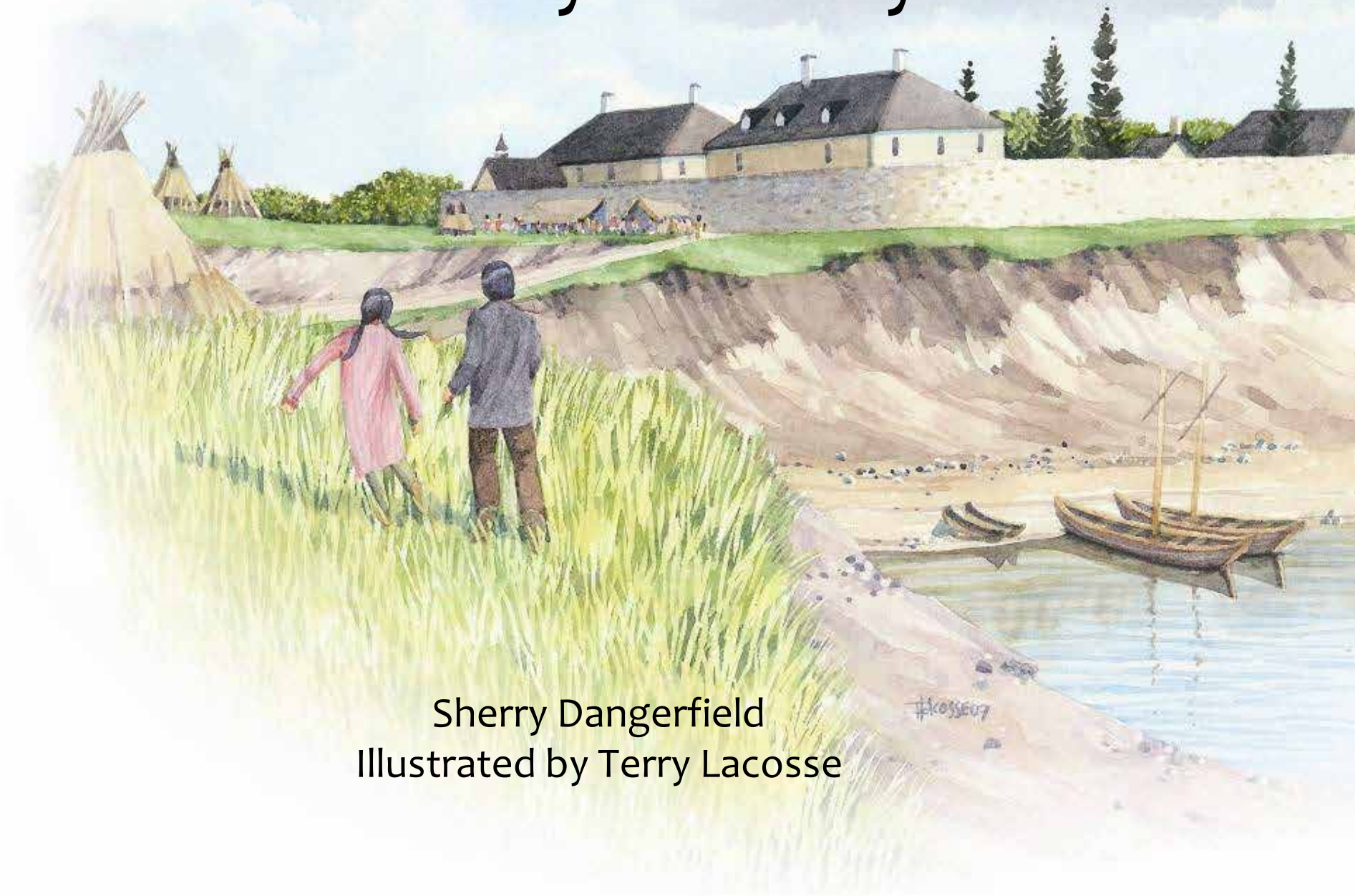


A Family Journey



Sherry Dangerfield
Illustrated by Terry Lacosse

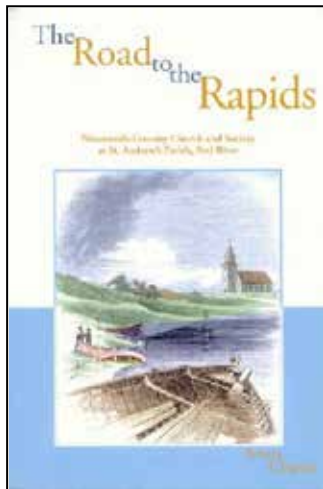
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Introduction

Join the Thomas family as they travel to the Stone Fort. It is 1845, and the fur trade way of life is coming to an end. Great changes are afoot. Church missionaries try to convert the settlement away from the “evils” of the fur trade life, to find salvation in farming, the church, and Victorian ideals. It is a difficult road ahead.

A Family Journey is the story of the Thomas family walking to the Stone Fort, what we call Lower Fort Garry today. The Thomases and their journey, while fiction, are based on historical fact. You meet other people in the story who are historical characters, people who lived on River Road at the time of the journey. This was a time of many changes. The fur trade and its lifestyle were quickly coming to an end. The church, and later the arrival of Ontarian and European settlers, brought a different way of life – one based on Victorian ideals, racial divisions, and agriculture. The economy was changing from fur trading to agriculture, but farms were too small to make a living. During this transition, families had to do a little of everything to survive – hunting, fishing, gathering wild foods, making country provisions, and farming.



If you want to discover more about River Road, we recommend:

- *The Road to the Rapids* by Robert J. Coutts
- *Many Tender Ties* by Sylvia Van Kirk

The following story was developed for interpretive signs on historic River Road. Along a 13-kilometre stretch, there are nine stops (six of which are historic sites) starting at the intersection of route 238 off Highway 9 just north of Winnipeg, and ending at Lower Fort Garry. This quiet road makes a nice family bike ride.

Meet the Thomas Family...

Mamma – Matooskie Thomas

Mamma is English-speaking Métis. Her mother was Omuskego Cree, and her father was a “mixed-blood” home guard for the Hudson’s Bay Company. Matooskie has lived much of her life near fur trade posts in the north. She married James Thomas, in the style of the country, when she was 15. They have had seven children; five departed this life in the influenza epidemic of 1835. Her two remaining children are William and Annie. Matooskie has many skills but is well known for her excellent snowshoes.



Pappa – James Thomas

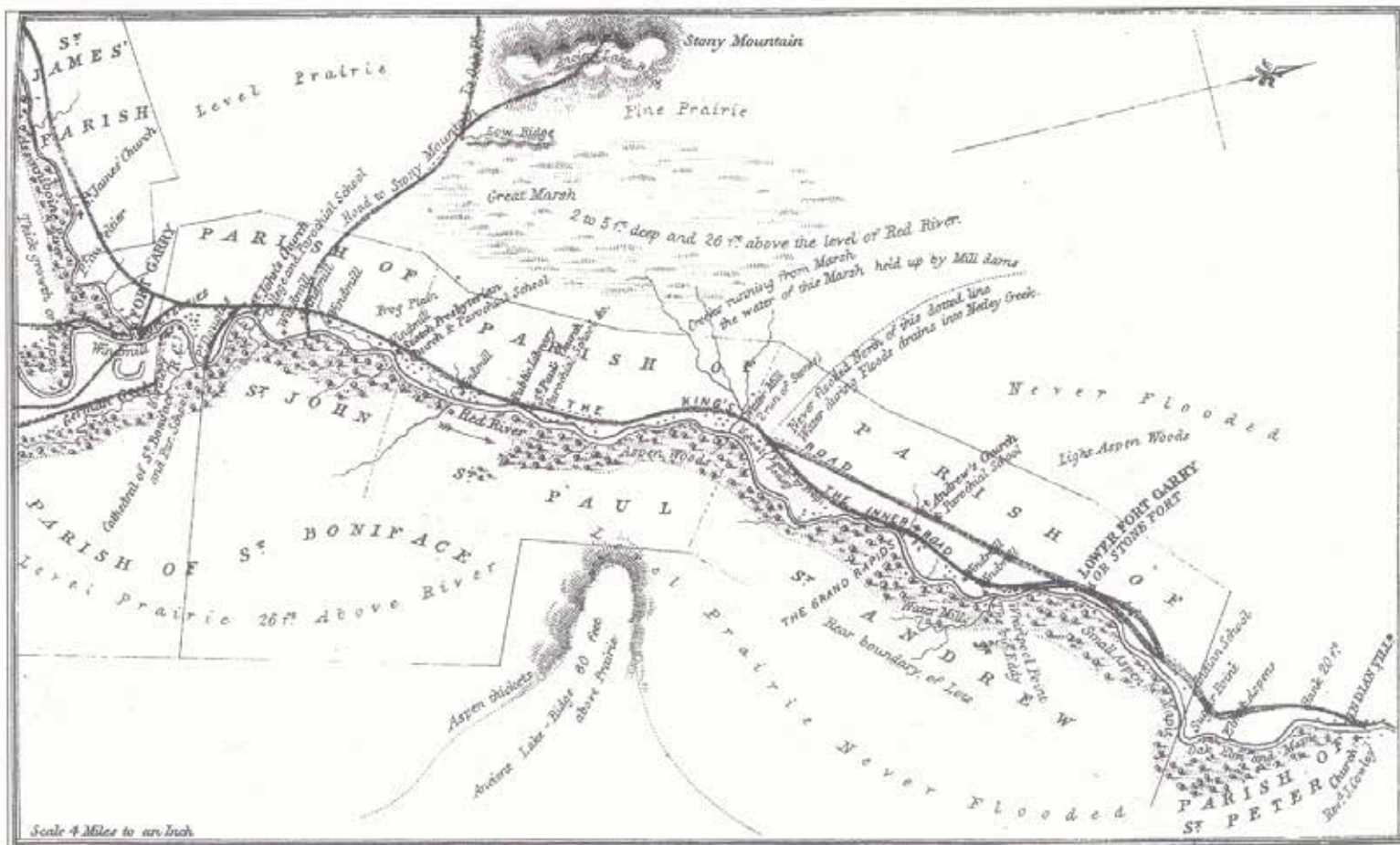
James’ father came from the Orkney Islands, off the northern tip of Scotland. His mother was Cree from York Factory. James started working for the Hudson’s Bay Company out of York Factory when he was 12. As a *tripman*, he rowed and towed the York boats between York Factory on Hudson Bay and Lake Winnipeg. James, like many in the fur trade, was forced to retire when the HBC and North West Company merged. In 1823, he and Matooskie moved south to the Red River Settlement along with 1,300 retired fur traders from across the northwest. Because of his lower rank with HBC, he received only a small grant of land on the Red River. He and Matooskie work hard to feed the family by hunting, fishing, gathering wild fruit, and making “country provisions” like maple syrup. They even try a bit of farming.

William

William is now the eldest child at 13 years of age. He is very strong for his age and a good hunter. William is very protective of his little sister but likes to tease her.

Annie

Annie, seven years old, was born after the influenza epidemic so did not know her other brothers and sisters. She is bright and mischievous.



Plan of the Selkirk settlement, from H. Y. Hind, *Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857*. Hind's map includes the Parish of St. Andrew, St. Andrew's Church, the Grand Rapids, and the "Inner Road," later known as River Road.

Henry Youle Hind (1823-1908) was a teacher, journalist, geologist, and explorer. Twelve years after the Thomas family's trip along River Road, called the Inner Road, Hind was here on an expedition. He came to assess the area for agricultural and mining potential. Hind's *Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857* included this map of the area.

Off to the Fort



The year is 1845. The Thomas family is on their way to the Stone Fort called Fort Garry. They will trade Mamma's snowshoes, some venison, and maple syrup in exchange for flour, tools, and maybe some sweets for the children.

They are taking the Inner Road, also called River Road or Road to the Rapids. They plan to make stops along the way.

"Come along, Annie. We want to get to the fort before all the sugar sticks are gone."

The Red River Highway



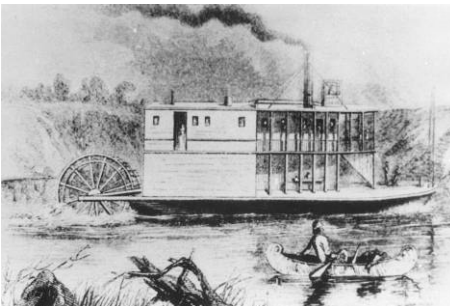
Birchbark Canoes

The canoe was the first method of transportation on the Red River. First Nations were expert in building these light craft. Eight to 12 birch trees were needed for one canoe. The water-resistant bark was shaped around a frame of cedar strips and then sewn together with pine roots. Seams were sealed with spruce or pine gum. As the fur trade grew, voyageurs adopted the canoe. *Canots du maître*, for big lakes and rivers, were 12 metres long. The *Canots du nord* were used for smaller lakes and rivers.



York Boats

The York boat was named for the Hudson's Bay Company fort York Factory. HBC employees from the Scottish Orkney Islands built the first York boat about 1749. It gave the company an advantage because the York boat could carry twice the cargo of a canoe with the same number of crew. The HBC had boat-building stations across the north. Five-metre long oars or a sail propelled the boats. The typical boat was 12.6 metres long, almost the length of a semi-trailer. The York boat was used until the 1920s.



Paddlewheel Steamboat

Steamboats were invented in France in 1685. The large paddlewheel was driven by steam from a wood or coal boiler. The first paddlewheel steamboat on the Red River was the *Anson Northup* in 1859. Larger cargoes could now be transported in and out of the Red River Settlement more cheaply and quickly. A paddlewheel steamer freighted the first train locomotive to St. Boniface, bringing its own demise. By the early 1900s, the railway had replaced the paddlewheelers.

Clap and Squeal



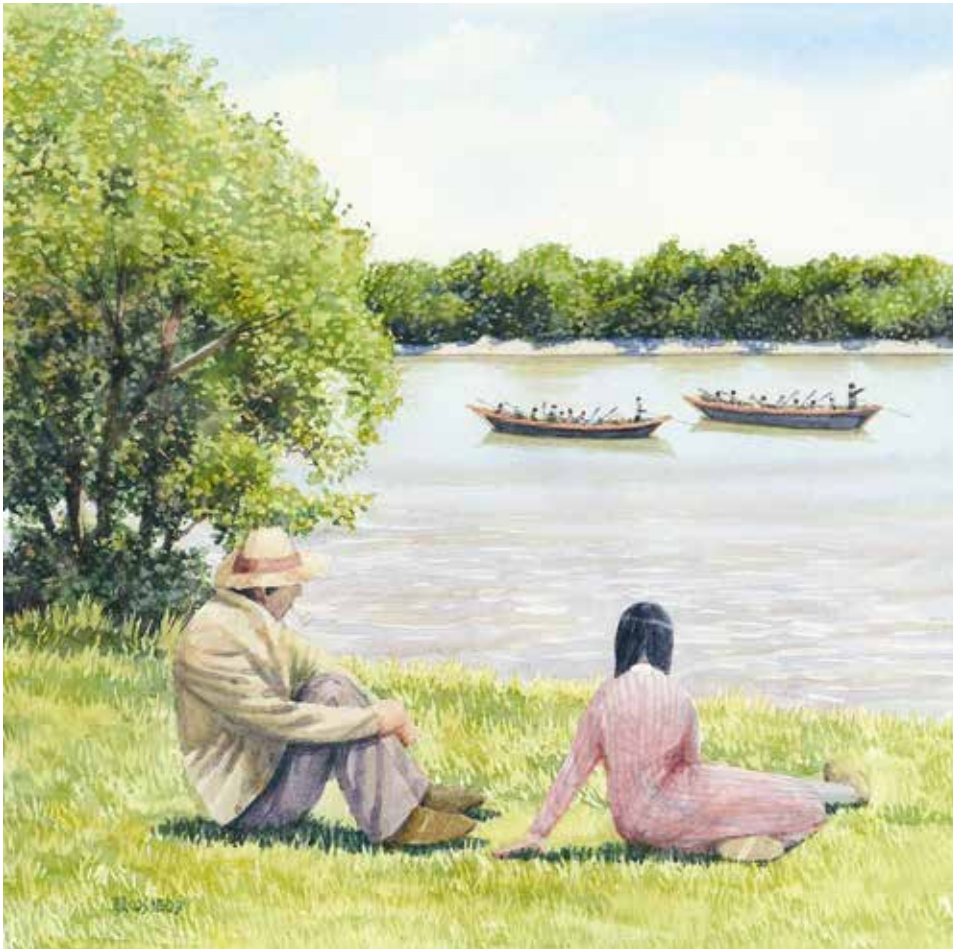
The family hasn't gotten far along the road when Annie runs down to the river's edge.

"Look, the York boats are racing," she calls.

The family stops to watch the York boats.

Pappa tells Annie about working on the York boats before he retired.

“I miss the clap of the oars hitting the water, and the squeal against their pins. Your pappa was a tripman for the HBC. It was backbreaking work, but I would trade that for farming any day. There were nine of us in a York boat carrying over 2,700 kilograms of cargo. On the water that wasn’t bad, but there were many portages. We had to pull the boat over rock, rolling it on logs.



“From York Factory on Hudson Bay, we went up the Hayes River into the Echimamish River, which means ‘flowing both ways,’ then up the Nelson River to Lake Winnipeg. Once you got to the lake, you could use a sail if the wind was right.

“Curse the south wind if you were rowing to Fort Garry. At the fort, you unloaded the goods from London, then loaded the furs and started rowing back to York Factory. You wanted the south wind then! You are a smart girl, Annie. Can you guess where the boats got their name?”

Mamma and William try a little fishing while Pappa and Annie watch the boats. Mamma tells William what it was like when she was young.

“When I was a little girl, my brother taught me how to fish. We ate a lot of fish. During spawning, we used nets made from spruce roots and willow. There was so much fish to dry in spring; smoke racks were everywhere. In summer we built weirs to funnel the fish and then used harpoons, but I like these metal hooks.”

“See if you can catch a goldeye. It will bring a good price at the fort, if we walk fast.”



Tea with the Scotts

The Thomas family planned to stop and visit the Scotts on their way to the Stone Fort. Mr. Scott sees them coming and calls to Pappa...

“Are you expecting snow, James? Come in for tea and bring your gossip.”



Women's Talk

Mamma and Mrs. Scott visit over tea.

“This little one is strong,” Mamma says, bouncing him on her knee. “It has been a bad time for babies but he will be fine. Annie, keep your fingers out of the maple syrup. It’s not a nice gift if your fingers have been in it.



“You won’t be going on the buffalo hunt in autumn with these little ones, Mrs. Scott, even if you ride on a cart. We’ll bring you some pemmican if we find the buffalo. I wonder how far we’ll have to walk this year. The company wants pemmican, but there’re too few buffalo. The church wants us farming to save our souls, but we produce too little to trade. You and I would be drinking English tea if our men were still working the York boats, but that has gone the way of the buffalo.”

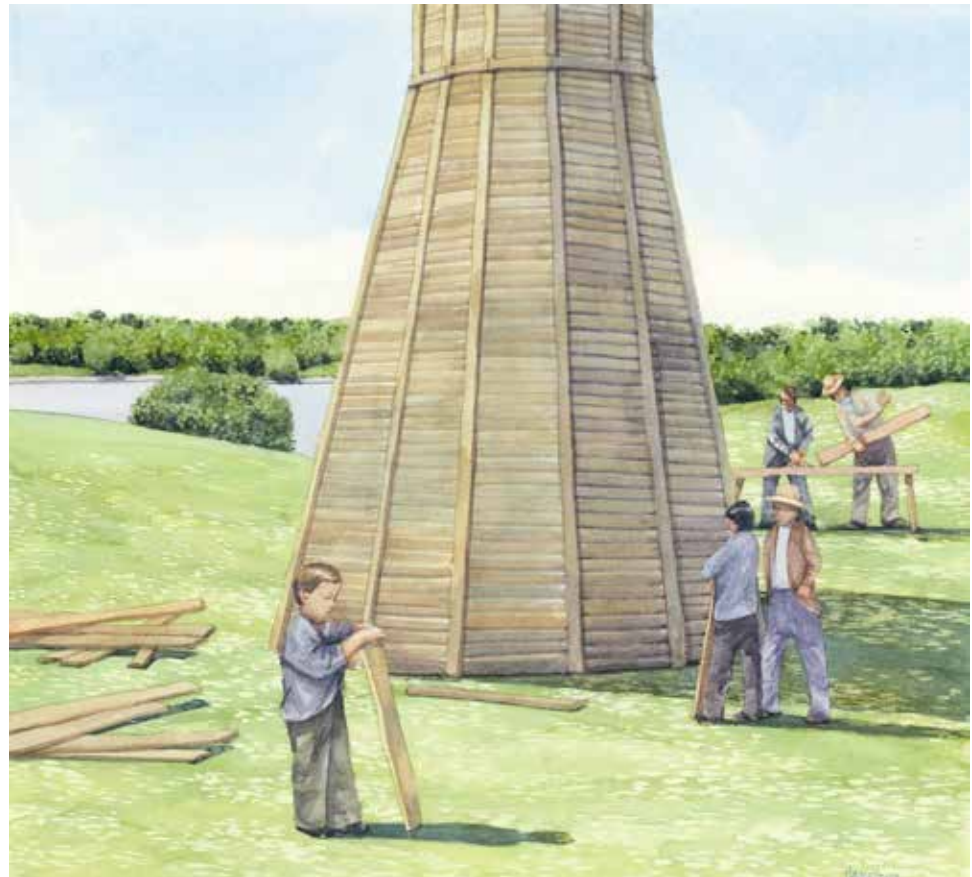
Traditions of the Trade Post

Pappa helps Mr. Scott with the granary, while Mr. Scott remembers life at the northern fur trading posts.

“I may have been born in the Orkney Isles but my heart is in the north of this country. The fur trading life was best for a man, even if the church disapproves. I’m a God-fearing soul, but Reverend Cockran doesn’t always get it right.”

“If we were working like this at a post, we would have half a dozen men helping without a word said. After the job was done, the women would have a feast ready, then there’d be fiddling and jigging into the night. There is still some of that here, but it’s dying out.”

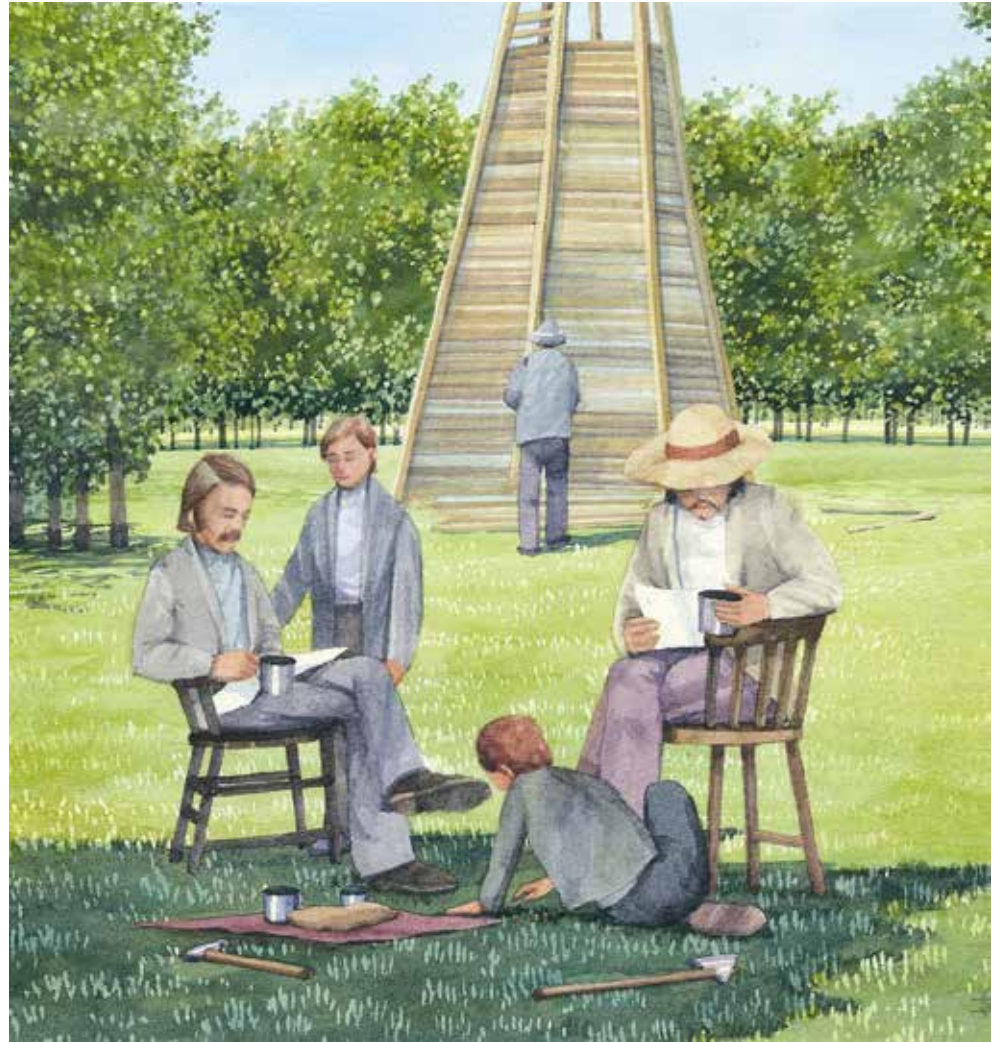
“And there is another thing Reverend Cockran gets wrong. Women! He wants them all delicate and fragile. What good is that?”



The men stop for tea and talk of the building and news of the day.

“Red River frame for a house or granary is a good choice. You still have a good stand of wood along the riverbank, and the neighbours will help. You don’t have to be too skilled, and you don’t need to buy a lot of nails. They’re two shillings and four pence a pound now. That blacksmith at the fort that makes the nails is worth his considerable weight in gold.”

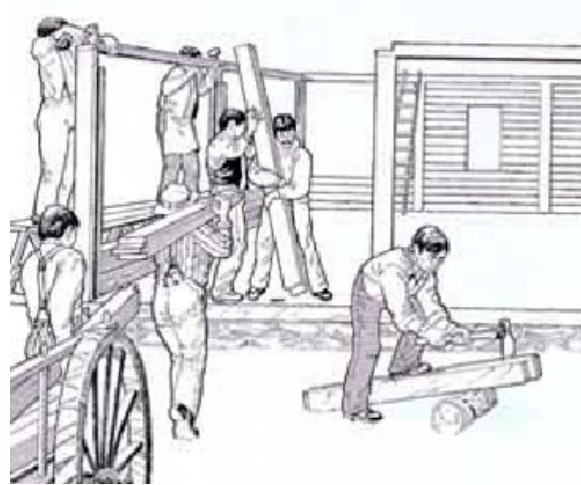
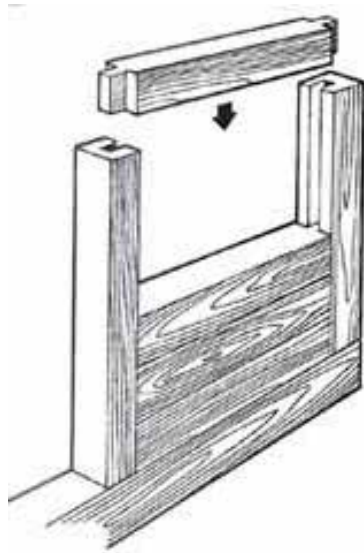
“Have you been down to the quarry site? I hear Reverend Cockran is rebuilding his church out of stone, and they’ve started cutting the blocks right out of the riverbank. That will cost a pretty penny when few can afford it.”



From Wood to Stone

The first Scott home was a Red River frame log house. Also known as “*pièce sur pièce*,” Red River frame was practical for the region. Squared horizontal logs were slid into grooves on vertical beams. Few if any nails were required, and wood came from riverbanks. The wood could expand and contract with the extremes of weather. Old buildings could be taken apart to construct new buildings.

Few of these wooden structures still stand. The St. Boniface Museum is a good example of Red River frame.



In 1855-56 the Scotts' log house was replaced with a stone house, the remains of which you can still see on River Road. It is a typical small farmhouse, and the limestone was quarried locally. There was also a summer kitchen, storehouse, granary, stable, barn, and outhouse that are gone now. Stone buildings and a few photographs are all that is left of the original structures along River Road.



The Missionary Schools

The churches established the first schools for the community. Reverend Cockran and his wife Ann started a boarding school for HBC officers' daughters in 1827. In the 1830s, they opened a day school for local "mixed-blood" children. The day school taught girls cooking, sewing, and proper wifely attitudes like being obedient to one's husband.

The officers did not want their daughters to learn menial tasks; they were to become refined English ladies. So in 1832, Church of England missionaries David and Mary Jones started the Red River Academy. It was an expensive boarding school for officers' children where a girl was taught to be an "accomplished well-bred lady, capable of teaching music, drawing, and of conciliating disposition and mild temper."



Red River Academy, 1852
Archives of Manitoba

School Belles

You can still see Miss Davis' School on River Road. It is a large stone building now called Twin Oaks. Matilda Davis, daughter of a retired Hudson's Bay Company officer, was born in Red River and sent to England for education. She returned and opened a boarding school for young ladies in 1858.

The school housed up to 40 boarders, daughters of company officers from across Rupert's Land. The girls, ages 10 to 18, slept upstairs, four or five per room. On the main floor was a large schoolroom. Students sat on either side of a long table while Miss Davis instructed at the head of the table.

Miss Davis, mixed-blood, ensured the girls were given an "English education" in many subjects, including deportment. It was said that you could spot one of Miss Davis' students by the way she walked or sat, as though balancing a basket of eggs on her head.



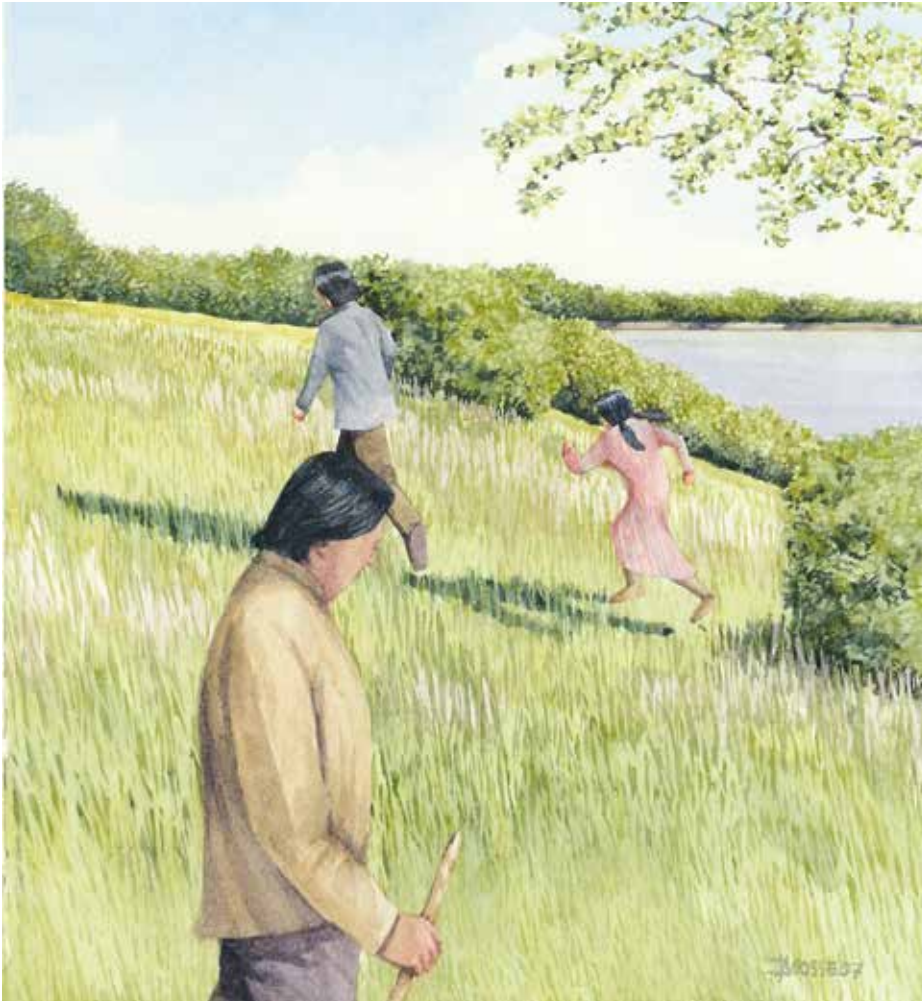
Off to School



William likes to tease his sister.

“Look, Annie, there goes Reverend Cockran. He is in search of girls for his wife to teach at the Grand Rapids School.

“You could go there with the other country-born girls to learn how to cook and sew and be married in a church. Or maybe you want to go to the Red River Academy, with the officers’ daughters, to become an English lady. They learn how to play music, dance, and walk like this.”



Pappa tries to console Annie, while she tries to catch her brother.

“Don’t worry, Annie, Cockran is probably off to welcome someone into the world or out of it – baptism and burial are his favourite pastimes. That and giving us fur traders a proper marriage.”

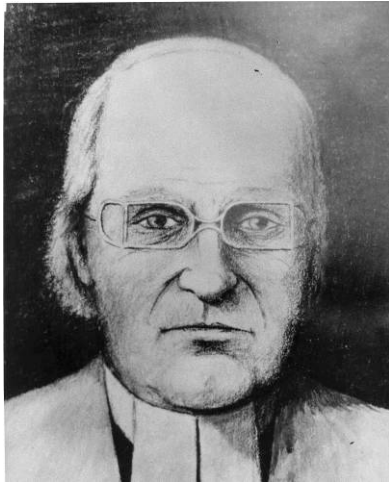
“Wasn’t this the spot you and the Scott children were sliding down the bank last winter? I think I’ll make you a proper toboggan this year – sliding down here on that old buffalo robe would be a bit bumpy.”

Grand Rapids Church

What is now known as St. Andrew's Church was once simply "the church at the rapids". The rapids disappeared when St. Andrews Dam was built. The original Red River frame church built in 1830 is also gone. They say the little wooden church, with its oak rafters and a thatched roof, felt like a tiny cathedral.

Both the wooden church and later the stone church were built by Reverend William Cockran and the people who went to his church. Cockran, a member of the Church Missionary Society of England, was the founder of the Anglican mission at "the rapids".

His calling was to bring change to those who lived what he thought was the wanton lifestyle of the fur trade. He preached a practical education, religious observance and European agriculture as the means to salvation.



Roar of the Rapids

Pappa wants to go look at the new church being built at the rapids, but Annie doesn't want to go near it.

"Speak up, Annie. I can't hear you over the rapids!"

"No, we aren't going to the church school. I'd just like to see the construction. They must have to dig a deep trench for the foundation of the new stone church."

"Cockran is lucky to have so many strong men in his church that are used to the hard work of the fur trade. With so many forced to retire from the company, they may not have much money to contribute but they have time and muscle."

"We'd better not dally or he'll be putting me to work."



Kennedy House

Aggathas Bear and Alexander Kennedy brought nine children into the world. One became a doctor, another a schoolteacher, two were wives of successful fur traders, another a storekeeper, and one a farmer.

Their son William became famous. He travelled the Arctic looking for the lost explorer Sir John Franklin. William also worked for the Hudson's Bay Company and as a missionary. William, known as Captain Kennedy, returned to Red River with his English wife and built the grand stone house next to his mother's in 1866.

Eleanor, William's wife, was well respected in the community. She taught music at Miss Davis' School and had a business selling women's and children's clothing. Eleanor was forced to sell the house after her husband's death to cover his debts. Some say the reason for his debts was the difficulty he had as a mixed-blood businessman in an increasingly race-conscious society.

If you visit River Road today, you can stop at Captain Kennedy House and have tea and a tour of the historic building.



Aggathas Bear – the Widow Kennedy

Mamma and Annie stop to look at the farm they are passing. Mamma tells Annie...

“That is where Aggathas Bear lives. She is an auntie on my mother’s side, Cree from the Saskatchewan River. She married a man named Alexander Kennedy, from the Orkney Islands, who worked for the company. They had nine children.

“Her husband bought this land and then took a voyage to England with two of the boys. He wrote Aggathas – ‘I intend to take Roderick and Alexander home to Orkney with myself and if I am alive, please God, I shall see you again next summer. In the meantime do not want for anything that I can afford to supply you with either for yourself, your mother, or the little ones, and be assured that as long as I live I shall never forsake you nor forget you, and if I die I shall not forget you.’ Her dear husband did die so never returned. They call her the Widow Kennedy now.

“Maybe on the way home we will stop in for tea and bannock and see if there are any piglets you can play with.”



Master Stonemason

Duncan McRae was a sturdy little hobbit of a man, born in the Hebrides Islands off the western coast of Scotland. He joined the Hudson's Bay Company as a stonemason at the age of 24 and spent the next five years building Lower Fort Garry. He was the master craftsman for many of the stone buildings along River Road including St. Andrew's Church.



Stone Legacies

Few of the original structures along River Road still stand. What is left is made of stone – Scott House, Twin Oaks, St. Andrew's Church and Rectory, Kennedy House, Hay House, Little Britain Church, and Lower Fort Garry. The Red River frame buildings have all but disappeared.

Reverend Cockran wrote of the difficulties of quarrying the limestone in 1845:

“The rock is covered with gravel and clay to the depth of 8 feet which has to be wheeled off before it can be worked. And after all our expense and labour, there is only one strata about 3 feet thick above water... The second strata is under water every time the North wind blows, consequently we shall be able to work it occasionally... The rock must be blasted with powder which [costs] 1/6 per lb., and our wages and other implements are also expensive from the high cost of Iron and Steel.”



The Quarry

Further down the road, the family comes to the riverbank quarry where they are cutting stone for the church. William stops to watch. From the edge he calls to his family...

“The limestone dust in the air is choking. Can you taste it? It’s chalky. See how the men have tied cloth over their nose and mouth. That must be Duncan McRae supervising. Look at his waistcoat covered in dust.”

“Can we stay and see if they will blast the rock with powder? John Scott said he saw it, and it makes a great explosion! Then there is dust everywhere. Billowing clouds of it float right across the river.”

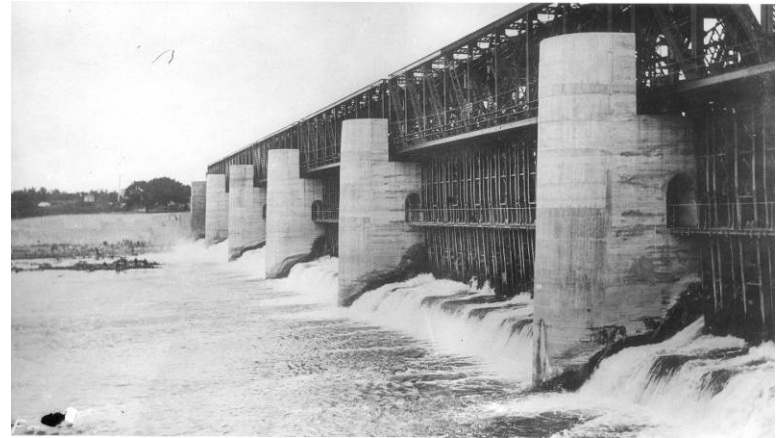


Largest in the World

St. Andrews Lock and Dam did not exist at the time of the Thomas family's journey. They would have seen the St. Andrews Rapids. In those days the major shipping route was the Red River from Lake Winnipeg to the settlement at the forks. The rapids along the way were death to boats and their crew. Even the York boats had to portage around the rapids. The dam was built to improve boat access over the rapids from Lockport to St. Andrew's Church. When completed in 1910, the dam could raise the water level as much as 6.6 metres.

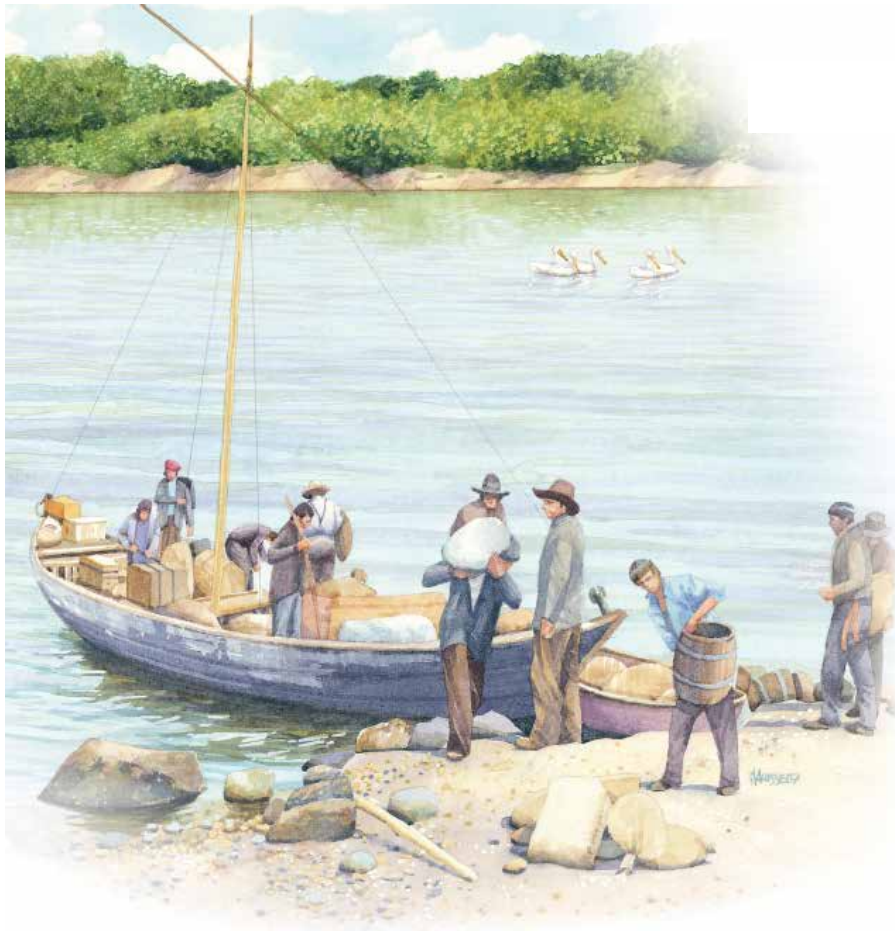
Constructing the dam was backbreaking work. Men used picks, shovels, wheelbarrows, and teams of horses. For their efforts they were paid from 15 to 25 cents an hour.

The dam's design is called a Caméré Curtain Dam because of the rolling wooden curtains that drop down between the piers. Today it is the largest of its kind in the world and a National Historic Site.



A Long Road

More than halfway to the fort, the family comes to a portage at another set of rapids. York boats are being unloaded onto ox carts. Gulls fight over scraps while pelicans work together to herd fish in the rapids. Pappa tries to encourage Annie, who is looking tired...



“It is a long walk to the Stone Fort on your little feet, isn’t it, Annie? What can we spy along the way? Look at those pelicans. They are a thing of grace and beauty. They fly in unison, effortlessly gliding. See how they silently work together on the river, flowing as one to bring the fish into the shallows. So peaceful to watch.”

“A gull, on the other hand, is an individual, a noisy one at that. See how it sits alone on the land squawking if its kin get near. Its call sounds like it is hurt – oww oww. They don’t share but fight each other over a scrap.”

“Seems to me there are too many gulls these days.”

The Stone Fort

River Road, the Inner Road, does not end at Lower Fort Garry, but the Thomas family's journey does. River Road continues north into Selkirk where you can discover another chapter in our history.

Lower Fort Garry is a place to explore stories from the fur trade and the 1850s, as well as a few more recent stories. It was a major supply depot for the Hudson's Bay Company and is the oldest stone fur trading post still intact in North America. There is a lot to see and do at this National Historic Site. You can even buy sugar sticks at the gift shop.



Journey's End

After a long walk, they have reached Lower Fort Garry. William and Annie run ahead to the fort while Matooskie and James come behind carrying all the packs.

“We are getting old, Mamma. I swear the road is getting longer. But each journey has its moments. William and Annie will be off to find sugar sticks.”

“Will you take the trade goods to the store? You’ll get a better price for the snowshoes than me. I’ll see if there is any work carting. Or maybe I’ll hear if Governor Simpson has another plan, like the wool or tallow companies, to keep us old fur traders busy. I’d best take William along and we will see what the future may hold for him.”



A Family Journey was developed as part of a series of interpretive signs along 13 kilometres of historic River Road, to celebrate the designation of the Red River as a Canadian Heritage River in 2007. This was a joint partnership of Parks Canada, Manitoba Parks and Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism, spearheaded by Rivers West Red River Corridor Inc. You can visit the six National or Provincial Historic Sites along the way. There are nine stops in total along the scenic Red River.

Rivers West Red River Corridor Inc. is dedicated to developing the Red River corridor as a destination. Rivers West is focused on creating year-round recreational, tourism, economic and conservation opportunities from Emerson to Lake Winnipeg.

For more information on Rivers West or to get additional copies of the story book, please contact:

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