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Madison, Wis.: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1906

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PIONEER LIFE IN THE FOX RIVER VALLEY

By ANNIE SUSAN McLENEGAN

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

MADISON
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN
1906

Pioneer Life in the Fox River Valley[1]

By Annie Susan McLenegan

Early French Settlers, 1745-1816

Fox River valley—the beautiful and fertile region comprised in the counties of Brown, Outagamie, and Winnebago—was doubtless the earliest explored portion of Wisconsin. The Fox and Wisconsin rivers, with the swampy portage of a mile and a half between, formed a natural trade route between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi.

Up to about 1830, the history of the valley is practically the history of the Green Bay settlement. The story of this outpost of civilization, beyond the early and flitting visits of French missionaries, explorers, and soldiers—now familiar to us all—begins with a small group of French pioneers.

[1]The twelve illustrations accompanying this paper are printed directly from engravings on wood made for and originally appearing in Martin Mitchel and Joseph H. Osborn's *Geographical and Statistical History of the County of Winnebago* (Oshkosh, 1856; 12 mo., pp. 120), now a very rare pamphlet. In 1886 Mr. Osborn presented the engraved blocks to the library of the Wisconsin Historical Society, and these are now utilized for the first time since the original publication fifty years ago. The cuts, which are admirable examples of the now seldom-practiced art of wood engraving, closely follow the daguerreotypes taken therefor in 1855 by J. F. Harrison; Mr. Osborn considered them faithful presentations.—Ed.

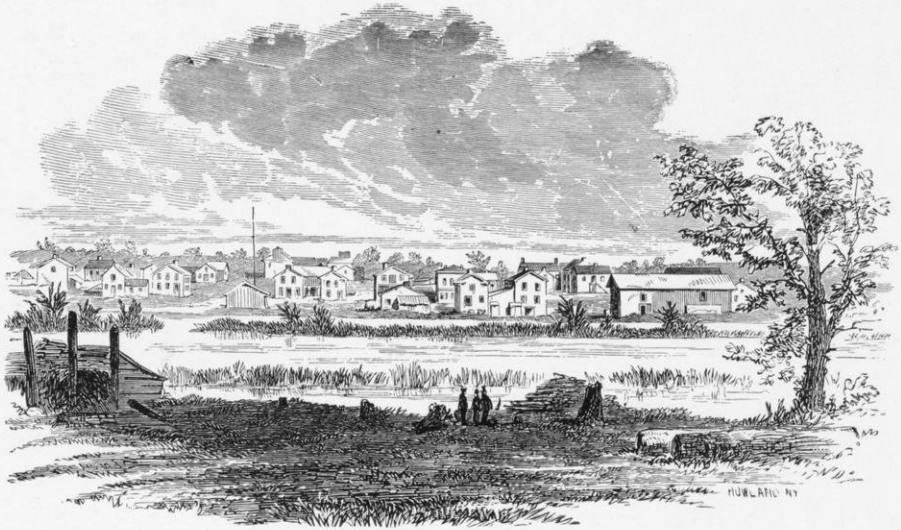
Augustin de Langlade and his son Charles, by an Ottawa wife, came to Green Bay in 1745 to engage in trade with the Indians, and proved to be the first permanent white settlers within the present limits of Wisconsin.[1] Charles de Langlade led the Indians of the upper lakes who assailed Braddock on the fateful ninth of July, 1755; he died at Green Bay in 1800. His wife was Charlotte Bourassa, daughter of a prominent Montreal merchant; and their daughter Domitelle was united to Pierre Grignon, Sr., when she was thirteen years old, and became the mother of the famous Augustin Grignon. He in turn married Nancy McCrea, the daughter of a trader and a Menominee woman, who was related to the well-known chiefs Tomah and Oshkosh.[2]

From 1745 to 1785 the Green Bay settlement was almost stationary. In the latter year there were seven resident families, who with the fur-trade *engagés* and others numbered but fifty-six souls. It was, nevertheless, the largest white community in what is now Wisconsin; in 1783 there were but four traders on the site of Prairie du Chien, and a few had a rendezvous in 1793 at Milwaukee. In the latter year, only one Frenchman, Laurent Barth, was at the Fox-Wisconsin portage.

At that time there was in Green Bay, says Augustin Grignon in his "Recollections," "my father, Pierre Grignon, Sr.," who "was born in Montreal, and early engaged as a voyageur with traders in the Lake Superior country. Having saved his wages, he after a while engaged as a trader on his own account and located at Green Bay prior to 1763. He had served on some expeditions, probably during the old French War. * * * By his first wife, a Menominee woman, he had three children. * * * By his marriage with my mother, he raised nine children and died in November,

[1] The following material is taken from Augustin Grignon's "Recollections," in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, iii.

[2] See R. G. Thwaites, "Oshkosh, the last of the Menominee sachems," in Oshkosh *Times*, April 22, 1876.



From daguerreotype by J. F. Harrison

Omro in 1855

1795. * * * He was a spare man, six feet in height, of light complexion, a man of bravery, and full of animation, but by no means quarrelsome. He was highly esteemed, and was regarded as strictly upright in all his dealings. He was particularly hospitable, and no year passed but he entertained many traders going to, or returning from, their winter trading-posts." He possessed two Osage slaves, Jocko and Collo. Several Pawnee slaves were at the time owned by the whites at Mackinac, and Augustin Bonnetèrre, a Green Bay trader, bought and married one of these; their children were living in 1857. There were but two negro slaves in the Green Bay community.

Another noteworthy figure in the settlement at the mouth of the Fox, was Joseph Jourdin, whose daughter Madeline married Eleazer Williams, the so-called "lost dauphin,"[1] and whose log-cabin was to be seen until 1897. John Lawe was an English Jew, educated at Quebec. His nephew, of the same name, succeeded him quite early in the fur-trade at Green Bay, and married Thérèse Rankin, the daughter of an English trader and a Chippewa mother. He served under Col. Robert Dickson and was an associate judge of Brown County, dying at Green Bay in 1846. In 1812, John Lawe and Pierre Grignon kept the only two trading stores in Green Bay. Jacques Porlier came from Montreal in 1791. In 1815, he was commissioned by the English government as justice of the peace at Green Bay, and in 1819 was made ensign of the Green Bay militia by Gov. Lewis Cass of Michigan territory. In 1820, Porlier was chief justice of Brown County, and held various offices until 1836, dying at Green Bay in 1839. His cottage, built in 1802, belonged later to the Tank family, and is still standing. Louis Porlier of Green Bay, a son-in-law of Augustin Grignon, was a son of the old judge. Nothing but

[1] See *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, vi. For a careful survey of Williams's pretensions, consult W. W. Wight, "Eleazer Williams—his forerunners, himself," Parkman Club *Papers* (1896), i, pp. 133–203.

the chimney of Jean Ducharme's trading house now remains; he was a native of La Chine, Canada, his sons being Joseph, Dominic, and Paul.

Judge Charles Reaume came from near Montreal to Green Bay before 1800, and at once became an important person in the community. His wife was a Miss Sanguenette, daughter of a Montreal merchant. Deserting her, he wandered to Green Bay to trade. The future interpreter of the law was unsuccessful in commerce, because of a too jovial and easy-going disposition. In 1803 he was commissioned by Gov. William H. Harrison of Indiana territory as justice of the peace, although Grignon states that Reaume's sense of honor and justice was not high. He had for some time been acting under a similar commission from the English government, and held court under either as he saw fit, his jurisdiction appearing to extend all the way from Mackinac and the upper Mississippi to Vincennes and Kaskaskia on the south. Being able to read and write he was one of the few persons then living west of Lake Michigan qualified for office; but his knowledge of English law was slight—what he did know probably was the old *coutume de Paris*—and his "decisions" were often influenced by a friendly glass, or reversed on demand. Many very amusing incidents of his career are given in the early volumes of the *Wisconsin Historical Collections*. "Judge Reaume," says Grignon, "was rather tall, and quite portly, with a dark eye, and with a very animated, changeable countenance. Like the Indians, his loves and his hates were very strong, particularly the hates. He was probably never known to refuse a friendly draught of wine, * * * and he was in truth very kind and hospitable. With all his eccentricities, he was warmly beloved by all who knew him." In 1818, Governor Cass appointed him associate justice of Brown County, and he died four years later in Green Bay.

The first saw mill in Brown County was built for Jacob Franks at De Pere in 1809, "by an American named Bradley."

In 1816 there was a government saw-mill for the Indians, at Little Kaukaulin, but fur-trading was still the principal occupation of the valley. The Indians still maintained trade relations with the English, who had a post on Drummond's Island, near Sault Ste. Marie.[1] Jean Ducharme's trading post was at Kaukauna, and there lived Augustin Grignon who took toll at the portage. The only school short of Canada was at Mackinac, and the only physician in the region lived on that island. There were no missionaries in Green Bay from 1745 until 1820. In 1784–85, Pierre Grignon took his children to Mackinac to be baptized.

By 1812, there were 252 people in Green Bay, two trading stores, three blacksmiths, a tailor, and a carpenter—Augustin Thibeau, who came from Quebec in 1800. There were an abundance of horses, cattle, hogs, and fowls. On the little river-side farms of the worn-out voyageurs were raised enough vegetables for the settlement. Articles of export and trade were furs, peltries, deer-tallow, potatoes, cattle, and sugar. Only enough wheat was raised to make bread. Mme. Amable Roy possessed the only apple-tree in Green Bay; but after 1816 an American brought a good supply from Detroit, and plums and cherries came a little later.

One highly picturesque and illustrative incident in this early Wisconsin life was the expedition, during the War of 1812–15, by Col. Robert Dickson and Maj. William McKay, to capture the American post at Prairie du Chien.[2] It must have been a great day for Green Bay when, in the summer of 1814, McKay's force of Sioux, Winnebago, and French-Canadian *engagés* arrived in a fleet of canoes and batteaux from Mackinac. There they were joined by Pierre Grignon and some Green Bay *habitants* and Indians, after the interest of the red men had been properly worked up by speeches and the promise

[1] See Thwaites, "Story of Mackinac," in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xiv, p. 13.

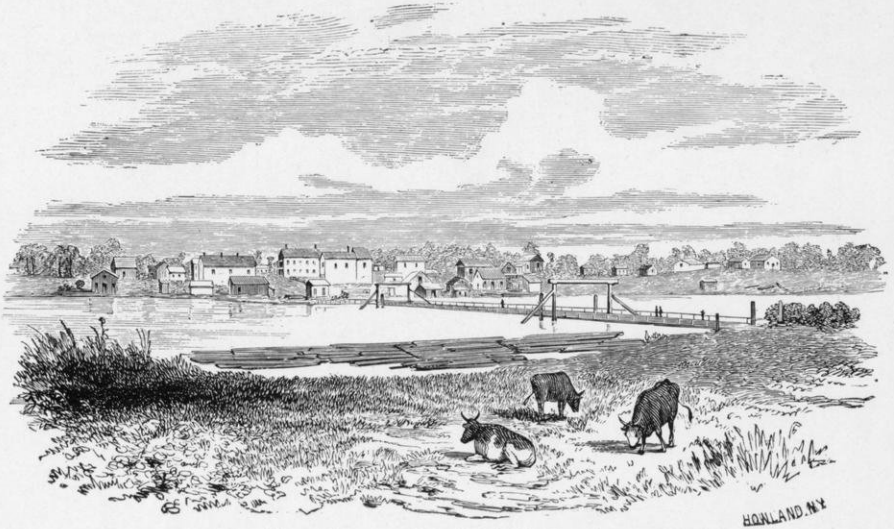
[2] On McKay's expedition, besides Grignon's "Recollections," see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, ix, pp. 207, 262; xi, pp. 254, 271.

of a good time, with probable loot. At the Fox-Wisconsin portage they were met by Dickson with a similar force, and all proceeded to Prairie du Chien. As this motley force ascended the Fox and descended the Wisconsin, starting the echoes with voyageur songs and "God save the King," the sunlight gleaming on canoe blades and the brilliant uniforms of dark-faced men, it recalls some scene in a comic opera; indeed, it was about as significant, so far as results were concerned. The British captured the post but abandoned it the next year.

We may close this account of early French life at Green Bay by extracts from the reminiscences of Ebenezer Childs and Henry S. Baird:

> There was quite a number of very respectable French families residing at the Bay when I arrived there * * * all of whom are now [1858] dead, except Augustin Grignon. * * * They were all engaged in the Indian trade under the American Fur Company, each cultivating a small quantity of land. Their manners and customs were of the most primitive character. * * * I made the first ox-yoke that was ever seen at the Bay. Their principal food was wild game, fish, and hulled corn. They caught large quantities of sturgeon and trout, and they made immense quantities of maple sugar. At the proper season in the spring, the entire settlement would remove to their sugar camps.[1]
>
> The character of the people was a compound of civilization and primitive simplicity, exhibiting the polite and lively characteristics of the French and the thoughtlessness and improvidence of the aborigines. Possessing the virtues of hospitality and the warmth of heart unknown to residents of cities, * * * they were ever ready to receive and entertain their friends, and more intent upon the enjoyment of the present than to lay up store and make provision for the future. With few wants, and contented and happy hearts, they found enjoyment in the merry dance, the sleigh-ride, and the exciting horse-race, and doubtless experienced more true happiness and contentment than the plodding, calculating, money-seeking people of the present day. This was the character of the settlers who occupied this country before the arrival of the Yankees—a class now [1859] entirely extinct or lost sight of by the present population; but it is one which unites the present with the past, and for whom the "old settlers" entertain feel-

[1] Childs's "Recollections," in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, iv, p. 161.



From daguerreotype by J. F. Harrison

Winneconnee in 1855

ings of veneration and respect. They deserve to be remembered and placed on the pages of history as the first real pioneers of Wisconsin.[1]

American Pioneer Settlement, 1816-50

August 7, 1816, three American sloops laden with soldiers under command of Col. John Miller arrived at Green Bay. They were piloted from Mackinac, howbeit somewhat unwillingly, by Augustin Grignon and Stanislaus Chappue of Green Bay. When Colonel Miller went through the conciliatory form of asking permission of the Indians to rebuild Fort Howard, the red men bespoke protection for their "French brothers." The garrison was put to work to make comfortable quarters at Fort Howard, so that soon after 1820 it assumed quite an imposing aspect.[2]

As nearly as one can judge from conflicting estimates, there were in 1816, about two hundred people at Green Bay. Prairie du Chien (Fort Crawford), the only other settlement in the present state, had twenty-five or thirty houses mostly of French families from Illinois. Detroit was an old French village of bark-covered houses. Solomon Juneau had not yet come to Milwaukee—although his precursor and father-in-law, Jacques Vieau, had had a trading house there since 1795.[3]

The Americans were not joyfully received by the little village at the mouth of the Fox, but a new era was about to begin for the whole region. By 1820, the population crept up to about five hundred, in addition to the garrison. John Jacob Astor as representative of the American Fur Company, had re-established (1816) headquarters at Mackinac with a branch at Green Bay. John Lawe was Astor's representative, and the inhabitants of nearly the whole valley were in the employ of the Astor traders. Stirring times began for Green Bay,

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[1] Baird in *ibid.*, p. 205.

[2] Biddle in *id.*, i, p. 57.

[3] *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xi, pp. 220, 221.

which was soon recognized as the natural trade emporium for the Fox River region.[1]

Prominent early Green Bay settlers were Moses Hardwick of Kentucky who came in 1816 with Colonel Miller, and Matthew and Robert Irwin, Sr. arriving in 1815 from Pennsylvania. Matthew Irwin was Indian agent and United States factor at the Bay. From 1820 to 1830 came Daniel Whitney from New Hampshire, Ebenezer Childs from Massachusetts, William and Joseph Dickinson and Albert G. Ellis (with the Oneida Indians, as a surveyor) from New York, James D. Doty originally from New York, Henry S. Baird from Pennsylvania, E. H. Ellis from New York, John P. Arndt from Pennsylvania, Morgan L. Martin and John V. Suydam, both from New York.

The land question now became the most important issue. American land-grabbing was a constant source of irritation to the Indians, bringing about the Black Hawk War in 1832. From 1804 to 1836 a series of cessions was obtained, some of which concerned the Fox River district. A specimen of the method by which some of the land claims were originally procured is shown by the deed for what is now the site of Kaukauna. The local chief in 1793 ceded this land to Dominic Ducharme for two barrels of rum; full satisfaction being afforded by five gallons extra to his heirs in 1796.[2] The original settlements at Green Bay were made on grants from France (before 1760) and England (1760–1796). In 1820 the question of these titles came before congress, who sent a government agent to Green Bay to collect evidence of such claims as were held by the French settlers under Jay's treaty, only those occupied by 1796 being allowed. About seventy-five titles in Green Bay and Prairie du Chien were established by this act.

[1] The sources used for this period are chiefly the "Recollections" of Ebenezer Childs and Henry S. Baird, the county histories of Brown, Winnebago, and Outagamie, and the biographies of pioneers.

[2] For a transcript of this deed see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xv, p. 1.

Settlement of Fox Valley

In 1828, Col. Ebenezer Brigham and others met the Indians at Green Bay to settle boundary disputes, and the lead region of southwest Wisconsin and northwest Illinois was bought. In 1831, the federal government purchased from the Menominee and Winnebago the land lying between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi, Fox, and Wisconsin rivers. Further purchases were made from time to time, and in 1834 the federal land near Green Bay was surveyed and the following year a land office opened. "There was a great rush to purchase, mostly from Milwaukee and Chicago."[1] "In 1836, Gov. Dodge had been commissioned by the General Government to hold a treaty with the Menominee Indians. The treaty was held at Cedar Rapids, on the Fox River; Henry S. Baird was secretary. * * * Oshkosh and all the leading Menominee chiefs were present. The Menominees ceded to the Government some four millions of acres west and north of Winnebago Lake and Fox River, and a strip along the Wisconsin River. * * * This cession gave a new impulse to the settlement of Northern Wisconsin."[2] "The tardiness of the Government in acquiring title to this land was a great drawback to the settlement and improvement of the country. If any attempted to 'squat' upon the lands, they were forcibly removed at the point of the bayonet, or prosecuted by the United States officials as trespassers upon Indian lands. This condition of affairs continued until treaties were made, and the lands surveyed and brought into market."[3]

The establishment of republican government in the Fox River valley was the result of the effort of some of its leading pioneers. In 1818, all of Wisconsin was added to Michigan territory. By proclamation of Governor Cass, Wisconsin was divided into Brown (the Fox River valley) and Crawford counties. The officers of Brown County were Matthew Irwin,

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[1] *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, iv, p. 186.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

chief justice; Charles Reaume, Benjamin Chittenden, associates; Robert Irwin, Jr., clerk; George Johnston, sheriff. No civil order worthy of the name existed, however, and the inhabitants of Green Bay were subject to the whims of the military autocrats at Fort Howard.[1] The supreme court of Michigan met at Detroit. "The Judiciary was composed of County Courts and Justices of the Peace. The 'Courts' consisted of three Judges, none of whom were lawyers. * * * The Justices of the Peace were such as could be selected from those who were capable of reading and writing. In the year 1823, Congress passed an act establishing what was called 'the additional Judicial District,' comprising the counties of Brown, Michilimackinac, and Crawford, and the Hon. James Doty was appointed by President Monroe. * * * In 1824 things had assumed a more orderly character. * * * But in the *subordinate,* or Justices' Courts, many singular incidents transpired."[2]

Nothing shows the spirit of the Green Bay pioneers better than two public meetings held at an early date to agitate for internal improvements. The first occurred in October, 1829, with Louis Grignon chairman, and M. L. Martin secretary, and voted to petition congress for a road from Green Bay to Chicago and an improvement of the Fox River. The latter demand was brought forward at a second meeting held November 10, 1833. In 1835 the citizens of Green Bay built a dam at De Pere.

After Wisconsin territory was organized in 1836, the legislative representatives of the county were Henry S. Baird, John P. Arndt, Ebenezer Childs, Albert G. Ellis, and Alexander Irwin. Says Childs: "The accommodations at Belmont were most miserable. * * * The whole of the Brown delegation lodged in one room, about fifteen by twenty feet. * * * There was a great deal of lobbying in the Legislature and as

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 176, 180.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 209.

From daguerreotype by J. F. Harrison, 1855

Webster Stanley, first settler at Oshkosh

a result of it the Capital went to Madison. * * * We contended for a temporary location at Green Bay or Milwaukee or any other place, until the country should have become more settled. * * * The members from the west side of the Mississippi were bought to go for Madison. * * * The town plat of Madison was divided into twenty shares; I was offered one share for the small sum of two hundred dollars. * * * I rejected the offer with disgust, and felt better satisfied than I should to have sold myself for the twentieth part of Madison. * * * We used to have tall times in those days."[1]

Winnebago and Outagamie Counties, 1836-50

From Brown County Winnebago was formed in 1840, and Outagamie in 1851. The most prominent of the early pioneers of these two counties were:

Oshkosh.—Webster Stanley, Ohio, 1836; H. A., Amos, Chester, and John P. Gallup, Ohio, 1836; George and Wm. W. Wright, New York, 1836; David and Thomas Evans, 1836; Chester and Milan Ford, 1837; Samuel and Stephen Brooks, New York, 1839; Charles and Clark Dickenson, New York, 1839; Edgar Conklin, New York, 1841; H. G. Freeman, New York, 1846.

Appleton.—John Johnson, New York, 1843; Capt. Welcome Hyde, Vermont, 1843–50; Henry L. Blood (agent of Lawrence University), New Hampshire, 1849; Col. Theodore Conkey, New York, 1849.

Menasha.—Curtis Reed, New York, 1848; James D. Doty, New York (on Doty's Island), 1845.

Neenah.—Harrison Reed, New York, 1843; Harvey Jones, New York, 1846.

1. The Settlement of Oshkosh. Robert Grignon, nephew of Augustin, and Louis B. Porlier of Green Bay had a trading post in 1830 at Algoma, now included in the city limits of

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 191.

Oshkosh. Peter Powell and his son William lived in a hut on Lake Winnebago, near by, as early as 1827. William Powell and Robert Grignon conducted a tavern and ran a ferry across Fox River. After the Menominee treaty of 1831, the federal government began a school building for the Indians at Winnebago Rapids, one of the workmen being Webster Stanley. In 1836 he left that work, built a hut at Coon's Point, on Fox River just above the present Oshkosh, and with a half-breed named Knaggs began a trading business on the mail route built in 1828 from Fort Winnebago to Fort Howard. In 1836, when this part of the country passed to the federal government, among those settled here were Stanley, A. H., Amos, John P., and Chester Gallup, George and W. W. Wright, David and Thomas Evans, Chester Ford, and Joseph Jackson; all of these staked off claims that were bid in at public sale in 1838.

This settlement was at first given the Indian name, Saukeer. In 1838, George Wright was appointed justice of the peace for all of Brown County west of Lake Winnebago. When a post-office was to be placed in the settlement in 1840, the name became a subject of controversy. The Gallups wished to call it "Athens," the Wrights "Osceola," the Evans brothers "Galeopolis," but Robert Grignon and William Powell came to the meeting with a troop of Indians and half-breeds, and secured the adoption of "Oshkosh," in honor of the local chief, as a bid for the Indian trade. It is reported that Oshkosh hovered in the vicinity of the settlement bearing his name until he died in ~~1856.~~ 1858

John P. Gallup was appointed first postmaster, and Chester Ford the first mail carrier from Fond du Lac to Wrightstown. Business meetings and elections took place at Webster Stanley's house. The first regular county officers were George F. Wright, W. W. Wright, W. C. Isbell, Samuel Brooks, Ira Aiken, C. Luce, Harrison Reed, and Charles Dickenson. Samuel Brooks built the first dwelling on the west side of Lake

From daguerreotype by J. F. Harrison, 1855

Oshkosh, a Menominee chief

Winnebago, where in 1847 was the first post-office of Vinland township. At his death in 1887, he was the oldest living postmaster in Wisconsin.

The lumber industry of this part of the valley began in 1843, when Harrison Reed, who had purchased a large tract of government property at Neenah, bought from Daniel Whitney 30,000 feet of logs cut in the Wolf River pineries. Five years later, there were two steam saw-mills at Oshkosh, and the next year the first flour mills were begun; while by 1850 there were 1,400 people in the settlement.

2. Settlement of Appleton. The founding of Lawrence University was in reality the origin of the city of Appleton. John Johnston from New York was its first white settler, having in 1843 a hotel on the site of the modern city. Eleazer Williams, who later claimed to be of French royal birth, while doing missionary work among the Oneida Indians as their agent had borrowed money from Amos G. Lawrence, a Boston philanthropist, and as security had given the land around the bluff at Grand Chute. This land (five hundred acres) came into Lawrence's possession who in 1848 had it surveyed, platted, and named Appleton, in honor of a bequest from Samuel Appleton of Boston to the newly founded (1847) Lawrence University. The Green Bay mission district of the Methodist Episcopal church centered in this institution, of which Dr. Edward Cook from Boston was made president (1853). By 1850 there were five hundred people in Appleton.

3. Settlement of Menasha. In 1835 Curtis Reed came to Milwaukee in stage-coach and wagon from Troy, N. Y., by way of Cleveland and Chicago. He boarded at Milwaukee with Solomon Juneau, clerked in a store for a time, and finally entered the employ of the federal government. He was the first permanent settler of the present Menasha. When the site was offered for sale in 1835, Governor Doty bid in most of it, Mrs. Doty giving it the name of Menasha, and ten years later settled on Doty's Island. In 1847, a company was organized

to improve the local water-power, by Governor and Charles Doty, Harrison and Curtis Reed, and Harvey Jones. At that time there was a strife over the location of the government lock and canal. Curtis Reed finally obtained the contract and built them on the Menasha side of the river, finishing the dam in 1849. By 1848, there were ten families on that side and the village was platted in 1849. By the close of 1850, there were two saw-mills, and a furniture and woodenware factory at this place.

4. Settlement of Neenah. Harrison Reed came in 1843 to the site of Neenah from Milwaukee, where in 1839 he had founded the *Sentinel.* He bought a large part of the land belonging to the government, upon which had been established an Indian school. Families moved into the old houses there, and these, headed by Reed, became the founders of Neenah; Harvey Jones, who came from New York in 1846, was also active in promoting the town. Reed cut the first road between Neenah and Oshkosh, and the first religious services were held at his house (1845). The village was platted in 1847. Jones started a canal to supply the Neenah mills (there were four by 1848), but he died in 1849 before its completion.

Brown County, 1836-50

The improvement of the Fox River and the metamorphosis of Wisconsin from territory to state were events closely related to one another. The early public meetings held by energetic citizens of Green Bay in 1829 and in 1833, to address congress on river improvement, have been mentioned. This movement had an organ in the second Green Bay newspaper—the *Wisconsin Democrat,* published by H. O. and C. C. Sholes. Promoters of this enterprise hoped to make Green Bay the commercial centre of the state. Governor Doty in 1843 fathered the belligerent resolutions presented to congress by the Wisconsin legislature.[1] Claiming that the legal southern bound-

[1] See R. G. Thwaites, *Story of Wisconsin* (Boston, 1891), chap. vii.

Menasha Lighthouse, Lake Winnebago,
in 1855

Residence of Harrison Reed, Neenah,
in 1855

From daguerreotypes by J. F. Harrison

ary of Wisconsin had been tampered with in the formation of Illinois, threats of secession were made unless the government would agree to the following improvements: 1. To build a railroad between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi. 2. To make the Fox-Wisconsin rivers a national waterway. 3. To connect the Fox and Rock rivers by a canal. 4. To construct harbors on the west shore of Lake Michigan. Interest in agricultural development of the valley was for a time overshadowed by the idea of a great waterway. In 1846, Morgan L. Martin, territorial delegate from Green Bay, introduced into congress a bill for the improvement of the Fox and Wisconsin. The bill was approved by President Polk, and certain land grants to help pay for the work were to be given Wisconsin when she became a state. After much rivalry between opposite sides of the river as to the location of the government lock and canal—finally placed, as has been said, on the Menasha side—work began in 1848. But under state control slow progress was made. Any state debt of over $100,000 being unconstitutional, the money could only be raised by the sale of public land. But immigration was too scanty to effect sufficient sales for this purpose. The promoters spent $400,000 and then stopped discouraged.

In March, 1848, a constitution was adopted, and without conceding any of her demands Wisconsin became a state under act of congress approved May 29, 1848. There can be no doubt but statehood was hastened by this Fox-Wisconsin improvement enterprise, which directed attention to the importance of this region, whose metropolis had by 1850 a population of 1,932.

Characteristic facts and incidents, 1816-50

The Indians and French traders were, as we have said, disposed to offer no opposition to the advent of Americans, nevertheless there was some dissatisfaction. Coming to the wilderness, the Americans did not propose to abandon their own institutions. One of the first acts of Judge Doty was to

stop Indian marriages among the traders. "Their plea was that they were legally married * * * that their marriage had been solemnized according to the customs of the Indians. The court took a different view of the legality of those marriages."[1] In some instances, the traders received the dispensations of justice from American hands with an ill grace. Childs says, "The first jury trial was held at Green Bay before Robert Irwin. I was the plaintiff * * * and * * * I gained my suit. The defendant * * * was a Frenchman. He and his friends were outrageous in their denunciation of the Yankee court and jury."[2] Traders kept liquor in the back of the store, which they sold quietly to the garrison and used in Indian trade. The children at the fort, and a few favored ones outside, were all who received schooling, while mission work slowly gained a foothold. An Episcopal mission was started at Green Bay in 1829 under the Rev. Richard F. Cadle, and a large school for children of white or mixed blood was also begun by that church in the same year, which was continued for a decade.[3] In 1830, the Rev. Samuel Mazzuchelli opened a Catholic mission school, which received government aid.[4] In 1835, Father Van den Broek came to Green Bay, followed by a colony of Dutch emigrants, who formed the nucleus of the large Dutch element of Outagamie County. Bishop Jackson Kemper was on the ground early (1834), actively directing Episcopalian missionary work in the Fox River valley.[5] The first Congregational church of the valley was organized at Green Bay, January 9, 1836, with twelve members; the Rev. Cutting Marsh was first pastor.

It is evident that these were God-fearing communities, although religion was a subordinate element in their life.

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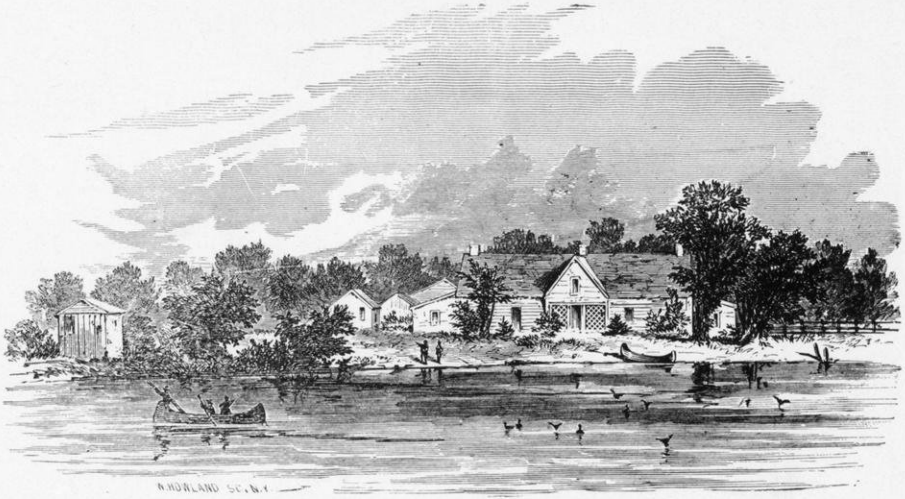
[1] *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, iv, p. 167.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 166.

[3] *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, v, p. 450; xiv, pp. 450–515.

[4] *Id.*, v, p. 155; xiv, pp. 155–161.

[5] *Id.*, v, p. 394; xiv, pp. 394–449.



From daguerreotype by J. F. Harrison

James Duane Doty's log house on Doty's Island, Neenah-Menasha, in 1855

Fighting Nature and Indians made men rough, but not immoral; plain speech was necessary. Classic oratory does not develop under such conditions as Childs describes in the first legislature at Madison (November 26, 1838).[1] Lobbying was common, and discussion ran high. About 1836 party lines became distinctly drawn; both Whigs and Democrats held conventions and formed party organizations. Early Wisconsin politicians—notably perhaps, Governor Doty—were inclined to be hasty and truculent. In a sudden political quarrel which arose out of the attitude of Doty toward the administration, during the legislature of 1843, James Vineyard of Grant County shot Charles C. P. Arndt of Green Bay. Vineyard was acquitted, but the event left an impression of horror on the minds of all concerned.[2]

A dash of old-world romance is given the life of the valley by the story of Eleazer Williams, who, posing as the "lost dauphin" of France, attracted such attention as to be seriously interviewed by the Prince de Joinville in the fall of 1841.

For many years life at Fort Howard comprised all that could be called social experience in this valley. Under some commandants, conditions there were very pleasant, much like the life at Mackinac portrayed in Miss Woolson's *Anne*. A number of distinguished people were stationed at the Wisconsin post. In 1817, Zachary Taylor succeeded Colonel Miller in command. Lieut. Jefferson Davis was at one time at Fort Howard, and Col. William S., son of Alexander Hamilton, in 1825 drove cattle to Green Bay for the use of the troops. During the holidays of 1823, "The School for Scandal" was performed by members of the garrison. But the amenities of civilization did not extend much beyond the fort; the military families, and a few of the American and French families at the Bay, made up a little society whose pleasures were simple

[1] *Id.*, iv, p. 191.

[2] See Dickens's mistaken impression of this in his *American Notes*, chap. xvii.

and few.[1] Travel and communication were slow. There were a few sailing vessels on the lakes. In 1821 the first lake steamboat, "Walk-in-the-Water," arrived at Green Bay from Buffalo. In 1829 Ebenezer Childs ran the first Durham boat up the Fox and over the Fox-Wisconsin portage for lead that he brought from Galena to Green Bay. People followed the Indian trails a-foot or on horseback; or, where possible, made a canoe voyage. The winters were tedious and lonely. The first mail route was established in 1834 from Fort Howard to Chicago, and about once a month the long-looked-for carrier arrived with his little freight of letters and old news. In 1833 the pioneer newspaper of the state, the Green Bay *Intelligencer*, was begun by Albert G. Ellis and John V. Suydam. In 1850, a telegraph line was run from Milwaukee to Green Bay.

Sources and Motives of Settlement

It will be noted from the lists of names already given, that almost without exception the American pioneer element in the valley came from the New England states, New York, and Ohio. In its inception, Oshkosh was an Ohio town. Menasha and Neenah were founded by New York men who had the Erie Canal "fever." These settlers came overland in wagons, or by the wretched lake boats that sailed from Buffalo to Cleveland, and from Detroit to Mackinac; on board of which, a passenger might be asked to "get out and push." The social and economic causes of this Westward movement are complicated. An immediate and practical inducement was the opening up of public lands for settlement, added to which in Wisconsin was immunity from Indian savagery, practically secured by the termination of the Black Hawk War of 1832. This had also well advertised the new territory. From the settlers who were early upon the scene, and bore the brunt of

[1] For an interesting narrative of pioneer social life, etc., see Juliette A. M. Kinzie, *Wau-Bun: the Early Day of the Northwest* (Chicago: Caxton club reprint, edited by R. G. Thwaites, 1901). Mrs. Kinzie came to Green Bay on the steamer "Henry Clay" in 1830.

From daguerreotype by J. F. Harrison

Oshkosh, showing old float bridge over Fox River at Ferry (now Main) Street, in 1855

pioneering, no published reminiscences are more valuable than those of Childs, Baird, and Morgan L. Martin. In their plain words, we have an insight into the motives which led themselves and many another to migrate to the far West. These explanations are therefore typical. Childs begins his narrative as follows:

> I was born in the town of Barre, Worcester County, Massachusetts, April 3rd, 1797. At the age of ten, I was left an orphan, and never inherited a cent from any person. I was turned loose upon the wide world without any one to advise or protect me, and had to struggle through poverty. I remained in my native State until 1816. I was then nineteen years of age, and was hard at work at fifty cents per day, when the Town Collector called on me for a minister tax. The amount was one dollar and seventy-five cents—I told the collector I had no money. "*Pay or go to jail.*" was the reply. He insisted on the payment of the tax; I finally put him off until the next Monday. It began to be close times with me. I must pay, go to jail or run away. I determined on the latter course. When I crossed the State line, and got into New York, I felt greatly relieved. I was then in the land of freedom, and out of reach of oppression.[1]

Colonel Childs began his Wisconsin career with a little trading store three miles above Fort Howard. He was engaged in several commercial and manufacturing enterprises, and on the whole may be taken as representative of the pioneer business man. Daniel Whitney, who came to Green Bay from New Hampshire a year later, was another notable of this type.

Henry S. Baird, the father of the Wisconsin bar, was born in Ireland, but came with his father to New York in 1804. Before the age of fifteen, Baird had a meagre literary education; at eighteen, he entered a law office at Pittsburg, and afterwards studied at Cleveland with Governor Word of Ohio. In 1823 he was admitted to practice by Judge Doty, and came to Green Bay for the first term of court held there the following year. Baird was prominent in the early legal affairs of the valley. A friend of the Indians, he was commissioner for many of their treaties. He also had charge for many years of

[1] *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, iv, p. 153.

the Astor property at Green Bay. With his wife he participated in the social gaieties of the garrison at Fort Howard, and his home was widely known for its delightful hospitality. As perhaps the finest representative of the early professional men of the valley, it is interesting to hear in his own words his reason for coming West:

> Some persons may feel disposed to enquire, what could induce a professional man, at so early a day, and when the country was but a wilderness—to settle here and become a resident of the country? For my part—without pecuniary resources, and having no influential friends to whom I could look for advancement and aid—I determined, after having acquired some knowledge of my profession, to seek my fortune, and pave my own way in life. With this view, I visited Green Bay in 1824.[1]

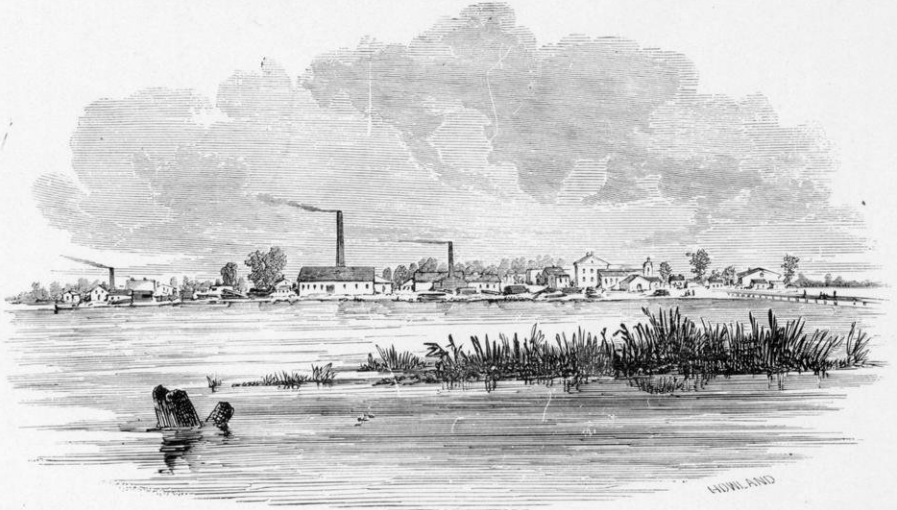
These two explanations represent many. Following the famous advice of the oracle of the New York *Tribune,* these men came West, one to escape cramping New England narrowness, the other to make his fortune.

Industrial Development, 1850 to the Present

Life in the Fox River valley, as elsewhere in the Middle West, became complex by the transforming action of two factors—the development of industries, and foreign immigration. Up to about 1840, the fur-trade had been the important occupation; after that date it was supplanted by agriculture and manufactures. The coming of the foreigner was at once the result and cause of industrial development; but chiefly, this element came in to form a laboring class for the industries developed by the capital and brains of the later American pioneers from the East.

After the admission of Wisconsin into the federal union (1848), both foreign and Eastern American immigrants flocked into the valley, and soon it was perceived that the leadership had changed hands. A new set of men were in control. In this rear-guard of the pioneers, may be noticed some

[1] *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, iv, p. 219.



From daguerreotype by J. F. Harrison

Algoma (now part of Oshkosh) in 1855

significant changes. The simple communal life of trading days had disappeared. Classes were formed. On the one hand, were the capitalist and the professional man; the plain laborer on the other. Many of the later pioneers were men of considerable education, and introduced a diversity of employments. These later men may be called the pioneers of ameliorated conditions. Much hard work had been done; peace and safety had been secured; the beginnings of civic life had been made.

Soon after 1850, the valley cities were incorporated—Oshkosh in 1853, Green Bay 1854, and Appleton 1857; while Neenah and Menasha came later, in 1873 and 1874 respectively. The lumber industry of which Daniel Whitney of Green Bay and Capt. Welcome Hyde of Appleton were noted valley pioneers, was now rapidly developed by a coterie of Eastern men, such as Philetus Sawyer, coming to Oshkosh from Vermont in 1849; Carleton Foster and James Jones coming from New York in 1855; Richard T. Morgan, born in Wales, arriving from New York in 1856; and S. B. Paige coming from New Hampshire in 1856. Gabriel Bouck, of Dutch ancestry, who arrived in 1849, and George Gary in 1850, both New Yorkers, and Leander Choate from Maine in 1857, were three Oshkosh lawyers who became widely known. John H. M. Wigman, the well-known lawyer of Green Bay, settled in that place in 1848. The pioneer in new enterprises may be typified by W. H. Rogers from New York, who about 1849 started market gardening at Appleton.

The early scheme of making a great waterway of the valley came in this period to be considered a necessity. The original promoters, who, overcome by debt, had stopped work, were relieved in 1853 by a charter granted to the "Fox and Wisconsin Improvement Company"—a group of capitalists who assumed the responsibility of the undertaking. Some of the Fox River valley men among the directors were Morgan L. Martin, Joseph G. Lawton, Edgar Conklin, and Otto Tank, all of Green Bay, and Col. Theodore Conkey of Appleton.[1] In spite

[1] *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xi, p. 385.

of enormous liabilities the waterway was opened, and in June, 1856, amid great rejoicing, the "Aquila," a stern-wheeler from Pittsburg, arrived at Green Bay.[1] Business and immigration were tempted hither by this success. In November 1862, the Chicago & Northwestern Railway, destined to minimize the importance of the whole waterway improvement, was opened through the valley. The Green Bay and Mississippi Canal Company, founded in 1866, sold out to the government in 1872. About $1,000,000 were then spent by the United States in further improvement, but railroads now control the carrying trade of the valley.[2]

The War of Secession temporarily retarded trade and immigration, but the close of the contest saw the rise of industry on a greater scale, due chiefly to the increased local and foreign demand for lumber and to better shipping facilities by rail and water. For a time, fires of appalling magnitude interfered with progress. A series of holocausts occurred in Oshkosh from 1859 to 1875; and in the extremely dry autumn of 1871 (October 8), Brown and Outagamie counties were fire-swept, being again visited by the destructive element September 20, 1880.[3] The laboring class having come to conscious existence during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, waged a duel with capital in the lumber business; however, no very serious troubles have occurred.[4]

Representative Later Pioneers

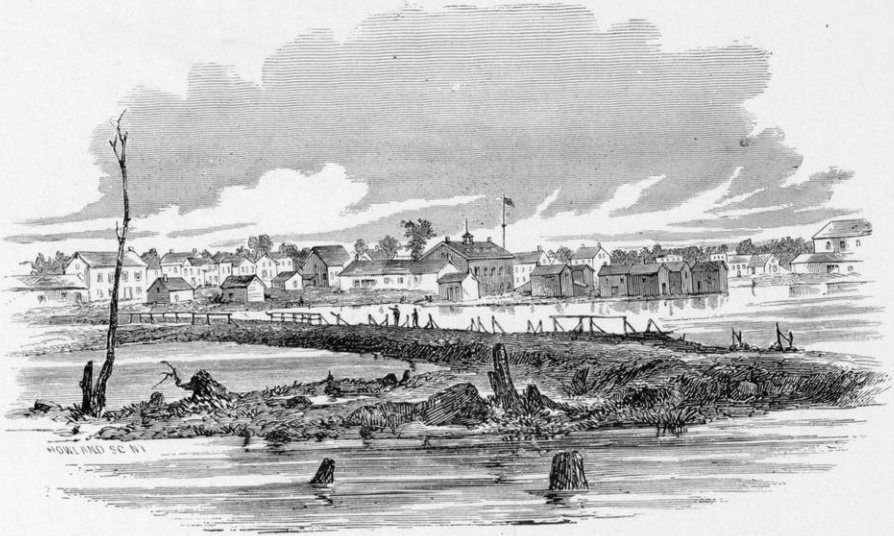
Morgan L. Martin, by a long and active life united the earlier with the later pioneers, but his activity was more conspicuous in connection with the latter group, so that notice of

[1] Oshkosh *Courier*, June 11, 1856; also Richard J. Harney, *History of Winnebago Co.* (Oshkosh, 1880), p. 143.

[2] See article in Appleton *Post*, December 13, 1877.

[3] *History of Northern Wisconsin* (Chicago, 1881), pp. 111–113, 124.

[4] On August 18, 1903, Thomas R. Morgan, of the Morgan lumber firm at Oshkosh, was shot by a German employee. There was no reason for the act—Milwaukee *Free Press*, August 19, 1903. Mr. Morgan came from Wales in 1868, and was a relative of Richard T. Morgan.



From daguerreotype by J. F. Harrison

Menasha in 1855

his work has been reserved until now. Martin was born in Martinsburgh, N. Y., in 1805. In 1824 he was graduated from Hamilton College, and for two years studied law. At their expiration he went to Detroit, where he was admitted to the bar, and acting on the advice of his cousin, Judge Doty, he settled in Green Bay in 1827 and lived there until his death. Martin at once became a leading figure in the political life of the little place. We have in his reminiscences an interesting account of a horseback trip with Judge Doty, Henry S. Baird, and others in 1829 through the country south of the Fox and Wisconsin, the very practical result of which was additions to the government map of that part of the territory. The framing and passage of the bill for the Fox River improvement (1846), was largely due to the efforts of Mr. Martin while territorial delegate to congress from Wisconsin. He was president of the constitutional convention of 1848, and fathered the improvement scheme of 1853. Martin was for many years active in the political life of the state. During the War of Secession he was an army paymaster, and served as Indian agent in 1866. In this latter year he was defeated for congress by Philetus Sawyer. His political career ended as judge of Brown County where he served from 1875 until his death in 1887. Martin was a man of fine taste and presence. His home, "Hazelwood," remains as one of the best examples in the valley of the classic New England style of house-building.[1]

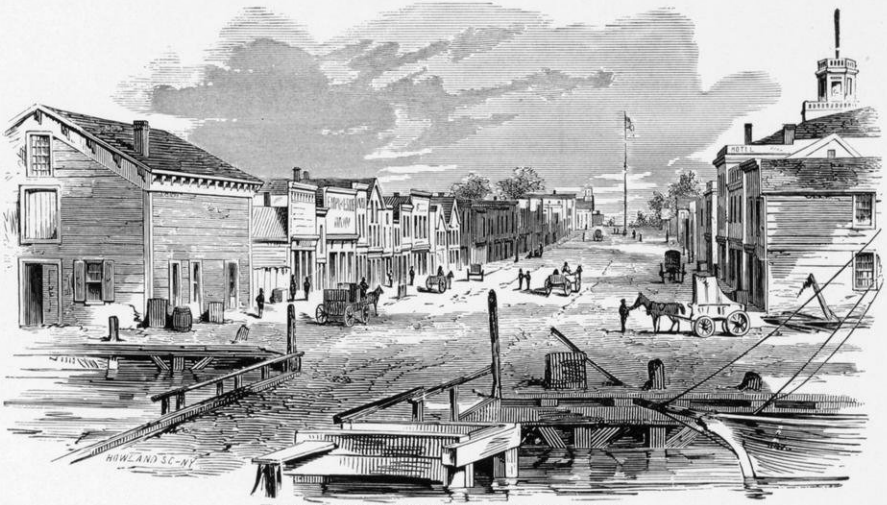
Capt. Joseph G. Lawton was a representative capitalist of the later period. Born in New York city (1822), on Broome Street in what was then a fine house, after a year at the University of Pennsylvania he conducted business with his father and brother in various places in Pennsylvania until about 1849. Then, like many another young man of the period, he began to study law. Hearing what great opportunities the West

[1] See the narrative and sketch of Morgan L. Martin, in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xi.

afforded, he came to Green Bay on a prospecting tour in 1851, starting business almost immediately, by entering into partnership in a factory with Otto Tank. In 1853 he organized the Fox River Bank, and in 1856 the Brown County Bank of De Pere. Next to Morgan L. Martin, Lawton was the most active director of the Fox River Improvement Company, and negotiated the sale of its lands. When the War of Secession broke out, Lawton gained his military title by raising a company of volunteers, with which he saw active service, but the illness of his wife compelled him to resign in 1863. He thereupon established a stave factory, a smelting furnace, and a flax factory at Pe Pere, platted a large part of that city, and built a wing dam and canal. The next year he built a bridge between East and West De Pere, and a sash and door factory at the latter place. Captain Lawton's energy increased the local population during the years 1863–64 from 150 to 2,500.[1] He died in 1896.

Senator Philetus Sawyer was a representative politician, lumberman, and capitalist combined.[2] Born in Vermont in 1816, the son of a small farmer and blacksmith, he early moved to the Adirondacks with his parents, and as a lad lived a hard and industrious life. By 1847 he had accumulated $2,000, and in 1849 came to Oshkosh to place his little capital in the Wolf River pineries. He finally bought a saw-mill and made a financial success of what had been a failure under other hands. From 1857 to 1861, Sawyer was in the state legislature, and from 1865 to 1875 in the lower house of congress, where he became widely known by his committee work on matters of Western expansion and improvement. The river and harbor bill of 1871, which provided about $7,000,000 for this purpose, was largely his work. In the United States senate he served two terms, 1881–93. Until 1880 he was vice-president of the Chicago, St. Paul & Omaha Railway, and

[1] See *Biog. Record of Fox River Valley* (Chicago, 1895), p. 28.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 980.



From daguerreotype by J. F. Harrison

Ferry (now Main) Street, Oshkosh, in 1855

vice-president of the First National Bank of Oshkosh. Mr. Sawyer remained identified with the lumber interests of Wisconsin, and died March 29, 1900.

Foreign Immigration

The foreign-born population of the valley soon after 1850 became a prominent factor in its life. Aside from the French-Canadian and English who came in individually all through the early part of the nineteenth century, there was the "canny Scot," with an eye to thrift, like Alexander Mitchell of Milwaukee;[1] the Irishman, who turned his back upon Irish politics and misery, like the father of Henry S. Baird; the deserter from the British navy, like Col. Samuel Ryan of Appleton,[2] and an occasional European refugee. These men, however, merely heralded the great movement of foreign population which took place about the middle of the century as a result of the democratic unrest pervading Europe and to some extent forcing the democratization of European governments. Before and after the War of Secession, settlers from our own Eastern states—especially from New York, Maine, Vermont, Pennsylvania, and Ohio—steadily moved in to form the basis of the present generation. But during the last quarter of the century, the foreign element took a prominent place in municipal affairs, and by the century's end the population of the valley had become an amalgamation of Eastern-American, native Wisconsin, and foreign-born elements.[3] The European-born citizens of the valley are mostly Germans (strongest in Outagamie and Winnebago), Scandinavians, English, Irish, and Dutch (strongest in Brown County), with a sprinkling of other nationalities. An interesting representative is John H. M.

[1] *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xi, p. 435.

[2] Elihu Spencer, *Pioneers of Outagamie County* (Appleton, 1895), p. 182.

[3] See *Men Who Are Making Green Bay* (Green Bay, 1897); *Pioneers of Outagamie County;* and county histories of Brown, Outagamie, and Winnebago in *History of Northern Wisconsin* (Milwaukee, 1882).

Wigman of Green Bay, who was born at Amsterdam in 1835. Coming of good family unusual attention was given to his education, and he became an excellent linguist. In 1848 he accompanied his father to Little Chute together with Father Van den Broek, founder of the large Dutch colony in Brown County. For several years Mr. Wigman worked near Green Bay, while engaged in the study of law. In 1864 he was admitted to the bar, and in 1868 opened an office in Green Bay in partnership with Mr. Hudd. Mr. Wigman's most celebrated case was connected with the question of the use of the Bible in public schools, his point of view being that of the Roman Catholics.[1] The French element is strongest in Green Bay. In 1895 the percentage of American-born population in Brown County was 76, Winnebago 72, and Outagamie 75.

Sources, Character, and Influence of Pioneer Life

In concluding this brief study what may be said of the sources, character, and influence of the pioneer life of the valley? As to the first, it has been indicated that the main source of American pioneer life along the Fox River, as well as in Wisconsin as a whole, was the state of New York. A noticeable percentage of men from that state were both lawyers and farmers in the valley. Statistics of the first constitutional convention at Madison (1846) show that out of 114 members, 42 were from New York; of the second convention (1847), 25 were from New York.[2] The old French and half-breed settlements constituted an earlier pioneer life, which blending with the American was gradually lost to sight. During the heyday of the American pioneer and the organization of state life, a few old survivors remained like "knitters in the sun," basking in the memories of other days.[3] The latest date that can

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[1] P. M. Reed, *Bench and Bar of Wisconsin* (Milwaukee, 1882), p. 389.

[2] Tenney and Atwood, *Fathers of Wisconsin*, pp. 20–22.

[3] See L. C. Draper's account of visiting Augustin Grignon in 1857, in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, iii, pp. 195, 196.

From daguerreotype by J. F. Harrison

Neenah in 1855

be assigned for the continuance of this element as an influence, is 1860. Augustin Grignon, the last of the old traders, died that year at Green Bay. The maximum date which can be assigned to the American pioneers who came before 1843, is 1887, the death of Morgan L. Martin of Green Bay. The maximum date for the later pioneers of 1849 and the few years following, can scarcely as yet be assigned. One of the last of these, Gabriel Bouck, passed away February 21, 1904.[1]

It has been shown that the French element was not constituted by nature or by numbers to play a leading part in state life. The men from the Eastern states, however, came prepared to build a new commonwealth. Economic causes were a positive motive force in Western emigration; but the nameless instinct that, ever since the dawn of Aryan history, has impelled men to the West, led these men to a land of promise.

The settlers of the Fox River valley were law-abiding, but not religious. Certain vagaries, however, flourished. There were Fourierism at Ripon[2] and Mormonism at Voree;[3] but of all the oddities of the time, the valley harbored none more picturesque than the belief in Eleazer Williams and his pretensions to the French throne.

The valley pioneers had few characteristics not common to those of the state at large; but withal they were highly intelligent,[4] resolute, yet peaceable.

The beginnings of real settlement and of organized life in Wisconsin must be credited to the earlier Fox River valley pioneers. For them,

"Hack and Hew were the sons of God,"

and many commemorative eulogies have rewarded their toil. To such men as James Duane Doty, Morgan L. Martin, and

[1] Milwaukee *Free Press*, February 22, 1904.

[2] See H. E. Legler, *Leading Events in Wisconsin History* (Milwaukee, 1898), chap. ix.

[3] *Ibid.*, chap. xi.

[4] Especially in law, noted by Edmund Burke as characteristic of the American colonist.

Henry S. Baird was due, in large part, the embryonic existence of the state. They were the pioneers of law and order, and the modern state owes their memory a debt of gratitude. The work of the Fox River improvement companies and the lumber pioneers of Oshkosh attracted population to the valley and indirectly proved a benefit to the growth of the entire state. Nevertheless the hope of making Green Bay the commercial metropolis of the commonwealth proved vain, because of the greater accessibility of Milwaukee, and the northward and westward movement of the lumber interests.

At the present time, the counties of the valley contain an average percentage of American-born population. What proportion of this population is descended from the original pioneers has not been determined. While many of their descendants remain, others are scattered over the state, and the ideals of all are modified by new conditions. Yet inherited characteristics are more tenacious than appears, and old voices speak from silent things. Occasional dark eyes and straight hair, or a Gallic name, preserve the memory of the mixed French and Indian blood of trading days. But as a memorial of the real makers of the valley, the wide, shady street with fine old New England houses in roomy dooryards, is still typical of the early American founders of Green Bay.