Recollections of Antoine Grignon[1]

I was born at old Fort Crawford, Prairie du Chien, Jan. 9, 1828[2]. My father, Amable Grignon, who was of French and Winnebago descent, was born at Portage, Wisconsin;[3] my mother, Archange La Bathe, was born at Prairie du Chien of a French father and Sioux mother, being a cousin of Wabashaw, the Sioux chief whose village was located on the site of Winona, Minnesota.[4] She was a sister of François La Bathe, the noted trader, long a trusted employee of the American Fur Company.[5] Amable Grignon acted as interpreter for the Federal Government on various occasions, and was stationed for a number of

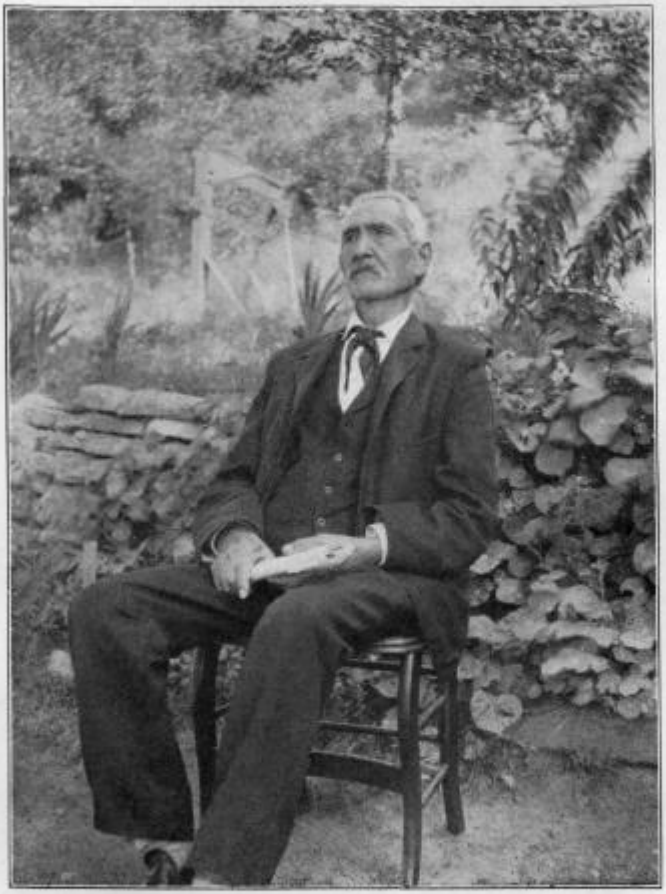
[1] This aged pioneer died at Trempealeau, July 24, 1913. He was one of the few survivors of the fur-trading régime in Wisconsin, and his recollections were secured by his fellow townsman, Dr. Eben D. Pierce. The transcriber writes, "I have written most of this narrative just as Grignon told it to me. In some places I have not used his exact words, but have tried to convey his meaning in language of my own construction." The interview was written in the shape it is here presented in December, 1912, and January, 1913.—Ed.

[2] The record of Antoine's baptism is preserved in the Prairie du Chien *Register*. He was, in fact, born Jan. 9, 1829, and baptized Jan. 17 by Father F. V. Badin. His godfather was François La Bathe, represented in his absence by Denys Cherrier, and his godmother was Virginie Fisher. A copy of the *Register*, the original of which is in Montreal, is in the Wisconsin Historical Library.—Ed.

[3] For a brief sketch of this person, see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xx, p. 167, note 31. Antoine, in an interview in 1909 with Charles E. Brown of the Society's staff, stated that in 1835 or 1836 his father had a trading post on the site of the present Dakota, Minn.—Ed.

[4] For this chief, see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xvii, p. 323, note 1; also *Id*, xx, *passim*.—Ed.

[5] See note on this trader in Wis. Hist. Soc. *Proceedings*, 1906, p. 252.—Ed.



ANTOINE GRIGNON

years at Fort Crawford as interpreter for its commandant, Col. Zachary Taylor.[6]

There were three children in the family, Paul, Archange, and myself, and although our parents had but a limited education, they determined to give their children the best opportunities within their reach. So I was taken to Col. Zachary Taylor, who permitted me to attend the school conducted in the garrison, thus laying the foundation for an education.

Col. Zachary Taylor was a very active man, alert, rough, and quick, but the soldiers thought a great deal of him, and my father admired him above all men. He was kind to those in need and did what he could for the betterment of the inhabitants of Prairie du Chien in my day. I'll never forget his negro servant, whose skin was as black as tar; I first saw him when I was a youngster some seven years old, and was nearly frightened out of my wits, and ran home as fast as my trembling limbs could carry me. My! but I was afraid of that black man, as I called him. He used to take delight in frightening me when he found how afraid I was of him.

I next went for two terms to a private school conducted by a Mr. Cady. [Cadle],[7] then John Haney became my teacher. There were no public schools in that day at Prairie du Chien, and the parents of the pupils in the private schools paid the teacher a certain amount each month for their instruction. I remember, too, my French teacher, a Mr. Gibault, who also taught English; and a lady by the name of Mrs. Crosby who held school in her home.

When I was a little past twelve years of age I went to school to Rev. Joseph Crétin, a Catholic clergyman, who afterwards

---

[6] Col. Zachary Taylor came to Prairie du Chien in 1829 as commandant of Fort Crawford; the same year he determined to remove the fort to higher ground, and began the new fort, finished in 1831. He continued in command until 1836.—Ed.

[7] Rev. Richard Cadle had been in charge from 1827 to 1836 of an Episcopal mission school at Green Bay (see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xiv., *passim*). The latter year he resigned, and was soon after appointed chaplain at Fort Crawford where he remained until 1841. He was probably the teacher to whom the writer refers.—Ed.

became bishop of St. Paul.[4] By the time I was fifteen years of age I had a fair education in the common branches of English[5] and was ready to go out into the world better equipped than most French Canadian boys of my time.

Early Prairie du Chien

Prairie du Chien was a small village at that time; the French lived on the west side of a slough near the river, and the American families lived on the east side of the slough. The French were mostly agriculturists with a number of trappers and traders among them as well as voyageurs. Considerable stock was raised by the farmers in the vicinity of the village, and no one ever thought of building a fence. They just let the stock run at large. Some corn was raised; I don't remember ever seeing dent corn at that time, it was all flint corn.

The French were a very hospitable people enjoying life in a happy, care-free manner. They were fond of dancing and feasting—in fact they were a merry set of people. They would gather at chosen homes to have their festivities and the young folks would dance and play games while the older ones joined in card-playing or story-telling, swapping yarns, or perhaps singing some of the lively songs of their language. Drinking was also indulged in, though not as a usual thing to excess, for the merrymakers were hilarious enough without the aid of the flowing bowl. As a class these people were very accommodating, and would do a kindness to one in need as readily as they would turn out to a feast.

---

[4] Joseph Crétin was born in 1800 in France, came to America as a missionary priest, being stationed in 1839 at Dubuque. There in 1844 he began a school for Winnebago children, which was next year discontinued by the governor of Iowa. Grignon does not say the school he attended was at Prairie du Chien, and it is possible he went to the mission school at Dubuque. Crétin continued at that place until the see of St. Paul (Minn.) was erected (1850), whose first bishop he became, dying there Feb. 22, 1857.—Ed.

[5] Grignon told C. E. Brown in the interview referred to, *ante*, note 3, that he attended for a time the mission school at Yellow River, Iowa, of which Rev. David Lowry had charge. For an account of this school, see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xii, p. 405.—Ed.

Beginnings of Trempealeau

When I was fifteen years old I went to work for the American Fur Company under a sub-agent named Alexis P. Bailly of Wabasha, Minnesota[10]. I was sent out to Turkey River, Iowa. We went by wagon fifty miles southwest of Prairie du Chien, where a store building was erected and trade opened among the Winnebago. A few months later I came back to Prairie du Chien, and went by the steamboat "Otter" up the Mississippi to Trempealeau which was then known as Reed's Landing or Reed's Town. James Reed had married my widowed mother and I visited her at his home, a large log house near the river.[11]

There were but a few families in Reed's Town. John B. Doville[12] and family were living there. He had been conducting a wood yard over on the island opposite Trempealeau for a few years, having been sent in 1838 by François La Bathe to occupy the island and furnish cord-wood for the steamboats passing up and down the river. Joseph Reed, a French Canadian, accompanied him.

The real object in holding the island was to secure the fur-trade, and to keep Wabashaw's band of Sioux from giving their trade to rival companies.

Doville was quite an agriculturist; he cultivated the land formerly broken by Louis Stram at the Swiss mission,[13] and also broke up more on the flat near where the city park is now located. He sowed oats, wheat, flax-seed, potatoes, and beans. He has the honor, I think, of being the first farmer in Trempealeau County. Stram broke the first land, but did not sow any seed except for garden purposes.

---

[10] For a sketch of this trader, whose name was frequently anglicized into Bailey, see *Id*, xx, p. 197, note 55.—Ed.

[11] See an account of the founding of Trempealeau in Wis. Hist. Soc. *Proceedings*, 1906, pp. 246–255.—Ed.

[12] John B. Doville (spoken of as James Douville in *Ibid*, p. 252) was a son-in-law of James Reed, and the first permanent settler of Trempealeau. His companion, Joseph (also called Antoine) Reed, was a French Canadian, not related to James Reed.—Ed.

[13] For an account of this mission, see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, x, pp. 367, 506, 507; *Proceedings*, 1906, pp. 251, 252.

Alexander Chenevert[14] was living upon the site that afterwards became the old Grant place. Farther up the river near Fred Ford's present residence, lived the Bunnells—Willard and Lafayette. Willard lived here until 1848, when he moved across into Minnesota. Lafayette Bunnell had moved to Minnesota a couple of years before his brother Willard.[15] There was another Frenchman here at that time by the name of Michel Goulet who chopped wood for Reed, and worked at odd jobs whenever opportunity offered. He did not remain long, a few years perhaps, and then went farther north.[16]

I worked for Mr. Reed, who was farmer for Wabashaw's band of Sioux at Winona, and as he could get home only occasionally I helped look after his stock, and built some pole fences for him in the fall of 1843, on what afterwards became the Van Engen farm. This was the first fence built in the county. Reed had considerable stock, several head of cattle, a bunch of ponies, and some blooded horses. They grazed on the hills, and out on Trempealeau Prairie and required little attention summer or winter, although we always put up some wild hay for them in case deep snow should make the grazing difficult. Cattle suf-

---

[14] According to the Prairie du Chien *Register*, Alexander Chenever, son of François Chenever and Marie Louise Giard was born at that place Jan. 10, 1827, and baptized Aug. 15 of the same year. He married a daughter of James Reed.—Ed.

[15] Willard B. Bunnell was born in 1814 at Homer, N. Y. He ran away and sailed upon the Great Lakes as pilot until 1832, when he settled at Detroit and there married, in 1837, Matilda Desnoyer. Having entered the fur-trade, he spent the winter of 1841–42 at the site of Escanaba, Mich.; then removed West, arriving in Trempealeau, July, 1842. In 1848 he made arrangements to remove to the Minnesota side of the river, where he occupied in 1849, by permission of the chief, Wabashaw, the site of the village of Homer. There he died in 1861. His brother, Lafayette Houghton, was born in 1824, removed to Detroit in 1832, and accompanied his brother to Wisconsin in 1841–42. He enlisted in the Mexican War, sought for gold in California, and after studying medicine, enlisted as surgeon of the 36th Wisconsin Infantry, and in 1865 served in the same capacity in the 1st Minnesota Battalion. He was the historian of Winona, Minn., where he died in 1903.—Ed.

[16] For an account of Goulet and his tragic death, see L. H. Bunnell, *Winona and its Environs* (Winona, Minn., 1897), p. 210.—Ed.

fered more during the deep snow than the horses, who could more easily paw the snow away.

In 1844 a Frenchman, Assalin, came to Reed's Town. He was a carpenter by trade and manufactured for Mr. Reed the first wagon in the county, that is, he made the woodwork, but the iron had to be shipped up from Prairie du Chien. Besides carpenter work and wagon-making Assalin manufactured sleds and French trains.

In speaking of these early French settlers I must not forget to mention Peter Rousseau who helped Reed build his house. Rousseau was an expert with a broad-ax and hewed the logs for Reed's house. This had two stories, was large and roomy, and served well its purpose as an old-fashioned backwoods inn.

Reed kept a bar, and I have often seen travelers sleeping on the floor rolled up in their blankets. Beds were a luxury seldom indulged in at that period. Around the old-fashioned fireplace in Reed's inn was often gathered a strange and varied company —traders, surveyors, trappers, and hunters, and a few blanketed Indians. As they sat smoking by the blazing fire in the evening, you might have heard stories of adventure that would thrill the heart of the dullest listener.

About the same year, 1844, there came to Trempealeau (Reed's Town) a Frenchman by the name of Antoine La Terreur, who was a cabinet-maker. He manufactured chairs, bureaus, chests, and other furniture, and was the first in our county to do work of that kind. Some of the chairs he manufactured are still, or were a few years ago, in the possession of La Vigne in Cedar Valley, Minnesota.

In 1845, Michel Bebault came here and hired out as a wood-chopper over on the island at the steamboat wood yard. He was about the best wood-chopper I ever saw at work. Three years later Leander Bebault and John La Vigne[11] came with their families to settle in Trempealeau. La Vigne bought a little piece of land up in the tamarack, but had not lived there long when he decided to move across the river to Minnesota, where he settled in Cedar Valley.

[11] Jean Baptiste Lavigne was an early settler of Green Bay, see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xx, p. 159, note 22. Probably the Trempealeau settler was his son. Louis Bibeau (Bebault) was an early Illinois trader, possibly the progenitor of these pioneers of Trempealeau.—Ed.

Hardships of Mail-Carriers

Joseph Reed became a mail-carrier, and I think it worth while to relate some of the hardships he underwent in performing his duty. His route lay along the Mississippi from Prairie du Chien to Wabashaw's village at Winona. At the latter place he met the mail-carrier from Fort Snelling, near St. Paul, and after exchanging mails the two returned to their respective starting-points. The trip was made by canoe in summer, and by French train on the river-ice in winter, and by pony with saddle-bags at times when neither canoe nor French train could be used.

One year, in the latter part of winter, early in March I think, Joseph Reed started from Prairie du Chien with the government mail bound for Winona. When he arrived the carrier from St. Paul was not there. It was mild weather, so Reed concluded to proceed on his journey until he met his partner from up river. By the time he reached Holmes's Landing,[18] the weather had grown considerably warmer, and the ice showed signs of breaking up. Still he pushed on, and urging his pony over the ice, sped away towards the north. On nearing Minneiska[19] he heard the ice begin to give way—groan, crack, and move; looking about he saw that an island in the river offered his only place of escape from drowning, as the ice was fast breaking up. He made his way thither, and arriving in safety started to explore his new quarters. He had gone but a short distance when he ran across the St. Paul mail-carrier who had likewise made the island in safety. By this time the ice in the river was moving fast, and before another day had nearly cleared. So there they were with little provision, shut off from the mainland by a wide channel.

After their provisions gave out, they subsisted on rose-apples; they hallooed in vain for help, but it was a sparsely-settled

[18] Holmes's Landing was near the site of the present Fountain City, Buffalo County, and was settled in 1839 by Thomas A. Holmes, previously of Milwaukee and Rock County. It was a well-known port of call on the upper Mississippi.—Ed.

[19] Minneiska is on the Minnesota side, in the southeastern angle of Wabasha County.—Ed.

region at that time and no one heard them. After living on the island nearly two weeks, they were rescued by a party of Sioux who were coming down the river in canoes. The Sioux took the two mail-carriers into their canoes and left them at Holmes's Landing where after two weeks of recuperation they resumed their routes. They were weak, emaciated, and nearly starved to death.

Dodge's Home Guards

I remained in Trempealeau until the year before the Mexican War broke out, when I returned to Prairie du Chien and went to work in a blacksmith shop. When war with Mexico was declared, I enlisted in Governor Dodge's regiment of home guards, serving therein for a year. We did not go out of the State, but were held in readiness in case we should be needed.[20] While in service at Prairie du Chien during the winter of 1846–47, a report came to our commander that the Indians were massacring the whites in the locality where Vernon County now is. We were ordered out and with great difficulty marched up through the deep snow to the supposed scene of murder. When we arrived we found the report was false; the whites had not been disturbed in the least, and no Indians had been seen in that region for a number of weeks. So we returned ingloriously to our quarters at Prairie du Chien.

In the Fur-Trade

After getting my discharge I went to work as clerk for the American Fur Company in their store at Prairie du Chien under B. N. Brisbois.[21] I remained in their employ until June, 1849, when I decided to go north and took the steamboat, "Lady Franklin" for St. Paul.

I soon secured employment at Fort Snelling, helping to get up hay for the cavalry stationed there at the time. I drove

[20] Grignon later drew a pension as a Mexican War veteran.—Ed.

[21] See the "Recollections" of this pioneer in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, ix. pp. 282–302.—Ed.

team and helped stack for a few weeks, when a man from St. Paul came and asked if I would run a boarding-house and bar for him at that place. I complied with his request, and worked for him for two months; at the end of this time I went down the river in one of A. P. Bailly's boats as far as Wabasha, where I went to work for Bailly. He was postmaster, and I carried the mail to and from the boats and also worked in the store as clerk. While there I was appointed deputy sheriff, and served papers on a man who was accused of stealing goods from my employer. I had a search warrant and went and looked over the man's house, but found none of the stolen goods in his possession.

In the winter of 1849 Bailly fixed me up a big load of goods on a French train, with a pony to haul it down the river; I took my departure for the site of Fountain City, where there was a large camp of Sioux. I traded among them until the spring of 1850, when I loaded my goods in a canoe and made my way down the river and through the sloughs to the present site of Marshland, where there was also a Sioux camp. I sold my pony and train to the Indians and bought a canoe of them, and traded with them for a number of weeks. They had been trapping up Trempealeau River, and had a fine lot of beaver, otter, marten, mink, and muskrat pelts. I had for my store a Sioux hut made out of buffalo hides—as comfortable as one could wish. After the spring hunting and trapping was over I returned to Wabasha, but not until I had an opportunity of attending a medicine dance at Minneowah, not far above the present town of Homer, Minnesota.

Winnebago Removal

In the early fifties the Winnebago were removed to Long Prairie, Minnesota. H. M. Rice[28] had charge of their removal

[28] In 1846, a few Winnebago chiefs visiting in Washington were induced to sign a treaty whereby their tribe was to remove to a reservation in Minnesota Territory, north of St. Peter's [Minnesota] River and west of the Mississippi. The members of the tribe as a whole repudiated the treaty; nevertheless, in 1849 attempts were made to induce them to remove thither. They disliked the country, and were

and secured my services to help him. We took the steamboat "Yankee" from St. Paul, and on the way down the river Rice asked me to accompany him on deck from which vantage point he thought we could locate the Indian camps near the river to good advantage. So we sat out on deck looking over the country for Indian camps. Just below Winona I saw smoke, and located it about where Sugar Loaf is at present. We kept a sharp lookout on the smoke, and when the boat rounded a bend we saw it was an Indian camp as I had predicted.

At Minneowah the boat stopped and let me off and I made my way as best I could through thickets along the bluffs to the camp which proved to be one of Winnebago. I told the Indians my mission and they at once began breaking camp and loading their canoes. When they were ready, I accompanied them to Trempealeau where they remained all night. Mr. Rice, S. B. Lowry, and David Olmstead[25] who were working in the interests of the government in removing the Winnebago to the reservation, stayed all night with Mr. Reed, and next morning we all went to La Crosse, taking our band of Indians with us. A few miles above La Crosse we located another Indian camp on French Island and took them also with us to La Crosse. There the Indians were loaded on barges and into boats and taken by steamboat to St. Paul, whence they were carried overland by wagons to Long Prairie, Minnesota, the new home.

---

afraid of the neighboring Sioux, and gradually returned in small bands to their old homes along the Mississippi and Wisconsin. Periodically they were gathered up and removed. It was probably one of these later assemblages which Grignon here describes.

H. M. Rice (1816–94) came from Vermont to Minnesota in 1839, where he engaged in the fur-trade. In 1853–57 he was territorial delegate, and later first senator from the new state (1858–63).—Ed.

[25] Syvanus B. Lowry and David Olmstead were both American Indian traders. The former had a post near the present Brockway, Minn.; was adjutant-general of the territory in 1853; laid out the town of St. Cloud, and died there in 1861. Olmstead (1823–61) came from Vermont to establish a trading post at Long Prairie; was president of the first territorial legislature, and first mayor of St. Paul.—Ed.

Hudson Bay Company

A few months after the removal of the Indians I went to the office of the Hudson Bay Company in St. Paul and told one of the head officers I intended to go to Long Prairie,[24] and asked him if there was a chance to work for his company there. He asked me my name and when I told him, he looked over some papers lying on a desk and returned to where I stood saying, "Yes, Mr. Grignon, you can have employment at once. There will be a place for you in our store at Long Prairie." The Hudson Bay Company had a large store at that place, where they kept a line of Indian supplies of the very best material. Their blankets made of all wool were the best I ever saw. There was no shoddy clothing in their store, and it was a satisfaction to work for them. We bought all kinds of fur from the Indians and trappers, and I remember one year taking in 700 raccoon skins, besides marten, mink, fox, and muskrat pelts.

Early St. Paul

It was a sight to see St. Paul at that time. It was a trading post, and had the largest warehouses of any in the West, because more fur was brought there for shipment. From St. Paul the peltry was shipped by boat to points down river. St. Louis was a big shipping centre for fur companies, and much of the northern fur went there to be reshipped.

The Hudson Bay Company used two-wheel carts to carry their supplies out into the country, and to bring in the bundles or bales of furs. You could see long lines of carts coming and going in the St. Paul streets at any time. These carts had two high solid wheels nearly as tall as a person's head; then there was a large strongly-constructed box between the wheels. These carts were drawn by an ox, a buffalo, or a horse, and it is surprising what a load one animal could draw. These cart-trains

[24] The Long Prairie agency seems to have been near the present town of that name, in Todd County, Minn.—Ed.

were the only ones running in and out of St. Paul when I first visited there—what a change has taken place since then!

Trading at Blue Earth

In 1854, I returned to Trempealeau and remained at home with my family until 1856. In the latter year Nathan Myrick, the pioneer settler of La Crosse,[25] wrote me a letter asking me to take charge as interpreter of his store at Blue Earth, Minnesota. Accordingly I went to Blue Earth and began work for Myrick. The Winnebago had meanwhile been removed from Long Prairie to the Blue Earth agency,[26] and Myrick opened a store at the latter place to secure their trade. Myrick told me to trust all Indians that were honest, but to look out for the rascals, and said, "you have traded with them a long time and know them well and so you know the good ones from the bad ones." I trusted them to the amount of over $3,000, and when they received their government annuity I got all the money they owed me, or very nearly all; I think I lost less than ten dollars in dealing with them.

I remained at Blue Earth until winter and then returned home to Trempealeau. I did not like the Prairie country and I wanted to be with my family, although Myrick offered to fix up a place where my family could stay at Blue Earth.

In 1850, I married Mary Christine de La Ronde, a girl from Portage, Wisconsin, whose father is well known to Wisconsin history, and whose narrative occurs in the *Collections* of the Wisconsin Historical Society.[27] Fourteen children were born

---

[25] Nathan Myrick (1822–1903) founder of La Crosse, came there in 1841 from Westport, N. Y. In 1848 he sold out his landed interests and removed to St. Paul, but continued to trade at several places on the Mississippi. He celebrated his golden wedding, 1893, in St. Paul, and died there ten years later.—Ed.

[26] In 1855, the Winnebago sold their Long Prairie reservation to the government, and were assigned to one in Blue Earth County, Minn., which they retained until removed (1863) to a reservation in Nebraska.—Ed.

[27] For this narrative, see vol. vii, pp. 345–365; his obituary is in *Id.* ix, p. 431. According to an article in the Trempealeau *Herald*, Dec. 17, 1909, Mary Christine de La Ronde Grignon was born at Portage,

to us, six of whom are still living, three boys and three girls.[28] The girls when they were young ladies were noted in this part of the country for their singing; one of them became a school teacher and was very successful in her work.

An Indian Census

In 1881 Major Halleck came from Washington, D. C., to enumerate the Winnebago, and wrote for me to assist him in the work.[29] We went to Eland Junction and enumerated Big Black Hawk's band,[30] and then proceeded to Black River Falls; after completing the work there, we went to Portage and Kilbourn, and wherever we could locate a camp of this tribe. Next spring I went with Major Halleck to Stevens Point to make a payment to the Indians and was with him a year, and whenever a payment was made I helped to locate and get the names of the Indians on the pay-roll. I also helped survey the land above Black River Falls, and assisted in locating the Indians on their homesteads. I have acted as interpreter on various occasions for the Federal Government, and on matters of business have helped the Indians whenever I could. I have lived

---

Christmas day, 1835, married at Long Prairie, Feb. 4, 1851, and died at Trempealeau, Dec. 8, 1909. She was at the time of her death one of the oldest settlers of the town.—Ed.

[28] The newspaper article mentioned in the preceding note gives the names of these children as follows: Ralph J. Grignon, of St. Paul; Alexander Grignon, of Oshkosh; Guy A. Grignon, of Glen Flora, Wis.; Mrs. Mary Jebb, of Paynesville, Minn.; Mrs. Camilla Dederich, of Sandusky, Wis.; Mrs. Nettie Coyle, of Trempealeau.—Ed.

[29] Jan. 18, 1881, Congress passed an "Act for the relief of the Wisconsin Winnebago," one of the provisions of which was that a complete census of the members of that tribe, scattered throughout the northern woods, should be taken, and their share of the Winnebago trust funds allotted to them; also that they should have titles to their lands assigned them in perpetuity. Maj. Walter F. Halleck, a retired army officer, was appointed special agent to take this census. Grignon appears to have been in his employ until 1884, when Halleck retired from the agency. Transcripts of several letters from Halleck to Grignon, showing appreciation of the latter's services, are in the Society's Library.—Ed.

[30] For an account of this chief, see *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xii, p. 430.—Ed.

here most of the time since I quit work for Myrick, and have always made my home in Trempealeau, being away only on business for short intervals. I live in the same house that I bought in 1857.

A Wisconsin Pioneer

I would like to say a word about James Reed. He was a remarkable man for his time, when just such a man was needed. I first saw Reed in Prairie du Chien when I was a boy and he was keeping tavern there. He was not a tall man, medium in height but thick-set, with a deep chest. He had bluish-gray eyes and a sandy or florid complexion. He was a good shot, one of the best I ever saw, and the Indians far and wide were aware of his skill with the rifle. I have seen him kill eleven prairie chicken in twelve shots, in the trees on the island across from Trempealeau. He was several rods away from the game when he shot. I have also seen him shoot the head from a partridge at a good distance.

One day a merchant from Rock Island, Illinois, who had advanced supplies to some lumbermen at Black River Falls, called at Reed's inn and asked the way to the Falls. Reed inquired if the man intended to go alone, and he answered he did. "You will find it difficult to make your way," replied the old hunter, "there are no roads and the trails are unmarked and hard to find unless you are acquainted with the country." The man said he had a compass and thought he could find his way all right. He remained all night, and in the morning Reed and I accompanied him on ponies to Beaver Creek, and saw him safely across the stream before we took our departure for home. One afternoon a week later the man came crawling into Reed's inn almost exhausted. He had lost his way and wandered about in the neighborhood of Decorah's Peak for a number of days subsisting on roots and berries. He was scratched about the face and hands, his clothing was in shreds, and when he reached Trempealeau Prairie, he was so exhausted that he had to crawl for three or four miles on his hands and knees. He remained at Reed's cabin about two weeks and then went home without attempting to visit the lumbermen at Black River Falls.

Reed could speak several Indian dialects and was as well acquainted with Indian character as any man I ever knew. He was of a kind disposition and generally used mild measures in his dealings with the Indians; but when diplomacy failed, he was a different man and his temper once aroused, he feared nothing, and could bring his rifle into play as handily as any backwoodsman I ever saw. He was noted for his fearlessness as well as for his expert marksmanship.

Fur-trading Customs

In looking back over the departed years, I can see Prairie du Chien as it was when I played along its streets as a boy. The strange, wild life of the hunters, traders, and trappers thrilled me, and I was often on hand to see the fleets of canoes from the northland with their throng of painted Indians or, to see the voyageurs arrive with their bateaux of furs. Indians came from far and near to trade at Prairie du Chien, which was in reality a big post with stores and warehouses belonging principally to the American Fur Company. From the north, the region along Minnesota and Chippewa Rivers, and the upper Mississippi, came the Sioux, Winnebago, Chippewa, and Menominee. Down the Wisconsin came bands of Indians belonging to different tribes. The Iowa, Sauk, and Foxes came from the river below Prairie du Chien. The Indians traveled mostly by river in canoes, but a few came on ponies, afoot, and horseback from the interior.

When the Indians came down or up the river, they were painted in their most gaudy colors, the bucks using red, yellow, and green to decorate their faces, while the squaws used vermilion, and painted a round spot of this color on each cheek and a streak down the middle of their hair where it was parted. The canoes used in these journeys were both the dugout and the birch bark, and a fleet usually consisted of a dozen or fifteen boats, but I have seen as many as forty in one flotilla. The Indians brought with them furs, wild game, and pemmican made out of clean, fat venison pounded to a pulp, or of buffalo meat treated in the same manner. They also brought venison and buffalo meat that had been jerked, scorched, and smoked. They

likewise brought baskets, mats, wild honey, maple sugar, berries in season, and dried lotus-root, which when cooked tasted like a potato. The Indians also made brooms out of birch, hickory, or ash wood. With these commodities they bought or secured in barter flour, pork, coffee, tobacco, blankets, hatchets, knives, dress-goods, ribbons, ammunition, and trinkets of many kinds. I must not forget to mention bows and arrows which the Indians made and sold to the whites, especially to the young boys; they also sold buckskin and moccasins. These bands of Indians would remain a week or two to trade at Prairie du Chien and the surrounding neighborhood. While there they would feast and dance and enjoy life that had a tinge of civilization in it. You could hear the tum-tum beating all night when a dance was in progress, and mingled with the crude song and the yell of the dancers, it made night hideous; silence was a luxury on nights of the Indian dance.

It was customary for the fur-trader to leave for the Indian country sometime during September. Some, who had shorter distances to travel left later, along in October. They took their supplies in large canoes, in barges, and in "a-la-cordelle". The barges were poled with long poles, while the cordelles were drawn with ropes from shore, although oars were also employed. The canoes were paddled by the French voyageurs, who sometimes used oars in the swift cross currents. The traders took along as supplies hatchets, knives, ammunition (powder and lead), blankets, and woolen dress-goods, calico, and trinkets, such as beads, ribbons, and silver ornaments of large plates and round and square silver pieces. The squaws used the latter on their dresses, while the bucks were fond of silver for decorating their hair.

Among Indian goods must be included traps for catching animals, and, last but not least, rum. A few kegs or barrels of rum would often get the trader more furs than any of his other goods. As a general thing the Indian would give more for rum or whisky than for anything else; he would even sell his squaw for fire-water. However, the trader was usually shrewd in dealing out liquor, and would give the Indian but a small amount. A reckless trader often did a great deal of damage by selling quantities of liquor to the Indians. When a crowd of them got drunk, fighting followed and shooting affrays.

Trouble with the whites could usually be traced to over-indulgence in fire-water.

The trader penetrated to the remote parts of the country in quest of furs, and dispersed his trappers into the interior; then at his trading quarters he would deal with the Indians and collect furs during the fall, winter, and spring. Then when the spring trapping was over, with his boats loaded with fur, he would depart for the fur company's headquarters. Voyageurs were paid by the year and furnished provisions for the season; these consisted of hulled corn, peas (for soup), and hardtack, with plenty of salt and pepper, but no tea or coffee. They also had salt pork in small quantities. The foreman or boss of the trading expedition always had a drinking cabinet and carried the best of rum and whisky. He kept this under lock and key and each day would give his men a few drinks, and on rare occasions after a hard day's work would allow them an extra drink to keep up their spirits or to show them their work was rewarded.

After the spring trapping was over the trader would pack his furs and set out for the trading post. On these return journeys, the voyageurs were a merry set. They would sing their French songs by the hour, keeping time with their paddles, thus making the journey homeward a pleasant one. How often have I heard the music of these boatmen's songs float out over the valley of the Mississippi, and then watched the canoes, bateaux, and barges round a bend and appear in sight with the head-canoe flying the American flag at its bow.

The traders and voyageurs remained all summer at Prairie du Chien, and then in the fall took their way into the wilderness again. The voyageurs were as a rule illiterate, and knew nothing but their work. After completing their time for the fur companies, many of them returned to Canada, though a few settled in this country. They were an honest people and many of them married among the Indians. When they went to work for the fur company they were required to sign a contract, and this bound them for a term of years. It was about the same as enlisting in the army.[51]

[51] See specimen engagement contracts in *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xix, p. 292; xx, p. 312.—Ed.

Indian Industries

I am asked about the industries of the Indians, especially those of the Sioux and Winnebago, with whom I am most familiar. Beginning with the soil, the first work was agriculture. The women were very industrious and would begin in the spring to spade up their ground for corn planting. They raised what was known as squaw corn, which is a flint corn, and also raised pumpkins, and any other vegetables, seed of which had found its way into their camp from the fur-traders. But pumpkins and corn were the principal crops raised. The corn was cultivated with hoes—big clumsy implements that weighed as much as three or four of our common garden hoes. It was principally eaten hulled, also in meal after being ground up in a wooden bowl with a large wooden pounder. This was their crude mill. This meal they baked into corn bread, or made it into porridge. They also used green corn as roasting ears, and dried it in the following fashion: they dug a hole in the ground and heated large stones; on these heated stones they threw husks, and on the husks laid the green corn on cobs; over this corn they threw more husks, and then covered it up and let it cook. When it was thoroughly cooked, the corn was cut from the cob and put out on mats in the sun to dry. This dried corn was used to make soup, and could be kept for years.

Wigwams, before canvas was introduced, were made of woven grass; long grass called foxtail was utilized for this purpose. Mats made from grasses were about four to six feet in width and twelve or sixteen feet in length. A wooden rod was put at the end of the wigwam mat, and twine made of basswood bark was used to tie the mat to the rod. Several of these mats were used to construct a wigwam, and they would shed rain as readily as canvas does. Both twine and mats were made by hand; it was a long piece of work for the squaw to make matting for a wigwam, but once completed it lasted for years and was always kept in repair. The matting was light, and very easily carried either on ponies or in canoes. In making this wigwam matting the Indians worked together, several squaws congregating and working until the wigwam was completed, just as pioneer women gathered at quilting-bees. Mats were

also used as carpets in the wigwam; and were made for trading purposes as well, for the whites often bought them for use in their houses. The women in the Indian camp also prepared the meat, made the pemmican, and jerked the fresh venison. This kept well though no salt whatever was used. The women also made moccasins and tanned skins of animals for use as clothing. Bags were made out of tanned skin and woven out of wild grasses. These bags were used to carry cooking utensils, clothing, and implements used about the wigwam.

The Winnebago were noted for mat weaving, basket making, ornamenting skins, and making wooden brooms. They dug out canoes, bowls, and other dishes from wood. These wooden vessels were made by the men and were ornamented with the heads of deer and bears, or of some other animal. They also made wooden ladles with handles ornamented with the head of a fish or a bird. The men also made the reed, a musical instrument like a flute. This reed was used in wooing; a brave would play on his reed in front of the wigwam where resided his lady-love. He would play his love tune, and if he was a welcome caller he would be invited in to see the maid for whom he was playing. If he was not welcome, no notice was taken of him, and he would take his departure. Sometimes he would return and play night after night until the reluctant father of the Indian maid would invite him in, but sometimes the father would drive the young wooer away.

Another instrument of a musical character was the drum, made of a hollow chunk of wood with a piece of rawhide stretched over it. This was called the "tum-tum" and was used at all their dancing.

Another article of manufacture was the bucket. This was made of birch bark and sewed together with twine from basswood bark, while to keep the bucket from leaking a glue, made from cherry sap or gum and from the backbone of a sturgeon, was used. These birch bark pails were used to catch sap. This was collected in a storage trough made of a log dug out and burned so it would hold several barrels. In former years the women did their sewing with sinew from the deer and elk and used bone needles.

The Sioux were noted for their leather implements. First was the wigwam made of tanned buffalo hides, sewed together

in the shape of a tepee which made a very warm dwelling. The hair was removed from the buffalo skin in making these wigwams, but for blankets and carpets the hides were tanned with the hair left on. These wigwams were decorated with bright paint. As a rule buffalo, deer, elk, horses, and birds were painted on the buffalo hide, but now and then you would see the human figure on a tent, and I have seen a few where a scene with hills, river, and woods ornamented the wigwam.

The Sioux were the most ingenious of the western Indians in making ornaments. They decorated their clothing with beads and shells. Porcupine quills stained with different colors were used to adorn their arrow quivers, while the arrows were colored, that is, the feather was stained some gaudy color. The bow was made of buffalo sinew and the arrows of wood. The Sioux were likewise expert pipe makers. They used pipe-stone, with a reed that grows in marshy places, for a stem. The pipe was decorated with bird claws, and tufts of fur from the weasel or mink. I have seen some of the most beautiful pipes among the Sioux that could be imagined.

The Chippewa were noted for their birch bark canoes. These were made of sheets of birch bark sewed together with sinew and watap root, and sealed with tamarack and pine pitch to keep them from leaking. These canoes would carry more weight than one would suppose.

Indian Babies

Indian children usually have a happy time. The child is put into a straight-back little cradle with sides and a bow handle. It is flat and has no rocker for none is needed. The young Indian babe seldom cries because it is seldom sick. It is a breast-fed baby, and gets along a great deal better than the average white child. Two saplings are used to make a swing for the baby. They are sharpened on one end and stuck in the ground about seven feet apart. A cord made of basswood bark is tied to the cradle and the babe is given a swing by tying the cord to the sapling. There the little one is swung back and forth or jounced up and down. Little trinkets are placed on the

bow of the cradle for the baby's amusement, and it will lie by the hour and play with these trinkets.

Games of the Indians

The principal game of the Indian in this part of the country was lacrosse. This game was often played as a sacred game, to redeem the bereaved from their long mourning period. They were obliged by custom to mourn a stated length of time, but could make a sacrifice instead, that is give away a certain amount of furs, blankets, or ponies; and these were played for in the lacrosse game. Two parties were formed, from a dozen to fifteen on a side, and these parties played the game for the goods as a stake, the winners taking the mourners' sacrifice. After the game the mourning was at an end. The game was played with a ball and lacrosse sticks. The ball must not be touched except with the lacrosse stick.

Among the Indian children games are indulged in; one something like shinny is played on the ice, and in another the players throw a twisted hickory stick on the ice; this is driven towards a goal, the one coming nearest the goal winning. Among the children sliding down hill is enjoyed. They use basswood and elm bark in making sleds for coasting. They always ride standing, and hold on to a string fastened to the front of their toboggan. They also play on the glaring ice. One game or sport was to take a small round niggerhead stone and spin it on the ice, then take a willow whip and whip it over the ice as fast as they could go. They had tops to spin also, made of wood and set in motion with a string.

Indian Beliefs and Customs

The marriage ceremony among the Indians was very simple. The young buck would call at the wigwam where resided the Indian maid he wished for a wife. If the mother of the girl was pleased with the young brave, she would not stir the fire in the least, but would sit quietly before the glimmering light of the ground hearth. If, however, she was not pleased with the young suitor, she would stir the fire again and again until

the wooer took his departure and would emphasize her disgust by spitting into the fire at times. Another custom was for the young buck to bring presents to the parents of the girl he desired, and if these presents, such as ponies, furs, and silver trinkets, were accepted, he would take the girl for his wife.

The Indians believed in "maunhoonah" meaning the Great Spirit or Creator of Earth. They believed in the hereafter, and that in order to get to the happy hunting ground, they had to be good Indians. They had a Grand Medicine Society in its form allied to the Free Mason orders. Not all could join this society, but a certain number were taken in each year. Application was made for membership, and the names taken up in council, and if elected to become a member the candidate was initiated into the order providing, of course, he could furnish the necessary fee of furs, blankets, ponies, or goods of any kind. After being initiated, the new member was given a medicine-bag made of the skin of some animal such as the coon, squirrel, otter, or beaver.

The Medicine-man

The medicine-man who looks after the bodily ailments of the tribe is not to be confounded with the medicine-man who is a member of the Great Medicine Lodge. The former is usually above the average intelligence, and gifted with the power of impressing his superiority upon the Indians, that is, in dealing with disease. This power of dispelling disease is supposed to be given him by the Great Spirit. In treating a patient, the medicine-man goes through certain incantations and rattles a gourd, which has seed or shot in it. He also uses roots and herbs for the treatment of the sick. A great deal of ginseng is used, and the bark of poplar trees, mandrake or May-apple root, and sweet-flag. The list of herbs would be a long one, and some of the medicine-men obtained very good results from these herbs, which they used as a tea, after steeping them over a fire in a kettle containing a sufficient amount of water. Some of these Indian doctors became noted even among the whites, and were able in a limited number of diseases to give relief and to obtain cures. They also practised

surgery, setting bones, opening abscesses, and treating wounds of various kinds. Their instruments were crude and were made mostly of bone and iron.

Mortuary Customs

At the burial or funeral ceremony, some member of the tribe was appointed to speak at the grave of the departed Indian. The mourners passed around the head of the grave in single file and scattered tobacco over the open grave. The funeral orator gave an oration on the life of the departed and pictured his journey into the land of the hereafter. Food was left on the grave sufficient to carry him on his journey, and a supply of tobacco, so that he could take comfort on the way to the happy hunting ground. On the death of a member of the tribe, the survivors had a wake—not exactly like the Irish wake—but friends and mourners met at the home where a death occurred, a speech was made, after which all except the mourners joined in a feast. This wake was the beginning of mourning, and the mourners observed the custom of fasting for at least three days. If a woman lost her husband, she remained with her husband's relatives for a number of months and was compelled to do their work without a murmur. She was not allowed to comb her hair for a number of months, or to ornament herself in any way, but went ragged and dirty with her hair unkempt and was forced to do the bidding of her husband's relatives. At the end of the mourning period she was liberated to go where she pleased and do as she pleased; she frequently remarried.

Miscellaneous Customs

When I was at Long Prairie, I was much interested in a custom among the Winnebago of making morning speeches. Early each morning when the weather would permit, one of the orators would appear in front of his wigwam and give an address of a religious nature to the Indians, who would assemble to hear the exhorter. He usually spoke in a kindly way, offering advice and telling the tribesmen to carry themselves in a manner

befitting good, true men and women. I suppose such a person among the whites would be called an evangelist.

Among the noted orators and chiefs that I have known were Winnoshiek, Black Hawk, Decorah, Wah-pa-sha, Little Creek, Little Priest, Snake Hide, Little Hill, Short Wing, and many others whose names I cannot recall. Big Fire was a noted astronomer. He studied the heavens and was familiar with the principal groups of stars.

The Indians had the heavens mapped out into constellations and were familiar with all the changes of the moon. They often studied the stars on cold nights when the light from the constellations was most brilliant. A month was called a moon and a year of time designated a winter.

Tribal History

Legends and traditions of the tribes were passed down from one generation to another by means of "word passers." A number of young Indians, say eight or ten, were chosen on account of their good memories to study, and learn lessons from the older "word passers." These young Indians were drilled in the legends, history, and traditions of the tribe. They were required to repeat them over again and again, omitting no detail, until they knew them by heart; and when the old "word passers" died, another generation of young men was selected and instructed by their predecessors. Thus dates and incidents were passed on from generation to generation, and a living history was kept. An old Winnebago chief, Decorah,[33] had a very interesting cane that he showed me one day, when I visited him in his wigwam. On this cane were carved many figures, a sort of hieroglyphics. It had been handed down from father to son and was in reality a record which old Decorah could read. It was a crude history of the tribe covering a good many years, and if I could remember some of the accounts Decorah gave me as recorded on the cane, they would be worth hearing.

[33] For a brief account of the Decorah family of chiefs, see *Id.*, xx, p. 235, note 34. Antoine Grignon was a descendant of this family, his grandmother, wife of Perische Grignon, being a daughter of Konokah Decorah; his wife's mother was likewise of the same family.—Ed.

The War-eagle Feather

The Sioux were fond of decorating themselves with quills, furs, and feathers; but I think they had one custom which is worth noting. A brave or more particularly a warrior used a war-eagle feather to adorn his hair. This long feather in the hair of a warrior was a mark of distinction, and it was acquired on merit, for no brave could wear one who did not merit it. On the feather notches were cut if the warrior had been successful in war. Each notch on one side of the feather represented a scalp taken from an enemy. The notches on the other side signified the number of times the brave had been on the war-path. This made it easy for one to tell what kind of a war record a brave had. If a warrior had a well notched feather he was looked up to and envied and praised by his tribesmen; he felt his superiority, too, and carried himself with a distinguished air. War-eagles were scarce and it was sometimes hard to get feathers. I remember one time seeing an Indian trade a pony for a war-eagle feather. Hunting parties from Wabashaw's village used to go out in search for the war-eagle, and a favorite resting-place for these eagles was among the hills of Waumandee. Waumandee means in Sioux "the land of the war-eagle."

Indian Invitations

Another peculiar custom which I recollect is the method of inviting a party of Indians to attend a dance, feast, or other gathering. One day while I was camped with a band of Sioux near the site of what is now Marshland, an Indian came into camp who was from another camp near Homer (Minnesota). He had crossed the Mississippi in a canoe, and came to invite several of the Indians over to his camp to attend a medicine dance. He would enter a tent and pass around some small sticks, and explain his object and depart. He must have had at least fifty sticks answering the purpose of invitation cards, which he distributed.

Indian Character

The Indians as I knew them were as a general thing peaceable. They loved their native haunts and their families and may be called a happy people. They had plenty. Game abounded; there was an abundance of fur-bearing animals; and the streams were full of fish. There was no need of poverty for with plenty of corn and wild meat and with fur enough to buy ammunition, traps, and knives, there was little else needed to make their lot an easy and comfortable one. They were not a stolid people, but were fond of fun. There was a humorous side to the Indian and a genial friendship when once you came to know him, but I have no respect for that unnatural picture so often made of him—the word picture of the novelist that shows him devoid of sentiment and emotion, a cold, cruel, unfeeling stoic, whose face is never rippled with a smile or stained with a tear. I think there is a truer picture of the Indian, as a natural human being with a heart that feels pain and pleasure, with a mind that appreciates the good and bad, the true and false, with a spirit that enjoys home and companions and friendship, with a life that throbs with love and sentiment. The Indian I knew loved and laughed with his children, visited his neighbor, had warm personal friendships, and loved the life of peaceful contentment he was living, a life near to nature.

I have often visited the Sioux and Winnebago and passed long pleasant hours in their wigwams, talking with them on various subjects as we sat circled about the glowing fire. I have heard the laugh of their children and seen them frolic about as happy as any young ones I ever saw. I have seen them play games and join in sports, and they were as interesting to watch as other children. Of course there were some whose barbarous nature was revealed. There are some white people also whose barbarous nature gets the upper hand of them. But take the Indian, all in all, he was a happy creature during the fur-trading days.

A War Party

One August day in the fifties we went up the tamarack plumming, for the place was noted for its wild plums. We had started to gather plums, and were intent on our work, when all of a sudden the stillness of the summer solitude was broken by a yell, a war-cry uttered in its wild blood-curdling manner. On looking up I saw our party completely surrounded by a band of Sioux warriors. It was a war party out after Chippewa; they mistook us for their enemies, but soon saw their mistake and went peaceably away. We gathered our plums in safety and returned home, but we never forgot the surprise we received by the Sioux warriors.

Primitive Justice

In cases of murder in the tribe the guilty party was given a trial. Witnesses were called to testify and speakers were chosen for and against the defendant. If the accused person was found guilty, a council was held to determine the punishment. They usually ordered the murderer killed in the same manner he used in slaying his victim—death by shooting, stabbing, or tomahawking as the case might be. In some cases the accused would redeem himself by furnishing enough goods such as ponies, furs, or weapons, to secure his liberty; these goods which were distributed among the dead person's immediate relatives, prevented retaliation on their part.