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*With kind regards,  
L. J. Burpee*

## The Lake of the Woods Tragedy

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II.—*The Lake of the Woods Tragedy.*

By LAWRENCE J. BURPEE.

(Communicated by W. Wilfred Campbell, and read May 19, 1903.)

All students of early Canadian history are of course familiar with the general outlines of that most tragic incident in the search for the Western Sea—the murder by the Sioux of the eldest son<sup>1</sup> of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, the Sieur de Lavérendrye, with the Jesuit missionary Aulneau, or Auneau,<sup>2</sup> and a score of *voyageurs*, on an island in the Lake of the Woods. None of the English histories of French Canada, however, contain more than a passing reference to the affair, and the French-Canadian historians are not much more explicit, with the exception of Benjamin Sulte. It has, therefore, seemed worth while to bring together such evidence as is now available,—the original documents, whether in manuscript or print,—so that we may have before us, in convenient form, the fullest possible details of the occurrence.

The Sioux having done their work with characteristic thoroughness, no survivor remained of Lavérendrye's party to carry an authentic account of the matter to the nearest post; and the Indians themselves showed a perhaps natural reluctance to enter into details. Consequently, the evidence we have is more or less indirect and circumstantial.

What may be considered the official account is contained in a letter from the governor, Beauharnois, to the French Colonial Minister, dated 14th October, 1736.<sup>3</sup> This is based on the elder Lavérendrye's report, and upon a statement made by one Bourassa,<sup>4</sup> a *voyageur*, who had met the same party of Sioux on the day of the massacre.

<sup>1</sup> The Sieur Véndrye had four sons. The eldest, here referred to, was Jean-Baptiste, born at Sorel, in 1713. He had taken an active part, under his father's directions, in the search for the Western Sea.

<sup>2</sup> For full particulars in regard to Father Aulneau, see *The Aulneau Collection*, 1734-1745, edited by Rev. Arthur E. Jones, S.J., and published by St. Mary's College, Montreal, 1893. As to the spelling of the name, Parkman and most of the other historians spell it Anneau. Mr. Benjamin Sulte says Auneau is the preferable spelling, but that Aulneau is almost equally good. There does not appear to be any sufficient authority for spelling it Anneau.

<sup>3</sup> Lettre de Monsieur de Beauharnois, à Québec, le 14 octobre 1736. See *Canadian Archives: Postes des Pays de l'Ouest, 1679-1759*. (Vol. 16), F. 126, pp. 335-339.

<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to place this man. He is never referred to, except as one Bourassa. Mr. Sulte is of opinion that he was probably a grandson of the first Bourassa, who came to Canada from France in 1684. See Tanguay.

Beauharnois reports Lavérendrye's arrival at Fort St. Charles,<sup>1</sup> after an enforced wintering at Kamanistiquoya; the illness of Lavérendrye's nephew, La Jemeraye; and Lavérendrye's suggestion that a new post should be established to the south of Lac des Prairies, which was thought to be a very advantageous situation for the fur trade; and then he goes on to say:—

"He (Lavérendrye) wrote me from the same place (Fort St. Charles) on the 8th of the same month (June, 1736), and he informs me that the canoes had just arrived from Kamanistiquoya, and that they had not met the party which had left on the 5th for Missilimakinac, led by his eldest son, and amongst whom were Father Auneau and twenty-two hired men. He . . . conveys to me his fear that this party was exterminated by the Sioux of the Prairie.

"I have since learned, monseigneur, that the party had been totally destroyed by these Indians, and here are the particulars of the occurrence. You must remember, monseigneur, that during the year 1734, Sieur de la Veranderie gave me a memorandum to be sent to you, which memorandum you approved last year, and in which he speaks to the Indians in the following terms:—"I am not opposed to your waging war against the Maskoutins Poïanes, your enemies." In the same memorandum it is stated that he gave them his son to lead them."

Lavérendrye's son did accompany the Indians, in their expedition against the Maskoutins Poïanes, but only for a short distance, when he returned to the fort. The Maskoutins Poïanes, however, discovered his trail, and attributed to him the leadership of the hostile party. This, in the opinion of Beauharnois, was the immediate cause of the subsequent massacre.

"After having carefully read," continues the Governor, "the memorandum of the Sieur de la Veranderie, I enquired from some old *voyageurs* who the Maskoutins Poïanes were. They told me that they were the Sioux of the Prairie. I immediately understood the misfortune which had taken place, and gave him (Veranderie) strict instructions not to send in the future any more French to war against

<sup>1</sup> In a letter from Father Auneau to Father Boivin (*Auneau Collection*, p. 72), he gives this description of Fort St. Charles:

"It is merely an enclosure made with four rows of posts, from twelve to fifteen feet in height, in the form of an oblong square, within which are a few rough cabins constructed of logs and clay and covered with bark."

Father Jones, who edits these letters, adds the following footnote:—

"The probable site of Fort St. Charles was a few miles up the bay now known as "North-West Angle Inlet." At the entrance of this bay, which begins at American Point, lies Gucketé Island. The latitude of the fort would be about 49° 6', and its longitude west of Greenwich 95° 4', or perhaps a few minutes further west."

this nation, nor to incite any Indians of his post to take part; that his orders were to maintain the Indians in peace, union and tranquility. . .

"I made enquiries with regard to what took place, and learned that the Indians at the post of the *Sieur de la Veranderie* had fired upon the so-called *Maskoutins Poïanes*, who had demanded: "Who fired at us?" They answered: "The French." They immediately resolved to be revenged, and had recourse to all the usual means to carry out their intentions, notwithstanding the fact that the *Sieur de la Veranderie* had not been concerne<sup>d</sup> in the affair. This act produced in fact the same effect as if he had been there himself.

"At the beginning of the month of June last (1736), a party of *Sioux* of the Prairies, to the number of one hundred and thirty men, found the canoe of *Father Auneau*, in which was one *Bourassa*. They captured all the French, and tied the leader (*Bourassa*) to a stake to burn him. Fortunately for him he had a slave belonging to this nation, whom he had taken from the *Monsonés*. She said to her people: 'My kinsmen, what are you about to do! I owe my life to this Frenchman. He did nothing else but good to me. If you desire to be avenged for the attack which was made upon you, all you have to do is, to go a little further on and you will find twenty-four Frenchmen, amongst whom is the son of the chief who killed your people.' They released *Bourassa* and his men, and went and totally exterminated the other party.

"This is, monseigneur, an unfortunate affair, which may perhaps be the cause of the abandonment of all the posts in this (western) country."

This letter of *Beauharnois*', dated 14th October, 1736, was, as already stated, based partly upon a report from the elder *Lavérendrye*. Unfortunately, however, the report (mentioned in *Beauharnois*' letter as of date the 8th June, 1736), is not in the Archives at Ottawa, nor, indeed, does it appear to be extant elsewhere. Although I have made a most minute search through the calendars of French Colonial documents published in the Canadian Archives Reports, no reference can be found to it there. *Parkman*, in a footnote on page 33 of *A Half Century of Conflict*, Vol. II., gives the following original documents as bearing on the Lake of the Woods incident:— "*Beauharnois au Ministre*, 14 Octobre, 1736; *Relation du Massacre au Lac des Bois, en Juin, 1736*; *Journal de la Vêrandrye, joint à la lettre de M. de Beauharnois du Octobre, 1737.*" He, however, makes no mention of *Lavérendrye*'s letter to *Beauharnois* of 8th June, 1736, which would appear to have conveyed the first intimation of the massacre, or rather *Lavérendrye*'s fear that such a massacre must have taken place, for as yet he had no direct proof of it. It is most

improbable that, if the letter of the 8th June was among the documents in the Colonial or other Archives at Paris, it would have escaped the notice of Parkman, and also of the late Mr. Marmette and of Mr. Richard, who, on behalf of the Canadian Archives, made exhaustive searches through the Colonial papers in the various departments of the French Government for anything that might have a bearing, direct or indirect, upon the history of New France.

The other document mentioned as forming the basis of Beauharnois' report—the Relation of Bourassa—is, however, in the Canadian Archives. It reads as follows:—<sup>1</sup>

"A *voyageur*, Bourassa by name, relates that on June 3rd, 1736, having set out the fifth (of the band) from Fort St. Charles, at the Lake of the Woods, for Michilimakinac, met the following morning, just as he was about to push off from shore, thirty canoes manned by ninety or a hundred warriors, who surrounded and disarmed him and his companions, and plundered their stores. When they had learnt from him that under the curtain<sup>2</sup> of Monsieur de la Vêranderie's Fort there were five or six wigwams of Cristinaux, against whom they had set out on the warpath, they released him, and departed with the intention of capturing the encampment. They told Bourassa, however, to wait for them, and at their return they would restore his arms. This he did not think advisable to do; on the contrary, he hurried to Michilimakinac, while the Sioux, on their side, pushed on to Fort St. Charles, where they failed to find the five wigwams of Cristinaux who had decamped, so they retraced their steps.

"Meanwhile, twenty *voyageurs*, who had lately arrived from Lake Alepimigon, were on their way to Michilimakinac. At a day's journey from there (Lake Alepimigon)<sup>3</sup> they were met by that same band of Sioux, who massacred them all.

"Among the slain were the young Sieur de la Vêranderie and Father Auneau, the missionary.

<sup>1</sup> This document is entitled "Affaire du meurtre de vingt-un voyageurs arrive au Lac des Bois, au mois de juin 1736." A copy is among the MSS. in the Canadian Archives: Nouvelle France, Vol. 15. Postes des Pays de l'Ouest, 1679-1759, pp. 340-343.

<sup>2</sup> The *curtain* is the line of enclosure between two bastions.

<sup>3</sup> The writer of this report was evidently somewhat at sea as to his geography. A reference to the accompanying map will show that Lake Alepimigon (the modern Lake Nepigon) is north of Lake Superior, while the Lake of the Woods is a considerable distance to the westward—certainly a number of days' journey as men travelled in those days. In any case, the *voyageurs* were travelling east, and therefore could not possibly have come from Lake Alepimigon to the Lake of the Woods. As a matter of fact, they had come from Fort St. Charles, on the western side of the Lake of the Woods.

"Their bodies were discovered and identified by a party of Frenchmen who passed by the same place a few days later.<sup>1</sup> Their heads had been placed on robes of beaver skin, and most of them with the scalp missing. The missionary was kneeling on one knee, an arrow in his side, a gaping wound in the breast, his left hand resting on the ground and his right hand raised. The *Sieur de la Véranderie* was stretched on the ground, face downward, his back all hacked with a knife; there was a large opening in his loins, and his headless trunk was decked out with garters and bracelets of porcupine quills.

"It will be only this year that we shall be in possession of the other particulars of this unfortunate affair.

"Some are of opinion that the Indians wished to wreak their vengeance more particularly on young *La Véranderie*, the son, who two years before had joined a war party of *Christinaux* against the *Sioux*. It would appear that in the council he had been proclaimed leader. Be that as it may, the young man had desisted and had not taken part in the hostilities.

"According to *Bourassa*, the bulk of the attacking party was composed of the *Prairie Sioux*, of some *Sioux of the Lakes* and of *Monsieur de la Ronde's* post. The latter appeared well disposed towards the French; perhaps they were overruled in the affair of the *Sieur de la Véranderie's* murder. If the *Sioux of the Lakes* conspired with the *Sioux of the Prairies* to shoot the French, then there is much to be feared for the *Sieur St. Pierre*, who is commandant at the post of the *Sioux*.<sup>2</sup> The *Sioux* nations are the fiercest of all the native tribes. They have been from time immemorial at war with the *Cristinaux* and the *Assiniboels*. These latter were originally from the same stock; they speak very nearly the same language, and yet they are irreconcilable enemies. A circumstance which the same *Bourassa* reports is, that the *Sioux* complained to him that the French supplied the *Cristinaux* with arms and ammunition. The *Cristinaux* might as well complain of the French furnishing the *Sioux* with ammunition.

"The *Sieur de la Véranderie* writes that, grief-stricken at the loss of his son, he intends placing himself at the head of the *Cristinaux* and *Assiniboels*, and of marching against the *Sioux* (an extreme measure and not to be recommended). He would do better to agree to give up the post of the *Western Sea*, or have another officer

<sup>1</sup> *Pierre Margry*, in an article in the *Moniteur* (Paris, 1852), says that the discovery of the murdered man was made by five Canadian *voyageurs*, several days after the event.

<sup>2</sup> *Fort Beauharnois*, situated on *Lake Pepin*, about forty miles south-east of the present city of *St. Paul*.

appointed to relieve the *Sieur de la Véranderie*, who could undertake the task of conciliating all the tribes.<sup>1</sup>

Under date of the 14th October, 1737, Beauharnois again writes the Colonial Minister,<sup>2</sup> forwarding an extract from the Journal of the *Sieur de la Véranderie*, containing a fuller account of the circumstances which led up to and surrounded the Lake of the Woods tragedy. The extract is as follows:—

“During the month of June, 1736, this officer held a meeting at Fort St. Charles, Lake of the Woods, as to the mode of obtaining provisions and ammunition, and it was resolved unanimously to send three canoes to Kamanistigouïa and thence to Missilimakinac. To this end *Sieur de la Véranderie* distributed powder and bullets to those who were to take part in this journey, and Father Auneau, Jesuit, along with the eldest son of this officer, left on the expedition.

“The officer in question received during the same month of June, a letter from *Sieur Bourassa*, informing him that having been met by the Sioux they pillaged all that he possessed, without, however, causing him any personal injury, and upon his asking these Indians why they were taking him in custody, being good friends and brethren, they answered that it was the custom of warriors not to recognize anyone on their path.

“The party which had gone to Kamanistigouïa and Missilimakinac not returning when due, *Sieur de la Véranderie* sent *Sieur Gras*<sup>3</sup> with a canoe and eight men commanded by a sergeant, to go and meet the expedition, but the sergeant having returned on the same day, reported that those forming part of the expedition had been massacred; that the great majority of the bodies had been found decapitated, and lying in a circle one next to the other, the heads being wrapped in beaver skins. Amongst the dead were found Father Auneau and the eldest son of *Monsieur de la Véranderie*. An account of this adventure was given last year, though at that time it had not, however, been confirmed.

“During the month of August following, two *Monsonis* Indians having gone around the Lake of the Woods, found two canoes belonging to this party, with more than twenty Sioux canoes, fastened together two by two, and in which there was a great quantity of blood. The two Indians, moreover, found human limbs which had been buried

<sup>1</sup> This translation is taken from *The Auneau Collection*.

<sup>2</sup> *Canadian Archives MSS.* Nouvelle France—Postes des Pays de l'Ouest. 1679-1759 (F. 126), pp. 349-367.

<sup>3</sup> The *Sieur Gras* (or *Legras*) mentioned here would appear to have been one of the sons of *Jean de Gras* (b. 1656), a merchant, of Montreal. This is the only family of the name mentioned by *Abbé Tanguay* in his *Dictionnaire Généalogique*. Mr. Benjamin Sulte is of the same opinion. See *Tanguay*, p. 372.

in the sand, and this left no doubt that the Sioux had also lost some of their number.

"The news of this adventure having got abroad, *Sieur de la Véranderie* was visited by delegates from the *Cris* and *Monsonis*, who informed him that during the following autumn the chiefs of their nations would come to him in order that, with him at their head, the blood of his son and that of the other French that the Sioux had killed, might be avenged; to which *Monsieur de la Véranderie* replied, thanking them and telling them that it would be necessary to await the orders of their father as to what course should be followed, and that after these had been received, he would inform them of it.

"A few days afterwards the *Cris* and *Assiniboels* assembled at *Fort Maurepas*, and sent twelve of their number to *Sieur de la Véranderie*, to ascertain if it was his intention to go and avenge the death of the French, and especially of his own son, whom their nation had adopted as their chief; that they were still mourning his death: that a portion of their warriors would proceed to the point below the fort which is their common meeting place; and that they had the hope of seeing him himself or one of his children at their head to march against the Sioux, or that at least he would send them a canoe with powder, bullets and tobacco.

"*Sieur de la Véranderie* having held counsel with the great chiefs of the *Monsonis* and *Cris*, they commenced by bewailing the death (of the French), and the Indian chiefs proposed to *Sieur de la Véranderie* to send expeditions against the Sioux, but upon considering that this would interfere with the autumn hunting, and also with the harvesting of the wild oats, and upon the representations of *Sieur de la Véranderie*, that owing to the limited number of canoes provisions were scarce, it was decided not to undertake the expedition. But this officer proposed at the same time to the chiefs of the two nations, to send word to the *Monsonis* of *Lake Tekamamiouen* to the effect that after having met together, they should go every year to meet the convoy of the French and escort it with fifty men, which they would furnish, in order that they might not be exposed to the insults of the Sioux. This was unanimously accepted and was carried out during the autumn of last year.

"*Monsieur de la Véranderie*, as a mark of gratitude, gave to the chiefs of these two tribes a collar to be kept by them, the one given to the *Monsonis*, at *Fort St. Pierre*, and the one given to the *Cris*, at *Fort St. Charles, Lake of the Woods*.

"This officer, moreover, promised to the Indians some tobacco, powder and also bullets, which would be delivered to them in the spring and autumn of each year.



"Towards the end of the month of September following, Sieur de la Véranderie received two delegates coming from the Cris and Assiniboels, who asked him on the part of their nations, to send canoes to their tribes in order to supply their needs. This officer granted to the delegates a canoe manned by six men and under the command of one of his children, who was escorted by the Indians as far as Fort Maurepas, and he gave his son instructions for his guidance that he might acquire knowledge during his voyage.

"One of the principal things which he recommended to him was to explore the Ouachipouannes, otherwise called the Koiatheattes, a white and civilized people who cultivate the land and live in forts and houses, and who, according to the knowledge of the Indians, lived at a distance of not more than one hundred and fifty leagues from Fort Maurepas; to induce these people to send to Fort Maurepas delegates of their nation, in order to form an alliance with the French; and to tell them that, when one of their number had come the winter before, the commandant had only been informed of the fact after his departure, which had been for him a cause of sorrow as well as for the other French.

"Sieur de la Véranderie added to these instructions to notify the Assiniboels and Cris to be at their fort during the month of January following, and that he would explain to them there the instructions of the Great Chief of all the French.

"During the month of October following, a great number of Indians, Cris, Monsonis and Assiniboels, came to Monsieur de la Véranderie, and the chief of the Cris, who was the spokesman of these nations, after having shown how their tribes were sensible of the accident that had occurred to the French, proposed to him again to come at their head to avenge the dead. They represented that they were very sorry that their death had retarded the establishment of a fort which they had promised to them at the far end of Lake Ouinipigon, where they could have found the subsistence of their families.

"The chief asked, lastly, that he would leave with them to spend the winter at Fort Maurepas one of his children, and to allow them to adopt his son the Chevalier as their chief, in the place of his brother whom they had lost." . . .

In the Collection Moreau St. Mery, of the French Colonial Archives, there is a memoir of Lavérendrye, addressed to M. De Beauharnois, and dated at Fort St. Charles, in 1737, which seems to cover generally the same ground and the same period of time as the extract from Lavérendrye's journal forwarded to Paris by Beauharnois, under date of the 14th October, 1737, quoted above. At the same

time, the details are in many particulars so widely different, that it is almost impossible to make the two accounts fit into each other. Possibly if we had a full transcript of the Moreau St. Mery manuscript the difficulty might be lessened, but unfortunately a copy of this document has not yet been received in the Canadian Archives (in the original it covers 38 pages of *Ms.*), and all that we have to go on is a synopsis of the document in the Archives Calendar which is given here for purposes of comparison with the preceding document:—

“Memoir of de la Véranderie to M. de Beauharnois,<sup>1</sup> to be sent to the court. Has already sent an account of what occurred from the date of his departure from Montreal, in June, 1735, up to 2nd June, 1736, the date of Sieur Bourassa's departure. Has since continued to keep up his journal with the same exactitude. His two sons arrived that same day from Fort Maurepas, telling him the news of the death of his nephew De la Jemmeraye, which happened on 10th May, at La Fourche des Roseaux, where they erected a cross. Being in want of merchandise and powder, he sent his eldest son with Père Auneau to Kaministiquia to meet the canoes from Michilimakinak. Letter from Bourassa pillaged by the Sioux. 17th June, arrival of Sieur Legras<sup>2</sup> with two canoe loads of goods. 20th June, arrival of 30 Cristinaux with furs, and news of the massacre of 21 men at a point seven leagues from the fort. 29th July, arrival of four Frenchmen. August 4th, arrival of four Crees, promising to help to avenge his son. Departure of his other son for Fort Maurepas, with Indians. September 17th, sent six men to disinter the bodies of Père Auneau and of his own son, which he caused to be buried in his chapel, with the heads of the other Frenchmen. October 15th, arrival of a large number of Indians. Their statements: “There are 800 Indians at la Pointe du Bois fort. They want to avenge his son and the other Frenchmen, and to have his second son for their chief.” His answer: Exhorts them not to go to war then. February 8th, 1737, leaves for Fort Maurepas, with his two children, ten Frenchmen and many Indians. February 25th, arrival at Fort Maurepas. Decided to remove Fort Maurepas to the great Forks of Rivière Rouge, where the Assiniboels were awaiting him. Speaks of another great lake to the west, which is called the brother of Lake Quinipigon, where there is an abundance of game. Sends a map of the country. General description of the country. March 11th, return to Fort St. Charles. June 3rd, departure for Montreal with 14 canoes laden with furs. June 25th, arrival at

<sup>1</sup> Collection Moreau St. Mery, 1732-1740, Vol. 10, F. 12, Fol. 248.

<sup>2</sup> See previous footnote in regard to Sieur Gras. Gras and Legras are evidently the same.

Kaministiquia. July 22nd, arrival at Michilimakinak. August 3rd, departure for Montreal."

In *The Aulneau Collection* are a number of letters bearing upon the Lake of the Woods massacre. They have particular reference to the death of Father Auneau, or Aulneau as it is always here spelled.

The first of these letters is from Father Nicholas de Gonnor<sup>1</sup> to a correspondent in France.<sup>2</sup> After some personal remarks he says:—

"Another reason for writing you is, to beg you to break as gently as possible to Father Aulneau's mother, the news of the death of her dear son, who, we have learnt but lately, was massacred last May by a party of wandering Indians, called the Sioux of the Prairies, while he was journeying from his own to another mission, with the intention of going to confession and of seeking advice on troubles to which his extreme delicacy of conscience had given rise. He is universally regretted by both the members of the Society and by seculars, for he was universally esteemed. . . .

"He was surprised with twenty other Frenchmen, but it is not known how they were put to death. No premonitory sign of distrust on the part of the Indians was noticed, nor were the victims tortured, as they are wont to be when prisoners are taken in battle. It is conjectured that they were surprised while asleep, and received their death blow unawares. The heads of all were then severed from the bodies.

"It is said, however, that from the position in which the Father's body was found, he must have been on his knees when he was decapitated, and one of the party who found him took possession of his *calotte*, remarking that poor as he was, he would not part with it for a thousand crowns." . . .

In 1739, Father du Jaunay, writing from Michilimakinac to Madame Aulneau, adds the following particulars:—<sup>4</sup>

"Concerning the circumstances accompanying the death of your dear son, here is what I have learnt from hearsay, and some of my sources of information seem trustworthy.

<sup>1</sup> Father Nicolas de Gonnor, according to a footnote at page 25 of *The Aulneau Collection*, belonged originally to the Province of Aquitaine. He was born November 19, 1691, and entered the Society of Jesus, September 11th, 1710. He came to Canada in 1725. In 1727 he was sent to the Sioux mission, and afterwards he was stationed some time at Sault St. Louis. In 1749 he had returned to Quebec; thence he was once more sent to the Sioux, where he was superior in 1752. He remained there until 1755, when he was transferred to Montreal, and the following year to Quebec, where he died, December 16, 1759. His Indian name was *Sarenhès*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Aulneau Collection*, pp. 87-89.

<sup>3</sup> The skull-cap sometimes worn by clergy of the Church of Rome.

<sup>4</sup> *Aulneau Collection*, p. 110-111.

"In the first place, the majority of the Indians implicated were averse to putting him to death. In the second place, it was through sheer bravado that a crazy-brained Indian set at naught the consequences which held the others in awe.

"A third particular I have gathered is, that scarcely had the deed been perpetrated, than a deafening clap of thunder struck terror into the whole band. They fled from the spot, believing that Heaven was incensed at what they had done.

"Finally, that the portable chapel and, namely, the chalice, which was plundered, had fallen into the hands of a widowed squaw who had several grown-up sons, the pride and wealth of the tribe. In a remarkably short lapse of time, all, or nearly all of them perished in her sight. This she ascribed to the chalice, which her sons had given her; so she rid herself of it by throwing it into the river.

"This," concludes Father du Jaunay, "is all I have been able to gather from the various accounts of the Indians. I met here with a native, who claimed to be a Sioux and to have been present at the massacre; but on being warned that he was an imposter, I did not think it proper to question him, trusting to time to throw more light on the occurrence."

In the Archives of the Gesù at Rome is preserved the following letter, from Father Lafitau to the Father General at Rome. The letter is dated at Paris, April 4th, 1738, and the original is in Latin:—<sup>1</sup>

"As to what relates to Father Aulneau, nothing more has been learnt than what has already been written. He had followed an officer whom the Governor of New France had commissioned to discover the way across the continent to the Western Ocean, as yet unknown from this side. He had reached the sources of the Mississippi and had penetrated further west. But, according to the custom of adventurers of that class, who are alive to their own interests which they consult rather than the common weal, the party had, in barter, sold powder and other munitions of war to the tribes they met with.

"Some of the Indians, incensed at this species of traffic at which their enemies gained an advantage, took occasion of an expedition this officer had planned and had entrusted to his own son as leader, with Father Aulneau—who had a presentiment of his death, as his letters attest—to accompany him.

"In fact, the savage band stole upon them unawares, and slaughtered them all. Father Aulneau received two thrusts of a knife, and was decapitated."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Aulneau Collection*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>2</sup> Father F. Nau, writing in 1738 to Father Aulneau's mother, said: "A party of Frenchmen had captured, last autumn, the murderer of our dear

About thirty or forty years ago, Father Felix Martin, S.J., sought to glean some additional particulars of the massacre, and the result of his researches is summed up in the following note—found among his papers after his death:—<sup>1</sup>

"We are not in possession of the details relating to Father Aulneau's family, education and vocation to the religious life.

"He came to Canada in 1730, and six years subsequent to his arrival, he was chosen to accompany an important expedition of discovery westward, undertaken by Monsieur de la Véranderie. The latter commanded a party of twenty determined men, one of his own sons being among the number.

"The explorers had reached the Lake of the Woods, and had landed on an island for their morning meal. Their camping fires, however, betrayed their presence to a band of Sioux warriors who were prowling about in the neighbourhood.

"These Indians, notorious for their cruelty and for the implacable war they waged on all those who gave them umbrage, resolved to attack the French. They stealthily landed on the island without attracting notice, and rushed upon the explorers who were off their guard. Many were pierced with arrows or were felled with the tomahawk. Some sought safety in flight, only to perish in the waves. Father Aulneau, wounded by an arrow, fell upon his knees, when an Indian coming up behind him dealt him the death blow with his tomahawk.

"All the baggage was pillaged, but the Indians dared not touch the body of the missionary. Three weeks after the occurrence, a party of Indians of the Sault (*Sauteux*), passing by the spot, found his body un mutilated. Not being able to dig a grave for it, as the island was all rock, they raised over the body a cairn one or two *metres* in height.

"Mr. Belcourt,<sup>2</sup> a missionary stationed at Pembino, in 1843, visited the place and saw the tumulus. He gathered on the very spot the tradition of the massacre from the lips of an Indian, whose father had helped to prepare a sepulchre for the missionary."<sup>3</sup>

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Father Aulneau, and intended to bring him to the French settlements to make him undergo the penalties he so well deserved; but God reserved to Himself the punishment of his crime. . . . Other heathen tribes rescued the Sioux prisoners from the hands of the French and sent them back to their homes."

<sup>1</sup> *The Aulneau Collection*, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. G. A. Belcourt was a well-known missionary in the North-west. He was a relative of the present Member of Parliament for Ottawa, of the same name.

<sup>3</sup> I fear we cannot put much credence in this explanation of Father Martin's. From the very beginning he is inaccurate. Father Aulneau did not come to Canada in 1730. He landed on the 12th August, 1734. Father

A translation of Mr. Belcourt's narrative will be found in the Minnesota Historical Collections. It is as follows:—

"A tradition of the savages near the Lake of the Woods reports that the French travellers in passing were invariably accompanied by a missionary; and that one of them was killed on this same lake, and his companions all either killed or drowned. The following is the manner in which they relate this occurrence: Early one morning, a French canoe manned with eight men left a trading house which the French had built about the middle of the Lake of the Woods, and stopped upon an island near to the last pass, to enter the river of Rainy Lake. The atmosphere was so still that the wind could hardly be felt. Having built a fire to take their repast, the smoke rose up and was perceived by a party of Sioux warriors who were approaching the same island by a branch of the river of Rainy Lake called *the Road of War*. These having landed on the opposite side of the isle unperceived by the French, fell upon them unawares and massacred the missionary and some of his companions; the others throwing themselves into the water in order to cross over to some other islands were drowned. This event took place, according to the report of the savages, about the year 1750."<sup>1</sup>

In a long memoir, written at Quebec, and dated 31st October 1744,<sup>2</sup> Lavérendrye once more refers to the Lake of the Woods tragedy, and this is the last bit of evidence which I have been able to gather:—

"I had many people in the fort and no provisions, and this determined me to send at once three canoes to bring us supplies and merchandise. The Reverend Father decided, on the spot, to go to Missilimakinak. He asked for my eldest son, as he hoped that his journey would be quick. It was not possible for me to oppose him. His resolution was absolutely taken. They embarked the 8th June, and were all massacred by the Sioux, seven leagues from the fort, by the

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Martin confuses Vêrandrye's general expedition to the west with the particular journey on which the tragedy occurred at the Lake of the Woods. This particular journey was not in any sense exploratory. It was simply an expedition to Kamanistigoïa and Missilimakinac for supplies. It was not commanded by Vêrandrye the elder, who did not accompany it at all. The graphic account of the massacre which follows would be extremely valuable and interesting if it were based upon a more substantial foundation. The remaining particulars are more probably correct.

<sup>1</sup> "Department of Hudson's Bay," by Rev. G. A. Belcourt. Minnesota Historical Collections, Vol. II., 1850-1856, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> "Mémoire du Sieur de la Verendrye au sujet des Etablissements pour parvenir à la découverte de la mer de l'ouest, dont il a été chargé par M. le marquis de Beauharnois, Gouverneur général de la Nouvelle-France en 1731." This document is published in Margry's Collection. It is also in the *Canadian Archives*.

worst of all treacheries. I have lost my son, the Reverend Father, and all my Frenchmen, which I shall lament all my life."

An examination of these various accounts will reveal a considerable diversity of opinion as to the circumstances which led up to and attended the massacre, and the causes which induced the Sioux to attack a party of Frenchmen. Much of this disparity may be attributed to the radically different points of view of those whose evidence has been adduced; some of it is explainable by the fact that the various statements were written at widely different times and places. Making due allowance for these circumstances, and weighing carefully the evidence of the various witnesses, the reader will, I think, find it possible to extract from these various documents a fairly complete and accurate account of this most disastrous incident in the search for the Western Sea—the tragedy of the Lake of the Woods.

LAKE OF THE WOODS TRAGEDY

TRANS. R. S. C., SEC. II., 1903

