

The court of France was very anxious to have it mapped out, but was unwilling or unable to advance the necessary funds, and so the discovery was left private enterprise.

The man who did most in that direction was undoubtedly de la Vérendrye, who ought to be rated as one of Canada's most notable heroes; a staple of which it has a plentiful supply. He is the discoverer of the great Northwest, which is developing so wonderfully in our days. His name was Pierre Gaultier de Varenne, and when he started out on his travels he was commandant at Nepigon, north of Lake Superior. He had seen service in two American campaigns, one in New England, another in Newfoundland, and afterwards fought in Flanders. He won the grade of lieutenant at Malplaquet, thanks to the nine wounds that left him for dead on the field. At the end of the war he returned to America, but without his rank and without a penny in his purse. Appointed to a little trading post near Three Rivers, he supported himself as best he could and married a wife. Governor Beauharnois, who was his friend to the last, made him Commandant at Fort La Tourette, near Lake Nepigon; "at the end of the world."

Though poor and with no future before him, he was dreaming of eclipsing Marquette, Joliet, de la Salle and the others in discovering new territories. At Mackinac he met Father de Gonnor, who had been out among the Sioux, and whose brain was seething with similar projects. Together they dreamed and schemed about the Far West, and when de la Vérendrye drew up his plan, de Gonnor journeyed down to Quebec to plead for him, and later on crossed the sea to France for the same purpose. Subsequently, de la Vérendrye showed Beauharnois a map made for him by a savage, which must have been a marvel of elementary cartography. Everything was ready but the money, and that could not be extracted from the French court, so de la Vérendrye was given a post at Winnepigon with permission to sell furs to see if he could get rich enough by that means.

At last, on May 19, 1731, he started for Mackinac with fifty men. With him was Father Mesaiger, whose name, Gárneau, Margry, and B. Sulte, spell Messenger — the autograph signature is very clear. They reached the Grand Portage of Lake Superior,