

SAINT-LAURENT, MANITOBA

The village of St-Laurent, situated on the southeastern curve of Lake Manitoba, has an interesting history. Located at 98W-50½N latitude, its origin goes back into legend, so that it is difficult to ascertain its exact beginning. The historian of the Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate, says: "It can be given different ages according as one is a missionary, an historian or a canonist." (1) Its first inhabitants were probably the Assiniboine Indians, who are said to have been donated the land between the lakes, by the Saulteaux and the Crees, about 1650.

1733 In 1733-34, a Jesuit priest, travelling with La Verendrye's expedition, came in contact with these Indians. It is known that the French Discoverer of the West, paddled the length of Lake Manitoba on his way to Cedar Lake. His sons, Pierre and Louis are said to have explored the Interlake Region after the death of their father.

In 1824, a group of Métis, obliged to leave Pembina, which had become American territory, settled at what is now St-Laurent. Another group, driven out by a Red River flood, in 1826, also settled there. In the same year, a priest from St-Boniface, Father Destroismaisons, went to the settlement to celebrate Christmas.

Lack of priests in the area, deprived the Roman Catholic colony of spiritual aid for about twenty years. Also, the inhabitants, living by hunting and probably fishing, were nomadic, and it was difficult to reach them at any particular time.

However, the settlement was not completely abandoned. The proximity of St-François-Xavier, (about 30 miles distant), where there had been a resident priest since 1823, made it relatively easy for them to get to church. The registers of that Parish contain accounts of baptisms and marriages of St-Laurent people; and its first inhabitants were buried in the cemetery there.

Seemingly, (2) the first white man to settle at St-Laurent, was the grandfather of a certain William Ducharme. (3) According to the latter, his grandfather came from Eastern Canada, with two brothers, whom he left at St. Anne's. He paddled his canoe, alone, along the Assiniboine River, into Lake Manitoba, probably portageing between the two waterways. He came ashore, near the south end of St-Laurent, (now) and started building a shack. It was late fall, and a blizzard buried the building under four feet

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1. Ami du Foyer, 1961 p. 5 (Octobre)
 2. Information furnished by Fernand Lambert grandson of Wm. Ducharme
 3. Died in St-Laurent about 1930