Before Pierre Gaultier, Sieur de la Verendrye, entered what became North Dakota in 1738, he had accumulated a lot of intelligence about the place and the people he would meet there. He questioned the Indian people he met at his trading post on Lake Nipigon, in the forests and waters north of Lake Superior. While sometimes things were pretty clearly lost in translation, the stories are as fascinating as history as they were to the soon-to-be explorer. Following are excerpts from a manuscript by Tracy Potter entitled First Contact: La Verendrye and sons meet the Nations of the West.

In 1729, three Cree Indians, all chiefs, La Verendrye said, had told him about the height of land and their adventures to the west. Beyond the height of land, Pako, Chief of Lake Nipigon, Lefoye and his brother, Petit Jour, had found a great river flowing directly toward the Couchant du Soleil, the setting sun. They took it. Pako said the party ran into so many rapids and waterfalls that they nearly turned back, but after a day and half portage, they were encouraged to continue because the country was so unlike their own that they were intrigued. Then, they found a great river which widened as it dropped.

They found a large settlement of Indians living there, who assured them that travelers were safe because the nations of that region were at peace. They continued on the river, seeing other large villages, until they reached an area where waters rose and fell daily, as if by tidal action. Through sign-language conversations with earthlodge-dwelling locals, Pako and his friends understood that there was a giant lake somewhere farther down that river where there many villages and the water was undrinkable.

The people who informed Pako were horse owners, who lived in a land of little wood. They used dried dung for fires and built their homes with earth. The people were strong and healthy.

La Verendrye’s addendum to a report Beauharnois produced for his superiors described an unspoiled paradise.

They give a great account of that country, saying that it is all very level, without mountains, all fine hard wood with here and there groves of oak; everywhere there are quanti-

Continued on Page 6
By Libby Custer

My husband was enchanted to have a room entirely for his own use. Our quarters had heretofore been too small for him to have any privacy in his work. He was like a rook, in the sly manner in which he made raids on the furniture scattered through the rooms, and carried off the best of everything to enrich his corner of the house. He filled it with the trophies of the chase. Over the mantel a buffalo’s head plunged, seemingly, out of the wall. (Buffaloes were rare in Dakota, but this was one the general had killed from the only herd he had seen on the campaign.) The head of the first grisly that he had shot, with its open jaws and great fang-like teeth, looked fiercely down on the pretty, meek-faced jack-rabbits on the mantel. (My husband greatly valued the bear’s head, and in writing to me of his hunting had said of it: “I have reached the height of a hunter’s fame – I have killed a grisly.”)

Several antelope heads were also on the walls. One had a mark in the throat where the general had shot him at a distance of six hundred yards. The head of a beautiful black-tailed deer was another souvenir of a hunt the general had made with Bloody Knife, the favorite Indian scout. When they sighted the deer they agreed to fire together, the Indian selecting the head, the general taking the heart. They fired simultaneously, and the deer fell, the bullets entering head and heart. The scout could not repress a grunt of approval, as the Indian considers the white man greatly his inferior as a hunter or a marksman.

A sand-hill crane, which is very hard to bring down, stood on a pedestal by itself. A mountain eagle, a yellow fox, and a tiny fox with a brush – called out there a swift – were disposed of in different corners. Over his desk, claiming a perch by itself on a pair of deer antlers was a great white owl. On the floor before the fireplace, where he carried his love for building fires so far as to put on the logs himself, was spread the immense skin of a grisly bear. On a wide lounge at one side of the room my husband used to throw himself down on the cover of a Mexican blanket, often with a dog for his pillow.

The camp-chairs had the skins of beavers and American lions thrown over them. A stand for arms in one corner held a collection of pistols, hunting knives, Winchester and Springfield rifles, shotguns and carbines, and even an old flint-lock musket as a variety. From antlers above hung sabres, spurs, riding whips, gloves and caps, field glasses, the map case, and the great compass used on marches. One of the sabres was remarkably large, and when it was given to the general during the war it was accompanied by the remark that there was doubtless no other arm in the service that could wield it. (My husband was next to the strongest man while at West Point, and his life after that had only increased his power.) The sabre was a Damascus blade, and made of such finely-tempered steel that it could be bent nearly double. It had been captured during the war, and looked as if it might have been handed down from some Spanish ancestor. On the blade was engraved a motto in that high-flown language, which ran:

“Do not draw me without cause;
Do not sheathe me without honor.”

Large photographs of the men my husband loved kept him company on the walls; they were of General McClellan, General Sheridan, and Mr. Lawrence Barrett. Over his desk was a picture of a bird – not a crane, but another bird – which he had shot in the field and skinned on his desk. In one corner of the room, and claiming a perch by itself, was a great white owl, which the general had given me. The owl stood on a pedestal, and over his head was a large raccoon, which the general had killed on the campaign.
of his wife in bridal dress. Comparatively modern art was represented by two of the Rogers statuettes that we had carried about with us for years. Transportation for necessary household articles was often so limited it was sometimes a question whether anything that was not absolutely needed for the preservation of life should be taken with us; but our attachment for those little figures, and the associations connected with them, made us study out a way always to carry them. At the end of each journey we un-boxed them ourselves, and sifted the sawdust through our fingers carefully, for the figures were invariably dismembered. My husband’s first occupation was to hang the few pictures and mend the statuettes. He glued on the broken portions and moulded putty in the crevices where the biscuit had crumbled. Sometimes he had to replace a bit that was lost, and, as he was very fond of modeling, I rather imagined that he was glad of an opportunity to practice on our broken statuettes.

My husband, like many other men who achieve success in the graver walks of life, could go on and accomplish his ends without being dependent on the immediate voice of approval. In all the smaller, more trifling acts of daily life he asked for a prompt acknowledgement. It amused me greatly; it was so like a woman, who can scarcely exist without encouragement. When he had reset an arm or modeled a cap I could quite honestly praise his work.

On one occasion we found the head of a figure entirely severed from the trunk. Nothing daunted, he fell to patching it up again. I had not the conscience to promise him the future of a Thorwaldsen this time. The distorted throat, made of unwieldy putty, gave the formerly erect, soldierly neck a decided appearance of goiter. My laughter discouraged the impromptu artist, who for one moment felt that a “restoration” is not quite equal to the original. He declared that he would put a coat of gray paint over all, so that in a dim corner they might pass for new. I insisted that it should be a very dark corner! Both of the statuettes represented scenes from the war. One was called “Wounded to the Rear,” the other, “Letter Day.” The latter was the figure of a soldier sitting in a cramped, bent position, holding an inkstand in one hand and scratching his head for thoughts, with the pen. The inane poise of his chin as he looked up into the uninspiring air, and the hopeless expression of his eyes as he searched for ideas, showed how unusual to him were all efforts at composition.

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**Continued from Page 2**

On the Roster

**Pvt. Patrick Coakley (Patrick Redican)**
- Rank: Private
- Assign: Company K
- LBH: Not present – on detached service
- Born: 1842 Kingscourt, Ireland
- Died: November 13, 1881, Washington, DC

On detached service as orderly for General Terry in the Sioux campaign. At the mouth of the Big Horn River on July 4. Enlisted from September 26, 1866, to December 26, 1871, in Company M, 7th Cavalry. Enlisted on December 26, 1871, at age 29, in Yorkville, SC, by Captain Owen Hale. Deserted on March 12, 1872. Surrendered on April 18, 1872. Discharged on February 8, 1877, in Brooklyn NY. Enlisted from July 8, 1878 to July 16, 1879, in Company K, 2nd Artillery. He had hazel eyes, brown hair, fair complexion and was 5’ 7 ½” tall. Received an invalid pension of $10 per month for consumption. Died at age 39 on November 13, 1881, at Barnes Hospital, U.S. Soldiers’ Home. Causes of death were gastritis from intemperance and hermestasis. Buried on November 14 in Soldiers’ Home National Cemetery. His widow, Bridget (McGuire) Redican, received a pension of $12 per month until her death on May 14, 1923.

**Men With Custer: Biographies of the 7th Cavalry** by Hammer, Kenneth; page 61; published in 1972 by Old Army Press, Fort Collins, CO.

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**NUMBER OF INDIAN SCOUTS**

The number of Indian Scouts at Fort Lincoln is about to be increased to seventy-five. They are found to be very good service, while the cavalrymen were somewhat bothered to keep the trail the Indians when they struck it, followed it, as a good dog would the scent of game. The Old Scouts discharged some time ago have all re-enlisted but three. A number of other have also joined. Bloody Knife who was of such great value to General Custer last summer in the expedition is expected in a day or two to enlist.

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**The Bismarck Tribune, April 29, 1874**

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The 7th Cavalry at the Battle of Mullen’s Corner

Kim Fundingsland often portrayed George Custer when the Custer House was reconstructed in 1989. Two years ago, he published a fun history of the early years of Bismarck. Called Bismarck, D.T.: The people and events that gave birth to the Wickedest City in the West, it contains thorough accounts about incidents at Whiskey Point, the saloons of Bloody 4th Street and engaging characters like Little Casino, Colonel Lounsberry and Denny Hannifin, who seemed a little eccentric after being shot in the head. Here are excerpts from the tale of the Battle of Mullen’s Corner.

One November day in 1873, Private Frank King of Company A, 6th Infantry, boarded a small skiff and crossed the river from Fort Lincoln to Whiskey Point. King settled into one of the makeshift saloons for the purpose of playing cards and turning up the bottle. He soon became involved in a disagreement with George “Spotty” Whalen over the attentions of a Whiskey Point “lady.” Whalen, a combination cut-throat and card shark, got the jump on King and dispatched him with a single shot from his revolver. Whalen then fled to Bismarck where he could solicit help from other frontier roughies.

King’s body, perhaps containing more alcohol than blood, was returned to Fort Lincoln where Acting Assistant Surgeon John LaBaree reported that:

“Frank King was killed in a quarrel having arisen through whiskey and a courtesan. The citizen fired a revolver and the ball severed the femoral artery of the left side about two inches below pouparts ligament, causing death in a short time.”

The following afternoon King was buried in the Fort Lincoln cemetery with the usual military honors. Even before the funeral, King’s fellow soldiers were planning to even the score. Spotty Whalen would be made to pay for his crime and anyone assisting him would also be held accountable. The soldiers, bored with routine garrison life during the Dakota winter, now had a cause to rally around.

The night after King was firmly planted in the post cemetery, the soldiers who angrily pounded on the door of Mullen & O’Neil’s that it was often referred to as the 7th Cavalry saloon... The disposition of the desperate duo was well known to Bismarck and to the Fort Lincoln soldiers who angrily pounded on the door of Mullen & O’Neil’s dance hall shortly after midnight. What followed was the fatal well-armed and determined soldiers crossed the Missouri in skiffs and canoes. They had learned that Whalen had been taken up with Dave Mullen, the proprietor of the Mullen and O’Neil dance hall in Bismarck. The soldiers knew the place quite well. In fact, so many members of the 7th Cavalry spent their free time at Mullen & O’Neil’s that it was often referred to as the 7th Cavalry saloon... The events of that night were witnessed, at least partially, by Bismarck citizen J.J. Johnson. Johnson lived adjacent to Mullen & O’Neil’s. Here’s his testimony as given to the coroner’s jury:

“I was in good hearing distance all the time. Some parties were kicking and making a noise at the front door. Mr. Mullen told them to go away but they still kept kicking and pounding. Mullen said, “What do you want?” The answer was “We want to come in.” But this time Hannifin (the barkeeper) told Mullen to not open the door; and Hannifin and Mullen had a scuffle.

Mullen took down the iron bar and opened the door. I heard some person say, “Dave Mullen, what is it you want?” Immediately after I heard a shot, and I think it was a rifle shot. Mullen said, “Oh Denny!” and I heard him fall and there was 10 or 15 shots fired in quick succession. I put on my pants and slippers and ran out of the back door. I saw a party which I thought to be soldiers running every way. I heard one man say “Let us burn the place!” Then I came back through my house, and the first thing I saw was a soldier lying there dead in front of Chris Gibson’s door. I saw Mullen lying dead and found Mr. Hannifin badly wounded in the head.”

Several of the soldiers hurried back to the scene to aid their fallen comrade, Private John Dalton of Company L, 7th Cavalry, but abandoned him when it was discovered that he was mortally wounded. The fatal bullet struck Dalton in the chest. The 7th Cavalry band and most of the command turned out for Dalton’s funeral the following day.

Under the headline “Bismarck’s First Baptism of Blood, The Bismarck Tribune reported on the fatal flurry of events.

“Great excitement in Bismarck caused by the murder of a soldier named Frank King by “Spotty” Whalen, at the Point, opposite Fort Lincoln. The row was over the affections of a disreputable character named Maud Seymour. The soldier’s comrades, bent on revenge, came to Bismarck in force and well armed late the same night and surrounded the notorious dance house of O’Neil and Mullen, on 4th Street in search of Whalen.

“Dave Mullen, known all along the Northern Pacific as one of the most desperate characters in the west, appeared at the door and immediately opened fire on the soldiers outside, killing one named Dalton. In return he was greeted with a rifle ball in his own brain. Another man named Dennis Manihan (Hannifin) was struck on the side of the head by a rifle ball and a dangerous wound inflicted. After killing Mullen the soldiers returned to the fort.”

No charges were filed against any soldier for killing Mullen. The coroner’s jury said soldiers did it, but left it at that. That jury had an impressive makeup. Foreman was Mark Kellog, the reporter who would die with Custer at the Little Big Horn. The Boss of northern Dakota, Alexander McKenzie, was on it, along with three other people for whom counties were named after North Dakota became a state. Spotty Whalen was arrested in Fargo and escaped. Arrested again in St. Paul, he was returned to Fargo, where he again escaped. When last heard of he was in Canada with Maud Seymour. Hannifin, known as Eccentric Denny, lived a long time in Bismarck, creating any number of very colorful stories, and issuing classical epi- grams. Of Mullen, he opined, “He was a square duck, as square a duck as I ever knew. He was broad gauge and never gave up. He wore boots at his own funeral.”

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May 31, 1743,
on the rolling prairie between the Turtle Mountains and the Missouri River, a party of Dakota Indians lay in wait for a trading party of a hundred Assiniboine, who were accompanied by four Frenchmen. The site where the ambush was laid was four days along the week-long trail between an earthlodge village along the Missouri and a site in the Turtle Mountains frequented by the Assiniboine. It could just as well as any place be near what is now Towner, North Dakota, along the Souris Loop leading to the Assiniboine River.

The French had joined the Assiniboine at an earthlodge village they called Fort La Butte. They had been on a grand exploration. Fourteen months earlier they had come down the Missouri with the Arikara and rested their horses and themselves for a week at one of the Mantannes several villages. They were at one not far from themselves for a week at one of the Mantannes May 18 and rested their horses and themselves for a week at one of the Mantannes several villages. They were at one not far from the first village they’d ever seen, the one La Verendrye visited in 1738. They had taken to calling that first village Fort La Butte, no doubt because of its location on a high point. The French intended to stay two or three weeks, but word came on May 26, that there was a trading party of about one hundred Assiniboine at Fort La Butte who were about to leave for Fort La Reine.

The news put Louis-Joseph into motion. He liked the idea of traveling with his allies and hurried to La Butte to meet them before they left. He sent no message, but went there the next morning ready to proceed. He was too late. Two Mantannes associated themselves with the French party and they set out in pursuit of the Assiniboine, whom they overtook at the first night’s camp. The Mantannes explained to Louis-Joseph that they wanted to learn the way to Fort La Reine and wished to greet his father again.

The mixed party moved northeast for four days without seeing other people. Then, on May 31, scouts reported thirty Dakota Indians lying in ambush along their route. The Assiniboine group ignored the threat, riding directly at the trouble. The Dakotas were surprised by the boldness of their traditional enemies, their number and their French colleagues. They fled in good order, defending their retreat. The battle included at least one fatality among the Dakota and several wounded Assiniboine.

The little skirmish is the first battle recorded on the land that became North Dakota, other than those recounted by oral tradition or recorded in the codes of the winter count. The Dakota troubles the travelers no further. The road between the Mantannes and the French was open, as long as one rode with the Assiniboine.

Louis-Joseph’s account speaks of more than he knew. Horses had not been mentioned as being among the Assiniboine in a 1738 account and here, five years later, the warriors were mounted and charging headlong into their enemy. It seems likely that the omission was an oversight, a flaw in the 1738 report, rather than an indication that horses were rare or unknown among the Assiniboine, or by extension the Mandan or Hidatsa. It seems likely that the omission was an oversight, a flaw in the 1738 report, rather than an indication that horses were rare or unknown among the Assiniboine, or by extension the Mandan or Hidatsa in 1738.

As the first written-up report of a battle on North Dakota soil, it needs a name. Readers of The Past Times are encouraged to offer it one.
ties of fruit trees, and all sorts of wild animals; that the Nations Sauvages are there very numerous, and always wandering, never staying in any fixed place, but carrying their cabins with them continually from one place to another and always camping together to form a village. They call these nations Assiniboine and Sioux because they all speak the Sioux languages. The nations about three hundred leagues lower down are sedentary, raise crops, and for lack of wood make themselves mud huts. The wood comes to an end on the shore of a great lake formed by the river about two hundred leagues from its source; on the left as you follow down, at the outlet of the lake, you come to a little river the water of which looks red like vermillion, and is held in great esteem by the Indians. On the same side of the river, but much lower down, there is a small mountain, the stones of which sparkle night and day. The Indians call it the Dwelling of the Spirit; no one ventures to go near it. This kind of mountain and the Red river, where in places a very fine gold-colored sand is found, seem to all the nations of the region something very precious.

This information, La Verendrye told Beauharnois, was an addition to word he’d been getting for more than a year. “The Indians of the interior have knowledge for the most part of this river; some speak as having been there, others have heard of it, and all agree in what they say about it.” One of those Indians of the interior, another Cree chief named Tachigis, was one who had been to the lake of the great River of the West. He produced a map that La Verendrye forwarded to Beauharnois. Tachigis’ map featured four rivers originating on a height of land and running in two general directions, south and north.

That map was not destined to cross the ocean. Another chief got credit for the one that did. Auchagah, a Cree, told Pierre a story of his own adventures in the West. Auchagah had explored there as a younger man, canoeing with the setting sun as his guide and goal, eventually reaching a large lake which he began to circle. On its western shore he found a river discharging from the lake. Auchagah followed the river to a point where it exhibited tidal characteristics, rising and falling as an estuary of some state. He had not actually seen the ocean, as his caution finally got the best of him and he heeded warnings from some contacts about dangerously vicious Indians that lived downstream. His most distant informants told him that the river ended in a great salt sea or lake where men lived in fortified cities visited by sailing ships. The coastal people wore armor and rode horseback.

This was the kind of information sure to fire La Verendrye’s imagination. His interest in the topic led to Auchagah drawing a map on birch bark, outlining his amazing exploration. The map was forwarded to French authorities by Caussegros de Lery in 1730.

Another Cree chief brought information in the form of an actual man of the West. Old Vieux Crapaud had a slave from the Missouri. The man had been captured by Assiniboine and traded or gifted to Crapaud. Now, in 1730, the Mantannes was conversing with a white man, eight years before any white man had reached the Mandan and Hidatsa villages. The unnamed slave told La Verendrye several things about his land and people. They were sedentary with an economy balanced between agriculture and hunting. They grew grain and vegetables in a country where there was so little wood that fires were fueled with buffalo chips, that is, dung. Canoes were unknown to his people.

These Ouachipouennes were certainly the people who would later be referred to as the Mantannes. They were described to Beauharnois by La Jemerais in person at the same time La Verendrye was compiling a more complete report on Cree and Assiniboine stories about them. La Jemerais said the Ouachipouennes lived on the River of the West, three hundred leagues distant from Lake of the Woods. There were eight villages of those people filled with homes like the French, that is, log frames covered with clay. They were agriculturalists, growing corn and squash. Something he told the governor bears a little analysis. Perhaps because his uncle had actually met a Mantannes or because La Jemerais was accompanied to Montreal by Mantannes children, his report to Beauharnois about these people who lived on the River of the West corrected one of the ancient legends about their height. They weren’t three or four feet tall as mentioned in earlier reports. Still, they were unique Indians in hair color. Some of them were redheads or blondes.

La Jemerais’ report had begun with delivering to Beauharnois two symbolic necklaces from the Cree. They represented a pledge of support and peaceful intent by the Cree to the French. The Cree and the Assiniboine sometimes warred against the otherwise peaceful Ouachipouennes, he told the governor, but relations were currently peaceful enough for the Cree to feel comfortable guiding him to the Ouachipouennes.

In fact, “...they were leaving as soon as spring opened to go to the Ouachipouennes or Cazeniers to buy corn, as they had promised to do last year.” It is clear that by early 1734, La Verendrye had made the acquaintance of some Assiniboine. They informed his report to Beauharnois about the Ouachipouennes. Their many villages were ruled by a single great chief, “each fort has its own chief, but all are subject to the first. When there is an alarm they warn one another from bank to bank by means of a trumpet, so that in a few hours the whole tribe is on the alert; apparently they have other modes of signaling.”

Those forts, at least nine in number, were on both sides of a westward flowing river.

La Verendrye’s reports about the Ouachipouennes created a buzz in New France. As the story spread it took on fantastic aspects. Father Francois Nau wrote:

The French who returned this year from the upper country have informed us that the savages told them that there, 1,100 leagues from Quebec, white people who wore beards and were subjects of a king. These people built houses in the French style and owned horses and other domestic animals. Would they not be Tartars or Japanese immigrants? The savages have spoken to them about the French, and they were pleased to hear that there were in Canada white, bearded people like themselves. “The French are apparently our brothers,” they said, “and we would like to see them; do invite them to visit us.” If this story is true, we have here a splendid opening for the Gospel.

But one is apt to doubt the sincerity of the Canadians who brought back this tale, for there is no country in the world where there is so much lying as in Canada.
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The Fort Abraham Lincoln Foundation is a member-supported, non-profit foundation established in 1982. It promotes the restoration and preservation of historic properties and sites in North Dakota. FALF is a 501 (c) (3) corporation. All contributions to FALF are tax deductible.

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Thirty years ago, a group of local leaders in business, tourism and education formed the Fort Abraham Lincoln Foundation to rebuild the Custer House. They succeeded, furnished the house as it was in Custer’s time, and opened it to the public with the Foundation’s signature “living history tours” in 1989.

After the House, with private donations and federal funds, the Foundation rebuilt the Commissary, Granary, Barracks and Stable, and expanded its efforts to include On-A-Slant Village, where it reconstructed and filled six earthlodges with information about the Mandan Indians, pioneer of agriculture and city building in the area.

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Today the Fort Abraham Lincoln Foundation is proud to say that after making Fort Lincoln a world class historical attraction, it is turning in another broader direction and will not operate the interpretive program at the park in 2013. We wish the state park well in maintaining the highest-level interpretation and visitor services.

The Fort Abraham Lincoln Foundation’s mission has always been promotion and development of North Dakota’s heritage tourism, and it will continue to be so. With the close of one mission, others open. The best is yet to come.

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