

Song of the Portage

Moccasin-footed creep the mists
Out upon the shining valley,
While with tread as swift and mute
From the wilderness men sally—
Indian, black-robed priest, and trapper—
Down my pathway 'twixt the rivers
Kankakee and clear St. Joseph,
And a song each one delivers.

“Leave all to follow, follow
The Portage Trail cries, ‘Come
March up and out the hollow,
LaSalle and Hennepin.
The ripples of the waters
Sing back to brave Marquette;
Come, follow, follow, follow,
My trail is widening yet’.”

I, the Portage, am a road;
I, the lure, the test of man—
Bertrand, Coquillard, and Navarre—
Nothing have, if nothing plan.
Where the smoke-wreaths greet the prairies
Let the fur-fleets rest their paddles;
Halt the ox-teams, clear the spaces,
Plant some fields, let lie the saddles.

Leave all to follow, follow;
The Portage Trail cries, “On!
Oh seek the river’s hollow
To build your house upon.
'Tis up and out the corn-brake,
'Tis down the wheat-filled hill
The Portage Trail has yielded
Its grain as grist for mill.”

I, the Portage, am a town;
Taylor, Baden, Sorin, see,
The edge of the Great Marsh has flowered—
Forty roads lead up to me,
Forty factories crown my girth—
And what splendor of the spirit
Have these hundred years flung o'er me,
I, the Portage, that shall merit.

The cry of, "Follow, follow
These pioneers. Be strong!
Lead up and out the hollow
Where romance dwelt so long
Draw nigh LaSalle's old portage,
From whence, a ghost in flight,
I peer from a wild-vine tangle
Upon a newer might."

—Mary Byerley