

F

589

G7N68

SOME HISTORIC SITES ABOUT GREEN BAY

BY ARTHUR COURTENAY NEVILLE

President of Green Bay Historical Society

[From Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1905]

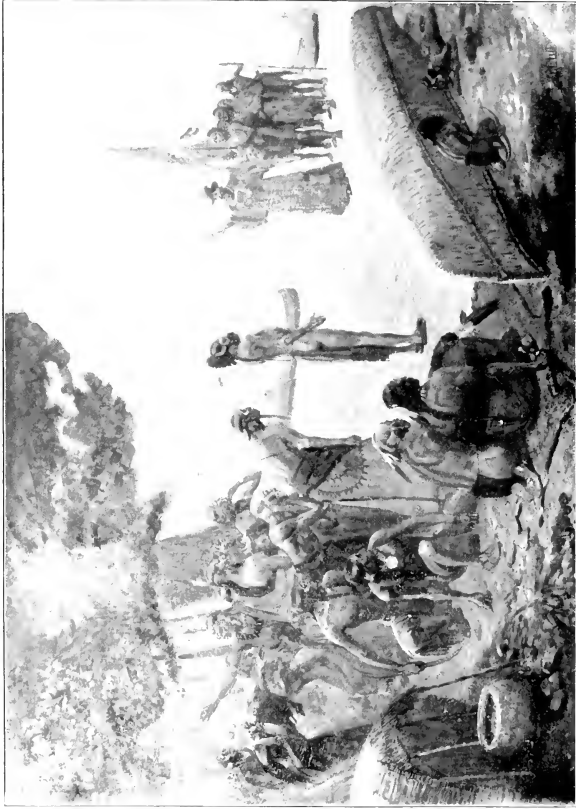
MADISON
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN

1906



Class 589

Book G7N68



Viccorcin Landfall of Jean Nicolet, 1634

From photograph of the original canvas by Edwin Willard Deming, presented to the Wisconsin Historical Society in October, 1904, by President Robert Laird McCormick

SOME HISTORIC SITES ABOUT GREEN BAY

BY ARTHUR COURTENAY NEVILLE

President of Green Bay Historical Society

[From Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1905]

MADISON
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN
1906

THE LIBRARY
OF CONGRESS

Historic Sites on Green Bay

Some Historic Sites About Green Bay

By Arthur Courtenay Neville

In the short time allotted me tonight it is impossible to mention even briefly all of the many interesting historical sites about Green Bay and the lower Fox River. I have therefore selected only two or three, about which the least has been written and in which I have been most personally interested. Ever since I was a boy my favorite summer recreation has been cruising about Green Bay in a yacht, or coasting along its shores in a small canoe. I was always much interested in visiting the places where Indian villages were said to have been located, particularly those at Red Banks and at Point Sable. These I explored many times, when there was still much to be seen, but without fully understanding or appreciating its significance. Being unable to read the *Jesuit Relations* in the old French, they were to me a sealed book. Since the publication, however, of the edition edited by Dr. Thwaites, with the accompanying English translation, my interest has been much intensified and I have gone over the familiar ground with a renewed and more intelligent interest. What I give you this evening is the result of later investigations, made with the light of the wider knowledge obtained by reading the *Relations*.

I have been particularly interested in determining where Nicolet found the Winnebagos in 1634, and where Father Allouez founded the mission of St. Francis Xavier.

Wisconsin Historical Society

Nicolet's Landing Place, 1634

About the earliest authentic record we find of the Green Bay region is Père Vimont's brief account of the expedition of Jean Nicolet to the Winnebago, probably in 1634, found in the *Jesuit Relations* of 1640.¹

But much earlier information had in a vague way reached the French at Quebec, concerning La Baye, and of a strange tribe of Indians living on its shores, a tribe not of Algonquian stock, nor speaking any of their languages, but surrounded on all sides by Algonquian tribes, and conspicuous because of their isolation. They were of the Dakota stock, sometimes called Ouinipigon, and at the time of Nicolet's visit inhabited the shores of Green Bay, and later the Fox River valley.

Vimont says, "they were a sedentary people and very numerous; some Frenchmen call them Puants, because the Algonquian word Ouinipeg signifies stinking water."² The bay on which they dwelt was called the Lake (or Bay) of the Puants. It was given their name, probably, instead of that of some of the more numerous Algonquian tribes, because of the prominence given to them on account of their position. Champlain's map of 1632 locates the tribe on a lake of the same name, but places the lake northwest of Lake Huron. Probably the map was based on information obtained from the Indians. It is possible, however, that some adventurous Frenchman had penetrated to the Green Bay region even earlier than 1634; although the first white man to visit the Winnebago, so far as recorded, was Jean Nicolet. Where did Nicolet find these people? That they were then living somewhere on the shores of Green Bay is clear; but there is nothing in Vimont's *Relation*, nor in any other early record that I have been able to find, giving the slightest clue to their exact position at this time.

I think, however, that we may locate the tribe—and, *ipso facto*, the place of Nicolet's visit to them—with a reasonable

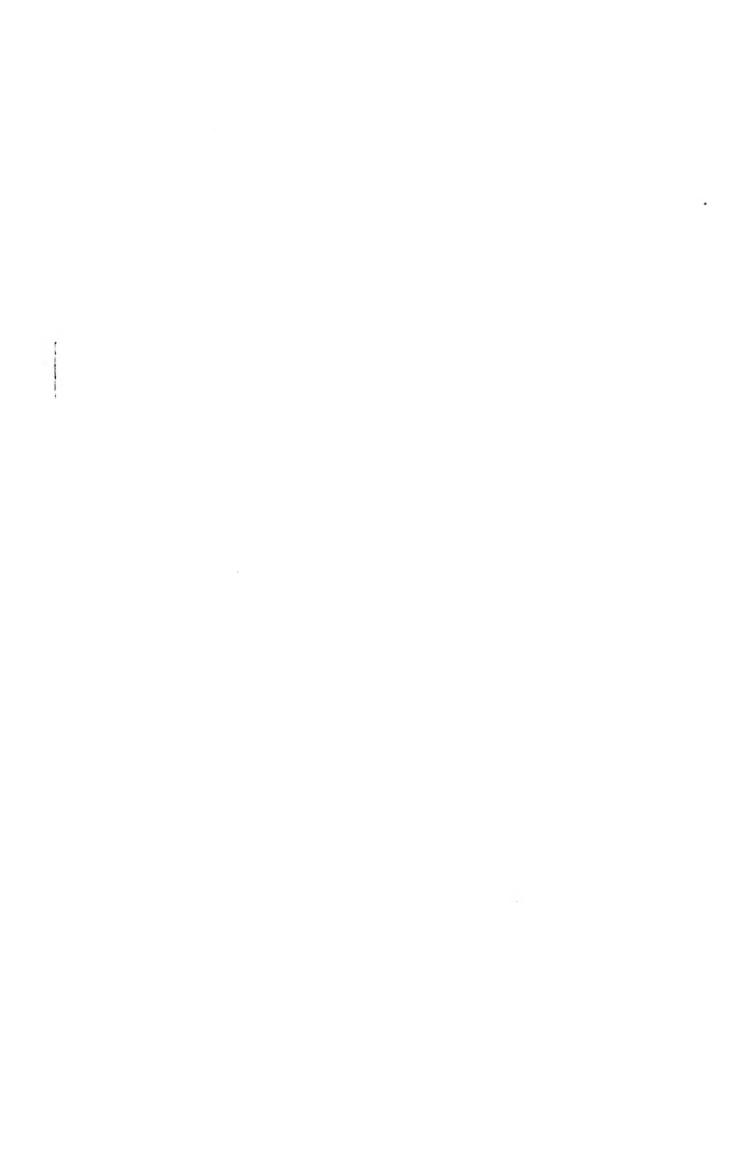
¹ *Jesuit Relations* (Thwaites ed.), xxiii, pp. 275-281.

² William R. Smith, *Wisconsin* (Madison, 1854), iii, p. 11.



From photograph by Mrs. Carlton Merrill, 1902

Red Banks, east shore of Green Bay, ancient seat of the
Winnebago



Historic Sites on Green Bay

degree of certainty, at the Red Banks, on the east shore of Green Bay. I reach this conclusion from a study of the traditions of the tribe itself, the statements of later explorers, and our present knowledge of the ancient Indian village sites along the bay shore.

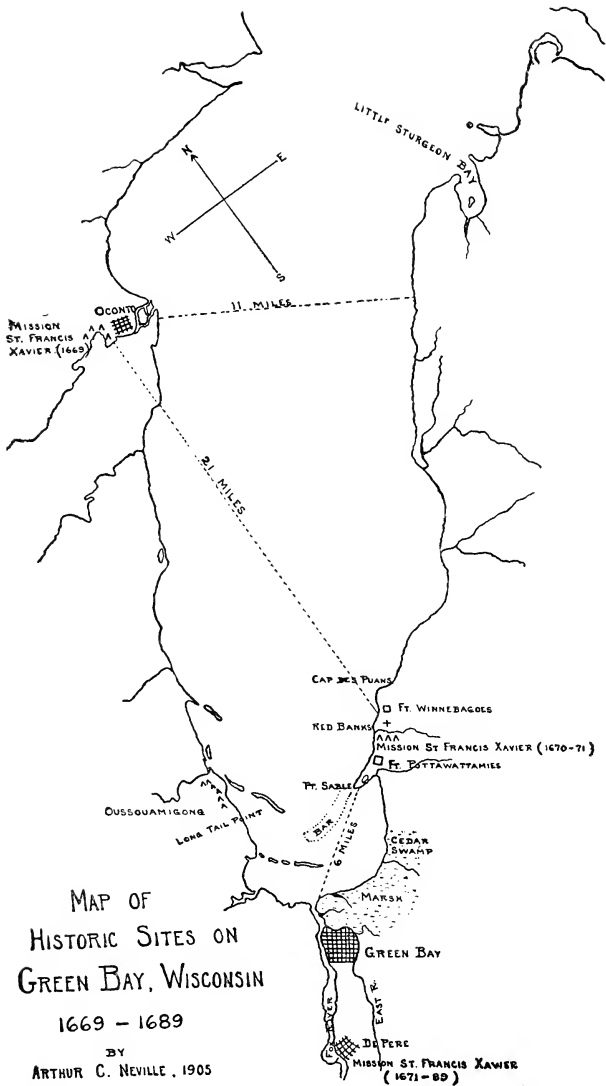
That the Winnebago occupied the Red Banks, and had a fort there from very early times, is almost a certainty. Schoolcraft, in his history of the Indian tribes, published in 1854, says: "The traditions of the tribe extend no further back than their residence at the Red Banks, some eight or nine generations since; and from the fact that the Winnebagos believe that their ancestors were created there it is probable that they dwelt at that place for a considerable length of time * * * that they built a fort, an event which appears to have made a general impression in the tribe, and that it was constructed of logs or pickets, set in the ground."¹

Grignon, in his "Recollections," says: "The Ottawas used to make war on the Winnebagos, who had their village on the elevated ground spoken of in O-Kee-Wha's narration as the Red Banks, but which has always been known by the French as La Cap des Puants."² It was probably so named, because of its occupation by the Puants. The northerly extremity of the Red Banks forms a very pronounced and prominent point or cape.

Still further, we have the evidence of Spoon Decorah, an old Winnebago chief, in an interview with Dr. Thwaites in 1887, in which he says: "It has been told me by my father and my uncles that the Winnebago first lived below the Red Banks, on the east shore of Green Bay. There was a high bluff there which enclosed a little lake. * * * From there they moved to the Red Banks and met at that place the first Frenchman

¹Henry A. Schoolcraft, *History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1851-57, 6th ed.), iii, p. 277; iv, 227, 228, 231.

²*Wis. Hist. Colls.*, iii, p. 204.



MAP OF
 HISTORIC SITES ON
 GREEN BAY, WISCONSIN

1669 - 1689

BY
 ARTHUR C. NEVILLE, 1905

Historic Sites on Green Bay

they ever saw.”¹ This “first Frenchman,” it would seem, was undoubtedly Jean Nicolet. I am aware that Mr. P. V. Lawson says that “we know the Winnebago Indians had their village there [Doty’s Island] when Nicolet came in 1634;”² but I can find neither reason nor authority for the statement.

This conclusion is further corroborated by Father Allouez.³ Assuming that Allouez first landed upon December 2, 1669, at the Indian village on Oconto River, and there spent the winter of 1669–70, as will appear hereafter, his statements as to the location of, and distances to, the several Indian villages mentioned by him indicate pretty clearly that the Winnebago were at or near the Red Banks. He says that “eight leagues from our cabin on the other side of the bay was a village of about three hundred souls.” Now the Red Banks is almost exactly eight French leagues from Oconto, measured in a direct line, and is about the only place on the east shore where an Indian village is known to have existed that comes so near that distance. Allouez further declares that on the 17th of February, 1670, “I repaired to the village of the Pottawatomies, which is on the other shore of the lake, eight leagues from this place” (meaning by this place his cabin on the Oconto);⁴ and on the thirteenth of May following he again crossed the bay “to go to find the Winnebago in their clearings where they were assembling.” At the same time he visited the Potawatomi, “who lived near them.” There must, then, have been two villages “on the other side of the lake,” a village of Winnebago, as well as a village of Potawatomi; and existing remains clearly indicate such to have been the case.

Col. Samuel Stambaugh, in his “Report on the Quality and Condition of Wisconsin Territory, 1831,” says: “About twelve miles below the fort [Fort Howard] there is a very conspicu-

¹ In *Id.*, xliii, p. 457.

² Wis. Hist. Soc. *Proceedings*, 1899, p. 206.

³ *Jesuit Relations*, liv, p. 211.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Wisconsin Historical Society

ous promontory called the Red Banks. They are at the highest point about one hundred feet above the level of the bay; the ground on these banks presents the appearance of having once been under cultivation; and on one place evidently bears vestiges of fortifications of some kind.”¹

Charles D. Robinson, describing the fortifications at the Red Banks in 1856, says: “Upon a high bank on the eastern shore of Green Bay, about twelve miles north of the town, is an interesting earth work. * * * Its walls, at one time, must have been some seven feet in height, or thereabouts, having a ditch or moat on the outside, and provided, on its three exposed sides, with regular bastions. Its fourth side fronts on a precipice of perhaps one hundred feet in height, whose base is washed by the waters of Green Bay; and leading down this steep bank, impassable at any other immediate point, is seen what seems to have been once a protected passage of steps cut into the clay. * * * In or near the center are two parallel walls united at the ends, as there is some appearance of it now. A few rods to the north, outside the walls and on the very brink of the precipice, is what was once apparently a lookout, a high mound of earth—now half carried away by the wearing away of the cliff. To the southward and eastward of the fort, occupying some hundreds of acres, were the planting grounds of the people who occupied the place. Large trees now overgrow the ground, yet the furrows are as distinctly marked as if made but last year and are surprisingly regular.”²

I have quoted Mr. Robinson at length, because his description corresponds almost exactly with my own recollection of the ground, when visited by me a few years later. The earthen breastworks were, however, most probably surmounted by wooden palisades, according to the prevailing Indian custom. In the fifty years since Mr. Robinson wrote, the erosion of the

¹ *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xv, p. 399.

² *Id.*, ii, p. 491.

Historic Sites on Green Bay

face of the cliff has been so great that all traces of these ancient works have disappeared. From the foregoing there would seem to be little doubt that the village and fort of the Winnebago was, when visited by Nicolet, at the Red Banks, and that Allouez afterward found them there.

Extending southward for about two miles to the low, marshy land near Point Sable, were, at intervals, other clearings and planting fields. The ground along the shore west of the limestone ridge, from the Red Banks to Point Sable, still bears unmistakable evidences of long-continued and very extensive Indian occupation. Several interesting mounds are still in existence; many others have been robbed and destroyed; great numbers of implements of flint and copper—arrow points, spear heads, knives, axes, etc.—have been found here; and in many places, more especially near Point Sable, the ground is literally strewn with flint chips, blocks of flint, and fragments of pottery. It was just north of Point Sable, upon the site of the village of the Potawatomi, that the bronze compass and sun dial was found in 1902, by Holmes and Duchateau, a very fine illustration of which appears in the *Wisconsin Historical Collections*.¹

After the mission of St. Francis Xavier had been finally established at De Pere, Father Allouez, on his return from a visit to the Outagami, says that on September 17, 1672, "I went to the fort of the Pottawatamie to procure a supply of corn."² On the twenty-seventh "I planted a great cross on a plateau, on the shore of the *lake* between the village of the Panteouatami and that of the Puants." It will be remembered here that Allouez mentions visiting the Winnebago two years before, in their clearing, also the Potawatomi who lived with or near them.

Some time afterward he went again to these villages, to visit a man who was dangerously ill. "The wind prevented us

¹ Vol. xvi, p. 65.

² *Jesuit Relations*, lviii, p. 37.

Wisconsin Historical Society

from crossing the bay," he says, "so I left my boatmen at the mouth of the river to watch the canoe. * * * I was obliged to go by land, one-half the journey being through a difficult country."¹ To one familiar with the locality, this is quite plain. It is some six miles from the mouth of the river to Point Sable, across what is usually known as the inner bay, which latter is formed by Point Sable projecting from the east shore for about two miles, and by Long Tail Point, almost directly opposite, extending into the bay from the west shore for about three miles. A strong wind from any direction makes it extremely dangerous to make this traverse in a canoe. To reach Point Sable by land from the mouth of Fox River, the first four miles of the journey would be "through most difficult country," consisting successively of marsh, sandy beach, bog, muddy bottomed creeks and tangled cedar swamps. Emerging from this, the missionary could see "from afar" the great cross which he had planted; and there would remain about four miles of most "delightful country," to be traversed before reaching the village of the Potawatomi.

If I have argued correctly from my premises, can there be any doubt that Nicolet found the Winnebago at the Red Banks?

Mission of St. Francis Xavier

It must be understood that the mission of St. Francis Xavier was successively located at three distinct places.

The first location was on Oconto River, at the place where Alouez landed on December 2, 1669, "the eve of the day of St. Francis Xavier." This was, he wrote, "the place where the Frenchmen were," who "aided us to celebrate the festival with all the solemnity that was possible * * * and praying him to be the patron of this mission that we were about to commence under his protection." Here the missionary built his cabin and had his headquarters during the winter of 1669-70; and at this time and place, wherever it might have been, was founded the mission of St. Francis Xavier.

¹*Ibid.*, p. 39.

Historic Sites on Green Bay

I have assumed that Allouez and his party ended their hazardous voyage on the Oconto. My reasons for so doing appear to me conclusive, although other writers have likewise assumed the contrary, notably the authors of *Historic Green Bay*.¹

It seems certain that Allouez's first landing was on the west shore of Green Bay. On his way up the bay, he mentions passing the Menominee, who forced him to land.² Afterwards he visited them on their river, eight leagues from his cabin, while he also mentions another village on the "other side of the bay."³ His statements, also, of the location of surrounding Indian villages and the distances to them, together with our present knowledge of the topography of the country, and the location of ancient Indian village sites, lead almost inevitably to the conclusion that it was on the Oconto River, some considerable distance above its mouth. Probably it was at the rapids about two miles above where the city of Oconto now stands, a well known Indian village site, where the ground still bears ample evidence of aboriginal occupation.

Assuming, further, that Allouez pursued the shortest, and what came in later times to be the usual, route to reach his destination, he would have crossed the entrance to Green Bay from island to island, called afterwards "the grand traverse," unto Death's Door Bluff. Thus would he avoid either the long detour up and around the shore of Big Bay de Noquet, or the dangerous passage of sixteen miles across its mouth. He would then coast along the east shore of Green Bay, from Death's Door Bluff to another high and rocky point, now called Eagle Bluff, just north of Fish Creek; thence, making another traverse across the bay, he would go first to the Strawberry Islands, three miles, thence to Chambers Island, about five miles, and thence to the west shore, about seven miles. The government chart of Green Bay will show at a glance the dis-

¹ Neville and Martin, *Historic Green Bay* (Green Bay, 1894).

² *Jesuit Relations*, liv. p. 205.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

Wisconsin Historical Society

tance saved, and the advantages and safety of this route. I have sailed over it many times, and can speak from personal experience. The low sandy west shore once reached, the shallow water and frequent harbors made canoe navigation easy and safe.

Continuing his narrative, Father Allouez says: "On the twenty-seventh, while we were trying to paddle with utmost vigor, we were perceived by four cabins of savages, named Oumalouminek, who forced us to land." This band of Menominee were probably the same referred to by Allouez afterwards, when he says "On the 6th [of May] I paid a visit to the Oumalouminek, eight leagues from our cabin, and found them on their river in small numbers."

On the twenty-ninth they arrived near the river mouth which they were to enter, and found it closed with ice. They thought of making the rest of their journey to the rendezvous by land; "but a furious wind having arisen during the night, we found ourselves enabled, owing to the breaking up of the ice, to continue our voyage." They arrived at their destination December 2.

Following the shore, it is about thirty miles by water from Menominee to Oconto, or one day's canoe journey. Allouez and his party must have left Menominee in the morning and arrived near the mouth of the Oconto River towards evening of the twenty-ninth. That night, the ice broke up, and it is to be presumed that they resumed their voyage on the thirtieth. They were then nearly three days in ascending the river. I cannot explain this otherwise, than that navigation in a bark canoe must have been extremely slow and difficult owing to the floating ice and danger of puncturing the canoe.

Arriving "at the place where the French were," the stalwart old father says: "I found here only one village, of different nations, about six hundred souls. A league and a half away was another, of a hundred and fifty souls." Probably this was on the Pensaukee, which is four miles, or about one and a half French leagues, from Oconto.

Historic Sites on Green Bay

“Four leagues distant one of a hundred souls.” Peshtigo is just about four leagues from Oconto, and in later times an Indian village was known to be located where the city of Peshtigo now stands.

To quote further, “eight leagues from here, on the other side of the bay, one of about three hundred souls.” As I have said before, the Red Banks are twenty-one miles, or about eight French leagues, from Oconto.

Referring now to the Jesuit map of 1670-71,¹ it will be noticed that the Menominee River is distinctly marked and designated. One other river only is shown—about midway between the Menominee and the head of Green Bay, on the west side. The Oconto River is just about half way between the Menominee and Fox rivers. The Oconto, as it appears on the Jesuit map, has its source in a small lake, very near another small lake, the source apparently of still another river, flowing almost due south—the latter evidently intended to represent Lake Shawano and Wolf River.

Consulting a modern map, it will be seen at once how closely the conditions shown on the Jesuit map tally with the situation as it actually exists. Ascending the Oconto River the course is almost due west until within four or five miles of Lake Shawano. Here the river turns abruptly and sharply to the north, and near this bend is a small lake, having its outlet to the Oconto. It is an easy and comparatively short portage from this bend in the Oconto to Lake Shawano, and probably it was well-known and frequently used by the Indians in that time of the French regime.

There is no other river on the west shore of Green Bay that will in any wise answer the requirements of this map of the Jesuits, save the Oconto; and it is no more than reasonable to suppose that the Oconto was shown on the map because it had been explored and was well known to the French, whereas the

¹ *Jesuit Relations*, lv, p. 94; *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xvi, p. 80; *Historic Green Bay*, p. 46.

Wisconsin Historical Society

other rivers entering Green Bay from the west—the Peshtigo, Pensauckee, and the two Suamicos—were unknown to and unexplored by them.

The Jesuit map shows the location of the mission of St. Michael to be on Menominee River, and does not show any mission of St. Francis on the Oconto; on the contrary, it is placed on the east side of the bay. This was because the mission of St. Francis Xavier had been removed from the Oconto to the east side of the bay, near to Point Sable, in the fall of 1670, before the map was made. Again, Father Allouez says,¹ in speaking of his first voyage up Fox River in the spring of 1670: "On the 16th of April I embarked to go and begin the mission to the Outagami, a people of considerable note in these regions. We slept that night at the head of the bay, at the mouth of the River des Puans, which we have named St. Francis. * * * On the 17th we ascended the river." Thus he clearly indicates that their location during the winter of 1669-70 was one day's journey from the mouth of Fox River, the actual distance by water being between thirty and thirty-five miles.

Secondly, upon the Jesuit map above referred to, the mission of St. Francis Xavier is located, very clearly and unmistakably, on the east shore of Green Bay, between Point Sable and the Red Banks. Further, Father Dablon, describing the location of the three Western missions,² says: "The third bears the name of St. Francis Xavier, at the far end of the bay called des Puans, which is separated only by a tongue of land from Lake Superior."

Father Allouez left Green Bay and descended to Quebec in the spring of 1670. He returned to the bay September 6, 1670, accompanied by Father Dablon. "They found serious trouble in the village at the *head of the bay*."³ The location

¹ *Jesuit Relations*, liv, p. 215.

² *Ibid.*, p. 128.

³ *Id.*, lv, pp. 185, 186.

Historic Sites on Green Bay

of 1669 was not at the head of the bay. It was, as shown above, one day's journey from the mouth of the Fox River.

Thirdly, in 1671-72 the mission of St. Francis Xavier was again removed, this time to its last and final location, at the Rapides des Pères. After Father Allouez had become more familiar with the Green Bay region, and after his experiences at Oconto and the Red Banks for the past two years, he, with concurrence of his superior, Father Dablon, finally decided that the De Pere (des Pères) rapids afforded greater advantages for the location of the mission than any other yet tried. The mission founded two years before at Oconto (1669-70), and removed to Point Sable in 1670-71, was now placed "altogether newly" at De Pere. Referring to "the place chosen to build the chapel," Father Dablon says:¹ "The past year [1670-71] the map of the lakes and the countries in which missions are situate has been given to the public: we have judged it proper to give it again this year [1671-72], to satisfy the curiosity of those who have not seen it and to mark down some new missions which have been established lately in that country: among others that of St. Francis Xavier, *placed altogether newly*, on the river which discharges itself into the bay of the Puants two leagues from its mouth."

Now the Jesuit map published in the *Relations*, it will be observed, is the map given to the public "the past year" (1670-71),² and not the corrected map of 1671-72 above referred to. The first map, the only one published, unmistakably places the mission of St. Francis Xavier at Point Sable. It must also be remembered that Father Allouez had founded this mission two years before Dablon wrote the above, and he had written a de-

¹I use Woodman's translation in W. R. Smith, *Wisconsin* (Madison, 1854), iii, pp. 99, 102, because it more nearly expresses the idea I wish to convey than that in the Thwaites edition of the *Relations* (vol. lvi, p. 91); and because it expresses, as it seems to me, more accurately the meaning intended to be conveyed by the Father. I quote Dablon's language, as given by Woodman; but the italics are mine.

²*Jesuit Relations*, iv, p. 94.

Wisconsin Historical Society

tailed account of its establishment, which had already been published. Dablon, therefore, while he speaks of republishing the map, "to mark down some new missions which have been established lately," does not mean to say that the mission of St. Francis Xavier was just then founded, but rather that it had been "newly placed." He then goes on to explain or enlarge upon the advantages of the place finally chosen to build the church. The structure was built, and the mission remained at De Pere until 1687. In that year the new church, mission house, and all the buildings of the establishment were burned and everything valuable either carried off or destroyed. There is no record of the church having been rebuilt, and the mission of St. Francis Xavier from that time until its final abandonment was a roving one.¹

¹*Historic Green Bay*, pp. 75, 76.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 016 098 083 7

