

*Adventures on the American Frontier*

# PIONEER TRADERS

Part Four

Joe LaBarge, Missouri River Boy



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This book features QR codes that link to audio of the book being narrated so that readers can follow along.

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Royal Fireworks Press  
P.O. Box 399  
41 First Avenue  
Unionville, NY 10988-0399  
(845) 726-4444  
fax: (845) 726-3824  
email: [mail@rfwp.com](mailto:mail@rfwp.com)  
website: [rfwp.com](http://rfwp.com)



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St. Louis was an important fur-trading city in the early years of the 1800s. Fur company outposts had been built all along the Missouri River and the rivers that ran into it. The traders at the posts bought furs from the Native Americans, and also from the hundreds of white men who went west to become trappers. They then sent the furs down the river to trade in St. Louis. Every boy growing up in St. Louis dreamed of going west to become a fur trapper.





One of the boys who dreamed of becoming a trapper was Joseph LaBarge. When he was seventeen years old, in 1832, Joe signed up to work for four years for the American Fur Company. He imagined



himself heading for the Rocky Mountains with a set of beaver traps and living a life of adventure. But for Joe, life had other plans.

“You’ll go to work at Cabanné’s Post to do whatever is needed there,” a manager at the fur company told him. So Joe went aboard one of the company’s steamboats and was taken up the Missouri River to a lonely fort on the west bank of the river, about ten miles upriver from where Omaha, Nebraska, is now.

From the start, Joe worked hard to show that he would make a good trapper. At first he worked mostly as a caretaker and stable boy. Then he was sent to a Pawnee village about 100 miles west of the fort to spend the winter and to buy furs for his company as the Pawnee braves brought them in. He did his work well and was allowed to go down to St. Louis in the summer when the furs were taken to market.

“Now I’ll be sent out with a company of trappers,” he thought as he went by



steamboat back to Cabanné's Post.

Joe didn't know it then, but the Missouri River and the steamboat would be important to him all his life. He learned how the big boat worked as he journeyed up the river. When the crew became ill with a terrible fever and the captain had to go back to St. Louis for more men, he left Joe in charge of the steamboat. Joe had to pilot it a short distance. But still the life of a trapper was what he looked forward to, and he returned to Cabanné's Post as soon as he could.