

Notes on Jean Nicolet

By Benjamin Sulte

It seems proper to explain what called forth the following paper on Jean Nicolet. The advent of this early and hardy explorer to Wisconsin is not noticed by our great historian, Bancroft, nor by our own Wisconsin historian, Gen. Wm. R. Smith. And even that careful antiquary, Dr. J. G. Shea, has not given him the credit of visiting our territory as early by some five years as he is justly entitled.

Father Le Jeune, in his letter of Sept. 10, 1640, published in the *Jesuit Relations*, states substantially that "Nicolet, who had penetrated farthest into those distant countries, avers that had he sailed three days more on a great river which flows from that lake [Green Bay], he would have found the sea;" hence, Mr. Shea infers, as this was written in 1640, that Nicolet's Wisconsin visit must have occurred not very long before, and thus, in his *Discovery of the Mississippi*, 1852, places it "as early as 1639," and again "about 1639;" while in his "Indian Tribes of Wisconsin" (*Wis. Hist. Colls.*, 1857, iii, 126), he says "in 1639," which he repeats in his edition of Charlevoix's *New France*, 1866, ii, 137, note.

Parkman, following Shea's earlier work, places this event, in his *France and England in North America*, 1869, as occurring "in or before the year 1639;" and in his *Jesuits in North America*, 1870, has it "as early as 1639." Neill's *Minnesota* adopts Shea's later date of 1639.

In 1876, Mr. Sulte, the author of the following paper, published his excellent *Mélanges d'histoire et de littérature*, in which he devotes a chapter to Jean Nicolet, showing that he made his Wisconsin exploration in 1634-35. Mr. Sulte's attention was called to a possible later period as the time of Nicolet's visit; and this inquiry drew from him the subjoined paper, proving quite conclusively that he made his eventful journey to Wisconsin in 1634-35, and could not have made it at a later period.

The further question which Mr. Shea avers, and Parkman twice repeats, that Nicolet partly descended the Wisconsin, and which the Canadian historian, F. X. Garneau, in the *Journal de Quebec*, of April 20, 1854, admits may have been so, if "the most liberal interpretation" be assumed. Mr. C. W. Butterfield controverts this point, with apparent success, in a monogram on *Nicolet's Discovery of Wisconsin*, which will soon be given to the public, and will deservedly attract the attention of all lovers of the truth of history.

That "Nicolet was a remarkable man," as Parkman asserts, is abundantly shown by the *Jesuit Relations*, Ferland's *Notes sur les Registres de Quebec*, the works of Shea and Parkman, and the forthcoming volume of Mr. Butterfield.

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