

Where
the past
is present

DETROIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

TEACHER RESOURCE LESSON PLAN

FRENCH RIBBON FARMS IN DETROIT



INTRODUCTION

This lesson helps third grade students understand the life and culture of the early French settlers that lived in Michigan in the first half of the 18th century. This lesson includes a comprehensive background essay on the French and New France, as well as a list of additional resources, and copies of worksheets and primary sources.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What did the French settlement of Detroit look like, and why?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Understand the geographical factors which influence land use and the importance of the Detroit River in the development of Detroit.
- Learn the important role Detroit played in the fur trade.
- Gather and analyze information through small group discussion.

MI GLCES – GRADE THREE SOCIAL STUDIES

H3 – History of Michigan Through Statehood

- 3-H3.0.1 - Identify questions historians ask in examining Michigan.
- 3-H3.0.5 - Use informational text and visual data to compare how American Indians and settlers in the early history of Michigan adapted to, used, and modified their environment.
- 3-H3.0.7 - Use a variety of primary and secondary sources to construct a historical narrative about daily life in the early settlements of Michigan.

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS - ELA

Reading

- 1 - Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it.
- 2 - Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development, summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Speaking and Listening

- 1 - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- 2 - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

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BACKGROUND ESSAY

After Columbus discovered the “New World,” people from many nations sailed across the Atlantic Ocean. In general, these travelers were looking for one (or more) of three things:

Rich goods and wealth: Stories from the first sailing expeditions told about great wealth in the New World – gold, silver, furs, spices, wild animals and unique plants. Adventurers also sailed to the New World to find an easier sailing route to Asia, which would open up new trade routes.

New territory: Many European Kings wanted new land, or colonies, to make their kingdoms larger. They offered generous rewards to men who would sail the seas, build forts, and claim new land for the king.

A new life: Some travelers had fallen on hard times where they lived, and were looking for a new home with lots of land, few laws and restrictions, and great opportunities.

Starting in the early 1600s, many European nations sent ships, explorers and settlers across the Atlantic on huge sailing vessels. Many settled on the Atlantic coast of North America. For example, the French settled along the east coast of Canada, the British settled in Massachusetts and Virginia, the Dutch settled in New York and the Spanish settled in Florida. Some groups, especially the French, sent smaller boats inland to explore the Great Lakes region.

Under the powerful King Louis XIV, France became a center of European fashion. Fur coats and hats were a sign that a person was rich and important. There were not enough fur-bearing animals in Europe to supply all who wanted them, and as a result, furs were very expensive. French voyagers traveled to the New World to find a bigger

source of fur and to make their fortune selling them in France. The trading and transportation of furs, especially beaver, became the most important economic force in Michigan between 1700 and 1815.

The fur business became a trading business because the Native American cultures did not want European money; they preferred to trade for goods. The fur trading process followed the seasons, moving goods when the rivers weren’t frozen. Native Americans and French trappers spent the fall and winter hunting, trapping, and skinning the animals. In the spring, merchants

from coast cities on the Atlantic Ocean sent men and trading supplies westward through the Great Lakes waterways. Tools, blankets, silver, muskets, and glass beads were distributed to traders and taken to smaller trading posts.

In the spring, the traders met the trappers to bargain for animal

pelts, sometimes at the trading posts and sometimes at Native villages. The traders transported the pelts to large trading centers on the Atlantic Coast, where huge merchant sailing ships waited to carry the furs to Europe. In return, the merchants and sailors in Europe shipped back supplies to continue the trading process the next spring.

By the 1690s, the French traders had brought so many furs to France that the prices dropped. Also, the French had started quarreling with the Native American tribes in northern Michigan. King Louis XIV decided to stop the fur trade in Michigan. He closed all the forts, including those in Mackinac and St. Joseph, and called the traders back to France.

Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac was a Frenchman stationed at Mackinac in the 1690s. After he returned to France, he persuaded King Louis XIV that a



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French military post and colony at the southern part of the Great Lakes would be the best way to secure, control and protect French interests in the area. The King agreed to Cadillac's idea.

Cadillac picked the location for his venture and called it Detroit, which is a French word for "the straits." A strait is a waterway that connects two lakes. Cadillac arrived at Detroit on July 24, 1701, equipped with men and supplies to build a fort and settlement for the French King.

Detroit was a strategic place for the fur trade in Michigan. The Detroit River connects the Great Lakes of Erie and

Huron. Lake Erie connects to Lake Ontario, and Lake Ontario connects with the Saint Lawrence River. The Saint Lawrence River connects to the Atlantic Ocean. This 2,000 mile waterway made it possible for the French to

reach the heart of the American continent. Detroit was a perfect location for a settlement and a fort because the river was narrow and easy to defend against invaders. Also, the land was perfect for planting and farming.

What Was Daily Life Like at Le Détroit?

For almost fifty years, a bustling trading community grew on the Detroit River. For the first time, the land at the river was claimed and "owned." French *seigneurs*, or nobleman, owned the lands; they also owned animals, fruit trees and important buildings like the church, the gristmill and the brewery. French settlers, called *habitants*, found jobs working on the seigneur's property.

As the number of traders, military men, women and children in the fort grew, skilled tradesmen

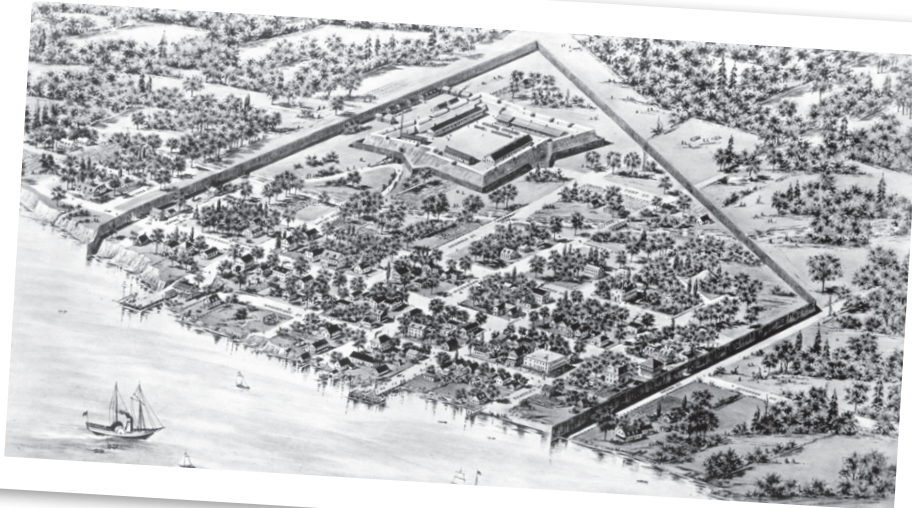
arrived to meet their needs. Barrel makers provided storage for grain, beverages and gunpowder. Bakers made bread, cakes and pastries. Carpenters built houses, buildings and boats. Blacksmiths forged metal tools and shod the horses.

Cadillac invited Native Americans to live near the fort as trading partners. For Native women in the area, life continued according to tradition. They contributed to the tribal community by tanning hides, making clothes, gathering food, raising children and caring for elders. Some Native women married French trappers and learned to speak French.

Madame Cadillac was the first Caucasian woman to live in Detroit. For

Caucasian women, daily life in Detroit was very different than in Europe or Canada, where they shopped at city markets for many family needs. Instead, they carried water to the house from the river, cooked over a fireplace

and made their own soap, clothes, food and toys. If children learned to read and write, it was the women who taught them. There were no schools during this frontier century. Women coming from Europe and Canada to the Detroit frontier had to work very hard and learn many new life skills.



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MATERIALS USED

Data Elements:

- *Ribbon Farms in Early Detroit*
- *Map: French Ribbon Farms, c. 1818*
- *Map: Contemporary Detroit Street Map*

Pencils and paper

LESSON SEQUENCE:

1. Read *Ribbon Farms in Early Detroit* to the students, or have them read it in small groups or by themselves. Lead a discussion around the following questions:
 - What were the major concerns of the French settlers?
 - What role did the Detroit River play in their lives?
2. Show the students *Map: French Ribbon Farms, c. 1818*. Show how the land was divided into ribbon farms.
3. Divide the students into groups and have them discuss farming and family life in the 1750s. Using the maps as references, ask each group to draw a ribbon farm on a piece of newsprint, as if they were creating a detailed map. They must draw the boundaries of the farm, and decide where to place their home, barn, fields, and so on.
4. Ask them to consider:
 - What was the farmer's main route of transportation? (The river)
 - Where would they build their house? Near the river or toward the back of the property? (near the river)
 - What vegetables did they grow, and where did they place their fields? (Peas, squash, wheat – behind their homes between the house and the forests.)
 - What animals did they have, and where did they live? (Oxen, milk cows, horses which they kept in barns on the property, near the house)
 - Where did they do their hunting, and what did the land look like? (At the back of their

property, where it is wooded. Also, fishing on the river front.)

5. When finished, have each group present their maps to the class.
6. Conclude the lesson by giving each group a copy of *Map: Contemporary Detroit Street Map*. Explain that a number of today's streets have French-sounding names (Livernois, Dequindre, St. Aubin, Chene, etc.)
7. Have each group highlight all the streets that have French sounding names. Then, have them compare today's map with *Map: French Ribbon Farms, c. 1818*. Ask them if they see any similarities between the two maps. Explain that many of Detroit's French street names come from the original habitants that settled in Detroit. The streets marked the boundaries between their ribbon farms. Even though the farms are long gone, the streets that bear these settlers names are still a part of Detroit today.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Hold a class discussion. Almost everything found on a French Ribbon Farm was made and/or produced by the members of the family. How many things in your home are made and/or produced by members of the family? Where are most of the things in your house made and/or produced?
- Review the role of men, women, and children during the years of the French settlements and compare them with life today in Detroit. Discuss why the Detroit River was so important to the French farmers. Ask the students if they think the Detroit River is important to the city today.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books:

Ackerson, Robert C. *LaSalle: A Classic Source Book*. Baltimore, Md: Bookman Pub, 1986.

Askin, John, and Milo Milton Quaife. *The John Askin Papers*. [Detroit]: Detroit Library Commission, 1928.

Brown, Henry D. *Cadillac and the Founding of Detroit: Commemorating the Two Hundred and Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the City of Detroit ...* Detroit: Published for the Detroit Historical Society by Wayne State University Press, 1976.

Cadillac, Antoine Laumet de Lamothe, Pierre de Liette, and Milo Milton Quaife. *The Western Country in the 17th Century: The Memoirs of Antoine Lamothe Cadillac and Pierre Liette*. New York: Citadel Press, 1962.

Deur, Lynne. *Settling in Michigan: And Other True Pioneer Stories*. Spring Lake, Mich: River Road Publications, 1992.

Deur, Lynne, and Sara Michel. *The Making of Michigan*. Spring Lake, Mich: River Road Publications, 1987.

Hamil, Fred C. *When Beaver Was King*. Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1951.

Johnson, Ida Amanda. *The Michigan Fur Trade*. Lansing: Michigan Historical Commission, 1919.

Kent, Timothy J. *Ft. Pontchartrain at Detroit A Guide to the Daily Lives of Fur Trade and Military Personnel, Settlers, and Missionaries at French Posts*. Ossineke, Mich: Silver Fox Enterprises, 2001.

Knudsen, Anders. *Antoine De La Mothe Cadillac: French Settlements at Detroit and Louisiana*. New York: Crabtree Pub. Co, 2007.

Marsh, Carole. *Michigan History: Surprising Secrets About Our State's Founding Mothers, Fathers & Kids!* Peachtree City, GA: Gallopade Pub. Group, 1998.

Morton, Edward Payson. *Lake Michigan and the French Explorers*. Chicago: Ainsworth & company, 1914.

Stapler, Harry, Berenice Bryant Lowe, and Amy South. *Pioneers of Forest and City*. Lansing: Michigan Historical Commission, Bureau of History, Michigan Dept. of State, 1985.

Stockham, Peter. *Little Book of Early American Crafts and Trades*. New York: Dover Publications, 1976.

Links:

- The French Fur Trade, Wisconsin Historical Society: <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-007/>
- New France, The Canadian Encyclopedia: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=a1ARTA0005701>
- Virtual Museum of New France, Canadian Museum of Civilization: <http://www.civilization.ca/virtual-museum-of-new-france>
- Seigniorial System, The Canadian Encyclopedia: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0007270>
- Pathfinders and Passageways, The Exploration of Canada, Library and Archives Canada: <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/206/301/lac-bac/explorers/www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/explorers/index-e.html>

For more information about the **Detroit Historical Society**, or to schedule a field trip to the **Detroit Historical Museum** or **Dossin Great Lakes Museum**, visit detroithistorical.org

RIBBON FARMS IN EARLY DETROIT

The first European inhabitants of Detroit were French people. Cadillac, a French explorer, was the founder of Detroit. Of course, the Ottawa, the Chippewa, and the Potawatomi were already in this area before the French came in 1701. Cadillac was granted permission by the King of France to come to Detroit to establish a fur trading post. Generally, the French had good relationships with the Native Americans.

Beginning in 1707, Cadillac began granting land on both sides of the Detroit River to French settlers who wanted to farm as well as hunt for beavers and fish. Because transportation was important, every farmer wanted to have land right on the Detroit River and near Fort Ponchartrain. Each farmer

was given land on the river front which followed the shore line for two hundred to one thousand feet and extended from the Detroit River back two or three miles. Because the lands were long and narrow, they were called “ribbon farms.” The ribbon farms lined both sides of the Detroit River from Ecorse up to Lake St. Clair. The farmers could use their canoes on the Detroit River to visit other farmers and friends in Fort Ponchartrain and to take their farm products and furs to market. Also, the nearby Fort provided them with security and safety.

When Cadillac granted the land to farmers, they had to agree upon certain things. The farmer could trade, hunt and fish on his property. The farmer was required to pay rent for the use of land and a fee for trading

privileges. Also, he had to pay still another fee to Cadillac for the use of his mill for grinding corn and other grain that he grew on the farm. The farmer could fish in the Detroit River and hunt on his land for deer, beaver, wild ducks, pheasants and other animals. They used the meat for food and traded the furs.

The farmers grew corn, wheat and vegetables and some of them had cattle, pigs and a few horses. The French farmers also had orchards, where they grew pears, apples and other fruits.

The entire family – the father, mother and children – worked on the farmland and made the things they needed. The housewives baked bread in outdoor ovens made of clay, made their own cloth and sewed their own

clothes. They were able to trade with the Native Americans to get maple sugar and other things they needed or wanted.

In the evenings, when work was done, the habitants of Detroit enjoyed spending time together. In the summer, they played outdoor games and raced carts. In the winter months, they rode sleighs up and down the frozen Detroit River. They also played games, like checkers and cards. On Sundays they gathered at Ste. Anne’s Church for Catholic services.

Today some of the streets in Detroit have the names of original French farmers. Beaubien, St. Aubin, Chene and Livernois Avenues are just a few of the streets named after the early French farmers and settlers.



MAP: FRENCH RIBBON FARMS, C. 1818

