

## PRAIRIE DU CHIEN, IN 1811.

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LETTER FROM NICHOLAS BOILVIN, INDIAN AGENT, TO WILLIAM  
EUSTIS, SECRETARY OF WAR.<sup>1</sup>

Prairie des Chiens is on the left bank of the Mississippi, Illinois Territory, about six miles above the mouth of the

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<sup>1</sup> This letter, written to the secretary of war — Hon. William Eustis — in 1811, by N. Boilvin, a well-known Indian agent, at this time at Prairie du Chien, was found among the papers of Governor Edwards. It is published as containing a description of that old French settlement, at that early period. The statement in the letter of the number of Indians visiting Prairie du Chien annually must excite surprise, and it is evident that there was quite a large commerce there at that time. I was not aware before reading this letter that the Indians at that early period were so extensively engaged in mining for lead ore and in manufacturing lead. The point at which they carried on their operations being described as sixty miles below Prairie du Chien, must have been at the lead mines of Julian Dubuque, where the city of Dubuque now stands. They might possibly have worked also on the east side of the Mississippi river, in what was afterward known as the Galena lead-mines. The earliest discovery of lead-mines in this country was made in this region. On an old French map, published in Paris in 1703, lead-mines (*mines de plomb*) are put down on both sides of the Mississippi river at this point. On the east side of the river the designation on the map is put down as being on the "Rivière de Parisien," afterward known as Fever river.

E. B. WASHBURNE.

The letter is taken from *The Edwards Papers* (Chicago, 1884), edited by the late E. B. Washburne. Nicholas Boilvin appears to have first visited Prairie du Chien in February, 1810, but at what time he was appointed Indian agent is uncertain. His father seems to have been a resident of Quebec, during the war of the American Revolution, and to have won a good record by great kindness to a wounded surgeon of the American army who was held captive there. Nicholas came to the Northwest, after peace was declared, and engaged in the Indian trade. Chancing to meet, in St. Louis, the surgeon whom his father had befriended, the former secured for the son the position of Indian agent. When McKay attacked Prairie du Chien, in 1814, Boilvin went upon an American gun-boat, with his family and other American residents in the village, and fled. In addition to his office as Indian agent, Boilvin held the position of