

FRENCH VILLAGE - FREMONT COUNTY, IOWA

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## FRENCH VILLAGE

French Village is one of the enigmas in the early Fremont County history: A town site as such never existed, its residents being scattered over a sizeable area in the same manner as were the residents of McKissick's Grove, Pleasant Grove, Lacy's Grove. Too, the inhabitants of French Village (consisting mostly of French Canadians, half-breeds, mountaineers, Indian traders, a mixture of Sioux, Ojoe and Pottawatamie Indians) by nature seem to have had little interest in establishing a corporation. Thus they inadvertently helped to obscure their history. Their only unity was one of a loose-knit nature--that of sharing a common interest.

Contemporary references do not help much. The Andrew, Iowa, "Western Democrat" of Nov. 6, 1850 said "...Fremont county..contains a population of 1,250 souls. The southern portion of the county has been settled for about ten years, and contains many highly cultivated and extensive farms. The prairies are less extensive than in many of our eastern counties, while the timber is likewise more equally distributed. In the southern portion of the county the population is made up of emigrants from Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana and Missouri, together with a small settlement of French..". Neither Dawson's 1852 history of Fremont County nor McEwen's 1853 history of Atchison County even refer to it. In 1859 five year old Eli Snider came to Fremont County with his parents who settled a mile and a half east of Hamburg. He remembered "...it was a French settlement, many French families living in that vicinity..."

So, any idea formulated regarding French Village is done so laboriously, often the merest mention of it adding a dimension to the picture.

It appears that one of the worst fallacies would be to limit one's idea of any renown and influence of French Village to its rather long and narrow geographical borders. There is testimony and facts to the contrary; those with kindred spirits to the inhabitants of French Village looked upon it as a sort of mecca for intellectual development and comfortable living. As an illustration to the point, take the James Bordeaux family, so well known in Nebraska, Wyoming and South Dakota history. During the 1860's he sent his children and their mother 'back east' to Hamburg so that the children could receive an education. A daughter, Susan, returned to the Fort Laramie area and assisted in the schools there. A son, Louis, was referred to by Harry Anderson in the South Dakota History magazine, Summer 1973:

"...The mixed-blooded children...made substantial contributions to the operation of government Indian policy among the Sioux and other tribes from the early 1870's onward. It was this younger generation that developed the vital function of interpreting English to Lakota and vice-versa to a new height of proficiency. Young men, such as Louis Bordeaux...for whom the Sioux language was their mother tongue and who benefited from the efforts of their fathers to give them the advantages of some formal schooling, finally made it possible for the Indians to know accurately and in detail what was going to happen to them under government policy changes, and for the agent to be able to communicate intelligently on the attitudes of his Indians to the commissioner in Washington. If this is not regarded as a significant accomplishment, examine the complicated language of the 1876 treaty, or the 1889 land agreement, and try to imagine under the old system how garbled would have been the translation of English ideas and terminology into Sioux terms and thought patterns by a semiliterate fur trader whose native tongue and upbringing was basically French..."

Joseph Vallandres, found in the history of South Dakota in the 1830's, spent the last twenty years of his life living with his wife and family comfortably in French Village. Louis and Mitchell Wilmet--their father's name, Antoine Quilmette, is

perpetuated in the Chicago suburb of Wilmette--lived in French Village in the early 1850's. Were the Wilmets tired of the reservation life of their Pottawatamie brothers in Kansas?

Evidently, French Village had its beginning in extreme northwest Atchison County, Missouri, about two miles south of present Hamburg, Iowa. Joseph Brenard (possibly by 1834) had settled there while the country was yet hunting grounds for the Iowa and Otoe Indians. In 1832 and 1833 Brenard had been employed by the United States government as a striker to the blacksmith for the Omaha, Otoe and Missouri Indians. In 1836, Brenard furnished corn for these same Indians, suggesting he had by then established himself as a farmer. Even if he had sub-contracted, he must have been looking for a market for a portion of his own crops; and the question becomes one as to how long he would have been farming before he had a surplus.

More concrete evidence as to when Brenard came to The Narrows is furnished by his estate inventory made in July 1842, which shows a note for \$16.50 due December 21, 1837 from Capt. John Gantt (1790-1849). It is known that Gantt was connected with the Pottawatamie Indians as their issuing agent from the time the first emigrating bands were marched up-river from opposite Fort Leavenworth to southwestern Iowa during July and August 1837. As these bands followed the Liberty-Council Bluffs road, this places Brenard most definitely on the east side of the Missouri River. (This road itself dates from the early 1820's and was traveled by those who were going into the Upper Missouri regions.)

What role did Brenard play in the emigration of the Pottawatamies? First, it is known that he later had a ferry over the Nishnabotana River at The Narrows. Secondly, the Indians word 'nichanabotanie' means a stream where it was necessary to make a canoe in order to cross it. Therein lies the reason for believing that Brenard was keeping a boat at The Narrows by 1837, and that it was contracted by Gantt to cross Pottawatamie Indian families and their personal belongings on their emigration trail.

Although this was Indian Country in 1834, Brenard could have been allowed to establish himself there, inasmuch as his wife Miampema was a full blooded Otoe. By the 1830's, it was customary for such marriages to give certain guarantees from the Indians of economic-political advantages. Obvious romantic considerations aside, it also secured the personal safety of an outsider residing in Indian Country for any length of time. There appears to be no reason why French Villager's founder could not have settled there by 1834.

Joseph Brenard's site for a home in the SE $\frac{1}{2}$  of S3 T66 R42 was far from being a random selection! Research shows that (1) the Nishnabotana Trace coming from the Des Moines River valley ended here, (2) The Narrows afforded a good boat landing and woodyard, (3) the Indian trail along the foot of the bluffs would have been intersected here, and (4) that the Liberty-Council Bluffs Road could find a ferry crossing over the Nishnabotana here. Considering the few years Brenard lived there, his estate inventory reveals a success quite equal to that enjoyed by Hamburg thirty years later. The site had been carefully chosen!

The potential of this area as a hub of activity possibly was noticed before Lewis and Clark, for their journals show that the French by 1804 had already given the name of Bald Island to the locality. Why? It would have been on the circuituous St. Louis-to-Santa Fe trade route of 1800 which ascended the Missouri Valley to the Platte River, ascended the Platte River to Pawnee Indian Country, and which then struck southwest toward the Spanish settlements. It could have been a convenient stop-over before starting the hot leg of the trip up the Platte Valley. And still thinking in terms of a route this long, it would have been seen as being in the same general locality as that in which Robert McClellan and Ramsay Crooks had established the first business house in Fremont County while that county was but a small part of Louisiana Territory. In the 1830's, Brenard could have found among the Otoe Indians a memory which spanned time back to these events:

THE LOUISIANA GAZETTE. St. Louis, Louisian Territory. Nov. 30, 1809.--JOURNAL OF A VOYAGE FROM ST. LOUIS, LOUISIANA, TO THE MANDAN VILLAGE UNDERTAKEN BY THE ST. LOUIS MISSOURI FUR CO., For the Purpose of Conducting Shekekah, the Mandan Chief To His Nation, and To Establish Trading Houses On the Headwaters of the Missouri.....On the 29th July, we arrived at Messrs. Crooks and McClellans old hunting camp. We lodged in their house. These gentlemen have constructed a comfortable quarters, the house having three rooms, when they occupied it. The Otoes and the Pawnees reported to them in great numbers... August 1st, arrived at the River Platte....

This party had advanced up the Missouri River about 12 miles a day. This rate of travel puts their July 29, 1809 camp somewhere along the borders of Fremont County. A more definite locality was noted by John Gale on September 21, 1819 when he entered into his journal that his party "...encamped on the North side near the lower

point of Oven Islands--two in number. One in the middle of the river the other on the South shore opposite 'Terriens prairie' on the North and at an old trading house in ruins..." Later journal entries by Gale show that this old trading house was sixteen miles below Weeping Water Creek, and thus, about five miles below present Nebraska City. Lewis and Clark had said the French were then calling this part of Fremont County 'Four le tourte'.

Lest we stray from the original point, reconsider the idea that Joseph Brenard established himself in the Missouri River Valley at a site where it long had been thought that economic opportunities could be enjoyed. These opinions and facts he could have learned from his Otoe inlaws.

As of February 17, 1837 the Missouri counties of Platte, Buchanan, Andrew, Holt, Atchison and Nodaway--collectively known as the Platte Purchase--were opened and subjected to settlement by white men. Having had attracted the attention of Missouri for many years, the Platte Purchase filled up with settlers with unbelievable rapidity. In 1842, Nancy (Rice) Burrows declared in a sworn statement that "...in the spring of 1839 they removed to the Nichinabottany which was then the attached part of Buckhannan County, but is now included within the boundaries of Holt County..." Her family and the families of her brothers Ica Foster Rice, William Street Rice, James Ellis Rice, Stephen Mack Rice and Moses Rice, all seem to have settled about that time in the immediate neighborhood of the old Beehive School which still stands along the road leading south at the crest of the big hill west of Riverton.

It seems probable that French Village would have prospered

much from the rush toward the rich farm lands lying in the extreme upper part of the Platte Purchase. The lower one half of Fremont County at that time would have been the most northwestern frontier of contiguous United States that was open to settlers. Neighboring Indians however had become alarmed about the great influx of settlers along the Missouri River, and in September 1839, Col. Stephen Watts Kearny with four companies of men from Fort Leavenworth made a march to the Otoe villages in a show of force by his dragoons. The situation of the Otoes had become truly a deplorable one. Without the Platte Purchase and the land along the Missouri slope in western Iowa (which the Pottawatamies had but recently moved onto), their hunting lands were greatly restricted and the tribe was in a starving condition. This had induced them to commit many depredations upon the whites. Col. Kearny's march did not have a lasting effect, when hunger again stared into the faces of the Otoe braves.

Late in March and in early April 1840, news of "another Indian War" appeared in Missouri newspapers. Two letters from The Narrows of the Nishnabotana dated March 14, 1840 and March 21, 1840 were sent to Col. Kearny at Fort Leavenworth, making a plea for military aid and assistance. A letter from Fort Leavenworth dated March 24, 1840 spread the alarm to the newspapers:

MISSOURI ARGUS. Vol III No. 50. St. Louis, Missouri.  
 April 4, 1840. 2 - 3.--"....Messrs. Editors: I haste to inform you of further Indian difficulties on our frontier. Today, Col. Kearney received, by express, a complaint, signed by several citizens on the extreme frontier of Buchanan county, against the Otto Indians, which tribe, they alledge, has committed many depredations upon the stock of the whites, and that they have great fear of their lives from the bravadoes and menaces of those Indians, who arrogate to themselves the belief (which they are by no means backward in generally expressing) that they frightened Col. Kearny



from the execution of stripes last fall, for misdemeanors which took him to their country with considerable force. Upon the immediate receipt of the intelligence of today's express, Col. Kearny ordered a detachment of 100 men, under command of Capt. Boone, to be in readiness for march by to-morrow. They will cross the Missouri river at this post, and proceed on the north side of the river to the state line, and remove all hostile Indians from the limits of the state, and punish, in a summary manner, such of the depredators as they may be able to reach. There seems to be a decided feeling of hostility existing among this tribe against all white men, which, added to the general faction of proximate tribes, loudly calls for an additional military force upon our frontier, and should warn the authorities at Washington City of the expediency--for the safety of frontier settlers, the pioneers of a lately desolate wilderness--the absolute necessity of establishing a post near the northwest corner of the State, and of adding strength to the command at Leavenworth. Experienced officers join me in the opinion, that an Indian war, of a fearful character, is much to be apprehended on our frontier. I haste to lay before the public, by tonight's mail, the facts herein contained, hoping ere long to communicate to you more elaborately upon the subject.

Respectfully,

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Unfortunately, the two letters of March 14 and March 21 from French Village were not printed by newspapers now available in archive libraries. "The Far West" of Liberty, Clay county, Mo., is known to have printed them, but a copy of this paper does not exist. Other accounts make it clear that several detachments of troops from Clay county had come to the rescue of the Nishnebotana settlers, and considering the fact that McKissick's Grove was first settled by former Clay Countians, all indications are that the signatures to these two letters would almost surely have been tantamount to a roster of Fremont County's first settlers. That the letters were from French Village does not matter; as will be shown later, French Village at The Narrows was dominant in the affairs of all this part of the frontier until about 1843, and it

was recognized as the headquarters for the areas which would later would be set off as McKissick's Grove and Pleasant Grove.

However, the following letter dated March 27, 1840 does summarize the content of those two important Fremont County letters of the 14th and 21st:

DAILY MISSOURI REPUBLICAN. St. Louis. April 4, 1840.  
2 - 3.--"Indian Disturbances.--By the steamer EUPHRASIA, we received yesterday, two letters from Fort Leavenworth, describing fresh Indian difficulties on our North West border. We subjoin the following, which comes to us from an officer in the U.S. services. The other is also from an officer, and takes a wider view of the whole subject. We are unable this evening to get it into type, but shall give it a place on Monday.

The Indians, prompted by their starving and impoverished condition, and knowing the small number of efficient troops at Fort Leavenworth, may be induced to go to great lengths; and should other tribes combine with them, there is cause to apprehend the most fearful consequences, to our frontier settlers. The substance of our informants letter is as follows:

"Strong symptoms of open war have lately been manifested by the Indians south of the Missouri, bordering on Buchanan county, the north-west county of this State. The citizens of this county have addressed two letters on the subject to Col. Kearny, commanding at Fort Leavenworth. The first, dated 14th inst., states that many of the Otoes from the Big Platte have crossed into the state, in small parties of fifteen or twenty, and have impudently and forcibly levied contributions from all of the whites that they met with--killing their stock, and taking away whatever of grain and other things they might want--and in one instance, they stopped a man on the road, stripped him of most of his clothing, and threatened his life, until he promised if they would spare him he would give them a keg of whiskey as soon as they could reach a trading house where it could be purchased.

The second letter is dated 21st inst., and from the same place, the Narrows of the Nishnabotany; and represents that the whole or a greater part of the Ioway's had crossed into the State, in a body, and had committed, and were then committing still greater outrages on the inhabitants than the Otoes--among other things, insulting the women in the most indecent manner. They had no women or children with them, were well armed with rifles--painted, and supplied with extra mochasins, and in their conduct, as in their appearance, gave the strongest reason to believe that they intended to war with the whites.

In that part of the state immediately threatened, there are not enough settlers to unite and make a stand against the Indians, and in their letters to Col. Kearney, they express the greatest apprehension of danger, and urge upon him to send troops to their protection. On the receipt of their first letter the Colonel despatched to their assistance, all of his disposable force, which only amounted to one hundred dragoons, under the command of Capt. Boone. This, it was thought, would be sufficient to check the Otoes; but should these unite with the Ioway's, as they probably will, they will jointly number, perhaps six hundred warriors, against whom the little force of Capt. Boone would be entirely inadequate. On the receipt of the second letter from Buchanan county Col. Kearney has suggested to Maj. Gen. Atcheson, of Clay county, the propriety of sending three companies of militia, of his division, to the assistance of Capt. Boone. The decision of Gen. Atcheson, is not yet known.

It is unfortunate that three companies of dragoons, of the proper garrison of Fort Leavenworth are still absent at Fort Gibson, whither they were sent last winter, on the requisition of Gen. Arbuckle; and where, according to our best information, they are not and never were required for any useful purpose--the difficulty with the Cherokees, if any ever existed, being long since settled.--Since the departure of Capt. Boone's command, the force at Fort Leavenworth is less than forty effective men.

A hope is entertained that the Otoes and Ioway's may yet be forced to leave the state before they shall have committed murders, or made open war; but they are a reckless set of Indians, unrestrained by any of their Chiefs, and if once fairly in the field against the whites, they would probably be joined by the Omahas and other wild Indians of the region, until a powerful force would be required to reduce them.

This Captain Nathan Boone (March 2, 1781 - October 16, 1856) who led the dragoons to the aid of the early French Villagers was the youngest son of the famous Daniel Boone. Those who knew him said he was much like his famous father in most ways. Capt. Boone was well acquainted with Fremont County by 1840, for it was he who as a commissioner had run the northern Missouri State line of the Platte Purchase across the middle of Fremont County in 1837, and who had recommended the location site of old Fort Kearney to be at present Nebraska City. The large forested area on the east side of the river was to be set off as the Fort Kearney Reservation.

Any one of these three activities would have ranked as an influence sufficiently important to have given its own shape to the history of the area.

So rapidly had the settlers poured into the Platte Purchase that Buchanan County with a population of 8,621 in 1840 ranked 10th in the entire state of Missouri. In 1841 the northern part was set off as Holt County, and at the second meeting of the Holt County Court in April 1841, "Nishnebotany Township" was established: "...beginning at the mouth of the Nishnebotany river, thence up the said river to the mouth of High Bridge Creek; thence up the high Bridge Creek to the Northern boundary of the state; thence west to the Missouri River; and thence south to the point of beginning." At this same session it was also ordered that the May 1841 election be held at the house of Joseph Brenard and that Ica Foster Rice be appointed one of the election judges. It was at this May election that John R. Jackson and Jacob McKissick were elected as justices and James Handley as constable of Nishnebotany Township.

At the June 1841 Holt County Court, Joseph Brenard was "granted a license to keep a ferry across the Nishnebotany River at his residence thereon" with rates determined as follows:

For crossing a single man	\$ .06 $\frac{1}{4}$
For crossing man and horse	.12 $\frac{1}{2}$
For crossing two horse wagon and team empty	.25
For crossing two horse wagon and team loaded	.50
For horse wagon and team empty	.37 $\frac{1}{2}$
For horse wagon loaded	.75
Six horse wagon empty	.50
Six horse wagon loaded	1.00
For crossing loose horses and cattle each	.03
For crossing hogs and sheep each head	.00 $\frac{1}{2}$

The June 1841 court also ordered "...that an election be held at the house of Simon Flurees in Nishnebotany township on the first day of August next and that David Jones, William Alley, and Cornelius McKissick are appointed judges of said election..."

Again, we see that an early act politically organizing what would be southern Fremont county was centered at French Village at The Narrows. Simon Fleury (he likely settled here in 1838) lived in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section two east of Brenard's ferry, where his house overlooked The Narrows. Captain William Alley would have been representing the southern part of Nishnebotany Township: his farm and steamboat woodyard was three miles south of The Narrows. Cornelius McKissick would have been representing the eastern part of the township: McKissick's Grove took its name from this man. David Jones would have been representing the northern part of the township for his house was in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of S3 T67 R42.

Again in 1842, elections within the township were held at the house of Simon Fleury. But then in August 1842 the Holt County Court ordered that "...all that territory included within the following described limits, to wit: BEGINNING in the middle of the main channel of the Missouri river opposite the Narrows of the Nishnebotany river, running thence to high bridge Creek, thence up said Creek to the northern boundary of the State, thence west with said line to the to the middle of the main channel of the Missouri river, thence down said River in the middle of the main channel thereof to the place of Beginning, is hereby created a separate and distinct Township to be called and known by the name of "Bluff"..." Within these boundaries French Village became the most southern part of the township, and the township election in 1843 was shifted up to Daniel Hunsakers in the Austin-Pleasant Grove areas.

But French Village was not to be left long in Bluff Township; in July 1844 the Holt County court formed an area east of the Nishnabotana River into a Township called "Polk", and the first election places were designated at Beal's on High Bridge Creek.

Moses Beal (1806 - 1854), grandfather of Ralph Beal of Hamburg, lived in S20 T66 R41 on High Creek where it enters the Missouri bottom. Since the earliest Holt County records often refer to simply the "high bridge creek", and sometimes to the name "High Bridge Creek", and later to only "High Creek", it must be assumed that the creek derived its name from the type of bridge built over it on the Council Bluffs-Liberty road. The floor of such early bridges was high above the general level of land around it, making a steep approach to the bridge necessary. Hence its name.

High Creek post office was established December 9, 1843 and was discontinued on January 15, 1850. (Do not confuse this early post office in Atchison County with the one established in 1869 in Fremont County. High Creek post office in Fremont County was on this same creek, but several miles northeast of Beal's earlier one.) Moses Beal was the first postmaster. The mail carrier's contract called for the mail to be carried from Oregon, Mo., to High Creek on Friday and Saturday, and called for starting with the return mail from High Creek to Oregon on the same Saturday, arriving at Oregon on Sunday. When Daniel Hunsaker established his post office on the Nishnabotna on February 10, 1846, the route from Oregon was extended to that place, the post office department calling it "Austin". However, service did not commence at Austin until November 26, 1846 with the arrival of the first mail to that place. French Villagers received their mail from these two post

offices. High Creek also was the post office for the Council Bluffs Indian Agency at Belleview, for the Council Bluffs Indian sub-agency among the Pottawatamies, for old Fort Kearney, for new Fort Kearney, for the Oregon Battalion, and for Fort Laramie in far-off Wyoming. The army posts sent an express to High Creek once or twice a month during its existence.

Since James Bordeaux was living at Fort Laramie during this period, it should not escape us that he undoubtedly knew of French Village--and vice versa--at this early date. This realization will make later developments more believable.

In 1845, Atchison County was organized from the northern part of Holt County. The first book of Holt County marriage records has been lost; not so in the case of Atchison County. Book "A", 1845 - 1863, Atchison County Marriages gives an excellent view of French Village.

The very first marriage recorded was performed by Noah Leabo on June 4, 1845 between Benjamain Francis Benoist and Rosella Brenard, the oldest daughter of Joseph Brenard. Francis Benoist is found in the earliest records of Holt County, and his was the first estate probated in Fremont County, the letters of administration being dated October 4, 1849. His widow married (2) Louis LaCroix who is known to have kept an inn and tavern at The Narrows as early as 1840. By 1850 he was in Minnesota Territory. Rosella Brenard Benoist LaCroix moved from Minnesota to Marysville, California, by 1857, having married (3) Mr. Scoville.

On January 10, 1846, John C. Scott married August Vassow and Loretta Glaud LeFrombois. Both names are found in the record relating

to the Pottawatamie Indians, 'LaFrombois' being especially prominent.

Touissant S. Benoist married Matilda Amen on February 18, 1847. During the 1830's and 1840's, T. S. and F. Benoist traded with the Indians located in the Nemaha and Council Bluffs Indian Agencies. In 1847, the stock of Benoist and Co. valued at \$5150, consisted of "blankets, cloths, satinets, calicos, brown cotton drilling, bed ticking, bleached cotton, flannel Janes, plad lincy hankerchieves, shalls, socks, suspenders, ribbons, thred, buttons, beads, knives, hats, caps, boots, shoos, powder, led shot, nails, shugar, coffee, tea, perlash, rice, molasses, salt, flower, queens ware, tin war, guns and combs". Their employees were "Francis Tazon, clerk, native of St. Charles, Missouri, and Theodore Grondie, laborer of Canada." Because Indian traders and/or their employees followed the Indians during the hunting season, being ever-ready to advance on credit anything needed by the Indians, their place of residence in French Village has not been established. And because of the nature of their business, their warehouse must have been near the landing at The Narrows, at the Iowa-Missouri border.

On December 20, 1847, John Greenwood was married to Frances Eberman by James Cummings. Kelly and Morgan, biographers of this Greenwood family, says the descendants had been told that Caleb Greenwood, the father, had lived amongst the French. However, these historians could find no French in the Upper Platte Purchase, and pursued that point no further. John Greenwood had been with his father when he piloted the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy wagon train to California in 1844; had served in the Mexican War with John C. Fremont's California battalion; had then returned to the Missouri River during the fall of 1847, his marriage following two months later. After picking up theyounger members of the Greenwood family



at Andrew Gemeckers who lived below The Narrows, the Greenwoods in 1848 piloted the wagon train for California whose members included Rufus Hitchcock and Daniel Hunsaker and families of Austin.

John Eberman, father of Frances Eberman, lived in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$  of S13 T67 R42, about one mile east of Austin. Atchison County records show his wife buying Betsy, a negro woman, in November 1846, and also list her as property in John Eberman's estate inventory dated December 4, 1847. Mrs. David (Elizabeth) Hiatt, another daughter of John Eberman, lived in Fremont County many years north of Sidney.

If the foregoing recital of marriages amazed the local historian, he had better breathed deeply--there were more to come: (1) Joseph Merriville, whose picture is kept by no less a prestigious society than the Smithsonian Institute, was married by Thomas Farmer on 23 June 1849; (2) The marriage of William Kenceleur to Exstacia A. Bow reads like a 'Who's Who in Western History': Father P.J. DeSmet performed the marriage, the witnesses being A. Pike Vasquez, Antonio Xavier Recontre and A. Bonois.

On May 20, 1971, the Sidney Argus-Herald published a sketch on French Village and one of its citizens--William Kenceleur. Research since that time has greatly expanded Kenceleur's known activities in the Far West. To place the time in Fremont County's history of 125 years ago is to make it unbelievable.

As pointed out in the 1971 article, Kenceleur during the winter of 1849 - 1850 built a toll bridge over the Nishnabotana River at the old rock ford in the NW $\frac{1}{4}$  NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of S23 T67 R42. Add to this the facts that the months of December 1849 was a cold one, the thermometer ten times reaching zero or below; that January 1850 had 13 readings of below zero weather; that February 1850 was just as cold. From November 8 to February 18, 46 inches of snow had fallen.

(What needs to be established for future consideration in one's mind, is that the Nishnabotana River would have been frozen solid.)

On August 17, 1852, county records show that William Kensler and Charles Martin borrowed \$2833 from Joseph Robidoux (1783 - 1868) of St. Joseph, Missouri. Other than showing the mortgage cancelled on October 8, 1854, no additional information is given, and county records give no indication that the two men might have used the money in a Fremont County enterprise. However, it was not long before Kenceleur made known his next enterprise. His part in the building of the famous Platte Bridge on the Oregon Trail near what is now Caspar, Wyoming, was advertised in the St. Joseph Gazette of February 23, 1853:

"NOTICE TO CALIFORNIANS".--Bridge across North Fork of Platte.--The undersigned are now building and will have completed in time for the earliest trains a substantial bridge on the North Fork of the Platte River, 110 miles above Fort Laramie, above all the sand hills and bad roads on the north side of the river, on the main travelled route to California, Oregon and Salt Lake.

In consequence of the great loss of life and property during the last spring emigration, by bad bridges and flat boats, and to insure safety, we have determined to build our bridge in a most substantial manner and of sufficient strength and width, for the heaviest teams to cross in the most perfect safety.

The proprietors have selected the best place on the river for a bridge, a place recommended by a great many emigrants and mountaineers well acquainted with the whole country. In crossing here, many dangerous ravines on the south side of the Platte disruptive to wagons, are avoided. The proprietors will be present to superintend and give every attention and aid to the traveling public. The rates of toll will be greatly reduced from those of any previous year. There will be at the bridge two blacksmiths and wagon maker shops for the accommodation of emigrants. The company will have a good grocery store and eating house, and all kind of Indian animal peltries, also hogs and cows, horses and mules at low prices. Emigrants will find it to their advantage to come direct to our bridge before purchasing elsewhere.

BISSONNETTE, KENCELEUR & CO.  
For further particulars, we refer to Mr. R. L. McGhee, our agent at St. Joseph, Missouri.

Obviously Kenceleur was using the winter time to build another bridge, this time on much larger proportions than the one he had built during the winter of 1849 - 1850. That the Platte Bridge was a financial success during the summer of 1853, there is little doubt:

MINER'S EXPRESS. Vol XIII No. 3. Dubuque, Iowa. October 5, 1853. 2 - 1. FREMONT COUNTY.--We learn from a reliable source that Messrs. Kanseler & Co. are building a bridge across the Nishnabotney, near Austin in Fremont county. A custom flouring and saw mill will be erected by these gentlemen during the fall and the winter. Those boys of McKissick's Grove are hard to beat for enterprise.

That this work was done at the same location as where Kenceleur had built the 1849 - 1850 bridge is determined when one studies the survey in 1856 of the French Bridge-and-Bluff Road as recorded in the county's "Road Calendar" for that time. (How appropriate that this road is the Bicentennial Trail!)

One year later one would have read of the ever-on-the-go Kenceleur from the Fremont County Journal published at Sidney, Iowa, and dated September 16, 1854:

"Horrible Outrage. Twenty Soldiers Murdered By The Sioux Indians.--We are called upon to record another wholesale murder, perpetrated by the Sioux Indians, the latter part of August. Our informant, Mr. Kensler, a citizen of this county, returned from Fort Laramie yesterday.--From him we obtained the following particulars:

A band of six hundred Sioux Indians had been prowling around Choteau's Fort for some time, and on the day prior to the butchery of the soldiers, stole a cow from a Mormon emigrant, four or five miles this side of Fort Laramie. Notice of the theft was immediately conveyed to Lt. Garnet, commanding officer at the Fort, who with a company of 28 men, immediately started in pursuit of the thieves and soon overtook them. They refused to give up the cow or make any reparation for the theft, and the commanding officer therefore ordered the cannon to be planted in front of the principal thief's tent, and after a little further parleying, was pointed upward and discharged. The top of the tent was torn off by

the discharge, when the infuriated savages rushed upon the Americans and killed and scalped every one of them. We did not learn how many Indians were killed. After this murderous onslaught, the savages attacked the American Fur Company's buildings, which they plundered of everything. They also attacked old Bordeaux's trading post, and stripped it of everything. They then took up their line of march for Fort Laramie, but concluded not to attack it. The force at the Fort was too small to attempt avenging the death of their comrades, and all that could be done was to forward the news of the outrage to Washington.

It remains to be seen what action the U.S. authorities will now take. Murder after murder has been committed this season by blood thirsty savages, and as yet no retaliation. If volunteers are wanted call on the West. Thousands are ready and willing to go and avenge the murder of their friends and neighbors.

Kenceleur was probably carrying back his share of the profits from the Platte Bridge because he paid off the \$2833 loan from Joseph Robidoux on October 8, 1854! Perhaps now is the time for a reminder that travel from parts of Wyoming to Fremont County had been going on from the time of Beal's High Creek post office!

Research in Rulo, Nebraska, where Kenceleur had become that town's proprietor, turns up an answer as to how the French Bridge in S23 T67 R42 had been engineered:

RULO WESTERN GUIDE. Rulo, Nebr. Ter. Vol. I No. 1; June 18, 1858. 4 - 4.--The Platte Bridge.--Taking into consideration the distance for procuring building material, and tools and machinery for its construction, the Platte Bridge is one of the World's wonders. As there are few men in the United States who have ever heard of it, we give a brief outline of its construction.

The names of the gentlemen who projected and built it, are William Kenceleur, Charles Martin, John Richards, Joseph Villaudrez, James Bordeaux and Mr. Bessonette. Two of the first named gentlemen now reside in this place; and the third at the bridge.

They begun the work in the winter of '52 and '53, one of the coldest ever known in the mountains. They examined the river in many places, till they found a rock foundation on which to rest their structure. This they got on the North Platte, about 750 miles from the Missouri River.

They hauled pine timber many miles to the spot, and when the rapid current of the Platte was bound in ice, they erected there, seven cribs in diamond shape, 19 feet in height, and 26 feet the long way, and 18 feet across-making the long way coincide with the course of the stream. The logs composing these cribs at the points where they cross each other, were bound with tire iron; the four apartments in side each crib, were then filled with stone. Under this immense weight as soon as a thaw commenced, the ice gave way, and the seven cribs settled safely at the bottom of the stream. As the sand was about four feet deep on a part of the bed of the stream, four of the cribs did not immediately go to the rock, but in a short time the action of the water carrying away the sand, and the weight of the crib worked them down to the solid rock.

The top of the cribs were then leveled up with other timber and stone. Six tons of stringers ten by sixteen inches in size and fifty five feet long, were thrown across the stream, connecting the banks and streams, making nine spans. These stringers were supported in the middle with a heavy cross timber passing underneath, supported at each end with a set of king posts. The whole Bridge was then floored with 2 inch plank, and a guard erected on each side. The whole length is 404 feet, and the width 16 feet. This built of pitch pine, stone and iron.

It would have cost in the States at least \$20,000.

To look at its superior workmanship, and the distant desert place in which it is built, it is truly wonderful. It was built to accommodate the California emigration.

The first year it cleared \$25,000. This year it will probably be of great service to the Government, for the crossing of its trains of wagons and troops. Those who have seen the bridge are struck with wonder at its strength, and superior workmanship, and say that it is advantageously selected and situated.

VIATOR.

Of the six named as builders of the famous Platte Bridge, four can be connected with French Village. And since Clement Lamoureux, son-in-law of James Bordeaux, was on the building committee for St. Mary's Catholic Church at Hamburg, and also petitioned for the incorporation of Hamburg, we have reached a transition to a later period of Fremont County's history.

If one thing is obvious about French Village, it is that it was a working part of the Far West of the 1840's and 1850's. If

one is thinking he sees Fremont County during that ten year period, French Village will reset his gaze further westward.

George Catlin had described it in 1832 thusly:

"Notwithstanding all that has been written and said, there is scarcely any subject on which the knowing people of the East are less informed than on the character of the West. By this I mean the 'Far West', the country whose fascinations spread a charm over the mind, almost dangerous to civilized pursuits. Few people even know the true definition of the term 'West', and where its location. Phantom-like it flies before us as we travel on our way, and is continually gilded before us as we approach the setting sun. In the commencement of my tour several of my traveling companions from the city of New York found themselves at a frightful distance to the West when we arrived at Niagara Falls, and hastened home to amuse their friends with what they had seen. At Buffalo a vessel was landing with four hundred passengers, and twelve days out. 'Where from?' 'From the West.' In the beautiful City of Cincinnati people said to me, 'Our town has passed the days of its most rapid growth, it is not far enough West!' In St. Louis my landlady assured me that I would be pleased with her boarders, for they were nearly all merchants from the West. I asked, 'Whence come those steamboats laden with pork, honey, hides, etc.?' The answer was, 'From the West!'

So, if one is to understand--really understand--French Village, he must not be afraid to look toward the setting sun and dream just a while. After all, this was the common interest within French Village, the only unity it had.