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OF THE

CHIPPEWA VALLEY

By ROBERT K. BOYD

An Address delivered at the County Training School at Eau Claire, Wis. June 6th, 1902.

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OF THE
CHIPPEWA VALLEY

By ROBERT K. BOYD

An Address delivered at the County
Training School at Eau Claire, Wis.
June 8th, 1921.

EARLY CONDITIONS
OF
THE CHIPPEWA VALLEY

An address delivered at the request of the Principal of the Eau Claire County Training School

I would be guilty of a long, tedious story if I should try to give you a complete history of the Chippewa Valley. The most that I dare to undertake is to put upon the screen a few views of the earlier conditions, so that you can see the more important changes; just like looking at one picture and then at another.

You know how the Chippewa Valley is now; well, forget it all for a few minutes, and in your minds go back into the past 150 years, twice the lifetime of a pretty old man.

I shall not ask you to remember dates. To keep dates in your mind is hard work, and when I write a history to be used in the schools there won't be any dates in it. I wish I could forget the date when I was born; it was entirely too long ago to suit me.

Now look at this valley before the Revolution. England claimed the country then, but the Indians and the French fur traders had it. There was a French village at Green Bay and one at Prairie du Chien, buying furs from the Indian trappers.

The fur of the beaver was in great demand in Europe, and flint-lock guns, powder and lead were in great demand with the Indians. The price of a gun was a pile of beaver skins well pressed down as high as the gun was long; and guns made for the Indian trade were never

made short; any way to get a good bargain off from the Indian.

At this time Jonqthan Carver, an officer in the British service, came through this country.

He had passed through Prairie du Chien, up the Mississippi to the Falls of St. Anthony, where Minneapolis is now, then up the Minnesota river probably 50 miles and spent the winter with the Sioux Indians. During the next season he went on the Mississippi to the mouth of the Chippewa, then up river past where Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls are now, and on north to Lake Superior.

Now let us look at this region as Carver described it. The Chippewa Indians held the whole country to the north and east; the Sacs and Foxes—or the Musquakies and Outagamies, if we call them by their own names—were to the south; the Winnebagoes and Menomonees farther east in the region of Green Bay. Along the Mississippi the Sioux or Dakota Indians had their villages. They were the enemies of the Chippewas, and a strip of country lying to the west of us, from 30 to 50 miles in width, was the War Road, or ground not occupied by either tribe, but frequently crossed by war parties. Between us and the Mississippi was a great country for game, buffalo, elk and deer in great numbers. Carver says that on the Chippewa River the buffalo were larger and more plentiful than in any other place of his travels.

After this view of our valley, let us make a jump of about 30 years and we shall find a trading post at the head of the rapids about a mile above where the Eau Claire paper mills are now. Let us stand on the top of Mount Simon and look across the river, and we shall see a cabin built by two ~~half-breed~~ traders, Le Duc and Penasha; this was in 1784, but you do not have to remember the date.

These traders were not very white ~~men~~, but they were white enough to be crafty traders, for they got into trouble with a party of Chippewas and were besieged in their cabin for several days, during which time they killed two Indians, the others going up river for help. Then our heroes decided to move away and take with them all they had except their reputations, and these they were wisely

anxious to leave behind them; so they packed up and went down river to do their trading with the Sioux Indians, who had a large village on the Mississippi, near the mouth of the Chippewa River.

To make friends with their new customers was delicate business for men of their complexion, coming from the country of the Chippewas, but they were good diplomatists and carried certificates of good character well suited to the understanding of the Sioux, for they displayed the two fresh Chippewa scalps.

These credentials were examined and approved by Wabashaw and his band, at their village where the city of Wabasha is now located.

Now let us make another jump of 50 years or more to the period between 1830 and 1850. The buffalo had been killed off or driven to the west, the elk were becoming scarce, for unlike his smaller cousin, the crafty deer, the elk is large and stupid and cannot conceal himself; so he is easily approached and is rapidly killed off by the white hunters.

During this period the French voyageurs in extending their traffic in furs, came from Prairie du Chien, up the Chippewa River in their long log canoes called pirogues, and named some of our smaller streams. At the mouth of what is now called the Eau Galle River they found a heavy gravel bar, called galet (pronounced galay) in their language, and so they called the stream La Riviere au Galet, the River of the Gravel Bank. When they reached the present site of Eau Claire, they observed that the river coming in from the east, was quite clear as compared with the water of the Chippewa, which was of a dark coffee color, being stained by needles of the tamarac trees which grow in the large swamps. So they named the river La Riviere de l'Eau Claire, the River of Clear Water, and we may thank our first settlers for their good taste in adopting the name which our river and city bear today. And here is a bit of advice; don't ever spoil the name by calling it "Yew Claire."

At this time, previous to 1850, the men from down river commenced cutting pine timber, and making the logs up into rafts to supply the towns which were growing up

along the Mississippi, and in the lead region of southwestern Wisconsin. These loggers paid nothing for the standing timber, cutting only that which was best and nearest the river. Lumber was sawed on the Eau Galle and Red Cedar rivers, and two small saw mills were operated near the mouth of the Eau Claire.

Now we are getting nearer to modern times for during my first few years in Wisconsin I met some of the earliest permanent settlers. I have seen Jean Brunet, (pronounced Brunay) who established the trading post at Brunet's Falls, the present site of the town of Cornell. I was well acquainted with Hiram S. Allen, Stephen S. McCann, William Carson and others who built the first saw mills. Two mills were built on the Chippewa River, one at Chippewa Falls, and one where Lake Hallie is now—called the Blue Mill.

In 1848 and 1849 the Government surveyors divided the land into sections one mile square, and made the first accurate mapsof the country.

Now look at Eau Claire as it was in 1850, or about 70 years ago. There was a saw mill at the present lanndry site, and another a half mile farther up, where the foot bridge is now, and around each mill there was a group of cabins or small houses.

At this time there were no railroads west of the Atlantic states, no steamboats on the Chippewa River, and no wagon roads worthy of the name to connect our settlers with the older parts of the country. Goods were brought up river by keel boats, from 6 to 8 feet wide and from 50 to 60 feet long. These boats were pushed up river by poles which were placed on the river bottom, usually six men with poles and a steerman at the stern with an oar.

Eau Claire was laid out into lots in 1856; the East Side was called the Village of Eau Claire, while the West Side took the higher sounding name of Eau Claire City; and to this day that is the way our lots are described when drawing deeds of property. At about this time the small steamboats came on the river, more saw mills were built, and the lumber busines became a great industry.

Now look at this country as it was 50 years ago; this brings us down to the time when I can tell you of condi-

tions as I saw them, for I came on the river in 1868. It was a fine country then, the best in the world it seemed to me, and of course I was a good judge. There were a lot of saw mills then, cutting the big pine logs into lumber which was made up into rafts and floated down river, sometimes as far south as St. Louis. We had no railroads then, and the farms, although quite numerous, did not produce sufficient grain to supply the lumber industry.

Now I will speak of the men who did the work; I knew the raftmen best, strong vigorous fellows, different from all other men in style, manners and speech, and to describe their dress it would take an artist to do them justice. The old time riverman wore a flannel shirt fastened at the neck with a silver stud the size of a half dollar, no suspenders, but a gorgeous sash around his waist, the fringed ends hanging down his right side to his knee. If he was dressed to suit him, his hat and trousers were the best that money would buy, but his shoes by way of contrast were of the thinnest of cloth, gaiters or slippers, of the smallest possible size, and if they lasted for only one trip down river, he would cheerfully buy another pair of the same kind. His silver watch had the heaviest possible case ,at least five ounces, and sometimes even as high as twelve ounces, with a silver chain of twisted links strong enough to hold all a horse could draw. Dressed in this style, his appearance excited no remarks either on the street or in the hotels; he was a riverman and nothing more need be said.

Each river had its own type of men, those of the Chippewa being entirely unlike those of the Mississippi. Our men never went below the mouth of the Chippewa, and held the down river men in contempt. The Mississippi raftmen were of a lower type, their work was less strenuous, and they received much smaller pay.

The up river men who worked on the log drives were of another class; they got large wages but were less picturesque in their dress and style than the raftmen. Their work was mostly in the spring when the water was ice cold, and they were wet every day. They never changed their wet clothing and the exposure did not seem to injure their health; a log driver never suffered from a cold.

The men who worked in the logging camps through the winter were a class by themselves, and many of them were wonderful in their skill in handling an axe and in rolling logs.

Of course there were some who drifted from one line of work into another, but there were enough in each class who held to their own line of work to maintain a distinct type in each branch of the lumber industry.

The mill hands were a sprinkling of men drawn from other branches of the work, many of them working in the mills in the summer and in the woods in winter. Having steadier work than the rivermen, many of this class paid for their homes, and they with their children are among our best citizens.

There were also many land lookers who made trips into the woods lasting for weeks at a time, locating pine lands for those who were buying from the Government, or making estimates for land owners or purchasers.

In the pine region there were no roads, and they took their supplies up river in bark canoes or light boats as near as possible to their work, and then carried their packs much after the manner of Indians. This work was often done in the winter, and a good woodsman would never delay a trip on account of the weather. The white woodsman to a great extent, acquires the careful walk and light tread of the Indian. The weight rests on the foot that is behind until the foot which is ahead has placed itself; otherwise a mis-step might easily result in a sprained ankle or broken leg.

In dealing in land I have at times traveled and camped in the woods all my life. Even at my age a pack is no burden to me, and I can carry a week's provision with my tent, sleeping-bag and entire outfit. I have often camped in winter and can do so with no special discomfort. There is a fascination in camping in a wild country, and if the habit is once acquired, it is hard to give it up.

I came on the river in the spring of 1868, and worked at a sawmill at the head of Eagle Rapids, a few miles above Chippewa Falls. Our lumber was made up into rafts, and our rafts were quite small, for we had to run them over two chains of rapids, and then over Chippewa

Falls. The rafts above Chippewa Falls were 16 feet wide, and about 120 feet long, and the bow was curved upward by spring poles to prevent its sinking as it would surely do except for this precaution. when it passed from the rapids into the slack water below. A raft goes much faster than the water, and if the bow were not curved upward the raft might sink several feet below the surface.

Rafts were often broken up on Chippewa Falls by striking the rocks, and could only be run on a medium stage of water, but the raftmen seemed to have charmed lives, for it was very seldom that a man was drowned or injured. To run the falls required a crew of eight men, two of whom, the pilot and steersman, must be men of special skill and experience. This work on the wild water was very attractive to the half-breeds, who were at home in any work that was exciting and in some degree dangerous.

Nothing could induce these rivermen who worked on the wild water to follow a long steady job, and the best men for this work were very often good for nothing else. They were a sprinkling of all kinds, Yankees from Maine, French, Scotch and Irish from Canada and the Provinces, half breeds from up river, now and then a Scandinavian, but seldom or never German. The Germans were good men at steady work, but they lacked the spirit of adventure, and were not attracted to this work which required great activity of body and mind and indifference to cold and exposure. Although most of these men were inclined to be reckless there were no criminals among them, they were faithful to their employers and took pride in earning the big wages which they received; in fact the worse the conditions were, the more cheerful they seemed to be. From a business standpoint most of them would be considered utterly unreliable, but for work requiring daring and indifference to exposure, no better men lived. I liked them and to some extent I was one of them, and fully understood their nature. They were faithful in their friendships, liberal and self-sacrificing, and among them were some men of noble character.

A description of the early conditions would not be complete without a few words in regard to the Indians. They had a large reservation near the headwaters of the river,

and above Chippewa Falls there were groups of them, mostly along the shores of the river and lakes.

The Chippewas had never fought against white men, and were by nature peaceable and inclined to be honest. They lived mostly by hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering wild rice, but would work for white men at times, making hay or in boating and packing supplies. They were faithful workers at any short job of such work as they knew how to do.

They often brought furs, buckskin, sugar and berries to the nearest stores, and were easy to deal with if you once had their confidence and knew how to settle with them in a way which they could understand. Of course there were some white men who had nothing but curses for the Indian, but these were usually men of low character, who habitually abused them and were dishonest with them in their dealings.

Their language to the extent of trading with them, counting money, etc., is not hard to learn, but a full knowledge of the Chippewa language could only be acquired by living with them for several years. Those who have made their language a study say it is very complete, and would be suitable for any people of high civilization; they seldom borrow a word either from the French or English, but make new words as occasion requires.

The Indian words in the poem of Hiawatha are genuine and mostly correct, but the true pronounciation and accent are not always given in the spelling.

Here are a few Indian expressions: Bo zhoo nitchie, Good morning, sir. Ah go nin kin ah tahway? What have you to sell? Nin bunghee ah mik ah wiah, I have some beaver skin. Ah ni mi nik shoo ne ah ah mik ah wiah pay zhik to bah bis ko che gon? How much money beaver skin one pound? Nish wah bik she ah ba tay, Two dollars and a half. In its construction the language is in some cases like English and at other times much different, but even if translated word by word the meaning is usually clear.

At a camp on a lake shore I heard an Indian boy say: Pitche nah' go wa bin don nin né' pay wit te o wah' sah je' mon ken e butch' kah win' jé' mon. Yesterday saw me wa-

ter-distance far, boat perhaps not boat. If he had been sure it was a boat he would have said "boat yes boat;" If it appeared like a boat but was not a boat, he would have said "boat not boat."

If you are putting the baby to sleep you will say: Ke ne' pah kan ah pi nin kah ghee mah chah. You sleep please when I shall have gone. As a rule the same idea or fact is expressed clearly and accurately with fewer words than in English. Noss my father, koss your father, noss i bon my deceased father, noss i go bon, my deceased father whom I have never seen.

Me gwetch', thank you. Min e go' win, a gift received. Me ghe ay gwin, a gift bestowed. One word in English often has several words in Chippewa of the same general definition, but used in a somewhat different sense. Equay a woman; equay zahs, girl (little woman) Osh kay e'quay, young women, osh kin a ghe quay, a young lady. Nin a-win kah bay shu an, our camp; not including the person spoken to. Kin a win kah bay shu an, our camp including the one spoken to. Nah is to ask a question; sah is to answer a question. Bo zhoo nitch ie ke me no aiah nah? Good morning sir, you well are that is my question. Kay-get ne kon es, ne me no ai ah sah. Yes indeed my friend I well am that is my answer. Some writers have said that languages of uncivilized people have no words to express abstract ideas, but this is not true of the Chippewa language. Buk ah tay, hungry; buk ah tay win, hunger, mish i buk ah tay win, great hunger or famine. Ah kos sick; ah ko se win, sickness; kay zhe tay ah ko se win, inward heat sickness, or fever; Ka zhe' tay, is inward or confined heat, heat in the wigwam; ka zhah' tay, outward heat, hot weather. You can see by these examples that they have a real language, and to my mind this accuracy of speech and the power to express the finer shades of meaning, proves that in mind and habits of thought they are far from being as uncultured as most white people believe, and they are not coarse or stupid either in speech or manners.

I will translate a few Indian names of places. Michigan(mishi sah ki ay gon,) large lake. Wausau, a town in Wisconsin; Owosso in Michigan, far away; Muskegon,

Michigan, a swamp; Manitowish, Wisconsin, wild spirit; Ishpeming, Michigan wild woods; Sheboygan, Wisconsin, large pipe; Odana (pronounced o day nah,) village; Kenosha, the pike; Namekagon (river in Wisconsin) Rock Sturgeon, (sturgeon with spines) Missabe (iron range in Minnesota,) the giant; Mississippi (mishi seepee) large river; Mikana (a town in Wisconsin,) the road; Ogema(a town in Wisconsin,) king or chief.

This is about all that I shall say of the early conditions of this part of Wisconsin. These times are in the past, and no power will bring them back to us. The modern world with its advanced social and business life, is of course better than these conditions of the past.

But there was a fascination in the old days, and a charm in the conditions of frontier life, that nothing in modern life can replace.

If I could be put back to twenty years of age and be given my choice to enter the world as it was fifty or sixty years ago, or to cast my lot in the present with all its promises of education and culture, and all its opportunities in the pursuit of wealth, although I would be conscious of making an unwise choice, I feel sure that I would go back to the half wild life.

But we cannot live two lives, and the time has come to me as it must to you all, when the future on this stage of action will be of short duration.

"The time for toil is past and night has come,
The last and saddest of the harvest eves;
Worn out with labor long and wearisome,
Drooping and faint the laborers hasten home,
Each laden with his sheaves.

Last of the laborers, thy feet I gain
Lord of the Harvest, and my spirit grieves
That I am laden, not so much with grain,
As with a heaviness of heart and brain;
Master, behold my sheaves.

Few light and worthless, yet their trifling weight
Through all my frame a weary aching leaves;
For long I struggled with my hapless fate,
And stayed and toiled till it was dark and late;
Yet these are all my sheaves.

Full well I know I have more tares than wheat,
Brambles and flowers, dry stalks and withered leaves;
Therefore do I blush and weep, as at thy feet
I kneel down reverently and repeat,—
"Master, behold my sheaves."

I know these blossoms clustering heavily,
With evening dew upon their folded leaves,
Can claim no value nor utility,
Therefore shall fragrancy and beauty, be
The glory of my sheaves.

Then will I gather hope and strength anew,
For well I know thy patient love perceives
Not what I did, but what I tried to do,
And though the full ripe ears be sadly few,
Thou wilt accept my sheaves."