

Archeologists look for treasure

By Maria Bohuslawsky

Some of Winnipeg's oldest ghosts may be stirred from their place of rest when the Forks renewal project gets under way at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers.

"What we expect to find is a considerable chunk of human history going back 3,000 years and even beyond," provincial archeologist Leo Pettipas said in an interview.

Waterfront development/47

"The area probably had a lot of people over the centuries passing by, stopping."

The Forks is 37.2 hectares behind Union Station on Main Street. Starting next summer the three levels of government along with private developers plan to breathe new life into it as a commercial, residential and recreational site celebrating its marvellous history.

Pettipas said archeologists expect to find at least one significant native burial site beneath the soil.

No human remains have been unearthed so far, but the only excavation ever done on the site was two months in 1984 by Environment Canada-Parks, which took it over from CN Rail for a 3.6-hectare national park.

"CN was not particularly inclined to having archeology there," Peter Priess, regional archeologist for Environment Canada-Parks, noted.

When Europeans started coming to the Forks in 1736 there were three native groups frequenting it: the Cree, Ojibway and Assiniboine.

After remains are found, "the question will be identifying whose burial grounds they are and dealing with the appropriate groups," Jean Friesen, Forks Renewal Board member and University of Manitoba

history professor, said.

The province is responsible for any human remains found, she said. The plan is to create a reburial site.

Ralph Abramson, researcher with the Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Research Centre, said native groups are watching the upturning of burial sites with interest.

"The most important thing is that the sites are (treated) with respect," he said.

A fur trader noted in 1800 in his journal that hundreds of men, women and children were buried at the Forks in the 1780s following a smallpox epidemic.

"We are troubled by swarms of water snakes which appear to lurk and breed in the old graves of which there are many," he wrote.

Another fur trader wrote about a mound near the mouth of the Assiniboine River in 1782. See **ARCHEOLOGISTS** page 4

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Assiniboine River up to six metres high which was the mass grave of 230 natives dead of smallpox.

The Forks is currently a CN railyard, but in past incarnations it has been a race track, an experimental farm, a European immigrant holding area and administrative centre, a fur trading post, a camping, fishing and meeting place for native people, a municipal hospital and various forts.

Native history

Up until 13,000 years ago the area was covered by glacier. Up until 8,500 years ago it was under Lake Agassiz. People have probably been living there since Agassiz disappeared, Pettipas said.

Priess, who headed an 18-member archeological team, said they found several hundred pieces of broken pottery dating back to AD 600.

"This is the first evidence of native people living at the Forks," Priess said.

Digging down about two metres, they also found part of the floor, fireplace, log wall and cellar of Fort Gibraltar I. Priess said.

what is believed to be part of Fort Gibraltar II and part of the foundation of an 1889 roundhouse turntable.

Hundreds of Icelandic, Ukrainian, Polish, Mennonite and Jewish immigrants stayed an average of 30 days at the Forks where they were processed in the 1870's. They lived in two immigrant sheds which could hold up to 500 people. A small municipal hospital operated in conjunction to the sheds.

The Forks was the site of four forts. Fort Rouge was built in the 1730s.

The Northwest Company began construction of Fort Gibraltar I in 1810. Its capture and destruction by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1816 was followed by construction of Fort Gibraltar II in 1817.

The Hudson's Bay and Northwest Companies amalgamated in 1821. Fort Gibraltar II was renamed Fort Garry and became HBC Red River headquarters.

In 1826 when the Red River reached its highest recorded spring flood, Fort Garry was extensively damaged. In 1835, construction of a new fort, Upper Fort Garry, was begun. It was the focus of economic, social, administrative and military activity until its dem-

In the early 1800's the Forks felt the vibrations of hundreds of oxen pulling Red River carts for the Metis buffalo hunt which was staged there.

Buffalo hunt

In 1894, a municipal grandstand and horse race track was opened at Fort Garry Park along the north bank of the Forks. The grandstand burned down in 1906 and the race track gave way to railway development in 1888.

In 1908, construction began on Union Station, designed by the same architects as Grand Central Station in New York City.

The Heritage Resources Act of Manitoba requires that impact studies be conducted before proceeding with specific developments involving excavation. The province can order developers to alter their design if it will damage an archeological site, Pettipas said.

One of the public programs for the site will be an ongoing excavation for public viewing when the park is ready in summer 1989.

"There's a story here that's of interest and value to all of us,"