LOUIS' BLUFF

THE STORY OF A WISCONSIN DELLS LANDMARK

as revealed in glimpses of its history, geology, and wildlife,
and some of the characters that shaped its neighborhood

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PREFACE

This booklet was prepared for those who visit or live at Louis' Bluff, or whose family history is somehow linked to this corner of southeast Juneau County, Wisconsin. My aim was to describe what can be found in neighborhood of the bluff, and how it came to be — to convey a "sense of place" of this noteworthy landmark.

The story of an isolated landform may seem to stretch the notion of "local history" to an absurd extreme. However, events at Louis' Bluff were often linked to general developments throughout the region and the state. Thus, the author hopes that the reader may find in this booklet some anecdotes of broader interest relating to characters and events that touched Louis' Bluff and contributed to the colorful history of the Dells region.

I have attempted to assemble a factual account of events at Louis' Bluff, often at the expense of extravagant tales spun for the benefit of tourists aboard the Dells tour boats. In this, I have relied on archival and published materials (see Bibliography) as well as oral history from many sources, particularly Helene Blaser and other descendants of the Dupless family. My thanks go to all who generously shared with me their knowledge, recollections, and cherished mementos; in addition to others cited in the text, kind assistance was received from Ray and Clara Blaser, Virginia Bogenshutz, Herb Campbell, Lee Clayton, Ross Curry, John Dixon, Rick Durbin, Morton G. Eberlein, Harold J. Funmaker, Bill Gartner, Bud Gussel, Buck Hacker and other "Hacker clan" members, Jack Hanson, Mrs. Robert Prokapec, Jean and Ollie Reese, Renee Spott, Jim Stoltman, Bernadine and Randy Tallmadge, and staff members of the State Historical Society, Milwaukee County Historical Society, and Milwaukee Public Library. As I have tried to indicate in the text, the line between authentic history and persistent (but unverifiable) local lore is sometimes blurred, especially with respect to events long past. But it seemed important to preserve fragile recollections pertaining to the bluff, particularly those that appear to be consistent with the historical record and to convey the color and texture of actual events, even at the risk of occasionally mixing some chaff with the historical wheat.

For this revised edition, many new materials have been added concerning Byron Kilbourn and his manipulative schemes. Bud Gussel graciously provided access to long-lost records of the Wisconsin River Hydraulic Company (see Appendix) that were invaluable in illuminating this area.

May this little booklet add to the reader's appreciation of the natural beauty of the Wisconsin Dells and the rich texture of Wisconsin life and landscape.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The sandy plains of the central Wisconsin River valley are punctuated by a number of remarkable rocky mounds, stubborn survivors of geological forces that ravaged the surrounding region. Louis' Bluff is prominent among these sandstone monoliths, lying at the southerly edge of the plain about two miles above the point where the river "turns on its edge" to cut through the famous Wisconsin Dells. Each year, thousands of sightseers aboard the Dells boat tours are greeted by the view of Louis' Bluff as their boat nudges out of the gorge between Sunset Rock and Prospect Point at the head of the Dells. James E. Jones, the editor of the *Kilbourn Mirror-Gazette,* described the scene aboard the steamer Apollo "sunset cruise" in 1918:

> *"At Steamboat Rock a guide announced through a megaphone that 'around the next point would be visible sunset.' Everyone was on the qui vive, and when the glory of that view came like the lifting of a curtain a volume of admiring ejaculation burst involuntarily from more than a hundred lips ... As the steamer glided on toward the sinking sun, through a path of golden light that stretched like a gilded path onto the bright orb of the declining day, the shadow-crested form of Louis' Bluff rising like a huge animal from the wide expanse of darkening water, the crowd sat spell bound, travelers over many lands declaring it the most magnificent view they ever saw."*

The rocky promontory was doubtless known by many names to the successive peoples who lived in its shadow. The name "Fox Mound" was preserved in local Indian traditions long after this once-powerful tribe (also known as Outagamie or Reynards, to themselves as Mesquakie) had been driven from the region in the genocidal Fox Wars of the 18th century. To the Winnebago (Ho-chunk-rah) Indians who were occupying the region throughout the time of white settlement, it was also called *Hay-wa-kha-chunk* ("Sacred Mound"), home of the water spirit, a sentinel outlook and ritual site for tribal assemblages at the nearby Stand Rock ceremonial grounds. To the early lumber rafters and landlookers, it was known as McEwen's Rock (or McCune's Rock, McEuen Bluff, etc.), probably for a pioneer lumberman who cleared timber at this site. But to the region's residents for the last century and more, it has become known as Louis' (or "Louie's") Bluff, named for the French pioneer Louis Dupless who came here in 1847 and lies buried in the small cemetery at the foot of the bluff.

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Louis' Bluff is one of the more recognizable features of the Dells landscape. Upper Dells tour guides often regale sightseers with stories about this curious fixture of the upriver landscape during the transit from Witches Gulch to Stand Rock. Tourists carry home souvenir photos and descriptions of Louis' Bluff in Dells guidebooks, brochures, and postcards, just as their ancestors did a century ago. A recent Wisconsin State Recreation Guide featured the cover photo, "Incomparable Beauty of Wisconsin Dells", showing the view of Louis' Bluff from the entrance to Witches Gulch. Yet, Louis' Bluff retains an aura of mystery and remoteness even for many old-time residents of the Dells.

As a prominent sentinel point along the principal waterway of the state, Louis' Bluff was often brushed by people and events that shaped the development of central Wisconsin. From the earliest times, a succession of voyageurs, explorers, geologists, and other bypassers paused here to gain the vista from the rocky castellations at the summit, as Indians had for millennia before. In historic times, the panorama of everyday life near Louis' Bluff shifted successively from pastoral scenes of hunting and the fur trade to the boisterous traffic of raftsmen and the lumber trade, the speculative frenzy of railroad construction and town settlement, the boom and bust of agricultural development, and eventually the glitz of tourism for which the region is best known today. Noteworthy too were events that shaped the natural environment at Louis' Bluff, affecting (sometimes subtly, sometimes catastrophically) the plant and animal communities that shared this unique site. The story of Louis' Bluff thus offers a glimpse of Wisconsin's history and the life and lore of the Dells region from the vantage point of one of its prominent geographical features.

This is the story of Louis' Bluff.

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CHAPTER 2

GEOLOGICAL ORIGINS

Lawrence Martin's classic book, *The Physical Geography of Wisconsin,* describes the geological origin of Louis' Bluff (page 351):

> *"On the western side of the Dells are Louis Bluff, Stand Rock, and several other interesting natural features. These are in the Driftless Area and seem to be chiefly due to preglacial weathering and wind work. Here the gorge of the Wisconsin broadens out into a wide valley, containing isolated rock hills such as Louis Bluff and the sandstone mounds to the north. These mounds and the Elephants Back mound east of the Wisconsin are outliers, left behind in the recession of the Magnesian escarpment."*

The conspicuous "Magnesian escarpment"* of which Louis' Bluff was formerly a protrusion now rises about five miles to the west, the "scenic bluffs" of the Elroy-Wonewoc region bordering the western Wisconsin valley. Near the deeply indented forward edge of this escarpment, one can recognize that erosional forces are still dissecting the soft sandstone ridges into isolated bluffs, most prominently in the weirdly castellated region near Camp Douglas. Remarkable is the number of these outlying bluffs that have survived out to great distances from the parent escarpment, while surrounding areas were eroded to a featureless plain.

The longevity of such outliers is apparently due to the physico-chemical properties of the iron-rich sandstone of which they are composed, similar to the mural sandstone exposed in the cliffs of the Dells. This material is extremely soft when first exposed, as will be apparent to anyone who cracks open a sandstone rock and crumbles the inner core material to sand in his fingers. But the surface hardens upon further exposure to oxygen to form a durable building material, probably strengthened by the thin layer of blue-green algae—cryptoendolithic cyanobacteria—that is characteristically seen just beneath the surface in a conspicuous greenish band. A bluff or ridge that somehow survives the initial vulnerable period of rapid erosion thereby acquires a protective shell, gaining a new lease on life once the vigorous stream-cutting action of the main escarpment has receded to a safe distance. The lime ridgetops of the nearby highlands to which Louis' Bluff was formerly attached mark

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* Martin's "Magnesian" horizon is the base of the modem "Prairie du Chien Group" (Ordovician dolomite) which caps the higher ridge tops. The conspicuous cliff face that presently marks the forward edge of these highlands is composed of the "Wonewoc Formation" (Cambrian sandstone) that caps Louis' Bluff, and is therefore called the "Wonewoc escarpment" in modern terminology. Recent studies have also indicated the relatively greater role of the glacial flood (see below) in shaping Stand Rock than suggested by Martin's description

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the geological transition from the sandstones of Cambrian Period to the magnesium-rich limestones of Ordovician Period, about 500 million years ago. While Louis' Bluff is composed entirely of Cambrian formations, its summit corresponds closely to the culminating period of explosive growth of life on earth which signaled the Cambrian-Ordovician transition. The outcroppings of the Dells region were once categorized simply as "Potsdam sandstones," but in modern parlance the layers of Louis' Bluff span the "Elk Mound Group" of Wonewoc (Ironton and Galesville members), Eau Claire, and Mount Simon sandstone formations (the latter forming the lower two-thirds of Louis' Bluff and all of the Dells), each distinguished by variations in coloration, composition, and resistance. Magnetic alignments frozen in ancient rocks reveal that in late-Cambrian times the underlying terrain was significantly skewed with respect to current compass directions, twisted about 90° from its present orientation (with, e.g., the Baraboo Bluffs standing due west of Louis' Bluff). The sedimentary layers of Louis' Bluff were originally laid down by alternate flooding and wind-driven ("aeolean") drifting of sandy deposits from earlier cycles of uplift and erosion, preserved in the freakishly skewed angles of successive strata ("cross-bedding") that are characteristic of the Dells. Plunged beneath ancient seas, where the sandy layers consolidated to rock under the great weight of overlying material, these strata were later uplifted, eventually to reappear in the current erosional cycle as a fossilized record of the older depositional patterns. Indeed, one can today see ripple patterns preserved in sandstone layers at the top of the bluff that are identical to those in the sandy river bottom about 200 feet below. However, these ancient events were less important in shaping the terrain around Louis' Bluff than those of comparatively recent geological times, associated with the recession of the glaciers about 15,000 years ago. Outliers such as Louis' Bluff presumably also once bordered the continuation of the limestone escarpment in eastern Wisconsin, along the eastern edge of the central plain. But these and many other features of the pre-glacial terrain fell victim to the crushing advance of the glaciers, which covered all but the curious "Driftless Area" of southwestern Wisconsin that includes Louis' Bluff. Even Louis' Bluff narrowly escaped destruction as the forward advance of the Green Bay glacial lobe thrust to within about four miles on the east and crossed the present bed of the Wisconsin River about nine miles further south. The survival of ornate rocky structures such as the castellated features atop Louis' Bluff provides strong evidence to geologists that this region was never invaded by glaciers.

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Although Louis' Bluff was pre-glacial in origin, the glaciers crowding up to the edge of this region radically altered the surrounding landscape. The Wisconsin River itself was apparently displaced far west of the river that originally drained central Wisconsin in pre-glacial times. (The pre-glacial Lemonweir and Yellow Rivers probably trended much further southeastward, crossing present Juneau and Adams Counties until they were blocked and "beheaded" by the incipient Wisconsin.) As the glaciers receded in the latter stages of the Ice Age, an enormous meltwater lake sprawled over much of central Wisconsin, covering an area comparable to the present Great Salt Lake of Utah. In this "Glacial Lake Wisconsin," Louis' Bluff and its rocky companions loomed as isolated islands. Eventually, the accumulated meltwaters found an opening through the sandstone bluffs that bordered the glacial lake close to where Louis' Bluff stood, thereby discharging the lake and forming the Dells. The newly emergent Wisconsin River assumed its present course past the base of Louis' Bluff, and a broad bay was formed before the bluff by the natural damming action of the narrow passage. Beyond the bluff the river enters the Upper Jaws and snakes through the Dells, as described in the words of John Muir,

> *"past the black yawning fissures and beetling, threatening rockbrows above . . . the invincible Wisconsin has been fighting for ages for a free passage to the Mississippi, and only this crooked and narrow slit has been granted or gained."*

The altered watercourses were to materially affect future patterns of development in the region, particularly around the curious watershed feature at Portage (a topological saddlepoint) that created the famous Fox-Wisconsin waterway from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi and later became the reference point for numerous political subdivisions of the future state of Wisconsin.*

The Glacial Flood

Recent geological research by Lee Clayton and John W. Attig of the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey has revealed many interesting details of the birth and death of Glacial Lake Wisconsin, suggesting the spectacular, cataclysmic scope of this great natural event. The glacial lake

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* It is noteworthy that the glacial landforms of the Dells also had a significant (if indirect) effect on the subsequent evolution of the University of Wisconsin. At a time in the mid-nineteenth century when the struggling frontier university must have seemed a scientific backwater for serious academic pursuits, the Wisconsin terrain beckoned as a veritable living laboratory in the emerging field of glacial geology, attracting world-class scientific talent to its investigation. Two of the most important of these were T. C. Chamberlin, who edited the four-volume "Geology of Wisconsin" (1877), and his successor C. E. Van Hise, whose scientific works included a paper on "The Origin of the Dells of the Wisconsin" (1895). Both became presidents of the University, spearheading UW's early rise as a preeminent research institution and its leadership in many aspects of Wisconsin life.

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apparently began to form about 19,000 years ago when the glacier butted up against the sheer eastern end of the granite-like Baraboo Bluffs (the present Cascade Ski Slope, about 20 miles south of Louis' Bluff), effectively damming up the meltwaters that gushed constantly from its forward edge. Prior to blockage of the Devil's Lake gap at "Devil's Nose," these waters escaped southwestward toward the Mississippi, but were now trapped in a broad basin formed by the glacial wall on the east and the highland bluffs (stretching north and westward from Baraboo toward Black River Falls) on the west, pinched closed at the southern tip.

Pinned by the stubborn Baraboo quartzite at the south and fronted by the deep meltwater lake that now blocked its forward advance, the Green Bay lobe was effectively stalled in place for about 4000 years (thus sparing the nearby island that would later become Louis' Bluff) as other portions of the Laurentide glacial sheet continued their advance. For much of its history, as the plugged Devil's Nose outlet continued to hold, the glacial lake was apparently stabilized by drainage from its shallow northern end into the present Black River channel to the Mississippi. Then, as the last (Wisconsin) stage of the Ice Age passed its zenith about 15,000 years ago, the glaciers began their slow retreat, and the icy shoreline of the glacial lobe edged back ominously from its snug grip on the Baraboo Bluffs that had given birth to the lake millennia before. On that fateful day about 14,000 years ago when the fragile ice link to the rock had finally melted down to the level of the lake's surface, water began to spill through the new southern breach. This initiated the catastrophic erosion of the ice dam holding back the 150-foot deep lake, unleashing a torrent of unimaginable proportions. It is authoritatively estimated that the level of the lake may have dropped by as much as 100 feet in a day or so![*]

The initial drainage was from a smaller elongated basin (only about 10 miles wide) trapped between the glacier and its moraine of furthest advance (roughly paralleling the present Adams-Marquette county border), which in turn formed the eastern boundary of the main basin. The two basins communicated through a narrow channel in the moraine where it crossed sandstone highlands

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* The draining of Glacial Lake Wisconsin has features in common with similar "catastrophic floods" in other glacial settings. One of the best documented modern examples occurred in southeastern Alaska in 1986 when a glacial lake (of similar depth, but much smaller volume than Glacial Lake Wisconsin) trapped in Russell Fiord by the Hubbard Glacier breached its ice dam and fell more than 80 feet in a single day. A similar event (Spokane Flood) of far greater proportions was apparently responsible for drainage of a glacial lake that once sprawled over Washington, Idaho, and Montana, leaving huge basaltic channel scars in southeastern Washington as its legacy. See Clayton and Attig, "Glacial Lake Wisconsin."

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at the present site of Wisconsin Dells. For most of its history, this channel had served as the spillway from the high eastern basin into the main northwestern body of the lake (containing Louis' Bluff). However, as the eastern basin abruptly drained, the direction of water flow through this channel was reversed with a vengeance, and the drainage of the great main basin now began in earnest. This second great "Dells Flood" probably occurred within a few days or weeks of the collapse of the Baraboo Bluffs ice dam, cutting savagely at the soft sandstone that underlay the earlier channel. From the top of Louis' Bluff, which stood virtually in the throat of the torrential discharge, one might have witnessed the awesome formation of the modern Dells channel in a mere matter of days or weeks! On the slopes of Louis' Bluff one can recognize ancient shorelines that presumably mark successive stages of the glacial lake and its drainage. Two of these probably coincide with earlier channels that have long been recognized by geologists: the "Old Channel" that encircles Blackhawk Island, and the still earlier channel that forms the present site of Rocky Arbor State Park. A third higher shoreline may be associated with formation of the Black River, which, as mentioned above, was connected with the earliest stages of discharge of the glacial lake. The rocks of Louis' Bluff are thus imprinted with ancient events that profoundly altered and shaped the landforms of present-day Wisconsin.

The Aftermath

The catastrophic draining of Glacial Lake Wisconsin left Louis' Bluff exposed on a tundra-like permafrost terrain for another thousand years, as sediment-laden meltwaters continued to drain from receding ice sheets further north. (The glacier would not complete its withdrawal from the present boundaries of Wisconsin until about 9,500 years ago.) The ravages of soil erosion were far more extensive than at present, as moving waters swept over the impermeable permafrost, tearing away frozen chunks rather than seeping harmlessly into the sands as they do today. The thawing of the permafrost (about 13,000 years ago) was to gradually open the way to return of climatic and ecological conditions more nearly resembling those of the present.

Fortunately, we have a rather detailed chronology of post-glacial botanical events (and indirectly, of associated climatological conditions) from an unlikely source—the muddy sediments of Devil's

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Lake and other nearby ponds and bogs! Devil's Lake was trapped without inlet or outlet near the level of the old glacial lake, and its sediments contain an unbroken 13,000-year record of pollen grains spread by the plants that successively arrived to dominate the landscape of the region. The earliest to invade the treeless tundra around Louis' Bluff were the spruce forests, spreading up from the south. These were successively followed by aspen, cottonwood, ash, and birch, creating a pattern resembling what might today be seen fringing high alpine meadows of the Colorado Rockies. About 11,000 years ago, the first pine trees arrived—first the red pines, and about a thousand years later, the white pines (due to play such an important role at Louis' Bluff during the lumbering era; see Chapter 5). Oaks and elm trees also thrust into the landscape about this time, but the latter diminished about 4000 B.C. when the climate entered a warmer, dryer period. By the end of this time (about 1000 B.C.), as the climate returned to cooler, wetter conditions that have prevailed to the present, the predominant mix of oaks and white pines was probably rather similar to that encountered by white settlers in the 18th century.

Although there is no similarly detailed and continuous record of animal habitation around Louis' Bluff, one can surmise from fossil remains found elsewhere that woolly mammoths grazed the tundra grass as the glaciers receded. American mastodons (such as the specimen recovered from Wisconsin River deposits near Boaz in Richland County, now on display in the UW Geology Museum) and other now-extinct species followed the coniferous forests into this region, as did caribou, moose, and other game animals. By about 3000 B.C. at the latest, clear local evidence of human habitation was accumulating in the nearby Raddatz sandstone rockshelter at Natural Bridge State Park, south of Reedsburg. The oldest artifacts found at Louis' Bluff also seem to date from this Middle Archaic era. However, a few Paleo-Indian sites elsewhere in Wisconsin suggest considerably earlier habitation within the present boundaries of the state.

It is thought that man first spread into the Americas (via the Bering Straits ice bridge) about 12,000 years ago. A fluted spearpoint found among the mastodon bones at the Boaz site gives evidence that human hunters coexisted with these prehistoric creatures in early post-glacial Wisconsin. The rapid extinction of several large mammalian species in this era probably gives indirect evidence of the deadly hunting proficiency of "the two-legged ones." However, the story of these early inhabitants of the

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region around Louis' Bluff belongs in the realm of archaeology, and will be taken up again in Chapter 9.

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CHAPTER 3

PRE-SETTLEMENT HISTORY

French and British Explorations

Thousands of years of human habitation preceded the first written records pertaining to the region around Louis' Bluff. The nature of the early Indian cultures that occupied this region can only be vaguely surmised from their scattered tumuli and artifacts, or the myths and traditions of their descendants (Chapter 9).

Perhaps the first white men to see Louis' Bluff were the French explorers, Pierre Esprit Radisson and his brother-in-law Mèdard Chouart, Sieur de Groseilliers, in 1659. Radisson and Groseilliers are generally credited with being the first white men to set foot in the present territory of Minnesota, and their journeys on the upper Mississippi apparently preceded by 13 years the famous discovery voyage of Joliet and Marquette over the Fox-Wisconsin portage. Radisson's manuscript, preserved in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, describes five expeditions to the upper Great Lakes region from 1652 to 1660, two of these (spanning about three years) into the territory of present-day Wisconsin. Radisson's description of the Wisconsin portion of the second Mississippi expedition is exasperatingly fragmentary and difficult to follow. Though a native Frenchman, Radisson wrote his narrative in a comically fractured English style for his patrons. He prefaces his entry into the Wisconsin region with a general description that reflects his delight in the countryside there:

> *"I can assure you I liked no country as I have that wherein we wintered . . . the country was so pleasant, so beautiful, and fruitful that it grieved me to see that the world could not discover such enticing countries to live in . . . the further we journeyed the delightfuller the land was to us. 1 can say that fin] my lifetime I never saw a more incomparable country, for all I been in Italy; yet Italy comes short of it . . . "*

Radisson describes the spring of 1659 as going "from river to river," and the route from Chequamegon Bay (where they built the first fort in Wisconsin) to the Mississippi probably carried them along the Wisconsin River valley, past Louis' Bluff, according to the best conjectures of scholars. In his general description of the countryside, Radisson recalls that "there are mountains to be seen far in the land," perhaps referring to Rib Mountain near Wausau, the Baraboo Bluffs near Portage, Blue Mounds near Dodgeville, or lesser landmarks along the Wisconsin valley. But

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Groseilliers's notes for this portion of the journey were lost in a spill in the lower Fox River. Radisson's recollections, recorded many years later, were admittedly extremely sketchy ("I will let you only know what course we runned in three years' time") and poorly recalled (" ... the names, which I hope to describe in the end of this most imperfect discourse, at least those that I can remember"), leaving many details of their travels open to speculation.

During the long period of French dominion (1634-1761) it is reasonable to suppose that fur trappers, traders, and missionaries were traveling the Wisconsin and other principal waterways of the upper Mississippi valley from about 1680 onward. But the rugged French-Canadian *voyageurs, coureurs de bois,* and *hivernants* blended so completely into the native Indian culture as to leave little written trace. Nor did the succeeding half-century of British dominion add significantly to knowledge of the central Wisconsin wilderness. Louis Beaupre of the Grignon-Porlier outfit of Green Bay came to the Lemonweir valley (only a few miles from Louis' Bluff) to establish an Indian trade in 1810, but his sojourn ended in near-starvation after a single winter because at that time the Indians, under the influence of Tecumseh's confederacy, would have no dealings with white men. Little is recorded of the region north of the Fox-Wisconsin portage until the 1820's, when John Jacob Astor of the American Fur Company successfully petitioned the U. S. Congress for the establishment of a military outpost at the Fox-Wisconsin portage for the protection of the dwindling fur trade, following the events of the 1827 "Winnebago War" and capture of Red Bird.

Fort Winnebago

The construction of Fort Winnebago at the present site of Portage in 1828-29 marked a turning point in the development of the upper Wisconsin valley and the region around Louis' Bluff. An important effect of this fortified outpost was to hasten the general westward migration of settlers into Wisconsin and the treeless plains beyond, spurring the demand for lumber that would usher in the next great stage of Wisconsin economic development. The fort also provided the base for systematic exploration of the region above the Portage, and the first eyewitness reports relating to the Dells of the Wisconsin and the region around Louis' Bluff.

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One of the first historical figures who may have passed near Louis' Bluff was the future Confederate president, Jefferson Davis. In 1829, Davis was a young second lieutenant stationed at Fort Winnebago, and was put in command of a detachment to search upriver for the timber needed in the construction of the fort. The pine stands were said to be located along the Yellow River, a tributary of the Wisconsin above the Dells, and the logs floated down to the Portage. If so, it would have been the first instance of lumber passing by Louis' Bluff and through the Dells.

Another important figure associated with the early historical record of the Dells was the Sauk chief Black Hawk. In 1831-2, Black Hawk and his renegade "British Band" became protagonists in the deadly "Black Hawk War," the only declared U. S. military action in the period between the War of 1812 and the Mexican War, and the last significant Indian uprising east of the Mississippi. Following the murderous battle at Bad Axe that ended this war, the defeated Sauk chief fled northward into Winnebago country and, according to official records, was captured "near the Dalles of the Wisconsin." This event, described in more detail in Chapter 9, probably occurred at the mouth of the Lemonweir a few miles above Louis' Bluff. It is noteworthy that the official report of Black Hawk's capture contains the first known reference to the "Dalles," French-Canadian slang for a narrow river passage between steep walls. However, the Dells region was presumably well known to the earlier voyageurs from whose dialect the word derives.

One of the first recorded military actions for the garrison at Fort Winnebago was to break up a pioneering lumber operation on the upper Wisconsin above Louis' Bluff. In the winter of 1827-8, Daniel Whitney of Green Bay hired Ebenezer Childs to take a foreman and crew of 22 Stockbridge Indians up to the mouth of the Yellow River to make shingles. The enterprising Whitney was one of the influential figures of pioneer Wisconsin, vaunted as "the only man in the Western Department who dared to oppose John Jacob Astor in the Indian trade." Whitney was eager to tap the rich timber resources of the upper Wisconsin, believing that he had secured the Indians' permission to enter the region that was claimed by both Winnebago and Menominee tribes at the time. But the U. S. Indian Agent at Prairie du Chien (Joseph Street) was incensed at the unauthorized white intrusion into Indian lands. Accompanied by the sub-agent from Prairie du Chien, a detachment of troops from Fort Winnebago went up river to arrest Whitney's men. The soldiers confiscated all the shingles that might

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be useful in the construction of the fort, then burned the remainder. A lively account of the confrontation is given in Childs' "Recollections" in vol. 4 of the *Wisconsin Historical Collections.* Thus ended ignominiously the initial chapter in the development of the lumber trade on the upper Wisconsin, which was to have such an important influence on events in the Dells region.

Among those who were probably acquainted with the region around Louis' Bluff were a group of fur traders from Green Bay who settled on the upper Wisconsin from about 1827 on. These included Jacques Porlier, Jr. and the Grignon brothers, Amable, Charles, and Paul. The Grignons were grandsons of the celebrated fighter of the French and Indian Wars and "founding father of Wisconsin," Charles Langlade. Amable Grignon was said to have taken his wife Judith up the Wisconsin river to "Grignon's bend" in northern Juneau County, below the present site of Wisconsin Rapids, and made it is permanent residence from 1829 on. John T. De La Ronde, a young French-Canadian trader formerly associated with the Hudson's Bay Company, arrived at the Portage in 1828 to begin an adventurous life in the central Wisconsin River valley. His recollections *[Wisc. Hist. Coll., vol.* 7 (1876)] preserve a valuable record of events and people (including many details of Indian life) throughout the region around Louis' Bluff during this formative period.

Another prominent trader on the upper Wisconsin was Jean Baptiste (John B.) DuBay, who operated a trading post at "DuBay Point" (between Stevens Point and Wausau, now inundated under the Big Eau Pleine reservoir) from about 1835 on. DuBay's enterprises stretched up and down the river between DuBay Point and Fort Winnebago, and for a time he operated a keelboat between Portage and Point Bluff to carry cargo through the Dells. DuBay later became the defendant in a celebrated murder trial for killing a claim jumper at his homesite near Fort Winnebago in 1857. This trial was one of the first conducted in the state of Wisconsin, featuring the testimony of a number of future governors, senators, and other leading figures of the day and pitting the simple code of the half-breed frontiersman against the sharp practices of later settlers and speculators. After two indecisive trials that ended in hung juries and left DuBay a broken man, the district attorney of Columbia county neglected to appear at Mineral Point to prosecute him a third time, and the matter was forgotten. Morton E. Krug's book, *DuBay, Son-in-Law of Oshkosh,* gives a full account of the case.

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Eyewitness Accounts

The search for white pine soon brought other explorers into the region above the Dells. Among the first was John T. Kingston, a prominent figure in the founding of Necedah and the development of the lumber industry in Juneau county. Kingston's account of his trip through the region with Samuel B. Pilkington in the winter of 1837 *[Wis. Hist. Coll.,* vol. 8, pp. 370-410] includes the first known mention of "McEwen Rock," as Louis' Bluff was known to him:

> *"We remained with Mr. Ubaldine [at Fort Winnebago] about a week, and until the river closed sufficiently to cross the ice, and again started on our explorations. Reaching the wigwams before mentioned, we struck across the south end of Dell Prairie, arriving at the Wisconsin River opposite McEwen Rock."*

The two men had been given a bottle of "Irish medicine" by Mrs. Ubaldine, to fortify them against being "frost bited." Kingston goes on to describe how this was put to good use as they approached Louis' Bluff:

> *"Arriving at the end of the prairie, and facing a cold west wind, we soon felt unmistakable evidence of the frosty atmosphere, so much so that we concluded to halt and try the remedy in the bottle, but here we found a difficulty - how to apply it. After mature consultation and reflection, we concluded to try an inward application, and 1 must say the result was equal to our highest expectations."*

Kingston's exploration soon led to extensive lumbering operations in the Lemonweir valley, including the lumber mill near the present site of Mauston that the young Louis Dupless was to visit within the decade. Other associations of Louis' Bluff with pioneer lumbering and rafting operations and the construction of the famous Dell House tavern are described in Chapter 5.

Another early traveler who recorded his impressions of the area around Louis' Bluff was Henry Merrell, a prominent citizen of Portage and the longtime sutler at Fort Winnebago. Merrell canoed down the river in 1840 and described the approach to the Dells:

> *"Further down the river, the rock views were grand and beautiful. At one point, we saw in front of us the rocks rising in one solid perpendicular front, a hundred or more feet, with the top scalloped, and pinnacles looking like some ancient fortifications, or the battlements of some old feudal castle. I wondered where the river was going to get by it, as it was directly facing us; but the stream here took a turn, and we left the towering rock to the right of us. Then we passed through the Dells . . ."*

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Even though the river channel has since been partially concealed under the flowage created by the Kilbourn dam, the present-day canoeist approaching the Dells will recognize from this description that the "towering rock" was doubtless Louis' Bluff.

Merrell's description of the canoe approach to Louis' Bluff recalls a provocative theory concerning the Indian origins of the word "Wisconsin"—derived from the earliest references to "Misconsing" ("Miscousing," "Ouisconsing," "Ouisconsin," "Wiskonsan," etc.) for the region's principal river. C. W. Butterfield, a well-known 19th-century Wisconsin historian, could find no antecedents for this name in the Winnebago language, but he continues:

> *"We now turn to the Chippewa dictionary, fully satisfied that we shall find a word (or words), if not exactly the same as `Misconsing' pretty nearly like it, and we are not disappointed. The word is at once discovered to be a compound; its roots are `missi,' great, and 'ossin,' a stone or rock. But why should the Wisconsin have been called 'the Great Rock river' by the Indians? The answer is at hand. In floating down that river (which has its source in what was then their country) the Chippewas found as its most prominent and striking feature the 'great stone,' which almost seemed to wall in the river, at what are now so widely known as the Dells."*

It is noteworthy that many of the suggested alternative interpretations of "Wisconsin" or "Wees-Konsan," although mutually inconsistent in a literal sense, are uniquely appropriate to the Dells.*

Even the remarkable theory of Virgil J. Vogel (author of "Indian Names on Wisconsin's Map"), that the name somehow preserves the Mesquakie (Fox) tribe's term for itself, evocatively recalls the old name "Fox Mound" (with its companion "Fox Point," the only known placenames with Fox associations along the length of the river). It seems not entirely fanciful to conjecture that these diverse connotations of "Wisconsin's" origin might somehow be connected with Butterfield's "Great Stone" that appears to "wall in" the upriver approach to the Dells, as described by Merrell.

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* For example (cf. Derleth, Stark in the Bibliography):

Place of the Gathering of Waters: This well describes how the sprawling, many-channel river of the broad central sand plains gathers ("turning on its edge") to enter the narrow Dells gorge.

Red Cliff: To Chippewa travelers from upriver, this term might well describe the ruddy mural sandstone walls that appear dramatically at the head of the Dells. (Several writers have remarked that the "cliff" reference could only refer to the Dells.)

Wild. Rushing River: This term well describes the tumultuous Dells passage of the pre-dam era (cf. Chap. 5), in marked contrast to the river's typically languid character elsewhere.

River of Flowery Banks: As naturalists would attest (cf. Chap. 10), the flowery botanical diversity of the Dells is unmatched elsewhere on the river.

River of a Thousand Islands: Although most are now covered under the Kilbourn flowage, numerous islands formerly dotted the broad bay at the head of the Dells. Indeed, 19th-century guidebooks often labelled the upriver view from Prospect Point as "The Islands" for this conspicuous feature of the landscape.

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Other descriptions of Louis' Bluff were left by the government geologists dispatched to conduct the first systematic survey of Wisconsin territory. J. G. Norwood was the leader of the survey party that came down the Wisconsin River in 1847, coming upon the "chain of hills" (including Rogge Bluff, Fox Point, and Elephant's Back) which intersects the river at Louis' Bluff. His description of the mounds includes an interesting remark on their religious significance for the native Indians:

> *"At two o'clock [October 14, 18471, we reached the chain of hills [spotted from afar the previous day . . . These cliffs differ from those seen yesterday in presenting on one side a nearly perpendicular face, from two hundred to three hundred feet high, while on the opposite side they descend, by long and very gradual slopes, to the general level. They rise at long intervals, being separated by wide ravines, sparsely wooded, and are distributed along the country like a cordon of forts. Many, indeed most of them, resemble, when seen from a distance, artificial works; and one who has seen them feels no surprise that the superstitious Indian should consider them dwelling-places of superior intelligences, and look upon them with awe and reverence."*

A year later, Norwood's colleague B. F. Shumard ascended the river with another survey party, and described the view as they came out of the Dells:

> *"From the extensive sandy plains that now set in, many remarkable isolated peaks rise, at distant intervals, some of which are almost vertical, to the height of two hundred feet and upwards. The first encountered [Louis' Bluff] was about two miles above the Dalles, which is one hundred and eighty-five feet high, its sides and summits dotted with pines and oaks. The rocks composing it are like those at the Dalles, excepting the upper beds, which weather and split into prismatic blocks, from one inch to one foot in thickness, and stand out in the form of turrets.*
>
> *From the summit an immense plain can be traced, apparently about thirty miles in extent, its uniformity broken at intervals of a few miles by these curious, isolated peaks of sandstone, most of which seem to have about the same elevation."*

Still another noteworthy explorer who climbed Louis' Bluff was Increase A. Lapham, the pioneer scientist who is often referred to as "the Archimedes of Wisconsin." Lapham's comprehensive *Geographical and Topographical Description of Wisconsin* was the sourcebook that guided many settlers to this frontier territory. The first edition of this book in 1844 had already included one of the first written references to the Dells, but it was not until 1852 that Lapham was able to personally travel into the region on a geological exploration. Lapham's diary for June 2, 1852, relates how, after canoeing the Narrows and arriving at the head of the Dells, he stopped to climb "McEuen's Rock":

> *"On Sec. 18 T[ownship]14 R[ange]6 a little above a creek is a steep rock cliff called McEuen's Rock which I ascended; it is 240 feet high sandstone throughout -*

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same as at the dells. At the summit discovered one slab covered with ripple marks - 2 to 2 1/2 inches wide."

The rippled slab noted by Lapham can still be seen at "the point" on Louis' Bluff as a conspicuous and curious feature, a onetime sandy beach or riverbed now fossilized and left perched atop the highest point of the region.

Lapham's arrival in 1852 may be said to mark the end of the pre-settlement era, signaling the onset of a wave of settlement that was to transform the region around Louis' Bluff in the next few years. At this time, large numbers of lumber rafts were already passing Louis' Bluff from the pineries further north, where thousands of workers were engaged in the lumber trade in the ceded timberlands near Wausau from about 1840 on (see Chapter 5). Wisconsin had gained statehood in 1848, but the vast "Menominee tract" that included Louis' Bluff was not ceded to the U. S. until 1849. The Menominee lands were surveyed in the years 1850-51, then brought up for sale at the U.S. Government Land Office at Mineral Point in early 1853 after the usual "pre-emption period" for early settlers. Among the pioneers filing for pre-emption was the young French settler Louis Dupless, who had entered the region about five years before Lapham's visit. In the next two or three years, the "land office business" at Mineral Point would lead to rapid settlement of the region, including the founding of Kilbourn City (Chapter 6), Mauston, and other towns and villages nearby. For the next half century, events at Louis' Bluff would center on Louis Dupless and his family.

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CHAPTER 4

LOUIS DUPLESS AND HIS FAMILY

Who was "Louis" of Louis' Bluff? Only a partial portrait can now be assembled from the reminiscences recorded by his children, conversations with surviving family members, contemporary newspaper accounts, and records in the Wisconsin State Historical Society and U. S. National Archives. Few records were kept in the remote region of the Wisconsin frontier where Dupless lived, and most of the family records and cherished heirlooms were lost in a fire at the home of Frank Dupless about 1920. Yet strong memories of "Old French Louie" persisted throughout the region for many years after his death.

Louis Frank Dupless was born June 10, 1820, in Bordeaux, France. It is said that his parents left Paris when he was twelve years old and that the family was exiled from France for political reasons, but little is known of their circumstances. The boy Louis ran away from home and joined the French Marine Service at about age 15. Thus began a period of twelve adventurous years as a seafarer that would soon bring him to the New World.

In 1836, at the age of 17, Dupless was aboard a ship bound for America. On this voyage he became acquainted with the Walklin family of Oxford, England, and their nine-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, who would years later become his first wife. The Walklins were bound for Wisconsin, but Louis Dupless continued the life of a sailor. He is said to have engaged in shipping cargo between Naples and New Orleans, bringing olive oil on the westward route and returning to Italy with lumber brought down to New Orleans from the upper reaches of the Mississippi. This enterprise continued until his ship ran aground in the Florida Keys near a lighthouse off Key West.

After this mishap Dupless took part in the early stages of the Mexican War, serving as a substitute soldier for $800. This was a common practice of the day when wealthy men wished to escape the obligations of service. In the meantime, Dupless had maintained contact with the Walklin family and his cheerful traveling companion of a decade before. In 1846, he made his way to Wisconsin and married Elizabeth E. Walklin in the fall of that year.

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Louis Dupless first arrived in the region above the Dells in the summer of 1847 and settled at the bluff that now bears his name in October of that year. Perhaps his contacts with the New Orleans lumber traders had informed him of the opportunities in the upper regions of the Wisconsin River, which was soon to become the premier lumbering region of the nation. According to his later recollections he stopped at the present site of Mauston in July, 1847, but the only living person in the place was a watchman for the saw mill, which was closed down on account of low water. Dupless inquired for the upper mill (at the present site of New Lisbon), but was cautioned not to go as he might get lost as some others had been a short time previous.

Dupless wintered over after staking his timberland claim at the bluff, then left the following spring for three months to fetch his bride and belongings. It is said that from the time of his return until his death nearly a half-century later (excepting only his Civil War service), he was scarcely ever out of view of his home at Louis' Bluff.

At the base of the isolated bluff in the midst of Winnebago lands, Louis and Elizabeth Dupless began to trade with the Indians and passing rivermen and to raise a family. This first son, Charles, was born in 1849, probably the first white child born in present Juneau County. The family seems to have maintained good relations with the neighboring Indians. A daughter recalled that

> *"there was a tribe of Indians that were very friendly with father and they came to our house a lot for meals when I was a little girl . . . I was young but I remember there was an old Indian chief who used to come when the river was frozen over. His canoe was dragging behind him for security, for he could borrow father's rifle to shoot buffalo and deer, and every spring he would bring it back."*

Another family story concerns the time their baby was bitten by a poisonous snake. The neighboring Indians agreed to cure the baby if Louis would let them have it, and in a few days the baby was returned sound and well.

In those early years the Dupless family had few neighbors besides the Indians, and fewer amenities. The rigors of frontier life in the central Wisconsin wilderness are well described by John Muir (who grew up about 20 miles east of Louis' Bluff) in his classic book, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth.* The general situation near the Dupless farmstead can be judged from the report of the U.S. Surveyor who carried out the original township survey in 1851:

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"A general description of this Township embraces perhaps as great a variety of topography as is often found within the limits of a single Township . [but] the improvements, about 450 acres cultivated and the dwellings about 15 are generally not of substantial character and poor indeed."

Most of the dwellings and "improvements" were still confined to the east side of the river, the only apparent exceptions on the survey map being R. V. Allen's Dell House tavern on Blackhawk Island (Chapter 4), Schuyler Gates' toll bridge at the Narrows, and the Dupless house at Louis' Bluff.

Although Dupless had occupied the site from 1847 onward, the first official owner of Louis' Bluff was Cyrus Woodman of Mineral Point. Woodman was one of the most influential Wisconsin citizens of the era and his illustrious career is recounted in Larry Gara's book, *Westernized Yankee: The Story of Cyrus Woodman,* published by the State Historical Society. Woodman served as the principal land agent at the U. S. Government Land Office at Mineral Point, presiding over the sell-off of the vast portion of Wisconsin included in the Menominee Tract. The transaction involving Louis' Bluff was in accord with provisions made by the U. S. Congress for early settlers within the tract to retain their homesteads by filing "pre-emption papers" prior to the official opening of the public land offering in 1853, in order to 'prove up' their claim without interference by land speculators. In December, 1852, Dupless made arrangements through attorney Jonathan Bowman of Delton (for whom the principal city park of Wisconsin Dells is named) for his land to be entered by Woodman at the land office. Per this agreement, Woodman purchased the 183 acres of the Dupless homestead on June 14, 1853, with a Military Land Warrant, a type of negotiable land voucher awarded for military service. Six weeks later Woodman transferred the deed to Dupless for the standard price of $1.25 per acre.

As the pace of the lumber traffic quickened in front of Louis' Bluff, Louis Dupless turned his nautical skills to the navigation of the Dells. According to local tradition he was the first of the "Dell pilots," skilled navigators who directed the crews of the lumber rafts through the most dangerous sections of the Dells (Chapter 5). Together with Leroy Gates and other flamboyant characters of the era, he doubtless helped create the colorful image of the Dell pilots as the most fearless

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representatives of the hard-fisted, hard-drinking rivermen. Dupless made this his profession until 1857, after which he described himself as a "farmer" instead of a "sailor."

In 1859 the Dupless family was struck by tragedy when their youngest son Charles slipped from a sand bank and was drowned in the Wisconsin River at the age of eleven. Four other children had been born by this time—Maria (Thresa) in 1852, Caroline in 1855, Frank in 1857, and Emeline (Emma) in 1859—and baby Frederick was still to follow in 1862 from the marriage to Elizabeth.

The passions of the Civil War swept strongly through the Dells from the first outbreak in 1861. Louis Dupless, awaiting another child, had to weigh his family obligations against his stout Republican principles and the ringing appeals for additional volunteers. Finally in 1864, at the age of 44, Dupless enlisted as a substitute soldier with Company G, 6th Regiment, Wisconsin Volunteers, departing for the front (via Camp Randall in Madison) in December of that year. He was slightly injured in action at Gravelly Run, Virginia, on March 31, 1865, the basis for a partial disability pension claim, and thereafter performed only light duties in the ranks. He was promoted in June to the rank of Colonel and mustered out a few weeks later (July 14, 1865), barely eight months after enlistment, following the surrender of pioneer Wisconsin River lumberer Jefferson Davis and his Confederate Army.

Dupless returned to life as a farmer on the banks of the Wisconsin River just as the region was being gripped by the giddy excitement of the hops boom (Chapter 7). Like many of his neighbors Dupless borrowed heavily to expand production of hops, and when "the bottom dropped out of hops" his property was left significantly encumbered with debt for the first time, a condition that was to worsen in later years.

At about the same time (August 1, 1869), Dupless suffered another tragedy in the death of his wife Elizabeth, of an epileptic seizure, at the age of 42. She too was buried in the family burial plot at the foot of the bluff.

Four years later, on April 10, 1873, Dupless married his second wife, born Amelia Roessler of Landskron, Austria (now Czechoslovakia) on March 8, 1846). Amelia had been married to Frank Ressler and had a daughter, Joanna, but that marriage ended in an uncontested divorce a few months

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before the marriage to Dupless. The circumstances of the divorce—on grounds of "willful desertion," with custody of the child awarded to the father—suggest that Amelia had abandoned her first husband for Louis.

The 27-year-old Amelia bravely took up life at the bluff with 53-year-old Louis and the children from the first marriage. This second union was to result in eight more children—Louisa in 1872, Helena in 1873, Nora in 1875, Ida in 1876, Daniel in 1877, Gertrude in 1881, Louis, Jr. in 1883, and William in 1884. The early years of the marriage were again a period of financial strain as Dupless fell further into debt.

In 1880, Louis Dupless went into partnership with his son-in-law August Blaser, who had married Emma in November of that year. The young Blasers set up household in the former hops house at Louis' Bluff. They later brought an adjoining farm near Stand Rock (including "Blaser's Creek" by which early tourists were paddled up to Stand Rock), but Dupless and Blaser continued to jointly farm two of the islands that would later be submerged under the flowage of the Kilbourn dam. Emma Blaser died in 1944 at the age of 85, during all of which time she had lived within a few miles of her birthplace at Louis' Bluff. Helene, Fred, and Ray Blaser, the last surviving children of August and Emma Blaser, provided the strongest direct links to the early days at Louis' Bluff until their deaths in the 1980's.

The two elder Dupless daughters both died at rather young ages under tragic circumstances. "Tress," the first, married Peter Weber and moved to Elgin, Minnesota, where she died of measles at the age of 35. Her sister Caroline ("Cal") died at the age of 32 after a life as unhappy as it was brief. Caroline was married on November 24, 1875, and bore a son to Hamilton W. Tyler of Plainville, the son of a prominent judge and hotel owner, Samuel W. Tyler. But young Hamilton was primarily remembered as a philandering cad who ran through three marriages, and after a short, unhappy marriage to Caroline, he abandoned bride and baby and moved to Oregon. Thereafter, Caroline was remembered as a tragic figure, frail and weak of heart. When she died in 1888 (of unspecified causes, perhaps by her own hand), her obituary read simply:

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CAROLINE GERTRUDE DUPLESS

Died at her father's, Louis DuPless, near Kilbourn, March 1, 1888, age 32 years, 11 months. Deceased was the daughter of one of the first settlers of this vicinity, and was known quite generally throughout her neighborhood. She had experienced much suffering and her death was a longed for release

Under her maiden name, Caroline was buried beside her mother and brother at the bluff.

In his later years, Louis Dupless played an active role in the local G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic, predecessor of the American Legion and VFW) with his former Civil War compatriots. An 1884 H. H. Bennett photograph of a G.A.R. reunion at Mauston preserves one of only two known likeness of Dupless. Another interesting fragment that has survived (in the possession of the David Lake family of Wisconsin Dells) is an undated sign-up list for "members of Post No. 50 who wish to purchase muskets and accoutrements at $3.50 each," signed by L. F. Dupless, H. H. Bennett, D. C. Van Wie, G. H. Van Alstine, J. Shumway, and other Kilbourn pioneers.

Dupless was also an ardent Republican and participant in Republican Party affairs of Juneau County. An obituary notice recalled that "he has always taken an active interest in politics, his tall form being a familiar one at conventions and other political gatherings." He was elected Juneau County Coroner on the Republican ticket in the year preceding his death.

Riverside Funeral

Louis Dupless died after a brief illness on October 5, 1895, at the age of 75, survived by his second wife and 11 of his 14 children. The funeral was conducted by the Grand Army Post of Kilbourn and included a chartered steamboat, muffled drum procession, firing squad, and other military dramatics. The scene was described movingly in the *Kilbourn Mirror-Gazette* of October 12, 1895 (no doubt by editor J. E. Jones, a member of the quartet that sang at the graveside), from which the following is taken:

The Post chartered the steamer Germania, which was the first instance known of similar character in this part of the state. The Germania left the landing in Kilbourn with a large number of the Grand Army, Relief Corps and Sons of Veterans, and citizens of Kilbourn, the steamer's flag at half-mast. After passing through the Dells, the boat went "nosing" through the islands, twisting between sand bars with barely room to pass, perhaps the most picturesque and novel bit of scenery on the Wisconsin river.

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A landing was made a few rods below the bluff and near the home of the deceased comrade...

After the services at the home the casket was borne by old comrades, the Post marching with reversed arms and with muffled drums, to a grave in the family cemetery at the foot of Louis' bluff, and on the bank of the river. It was a touching bit of sentiment, that old soldier's burial near the close of the season when Nature is dying so gloriously and in such a magnificent funeral garb. The grave was at the foot of a high mountain of precipitous rock, up the sides of which clusters of foliage in colors beautiful and varied, hung like a floral boquets, a heavy forest fringing the base up to and beyond the grave. In front of the picture was a wide stretch of open marsh and field, the seared grass, dull and dark, forming a fitting funeral pall, under the edge of which had been dug the grave. A few steps to one side the Wisconsin river flowed silently but swiftly by, spreading out here to a great width, and dotted with wooded islands. Over it all the sun, in its declining hours, cast a soft radiance of golden light . .. [S]eeing the remains lowered into the grave, as the muffled drum rolled and the quartett sang

There let the way appear
Steps unto heaven
All that thou sendest me In
mercy given,
Angels to beckon me
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee.

how could one, under such an inspiration fail to enter into a spirit of harmony with the surroundings? A firing squad under G. H. Van Alstine fired a salute of three volleys, and their Comrade, after years of service in war, and years of fraternal association as a citizen veteran, was left beside a wife and son in a cemetery beside the river on which his life has been spent.

Louis was the last to be buried in the graveyard at the bluff.

The Family Moves On

Soon after Louis' death in 1895, the financially encumbered farm passed out of the family's hands in a foreclosure action. About the same time, the family name began to be written as "DuPless," as it is by the descendants today. Amelia and her children moved out of the area, first to Portage, later to Eau Claire. There she continued to live on the modest Widow's Pension from Louis' Civil War service, until her death on September 15, 1920. Of the surviving children from the first marriage, Frank Dupless married Emma Weber in 1897 and lived for a time at Lyndon Station, later moving to Montello to become a bartender, while Emma Blaser and Fred Dupless, the youngest son by Elizabeth, both remained in the Dells region until their deaths.

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Fred Dupless was himself a memorable character of the Dells, "Old Dad" to his fellow veterans in later years. He guarded the Kilbourn bridge from saboteurs in the early stages of World War I. He enlisted for active duty at the age of 54(!) and lost his right arm in service in France. He is recalled in Don Saunders' book, *Driftwood and Debris,* as the old riverman who narrates "The Legend of the Witch's Window":

> *"It was Fred Dupless who enlightened the lad one night in one of the quaint bars that nestle so cozily off the main stem of the town. Fred Dupless, God love him, the last of our local raftsmen, whom we no longer shall see, sipping his beer and day dreaming his wonderful memories. He has joined his family in hallowed ground at the foot of Louis' Bluff; that is, all of him except the lead-laden arm that he left on French soil in 1916. Fred had enlisted when he was in his fifties . . . "*

With Fred's death in 1939, the Dupless name became but a memory in the Dells region.

Old French Louie

What kind of man was Louis Dupless? There is now no living person with a direct memory of his character and personality. But impressions have survived from recollections told by his children, grandchildren, and others who knew him well.

Dupless' physical appearance is suggested by the two known photographs—one at perhaps age 45-50, the other at age 64—revealing a dark beard and a bold eye. His military record describes him at 5 feet, 8-1/2 inches in height, with dark complexion, black hair, and blue eyes. His bearing was evidently more imposing than his physical height, for there were references to "the tall bearded Frenchman" and "his tall form" by those who knew him.

Dupless was known as an intimidating fighter who boxed karate-style, and could deliver a knock-out punch with either his hands or his feet. He prided himself on being able to beat his son Fred (himself no slouch as a pugilist) until an advanced age. The family recalled the image of Louis walking back from Baraboo alongside his ox team, effortlessly carrying a sack of flour over his shoulder.

Although Louis Dupless was at home among the coarsest rivermen of the Wisconsin backwoods, there was an air of refinement about him that suggested a more cultured upbringing. It is said that

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he drank only the best whisky, and only filled half a glass. He knew proper table manners and would correct his children at the table. The only known document in the hand of Louis Dupless, an agreement to lease the cropland to Fred and Daniel Dupless for the 1894 season, is executed in well-wrought legal language and with a fine hand. Newspaper accounts of the time indicate that Dupless even served as a "lawyer" or legal representative in local court actions. An obituary writer observed that "he was a man of more than ordinary mental capacity, well educated, and could speak and write four or five languages."

Although Dupless lived in relative obscurity at his isolated farm along the river, he seems to have been generally well regarded throughout the neighborhood. His closest friend and nearest neighbor ("our houses were not over 100 rods apart") was James Dougherty, who arrived in 1868 and served as witness for Dupless on legal documents for many years. Another neighbor was Bernard Miller, a headstrong farmer of German descent who, like Dupless, was vocal in his political opinions; neighbors joked that Dupless and Miller continued to fight the Franco-Prussian War long after its completion. The general regard for Dupless was expressed after his death by obituary writers who described him as "one of the best known old residents of Juneau County," and noted that "as a citizen he was esteemed and respected by all who knew him." Another obituary writer said simply, "A good man is gone."

Epilog

After Louis Dupless' death, the south end of Louis' Bluff passed through four changes of ownership in the years immediately following foreclosure. In 1908 the farm came into the Hacker family where it remained for 52 years. Marie Hacker of Lake Delton died in 1989 at the age of 100, the oldest member of this family who lived and worked so long at Louis' Bluff. In 1960 the farm passed from the Hackers to the Tiesberg family, where it remained for the next 21 years until acquired by the author's family.

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CHAPTER 5

LUMBERING AND THE RAFTSMEN

From the 1830's, when the search for the great white pines first brought lumbermen into the region, until 1890, when the last lumber raft passed through the Dells, the history of Louis' Bluff was intimately tied to the lumber trade on the upper Wisconsin and its tributaries. The construction of Fort Winnebago in 1828-29 had already tapped pine stands above the Portage and opened the way for development of this little-known region. Among the first to arrive was Daniel Whitney, the shrewd Yankee trader of Green Bay and first white man to own property at the present site of Portage. (Whitney's earlier association with an abortive lumbering operation on the upper Wisconsin was noted in Chapter 3.) In the fall of 1832, Whitney and John Metcalf ascended the river to "Whitney's Rapids" (between present-day Wisconsin Rapids and Nekoosa) with a two-man power sawmill to cut lumber and shingles through the winter. The next spring, they built the first lumber raft and made the pioneer run past Louis' Bluff through the Dells to Portage. Thus opened the rugged and romantic era of rafting on the upper Wisconsin.

Although Whitney's sawmill was in operation as early as 1832, the rapid development of the northern pineries did not begin until about 1840. In that year the thin strip of land extending 40 miles northward along the river from Point Basse (near Nekoosa) to Big Bull Falls was first opened for public sale, after the Cedar Point cession of 1836 had extinguished Indian title in this area. Lumbermen arrived in droves to this narrow island in the midst of Indian lands to cut the white pines and drive them downriver. In 1847, the year that Louis Dupless first settled at Louis' Bluff, Owen's survey found about 350 people at Wausau and several thousand overall in the narrow timber tract, whereas the long stretch from Point Basse to the Dells showed few traces of the white man.

The lumber traffic past Louis' Bluff swelled to great volume in the years 1849 to 1856, requiring the annual construction of some 2000 to 3000 rafts and the employment of 4000 to 5000 rivermen during the height of the spring and summer rafting season. *Hunt's Gazetteer* of 1853 describes the lumber boom on the Wisconsin at its crest:

> *"To the lumbermen, the pineries of Wisconsin present inducements for investment and settlement which can be hardly overrated. That of the Upper Wisconsin and its*

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tributaries is the most extensive; and distinguished still more for the fine quality than the inexhaustible quantities of its timber . . The course of the lumber trade may now be considered as permanently changed. The pineries of Wisconsin now control, and will hold exclusive possession of the market of the valleys of the Mississippi and its great western affluents."

In that single year, the amount of pine brought down the Wisconsin was estimated to exceed 58 million board feet, greater than the combined totals of the next two most important river systems, the Chippewa and the Wolf, and about 30% of the state's total production.

Rafting in the Dells

The giant rafts sent downriver from the mills encountered some of their most dangerous obstacles at the Dells. The narrow constrictions, abrupt right-angle turns, and deep rushing torrents and eddies of the Dells made this section of the river a dreaded prospect in the best of circumstances, and hopelessly impassable at high water. A raftsman's first-hand description of the approach to Louis' Bluff and the run through the Dells was recorded in the 1850's:

"Below [Point Basset, for sixty miles to the Dells, the country assumes an entirely different character, the river flowing in a gentle current, without rapid or interruption, its banks moderately high and regular. Through openings and sandy plains, remarkable rocky elevations are observed on either side . . . Other lone elevations, of which there are many coming nearer to the river as we descend, seem to be the remains of ***a*** *chain of rocky highlands which unite and cross the stream at the Dells ...*

At [the Dells], the river makes a frightful descent in surging rapids through a crooked, rocky chasm only sixty feet in width and fully six miles in length, the water raging and foaming, with an unknown depth, and dashing from rock to rock in indescribable fury. The chasm seems to have been cut through an adamantine wall three hundred feet in height. Through this terrific gorge all the lumber has to pass. Though dangerous in the extreme, the hardy pilots make the run with the utmost sang froid."

Other vivid descriptions of running the rafts down the 'Wisconse' and through the Dells are given *in* Pulitzer prizewinner Hamlin Garland's *Trail-Makers of the Middle Border* and in William F. Steuber's *The Landlooker.* In addition, H. H. Bennett's famous photographs of the Arpin fleet preserve a remarkable pictorial record of one of the last lumber fleets to pass through the Dells. The broad bay in front of Louis' Bluff became the natural staging area for the crews preparing to take their rafts into the perilous passage.

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The rafts were made up of "cribs," each a square of the length of the lumber (say, 16 feet) and stacked 16 to 24 boards deep, held together at the corners by "grub pins." Seven such cribs were strung together in tandem to form a "string," and a full Wisconsin river raft consisted of three such strings, accompanied by a crew of two to four men. However, in the bay near Louis' Bluff the rafts were uncoupled into separate strings or "rapid pieces" to be run through the Dells, manned by double crews under the supervision of a Dell pilot such as Louis Dupless. Don Saunders' book, *When the Moon is a Silver Canoe,* evokes the scene:

> *"Rugged raftsmen could be seen at the foot of Louis' Bluff uncoupling the sections of cribs heavy with lumber preparing for the perilous journey through the Narrows. Louis Dupless, the master pilot, was lending a mighty hand."*

Each piece was run separately down the gorge—past such feared features as Notch Rock and Devil's Elbow—to the first safe landing at the old Dell House on the lower end of Blackhawk Island. There the crews tied up the assembled pieces, celebrated the safe arrival at the Dell House, then "gigged" (walked, trotted, and ran) back up the west bank to Louis' Bluff for the next string. In times of heavy water the bay in front of Louis' Bluff was covered with acres of rafts awaiting the run through the Dells.

The Dell House

The increasing river traffic associated with the lumber trade brought the first signs of permanent settlement to the region above the Portage. Already in 1838, Robert V. Allen, C. B. Smith, and Amasa Wilson came up from Galena, Illinois, to build a shanty and cut timber on Blackhawk Island. By the end of the following winter the nearby lumber was exhausted, so Smith and Wilson moved on northward, becoming founding fathers of New Lisbon. But Allen remained behind to begin construction of the Dell House, a block house built originally of square timber and later covered with siding, soon to become the most celebrated inn and tavern of the region. The Dell House was completed in 1841, and for some years was the only house above the Portage, and indeed, one of the only signs of civilization along a 75-mile stretch from Fort Winnebago to Point Basse.

Allen also established a ferry across the river at this point, it being (according to H. H. Bennett) "one of the principal lines of travel for the pioneers from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi and the

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Pineries of Wisconsin." About 1848, however, Allen's ferry service was supplanted by a substantial toll bridge built across the Narrows by Schuyler S. Gates. The "Dell Bridge" was the first bridge ever built across the Wisconsin and served as a tollway for thousands of passengers and teams, as well as the favored viewing platform for spring rafting runs, until it was swept away by high water in 1866. Schuyler Gates, the father of Leroy Gates and a neighbor of Louis Dupless, subsequently fell victim to the murderous gang of Pat Wildrick, "the dread of travelers, the plague of sheriffs, and the torment of the entire region," who was lynched at Portage City on September 18, 1869, by a mob that included prominent citizens of the Kilbourn region (possibly including Louis Dupless), one of the most sensational events of pioneer Wisconsin history.

Although the Dell House was constructed by Allen, a bachelor, it was first occupied (according **to** Cole's *Stagecoach and Tavern Tales of the Old Northwest)* by J. B. McEwen and family. McEwen was presumably the namesake for "McEwen's Rock" (as Louis' Bluff was originally called), just three miles upstream. He perhaps had a shanty there, and likely was involved with Allen in timber cutting and construction of the Dell House prior to moving there with his family in 1841. There seems to be little evidence of what subsequently became of the McEwen family. Turner's *Family Tree of Columbia County* makes reference to "McEwen's little tavern, erected principally for the entertainment of the rivermen who tied up their rafts occasionally at the mouth of Duck Creek [south **of** Portage]." The Columbia County census of 1846 includes a "Wm. B. McEwen," who is also mentioned as a pioneer settler of Dellona township in the 1880 *History of Sauk County.* But how these names are connected to one another, or to Louis Dupless and the bluff, is not known.

The Dell House was a famous landmark and stopover for the passing rivermen, who were often wont to squander their season's earnings in boisterous carousing. In its heyday, the Dell House "bore a hard name," in the words of a local newspaper, and was associated with bad whisky, crooked gambling, and other rough activities. H. E. Cole recalls that

> *"Strange tales are told of the old Dell House which stood where waters go roiling through the Wisconsin river dells. Rough and ready rivermen engaged in many a combat at this tavern during pinery days are said to have hidden all evidence of their crime in the waters of the swirling stream. This is not an improbability."*

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H. H. Bennett similarly describes the boisterous atmosphere:

> *"By far the larger part of the raftsmen in those days were not prominent as 'Sons of Temperance' or kindred organizations, at least not consistent members, and would, on landing safely at the Dell House, partake freely of the concentrated river water kept there for emergencies; if the trip had not been successful and the raft had been broken up, then something must be taken to the success of the next trip; if one of the crew had been lost in the mad waters, partaking of something in token of good wishes for his hereafter was not to be neglected by any means, and sometimes like token was deemed necessary for the welfare of each of his surviving relatives, and so the old place became the scene of many a boisterous time, which may be all the foundation there is for the stories of the horrible crimes committed in and about the place in the early days."*

R. V. Allen once boasted that "no one was ever killed in the Dell House, but **I** won't vouch for the grounds."

With the decline of the lumber traffic, the Dell House itself drifted into decline. R. V. Allen was sometimes seen as a shadowy figure in the windows until about 1880. After that he went to the county poor farm, where he died in 1889. The ghostly legacy of the Dell House is recalled in the book, *Haunted Wisconsin,* by Scott and Norman, and also serves as the backdrop of August Derleth's adventure story, *The Ghost of Blackhawk Island.* The Dell House stood vacant and unattended for some time, then was burned to the ground by vandals in 1899. By this time the last of the lumber rafts had passed through the Dells. Like the Dell House, the lumbering and rafting era was only a romantic memory, and the everyday concerns of those living around Louis' Bluff had shifted to other activities.

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CHAPTER 6

RAILROADING AND THE BIRTH OF KILBOURN CITY

The curious names—"Kilbourn Fire Department," "Kilbourn Library," and so forth— for the municipal institutions of Wisconsin Dells evoke memories of the earlier town name of "Kilbourn," replaced by the present name in 1931. "Kilbourn" was in turn a modification (1895) of the original "Kilbourn City" adopted by this fledgling river town at its settlement in 1856. These changes provide a hint of the unusual circumstances that surrounded the establishment of Kilbourn City, having few parallels in Wisconsin history. Louis' Bluff lies six miles from the modern townsite and two miles further from the ill-fated ghost town of Newport, but was destined to play a surprising role—for a time, even as a possible rival townsite!—in the complex web of manipulation and subterfuge that led to the present map of the region.

The townsite of Kilbourn City was chosen to occupy the high tableland overlooking the natural dividing boundary between the upper and lower Dells, where the river angles sharply between sandstone cliffs to plunge over the rapids. Today this boundary line is marked by the 17-foot power dam, the auto-choked bridge overhead, and higher still, the railroad bridge which here leaps the Wisconsin gorge on its way from Chicago toward the Twin Cities and the broad lands beyond the Mississippi. In common with townsites everywhere, the location was partly dictated by local geography and partly by the vision of its pioneer settlers. However, more remote and perfidious influences would be brought to bear on the location of this intersection of the state's principal river with its most important rail corridor, connecting the two dominant metropolitan areas of the upper Midwest.

The leading character in these events was Byron Kilbourn, an early part-owner of Louis' Bluff and one of the most prominent figures of 19th-century Wisconsin history. In order to understand the backdrop of events near Louis' Bluff, it is necessary to first describe Byron Kilbourn's background and early career in Milwaukee, prior to his involvement with railroading and the Dells region. The following sketch is drawn principally from materials in the Byron Kilbourn WPA-Wisconsin Biographies collection in the archives of the State Historical Society.

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Byron Kilbourn of Milwaukee

It was said that few men in America could boast of a more ancient and honorable lineage than Byron Kilbourn. His mother Lucy was the sister of prominent American inventor John Fitch, credited (with Fulton) as an inventor of the steamboat. On his father's side, the family name traced back to William de Kilbourne of Yorkshire (died 1233 A.D.), whom the historian Campbell describes as "The proudest Briton of the thirteenth century, ... lord of the manor of Kilbourne, in Yorkshire, whose disposition for show caused him to outstrip all the men of the North of England in the parade of his equipage, and the sumptuousness of his entertainments," able to excite even the envy of King John. Byron's grandfather, Thomas Kilbourne, had first arrived in America from England in 1635 to become **a** well-known pioneer of Connecticut. His father, James Kilbourne, enjoyed a celebrated career in the Ohio frontier—U. S. Surveyor of public lands, Whig member of Congress, founder of the first newspaper in central Ohio, enthusiastic canal promoter—until bankrupted by changes in the tariff law after the War of 1812. In certain ways, the father's career presaged that of his son Byron, born in 1801.

The family bankruptcy threw Byron Kilbourn (he and subsequent generations dropped the "e") onto his own resources at the age of 17. Having only a rudimentary formal education to age 13, he worked for a time as a canal surveyor, then struck out for the frontiers west of Lake Michigan, "beyond the bounds civilization would reach during that age." In the company of James Doty (founder of Madison) and Garret Vliet (father of John B. Vliet; see below), he first visited the present site of Milwaukee in 1834 at a time when Solomon Juneau's trading post was the only habitation. Kilbourn quickly recognized the promise of the site and by the following year had borrowed sufficient funds from his employer, Micajah T. Williams (Surveyor General of the Northwest Territories), to purchase the tract containing most of the present city of Milwaukee lying west of the Milwaukee River. For the remainder of his career Kilbourn promoted his Milwaukee interests with tireless zeal, and for the next quarter-century there was scarcely a political or commercial event affecting Milwaukee in which he did not play a leading role. With Juneau, he deserves to be called, "Father of Milwaukee."

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From the beginning, Kilbourn's dealings sparked controversy. Among his early enterprises was construction of the first steamboat fleet in Wisconsin, built to service the Milwaukee River. But it soon became clear to observers that "all of Kilbourn's boats discriminated between the divisions of the town with partisan unfairness," thus fueling a spirited rivalry between east-siders ("Juneautown") and west-siders ("Kilbourntown") that continued for decades.

In 1838, Kilbourn became commissioner and first president of a corporation to build an ambitious "Rock River Canal" from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River (via Madison), to be financed by a 140,000 acre land grant authorized by Congress. This was in the waning phases of the great wave of canal-building following completion of the Erie Canal in 1825. Charges of misappropriation and deceit soon swirled about land sales for the project. The bitter resentment inspired by Kilbourn's rude methods can be judged from the following exchange between Kilbourn and a Milwaukee political adversary, Alanson Sweet, concerning supposed slanderous representations:

> Kilbourn to Sweet: *"I will exercise the power which I hold over you, the nature of which you will learn in time . . . I have the screw upon you, and can turn it at any time at my own pleasure; and whenever your acts make it necessary I shall not hesitate to do so."*
>
> Sweet to Kilbourn: *"I fear you not -- the settlers fear you not. You may have a few men you can control, but you can never get the citizens of Milwaukee to submit to you as Dictator . . . [The greatest representation it would be in our power to make would be to call you an honest man."*

Shortly thereafter (Feb. 26, 1839) the legislature thwarted the most blatant practices by passing a law that forbade canal officers from purchasing canal lands. As a historian noted,

> *"Singular legislation indeed! If it was intended to give a death blow to the canal, no more effective mode could have been adopted . . ."*

The ill-fated canal project was further embarrassed when Kilbourn incongruously appeared for the ground-breaking ceremony wielding a grain scoop. According to Buck's description:

> *"When at last the auspicious moment arrived, Kilbourn, in anticipation of the severity of the labor to be performed, divested himself of his coat, standing before the assembled multitude, the very personification of a sinewey son of toil, seized the treacherous scoop, placed his foot upon its heel, . . . gave the fatal thrust, and all was over, i.e., with that scoop, it doubling up like a piece of tin. The look of mingled disappointment, mortification, rage, and disgust which came over the face of Mr. Kilbourn, at this faux*

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I shall never forget while life remains."

The *Milwaukee Sentinel* headline shouted "BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION!" when it was disclosed that Kilbourn had promised to terminate the canal at whichever of two rival sites would give him the larger interest. By the end of 1839, a legislative committee was reporting unfavorably on the canal and calling for revocation of the enabling law. This move failed, but new Governor James Doty replaced Henry Dodge in 1841, summarily revoked Kilbourn's power as agent, and successful) y spearheaded legislation to terminate the canal project. Kilbourn's bold dream of a canal to the Mississippi was abruptly ended, with $500,000 expended and only a single mile completed.

Kilbourn's bridge construction projects were to engender even more violent controversies. About 1835 Kilbourn had constructed the first bridge in the region to cross the Menomonee River, providing a crucial advantage to west side commercial interests. Meanwhile, Kilbourn's fleet of steamboats operated continuously on the Milwaukee River to "forever stand as a bar against bridging the Milwaukee River" (based on a provision of the Northwest Ordinance forbidding obstruction of navigable streams by bridges or dams). This ruse succeeded until 1840 when the county commissioners finally built an east-west bridge directly in front of Kilbourn's residence. Festering resentment over the bridge disputes was brought to a head in May, 1845, when a shipping `accident'(?) damaged a bridge to the east side. As newspapers of the day reported,

> *"[A] mob of several hundred East Siders armed with various implements . . . determined to destroy all bridges that united them with the West Ward Wilbournites' [R]ioters rampaged the city streets, cannon boomed, and a mob hacked away at the Spring Street bridge"*

Word circulated that Kilbourn's canal dam might be attacked next. The mob dragged a small cannon to a position commanding Kilbourn's house, but was apparently deterred from decisive action by news that Kilbourn's infant daughter had died the night before, and by want of adequate ammunition (clock-weights were brought up to serve as musket balls). During this tense period, Kilbourn residence was protected by a posted sentinel throughout the night while a large force of armed West Siders guarded the dam, and the Milwaukee "Bridge Wars" ended without further incident.

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Kilbourn's involvement in partisan politics was similarly tinged with controversy. He was an active participant in Democratic Party affairs, but as the *Wisconsin Democrat* remarked, "Byron Kilbourn is so well known in the territory that his name has become almost synonymous with political tergiversation and intrigue." Kilbourn's electoral successes were largely confined to local Milwaukee constituencies. In his first election try in 1839, he ran for delegate to Congress and lost in a bitter battle against James Doty. The Milwaukee *Sentinel* caustically proposed as his campaign slogan:

> *"Democratic, Whig, Rock River Canal, Anti-Doty, Available Candidate for Delegate to Congress,—BYRON KILBOURN!"*

After this defeat, Kilbourn was twice (1845, 1854) elected Mayor of Milwaukee, once (1845) to represent Milwaukee county in the territorial legislature, once (1847) as an Alderman, and once (1847) as delegate to the state constitutional convention. Twice (1849, 1855) he ran unsuccessfully for the U. S. Senate. After the catastrophic events of 1857 (see below), he never again sought public office.

But the controversies attending Kilbourn's involvement with canals, bridges, or political office were but a prelude to those associated with building of the railroads. The arrival of railroading and its extension westward would soon bring Byron Kilbourn's influence directly to Louis' Bluff.

Early Wisconsin Railroad Development

By all accounts, Kilbourn is credited with originating our railroad system in Wisconsin. Within *a* decade or so of the first appearance (1827) of the railroad in the U.S., it was becoming clear that railroads, rather than canals or plank roads, would provide the future transportation links of the frontier territory. From about 1840 on, Byron Kilbourn began to annually petition the Legislature for a railroad charter, and in 1847 his petition was finally approved to build a line from Milwaukee to Waukesha. The ensuing years were to witness a frenzied period of railroad development in Wisconsin as some 32 new railroads (many involving Kilbourn) were chartered in 1847-1853, with larger metropolitan areas locked in mortal combat for control of the routes. It was said that one wall of Kilbourn's office was always covered with maps showing his plans for railroads.

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The urgency of establishing a rail link between Milwaukee and the Mississippi was perceived clearly by Kilbourn:

> *"[I]f we build the first one, and get to the river first, Chicago will not dare to touch our territory . . . we can defy the world to come between us and this great northwest."*

The Milwaukee & Waukesha was therefore soon transformed into the Milwaukee & Mississippi Railroad, originally chartered to build a line to Dubuque (bypassing Madison) but later redirected down the lower Wisconsin River valley to Prairie du Chien. On September 12, 1850, the M&MRR's first locomotive arrived by schooner in Milwaukee, and two days later, with Byron Kilbourn at the throttle, it made the initial run through Milwaukee before a huge crowd of admiring onlookers.

From the beginning, the grandiose plans of the railroad developers were bedeviled by the need for capital. There was virtually none available in the new wilderness state, nor anything readily convertible to capital except land itself, particularly at prospective townsites along the line of railroad expansion. Kilbourn had first sought in 1850 to borrow money from the Milwaukee school fund but was firmly rebuffed (to the eternal benefit of the Milwaukee school system). He thereupon made his first foray into the eastern money markets to negotiate bonds, sell subscriptions, and buy equipment in April, 1851. Upon his return, he declined to present an expense report of his activities, and irregularities soon began to appear amid allegations that "certain directors" had taken stock without knowledge of the board. A certain Joseph L. Bean of New York appeared with a $600,000 stock certificate of which there was no record on the books, and it was subsequently determined that Kilbourn had promised Bean the contract to build the road, although the contract had already been awarded. Another $34,000 disappeared when company treasurer Walter P. Flanders was gulled into handing over securities to a phony group of "financiers," supposedly introduced to him by Kilbourn. In the aftermath of this "Flanders Fraud," the board revoked Kilbourn's power to negotiate securities and removed him as president.

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The LaCrosse & Milwaukee Land Grant Scandal

Kilbourn's abrupt dismissal from the affairs of the Milwaukee & Mississippi Railroad set the stage for his reappearance as president of the LaCrosse & Milwaukee Railroad (chartered in 1852 by Kilbourn, Moses Strong, and Timothy Burns), perhaps the most infamous venture in railroad history.

The "LaCrosse Railroad" was to connect Milwaukee with the emerging port cities of LaCrosse and St. Paul via Portage City and the virgin region between the Wisconsin and Mississippi (including Louis' Bluff) that had only recently come up for public sale at Mineral Point. Kilbourn deliberately emphasized "the LaCrosse" in this enterprise to counter his close identification with Milwaukee interests and broaden state-wide public support, but this new emphasis perhaps signaled also a desire to shift the focus of his prodigious city-building skills to some new site in the Wisconsin wilderness. The topography of the region dictated that the line would cross from Portage over the terminal moraine onto the old glacial lake-bed, presumably near its southern tip at the Dells, thence follow the level grade of the lake-bed, skirting the western highlands to the natural junction near the present site of Tomah, where one fork would descend to LaCrosse while the other continued northwestward toward St. Paul. In September of 1852 Kilbourn sought a loan from the city of Milwaukee, but was again turned down as the *Milwaukee Sentinel* fulminated against him in editorials "almost too stormy to print."

To finance road construction, Kilbourn adopted a scheme that was first employed during his tenure with the Milwaukee & Mississippi Railroad, described by one writer [R. S. Hunt, *Law and Locomotives,* (State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, 1958)] as "a plan unique in the annals of railroad finance." In effect, the scheme consisted of persuading farmers along the route to mortgage their farms as security for railroad bonds that could be sold in the eastern money markets, the farmer in turn receiving railroad stocks whose nominal 'dividends' were signed back to the company. As Hunt explains,

> *"By this somewhat irregular transaction the farmer came into possession of fully paid shares of railroad stock without putting up a cent of cash and, apparently, without having to pay any interest on his note. The railroad company in turn acquired a set of documents that it could readily convert into cash."*

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Railroad salesmen (such as Decon Clinton, the LaC&M agent who worked Columbia County) persuaded farmers to mortgage their farms on the promise of access to new markets and the increase in farm values that would accompany the railroad's arrival. In the years 1850-57, this scheme resulted in nearly six thousand farmers subscribing to almost five million dollars in railroad stock, fueling explosive railroad expansion throughout the state. Subscriptions to the LaCrosse & Milwaukee and Milwaukee & Mississippi Railroads nearly surpassed all others combined. However, as Hunt points out,

> *"The day of reckoning was not far off The railroads perpetrated frauds and corruption such as no one had dreamed of: some of them did not lay a foot of track; others used the proceeds of their bond sales to pay handsome sums to directors and officers; still others sold the notes and mortgages at disgraceful discounts on the Eastern market. They changed routes at will, leaving villages and farmers high and dry; they issued bogus stock; they continued to accept notes and mortgages after they knew that their roads were bankrupt. The panic of 1857 put on the finishing touches. Every railroad in the state defaulted on its bonds."*

A railroad officer [John W. Cary, "The Organization and History of the Chicago, Minneapolis, and St. Paul Railroad" (1892)] laconically described the inevitable result:

> *"It is needless to say that this stock proved worthless and that the farmers were compelled to pay their mortgages and in very many cases lost their farms."*

However, during the boom years 1853-1856 of railroad construction, little thought was being given to the possibility of future collapse. On the strength of its farm mortgage financing, the LaCrosse & Milwaukee had completed the 50-mile stretch to Horicon by December of 1855, with another 45-mile segment to Portage City added the following year. During this period, intense speculation was raging in the region around Louis' Bluff, near where the line was expected to cross the river. But 1856 also brought new federal and state legislation that was to dramatically increase the pace of railroad construction beyond Portage City, pushing the line toward the Dells region and beyond.

In June of 1856 Congress authorized two land grants to aid construction of Wisconsin rail routes: (i) a "Northwest Grant" for a route *via* Portage City to the St. Croix and Lake Superior, and (ii) a "Northeast Grant" for the route to Green Bay. Each grant provided for a liberal grant of six sections of land for each mile of road laid, a veritable bonanza amounting to over a *million* acres for the companies that might be selected by the Legislature to build the routes. The struggle for the spoils

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was soon joined. Both the Milwaukee *Sentinel* and the Madison *Daily State Journal* warned that the congressional act would "open the flood gates of corruption and fraud," but even the most cynical observers could scarcely imagine how far such corruption might proceed. Fred L. Holmes ["Badger Saints and Sinners" (1939)] aptly summarized the land grant's legacy:

> *"The gift was so valuable and the methods employed in obtaining it were so odorous... 75 years have hardly failed to stifle the stench of political rottenness."*

Kilbourn and his legal adviser, Moses M. Strong, immediately sought to gain the advantage by absorbing his chief rival for the Northwestern line, the Milwaukee & Watertown Railroad, through generous gifts of stock to its directors. He next moved to neutralize the rival St. Croix & Lake Superior Railroad Company in a complex transaction involving replacement of its board with LaCrosse men and million-dollar bond exchanges that netted the outgoing members a handsome profit. But far more audacious jockeying for the Legislature's favor was occurring in Madison, where Kilbourn and Strong set up headquarters in the Capital House hotel, virtually in the shadow of the Capitol dome, to take personal charge of contacts with elected officials. Despite fierce opposition from the Chicago, St. Paul & Fond du Lac Railroad, controlled by Chicago interests under William B**.** Ogden, Kilbourn succeeded in securing the Northwest Grant for his company. As Hunt reports,

> *"In October of 1856 both houses—activated by Kilbourn's promises of pecuniary reward—passed with remarkable speed the bill disposing of the northwest portion of the grant, and [Governor] Bashford signed it forthwith"*

even as reports were circulating *(State Journal,* Oct. 1, 1856) that men were bragging in the streets of having bought up a majority of the legislators in both houses.

When a legislative investigation was conducted in 1857, perhaps instigated by a rival legislative group bribed by Ogden, it was established that Kilbourn had doled out more than $600,000 in bribes for his legislative triumph. The committee's infamous "Black Book" report of 1858 (printed in 5000 copies, of which but two apparently survive, both in the State Historical Society) identified the recipients of Kilbourn's munificence: 39 assembly members ($5,000 each), 13 senators ($10,000 each), Governor Bashford ($50,000), a Supreme Court judge and two other state officers ($30,000), and assorted figures further afield, including two U. S. Congressmen and two *New York Times* reporters. As the Black Book reported,

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"the ingenuity displayed in the attempt to veil the transaction beyond the possibility of deception is so supremely unique as to extort attention."

Many sensational details of the episode and subsequent legislative investigation are described in Hunt's book and an article by John M. Bernd ["The LaCrosse and Milwaukee Railroad Land Grant, 1856"] in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History.*

The entire nation was shocked by the scale of the Wisconsin corruption. A cartoon in *Harper's Weekly* of June 12, 1858 (reproduced in Hunt, p. 18) depicts a "Rail-Road President" shopping in a "Political Market" for political figures hung like carcasses from meat hooks (labelled "Wisconsin Senate," "Wisconsin Legislature," "A Lot of Editors Cheap," etc.), with the R.R.P. concluding his shopping list: "But I want a Governor very much indeed, and will stand $50,000 for him. Get me a Wisconsin one, if possible!"

In the aftermath of this scandal, reforms were adopted in Wisconsin and elsewhere. Legal scholars trace much of modern Wisconsin law on corporate regulation, financing, and legislative investigation to the LaCrosse land grant scandal. Public revulsion to the scandal also laid the basis for the eventual rise of the LaFollette Progressive movement, with its strong emphasis on "clean government" that animates Wisconsin political traditions to the present day. As Governor Alexander W. Randall said, upon assuming office from the disgraced Governor Bashford,

"It is due the people of this State to know whether their representatives can be bought and sold like slaves in the market or like cattle in the shambles . . . "

Rails Across the Wisconsin River

In 1856, the Black Book revelations were still two years away, rail construction was just nearing Portage City, and planning was well underway for the next segment, running up toward the Delis and across the Wisconsin River. The provisions of the Northwest Grant added a powerful incentive to Kilbourn and associates to accelerate the construction schedule, since each 20-mile increment certified by the Governor would allow release of an additional 76,800 acres of land to the railroad, ready to be converted to capital for further expansion. Now only the crossing of the Wisconsin River stood in the way of rapid expansion across the old glacial lake-bed.

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As planning began for this segment, Kilbourn's attention must have been quickly drawn to the question of where the railroad would cross the Wisconsin River. Here, all of Kilbourn's proclivities for grand engineering projects might be indulged—steamboats and water transportation, bridge construction, dams, water power for manufacturing, railroad lines—and here would surely arise a city whose prospects might eventually rival Doty's Madison (or Milwaukee itself) for dominance of the Wisconsin interior. The dream of a new "Kilbourn City" must have seemed irresistible.

Unfortunately for Kilbourn, pioneers who settled from about 1849 onward in the Lower Dells at a place they called "Newport" had also recognized such a prospect. Newport lay at the mouth of Dell Creek, whose deep gorge (presently dammed to form Mirror Lake) provides an obvious source of water power, and its site was recognized to lie athwart the likely path for future rail connections between Milwaukee and LaCrosse. About 400 acres on the east bank of the river were purchased and platted by Joseph Bailey and Jonathan Bowman in 1851 to form the original village, while across the river, John Marshall and others platted a companion village of "Dell Creek." The two tracts were subsequently merged into the single village of Newport, platted for a population of 10,000. Already in 1852 a charter was secured from the Legislature for construction of a highway bridge, and in the following year Newport's organizers received legislative authorization to construct a dam across the river at this site. Thus, when formation of the LaCrosse and Milwaukee R.R. was announced in 1852, the founders of Newport had reason to congratulate themselves for their foresight in acquiring the site.

Bailey and Bowman well appreciated that the future prospect of their tract as a city site was critically dependent on the actual selection of Newport for the LaC&M railroad crossing. They contacted Kilbourn and received what appeared to be a favorable reply to their request. To further secure his commitment, Bailey and Bowman agreed to hand over to Kilbourn a 50% interest of their entire Newport tract together with the charter to build a dam. In return they were to receive two bonds from Kilbourn, each valued at $100,000, which should be forfeited in case the railroad failed to cross at this point or the dam were not built. Kilbourn agreed to these conditions, and sent his representative Garret Vliet to work out the details, deliver the bonds, and begin construction on the dam.

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Lot sales boomed from the first offering in 1854 and lot prices spiraled skyward. Within a year the village boasted about 1,500 inhabitants, with thirteen large stores, three hotels, and other businesses. Those who still doubted that the railroad would cross at Newport could soon see the evidence of the road-grading activity which came virtually up to their doorstep on the east side, and according to Dixon ("Newport - Its Rise and Fall," in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History)* "continued to the Norris farm two miles farther, on the west side of the river." When Bowman. Bailey, and Vliet extended the survey and plat to the remainder of the 400 acres, according to the *History of Columbia County* (1880),

> *"it gave a new impetus to every kind of business, especially in the sale of lots, which changed hands rapidly at advanced rates. In some cases parties would double their money in twenty-four hours' time, and holders of lots did not know whether or not to dispose of them."*

Even the town's name was considered too tame, and for a time it was re-christened "Wisconsin City' until the Legislature intervened to restore the original name. Newport's citizens were convinced (as Dixon relates) that "a new El Dorado had been discovered."

A Turn in the Tracks

Railroad developers knew that a "turn in the tracks" could often net the director or surveyor a handsome profit. Certainly this fact was not lost on Byron Kilbourn. Kilbourn's engineering competence was once challenged on the basis of his crooked railroad from Milwaukee to Waukesha Perhaps sensing the implications of this remark, Kilbourn acknowledged that he had "established the line myself in the most difficult sections," but added testily, "we could not run a straight line in crooked valley." Few geographic obstacles were to be found on the sandy lake-bed that would carry Kilbourn's road from the Dells to Tomah junction, but 'crookedness' of a different sort conspired to place some surprising turns in the track of the LaC&M Railroad.

As explosive growth fueled rampant speculation at Newport in 1855, a fateful new development occurred, no doubt at Kilbourn's instigation. The Legislature in that year authorized Garret Vliet, Andrew Dunn, Anson Aldred, John Anderson, John B. Vliet, and "all who should become associated with them" to incorporate as the Wisconsin River Hydraulic Company (see Appendix) to construe

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and maintain the dam. The nominal purpose of this corporation was to avoid personal responsibility for "flowage damage" that might result from the dam. To this end, Garret Vliet and Kilbourn conveyed to the hydraulic company the real estate secured from Bailey and Bowman, as well as the charter for building the dam, while the company assumed in its name the bonds given to Bailey and Bowman. Certain ominous implications might have been recognized in the act's permissive new language concerning possible locations of the dam "in Sections 9, 10, and 15, or either of them whereas Newport lay wholly in Section 15. According to Dixon, the $200,000 bonds,

> *"signed by promoters of the highest personal and financial standing . . . were deemed the firmest possible guarantee that the entire program of constructing the dam and railroad bridge would be carried out."*

As the *History of Columbia County* relates, a new type of threat was raised against the corporation when

> *"Holders of real estate . . . whose lands would be overflowed by the construction of the dam, gave notice they should expect quite large sums for 'flowage.' This proceeding alarmed the members of the hydraulic company, who feared their profits would thus be cut short. "*

Noting the improper use that was being made of the fact of the bonds' existence (as Dixon relates),

> *"Kilbourn and Vliet asked that the two bonds be returned to them. Grading had been completed on the railroad right of way west of the river and substantial work had been done on the dam; therefore, the request of the makers of the bonds was granted."*

The inexplicable decision to return the surety bonds to Kilbourn's control effectively sealed Newport's doom.

During the summer of 1855, other events unfolded whose implications would only be fully grasped in the following year. During what was. Newport's most rapid period of growth, a large tract of land was being purchased upriver (by John B. Vliet) for resale to the Wisconsin River Hydraulic Company, fronting the east side of the river where Kilbourn City would afterward be located. This purchase naturally caused consternation among Newport's promoters, but it might still be rationalized on the basis of alternative dam sites provided for in the hydraulic company charter, whereas the railroad bridge was the far more critical issue for Newport. However, during the same period other large tracts were being purchased by Kilbourn and his henchmen which, had they been known at the

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time, could have only been interpreted as alternative townsites. The largest of these was centered at Louis' Bluff.

Kilbourn-Vliet Purchases at Louis' Bluff

On July 28, 1855, John B. Vliet of the hydraulic company purchased a 490 acre tract which included the north end of Louis' Bluff and much of the available adjacent land along the west bank of the river for a mile around (excluding the properties of Dupless and his neighbors, Kelly and Miller), plus the two government lots lying directly opposite Louis' Bluff on the east bank. Vliet also purchased another tract of 125 acres (with parcels on both sides of the river) lying about six miles further north, near where the Highway 82 bridge presently crosses the river. Both tracts were purchased for $6.00 per acre from a prescient Dutch speculator, Johannes B. Stoop of Amsterdam, who had acquired them at the standard Government issue price of $1.25 per acre less than ten months before. On November 26, 1855, an undivided half-interest in these and other lands acquired by Vliet (including an additional 340 acres around Louis' Bluff, plus a 560-acre tract east of the river, about 2 miles beyond Coldwater Canyon) was transferred to Kilbourn.

Table I summarizes the acreages and parcels associated with the Kilbourn/Vliet transactions of 1855. As the table indicates, these properties could be grouped into three major tracts: (1) the "Louis' Bluff Tract," about 775 acres; (2) the "Point Bluff Tract" north of the Lemonweir, about 135 acres; and (3) the "Eastside Tract" east and north of the present city, about 560 acres. The first two were obvious candidates for river crossings; in the pre-dam terrain, the channel narrowed significantly just north of Louis' Bluff (though this feature is now completely obscured by the flowage), while the Point Bluff Tract was the actual site later selected for the Highway 82 bridge crossing. The remaining Eastside Tract was perhaps contemplated for the bend in the track (and potential townsite) where the line would cross the moraine from the south to angle northwestward for the river crossing. Together with the main "Kilbourn City Tract" first mentioned, these properties provided Kilbourn and associates with ready alternatives for townsites and crossing sites, now that the Bailey-Bowman bonds were no longer a factor.

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The Annual Report of the Directors of the LaC&M Railroad for 1855 (Wisconsin Mirror, February 19, 1856) states that the route would be selected "not primarily to promote the interests of any particular localities along the line" but on the basis of topographical considerations, particularly the shorter route that would be achieved by following the Lemonweir Valley:

> *"The distance from Milwaukee to La Crosse is as short as the distance from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi by any other Railroad in the State, constructed or projected . . . The route after crossing the Wisconsin River follows up one of its tributaries, the Lemonweir, to its source, thence crossing the 'divide' through a natural `gap' [near the present site of Tomah] at a grade of fifty feet, it at once strikes the sources of the LaCrosse River, and follows that stream to its mouth at the village of La Crosse . . . So that the river from St. Paul to LaCrosse, and the Railroad from LaCrosse to Milwaukee form almost a direct line from St. Paul to Milwaukee. Indeed, if an air line be drawn on the map from Milwaukee to St. Paul, it would follow the route of our Railroad as near as it was practicable to construct it to its intersection with the head waters of the Lemonweir, a distance of about 160 miles ..."*

This suggests the manner in which the line was being surveyed 'backward' from Tomah junction toward Milwaukee, with the Lemonweir Valley as a central focus. From a state map one can see that an "air line" from Tomah to Milwaukee more or less parallels the Lemonweir on the north, crossing the Wisconsin at or near the Point Bluff tract. Alternately, if the line is drawn through the mill site at Mauston, so as to follow the south side of the Lemonweir, the corresponding Milwaukee "air line" crosses the Wisconsin at or near the Louis' Bluff tract. Such considerations may suggest why Vliet and Kilbourn singled out these tracts for purchase in anticipation of the likely alternatives that would present themselves as further details of the line became fixed.

A Site Is Selected

In August of 1855 rumors were circulating in Newport of spectral figures upriver, "moonlight surveyors" making soundings by torchlight. Dixon relates the Shute family tradition that William B. Shute assisted John B. Vliet in this enterprise at the present bridge site. Possibly similar surveys were made at other prospective sites as Kilbourn and associates weighed their choices. When the citizens of Newport got word of the surveys, as the History of Columbia County relates,

> *"their fears and anger were unbounded. The further growth of the village was at once checked... Communication was entered into between the citizens and the railroad company and with the hydraulic company, but no satisfaction was given.*

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The latter company were asked to again enter into bonds or to restore the land and dam privileges, to all of which they turned a deaf ear."

Apparently the actual decision was reached shortly thereafter, for in November of 1855 a newspaperman, Alanson Holly of New York, appeared in the woods at the future site of Kilbourn City to found a newspaper, the Wisconsin Mirror, even though not a single dwelling could be found within a mile of the newspaper office, Rev. Dixon charitably describes Holly as "a gentleman of the highest character, of much ability, and of the finest New England type and tradition," and states that "Holly had no connection whatever with either the hydraulic company or the railroad company." but there is much circumstantial and direct evidence to indicate otherwise. As Holly's own account in the Mirror (Feb. 5, 1856) indicates, others were preparing for his arrival and had apparently set the timetable for the role Holly would play:

"When we came here about the 20th of November, there was scarcely a beginning made in the woods at this point. Part of the frame of our office, and part of the frame for a dwelling, were on the ground, that was all. It was cold weather, and a dwelling for our family and a printing office were to be prepared in time to open our press and materials, and issue the first number of the Mirror on the 1st day of January [1856]."

As Bud Gussel (president of the Wisconsin Dells Historical Society) has discovered, minute books of the Wisconsin River Hydraulic Company firmly establish that the hydraulic company deeded Holly the land he built on, agreed to assume all the expenses incurred by the newspaper, and made him a member of its board of directors. First to join Holly as neighbors near the newspaper site were John B. Vliet and John Anderson of the hydraulic company, and soon "[a] considerable number of men were employed in clearing away the trees for the streets of the village, and others were engaged in building houses and working on the dam." Holly's Mirror regularly offered 'scoops' that indicated insider knowledge. He announced on February 12, 1856, that a definite decision had been reached to place the dam upriver from Newport. On June 10, 1856, he informed his readers that "We are no longer publishing a paper in the woods without a name. Our new town plot has been surveyed, neatly mapped, and named Kilbourn City." Holly's fealty to Kilbourn is further suggested by his editorial (June 17, 1856) on the newly chosen town name and its implications for the future:

"Under ordinary circumstances we should be opposed to naming a town after a person, but we think the circumstances in this place are such as to make it eminently proper. Hon. Byron Kilbourn, of Milwaukee, for public enterprise which tells on the

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prosperity of the State, undoubtedly stands first. This makes it proper that an important central town should be named after him. He is one of the early settlers of the State, having come to the metropolis in its infancy, and having been instrumental beyond any other individual in its growth and prosperity; hence there is a propriety in fixing his name to an enduring monument. He is the body and soul of the La Crosse Railroad. On that more than all other enterprises he has staked his reputation as a business man, to make it the great trunk line of the State. The present prosperity of the road shows that his success is almost certain. Under these circumstances it seems highly fitting that some place on the line of the road should bear his name. Our place is nearly central on the road, at the place where it crosses the largest river in the State, and we expect it to be the largest inland town in the State. Then what place could be named after the head man of the road with greater propriety than this? . . . And as the place is honored by the name, it is expected that the name will be honored by the place."

The dreaded blow at Newport was struck less than two weeks later when a broadside appeared (reproduced in Dixon's Wisconsin Magazine of History article) announcing the railroad's decision:

Pursuant to this decision, the directors of the LaC&M signed the contract on November 15, 1856. for construction of the railroad bridge at Kilbourn City, to be completed by September 1, 1857.

Establishment of Kilbourn City

The first public sale of lots at Kilbourn City was held in August of 1856, with buyers gathering from Milwaukee, Madison, Portage, and other cities, together with some from Illinois, Ohio, New York, and other states. Sales for the week exceeded $76,0000, with lots ranging from $50 to almost $1500. A second sale was conducted two months later, drawing another $34,000. An advertisement for this sale (by the sales manager, Caleb Wall of Milwaukee) suggests the grandiose aspirations that Kilbourn and associates held out for the enterprise:

"There is no new city which holds out such great inducements for all classes of mechanics as Kilbourn City. Many who are now rolling in wealth in Milwaukee, and other cities of our State, owe it to the rise of property; and the chances in Kilbourn City are as great as in any city that has been started in the last ten years. I have no doubt in my own mind, taking the central position of Kilbourn City, that the seat of Government of our State will be located there! A more beautiful site is not to be found for a city."

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Ironically, this attempt to promote Kilbourn City as the future capital of Wisconsin occurred at virtually the same time that Kilbourn and Strong were distributing bribes in Madison, corrupting the legislative process in the existing state capital.

Still, any attempt to visualize a capital city in this scarcely-broken wilderness must have required considerable imagination. Editor Holly recalled that "[t]here was ... a considerable quantity of game seen where Kilbourn City now stands" and "the northern bears got so hungry that they made us quite a long visit." During one of the land sales, it is said that an Irishman came running up, profusely sweating, and inquired, "And is this Kilbourn?" Assured that it was, he replied, "And glad I am, for I could not see it all, for trees, till I was just here, and I was afraid it was a great ways off in the woods, and it would be dark, and the bears would catch me!"

Kilbourn City's growth in the first year was not very rapid, as speculative fever was dampened by fear that its future might be undercut like that of Newport, despite the assurances of the railroad. Neighboring villages harbored resentment against the brash newcomer; as the Mirror reported (Dec. 9, 1856):

> *"At first these wiseacres of our neighboring cities pretend to be ignorant that any such place as Kilbourn City exists; afterward they do recollect that there is a place of some such name up there in the woods, but it will never amount to anything; and finally they come fully to their recollection, and declare that though there is such a place, the railroad is not located and will never be built there; the grading is all for sham; the bridge is not let; and the dam will never be put in, and a string of similar falsehoods too lengthy to report. "*

However, as Holly had predicted, the rails turned northward past Newport to enter Kilbourn City in August of 1857.

Newport was apparently not the only alternative crossing site whose aspirations were dashed by the LaC&M's final decision. At the Point Bluff tract some 14 miles upriver, a school and settlement had evidently been promoted under the impression (ultimately mistaken) that theirs would be the chosen site. As the 1880 History of Columbia County relates (p. 823):

> *"At an early day a man named Bronson, a resident of Prairie du Chien, endowed an institute for the higher education of young men and women . . . In 1856, Point Bluff was selected as the site of the proposed seminary, and it was completed and opened in 1857. For a time, everything prospered and the school was full. Fine houses were built and the future of Point Bluff seemed assured, but in 1858 the Milwaukee &*

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LaCrosse Railroad was completed to Kilbourn City, and from that time the place began to decay, though the school was not closed until 1865."

(The school building was eventually acquired by a group of incorporators and moved to Kilbourn City as the "Kilbourn Institute." It operated for about a year, then burned to the ground. With the help of the $4,000 insurance settlement it was promptly replaced by an impressive brick "Kilbourn Medical and Surgical Institute" that dominated the town's skyline until near the end of the century.)

The minute books of the hydraulic company indicate that company directors took quite seriously the threat that alternative townsites might still be platted to jeopardize their Kilbourn City tract, even after the site of the rail crossing was established. In November of 1857 the board agreed to a transaction with John B. Vliet involving lands on the west side of the river,

. . provided said Vliet shall . . . execute and deliver to the Company a bond in $40,000 damage that he will not lay out said lands into a village plat . . for building or Village purposes for and during three years from the first day of January next . . ."

Evidently, this bond dissuaded Vliet from attempts to develop the opposite bank of the river. The future of Kilbourn City was assured. Shortly thereafter, Kilbourn and Vliet sold their remaining properties at Louis' Bluff and Point Bluff to the hydraulic company, their purposes apparently served.

Meanwhile, property values at neighboring Newport sank from their former heights to practically zero, spelling ruination for many, as citizens began drifting away to Kilbourn City or other locations. Some buildings were torn down for material to be used elsewhere while others were skidded across the river or pulled intact by ox team up to Kilbourn City. (Wisconsin Dells is perhaps unique in containing houses that are certifiably older than the town itself.) A brief, futile attempt was made to save the village by building a depot and connecting line to the main road 1-3/4 miles distant, any an optimistic "Resurrection of Newport" jubilee was celebrated in February of 1858. But all such efforts failed, and after the post office was discontinued in April, 1868, Newport ceased to exist. As Rev. Dixon wrote in 1942,

"Newport is a ghost town, indeed, and the ghost still walks but only in the increasingly indistinct memories of the descendants . of those who came to this new settlement on the banks of the Wisconsin River . . . with high hopes of being the founders of a great city."

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Decline and Fall of Kilbourn's Empire

The first year of Kilbourn City's brash existence was also to witness the abrupt collapse of Byron Kilbourn's railroad empire. Even as its tracks were about to enter Kilbourn City, the LaC&M was hurriedly issuing a "Statement of Affairs" (dated July 23, 1857) in an attempt to dispel growing panic among Eastern investors. This report attempted to disguise huge expenses (including the land grant bribes) by assigning portions to each segment of the line, but it was soon recognized that the company's costs amounted to some $100,000 per mile, about 2-3 times higher than any previous road in Wisconsin. Rumors of the impending legislative investigation may have contributed to the unstable market conditions. Investor confidence failed in a domino-like collapse, and by year's end the LaCrosse & Milwaukee, together with every other Wisconsin railroad, was bankrupted. The LaCrosse railroad fell into receivership, eventually to be reorganized as the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad, destined to play a leading role in the promotion of tourism at the Dells. The land grant which had originally provoked the scandal was rescinded before a single acre was deeded to the LaCrosse or its successors.

Hard on the heels of the 1857 financial collapse, Kilbourn was subjected to the political humiliation of the 1858 Black Book exposures. Thereafter, he essentially withdrew from public view. As Judge George Gale related,

> *"On the bankruptcy of the company, Mr. Kilbourn retired from public employment, and has ever since continued in the enjoyment of domestic life on his fine estate in Milwaukee."*

Kilbourn's Wisconsin River Hydraulic Company also fell into financial collapse by 1860. Numerous unsuccessful attempts had been made to complete the dam, but high waters carried away a large portion of the dam in November of 1858, and vandalous raftsmen destroyed the structure entirely in 1859, even as the State Legislature was being pressured to withdraw the company's dam charter. But the company's financial doom had been sealed virtually from the beginning. At the board meeting of April 30, 1859, the directors were informed that

> *"it appears that a practice was adopted by the Officers of this Company, in making the original purchase [of the Kilbourn City tract], in cases were they were to be paid for in the Stock of the company, of entering the consideration or purchase price, in the deed, at one-tenth of the actual price ... and then issued ten times that amount of*

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Stock in payment therefor, charging it in the accounts at one tenth its face . . . said practice [being] irregular, improper, and not authorized by the Board of Directors."

It was subsequently clarified that the principal offending officer was John B. Vliet who, as president of the hydraulic company, had effectively negotiated the purchase of the Kilbourn City tract from himself! (Only the Kilbourn City tract was sold to the hydraulic company in this manner; Vliet and Kilbourn retained personal control of the Louis' Bluff, Point Bluff, and Eastside tracts until the railroad actually reached Kilbourn City.) Not surprisingly, the larcenous "one-tenth" transactions left the company's accounts in shambles, and desperate attempts were ordered to

"review all the books of the Company . . . and correct the same to correspond with the facts, so that the Books will show the true state of the accounts of the Company without any fictitious entries... "

However, the company was soon awash in lawsuits and adverse judgments that left it virtually powerless to proceed. By 1860, the company's day-to-day operating expenses were mostly being borrowed from Byron Kilbourn. The remaining few board meetings were reduced to a miscellany of trifling small settlements, such as dispersal of office furniture or sale of unused office books for 40 cents each. The remaining few assets of the bankrupt company, including some milling and power rights, reverted to Kilbourn as chief creditor.

In the collapse of the hydraulic company, Louis' Bluff passed out of control of Kilbourn and his associates. Following the 1856 land sales, the hydraulic company directors had agreed on November 4, 1856, "to take certain Lands above the Dells of Messrs. Vliet and Kilbourn and pay them a fair price for same in stock." Final arrangements were reached on July 3, 1857, when, according to the minutes,

"The company agree to take certain lands of J. B. Vliet and Byron Kilbourn known as tracts lot of Van Steenwyk 'lawyer and agent for J. B. Stoop] and others for flowage at $15 per acre and pay in stock at par - said land laying north from K. City."

The transfers of the Louis' Bluff and Point Bluff tracts were accordingly carried out on November 20 (Vliet) and December 9 (Kilbourn) of that year, shortly after the rails had actually reached Kilbourn City. The Louis' Bluff tract, encumbered by the remaining mortgage to Stoop, eventually fell into foreclosure after the hydraulic company collapsed into bankruptcy.

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Kilbourn was later involved in one more attempt to raise a dam at Kilbourn City. This was under the aegis of the "Kilbourn Manufacturing Company," incorporated in 1866 by a group of frontmen (John Tanner, Edward T. Hooker, M. Griffin, Ulmer F. Hinds, and Guido J. Hansen), but largely controlled and financed by Kilbourn. The raftsmen and lumber interests reacted with injunctions and lawsuits to prevent the obstruction of navigation, invoking the same Northwest Ordinance provisions that Kilbourn had employed years before to protect his Milwaukee River interests. The principal suit against Kilbourn and associates was brought before the U. S. Circuit Court in 1867 on behalf of the lumber interests by Cyrus Woodman (see Chapter 5). Many of the still-active raftsmen were brought in to testify about their experience in rafting the Dells and the hazards created by the dam. The trial was laced with virulent criticism of Kilbourn and his business practices:

> *"The country is overrun with wild-cat operators, who can and do get up a splendid paper exterior, and who are ready to sell one a fortune in stock certificates, at ruinous figures. When one bubble bursts, with their soap and pipe they blow up another. This "Kilbourn Manufacturing Company" is probably the last effort and offspring of speculating and scheming dealers, who cling to their ancient vocation with unaccountable tenacity."*

The bitter antagonists Kilbourn and Woodman probably never realized that one of the few things they shared in common was former ownership of Louis' Bluff, though at different times and of opposite ends. Before a final judgment was rendered in his favor, Kilbourn died at his retirement home in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1870.

What If ...?

For a brief period in 1855-6, it appears that Byron Kilbourn was considering Louis' Bluff or one of his other two tracts as the site for his new city, perhaps even a new state capital! Who is to say that he lacked either means or motive to accomplish such a goal? A movement was afoot, boosted among others by Alanson Holly's Mirror, to carve out a new state "Superior" from the newly opened territories of upper Wisconsin; Kilbourn's chosen townsite would be well positioned to become the queen city and capital of this emergent region. Kilbourn had the State Legislature and other organs of government as well as influential newspapers firmly in his pocket, bought and paid for. Would he shrink from wielding that political leverage again, had not other circumstances intervened?

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A tantalizing hint of what may have been an earlier plan can be seen in the present course of the road between Mauston and the Dells. The track follows a straight line toward Milwaukee for about six miles from Mauston, then makes a pronounced turn southward (in Sec. 25 of T15R4E) toward the crossing at Wisconsin Dells. However (as remarked above), if one extends this line with a straight-edge directly across the river, it passes virtually through the center of the Vliet-Kilbourn tract at Louis' Bluff, landing neatly in the smaller parcel on the opposite bank. If the same line is extended six miles further, it passes close to the Eastside tract, from which a gentle grade southward (roughly paralleling County 0) leads directly toward the connecting tracks near Newport.

It seems likely that Kilbourn's powerful influence might have sufficed to steer the railroad tracks to whichever city site he might have chosen, assuming no insuperable topographic obstacles. Why then was the actual present site of Wisconsin Dells chosen rather than the Louis' Bluff tract, or one of his other alternatives? Perhaps the simplest answer is that the present site was suitable for a dam. whereas the other properties were not. If the engineering problems of grading a railroad and bridge near the dam site could be solved, it was reasonable that the sites be in close proximity. Perhaps another answer is that the Louis' Bluff tract was broken by the earlier preemptive purchases of Dupless and his neighbors, who presumably identified with the raftsmen in opposition to Kilbourn and the hydraulic company, whereas the Kilbourn City tract had been purchased intact. Another consideration may have been the time pressure imposed by the land grant provisions and the constraints of other similar decisions along the line, which mitigated against the kind of tricky maneuvering that might be required to undercut (a la Newport) the hydraulic company site. For whatever the reasons, Louis' Bluff was fortunately not destined to become the site of Wisconsin Dells.

Epilog

In the aftermath of foreclosure actions against the hydraulic company, the "Kilbourn end" of Louis' Bluff was re-sold in 1873 to Patrick Welch and thereafter in 1884 to John Lynch, in whose family it would remain for nearly the next century. Margaret Kelly of this family became sole owner in 1913, and in 1933 she deeded it over for $1 to her son, James E. Kelly, a Catholic priest in

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Milwaukee. Following Father Kelly's death in 1978, the parcel (bearing still no trace of human development) was sold in 1980 to Baraboo land speculators, who promptly dealt it to a construction firm, "Total General Contractors, Inc." of Chicago. Before any construction or development work was carried out, the contracting firm defaulted on payments and mysteriously disappeared from view, eluding even a Chicago detective hired by the land contract holders. The parcel cycled again through a series of foreclosure actions (1988-1990) before returning to the market. On December 27, 1991, the "Kilbourn end" and "Dupless end" of Louis' Bluff were officially re-joined under common ownership for the first time since the original 1851 government survey

At Louis' Bluff, the train's whistle can still be heard blowing across the sandy pine barrens from Kilbourn's old LaCrosse and Milwaukee route (now the Soo Line), about a mile to the west. As Kilbourn had foreseen, this route still serves as a vital rail link of the region, now as part of the main Amtrak line providing one of the few surviving long-range passenger services in the United States.

Wisconsin Dells boasts one of the few active passenger depots in Wisconsin, testimony to the community's plucky determination to retain its historical ties to the rails. The bankrupt Milwaukee Road had sought to end passenger service at Wisconsin Dells after a train derailment in July of 1982 damaged the depot, coming within a few hundred feet of a disastrous collision with the highway bridge. A remarkable volunteer effort was spearheaded by 011ie Reese of the Bennett Studio to build a new depot without a dollar of railroad or government support, based on a design selected by readers of the Wisconsin Dells Events. The popular choice was to recreate from old photographs an accurate replica of the former brick depot that had served the community a half-century before. Construction was financed primarily from sales of a specially commissioned print by local railroad artist Russ Porter (whose passenger car studio is just off Stand Rock Road, about three miles from Louis' Bluff), depicting a night-time scene at the old depot as it might have appeared around 1930. The new Wisconsin Dells depot faithfully recreates this scene, save only for the bold name that formerly greeted passengers from the side of the depot:

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CHAPTER 7

HOPS FEVER

In the town park of Lyndon Station, just off State Highway 12 and Interstate 90-94, a state historical marker recalls one of the most extraordinary periods in the history of the region around Louis' Bluff:

HOP RAISING

> *"Keep hopping, hoeing, and hoping," said an editorial in 1867 when hops were selling for 50d a pound, pickers by the thousands worked in the fields, merchants were selling silks, laces, paisley shawls and grand pianos, and farmers were building newer and larger homes and driving carriages drawn by "blooded" horses. Introduced to Wisconsin in 1852 by Jesse Cottingham, hop culture reached its peak in 1866-67 when this area was being called "the greatest primary hop district in the United States." Competition and crop disease brought the short-lived prosperity to an end in 1868 when farmers were eager to dispose of their hops at 15d a pound. In August during the boom period the land was canopied by clusters of yellowish-green hops growing up the hop-poles. At harvest time young people from all over the state arrived to do the picking. Working hours were long but singing helped to pass the time. Popular songs of the day were "Barbara Allen," "Billy Boy," "Lorena," and "Listen to the Mocking Bird."*

Hops were grown in modest numbers in Wisconsin before the Civil War, but two events of the early 1860s sharply increased the demand: (1) the Whisky Tax, which created a boom in the consumption of lager beer, and (2) the hops louse, which infested and devastated the eastern hop centers. By 1865, stories circulated that hops farmers could recover the entire cost of clearing and improvements in a single season, reaping $1,000 or more per acre. Thereafter, hops acreage increased in a dizzying spiral, approximately doubling each year until the great crash of 1868.

Although "hops fever" eventually spread over much of the state, the main production was centered in Sauk County with Kilbourn City as the shipping center of the Wisconsin hops industry. It is known that hops were also the primary crop at Louis' Bluff during this era, and it may be supposed that events there were typical of those sweeping through the Dells region at the time. Life in the Sauk County hop fields is depicted in Flavia C. Canfield's 1922 novel, The Hop Pickers. An exhibit describing many details of the hop harvest, prepared for statewide agricultural tour in 1987 by the Dells Country Historical Society, is now displayed in the Society's Bowman House in Wisconsin Dells.

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The hops bonanza flooded the Dells region not only with unaccustomed wealth, but with startling numbers of young girls (said to number as many as 30,000 in the Kilbourn City region in 1868), brought from every corner of the state to harvest the hop gardens. The picking and drying of hops required considerable hand labor, and as hops acreage continually multiplied, the availability of laborers soon became the profit-limiting bottleneck. The opportunities presented by this situation were recognized by the enterprising Leroy Gates (erstwhile photographer and Dell pilot) and Anson Rood (namesake of Rood's Glen), who created a statewide network with agencies in almost every village to import contracted seasonal workers to Kilbourn City. The editor of the Milwaukee Sentinel, aboard a train at Kilbourn City in 1867, expressed the wonderment of the spectacle:

> *"Coming from Milwaukee, a few days ago, while comfortably enjoying a cigar in the smoking car, the train stopped at a little station—there they were, and in they came—a thousand we thought, but the recruiting officer said there were but six hundred—a thousand were coming on the next train. The major general of this division of the army of hop pickers was Leroy Gates, who makes the unsuspecting public, who read the Sentinel, believe that he is a Dells pilot. Pilot he is, but not of logs or lumber—he pilots the wearers of calico and crinoline to the fields where the hops do grow. It broadens human feelings to know there are so many lively girls in the world, and beer will be none the worse for a view of the hands which pick the berries, that give it its bittersweet."*

The chartered trains streamed in, often in the dead of night, looking like "an excursion train on some great gala day, loaded down as they were with the myriads of bright-faced young girls." There they were met by as many as three hundred teams and wagons to carry workers to their designated hop yards. Unscrupulous operators sometimes took advantage of the newcomers' confusion to divert workers from their contracted destinations, swindling the contractors out of their fees and the contracting farmers out of their workers.

The presence of thousands of unattached girls in the fields around Kilbourn City naturally **had** an enlivening effect on the social scene. Professor Frederick Merk's book, *Economic History **of** Wisconsin During the Civil War Decade,* describes the picking season as

> *"a time of feasting and merrymaking. Each night when darkness put an end to labor, the well-used fiddle was fetched from its case, and to its merry strains, under the mellow autumn moon the unwearied tripped the jovial steps of the hop dance. "*

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Such festive scenes must have also been common at Louis' Bluff. It is said that Louis Dupless met his future wife Amelia at a hop party at Louis' Bluff.

The windfall profits from hops created a giddy atmosphere in which even prudent landowners might mortgage every possession to acquire additional acres and poles for the next season's plantings. It was at this time that Louis' Bluff first became heavily mortgaged. When the bubble burst in 1868 the effect was ruinous for many growers. The crash was occasioned not only by the inevitable market glut, but by the arrival in Wisconsin of the hops louse, which greatly reduced the quality of the crop. Hops which had sold for 55-70¢ per pound the previous year now fetched 10¢ or less, barely half the cost of production. By the time prices recovered to a break-even level, many farmers had lost their holdings and much of the hop acreage was plowed up.

A few farmers continued to hope vainly for return of the former prosperity, but the hops boom was soon only a painful memory, and the crop disappeared entirely from the region. The hop house that once stood at Louis' Bluff ("so near the bluff you could almost touch the rock") has long since disappeared, and many of the acres originally cleared for hops have reverted to scrub timber. Only the occasional wild hop vines still found in these woods remain as a bittersweet reminder of the time when "the bottom dropped out of hops."

After the hops craze, farming at Louis' Bluff settled into a more stable pattern. Typical crops of the late 19th century included corn, potatoes, oats, and meadow hay, all still to be seen in the area today. With the raising of the Kilbourn high dam in the early years of this century, the acreage at Louis' Bluff was greatly reduced by the broadened flowage. As agricultural prices continued to decline following World War II, the farm eventually proved too small to survive as a single-family unit and was leased out to a neighboring farmer, Jim Hall of Lyndon Station, from 1960 onward. Planted now mainly to corn, soybeans, and alfalfa, the fields around Louis' Bluff have been continuously cultivated for more than 130 years.

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CHAPTER 8

THE RISE OF TOURISM AND THE KILBOURN DAM

For better or for worse, the Wisconsin Dells have become virtually synonymous with Wisconsin tourism. Described by the Rand-McNally guide as "the state's most glittering tourist mecca," Lake Delton and Wisconsin Dells have a combined population of barely 4,000 permanent residents, but boast about 4% of the state's total motel rooms, hosting an estimated 2-3 million visitors each summer. By any standards or statistics, the Dells region is a major player in the state's second largest industry.

Although Louis' Bluff lies just beyond the reach of the Dells boat cruises and five miles from the commercial center of Wisconsin Dells, it has not remained immune to the effects of tourism. In earlier times Louis' Bluff was itself a destination of Dells boat cruises and guided tours. While the bluff has not been open to the public for more than a half-century, pleasure boats from nearby resorts often dot the waters near its shoreline; sightseeing aircraft (seaplanes, helicopters, ultra-lights, even hot-air balloons!) are often seen circling the skies overhead; and Indian chants are often heard on summer nights, wafting up over open waters from the Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial grounds, a mile downriver.

Although it now seems scarcely conceivable, the potential of this region was originally envisioned in terms of manufacturing and transportation resources, the nucleus of a great inland industrial city. The focus of this vision, as well as the alternative vision of a scenic and recreational resort area that ultimately prevailed, was the deep gorge of the Wisconsin River with its obvious commercial power capacity. The evolution of tourism in the Dells was thus intimately connected with successive attempts to harness the river, with predictable dramatic effects on Louis' Bluff and the surrounding broad flowage created by the natural damming action at the head of the Dells.

H. H. Bennett and the Roots of Dells Tourism

Even before the founding of Kilbourn City (Chapter 6), a few intrepid travelers made their way into the region to view the legendary scenic beauty of the Dells. Our such 'tourist' was famous

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naturalist Increase A. Lapham (Chapter 3), who came in 1852, lodged at the old Dell House, and hired a boat and guide to take him up through the Dells and to Louis' Bluff. Lapham's guide may have been Leroy Gates (probably then living at "Gates' Ravine" near his father's Dell Bridge across the Narrows), who later placed the first ad offering to paddle visitors upriver ("For Recreation, RESORT TO THE DELLS"; *Wisconsin Mirror,* Oct. 7, 1856). This was the typical pattern of tourism even after the LaCrosse & Milwaukee Railroad extended its lines into the region, bringing many new settlers and visitors to the fledgling townsite. Since the upper river could be seen only with considerable difficulty, the Dells remained relatively unknown even to the citizens of Kilbourn City, who tended to view the future of the area in terms of milling, transport, and lumber trade rather than tourism.

In 1865, a young Civil War veteran named Henry H. Bennett arrived in Kilbourn City and began to devote himself to the landscape photography of the Dells. Bennett had accidently shot himself through the hand during the war and, finding himself thus unfit for other types of manual labor, had purchased the tintype photography stand of Leroy Gates. Thereafter, Bennett began to systematically explore the upper and lower Dells, recording their moods and marvels in photographs of great technical ingenuity and beauty. Over the next forty years, Bennett's stereoscopic views of the Dells were exhibited widely in the U. S. and abroad, attracting visitors to the region from many corners of the world. Bennett's life and work are well described in Sara Rath's book, *Pioneer Photographer, Wisconsin's H. H. Bennett,* and the video documentary, *Views of a Cameraman: H. H. Bennett,* which was produced by WHA-TV for the public educational television network. The Bennett Studio is the oldest photography studio in the U. S. in continuous operation by one family (now under the aegis of the Bennett Studio Foundation), and both the studio and Bennett's house are on the Nations Registry of Historic Places.

Bennett is said to be responsible for many of the picturesque names now attached to the rocks, ravines, and formations of the Dells. It is likely that he was also instrumental in changing the name of "McEwen's Rock" to "Louis' Bluff," for its association with Louis Dupless. One of Bennett's early stereoscopic views was entitled, "View from Luncheon Hall, towards Lewie's Bluff," and later guidebooks emanating from the Bennett Studio generally referred to "Louis' Bluff." Bennett and

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Dupless were both active members of the local G. A.R. post and doubtless knew one another well Louis' Bluff and its surroundings of a century ago are captured in a number of Bennett photos. One of the best of these, entitled "Up the River from Mouth of Witches Gulch," shows the distant view of Louis' Bluff with islands in the foreground, as the scene appeared to a boy on the high riverbank in 1876. Bennett's wealthy Milwaukee patron, William Metcalf, wrote appreciatively of this picture,

> *"I am much obliged for the views you sent — I liked them all very much, especially the one showing islands through the pine trees . . . as a composition and massing light and shadow the view of rocks and river with litle boy standing in right foreground is the best of all — it is a very rich picture."*

This photo (with an added steamboat) was the basis for a lithograph, "Sketches in Wisconsin," by Charles Graham, published in *Harper's Weekly* of September 5, 1885.

Steamboats in the Dells

Although Bennett, Gates, and other river guides would occasionally take small parties into the Dells by rowboat, the real beginning of the Dells tourist trade dates from 1873 when the first regular steamboat service made the upper Dells conveniently accessible. In that year, Captain Abe Wood came down from Point Bluff (in Quincy township, about 6 miles above Louis' Bluff) on the steamer *Modocawando,* a former flatbottom scow outfitted with side-sheel and a small steam engine. "Hurray for the steamer and jolly excursion trips through the Dells!" was the exultant newspaper headline. As the fame of the Dells spread, particularly through descriptive articles in the Milwaukee newspapers, two more steamers were quickly added to the route: the *Dell Queen,* rechristened and brought overland from Madison (where it was formerly the *Lady of the Lake)* and the *Champion,* refitted at Point Bluff expressly to run the Dells. The first *Dell Queen* was replaced by a more elegant and commodious steamer of the same name to compete with the *Champion* on the upper route, while the *Modocawando* was transferred to begin tours in the lower Dells. By 1875 the Dells tourist trade was, quite literally, in full steam.

It is noteworthy that the first passage of steam through the Dells, itself a historic event in the commercial development of the upper river, had occurred almost three decades earlier. The feat has often *been* attributed to the steamer *Enterprise,* under Captain Gilbert, which ascended the river in

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1850 from Portage to Point Basse (above the present Petenwell Lake flowage). However, the actual honor apparently belongs to the steamer *Maid of Iowa,* under Captain H. W. Kingsbury, which ascended through the Dells in 1844, doubtless an object of wonderment to whatever observers may then have been watching from Louis' Bluff. The *Maid of Iowa's* precedence was duly noted in the *Fort Winnebago River Times* of August 12, 1850, as the *Enterprise* started upriver. Captain Kingsbury's own entertaining account of the *Maid of Iowa's* adventures is given in an article ("The First Steamboat!") appearing in the *Wisconsin Mirror* of August 21, 1874. According to that account. the arrival at the head of the Dells was an inglorious experience for most of the passengers:

> *"On the next morning [July 4, 1844] the boat started up the river, arriving at the Elbow of the Dalles at about 2 p.m. A great deal of argument was indulged in by the officers as to the best means of getting through the Dalles . . . It was then decided that the passengers and crew should go ashore with ropes on each side to guide and assist in pulling her through the Narrows. Everything being in readiness, with the help about evenly divided upon either bank . . . the engineer was instructed to 'put on steam,' when the boat walked up the stream, leaving those on shore looking after her in astonishment. She proceeded to the head of the Dalles where she lay up for those left behind.*
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> *Those parties had a labourious task to encounter in making the three miles by land. They would explore every ravine to the river, only to find they must go further up stream. After some three hours they succeeded in reaching the boat. "*

Two days later, the *Maid* again passed Louis' Bluff on her return trip from Point Basse. The trip through the Dells was less eventful until the boat struck a rock near the present site of the Kilbourn Dam and broke her wheelhouse. After repairs at Fort Winnebago, the ill-starred *Maid* returned to Galena to bring another load of cargo to Fort Winnebago, but on this, only her second trip down the river, she ran onto a snag and sank just below Prairie du Chien, and "thus ended the career of the first steamboat ever running above Portage and through the Dells." W. J. Petersen's book_ *Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi,* reproduces (p. 376) the *Maid of Iowa's* posted schedule for 1845 from Galena to "Point Boss" on the upper Wisconsin. The quoted prices of passage from Galena were $4.50 to Helena (Spring Green), $4.75 to Sac Prairie, $5.00 to Fort Winnebago, and $8.50 to Point Boss, the steep increase of the final leg no doubt reflecting the rigors of the ascent through the Dells. It was noted that "deck passengers were carried either way at half fare and paid only twenty-five cents for meals."

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Early Tourism at the Head of the Dells

Even after the arrival of regular steamer service in the Dells, all indications point to the great difficulty of navigating the river above Witches Gulch, except at favorable water levels. The features near Stand Rock could only be reached by taking a small boat up "Blazier's [August Blaser's] Creek" and following a footpath "amid ferns and shrubbery" to Hornet's Nest. Until the building of the high dam in 1908 at Kilbourn ("City" had been officially dropped from its name since about 1895), Louis' Bluff and the island-studded bay were well above the path plied by the steamers, providing the "prospect" for sightseers atop Prospect Point (present Cambrian Lodge site) at the outermost turning point. The 1885 edition of the guidebook *Dells of the Wisconsin River* describes the scene at the terminus of the boat trip:

> *" . where the river widens, and where numerous small islands are scattered here and there throughout the broad expanse. A view from the bluff [Prospect Point] on the west bank of the river, extending to Louis' Bluff or McEwen Rock, is beautiful and grand; and from a point a little below, looking up, the scene is very much like that from the head of Lake George."*

Jones' guidebook of 1887 similarly describes the view at the head of the Dells:

> *"Before us as we come on through the walls of rock, the river widens out to nearly a mile. We can see a panorama of beauty stretching out to the limit of visionary power, its boundaries but being the entrance to a world of imagination that is unlimited. Lovely fields, great mountains of rock, high peaks, and an indescribable variety of foliage lies before like a beautiful picture, more beautiful than the greatest artist's imaginative productions. This wider part of the river is dotted with many islands of all sizes, covered with foliage."*

This scene is now preserved only in the photographs of Bennett and other pioneer photographers of the region.

The Kilbourn Dam

The building of the dam at Kilbourn in 1908 culminated more than a half-century of bitter dispute and was to drastically alter the landscape around Louis' Bluff. The rapids at Kilbourn had always been the dividing line between the upper and lower Dells and was the natural focus of attempts to harness the river for milling, manufacturing, and (later) electrical power. Such efforts were naturally inimical to the interests of the lumber trade, which saw the damming of the river as a dangerous

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impediment to the transport of lumber down the great waterway. As described in Chapter 6, a small dam had been started by the Wisconsin River Hydraulic Company in 1856, but was so destructive of lumber and life that it was destroyed by raftsmen in the spring of 1859, after litigation to remove the dam had failed. It is said that the angry rivermen then started toward Kilbourn, intending to destroy the village as well, but they were met and stopped by the dam's superintendent, Joseph Bailey, who stood up to them firmly. By 1872 (after Kilbourn's interest had been inherited by his son, Byron H. Kilbourn), another dam was completed for a flour mill, with an opening in the center for rafts, and the profits from the mill were used to fight the lawsuits filed by the lumber interests. But again in the fall of 1876 the lumbermen took matters into their own hands and burned the dam.

As the raft traffic dwindled to an end and the dispute with the lumbermen became moot, the village built another small timber dam in 1894 that was washed out three years later. Those who envisioned the future of Kilbourn in terms of manufacturing and water power now began planning a much higher and stronger dam, which was to raise the water level in the upper Dells by fifteen to twenty feet, with profound consequences for Louis' Bluff and the bay at the head of the Dells.

The construction of the Kilbourn Dam was vigorously opposed by the aged H. H. Bennett an a handful of others, against a tide of support for industrial expansion. In 1906, Bennett wrote passionately of his love for the Dells and opposition to the dam:

> *"My energies for near a lifetime have been used almost entirely to win such prominence as I could in outdoor photography and in this effort I could not help falling in love with the Dells. There are few people who see them who don't become infatuated in a greater or lesser degree. Except with me, every rock that is to be hidden from sight is a sacrilege of what the good God has done in carving them into beautiful shapes, but very few of my good Kilbourn neighbors feel this way and most of them believe now that the Dells will be quite as beautiful with fifteen feet of them under water."*

Ground was broken for the new dam late in 1906 as a newspaper headline proclaimed, "A Great Commercial Center is Ours!" Bennett himself died within about a year, before the waters began to cover over his beloved scenes.

The rising waters backed up by the Kilbourn Dam produced a variety of changes around Louis' Bluff. Only the shoreline along the sheer east face of the bluff was left to coincide with the earlier

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1906 U. S. Geological Survey map of the Wisconsin River. On the north, the river began to encircle the bluff like an island, creating a broad marshy bay between Louis' Bluff and Fox Point and shifting the shoreline up to 1500 feet westward. On the south side, the river backed up Gilmore Creek to form the present River Bay Marina, indented almost one-half mile west of its original mouth, and dissecting the original Dupless farmstead almost to its western boundary. The original islands were all covered, but a new island was created in front of River Bay Marina which includes the former southeast corner of the Dupless farm. Other acreage to the south, although not permanently inundated, became marshy lowland unsuitable for cultivation. Only about 40 acres of good farmland remained on the sheltered west side of the bluff, on the neck of land followed by the driveway that connects the farmyard to Stand Rock Road, west of the altered floodplain. In former years, spring and fall high water levels would periodically encircle the bluff, and the record floods of 1938 even brought the floodwaters up to the lower windowsill of the house! However, since completion of the Castle Rock and Petenwell Dams above Louis' Bluff, such flooding has been effectively controlled.

Tillmanns Park

There is a curious footnote relating to Louis' Bluff and the construction of the Kilbourn Dam. In August of 1906, shortly before ground was to be broken for the dam and about nine years after Louis' Bluff had passed out of the Dupless family, the south end of the bluff and surrounding acreage were sold to Clemens W. and Lillian C. Tillmann. Immediately thereafter, the Tillmanns recorded a plat for a grandiose development to be known as "Tillmans Park" and began selling lots. Tillmanns Park was to lie at the base of Louis' Bluff along the doomed river frontage, a village of 258 lots for a population of perhaps 500-1000 people. It was to be bounded by grand boulevards on all sides, crisscrossed by a network of streets named for presidents and large cities. Some of the first lots sold, for instance, were near the intersection of "Roosevelt Boulevard" and "Milwaukee Avenue," adjacent to "Waverly Beach." Only a few lots were sold, all now completely submerged, and only about one-third of the proposed townsite remained (usually) above water after the new shoreline was established. By the time the waters began to rise in 1909, the Tillmanns were gone, and the bizarre paper-city of Tillmanns Park was only a watery memory.

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Sunset Trips and the Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial

As the waters began to cover the islands that had formerly stood in the bay before Louis' Bluff, many trees were left standing out of the water. During the first winter, many of these were cut **by** farmers who drove their horse teams out onto the ice and felled the trees at ice level. The remaining unsightly stumps were left to rot, and can still be seen in photos of the late 1920's. Even though the portions above water eventually rotted from view, the stumps lurking just below water level became nearly impervious to decay, and have survived to the present day. These menacing lurkers, described by tour guides as the "Sunken Forest," still present a significant hazard to boaters unfamiliar with the main channel.

The water levels raised by the dam completely submerged some well-known features of the upper Dells and reduced the relief and boldness of many others, as Bennett had feared. But the higher waters also created new beauty spots and improved the access to Witches Gulch, Stand Rock, and other features at the head of the Dells. The consensus of those who knew the Dells both before and after the dam was that the overall beauty of the Dells was not greatly impaired, and in certain respect was enhanced. Louis' Bluff was left thrust out more boldly into the enlarged bay, having the appearance of an island from certain directions.

The changed water levels and improved access to the higher features soon altered the patterns of the tourist traffic in the upper Dells and brought Louis' Bluff into the mainstream of that traffic for the first time. In 1918, Captain Glen D. Parsons began running the steamer *Apollo* out to Louis' Bluff for the "sunset view" trips. The editor of the *Mirror-Gazette* described this new departure in October, 1919:

> *"During the past two seasons the Dells Boat Company have run sunset view trips to Louis' Bluff. In connection with these trips there has been brief lectures on geology, on the rare and prolific history of a pre-historic race, on the Wisconsin River Indians, etc. This feature of the Dells was entirely unprecedented, and in connection with the fact of its popularity is intimately associated the interest of the people in the historical lectures. All of this is intended to demonstrate the fact that we have never been utilizing some of the important features of the Dells."*

A tour guide aboard the *Apollo,* Mrs. Frank Waldron of Milwaukee (whose husband also worked on the *Apollo* when both were still high school students) recalled that the steamer departed from

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Riverview Boat Dock for the 4-5 hour round trip, with a stop at Stand Rock. Landing at Louis' Bluff, the passengers were entertained by Indian dances on the beach, and those who wished were allowed to climb to the top "at your own risk." From there, it was said one could see four counties and the steeple of St. Mary's Church in Lyndon.

Through the early years of the "roaring '20s," Louis' Bluff was associated with the music and gaiety of romantic moonlight trips. First the *Apollo,* and later the steel steamer *Winnebago* were outfitted with an "electric searchlight" for "special Searchlight Trips with music and dancing." A tourist pamphlet for the 1925 season, issued by the Dells Boat Company (G. D. Parsons, President and General Manager; G. H. Crandall, Secretary), described the attraction:

> *"Take the evening ride on the new steel steamer Winnebago, with electric searchlight, to Louis' Bluff; a lecture on the early history of Wisconsin; music and dancing all the way; two hour trip. Fare 75¢."*

The sunset trips featured music by Vivian Peterson and the Peterson family string orchestra, with dancing and soft drinks aboard the boat.

In the mid-20's, Parsons and Crandall conceived the idea of recreating the Indian dances and ceremonies at the site of the ancient natural amphitheater at Stand Rock. The same Dells Boat Co. brochure quoted above announces that:

> *On July 25, 1925, and lasting until Aug. 26 the Winnebago Indians will hold their Annual Harvest Dance and will celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of their victory in battle over the Sioux in the year 1825.*
>
> *This dance is given annually by about 200 of this once powerful tribe and only in late years have white people been permitted to witness this ancient and sacred ceremony that takes place at night only in an old Indian amphitheater, which for many hundreds of years was a favorite spot for holding this dance.*
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> *The amphitheater is located in a rocky gorge 7 miles upstream from Kilbourn and seats 2000 people.*
>
> *Chief Za Za Mone Ka (Thunder Bird)*
> *Master of Ceremonies*

Thereafter the Stand Rock amphitheater became the destination of the Sunset Trips, as it is to this day, and Louis' Bluff returned to its former solitude outside the range of the regular Dells cruises. The Indian dances that were once performed on the beach at Louis' Bluff thus evolved into one of the

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most popular and enduring summertime attractions of the Dells, the Indian Ceremonial at Stand Rock, and the clipper *Winnebago* still takes tourists up to the ceremonial grounds on the nightly sunset cruises.

During the later 1920's, Louis' Bluff continued to be visited by tourists from C. L. Tenney's Riverdale Farm across the river. A brochure from this resort pictures a group of smiling sightseers and their guide on the south promontory of the bluff, and notes that "Louis' Bluff is much frequented by guests of the farm, it being convenient, but a few minutes trip by row-boat and the view from its summit is wonderful."

Toward the end of the '20s, Frank Hacker, who was then the owner of the farm at Louis' Bluff. conceived a plan to develop the site as a luxury resort. Lodges were to be built around the base of the bluff, with a golf course in the fields and a dining room to command the view from the summit. Plans were drawn up for the resort and the necessary loans were sought. However, the onset of the Great Depression of 1929 ruined the chances for financing and, fortunately, no construction work was ever begun.

Wisconsin Dells National Park

As the pressures of rampant commercialization increasingly impinged on the natural beauty of the Dells, there arose periodic attempts to preserve the Dells as a state or national park. An attempt was made as early as 1906, shortly before erection of the dam, to protect both the Dells and Devil's Lake as Wisconsin's first state parks. However, the state investigating commission opted to drop the Dells site in February of the following year. In September of 1934, various civic groups in Wisconsin Dells (as the town was by then called) began to unite behind the idea of a Wisconsin Dells National Park, and the proposal received editorial support from several newspapers. As William T. Evjue of Madison's *Capital Times* wrote:

> *"In past years the number of visitors at Wisconsin Dells has equaled the number of tourists visiting Yellowstone Park. And there you find a valid argument for making a national park out of Wisconsin Dells."*

A survey and plans were drawn up which would have included a five-mile wide swath of the river from the lower Dells northward to the "Big Dells" at the mouth of the Lemonweir, with Louis' Bluff

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near the center of the park. On June 13, 1935, the *Wisconsin Dells Events* reported that Senator E. Merwyn Rowlands was sponsoring a measure to favor such a park, but the proposal failed to get off the ground, apparently never gaining popularity with the National Park Service.

At about the same time, George H. Crandall began his remarkable single-handed attempt to rescue the Dells from further commercialization. Crandall was a son-in-law of H. H. Bennett, and shared with his family an abiding love of the riverway and deep concern about rampant commercial exploitation that was despoiling it. Crandall began to systematically purchase the river bank along the entire course of the Dells, tearing up existing 'improvements' and restoring the original appearance of the river through a massive program of reforestation. In this manner he succeeded in acquiring virtually all the river frontage from Stand Rock to the lower Dells.

Crandall regarded this acquisition as a sacred trust for future generations and expressed the conviction that "no man can own the Dells—he can only be custodian for a time." After Crandall's death, his entire Dells properties were transferred in 1954 by his heirs (Phyllis and Ralph Connor, Lois and Howard Musson, daughters and sons-in-law of George Crandall) to the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation and its wholly owned subsidiary, the Dells Boat Company, for the preservation of the trust. The income from this trust constitutes a portion of the annual gift of WARF to the University of Wisconsin for support of graduate research and fellowships. Thanks to this far-sighted action, the river gorge is largely free of the tawdry commercialization that afflicts the towns above, and every sightseer on the river contributes in some small measure to the graduate research programs of the University of Wisconsin.

River Bay Marina

One later aftermath of the dam may be mentioned. In 1949, the southern end of the Dupless homestead was sold off, later to become the River Bay Marina and Campground. The sale reflected the realities of the new flowage shoreline, which had cut the farm nearly in two and left the low southern end suitable only for recreation and camping. The 74 acres remaining at the northern end of the property includes the two fields west of the bluff that continue to be cultivated, shielded from River Bay by the woods flanking Gilmore Creek. The dissection of the original Dupless homestead

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into farming and marine recreational units merely reflects in microcosm the dramatic shifts wrought by tourism and the Kilbourn Dam throughout the region around Louis' Bluff.

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CHAPTER 9

INDIAN LORE AND LEGEND

The earliest descriptions of Louis' Bluff often identified it as "an old Indian signal station," "Indian lookout," and similar. No one who has seen Louis' Bluff and its strategic location on the river will doubt this description. But it is difficult now to reconstruct the role the bluff may have played in the religious and ceremonial activities, military actions, and day-to-day life of the tribes that inhabited the region. Events that transpired before the arrival of the white man remain largely a matter of speculation and uncertainty.

Archaeological Sites Near Louis' Bluff

The four counties—Adams, Columbia, Juneau, Sauk—that join near Louis' Bluff are rich in the Indian mounds and other artifacts of cultures that once inhabited the region. Although Sauk County is best known in this regard, Adams County was found to contain more than 600 mounds when the first systematic survey was conducted in 1913-16 (long after the settler's plow had obliterated many earthworks), and Juneau County contains hundreds more.

The banks of the Wisconsin River were favored sites for the mound builders. One of the better examples of Indian earthworks near Louis' Bluff is the Kingsley Bend effigy mound collection located on a 30-acre wayside on Highway 16 just east of Wisconsin Dells, near Otto's Supper Club. This site contains a 200-foot eagle, two 100-foot bears, a panther with a 300-foot tail, plus other conical and linear mounds, about 20 in all. Another example is the famous "Man Mound" just east of Baraboo, in a state wayside park off Highway 33. Other earthworks in the area include a group of 61 conical mounds about 12 miles north of Louis' Bluff and another group of eight mounds and two nearby bird effigies at Point Bluff, about six miles above Louis' Bluff. The birds each have wingspans of 150 feet, and one was said to have had trees 8 to 15 inches in diameter growing on it when it was first cleared in 1878. Like all earthworks in the region, these are associated by archaeologists with the

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"Effigy Mound Culture," Woodland peoples who occupied the region from about the 3rd century A.D. and are likely the direct ancestors of tribes inhabiting the state today.

The Dells area also contains several interesting examples of pre-Columbian planting beds, evidence of sophisticated agricultural practices dating from about the 10th century A.D. These ancient fields are found at three sites in the Dells, in the vicinity of Mirror Lake and Rocky Arbor State Parks and in Hulburt basin off County H, appearing as raised parallel ridges a foot or so in height and two feet or so apart, arranged in linear or S-shaped patterns. The Hulburt basin site was excavated and dated by geographer-archaeologist Bill Gartner of UW-Madison, whose work was described in a brief "On TV" segment broadcast over WHA-TV in 1992.

Other nearby earthworks noted by pioneer observers were subsequently destroyed by white settlers. An interesting example was the "Dell Prairie Enclosure" which stood along the creek that forms Cold Water Canyon, about four miles from Louis' Bluff. This was an oblong double embankment with walls ten feet in width and 70 to 230 feet in length, described in I. A. Lapham's 1855 Smithsonian report, *Antiquities of Wisconsin*, but subsequently obliterated by cultivation. Lapham conjectured that "the double walls may have been surmounted by palisades, and. . .formed a sort of fort or stronghold." Another ill-fated collection of earthworks was noted in 1856 by Alanson Holly's *Wisconsin Mirror*, which reported in one of its first issues that large effigy mounds were being levelled for town-building virtually in the center of where Wisconsin Dells now stands.

However, no earthworks seem to have been recorded in immediate proximity to Louis' Bluff. When the "Archaeological Reconnaissance of Juneau County" was conducted in 1918, the surveyor was traveling by rail and reported that:

> *"The station nearest Kilbourn is Lyndon, nine miles from the river crossing, leaving an unexplored corner of the area about which the writer could obtain no definite information."*

However, he included a reference to what may have been bypassed in this "unexplored corner" around Louis' Bluff:

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"On the north side of a bluff a few miles to the south of Lyndon station the presence of several mounds was noted by a Mr. John Bannon. He could give no directions sufficiently definite to enable them to be readily found."

This may refer to Louis' Bluff or one of its smaller companions, Fox Point or Rogge Bluff (the only such features fitting the location). But if so, the mounds seem to have been lost, perhaps under the waters of the Kilbourn flowage, or to cultivation.

Louis' Bluff is the location of the only officially recorded archaeological site in the township of Lyndon. This was recorded in 1923, subsequent to the original archaeological survey of Juneau County, and was first reported by Martin Hacker of the family then living at the bluff. The initial report identifies the location as a

"Camp and Workshop Site. . . about one half mile from Louies Bluff Sandy site, near the Hacker farm, on west bank of the river. Many flint chips. Has some flint points found here, notched and triangular, also small knife and perforator. Brother found copper spearpoint, 4 inches long. "

The site was examined by C. E. Brown (Senior Archaeologist at the State Historical Society and longtime editor of the *Wisconsin Archaeologist*) and recognized as a prehistoric village site. The entry in the *Wisconsin Archaeologist* (Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 66) reads:

Lyndon Township

Village site near the Hacker farm, about one-half mile from Louis bluff, on the west bank of the Wisconsin river, Sec. 18.

Reported by M. Hacker, Oct. 22, 1923.

At least two other exceptional copper spearpoints, each more than 6 inches in length, were found at or near Louis' Bluff. A report on "Copper Spearpoints from Reedsburg, Wisconsin Dells" (*Wisconsin Archaeologist*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 15-17) includes photographs of these specimens (*d*, *f* of the frontispiece) with the comment:

"In the fall of 1931, Arthur E. Kelley, Reedsburg, Wisconsin, found a spearpoint exposed in a cornfield[*] *on the west bank of the Wisconsin River, in Lyndon Twp., Juneau County, seven or eight miles north of Wisconsin Dells in the region of Stand Rock. . .According to Mr. Herman Knippel of Wisconsin Dells, a number of coppers have been found in this area and these are now in his private collection. "*

* John Marz related to the author that this location was in fact the village site at Louis' Bluff.

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In 1932 a third copper knife was found just across the river, in Adams County. In subsequent years, many other artifacts were gathered at Louis' Bluff by Roger (Little Eagle) Tallmadge for exhibit at the Winnebago Indian Museum on River Road. Other specimens from the Louis' Bluff village site were collected by amateur archaeologist John Marz and are displayed at the Sherman House in Wisconsin Dells.

The neighboring area also yielded the noteworthy "Edmonds Cache" of rhyolite blades. These were discovered by a farmer in 1912 in a sandy bank on the opposite side of the river (in Sec. 6, near Plainville), less than two miles from Louis' Bluff. These handsomely wrought blades, ranging up to about seven inches in length and two inches in width, were probably ritualistic or ceremonial in nature. They are now exhibited in the Sauk County Historical Museum in Baraboo.

Juneau County boasts one of the finest set of Indian petroglyphs (rock carvings) in Wisconsin. These are located at Twin Bluffs, just west of New Lisbon, about 20 miles northwest of Louis' Bluff. The glyphs depict thunderbirds and other animals in a mural nine feet wide and seven feet high, incised with stone tools in the soft sandstone about half way up the side of the bluff. Other examples (badly marred by vandals) can be seen at Roche A Cris State Park in Adams County.

Much closer to Louis' Bluff is another set of petroglyphs that may have an association with one of the most dramatic events of the region's history, the capture of Black Hawk. These are the "Lemonweir glyphs," located on a bluff along the west bank of the Wisconsin River just below the mouth of the Lemonweir. The glyphs are about half-way up the bluff, some 30 feet above the water. protected by a protruding rock canopy which forms a sort of rockshelter. The site was described in 1947, and the glyphs were said to have been known to local residents from the earliest days of settlement. A fish, deer, thunderbird, buffalo, and a few other animals could still be discerned in 1947, but about 40 other figures were by then indecipherable, faded by age or mutilated by initial-carvers. The rock surface was noted to be stained red in places from the iron deposits above, and it was stated that in former years some of the animal figures showed traces of having been painted with this iron ore. These details will be referred to below in connection with the account of Black Hawk's capture, which may have occurred near this very spot.

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Winnebagoes in the Dells

The earliest reports of l7th-century French Jesuit missionaries in the Wisconsin wilderness indicate that the region around Louis' Bluff was peopled variously by Fox, Mascouten, Miami, Kickapoo, and Illinois tribes. But through much of the eighteenth century, and into the time of arrival of the first white settlers, this region was considered homeland to the Winnebagoes, or *Ho-chunk-rah,* as they called themselves. This was the same tribe that Nicolet had found near Green Bay in 1634, and that Carver encountered along the Fox River in 1766. The gradual western shift of the tribal grounds in historic times was perhaps but the latest phase in a shifting pattern of alliances and territorial rivalries that carried the tribe in and out of central Wisconsin.

Their language and religious customs marked the Winnebagoes as more akin to the Sioux Indians of the plains (particularly, the Oto and Osage tribes) than to their Algonquin neighbors. Anthropologists suggest that the tribe reached Wisconsin from the southern Mississippi valley about twelve centuries ago. One of the Winnebagoes' own tribal traditions is that "our people came from far to the south by the great salt water, where once we lived in white houses covered with roofs of gold."

The pattern of Winnebago occupation around Louis' Bluff was probably a shifting one, tied to the seasons, the hunt, and the pressures of neighboring tribes. Roger Little Eagle Tallmadge of the Winnebago Museum described this pattern:

> *"The Winnebagoes were great warriors, travelers, hunters and fishermen and the Wisconsin River served to carry them to their various encampments throughout the state. Thus the Dells was a favorite haunt . . . Young warriors would court their maids in the quiet glens and coves of the Upper Dells. More hunting and fishing villages were to be found near the famous Rocky Islands of the Lower Dells; as well as the many burial mounds of those departed. A large hunting camp was always to be found about a mile above famous Stand Rock (at Louis ' Bluff). There were many minor camps located on the Lemonweir River about seven miles above the ceremonial grounds. "*

The Winnebago's picturesque name for the Dells was *Neesh-ah-ke-soonah-'er'-rah,* "where the rocks strike together."

The center of ceremonial activities, then as now, was the ancient natural amphitheater and council grounds near Stand Rock. A brochure of the 1920's (probably written or based on information compiled by Glen D. Parsons) describes the amphitheater and its surroundings:

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"The Dells of Wisconsin was a favorite hunting and fishing ground for them in the early days. One of their largest villages was located at the head of the Dells near what is known as Louis ' Bing or by them as Fox Point. One mile south of this point is a natural amphitheater and in that place thousands of the tribe assembled to offer up their thanks to the Great Spirit and also to hold their councils. The acoustics were perfect in this great out of doors amphitheater and the talks by the chief to his people could be plainly heard. "

Local Winnebago tradition holds that Louis' Bluff was called *Hay-wa-kha-chunk,* or "Sacred Mound." The beach there was said to be the ritual washing site for those arriving by canoe to join in tribal gatherings at the Stand Rock amphitheater. The beach at Louis' Bluff is most directly associated with the Water Spirit, but another Winnebago tradition identifies Louis' Bluff as the home of the Beaver People ("the rocks are their windows").

Sioux Massacre at Louis' Bluff

Although early events of Winnebago history are shrouded in mystery and legend, there is a persistent tribal tradition of a battle with the Sioux Indians at Louis' Bluff about three centuries ago, marking one of the leading events of their history. It is said that the enmity between the Winnebagoes and Sioux was due to Sioux encroachment on Winnebago hunting and fishing grounds, and the Winnebago attempts to exact tolls for passage along the river routes of central Wisconsin.

The decisive battle was said to have been fought between Louis' Bluff and Fox Point, lasting twenty days and nights. At the conclusion of the battle, the Sioux drove the Winnebagoes into the river and killed or drowned most of them. The battle is described by Don Saunders, who spent many years gathering Winnebago lore:

"Paddling down the Wisconsin River in a large fleet of canoes, taken from the Ojibways, the Sioux were now firmly intrenched in the thickets behind Louis' Bluff, unseen and unheard by the soft living Winnebagoes, who had lost their native alertness. The Sioux strategy was simple. Several of the swiftest warriors were sent ahead to harry the villagers and then retreat in feigned fright, decoying the Winnebagoes to the ambush that was to become an historical landmark in the annals of the tribe. The Winnebagoes fought with courage, but they fought against an enemy that had lean bellies and mighty arms. The price of gluttony was paid with hundreds of fine scalps. The Sioux followed the massacre with a visit to every camp and village with the avowed intention of killing all males, regardless of age, and thus avoiding possible retaliation in the future. "

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The utter destruction of the village at Louis' Bluff was said to be a devastating blow to the Winnebagoes, who thereafter abandoned the place of worship at the Stand Rock amphitheater for many years.

Contemporary Accounts from Early Settlement Times

G. O. Glazier, one of the earliest settlers, related the story he had heard as a boy concerning other types of 'ceremony' at Stand Rock and the adjacent cave known as "Squaw's Bed Chamber":

> *Wish-No-Nena... told me how under a superstitious belief of the young people of the tribe it was the desire of all the newly married to spend the first nights of their honeymoon in a certain secluded cavery at the head of the rocky region of the Wisconsin river (the dells). That by doing so good luck would follow them and game be plentiful in their lodges forever.*
>
> *She told me how a few rods to the north, in the inner recesses, would be found a little side chamber with a rocky pedestal on which the young squaw would crown her lover husband at sunset with a wreath of fragrant fern. She told me that this had been the common practice of her people for ages, and that those who had ignored the practice were the ones on whom Dame Fortune had wreaked her vengeance in the form of accident, hunger, and distress.*
>
> *This much. I learned in after years from the early settlers of the first discovery of the cave by white men. It was found to be bedded with a deep mat of fern leaves, and those with whom I spoke stated that they positively know that the Indians living near McCune Rock (or Lewis Bluff) used the stand rock as a physical test to all young braves to make the leap from one rock to the other to prove their courage and daring.*

The thrilling leap to Stand Rock, recorded in H. H. Bennett's famous "instantaneous shutter" photographs of his son Ashley, remained a test of daring (or foolhardiness) for tour guides and other young white 'braves' of the region for many years, but the feat is now wisely delegated to a dog.

In early historical times, Chief Dandy, "the Beau Brummel of the Winnebago" (admirably described in Juliette Kinzie's classic book, *Wau-Bun*), was said to have had his camp near the Dells in 1828, later moving to the upper Baraboo River. Other important Winnebago leaders of the early settlement period included Red Bird (tragic central figure of the "Winnebago War" of 1827), Big Fox, and Yellow Thunder, whose grave and memorial is at County A and Shady Lane Road, just south of Lake Delton. In the first years of settlement there was said to be an Indian village of 51 lodges situated on the south bank of Lyndon Creek, about two miles north of Louis' Bluff, where

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Indians rented patches of corn and garden ground from the farmers and were in turn employed by the farmers to cultivate fields. There was evidently another village or camp in 1866 at Shattuck Creek, directly across the river from Louis' Bluff, which was visited by H. H. Bennett:

> *"He ferried us over the River and after much wading through swamps we arrived where we started for. an Indian camp. Gained admittance to the 'Big Wigwam, ' and heard some splended speeches I guess, any quantity of grunting and a little dancing. "*

Bennett later photographed some of the most sensitive and memorable scenes of Winnebago life in this period, perhaps taking some of his subjects from this camp.

Black Hawk's Capture

The earliest written records pertaining to the Dells (see Chapter 3) concern a famous Indian fugitive who was not himself a Winnebago — the Sauk chieftain Black Hawk, who was captured near the Dells in 1832. The Black Hawk War marked a turning point in the development of Wisconsin, in part by removing the threat of further Indian hostilities, and in part by acquainting thousands of young volunteers with the favorable opportunities for settlement in these remote hinterlands. Even after his defeat and capture, Black Hawk was the most celebrated Indian of the era. Lionized by much of the eastern press, he was greeted by large and admiring crowds at every stop when taken to Washington after his capture to meet the President and tour the eastern seaboard.

Considerable interest has always attached to the question of where Black Hawk was captured by the Winnebagoes Chaetar and One-Eyed Decorah, at the end of the Black Hawk War. The official report of the Indian agent, General J. M. Street, states that, "The Black Hawk was taken about 40 miles above the Portage, on the Wiskinsin River near a place called the Dalle," and Chaetar himself is quoted as boasting, "Near the Dalles of the Wisconsin I took Black Hawk." Various conflicting attempts have been made to amplify these remarks. Despite the fanciful names attached by later tour guides to "Blackhawk Island," "Black Hawk's Leap," "Black Hawk's Cave," etc., there is little direct evidence to connect the capture with these specific sites in the Dells. A competing version of Black Hawk's capture (by a sometime Mauston newspaper editor) purports to locate the capture at Seven Mile Bluff near Mauston, but this account is embroidered with such implausible detail as to discredit

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even its general outlines. Only a handful of authentic accounts appear to provide useful supplementary information on the meager details of Street's report.

An eyewitness account that must be accorded considerable authority was provided by John T De La Ronde [*Wis. Hist. Coll.,* 7, 345-365 (1876)] who describes his chance encounter with the returning party of Indians "some time pretty well along in August" as he was traveling overland from Reedsburg to the Lemonweir River, at the present site of Mauston:

> *Near there I met with Chaetar, who subsequently died at Turkey River, and One-Eyed Dekaury; they were bringing with them, as prisoners, the Prophet and Black Hawk, whom they had taken at the Big Dells, a little above the mouth of Dell Creek. Black Hawk's camp was between two rocks, on the west side of the river, close to the water; the Prophet only was with him in his lodge, and they made no resistance when told that they were wanted. This camp was a mile and a half or two miles above Kilbourn City. Chaetar and One-Eyed Dekaury were going to take their prisoners to General John M. Street, the Winnebago Indian agent at Prairie du Chien.*

While this account seems to locate the capture squarely within the Dells (perhaps three miles downriver from Louis' Bluff), two curious details suggest a possible misunderstanding. First, since the Indian party was said to be going to Prairie du Chien when they were met at Mauston, it seems likely they were moving southward or westward, rather than making a strange 15-20 mile circuitous detour northward from Kilbourn. Second, the site is specifically identified as the "Big Dells," but rivermen used this term to refer to the much broader and lower sandstone banks further upriver (just below the mouth of the Lemonweir) rather than the spectacularly narrow "Little Dells" at Kilbourn. De la Ronde's confusion on this point suggests that he may have mistakenly assumed the reported "Big Dells" capture site to be far south of its actual location. It is also possible that Black Hawk hid in another location in the Kilbourn Dells prior to the final capture upriver. This could account for some confusion in La Ronde's account, as well as for persistent local tradition (based on information that H. H. Bennett considered reliable) that Black Hawk hid from his pursuers in "Black Hawk's Cave" in the Narrows.

Another significant personal recollection was recorded by John T. Kingston (*Wis. Hist. Coll.* 7, 293-365):

> *A band of [Winnebagoes], led by Caramaunee, a second-grade chief, pursued Black Hawk... and captured him at the head of the Big Dells, on the Wisconsin River. A few*

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years since, just below the mouth of the Lemonweir River, on the south side of the first high bluff point, might be seen, and yet probably visible, a rough sketch of a steamboat painted with vermillion, and also of an Indian standing near by looking at it. The sketch was apparently made by the finger, and was probably by Black Hawk himself... It was under the projection of the bluff above mentioned, that Caramaunee informed the writer that Black Hawk was taken prisoner.

Kingston's description again places the capture at the Big Dells (correctly located) and matches significant details of the archaeologist's report on the "Lemonweir glyphs" prepared seventy years later, including the projection of the bluff, the vermillion coloring of the figures with iron ore, and the precise location with respect to the mouth of the Lemonweir. That the sketch of a steamboat and Indian "apparently made by the finger" was no longer decipherable in 1947 (as indeed Kingston feared might be the case in 1876) would not be surprising.

Kingston's account was questioned by editor L. C. Draper, who doubted the direct participation of Caramaunee:

The elder Caramaunee was, at my time, ninety-seven years of age, and could not have been the chief referred to; and it would seem to be a mistake that his nephew, the younger Caramaunee, had anything to do in the capture of Black Hawk and the Prophet. Gen. Joseph M. Street, the Indian Agent at Prairie du Chien, sent out One-Eyed De Kaury [Decorah] and Chaetar, both Winnebagoes; they captured the Sauk leaders, and delivered them to Gen. Street, who gives a full account of the affair, published in the Niles Register September 29, 1832. While Caramaunee pointed out the place where Black Hawk and his companions were captured, he doubtless did not mean to be understood as claiming that he had any personal participation in their captivity.

However, the report cited by Draper is incomplete as to the party sent out by General Street. Wakefield's *History of the Black Hawk War* makes clear that the general's charge was made not only to the two Winnebagoes who eventually returned with Black Hawk, but to "the principal chiefs of the Winnebagoes and a few of the Menominees." Indeed, Chaetar himself identifies Caramaunee as one of those present when he is quoted as saying, "My father, when you made the speech to the Chiefs, Waugh-kon-decorri, Carimanee, the one-eyed Decorri, and others..." Wakefield also states that Chaetar and One-Eyed Decorah "took some of their men with them and went in pursuit of these Sac chiefs." It therefore seems most likely that the younger Caramaunee was indeed a member of the band of Winnebagoes that participated in Black Hawk's capture (though he did not accompany the prisoner back to Prairie du Chien), and that his account should be accorded considerable authority

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The Lemonweir site is further supported by the fact that references in Street's report place the capture "near the Dalles" or "near a place called the Dalle" rather than, e.g., "in the Dalle" or "at the Dalle." The Lemonweir site would also be somewhat more consistent with the estimate "about 40 miles above the Portage" than would a site near Kilbourn, barely half that distance.

"In Search of Chaetar"

The controversy surrounding Black Hawk's capture took a surprising twist in 1988 when an article entitled "In Search of Chaetar: New Findings on Black Hawk's Surrender," by Nancy O. Lurie, appeared in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* (vol. 71, p. 162). The "new findings" consist of the 2-page "JBM typescript" (undated, but certainly of 1920-ish vintage), said by a modern Winnebago to describe his great-grandfather's purported role in Black Hawk's capture. The story recounted in the typescript involves virtually an entirely new cast of characters (intertwined in such labyrinthian fashion as to defy easy summary) and places the capture at a small lake near Tomah, far from the Dells. There, it is said, Black Hawk and Prophet (White Cloud) surrendered to some Winnebago hunters who had chanced upon their camp, then were ferried back from La Crosse by boats sent up to fetch them from the garrison at Prairie du Chien. The typescript reports that the defiant Sauks, after spurning the preferred peace-pipe, were induced to surrender when a young boy of their party seized the pipe and smoked it ["in spite of the elder members who shouted 'Do not! Do not!' The Sauks wailed and cried, for this meant complete surrender and cessation of the war."] The accounts of De La Ronde and Kingston are overlooked, and other conflicts — with Black Hawk's autobiography, with military records concerning Black Hawk's transport to Prairie du Chien, and with an alternative version told by an earlier family member — are passed over with little explanation. To explain the numerous inconsistencies with contemporary historical documents, Lurie supposes that the latter were corrupted through an astonishing sequence of blunders and errors. The two most critical suppositions are:

(1) The interpreter, not being familiar with the Tomah lake, must have misunderstood the location of the capture and erroneously inserted the reference to the more familiar "Dalles of the Wisconsin." In Lurie's words, "Mixed-blood women might have served as ad hoc interpreters ... and would have

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been even less likely than men to be familiar with locations far from their homes. [The interpreter] was etymologically naive and could well have erred on a place name."

(2) The Winnebago historically identified as "Chaetar" must have been the mistaken spelling of "Chasja-ka" (one of the typescript's cast of characters) through a copyist's transcription error. Lurie believes that the name "Chaetar" contradicts Winnebago linguistic principles [developed in her previous article in *Journal of the Wisconsin Indian Research Institute*, vol. II, 50-73 (1966)] and claims that "no one had ever heard of Chaetar, and after his brief appearance at Prairie du Chien he is never heard of again."

Neither supposition is plausible. As mentioned above, General Street's reference to "a place called the Dalle" was actually the first recorded mention of the Dells, and it is therefore quite improbable that the Prairie du Chien interpreter should have been able to insert a correct reference to this previously unrecognized wilderness feature (even getting it in the right river!) solely on the basis of a transcription or translation blunder. Nor does Street's further specification of the location as being "40 miles above the Portage on the Wiskinsin River" seem to indicate imprecision or confusion about what river or geographical area was being referred to. Moreover, as mentioned above, an essentially similar description had independently been given to De La Ronde, who was quite familiar with the Winnebago language (indeed, was often employed as the interpreter on U. S. military operations among the Winnebagoes) and could not have been similarly misled. As to possible confusion over Chaetar's name, there is much independent evidence of the person of this name and spelling, recorded as being a minor chief of the Four Lakes (Madison) area during the earlier stages of the Black Hawk War (see, e.g., the several documented references to Chaetar in A. W. Eckert's book, *Twilight of Empire).* As to his subsequent fate, De La Ronde provides the answer (as quoted above), implying that Chaetar was among those removed to the Turkey River (Iowa) reservation in the military operation described later in his narrative.

Thus, there seems no reason for rejecting contemporary historical records and accounts of the actual participants in favor of the version presented by the JBM typescript. The latter might have stemmed from some real incident of contact between Winnebagoes of the Tomah area and scattered

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Sauk parties fleeing through their territory, with much subsequent embellishment. It is interesting that Lurie's research identifies Caramaunee (whom Kingston described as only a "second-grade chief') to have been the paramount civil chief of the Winnebago tribe in 1832. Caramaunee's own description (through Kingston) of the capture site at the Lemonweir confluence a few miles above Louis' Bluff still seems most consistent with the overall historical record.

Indian Legends of the Dells

The deep kinship felt by the Indians for the lands they occupied can perhaps best be recognized in their legends and stories. In these stories, the rocks, rivers, and bluffs are animated with gods and evil spirits, and the heroic feats or mythic symbolism are often closely associated with the landforms. The Dells region, with its fantastic rocky formations, was the natural setting for many of these legends, elaborated and retold in many forms.

A number of these legends were gathered in booklet form by Don Saunders, longtime river guide and student of Winnebago lore. One of these stories, "The Legend of Hey-Nah the Hero" was supposedly performed each year in ceremonials at Newport in the Lower Dells, involving (in addition to its human and supernatural heroes) Louis' Bluff and its companion bluffs Fox Point (1/2-mile northwest) and Elephant's Back (2-1/2 miles southeast), as well as Demon's Anvil, Stand Rock, and other familiar locations in the Dells. Although the authenticity of this story is unknown, it illustrates the intertwining of mythology and landscape that is characteristic of many Winnebago legends. A brief synopsis of the legend follows:

The Legend of Hev-Nah the Hero (after Saunders)

Hey-Nah was a chieftain's grandson, growing to manhood in a bark lodge near the Sturgeon Caves. His tall, slender, strong features left the maidens of the village breathless. Preparing for manhood, Hey-Nah journeyed to the Thunder God's home at Devil's Lake to seek guidance and fast for eight days. The Thunder God directed him to Lone Rock where a beautiful maiden named Hee-noo-ga, the Star Girl of Fox Point, was being held captive by the Water Spirit.

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The despairing Star Girl told her story: Her father was Na-joo-shooch-go, the Red Star, who had come to earth disguised as a hunter after being enchanted one moonlit evening by the sight of a maiden on the peak of Fox Point. Red Star's radiant passion could not be resisted by the maiden, and their baby Hee-noo-ga was born soon thereafter. But as Hee-noo-ga was growing into the bloom of maidenhood, her mother died, and her grieving father Red Star prepared to ascend to heaven to resume his true identity.

Before he could return to heaven, Red Star was snatched by Kay-ley-joo-sep-la, the wicked Hawk of Dead Squaw's Hill *[Elephant's Back],* who angrily bit off Red Star's head because the father had once refused the Hawk's advances toward his beautiful daughter. Red Star's suffering head was kept alive by the Hawk with herbs that grew on the slopes of the Sacred Mound *[Louis' Bluff],* Red Star could have no peace unless Hee-noo-ga consented to the Hawk's evil intentions.

Hey-Nah heard Hee-noo-ga's sad story and prepared to do battle with the evil spirits. Fearful for his safety, his clan brothers grieved for him with their death chants. At daybreak Hey-Nah was at the foot of the Sacred Mound, and he worked all morning to destroy the magic herbs. At high noon the Hawk's shadow fell over the Sacred Mound, now strewn with wilted uprooted plants, and he screeched with madness at the sight of the barren slope. The suffering head of Red Star was now sure to die and gain its longed-for release.

The furious Hawk tore up hundreds of trees searching for Hey-Nah, who took refuge in a cave near the Hornet's Nest. The Hawk's friend, Wong-looch-ga, the Giant, was about to catch Hey-Nah, but he slipped in the quicksand and was petrified by a thunderbolt, becoming Stand Rock. The Thunder God also shot the brain out of the Hawk's hideous head, leaving the petrified body as Demon's Anvil. Hey-Nah's heroic triumph over the evil spirits was celebrated by the largest gathering in the history of Winnebagoland. Hee-noo-ga, the Star Girl, had joined her father in the heavens as the jeweled star, Venus, and her bright smile for Hey-Nah was never dimmed.

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Winnebagoes in the Modern Era

With the arrival of white settlers, the days of Winnebago dominion in the region around Louis' Bluff were numbered. The displacement of the Winnebagoes from their lands ensued with a kind of dreary inevitability, patterned after that of other tribes driven westward by advancing white civilization. At the end of the Black Hawk War in 1832, the Winnebagoes and other Wisconsin tribes were forced to cede their claims between the Rock and Wisconsin rivers. The tribe was forcibly removed in 1840 to a tract beyond the Mississippi along the Turkey River in Iowa, but many tribe members soon melted back into Wisconsin. Chief Yellow Thunder was said to have remained at the Iowa tract for one hour and twenty minutes, reaching Wisconsin before his returning captors.

J. T. De La Ronde participated in the military removals around Portage in 1840 and later recalled the pathos of the scenes:

> *"A little further on, we came to the camp of Kejiqueweka and others; when they were told by the captain, through me, to break up their camp, and put their things in the wagon, and come along. After they had thus deposited their little property, they started south from where we were. The captain bade me to ask them where they were going. They said they were going to bid good bye to their fathers, mothers, and children. The captain directed me to go with them, and watch them; and we found them on their knees, kissing the ground and crying very loud, where their relatives were buried. This touched the captain's feelings, and he exclaimed "Good God! What harm could those poor Indians do among the rocks!"*

Other treaties, cessions, and forced removals followed. The Winnebagoes were removed to a tract in Minnesota, then to the infamous Crow Creek Reservation in Missouri, and eventually to Nebraska in the 1860s. Winnebagoes who had remained hidden in Wisconsin were gathered up in 1874 for removal to the Nebraska reservation, but about 500 were back in Wisconsin within a year's time, and no further steps were taken to return them. By 1900 the remnants of the tribe were about evenly divided between the reservation at Winnebago, Nebraska, and the traditional homelands in Wisconsin.

The Winnebagoes living in Wisconsin today have no reservation. However, the tribe has purchased tracts of land for communal usage in the areas of largest concentration, near Black River Falls and Wisconsin Dells. Tribal community services are partially financed from lucrative gambling operations conducted on these properties, such as the Ho-Chunk Casino south of Lake Delton. In the

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Dells area, the largest Winnebago community is at Indian Heights, a tribally-owned tract located near the Stand Rock ceremonial grounds, about a mile southwest of Louis' Bluff.

Today, as in the past, the Indian presence is felt in the Dells. Tribal members convene at community centers at Delton or at Indian Heights, or at the two Native American churches along Highway 16 north of Wisconsin Dells. Local Indians in native dress are frequent participants in parades, festivals, school Indian awareness programs, and other community activities. Indians still bring their native crafts and wares to sell at the Winnebago Museum on River Road north of Wisconsin Dells, or at Parsons' Trading Post and Indian Museum in Lake Delton. And every evening throughout the summer, the Indian ceremonials and chants are recreated within earshot of Louis' Bluff at the Stand Rock amphitheater, a unique and durable tourist attraction for more than fifty years.

The modern Winnebago presence in the Dells was portrayed in a television documentary, "Thunder in the Dells," produced by Dave Erickson and Lance Tallmadge and broadcast over the Wisconsin Public Television network in 1991. The program recalls episodes of local Winnebago history, including an incident of the 1800's in which neighboring German settlers of the upper Reedsburg area gathered to prevent the forcible military removal of Blue Wing and his family. Other segments illustrate the continuity of Winnebago traditions into the present day. As the promotional description on the video cover relates:

> *"For hundreds of years, the mysterious twisted rock canyons of the Wisconsin Dells have been both the physical and spiritual heart of Winnebago Indian country. 'Thunder in the Dells' shows how the spirit of the Wisconsin Winnebago people has endured, even as non-Indians 'discovered ' the spectacular scenic beauty of the area and created a mega-million dollar tourist industry around it. Ironically, tourism has provided a means for preserving traditional dance, basketry and clothing.*
>
> *Award-winning Ootek Productions utilizes stunning visuals to bring the Winnebago past to life. As we experience the power of the Eagle Dance on a river bluff at sunset and see how a black ash tree is transformed into a beautiful Winnebago basket, we learn how this legacy lives on in the present. ''*

Several of the "stunning visuals" of this video (including the title scene featured on the cover) are enhanced by the silhouetted sunset view of Louis' Bluff rising in the background.

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In conjunction with the U.S. Bicentennial celebration in May, 1976, Roger Tallmadge (Chief Little Eagle) addressed a gathering of Indians and whites in moving terms:

> *"Here is my serious thought... We love this land. It is very deep... So tonight in a spirit of a strong heart and a clean mind and faith in God—we call him Maoonah in Winnebago, the Earth-Maker—our people are here. We are here because we love this land. We can feel it. We are not charged to throw... filth and beer cans upon her; we are charged to get our life from our mother. We are her guardians, and we return to her...*
>
> *We are proud of this land. Our people knew it for over 25,000 years. Indians have lived in the Dells for over 7,000 years. The Bicentennial is a 200-year scratch on the rocks. Let us look into each other's hearts and learn how to live together in peace, good will, integrity, honesty, and freedom, toward a better and stronger America for all. Pee-na-gee-gee wee. Ah hay I"*

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CHAP7ER 10

NATURE AND WILDLIFE

Botanical Wonders of the Dells

The scenic beauty of the Dells awakens even in casual visitors an interest in its flora and fauna. But to serious naturalists, the region presents attractions that can scarcely be matched in the upper midwest. John Muir, arriving here in 1867 to seek the fragrant fern (*Dryopteris fragrans),* wrote of the ravines of the Dells:

> *"[They] are the most perfect, the most heavenly plant conservatories I ever saw. Thousands of happy flowers are there, but ferns and mosses are the favored ones. No human language will ever describe them. We traveled two miles in eight hours, and such scenery, such sweating, scrambling, climbing, and happy hunting and happy finding of dear plant beings we never before enjoyed."*

Another l9th-century botanist surveyed this "weird and enchanting spot" and remarked that

> *"The botanist cannot fail at any season of the year to find these cliff faces and the damp, dark crannies, beneath frequent projecting shelves of great interest . . . Certain it is that, approached from almost any standpoint, the Dells will richly repay any one visiting its crags and cañons. "*

When the fruit of the sword moss (*Bryoxiphium norvegicum)* was first discovered at the Dells in 1883 by Elizabeth Britton (later curator. of the moss collection at the New York Botanical Garden), a leading botanist wrote, "If I tell you that I have searched for the fruit . . . since the first year of my arrival in America in 1847, you will understand . . . how sincerely I am rejoiced to congratulate you for your discovery." The noteworthy botanical rarities of the Dells region also include the large-spurred violet *(Viola selkirkii)* and a single example (its precise location a closely guarded secret) of the Lapland rosebay *(Rhododendron lapponicum),* an alpine purple-flowered dwarf shrub that is approximately 800 miles from its nearest companion stands in the southern arctic and high Adirondacks!

A popular nature magazine of the last century extolled the Dells as the "wonderland of Wisconsin and the north" and a "Mecca [for the] enthusiastic botanist, who here finds a vast natural finery where a great variety of the rare green beauties may be obtained for the plucking." Unfortunately, such indiscriminate plucking has since virtually obliterated some of these "rare green beauties" (including the fragrant fern) from the region. Older residents of the region recall that Louis' Bluff was once a

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favorite hunting place for the exquisite trailing arbutus, but this also seems to have disappeared from the region. While the rocky crags of Louis' Bluff and the Dells have often provided safe haven for threatened plant and animal species, they have also witnessed episodes of wanton human disregard for the natural communities that once graced water, field, and sky in this region.

Plant and Animal Communities Around Louis' Bluff

The simple pleasures of nature walks in and about the Dells are well captured in Chester W. Smith's book, A *Summer of Saturdays.* Smith (an early superintendent of the Kilbourn City school system) builds his narrative around a visiting teacher from Chicago who meets a young Kilbourn lad (none too successful at book-l'arning) and accompanies him on excursions through the Del1s countryside, where the teacher is tutored by the schoolboy in the lessons and wisdom of a keen natural observer. Although this book was written nearly a century ago, it contains descriptions of local plants; and animals that can still serve as a naturalist's introduction to the Dells. Aldo Leopold's classic *Sand County Almanac* also contains much information relating to the ecology of the region from the vantage point of Leopold's "shack," about 20 miles downriver from Louis' Bluff. Many of August Derleth's books (such as *Village Daybook, Walden West, Place of Hawks,* etc.) contain descriptions of the natural surroundings along this stretch of the river.

Approaching Louis' Bluff from the driveway, the visitor is apt to see the whitetail deer browsing the fields at dusk, or glimpse the bright eye of a fox darting through a headlight beam to the cover of a roadside den. Less frequently to be seen around the farmyard are the opossums, woodchucks and other shy animals, even a lynx! A nature walk around the base of Louis' Bluff takes one from the silver maple, shagbark hickory, flowering plum, and other typical trees of the farmyard area into the surrounding mixed deciduous forest of maple, oak, jack pine, birch, and aspen (the latter often whittled by beavers from adjacent Gilmore Creek), The ascent of Louis' Bluff, however, brings one into the domain of the white pines, interspersed with oak, mountain ash, hemlock, Norway pines, and other minorities. Old photographs and written descriptions indicate that these trees are not of the original stands, but the present girth of the larger pines suggests the grandeur of the sight that must

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have confronted the pioneer lumbermen. The height of these giants testifies to the structural quality that made the white pine the lumberman's favorite-the strongest wood still light enough to float.

The white pines that crown the isolated rocky bluffs of the sandy south-central plains are themselves ‘outliers' from the coniferous forest zones further north. As Professor John Curtis's *Vegetation of Wisconsin* explains, the state is diagonally dissected from northwest to southeast by a "tension zone" that separates the predominantly coniferous north woods from the predominantly deciduous forests of the south. Plant and wildlife patterns differ dramatically in these two regions, often intersecting in incongruous fashion near the tension zone. Louis' Bluff and the Dells region lie in (or just south of) this tension zone, but the bluff tops and canyon recesses often harbor plant and animal communities representative of climates much further north. In the isolated sunny exposures afforded to wildflowers atop Louis' Bluff (particularly near the rocky north promontory), the plant communities are classified as "Dry Prairie" by Curtis, but the hiker may elsewhere have the impression of a walk through a northern forest.

Fishing boats still cluster around Louis' Bluff, drawn to what was identified even on the earliest maps as "The Fishing Grounds." Duane Counsell of the Parsons Indian Post recalls the time in the ‘30s when a high school ag teacher caught a Northern Pike "with a mouth so big you could stick your arm down his throat." Another Northern taken at the bluff around 1960 was said to be a Wisconsin state record. In wintertime, a shantytown of ice-fishing huts sprawls over the entrance to River Bay Marina, sometimes even after spring thaws have allowed the first fishing boats back into the main channel. From atop the bluff one can sometimes spot the shadowy schools of huge channel catfish stalked by fishing boats from Catfish Bay to the north, or watch fly fishermen cast for trout in Gilmore Creek along the southern boundary. Walleyes, pike, bass, sturgeon (revered by the Indians as a deity) and other gamefish abound in the Wisconsin, whose water quality is said to exceed that of any comparably large river system in the United States. Snapping turtles glimpsed slipping from the riverbank or clam and oyster shells found washed up on the sandbars give evidence of other thriving marine communities just hidden from view.

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Overhead, the skies are enlivened by the sights and sounds of myriad bird species. Common sightings at Louis' Bluff include: cliff swallows, swarming about their nests on the sheer east face throughout the summer; blue herons, stalking the marshy rookery areas on either side of the bluff; barred owls, surveying the scene from high fringes around the farmyard; turkey vultures, flying up from their nesting areas at Witches Gulch to catch the thermals and circle the bay; sandhill cranes, strutting out from their nest site in the marsh to perform courtship rituals at the edge of the north field; the unique "Maxima" Canada Geese flock, assembling here each year from their nesting grounds at Rochester, Minnesota; and an astonishing variety of other migratory waterfowl-ducks, geese, swans, even an occasional loon!-stopping over in the protected bay at the north end of the bluff.

But perhaps the most stirring sight to be glimpsed at Louis' Bluff (most often on the north end are the bald eagles, now making a gradual recovery after near-extinction by pesticides and loss of habitat. The narrow canyons of the Dells offer the eagles protection from winter gales, while the high bluffs provide perches from which to scout fish and other prey. At the dam in Wisconsin Dells. wintering eagle pairs often arrive like clockwork to feast in the ice-free opening below the spillway. Owen Gromme's painting, "Eagles in the Dells," captures the scene after summer revelry has yielded to winter solitude in the Lower Dells, Although the broad bay around Louis' Bluff usually remains icelocked throughout the winter, the first appearance of open water is a signal to look skyward for the high-soaring profile of the Indian's avian deity.

Nearby Parks and Preserves

Louis' Bluff is located amid a number of national, state, and private nature centers and wilderness preserves where the visitor can meet informed naturalists, view rare species, or witness natural spectacle. The following brief descriptions include approximate distances and directions from Louis' Bluff "as the crow flies."

Perhaps most remarkable is a nature preserve that is not affiliated with any governmental agency, but is supported entirely by private contributions and volunteer effort. This is the International Crane Foundation (11 mi. S), located south of Lake Delton along Shady Lane Road, between Highway 12

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and County A. Here are housed examples of the world's rarest crane species, some all but extinct in the wild, and here are engineered remarkable efforts to procreate these species and to negotiate international exchanges for their re-establishment in the wild. Perhaps the most celebrated achievement at ICF was the first successful hatching of a live whooping crane chick in captivity, an event heralded on the front page of the *New York Times* in summer of 1982. Pictures flashed around the world showed ICF director George Archibald dressed comically in crane costume, mimicking the motions and sounds of the crane's ritual courtship dance to coax the female whooper into estrus. However, triumph turned to tragedy when a marauding raccoon broke into ICF's antiquated compound and killed the chick's mother even as Archibald was preparing to appear on Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show" to celebrate the hatch. This incident soon led to the re-location of the ICF facility from its former site near Baraboo to the improved facility near Lake Delton. The experience of visiting the ICF Visitor Center to "walk with the cranes" and contribute to the work of the Foundation should not be missed by any nature-loving visitor to the region.

Still closer to Louis' Bluff is the nature center at Upham Woods (3 mi. SE), along Stand Rock road (County N). The Upham estate, which includes Blackhawk Island and the site of the old Dell House, was donated to the University of Wisconsin by Caroline Upham Keene and Elizabeth Upham Davis in 1941, and today is operated as a nature retreat for 4-H clubs, Boy Scouts, and other youth groups. Much credit for development of Camp Upham Woods belongs to Professor Wakelin McNeel, "Ranger Mac," the camp's first superintendent and one of the outstanding conservationists and teachers of nature lore of the state. Radio listeners of the ‘4Os and ‘5Os will recall McNeel's weekly broadcasts, "Afield With Ranger Mac," from Camp Upham Woods, carried into classrooms on the Wisconsin School of the Air for 21 years. Through these popular broadcasts, many Wisconsin youth first gained an appreciation of the state's natural heritage. As the memorial resolution of the University of Wisconsin faculty noted:

> *" ‘Afield with Ranger Mac' each Monday morning became a time of inspiration for young and old alike, for the broadcasts were more than nature hikes and conservation lessons. Vley were explorations into the mysteries of nature and the meaning of creation, and they carried a philosophy, a faith, which reached out to all who heard . . . "*

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The Ranger Mac Memorial is located at a secluded meditation spot atop a rocky ledge overlooking the old channel and Blackhawk Island.

Other noteworthy preserves of south-central Wisconsin include the MacKenzie State Environmental Center and Game Farm near Poynette (30 mi. SE), a working environmental laboratory and wildlife _hospital' for injured birds and animals from throughout the state, the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge (30 mi. NW), covering the large marshy tract of former "drainage districts" near Necedah, and the remarkable Horicon National Wildlife Refuge (55 mi. E), the "Wild Goose Capital of the World," which annually hosts a quarter million or more migrating Canada Geese as well as Whistling Swans, egrets, and other transients. *Wild Goose Marsh, Horicon Stopover,* by Robert E. Gard and Edgar G. Mueller, captures the mystic beauty of the marsh and the breathtaking spectacle of the mass goose flights.

There are no fewer than six state parks within about a 20-mile radius of Louis' Bluff, including two parks-Rocky Arbor (3 mi. S) and Mirror Lake (8 mi. S)-incorporating peripheral scenery of the Dells; Natural Bridge State Park (17 mi. SW), one of the earliest known sites of human habitation in Wisconsin; Buckhorn State Park (18 mi. NW), set on a peninsula formed by the Castle Rock flowage; Roche A Cri (20 mi. N), a companion bluff that can be seen from the summit of Louis' Bluff across the old glacial lakebed; and Devil's Lake (20 mi. S), the state's oldest and most popular park. Slightly further afield is Mill Bluff State Park (30 mi. NW), near Camp Douglas, dominated by sandstone buttes that are close geological cousins of Louis' Bluff. Numerous county parks and waysides add to the delights of the motorist seeking to explore the Wisconsin countryside in this region.

For those afoot, Louis' Bluff lies along a branch of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, linking this region to glacial terrain across the state. This 300-mile trail follows roughly the forward edge of the most recent (Wisconsin) stage of glaciation, anchored by Scientific Reserve Units at Devil's Lake, Mill Bluff, and other locations. The description of the proposed trail route north from Devil's Lake toward Louis' Bluff reads:

> *"Passing the Dells of the Wisconsin River, which were formed by glacial meltwater, the trail route crosses the flat bed of glacial Lake Wisconsin in Juneau and Adams Counties, passing sandstone banes rising among scrub oaks and jackpines."*

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Former Representative Henry Reuss's book, *On the Trail of the Ice Age,* provides a comprehensive account of this ambitious project.

Conservationists of the Region

The region around Louis' Bluff boasts associations with several figures who have played prominent roles in the American conservation movement.

Perhaps best known in this respect is John Muir (1838-1914), the "Father of the National Park System" and founder of the Sierra Club. Muir's boyhood home was at Fountain Lake farm, along County F between Montello and Portage, about 22 miles east of Louis' Bluff. The Muir farmstead was shaded by soft maples and fringed by small, delicate iris much like those still be be seen at Louis' Bluff. The decisive influence of Muir's Wisconsin years in shaping his intense appreciation of wild things is vividly described in the autobiographical *Story of My Childhood and Youth,* which spans his period in this region.

Another father of the American conservation movement with intimate ties to this region was Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), whose famous sand county farm and "shack" lies about 20 miles downriver from Louis' Bluff, along Levee Road between Wisconsin Dells and Portage. Leopold was reared in Iowa, educated at Yale, and established an early reputation in wildlife management in the American southwest before taking up the first U. S. professorship of wildlife ecology at the University of Wisconsin. But it was his purchase of a ruined farm along the Wisconsin River and his patient efforts to cure the "land pathology" that inspired Leopold's land ethic and the lyrical essays of the *Sand County Almanac* (published posthumously), securing his position as a leading voice of the American conservation movement. A drive to the l4OO-acre Leopold Memorial Reserve and Leopold's beloved shack (now overseen by Charles and Nina Leopold Bradley) evokes memories of the images captured in Leopold's beautiful essays. Leopold's principles of game and wildlife management continue to influence the work of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and similar conservation agencies throughout the world.

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Another renowned Wisconsin naturalist of the region was Owen J. Gromme (1896-1991), "The Dean of American Wildlife Artists," whose farmhouse and studio were on Lake Mason near Briggsville, about 13 miles east of Louis' Bluff. The life of this remarkable man spanned two distinguished careers: first, as Curator of Birds and Mammals at the Milwaukee Public Museum, crowned by publication of his monumental *Birds of Wisconsin* in 1963; and second, following mandatory retirement at age 70, as a full-time artist "painting anything I want." Gromme's wildlife prints are sought by collectors around the world, and his life and work are celebrated in *The World of Owen Gromme*, by Roger Tory Peterson, Michael Mentzer, and Judith Redline Coopey. Many of Gromme's works depict scenes of central Wisconsin and its wildlife, including scenes of the Dells region. At the time of Owen Gromme's death in late 1991, George Archibald wrote a stirring tribute (*Dells Events*, Nov. 21, 1991) describing the graveside eulogy near Gromme's beloved Briggsville home:

> *"Just before the storm [that dropped 27 inches of snow in Minnesota] swept over the heart of the continent, Owen Gramme's spirit left his 95 year-old body. But when we gathered by his grave, Owen's spirit seemed to be with us on the wings of thousands of birds … "Swans! Swans!" someone shouted. Preceded by a chorus of musical calls, a wedge of Tundra Swans winged their way overhead. We gathered around the casket and the priest began his readings. Roy Gromme politely interrupted, "Aren't those Sandhills I hear up there?" Everyone piled from under the canopy and gazed skyward to drink in the wonder of a flock of cranes . . . As the short service ended with the Lord's Prayer, a multitude of loudly-honking Canadian Geese flew over the cemetery and on to the Briggsville marsh . . . The swans, the cranes, the geese, and the armed salute, were miraculously all there during a pinch of an hour when we said goodbye to Owen. . . Yesterday, creation shouted that a God of love exists, that Owen and Anne are with Him, and that we must continue in good spirits the work we have been given. "*

Among those presently carrying on the work of preserving Wisconsin's natural heritage is Kenneth I. Lange, Park Naturalist at Devil's Lake. His works include articles in professional botanical journals describing the Dells and Devil's Lake region, as well as books relating to the history and glacial geology of Devil's Lake and Sank County.

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Passenger Pigeons

The birth of the American conservation movement followed in the wake of an ecological disaster whose darkest chapter was played out virtually in the shadow of Louis' Bluff-the extinction of the passenger pigeon. As a State Historical Society booklet notes:

> *"They were the most numerous species of bird the world has ever known. Each spring they flew northward, three or four billion of them, darkening the sun like a biblical judgment, seeking the great unbroken tracts of oak and beech where they would nest, procreate, and endlessly multiply. Such were their numbers, and the manner of their coming, that they inspired awe, even terror, among American colonists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries . . . At rest or on the wing, they were strikingly handsome. The male bird was sixteen inches and a bit more from his beak to the tip of his slender, dartlike tall. His head and back were slaty blue, his neck iridescent bronze and green, his muscular breast a glowing russet or wine-red . . . "*

One can scarcely now comprehend the annual spectacle of the mass migrations and roosts of the "inexhaustible" wild pigeons, nor the carnage unleashed on these "sitting pigeons":

> *"[T]heir vernal migrations signaled a carnival of shooting, netting, clubbing, and nest-robbing-a fortnight of joyous, unbridled slaughter that stocked to overflowing the larders of rich men and poor . . ."*

Less than 30 years before the last passenger pigeon on earth was gone, the greatest single gathering of these birds ever witnessed on the planet occurred at the Kilbourn nesting of 1871, blanketing Louis' Bluff and its surroundings. The roosting stretched northward from the head of the Dells along both sides of the Wisconsin River across much of the old glacial lakebed. The editor of the Kilbourn *Mirror* reported:

> *"It seems unaccountable where they all come from . . . For the past three weeks they have been flying in countless flocks which no man could number. On Saturday, April* ***22,*** *for about two hours before nightfall, they flew in one continuous flock from south to north, darkening the air and astonishing the people by the sound of their wings, and could be seen for miles in extent . . ."*

The nesting area spread more than 70 miles upriver, about four to five miles on each side of the river, covering every timbered area "as thick as locusts."

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A. W. Schorger,* who meticulously assembled the details of this event in his classic book, *The Passenger Pigeon,* judged from the available evidence that "practically all the pigeons left in the United States nested in Wisconsin in 187L" Since passenger pigeons were at that time far the most populous bird species on earth, comprising about 30% of the *total* bird population of the U.S., it can be judged that in the early weeks of May, 1871, nearly one of every three birds in the United States might be seen in the vast roost stretching northward from Louis' Bluff.

Schorger's description of the 1871 Kilbourn nesting quotes extensively from newspaper accounts of the time. From the Kilbourn *Mirror* of May 6 came a description of the commercial frenzy surrounding the bird slaughter:

> *"Hardly a train arrives that does not bring hunters and trappers. Hotels are full, coopers are busy making barrels, and men, women, and children are active in packing the birds or filling the barrels. They are shipped to all places . . to Milwaukee, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, being picked and packed in ice for the most distant points . . . in many instances the work of picking and packing being continued all night . . "*

A hunter from Fond du Lac recorded (May 20, 1871) a vivid first-hand description of the nesting grounds:

> *"Embarking on the 10 A.M. train, we found on board a party, like ourselves, headed for the great pigeon roost, stretching from Kilbourn City on the Wisconsin River, for scores of miles beyond . The indescribable cooing roar produced by uncounted millions of pigeons . . . arose from each side, creating an almost bewildering effect on the senses, as it was echoed and re-echoed by the mighty rocks and ledges of the Wisconsin bank . . .*
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> *And now [as the first streakings of daylight began to break] arose a roar, compared with which all previous noises ever heard are but lullabys, and which caused more than one of the expectant and excited party to drop their guns... The sound was condensed terror. Imagine a thousand threshing machines running under full headway, accompanied by as many steamboats groaning off steam, with an equal quota of R. R. trains passing through covered bridges—imagine these massed into a single flock and you possibly have a faint conception of the terrific roar following the monstrous black cloud of pigeons as they passed . . . The slaughter was terrible beyond any description. Our guns became so hot by rapid discharges, we were afraid to load them...*

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* A. W. Schorger, the "Aeschylus of the wild pigeon's tragedy," was himself a noteworthy figure. Schorger was originally a research chemist, trained at the University of Wisconsin (Ph.D., 1917), eventually becoming president of the Burgess Cellulose Company of Madison and Freeport, Illinois, and author of a noted book on The Chemistry of Cellulose and Wood. But his passionate avocation was to collect and organize all extant information on passenger pigeons, stemming from a childhood incident in Ohio when his uncle pointed out a field that had once been carpeted blue with pigeons. Schorger immersed himself in the newspaper collection of the State Historical Society, an hour or two at a time, spending lunch hours, weekends, and other spare time for more than 20 years. The bibliography of his book comprised some 8,000 newspaper entries and 2,200 other titles, encompassing every known source on the extinction of this bird. After his retirement as a chemist, Schorger joined Leopold's Wildlife Ecology department.

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Leaving the rest of the party, we drove off a few miles further into a high wooded ridge where nests were located. Every tree contained one to four hundred nests. The young pigeons (squabs) were hardly able to fly, and could be caught easily, when once ousted from the nest. Here of course were hundreds of thousands of single birds (probably the females), which could be shot one or two at a time, as fast as the hunter could load and fire. We saw more than a hundred trees that had fallen, by reason of the number of nests built upon [their] branches. Many of the young pigeons were dead in their nests; the mothers probably have been killed and their young starved. Thousands, driven by hunger, had managed to crawl or flop from the nest, and whose dead bodies lay thick upon the ground. Thousands of dead pigeons also were scattered around, having doubtless been wounded away from home, and flown to their young to die . . . "

H. H. Bennett, perhaps appalled by the carnage, never photographed the passenger pigeon massacres.

Just 76 years later, on May 11, 1947, Aldo Leopold (in the last year of his life) stood atop a high bluff overlooking the confluence of the Wisconsin and Mississippi at Wyalusing State Park to address the participants in a dedication ceremony for a simple bronze tablet bearing the inscription:

"Dedicated to the last Wisconsin passenger pigeon, shot at Babcock, Sept. 1899. This species became extinct through the avarice and thoughtlessness of man. "

Leopold's words expressed the poignant sense of loss for a species forever erased from the skies:

"We meet here to commemorate the death of a species. This monument symbolizes our sorrow. We grieve because no living man will see again the onrushing phalanx of victorious birds, sweeping a path for spring across the March skies, chasing the defeated winter from all the woods and prairies of Wisconsin.

Men still live who, in their youth, remember pigeons; trees still live that, in their youth, were shaken by a living wind. But a few decades hence only the oldest oaks will remember, and at long last only the hills will know . . . "

Forty years later, Owen Gromme's painting, "Distant Thunder—Passenger Pigeons," recreated the image of how this "onrushing phalanx" might have appeared from a high sandstone vantage place such as Louis' Bluff.

The spectacle of the passenger pigeon flights will never be repeated in the skies over Wisconsin. **A** visitor who values the natural world of the present should recall that even the most populous bird species on earth fell victim to the ravages of man over a remarkably short period. The survival of our wild companions depends on human respect and protection for their unique natural sanctuaries such as Louis' Bluff.

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Newspapers and Periodicals

Baraboo Weekly News

July 3, 1919 — Soldiers outing with Senator George Staudenmayer at Louis' Bluff

Eau Claire Leader

September 16, 1920 — Obituary of Amelia DuPless

Harper's New Monthly Magazine

August, 1882 — "Some Western Resorts," (Vol. 65, No. 387), pp. 325. Description and lithographs of the Dells (pp. 329-334).

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Harper's Weekly

September 5, 1895	"Sketches in Wisconsin," p. 588, drawn by Charles Graham, including "Dells of the Wisconsin," showing islands above Witches Gulch and Louis' Bluff in background

Juneau County Chronicle

March 17, 1887	Dupless for defendant
June 23, 1887	"Old Settlers," by John T. Hanson
July 4, 1887	Old Settlers' Day with Louis Dupless as V.P. for Lyndon
October 8, 1888	DuPless as delegate to Republican convention
October 10, 1895	Dupless obituary

Kilbourn Mirror-Gazette

March 8, 1888	Obituary of Caroline Dupless
October 12, 1895	Dupless obituary
October 2, 1919	"The Dells Up To Date" sunset view editorial
August 1, 1918	"Seeing Kilbourn First" sunset view editorial
October, 1899	"Vanished by Fire" Dell House history
June 8, 1916	Front page picture of Louis Bluff

Kilbourn Weekly Events

September 9, 1905	Photo of Louis Dupless among Civil War veterans
July 28, 1906	Soldier's reflections at Louis' Bluff
June 20, 1916	Letter from Ray Blaser
August 17, 1916	Indian camp at McCune Rock or Lewis Bluff
July 25, 1918	Sunset excursions to Louis' Bluff
August 22, 1918	Sunset view trips
August 29, 1918	End of season for sunset trips
July 3, 1919	Baraboo veterans' outing at Louis' Bluff
August 6, 1925	Indian dances at Stand Rock
August 13, 1925	Indian Harvest Dance, including talk by Capt. G. Parsons referring to Indian village of 10,000 population near Stand Rock
January 21, 1926	Yellow Thunder's history (reply to article of Dec. 17, 1925)

Mauston Star

April 14, 1887	L. F. Dupless as Justice for Lyndon township
July 4, 1887	List of early settlers, Louis Dupless - July 1847
October 10, 1895	Dupless obituary

Milwaukee Sentinel

January 28, 1883	H. H. Bennett profile.

Portage Daily Register

July 16, 1962	Louis' Bluff history, compiled by Helene Blaser

Wisconsin Dells Events

March 10, 1938	Obituary of G. H. Crandall.
miscellaneous dates	"Old Kilbourn Tales," occasional columns
October 19, 1944	Obituary of Emma Blaser
April 8, 1971	"Lost!" Islands and Louis' Bluff

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March 25, 1976	"Dells is Part of Geological Wonder," by Mayor Howley
July 9, 1981	Photo of sailboat at Louis' Bluff
April 15, 1982	Stump clearing near Louis' Bluff
January 6, 1983	Steele Tavern photo and history
October 27, 1983	"Louis Dupless: Still Part of the Romance of Louis' Bluff"
July 31, 1986	Obituary of Helene Blaser
December 4, 1986	Obituary of Fred Blaser
March 31, 1988	Letter from John E. Stringer of Idaho Falls, Idaho, concerning his great grandparents George and Minerva Orcutt, who lived in the Dell House until 1865 and whose three sons and two daughters were born there.
January 26, 1989	Mirror Lake history
February 3, 1989	Rocky Arbor history

Wisconsin Mirror

July 7, 1876	Kilbourn City history
August 21, 1874	"The First Steamboat," by Capt. H. W. Kingsbury

Wisconsin Magazine of History

4, 199 (Black Hawk capture); 7, 75 (Kilbourn City river port); 9, 336 (hops raising); 12, 95 (Lyndon Station mission); 18, 389 (hops raising); 21, 445 (Wisconsin Dells ferry); 22, 268 (H. H. Bennett, recruits at Delton); 23, 247 (recruits at Kilbourn City); 24, 174 (Jefferson Davis); 25, 169 (rafting hazard); 25, 444, 454 (Dells lands acquired); 30, 29 (hops raising); 32, 159, 468 (residents); 32, 300 (H. H. Bennett); 35, 290 (Dells hydroelectric plant); 37, 102 (lumbering picture); 32, 191 (Dells photos acquired); 43, 249 (H. H. Bennett); 59, 259 (passenger pigeons)

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APPENDIX: THE WISCONSIN RIVER HYDRAULIC COMPANY

Wherever you go in Wisconsin Dells, the land under your feet was quite probably first deeded to the Wisconsin River Hydraulic Company. The WRHC was arguably the most important formative agency in the early development of the Dells-Delton region, yet few who live or come to visit in this vacationland mecca have heard of the WRHC or its dark role in Dells history. Only a few old-timers with deep roots in the Dells recall family stories of the hydraulic company's treachery, a bitter legacy that generations could not erase.

In its heyday, the WHRC's operations were cloaked in secrecy that prevented even the town's closest observers from grasping the full scope of its nefarious influences. However, the discovery of the original "minute books" of the hydraulic company (in an old barn scheduled for demolition)[1] has recently cast remarkable new light on this long-hidden facet of Wisconsin Dells history. We can now appreciate in much greater detail how the WRHC and its organizers selected the Dells townsite, platted the layout, brought in pioneer settlers, financed the first newspaper, and nursed the controversial new community through precarious birth and infancy. The minute books let us trace (virtually from day to day) how the hydraulic company utterly failed its chartered purpose of building a dam, but was able to engineer the creation of "Kilbourn City" (now Wisconsin Dells) and ruination of old Newport, the ghost town of the Lower Dells.

Although the WRHC's primary locale was the Dells region, its rise and fall is also deeply tied to the history of Milwaukee. Indeed, the WRHC's cast of characters was a veritable cross section of Milwaukee's financial and political power elite of the 1850's, drawn particularly from the Fourth Ward "Kilbourntown" West Side. The history of the WRHC illustrates how the fate of a frontier town might be manipulated from the parlors and boardrooms of Milwaukee, imprinting the emerging Central Wisconsin wilderness with the incidental associations of Milwaukee business, social, and political life.

The WRHC minute books span a relatively brief but turbulent period. Barely five years elapsed from the WRHC's first organization in April of 1855 until it effectively ceased operations in mid-1860 (though another year and a half would elapse before the anticlimactic final board meeting in

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January 1862, when only one officer bothered to appear). Throughout this period the WRHC was a virtual revolving door for officers and agents, with its principals frequently embroiled in mutual recriminations, accusations, and lawsuits. However, until the detailed records of the minute book became available, outsiders could have little inkling of the shadowy workings of the hydraulic company or the sharp practices that its officers often turned on one another, as well as on the general populace.

Background of the Hydraulic Company's Creation

The Wisconsin River Hydraulic Company was incorporated with $400,000 capital and chartered to build a dam in the Dells by act of the Legislature[2] at the petition of Garret Vliet, John B. Vliet, John Anderson, Andrew Dunn, and Anson Eldred. However, the unseen force behind the hydraulic company was Byron Kilbourn, a principal co-founder of the City of Milwaukee, president of the LaCrosse & Milwaukee Railroad, and one of the most ruthless and powerful leaders of pioneer Wisconsin.[3]

The two Vliets were both "Kilbourn men." Garret Vliet[4] (then 65) was Kilbourn's oldest and most trusted associate, going back to their canal-building days together in Ohio in the 1830s and their 1834 trip into the Wisconsin wilderness where Kilbourn first saw the future site of Milwaukee. Kilbourn later employed Vliet in numerous schemes for Milwaukee's improvement, and one of the principal business streets of the city is named in his honor. Milwaukee's growth had brought Vliet early prosperity, but he was financially encumbered by failed investments in other railroad enterprises and came to his WRHC assignment in reduced circumstances. His eldest son John B. Vliet[5] (then 33) was employed as an advance land surveyor ("locating engineer") for Kilbourn's LaC&M Railroad, and had arrived as one of the earliest settlers at Newport in pursuit of these duties. He was to be the pivotal figure in the affairs of the WRHC, and his dishonorable dealings ultimately sealed the company's doom.

The other three incorporators were likewise well-known Kilbourn associates. John Anderson[6] was a contractor for Kilbourn's early canal and dam-building projects in Milwaukee and was remembered by an obituary writer *(Milwaukee Sentinel,* Feb. 25, 1883) as "a warm and persistent

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supporter of the late Byron Kilbourn." Anson Eldred[7] was an important Milwaukee financier and railroad promoter, having joined Kilbourn in 1849 as a founding director of the Milwaukee & Mississippi Railroad. Andrew Dunn[8] was a prominent Portage City property owner whose lands included the railroad and depot buildings for Kilbourn's LaCrosse & Milwaukee line, arranged through a generous gift to Byron Kilbourn; as the *History of Columbia County*[9] (p. 521) reports, "He built, at his own expense, the depot buildings and gave the railroad company a deed of four blocks for nothing, as an inducement to the railroad company to locate the depot where it now stands."

The impetus for the hydraulic company's formation lay not in dam construction *per se,* but in the jockeying over prospective townsites and railroad routes for Kilbourn's LaCrosse & Milwaukee Railroad. Pioneers who settled at Newport in the Lower Dells from about 1849 onward, led by Joseph Bailey[10] and Jonathan Bowman[11], had recognized that the site lay along the likely path of a future railroad crossing between Milwaukee and LaCrosse. Thus, when Byron Kilbourn organized the LaCrosse and Milwaukee Railroad in 1852 (following his abrupt dismissal as president of the Milwaukee & Waukesha R.R. in the wake of the "Flanders Fraud" scandal[3]), the stage was set for a confrontation with the Newport settlers, who were already celebrating the expected escalation of property values that would accompany selection of their site for the first railroad crossing over the Wisconsin River.

Bailey and Bowman, organizers of Newport, understood the importance of committing the LaC&M to a railroad crossing at their site. According to the *History of Columbia County*[9] and Dixon's account[12], they approached Byron Kilbourn with the offer of an outright gift of one-half their 400-acre Newport tract, plus a dam charter which they had previously procured from the Legislature. In return, Kilbourn signed over two $100,000 bonds guaranteeing that the LaC&M would cross at Newport. However, the charter obligation to build a dam at the Dells (apparently only a 'kicker' in the main deal) soon became a financial albatross to Kilbourn, as property owners boasted openly of the exorbitant settlements that would be demanded for "flowage damage" caused by the dam.

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With his options severely constrained by the Bailey-Bowman bonds, Kilbourn apparently moved to create the Wisconsin River Hydraulic Company in order to limit his personal exposure to the threatened flowage settlements and, if possible, regain control of the bonds. Kilbourn conveyed to the hydraulic company all his Newport property and the charter to build the dam, while the company assumed in its name the guarantees secured by the Bailey-Bowman bonds." The announcement at Newport of the existence of these bonds, secured by some of Milwaukee's most prominent financial figures, further fueled speculative frenzy and increased the clamor for large flowage settlements. Under these circumstances, and with evidence of railroad construction virtually at Newport's doorstep on both sides of the river, Kilbourn's men were successful in persuading Bailey and Bowman to return the surety bonds, thus sealing Newport's doom. Thereafter, the WRHC's primary focus was on creating a new "Kilbourn City" and dam at a site two miles upriver, while Newport (the once-bustling boomtown of 1,500 population) was left to wither away to a ghost town.[12]

The minute books of the Wisconsin River Hydraulic Company record the chronology of these events, presenting a tale of corporate graft and deceit from the heyday of mid-nineteenth century American capitalism, when immature state regulative mechanisms were unequal to the avaricious business practices of the day. While the laconic entries in the company minutes provide but a bare outline of what was transpiring, enough is recorded to reconstruct a partial picture of the hydraulic company's role in this formative period of Dells history. The following chronological account of the hydraulic company's affairs has been assembled from these corporate minutes and companion records of the day.[13]

1855: The Hydraulic Company Organizes

At the WRHC's organizational meeting in Milwaukee on April 19, 1855, the minutes record that four directors (G. Vliet, Anderson, Eldred, J. B. Vliet) were present, with Garret Vliet presiding and John B. Vliet acting as secretary. As first officers, the board elected John B. Vliet as President, George D. McAllaster[14] as Secretary, and Andrew Dunn as Treasurer. Resolutions were adopted to (1) authorize stock subscriptions; (2) authorize the company president to purchase lands

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for the company; (3) appoint Anderson and Eldred as a committee to deal with "parties holding privileges" under the Legislative charter (Kilbourn?); and (4) draft bylaws and set up the books of the company.

The bylaws were accordingly adopted at the next scheduled board meeting on October 2. At a special meeting the following day, Eldred's resignation was announced *(in absentia),* with E. T. Hooker[15] taking his place. The board then approved two land purchases that President John Vliet had negotiated—one with new Director E. T. Hooker, Joseph Bailey, Andrew Dunn, and Abram Vliet,[16] the other with Charles Teshner,[17] Jason Weaver,[18] and W. Riley Smith[19]—for what would later become the site of Wisconsin Dells.[20]

[It subsequently became known that John Vliet and Kilbourn had also made additional large land purchases upriver (including tracts spanning both sides of the river near Louis' Bluff and the present Highway 82 bridge, as well as a tract about three miles northeast of the present city),[21] but no reference is made to these lands in the minutes until more than a year later.]

At the meeting of October 2, Director John Anderson was awarded the contract to build the dam, and Joseph Bailey and Jonathan Bowman, the founders of Newport, were respectively appointed superintendent for dam construction and attorney for the company. Two other meetings were held before the end of the year to deal with lot exchanges for those (William Wait,[22] John Tanner,[23] and George F. Noble[24]) who were apparently already engaged in construction (along with editor Alanson Holly) at the newly purchased upriver site.

1856: The Selling of Kilbourn City

At the first meeting of 1856 on March 12, a distribution of stock was approved (in unspecified amounts and for unspecified considerations, but probably connected to the Vliet land purchases) to Byron Kilbourn, Garret Vliet, Charles A. Cady,[25] Charles Teshner, and Moses Strong.[26] The latter would later be implicated as Byron Kilbourn's principal henchman in the bribery of Governor Bashford and a majority of both houses of the Wisconsin State Legislature in the infamous land grant scandals of 1856.[27] As mentioned earlier, from the time of the hydraulic

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company's formation Kilbourn's men were working to recover the $200,000 in surety bonds given to Bowman and Bailey to guarantee the railroad crossing at Newport. This deed was apparently accomplished before early 1856, for on February 5, Alanson Holly's new *Wisconsin Mirror* newspaper announced that the dam would be built near his isolated newspaper office where Wisconsin Dells now stands, rather than at Newport.[28] In the *Mirror* of May 13, 1856, Holly reported that Byron Kilbourn himself had

> *"visited our place last week and took a view of the foaming waters and rushing rafts as they passed through the Dells. He looks as if he might live to build a dozen more Railroads and half a dozen cities yet."*

The purpose of Kilbourn's visit to the Dells region (beyond sightseeing) was not revealed, but it may have involved intense discussions with Newport's organizers concerning the imminent decision of the railroad to cross at the upriver site.

By the time of the next WRHC board meetings of May 23-24, it was clear that a watershed had been passed with respect to the company's obligations to the Newport tract. At these meetings, Joseph Bailey was gifted "the Lot on which his Home now stands" in return for "his services to date," whereas Jonathan Bowman's association with the company was abruptly rescinded. This seems to indicate that Bailey (who had little to lose by abandonment of the Newport site, since Bowman had put up the purchase money) was at least a passive accomplice in the return of the surety bonds to Kilbourn (as indicated also by his public statement vindicating the WRHC's actions[29]). At the same meeting, the board consented to swap John Vliet's Newport properties (now virtually worthless) for company stock and moved to give him an additional $10,000 in stock (later reduced to $4,000) "for his services." The board also offered Kilbourn the option to buy up to 1000 shares of stock at the bargain price of $40 per share (i.e., 40 cents on the dollar).

By the time of the next meeting (June 16), editor Holly had announced the name "Kilbourn City" for the hydraulic company's new tract of land,[30] and a week later Kilbourn's LaCrosse and Milwaukee Railroad announced that the railroad would cross there. Residents of Newport were thrown into panic and despair by the realization that their property values were ruined. The first sale of lots at Kilbourn City was announced *[Mirror,* July 15] for August 18-21 and resulted in sales of

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$76,235. During its meeting preceding this land sale, the WRHC board also took possession (from William S. Wait, in exchange for five lots) of a building and dwellings which became the company's headquarters

At the conclusion of the land sale, the board re-convened on August 21 to ratify the results and to award lots to those (presumably, hydraulic company employees) who had previously put up buildings at the new townsite (including Alanson Holly, D. Kuney, A. Bergstrasser, John P. Mono, John Tanner, and John Vliet). It was the hydraulic company's policy to encourage rapid building in this manner, and Superintendent Joseph Bailey was responsible for certifying when a builder had successfully completed the requirements for his deed.

A second land auction was held at Kilbourn City on October 14-16, with sales of $34,447. At the ensuing board meeting on October 17, Andrew Dunn and Garret Vliet resigned as company directors and were replaced by Joseph Bailey and Alanson Holly.

The annual stockholder's meeting was held on November 1, at which time John B. Vliet, Joseph Bailey, Alanson Holly, John Anderson, and E. T. Hooker were returned to the board (by recorded stockholders J. B. Vliet, A. Holly, C. Teshner, G. D. McAllaster, G. Vliet, and B. Kilbourn). Five board meetings were then held in the week that followed. John Vliet was re-elected as President, with Bailey as Vice-President (and Superintendent) and McAllaster as Secretary-Treasurer. It was decided to notify auctioneer Caleb Wall of Milwaukee not to hold a third land auction at Milwaukee "as heretofore thought best," perhaps because previous sales were disappointing. The board consented to purchase the lands previously acquired by Vliet and Kilbourn above the head of the Dells for "a fair price" in stock and authorized issuance of $25,000 in bonds to be secured by mortgages on remaining company lots. Various payouts were authorized to compensate company officers (with cash) and to liquidate the company's indebtedness (with company stock). After the meetings of November 1856, miscellaneous lot sales and trades (not detailed further) were routinely handled on a piecemeal basis at regular board meetings.

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Aside: Alanson Holly and the Wisconsin Mirror

Editor Alanson Holly's appointment to the WRHC board of directors in October of 1856 (shortly after his arrival from New York[31] at the future site of Kilbourn City) presaged a growing dependence of the *Mirror* on the munificence of the hydraulic company, which can be traced in the minute books throughout his stay in Kilbourn City. On December 29, 1855, the board ordered 100 additional copies of the *Mirror* for distribution. As the first issue was struck on January 1, 1856, company directors and associates (including Hooker, Weaver, and the Vliets) gathered to offer congratulatory speeches and conduct a mock auction that netted Holly $80 for the first three copies; as Holly later recounted (Ref. 9, p. 831),

> *"This, of course, was all done for my encouragement, but it was all kept a profound secret from me, till the sale began. It was to keep me 'printing in the woods' till things thawed out, and it was a good way to do it."*

On February 25, 1857, Holly was authorized to distribute the *Mirror* "among those he may think best," and at the following meeting (Mar. 10), it was "Resolved, That the future expenses of the printing and carrying forward of the Wisconsin Mirror hereafter be assumed by the Company." The following year (Feb. 15, 1858), it was resolved that

> *"Whereas The Wis. Mirror has been published at K. City during the past two years with signal ability, and with great advantage to our young City and to this Company and Whereas: This Board is convinced that the same has been done at a loss to the publisher Mr. A. Holly, therefore Resolved: That stock in this Company in the amount of Fifty shares be issued to Mr. Holly in compensation for his losses."*

Later that year (Aug. 4), a contract was signed with Holly surrendering the hydraulic company's ownership interest in his newspaper company, printing press, type, and printing materials for $1,000 (offset by $1,000 in lots of his choice), "and the said Holly on his part agrees to publish said Mirror during the current year." Holly was elected Secretary of the board on December 8, 1858, and regularly received lots and payments for his services. However, on April 4, 1859, Holly notified the board of his intention to resign, and the board received his letter of resignation on May 10 and voted him a final $200 and a lot, after which Holly moved out of the area and the *Mirror* discontinued publication (June, 1859) for about a year.

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From this chronology it is evident that Holly's *Wisconsin Mirror* newspaper—far from being an impartial witness to events—was an instrument of the hydraulic company from the beginning. Reverend Dixon's charitable judgment that Holly "had no connection whatever with either the hydraulic company or the railroad company"[12] is firmly refuted by the hydraulic company's records.

1857: LaC&M Tracks Through Kilbourn City

Only two meetings were held in early 1857. At the first (Jan. 5), a $4,000 charge on President John B. Vliet's account was moved to the company's general expenses, a lot was bestowed upon a certain William Burke of Washington, D.C. (for unspecified "services to the company"), and company stock was allowed to John Kneen[32] for his Newport lots. At the second (Feb. 25), the board turned attention to its chartered purpose of building a dam "with a view of completing the same within the present year," as Kilbourn City land sales were winding down. However, dam construction would drag on for more than three years, ultimately without success.

Holly's newspaper expenses, surveying payments (to R. Csonk and William Spira), and other miscellany occupied the final board meeting before the annual stockholder's meeting on April 25. At that time, John B. Vliet, John Anderson, E. T. Hooker, Joseph Bailey, and Alanson Holly were re-elected as directors, with votes being cast by stockholders J. Bailey, J. B. Vliet, E. T. Hooker, A. Holly, and G. D. McAllaster. At the April 27 election of officers, J. B. Vliet was again elected President, with J. Bailey as Vice-President (and Superintendent), G. D. McAllaster as Sec.-Treas., and A. Holly and E. T. Hooker as "auditors." Pursuant to dam construction, Superintendent Bailey was authorized to contract for boats and other supplies.

The railroad's imminent arrival was indicated by the resolution (June 1) to record the "Railroad Addition" to the plat of Kilbourn City and deed to the LaCrosse & Milwaukee R.R. this land plus right of way through all the company's Columbia and Sauk county lands. At the following meeting on July 3, the company also agreed to buy the large "Van Steenwyk tract" near Louis' Bluff (which Kilbourn and J. B. Vliet may have procured as a possible alternative crossing site, prior to the actual decision to locate the crossing at the eventual site of Kilbourn City[22]). Later that month (July 25), Bailey, Hooker, and Anderson were designated a committee "to investigate matters in relations

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to roads running into K. City." The railroad reached Kilbourn City by September as the railroad bridge across the river was completed.

However, the nervousness of the board with respect to the intentions of its president, **J.** B. Vliet, became evident in the next three meetings (Nov. 3, 6, 7), which dealt with matters concerning the "Comfort tract" on the opposite (west, or Sauk Co.) bank of the river. Vliet claimed rights to personal title to the land, and was evidently considering platting this tract in direct competition with the hydraulic company's east-side tract. On November 7 the company consented to deed this tract to Vliet in return for the company stock he was previously given,

> *"provided said Vliet . shall execute and deliver to the Co. a bond in $40,000 damage that he will not lay out said lands into a village plat or sell or loan any lots by metes & bounds or otherwise for building or Villages purposes for and during three years from the first day of January next"*

This may have marked a turning point in Vliet's dealings with fellow board members.

Board member Joseph Bailey then seized the initiative. On November 17 the board approved his proposal to sell his lots in and around Kilbourn City for 402 shares of stock (e.g., $40,200 at par)**.** At the following meeting (Dec. 10) Bailey presented a bold proposition for financing construction of the dam, which apparently had made scant progress. Bailey's plan involved giving him the company's assets (lots, mortgages, notes, etc.) at 1/3 their face value, to be negotiated as necessary for dam construction. This plan was further discussed at the board's next meeting (Dec. 17), but no action was taken as the year came to an end.

The events of late-1857 occurred against a backdrop of catastrophic financial collapse for many of the hydraulic company's principal backers. Shortly after its arrival at Kilbourn City, Kilbourn's LaCrosse & Milwaukee Railroad (and all other Wisconsin railroads) were pitched into bankruptcy by the financial panic of 1857.[33] Presumably, John B. Vliet was suddenly out of a job, and other Kilbourn men were undoubtedly severely embarrassed or ruined by their ties to the LaC&M. Kilbourn's own position was severely weakened, and his ability to influence events would be further compromised by the politically explosive revelations of the Legislative Committee "Black

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Book" report of 1858 detailing his role in the land grant bribery scandal. Under the circumstances, Bailey's proposal for the dam project may have attracted John B. Vliet's attention as a financial life raft, now that his opportunities for private development of the alternative west side townsite were thwarted.

1858: Rise and Fall of the Dam

On January 25, 1858, the board approved a plan to hire Joseph Bailey to build the dam, and agreed that all its bonds, notes, mortgages, land contracts, and lots in Kilbourn City and Newport, together with lands deeded to the company by J. Bailey, J. Manhan,[34] G. D. McAllaster, J. B. Vliet, and B. Kilbourn in Columbia, Adams, and Juneau County, should be used to liquidate the mortgage held by Hildah Hulburt and "secure the completion of the aforesaid works." However, on March 18 this contract was amended to read with "Joseph Bailey and John B. Vliet" instead of Bailey alone.

At the annual stockholder's meeting on April 17, neither Vliet nor Bailey was returned to the board. This may have reflected dissatisfaction with their action as company officers in negotiating a contract with themselves to build the dam. Havens Cowles[35] and Garret Vliet were named Directors, joining incumbents John Anderson, E. T. Hooker, and A. Holly. Hooker was elected as *new* President, Holly as Treasurer, and G. D. McAllaster as Secretary. The minutes of this meeting identify the company shareholders (and their stockholdings) as follows: J. B. Vliet (700), G. Vl*iet* (411), G. D. McAllaster (484), J. Bailey (292), B. Kilbourn (196), A. Vliet (157), A. Holly (80), W. Riley Smith (35), E. T. Hooker (10), C. C. (Mrs. J. B.) Vliet (9), John Anderson ([1]).

At its following meeting (Apr. 20), the board pointedly resolved that no handouts of shares or property below par value should be allowed except by recorded vote of the board. Bailey and Vliet were given until the end of 1858 to complete the dam, and former contractor John Anderson relinquished his contract in return for 13 lots (and $1). The board also noted the outstanding mortgages and encumbrances on properties procured by John B. Vliet, which were to be assumed under the terms of the bond to Vliet: $2,692 to J. B. Stoop[36] (July 26, 1855, Louis' Bluff area, Juneau and Adams Co.); $11,500 to A. H. Hulburt (Aug. 31, 1855, Hulburt Creek area, Sauk

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Co.); $1,417 to E. B. Ellsworth (Oct. 8, 1855, railroad area, Sauk Co.); $1,000 to R. F. Comfort (Mar. 15, 1858, railroad area, Sauk Co.).

In thirteen meetings that summer, the board recorded the bail-out of Holly's *Mirror,* various lot payments to officers, the letting of a contract for a foundry and machine shop to Birdsill Holly, an agreement with Wm. G. Gardner to build a warehouse near the railroad, and other miscellaneous land transactions. The board also issued to Kilbourn a $2,400 bond to liquidate his note to W. Riley Smith, a $1,308 note to liquidate his note to John Kneen, and 117 shares of stock for his interest in the Louis' Bluff tract (after his complaints about receiving only $15 per acre under an earlier agreement). The board also gave additional lots to Bailey and Vliet to support dam construction and altered some details of the dam as construction went forward.

However, disastrous floods swept away much of the construction work in mid-September of 1858, and the frustrated co-contractors Vliet and Bailey were evidently at loggerheads. As the minutes of November 11 record:

> *"Whereas, as a large proportion of the dam, after having been nearly perfected, has been carried away, and as since the said accident the contractors, Messrs. Vliet and Bailey, have nearly suspended operations on said dam for over three weeks, which time they have spent in fruitless efforts to negotiate a dissolution of their partnership, and whereas the said contractors have this day informed this board that they have not been able to agree upon such a dissolution, and whereas the said Vliet has declared in the presence of this board that he will not proceed further in the execution of this contract to build said dam, in connection with said Bailey, although said Bailey has expressed his willingness to go on with the work in fulfillment of said contract: Now therefore be it. Resolved: that the said contract be declared abandoned; and that the President be and he is hereby authorized to select the same to any responsible parties, at the earliest practicable moment ..."*

The same day, the board agreed to execute a new contract with Bailey alone. In the next few meetings (Nov. 11, 23, 24) lots were deeded to Bailey, amendments were made in the contract, and John Anderson was appointed as Superintendent to approve the work. The financial loss associated with the flood damage was apparently a serious blow to the reeling company.[37]

On November 25 it was noted that "John B. Vliet, former President of this Company, has through other parties proposed to refer all unsettled matters between himself and the Company to S. Park Coon and B. Kilbourn of Milwaukee for final settlement," and to this the board agreed. However, the

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estrangement between the board and its former president was to become further exacerbated, as described below.

As 1858 came to a close, the financial disarray in the company was increasingly evident. Lots, stock shares, and even office furniture were being distributed among the directors. G. D. McAllaster resigned as secretary (Dec. 4) and was replaced by Alanson Holly (Dec. 8). Additional lots were also given to Bailey as construction work resumed to rebuild the dam.

1859: Chaos in the Hydraulic Company's Financial Affairs

The internal turbulence of the company was evident in early 1859 as additional lots were assigned to Bailey at virtually every meeting and his contract was extended in monthly increments. At the meeting of February 8, Jonathan Bowman was reinstated as company attorney[38] and ordered to file suit against former Secretary McAllaster, who was prohibited from receiving further transfers until his overpayments were settled. At the same meeting, John Anderson resigned from the board and was replaced by John Sercomb.[39]

On March 15-16, a series of stockholder's meetings were convened "for the purpose of taking such measures as they shall deem proper to investigate the affairs of the Company." On a resolution introduced by Byron Kilbourn, an audit of company books was ordered. Kilbourn agreed to advance further funds to Bailey (whose contract was extended to April 1) and the company donated further lots of his choice (up to $2,000) to continue dam construction. The board also deeded over to Kilbourn a large proportion of its remaining lots, noting that

> *"Byron Kilbourn has devoted much time and incurred considerable expenditures in aiding the operations of this Company, by his counsel and advice ...whereby many thousand dollars were saved to this Company, and the work on the dam prevented from proving a total failure . . . "*

Kilbourn was also authorized to consult counsel and take such measures as he deemed advisable concerning the Hulburt tract. Finally, the board ordered that 50 shares of stock previously issued to John B. Vliet be transferred to James Ludington,[40] on Vliet's endorsement.

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On April 4, editor Alanson Holly resigned from the board, and the dam contract was extended yet again (to July 31) with additional design changes, as Kilbourn's account was credited for the weekly work. However, at the following meeting (Apr. 19), the board received notice from John Kneen that he had assumed Bailey's dam contract. President E. T. Hooker was empowered to take whatever steps necessary "to render the [dam slide] passable by rafts and to obviate the difficulties which exist at this time," and Kneen's contract was promptly approved the following day.

At the following meeting (Apr. 30), the devastating result of the audit of company books was announced:

> *"Whereas it appears that a practice was adopted by the Officers of this Company, in making the original purchases of lands in Sauk and Columbia Counties, in cases where they were to be paid for in the Stock of the Company, of entering the consideration or purchase price, in the deed, at one-tenth of the actual price agreed upon by the parties, and then issued ten times that amount of Stock in payment therefor, charging it in the accounts at one-tenth its face, whereby the whole amount of the stock issued was in fact equal to the full price of the land ... although the accounts exhibit only one-tenth part of these amounts; and whereas said practice was irregular, improper, and not authorized by the Board of Directors, therefore*
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> *Resolved: That the Secretary review all entries in the books of the Company ... and correct the same to correspond with the facts, so that the Books will show the true state of the accounts of the Company without any fictitious entries, embracing in said corrections the accounts ... to the following named parties, to wit: E. T. Hooker, Chas. Teshner, G. Vliet, A. Vliet, Jn. B. Vliet, C. A. Cady, B. Kilbourn, J. Bailey, G. D. McAllaster, Andrew Dunn, M. M. Strong, Mrs. C. C. Vliet, Jn. Kneen, W. Riley Smith, Jn. Marshall, E. Norris, and Jason Weaver"*[41]

Whatever flickering hope might have remained for the company's financial recovery must have been dashed by disclosure of former President John B. Vliet's crooked ten-for-one scheme in the purchase of lands from himself and his associates.

At the following meeting (May 10), John Anderson replaced Director Alanson Holly and S. D. Havens[42] took over as Secretary, as the disclosures against Vliet continued:

> *"Resolved, That the following charges [$1,273] made by John B. Vliet for advances said to have been made to the Company are erroneous and wrongfully made and that the Sec'y is authorized to charge the same back to the said Vliet upon the books of the Company."*

Four successive meetings were held in the period May 24-27, leading to further charges against Vliet:

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".. . this Board [on Jan. 5, 1857] adopted a resolution authorizing the Secretary [John B. Vliet] to transfer the item of $4000 charged to John B. Vliet, March 12th, 1856, to a General Expense a/c, said amount being one-tenth part of Four hundred shares of stock issued to said Vliet and... said transfer had actually been made by the Sec'y [on July 1, 1856] without authority... "

Further errors were noted for charges to Bailey and Vliet "performed without authority of the Board," and it was resolved that

"the action of the former Secretary ...was irregular and unauthorized and is entirely disapproved by this Board and the Sec 'y is hereby instructed to expunge said charges from the books of the Company."

Vliet was issued 158 shares of (now virtually worthless) stock for the quit claim deed on his remaining lands in Sauk County. A sale of lots for $3600 to James Ludington and Moses Kneeland[43] was used to pay off bills to Byron Kilbourn and other creditors, and generous dispersals of remaining lots were made to company directors. On May 27, the board conveyed the dam, water power rights, and 65 lots to Kneeland and Ludington for $1 and "further payments to be made and acts to be performed," including a bond to liquidate the indebtedness of the company (with various contingencies if Bailey did or did not complete the dam). Further charges were made against accounts of John B. Vliet for 35 properties "conveyed by him to various persons, without the authority of the Board of Directors and for which the Company has received no consideration."

On June 2, further charge-backs were made against John B. Vliet and George D. McAllaster (who had apparently entered his receipts at 1/3 value rather than the 1/10 favored by Vliet). Havens Cowles's resignation was received at the next meeting (June 29), replaced by Walter S. Chandler.[44] On July 16, modifications of the dam were authorized, then rescinded the following week (July 23) with instructions to modify the dam as "deemed best for passing rafts safely."

On August 2, the board's problems compounded as it was announced that W. Riley Smith had lately obtained judgment against John B. Vliet, E. T. Hooker, Joseph Bailey, Garret Vliet, and Byron Kilbourn for liabilities by them in behalf of the company. Bailey was allowed full separation from the company in return for assuming 1/5 of this judgment. The bankrupt board then agreed to execute a bond for 134 lots to Byron Kilbourn and Garret Vliet "as additional security" on a previous

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bond (Aug. 4, 1858) that was "forfeited by the non payment by said Company of the indebtedness."

Wholesale resignations followed on August 18 as Garret Vliet and John Sercomb resigned as directors (replaced by John Townsend[45] and J. F. Birchard[46]), E. T. Hooker as President (replaced by John Townsend), and S. D. Havens as Secretary (replaced by W. S. Chandler). New Director and President John Townsend was also appointed attorney of the company.

At the following board meeting (Oct. 20), convened in Milwaukee, the board resolved to move the company office to Milwaukee. The next day, the board was notified that Kneeland and Ludington had turned down the settlement offered May 26-27, removing the final hope of escaping the judgments and indebtedness mounted against the company. Thereupon (Dec. 8), John Anderson resigned (replaced by William Vliet[47], and Chandler, Birchard, and J. H. Toate[48] were named as a committee to ascertain the assets of the WRHC and "to receive proposals of compromise and terms of settlement from the creditors of said company and to report thereon with all convenient speed." Attempts to hold meetings on December 9 and 10 failed for lack of a quorum.

1860-2: Demise of the Dam and Hydraulic Company

Six meetings were held in January of 1860 to deal with outstanding claims by John B. Vliet and Joseph Bailey. After two propositions by William Vliet, a settlement with John Vliet was reached. At the meeting of January 28, J. F. Birchard resigned and was replaced by S. D. Havens. The following month (Feb. 2), Joseph Bailey was authorized to negotiate with the lumbermen who continued their resolute opposition to the dam. A plan was formulated (Feb. 8) to distribute remaining properties between Havens Cowles (40%), Abram Vliet (30%), J. F. Birchard and W. S. Chandler (10% each), and J. F. Birchard, W. S. Candee,[49] and Byron Kilbourn (3.3% each), with S. D. Havens as trustee.

Following this action (Feb. 14), J. G. Townsend resigned as Director and President (replaced by J. F. Birchard), and W. S. Chandler as Director and Secretary (replaced by W. S. Candee, with S. D. Havens made Secretary). The new board then voted to move its company offices back to

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Kilbourn City to J. F. Birchard's store and returned to meet there on February 16. Its first action was to ask a Mr. Biron to desist from trespassing on the dam and slide, the company's only substantial remaining asset.

In the meantime, it was learned that lumbermen were pressuring the State Legislature to rescind the company's charter, and the board therefore devoted the meeting of February 21 to "memorializing" (petitioning) the Legislature against such action, while authorizing the President to "take measures for altering and perfecting the Slide in the Dam." On March 6, the board ordered further alterations of the slide and instructed that "if found necessary or expedient, the Dam is to be cut down and lowered two feet." Following a report from Superintendent John Anderson, the board issued instructions to protect the dam from the lumbermen's continuing attacks:

> *"Whereas certain parties have taken possession of and are trespassing upon the Co.'s property, by tearing up and destroying the Slide and Gunwhales and have been duly notified by the Pres. of the Co. to leave and desist from such trespass, and whereas these parties still continue to commit such trespass and are still engaged in their work of destruction, therefore resolved, That the Sup't. is hereby empowered and instructed to protect the Co.'s property by such means as he may have at his control: to take possession of the Co's. works and hold possession of the same, peaceably if he can and forcibly if he must."*

The draft of the Memorial to the Legislature was read and approved on March 13, noting that

> *"[We] have been informed ... efforts are being made . . . to repeal Chapter 330 of the local laws of 1855 . .. [because] the Company have constructed a Slide or Chute in their Dam across the Wisconsin River which is unsafe for the passage of rafts, and they they have not taken any effectual or energetic steps toward repairing or changing it"*

However, about this time the lumbermen mooted the issue by completing the destruction of the dam.

On March 26, a full discharge was made to Byron Kilbourn in return for $10,000 in stock certificates credited to his account. At the only remaining meeting of 1860 (on May 2), a miscellany of trifling matters occupied the directors, including sale of an unused "six-quire book" to Director J. F. Birchard for 40 cents per quire.

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More than a year later, the board met on September 21, 1861, to consider a proposition from John B. Vliet to purchase the company's abstract books for $1. This proposition was tabled, and the abstract books were sold to Cowles, Candee, and Birchard for $3.

At the WRHC's last regular meeting, on December 20, 1861, the board came full circle as John B. Vliet was nominated and elected to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of William Vliet. A resolution was presented asking that

> *... a Committee of three [Vliet, Candee, and Havens] be appointed to take into consideration the affairs of the Company, and the best policy to be pursued for promoting and securing all interests connected with the Co., and to report... at its next meeting."*

But apparently the "best policy" was to give up the ghost, for the last entry of the WRHC minute book (for the scheduled meeting of January 10, 1862, with only J. F. Birchard present) records simply: "There being no quorum, no business was transacted."

Aftermath

The remaining assets of the bankrupt hydraulic company, including some residual milling and water power rights, reverted to Byron Kilbourn, who had virtually gone into semi-retirement after the collapse of his railroad empire and the scandalous "Black Book" political revelations of 1858. Kilbourn later tried to capitalize on these assets by organizing the "Kilbourn Manufacturing Company" to build a dam and develop water power at the Dells. However, the effort was embroiled in lawsuits brought by the lumbermen, lasting even beyond Kilbourn's death at his Florida retirement home in 1870. John T. Kingston[50] eventually purchased half of the dam on behalf of the lumbermen, and rafts ran unimpeded after that time.

Shortly after the WRHC's demise, Joseph Bailey joined the Union army to fight in the Civil War. Bailey later gained national acclaim (and a special commendation from the U. S. Congress) for his heroism in the Red River campaign of 1864, engineering a daring rescue of the Union Fleet using the dam-building skills acquired from his WRHC experience.[131] At war's end, Bailey was a Brigadier General and celebrated war hero, but he apparently never felt comfortable returning to his home town in Wisconsin, where bitterness toward the hydraulic company persisted. He drifted

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off to a sheriff's job in Missouri and was killed by bushwackers a few months after taking office. John B. Vliet also left to join the Union army, later drifting off to railroad construction in Kansas and a flour milling operation in Green Lake Co., Wisconsin.[51] He later returned to his boyhood Milwaukee home after his father's death and penned a biographical sketch of his father Garret's experiences as a pioneer Wisconsin surveyor for the *Wisconsin Magazine of History.*[52]

Other principals of the hydraulic company seem to have drifted out of the scene. Alanson Holly eventually returned to the Dells for a few years to revive the financially troubled *Wisconsin Mirror.* But neither the 1880 *History of Columbia County* nor later county histories mention other WRHC directors or officers as playing a significant role in later community affairs. Dixon[12] recalls the animosity that likely dogged those viewed as collaborators with the hydraulic company:

> *"Whether there was .. an actual purpose to commit fraud . . . , probably only the opening of the books on Judgment Day will ever reveal. But whatever the facts may have been, division of opinion was positive and intense, and enmities developed which were not composed during the lifetime of the inhabitants . . . "*

Today, the Wisconsin River Hydraulic Company, once described as "Father of Kilbourn City," is scarcely remembered in the town it begat nearly 150 years ago.

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1 The handsome leather-bound "Records" book of the hydraulic company's minutes were kindly made available to the author by Mr. Bud Gussel of the Dells Country Historical Society. The WRHC Minute Book was found by Mr. Gussel's brother-in-law in an abandoned barn at the old Lynch farmstead, near Spring Brook off old Highway 16.

2 Chap. 330, local acts of Wis., 1855

3 Byron Kilbourn's (1801-1870) career is recounted entertainingly in Robert W. Wells, *This is Milwaukee* (Doubleday, New York, 1970), and more comprehensively in James S. Buck, *Pioneer History of Milwaukee*, 4 vols. (Milwaukee News Co., Milwaukee, 1876-86); F. A. Flower, *History of Milwaukee*, 2 vols. (Western Historical Co., Chicago, 1881). See also the WPA biographical notes (Wis Mss MM) in the archives of the State Historical Society.

4 Garret Vliet (1790-1877) is the subject of a WPA biographical study (Wis Mss MM) in the archives of the State Historical Society, and his extensive involvement with Byron Kilbourn in the early development of Milwaukee is documented in Buck, Flower, and other standard histories of the city. Brief biographical portraits are presented in R. A. Drechsler, *Historical Messenger* (*Milw. Co. Hist. Soc.*), vol. 21, pp. 6-8 (1965), and in Tenney and Atwood's "Fathers of Wiscconsin" (1880), p. 179, where he is described as having "none of the sordid, calculating selfishness and grasping rapacity so characteristic of the present time." Three of his sons (John B., William, Abram) were to play prominent roles in WRHC affairs, and a fourth, Jesper (a fifth son died in infancy), was a director of the Milwaukee & Horicon Railroad, whose failure later bankrupted Garret Vliet.

5 John Black Vliet (1822-1910) followed his father's footsteps as a surveyor for various Milwaukee improvement projects (including the poor farm) and served as City Engineer of Milwaukee (1848-50). Vliet became increasingly involved in Byron Kilbourn's railroad enterprises, first as a surveyor for the Milwaukee & Waukesha (1847) and Milwaukee & Prairie du Chien lines (1848), then as Secretary and Director of the Milwaukee & Fond du Lac (1850), and finally as Chief Engineer of the LaCrosse & Milwaukee (1852), the latter duties bringing him to settle at Newport. As Buck records (Vol. 4, p. 163; cf. *Wisconsin Mirror,* Mar. 10, 1857) his first forays into the wilderness west of the Wisconsin nearly resulted in disaster: "The preliminary survey for this [LaC&M] road was made by John B. Vliet, who was its first chief engineer, and who, with his whole party, came near perishing while running the line west of Kilbourn City, by being caught in an unusually severe snow storm."

6 John Anderson (1799-1883) first came to Milwaukee in 1838, after service in the 1834 rebellion in Canada (from which his military title of "Colonel" derived). He had a long association with Kilbourn construction projects in Milwaukee, including the first grist-mill and dam on the Milwaukee River and the building of the Rock River Canal. This genial Scotsman is frequently the object of good humored references in early issues of Alanson Holly's *Wisconsin Mirror.* He is a subject of WPA biographical field notes (Wis Mss MM) in the archives of the State Historical Society.

7 Anson Eldred (1820-1895) was a prominent Milwaukee lumber dealer and banker, and later one of the most important lumbermen of Northern Wisconsin. According to his *Milwaukee Sentinel* obituary, "at the age of twenty-two he was a man of large wealth." His lumberyard at 168 West Water St. was listed in the first Milwaukee city directory, and the bank he helped to organize (later, the First Wisconsin National Bank) became the largest in the state. He was an early advocate of railroading in Wisconsin, working actively to promote the Milwaukee & Watertown, and later serving as a founding director (with Byron Kilbourn, J. H. Tweedy, James Kneeland, Alexander Mitchell, E. B. Walcott, E. D. Clinton, and E. D. Holton) of the Milwaukee & Mississippi (1849). However, in 1853-4 he resigned his railroad and other Milwaukee obligations (and, soon after its organizational meeting, the WRHC directorship) to purchase timber lands in Northern Wisconsin. At the time of his death he was described as "one of the wealthiest lumbermen in the state." See the WPA biographical field notes (Wis Mss MM) in the SHS archives for further information.

8 Andrew Dunn (1816-1868) was one of the earliest pioneers and developers of the present site of Portage, and was later a co-developer of New Lisbon. See *History of Columbia County* (Ref. 9), p. 520, for a biographical portrait.

9 C. W. Butterfield (ed.), *History of Columbia County* (Western Historical Co., Chicago, 1880), particularly pp. 804-807.

10 Joseph Bailey (1827-1867); see Ref. 9, pp. 522-526. Bailey's Civil War exploits are recounted in Fred L. Holmes, *Badger Saints and Sinners* (E. M. Hale & Co., Milwaukee, 1939), Chapter 16.

11 Jonathan Bowman (1828-1895). He is subject of biographical portraits in Ref. 9, pp. 1009-1010; J. E. Jones, *History of Columbia County* (Lewis Publishing Co., Chicago, 1914), vol. 2, pp. 456-458.

12 E**.** C. Dixon, "Newport - Its Rise and Fall," *Wis. Mag. Hist.,* vol. 25, pp. 444-455 (1942).

13 The handwritten entries of the WRHC minute book were written by different secretaries, with variations in spellings, abbreviations, and legibility of the script. Wherever necessary, proper names have been corrected to conform to the most authoritative available spelling.

14 George D. McAllaster advertised his services to the Newport populace as "Conveyancer and Notary Public, Office at the 'Wisconsin Mirror' Office" in early issues of the *Wisconsin Mirror.* He served as the principal WRHC agent at the company's office throughout its early period. Ref. 9 also records him (under the spelling "McAlister") as the first clerk of the school district (1856), but he has not been otherwise identified.

15 Dr**.** Edward T. Hooker (1809-1877), namesake of "Hooker's Addition" of Wisconsin Dells, owned a portion of the land purchased by the WRHC to become the site of Kilbourn City. According to his obituary *(Kilbourn City Guard,* Apr. 25, 1877), he first came to Wisconsin from New York in 1838 and purchased lands near Milwaukee ("some of which he held at the time of his death") on a tour of Western states, after completing his medical studies. Finding no suitable place to settle at that time, he relinquished his profession, took up hop-growing in Canada for some years, then returned in the spring of 1854 to Newport, Wisconsin, and "invested largely in real estate, purchasing lands near the site of the present village of Kilbourn City." He evidently suffered ill health throughout life, for as a youth (about age 18), with "his health failing, he left his position [as a clerk] and did very little for two or three years," and prior to his death (from tuberculosis), "he had not been thoroughly well for many years." Dr. George W. Jenkins, a distinguished pioneer physician of Newport and Kilbourn City, was his brother-in-law. His was one of the businesses (along with the Wisconsin Mirror office) hit by the disastrous fire of October 4, 1876, which destroyed the south side of Broadway between Oak and Elm Streets.

16 Abram Vliet was the youngest son of Garret Vliet; died in 1882.

17 Charles Teshner, born about 1805 in Prussia, was recorded by the *History of Columbia County as a* a trustee of the Spring Grove Cemetery (1859), a Newport township supervisor (1864, 1867), and a Kilbourn City trustee (1870-1). In the late 1880's, ads for his harness shop appeared regularly in the *Mirror.*

18 Jason Weaver of Ohio was an original owner of the tract sold to WRHC to become the site of Kilbourn City. He made a speech on the first day of publication of the *Wisconsin Mirror* on January 1, 1856, and paid $65 to win the auction for the first issue. According to the *Wisconsin Mirror* (Feb. 12, 1856), he and Joseph Bailey were planning to build a large block of stores, 45 by 50 feet, three stories high.

19 W. Riley Smith. Mrs. W. Riley Smith is recorded as being Treasurer of the Freedman's Aid Committee (1865) in Milwaukee, but her husband has not been otherwise identified.

20 The first transaction refers to two parcels purchased by John B. Vliet directly from the Topping family [13 Ds. 296 (Feb. 28, 1855); 15 Ds. 9 (Aug. 2, 1855)], then immediately "re-sold" in part to Andrew Dunn, Abram Vliet, and Joseph Bailey (by a more circuitous route, which also saw a portion go to Jason Weaver) for sale to the WRHC. John Vliet (not E. T. Hooker, as stated in the WRHC records) remained the owner of the largest portion; thus, Vliet was effectively negotiating this portion of the WRHC sale with himself. The second transaction apparently refers to the smaller (1/12) portion acquired by Weaver, an 80-acre parcel which W. Riley Smith had purchased from Asa Abells [15 Ds. 102 (Sept. 17, 1855)], and an unidentified transaction involving Charles Teshner. It is noteworthy that Byron Kilbourn appears to have had no direct ownership position in these properties (unlike the Louis' Bluff. and Point Bluff tracts which Vliet purchased in the same time period; Ref. 22); thus, Kilbourn may have had less to gain from the

Kilbourn City crossing site than from other sites that were under consideration.

21 For further details, see Chapter 6, "Railroading and the Birth of Kilbourn City."

22 William S. Wait was a Newport merchantiler *(*as well as postmaster and justice of the peace) whose attention-grabbing advertisements enlivened early *Mirror* issues ("Everything that their hearts desire or their bodies need — As cheap as the cheapest and as good as the best — If my Goods don't suit you, my Money will ... ").

23 Rev. E. C. Dixon (Ref 12) explains the circumstances that led his grandfather, John Tanner, to build a hotel at the hydraulic company's bequest. The "Tanner House" later (ca. 1875) became the "Finch House," a fixture of downtown Wisconsin Dells into the 1940's.

24 George F. Noble (1818-?) served as auctioneer for the first issue of the *Wisconsin Mirror* and advertised his services as a "Carpenter and Joiner" at the new site of Kilbourn City. A biographical portrait appears in Ref. 9, p. 1012-3.

25 Charles A. Cady was born about 1828 in New York and came to Columbus township of Columbia Co. with his parents before 1850. The Cadys are recalled in Miriam Bennett's "Kilbourn Saints and Sinners" as one of the families to move up from Newport to Kilbourn City. Cady and Robert Blood were involved in the bewildering series of transactions (first to John Vliet, then to Jonathan Bowman, then to Blood and Cady, then to Joseph Bailey, all within approximately a three month period) by which a portion of the original Topping tract came to Joseph Bailey (Ref. 21). In the 1880 census, Cady is recorded as a farmer living in Dell Prairie township with a wife, son, and servant.

26 Moses Strong (181-1894) was a long-time political ally and legal counselor of Byron Kilbourn and an important figure of pioneer Wisconsin history; see Kenneth W. Duckett, *Frontiersman of Fortune: Moses M. Strong of Mineral Point* (State Historical Society, Madison, 1955).

27 An entertaining account of this episode is given by Fred L. Holmes, *Badger Saints and Sinners* (E. M. Hale & Co., Milwaukee, 1939), Chapter 10.

28 It was strongly hinted that the railroad crossing would follow suit, for as Holly writes *(Wisconsin Mirror,* Feb. 5, 1856): "Last summer this growth [of Newport and Delton] was checked by a change in the plans of the Hydraulic Company, by which they determined to construct the dam a mile above its first contemplated location; and by the expectation of many that the Railroad crossing would finally be located at this upper point ... That the dam will be built at the upper point, there is now no question. The Railroad crossing is still an open question, and will doubtless be determined by the merits of the two routes. We do not hesitate to say we expect it will take the upper crossing ... " In the April 15 issue Holly adds: "We now, once for all, say we confidently believe the road will cross the Wisconsin river within sixty rods of our office ..."

29 Joseph Bailey gives an account of these events [Statement of J. Bailey, "To the Public," *Wisconsin Mirror,* March 10, 1857] which differs in significant respects from that given by the *History of Columbia County* and Dixon. Bailey never mentions Byron Kilbourn. He contends that Garret Vliet initiated the offer to purchase a half-interest in Newport at $10 per acre, and that Vliet would only consent to conclude the contract under the assurance that the LaC&M would cross there (a strange negotiating position indeed, since Vliet himself was vice-president of the LaC&M). His explanation of the bonds is that "some of the parties who had agreed to sell to [Vliet] were not willing to convey their lands ...unless he would give bonds for the building of a high dam" (again seemingly turning common sense on its head). His chronology, perhaps deliberately vague, seems to date the return of the bonds to late 1854 or early 1855, and he traces continuing efforts to build the dam at Newport to May of 1855 (although J. B. Vliet had already purchased the upriver site in February). All sources concur that the avaricious demands of the Newport settlers for exorbitant flowage settlements and the superior topographic features of the upper site were instrumental in the decision to relocate the dam and rail crossing.

30 In the June 17 *Mirror,* Holly indicates his mild disapproval of this choice: "It was not according to our taste attaching 'City' to the name of our place. `Kilbourn' would have been sufficient; and in our opinion 'City' adds neither dignity nor strength. But the 'powers that be' ordered otherwise; so we will

practice our vocal organs on the sound, till our place becomes what a falsehood will not help to make it."

31 Holly was, until the previous summer, editor of the *Wyoming Mirror* of Wyoming County in western New York. In the *Wisconsin Mirror* of March 18, 1856, Holly mentions that, on the occasion of a visit to Wisconsin, "this place was brought to our notice; and ... we were solicited to come into the forest, establish a paper, and help build the town which its friends fully believed would grow here."

32 John Kneen (born in England, ca. 1818) was identified as a carpenter in Milwaukee's 2nd ward in the 1850 census. He received (with J. Bailey and J. B. Vliet) a legislative charter for a ferry at Kilbourn City which was reported by the *Mirror* to be operating in October of 1856.

33 R. S. Hunt, *Law and Locomotives* (State Historical Society, Madison, 1958).

34 Although the handwritten entry appears to read "J. Manhan," no such name appears elsewhere in the WRHC minute book. It seems possible that this was a transcription error for "J. Bowman."

35 Havens Cowles (1819-1871) of Worthington, Ohio, was Byron Kilbourn's nephew. He was a student at Kenyon College, Ohio, but left without graduating at the time of his father's death. According to G. D. Cowles ["The Cowles Genealogy," vol. 1, p. 408], "He afterwards went to Milwaukee, Wis., to take charge of his uncle, Byron Kilbourn's private business, while the latter was serving time as a congressman, and at the same time engaged in the real estate business for himself." Milwaukee was thereafter his home, but he later died in a sanitarium at Kenosha, having been an invalid for nearly four years.

36 Johannes B. Stoop of Amsterdam, Holland, was a foreign speculator (represented locally by attorney Gysbert Van Steenwyck) who owned the large tract in Juneau and Adams Counties (roughly centered at, and including the north end of, Louis' Bluff) which Vliet and Kilbourn purchased in the summer of 1855, then re-sold to the hydraulic company after the river crossing was fixed.

37 *History of Columbia County* (Ref. 9, p. 814) relates: "When the dam was torn away by the lumbermen, in 1859, the hydraulic company had become hopelessly involved. The building of the dam had cost them a very large sum of money, which, together with improvements made in the village, had compelled them to borrow largely, their heaviest creditor being Hon. Byron Kilbourn, who had taken judgment notes for all that he advanced. When the loss of the dam occurred, Mr. Kilbourn entered up his judgments, and in due course of time the property all passed into his hands."

38 In later years, Bowman continued as Kilbourn's personal agent in his dealings at Kilbourn City, continuing in this capacity until Kilbourn's death in 1870. Bowman's land books (in the archives of the State Historical Society) indicate that he eventually acquired much of Kilbourn's residual WRHC land holdings from Kilbourn heirs.

39 John Sercomb came to Milwaukee in 1838 and operated (with fellow Englishman Thomas Turton) the Turton & Sercomb Foundry and Machine Shop on West Water Street. Sercomb served as Railroad Commissioner of the Fourth Ward (1853, 1857) and is recorded (together with fellow WRHC insiders Byron Kilbourn, A. Eldred, J. G. Townsend, W. S. Candee, J. Ludington, J. F. Birchard, M. Kneeland, G. and J. B. Vliet, and M. M. Strong) as a member of the large "Committee for Arrangements" for the celebrated opening of the Newhall House on April 25, 1857 ("a notable event in the history of our city," according to Buck)

40 James Ludington (1827-1891) was a prominent Milwaukee businessman and lumberman who first came to Milwaukee in 1843. In his early years he was associated with the firm of Ludington, Birchard, & Co. (founded by his father) on "Ludington's block" at East Water and Wisconsin Streets. In 1854 he helped to organize the Bank of the West at Madison, and in the same year was involved in an attempt to buy up all the school lands of Wisconsin, (in the words of his obituary) "a transaction of great notoriety at the time...used much to the prejudice of then Governor Barstow's administration." He later acquired huge timber tracts in Michigan (the town of Ludington, Michigan, is named for him) and was instrumental in development of Whitewater (with G. W. Chapman) and the mills at Beaver Dam. In Milwaukee, he served as an alderman and supervisor of the Fourth Ward under Mayor Kilbourn, "and has also filled the offices of director of railroads, banks, and insurance companies," including service as an officer

(Treasurer) and director of Kilbourn's LaCrosse & Milwaukee Railroad. Ludington was one of those charged with receiving a $10,000 railroad bond in the Legislative Committee's 1858 "Black Book" investigation. He suffered a debilitating stroke in 1869 and another in 1877 which left him helplessly paralyzed for the last thirteen years of his life.

41 John Marshall and Edward Norris were pioneers of Delton and co-developers (with Bailey and Bowman) of the Newport tract. John Marshall was the father of later Justice Roujet D. Marshall of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, whose two-volume *Autobiography* (1931) gives a good account of the Marshall family and early life in Delton.

42 Sylvester D. Havens (1829-1885) lived in Milwaukee's First Ward and was identified as an "engineer" in the 1860 census. He was descended from a prominent family of Suffolk Co., New York.

43 Moses Kneeland (1809-1864) came to Milwaukee in 1843 or 1844 and was described (Buck, Vol. 3, p. 375) as "one of the most energetic as well as one of the most aggressive men, both in politics and business, that Milwaukee ever had." It was added, "He was of too positive a character, as well as too fond of money, to make and retain friends." He was prominent in the Milwaukee "Bridge Wars" of 1846 (at which mobsters threatened to destroy Byron Kilbourn's house with a cannon), served as a West Ward Alderman (1846), and was a losing candidate for Mayor (1852). He was closely associated with Kilbourn's LaCrosse & Milwaukee Railroad, serving as Director (1855, 1857) and Vice-President (1856) before resigning in 1857 and being charged (May 15, 1858) with accepting $25,000 bonds from the railroad. [See the SHS archives folder.]

44 Walter S. Chandler (1836-1896) was involved in the lumber business in Milwaukee and served as a School Commissioner for the Fourth Ward. In 1859 he married the daughter of Hon. Moses Kneeland (Ref. 43), and his elevation to the board of the WRHC was more or less coincident with becoming Kneeland's son-in-law. See the *Portrait and Biographical Record of Waukesha Co.* (Chicago, 1894), p. 418-419.

45 John G. Townsend was the son of Edwin Townsend, a fellow director (with James Ludington and Moses Kneeland) of Kilbourn's LaC&M Railroad. Young Townsend later returned to the East, and was recorded in 1870 as being secretary and treasurer of a lumber company in Derby, Connecticut.

46 John F. Birchard (1819-1894) was a Milwaukee cabinet maker who first came to Milwaukee in 1845 to establish business in the "Birchard Block" at 179 W. Water St. Like James Ludington, he was presumably related to founders of the original Ludington, Birchard & Co. store, founded in 1838. He served as a Milwaukee Railroad Commissioner from the Third Ward (1855). Buck recalls that he was "not much of a talker," but "a practical and thorough-going mechanic ... [who] has built up a reputation for good workmanship that no other firm in the West has ever excelled," adding that "although others have outdistanced him in the race for wealth, yet he has the consolation of knowing that the work of his hands... will be found in the dwellings of the descendants of the early Milwaukeeans for a century to come." He evidently maintained a shop in Kilbourn City in later years.

47 William Vliet was the fourth of Garret Vliet's five sons.

48 J. H. Toate has not been further identified.

49 W. S. Candee (1831-1905) was a Milwaukee dry goods merchant, associated with the firm of Candee & Dibble. The 1881 *History of Milwaukee* (vol. 2, p.1099) records that in 1858 his "health became impaired and he sold out his business." In 1863 he married the daughter of Supreme Court Justice A. D. Smith (implicated in the Legislature's "Black Book" investigation as having accepted a $10,000 bribe from Kilbourn in the 1856 land grant scandal) and became a private banker, eventually to be absorbed by the Manufacturer's Bank of Milwaukee where he continued to serve as Cashier in the later years of his life.

50 John T. Kingston (1819-1897), Juneau County pioneer lumberman and co-founder of Necedah. His reminiscences of early life in Juneau County are given in *Wis. Hist. Coll.,* vol. 8, pp. 370-410 (1879).

51 After the hydraulic company's demise in 1862 (during the early stages of the Civil War), Vliet enlisted as a private in the Union army and rose successively to the rank of Captain and Lieutenant Colonel. His wartime duties involved conveying troops and supplies to the front and guarding construction of the

Missouri Pacific Railroad from Kingsville to Kansas City. He was a prisoner of war at Macon, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina, from June 18th until October 5th of 1864, when he escaped by jumping from a speeding prison train and made his way back to Union lines. He was injured at Fayetteville, North Carolina, in March, 1865, when an arsenal building that was being torn down by order of General Sherman collapsed unexpectedly, burying him in the rubble. He remained hospitalized for a month and never fully recovered from the injuries. After being mustered out of service on August 26, 1865, Vliet set off for Leavenworth, Kansas, to become chief engineer of Senator (General "Jim") Lane's projected railroad from Leavenworth to the Gulf at Galveston. By 1870 only about 30 miles of the Leavenworth, Lawrence & Galveston Railroad were complete, and Vliet returned to Dartford, Wisconsin, to engage in a flouring mill operation (which "did not prove remunerative") until 1882. At this time he returned to his boyhood home in Milwaukee where he was engaged in a pension agency business. He died on January 10, 1910, and was buried in Forest Home Cemetery.

52 John B. Vliet, "The Story of a Wisconsin Surveyor," *Wis. Mag. Hist.* , vol. 8, pp. 57-66 (1924). Young Vliet also wrote a long letter to Mayor David S. Rose of Milwaukee (Jan. 21, 1905; copy in the possession of the Milwaukee Co. Historical Society) giving much useful information on his father's career, but making no reference (by name) to Byron Kilbourn or events at Kilbourn City.