



HISTORIC

GREEN BAY.

Wis.

1634-1840

BY

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the County Seat at Shantytown, or, more properly, Menomineeville, where a court house, which served also as a jail, was erected on the river bank.* It was an ordinary log cabin, and here the first court convened on October 4th, 1824, the Grand Jury holding its deliberations in the court-room. The prosecuting attorney was Henry S. Baird, who, the year previous, had settled at the Bay, was admitted to the bar at this term of court, and was the first lawyer to practice west of Lake Michigan.

This first session of the United States Circuit Court was a memorable one; for Judge Doty at that time charged the grand jury to make special inquiry in relation to persons living with Indians, to whom they had not been married according to church or civil law. Thirty-six bills of indictment were brought in, and the offenders notified that they must be married in proper form and produce certificate of the fact or stand a trial.†

*This building stood west of the line of large poplar trees at the entrance to the Kellogg stock farm.

†Child's Recollections. Wis. Hist. Colls., Vol. IV., p. 161. Address of M. L. Martin, 1851.

This decisive action on the part of the court toward the improvement in moral tone of the community, although in the end salutary, created at the time intense indignation among the habitants, and was even severely censured by newcomers. Marriages entered into according to the Indian custom before witnesses, were now declared invalid, and the children of such unions illegitimate. Much litigation grew out of this decree in succeeding years, and when brought to the test, many of these contracts were pronounced legal by decision of the courts.

Until superseded by David Irvin, in 1832, Doty continued to discharge his onerous duties. It was not easy to inaugurate law and order in this far-away district; to create sheriffs, clerks, and jurors out of half-breeds, Indian traders, and voyageurs; but tact, patience, and perseverance prevailed, and good government gradually emerged from this chaotic transition period.

Judge Doty took up his residence at Menomineeville, and in 1825 built the first frame house seen in this section of country: a large, two-story structure, afterwards

purchased (1827) by government for an Indian agency house, and occupied by Major Henry B. Brevoort, third appointee to the office. Still another style of architecture attempted by the Judge at this time was the queer stuccoed dwelling built partly into the side hill, just north of his first residence, long called the Jones place, where he lived a number of years. In 1827 he induced his young cousin, Morgan L. Martin, to migrate westward and open a law office in the village.

Doty's successor, David Irvin, was a stately Virginia gentleman, with many whims and peculiarities, as learned in the knowledge of dogs and horses as in the law, yet attentive to duty, and without intrigue or deception. It was said by the wags, that in order to win a case before the Judge, one must praise his horse, Pedro, and dog, York. During Judge Irvin's term of office, he made his home in Virginia or Ohio, when not holding court, and it was questioned whether a non-resident could legally retain so responsible an office in the Territory. The people of Green Bay petitioned President Jackson to make another appointment, but the

Judge Doty's Residence at Shantytown.



petition was not recognized and Irvin held the judgeship until the formation of Wisconsin Territory.*

Mercantile interests of the town, during its first decade, continued to center in the peltry traffic, Americans as well as Creoles finding it to their profit to engage in the pursuit. The early traders, Lawe, Grignon, and Jacques Porlier, although agents of the American Fur Company, had worked independently of each other until in 1821 a co-partnership was formed by advice of Ramsay Crooks, who promised to aid the firm by all means possible. Goods furnished by the larger corporation were brought from Mackinac, and their value returned in peltries, together with a detailed statement of the amount and distribution of property received.

The custom of giving credits to Indians dated back to the days of Nicolas Perrot, but the Astor Company, while continuing the practice, systematized trade to a remarkable degree. The amount to which an In-

* In the Probate Court John Lawe held office from 1823 to 1829, when Alex. J. Irwin was appointed register of probate. In 1838 the office was held by Charles C. P. Arndt.—Minute Book Brown County Court.

dian hunter was trusted by the trader was from forty to fifty dollars at cost price, upon which a gain of about one hundred per cent. was expected, so that the annual amount brought in by the hunter to pay his credits, should have been between eighty and one hundred dollars in value.* Utmost exactness was required of those in the company's employ; the French traders not infrequently receiving back their carefully-prepared reports with the curt request that they be made more intelligible, as it would be impossible in their present shape to close the accounts in the company's books.

Individually, the traders were already heavily in debt to the corporation for goods purchased in preceding years, and matters did not improve under the new arrangement. Accustomed to the old, careless methods of trade, the firm was no match for the keen, scheming capitalists who gradually gained possession of the broad acres afterward included in the plat of Astor. Much Green Bay property belonging to the French traders was swallowed up

*Turner's "Character and Influence of the Fur Trade in Wisconsin," p. 89.

by the great monopoly, and land in Canada, deeded to Charles de Langlade by the English government, was also absorbed; until in 1835, Ramsay Crooks writes that the last of the Canadian inheritance has been handed over to the American Fur Company.*

At this time, and for years after, John Lawe held in many respects foremost rank among the colonists. A large hospitality, generous mode of living, and almost imperial sway over the Indians, gave him high popularity and influence. "His home, a large one-story building, with many additions, stood near the river, and a path led from it through the grass to the beach. The ceilings were very low and the windows small, so small that when the Indians came peering in, the room was almost darkened.† An indescribable air of mystery hung over the place, there was a dreamy appearance about the whole. Then all around the house and store stood Indians waiting to trade off their peltries. One

*MS. letter of Ramsay Crooks to M. L. Martin

†Mrs. Baird, "Contes du Temps passé," in the *Green Bay Gazette*, 1887. Judge Lawe's house stood just north of D. H. Grignon's residence, corner of Jefferson and Porlier Streets.

might sit in that house and imagine all sorts of things not likely to happen."

North of Judge Lawe's residence, close to the water's edge, stood the roomy log trading house, where were the great scales used in weighing peltry packs—the platforms fully five feet square, suspended by heavy iron chains, and so nicely adjusted as to give exact weight from a half pound up to several hundred.

These buildings, with the ones occupied by descendants of the De Langlade family, at that time (1821) composed the whole of Green Bay proper.

Starting at the Langlade residence and following closely the river shore, ran the well-worn Indian trail, leading to the lower country, and facing upon this a school-house* was erected in 1821, John Baptiste Jacobs being installed as teacher. He was followed by Mr. Douglas, a well-educated employé of the American Fur Company. In March, 1823, Amos Holton, a lawyer from the East, assumed charge of the school. He had acted as counsel in the trial of a soldier who had assassinated his

*This school house stood a few rods southwest of Mrs. M. L. Martin's residence.

superior officer, and being winter-bound at the Bay, with an abundance of leisure at his disposal, agreed to teach for one quarter, comprising a period of twelve weeks, the price of tuition to be four dollars per capita. The small log school-room, lighted by its one window, was furnished with benches alone—desks being an undreamed-of luxury—and the curriculum adopted most limited, yet the dominie was a gentleman, and, according to the testimony of a contemporary, taught his pupils polite manners as well as the rudiments of learning. Soon afterwards this school-house was abandoned for a building* larger and more accessible to the youth of Shantytown, and Captain Daniel Curtis, an ex-army officer, became schoolmaster.† He reports the "Schollars" as being destitute of books, adding that "three dozen spelling books and six Murray's grammars will be necessary, and the sooner we are provided with them the

*This school-house stood near the present residence of Thomas McLean.

†Captain Curtis's daughter Irene married General Rucker, U. S. A., and their daughter became the wife of General Philip H. Sheridan. Mrs. Curtis was killed by lightning, while living in the barracks at Camp Smith.

restless minds, only required slight provocation for a hostile outbreak. This was furnished in the reported murder of two Winnebago prisoners by the soldiers at Fort Snelling. A council was straightway called, and Red Bird, a young chief of some local celebrity, universally trusted by the pioneers of the region, was selected with two other braves to carry out a scheme of revenge in accordance with the savage code of justice.

The first scalps were taken on the outskirts of the Prairie, at the cabin of a half-breed squatter, where the Indians, with customary craft, broke bread with their unsuspecting victims in apparent friendship, then, when opportunity offered, swiftly and stealthily executed their merciless purpose. The mother, with one child, escaped and flying to the village, rehearsed the tragedy, identifying the murderers, while these last, adorned with the gory prizes so treacherously gained, sought the remainder of their band, which was encamped on the Mississippi River. This cruel deed was only the preliminary to other outrages, which spread a panic throughout the threatened district. Ac-

tive preparations were made by the settlers for defense; Indian runners were dispatched across country to summon military aid from Fort Snelling and Fort Howard, and as the latter post was but slenderly garrisoned, the commandant, Major Whistler, called upon the citizens for assistance. William Dickinson and Ebenezer Childs promptly recruited a company from the Stockbridge and Oneida Indians; the volunteer militia was mustered in, with George Johnston as captain, and all, under the command of Major Whistler, started for the scene of action.

En route a council was held at Butte des Morts, when the Winnebagoes were threatened with annihilation should they refuse to give up Red Bird and his accomplices to justice. Notification was sent to scattered bands of the offending tribe, and Whistler moved on, again encamping at the Fox-Wisconsin portage. On the day following, a squad of thirty warriors was seen approaching the camp. In their midst walked Red Bird bearing a flag of truce, singing in weird, melancholy cadence, his death song. His dress was of soft, white doeskin, jacket and leggings or-

Williams at this time had great influence with the Indians, and during his stay among the Oneidas persuaded nearly three-fifths of the tribe to abjure paganism and embrace Christianity. A thorough master of the Mohawk language, he preached the gospel to his Indian converts in their mother tongue, and with such enthusiasm that the message, hitherto heard only through the misty veil of an interpreter, made deep impression on his auditors. He so revised the alphabet that whereas twenty characters had been in use, he reduced the number to eleven, making the Mohawk a more perfect language than before, and so simplifying it that an Indian child could be taught to read in a few lessons.*

It was about this time that the project was set in motion to transfer the New York Indians from their restricted reservations in the thickly populated Mohawk valley to unclaimed lands west of the Great Lakes. Commissioner Jedidiah Morse gave a favorable report of the tract lying along Fox River, and in 1821 Williams, who had become deeply interested in the

* A. G. Ellis, Wis. Hist. Colls., Vol. VII.

scheme, traveled westward to Green Bay with a delegation of Oneidas, Onondagas, Tuscaroras, and Stockbridges, their object being to treat with the Menominees and Winnebagoes for a cession of their territory. As a portion of the Oneidas strenuously opposed the removal, complications arose; but government favored the transfer, Thomas L. Ogden, principal of the New York Land Company, furthered it in all possible ways, while Bishop Hobart and the Rev. Mr. Kemper, of whom Williams solicited aid to establish an Indian mission at Green Bay, gave cautious encouragement to the enterprise. But, while apparently working in the interest of his compatriots, Williams cherished at heart one of the most daring and comprehensive plots ever devised: to unite not the Oneidas only, but the whole Six Nations, into a despotic commune—the country west of Lake Michigan to be mapped out and a large area set off for each tribe—the St. Regis, to be located at Green Bay; for this confederation he devised a new form of government—never a republic—an Indian empire, of which he was to be Chief Sachem and King. Such was the startling

plan originated by this reputed son of the half-caste, Thomas Williams, and his Indian wife.

The emigration project matured slowly. On the first of September, 1822, Eleazer Williams and his assistant, A. G. Ellis, with a representation from the Six Nations much larger than that of the preceding year, entered the mouth of Fox River in the staunch, new schooner "Superior."

"The sun," writes Mr. Ellis, "coming up in majestic splendor, gilded the shores of the river and the hamlet of Green Bay with light and beauty. Both banks, for five or six miles, were dotted with the settlers' cabins which were uniformly white-washed with lime, and in the bright morning sun, at a mile's distance, shone like balls of fire. The scene was a perfect enchantment."

All the village was astir with expectation and excitement, for the arrival of an eastern schooner was an event of prime importance. To some it brought friends, to others supplies, and to all the latest news, public and personal, for it was the bearer of the mails, not for Green Bay alone, but for all the upper country.

Williams took possession of the agency house, which stood on the north bank of Dutchman's Creek, where it empties into Fox River. News of his arrival having been bruited abroad, the Winnebago and Menominee tribes began assembling to receive from the New York Indians the fifteen hundred dollars in goods guaranteed them at the treaty of the preceding year. They gathered to the number of three or four thousand—a picturesque sight; the braves in their gay toggery of beaded buckskin, with gaudy blankets hanging loosely from the waist, and unencumbered save by their firearms; the meagre camp equipage and papooses packed on small, rough ponies, or carried by the unhappy squaws. A village of matted lodges sprang up almost in a single night on the level plain north of the agency house, where, in presence of Colonel Pinkney and other officers from the garrison, and French residents from the town, the council dragged its slow and smoky length along. The Winnebagoes almost immediately repudiated the treaty, declaring that their land was already overrun with white men, and they had no

mind to share with others the little that remained of their once wide territory. Yet they lingered around the encampment to join in the pow-wows, which made each night hideous, and, as a fitting climax to the revelry, consented to give a grand war dance for the diversion of the visitors, white and copper-colored.

A circle was formed, the little band of white men in the inner ring, while the hollow space in center was filled with dancers, drummers, and singers. The drum, made from an old keg or hollow log, over which had been stretched wet deerskin, was beaten with ceaseless monotony, and in addition the players used a reed pipe of their own invention, not unlike a flageolet, from which they drew a plaintive harmony, touching beyond description. On the outside of the circle were massed hundreds of savages, lying, leaning, standing, daubed with paint of every tint, and with one, two, or as many as twenty, feathers stuck upright in the hair.

A score of the most stalwart young Winnebagoes, without a thread of clothing save a breech cloth, painted in

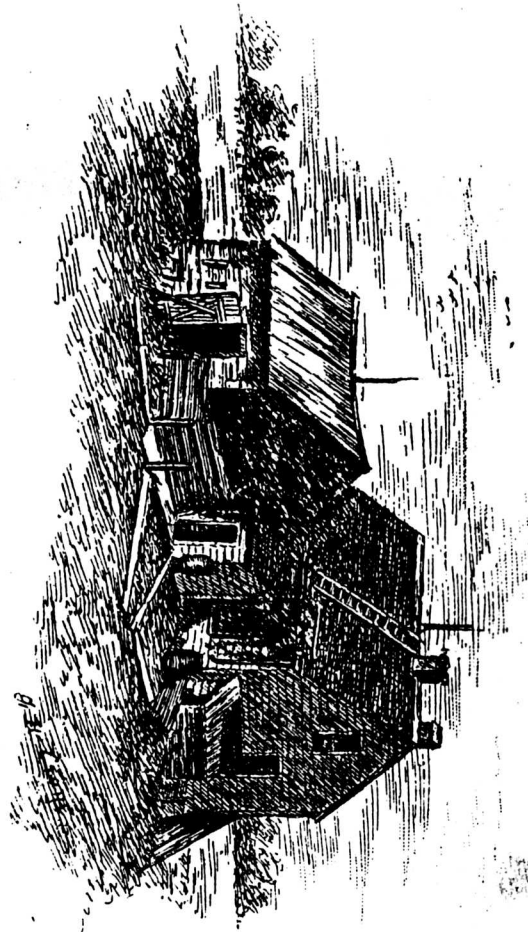
gorgeous colors with circles of red, green, and blue around the eyes, and armed with spears and tomahawks, began at a given signal the pantomimic description of war. First the crafty seizing of the tomahawk, then the discovery of the enemy, the shooting and scalping—all so well enacted that the spectators could easily understand the import of their wild and savage movements. The excitement gradually increased until all the participants were in motion, dancing, singing, shouting, yelling, dangling metallic rods; at one time humming a sort, of chant in a low bass monotone, then suddenly passing, after a wild, disjointed interval, into a sharp scream, made tremulous by placing fingers on the lips, and repeated every two or three minutes. With their bodies naked except for the covering of paint, and their feathered crowns, they seemed as they darted back and forth brandishing their death weapons more like demons than men.

None could endure the sight unpalled, for the Winnebagoes were at that time the most warlike of Wisconsin tribes, quick to revenge fancied injury and re-

quiring in recompense five lives for one. This was, however, a peaceful exhibition of their powers; with the last war-whoop silently and swiftly they moved away, and while horror of the weird spectacle still thrilled the on-lookers, the camp was struck and the Indians were off for the winter hunt.

The Menominees remained, and a concession was wrung from them which resulted during ensuing years in much confusion and dissatisfaction. They agreed that the New York Indians might become joint possessors with them of their territory; the Oneidas to have a tract of land lying about eight miles westward from Green Bay; the Stockbridges, Menominees and Brothertowns to be settled on the east side of Lake Winnebago. The time now seemed ripe for the realization of Williams's scheme of government, but the man himself was too vacillating and lacking in straightforward purpose to hold the confidence of the Indians. Hints of false dealing were already whispered against him, and the kingdom which his brain had evolved, eluded his grasp just as it seemed about to materialize.

House where Priest Williams was Married.



organized church at Navarino; the agent of American Fur Company, who brought the latest Eastern news; officers from the garrison, with distinguished guests, who were here on a visit of inspection or pleasure, were all made welcome.

A most important work, commenced about this time (1832), in which soldiers from Fort Howard were employed, was the opening of two highways, known for many years as the military roads: one following Fox River to Fond du Lac and striking across country to the Fox-Wisconsin Portage; the other running southeast to Manitowoc, and from thence along the lake shore to Chicago.* The latter route closely followed the old Indian trail, the same that Alexis Clermont took (1833-36) when making regular trips with the United States mail bags strapped on his back. Moses Hardwick was also employed during the thirties as mail carrier to Milwaukee, where Solomon Juneau was at that time postmaster. The small newspaper published semi-monthly at Green Bay, in

* Map of Wisconsin Territory compiled from the public surveys, 1st session, 33d Congress.

1834, has this refrain at the head of its columns:

Three times a week without any fail,
At four o'clock we look for the mail,
Brought with dispatch on an Indian trail.

Often, however, the villagers must have looked in vain for a sight, at the forest's edge, of the queer, brown figure, with its burden of wished-for letters. Trusty carriers were hard to find, although the pay was ample according to the scale of wages in those days,—\$45 to Milwaukee, and from \$60 to \$65 to Chicago and return,—and communication must have been very irregular, to judge from letters that passed between Bernard Grignon, who had the contract for transporting the mail, and the Milwaukee postmaster.

Following Captain Clark as commandant at the fort was Major A. C. W. Fanning, who was relieved in 1833 by General George M. Brooks. The officers of the 5th Infantry who came with Brooks, or were stationed here up to 1838, were Moses E. Merrill, Martin Scott, Kirby Smith, Caleb Sibley, W. B. Rosselle, William H. Chapman, Randolph Marcy,* John C.

* Lieutenant Marcy afterward rose to the rank of Inspector General of the U. S. Army. His

Robinson—gallant officers, whose names are all familiar to old Green Bay residents.

Captain Martin Scott, whose eccentricities were well known not only in army circles, but in civil life also, was famous in his youth among the sharp-shooters of the Green Mountains. His wonderful success in the use of a gun gave rise to his boast that no bullet ever moulded could strike Martin Scott, a prediction sadly unfulfilled in the end. Many anecdotes are told concerning the misanthropic officer, who loved his dogs better than mankind, but the memorials left by him of these favorites have been ignored by his biographers. The captain's devotion to the chase necessitated a variety of canine breeds, and for their comfort he built a liliputian city, each kennel in pagoda shape, with florid ornamentation, conspicuous even from a distance on entering the harbor, and dubbed by villagers and sold-

daughter, Ellen, who became the wife of Major General George B. McClellan, was born at Fort Howard, and her babyhood's nurse, Aunt Polly Doxtater, who died at Green Bay, December, 1882, at the age of 97 years, was an Oneida woman of considerable intelligence and some education—a most interesting character to her life's end, able to recall entertaining memories of people and events long passed away.

iers, "Scott's four-legged brigade quarters."

While Captain Scott remained at the fort, the care given to the appointments of this miniature village might have done credit to Gulliver's palace of the pigmies, but when marching orders came, the dogs were given to friends and scattered abroad, and the buildings, erected with so critical an eye to architectural detail, and such consideration for the comfort of the animals, fell into disuse and decay. The dilapidated skeletons remained for a few years, however, as broken records of the faithful friend and brave soldier who marched so unfalteringly to carnage and death.

By 1835, many of the old colonial customs had passed away; the village had lost something of its primitive social character, but the people were still given to lavish entertainment and merry-making to an unusual degree. The French habitants, never aggressive, retired more and more within their own circle and nationality, while a more prim and sober class of Americans were filling the vacant places, and stamping their influence on the