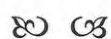


AMERICAN JOURNEYS COLLECTION



Memoir of Duluth
on the Sioux Country,
1678-1682

by Daniel Greysolon Duluth

DOCUMENT NO. AJ-054



WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
DIGITAL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES



|| www.americanjourneys.org || www.wisconsinhistory.org ||
© Wisconsin Historical Society 2003

Memoir of Duluth
on the Sioux Country,
1678-1682

C O N T E N T S

Introduction	325
Plans for the Exploration	329
Reconciliation of Sioux and Assinboin.....	330
Exploration by Water; Rescue of Father Hennepin.....	331
The Vermillion Sea; Return and Defense of Duluth	333

AMERICAN JOURNEYS COLLECTION

WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
DIGITAL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

INTRODUCTION

THE heroic age of French exploration in the Northwest would be incomplete without an account of the adventures of Daniel Greysolon, Sieur Duluth, the peer of Perrot and La Salle. Duluth was a native of St. Germain-en-Laye, a suburb of Paris. His family was allied to that of Tonty, who spoke of him as his cousin. This family alliance gave Duluth access to the court, and advanced him in his chosen career of arms to a place in the King's Guard—an honor reserved for youth of noble families alone. Just what his military services were we do not know, save that he participated as squire to a great noble in the bloody battle of Seneff in 1674, and escaped unharmed while his patron was sorely wounded.

Duluth had before this battle made a visit to New France, where several of his relatives had preceded him and held offices in the colony. After his feat of arms he returned to the new country, whose great rivers and vast silences seemed ever to call him to solve their mysteries, and to whose exploration he devoted twenty years of his mature life. It was in 1678 that the resolution to explore the Sioux country came to him in his quiet home among the river-side gardens of old Montreal. Perchance a hint dropped by the great Count de Frontenac determined the future career of the young soldier; perchance, the lure of the wilderness life directed his vagrant fancy. At all events, he determined to see for himself the great fresh-water seas of the northern country, and to push beyond toward the setting sun, and the possible hope of a route to the Vermillion Sea.

After having circled the lofty and picturesque shores of Lake Superior he found his way through the tangle of lakes,

streams, and marshes that constitute the headwaters of the Mississippi, and planted the arms and emblems of the French monarch in the heart of the country of the great Sioux tribe. The alliance with this tribe was to bring unlimited wealth in furs to the young colony along the St. Lawrence, for the Sioux were a great people, of many branches, whose territory abounded in beaver and other valuable peltry.

Duluth next visited the country of the Assiniboin, far northwest of Lake Superior, and having made peace between them and their neighbors diverted the stream of the rich northern fur trade from the channels leading to the English posts on Hudson Bay to those leading to the Great Lakes and the Ottawa.

On one of his expeditions into the Siouan territory, he was astonished and annoyed to learn that the tribe was holding as prisoners three Frenchmen, one of whom was a Recollect friar, chaplain of La Salle's expedition. Without a moment's hesitation Duluth changed his plans for farther westward exploration, and set out to rescue the captives from the hands of his quondam friends. Spurning the calumets with which they met him, he sternly demanded why they had violated their treaty with the French, and from the cowed and repentant chief he carried off Father Hennepin and his two voyageurs.

Like Nicolas Perrot, Duluth was a master of the art of Indian domination. Mingling sternness with kindness, and always meting out a rude justice, he secured an ascendancy over the savage mind that proved of vital importance to the colony of New France. He composed the difficulties between warring tribes, imposed a *Pax Gallica* upon the northern country, and made its ways safe for every French wanderer through the forests of the great Northwest.

Halted in this daring and beneficent labor by the petty criticism and condemnation of small-minded officials, Duluth

was obliged to return to the colony to justify his actions, and to clear himself of the charge of being a *coureur des bois*. His patron Frontenac had him arrested, in reality for the purpose of keeping him safe from machinations of his enemies. Soon Duluth was permitted to return again to the great territory he had explored, whose reservoirs of wealth he had tapped for the sake of New France, and whose inhabitants he swayed by the force of truth and justice. In 1686 he was sent by the governor of that time to build a post on the straits between Lakes Erie and Huron in order to intercept the Dutch and English traders that were trying to break the monopoly of the French with the Northwestern tribes. At this Fort St. Joseph, somewhere on the St. Clair River, the wild tribes of the West gathered for Denonville's expedition against the Iroquois in 1687. Thither came Perrot with the tribes of the Mississippi and Wisconsin, and thither Tonty led his gathered forces from the Illinois. Great must have been the satisfaction of these explorers and governors of the great Western hinterland to meet and relate tales of adventure and plan for future growth and progress.

After Denonville's disastrous failure, and the return of Frontenac in 1689 as governor of the distracted colony, it was to Tonty, Perrot, and Duluth that the great governor turned to maintain the French empire in the West and keep the ascendancy over its numerous tribesmen. It was Duluth's part to spend more years among the Sioux, to explore the west and northwest shores of Superior, and to build a fort upon Lake Nipigon. In 1696 he was called to command at Fort Frontenac on the northern shore of Lake Ontario, after having been promoted to a captaincy in the colonial troops.

After the death of Frontenac, Duluth returned to Montreal, where his latter years were quietly spent. His death in 1710 was a release for his brave spirit.

Thus passed away a nobleman of old and new France.

He had annexed an empire to the colony, had secured it by forts on Lake Superior, Lake Nipigon, and the River St. Clair; he had threaded the portages from Lake Superior to the Mississippi, had discovered the headwaters of that stream and the sources of Lake Winnipeg; he had turned back the threatening English invasion of the Northwest, and by firmness, decision, good judgment, and sacrifice had saved to New France a seventy years' tenure of the Upper Country. Singularly modest in the midst of boasters, always a nobleman in his treatment of both friends and rivals, this "gentleman of the King's Guard" was equally at home in the haunts of pleasure or the savage wilderness, in the palace at Versailles, or the council-house of the Sioux. His memory is perpetuated by the noble city that bears his name at the head of the mighty lake he delighted to traverse.

The brief account which we here publish of Duluth's early experiences in the Northwest was a memoir addressed by him to the French minister of marine in 1685. The manuscript is in the archives of the Ministry of the Marine at Paris; it has been printed by Henry Harrisse, *Notes pour Servir à l'Histoire de la Nouvelle France* (Paris, 1872), pp. 177-181; also in Margry, *Découvertes et Établissements des Français dans l'Amérique Septentrionale* (Paris, 1886), VI. 20-25. It appeared first in English form in John G. Shea, *A Description of Louisiana by Father Louis Hennepin* (New York, 1880), pp. 374-377, from which we here reprint.

MEMOIR OF DULUTH ON THE SIOUX
COUNTRY, 1678-1682

Memoir of the Sieur Daniel Greyselon du Luth on the Exploration of the Country of the Nadouecioux, of which he gives a very detailed Narrative.

*To my Lord the Marquis de Seignelay:*¹

My Lord:

AFTER having made two voyages from here to New France, where everyone believed that it was impossible to explore the country of the Nadouecioux,² nor to have any commerce with them, both because of their distance, which is 800 leagues from our settlements, and because they are at war generally with all sorts of tribes, this difficulty caused me to make the resolve to go among them, which I could not put into execution at that time, my affairs having obliged me to come back here, whence, after having made the campaign of Franche Comté, and of the battle of Senef, where I had the honor to be a gendarme of the guard of his Majesty and squire of Monsieur de Lassay,³ our ensign, I set out to return to Quebec, where I had no sooner arrived, than the desire I already had to carry out this plan increased, and I began to take my measures to make myself known on the part of the savages, who having assured me of their friendship, and for

¹Seignelay (1651-1691), eldest son of Colbert, was minister of marine from 1683 to 1690.

²The Sioux Indians, living in northwest Wisconsin and in Minnesota. See p. 24, note 1, *ante*.

³The battle of Senef occurred August 11, 1674, between the forces of the United Netherlands and those of Louis XIV. The French general was the great Condé, one of whose aides-de-camp was Armand de Madaillan de Lesparre, Marquis de Lassay. The latter had two horses shot under him and was thrice wounded in this affray. It is interesting to remember that succoring the wounded in the Flemish ranks was the Recollect monk Louis Hennepin, whom a few years later Duluth was to meet in the depth of the American wilderness.

proof of it given three slaves whom I had asked of them only in order that they might come with me, I set out from Montreal with them and seven Frenchmen on the first of September of the year 1678, to attempt the exploration of the Nadouecioux and the Assenipoulaks¹ who were unknown to us, and to cause them to make peace with all the nations around Lake Superior who dwell in the dominion of our invincible monarch.

I do not believe that such an expedition can give anyone ground to accuse me of having disobeyed the King's orders of the year 1676, since he merely forbade all his subjects to go into the depths of the woods to trade there with the savages.² This I have never done, nor even been willing to take any presents from them, though they have several times thrown them to me, which I have always refused and left, in order that no one might be able to accuse me of having carried on any indirect traffic.

On the second of July, 1679, I had the honor to set up the arms of his Majesty in the great village of the Nadouecioux called Izatys,³ where no Frenchman had ever been, nor to the Songaskitons and Houetbatons,⁴ distant 26 leagues from the first, where also I set up the arms of his Majesty in the same year 1679.

On the 15th of September, having made with the Assenipoulaks and all the other nations of the North a rendezvous at the extremity of Lake Superior to cause them to make peace with the Nadouecioux their common enemy, they all appeared there, where I had the good fortune to gain their esteem and their friendship, to bring them together, and in order that peace might last longer among them, I believed

¹ For this tribe, now known as the Assiniboin, see p. 133, note 2, *ante*.

² This edict was one of several issued by the King against the *coureurs des bois*, illegal traders with the Indian tribesmen.

³ Hennepin called the Sioux tribe who captured him "Issati." The village in which Duluth placed the King's arms, no doubt with ceremonies similar to those of St. Lussou at Sault Ste. Marie, is supposed to have been situated on the shore of Lake Mille Lac in northern Minnesota.

⁴ These were two branches of the Eastern Sioux; the term "Songaskitons" is translated by some as the "village of the fort," by others the "strong or brave" ones; the "Houetbatons" are known to ethnologists as the Wahpeton, interpreted as the "village of the river." See *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, XVI. 193, 194.

that I could not better cement it than by causing marriages to be made mutually between the different nations. This I could not carry out without much expenditure. During the following winter I caused them to hold meetings in the forest, at which I was present, in order to hunt together, feast, and thus draw closer the bonds of friendship.

A still greater expense arose from the presents which I had to make in order to cause the savages to come to Montreal, who had been diverted from this by the Openagos and Abenakis¹ under incitement from the English and the Flemings² who made them believe that the pestilence was in the settlements of the French, and that it had gone up as far as Nipissinguie, where the greater part of the Nipissiriniens had died of it.³

In June, 1680, not having been satisfied with having made my exploration by land, I took two canoes, with a savage who was my interpreter, and with four Frenchmen, to seek a means of making it by water. For this purpose I entered into a river which has its mouth eight leagues from the extremity of Lake Superior on the south side,⁴ where after having cut down some trees and broken through about one hundred beaver dams, I went up the said river, and then made a carry of half a league to reach a lake,⁵ which emptied into a fine river, which brought me to the Mississippi, where I learned, from eight lodges of Nadouecioux whom I met, that the Reverend Father Louis Hennepin, Recollect, now at the convent of St. Germain, had with two other Frenchmen⁶

¹ For the Abenaki, see p. 294, note 1, *ante*. The name Openagos is a variant of Abenaki; it is sometimes applied to the Passamaquoddy branch of this tribe.

² Duluth uses the term "Flemings" to denote the dwellers in the Low Countries generally; the reference is to the Dutch of the colony of New York, who were the rivals of the French in the Western fur trade.

³ The pestilence was doubtless smallpox, which was very fatal among the Indians. For Lake Nipissing and the tribe of that name, see p. 15, note 4, *ante*.

⁴ The stream now known as the Bois Brulé, or simply the Brulé, in Douglas County, Wisconsin.

⁵ The portage is to Upper Lake St. Croix. See description of this portage in recent times, in *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, XX. 405, 406, notes 32 and 34.

⁶ For Father Louis Hennepin, see p. 287, note 3, *ante*. His companions were Antoine du Gay Auguel, known from his birthplace as "le Picard"; and Michel Accault, a native of Poitiers, for whom see p. 290, note 1, *ante*.

been seized and taken away as slaves for more than three hundred leagues by the Nadouecioux themselves.

This news surprised me so much that, without hesitating, I left two Frenchmen with these above mentioned eight lodges of savages, together with the goods which I had for making presents, and took one of the said savages, to whom I gave a present in order that he should conduct me with my interpreter and two Frenchmen to the place where the said Reverend Father Louis was, and as it was eighty good leagues I went in my canoe two days and two nights, and the next day at ten o'clock in the morning I met him with about 1000 or 1100 souls. The want of respect that was being shown to the said Reverend Father provoked me, and I let them know it, telling them that he was my brother, and I put him in my canoe to go with me into the villages of the said Nadouecioux, to which I took him. There, a week after having arrived, I caused a council to be held, setting forth the ill-treatment which they had bestowed both upon the said Reverend Father and upon the other two Frenchmen who were with him, seizing them and leading them away as slaves, and even taking the priestly robes of the said Reverend Father.¹ I caused two calumets (which they had danced to us) to be given back to them in recognition of the insult they had done us, these being the things most esteemed among them for pacifying affairs, saying to them that I took no calumets from people who, after having seen me, having received my peace-gifts, and having been constantly for a year with Frenchmen, kidnapped them when they were coming to see them.

Each one sought to excuse himself in the council, but their excuse did not prevent me from saying to the Reverend Father Louis that he must come with me toward the Outagamys,² which he did, I informing him that it would be

¹ The vanity of Hennepin did not allow him to admit that he was a captive and a slave, the cruel sport of the Indians. He represented that he accompanied Duluth because of the latter's pleasure in his society, and his desire for his companionship. See Hennepin, *New Discovery* (ed. Thwaites, Chicago, 1903), pp. 293-305.

² The Fox Indians, dwelling at this time on the river of their name. See p. 76, note 2, and p. 81, note 1, *ante*.

striking a blow at the French nation in a new exploration, to suffer insult of this sort without showing resentment of it,¹ though my plan had been to penetrate then to the sea of the west-northwest coast, which is believed to be the Vermillion Sea, whence the savages who had gone to war in that direction gave salt to three Frenchmen whom I had sent to explore and who brought me some of the said salt, having reported to me that the savages had told them that it was only twenty days' journey from where they were to the discovery of the great lake whose water is not good to drink.² This is what makes me believe that it would not be at all difficult to find it, if one were willing to give permission to go there. Nevertheless I preferred to retrace my steps, letting them know of the just indignation I had against them, rather than remain after the violence they had done to the said Reverend Father and to the two Frenchmen who were with him, whom I put in my canoes, and brought them to the Michelimakinak mission of the reverend Jesuit fathers,³ where wintering together, I learned that, far from being approved in what I had done, using up my goods and risking my life every day, I was treated as the chief of a party, although I have never had more than eight men with me.⁴ It was not necessary to say more, to compel me, on the 29th of March of the year 1681, to set out over the ice with the said Reverend Father and the two other Frenchmen, causing my canoe and our provisions to be dragged along, to come the sooner to our settlements and to make known the correctness of my conduct, never having been disposed to depart from the obedience which is due to the orders of the King.

Accordingly, three months before the arrival of the amnesty which his Majesty has been pleased to accord to his subjects who had disobeyed his orders, I reached our settle-

¹ Duluth recognized the necessity of rendering the lives of Frenchmen secure among such a horde of savages. See his punishment of Indian murderers related in *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, XVI. 114-125.

² This is by some historians considered a probable reference to Great Salt Lake.

³ For the foundation of this mission, see p. 229, note 1, *ante*.

⁴ See La Salle's complaints of Duluth in *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, XVI. 107-110. It should be remembered, in this connection, that La Salle could brook no rivals.

ments without Monsieur the Intendant's¹ having been willing to hear what request I had to present.

As to the manner in which I lived during my journey, it would be superfluous to enlarge upon this subject, and to weary your Excellency by a long discourse, being persuaded that thirteen original letters from the Reverend [Father] Nouvel, superior of the missions to the Outaouas,² the Reverend Father Enjalran, missionary of St. Francis of Borgia,³ the Reverend Father Bailloquet, missionary of Ste. Marie du Sault,⁴ and the Reverend Father Pierson, missionary to the Hurons at St. Ignace,⁵ all Jesuits, will for the rest suffice to inform your Excellency faithfully and amply.

¹ Duluth is thought to have been acting for the governor, Count de Frontenac, who was in opposition to the intendant, Jacques de Muelles. The former's protection was probably the source of the latter's enmity.

² Henri Nouvel, born in 1624, entered the Jesuit order in 1648 and was sent to Canada in 1662. He served in lower Canada for seven years, and in 1669 was sent to the Ottawa mission. He was superior for the years 1672-1680 (with an interregnum in 1678-1679), and again from 1688 to 1695. The date of his death is uncertain.

³ Jean Enjalran, born in 1639, came to Canada in 1676, and the following year was sent to the Ottawa mission, where he served for many years. From 1681 to 1688 he was superior of the mission; in 1687, having accompanied as chaplain Denonville's Iroquois expedition, he was seriously wounded. After a visit to France, he returned to the Mackinac mission, where he was in service as late as 1706. He died, probably in France, in 1718. The mission to the Algonquian tribes at Mackinac was known as St. Francis Borgia.

⁴ Pierre Bailloquet came to Canada in 1647; he was assigned to the Ottawa mission in 1673, and spent five years among the Indians of the Manitoulin Islands. Afterward he was stationed at Sault Ste. Marie and at Mackinac, and died in the Ottawa country June 7, 1692.

⁵ Philippe Pierson was a native of Flanders, who came to Canada in 1666. In 1673 he went to the St. Ignace mission at Mackinac, where he resided ten years. The final years of his ministry were spent among the Sioux, whence he returned to die at Quebec in 1688.