

HISTORIC ROOTS

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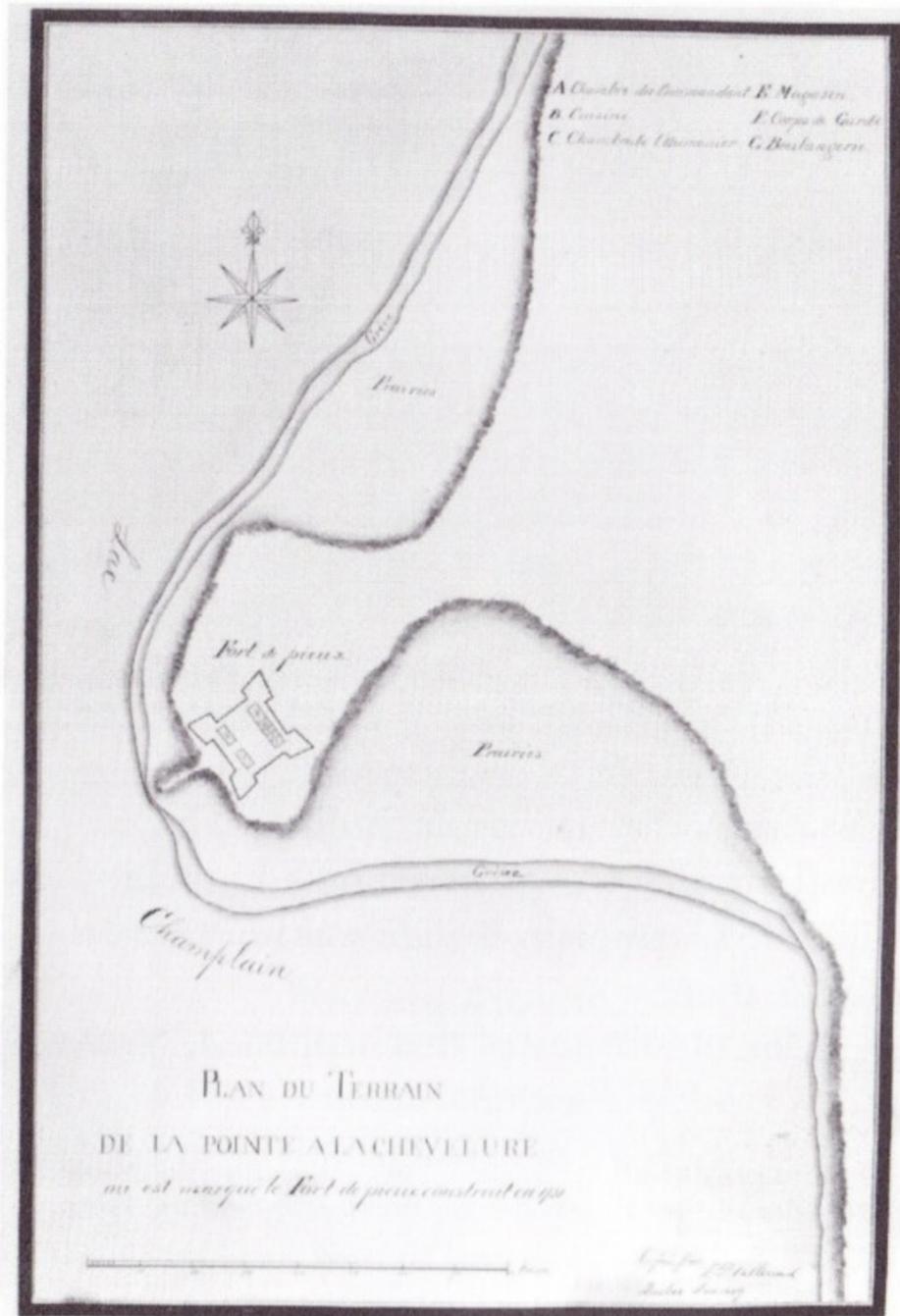
CHIMNEY POINT: WHERE CULTURES MEET

By AUDREY PORSCHE

At a place called Chimney Point, in Addison, Vermont, sits an old tavern building where Thomas Jefferson and James Madison spent a night during their 1791 visit to the Champlain Valley. The narrows of Lake Champlain had long been a good place to cross the lake. A sail ferry operated in 1785. Later there were other ferries, including "The Gipsy," which was powered by horses. In 1920, the Champlain Bridge was built across the lake there.

Long before any of this happened, Native Americans had a seasonal campsite at Chimney Point. They were nomads, people with no permanent home, who moved across the land in search of the food and materials they needed to live. Starting about 5,000 years ago, they hunted, fished, and gathered food in the area.

By about 1400 A.D., the Indians around Chimney Point began to farm. They grew corn, beans, and squash, using hoes made of stone or bone. They still hunted and fished, but they were not nomads. They stayed close to



Archives de la province de Québec

A map of Chimney Point in 1731, showing the small wooden fort built by the French. They called it Fort de Pieux.

their fields in order to tend their crops. Modern historians call these people the Woodland Indians.

During the time of the Woodland Indians,

two changes in technology further altered their way of life. They began to use bows and arrows instead of spears for hunting. And they began to make pottery pots, in addition to those of wood and bark, for cooking and storage. Archeologists think that the Woodland Indians are the ancestors of the Abenaki.

The Woodland way of life did not last long. European explorers and settlers began to move in and displace them. French explorer Samuel de Champlain visited the area in 1609. The lake is named for him.

The French began settling there in earnest in the 1730s, moving down from Quebec. The first to come were soldiers. They built a small wooden fort on the Vermont side of the lake. This was replaced in 1734 by Fort St. Frederic, a stone fort, across the lake, where Crown Point is today.



Musee regional de Vaudreuil-Soulanges

Gilles Hocquart.

Homes grew up around the fort, on both sides of the lake. This settlement was known as the Hocquart settlement, after Gilles Hocquart, who received the land from King Louis XV of France. It was the largest French

settlement in the Champlain Valley. In 1759, 57 families lived there. They sold supplies to the fort. In times of war, the men served as soldiers.

During the French and Indian War (1754-1763), it became clear that the British would soon control this part of the Champlain Valley. So the French soldiers and settlers decided to return to Quebec. It is said that before they left, the settlers burned their homes so that the British would not get them. When the British arrived at the Vermont side of the settlement, the story goes, only the chimneys remained. As a result, this point of land was called Chimney Point.

Interestingly, no one has found either the remains of the wooden fort or the chimneys. But maps, letters, and pictures tell us they were there. A short distance from Chimney Point, at DAR State Park, in Addison, are foundations of buildings believed to have been part of the Hocquart settlement. Only further study will tell whether or not this is so.

Today Chimney Point is a state historic site. The old tavern building where Jefferson and Madison stayed is now a museum. In it are exhibits that celebrate Vermont's Native American and French heritage,¹ from prehistoric times down to the present.

¹Heritage means culture and traditions handed down from the past.



State of Vermont, Division for Historic Preservation, painting by Philippa Daigle.

The Chimney Point State Historic Site. The oldest part of the building is from the late 1700s. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison stayed there in 1791.

Rooting Around

Chimney Point State Historic Site is at the corner of Routes 125 and 17 in Addison, Vermont, just before the Champlain Bridge. It is open Wednesday through Sunday, 9:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m., from Memorial Day to Columbus Day. Call 802-759-2412 for information and directions.