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# Return to Namā'o Uskiwāmît: The Importance of Sturgeon in Menominee Indian History

By David R. M. Beck

ON April 17, 1993, the Menominee Indians of Wisconsin celebrated the return of the sturgeon to *Namā'o Uskiwāmît*, or Sturgeon Spawning Place, the name the tribe has used for Keshena Falls on the Wolf River since before the creation of the Menominee Reservation in 1854. After several years of pressure from tribal members, and months of negotiation with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the state agreed to provide the Menominee with the sturgeon required for the renewal of this celebration, a part of the tribe's heritage dating to its earliest history, and to formulate and implement a plan for reintroducing sturgeon, once an important basis of the Menominee economy, into Menominee waters.<sup>1</sup>

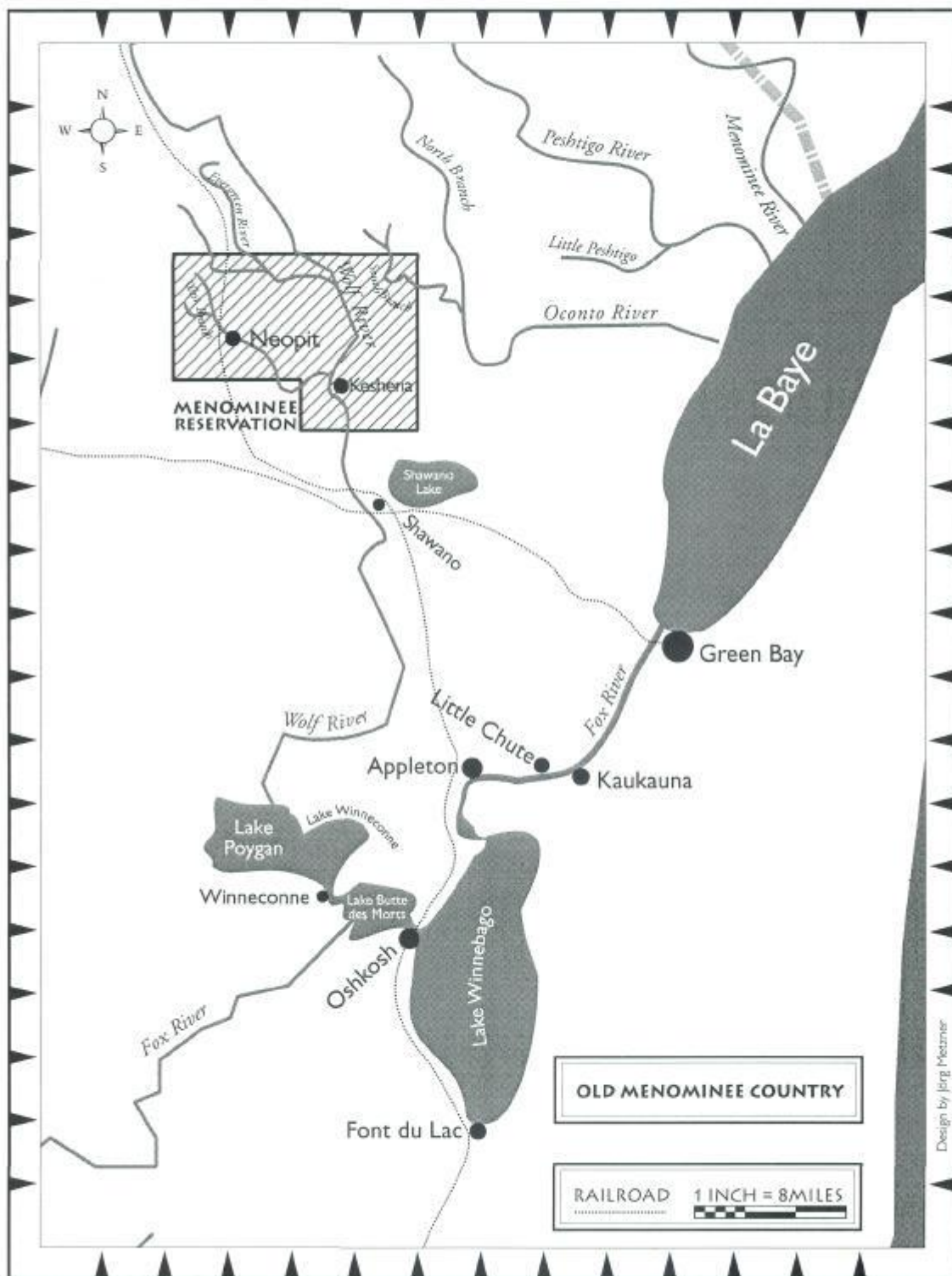
AUTHOR'S NOTE: This article is based upon "The Importance of Sturgeon in Menominee History As Viewed Through Some Documentary Sources," a paper written for the Menominee Indian Conservation Commission in January, 1993. Portions of it also appear in the author's doctoral dissertation, "Siege and Survival: Menominee Responses to an Encroaching World" (University of Illinois at Chicago, 1994).

<sup>1</sup> Newspaper articles discussing the 1993 celebration and the process leading to the return of the sturgeon include front-page stories by Michael J. Boucher in the *Shawano Leader* for January 29, 1993.

At that celebration, after the traditional opening ceremonies and welcomings, tribal elders and members spoke about the historical and cultural significance of sturgeon to the tribe. Recognition was given to the family which had continued to offer prayers and ceremonies to the sturgeon despite a century-long absence of the fish in tribal waters. The tribe's director of historic preservation, David J. Grignon (Nahwahquaw), led dancers in performing the Fish Dance. Afterward, the tribe fed nearly five hundred people, including tribal members, the negotiation team of the DNR, and outside visitors, in a feast that included sturgeon and wild rice.<sup>2</sup> The cultural and historical significance of this event cannot be overstated.

The Menominee have lived in Wisconsin longer than anyone else. Traditionally, they based their economy on the natural abundance of the forests and waterways which defined the landscape in the wake of Wisconsin's receding glaciers. This environment provided myriad food sources—various types of game, water-

<sup>2</sup> Y. M. Kaquatosh-Aragon, "Sturgeon Return to Keshena Falls," *Menominee Tribal News*, April 22, 1993.



fowl, fish, and edible plants. But for the Menominee, two stood out above all others: the wild rice from which the tribe derives its name, and the lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens* in scientific Latin, or *nāmā'o* in Menominee terms), which ran upstream to spawn each spring as water temperatures warmed. The sturgeon—an oddly prehistoric-looking fish which might grow to four or five feet in length and weigh as much as 200 pounds—provided much-needed sustenance and nutrition after the harsh winters of Wisconsin's northlands, often saving tribal members from starvation in this critical transition period.

THROUGHOUT the pre-contact years and well into the nineteenth century, the Menominee nation consisted of several bands, sometimes as few as half a dozen, sometimes nearly a dozen and a half, each autonomous, each with its own economic territorial base which shifted throughout the year according to a seasonal cycle. The entire nation came together only for religious purposes or at the annual rice harvests, which generally occurred in September.

During the spring, each band moved from its inland winter hunting grounds, which ranged throughout much of central and northeastern Wisconsin, to the shores of Lake Michigan or points along Lake Winnebago and the inland riverways. After a harsh winter, the Menominee relied on maple sugar and sturgeon and other fish in their spring spawns to give them the sustenance they needed to rebuild body strength. The sugar helped sustain people, but it was the sturgeon which restored them to health.

The Menominee people spent the summers gathering roots and berries, growing corn and squash (among the southern bands), and fishing and hunting. From late spring to early autumn, the Menominee enjoyed the abundant fruits

of forest, garden, and waters. Later in the fall, the various bands assembled for the annual rice harvest. The rice was treated and dried for use during the bitter-cold months of winter. The ripening rice also attracted flocks of migrating wildfowl which were easy prey for native hunters.<sup>3</sup>

The most difficult period for survival in Wisconsin's varied climate was of course winter. As the different bands returned to their winter hunting grounds, families carried their rice with them, to thicken the soups and stews made from game such as beaver and deer killed during fall and winter hunts. These helped sustain Menominee people until the spring harvest of maple sap and lake sturgeon restored their strength and health.

From their earliest contact with the Menominee in the seventeenth century, the French recognized the importance of sturgeon. The fish remained an important source of food well after the tribe settled at its present reservation site in the early 1850's. The fur trade which brought the French into Menominee country had wide-reaching effects on Menominee culture, but it did not severely disrupt the Menominee economy as it did that of other tribes. Although some individuals became indebted to traders, the tribal economy remained firmly rooted in the rich resources of their homeland.

THIS economy was not significantly disrupted until after the American arrival in the Menominee country. Menominee furs were just the first of three vital resources which the Americans wanted from the tribe; the others were the land and the forest. After the close of the War of 1812, which ended

<sup>3</sup> Archeological studies confirm the use of nets to capture wildfowl in the rice fields, for example. See Carol I. Mason, *Introduction to Wisconsin Indians: Prehistory to Statehood* (Salem, Wisconsin, 1988), 108.



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*Menominee Indians fishing, from a watercolor by Franz Holzhuber. The housing is not Menominee. From the Glenbow Collection.*

British hegemony in the Old Northwest, the newcomers went after the natives' resources with a lust that eventually crippled the Menominee economy. As Americans encroached on Menominee land, the tribe was forced to negotiate a series of treaties which diminished the tribe's land base until, by the mid-1850's, the natural resources still accessible proved inadequate to sustain the tribe. The governmental food allotments provided in return for the land cessions failed to meet tribal needs as well. The reservation created in one small part of the Menominee homeland still provided fish and some game, but as the surrounding white population grew, the Menominee were increasingly restricted from leaving the reservation to hunt, fish, and gather

food. By the end of the century, most Menominee were reduced to living a meager, marginal existence on what remained of their tribal homelands.

Logging dams in the latter half of the nineteenth century slowed the progress of sturgeon swimming upstream, but the real blow to the Menominee came in 1892 when a concrete dam was built for a papermill in Shawano, only a few miles downriver from the tribe's reservation. This effectively stopped the sturgeon from returning to Keshena Falls, and the few

<sup>4</sup> Derived from interviews conducted with Menominee people by the author between 1990 and 1994. The interviewees were offered anonymity, which some accepted.

fish that remained above the dam eventually died. In 1926 a power dam built just three miles south of the reservation further restricted sturgeon mobility. Later attempts by the Menominee to restock the sturgeon in the small area which remained open inevitably failed.<sup>4</sup> While some Menominee continued to catch sturgeon at other sites, the fish as a basis of the economy was destroyed. At the same time, relentless pressure by the Americans on the lake sturgeon nearly caused the extinction of the fish, which had once existed in abundance throughout Lake Michigan and its watershed. By 1860, according to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, "the lake sturgeon was considered a nuisance by commercial fishermen, who stacked the fish like cordwood on shore and left them to rot." Ironically, soon thereafter, the increasing value of sturgeon roe for caviar, of sturgeon oil, and of isinglass (a pure form of gelatin made from the fish's swim bladder) caused the fish to be overexploited by the fishing industry. This lasted well into the twentieth century. The sturgeon population has never recovered.<sup>5</sup>

ALTHOUGH it was a keystone of the Menominee economy until well into the reservation years, the role of sturgeon in Menominee life has been given surprisingly little attention by scholars. However, primary source materials written by Euro-American visitors to Menominee country as well as Menominee oral tradition heavily document the historical and cultural significance of the fish to the

tribe. Through these sources, we can gain a deeper appreciation of Menominee identity in relation to Wisconsin's natural environment. We can also begin to see why the return of sturgeon to Menominee waters was such a momentous occasion.

In terms of the study of American Indian history, both written and oral sources have their limitations. Written documentation created by French, British, and American observers who visited or lived among the Menominee represents a Western point of view. No matter how objective or sympathetic they were toward the native peoples, none of the observers were Menominee themselves; they therefore understood Menominee culture only from within their *own* cultural contexts or biases, and they were writing their own history, not Menominee history. On the other hand, however, their documentation frequently offers the most readily accessible record we have of Menominee life in the years of early contact.

Menominee culture, like most American Indian cultures, is historically based in oral tradition rather than on the written word. This means that tribal history and culture have been passed from generation to generation by memorization. To this day, much of the most important and even the most accurate data about the Menominee must be gleaned from oral sources rather than from written histories. Without these oral histories, we lack a complete picture of the tribal past. However, because of the misuse of oral tradition by both government officials and scholars in ways that have often proven detrimental to the tribe, Menominee people possessing knowledge of their past have been understandably reluctant to share this information with outsiders.

Judicious use of documentary history as it is informed by oral history can reshape our knowledge and understanding of Menominee history. For example, the written documentation of the tribe mentions sturgeon only briefly; but the fish

<sup>4</sup> Maureen Mecozzi, "Lake Sturgeon," Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Fisheries Management, publication FM-704-88 (Madison, December, 1988), 1; Gordon R. Priegal and Thomas L. Wirth, "The Lake Sturgeon, Its Life History, Ecology and Management," Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, publication 240-70 (Madison, 1971), 4, 15.

plays a far more significant role in the oral tradition. For this reason, we need to examine the primary documents and written histories more carefully to see how they treat sturgeon.

The documents cited below were created over a period of more than two and a half centuries. French missionaries and fur traders wrote the earliest ones, based upon their direct experience and observation. The same is true of some early American documents, but others were written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by ethnologists who incorporated a large degree of oral history of the Menominee. From these various sources—written and oral, ancient and modern—it is possible to piece together a picture, or rather a kind of mosaic, depicting what the lake sturgeon meant, in economic and spiritual terms, to these earliest known settlers of the place that came to be known as Wisconsin.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Other oral history for this article was collected in a paper by Kathy McDonough with assistance from David Grignon entitled "Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin: The Importance to Menominee Culture and Tradition." (Copy in author's possession.) The American scholars and observers whose works are cited below came in two waves. The first group arrived in the 1820's and 1830's, the early American years, in the employ of the War Department or as local traders and missionaries. Around the end of the nineteenth century a second group arrived. Two of these, Walter J. Hoffman and Albert Ernst Jenks, worked for the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of Ethnology. S. A. Barrett and Alanson Skinner worked for major museums in Milwaukee (i.e. the Milwaukee Public Museum) and New York (the American Museum of Natural History and the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation), gathering material objects for the museums' collections and publishing their observations in museum bulletins and journals. Leonard Bloomfield and Felix Keesing worked in the late 1920's and early 1930's as academics. Keesing worked both in the documents and through oral sources, while Bloomfield relied on oral sources to do a linguistic study of the tribe. All of these observers wrote prolifically about the Menominee.

IN order to understand the importance of sturgeon to the Menominee, we need to know not only its use as sustenance but also its role in the social, political, and spiritual life of the tribe. This role dates to the very origins of the tribe. Alanson Skinner, an ethnologist who wrote prolifically on the Menominee, observed in the 1920's that "Sturgeon played so important a part in early Menominee economy that they receive frequent mention in mythology."<sup>7</sup>

Walter J. Hoffman, the Smithsonian Institution ethnologist who studied the Menominee for the Bureau of Ethnology, wrote that the Menominee creation story places the tribe's origin at the mouth of the Menominee River, where the Bear clan first organized, and at Lake Winnebago, with the creation of the Thunderer or Eagle clan. According to tribal history, when the Bear invited the Thunderer to become his brother, the Bear brought wild rice, and the Thunderer brought corn and fire to the new family. Other animals invited into the family by the Bear included the Beaver (a woman) and Elk, to be directly related to the Thunderer, as well as the Sturgeon, who was to be the younger brother and servant of the Bear. In time, the Crane, Wolf, Dog, Deer, and Moose were also adopted.<sup>8</sup> All of these animals, including the sturgeon, eventually became leaders of Menominee bands.

In other versions of the story, the sturgeon also plays a key role. In 1913 Skinner described the tribe's origins as related to him by a tribal elder. When the two Bears first became a man and a woman

<sup>7</sup> Alanson Skinner, *Material Culture of the Menominee*, in F. W. Hodge, ed., *Indian Notes and Monographs*, vol. 20 (New York, Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1921), 199.

<sup>8</sup> Walter James Hoffman, *The Menominee Indians*, in *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution 1892-93*, vol. 14, part 1 (Washington, 1896), 39-44.

at the mouth of the Menominee River, the man immediately built a wigwam. His next act was to build a canoe "in order that he might go out on the waters and catch sturgeon, which were very abundant at the foot of a nearby cataract, where they had been created for the use of man. [He] was very successful in taking sturgeon." His wife then prepared the abundant catch of sturgeon: "First she split them from the head down and drew them; then she hung them over a frame to dry. When they were sufficiently cured she cut them into flakes and made the first sacrifice and feast to all the powers."<sup>9</sup> The first Menominee thus relied on the sturgeon for sustenance. In addition, they used the sturgeon for religious purposes; namely, to thank the higher powers which provided them with food.

In 1928 the linguist Leonard Bloomfield recorded a third version of the origin story in both Menominee and English. When the first Menominee (the Bear clan) came into the world, they brought with them a kettle. They carried the kettle to the river, which they found to be "full of sturgeon." The tribe's leader used the kettle to cook sturgeon and feed his people. Because he was thus able to provide for his people, the other clans brought him their own foods and joined the Bear.<sup>10</sup>

TO this day, Menominee elders recall the sturgeon's role in the story of the tribe's origins. In it, the Sturgeon, whose responsibilities included keeping the wild rice and serving as the tribal historian, is the younger brother of the Bear: "Because the sturgeon was the his-

torian, he knew things that the other totems did not, hence, this placed the sturgeon close to the Creator of all things."<sup>11</sup> The Sturgeon became the totem for one of the tribe's clans. In all of these histories of the tribe's origins, the great fish plays a significant role in both physical and spiritual sustenance. As one elder recalls:

When the sturgeon came up the Wolf River to the falls [at Keshena], some sturgeon were taken for a ceremonial feast. . . . Spiritually and culturally there is significance in all Menominee feasts. Like the sturgeon, Menominees live by cycles. The feasts, for example, occurred during the most opportune moment for the taking of the sturgeons based upon the sturgeon's cycle of reproduction. Offerings are always made in the way of prayers of thanks and tobacco out of respect for allowing the people to take sturgeon. The prayers were to maintain balance, peace and harmony in their environment and in nature.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, sturgeon became connected with the traditional Menominee religion—the Metawin—which is still practiced today. A ceremonial dance was held to welcome each season, and the spring dance "concurred with the run of sturgeon." The Dream Dance ceremony was performed both before and after the sturgeon were taken. Sturgeon was also served on feast days, including those associated with the Metawin.<sup>13</sup>

WRITTEN information regarding the spiritual relationship of sturgeon to the Menominee is scant. Little has

<sup>9</sup> Alanson Skinner, *Social Life and Ceremonial Bundles of the Menomini Indians*, vol. XIII, part I of *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York, 1913), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Leonard Bloomfield, *Menomini Texts* (New York, 1928), 70–73.

<sup>11</sup> McDonough and Grignon, "Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin."

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*



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*Sugar making, from The 18th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1896-1897.*

been formally recorded by non-Indian observers. Although several visiting scholars recorded aspects of Menominee religion, none understood the traditional religion within a tribal context. Their observations are therefore superficial and misinformative. Walter Hoffman, for example, simply tried to scientifically dissect parts of Menominee religious ceremony in order to debunk its religious nature and expose it as a kind of charade.<sup>14</sup> The Menominee were well aware of this. Partly for this reason, and partly because of its sacred nature, they refused to share certain aspects of their religious beliefs with non-Indians.<sup>15</sup>

Before their first contact with Europeans in the mid-seventeenth century, all the Menominee bands came to the rivers in the spring when the sturgeon ran. In at least one instance, two bands fought for

control of access to the all-important fishing grounds. This incident first appears in the documentation in 1823, in the journals of C. C. Trowbridge, an army officer stationed at Green Bay who over the years recorded ethnological data about numerous tribes.

In the history as related by Menominees to Trowbridge, the incident happened

<sup>15</sup> This is understandable when we consider, for example, that Alanson Skinner prided himself on obtaining sacred information by subterfuge—for example by breaking into people's homes when he knew they were away, or plying them with alcohol to loosen their tongues. In addition, many Menominee sacred objects were taken, legally and illegally, from the reservation for use in museums. Such thefts peaked between about 1910 and 1930, but continued at least into the 1960's. See David R. M. Beck, "Collecting Among the Menominee: The Failure of Ethnologists to Destroy an Indigenous Culture," paper delivered at Native American Studies Conference, "Survival and Renewal: Native American Values," Lake Superior State University, October 24-25, 1991.

<sup>14</sup> Hoffman, *The Menominee Indians*, 79, 86-92, 96-102, 137.

"fifteen or twenty years before the arrival of French troops in the country." In all versions, one band lived upstream and the other at the mouth of the Menominee River.<sup>16</sup> When the lower band built a dam blockading the river, preventing the sturgeon from swimming upriver to spawn, the two bands traded insults and eventually attacked each other. According to Trowbridge, this was the only civil dissension of any importance in tribal history to that point. Significantly, the cause was the disruption of the supply of sturgeon during the spawning season.<sup>17</sup> Had the band upstream not been able to catch sturgeon during the short-lived spawning season, many would have starved.

In 1936, during the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) collected Indian legends in Wisconsin, and recorded this dispute also. Directly quoting Menominee Louis Bernard, the WPA researchers recorded the same civil dispute as had Trowbridge, Hoffman, and

Skinner and Satterlee. Bernard began his account with a statement showing the importance of the spring run of sturgeon: "In the water the fish were running upstream to spawn. And with the first return of the fish came the great sturgeon, the prize food fish of the Indian. They were speared, netted, and trapped until each band had an abundance for immediate use as well as fish to dry."<sup>18</sup>

The documents show that the sturgeon retained this place of highest significance among fish into the twentieth century. Leonard Bloomfield recorded a story written down by John V. Satterlee called "The Hunter's Treat." This story says that when two men go hunting, whoever catches the game offers the other a generous treat. If they are in a canoe spearing sturgeon, the one who spears the sturgeon gives the canoe paddler half the fish, as a gesture of generosity.<sup>19</sup> The importance of the fish was thus translated into social etiquette.

<sup>16</sup> The only disagreement on this point is Patricia K. Ourada, *The Menominee Indians: A History* (Norman, 1979), 11, and Carl Krog, "The Menominee Indians on the Menominee River," in the *Wisconsin Academy Review* (September, 1977), 27-28. These authors refer to this as a war between the Chippewa and the Menominee. Krog begins the story "according to legend," and credits Fr. Allouez with details, unfortunately without citation, while, also unfortunately, Ourada cites no sources for this interpretation.

<sup>17</sup> Excerpts from C. C. Trowbridge's "Account of the Menominee Taken at Green Bay, summer of 1823," transcribed from the Leonard Bloomfield Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, pp. 4-5; Hoffman, *The Menominee Indians*, 217-218; Alanson Skinner and John V. Satterlee, *Folklore of the Menominee Indians*, vol. XIII, part III of *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York, 1915), 445-446; "Battle of the Pierced Forehead," in Works Progress Administration, Charles E. Brown, *Wisconsin Place Name Legends or Wisconsin Indian Place Legends* (Madison, 1936), pp. 34-38 (transcribed by Rosalyn LaPier; copy in the Wisconsin State Archives, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison); author's interviews with Menominee people.

IT should come as no surprise that the first white contact with the Menominee occurred at the mouths of rivers. When the French began to establish a permanent presence in Menominee country in the late 1600's, and began to record their observations, they noted the importance of sturgeon, among other things. Nicholas Perrot, a French *coureurs de bois*, lived in the Green Bay area for a large part of the period from 1655 to 1699. He learned the languages of many of the Indian nations that had moved into Menominee country during those tumultuous years, and he was one of the few French traders to document his firsthand observations in writing. Perrot's writings, most of which have since been lost, are widely accepted as forming the basis of Bacqueville de la Potherie's works on French and Indian

<sup>18</sup> Brown, "Battle of the Pierced Forehead," 34.

<sup>19</sup> Bloomfield, *Menominee Texts*, 6-9.



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*A dam at Shawano on the Wolf River.*

relations in the Lakes Country. In describing the Menominee, La Potherie said, "they raise a little Indian corn, but live upon game and sturgeons; they are skillful navigators. If the Sauteurs [Ojibwa] are adroit at catching whitefish at the Sault, the Malhominis [Menominee] are no less so in spearing the sturgeon in their river." He continues, "For this purpose [spearing] they use only small Canoes, very light, in which they stand upright, and in the middle of the current spear the Sturgeon. . . . [O]nly canoes are to be seen, morning and night." He adds that sturgeon were an important food source "all year round."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Bacqueville de la Potherie, "Savage Allies of New France," in *Histoire de l'Amérique Septentrionale*, in Emma Helen Blair, trans. and ed., *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes*, vol. 1 (Cleveland, 1911), 304; excerpt from Bacqueville de la Potherie's *Histoire de l'Amérique Septentrionale*, published in Paris, 1722 and 1753, in *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, vol. XVI (Madison, 1902 ed.), 8–9.

French missionaries likewise observed the significance of the sturgeon to the Menominee. The earliest Jesuits to carry out missionary work among the Menominee were Fathers Claude Jean Allouez and Louis André. Fr. André served among the Menominee and other tribes in the area beginning in 1671, when he attended, in an official capacity, the French annexation of the territory by François Daumont de St. Lussion. But he began his service to the Menominee in spectacular fashion in April of 1673. He described the occasion in a lengthy letter published in the *Jesuit Relations*.

He found the Menominee River band waiting on the banks of the Menominee River for the sturgeon to make their spring run upstream. The fish were late, and had already entered the other major rivers farther south on the bay—probably the Peshtigo, the Oconto, and the Fox, which were more distant from the mouth of the bay and the main body of Lake Michigan. (Fr. André did not know it, but the

sturgeon first begin spawning in the bay's southern rivers, when water temperatures reach 53 to 59 degrees Fahrenheit, depending upon water conditions. The Fox River, fed by a warmer climate area than the Menominee river, warms up earlier in the season, generally by anywhere from several days to a week.)

No doubt the Menominee band was in dire need of fresh fish in their diet after existing all winter on dried fish and game and whatever rice they had preserved in the fall. (By then, too, the spring sugaring season may already have passed.) Perhaps the sturgeon were a little later than usual that year in coming to the Menominee River. In any event, to hasten the coming of the fish, the Menominee had raised a banner to the sun, which they recognized as "the master of life and of fishing, and the dispenser of all things." When Fr. André inquired about the banner, he was informed "that it was a sacrifice—or rather, to use the expression of their language, 'an exhortation.'"

The Jesuit believed that the Menominee lacked religion, and he was duty-bound to bring it to them. He proclaimed them "superstitious," and he mistook their spirituality for "superstition." He might have recognized the difference if he had contemplated the difference between exhortation and superstition, the two words he used in describing their spiritual customs. But Fr. André had been taught that all who did not believe in *his* God believed in false gods, or in none at all, which made them at best superstitious. His training rendered him incapable of taking Menominee religion seriously.

Fr. André spoke to a large part of the group, all but three elders. "After disabusing them of the idea which they had of the sun, and explaining to them in a few words the principal points of our Faith," he asked them to allow him to replace the "picture of the sun" with "the image of Jesus crucified." The Menominee

permitted this, and he quickly made the switch. The next morning, a bounteous run of sturgeon surged up the river where the Indians were encamped. The Menominee, said Fr. André, were "delighted," and they said to him, "Now we see very well that the Spirit who has made all is the one who feeds us. Take courage; teach us to pray, so that we may never feel hunger."

According to the priest, this wondrous event gave this band of Menominee a large dose of confidence in the power of Christianity. Thereafter, many listened to his teachings and showed affection for his God. Though he asked to teach only the children, many adults came to listen as well, especially at night after they finished the work of fishing. Fr. André reported that he made a great impression on the tribe. Of course, the Jesuits published their *Relations* in order to raise money to support their missions, so they tended to report only the most glorious of stories, and often these might be exaggerated.<sup>21</sup>

THE Jesuit missionaries left the Green Bay area in 1707, and though both the fur trade and French-Menominee contact continued, little ethnographic information was written down for the next century. Indeed, it was not until the Americans began to move into the area in the 1820's that these kinds of observations were again recorded. But throughout this

<sup>21</sup> Fr. André's story appears as "Letter from Father Louis André, Of the Mission of the Folle Avoine (Menominee), Near the Bay des Puants (Green Bay), April, 1673," in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations*, vol. 58, pp. 272-281. Information regarding spawning habits of sturgeon from George Howlett, Jr., telephone conversations, January 7, 1993, and George C. Becker, *Fishes of Wisconsin* (Madison, 1983), 221; Priegal and Wirth, "The Lake Sturgeon, Its Life History," 7; Mecozzi, "Lake Sturgeon," 5.

period, the Menominee continued to rely on sturgeon as an important food source.

In 1820, Secretary of War John Calhoun sent the Reverend Jedidiah Morse to report on conditions among the Indian nations throughout the United States and its territories. Among many other things, Morse reported that the Menominees' main subsistence was of wild rice, and that fish comprised an important part of the diet in spring, summer, and winter. "The fish, consisting principally of sturgeon and salmon-trout, are in the greatest abundance in the Bay," he wrote.<sup>22</sup> C. C. Trowbridge in 1823 reported similarly that the Menominee subsisted mainly on sturgeon, which they speared through the ice in the winter, when "they are taken in great number."<sup>23</sup>

Fr. Samuel Mazzuchelli, a Dominican missionary from Europe, served among the Menominee from 1830 to 1834. He too observed that the Menominee speared sturgeon through the ice. The winter fishing season was one of the best times to do mission work, he wrote, because a significant portion of the tribe gathered either along Green Bay or Lake Winnebago in order to be near the sturgeon fishing grounds. These would have been the bands of Menominee with which the priest had the most contact. Fr. Mazzuchelli described the winter fishing in 1834:

The Indians . . . make a hole in the ice about a yard across, and let down by a cord a little wooden fish which they keep in motion. Stretched at full length with head over the hole and under cover the better to see below the ice, they watch for the

sturgeon as he makes for the little wooden decoy. Then the skillful Indian with a barb fastened to a pole spears the sturgeon, which, after a useless struggle, becomes his prey. This is the principal means by which many Indians get their food in winter.

At this time, Mazzuchelli observed, Menominee fishermen not only used sturgeon for sustenance but also sold it to the local white population.<sup>24</sup>

During the same period we occasionally catch a glimpse of the important role played by the sturgeon in the letters of fur traders who lived in Menominee country. John Lawe, writing to Louis Grignon in January of 1820, for example, observed that the late date at which ice had yet to form on the bay forced Indians to wait before they could begin their winter spearing. In February of 1824, Lawe wrote to James Porlier that the lake had not yet frozen, which caused great hardship to the Menominee:

[T]he Winter has been so Open & mild this Year that the Lake is not yet taken to this Day so that there has not been a single Speared Sturgeon has been brought to the Bay this Year, the Indians is all a Starving & it is quite a famine for them There is not a Single bit of Ice at the Follavoine [Menominee River] nothing but the bare Beach the Nets has catch'd but few fish I do not know what is agoing to become of us it will be quite a famine in the bay this Year.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Rev. Jedidiah Morse, *A Report to Secretary of War of the United States, on Indian Affairs, Comprising a Narrative Tour Performed* (New Haven, 1822), appendix, 47-48.

<sup>23</sup> Trowbridge, "Account of the Menominee," transcribed from Leonard Bloomfield Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 54-55.

<sup>24</sup> Fr. Samuel Mazzuchelli, "Visits to Indians on Their Fishing Trips—Remarkable Circumstances Connected with Them—Many Conversions in 1834," in *The Memoirs of Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, O.P.*, chap. 24 (Chicago, 1967), 101-105.

<sup>25</sup> John Lawe to Louis Grignon, Green Bay, January 11, 1820, and John Lawe to James Porlier, Green Bay, February 3, 1820, both in *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, vol. 20 (Madison, 1911 ed.), 147-149 and 331-334.

Although relatively little was written about the Menominee by early observers, wherever the sturgeon are mentioned their importance to the tribe comes through. In the 1840's the artist Paul Kane visited the Menominee, where he made the well-known painting which depicts Menominees spearing fish at night from bark canoes. (The painting is reproduced on the outside back cover of this magazine.) This picture graces the cover of a book on the Potawatomi, where it is used to show a style of fishing similar to that of the Potawatomi.<sup>26</sup>

IN the years from 1820 through 1854 the American population in Wisconsin grew dramatically. American loggers and speculators coveted Menominee resources, and federal officials purchased Menominee land by means of a series of treaties which shrunk the Menominee land base and destroyed the tribal economy. U.S. officials hoped to remove the Menominee from Wisconsin entirely. In 1836, the year Wisconsin became a territory, Governor Henry Dodge purchased 4 million acres of Menominee land. The vast tract included all of the tribe's northern lands from the Wolf River east to Green Bay; everything north to the Bay de Noque in Michigan's upper peninsula; and land east of Lake Poygan from the Wolf to the Fox as well. A treaty of 1848 secured the balance of Menominee land in Wisconsin and called for the removal of the tribe to the Crow Wing country in Minnesota. But tribal leaders never planned to leave. They inserted an escape clause in the treaty which eventually led to subsequent treaties in 1854 and 1856, which established the present contours of the reservation. When the Menominee settled there, on the much-reduced remnant of their ancient homeland, many tribal members spent their first years enduring extreme hardship and near-starvation.

The nucleus of their new reservation home—Keshena Falls—was such an important fishing place that the Menominee called it *Namā'ō Uskiwāmīt*, "the sturgeon spawning place."<sup>27</sup> Alanson Skinner wrote of the site:

Up to the time that the whites placed dams on the Wolf [River], Keshena Falls, on the present reserve, was a great resort of these fish in spring. Here the high water that follows the thaws and rains beats against a mass of rock, making a drumming noise. Menomini folklore declares that this is the music of a mystic drum belonging to the manitou who owns the cataract. They say that when this drum beats, the toads and the frogs begin their mating songs, and the sounds call the sturgeon to the pools and eddies below the cataract. There they formerly spawned and were then speared in large numbers.<sup>28</sup>

Felix Keesing observed that the Menominee chose their present reservation site because of the natural resources in the vicinity, including the sturgeon.

<sup>26</sup> The painting is titled "Spearing Salmon by Torchlight," but experts at the Menominee Historic Preservation Department say that it would be an accurate depiction of Menominees spearing for sturgeon as well. Kane, in his *Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America* (Toronto, 1925), 21–22, titles the original sketch of this picture as "Spearing by torch-light on Fox River." He painted it while staying at a Menominee camp in preparation for observing a Menominee annuity payment. The photo of the painting appears on R. David Edmunds, *The Potawatomi: Keepers of the Fire* (Norman, 1978), dust jacket and following page 58. There are, however, distinct differences between Potawatomi and Menominee methods of spearfishing, as documented in the author's interviews with Menominee people.

<sup>27</sup> S. A. Barrett and Alanson Skinner, "Certain Monand Village Sites of Shawano and Oconto Counties, Wisconsin," in *Bulletin of the Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee*, vol. 10, no. 5 (March 4, 1932), 502.

<sup>28</sup> Skinner, *Material Culture of the Menomini*, 199.



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*Keshena Falls, a twentieth-century picture that still gives some sense of the scene described by Alanson Skinner on the preceding page.*

"The river at this point [the falls] was celebrated as a breeding place for the sturgeon," he wrote, adding that he had been told by tribal members that "every spring [Menominees] would assemble on either side of Keshena Falls to fish for sturgeon." Tribal member Weshonaquet Mosehart later recalled, "After I grew up to manhood I came upon the present Reservation. My people were accustomed to roam all over the present Reservation every spring when the sturgeon came up the Wolf River as far as Keshena Falls. It was the custom of all the Indians from the various bands that were scattered far and near to gather together at the Keshena Falls to catch the fish and [we] would camp there for months for the purpose of catching the sturgeon."<sup>29</sup>

The ethnologists who visited the tribe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to gather material for their publications and museum collections first noted the difficulties caused by the erection of permanent dams on the Wolf River. Hoffman, who studied on the reservation in the early 1890's and published his work in 1896, was the first scholar to remark upon these problems:

Previous to the erection of dams in Wolf river, great numbers of sturgeon

<sup>29</sup> Felix M. Keesing, *The Menomoni Indians of Wisconsin: A Study of Three Centuries of Cultural Contact and Change* (Madison, 1987 ed.; originally published in 1939), 148, 152. Deposition in Keshena, 25 August 1913, interpreter Reginald Oshkosh; witnesses Reginald Oshkosh and Frank Wilber, Menominee Historic Preservation Department.

migrated upward each spring to spawn, and Indians were then stationed along the river at favorable places ready to cast the spear when the fish appeared. Many of these fish are from 4 to 5 feet in length. The excitement during their capture was intense, and even now frequently forms the topic of animated conversation relating to by-gone days.<sup>30</sup>

Citing Hoffman, Keesing observed that "sturgeon fishing on the reservation had come to a sudden end with the erection of power dams lower down the Wolf river."<sup>31</sup> As one tribal elder today recalls, after the dam was built, "the Menominees were forced to go elsewhere for sturgeon. Families would send a few individuals to the Oconto River to catch the fish and bring back wagons of sturgeon for the people to feast."<sup>32</sup>

Jenks, in a study entitled *Wild Rice Gatherers of the Upper Great Lakes*, observed that of all the foodstuffs regularly consumed by Indians of the region at the end of the nineteenth century, sturgeon and dried beef ranked highest in "flesh-producing substance."<sup>33</sup>

Skinner's 1921 publication contained a section on tribal methods of preparing and cooking fish. He included instructions for drying sturgeon roe, which could then be made into roe pudding, roe dumplings, and roe cakes. He presented traditional recipes for all three of these, as well as a recipe for raw, fermented sturgeon roe.<sup>34</sup> Thirty years had passed since the dam was built, but Skinner's writings indi-

cated that the Menominee still knew numerous ways to prepare sturgeon.

Even as late as 1993, over a hundred years after the building of the first Shawano dam, tribal members recalled old recipes. Sturgeon heads, for example, were used to make soup, a special treat reserved for the elders. Sturgeon oil was used as medicine. Sturgeon was used "to heal headaches, ear aches, and some eye problems, according to one elder." People also remember that it was used to treat tuberculosis.<sup>35</sup> This is confirmed by Phebe Jewell Nichols in a novel published in 1930, *Sunrise of the Menominees*. Nichols was married to Angus Lookaround, a Menominee, and she well knew tribal customs and lore. Her novel recounts the courtship of a white woman and a Menominee man during the 1920's. In it the young man, who later becomes involved in tribal politics, rails against the Indian Bureau for its heavy-handed treatment of Menominees:

"You see, Indians can no longer get the food to which racially they were accustomed. Bear meat, venison, wild goose, sturgeon, all have the calories so much talked about. The dam at Shawano has kept the sturgeon out of reach of the Menominees for thirty years. The game laws forbid the Indians fishing below the dam. You ought to hear my father tell of all the food and other uses to which the Indian puts sturgeon. They even used the oil for the 'sick lungs folk.' . . . In any event, wild game food is scarce now. In place of it those old Indians are frequently doled out rotting pork and wormy flour for rations. No wonder they say 'hard times.'"<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Hoffman, *The Menomini Indians*, 273.

<sup>31</sup> Keesing, *The Menomini Indians of Wisconsin*, 196.

<sup>32</sup> McDonough and Grignon, "Menominee Indian Tribe."

<sup>33</sup> Albert Ernst Jenks, *The Wild Rice Gatherers of the Upper Lakes: A Study in American Primitive Economics in Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (Washington, 1901), 1080-1083.

<sup>34</sup> Skinner, *Material Culture of the Menomini*, 205-206.

<sup>35</sup> McDonough and Grignon, "Menominee Indian Tribe"; author's interviews with Menominee people.

<sup>36</sup> Phebe Jewell Nichols, *Sunrise of the Menominees: A Story of Wisconsin Indians* (Boston, 1930), 41-42.



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*The Dells Dam on the Wolf River, shown here, was above Keshena Falls where the sturgeon stopped, but it is similar to the logging dams which blocked the movement of the sturgeon elsewhere.*

ALL of this documentation, from the earliest French observers to the scholars and researchers of the early twentieth century, confirms the significant place of sturgeon in Menominee oral history. The fish served as sustenance, as medicine, and as ceremonial food. It formed a basis for the tribe's origins and its clan system, and it became an integral part of the tribe's spiritual life and identity.

As a food source, the sturgeon prevented starvation and provided important nutritional sustenance, especially during the winter when it could be taken through the ice, and in the spring spawning runs, when it could be speared or netted on the Menominee, the Wolf, and other rivers that debouched into the great bay. In the early 1850's, sturgeon played a significant role in the selection by tribal leaders of the site for the reservation. The fish remained a significant source of food

to the tribe long after the federal government began its unsuccessful campaign to make farmers out of the forest-dwelling Menominees. With construction of permanent dams on the Wolf River, the tribe began to be deprived of sturgeon, and this caused hardship and suffering. By the 1890's, the federal agent was making an effort to stop the Menominees from leaving the reservation in search of subsistence foods, even in times of hunger.

The federal government was supposed to protect, not to abrogate, the right to these food sources. The 1854 treaty which established the boundaries of the Menominee reservation had guaranteed the Menominee the rights to this land "to be held as Indian lands are held."<sup>37</sup> In

<sup>37</sup> Article Two, "Treaty with the Menominee, 1854," in Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Treaties, 1778-1883* (New York, 1972 ed.; originally published in 1904), 626.

*Menominee Tribe of Indians v. United States*, a landmark fishing and hunting rights case, the United States Supreme Court decreed in 1968 that "treaty language requiring reservation lands 'to be held as Indian lands are held' includes the right to fish and hunt." The court also ruled that the Termination Act of 1954 as applied by the federal government to the Menominee did *not* abrogate the tribe's fishing and hunting rights.<sup>38</sup> This act, part of a broad federal Indian policy, had attempted to eliminate all federal responsibilities to the Menominee nation in an ill-fated effort which was overturned in 1973 when the tribe achieved Restoration.<sup>39</sup> In the 1968 ruling, the high court did not address the issue of the Indians' spearing sturgeon during the spring spawning run. It can, however, be inferred that this would be included under the rights retained by Menominees in holding lands "as Indian lands are held."

Yet the significance of sturgeon goes well beyond its economic use as a food source. The sturgeon became institutionalized in the clan structure of the tribe's governance. It also became institutionalized in tribal folklore, and even a cursory study of oral history shows that it holds religious significance. Its role in the very origins of the tribe has accorded it a place of political, social, and religious importance as well.

Though its significance has remained relatively unexplored by scholars, the role of sturgeon in Menominee history and culture was never forgotten by the tribe's spiritual leaders, historians, and elders. These people kept its place in the culture alive even when the fish itself was unavailable. They did this by remembering the stories, by passing on to succeeding generations the knowledge of the ways in which sturgeon were used by the tribe, and by making regular spiritual offerings to the great fish. The return of the sturgeon to *Namā'o Uskīwāmīt* in the last de-

cade of the twentieth century is complicated by the wanton destruction of the mid-nineteenth century and the subsequent over-exploitation of the fish for both isinglass and caviar well into the twentieth century. The sturgeon population has never recovered from these assaults, and today the fish is considered a threatened species and classified as "rare over much of its original range."<sup>40</sup> However, its return to Menominee waters marks an event which reconnects some important threads of Menominee history and culture—threads which were broken long ago by European and American incursions into the world of Wisconsin's earliest inhabitants. It is therefore something from which all the peoples of Wisconsin can draw a measure of satisfaction.

<sup>38</sup> Excerpt from *Menominee Tribe of Indians v. United States* (391 U.S. 404, 88 S. Ct. 1705, 20 L. Ed. 2d 697 [U.S. Sup. Ct. 1968]), in American Indian Resource Institute, *Indian Tribes as Sovereign Governments* (Oakland, California, 1988), 115.

<sup>39</sup> Termination and restoration encompass the most-studied era in Menominee history. See Stephen J. Herzberg, "The Menominee Indians, from Treaty to Termination," in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 60:267-329 (Summer, 1977), and "The Menominee Indians: Termination to Restoration," in the *American Indian Law Review*, 6:143-168 (Summer, 1978); Ada E. Deer, "The Menominee Restoration Act," in the *American Indian Culture Center Journal*, 4:29-30 (Fall, 1973); Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "The Menominee Indians, Menominee Termination: or, Can the White Man Ever Overcome a Cultural Lag to Progress with the Indians?" in *The Indian Historian*, 4:31-43 (Winter, 1971), and "Menominee Termination: From Reservation to Colony," in *Human Organization*, 31:257-270 (Fall, 1972); Deborah Shames, ed., *Freedom with Reservation: The Menominee Struggle to Save Their Land and People* (Madison, 1972); and Nicholas Peroff, *Menominee Drums: Tribal Termination and Restoration, 1954-1974* (Norman, 1982). The latter analyzes the enactment of the termination policy and Menominee resistance to it from the perspective of policy-making theory.

<sup>40</sup> Priegal and Wirth, "The Lake Sturgeon, Its Life History," 15-16; George C. Becker, "Sturgeon Family—Acipenseridae," in *Fishes of Wisconsin* (Madison, 1983).

DON'T  
BE  
FOOLED!

**LOTTERIES  
INCREASE ~~OUR~~ TAXES**

WHL Image ID: 41467

*After the establishment of the Illinois Lottery in 1974, the debate over whether Wisconsin should sponsor her own lottery heated up once again as arguments raged on both sides of the issue. Proponents expected that a lottery would provide property tax relief, while opponents, like the maker of this bumper sticker, disagreed.*



**VO  
IN  
WISCO**

*by Jonathan Kasperek*

**A**t noon on September 14, 1988, amid much fanfare and press coverage, Governor Tommy Thompson scratched the latex coating off of a new “Match-3” ticket and became the first person to play the Wisconsin Lottery. His ticket did not win, but this did not deter Wisconsin residents who eyed the million-dollar jackpot: the state sold tickets totaling \$3.5 million that first day in almost 4,300 retail outlets. Most players lost, of course, but a few lucky winners claimed prizes; eleven won \$5,000 and another hundred won \$500. The Wisconsin Lottery was off



**WISCONSIN**



Wisconsin Lottery

WHI Image ID 2047

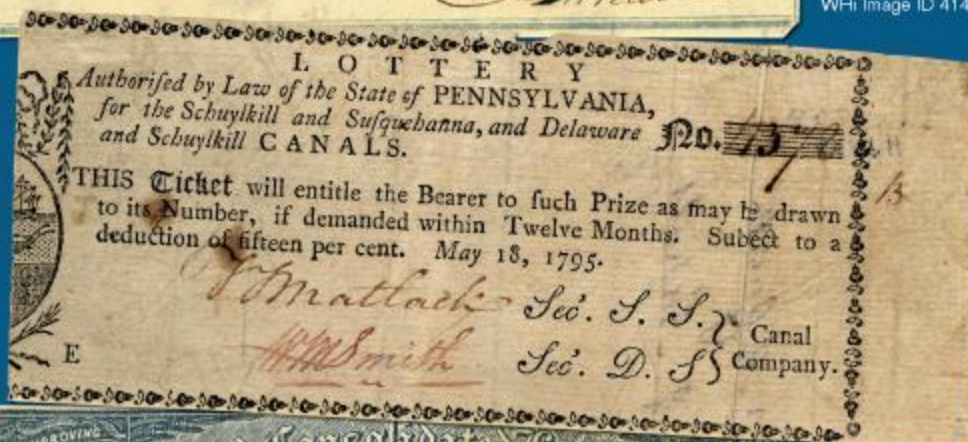
*Wisconsin's prohibition on gambling was strong throughout the history of the state. In this 1955 photo, an official takes a sledgehammer to a pile of impounded slot machines.*

*A "Match 3" ticket like the one Governor Tommy Thompson scratched off at the 1988 lottery sales Kick Off.*

to a strong start, but controversy remained. Members of the Wisconsin Conference of Churches protested the opening ceremonies in five Wisconsin cities, angered that the state would sponsor what they considered immoral and addictive behavior.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, these few protestors upheld a long tradition in Wisconsin—gambling of any kind had been illegal since territorial days, and the long and controversial movement to legalize it raised questions over the state's moral authority and the need to protect its citizens.



WHi Image ID 41473



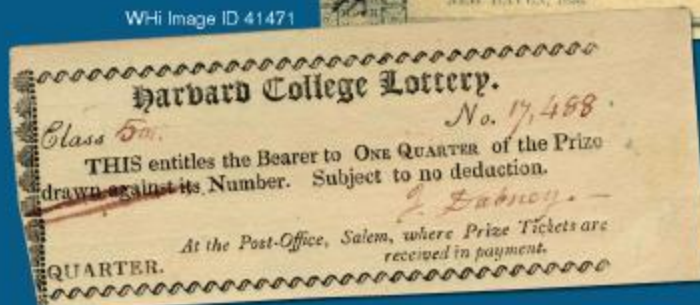
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WHi Image ID 41474



WHi Image ID 41471



WHi Image ID 41489

American companies and state governments began authorizing lotteries long before the Revolutionary War; but the popularity of lotteries began to wane in the 1830s because of widespread corruption. The tickets shown above raised funds for the Dismal Swamp Canal Company of Virginia (1827); the Pennsylvania Canal Company (1795); the states of Delaware and Georgia (1845); the "bishops fund of Connecticut (1826); and Harvard college building projects (1774).

By the 1840s, most states had outlawed lotteries.



WHI Image ID 41344

*In light of growing alarm over rampant gambling, Governor John Blaine approved a law in 1923 that allowed the government to confiscate any prize won in a game of chance.*

**G**ambling was an issue even before statehood. Delegates to Wisconsin's 1846 constitutional convention squabbled among themselves over a number of divisive issues—property rights of married women, banking, black suffrage—but the prohibition of lotteries received universal support. Article VI, Section 7, read simply, “The legislature shall never authorize any lottery.”<sup>2</sup> Not a single delegate opposed the ban on the convention floor, and the public reacted favorably as well. Residents of Wisconsin Territory did not ratify the 1846 constitution, but when a second convention met in 1847, delegates retained the prohibition on lotteries as a matter of course. Again, the ban met with overwhelming acclaim. Citizens of Dane County passed a resolution in support of the proposed constitution in March 1847, citing the fact that it “prohibits lotteries, the grand scheme of swindling.”<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the *Racine Advocate* praised the new document for ensuring the legislature had no power to authorize “the immorality of lotteries.”<sup>4</sup>

This hostility to lotteries can be explained, in part, by moral concerns, but it also reflects the eagerness of territorial leaders to learn from other states’ disastrous experiences after

the American Revolution (1775–1783). By the 1840s, 24 out of 33 states had created a lottery to finance schools, orphanages, or public works; in the days before income tax, it provided an easy means of generating revenue. Even some private organizations, including Harvard University, relied on lotteries for financial support. They proved to be immensely popular: in 1809, lottery sales nationwide exceeded \$66 million. State governments did not run the lotteries directly but, rather, contracted with private management companies that received a percentage (up to 25 percent) of the gross income. Supervision by negligent managers, however, quickly became a problem, and, by the 1830s mismanagement and corruption caused a number of lotteries to fail. Moreover, the moralistic fervor spawned by the religious revival during the Second Great Awakening led many people to question the use of lotteries. The reform impulses generated by this widespread, evangelical movement led to the creation of societies dedicated to abolition, temperance, and even to the eradication of lotteries. Not surprisingly, Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts, states at the center of most antebellum reform, became the first to abolish lotteries in 1833.<sup>5</sup>

Settlers in Wisconsin were certainly familiar with the lottery debacle in other states; fully a third of the state’s population in 1850 had migrated to the territory from New York or New England. This Yankee predominance was especially notable in political leadership: the first seven governors were all from New York or New England, as were 88 of 124 delegates to the 1846 convention.<sup>6</sup> The delegates, eager to learn from the mistakes of their home states, included the ban on lotteries as matter of good social policy. Furthermore, the constitution’s terse ban revealed an underlying general hostility to gambling, which also reflected the Eastern backgrounds of the framers. Any game of chance, be it lottery, poker, or roulette, was strictly prohibited. In 1838, the Territorial Legislature, meeting in Burlington (Iowa—until 1838 Wisconsin Territory extended west to the Missouri River), established draconian laws to prevent and punish gambling. Participating in a game of chance carried a fine of up to \$500, and a person running a gambling table could be fined up to \$1000 or imprisoned for three months. The statutes enjoined justices of the peace to destroy confiscated gaming devices in public, and luckless gamblers could sue to recover their losses.<sup>7</sup> Legal authorities adopted remarkable rhetoric in denouncing the evils of gambling. William C. Frazer of Pennsylvania, newly appointed judge of the eastern district of Wisconsin in 1837, opened his court in Milwaukee with a blistering attack. “A gambler,” he told the grand jury, “was unfit for earth, heaven or hell . . . God Almighty would even shudder at the sight of one.”<sup>8</sup>

But the best efforts of the constitution and judiciary could not stop such a common practice as gambling—what people said in public did not always square with what they did in pri-

vate, Judge Frazer didn't tell the jury that he, himself, had been up until dawn that morning playing poker with some Kentucky friends he had met at the tavern where he was boarding, and his experience was hardly unique. In the booming lead region, poker players used Mexican and French coins when American specie was unavailable. Visitors to Nichols's tavern in Mineral Point saw men playing the popular card game "Faro," a roulette wheel, and hundreds of dollars stacked along the tables. Young army officers stationed at Forts Howard and Crawford regularly played cards with civilians.<sup>9</sup> Gambling, as in so many frontier communities, was simply part of the social fabric and a significant aspect of tavern culture. Throughout the nineteenth century, gambling continued to be common in taverns, county fairs, lumber camps, and vacation resorts. Northern Wisconsin communities such as Hayward and Hurley became notorious as lawless centers of vice—it was said that "the four toughest places in the world are Cumberland, Hayward, Hurley, and Hell."<sup>10</sup> Local law officials were reluctant to risk incurring the wrath of their neighbors by interfering with a popular pastime that was often quite lucrative for tavern and hotel operators.

Despite the widespread existence of gambling, there was no question about the state's policy, which remained rooted in the belief that gambling was a moral problem to be stamped out. In addition to existing statutes, the legislature repeatedly stiffened gambling laws to punish some of the more flagrant practices and ban some forms of gambling that the authors of the original statutes never imagined. Some unscrupulous retailers, for example, sold goods with the pretense that with the purchase came the chance to win a prize. In 1875, the legislature outlawed this practice. Policy shops—private lotteries much like the more familiar "numbers" racket—were outlawed in 1883, and organized betting on agricultural futures (commonly called a "bucket shop") was outlawed in 1903.<sup>11</sup> A few clever bookmakers tried to get around gambling laws by arguing that placing a bet on a horserace was really a contest of skill, not chance, dependent on one's knowledge of horses. In response to increased betting on horse races (even at the state fair), the legislature, in 1897, outlawed bookmaking and betting on "the result of any trial or contest of skill, speed or power of endurance of man or beast . . . or upon any other uncertain event or occurrence."<sup>12</sup> In fact, gambling continued to so alarm legislators that, in 1923, Governor John Blaine signed a law that made a prize won in a game of chance subject to forfeiture.<sup>13</sup>

**I**n spite of the state's clear stand, however, public opinion was hardly monolithic, and indeed began to shift toward a greater openness of some forms of gambling. Although there was still a vociferous element that decried the immorality of any game of chance, arguments against gambling began to



WHI Image ID 41348

*President of the Tavern League of Wisconsin, Frank Deichsel, poses with a slot machine in Wausau for this photo dated 1942. Many tavern owners relied on revenue from slot machines and other gambling apparatus.*

## WISCONSIN MAGAZINE OF HISTORY



WHI Image ID 34262

*Despite increasingly stringent laws, slot machines were a prominent feature in many Wisconsin taverns and roadhouses.*

emphasize the potential for corruption, not just the moral questions. Turn-of-the-century Milwaukee, under the rule of Mayor David Rose in particular, became infamous for being a wide-open city in which city aldermen sold "licenses" to gambling houses for as much as \$500.<sup>14</sup> The exposure of political corruption in Milwaukee suggested that opinion had shifted: people tended to view gambling less as a problem caused by individual moral lapses and—like so many other issues in the progressive era—more as a social problem caused by irresponsible businesses and abetted by corrupt politicians. God may have stopped shuddering at gamblers, but he still frowned upon corruption.

Slot machines in particular earned the wrath of those who saw the owners as another sinister organization out to bilk innocent folks of their hard-earned money. Most taverns and roadhouses kept a few slot machines set up in a corner for customers to play while drinking and socializing; private clubs also offered discreetly-placed slot machines for members to try their

luck. The companies that manufactured these slot machines leased them to tavern owners, who then received a percentage of the profit. One Waukesha tavern owner kept half the slot machines' winnings, which netted him over \$5000 a year. "I have two machines," he told an investigative reporter for the *Milwaukee Journal*. "If it weren't for them, I'd be broke." In fact, during the Prohibition Era (1919–1933) slot machines became such a familiar scene in tourist areas that some resorts and taverns depended on them to stay profitable, which raised the question of exploitation. How much of an "honest chance" did players have if tavern operators could adjust the machines for different levels of payout, especially if they then profited from them? Those who opposed slot machines were

worried less about the lack of moral fiber of those who pulled the lever and more about the unscrupulous operators who played tourists for suckers, thereby giving the entire state a bad name. Increased pressure on public officials to remove slot machines had little effect. Sheriffs claimed to be incapable of eliminating them, and one ruefully observed that as soon as he confiscated one, two more could show up in its place.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, law enforcement officials had a pretty good idea of how many illegal machines existed in the state. By the end of the 1930s, the Internal Revenue Service had registered more than 10,000 slot machines in Wisconsin, assessing a \$50 federal tax on each one.<sup>16</sup> Slot owners evidently had good reason to fear the taxman more than the sheriff.

The state now had more to worry about than illicit gambling and local graft: the entire state's reputation was at stake. The number of gambling devices continued to rise, and by 1945, there were at least 45,000.<sup>17</sup> In his annual message to the legislature, Governor Walter Goodland of Racine pointed out that Wisconsin ranked number one in the nation in the number of gambling machines, despite its complete prohibition on gambling.

Reports indicate that slot machine owners and operators have become so emboldened as to bribe officials in some localities, and have gone to the extent of providing funds for use in local and statewide elections. Wisconsin, with its wholesome heritage of sturdy honesty, and with its reputation for progressive legislation and enforcement of its laws, cannot afford to jeopardize its place in the sun by permitting such festers on the body politic, to grow and develop.<sup>18</sup>

He went on to call for a new anti-gambling law to stamp out the problem. Again, despite the widespread presence of gambling, the public—spooked by stories of organized crime and graft—seemed to approve of the governor's position. Both Goodland and future governor Vernon Thomson of Richland Center, who introduced the bill into the legislature,



WHI Image ID 41347

*Wisconsin's rank as first in the nation for its number of gambling machines was of great concern to Governor Walter Goodland (right). He is pictured here discussing Grant County's gambling problems with District Attorney, John Grindell, and Sheriff, Aloys Klaas.*

## WISCONSIN MAGAZINE OF HISTORY



WHS Museum 1993.14.9, Photo by Joel Heiman



WHS Museum 1993.14.10, Photo by Joel Heiman

*The front and back of a Jennings slot machine, ca. 1950. When a winning combination appeared on the reels, a lever inside the machine would move a slide, releasing an exact number of coins.*

received hundreds of letters from around the state supporting their efforts to rid the state of slot machines.<sup>19</sup>

The "Thomson Anti-gambling Law" of 1945 was indeed a stringent measure. It gave enforcement authority not to local officials, but to agents of the State Beverage Tax Commission, who had the power to revoke any establishment's liquor license for one year when they were discovered operating slot machines.<sup>20</sup> Since local officials tended to tolerate gambling violations—often from a disinclination to harass the neighborhood bar owner—the law placed enforcement power with state tax agents who were thought to be immune from local graft. Tavern and resort owners strenuously opposed the bill, claiming that it would ruin their businesses, and some opponents questioned the constitutionality of a law that allowed

such confiscation without a jury trial.<sup>21</sup> The vote on the bill in the legislature indicated a decided urban-rural split: representatives from urban areas and from resort areas voted against the Thomson law, and representatives from rural and small-town areas voted for it.<sup>22</sup> On July 4th, just a month after the governor signed the law, state agents raided resort areas in Racine County and confiscated seventy-one devices. They had chosen Racine County for the first crackdown at the governor's behest, raiding in his home county so he could not be accused of playing favorites.<sup>23</sup>

The state's sudden resolve to clamp down on gambling occurred at the same time that the definition of gambling was becoming increasingly unclear. The state had always interpreted the constitution to prohibit all forms of gambling, not

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WHI Image ID 41346

*As a member of the Wisconsin legislature in 1945, future governor Vernon Thomson introduced an anti-gambling law that permitted law enforcement to revoke the liquor license of any establishment caught with slot machines.*

just lotteries; officially, any game that involved an element of chance, offered some kind of prize, and required the contestant to offer something of value to play (what the Wisconsin Supreme Court termed a "consideration") was a lottery and therefore unconstitutional. A growing number of businesses tried to use raffles or contests to attract customers, and although the public tended to tolerate these promotions, the state held them to be illegal nonetheless. In 1908, Attorney General Frank Gilbert ruled that a cigar machine, which usually sold one cigar per nickel but was also rigged to randomly dispense several for a nickel to some lucky customer, was an illegal gambling machine. Although the customer always received something of value, there was still the potential to win "free" cigars.<sup>24</sup> A similar promotion that offered a free punch on a punchboard (a large set of paper-covered pigeonholes with prizes in some of the holes) with the purchase of a five cent postcard was declared gambling even if there was a prize in every hole.<sup>25</sup>

Every one of these schemes contained the three elements of prize, chance, and consideration, and was therefore constitutionally prohibited. Some businesses tried to get around the laws by allowing anyone to participate in promotional raffles without paying a fee or even making a purchase. For example, in the late 1930s, a theater in La Crosse sponsored regular "bank nights" during which anyone could enter the lobby and fill out a ticket. During the show the winning number was announced, and the holder had three minutes to claim the cash prize. If no one claimed it, the prize money rolled over until the next game. The Wisconsin Supreme Court, however, ruled that the very act of entering the theater was "consideration" because the theater benefited by increased attendance at its movies.<sup>26</sup>

Complicating the issue was the fact that by the early twentieth century, bingo games became a popular fundraiser for churches and charitable organizations. Again, the state's highest court ruled that gambling sponsored by churches was no less a crime than gambling sponsored by private businesses. In 1939, Albert and Marie Multerer and Edward and Marie Zrimsek, tavern owners in Milwaukee, were convicted of allowing the second floor of their building at 1118 West North Avenue to be used by local religious groups for bingo games. As many as 1000 people paid 25 to 35 cents to play in the evening and afternoon games for prizes from \$2.50 to \$165.00. There was no question that the games met the legal definition of gambling, and the fact that they were for charitable purposes had no impact on the state's ruling.<sup>27</sup> Nor could local governments authorize any kind of raffle to raise money to benefit the entire community, as New London attempted to do in 1938. Attorney General Orland Loomis declared it illegal, although he admitted that absolute prohibition was impractical and that state-supervised gambling could have social benefits. "We reach this conclusion somewhat reluctantly," he wrote, "as the plan is obviously aimed at promoting the business interests of communities. . . . But if the scheme contains the elements of a lottery, it cannot be approved however meritorious its motive."<sup>28</sup>

Loomis' musings mirrored the thinking of many storeowners and managers who began lobbying the legislature to allow such promo-



WHI Image ID 41345

*Police officers publicly destroyed confiscated slot machines, 1955.*

tions. Because of the strict interpretation of the anti-lottery clause of the constitution, Wisconsin residents could not even participate in national sweepstakes, even if the only requirement was to mail in a postcard. The legislature did try to legalize such participation,<sup>29</sup> but the Wisconsin Supreme Court overturned the law in 1955, declaring that the increased revenue generated by the drawings met the legal definition of "consideration."<sup>30</sup> In other words, since the sponsoring business stood to gain from a raffle (and why else would it run one?), it was unconstitutional. In April 1965, years after the legislature first debated the issue, Wisconsin voters altered the constitutional prohibition on gambling for the first time. The 1965 amendment overturned that ruling and allowed Wisconsinites to participate in promotional giveaways.<sup>31</sup> Critics of the proposal did not argue that such participation was in itself wrong, but they did argue that it would open the door further for gambling, or that the bill would benefit large businesses at the expense of small, local ones who could not afford to offer their customers prizes. David Carley, member of the Democratic National Committee, opined in the April 1st edition of the *Capital Times* that "The constitutional amendment is the 'first step off the cliff' into an abyss of uncontrolled lotteries and gambling in our state. Its primary purpose is nothing but to water down the only constitutional safeguard we have in our state against gambling."<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, the amendment passed overwhelmingly, 454,390 to 194,327.<sup>33</sup> Businesses could now hold drawings, and Wisconsin residents could mail in their box tops like everyone else, all for the simple chance to win a prize.



WHI Image ID 41368

*This political cartoon illustrated the belief that legalizing charity gambling would boost organized crime and encourage professional gamblers.*

Opponents of the 1965 amendment were right about one thing: it did lead to further loosening of the restrictions on gambling. The irony that businesses could now make

use of lotteries and raffles to promote their private interests even though charities were still prohibited escaped few, and the movement to legalize charitable bingo gained momentum. Since the Wisconsin Supreme Court had ruled bingo illegal in 1940,<sup>34</sup> law enforcement officials found themselves in an awkward position—no sheriff wanted to arrest the local priest for trying to raise funds for kiddie camp. Organizations lobbied heavily for the legal right to bingo, and between the 1940s and 1970s, the issue came before the legislature frequently. By that time, many other states were beginning to legalize charitable bingo. In April 1973, Wisconsin voters overwhelmingly approved an amendment to nonprofit organizations to sponsor bingo games for fundraising by a vote of 645,544 to 391,499.<sup>35</sup> Almost immediately, church groups and local chambers of commerce began pushing for the legaliza-



WHI Image ID 17287

*Police officers raffled refrigerators outside the Capitol for their benefit picnic in this 1933 photo. In the mid-twentieth century, bingo and raffle games became popular fundraisers for non-profit organizations despite the fact that they were illegal.*

tion of raffles as well. Again the measure was successful, not because of an overwhelmingly popular desire to gamble, but because of a concerted lobbying effort and the recognition that such activity could be socially beneficial. Despite the dire predictions that legalized raffles would bring increased "organized crime," the amendment passed 483,518 to 300,473.<sup>36</sup>

The legislation of both bingo and raffles seemed like reasonable adjustments to the state constitution; only a very broad interpretation held that it prohibited all forms of gambling and not just a state lottery. The success of these endeavors, however, lent strength to arguments for a statewide lottery—clearly, regulated gambling could bring social benefits, and dire warnings of mafia influence proved unfounded. The idea wasn't new, and ironically, the impetus to legalize gambling for charitable and promotional purposes had first come from New England, the area that had provided so much hostility to lotteries in the nineteenth century. In 1963, New Hampshire authorized the first lottery in the United States since the Civil War, and many looked to it as an example of how regulated gambling could benefit not only businesses and charitable organizations, but also the state itself. Within ten years, the rest of the Northeast followed New Hampshire's example.<sup>37</sup>

In 1987, the movement for a state lottery culminated in a proposed constitutional amendment authorizing the Wisconsin legislature to establish a state lottery—exactly what the constitution originally forbade. Members of the legislature were under increasing pressure to propose such an amendment. Proponents argued that people wanted to gamble and were doing it anyway, playing in the Illinois Lottery which had been established in 1974. Others expected a state-run lottery to provide property tax relief, a perennially popular subject, especially since New Hampshire had no sales or income tax. Opposition to any gambling, however, was still strong. A 1965 proposal to operate a state lottery to benefit public education failed,<sup>38</sup> and in the 1980s, opponents of the state lottery again claimed it would lead to an increase in organized crime, require bigger state bureaucracies, and create a population of gambling addicts. The ethics of gambling were still under question, both

**Mom's a Winner!**

Jones agencies, and the families of each. This sweepstakes is void in the states of Idaho and Missouri and wherever prohibited by law. Sweepstakes participation via entry blanks distributed through retail stores is void in Wisconsin and Maryland. Federal, State and local laws and regulations apply. All prizes will be awarded.

6. For a list of winners, send a separate, stamped, addressed envelope to:

5c

eggs are so important

Del Monte

Van Nuys, CA "The News"

*National sweepstakes and promotional giveaways were required to include the statement "void in Wisconsin" in their fine print. In 1965, Wisconsin voters altered the constitutional prohibition on gambling, which allowed state residents to participate.*

from people who found gambling to be morally wrong or contrary to the ideal American work ethic, and from people who worried that lotteries and lottery advertising were designed to deceive participants.<sup>39</sup> As with the legalization of bingo, progressive arguments were also raised. Senator President Fred Risser, of Madison, cited studies that showed lotteries specifically targeted the lower and working-class people who could not afford to throw their money away, asking, "Is the purpose of the state to try to skim money off of people?"<sup>40</sup> Calling the lottery

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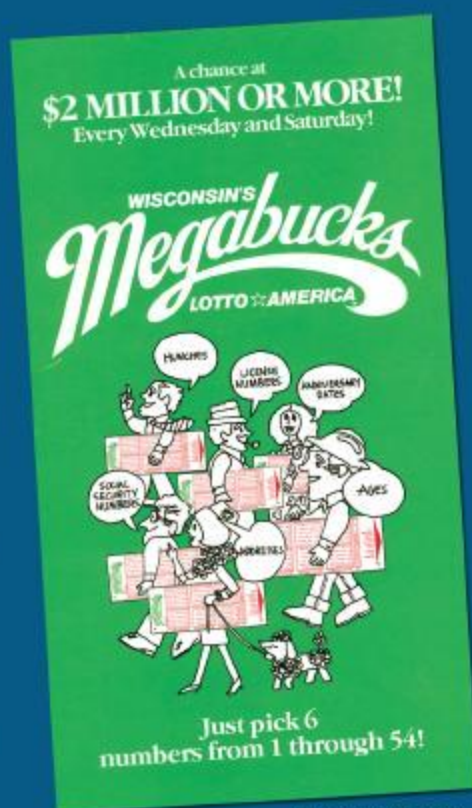
"regressive and inefficient," Assembly Speaker Tom Loftus, of Sun Prairie, pointed to the long odds of winning a jackpot and called the measure a "tax on stupidity."<sup>41</sup> Despite arguments against a lottery from both liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans, the legislature passed the proposed amendment and submitted it to the voters.

Wisconsin voters have never passed up a chance to loosen gambling restrictions, and the state lottery amendment passed overwhelmingly 739,181 to 391,942.<sup>42</sup> Although the state-run lottery passed easily, the vote on a second proposed amendment to allow on-track pari-mutuel betting was extremely close—it passed by a margin of 50,000 votes out of 1.1 million cast.<sup>43</sup> Strongest opposition to racetrack betting came from the rural areas of the west and central portions of the state, suggesting that gambling for property tax relief was clearly more popular than gambling for profit. In less than 40 years, the state had moved from an absolute ban on gambling to allowing raffles, bingo, betting on races, and even running a lottery of its own. The next year, people began purchasing

instant win scratch-off games and picking six numbers out of fifty in the hopes of striking it rich.

The movement to legalize gambling in Wisconsin illustrates the complexities of enforcing social policy in rapidly changing times. Undoubtedly, the authors of the state constitution had the best interests of the state in mind when they initially drafted the ban on lotteries, even if gambling continued unabated. Lax enforcement, however, did not cause the eventual changes in the law. Changes in businesses' advertisement and promotion, quickly adopted by charitable organizations and local governments, pushed the idea that trying to win something for free was not inherently immoral and could well prove beneficial. The progressive faith in government regulation of private industries to protect the public—indicated in the move against slot machines—continues in the state's rigorous supervision of all state gaming, from bingo to raffles to "Supercash." And, the abiding human desire to risk a buck in the hope of winning the big game should not be overlooked. ❧

*Although the state constitution limits the lottery to informational advertising and prohibits all promotional advertising, advertisements like this Megabucks poster prove how fuzzy the line between information and promotion can be.*



*Many Wisconsin Lottery scratch off tickets also gave buyers the chance to win a spot on the Money Game TV Show and compete for additional prizes.*



*Magic Moola ticket, an example of a Wisconsin Lottery scratch off instant win game*

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## Notes

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25. *Opinions of the Attorney General*, 1920, 143.
26. *State ex rel. Cowie v. La Crosse Theaters Company*, 232 Wis. 153.
27. *State ex rel. Trampe v. Multerer*, 234 Wis. 55.
28. *Opinions of the Attorney General*, 1935, 613.
29. Chapter 463, Laws of 1951.
30. *State v. Laven*, 270 Wis. 524.
31. Dan Ritsche, *The Evolution of Legalized Gambling in Wisconsin* (Madison: State of Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau), 1. Available online at <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lrb/pubs/rb/00rb1.pdf>. Amending the state constitution requires that the legislature pass the same proposed amendment twice in subsequent sessions before submitting it to a state-wide referendum.
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38. Ritsche, 10.
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WHS Museum 2001.83.8A-C, Photo by Joel Heiman

A lottery ticket dispenser used by vendors, featuring up to 24 different games

January 1987); in Thomas A. Loftus Papers, 1970-1991, Wisconsin Historical Society Collection M91-001, Madison WI, Box 3, folder "Lottery."

40. *Capital Times* January 26, 1987.

41. *La Crosse Tribune* February 25, 1986; Tom Loftus Papers, Box 3, folder "Lottery."

42. Ritsche, 10.

43. *Ibid.*, 5. Pari-mutuel betting is a system in which all bets of a kind are placed in a pool, the house take is removed, and the payouts are calculated based on the remainder.

### About the Author

Jonathan Kasperek has a PhD in history from the UW-Madison. He has published several articles on the history of the state and is the coauthor of *Voices and Votes: How Democracy Works in Wisconsin* and *Wisconsin History Highlights: Delving into the Past*, both published by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press. He has spoken on Depression-era Wisconsin as part of the Voices of the Progressive Tradition program at Taliesin and the state capitol and teaches history at UW-Waukesha.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD MCDAVITT



Hand-colored photo of two enrollees at Devil's Lake. Young men in the CCC program learned the valuable skills necessary to compete in jobs such as construction.



# THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS IN SAUK COUNTY

DEVIL'S LAKE AND LAVALLE

BY ROBERT J. MOORE

Over two million teenagers and young adults served in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) before it was disbanded in 1942. It was one of the most successful of the New Deal relief programs set up during the Great Depression of the 1930s. CCC camps were established in all states. Their mission was to provide teenagers and young adults meaningful work in outdoor conservation projects. While camp numbers fluctuated from year to year, the peak year of 1935 saw 2,110 camps in operation nationwide. In June 1935, there were 103 camps operating in Wisconsin. Most of them were located in the north woods area of the state or in the rolling farmlands of western and southwestern Wisconsin.<sup>1</sup>

Young men who entered the program had to be unemployed and between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. They also had to be willing to sign up for a minimum of six months. Upon enlistment, the men were given a physical exam and assigned to a company of two hundred men. Theirs was a soil, forest, and parks conservation effort that had never been attempted before on such a scale. Even the National Park Service, with its reputation for preservation and conservation, didn't have nearly

CCC patch Madison, Wisconsin, 1933–1941



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD McDANITT

Devil's Lake camp as seen from the top of the bluff in 1937. The tents to the right of the buildings were temporary and most likely used as storage or as comfortable summer sleeping quarters.



WHI IMAGE ID 84591

When this photo was taken in June 1935, there were 103 CCC camps operating in Wisconsin. This panoramic group portrait includes CCC companies 2615 and 2669.

enough manpower to fulfill its wish list prior to the creation of the CCC. For both the Park Service and US Forest Service, the new youth agency was a means to provide much-needed labor.

There was a lot of backbreaking outdoor work to be done, but the CCC boys rarely complained. For many of them, it was an adventure and an opportunity to get away from home. They became independent from their parents, but that independence came with the realization that the folks back home depended on them more than ever. Every one of them knew that of the \$30 they earned in the CCC each month, \$25 of it was sent home to help their families pay the bills. Despite having only \$5 cash at the end of the month, enrollment in the CCC was voluntary and robust.<sup>2</sup>



WHI IMAGE ID 85333

C.C.C. 2615 AND 2669 JUNE 1935.



Interior of CCC barracks, ca. 1935

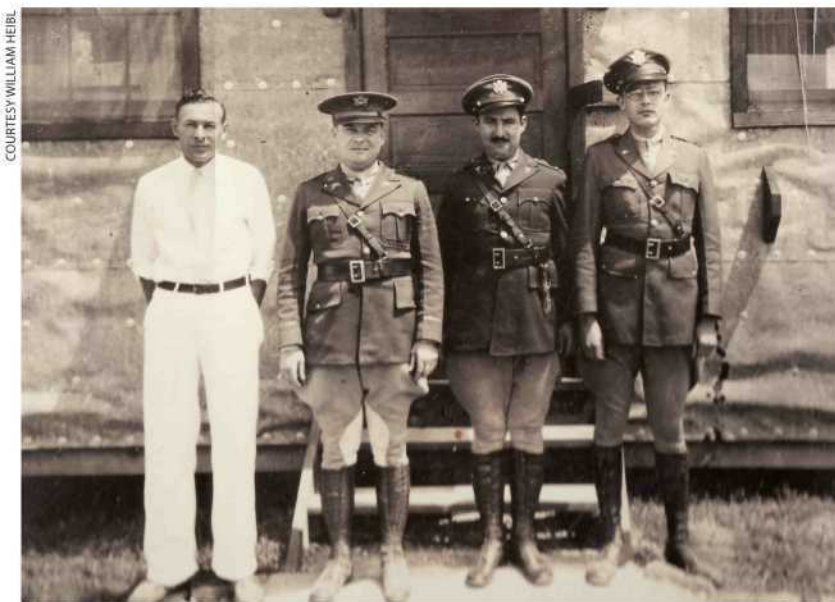
Thousands of teenagers throughout Wisconsin signed up, among them Jim Mitchell. His story of finding the CCC was not typical of all recruits but was nonetheless representative of what a large number of young men went through during the Depression years. Jim's father came home one day in 1933 to announce to his family that he had lost his job. "It was the first time in my life I ever saw my father cry . . . it weighed in on you," remembered Jim.<sup>3</sup> The 16-year-old from Kenosha decided the best thing he could do was get away and look for work. The young runaway lived the hobo's life, hopping freight trains, and sleeping in makeshift shanties in the woods near the tracks. It seemed like a romantic lifestyle when he dreamed about it in his Kenosha bedroom, but things quickly changed. "I don't think I was 20 miles down the road . . . and it was cold

and miserable. Hell, I knew right then I made a mistake."<sup>4</sup> Later, during conversations in the shanty towns near the rail yards, he heard about the CCC. Three meals a day, sleeping in your own bed, and being outdoors all day planting trees, improving trails, and building roads. Traveling buddy Peter Lijinski thought the CCC was a great idea, but Jim was wary. He heard the US Army was running the camps. They talked and weighed their options. Jim said, "I balked at the idea of having some army guys push me around . . . Little did we realize that this stark encampment was the haven thousands of boys like ourselves needed."<sup>5</sup>

Jim was only partly right about the army. Army officers would be assigned to each company and would be responsible for the young men while they were in the camps. It was made clear that the CCC enrollees were not members of the military, but they would have to follow a set of rules that the officers enforced. Barracks inspections, roll call, KP, and evening parade formation were some examples. But outdoors, at the job sites, they would be under the control of what became known as the technical services. These were the government agencies that planned and executed the outdoor conservation jobs. There were a number of agencies competing with each other for CCC workers, but in Wisconsin (and most of the rest of the country) there were three technical agencies that got the most supervisory assignments: the US Forest Service (a part of the Department of Agriculture); the National Park Service (NPS); and the Soil Conservation Service (SCS).<sup>6</sup>

The CCC boys who worked under the direction of the NPS at Devil's Lake State Park—the most visited park in the state—





COURTESY WILLIAM HEIBL



COURTESY OF WISCONSIN DNR, DEVIL'S LAKE STATE PARK

Education Advisor Anthony Heibl (left) and the command staff at Camp La Valle, 1936. Next to Heibl is Camp Commander Lt. John Joseph, Medical Officer S. Leavitt, and Second-in-Command Lt. George Watson. Heibl would later serve as education advisor at Devil's Lake.

As chief project superintendent for all CCC work at Devil's Lake, Eugene Odbert, seen here in 1939, was responsible for the timing, pace, and quality of building and trail projects in the park.

became the center of attention thanks to the popularity of the area. Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, train service from Chicago and Milwaukee had taken visitors right to the water's edge. Later, the automobile made travel easy from elsewhere in the Midwest. Because of its location, CCC duty at Devil's Lake was perhaps the most attention-getting assignment in Wisconsin. The camp, designated SP-12, was operational at the lake for all but two of the nine years the CCC operated, with CCC Company 2669 handling all project work.<sup>7</sup>

Serving in the CCC was never thought of as high profile or high status work. Yet there was certainly an element of romance and pride attached to the new organization. The allure of working in the CCC often depended upon which technical agency supervised the jobs at a camp. The work of the forest service that involved planting trees and breaking trails in the mountains of the west was the way most people envisioned CCC jobs. However, duty in America's national forests, including Wisconsin, could feel like time spent in a lonely outpost. Camps were in remote areas and few citizens observed the good work that the young men were doing. Even after the CCC program ended, it was almost impossible for later generations to figure out which forest improvements were put in by CCC boys, as opposed to those constructed by contract laborers years later.

The NPS was perhaps the most visible of the technical services that worked with the CCC. As caretakers of the national parks and monuments, tourists by the millions crossed paths with friendly rangers each year—even during the Depression days. Wisconsin officials partnered with the NPS to make

COURTESY OF WISCONSIN DNR, DEVIL'S LAKE STATE PARK



improvements to the fledgling state park units. The young crews that worked in the state parks of Wisconsin became the face of the CCC, even though much of the work they did in the parks was not unlike other CCC companies elsewhere in the Badger State.

No one had more knowledge of CCC projects at Devil's Lake than NPS project superintendent Eugene Odbert. While most of his reports to superiors were confined to unadorned facts, he took time to remind CCC administrators in Washington DC why this camp was special. He described Devil's Lake as "... a natural wonder attracting thousands of visitors each season. Add to this the spectacular geological formations . . . plus the inspiring beauty of the wooded hills and vales and you have a lure which has pushed to the background many a man's resolution to be back at the office on Monday morning."<sup>8</sup>

Odbert, along with NPS regional planners and state park officials, developed an aggressive building program that was intended to make park visitors more comfortable while also highlighting the natural landscape of the area. The pride of the program would be construction of a bathhouse on the north shore of the lake. Odbert brought in local tradesmen,

called local experienced men (LEM), to teach the CCC boys how to put up buildings. The NPS had put together building standards that called for a rustic style emphasizing local materials. Devil's Lake was surrounded by quartzite cliffs that had long been mined for construction material, and the CCC used the same lavender quartzite to build the lakeshore bathhouse.

The completed bathhouse, the CCC-built parking lot, the administration building, and other north shore campground structures are an enduring tribute to the young men and the LEMs who trained them. But working at Devil's Lake produced longterm benefits other than the buildings. The projects also taught the CCC boys construction skills that would serve the young men after they were discharged and went back home to find a job. It was also something special for the CCC boys partly because those skills were generally not taught at the Soil Conservation Service camps nor at the US Forest Service camps in northern Wisconsin.<sup>9</sup>

Roosevelt's goal to put young men to work on conservation projects was not the only mission of the CCC. Administrators soon discovered that many of the enrollees arriving at the camps lacked basic educational skills—some of which were necessary to complete jobs in the field such as construction of buildings. Thousands of enrollees nationwide were not able to read or write. Thousands more had not finished high school. The president made it clear that the CCC was intended not only as a forest and farm conservation effort, but also as a means to increase an enrollee's skills and maturity. The resulting education component was voluntary for the young men, but the response was so positive that the CCC hired one more person per camp to manage the program.<sup>10</sup>

The camp education adviser was a civilian, oftentimes a school teacher. His job was to organize classes for the men not only in the basic subjects like English and math but also to offer vocational classes that were often connected to the jobs the men did during the workday. Such classes included land survey methods, blueprint drafting, forestry, auto mechanics, and typing. If the education adviser was unable to teach those subjects, he enlisted members of the technical staff or even a knowledgeable young enrollee. The education adviser was also often the camp confidante to the enrollees, listening and helping the young men resolve personal problems.<sup>11</sup>

In 1938, Anthony J. Heibl came to Devil's Lake as education adviser. Heibl's background and experiences at the park, and elsewhere in the CCC system, was a good example of what the organization was looking for in a civilian adviser to young adults. Heibl had earned an undergraduate degree in physical



An enrollee works on the pride of the Devil's Lake CCC program projects, construction of a bathhouse on the north shore of the lake.



CCC insignia patch, 1934–1935

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education from the University of Wisconsin and had planned to pursue a career in coaching. Unable to get a regular teaching job, his skills were nonetheless coveted by the CCC. He had teaching credentials and knew how to organize classes, conduct meetings, and advise students. Another necessary duty taken on by many educational advisers, including Heibl, was journalism adviser to the enrollee-directed camp newspaper.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps Heibl's most rewarding duty of all was organizing and overseeing the camp sports programs. Enrollees were active in setting up their own teams, but they often turned to the adviser for help. For example, Heibl was the coach of the basketball team and scheduled games with other CCC camps. He acted as the game referee and ran the intrabarracks basketball competition at Devil's Lake. Thinking about how his rulings as a referee would affect his enrollee relationships, Heibl remarked, "Here's where I find out who my friends are."<sup>13</sup>

When not engaged in sports or other recreational opportunities, the young men looked forward to spending their free time in the nearest town. For the CCC boys at Devil's Lake, Baraboo was the closest destination. Going to town was like being on vacation. Every Saturday and Sunday, citizens of Baraboo could find CCC boys in dress uniform proudly walking around the town square. For those with money to spend, the local movie theater was always a popular destination. A 25-cent admission made it possible to temporarily leave the reality of CCC duty and escape to places far away. An extra bonus would be finding a girl who would go along.

Devil's Lake enrollee Clarence Guetzkow recalled, "[J]ust a half a block off the town square was the Alpine Restaurant.

WHI IMAGE ID B4388



CCC worker at Devil's Lake, undated

A lot of guys liked to go there because it was easy to strike up a conversation with the waitresses."<sup>14</sup> A more common pastime was the ritual of strolling around the town window shopping or maybe sitting on a park bench admiring the young ladies. Their military-style uniform with a green and gold CCC patch on the shoulder identified the boys as members of the tree army, but it also made the young men looking slightly older. Many who thought they could get away with it confidently walked into a Baraboo tavern and sought out a bartender who would serve them a drink. Sometimes it worked.

Whether it was in town or back at camp, making your own fun was part of life in the CCC. But sometimes the young men's choices were surprising. After a hard day outdoors, for example, who would want to get additional exercise? Enrollee Bruce Budde remembered that "some nights after work a

bunch of us would cross the road in front of our camp and follow the trail up the bluff just for something to do.”<sup>15</sup> It was a punishing hike, even for young men, but the views from the top were splendid, and there was no supervisor present to tell the young men to get down.

While it was true that Devil’s Lake grabbed most of the attention and publicity connected to CCC work, there was another camp less than thirty miles to the northwest. Camp LaValle (SCS-9) was a fully functional and permanent CCC camp with a full complement of men and plenty of work to do. But like a younger sister in a big family, this camp was overshadowed by the accomplishments of her flashy older sibling. Both Devil’s Lake and LaValle were camps with the same overall mission: to give young men work experience in outdoor conservation. Both camps were located in Sauk County, and both began operation at about the same time. But that is where the similarity ends. At Devil’s Lake the camp itself became a tourist attraction. The young men serving there interacted with visitors on a daily basis. It wasn’t like that at LaValle.

Tucked into the hill country of northwestern Sauk County, the small community of LaValle (in 1940, the population was 408) was similar in size and function to thousands of other rural communities across the Midwest. Many of the CCC boys working at the nearby camp had come from hardscrabble towns just like LaValle. The CCC camp (SCS-9), just a little over a mile south of town, was under the project jurisdiction of the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), rather than the more recognizable National Park Service. LaValle’s mission, work history, and level of public attention was quite different from that of the high-profile camp at Devil’s Lake. The LaValle unit was part of a series of camps set up to deal with severe farmland soil erosion. All the SCS supervised camps were located in what is known as the Driftless Area. The characteristics of the Driftless Area determined the location of over twenty Wisconsin CCC camps.

The Driftless Area was an important part of Wisconsin’s geologic past, a part of Wisconsin that escaped extreme glacial activity during the Ice Age 10,000 years ago. The lack of glacial leveling resulted in a landscape characterized by rolling farmlands and woods, typical of stylized postcard views of America’s Dairyland. Unfortunately, the hillsides were subject to careless planting techniques and overgrazing, and the resulting soil erosion carried away nutrient-rich topsoil and had a negative impact on crop yields.<sup>16</sup>

The work of reversing the effects and preventing future soil erosion was lonely, and only a few people would ever see the results of the various agricultural projects. Yet the LaValle efforts were no less important than the work done by the Devil’s Lake crew. Some would say the work they did to control erosion and save topsoil was in the long run more important than anything the other technical services did for individual people.<sup>17</sup> But their work was on farms, and besides local communities and farmers, few people knew they were there.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD MCDONALD



Enrollee Frankie Culetta getting in some practice after work. Sports was such a big part of CCC life that camp commanders arranged for gymnasium space in nearby towns when winter weather made outdoor games impractical.



Al Ringling Theatre, Baraboo, 1946

SCS-9 sat on leased farmland situated on a hilltop south of LaValle, in the middle of rolling country and off the main travel routes, the perfect spot to fulfill its mission. When the camp opened in July 1935 (about the same time that permanent camp buildings were going up at Devil's Lake), LaValle project superintendent A. C. Wojta announced, "We are here only for the erosion control [and] we would like to work out the erosion problems with the farmers. We are not here to try and tell them how to farm."<sup>18</sup>

The SCS contracted with local farmers to address soil conservation and erosion control problems on their land. The resulting projects included brush clearing, hillside terracing, and tree planting. The CCC boys did the work, and the farmer agreed to provide some materials and to engage in prescribed conservation practices for at least five years after the work was done. The CCC boys at LaValle went out to remote farms each day to construct "soil saving" erosion control dams in gullies and steep watersheds. The most beautiful of the dams were small masonry notch dams using native limestone. Smaller still were poured concrete dams that blended into the hillsides. The kind of dam necessary for a particular gully or watershed was determined after study by the camp's technical staff of agronomists, foresters, and engineers. The other work projects were pick-and-shovel jobs such as stream bank protection and fence



Main Street La Valle, ca. 1940

building. Like the Devil's Lake crew, the LaValle boys worked in teams of three to fifteen men, with each team working on several projects at the same time. Success of the LaValle camp depended on keeping farmers informed about what was taking place in the area and also convincing them to sign on as partners in conservation projects. It was a far cry from the Devil's Lake camp's work constructing tourists' amenities with the National Park Service.<sup>19</sup>

William Tylutki was one of the young enrollees working at LaValle in 1936. While many of the LaValle CCC boys were Wisconsin natives, Tylutki and a few others were from out of state. Young Bill was a self-described street kid from Dearborn, Michigan. "As a young high school student I worked as a newspaper kid, a bowling alley attendant, and anything else I could find. It seemed I was always doing something on the street." The truant officer at school—whose house was on Bill's paper route—began to see what kind of future awaited the young man. "There's a better life," he told Bill. "Try the CCC."<sup>20</sup>

At LaValle, Tylutki got an assignment driving a truck. "A typical day for me was to get the work crew and their equipment loaded in the back and drive them out to the job site." Bill also remembered a very specific command: "Never overload the truck." Those were the words often uttered by 1st Lt. John Joseph, camp commander at LaValle. "I drove a 1½ ton government truck and I remember figuring in my head the number of men we had in the back of the truck and what their average weight might be. We then had to estimate the weight of the tools and other equipment and hope we hadn't gone over the limit." Cargo weight wasn't the only thing the camp commander was concerned about. "He was strict on speed limits on the highway too," said Bill. "Those trucks had governors on them that only allowed a top speed of 45 miles per hour."<sup>21</sup>

Supply runs and quarry work took the Devil's Lake boys outside the park boundaries, but Bill remembered, "Our camp at LaValle was for soil erosion work and the Devil's Lake boys were building things in the park, so we never saw each other during the day."<sup>22</sup> The Ableman District near Rock Springs was a quarry location for Devil's Lake workers, and crew from Devil's Lake was at work there obtaining flat red sandstone for the bathhouses at the park. It was almost halfway between the Devil's Lake and LaValle camps, but as Bill explains, "We did quarry work at LaValle too . . . But our quarry was for crushing limestone, not mining sandstone for

WHI IMAGE ID 84597



CCC workers pose at a rock formation at Devil's Lake, undated. Sometimes CCC enrollees climbed the bluff, even after a grueling day of work, to enjoy the beautiful views.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WILLIAM HEIBL



Located in farm country south of town and away from the main road, the La Valle camp never got the attention given to the Devil's Lake camp despite having the same number of enrollees.



CCC crew installing a drainage canal in Vernon County to control erosion, 1937. Enrollees from the Soil Conservation Service camp at La Valle were doing the same work at the same time on farms in Sauk County.

flooring. Our crushed lime was used by the farmers to spread on their fields. All our work at LaValle was intended to benefit farmers, not tourists.”<sup>23</sup>

The most noticeable and frequent contact between camps was through sports. Baseball was by far the most popular team sport, but basketball, track and field, and boxing were also high-interest activities. All CCC camps formed teams, and Devil's Lake and LaValle played in the same league. Since LaValle and Devil's Lake were so geographically close, it was logical that a friendly rivalry developed. But since it was “all in

fun,” the camp newspapers didn't gloat or boast about defeating their neighborhood opponent. “I played baseball, basketball, and boxing,” said Bill. “I remember a guy knocked me out once during a boxing match. It was a good thing I was just in it for the fun of it.”<sup>24</sup> Even when the camp teams didn't play each other, Bill remembered driving the LaValle boys to Devil's Lake on weekends just to watch or participate in informal baseball or softball games.

Off-duty hours were about the only opportunity for the men of the two camps to meet and talk. Naturally, the biggest draw for the LaValle boys on a free weekend was to go to Baraboo or the lake. “Of course we all wanted to go to Devil's Lake on our free time,” said Tylutki. “We even hitch-hiked if we had to. But if we planned ahead the cook staff at LaValle would make a group of us sack lunches to take to the lake for a Saturday trip. We didn't go to the Devil's Lake CCC camp but we did see

and talk with the Devil's Lake guys when we happened to see them around the park. We were all just kids then, so we didn't have a lot of important things to talk about. And that didn't happen very often. I imagine after working in the park all week, the Devil's Lake kids had different places to go on the weekend.”<sup>25</sup>

Besides the obvious attraction of Devil's Lake, the LaValle CCC boys had their own less scenic hangouts closer to camp. While Baraboo was the closest town of any size, Bill remembers that Reedsburg became a destination of choice for many of the LaValle enrollees, mostly because it was just a few miles down

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COURTESY US DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE, NATIONAL CONSERVATION RESOURCE SERVICE, MADISON, WI, OFFICE

Masonry notch dam under construction on a farm in Vernon County, 1934. CCC enrollees supervised by the Soil Conservation Service (Local Experienced Men, standing on right), including those at La Valle, built dozens of similar structures as a way of controlling erosion by slowing storm water flow.

the road from the camp. Bill recalled, “The guys knew some girls in Reedsburg, so that became a popular spot.”<sup>26</sup>

Even closer than Reedsburg was the town of LaValle. The town was small and there wasn’t much there to keep the boys entertained, but there was a small tavern. “I remember the tavern in town very well,” said Tylutki. “It was a memorable spot because they would sell you bottles of beer and liquor if you drank it at the bar. They didn’t check our ages. I guess they figured if we were in CCC uniform, it was OK. But that wasn’t the only reason to go to town. Once in awhile they would have a street dance in LaValle, but that was about it for fun.”<sup>27</sup>

If enrollees could not get to town, they still found ways to have fun. A particular form of farm country entertainment was especially memorable for a city kid like Bill Tylutki. “We had a couple of kids at camp who had farms in the area, one near Cross Plains. Somebody worked out a deal to get a movie and

projector and we sat in the grass and watched movies outdoors, using the side of a grain elevator as a screen.”<sup>28</sup>

By late 1936, Tylutki had heard rumors about job opportunities back home. After Bill served out his enlistment, he made his way back to Dearborn. Things were beginning to turn around for the auto industry, and he was fortunate enough to get a job at the glass factory at Ford Motor Company. His CCC working life at LaValle was a short six months, but he never forgot Wisconsin.

The LaValle camp closed in 1937. It was the start of a trend of camp closings. All the enrollees at LaValle served out their enlistments and either went home or were reassigned to another camp. As for Bill Tylutki, he thanked his lucky stars that he had a job. Of his CCC experiences he said, “I remember it most as just a good, good life. That truant officer in Michigan was right.”<sup>29</sup>




This 1934 terrace outlet project from Coon Valley, Wisconsin, is designed to channel water down a hillside while protecting cropland from soil erosion. The La Valle camp enrollees engaged in identical work in Sauk County.



CCC workers in trucks

Thanks in part to its location and eye-catching building projects, the CCC camp at Devil's Lake continued until late 1941. While the bathhouse and other buildings remain at the lake as a visible reminder of the Devil's Lake camp's efforts, Camp LaValle was quickly forgotten, its projects hidden in the woods and farm fields. While the efforts at LaValle are no less important, CCC work at Devil's Lake seems to live on even for those who never served there. CCC veteran Emil Pradarelli served at Long Lake near Iron River in the heavily wooded and lake-studded part of extreme northern Wisconsin. Winters were long, the spring season was

muddy, and the pleasant summer weather attracted swarms of mosquitoes. It was tough duty. In 2004, Pradarelli attended the memorial tribute to the CCC held at Devil's Lake. Later, he was asked if he saw duty at Devil's Lake in his younger days. "No," he said. Then he paused for a long moment, sighed, and slowly added, "That would have been nice."<sup>30</sup> 

## Notes

1. For an overview of national politics about the creation of the CCC, including eligibility and camp numbers, see John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps 1933–1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1967), Chapter 3–4, [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/ccc/salmond/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/ccc/salmond/index.htm).
2. Carol Ahlgren, "The Civilian Conservation Corps and Wisconsin State Park Development," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 71, no. 3 (1998): 185.
3. Errol Lincoln Uys, *Riding the Rails: Teenagers on the Move During the Great Depression* (New York: TV Books, 1999), 259–260. The book is a companion to a video look at life on the road for runaway teens during the Great Depression presented by PBS-TV, *American Experience*, "Riding the Rails," aired April 19, 1998. Direct quotes from Jim Mitchell are from the PBS transcript.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. While the US Forest Service supervised more camps, a case can be made that the National Park Service was more visible to the public. For background on National Park Service interest in CCC, see John C. Paige, *The Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Park Service, 1933–1942 (An Administrative History)*, National Park Service, Department of Interior, 1985, [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/ccc/ccc1a.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/ccc/ccc1a.htm).
7. A full list of supervising agencies listed by state and camp initials can be found at CCC Legacy Foundation, [http://www.ccclegacy.org/camp\\_lists.htm](http://www.ccclegacy.org/camp_lists.htm).
8. Eugene Odbert Jr., Narrative Supplementary Report, March 31, 1936, Devil's Lake Camp Inspection Report, Records Group 79, page 1, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland. Devil's Lake popularity during and following the CCC days is noted in the story of the CCC statue program and its focus on the lake location. See Dave Zweifel, "CCC Gets Its Due at Ceremony Friday," *Capital Times*, July 28, 2004.
9. For summary of work projects, see Camp Inspection Reports, SP-12 and SCS-9 Wisconsin, Records Group 79 National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.
10. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942*, Chapter 3, [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/ccc/salmond/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/ccc/salmond/index.htm). For educational goals, see Robert Fechner, "The Civilian Conservation Corps Program," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 194 (November 1937): 134.
11. Fechner, "The Civilian Conservation Corps Program," 134–135.
12. William Heibl (son of CCC education adviser Anthony Heibl) in discussion with the author, April 20, 2009. John A. Heibl in discussion with the author, January 24, January 31, 2009.
13. *The New Camp Paper* (Baraboo, WI: CCC Camp newspaper, Devil's Lake), February 1938.
14. Clarence Guetzkow (CCC veteran), in discussion with the author, August 24, 2009.
15. Bruce Budde (CCC veteran) in discussion with the author, July 24, 2009.
16. Norman Risjord, *Wisconsin: The Story of the Badger State* (Black Earth, WI: Trails Books, 1995), 1–8. For a full treatment of the importance of the Driftless Area and soil conservation efforts in the area, see Leonard C. Johnson, *Soil Conservation in Wisconsin: Birth to Rebirth* (University of Wisconsin–Madison: Dept. of Soil Science, 1991).
17. The worth of one project and one agency over another is certainly debatable, but for the SCS side of the story, see Johnson, *Soil Conservation in Wisconsin*, 65–68.
18. *Baraboo News-Republic*, July 11, 1935.
19. Examples of work projects at LaValle can be found in the pages of the CCC camp newspaper, *The Hilltop*. LaValle WI, 1935–1937, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Micro film collection P10-734, DN10-29.
20. Author interview with CCC veteran William Tylutki, July 14, 20, 2008, May 11, 2009, Dearborn, Michigan.
21. Tylutki, May 11, 2009.
22. Tylutki, July 14, 2008.
23. Tylutki, July 20, 2008.
24. Tylutki, July 14, 2008.
25. Tylutki, May 11, 2009.
26. Tylutki, May 11, 2009.
27. Tylutki, July 14, 2008.
28. Tylutki, July 20, 2008.
29. Tylutki, July 14, 2008.
30. Author interview with CCC veteran Emil Pradarelli, June 25, 2007, Cudahy, Wisconsin.

PHOTO COURTESY OF R. J. MOORE



Modern photo of the bathhouse at Devil's Lake.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Robert J. Moore** is a former high school American history teacher. In 1998, he was named American History Teacher of the Year by the Arizona chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). He also served for eight seasons as an interpretive specialist of regional history for the US Forest Service in Arizona. Since relocating to Wisconsin in 2003, he has continued to research CCC history. His first book, *The Civilian Conservation Corps in Arizona's Rim Country*, was published by the University of Nevada Press, and his latest book is *Devil's Lake, Wisconsin, and the Civilian Conservation Corp.*, published by the History Press.



# Mary Lincoln and Her Visit to Wisconsin's Wild Region

BY CYNDY IRVINE



Portrait of Mary Lincoln engraved by Samuel Sartain and printed by Irwin & Sartain, ca. November 1864

County map of Wisconsin and Michigan including major ports from Mary Lincoln's travels, 1867



WHI IMAGE ID 91714



Cartes de visite, so named for their size (which resembled a small calling card), became popular in the 1850s and 1860s. They were taken with a specially designed camera and the images could be printed on one sheet of photographic paper, then cut up and mounted on pocket-sized cardstock. This photograph is a composite image that uses a Matthew Brady photograph of Lincoln reading to Tad with a superimposed image of Mrs. Lincoln seated next to her husband and another of Robert in military uniform standing behind his father's chair, ca. 1862. Although Willie's death is acknowledged by his absence from the picture, Mrs. Lincoln is not shown in mourning dress.

**I**n the years following Abraham Lincoln's assassination on April 14, 1865, his widow Mary Lincoln traveled throughout the United States and Europe. Most of her travels were documented by her own correspondence and the observations of others. One brief venture is less widely known. In August 1867, twenty-eight months after her husband's death, Mary Lincoln departed from Chicago with her young son Thomas ("Tad") on a steamboat excursion to the Lake Superior region. Although no letters have been found from Mary Lincoln during this time, the writings of people she met and newspaper accounts of the day, many of them only recently brought to light, provide us a glimpse into this little-known chapter of her life.

For Mary Lincoln, still mourning the loss of her husband, the journey was hopefully a pleasant reprieve—steaming along the Lake Superior shoreline, entranced by the wilderness, cooled by the brisk breezes, and blessedly unaware that she was soon to endure additional agonizing tragedy.

### Mary Lincoln's Early Life

Mary Lincoln was known to be intelligent and articulate, also temperamental, high-spirited, and fiercely loyal to her husband and family. Scorned by many during her lifetime and ever since for what was believed to be her emotional instability, she remains revered by others for her devotion to her legendary husband.

Mary Todd was born into a wealthy family in Lexington, Kentucky, on December 13, 1818. Her father, Robert Smith Todd, was a prosperous merchant and Kentucky state legislator. Her mother, Eliza Parker, was from an aristocratic family herself. She died when Mary was just six years old, an early event in a succession of tragedies in Mary's life. Mary would never become close to the woman her father married after her mother's death, although she became very fond of her half-sisters and brothers. Mary enjoyed all the privileges of an upper-class childhood. She received an exceptional education for a young woman of her time, attending the Shelby Female Academy and Madame Mentelle's boarding school for young ladies, where she excelled in her studies and learned to read and speak French fluently. Lexington was a center of slave activity in the early 1800s, and the Todds were slaveholders themselves—perhaps childhood memories (along with her husband's strong feelings) contributed to Mary's later abolitionist views.

WHI IMAGE ID 36580



The Congressional Committee accompanied Lincoln's body all the way to Springfield for his funeral. They are pictured here in May 1865 in front of the Abraham Lincoln home, which was decorated with mourning ribbons.

While residing with her older sister, Elizabeth Todd Edwards, in Springfield, Illinois, Mary was introduced to the hardscrabble lawyer and Illinois state legislator Abraham Lincoln. The couple was married at the Edwards home on November 4, 1842, and they soon had two sons, Robert, born in 1843, and Edward (Eddie), born in 1846. It was also in 1846 that Abraham Lincoln won a seat in the US House of Representatives. After his congressional term ended, he returned to Springfield and resumed an increasingly successful law practice. During this time, four-year-old Eddie Lincoln died after a prolonged illness, the first of three Lincoln sons who would die before Mary. Within the next three years, two more sons were born, William (Willie) in 1850 and Tad in 1853. Abraham Lincoln's political activity intensified, and Mary vigorously supported and encouraged his ambitions. After an unsuccessful run for US Senate, he was elected president two years later, and the Lincoln family moved into the White House in early 1861.

The White House years were painful for the Lincolns. The Civil War consumed nearly all of Abraham Lincoln's presidential tenure. More than 620,000 lives were lost in this bloodiest war in American history, with the human suffering extensive in North and South alike. President Lincoln agonized over the unending bloodshed and his military decisions, Mary Lincoln endured malicious criticism for her Southern heritage (while privately grieving the deaths of three Confederate half-brothers), and the couple suffered yet again the loss of a beloved son, eleven-year-old Willie, to typhoid fever in February 1862.

Lincoln was reelected president in November 1864, and by mid-April 1865, the end of the war was in sight. Robert E. Lee had surrendered at Appomattox on April 9. Spring was in the air, the war was officially over, crowds celebrated in the streets of Washington DC, and, as Mary wrote in a letter on April 13, "We are rejoicing beyond expression . . ." <sup>71</sup> Such was the atmosphere when the Lincolns attended a celebratory performance at Ford's Theatre on Good Friday evening, April 14. The rejoicing ended when John Wilkes Booth took Abraham Lincoln's life with a single bullet to the back of his head as he sat by his wife in the presidential box.

After her husband's death, Mary Lincoln sank into inconsolable grief. It was several weeks before she was able to com-



Thomas (Tad) Lincoln, age 11, by photographer Mathew Brady, April 1864

pose herself and return with her surviving sons, twenty-one-year-old Robert and twelve-year-old Tad, to Illinois. The family was now three, and Mary related to a friend: "As dear little Taddie, often says, 'three of us on earth, & three in Heaven.'"<sup>72</sup>

In July 1867, two years after settling in Chicago, Mary, Robert, and Tad Lincoln were summoned back to Washington, DC, to testify at the trial of John Surratt, one of the accused conspirators in the presidential assassination. A return to Washington, the scene of so much grief and pain, must have seemed a formidable task for the weary and heartbroken Mary, and she declined the trip.

In her sons' absence, and hoping to find "rest & quiet," Mary traveled the short distance to Racine, Wisconsin, to investigate a boarding school for Tad.<sup>73</sup> She decided against enrolling him, confessing to a friend, "how can I be separated from my precious child," and was soon back in Illinois.<sup>74</sup> But she did not remain for long: within days of her return, she embarked on a Lake Superior excursion. She was accompanied by Tad, described by Mary's cousin as "a gay, gladsome, merry, spontaneous fellow, bubbling over with innocent fun" and whom Mary admittedly described as her "troublesome sunshine Taddie."<sup>75</sup>

### Tourism and Steamship Travel in the Lake Superior Region

In the late 1860s, Lake Superior was bustling during the summer months with hundreds of fishing, cargo, and passenger vessels. The entire region was experiencing a robust revival of tourism after a decline during the Civil War years. The canal and locks at Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan, had opened over a decade earlier, in 1855, allowing continuous ship travel between Lake Superior and the other Great Lakes. By the summer of 1867, many of the finest steamboats on the Great Lakes were bringing tourists to the Lake Superior ports.

As early as 1857, John Disturnell had published his travel guide *Upper Lakes of North America*, which included scenic descriptions and lucrative advertisements for steamship lines and "Grand Pleasure Excursions" around Lake Superior. One advertisement for a steamboat route from Chicago to Mackinac and Sault Sainte Marie proclaimed: "USUAL FARE, \$8, including meals. . . . USUAL TIME, 48 hours."<sup>76</sup> Disturnell published a subsequent volume in 1863, in which he described



Modern photographic view of the scenic Pictured Rocks on the Lake Superior shoreline between Sault Sainte Marie and Marquette, Michigan

the lakes as "now being whitened by a large fleet of sail-vessels, in addition to the swift steamers and propellers which plough the waters of these Great Lakes, transporting annually large numbers of passengers, and an immense amount of agricultural and mineral products, to and from the different ports."<sup>7</sup>

The predominant steamers during this time were the "propellers"—steam-powered vessels moved by underwater propellers that replaced the earlier paddle-wheelers. They offered numerous advantages as they operated with smaller crews, required less fuel, and were cheaper to build.<sup>8</sup> A distinctive feature of life aboard a propeller-driven steamer was the constant vibration generated by the propeller as the vessel churned through the water.<sup>9</sup> Most steamers could travel at fifteen knots, or a little over seventeen miles per hour. Fire was an ever-present danger; in the evenings the red hot sparks and flames could be seen spewing from the stacks and a wayward wind could blow them back on deck or into the hold.<sup>10</sup> Propellers accommodated their passengers in staterooms above deck and their cargo in holds below deck. Also on deck was the main cabin, or dining room, where hungry passengers were served their meals at long tables running lengthwise in the cabin. Here also passengers could gather by the wood stove on chilly evenings, the cozy setting illuminated by brass oil-lamps hanging sturdily from gimbals that held them level even as the vessel rocked.<sup>11</sup>

A further description of daily life aboard a propeller in a travel account was published shortly after the time of Mary's excursion. Mealtimes were announced by a waiter who appeared with a "great dinner-bell in his hand" and promenade around the deck.<sup>12</sup> In the evenings, passengers weary of the brisk outside air convened in the lamp-lit cabin for reading or games. On one occasion the dining tables were pushed against the wall and the chairs moved on deck to accommodate music and dancing: "The floor was crowded with dancers, all formality was laid aside, strangers danced with strangers, and even that relic of the past, the slow waltz, had its devotees."<sup>13</sup> On a more somber note, during times of dense fog, the whistle

sounded all night at regular intervals, "a dreary, dirge-like note, that kept sleep from our eyes, and filled our minds with visions of possible ships sailing silently across our course in the mist, or unseen propellers bearing swiftly down upon us..."<sup>14</sup>

For many Americans, Great Lakes steamer excursions provided a refreshing reprieve from the summer heat and a glimpse at a wild country and its array of intriguing residents, including trappers, explorers, missionaries, miners, and Ojibwe and other native peoples living along the shorelines. They were also an adventure, not for the faint of heart. The weather was unpredictable and notori-

ously stormy; tragic collisions, foundering, and fires were common. In the year in which Mary Lincoln visited Lake Superior, 931 disasters were reported and 211 lives were lost.<sup>15</sup> Yet hardy tourists sought the adventure. Various shipping lines competed for their business and published advertisements in travel guides and big city newspapers. Touted pastimes, beyond seeing "wonders of almost indescribable interest," included exploration, hunting, fishing, tent camping, agate hunting, visiting the great iron and copper mines, and observing "authentic Indian ceremonies."<sup>16</sup>

Just three months before Mary's journey, the May 1867 *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* featured an illustrated cover story on the scenic Pictured Rocks area located on the Lake Superior shoreline between Sault Sainte Marie and Marquette,

Announcement describing the *Union* published in the *Lake Superior Miner*, October 26, 1867

**Miscellaneous.**

**LAKE SUPERIOR LINE,**  
**1867.**  
**THE FAST SAILING STEAMERS**  
**UNION,**  
 GEORGE DAVIS, Master,  
 and  
**IRON CITY,**  
 JOHN HALLORAN, Master,  
 WILL RUN DURING THE SEASON OF 1867 BETWEEN  
**CHICAGO and LAKE SUPERIOR**  
 TOUCHING AT  
 MILWAUKEE, PORT WASHINGTON, MARQUETTE & MARQUETTE  
 ON LAKE SUPERIOR,  
 Marquette, Houghton, Houghton,  
 Eagle Harbor, Copper Harbor, Eagle River,  
 ONTONAGON AND DAYFIELD  
 ON LAKE SUPERIOR.

Having been put in fine order, and the Cabin enlarged  
 also has now superior accommodations for passengers,  
 being large and airy State Rooms, with a number of  
 Family Rooms which will accommodate a family of six  
 or eight persons.  
 The Cabin will be supplied with the best of the market at  
 all times, and it will be the study of the officers to make her  
 a first class hotel, and to make the trip to the passenger  
 as pleasant as possible.  
 A first class Messenger will go on the boat, taking charge  
 of all express and valuable packages, &c.

For Freight or Passage, apply to PLATT  
 & THORN, near King's St. Bridge, or to  
 CHAS. H. RICE & CO., 211 S. Water St.,  
 Chicago.

**RICE BROS.,**  
 Milwaukee.

**Excursion.—Propeller Union will leave Flat & Thorn's Dock, Kinzie street bridge, Wednesday evening, August 14th, for an excursion to Lake Superior. Special rates for the round trip. C. H. Rice & Co.**

This ad for a Great Lakes Excursion on the *Union* ran in the *Chicago Tribune* on August 12, 1867.

Michigan. Mary may have perused this edition of the popular periodical, perhaps dwelling on these words: "A steamboat is a much more wonderful thing than Solomon . . . ever dreamed of . . . one of them will take you from either Buffalo or Chicago, and in a very short and eventful trip you find yourself, some fine morning about sunrise, far out into Lake Superior, glass in hand, looking southward, trying to make out whether it is rocks or sand banks that you see."<sup>17</sup>

### Mary and Tad Lincoln's Excursion on the *Union*

For several days in mid-August 1867, the *Chicago Tribune* carried a small notice announcing an upcoming Lake Superior excursion by the propeller *Union*, scheduled to depart on Wednesday evening, August 14.<sup>18</sup> Robert Lincoln, who had by then returned to Chicago from the Surratt trial in Washington, wrote on August 13, "My mother will be here tomorrow."<sup>19</sup> This may refer to her returning from Racine or to her visiting his office. Mary made no mention of it in any correspondence beforehand, why or when she decided to join the Lake Superior excursion remains unknown.

Perhaps Mary wished to see for herself the scenic wonders of which she heard and read, or perhaps she was encouraged by a concerned Robert. She may have been inspired to seek adventure for a disconsolate Tad who had so recently lost his father, or she might have been invited along by a thoughtful friend. There is one bit of evidence to support this latter possibility. During the excursion, the ship stopped as scheduled at Ontonagon, Michigan. Here Mary visited the family of a young girl, Jean Prince Durfee, who later reminisced about that day, recalling Mary Lincoln's introduction of one of her traveling companions as the wife of former Senator Rice, her "very good friend."<sup>20</sup> Mathilda Rice was the wife of Senator Henry Mower Rice, who had been elected as one of the first US senators from Minnesota. Henry Rice had been a fur trader and a federal agent for Indian affairs; he was also known as the founder of Bayfield, which had its official beginnings in 1856.<sup>21</sup> At the time of Mary's visit, Rice was likely promoting development and tourism in the Bayfield area—perhaps Mary had been invited by Mathilda Rice to accompany her there. Whatever Mary's reasons for joining the excursion, she may have decided quickly, which would have involved last-minute scurrying and prepara-

tion—Tad purchased a pair of "Calf Gaiters" (boots) from a lake-front wholesaler on the day of the scheduled departure.<sup>22</sup>

The propeller *Union* was built in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, in 1861. The ship bore one mast, and it was "a staunch little steamer"<sup>23</sup> nearly 170 feet long and 26 feet wide. There is additional descriptive information about the *Union* in a newspaper advertisement from the time of Mary's excursion: "Having been put in fine order, and the Cabin enlarged, she has now superior accommodations for Passengers, having large and airy State Rooms, with a number of Family Rooms which will accommodate a family of six or eight persons. The table will be supplied with the best the market affords, and it will be the study of the officers to make her a first class boat, and to make the trip to the passengers as pleasant as possible." The advertisement also proclaimed that a "trusty Messenger will go on the Boat, taking charge of all express and valuable packages, &c [sic]."<sup>24</sup>

The *Union* was advertised to depart Chicago on August 14. But there was some delay and the ship actually departed one day later, perhaps because of weather or mechanical problems. Or perhaps more time was needed to stow below deck the "sundries and 18,574 bu wheat" the *Union* took on for the ultimate destination of Bayfield. Whatever the cause for delay, sometime on Thursday, August 15, the ship steamed out of the harbor and commenced northward.<sup>25</sup> The weather that day was seasonable, the temperature reaching eighty-one degrees by mid-afternoon with gentle to breezy winds.<sup>26</sup>

For two weeks and one day, the *Union* would be home for Mary and Tad Lincoln. Mary didn't keep a diary, though for much of her life she was a prolific letter writer, often penning several letters a day. There is no correspondence from her



The *Charles N. Ryan* was wrecked in a storm on Lake Michigan in 1897. The weather was stormy and unpredictable on the Great Lakes, and shipwrecks, collisions, and fires were concerns.

while on this voyage—she either wrote none or what she wrote is lost, so her daily activities or her responses to the hustle and bustle of the excursion cannot be captured. Whether it was her wish or not, newspaper accounts provide evidence she was not able to travel anonymously.

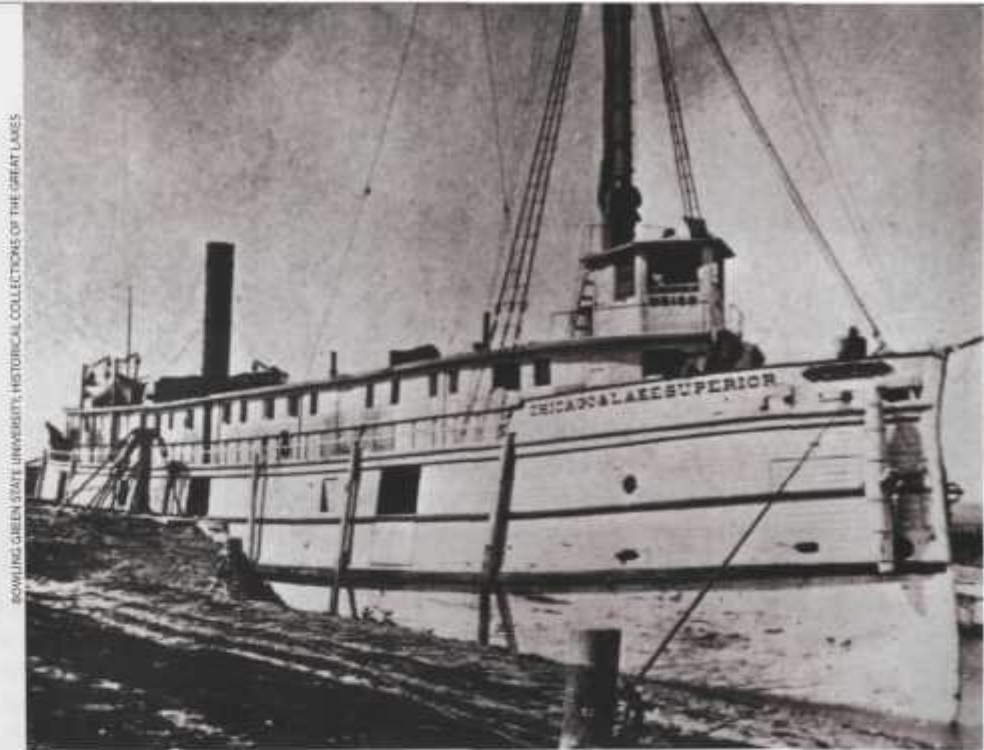
According to the schedule for Mary Lincoln's excursion, the *Union's* first stop after departing Chicago was Milwaukee, eighty-eight miles to the north, a trip of about seven hours. Perhaps many of the passengers disembarked while the *Union* took on additional cargo of flour, oats, corn, and sundries.<sup>27</sup> The Milwaukee newspapers, noting the presence of Mary Lincoln and her son, seemed quite enamored with the young Tad. The *Sentinel* of August 17 commented: "Mrs. Lincoln, widow of our late martyred President, passed through this city yesterday with her little son Tad, en route for Lake Superior. Tad made his appearance on 'Change, and attracted considerable attention.'" <sup>28</sup> The *Daily Milwaukee News* of that same date provided more information:

The *Union*, of Rice Brothers lake Superior line, passed Milwaukee yesterday on her way to the straits. Among her passengers were Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, and her son Tad. While the vessel lay at the dock, Mr. Rice accompanied Tad to the Chamber of Commerce and presented him quietly to a number of gentlemen. He stated in conversation, that he was twelve years of age on the day he entered Richmond with his father, after its surrender.<sup>29</sup>

Subsequent advertised stops for the *Union* along the Wisconsin shoreline of Lake Michigan included the harbors of Port Washington, Sheboygan, and Manitowoc, where, most likely, passengers again disembarked and reboarded while cargo and fuel were loaded. There are no newspaper accounts of Mary visiting any of these lakeshore towns.

As the excursion progressed, other passengers were certainly aware of the black-clothed Mary Lincoln and her young son. It's not known exactly how many passengers traveled on the *Union*, perhaps a total of twenty to sixty.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, prior to the late 1800s, no records were kept of passengers on Great Lakes vessels.<sup>31</sup> Did Mary encourage friendly approaches from her fellow passengers? She may have done so reluctantly, since she had written during her visit to Racine just one month earlier, "I occasionally, see persons who call . . . yet to be candid, I would prefer, that my present solitude, should be unbroken."<sup>32</sup>

Assuming the *Union* stopped at Manitowoc as scheduled, the vessel headed from there across the open water, northeast toward Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan. Here, on August 18, three days after departing Chicago, the vessel navigated the locks and gained entrance to Lake Superior. The weather was



The propeller ship *Union* was built at Manitowoc in 1861. For two weeks and one day in 1867, it would be home to Mary and Tad Lincoln.

decidedly unfavorable as the *Union* passed through. Local shipbuilder Jesse Wells Church hosted Mary and Tad Lincoln, writing in his journal, "Wind N.W. a gale—rainy—cold—UNION up [headed upward to Lake Superior]; Mrs. Lincoln and son Teddy on board; came into the house and talk and drink wine—nice party on board."<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps the passengers braced themselves against a cool breeze as the *Union* then headed west, hugging the southern shores of Lake Superior. About one hundred miles from Sault Sainte Marie, the *Union* passed the scenic Pictured Rocks, widely known for their awe-inspiring formations. Ship captains were known to slow their vessels and drift past the immense sandstone structures rising from the chilly waters—even by moonlight if at night—and allow their passengers to enjoy the surrealistic beauty.

The *Union* continued along the rugged Michigan shoreline, most likely stopping as advertised at Marquette, then Hancock, Houghton, Eagle Harbor, Copper Harbor and Eagle River on the northward-protruding Keweenaw Peninsula, and then Ontonagon, before traveling the seventy-five miles to its final destination of Bayfield, Wisconsin.<sup>34</sup>

Ontonagon resident Jean Prince Durfee, to whom Mary Lincoln introduced her traveling companion Mrs. Rice, later described the steamboat activity during the time of Mary's visit: "[T]he boats were filled with passengers taking the trip from Buffalo and the lower ports to the head of Lake Superior and back. The boats put in every port on the way, several hours to unload and reload freight. Sometimes the hours ran into days and nights according to the freight they carried. Always if the stop was made in daylight, there was plenty of time for

the passengers to go ashore and satisfy their curiosity as to whether the inhabitants lived in houses that had windows, or lived like the Indians in wigwams."<sup>35</sup>

Durfee recalled the day that Mary, Mrs. Rice, and four other travelers disembarked from the *Union* and were hosted by Durfee's family. After being told by Mary that she would be visiting La Pointe, Durfee advised her not to stay at a particular hotel there, as it was "full of knot holes and the men snore something awful."<sup>36</sup> Mary laughed and replied that they would only be there long enough to see the church and the old mission she had heard so much about. She assured Durfee she would see her again on the return trip. Durfee was to be disappointed—the return visit did not take place, as the *Union* passed Ontonagon during the night on its return voyage.<sup>37</sup>

Durfee provided a visual description of her famous guest: "Mrs. Lincoln was a little dumpling of a woman with beautiful dark eyes and hair, and one of the sweetest smiles I ever saw. . . . I remember the pretty dolman Mrs. Lincoln wore as it was of heavy black silk and trimmed with wide jet fringe, which I couldn't help fingering all the time she talked to me." Durfee also commented, "I've wondered since why the newspapers spoke of her so unkindly. I thought she was lovely."<sup>38</sup> Durfee made no mention of Tad Lincoln in the party of travelers.

After Ontonagon, the *Union's* next stop was Bayfield, its final destination. Here the ship was unloaded of its wheat and other vital foodstuffs and then restocked with a cargo of fish for the return trip to Chicago. Bayfield at that time was a bustling young town and had become the primary port of the region, supported by small-scale fishing, lumbering, and, more recently, tourism.<sup>39</sup> To accommodate the influx of tourists, fine hotels and eateries had been established, an area resident later proudly recalling: "They [the tourists] lingered to eat our white fish and went away to praise it."<sup>40</sup>

Mary Lincoln's presence in Bayfield did not go unnoticed; the town was "all agog" at her stay there.<sup>41</sup> Longtime resident Delia Whittlesey Chapman later recalled that Smith's Hotel in Bayfield entertained after the Civil War several distinguished persons, including "Mrs. Abraham Lincoln and son Robert [who] were guests there for one day. Mrs. Lincoln was then living in Chicago and on this occasion making a trip up the Lakes."<sup>42</sup> Although Chapman mentioned Robert as Mary's companion, all contemporary newspaper accounts indicate it was Tad. Unfortunately, there were no local newspapers published in Bayfield during the time of Mary's visit, and Smith's Hotel burned to the ground, with all its records, in the 1880s.<sup>43</sup>

As Mary had implied in her conversation with Jean Prince Durfee, she and Tad did indeed visit La Pointe, the tiny village on the southern end of Madeline Island, just three miles across the bay from Bayfield. This site of missions and churches and cemeteries, described in one guide as "the fairy region," was well-known to Lake Superior tourists, enjoying a reputation as "a place of romantic interest—a place of relics and ruins."<sup>44</sup>



The *Union's* first stop after departing Chicago was Milwaukee, where Tad visited the Chamber of Commerce shown in this photo.

Mary and Tad's presence here was referenced in a letter written soon after by a Father Trobec, who wrote: "Even the wife of Lincoln, the late president of the United States, spent two days at LaPointe [sic] and when she heard the Indian girls sing so beautifully in the church, she was so touched that she shed tears. A son of Lincoln also was there and Father Chebul gave him a good reprimand because of his improper behavior in church."<sup>45</sup>

The *Union* most likely departed from Bayfield and began the return journey to Chicago during the weekend of August 23–25. The Saturday, August 31, edition of the weekly *Lake Superior Miner*, reporting on the previous week's activities, noted that "Mrs. Lincoln and one of her children was on board of the Propeller *Union*."<sup>46</sup> They were on the return trip by this time.

There is no more documentation of any port visits by Mary and Tad Lincoln until their arrival in Milwaukee again, which was duly noted in the August 29 *Scintinel*: "The propeller *Union*, of Rice's Lake Superior Line, arrived in this port yesterday afternoon with a full load of passengers, among whom were Mrs. Lincoln and her son Tad. Clerk Rice informs us that Mrs. Lincoln received distinguished attentions at Houghton, Bayfield and other points."<sup>47</sup>

The August 31 *Lake Superior Miner* also reported that the "First Storm of the season [had] commenced Tuesday night and continued for nearly thirty hours, being very severe indeed."<sup>48</sup> This inclement weather apparently stalled Mary's return to Chicago—the *Times* of Friday, August 30, reported that the *Union* had arrived the day before, but it had been "compelled to lay up at the Manitou Island on Tuesday night, on account of the stormy condition of the lake."<sup>49</sup> (Manitou Island, off the coast of Michigan directly across from Wisconsin



Mission Church at La Pointe on the southern end of Madeline Island, 1870

sin's Door County Peninsula, offered a safe harbor for ships enduring Lake Michigan storms.<sup>50</sup> By the time of the Union's arrival in Chicago, the weather was seasonable and calm, the excursion ending under pleasant circumstances similar to those of its beginning.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, on Friday, August 30, Mary and Tad returned to the place from which they had departed fifteen days earlier, having traveled over 1,700 miles from Chicago to Bayfield and back. Four days after their arrival, on September 3, the *Chicago Times* reported that "Mrs. Lincoln and 'Tad' have returned to this city, with the intention of remaining through the present fall and the winter."<sup>52</sup> Yet this was not to be—the restless Mary Lincoln would post a letter from New York City within two weeks.<sup>53</sup>

Nearly one year after her excursion on board the *Union*, Mary wrote a letter to Dr. Robert King Stone, the Lincoln family physician. She offered a gift to him:

May I request your acceptance of this 'Indian Medicine pouch,' which was presented me last summer, as coming direct from an Indian Chief—I met with it, in the lake Superior region, Some months Since. Remembering your appreciation of any thing that is uncommon, I feel assured that you will look upon this relic of a wild region, with interest.<sup>54</sup>

In all of her known correspondence, this is Mary Lincoln's only mention of her journey to the "wild region." Her appraisal of the experience remains a mystery. Accompanied by her beloved Tad, it is possible to surmise she enjoyed her sojourn along the Lakes Superior and Michigan shorelines and that she found some solace and pleasure among their accommodating residents and picturesque scenery.

### Her Life after Lake Superior

This Lake Superior voyage occurred just prior to Mary's ill-fated clothes-selling fiasco in New York City—an unsuccessful fund-raising attempt at selling her personal items that would generate public ridicule and indignation.<sup>55</sup> She and Tad traveled to Europe one year later, and then Tad died from pneumonia in July 1871, just two months after their return to the United States. This was a nearly unbearable tragedy for Mary, who now had lost three out of four sons in addition to her husband.

With Tad's death, Mary's emotional state crumbled. Robert still survived, but he was married and had his own family. Tad had been Mary's constant companion, and without him she was devastated. Overwhelmed by grief, Mary briefly returned to Wisconsin in the summer of 1872 to seek solace from the healing waters at Waukesha.<sup>56</sup> After her return to Chicago, her condition deteriorated—she displayed bizarre spending habits, sought encounters with spiritualists and séances, and suffered delusions that people were trying to kill her.<sup>57</sup> In 1875, Robert successfully petitioned to have her declared insane and she was

FORD'S THEATRE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

July 31<sup>st</sup> 1868.

Dr Stone.

My dear Sir:

I request your acceptance of this Indian Medicine pouch, which was presented me last summer, as coming direct from an Indian Chief—I met with it, in the lake Superior region, Some months Since. Remembering your appreciation of any thing that is uncommon, I feel assured that you will look upon this relic of a wild region, with interest.

Mary Lincoln's letter to Dr. Robert King Stone, the Lincoln family physician, dated July 31, 1868, nearly a year after she took the Great Lakes excursion on the *Union*. The letter mentions a Native American beaded medicine pouch she offered him as a gift.

subsequently committed to a private sanitarium in Batavia, Illinois. She secured her release several months later and became a vagabond, wandering throughout Europe, often seeking seclusion, dressed in black mourning attire, "a very broken hearted woman" as she described herself.<sup>58</sup>

She would eventually return to her sister's Springfield home in the spring of 1882. She was, by that time, chronically ill, partially blind, and crippled by a back injury. Living in relative obscurity, preferring a darkened room, Mary Lincoln died there on July 16, 1882, at the age of sixty-three, in the house in which she had married Abraham Lincoln almost forty years previously. It was most likely a welcome reprieve for Mary, who had previously penned: "When the summons, comes for my departure, I will gladly welcome it—for 'there, the weary, are at rest.'"<sup>59</sup>

## Notes

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2. *Ibid.*, Mary Lincoln to Elizabeth Blair Lee, Chicago, December 11, 1865, 302.
3. *Ibid.*, Mary Lincoln to David Davis, Racine, July 8, 1867, 427.
4. *Ibid.*, Mary Lincoln to Elizabeth Emerson Atwater, Racine, June 30, 1867, 426.
5. Ruth Painter Randall, *Mary Lincoln: Biography of a Marriage* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1953), 242; Mary Lincoln to Elizabeth Emerson Atwater, Racine, June 30, 1867, Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 425.
6. John Disturnell, *Upper Lakes of North America: Being A Guide From Niagara Falls and Toronto to Mackinac, Chicago, Sault Ste Marie, Etc., Passing Through Lakes Michigan and Superior: Returning Through Lakes Huron and St. Clair, to Detroit and Buffalo* (New York: J. Disturnell, 1857), 93, 120.
7. John Disturnell, *The Great Lakes, or Inland Seas of America* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1863), iii.
8. Jane C. Busch, *People and Places: A Human History of the Apostle Islands* (Omaha: Midwest Regional Office, National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, 2008), 302–304; George W. Hilton, *Lake Michigan Passenger Steamers* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 73; Minnesota Historical Society, "Minnesota's Lake Superior Shipwrecks: History and Development of Great Lakes Watercraft," <http://www.mnhs.org/places/nationalregister/shipwrecks/mpdf/mpdf2.html>.
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14. *Ibid.*, 531.
15. J. B. Mansfield, ed., *History of the Great Lakes: Volume I* (Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1899), 707.
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17. A. L. Rawson, "The Pictured Rocks of Lake Superior," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (May 1867): 682.
18. "Local Matters," *Chicago Tribune*, August 11–13, 1867.
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20. Gay M. Burnham, *The Lake Superior Country in History and in Story* (Ashland, WI: The Ashland Daily Press, 1930), 222.
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24. *Lake Superior Miner* (Ontonagon, MI), August 31, 1867.

25. "Marine Intelligence," *Chicago Tribune*, August 16, 1867.
26. *Ibid.*, "Meteorological," August 19, 1867.
27. "Marine Intelligence," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, August 19, 1867.
28. "Personal," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, August 17, 1867.
29. *The Daily Milwaukee News*, August 17, 1867. It was Tad's twelfth birthday the day he accompanied his father to the newly fallen city of Richmond, Virginia, on April 4, 1865—just ten days before the assassination.
30. Walter Lewis, website developer, Maritime History of the Great Lakes, e-mail to author, November 27, 2010.
31. Wisconsin Maritime Historical Society, "Great Lakes Marine Collection," <http://www.mpl.org/ship/>.
32. Mary Lincoln to Elizabeth Emerson Atwater, Racine, July 13, 1867, Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 423.
33. *Journal of Jesse Wells Church*, August 18, 1867, privately held.
34. *Lake Superior Miner*, August 31, 1867.
35. Burnham, *Lake Superior Country*, 221.
36. *Ibid.*, 223.
37. *Ibid.* Durfee actually identified the ship as the *Mineral Rock*. The *Mineral Rock* was serving the Lake Superior area in the 1860s; perhaps Durfee's recollection was incorrect after the passage of half a century, as all other sources indicate the vessel to be the *Union*.
38. *Ibid.*, 222–223.
39. Busch, *People and Places*, 302–303.
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41. Hamilton Nelson Ross, *La Pointe: Village Outpost on Madeline Island*, repr. (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 2000), 127.
42. Burnham, *Lake Superior Country*, 204.
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45. Father James Trobec as quoted in Weldon E. Petz, "Mary Todd Lincoln: The Mystery of a Reported Visit," *Harlow's Wooden Man* 24.3 (Summer 1988): 3–6.
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53. Mary Lincoln to Elizabeth Keckley, New York, September 17, 1867, Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 433.
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55. Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 429–433; Jean H. Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008), 271–277.
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57. Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 608–609; Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 310–311.
58. Mary Lincoln to Jacob Bunn, Pau, France, January 24, 1878, Turner and Turner, *Letters*, 638.
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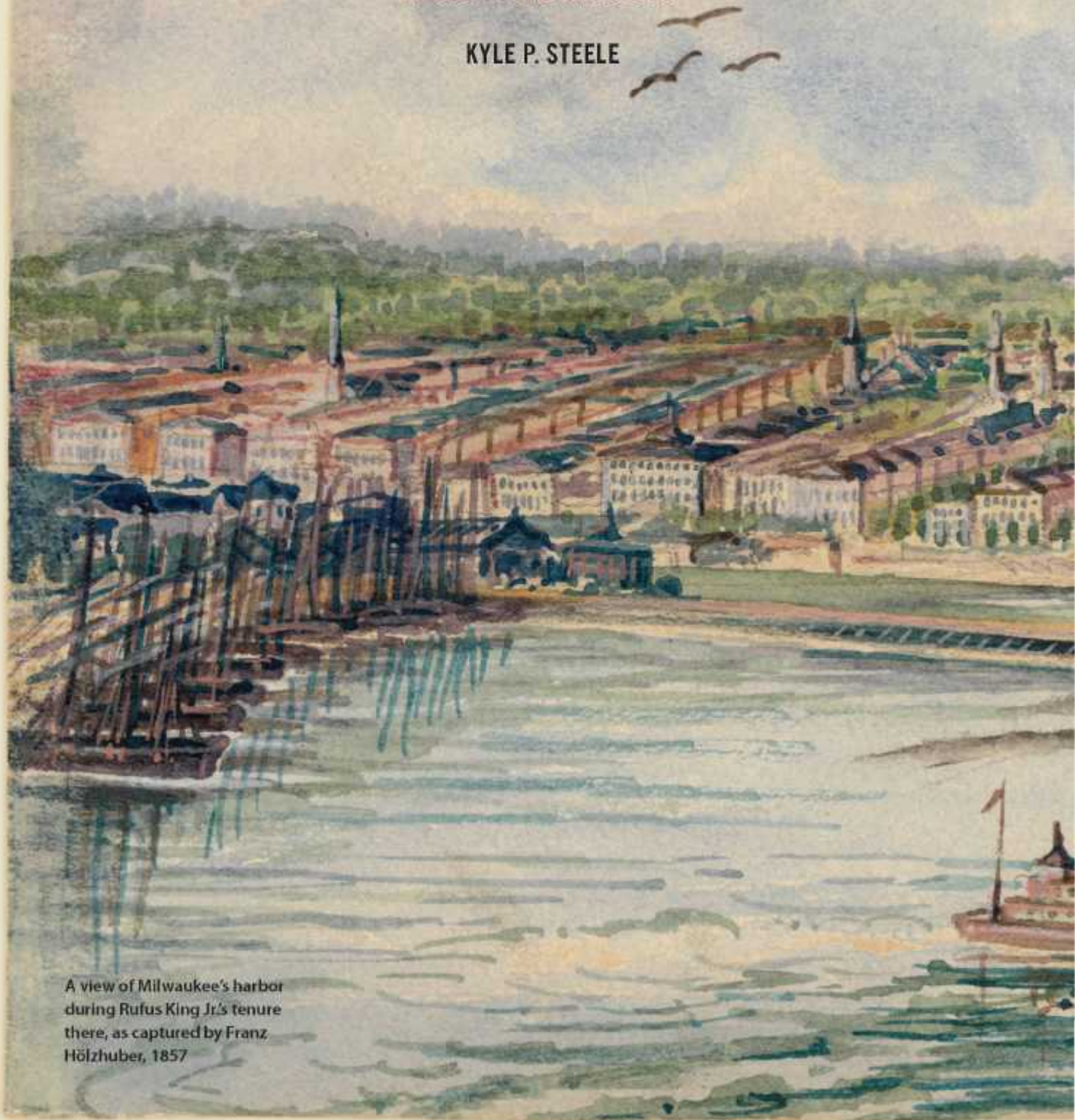
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Cyndy Irvine** earned a BA in history from Texas Tech University, a BS in nursing from the University of Texas–Austin, and has completed writing classes from University of Iowa and University of Wisconsin–Madison. She has written for *American Journal of Nursing*, *Wisconsin Trails*, *American Profile*, and suite101.com. Cyndy works as a registered nurse in Cardiac Rehabilitation. She lives in rural Portage County where, when not working or writing, she tends a large organic garden, runs, swims, and skis, counting days until the Birkie all year long.

# A YANKEE WHIG IN MILWAUKEE

*Rufus King Jr. and the City's First  
Public Schools*

KYLE P. STEELE



A view of Milwaukee's harbor  
during Rufus King Jr.'s tenure  
there, as captured by Franz  
Hölzhuber, 1857

*All told, Rufus King Jr.'s time in Milwaukee was relatively short, lasting from only 1845 to 1861. Yet his efforts in shaping the foundations of the city, which was granted its municipal charter in 1846, were significant. This is particularly true of his work developing Milwaukee's first public, or "common," school system, where his mark is still visible in the schools and streets that bear his name. King's efforts were informed by a strong Whig ideology that he hoped would knit the expanding nation together—economically and culturally—through railroads, canals, newspapers, and, at last, government-sponsored, tax-supported schools.*



### Knitting the Nation Together

On August 12, 1855, newspaper editor, local school board member, and Whig Party crusader Rufus King Jr. boarded a train in Milwaukee, barely able to contain his excitement for what lay ahead. A native New Yorker who had relocated to the Midwestern city a decade earlier, King was embarking on a multiday journey to Saint Paul, Minnesota. This journey was of particular importance to him because it had been made possible by the recent extension of the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad, a project, both expensive and laden with delays, that finally connected King's adopted home on Lake Michigan with the Mississippi River at Prairie du Chien.<sup>1</sup>

From Prairie du Chien, King took the steamship *War Eagle* to Saint Paul. The cutting-edge swiftness of this final leg, he noted, "a distance of three hundred miles . . . [in] just thirty-six hours," represented perfectly to him the connective power of the Mississippi, which he often referred to fondly as the "Father of Waters." "Every minute of it was . . . unalloyed enjoyment," he wrote, for "it was a new experience and almost a new life for us all."<sup>2</sup>

As the trip unfolded, King recorded his experiences in great detail, sending portions back to Milwaukee where they were published in lengthy installments in the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, the newspaper that King himself both owned and edited.<sup>3</sup> More than basic travel writing, his documentation of the trip reads like an advertisement for the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad and the towns through which it passed. To those King met along

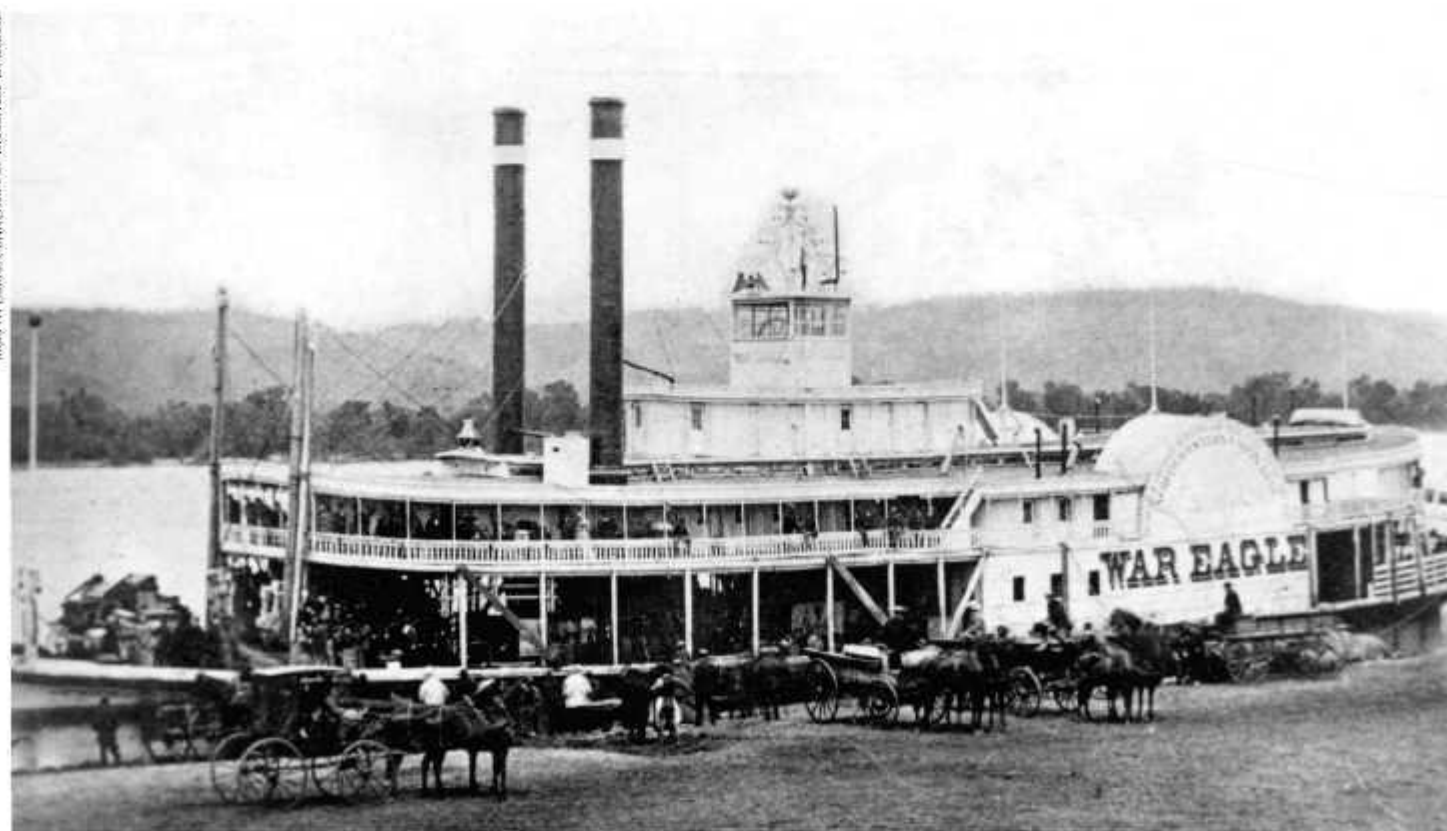
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Rufus King Jr., seated in uniform, ca. early 1860s

the way in places like Whitewater, Madison, and Black Earth, the arrival of the railroad meant easier movement of manufactured and agricultural products. It also promised a host of new possibilities for the future of the state and nation, as well as the role that government and business, perhaps working together, might play in that future. Whether it was through railroads,

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The steamship *War Eagle*, which King took from Prairie du Chien to Saint Paul in August 1855



The Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad and its connections, printed by J. H. Colton & Co. in 1855

canals, or ideas carried by newspapers and telegraphs and in schools, King was certain his Whig ideals were making life better for himself, and for the rest of America, too.

As American political parties go, the Whig Party operated for a short time, from 1833 to 1856. Obscuring its historical legacy further, the two presidents produced by the Party, William Henry Harrison (1840) and Zachary Taylor (1848), died a month and sixteen months, respectively, after taking office. The Whigs are often remembered nonetheless because the program of national development they advanced was straightforward and cohesive, and because it put them directly at odds with their formidable Democratic Party foes. In short, the Whigs were the big government party of the day, believing the federal government should protect domestic industries with tariffs, subsidize internal improvements, and, most divisively, permit a national bank to regulate currency and make tax monies available for government investment in private enterprises.<sup>4</sup> Defenders of the Whig platform, though far from homogenous, tended to be elite businessmen or professionals, farmers with ties to larger markets, residents or natives of New England, and members of New England-style Protestant churches.

By contrast, the Democratic Party, the party of Thomas Jefferson and later Andrew Jackson, tended to believe in a small government, preferring to relegate powers to state and local governments and expand personal liberties for white males. Accordingly, it attracted much of the slaveholding South, as well as large swaths of recently arrived immigrant groups like Germans and Irish Catholics, who, historian William Reese has noted, “rightly concluded that the largely Protestant Whigs were hostile to their religion and culture.”<sup>5</sup> The differences between Whigs and Democrats often played out along these ideological and demographic lines.

Given that King himself was a Whig through and through, his trip to Saint Paul carried no shortage of political weight. Uniting the nation and convincing others to join him in the cause was both his passion and political preoccupation. As such, he raved in the *Sentinel* about

the multitude of thriving little towns which have sprung up along the banks of the upper Mississippi within the past four or five years, and which form so many nuclei for the business of the adjacent country, . . . [The people] all wear a thrifty, wide-awake look; the houses are neatly built, the villages tastefully planned; the stores are well-filled and apparently well-patronized, and in almost all of them the neat spires of church and schoolhouse complete and crown the picture.<sup>6</sup>

By King’s distinctly Whig logic, the growth of railroads and increased navigability of rivers brought the possibility of thriving, busy towns “crowned” with the sure symbols of a populace committed to a common moral culture: a church and a schoolhouse.<sup>7</sup> “None but a sober, active, intelligent, self-relying, and enterprising people,” he continued, “could . . . have wrought such magical changes along the banks of the mighty Mississippi.”<sup>8</sup> This was the America that King wanted to develop: one that unceasingly expanded, one that “modernized,” and one that had little use for separating capitalism, republicanism, and a morality based in Protestantism, all of which would move it forward into “a new life for us all.”<sup>9</sup>

Given King’s political leanings, his contributions are all the more fascinating in that they took place in Milwaukee, a city known for Democratic Party dominance that lasted well into the

1880s. The simple fact is that Milwaukee's often German, often immigrant, and often working-class Democrats—never wholly against public schools, but always suspicious of unchecked government growth—held the mayor's office and common council majority for much of the second half of the nineteenth century. As part of their duties, they set the city's school budget and played a role in choosing school board members.

Despite the notable changes Milwaukee made to its schools, many the result of King's efforts, the nuances of city politics remained ever-present. The establishment of a permanent public high school in 1868, which King and his allies began advocating for as early as 1846, was the clearest manifestation of this process of political give-and-take. No matter the era, school reform does not occur in a vacuum; it often takes place on a battlefield of conflicting ideologies, as the experience of Rufus King Jr. in Milwaukee makes clear.

### A Whig Worldview

Born in 1755, Rufus King Sr.—the grandfather and eponym of Rufus Jr.—was a graduate of Harvard, a delegate to the Continental Congress, and a signer of the US Constitution. He was twice a US senator from New York, the nation's minister to Great Britain, and the Federalist Party candidate for vice president in 1804 and 1808 and for president in 1816.<sup>10</sup> Despite his illustrious political and diplomatic career, his loss in the 1816

presidential election is typically remembered as the beginning of the end of the Federalist Party. Historian Daniel Howe writes that its members were doomed by “their failure to develop a nationwide coherence, a failure for which their last nominal standard-bearer, Rufus King [Sr.], must bear a good deal of the responsibility.”<sup>11</sup>

Though it may be too simplistic to say that the Federalist Party gave birth to the Whig Party, there is a great deal of overlap between the two, particularly with respect to demographics and beliefs regarding the parameters of federal and state power. Rufus King Jr. was only a child when his grandfather lost the 1816 election, but it is perhaps no coincidence that the Whig Party of his day worked to cultivate a “nationwide coherence,” not only in politics, but also in economic, cultural, and moral development.

Rufus King Sr.'s firstborn son, Charles, was not as well-known as his father but nonetheless led a distinguished life. He fought in the War of 1812, was elected to the New York State Assembly in 1814, and later served as president of Columbia College from 1849 to 1864. The strongest connection between him and his eldest son, Rufus, born in January of 1814, was his work in the newspaper business. Rufus Jr. was destined to become a journalist, too, and his father's rise to the helm of the *New York American* when Rufus was nine years old undoubtedly informed his understanding of the bitter and personal nature of the nineteenth-century American press, a ruthless intellectual network often fueled by differences of partisan politics and sectarian religion.<sup>12</sup>

After his graduation from West Point in 1833, King Jr. joined the Army Corps of Engineers, where he quickly distinguished himself and was awarded with his own attachment of engineers, charged with increasing the navigability of the Hudson River. Shortly after, they were sent to survey the boundaries of Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana, which, in the words of biographer Perry Hill, may have “planted the seed of westward attraction” in the young King.<sup>13</sup> King Jr. moved seamlessly from one project to the next while serving in the corps, but ultimately life in the peacetime army proved too mundane for his tastes. Instead, he took a job as a surveyor for the New York and Erie Railroad, which was conveniently owned by his uncle, James King. Soon after, in 1838, he moved to Albany to take up his father's longtime profession, joining the staff of the *Albany Advertiser*.<sup>14</sup>

Over the next two years, King Jr.'s political star ascended rapidly, in part because of his capacities as a newspaperman, but no doubt, too, because of the substantial social connections his family afforded him. Most fortuitously, he caught the attention of an up-and-coming Whig politician, William Seward, who, as the recently elected governor of New York, was developing a national reputation for his rhetorical power. Impressed by the twenty-five-year-old King, Seward named him adjunct general of the state, a position King would occupy for all four years of the governor's regime (1839–1843).<sup>15</sup>



A portrait of Rufus King Sr., the grandfather and namesake of the Rufus at the center of this story, painted by Gilbert Stuart, ca. 1819–1820. The elder King was a graduate of Harvard, a delegate to the Continental Congress, and a signer of the US Constitution.



A portrait of governor of New York William Seward, who appointed a twenty-five-year-old King adjunct general of the state in 1839. Seward, along with his adviser Thurlow Weed, served as political mentors to King.

As important as gaining access to Seward's administration was King's introduction to the governor's most trusted adviser, Thurlow Weed, who was perhaps "the most powerful political boss in the country," according to historian Doris Kearns Goodwin.<sup>16</sup> In concert with the political handiwork Weed did for Seward, he also served as editor of the influential *Albany Evening Journal*, and in 1841, persuaded King to leave his post at the *Advertiser* to become his associate editor. King, honing his journalistic craft during this period, was, as Hill put it, "absorbing the Whig doctrine at the master's feet."<sup>17</sup>

It was during this period that King got his first taste of the political battle surrounding public schooling. When Seward was elected, the New York City schools were governed by what historian Carl Kaestle describes as a "self-perpetuating philanthropic board," the Public School Society. This Protestant-dominated entity was at odds with the city's Catholic schools, which received limited public funding and, as an 1840 survey found, served only a portion of the city's Irish Catholic youth, leaving thousands to attend no school at all, private or public.<sup>18</sup> Many Whig politicians and school reformers, to the dismay of Catholics, saw the public schools as tools of cultural assimilation, useful in making Irish Catholic children less Irish and more American, and less Catholic and more (vaguely) Protestant. The city's new Catholic bishop, the outspoken John Hughes, regularly attacked the public schools, condemning their use of the Protestant Bible, their avoidance of teaching scripture explicitly, and, perhaps most egregiously, their practice of teaching all students, Catholic or otherwise, that Catholics were "necessarily, morally, intellectually, infallibly, a stupid race."<sup>19</sup>

Despite the mounting tension, Seward chose to refrain from digging the trenches deeper. Instead, in an address aimed at the city's Catholic population, he stated that, if universal education was the goal, they should have "schools in which they may be instructed by teachers speaking the same language as themselves and professing the same faith."<sup>20</sup> Privately, he maintained that "knowledge taught by any sect (or in any language) is better than ignorance. I desire to see the children of Catholics educated as well as those of Protestants; not because I want them Catholics, but because I want them to become good citizens."<sup>21</sup> Though paternalistic at its core, Seward's willingness to entertain more expansive notions of cultural and religious pluralism within a framework of Whig school reform is noteworthy, and it would continue to influence King in years to come. In fact, letters exchanged between the two men reveal that they spoke at length and with great passion about the most pressing issues of the day, including—beyond public education—abolitionism, the annexation of Texas, and the direction of their beloved Whig Party writ large.<sup>22</sup>

Three years later, in the summer of 1845, Weed was approached by the two owners of the Wisconsin Territory's *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* who, familiar with Weed's political celebrity, were looking for some advice. The *Sentinel* was then known in the Northeast as, in the words of historian Perry Hill, "a staunch but somewhat lonely outpost of Whiggery in a wilderness of rampant Democracy."<sup>23</sup> It had gone through six editors in its first eight years of existence and was once again floundering. Rather than buy the paper himself or reach out to his extensive contacts already stationed in the Midwest, Weed, in a rather unexpected move, recommended the services of his trusted associate editor.

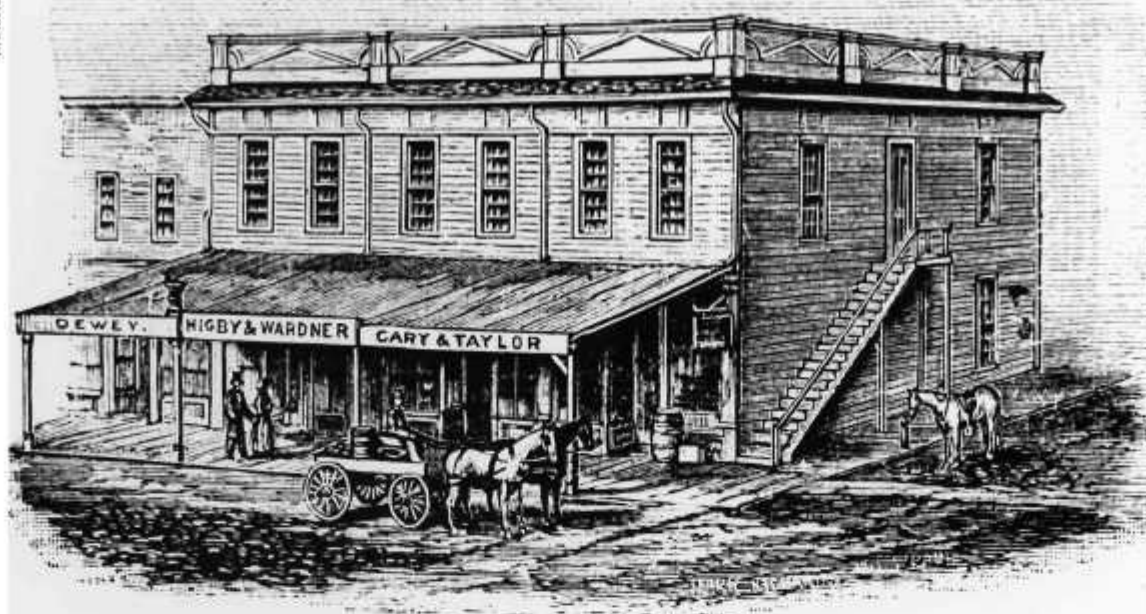
By chance, King had visited Milwaukee only a few months prior as part of an extensive journalistic report on what he called "western journeying" for the *Evening Journal*. Perhaps excited by the possibilities of what he had seen, he not only accepted the offer to become editor of the *Sentinel* but purchased the paper outright.<sup>24</sup> This bold decision, though it proved to be financially unwise, served as a symbol of his unequivocal commitment to the move west.

### King's Life in Milwaukee

King arrived in Milwaukee in September 1845 on a steamship fittingly named *Empire State*. Accompanying King were his wife, Susan Eliot, and their one-year-old son, Charles Jr. The young family stayed for a short time in the United States Hotel while they settled into city life but eventually moved to a modest A-frame house at the northeastern corner of Mason and Van Buren Streets, which before long was known by locals as "King's Corner."<sup>25</sup>

Given his deep engagement with politics even before his arrival in Milwaukee, King would have been well aware of the power held by the Democratic Party in his new city. He may have





## SENTINEL BUILDING—MILWAUKEE 1843.

Milwaukee's *Sentinel* Building, 1843

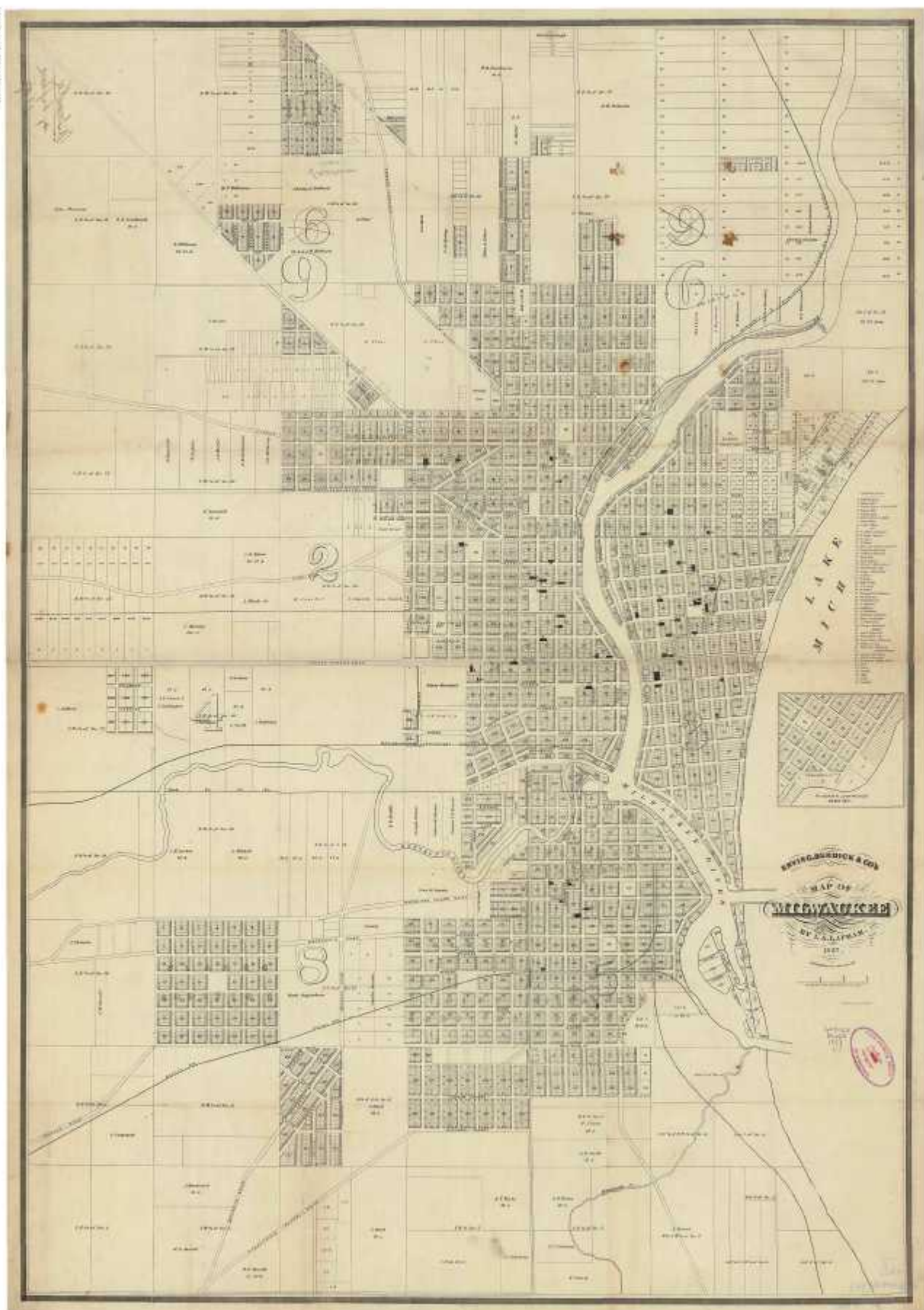
weeks later, stating, "It is for them [opponents of public schools] to say . . . [whether] it will be best or cheapest in the end to suffer those children to roam the streets in idleness . . . or to gather them within the folds of the public schools, and train them up to be intelligent, virtuous, and useful members of society."<sup>31</sup> Like Seward, King preferred to frame public schools as vehicles for citizenship and civility, though their assimilationist traits were often implied. When renowned Connecticut school reformer Henry Barnard visited Milwaukee in 1846, King printed his speech in full in the *Sentinel*, further revealing his position: public schools should, as Barnard believed, unify a population of "mixed character, varying creeds, conflicting sentiments, and different habits of the several classes."<sup>32</sup>

Given the steady attention King and the *Sentinel* paid to the Milwaukee schools, it seemed appropriate for the city's political elite to send him to Mineral Point early in 1846 for the territory's first education convention.<sup>33</sup> Held two years before Wisconsin became a state, the convention was charged with drafting a list of education recommendations for the state's constitution. Much of what they submitted was predictable: the state should appoint a superintendent, organize local associations to "promote a proper attitude on educational matters," and facilitate the formation of teachers' associations. Revealing hopes for a Wisconsin that would mirror its northeastern peers, which King could describe in great detail, the convention also advocated that the state build school systems that were "similar to those established within the past few years in . . . New York and Massachusetts," which have "contributed so materially to improve the character" of schools in those states.<sup>34</sup>

King was able to parlay his time in Mineral Point into a seat on a citizens' committee tasked with drafting the school provisions for Milwaukee's first city charter.<sup>35</sup> Their proposals were approved by the Territorial legislature a short time after with little debate. King printed the adopted laws in their entirety in the *Sentinel*, editorializing in an introduction that

The general provisions . . . are similar to those in force in the cities of Albany, Rochester, and Utica; though they differ in some respects from each of these systems. We entertain the hope that our Common Schools, under this new system, will ere long take rank with those admirable institutions in New England and New York, where the children of the commonwealth meet and mingle together and drink from the same fount of Knowledge, Virtue, and Patriotism.<sup>36</sup>

The laws specified that the common schools be administered by a school board of commissioners consisting of three representatives from each of the city's wards, selected and approved by the mayor and the common council—both of which were controlled by the Democratic Party through the 1870s. The appointed board held the power to select and monitor its teachers and principals, select textbooks and curricula, set tuition rates (if deemed necessary), and manage facilities. Importantly, the common council and mayor maintained the authority to allocate the school budget, thus determining the boundaries of the system's growth.<sup>37</sup>



This 1857 map of Milwaukee shows the location of the city's public schools as shaded. The map was created by Increase Lapham, King's close friend and ally on the school board

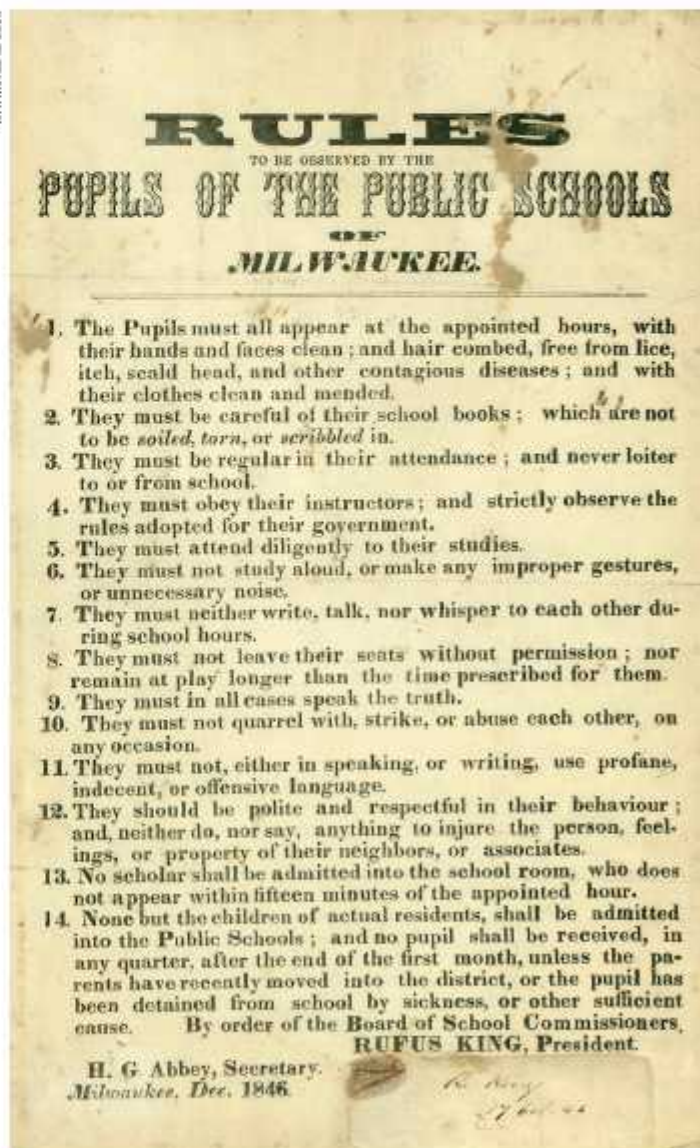
The Milwaukee charter also addressed an issue that was noticeably absent from the state recommendations: the language of instruction. The charter stated, "No school . . . shall be entitled to any share of the monys [sic] raised or received for school purposes . . . unless the English language be taught therein as a branch of Education."<sup>38</sup> "Branch of education" in this instance was key. English as a standalone subject would be required in Milwaukee, but individual schools would maintain the freedom to teach all other subjects—science, history, and geography, for example—in a language of their choosing, presumably one that most fully met the needs of their students. King refrained from commenting explicitly on this issue in the *Sentinel*, and one might speculate he was remembering Seward's experience in New York more than a decade before. His hands-off approach paid off. After a stint on the citizens' committee, he was chosen as one of his ward's representatives to the board, and at its inaugural meeting, his fellow members, many of whom were Democrats, elected him board president.<sup>39</sup> His goal, and theirs, was to provide tuition-free public education to the city's children.

It is inconceivable that a Whig like King—in a city dominated by the opposition—could earn a seat atop the public school system without demonstrating a keen sensitivity to the cultural, linguistic, and religious differences that surrounded him. While it may have been his sheer political acuity that won him the board presidency, it is more likely—considering his mentor Seward's approach to the New York City schools—that King found this form of diversity, operating within a broader framework of common school reform, completely acceptable because, ultimately, it facilitated the expansion of state-sponsored education. King appeared to believe, in Seward's paternalistic words, that "knowledge taught by any sect (or in any language) is better than ignorance," because in the end, it leads students "to become good citizens." The moment solidified the city's acceptance of King and his involvement with its public schools.<sup>40</sup>

By the end of its first full year of work, King's board had managed to considerably expand student enrollment while keeping the schools entirely free. To do so—on a \$2,700 budget that precluded the construction of new buildings—the board negotiated with local Methodist and Catholic churches to hold classes in their basements and often had to find teachers willing to accept a meager \$300 salary for nine months of work.<sup>41</sup> The model proved unsustainable. Milwaukee's common council, unwilling to increase the budget for the 1848 school year, suggested the board charge tuition to offset the looming fiscal shortfall; led by King, the commissioners considered but ultimately dismissed the idea. As the board stated in the Milwaukee public school's first *Annual Report*: "It is the desire of the Board to make the Public Schools, as far as possible, Free Schools; to throw open the door to all, without money and without price; to shut out all distinctions, and to place on the same footing and to treat with strict equality, the children of our city, no matter what the condition, creed, or circumstance of the parents."<sup>42</sup>



A photograph of the First Ward School, late 1800s



The school board, headed by King, mandated a rigorous set of rules for public school pupils.

**Wisconsin Printers'**  
**FURNISHING ESTABLISHMENT.**

**Rufus King & Co., Proprietors of the**  
**MILWAUKEE SENTINEL,**

WOULD RESPECTFULLY ADDRESS TO THE CRAFT IN GENERAL,  
*That in connection with their other Business, they have established an Agency for the*  
SALE OF, AND HAVE CONSIDERATELY OF HAND, ALL KINDS OF

**PRINTERS' STOCK,**  
CONSISTING OF

**Type, Presses, Cases, Borders, Cuts, Stationery of every description**  
**INKS, &c.**

<p><small>BLISS, POTTER &amp; Co., JEWETT, THOMAS &amp; Co., CINCINNATI TYPE FOUNDRY, L. JOHNSON &amp; Co., BUFFALO PRINTING INK COMPANY, J. D. McCREARY.</small></p>	<p><small>THEY ARE THE AGENTS FOR THE SALE OF</small></p>	<p><small>New-York City, Buffalo, New-York, Cincinnati, Ohio, Philadelphia, Pa., Buffalo, New-York, New-York City.</small></p>
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**PERSONS SEEKING THESE GOODS TO THEM, MAY BE ASSURED**  
**OF RECEIVING THE**  
**LATEST STYLES,**  
As they are Receiving Daily from the above named Houses, and will  
Dispose of them at Manufacturers' Prices, for Cash or Approved Paper.

They are also Agents for the sale of JEWETT, THOMAS & Co's  
**ACHROMATIC BORDERS.**  
Which surpass anything of the kind ever before introduced

*Milwaukee, July 1st 1855.*

An 1855 advertisement for Rufus King & Co., which offered printing services in addition to publishing the *Sentinel*

While King and the board echoed the belief, common among public school leaders nationally, that tax-supported education could reward personal merit and prevent the hardening of social class divisions, the children of Milwaukee who labored on the streets and in industry, whose parents needed them to contribute financially, likely saw the issue differently. Whether boy or girl, German or Irish, black or white, education came at too great a cost for many families. Further, on the question of race in particular, it is worth noting that, while black children could conceivably attend the public schools in Milwaukee, their fathers would not even secure the right to vote until 1857, after years of petitioning both locally and in Madison. As in any era, educational expansion did not mean racial equality.<sup>43</sup>

Nonetheless, in light of the board's commitment to free education, King used the *Sentinel* to build support for increased

municipal funding for school construction projects. In May 1847, the city held a special election concerning a tax increase (one-fourth of one percent) that would provide \$15,000 over a ten-year period for the erection of multiple school buildings. Imploring his fellow Milwaukeeans, King suggested the current infrastructure could only accommodate one-third of the city's children and reminded them that there was "but a single respectable Public School House in the city." Reflecting once more his ties to the larger Whig reform movement, he also made numerous appeals to the city's republican sensibility, fear of lawlessness, and civic pride. "Universal Education is the cornerstone of our Republican Institutions," he wrote in a May 1 editorial, and "upon this foundation, and this alone, can they rest safely and securely." He continued, "Every dollar expended upon our Public Schools is . . . saved in the expense of our Jails



Rufus King International High School still stands today on West Olive Street in Milwaukee.

and Poor Houses” and leads to “the preservation of Liberty, and the maintenance of the Law.”<sup>44</sup>

Milwaukee’s population increased more than tenfold between 1840 and 1850, and with it, the number of taxable citizens and enterprises. If the city was going to offer universal education, constructing more buildings and contracting more teachers was paramount. Many of Milwaukee’s leaders, of all political persuasions, spoke openly and often about the importance of the city “keeping up” with the other burgeoning commercial centers of the region, Chicago in particular.<sup>45</sup>

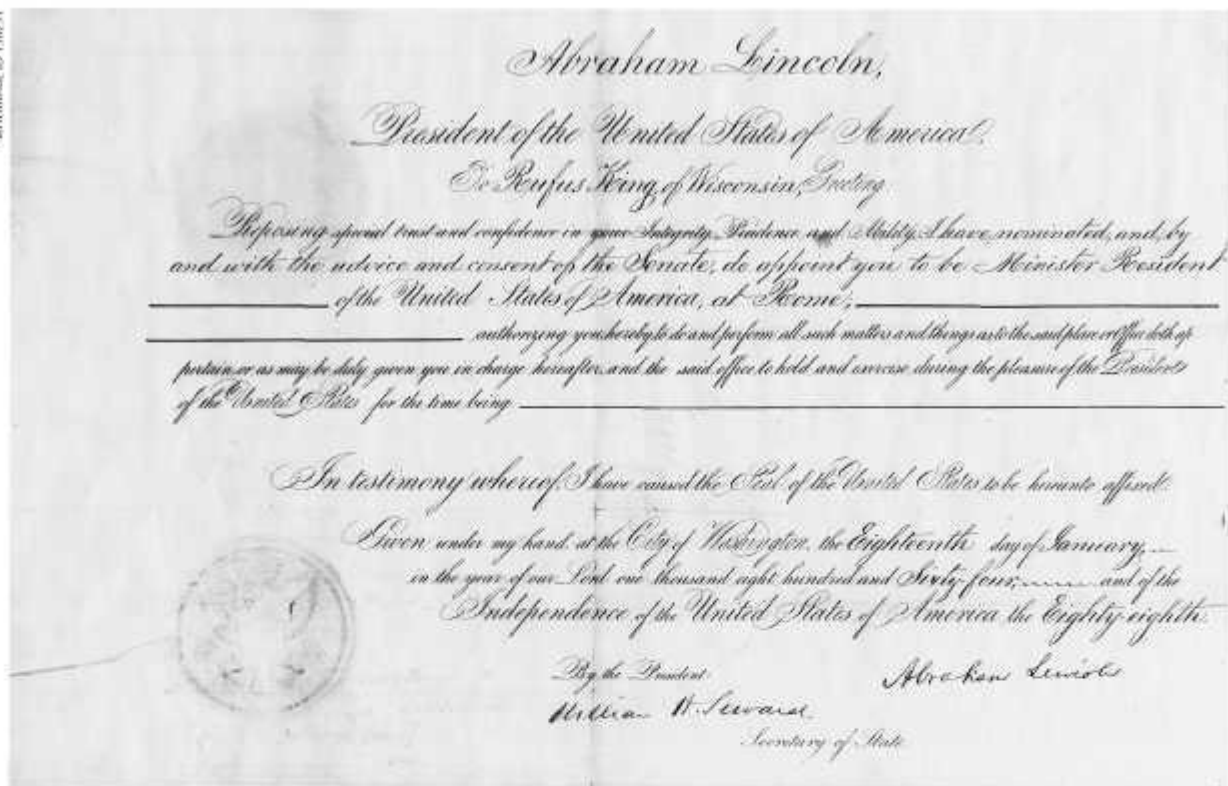
In 1847, as a result of King’s persistent advocacy, the swelling of the city’s population and tax coffers, and garden-variety mid-nineteenth-century urban boosterism, Milwaukee’s voters passed the measure, compelling the common council to inject multiyear funding into the school system to be used explicitly for the construction of schools. King and fellow board member Edward Holton, a key figure in the city’s railroad development, were appointed project supervisors, and the new buildings—“a two-story brick schoolhouse in every ward”—cost \$4,000 apiece and featured multiple classrooms and individual student desks. They welcomed their first pupils in the fall of 1851.<sup>46</sup>

Between early 1852 and 1860, the number of permanent teachers employed by the public schools—a further indication of the growing size of the institution—jumped from twenty-three to sixty. During the same period, the average teacher salary rose apace, albeit along gender lines, from \$200 for females and \$500 for males, to \$300 and \$800, respectively. In fact, the entire operating cost of the schools, which was \$2,700 just over a decade earlier, exceeded \$70,000 by 1859.<sup>47</sup> To manage the interwoven challenges of growth and uniformity, the board hired its first fulltime salaried superintendent in 1859. It came

as no shock when King announced that he would be delighted to fill the role. Citing his steadfast commitment to Milwaukee’s public schools, his supporters reasoned that he would fill “the post with distinction, bringing about a decided improvement in the management of the schools.”<sup>48</sup>

Despite the impressive number of reforms achieved by the board in the 1850s, the institution of a public high school remained elusive, once more proving that Whig proposals required Democratic support. As early as 1846, Increase Lapham, King’s close friend and ally on the board, agreed to donate thirteen acres on the city’s West Side for a high school campus. When the common council denied the funds needed to erect the building, Lapham persisted, and even traveled throughout New England, albeit unsuccessfully, to secure donations from sympathizers. When the board revisited the idea in 1857, they resolved to form three high schools, two of which operated on the top floors of grammar schools in the second and seventh wards. Faced with tight budgets that were stretched even thinner by the Panic of 1857, however, the common council slashed the school fund by more than half over the next few years, down to \$32,000 in 1860.<sup>49</sup>

Losing more than half of its annual budget was a huge setback for the growing school system, and the board was forced to dismiss sixteen teachers and suspend classes in the entire system for two months. In the face of underwhelming enrollments, the board also reluctantly shuttered both of the high schools and discontinued its plans for a third.<sup>50</sup> In fact, a continuously operating public high school would not arrive until 1868, and only after a mandate from the Wisconsin state legislature. Its establishment was nearly twenty-five years later than in cities similar to Milwaukee, such as Cleveland (1846) and



President Lincoln and Secretary of State Seward signed King's appointment to the Papal States.

Cincinnati (1847), and twelve years later than Chicago (1856). What is more, school board records from the late 1860s indicate that, despite King's efforts, one-third of Milwaukee's children were still completely unschooled.<sup>51</sup>

Besides derailing a number of school reforms, the Panic of 1857 affected King personally. According to historian James S. Buck, King was prone to ignoring the financial health of his newspaper while attending to other interests.<sup>52</sup> That year, thanks to a number of crippling financial setbacks, he was forced to sell his stake in the *Sentinel* to two publishers from New York. The new owners gave him the opportunity to stay on as editor, an offer King accepted for three more years. The modest income from the *Sentinel*, in addition to his \$2,000 salary as superintendent of schools, allowed King and his family to remain in the city. By decade's end, though, it was clear that their future in Milwaukee was unsustainable. King came to accept that his time in the city, and the Midwest in general, was coming to a close.

### The Whig Legacy of School Reform in Milwaukee

With letters of recommendation from several prominent Milwaukeeans, King set out for Washington, DC, in early 1861 in hopes of securing a more suitable means of employment, and his early connection with Seward, now secretary of state under President Lincoln, proved key. By his second day in the city, Seward had spoken to Lincoln on his behalf, and—emblematic of the reach of mid-nineteenth-century political favoritism—had secured for him a post as minister to the Papal States, effective immediately.<sup>53</sup> On his way to Rome, however, the Civil War broke out. King took a leave of absence to organize and then

lead the Iron Brigade, journeying to Italy to take up the ministerial post after he left military service in 1863.

King did not return from Rome until 1867, and he never lived in Milwaukee again. Without question, however, he made a permanent mark on the city. Beyond his work at the *Sentinel* and on the school board, King founded multiple clubs and organizations, most of which reflected his Whig penchant for cultivating a Protestant morality, a vibrant republicanism, and a hurried modernization of America: among them, the Milwaukee Light Guard, the Fire Engine Company Number One, Saint John's Episcopal Church, the Milwaukee Boat Club, the Milwaukee Cricket and Baseball Club, the Sons of Temperance, the Fourth of July Commission, the Poor Relief Commission, and the Excelsior Society of Native New Yorkers.<sup>54</sup>

King's relatively short time in Milwaukee was productive because of the particular, and at times successful, political agenda he pursued, one that is difficult to fully grasp without also considering his very active, and extraordinarily privileged, past. Like his mentor Seward, King conceived of a public school system, though rooted in assimilationist ideals, that could be adapted to meet a number of diverse local needs, in particular those brought on by religious and linguistic diversity. To reformers like King, differences in language and creed did not need to stand in the way of providing a free education to the city's children. ❧

### Notes

1. Rufus King Jr., "Milwaukee to St. Paul in 1855," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 11,2 (1927): 169. Excerpts from King's letters were published in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* on August 17, 21, and 28, 1855. For detailed account of King's time in Milwaukee with a focus on schools, see Kathleen E. Code Gomez, "Rufus King: Civic and Political Leader in the Development of the City of Milwaukee," PhD dissertation, Marquette University, 1998.



General Rufus King, seated in uniform, ca. 1862, as photographed by Mathew Brady. King left Milwaukee in 1861, fought in the Civil War, and later served as the nation's minister to the Papal States.

2. King, "Milwaukee to St. Paul in 1855," 170–172.
3. When King Jr. took on ownership, the name of the newspaper was the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*. It became the *Daily Sentinel and Gazette* in 1846 and the *Milwaukee Sentinel* in 1851.
4. For more on Whig culture and a comparison of the Whigs and Democrats, see Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
5. William Renss, *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind"* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 20–21.
6. King, Jr., "Milwaukee to St. Paul," 180–181. For more on the effect of railroad expansion on the Midwest, particularly Chicago, see William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).
7. For a broad overview of advances in transportation and communication, see Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Sean Wilentz, *Andrew Jackson* (New York: Times Books, 2005).
8. King, "Milwaukee to St. Paul in 1855," 180–185.
9. King, "Milwaukee to St. Paul in 1855," 179.
10. For a biographical treatment of Rufus King Sr., see Robert Erma, *Rufus King: American Federalist* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968) and, though less scholarly, Edward Hale Brush, *Rufus King and His Times* (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1926).
11. Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 93.
12. Charles King, "Rufus King: Soldier, Editor, and Statesman," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 44 (1921): 371. As noted by Howe, politics and religion dominated American culture in this era, and "the press was largely the creature of . . . [those two forces], owned and operated for their partisan ends." In many cases, "the political press [simply] transmitted the views of party leaders to the electorate." See Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, 7.
13. Perry Hill, "Rufus King and the Wisconsin Constitution," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 32.4 (1949): 417.
14. Hill, "Rufus King and the Wisconsin Constitution," 417. For more biographical information on King Jr., see James Smith Buck, *Pioneer History of Milwaukee, Volume IV* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee News Co., 1876), 79–83.
15. Hill, "Rufus King and the Wisconsin Constitution," 417. Seward had run for governor in 1836 but was defeated by his Democratic opponent, William Marcy.
16. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New

York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 14–17. Of Weed and Seward, Goodwin writes, "They made an exceptional team. Seward was more visionary, more idealistic, better equipped to arouse the emotions of the crowd; Weed was more practical, more realistic, more skilled in winning elections and getting things done." Weed was a skilled and powerful political boss, and dealt daily with political patronage. In fact, the widespread corruption surrounding the "Weed-controlled legislature," Goodwin notes, was part of what led to Seward's loss to Abraham Lincoln at the 1860 Republican National Convention.

17. Hill, "Rufus King and the Wisconsin Constitution," 418.
18. Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 169.
19. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 168.
20. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 157.
21. Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of the New York City Public Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 39–41.
22. For example, see William Seward to Rufus King, February 1845, Box 1, Folder 4, Rufus and Charles King Collection, Carroll University Archives, Carroll University, Waukesha, WI.
23. Hill, "Rufus King and the Wisconsin Constitution," 418.
24. Hill, "Rufus King and the Wisconsin Constitution," 418.
25. Charles King, "Rufus King: Soldier, Editor, and Statesman," 373; Gomez, "Rufus King," 38–41.
26. Margo Anderson and Victor Greene, eds., *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 19–20.
27. Bayard Still, *Milwaukee: History of a City* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1948), 133.
28. Anderson and Greene, *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past*, 21.
29. Still, *Milwaukee: History of a City*, 134–135.
30. King quoted in Still, *Milwaukee*, 84–85.
31. Rufus King Jr., "Our Public Schools," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 12, 1846.
32. Still, *Milwaukee*, 85. For more on Milwaukee's earliest schools and further examples of King's newspaper writing on the subject, see Gomez, "Rufus King," 40–49.
33. Hill, "Rufus King and the Wisconsin Constitution," 418.
34. Joseph Schafer, "Origin of Wisconsin's Free School System," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 9.1 (1925): 39–40.
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36. Rufus King Jr., "An Act in Relation to Common Schools in the City of Milwaukee," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, February 14, 1846.
37. Still, *Milwaukee*, 219.
38. Rufus King Jr., "An Act in Relation to Common Schools."
39. Hill, "Rufus King and the Wisconsin Constitution," 435.
40. For more on the origins of the Milwaukee board, see the *Milwaukee School Board Annual Reports*, the first four of which are printed in James Smith Buck's *Pioneer History of Milwaukee, Volume III*.
41. Still, *Milwaukee*, 217.
42. *Milwaukee School Board Annual Reports*, 1847.
43. In 1870, there were only 176 African Americans living in Milwaukee, less than one-half of one percent of the city's total population. See Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915–1945* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), xxvii–7.
44. Rufus King Jr., "Shall We Have School Houses?" *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 1, 1847.
45. For more on the nineteenth-century rivalry between Chicago and Milwaukee, see Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 41–46.
46. Still, *Milwaukee*, 218.
47. Still, *Milwaukee*, 219.
48. Still, *Milwaukee*, 219.
49. Still, *Milwaukee*, 219–220.
50. Still, *Milwaukee*, 220.
51. Still, *Milwaukee*, 220.
52. Buck, *Pioneer History of Milwaukee, Volume VI*, 78–83.
53. Charles King, "Rufus King: Soldier, Editor, and Statesman," 375–381. King persuaded Lincoln to send Wisconsin governor Alexander Randall in his place. King took Randall's place in Rome two years later.
54. Hill, "Rufus King and the Wisconsin Constitution," 419.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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## THE WOMEN OF WISCONSIN BREWING

**BY ROB NOVAK**

On February 8, 2022, a group of women gathered in Green Bay, Wisconsin, to brew a batch of beer. These industry professionals from across the state represented the Wisconsin chapter of the Pink Boots Society, formed in 2007 to bring together women in the brewing industry. The beer, a weiss ale recipe featuring fragrant malted barley, white wheat, and a unique hop blend, was a tribute to a woman who, more than one hundred years earlier, had owned and operated a brewery on the opposite bank of the Fox River. Not only was Octavia Van Dycke the brewery's president, the O. Van Dycke Company was the first brewing operation in Wisconsin to be named for a woman. The members of the Pink Boots who gathered to honor her—brewers, maltsters, managers, cellarwomen, and others employed in the brewing and distilling industry—represent a direct connection Wisconsin's women brewers and the longer tradition of women brewing beer across human history.

**Above and left:** Octavia Van Dycke, ca. 1925, was owner and manager of the O. Van Dycke Brewing Company from 1881 through the sale of the brewery in 1908. She was the inspiration for the collaborative beer created in 2022 by the Pink Boots Society and Titledtown Brewery whose label is shown at left.

## A Ten-Thousand-Year History of Women Making Beer

As the last of Wisconsin's glaciers receded ten thousand years ago, the first beer-like beverages were likely being fermented on the other side of the world. From ancient China to Mesopotamia, the origin story of beer has been dominated by women. Ninkasi, the Sumerian goddess of beer, is immortalized in a hymn that describes the beer-making process in detail. In Mesopotamia, where cuneiform tablets dating to 2000 BCE record recipes for beer, the only trade presided over by a goddess was brewing.<sup>1</sup> Egyptians worshiped the beer goddess Tenenit, who was closely associated with the goddess of birth. Beer in ancient Egypt was brewed by women in the home, though there is some evidence men and women brewed together in commercial hybrid bakery-breweries.<sup>2</sup>

In her book *A Woman's Place Is in the Brewhouse*, historian Tara Nurin collects the traditions of women not only in early history but in Europe, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, China, Japan, and Peru—all of whom were, and some of whom still are, responsible for the brewing or distributing of fermented beverages in their societies. In the grain-growing Celtic lands of Northern Europe, evidence of beer brewing dates back to at least 800 BCE, likely carried out by the women of nomadic tribes.<sup>3</sup> Records of Finnish women brewing *Sahtis*, an often un-hopped, juniper-spiced, murky, and sometimes sour beer that is still made today, show women as central to farmhouse brewing in Northern Europe.<sup>4</sup>

German traditions of brewing, of course, would have a great influence in Wisconsin, and here, too, women were influential. During the Middle Ages, the nuns of Germany were scientific-minded brewers at least partially responsible for evolving lager yeast.<sup>5</sup> Abbess Hildegard von Bingen has become a hero in beer history: she is recognized as the first person to provide a written description of hops as a bittering agent and preservative in beer.<sup>6</sup> While German women were welcome to brew beer during Hildegard's time, they experienced the erosion of their rights to legally distribute it between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. German monarchs, eager to raise funds from the sale of beer, passed laws regulating ingredients, culminating in the *Reinheitsgebot*. This legendary Bavarian law was passed in 1516 by Duke Wilhelm IV and mandated the use of *only* malt, water, and hops in the production of beer. Hailed by the nascent brewers guilds as a way to protect the purity of beer, its effect on women brewers was devastating. Not only were they no longer able to sell non-hop beers, they were unable to afford the taxes levied on hops.<sup>7</sup>

Prior to the ascendance of hop farming in England, Scotland, and Wales, many brewers had carved out a living running their own taverns, not unlike today's brewpubs. Commercial hop farming led to an increase in production for breweries and



Babylonian seals depict beer consumption via straws circa 2600 BCE. There is evidence that women participated in the production and sale of beer in ancient Mesopotamia, where, according to scholar Tara Nurin, the only trade presided over by a goddess was brewing.



Abbess Hildegard von Bingen: theologian, scientist, writer, composer, and brewer of the Middle Ages



The Ludemanns' farm, painted by Franz Hölzlhuber ca. 1856, was situated on land that would become Lake Park in Milwaukee. Early farms such as this would have grown and produced all of the ingredients necessary to make beer.

the beginning of an industrial brewing revolution. This shift from cottage brewing, which provided a means for women to participate in the industry, to large-scale brewing operations that relied on the same pool of male labor as factories and mills, effectively pushed women out of not just brewing but also most of the industrial trades.<sup>8</sup> With women feeling increased societal pressure not to make a living brewing, the era of women as the primary brewers in Europe was coming to an end. As Nurin elegantly and succinctly puts it, “Any time an industry mechanizes or significantly scales up, women get left in the dirt.”<sup>9</sup>

While the technology of fermenting beverages was proliferating at points across the globe, there is scarce evidence of fermented beverages in precolonial North America. Traditions of brewing beer came from European immigrants who brought their knowledge of the trade with them to the new world.<sup>10</sup> So, too, did families bring their recipes for home brewing—and with them, the possibility for women to play a role in establishing the Wisconsin’s brewing identity.

## Beer Finds Wisconsin

The brewing of beer in Wisconsin begins with a great unknown; we don’t know, and never will know, who brewed it first. For certain it was an ale, as lager yeast wouldn’t make its way to Wisconsin until the mid-nineteenth century, around the time of statehood. Almost certainly these ales were produced at a “fort, farm, or homestead,” as Doug Hoverson states in *The Drink That Made Wisconsin Famous*.<sup>11</sup> The land provided a ready supply of clean spring water, grains, and hops—three of the four ingredients necessary for beer making. As barley might not have been immediately available in brewing quantities, early brewing grains may have included wild rice.<sup>12</sup>

It is likely that most brewing in early Wisconsin was done in the home or in the summer kitchen and fermented in the root cellar. Along with the other household work, it’s possible that the women of the family would have brewed the beer while the men were clearing land and tending to their fields or livestock. German geographer Johann Kohl observed that

“it was very common in 1850 for Irish squatters in Wisconsin to brew ‘la petite beer,’ which natives called jingobabo, or fir branch water.”<sup>13</sup> This would have been brewed quickly and with the same vessels and implements the settlers used to cook their daily food.

Ales were easily the most common beer made for home consumption, but the practice of brewing home ales is difficult to track as little archaeological evidence was left behind. Oral histories help fill the gap and offer tantalizing glimpses into the practice. In one example, Louis Bosman, born in 1894 and interviewed in 1976, describes his Belgian-born grandfather not only brewing in the springtime but also harvesting and malting his own barley. The techniques described indicate a true farmhouse-style ale brewed for daily summertime consumption, often while working on the farm. His grandfather was experienced enough to brew “good beer” without a recipe, though he did utilize a marked measuring stick to control water volumes and hop additions.<sup>14</sup> In another interesting example, Frank Ausloos described how his grandfather, born in Hoegaarden, Belgium, in 1839, had worked at the famous Hoegaarden brewery as a boy. He arrived in the US with some knowledge of the unique production methods and recipes of the beer produced only in that city. His grandfather made his farm version of Hoegaarden beer his whole life and passed the tradition along to Frank’s mother, who occasionally made the beer in their kitchen. His mother, not wanting her children to be “soaks,” did not write down or pass on the recipe to the next generation.<sup>15</sup> While these examples describe men doing most of the brewing, Frank’s grandfather passing the brewing tradition on to his daughter does provide some evidence of women remaining involved in farm brewing.

German immigrants, especially those intent on making beer for a living, often arrived in Wisconsin with formal experience or training from institutions and universities where brewing was done exclusively by men. Wayne Kroll’s book *Wisconsin’s Frontier Farm Breweries* is a valuable study of the advent of German immigrant farm breweries between 1830 and 1880.<sup>16</sup> These rural breweries popped up in almost every county in the state, sometimes two or three of them in a single town. Their output was as little as fifty barrels of beer per year, though most made several hundred. The fact that nearly all of these rural breweries were gone by the twentieth century gives us a glimpse at the rapidity of technological advances like the railroad and refrigeration. By 1880, urban breweries were becoming strong competitors to their rural counterparts, as they were often founded by men with more capital, scientific knowledge, and professional brewing experience than the farm brewers. Kroll notes that taxation during the Civil War and the adoption of pasteurization technology by city breweries were two major hurdles that most small breweries could not overcome.<sup>17</sup>

## Women in Wisconsin Frontier Breweries

A fascinating note about Kroll’s research is that his compilation of numerous frontier farm breweries does include the names of women. This list, which relies on the first Wisconsin State Business Directory, includes more than 150 names, of which at least eight are women.<sup>18</sup> These names provide a window into frontier family businesses while simultaneously providing an example of how difficult it is to research the impact of women on the early brewing industry. The roles of women at frontier breweries were rarely defined in writing, and they are often mentioned only in concert with their husbands or male brewery employees, sometimes without even their first name being included. As Kroll’s list indicates, little material exists that would allow us to interpret their management methods, business strategies, or personalities.

**Virginia French**, 1856. There is no mention of Virginia in historical data beyond the sources used to make Kroll’s list. There seems to be a discrepancy as to whether she lived and worked in Menomonic (Dunn County) or Menomonee Falls (near Milwaukee).<sup>19</sup>

**Margarethe Wittman**, Port Washington, 1865–1870. Margarethe operated the Wittman brewery upon the death of her husband. Her son, George, was fifteen when his father died in 1865; by 1870, he was operating the brewery, possibly with the guidance of his mother.<sup>20</sup>

### *Excellent Table Beer.*

On three bushels of malt pour of hot water the third of the quantity you are to use, which is to be thirty-nine gallons; cover it warm half an hour then mash, and let it stand two hours and a half more, then set it to drain. When dry, add half the remaining water, mash, and let it stand half an hour, run that into another tub, and pour the rest of the water on the malt, stir it well, and cover it, letting it infuse a full hour. Run that off, and mix all together. A pound and a half of hops should be infused in water, as in the former receipt, and be put into the tub for the first running.

Boil the hops with the wort an hour from the time it first boils. Strain off and cool. If the whole be not cool enough that day to add to the yeast, a pail or two of wort may be prepared, and a quart of yeast put to it over night. Before tuning, all the wort should be added together, and thoroughly mixed with the lade-pail. When the wort ceases to work, put a bit of paper on the bung-hole for three days, when it may safely be fastened close. In three or four weeks the beer will be fit for drinking.

*Note.* Servants should be directed to put a cork into every barrel as soon as the cock is taken out, and to fasten in the vent peg, the air causing casks to become musty.

A recipe from the *New System of Domestic Cookery* (1814) provides a glimpse into the types of recipes that would have been commonly brewed in households, usually by women, throughout the nineteenth century.

**Mrs. W. Knecht**, Onalaska, 1867–?. Though a home and hotel were located on the site of the brewery owned by her husband, there is no specific mention of Mrs. Knecht's involvement in brewery operations. Multiple tragic accidents occurred on the property, including a partial collapse, a robbery, and a major fire. It appears that Mrs. Knecht remarried after her first husband's death and that her second husband and son continued to operate the brewery.<sup>21</sup>

**Maria Runkel**, Germantown and Mauston, 1867–1888. Started by Maria's husband in 1858, the brewery moved from Germantown to Mauston in 1867, after which the business was kept in Maria's name. She sold half of her shares to another partner in 1886 and the remainder in 1888, marking her departure from the industry.<sup>22</sup>

**Anna Warm**, Manitowoc County, 1874–1880. Anna operated a small brewery after the death of her husband. She retired from the industry by 1880.<sup>23</sup>

**Elizabeth Kunz**, Manitowoc, 1872–1888. Elizabeth assisted her brother in opening a brewery, and by 1870 the business was in her name. Under her management, this successful brewery was the second largest in Manitowoc. It is worth noting that an extensive interview with her grand-nephew Frederick Kunz in 1976 does not mention Elizabeth by name nor does it provide any information on her role at the brewery.<sup>24</sup>

**Caroline Hochgreve**, Green Bay, 1877–1879. Caroline took control Hochgreve Brewery, located in Bellevue, upon the death of her husband and managed the brewery until 1879. Records indicate her father might have assisted in the brewery's management. The Hochgreve name appears to have been associated with the brewery as late as 1905.<sup>25</sup>

**Margaret Link**, Dousman, 1881–1882. Margaret operated the John Link brewery for two years following the death of her husband. She subsequently sold the brewery.<sup>26</sup>

One name that was surprisingly not included on Kroll's list is that of Wilhelmina Melchoir (variously spelled Malchior), of Trempealeau. Jacob Melchoir's brewery was situated on the Mississippi River in the town of Trempealeau and opened in 1859. In the heyday of riverboat travel, it also operated as a hotel. Research done by Chris Hardie uncovered a 1937 *Galesville Republican* article stating that "in days even before the Civil War, Jacob Melchior stood in the doorway and waved greetings to the steamboat pilots as they steamed north to St. Paul or south to St. Louis. Mr. Melchior gave most of his time to the manufacture of beer, while his wife conducted the hotel."<sup>27</sup> The operation of a Civil War–era hotel and brewery along the river sparks the imagination of any admirer of Wisconsin history. Local lore adds that Jacob and Wilhelmina were great dancers and larger-than-life characters in their town. Jacob passed away in 1881 and Wilhelmina moved away shortly after.<sup>28</sup> A small section of the original

GREEN BAY PRESS GAZETTE, JUNE 3, 1932



LOW-GREEN BAY



**Left:** Caroline Hochgreve ran Hochgreve Brewing Company for at least two years following her husband's death in 1877. Photographs of brewers and breweries from this era are rare; rarer still is a photograph of a brewery proprietor.

**Right:** Hochgreve brewery employees, ca. 1905. The brewery continued to operate under the Hochgreve name after Caroline sold it in 1879.



Wilhelmina and Jacob Melchoir operated this lager brewery, restaurant, and guest house on the banks of the Mississippi in Trempealeau between 1859 and 1881. A riverboat dock would have provided all the business the couple could handle.

building still stands along the banks of the Mississippi today, an homage to a husband-and-wife team who built a brewery not unlike the local craft breweries of today.

### The Best Women and the Pabst Brewery

As more and more German immigrants made their way to Wisconsin, the transition from a diverse cottage industry supplying regional ethnic ales to a city-based major industry capable of supplying the entire region with high-quality lagers was in full swing. Perhaps no family better encapsulated this period of change than that of Jacob Best Sr. and Eva Marie Schmidt Best. Their success is well documented, in large part because Empire Brewing Company, founded in 1844, became the iconic Pabst Brewing Co. by 1889, via marriage, death, and stock purchase. The family's move from Mettenheim, Germany, happened in phases; Phillip (the third son) emigrated in 1838, followed by his brothers Jacob Jr. and Charles a few years later. This initial exploratory period was successful enough (they set up a vinegar factory in 1842) that

the brothers convinced their parents to move the whole family to Milwaukee by 1844, using the proceeds from the sale of their German brewery to establish a new brewery in America.<sup>29</sup>

By 1847, Phillip Best felt confident enough in the success of the young brewery that he wrote a convincing letter to the family of his wife Maria encouraging them to move to Milwaukee. Phillip's letter covers several interesting topics ranging from German politics ("In Germany no one knows how to appreciate the liberty to which every human being is entitled by birth, only here in America can he experience it") to the Mexican-American War (which was a concern for German immigrants; they didn't want to move to the US only to be conscripted into service) to details about Milwaukee's growth and potential ("For here is the most excellent wheat land, and it will become one of the best states in America, and Milwaukee is and remains the first city in the state, for it already numbers 12,000 inhabitants"). Of note is his advice for traveling, including "You do not need any passports," inspiring Maria to add her own advice in the postscript, "But

it is safer if you take your passports along.”<sup>30</sup> This short but telling interaction serves as a reminder that success and safety were never guaranteed to immigrants, and also provides a rare glimpse into the relationship between Phillip—according to scholars, a “born leader of a fiery, imperious type”—and Maria, of whose personality we can find no description.<sup>31</sup> It also reminds us that, like the history of Wisconsin’s frontier brewing, the history the state’s urban brewing is a record dominated by men. Men’s names, occupations, and stories provide the majority of researchable materials. Only by examining these sources for names, birth, death, and marriage records, and press mentions do patterns emerge which allow historians to begin to understand the lives of the wives and daughters of the future beer barons. Together, Maria and Phillip would have one son, Henry, and three daughters, two of whom, Maria and Lisette, would play prominent roles in the Milwaukee beer industry and the society that blossomed around it.

The Best family was responsible for founding more than one legendary Milwaukee brewery. In 1849, Charles Best separated from the family business and, along with his business partner Gustavas Fine, built the Plank Road Brewery in the Menomonee River valley adjacent to the Milwaukee-Watertown Plank Road.<sup>32</sup> Considered a rural site in the mid-nineteenth century, Charles’s brewery was a link between pioneer farm breweries and urban breweries. Charles was joined by his brother Lorenz in 1850. Together they began to excavate caves into the nearby limestone cliff and opened a beer hall in Milwaukee proper. The brewery they had built together was beginning to measure up to that of their brothers. Sadly, with Lorenz’s unexpected death in 1854, Charles sold his shares of the Plank Road Brewery and moved to Illinois.<sup>33</sup> What happened next provides a textbook example of how exciting, dramatic, and political the lives of Milwaukee’s emerging beer barons—and their families—were about to become.

As fate would have it, Phillip Best was fond of traveling by boat. And if you traveled by boat on the Great Lakes in the late 1850s, you would eventually meet the charismatic steamship captain Frederick Pabst. Maria Best met Frederick, likely through her father’s connections, in 1860. By 1862, they would marry. He was twenty-six; she was seventeen. In 1863, the Captain “skillfully” beached a passenger ship during a sudden storm to the tune of \$20,000 in damage (but without injuries); he took a job at the family brewery a year later.<sup>34</sup>

Lisette Best, Phillip’s middle daughter, married brewer Emil Schandain in May 1866. Emil’s technical skills and professional training paired well with the Captain’s people skills and social standing.<sup>35</sup> Though no documents of their working arrangement exist, the partnership between Emil and Frederick ushered in a long period of growth and success that drove Pabst to become the largest brewery in the country

WHI IMAGE ID 117034



Maria Best married Captain Frederick Pabst in 1862; by 1889, her family’s brewery would bear his name. Pictured here in 1870, she and her sister Lisette (who married Pabst’s brewer Emil Schandain) were celebrities in Milwaukee society.

by 1895.<sup>36</sup> Maria Pabst passed away in 1906, two years after the Captain. She was laid to rest as a matriarchal figurehead. Following Emil Schandain’s death in 1888, Lisette became the only woman vice president of a large brewing company in the US. She retained this post until she took leave to travel in 1894.<sup>37</sup> No details of her involvement as a vice president exist.

Lisette’s death in 1905 sparked intrigue over inheritance and infidelity as her surviving children brought a suit against Jacob Heyl. Heyl—her supposed ex-lover, her son-in-law twice over, and the father of her grandson—had been appointed executor of her estate, valued at \$7 million.<sup>38</sup> The courtroom drama over the family’s fortune played out before an enraptured city and landed the story on the front page of the *New York Times*.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, her children and grandson reclaimed their inheritance, including many shares of Pabst Brewing Company.

## Miller, Blatz, and Schlitz: The Women behind the Beer Barons

In many ways, Frederick Miller owed his brewing career to the women in his family. After being widowed in 1837, his mother, Maria Ludowika Zepfel Miller, encouraged him to learn a trade that would begin earning pay immediately. He chose to enter a brewing apprenticeship in Riedlingen, Germany. While the family had a comfortable stipend, it was clear to Maria that her children would have to work for a living. By 1849, twenty-five-year-old Fred was prepared to lease the royal brewery in Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen with support from his family. A sizable deposit was put down by his sister, Maria, and his mother offered to double the sum if necessary.<sup>40</sup> It is reasonable to presume that the Miller brewing dynasty would have never started if not for the fiscal and personal support of the Miller women. While Fred was well-versed in the brewing of beer, the next decade provided him with invaluable experience in brewery management that he would bring with him to Wisconsin. The Miller family, including Fred's wife, Josephine, and their seven-month-old son, Joseph Edward, arrived in New York in 1854. They spent several months in the city researching breweries before heading to Wisconsin via New Orleans. A journey up the Mississippi saw them disembark in La Crosse, just a few miles south of where the Melchoirs were about to build their riverside brewery. From there, the Millers traveled to Milwaukee, arriving in 1855. By July, they had purchased the Plank Road Brewery.<sup>41</sup> According to records, many of the employees who had worked at the brewery under Charles Best remained on staff. The continuity proved to be a valuable asset for the Millers. The business did employ at least one woman, twenty-year-old Katharine Marst. Her role was not recorded, but the company paid her half the salary of the male employees.<sup>42</sup>

The success of these breweries was not preordained, nor was the safety and health of the families who operated them. Just as the death of Lorenz Best preceded Charles's sale of the Plank Road Brewery, many famous Milwaukee breweries owe their origins to the tragedies that befell other would-be beer barons. In 1856, the death of August Krug, who had founded his brewery in 1849, led his widow, Anna Marie Hartig Krug, to manage the brewery for two years before her marriage to Joseph Schlitz, who had been hired as the brewery's bookkeeper in 1858. When Johann Braun, owner of two early Milwaukee breweries, was killed after being thrown from a wagon in 1851, his former brewmaster, Valentin Blatz, married Braun's widow, Louise, just eight months later. Blatz merged the two breweries to form what would eventually become the Blatz Brewing Company.<sup>43</sup>

Frederick and Josephine Miller, who had enjoyed success after adding amenities such as beer gardens, a hotel, and a

bowling alley to their business, seemed to have escaped the tragedies that had altered the names and trajectories of their competitors. That all changed in 1860 when Josephine and two of their children (eldest Joseph and second-eldest Mary Margaret) died of tuberculosis. Frederick turned to religion and remarried six months later to Lisette Englehardt Gross, whose family owned a farm with a small brewery in Franklin. Lisette was nineteen and Fred was thirty-six.<sup>44</sup> The brewery, a full twelve miles from Milwaukee, provided the Gross family additional income beyond farming and offers a unique link between Miller and the fast-disappearing frontier farm breweries. The Grosses don't appear to have had formal brewing training in Germany and often sold their beer from a tavern on their property. In the 1860 census, Lisette's occupation was listed as "house servant." In frontier brewing fashion, she may have been expected to keep the brewery clean.<sup>45</sup>

While Frederick Miller never merged the two breweries, several beer historians have posited theories connecting them. In the early days, Lisette was an active participant at the Miller Brewery, just as she had been on her family farm, performing such tasks as cooking and cleaning for the brewery employees. Jan Kowalski suggests that the Gross beer may have been sold directly to Miller and that Frederick also received the Gross family recipes, the great rumor being that the recipe for the future Miller High Life was among them.<sup>46</sup> According to Wayne Kroll, it was likely that Miller utilized the Gross caverns for storage even after the brewery closed in 1894.<sup>47</sup>

Lisette and Frederick Miller would go on to have five children of their own, establishing a strong foundation for company control; the brewery would remain at least partially in the family well into the twentieth century. Frederick died of cancer in 1888. Lisette, who lived a long life surrounded by children and grandchildren, died of cancer in 1920. The Miller brewery, whose foundation and early success relied on the work of both Josephine Miller and Lisette Miller, would become the largest of the Milwaukee production breweries and remain independent the longest. The Blatz, Schlitz, Pabst, and Miller breweries helped drive the economic and social engines of Milwaukee. And while the women of these brewing families did not perform the same tasks as ancient, medieval, or frontier brewer women, they were no less instrumental in the foundation and growth of these breweries than their fathers, brothers, and husbands.

### In Capable Hands

The fast-growing brewing industry and its rapid industrialization in Milwaukee manifested no operational or managerial roles for the wives and daughters of the beer barons. Women were hired by large production breweries to work on bottling lines prior to Prohibition, as a cost-cutting measure in tandem with the increase in payroll due to union negotiations. Between



**Above:** The Schlitz Palm Garden, 1896. Beer gardens meant to rival those in major cities like New York and Chicago were premiere destinations for Milwaukee citizens in the late nineteenth century. **Left:** Anna Krug married Joseph Schlitz following the death of her husband August Krug. Joseph named their brewery after himself, inserting his name into the ranks of Milwaukee beer barons. **Right:** Ad for Blatz Beer, ca. 1893. Valentin's Blatz's 1852 marriage to the recently widowed Louise Braun allowed him to absorb her deceased husband's two breweries into his growing business. Acquisitions via marriage played a key role in the expansion of many nineteenth-century breweries.

1905 and 1909, newspapers reported that women earned three dollars per week on the bottling line, while men earned twelve.<sup>48</sup> Yet in small cities and rural areas of the state there are examples of women leading breweries to great success, not as cooks, bottlers, or even brewers, but as brewery owners. They each had a keen familiarity with their products, customers, and employees; they weren't rattled or intimidated by competition; and they exhibited the same visionary traits that have been so well-documented in the male beer barons of Milwaukee.

Johanna Bandel was born in Württemberg, Germany, on August 31, 1831. She arrived in New York with her brothers in 1852, where she worked for several years before moving to Milwaukee in 1856. When she met her future husband, Gottlieb Heileman, he was a frequent visitor to the Frederick Pabst mansion. They were married in 1858.<sup>49</sup> Gottlieb does not appear to have been a brewer in Milwaukee, but, perhaps because of his association with the Pabst family, he did recognize a growing demand for German lagers. He and Johanna settled in La Crosse in 1858, and Gottlieb opened a brewery on the Mississippi River with a partner, John Gund. The brewery operated with moderate success despite a falling out between Gottlieb and John in 1872—an apocryphal tale says that the two men flipped a coin to determine who would get the brewery and who would get their other business, a hotel.<sup>50</sup>

Johanna appears to have been active in the brewery. She prepared lunches for the unmarried workers, but precious little exists to paint a full picture of her personality or role. She

and Gottlieb had eight children: seven daughters and one son. Gottlieb passed away in 1878 when Henry, the presumptive heir to the brewery, was just ten years old. Johanna became the president of the operation and held the role until her death in 1917. While the meteoric rise of Heileman's is evident in the production increase between 1900 and 1913 (total barrels sold rose from 30,601 to 131,966) and the debut of Old Style Lager, in 1895 the family suffered the loss of twenty-six-year-old, Henry, to suicide—a tragedy of which they did not speak.<sup>51</sup> Johanna Heileman was one of the earliest CEOs of a major American company. Yet despite her industry accomplishments, her obituary only mentions her as Gottlieb's widow.<sup>52</sup>

When Maria Haertel married Peter Fauerbach in Portage in 1859, a series of events were sent into motion that would lead to Maria becoming proprietor of their family brewery in Madison. Maria's father, Karl, was a successful brewer in Portage. He had helped establish a brewery in New Lisbon that Peter operated. The couple moved to Madison in 1868 to lease the Sprecher Brewery (no relation to the 1985 brewery established by Randy Sprecher in Milwaukee), and by 1873, they had purchased the brewery outright. Maria and Peter had six sons. When Peter died in 1886, four of the six sons were working in the beer industry. Despite this, Maria took charge of the business. Between 1886 and 1890, Maria managed the property, which included the brewery, a general store, and a small farm. She also oversaw the installation of two 200-horsepower engines to power the brewery.<sup>53</sup> Maria

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**Left:** Johanna Heileman became the first female president of a brewery in the United States following the death of her husband in 1878; she held the position for almost thirty years. **Right:** The Fauerbach brewery operated in Madison on the shores of Lake Monona from 1868 to 1966. Maria Fauerbach was proprietress of the brewery following her husband's death in 1886. She operated the brewery for nearly four years and was responsible for its many technological upgrades.

passed away in 1907 in her home not far from the brewery. Her decisions and oversight set the business up for success. Fauerbach Brewing Company survived Prohibition and operated on the shores of Lake Monona until 1966. Her obituary hints at her generous spirit: “She was a silent supporter of the needy and downtrodden who will be surely missed.”<sup>54</sup> Her surviving business cards and letterheads announce her as “Mrs. Peter Fauerbach, Proprietess.”<sup>55</sup>

The O. Van Dycke Brewing Company was one of the few nineteenth- or twentieth-century breweries in the country to bear the name of a woman. Octavia Van Dycke, wife of Louis Van Dycke, was born in Bouvechain, Belgium, on August 4, 1840, and immigrated to the US in 1856. Louis and Octavia married in 1857 and settled in Green Bay. They were an entrepreneurial couple; while managing other successful businesses, Louis purchased City Brewery in 1876. Prior to his death in 1881, Louis changed the name of the brewery to O. Van Dycke Brewing Company.<sup>56</sup> The name change lends credence to the story that Louis wished for Octavia to manage



COURTESY OF THE NEVILLE MUSEUM OF BROWN COUNTY



**Above:** Employees of the O. Van Dycke brewery, ca. 1880. **Above right:** Promotional items such as this calendar topper were popular in the late 1800s. Today's neon signs and tin tackers follow the same tradition.



JAMES GILL



**Above:** Deb Carey, founder and CEO of New Glarus Brewing Company, and her husband, Dan Carey, brewmaster. **Left:** The label for this women's brewing collaboration reminds us of the invisibility of women in brewing history: "Artisanal women lost their domination of the daily ritual of brewing during the Industrial Revolution. Today's brewing trade is controlled by men. The collaboration of two Craft companies both led by women, New Glarus Brewing and Weyermann Malting, is unique."

the brewery after his death. O. Van Dycke was one of only a few breweries making weiss beers (German wheat ales) in Wisconsin at the time. She sold the brewery in 1908, possibly to focus on other business ventures.<sup>57</sup> Octavia was one of the "oldest residents" in Brown County when she passed away on November 1, 1926. Her obituary lists her accomplishments proudly (from settling in a "totally unpopulated" area with her parents to operating a general store for fifteen years) and notes that she was survived by fourteen grandchildren and sixteen great-grandchildren. Her brewery is not mentioned.<sup>58</sup>

### Establishing a New Tradition of Women Brewers

As the women of the Pink Boots brewed on that day in February 2022, a photo of Octavia watched over them. It wouldn't be hard to imagine her smiling as she experienced the smell of the malt, the sound of the boiling wort, and the taste of the fermenting beer that would have been so familiar to her. "It was so amazing to brew a beer in honor of an incredible woman who paved a path for us," recalls Samantha Danen, the leader of the Pink Boots Wisconsin Chapter who in 2015 became the first woman brewer at a Milwaukee craft brewery.<sup>59</sup>

One mile away, across the Fox River, the buildings of O. Van Dycke Brewing Company are long gone, replaced many times over. When the Wisconsin chapter gathers together to brew, as they did for Octavia's tribute beer, they represent a history that was nearly erased in the years following Prohibition. As small breweries closed or were sold, leadership roles

for women were carved out of the industry. Fauerbach's closed in 1966, and Marie's early leadership was only recently documented by her family. Blatz and Schlitz, whose success is due to Anna Marie's and Louise's marriages, and Pabst, whose empire was tied to the financial stability of the Best women, were all folded into larger breweries. Even Johanna Heileman's brewing company was sold in 1987, after a valiant attempt to stay relevant in a beer world dominated by homogeneity. Women were relegated to the bottling lines and secretarial pools of huge corporations.

Wisconsin wouldn't see the return of successful small, family-owned breweries until the early craft beer movement of the 1980s, when state laws made home brewing legal for the first time since Prohibition. The founding of breweries like Sprecher, Capitol, and Lakefront, all of which were started by men, helped establish a new craft brewing tradition. In 1993, Deb Carey of New Glarus Brewing Company became the first woman to found a brewery in the US; her husband, Dan Carey, is brewmaster. Today, New Glarus brews like Spotted Cow are household names—but when Carey became involved with the brewing industry more than forty years ago, a woman working in the industry was very rare. As she noted in an interview, "I can't think of a single [woman] who was involved in brewing."<sup>60</sup>

New Glarus Brewing Company, which celebrates its thirtieth anniversary this year, pays homage to both the history and future of women in brewing with Two Women lager, a collaboration between Deb Carey, Sabine Weyermann of Weyermann

Malt, and Gayle Goschie of Goschie Hop Farms—not unlike the collaborative beers created each year by Pink Boots members. To achieve equity in a brewery, Carey says, it is key for “women [to be] taken seriously. And then we ask ourselves, what can we do to support our good people and help them be better?”<sup>61</sup>

It was an early March morning when I spoke to Deb Carey about the history of women in Wisconsin brewing history. It had snowed the night before, a blanket of calm under which spring was waiting. I had recently visited the ever-changing hilltop brewery. Deb had just opened up access to a museum she created to pay tribute to the journey she and her husband have been on for the past forty years, and I wanted to see it. The exhibits were evocative; there was a story being told, and it was directly connected to the impact of women on Wisconsin beer history. After having been discouraged by the lack of documentation on the historic roles of women in the industry, I was curious about her reasons for creating the space. “I wanted the truth to be out there,” said Deb, who was named a 2012 White House Champion of Change by the Obama administration. “And I wanted to let others who were struggling in their careers or thinking of change to know that it’s not always a straight path—it also doesn’t just fall into your lap.”<sup>62</sup>

I was quiet for a moment as I considered the struggles faced by the women whom I had researched, the difficult paths they must have taken, the way that almost all of them had faded from history despite their achievements. I thought about the women I have worked with in the industry, many of whom are my leaders, mentors, and heroes. I looked out at the snow, already melting, and realized that with the rising profile of women like the members of Pink Boots and Deb Carey, they would have the chance to tell their own stories, however they’d like to tell them. I can’t wait to hear them. ❧

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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