

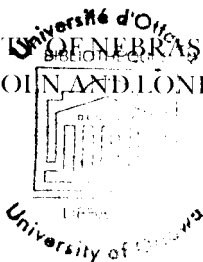
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# French Fur Traders and Voyageurs in the American West

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UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS  
LINCOLN AND LONDON



## Jean Baptiste Charbonneau

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*Provo, Utah*

Of Baptiste Charbonneau's birth we have an interesting record. On February 11, 1805, Captain Meriwether Lewis records in his journal of the Lewis and Clark expedition:

About five o'clock this evening one of the wives of Charbono (Sacajawea) was delivered of a fine boy. It is worthy of remark that this was the first child which this woman had borne, and as is common in such cases her labour was tedious and the pain violent; Mr. Jessome informed me that he had frequently administered a small portion of the rattle of the rattle-snake, which he assured me had never failed to produce the desired effect, that of hastening the birth of the child; having the rattle of a snake by me I gave it to him and he administered two rings of it to the woman broken in small pieces with the fingers and added to a small quantity of water. Whether this medicine was truly the cause or not, I shall not undertake to determine, but I was informed that she had not taken it more than ten minutes before she brought forth. Perhaps this remedy may be worthy of future experiments, but I must confess that I want faith as to its efficacy.<sup>1</sup>

During the preceding year, the young explorers had slowly made their way in keelboats up the Missouri River from St. Louis, and had reached the Mandan Indian villages in present North Dakota. Here they had built Fort Mandan and settled for the winter. Here, also, they arranged with Toussaint Charbonneau, a French trader among the Indians, to accompany the expedition and act as interpreter. His wife, Sacajawea, was to go along and was expected to be especially useful, as she was a Shoshone girl who could probably help the expedition when it reached the land of her people in the Rocky Mountains.

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<sup>1</sup> R. G. Thwaites (ed), *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806* (New York, 1904-05), I, pp. 257-258.

In early March (1805) the ice in the river began to break, and preparations were rushed for continuing the journey. The party set out on April 7th. Clark lists the regular members of the company and adds: "Shabonah and his Indian Squaw to act as an Interpreter & interprestess for the Snake Indians."

Captain Lewis, after recording the departure, expressed his enthusiasm:

Our vessels consisted of six small canoes, and two large perogues . . . we were now about to penetrate a country at least two thousand miles in width, on which the foot of civilized man had never trodden; . . . in a voyage which had formed a darling project of mine for the last ten years, I could but esteem this moment of my departure as among the most happy of my life.<sup>2</sup>

The party, comprising thirty-one men, besides Sacajawea and her baby, made steady progress up the river. After pushing at the oars all day, the men were glad to tie up for the night and camp on shore. A fire was built to cook the game brought in by the hunters.

Capt. Clark myself [says Lewis] the two Interpreters and the woman and child sleep in a tent of dressed skins. This tent is in the Indian stile, formed of a number of dressed Buffaloe skins sewed together with sinues . . . to erect this tent a parcel of ten or twelve poles are provided.<sup>3</sup>

Wrapped as snug as a cocoon, with his feet toward the all-night fire, baby Baptiste slept under the big skin tepee. Sometimes, in the early morning, he rode on his mother's back while she hunted onions for seasoning the soup or wild turnips for supper, or perchance while she opened the nests of prairie mice to find artichokes.

On up the river the boats crept until they came to the Great Falls of the Missouri. Here a month passed while they worked their way around the cataracts – a month to go

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 284-285.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

only eighteen miles. But wagons had to be built; wheels made by sawing off round sections of tree trunks; roads cut through thick timber.

In the path of the explorers the great Stony (Rocky) Mountains loomed like an unbroken wall. Baptiste's mother knew this country, however; it was her childhood home. She was going to see her people once again, people whom she had not seen since she was stolen away many years before.

Finally the explorers came upon a band of Shoshones. With a happy cry the long lost one ran to the embrace of her brother, the chief. The Shoshone Indian women cuddled Baptiste. They set him down in the middle of a big buffalo robe with a shaggy dog. The other children crowded around to see the pale-face Indian baby. Sacajawea's brother, a Shoshone chief, and her people urged Sacajawea to stay and make her home with them. But the woman guide preferred to travel onward with her husband and the kindly white men.

With horses bought from these Indians, the Lewis and Clark party traveled on until they came to rivers that ran westward to the Everywhere-Salt-Water. As they floated in canoes down the Columbia River to the ocean, Baptiste reached up for the white sea gulls that hung above him in the morning sunshine.

At the river's mouth the explorers camped for winter in their Fort Clatsop, an enclosure of log houses. Then, with spring, they began their return, back over the mountains and down east-flowing waters to the Mandan villages. Here Charbonneau and his wife and baby remained with their Indian friends. Before the explorers departed, they presented the blacksmith tools to the Charbonneaus to show their gratitude for the services of the useful guides.

On the trip to the Pacific William Clark had grown very fond of Baptiste. He now urged the child's parents to let

him take the boy and rear him as his own. This the parents were unwilling to do: the mother was much attached to her baby and he was not yet weaned.

As Lewis and Clark floated down the Missouri, they met traders coming up. Clark decided to send, with one of them, a renewed appeal for the Charbonneaus to come down to St. Louis. He wrote:

CHARBONO:

August 20, 1806

Sir: Your present situation with the Indians gives me some concern — I wish now I had advised you to come on with me to the Illinois where it would most probably be in my power to put you on some way to do something for yourself . . . You have been a long time with me and have conducted yourself in such a manner as to gain my friendship; your woman, who accompanied you that long dangerous and fatiguing route to the Pacific ocean and back, deserved a greater reward for her attention and services on that route than we had in our power to give her at the Mandans. As to your little son (my boy Pomp) you well know my fondness for him and my anxiety to take and raise him as my own child. I once more tell you if you will bring your son Baptiste to me, I will educate him and treat him as my own child. . . .

Wishing you and your family great success, and with anxious expectations of seeing my little dancing boy Baptiste, I shall remain your friend.

WILLIAM CLARK <sup>4</sup>

Soon Baptiste and his father and mother were sweeping down the great river to St. Louis. For the next few years, while his father went off on trading expeditions, Baptiste and Sacajawea remained under the care of the kind Redhead Captain. As the boy grew older, sometimes his tutor was a Catholic priest or nun, sometimes a Baptist minister. The young half-breed, who early learned to talk English, French, and some Indian words and signs, went on learning from books as the white boys did.

When Baptiste was eleven years old, he was reported among the Mandans, where he was met by a white trader,

<sup>4</sup>This letter was found among the papers of some of Clark's relatives and was published in *Century Magazine*, October, 1904.

Hugh Munroe. This traveling white man says he saw young Baptiste's gift horse gambled away by the lad's father.<sup>5</sup>

At eighteen, Baptiste met the twenty-five-year-old traveler from Germany, Prince Paul of Wurttemberg. The prince, who had come west in pursuit of scientific knowledge, was delighted with this unusual boy whom he found in a trader's village at the mouth of the Kansas River. With Clark's consent, the royal visitor arranged for Baptiste's return to Europe with him. Prince Paul has left us a detailed account of the voyage.<sup>6</sup>

On November 3, 1823, the prince and Baptiste took passage from St. Louis to New Orleans, which they reached on December 19th. Baptiste was probably delighted with the Crescent City, its graceful French homes and their balconies with lacy iron grill work. No doubt, too, he was attracted by the pretty dark-eyed ladies with their Parisian arts. Prince Paul considered New Orleans his favorite city of America; he liked its choice foods and its comforts, as well as its wines and conversation with hospitable people. Still, his first concern was to book passage for overseas. On the front page of the *Louisiana Gazette* of December 20, 1823, he found this advertisement, among about fifty reporting ships seeking freight or passengers:

Passage for Havre - The fine coppered brig SMYRNA, will sail on Sunday morning, 21st inst, and can accommodate two or three passengers handsomely. Apply to Captain Packard on board opposite the water works, or to

VINCENTE NOLTE & Co.<sup>7</sup>

Arrangements for passage on the *Smyrna* were made; they quickly said goodbye to friends, and boarded the brig. For

<sup>5</sup> J. W. Schultz, *Bird Woman* (Boston, 1918), 111-14.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Wilhelm Friedrich Herzog von Wurttemberg, *Erste Reise nach dem nördlichen America in dem jahren 1822 bis 1824* (Stuttgart, 1835) (*First Journey to North America in the years 1822 to 1824*). For this research, the manuscript translation by Prof. W. G. Beck of the University of North Dakota was used.

<sup>7</sup> Found by the writer in the New Orleans Public Library in April, 1950.

two weeks, however, the three-masted vessel drifted about on the Mississippi, where mosquitoes swarmed and alligators nosed above the waters.

At last news came that the wind was favorable, and the *Smyrna* was piloted out to sea. She finally reached the gulf waters and left the coast behind. By January 10, they were in sight of Cuba. Gloriously, day by day, the sun rose and set, illuminating the horizon with a wonderful red glow. Above the mirror waves the flying fish and sea gulls played.

By the last of January they met the chill of the banks of Newfoundland with the mercury fourteen below. Thunder shook the sails while lightning speared the sky; but the brig, with mast creaking and rigging aw whistle, rode the liquid mountains of the deep. On she sailed, cut through the fogs of the English Channel, and slipped into Havre de Grace on February 14, 1824. Three and one-half months had passed since Paul and Baptiste left St. Louis on the Mississippi River.

For the next six years Baptiste did not see his native land. He lived with Prince Paul in a fine castle about thirty miles from Stuttgart, Germany, in a verdant woodland. There he studied the languages which later made him an excellent interpreter. With Prince Paul he visited the interesting spots of France, England, Germany, and Africa. (Paul wrote much; but most of his writings are still untranslated, unpublished, and mostly destroyed in World War II bombings. Whether Baptiste kept a diary, or whether any letters were written by him to America, we have been unable to learn.)

An evaluation of the prince has been made by Möllhausen, who accompanied him on some of his later journeys:

The duke is a man of an intellectuality far beyond ordinary comprehension. But his weak point is impulsiveness. His courage is so boundless that it often approaches downright madness itself. In spite of his early bringing up at one of the most exclusive royal courts in Christendom he is utterly democratic and considerate in all his dealings with others.<sup>8</sup>

Prince Paul himself, but one link removed from wearing the purple, once made this declaration :

In the atmosphere of a palace I would feel like a wild thing that is imprisoned in a gilded cage. The ermine, the sceptre, and the crown would be to me the emblems of a galley slave, and my heart would never cease to hunger for the vast silent places and the simple life among free unaffected children of nature.<sup>9</sup>

With tastes such as these, it is not strange that Prince Paul should choose this lad Baptiste for a fellow traveler. The prince states that Baptiste "was my companion there on all my travels over Europe and northern Africa until 1829, when he returned with me to America."<sup>10</sup>

Undoubtedly Baptiste acquired skills as well as book-learning while in Europe. The prince was an expert with firearms; he was a finished horseman, and knew the good points of the well-bred horse. His passionate interest in science kept him ever alert for new plants and animals to add to his collection brought from the New World. Also, he was an intelligent conversationalist, meeting with the educated minds of Europe. Being near to the Black Forest, the prince and Baptiste engaged in the art of hunting. Indeed, Baptiste was dubbed by the prince his "hunter extraordinary." Exposed to all of these interests, Baptiste's alert, inquiring mind was enriched to satisfy the fuller life.

Upon his return to America, Prince Paul obtained a "passport" from William Clark to ascend the Missouri and visit Indian agencies. He set out from St. Louis on December 23, 1829, "accompanied by his servants (two), a clerk, and two hired men of the American fur Company."<sup>11</sup> Baptiste presumably was one of these.

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<sup>8</sup> *New Mex. Hist. Review* xvii (1942), 190.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>10</sup> Journal of Prince Paul while at Sacramento, Calif., in 1850, translated by Louis C. Butcher, University of Wyoming. See also Grace R. Hebard, *Sacajawea* (Glendale, Calif., 1933), 119, 124; and *New Mex. Hist. Review*, xvi, 192.

<sup>11</sup> Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.



The next fifteen years of Baptiste's life were lived as a Mountain Man, threading the streams of the western wilderness in search of beaver skins. The garnered pelts were sent across the ocean to make fine beaver hats for the nobles whom he had amused while in Europe. He ate the simple food of the mountaineer – venison steaks and beaver tails broiled over the coals of his campfire. Riding a horse and leading his pack-mule, he traveled the Rockies from New Mexico to Oregon. By night, around the glowing coals, he listened to the tall tales of seasoned trappers, and spiced the trapper talk with wonderful stories of overseas adventure. With clever tongue he could converse with Frenchman, German, Spaniard, Mexican, American or various Indian breeds. At summer rendezvous he joined with the Mountain Men in their horse racing, dancing, gambling, wrestling, and trading.

If Baptiste kept a diary, it has never come to light. Nevertheless, it is possible to glean from journals of explorers and travelers, from fur company records, government files, family records, and reminiscences, enough to make a profile of his later years.

Not long after Baptiste's return from Europe in 1829, we find him in the employ of the American Fur Company, on his way to the mountains with a company of fur hunters. While he was with the Robidoux Fur Brigade, trapping the Idaho-Utah country in the fall of 1830, he became separated from the main party and had an experience reported thus by a fellow trapper:

We returned to Cache Valley by the way of Porteneuf, where we found Dripps and Fontenelle, together with our lost companion Charbineaux. He states that he lost our trail, but reached the river Maladi after dark, where he discovered a village of Indians. Fearing that they were unfriendly, he resolved to retrace his steps, and find the main company. In pursuance of this plan, he filled a beaver skin with water, and set off on his lonely way. After eleven days' wandering,

during which he suffered a good deal from hunger, he attained his object, and reached the company at Porteneuf.<sup>12</sup>

Though Baptiste could not be called a "greenhorn," still this stringent experience was rather a strong initiation for a boy so lately come from the refinements of Europe. His western education went steadily on. In 1831 we find him mentioned as traveling with Joe Meek; in 1832 with Jim Bridger. In 1833 he attended the fur trade rendezvous at Green River, and probably caroused with the crowd in '34 at the great fair in the wilderness. Captain Wyeth mentioned Charbonneau several times in his journal. For instance:

The Indians got seven horses; all there were. Charbonneau pursued them on foot and got his gun wet crossing a little stream and only snapped twice.<sup>13</sup>

In 1839, T. J. Farnham speaks of meeting an educated Indian at Fort El Pueblo, five miles from Bent's Fort. Though this trapper prodigy may not be Baptiste Charbonneau, the recorded conversation could well have come from him (though doubtless embellished by Farnham):

"Why did you leave civilized life for a precarious livelihood in the wilderness?" asked Farnham.

For reasons found in the nature of my race, [replied the trapper]. The Indian's eye cannot be satisfied with the *description* of things, how beautiful soever may be the style, or the harmonies of verse in which it is conveyed. For neither the periods of burning eloquence, nor the mighty and beautiful creations of the imagination, can unbosom the treasures and realities as they live in their own native magnificence on the eternal mountains, and in the secret untrodden vale. . . .

I must range the hills, I must always be able to out-travel my horses, I must always be able to strip my own wardrobe from the backs of the

<sup>12</sup> W. A. Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains* (Denver, 1940), 67. When first mentioning Baptiste Charbonneau, Ferris explains: "This was the infant who together with his mother was saved from a sudden flood near the falls of the Missouri by Capt. Lewis [Clark], - vide Lewis and Clark Expedition" (p. 64).

<sup>13</sup> "The Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831-6," in *Sources of the History of Oregon*, I, p. 207.

deer and buffalo, and to feed upon their rich loins; I must always be able to punish my enemy with my own hand, or I am no longer an Indian. . .<sup>14</sup>

In the journal of E. Willard Smith we have a fairly detailed account of Baptiste's activities during the years 1839-40. He was a member of the party led by the experienced trappers and traders, Louis Vasquez and Andrew Sublette, who built and operated Fort Vasquez on the South Platte River near present Platteville, Colorado. The little train of four wagons, each drawn by three spans of mules, set out from the outfitting town of Independence, Missouri, on August 6, 1839. Smith records in his diary:

The two gentlemen who had command of the party were old Indian traders, having followed this mode of life for more than ten years, there were also with us Mr. Thompson who had a trading post [Fort Davy Crockett] on the western side of the mountains, and two half breeds employed as hunters. One of them was a son of Captain Clarke, the great Western traveler and companion of Lewis. He had received an education in Europe during seven years.<sup>15</sup>

Charbonneau appears to have spent the winter in the mountains in the vicinity of Fort Vasquez and Fort Crockett. In the spring of 1840 he was in a party of seven men boating furs down the Platte. Their boat, thirty-six feet long and eight feet wide, had been made at the fort. Loaded with seven hundred buffalo robes and four hundred buffalo tongues, the hardy craft made its way with difficulty, the crew often waist deep in water.

In relating his one experience in buffalo hunting, Smith records this incidental bit about Charbonneau: "This afternoon we had, as usual, tied up our boat, and the hunter, Mr. Shabenare, went out a short distance from the river bank to

<sup>14</sup> Farnham's Travels, in R. G. Thwaites, *Early Western Travels* (Cleveland, O., 1904-07), xxviii, 176, 179.

<sup>15</sup> L. R. and A. W. Hafen, *To the Rockies and Oregon, 1839-1842* (Glendale, Calif., 1955), 155-56.

shoot a buffalo for his meat. At the time there were several large buffalo bulls near us. After killing one we assisted the hunters in butchering it, and in carrying portions of the meat to the boat."<sup>16</sup>

The voyage was finally completed, the boat reaching St. Louis on July 3, 1840. It was one of the very few successful voyages from the mountains down the Platte to the Missouri.

In 1842, two years later, we find Charbonneau again in charge of a party boating furs down the South Platte River. This time the spring rise had been too low to carry the boats. The fur men finally gave up the attempt to navigate the river and had sent for land transportation. While waiting among the cottonwoods and the mosquitoes on an island not far from present Fort Morgan, Colorado, they were visited by various travelers. One of these was Lieut. John C. Fremont, on his first tour of western exploration. Fremont reports:

Arrived at Chabonard's camp, on an island in the Platte. . . Mr. Chabonard was in the service of Bent and St. Vrain's company, and had left their fort some forty or fifty miles above, in the spring, with boats laden with the furs of the last year's trade . . . finding it impossible to proceed, had taken up his summer's residence on this island, which he had named St. Helena . . . the island here had a fine grove of very large cottonwoods, under whose broad shade the tents were pitched . . . smoke was rising from the scattered fires, and the encampment had quite a patriarchal air. Mr. C. received us hospitably. One of the people was sent to gather mint, with the aid of which he concocted very good julep; and some boiled buffalo tongue, and coffee with the luxury of sugar, were soon set before us.<sup>17</sup>

A month later Baptiste was still stranded when the traveler, Rufus B. Sage, called upon him and wrote thus:

August 30 [1842]. A ride of ten or fifteen miles, from this point, brought us to a camp of whites, in the employ of Bent and St. Vrain, occupying a small island in the Platte. They were guarding a quantity

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-93.

<sup>17</sup> J. C. Fremont, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains* (Washington, D.C., 1845), 30-31.

of robes with which they had attempted to descend the river, but were unable to proceed further on account of low water. . . .

The camp was under the direction of a half-breed, named Chabonard, who proved to be a gentleman of superior information. He had acquired a classic education and could converse quite fluently in German, Spanish, French, and English, as well as several Indian languages. His mind, also, was well stored with choice reading, and enriched by extensive travel and observation. Having visited most of the important places, both in England, France, and Germany, he knew how to turn his experience to good advantage.

There was a quaint humor and shrewdness in his conversation, so garbed with intelligence and perspicuity, that he at once insinuated himself into the good graces of listeners, and commanded their admiration and respect. . . . About noon we bade farewell to our new friends, by whom we had been kindly entertained.<sup>18</sup>

Charbonneau must have reached St. Louis with his furs, for the next spring he accompanied the cavalcade of pleasure and health-seekers to the Rocky Mountains under leadership of the Scotsman, Sir William Drummond Stewart. The party consisted of about eighty men, all fully equipped for hunting and sport. One of the accounts of the tour is by William Clark Kennerly, a nephew of William Clark. Kennerly writes:

To each six men was allotted one two-wheeled cart, or charette, the covers of which, I remember, were painted red; each cart was drawn by two mules driven tandem.

One of the drivers, Baptiste Charbonneau, was the son of the old trapper Charbonneau and Sacajawea, the brave Indian woman who had guided Lewis and Clark on their perilous journey through the wilderness. . . . By a singular coincidence he (Baptiste) was now again to make the journey and guide the *son* of William Clark through the same region.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> R. B. Sage, *His Letters and Papers*, etc., edited by L. R. and A. W. Hafén (Glendale, Calif., 1956), II, pp. 52-54.

<sup>19</sup> W. C. Kennerly and Elizabeth Russell, *Persimmon Hill* (Norman, Okla., 1948), 144. See also, Mae R. Porter and Odessa Davenport, *Scotsman in Buckskin* (New York, 1963), chap. 23.

The sportsmen followed the Oregon Trail to and over South Pass and turned north to the upper Green River and the Yellowstone country. One incident of the trip, as reported by Kennerly, gives a sidelight on Charbonneau:

Later there was a fight between Walker and Smith, and the whole cavalcade stopped to witness it, while Charbonneau ran excitedly about, keeping a ring around the combatants with his heavy whip and shouting for no one to interfere. It was not a very even fight; Smith was much the larger man, but, after a few rounds when he jumped on Walker's back in an effort to bear him to the ground, Walker drew his pistol and, firing over his shoulder, wounded Smith in the thigh, the wonder being that he did not kill him.<sup>20</sup>

Following the death of his father, J. B. Charbonneau inherited some land that was sold in 1843 for \$320.<sup>21</sup> The following year, 1844, Charbonneau was at Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River in the employ of Bent and St. Vrain. William M. Boggs, a son of Governor L. W. Boggs of Missouri, met Charbonneau there and left this record:

I also learned considerable from the hunters of Bent's Fort, particularly from Charbenau, an educated half-breed. His father was a French Canadian, his mother said to be a Blackfoot Indian squaw. . . . This Baptiste Charbenau, the hunter of Bent's Fort, was the small Indian papoose, or half-breed of the elder Charbenau that was employed by the Lewis and Clark Expedition as guide when they descended the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean. He had been educated to some extent; he wore his hair long - that hung down to his shoulders. It was said that Charbenau was the best man on foot on the plains or in the Rocky Mountains.<sup>22</sup>

One of Charbonneau's hunting excursions into the mountains was with Solomon Sublette, M. St. Vrain, and others, for the purpose of catching antelope and bighorn sheep

<sup>20</sup> Kennerly and Russell, *op. cit.*, 158.

<sup>21</sup> Promissory note dated August 17, 1843, in the Sublette Papers, Mo. Hist. Soc.

<sup>22</sup> L. R. Hafen (ed.), "The W. M. Boggs Manuscript about Bent's Fort," etc., in the *Colorado Magazine*, VII (1930), 66-67.

alive.<sup>23</sup> Some of these animals were taken successfully to St. Louis, and some even to Sir William Drummond Stewart's estate in Scotland.

Charbonneau next accompanied Lieut. J. W. Abert on his exploring expedition from Bent's Fort south and down the Canadian River. The Mountain Man, Thomas Fitzpatrick, who was also with the party, expressed delight at the usefulness of the guide, "Mr. Chabonard."<sup>24</sup>

George F. Ruxton, young English traveler and writer, in referring to famous Mountain Men, mentions Charbonneau several times and tells of his sitting with Bill Gary "in camp for twenty hours at a deck of Euker."<sup>25</sup>

One of the notable expeditions of the Mexican War was the march of Col. Philip St. George Cooke and his Mormon battalion, from Santa Fe to San Diego in 1846. Baptiste Charbonneau was one of the guides selected to pilot this battalion across the deserts of New Mexico and Arizona. It was a hard journey, over rough mountains and across waterless plateaus, and it was doubly difficult because they were to break a road and take wagons the entire distance of seven hundred miles.

In diaries of the trip, Charbonneau is frequently mentioned. Sometimes he is ahead of the caravan looking for water holes; at times, seeking passes over mountains, or searching for suitable crossings of arroyos. Two incidents recorded by Col. Cooke reveal other sides of his nature:

November 22, 1846. Since dark Charboneaux has come in; his mule gave out, he says, and he stopped for it to rest and feed a half an hour; when going to saddle it, it kicked at him and ran off; he followed it a number of miles and finally shot it; partly I suppose from anger, and

<sup>23</sup> Letters of Solomon Sublette of May 5 and June 6, 1844, in the Sublette Collection, Mo. Hist. Soc.

<sup>24</sup> "Journal of Lieut. J. W. Abert from Bent's Fort to St. Louis, 1845," in *Sen. ex. doc.* 438, 29 Cong., 1 sess.

<sup>25</sup> G. F. Ruxton, "Life in the 'Far West'," in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, June, 1848, 713.

partly, as he says, to get his saddle and pistols, which he brought to camp.

Then toward the last of November, while the train was crawling up the pass:

I discovered Charboneaux near the summit in pursuit of bears. I saw three of them up among the rocks, whilst the bold hunter was gradually nearing them. Soon he fired, and in ten seconds again; then there was confused action, one bear falling down, the others rushing about with loud fierce cries, amid which the hunter's too could be distinguished; the mountain fairly echoed. I much feared he was lost, but soon, in his red shirt, he appeared on a rock; he had cried out, in Spanish for more balls. The bear was rolled down, and butchered before the wagons passed.<sup>26</sup>

After the Mormon Battalion reached San Diego in January, 1847, Charbonneau was released from service. The military took over in California. General Kearny appointed Capt. Hunter of the Battalion to serve as sub-Indian agent for the southern district, with headquarters at San Luis Rey, a mission north of San Diego. In November of 1847, "Jean B. Charbonneau" was appointed *alcalde* for the mission. Duties of the new officials included "care and protection of Indian servants and ex-neophytes, as well as the keeping in check of gentile bands. Statistics and information on manners and customs were also called for."<sup>27</sup>

This period of shifting authorities had a disturbing effect on the Indians of the region. Reports said Charbonneau was implicated in a planned insurrection. Since the Bandini papers concerning this matter (from the San Diego Archives) contain the only direct statements known as coming from the pen of Charbonneau, they are given here. In the investigation Charbonneau made the following statement:

<sup>26</sup> P. St. George Cooke, *Conquest of New Mexico and California* (New York, 1878), 131, 134. Other accounts of the Mormon Battalion march also refer to Charbonneau.

<sup>27</sup> H. H. Bancroft, *History of California* (San Francisco, 1925), v, 568.



I, John B. Charbonneau of St. Louis, State of Missouri, came to California in the service of the U.S. as a guide for the Mormon Battalion, under command of Col. Cook, and after being in California nine months was appointed Alcalde for San Luis Rey, within the district of San Diego. . . [He denies giving the orders sworn to by the Indians as above, and says:] I am prepared to prove that the Indian Paulino is guilty of what he has sworn to my charge, and I will prove in the trial that he has taken a false oath.

[Letters of April 6 and 7th, written by Charbonneau at San Luis Rey Mission, give further particulars.]

The outcome of the controversy is thus reported :

1848, July 24th, Los Angeles

J. D. Stevenson, Col. Command. South Military District. To Gov. Mason :

*Alcaldes.*

Encloses the resignation of J. B. Charboneau as Alcalde for San Luis Rey, and says that he has done his duty to the best of his ability but being "a half-breed Indian of the U.S. is regarded by the people as favoring the Indians more than he should do, and hence there is much complaint against him."

[Stevenson suggests that the expenses of Charbonneau's office should be paid from the Civil fund and that the A.A. Qr. Master be authorized to do it, since the Alcaldes serve without pay.]<sup>28</sup>

Shortly after Charbonneau's resignation was accepted, Sub-Indian-Agent Hunter also offered to resign; but instead, Hunter was granted a six-months' leave of absence, beginning December 17, 1848. Probably the two men visited the gold fields in the Sacramento Valley together. At any rate, Jim Beckwourth came to Murderer's Bar on the Middle Fork of the American River and reports: "Here I found my old friend Chapineau house-keeping, and staid with him until the rainy season set in."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Bandini Documents and Unbound Documents, San Diego Archives, 328-33. (In the Bancroft Library, Univ. of Calif., Berkeley. Photostat copies in possession of the writer.)

<sup>29</sup> T. D. Bonner, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth* (New York, 1931), 353, 364.

A Forty-niner, in relating his experiences at Murderer's Bar, reported: "Tom Buckner's heart was gladdened by the appearance of other white men, not hostile, at his camp, in the person of J. B. Charbonneau, Jim Beckwourth, and Sam Mayers, all noted mountaineers."<sup>30</sup>

Soon after this, Prince Paul was in California and visited Captain John Sutter at Fort Sutter in August, 1850. While there, he noted Indians driving horses over the threshing floor. Among these Indians, comprising several tribes, were a few Shoshones. Prince Paul writes:

Among these latter was a handsome youth who reminded me, on account of his startling likeness, of a lad from the same tribe whom I took to Europe with me from a fur-trading post at the mouth of the Kansas, in western Mississippi, in the fall of 1823, and who was my companion there on all my travels over Europe and northern Africa until 1829, when he returned with me to America in 1829. This latter was the son of a Shoshone woman who with her husband, a Canadian Frenchman, accompanied the Messrs. Lewis and Clarke on their expedition to the Pacific Coast in 1804-06, the one as guide and the other as interpreter. . . . When still quite young, General William Clarke asked the mother's permission to take him to St. Louis in order that he might have him educated at the Catholic Brothers' Seminary.<sup>31</sup>

Whether Prince Paul, while at Sutter's Fort, learned of Baptiste's presence in the mining country, we are uncertain. Twenty-one years had passed since the prince and Baptiste came back from Europe together.

Because of the great controversy as to Charbonneau's whereabouts in his later years, we examined various census reports of California. The census of 1850 in Sutter County, California, does not carry his name; nor does the census of 1852, prepared by the D.A.R., with an alphabetical index. The 1860 U.S. Census of Placer County, California, lists: "J. B.

<sup>30</sup> Myron Angel (ed.), *History of Placer County, California* (Oakland, Calif., 1882), 71.

<sup>31</sup> Journal of Prince Paul at Sacramento in 1850; translated by Louis C. Butscher, University of Wyoming.

Charbonneau . . . male . . . age 57 . . . born in Missouri . . . P. O. Secret Ravine" (Secret Ravine is about ten miles from Auburn, California).

In the *Directory of Placer County, 1861*, we found this listing on page 79: "John B. Charbonneau, Clerk . . . Orleans Hotel . . . Auburn . . ."

Finally, in 1950 we found an obituary in the *Placer Herald*, Auburn, California, dated July 7, 1866, on the editorial page:

#### J. B. CHARBONNEAU

*Death of a California Pioneer.*—We are informed by Mr. Dana Perkins, that he has received a letter announcing the death of J. B. Charbonneau, who left this country some weeks ago, with two companions, for Montana Territory. The letter is from one of the party, who says Mr. C., was taken sick with mountain fever, on the Owyhee, and died after a short illness.

Mr. Charbonneau was known to most of the pioneer citizens of this region of country, being himself one of the first adventurers (into the territory now known as Placer county) upon the discovery of gold; where he has remained with little intermission until his recent departure for the new gold field, Montana, which, strangely enough, was the land of his birth, whither he was returning in the evening of life, to spend the few remaining days that he felt was in store for him.

Mr. Charbonneau was born in the western wilds, and grew up a hunter, trapper, and pioneer, among that class of men of which Bridger, Beckwourth, and other noted trappers of the woods were the representatives. He was born in the country of the Crow Indians—his father being a Canadian Frenchman, and his mother a half breed of the Crow tribe. He had, however, better opportunities than most of the rough spirits, who followed the calling of trapper, as when a young man he went to Europe and spent several years, where he learned to speak, as well as write several languages. At the breaking out of the Mexican War he was on the frontiers, and upon the organization of the Mormon Battalion he was engaged as a guide and came with them to California.

Subsequently upon the discovery of gold, he, in company with Jim Beckwourth, came upon the North Fork of the American river, and for a time it is said were mining partners.

Our acquaintance with Charbonneau dates back to '52, when we found him a resident of this county, where he has continued to reside almost continuously since – having given up frontier life. The reported discoveries of gold in Montana, and the rapid peopling of the Territory, excited the imagination of the old trapper, and he determined to return to the scenes of his youth. – Though strong of purpose, the weight of years was too much for the hardships of the trip undertaken, and he now sleeps alone by the bright waters of the Owyhee.

Our information is very meager of the history of the deceased – a fact we much regret, as he was of a class that for years lived among stirring and eventful scenes.

The old man, on departing for Montana, gave us a call, and said he was going to leave California, probably for good, as he was about returning to familiar scenes. We felt then as if we met him for the last time.

Mr. Charbonneau was of pleasant manners, intelligent, well read in the topics of the day, and was generally esteemed in the community in which he lived, as a good meaning and inoffensive man.

Reports of Charbonneau's death appear in two other mining newspapers. On July 14, 1866, the *Butte Record* of Oroville, California, states: "L. B. Charbonneau died recently on his way from this country to Owyhee. Strangely enough, Montana was the land of his birth. He was by nature and occupation a hunter, trapper, and pioneer with Bridger and Beckwourth – his father a Canadian Frenchman, his mother a half-breed Crow squaw." (Material apparently copied from the *Placer Herald* of July 7th.)

The *Owyhee Avalanche*, in Ruby City, Idaho, ran this story on June 2, 1866:

*Died.* – We have received a note (don't know who from) dated May 16, '66, requesting the publication of the following:

"At Inskip's Rancho, Cow Creek, in Jordan Valley, J. B. Charbonneau aged sixty-three years – of pneumonia. Was born at St. Louis, Mo.; one of the oldest trappers and pioneers; he piloted the Mormon Brigade through from Lower Mexico in '46; came to California in '49, and has resided since that time mostly in Placer County; was en route to Montana."

Through correspondence with Merle Wells, director of the Idaho Historical Society, we learned that Inskip's Ranch is at the mouth of Cow Creek, at present-day Danner, Oregon. Across the road from the ranch are three old graves, one of which is presumed to be that of our Mountain Man, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau.

What then of the Baptiste Charbonneau who presumably spent his last years on the Wind River Reservation, who was buried thereabouts in 1885, and to whom a monument was raised by the author, Grace R. Hebard? In those government records there are many references to a "Bat-tez" and much of the evidence acquired by Dr. Hebard for her book on *Sacajawea*, cannot be brushed aside. But for this study, we must close with the conclusion that there is mistaken identity somewhere. Time, we hope, will unravel it.