

French Forts Near the Mouth of the Wisconsin

By James Davie Butler, LL. D.

A prominent historian of Wisconsin thus writes: "There was never within the boundaries of Crawford County a French military post of any kind, while France held dominion over this region. No traveler mentions any fortification there. No official French document has ever been discovered giving any account of any fort there. Yet as early as 1820, a map was published by the United States on which is delineated a famous fortification—huge walls with their salient projections, all shown as if some mighty military genius had planned its construction."¹

Such is the language of a recent historian, who further declares belief in any French fort near Prairie du Chien to be "one of the mock pearls in Wisconsin history." Belief in such a post is dear to me as adding something to the length of our annals, and yet I would not hold to a delusion. The real existence, however, of at least one French military post, near the mouth of the Wisconsin, still seems to me pretty well proved.

The point was one where a stronghold would naturally be built. It was the northern limit of the Illinois tribes, and a starting point for raids against the Iroquois, who had establishments near Chicago.² It was the starting point for all expeditions.—either up, down or beyond the Mississippi. On

¹ *History of Crawford County, Wisconsin*, p. 329, edited by C. W. Butterfield, and a paper read before the Madison Literary Club by Mr. Butterfield. S. J. Clarke, the publisher of the *History of Crawford County*, disclaims any share or responsibility for the statements made by Mr. Butterfield.

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² La Potherie, II, p. 132.