

Recollections of Green Bay in 1816-17

By James W. Biddle, of Pittsburgh, Pa.

My first visit to Green Bay was in the fall of 1816. I was concerned with Col. James Thomas in the supply of the troops at Detroit, Mackinaw, Chicago, Green Bay—provided, said the contract, that a military post should be established at the latter place within the year. The post at Mackinaw was then under command of Brevet Col. Talbot Chambers; but in August, or thereabouts, Col. John Miller, afterwards Governor of Missouri, arrived, and taking command, determined on establishing a post at Green Bay.

Vessels were accordingly chartered, and, I think, three companies of riflemen and infantry were put on board. I furnished the required amount of provisions and they all arrived safe, though this was the first instance of merchant vessels navigating the Bay. The leading or most reliable commodore of the fleet was Capt. Dobbins of the "Washington," belonging to Erie, Pa., of hundred tons, the largest vessel at that time on the Lakes, though they spoke of the "Wellington," of one hundred and thirty tons, belonging somewhere in Canada, which *had been* on the Lakes, but found too large or drawing too much water for lake navigation, and had then disappeared. Dobbins sounded the whole way up the Bay, and on his return gave the worst account of the navigation—all shoals, said he, and rocks, with no harbor, river, or creek

to put into, or island to take shelter under, excepting two at its mouth.

This account was all gammon, as I conjectured at the time, as, though not contradicted by the other masters of vessels, it was not confirmed by them. They were, however, under some kind of *cow* to Dobbin, who besides being in some capacity in the U. S. service, was of a lordly, imperious disposition, and commanded the finest vessel on the Lakes, and was, moreover, acquainted with the fact, that I had further and large supplies to forward. He first asked \$10 per barrel freight, then \$7—\$5—\$3.50, and finally closed with my offer of \$1.50 per barrel, at which I loaded his own and four other vessels of forty and fifty tons each—schooners and sloops. This gives you an idea of the price of freights at that time, the general rule being \$2 per lake for a barrel bulk—that is, from Buffalo or Erie (Cleveland not being much known then) to Detroit or Malden, \$2; to Mackinaw \$5, St. Clair Lake being called half one. Chicago then had no trading reputation, vessels only visiting it to carry troops or provisions to supply them; and these provisions and supplies up to that time, were principally brought from Pittsburgh, including pork, flour, whiskey, soap, candles, vinegar, conveyed by keel-boats up the Alleghany, and French Creek, to Le Bœuf, or Waterford, and thence wagoned over to Erie.

At this date, Ohio first began to furnish pork and flour for these posts; both, however, were held as inferior, the hogs being light, and the flour dark or yellowish. Michigan farmers then raised little or nothing to sell. They were French, settled on so many arpents* of land, fronting on Detroit river, and limited back, I think, by no defined line; it never entering their grave heads that any man would locate himself without a river front. Here they raised a few vegetables which they preserved through the winter, and some wheat and corn, which they ground by wind mills, still to be seen on the points of land along the Detroit. The town of

*An arpent is about one-seventh less than an English acre.

Detroit was of some business importance, but Mackinaw was the great emporium of trade of the North American Fur Company, at this time embodied in John Jacob Astor. Here his agents resided, and from hence were fitting out his trading boats for the various Indian regions, north, east and west. I think in 1816, he fitted out two hundred and forty boats, each one containing two traders and from four to six hands. The *two* traders were only for this year, Congress having by law forbidden *foreigners* being licensed to trade with Indians—all his traders had hitherto been Canadians. Astor was compelled that year to send United States' citizens, and sent out two hundred young clerks from city counting-houses of whom to make Indian traders. As they knew nothing of the *traps* connected with the business, Astor had to send his old traders with them as *hands*. But a single year sufficed to make them all first-rate men—the Yankees being always at home at a trade, and they easily took up with the traps, leaving the Frenchmen to seek other pursuits.

I did not visit Green Bay until October or November, 1816. I found the troops in quarters prepared for them by Col. Gratiot, the engineer, who accompanied Col. Miller* to the post, which the latter left in command of Col. Chambers, and returned to Mackinaw, and afterwards to Detroit, that year, leaving the post at Mackinaw in command of Brevet Col. John McNeil, brother-in-law of the present President Pierce; at which post were also stationed at the same time, Capt. Benj'n. K. Pierce, and Lieut. John Pierce, of the Artillery, both brothers of President Pierce. The former, now Gen. B. K. Pierce, I believe is still living, and still in service—at least he was in 1848, when I had the pleasure to see him in this place by receiving a call from him when passing through.

*Col. John Miller, the first American officer in command at Green Bay, was a native of Virginia. He had served with great reputation during the war of 1812-15. After his command at Green Bay, he was appointed register of the public lands in the Howard district, Missouri, and was subsequently elected governor of that State, and for several years a member of congress. He died near Florissant, Mo., March 18th, 1846. L. C. D.

The fort at Green Bay, I think called Fort Howard, was built lower down Fox river, and nearer the lake than any of the settlements, and on the right as you ascended the river. The settlement was a promising and a pleasant one, having comfortable houses, framed buildings of two stories, with numerous small farms under good cultivation, and the land very productive in corn, wheat, grass, &c. So rapid was the vegetation, that it was gravely asserted that they could hear and see the corn growing.

Col. Miller experienced no difficulty from the Indians in establishing his post, though something of this had been anticipated from the Winnebagoes, a bold and warlike tribe who lived at Lake au Puant, or Stinking Lake—now Lake Winnebago—some sixty miles up Fox river. None was apprehended from the Menomonees or Wild Rice Indians, who resided at the mouth of the river. A deputation of the Winnebagoes came down and remonstrated with Col. Miller against what they termed an intrusion; and inquired why, and for what purpose, he was about to establish a fort there? Miller gave them what he had in explanation, and that his purpose, though armed for war, was peace. The Winnebago Chief then made to him the celebrated remark of the Armenian Prince, I think it was, to Lucullus, "that if his object was peace, he had brought more with him than was necessary to treat; but if his object was war, he had brought too few to fight." Miller told him that he had not seen all the force he had with him, and invited him down to the river bank, among the grass of which he showed him some ten or twelve large cannon lying, which the Indian had not before seen; but upon viewing them, he said that Col. Miller probably had enough to make good his right—broke up the conference, and gave no farther trouble. The Winnebagoes seemed to be a different race of people, and were so regarded, from the Chippeway, or rather Ojibway, of which great family, nearly, if not all, the other tribes in that region were branches—their language being totally different, having a guttural sound like the German.

The Menomonees at Green Bay were a small and generally

peaceable tribe, but had, at this time, a very remarkable man as their chief—one held in much awe by the surrounding Indian nations, and in high respect by the whites. His name was Tomah, whom I personally knew, and I may say, venerated. I learned from those who were acquainted with his history, many marked occurrences of his previous life. He had no hereditary claim to the chieftainship. This was held, at the time, by a man nearly as old as himself, who was an idiot, but who they always took with them in their excursions. Tomah merely ruled as the acknowledged strongest man of the nation, and this he had continued to do for a great many years. The Indian tribes around were represented to me as all afraid of him, though they mentioned it as a singular fact, that he had never engaged in war with any of them while in control of the nation.

An interesting illustration of this I received from several persons, as occurring upon an interview he had with Tecumseh in 1810 or 1811, when that remarkable man was forming his great combination for driving the Americans back, who like the waves of the sea, were encroaching upon their hunting grounds. With this view he visited Green Bay, obtained a council and hearing from Tomah and his people, whom he addressed in a manner he best knew how to do; and in the course of which, in true Indian spirit, he pictured the glory, as well as certainty of success, and as omens of this, recapitulated to them his own hitherto prosperous career—the number of battles he had fought, the victories he had won, the enemies he had slain, and the scalps he had taken from the heads of warrior-foes. Tomah appeared sensible of the influence of such an address upon his people, and feared its consequence, for he was opposed to leading them into war. His reply was in a tone to allay this feeling, and he closed with the remark to them, that they had heard the words of Tecumseh—heard of the battles he had fought, the enemies he had slain, and the scalps he had taken. He then paused; and while the deepest silence reigned throughout the audience, he slowly raised his hands, with his eyes fixed on them, and in a lower, but not less prouder tone, continued

"but it is my boast that these hands are unstained with human blood!" The effect is described as tremendous—nature obeyed her own impulse, and admiration was forced even from those who could not, or did not, approve of the moral to be implied, and the gravity of the council was disturbed, for an instant, by a murmur of approbation—a tribute to genius, overpowering, at the moment, the force of education and of habit. He concluded with remarking, that he had ever supported the policy of peace, as his nation was small and consequently weak; that he was fully aware of the injustice of the Americans in their encroachments upon the lands of the Indians, and for them feared its consequences, but that he saw no relief for it in going to war, and therefore, as a national thing, he would not do so, but that if any of his young men were desirous of leaving their hunting grounds, and following Tecumseh, they had his permission to do so. His prudent counsels prevailed.

I always thought this an odd speech—a very remarkable one to come from a savage, for such Tomah was by birth and education, but by nature I always thought him one of the grandest specimens of humanity I had ever seen. I had not met with him at Green Bay; I was only a few days there in 1816, and hurried with business, nor did I hear much, if anything, of him, until after meeting with him the next year at Mackinaw. The first I heard of him, was a prescription of his to Col. John Bowyer, the Indian agent at Green Bay, for the gout, of which my brother, Edward Biddle, told me, and a very rational one I thought it—"to drink no whiskey, live on lean meat and wild rice, and *scarify his feet.*" This led me to make inquiries about him, when I found, that my brother had become a warm friend of his—an admirer of him.

When at Mackinaw, early one morning in the latter part of May or early in June, 1817, I had come out of my lodgings and observed approaching me, one of the many Indians then on the island, and taking a look at him as he emerged from the fog, then very heavy, I was struck, as he passed, in a most unusual manner by his singularly imposing presence. I had never seen, I thought, so magnificent a man. He was of

the larger size, perhaps full six feet, with fine proportion, a little stoop-shouldered, and dressed in a somewhat dirty Indian blanket, and had scarcely noticed me as he passed. I remember it as distinctly as if it was yesterday. I watched him until he disappeared again in the fog, and remember almost giving expression to a feeling which seemed irresistably to creep over me, *that the earth was too mean for such a man to walk on!* The idea, to be sure, was discarded the moment it came up, but existence it had at this my first view of Tomah. I had no knowledge at the time who he was, or that Tomah was on the Island, but while standing there before my door, and under the influence of the feeling I have described, Henry Graverat, the Indian interpreter, came up, and I enquired of him whether he knew of an Indian who had just passed up? He replied yes, that it was Tomah, chief of the Menomonee Indians, who with his people had arrived late the evening before, and were encamped at the "Point;" that Tomah had just been with him to ask a council with the Indian agent, Maj. Wm. H. Puthuff. The council was held at 10 o'clock, and I made it my business to attend.

To understand what follows, I must make a short digression.—The British for many years had paid annual contributions, termed by them Indian annuities, giving each member of the tribe a suit of clothes, consisting of a shirt, leggins, breech-clout, and blanket—and each family, a copper kettle, knives, axes, guns, amunition, &c. For these, each tribe came regularly in the spring or fall, either to Mackinaw or Drummond's Island, or the Sault Ste. Marie. Tomah was a British Indian. He had not himself engaged in the war, but his feelings were with the British, as were personally some of his young men. He had arrived on Mackinaw Island with his whole people on their way to Drummond's Island to receive their usual annuity, and had stopped at Mackinaw to rest over night. There was nothing novel to us in this, as a number of tribes had previously arrived, stopped and had a council, at which they told their story, always winding up with professions of love for their "*Chemuckiman Nosah,*" or *American Father*, who, they hoped,

would open his heart, and give their people some meat to stay them on their journey, and his breasts to give them some milk—i. e., whiskey—to make them joyful. This was the usual winding up of all such councils. When the council in this instance had met, and the proper time offered, Tomah arose and stated to Maj. Puthuff, that he had arrived with the Menomonee Nation, the night before, on their way to visit their British father, and that having stopped on the Island to rest over the night, he had thought it his duty to report the fact to his American father. With this simple announcement, he sat down. Puthuff, a little nettled, made a short reply, and the council broke up.

Coming out of the council house, I waited for Maj. Puthuff, and remarked to him that Tomah would want some provisions for his people, and that I wished he would give me an order for that purpose. "D—n the rascal, why didn't he ask for it, then?" "I suppose," said I, "being a British Indian, he is too proud." "Well, let him starve, then." "If all are to starve who are proud, God help many that I know of, Major." I had no difficulty in prevailing in the matter, as government had made provision for such issues to Indians, and Graverat and I made out an estimate proper under the circumstances to give, and Tomah and his people continued their voyage.

In a few days he and they returned, dejected and disconsolate. A change had come over the spirit of British policy. They had just come out of a long and exhausting dance led them by Napoleon, and were counting the cost. They had been casting around to find where surest and readiest to cut off drains upon their treasury, and judging that they had no further need of Indian services, lopped off the whole list of Indian annuities. This was already known at Mackinaw, and had been told to Tomah upon his first arrival, but he would not, or did not, believe it. He found it, however, too true. There were no annuities there for him, or for any other tribes, many of whom were there; and it was anticipated at one time, that they would rise upon the British force there, and take what they could get. But this was not attempted.

My brother Edward, then and now at Mackinaw, had been well acquainted with Tomah at Green Bay, and immediately after his return to the Island, he came into the store, spoke a few words to my brother, and left. I had seen the interview, and watched the result, without making any enquiry, for I saw that my brother, who greatly loved Tomah, was imbued with all his melancholy. In a few moments a young Indian came in with a three gallon keg, which my brother bade the young man in the store to fill with whiskey, which was charged on the books to Tomah. I was looking over the books but a few years ago, and saw the entry on the ledger, which brought with it a train of wild and melancholy thoughts. This insult from the British authorities, as he took it, was more than his proud heart could bear. For himself he might have borne up against it, but for his people, and in the sight of those whose good offices he had refused to ask, he could or would not. The keg was brought to him in his tent, from which he drank alone, and to an excess, that relieved him the third day of pride, grief, joy and care. He was buried on the Island. I was present at his funeral, and witnessed his daughter, a young girl of nineteen or twenty, as she mournfully sang his death song at the head of the coffin, just before lowering into the grave all that was mortal of Tomah. I never saw so distressed and broken-hearted a people. They said they were no longer a nation—no longer anything. Tomah could alone command and keep them together, but now they would be scattered and lost. We made a collection, and bought them provisions which carried them home, where they organized under some other chief, until driven from their old hunting-grounds by you land-grasping Wisconsiners!*

*Of Tomah, or Thomaw, or Thomas Carron, we have found but little in print. He seems to have been the great Indian chieftain of the Wisconsin tribes; our Phillip of Pokanoket—our Pontiac—our Tecumseh; not so well known, to be sure, and figuring on a smaller theatre, but exhibiting traits of character none the less noble—none the less extorting our admiration. Col. De Peyster, in his rare work previously alluded to, thus spoke of him in 1779:

“While none on earth live more at ease,
Than *Carong's* brave Menoninees;”

The settlement at Green Bay in 1816, as I have remarked, was a very clever one. They had comfortable houses and good farms. It was composed mainly of old *engagers*—Canadian boatmen, who had withdrawn from the employment of the fur companies, and fixed themselves down on a piece of land *fronting on the river*, and married to whole or half-breed Indian women. The custom I found prevailing here was somewhat unique of its kind, as a leading feature of the community, though something of the kind still exists at New Orleans among a distinct class. You Wisconsiners may smile, or grin, or scowl at it, but you cannot alter the facts as I found them at that time. The young people there were generally a cross between the French Canadian and Indian, and marriage between girls of this class and the white men arriving, was of a conventional or business kind, to suit the convenience of the case, the residence of the men not being permanent, or intending to be so. Marriage, therefore, was limited as to time, and was contracted either for life, or for six, or twelve months, as the case might be—with the white men arriving, it was generally of the latter kind. The lover having made choice of a girl, applied to her parents, with whom he entered into a limited marriage contract—specifying the amount to be paid them for deprivation of her services—the amount to be paid her in hand for her own benefit, and the amount per week for her boarding and rent

and added, that he was "a very clever fellow, chief of the nation of Menominees—the handsomest man among the Indians."

Dr. Morse, in his *Tour among the Indians*, in 1820, speaks of him as "the celebrated Thomaw, who died, and was buried, at Mackinaw, and over his grave Mr. John Law of Green Bay, erected a monument with the following inscription:

"Here rests the body of Thomas Carron, Grand Chief of the Folle Avoine (Menominee) nation, who departed this life July 8th, 1818, aged 56 years, regretted by all who knew him." This date makes his death occur a year later than Mr. Biddle, who thinks he cannot be mistaken; and Tomah must have been fully ten years older than the age upon this monument represents, judging from the fact of his being a prominent chief as early as 1779. His son Mau-cau-tau-bee, or Carron, of whom Dr. Morse spoke as a modest, sensible man, is one of the present chiefs of the Menomonees, and has so been ever since his father's death, and has attained the age of fifty-five years.

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of a room in the house, if to remain in the dwelling of her parents. These payments were generally made in provisions, clothing &c.

In case the lover or husband removed from the place before the expiration of the time agreed on, he had the right—as in the case of the *engager*—to transfer his marital claim thus acquired, to another; so that during the term of the stipulated coverture, the girl might find herself the wife of two or more husbands. I knew of several marriages of this kind during the few weeks I was at the Bay in 1816 and 1817. I could state that of Capt. ———, of the U. S. Army, but I decline any reminiscences of names. I was so far intelligent of this, as to be called upon by the Captain, an old acquaintance, to heal some breach between him and his thus acquired wife—for the reason that I could speak some French, which he could not. She was in high *tantrems*, he said, about something which he could not understand. He wanted that I should go with him to ascertain what *could* be the matter. Of course I went, and found the fair dame sulky and sullen, but with an eye flashing high anger. I easily got the truth from her. Her jealousy had been excited or roused by some tale-bearer. I gave her the explanations and details he tendered, with promises of caution and good conduct for the future; and having restored peace between man and wife, I went merrily home. The contracts entered into in this manner were regarded by them as sacred, and no evidences were adduced or known of infidelity on the part of the women, and were consequently highly resented if occurring on the part of the spouse.

The Bay was unblest at this time with anything in the nature or calling of a priest, but it did rejoice in the possession of a magistrate, who had enjoyed the office of judge time without memory of when it began; and long had all the business of the colony been regulated and kept in order by the awe-inspiring authority and portly person of Judge Reaume. No person there could tell when his official duties first devolved upon him, nor from whence his authority was derived. It was sufficient to ob-

tain obedience, that it existed, and no one disputed his authority or appealed from his decision, for, in truth, there was no power above him. Before him all complaints were brought, and all wrongs redressed, and marriages celebrated—for doing which he had fixed fees. In the case of marriage, of which it was discovered he kept some kind of record, if you remained in cohabitation beyond the stipulated time, he would send for you; have you to renew the engagement, or punish you by fine for contumacy or neglect—thus securing a new fee for his own pocket, and enforcing a proper respect for the laws and customs of the country. While I was there, a vagabond French desperado was arrested for an act of violence to a half Indian girl. The case was rather broadly made out against him, which excited the ire of the good Judge to such a degree, that he sentenced the fellow to buy the girl a new frock—it having been proven that her own had been torn in the scuffle, and to work one week in his, the Judge's garden!

It was reported, but I know not with what truth, that his library was enriched with two odd volumes of Blackstone, but whether in French or English I did not learn. A gentleman, a friend of mine, had a dispute with a troublesome fellow about some trifle, and upon whose application, Reaume sent my friend a summons—instead of paper with name and seal, the constable exhibited the well-known large *jack-knife* of the Judge, which had long been made to serve that purpose. On the day of appearance, defendant broke ground for the Judge's, and stopping at a store on the way, bought some cheap article. On approaching the office, he found the Judge at the door, who exclaimed to him in broken English, "You may go away—go away; I has given judgment against ye." "Good morning, Judge." "Good morning; I has given judgment against ye." "Coming along by Burgan's store, I saw this small coffee-pot hanging out, and I bought it to present to you, Judge; will you do me the pleasure to accept it?" "O—yes, tank ye—tank ye kindly—very much 'bliged to ye." "Judge, I don't owe that fellow any thing." "You don't?" "No, I have really overpaid him." "The rascal; I reverses my judgment, and he shall pay de costs."

Now it must not be imagined from this, that Judge Reaume was a bad man. He was the reverse of this, but followed the temper of the times, and bowed to the current of the country's customs, rather than undertake the labor of changing or rising above them. The quiet acquiescence of the people to his authority for so long a time, and the sufferance of his rule and sway under British and American supremacy—and possibly under French, too—for he may not have surrendered until long after Montcalm and Cornwallis did, is an argument at least in favor of the mildness of his administration. Nor was he deficient in intelligence, and possessed much of the natural politeness of the better class of rural French.* The most considerable man however, in the settlement, the one of most intelligence and enterprise—the *substantial* one of the colony, was John Law, who occupied a fine farm on the left bank of Fox river as you ascend, which he afterwards sold to John Jacob Astor, and which now, I think, forms a part of the town of Green Bay.

There is, or was, a natural phenomenon at Green Bay, which I have before made public notice of, and repeat here; I mean a re-

* Judge Charles Reaume was probably a native of Detroit—at least, in 1777, there was a prominent resident of Detroit, named Pierre Reaume; and in 1778, Charles Reaume, was a captain in the British Indian Department, at Detroit, and accompanied Gov. Hamilton in his expedition against Vincennes in December of that year, and when the American Col. George Rogers Clark recaptured that place in February, 1779, Capt. Reaume was among the prisoners, who taking the oath of neutrality, was permitted to return to Detroit. Gen. Clark's *MS. Papers*, in the writer's possession, prove this fact. From Morse's Indian Report, it appears that Capt. Reaume settled at Green Bay in 1790, and probably derived his early commission of Judge from the British authorities at Detroit; and anticipating perhaps, the early transfer of Detroit to the American government, may have had something to do in hastening his departure. When Brown county, in which the Green Bay settlement was and is still situated, was organized under the authority of Michigan Territory, in 1818, Judge Reaume was appointed by Gov. Cass an Associate Justice, and Justice of the Peace; in July, 1824, another filled his place on the bench—hence it would appear, that he died sometime between 1818 and 1824.

gular ebb and flow as of a tide in the waters of Fox river.* I noticed it every day for about ten days that I staid there in 1817. The rise and fall was, I think, twelve to eighteen inches, and occurred regularly at the same hours every day—being greater or less in its rise and fall as the wind was up or down the Bay. I published a notice of this in the Pittsburgh Gazette in 1818-19, which was copied into various papers, and came under the notice of Judge Woodward, of Detroit, a gentleman of much learning and science, who visited Green Bay and examined into it, and, in a published report, confirmed the existence of the ebb and flow as I had found and described it.

Now, don't set me down as delving behind Chateaubriand.—Poor Chateaubriand had been landed on the wild shore in Canada from a boat on Lake Ontario, and ran into the woods to enjoy the luxury of the wild, unstinted freedom of Nature in all her glory of forest and flowers; and in the ecstasy of excitement, he was hugging the trees, he tells us, when he heard a loud and rumbling roar, which alarmed and brought his mind back to earth from elysium, and caused him to run to his comrades in the boat to see what was the matter. The alarm, he said, had been causeless: *It was only the tide coming in!* This is not worse than Oliver Goldsmith, good honest fellow as he was, who, in an old and honored school book, gave a very fair, true and faithful description of Niagara Falls—the perpendicular height and vastness of the column precipitated; and then, after writing all this, and seeing what he had written, quietly and calmly remarked, that notwithstanding the height of the fall, and the power of the current, Indians had been known to pass down it in their canoes in safety! I well re-

*An able article upon the tides of the North American Lakes, written by the late Col. Henry Whiting, of the U. S. Army, may be found in *Silliman's Journal*, and also in *Historical and Scientific Sketches of Michigan*. Col. Whiting argues that there is no sensible lunar tides on the Lakes, and is sustained in this opinion by Gen. Cass and Henry R. Schoolcraft, Esq.; that there are probably planetary influences operating on the lake waters, but that the changes in the level of the waters are mainly produced by atmospheric phenomena.

member reading it in my own old school book, fifty years ago, and of being bothered about it; but that passage about the canoes has been dropped in all the later editions.

The fowl-game at Green Bay were the duck and prairie hen—both abundant. The ducks used to rise like large dark clouds, subsisting probably on the wild rice growing near the head of the Bay. I wonder, by-the-by, if it grows there still! The Indian women used to make a favorite dish of wild rice, corn and fish, boiled together, and called *Tassimanonny*. I remember it to this day as an object of early love.

Pittsburgh, Pa., Jan., 1854.

To Lyman C. Draper, Esq.