

Introduction to Castorland

Rediscovering the Black River



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A Presentation by
John A. Gallucci,
Lowville Academy,
July 28, 2022



CASTORLAND

French Refugees
in the Western Adirondacks
1793 - 1814

By
Edith Pilcher

HARBOR HILL BOOKS
Harrison, New York
1985

12/22/97

For John Halluci,
I am delighted by your
interest in this fascinating story,
and look forward to your production
of a Journal translation.

Beginning on a personal note...

What is Castorland?

An optimistic, carefully planned business venture:
The New York Company...

An inaccurate map...

Struggles and slow progress...

The American commissioners...

What is the Castorland Journal?

A business report... a commentary on New York State in the
1790's... a personal diary...

Comparing the 1790's in France and the United States:

United States

1788 US Constitution

1789 United States
begins official
existence

War with England?
The Western Posts,
Oswego

1794-1795 Jay's
Treaty

France

1789 Fall of the Bastille

1793 death of Louis XVI,
January; death of
Marie Antoinette
in October

Rise of Robespierre

1794 Fall of Robespierre

A. MAP
of
TRACT of LAND
IN THE
STATE of NEW YORK
called
MACOMB'S PURCHASE

Compiled from the Official Returns under
the Inspection of the Surveyor General,
by Charles C. Bartholomew.

Contents of Macomb's Purchase

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| No. 1 Containing | 321,819 |
| " 2 " | 333,000 |
| " 3 " | 438,228 |
| " 4 " | 450,950 |
| " 5 William and P. Tract 2500 | |
| Acres | 7,000 |
| " 6 James & Robert Tract 47,000 | |
| Acres | 500 |
| " 7 John & John Tract 210,000 | |
| Acres | 4409,738 |
| Subtotal of above to | 5,099,755 |
| Acres | |
| to be added at 100 Acres per Section | 20,000 |
| Total | 5,119,755 |

Paris, France... 1792...

Jacques Donatien Le Ray de Chaumont



James Le Ray de Chaumont

L E T T E R S

FROM AN

AMERICAN FARMER;

DESCRIBING
CERTAIN PROVINCIAL SITUATIONS,
MANNERS, AND CUSTOMS,
NOT GENERALLY KNOWN;
AND CONVEYING
SOME IDEA OF THE LATE AND PRESENT
INTERIOR CIRCUMSTANCES
OF THE
BRITISH COLONIES
IN
NORTH AMERICA.

WRITTEN FOR THE INFORMATION OF A FRIEND
IN ENGLAND,

By J. HECTOR ST. JOHN,
A FARMER IN PENNSYLVANIA.

LONDON,
PRINTED FOR THOMAS DAVIES IN RUSSEL STREET COVENT-
GARDEN, AND LOCKYER DAVIS IN HOLBORN.
M DCC LXXXII.

“What then is an American, this new man?...He is an American who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys...Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world...”

Optimism of the New York Company...

The Castorland jeton:

FRANCO-AMERICANA COLONIA
CASTORLAND 1796



SALVE MAGNA PARENS FRUGUM



“America’s Most Beautiful French Coin”, Chester Sullivan, writer and specialist of the Castorland jeton

Castorland jeton compared



The *Prospectus* of the New York Company:

*The Association, the Plan for which we will present, will no doubt draw the attention of Fathers with families, **everything** substantial and advantageous which they can wish for is found united in this enterprise; **its success cannot be doubtful**... We shall finish with several observations on the advantages which this Region offers Commerce.*

The New York Company, *Prospectus*, ‘Commerce’

*In casting one's eyes on the geographical position of New York, one easily conceives what the superiority of its commerce over that of the other United States should be...**Located at that extremity of Lake Ontario which is nearest the inhabited regions & divided by several navigable rivers**, the Concession made to the New York Company contains everything suitable for nourishing the industry & activity of its Inhabitants.*

Will the New York Company actually have a river?

The *Constitution* of the New York Company:

“The land sold to the New York Company, is part of the lands bought by the State of New York from the ancient Indians who inhabited them.

It is located on the Black River and near Lake Ontario. It begins on the north shore of the Black River, beginning from the western boundaries of the Concession of William Inman and extends along the said shore towards the west, to Lake Ontario...”

And the land has a name: Castorland...

Constitution of the New York Company: the name 'Castorland'

'This marshy Tract

is full of

Beavers and Otters'

Sauthier, 1779



Physiographic Provinces of New York



Produced by the NYS Geological Survey / NYS Museum
Adapted from Fenneman, N.M. and Johnson, D.W 1946, Physiographic
Divisions of the Conterminous U. S., U.S. Geological Survey

Map with course (in blue) of the Black River



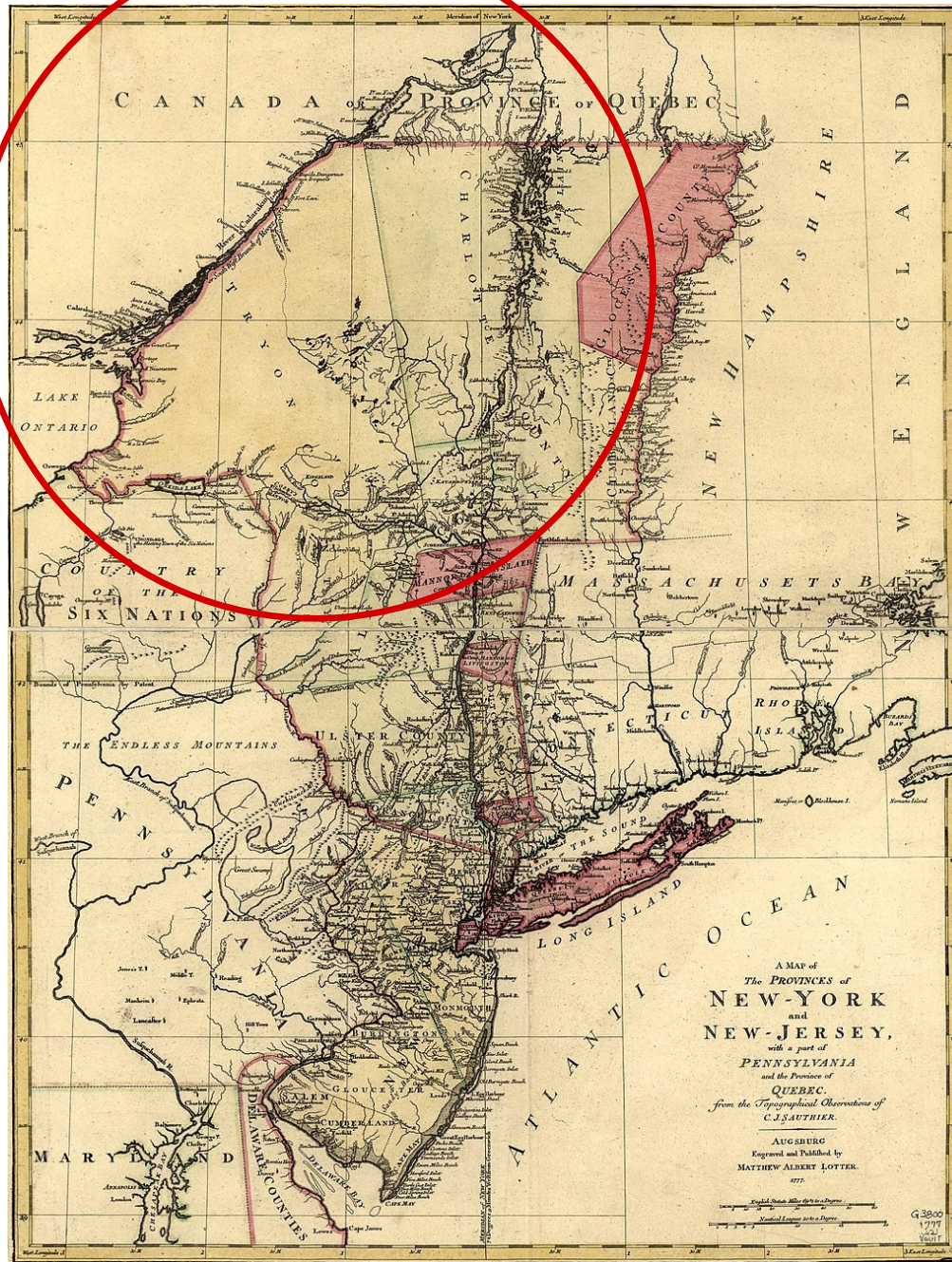
Old maps: coast-lines, rivers, and many blank spaces...



Guillaume De L'Isle, map of Louisiana, 1718, detail, showing New York State: does it show the Black River?

Inconsistencies of mapping northwestern NY State...

A historical map of the Province of New York and parts of surrounding regions, including Canada, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. The map is titled "A MAP of the PROVINCES of NEW-YORK and NEW-JERSEY, with a part of PENNSYLVANIA and the Province of QUEBEC. from the Topographical Observations of C. S. A.UTHIER." The map shows the Hudson River, Lake Ontario, and the Atlantic Ocean. A red circle highlights the area around the Hudson River and the city of New York.





Sauthier, 1777, detail





Waldseemüller Map, 1507, first time the name ‘America’ appears on a map...

Waldseemüller map,
Detail,
showing
North and
South America



Sancti michaelis

Rio de S. fransco
razia ba ril

Rio de perera

Serra de S. maria de gma a

Rio de casa

portu real

Rio S. iheronimi

Rio de odio

Rio domezo

Monte fregoso

Abbatia omnium
Sandorum

Rio S. iaco bi

Rio S. angustini

Rio de S. luia

Rio de virgine

Rio de S. ioham

portu seguro

lucanus vermegu

de braz il

capitaneus nauis qua norde
rex portu zalie ad Calicu
ra die prim apparuit: que o
firma cum reuera sit cum pu
parte circū sua mire sed nō
cognite magnitudinis insul
virlis ac feminet etiā seruo
non aliter quam eos mater
tre asuenerunt. Et sunt his
to albiores eis quos superio
tione re mandat regis Cal
reperire.



Terra Ulteri' Incognita = our North America... notice the numerous rivers indicated on the coast, and the blank interior...



Sauthier, 1779,

Showing grants of land



Detail of Sauthier 1779



Detail, showing 'Niaouenre Bay' (Black River Bay)...

The Black River appears on a map...



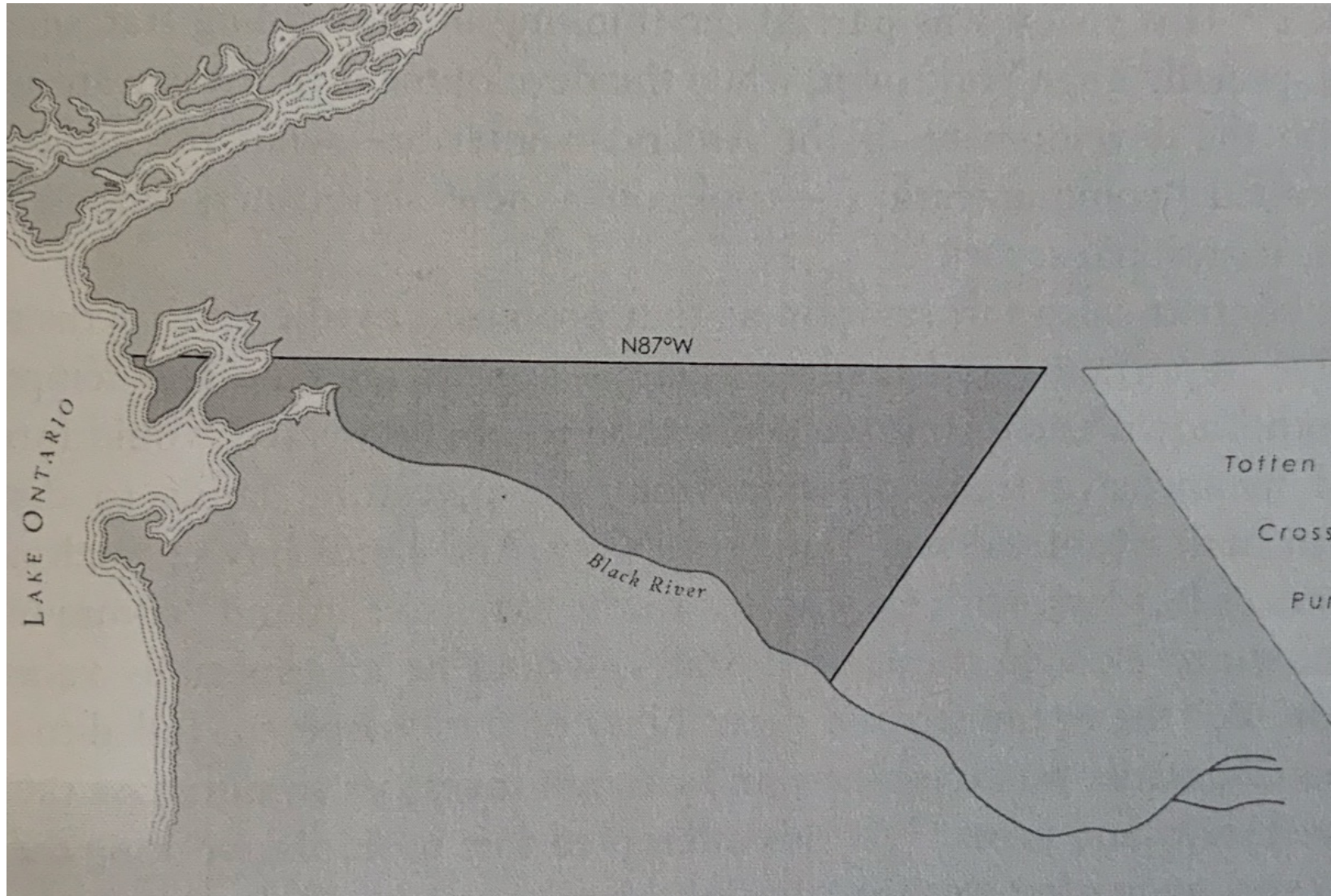
Sauthier map:

The actual map that was used by William Constable:

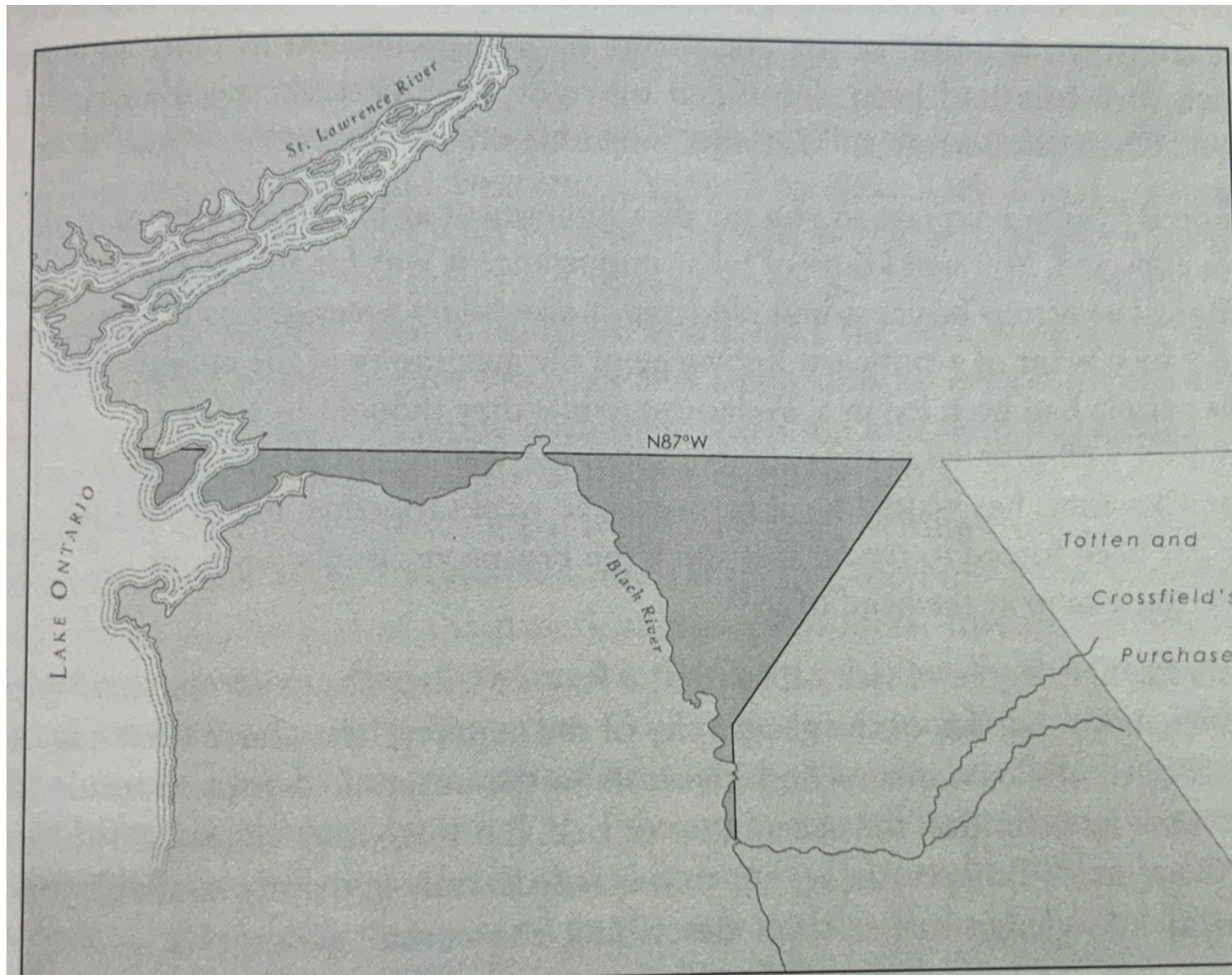


Detail, Constable's map: Black River drawn in, from Black River Bay to the Adirondacks...

Castorland Tract: expected size and extent:



Castorland: actual extent as finally surveyed:



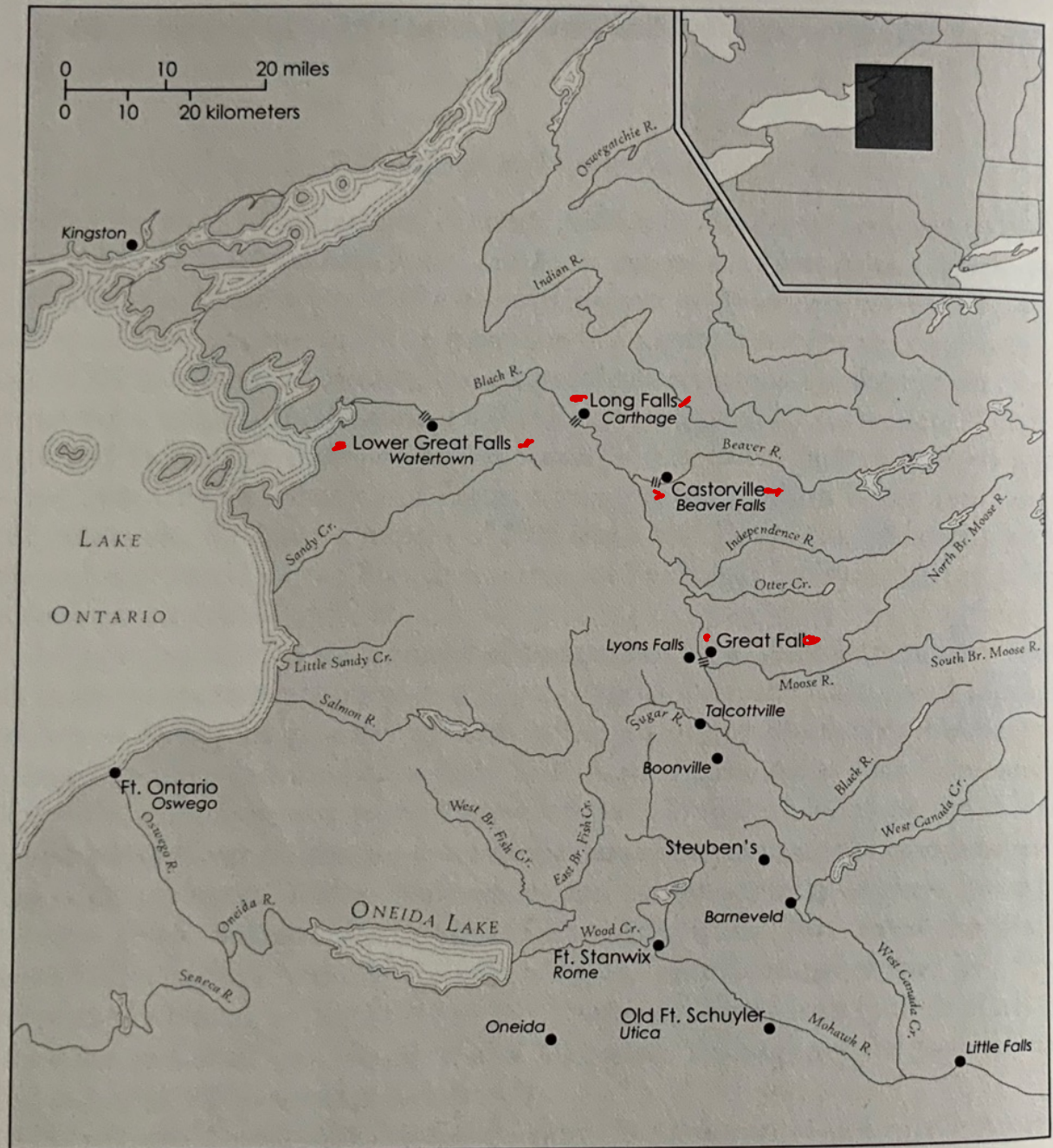


*C. Brodhead, map of
Macomb's Purchase*

Actual size and boundaries
of Castorland outlined in
red;

Actual course of the Black
River outlined in blue

Map of Castorland sites, with modern-day place-names:



6. Map of New York State showing location of rivers, streams, settlements, and cities mentioned in the Castorland Journal, giving in certain cases both historical place-names and current place-names. University of Wisconsin-Madison Cartographic Laboratory.

The Castorland Journal: the exploration and settlement of Northern New York State in 1793-1796/7

- Observations
 - A business report
 - A record of travel
 - The practical and the esthetic
-
- Conflicts and tensions:

Optimism and Reality

The American commissioners and the New York Company

“1 July 1793 Are named as the Company’s American commissioners Messrs. Pharoux and Desjardins...”

Castorland Journal 1793

ARRIVAL AND FIRST EXPLORATIONS

1 July 1793 Are named as the Company's American commissioners Messrs. Pharoux and Desjardins.

To M. Chassanis, Director,¹ Pharoux gives his receipt for the property titles and receives the sum of one thousand *livres* in *assignats* for travel expenses.² Desjardins receives his instructions, and, as the shares were not yet printed, he entrusts M. Chassanis, on his recognizance, with M. Lambot's receipts for sixty shares.

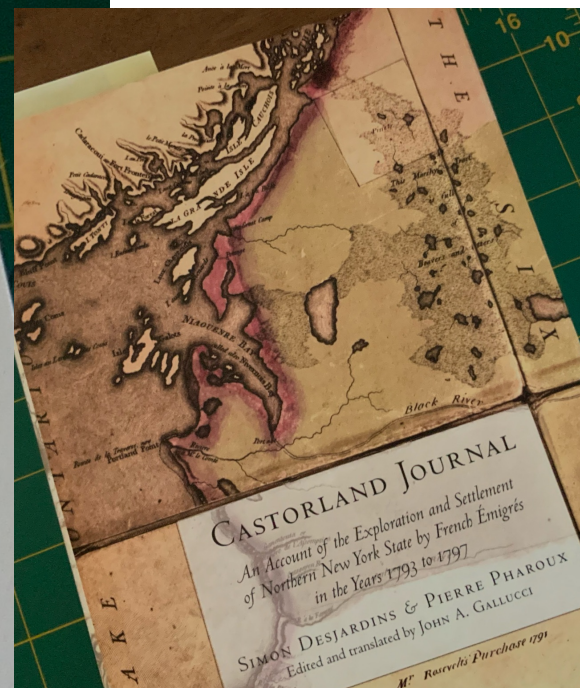
That evening left with his brother in the coach for Le Havre de Grace, leaving Pharoux authorization to pick up his brother's passport, which had not yet been sent to the Department.

2 July 1793 Arrived in Rouen. Stayed to meet with M. Le Normand and settle several shipping accounts.³

Pharoux deposited with M. Lambot receipts for twenty whole shares, of which he is to keep as security only the twenty coupons of undivided shares, and is to deliver the twenty coupons of divided shares to his legal representative.

3 July Received at Rouen the passport for Desjardins the younger,⁴ with letter from Pharoux. Messrs. Desjardins left for Le Havre in the evening.

Le Havre, where they rejoined



Setting the record straight...

Did Castorland fail? If so, why?

Castorland vs. the Castorland Journal...

Impatience...

Obstacles...

Summary of the Castorland Journal

1793: Arrival in America...journey to the Black River

1794: First settlement begun... Survey... Discovering the Black River...

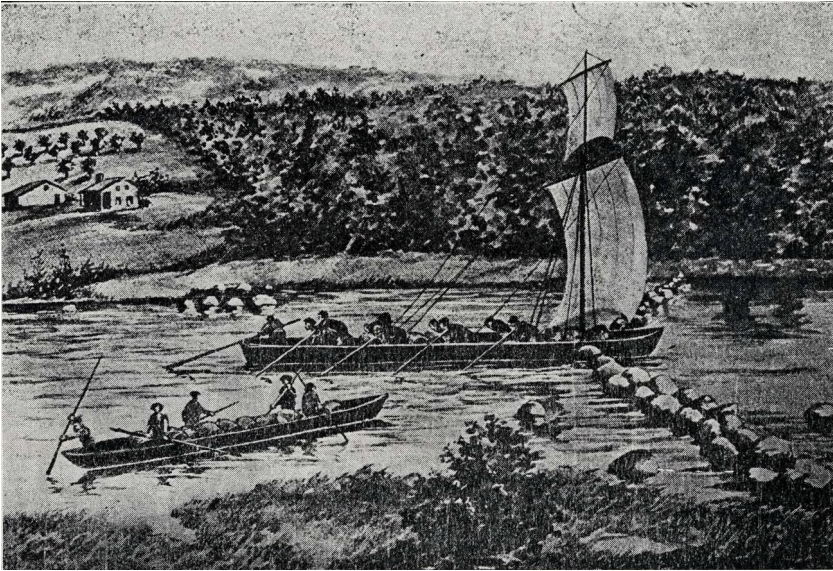
1795: Further progress, then disaster strikes...

1796/1797: Further progress, but a new American commissioner arrives...

After 1793, a basic rhythm develops: winters are spent in Albany and New York City; spring means a return to Castorland, and work resumes through the summer and fall...

Timeline: 1793:

Arrival... journey to the Black River and Castorland...



James Constable... Fort Ontario... Black River Bay... Castorland...

(...and much more...)

“...We had supper and slept on our lands, at long last...”

Timeline: 1794:

- Pharoux and John Thurman: the 'North Canal'
- Baron Steuben
 - Road to Castorland begun...
 - Survey of Castorland begun...
- Independence River is named, July 4, 1794
- Discovery of true course of the Black River

Letter to N. Olive: *"...we will subscribe to no arrangement which would not give us our 220,500 acres, including the allowances, in a single tract, and which would not give us a boundary on Lake Ontario..."*

Timeline: 1795:

- Pharoux at Speranza...

- Return to Castorland

- Mill begun at Otter Creek: ‘our workers have worked well...’

- Discussion and disagreement with Louis Tassart...

A catastrophic loss...

September 1795:

Sept 8: 'Rainstorm nearly all day long...'

Sept 12: 'Constant rain...'

Sept 18: 'Rain and constant storm...'

Sept 19: 'The Black River having risen about eighteen feet in two days...'

Sept 20: 'Rain nearly constant...'

September 21, 1793: *at the mill site, Geoffrey Desjardins writes the following:*

'At three, I caught sight of some people on the other side of the River: I recognized them as being from Pharoux's company, and I was afraid that there had been some accident...'

September 22, 1795:

‘...and we will raise to him an insufficient monument...

Timeline: 1796/7:

- Reimbursement

- William Constable

- Improvements...

- Theft

- arrival of Rodolphe Tillier...

- disagreement over choice of lands for 'M de Chaumont'...

“Our new arrivals from France found the reality very different from the idea which they had formed. They saw Castorland as a Normandy, or the environs of Paris, and they thought that they only needed to come and settle. They did not suspect that here, if one wishes to eat bread, one has to bring flour, etc.”

Aftermath...

- Desjardins continues with Castorland... eventually returns to France
- Gouverneur Morris... Le Ray de Chaumont...
- Dissolution of the New York Company

Castorland Journal: 1793: meeting with James Constable

“We went to see James Constable, brother of our seller, who received us in a rather singular fashion, as we did not yet have our property titles. He had assumed that we were the commissioners of the Boylston party, which had not fulfilled its engagements. He told us that he had indeed received the order to have the boundary-lines run but that it was too late to proceed, and that we could count on this task being finished with the first days of spring. And so we gave up any idea of doing any operation this year; we had moreover no funds, and in order to make the best use of the little time which remained to us, we decided to use it to travel to our lands [and] provide our Company with a description of them...”

“...for God’s sake attend to the surveys...”

First days on 'Castorland': Optimism about the future city to be built...

“ We saw all the advantages of this location. The quays of cut stone have already been **built by Nature’s hand**; the ground being entirely of stone and elevated twelve feet above water level in the section between the upper and lower basin, **the city** would receive via the upper basin the output of the mills located on the falls and rapids; and the lower basin would be used for its exports and allow products to be brought in from the Lake. The ground is dry naturally and promises salubrity. The terrain rises and forms hills around the basin, and would allow the city to expand to advantage. The stone needed for building and pavement would be found in digging cellars. To make bricks handily clay is found nearby: but all of these advantages amount to nothing if the channel cannot be navigated, as commerce on the Lake requires ships with a keel. In this case , we will have to locate it on the bay, where we will not lack for places that form natural ports.”

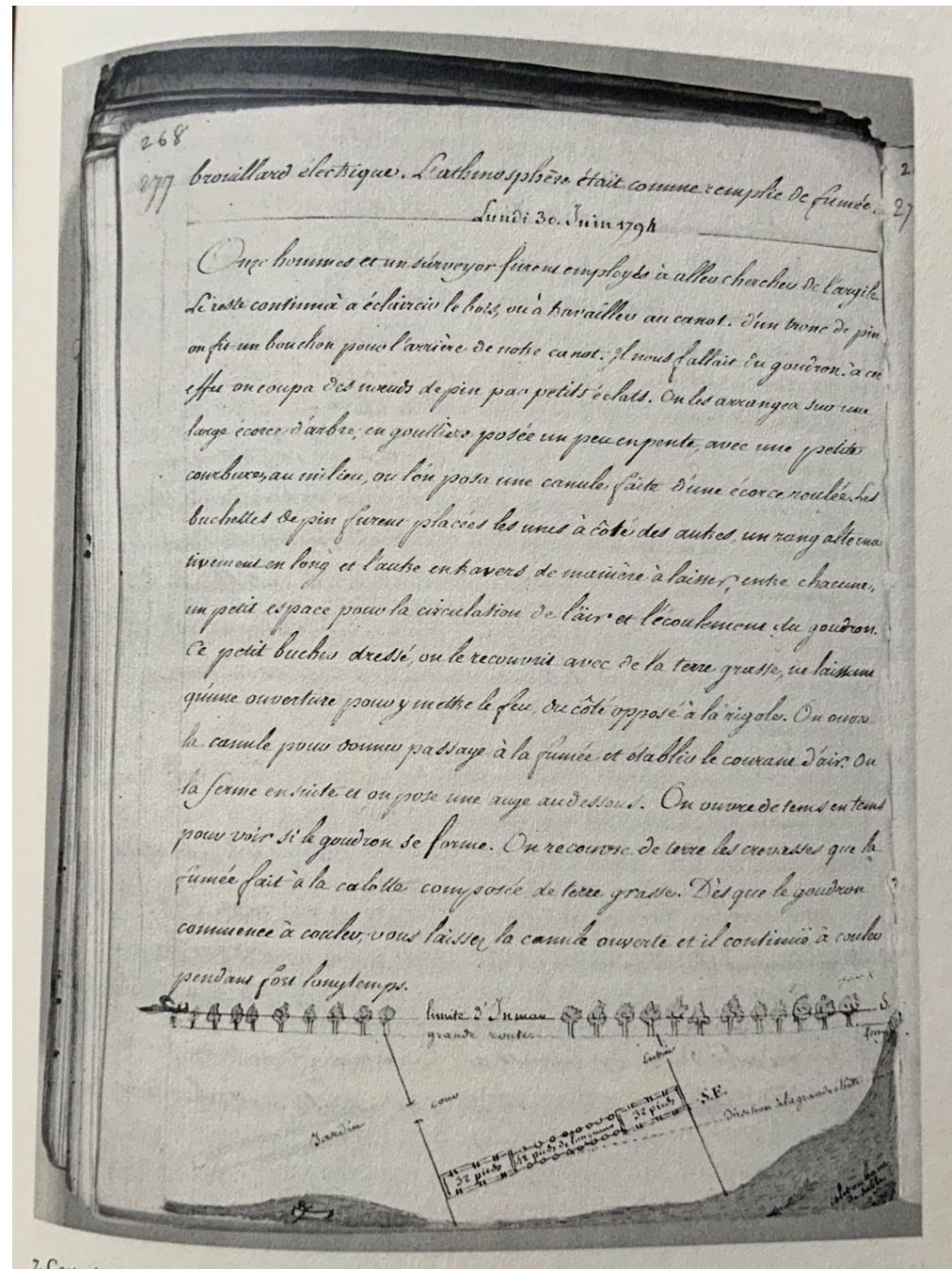
Hints of future difficulties:

“We were about a dozen passengers in the captain’s room, aside from about an equal number who we’re traveling on the deck. Among other traveling companions, we had Mr. Inman, the purchaser of the triangle bordering our lands. As he speaks French, this facilitated our conversation. He told us that perhaps the large fall on the Black River would not belong to us, although, on his map, which he showed us, it was located a quarter mile from his triangle, and we have the river as a boundary from this corner all the way to the Lake. **He added that the Black River did not flow as it was drawn on the map;** and that, as he had bought a square whose northern side separates him from us, if this line should prove to be traversed by the river, as he thought it did, the falls would be in his lot.”

*Benjamin Wright, surveyor, hired... Pharoux in New York City...
Desjardins in Albany...*

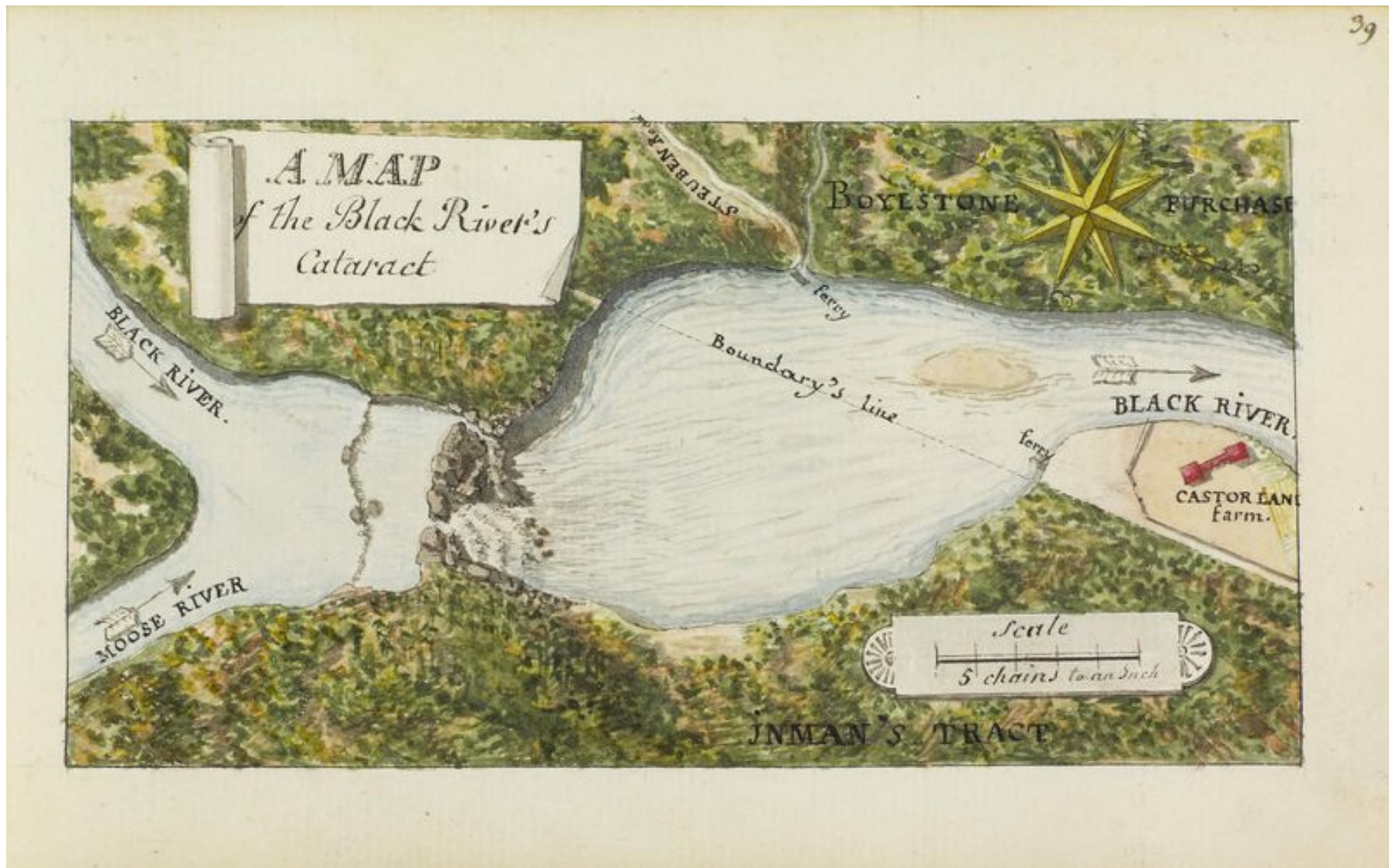
Castorland Journal, 1794: first building, the High Fall [Lyons Falls, NY]

- “The inconvenience of not having an oven made us look for clay to build one...”

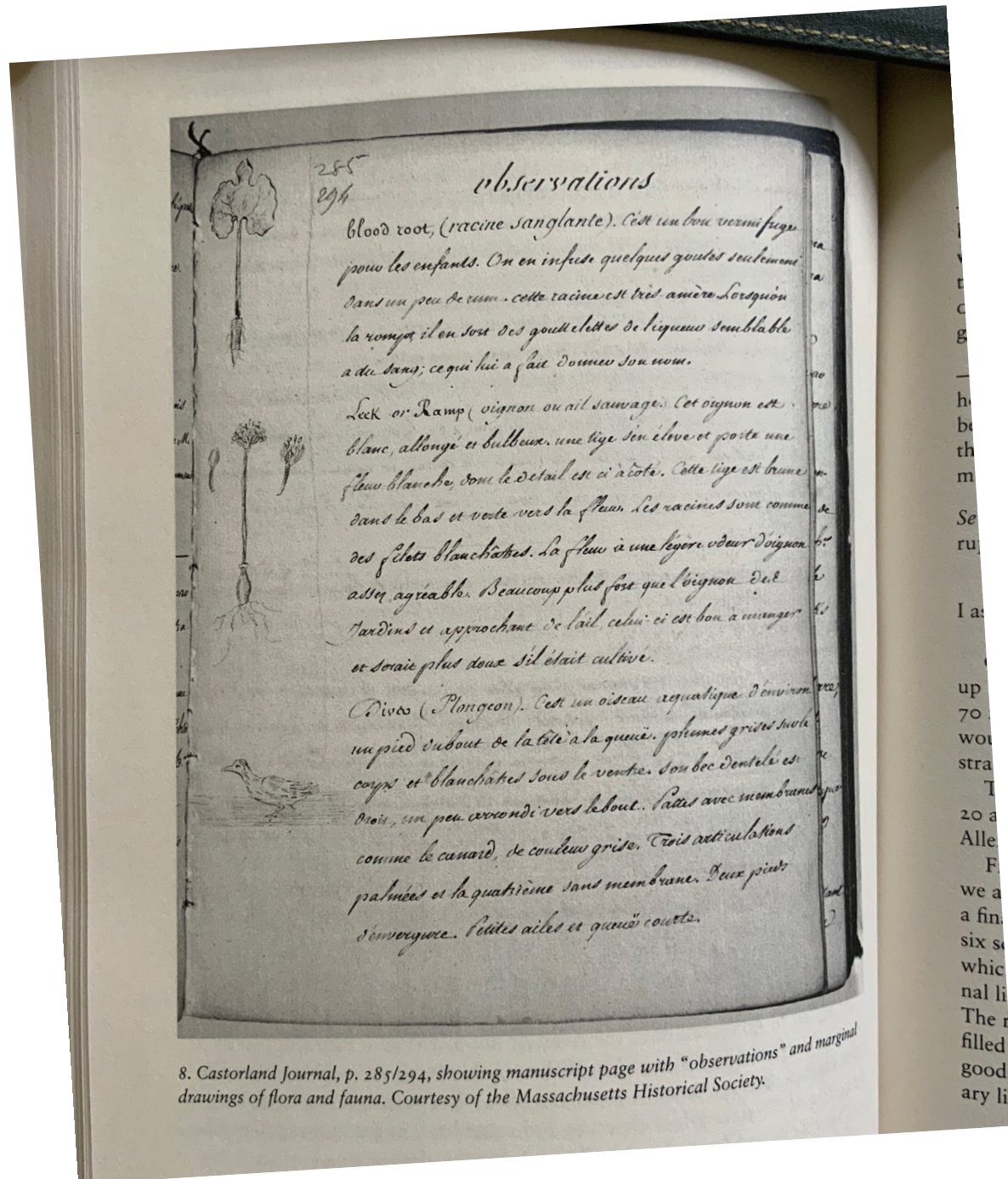


Map of the first settlement: 1794

North —>



Castorland Journal, 1794: example of marginal drawings:



8. Castorland Journal, p. 285/294, showing manuscript page with "observations" and marginal drawings of flora and fauna. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Description of the High Fall [Lyons Falls, NY], 1794:

“Above the great fall, the junction of the Moose River with the Black River creates a peaceful basin, the waters of which...rapidly escape [and] plunge downwards in an impetuous torrent which widens as it falls. From the turbulence...there continually rises a cloud, like smoke, and on which, when the sun is shining, the colors of the prism are painted and even a large rainbow, when one looks at the cataract from above and the sun is behind the spectator...[And] if the wind pushes the mist from the fall onto you, you find yourself surrounded by the seven colors... The water also cascades down in a sheet over a rocky part to the right...This enormous mass of rocks is town by awesome crevices... Above the flood levels, the plant growth is very beautiful...”

Desjardins still dreams of the future:

*“I stayed in spite of the mosquitoes more than a quarter of an hour contemplating the ravishing view which the river offers in this site, and I admired the degree to which Nature can vary her ever sublime forms. This is not an impetuous torrent massively hurling itself from a summit of 63 feet high, as at the great fall; nor a swirling chaos, the image of Nature’s power to destroy and overwhelm, as at the the long fall...**The waterfall here is one which the art of Le Nôtre could never equal...** The larger surge of churning water rushes majestically into the middle, and the others act as its accompaniment. The tranquillity of the waters in the upper basin, which like a mirror reflects the small islets of rock and green that are scattered in it, is in contrast with the lower basin, rocky and foaming. The location of the cascade on the **city** side seems almost deliberate. A **canal** need only be supplied here to conduct the waters into the **city**, to have these turn a saw-mill and also feed a lock so that boats can be raised or lowered. The time of year augmented still more the charm of this spectacle...*



H. 188354



André Le Nôtre,
Landscapes of Versailles

Desjardins admires
Nature, and dreams of the
future: “...a waterfall that
the art of Le Nôtre could
never equal...”

“The old Indian, back from the hunt, explained to me that they call the Black River Caginagoha...”

Castorland Journal, 1796: Desjardins imagines the future:

“As soon as this country begins to be inhabited, cleared land will appear as if by magic, and several years of settlements will entirely discover this beautiful country...”

Legacies...

The Castorland Journal...a work of American literature...

Setting the record straight: beyond the stereotypes of 'romantic' expectations and 'aristocrats' etc.

Two famous engineers... from canals to iron and steam...

Benjamin Wright and the Erie Canal



Marc Isambard Brunel



Both were part of the Castorland venture in their early lives...

Legacies: The art of Pierre Pharoux...

Pierre Pharoux,
Design for the
'Mannor' of
W. Frederic
Baron of Steuben



A final legacy?

Re-discovering the Black River of New York State...

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Edith Pilcher, *Castorland: French Refugees in the Western Adirondacks*;

Chester Sullivan, ‘America’s Most Beautiful French Coin’; with thanks for the copper Castorland jeton;

Digital collections of the Library of Congress;
New-York Historical Society; Wikipedia Commons