

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

For more than two centuries following the arrival of Nicolet in Wisconsin in 1634, the fur trade was the dominant economic pursuit of Europeans in the New World. Spurred by the region's bountiful supply of fur-bearing animals, especially beaver, and a demand for furs among the growing fashion-conscious classes in Europe, traders and merchants from France, Spain, Great Britain, Canada, and the United States were lured to the Northwest in the search of furs and profits.

The fur trade depended on native Indian tribes, as skilled hunters and trappers, to provide the furs. Bartering for the furs, the trader supplied the Indians with European-made goods that offered more efficient ways of doing things they always had done. Such articles included fire steels, metal cooking implements, steel traps, firearms, blankets, clothing, and a variety of decorative items including vermillion, silver ornaments, glass beads, and alcohol. Trade goods were brought west to the Wisconsin region via Green Bay and the Fox-Wisconsin waterway to Prairie du Chien, or by way of Sault St. Marie to La Pointe. Traders were dispatched from these centers to the interior to live among and barter with the Indians. Much of a trader's success depended on his learning and adapting to the Indian's way of life. Many traders in fact found it advantageous to marry an Indian woman in order to enhance his social standing and trading position among the tribe.

For Indian society as a whole it was a time of transition, conflict, and rapid adjustment. By the 1660s most of these changes were already under way in the Wisconsin region. The devastating large-scale warfare of the Iroquois against the Huron for control of the fur trade in the East had forced many Indian tribes such as the Huron, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Sauk, Mascouten, Miami, and Chippewa to leave their original homelands and to seek refuge in Wisconsin. This dramatic shift in Indian populations drastically changed the fabric of Indian society as intertribal contacts, marriages, and warfare increased. Although the impact of the fur trade on Indian culture varied from tribe to tribe, it was mainly detrimental. Whole Indian communities were decimated by European diseases. Moreover, alcohol, which Europeans introduced into Indian culture was embraced with "disastrous enthusiasm." Traditional crafts and skills were forgotten when replaced by European tools and weapons, thus increasing Native Americans' dependency on the fur trade. Traditional subsistence activities such as gardening, wild rice gathering, hunting, and maple sugaring, however, continued through the late nineteenth century.

For purposes of study, the fur trade in Wisconsin has been divided into three periods: 1) French Fur Control, 1634-1763, 2) British Fur Control, 1763-1815, and 3) American Fur Control 1815-1850. Although scholarly research of the fur trade has been conducted in the past by historians and archaeologists, additional studies of the Indian trade as it was practiced during each period in Wisconsin is greatly needed. On-going archaeological research concerning the French occupation on Rock Island and the British presence in northwestern Wisconsin are two significant attempts to do just that.

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PROTECTION

Threats to Resources

Urban and suburban development in communities such as Green Bay, La Pointe, Prairie du Chien, and Milwaukee has destroyed the integrity of numerous sites associated with the fur trade. Shoreline erosion along the Great Lakes is continuing to threaten archeological evidence associated with historic fur trade sites in places such as Madeline Island. Many fur trade sites have been and continue to be vandalized by amateur archeologists and collectors. Other potential threats include flooding and erosion along rivers and streams, intensive agriculture, and recreational development.

Survey Priorities

Locate and record sites associated with French, British, and American fur trading activity throughout the state. This would be accomplished through intensive literature searches (including the archives of Canada, England, and France) and on-ground surveys.

Registration Priorities

Since so little evidence of the various phases of fur trading activity remains in the state today any sites or structures discovered during surveys should be listed in the National Register if they retain enough of their original integrity.

FRENCH FUR CONTROL

Temporal Boundaries: 1634-1763

Spatial Boundaries: Entire state, with special emphasis on a crescent-shaped area extending from Chequamegon Bay and the Brule-St. Croix rivers to the upper Mississippi and Wisconsin-Fox waterways and Green Bay

Related Study Units: British Fur Control, American Fur Control, all Historic Indian study units.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The French period in Wisconsin was important as a time of great trade, exploration, and discovery. Although France had established a foothold in eastern Canada as early as 1534, the first French traders probably did not reach the western Great Lakes region until after 1610 when young Frenchmen were sent westward to live among the Indians in order to learn their ways and language and to help carry on the trade in furs (Smith 1973:6). The first trader to reach Wisconsin may have been Etienne Brule during a voyage along the south shore of Lake Superior in 1621-1623 (Smith 1973:7). Brule had been sent west to work among the Huron residing north of the Great Lakes, who later clubbed him to death in 1633.

Following Brule's tragic death, Jean Nicolet was sent to the west in 1634 in order to find a trade route to the Orient and to make peace with the "People of the Sea". Landing at Red Banks on the southeastern shore of Green Bay, Nicolet found not only Winnebago and Menomini living in Wisconsin, but also Potawatomi, Sauk, Fox, Mascouten, Miami, Kickapoo, Huron, and Ottawa - all refugees from the Iroquois (Clark 1955:6).

The next French traders in Wisconsin were probably Medard des Groseilliers and his younger brother-in-law, Pierre-Esprit Radisson, who landed along the south shore of Lake Superior in 1659. At Chequamegon Bay near present-day Ashland the two French traders erected a cabin and penetrated some distance into northern Wisconsin, possibly as far as modern La Court Oreilles, to trade with the Ottawa who were residing there (Ross 1960:20, Smith 1973:17). After wintering in Wisconsin, during which they barely escaped starvation, Groseilliers and Radisson returned to Quebec with "a great store of castors' skins" (Adams 1961:101). This highly profitable trip, however, resulted in the confiscation of their trading licenses and furs because of their unauthorized departure from the St. Lawrence 11 months before (Smith 1973:20).

Despite their harsh treatment, the reports of Radisson and Groseilliers heightened French interest in the North American fur trade, particularly among Jesuit missionaries who, since 1625, had become interested in saving the souls of Indians in the New World. The first Jesuit priest to reach Wisconsin was Father Rene Menard, who arrived at Chequamegon Bay in 1661 and lived for a while among the Ottawa (Smith 1973:26). While enroute to minister to some half-starved Huron in the interior near the headwaters of the Black River, Father Menard mysteriously disappeared while portaging around a rapids and was never seen alive by his countrymen (Schmirler 1961-1962:101). Following the ill-fated journey of Father Menard, Jesuit missionary work in Wisconsin intensified. In 1665 Father Claude Allouez arrived at Chequamegon Bay and built La Pointe du St. Esprit, the first Christian mission in Wisconsin (Smith 1973:27). Following the arrival of Father Jacques Marquette at Chequamegon, Father Allouez transferred his activities to the Winnebago, Potawatomi, Menomimi, Mascouten, and Miami and

established various missions along the Menominee, Oconto, lower and upper Fox, and Wolf rivers and on the shores of Green Bay. During the winter of 1671-1672 Father Allouez built the first permanent mission house in Wisconsin on the Fox River at De Pere, the mission of St. Francis Xavier which was occupied from 1671-1687 (Smith 1973:28). Eventually, Father Allouez worked his way southward into the Illinois country, leaving Wisconsin around 1677.

In 1667 a temporary peace was made between the French and the Iroquois and in 1671 the Sioux drove the Ottawa and Huron from their position as middlemen in the upper Mississippi Valley trade (Gilman 1974:5). The decades that followed saw French pushed rapidly westward in their travels and quest for furs in the decades that followed. In 1673 Father Marquette was sent to accompany the trader Louis Jolliet on a mission to find the "Messipi," - the great river about which rumors had circulated in New France since the time of Nicolet. Guided by friendly Indians and five French Canadian boatmen, Marquette and Jolliet reached the Mississippi near Prairie du Chien via the Fox-Wisconsin waterway. In 1680 the French trader Du Luth (whose name was later transposed to Duluth) reached it by way of the Brule-St. Croix rivers. In 1763 he occupied a fort at the foot of St. Croix Lake. For the next two centuries, thereafter, these two routes became the principal water highways for traders, explorers, and missionaries in Wisconsin.

During the late seventeenth century French traders, voyageurs, coureurs du bois, illegal traders under proscription, and the ever-present "blackrobes" penetrated deeper into the frontier, broadening the domain of France in North America (Nesbit 1973:24). In 1683 Du Luth presumably built a supply post at the Brule-St. Croix portage (Nute 1930:385). Du Luth also penetrated the western areas around Lake Superior and initiated French contact with the Dakota (Kellogg 1925:211). Du Luth's fur trade interests in the region, however, later collided with those of La Salle, another French trader who was attempting to establish a monopoly of the fur trade south of the Great Lakes (Smith 1973:33). To accomplish this, La Salle built a series of posts in the Illinois country and, in 1679, built the "Griffon", the first sailing vessel on the Great Lakes. On its return trip to Niagara from an island at the entrance of Green Bay (possibly Rock Island), the "Griffon", loaded with furs and skins so vital to La Salle's fortunes, sank off the tip of the Door Peninsula (Quimby 1966:45-62; Mason 1974:150). The exact location of the shipwreck has never been determined, however. La Salle also may have built a trading post at the mouth of the Wisconsin River near Prairie du Chien (Draper 1888:322).

In 1685 Nicolas Perrot arrived in the upper Mississippi Valley and constructed a number of trading posts on the Wisconsin side of the river. The first of these, Fort St. Nicolas, was built at the mouth of the Wisconsin River near Prairie du Chien (Draper 1888:323). Perrot was apparently urged to build a post here because the Miami disliked making the trip to Green Bay where they were compelled to sell their furs cheaply through the Potawatomi (Thwaites 1902:146-151). Perrot also built a wintering post near Trempealeau ("Fort Perrot") and a more permanent fort, Fort St. Antoine, on the east shore of Lake Pepin (Nute 1930:383-384). Perrot also took an active interest in exploring the lead mines of southwestern Wisconsin and around present-day Galena and Dubuque (Kellogg 1925:359-361).

Du Luth, La Salle, Perrot, and the countless voyageurs, couriers du bois, and missionaries who followed them into the frontier played an important role in extending French control over new fur lands, spreading Christianity, and broadening French influence over the Indians. Alarmed by the competition of English traders who offered cheaper and better quality goods, however, the French government found it necessary to repeat their claims with sufficient pomp and ceremony to impress the Indians and to assure their allegiance. As a result, public displays proclaiming the strength of the French monarch and the Church were staged by traders throughout the West: by St. Lusson at Sault Ste. Marie in 1671, Du Luth in Sioux country in 1679, La Salle at the mouth of the Mississippi in 1682, and, in Wisconsin, by Perrot at Fort St. Antoine on Lake Pepin in 1689 (Smith

1973:29).

With the outbreak of King William's war between France and England in 1689, the French abandoned the trading posts in the western Great Lakes and upper Mississippi region in order to consolidate their interests in the St. Lawrence valley (Kellogg 1925:248). In 1693 Pierre Le Sueur returned to the West to reopen the trade routes to the Mississippi and to bring the Sioux within the circle of French alliance (Kellogg 1925:252). In pursuance of this policy, Le Sueur built trading posts on the south shore of Madeline Island (Ross 1960) and along the upper Mississippi River (Wedel 1974, Birk and Poseley 1978). Like Perrot, Le Sueur was a trusted friend among the Indians and was actively engaged in fur trade activities, mineral exploration, and the administration of Indian affairs.

Between 1696 and 1701 the French again abandoned their posts west of the Great Lakes as English traders and their Iroquois Indian allies continued their warfare for control of the fur trade in the East. With peace restored in 1701, the French reoccupied their posts around Chequamegon Bay and along the upper Mississippi River. Trouble, and finally outright war with the Fox, began soon after the French withdrew from the West in 1696. Assuming a more militant character, the Fox closed the Wisconsin-Fox waterway to French traders in an attempt to retain their middlemen position in the trade with the Sioux to the west. Venturing far into the Minnesota country in 1702, the Fox attacked one of Le Sueur's posts (Wedel 1974:163). During the ensuing Fox wars lasting from 1701 and 1738, the French led several military expeditions against the Fox, operating from Fort La Baye at Green Bay from 1717 to 1760. Major engagements between the French and the Fox were fought at Big Lake Butte des Morts in 1716 and on the south shore of Little Lake Butte des Morts in 1730 near present-day Neenah. The Fox village site attacked by Louvigny in 1716 has been explored through archeological excavations (Wittry 1963). The Fox were a continual threat until the French finally drove the Fox permanently southward (see Kellogg 1925:268-340 for more details on the Fox wars).

Meanwhile, intermittent warfare between the French and English for control of the fur trade persisted in the east until the close of the French and Indian War, which brought to an end French control in the Northwest. During this war many of Wisconsin's Indians fought for the French under the command of Charles de Langlade in battles far to the east of their homeland. With the fall of Quebec in 1759 and the capitulation of Montreal the following year, the 126 year reign of French dominion in the Northwest ended and "Ouisconsin" came under the control of the English crown.

In spite of the high level of French activity in Wisconsin during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, French influence was not lasting. Many of the French traders left the region altogether after the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763 and headed down the Mississippi River for St. Louis or New Orleans. While many Frenchmen remained, most eventually merged with English and, in later years, American traders at La Baye, La Pointe, and Prairie du Chien.

It is difficult today to trace clearly the succession of French forts, posts, and missions built in Wisconsin and nearly impossible to pinpoint their locations with any certainty. As a result, the locations of most French fur trade related sites mentioned in the historic sources in Wisconsin are only approximate (Neville 1906; Kellogg 1934; Corcoran 1946; Ross 1960; Freeman and Oerichbauer 1978; Oerichbauer 1976, 1981) and only a few have been verified and explored through archeological investigations (Squier 1916; Wittry 1963; Mason 1986; Penman 1981).

Despite the paucity of documentation for the French period in Wisconsin, the small number of available maps, and the vagueness of explorers' and traders' accounts, evidence of the French presence can still be found on the cultural and natural landscape. Evidence of French construction techniques has been found in several old buildings at Prairie du

Chien and Green Bay, as well as at the archeological site of a North West and XY wintering post on the Yellow River in northwestern Wisconsin (for further details on French construction techniques see the Architecture section, "Log Construction"). French heritage is also reflected in the surviving system of old French farm lots along the lower Fox River at Green Bay and on St. Feriote Island and along the Mississippi River terrace at Prairie du Chien. And, of course, there remains the many French place names of rivers, lakes, cities, counties, and physiographical features in the state (Kellogg 1925:441). Even the name of the state itself, taken from "Ouisconsin", is derived from the French version of various Indian names for the major river which flows through it enroute to the Mississippi (Vogel 1965:181-186).

IDENTIFICATION

Resource Types. Sites of forts, trading posts and fur traders' cabins, portage routes, mission sites, landing sites, battle sites (French-Fox wars), rendezvous sites, Indian villages/cemeteries

Locational Patterns of Resource Types. Areas along major water transportation routes including the Great Lakes, and rivers, streams, and associated lakes. Special emphasis on Chequamecon Bay, Superior, Brule-St. Croix Rivers, the upper Mississippi, the Wisconsin-Fox waterways, and Green Bay.

Previous Surveys. Historical study of the Green Bay area, Neville 1906; Archaeological excavations at the supposed site of Perrot's wintering post near Trempealeau, Trempealeau County, Squier 1916; Historical study of La Pointe and Chequamegon Bay area, Ross 1960; Archaeological excavations at an early historic Fox village site (Bell Site, Wn9) on the south shore on Big Lake Butte des Morts, Wittry 1963; Archaeological excavations at Rock Island, Door County, Mason 1986; Archaeological test excavations at the supposed site of Perrot's Fort St. Antoine (PE22) near Stockholm, Pepin County, Hurley 1971; Historical overview of the French at Rock Island and the Door Peninsula, Mason 1974; Archaeological survey of Madeline Island and excavations at the Marina site (AS24), Overstreet 1974, Salzer and Overstreet 1974, Birmingham and Salzer 1984; Historical study of Prairie du Chien, Oerichbauer 1976; Archaeological survey for Fort Beaharnois, Goodhue County, Minnesota, Birk and Poseley 1978; Literature search and field reconnaissance to locate fur trade related sites in northwestern Wisconsin, Freeman and Oerichbauer 1978, Oerichbauer 1981; Great River Road archaeological test excavations at the supposed site of Perrot's Fort St. Antoine (PE22) near Stockholm, Pepin County, Penman 1981.

Survey and Research Needs. Research focused on collecting and synthesizing baseline data pertaining to the French fur trade in Wisconsin is needed.

EVALUATION

National Register listings and determinations of eligibility

Marina Site (47-As-24) Town of La Pointe, Ashland County (NRHP 1978).

Fox-Wisconsin Portage Site (1673), Wauona Trail, Portage, Columbia County (NRHP 1973).

Tank Cottage (1776), Heritage Hill State Park, Town of Allouez, Brown County (NRHP 1970).

Brule-St. Croix Portage (1680), Town of Solon Springs, Douglas County (NRHP 1970).

Rock Island Historic District, Town of Washington, Door County (NRHP 1972).

Context Considerations. Most remaining fur trade resources from this period will be in the form of archeological sites. All such sites should be considered significant if the archeological deposits are not substantially disturbed.

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BRITISH FUR CONTROL

Temporal Boundaries: 1763-1815

Spatial Boundaries: Entire state, with special emphasis on Green Bay, La Pointe, Prairie du Chien, Superior, Milwaukee, the Wisconsin-Fox and upper Mississippi River corridors, and the northern lakes region

Related Study Units: French Fur Control, American Fur Control, all Historic Indian study units.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

With the fall of French Canada in 1763 at the close of the French and Indian War, control of the fur trade passed into the hands of the British. Hundreds of French traders scattered through the Great Lakes and upper Mississippi region, chose to remain in the area, however, and went to work for English and Scottish merchants.

During the British control of the fur trade, goods and pelts flowed through three main centers established at Detroit, Grand Portage, and Mackinac (Gilman 1974:11). Each spring canoes piled high with trade goods left Montreal for these frontier outposts and returned later in the year with the season's supply of furs. During the period of British control of the fur trade in Wisconsin, supply posts at Green Bay and La Pointe were reoccupied and Prairie du Chien, located at the meeting point of the Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers, became an important rendezvous and distribution center for traders and Indians from the upper Mississippi valley (Oerichbauer 1976). Vivid accounts of the great gatherings held there are found in the journals of Jonathan Carver who travelled through the upper Mississippi region in 1766 (Parker 1976) and by Peter Pond who visited Prairie du Chien nearly ten years later (Gates 1965).

British fur trade policies in North America were quite different from the previous French patterns. Indians were no longer expected to bring their furs to Mackinac and other centralized frontier outposts to trade, and gift giving to the Indians, considered to be no more than bribes by British administrators, was reduced (Smith 1973:58). Shortly after these new policies been established the Indian tribes west and south of the Great Lakes staged a bloody and widespread uprising against the new regime (Smith 1973:57). The Pontiac rebellion (1763-1766) tried, as the Fox Wars had a generation earlier, to unite the Algonkian tribes and restore to Indians control of their own destiny (Gilman 1974:8). So sudden was the start of the Indian uprising that within a month five forts, including Mackinac, were captured (Smith 1973:58). Although the Wisconsin area had no direct involvement in the uprising, many Indians from the region participated in the raids on English settlements to the east.

British trade in the Northwest was also plagued by the presence of French and Spanish traders on the western frontier and by the refusal of many Indians from the upper Mississippi region to bring their furs across the Wisconsin-Fox route to Mackinac (Kellogg 1935:39). Many of Wisconsin's Indians such as the Sauk, Fox, and Potawatomi preferred instead to carry their furs down river to St. Louis, which had been established in 1764 by the French, who objected to living under British control (Gilman 1974:8). By 1767 Spanish traders had come up the Mississippi as far as Prairie du Chien in order to intercept illegal furs being taken from Spanish territory located west of the river and to prevent them from reaching British traders at Mackinac (Gilman 1974:9).

The force of Indian resistance and the refusal of Indians west of the Great Lakes to come

to Mackinac persuaded the English to re-examine their fur trade policy. The immediate result was the Proclamation of 1763, which closed all of the Indian country north of the Ohio River between the Alleghenies and the Mississippi to white settlement, except for military garrisons which were to be financed by levies on the colonists (Smith 1973:60). This new policy was highly unpopular in the American colonies along the Atlantic seaboard and failed to solve the problems of governing the West. Attempts to restore unregulated competition in the area, followed by a return to restricted trade policies, however, did little to solve the English problems (Smith 1973:60).

While the British government was trying to devise a policy that would satisfy Indians, traders, frontiersmen, and eastern merchants, the American colonies declared their independence from Great Britain. The war for American independence (1775-1783) had little impact on the Indian trade in Wisconsin. Most of Wisconsin's Indians remained neutral through the war, although some tribes such as the Sioux and Menomimi openly declared their loyalty to the English crown and allegedly fought against Colonel Clark of Virginia in Indiana and Illinois (Kellog 1935:153-155, Thwaites 1908:447). When Spain declared war on England in 1779, a military expedition consisting of British regulars, traders, voyageurs, and Indians from Mackinac and Green Bay was organized at Prairie du Chien for an attack upon the French and Americans at St. Louis (Smith 1973:71). Before journeying down river, traders in the war party constructed a small palisaded "fort" at the mouth of the Wisconsin River in order to store the furs that they were carrying (Thwaites 1908:411). The attack failed, however, and the traders returned to rescue their furs before the fort was burned to the ground to prevent it from falling into American hands (Thwaites 1908:418). The existence of this fort, like so many of the others that were supposedly built on the plain near Prairie du Chien, has never been confirmed (Oerichbauer 1976:71).

In negotiating the Treaty of Paris in 1783, Britain conceded territory north of the Ohio River, south of the Great Lakes, and east of the Mississippi River, abandoning her Indian allies in these areas and also relinquishing most of Britain's major fur trading posts in North America. Despite the British crown's generosity regarding the American colonists, the British traders operating in the ceded territories were not disposed to give up their livelihoods. The years from 1783 to 1812 were marked by increasingly difficult relations between the American settlers, who felt that it was their right to continually push settlement westward, and the British, who had made treaties with the colonists and alliances with the Indians which they could not keep, or perhaps had no intention of keeping in the first place. One consequence of these growing tensions for the territory that was to become Wisconsin was the deteriorating conditions for the Indians, who the American settlers were inclined to shoot on sight and the British viewed as pawns to be bartered in negotiations.

After the Revolutionary War and up to the early stages of the War of 1812, the Northwest Territory, partially because of ill-defined treaty boundaries, but largely because of the fur trade, remained British in sentiment, trade, and actual occupation (Oerichbauer 1976:77). Most of the region was dominated by the Northwest Fur Company which was formed at Montreal in 1783. Many of the traders in Wisconsin during this time were connected in some way with this great fur trade monopoly. Individuals such as Michel Cadotte (La Pointe), Jean Baptiste Perrault (Superior), Robert Dickson (Prairie du Chien), and Jacques Vieau (Milwaukee and other posts along Lake Michigan) were sent to the region by the Northwest Company to work among the Indians and to keep them loyal to British commercial interests. Several traders, however, preferred to remain independent in their dealings with the Indians. Notable examples include Daniel Whitney at Green Bay, the Grignon and Porlier families at Butte des Morts, and Joseph Rolette at Prairie du Chien.

By the late 1780s the Northwest Company controlled most of the fur trade south of the Great Lakes and in the country beyond Lake Superior (Stevens 1918:287). In 1798,

however, disgruntled traders left the company and formed a rival organization which became known as the XY Company. In 1806, after years of intense rivalry and ruthless competition in the Northwest, the companies merged. Finally, in 1821, the Northwest Company merged with its older fur trading rival, the Hudson's Bay Company.

The Northwest Company was particularly active in the Wisconsin and Minnesota country (Nute 1930). In Wisconsin, trading posts were built at La Pointe, along Lake Michigan, and across the northern lakes region (Ross 1960, Freeman and Oerichbauer 1978; Oerichbauer 1981a). Recent archeological excavations at the site of a combined Northwest Company and XY Company wintering post (c. 1802-1804) on the Yellow River in Burnett County have provided exciting new information on the conduct of the British fur trade in Wisconsin (Oerichbauer 1981b, 1982a, 1983b).

Growing hostilities between the British and Americans over "freedom of the seas" and the regulation of the fur trade on the western frontier finally erupted into war in 1812. Early in the war the British captured Mackinac and sent an agent to Prairie du Chien to organize the western tribes in the British cause. Fearing British control of the upper Mississippi valley, the Americans built Fort Shelby in 1813 on St. Feriole Island at Prairie du Chien. A month later the British successfully attacked the fort with a force of about 150 regulars and 400 Indians (Mahan 1961:467). Fort Shelby, renamed McKay, remained in British hands until the close of the war in 1815, when it was burned by the British prior to their withdrawal from the Northwest.

IDENTIFICATION

Resource Types. Sites of military forts, trading posts, and fur traders' cabins, rendezvous sites, portage routes, battle sites (British-American), Indian villages/cemeteries.

Locational Patterns of Resource Types. Locations along the major water transportation routes. This includes the shores of the Great Lakes and major streams, rivers, and associated lakes in the interior with special emphasis on Green Bay, La Pointe, Prairie du Chien, Superior, Milwaukee, the Wisconsin-Fox and Upper Mississippi corridors, and the northern lakes region.

Previous Surveys. Archeological excavations at the Cadotte trading post, Madeline Island, Cooper 1930s; Historical study of La Pointe and Chequamegon Bay area, Ross 1960; Archeological survey of Madeline Island and excavations at the Marina Site, Overstreet 1974, Birmingham and Salzer 1984; Archeological excavations at Crabapple Point (JE93), Spector 1975; Historical study of Prairie du Chien, Oerichbauer 1976; Records and literature search of archaeological sites in Wisconsin counties located within the Lake Michigan coastal zone, Fay 1978; Literature search and field reconnaissance to locate fur trade related sites in northwestern Wisconsin, Freeman and Oerichbauer 1978, Oerichbauer 1981a; Archeological excavations at the site of a North West and X. Y. Company wintering post on the Yellow River, Burnett County, Oerichbauer 1981b, 1982a, 1982b.

Survey and Research Needs. Additional research focused on collecting and synthesizing baseline data pertaining the British fur trade in Wisconsin is needed, using the combined Northwest Company and XY Company wintering post site in Burnett County as a comparative model.

EVALUATION

National Register Listings and Determinations of Eligibility

Astor Historic District (site of John Lawe's trading post c. 1792), Green Bay, Brown County (NRHP 1980).

Tank Cottage (1776), Heritage Hill State Park, Brown County (NRHP 1970).

Northwest and XY Company Trading Post (c. 1802-1804), Town of Union, Burnett County (NRHP 1974).

Strange Powers House (c. 1800-1820), 338 N. Main St.) Prairie du Chien, Crawford County (NRHP 1979).

Context Considerations. Most remaining fur trade sites from this period will be archeological in form. All such sites should be considered significant if the archeological deposits are not substantially disturbed.

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AMERICAN FUR CONTROL

Temporal Boundaries: 1815-1850

Spatial Boundaries: Entire state, with special emphasis on Prairie du Chien and La Pointe

Related Study Units: French Fur Control, British Fur Control, Lead and Zinc Mining, Wheat Cultivation, and Early Speciality Crop Cultivation, and all Historic Indian study units.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

With the end of the War of 1812 and British dominion in the Northwest, Americans moved quickly to consolidate control of the fur trade on their side of the international boundary. Since the treaty of Ghent contained no stipulation with regard to the Indian trade, in 1816 Congress enacted a law that prevented foreigners from trading with Indians in United States territory. It also authorized the establishment of government-operated factories: (public trading houses which sold goods to Indians), in conjunction with military forts at Green Bay and Prairie du Chien in an attempt to gain better control of the trade (Stevens 1918:291, Peake 1954).

Many of the Canadian traders left the Northwest immediately after the war. A few, like Robert Dickson, headed for the Earl of Selkirk's new colony in the Red River Valley, while others went to work in the rich fur-bearing Athabaskan country of Canada (Tohill 1927:93). Several traders who had made their homes in the area chose to stay, eventually accepting United States citizenship and seeking employment with the American Fur Company which had been organized by John Jacob Astor in 1808. Some of those who stayed, like Joseph Rolette of Prairie du Chien, remained independent but agreed to buy and sell only through American Fur (Gilman 1974:16).

Following the war of 1812, the American Fur Company moved into the Great Lakes and upper Mississippi region to monopolize the fur trade and to prevent any penetration of the North West and Hudson's Bay companies back into the area. To accomplish this, a series of American Fur Company trading posts were established along the international boundary and throughout the Minnesota and Wisconsin country (Nute 1930). Many of the supply posts were built at or near Indian villages where previous British and Canadian traders had erected their posts. In 1822, the American Fur Company was able to strengthen its control of the trade even more so when it succeeded in getting Congress to terminate the entire government factory system (Peake 1954:295).

Although goods and furs continued to pass through Mackinac enroute to New York as late as 1842, much of the fur trade traffic was directed down the Mississippi River to St. Louis which, in 1803, had been acquired from France as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Following the voyage of the Virginia in 1823, supplies and peltry moved up and down the river to Prairie du Chien and the Minnesota country by steamboat (Petersen 1932:221-243).

During the final episode of fur trade activity in Wisconsin, the importance of Prairie du Chien and La Pointe as major trading centers increased. In 1826, Hercules L. Dousman, an agent of John Jacob Astor, arrived at Prairie du Chien and soon established a thriving fur trade business there for the American Fur Company. Several buildings dating from this era, including Dousman's mansion "Villa Louis" (1843, remodelled 1872), a stone warehouse or store (1835), and the Michael Brisbois House (c. 1840) remain along the

waterfront on St. Feriole Island at Prairie du Chien.

Fur trading activities became equally intense at La Pointe. In 1834, following Astor's withdrawal from the American Fur Company, a new firm under the same name was organized with Ramsey Crooks as its president. Under Crooks' direction, the company moved its headquarters from Mackinac to La Pointe in order to begin fishing and shipbuilding enterprises on Lake Superior (Nute 1925:483-503). Between 1834 and 1842, numerous warehouses for storing furs and fish, a wharf for sailing vessels, and a cluster of dwellings for clerks and employees were built on the southwest side of Madeline Island (Nute 1925; Ross 1960).

As early as the 1820s, lead mining was developing in the southwestern corner of the state, and some who were unable to secure their livelihood through mining began farming during that period. (See Lead and Zinc Mining study unit). It was only after the Black Hawk War of 1832 that the importance of the fur trade waned and settlement began in earnest. It was not long before traders began to view the wilderness as a developing frontier rather than strictly as a reserve for Indians and fur-bearing animals. As traders began to close out their interests in the diminishing fur trade, many became more and more deeply involved in lumbering, banking, general merchandising, road construction, steamboat lines, railroad development, and land speculation.

Although many traders such as Dousman of Prairie du Chien and Henry Sibley of Minnesota profitted immensely from treaty negotiations with the Indians and from their new business ventures, the demise of the fur trade among Indians in the region was devastating. The few furs that were secured by Indians were simply not enough to offset the price of goods and food that they needed for survival. As a result, many Indians who depended on the trade for their entire livelihood often faced poverty and starvation (Gilman 1974:18). Many of the traders and Indians could not afford to abandon the business, however. As a result, traders continued to advance Indian trappers more and more credit each year in hopes of better hunting seasons. By 1850, however, the fur trade system as it had been conducted for more than two centuries in Wisconsin had come to an end due to Indian land cessions, dwindling supplies of beaver, and the movement of Indians to reservations in Wisconsin and west of the Mississippi River.

IDENTIFICATION

Resource Types. Sites of trading posts, fur traders' cabins, warehouses, wharfs, military forts, Indian agencies and missions, houses of people associated with the fur trade, rendezvous sites, portage routes, Indian villages/cemeteries, government fur factories

Locational Patterns of Resource Types. Entire state along major water transportation routes. This includes the shores of the Great Lakes and major streams, rivers and associated lakes in the interior.

Previous Surveys. Historical study of La Pointe and the Chequamegon Bay area, Ross, 1960; Archaeological salvage excavations at the site of the DuBay trading post, Portage County, Abler 1964; Archaeological excavations at the Overton Meadow sites, Winnebago County, Bedwell 1971; Archaeological and historical site survey of the middle Fox River passageway, Faulkner 1974; Archaeological survey of Madeline Island and excavations at the Marina Site (As24), Overstreet 1974, Birmingham and Salzer 1984; Historical study of Prairie du Chien, Oerichbauer 1976; Literature search of archaeological sites in Wisconsin counties located within the Lake Michigan coastal zone, Fay 1978; Literature search and field reconnaissance to locate fur trade era sites in northwestern Wisconsin, Freeman and Oerichbauer 1978, Oerichbauer 1981; Portage County historic site survey II, Krajnak, *et. al.* 1979.

Survey and Research Needs. Research focused on collecting and synthesizing baseline data pertaining to the American fur trade is needed.

EVALUATION

National Register Listings and Determinations of Eligibility

Marina Site (47-As-24) (Father Baraga mission site, 1835-41), Madeline Island, Town of La Pointe, Ashland County (NRHP 1978)

Astor Historic District, Green Bay, Brown County (NRHP 1980)

*Villa Louis (1872), Villa Louis Road, Prairie du Chien, Crawford County (NRHP 1966)

*American Fur Company Warehouse (1835), Water and Bolvin Streets, Prairie du Chien, Crawford County (NRHP 1966)

*Michael Brisbois House (c. 1840), Water Street, Prairie du Chien, Crawford County (NRHP 1966)

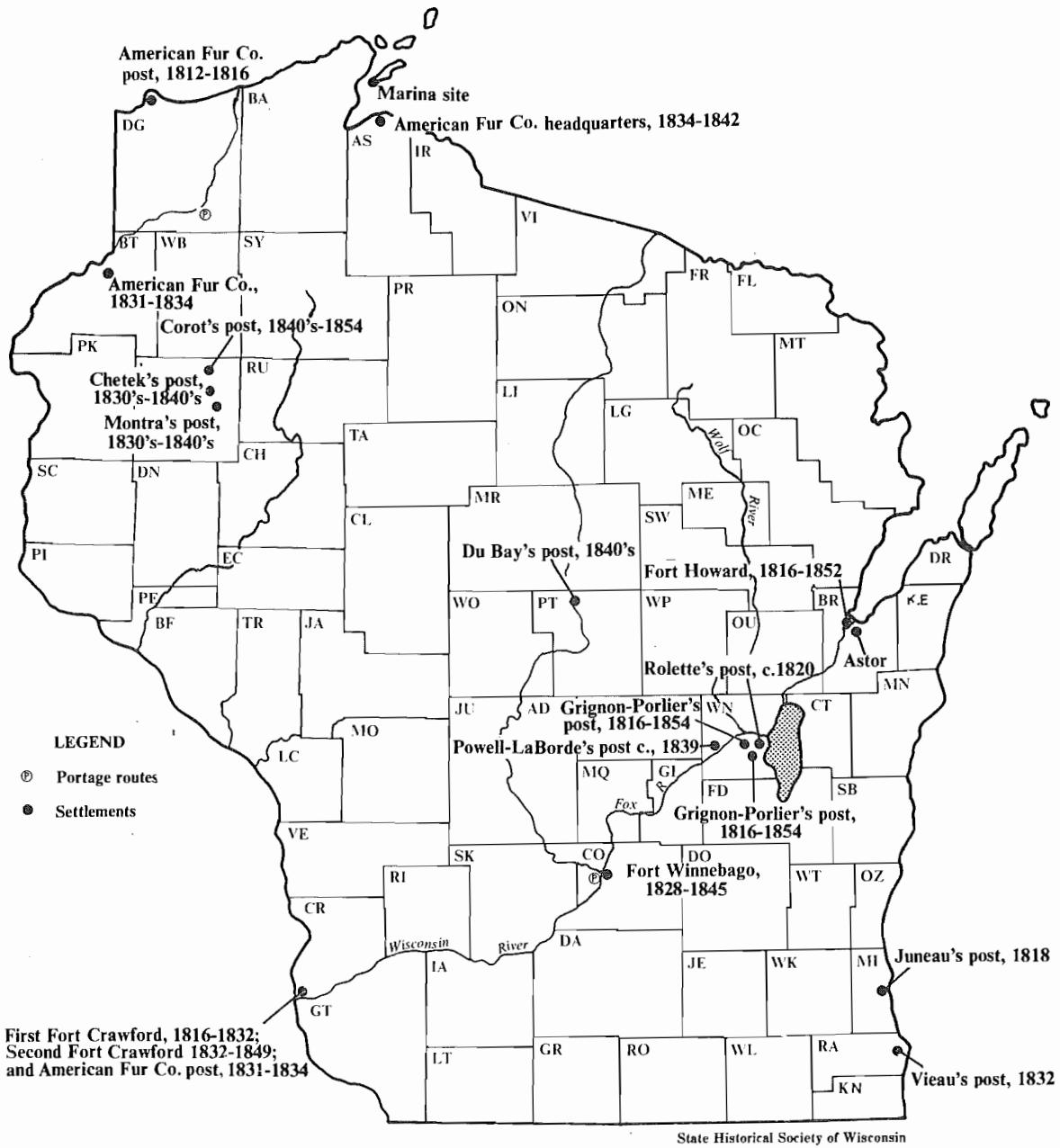
Joseph Rolette House (c. 1842), Water and Fisher Streets, Prairie du Chien, Crawford County (NRHP 1972)

Charles A. Grignon House (c. 1836), Augustine Street, Kaukauna, Outagamie County (NRHP 1972)

Overton Archeological District (includes the site of an early nineteenth century trading post believed to have been set up to compete with the nearby post of Robert Grignon, c. 1830s), Town of Oshkosh, Winnebago County (NRHP 1975)

*indicates a National Historic Landmark

AMERICAN FUR CONTROL



American Era Fur Trade Sites, 1815-1850

Source: Compiled by Fay

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The Archive Division of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin houses a number of documents and manuscript collections relating to American fur trade, 1815-1850. These include:

American Fur Company Papers
Hercules L. Dousman Papers
Louis Grignon Papers
Solomon Juneau Papers
John Lawe Papers
Jacques Porlier Papers
Andrew J. Vieau Papers
Jacques Vieau Papers
Daniel Whitney Papers

*Unpublished manuscripts on file, Archives Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.