

Prairie du Chien. At the time of the American war the only inhabitants who were settled there were principally Canadians and half-breeds, the descendants of the early French and English fur traders, about two hundred in number; nearly half of them were hunters and voyageurs, the remainder were settled on the land in the vicinity of the old trading post. Situated as they were—in the interior of that vast country which, before the war, belonged exclusively to the Indian tribes—unknown almost to the outer world, and having lived for years uncontrolled, there being neither magistrate nor minister of religion in the country, these people had become almost as intractable as the Indians themselves. Still, before the war destroyed the tranquillity of the little settlement, they apparently lived happy and contented in pursuit of their various occupations.

The peculiar position which Prairie du Chien occupied in the Indian country at once pointed it out as a most important place—of the value of which both the hostile Powers were fully cognizant—from the fact that whichever army took possession of it could command that immense territory inhabited by the warlike tribes of the West (known at the time of the war as the Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana countries) which lay along the west frontier of the United States from Sandusky, on Lake Erie, to the Mississippi. Although both the contending Powers were most anxious to establish a military post at Prairie du Chien, it was not until 1813 that any definite move was made to do so. Then the Americans showed a determination to take possession of it,—their object being to obtain control of the warlike tribes of the West, with a view of attaching them to their side, and thereby open a way to advance into the interior and attack Michilimackinac in the rear. Some time, however, elapsed before the people at Prairie du Chien became acquainted with the intentions of the Americans. The first intimation they received of that fact was by some letters which reached them from Nicholas Boilvin, Indian Agent for the United States