

A Pioneer's Talk of Pioneer Days.

Written for The Chronicle by Mr. Isaac Labissoniere.

HOW many horses would it require at the present condition of the market to purchase St. Anthony hill? This is the question an old man asked himself as he strolled among the mansions of St. Paul's aristocratic elevation yesterday and ruminated upon the fact that he had once driven a hard bargain with a man and palmed the unwatered hill off on the other for a good, sound horse, worth all of \$15 or \$20.

"And I felt somewhat conscience-stricken afterward, for it was a good horse, which was a much better recommendation than I could give along with



ISAAC LABISSONIERE.

my hill," said Isaac Labissoniere, 535 Canada street, in discussing old times in and about St. Paul. "It had no water on it and Lake Como and Dayton's bluff land was worth a good deal more in those days. I guess there are hardly enough horses in the Northwest to buy the hill now. Still that's only one of the changes I find.

"You see, I feel somewhat like Rip Van Winkle, because I have come back after an absence of nearly half a century to find my days in strolling around where once I saw Indian blood run like water."

Mr. Labissoniere is a real Minnesotan, as he is a quarter-blood Chippewa and was born on the soil. He is 79 years old, having been born in the northern part of North Dakota, near the Canadian line, July 7, 1823. His father was captain in a Canadian regiment during the war of 1812, having attained that position by reason of being one of two men who stepped from the ranks at the bidding of the commanding officer for all those who could read and write to make the fact known by stepping forward. Later the elder Labissoniere settled in Minnesota, where he married a Chippewa half-blood. After the birth of Isaac the family moved to St. Boniface, Man. In the fall of 1837 they came to St. Paul and took up a claim near the

present site of the fish hatchery, then known as Pine creek.

The younger Labissoniere established a homestead of his own at Osseo, where he lived until a year ago. He is now in St. Paul, living with his son-in-law.

"I can get all the pleasure out of what years are left to me in walking around the town and comparing it with what it was when I lived here before," said Mr. Labissoniere, as he made his way down the Jackson street "trail" yesterday.

One of the bloodiest incidents in the history of St. Paul occurred under the very eyes of Labissoniere, and he figured in it as its hero, making his way in early evening through the woods that were alive with bloodthirsty Indians, and summoning troops to the rescue of twenty beleaguered families who had escaped in canoes to Raspberry island after the famous battle of July 8, 1842, between the Chippewas and the Sioux.

"There was only one other family down in the Pine creek district at that time," said Mr. Labissoniere, "and along the other side of the river the Sioux held forth. Big Thunder was their chief and there were five other villages stretched along the river.

"Our white neighbor had received a barrel of whiskey two days before the fight, and a keg of this he presented to Big Thunder. The remainder I helped him sink in the creek, and I remember that I then tasted liquor for the first time in my life. I took perhaps three teaspoonfuls, and my friend, the settler, had a hard time keeping me from killing him when it began to affect me. On the morning of the 8th, about 10 o'clock, I was making hay in the lowlands when I heard the rattling of guns.

"I climbed into a tree and could see every move of the battle, which was so terrible that I can see it in my mind's eye to this day. The Chippewas had assembled in the fork of the creek—120 of them—and sent eight braves to fire on the Big Thunder camp across the river so as to draw the Sioux to the place they had selected as the battle ground. After firing a volley into the cluster of wigwags the eight Chippewas stood on the bank and made signs of deadly insult to their enemies, challenging them to come over and fight.

"Twenty chosen bucks manned canoes and started for the opposite shore. The attack of the Chippewas was planned with stratagem, and the eight warriors who had been sent out as a decoy retired slowly enough to exasperate their pursuers, but at the same time draw them onward.

"In retreating back to the creek the eight passed the cabin of a settler who was married to a Sioux woman. She and another woman and a boy of 12 years were working in the field when

the eight Chippewas hove in sight.

"Immediately upon discovering that the Sioux women had disregarded the mandate of the Chippewa chief, for all Sioux women married to white men to attire themselves in white, as a badge of immunity, the Chippewas swooped down on the helpless trio and pursued them toward the cabin. The wife of the settler ran screaming into her husband's arms just as her scalp was torn from her head. The boy was held up by the hair and his throat cut, and the other woman was scalped. The settler tried to drag his dying wife into the cabin, but a Sioux Indian who happened to be inside had barred the door.

"This little job only delayed the eight skirmishers a minute or two, and elated over their capture of scalps, they proceeded to lead the score of furious Sioux into the trap which had been prepared for them. The Sioux fell into it nicely, and nineteen of them fell in a narrow ravine.

"I saw the charge of the Chippewas, and this reminds me of a peculiarity of the Indians that is seldom heard of in connection with the descriptions of battles. Killing and scalping, of course, conduced to the glory of the braves, according to the number they personally conducted, but there was only one way to win the most coveted kind of a quill, and that was by striking the first knife blow in a free fight. When the Sioux came in sight, therefore, there were sixty fleet, yelling Chippewas bounding toward them in an instant with uplifted knives. Only one of them could be first, and he was the man they all wanted to be—and get a quill. The second man also received a quill. The Sioux were in the mud nearly to their waists, having been easily entrapped on account of the fact that they were all drunk.

"Meantime, however, the Sioux of two or three other villages had been informed of the battle and were swarming across the river to avenge the death of their other warriors. The battle raged until 4 o'clock in the afternoon and ended with the Chippewas being pursued out of the country by the Sioux, who came from every village within reaching distance. The Chippewas were chased clear to Stillwater.

"Some idea of the fierceness of the conflict may be gained from the fact that there were sixty-eight Chippewas given quills and consequent promotion for being first in that number of charges and eight Sioux gained similar distinction.

"I was in the house about 8 o'clock that evening when I heard the most diabolical yell I ever heard in my life. It was enough to cause a person's hair to stand on end and I guess mine did. A moment later the cabin door was pushed open and there stood before us the quivering form of Big Thunder, the

Sioux chief. His face was distorted with grief and rage and he aloft a long, bloody bowie knife as he screamed at my mother:

"My five sons have been killed. It is your fault. Your blood must pay. You knew your people were coming and you did not tell us. My sons are dead. You killed them. I don't know why he didn't kill her in her tracks, and I don't know why I didn't slay him. I never felt like killing a man so much in my life as I did at that moment. At any rate, he backed out of the house and went howling up the road.

"Feeling sure that we would be murdered that night, I decided to come to St. Paul for help, and I sneaked into the settlement in the dark. I found the place in terror, however, as the Sioux were rushing into the houses and confiscating all the guns they could find. Then they would throw their blankets down on the ground, indicating that they were ready to fight, and yelling 'Chippewa, Chippewa,' would dash in pursuit of the enemy. I went back after my mother, and with nineteen other families, mostly women and children, went to Raspberry island in canoes. As I was the only person anywhere near a man's size I volunteered to go to Fort Snelling and notify the troops.

"I found the way so dangerous, however, that I made my way instead to General Sibley's house at Mendota. He at once communicated with the commandant at the fort and the soldiers came to our relief the next day.

"Some years afterward—in the fall of 1850—the Sioux secured revenge for the blood of their fellow tribesmen who fell before the Chippewas. It was the custom of the latter tribe to make a winter camp in the vicinity of Coon Lake, north of St. Paul, and the Sioux, learning of this, determined to come down upon them there and get the blood satisfaction that was due them. So forty of their warriors started out for Coon Lake.

"One evening they came upon two Chippewas hunting. One of these spied the Sioux in time and made his escape; the other, who was carrying a deer on his back, which was secured by a strap across his forehead, as was the custom among the Indians, went on all unaware of the presence of enemies, advancing toward the Sioux with his back bent beneath his load, and his eyes on the ground. He raised his eyes, no motion of his body showing that he had looked up, and saw forty couchant Sioux with rifles leveled at him. Like a flash of lightning his gun was aimed, and his discharge of buckshot brought down three Sioux and wounded two others. Of course, almost simultaneously the Sioux fired, and the Chippewa dropped, riddled with bullets."

HELPS EVERYBODY.
A nun belonging to a teaching order writes us: "The chats by Prof. Egan are alone worth the price of The Chronicle."