

The People Of Our Place

The Missouri French



French immigrants from the Great Lakes and France settled in Missouri in the 1700s in search of minerals for mining and furs for trading. In 1763, Pierre Laclède Liguist and Rene Auguste Chouteau found a site for a fur trading company on the Mississippi River in Missouri, named St. Louis in honor of King Louis IX of France.

St. Louis became a trading post for the western frontier. French **voyageurs** (voy-a-joors) were hearty canoemen who traveled on the rivers in search of furs for trading. Their diet was corn, wild rice and bear grease. Beads, knives and blankets were some items traded. Beaver pelts were popular in the 1800s for European beaver fur hats. Buffalo hides were used as blankets.

Through friendships with the Indians, the French learned of Missouri's mineral-rich mine areas such as the lead belt southwest of St. Louis. In 1723, Philippe Renault began smelting lead in Washington County for shipment on the Mississippi River. Missouri was the world's largest producer of lead through the 20th Century.

French families settled near rivers. Long lots were clustered together with each family having a piece of land for farming

near the river or stream if possible.

Communities enjoyed simple pleasures such as baking French wheat bread cooked in outdoor ovens. A community celebration practiced to this day is **La Guignolee**. Carolers travel from house to house on New Year's Eve singing La Guignolee, chorus: "Bonsoir le maitre et las maitresse et tout le monde du logis!" Good evening master and mistress, and to everyone else who lives with you!

Common French words include: **prairie, depot, crevasse, bayou, levee and bureau**. French names of Missouri towns and rivers include: **Bourbeuse, Carondelet, Maries, Bonne Terre, Florissant, Cuivre River, Portage des Sioux, Rocheport, Courtois, Ste. Genevieve, Gasconade, St. Francois, Creve Coeur, Cape Girardeau**.

The French voyageurs (canoemen) and **coureur de bois** (forest or woods runners) were men who traded goods and supplies in the fur trade. Birch-bark canoes, often painted red and green, were loaded with iron tools, utensils, bright cloth, beads, kettles, traps, needles, fish hooks, blankets, jewelry and guns for trading furs such as muskrat, otter, fox, raccoon, deer, bison and beaver.

Activities



- In the 1700s and 1800s, the Missouri French worked as farmers, canoemen and traders to make a living. Search your newspaper to find occupations of today's men and women in your community. Explore the classified ads.
- Fur trading canoe: Many Frenchmen traveled by canoe and worked as fur traders in the 1700s. To show where the Frenchmen did most of their work, design a diorama of a fur trading center and start by first making a canoe.
- Fold a piece of construction paper in half.

Fold each of the halves into half, making a "w" shape. Fold up the paper, longwise, and cut just around the ends to make a canoe shape. Punch holes in the rounded ends and place yarn through the holes to hold the ends of the canoe together. Decorate the outside of the canoe in red or green as the early traders did. Complete the diorama by placing the canoe near a river and scale model trading post.

- Classroom Trading Post: Set out a table to be used as a fur trading post. Gather items for bartering such as metal nails, iron skillet, blankets, real or fake fur pelts. Or, draw pictures of items to trade.

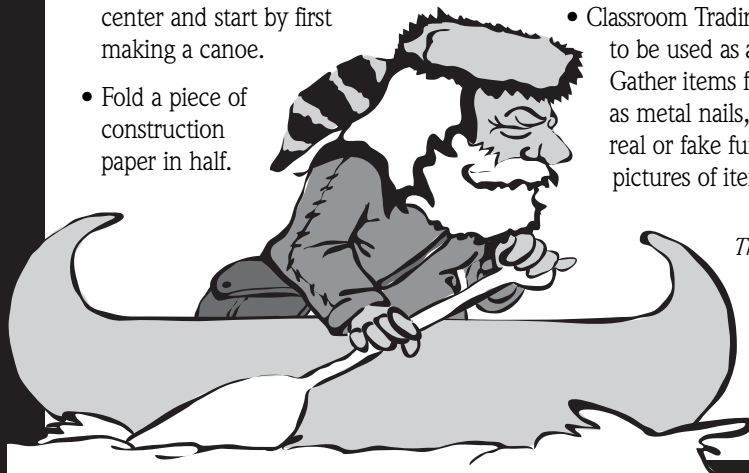
Put a sign above your post with the values of bartered items:

- 1 blanket = 6 beaver pelts
- 1 kettle = 1 beaver pelt
- 1 otter pelt = 2 beaver pelts
- 3 fox pelts = 1 beaver pelt
- 1 bear pelt = 1 beaver pelt

Invite friends, classmates and family members. Enjoy some French wheat bread with honey as the early settlers did.

Can you find newspaper articles on hunting or trapping in Missouri today? What animals are now hunted in Missouri?

Social Studies Knowledge Standards: 2,5,6
Performance Standards, Goals: 1:9,1:10,
2:1,2:3,2:4,2:5,4:3,4:6



This Newspaper In Education feature is brought to you by this newspaper, Missouri Geographic Alliance and the Missouri Press Association.

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The 2004 National Geographic Action theme is "Culture: The Sounds of Place." For more details, visit: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/geographyaction/>