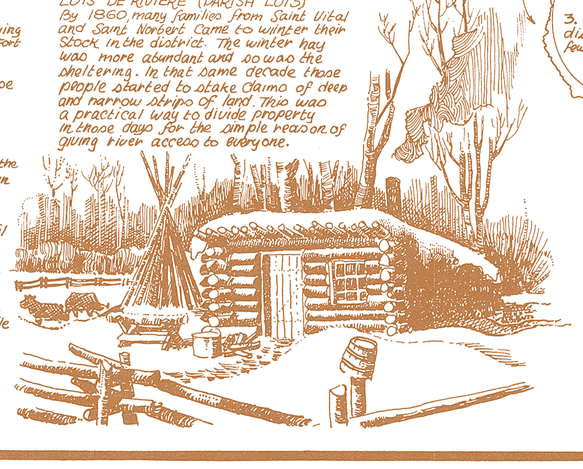
Alexander Henry (the young) who, with some Indians, camped at the mouth of the river on Sunday, August 24th, 1800 saw the remains of Chaboillez's old buildings and adds: "Few years ago beavers were plenty on the upper parts of these forks, but now are nearly destroyed". The C.N.O. records Hivernant en dérouine refer to Le District de la Rivière aux Rats and makes account of its staff in men, canoes, trading goods, provisions and returns in fur "Les Voyageurs" of the time also used the spruce stands up the river to furnish spruce gum for their birch canoes.



16 CM.

Indian stone hammers such as the one shown above are still frequently found in the region. The primitive tool consisted of an oval shaped granite stone lashed with rawhide thongs to a stout wooden handle.

CHEMIN FORT GARRY-SAINT PAUL (CROW WING TRAIL) (No.39) This cart trail was the route lying east of la Rivière Rouge between Fort Garry, Crow Wing and Saint Paul. Some of the old freighters such as William Charette and Moise Goulet, have often told of the times when they drove ox-cart caravans. They would frequently get tired of hearing the squeaking of their cart wheels and occasionally would lubricate the vehicle by shoving frogs between the axle and the hub. This would content the wheels for some distance. On the map, no. 39 locates the crossing of the trail from the east to the west side of the river, a depression in the soil going up the east bank is the only visible sign of past history. The reason for traversing at this point was to avoid la Coulée Bodé, half a mile south and Place Molé, at what is now known as La Rochelle.



LOTS DE RIVIÈRE (PARISH LOTS) By 1860, many families from Saint Vital and Saint Norbert came to winter their stock in the district. The winter hay was more abundant and so was the sheltering. In that same decade those people started to stake claims of deep and narrow strips of land. This was a practical way to divide property in those days for the simple reason of giving river access to everyone.

SCALE
Miles 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

CAUTION:
This Canoe Route is to be used for general information; it is not a navigational chart. It was prepared in the April of 1971 and the information recorded, including information with respect to the volume and velocity of water, reflects only the conditions which existed at that time. Because of the constantly changing nature of the waterway, this Canoe Route should be referred to with extreme caution, and only in conjunction with topographical maps and other available data.

Manitoba Department of Natural Resources
Parks Branch

Manitoba Natural Resources

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