



Journeys to the place of spirits: the journals of an imaginary traveler to Manitowoc.

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JOURNEYS TO THE
PLACE OF SPIRITS
THE JOURNALS OF AN
IMAGINARY TRAVELER
TO MANITOWOCby: *Kerry A. Trask*
Associate Professor of History
University of Wisconsin-Manitowoc County Center

Editor's Note: The lower valley of the Manitowoc River has been inhabited by human beings for centuries and there has been a European community here since the early nineteenth century. There are few pictures of this area and its people from before the Civil War but there is a good deal of information available to us about them. This monograph combines some of that factual historical information with some literary license in an effort to provide mental pictures of the lives of both the Indian and European peoples living here then. The narrator — the traveler who stopped at Manitowoc on three different days in its early history — is a creation of imagination but the people and the community he describes were very real.

The world seems on the brink of chaos. It is early August of 1795 and civilization is crumbling and collapsing on all fronts. Europe is being battered to death by blows of revolution, reigns of terror, and international war. Even in America civil war appears imminent. Washington's government is in rapid decline. Last year disgruntled farmers in western Pennsylvania rose in armed rebellion against his policies. Throughout the nation popular passions have swept aside all restraints of reason and a great many people now believe that the democratic experiment has gone too far and that the nation is doomed to disintegration. But for me all that seems remote and unreal as I paddle my bark canoe southward through the choppy waters of Lake Michigan.

Three days ago I was in Green Bay. It is a small settlement, barely a village, inhabited by no more than thirty people living in small log and plank huts scattered over a four mile area near the mouth of the Fox River. In the summer they work their small farms. In the winter they live in the forest among the Indians with whom they trade. Most of these people are more-or-less French, descendants of French-Canadian voyageurs and traders who mingled and sometimes married with the daughters of their customers. Almost all of them work for the Northwest Company under the command of their half-breed patriarch, Charles de Langlade, the most revered and respected man in this part of the continent.

After departing Green Bay I crossed the portage at Sturgeon Bay and made my way down the western shoreline. After hours of strenuous paddling I rounded a bulging point and immediately before me was a large number of canoes and dug-outs containing hundreds of Indians out in

the warmth of the late afternoon sun spearing fish. They waved and shouted when they saw me. White men are rare in these parts. I waved back, and hoping their signs of friendship were sincere, pushed on through them along the concave curve of the lake and turned the bow of my boat shoreward towards the mouth of a medium sized river.

Where the river meets the lake a huge sandbar had accumulated damming back the water into an expansive marsh and reducing the river's flow to almost a trickle. The marsh was thick with wild rice and crowded with water fowl. From the banks of the stream the land rose gradually into great, rounded, timber covered hills on either side. Most of the trees were pine, stout, tall, pillar-like pines which sighed and swayed in the late afternoon breeze. Among them and along the river there also grew maples, oaks, and birch, and the fringes of the marsh grew thick with tamaracks. Great flocks of pigeons flew overhead and through the clear sweet water I saw uncountable numbers of sleek, fat fish.

As I stood there I was suddenly startled by Indians returning from the lake. Their canoe rode low in the water, heavy with their still squirming cargo. They laughed and gestured to me and one of them suggested that I follow them back to their village where there was another white man who, he assured me, would be glad of my company.

Fearing that offense would be taken by even the most polite refusal, I nodded my acceptance, pulled my canoe over the sandbar, and followed behind with some anxiety. About two miles upstream I heard the unmistakable sounds of a human habitation. The men who had gone before me were already gutting their catch when I landed, and women were carrying fish like cord wood to

smoking racks along the bank. To the north, from the flat top of a high bluff, campfire smoke rose through the leaves and swirled in the long rays of the lowering sun.

By then it was too late to back out, so I pulled my canoe up to the bank, mustered my courage, and set out for that hill-top village. In my ascent I was almost overcome by the smells; the smells of cedar smoke and drying fish, of rancid grease, decaying meat, unscraped hides, garbage heaps, and the sweat and oil of human bodies all hung heavy in the warm air. I was almost out of breath when I reached the edge of the village in which blacked pots of fish heads and corn meal bubbled over fires and my stomach grew uneasy from the sights and smells, and from the rising apprehension I felt about proceeding further.

The village consisted of about thirty huts. Each was the same: rectangular in shape, about eighteen feet long, twelve feet wide, and the side walls rose about six feet to where they met the eaves of the pitched roofs. They were covered with cedar bark. There were long openings along the ridges of the roofs to allow the smoke from inside to escape. All faced eastward to catch the warmth and light of the rising sun, and blankets hung over most doors.

Most of the men in camp were lying on porch-like platforms built up in front of these huts. Some were sleeping, others gambling, and still others were noisily sucking the marrow from broken bones. Throughout the camp, children chased dogs, threw balls, wrestled and splashed in the puddles left by the most recent rains. Women, some dressed in skin clothes elaborately decorated with bead and quill work, others immodestly nursing infants at their naked breasts, tended to the hard and menial work of the woodland community.

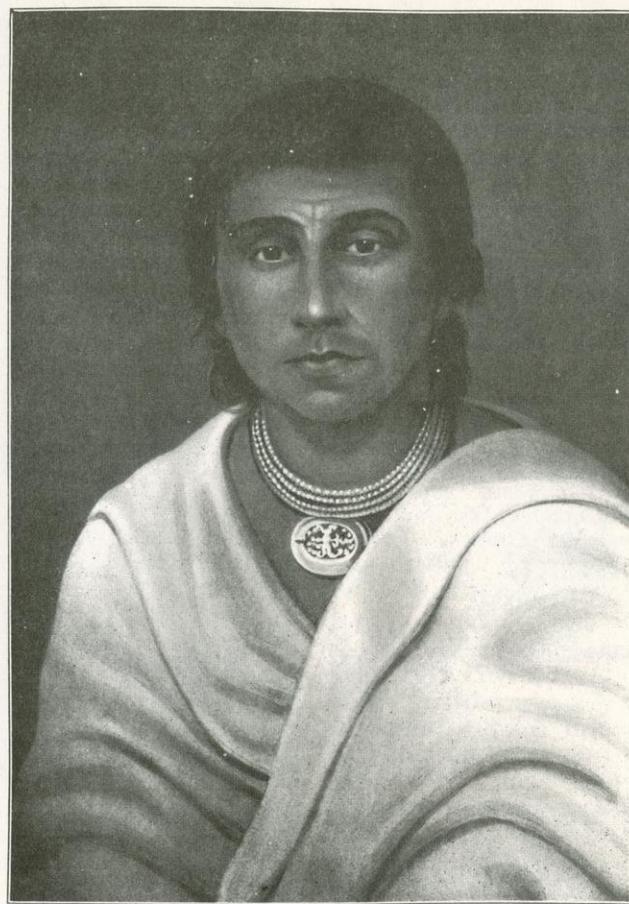
Through the confusion, off towards the far end of the camp, I saw some white men and a white woman sitting upon blankets engaged in intense conversation with a young Indian man. At the river I had noticed a Mackinaw boat full of trade goods and a forty-foot canoe stuffed with packs. I assumed those to be the property of

these men who had come to this village to trade.

After a short while one of the white men noticed me. He rose and briskly walked in my direction. He was a slight but wiry man with stooped shoulders. He was in his mid-forties. When he reached me he began speaking rapidly in French until I indicated that I did not understand. Then, in more-or-less clear English he introduced himself as Jean Vieau and asked me to join the group from which he had come.

He immediately introduced me to Waumegesako, the Indian with whom they had been talking, and identified this Waumegesako as the head chief of the village. I was a little surprised. He was probably no older than I, only in his early twenties. Also, he was dressed very plainly and wore none of the feathers, spangles, or beads which most chiefs display as badges of their high status. He was a strong and athletic looking man, about six feet tall, and had none of the sharp and angular features so common to the natives. His hair was neatly parted in the middle and pulled back in a single braid behind, his eyes were large, warm, and intelligent, and his manner was regal, yet friendly. From his appearance I sensed he was a most unusual man.

We all sat down, and Jean Vieau told me that he had left Michilimackinac in mid-July with eleven men rowing the big flat-bottomed Mackinaw boat while he, his wife Angeline, their three children — Madeleine, Josette, and Paul — and his clerk Michael la Petteel, followed along in the canoe. He had already established a "jack-knife" post about nine miles up the most easterly of the twin rivers to the north. A modest cabin had been built on the north side of a creek running into that river, and he had left one of his men there to carry on trade with the Indians in that area throughout the winter. He also intended to establish a similar post at this place, a place the Indians call "Manitowoc," which means, in the Algonquin language, "the place of spirits." He is very optimistic about business. He is the only trader in this region, the first in anyone's memory to work the western side of the lake. He said he intends to build another "jack-knife" post another thirty miles down lake, and then to erect a substantial cabin and warehouse near the mouth of the Milwaukee River where he, and his family, and most of his men would winter among the Potawatomis. He would return to Michilimackinac in the spring with his cargo of pelts and skins, refurbish his trade goods and provisions, and head south again in mid-summer. Along the way he would stop at his small posts, collect what his men had purchased from the Indians, replenish their supplies, and be back to his Milwaukee post by late August.



*Chief Waumegesako or Mexico
Born 1789. Died at Rapids 1844*

It seemed to me a well thoughtout plan. Waumegesako agreed and said that the many Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi people living in the immediate area would be delighted with the opening of trade. There was a rather large band of Potawatomi living near the common mouth of the two rivers to the north, he said. They were led by Nanaboujour, an old and famous story teller. An Ottawa and Potawatomi band under Chief Mishicot spent their summers along a broad creek just north of there and in winter migrated inland to hunt amidst the forest. Further up the Manitowoc River, near another rapids, lived Old Quintos and a small village of Potawatomi, and far up the most eastern of the two rivers was a very large Chippewa settlement. The headman of that village was Old Solomon. In all, counting his own people, Waumegesako estimated that there were as many as seven hundred Indians who lived permanently within a forty mile radius of this place and indicated that perhaps another five hundred migrated into the area during the height of the fishing season. He assured Vieau that they would all be eager to exchange their pelts, skins, and maple sugar for the blankets, blue

stroud-water cloth, copper kettles, steel axes, gunpowder, and whiskey he carried with him.

The conversation was friendly, and I was made to feel part of the group. Just after sunset we feasted on fresh boiled corn and roast dog and then talked long into the night.

Waumegesako told me of his people and himself. They are a mixed band of Chippewa and Ottawa who have lived in this place for more than eighty years. His grandfather, Etoigeshak, had led the small band of Chippewa out of Canada early in the century when the brutal and prolonged struggles of the fur trade left them homeless refugees in search of asylum in the deep forests west of Lake Michigan. They had settled along this river but found no peace until the Fox ended their war with the French. Since then life has been good.

It was while his father Chaicoanda was headman that they had taken in the Ottawa. Because they and the Ottawa spoke a mutually intelligible dialect of the Algonquin language and because they shared many common customs and traditions, the two peoples compatibly combined and remained in this almost idealic land along the Manitowoc River.

During our long meal, Jean Vieau, or "Jambo" as the Indians call him, told of his first journey into this western wilderness. Originally he had signed on as a common voyageur at Montreal and had been one of twelve paddlers in one of the Northwest Company's great birch bark freighter canoes making the trip up the Ottawa River, across to Lake Nippising, down the French River to Georgian Bay, and across the open waters of Lake Huron to Michilimackinac. It was a hard trip, carrying the canoes and the eighty pound packs over the seventeen long portages between Montreal and Michilimackinac, paddling constantly for at least fourteen hours a day every day, eating nothing but cornmeal and pork lard, and being devoured alive by black flies and mosquitos every stroke of the way. Nevertheless, the effort had been worth it, he said. He enjoyed the wilderness, the Indians, the trade, and he had already done rather well for himself. After serving time as a clerk at Chequamegon Bay and La Point and after becoming Joseph le Roy's son-in-law he had become a full fledged trader and he was now off to make his fortune in the wild country of Lake Michigan's western shore.

We talked and smoked for hours. The eastern sky was growing light when I retreated from the fire into Waumegesako's lodge. During those hours of darkness the three of us had been drawn closely together in friendship. I was asleep only a short while before the clamor of the village and the growing heat of the morning awakened me. Jean Vieau and his men were already busy cutting and hauling logs for the trading post. Most of the men of the village had already departed for the day's fishing and most of the women were cutting wood and feeding children. I ate some boiled fish presented to me by an old wrinkled and toothless squaw, and after bidding farewell to Jean Vieau and the young chief I returned to my canoe and made my way back to the lake, filled with feelings of sublime contentment.

1842

It is late October, 1842. Three days ago I was wandering amidst the mudfilled streets and the dreary shanties, shacks, and warehouses of Chicago. What a depressing place, a place that will have no future once the Indian trade has ended. It is good to be out of there and heading north by schooner for Manitowoc. I recall with deep delight my first visit there some forty years ago. Now, the ship, its white sails full of clean northwesterly wind, plunges and rises, its taut ropes singing in the stiff gale and its planks creaking and groaning, as we batter our way northward.

My voyage complete, I once again find myself at the sandbar of the river's

mouth. This time there are no Indians. It is too late in the season, too cold on the water for fishing. But now there is a line of weather-beaten sheds built up on posts along the beach south of the river and since my last visit, a brick lighthouse has been built back from the north bank in about a hundred yards from the lake. About two hundred yards further west of that stands a substantial frame house. Smoke rises from its chimney and that is the only sign of life this cold October afternoon. There is a warehouse, some humble board shacks, and a large unfinished building pretentiously identified by its sign as the National Hotel. A sawmill stands silent and idle along the river. In the same general area, among the untidy clearings of the north bank, there is a schoolhouse, but there are no children, and no sounds. It is a lifeless place without stores, churches, people, or motion, except for that thin wisp of white smoke.

I crossed the river at the sandbar and made my way to the dwelling from which the smoke was rising. I knocked on the door. Even before I had stopped my rapping it opened and there stood a big, barrel-chested, broad-shouldered, thick-necked man who gruffly introduced himself as Mr. Benjamin Jones and asked me what I wanted. Before I could answer I was unceremoniously ushered into a parlor. He pointed to a chair which I assumed I was to sit upon and then for a time, for a deadly pause that seemed to last for hours, we said nothing. Jones slouched in his chair and looked through the window. His almond shaped eyes were cold and sad and his thin lips remained motionless. He was by no means a handsome man, but his appearance had an air of refinement about it. His short brown hair, which had receded back to nearly the middle of his head, was brushed neatly forward, his well-trimmed sideburns grew down past the curve of his jaw, and he wore a black suit. I knew by that he was a man of some importance.

The awkward silence was finally shattered when Jones turned to announce that he was the owner of the house, the warehouse, the National Hotel, the sawmill, and the barges I must have noticed floating in the river. He also said that he was the owner of almost all the land, all 2,000 acres of it, in the area. Furthermore, he was the justice of the peace, the postmaster, the poor master for the entire county, as well as the employer of almost everyone living in Manitowoc.

He informed me he had been born in Massachusetts, but that while he was a boy his family had moved to upstate New York and how as still a boy he had served in the army during the War of 1812. In 1833 he and his brother William had moved to Chicago where they opened a store. From their profits

they invested in land. He bought land around Chicago while William initially purchased land south of the Little Manitowoc River. After the land office opened in Green Bay in 1836, land had been selling around here for \$1.25 an acre. He and his brother formed a company — Jones, Clark, and Company — and he, who also had no optimism about the future of Chicago, persuaded his brother to exchange holdings with him.

In May of 1836 he had sent forty-five men to Manitowoc on board the schooner "Wisconsin" to clear house lots and prepare the land for the building of a city. They accomplished little. All but five of them deserted soon after arriving. The five who remained cleared only one house site and built only one crude shanty and by the coming of winter only E.L. Abbott remained.

Jones spoke of his own arrival in February of 1837. At that time he had felt sure he was on the verge of becoming a wealthy man and the founder of a great city. In April he brought in forty more men to commence the construction of that envisioned city. During that spring and summer he and his men worked hard. Streets were laid out and named, house lots were cleared, and the mill, warehouse, and National Hotel were begun. The town site they cut from the forest was bounded by Huron Street on the north, Division Street on the south, and stretched as far west as 14th Street.

Throughout that spring and summer, land prices soared. Land Jones had purchased for \$1.25 an acre the year before sold for as high as \$200 an acre in July of 1837. Most house lots in the town sold for \$100 each. Because of that, and his confidence in the future he paid his workmen well. Common laborers received between \$35 and \$40 a month, while carpenters were paid between \$2.75 and \$3.00 a day. Wages like that, Jones assumed, would draw men to Manitowoc.

The people came. They moved north from Chicago and west from Detroit, New York and New England; they built houses, planted gardens, worked in the forest and the mill, and by mid-summer there were sixty of them living in Jones' settlement. That spring Jones brought his wife, his two daughters, his young son Alonzo, along with his mother-in-law, her 15 year old boy Perry Peter Smith, and her other daughter Marie. Marie Smith married E.L. Abbott, the lone holdout from the previous winter, and Jones, the newly appointed Justice of the Peace, performed the ceremony. Oliver Hubbard came with his wife and four sons and D.C. Munger settled with his family in Manitowoc that summer. In September Mrs. Munger gave birth to a son whom they named Charles, and

less than two months later Mrs. Jones added a third daughter — Adaline — to the village's first family.

The whole area resounded to the same economic boom that shook the entire nation. As President Jackson retired to the Hermitage leaving the national government in the hands of Martin Van Buren, the whole country was almost unbelievably prosperous. In the midst of that prosperity, Jacob Conroe together with his wife and three brothers migrated from Vermont in 1836. They built a sawmill and started the Town of Manitowoc Rapids not far from the old Indian village. Forty people lived there in the summer of 1837. In May of '37, J.L. Thayer from Waddington, New York, opened another mill further up river and brought in fifteen men to work for him. Another forty men lived and worked at John Lawe's sawmill at the junction of the Mishicot and Neshoto Rivers, and almost as many at Oliver Longvine's mill at Two Rivers. That same summer A.M. Burnham of Detroit opened up still another sawmill eight miles up the West Twin River. By midsummer there were 180 people, not counting Indians, living in the area which the territorial

assembly had designated as Manitowoc County. At that time everyone felt sure the boom had just begun.

As that summer lengthened, the boom fever intensified and then in early autumn it broke. Back east, banks began to fail and throughout the old part of the nation prosperity quickly gave way to panic. By fall a tidal wave of economic depression had begun to roll over the west. Jones' mill, which had only begun to saw planks, was shut down for lack of funds and lack of market. In fact, all the lumber mills in the county, except for Conroe's, cut their labor forces, slashed wages, and eventually shut down completely. With the collapse of the economy and the closing of the mills, people quickly deserted the area. By winter only the Jones, Hubbards, Abbotts, Mungers, and Smiths remained in Manitowoc. They were people with nowhere to run, and no money for the running.

They endured a hard winter, subsisting almost exclusively on salt fish and potatoes. In the midst of the almost unbearable cold of that winter the men of Manitowoc rowed a Mackinaw boat as far north as

Kewaunee and back to rescue Peter Johnson and his family who had been stranded there and who were on the verge of starvation. The Johnsons survived; all the people of Manitowoc survived; but the spring proved almost as difficult as the winter. After the snow had melted the people planted gardens. Jones, himself, planted five acres of wheat at the south end of Tenth Street. They hunted and fished and lived as well as they could by imitating the Indians. They made shingles and cut cord wood and occasionally a steamship stopped to refurbish its fuel supply.

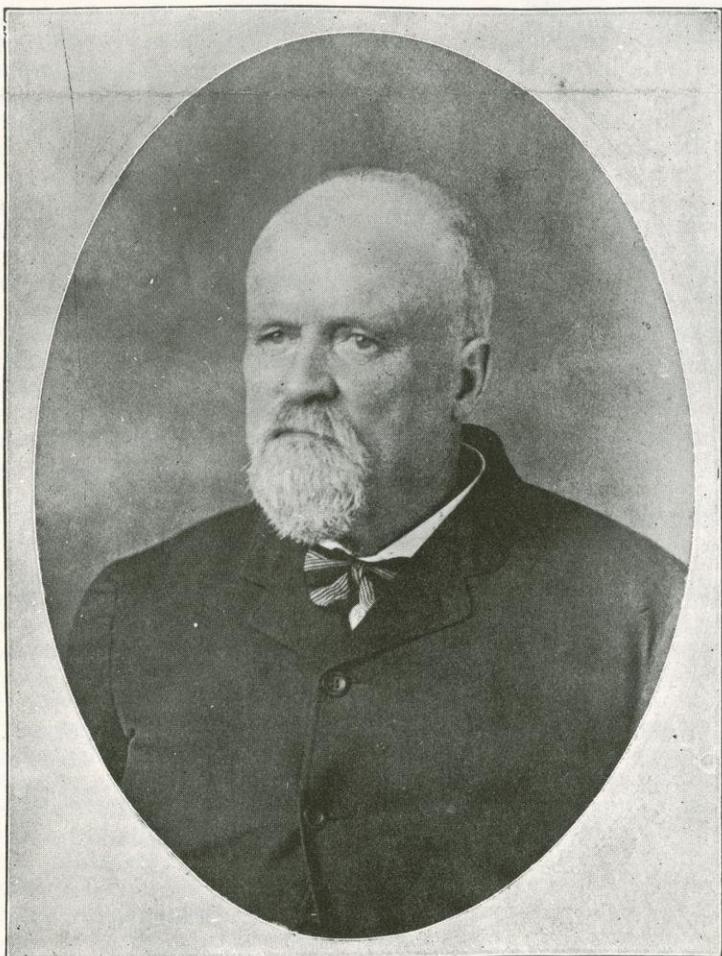
In late summer J.P. Clark and fifteen men came from Detroit. They built the shanties south of the river and commenced fishing the waters between Manitowoc and Two Rivers. The fishing was good. Joseph Edwards from Green Bay, who had built lumber barges for Jones, and young P.P. Smith entered the business. For the last few years they have been netting about 2,000 barrels of fish a season. Each barrel contains about 200 pounds of fish and sells for \$12.00 in Detroit.

Since the autumn of 1837 times have remained lean and hard. The people and their small settlement have persisted, but they have not prospered. Now, after five long years of depression, their once boundless optimism has all but completely vanished, and they have become more anxious and fearful with the passing of each summer.

Jones' own brooding brow betrayed his own loss of hope and our more-or-less one way conversation left me in a deeply depressed mood. I left his house feeling as unwelcomed as when I had come and it seemed apparent that Mr. Jones wished to have his failure remain a secret from the world. On my way out I paused on the steps. My mood became even more melancholic as I surveyed those stark, grey, wind-worn huts that comprised Jones' city. The cold winds of late October howled and I felt that it was as if I had come a great distance to attend the funeral of this pathetic village which would soon be buried beneath the snows of approaching winter.

Pulling my coat around me I headed towards the National Hotel. On my way I brushed past a blanket-wrapped Indian only to realize, as he continued at a brisk pace towards the house from which I had just come, that he was Waumegesako. I called to him. He turned back and soon his bewilderment gave way to recognition. He seemed sincerely glad to see me again. He looked older, of course, and his face showed the wrinkles of passing winters, but he was still the man of dignity and grace I had remembered.

We took shelter along the south wall of Jones' warehouse and talked. Waumegesako told me that he now had



Charles P. Munger
First white child born in the county.

four wives, boasted that he was the father of eleven strong and healthy children, and declared that he had become a chief of some prominence in the world since our last meeting. He showed me the silver medal at his neck indicating it had been sent to him by King George III soon after the War of 1812. He also mentioned with much pride that he had placed his mark upon the treaties of Buttes des Morts, Green Bay, Prairie du Chien, and Chicago and that he was very well liked by all of the white people of the region who called him John Y. Mexico.

This was his good news. But most of his news was not good. The last few years have been hard on him and his small band. Since the coming of the settlers and sawmills, although relations with the whites had remained friendly for the most part, there had been some troubles. In November of 1820 some soldiers had come down from Fort Howard to arrest some of his young men after they had attacked and robbed a drover herding cattle from Chicago to Green Bay. The next year the soldiers returned again and dragged away another of his men in chains. They charged the man with ambushing and killing Dr. William Madison, who had been traveling home on leave to Kentucky from Fort Howard. They took him to Detroit where he was put on trial and then hanged two days after Christmas, 1821. In the winter of 1826-27 the agents of the American Fur Company had become upset with him and his people because they permitted a renegade trader, Moses Swan, to live among them, but by then the trade was no longer as profitable as it had once been. With the decline of the trade, life had become more difficult. There was more hunger in the village, the people were sick more often, and then in the midst of the winter of 1832 disaster struck. A terrible plague of smallpox fell upon the people. Many of them died, hundreds of Indians throughout the territory did not live to see the coming of the spring that year. The traders tried to help. They gave the Indians food and blankets on credit. They buried the dead and nursed the dying. The people who survived were too few or too weak to hunt and repay their debts, and many traders had to go out of business. Since then the people have been poor. They have even lost their ownership of the land. In 1833 the Great White Father in Washington promised them good land west of the Mississippi, but that promise and many others has not yet been fulfilled. The Indians stay and wait. They collect their treaty money and live as well as they can. But the treaty money cannot buy back the happiness and health of the old days.

He spoke briefly of Jean Vieau, who was still alive but had not been back to



Perry P. Smith

Manitowoc since he sold out his Milwaukee interests to his son-in-law Solomon Juneau in 1819. We then parted company. I completed my walk to the National Hotel. There I ate an unappetizing meal of salt fish and boiled beans and talked with the bartender, Peter Johnson, who was also keeper of the lighthouse, Oliver Hubbard, and young P.P. Smith. I downed some of their foul tasting whiskey, spent a restless night in one of the hotel's three shabby rooms, and left in the dreary cold of dawn aboard the schooner by which I had come.

1853

No ships would be sailing out of Milwaukee for weeks, no stage coaches yet made the northern run, and because I had business that could not wait, I rolled and bumped slowly northward towards Manitowoc behind the swishing tails of an ox team. It was early May of 1853. The water was still high in the creeks and rivers, most of

which had not been bridged. My ancient bones ached from the lingering chill of winter and from the constant jarring of the two-wheeled cart as it slipped in and out of the ruts in the road.

This morning my driver yoked up our dumb brutes for the last time and we passed through clearings only recently cut from the primeval forest. In some stood log houses and log barns, and in some men were out plowing amidst the stumps. By noon we were rolling down Captain Bell's Hill into Manitowoc.

I was back after eleven years. The Village had defied my bleak predictions. It had survived. Its people had prevailed against both the harshness of nature and the whims of the American economy. Where trees and bogs and decaying shanties had once been there was now a small but obviously growing community.

We moved down Marshall Street into the village, and I observed a cluster of simple houses near the south bank of

the river. Some of the swamp had been filled. My driver told me that those people living in the south side of the village had cut down the hill we had just descended and had hauled away the dirt to make new land for themselves near the river's mouth. He also informed me that most of those southerners were "foreigners" and that although there were fewer than thirty houses in their part of town, there were already two breweries — no church or library, but two breweries. The largest of these is the Eagle Brewery run by William Rahr, a German from Wesel who had arrived in 1847.

After paying my driver, I tramped down to the river and walked out to the lake. Two piers had been constructed since my last trip, one at the foot of Franklin Street and the other between the river and Quay Street. More than a dozen schooners were moored there. Men were loading them with shingles, lumber, and barrels of fish and hauling barrels and crates from out of their holds. A man with a team of oxen was engaged in what must be an almost continual battle to keep the sandbar from blocking the river channel.

Impressed with the activity along the shore, I turned back towards the village itself. There was now a bridge spanning the river at Eighth Street. Jones' mill was operating again, and further down river I could see two other sawmills.

I walked down to the bridge and crossed over to the north side of town. The bridge was a primitive structure consisting of piles driven down into the mud of the river bottom upon which planks had been nailed. No boats could pass beneath it and it was so small that only pedestrians dare trust it.

Upon my safe arrival on the north bank, I made my way to the National Hotel. It had been completed since my last trip, and although it was far from an impressive edifice, it was, nevertheless, a moderately inviting place. Outside stood six or seven ox teams and carts. Some Indians loitered around the door. Seeing none among them whom I recognized, I moved past them and into a noisy lobby. The place still had a tavern and I was eager to wet down the dust of my journey.

The tavern was crowded. Near the bar, which had replaced the barrels and boards of former days, stood Benjamin Jones. His eyes were still cold, but the size of his belly and the cut of his suit revealed that he had prospered. Oliver Hubbard was there. Peter Johnson was still behind the bar where I had left him that cold depressing night in 1842. But most of the men there I had never seen before. They were sailors from the schooners, millhands with sawdust in their hair and beards, and farmers clutching mugs of luke-warm beer in their

calloused palms. Over in the shadows of a corner I noticed P.P. Smith. He was sitting alone so I decided to join him.

Like the village, he too had changed much in the past eleven years. In 1842 he was a strong skinny boy of eighteen. Now he was a distinguished looking young gentleman who had acquired the appearance of a benevolent patriarch. But his stare was vacant, his thoughts seemed miles away, and when I sat down he did not turn to look my way. Presently I realized he was blind. When I asked he said that it had happened only a few months before and that the darkness had descended upon him without warning. He still hoped that it would pass as quickly as it had come, but until then he would bear the affliction with as much patience as possible.

Smith had been one of the first settlers here. He had come on the schooner "Oregon" in the spring of '37. He had worked at building Jones' mill, he had worked at harvesting Jones' wheat, he had worked with Edwards and Clark in fishing the waters of the lake. He had come through the starving times, learned how to read and write in the village's first school under the inspiration of S.M. Peak's birch rod, and he had seen this dying settlement

spring back to life. In 1846 he had opened the village's first general store in the corner of Jones' warehouse, and in that corner he had become a very successful merchant. The migration of people into Manitowoc, which began that year, had been very good for business, along with the fact that the people living here remained utterly dependent on Chicago for almost all their necessities. Prices were high, he admitted — flour costing \$12.00 a barrel, salt pork fluctuating between \$10.00 and \$40.00 a barrel, eggs 20¢ a dozen, butter 25¢ a pound, and good whiskey sometimes running as high as 30¢ a gallon. Few people had money, so he exchanged his goods for shingles, lumber, and potatoes which he sold in Chicago. By 1852 business was so good that he bought his own schooner. For awhile he had a monopoly until Peleg Glover opened a store on York and Sixth Streets and John Schuette, from the Dutchy of Oldenburg, established a modest grocery store on Eighth.

He took some credit for the survival of the settlement, but, more than anything else, it was the coming of the new people — the Germans, Bohemians, and Norwegians — that had saved Manitowoc from becoming a ghost town. In the mid-1840's the



Benjamin Jones
"Father of Manitowoc"

waves of discontent, famine, and revolution which swept over Europe produced a new generation of refugees, some of whom, like the Indians before them, sought peace in the forests of eastern Wisconsin.

That, of course, had resulted in a population explosion for the county and Manitowoc. In 1842, the time of my last visit, there were only 263 people living in the entire county. At the time of the national census of 1850 the number had jumped to 3702. More than a thousand of them are Germans. The Village of Manitowoc itself has grown from the 60 people who initially settled here in the summer of 1837, to 89 in 1847, to 756 in 1850, to almost a thousand inhabitants at present.

I concluded my conversation with P.P. Smith with a second drink of whiskey and then excused myself since I was eager to find out what had become of my old friend Waumegesako since my last trip. I returned to the street, hoping to talk with the Indians I had passed on my way in, but when I got outside they were no longer there. Eventually I noticed them congregating near a store on the corner of York and Sixth, and recalling that to be the location of the Glover store, I walked over. Around the side of the building were stacks of evil smelling barrels. Through the front window I saw pelts and skins hanging from the low rafters. Politely I made my way through the Indians sitting on the steps, opened the door, and stepped inside. A man of swarthy complexion, speaking fluent Chippewa, looked up

and asked me what I wanted. He introduced himself as Colonel Peleg Glover. I asked him about Waumegesako and he told me, in a quiet voice, that the Chief was dead.

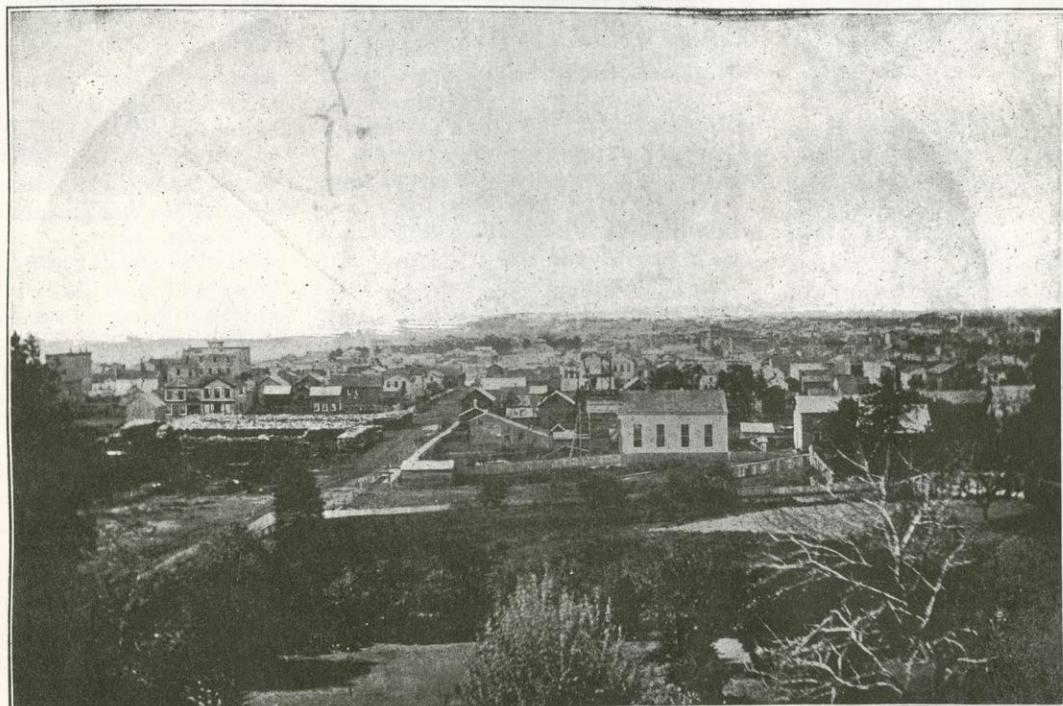
He had died quite unexpectedly, said the Colonel, in December of 1844. The end had come in a log hut up river from Cato Falls, but his people had pulled his body back through the deep snow upon a sleigh to Champlin's mill where a rough wooden coffin was prepared for their beloved leader. When the word of Waumegesako's passing went out, more than five hundred Indians, some from Sheboygan County, others from Green Bay, and still others from as far away as the Wolf River, gathered at the old village site at Manitowoc Rapids where they were joined by a large number of white people from all over the county. They gathered in the midst of a terrible blizzard to lay their old friend to rest near the place where he and his father had been born. The funeral was a solemn occasion. An era was passing, and the grief of his people was so intense that they continued their haunting death chants for three weeks.

The band, or what is left of it, now lives far up river under the direction of two of Waumegesako's sons. Up until three years ago, Glover informed me, they would all come to town in mid-summer and camp near his store. There they would wait until old Katoose and his band arrived from up the Neshoto River, and Chandelle brought his people down from the headwaters of the Mishicot. When all had

rendezvoused, the camp contained as many as three hundred men, women, and children. During their wait they traded with Glover and the settlers, exchanging muskrat and raccoon pelts, deer skins, maple sugar, and fresh venison for blankets, salt pork, gunpowder, and whiskey. At times, admitted Glover, he had been forced to preserve order with his whip. Soon after all the people arrived, they then all embarked by canoe to collect their treaty money in Detroit.

Now there are no great mid-summer camps, no more great birch-bark flotillas bound for Detroit. But some Indians still come to town to trade. They fish near Two Rivers, extract the oil from their catch, and sell it to Glover. Sometimes twenty-five to thirty canoes come down lake with cargos of foul smelling fish oil. The Colonel buys it, puts it in barrels, and ships it off to Milwaukee before the villagers protest too loudly about the stench. Fish oil is a very substantial part of his business. It has become a very important part of the Indians' livelihood now that the fur trade is dead and the treaty money has gone.

For the most part, the lives of the people living here, both red and white, seemed quite satisfactory to me — not opulent or even comfortable, but solid and secure in a simple way. Glover agreed to a point, but indicated that the people were no strangers to tragedy. Death had sometimes been unmerciful in its attacks upon them. It had come in the form of the devastating small-pox plague in the winter of 1832. Also, in



Manitowoc in 1859

1847, the steamship "Pheonix", upon casting off from the south pier to complete its voyage to Port Washington was suddenly rocked by an explosion. It burst into flames and burned to the waterline in minutes. All 150 people on board were lost.

Tragedy struck again in August of 1850. On Sunday, the fifth of August, a large number of Indians gathered at Two Rivers for a celebration. The following day many of them fell ill and before nightfall six were dead. By sundown Tuesday another six had died and by the end of the week more than fifty of the villagers had been laid in their graves. It was cholera. Those who were not sick or dying soon fled the town by ship.

The plague quickly spread to Manitowoc. One hundred people were stricken and twenty-two died before the epidemic moved up river to harvest among the Indians. Death cut a deep swath that summer, particularly among the village children. Dr. Abram Preston, who migrated in from New Hampshire in 1847, worked tirelessly throughout the summer to minimize the grief of the people and the work of the grave diggers, but, in spite of his skill and toil, no grass grew that season on the path between the village and the burying grounds on the corner of Park and Eighth Streets.

As a consequence of that, the village has been a fearful settlement. The isolation of the place has contributed to that anxiety. Up until only recently the mail was carried on foot by Francis Finn, who made his rounds from Green Bay to Milwaukee only about twice a month. Even now the mail steamers land irregularly, and although Charles W. Fitch, from New Jersey, commenced publication of the *Manitowoc County Weekly Herald* in November of 1850, most of the news is still pretty provincial stuff.

The biggest news in recent years concerns the old and new courthouses. The old one, at Manitowoc Rapids, along with the county jail and offices, was burned to the ground in April of 1852 by a drunken mad man named Benjamin Lynde. Since then the men of the county, by a vote of 498 to 60, have decided to move the county seat down river to Manitowoc, even though it is still a significantly smaller community than either Two Rivers or Manitowoc Rapids. Now Manitowoc is caught up in a battle between the people of the north and south sides. Benjamin Jones wants the new courthouse located in the north end of town, but the southenders have strong objections to that. They are now trying to raise money to buy a lot on the corner of Washington and Eighth Streets which they plan to donate to the county so that the new center of regional politics will be among them. There are also arguments raging over the amount of money the County Board intends to spend on the construction of that new

edifice. At present the Board is proposing a building which will cost \$10,000, which will give Manitowoc a more expensive courthouse than either Chicago or Milwaukee. Some people believe that to be excessive.

These issues are important to the people here, but I cannot believe they are much more than family quarrels which will leave no serious scars. Life in this isolated little clearing along the lake has created a strong community spirit among the people. That spirit is the foundation of the village, and I cannot see it being injured by attempts to decide on which side of the river the scales of justice will hang.

After leaving Glover's store, I walked through the streets. Manitowoc is still a simple and somewhat rough place inhabited by simple and somewhat rough people who still live mostly upon salt pork, fish, and potatoes. Nevertheless, the signs of civilization have begun to slowly creep in. There is now a church — St. James Episcopal Church — there are two schools, one on each end of town; a newspaper, three hotels, a theater, and there will soon be a new jail. There are still almost twice as many men as women, but the shortage of women and the high demand for them has created a condition in which the women here are treated with more consideration, courtesy, and even respect than is generally the case with their sisters further east. Money is still almost unknown. Trade is carried on through the exchange of shingles and potatoes and with the cardboard "currency"

issued by the storekeepers. Fresh meat remains a rare delicacy, and there are still no horses in town. Nor are there any brick structures except for the lighthouse. Not even the chimneys are made of brick. Manitowoc remains a settlement of clap-board, shingle-sided shanties with rusted stovepipes sticking through their roofs. Kerosene remains prohibitively expensive. Almost all the necessities of life and a few of its luxuries have to be brought in by ship. In spite of all these so-called deficiencies, it is a pleasant and unpretentious Village in which most of the people are neither very rich nor very poor, and it is now a village of some rising importance. In 1847 Joseph Edwards, who began life here building lumber scows for Jones, built the schooner "Citizen." Since then the villagers have launched twelve more schooners, and they are said to be some of the best built and fastest vessels on the lakes.

My walk through the fresh spring air along the streets of the slow-paced settlement eventually led me back to the hotel. There I ate a hearty supper which I washed down with generous quantities of Eagle Beer. I thought about what Manitowoc had been and what it had become. I left the table full of contented feelings and slept soundly throughout the night. It was a bright morning. Soon after breakfast I walked to the south pier and departed this place of spirits for the last time upon the Manitowoc-made schooner "Defiance." We were carried northward on the fresh spring wind.

MANITOWOC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Address of Communications To:

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