

Echoes of Ecorse –January, 2019



Muskrat Hunters

An Ecorse Story by Letter

This story seems to validate the reputation of Muskrat Frenchmen (and women) for telling colorful, tongue-in-cheek tales.

MUSKRAT HUNTERS.

(Special Letter.)

The muskrat Frenchman is to be found dwelling in the flats along the Detroit river, near Detroit. Mich. In stature he is small, in complexion like to his n a t i v e mud. in habits simple and—uncleanly, in appetite satisfying himself with roast “muskrat shtuff vriz onyon,” washed down with whisky little better than raw alcohol. In imagination he is wild, vivid, fanciful, extravagant. On Monday, Antoine Boudie, a true type of the Muskrat Frenchman, came into Jean Baptiste Montie’s saloon at Ecorse with a red and swollen nose.

There was considerable excitement in the saloon. The two Cicottes of Detroit were playing a game of Pedro with the two Morale brothers. Thedo Cicotte was winning, and playing every card with a yell o f triumph and a thump of the k n u c k le s that made the table dance. “Fourteen time!” he shrieked, as he played on the last trick and chalked the score down on the table top, while the crowd, composed of unkempt, unwashed, but sympathetic Muskrat Frenchmen, pressed closely around the players.

The triumphant Thedo turned and beheld Antoine Boudie’s nasal beacon. “Haylo, Antoine, lia! Z red nose. W are yon get him?”

“W are I get him? 1 tells you. You say liar, but so it is. Thiss morn I tak ’ pail an’ ax an’ go to rivaire; walk out ’bout half acre on ice. chop hole In ice an’ get wataire. Den I say, ‘I t’irsty, get drink.’



Antoine continues his story: I stoop, pool head in hole, drink wataire. Splosh! bang! Somet'ings by ze nose h a f m e fast. I geev great swair. leap, fall on ice, hear somet'ing strike. I rub wataire out my eye. Look. Dere on ice lie cat feesh. beeg, so long, w'at I poo' out wataire by my nose. Ah!she hurt an 'bleed, but I tak 'feesh an' pail an' go to house. F irs' i put leetle fat musk rat on my nose tee! sh e feel ver' fine.

Den I weigh feesh—20 pounds. I tak' before many beeg ieesh, but not so on my nose. Wen feesh tak- nose
for bait I jus' soon be couple acre off. I tell y'ou. feesh hi;e my nose. How wheesky
mak' red lak dat? You call
me liar? You hear dat Kanuck fellow? Somebody bol- me! I keel him! Oh! good. All
right. Yas, I drink den. Leetle glass wheesky. please."

Antoine went to the bar, and the cards being dealt again, the game was proceeding when the side door opened

and Theophile Campau came in dragging a large sturgeon that would weigh perhaps 2O pounds. Jean Baptiste

Montie turned to him with an innocently inquiring expression: "Ha. Theophile. you got w'ale. Ware
you fin- dat d rif 'shore?-

" W a t ! You insool' m e lak dat? I find him on hook w'ai I bait for him.

You stop play card miunit I tell you. Dis morn—early—I go feesh. Think I catch few leetle perch.
1 row out couple acre oil Lighthouse point, wh'ere ice is gone off. After w'ile perch he begin bite. I pool.
Splosh! B e e g sturgeo n he come, ketch perch by tail: ho him up out wataire. Unhook him off hook, i'row
him in air. Perch fall back in wataire and swim way. Wal. I fink dat quare fin. Den I t'row iif 'gen. Ketch
udder perch. Splosh! Sturgeon save him same way by tail. Dis go on nine, ten time.

Den I get mad. I rage, I swair, I t'row fist in air. I stamp pritty near hole in bottom boat, but when I t'row in
'gen sturgeon coins ju s' lak- same time before, on'y dis ime he wink at me W s eye. "Den I t'ink. I jump up.
Pool up anker out mud. Tak- one perch I *ketch* an ' tie him 'lo n g s id e anker flook so his tail come jus' to
end. Den I t 'row him in.

Splosh! W en he get perch by tail dal time anker get him by nose. *D e n I g 'ess* he make fly. He tak' boat
long faster dan Loss draw Car. F irs' he go up rivaire, pritty near ceety Detroit. Den he go down. Go by
steamboats **jus** lak' she stan' still. Den. *ho'm* by, Mr. Feesh lie get tired. We stan' still bout 10 minnit. Den
pretty quick, when he rest, he start jump out wataire. He jump once—jump twice.

Den I f ink. Tak- oar. Tool two oar in wataire
ready for tak ' beeg, long, queeck stroke. He
jump 'gen. Queeck stroke, swish! go boat right
under him!

W'en he in air. *Bang*: he come down all r'at in
boat. I tak' oar—I keel him wid beeg knock on
head. Ketch few m o re ' perch an' come
'shore."



"SWISH! GO BOAT RIGHT UNDER
HIM!"

Then Antoine Boudie spoke up: "D st pritty good story, Theophile. On'y nax' time-you-do lak' dat, better bring feesh in w'en you ketch 'im an' not leave I'm outdoor in mud all night. I was out ves'day 'bout 4 o'clock by Lighthouse Point an' I see beeg sturgeon lie drif' up on mud bank. Got beeg bang on head same lak' yotirn. I t 'ink I go out on point now—I fin' d at feesh gone—hey, Theophile?"

"W'at you t 'ink, who is bettaire liar, Antoine or Theophile?" asked Thedo Cicotte of the company in general.

"M e!" shouted the two storytellers without pausing in th eir eagerness to ciaim superiority, to observe the exact bearings of the remark.

"Y o u hear dat ? " said Jean Baptiste Montie. " You each haf called odder a liar. You haff your fight-eet-out outside my saloon."

"I keel dat Theophile," declared Antoine savagely, leaving by the side door.

"Antoine jus' lak' dead a'ready." announced Theophile between clenched teeth, hastening from the front door.

The pedro players paused long to listen, but no sound came from without.

Thedo Cicotte broke the silence. "I t 'ink he hot' run away home as fas' as leg can carry, eli? I weesh Theophile tak- hees sturgeon wiz him."

"T irtcen time," shouted Jean Baptiste Montie, as he banged down a winning card on the table, and the game went on.

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