

# Frontenac on Lake Pepin

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Frontenac has been a name to conjure with, ever since the Iron Governor of New France reached the shores of the New World in 1672 and began an administration characterized by vision and strength. Therefore the man who chose Frontenac as the name for a tiny hamlet on the upper stretches of the river once called after the French count had a true sense of the appropriate. Though Frontenac himself never reached the Mississippi in his travels, he sent out on their explorations some of the boldest, ablest spirits that ever navigated the Father of Waters—La Salle, Hennepin, LeSueur, Nicholas Perrot, Duluth, and many others.

The Mississippi derives its name from Father Claude Allouez' rendering of an Indian word designating the great central river of the continent. The Jesuit priest was located at a mission near the site of Ashland, Wisconsin, for a few years in the mid-1660's, and it was there that Illinois tribesmen told him of the "Messipi." The word first appeared in print in the Jesuit Relation of 1666-67. Of course, the river's lower course had been known for well over a century, but no one, as far as is known, had navigated it from its source to its mouth, so that there was some question whether Allouez' "Messipi" was the same stream as De Soto's "River of the Holy Ghost." It was to put an end to speculation of that sort that Jolliet in 1673 and La Salle seven years later departed on their well-known explorations. In 1682 La Salle reached the mouth of the river and ended the uncertainty.

It was La Salle, too, who sent Father Louis Hennepin to explore the upper reaches of the Mississippi in 1680. On his journey the Recollect priest saw and named for the patron saint of his particular branch of the Franciscan order the chief obstruction to navigation in the main course of the river, that is, the Falls of St. Anthony. He also saw and described in his travel account the enlargement of the river now known as Lake Pepin, on which the Village of Frontenac stands today. This bluff-encircled body of water was named for the Pepin brothers, young *coureurs du bois* in the employ of Duluth.

Hennepin's Description of Louisiana appeared in Paris in 1683. In it he describes Lake Pepin thus: "There is a lake 30 leagues farther north which we named the Lake of Tears, because when the Indians who had taken us wanted to kill us, some of them wept all night to make the others consent to our death. The lake, formed by the Colbert River (another early name for the Mississippi), is seven leagues long and about four leagues wide. There is an appreciable current at its inlet and outlet but not in the center of the lake." Fortunately, "Lake of Tears" did not survive as the permanent name of this scenic stretch of the river.

All who saw the lake in its pristine beauty and wrote their impressions of it were affected by its majestic sweep and wild grandeur. Travelers described its castellated hills and its rippling waters in words, artists represented them with pencil, pen, and brush. One famous explorer, Pierre Le Sueur, who passed through it in a Mediterranean-type sailing craft, a felucca, in 1700, drew a map of the entire length of the river up to what he considered its source, and, of course, included Lake Pepin. Other cartographers from 1680 on represented it on their charts and maps.

Few of the later writers failed to include in their descriptions of the lake the legend of one of the numerous bluffs that surround it. This so-called Maiden's Rock can be seen across the lake from Frontenac and gives its name to Winona, a city on the western shore of the lake. Originally the legend centered about the first-born daughter (always called Winona in Sioux families) in a Sioux family in the village of a great chief, Wabasha; on the site of Winona, then called Keoxa or Kiyuksan. Unwilling to marry the brave whom her parents chose as her husband, the maiden flung herself off a cliff into the lake below.

Another bluff near Frontenac, from whose summit one may see the whole length of the lake, bears the curious name of Point No Point, because, as one writer wrote in 1869: "Persons going in boats down the river see this point for six or eight miles, while the boat seems all the time approaching it, yet none of the time getting any nearer till just as they arrive at Frontenac." Back of Frontenac rise Garrard Bluff, named in honor of the man who founded and baptized the village, and Waconia Bluff, called by the Sioux word for a spring at its base.

Jutting out far into the river at the mouth of Wells Creek, a little below the village, is Sand Point. The brook is called Sand Point River on the first detailed map of the Minnesota country, which was drawn by a distinguished French scientist, Joseph N. Nicollet, and published in 1843. This low sand spit may have been the site of the first known French fort on the Minnesota side of Lake Pepin. The post was established in the general vicinity of the spit in 1727, while Charles de la Boische, Marquis de Beauharnois, was governor of New France, but its exact location is uncertain. From it the French hoped to advance to the Western Sea, and because of its presence among a fierce tribe, it seemed the means for keeping those Indians friendly to the French. Moreover, it appeared the best device available for clearing a way for a northern exploratory route via Lake of the Woods and Lake Winnipeg to the Western Sea, by keeping the Sioux from joining forces with the hostile Fox Indians.

A fine old families of New and Old France were represented in the company of men who arrived September 17, 1727, at Pointe au Sable, as they dubbed the sandy point chosen for the site of their fort. They had been three months on the way from Montreal and must have been delighted with the glories of autumn weather and the foliage colors gleaming across the blue waters of Lake Pepin. By the end of October they had built their post. It was named Fort Beauharnois for the man whose fête day was soon celebrated with rockets and fireworks. Terrified natives fled the scene, fearing that their new guests were causing the stars to drop from the skies.

Winter passed and the snows of the upper river melted and inundated the sand point in the spring. Then or later the fort may have been moved to higher ground. The following October nine members of the little post fled for their lives from Fort Beauharnois, leaving about eleven staunch souls to hold it against hostile Indians. The leader of the handful that remained was the Sieur de la Jémeraye, a nephew of the renowned explorer of the north, Pierre de la Vérendrye, who was later to play a prominent part in the attempt to find the Western Sea by way of Rainy River and Lake of the Woods. La Jémeraye proved to be a resourceful young man, able to conciliate the Sioux and hold them to a French alliance. Finally, however, after he had begun his northern explorations from Lake of the Woods, the Sioux broke away from their French alliance on Lake Pepin and attacked a group of men setting out for Lake Superior from La Vérendrye's fort on the Northwest Angle. They killed La Vérendrye's son, a priest, and a number of other Frenchmen. Therefore, in 1737, Fort Beauharnois was abandoned as untenable in the face of such Sioux hostility. Many persons have wondered why a post on Lake Pepin was so closely linked to a Lake of the Woods tragedy, failing to realize that it was the Sioux from the Lake Pepin area that massacred the Frenchmen in the north and that later showed their gory trophies to the garrison on the site of Frontenac.

Other French traders established themselves later on Lake Pepin. Outstanding among these were members of the Marin family, one of whom did more to pacify the western tribesmen after 1736 than anyone else was ever able to do. He and his son built posts both below and above the old site of Fort Beauharnois. Another well known Frenchman, St. Pierre, established an important fort across the lake on the Wisconsin side. Therefore the Frontenac area saw many a trader, explorer, and voyageur from 1727 until the entire West was abandoned by Frenchmen during the Seven Years War. At its close in 1763 Great Britain became the heir to French daring and energy by the Treaty of Paris, when they acquired France's claim to much of the North American continent.

Then followed a period when English and Spanish traders predominated. The Spanish traders came to Lake Pepin's shores because a secret treaty between France and Spain in 1762 ceded all of France's territory west of the Mississippi to her Latin neighbor, rather than let it fall into the hands

of the English. From the Lake Pepin area during the American Revolution sallied Indian troops to fight in the campaigns about St. Louis and even in the Ohio Valley. Many of these braves fought on the patriot side, but later, in the War of 1812, practically all of the Indian soldiers from the Minnesota country were to be found under the Union Jack. It was many years before British influence waned in the Frontenac area. To offset it, Americans begin to give flags and medals to deserving chiefs such as Red Wing. One of these trophies, a beautiful silver medal of Jefferson's administration, was found when the Village of Rew Wing was growing up, and is now preserved at the Minnesota Historical Society. It was buried with the chief who had worn it so proudly.

About 1830 missionaries penetrated the Lake Pepin region and began to establish stations for converting and educating the natives. A prominent Swiss Protestant mission was founded at Remnica, now Red Wing, only a short distance upriver from Frontenac. It was maintained under various sponsors until the Sioux had ceded their land west of the Mississippi to the United States Government in 1851, and surveyors had made the area available to purchasers during the next two or three years.

Settlers began to pour into the fine agricultural land as soon as the Indians left and title to land could be obtained. Some even anticipated the Government sales and squatted on the land they hoped to acquire. Among the earliest settlers were two brothers, Louis H. and Israel Garrard of Cincinnati, Ohio. Their mother was Mrs. Sarah Belle McLean, widow of Judge John McLean of the United States Supreme Court, who lived in Cincinnati before the Civil War. In 1854 these two young men came to Minnesota on a hunting expedition and saw the Frontenac region just as it was being offered for sale by the Land Office. The first claim seems to have been taken by a colorful fur trader, James (Bully) Wells, whose post gave its name to the creek near the south end of the village. Wells had been on the site since 1839. Probably, it was his location that was described in the New York Daily Tribune of August 20, 1852, by a traveler on an Upper Mississippi steamboat, who signed himself merely, "E.F.E." He wrote: "The Maiden's Rock towers some two hundred feet above the water, a gray, stark, frowning precipice, looking grand and savage in relief against the moonlit sky. Nearly opposite is the residence of a celebrated trader, who lives in baronial style, and is now enclosing a park, with pickets, for his deer. He married a half-breed of the country, and may be considered to represent both the savage and civilized condition."

In 1854, Wells sold his interests to Everett Westervelt, who had arrived in 1852. Westervelt proceeded to lay out a town named after himself. When Israel and Lewis Garrard decided to buy property in the region in 1857 at the time when halfbreed script was issued covering Westervelt's claim, a townsite company consisting of Westervelt, H. H., Israel, and Kenner Garrard was formed, which purchased the property. Shortly thereafter

Westervelt sold out to the Garrards. He continued to live in the place, however, until his death in 1888. His white frame house is still standing, surrounded by the fine hedge that he planted.

Before the outbreak of the Civil War several of the Garrards and McLeans had built homes in Westervelt, whose name was changed to Frontenac by Israel Garrard in 1859. First to build seems to have been Israel, a graduate of Harvard College and the Cincinnati law school, who constructed a hunting lodge. This he called St. Hubert's Lodge after the patron saint of hunters. A sort of coat of arms, consisting of a stag's head with a cross between the antlers, the insignia of St. Hubert, may still be seen in Garrard's home. It was built in Southern style of whitewashed vertical battens on a wood frame, with an upper veranda or gallery, shuttered windows, and a two-story porch. Mrs. McLean came to live in Frontenac, where she became the presiding spirit of the little community. Dr. Lewis Garrard, a graduate of the medical school of the University of Pennsylvania, also lived in Frontenac for twelve years before re-moving to Lake City. He introduced Devon cattle and South-down sheep and engaged in farming on an extensive scale.

Israel Garrard raised a troop of Ohio cavalry in the Civil War at his own expense, served throughout the war as a colonel in the Seventh Ohio Regiment, and was promoted to be a brigadier general. At the close of the war he and his wife, a daughter of George Wood of New York City, returned to Frontenac, where he established a sort of baronial estate of Swiss and German colonists from Cincinnati. The grounds were platted and the colonists became the nucleus of the village, where they worked for the general.

One of McLean's former friends in Cincinnati had been an artist, Augustus O. Moore, who like throngs of others in his day came to Minnesota in quest of health. He was invited to stay with the Garrard family in Frontenac after his arrival in 1862, and became so "bewitched" with the place, as he wrote his wife on September 25 of that year, that he began to urge her to join him in "the enchanted spot." With Mrs. Moore came her little daughter, Nina, who is still living in St. Paul, though long since past the century mark. At a gathering in Frontenac in 1939, she related her memories of her arrival in Frontenac aboard a river steamboat, and the adventures of the months that followed—how her father had to provide meat for his little family by hunting, how the passenger pigeons flew over in seemingly endless flocks in the spring. Many of her father's pencil sketches are preserved in the Minnesota Historical Society.

After the Civil War steamboating on the Mississippi was at its peak of activity and romantic interest. Immigrants and tourists crowded scores of floating palaces that plied up and down the Father of Waters until long after railroads became active competitors in the 1870's. Frontenac decided to capitalize on the tourist trade and established its Lakeside Hotel. Thereafter the little village was known for many years as the "Newport of the Northwest." In the Travellers' Journal of August, 1, 1881, it is described as "one of the loveliest spots conceivable," located "at the head of Lake Pepin on

the Mississippi river." Registers of this hostelry, which is still standing and which operated as an inn until the period of World War II, go back to 1871 in the files preserved in the Minnesota Historical Society and the Goodhue County Historical Society. Famous signatures on its pages testify to the lure of old Frontenac.

General Garrard's home was almost as renowned for its hospitality as was the inn. There he entertained in true Southern fashion. Among his guests in the winter of 1883-1884 were Grant La Farge and George L. Heins, the architects of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. After visiting a limestone quarry at Frontenac and admiring the rich creamy tones of the rock, the two men determined to use it in the church. There it may be seen in the interior of the sanctuary and the apse. Other famous guests who came to write or paint, or for other purposes, were General Charles King, John La Farge, Joseph Jefferson (a painter as well as an actor), and Henry Ward Beecher.

Other church constructions with which the Garrards were connected were the beautiful church and the parsonage of the Christian denomination, which Mrs. McLean built near her imposing home on the terrace overlooking the lake. Though the church was later destroyed by fire, the parsonage still remains and was long known as the Moccasin Inn.

General N. C. McLean took up his residence in a dwelling opposite the Episcopal church, which was built in 1868 largely through his influence and the efforts of the great Minnesota bishop, Henry B. Whipple. General Garrard made his church contribution mainly through his gift of a hundred acres of land where the Villa Maria, a Catholic school for girls, now stands. This gift was made to the Ursuline nuns, whose excellent work in their small house in Lake City aroused the general's admiration. The institution was built on a little knoll in whose soil during building operations many relics of French occupation were found.

By and large Garrard kept his little community idyllic and bucolic, but there were evidences of commerce and industry, too, such as the inn and the quarry. A sawmill, too, was built just above the point on which the old inn stands. In very early days the Territorial Road ran close to the creek, and there a government station stood, in charge of a man named Rafferty, as a waystation for soldiers and supplies hauled from La Crosse to Fort Snelling. When the railroad came in the late 1860's, however, Garrard had the station located about two miles away from the river, his house, and his estate. In a nearby pasture General Garrard raced thoroughbreds from his twenty-two horse stable.

Time, like the majestic river loved by the Garrards and their guests, moved on inexorably, and the year came when steamboats ceased to pull alongside the little inn's quai to disgorge famous tourists or guests of the Garrards' southern hospitality. The sleepy little hamlet grew even drowsier, and reverted more and more to its primitive natural setting. Then birdwatchers began to make pilgrimages to it, for it is on one of the major flyways of the continent. At first the visitors stayed at the inn, kept for years by Miss Celestine M. Schaller. After her death, just before World War II, it be-

game a campmeeting place for Methodists, as it is today. Many are the fond memories of those of us who had rooms in the inn over May weekends, ate at the long tables, and listened to Miss Schaller as she told of days gone by.

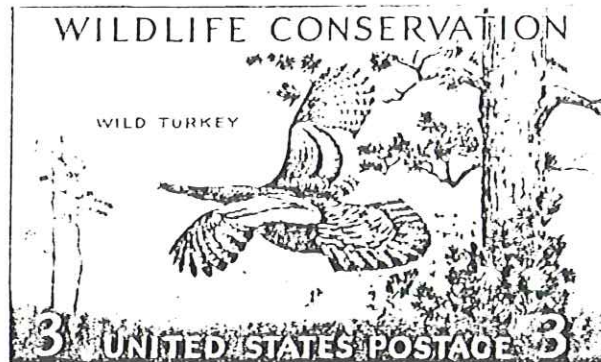
Some of the birds that may be seen at Frontenac are migratory water fowl and waders on the sandy point, wood warblers in the brush and trees on the hillsides, hawks wheeling overhead, pileated woodpeckers, tanagers, cardinals, prothonotary warblers, tufted titmice, wood ducks, orchard and Baltimore orioles, several kinds of swallows, many kinds of sparrows, and other rather unusual birds nesting in various places in the vicinity. These are to be seen in the spring or early summer, but again in August, Frontenac is an excellent place for returning migrants, especially warblers and waders. Pilgrimages are made to Frontenac both in May and August by many bird watchers from the Twin Cities.

These pilgrimages began just before World War I, when a few persons realized the attractions of Frontenac. In the 1920's, when the author commenced her trips, she found only a few kindred spirits there. It has been a revelation to watch the great upsurge of interest, especially in the last decade. In mid-May large, organized parties descend upon the little hamlet. Soon the woods and hillsides, as well as the sandy point, are alive with

binocularped pedestrians peering into hedgerows or treetops, or strolling through the old cemetery, hopping to hear the buzz call of a blue grey gnatcatcher or run up a long list of unusual warblers.

One's mind then reverts to the first known white men to become well acquainted with those shorelines and forested hills and speculates on the possibility that among those hardy Frenchmen accustomed to Continental battlefields and Indian ferocities there might have been one or two who noticed the unusual number of birds about their little picketed fort or heard music in the dawn chorus that greets every May dawn. Did they by any chance feed a few birds that first hard winter? Were the returning swans, geese, and ducks of interest only for creating a change in diet that first spring, when the Father of Waters entered their cabins and stood almost three feet deep on their punchcon floors? One can only speculate, for nowhere, apparently, does a contemporary record indicate any display of ornithological interest on the part of early explorers. Yet there may have been a silent observer or two among the anonymous winterers, who noticed the beauties of bluff and water, surreptitiously threw out a few crumbs to chickadees, woodpeckers, and nuthatches, felt a deep thrill as geese flew honking overhead in April, and wondered at the infinite, delicate markings of shy wood warblers in May. Let us hope so.

## New Wildlife Conservation Postage Stamp



Postmaster General Arthur E. Summerfield today announced that the first of the three stamps being issued to emphasize the importance of Wildlife Conservation in America will be released at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, on May 5, 1956. This special 3-cent stamp will be first placed on sale on the occasion of the convention of the Wisconsin Federation of Stamp Clubs.

The wild turkey, which is the subject of this issue, offers an outstanding example of the conservation work being carried on by Federal and State Governments. Wild turkeys, largest and fastest flying of upland game birds, have been restored to their original haunts in many eastern, southwestern and middle western states where they provide recreation to nature lovers, bird watchers, and sportsmen.

The stamp is 0.84 by 1.44 inches in dimension, arranged horizontally with a single outline frame, printed by the rotary process, electric-eye perforated, and issued in sheets of 50. The color of the

stamp will be announced later.

The design portrays a wild turkey in flight against a sparsely wooded background. Across the top of the stamp is the wording "Wildlife Conservation" in dark modified Architectural Roman, and across the bottom "3¢ United States Postage 3¢," in modified white face Roman. The wording "Wild Turkey," in dark Gothic, appears to the left of the stamp. The design was reproduced from a drawing by Bob Hines, Artist of Fish and Wildlife Service, U. S. Department of the Interior.

Stamp collectors desiring first day cancellations of the 3-cent Wildlife Conservation (wild turkey) stamp may send a reasonable number of addressed envelopes to the Postmaster, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, with money order remittance to cover the cost of the stamps to be affixed. An enclosure of medium weight should be placed in each envelope and the flap either sealed or turned in. The outside envelope to the Postmaster should be endorsed "First Day Covers."