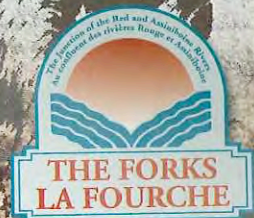


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The Heritage Beneath our Feet

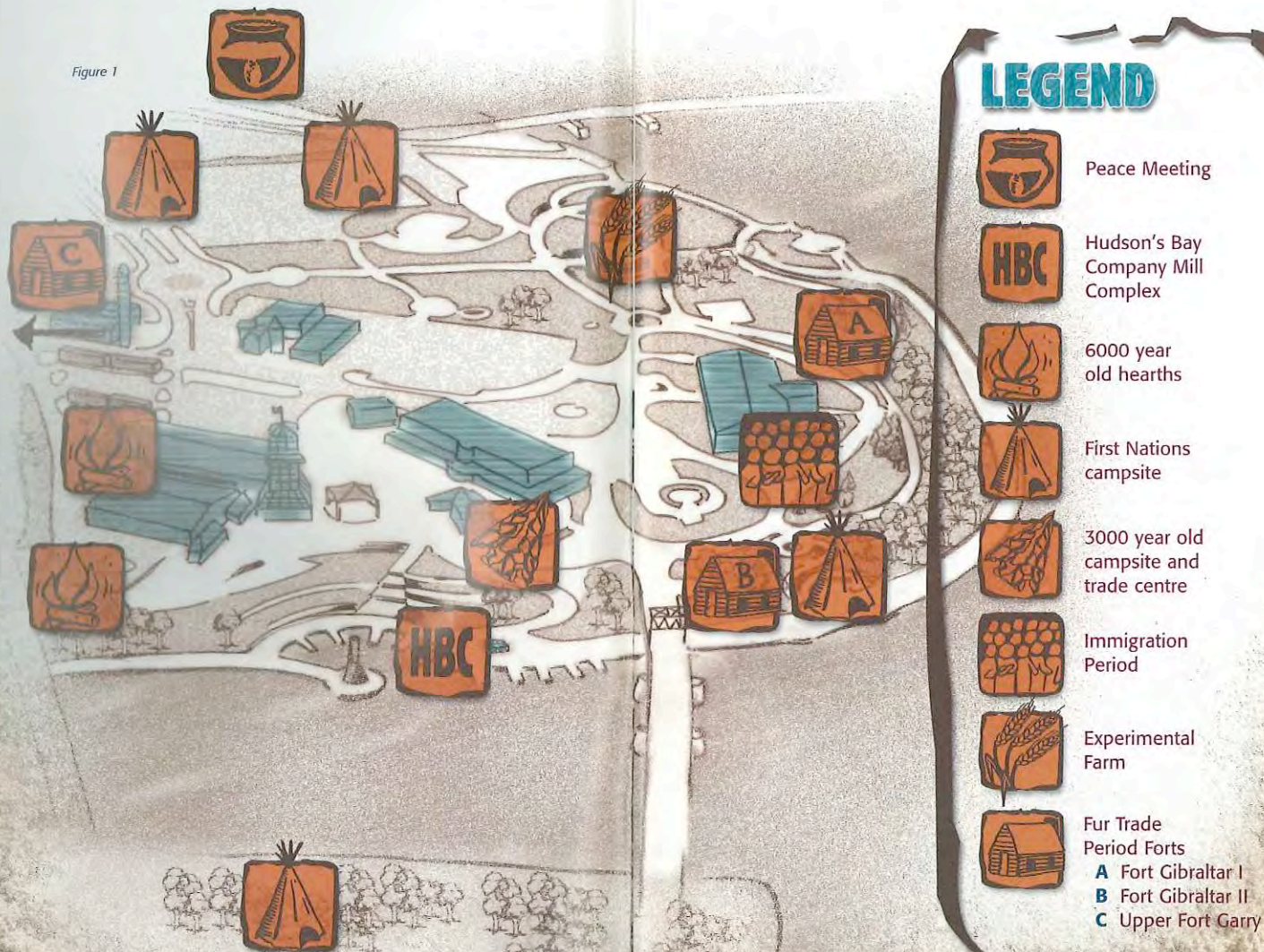


The *Heritage* Beneath our Feet

Over the last 6000 years, The Forks has been a site of intense use by people of the First Nations and more recently by Europeans and others from abroad. Archaeological investigations over the past 15 years have recovered artifacts that tell part of the story of the way of life and various survival techniques of the people of the past. These investigations have peeled

back the layers of soil to reveal our heritage. This guide will highlight some of the major discoveries from specific time periods including the tools that were used for hunting, fishing, clothing manufacture, tool manufacture, and day-to-day activities. The teachings of the Elders also add important insight to the knowledge of the past.

Figure 1



From GLACIERS to 6000 Years Ago

10,000 years ago, this area was under hundreds of metres of ice. Gradually, this ice retreated to the north leaving behind the world's largest freshwater lake, glacial Lake Agassiz. As the lake receded 8500 years ago, herds of animals moved into this area followed by hunters from the south and the west.

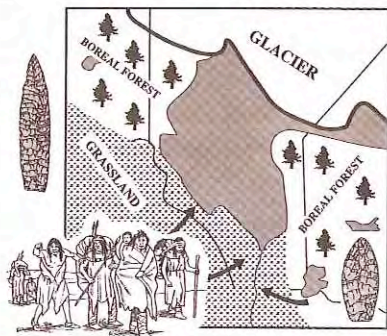


Figure 2

The first peoples were bison hunters who used the atlatl, a throwing board which increased the distance and force of a thrown spear.



Figure 3

Two 6000 year old hearths (camp fires), containing catfish remains and flakes from making stone tools, are the earliest evidence that people camped at The Forks. These hearths were uncovered at a depth of 6 metres (20 feet).



Figure 4

A 3000 Year Old Campsite and Trading Centre

Archaeologists discovered a 3000 year old campsite and trading centre on the north bank of the Assiniboine River, three metres (10 feet) below the surface. Early peoples traded far and wide with others to obtain special items. A lithic (stone) cutting tool made of Alibates Chert, which is a type of rock found only in the Texas Panhandle, was recovered here.

This knife was probably traded north along the Mississippi River and the Red River to reach The Forks.

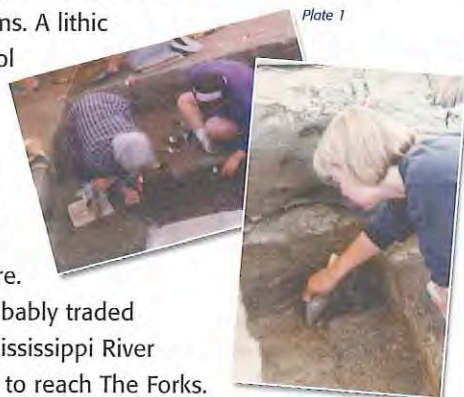


Plate 1

Plate 2



Figure 5

The different styles of recovered projectile points (arrowheads) confirm that people from the north, the plains, and the west met at The Forks.



Plate 3

The majority of the recovered artifacts were animal bone (bison, whitetail deer, fox, rabbit, beaver, and squirrel) and fish bone (catfish, sucker, pike, drum, walleye, goldeye, and sturgeon). Fish were harvested using a toggling harpoon, a sophisticated fishing technique.

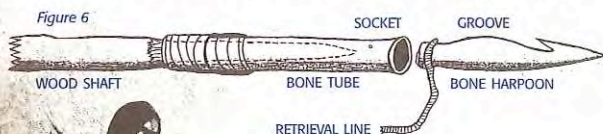


Figure 7



Plate 4

Daily activities also took place here. Knives, scrapers, projectile points and other tools were made by flaking suitable types of stone such as chert, quartz, quartzite, rhyolite, and chalcedony. This process, using many different techniques, is called flintknapping.

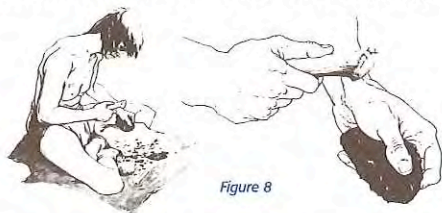


Figure 8

Women, with the help of the children, gathered many different plants and berries for food. Local plants that could have been part of the diet include hazelnut, cattail, nettle, fireweed, and breadroot. Berries such as saskatoon, pincherry, chokecherry, raspberry, and strawberry, would have been collected for eating and the surplus would have been dried for winter food supplies. The women also worked animal hides for the manufacture of clothing, shelter, and containers.



Figure 9

Stone scrapers were used to cleanse the hide and bone awls were used to punch holes for sewing the hide with sinew.



Plate 5



Plate 6



Woodworking, using stone axes and wedges for rough work as well as lithic knives and beaver teeth for finer work, produced arrow shafts, harpoon shafts, teepee poles, and dozens of other items.



Fresh-water clams not only provided food. People used the shells as raw material for making decorative beads and pendants.

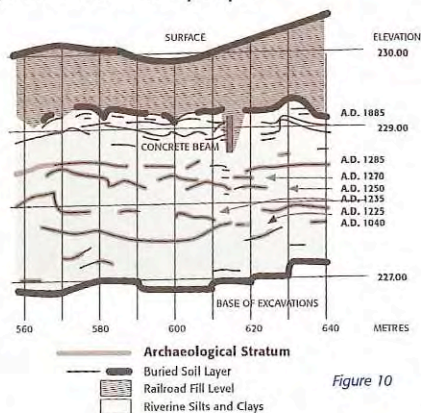


Plate 7

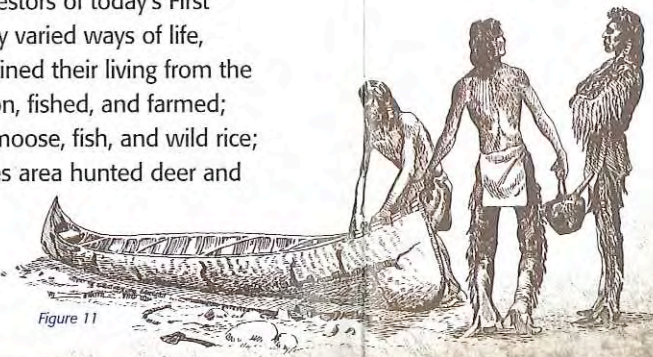
Campsites and floods

Over the centuries, changes in climate resulted in differing vegetation and flooding that altered the landscape. One of the defining characteristics of The Forks are the many floods on the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. After people had camped here, the evidence of their campsites would be covered by mud from a flood, preserving the artifacts beneath the new soil.

The Forks was continually visited by different groups of people. A soil profile shows numerous sequential layers where artifacts from various cultures were found and the dates that people came to camp, hunt, fish, visit, trade, and meet other people.



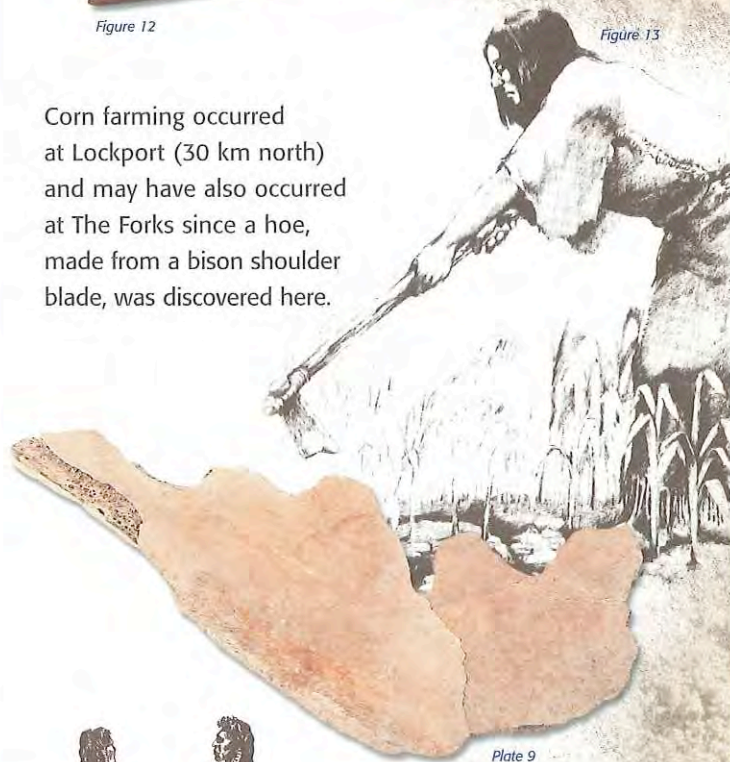
These people are the direct ancestors of today's First Nations peoples. They had many varied ways of life, depending upon how they obtained their living from the land: prairie people hunted bison, fished, and farmed; people of the forests relied on moose, fish, and wild rice; and people from the Great Lakes area hunted deer and fished. Because of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, it was very easy for people to come together to trade their special products with others.



As well as being a highway, the two rivers provided a source of food. Different types of fishing methods were used. Recovered artifacts include a bone harpoon and a copper harpoon.



Corn farming occurred at Lockport (30 km north) and may have also occurred at The Forks since a hoe, made from a bison shoulder blade, was discovered here.



The "peace meeting"

Aboriginal Elder oral history tells of a Peace Meeting of several tribes, held at The Forks, over 500 years ago. Archaeological recoveries of campsites from this meeting are radiocarbon dated to A.D. 1285.



Figure 14

To support such a large gathering of people, intensive hunting and fishing occurred.



Figure 15



Plate 10

In addition, everyday activities took place in conjunction with the important trade and territory discussions. The site of this meeting covered a large area and archaeological research has recovered artifacts indicating that hideworking, stoneworking, and ornament manufacture occurred as well as daily food preparation.



Plate 11

chalcedony knife and bone spatulas for food preparation

bone scrapers and awls for hideworking

Plate 12

Plate 13

antler flaker for stoneworking and elk tooth for decoration

One of the most important activities was the creation of pottery by the women of the different groups. These pots were used as storage containers or cooking pots. Archaeologists use the different styles of pottery, which were introduced 2000 years ago, to identify different cultures. The earliest technique of pottery making was coiling, while later pots were made inside woven bags or net molds. The pottery found so far at The Forks has been made with the net method.



Figure 16

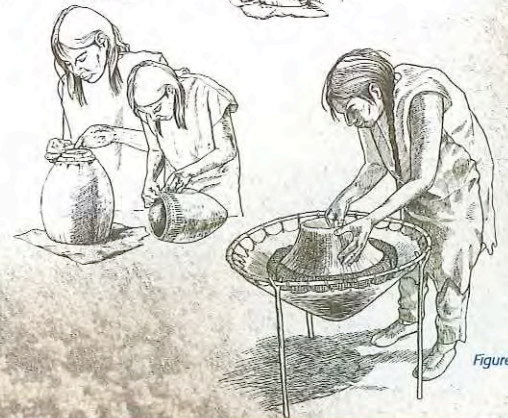


Figure 17

Various bone and wood tools were used to decorate these pots with distinct patterns. This was done by using a cord-wrapped stick to produce impressions by incising with shaped bone tools or by pressing round, oval, or square objects into the clay. Different decorative styles have been given names usually based on the area or town where the sherds of that type of pottery were first discovered. More than one group of First Nations people could have manufactured the same style of pottery.

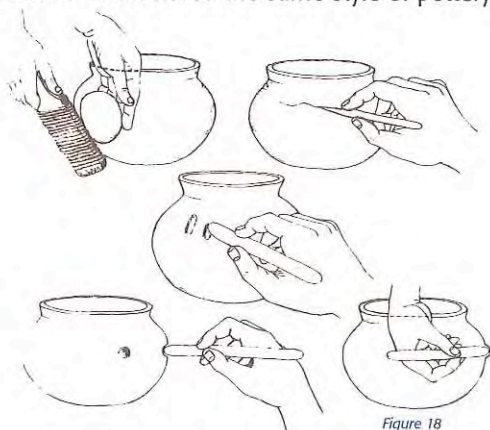


Figure 18

The distinctive types of recovered ceramics indicate people came from southern Manitoba (Winnipeg River and Blackduck); southwestern Manitoba and eastern Saskatchewan (Plains Woodland); Manitoba and the Dakotas (Sandy Lake and Red River); east central Manitoba (Bird Lake and Duck Bay); western Ontario (Rainy River); and southern Minnesota (Oneota).

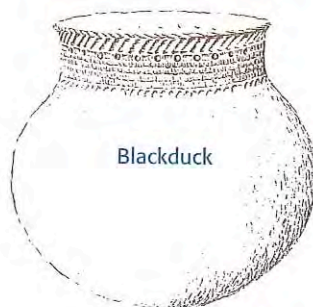


Plate 14

Archaeologists seldom find complete ceramic pots. Based on the recovered ceramic fragments, artists have drawn images that show what the complete pot may have looked like before it was broken during use.



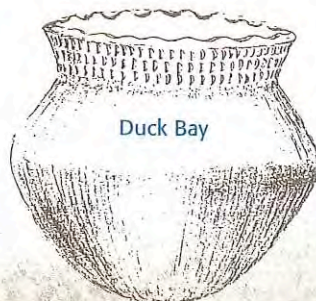
Red River



Blackduck



Bird Lake



Duck Bay

Figure 19

First Contact

La Vérendrye was the first European to meet the First Nations peoples camped at The Forks. While he was at Lake of the Woods in 1737, he was invited by the Nakota (Assiniboin) to come to The Forks. He reported that there were two camps of Assiniboin at the junction of the two rivers. When he returned in 1738, Cree were present.



Figure 20

Archaeological evidence has yet to be found, but valid archival data records the presence of Fort Rouge (1738 - 1749), established by La Vérendrye, somewhere in the vicinity of The Forks.

Other traders passed through the area prior to the establishment of the first permanent fur trade post here in 1810. Along with the traders, numerous First Nations groups including the Nakota (Assiniboin), Dakota (Sioux), Anishinaabe (Ojibwa), and Cree also camped in the area.

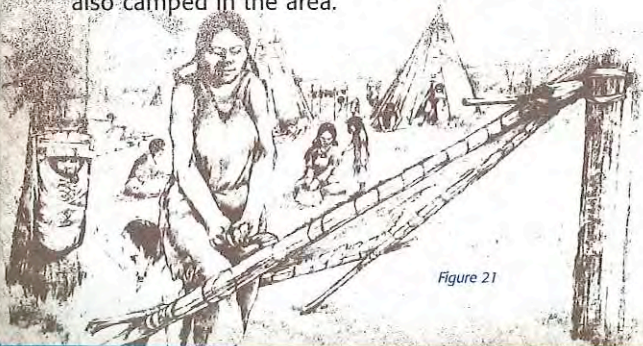


Figure 21

The Fur trade era

Fort Gibraltar I was built on the west bank of the Red River in 1810 by the North West Company. It was a provisioning post for obtaining pemmican, a pounded mix of dried bison meat, melted fat, marrow, and berries.

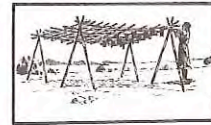


Figure 22

Plate 15



Archaeologists found remnants of the buildings and evidence of trade. Items traded for furs included muskets, shot and gunflints, beads, tinkling cones, rings, and brass pots.

Figure 23
Chief Peguis
painted by
Peter Rindisbacher
circa 1821

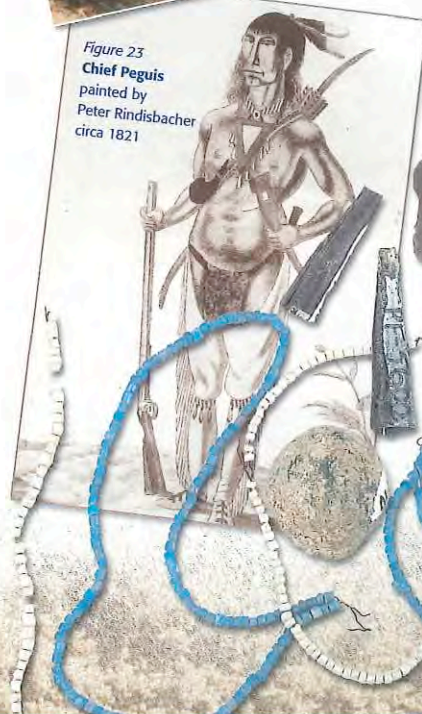


Plate 16



Fort Gibraltar I was dismantled and burned in 1815 during conflict between the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company and their allies, the Selkirk Settlers.

In 1826, a huge flood inundated this area, leaving a layer of sand and silt over the ruins of the fort. Archaeologists found prints of moccasin-clad people, cattle, horses, and buggy wheels encapsulated just underneath this layer. These may have been made by people fleeing from the flood with their livestock and possessions.



Figure 24

Plate 17

Fort Gibraltar II was built in 1817 by the North West Company on the north bank of the Assiniboine River at the junction of the two rivers.

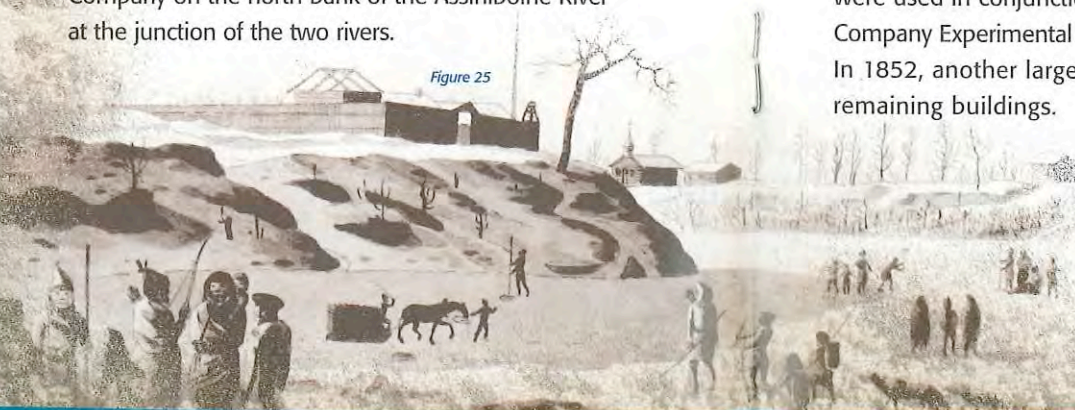


Figure 25

In 1821, after amalgamation with the Hudson's Bay Company, it became the western headquarters for the fur trade. It was then renamed Fort Garry.



Figure 26

During its existence, Fort Garry was a major provisioning centre for the pemmican trade with large groups of Métis bison hunters pursuing the herds in the western prairies and bringing back the meat in caravans of Red River carts. The hunts expanded from 500 carts in 1820 to 1200 carts in 1840.



Figure 27

This fort was badly damaged by the huge flood of 1826. Some surviving buildings were used in conjunction with the Hudson's Bay Company Experimental Farm, established in 1836. In 1852, another large flood destroyed the remaining buildings.

Because of the 1826 flood which almost destroyed the Hudson's Bay Company facilities and the Red River Colony, George Simpson (Governor of the HBC) decided to build a fort outside of the flood zone. He commissioned the construction of Lower Fort Garry, a considerable distance north on the Red River. It was a good location, but the fur trade focus was at the junction of the two rivers requiring the building of another fort at The Forks. In 1835, Upper Fort Garry was built by the Hudson's Bay Company.

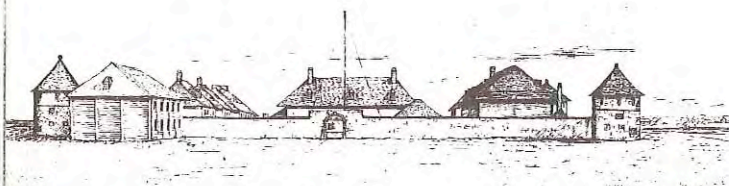


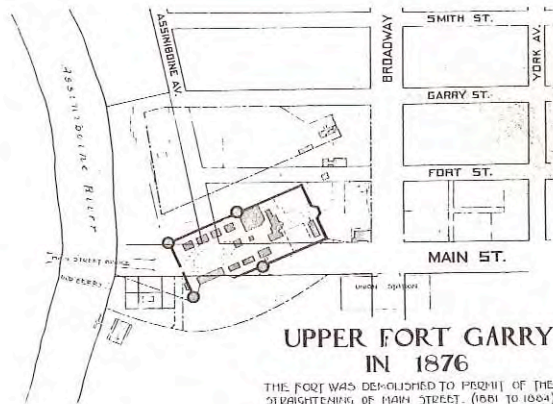
Figure 28

In 1852, the fort was doubled in size to accommodate British troops as well as carry on company business.

Figure 29



During the reconstruction of Main Street in 1998, archaeologists discovered the remains of one of the bastions and the east wall of Upper Fort Garry.



**UPPER FORT GARRY
IN 1876**

THE FORT WAS DEMOLISHED TO PREVENT THE STRAIGHTENING OF MAIN STREET. (1861 TO 1864)

Figure 30

Plate 18



Plate 19



Upper Fort Garry was the political, administrative, business, and social centre for Rupertsland (western Canada). The fort had permanent residents—traders, clerks, and the governor of the territory. Some remnants of dishes that would have been used by the inhabitants were recovered along with other artifacts such as cloth, buttons, beads, combs, and square nails.



Plate 20

The introduction of steam paddleboats on the Red River increased trade with the Americans to the south. To accommodate commercial freight, the Hudson's Bay Company built a large warehouse at The Forks.



Figure 31

With the economy changing from fur trade to agriculture and with increased urbanization, the First Nations presence at The Forks diminished. However, over the next century, the City of Winnipeg continued to benefit from the many contributions of members of the different First Nations communities with increasing numbers choosing to reside in the city.

The Hudson's Bay Company established a flour mill complex in 1872. Evidence of the basement and pilings from this mill were found during an archaeological project.

Plate 21



Figure 32



Demolition of Upper Fort Garry began in the 1870s and by 1885 the only remaining portion was the north gate which still stands at the corner of Broadway and Main Street.

The Immigration Period

Massive waves of immigrants began arriving by steambot, from 1870 through the 1890s. Women and children could stay at the immigration sheds built along the river while the men went out to homestead.

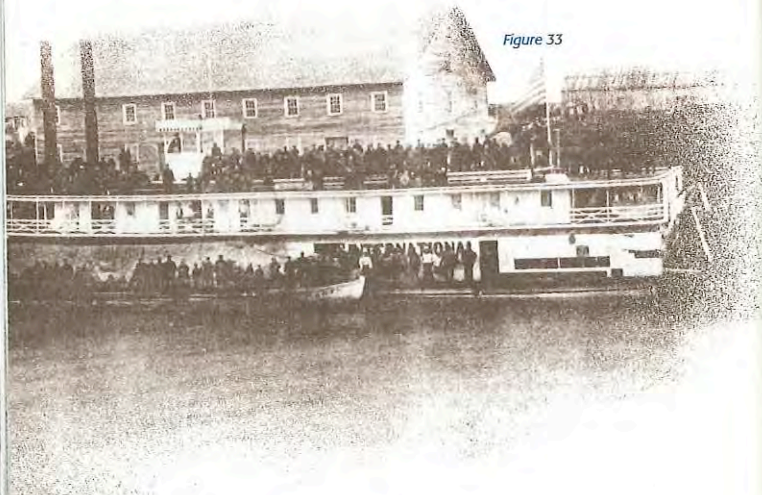


Figure 33

In 1888, the Northern Pacific and Manitoba Railroad established its northern terminus at The Forks and settlers began arriving by train.



Figure 34

For a century this area was a hub of railroad activity. The construction of Union Station (on Main Street) and the High Line Main Track in 1911 made The Forks all but inaccessible to most people.



Figure 35

Since 1988, with the establishment of The Forks Renewal Corporation and The Forks National Historic Site of Canada (Parks Canada), this site has once again become a meeting place for all with visiting, trading, music, and storytelling as it had been in the past.

In recognition of the rich history of this location, The Forks North Portage Partnership ensures that all development projects have an archaeologist present. This is to make sure that the resources are protected and recovered in such a manner that the pages of history have new facts written upon them. There are still untold resources beneath our feet, each with their own story to tell.

acknowledgements

The guidance and help of Dr. E. Leigh Syms, Sid Kroker, Jeff Palmer, and the members of The Forks Heritage Advisory Committee are gratefully acknowledged.

Author: Pam Goundry

Artifact Photos: Ken Miner

Design: Tom Powell Design Studio

For those who wish to learn more of the fascinating history of this site, further information can be obtained from The Forks North Portage Partnership; The Forks National Historic Site of Canada (Parks Canada); Historic Resources Branch of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism; The Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature; the Provincial Archives of Manitoba; and Quaternary Consultants Ltd.

July 2002

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Plate 2 Archaeologists excavating at 3000 year old campsite

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Plate 20 Artifacts from Upper Fort Garry (pitcher, plate, cup)

Source: Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature Collections; Quaternary Consultants Ltd., 1998, *Archaeology of Main Street Roadworks: York Avenue to Tache Avenue 1996 - 1998*.

Plate 21 Archaeologist excavating piling from Hudson's Bay Company Flour Mill

Source: Quaternary Consultants Ltd.

