EARLY HISTORY OF PORTAGE AND VICINITY

Derivation of the City's Name and the Early Indian Tribes

(Editor's Note—This is the first of a series of historical sketches pertaining to Portage and its surrounding territory, suggested by the approaching tercentenary celebration of the landing of Jean Nicolet, early French explorer, on Wisconsin soil, and designed to more thoroughly acquaint Portage residents with the history of the city and its locality.

Derivation of the name "Portage"

So far as historical records can be traced, the first white men to visit Portage were Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet.

To the Winnebago Indians, who inhabited this section at that time, the word for "a portage" was "Waw-wan-a-neh," now contracted to "Wuona." Portage means the "carrying Place." Here the Indians helped Marquette and Joliet "portage" their birch bark canoes from the Fox to the Wisconsin river.

Early Indian Tribes

Among the different tribes of Indians found at "the Portage" were the Winnebagoes, Sac, and Fox; but the chief inhabitants were the Winnebagoes, which means "men of the sea," a family of the Sioux tribe.

Historians think that possibly the name points to early migrations of the tribe from the Mexican gulf or the Pacific.

It is believed that as early as 1634 this "sea tribe" was visited by French agents and a treaty made with them. Nothing more is known of them for more than 35 years, when early in 1670 they were engaged in active trading with the French. It is not known what territory they occupied at this early date. In 1718 the nation numbered about 600, but in 1814 had grown to about 4500.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century they were in firm alliance with France, but readily changed their course of trade, and when the English took possession of the French posts they asked for English traders to be sent among them, and alternated their support between the French and English in the several conflicts.

In 1825 the Winnebagoes claimed a vast territory extending from Northern Illinois to upper Wisconsin and westward into part of northern Minnesota, but eastward only to include Lake Winnebago.

By terms of a treaty of November, 1837, they ceded to the General Government of the United States all of their lands east of the Mississippi, and agreed that within eight months they would move west of the "great river." This agreement, however, was not fully carried out. They went to a reservation in Nebraska, but later moved to Minnesota.

A few families of Indians remain in the vicinity of Portage today, some still bearing the name of Decorah. They carry on a little farming or gardening, but subsist mainly on basket weaving and odd jobs.

Indian Mounds and Graves

About ten miles north of Portage is a group of Indian mounds. The first of these, located near the railroad crossing, is known as the Crossing group, and consists of
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July 7, 1934

July 2, 1934

EARLY HISTORY OF PORTAGE AND VICINITY

An Outline of Territorial Occupation and Ownership

Editor's Note—This is the third of a series of historical sketches pertaining to Portage and its surrounding territory, suggested by the approaching tercentenary celebration of the landing of Jean Nicolet, early French explorer, on Wisconsin soil, and designed to more thoroughly acquaint Portage residents with the history of the city and its locality.

Under Spanish Rule

Though no Spanish explorers had ever penetrated into the Northwestern territory, though none had ever ascended the Mississippi river very far, the claims of the Spanish government included all the great Northwestern territory, including what is now Wisconsin. Spain's discovery of America, and the establishment of a colony in it, gave her a claim, never strongly asserted, of right of dominion over the entire western continent, but she failed to extend her influence very far away from the coast line and so small regard was given to her claim of possession beyond the territory she actually occupied. There were no Europeans to dispute the claim practically (1684), and the period of Spanish domination is ordinarily given as extending from 1512 to 1814, when Nicolet made his exploration of the Northwest territory for the governor of New France, Samuel de Champlain.

The French Regime

By virtue of the daring of the fur traders and the devotion of the French Catholic priests, France was the first European nation whose citizens actually visited and explored the land that is now included in the State of Wisconsin.

When Jacques Cartier sailed into the bay of St. Lawrence in 1534, the basis for a claim of division of territory of undefined extent, on the part of France was laid. In 1606, authority over "New France," as the territory occupied by her was called, was inaugurated by the appointment of Samuel de Champlain as governor. So the territory comprising Wisconsin became a dependency of France and her affairs were to be administered by Louis XIV. The enmity of the Fox Indians brought about a collection of affairs that did much to disrupt French dominion over the continental interior.

In this long and growing struggle for racial supremacy on the American continent, Wisconsin waterways and Wisconsin Indians played a significant part. French supremacy could not permanently exist in the interior of the continent without free communication by boat between the many drainage

Six conical mounds in the woods east of this group are fifteen earthworks, known as the Gale group, named for Miss Hattie Gale of Kilbourne; and to the northeast of these is located the Bennett group, named for the H. H. Bennetts. The most striking mound in this group is a bird, having a wing spread of 275 feet.

To the rear of the Agency House at Portage, Four Legs, the great chief of the Winnebago nation, is buried, and the Winnebago mother of Pete Piquette is buried nearby in front of the Agency House. However, the exact location of these two graves has been lost.

Indian Legend of the Wisconsin River

As related by a Chippewa Indian, the bed of the Wisconsin River was formed by an immense serpent.
systems of the Great Lakes and the Mississippi river. The Fox-Wisconsin trade route was early recognized in many respects as a most feasible connection between the two systems New France and Louisiana. Wisconsin was the key stone of the arch of French occupation, and so essential to the plan. Interruption of this highly strategic path to the Mississippi finally contributed to the downfall of the power of France in this territory.

French occupation continued till the conclusion of the Seven Years War between France and England, when the Fleur de Lis of France was lowered to the ensign of George III. on the Plains of Abraham on that eventful day, in 1759, and the ambitious dreams of the rulers of France of vast empire in the new world, had departed forever.

English Military Occupation
New France was surrendered to the British in 1763 at the end of a long series of European wars. The treaty of Paris, 1763, ended what is known as the Seven Years War. Wisconsin thus became English colonial territory, and was governed first under military authority from Mackinac, and by the Quebec Act of 1774 was made a part of the province of Quebec.

The British occupation was not without its advantages—first, the intensification and development of the fur trade with the native inhabitants, and second, the changes growing out of the rebellion of the seaboard colonies.

Because of the fur trade, the British kept their economic hold on Wisconsin long after the political transfer to the authority of the United States. It thus happened that Wisconsin remained to all intents and purposes a British possession till the end of the Revolutionary War—when the United States government awoke to the fact that there was in this Northwest Territory a rich land to take possession of. By the treaty of 1783 Great Britain formally ceded the territory to the United States, it was not actually surrendered till the year 1790 when the British evacuated the Northwestern military posts.

American Occupation
The United States of America had no existence as a government till the spring of 1781 when a constitution was drafted and ratified by the required number of states and in 1789 the constitution of the United States was established. In 1816 two military forts were built, one at each end of the route connecting the Great Lakes with Wisconsin; there were in 1830 more than 150,000 people.

Settlers in Wisconsin were rare during these years, and probably there was not a single inhabitant, aside from the Indians, in the limits of Columbia County, while Wisconsin was under French and English occupation. The military period of American occupation began.

Our old settler's business, then, would have been transacted first at Marquette, Wisconsin County, then at Milwaukee, Wisconsin Territory, if he lived in territory the waters of which flowed into Lake Michigan; if he did not live in such territory he was a resident of no organized county, and there was no controversy about the county seat. For there was not a white person at that time within their borders, and at the time they were set off from the territory they were in organized county in 1836, the first entry of land in these towns was in 1838.

Our old settler has been a resident of the Northwest Territory from 1787 to 1800; Indian Territory, from 1806 to 1809; Illinois Territory, from 1809 to 1813; Illinois Territory, from 1815 to 1818; Michigan Territory, from 1815 to 1836; and Wisconsin Territory, from 1836 to date.
July 31, 1934

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Father Marquette's Missionary Visit to "Portage" in 1673

(Editor's Note—This is the fourth of a series of historical sketches, pertaining to Portage and its surrounding territory, suggested by the tercentenary celebration of the landing of Jean Nicolet, early French explorer, on Wisconsin soil, now being held at Green Bay, and designed to more thoroughly acquaint Portage residents with the history of the city and its locality.

Pere Jacques Marquette

"And the gospel must first be published among all the nations. Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

Pere Marquette was born in Laon, France, in 1637. He was sent to Quebec in New France at the age of twenty-nine years by the Jesuit Order in 1666. His missionary duties carried him through the wilderness to Three Rivers where he spent some time mastering the Indian dialects, and was sent at the age of thirty-one to his first mission at Bassi de Ste. Marie, the land of the Ottawas, one of the farthest outposts of New France. Later he was sent to La Pointe on Chequamegon Bay, to succeed Father Allouez, from where he was driven with the Hurons and Ottawas to the mission of St. Ignace at Mackinac.

In December, 1672, while he was still at St. Ignace, he was joined by Louis Jollet, who had been commissioned by Governor Frontenac at Quebec to accomplish the discovery of the Mississippi. Pere Marquette was appointed to accompany him to assist in the exploration and convert the Indians. They left St. Ignace in May, 1673, stopping for sometime near Green Bay, and also visited the Mission of St. Francisco Xavier, founded by Allouez in 1649. When leaving the mission three Miami Indians were dispatched as guides to conduct the party to the Menominee (Wisconsin) river, which flowed into the Mississippi. Upon reaching "The Portage" the Indians returned. The Mississippi River was reached June 17th, 1673. They went as far south as Arkansas and returning they portrayed to the great lakes (Michigan) and on to De Pere.

Marquette spent the winter and following summer at the Mission of St. Francisco Xavier while Jollet went back to Canada to report the results of the historic trip. Jollet stopped at the mission at the Sault and left one copy of his notes and maps which were later destroyed by fire. As he neared his journey's end his canoe captured in the Lachine Rapids of the St. Lawrence. Thus Marquette's notes and maps became the only original records of the journey of discovery, and are now to be found among the government documents at Montreal.

Marquette again returned to work among the Illinois Indians, but ill health compelled him to return to Mackinac. He died on the return trip at a point near the present city of Ludington, Michigan, April, 1675. Later his body was removed to the mission of St. Ignace by his loyal followers among the Hurons. The mission was burned some time after Marquette was buried beneath its church. After many years his grave was discovered and his bones were removed to the sanctuary of the Catholic church, some now being kept as sacred relics at the University in Mik-waukee that proudly bears his name, in his honor.

Marquette traversed the shores of Wisconsin on the north, and for some time resided at Chequamegon. He cruised the entire western coast of Wisconsin, crossed the state by way of the Fox-Wisconsin route. For nearly a year he was a resident of the Mission at De Pere. It was for these reasons that the legislature considered him a citizen of Wisconsin and recommended him as worthy of its most distinguished-commemoration. Marquette's statue sculptured by the celebrated Italian sculptor, G. Trentanove stands as one of two of Wisconsin's contributions to Statuary Hall under the dome of the capitol at Washington, D. C.