HOW THE CHAUTAUQUA PORTAGE CHANGED
WORLD HISTORY

I suppose everyone remembers the old nursery rhyme about the horse-shoe, the rider and eventually the kingdom that was lost, all because of a horse-shoe nail. In the 18th century, an empire was lost and another gained, all because of a road that was cut by the French over the Chautauqua Portage from Lake Erie to Chautauqua Lake.

When I made this statement with a brief explanation in an article several months ago, I was politely taken to task for exaggerating and stretching historic facts in order to suit a public desire for sensationalism and my own sense of the dramatic. Now the occasion presents itself when I can expand my statement and prove my point.

It is an indisputable fact conceded by all historians, including Schevill, that the French and Indian War in America was responsible for the exhausting Seven Years War which starved and impoverished all of Europe. True enough, England and France would have probably found an excuse to resume their centuries old quarrel on the European continent eventually, but it is impossible to speculate on what the results of any other war might have been. We know that as it did turn out, France lost her hold on the American continent and India and England possessed herself of Canada and India. It was the beginning of her great Empire, the shattering of any hopes for a French one, and of most immediate importance to us, the English victory determined that our heritage and language would be Anglo-Saxon, not French.
Since there is no argument that the American-Colonial conflagration brought on the Seven Years War, this paper is concerned primarily with the beginning of the French and Indian War and the part in it played by the Chautauqua Portage.

I think that in order to get a panoramic view of the situation, it is necessary to establish a few dates and fact. When the New World was discovered in 1492, it was the signal for the three great European powers, Spain, France and England to whip over here as fast as possible and claim anything that looked valuable. As time passed, Spain became colonially weak and although her influence is still felt in the southern part of the U.S., she's not part of this picture. But England solidly entrenched herself along the Atlantic coast and France established herself around the mouth of the Mississippi and in southeastern Canada.

By 1615, French missionaries were exploring south of Quebec and Niagara, and in that year a man by the name of Etienne Brule wandered through Chautauqua County with a band of 12 friendly Hurons. He is the first white man of whom we have any record who traveled in this section. La Salle, to whom that honor has often been given, sailed past the county's shores 6 4 years later, in 1677. But by 1640, there had already been missionaries through Chautauqua and in 1669 there had been French expeditions on Lake Erie.

It is evident that this territory was not unknown to the French when Baron Longueuil passed over the Indian portage trail between Lake Erie and Chautauqua Lake in 1739 with the first military expedition, which was moving against the Chickasaws in northern Mississippi. He called our lake, Lake Ste. Croix, in an attempt to give meaning to
the Indian word, Chautauqua.

In 1740, an 18 year old French engineer by the name of Chaussegros de Lery knew this section well enough to make a map of it, and when Celoron, nine years later, found the Chadakoin too shallow for his boats, one of his men, Sieur de la Saussaye, already knew of a portage around Jamestown. Celoron should get credit for much, but not for being the first explorer in Chautauqua County.

The treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, also known as the Peace of Aachen, in 1748 had ended the European war of the Austrian Succession in which most of Europe was embroiled. It left a festering sore between the nations, and France, especially, was anxious to make up for the failure of her European plans by expansion in the New World. England had the same idea, and the Ohio Valley was what they both wanted. Each claimed it by the right of exploration, and in the past the kings of both countries had found it a simple and gracious gesture to grant any of this land to anyone who pleased them. Naturally the grants infringed on one another. But if either had a right by exploration to this rich valley, France's was unquestionably stronger and she thought so, too.

To claim La Belle Riviere, the Beautiful Ohio, in the name of the King of France and warn off all Indians and settling English, Captain Pierre Celoron, Sieur de Blainville, in 1749, was put in charge of a detachment to quietly and peacefully float down that river. No war, only warning, but incidently he was to destroy an Indian settlement on the banks of the Ohio which was in British interests. That, according to French plans, was the first step toward the locating of a series of forts from Niagara to New Orleans, which would completely and effectively limit the English to the Atlantic coast. One may well wonder about
the consequences if those forts had been built.

Now Celoron was chosen for this job because he had distinguished himself in the past. He was a man of deep integrity and pride. He was conscientious and honest, but he was also haughty and dictatorial, and those traits, together with jealous enemies got him into trouble with his superior officers. When he was accused of insubordination, he felt it beneath him to even plead his case. Few French officers were really popular with their men, but Celoron got along with them better than the famous General DuQuesne, for whom the fort at Pittsburgh was named, for that pompous fellow commanded no respect at all and his soldiers sang dirty songs about him.

In spite of his faults and because of his excellent fighting record, the Lieutenant General of Canada, Marquis de la Gallisoniere, who was a hunch back of meagre appearance and tremendous ability as a naval commander, appointed him to lead the detachment south. It is interesting at this point to note that the deformed Gallisoniere would have preferred to send 10,000 French peasants to settle the Ohio Valley, but his good advice was not taken. What an interesting turn history would have taken the next few years if it had been!

A thing which has continually astonished me in reading reputable histories on this period, is the constant confusion between Celoron, Sieur de Blainville, and Jean Baptiste Lemoyne, Sieur de Bienville who was Governor of Louisiana at this same time. Most of our local histories and even one of America's finest historian's, Rupert Hughes, himself, in his inimitable biography of George Washington, mistakenly calls Celoron the Sieur de Bienville. The point is conclusively settled by Severance who
is an authority on early French-American history, and also by the "Wilderness Chronicles of Western Pennsylvania," a treatise published by that state just a few years ago.

Most of what we know of Celoron's expedition, we've learned from his maps and manuscripts and from the diary of Father Bonnecamp, one of his Jesuit Missionaries who made inaccurate hydrographic computations throughout the trip but was better educated than his leader, if translations are any guide. All these papers were found in Paris in 1856 by O. H. Marshall who was a founder of the Buffalo Historical society and to whom we are everlastingly indebted.

From the start, Celoron was cursed with bad luck and his expedition doomed to failure. His boat capsized just off Barcelona and he nearly drowned. The water, nevertheless, was still so shallow his men had trouble disembarking and only enough depth could be found at the mouth itself of the Riviere Pomme, or Apple River, ---the stream we know as Chautauqua Creek. On their arrival at Barcelona the 16th of July, it rained steadily and depressingly, but Celoron was optimistic and hoped that it would deepen the river. And then, because of "numerous hills and mountains," the sharp grades, the necessity for cutting through heavy forest and building causeways, combined with the bad weather, it took fifty men six days to cut the nine miles of road, and get the canoes, bateaux, pirogues, provisions, munitions and gifts for the Indians to the head of what they called "Lake Chataque."

On reading documents and manuscripts written during those years, one is especially impressed by the harsh life suffered by these expeditionary soldiers. They usually ended up without food or clothes or pay, and if they weren't dead of disease or killed, they returned to Canada
emaciated and with their health shattered by scurvy, lung trouble, fever and dysentery.

It was early in their long trip when Celoron's men reached the shore of the lake in Mayville near where the old dock used to be. They were still fresh and healthy, but after the arduous labor of those six days and the constant penetrating rain, that clear cool expanse of water stretching out ahead of them must have seemed quite beautiful. I like to believe that perhaps the sun came out that July day, and they felt rewarded.

The next day, the entourage of blue-coated French officers, priests in dark habit, swarthy Indians and and French forest rangers who were called Couriere de Bois, or Scouts of the Woods, paddled slowly down the quiet lake with only a leaping bass to break the smooth reflection of the green shrouded shore, and a frightened deer crashing through the underbrush. That night, the 23rd of July, they camped near Fluvanna and the flares of their fires threw flitting shadows against the dark enclosing forest. Many relics of their passing this way, have been found since, including an ax, a musket, engraved knives and even skeletons, although the last is a mystery for some histories say that no men were lost on the expedition. But more than guns and knives were left behind, for the Canadians stole from the expedition and buried the loot with the intention of returning for it later. The story goes that 12 pure silver apostle plates, presumably taken from one of Celoron's priests, have been found in the county. Perhaps the disappearance of altar pieces was another of Celoron's troubles.

July 24th he entered the "Chatakuin",--Celoron was a better explorer than a speller,--and he encamped in Jamestown near the boatlanding,
but in order to get that far he had to drive piles into the channel of the outlet and raise the water to float the heavily laden pirogues and bateaux through. Then another short portage around Jamestown was necessary because of the shallowness of the Cassadagah and the Connewango. Finally he reached open river and followed it to Warren where there was an Indian village. There at the foot of a red oak he buried the first leaden plate, claiming the entire Ohio Valley in the name of his king. Meanwhile, one of the greatest of all his troubles had befallen him, though he probably never realized its importance.

The leaden plate which was marked with the name "TCHADAKOIN", and was to have been buried on the shore of this lake, or was perhaps mistakenly engraved, was stolen by a Seneca Indian who was suspicious of French intentions. With an Indian runner that plate was brought to the English gentleman, Sir William Johnson at his seat on the Mohawk, to be translated. The English had promised protection to the Indians against the French, as well as everlasting hunting grounds, in return for their support. The French promised the same thing, and, Rupert Hughes says, on the whole treated them much more humanely. But the Indians were only pawns of two aggressive and ambitious nations, and too late, they realized it.

When Sir Johnson read the inscription on the plaque and knew the French were claiming the Ohio Valley, he reported the situation to Governor Clinton of New York, who fully informed the Lords of Trade in London. Resentment ran high, and with the charge that France was violating her treaty by sending military forces into English territory another step was taken in the direction of the French and Indian War.

Meanwhile, Celoron, oblivious of the commotion he had caused, continued down the Ohio planting leaden plates on the way. Six were buried but
only two, in spite of intense search, were ever found, and those accidently. The stolen plate disappeared. Governor Clinton probably took it to England where it was eventually melted down for its lead.

Before Celoron's expedition returned to Canada an attempt was made on his life. Some Indian, warned by the English of the detachment's approach, greeted him with a cannon ball that just grazed him. That, together with the apathetic attitude of the Indians in general and the obvious contempt of the English settlers who moved back into their homes as soon as he and his men had disappeared into the forest, was most discouraging to him. By the time he had followed Baron Longueuil's itinerary as far as the Great Miami River, and was on his way home by way of Lake Erie, he knew his mission had failed. To top off his bad luck Governor Jonquiere placed the blame for the failure on him and accused him of badly executing orders and instructions. Poor Celoron was eventually killed at Fort Cumberland in 1756, sometime between June 10 and August 8th. Not even the exact date is known.

By 1753 the French were still worried about their claim to the Ohio Valley, so an officer by the name of Marin, a disagreeable old man who was much disliked, was ordered by the equally disagreeable Marquis DuQuesne to go south by way of the Chautauqua Portage. But a quarrel arose between Marin and another commander because he hadn't built forts at either end of the portage in the time allotted. He had promised a completely equipped portage early in 1753 but had fallen ill. Marin finally settled the argument by choosing to go south by way of Presque Isle (now Erie) instead of Chautauqua Lake, so the men took to their boats again without traveling over the Westfield hill. That expedition was a failure, too, for it never reached the Ohio, and in the fall
returned to Niagara. However, on this return trip a stop was made at Barcelona where a detachment of men had been sent from Canada to transform the portage into a military road, preparatory to another campaign. For several days 1000 men were encamped at the Erie end while 200 of them struggled to recut the well overgrown trail to Wayville. Although it had been only four years since Celoron's men had carved out a wagon road between the two lakes, such heavy growth was not unusual, for in 1755, Braddock cut a road that was impassable by 1758. A great deal of information about this engineering project comes to us through an English prisoner, Stephen Coffen, and also from Samuel Shattuck who was part of an English scouting party and narrowly missed capture while he was watching the French soldiers working on the road. There is no doubt that plans were being made for forts at Wayville and Barcelona.

Historians agree that this road which was a gateway to the south was the most important link in the chain of events leading to the French and Indian War. In spite of his failure, Celoron had paved the way for a means of opening the Ohio Valley to invasion from Canada.

The next year, 1754, the persistent French carefully planned an elaborate campaign in the command of the same man who had improved the road, Sieur de Pean. Chabert Joncaire was his lieutenant and this man is another whom historians have continually confused with his brother and father. Severance has gone to great lengths to clarify the relationships and establish the identity of this man whose name constantly pops up in history during these years. De Lery, whose maps made at the age of 18, guided Celoron was also in the expedition. But the most important person of all to us was one who is seldom mentioned in histories. His name
is de Villiers, and he joined the expedition later, but still in time to be the immediate cause of the French and Indian War. Remember his name for we'll come back to him again.

This 1754 expedition began to move into Chautauqua early in the spring and troops arrived in June. Commander Pean himself arrived on the 15th and the camp at Lake Erie was set in order. Tents were pitched in five lines, a powder magazine was built at the foot of the hill, and a smith's forge was brought from Presque Isle. All through the month of July there was constant travel over the portage as men and supplies arrived from Niagara and were sent on down the Chadakoin to Fort Duquesne which had been established three months earlier.

It was undoubtedly this force of French soldiers that held Fort Duquesne and achieved Braddock's defeat the next year.

While Pean was making plans to send these hundreds of men down the Chautauqua, many more of them were traveling down Chautauqua Lake and Lake and the Allegheny, and Coloron was still trying to get the English out of "French" territory without warring on them. He wrote Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia that he was "surprised" to find Englishmen over as far as the Ohio Valley. Dinwiddie immediately sent a young Virginian, George Washington to Venango (now Franklin, Pa.) to tell the French how grieved the King of England was to "learn that certain stupid subjects of his beloved cousin, the King of France," had blundered onto the private property of the English king. Washington had a personal interest in this well mannered argument, for the land in question, extending to the Mississippi, was part of the Ohio Company, a speculative land enterprise of which George's brother, Lawrence, was a founder. Washington, of course,
had inherited his brother's interests on his death.

The meeting at Venango achieved nothing except that Washington quietly took notice of the fortifications. In his report, he also expressed his shock at the French perfidy which tried to seduce the Indians away from the English. One is amused to find that the French were equally shocked that Washington was attempting the same thing.

Seeing that polite conversation would not drive out the French, and being a heavy investor in the Ohio Company, Dinwiddie promptly ordered Washington to train troops for an expedition into the disputed territory and up as far as Niagara. Washington, however, had never drilled soldiers, had never even been drilled in company, and he knew he would have to meet the trained soldiery of France which came from what was at that time the best army in Europe. Only the Governor's frenzy to meet the French could have led him to place such responsibility on a green horn.

In spite of a lack of money, food, equipment and clothing he whipped his Virginia troops into some sort of shape and marched out to meet the enemy, late in the spring of 1754. His first skirmish was a victory but the repercussions were tragic. No less a man than Horace Walpole referred to it as "trifling" and yet "remarkable" for being the immediate cause of the French and Indian War.

When Washington met a party of Frenchmen in the western part of Pennsylvania near the middle of June that year, he annihilated them and killed their leader, Jumonville. But the infuriated French claimed that Jumonville was carrying a message to Washington and should have been treated with ambassadorial courtesy, and that Washington was guilty of murder.
When Commander Bean arrived at the Mayville camp a few days later, June 15th, he brought the news of Jumonville's death to his brother de Villiers, who was a part of his expedition by this time, and whom he mentioned earlier. De Lery called it treachery. Villiers was furious and determined to avenge his brother's death. He immediately organized a detachment and swooped down on Washington. Villiers passed the place of the "Assassination" on the 28th of June. He met Washington on the 3rd of July at Fort Necessity with superior forces, and ironically enough he forced him to surrender and sign articles of capitulation on the 4th of July.

Unfortunately for that young Virginian, they were written in French, and the Dutch interpreter whose knowledge of that language was weak, translated the "Assassination" simply as "killed." The result was that Washington unwittingly admitted on paper that he had assassinated the French officer, Jumonville.

Whether Jumonville gave Washington proper warning that he was acting as an ambassador seems to be still a moot question. Both sides of the case are fairly presented by Rupert Hughes. But at the time it was a scandal which spread all over France and England as well as through the colonies. The French pointed to this violation of the peace treaty of Aix la Chapelle as another action typical of "perfidious Albion." So in that same year, 1754, the colonial quarrel between the two powers broke out into the French and Indian War.

England decided she had better protect her colonial interests by sending over some trained soldiers, so Braddock arrived in America to find little cooperation and plenty of dissention among King George's subjects. He did the best he could, but his fate was sealed for there was a...
band of French soldiers at Fort Duquesne waiting who had been sent there by Commander Pan via the Chautauqua Portage in the summer of 1754, and in a few months would kill him and wipe out his army.

Braddock died after the battle at Great Meadows July 13, 1755.

This paper cannot go into the defense of the unfortunate general's strategy. Enough to say that he has been greatly maligned on the score of poor judgment. He did follow the advice of Washington and other frontier fighters, and his decision to advance on Fort Duquesne was the only thing he could have done under the circumstances. Any one who is interested in the details of this tragic massacre, I again refer to Rupert Hughes and his biography of Washington.

How the soldiers from the Chautauqua Portage returned after they defeated Braddock,---if they ever did return, no one knows, and there is no record of any retreat back over the Chautauqua hills at the end of But the French and Indian War in 1760. They had played their role in history.

The war spread from the colonies to the European continent and in 1756, the year after Braddock's defeat England and France were at each other's throats again. The outcome of that Seven Year's War has already been discussed. We acknowledge this country's English heritage.

The 1754 French campaign was the last in which the Chautauqua Portage held any importance. The English attempted to make use of it in 1782 during the American Revolution, and spent two months around Chautauqua Lake fitting out 12 pieces of artillery and preparing to float down and attack Fort Pitt, as Fort Duquesne was known by then. But the
plan was abandoned when spies reported the fort's repairs and strength. After that the old French road never had any further military value.

It is interesting to know exactly where the French road is,—that is, what is left of it. There are still remote traces if one knows where to look and what to look for. In 1872 when William Peacock was an old man, in one of his lucid moments he said that he first saw the road in 1799 and it was still obvious that wagons and cannon had passed over it and work had been expended making causeways. He said he saw the stones that had been erected at both the Barcelona and Mayville camps for cooking.

This road started on the west side of Chautauqua Creek at Barcelona and followed along the west bank of the creek to the old cross roads one mile west of the center of Westfield at the monument erected in 1870. Here by a south easterly course, it soon reached the steep bank of the creek where it passed into a deep gorge of 100 feet or more in depth, by a dug-way on the edge of the old Stone farm. Then it crossed the creek, and by another dug-way it climbed the high banks a few rods from the Glen Mills bridge. Above Glen Mills, in order to avoid the steep west bank of the gorge, the road passed up the east branch of Chautauqua Creek for some distance and then continued at the east of the present highway to Mayville. It ended approximately where the Mayville dock used to be.

There are two tablets, dedicated by the Patterson Chapter DAR to indicate where the French road crossed present day highways. One by the side
of the Mayville road marks the place where the road ascended from the creek. The other tablet is on the Sherman road and marks the place where the road went down to the creek.

After all these years, it has pretty well disappeared but Mr. Burmaster told me remnants could be found. Of course it would take him to find them, but I've often thought I'd like to get into a pair of hiking boots, take a day off and follow that trail from Lake Erie to Lake Chautauqua, just to see if I couldn't find some small thing still in existence to remind me of the road that changed the history of the world.

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