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ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

**WISCONSIN
LAND OF FRENCHMEN,
INDIANS, AND THE BEAVER**

James I. Clark

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin



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by

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WISCONSIN: LAND OF FRENCHMEN, INDIANS, AND THE BEAVER

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JAMES I. CLARK

THE BEAVER WAS KING of the Indians. "In truth, my brother," a chief once said, "the beaver does everything to perfection. He makes for us kettles, axes, swords, knives, and gives us drink and food without the trouble of cultivating the ground."¹ That brown, trowel-tailed animal with the big front teeth was a wonderful creature indeed.

The beaver domain covered most of North America. During the time of the French one of the richest parts of that kingdom lay in the area between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi, including what has come to be known as Wisconsin.

Roasted, beaver meat was good enough; for warmth the fur served well. But there was other food, and other fur. Before the white man came the ten million or so beaver were fairly safe behind their log dams on the streams of North America. Only a few, comparatively, fell prey to the Indian trap, net, stone-tipped arrow or spear.

Then, someone in Europe discovered that beaver fur made wonderful hats. The style caught on. The beaver became a very popular animal.

In the European scramble for places in the New World, the French

had already claimed the land around the mouth of the St. Lawrence river. Eventually, they hoped, that river would lead them to the Far East. In the meantime, the land was rich in beaver, and hats and capes were selling well in Paris.

The Fur Trade and the Indian

The best furs were taken between October and May. The pound and a half pelt was scraped and rubbed with fat, then worn for a season with the fur next to the Indian's body. The fur was thus greased and softened and well prepared for hat and coat manufacturing. Dry furs were also sold, especially if the demand was great, but the greased variety was more valuable.

During the early years of the trade, Indians brought furs to the French settlements on the St. Lawrence. There an annual fair was held. The Indians could choose from a variety of goods on which to spend their furs. After making their trades, the redmen spent some time in celebration. They feasted, danced, sang and drank brandy, and they often got pretty wild. But furs kept the colony alive, so no one interfered with the merry-making, although everyone



A 17th century representation of a beaver.

hoped the Indians would grow tired quickly. After a couple of days, exhausted and out of skins, they broke camp and disappeared into the forest. The process of collecting furs began again.

The market was in the hands of a monopoly run by a group of merchants in Canada, or sometimes by men in France. The price of furs was fixed, usually at around four *francs*. Ships bringing goods for the trade returned to France loaded with furs. In the cities of Saint Mâlo, Lyons, Nantes and Marseilles the fur was made into hats for people of the upper classes, and the skins became coats for others.

Generally a beaver hat sold in Paris for 24 *francs*. The difference between the selling price and the original cost of the fur went into shipping expenses, other hat mate-

rial, hatters' wages, and profit for the owner of the factory. The usual profit was around one-third.

The industrious beaver couldn't multiply fast enough. As the nearby supply disappeared Indians had to go farther afield to find the animals. But they had to be found. Axes of iron cut better than those of stone. Iron awls and needles made sewing easier. Arrow heads made of iron went deeper and killed more swiftly. A knife of iron would skin an animal in much less time than it took with one laboriously chipped out of a hard stone. An iron knife was certainly better for scraping skins than an old clam shell. In a short time the Indian owed even the clothes on his back and the covering for his feet to the beaver. And those wonderful trinkets—those bells, necklaces and mirrors! The Indian couldn't under-

stand how the white man made those things, but he understood how much easier life was with them. They could all be had for a few worn-out beaver skins. So the Indians forgot how to make things from stone. Many forgot how to make clothes from animal skins. Many couldn't take the time to raise corn. The important thing was catching beaver.

Each hunter took fifty to sixty pelts during an average season. About half that number would buy a gun, eight pounds of powder, forty pounds of lead, three blankets, four shirts and six pairs of stockings. The rest was used for additional guns, for kettles, knives, awls, trinkets, and brandy. Usually two beavers were left in a colony to reproduce. When the market was high even that measure of conservation was forgotten.

The most remarkable thing the white man brought was the gun. With it a hunter didn't need to stalk his prey so closely, didn't need to go to all the trouble to make bows and arrows. The gun increased the take of beaver. It also took a heavy toll of enemies, both white and red.

As Indians roved farther from home, looking for new beaver lands, they met other tribes looking for the same thing. New quarrels were started, and fuel added to old ones. The Algonkian and Huron Indians had long been enemies of the Iroquois. When those tribes tried to monopolize beaver lands, wars began anew. Most of the early French contact had been with Algonkian and Huron, along the St. Lawrence and on the southeast shore of Lake Huron. The first French missionaries had worked with those Indians and had been fairly well received with

their message of Christianity. That wasn't true of the Iroquois. When the French had to choose a group of Indians to support, they preferred to take the Algonkian and Huron over the Iroquois.

Shortly after the French settled in Canada, the Dutch established trading posts at Albany and at other spots in New Netherlands. Those posts became sources for guns and a market for Iroquois furs. The contest for fur lands then became more severe. When the English took over the Dutch colony in 1664 the posts continued to do business.

Some Indians, instead of hunting their own furs, acted as middlemen to other tribes. They supplied certain tribes with European goods and received furs with which to obtain more merchandise. Many Iroquois did this. Another such tribe was the Ottawa, living on the islands of Georgian Bay.²

Opening the West for the Fur Trade

Ranging far west in search of furs, the Ottawa met a tribe called the Winnebago, or "people of the sea," as the French came to call them. It was said that the Winnebago traded with people even further west. It occurred to the French that those people might be Orientals. If the Winnebago could be found, they might show the French a passage to the Far East. At the same time, new lands would be opened for the fur trade. What the French didn't know was, the only "sea" near the Winnebago was Lake Michigan.

In 1634 Samuel de Champlain [shäm-plän'], governor of New

France, sent Jean Nicolet [zhän nēk-o-lā'] with some Indian guides to find the Winnebago. Nicolet was a *voyageur* [vwä-yä-zhür'] who had been in the service of the French colony for a number of years. He was well acquainted with the land and the Indians around the St. Lawrence.

Because the Iroquois controlled the Lake Erie region, Nicolet had to go north, up Ottawa river to the Mattawa and over to Lake Nipissing, then to Lake Huron in order to get to the West. After a long journey the Winnebago were found, and Nicolet thus became the first white man to travel the western Great Lakes and the first to set foot in what became Wisconsin. The Winnebago were glad to see the Frenchman, and happy to receive French merchandise. No passage to the East was found, but the area was rich in beavers, and later became a very important part of the French fur empire.³

Thanks to the Iroquois, no stream of traders followed Nicolet. In 1642 that tribe opened war against the Huron and the Algonkian and eventually attacked the Ottawa, and Indians even further west. With Dutch guns and under the well-organized Confederacy of the Five Nations, the Iroquois drove tribes out of the region around the St. Lawrence and seriously threatened French control of the area. They even managed to block the Ottawa-Lake Nipissing route to the west, and it was dangerous for traders to try to get through to the land opened by Nicolet. It was 1660 before the Iroquois were halted, and then not permanently, for they were to rise again.

The war was disastrous for the fur trade. The colony suffered without

its main economic support. Western Indians, fearing the Iroquois, refused to bring in furs. Many of the tribes that had traded with the French had migrated to the western Great Lakes region. Nicolet had found only Winnebago and Menominee living in Wisconsin. Now there were Potawatomi, Sauk, Fox, Mascouten, Miami, Kickapoo, Huron and Ottawa as well. Most of those tribes belonged to the Algonkian group; all of them were refugees from the Iroquois.⁴

During the 1640's and '50's a few traders slipped by the Iroquois and made contacts with western Indians. It was risky business; not many furs were brought in. Then in 1659, a man named Pierre-Esprit Radisson and his brother-in-law, Médart Groseilliers [p-yâr' ës-pré' rä-dēs-sōn'; mā-där' gro-zā-yä'], worked their way past hostile bands and travelled to the southern shore of Lake Superior.

They spent a winter around Chequamegon Bay [shē-kwôm'-ē-gûn], exploring south and west of there, visiting and trading with Sioux, Cree, Huron and Ottawa. In the spring of 1660 the two traders returned to the St. Lawrence with sixty canoes of Indians and forty to fifty thousand furs. That same spring French garrisons had broken the Iroquois grip on the northern trade route and the way was open for development of the rich western lands.

The reports of Radisson and Groseilliers quickened interest in the trade and in missionary activity. The traders and merchants envisioned huge profits. Jesuit missionaries dreamed of souls to be saved, and renewed contacts with their Huron and Ottawa missions.⁵



Nicolet's landfall, near what is now Green Bay. Thinking he would meet Orientals, he wore a bright-colored robe. (From a painting in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin Museum).

Missionaries and Traders Travel West

Missionaries played an important part in opening new country, carrying Christianity to the Indians, and establishing missions, some of which were used as posts for the fur trade. The mission activity in Canada reflected the religious spirit of the 17th century. Spanish Jesuits and Franciscans carried on similar work among Indians in South America and Mexico. The work in New France was hard and dangerous, yet to die a martyr's death was the highest reward a missionary could have. Many of them achieved just that, some by

the hand of those they went to help, often after long, cruel torture. Letters and reports sent back to France, known as *The Jesuit Relations*, inspired people to give generously of their money and even themselves to the work of converting the Indians. The missionary spirit of self-sacrifice persisted during most of the 1600's.

Father René Ménard [rē-nā' mā-nār'] was the first Jesuit sent to work in the area recently explored by Radisson and Groseilliers. He was worn out at fifty-five after many years of working among the Indians, but he welcomed the chance to go out again. His attitude toward his new mission

reflected the attitude of all the missionaries. Before he left he wrote:⁶

In three or four months you may include me in the Memento for the dead, in view of the kind of life led by these peoples, of my age, and of my delicate constitution. In spite of that, I have felt such powerful promptings and have seen in this affair so little of the purely natural, that I could not doubt, if I failed to respond to this opportunity, that I would experience an endless remorse . . . and even if it should be our lot to die of want, it would be a great piece of good fortune for us.

Menard's prediction came true, although a few months later than he had thought. In the summer of 1661, looking for a Huron village near Lac Court Orielles [lāk kōō-tör-rā'] in northern Wisconsin, he got lost in the dense forests. Searchers were unable to find his body.

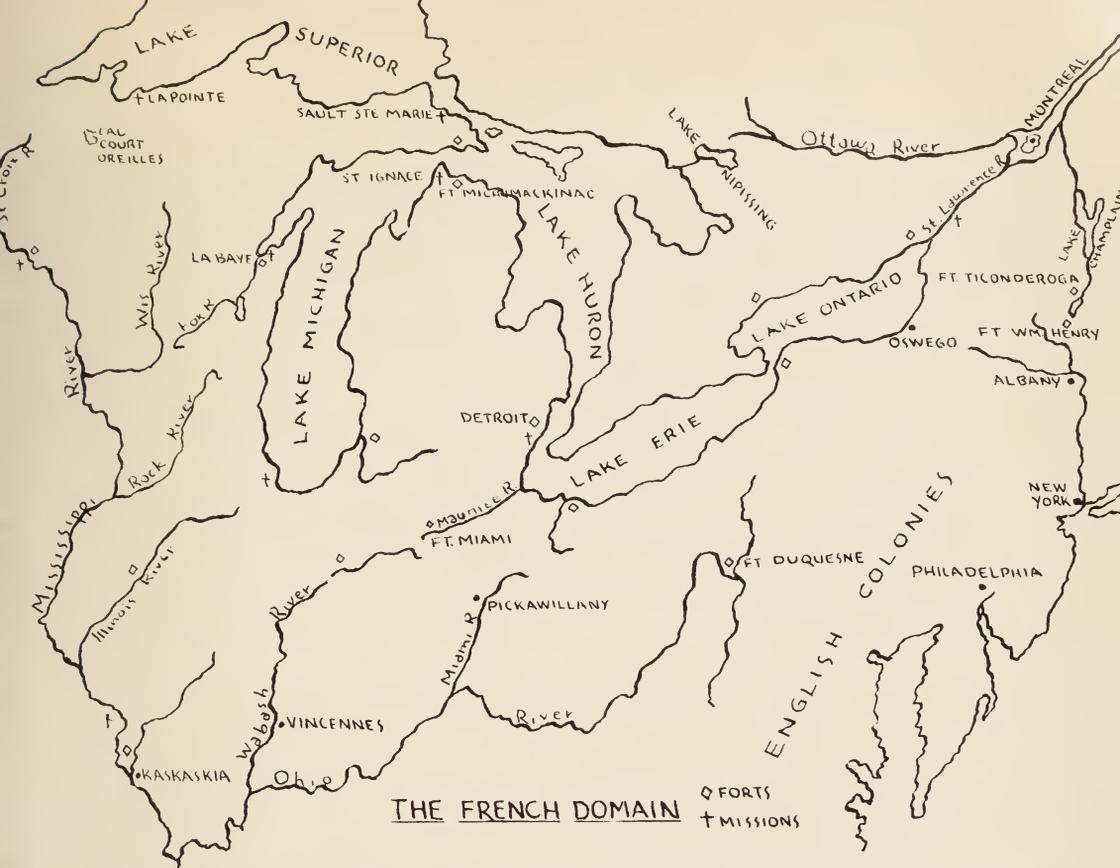
Four years later Father Claude Allouez [äl-lōō-ā'] arrived to continue the work. He established a mission on Chequamegon Bay, and called it *La Pointe du Saint Esprit* [pwänt dū sänt ēs-prē']. Later Father Jacques Marquette [zhäk mär-kët'] took over there, freeing Allouez to work near La Baye and on the Fox and Wolf rivers. Marquette in turn left *La Pointe* and founded *St. Ignace*, at Michilimackinac [mīsh-ī-lī-mäk'-ī-nô].⁷

In the early years of the trade, missionaries were often accompanied by *voyageurs* who helped them establish contact with Indians. The *voyageurs'* knowledge of the tribes was a valuable asset. Not much on-the-spot trading was done, for the Indians were willing to bring furs to the annual fair. The monopoly set-up

worked fairly well, and the trade was controlled without much trouble. Later, as a result of the disappearance of the beaver around the St. Lawrence, and the Iroquois wars, the western Indians had a longer trip to make and were not so eager to come east. Those who did often were intercepted by the English or the Iroquois and the French never saw the furs. To retain the western trade, the French had to establish posts and send traders out. Thus the method of carrying on the trade changed. The annual fur fair was held no longer. The *voyageur* became an even more important cog in the fur trade machinery, meeting Indians at outlying posts and in the wilderness, gathering furs to bring back to the St. Lawrence. As he went further from home, it was more difficult to control him.

Now trading licenses were sold each year for from 800 to 1,200 *francs* each. The license-holder, called the *bourgeois* [bōōr-zhwä'], had to provide the trading goods, canoes, *voyageurs* and provisions. He could send out from one to four canoe-loads of goods, worth from \$1,600 to \$1,900 each. Five to eight *voyageurs* were needed for each canoe. Those were usually recruited from the peasant class. They received an advance for their personal supplies. Most of them signed a contract with an X, binding themselves to work for only the one employer and do no trading on their own in the wilderness.

In the spring or fall, flotillas of canoes would outfit on the St. Lawrence. Spindly-legged *voyageurs*, their arms and shoulders over-developed from long hours of paddling, would be hard at work. The canoes were loaded with packs of Indian goods,



(St. Ignace and Ft. Michilimackinac were originally founded on the north side of the strait, and later moved.)

guns, ammunition and food. When all was ready, the *voyageurs* would pay a visit to Sainte Anne, their patroness, and be off. With red caps bobbing, wet paddle blades flashing in the sunlight, they set out for the western country to gather the annual harvest of furs.

The trip from Montreal to the western posts and back often meant a journey of 2,500 miles. One of the main routes was the one used by Jean Nicolet, up the Ottawa to the Mattawa and then to Lake Huron. Later, when the Iroquois danger was past, the route through Lakes Ontario and Erie was used. Frequently the canoes had to be unloaded and carried. Ninety pound packs would

be hoisted in powerful arms and taken around rapids, waterfalls and over portages. The *voyageurs* often waded through cold, swift rapids, whose bottoms were strewn with sharp rocks. Sometimes they slipped and went down. Then, after a hard struggle to get to shore, the trip had to be halted and the packs opened and dried. Usually the traders ate but two meals a day—morning and night. Dried corn or peas boiled in a kettle, biscuits, and sometimes fish, were the main food. There wasn't time to hunt game. If food ran low there was always *tripe de roche*, [trêp dè rôsh], a kind of moss which made a thin, not especially agreeable or tasty broth.

About 650 miles west of Montreal was Michilimackinac, guarding the strait between Lakes Michigan and Huron. There traders rested and re-equipped. Some might remain there and trade with Indians who brought in furs. Others pushed on, north to Lake Superior, south down Lake Michigan to the Illinois country, south and west by the important Fox-Wisconsin to the Mississippi. Those going to the Fox stopped at La Baye, another depot for furs. There Indians brought corn, peas, beans and other products to supply traders. At such posts Indians often made and sold birch bark canoes, getting two to three hundred *francs* worth of goods for them. Indians also purchased supplies with sheets of bark that were used for cabin roofs. In season the sale of wild strawberries was brisk.⁸

Voyageurs were experienced woodsmen. All knew the language and ways of at least one Indian tribe. They knew how to make canoes, and how to mend them when they were torn by snags or sharp rocks. They knew how to pack and bale furs, and how to judge the quality of beaver pelts. Traders liked their work. They liked the freedom of the woods, the adventures of unknown places. To many of them civilization was pale in comparison. And they sang. Their songs were as much a part of the *voyageurs* as their canoes and paddles, red caps and pipes. Songs were sung to the beat of the dipping paddles as the canoes skimmed along the streams and lakes, and they were sung around the campfire at night. Songs like *Mon Canôt D'écorce* ("My Birch-bark Canoe"):⁹

*Mon canôt est fait d'écorces fines
Qu'on plume sur les bouleaux
blancs;*

*Les coutures sont faites de racines,
Les avirons, de bois blanc.*

*Je prends mon canôt, je le lance
A travers les rapides, les bouillons;
Là, à grands pas il s'avance,
Il ne laisse jamais le courant.*

(My canoe's of birch, light as a feather

That is stripped from silvery birch;
And the seams with roots sewn together,

The paddles made of white birch.

(I take my canoe, send it chasing
All the rapids and billows acrost;
There so swiftly see it go racing,
And it never the current has lost).

Spending so much time in the woods, *voyageurs* became half-Indian, half-white. The more they adopted Indian ways, the better it was for business. It was a rough life, far removed from white man's law. Some might use any shortcut to gain furs at the least cost. Some traders were not above forgetting their contracts, and sold furs to the highest bidder, English or French. There were those who seized the opportunity to make a little on the side, and did some trading on their own. It wasn't an easy way to make a living; a man needed wit and experience to survive.

When *voyageurs* hit a settlement, after many months in the wilderness, they wanted relaxation. Their pleasures were simple, and usually noisy. Their parties and celebrations, carried on until money ran out, got them into trouble with more settled people. Yet the fur trade depended on the traders; it did little good to protest the wildness and the noise.



Fur traders and their canoe at portage.

Season after season traders went out, until they grew too old to paddle, too slow to keep up at portages. As one wrote about himself, in a later time, but still expressing the ageless spirit of the *voyageur*:¹⁰

I have been forty-two years in this country. For twenty-four I was a light canoe man; I required but little sleep, but sometimes got less than I required. No portage was too long for me; all portages were alike. My end of the canoe never touched the ground till I saw the end of it. Fifty songs a day were nothing to me; I could carry, paddle, walk and sing with any man I ever saw. . . . No water, no weather, ever stopped the paddle or the song. I have had twelve wives in the country; and was once possessed of fifty horses, and six running dogs, . . . I was then like a *Bourgeois*, rich and happy; no *Bourgeois* had better-dressed wives than I; no Indian Chief finer horses; no white man better-

harnessed or swifter dogs. I beat all the Indians at the race, and no white man ever passed me in the chase. I wanted for nothing; and I spent all my earnings in the enjoyment of pleasure. Five hundred pounds, twice told, have passed through my hands; although now I have not a spare shirt to my back, nor a penny to buy one. Yet, were I young again, I should glory in commencing the same career again. I would willingly spend another half century in the same fields of enjoyment. There is no life so happy as a *voyageur's* life; none so independent; no place where a man enjoys so much variety of freedom as in the Indian country. Huzza! huzza! *pour le pays sauvage!* [for the Indian country].

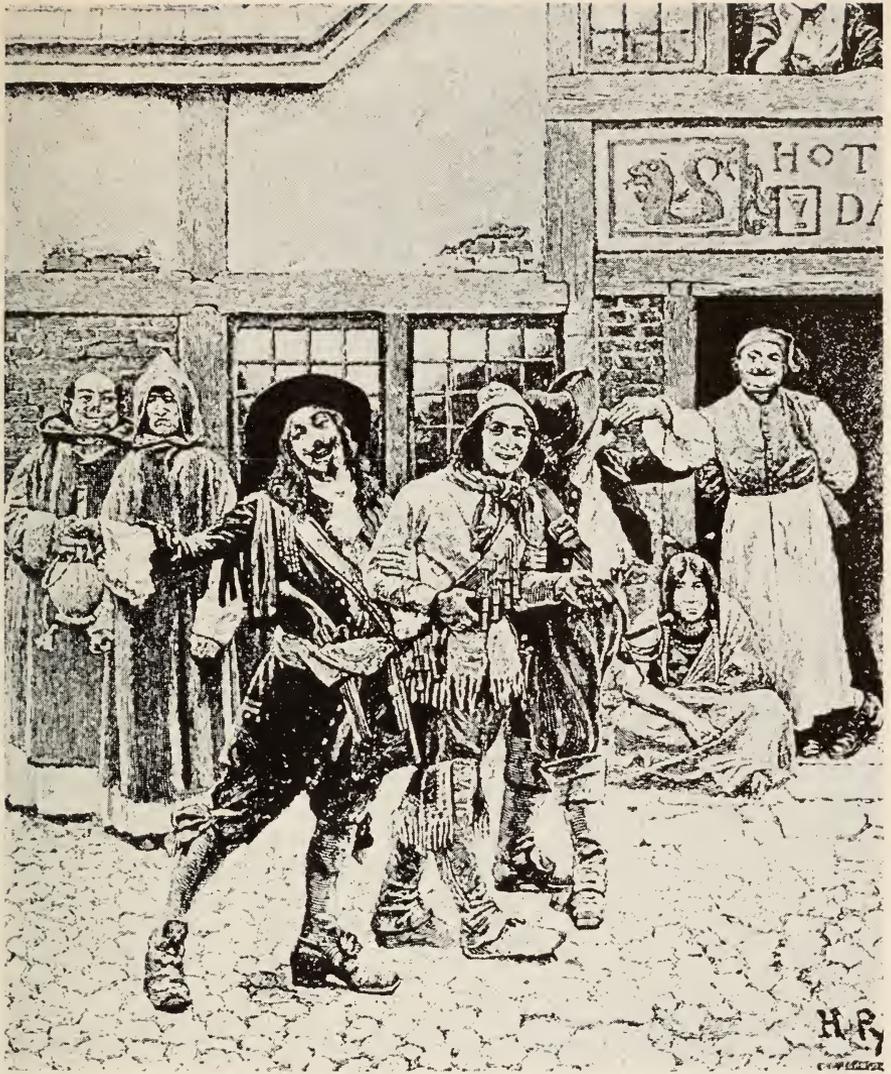
Troubles came with unlicensed trading. It was easy enough for a young man to trade without a license, depending on his knowledge

of the country to avoid the law and make a profit. Often the furs gathered that way could be sold at western posts to licensed traders who didn't want to go into the woods. Unlicensed traders, called *coureurs de bois* [kōōr-ī-ēr' dē bwä] or "wood rangers," became one of the most persistent problems in the control of the fur trade. They were difficult to catch in an area where the law was based on strength and craftiness. After Louisiana was settled in 1699 *coureurs de bois* found it easy to sell their furs there, and thus escape the laws of New France. The English were always willing to take furs too. Many illegal traders stayed in the woods, married Indians, and never returned to white civilization. In order to get furs, the government several times issued general pardons to *coureurs de bois*; but that didn't solve the problem for long.¹¹

The trader, licensed or unlicensed, often had a bad effect on the Indians. One of the most desirable goods the trader had was brandy. Not much of it was needed to make an Indian lose control of himself. When he did he became dangerous. Many settlements were disturbed and endangered by drunken Indians shooting guns and wildly swinging tomahawks. Once an Indian had experienced the effects of "fire-water" he would do almost anything to get more. Because of that missionaries didn't always get along well with traders. The Jesuits wanted to make Christians of the Indians and the job was hard enough without the influence of the traders and their brandy. The missionaries wrote many letters to the governor on the subject. The

Jesuits really wanted to get traders out of the West entirely and return to the old system of having Indians bring the furs to the St. Lawrence, where traders and goods could be better controlled. Traders argued that if they didn't supply brandy, the English would give the Indians rum, and thus get their furs and also turn them against the Jesuits. Rum or brandy, the effects were the same on the Indians.¹²

The profit to the trader was often small enough, and sometimes he had to use every possible means to keep furs coming in. For all his work he might make only about 1,800 *francs* in a good season. Therefore his trading was sharp. As one man said, "These sparks called *Coureurs de Bois* bite the savages most dextrously."¹³ The Indians were sharp in return, and soon learned to drive hard bargains. The trader sometimes got nothing for his goods. After selecting a large assortment of merchandise the Indian might say, "No money, now; no furs; I pay you when hunt is over," and he would leave. In a few moments he would be back. "How *can* I pay you," he would ask, "when I have no gun, no traps, no kettle? And my son and my brother and my father have no guns or traps. So lend me some." To keep the Indians' good will, the trader would usually give in. The Indian might die from an accident or in battle, lose the equipment, or he might forget the deal. If the articles lent came back at all, they were often in poor condition. Furs to pay for the goods might be sold someone else.¹⁴



Coueurs de bois, after a season of gathering furs.

The West Is Explored, and Claimed by France

In spite of Indian and *coureur de bois* troubles, France extended control over new fur lands with missionaries, traders and explorers. Louis

Jolliet [zhō-lyā'] and Father Marquette were sent to explore the Mississippi in 1673. Robert de La Salle pushed into the Illinois country and along the lower Mississippi. Men like Daniel Greysolon Duluth, Pierre

Le Sueur [lě sūr] and Nicolas Perrot [pā-ro'] explored a great deal of Wisconsin north and west of the Fox-Wisconsin. The land was mapped, forts were built, and Indians were won to the side of France. Missionaries were working at Michilimackinac, La Baye, Chequamegon Bay, in the Illinois country, on the Mississippi spreading Christianity and French influence.

In the summer of 1671, at Sault Ste. Marie [sōō sānt mā-rē], a ceremony of "taking possession" was held. In the presence of traders, missionaries and representatives of fourteen Indian tribes, large claims were made. A cross and a coat of arms were raised and King Louis XIV was proclaimed ruler of the Great Lakes region, "and all other countries, rivers, lakes and tributaries contiguous and adjacent thereunto, as well discovered and to be discovered, which are bounded on the one side by the Northern and Western seas and on the other side by the South Sea including all its length or breadth." Eighteen years later, Nicolas Perrot, one of New France's most influential and able *voyageurs*, staged a similar ceremony at Lake Pepin, on Wisconsin soil. There Louis XIV was proclaimed King of the Wisconsin area and the country of the Sioux.¹⁵ The English did not entirely agree with those bold claims.

The British Challenge, and Troubles With the Fox

The British presented increasingly serious competition. English traders seized every chance to get Indians to leave the French and deal with them. They also made good use of the Iro-

quois to cut into the French trade and make things difficult for Indian allies of New France. The English and Iroquois combination almost overcame the French during King William's War, which ended in 1697. It required all the power of arms and diplomacy of Count de Frontenac [frōn'-tē-nāk], then governor, to hold the empire together, and beat back a very serious threat.

Before the war the French had decided to pull out of the western posts and concentrate the fur trade on the St. Lawrence. The western land would be left to the missionaries. Indians could again come east with furs. Missionary influence helped make that decision. A surplus of furs and a drop in the price helped. Some traders still went out; it was impossible to keep them all out of the woods. But the official policy was to concentrate the trade in the east.

That soon proved to be no way to run a fur trade. The Indians were used to having traders come to them. Besides, some English posts were closer than any French settlement. English goods were cheaper too. An Indian could get a gun for two beavers at Albany, for instance, instead of the five it cost him at Montreal. Eight pounds of powder cost four furs at Montreal, which was four times the price at Albany. One beaver would buy six shirts at Albany, half what the Indian had to pay the French for them.

Indeed, such prices even attracted the traders of New France. In one year fifteen per cent of the furs entering Albany came from Montreal in payment for English merchandise. Neither the English nor the French authorities liked that state of affairs.

Apparently it was no way for competitors to act. Trade between whites was eliminated.

After King William's War the French knew they had to rebuild the western posts. In 1701 Detroit was built, to guard against further British advances and to serve as a center for the fur trade. Thinking a concentration of Indians around such forts might make for better control, the French invited several tribes to settle at Detroit. Potawatomi, Huron, Ottawa, Mascouten, Illinois and others agreed to move there.

One tribe of Wisconsin Indians wasn't so cooperative. That was the Fox, also called Reynard or Outagami. That group caused the French a lot of trouble, and helped influence the destiny of New France.

The Fox had become one of the most powerful tribes in the western Great Lakes region. They got into trouble with the French over the question of who was to supply the Sioux on the Mississippi with French goods. The Fox had been acting as middlemen, and enjoying good profits. The French wanted to go directly to the Sioux. Unable to stop them, the Reynard found a way of benefiting from the trade anyway. They began to charge a toll for letting French trade expeditions go up the Fox River. They treated traders with contempt and gradually the French came to look rather weak to other tribes.

The French asked, then insisted that the Fox move to Detroit. They were reluctant. Finally, after many threats and much persuasion, one band of them erected lodges around the fort in 1710.

That was the beginning of real trouble. During the winter of 1711-



Kee-o-tuck, a Fox chief
of a later day.

'12 the Mascouten and Ottawa had an argument and a few were killed. The Fox took the Mascouten side and the French supported the Ottawa. The whites rallied other tribes to a showdown with the Reynard. A nineteen-day siege of the Fox settlement resulted. Not many escaped. Those who did took a bitter story back to the other tribesmen still living in Wisconsin.

Wiping out the troublesome Fox now became an important part of French fur trade policy. The Reynard were equally determined to obstruct the trade in every possible way. The Fox Wars dragged on for twenty-five years before the tribe, almost liquidated, fled to new homes in southwestern Wisconsin and west of the Mississippi.

Those wars cut off the Fox-Wisconsin route to the Mississippi. The Fox also made it hard for the French to use the Lake Michigan-

Chicago portage route to the Illinois country. That forced a shift to the Lake Erie-Maumee-Ohio river trade route, in order to maintain connections with the Illinois forts. At the same time, the wars, plus the policy of concentrating tribes, had moved some Mascouten, Kickapoo and Miami eastward and settled them in the region of the Maumee and Wabash rivers. To maintain trade with those tribes. Frenchmen followed the migrating Indians.¹⁶

The British Challenge Grows Stronger—The French Reaction

Then into the region east of the Maumee-Wabash moved some Shawnee, Delaware, and other tribes from the Allegheny region. Those Indians depended on English traders for supplies. The British followed them. During King George's War, which began in 1744, the English were able to cut off the supply of Indian goods coming from France. The French trade suffered. It became impossible even to give away trading licenses. Even the faithful Ottawa and Huron were attracted to the English. The Indians were desperate for supplies, and the British were eager to oblige.

In 1748 a Miami-Shawnee delegation visited the English in Pennsylvania and made a treaty of alliance. The Miami then moved from their villages on the Maumee to a spot on the Great Miami river. There was built the town of Pickawillany, run by a chief named La Demoiselle [dë-mwä-zël'], also called Old Briton.

By the end of 1750 about fifty traders and over four hundred Indian families lived in the town. Hundreds of packs of English goods came

on mule-back over the Alleghenies. French commanders at Detroit and other forts could do little but watch as more and more Indians left to take their furs to the British.

Expeditions were sent to warn the English from the country claimed by France. Attempts were made to persuade the Indians to return to the French side. The Indians listened politely, the English agreed to leave. After the French expeditions left, things went on as before.

Then in 1752 lightning struck Pickawillany in the form of a band of Wisconsin Indians led by a half-French, half-Ottawa named Charles Langlade. Born in 1729, Langlade had lived all his life among the Indians and the fur trade around Michilimackinac and La Baye. Wise in Indian ways, he got a party of about 240 savages fired up for a raid against the hated British-Indian town on the Great Miami.

The war party approached the town at about nine o'clock in the morning on June 21. Only eight traders were in the place. Most of the Indians were out on the summer hunt. Three of the traders were caught outside the fort. The battle didn't last long. The whites in the fort held out until afternoon, when three of them surrendered and the other two escaped. The village was burned and the captives taken to Detroit. Old Briton was boiled and eaten by the victors.

That was lesson enough. The Miami, Huron and Ottawa returned to the French fold and the Shawnee made peace. The English stayed out of the area.¹⁷



Painting of a scene near a French fur trading post.

The Final Conflict

The struggle for control of the fur trade in the Ohio country set the stage for the final contest between France and England. The British were now ready to challenge the French claims made at Sault Ste. Marie eighty years before.

The French took the offensive and built forts in the Ohio valley. In 1755 the English counter-attacked, with Braddock marching on Fort Duquesne. Once again Langlade and his tribesmen helped the French. The British suffered another setback as the French and their Indians mauled and chased the redcoats back into the Pennsylvania woods. The future of North America was on the line.¹³

For a time it appeared that the colony of New France, numbering scarcely 100,000 people, might retain its hold on the vast network of waterways and the rich fur country. A few battles were won by French forces, like the capture of Fort William Henry in 1757 and some skirmishes around Ticonderoga. Charles Langlade and his Wisconsin Indians played a prominent part in both of those engagements. Superior British strength, control of the seas, and corruption within the government of New France proved too much for the

far-flung empire to withstand, however. The end came in September, 1759, when Quebec surrendered to an English army under Wolfe.

Charles Langlade had taken part in the defense of the city with some of his Indians. It fell to him to carry the news of the surrender to the West. The citizens of the western posts were to keep their property and religion, or they could migrate to France if they didn't want to become British subjects. Few of them left. France was a foreign country to them.¹⁴

Louis Beaujeu [bō-zhū'], commander at Michilimackinac, decided to evacuate his troops and make for the Illinois country, in the vain hope that France would make another stand there. Destroying what he couldn't take, Beaujeu and his men went to La Baye. The garrison there joined the retreat. As the days of Indian summer came, and the oak and maple leaves changed to red and gold, the last French expedition passed along the Fox-Wisconsin to the Mississippi. As it left the region French influence and power in Wisconsin and around the western Great Lakes went with it. The land that had been possessed with such great ceremony in 1671 and 1689 was French no longer.

The next year the British took over the western forts. Detroit was occupied and from there troops went farther west. A detachment of twenty-eight soldiers under Lt. William Leslie took possession of Michilimackinac in September. A month later a garrison arrived at La Baye. The fort there was in bad shape. The stockade was almost all down, the houses lacked roofs, and the whole place was rotting away. No one was there to welcome the British soldiers. Later, another garrison sent to the fort on Chequamegon Bay found starving Indians, desperately in need of supplies of all kinds.²⁰

The fur trade continued under the British and gradually moved north and west from the Wisconsin area. *Voyageurs* went out each season, made their trades, and carried furs back to the posts. They did their work, sang their songs, and enjoyed their strenuous entertainment much as they always had. Under French or British control, things were much the same for the *voyageur* and the valuable beaver.

What the French Left Behind

The Indian remained as dependent on the trade as ever. His old stone-age culture was now behind him. He had not yet caught on to the iron-age culture of the white man. Caught between the two, needing the goods the white men supplied, he was not sure how to defend himself, how to stay out of trouble. Too often he was driven to solving his problems by making war. With the better, easier life the fur trade might have brought the Indian, it also brought him a lot of sorrow.

The missionary influence on the Indians is hard to trace. The enthusiasm for mission life and martyrdom began to slacken toward the end of the 1600's. The Jesuits became involved in religious conflicts in France and in 1764 the order was dissolved. No tribe officially adopted Christianity. Except for old people and children, few were baptized. Most Indians could see little sense in the Christian ideas of loving one's enemies and humility. Perhaps though, some Indians were made less savage. Some people feel that Indians tortured fewer prisoners and that their warfare was more "civilized" during the next century. Perhaps the missionaries served as a balance to the fur trader who wasn't always a good influence on the Indians. The Jesuits in New France did leave shining examples of heroic deeds and perseverance against terrific odds.

For one hundred years Wisconsin had been the scene of wars, missionary work, exploration, and the fur trade. Indians there had contributed many rich pelts to the French empire and had fought both for it and against it. Yet Wisconsin was just an outpost, although an important one, and never a colony in any sense of the word. Thus the French influence was not lasting, as it was around the St. Lawrence. Reminders of the French period in Wisconsin are the names of rivers and cities, and the names of fourteen counties. All else is gone, except one important thing: a heritage, of missionaries struggling to convert Indians, traders making their deals and singing their songs, explorers pushing into unknown land, and a small, tree-felling, dam-building animal, which had caused it all.

NOTES

¹ Quoted in Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (New Haven, 1930), 25.

² Material on the beaver and the fur trade from *Ibid.*, 1-4, 10-11, 14-18; Francois Xavier de Charlevoix, *Journal of a Voyage to North America*, ed. by Louise P. Kellogg. (2 vols., Chicago, 1923), 1:140-56; Sieur Lamothe Cadillac, "Description of Michilimackinac," State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Collections* 16:356-57.

³ Louise P. Kellogg, *The French Regime in Wisconsin and the Northwest* (Madison, 1925), 65-83; Consul W. Butterfield, *History of the Discovery of the Northwest by Jean Nicolet in 1634* (Cincinnati, 1881).

⁴ Kellogg, *French Regime*, 84-100; Francis Parkman, *The Old Regime in Canada* (Boston, 1875), 41-83; *The Jesuits in North America* (Boston, 1870), 211-261.

⁵ On the various travels of Radisson and Groseilliers, *Voyages of Peter Esprit Radisson* (Reprint ed., New York, 1943); Grace L. Nute, *Caesars of the Wilderness* (New York, 1943).

⁶ Letter in Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (73 vols., Cleveland, 1895-1901), 46:81-83; Louise P. Kellogg, "The First Missionary in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 4:417-25 (1920-21).

⁷ Joseph S. LaBoule, "Claude Jean Allouez," Parkman Club Publication No. 17 (Milwaukee, 1897); Kellogg, *French Regime*, 153-56, 158-66. For over-all picture of missionaries in New France see Parkman, *Jesuits*.

⁸ Kellogg, *French Regime*, 203, 367-70; Cadillac, "Description of Michilimackinac," 350-57; Nute, *Voyageur*, 13-14.

⁹ Nute, *Voyageur*, 29-30. Quoted with permission.

¹⁰ Alexander Ross, *The Fur Hunters of the Far West* (2 vols., London, 1855), 2:235.

¹¹ Kellogg, *French Regime*, 356-66; Innis, *Fur Trade*, 62-63.

¹² Kellogg, *French Regime*, 384-85.

¹³ Baron de Lahontan, *New Voyages to North America*, ed. by Reuben G. Thwaites (2 vols., Chicago, 1905), 1:100.

¹⁴ "Narrative by Louis P. Porlier," State Historical Society of Wisconsin *Collections*, 15:440.

¹⁵ La Potherie, in Emma H. Blair, *Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi and the Region of the Great Lakes* (2 vols., Cleveland, 1911), 1:346-47; Nicolas Perrot, in *Ibid.*, 1:220-25; "St. Lussou Procès-verbal," State Historical Society of Wisconsin *Collections*, 11:26-29.

¹⁶ On Fox Wars and trade policies, Kellogg, *French Regime*, 268-341.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 413, 419, 420-23; Albert T. Volwiler, *George Croghan and the Westward Movement, 1741-1782* (Cleveland, 1926), 18-21; Augustin Grignon, "Seventy-two Years' Recollections of Wisconsin," State Historical Society of Wisconsin *Collections*, 3:198-99.

¹⁸ On Langlade at Braddock's defeat, Grignon, "Recollections," 3:214-15; Francis Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe* (2 vols., Boston, 1887), 2:425-26.

¹⁹ Kellogg, *French Regime*, 436-38; "Langlade Papers," State Historical Society of Wisconsin *Collections*, 8:215-17.

²⁰ "The British Regime in Wisconsin," State Historical Society of Wisconsin *Collections*, 18:237, 277; "French Regime in Wisconsin," *Ibid.*, 18:221-22; "Lieut. James Gorell's Journal," *Ibid.*, 1:25-26.

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A collection of Francis Parkman's writings has been edited and published by Samuel E. Morison under the title *The Parkman Reader* (Boston, 1955). The 500 pages of selections are arranged chronologically according to the events narrated. Some of the best writing on the French period is found in Parkman's works.

Important documents from the 73 volumes of Jesuit writings have been selected by Edna Kenton and published in one volume as *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (New York, 1954). Contemporary accounts of much of New France's history can be found in this.

A popular history of the French in Canada is Thomas B. Costain, *The White and the Gold* (New York, 1954). This covers the period up to the end of the 17th century.

Other books dealing with the French and the fur trade and written for younger readers, many containing certain amounts of fiction, include:

Merritt P. Allen, *The Wilderness Way* (New York, 1954), is a fictional story of a couple of traders with La Salle in western exploration. Jim Kjelgaard, *The Explorations of Père Marquette* (New York, 1951), is a landmark book, written with an emphasis on action, with many maps and pictures. Flora W. Seymour, *La Salle, Explorer of Our Midland Empire* (New York, 1939), is on about junior high school level, and contains information on La Salle's background before his explorations. Ronald Syme, *Bay of the North* (New York, 1950), is about Pierre Radisson. The "Bay" refers to his activity while working for the English around Hudson's Bay, after his service to the French. Louise H. Tharp, *Champlain, Northwest Voyager* (Boston, 1951), tells of some of the explorations made by Champlain. It is a little more detailed and for somewhat more advanced readers than Ronald Syme, *Champlain of the St. Lawrence* (New York, 1952).

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