

# *Souris Valley Plains – A History*

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## INTRODUCTION

The following account has little to do with the pioneers who flooded the Souris Valley in the 1880's. Instead it deals with an earlier period, the little known history of the inhabitants who lived in the era before the pioneers, from the first stone age inhabitants to the traders, trappers and buffalo hunters. A good part of this work also deals with the fascinating people who operated trading posts on the Souris River.

The prairies and sandhills of south west Manitoba and the Dakotas must surely have seem strange and lonely to the first men who crossed them. These men, Indians, trappers, traders and hunters were entering a land that had existed millions of years before them. Most would move on to explore new mysteries but a few would linger to act out the story of the Souris Valley Plains.

The buffalo herds that roamed the south west were immense. They had arrived in North America from Siberia thousands of years ago and after a long period had sorted themselves into four large herds numbering in the millions. Two of these herds made periodic visits to south west Manitoba and the Dakotas. In the summer the Republican herd ranged from Wyoming and to southern Manitoba and Saskatchewan. In the winter the northern herd moved into southern Manitoba.

For this reason there were two buffalo hunts a year. From Fort Garry and St. Francois Xavier the buffalo hunters moved into the south Manitoba plains for a summer hunt. This hunt often extended into the Dakotas. It might last six weeks and then the hunters would return home with their supply of pemmican. The winter hunt was fairly stationary. Once the buffalo were located the Metis erected their lodges usually rough log cabins or tents and prepared to shoot and skin as many buffalo as possible in that area.

The buffalo hunt began in southwest Manitoba around 1820 and lasted until 1865. By then the remaining buffalo were found only in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Montana. During this period great numbers of buffalo were killed. During World War I trainloads of buffalo bones were shipped from Grand Clariere, Manitoba to chemical plants in eastern Canada. Several distant buffalo runs can still be located along the Souris River. These are places where the buffalo were driven over steep riverbanks to their death below. Some of these sites are found in the Hartney, Lauder and Melita areas. At these locations one finds plenty of buffalo bones at the bottom of the cliffs, and the plains above the cliffs are a great source of projectile points and scrapers. One of the best sites on the Souris is just north east of Hartney where the Indians held their annual fish run.

Many trails and routes existed along the Souris Valley even before the advent of the white man. One of them, "The Yellow Quill Trail" was used by, first of all, Indians, then traders, explorers and finally freighters and buffalo hunters. This trail began twenty miles east of Fort Garry. At this point, a branch called the Missouri Trail turned south west. The Yellow Quill Trail continued west through the sandhills north of Glenboro, to the junction of the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers. From here it followed the north bank of the Souris River just past Fort Brandon, and then past Fort Grant and Fort Desjarlais, near Hartney and Lauder respectively. South of Fort Desjarlais, the Yellow Quill Trail branched, one branch following the river into North Dakota and the other branch turned south east toward the Turtle Mountains, where it linked up with the Mandan Trail. The Yellow Quill Trail was easily seen in the 1930's by a group of citizens from Souris, headed by the Plaindealer Editor, G. A. McMorran. In 1969 it was still faintly seen in the

Fort Desjarlais and Fort Ash areas. The Yellow Quill Trail served the following Forts and Trading Posts:

- 1.Fort La Reine on the Assiniboine River;
- 2.Brandon House on the Assiniboine River;
- 3.Fort Grant on the Souris River;
- 4.Fort La Souris on the Assiniboine River;
- 5.Fort Desjarlais on the Souris River; and
- 6.Fort Garrioch on the Souris River.

On the Souris River south west of Hartney was Ash House. It was a canoe fort, and probably not serviced by the Yellow Quill Trail. The Missouri Trail, mentioned before, branched off in the vicinity of St. François Xavier crossing the Boyne River near Carman and extending along the east side of the Turtle Mountains into the Dakotas. It was a route mainly for Indians and buffalo hunters.

North of Fort Desjarlais (see map) was a trail sometimes known as the Hudson Bay Trail. It extended from Fort Desjarlais north through the sandhills, past Oak Lake, and then split, one branch going to Fort La Bosse and the other to Brandon House. It was probably a freighters supply route.

Another trail was the route of the Warriors running from Devils Lake, North Dakota past the west side of the Turtle Mountains and then north east towards Fort La Reine. It apparently was used by the Sioux raiding parties.

The Mandan Trail was another Indian trail which ran from the Mandan villages on the Missouri River north past the Turtle Mountains. It was used by the Mandans and later by the Red River carts in the buffalo hunt.

There were certainly many trading posts along the river, some large and some small. The Metis and the Indians of the area told many stories of resting at old trading houses, some of them rude log shelters with mud or clay chimneys and small cellars. There were probably at least 14 trading posts between Souris, Manitoba and the United States border along with several more located in Dakota Territory. The remains of some of them can still be seen.

From this we can conclude that Souris River country was a good fur-bearing country. The Turtle Mountains for example, contained moose, buffalo, lynx, bear, plus all the smaller animals. In the Oak Lake area was found great numbers of mink, beaver and muskrat. Furs also were obtained from the Whitewater and Chain Lakes areas. There is also some evidence that the American Indians brought furs to Fort Desjarlais.

There is a great scarcity of detailed records regarding history of the Souris River Valley. When I first began my search for them, it seemed that few would be found. But happily, I was mistaken. A considerably number of references to this story were found in old history books, documents, diaries and from old-timers still living in the area.

It was after reading the correspondence that transpired between G. A. McMorrان, former editor of the Souris Plaindealer, and Dana Wright, former historian with the North Dakota Historical Society, that I decided to collect historical materials regarding the Souris River Valley.

In 1934, McMorrان and Wright had discovered the sites of several trading posts and forts along the Souris River. They had been helped in this search by a 94 year old Metis woman, Madam La Fontaine, who had lived in one of the forts as a child and as a young woman.

Almost at once I was surprised to find living in the area, four descendents of the buffalo hunters of the 1800's, two descendents of a man who worked in Fort Desjarlais in the 1840's and 50's, two descendents of Cuthbert Grant the trader who built Fort Grant on the Souris River in 1824, and finally a man whose father had been a friend of Gabriel Dumont, the famous Indian fighter. I missed a 107 year old lady by two years but her daughter remembered a good deal of the information that had been passed down through the family. In addition several universities and libraries in the United States and Canada were kind enough to send me some revealing transcripts as were several Canadian government agencies.

Some archaeologists believe that man first arrived in North America more than 20 thousand years ago. However, stone artifacts from south west Manitoba indicate that men first arrived along the Souris about 10 thousand years ago. These first primitive tribes were hunters of buffalo and other animals. From these early men, who were nomadic, developed more stable groups or tribes such as the Cree, Gros Ventre (Big Bellies) and Chippewa.

## CHAPTER 1

### *ORIGINS OF THE SOURIS RIVER AND ITS FIRST INHABITANTS*

About 15,000 years ago, the Souris Plains were partly covered with a sheet of ice. It took 7,000 years for this ice to melt and drain into Hudson Bay. During the melting period most of the Souris Valley in south western Manitoba was a part of Lake Agassiz as was a portion of the Souris Valley in Saskatchewan. The sandhill beaches of this lake are still evident in south western Manitoba. The remnants of an ice-age lake north and west of Weyburn, Sask. are the sources of the present Souris River.

It was during the Cretaceous period that sandstone sediments were built up on many parts of the prairies. These sandstones often appear in river valleys and are called badlands. East of Estevan, Sask. the Souris River has been excavated in such a way as to expose a weird and wonderful world of badlands, strange sandstone rock formations and weather-shaped hills standing in the bottom of the valley and along its sides. Ravines which feed into the main valley have been eroded to expose soft sandstone rock walls and hoodoos.

At the present time the University of Alberta is doing some excavations in one ravine. Excavations along a tributary stream called Long Creek reveal that natives lived there as long ago as 3050 B.C. South of the ghost town of Shand in the same area a Professor Thompson of London, England claimed to have found the fossils of Ichth Ysauri Dinosaurs.

The present Souris River has one branch rising in the Yellow Grass marshes north of Weyburn, Sask. Several other branches from the west rising in the Missouri Couteau join the first branch at Goodwater, Sask, and Weyburn, Sask. All of these sources rise in what was called a dead ice area from the last glacial lake in the area, The Regina Sea.

Winding through two provinces and the state of North Dakota the Souris traverses a distance of about 450 miles and is navigable for much of this distance. The Souris River may not always have followed this course. It is thought that following previous ice ages it may have coursed in a south easterly direction into the Missouri River and thence to the Gulf of Mexico.

At certain times of the year in the previous century and in the early part of this one the Souris has heard the whistle of steamboats and barges. One old timer from the Wawanesa area remembers the sound of the whistles and reports have it that steamboats from Scotia, North Dakota tied up at the Souris docks in Manitoba in the early 1900's. These reports may have grown larger with age as today's river seems navigable for only a short period each year.

According to the Bering Straits migration theory some Asiatic peoples moved across a land bridge that existed perhaps 20,000 years ago between Asia and Alaska. This early migration followed the east side of the Rocky Mountains to the south. Under normal conditions this migration might have crossed south western Manitoba. But at that time the last ice age had covered all but the extreme south west corner of Manitoba and did not begin its retreat until about 7,000 years later. So man may alternately have arrived along the Souris about 13,000 years ago. At this time the glacial lakes Agassiz and Souris were being formed and as they eventually dried up sandy beaches were left along their shore line. It is along these beaches that some projectile points called Folsom, about 10,000 years old have been found. Along the Souris River in North Dakota these points are found in large quantities. So Nomadic Man was in the Souris area at this time.

Folsom points probably date from 10,000 to 20,000 years. Two older points, Sandia and Clovis, are found along the Souris Valley in North Dakota, the Clovis probably being the ancestor of the Folsom.<sup>1</sup>

New evidence of very early migrations to North America by another route has been discovered. Stones with North African inscriptions on them have been found in Canada, the United States, southern Mexico and South America. The inscriptions tell of visits by people from the old world around 500 B.C. This, of course would mean that not all the first native Americans came across the Asian land bridge. Possibly these later visitors may have inter-married with the earlier group producing a race of North Americans not wholly Asiatic. Such a new race could easily have moved northward to settle along the Missouri and Souris Rivers and this would explain the light skinned Mound Builders who appeared in southern Manitoba before 1500 A.D. Such a movement northward from the Gulf of Mexico has been theorized for many years and various speculations concerning it have been put forward.

Certainly the greatest Indian Nation to reach the Souris plains were the Sioux (Dakotas). The Sioux arrived in North America during the last Glacial Period, crossing the Bering Straits into Alaska. They then moved south along the Mackenzie River and entered the prairies along the foothills. They settled along the Mississippi River and in the Great Lakes region and according to one American expert may have extended themselves as far east as North Carolina. Nomadic in nature they ranged as far north as the Souris and Qu'Appelle Rivers and as far west as the Rockies.

In the early 1600's the Sioux were forced west from the woodlands south of the Great Lakes by the Ojibway who were armed with rifles from the eastern traders. The Sioux made new settlements in Minnesota and the Dakotas. This pressure by the Ojibway continued until 1800 when some of the Santee (one branch of Sioux) moved to Rupertsland (Manitoba today). Other branches, the Oglalla Sioux migrated to South Dakota and the Hunkpapa Sioux to western North Dakota.

At one time an Indian Nation called Kiowa lived along the Souris River in Manitoba and North Dakota. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century they began to move south and west along the Missouri and finally south to make a permanent home in Colorado. Their migration can be traced by the trail of two and three-ring stone axe heads they left along their route. Many of these axe heads have been found in south western Manitoba (they can be seen in the museums at Boissevain and Melita).<sup>2</sup>

Earth mound villages have been found on the Souris River near Minot, North Dakota and Coulter, Manitoba. Some of these can be credited to a group of Indians called Hidatsa who may have moved north from the Gulf of Mexico about 1600 A.D. However, it is believed that the Hidatsa were relatives of an earlier group of Mound Builders who lived in the Souris-Antler River area some years earlier. Both groups disappeared except for a few remaining Hidatsa who were located along the Missouri in 1853.

In the summer of 1796 an American, John Evan, was hired by the Missouri Fur Company of St. Louis to find the lost legendary Welsh Indians supposedly living north of the Missouri River, and at the same time engaged in fur trade with the Mandans. According to Welsh history a Prince Madoc reached America from Wales about 1170

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<sup>1</sup> E. Milligan, Known Migrations of Historic Indian Tribes, Courant Press, Bottineau, N.D. 1969.

<sup>2</sup> E. Milligan, Known Migrations of Historic Indian Tribes, Courant Press, Bottineau, N.D. 1969.

A.D. and disappeared with his followers into the interior. If this did happen there is reason to believe these people would have assimilated with the Indians. In any case a fair skinned light haired race of people were reported on the Souris River about 1700.

They were probably descendents of an earlier race of mound builders who lived on the Souris and South Antler Rivers at a much earlier date, Remnants of their mound and earthwork fortifications can still be seen south of Melita along the Souris and Antler Rivers. The earthworks were in triangular form or in some cases in a sort of tandem form approximately six feet high and about two hundred yards to a side.

Strangely enough the mound builders did work with copper metal just as the Welsh miners had done on the east coast of England. In some of the mounds skeletons were found wearing metal ornaments. Mound excavations along the Souris River have yielded:

1. copper breast ornaments;
2. copper head ornaments;
3. copper bracelets;
4. copper pots;
5. clay pots; and
6. bone implements, one of which may have been surgical nature.

The earth fortifications were for protection against the Indians, who are believed to have, in earlier times, followed them north from Central America. By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century these white Indians had been destroyed.

Today there are only a few mounds left. A few were excavated, but many were broken up by curiosity seekers and farm implements. The fortifications, once six feet high, have been reduced to eighteen inch ridges.

A recent excavation by archaeologists, north of Deloraine, revealed thirteen skeletons arranged in a circular fashion. Around the skulls were copper bracelets.

## CHAPTER 2 *INDIAN MIGRATIONS , NATIONS AND WARS*

The Sioux nation was divided into eight branches of which the Dakotas were the largest. The Dakotas were in turn divided into thirteen branches. The most important branches, as far as the Souris Plains is concerned, were:

- the Santee from western Minnesota and later southern Manitoba;
- the Wapeton from Minnesota;
- the Sisseton from eastern North Dakota;
- the Yanton from central North Dakota.

It was from this group that the Assiniboines broke away in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and settled along the Souris River and in the Turtle Mountains.

- The Hunkpapa from Minnesota and later eastern Montana and moving into plains on occasions; and
- The Oglalla from Dakota territory and who, along with the Hunkpapa, formed the Teton alliance.

In 1640 the Sioux obtained horses from the Spaniards or more likely from Indians living in close proximity to the Spaniards. This enabled them to range over greater territories and would bring them more and more into the Souris Plains.

By 1650 two tribes had semi-permanent homes along the Souris. Along with the Assiniboines were the Gros Ventres. The Gros Ventres had inhabited the area west of the Souris River from Oak Lake to the Moose Mountains and south into the Dakotas. Moving into the Souris area on frequent occasions came the Sioux. At first these trips were to attack and punish the Assiniboines but later they came to attack the traders and trading posts and still later they came to settle permanently along the Souris River.

When the Hidatsa first came into Dakota territory from the south they settled along the Missouri River near the Mandans. Later they moved north west to the Knife River where they thought that a splinter group moved north settling along the Souris River near Minot, North Dakota. The Hidatsa built earth lodge villages and the remains of such villages can be seen east of the Souris River in Manitoba not far from the village of Coulter. This site may have been the work of an earlier group of Mound Builders.<sup>2A</sup>

Early in the 1600's the Assiniboine Dakotas had split off from the Sioux nation. They were members of the Yankton branch in Central Dakota. The quarrel was over a trivial incident but it would to 200 years of warfare between Sioux and Assiniboine, much of it along the Souris River.

The Assiniboines moved north to Lake Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba but a new quarrel with the Cree Indians forced them to move west to the Souris River and Turtle Mountain areas.

Shortly after this they formed an alliance with the Cree and Ojibway for defense against the Sioux who continued to press north.

For the next 100 years the Assiniboines prospered and multiplied. By 1800 they were 28,000 strong across Manitoba with more than 10,000 in the Turtle Mountains alone. They had many villages along the Souris River and these were periodically attacked by the Sioux.

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<sup>2A</sup> The Great Canadian Northwest, Gaire, Lille, France, 1896.



After 1670 the Assiniboines began the long trip down the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers and then north through Lake Winnipeg to the English forts on the shores of Hudson Bay. In order to intercept this trade for the French Montreal interests, La Verendrye built Fort La Reine on the Assiniboine in 1738,

By 1750 the Assiniboines had spread up the Souris River into the Saskatchewan area, settling along the river not far from Roche Percee and also in the Moose Mountains. This part of the Souris Valley and some of its tributary ravines are noted for their strange rock formations. The Sioux had already laid claim to this area and the two tribes soon became involved in warfare over ownership of the valley.

The Assiniboines gained mobility on the plains in 1750 when they obtained horses. The horses had actually developed in North America and then about 30,000 years ago migrated to Asia, probably across a land bridge between Alaska and Siberia. In 1534 the Spaniards brought the horse back to America. Some escaped and wild horse bands were established in the mountains of California. Eventually they were captured and tamed by the Apache and Comanche Indians and by trading or stealing the Sioux and Assiniboine obtained them. According to Alexander Henry the Assiniboines were the most skillful of all the Plains Indians in the art of horse stealing. They would patiently follow traders for days until the right moment for stealing the horses came. They also enjoyed selling some of their horses to a trader and then stealing them back.

According to the son of one of the buffalo hunters along the Souris River both his father and his grandfather referred to the Assiniboines as "Horse Indians". In one battle near Fort Desjarlais, the Horse Indians attacked another group of Indians killing several. Their graves can be seen in the area.

Around 1660 the Santee and Yankton Dakota from western Minnesota and central North Dakota began moving into British Canada to fight the Cree, Ojibway and Assiniboines. The battles with the Assiniboines took place along the Souris and in the Turtles.

It was about this time the Santee and Yankton began to claim southern Manitoba as their exclusive hunting grounds and continued that claim right up to the time they were granted small reservations by Canada in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These claims included the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers.

In the latter half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Sioux were getting arms from French fur traders who arrived in Sioux country about 1673. By the end of this century the Sioux had contacted British traders in the Hudson Bay area and were getting their supplies from this source.

Only one attempt to Christianize the Sioux was recorded in the 1600's and that was by Father Rene Menard, who established a mission somewhere in Sioux territory. He was not seen again but the Sioux are said to have preserved his cassock as a sacred symbol.

The Sioux attacked the Assiniboines on several occasions in the late 1600's. The last attack occurred in 1691 when the Yanktons located the Sioux in the Turtle Mountains.

In the early 1700's the Sioux continued their wars with the Ojibway and Assiniboines. In 1732 they attacked the Ojibway west of Lake Winnipeg and in 1748 they traveled up the Souris River to attack the Assiniboines and also the French traders at Fort La Reine. From 1770 to 1778 the Assiniboines carried corn and furs from the

Mandan Country up the Souris River to Fort La Reine, although they had been expressly warned by the Sioux not to traffic with the Whiteman.

In 1780 many Sioux Chiefs received medals of King George III for fighting on the British side during the American Revolution. Chiefs of the following Dakota Nations received these medals: Yankton, Sisseton, Wapeton and Hunkpapas.

In the last half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Sioux, armed with Hudson Bay Company muskets roamed the Souris River attacking Assiniboines and traders alike. In 1781 they combined with the Madans to attack the Assiniboine villages in the Turtle Mountains and continued these attacks along the Souris in 1786 and 1793. In 1795 they attacked McDonnells House and Brandon House #1 at the mouth of the Souris. One year later they advanced up the river to attack the Assiniboines who had established a village near present day Lauder. It was at this point that the Northwest Company occupants of Fort Ash decided to vacate their fort.

Records of Sioux dealing with white traders in the later years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century are few and this probably reflects the Sioux's increased determination to keep white traders out of territory they considered theirs.

In the war of 1812-14 between the British and the Americans, the Sioux once again fought on the British side. British flags and medals were once more distributed to Yanktons, Sissetons, Hunkpapas as well as Little Crow, Chief of the Santee. Years later their relatives would seek help from the British and show these medals to the Manitoba authorities. It was during this war that the Sioux brought a captured American cannon to Fort Garry. The British authorities at the fort named the cannon "Little Dakota" and promised to aid the Sioux whenever they were in trouble. Some of the Sioux, pursued by the American army, fled into the Turtles which prompted one Canadian historian to believe the American invaded Manitoba in 1814. This might have been true except for the fact that the boundary was not decided on until 1820.

As the Sioux had little understanding of boundaries or political divisions they did not realize that all the land would be divided between the British and the Americans. Dakota Indians believed the land was free to all, to roam, hunt and fight as they pleased.

Also in the last few years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Sioux continued to attack the Assiniboine villages on the Souris River. In 1815 they wiped out the Gros Ventre Nations who were living at this time at the junction of the Souris and South Antler Rivers. In this period too, the Metis were conducting small buffalo hunts out of Fort Garry in preparation for the great hunts which would come later along the Souris.

It was in the first part of the century that the Assiniboines along the Souris suffered from great smallpox epidemics. Estimated at 10,000 strong in the Turtle Mountains in 1806 they were reduced to 4,000 by 1825. A small part of the attrition was due to war with the Sioux. But well into the 1830's the Assiniboines were still a force to be reckoned with.

The 1830's was a period of intense warfare for the Sioux and Assiniboine and much of the conflict centered around a strange area on the Souris River near Roche Percee, Sask. It was a war between the Sioux and an alliance of Assiniboines, Cree and Ojibway. But, at the heart of this war was a conflict between Sioux and Assiniboine over some strange rock formations found along the Souris and one of its tributaries called Short Creek. This portion of the Souris River in question extended east from Roche

Percee to Riviere Des Lacs (see map) and was considered a holy area by both Indian Nations.

The valley at this point is about 165 feet deep and is rather rough as well. Short deep canyons run into the valley for a few miles in the area. Along the sides of the valley are found decomposing sandstones, parts of which are made of a harder material.

The results are strange mushroom shaped pillars (called Hoodoos). One of the pillars is perforated by a large hole and so the name "Roche Percee". The Indians in the past believed the place sacred and when passing the hoodoos rubbed vermilion on them or put gifts of beads, tobacco, etc. in the caves in the area.

The natives in the previous century believe that in the past a temple had been raised on this spot to some great Manitou and the scattered stones were an arch of the doorway. The idea of a great stone temple on this spot is not unbelievable. A short distance to the south at Rutland, North Dakota, it is known that the Sioux had a stone temple. Until a few years ago the Sioux considered its remains sacred. One of the rock remnants in this old ruin is believe to have an astronomical significance.<sup>2B</sup>

Rock remnants have also been found in the Moose Mountains. There, a medicine wheel may have had directional or astronomical significance. South west of Lauder, Manitoba, stones were laid out in the form of a serpent but no one seems to know what meaning, if any, this site had.

However, any concrete evidence of a temple at Roche Percee would be from the carvings (petroglyphs) on some of the strange rocks. These carvings of men, deer, fish, turtles and rough sculptures of tents and stars appear to have been done by the Sioux, at least L. A. Prudhomme believes they are indicative of Siouan style. Some of the carvings are of horses so we know that at least some of this work was done by Plains Indians who only acquired horses in the 1700's.

The contest between Sioux and Assiniboine for mastery of these strange canyons has never been fully settled although the Sioux were probably in control of the area more than the Assiniboines. According to Assiniboine legend the Assiniboines stopped at Roche Percee every Spring and Fall to pay homage and Chief Ochankugahe, in this century, claimed that it was formerly an Assiniboine Shrine. But in 1738 La Verendrye called it a Sioux Shrine and Roche Percee residents today refer to it as a former Sioux Shrine, claiming that the Sioux had more than one sacred place in the valley. A Northwest Mounted Police report in the previous century is alleged to refer to Sioux Shrines in the area. However the R.C.M.P. archives in Ottawa were unable to come up with exact report. The Assiniboines arrived in this valley in the late 1700's and while camping there a chief claimed to have had a vision in which a ghostly spectre talked to him. But the Sioux had been in the valley before this.

In the early part of the present century the Sioux came back to Roche Percee to hold dances at their shrine. This shrine on the side of the valley was destroyed when coal mining operations came too close to the edge and the shrine was buried by tons of earth. The Sioux then moved to a different area in the valley and warned curious white onlookers not to approach their new shrine. No one in the valley today seems to know exactly where it was located, but a beautiful canyon to the east, which I shall describe later, may be the place.

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<sup>2B</sup> Petroglyphs, Pictographs, Prehistoric Art in the Upper Missouri and Red River. E. Milligan, Courant Press, Bottineau, N.D. 1968.

In 1830 a large band of Assiniboines marched west to attack the Sioux in Souris Valley near Roche Percee. They sent warriors ahead to scout the area. As the scouts approached La Rivieres des Lacs they climbed a large hill and found a Sioux sentinel asleep whom they killed. The main Sioux Band soon found their murdered sentinel and withdrew to Roche Percee. The Assiniboines moved up the Souris Valley to attack but the Sioux were victorious. The hill where the sentry was killed is still called "The Hill of the Murdered Scout" and readily seen from Highway 9.

Today the pictures on the rocks at Roche Percee have been almost destroyed by vandals but they still have that mysterious appearance and are worth a visit. Among the rocks are found a few small caves.

To the east about four miles down the valley is a curious flat-topped hill symmetric in every way. It stands like a butte in the middle of the valley and is called Sugar Loaf Mountain by the valley residents. At its base on one side is the entrance to a deep shaft coal mine, no longer in use. Old timers suggest that this hill was sacred to the Sioux and its flat top was used for certain dances.

When the Sioux Shrine was destroyed by coal mining operations, they may have moved still further down the valley to another canyon. The hoodoos and other strange rock formations in this canyon are well worth the climb to see them (permission is required). Rock walls, hoodoos and a special rock throne chair which hangs out over the canyon can easily be reached. The throne or armchair is about 20 feet high, inclined a little with huge legs that extend over the canyon. Sitting in such a chair gives one a feeling of insignificance.

However, one old resident tells me that she does not believe the canyon just described was the second sacred place of the Sioux. She claimed to have heard that I was further to the south but in the short time available to me, I was only able to find a more southerly canyon of any significance.

In 1831 the Sioux returned the Assiniboine attack moving east down the Souris River into Manitoba. They turned north where they met a Metis Buffalo Brigade returning from the Moose Mountains. The buffalo hunters, as usual, formed a circle with their cars and held off the attackers. This attack took place to the west of Oak Lake. In the same year, Sioux war parties forced the forts at the mouth of the Souris to close.

In 1834 warfare occurred once more as the Sioux descended the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers to Fort Garry. Here they warred briefly with the Saulteaux Indians. This battle was stopped by Cuthbert Grant's Metis who escorted the Sioux south toward the Turtle Mountains.

In 1838 the Sioux again moved up the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers to attack the settlement at Fort Garry. The settlement was defended by the Metis from St. Francois Xavier who dug rifle pits to hold off the invaders. In the same year smallpox once again struck the Assiniboines who were now reduced in numbers to less than 4,000 from the original 10,000.

The Hunkpapa made occasional sorties into the Souris area. In 1840 they attacked an Assiniboine camp at the west end of the Moose Mountains. Many prisoners were captured and the Assiniboines are reported to have been so decimated by recent smallpox epidemics that they were unable to muster enough warriors to seek revenge.

More battles occurred between the Sioux and the Saulteaux in 1844, 1845 and 1850. In 1845 Cuthbert Grant attempted to bring peace to the warring Nations. The

Peace Meeting was held north of the Souris River in the Moose Mountains and Grant was able to affect a temporary peace.

In 1849, there was great resentment by the Red River Colony Metis against the Hudson Bay Company over the fur trade. The Company had forbidden the Metis to engage in the fur trade. The Metis turned to their long time enemies, the Sioux, and tried to persuade them to attack the forts on the Souris, Assiniboine and Qu' Appelle Rivers. The final attack was to be on Hudson Bay Headquarters at Fort Garry. However, a severe outbreak of measles put a stop to this plan.

By 1851 the Santee Sioux had ceded to the United States most of their territory except for a small stretch along the Minnesota River. The Treaty signing away their lands took place in 1851 when Governor Ramsey of Minnesota came to Canada, met the Sioux, and made a Treaty for the extinction of their land claims in Minnesota. This is surely proof that the Sioux were in Canada before 1862 when the Minnesota Massacres took place and that their claim to Canadian lands had some basis.

The annual payment of money and goods for this land was left up to Indian Agents who made it their business to cheat the Sioux of their annuity. In June of 1862 the annuity payment itself was not sent out by the American Government and the Indians, unable to pay their bills, could not buy food and were on the verge of starvation. One of the storekeepers in the area is supposed to have said, "If they are hungry, let them eat grass". Whether this was true or not it was probably a typical attitude of too many whites.

Of course there were a few bad Indians who contributed to the Minnesota outbreak as well. A Chief Inkpaduta had massacred some whites in 1857 and remained unpunished. But most of the Sioux were willing to live in peace in spite of the many grievances they felt against the whites.

Finally, in August 1862 several thousand starving Indians broke into a Government storehouse and took the food they needed. The leader of the Sioux was Little Crow, a Santee Chief, who tried to unite the various Sioux branches in a war against the whiteman.

Not all the Sioux united in this war, but at least some of the Santee, Sisseton, Wapeton and Yankton were involved. But many tried to help the whites. The Sissetons protected white prisoners, while a Santee Chief, Standing Buffalo, along with his warriors tried to rescue the prisoners. Unfortunately, the Americans would punish all the Indians, regardless of their innocence or guilt. The Sioux knew this would happen and some Sissetons and Wapetons moved into the Missouri and Souris River areas of North Dakota and Manitoba, believing they would be safer there.

After several engagements the rebels were defeated by the American Army and many Sioux, Santee, Sisseton and Wapeton fled to Manitoba, to Fort Garry, Portage, the Turtle Mountains and the Souris River. Others fled to the Missouri Couteau to the west of the Souris River in Dakota.

The Sioux claimed to have lived in these areas before 1862 and most certainly some of them did, especially along the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers.

Wearing their George III medals, they asked for protection from the American Army. The first groups were made up of 1,000 starving people. The British Authorities supplied some food and urged them to return to Minnesota (forgotten was the promise made in 1812).

Most of the Dakotas who fled north carried only small goods. These included copper pots containing, in some cases, gold coins which was their treaty money currency. This treaty money was for large tracts of land they had ceded to the Americans in 1815, 1836 and 1858. Some of this money and the copper pots arrived in Canada and the pots can still be seen on some reservations, but much of it was lost as the Sioux fled north and some was even turned up in the later years by cultivation.<sup>2C</sup>

Chief Little Crow and his warriors now camped in the Turtle Mountains in Dakota Territory. Here they were visited by Sitting Bull, a Hunkpapa Medicine Man. In December 1862, 500 of this group moved north to the Assiniboine River about ten miles west of Fort Garry. In May, 1863, Chief Little Crow arrived at Fort Garry displaying George III medals and asserting that the Sioux had always been allies of the British, he demanded food for his hungry people. The Governor of the Red River Colony gave Little Crow food but no ammunition as they settlers were afraid of the Sioux. During this visit, Chief Little Crow and some of his warriors joined the Metis on one of the last buffalo hunts to the Souris River. ON this hunt a herd was not located, only isolated buffalo and mostly bulls.

In the autumn of 1863, the American authorities sent a priest, Father Andre, to a large Sioux camp on the Souris Rive (west of present day Lauder). His mission was to persuade this band of Sioux to return home. Father Andre reported that the Sioux did not seem to care whether they lived or died, but they refused to return to the United States.

In December, 1863 about 500 Sioux crossed the border and camped on the Assiniboine River, near St. Francois Xavier. Here they were helped by the Metis who had signed a Peace Treaty with the Sioux in 1861. The Grey Nuns, a small convent at St. Francois Xavier, established in 1859, fed many of the children.

Also, in the autumn of 1863, several hundred Sioux arrived in the Turtle Mountains, along with their white prisoners. They also were in a state of starvation, and failing to get much help from the Canadian Authorities they made raids into the U.S. to hunt buffalo.

The Sioux were now spread out across southern Manitoba, camped on the Souris River in two places and at Fort Garry. Farther west they were crossing the border to camp along the Souris River in southern Saskatchewan.

The American Authorities exerted great pressure on the Canadians to force the Sioux back to the U.S. One of the attempts was through Gabriel Dumont (of Riel fame) who tried to negotiate the Sioux along the Souris River and in the Turtles back to the U.S. Dumont was not successful.

Most of the Sioux in Canada at this time were Santee. In the Dakotas many Sissetons and Waphetons were still camped along the Missouri River and were being harassed by the American Army. They too, began to look at their countrymen camped along the Souris in Canadian territory.

The Sisseton along the Missouri was led by Standing Buffalo, the Chief who had protected the white prisoners in Minnesota. In the spring of 1863 they were attacked by units of the American Army. At least 800 lodges of Sisseton and Waphetons crossed to the north side of the Missouri River followed by the Americans. Standing Buffalo led the defense and the Sissetons escaped under cover of darkness. In the meantime, a large band of Hunkpapa Sioux had followed the Americans across the Missouri and were

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<sup>2C</sup> Interview with Residents of Sioux Valley Reservation, Griswold, Manitoba.

Preparing to attack. With this later group was Sitting Bull and they were joined by the Renegade Chief, Inkpaduta.

In the battles that followed, the Sioux were defeated and the Sisseton and Wapeton groups continued to retreat toward the Souris Valley and the Turtle Mountains.

Early in 1864 a final battle took place in this war and 3,000 Sissetons now retreated to the Souris River. But by April, 1864, they were living once more on the banks of the Missouri. Finally, in June, they learned of another American Army moving toward them and they fled to Canada permanently. First of all, Standing Buffalo led his people to the Souris River south east of the Moose Mountains. Here he concluded a Peace Treaty with the Canadian Cree and Saulteaux. For the next two years until 1866 the Sioux wandered the Manitoba Plains from Fort Garry on the east to the Souris River Plains in the west. They did not receive any supplies from the Fort Garry Authorities and existed only on the few buffalo left on the plains.

At times they were attacked by jealous Canadian Indians. In 1865 they were engaged by the Cree, north of the Souris River, in the vicinity of present day Deleau. According to a member of the Oak Lake Sioux reserve, the battle took place in a group of sandhills to the north east of the village and ended only when one of the chiefs was killed. However, in spite of great suffering the Dakotas tried to obey the laws of Grandmother's country (Canada) and eventually were given small reservations. In this regard the Canadian authorities refused to consider Sioux claims to land ownership north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel and this meant they would not receive treaty money from the Canadian government.

By this time, the white settlers had overcome their fear of the Sioux and looked on these Indians with favor. While waiting for the Canadian Government to give them land, many Sioux men and women hired out to the white farmers who found them industrious and thrifty.

Finally, in 1867 many of the Portage Dakota began to move west, ending up along the Souris River and in the Moose Mountains. One of them was Chief Standing Buffalo.

In 1868 an International Meeting of Indians was held in the Turtle Mountains. The meeting was chaired by the Oglalla Chief, Crazy Horse, who pleaded for the unification of all tribes to defeat the whites. These pleas were rejected and the Sioux were left alone to stem the tide of Whiteman expansion.<sup>2D</sup>

In 1869 an exodus began from west to east. A large band of Sioux left the Souris River area and traveled to Portage la Prairie, where they refused to support Louis Riel in the coming Manitoba Rebellion. Evidently afraid that he might get drawn into this Rebellion, Standing Buffalo and his followers returned west to the Souris River in the same year, camping near Estevan, Saskatchewan. Here he became engaged in warfare with the Crow Indians. In the final battles between the Crows and the Dakotas on the banks of the Souris River, Standing Buffalo was slain.

By this time, the Assiniboines had all migrated from the Souris. Their numbers greatly reduced by smallpox (the greatest epidemic was in 1838) they followed the few remaining buffalo west. Eventually they were placed on reservations in the Moose Mountains and in the foothills of the Rockies. Of the 10,000 that Alexander Henry estimated in 1806, only a few hundred remained.

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<sup>2D</sup> Dakota Twilight, E. Milligan, Exposition Press, New York, 1976.

Their last great victory in war occurred in 1832, when about 60 Assiniboine warriors traveled south from the Souris River to Fort Buford, a trading post at the junction of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers. Here they attacked and defeated a large band of Blackfeet, capturing about 400 horses in the action.

The Sisseton and Wapeton Sioux continued to camp along the Souris and Qu' Appelle River. They were now led by the son of Standing Buffalo. In the Moose Mountains a group of Assiniboines were establishing a camp. In 1870, more Sioux arrived from the Dakotas and they camped along the Souris north west of present day Lauder.

In 1874, the newly created Northwest Mounted Police marched west from Dufferin, Manitoba, on passing the Turtle Mountains they had a brief glimpse of some of the Minnesota Sioux and their white captives. They continued to march west and camped along the Souris River at Roche Percee where they noticed the Indian carvings on the rock walls. A few miles further west they came across an Indian Band who called themselves Sippeton Sioux. This seems to be the only reference made to such a Siouan Tribe.

In 1875, a Sioux Reserve was established at the junction of the Assiniboine and Oak Rivers. This is the Oak River Reserve although it is often referred to as Sioux Valley. Today it has a population of around 1,000 people, most of whom are Santee. At least two families on the Reserve claim their relatives were involved in the Custer Massacre. Also, 1875, a reservation was established at Birdtail Creek near Fort Ellice on the Assiniboine. These were Wahpetons under Chief Mahpiyaduta.

Born in 1831, the great Hunkpapa Medicine Man, Chief Sitting Bull, probably entered Canada only once and that was following the Custer Massacre in 1876. At this time, he was in the Wood Mountains and Qu' Appelle area. However, his military actions resulted in many Sioux entering Canada, some arriving in the Turtle Mountains, and others along the Souris River.

The western Sioux, Oglallas and Hunkpapas, along with the Santee realized by 1870, that the Americans intended to take their homeland regardless of the terms of the Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868. War with the U.S. Army followed with the Sioux winning two great victories against General Crook and General Custer. But, then fortunes changed and the Sioux began the long migration to Canada in 1876.

According to L.C. Lockwood, a civilian Scout and Custer's Troops in 1876, following the Custer Massacre, one band of Sioux escaped to the Turtle Mountain camping on the Canadian side beside Lake Flossie.

From there they sent raiding parties into the Dakotas to attack army units and American settlements. To counteract this, the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was sent north to patrol the Canadian border along the Souris River and Turtle Mountains. These attacks by the Sioux continued for two years. In 1878, the U.S. Army still kept pickets at Fort Lincoln (present day Bismark) on the Missouri River, as the Sioux from the Turtles had attacked the fort several times. It appears that this band of Sioux, probably Hunkpapas, maintained this Turtle Mountain stronghold until 1885 and probably later.

By the end of 1876 more than 7,000 Sioux had crossed the Medicine line into Canada. Many of them camped in the Wood Mountains, the source of the Souris River. Among this group was White Eagle, a Santee Chief, who arrived with about 600



followers. At a later date, he and some of his followers would move to the Sioux Valley Reserve on the Assiniboine.

In 1879 some of the Manitoba Sioux joined one of the last Metis buffalo hunting parties, a group of 500 men, women and children. While hunting along the Souris River in Dakota they were attacked by General Miles and the American Cavalry. The Sioux were forced to withdraw to Canada but the Metis were taken prisoner. The American authorities then tried to settle the Metis permanently in the Turtle Mountains and on the American side. This may have been the beginning of a Metis settlement that exists in the Turtles today.

Several lodges of Hunkpapas arrived at Moose Jaw, Sask., in 1877. They had been camping on the Souris River near Estevan for a year and would return there several more times before establishing a permanent camp along the Moose Jaw River. In 1878 they were moved but it is not clear just where. It may have been to Qu' Appelle or back to the United States.

We had previously referred to the outlaw Chief Inkpaduta. In 1862 he fled the Minnesota massacre into Dakota Territory and on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1863 he was driven north into Canada by General Sully. He made his headquarters in the Turtles and from the Canadian side made repeated raids into the United States until 1868. He then moved to Montana to join Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull. After the Custer Massacre in 1876 he returned to Canada and the Turtle Mountains with about 25 families. He lived there until 1878 at which time he moved to a temporary encampment on the Souris River. It is believed that Chief Inkpaduta spent his remaining days on a reserve in Saskatchewan.

A large number of Santee Sioux had lived in the Turtle Mountains and along the Souris River since 1863. In 1872 the Sioux along the river moved to a proposed reservation just south and west of Grande Clariere. This temporary 36 square mile reserve was only in use for a short time until a permanent reserve was set up.

In 1877 the Santee Sioux, in the Turtles, request a reserve from the Manitoba Lieutenant-Governor. This was granted them on their promise not to aid the American Sioux, who were still at war with the American authorities, and in 1878 they received a reserve north of Pipestone near Oak Lake. Today this is called the Oak Lake Reserve.

In the same year a Turtle Mountain Reserve was established for a group of Wapeton Sioux and some Hunkpapas from Lake Flossie. This reserve operated until 1907 when its residents were moved to the Oak Lake Reserve. In 1908 then the Oak Lake Reserve included Wapetons, Santee, a few Hunkpapas and some descendents of Chief Inkpaduta (Santee outlawed before 1862 by the main Santee Nation).

Before the establishment of the reserves starting in 1875 there were about 1,300 Sioux lodges scattered throughout western Canada. If one ignores the continual movements of the various bands from one place to another we might place the lodges as follows: there were Hunkpapas, Sissetons and Santee at Wood Mountains; Santee and Sisseton along the Souris River in Manitoba and Saskatchewan; Wapetons and Santee along the Assiniboine and at Portage La Prairie; Santee in the Turtle Mountains and Hunkpapa along the Moose Jaw River.

After the death of Standing Buffalo along the Souris River in Saskatchewan, his son became the new Chief. He led his band of Sissetons and Wapetons north to the Qu' Appelle River where they were granted a reserve in 1878. However they continued to roam for a few more years reaching the Souris River on several occasions. Eventually

they settled down to become farmers and ranchers along the Qu' Appelle River. They were well known to a member of the staff of Bottineau State College who has made a study of the Sioux since the 1930's.

It was a busy year in 1885 in the Souris Valley. Riel runners arrived along the Souris. They came from Batoche in Sask. and tried to persuade the Sioux in Oak Lake and the Turtles to support Riel in the coming Sask. Rebellion. Although they Sioux in the Turtles performed a few war dances and frightened the settlers in older Deloraine they remained out of the fray. The Northwest Mounted Police from Moosomin made regular patrols through the Moose Mountains in 1885 where they visited the feudal estates such as Cannington Manor. They also patrolled the Canadian-United States border into Manitoba. They were checking for any illegal influx of Sioux or American outlaws. They also checked established Sioux villages for signs of unrest or support for Riel. One such patrol, a four-seater carriage, arrived at the community of Old Deloraine during a celebration. In the carriage were four constables, two facing in each direction. The settlers had foolishly asked the Hunkpapas from the Turtles to put on a dance for them. The Indians were just working themselves up for an attack when the constables arrived.

In 1888 the Sioux were still nomadic and many of them roamed from Devils Lake, North Dakota to the Turtle Mountains and still further north to Oak Lake. Father Gaire, the first priest at the Grande Clariere Parish, met and fed many of these people as they wandered about the country. Even in the early 1900's there were still a few Indians moving from one community to the other.

The period between 1862 and 1888 had been a difficult one for the Sioux. In the United States they had been attacked repeatedly by the Army, usually for trying to protect their homeland, and sometimes when they were completely innocent of any wrongdoing. In Canada they were occasionally refused food by the Canadian Authorities or given very short rations. In addition the Canadian Indians attacked them on several occasions. But their belief in an unspoken alliance with British continued. In 1874, during the American Indian wars a traveler who left St. Paul for Fort Garry was warned by the Americans not to do so as they Sioux were on the warpath. But when the traveler met the Sioux he simply ran up the Union Jack and the Hudson Bay Flag and was allowed to continue his journey north.

In 1891, a band of Yankton Sioux moved north into Sioux Valley, but were expelled by the Indian Council at this Reserve. They then moved down the Souris Valley living in the Lauder-Hartney sandhill area for sometime. By 1893 they had established a camp in the Moose Mountains. Here they found themselves sharing a forested region with their old enemies, the Rebel Assiniboines, who had broken away from the Yanktons in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Four Indian Nations appeared to play a role in the history of the Souris River. The Sioux and the Assiniboine have been discussed at some length in this volume. The other two, the Hidatsa and the Gros Ventre have been referred to only briefly in both volumes as little is known of their activities in the Souris area.

### CHAPTER 3 *EXPLORERS, TRADERS AND TRADING POSTS*

It is difficult to say exactly when the first white man visited the Souris River, but certainly explorers and traders were at least close in the late 1600's. From "Histoire de la Nation Metisse dans l'ouest Canadienne" by Henri Tremandeu we learn that the Champlain Society of Montreal believed that Jean Nicollet penetrated to the Assiniboine country in 1618.

The Jesuit Relations indicate the Jesuits were communicating with the western savages in order to gain information on canoe routes to the Pacific. The savages were probably Western Plains Indians such as the Sioux and the Assiniboine. Father Gabriel Dreuillettes, a Jesuit, records in the relations that French fur traders met the Assiniboines in 1656.<sup>3</sup>

This does not necessarily mean that the fur traders were in Assiniboine country. It may mean that the Assiniboines had traveled east to Lake Winnipeg to meet the traders. The relations also record that Father Albaney, a Jesuit priest, had journeyed west to the country of the Assiniboines.

In 1662 Radisson and Groselliers, French traders, explored the Missouri River as far west as the Mandan Indian villages. This would put them in present day North Dakota and not far from the Souris River and it seems unlikely the Mandans would not tell them about this river only a few miles to the north. By 1673 French traders were moving west into the Sioux Indian country and may have reached the Souris River in the Dakotas. And in 1683 the Assiniboines began their long trips from the Souris River area north to York Factory to trade with the British Hudson's Bay Company.

From 1660 on the French traders in the west continually accused the British of inciting the Sioux to attack them with British made guns. For this to happen British traders would have to leave their Hudson Bay posts and move south into Sioux Indian country or they may have moved west from Lake Superior to meet the Sioux. In either case this may have brought them into close proximity to the Souris River. Perhaps a more likely possibility is that the Sioux traveled north to the Hudsons' Bay Company posts to trade and receive their guns. There does not seem to be any record of such a movement but we do know the Assiniboines made this long journey as early as 1683.

In 1690 the Intendent of New France, Campigny, gave two traders,, Tonty and La Forest, permission to travel 500 miles west of Lake Superior in order to trade with the Assiniboines and this would have put them in the vicinity of the Souris River. One year later in 1691 the Sioux began the first of their many excursions up the Souris River to attack the Assiniboines.

It seems safe to conclude that during the 1600's few whitemen, if any, visited the Souris River. The most likely white visitors were the French traders from Montreal, followed by English traders from the Great Lakes region. These latter, of course, would be from the original 13 British colonies, later to become the Unites States of America.

In the 1700's the pace quickened. In the last half of this century, trading posts were established on the Souris and three fur companies, along with many independents, were rivals for the regions furs.

Rivalry over the North American Fur Trade between Britain and France (after 1776 it was between Britain and the Americans) began in the late 1600's and continued

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<sup>3</sup> History of the Northwest, Begg, Toronto, Vol 1, Pages 60-61, 1894.

into the 1700's. It was at this time also that British and French fur traders began their temporary marriages with Indian girls to produce the race of Metis (half bloods) who played such an important part in the history of south western Manitoba and the Dakotas. In fact, Tremandeu believed the first Metis was born along the Souris River.

In the early years of the 1700's the French were still trying to establish trade with the western Indians. In his diary, Nicholas de la Salle records that in 1708 French voyageurs ascended the Missouri River as far as the Great Bend of the Souris River. This would be in the vicinity of present day Minot, North Dakota. Fifteen years later in 1728 a Jesuit Missionary, Father Charevois, lived with the western Sioux and tried to convert them to Christianity. In 1727 the French established a trading post in Sioux territory. Its location was not given but it is known to have operated for ten years. In the fall of 1728 Father Charlevois returned from his Sioux mission and discussed exploration of the west with La Verendrye.

By then French fur interests were aware that some of the western tribes were making an annual trip to the north to trade with the English Hudson's Bay Company which had its posts located along the shore of that great bay. The Assiniboines had been making the trip from the Souris country since 1683 and other tribes were beginning to follow their example. The French decided to intercept this northern trade and in 1738 the French Explorer, La Verendrye, built Fort La Reine on the Assiniboine River (near present day Portage La Prairie).

On October 18, 1738 he left Fort La Reine traveling south west along the Souris River. When he reached the Turtle Mountains, on the insistence of his Indian guides he turned northwest until he reached the Souris River. Here he met 102 lodges of Assiniboines. From this point he followed the Souris River south west until he reached the Mandan Indian villages on the Missouri River. The 102 lodges of Assiniboines had accompanied him on his last leg of the journey but they were not accorded a warm welcome by the Mandans who realized they would have to feed them. So, the Mandans pretended that a Sioux attack was imminent and this caused the Assiniboines to depart for the Souris River and home. Tremandeu believed that during this trip the first Metis was born in the west.

From "Revue Canadienne", II, 1908, by L.A. Prud'Homme we learn the following: that La Verendrye christened the Souris River "Riviere Saint-Pierre", after his own name but it was changed to Mouse River and later to Souris River by the traders who followed him, and that La Verendrye visited the natural rock formations of "Roche Percee" which are found on a tributary of the Souris called Short Creek. These rock fortifications were a sacred place for the Sioux Indians, who inscribed their petroglyphs on the walls.

In 1743 La Verendrye brought a priest, Father Coquart, to the Souris River. He taught the Assiniboines to say prayers. Forty years later French and English traders were astounded to hear the Assiniboine Indians reciting prayers they had memorized years before.

La Verendrye's son also spent some time in the area. In 1739 a son was sent west from Fort La Reine to visit the Sioux and Assiniboines. His purpose was to persuade them not to trade with the English Hudson Bay Company. In the same year Joseph La France explored the Lake Winnipeg area and then traveled to meet the Assiniboines in the west.

In 1743 La Verendrye's sons reached the Big Horn Mountains in Montana. It is possible that they followed their father's route down the Souris River and in 1747 Pierre La Verendrye traveled to the Souris country where he saw evidence of a Souix-Assiniboine battle.

From 1748 on the Sioux waged incessant warfare against whiteman and Indian alike whom they found trading on the Souris River.<sup>4</sup> On some occasions, they traveled up what was known as the Route of the Warriors which crosses the Souris Plains just west of the Turtle Mountains. On other occasions they followed the banks of the Souris River. The Siouan tribes who moved into the Souris area were the Santee from central North Dakota, the Hunkpapas from western North Dakota, and the Yankton and Sisseton Sioux from eastern North Dakota. In the year 1748 the Dakota Sioux traveled up the Souris River to attack Fort La Reine.

In 1766 the Hudson Bay Company sent traders to the Missouri River Country to trade with the Sioux, Mandan and Arikara Indians. Their route was along the Souris River. From this time on the Hudson Bay Company would trap and trade for furs on the Souris. That they did not appear to build a major post on the Souris seems to be strange when we consider that some trading posts on the river operated continuously for twenty years or more. These posts will be discussed later.

Following the American revolution in 1776 the Hudson Bay Company and the independent Canadian traders operated legally in present day North Dakota and Montana because the boundary line separating the Northwest (western Canada today) and the United States was not agreed on until 1820. By the early 1800's American traders had reached the Missouri River and for the same reasons mentioned above began to trade on the Souris River. This trade in each others territory continued until about 1870. After 1820, of course, the London Treaty made such trade illegal, even though the boundary line was not surveyed until 1873. So inroads by the United States traders continued.

In 1767 a British military expedition headed west from Lake Superior. Its purpose was to meet the Sioux Indians and prepare the way for British traders. The expedition also met the Assiniboines on this trip and it is likely that British trading posts were built shortly after.

In 1770 the Assiniboines started a trading business of their own and for the next nine years they brought furs and corn up the Souris River to rebuild Fort La Reine. This was a dangerous policy for the Assiniboines as the Souix not only disliked Assiniboine Indians, but middlemen as well.

Large numbers of traders from the south arrived on the Saskatchewan River in 1773. Many of these had come from the Souris and Qu' Appelle Rivers and most were independent traders whose operations were direct against the Hudson Bay Company monopoly in the northwest.

British traders were active on the Souris by 1777. They did not build permanent posts, only temporary storage sheds. The Hudson Bay Company archives mention only one post on the Souris River and it was called Souris River.

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<sup>4</sup> From *The Fur Trade*, by Paul Chrisler Phillips, Volume 2, page 247. Copyright 1961 by the University of Oklahoma Press. According to Mr. Phillips, the Sioux up to 1797, lived in the region between the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. Strong in numbers of warriors they attacked other tribes in the area as well as white traders. Their purpose was to have absolute control over trade in the region. They obtained goods, including guns and ammunition, from British traders working out of posts along the Great Lakes.

In 1778, a Frenchman named Menard lived with the Mandans. He apparently got his trade goods from British posts on the Souris. He was probably an independent trader who would perhaps join the Northwest Company when it formed in 1779. Prud'Homme also confirms that the Hudson Bay Company was active on the Souris at this time.

According to Northwest Company records, there were several explorations of the Souris in 1780 and in succeeding years. These explorations after 1785 came from Pine Fort situated on the Assiniboine River just west of Fort La Reine. It was in 1780 also that the trading alliance between the Mandans and the Assiniboines came to an end. Spurred on by the Sioux, the Mandan war parties moved northward and fought several battles with the Assiniboines just south of present day Melita.

In 1782 the Assiniboines living along the Souris River suffered a great smallpox epidemic but by 1784 they had recovered enough to resume trading operations. They now dealt directly with Menard and other independent traders.

The Northwest Company built Pine Fort in 1785. Located on the Assiniboine a few miles east of the Souris mouth it was a jumping-off place for Northwest Company traders and in 1787 James MacKay took an outfit down the Souris River into Mandan country. In the winter of 1788 he returned by a more easterly route to avoid the Sioux who were camped along the Souris at this time. MacKay established a trading post near present day Minot, North Dakota on this trip. Also in 1788 David Monin conducted an expedition down the Souris River. He traded with the Assiniboines and spent the winter trapping on the river. He was fortunate to avoid the Sioux on this trip but his luck in this respect would soon run out.

By 1786 the Sioux were well armed with rifles, powder and musket balls by the Hudson's Bay Company traders. This silent alliance between the Sioux and the British continued until 1876 when Sitting Bull and his 4,000 Sioux warriors were not welcomed very warmly by Canadian authorities when, chased by the American army, they fled into Canada.

In 1789 the Hudson Bay Company continued to trade on the Souris River, near its mouth, and south into the Dakotas. This trade continued until 1791 when the Company built what was probably its first post on the river. From this post Hudson's Bay trappers and traders continued to work the Souris until the post burned in 1793.

But more independents now appeared on the river to compete with the Hudson Bay Co. In 1791 two traders, Fortman and Jussome, appeared on the Souris. During the following years the independents along with the Northwest Company began to claim the Missouri River was north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel and that the American traders had no right to work the Missouri.

The year 1793 was a busy one on the Souris. David Monin, acting for the Northwest Company led an expedition down the river. He established a fort in the Dakotas but on the return trip in the spring of 1794, with a load of furs, they were all killed by the Sioux. The Sioux continued to be active on the Souris and elsewhere in Manitoba. From 1785 to 1860 they made a determined effort to stop traders from entering the Souris-Missouri country. At times they would act as middlemen between the traders and the other Indian tribes, but usually their main efforts were stop the Assiniboine, Arikara and other tribes from trading with the whiteman. To help this policy along, the Sioux attacked the Assiniboines in the summer of 1793. The battle

occurred along the south bank of the river about four miles south west of present day Hartney. In this battle a whole village of Assiniboines were destroyed.

In 1793 the Hudson Bay Company built Brandon House #1 near the junction of the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers. The post was built by Donald MacKay and later he became post factor. This company does not appear to have built posts further up the river on the Canadian side although its competitors built at least 14 posts between the town of Souris and the Great Bend of the Souris River near Minot, North Dakota. In the same year the Northwest Company built MacDonnells House just south of Brandon House #1.

Two other actions occurred on the Souris Plains in the year 1793. A Northwest Company trader, John MacDonnell, explored the Souris River in the summer, and in the fall an independent trader, name unknown, built a post on the Souris, site unknown. But this may have been one of the sites to the north east of Hartney which will be discussed later. This trader was attacked by the Sioux but in the spring of 1794 he was successful in bringing out a load of furs.

In the winter of 1793 five different interests were trading on the Souris River. The sites of many old posts have been located along the river and were almost certainly used by these interests. One of the companies was a strange group of traders called "The South Men". Their headquarters was south of Lake Superior. It is known that they operated on the Souris River in the 1780's and 90's and had established at least one post.

North east of Hartney, Manitoba, along the Souris River, are the sites of three old trading posts probably operated by such concerns as the Northwest Company, the South Men and the XY Company. Near present day Menteith, on the north side of the river, such a site exists on Sec. 18, Tp. 7, Rge. 26. Here have been found musket balls, trade beads, broken dishware, a rusty knife along with Indian artifacts. The first homesteaders in this area found no sign of foundation logs, cellar holes or chimney mounds on this site but this was to be expected because of the constant shifting of the light sandy soil. The above artifacts were almost all turned up by cultivation. This location is sometimes called the McBurney site.<sup>5</sup>

Across the Souris, to the south of this site, it appears that a large Indian village was located. Sec. 16, Tp. 7, Rge. 22. Human bones and flint artifacts have been dug up in this area.

In the 1940's a Hartney resident found a site on sec. 34, Tp. 6, Rge. 23. It was on the north side of the Souris River. He believed it to be the remains of a very old trading post. This one also was probably built by an independent trader. The location of this post is called the Magwood site.

In 1937 a site was found on Sec. 3, Tp. 6, Rge. 23, about two miles northeast of Hartney. It was enclosed in an oxbow on the river. This one was dug into and the log foundations found. Of the fourteen known trading posts on the river between Souris, Manitoba and the U.S. border, this is one of two situated on the south side of the river. There are probably several reasons for posts built on the north bank, that lookout hills exists on the north side only may be the best one. This post probably operated in the late 1700's and is called the Alston site.

In 1794 a Northwest Company trader, John Hay, wintered on the Souris River. In the spring of 1795 he packed his load of furs down the Souris to McDonnells House. On arrival, he learned that the opposition, Brandon House #1 had been attacked by the

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<sup>5</sup> Souris River Posts, McMorran, Page 6, Souris, 1948.

Mandans. In the same year the XY Company, made up of Northwesters who refused to join the Northwest Company, established a fort on the Souris, south west of Hartney. Its location was Sec. 7, Tp. 6, Rge. 23.

Also in 1794 Hudson's Bay Company traders traveled down the Souris to the Missouri. Here they met American traders on their way to the Rocky Mountains. They also met the independent, Captain MacKay, who had been established near Minot since 1787. MacKay's journal states that both groups were forced to leave the region by a Spanish expedition who were trying to extend their trading area north from California. However, the Hudson Bay Company came back in 1797 to build a post on the lower Souris, probably in the vicinity of present day Minot, North Dakota.

In 1795, both MacKay and the Hudson's Bay Company traders moved back down the Souris into the Minot area to re-establish the Mandan trade. At the same time the Northwest Company built Fort Ash on the Souris about two miles south west of Hartney. Its location was Sec. 12, Tp. 6, Rge. 24. It was evidently in operation for only two years. In the winter of 1797 the explorer David Thompson says, "We find ourselves about three miles below Ash House where people resided two years ago".

Fort Ash was obviously a canoe fort. Surrounded by the river on three sides, there is also a shallow depression on its north side, so in times of high water it could be approached only by canoe. To the north of the depression is the Yellow Quill Trail which parallels the river and can still be seen (very faintly) today. A few hundred yards north west of the fort and close to the Yellow Quill Trail is a high sandhill which may have served as a lookout.

Today the Fort Ash site consists of four cellar holes and two piles of stone. This fort has not been excavated, although Dana Wright, of the North Dakota Historical Association, dug up an old musket in 1934. It was a fair sized post, about eighty feet by eighty feet, but certainly not as large as some of the other forts soon to be built on the river. Its clay chinking appears old.

It was undoubtedly abandoned because of Indian attacks. As Alexander Henry, Jr., records in his diary in 1806, "Fort Ash was too exposed to attack from the Sioux".

A few years earlier, the XY Company had been formed, made up mainly of disgruntled Northwest Company partners. They soon became bitter rivals of the Northwest Company and sent traders down the Souris River. The old site mentioned previously on Sec. 7, Tp. 6, Rge. 23, could easily have been the remains of an XY establishment. The condition of the chimney mounds, cellar holes and clay chinking indicate that it would have been about the same age as Fort Ash, and according to A.S. Morton, University of Saskatchewan, opposition to Fort Ash did exist on the Souris River. Evidently it was headed by an XY trader, Peter Grant, who after one year was taken into the Northwest Company as a partner. This move could have disposed of arrival post situated within a miles of Fort Ash.

When John Evans arrived at the Mandan villages in 1796 he found the Northwesters already there. He drove them north towards the Souris River and when more arrived in 1797 from Fort Ash, he drove them away as well. Cuthbert Grant Senior from the Northwest Company's Fort Esperance on the Qu' Appelle River sent word to Evans that his company wanted peaceful relations with the Missouri Fur Company. But late in 1797 John MacDonnell sent his partner Jessaume down the Souris with plenty of



trade goods and instructions to crush Evans. Arriving on the Missouri River, Jessaume bribed the Mandans to kill Evans, who fled to St. Louis.

Indian warfare against Canadian trading posts was not uncommon in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it was not only the Sioux who conducted this warfare against the whiteman. During the years 1785 to 1840 the Mandans journeyed up the Souris in the summer and across the Turtle Mountains in the winter. Some of these trips were for trade purposes but others were to attack the forts at the mouth of the Souris. On at least one occasion a Northwest Company fort was destroyed. In 1794 they attacked the Hudson Bay Company post Brandon House and in 1831 Governor Simpson reported to London that Brandon House had to be abandoned as it was too exposed to Mandan war parties.

We have already discussed the abandonment of Fort Ash in 1797 and attributed this to Sioux war parties.

In the years 1792 and 1794 Manchester fort on the South Saskatchewan River was attacked and finally destroyed. In 1793 the Cree Indians attacked South Branch Fort and Pine Island Fort, also on the South Saskatchewan. In 1795 the Crees attacked all the forts on the South Saskatchewan and repeated the attack in 1796. So contrary to the opinion of many people, forts were attacked north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel as well as on the American side.

In 1797 explorer David Thompson met the trader, Menard on the Souris River. Menard spent about twenty years on the Souris and nearly every year he brought out a load of furs. The Sioux were aware of him but Menard managed to evade them until 1803.

Also in 1797 Fort Assiniboine was built by the Northwest Company at the junction of the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers. Fort Ash, in the Hartney sandhills, had been abandoned this same year because it was too exposed to attacks from the Sioux. Northwest Company traders working on the Souris now picked up their supplies from Fort Assiniboine. This fort was a good sized one, one hundred fifty-five feet by one hundred twenty-four feet, and its location was S.W. ¼, Sec. 19, Tp. 8, Rge. 16. By this time the importance of the Souris River was clear to all the competing fur companies.

On November 26, 1797, David Thompson, the great explorer, began his journey down the Souris River. Leaving McDonnell's House near the Souris mouth, he headed south west skirting the Moose Head or Brandon Hills on the south. On November 29 it became so cold and stormy they made camp, probably along the river south of Nesbitt, Manitoba. On December 4, Thompson continued his journey crossing to the south side of the river and pitching camp near the present day town of Souris. The next day, December 5, he turned south following the Elgin Creek and then turned south west reaching a point somewhat to the west of Regent. He then turned north west back to the river which he reached near present day Hartney and continued up stream. His guide, Jursomme, now led him south west along the river and shortly after they were joined by two Canadian trappers. It began to storm at this point but they kept on walking along the south bank of the river, reaching a wooded area at 7:00 p.m. This gave them some protection from the storm and they made camp. The next day, December 6, they rested as it was still storming, and hunted for provisions. An entry in Thompson's diary at this point reads, "We find ourselves about three miles below the Old House". They were obviously referring to Fort Ash (or Ash House) which by this time was abandoned, and this would put their camp about one mile north east of Hartney, Manitoba. On December

7, Thompson continued south west along the river. At a point south west of Lauder, Manitoba, he crossed the river and turned toward the Turtle Mountains, which he reached on December 12. He now hired an Assiniboine Indian to guide him to the Mandan villages on the Missouri River, where he spent about three weeks.

Thompson arrived back on the west side of the Turtles on, January 30, 1798. He tells of killing two buffalo on this day, and in fact, his diary for this trip records several instances where buffalo were killed, or buffalo meat was purchased from the Indians, so obviously there were plenty of buffalo in south west Manitoba even in the winter. On January 31 they sighted the sandhills and noted that they were covered with trees. This was probably done through Thompson's telescope. Of the journey on Feb. 1, he says, "At 6:10 a.m., we set off made the Isle of Woods at 1:00 pm. **Six tents of Stone Indians.** They behaved kindly to the Mandan young men". What does he mean by the Isle of Woods? It seems obvious he means the island of sandhill trees surrounded by bare prairie. If this is so, then the sandhills had a good tree cover in 1798. However, there is an island in the river north of Lauder which has been called the Island of Woods since the pioneers first arrived. This may be what Thompson was referring to. On February traveling north east along the river he passed Fort Ash and reached the intersection of Plum Creek and the Souris at 3:30 p.m. Here Thompson pitched camp for the night alongside five tents of Assiniboines who told them that Hudson's Bay Company traders passed through the area about eight days previous. On February 3 they set off early, 1:50 a.m., continuing straight through the Brandon Hills and reaching MacDonnell's House at 10:30 a.m. Thompson's final remark for the February 3 entry, "Thank God".

In 1798 the Northwest Company continued to use the Souris River for trade and as a base for trade in the Missouri country. After about 1806 it appears that the Northwest Company lost interest in the Souris but their place on that river was soon taken by American traders and Independents.

In 1799 Fort Souris was built at the mouth of the Souris River by the XY Company just across from MacDonnell's House.

The fur trade in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was a large operation. In the early 1800's the Northwest Company and the XY Company together employed more than 1,400 men while the Hudson's Bay Company had more employees than the other combined. All three companies along with the independents and at least on American fur company operated on the Souris River in the early 1800's. The approximate values of skins and furs at this time are listed below:

- Deerskin .40c/lb.;
- Beaver \$2.00/lb.;
- Buffalo robes about \$6.00 each;
- Fox \$1.00/lb.;
- Muskrat .50c/lb.;
- Wolf \$1.00/lb.; and
- Lynx \$5.00/lb.

In the early 1800's American traders believed in, and hunted for, a river which connected the Missouri to the rich fur trade in the northwest. One possibility they investigated was the Souris River which was connected with the Assiniboine, Qu' Appelle and Saskatchewan Rivers.

At this time the Canadian traders used thousands of galleons of rum and wine in their trade with the Indians. Some of this was used on the Souris River. The volume of liquor was increased by mixing it with chewing tobacco, red pepper, red ink and water. The mixture was called firewater. All traders, even the better ones such as David Thompson, carried firewater on their trips down the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers. A famous trader, Alexander Henry, used liquor on the Souris and later a trader named Joseph Desjarlais was charged on many occasions by the Fort Garry authorities for his use of liquor on the Souris.

In 1800 Alexander Henry Jr. made his first trip down the Souris River. Leaving the Northwest Company Fort La Souris at the junction of the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers Henry journeyed down the river to about the present day town of Souris. From here he traveled across country to Fort La Bosse on the Assiniboine River where he engaged in the buffalo hunt.

In 1801, John MacKay, factor at Brandon House decided to establish a trading post in the Turtle Mountains. On November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1801 he sent seven men off for this purpose. On December 11<sup>th</sup>, MacKay crossed the Souris River on his way to check the progress of this new post.

Both the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company built winter posts on the east side of Whitewater Lake in 1802. They were not a success and were soon abandoned, as evidenced by John Pritchards visit to Whitewater Lake in 1805.

In 1803, the trader Mendard, was killed on the Souris River by the Sioux. He had operated successfully on the river for 16 years.

The XY Company and the Northwest Company united in 1804. The new Northwest Company, along with numerous independents remained in bitter competition with the Hudson's Bay Company. The Northwest Company sent expeditions into the Souris Plains in the years 1804, 1805 and 1806. In 1804 Jean Chaboillez worked the Souris River and was back again in 1805, but in 1806 his movements were restricted by the war-like Sioux.

One expedition sent down the Souris in 1804 was under the direction of the traders Antoine Laroque and Charles MacKenzie. At the same time the Lewis and Clark American expedition moved up the Missouri River to the Mandan country. It was here the two groups met and exchanged harsh words over the sovereignty of this territory. According to Laroque's journal, Lewis and Clark claimed the United States extended north to and included the Souris River and country.

Also in 1804 Lewis and Clark met a trader, Hugh Heney, who had been working for a southern fur company. At this time he was transporting goods down the Souris River for the Northwest Company. He was also trading with the Sioux, one of the few traders to do this successfully.

Finally, in 1804 the Americans sent their first trader, Baptiste Le Page up the Souris River. This exploratory trip led the American Fur Company to build at least one, and probably two, establishments on the Souris in later years.

Fur trading operations were not always along the banks of the Souris River. In June, 1805, a man named John Pritchard left Fort La Souris, a Northwest Company post at the mouth of the Souris River. He was on his way to forts on the Assiniboine and Qu' Appelle Rivers. The next morning he and a companion woke up west of Oak Lake to find their horses gone. The companion set off to search for the horses but never returned.

Pritchard now began to walk during a rain storm with no sun to guide him. He eventually discovered a small river and followed. This may have been Pipestone Creek but more likely was Stoney Creek which flows into the Souris. He was living on bird's eggs, frogs and magpies at this time, having no gun, knife, blanket or supplies of any kind. He walked along this river for about ten days when he perceived a larger river before him. This was probably the Souris. He crossed it and advanced across the plains. He now discovered the plant called the Turnip of the Plains-this was Indian Breadroot. At first he so hungry he ate it raw but later cooked it. He had now been alone for 30 days and was naked with no shoes. Reaching a large lake he found two old deserted trading posts and at first believed himself on the Qu' Appelle River lakes. But as he studied the locality he suddenly realized that he was at Whitewater Lake. In one of the houses he found some old shoes and socks and the next day set off in a north east direction. That evening he was found by an Indian family who fed him pemmican and pulled him to Fort La Souris on a travois. The people at Fort La Souris could not believe that he was alive, and John McKay of the opposition Hudson Bay's Brandon House prepared a banquet for him.

The Northwest Company built Fort La Souris at the Souris River mouth just a few hundred yards north of the XY Company post, Fort Souris. By this time the Northwest Company and the XY Company had united to form the larger Northwest Company (1804), so that the XY post, Fort Souris, was abandoned in favour of the new post.

In 1805 Antoine Laroque led an expedition down the Souris River south to the Yellowstone. After trading with the Arikara Indians, he returned to Northwest Company headquarters on the Souris.

In the winter of 1805 Lewis and Clark met a large band of Assiniboines in the Mandan villages. On their way south to trade for Mandan corn, these Assiniboines had met and killed a party of Independent traders on the Souris. A little further south on the same river they had robbed a group of Hudson's Bay traders.

In the summer of 1805 an American fur company decided to build Fort Union at the junction of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers. On the way up the Missouri they met Charles Chaboillez of the Hudson's Bay Company who was heading for the Souris River with a load of furs. The Americans took this opportunity to inform the Hudson Bay Company that they intended to operate as far north as the Souris Plains, and also that they would construct trading posts on the Souris River. In return, they said they would permit the Hudson Bay Company traders on the Missouri. This was not a bargain for the Hudson Bay Company as they had already been operating on the Missouri River for 25 years. However, it was probably as a result of this decision by the Americans that they built two posts on the Souris River a few years later.

In 1806, a Northwest Company trader, Alexander Henry Jr. started across the Souris plains. He carried the usual trade goods, tobacco, beads, knives, muskets and in his case a good supply of liquor.

On July 15<sup>th</sup> he stopped for the night at the Fort Ash site. During the trip upriver he mentions passing several Assiniboine camps of about 70 tents and after visiting the Turtle Mountains he estimated the Assiniboine population at about 10,000. In the next 40 years this number would be reduced by war and smallpox to about 3,000. A local resident of Hartney, Mrs. De Pevre, whose grandfather worked in the Souris River orts in the 1840's, states that her grandfather observed two Assiniboine villages in 1842 where everyone was dead of smallpox. While passing along the Souris, Henry was careful to

put night guards on the horses as the Assiniboines had the reputation of being the greatest horse thieves on the prairies. Guards were also necessary as Henry was carrying guns and ammunition to the Missouri River Indians.

Henry also mentions the great herds of buffalo along the Souris plains this summer. Thompson in the winter of 1797 had found the buffalo in plentiful supply, so this would explain why, starting about 1820, the buffalo hunters began visiting the Souris plains twice a year, summer and winter.

Henry's use of liquor in trading with the Indians was well known. According to the editor of Henry's journal, "Henry cheated and debauched the Indians as a matter of course".

In the same year the following events happened. Daniel Harmen in his travels through the Souris area met the Assiniboine Indians who were still repeating prayers taught their parents by Jesuit missionaries in the 1740's. A Sioux-Assiniboine battle occurred to the east of Whitewater Lake. Two Hudson Bay Company traders left Brandon House on February 10<sup>th</sup> to collect the furs taken in at Lena House in the Turtle Mountains. About this time the Northwest Company quit operations on the Souris. Their place was soon taken by Independents and the Americans.

In 1807, Francois Jeanette, was born on the Souris River near the present day city of Bottineau, North Dakota. His father, a French Canadian, first name Justas, was a trapper on the Souris River and had lost his first wife and son to the Gros Ventre Indians. He lived and worked in the Souris Valley until 1905.

The American Fur Company was officially formed in 1808. It intended to operate on the Souris River and one of its claims was that the Souris lay south of the still unscrewed border.

In 1810, John Pritchard of the Northwest Company, mentions in his records that a trading post called Plum Creek was built. This may have been near the junction of the Souris River and Plum Creek but there is no record of a site being found in this area.

In 1934 an old Metis, Antoine Gladu, disclosed the existence of a trading post on Sec. 31, Rge. 24, Tp. 5, on the north bank of the Souris River directly north of Lauder. Gladu was, at this time, a very old man having been born in the Hartney-Lauder sandhills in 1860. Almost certainly his parents had been buffalo hunters or worked in the various forts along the river. This old post has been called the American Fort, and this name handed down through generations. Even today old timers in the area refer to it as the American Fort. It was probably built by the American Fur Company, one of two they built in this area. The other was built near the junction of the Souris and Antler Rivers.

The American Fort, north of Lauder, was built about 1810. The site of its chimney mounds indicate that it was in operation for a considerable length of time so we can speculate that it operated until 1828 when Cuthbert Grant was appointed "Warden of the Plains" and instructed by the Hudson's Bay Company to clear out all opposition trading posts. In the summer of 1828 Grant reported these two American posts were operating north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel and it is likely that he put a stop to their operations. These American posts were also used as a springboard to the rich Assiniboine and Qu' Appelle River regions and it is known that the Americans traded extensively on the Qu' Appelle.

The condition of the clay chinking of the American fort near Lauder indicates that it could have been an earlier fort than Fort Desjarlais (built in 1836) but probably later

than Fort Ash (built in 1785). All things considered, the date 1810 should be close. A charcoal line about 10 inches deep on the river bank would indicate the post was burned but perhaps not by Cuthbert Grant – old timers in the district believe that after its operations ceased it remained standing for a time. It may have been burned by the Sioux or a prairie fire. These same old timers refer to it was the American Fort but they don't know why.

A portion of this fort has been removed by river erosion but from what is left we can guess that the fort was approximately 120 feet by 100 feet and it's cellar holes and chimney mounds indicate there may have been three buildings inside the stockade. There is another site on the river about one mile north east of the American Fort. It was found in the 1890's by an old time Lauder resident. At that time its chimney was still standing and its remains are still visible. If it was a trading post it was probably built in the 1850's but there is no evidence as to what it was. Pete LaFontaine states his father told him two forts existed near Desjarlais so this may have been one.

In 1812 an American engineer, searching for a passage north from the Missouri River, found a large Gros Ventre Indian village at the intersection of the Souris-Antler Rivers. The following year Indians from this village scalped Francois Jeannotte's sister and he and his mother moved to Fort Garry. However, a few years later, Jeannotte returned to the Souris River and later worked in two trading posts above the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.

It was about this time that the buffalo hunts began along the Souris River. They were small for the first few years, just a few tents, but by 1820 they would be large organized affairs.

Cuthbert Grant, youthful Metis leader, captured the Hudson Bay Company fort, "Brandon House" at the mouth of the Souris River in 1816. Here he destroyed all the pemmican destined for the company's traders and for the Selkirk settlers. This action took place during the so-called Pemmican War in which the Northwest Company attempted to frighten and starve the Selkirk settlers into the leaving the Red River area.

In 1818 Brandon House #2 was built by Peter Fidler at the junction of the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers, and in the same year an independent trader began a post in the Turtle Mountains to the south of Lake Metigoche. This post operated until about 1850. A whiskey post operator on the Souris, Joseph DesJarlais, had a close connection with this Lake Metigoche post. A very old Indian living in the Turtle Mountains in the 1930's remembered the Desjarlais visits to this post.

Maria Grant, daughter of Cuthbert Grant, was born in 1820. She raised a family called Breland who would play an important part in the trading posts on the Souris and later be the first settlers in the Grande Clariere sandhills.

Also in 1820 the first Metis buffalo brigade from Fort Garry crossed the Souris River near present day Melita. Finally a Sioux-Assiniboine battle took place just east of Whitewater Lake.

The use of liquor in the fur trade grew worse with the union of the Hudson Bay and Northwest Companies in 1821. The Hudson Bay Company up to this time had tried to restrain the liquor trade. Nevertheless rum and high wine continued to be dispensed to the Indians until 1874 when the Northwest Mounted Police put a stop to this practice. The Americans also began using corn whiskey and alcohol about this time and these were

introduced along the Souris River and the Turtle Mountains by a trader whom we shall discuss later.<sup>6</sup>

The last Hudson Bay Company post on the Souris was still operating in 1821 and south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. The factor, Kenneth McKenzie, soon after joined the American Fur Company and operated out of Fort Union.

In 1822 Peter Fidler noted the abundance of sturgeon at the intersection of the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers. In the same year the forts at this intersection were attacked by the Sioux.

In 1823 Francois Jeannotte returned from Fort Garry and began to trap along the Souris, south of Melita. He reportedly took his furs to an American Fur Company post near present day Minot run by a trader "Gravelle".

In 1824 Brandon House was abandoned by the Hudson Bay Company. American traders were not doing well in Canada at this time. In the same year Cuthbert Grant started a freighting business on the Souris Plains. He brought boats and carts into the Souris valley in order to buy and bring out buffalo robe and furs. At the same time he started a Metis settlement at St. Francis Xavier. This settlement was to serve as protection for the Fort Garry Settlement against the Sioux. He was encouraged in both these projects by Governor Simpson of the Hudson Bay Company.

In 1824 Cuthbert Grant also built Fort Grant on the Souris about two miles south west of Hartney (Sec. 7, Tp. 6. Rge. 23). He was encouraged in this venture as well by Governor Simpson, who expected Grant to keep American and independent traders out of the Souris Valley.

Grant's father, who was of noble birth, worked for the Northwest Company and had married a Cree woman. Cuthbert was the product of this union. Grant, like his father, worked for the Northwest Company but in 1821 became an independent.

Grant operated his Souris Fort as an independent until 1828. At that time the Hudson Bay Company put him on salary and gave him the title "Warden of the Plains". His job was evidently to ride the Souris Plains of independents and Americans, and to protect the Fort Garry settlement from the Sioux. Simpson stated it this way, "As they have a number of Indian and half-breed relations and are acquainted with the different tribes in that area, they have it more in their power to harass our opponents than we would with a great establishment.

Hudson Bay Company records have very little to say about Grant and his Souris River fort. For this reason we might suspect that Grant operated independently of the Great Company. A. S. Morton supported this view in his correspondence to the Souris Plaindealer in 1935. Morton believed that Grant was in the Souris to prevent the smuggling of furs to the U.S. and to stop the smuggling of American whisky into Canada.

The fort was situated on the north side of the river. The site is still intact as no river erosion has taken place. Six cellar holes are visible and it is possible to estimate its

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<sup>6</sup> From *The Fur Trade* by Paul Chrisler Phillips, Volume 2, Page 387. Copyright 1961 by the University of Oklahoma Press.

According to Mr. Phillips, the American government passed a law in 1832 discontinuing the use of liquor in the fur trade. The Hudson's Bay Company had agreed to stop this practice as well, but probably did not do so north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. This is almost certainly one of the reasons why American traders did poorly in the Canadian northwest after 1830, as the Indians would naturally trade with the company which offered fire water.

size at about 150 feet by 120 feet. It was not destroyed by fire as there are no charcoal signs present.

To the north, the Yellow Quill Trail is still faintly visible. This was the trail, running parallel to the Souris River, used by explorers and traders as well as Indians. Grant used this trail to freight furs to Fort Garry and supplies to his Souris fort. Of course Grant also used the river as a freightway. In one of his best years he shipped more than 50,000 furs and robes by boat to Fort Garry.

A large force of workers were at the fort during parts of each year. One of the most important workers was Alexander Breland whose descendents continue to live in the area up to this day. Other workers who stayed in the area and began to farm were the Levielles and the Dauphinais.

After Brandon House was abandoned in 1824, the Company (Hudson Bay) met the opposition of the American traders by permitting settlers to trade with the Indians who would otherwise deal with the Americans. On July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1827, Governor wrote the Company in London informing them that Cuthbert Grant and Louise Giboche were provided with an outfit to trade in the Turtle Mountains.

The remarkable thing is that Fort Grant operated continuously from 1824 to 1861, the last six years as a winter fort only. By 1861 Grant had been dead for many years and the fort continued to operate under the guidance of relatives.

In 1825 Grant visited all parts of the Souris Plains in his search for furs including Oak Lake, the Turtle Mountains and upriver to the American border. He now started to trade with the Turtle Mountain Indians in order to win their furs away from the Americans.

The buffalo hunt on the Souris Plains was a failure that year and hunters and traders were forced by starvation to eat their horses and dogs. One trapper, Charles McKenzie, deserted the Hudson Bay Company and began working for an American Company in Wyoming.

In 1826, Grant reported to Governor Simpson that there were plenty of furs on the Souris, and also that there were two American Forts whose personnel had threatened to seize Grant's Fort. In the same year, Louis Giboche, Grant's partner, traded on the Souris Plains and in the Turtle Mountains. Governor Simpson sent a surveyor named George Taylor to Fort Grant. He was to ascend the Souris River and visit the Turtle Mountains to establish the location of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel in each case. In the Dakotas the American Army built Fort Union at the junction of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers. Its purpose was to control the Sioux Indians.

Grant left his Souris River Fort in the spring of 1828 and returned to Fort Garry to discuss plans with Governor Simpson for driving out the American traders. Grant had trouble that year with the Assiniboines who threatened to destroy his fort. He was, however, successful in pacifying this tribe and traded with them during the winter.

In July, 1828, Grant was appointed "Warden of the Plains" by Governor Simpson. This has been interpreted by some as meaning Warden of the Souris Valley Plains and is probably true as Grant was certainly operating in the Souris Valley Plains area. This appointment probably made it official that he was to discourage independents and American traders from operating in the Souris Plains, he seems to have been successful, for by the end of 1829, the American posts were deserted. Grant spent the winter of 1828-29 at the fort and is reported to have, during this period, attacked an American post



whose site is directly north of the village of Lauder. Once again in the spring of 1829 Grant brought out a large number of furs.

However, sometime in the 1830's, Grant seemed to have lost interest in his fort and turned his attention to the Metis settlement at St. Francois Xavier and the buffalo hunts. Because of this, an independent trader with American connections, established a fort on the Souris in 1836. In 1840 another independent started a post south of Melita. Grant's Fort continued to operate until his death in 1854. After that it was operated by his relatives as a winter post.

Also in 1828, the Hudson Bay Company established a trading post at Oak Lake under the leadership of George Setter. This winter post was situated on the north shore of the lake. The Company also built Brandon House #3.

In 1830 a Sioux-Assiniboine war occurred. One of the battles was north east of Napinka on the north side of the Souris. IN 1831 Sioux war parties forced the forts at the Souris mouth to close.

In 1836 a fort appeared on the Souris River operated by a man the Indians called "Hairy Legs". This man seemed to have a special status with the Indians and in many ways his fort was a most unusual one.

Most of the information about this fort was given orally by the LaFontaine family to the Souris Plaindealer in the 1930's and to myself in the 1960's. Madame LaFontaine, who told her stories to the Plaindealer when she was over 90 years of age, was born in St. Francois Xavier.<sup>7</sup> Her father, Francois Jeunette, worked at both Forts Grant and Desjarlais, packing and freighting furs to Fort Garry and supplies back to the forts. The Jeunettes were also, on occasion, members of the buffalo cart brigades that worked the Souris sandhills and plains.

Madame LaFontaine was born in St. Francois Xavier, about 1840 and spent her summers around Fort Desjarlais. She married one of the workers at the fort and in 1860 gave birth to a girl. One hundred and seven years later, this girl, now called Mrs. Vodon, took part in the Hartney Centennial Celebrations. Mrs. Vodon's daughter, Mrs. De Pevre, was able to give us a good deal of information that was handed down from her mother and her grandmother. Another child called Peter was born to Madame LaFontaine about 1880. Pete was also a great source of information before his death in 1971.

For Desjarlais was built in 1836 by Joseph Desjarlais. It was located on the north bank of the Souris on Sec. 31, Tp. 5, Rge. 24, to the north west of Lauder. Downstream about one mile was the location of the older American Fort.

With Desjarlais at the fort his son-in-law Charles Demontine, Sime Blondin, Eusebe Ledour and his son Baptiste, Mrs. LaFontaine believed that a force of about seventy-five men was maintained at this fort, perhaps for protection against the Sioux. However, this brings up some questions which we will discuss later on.

The fort itself was served by the Yellow Quill Trail and also an old train running north, sometimes called the Hudson's Bay Trail. Traces of these trails can still be found. Facing the river the fort was about two hundred feet long. A charcoal line more than one hundred fifty feet long can still be found on the river bank, left from its fiery demise in 1856. The fort may have been one hundred fifty feet deep, but this is difficult to tell because of erosion by the river. People who saw the remains in the 1930's estimate the

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<sup>7</sup> Souris River Posts, McMorran, Souris, 1947, Page 12-14.

fort was two hundred feet by one hundred fifty feet. The fort was surrounded by a stockade of oak posts. Inside the stockade was a long log building and several small ones. Adjacent to the fort and probably included in the stockade was horse corral. An excavation of this fort in 1967 showed evidence of a two foot layer of manure over a great area, and this would support the claim of seventy-five men and many horses.

Since 1969 three sever floods on the Souris all but completely eroded Fort Desjarlais. However, before 1969, several distinct cellar holes and chimney mounds were visible at the site. A little digging could bring to light various artifacts such as, rusty knives, pieces of clay pipes, musket balls, broken dishes with a distinct pattern, etc. Clay chinking was easily found, molded in the shape of the logs used in the log houses and the stockade. Clear and colored heads were easily found by sifting a little sand. The site was excavated by a Winnipeg group in 1967, but no information from this excavation was passed onto local residents. However, rumor has it that this excavation group dug up the foundation logs, found a thick layer of manure, plus some of the usual things like bones, crockery, etc. One foundation log left appeared to be square and about 14 inches to a side.

Fort Desjarlais operated for 20 years. According to Madame LaFontaine it burned in 1856, probably by a prairie fire, but perhaps by rivals or Indians. Desjarlais immediately resumed operations on the Souris, south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.

This fort is indeed a real mystery. It was so large for the Souris River area, and it operated steadily for 20 years. Few forts or posts in Western Canada operated for such a long time. Almost without fail they were abandoned in a few years. A force of 75 men and many of them with horses. How could Desjarlais support such a force? He would need food for the men, hay for the horses and this in itself would have been formidable task.

Some possible reasons for the existence of this fort and such a large body of men follow:

Protection from Cuthbert Grant, the Warden of the Plains, may have been required. His job was to remove the independent traders from the plains and stop trading with the Americans. Besides Grant's Fort was only about five miles downstream from Desjarlais, close enough for attack. It is known that Desjarlais had strong connections with the American Indians in the Turtle Mountains, so perhaps he was smuggling furs to the Americans and felt the need for a large force to protect him from Grant. OF course Grant lost interest in his Souris Fort in 1838 devoting himself to his St. Francois Xavier settlement and the buffalo hunt so perhaps Desjarlais had less need for this large a force. According to Madame La Fontaine there were about 75 men at the fort when she lived there in the 1840's.

At this time the Hudson Bay Company had made trade in furs with the Americans illegal. This caused great anger among the Metis and the Desjarlais post may have been an organized attempt by the Metis to continue this illegal trade. Fort Garry Metis, in particular, may have brought their furs to Desjarlais for disposal.

It has also been suggested that this fort was in such close proximity to the Sioux-Assiniboine battle grounds that Desjarlais needed a large force for defense against the Sioux. As Desjarlais was able to operate continually for 20 years in such a dangerous area there is a distinct possibility that Desjarlais was friendly with the Sioux, but if this was the case the large force of men was not necessary.

It was recorded that Desjarlais faced several charges of using liquor to deal with the Indians and was tried in Fort Garry so there is a possibility that Desjarlais was smuggling American corn liquor into Canada and Canadian furs into the United States. This two-way traffic would have required a sizable force of men.

The best guess is that Desjarlais and his men were buffalo hunters. From 1836 to 1856 were good years for hunting buffalo as well as trapping for furs. Of course by this time some fur-bearing animals were pretty well trapped out such as the beaver. But it was by building a fort they could also engage in the fur trade with the Indians. This would give them three sources of income, from buffalo robes in both summer and winter hunts, from Pemmican which they sold to the Hudson's Bay Company, and from trading furs with the Indians and trappers, and if they also engaged in a little illegal trade with the Americans they might conceivably have year round employment for such a large force of men.

Joseph Desjarlais is indeed a man of mystery. According to a resident of Minnedosa, Manitoba Desjarlais' descendants may live in the Minnedosa area. About the year 1800 a band of Chippewa Indians migrated from Red Lake, Minnesota to Manitoba. Desjarlais may have been married to one of the descendents of this band. His father-in-law later moved back to Minnesota where he received treaty money and when he died in 1904, his wife, living at Rolling River reserve in Manitoba, received an inheritance from him. This may be the American connection referred to in a previous paragraph. To bolster this conjecture is the fact that there are several Desjarlais families living in the Minnedosa at the present time.

IN 1840 a four year war began between the Metis buffalo hunters and the Sioux. Grant was present at some of the battles, but most of the action took place in the Dacotahs south of the Souris River. Peter Garrioch, an independent, began trading on the Souris. Some of his trade was with the Americans and was illegal. In 1840 trappers on the Souris received 35 cents a pound for muskrat hides, down from 50 cents a pound in 1804.

A Metis historian visited Hartney in 1941. In a trip down the Souris he located the site of a Metis trading post on Sec. 20, Tp. 6, Rge. 23. It is believed this post operated for a short time in the 1840's.

Peter Garrioch built a trading post on the Souris River in 1843 located south of Melita. His diary tells of his trips to Red River and to the Missouri. He also records the day-to-day life in his post which seemed to consist of trading and drinking. In 1844 he tells of a scarlet fever epidemic which killed many of the Indians. His diary ends in 1845 so probably his post ended then as well. Garrioch was a bitter competitor of the Hudson Bay Company and Hudson Bay Company records reveal that he smuggled furs across the line to the Americans.

In 1846 an independent trader established a post on the Souris in the Napinka area. This post was evidently tolerated by Desjarlais and his men. The presence of this fort was divulged by Madame La Fontaine who believed the trader came from the Turtle Mountains.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, 1846, Governor Simpson of the Hudson Bay Company wrote to London headquarters informing them that a new trading post was being built in the Turtle Mountains. Lena's House, at this time, had ceased to operate. The new post was operated in 1846 by H. Fisher, interpreter, and later from 1848-1855 by Antoine

Desjarlais, interpreter. This post operated somewhere on the northern slopes of the Turtle Mountains. One cannot help but wonder if Antoine Desjarlais was a relative of the Joseph Desjarlais who was in such great disfavor with the Hudson Bay Company over his use of liquor.

A Sioux-Assiniboine battle took place along the river in 1849. The site of this battle was SE Sec. 36, Tp. 5, Rge. 24. In the same year a trading post operated very close to the site of present day Melita. Madame La Fontaine mentioned this post to G. A. McMorrان and it was also referred to by the Turtle Mountain Indians when they were interviewed by a North Dakota historian.

In 1845 Cuthbert Grant died. His Fort Grant was operated by relatives until 1861. One of these relatives was Thomas Breland who was the son of Grant's daughter, Maria. By this time business for the two remaining forts was greatly reduced, consisting of buffalo robes, wolf skins and a few muskrats. The Metis operating Fort Grant were now making an attempt to raise livestock and a few small crops.

By 1855 the Assiniboine nation was reduced to about one-tenth of its original population. Smallpox had been the main killer, although the Sioux and starvation accelerated the rate of attrition. It was in 1854 that Francois Jeanotte, who worked in Fort Grant, walked into an Indian village and found every occupant dead of smallpox. Hudson Bay Company records for this year list a fort called "Souris River". It was recorded as being under the charge of J. Sinclair, interpreter. This may have been a reference to Fort Grant.

In 1856 Fort Desjarlais was burned to the ground, either by a prairie fire of the Sioux. Joseph Desjarlais rebuilt on the Souris River, near present day Minot, North Dakota.

The next year the Souris River was explored by Captain Palliser. In August he arrived at what he described as a Hudson's Bay Company post. It was deserted and Palliser believed that it corresponded to Grant's House. Palliser described the post as situated on the north side of the river and that it was not operating.

In 1858 the region was explored once again by Henry Youle Hind. Both he and Palliser were making a survey for the Canadian Government. He also noticed Fort Grant as deserted and described it as being used only in the winter. Hind also noted that only a few Assiniboine Indians were left in the Turtle Mountains.

In 1861 Fort Grant closed for good. It had only been a winter operation for the last seven years. Some of the workers from this fort now started a mixed farming industry, growing small crops and raising livestock. They continued the buffalo hunt until about 1866. These were the first settlers in the area.

About this time the Hudson Bay Company wolfers ceased operating. They killed wolves by poisoning buffalo carcasses with strychnine. They were very unpopular with Indians because they poisoned Indian dogs as well as wolves. To remedy this, they usually married an Indian girl first hoping in this way to soften the Indian's anger. They operated along the Souris River and in the Dakotas.

Today the sites of almost all the 18 posts and forts that existed along the Souris between Souris, Manitoba and Minot, North Dakota have been erased by river erosion. The sites of Fort Ash and Fort Grant are intact and about 80 percent of the American Fort is left. Fort Desjarlais is almost completely gone. An old-timer in the area estimated that Fort Desjarlais crumbled into the river at an average rate of two feet per year. At this rate

Fort Desjarlais would have taken about 100 years to disappear. The 100 years was up to 1956 but it probably took 20 years or more for the river erosion to reach the fort initially.

## CHAPTER 4

### *THE BUFFALO HUNTERS, WARS WITH THE SIOUX*

Buffalo hunts on the Souris Plains began in the early 1800's. They were, at first, small parties of Metis hunters organized by the trading companies at the junction of the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers. In the summer they hunted on horseback and used carts to bring back the meat. The winter hunt was described by Captain John Rogers.

In 1817 Captain Rogers visited the hunting tents along the Souris River. They were located in an area south of the present day town of Souris, Manitoba. His supplies for the trip consisted of tobacco, tea, sugar, powder, ball, flints, 3 quarts of rum, blankets and one buffalo robe. He found the life of a buffalo hunters to be one of hardship and cruelty. Living in tents, cooking their meals in tents, they usually slept in their clothes because it was so cold at night. In the morning their keg of rum was often frozen. As the tents were full of smoke a great deal of the time bars of wood supporting fat, tripe and buffalo meat strips were suspended halfway up the tent to dry out and be smoked. Rum and other spirits were drunk at night and occasionally during the day by the Metis hunters who, according to Rogers, are greedy drinkers. However he acknowledges that rum provides a certain amount of warmth in sub-zero temperatures.

Dogs and sleds were used to haul supplies and buffalo meat to camp but horses were often used in the winter hunt itself. Rogers saw thousands of buffalo along the Souris River so evidently buffalo were plentiful in the winter.

In 1820 the first buffalo brigade from Fort Garry crossed the Souris River near present day Melita. Also in 1820 Maria Grant, daughter of Cuthbert Grant, was born.<sup>8</sup> She raised a family called Breland who would eventually play an important part in the trading operations and the buffalo hunts along the Souris River.

After 1820 the Metis hunters began to range west of Fort Garry and from St. Francois Xavier came Cuthbert Grant's buffalo hunters. They now rode out in large parties for defense against the Sioux Indians who claimed the Souris Valley Hunting Grounds as their own. The St. Francois Xavier group were not always led by Cuthbert Grant, but sometimes by his Lieutenant, Baptiste Wilkie. Much later, around 1840, another smaller group, the 60 families, began hunting in the Grande Clariere sandhills and farther west.

The hunt was conducted as follows: First a hunt captain was chosen, this office was often held by Cuthbert Grant. The hunt captain then chose ten advisors whose duty it was to advise the captain. When the party moved off, scouts were sent to ride on ahead and to the side to watch for buffalo herds and for the Sioux. If an attack was likely, they wheeled their carts and horses into a circle and fired from behind the carts.

Usually encounters with the Sioux would only amount to light brushes in which the Sioux would raid the party for a few minutes and perhaps steal some horses, but occasionally the Sioux attacked in large numbers. These larger engagements will be discussed later.

Rigid discipline was maintained once the hunt started. One of the rules was that no hunting was to take place on the Sabbath.

The buffalo hunt west of the Red River was very important for both the Selkirk settlers and the traders. The traders, on leaving Fort Garry for the north west, would take a winter's supply of Pemmican with them. This Pemmican was stockpiled at Fort Garry

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<sup>8</sup> The Metis Living, H. Parkinson, Altona Press, 1957.

from the buffalo hunts on the Souris Plains. The buffalo were also very important to the Plains Indians. It was their main source of food and might, at times, be supplemented with a few wild vegetables or fruits.

The buffalo herds on the Souris Plains were immense. One group of white traders working along the Souris River were stopped for two days as a herd of buffalo rumbled by. After such a passage, the soil would be barren of vegetation for width of several miles.

The Plains Indians hunted the buffalo in the following ways: Before the acquisition of horses and firearms, the Indians would drive the buffalo toward the narrow end of a “V”. This “V” usually ended in a cliff on a riverbank where the buffalo would be driven over to their death. Several buffalo runs were used along the Souris River in this fashion. After the Indians acquired horses and guns, they conducted the hunt in much the same manner as the Metis. In the Indian buffalo hunt the meat and other usable parts of the buffalo were divided equally among all the families.

Plains Indians used the buffalo in the following ways:

1. The meat was dried and pounded to a powder, placed in buffalo skin bags and hot buffalo grease and bone marrow added, enough to make a 100 lb. bag. This was stirred up with the addition of certain berries. When made in the summer pemmican would last for years, but if made in the winter it would only be good for a few months.
2. The hides were used in the following ways. About 16 hides were required to make teepees. They were also used to make robes, moccasins, saddle bags, skin for boats, drum covers, and the tough skin from the neck was used as a shield against weapons.
3. The sinews were used as a thread for sewing.
4. The bladder was used as a water bag, and the stomach as a cooking pot.
5. The horns were carved into utensils and also used as a head dress. The tips were used by Indian children as spinning tops.
6. The bones made scrapers, knives, awls and needles and the ribs made sleds for children.
7. The hooves were boiled into glue.
8. Buffalo chips (dried dung) were used as a fuel if trees were scarce.
9. The brains were boiled into a tanning paste and eaten as a great delicacy.
10. After the white traders appeared the Indians sold buffalo robes and pemmican to them.

This one animal supplied all the Indian’s needs, so it is little wonder that the Sioux fought the Metis buffalo hunting parties as they crossed the Souris Plains.

The Indians also made good use of wild vegetables, fruits and other plants. Found along the Souris River were the following:

1. Wild turnip – known as Indian Breadroot. It was eaten raw or cooked and dried for use in the winter. It was also added to pemmican stew. John Pritchard ate this vegetable in 1805 when he was lost on the Souris Plains for 40 days.
2. Wild onions – reputed to have medicinal qualities. They also were added to pemmican stew.
3. Pincushion cactus – the berries were sometimes added to pemmican.

4. Reindeer moss (Lichen) – occasionally boiled for food.
5. Strawberry plant – it's leaves were boiled for tea.
6. Chockecherry – the berries were used in pemmican. The inner bark was used as a poultice and the leaves were brewed for tea.
7. Bearberry – the leaves were used for tea and also dried and ground up for use as Indian tobacco.
8. Cattail – leaves used for weaving.
9. Saskatoon and Buffalo berries used in pemmican.

After 1830 the buffalo hunters began to use the south side of Chain Lakes as a stopping place. One of their routes was from the Turtle Mountains past Whitewater Lake to Chain Lakes, and then north west across the Souris River into the Lauder sandhills. Buffalo rubbing stones can still be seen in the Chain Lake and Elgin Creek areas.

In 1837, a Metis group from St. Francois Xavier began regular trips to the Lauder sandhills area to hunt buffalo. This group consisted of sixty families who arrived regularly each spring and fall. This group would greatly increase in size in the late 1840's when a splinter group from the Fort Garry hunters would also start hunting on the Souris Plains and as far west as the Moose Mountains. The last buffalo hunt on the Souris Plains was in 1865.

Some of the members of the sixty families were Francois Jeunette who also worked in Fort Grant, Jean La Fontaine who worked in both Fort Grant and Fort Desjarlais. The daughter of Francois Jeunette born in 1840, played as a child in Fort Desjarlais, and would eventually marry a La Fontaine. In 1934, at the age of 94 years, she would reveal the fort locations to G. A. McMorran. There was also Armand Breland who would eventually marry Maria Grant, daughter of Cuthbert Grant. Armand worked in Fort Grant until 1860. In 1861 his son Thomas Breland began mixed farming about one mile east of present day Grande Clariere. A few descendents of this group live in the Hartney area today.

After 1824 the hunts organized from Fort Garry and St. Francois Xavier were much larger in size. Whole families would move out for both the summer and winter hunts. As the Metis were a devout people they always brought a priest along with them. Extreme discipline was exercised by the captain of the hunt. A descendent of the La Fontaines related that each night the carts were arranged in a circle with the horses kept inside the circle. The Metis feared attacks by the Sioux and horse stealing raids by the Assiniboines. Sometimes, if the Sioux were known to be in the vicinity, the Metis would dig rifle pits. Such pits have been found along the Elgin Creek. Another La Fontaine descendent recounted that his father told him the following story. In the winter their camps consisted of tents or often rude log cabins located in a sheltered spot along the river. The men would set off each day in search of buffalo. Occasionally they would be trapped by severe blizzards, but were adept at making shelters out of snow blocks in order to survive the storm, or they might find a sheltered spot along the river and dig into the bank. But summer tents were usually pleasant. While the buffalo were still plentiful they would camp beside Fort Grant or Fort Desjarlais. While the hunters were out the days were spent in making pemmican and searching for berries (including wild grapes) which can still be found in the sandhills. By 1855 however the hunt was moving as far west as the Moose Mountains in Saskatchewan.



Evidence of the size of the buffalo hunts along the Souris River was seen from 1914-1917 when train loads of buffalo bones were hauled from Grande Clariere to industrial plants in the east. The 1840 hunt which moved across the Souris River near present day Melita consisted of 1,600 people, 1,210 carts and 1,000 riding horses. From this hunt over 1,000,000 lbs. of pemmican was produced, for which the Hudson's ay Company paid out \$5,000. The 1850 hunt which left Fort Garry in June consisted of about 1,000 people and 1,000 carts. Six days after leaving Fort Garry they camped on the north side of the Turtle Mountains. Their Scouts found thousands of buffalo in the Whitewater Chain Lakes area. Cutting up the carcasses and making pemmican took eight days.

The buffalo hunters traded buffalo tallow, dried meat, pemmican, buffalo robes, marrow, etc. In return, they received tobacco, kettles, guns, lead balls, gunpowder, firewater, clay pipes, glass beads, blankets, etc. In 1840 a bottle of rum cost about two beaver skins, a blanket about ten beaver skins and a gun about 20 beaver skins.

In 1844 the Metis attacked the Sioux during a buffalo hunt in the Souris River area. Several Sioux were killed and they demanded compensation. A meeting between the two groups was held on the plains and as a result peace was declared. It lasted until about 1849.

One thousand three hundred Metis left Pembina in June, 1850 traveling west for the buffalo hunt. With them was Father LaCombe. North of the Turtle Mountains on the Souris Plains they encountered a great herd. Several hundred Metis charged firing their muskets for 20 minutes. Afterward the women began the work of cutting up 800 carcasses. The following day Father LaCombe and the Metis climbed to a summit in the Turtles and erected a cross. Here they gave thanks to God for their success and it should be noted that the Metis were a very devout people. It took eight days to cut up the meat, dry it, and mix it with hot buffalo fat and berries, and pack it in buffalo skin sacks.

The next year the buffalo hunters set out once more, one group leaving St. Francois Xavier on the Assiniboine and the other moving out from St. Boniface. The St. Francois Xavier group were made up of 325 people driving 250 carts. With them was a priest, Father La Fleche. The St. Boniface group was larger and its resident Priest once again was Father LaCombe. As this latter group reached the Turtle Mountains they met a band of Sioux Indians. They sent a messenger to warn the St. Francois Xavier group who were on the Souris River west of the Turtles.

The Xavier group continued down the Souris until they had reached the vicinity of present day Minot, North Dakota. Here their Scouts reported back to them that a band of 2,000 Sioux warriors were approaching. They immediately circled their carts with the horses inside and set themselves for an attack by digging trenches to fire from. They also sent a message to Father LaCombe's group of Fort Garry hunters.

The next morning just as the sun cleared the horizon, hundreds of mounted Sioux warriors came riding up a slope toward the hunters. The Metis offered presents but the Sioux refused them and attacked, surrounding the camp, dashing in and out, and creeping up through the grass. The attacks failed and the Sioux, seeing the black robed Father La Fleche, retired, probably attributing their failure to the presence of a Manitou.

The next morning the Metis began moving south hoping to effect a meeting with the St. Boniface group. Once gain the Sioux attacked and after a four hour battle the St.

Boniface party approached and the Sioux were forced to retire. One survivor of this battle eventually settled in the Grande Clariere sandhills.

In 1852 the sixty family group of buffalo hunters from St. Francois Xavier were camped in the Lauder-Hartney sandhills. This group had been hunting in the sandhills since 1837, although in some years an absence of buffalo would cause them to move further west to the Moose Mountain area. This year they were attacked by the Sioux. Mrs. De Pevre, a resident of Hartney described the action as told by her grandmother, Madame La Fontaine: The hunters followed the usual procedure of forming their carts in circle, otherwise they would have been stolen. Digging trenches once again they held off the Sioux with few casualties. According to Mrs. De Pevre one-half of the Metis fired, then the rest kept up a steady fire until the first half had reloaded. It seems almost certain that some of the members of this hunting party were also workers at Fort Desjarlais on the Souris River.

According to one expert on Sioux migrations into Canada, another battle between the Sioux and the Metis took place just west of the great bend of the Souris in Dakota territory in 1853. This action can be found in "The Canadian North West" by Oliver. In it the buffalo hunters from St. Francois Xavier once again held off the Sioux in the 24 hour battle in which several were killed and wounded on both sides.

This was the last great battle between the Sioux and the Metis. Having gained mutual respect for each other both sides agreed on a peace.

It should once again be pointed out that in these wars with the Metis the Sioux were probably protecting their hunting grounds. This proprietary interest in the Souris River and what is now southern Manitoba is evidenced by the many raids against trading posts, other Indian tribes and even settlements.

In 1861 Fort Grant closed for good. It had only been a winter operation for the last seven years. Some of the workers from this fort now started a mixed farming industry, growing small crops and raising livestock. They continued the buffalo hunt until about 1866. These were the first settlers in the area. They included: J. Leveille, Sec. 34, Tp. 6, Rge. 25; R. Breland, Sec. 30, Tp. 6, Rge. 24; A. Coutean, Sec. 5, Tp. 6, Rge. 24; and A. Dauphinais, Sec. 6, Tp. 7, Rge. 24.

These are only some of the buffalo hunters who settled north of the Souris River in the Grande Clariere district. Others settled in the Oak Lake area, some on the Turtle Mountains and a few returned to St. Francois Xavier.

The last year any attempt was made to hunt buffalo along the Souris River by an organized group of Metis was 1868. Of course the occasional buffalo could still be seen in the area. The last reported single sighting of a buffalo in the area was 1885 according to an old Metis, Anable Pritchard, whose grandfather worked in Fort Eserance on the Qu' Appelle River. Some of the Metis from the Red River Rebellion arrived in the Oak Lake-Grande Clariere sandhills in 1869. Along with the Metis already living there, they raised the population of the area to about 20 families.

## CHAPTER 5

### *PALLISERS EXPEDITION ALONG THE SOURIS, DISCOVERY OF THE COAL FIELDS*

Many of the residents of the Souris Valley in Roche Percee area have, or have had, some connection with the coal mines. It is not hard to find old-timers who worked in the coal fields in the early part of the century. It is also easy to find people who work in the mines today. Many of this latter group combine farming in the valley to supplement their income from the coal mines.

One of the most interesting stories in the history of the Souris Valley is the discovery of the coal mines east of Estevan, Sask. They were actually discovered three times, in 1853, in 1857 and in 1880. The 1880 discovery is the unbelievable story of two English youths, who came to the Souris River to shoot non-existent buffalo and literally stumbled over the main coal seams. Here is the full story.

In 1853 U.S. Railroad surveyors who were mapping a route to the Pacific, discovered lignite coal along the Souris Valley. Nothing was done about this discovery at the time.

Then, 1857 the Palliser Expedition was sent out by the Canadian Government to explore that portion of British North America containing the Souris River. On August 17<sup>th</sup> the party, including a geologist, Doctor Hector, set off from Fort Ellice traveling south. The next day they crossed Pipestone Creek and were able to see the Moose Mountains in the distance. They noted the boulders in the Pipestone Valley were formed from limestone, and these are the boulders the feudal owners built their houses with at Cannington Manor, in 1885. Crossing the Moose Mountains they followed Moose Mountain Creek southward. Here they met a buffalo hunting party and the next day Palliser killed two bulls. On approaching the Souris River they found the ground covered with boulders. They reached the Souris Valley on August 21<sup>st</sup>, a few miles to the east of Roche Percee. On the opposite bank were many tents of Indians, some armed with guns and others with bow and arrow. Doctor Hector found the valley to be about 170 feet deep at this point, with the beds of rock in the bank of the valley to be made of soft sandstone. On the sides of the valley in many places the strata was exposed showing clay, sandstone, a thin layer of limestone which was blue under the surface but turned light orange when exposed to air, and an ash-coloured sandy clay containing a thin seam of lignite coal. This coal was of variable quality from shiny bituminous to dull charcoal. On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, Doctor Hector visited the Roche Percee area noticing the curious sandstone rock figures and was told by the Indians that it was the lace of the Manitou. He also noted that many of the ravines which join the main valley are filled with strange rock formation which resemble the half buried remains of ruined temples. Doctor Hector believed the coal seams that he discovered were not of commercial value. The real coal seams were discovered by accident in 1880.

In the spring of 1880 two brothers, George and Sydney Pcock, arrived at Emerson, Manitoba from London, England. Their purpose, to hunt buffalo, which were non-existent in the Souris area by this time. On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, they set out from Emerson by horse and buckboard. The inhabitants of the town turned out to wish them well, but no one told them that the buffalo had some time ago disappeared from the Souris Plains. They were warned, however, of other difficulties such as broad rivers to cross, alkaline sloughs, steep mountains and deep canyons. Even in 1880 the western lands must have presented quite an imposing site to the inhabitants of Emerson.

The two brothers went merrily on their way making about 25 miles a day. With a limited supply of provisions, they bought their meals whenever possible, one of fat pork and potatoes being purchased from an Indian squaw. The brothers enjoyed this meal until they discovered some black hairs in the stew.

The travelers experienced a great deal of trouble from the large slough in the Turtle Mountains area, some which were full and had to be forded, the sticky alkaline mud making progress slow. When they reached the Souris River in the Melita area they decided to swim the horses and buckboard across instead of making a raft. They made it safely but all their provisions were soaked in the process.

Their greatest discomfort, however, was from the mosquitoes, much worse in those days than now. Mosquito netting or a smudge was almost essential, especially at night. They were even worse for the horses who would nudge their owners to the fire or smudge going.

One night the fire was very low and George had to get up to replenish the fire. The mosquitoes were so thick that his face, neck and hands were soon swollen all over. In his haste to get a fire going, George burned up the best of the two area maps they had.

The brothers, up to this time, had seen no signs of buffalo but one day they were tracking a moose across the homestead of a man named Chris Troy. This homestead, south of the Moose Mountains, was the 19<sup>th</sup> on which the Nomadic Troy had settled. Troy decided that a little adventure was more exciting than his 19<sup>th</sup> homestead so off he went in a southerly direction with Pocock brothers.

Troy now told the Pocock brothers that they were unlikely to meet any buffalo as they had all been killed off in the area some years ago, American hunters killing the last of them for the glue factories. When they reached the Roche Percee-Bienfait area, the brothers began to search the ravines running out of the Souris Valley for buffalo. Almost the first ravine they entered showed a dark streak along one side of the ravine. They had discovered a coal seam that was only about 18 inches thick. That night their camp fire was stocked with coal.

The brothers now decided to forget about buffalo and concentrate on coal. The next day they found another coal seam in a second ravine but it was not much thicker than the first one. Chris Troy now gave the brothers some advice, he said, "Whenever you see a spring you can be sure that minerals are present".

George now began to follow a rocky ravine with small trees and shrubs growing up the sides. All at once he noticed a small stream of cold water and with an iron-like taste. Tracing it to its source, George found a large seam of coal. When he reported this find he found his brother Sydney had found even larger seam.

The brothers now crossed the river to the south side where they found more timber but less coal. They now loaded two large chunks of coal into their buckboard and began the long trip back to Winnipeg. Here they found great excitement over their discovery and the same year a man named Hugh Sutherland dug coal in the Roche Percee area and shipped it to Winnipeg on barges via the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers. This proved to be a difficult task because of rapids on the Souris River.

In 1887 a town grew up on the banks of the Souris about three miles east of Roche Percee. It was started by two brothers, Jim and Tom Taylerton and the town had the same name. In 1891 a commercial mine began in the area. It was eventually called the Taylerton Mine. It was purchased by a Winnipeg Company in 1905 and in the 1920's

when the mine ran out, the town was moved a few miles west where the new town was called Western.

In 1906, a second commercial mine was opened at Bienfait by the C.P.R. and shortly after a third mine, the Manitoba and Saskatchewan was started between Roche Percee and Estevan. Near the Latter a good sized town called Shand sprang up. Finally many small farmer (or gopher) mines, sprang up in which the farmers mined only in the winter.

Wages were poor and hours long by today's standards. The Sanger Mine Company paid their workers \$1.50 per day or \$4.00 per week and board. These workers were underground 11 hours per day with one hour off for lunch. What this meant from a sociological point of view was that the workers never saw the sun from November to March.

In the deep seam mines the miners timbered the roof of the coal rooms they worked in, laid the track for the coal cars and often blew the coal seams with powder or dynamite. For lights to see by, at first, they wore a small tin kettle in which coal oil (or fish oil) burned. Later they wore carbide lamps and finally electric ones.

The miners were allowed to work overtime loading coal in the underground rooms if they wished to. For this they were paid 10 cents a ton, later raised to 25 cents a ton.

The deep seam mining operations ended about 1937 replaced by strip mining. This method will continue until the top seam is finished. There is another seam below which is too deep to be stripped by drag line. Larger equipment will be necessary for this operation.

South east of Bienfait, on the north bank of the Souris Valley, is a collection of white limestone buildings with a huge coal mine in the background. This is the ghost town of Taylerton. By 1920 it was a good sized town . Besides the mine, there were stores, a school, a church, a power plant, a long street of houses along the edge of a steep valley. When the seam ran out, the town just moved to another location called Western which also became a ghost town in time. West of Roche Percee and along the Souris River is another ghost town called Shand. The remains of 22 red brick buildings are still visible, with a few of them still standing.

The most outstanding ghost town in our area is Old Deloraine. In 1880 settlers from Ontario arrived around the area of Sec. 30, Tp. 2, Rge. 22. They had been assured by the railroad officials at Morden that the rail line, when extended, would pass through this section. So a town site was laid out and on the main street was built a store, run by L. Cavers and A. P. Stuart, a livery barn, a hotel, a bank built by G. Richard and run by F. Stuart, two blacksmith shops, two implement dealers, a law office and a town hall which also served as a school and church. To the south was a land titles office and on the west edge of town was a grist mill run by P. Shepherd.

When the Manitoba South Western Colonization Railway did move west from Morden in 1885, it by-passed Old Deloraine by several miles to the north. So the town simply picked itself up and moved to the present site. Left behind was the hall, which continued to serve as a school, and a huge fieldstone bank vault. The walls of this vault are about 18 inches thick and the structure itself is about 12 feet high, 20 feet long and 10 feet wide.

## CHAPTER 6

### *METIS SETTLEMENT OF 1861, OTHER EARLY SETTLEMENTS, ATTEMPTS AT FEUDALISM*

In 1861 Fort Grant closed for good. It had only been a winter operation for the last seven years. Some of the workers from this fort now started a mixed farming industry, growing small crops and raising livestock. They continued the buffalo hunt until about 1866. These were the first settlers in the area, they included: J. Leveille, Sec. 34, Tp. 6, Rge. 25; R. Breland, Sec. 30, Tp. 6, Rge. 24; A. Couteau, Sec. 5, Tp. 6, Rge. 24; and A. Dauphinais, Sec. 6, Tp. 7, Rge. 24.

These are only some of the buffalo hunters who settled north of the Souris River in the Grande Clariere district. Others settled in the Oak Lake area, some on the Turtle Mountains and a few returned to St. Francois Xavier.

A few other Metis settlements appeared about the same time along the Souris plains. One was established on the north shore of Whitewater Lake. Fifteen years later it was deserted. In 1865 another was established at Pelican Lake. Its remains were found by the first white settlers to appear in that area in 1882.

The evidence that people lived in the sandhills before the eastern settlers arrived is convincing. Even today many sites of old homesteads can be found in the Lauder and Grande Clariere sandhills. They are found along the banks of the Sours River for a range of about 20 miles and extend about twelve miles to the north. Where these people came from is a matter of speculation.

One story is that Metis from North Dakota and Montana had moved into the Carman, Manitoba area in 1875. Here they attempted to start a settlement but were soon driven away by newcomers from Ontario. Returning west they stopped in the Lauder sandhills for a few years.

Another is that following the Red River Rebellion of 1870 some of the Metis who had lost their homes in this tragic affair moved west into the sandhills. Here they lived for a number of years before moving west into southern Saskatchewan around 1905.

One story that has a good deal of truth is that an American Metis named Whiteword started a ranch in the sandhills in 1875. The ranch extended through sandhill country from Grande Clariere to the Saskatchewan border. There is one local resident in Hartney who says that his father worked on this ranch. The ranch probably ceased operating by the turn of the century. In any case the Whiteword family is mentioned in "Dix annees de Mission au Grande Nord-Quest Canadien, Gaire, Lille, France, 1898". According to Father Gaire he was called to the Whiteword home in December 1888. In addition a rancher from the sandhill area believes that a large herd was driven into the sandhills from the south, the owner looking for land in the still un-surveyed Canadian west.

It has been suggested that some undesirable settlers may have appeared about this time as well. Up to 1875 many American army deserters from Fort Union as well as other posts on the Missouri River fled north across the Souris and often ended up at Fort Ellice on the Assiniboine River. Some obtained work with the Hudson's Bay Company while others settled at Red River and other places in the north west. In any case they must be counted among the first settlers.

In 1879 two settlements appeared on the Souris River. A Plum Creek settlement was started by Squire Sowden which became the present town of Souris. North east of

Hartney a small village called Malta began. One of the first settlers was Jack Selby from Montana. He homesteaded on the south side of the river on Sec. 34, Tp. 6, Rge. 23. In 1881 he returned to Montana for a visit and was struck by lightning. His homestead was taken over by his brother Harry. Other early settlers included, O’Niel on Sec. 6, Tp. 6, Reg. 23, and J. Winters on Sec. 13, Tp. 6, Rge. 23. Malta had a blacksmith shop, a boarding house and a store, but in 1889 when the C.P.R. built on the south side of the river, the residents all moved to form the village of Menteith. To the south of Malta a ferry operated on the Section 7.

In 1880 a group of Ontario settlers started the settlement of Old Deloraine to the north of the Turtle Mountains in Manitoba. The settlement was successful but in 1885 the railway by passed the settlers by several miles and they were forced to Deloraine’s present location.

After 1880 another kind of settler appeared along the Souris River – the remittance man. There are many stories of these outcasts from English society who arrived in the Dakotas and on the Canadian prairies. The most spectacular of these were the attempts to establish a sort of European feudal system in the Moose Mountains.

In 1882 a retired British army captain, Edward Michell Pierce, arrived with his family in the Moose Mountains and proceeded to build a feudal village called Cannington Manor. In the village were to be found, a hotel, a blacksmith shop, a store, a church, which still stands, as well as several fine dwelling places. A few years later a new group of English settlers arrived. Among them was James Humphreys, who built a twenty-three bedroom house. He also started a meat packing factory, and had his own blacksmith shop. Another manorial village called ‘Didsbury Manor’ was built by three brothers, sons of an English nobleman. Their mansion had twenty-two rooms including a billiard room. In this village was a foreman’s house, a racing stable, for the Beckton brothers who raced their horses all across North America, two barns, a blacksmith shop and a bunkhouse with eighteen beds. Several other upper-middle class people built large homes in the area.

A few miles to the north, and in the same time period, five French counts and a French baron established their own feudal system. Here they built fine houses and attempted to live the kind of life they felt members of the French nobility deserved. Most of their attempts at money-making enterprises failed and they, along with their English counterparts to the south, were soon hard pressed financially.

But for a few years they all lived the grand life. They held court once a year in the Whitewood hotel. Fox hunts, cricket and horse racing were fashionable. All these events were attended by traveling in handsome carriages with grooms and footmen. By the beginning of the twentieth century, most of the peoples had left the area and their properties taken over by their Canadian neighbors.

A few buildings still stand, the French counts church at St. Hubert, the English church at Cannington Manor and the Humphrey Mansion. Didsbury Mansion is crumbling and not safe to enter but is certainly worth a visit.

Northeast of Hartney on the south side of the Souris River a remittance man called Baron Trelawney settled in the 1880s. He was called Baron by the Canadian pioneers because he was related to an English nobleman. On one side of his large house he built a cricket field. He was not highly regarded by his neighbors because he had little

use for Canadian customs and even less for his Canadian servants. After several unhappy experiences in this pioneer community he returned to England.

About a mile north of Napinka a small creek runs south from the Souris River. In the early 1900's a remittance from England, known only as Titus, built a log cabin along the creek. Below in the creek valley he started an orchard and was soon pedaling his fruits along the streets of Napinka. His cabin, which is still standing, was made of notched logs and the rafters were bound to the frame with a pliant wood, probably willow. Shortly after his death, a large foreign car arrived in Napinka driven by a chauffeur. The occupants, well dressed and speaking with British accents, request the way to the Titus cabin. After inspecting the cabin they promptly left Napinka.

In 1886 a circular stone wall was discovered a few miles south of Dand. Its original purpose is unclear, but old-timers believe that it might have been an Indian or Metis burial site. This belief was lent some credence when a circular burial site containing thirteen skeletons was discovered a few miles further south. Baden Hathaway, a descendent of the pioneers of that area, noted that the Indians, who continued to travel from the Pipestone Reservation to the Turtle Mountains, used this site as a stopping place. Mr. Hathaway also noticed that an odd caliber of used rifle cartridges were picked up in the area, 44-40. Research shows that the Remington Rifle Company made rifles of this caliber in the 1880's and that Smith-Wesson produced revolvers of the same caliber beginning in 1873.

By 1888 homesteaders had settled along the river all the way from Treesbank to the American border. The plains between the river and the Turtle Mountains were filling up as well. To the north a Roman Catholic priest, Father Gaire, arrived at Oak Lake Parish in June 1888. The Parish was situated seven miles south of the Canadian Pacific Mainline and it was from this point that Father Gaire set off in a south-westerly direction searching for a suitable location to start a new parish. After a four hour drive with horse and buggy, he was amazed to arrive at a Metis farm, John Leveille, Sec. 34, Tp. 6, Rge. 25. From Leveille he learned that he had a ready-made parish in the area made up of about twelve Metis families.<sup>9</sup> He drove four miles east to stay at the farm of Thomas Breland just east of present day Grande Clariere. He then chose the site for his church, but first, with the Metis helping, he built a log cabin and a stable with mud walls.

The Metis living in the sandhills had started farming there in 1861 following the close of Fort Grant. They continued the buffalo hunt until 1868 but missed farming was their real livelihood.

During the first winter, the Metis entertained Father Gaire with stories of their battles with the Sioux who by now, through starvation, had been reduced to stealing and begging. The Metis also told him about their last buffalo hunt in 1873 when a few buffalo reappeared in the area.

Some of the Metis still led a nomadic life and in 1888 most of the Indians were still moving freely over the countryside, but reserves had been outlined, running in size about 12 square miles to 1,000 square miles. About 1876, the Canadian Government had outlined a 36 square mile reserve for the Sioux Indians who had moved north into Manitoba after the Minnesota massacres. In doing so, they had ignored the small farms of the Metis settlers in the area. This reserve extended west of Grande Clariere for six

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<sup>9</sup> Dix Annees de Mission au Grand Nord-Quest Canadien, Gaire, Lille, France, 1898.



miles and south to the Souris River, but it was subsequently moved north when the white settlers began to arrive.

Father Gaire was often visited by the Sioux who looked on all the black robes as Manitou's. One occasion in 1889 two Sioux arrived at Father Gaires' cabin. They talked with Thomas Breland translating. The Indians claimed they had walked from Devils Lake, North Dakota, with nothing to eat. Father Gaire fed them and then the Indians produced a red stone polished pipe and began smoking. They passed the pipe to Breland but not to the priest.

In his account, Father Gaire described a typical Metis home at this time. The house of J. Leveille was two stories, with rough furniture, chairs, tables, sofas, etc. The supper they served was Metis soup (flour soup), with meatballs as big as billiard balls, potatoes, dried plums and tea.

The first Metis to die after Father Gaires' arrival was James Whiteword in 1889. His was the first burial in the new parish and his grave can be seen in the Grande Clariere Churchyard.

Even before the end of 1889, new settlers began to arrive. The first two were Francis Vodon and Joseph Charles. By 1891 Grande Clairere and district was saturated with settlers, 450 in all. Because of this, Father Gaire began extending his mission westward toward<sup>10</sup> the Moose Mountains. As the white settlers continued to move into the sandhills area, the Metis began to withdraw with many moving to southern Saskatchewan. Today there are only a few descendents of these historical people left.

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<sup>10</sup> Dix Annees de Mission au Grand Nord-Quest, Canadien, Gaire, Lille, France, 1898.