

upon St. Louis for 1781 and assured his superior at Montreal that 1,000 Sioux would be in the field under his command by April. Instead, the plucky Spanish governor in midwinter sent a

force to plunder the British at St. Joseph, Mich., and this party was joined by 200 Indians, among them the Milwaukee chieftains Siggenauk and Nakewoin.

September 26, 1920

STORIES OF WISCONSIN

No. 25 The First Settler of Portage

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[Written for The Journal]

In an earlier article we have shown that Portage, the break in one of the principal water routes between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi, was one of the five "keys of the continent." With the increase of travel along the Fox-Wisconsin river route it was inevitable that sooner or later someone would make a business of transporting voyagers across the mile or so of dry land that separated the two rivers.

The first white man who engaged in this business was, of course, the first settler of Portage; and he seems, by the scanty accounts that have come down to us, to have been as interesting a character as any in the long history of that interesting community.

Was French Deserter

Of the weird career of "Old Pinnashon," as he was known, we have an interesting narrative by another interesting character, Peter Pond, a Connecticut Yankee who was trading in Wisconsin as early as 1773. According to Pond, Pinnashon had been a French soldier stationed in the Illi-

nois country. There he had deserted, and ascending the Missouri river in a boat, spent many years among the natives. He learned many languages, and proceeding from place to place came finally to the Mandans of North Dakota. Here he fell in with some French traders from the Red river, and returning with them to their headquarters traded in this region until the English conquered New France in the Seven Years' war. He evidently acquired great influence with the Sioux, for in 1763 he sent to Lieut. Gorrell at Green Bay, then hard pressed by the surrounding natives, a letter from the Sioux proffering their services to "come and cut them off from the face of the earth," if they interfered with the passage of the traders to that tribe.

At Portage in 1776

Just when Pinnashon located at Portage we do not know, but Jonathan Carver found him there in 1776, and to Carver he related a wonderful yarn about the doings of a rattlesnake which an Indian had tamed and made a god of; Carver repeated the story in his famous book of Travels, published in London in 1778, only to incur the charge on the part of his skeptical readers that he was nature-faking.

The trader who went into the wilderness was exposed to daily perils both from the elements and from the fickle savages. Pinnashon had his share of these perils and some of them are related by Augustin Grignon, who was born at Green Bay in 1780. One of these exploits explains how Portage lost her first settler. Having some difficulty with a Sioux, Pinnashon killed him, took his scalp, and fled to the Chippewas. His story won him ready favor at the hands of these enemies of the Sioux.

Outwits His Enemies

At a later time the tide of fortune turned and Pinnashon fell into the hands of a Sioux party, who promptly made preparations to burn him. Pinnashon saw that there was no hope for him, except in the exercise of his wits. Accordingly he proposed to his captors, as a sporting proposition, that they give him a start of an arrow shot, and then their young men might pursue him on their fleetest horses and shoot at and torture him to death with their arrows.

This seemed to the Sioux a fair proposition, and besides it held the promise of affording them additional sport. But they reckoned without their host, for, unknown to them, Pinnashon prided himself on his fleetness of foot. With the start given him he quickly outstripped them and made good his escape. But deeming the neighborhood of the Sioux no longer a desirable place of residence he left Wisconsin and retired to the region of Mackinac.