

F 586
.V57
Copy 2

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

By Rev. Chrysostom Verwyst



By Transfer
JAN 28 1919

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Separate No. 173
From the Proceedings of the Society for 1916

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

By Rev. Chrysostom Verwyst



The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Separate No. 173
From the Proceedings of the Society for 1916

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

By Chrysostom Adrian Verwyst

I was born November 23, 1841 in the land of windmills, dikes, and wooden shoes, in Uden, a town of North Brabant, Holland. My parents migrated to the United States in 1848, and of my life in Holland I remember almost nothing.

The occasion of our removal to the United States was as follows: Rev. Theodore Van den Broek,¹ a Dominican priest, had come from Holland to this country in 1832 and had resided for a time in a house of his order, St. Rose, near Springfield, Washington County, Kentucky. In 1834 he removed to Green Bay where a brother Dominican, Father Mazzuchelli,² had been working among the whites and the Indians. Thereafter the two Fathers labored along the shores of Green Bay, sometimes separately, sometimes together. Father Van den Broek was stationed at Little Chute and along the upper Fox River until his death at Little Chute in 1851. In 1847 he re-

¹ Rev. Theodore J. Van den Broek, after officiating for the whites at Green Bay from 1834 to 1837, established in the latter year his mission for the Menominee at Little Chute on Fox River. The Indians built a wigwam for him and then a log church twenty-two by thirty feet, roofed with bark. Later the church was covered with boards, and about 1844 a schoolhouse was built. After the removal of the Menominee to their reservation in Shawano County, the mission buildings were used by the whites. See letters of Father Van den Broek in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, XIV, 192, 196-205.

² For a sketch of Father Samuel Charles Mazzuchelli see *ibid.*, 155-61. His *Memoir* (Chicago, 1915) has been translated and published in book form.



Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

turned to Holland on some family mission, and his description of the cheap and good lands to be had in Wisconsin induced many of the people of North Brabant, among them my father, to migrate thither. Accompanied by Father Van den Broek and by Father Goddard, a Franciscan, they set sail in three ships,¹ two of which landed at New York and the third at Boston.

On the latter ship my father had embarked. We were fifty-five days on the ocean but the voyage was a prosperous one and none of the passengers died at sea. On reaching America Father Van den Broek returned to the scene of his labors at Little Chute, while Father Goddard went with a number of his countrymen to Hollandtown, Brown County. This settlement was originally called "Franciscus Bush"² in honor of the patron saint of the church. On the arrival of our ship at Boston most of our fellow passengers went immediately to the West, but our family and another by the name of Verkampen were obliged, through lack of means to travel farther, to stay in Boston. It was in the month of May and we therefore made our living at first by going into the woods, to Dorchester and other places near Roxbury, and picking blueberries, blackberries, and huckleberries, and cutting water cresses.

Soon after our arrival a laughable adventure happened to our neighbor, Verkampen. Rooms had been engaged for the two families together, the Verkampens occupying those in front of the building and our family those in the rear. One night the owner came with a German boy who acted as interpreter and told Verkampen we would have to vacate the premises immediately. When Verkampen

¹ The three ships were named, respectively, Mary Magdalena, Liberia, and America.

² The settlement is still known as Franciscus Bosch.

Wisconsin Historical Society

at length comprehended the demand thus made upon him he seized an ax and made for the proprietor with the intention of scaring him away. The latter promptly beat a hasty retreat, but shortly afterwards Verkampen was arrested and lodged in jail. His poor wife was disconsolate. "Scarcely in America and my man in jail," she lamented. Verkampen, however, urged her not to feel worried. He was getting plenty to eat, more than he had ever enjoyed in Holland, and was living, he wrote, "like a prince in a palace."

A few days after his arrest many of the townsmen celebrated the Fourth of July by imbibing too freely of liquor, and as a result were landed in jail. Verkampen, who had a bottomless stomach, ate not only his own rations but also those of the drunken fellows incarcerated with him. For the first time in all his life, probably, he enjoyed a full meal. A day or two after the Fourth the prisoners were brought to trial. Verkampen, who was defended by a German lawyer, was dismissed since it was shown that the owner of the building had had no right to attempt to eject us in the middle of the night and that Verkampen had intended only to scare him away and not to kill him.

We soon removed to East Boston where my Father and my oldest brother engaged in the cooper trade. About the year 1850 we moved to Roxbury where they obtained employment in a rope factory. I have omitted to mention, I find, that prior to 1850 Father and my two brothers, Martin and John, went to Vermont to work on a railroad, and there John died. Thereupon my Father and my brother Martin returned to Boston or East Boston. We two boys--both of us still alive (1916)--attended the German Catholic school in Boston.

Finally, in the early spring of 1855, our family migrated to Wisconsin. We left Boston in pleasant spring weather

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

but when the train reached Rutland, Vermont, the same evening it was snowing and when we arrived at Albany it was raining. In the depot at Albany there was posted in a conspicuous place a large placard warning travelers against "thieves, pickpockets, and confidence men." The notice appeared somewhat strange to us but to our cost we found out that it was not uncalled for. Father engaged a man to convey our baggage to another depot, paying him in advance. When we arrived at the depot he refused to surrender our belongings unless we again paid him. In vain Father protested. Finally, he appealed to a policeman, and that worthy representative of law and order declared that Father had had no right to prepay the baggage man; so he was compelled to pay the bill a second time.

From Albany we went by way of Niagara Falls, where we passed over into Canada, to Detroit. The train moved very slowly, and it took us many days--how many I do not now remember--to reach Chicago. That city left a decidedly dismal impression on my boyish mind. It certainly did not look neat and clean like Boston. From Chicago we took a steamboat which brought us to Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Here mother and we two boys tarried for over a week while Father and my oldest brother started out in quest of land. Finally, they returned and we hired a conveyance to bring us and our baggage to Fond du Lac. On the way a man ran against our wagon; the two drivers became very angry, each blaming the other for the collision, and nearly came to blows. We dined at Green Bush¹ and arrived late that evening at Fond du Lac. The next morning we took a small steamer on Lake Winnebago which brought us to Menasha. From

¹ Greenbush is a town in western Sheboygan County. The first cabin was built there in 1844; the village was platted in 1848, and became a station on the plank road between Sheboygan and Fond du Lac.

Wisconsin Historical Society

there we took a wagon and through mud, stones, and deep holes on the road we finally came to Hollandtown in Brown County.

Father bought sixty acres of land from a man named Stephen Fink, and we started to erect a cabin of unhewn logs, the neighbors helping at the raising. The house had no floor but there was a wretched wooden chimney which at times smoked fearfully. In cold weather the occupants would be too warm in front while their backs were almost freezing. Luckily for us we carried a floor about with us in the shape of wooden shoes made of poplar. My brother, Cornelius, and myself worked hard all winter with Father cutting down hardwood and other trees and chopping them into logs about sixteen feet long. We tacked a piece of old cloth to our wooden shoes and tied strings together around our legs below the knees to prevent the snow from falling into our shoes. In this way we kept our feet dry and warm, better in fact, than we could have done with leather boots.

In the spring father would split fence rails, at which work we boys faithfully assisted him. After the clearing had been fenced, having neither horses nor oxen to plow the ground, we made potato hills and planted corn and potatoes, doing the work with heavy grub hoes. There was a clearing of about seven acres when we bought the land of which one-half was meadowland. We had to work like beavers all the year round and our only leisure was on Sunday afternoons, when we were allowed to visit the neighbor boys. At the end of four years of such toil we had thirty acres cleared, on which we raised wheat, rye, barley, potatoes, beans, and other vegetables.

In Hollandtown, where a stately brick church now stands, prior to 1855 a small church had been built. A priest used to visit our settlement about once a month,

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

the good man being obliged to walk all the way from Little Chute, a distance of about fifteen miles, over most horrible roads. Every Sunday we had religious services. As the church had neither steeple nor bell the blowing of a horn announced the time for religious services. An old man named Van der Hey used to give out the prayers and read a short sermon. The men and boys sat on one side of the church and the women and girls on the other. The women used to wear those queer Holland-fashioned dresses and some had gold earrings. Nearly all of them came to church in their wooden shoes. A man named Verhulst was doorkeeper and woe to the luckless canine that happened to get into the church. Verhulst would grab him in his giant hands and drag him out of the church, the poor dog howling loudly. Once outdoors Verhulst would swing the dog in a circle and hit him against the church, the animal meanwhile howling for mercy. When finally released the unfortunate dog would take care to avoid the vicinity of the church in future. Of course such proceedings did not serve to increase the gravity and attentive devotion of the youngsters.

Whenever the Father came from Little Chute there was always a great rush to get to him first to make one's confession. I think if any of our non-Catholic people had been present on such an occasion and had seen how we fairly raced to get to the priest first, they would have concluded that confession after all is not so difficult an ordeal as some of those outside the church have imagined it to be.

I will now give the names of some of the people I recall who were at Hollandtown and its vicinity in the period from 1855 to 1860: Van den Berg, Verkuilen, Kobussen, Verhulst, Van den Loop, Ballard, Beach, Fink, Eittings, Verkamp, Van der Jagt, Loftus, Curtin, Malloy, Glachine, Sievers, Kersten, Rolf, Kordsmeier, de Bruin, School,

Wisconsin Historical Society

Hoevenaar, Tillemans, Van Aerts, Hintermeister; besides these there were many others whose names I can not now remember.

My countrymen used to have an occasional jollification. There was, for instance, the carnival entertainment just before Lenten fast. After mass was over they would betake themselves to the home of Mr. Van den Berg. The house was a large building for those primitive days, and there they would dance--the younger generation, of course--all day till sundown, when all would go home. Night dancing was never carried on, and I believe the present generation religiously follows this custom of their grandparents; that is, they dance only during the day, and every decent woman and girl is supposed to be at home before dark.

Our people also had a guild, that is, a certain kind of society at the head of which were a king and a queen for the year. On an appointed day all the members would meet at the chosen rendezvous to shoot down the wooden bird, made of very tough material, placed at the top of a high pole like a flagstaff. Sometimes it took much shooting to bring down the last piece of the wooden bird, whereupon the lucky marksman would be proclaimed king, with the privilege of choosing a queen and getting a large silver heart made which he was to wear during the year as a token of his royal dignity. Of course innocent day-dancing and other jollification were indulged in by the younger generation on this great day.

Occasionally we heard of a fight, or of some poor fellow becoming tipsy, but nothing more serious than that occurred. There was universal good will among all and towards all. Our neighbors lived the simple life of hard-working, religious, God-fearing people. From time to time they gathered on Sunday afternoon at the house of

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

some neighbor, where the men played cards and took an occasional drink from a jug of liquor; the women, meantime, sipped their tea or coffee and chatted over household affairs and current news; while the boys found amusement in innocent games. Such entertainments fostered friendly neighborly feelings and promoted good will in the community. Indeed, in the four years I spent on the farm from 1855-60 I do not recall a single instance of a man or woman being arrested for disorderly conduct.

At house raisings and marriage feasts there would be some liquor consumed and all kinds of fun indulged in, but all with a neighborly feeling and not for the mere indulgence of drinking. When I recall my boyhood days in Wisconsin sixty or more years ago, I feel a certain regret that they are gone, never to return. It seems to me that people are now becoming too civilized, and their life is too artificial and filled with too much sham.

In those days bears, deer, racoons, and wild pigeons abounded. In some years pigeons could be seen on the ground and in the air by millions, but alas! man's greed has exterminated the wild pigeons. Year by year they become scarcer until now I believe there is not a single one in the whole length and breadth of the United States. We have exterminated the pigeon as we have exterminated the buffalo, and as we are fast exterminating the deer, elk, whitefish, and lake trout. The white man's philosophy seems to be summed up in Mark Twain's observation when told that we should provide for posterity: "Provide for posterity! Do something for posterity! *What has posterity done for us?*" In those days bears were plentiful and occasionally they paid unwelcome visits to the farmers' cornfields and pigpens. They were fond of pork and would often catch a squealing pig and make away with him to the woods to enjoy a hearty meal.

Wisconsin Historical Society

One day--it was on a Sunday and the people had all gone to church--a big bear invaded the precincts of Mrs. Van der Heide of Hollandtown. Hearing the squeals of one of her pigs, Mrs. Van der Heide rushed out of the house and saw a bear trying to carry one of them away. The animal was attempting to pull the struggling porker over a rail fence. In this he failed, however, for Mrs. Van der Heide, forgetting all fear, grabbed the hind feet of the pig and pulled with might and main while the bear, growling fiercely on the other side of the fence, did likewise. It was a pitched battle between the undaunted woman and the bear for the ownership of the pig, but at length the woman won. She told her little boy to take a stick and hit the bear on his hind legs. The bear growled fiercely but had to give up. Mrs. Van der Heide saved her pig, but the animal had to be butchered as it was so badly lacerated by the teeth of the bear. Everyone wondered at the courage of the woman and that the bear did not attack her. Let her name be immortalized in the annals of Wisconsin!

Occasionally an Indian would pay us a visit, although I never saw one in the village itself. The neighbors advised us not to give them anything when they came to beg for something to eat, for if we once gave them food they would come again and again. I considered their well-meant advice heartless. Mother, too, pitied the poor people when they would come asking for something to eat. I remember perfectly one occasion when she gave a hungry Indian a whole loaf of bread. He asked for a knife and cut off a slice two or more inches thick to eat immediately.

One time the Father in Little Chute had several guests at table, among them an Indian. When the meat was passed to the latter he emptied the whole dish into his bag thinking that it now belonged to him. The other guests

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

were not particularly pleased with the procedure, but the thing was done, and they had to make out their dinner as best they could.

Another time mother had made some homemade beer which consisted of hops, water, and molasses boiled in the wash boiler. This time the brew proved to be a failure. We had some neighbors as guests on Sunday afternoon, and some of this homemade product was served them, but very little of it was drunk for it was fearfully bitter. An Indian happened to come along, and mother offered him some of it, but after taking some of it in his mouth he spat it out. Mother afterwards threw away the remainder of the beer. Next day I was working, planting or hoeing potatoes near a creek that ran through our land. Suddenly I heard mother screaming at the top of her voice. I ran up to the house to see what was the matter. On reaching it I found four Indians on horseback who said they had come to drink the beer of which their comrade—the Indian of yesterday—had told them. We explained to them that we had thrown it all away because it was not good. Father, who was working near by for a neighbor, hearing mother's loud call came running with a pitchfork intent on defending his wife and children, but luckily he was not needed, the Indians laughing good-naturedly at the poor man's simplicity in thinking to fight four Indians with a pitchfork.

A neighbor of ours, a distant relative, Martin School by name, lived some three miles away in a deep valley, or rather ravine through which a creek ran. One night he heard some noise near the creek and thinking it was a deer coming to drink he tried to shoot it. His gun, which was one of the old-fashioned kind, failed to go off, and so he went back in the dark to his house to fix it. In a moment in rushed an Indian in a terrible rage, exclaiming:

Wisconsin Historical Society

“You want to shoot Indian! shoot Indian!” The poor man tried to make the Indian understand that he was very near-sighted and that he had thought it was a deer drinking at the creek. Gradually the Indian comprehended his explanation, which was given more by signs and motions than by words. The red man’s anger gradually died away but he insisted on having a dance then and there. Probably he had imbibed too much fire water somewhere. So School had to do the singing and clapping with his hands to keep time, while the Indian danced around on the floor until finally he became tired and departed.

On one occasion in the wintertime my oldest brother, Martin, who used to work every winter in the pineries near Green Bay to help support the family, was walking along when he came upon a drunken Indian. The latter insisted on dancing with him immediately. Martin had never danced in all his life and, in fact, knew no more about dancing than the man in the moon, but dance he must, for the Indian demanded it and to refuse might cost him his life. So the two jumped around in the snow on the road, yelling as loudly as they could to keep time and moving about like two inmates of a lunatic asylum. My brother began to get tired of this strenuous exercise, but he dared not stop for fear of the Indian’s gun. At length the Indian suddenly started off and Martin gladly took the opposite route.

The roads in those primitive days were generally poor, often in miserable condition. The only good one I knew of was the Military Road from Fond du Lac to Green Bay. It was a plank road from the county line between Calumet and Brown counties to Green Bay, a distance of about twenty-four miles. The south end of the road—not planked through Calumet County to Fond du Lac—

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

was fairly good, considering the general condition of Wisconsin roads in those days, but it was very poor when compared with the public roads of the present time. Two or three times in my boyhood days I went to Green Bay on this plank road; the first time with my father about the year 1857. My brother had earned a little over \$200 in the pinery north of Green Bay, but instead of the cash had received only a note, or check, for his pay. He had left the check with Timothy Howe¹ in Green Bay for collection. I went along with father to act as interpreter on this occasion; but we made a long journey of some fifty miles going and returning for nothing. Ever since then I have felt rather unkindly toward lawyers. The second occasion was about a year later when I went to call Martin Van den Broek, then working in Green Bay, to the funeral of his father. The latter had died from the effects of partaking too freely of ice-cold water while assisting in haymaking at Ballard's farm. On this occasion I walked continuously for twenty-four hours, going to Green Bay in the daytime and returning to Hollandtown the ensuing night, a total distance of about fifty miles.

The most wretched road I remember was the one from Hollandtown to Kaukauna, or Kaukaulo, as it was then called. This road followed no particular town or section line but zigzagged through the woods. There were innumerable mudholes, each one apparently worse than the rest, and no attempt had been made to improve the road. It struck the river bottom not far from Beaulieu's Mill

¹ Timothy Otis Howe, who was born in Maine in 1816, came to Wisconsin in 1845 and opened a law office at Green Bay. He was circuit judge from 1850 to 1855, when he resigned and retired to private practice until his election in 1861 to the United States Senate. He was twice reelected and was tendered the positions of chief justice of the United States and of minister to England, both of which he declined. In 1881 he was appointed postmaster-general and while an incumbent of that office died, Mar. 25, 1883.

Wisconsin Historical Society

and then continued up the river to the dam, above which people would cross the river to the village of Kaukaulo. This consisted of some half a dozen houses in addition to a store kept by Hunt. On the south side of the river there were in 1855 only two settlers; one was Beaulieu, an Indian, or half-breed, who had a small farm and a grist-mill;¹ the other was one Sanders, a Dutchman, who had a large farm across the river from Hunt's store.

One time a Dutchman named Jan den Dickken (John the Thick, John the Fat) wanted to buy some pork at Hunt's store. Someone had told him he should ask for pig's pork. When he told Hunt what he wanted, the latter did not understand him. Finally, thinking that John wanted to buy a pitchfork, he brought some samples of the latter article for him to choose from. "No, No! Pick pork!" replied John the Fat. Luckily a pig chanced to run by the door, whereupon John pointed at it, at the same time making a motion with his knife as if he wanted to cut off a piece. Thus assisted Hunt at length comprehended the fat Dutchman's request.

In those days it was sometimes difficult to obtain provisions. For some time our nearest store was Hunt's at Kaukauna, eight or nine miles away. After some years Bertus Van den Berg opened a store at Hollandtown, and then we were no longer compelled to travel through mud and slush to Kaukauna to procure the necessaries and conveniences of life. Before our arrival at Hollandtown things had been still worse. Some of the settlers actually had to carry sacks of flour on their backs all the way from

¹ Paul H. Beaulieu settled on the south side of Fox River in 1835 and purchased the mill that had been erected by the government for the Stockbridge Indians. He died at Kaukauna in 1850. His son Basil was a partner in the mill, and in 1842 first clerk of the town of Kaukauna. In 1871 the Beaulieu property was sold for a paper-mill site, and in 1878 Basil removed to White Earth, Minn., where he died in 1894.

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

Green Bay to Hollandtown, a distance of about twenty-four miles. I remember vividly an incident of my own boyhood days. Father and I carried a sack of grain, either wheat or rye, I have forgotten which, on our backs to Beaulieu's gristmill about a mile or so below the dam opposite Hunt's store. It was a trip of some sixteen miles going and coming, over horrible roads. We were compelled to make this trip three times before we got our grain ground.

After a time things grew more convenient. In the wintertime farmers near Fond du Lac used to take loads of flour to Green Bay, a distance of about sixty-five miles. Of course they would gladly sell their whole load somewhere on the way if they could find a buyer. John Kobussen, our rich neighbor, occasionally bought one or more loads of flour and then disposed of it to his neighbors.

There was a stopping place at Dundas, about one mile from our place, kept by an enterprising American named Beach, the father of a large family of boys. He kept the post office and had a large, well-cultivated farm. At his place most of the travelers and flour sellers were in the habit of stopping. He was about twenty-five years ahead of his surrounding neighbors with respect to his buildings and other improvements. On one occasion a Hollander asked Beach to give him the post-office address in full, in order that he might send it to his Boston relatives. Beach wrote: "Send your letters to Dundas Post Office, Calumet County, Wis." Thereafter the Boston correspondent would always address his letters to his Wisconsin relative thus: "Mr. Henry Fink, send your letters to Dundas Post Office, Calumet County, Wis." Naturally the queer address caused much merriment among the postmasters.

Another enterprising Yankee, a regular New Englander, was Ballard, a good-hearted industrious bachelor. I often

Wisconsin Historical Society

worked for him, for he lived only half a mile from our place. In spring and fall especially, he would hire "the general," as he delighted to call me, to help him plant or dig potatoes and do other light work. He kept his house scrupulously clean and tidy and had periodicals and newspapers and quite a library. With "the general" he would discuss all kinds of questions, occasionally urging me to hurry up when I paid more attention to my employer's talk than to my work. He doubtless conceived a liking for me because I was fond of reading and he had a large number of well-chosen books which I delighted to read.

Road making was carried on in those days in rather primitive fashion. The citizens would vote a certain amount of road tax at the regular town meeting, or election day. The farmers elected a "pathmaster" who had charge of the roads in a certain district. When the time came to work on them, he would send notice to all the tax payers within his district to come on a certain day to the place appointed to work on the road. The farmers would meet, perhaps at nine o'clock in the morning, with axes, shovels, and grub hoes and begin to build a corduroy bridge over some creek, throwing over the logs a few shovelful of dirt; or, if there was a mudhole to be filled up, they would cut some green brush, throw it into the hole, and scatter over it a few shovels of earth and lo! the road was fixed. More than once I have worked on the road and though but a boy of fifteen to seventeen years I believe I did more work than the average farmer when working out his road tax.

I traveled very little during my boyhood. I went a few times to Green Bay, Appleton, and Little Chute. As to Depere I have no distinct recollection, although of course I must have passed through it on my way to Green

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

Bay. In those days we called the place "Rapides des Peres," which was afterwards abbreviated to Depere. The ancient name, a French appellation, was derived from the fact that from 1672 to about the year 1720 the Jesuit Fathers had a house of their order and a church there.

In a letter dated at Green Bay, June 11, 1831, Right Reverend Bishop Fenwick of Cincinnati speaks of Reverend Mazzuchelli as having traveled with him from Mackinac to Green Bay; also of Mrs. Dousman,¹ a pious Catholic widow. I met the latter later on in Keshena in 1866 where she was then a teacher, perhaps also a government interpreter to some extent. She acted as interpreter for me also, and I never saw a woman so lively, energetic, and expressive in gesture and tone in her conversation. The Bishop also states in the letter to which I have referred that he had chosen the site for a new church halfway between Averino (Navarino) and Shantytown, for which two acres of land had been promised. I remember passing through Shantytown on my trips to Green Bay and hearing the people speak a language of which I could not understand a word. I learned afterwards that they were Belgian Walloons.

I made several trips to Appleton. On one of them, I remember, I went with a neighbor of ours to get a load of grain ground. Both Green Bay and Appleton seem to me to have been then about the size of Bayfield at the present time. Little Chute was a rural hamlet with from twelve to fifteen houses, a store belonging to John Verstegen, and a long, low, frame church on the bluff facing Fox River. The majority of the farmers in that vicinity were Hollanders who had come to America in 1848 and the following years.

¹ For a sketch of Mrs. Dousman see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, XIX, 105, note 42.

Wisconsin Historical Society

Farming in those days on land full of stumps and roots was conducted in very primitive fashion. When a man had succeeded in cutting down the trees and chopping them into logs of fourteen to sixteen feet in length, he had to pile them up. This was a laborious task, especially if he had no oxen or horses. I remember how, when I was a lad of about thirteen, we had to work with might and main to roll up the heavy logs into piles to burn. Father was a small man, below medium size, but Mother was a large and strong woman and we boys had to work like little men. When the difficult task of burning the logs and brush had been accomplished, we cultivated the land thus wrested from the primitive forest.

For the first two years we had no oxen and so were compelled to plow with heavy grub hoes. Oftentimes our wrists would ache from digging and working in the hard, rooty ground. We would hoe a great number of hills in which to plant potatoes and corn. When the plants appeared above ground it was necessary to hoe them again to kill the weeds and get the crop to grow. Of course we had to dig the potatoes with our heavy grub hoes and stow them away in some kind of root house or cellar. It was hard, slavish work throughout the entire year. There were no mowing machines, and I remember seeing Father cut our grain with a sickle, such as was used 4,000 years ago. The first improvement on the sickle was the cradle, with which a good cradler might cut five acres in a day, provided he had strong arms and an iron will. Haymaking was carried on much as it had been in Old Testament times. Heat, fatigues, and sweat were expended lavishly in procuring food for the stock.

In spite of the want of modern machinery, however, the farms grew in size and value year by year. First, five to ten acres of stumpy and rooty land, a small log

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

house with wooden chimney and floor made of hewn logs or rough boards, a small stable for the cattle, a pigpen, and a henhouse—such were the rude beginnings of farm life in those days. However, things began gradually to change for the better. Frame house and barn took the place of the old log buildings; horses replaced the slow, patient oxen; the roads became more fit for travel; board fences replaced those made of rails; thus primitive Wisconsin developed into one of the most prosperous states of the Union. This transformation was largely wrought by the strong arm and tireless industry of the now-sometimes-despised foreigner. The German, Dutch, and Irish immigrants dug our canals, built our railroads, cleared our forests, and made a paradise of what was but a few years before a dreary wilderness, the habitation of uncivilized Indians and of wild animals.

In the summer of 1859 I determined to train for the priesthood and began to study Latin, Greek, and French under the instruction of our first pastor in Hollandtown, Reverend Father Spierings. He was a countryman of mine and was also a dear friend whom I shall never forget. After the death of my father Reverend Spierings sent me to the Seminary of St. Francis near Milwaukee to continue my studies. A neighbor took me as far as Brothertown and from there I walked all the way to Fond du Lac, arriving late in the evening or rather in the night. If ever there was a tired boy, I was the one, for I had walked twenty-five or thirty miles carrying a heavy grip. Next day I took the train to Milwaukee and walked out to the Seminary, a distance of about five or six miles. A Jew, a countryman, accosted me on the sidewalk and, overflowing with suavity, smiles, and friendliness, invited me to enter his store and urged me to buy a watch, but his officiousness and excessive suavity made me distrust him.

Wisconsin Historical Society

I began to surmise that he must be a Jew, a race of which I had heard so much at home, and I told him I did not need a watch just then, nor anything else. He then pressed me to buy at least a pair of suspenders, but without avail, and I finally got away from my importunate Jewish countryman.

My seminary days were passed during the stormy period of our Civil War, 1861-65. I was drafted for service but I attempted to be released on the plea of being a subject of the king of Holland. To establish this fact I obtained from our Dutch consul in Milwaukee a document about two feet square, the cost of which was \$3. Armed with it and with \$300 in my pocket, partly procured at home and partly through the efforts of kind friends, especially Father Gernbauer, I presented myself at the provost marshal's office in Milwaukee. That officer questioned me as to my parents and I told him that Father had taken out his first citizenship papers in Boston; and that subsequently he had voted in Wisconsin, as other aliens had done. I was thereupon most solemnly declared to be a citizen of the United States, having been a minor when I came into the country in 1848 and my Father having voted; accordingly I was told to step into a side room to be examined. I was as sound as a dollar and knew that I would not have any chance to escape military duty on the score of physical ailments or defects. So I told the marshal I would pay the commutation fee of \$300, in order to be absolved from military duty. I was then taken by a soldier to an adjoining building where I paid my money and received a receipt exempting me from military duty for three years. This document is still preserved in the courthouse in Superior.

I walked back to the Seminary in a very pensive mood. About three or four months later came the spring election,

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

and as I had paid \$300 for my American citizenship I thought I would go to the polls to vote. The voting lords recognized that I was a stranger and some one challenged my right to vote, requiring me to swear to my citizenship. I told them how I had been drafted and been declared a citizen liable to military duty, and that I had paid \$300 commutation money to exempt me from military service. Notwithstanding this the election board declared I was no citizen and, therefore, had no right to vote. I was so deeply disgusted at this manifest humbug and conceived so great a dislike for Uncle Sam that I did not take out my citizenship papers until about fifteen years later.

During my vacation time in the summer of 1862 I was working at a neighbor's place helping to thresh grain. I believe it was the first time I ever saw grain threshed with a machine instead of with the flail as had always been done in my boyhood. While thus engaged there suddenly came to us the startling report: "The Indians are coming! they are killing the whites!" The threshing ceased instantly and every man hastened home to get his gun to go to fight the Indians. I, too, hurried home. Father was dead, and Mother and Brother Cornelius were the only remaining members of the family. The latter was confined to the house on account of a sore foot. Not having bullets or lead, I pounded some pewter spoons into bullets and started for Hollandtown with loaded gun. There all was in an uproar. People had abandoned their farms in terror and dismay, some to hide in the woods, others to seek refuge in the village. Reverend Van Luytelaar was then the pastor of the Hollandtown congregation. His house was full of women with crying babies, many of whom were laid crosswise on his bed. All kinds of wild reports were in circulation; some said that the Indians

Wisconsin Historical Society

had been driven into a swamp and surrounded; others had still wilder tales to relate.

I think it was in the afternoon when we first heard of the Indians coming and killing the white people. It was decided that after dark some men should be posted on the outskirts of the town as sentinels to watch and report any Indians that might be coming; others, myself amongst the rest, were to go to the intersection of the Military and Kaukaulo roads and watch there. It was a bright, moonlight night when my worthy neighbor, Ballard, carrying two guns, and I wended our way homeward, for we were hungry, not having eaten anything since noon. "Look out general," the fat Yankee would say to me, when I would walk carelessly along, "look out, general, walk as much as possible in the shade, not in the moonlight. The Indians may see and shoot you." At length we posted ourselves behind a fence near the road. Woe to the poor Indian, if he had come along that way! He would have been shot down without mercy or inquiry. Luckily no redskins showed themselves, and we finally got up and went home.

After eating supper I went alone to the crossing mentioned above. There was a small clearing near by in which I noticed a fire burning. Probably the people had been burning brush and chips on the land that afternoon and had fled into the woods or to town when news of the Indian foray came. Seeing nothing suspicious I walked a few rods from the road into the woods, stood my gun up against a tree, and lay down and slept soundly until morning, for I was tired out by the day's work and my trip to the village and return. I learned afterwards that some men, who had been working on the Fox River Canal near Little Chute and whose folks lived in or near Hollandtown, had been on their way to this village that night.

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

When they reached the intersection of the Military and Kaukaulo roads they saw the fire and all at once some pigs began to squeal. "Oh! the Indians are there! See the fire! Hear the pigs! They are killing everything!" And my brave countrymen ran at top speed back to Little Chute to tell the terrified people there the fearful news about the Indians' doings. Of course they had not seen a single Indian, but terror made them imagine all kinds of wild sights. The next day the Indian scare which, I subsequently learned, extended all over Wisconsin was over, and many a ludicrous story was told about what had been done during the universal fright.

This scare on the part of the people of Wisconsin, especially of those dwelling in the northern part of the State, was not without some reason, for at that very time Hole-in-the-Day had planned to attack Crow Wing, Minnesota, and kill the whites there and in that vicinity. The project was frustrated by the efforts of a venerable Catholic priest of seventy-seven years, Reverend Father Pierz¹ (Pirec was his Slavonian name) who induced Hole-in-the-Day to give up his cruel design.²

¹ Francis Xavier Pierz was born in Carniola, Austria, in 1785. At the request of Father Baraga, Pierz in 1835 came to the United States and was a missionary at Sault Ste. Marie, La Pointe, and l'Arbre Croche. In 1852 he removed to Crow Wing on the Mississippi where he ministered until 1864. In 1873 he returned to his native land where he died in 1880.

² As the writers on the Minnesota massacre, either designedly or from ignorance do not mention this fact, I will give the account as it is found in *Acta et Dicta*, III, 83-84, published by the St. Paul Catholic Historical Society:

"Through his [Rev. Pirec's] influence with the chiefs he frequently averted wars and hostile expeditions among them. He prevented the threatened massacre of the inhabitants of Crow Wing in 1862. From a friendly Indian he received the information that the Red men of Leech Lake under the leadership of Chief Holeda were preparing to attack the above named village. Father Pirec at once set out towards the camp in a dark forest. When approaching the place where the council of war was held he was halted by two heavily armed horsemen, who refused to let him pass the "dead-line." The sentinels informed him that no white man was allowed to pass alive beyond that spot. But as

Wisconsin Historical Society

On November 5, 1865 I was ordained with many others and sent to New London, Wisconsin. The village at that time was small and the inhabitants consisted of Americans, Irish, Germans, and Poles. I think New London was not far from the site of the ancient village of the "Oudagamig" after whom Outagamie County has been named.¹¹ I had the whole of Waupaca County for my mission district and I was almost always on the road traveling from one place to another. The people, mostly Irish, were very kind to their priest and many a pleasant evening I spent with them, they telling me about old Ireland and generally winding up their narratives with some uncanny ghost story. A few days after my arrival in New London I had to go to Waupaca, the county seat, to register my clergyman's certificate. It was a warm, sunny afternoon

the good father insisted, he was lifted bodily from the ground and carried across the danger point. The chiefs were sullen and silent at the approach of the aged black-robe; but after half an hour's convincing and serious talk on the evils of war Pirec succeeded in showing them how useless it is for them to wage war against the whites. Holeda finally grasped the missionary's hand and promised that the next day the chiefs would come to Crow Wing to make peace. Matters were finally settled in an amicable manner the following day."

This is but a summary account of the affair. Many years ago I read a more detailed description of it, but I cannot find it now. There is no doubt that Father Pierz averted—and that at the danger of his own life—the intended massacre of the whites at Crow Wing. He took his life in his hands in daring to go to the hostile Indian camp. What saved him from being killed was the respect they had for him, knowing him to be a kind-hearted, good old man. None of the Indians, as he afterwards declared, was Catholic.—C. A. V.

¹¹ These Indians called themselves "Miskwakig," that is, "Red Land People," probably from the fact that they inhabited a country where red clay was the predominant soil. They were called by the French, Reynards (Foxes), and their territory seems to have stretched northward from Lake Winnebago and along the Wolf and Fox rivers. They were constantly at war with the Chippewa and later on with the French. Father Claude Allouez, S. J., first visited them early in the spring of 1670 and on March 25 of that year, St. Mark's Day, he said Mass at their village for the first time and hence named the place "The Mission of St. Mark." From Marquette's map of 1674 it appears that the village was located on Wolf River about due west from the head of Green Bay at Depere, which would indicate that it must have been somewhere in the vicinity of New London.—C. A. V.

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

when, on horseback and but thinly clad, I started for Waupaca via Weyauwega, but the weather soon changed. Shivering with cold I came to Weyauwega where I stayed over night. Next morning I continued my journey, the weather being still very cold. On the way the horse stumbled and fell, throwing me over his head on to the frozen ground. Luckily no bones were broken but my wrists ached from striking the hard ground with my hands. I rode on, however, and about noon arrived at Waupaca. I put up at a hotel and after dinner called upon the proper county official and had my certificate registered. Then I started homeward via Ogdensburg, Royalton, and Northport to New London. The weather was so cold that I was frequently forced to dismount and walk in order to warm myself somewhat; then I would mount and ride until the biting wind forced me again to take to walking. Finally, after dark, I arrived at the house of Sullivan, near Royalton, where I stayed over night. After a good warming up and an appetizing supper, I was shown my bedroom. "Father," said Mrs. Sullivan, "not long ago a woman died in that room and before she died she saw five ghosts coming into it." A creeping sensation of terror came over me at this news of walking spirits. I believe in all my life I never said my bedside prayers as fervently as I did that night; but I was tired out by the hardships of the day and when I got into the warm bed I slept as soundly as a bear, and if ghostly visitors put in an appearance I did not notice them. Next day I returned safe and sound to my residence, which consisted of a couple of rooms in the second story of an old frame house. Later on I built a small parsonage for myself near the church.

Towards the end of December, 1865 I went to Keshena via Bear Creek, Clintonville, and Shawano, riding all

Wisconsin Historical Society

the way on horseback and carrying my vestments in a saddlebag. Here and there were small clearings and poor log houses. At Clintonville I saw but one house in the midst of a small clearing. Whether there was a village of the same name somewhere else, not on my route, I can not tell, but I believe not. At Shawano, which was then but a mere hamlet, I stopped over night at the house of Doctor Wiley, who was married to a daughter of Mrs. Dousman, a half-breed lady, one of whose daughters was a government teacher at Keshena.

The Menominees were first visited by Father Allouez in 1669, and subsequently by Father André, S. J. Father Marquette, who stopped at their village in 1673 on his voyage of discovery and exploration of the Mississippi, says that some of them were Christians. They tried to dissuade him from his intended exploration, depicting in most lively fashion the many dangers which he would encounter.¹ In 1853 Reverend Father Skolla, O. S. Fr. St. Obs. went to them and labored among them about two years.² They finally turned against him for various superstitious reasons. Occasionally Father Skolla played chess all by himself in his poor habitation, while some distrustful Indians watched him stealthily through some window or aperture in the wall. Seeing the chessmen of two different colors arranged on the board, fighting one another as it were, they concluded that the game was "bad medicine" used by the whites to exterminate the red man. The Father had also a large cat to which at

¹ See Reuben G. Thwaites (ed.), *Jesuit Relations* (Cleveland, 1896-1901), LXIV to LXIX, *passim*.

² Rev. Otton Skolla, born in Carniola, Austria, in 1805, was ordained in 1831 and came to America in 1841. He was stationed at Detroit in 1842; at Mackinac, 1843-45; and at La Pointe from the latter year to 1853. Thence he was sent to the Menominee Indians for whom he built a chapel at Keshena, Wis. Father Skolla died at Fiume, Austria, in 1879.

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

times he would talk or say some words, and this again was interpreted as "bad medicine," for how could a man converse with a cat if they did not understand each other? At length a pagan Chippewa told them that the Father dug up the bodies of the dead (I suppose also for "bad medicine") and, pointing to a box on which he was sitting, asserted that it contained human flesh. These absurd and malevolent stories turned the people against the priest and he was obliged to leave in 1855, returning to his native land, where he died many years later.

After Father Skolla's departure Father Mazeaud¹ was stationed in Keshena, where he became imbroiled with the Indian agent and was arrested for persisting, contrary to the agent's prohibition, in having church services during a season of smallpox. At the time I visited the natives in 1865 and in March, 1866, they had had no divine service for some years. The first time I visited Keshena I stayed for some days at the house of the Indian agent, who treated me very kindly. The second time, in March, I stayed at the house of Mrs. Dousman, who acted as my interpreter. Later on Father Maschelein² had charge of the Menominee mission for many years, but as he was getting old and infirm the mission was finally given in charge to the Franciscan Fathers. They continue to labor there, having a large frame church and boarding school for Indian children not far from the government school.

In 1868 I was sent by Right Reverend Bishop—after-

¹ Father Mazeaud was a French priest who officiated at Keshena, 1863-64. He was arrested and taken to Shawano where he was released and departed for Milwaukee, never to return.

² Father Amandus Maschelein was at Keshena from 1875 until 1880. He built the Catholic church for the Menominee in 1875. He did not know their language and was obliged to communicate through an interpreter. In September, 1880 the Franciscans from St. Louis arrived and the aged priest, Maschelein, retired.

Wisconsin Historical Society

wards Archbishop--Henni¹ of Milwaukee to Hudson. Here I had a large territory under my care, namely, St. Croix, Polk, and Pierce counties, my mission extending from Long Lake in Polk County to Diamond Bluff, about fifteen miles below Prescott. The principal places were Hudson, Prescott, Big River, Somerset, and Farmington.

Hudson was at that time (1868-72) a thriving town with a good farming country adjacent. Before the railroad was built into it the farmers from Erin Prairie, New Richmond, Hammond, Pleasant Valley, and other places used to haul their grain to Hudson and do their trading there. I think the railroad took much of this trade away as thereafter people brought their grain to the nearest railroad station and did their trading at that place.

There are two St. Croix lakes, the upper and the lower. The upper lake extends from Solon Springs--formerly White Birch--to Gordon. The Chippewa name is Wigwasikag (Wig-wau-se-kaug), which means a place where there are many white birch trees. They call St. Croix River "Manominikeshi Sibi [Man-no-me-ne-kesh-e-Se-be]," Wild Rice Bird, or Snipe, River. The lower St. Croix Lake, from Stillwater to Prescott, where it empties into the Mississippi River, is called by the Indians "Gigo-Agomod [Ge-go-Aug-o-mod]."² An Indian told me the following legend concerning this lake. In the olden time, before the advent of the palefaces, two Indians were hunting on the shores of the Lake. Evening came and

¹ John Martin Henni was born in Switzerland in 1805; in 1829 he met Bishop Fenwick of Ohio at Rome, and at his solicitation came to America. Shortly afterwards he was ordained at Bardstown, Ky. In 1843 he was elected bishop of Milwaukee, and having been consecrated, proceeded to his diocese, where he arrived May 3, 1844. He became archbishop in 1875, and his death occurred Sept. 7, 1881.

² This signifies "something floating."

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

they had nothing to eat except two fish which one of them had caught. "Friend," said he to his companion, "take one of the fish to eat." "Never mind," replied the other, "tomorrow we will get some game. When I eat fish, I become very thirsty and can't stop drinking." At length, however, he yielded to his friend's request and ate one of the fish. He became very thirsty and during the night his companion had to go frequently to the lake and fetch water in a birch-bark vessel; this the thirsty man would hastily drink and fall asleep again. In a short time, however, he would awake and call for more water. Finally, his companion grew tired and fell asleep. His friend awaking called out to him to get more water, but being sound asleep the water carrier did not hear the request; so the thirsty Indian arose and going to the edge of the lake lay down and drank to his heart's content. When his friend awoke he missed his thirsty companion and immediately went down to the lake. But lo! there was no more water in it! The thirsty hunter had drunk all the water, only here and there could be seen some pools of muddy water where some fish were floating about; hence the Chippewa name.

At a very early day there was a French fort or trading post up the St. Croix River, at the mouth of Yellow River, probably built about the year 1686. I suppose it was the French traders who named the stream "St. Croix [Holy Cross] River."¹

¹ The fur-trade post on Yellow River was built much later than the author thinks. It was established in the latter part of the eighteenth century. See report of a trader there in 1803-4 in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, XX, 396-471. There were, however, seventeenth-century trading posts on the St. Croix-Brule waterway. Duluth took this route in 1680 and may have established a temporary post at upper St. Croix Lake. Le Sueur had trading posts to protect this waterway in 1693. See *id.*, XVI, 173, note 1.

St. Croix River was named for an early *coureur de bois* of that name who was wrecked at its mouth. *Ibid.*, 185-86.

Wisconsin Historical Society

In 1872 I was sent to Seneca, Crawford County, a hamlet of about a dozen houses some twenty-two miles north of Prairie du Chien. The people, about 130 Irish families, were industrious and well behaved, most of them being farmers. I was the first resident priest, the place having previously been attended by the priest from Rising Sun. During my six-year stay there I built a church and a parsonage. Oftentimes I used to go to Prairie du Chien to visit my clerical friends there. Through the generosity of John Lawler a large college was bought and liberally endowed, and a large academy for Notre Dame Sisters established.¹ Both institutions are in a flourishing condition and are doing a noble educational work. Lawler was a noble-hearted, energetic, self-made man and a model Catholic. While in Seneca I became acquainted with Walter Farady, a bright young man, who was then teaching school somewhere in the vicinity. He studied for the priesthood, was ordained, and subsequently was stationed at New Richmond and Superior. For many years he was vicar-general of the diocese of Superior; he died last autumn in West Superior, where he was buried.

As the Indians of the La Crosse diocese had had no resident priest for three years (1875-78) Bishop Heiss, then bishop of La Crosse but afterwards archbishop of Milwaukee,² requested me to go to the Lake Superior

¹ John Lawler was born in Ireland, May 4, 1832; he came to America at the age of four and at fifteen entered the railway construction business. When the first railroad reached Prairie du Chien in 1857 he was appointed station agent and two years later general agent. Lawler accumulated a fortune in the transportation business, building in 1874 the pontoon bridge across the Mississippi; he was a liberal patron of education and was awarded by the pope the knighthood of St. Gregory. He died Feb. 24, 1891. St. Mary's Institute for girls was founded in 1872 on the grounds of old Fort Crawford. The college of the Sacred Heart founded about the same time is now a training school for the Jesuit Order.

² Michael Heiss was born in Bavaria, April 17, 1812. He was ordained at Munich in 1840, and two years later came to the United States. In 1844 he went

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

country. I arrived at Bayfield on June 19, 1878 and for about half a year had charge of this place, and also of La Pointe (Madelaine Island) and Bad River Reservation.

The whites first visited the region at the western end of Lake Superior about the year 1659.¹ For a decade thereafter French missionaries made valiant attempts to establish Christianity and civilization in this region. The last of these early missionaries, the famous Father Jacques Marquette, was forced to flee the country with his people in the summer of 1671 through fear of the bloodthirsty Sioux. In July, 1835, 164 years after the departure of Father Marquette from Chequamegon Bay, Rev. (later Bishop) Frederic Baraga² came to reëstablish there the Catholic church. Of the character of La Pointe and its population in Baraga's time Vincent Roy,³ formerly of Superior but now deceased, says in a letter addressed to the present writer:

There were no pure European families in La Pointe at that time (1835-43); European males married into mixed-blood families, with the

to assist Bishop Henni at Milwaukee, and in 1868 was made bishop of La Crosse. In 1880 Bishop Heiss became coadjutor of Archbishop Henni, whom the next year he succeeded. He died at La Crosse, March 26, 1890.

¹ The date of the visit of the first white explorers of Lake Superior, Radisson and Groseilliers, is somewhat in doubt; it may not have been until 1661.

² Frederic Baraga was born in Carniola, Austria, June 29, 1797. He was a law student at the University of Vienna, took orders in 1823, and in 1830 came to America. From 1831-33 he was missionary at l'Arbre Croche, and from 1833-35 at Grand River, Mich. In 1835 he went to the Lake Superior region and reëstablished the mission at La Pointe where in 1835 he built a church. In 1843 Baraga founded a mission at L'Anse; in 1853 he was consecrated bishop of Upper Michigan and removed his headquarters to Sault Ste. Marie. In 1865 the see was transferred to Marquette where on Jan. 19, 1868 Bishop Baraga died. His linguistic knowledge was great, and he published a Chippewa grammar and dictionary.

³ Vincent Roy was born on Rainy Lake in 1825, his father being a French trader, his mother a Chippewa squaw. At fourteen, he was sent to school at La Pointe, but he soon entered the fur trade, having an early post on the site

Wisconsin Historical Society

exception of the families of the Presbyterian mission—Rev. Sherman Hall and Teacher Sprote (two families). The population varied very much according to the season. In the winter they would number about thirty or forty mixed-blood families, besides a very few pagan Indian families. In the summer the population would about double in all shades of color. It must be borne in mind that La Pointe was pre-eminently the Indian depot for the distribution of goods to the different minor posts, and it was necessarily the headquarters for all engaged in the fur traffic. Fishing was also carried on very extensively. Those who were engaged in this occupation were those who remained at home during the winter, mending their nets and making preparations for the next season's work. Fishing was also a branch of the American Fur Company's business.

There was but one store and that was the fur company's. They carried in stock everything that was necessary—groceries, dry goods, hardware, etc. The grocery department occupied a two-story building about the same size as the dry goods department building, one standing on each side of a street leading from a dock about the same place where the present dock is. There was also a banking department, which was situated about 200 feet east of the other buildings. *There was no saloon.* There were two carpenter shops, one operated by Mr. Perinier and the other by Dufault, also one large cooper shop maintained by the company, one blacksmith shop, etc. There was also one very large warehouse for repacking fish; it was about 200 feet long and was situated on the dock. In the rear of these buildings the company also maintained a very extensive garden and orchard, in which were raised all kinds of garden vegetables, grapes, cherries, crabapples, currants, strawberries, etc. This was enclosed by a high board fence and was in charge of old man Oakes, father of Charles H. Oakes, lately of St. Paul, who was an expert gardener. Antoine Gaudin (Gordon) assisted him one or two years. "Squire Bell" was at La Pointe upon my arrival in 1839. Rabidoux, Charpentier, Dufault (Dénommais) were there before me. Remillard came two or three years after me. Stahls and O'Malley came during Father Chebul's time, about 1860-61. Borup and Oakes were headmen for the fur company (John Jacob Astor). All voyageurs, "runners," as they were called, were employed by said company. They would leave La Pointe about the beginning of September, stay away all fall and winter among the Indians in their respective districts, collect furs, and return about the beginning of June. They would take along blankets, clothes, guns, etc., to trade with the Indians for their

of Superior, of which city he was a founder in 1845. Twice Roy visited Washington (in 1852 and 1866) in the interests of the Chippewa tribesmen. In 1868 he established a store at Superior, where on April 2, 1896 he died.

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

furs. They took along very little provisions, as they depended mostly on hunting, fishing, wild rice, and trade with the Indians for their support. There were several depots for depositing goods and collecting furs, for instance at Fond du Lac (Minnesota,) Sand Lake, Courtes Oreilles, Lac du Flambeau, Mouth of Yellow River, etc. The vessels used on Lake Superior for the fur trade were the "John Jacob Astor," a three-masted schooner, the "Brewster," and the "Siskowit" built by old man Perinier.

The Presbyterian school was then in full operation under Rev. Sherman Hall, the number of scholars at this school was about forty.¹

When I came to the Lake Superior country in 1878, about forty years after Baraga's time, I found La Pointe old, dilapidated, and dead, instead of full of life and stir as it had been in his day. No trading post, no fur traffic, the buildings all gone except some old, tumbling-down structures, no orchard, no garden; the thriving community of 1835 was gone and in its place were a few rickety buildings, some of logs, others, frame structures. One day about the year 1884 I took a walk along the beach and entered the old Presbyterian boarding-school building. It was then open and tenantless. The church was the very picture of dilapidation. I believe some one had stored hay in it. Some years ago it was removed to its present site, and the boarding school has been repaired and remodeled into a neat hotel for summer tourists.

La Pointe is now entering upon a new transformation; it is fast becoming a tourist's resort to which in July and August many come from all parts of the South. The time is not far distant when it will become a fashionable pleasure resort. The old church built by Reverend Father Baraga in 1835 and removed in 1841 to the site where the new Catholic church now stands burned down in 1901. The fire was apparently of incendiary origin as there had been no divine service in the building for some days prior

¹ For this missionary see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, XII, 442-47.

Wisconsin Historical Society

to its destruction. An attractive new church was built on the site of the old one in 1902 by Reverend [Father] Casimir Vogt, O. F. M.¹

There have been resident priests in La Pointe and Bayfield for the last eighty years, yet it is a remarkable fact that not a single one has died there in all that time.

In the summer of 1878 Right Reverend Bishop Heiss of La Crosse offered the Indian missions of his diocese to the Franciscan Fathers of the Sacred Heart Province with headquarters at St. Louis, Missouri. The latter order sent Rev. Kilian Schloesser, O. F. M., to investigate the state of affairs among the Chippewa Indians at Bayfield and other places near by. He went to Bad River Reservation and held a council with the Indians, the result of which was that he made a favorable report to the Chapter assembled at St. Louis and it was determined to accept the Indian missions of the Lake Superior region. Fathers Casimir Vogt and John Gafron with Brother Juniper arrived at Bayfield about the middle of October and took charge of the Indians at that place, La Pointe, Bad River, and other inland points. I was then sent to Superior where I arrived about November 6, 1878.

Superior was then a dead town with but few inhabitants and nothing going on. A man might stand a whole day on the principal street of the town without seeing a single wagon or team go by. Most of the houses were empty and there were but a few small stores. A small steamer, about thirty feet long, ran between Superior and Duluth, carrying generally half a dozen passengers going to Duluth to

¹ Casimir Vogt was born in 1846 at Wurzen, Prussia; he was educated at Breslau and ordained in 1870. In 1875 he joined the Order of St. Francis and the same year came to America and was sent to Lake Superior as a Chippewa missionary in 1878. He made his headquarters at Bayfield from 1878-88, and ministered throughout the northern country. From 1884-91 he was at Superior. The latter year he returned to Bayfield.

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

make their purchases. The boat was owned by George Brooks. There were about forty-five Catholic families in the town, of whom fifteen were white and the remainder Indian half-breeds.

For eleven months I had charge of the Catholic people of Duluth and Superior, Father Genin having gone to France to visit relatives. During the year I also attended Fond du Lac (Minnesota), Cloquet Reservation, Barnum, and Moose Lake. There were then about 130 Catholic families in Duluth, of whom about one-half were Poles, the remainder being Irish, Germans, and French-Canadians. There was but one small frame Catholic church in Superior and only one in Duluth, where the cathedral now stands. Now (1916) there are eight Catholic churches in Duluth and eighteen priests, while in Superior there are nine churches and eleven priests; in addition there are two bishops, one in each city.

During the four years I was stationed at Superior the Franciscan Fathers of Bayfield attended the white and Indian missions of northern Wisconsin, then almost fifty in number. These self-sacrificing, zealous Fathers did almost all their traveling on foot, in winter on snowshoes. While one remained in Bayfield to attend to the spiritual wants of the people in that vicinity the other would start out on his trip to the Indians in the region of the St. Croix and Chippewa rivers, the round trip being, at a moderate estimate, a distance of 400 miles. This was kept up summer and winter, in cold weather and in hot, in sunshine and in rain, sleeping in the open air or in some log house or Indian wigwam. The traveling Father would take one or two Indian guides or packers along to help carry his luggage and tent and cooking utensils. He depended for food on supplies he had taken along, or on what was prepared for him by the good Indian and

Wisconsin Historical Society

white people—muskrat, raccoon, bear meat, fish, and venison being common articles of diet. He would go from one Indian hamlet to another situated miles apart on the countless inland lakes and rivers, preach, baptize, marry people, hear confessions, and administer the sacraments; when through at one place he would pack up his belongings and go to the next only to repeat the same multifarious work. And all this for poor Indians, who never realized the hardships and sacrifices that the “Black Gown” was making for them to bring them the light and blessings of Christianity. In those days the Fathers would travel all over the country in their brown, worn-out Franciscan habit, which they would not change till they returned home. Verily, theirs was a hard but apostolic life, traveling without roads, riding in canoes, wading rivers, tormented in the summer by mosquitoes and sand flies, and in winter enduring all the hardships of this inclement season in northern Wisconsin; and all this not for money but to save immortal souls redeemed by the precious blood of our Saviour. To them the soul of a poor Indian child was as dear as that of the white millionaire.

To give the reader of these pages some idea of the hardships and dangers those apostolic men incurred, I will narrate here a few incidents that happened to Father Casimir.

One day he was traveling along the Chippewa River, visiting his scattered people, many of whom worked during the winter in the logging camps. Incidentally he used to collect among the “boys” for his churches and chapels. In one of the camps he was told that there was another camp about three miles away and that if he could get there in time the “boys” might contribute something. About two hours after midnight he arose and started for the camp. The “boys” had told him about the

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

route and had given him a lighted lantern to take along. After he had walked for a mile or so, he noticed about a dozen dogs, as he thought them to be, circling around him, some running ahead, others following behind, others again running through the woods on both sides of the road. He thought it strange to see so many dogs around these camps, and some inward monitor told him to keep swinging his lantern around him. So he walked on, followed by the animals for two whole miles. A length he arrived at the camp and went inside. A moment later one of the men had occasion to go out. Presently he came in again and remarked, "I wonder why there are so many wolves around." "Wolves!" exclaimed Father Casimir, "I thought they were dogs." It was a lucky thing that the good Father did not realize his danger and that his lantern did not go out, or that he did not stumble or fall to the ground. Had any of these things occurred he would have been devoured in a short time.

The same Father one time planned to go straight through the woods from Big Bend to Flambeau Farm. It was early in the spring after the snow had melted and the bottom lands along the Chippewa River were all under water. Doubtless the Father did not fully realize this fact, otherwise he would not have undertaken the journey, a distance of about ten miles on foot through those lowlands. He had himself conveyed across the river and started on his journey. It was not long before he came to lower land, all of which was submerged, and the water icy cold. No road or path was to be seen, nothing but water between the trees, which at times was knee deep or even more. At any moment he might have stepped into a hole and drowned. His fatigue and misery were increased, moreover, by the fact that he carried a satchel. Once he climbed a tree to reconnoiter the country through

Wisconsin Historical Society

which he was traveling and to see which way to go. But his clothes being wet he slipped and fell, hurting himself badly. He had shortly to cross a creek running into the main river. To wade it would have been dangerous as the water might have been too deep, so he walked along the bank for some distance seeking a place to pass over; finally he found a long pole and with the help of it jumped across the creek. He then continued towards his destination wading through the icy water, until he finally arrived at Flambeau Farm. The good people of the place, whites and Indians, marveled at seeing the Father and learning of his terrible tramp through the bottom lands. Only divine Providence brought him safely through.

After attending Superior for about three years I determined to join the Franciscan Order and in February, 1882 I entered upon my novitiate at Teutopolis, Illinois. Having finished my novitiate, I was sent in 1883 to Bayfield, from which place and, later on, from Ashland, I attended Washburn, Odanah, and the Chippewa River country. Ashland was but a mere hamlet in 1878, Washburn did not exist at all, and Odanah was an Indian village with a handful of Indian and white inhabitants, the latter being principally the employees of the Presbyterian Indian boarding school under the care of Reverend Baird.¹

There was then but one railroad at Ashland, the Wisconsin Central, built into town about the year 1876. The town was as dead as Superior, only a small steamer plying between Ashland and Bayfield. In fact there was then more stir and business in Bayfield than in Ashland. About the year 1884 the town of Washburn was founded; a large

¹ Rev. Isaac Baird reached Odanah under appointment from the Presbyterian mission board, Mar. 15, 1873, and remained in charge of the school and church until 1884, when he was removed to Crystal Falls, Mich.

Reminiscences of a Pioneer Missionary

elevator, coal docks, and several sawmills were put up and the town grew rapidly. I erected a small frame church there, which, however, was soon replaced by a large combination church and school erected by Father Marianus Glahn, O. F. M. I also attended Hurley for some years. Here at first I held divine service in private houses and public halls; finally I began the erection of a large frame church, which was finished by my successor, Reverend Father Gilbert Nuono.¹

In 1897 I was sent to St. Louis, Missouri, on account of failing health, and about a year and a half later to Los Angeles, California. At first I liked the climate in California very much, but later I grew tired of everlasting sunshine and in 1900 asked to be sent back to Wisconsin. For twelve years thereafter I was stationed at Ashland, engaged in attending outside missions, especially those in the Chippewa and the St. Croix country. But the infirmities of old age making themselves more and more felt, I was obliged to give up missionary life and was sent to Bayfield, where I have resided the last four years and where, perhaps, I shall end my days. I have devoted my spare time these many years to studying and composing works in the Chippewa language, among which I may mention "Chippewa Exercises" and a large Chippewa sermon book, the "Enamiad Gegikimind" or "The Instructed Christian."

¹ Gilbert Nuono was born in Italy in 1842; he was ordained in 1865 and came to America the same year. He was appointed to the Hurley pastorate in 1886, and after completing the church, built a school in 1891.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 016 091 240 6 ●