

# Col. Henry Gratiot<sup>1</sup>

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By Elihu B. Washburne

The early history of the country now embraced in the State of Wisconsin has all the interest of a romance. No man can read the account of the French domination over the whole country of the Great Lakes, running back as far as 1671, and coming down to 1763, without awakening within him the greatest admiration of those pious French missionaries who erected the cross among so many tribes of Indians, where a white man had never before been seen, and planted the flag of France as the sign of the protection of the French government. It was the French missionary, with a devotion unparalleled, with a courage unsubdued, and with a heroism never surpassed, facing hardship and danger unheard of, illustrating his whole life and career with pure and devout piety, who first trod the soil of Wisconsin.

No new State of the Union has done so much to preserve its history and illustrate its career and progress, as has the State of Wisconsin. Researches have been pushed in every direction by able and intelligent men, stimulated by an enthusiasm inspired by the subject. Such light has been shed on your earlier as well as your later history, as to challenge the deepest interest of all whose tastes lead them to pursue historic paths. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, thanks to the intelligent and useful labors of the men who have directed its affairs, and instituted its investigations, stands now in the front rank among the historical societies of the country. In the history of what was so long known as the "Northwest," it now excels any Society in the United States. It has not only passed beyond the ordinary bounds of historic research, but it has sought in print and in canvas to perpetuate the names and lives and labors of

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<sup>1</sup> An address on the occasion of the presentation of his portrait to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, November 13, 1884.