

In Search of Cousins: Nikki Rajala (3rd Cousin 1X Removed of Charles Sieracki)

In 2019, I was visiting in the Twin Cities and had an opportunity to attend a meeting in Hugo of the Family History Group led by Don Marier. One of the presenters, Nikki Rajala, discussed her interest in the voyageur journeys made by some of her ancestors. As she was mentioning the names of her Peloquin ancestors, they sounded very familiar. They were my ancestors also. It was a pleasure to meet another cousin passionately interested in the family's history and culture. Nikki has made unique contributions to our family's genealogy and history. She has discovered the historical facts of our Peloquin ancestors' involvement in the fur trade and has written two historical fiction novels which bring to life the imagined adventures of our voyageur ancestors.

We cannot underestimate the importance of the fur trade in the exploration and settlement of Canada. In their article "The Fur Trade in Canada" in [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#), Foster and Eccles state: "The fur trade was a vast commercial enterprise across the wild, forested expanse of what is now Canada. It was at its peak for nearly 250 years, from the early 17th to the mid-19th centuries. It was sustained primarily by the trapping of beavers to satisfy the European demand for felt hats. The intensely competitive trade opened the continent to exploration and settlement. It financed missionary work, established social, economic and colonial relationships between Europeans and indigenous people, and played a formative role in the creation and development of Canada."



Shooting the Rapids, 1879 by Frances Anne Hopkins (1838–1919)

Wikipedia tells us this about the voyageurs:

“From the beginning of the fur trade in the 1680s until the late 1870s, the voyageurs were the blue-collar workers of the Montreal fur trade. At their height in the 1810s, they numbered as many as three thousand. For the most part, voyageurs were the crews hired to man the canoes that carried trade goods and supplies to trading locations where they were exchanged for furs, and "rendezvous posts," such as Grand Portage at the western end of Lake Superior. They then transported the furs back to Lachine near Montreal, and later also to points on the route to Hudson Bay.”

Voyageurs signed contracts for their services with merchants. The contract spelled out the destination, the length of service, duties including the position in the canoe and of course the wages. These contracts are now accessible on line. Nikki combed through the contracts of our Peloquin ancestors and created a chart that first lists the contracts chronologically, then it presents the contract information that she has culled and translated. Below are the first 12 listings.

Peloquin --Voyageur Contracts, by date <http://archivesshsb.mb.ca>

1. Felix peloquin, Emmanuel fils) 1754 Microfilm Number M620/024 I believe this is Emmanuel Peloquin, born 12/23/1731. Emmanuel is the 5th son of Felix (b 1700) and Marie (Pelletier, b 1699). Antoine, our direct line, is the next youngest son, born 1734.

<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs65608>

2. Pelloquin, Félix 1789 Microfilm Number M620/1197 I believe this is Felix Peloquin, also called Jean-Baptiste dit Felix, born 1768, d 1832. He was the son of Jean Baptiste b 1735 (right after Emmanuel and before Antoine, our direct line) and Marie-Anne Gauthier Permalink?

3. Peloquin Dt [filin?], Antoine 1801 Microfilm Number M314/0093 I believe this is Antoine, b 1780, d Jan 31., 1835; son of Joseph b 1751, grandson of Francois b 1721. Francois (b 1721) is the oldest son of Felix (b 1700) and Marie (Pelletier, b 1699). Antoine, our direct line, was the 6th son, born 1734. <http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68162>

4. Peloquin, Charles filix 1801 2 years Microfilm Number M314/0092 I believe this is Charles Peloquin, b. 1784, son of Charles Michel, b. 1761, son of Charles, the 3rdh son of Felix (b 1700) and Marie (Pelletier, b 1699). Antoine, our direct line, was the 6th son, born 1734.

<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68137>

5. Peloquin Dt filin, Francois 1802 Microfilm Number M314/0093 I believe this is Francois, b Oct, 23, 1778, son of Joseph (b 1751) & Marie Hus; [the Company Rep for the contract comes through Louis Hus Paul (not sure of the order of names)]; the grandson of Francois (b 1751) and Marie-Anne LaVallee. Francois (1721) is the oldest son of Felix (b 1700) and Marie (Pelletier, b 1699). Antoine, our direct line, was the 6th son, born 1734.

<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68207>

6. Peloquin Dt filix, Antoine DEVANT 1802 Microfilm Number M314/0093 I believe this is Antoine, b 1780, d Jan 31., 1835; son of Joseph b 1751, grandson of Francois b 1721. Francois (1721) is the oldest son of Felix (b 1700) and Marie (Pelletier, b 1699). Antoine, our direct line, was the 6th son, born 1734.

7. Peloquin dit Felix, Charles 1804 Microfilm Number M620/1535 01239 I believe this is the same Charles Peloquin as above, b. 1784, son of Charles Michel, b. 1761, son of Charles, the 3rdh son of Felix (b 1700) and Marie (Pelletier, b 1699). Antoine, our direct line, was the 6 th son, born 1734.

<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs44600>

8. Peloquin dit Credit, dit Felix Mathieu 1815 3 years Microfilm Number M620/0070 I believe Felix (Generation 4) is the great uncle Mathieu. Felix' brother is Pierre b 1702, d 1780?, m. Genevieve Tournois; his father is Pierre dit Credit, b 1733, d 1782, m Marie-Catherine Gauthier. They have a son Mathieu, born 1772. However, there my info ends, and we need one more generation, for Mathieu to be born about 1796-99 for this to be cemented. There is a Mathieu Peloquin b 1796, (sibling is Antoine, b 1799). But I don't have any more data on their ancestry.

<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs59906> Of these next 3: Benony and Louis signed

the same day, Francois the day after, for the same amount with the same company. I bet they were related and traveled together.

9. Peloquin filix, Benony 1815 Microfilm M314/0099 I believe this is Benoni Peloquin, b Nov. 12, 1794. His father is Charles Michel, b 1784; his grandfather is Charles b 1727, the 3rdh son of Felix (b 1700) and Marie (Pelletier, b 1699). <http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68409>

10. Peloquin filix, Francois 1815 Microfilm number M314/0099 I believe Francois is Francois-Xavier, born 1786, d 1845. His parents were Charles Michel P and Marie Francoise Decambre. And one of his younger siblings is Benoni! <http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68410>

11. Peloquin filix, Louis 1815 Microfilm Number M314/0099 I have only found a mention of a Louis, born 1795, whose sibling is Charles and children include Louise Vandel and Louis. But I don't have any more data on their ancestry. <http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68405>

12. Peloquin filix, Jean Baptiste 1820 Microfilm Number M314/0100 I have only found a mention of a Jean-Baptiste, born 1801, died 1854, siblings Agathe and Clement, married to Francoise, whose children are Edesse, Delima and Paul. But I don't have any more data on their ancestry. It's likely the same person as #14, but we don't have enough to go on. <http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68412>

CONTRACT INFORMATION, Culled and Translated

1. Felix peloquin, Emmanuel (fils) Microfilm Number M620/024
<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs65608> Contract Date 1754 0501 Contract Place Montréal Length of Contract 0 Overwintered No Parish (Standardized) Sorel Destinations Détroit Occupation NL Function Notes - leave this town in a canoe loaded with Ayder goods to take him And drive to the detroit post Merchant Company François marie piquote Ecuyer Sr De Belestre Lieutenant d'infanterie Company Representative Louis St-ange Charly Notary Name Danré de Blanz, Louis Claude Servant Signature Signed Wages 150 LIVRES Advance at Signing 0 NL Advance at Departure 0 NL Contract Notes -with the sum of 150 Pounds as the dt. Sr. promises And Soblige yawn And payer at dt. Engaged on his return In this city for his wages And Salary of the said voiding In monoye having Course In this past - Being Agreed that the said Engage Will be exempt from portaging By going up And down a little

2. Pelloquin, Félix Microfilm Number M620/1197 Contract Date 1789 0123 Parish (Standardized) Sorel Contract Place Montréal Length of Contract 0 Destinations Michilimackinac Occupation NL Functions GOUVERNAIL Merchant Company NL Company Representative Campion & Tabeau Notary Name Chaboillez, Louis Wages 230 LIVRES Advance at Signing 28 LIVRES Advance at Departure 0 NL Contract Notes - ordianry équipement

3. Peloquin Dt [filin?], Antoine Microfilm Number M314/0093
<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68162> Contract Date 1801 1230 Contract Place Sorel Length of Contract 0 Destinations Grand Portage MICHILIMAKINAC LAC DE LA PLUIE Occupation Habitant Functions MILIEU Function Notes -leave Montreal quality of Environment in one of their Canoes, to make the trip, both by going up and by leaving the Grand Portages in Pierre Boneamie's Canoe - go through Michilimakinac, if required – pass/carry 8 pieces on the Grand Portage on entering, and 4 bundles on leaving, or cut down 6 pounds or chelins, old course, by each piece or bundle, at the option of said Sieur McTavish, Frobisher & Co. - work six days on all other works except to pass again coins - Obliges himself to go to Rainy Lake if necessary, increasing the

wages below by 120 pounds or chelins Merchant Co MCTAVISH, FROBISHER & CO. Co Rep Pierre Bonami Notary Name Crebassa, Henry Servant Signature X mark Wages 230 LIVRES Advance at Signing 48 LIVRES Advance at Departure 0 NL Contract Notes for and in return for the sum of 230 Pounds or Chelins, old currency of this Province, which they promise and oblige themselves to yawn and pay to the said engaged one month after his return in this city - on his departure the equipment simple - acknowledges having received 48 pounds in advance - undertakes to contribute one per cent on his pledges for the Voyageurs Fund

4. Peloquin, Charles filix Microfilm Number M314/0092

<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68137> Contract Date 1801 0104 Contract Place Sorel Length of Contract 0 Destinations Grand Portage LAC DE LA PLUIE Occupation Habitant Functions GOUVERNAIL Function Notes leave Montreal as a Rudder in one of their Canoes to make the trip, both going up and out of the Grand Portage - obliges himself to go to La Pluy Lake if required by adding his 200 Pound Pledges Merchant Co MCTAVISH, FROBISHER & CO. Co Rep Jean Bte Mandeville Notary Name Crebassa, Henry Servant Signature X mark Wages 400 LIVRES Advance at Signing 20 PIASTRES Advance at Departure 0 NL Contract Notes - for and in return for the sum of 400 Pounds or Chelins, old current of this Province, which they promise and oblige themselves to yawn, to pay to the said engaged one month after his return in this city - on his departure the equipment lies simple - acknowledges having received in advance on account 20 Piastres - undertakes to contribute one per cent on its pledges for the Travelers' fund

5. Peloquin Dt filin, Francois Microfilm Number M314/0093

<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68207> Contract Date 1802 0214 Contract Place Sorel Destinations Grand Portage MICHILIMAKINAC LAC DE LA PLUIE Occupation Habitant Functions MILIEU Function Notes leave Montreal as a Midfielder in one of their canoes, to make the trip, both up and out of the Grand Portages - go through Michilimackinac, if required – carry 8 pieces on the Grand Portage - work 6 days to all other works, except to pass more coins - obliges himself to go to the Lake of the Rain if necessary - to pass/carry 4 bundles on leaving, or to cut back 6 old books or chelins by each coin or bundle, to the option of the so-called Sieurs Bourgeois or their representative - by increasing the pledges below by pounds or chelins Merchant Co Alexr. MacKenzie et Compagnie Co Rep Louis Hus Paul Notary Name Crebassa, Henry Servant Signature X mark Wages 400 LIVRES Advance at Signing 48 LIVRES Advance at Departure 0 NL Contract Notes - for and in return for the sum of 400 pounds or chelins, old currency of this Province for the Voyages Until Lac La pluy, which they promise and oblige themselves to yawn, to pay to the said engaged one month after his return to this city - to his departure an equipment Consisting of a Cover of 3 points (blanket?)a Necklace a pair of Soullier Three alders of Cotton - The said engaged confesses to have received by engaging the sum of 48 pounds or chelins, former current on account of his said wages

6. Peloquin Dt filix, Antoine DEVANT Microfilm Number M314/0093 Permalink? Contract Date 1802 1206 Contract place: Sorel Overwintered: No Destinations Grand Portage LAC DE LA PLUIE MICHILIMAKINAC Occupation: Habitant Function: Devant Merchant Co Alexr. MacKenzie et Compagnie Co Representative St vaillier Mailloux Notary Name Crebassa, Henry Servant Signature X mark Wages 800 LIVRES Advance at Signing- 100 LIVRES Advance at Departure 0 NL (Pierre and Antoine Cournoyer paddle as milieux with him, see end pages) Contract notes: -for and by means of the sum of 800 pounds or chelins, old currency of this Province, which they promise & oblige themselves to yawn and pay to the said hired person one month after his return to this city - on his departure an ordinary equipment of a Bout de Canots - The said enlisted person confesses to having received by committing the sum of 100 pounds or chelins, old currency on account of his said pledges

7. Peloquin dit Felix, Charles Microfilm Number M620/1535 01239

<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs44600> Contract Date 1804 0313 Contract Place Montréal Length of Contract 2 Overwintered Yes Parish (Standardized) Sorel Destinations Michilimackinac Dependances du Sud Occupation NL Functions MILIEU Function Notes NL Merchant Company Forsyth, Richardson & Co. Notary Name Gray, Jonathan A. Wages 600 Livres ou chelins par année; Adv Signing 12 PIASTRES; Adv Departure 4 Piastres Contract Notes - lives with his father Charles. - receives a set of 2 covers, 2 shirts, two pairs of cotton breeches, a pair of Soullier and a Necklace per year.

8. Peloquin dit Credit, Mathew PELOQUIN DIT Felix Microfilm Number M620/0070

<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs59906> Contract Date 1815 0103 Contract Place Montréal Length of Contract 3 Overwintered Yes Parish Sorel Destinations Michilimackinac, Dépendances du Nord Ouest, Fort William Portage de la Montagne Occupation NL Functions MILIEU Function Notes -leave Montreal, as a Middle in one of their canoes, to make the trip, and to winter for three consecutive years in the dependencies of the North West - go through Michilimackinac, if required, give 6 days of chore, make two trips from Fort William to the Portage de la Montagne, or instead of them give 6 days of time to other works at the option of the said Sieurs - help carry the 3 canoes in the land Merchant Co McTavish, McGillivrays & Co. et Thomas Thain et Alexander McKenzie Co Repe A. N. McLeod Notary Name Beek, John Gerbrand Servant Signature X mark Wages 700 LIVRES Advance at Signing 20 PIASTRES Adv at Departure 10 Piastres Contract Notes - by means of the sum of 700 pounds or chelins, former course of this Province, which they promise and oblige themselves to yawn and pay to the said hired person one month after his return to Montreal - and to have for equipment a cover (blanket) of 3 points, a cover of 2 1/2 points, 6 cotton aunes, a pair of beef couliers and a (Portage) collar, for the first year and the Pledges & Conditions of the Post for the Others - acknowledges having received on account in advance 20 Piastres Will receive 10 when leaving - undertakes to contribute one per cent of his pledges for the Travelers' Fund

9. Peloquin filix, Benony PELOQUIN DIT Felix Microfilm M314/0099

<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68409> Contract Date 1815 1030 Contract Place Sorel Length of Contract 1 Overwintered Yes Parish Sorel Destinations Fort William MICHILIMAKINAC LAC DE LA PLUIE Portage de la Montagne Occupation Habitant Functions MILIEU Function Notes - leave Montreal as a Midfielder in one of their canoes or boats, to make the trip, both going and coming back from Montreal to Fort William & the Hyverner This year - right to get off at the first Navigation - du Fort William on the Kaministiguia River - go through Michilimackinac - go to Rainy Lake, if required - give 6 days of drudgery - make 2 trips from Fort-William to Portage de la Montagne, or instead of them give 6 days of time to other works at the option of the said Sieurs - help to carry the canoes to 3 in the land Merchant Co McTavish, McGillivrays & Co. et Kenneth McKenzie Company Representative Richard Grant Notary Name Crebassa, Henry Servant Signature X mark Wages 1000 LIVRES Advance at Signing 0 NL Advance at Departure 0 NL Contract Notes for and in return for the sum of 1,000 pounds or chelins, former course of this Province, for the trip to Fort William, and to receive the prize of the others, if he makes the trip to the Lake of Rain, which they promise and oblige themselves to yawn and pay to the said hired person one month after their return to Montreal - to have Double equipment - obliges themselves to contribute one per cent of their wages for the Voyageurs Fund

10. Peloquin filix, Francois PELOQUIN DIT Felix Microfilm Number M314/0099

<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68410> Contract Date 1815 1031 Contract Place Sorel Length of Contract 1 Overwintered Yes Destinations Fort William LAC DE LA PLUIE Portage de la Montagne Occupation Habitant Functions MILIEU Function Notes leave Montreal as a Midfielder in one of their canoes or boats, to make the trip, both going and coming back from Montreal to Fort William & the Hyverner This year - right to get off at the first Navigation - du Fort William on the

Kaministiguia River - go through Michilimackinac - go to Rainy Lake, if required - give 6 days of drudgery - make two trips from Fort-William to Portage de la Montagne, or instead of them give 6 days of time to other works at the option of the said Sieurs - help to carry the canoes to 3 in the land Merchant Co McTavish, McGillivrays & Co. et Kenneth McKenzie Company Representative Richard Grant Notary Name Crebassa, Henry Servant Signature X mark Wages 1000 LIVRES, Advance at Signing 0 NL , Advance at Departure 0 NL Contract Notes for and in return for the sum of 1,000 pounds or chelins, former course of this Province, for the trip to Fort William, and to receive the prize of the others, if he makes the trip to the Lake of Rain, which they promise and oblige themselves to yawn and pay to the said hired person one month after their return to Montreal - to have Double equipment - obliges themselves to contribute one per cent of their wages for the Voyageurs Fund

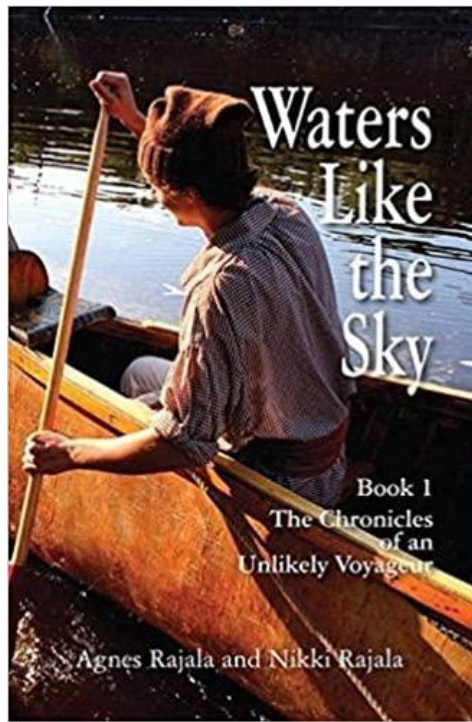
11. Peloquin filix, Louis Microfilm Number M314/0099 PELOQUIN DIT Felix

<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68405> Contract Date 1815 1030 Contract Place Sorel Length of Contract 1 Overwintered Yes Parish Sorel Destinations Ft William MICHILIMAKINAC LAC DE LA PLUIE Portage de la Montagne Occupation Habitant Functions MILIEU Function Notes leave Montreal as a Midfielder in one of their canoes or boats, to make the trip, both going and coming back from Montreal to Fort William & the Hyverner This year - right to get off at the first Navigation - du Fort William on the Kaministiguia River - go through Michilimackinac - go to Rainy Lake, if required - give 6 days of drudgery - make 2 trips from Fort-William to Portage de la Montagne, or instead of them give 6 days of time to other works at the option of the said Sieurs - help to carry the canoes to three in the land Merchant Co McTavish, McGillivrays & Co. et Kenneth McKenzie Company Rep Richard Grant Notary Name Crebassa, Henry Servant Signature X mark Wages 1000 LIVRES Advance at Signing 0 NL Advance at Departure 0 NL Contract Notes for and in return for the sum of 1,000 pounds or chelins, former course of this Province, for the trip to Fort William, and to receive the prize of the others, if he makes the trip to the Lake of Rain, which they promise and oblige themselves to yawn and pay to the said hired person one month after their return to Montreal - to have Double equipment - obliges themselves to contribute one per cent of their wages for the Voyageurs Fund

12. Peloquin filix, Jean Baptiste Microfilm Number M314/0100

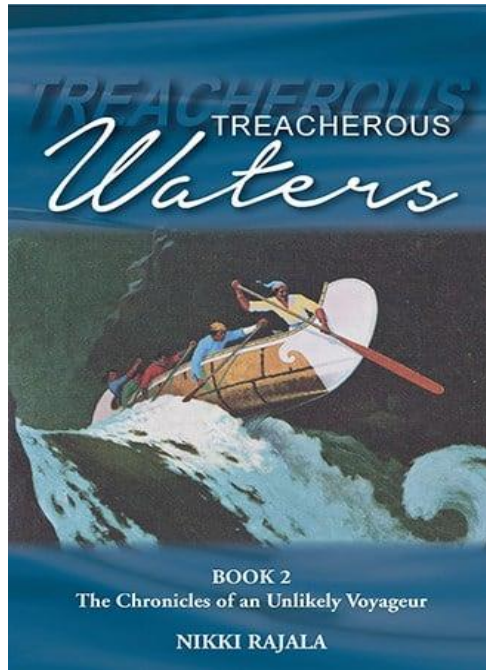
<http://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en/permalink/voyageurs68412> Contract Date 1820 0126 Contract Place Sorel Length of Contract 0 Parish Seigneurie de Sorel Destinations Sault Ste Marie Dépendances du Lac Supérieur Occupation Garçon Functions MILIEU Function Notes - leave Montreal as a Middle in one of his Canoes or Boats to make the trip both going and returning from Sault Ste Marie & dependencies of the Superior Lake - give 8 Days of Corvée to the post - free on his return to Montreal Merchant Company Charles [oalnes? Ermatinger?] du Sault Ste Marie Marchand, Frederick William [Ermatinger?] de Montréal Ecuier Co Rep Antoine Guiguere Guide habitant de Sorel Notary Name Crebassa, Henry Servant Signature X mark Wages 180 LIVRES Advance at Signing 8 PIASTRES Advance at Departure 0 NL Contract Notes for and for the sum of 180 pounds or old Chelins Currency of this province for the said trip which he promises and obliges to yawn Pay to the said hired one month after his return to the city of Montreal - upon his departure Simple Equipment - he acknowledge having received on account of his said pledges the sum of 8 piastres Need more info on these contracts and connection to Peloquins in our ancestry.

Nikki makes the historical data come alive in a fictional presentation of voyageur adventures in two novels. Presented below is the plot summary of the novels found on Amazon.com.



Waters Like the Sky

Steeped in the history of the French-Canadian voyageur journeys in the early 1800s in North America, **Waters Like the Sky** is a story of a well-educated teen boy who despises his fancy schooling and longs for a more adventurous life. André's fate changes when a letter with a royal seal arrives. He discovers he has French noble blood. He is part of a family in France, has a brother he's never met, and an enemy who wants him dead. Determined to locate his brother and set things right, André sets out to search for Denis in the only way open to him—becoming a voyageur. Unaccustomed to the hard voyageur life, André uses his only advantage—his education. He fights to earn the respect of his fellow voyageurs and gains many life lessons on his quest to track down his brother. Will he be able to reach Denis before the evil one the natives call the windigo finds him first?



Treacherous Waters

After André nearly drowns in the St. Lawrence River in French Canada, the fear of water terrorizes him. Can he combat that fear in order to paddle as a voyageur with Antoine, ace canoe brigade leader, to the rendezvous and clerk at the fur trade post deep in North America's Indian territory? Still an unlikely voyageur at 14, André thrived in his first winter. He expected his second journey to be easy, knowing his murdering nemesis had perished in an icy river. But it is not. Fear haunts André, putting him and his canoe-mates in peril. André struggles to survive, his every ability challenged by the harsh environment, dangerous rivers new responsibilities—and a man intent killing him.

About the Author

Minnesota native, writer and appreciator of early American and Canadian history, **Nikki Rajala** grew up watching her mother, Agnes Peloquin Rajala, create literary works based on the rich heritage of their family's ancestors. Nikki joined her in researching the lives and history of French-Canadian voyageurs and explorers. Nikki's first book, *Some Like It Hot: The Sauna, Its Lore and Stories*, published in 2000 by North Star Press of St. Cloud, Minnesota, is a reflection of her Finnish heritage and love of the family sauna. Agnes and Nikki co-authored this book, *Waters Like the Sky*, which pays homage to being direct descendants of French-Canadian voyageurs. After Agnes died in October of 2013, Nikki carried the legacy of *Waters Like the Sky* forward, determined to share this historical adventure with readers everywhere. The end result is an action-packed, yet historically accurate, adventure. Nikki is also an avid photographer. She retired from teaching English as a second language and currently works as a copy editor. She resides in Rockville, Minnesota, with her husband, Bill Vossler, also a freelance writer. Readers can connect with Nikki Rajala on her website: <http://nikkirajala.com/>.