Fort Beauharnois

Nell Mabey

In France, the fifteenth Louis; upon the British throne
The second George; and in this, our country, yet unknown,
Sixty years—precisely sixty years, by way
Of Lexington and Concord, to Constitution Day... . . .

Figures sharply etched against the sun-drenched sand,
Against September's evening glow, the swaggering band,
Explorers, trappers, French and Sioux, divinely led,
Relives its moment; there's a clanking of swords, the tread
Of marching feet—or is it only the waves that swoop,
Advancing, retreating, smartly, briskly, like an ordered troop
Of white-horsed cavalry rounding the point? Is it a dream?
But no! On they come! Two black-robed priests—one catches the gleam
Of their crosses. That tall, slim fellow, stepping jauntily,
Is Dumain, the captain; that other, Campeau, the blacksmith, he
Of the Vulcan shoulders... epic pageant passing by
To the sound of the wind and the waves and a sandpiper's shrilling cry... . . .
A three-fold requiem... . . .

We saunter down to the brink
Of the lake, stand watching. Splash! Above the fading pink
Of the water, a leaping bass describes a silver arc;
The light upon the point is like a glowworm's spark.

1 Fort Beauharnois, on the Minnesota shore of Lake Pepin near Frontenac, was founded on September 17, 1727, by a party of French adventurers under the Sieur de la Perrière. For a full account of this early French post in the Minnesota country, see Louise Phelps Kellogg, "Fort Beauharnois," in Minnesota History, 8:232–246 (September, 1927). Ed.