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2

HISTORICAL NOTES. 6 FEB. 1999.

Another look at Butte Michaux.

I have received many comments, and also help, about more information on Butte Michaux.

On Feb. 26 I received a packet of info, and letter, from Dennis and Lorna (Vigesaa) Olson of Bismarck which contained sidelights about Andre Michaux concerning his travels here in USA and Canada, and about his return to France.

(Incidentally, Lorna's grandparents were Paul and Sophie Overby who lived on a farm near Binford. I knew them both, wonderful people, and both passed away. Walter Vigesaa is her father, and I know him, and I believe he lives in Arizona.) ← ANDRE

Yes, Dennis and Lorna supplied me with much about Michaux, but the mystery remains; how did that butte get his name?

Briefly I will herein tell what I did learn about Michaux. He was born March 7, 1746 on the farm that had been in his family for many generations near Versailles, Satory, France. His parents both died before he was 20 years old, leaving him to raise his brother and sisters.

He was married to Cecile Claye, a farm girl from Beauce, in 1769. She died eleven months later, after giving birth to their son Francois Andre. He was in deep despair at her death, then turned his attention to the study of botany, and became an avid botanist/explorer.

Michaux had great ability at learning new languages, to the extent that he completed a French-Persian dictionary while in Persia for three years.

Botany was his chief interest however, so in October 1785 Michaux, and son Francois (then age 15) arrived at New York to search for suitable trees and plants which he could send back to France to rejuvenate its depleted forests.

He traveled to New Jersey, Penn., Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia and other southeastern states on this mission. In 1789 son Francois returned to France.

Michaux returned to Philadelphia in 1792, and there it seems Thomas Jefferson approached him about investigating the recent Louisiana Purchase, and on to Oregon. But this expedition did not materialize, due to Jefferson's misgivings about Michaux's loyalties to the US, or France. The matter was dropped.

So in 1792 he botanized in Canada, among other places Hudson Bay and area. But on July 15, 1793 he left Philadelphia for his famous mid-western travels, (of which no area or Territory is directly mentioned other than upper-midwest in one source).

It would seem that it would be during that three-year period that the possibility of his name being attached to our Butte, either through his physical presence, or fathering another son, who MAY have contributed to the Butte's name.

In April 1796 he returned to Charleston, South Carolina, and we are told that he left for France in August 1796 on the ship Ophir, and three weeks later the ship encountered a violent storm which drove it onto the shore at Egmont, Holland, where it was battered to pieces by waves, Michaux was rescued unconscious by nearby townspeople.

6 Feb. 1999

HISTORICAL NOTES-ANDRE MICHAUX, page 2.

It seems that most of the boxes and chests containing his plant specimens, bird skins, and his journal note books were salvaged.

So I am still "in the dark" as to exactly our Butte got its name. Can we ever know? But we do occasionally read about an old manuscript being found that has very valuable information.

At any rate the name Butte Michaux appears on the old government map drawn by I.N. Stevens who had been appointed governor of Washington Territory, and made his way, with about fifty men, from Wahpeton in a northwesterly direction to Griggs county and Jessie Lake in 1853. The map was printed in 1855.

Again, I thank Dennis and Lorna Olson for their help.

Incidentally, a week ago I visited with Loren Haugen, formerly of Hannaford, but now teaching history in Hawaii. If I recall correctly he said he was teaching his students about the westward movement of prairie settlers, and found these Courier stories of interest.