



“Life’s so damned full o’ ‘if’s’ Bud”

“Old Neutriment—Memories of the Custers,” by Glendolin Damon Wagner

Glendolin Wagner gets my goat. She wasn't there. She didn't hear John Burkman being interviewed by Bud O'Donnell. He didn't write the interview notes in some version of dialect. Yet Ms. Wagner felt it necessary to pollute her pages with apostrophes and misspellings. It's not only annoyingly distracting, it is untrue to history. She's making it up.

*John Burkman may have made some stuff up, too, but probably not intentionally. His memories at age 85 of a time half a century previous undoubtedly had some holes and contradictions. Still, **Old Neutriment** is a treasure, presenting as it does, not just an enlisted man's view of the 7th Cavalry at Fort Lincoln, but an intimate portrait of George and Libbie Custer's life from an unswerving admirer who saw them and interacted with them daily for several years.*

Tracy Potter

Taken from “Old Neutriment – Memories of the Custers,” by Glendolin Damon Wagner, page 44-49.

John got up to pour a scuttle of coal into his stove. “Reckon I’m gittin’ old, Bud. I feel the cold more’n I used to. I’ll be eighty-five years old my next birthday. Custer’d be the same age if he was living. That don’t seem no way possible. I can’t think of him except as he looked the last time I seen him, that mornin’ when he led his troops to the charge, sittin’ Vic so straight, lookin’ so young and strong. But he’d be an old man now, same’s me.”

“Bud, did I ever tell you how I come to get the name: ‘Old Neutriment’? We all had nicknames at the Post.”

Mr. O’Donnell settled himself comfortably for the story. “Tell me about it, John.”

“Wall, it was this way. It was onest when I was ailin’. Nothin’ much the matter with me, I recon, but vitals didn’t taste good and my knees was wobbly and I was kinda pale ‘round the gills. Miss Libby noticed it. I was splittin’ some fire wood back o’ their quarters and she come out and said to me:

“ ‘Don’t you feel well, John?’

“I says: ‘Jist fair to middlin’, Miss Libby.’

“She told me: ‘You go right straight to the doctor. We can’t have you gittin’ sick ‘round here. Maybe you orter go to the horsepital for a spell.’

“The General was writin’ inside. He stuck his head out the window and laughed and said: ‘All John needs is

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Continued from Page 1—"Life's so damned full o' 'ifs,' Bud"

some brandy with a lot o' pepper in it.'

"But I acted accordin' to Miss Libby and Dr. Porter told me what I needed was a change of vitals and sich. The upshot was Miss Libby had me come and eat in the kitchen with Mary fur a spell. But, the stewed tomatoes that Mary fixed! I can taste 'em yet. And the dried apple pie! Ain't no pies you git in a restaurant tastes like them used to. I want in no hurry to git well and go back to mess, livin' on hardtack and rice and beans and bacon. My appetite come back somethin' terrible and I got to feelin' frisky as a young colt but I kept on goin' to the kitchen fur my meals. I eat and I eat. My Bunkie joshed me. He got to callin' me: 'Old Neutriment.' And arter that, when I come out o' the kitchen, pickin' my teeth, the men 'ud say, 'Here comes Old Neutriment.'

"I jist let 'em josh. I knowed they'd give their right arms fur the pie and stuff Mary was handin' out to me.

"Miss Libby and me allus had our jokes. I took keer o' Phil Sheridan fur her, o' course, and usually when her and the General went huntin' I'd ride along with 'em, across the plains. And allus, when I was helpin' her on or off her horse, I'd say, 'How old be you, Miss Libby?'

"And she'd laugh and say, 'The General don't think it proper I should tell gentlemen my age, John.'

"When I was at Monroe awhile back, Bud, when they had the unveilin' of the monument fur General Custer, she was thar too, o' course, and I stood right aside her, and arter she'd pulled the ribbon and the crowd was cheerin' and the band was playin' Gary Owen – that was Custer's favorite tune – I whispered to her and says, 'How old be you, Miss Libby?'

"The tears come to her eyes and she whispered back, kinda smilin', kinda cryin': 'I don't think the General would want me to tell genelemen my age, John.'

"Wall, jist this winter, in one o' her letters to me, she writ:

"John, I think it would be quite proper fur me to tell you my age now, and I don't think the General would mind. I am eighty years old today.' *

"Wall, life goes on. To me she'll allus be jist Miss Libby, young and purty and sweet.

"Did you ever drink champagne, Bud?'"

"Yes, do you like it John?'"

The old man chuckled. "I got drunk on it onest. One time when *The Key West* – that was one o' the boats under Captain Marsh – come up the river it brung the usual supplies o' Jamaica Ginger which was sure welcome to us men, the water 'round thar bein' full o' alkali. And if brung kegs of whiskey and some bottles o' champagne.

"General Custer give a poker party that night and though he never tiched a drop hisself – not since Civil War days – he served champagne to his company. Doctor Burleigh was thar, I recollect, and Captain Marsh and 'Boss' Custer and young Autie Reed, the General's nephew and some others I disrrmember. All night I was kept on the jump bringin' in wood fur the fire and openin' bottles and sich. Onest Custer nudged me and whispered:

" ' Save a bottle of champagne fur Mrs. Custer.'

"I knowed that was the only drink she liked. Wall, 'long 'bout two o'clock the party broke up. Whilst I was straightenin' things up I tasted some liquor that was left in a glass. I never tasted nothin' so good, Bud. They was several bottles left. I opened one and poured me out a drink and my innards begun to feel warm and nice. So I took another drink. I emptied that bottle and opened another. Purty soon I was tight as a hoot owl. I kept openin' bottles and drinkin'. But all the while I was worryin' 'bout something.' I knowed that was something I orter do or else orter not do and I curled up on the floor under the table still worryin' 'bout some-

thin'.

"Wall, by'n by I woke up and it was broad daylight and I had the damanedest headache and a queer feelin' that somethin' awful'd happened. I lay thar fur a spell, worryin', tryin' to figger things out. Then, sudden-like, it all come back to me, how the General had said: 'Be sure and save a bottle fur Mrs. Custer.'

"I felt awful glum, Bud. I looked 'round. Every bottle was empty. Custer could be purty stern when he was good and mad. Fur all his kind ways he expected his orders to be carried out. I begun to plan maybe I'd best git a transfer to another company. Then I rolled over on the floor whar I was layin' and I felt somethin' hard under me and I opened my coat and thar was a hull bottle o' champagne. Funny, want it, Bud, how I'd saved it fur Miss Libby and then disremembered everything?"

"Wall, whilst they was at breakfast I took it in to her and put it aside her plate. She looked up smilin' – she had a purty smile – and she says:

" 'Oh, thank you, John!'

"But Custer looked me over, kinda stern but with his eyes a-twinklin', and he says:

" 'Better take the dogs out fur exercise, John.'

"We kept 'em chained up so's they wouldn't kill the Post cats and sich. I reckon he was thinkin' more o' me than the dogs jist then, guessin' maybe a leetle fresh air'd be good fur me, too.

"Bud, I get all hot under the collar when I hear folks say nowadays that Custer was a drinkin' man, hintin' that maybe he'd been drinkin' too much jist afore his last charge. That's a damn lie, Bud. They was jist one man drunk whilst we was on the Little Big Horn expedition and that was Reno. If Reno hadn't been drunk and a coward to boot maybe Custer and most o' the other two hundred men'd be livin today.

"Life's so damned full o' 'ifs,' Bud. □

John Burkman: A Private of Good Character?

OK, so Libbie loved him and her General well-tolerated him. He was loyal as the dogs he cared for, and a faithful soldier of these United States. But the discharge papers that claim John Burkman was a “private of good character,” did not consider all the facts.

John Burkman was born January 10, 1839, in Pennsylvania’s Alleghany County, though that is a matter of some debate. Burkman once said he was born in Germany. His death certificate lists his birth state as Missouri. It was in Missouri his official biography begins. He worked as a teamster for William Bent before enlisting in the 5th Missouri Mounted Infantry at the very beginning of the Civil War. In fact, his enlistment date of May 17, 1861 was exactly 15 years to the day before the 7th Cavalry marched out of Fort Abraham Lincoln on its way to the Little Big Horn and destiny, as they say.

Burkman came to Dakota long before his hero Custer, in fact, even long before Custer became his hero. Burkman was with General Alfred Sibley when he crisscrossed east central North Dakota in search of Dakota Indians to fight in 1863. From the end of the Civil War to 1870, Burkman’s movements are somewhat of a mystery, but my speculation is that he continued to be a member of the military service. The reason I make that speculation is that his second enlistment date in 1861 was August 16. Exactly nine years later, August 16, 1870, Burkman enlisted in Company A of the 7th Cavalry. Maybe it was just a coincidence, but it would be a remarkable one. He apparently tried civilian life for all of two weeks in 1875 before enlisting again at Fort Lincoln, September 1, 1875 at age 35.

Although he soldiered with Custer on the Yellowstone Expedition of 1873 and the 1874 jaunt into the Black Hills, to his eternal regret, Burkman was not with Custer’s brigade at the Little Big Horn. He was detailed to be with the pack train. In *Old Neutriment*, Burkman said that Custer leaned down from his horse Vic, put his hand on the private’s shoulder and said, “No,

John. You’ve been doing guard duty three nights in recession. You’re tired out. Your place is with McDougal and the pack train. But if we should have to send for more ammunition you can come in on the home stretch.”

So Burkman didn’t die at the Little Big Horn, but his spirit was broken. He continued to serve in the 7th until May 17 (there’s that date again) of 1879, when he was discharged for disability after falling of a horse in Nebraska. It was in that discharge that Burkman received the usual appellation of “private of good character.”

But his character by modern standards, as well as the standards of his own age, doesn’t seem very good. At least not when it came to his obligations as a father.

The National Archives holds the pension records of veterans and claims for pensions. Mary Spriggs, daughter of Nancy Mucks Johnson applied for a pension after Burkman’s death by self-inflicted gunshot November 6, 1925. In her filing, Mary claimed that Burkman was her father. Her story was that her mother had told her the following (reprinted from John Manion’s “Custer’s Cooks and Maids,” in *Custer and His Times: Book Two*):

“Her father was a common soldier ... at Fort Abraham Lincoln ... an Irishman named John Burkman ... I got into trouble by him over there at the Fort and that is the reason I had to leave and come here to Bismarck. I was to have married Burkman, but after I was in a family way by him he wanted me to get the marriage license and pay for it, since I was working. But this I would not do.”

□



Photo is of Thane Grewatz who portrayed John Burkman, Custer’s Striker, at Fort Abraham Lincoln in the 1990s. Though a quick-witted school teacher, Grewatz had no trouble playing the slow-moving, ponderous-thinking Burkman. The corporal stripes are an affectation allowing Grewatz a little advantage as a supervisor of other interpreters of the time. They also allowed Sgt. Kenneweg the opportunity to regularly bust Grewatz back to private for one presumed violation or another. □

General William S. “Mad Bear” Harney

Your editor promised an article on General Harney for The Past Times on the Fort Abraham Lincoln Foundation facebook page recently. He’s written it, too. It just got crowded out by Pierre Falcon and John Burkman. Next issue, for sure, a brief biography of the man for whom the highest point in South Dakota is named.

Just for a teaser preview: Harney’s public service stretched

from 1818 to 1869, including military actions in the Indian removal from Illinois and Florida, distinguished service in the war with Mexico, stirring up trouble with the British in Oregon country, delivering the most demoralizing defeat suffered by Lakota Indians to that point and then serving as a peace commissioner to the same and other Indian nations.

Tracy Potter

The Battle of Seven Oaks (Frog Plain)

June 4, 1793, Pierre Falcon's Cree Indian wife delivered a son the happy parents named after his father. The elder Pierre was a Northwest Company clerk at Elbow Fort in the Swan River area overlapping the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border.

Father and son left the frontier for Quebec in 1798, where the boy received Catholic baptism and some schooling. At age fifteen, young Pierre began his own career in the West, following his father's path as an employee of the Norwester's.

In 1812, Pierre married Marie Grant. Marie was the sister of Cuthbert Grant, the legendary leader of the New Nation, the Metis, *les Bois-Brûlés*. Grant, like Falcon, was born in 1793 to a Cree mother and fur trader father. In Grant's case, his father, also named Cuthbert, was Scotch, not French, and the youngster was sent to Scotland, not Quebec, for his education. Grant and Falcon would be joined as allies for decades. Pierre and Marie settled into Grant's headquarters town of White Horse Plain, along the Assiniboine River just west of its meeting with the Red River in what is now modern-day Winnipeg.

Times were good and bad, of course, but they were far too violent, stirred by literally cut-throat competition between the Northwest Company and the Hudson Bay Company.

The Northwesters had been first. From the time Pierre Gaultier des Varennes, Sieur de la Verendrye established trading posts on the Red and the Assiniboine, the traders from Montreal intercepted business that would otherwise have flowed to York Fort on Hudson Bay. The character of a national competition in the trade war between France and England morphed imperfectly after the French surrendered Canada into a trade war between the Northwest Company and the Hudson Bay Company. Early in the 19th century, the HBC left its dismal spot on a half-frozen sea to compete more directly in the fur trade of Assiniboia, the area of what is now Saskatchewan and Manitoba drained by the Assiniboine River

and its tributaries, including the Souris in North Dakota. Armed conflict followed.

Young Cuthbert Grant was leader of the Metis, backed by the Northwest Company. In their interests, Grant led Metis hunters against Hudson Bay trading posts in the region. Even more troubling than the competing fur traders to the New Nation and their corporate allies were Lord Selkirk's settlers, who were brought to the area to establish farming communities which would support the HBC with provisions and soldiers. The most significant of these was Winnipeg, at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine. An opposition settlement there threatened everything about the Metis way of life and the Northwest Company's business. Grant took action.

The hapless settlers Selkirk recruited from among the dispossessed farmers of Scotland had a miserable trip to reach their destination, and arrived too late in the season of 1812 to be able to plant crops. They built Fort Douglas, but most abandoned it to travel south to Pembina where they were dependent on the goodwill of the resident Metis buffalo hunters for their survival that first year. Their first growing season wasn't much good either, and food shortages led to impolitic declarations from Selkirk's Governor Miles MacDonnell, who declared it illegal to travel with pemmican and forbade mounted buffalo hunting in hopes that buffalo would come close enough to the settlement to allow settlers to feed themselves. Enraged, the Metis not only ignored the Governor's edicts, but burned Fort Douglas to the ground, for the first time. Governor MacDonnell resigned, citing severe emotional instability.

Pemmican remained a major issue, as it was the fuel for the fur trading brigades. In 1815, the Hudson Bay Company was able to steal a major load of pemmican from the Nor'Westers, who retaliated and stole it back, destroying an HBC post in the process. **Traveling with the pemmican to sell to their allies in the Northwest Company, Grant's men were accosted near the**

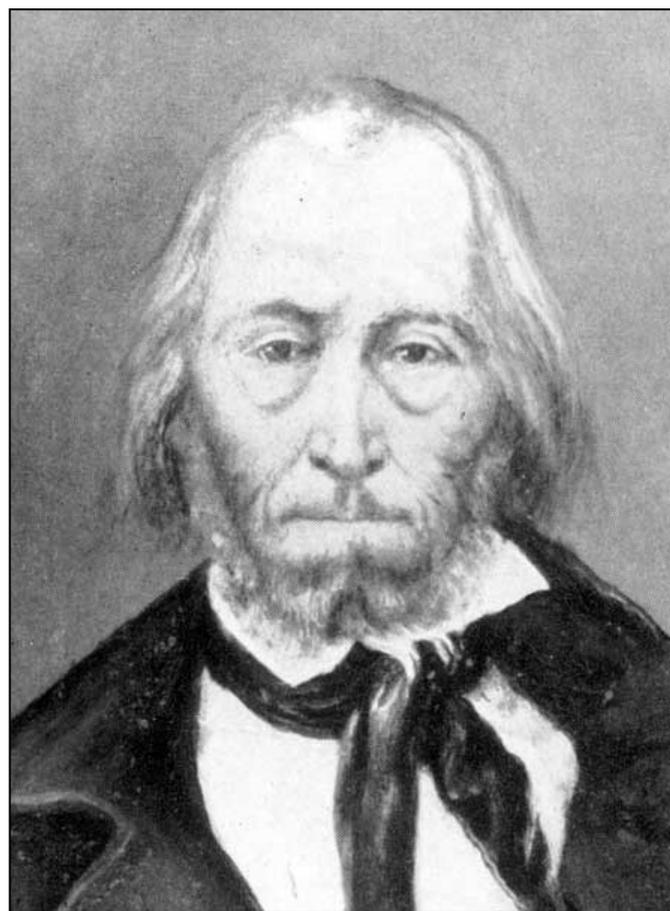
rebuilt Fort Douglas in a place they called Frog Plain (la Grenouilliere) and the settlers called Seven Oaks. Selkirk's new governor, an American businessman named Robert Semple led a party of settlers out to intercept the Metis. The settlers found themselves surrounded by men who knew which end of a gun to use for which purpose. The Metis sent an ambassador, Francois Firmin Boucher to speak with Semple. The Governor attempted to arrest Boucher, a shot was fired and the Battle of Seven Oaks begun. It ended as quickly. Semple and 20 of his men were dead within twenty minutes. The Metis suffered two fatalities.

In the official report of the incident, a royal commissioner noted that it was a fact "next to certainty" that one of Semple's men fired the first shot. In any case, the Metis were exonerated, despite an enthusiastic post-battle despoiling of the dead by a French father and his three sons.

One of the Metis in the fight was Pierre Falcon. He wrote a song to commemorate the victory at Frog Plain, *La Chanson de la*

Grenouillere, which became an anthem to the New Nation. For decades the Metis hunting brigades sang Falcon's song on their marches. Nearly 50 years after the battle, the Reverend J. A. Gilfillan, traveling through the Red River Valley with Antoine Gingras (the same for whom Gingras State Historic Site near Walhalla, North Dakota is named) heard Gingras sing it so often it got on Gilfillan's nerves. During the rebellion of Louis Riel in 1869, the song "generated the most fire and fervor among the Metis," in the words of Gerhard Ens in his thoughtful essay: **The Battle of Seven Oaks and the Articulation of a Metis National Tradition, 1811-1849.**

Presented here in French and translated for Americans (if you speak more than two languages, you're multi-lingual; if you speak two languages, you're bilingual; if you speak one language, you're an American) is *La Chanson de la Grenouillere*, by Pierre Falcon, Bard of the Prairies.



Pierre Falcon, 1793—1876

Source: Archives of Manitoba

The Song of Pierre Falcon, Bard of the Prairies

“Chanson de la Grenouillère”

Voulez-vous écouter chanter une chanson de vérité!
Le dix-neuf de juin les “Bois-Brules” sont arrivés

Comme des braves guerriers.
En arrivant à la Grenouillère
Nous avons fait trois prisonniers
Des Orcanais! Ils sont ici pour piller notre pays.

Etant sur le point de débarquer
Deux de nos gens se sont écriés
Viola l'anglais qui vient nous attaquer!
Tous aussitôt nous nous sommes dévirés

J'avons cerne la bande de Grenadiers,

Ils sont immobiles!

J'avons agi comme des gens d'honneur
Nous envoyâmes un ambassadeur.
Gouverneur! Voulez-vous arrêter un p'tit moment!?
Nous voulons vous parler.

Le gouverneur, qui est enrage, Il dit à ses soldats —Tirez!
Le premier coup l'Anglais le tire,

L'ambassadeur a Presque manqué d'être tue

Le gouverneur se croyant l'Empereur Il agit avec rigueur.

Le Gouverneur se croyant l'Empereur
A son Malheur agit avec trop de rigueur.
Ayant vu passer les Bois-Brules
Il a parti pour nous épouvanter.
Etant parti pour nous épouvanter,

Il s'est trompé; il s'est bien tue, Quantité des ses grenadiers.

J'avons tue Presque toute son armée.
De la bande quatre ou cinq se sont suaves.
Si vous aviez vu les Ang'ais
Et tout les Bois-Brules après!
De la bande quatre ou cinq se sont sauves.
Si vous aviez vu les Ang'ais
Et tout les Bois-Brules après!

De butte en butte les Anglais culbutaient.
Les Bois-Brules jetaient des cris de joie!

Qui en a composé la chanson?
C'est Pierre Falcon! Le bon garçon!

Elle a été faite et composée Sur la Victoire que nous avons gagnée!
Elle a été faite et composée
Chantons la gloire de tous ces Bois-Brules!

Song of Frog Plain

Will you come and listen to a song of truth!
On June 19th the Bois-Brules arrived

Like brave warriors
At Frog Plain.
We took three prisoners, Orkneymen who had come to pillage our
country.

Standing on the ridge two of our comrades cried out.
There are the English who come to attack us!

At once we turned around to meet them.

We surrounded the group of grenadiers.

They stood still! They were baffled!

Acting as men of honor
We sent an ambassador to them.
Governor! Stop for a moment!
We wish to talk to you.

But the governor was enraged and told his soldiers to fire!
The English nearly killed our ambassador.

The Governor, thinking himself to be superior to us, acted harshly.

The Governor, thinking himself superior to us,
to his misfortune acted too harshly.
Having seen the Bois-Brules
He tried to frighten us.
He was wrong to attempt to frighten us.

He was killed along with many of his grenadiers.

We have killed most of his army
Only four or five of his group were saved.
If you had seen the English
And all the Bois-brules afterwards!

Exposed, the English fell.
The Bois-Brules uttered shouts of joy.

Who composed this song?
It is Pierre Falcon! A good lad!

It was composed about the victory we have won!
It was composed
and sung to the glory of all those Boise-Brules!

Pierre Falcon was born at Elbow Fort, Swan River, on 4 June 1793, the son of Pierre Falcon and an aboriginal mother, believed to be a Cree. He was taken at an early age to his father's village, Lacadie, in Lower Canada, where he was baptized

in 1798. In 1812 he married Marie, daughter of Cuthbert Grant, the Nor'Wester, and sister of Cuthbert Grant, the Warden of the Plains. They had seven children. He entered the service of the North West Company at the age of 15. He accompanied Cuthbert Grant at the massacre

of Seven Oaks on 19 June 1816.

Falcon was famous as a composer and singer of chansons. The best known, *Chanson de la Grenouillère*, is a narrative of the massacre at Seven Oaks, written from the Métis view-

point He died at St. Francois Xavier on 21 October 1876.

Pierre Falcon, Manitoba Historic Resources Branch (1984).

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They Call it Fiddler's Green

A couple of giants in the world of Custer buffs shuffled off this mortal coil recently.

Here in North Dakota, we said goodbye to Dr. Kermit Lidstrom, founding President of the Fort Abraham Lincoln Foundation.

Kermit was 83, and decided on his own terms to end kidney dialysis, and consequently, his life shortly before Thanksgiving.

Accurately described in the lead of his obituary as amiable and politically savvy, Lidstrom was raised in Mandan on stories of George Custer and the 7th Cavalry. As the son of the county sheriff, he heard lots of other stories of more local interest as well. Kermit went off to college and a career in marketing in Cleveland before finding his niche as a college teacher and administrator. When he returned to Bismarck-Mandan as President of Bismarck State College, Kermit learned that a group of other history enthusiasts were meeting semi-regularly at the coffee shop in the historic Lewis and Clark Hotel in Mandan. Their main topic of discussion was the possible reconstruction of the Custer House at Fort Lincoln State Park. It had been a topic of discussion in Mandan since the CCC left it undone in the 1930s. A powerful friends group had begun raising money in the 1950s for either reconstruction of the house, or at least the placing of an equestrian statue of Custer on the parade ground at the old fort. The money and the group faded away and so, in 1982, when Lidstrom arrived on the scene, the project was still grounded.

Kermit asked pertinent questions at that first meeting about

how long they had been talking and whether or not they had filed for nonprofit corporate status, or applied for a 501(c)(3) designation. Naturally, they made him the founding President of the group they called the Fort Lincoln Foundation. Things started happening fast. Money was raised, and this time it was well-invested in wood and wiring. The Custer House, built with all private funds, at a cost of a half million dollars, opened to the public for the state's centennial observance in June, 1989.

Lidstrom remained on the board for the rest of his life, serving as chairman of the committee that hired me to follow Pat Ness as executive director in 1993. He was active in many other civic engagements, too, elected to the Burleigh County Commission, accepting a gubernatorial appointment to the Education Fact Finding Commission, serving as President of the Bismarck Rotary Club, working with the AARP, and as a dedicated supporter of the Boy Scouts of America. Lidstrom was one of only eight North Dakotans to achieve the designation of Distinguished Eagle Scout, a distinction of which he was justly proud. He was a long-time member of the Little Big Horn Associates, and helped bring the LBHA to Bismarck-Mandan on two occasions.

Amiable, certainly, and remarkably effective, Kermit Lidstrom cut a wide swath. He'll be missed, but his accomplishments will stand for a long, long time.

Meanwhile, in Custer's own Michigan, Frank Mercatante passed away in Grand Rapids at age 91.

Frank was considered the dean of Western bookman and a font of information on all things Cus-

ter and Custeriana. Here are two tributes from people who knew Frank well.

Back when things were good, I used to travel for Consumers Energy on the survey crew. The job saw me staying in many parts of the state, including Grand Rapids. The motel could have had a speed dial to Frank as he was often the first call I made when I came in from the field.

"Frank!"

"YES!"

"Are you hungry?"

"Starving!"

Soon he and I would be on our way to one of the many favorite eateries he'd enjoy through my many visits during those years. Often we'd be joined by Dave Hartman, which meant an extended visit at his house or Frank's to debate the many Custer stories and mysteries we were able to solve before I'd have to excuse myself and return to the motel. After all, I was really in Grand Rapids to work, but seeing Frank and getting paid, didn't get any better than this.

For years my parents have promised to travel to Montana and watch me die in one of the reenactments I've attended over the past two decades and a half. Imagine my surprise a few years back when I was informed by one of the spectators that they had seen my "Dad" t the monument and he was on his way to see me. In those days Frank wore his hair a little longer and it wasn't a stretch for someone to believe he was "General Custer's Dad." Whether he had them convinced he was in fact GAC's dad or the father of the man who portrayed the "Boy General" he greeted me with a

dressing down that only a parent could give their child.

Frank and I shared a deep friendship with Dr. Lawrence A. Frost. It was stories about that friendship, the great Custer debates and the greater names in the Custer canon of literature that made our visits so cherished. Frank was a window to the past. He'd shared that as a small boy he had visited in a rest home an old cavalry veteran who'd rode with the Michigan Cavalry Brigade. The stories of his adventures sprinkled with Mercatante Humor made the price of his books a bargain. I was always admonished for buying the soft covers because even when I had a larger pay check the first editions were usually out of my reach. Frank was known to pull a damaged copy out of a box or have an extra copy lying about his house he'd set aside for me.

One night he and Dave Hartman compiled a list of books I needed to read to perfect my Custer portrayal. Through the years I've gotten close to 95% read. Whether it was an excuse to keep me purchasing books from him, I'll never really know? But one fact remains, Frank Mercatante enriched my life and a myriad more folks who'll shed tears at his passing and not necessarily write a paragraph or two like I've done, because those loving memories line the shelves like Good Books and fill our souls for having known this "Giovanni Martini of the Book World."

We'll miss you Frank!

*Your other Loving Son,
General Custer,
sometimes known as
Steve Alexander*

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Join Us Today—Memberships are Available!

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.

FALF has reconstructed the last home of General George Custer, four other 7th Cavalry-era buildings, and six Mandan earth lodges in the On-a-Slant Village at Ft. Abraham Lincoln State Park. Historical sites are good for the community in a number of ways. We're all interested in passing our heritage on to future generations—we want to teach our children and grandchildren about the past. The happy coincidence is

that in preserving and promoting our past, we also build our future by providing cultural and economic advantages to the community. Your Fort Abraham Lincoln Foundation Membership helps us develop new historical/cultural offerings at the Port of Bismarck, at the Post and at Five Nations Arts Gift Shop.

Your recognition that the Fort Abraham Lincoln Foundation is doing a good job for the community, for our past and our future, is welcomed. Corporate and Business Memberships, as well as Family and Individual Memberships, are available as follows:

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Family and Individual Memberships

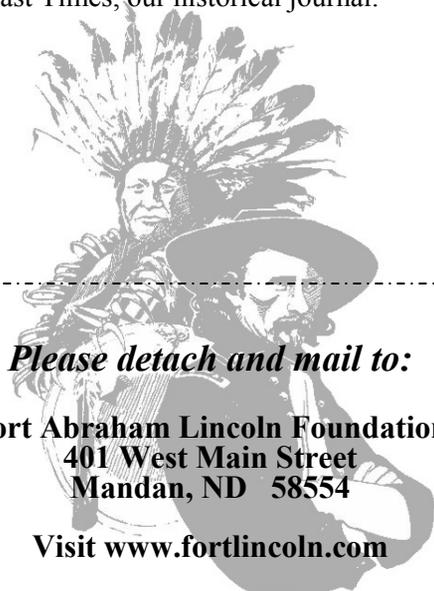
Members at a \$40 level or above enjoy the following benefits:

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- | | |
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Baking Tip from the 1700s – the Pot Pie

Common Meat Pie Crust

Directly from *The Cooking of History: Historic Recipes of Old America, Volume I*, by Robert S. Hill, Redcoat Publishing, Hayward, Minnesota, 1992.

All grammatical choices are Mr. Hill's, not 'The Past Times'.

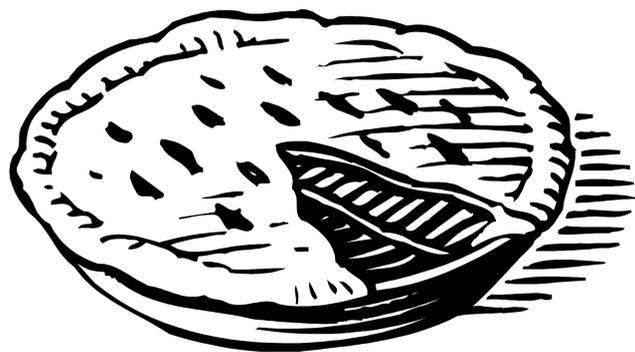
A "pye" cooked in the mid 1700's was mostly of the meat variety; what we term to-day as a pot pie. At the home of a wealthy person, several pies would be featured at one meal: chicken, beef, veal and so on.

In old cookbooks (pre 1900) a pie crust was referred to as a *paste*, a word derived from *huff paste*. A huff paste was an unleavened pastry used to wrap food so that the juices and flavor remained in the food when it was baked.

- 2 Cups of sifted Whole Wheat Flour.
- ½ Cup of Butter.
- 6 Tablespoons of cold water.
- ½ Teaspoon of Baking Powder.

Measure and set aside ½ Cup of flour and 2 tablespoons of butter. Rub the remaining butter into the rest of the flour. Stir in the water with a fork. Roll the dough on a well floured surface.

Spread 1 tablespoon of butter on the dough and sprinkle with 1 tablespoon of flour. Roll up the dough, flour lightly and re-roll to a ¼ inch thickness. Again repeat the process to use up the butter and flour. Do not, however roll out more than 3 times or the pastry will be flaky. Makes two 9 inch pie crusts.



1800 Family Style Beef Pie

Fried food in the late 1780's was considered "unwholesome" by many, and was even banned in the army by regulations at the time. Meat could be roasted, boiled, broiled, or made into a pie using open hearth cookery methods. Households would make economical use of the brick oven by baking more than one pie at a time. In the winter extra pies were frozen in an out building until need.

This recipe could have been served in any household in the early 1800's.

- 1 Pound of Rump Steak.
- 1 Small Onion, chopped fine.
- Salt and Pepper to taste.
- Flour.

Soften the meat a little by lightly beating with a rolling pin or meat mallet. Cut the meat into cubes and dust with flour. Add the meat and onion to a skillet and brown well with a little lard. Pour a little hot water over the meat to make plenty of gravy. Cover and cook for 20 minutes, adding water to keep the meat covered with gravy. Season well with salt and pepper.

Lay the meat and onion evenly on the bottom of the pie dish and smother with the gravy. Put on the top crust and brush with egg. Bake near the top of the oven at 425 degrees F for 15 minutes. Reduce the heat to 350 degrees and cook for a further 30-40 minutes.

Editor's Note: I intend to try this, but with butter and olive oil in place of lard. I'll let you know how it turns out.
(Tracy Potter)

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They Call it Fiddler's Green

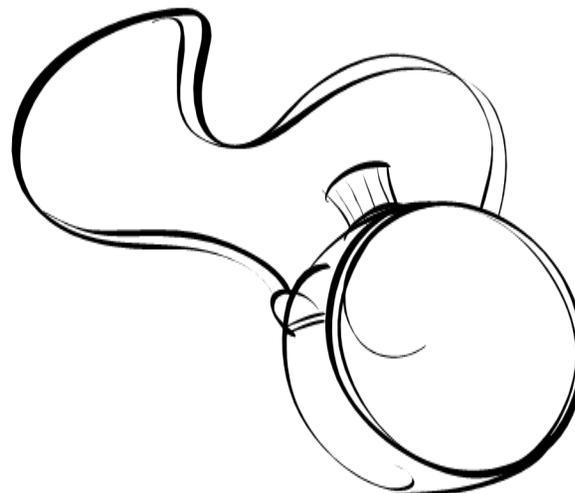
And, from historian Jerry Greene

I first knew Frank Mercatante when I worked at the then Custer Battlefield NM back in 1968. We became close friends. He enhanced my interests by gifting me with books, including a mimeographed two-volume complete transcript of the Reno Court as well as a set of Sheridan's memoirs (all of which I still possess). We reminisced about this at the Oklahoma LBHA meeting two years ago. He and Dr. [Lawrence] Frost often visited

the battlefield together, along with Frank's two boys. Frank told riotous stories of hunting books, including one in which he posed outright as a priest to get into a convent where some Custer books were suspected to be.

Frank was a delightful person to hang with, one of my all-time favorites. I'm very saddened to learn this news. He was a wonderful friend and I miss him already.

Jerry Greene



The Cavalrymen's Poem

Halfway down the trail to Hell,
In a shady meadow green
Are the Souls of all dead troopers camped,
Near a good old-time canteen.
And this eternal resting place
Is known as Fiddlers' Green.

Marching past, straight through to Hell
The Infantry are seen.
Accompanied by the Engineers,
Artillery and Marines,
For none but the shades of Cavalrymen
Dismount at Fiddlers' Green.

Though some go curving down the trail
To seek a warmer scene.
No trooper ever gets to Hell
Ere he's emptied his canteen.
And so rides back to drink again
With friends at Fiddlers' Green.

And so when man and horse go down
Beneath a saber keen,
Or in a roaring charge of fierce melee
You stop a bullet clean,
And the hostiles come to get your scalp,
Just empty your canteen,
And put your pistol to your head
And go to Fiddlers' Green.