



Minnesota Works Progress Administration.  
Papers.

## **Copyright Notice:**

This material may be protected by copyright law (U.S. Code, Title 17). Researchers are liable for any infringement. For more information, visit [www.mnhs.org/copyright](http://www.mnhs.org/copyright).

Topic: Savannah Portage.

Research made and notes taken by:

James H. Reichel

Agnes Byron.

Essay written by:

Agnes Byron.

Citations checked by:

Antoinette Korber.

Edited by:

Antoinette Korber.

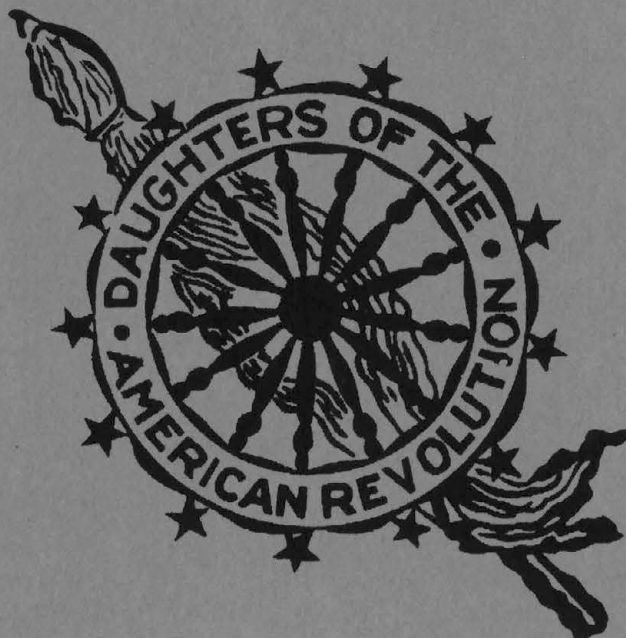
Remarks:

The research and rewrite on this topic was very good.  
A. M. K.

Agnes Byron.

Savanna Portage.

# GUIDE TO HISTORIC MARKERS



ERECTED BY THE  
DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL RECORDS SURVEY PROJECT  
DIVISION OF COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAMS  
WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION



## SAVANNA PORTAGE

East and West Savanna Rivers, and the region surrounding it are rich with events full of significance in the history of the northwest. There is no other place in the whole northwest where the waters of the Mississippi and the St. Lawrence river systems, approach each other so closely as they do here between the two Savannas, rendering the Savanna Portage unavoidable in the days when transportation was largely by canoe. This particular region became the site of the most important portage routes in the northwest.

The Savanna Portage is six miles long located between the East and West Savanna Rivers. In the spring and wet seasons the portage was low making it necessary for the voyager to wade through mud and water. Five days was the usual time taken to cross the portage with "12 pices" per man. (1)

Long before the white man set foot in North America, the Savanna Trail and Portage was an established route for the Indian. In the period of "free trade" as contrasted with that of the organized trade with companies, the furs were often collected at a packing point. Small canoes were loaded with packs and paddled up the Prairie River to the mouth of the West Savanna and thence up this winding stream as canoes could be paddled or dragged. The head of this primitive type of navigation of West Savanna was at a point

(1) "Notes and Documents," Minnesota History, 5:30-39, (St. Paul, 1923-24); Irving H. Hart, "The Old Savanna Portage," Minnesota History, 8:117, 139, (St. Paul, 1927).

## Savanna Portage

where the valley of the little stream widens out into what is now a hay meadow just to the west of the road leading to the Anderson farm, in Balsom<sup>a</sup> township, and one half mile below Savanna Lake. Due to the nature of the country, it is assumed that the Chippewas used this route to push westward from their homes on the shores of Lake Superior into the territory occupied by the Sioux in the region of Big Sandy Lake. The war between these tribes began approximately in 1730 and continued intermittently almost a century.

"The old voyageurs measured the distance over the portages not in miles but in 'poses' or pauses, representing the distance over which a man was expected to carry his pack without stopping to rest. Sometimes a distance over a portage was measured in 'pipes' - a pipe being the distance which a man could travel before his pipeful of tobacco was smoked out. Naturally along the better part of the trail the pauses were longer than they were in the tamarack swamp at the eastern end, where at every step the traveler had to take care lest he lose his footing and become engulfed in the morass." Here too, at the end of pauses, log platforms were constructed on which the men could deposit their loads. In the last stages of the portage at times of relatively high water, the packs were carried in canoes which were dragged along the



## Savanna Portage

channel of a little creek draining the marsh, east of Wolf Lake. But this part of the trail was always extremely difficult. (2)

In the seventeenth century, came the first explorer. It is believed that in the summer of 1679, DuLuth, probably the first white trader upon the headwaters of the Mississippi, penetrated with his lively crew of voyageurs to the Sandy Lake country by this route. No immediate results followed DuLuth's expedition so far as Sandy Lake country is concerned unless it served to reveal to the French the fact of the existence of the practicable route of travel and trade by way of the Prairie and Savanna Portages.

About 1690 LeSueur, a French explorer, ascended the Mississippi by canoe from the Falls of St. Anthony and historians assume that he reached Sandy Lake as the northern most point of his explorations. From this date on for almost a century the records are silent with regard to this region.

While on an expedition from 1735 to 1738, Pierre La Verendrye and his sons crossed the portage. La Verendrye's map shows Portage de La Savanna as located between the Rouseau River and Lake of the Woods. The Roseau River, rises in great swamps west of this lake and on or about the present international boundary line empties into the Red River. At this junction is marked La Fourche. La Verendrye, and his people evidently

---

(2) Irving H. Hart, "Sandy Lake," McGregor Pilot Review, June 9, 1932; Rolf Mills, "Savanna Portage," Minneapolis Tribune, (December 18, 1932).

## Savanna Portage

had discovered and were using two routes from Lake of the Woods to Red River: one by way of Winnipeg River and Lake Winnipeg, and the other by the Roseau River. Fort St. Charles, which was on what is now Minnesota soil, was La Verendrye's headquarters during the first period of his work<sup>of</sup> exploration. (3)

The earliest account found yet is of Jean Baptiste Perrault, who spent twenty years in the fur trade of Lake Superior region and lands to the west. His diary is extremely detailed and colorful and serves to picture and give an accurate account of the hardships of life in the northwoods in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Probably the oldest detailed map of the country between Lake Superior and Sandy Lake was sketched by Perrault. <sup>This map is</sup> entitled in crude French, "Sketch map of the country from the entrance of the river Fond du Lac Superieur to penetrate to the entrance, of the discharge of Lac des Sables (Sandy Lake) where it flows in the Mississippi, and where the posts are marked with a zero apostrophe". This map is not drawn to scale and is naturally inaccurate in many details; Perrault styles the St. Louis River as "Fond du Lac" <sup>with a tributary,</sup>

(3) Sieur de la Verendrye, "Report of June 2, 1736," Journals and Letters of Verendrye and Sons, 214, 215, (Toronto, 1927).  
 "News and Comment," Minnesota History, 9:410 (St. Paul, 1928).



the "riverere la Savanna"; Prairie Lake, unnamed on the map, but called "Lac de la pousse" in the narrative; Prairie River is likewise unnamed on the map, though Perrault calls it "riviere des prairie" in one account of the portage; and "Lac des Sables", with an unnamed stream by which the lake empties into the Mississippi. The interesting feature of this map is the fact that two portage routes from river to river are marked by dotted lines; one from the St. Louis River directly to Prairie River just below its discharge from Prairie Lake, and the other from the East Savanna to the Prairie River farther down on its course to Sandy Lake. These two portages are marked as the "portage la prairie" and "portage la Savanna" respectively. The location of the "portage la Prairie" is further confirmed by the mark of a "zero apostrophe" (0), by which the site of a log cabin built by Perrault in 1785 is shown near the lake out of which Prairie River flows. On his return in July 1797, one of his men, St. Louis, was poisoned and was buried on the Portage; old Savanna Portage has at least this one known dedication of human life to add to its historic interest.

From Perrault's references by name to the various physical features on the map, it would seem that they were known and named previous to his first visit to the country and that the trails were already well defined. The fact that the map does not show the West Savanna River at all casts some doubt upon

the identity of Perrault's "portage la Savanna" and the Savanna Portage of later days. The physiography of the region between the East Savanna, and the Prairie River would seem to make unadvisable the use during the summer months of any other route between these two streams. (4)

Another traveler, who left a record of the use of this portage route was David Thompson, a Scotch surveyor in the service of the Northwest Company, who ~~in~~ May 3, 1798, struck across to the Mississippi river, down which he traveled through "Winnipegosis" Lake to the mouth of Sandy Lake River. Here he left the main stream and turned up Sandy Lake river to Sandy Lake in (Aitkin County) on which was a house belonging to the Northwest Company, a mile and a quarter east from the head of the river, in latitude  $46^{\circ}46'39''N$ . From this house he crossed the lake to the mouth of Savanna carrying place, a deep bog four miles across. He crossed this portage to a small creek that flows into St. Louis <sup>River</sup> he descended the latter stream to Fond du Lac, House, two miles and a half up the river from Lake Superior. (5)

- 
- (4) <sup>Early History of</sup> ~~Irving H. Hart~~, "The Sandy Lake Region", McGregor Pilot Review, Aug 4, 1932; Jean Baptiste Perrault, "Perrault Narrative," Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections, #37:513-619 (Lansing, 1909-10); ~~Irving H. Hart~~, "The Old Savanna Portage," Minnesota History, 8:121, 122 (St Paul, 1927).
- (5) Joseph Burr Tyrrell, A Brief Narrative of the Journeys of David Thompson in North-Western America, 10, 11 (Toronto, 1888).

Zebulon Montgomery Pike in his expeditions to the headwaters of the Mississippi in 1805 refers only incidentally to the portage as it was not included in his route. (6)

George Henry Monk, a clerk in the employ of the Northwest Company, writing in 1807, is one of the few to describe the Portage who gives the direction of the flow of the East Savanna. Monk states that "at the west end of the portage is a small river called La Savanna". The entrance of River La Savanna is (24) miles <sup>from</sup> Portage La Savanna. Here Monk conveys the idea that canoes, after leaving the St. Louis River, passed up the East Savanna River for twenty-four miles before coming to the Savanna Portage, making this portage between the East and West Savanna rivers one of the most unpleasant incidents which the <sup>fur</sup> trader of the Northwest experienced. (7)

An exploring expedition from Detroit to the Mississippi region in 1820 led by Lewis Cass, then governor of Michigan Territory, which at that time included northeastern Minnesota, traveled by canoe along the shores of Lakes Huron and Superior to the head of the latter lake. From here the party ascended the St. Louis and East Savanna rivers, portaged across to the West Savanna, and thence proceeded by way of Sandy Lake and the Mississippi to Cass Lake, which at that time was believed to be the ultimate source of the Mississippi. (8)

- 
- (6) Elliott Co<sup>o</sup>xes, Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike, 1:138 (New York, 1895).  
(7) "Notes and Documents," Minnesota History, 5:30, 331 (St. Paul, 1923-24).  
(8) ~~Irving~~ <sup>W. O. L.</sup> Hart, "Savanna Portage," Minnesota History, 8:123 (St. Paul, 1927).



## Savanna Portage

Dr. Alexander Wolcott, a surgeon with the Cass party, has left a detailed description of the portage. Wolcott states, "The Savanna Portage is six miles, and is passed at thirteen pauses. The first three pauses are shockingly bad. The country, after passing the third pause, changes in short distances, from a marsh to a region of sand hills. Where the portage approaches the sources of the West Savanna there is a descent into a small valley covered with rank grass without trees and here and there clumps of willows. The valley is skirted with a thick and brushy growth of alder, aspen, etc.. The stream here is just large enough to swim a canoe, and the navigation commences within a mile of its source. It pursues a very serpentine course to Sandy Lake, in a general direction northwest."

The river receives a tributary from the south, called Ox Creek, and from the point of its junction, the navigation is good at all seasons, to Sandy Lake, a distance of six miles. (9)

Henry R. Schoolcraft engaged as a miner<sup>g</sup>ologist, in the Cass expedition 1820, was by no means satisfied that Cass Lake was the true source of the great river. Appointed Indian agent of the Chippeways he resided for many years at Sault Saint Marie<sup>s</sup>. "It was not until 1832 that the War Department, delaying to

---

(9) <sup>The Old</sup> Irving Hart, "Savanna Portage," Minnesota History, 8:123 (St. Paul, 1927).



Governor Cass, was content to give him leave, and then by indirection only. The instructions, given Mr. Schoolcraft was to make permanent peace among the Indians. He had no commission to explore. An officer of the Army, Lieutenant James Allen, with a small detachment of soldiers, was ordered to be his escort. Schoolcraft agrees with Wolcott in the description of the portage but adds information for the first three pauses, "trees and sticks, have, from time to time been laid to walk on, which it requires the skill of a balancing master to keep." (10)

Dr. Houghton who had been appointed as surgeon and botanist to the Schoolcraft expedition, for the discovery of the sources of the Mississippi, writes in a letter to his brother Richard: the route followed was by the way of the Grand Portage, St. Louis River Portage, Aux Coteau, Savanna River, Savanna Portage, Sandy Lake and Sandy River to the Mississippi River." From thence ascend the Mississippi River, pass by Little Lake Winnepeg to Upper Red Cedar Lake, and from thence to Lac La Bishop; from thence return by another route to Upper Red Cedar Lake, then proceed by Leach River to Leach Lake, thence by a series of small lakes and portages to the great southwest fork of the Mississippi----. (11)

---

(10) Henry R. Schoolcraft, "Narrative," Journal of Travels, p. 220 (Albany, 1821).

(11) Alvah Bradish, Memoir of Douglas Houghton, pp. 119, 120 (Detroit, 1889).

## Savanna Portage

Reverend Boutwell, a Presbyterian missionary to the Indians, in the Schoolcraft expedition of 1832, wrote in his diary an interesting description of the Portage, from which the following is taken: to describe the difficulties of this portage, would puzzle a Scott, or Knickerbocker even. July 2, 1832, "The rain has rendered the portage almost impassable for man or beast. Our men look like renegades, covered with mud from head to foot, some have lost one leg of the pantaloons, others mangled toes and bruised legs were brought forward to Dr. Houghton, which I venture to say will long fix in mind the fatigues of this portage". Boutwell is one of the few to mention the hoards of mosquitoes, that exceeded all description for being voracious. (12)

Lieutenant James Allen with the Schoolcraft expedition of 1832, in his official report to Major General Macomb, June 30, 1832-- "The Savanna Portage, is six miles in length the first two pauses are of the worst type, being mostly through swamps of tough deep mud, which it was difficult to walk through uncumbered; and that could scarcely be deemed achievable, with the loads that the men were obliged to carry: The remaining four over lands were more elevated, but with deep ugly swamps intervening, making this much the most troublesome and difficult of any part of our route." (13)

---

(12) Reverend William Boutwell, "Diary", June 29, 30, 1832, "Manuscript in possession of Minnesota Historical Society pp. 24, 25, 26.

(13) Schoolcraft and Allen, Expedition to Northwest Indians, Letter from Sec. of War, House executive documents, No. 323, Special Order No. 2, p. 3 (New York, 1834).

## Savanna Portage

William Johnston, in the service of a competitor of the American Fur Company, in 1833 wrote a very detailed description of the route from Fond du Lac to Sandy Lake. "Johnston describes the first half pose of the Savanna Portage as 'Middling', and the next two poses as having sufficient water to allow half canoe loads to be dragged through. Very little labor is required to make this part passable for canoes, nothing however, has been done to it since the Northwest Company's time, their traders had a platform made, the extent of the bog, the remnants of which still can be seen, single logs have lately been laid at the end, and which is very dangerous to pass, especially with loads." The remaining eight poses were dry, compared to those first passed; the land gradually rises for about four poses, and then descends. It marks the height of land from each side of which, the waters run to Lake Superior and the Mississippi. (14)

The Rev. Edmund F. Ely, a Congregational Missionary, came to Sandy Lake in 1833, where he established one of the first schools in Minnesota. On this trip he was accompanied by William A. Aitkin, the American Fur Company trader at Sandy Lake. Ely in his diary for Sept. 18, 1833 states: <sup>a</sup> "A very small stream runs into the Portage Northwest. I should think this stream when dammed is deep enough to allow a canoe to be drawn with  $\frac{1}{2}$  load through mud and water about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles". (15)

(14) William Johnston, "Letters on Fur Trade in 1833" Michigan Pioneer & Historical Collections 37: 172 (Lansing, 1909-10).  
 (15) Edward F. Ely, "Diaries," Sept. 18, 1833, <sup>ms.</sup> in possession of Minnesota Historical Society, p. 26.



## Savanna Portage

Martin McLeod, on an expedition, crossed the portage on Nov. 5, 1836, and reported that it was so damnable that they had to wade in water up to their hips for nearly three miles and carry equipment besides. He says that the portage is eight miles long. (16)

Joseph G. Norwood, a geologist in the service of the United States government, made a survey of this portion of Minnesota in 1848. The following extract is taken from his report:

"The east end of the portage, for the distance of a mile and a half, runs through a tamarack swamp, which was flooded with water, and next to impassable. It is generally considered the worst 'carrying place' in the Northwest, and, judging from the great number of canoes <sup>which</sup> lie decaying <sup>along</sup> this part of ~~it~~, having been abandoned in consequence of the difficulty experienced in getting them over, its reputation is well deserved". (17)

The following extracts of a letter from J. P. Bardwell, a missionary who made the trip in 1843, writes: "we found the Savanna Portage fairly good walking, the bears and wolfs having trod a very good path. This Portage is seven miles long. It is assumed that other missionaries in reaching their posts on Sandy Lake and Leech Lake, used the Portage frequently".

---

(16) Grace Lee Nute, "Martin McLeod's Diary," Minnesota History, 4:384 (St. Paul, 1921-22).

(17) David Dale Owen, Geological Survey of Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, p. 301 (Philadelphia, 1852).



John H. Pitezel made the trip in 1849 and Mrs Lucy M. Lewis in 1844. Both have left records of their experiences. (18)

~~Julius~~ <sup>Julius</sup> Chambers who visited the region in 1872 writes: "We slept that nite at the mouth of Sandy Lake River, upon the floor of Mr Libby's historic trading post, 'Libby's' has been known for three generations as the point of portage for the 'Big Sea Water' (Lake Superior)".---- Chambers did not make the portage trip himself, and spoke of ~~it~~<sup>it</sup> mer<sup>e</sup>ly from hearsay. One might ~~deter~~<sup>de</sup>termine from what he says that the route was still more or less <sup>in</sup> use at that time.

A late reference, to the use of the Savanna Portage in a letter wtitten in 1855 by the Reverened Samuel Spates who conducted a Methodist Mission for the Indians of Sandy Lake in the forties and fifties, is that traders and missionaries in crossing the portage were hindered by underground logs and brush. (19)

The portage trail is indicated on a manuscript map of the northwest by John Dutton, dated ~~1814~~<sup>1814</sup>, and on one of a section of northeastern Minnesota prepared in 1807 by Alfred J. Hill for Charles H. Baker. In the Office of secretary of

---

(18) Hart, "The Old Savanna Portage," Minnesota History, 8:129, note 126 (St. Paul, 1927).

(19) Letter from Bardwell, Oberlin Evangelist, 6:61 (Oberlin, 1844); Julius Chambers, The Mississippi River and Its Wonderful Valley, p.169<sup>x</sup> (New York, London, 1910).

## Savanna Portage.

state in St. Paul a map, made in 1874, showed by a dotted line the eastern half of the Portage trail. It would seem likely that at the time, when the original township surveys were made in this region, the eastern part of the trail, while, either because of lack of interest or because its route was already more or less obliterated, the western part of the portage was left unmarked. A United States engineer's map of Sandy Lake Basin and the township maps based upon the government surveys <sup>show</sup> that the west end of the trail was located somewhere in section 7, township 50 north, range 22 west. Wolf Lake is shown for the most part in ~~section~~ 5 and 6. Along the north line of township 50 a drainage ditch had been constructed with laterals extending southward between sections 2 and 3 <sup>and</sup> ~~sections~~ <sup>and</sup> 1 ~~and~~ 2. (20)

"West Savanna River enters Prairie River about a mile and a half above Sandy Lake. It is twenty feet wide at its mouth, but soon contracts to ten or twelve feet, which general width, it retains throughout its course. It is <sup>t</sup>extremely crooked, and winds through expansive swamps covered with aquatic grasses. It is very shallow, becomes rapid towards its source, with a pebbly bottom, and, as the portage is approached, is obstructed by boulders."

(20) Hart, "The Old Savanna Portage," Minnesota History, 8:129, 130, and note ~~129, 130~~ (St. Paul, 1927).  
21

## Savanna Portage

Toward the head of the stream, the swamps through which it flows are surrounded by high drift-hills, on the <sup>side</sup> sides and the tops of which are many enormous boulders, derived principally from granitic, gneissoid, and schistose rocks. Among these hills, the stream expands into small ponds, connected by ~~amere~~ rivulet, barely wide enough to let a canoe pass. The distance from the mouth of the river to the beginning of the portage, is about ten miles. The Portage is six miles long and leads over the highlands which <sup>divide</sup> divide the waters of the Mississippi from those of Lake Superior. East Savanna river, where the Portage strikes it, is about five yards wide. It comes from the northwest, and turning a short distance below the portage, follows a general northeasterly direction to its junction with the St. Louis River.

The St. Louis however, ran down through a series of rapids too dangerous and difficult to be passed in canoes. Around these rapids the packs and canoes had to be carried, although the distance was not great. One of these portages was extremely trouble<sup>s</sup>ome, however, from the fact it was covered with innumerable sharp rocks with knifelike edges, hence derived its name Knife Portage. The word Savanna more frequently used in Georgia and Florida, is of American Indian <sup>origin</sup> origin, meaning a treeless area, and it is here applied to tracts of partly marshy grassland, over which the portage between the East and West Savanna rivers were made. (21)

(21) David Dale Owen, Geological Survey of Wisconsin, Iowa Minnesota, p.300,301 (Philadelphia, 1852); Warren Upham, "Minnesota Geographic Names," Minnesota Historical Society Collections, 17:499 (St. Paul, 1920).



In the year 1792, immediately after the noted expedition of John Baptiste Cadotte to the upper Mississippi, the Northwest Company extended their operations over the whole Ojibway country within the limits of the United States, on Lake Superior and the Mississippi River. Their trade in these regions was divided into four departments:-

[The Fond du Lac department consisted of the county at the head of Lake Superior, and the sources of the St. Louis and Mississippi rivers. From the season of 1792-93 Perrault built for the North West Company a fort at Fond du Lac. This being the first permanent fur-trading post in the St. Louis Valley. The fort included two houses, a shed, and a warehouse, all surrounded by a stockade. It was called Fort St. Louis and was continuously occupied by the North West Company until after the war of 1812, when the company was compelled to withdraw from American territory.] In 1794 another permanent post of the Company was built on Sandy Lake, and within a few years the headquarters of the department of Fond du Lac was transferred to this station. This post was probably built by William Morrison, later for a time an opposition trader and still an employee of the Company. The post stood on the south shore of the bay which forms the northernmost extension of this beautiful lake, about midway of the distance from the state highway to the end of Brown's Point. The general location of the post is indicated by an official marker placed on Highway number Five, opposite the entrance to the road along Brown's Point.

Fond du Lac

N.W. Co. post.



## Savanna Portage

The post was one of the stopping places of the surveyor, David Thompson, who visited the post in 1798, and thence continued his journey over the Savanna Portage to Fond du Lac.

Lieutenant M. Pike who visited the post in 1806, mentions that "on the west and northwest is a picketed enclosure of about four acres in which last year they raised about 400 bushels of Irish potatoes, cultivating no other vegetables".

Schoolcraft stopped at the post in 1820 and adds information "that the pickets of the main stockade were pinned together with stout plates of the same material".

Here in the post on Brown's Point, surrounded by a stockade, the factors of the North West Company, exercised their sway for more than twenty years. The present village of Fond du Lac, Minnesota, grew upon the site of the American Fur Company's post, constructed some years later farther up the St. Louis River. (22)

The title "Canoe Route" appears on a marker, on United States highway 2, in the Northwest Area of Minnesota. The location of the marker in relation to prominent landmarks is the crossing of the St. Louis River at Floodwood, St. Louis County. The marker bears the following inscription:

"From Lake Superior to Sandy Lake and the Mississippi, used by Indians and traders from the latter half of the 18th century. It led up the St. Louis to the East Savanna, up that

(22) Hart, "Early History of Sandy Lake," McGregor Pilot Review, (September 1, 1932).

## Savanna Portage

stream some ten miles, and thence by a hard six mile portage, to the West Savanna and Sandy Lake".

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, new markets began to open further south. Other travel routes were established and new forms of transportation <sup>i</sup>nvolved. Then the lumber industry caught its stride in Minnesota. With all this activity in a pioneer country, a silence fell about the Savanna Portage which has remained practically unbroken, through the years that followed. In 1926<sup>x</sup> Professor <sup>W. W. W.</sup>Harlow Hart of Iowa State Teachers College at Cedar Falls, together with William P. Ingersoll, a resident of Big Sandy Lake, did notable work in rediscovering a large portion of the portage. Professor Hart has given an excellent description of his findings while on that outing. He reported "that parts of the trail were recognized by chipped bark of trees, signs hewn long ago for brave pioneers who journeyed through".

In the Summer of 1927 Prof. Hart had the privilege of an interview with Mrs. George Curtis, an Indian woman <sup>a</sup>more than ninety years of age who was originally a member of Sandy Lake band of Chippewa. Mrs. Curtis, whose Indian name was Beengwa, was born on Brown's Point on the south shore of the bay at the northwest extremity of Sandy Lake in Aitkin County. She died in the early part of 1928. At the time of the interview she was apparently in vigorous health. Her memory was clear and her statements definite with reference to matters of which she had personal knowledge. Her readiness to say "no" to questions regarding matters beyond her own knowledge gave increased credence to

## Savanna Portage

her positive statements. Although she understood and spoke English without difficulty she preferred to give her answers and tell her stories in the native Chippewa tongue.

Beengwa was the seventh and youngest of the children of Augenosh, one of the leading men although not the chief of the Sandy Lake band. Both Augenosh and his wife, according to Mrs. Curtis lived to be over one hundred years old. Augenosh was one of the greatest hunters and most successful trappers among the Indians of the upper Mississippi Valley. He was one of the few hunters who could get a moose in the summer time. With his wife he would go away in his canoe and stay in the woods for months at a time both he and his wife "packed" for a trading outfit which used the old Savanna Portage. (23)

The old Savanna Portage trail was located and cleared of underbrush, and marked during the summer of 1939. Engaged in this work were sixty-six Eagle Boy Scouts from Minnesota, Montana, North and South Dakota. (24)

To-day much of the Savanna area remains the same as that which greeted the earliest visitors. There has been some cutting of timber, but a fine growth of both hard and soft wood, untouched by fire, covers the country, and there are some originals standing too. Just as in the early days, the territory, especially that portion which lies in Atkin

---

(23) Hart, "The Story of Beengwa," Minnesota History, 9:319, 320 (St. Paul, 1928) ; Hart, "The Early History of Sandy Lake," McGregor Pilot Review, (June 23, 1932) ; Minnesota Historic Records Survey, Guide to Historic Markers, p.26 (St. Paul, 1940).

(24) Hart, "The Early History of Sandy Lake," McGregor Pilot Review, (June 30, 1932).



County, abounds in deer, bears, wolves, beaver and, in fact virtually every type of game and fish native to Minnesota. Even the stately moose, whose complete extinction in the state was for some time threatened, still roams freely through its spacious and almost impenetrable swamps. With all of its beauty and game abundance, however, the Savanna country, has become a real problem for the state. Much of its soil is unfavorable for agriculture. Many farms have been abandoned. Just to the south the state has already set aside the Minnewawa forest, consisting of about 31,000 acres. The forestry department, under the directorship of Grover M. Conzet, in the summer of 1931 made an extensive survey of the county involved, to determine the best course to pursue<sup>d</sup>. Several experienced men, of the department, including E. L. Lawson and R. Clement, assisted by P. W. Smedley, ranger, and W. E. Bright, patrolman, was assigned to the job. They unearthed fragments of guns in use more than a century ago, ropes of beads and some old fashioned bullets. Other articles used in trading with the Indians a century <sup>or</sup> ~~and~~ more ago also were found, and these have been preserved at the forestry observation station on Billhorn Bay, Big Sandy Lake.

There also were evidence<sup>s</sup> of several of a period preceding the days when the lumber industry worked through this section. Lawson and Clement left a marker at the point of their discovery for identification for later investigation of a more thorough nature. In their report, Lawson and Clement found that in the area which it is proposed to turn into a state

## Savanna Portage

forest the population is about 1,500. Less than two per cent of the area is under cultivation. They recommend that parts of  $11\frac{1}{2}$  townships be set aside, which added to the adjoining state forest, would make up an ~~area~~<sup>east</sup> nearly 192,000 acres.

A campaign also is on foot to change the name of this proposed new forest from Minewawa, an Indian term for water-goose, to Savanna. The latter, Savanna, is also an Indian expression, meaning an open or level region. This term, according to foresters is expressive of much of the portage.

The territory which the conservation department will propose to set aside is bounded on the west by highway No. 5, on the east by Carlton and St. Louis counties, a real wilderness, on the south by state highway No. 2 and on the north by Itasca county. About 10,000 acres are state owned at the present time. The area contains 17 major lakes, the largest of these being Big Sandy Lake, Minnewawa and Aitkin, and two tiny villages, Libby and Jacobson.

Should the state legislature decide to acc<sup>E</sup>pt the recommendation and establish this Savanna forest, the forestry department will at once increase the fire protection. A new fire tower would<sup>l</sup> be erected in addition to the one now ~~over~~<sup>o</sup>looking Billy<sup>h</sup>orn Bay. Recreational facilities would be extended wherever practical. Part of the county be set up as game preserve. New lake shore lands would<sup>l</sup> be open for summer homes.

## Savanna Portage

An effort also would be made to mark the entire Savanna trail and portage which, as it now exists would be definitely lost in case of a fire of any more serious nature.

Instead of a country marked <sup>by</sup> ~~by~~ abandoned settlers' cabins, there would arise new colonies of summer homes, taxes would be paid, and the state would have fittingly preserved vestiges of a bygone day which once were of extreme importance to the whole northwest. (25)

---

(25) Rolf Mills, "Savanna Portage" Minneapolis Tribune,  
December 18, 1932.



Savannah Portage.

Used Material.

~~David Thompson~~, A Brief Narrative of the Journeys of David Thompson in N. W. America, 1888 by Tyrell.

McKay Journal, 1794.

Rev. Boutwell Diaries.

J. Fletcher Williams Diaries, June 30, 1832.

Rev. Samuel Spath (Spate) papers.

Peter Akers papers.

Dr. Douglass Houghton Diaries.

Dr. Wolcott Diaries, 1820.

Allen Morrison, "History of Fur Trade in the Northwest", letters.

Chambers, Julius, "The Mississippi River and its Wonderful Valley, 1872.

William Warren, 1885-1888, *papers*.

Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society Collections.

Edw. D. Neill, History of Minnesota.

J. W. Bardwell, 1843, *papers*.

Mrs. Lucy M. Williams, 1844---Dr. William Lewis papers.

John H. Pitezel, 1849, *papers*.

N. H. Winchell, Geological and Natural History Survey of Minnesota,  
Vol. 6, Plate 57.

George Wakefield describes the west end.

Frank Leverett, Surface Formations and Agricultural Conditions of  
of N. E. Minnesota.

Burpree, Journals and Travels of La Verendrye.

Martin McLeod's Diaries.

Wm. Johnston, Letters on Fur Trade.

Z. M. Pike, Expeditions to the Headwaters of the Mississippi <sup>Rivers</sup>.

<sup>wood</sup>  
Floodwater Historical Society.

Schoolcraft Expedition, 1832.

Schoolcraft, Narrative Journal of Travels through the N. W. Regions of the United States.

Jean Baptiste Perrault, Narrative of the Travels and Adventures of a Merchant Voyage.

Wisconsin Historical Collections.

Monk, George Henry, 1807, *papers*.

William P. Ingersoll, 1926, *papers*.

Irving H. Hart. *McGregor Pilot Review, June 9-11, 1926.*

Jacob Brower, Mississippi River and Its Source, 1893.

James Dickson, *papers*. *1/4/41*

Bertha Heilborne, Journal of Canoe Voyage from the Falls of St. Anthony to St. Louis.

Alfred J. Hill, *map of 1870*

Schoolcraft and Allen Expedition of N. W. Indians.

Minnesota History, all volumes.

Minnesota Historical Society Collections, all volumes.

American Geologist, Sept. 1902.

*assigned*  
*10/9/41*

Prescott map.

Allen Monism younger brother of  
of The William Monism who claimed  
to be The first white man to have visited  
Lake Itasca, The source of The Miss-River,  
came to The N-W- about 1820 and became  
an important fur-trader. In a short man-  
uscript sketch of The fur trade he states  
that his brother William built The orig-  
inal fort at Sandy Lake. Lieut Zebulon  
M. Pike in his Expeditions to Headwaters  
of The Miss-River. 1:139 (Cone's edition, New York  
1895) records that this event took place in  
1794. The American Fur Company's post  
however, was not on The site of The original  
fort. The relative position of The two posts is  
shown on Lieut. Allen's map, which  
accompanies his Expeditions to Northwest  
Indians (serial 257). get Page no.



## Savannah Portage, Maps.

M. H.  
8:119

The Sandy Lake and St Louis River Basins.

(see M. H. 8:119)

M. H.  
8:131

The Route of the Savannah Portage, Township 50 north, Range 22 West.

(see M. H. 8:131)

M. H.  
4:379

Route of Martin M & Seods Travels of Savannah Portage  
October 22, 1836 to April 16 1837.

1837

Schoolcraft  
and  
Allen  
Expedition

Route passed over by an Expedition into the  
Indian Country in 1832 to the Source of the  
Mississippi by Sient J. Allen U. S. Inf.

1832

N.W. Indians  
\*F 597  
.U 554

(Reduced from the original and drawn by  
Sient Drayton.

Page 1.

(See M. H. 8: m P. 129)

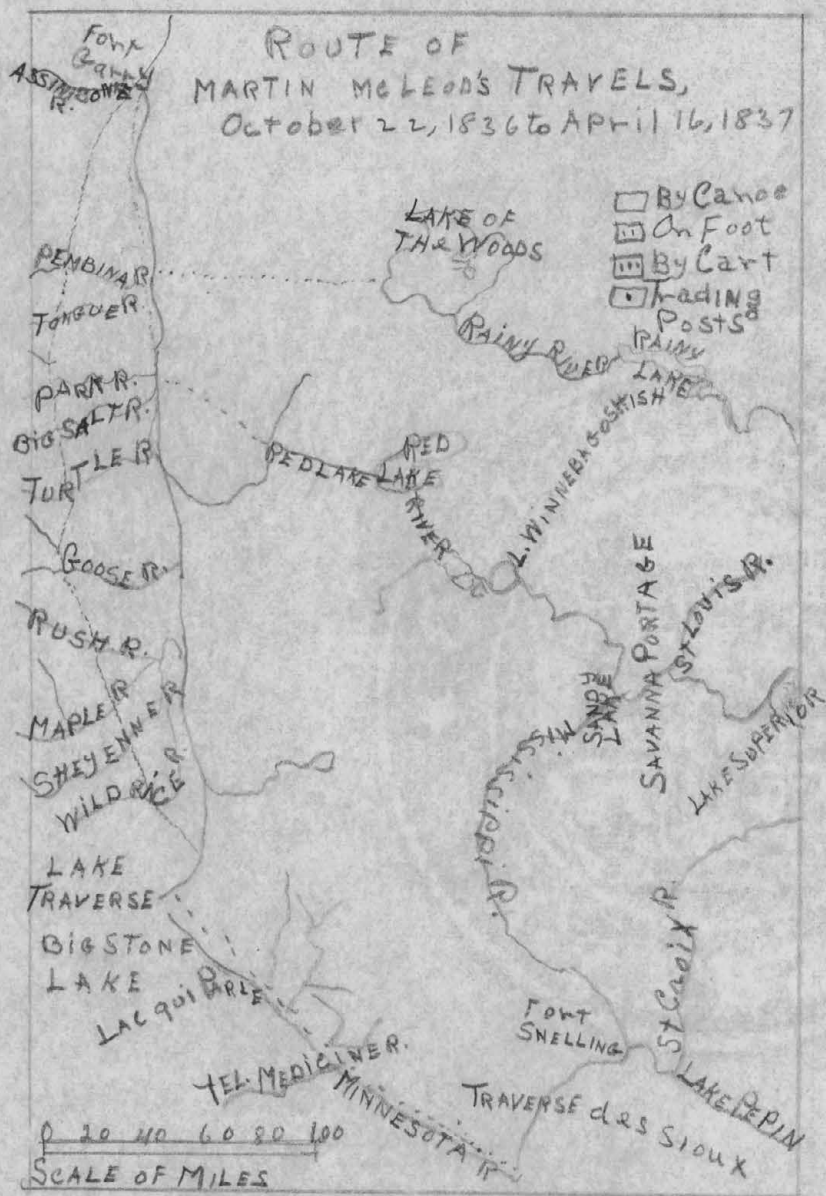
McNaghen  
Pilot  
Review  
June 16  
1932

Map of the Savannah Portage  
Township 50 north Range 22 west.

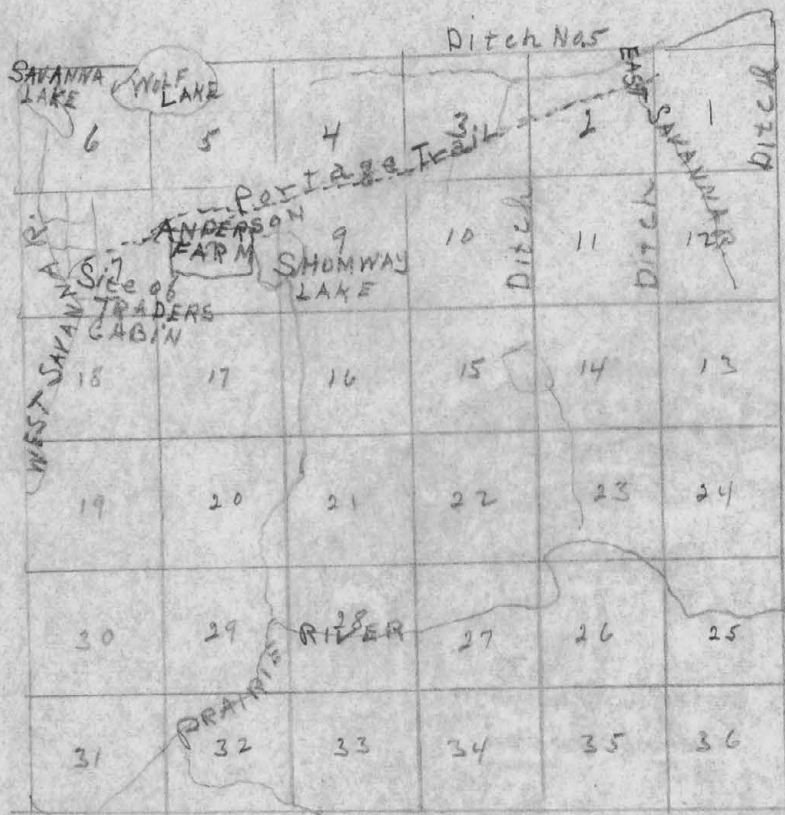
On a map of 1737 Pierre Sa Varendrye  
shows Portage De Sa Savane as located  
between the Rouseau River and Lake of  
The Woods. in.

Burpee Journals of Verendrye 117. 1737

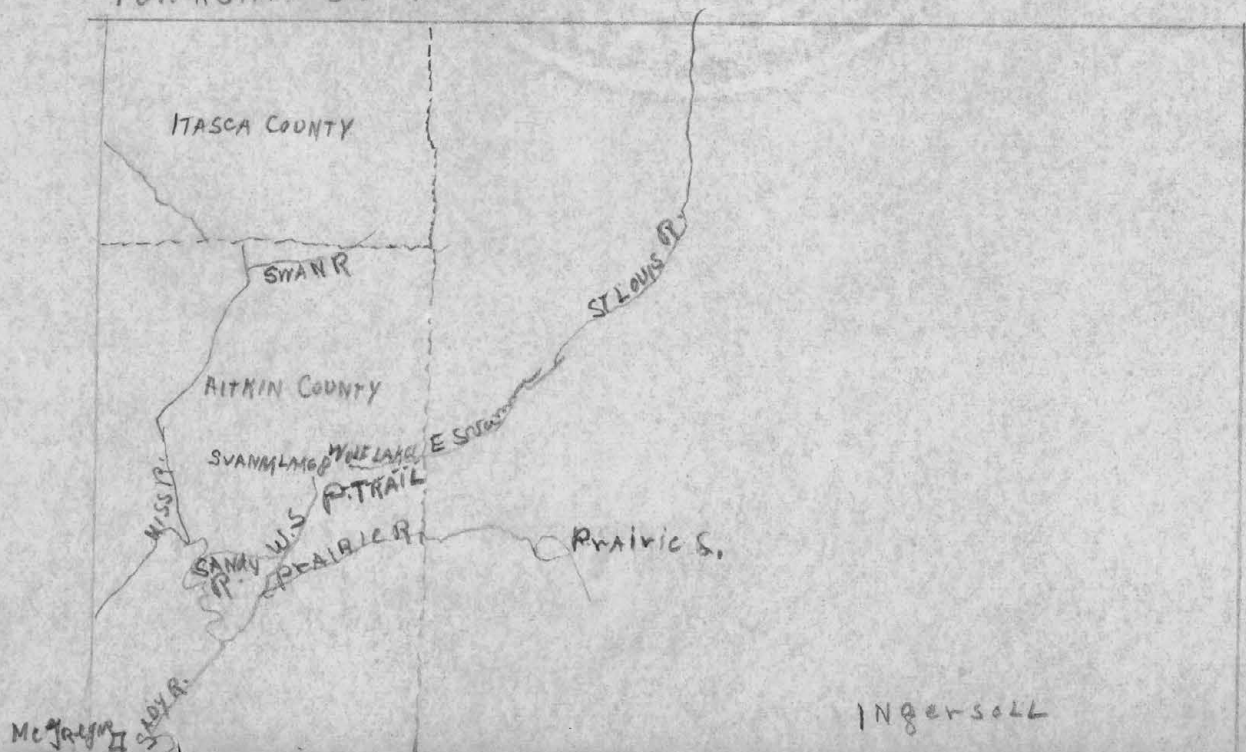
Bellins map of N. A. Published in  
1755, which shows the 'R du Fond du Lac'  
or St Louis River and a portage from its  
Source to 'Lac Rouge' which is evidently  
confounded with Mille Lacs.



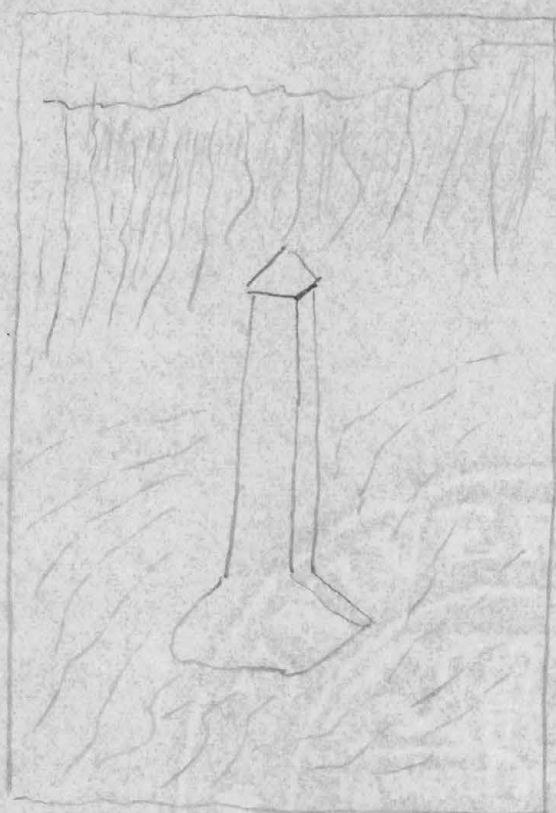




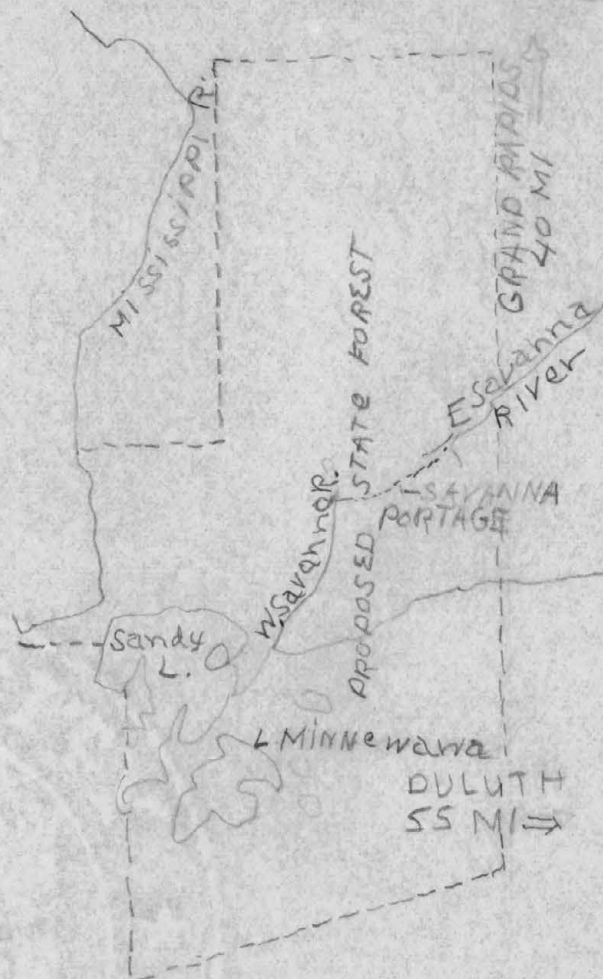
THE ROUTE OF THE SAVANNA PORTAGE  
TOWNSHIP 50 NORTH, RANGE 22 WEST







WEST TERMINUS OF SAVANNA  
PORTAGE



By R. Alf Mello

Minneapolis Tribune Dec. 18, 1932 Savannah Portage

5:32-39 Minnesota, Iowa, Red Bk  
on shelf.

Boutwell Journal, mss. get page.

~~M. H. S. C. V: 378~~ (mss. <sup>AA</sup> B 781)  
(see M. H. 13:320 (14))

M. S. S. Spates, Samuel: 1815-1887 ✓

A A: Akers, Peter, 1790-1885

A 3/5 1 Box.

Folwell, Minn. North Star <sup>P</sup> 47

Schoolcraft, Henry. The Journal of  
the Cass expedition.

(Tyrell, Thompson's narrative  
of his expedition in W. A. P. LXXVI  
get yr. published.)

Folwell, Hist on Snow shelf.  
year published

Tyrell, Thompson's narrative of his  
Expeditions in W. A. get yr. pub. please

M.H.  
8:129

Traders and missionaries in crossing the portage were hindered by underground logs and brush. Many lost a shoe or a leg of their pantaloons and emerged all scratched and bleeding. Some even lost a toe by stepping on a sharp object. Attention may be called to the fact that the portage trail is indicated on a manuscript map of the northwest by John Dutton, dated 1814, and on one of a section of northeastern Minnesota prepared in 1870 by Alfred J. Hill for Charles H. Baker. The Minnesota Historical Society owns the original of the second map and a photostatic copy of the first, the original of which is in the archives of the Province of Ontario at Toronto. The trail is shown in detail on a map of Aitkin County by Warren Upham, in the Geographical and History Survey of Minnesota, Final report, 1900, Vol. 6, plate 57 ✓

M.H.  
9:320

"Augenosh, one of the leading men, although not the chief of the Sandy Lake band, was one of the greatest hunters and most successful trappers among the Indians of the upper Mississippi Valley, was one of the few hunters who could get a moose in the summer time. With his wife he would go away in his canoe and stay in the woods for months at a time and he always came home with his canoe loaded with furs. At times both he and his wife "packed" for a trading outfit which used the old Savanna Portage."

M.H.  
9:410

Mr. Crouse points out that Fort St. Charles which was on what is now Minnesota soil was "La Verendrye's headquarters during the first period of his work of exploration". He also calls attention to the use that was made of the route from the Lakes of the Woods to the Red River by the way of the Savanna Portage.

Minn.  
Hist.  
V.13  
P 403

"Notice has previously been called to the fact that the adoption of the Savanna Portage as one of the most important of the links in the chain of communication between the upper Mississippi and



①

## Savanna Portage

St. Louis County

F561

M66

M.S.

A

S564

M.S.

M.H.

12:319

Jean Baptiste Perrault

Narrative of the travels and adventures.

M.H.

8:123

Michigan Pioneer and Historical Col. 37:521

J.W. Bardwell 1843

M.H.

V 8:129

Mrs Lucy M. Lewis

M.H.

8:129

Lewis Papers May 29, 1844

Newton H. Winchell 1878

M.H.

8:129

## Geological and Natural

\*S451

M6L6

History Survey of Minn. V 6, Plate 57 (on lower shelf)

Frank Severtl 1859,

M.H.

2:178

Surface formations and agricultural cond. M. E. Minn.

By Burpee

M.H.

9:410

Journals and Travels of Sa. Verendrye.

Martin McLeod Diaries

M.H.

4:384

Wm. Johnston

Letters on fur Trade

\*F592

P63

J.M. Pike

Expeditions to Headwaters of the Mississippi

1895

②

Savanna Portage

St Louis County

F1060.7

T47T9

By Tynell 1888

A brief narrative of the Journeys of David Thompson in Northwest America

F1060.7

T47

By Tynell

David Thompson's narratives of his Exploration in Western America.

F598

M2

Mc Kay's Journal 1794.

M.S.

AA

B781

Rev. Boutwell's Diaries

June, 30, 1832

m. H.

V5

M.S.

AA

A315

Rev. Samuel Spate 1855

QE22

H83B8

Dr. Douglas Houghton Diaries

check this for part of Pub.

Dr. Wolcott Diaries 1820

Allen Morrison

History of the fur trade in the Northwest.

Julius Chambers, 1872.

\*F351

C44

The Mississippi River and its wonderful Valley.

William Warren

m. H. C.

5:117

History of the Ojibways

Neill's History of Minnesota

P-234

③

Dawanna Patage

St. Louis County

F576

.W82

Wis. Hist Cal. U. 13:12-43

m. H

8:123

Mank, George Henry 1807

m. H

5:28-39

m. H

7:311-325

Hart Irving H.

m. H.

13:339

The early history of Sandy Lake

8:238

Minn Hist Cal.

m. H.

7:31

Prehistoric man at the headwaters of the Miss. River

Brewer, Jacob 1893

m. H &amp; C

7:162

Mississippi River and its source

Dickson, James 1836

m. H.

4:351

A Filibuster in Minnesota

m. H &amp; C.

3:-1

Heilbrone, Bertha L  
Journal of a canoe voyage from the Falls  
of St. Anthony to St. Louis.

m. H. &amp; C.

Hill, Alfred J. 1867

\*F597

.U554

Schoolcraft and Allen

Expedition of Northwest Indians

Pitigal Apr. 10, 1844

Aberlin  
Evangelist

Sights and shades of Missionary life



(4)

American geologist, of Little Falls.  
By Warren Upman.

D.A.B

Warren Upman - Bull. Geo. Soc. of Amer.

"

Who's who in America 1914-15

"

Beltrami

nothing

"

Capt. W.B. Douglas

"

Gen. Lewis Cass

"

Miscell. 1836

"

\*Z1299  
.M665

ms. x Hall, Alfred J. (Papers) 1855-1895.

Guide to  
Per. Papers

A Bibliography of Minn.

Ter. Doc. by Ester Jerabek.

m. John  
m. H. 13

Hart, Irving Harlow. 1877.

cat.

Missouri State Hist. Rev. Minn. <sup>Henry Lewis</sup> Squares

cat.

mp. Trib. Dec 18, 1932

m. Smith

\*  
F606.01  
.B66

✓ Blegen, Theodore C. - Minn. - Its History & People. m. J.

\*  
F606.01  
.B64

Blegen, Theodore C. - Minn. Hist. A study outline m. J.

Blegen, Theodore C., Minn. Alumni Weekly,  
Jan. 23-1932 - 31: 235-237

Neustaden

Neill, Edward D., History of Minn.  
on shelf.

French.

(5)

Winchell  
1878

# Savanna Portage

m. H 11:353-85

\*F606.01

Route, Grace See; Posts in Minn. Fur Trading Area. B66

Vol. 1:127-278

Book on top shelf.

Groseilliers, Radisson, DuRoi, Minn. in 3 Centuries "

Quarfe, Miles M. Exploration of the U. Miss and the fur  
trade in the 17 cent. "

Quarfe, Miles M. Extracts from Capt. McKays Journal. "

Miss Valley Hist Review m. H. 6, 330-42

Tohill, Louis A; Robert Dickson, British Fur Trade on the U. Miss. "

Folwell, William W; Hist. 1:76-79 88-100, 133-40.

" " " Hist 1:100-30

look for this book on shelves.

Neill, Edward D; History of Minn 240-99, 319-40

m. H. C. VII - VIII IV

x ✓ Briaver, J. V; The Miss River and its source

1895

Daty, James D; "Papers," Wis. Hist Coll. 13:163-219

look on lower shelves.

Folwell, William W., History 1:100-30

1820

Britwell  
William  
Thurston

ms. A. B. 781 1. P. 153-176

Schoolcraft, Henry R; The Journal of the Cass expedition

The French occupation of  
Minn.

Folwell, William W; Hist 1:1-52

Hart, Irving H; "The Geologic Origin of the Savanna"  
and Prairie River Portages: Minn Hist 13:403-07

" " 8:117

Perrault, Jean Baptiste; Narrative of the Travels  
and Adventures of a Merchant Voyager.

M.P.

Pike Explorations m. H. C. 1:302-42

Pike and Longs Exp 362-64.

Upham Warren, Minn in 3 cent. 1:329-46, 357-59

A brief extract from a letter, addressed  
to - from -

His report contains a record of his  
passage of the Sacramento Parage,  
from which the following extract  
is taken.



①

# Savanna Passage

Blegen

1:343-44 \*606.01  
B66

Morrison, Allen, and William M. H. C.  
Narrative Journal of Travels Through the N. W. Regions  
of Minn.  
Schoolcraft, Henry R.

M. H. 7:311-25

Hart, Irving H: The site of the N. W. Co. Post on Sandy G.

For  
Trails

Early Economic Conditions and the  
development of agriculture in Minn.

Robinson, Edward Van Dyke,

M. H. C. 9:18-20, 23-24

For  
R. Roads

Baker James H: History of Transportation in Minn.

M. H. 11:387-411

" Larsen, Arthur J: Road and Trails in Minn. Triangle

M. H. 16:282-99

" Primmer, George H: "Pioneer Roads Centering at Duluth",  
look in cat.

Shatridge, Wilson P., The Transition of a Typical Frontier

Journal of Geography, Vol. 14 No. 6 Feb. 1916

The General Physical Features of Minn.

Winchell, Newton H., Minn. Geological and Natural Hist Survey VI. ch 2

M. H. 6:317-329

Adams Arthur T, A new interpretation of the Voyages of Radisson.

Kellogg, Louise P., Early Narratives of the N. W.,  
1634-1649, 29-65, 213-334. (Original Narratives of Early  
American Hist. M. Y. 1917.)

Alfred J Hill. M. H. C. 7:305-352

Quaife, Milo M. "Jonathan Carver & Carver Grant  
Miss Valley Hist Review 7:3-25 - June 1920

Radisson Voyages. 1665 - M. H. C. V. 10 Part II 1905  
Du Suth  
p. 449.594

McNeill, Everett - Daniel Du Suth or Adventuring  
on the Great Lakes.

David Thompson. 1798

Pike got date - Zebulon M. Pike, Expeditions to  
Headwaters of the Miss. River  
Monk. 1807

Lewis Cass 13 20

Walcott, 1820

Schoolcraft 1822

Second. 1832

Lieutenant Allen 1832

Bontwell 1832

1833  
Oly.

Cutkin 18 3 3

Will Johnston 1833

Spates

1872

Chambers

1872

Letter to Jabez Brooks  
Mar. 8 - 1855

0.569

08917

Samuel Spates to Jabez Brooks ✓ m.s.  
Mar. 8, 1855 - Spates Papers. ✓

Clay & Peet. - 1832-39. ✓

Jos. Lewis Cass 1820. ✓

James Duane Doty. - 1820

John & Sead. ✓ 1836

Dr Wolcott Draper ✓

Jacob B. Brewer 1890 m. H. C. - 8

Lieutenant James Allen ✓

Davidson 1812 m. H. C. - 8

J. P. Bardwell 1843

Miss Valley Hart 1836

Dickensons 1836

✓ Mrs Lucy M. Lewis to James B. Wright ✓

May 29 - 1844 - Dr Will. Lewis Papers. ✓

John H. Pitezel 1849 and have left

records of their experiences.

Newton H. Winchell 1875 see -

Oberlin Evangelist 6: 61 (Apr. 1844) and

The aborigines of Minn. 589 (St Paul 1911)

John H. Pitezel, - Sights and

Shades of Missionary Life 2/10-2/12

(Cincinnati 1833).

Minn official road map by

Dept of Highways (1940)

Jean M. Nicallet.

m. H. C. 1: 17

Check this  
Allen Morrison  
J. W. Bradwell  
1843  
V. 6 m. H.  
note  
V. 7. Hart

Jean Baptiste Perrault



# Savanna Portage

The East Savanna flows into the St Louis, and the West Savanna flows into the Sandy Lake thence to the Miss.

Assuming

Duluth

Pipe Rock 1798

Dr Alexander Wolcott, - says six miles 1820

Sicut Allen 1832 - 6 miles. 1832

Henry R. Schoolcraft, 6 miles. 1820

Bentwell - 1832 - 7 miles 1832

Sewis Cass

Rev. Edmund F. Ely

Martin McLeod says eight miles 1836

J. W. Bardwell

Chambers 1855 1844

Mrs Lucy M. Lewis

Martin M. Cloud. 8 mi. 1849

John H. Patezel

David Thompson 1798

Jean Baptiste Perrault. 1783

William Johnston nine poses. 1833

The length of the Savanna Portage is six miles long, and is passed at thirteen pauses.

Winchell, The Aborigines of Minn. 1859  
Pitzel, Sights and shades of Minnesota 1810  
Berlin Evangelist, 1841  
all have left records of their experiences

\*E78

f.M7M6

XF 604.2  
1938 62  
C. R

Minnesota  
a state guide.

Compiled and Written by The Federal  
Writers Project, of the Works Progress  
Administration.  
(New York, Nov. 1938)

To Pike was entrusted the duty  
of extending the Federal authority over the  
newly acquired U.S. Ter. From St. Louis  
he set out in 1805 with twenty soldiers  
and spent the winter on the upper  
river. He explored the banks as far north  
as Seck and Cass Lakes. For 60 gallons of  
whisky and \$200 worth of baubles, he acquired  
military sites at the mouths of the St. Croix  
and the Minn. Rivers. (The latter site  
embraced most of the area now occupied  
by the Twin Cities.) But he had no sooner  
departed than the fur traders hauled  
down his American flags and resumed  
their illegal activities, which were to  
be a factor in fomenting the War of 1812.  
The Indians whom he thought he had  
reconciled to American rule, continued  
their allegiance to the British and, with a  
few exceptions, fought for the Canadians  
as they had in 1776.

The final vestige of British authority was swept away with the Treaty of Gent in 1814, and the last British soldiers left Prairie du Chien a few months later. Congress passed a law denying fur-trading privileges to all but U. S. Citizens. After 1816 The North-west Co. was entirely replaced in the area by John Jacob Astor's American Fur Co. The rank and file of the fur trade personnel again transferred its allegiance. Minn. had become part of the U. S.

The westward surge of settlers that followed the peace treaty necessitated the policing of the borders. Col. Henry Leavenworth arrived in 1819 and camped his troops on the site of the future Mandata. An additional \$2,000 and a generous supply of men were given to the Indians. The post was moved across the Minn. R. and in 1820 Colonel Josiah Snelling started the construction of the fort which now bears his name but which until 1825, was called Fort St. Anthony.



## Description of Portage

1 The lower St Louis River is one of the most historic travel routes in northern Minn. ①

During the period of fur trade this route was in continual use canoe men came to the head of navigation at Fond Du Lac. Portaged over the Grand Portage to avoid the rapids and falls of the St Louis River Falls.

The St Louis River Grand Portage was the long, difficult Portage of the lower St Louis River and many of the early travelers commented on it in their diaries, reports, and letters. The most historical route was the voyage route. Coming to the foot of the rapids a mile and a half above Fond Du Lac. The top of the bank was the first Passel. Here the Knife Portage starts.

The Knife <sup>Portage</sup> was named by reason of the vertical strata of sharp slates of sharp slates which cut the feet of voyages...

The Indian route of Grand Portage was practically the same as the Voyage Route...

Other things close by in old times. 2

This route is significant inasmuch as it became the first road from Cloquet to Duluth.

This route was well traveled during the period of fur trading. Jean Baptiste Perrault traveled it about 1784 as a clerk for Alexander Kay, an independent trader. George Henry Monk, a clerk in the employ of the N.W. Co. described in his "Account of the Dept of Fond du Lac." David Thompson, Explorer and Geographer of the N.W. Co. traveled it several times.

Various diaries mention Jean Baptiste Cadotte and Alvin A. Aitkin.

## 2 Reference + Proofs.

The evidence available consisted of old maps, the writings of early travelers and information from Pioneer Res. With this inform. certain places were found along the route. In re-tracing the Portage routes it was assumed that

V

3

Serjeant Allen accompanied party in 1832 as commander of the military escort. His report gives an interesting account of the trip.

1832

Dr Douglas Houghton accompanied the Schoolcraft expedition in 1832. On page 1-3 of his diary is an account of his trip.

The diaries of Edmund Cley give a detailed account of his first trip to Sandy Lake and likewise the return trip. In years later he made other trips which are mentioned (on page 10) the following accounts appear Sept. 13 - Left Fond du Lac Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup>

William Johnson a half breed Indian trader gave an account of his trip over the Grand Portage (This was published in Mich Pioneer H.C. V 37-163. Settlers on Fur Trade.

Allen Moursons "History of The Fur Trade in The Northwest" contains only one ref. of the Grand Portage (that is on page 22)



41

Then Rivers and Portages. of others  
David Thompson, Explorer and Geo. of  
the N.W. Co. traveled the Grand Portage  
several times and made a survey.  
The chaplain Society publication  
David Thompsons, Narrative of his  
Exploration in N.W.A. 1784-1812 {1784}  
by Tyrell refers to the Portage on {1812}  
the lower St. Lawrence River on Page  
11 of Tyrell's "A brief narrative of the  
Journals of David Thompson in N.W.  
A. - 1888. is another ref - These accounts  
give no detail other than the fact  
that the distance across the Grand  
Portage is seven miles instead  
of none as other accounts give it.  
The reason is that David Thompson is  
the only one who measured the distance  
The Grand Portage is shown in David  
Thompson maps 1813-1814.

5

One of the most detailed description  
of the Lower St Louis River appears in  
V. XIII Wis., H. C. P. 204 "The Papers of  
James D. Mearns Doty" Mr Doty  
travelled with General Cass uped.  
1820 in search of the headwaters 1820  
of the Miss. and in capacity of clerk,  
for the party, wrote a very complete  
account of the trip. He described the  
Woman's Portage as two miles  
against a very strong rapid.  
Here the grand Portage began ----

"The Geo. and Natural Hist. Sur.  
of Minn., 1896-1895 V 4 by Winchell  
State Geo. gives a no. of important  
ref. and proofs.

---

Then describe maps.

General Land Office maps of  
Township 48-15 St Louis County.

(On Pages 60-61) of The 1886 Pub-  
lication of "The City of Duluth its trade.

6.

Then describe what is now located  
on the place.

Then describe what personal  
records show.

" " formation and soil

Sum. of Ref. and proofs.

---

The distance between Fond du Lac and  
the starting point of the Woman's Portage  
was given by Doty as ~~two~~ miles  
by Ely one and one half miles.

The distance of a mile and a half is  
right.

Then compare all remarks.

---

Trail to the foot of the rapids.

Something close by

Trails from somewhere else.

---

Railroad grades of the Lake Superior  
and Miss Railway.

---

Then Military roads.

" " main st roads.



McGregor.

June 9. 1932

VI

## General Inf. Water Routes of Communication,

transportation, and trade have lost their importance since the coming of the railroad and truck highways; but in the days before these modern innovations were introduced the lakes and the rivers and their connecting portages were necessary as supplements to the forest trails and were the only routes by which relatively long journeys could be made in reasonably short time or by which furs and trade goods could be transported in quantities. The Indians had travelled these water trails in their bark canoes for centuries before the coming of the white man. The whites found and used these routes in their exploration of the country and later in fur trade, the industry which first opened this region to white settlement.

II

0.11.93

# Savanna Portage

Complete. M. C. Grogan Paper

(Why Sandy Lake is Historically Significant)

Prefacing

H. Hart

Sandy Lake

M. C. Grogan

Pilot

Review

June 9, 1932

Its peculiar charm, lies in its unusually irregular and heavily forested shore line, the large number of wooded islands contained within its area, and particularly in the sandy shores from which it takes its name.

It is no accident of circumstance that the Sandy Lake region was the scene of so many events of historic interest and significance, and that no adequate history of Minnesota could be written without frequent reference to this region. This is due to the fact that Sandy Lake was an essential and important link in the shortest and most practicable route of transportation between the Mississippi valley and the Great Lakes.

Water routes of communication, transportation, and trade have lost their importance since the coming of the railroad and trunk highways; but in the days before these modern innovations were introduced the lakes and rivers and their connecting portages were necessary as supplements to the forest trails and were the only route by which relatively long journeys could

V

2  
me made in a reasonable short time  
J. 9, 1932 or by which furs and trade goods could be  
transported in quantities. The Indians had  
travelled these water trails in their bark  
canoes for centuries before the coming of the  
white man. The whites found and used  
these routes in their exploration of the country  
and later in fur trade, the industry which  
first opened this region to white settlement.

To-day if one wants to go from Sandy  
Lake to Duluth he finds it possible to  
make the journey either by rail from  
Omaha or by auto over some ninety  
miles of highways constructed and maintained  
by the state.

Prof. Irving H. Hart, head of the extension  
department of Iowa State Teachers College,  
has unearthed and brought to light many  
interesting facts in regards to the historical  
background of Sakes Region.



M.H.7:315

Edmund F. Ely, a congregational missionary to the Indians, who was stationed at Sandy Lake in 1833 and 1834, refers several times in his journal to the old fort, at that time occupied by a man named Abbott, who had there a fur trading station in competition with that of the American Fur Company at the mouth of Sandy Lake. Ely speaks of the Fort being NW.

~~No significant references have been found to the location of the Northwest Company Post between 1833-1894.~~

8916

M.H.7:318

In 1900 the Point on which the Northwest Company's Post was situated was purchased by Thomas Edward Brown. His log cabin stood there until ~~four~~ years ago (1922) before Brown's death. The north shore of the Point was subdivided into lots, which have since been sold for cabin sites. Today it has the appearance of the usual tourist resort.

able to pay their taxes would be removed,  
but whenever land became delinquent,  
it would definitely revert to the state.

Instead of a country marked by many  
abandoned settlers cabins, there would arise  
new colonies of summer homes, taxes  
would be paid and the state would  
have fittingly preserved vestiges of a by-  
gone day which once were extreme import-  
ance to the whole northwest.

The area contains 17 major lakes, the largest of these being Big Sandy Lake, Munnemoose and Aitkin, and two tiny villages, Sibley and Jacobson.

Should the state legislature decide to accept the recommendation and establish this savanna forest, the forestry department will at once increase the fire protection, now under two cents per acre, to about four cents. A new fire observation tower would be erected in addition to the one now overlooking Billhorn Bay. Recreational facilities would be extended wherever practical. Part of the county would be set up as game preserve. New lake shore lands would be open for summer homes. An effort also would be made to mark the entire savanna trail and pathage which, as it now exists, would be definitely lost in case of a fire of any more serious nature.

In short, instead of a portion of the state which would everlastingly be struggling to pay taxes on land not especially suited to agriculture, there would be a beautiful and practical new Minnesota playground. None of the settlers who are



9

proposed to turn into a state forest. ~~The~~  
The population is less than 1,500 some of  
it summer vacationists. Less than 2 per  
cent is under cultivation. They recom-  
mended that parts of 1 1/2 townships be  
set aside, which added to the adjoining  
state forest, would make up an area of  
142,000 acres.

A campaign also is on foot to  
change the name of this proposed new  
forest from Mineauwau, an Indian  
term watergoose to Savanna. The latter  
is also an Indian expression, meaning  
an open or level region. This term,  
according to foresters, is expressive of much  
of the outage.

(Summer homes would replace abandoned farms)

The Territory which the conservation  
department will propose to set aside  
is bounded on the west by Highway No. 5,  
on the east by Carlton and St. Louis  
counties, a real wilderness, on the  
south by State Highway No. 2 and on  
the north by Itasca county. About  
10,000 acres are state owned at the  
present time.

threatened, still roams freely through its spacious and almost impenetrable swamps. The country is truly a paradise for hunters, fisherman and tourist.

X With all its beauty and game abundance, however, the savanna country has become a real problem for the state. Much of its soil is unfavorable for agriculture. Many farms have been abandoned. The forested area of this section is 69.1 per cent tax delinquent as compared to only 5.8 per cent for the country. One township alone has a tax delinquency of 94.7 per cent.

Just to the south the state has already set aside the Minnewauka forest, consisting of about 31,000 acres. But with the increasing tax delinquency and the ever growing number of abandoned farms, the forestry department, under directorship of George M. Conzette, last summer (1931) made an extensive survey of the country involved, to determine the best course to pursue.

Evidence of old T.P. has been discovered.

8

Several experienced men, of the Department, including E. L. Sawson, and R. Clement, assisted by P. W. Smedley, Ranger, and W. E. Bright, Patrolman, was assigned to the job.

Fragmentary evidence was found on the surface, and the men, their curiosity aroused, began spading into the ground. They unearthed fragments of guns in use more than a century ago, ropes of beads and some old fashioned bullets. Other articles used in trading with the Indians a century and more ago also has been found, and these have been preserved at the forestry observation station on Bullhorn Bay, <sup>Big</sup> Sand Lake.

There also were evidence of several cabins of a period preceding the days when the lumber industry worked through this section. Sawson and Clement left a marker at the point of their discovery for identification for later investigation of a more thorough nature.

In their report S. & C. found that in the area which it is



Mrs. Lucy M. Lewis made the trip  
in 1844, and John H. Pitezel in 1849.  
and all three have left records of  
their experiences. (18)

(18) Bradwell's letter.

Chambers who visited the region  
in 1872 writes:

"We slept that night at the mouth  
of Sandy Lake River, upon the floor  
of Mr. Sibby's historic trading post.

"Sibby" has been known for three  
generations as the point of portage  
for the "Big Sea Water" (Lake Superior).  
Chambers did not make the portage  
trip himself, and spoke of it merely  
from hearsay. One might conclude  
from what he says that the route  
was still more or less in use at  
that time. (19)

(19) Chambers, The Mississippi River. p 169

"A late reference to the use  
of the Savanna Portage is that in  
a letter written in 1855 by the  
Reverend Samuel Spates, who conducted  
a Methodist mission for the Indians

### Savanna Portage later:

M. #8:129

S.P. Sater

In the summer of 1926 a trip was planned by Irving H. Hart and Mr. Ingersoll, for many years a resident on or near Sandy Lake, in the effort to relocate the route of the old Savanna Portage. The historical data were supplemented by interviews with old residents of the locality. The most helpful information was secured from Mr. A. C. Maddy and J. E. Murphy, both of Mc Gregor, and indirectly from Mr. George Wakefield of Swan River. Both Mr. Maddy and Mr. Murphy were in earlier years timber cruisers and had covered in their wanderings practically every part of the country around Sandy Lake. Both had seen and crossed the trail many times.

Hart  
(S.P.)  
M.H. 8:128

18a  
--- The east end of the Portage, for the distance of a mile and a half, runs through a tamarack swamp, which was flooded with water, and next to impassable. It is generally considered the worst "caring place" in the Northwest, and, judging from the great number of canoes which lie decaying along this part of it, having been abandoned in consequence of the difficulty experienced in getting them over, its reputation is well deserved.

Hart  
(S.P.)  
M.H. 8:128

East Savanna River, where the Portage strikes it, is about five yards wide. It comes from the northwest, and turning a short distance below the Portage, pursues a general northeasterly direction to its junction with St. Louis River.

Hart  
S.P.  
M.H. 8:128

~~A late reference to the use of the  
Savanna Portage~~



It is assumed that other missionaries in reaching their posts on Sandy Lake and Pease Lake, used the portage frequently.

5

Lake. These two portages are marked as the "portage la Prairie" and the "Portage la Savanna" respectively. A second interesting feature is the "zero apostrophe" on the shore of Sandy Lake, some distance to the south and west of the discharge of the waters of the lake into Sandy river, which marks the site of the northwest Company post established and maintained here soon after Perrault's first coming to the region, August 1784 as a clerk for Alexander Kay, a young Scotchman operating as a free traveler in Sandy Lake area.

IV  
The route of the Savanna Portage was retraced from end to end by the writer (Prof. Irving H. Hart) with the indispensable assistance of William P. Ingersoll in the fall of 1920. Two years later with assistance of an engineer, Frank J. Zink, we retraced the route with a survey <sup>on a</sup> ~~old~~ transit and by field notes definitely determined its location with reference to a number of permanent government markers. Some day perhaps some organization interested in the marking of sites of historic interest may see fit to erect somewhere along the course of this portage lasting memorials to fix its location forever in the memory of the coming generations and thus acknowledge our unpaid debt to the men of the now distant past who by this trail came first into the great northwest.

McGowan  
In 1806 the post was visited by Lt. Zebulon Pike, who left a detailed description of it in his expedition to the headwaters of the Mississippi. He evidently missed the old portage trail which lead from the river to the lake for he writes:

"Only a few of the many persons who annually visit and camp on this site nowadays realize (or care perhaps) that they are treading soil sown thick with historic memories, but to some this <sup>fact</sup> ~~fact~~ is significant. In matter of fact no spot in the whole upper valley is of greater historic interest or is more frequently mentioned

By Rolf Mills

Minn. Tribune Dec. 18.

6

(Rediscovered Portage remains much the same)

In 1926 Professor Harold Hart of Iowa State Teachers' college at Cedar Falls, together with William P. Ingersoll, a resident of Big Sand Lake, did notable work in rediscovering a large portion of the portage. Professor Hart has given an excellent description of his findings while on that outing. He reported that parts of the trail were recognized by clipped bark of trees, signs heun long ago for brave pioneers who journeyed through.

Today much of the savanna area remains the same as that which greeted the earliest visitors. There has been some cutting of timber, but a fine growth of both hard and soft wood, untouched by fire, covers the country. And there are some original stands, too.

Just as in the early days, the territory, especially that portion which lies in Aitkin county, abounds in deer, bears, wolves, beaver and, in fact, virtually every type of game and fish native to Minn. - Even the stately moose, whose complete extinction in the state was for some time



## End of Story

5

II

Two members of A.C. party, Lieutenant James Allen and the Rev. W.T. Boutwell, have left excellent descriptions of the portage. It is to the travelers that covered this route between 1820 and 1855 that most of the credit must go for what is known to-day of the trail and its history. ✓

check this  
1855  
states

IV

One of the latest reference to the Savanna portage is that contained in a letter written in 1855 by Rev. Samuel Spates, who conducted a mission for Indians in the region of Big Sand Lake. From his notes, it is assumed that the trail was still in general use at that time.

V

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, new markets began to open further south. Other travel routes were established and new forms of transportation evolved. Then the lumber industry caught its stride in Minn-

VI

With all this activity in a pioneer country, a silence fell about the Savanna portage which has remained practically unbroken through the years that followed.

*H* ~~Some of the history of the area around Sandy Lake and the old Savanna Portage is recounted in a feature article in Minneapolis Tribune for December 18, 1933 by Rolf Mills, who calls attention to the proposal of the Minnesota department of conservation that this region be set aside as a state forest. The writer mentions some of the explorers who used the well-known Savanna Portage route between Lake Superior and the upper Mississippi and who left descriptions of the country through which they passed, and he calls special attention to the Schoolcraft expedition of 1832; He also tells of the retracing of the portage route in the summer of 1926 by Professor Irving H. Hart and Mr. William P. Ingersoll and describes the more recent survey of the region by members of the department of conservation. Among the illustrations that appear with the article are a view on the West Savanna River, and a map of the proposed state forest.~~

M.H.  
21:328

*V* The old Savanna portage trail, which was used by traders and voyageurs in traversing the divide between the waters that flow into Lake Superior and those connecting with the Mississippi, was located, cleared of underbrush, and marked during the past summer.

Engaged in this work were sixty-six Eagle Boy Scouts from Minnesota, <sup>Montana,</sup> North and South Dakota. (1939)

School-  
craft

Henry R. with the St. Louis, but soon narrows to about half the breadth, which Narrative

Journal it retains until it forks at the distance of twelve miles from its of travels

to the mouth. Its whole course runs through a low marshy meadow. The sources of

the Miss.R. timbered land occasionally reaching to the banks of river, but 1:221

generally keeping a distance of about twenty rods on either side.

*6 mi* The meadow is for the most part covered with tufts of willow and

other shrubs, common to marshes. The woods, which skirt it are of



46' 39" N. From this house he crossed the lake to the mouth of Savannah <sup>carrying</sup> place, a deep bog four miles across. He crossed this portage to a small creek that flows into St. Louis river.

*Portage*  
 Elliott <sup>Coyes</sup> "The N. W. Co. house stood on the west shore of Sandy l., next to the  
 Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike marks the site on his map and gives it as 1½ M. S. of the discharge of the lake into the short thoroughfare by which this reaches the Mississippi. There are existing remains of old settlements in various positions further south. It was a point of commercial and even political importance at the pivotal date 1763 in the history of French English occupancy of the Upper Mississippi. The Savanna which by a portage of 3 3/4 miles communicates with the river (Fond du Lac) St. Louis which empties into Lake Superior at Fond du Lac and is the channel by which the N. W. Company bring all their goods for the trade of the upper Mississippi. Game is very scarce in this country."

M.H.S.C. 8:245 "Pike and his soldiers in 1806 were designated by the Ojibways "white Indians" because they were neither Frenchmen or Englishmen, as was usual in those days, but of that American nation of men to whose existence the attention of the Ojibways had not been directed prior to Pike's visit to them.

17:499 The word Savanna more frequently used in Georgia and Florida, is of American Indian origin, meaning a treeless area, and it is here applied to tracts of partly marshy grassland, over which the Portage between the east and west Savanna rivers were made.

Michigan Pioneer Hist. Soc. Co. Vol 37 521 Portage de la Prairie or Savanne Portage lies between the East Savanne, flowing into the St. Louis, and the West Savanne flowing into Sandy Lake. see Perraults map. Jean Baptiste Perrault on an expedition in the winter of 1783 lived on the Portage de la Prairie or Savanna Portage for several days. They were without food and lived on "toeibies" (a species of small whitefish weighing from one to three pounds) until the source became exhausted. They then lived on



p 119 He is European French, and has been in the Indian country more than twenty years. To-morrow our baggage will be arranged in packages smaller than is usual, weighing ninety pounds and will commence passing around the falls of this river upon the portage, which is nine miles in length. Our <sup>e</sup> precise route is but just determined. We will proceed

p 120 from this place by the Grand Portage, St. Louis River portage, Aux Coteau, Savannah River, Savannah Portage, Sandy Lake and Sandy River to the Mississippi River, thence by a series of small lakes and portages to the great southwest fork of the Mississippi. By the time I reach Sault Ste. Marie I will be about twelve hundred miles from you. I find the vaccination of the Indians an irksome task, last evening after our arrival, I operated upon two hundred and forty, at one sitting. As yet I only found a few who had never heard of vaccination. It is astonishing to learn the fearful dread they have of the small-pox. I keep an accurate list of the number, age and sex of those vaccinated, together with the tribe and band to which they belong."

Minn. N.  
Star  
State  
Folwell  
P 47

First Lieutenant Zebulon Montgomery Pike who made the expedition in 1805, was a native of New Jersey, then twenty six years of age. "He was five feet eight inches tall; eyes blue; hair light; abstemious, temperate, and unremitting in duty"....The first entry of his journal reads, "Sailed from my encampment, near St. Louis at four o'clock, P.M. on Friday the 9th of August, 1805; with one sergeant two corporals and seventeen privates, in a keel boat, 70 feet long, provisioned for four months." On the 21st of September Pike <sup>reached</sup> the mouth of Minnesota, and "encamped on the northeast point of the big island," which still bears his name.

Minn. N.  
Star St.  
Folwell  
P 75

Henry R. Schoolcraft, who accompanied Cass in 1820, was appointed Indian agent of the Chippewas, he resided for many years at the Sault Sainte Marie, longing for another plunge into the wilderness of the upper Mississippi. It was not until 1832 that the War Department, de-

4  
M E Meyer  
Sometimes with a favorable stage of water and good weather some of the portages could be passed in two days, but it usually took three. The journey from the west to east took even longer, for the canoes, laden with trade goods rather than furs, had to breast the adverse current of the St. Louis and the Savanna all the way from Fond du Lac (Minn.) to the eastern end of the Savanna Portage."

McGowan  
William W. Warren son of a white father and a Chippewa Mother, received what was for those days on the frontier, a good education and later became a member of the Minn. Legislature.

Aug. 4  
1932

The earliest account found yet is Jean <sup>SP</sup>Baptiste Perrault, French-Canadian who spent forty two years in the fur trade business, during twenty of which he was engaged directly in the trade of the Lake Superior region and lands to the west. His diary is extremely detailed, vivid, and colorful and serves to give an account and accurate pictures of hardships and hazards of life in the northwoods in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The diary accompanied by a series of free-hand sketch maps drawn by Perrault himself, one of which is entitled in crude French "Sketch map of the country from the entrance of the river Fond du Lac Supérieur to Penetrate to the entrance of the discharge of Lac des Sables (Sandy Lake) where it flows into the Mississippi. The map is not drawn to scale, and is naturally inaccurate in many details. It shows the St. Louis River, which Perrault styles the "Fond du Lac", with a tributary, the "riviere de la Savanne" the (East Savanna); Prairie Lake, unnamed on the map, but called "lac de la Puisse" (lake of the fish-dam) in the diary. A particularly interesting feature of the map is the fact that two portage routes from river to river are marked by dotted lines: one from St. Louis river directly to Prairie river just below its discharge from Prairie Lake, and the other from East Savanna to the prairie river further down on its course to Sandy

Rept. of  
1871.  
of  
Savanna  
Lake  
Savanna  
Lake



Hart.  
M.H.  
8:117

The relocation of this historic route of trade and transportation was a challenge, and under the guidance of William P. Ingersoll, the attempt was made in the early fall of 1926. A map of the route of the Savanna Portage township 50 North Range 22 West M.H.V 8 P131 (1926) ✓

M.H.  
8:118

It is believed that this portage was used by the Indians for centuries before the white men set foot upon the trail. It seems reasonable to assume that Duluth made his epochal journey to the upper Mississippi country in 1679. It is an equally reasonable assumption that it was along this trail that the first Chippewa pushed westward from their homes on Lake Superior into the territory then occupied by the Sioux around Sandy Lake. (Map-Minn. History 8:119) 1679 ✓

Minn.  
Hist.  
V 8 P121

"That by the middle of the eighteenth century the existence of a portage route from the St. Louis to the Mississippi was known to the French, is evidenced by Bellin's map of North America published in 1755, which shows the "R. du Fond du Lac", or St. Louis River and a portage from its source to "Lac Rouge", which is evidently confounded with Mille Lacs. In common with all early maps of this region Bellin's is extremely inaccurate; but the physiography of the region makes it seem probable that the reference is to the Savanna Portage. ✓

map.

P121

Other than a somewhat obscure reference is an English military memorandum, apparently written in 1777, the earliest reference to the portage routes between Lake Superior and Sand Lake thus far discovered are those of Jean Baptiste Perrault. ✓

Perrault wrote his narrative about 1830, evidently basing it upon diaries kept during the years of his active participation in the fur trade of the northwest. Between 1784 and 1797 he made comparatively frequent trips back and forth from Lake Superior to Sandy Lake of which he has left more or less detailed accounts. In these accounts he makes mention of two portages between the St. Louis and Sandy Lake ✓



which he calls the "portage de la prairie" and the portage de la savanne". From the dates given it is evident that the former was used in the winter months and the latter in the summer. Accompanying the narrative of Perrault are a number of maps of the regions traversed by him, sketched by himself, one of which is probably the oldest detailed map of the country between Lake Superior and Sandy Lake. ✓

p 122

From Perrault's references by name to the various physical features on the map, it would seem that they were known and named previous to his first visit to the country and that the trails were already well defined. His errors in the direction of stream flow are no more serious than those of later travelers through the region, whose opportunities for exact observation and record were at least equal to his. The fact that the map does not show the west Savanna River at all casts some doubt upon the identity Perrault's "portage la Savanne" and the Savanna Portage of later days," but the physiography of the region between the East Savanna and Prairie rivers would seem to preclude the parclicability of the use during the summer months of any other route between these two streams. ✓

p.122  
M.H.8:122

123

George Henry Mork a clerk in the employ of the Northwest Company, writing in 1807, gives a fairly complete description of the entire route from Lake Superior to the Mississippi. He is one of the few to describe the portage who gives the correct direction of the flow of the East Savanna. Mork states that "At the west end of the portage is a small river also called La Savanne. ✓

M.H.  
8:123

In 1820, Lewis Cass, then governor of Michigan Territory, which at that time included northeastern Minnesota, led an exploring party from Detroit to the upper Mississippi region. ~~1820~~ ✓

ferring to Governor Cass, was content to give him leave, and then by indirection only. The instructions given Mr. Schoolcraft were to proceed to the country at the head of the Mississippi, to visit as many Indians as circumstances might permit, to establish permanent peace among them, to look after the Indian trade and in particular the trespasses of Hudson's Bay traders, to vaccinate Indians as many as possible, and to gather statistics. He had no commission to explore. An officer of the army, Lieutenant James Allen, with a small detachment of soldiers, was ordered to be his escort. Traveling by way of Fond du Lac and the Savanna Portage, Schoolcraft's party was at Cass Lake on July 10.

P 40 ~~X~~ Fond du Lac, near the mouth of the St. Louis River, at the head of Lake Superior, was the gateway to an immense region abounding in the finest peltries and occupied by a large Chippeway population, eager to buy the white man's guns and ammunition, knives, kettles, tobacco, and most dearly prized of all his deadly firewater. It led up the St. Louis River to the mouth of the East Savanna near the Floodwood railroad station. From the head of the east Savanna a short portage led to the West Savanna, an affluent of Prairie River which empties into Sandy Lake.

Tyrell, "From this house (N.W.Co.) he crossed the lake (David Thompson) to the J.B.A. brief mouth of Savannah Brook, which he followed up to the Savannah Carrying Nar.of the Place, a deep bog four miles across, Crossing this portage to a small journeys of Davidcreek that flows into the St. Louis River he descended the latter stream Thompson Page 11 to Fond du Lac House, two miles and a half up the river from Lake Superior.

He reached this post on May 10th two months and 18 days after leaving the mouth of the Souris River. ~~May 3, 1798, David Thompson struck across to the Mississippi river, down which he traveled through "Winnipegosis" lake to the mouth of Sandy Lake river. Here he left the main stream of the Mississippi and turned Sand Lake river to Sand Lake (Sandy Lake in A itkin county) on which was a house belonging to the Northwest Company, a mile and a quarter east from the head of the river, in latitude 46°~~

Page  
lxxvi

Map. of His Eff. in Western Amer.



123 travelers who traversed the trail between<sup>11</sup>  
1820-1855 that we owe the greater part  
of our present knowledge of the route of  
the Savanna Portage.

123 In 1820, Lewis Cass, then Governor  
of Michigan Territory, which at that  
time included northeastern Minn.,  
led an exploring expedition from Detroit  
to the upper Miss.-region, traveling  
by canal along the shores of Lakes  
Huron and Superior to the head of the  
latter lake. From here his party ascended  
the St Louis and East Savanna rivers,  
portaged across to the West Savanna,  
and thence proceeded by way of Sandy  
Lake and the Miss.- to Cass Lake -  
at the time believed to be the ultimate  
source of the Miss.-! ✓

Dr Alexander Wolcott, a surgeon  
with the Cass party, has left a detailed  
description of the portage. The length  
of the Savanna portage is six miles,  
~~and~~ and is passed at thirteen pauses.  
The first three pauses are shockingly ✓



By Hunt  
M.H. 7:311

become, the M-W-C-Post is unknown  
By Grace S. Nute. The Diary of Martin McLeod  
M.H. 4:384m;

It is reasonably certain, however, that in  
the year 1794 the M-W-C-erected a per-  
manent establishment here, which, probably  
from its form and strength, came to be known  
as the "fort".

William W. Folwell, A History of Minnesota - 1:68

Zebulon M. Pike gives the first detailed  
description of the M-W-C-Post on Sand Lake. ---  
Pike relates that the "fort" at Sand Lake is  
situated on the S. side, near the W. end."  
Zebulon M. Pike, Expeditions to the Headwaters  
of the Mississippi - River 1:138-281

George Henry Monk, Jr., writes in 1807, also 1807  
locates the fort on the south side of the Lake.

M.H. 5:36

Coues's statement that "The M.W.Co. house where  
Pike was entertained stood on the W. shore  
of Sandy S. Coues, in Pike, Expeditions, M.H. 1:138m.

Then get Schoolcraft; Ely, Johnston.  
ref. Morrison and Nutt

M.H.  
7:314

It was not until after the war of 1812  
and the treaty of the Ghent that the juris-  
diction of the United States over the Sandy

1812

the same kinds observed on the preceeding days, except that a species of small oak, frequently appears among it. The river becomes so narrow towards its head, that it is with great difficulty canoes can make their way through its windings; and the portage commences a mile or two from its source, which is in a tamarack swamp". The descent of the St. Louis river in the same distance according to the estimate kept by Dr. <sup>W</sup>alcott, is two hundred and thirty feet. The length of the Savannah Portage is six miles, and is passed at thirteen pauses. The first three pauses are shockingly bad. It is not only a bed of mire, but the difficulty of passing it is greatly increased by fallen trees, limbs and sharp knots of the pitch pine, in some places on the surface, in others imbedded one or two feet below. Where there are hollows or depressions in the ground, tall coarse grass, brush, and pools of stagnant water are encountered. Old voyageurs say, that this part of Portage was formerly covered bog, or a kind of a peat, upon which the walking was very good, but that during a dry season, it accidentally caught fire and burnt over the surface of the earth so as to lower its level two or three feet when it became miry, and subject to inundation from the Savannah River. The country, after passing the third pause, changes in a short distance, from a marsh to a region of sand hills covered mostly with white and yellow pine, intermixed with aspen. The hills are short and conical, with a moderate elevation. In some places they are drawn out into ridges, but these ridges cannot be observed to run in a uniform course; on the contrary they are confused in their arrangement. The country has a general rise from the east to the west Savannah, which may be estimated at thirty feet. This is the dividing ridge between the waters of Lake Superior and the Mississippi River. Where the portage path

Schoolcraft

330  
Davenport



m. H. D. C. - 1856 - 64 - 96

m. H. C. 1-1368-416

Elliott Caves,

\* F 592 } The expeditions of Z. M. Pike  
P 63 } to the headwaters of the Miss.  
1895 }

Check Bradish,



Mem. Hist. only.

8

M.H.  
5:35

The entrance of River La Savanne is twenty-four miles from Portage La Savanne. Here the river is not navigable even for the smallest canoes. At the west end of the portage is a small river also called La Savanne, and five leagues to the entrance where it disembogues into Sandy Lake. In dry seasons it takes from five to six days to come down Sandy Lake. It is five miles long and as many broad. It empties itself into the Mississippi by a river four miles long, in the vicinity of which lakes and small rivers are numerous. When the land is not low and swampy, it is generally sandy and shaded with fir, oak, maple, cedar, ash and birch. Beaver formerly abounded here. Making this portage was one of the most unpleasant incidents which the fur trader of the northwest experienced. ✓

M.H.  
5:35

Few travelers who passed over it failed to describe either the swamp or the mosquitoes. The missionary, William T. Boutwell, sums up in his diary the feelings of many a traveler when he writes under date of June 30, 1832: "To describe the difficulties of this portage would puzzle a Scott or a Knickerbocker even. Neither language or pencil can paint them."

IV

The Northwest Company's traders facilitated the passage of their men by constructing a platform over the entire bog.

M.H.  
7:31

The location on Sandy Lake was determined by its proximity to the route between Lake Superior and the Mississippi by the way of St. Louis and East Savanna rivers, the Savanna Portage, the West Savanna and Prairie Rivers, Sandy Lake, and <sup>d</sup>Sany River. This route which gave access to the great regions lying south, west, and north had probably been used by the Indians for centuries before. ✓

M.H.  
7:31  
I.M.

"The advent of the white man. It was by this route that Duluth in the summer of 1679 penetrated with his lively crew of Voyageurs to the Sandy Lake country, being probably the first white trader upon the head-waters of the Mississippi!" ~~1679~~ ✓

Continued from 4

4a

June 16/1932 So in old days was this tiresome  
journey made, which today is only a  
matter of a few hours.

on the way.

At Fond du Lac the furs were  
delivered to the representative of the Trading  
Company and re-packed for shipment in  
larger canoes by the lakes and the St.  
Lawrence to Montreal Quebec, then the  
great outlet to the world at large.

on the way.  
June 16  
I

There is no other place in the whole  
northwest where the waters of the Miss-  
sippi and the St. Lawrence river systems ap-  
proach each other so closely as they do here  
between the two Savannas. It is this fact  
that accounts for the historical importance  
of the Sandy Lake region. (See p 5) ✓



It is assumed that it was  
along this trail that the first Chippewa  
pushed westward from their homes on  
Lake Superior into the territory then  
occupied by the Sioux around Sandy  
Lake". (3)

(3) M. H. 7:3 / M. H. 8:118

No immediate results followed  
Du Roi's expedition so far as the  
Sandy Lake country is concerned, unless  
it served to reveal to the French, the fact  
of the existence of the practicable route  
of travel and trade by way of the  
Prairie and Savanna Portages.

About 1690 Le Sueur, a French  
explorer, ascended the Mississippi  
by canoe from the Falls of St Anthony  
and is believed to have reached Sandy  
Lake as the northernmost point of his  
explorations. (4)

(4)

Irving H. Hart, Savanna Portage M<sup>c</sup>Gregor Pilot Review



Grace  
See Mite  
McLeod  
Diary  
M.H. 4:383

## Rivers.

At The junction of The St. Louis and East Savanna rivers The former comes in from The N - and The latter from The general direction of Sandy Lake to the south. With a carrying - place between them The East and West Sav- rivers form a good canoe route to D.S. McLeod designates some branch of The East Savanna as The Prairie River. Contemporary maps show The Prairie as a branch of The W. S., and The stream still bears that name. The map which Dickson's party used must have been quite incorrect, indeed, if it showed Prairie River as a branch of The East Savanna River. Schoolcraft notes that The E. S. R. forks twelve miles above its mouth but fails to state up which branch his party went.

✓

Governor  
Lewis Cass  
Expedition  
to the upper  
Miss.  
Geological  
Natural  
History  
Survey.

N. H. Winchell  
P. 31.

In 1820 Jas. Lewis Cass, of Detroit, 1820  
conducted an exploring expedition from  
Detroit to the upper Miss. region, coasting  
the shores of lakes Huron and Superior in canoes.  
From the head of lake Superior he followed  
the route then much traveled, for canoes,  
by portaging, to Sandy lake and the upper  
Red Cedar lake, the latter of which was  
denominated Cass Lake, by Mr. Schoolcraft the  
chief narrator of the expedition. This lake was  
considered by him, as by Lieut. Pike, the chief  
head of navigation of the Miss. ✓

Lieut. Allen's report of the expedition  
of 1832, the country on the portage to the West  
Savanna river is described as very swampy,  
but divided by a ridge of higher land timbered  
with sugar, maple, birch and hemlock, running  
southeastwardly, about a mile and a half from  
the West Savanna river. It is less than half a  
mile wide, and is succeeded by swamps  
again on its west or Mississ. side, which ex-  
tend with some alternating ridges of higher  
land to the West Savanna river. The highest  
point on the portage is about 150 feet above  
the Savanna rivers.

Northwest as does Walcott. (13)

(13) R.W.T. Boutwell, Journal (Mss 1st copy)

Sieutenant James Allen with the Schoecraft expedition of 1832, in his official report to Major General Macomb.

"June 30, 1832. - Reached the mouth of East Savanna river, which is a little, narrow, and very crooked stream, having its source in wet meadows and swamps, about 30 miles from its mouth, and running in a general direction northeast, in a very

Official



brother Richard: "The route followed was by the way of Grand Portage, St. Louis River Portage, Aux Coteaux, Savanna river, Savanna Portage, Sandy Lake and and Sandy River to the Mississippi River, thence by a series of small lakes and portages to the great southwest fork of the Mississippi" (12)

(12) By Bradish, Memoir of Dr. Douglass Houghton, p. 188.

Rev. Bantwell made the trip in 1832, gives the direction of the flow of the West Savanna as northwest, as does Walcott. He is one of the few that mentions the musketoes. July 2, 1832: The rain has rendered the portage almost impassable for man or beast. Our men look like renegades,

and are much to be pitied.

Notes - 1855

Chambers, The Miss-River P. 169.

Chambers who visited the region 1872, writes:

We slept that night at the mouth of Sandy Lake River, upon the floor of Mr Sibby's historic trading post. "Sibby's" has been known for three generations as the point of portage for the "Big Sea Water" (Lake Superior). Chambers did not make the portage trip himself, and spoke of it merely from hearsay. One might conclude from what he says that the route was still more or less in use at that time.

Ely papers.

Sept 18

1833

less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  leg deep and in some places more than knee deep, for this distance in mud and water. Several times sandy mid thigh deep -- after this, much of the path is good. -- several spots very wet and muddy. We did not rest until we arrived about 5 o'clock. It is now about 18 miles to "Sae du Sab" (Sandy Lake) by the river -- about 12 by the winter road. The stream on which we here embark is but large enough to float a canoe -- This empties itself into Sandy Lake. We cross the lake and descend to the outlet to its confluence with the Miss -- at which Point Sandy Lake Post is situated.

Sept. 19 - 1833. Left our encampment about 9 this morning -- and after a very pleasant passage of 3 hours came into the little lake, upon which this post takes its name. -- 4 or 5 miles from where we entered it to outlet. From the outlet direct to the house distance is about one mile -- at least two by the river. -- we arrived about 3 P. M. distance about 18 miles. The meadows.



Clyde, Penn.

Sept. 17  
1833

The river Savanna is small -- not more than 30 ft broad (except at the mouth) -- and extremely serpentine in its course about 12 or 15 miles from its mouth its course is through Savanna -- its bed obstructed by weeds and Monnina (wild rice) -- and thus continues to this place, where it is a mere ditch, deep winding its course among high grass -- scarcely wider than our canoe -- We are now on a spot a little higher than its bank -- having made our way out of the Savanna -- Towards the forest -- a few rods -- our course has been westerly -- about as far North I should judge as the mouth of the river -- and the most westerly point of our journey, our course will be S. & W. to-morrow.

Sept. 18-1833: Arrived at the portage about 1 or 2 o'clock. A very small stream runs into the Portage N. W. I should think -- This stream when dammed is of sufficient depth to allow a canoe to be drawn with  $\frac{1}{2}$  load -- through mud and water about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles. We prepared ourselves for our walk, which was not less

Ely Papers.

3

Ely Edmund  
F. Papers  
1833  
P. 23

Most of the way the path was quite hard and the Savanna in consequence frequent heavy rains were worse than usual. This is the largest <sup>(hard)</sup> portage on our route distance 9 miles.

Sept. 16  
1833

Left our encampment about 1/2 Past 7 in the morning. arrived in the afternoon at the mouth of "Savanna River" and encamped about 5 o'clock, only one of our canoes besides us -- have arrived -- have probably encamped at Portage in Prairie 3 leagues below. Our course has been N W to day, have traveled 35 or 40 miles to day -- a few rapids to ascend -- are now about 70 miles from Ford du Sac Post and 95 from mouth of the river; -- as we have saved many angles by Portages. It is a fine stream --- water is black. Savanna river is quite small.

Sept. 17

Left the mouth of Savanna River at 11 a.m. were detained there late by waiting for canoes to arrive. Two canoes had not arrived when we left -- we were informed that one of them had wet some of her load in ascending a rapid yesterday.

Ely

Edward F  
Papers.

1833

P. 22.

See Oct 12,

2

after travelling about 3 days, we arrived at the other end of this portage.

Thursday started - about 8 30 a.m., came up 4 or 5 miles to Portage Cottage, here we opened our wet Bales and spread them to dry, some articles entirely ruined - nights are cold, heavy dew, and frost.

Sept. 15-18 33. Our goods were all across the portage on Friday evening. Yesterday morning left, and came to the head of the Grand Rapids -- distance up the Rapids is 4 or 5 miles, and very dangerous -- as a loss of the hold of the setting poles would be, in some places, destruction to the canoe -- loss of goods and perhaps our lives. In ascending a very dangerous Rapid our canoe was, by unfortunate slip of a pole turned across the stream and carried down against a rock -- but fortunately, by our exertions, struck lightly, else the tremendous pressure of the stream against the side of the canoe would have broken it in the middle, and plunged us, and goods into the torrent.



M. H.

9:40.

Mr Crause

points out that Fort St. Charles which  
was on what

Henry Schoolcraft engaged as a II Sept.  
1820  
mineralogist by (Cass 400) in 1820

Leaving Detroit in May, 1820 with ten

P 71

Indians and seven soldiers, in three canoes,  
Cass was at The American Fur Co. Post at  
Fond du Lac (of Superior) on the 6th day of  
July. He ascended the St. Louis River and  
took the Laramie passage to Sandy Lake. He  
then pushed up stream through Lake Winne-  
bigoshish to that upper Red Cedar Lake  
which Pike had seen fourteen years before.  
Assured that this was the true source  
of the Miss - , he ended his journey. Mr.  
Schoolcraft doubted, but was too polite  
to differ openly with his chief.

P. 73.

But was by no means satisfied  
that Cass Lake was the true source of  
the great river. Appointed Indian agent,

Fond du Lac post.

Dec. 17-1932

Fond du Lac Post of the Northwest Company was located within the limits of the present city of Superior, Wis. -

Monk - describes the Fond du Lac post, three miles up the River St. Louis on the S. side.

Thompson gives the exact location as  $46^{\circ} 44' 2''$  north latitude.

Perrault, rept.

1793

The present village of Fond du Lac, Minn. grew upon the site of the American Fur Co. post, constructed some years later, farther up the St. Louis River.

Monk states: From Fort William to the River St. Louis boats are more commodious, safer, and cheaper conveyance than large birch canoes.

Diary kept by The Reverend William  
Thurston Bartwell, Missionary to the  
Ojibwa Indians. 1832-1837. 1st copy P. 22ms.  
Minnesota Historical Society

---

The Saint Louis River, at the end  
of Grand Portage is very rapid, Mr. Cate,  
one of Mr. Aitkin's Clerks, ~~tells me~~ states  
they were obliged to draw the canoe up  
the stream by ropes, just before reaching  
the next Portage, <sup>Knife Portage</sup> ~~Sawanna Portage~~ 9  
miles distance, so called from the (P. 23)  
slate rock standing edgewise which  
renders it very unsafe for moccasins  
and feet.

(For Bartwell) is one of the few to mention  
the hordes of musktoes

The musktoes came in hordes and  
threatened to carry away a man alive, (p. 26)  
and devour him ere they could get away.

To all the other severities of this (P. 27)  
Portage, is yet to be added, that of being  
half devoured by musktoes. They exceed  
all description for being voracious, as if (over)



They never saw a human being.

Ely papers - 1833

Baggage 1

Ely, Ed- Sept. 13, 1833 "Left Fondu Lac Tuesday 10th all Mr. Aitkins had

mund F.

Ely

Papers

1833-

1904

p 22-3

crossed the Portage. Our company consisted of Mr. Aitkins & sons-- Alfred, John and little Roger, Mr. Boutwell and myself (Ely) with our baggage. Came up to the foot of the rapids Mr. Boutwell, John, self and two Leech Lake Indians disembarked and walked to the <sup>foot</sup> front of the Portage where we waited the arrival of the Barge. About 1/2 past nine, commenced the portage. We had previously prepared ourselves with moccasins as being the most easy in which to encounter the mud and water. (see 27 a. here) Two or three men came up with us to take back the barge. From the landing rose a steep hill 50 <sup>or</sup> 60 feet and half the distance across the portage another rise of 2 <sup>or</sup> 300 feet, Some of the "poses" were through marshes or "Savanns" -- and our path lay through deep mud and water. Most of the way the path was quite hard and the Savanns in consequence of recent heavy rains were worse than usual. This is the largest portage on our route-- distance 9 miles. We then strike the St. Louis again.

Hist.

Rec. Sur.

Guide to

markers

p. 26

Minn. Hist.

Records Survey

on miss

East

Desk.

Canoe Route U. S. highway 2, crossing of the St. Louis River at Floodwood, St. Louis County. From Lake Superior to Sandy Lake and the Mississippi, used by Indians and traders from the latter half of the 18th century. It led up the St. Louis to the east Savanna, up that stream some ten miles, and thence by a hard six mile portage, to the west Savanna and Sandy Lake. P. 26 (Minn. Hist. Records Survey Guide to Historical Markers)

Minn. Fed.

Writer's

Proj.

page 491

Henry R. Schoolcraft, previously a member of the Cass expedition, reaches the upper Mississippi River by the way of Fond du Lac (Duluth) the Savanna Portage and Sandy Lake, and locates the source of the Mississippi in a lake which he names Itasca, July 13, 1832.

Fond du Lac, one of Mr. Aitkins Ports under Mr. Cottle has land under partial tillage -- some stock, a very fine field of Potatoes yielding him about 200 bushels.



of a piece, full of rents and mud. Face, hand and necks, look like men scarred with the small-pox. A bout 6 P. M. I reached the end of the portage, to which Mr. Schoolcraft had forwarded my baggage, and here I found both him and the D. The men have come through with our light baggage, but remain one pose behind with the remainder, till morn. Mangled toes and bruised legs were brought forward to the Dr. which I venture to say will long fix in mind the fatigues of this portage.

- P 27 The stream into which we now put our canoes, is very small, rising in some bog or fen, like to what we have been passing and flowing 18 to 20 miles, empties into Sandy Lake. To all the other severities of this portage, is yet to be added, that of being half devoured by musketoes. They exceed all description for being voracious, as if they never saw a human being, and were fully determined he should not escape till they had made a meal of him, at least. They are, if possible, more numerous then frogs, locusts or lice of Egypt, rising in clouds from the grass, and underbrush. Within a half mile of this end of the portage, we cross a pine ridge which seems to have escaped the ravages of fire. The men have made 9 poses with the baggage, etc.
- p 28 July 3, 1832 - End of Savannah Portage. Our canoes are now preparing, and we soon leave for Sandy Lake, 18 miles. Bruised skins, sore toes, and legs will leave every one carrying some mark of remembrance of this portage."

Bradish  
Memoir  
of Dr.  
Douglass  
Houghton  
p 118

"Dr. Houghton had been appointed as surgeon and botanist to the Schoolcraft expedition for the discovery of the sources of the Mississippi. This letter is to his younger brother Richard:

Fond du Lac, June 24, 1832. We arrived at this place, which is twenty four miles beyond the head of lake Superior, on the St. Louis River, last evening. Mr. Aiken the director of the company in this section of the country is now here - his headquarters at Sandy Lake. ~~He is~~



24  
conducted a Methodist mission for the Indians  
of Sandy Lake in the forties and fifties."

Traders and missionaries in  
crossing the Portage were  
hindered by underground logs and brush.

~~Many lost a shoe or a leg of their pant-  
aloons and emerged all scratched and  
bleeding. Some even lost a toe by stepping  
on a sharp object. The Portage trail is  
indicated on a manuscript map of the  
northwest by John Wutton, dated 1814,  
and on one of a section of northeastern  
Minnesota prepared in 1807 by Alfred  
J. Hall for Charles H. Baker. In the  
office of Secretary of State at St. Paul a map  
made in 1874 which showed by a dotted  
line the eastern half of the Portage trail. It  
would seem probable that at that time  
when the original Township surveys were  
started here, made in this region, the eastern part  
of the trail was discovered; while, either  
because of lack of interest or because its  
route was already more or less obliterated,  
the western part of the Portage was left  
unmarked. A United States engineer's  
map of the Sandy Lake basin and the  
Township maps based upon the gover-  
ment surveys that probably the~~

and carry equipment besides. He says

"The portage is eight miles long" (16)

(16) Grace See Note, Martin McCleod's Diary. M.H. 4:383

Joseph W. Morwood, a geologist in the service of United States government, made a survey of this portion of Minnesota in 1847. The following extract is taken from his report.

~~"On June 24th, we left Sandy Lake for Lake Superior, by the route over which the Fur Companies have transported their goods toward the far northwestern posts for many years past. ---~~

~~"In winter and occasionally in summer, the Indians, passing from Sandy Lake to Fond du Lac, following this river to its source, and then, by a portage of twelve miles, reached St. Lawrence River, a few miles below the mouth of the East Saginaw river.~~

~~In summer, however, the swamps about the head of Prairie River are almost impassable, and then the line of travel is the same as the one pursued by us. ---~~



boiled roots until that resource failed and then they were compelled to move on. Near Christmas, with leggings made of blankets, they descended the Riviere Des Prayrie which flows into Lac Des Sables (Sandy Lake). On his return in July 1797 one of his men, St. Louis was poisoned and was buried on the portage.

Chambers Ju- Chambers, who visited the region in 1872 writes: "We slept that night  
lius  
Miss. at the mouth of Sandy Lake River, upon the floor of Mr. Libby's historic  
River trading post. Libby's has been known for three generations as the point  
p 169 of portage for the "Big Sea Water"(Lake Superior) reached by descending  
the turbulent St. Louis River."

Neill Perrault, with his men, built a log hut on the portage in 1784.  
Hist.  
of  
Minn.  
p 234

Burpee X Pierre La Verendrye and his sons were on an expedition from 1735 to  
Lawrence  
Johnstone 1738. The portage was crossed several times. On a map of 1737 he  
Journals  
& let- shows Portage De La Savane as located between the Rousseau River and  
ters of Lake of the Woods. The Rousseau River, which rises in great swamps  
P. La Ve- west of the Lake of the Woods and on about the present international  
rendrye boundary line, empties into Red River. At this junction is marked  
p.214 La Fourche. La Verendrye and his people evidently had discovered  
219 and were using two routes from Lake of the Woods to Red River; one  
by way of Winnipeg River and Lake Winnipeg and the other by the  
Rousseau River. His two sons arrived from Fort Maurepas with two  
soldiers in February. They left the cargo offour canoes at Savanna  
Portage guarded by two men. In June La Verendrye felt uneasy and  
sent his son and a party to get the cargo. When he asked some tra-  
ders about the men, he was told that they had not been seen. He  
sent another party to search for them. Several days later they  
returned with news that his son and twenty others were massacred on  
a small island in Lake of the Woods. This became known as Isle Du  
Massacre.



"The east end of the Portage, for the distance of a mile and a half runs through a tamarack swamp, which was flooded with water, and next to impassable. It is generally considered the worst 'carrying place' in the Northwest, and, judging from the great number of canoes which lie decaying along this part of it, having been abandoned in consequence of the difficulty experienced in getting them over, its reputation is well deserved....

"East Savanna River where the Portage strikes it, is about five yards wide. It came from the northwest, and turning a short distance below the Portage, pursues a general northeasterly direction to its junction with St. Louis River." (17)

(17) David Wake Owen, Geological Survey of Wis. Iowa, Minn., P. 300

The following extracts of a letter from J. P. Bradwell, a missionary who made the trip in 1843, writes: "We found the Savanna Portage tolerable good walking,

23

The bears and wolves having trod a very good path.

The portage is seven miles long.

After missionaries in reaching their posts on Sandy Lake and Seech Lake, is assumed to have used the portage frequently. Thus Mrs Lucy M. Lewis made the trip in 1844, and John H. Pitezel in 1849.

Both have left records of their experiences. (18)

(18) M.H. 8:129 Setler from Bardwell in Oberlin Evangelist #6:61

Chambers who visited the region in 1872 writes: "We slept that night at the mouth of Sandy Lake River, upon the floor of Mr. Sibby's historic trading post. 'Sibby' has been known for three generations as the point of portage for the 'Big Sea Water' (Lake Superior). Chambers did not make the portage trip himself, and spoke of it merely from hearsay. One might conclude from what he says that the route was still more or ~~less~~ <sup>less</sup> in use at that time," (19)

(19) Chambers, The Mississippi River. P 169

"A late reference to the use of the Savanna Portage is that in a letter written in 1855 by the Reverend Samuel Spates, who conducted a

and carry equipment besides. He 21  
says the portage is eight miles long. (16)

(16) Trace See note, Martin M & Sons Diary, M. H. 4: 383

Joseph G. Maynard, a geologist in  
the service of United States government,  
made a survey of this portion of Minnesota  
in 1848. The following extract is taken  
from his report.

"On June 24th, we left Sandy  
Lake for Lake Superior, by the route over  
which the Fur Companies have transported  
their goods toward the far northwestern  
posts for many years past."



## Savanna Portage

2

Minneapolis  
Tribune  
Dec 18, 1932  
Savanna  
Portage  
By Rolf Mills

On a site that at one time provided the only known travel route from the east by the way of Lake Superior into the upper Miss - river valley, and which for nearly a century furnished the setting for fierce battles between the powerful Chippewa and Sioux Indian tribes, the Minn - Dea Co. now proposes to set aside a beautiful wooded area as a state forest which will forever remain as a fitting monument to these important episodes in history of the M - W -.

Death long ago claimed all eye witnesses of those days when the Savanna trail was an important link in the travel to and from eastern markets.

To-day parts of the trail have been rediscovered, but none of it has been permanently marked.

Long before the white man set foot in M - A -, the Savanna Trail and Portage was an established route of travel for the Indian, who, wise in the way of wilderness, had a happy faculty for selecting the least difficult ways, through unbroken

approaches the sources of the West Savannah there is a descent into a small valley covered with rank grass - without forest trees and here and there clumps of willows, similar to those on the East Savannah. This valley is skirted with a thick and brushy growth of alder, aspen, hazel, etc. The adjoining hills are sandy, covered with pine. The stream here is just large enough to swim a canoe, and the navigation commences within a mile of its source. It pursues a very serpentine course to Sandy Lake, in a general direction northwest, and has several rapids. The thermometer this day stood at 80 degrees at noon." ✓

School-  
craft  
Allen  
Expedit.  
of N W  
Indians  
p 2

"A letter from J. Allen Lieutenant 5th Infantry to Major General Macomb"

" November 25, 1833" "Sir: In obedience to the foregoing orders and instructions, I have prepared the accompanying map and journal which are now most respectfully submitted, as embracing my report on the several subjects to which you have directed my attention. The route of the expedition was up Lake Superior, to Fond du Lac thence up the Fond du Lac river, ninety one miles, to the mouth of the East Savanna river, and across by the latter river, the Savanna Portage, and the West Savanna river, to Sandy Lake and the Mississipp, thence up the Mississippi through Lake Winnipeg, Upper Red Cedar or Cass Lake, and Lac Traverse, to Lac la Biche or Elk Lake, the source of the river.( June 7) The party organized for this expedition consisted of Mr. Schoolcraft, who had the principal conduct of it; Doctor Houghton, the Surgeon to vaccinate the Indians; Mr. George Johnston, interpreter; Mr. Boutwell, a Presbyterian missionary; and twenty engagees, or Canadian voyageurs; in the employment of Mr. Schoolcraft, and the military part, consisting of myself and ten soldiers, from the companies at Fort Brady. This part may be considered as divided into two parts; That organized by Mr. Schoolcraft and the military part under my command. ✓

page 3

June 7  
1833

S. Allen  
6 miles



P. 75

of the Chipewyags, resided for many years at Sault Saint Marie. It was not until 1832 that the War Department, deferring to Gov - Cass, was content to give him leave, and then by indirection only. The instructions given Mr Schoolcraft were to proceed to the country at the head of the Miss - to visit as many Indians as circumstances might permit, to establish permanent peace among them. He had no commission to espouse. An officer of the Army Lieutenant James Allen, with a small detachment of soldiers, was ordered to be his escort. Travelling by the way of Fond du Lac and the Savanna Portage.

Minn. N. S. State. Explorations and Settlements by Folwell 47-75



6  
in the chronicles of this region's historic past."

Allen Morrison brother of William Morrison, in a manuscript in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society, says of this port:.....

Jacob B. Brower who in the early 1890's visited the site of the post at the mouth of Sandy River says of it in an article in Minn. Hist. Col.:.....

When Schoolcraft visited Sandy Lake in 1832 on his way to the headwaters of the Miss. (The journey resulted in his discovery of Lake Itasca.)

In the summer of 1927 Prof. Irving H. Hart had the privilege of an interview with Mrs. George Curtis, an Indian woman then more than ninety years of age who was originally a member of the Sandy Lake band of Chippewa. Mrs. Curtis' Indian name was Beengwa, was born on Brown's Point on the south shore of the bay at the northwest extremity of Sandy Lake in Aitkin County. She died on the early part of 1928. At the time of the interview she was apparently in vigorous health. Her memory was clear and her statements definite with reference to matters of which she had personal knowledge. Her readiness to say "no" to questions regarding matters beyond her own knowledge gave increased credence to her positive statements. Although she understood and spoke English without difficulty she preferred to give her answers and tell her stories in the native Chippewa tongue.

Beengwa was the seventh and youngest of the children of Augenosh, one of the leading men although not the chief of the Sandy Lake band. Both Augenosh and his wife according to Mrs. Curtis lived to be over one hundred years old. Augenosh was one of the greatest hunters and most successful trappers among the Indians of the upper Miss. Valley. "He was one of the few hunters who could get a moose in the summertime." With his wife he would go away in his canoe and stay in the woods for months. At times both he and his wife "packed" for a trading outfit which

4

in the region of Big Sandy Lake. The warfare between the Chipewyans and Sioux ~~be~~gan approximately in 1730 and continued intermittently for almost a century. ✓

Soon after 1730, French Traders began to rush into this fertile Territory, although no detailed records of these journeys remain to-day. By the middle of the eighteenth century the portage route from the St. Louis to the Mississippis was well known to the French.

Removal of headquarters of the N.W. Co - from Grand Portage to Fort William in about 1802 and the sale in 1816 to the American Fur Co. of all the Northwest's posts and stocks in the territory, brought a new era to this Portage. Between 1816 and 1855 many travelers went over this route, and some <sup>left</sup> fairly accurate descriptions of the country, as it was in those days have been preserved. ✓

1802  
1816  
1816  
1855

(Schoolcraft ———)

Among the nineteenth century travelers into this country, were H. Rowe. S., whose one-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the source of the Mississippi was commemorated last summer (1931) in Staked Land.

II  
States  
Lewis  
Portage



2

The going for the first three or four miles was comparatively easy, winding up by easy gradients around the wooded sandy hills, skirting the swamps and descending gradually into a tamarack forest which was generally an almost bottomless morass. Here in fur trading days trees and sticks were laid lengthwise of the trail to keep the heavily laden carriers from miring down, and the going was so difficult as to cause this part of the Portage to be characterised as 'the worst carrying place in the Northwest.' ✓

*See yellow sheet.*

V

The old voyageurs measured the distance over the portages not in miles but in 'poses' or pauses, each 'pose' representing the distance over which a man was expected to carry his pack without stopping to rest. Sometimes a distance over a portage was measured in 'pipes' - a pipe being the distance which a man could travel before his pipeful of tobacco was smoked out. Naturally along the better part of the trail the 'poses' were longer than they were in the tamarack swamp at the eastern end where at every step the traveller had to take care lest he lose his footing and become engulfed in the morass. Here, too at the end of the 'poses' log platforms were constructed on which the weary men could deposit their loads. ... In the last stages of the Portage at times of relatively high water, the packs were carried in canoes which were dragged along the channel of a little creek draining the marsh east of Wolf Lake. But this part of the trail was always extremely difficult.

McGregor  
Pilot  
Review  
June 16,  
1932

Map of the Savanna Portage Township 50 North Range 22  
West. ✓



Minn.  
Tulame  
Dec 18, 1932  
S.P.B.  
R. L. Mill

stretches of wilderness.

Coming from regions around and north of Lake Superior they would journey up the St. Louis river to the point where it forms a junction with the C-S-, then up this stream as far as possible. At a point near Savanna and Wolf Lakes, in northeastern Critten county, where the waters of the Miss- and the St. Lawrence systems approach each other most closely, they would portage across to the W-S- river, which empties into Big Sandy Lake, and then continue to the Miss-river, (Early explorers may have utilized portage)

For centuries, perhaps, this route of travel was known to the Indian. Then, in the seventeenth century, came the first explorer, and it is believed by some historians that DuRoi made his exploration trip into the upper Miss- country by the way of this trail and portage.

Because of the nature of the country, it also is assumed that the Chippewas used this route to rush westward from their homes on the shores of Lake Superior into the territory occupied by the woodland Indians ✓