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Fort Reconstruction Set For Land Near Bridge

It is considered poor form to open a story with a negation. But who ever heard of a strip of uninhabited rocky shoreline becoming a tourist attraction? It just doesn't happen. Yet, at the north end and just to the left of the Mackinac Bridge is a spit of land, soaked in history, which is setting an uncommon amount of attention from the Michigan traveler. For this is the site where Fort de Buade will be reconstructed. For this is the land of Father Marquette, greatest of all the missionaries; of Sieur de LaSalle, most intrepid of French explorers; of Sieur de LaMothe Cadillac, most colorful of outpost builders.

It is the St. Ignace country—once the last outpost of civilization, a place of terror and opportunity, of wealth and spilled blood. But history plays an important part in today's recreational travel business, according to Robert J. Furlong, executive secretary of the Michigan tourist council.

"A RECENT survey of 10,000 Michigan vacationers showed history to be among the top attractions of our state," he said, "and while the reconstruction of this ancient fort still is in the planning stages, already it is attracting attention from the early publicity these plans have been given."

And nowhere is the romance of the past linked so closely to the present, the tourist chief said. The site where the reconstructed fort will stand commands a sweep of the Straits of Mackinac and of the two inland seas of Lake Huron and Lake Michigan as far as the eye can see. This channel and the bridge which now spans it are today's corridors of commerce. But the Straits was a highway of the past, and the ghosts of the couriers de bois penetrate the mists of time.

Here to the St. Ignace country in the 1600's came the remnants of the Huron Indians, fleeing their ferocious enemies the Iroquois. Accompanying them was Father Marquette who stayed to minister to their spiritual needs. He established in 1672 the Mission of St. Ignace at the place called Mississinick, the present day St. Ignace region.

THIS MISSION soon became a focal point of Hurons, Ottawas and French fur traders and adventures, some seeking gold of which there was none, some seeking copper—of which there was plenty, but which was to elude the white man for another century. And with them came the free

traders—the coureurs de bois. In 1685 they brought 100 barrels of brandy and trade goods. This bit of business brought on the building of Fort de Buade. But there was another reason for establishing Fort de Buade. English fur traders were reported penetrating to the Great Lakes. A garrison at St. Ignace could block them. De LaDunayville erected a fort in 1697. Then in 1699 came Cadillac, a proud Gascon, quick tempered, and equally quick with sword or pen, who left a colorful description of his command. He tells us that the French colony now numbered 60 houses, and that 7,000 Hurons and Ottawas lived in a huge palisaded town enclosed with three concentric rows of palisades. Fort de Buade was puny by comparison, lacking even block-houses.

"THE HOUSES of the French are of wood, one log upon another," he wrote, "but they are roofed with the bark of cedar trees. Only those of the Jesuits were roofed with planks."

The plot of furs on Montreal markets probably sealed the fate of this early fort. King Louis XIV in 1696 decreed that all French forts be classed to all except missionaries so Cadillac moved to a place called DeTrois in 1701. Most of the Indians moved with him. The Jesuits gave up the struggle in 1705, burning the mission to prevent its desecration.

The exact location of the original Fort de Buade still is not known. And if, as is supposed by some historians, it was on the waterfront it may be lost forever to archaeologists because of latter day construction.

But a fort near the north approach to the great bridge would be a fitting monument to the great men who opened the way for the forging of a new America, to men who even then saw past the wealth of fur. For it was Cadillac himself who wrote, "One is always in



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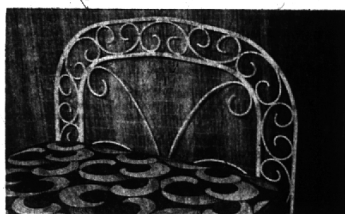
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