# *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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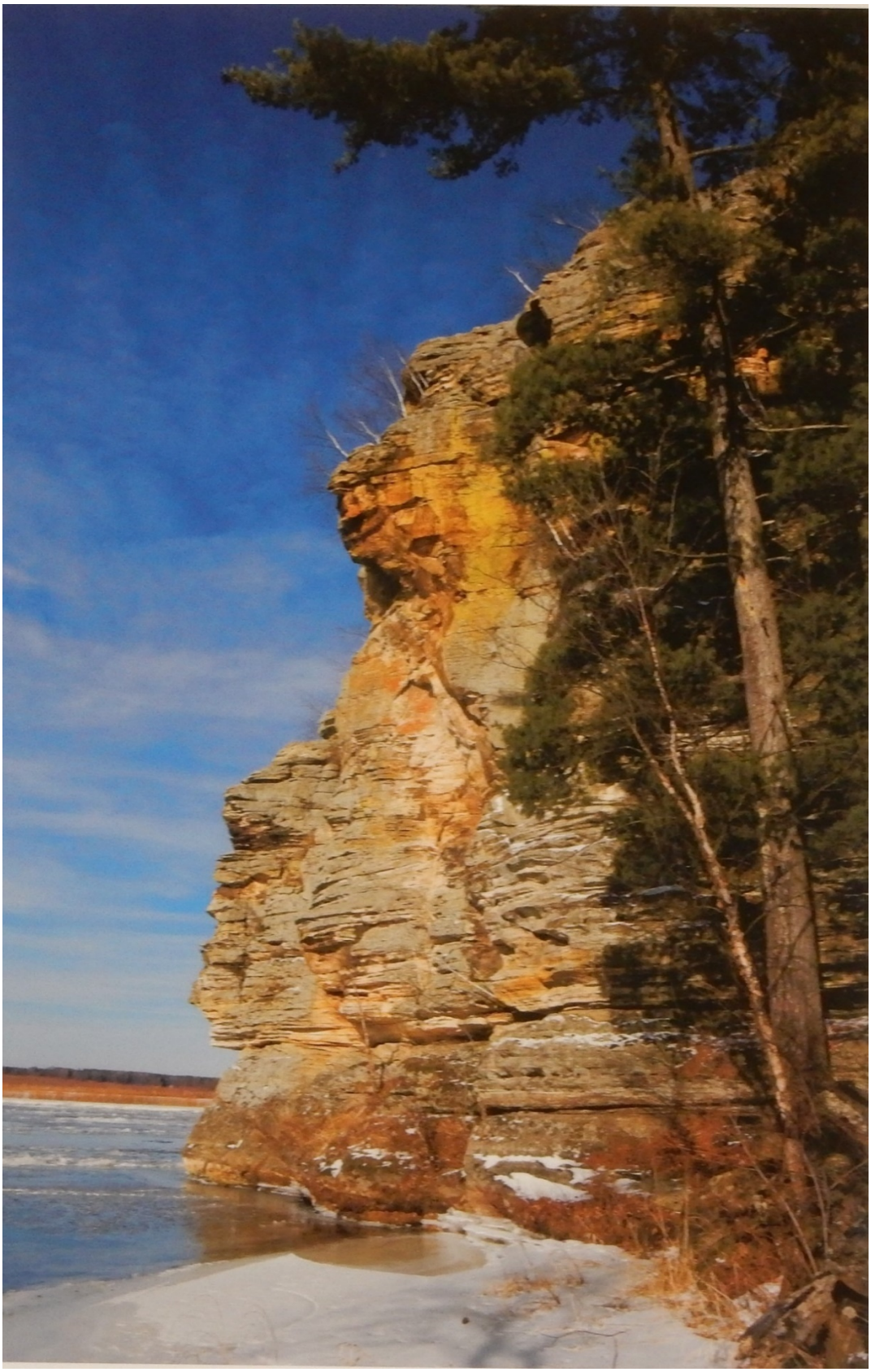

# PREFACE

*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, state, and beyond. 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, Bob Birmingham, Virginia Bogenshutz, Herb Campbell, Lee Clayton, Ross Curry, Richard Dieterle, John Dixon, Rick Durbin, Morton G. Eberlein, Harold J. Funmaker, Bill Gartner, Forrest Green, Monte Green, Bud Gussel, Buck Hacker and other "Hacker clan" members, Jack Hanson, Nick Neher, Rob Nurre, Mrs. Robert Prokapec, Jean and Ollie Reese, Melanie Tallmadge Sainz, René Spott, Cynthia Stiles, Jim Stoltman, Bernadine Tallmadge, 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 are consistent with the historical record and seem to convey the color and texture of actual events, even if occasionally mixing some chaff with the historical wheat.*

*New materials for this revised and illustrated 3rd edition include additional biographical material for Elizabeth (Walklin) Dupless, Civil War letters between Louis and Elizabeth, and further information on Wisconsin's place name.*

*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.*

FRANK WEINHOLD (Madison WI, September 2021)

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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.*



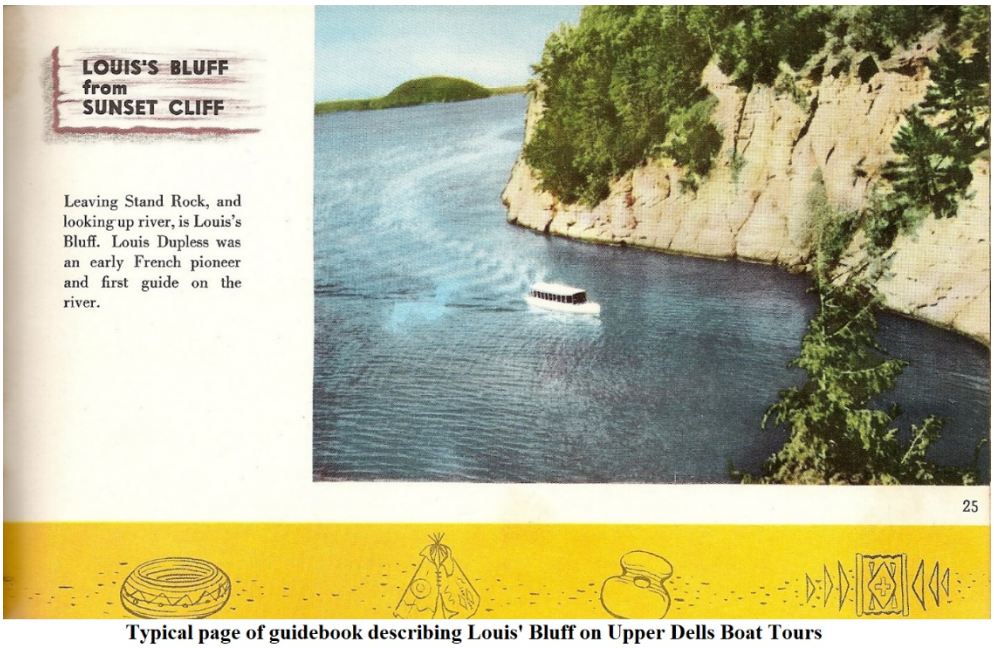
(Joseph Leute)

. As a strangely isolated "gatepost" landform marking where the mighty Wisconsin River plunges into the Dells, Louis' Bluff has always evoked curiosity and interest. The headline of the *Kilbourn Weekly Events* of July 22, 1920, expressed it as follows:

***A SUGGESTION OF THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF THE DELLS***
***LOUIS' BLUFF IN THE WISCONSIN RIVER DELLS***

*One of the most interesting places on the Wisconsin river at the head of the Dells is Louis' Bluff. Rising to a height of several hundred feet above the river, standing out alone with the river on three sides, and low flat land on the other, it is a notable scenic attraction. Both authentic history and tradition invest in this prominent feature of the Dells with having been for ages associated with exciting and interesting events. When the Indians,with their canoes made the Wisconsin river a highway it was a lookout and signal station. In the days of lumbering and running rafts from the pineries of the north to the Mississippi river, this was a landmark for miles, and a popular stopping place for rafts. Owing to the magnificent sunset view, its historic interest and the beauty of the view from its summit, this is a popular evening trip for the steamer Apollo.*

The rocky promontory was doubtless known by many names to the successive peoples who lived in its shadow (**APPENDIX A**). 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


LOUIS'S BLUFF
from
SUNSET CLIFF

Leaving Stand Rock, and looking up river, is Louis's Bluff. Louis Dupless was an early French pioneer and first guide on the river.

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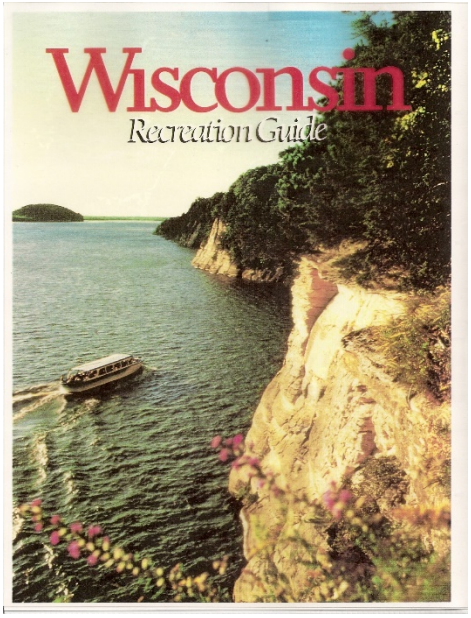
**Typical page of guidebook describing Louis' Bluff on Upper Dells Boat Tours**

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 worker in the lumber tract upriver. 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.

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 Wisconsin State Recreation Guide of the 1990s 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.

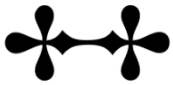



As a prominent sentinel point along the principal waterway of the state, Louis' Bluff was often brushed by people and events that shaped the development of central Wisconsin. From the earliest times, a succession of voyageurs, explorers, geologists, and other bypassers paused here to gain the vista from the rocky castellations at the summit, as Indians had for millenia 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.



*CHAPTER 2*

# GEOLOGICAL ORIGINS

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

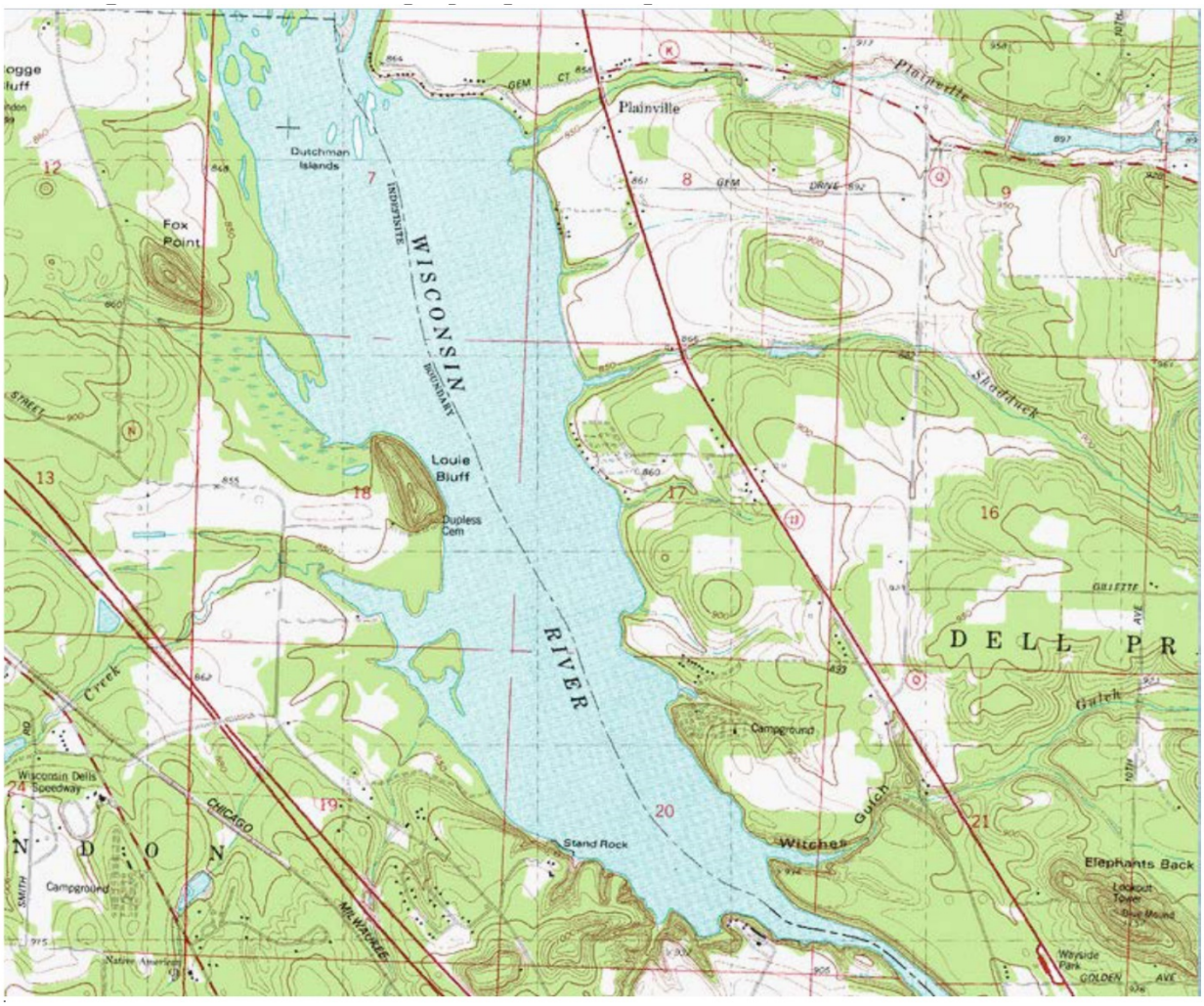


*W. C. Bryant (ed.),* ***Picturesque America****, Vol. II (1872), p. 535*
*(Alfred R. Waud, artist)*

> *"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"[1] 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,




**Principal topographic features surrounding Louis' Bluff at the head of the Dells**

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 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 signalled the Cambrian-Ordovician transition. The outcroppings of the Dells region were once

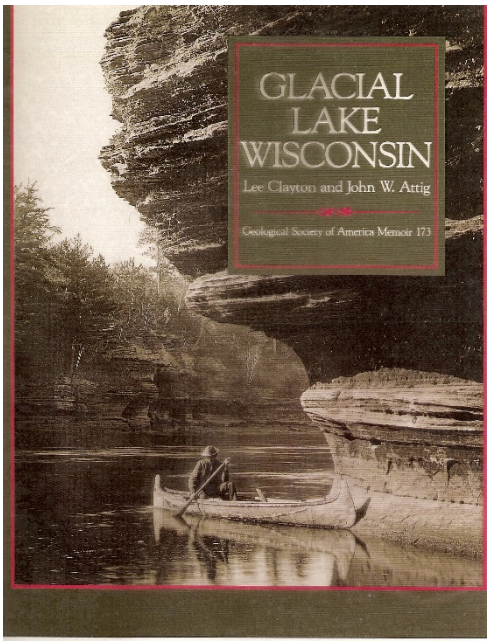
categorized simply as “Potsdam sandstones,” but in modern parlance the layers of Louis’ Bluff span the “Elk Mound Group” of Wonewoc (Ironton and Galesville members), Eau Claire, and Mount Simon sandstone formations (the latter forming the lower two-thirds of Louis’ Bluff and all of the Dells), each distinguished 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$^{o}$ 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.


**Cross-bedded sandstone layers of Louis' Bluff**

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.

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**

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 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



(Wisconsin Geological & Natural History Survey)

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 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![2]

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 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!



**Ancient shoreline (ca. 130' above present river), marking coast of "Isle Louis" in the time of Glacial Lake Wisconsin.**

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 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 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. The oldest artifact found at Louis' Bluff is dated from the late Paleo or Early Archaic era (ca. 8000 B.C.). However, Paleo-Indian sites elsewhere in Wisconsin suggest considerably earlier habitation within the present boundaries of the state.



**Late paleo-era (ca. 8000BC) rhyolite blade, possibly for digging out log canoes**

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

**Footnotes: Chapter 2**

[1] Martin's "Magnesian" horizon is the base of the modern "Prairie du Chien Group" (Ordovician dolomite) that 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.

[2] 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.

[3] 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."

*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 Europeans to see Louis' Bluff were the French explorers, Pierre Esprit Radisson and his brother-in-law Medard 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:



**Pierre Esprit Radisson (1636-1640), co-founder of Hudson's Bay Company**

> *"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. I can say that [in] 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 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 travelling 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 local 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.




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 war 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.

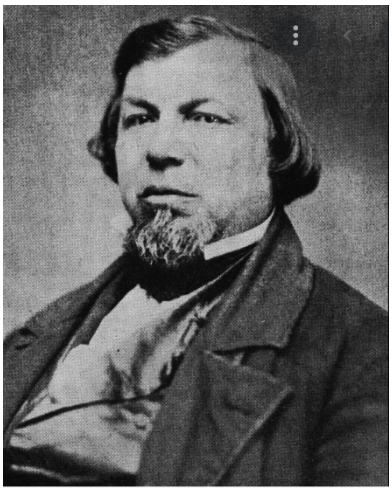

**Black Hawk, *Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak***
**(1767-1838)**

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 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.


Daniel Whitney (1795-1862)

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.

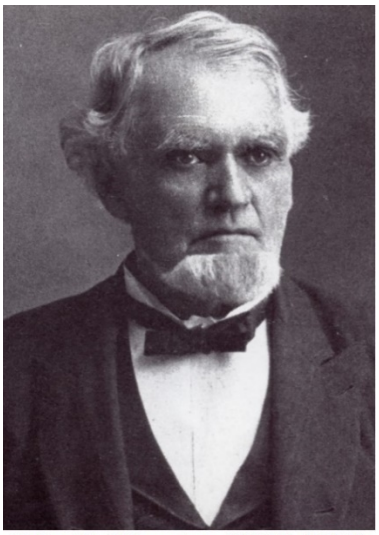

John Baptiste DuBay (1810-1887)

Another prominent trader on the upper Wisconsin was Jean Baptiste (John B.) DuBay (son-in-law of Menominee chief Oshkosh), 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.

**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:



**John T. Kingston (1819-1899)**

*"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:

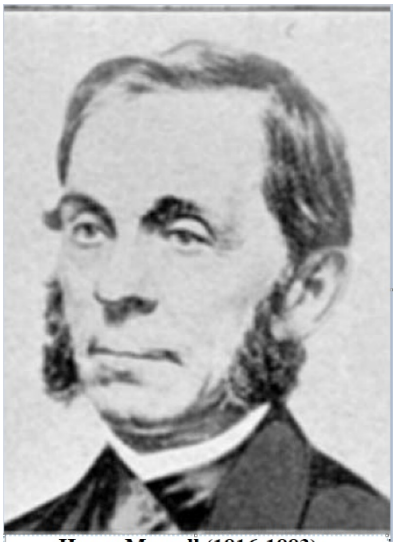
> *"Arriving at the end of the prairie, and facing a cold west wind, we soon felt unmistakable evidence of the frosty atmosphere, so much so that we concluded to halt and try the remedy in the bottle, but here we found a difficulty - how to apply it. After mature consultation and reflection, we concluded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



**Henry Merrell (1816-1883)**

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.



**Rogge Bluff, Fox Point, Louis' Bluff "chain of hills" as viewed from the south. (Jim Kinder)**

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, 1847], 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 colleage B. F. Shumard ascended the river with another survey party, and described the view as they came out of the Dells:



**View south-eastward from crest of Fox Point toward Louis' Bluff and (beyond the river) Elephant's Back, three of the "cordon of forts" that cross the river at the Upper Jaws of the Dells.**

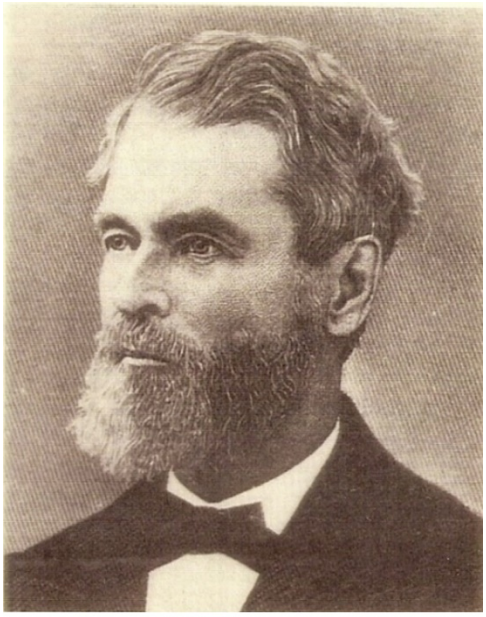
*"From the extensive sandy plains that now set in, many remarkable isolated peaks rise, at distant intervals, some of which are almost vertical, to the height of two hundred feet and upwards. The first encountered [Louis' Bluff] was about two miles above the Dalles, which is one hundred and eighty-five 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 - same as at the dells. At the summit discovered one slab covered with ripple marks - 2 to 2 1/2 inches wide."*



**Increase A. Lapham (1811-1875)**

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, signalling 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.

*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 (1820-1895)**

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 (**Appendix B**), 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



**Elizabeth Walklin Dupless (1827-1869) (with baby Frederick)**

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 travelling companion of a decade before. In 1846, he made his way to Wisconsin and married Elizabeth E. Walklin in the fall of that year.

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 ew 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

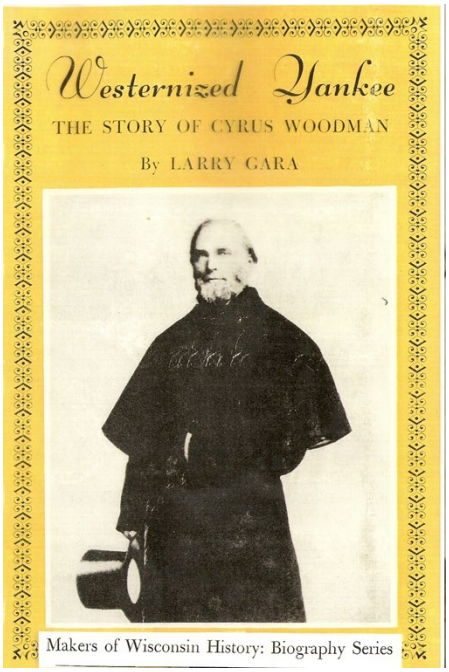
> *"there was a tribe of Indians that were very friendly with father and they came to our house a lot for meals when I was a little girl . . . I was young*

*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:

*"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.



**"Running the Kilbourn Dam"**

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 flambuoyant characters of the era, he doubtless helped create the colorful image of the Dell pilots as the most fearless 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 (Theresa) 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 and financial 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. A treasure trove of letters between Louis and Elizabeth Dupless (**Appendix C**) reveal the severe personal and financial stresses during this Civil War period.

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.



**Amelia (Roessler) Dupless with daughter-in-law Emma Blaser and granddaughter Helene at the August Blaser farmstead across "Blaser Creek" (now Gilmore Creek) from Louis' Bluff.**

Four years later, on April 10, 1873, Dupless married his second wife, born Amelia Roessler of Landskron, Austria (now Czech Republic) 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 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.



**August Blaser (1856-1942)**



**Emma Dupless Blaser (1859-1944)**

In 1880, Louis Dupless went into partnership with his son-in-law August Blaser, who had maried 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



Maria Theresa ("Tress") Dupless (1852-1887)

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.



Caroline Dupless (1855-1888)

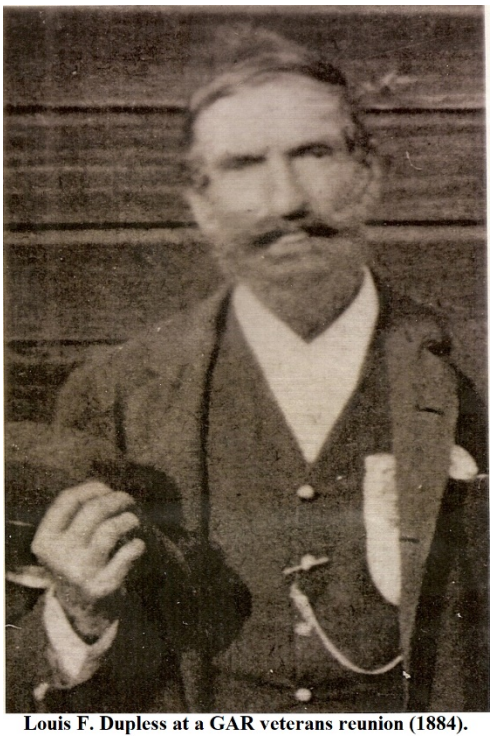
Her sister Caroline ("Cal") died at the age of 32 after a life as unhappy as it was brief. Caroline was married on November 24, 1875, and bore a son to Hamilton W. Tyler of Plainville, the son of a prominent judge and hotel owner, Samuel W. Tyler. But young Hamilton was primarily remembered as a philandering 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:

*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.


Louis F. Dupless at a GAR veterans reunion (1884).

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 polical gatherings." He was elected Juneau County Coroner on the Republican ticket in the year preceding his death.

**Riverside Funeral**



Funeral card of Louis F. Dupless

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



**Dupless family graveyard at the foot of Louis' Bluff**

*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**


Frank Dupless (1857-1930)

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.


Fred C. Dupless (1862-1939)

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, as well as surviving Civil War correspondence with his wife Elizabeth (**Appendix C).**

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. As a father, he was also remembered for teaching his children how to jump into their pants from a kitchen chair.



Fred and Dan Dupless

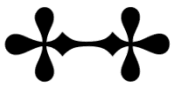
Although Louis Dupless was at home among the coarsest rivermen of the Wisconsin backwoods, there was an air of refinement about him that suggested a more cultured upbringing. It is said that he drank

only the best whisky, and only filled half a glass. He knew proper table manners and would correct his children at the table. A 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."

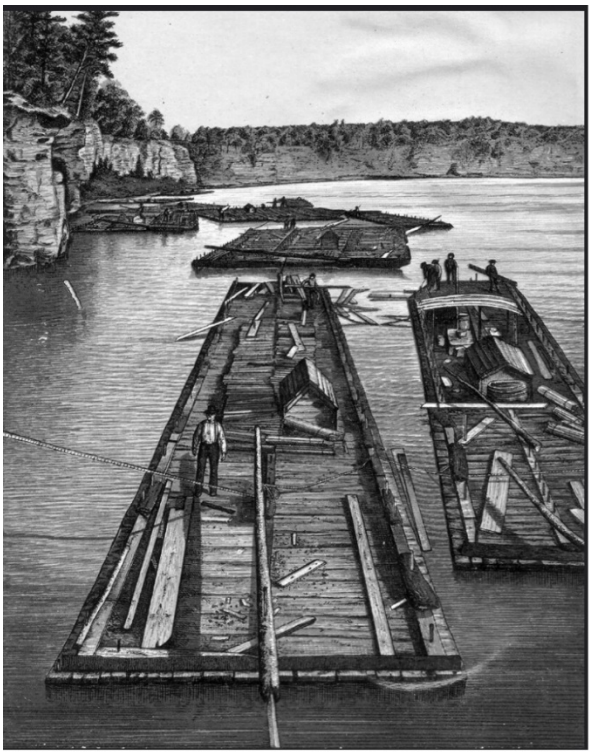
**Epilog**

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 Teisberg family, where it remained for the next 21 years until acquired by the author's family.



*CHAPTER 5*

# LUMBERING AND THE RAFTSMEN



***Arpin* fleet in the Dells** **(H. H. Bennett)**

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 Gazeteer* 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 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 Basse], 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*



**(Harper's Magazine)**

*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."*

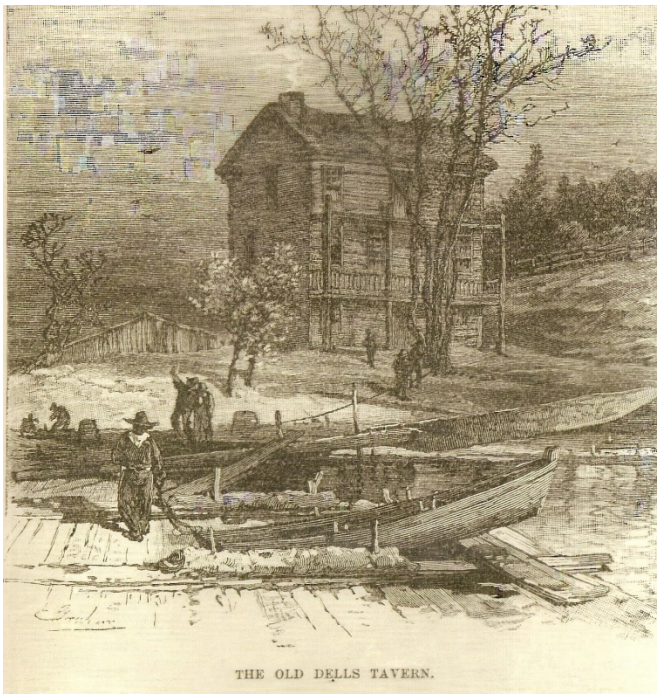
Other vivid descriptions of running the rafts down the `Wisconse' and through the Dells are given in Pulitzer prizewinner Hamlin Garland's *Trail-Makers of the Middle Border* and in William F. Steuber's *The Landlooker*. In addition, H. H. Bennett's famous photographs of the Arpin fleet preserve a remarkable 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.

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."*

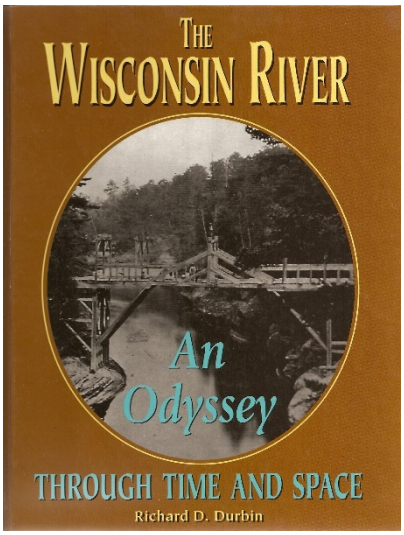
Each piece was run separately down the gorge––past such feared features as Notch Rock and Devil's Elbow––to the first safe landing at the old Dell House on the lower end of Blackhawk Island. There the crews tied up the assembled pieces, celebrated the safe arrival at the Dell House, then "gigged" (walked, 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 OLD DELLS TAVERN.

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 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.



Many details of these events are retold in the book and articles of Richard Durbin (see Bibliography).

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."*

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.

*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.

## 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."

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.




**"Kilbourntown" and "Juneautown" sections of downtown Milwaukee, showing incommensurate street alignments on opposite sides of the Milwaukee River.**

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 . . . [T]he 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 embarassed 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 pas, 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 successfully 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.



**James Doty (1795-1865)**

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 westside 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 commisioners 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 `Kilbournites' . . . [R]ioters rampaged the city streets, cannon boomed, and a mob hacked away at the Spring Street bridge"*



**Milwaukee Bridge Wars of 1845**

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's 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.

Kilbourn's involvement in partisan politics was similarly tinged with controversy. He was an active partipant 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 synonomous 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.

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 intitial 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.

**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 signalled 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."*




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,

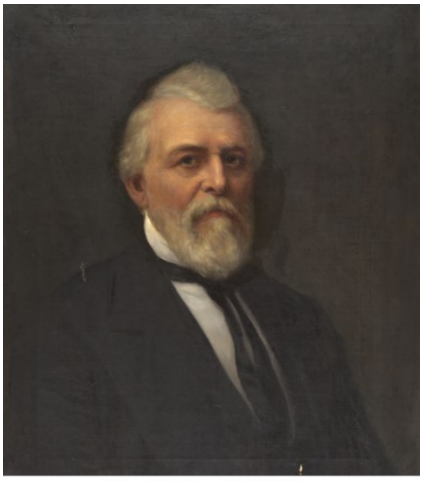
> *"The day of reckoning was not far off. The railroads perpetrated frauds and corruption such as no one had dreamed of: some of them did not lay a foot of track; others used the proceeds of their bond sales to pay handsome sums to directors and officers; still others sold the notes and mortgages at 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 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:



Moses M. Strong (1810-1894)

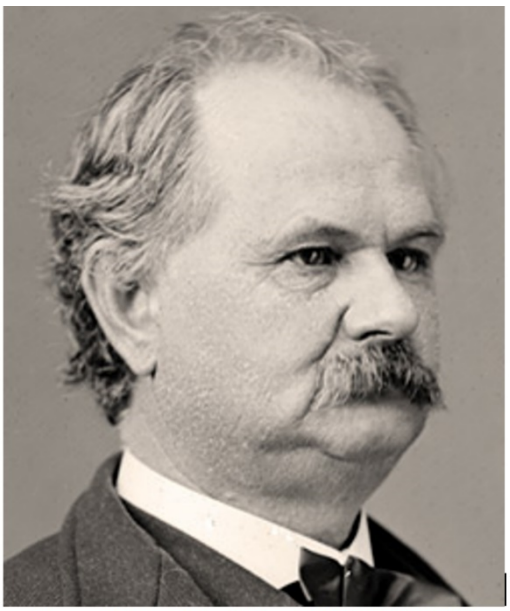
> *"The gift was so valuable and the methods employed in obtaining it were so odorous . . . 75 years have hardly failed to stifle the stench of political rottenness."*

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.



**Gov. Coles Bashford (1816-1878)**

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,

> *"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 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!"



POLITICAL MARKET

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 Dells 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.

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.



**Jonathan Bowman (1828-1895)**



**Joseph Bailey (1826-1867), "Hero of the Red River"**

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.



**Garret Vliet (1790-1877)**

Lot sales boomed from the first offering in 1854 and lot prices spiralled 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 a 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&MRR.

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 (**APPENDIX D**) to construct 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 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.

**Table I.** Kilbourn/Vliet Transactions of 1855.

| S.T.R[a] | acres deed[b] | parcel description | tract[c] |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.14.5 | 67 VKHh | Fr. 3 & 4 | LB-W |
| 12.14.5 | 80 VKHh | S-1/2 of NE-1/4 | LB-W |
| 17.14.6 | 122 VK | Fr. 4 & 5 | LB-E |
| 18.14.6 | 146 VKHh | Fr. 6 & 7[d]; SW-1/4 of NW-1/4 | LB-W[d] |
| 19.14.6 | 120 VKHh | W-1/2 of NE-1/4; SE-1/4 of NE-1/4 | LB-W |
| 12.14.5 | 160 KHh | SE-1/4 | LB-W |
| 12.14.5 | 40 KHh | SE-1/4 of SW-1/4 | LB-W |
| 13.14.5 | 40 KHh | SW-1/4 of NE-1/4 | LB-W |
| 14.15.5 | 27 VKHh | Fr. 3 | PB |
| 23.15.5 | 98 VKHh | Fr. 1 & 2 | PB |
| 25.14.6 | 120 K | W-1/2 of SW-1/4; SE-1/4 of SW-1/4 | E |
| 35.14.6 | 280 K | NE-1/4; N-1/2 of SE-1/4; NE-1/4 of SW-1/4 | E |
| 36.14.6 | 160 K | NW-1/4 | E |
| 6.14.6 | 20 K | S-1/2 of Fr. 4 | I[e] |

[a]Section/township/range: E.g., "1.14.5" designates Sec. 1 in Township 14, Range 6 East of the standard survey system.
[b]Deed abbreviations: V (Stoop to Vliet, July 28, 1855); K (Vliet to Kilbourn, November 26, 1855); H (Vliet to Wis. Riv. Hydraulic Co., November 20, 1857); h (Kilbourn to Wis. Riv. Hydraulic Co., December 9, 1857)
[c]Tract identification: LB (Louis' Bluff area, W or E); PB (Point Bluff area); E (Eastside area, NE of present Camp Wawbeek); I (isolated smaller parcel)
[d]Location of Louis' Bluff (north end). The Dupless property occupied fractional lots 8 & 9 in the same section.
[e]Wisconsin River Hydraulic Co. records indicate that Kilbourn also acquired an isolated 80-acre parcel in the S-1/2 of NE-1/4 in Sec. 34 of T14R6E, near the Eastside tract.

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 atthe 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. 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 (longtime president of the Wisconsin Dells Historical Society) 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 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:


LET THE EAGLE SCREAM!!

CLEAR THE TRACK!!

THE CARS ARE COMING.

Railroad Crossing Located!

AT KILBOURN CITY.

At a Meeting of the Directors of the LaCrosse and Milwaukee Railroad Company, held at Milwaukee last Saturday, it was unanimously resolved that the point for crossing the Wisconsin River be fixed at

KILBOURN CITY,

as lately surveyed by Mr. Reid. It was also determined that Mr. Reid shall proceed immediately to lay out the work for letting the road between Portage City and the point of crossing; and probably work will be commenced within the next few weeks. Kilbourn City is now open for the crowd.--Dated June 26, 1856.

**Broadside announcing death of Newport**

**LET THE EAGLE SCREAM!!**

CLEAR THE TRACK!!

*THE CARS ARE COMING.*

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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."*

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 & 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.)



**Kilbourn Institute (WHS)**

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, and 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."*

**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 hurridly 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 <u>one-tenth</u> of the <u>actual</u> price . . . and then issued ten times that amount of Stock in payment therefor, charging it in the accounts at <u>one tenth</u> 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.

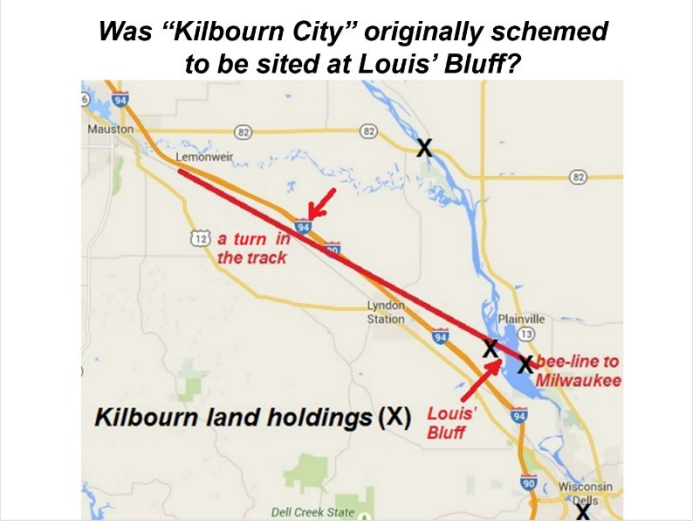
Kilbourn was later involved in one more attempt to raise a dam at Kilbourn City. This was under the aegis of the "Kilbourn Manufacturing Company," incorporated in 1866 by a group of frontmen (John Tanner, Edward T. Hooker, M. Griffin, Ulmer F. Hinds, and Guido J. Hansen), but largely controlled and financed 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?




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 O) 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 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, 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 sevice 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 Ollie 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: **KILBOURN**.



*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 50c/ 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 15c/ 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 (*Humulus lupulus*) 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. Fueled also by the excitement of soldier boys returning from the Civil War, hops acreage increased in a dizzying spiral, approximately doubling each year until the great crash of 1868.





**Hops garden near Mirror Lake in the Dells (H. H. Bennett)**

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.

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.



**Leroy Gates and tamily (H. H. Bennett)**

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.



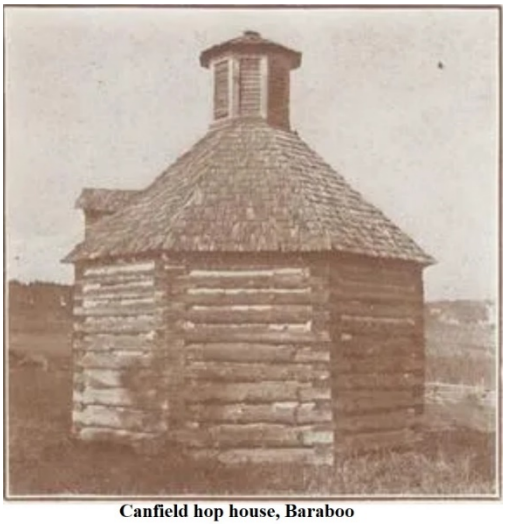
**Illustration from "The Hop Pickers"**

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."*

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 55-70c/ per pound the previous year now fetched 10c/ 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.



Canfield hop house, Baraboo

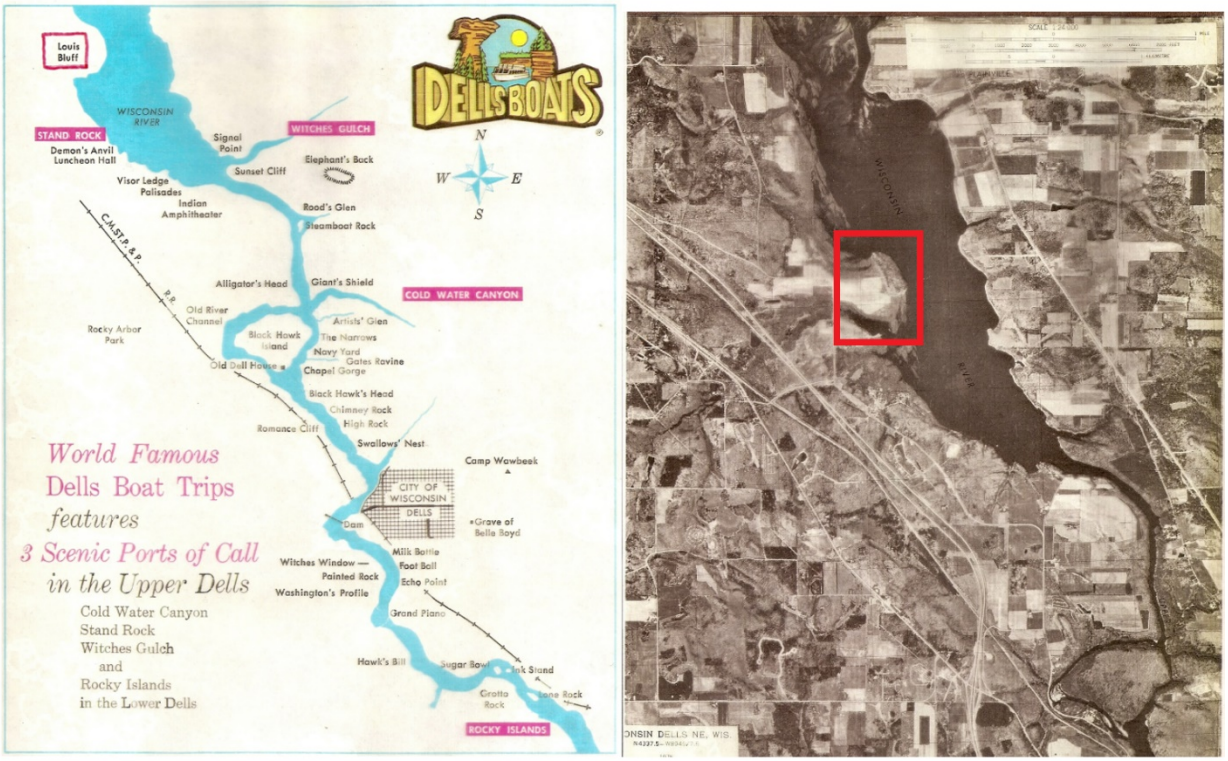
A few farmers continued to hope vainly for return of the former prosperity, but the hops boom was soon only a painful memory, and the crop disappeared entirely from the region. The hop house that once stood at Louis' Bluff ("so near the bluff you could almost touch the rock") has long since disappeared, 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 150 years.

*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.




**Aerial photo of Louis' Bluff (right), with nearby scenic features seen on Upper Dells Boat Tours (left)**

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, jet boats and pleasure boats from nearby resorts often dot the waters near its shoreline; sightseeing aircraft (seaplanes, helicopters, ultralites, even hot-air balloons!) are sometimes seen circling the skies overhead; and for many years the Indian chants were 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**


**Henry Hamilton Bennett (1843-1908)**

Even before the founding of Kilbourn City (Chapter 6), a few intrepid travellers made their way into the region to view the legendary scenic beauty of the Dells. Our such `tourist' was famous 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 Wisconsin Historical Society), and both the studio and Bennett's house are on the National 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 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 little 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.



**"Dells Queen" at the Devil's Elbow**

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 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:


Capt. H. W. Kingsbury

*"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.*

*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.”

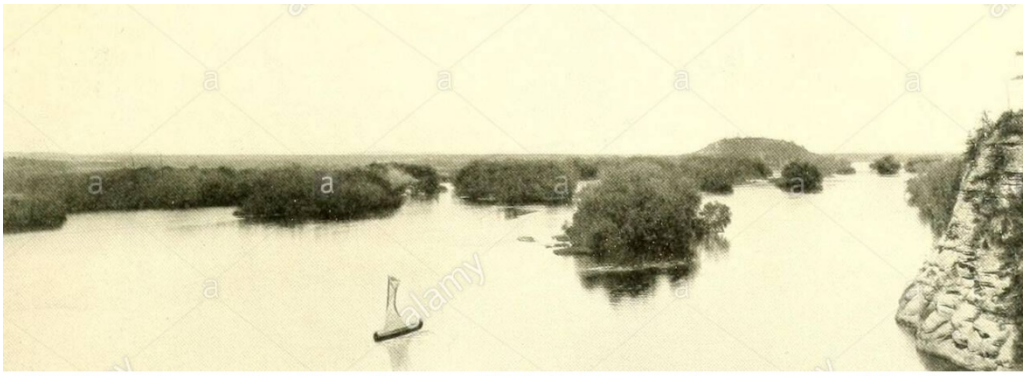
**Early Tourism at the Head of the Dells**

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*



**Pre-dam view upriver from Prospect Point, showing the numerous islands that formerly dotted the river near Louis' Bluff**

*productions. This wider part of the river is dotted with many islands of all sizes, covered with foliage."*

This island-dotted 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 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 superintendant, 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.



**Kilbourn Dam and powerhouse, separating the Upper and Lower Dells**

The construction of the Kilbourn Dam was vigorously opposed by the aged H. H. Bennett and 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 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 (County Highway N), 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 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, criss-crossed 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.

**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.

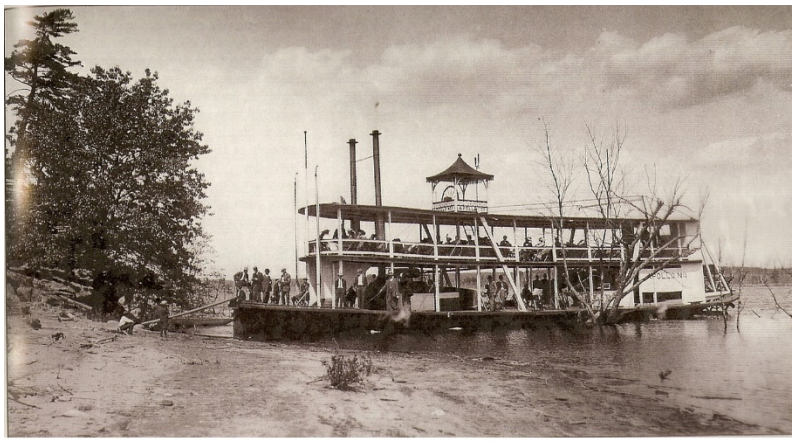
The water levels raised by the dam completely submerged some well-known features of the upper Dells and reduced the relief and boldness of many others, as Bennett had feared. But the higher waters also created new beauty spots and improved the access to Witches Gulch, Stand Rock, and other features at 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 respects was enhanced. Louis' Bluff was left thrust out more boldly into the enlarged bay, having the appearance of an island from certain directions.



**Glenn D. Parsons (1879-1943)**

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 Glenn 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."*



**Steamboat *Apollo* at Louis' Bluff**

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 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:



**Vivian Peterson**

*"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 75c."*

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:



**Indian Ceremonial in the natural amphitheater near Stand Rock**

*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.*

*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, 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 most popular summertime attractions of the Dells, the Indian Ceremonial at Stand Rock. The Indian Ceremonials continued until 1997, when the natural amphitheater and boardwalks could not be brought into compliance with ADA requirements.

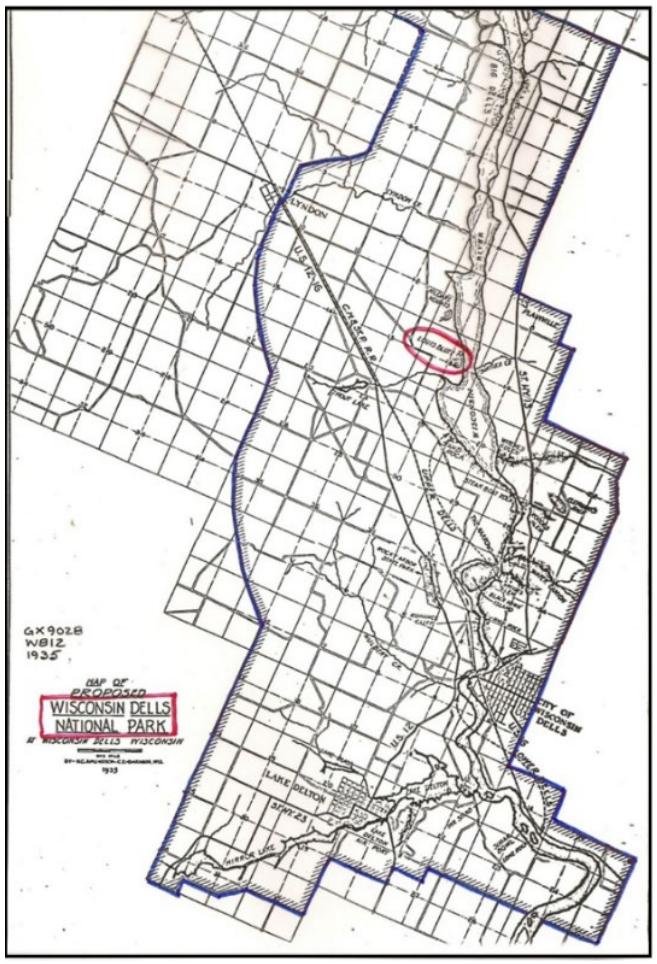
During the later 1920's, Louis' Bluff continued to be visited by tourists from C. L. Tenney's Riverdale Farm across the river. A brochure from this resort pictures a

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

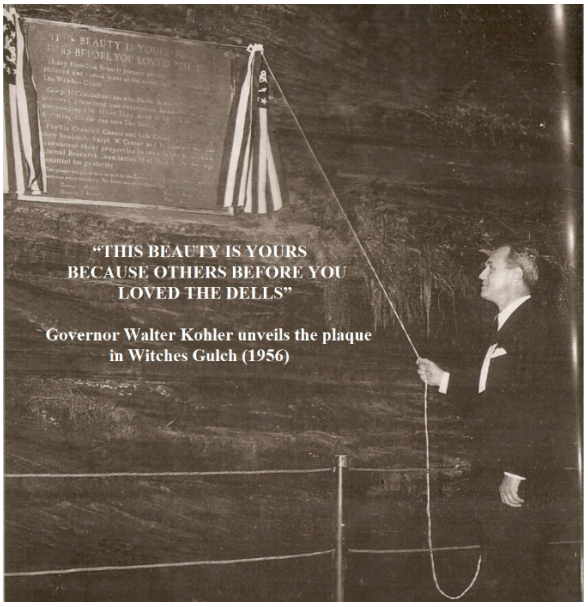
mouth of the Lemonweir River, with Louis' Bluff near the center of the park. On June 13, 1935, the *Wisconsin Dells Events* reported that Senator E. Merwyn Rowlands was sponsoring a measure to favor such a park, but the proposal failed to get off the ground, apparently never gaining popularity with the 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."



**G. H. Crandall (1869-1938)**

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. A plaque in Witches Gulch was dedicated by Governor Walter Kohler in 1956 to commemorate the gift with the memorable title phrase: "This beauty is yours because others before you loved the Dells." The historic Crandall family gift ensures that the river gorge remains largely free of the tawdry commercialization afflicting the towns above, and every sightseer on the river contributes in some small measure to support of the University of Wisconsin.

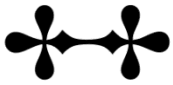



**Governor Walter Kohler unveils the plaque in Witches Gulch (1956)**

## 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 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.



*CHAPTER 9*

# INDIAN LORE AND LEGEND


LOUIS' BLUFF—HEAD OF THE DELLS, KILBOURN.
An Old Indian Signal Station.

**First illustration in first issue (1903) of James Jones' "Illustrated Events."**

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 mound 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 southeast of Wisconsin Dells. 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," a National Historic Site along Man Mound Road, just east of Baraboo. 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



Man Mound National Historic Site at Baraboo WI

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 archaelogists with the "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-archaelologist 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 travelling 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:

> *"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 two officially recorded archaeological site in the township of Lyndon. The first 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

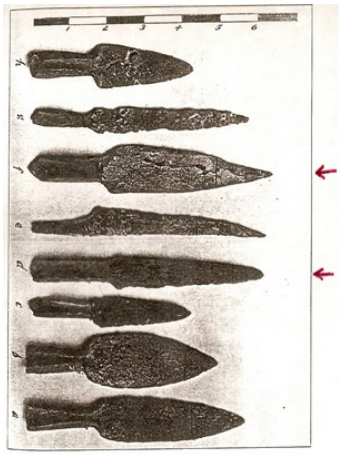
> *"Camp and Workshop Site . . . about one half mile from Louies Bluff. Sandy site, near the Hacker farm, on west bank of the river. Many flint chips. Has some flint points found here, notched and triangular, also small knife and perforator. Brother found copper spearpoint, 4 inches long."*

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 Archeologist*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 15-17) includes photographs of these specimens with the comment:

> *"In the fall of 1931, Arthur E. Kelley, Reedsburg, Wisconsin, found a spearpoint exposed in a cornfield* [at Louis' Bluff] *on the west bank of*



Copper Culture artifacts from Louis' Bluff (arrows)

*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, displaying some of the artifacts collected at Louis' Bluff

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 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.



Lemonweir Glyphs near former Nine Eagles Resort and Two Rivers canoe landing

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.



Twin Bluffs petroglyphs near New Lisbon

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.

The 1994 transfer of Dells properties from Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation to the Wisconsin DNR led to an extensive archaeological survey of the Dells riverway in 1996 that uncovered a previously unrecognized rock art site at Louis' Bluff. Although much more modest (and dangerously inaccessible) than panels described above, the site is consistent with features and iconography of other petroglyphs found throughout the Driftless Region. The archaeological records of the site, like those of other

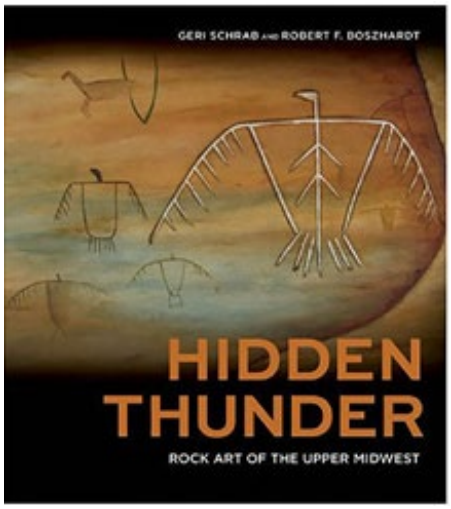


State Archaeologist Bob Birmingham and glyphs of Louis' Bluff

rock art sites throughout the state, are withheld from the public in order to shield the glyphs from the pernicious vandalism that has ravaged practically all known sites exposed to public view. Artist Geri Schrab's "Vanishing Point" impression of the Louis' Bluff glyphs suggests the general similarities to other sites in the driftless quarter of the state.



*"Vanishing Point" (Geri Schrab)*



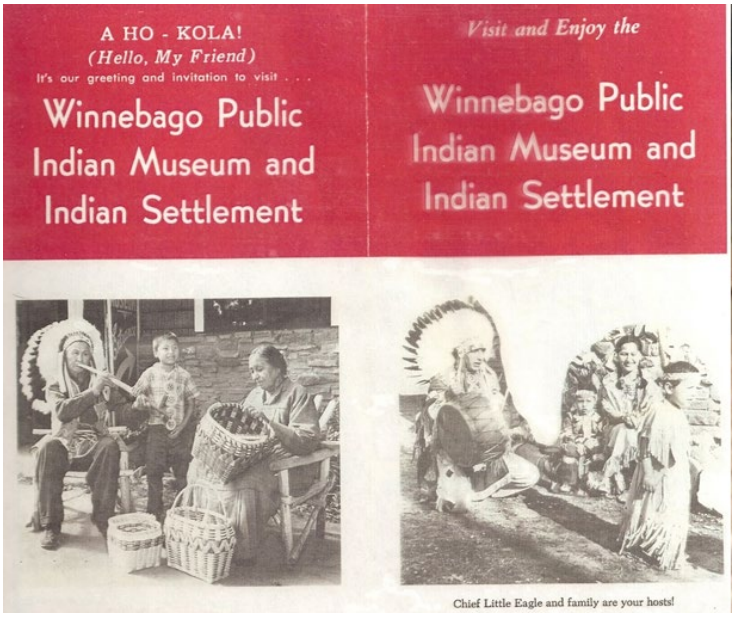

**Winnebagoes in the Dells**

The earliest reports of 17th-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

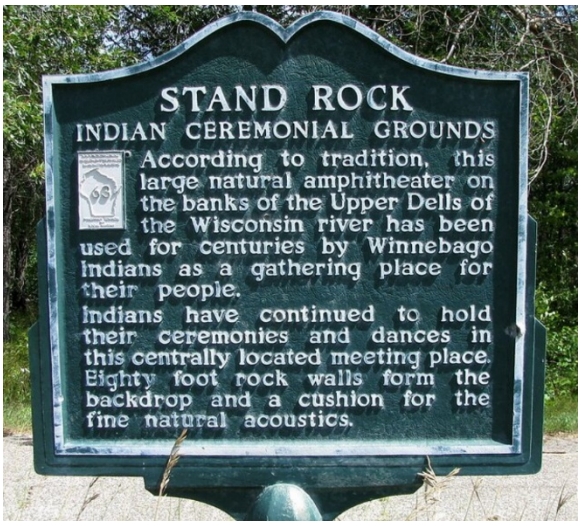
Eagle Tallmadge of the Winnebago Museum (across the river from Louis' Bluff) described this pattern:




*"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:




*"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' Bluff 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 over 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:

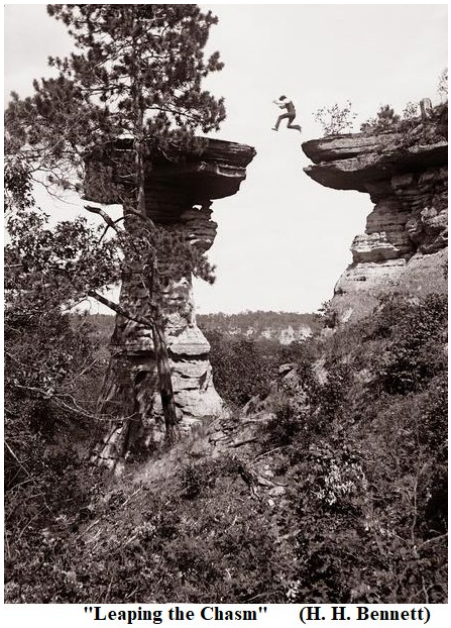
*"Paddling down the Wisconsin River in a large fleet of canoes, taken from the Ojibways, the Sioux were now firmly intrenched in the thickets behind Louis' Bluff, unseen and unheard by the soft living Winnebagoes, who had lost their native alertness. The Sioux strategy was simple. Several of the swiftest 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."*

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 the "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.*



"Leaping the Chasm" (H. H. Bennett)

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 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.


GEN. JOSEPH M. STREET.

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 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 travelling overland from Reedsburg to the Lemonweir River, at the present site of Mauston:



"One-Eyed Decorah" (Big Canoe, *Wajxatega*)

> *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 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.*



**NawKaw Caramaunee, village chief at Baraboo**

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. 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 proferred 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 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 Winnebagos of the Tomah area and scattered 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.

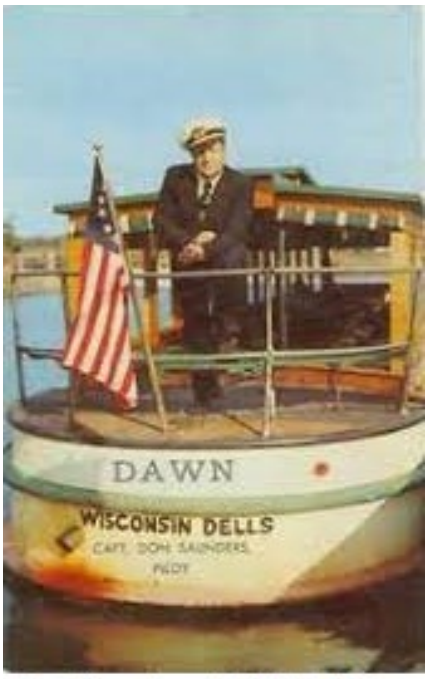
**Indian Legends of the Dells**

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 heros) 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



**Some of the many editions of Don Saunders' booklets, "When the Moon is a Silver Canoe"**



**Don Saunders (1904-1970)**

intertwining of mythology and landscape that is characteristic of many Winnebago legends. A brief synopsis of the legend follows:

**The Legend of Hey-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.

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.

**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.

In 1994, the Winnebagoes of Wisconsin adopted "Ho-Chunk" as their official name, in accord with traditional "People of the Big Voice" self-identification. The Ho-Chunks living in Wisconsin today have no reservation, but 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 Dells area, the largest Ho-Chunk community is at Indian Heights, a tribally-owned tract located near the Stand Rock ceremonial grounds, about a mile southwest of Louis' Bluff.



**Former and current caretakers at Louis' Bluff: Forrest Green (with author's wife) and Terry Walker**

Today, as in the past, the Indian presence is felt at Louis' Bluff and elsewhere 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 Parsons' Trading Post and Indian Museum in Lake Delton. Recent (Forrest Green) and present (Terry Walker) native caretakers at Louis' Bluff often host tribal neighbors for ceremonial events at the bluff, which remains an active religious site for many traditional practices. However, now long past (but not forgotten) are evenings throughout the summer when the Indian ceremonials and chants were recreated within earshot of Louis' Bluff at Stand Rock amphitheater, a unique and durable tourist attraction for more than seventy years.

The modern Ho-Chunk 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."*


Roger (Little Eagle) Tallmadge at Demon's Anvil near Louis' Bluff

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.

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 Ma-oonah 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!”*



**(S. H. Carow)**

*CHAPTER 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:


John Muir (1838-1914)

> *"[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 19th-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 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 superintendant 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 throgh the Dells countryside, where the teacher is tutored by the schoolboy in the lessons and wisdom of a keen natural observer. Although this book was written over 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 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.



**Pasque flowers in the dry prairie remnant atop Louis' Bluff (Don Gaines)**

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.

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 at 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 ice-locked 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 message-takers to the deities.



**"Eagles at the Dells" (O. J. Gromme)**

## 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."



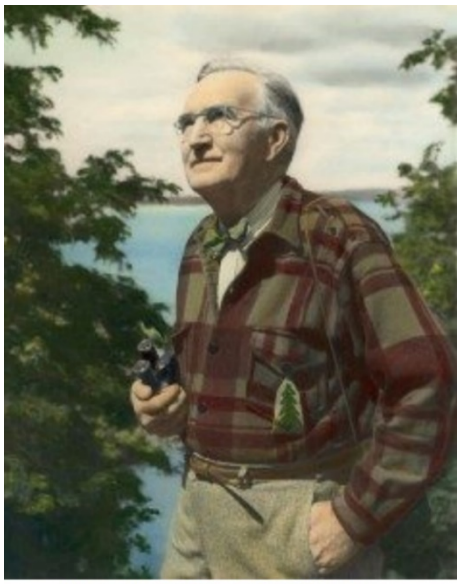
**George Archibald (1946- )**

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 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 ("Gee Whiz") 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 coutship 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 superintendant and one of the outstanding conservationists and teachers of nature lore of the state. Radio listeners of the `40s and `50s 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:

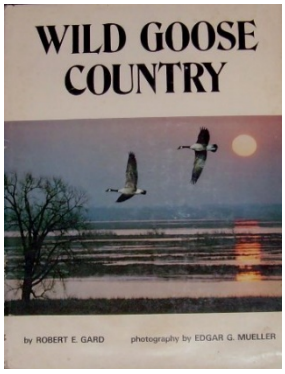
> *" `Afield with Ranger Mac' each Monday morning became a time of inspiration for young and old alike, for the broadcasts were more than nature hikes and conservation lessons. They were explorations into the mysteries of nature and the meaning of creation, and they carried a philosophy, a faith, which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



**Wakelin McNeel (1884-1958)**

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 buttes rising among scrub oaks and jack pines.*"

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

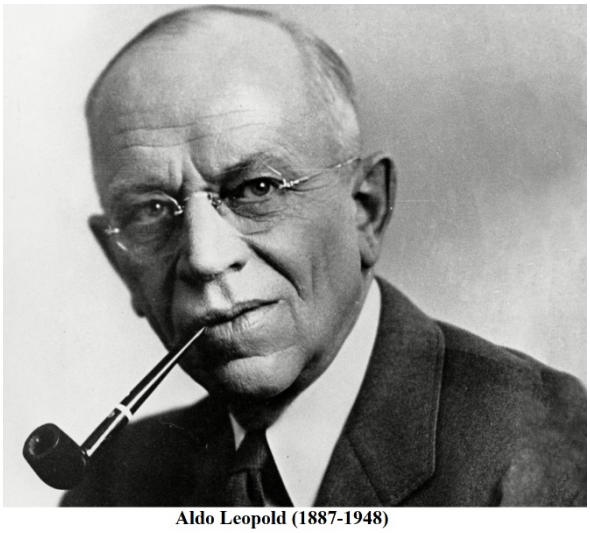
**Conservationists of the Region**

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, 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 1400-acre Leopold Memorial Reserve and Leopold's beloved shack (previously 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.



**Aldo Leopold (1887-1948)**



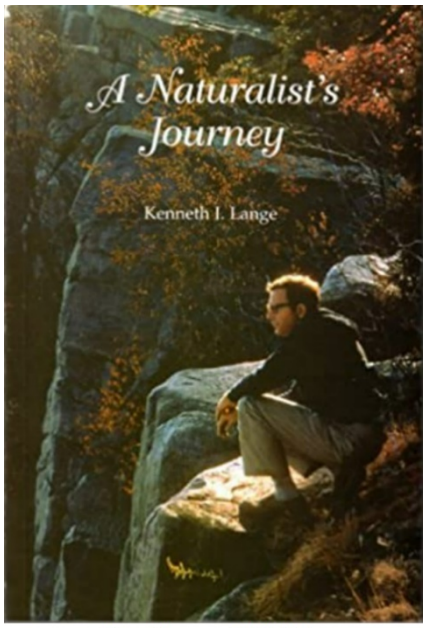
**Owen J. Gromme (1896-1991)**

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 Gromme'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 out 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."*



**Ken Lange (1934-)**

Among those carrying on the work of preserving Wisconsin's natural heritage is Kenneth I. Lange, longtime 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 numerous books relating to the history and natural history of Devil's Lake and Sauk County.

**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 tail. 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 . . . "*



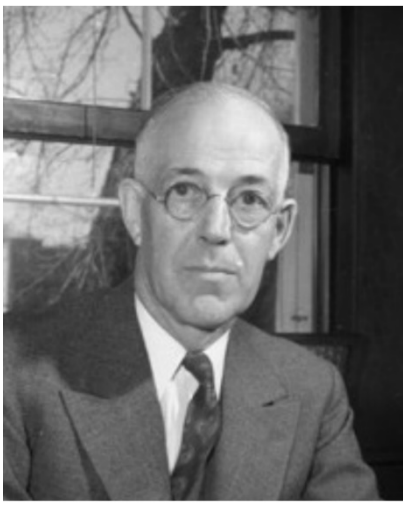
**Passenger pigeon pile from the hunt of 1878 near Petosky, Michigan**

Less than 30 years before the last wild 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."

A. W. Schorger, [1] who meticulously assembled the details of this event in his classic book, *The Passenger Pigeon*, judged from the available evidence that



**Arlie Wm. Schorger (1884-1972)**

"practically all the pigeons left in the United States nested in Wisconsin in 1871." 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 . . .*
>
> *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 . . .*

*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 fom 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.



**"Distant Thunder-Passenger Pigeons" (O. J. Gromme)**

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.

**Whooping Cranes**

A more successful episode in ongoing efforts to protect threatened species was played out more recently at Louis' Bluff. To this day, America's tallest and most highly endangered birds are the magnificent whooping cranes (*Grus americana*), which tower over the more familiar sandhill cranes (*Antigone canadensis*) that nest throughout central Wisconsin. Ravaged by unregulated hunting and habitat loss, the whoopers had been reduced in the 1940s to a pitifully small total population of less than two dozen individuals, whose fragile hopes for survival rested on the still smaller number of reproductively active females, countable with a few fingers of one hand.

Wild whooping cranes had long since disappeared from the Wisconsin landscape. However, fortuitous circumstances brought George Archibald and Ron Sauey to Baraboo in 1973 to co-found the "International Crane Foundation" (ICF), which quickly became a leading center of research for conserving whoopers and other crane species of the world. Fortunately, the northern nesting grounds of the whooping

cranes had been located in 1954 within the boundaries of Wood Buffalo National Park in northwest Canada. This discovery allowed crane conservationists to "harvest" surplus eggs that could be brought to hatch as captive stock in secure facilities.



**"Gee Whiz" (1982-2021)**

In 1976, ICF acquired one such hatchling named "Tex," later discovered to be a female. After some seven years of effort, George Archibald was able to dance and romance Tex as described above, successfully leading to the fertile egg and chick "Gee Whiz" who was the first live whooping crane hatched in captivity. Gee Whiz was subsequently paired with a female "Ooblek" to produce many offspring for the captive breeding program and release into the wild.

For whooping cranes, "wild" is synonymous with "migrating," a behavior that is *learned*, once and for all, by following a migrating parent to the wintering grounds (for the wild western flock, on the gulf coast near Port Aransas, Texas). However, for whooper chicks raised in captivity, there is seemingly no available parent to teach the migration pathway.

In the early 1990s, George Archibald attended the Oshkosh EAA Air Show and learned of the amazing feats of Canadian ultralite pilots Bill Lishman and Joe Duff to "fly in formation" with migrating geese, the factual basis of the popular 1996 movie, *Fly Away Home*. The idea was soon hatched to attempt similar flights between ultralites and cranes, essentially by duping the chick to regard the ultralite airplane as its "parent" -- the first large object it sees upon emerging from the egg.

To implement this audacious idea, a chosen crane egg is serenaded with the purr of an ultralite engine even before it hatches. The newborn chick is then exercised and fed from the ultralite by a costumed pilot in a white-draped "baggy" who neither speaks nor exposes any aspect of human shape or apparel. Indeed, the cranes are sometimes subjected to the frightening shouts of a normal-garbed human, who is then driven away by the baggy-clad "parent" to sharpen



**Crane chicks with "parent" ultralite**




the chick's aversion to human contact. In flight training, the chick is taught to follow the crane calls broadcast from the ultralite's speaker, and to switch from one ultralite to another if the calls are switched.

The chosen goal of the ultralite-led migration scheme was to establish a new "Eastern Flock" of whoopers whose migration route would stretch from the nesting/training grounds in Necedah Wildlife Reserve (about 40 miles north of Louis' Bluff) to the wintering grounds along the Florida gulf coast. An administrative "Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership" (WCEP), directed by Beth Goodman, was formed as umbrella organization for the many state and federal agencies having jurisdiction over portions of the proposed route. The companion "Operation Migration" (OM) organization, directed by Joe Duff, was composed of the derring-do pilots and supporting ground staff who moved the crane pens, hangars, and other paraphernalia from one (secret) landing strip to another along the pre-planned migration route.

After years of planning and a full trial run with sandhill cranes, the first flight of the initial coterie of seven whooping cranes was scheduled to launch on October 12, 2001, barely a month after the sobering events of 9/11. The initial flight path was chosen to cross directly over the north end of Louis' Bluff, which was well known to ICF staffers who had previously tracked banded sandhill cranes from its summit.



George Archibald and a small invited "craniac" group of WCEP, DNR, and ICF representatives arrived at 4$^{am}$ to climb the bluff or hike to the shoreline lookout for the pre-dawn fly-over. The glorious view of the ultralite and its sun-sparkled chain of whoopers as it came across the river was a sight beyond imagination for those privileged to witness it!

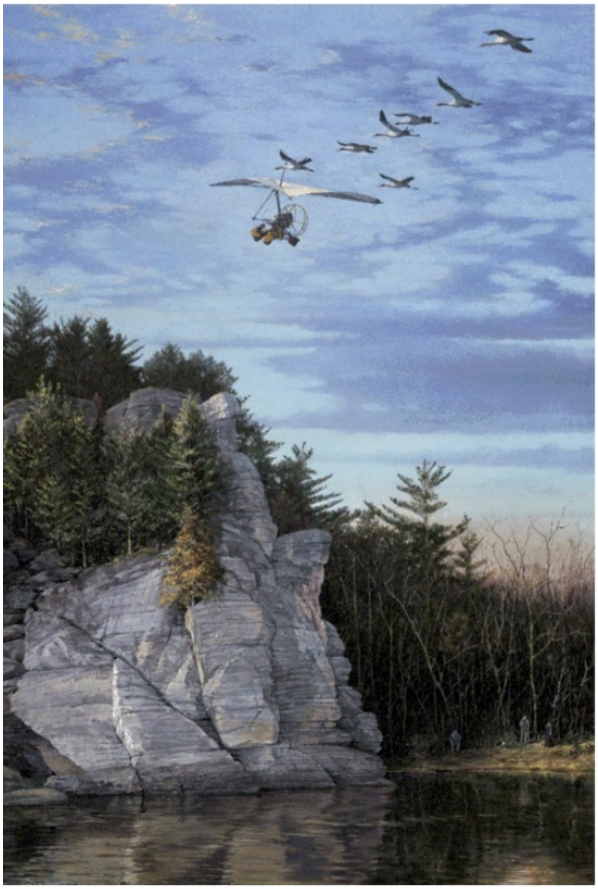
However, as the ultralite passed out of view of the spellbound onlookers, the exhilaration was broken by word from the trailing spotter plane that some birds had



**Geo. Archibald, the author, Sylvia Marek, Nancy Heiden, videographer Peter Shatalow, WCEP Director Beth Goodman, and author's wife and dog atop Louis' Bluff on "First Flight" day (Oct. 12, 2001).**

broken rank and had to be rounded up by the second ultralite that always accompanies the lead "mother"-craft.

The unsuccessful completion of the first flight segment saw the entire OM flight crew return to Louis' Bluff for brunch at the riverside gazebo, sightseeing atop the bluff, and consultations about the next day's flight. It was recognized that a strong contributing factor was the birds' alarm at first seeing the many distractions of the Dells traffic corridor -- including the heavy traffic of I90-94, rail traffic on the adjacent Amtrak line, and the nearby River Bay Marina campground. The following day's flight (again over Louis' Bluff) was rescheduled to minimize this impact, but the flight (with a newly invited small group atop the bluff) went much as the first. So the third -- and finally successful! -- run through the Dells was completed the following day by re-routing the crossing of I90-94 further to the north, where it separates more widely from State Highway 12 and the adjacent railway of the old LaCrosse and Milwaukee line. The human-assisted migration of the newly minted Eastern Flock of whooping cranes was on its way!



**(Viktor Bakhtin)**

The thrilling "First Flight" passage of the whoopers over Louis' Bluff was subsequently envisioned and painted by ICF resident artist Viktor Bakhtin in acrylic and watercolor views that effectively capture the drama and beauty of this bold experiment in wildlife ecology.

The full cohort of seven birds safely reached their scheduled stop near the Baraboo bluff, then proceeded the

following day to a second stop near New Glarus. However, the area was struck overnight by a severe thunderstorm which overturned the holding pen. One of the chicks who escaped was found dead the next morning after striking a power line. The remaining six chicks successfully survived the ca. 1200 mile migration route to Florida, arriving in late December to an appreciative crowd at a publicly announced fly-over.



**President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia piloting an ultralite-led migration of endangered Siberian Cranes (N.Y. Times, Sept. 5. 2012)**

In the shock and despair of events surrounding 9/11, the miracle of the new whooping crane migration came as a glimmer of light for many Americans. The ultralite-led flights continued for more than a decade, eventually adding about 100 birds to the eastern migratory flock. Related approaches were adopted for other species, including a remarkably similar effort by President Vladimir Putin of Russia to lead a migration of Siberian Cranes. However, increasing evidence indicated lack of adequate parenting skills in the ultralite-led birds, which led to replacement of Operation Migration by the present direct autumn release program in 2015. The death of "Gee Whiz" in February 2021 also signaled the end of an exciting era of whooping crane restoration, one of whose most adventurous episodes was launched over Louis' Bluff.

**Bald Eagles**

Louis' Bluff has a more direct and ongoing connection to another success story in wildlife restoration -- the recovery of the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), America's national bird. The decimation of eagle populations by DDT in the 1950s and 1960s had dropped the number of breeding pairs in Wisconsin to a precariously low value (ca. 100) by the early 1970s. But the subsequent banning of DDT allowed these numbers to rebound robustly, to more than 1100 breeding pairs in 2010 and about 1700 in 2019, third most (after Alaska and Minnesota) in any state.

The Wisconsin DNR cooperates with neighboring states in a uniform blood-testing and banding program that provides an accurate ongoing record of eagle health and population recovery throughout the state. DNR aerial surveys for active eagle nests are conducted annually, supplemented by direct reports from citizens on nests that



DNR tree climber at Louis' Bluff

have been missed. When a new eagle nest is reported, as at Louis' Bluff in 2015, a DNR specialist (presently, Mike Meyer) and tree climber will arrange a visit in early summer to determine the number and health of chicks found in the nest. How this works and what may be learned are naturally matters of interest to the proud landowners.

The nest may be expected to be sequestered among the most hidden branches of the highest white pine that commands the best possible view of the adjacent waterway. The daunting task of the tree climber is to reach the nest, at first by climbing rather easily up the bare bark of the lower trunk, then fighting ever more strenuously to cut a clear vertical path through the dense pattern of radiating limbs that oppose upward progress, while the DNR man chats amiably with the landowners below.



"Bird's Eye View," looking northward from the eagle's nest atop Louis' Bluff

The increasingly irritated screeches of the adult birds that circle above the nest as the tree man ascends are the only evidence perceived by the DNR man and landowners of progress in the operation. When the nest is finally reached, it will appear as a bracken bowl of interwoven branches and bedding, perhaps 4-5 feet across and 3 feet deep, with one or more angry chicks eager to tear the tree man's eyes out.



Angry bird

The tree man arrives at the nest with the necessary long rope, supply of cloth bags, and heavy leather gloves to complete the bag-and-drop operation. All this occurs under the watchful eyes of one or both adults perched nearby, vocalizing their displeasure but not otherwise interfering in the operation. The chick is put into the bag and dropped by attached rope to the ground far below, where the DNR man takes over while the tree man relaxes under the menacing gaze of the adults.

The business part of the operation now begins. The DNR man opens the bag and performs a series of measurements on the chick (wingspan, weight, and similar body descriptors), recording the entries in a standard form that has been used throughout the upper midwest for nearly a century. A blood sample is drawn that will later provide chemical details of DDT concentration and related vitality measures. The chick is then banded with identifying markings that will allow its unique association with the data of the DNR protocol whenever its body or corpse is again examined.



Disgruntled onlooker



Successful banding (May 28, 2015)

Once the measurements, blood draw, and banding are complete, it only remains to take a "mug shot" of the chick for the smiling landowners, re-bag the chick for re-ascent to the nest above, and await the descent of the tree man to mother-earth and departure for the next nest on their list. According to past DNR experience, everything will have returned to normalcy in a half-hour or so for the eagle family in their heavenly abode atop the bluff.

At present writing (2021), the old nest sits abandoned, but a new nest (even more cunningly concealed) has replaced it, looking more directly over the panoramic view from the north point. Whether the present occupants of the nest include the adults or chick seen in 2015 is unknown. Safe to say is that a visitor can practically always be guaranteed the thrilling sights and sounds of the resident bald eagles that continue to fluorish in the nest and skies above Louis' Bluff.

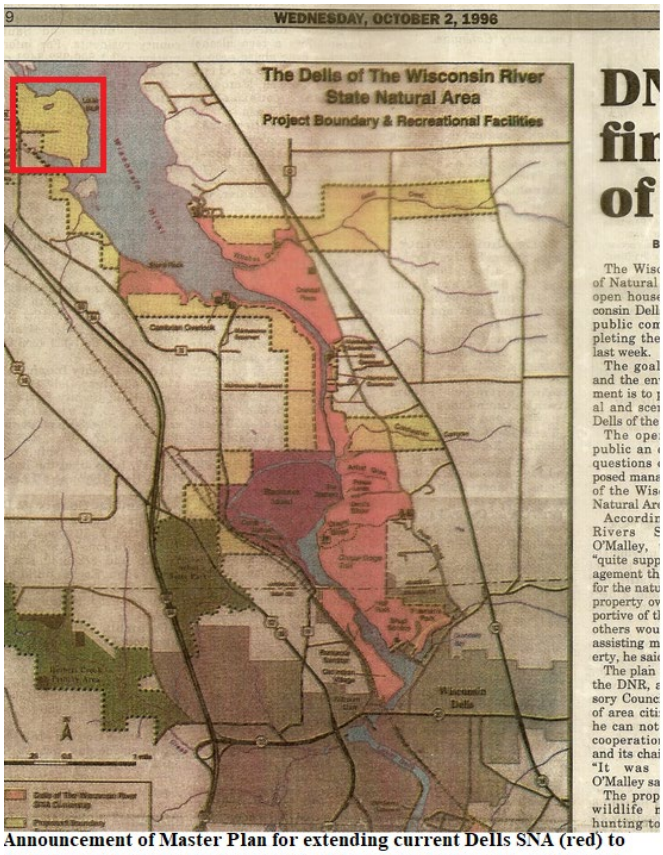


Present (2021) territorial ruler of Louis' Bluff (Lukas Weinhold)

## Natural Heritage Preservation at Louis' Bluff

Since the time (1993) of the previous edition of this book, threats of commercial development along the upper Wisconsin riverway have continued to increase, fueled by the allure of "Vacationland" condos and second homes in the Dells region. The realities of the current political climate seem to preclude extension of the 1980s-era Lower Wisconsin State Riverway to protect Louis' Bluff and other sections of the upper river. As the earlier edition of *Louis' Bluff* was completed, the long-range future of this signature feature of the Dells landscape remained in considerable doubt.

In late 1996, the Wisconsin DNR announced an ambitious Master Plan for future extensions of the Dells of the Wisconsin State Natural Area (SNA). As shown in the newspaper feature announcing the plan, the extensions would include the two nearby State Parks (Mirror Lake and Rocky Arbor), Blackhawk Island and Upham Woods, and various border-extensions of the present SNA near Coldwater Canyon, Witches Gulch, and Stand Rock. Most strikingly, a one-foot-wide strip from the Stand Rock extension would then cross the shoreline of River Bay Marina and enlarge to envelop the entire property at Louis' Bluff.

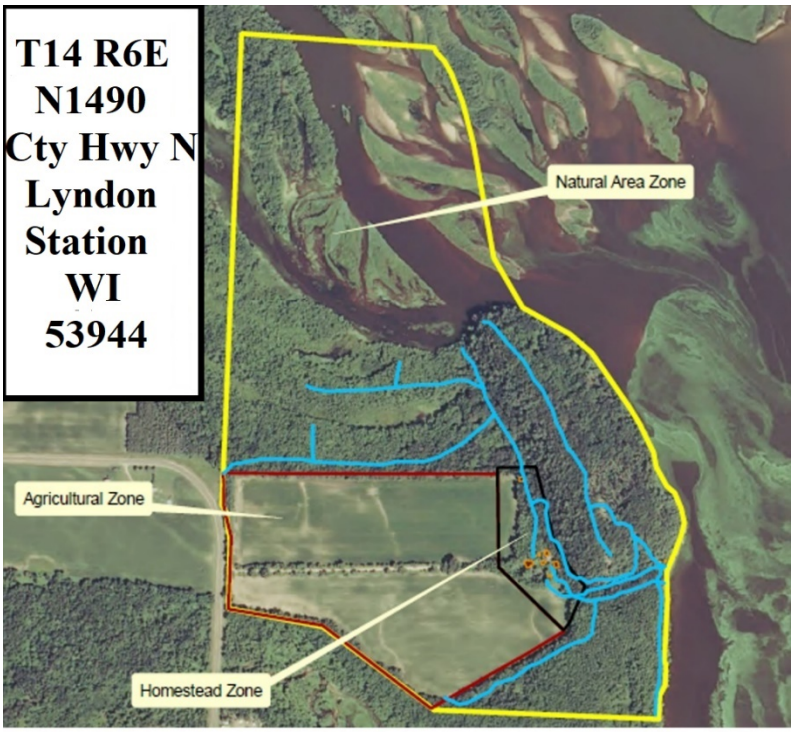

9 WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1996

The Dells of The Wisconsin River State Natural Area
Project Boundary & Recreational Facilities

Announcement of Master Plan for extending current Dells SNA (red) to include nearby State Parks (green), Upham Woods (purple), and Louis' Bluff (upper left) and other border areas (tan).

Although the Master Plan suggests a possible future state of grace for Louis' Bluff, it offers little assurance concerning near-term protection of Louis' Bluff. Accordingly, steps were initiated in 2007 to establish a conservation easement on the property. At the time, there were practically no precedents or available land trust partners for such easements in Juneau County. With assistance from Gathering Waters land trust alliance, the easement agreement was forged with Natural Heritage Land Trust (now Groundswell Conservancy, directed by Jim Welsh) and Wisconsin DNR as joint partners. The details of the easement agreement express the shared commitment to maintain the bluff and surroundings in their present natural state in perpetuity.

The adjacent figure shows the overall outline (yellow) of the property covered by the "Louis' Bluff NHLT/DNR Conservation Easement," together with its divisions into the small "Homestead Zone" (black), the 40-acre "Agricultural Zone" (red), and the large remaining "Natural Zone," which includes the high bluff and surrounding woodlands. Blue lines mark established trails of the Natural Area Zone. The sharp turn of County Highway N (with long entry driveway to the Farmstead Zone) is seen at the lower left of the figure.




**Louis' Bluff NHLT/DNR Conservation Easement**



EVENTS

SATURDAY, JUNE 2, 2007 75 CENTS

# Easement to protect Louis' Bluff

By Kay James
kbj@wcn

The Natural Heritage Land Trust purchased a conservation easement to protect Louis' Bluff this week.

The 133.5-acre property, in the town of Lyndon in Juneau County, includes more than 7,000 feet of undeveloped shoreline on the Wisconsin River, all within the Dells of the Wisconsin River State Natural Area.

Frank and Marianna Weinhold of Madison are the owners of the property.

Frank Weinhold in a telephone interview said they decided to do the conservation easement to ensure the bluff is protected as is. "There's lots to preserve," he said citing fishing, scenery and "beautiful solitude. It's a chance to escape wholesale development."

Jim Welsh, executive director, Natural Heritage Land Trust said the easement protects the sandstone formation known as Louis' Bluff and surrounding lowland forest. "Basically it limits further development of property — to keep it pristine. Our responsibility is to monitor property and future landowners. We were given a public trust to keep undeveloped."

Both sides – the Weinholds and the trust have made a big commitment to preserving the bluff as it is. "It's as rich as anything imagined."

"People from all over Wisconsin and beyond will benefit from the permanent protection of Louis' Bluff. Although still private property, the protected land is visible to all who go boating on the Wisconsin River above the Dells."

Louis' Bluff is located north of Witches Gulch and Stand Rock on the Upper Dells of the Wisconsin River. Although not owned by the Department of Natural Resources, Weinhold said the DNR is in the partnership with the Natural Heritage Trust.

Weinhold hopes the conservation easement will set a precedent for others in the Dells. He noted that not much has been done with conservation easements or sale of development rights in Adams and Juneau counties or around the Dells. More has been done in the Baraboo Bluffs and around Madison.

The Natural Heritage Land Trust is a nonprofit organization that has been in existence for 24 years. Welsh said its mission is to protect important places. Some of the conservation projects it has been involved in have been to help Merrimac create park, and to help farmers pay for development rights in Dunn and Windsor townships in Dane County. Much of its work has been in Dane County, he said, and added the trust has limited resources.

With the quality of this property, Weinhold said, he hopes that others in the Dells will consider the same option.

Weinhold and the Trust declined to say how much was paid for the conservation easement. "It's not a humongous amount," he said.

The DNR's Stewardship program awarded the Natural Heritage Trust a $52,100 grant this year to be matched by an equal amount under the Stewardship – Nonprofit Conservation Awards Program.

Louis' Bluff is named for early settler Louis Dupless.

CONTINUED

Louis' Bluff, the historic bluff on the Upper Dells, is a place of quiet and peace.

The easement to protect Louis' Bluff was warmly welcomed in the Dells community. The headline story in the *Dells Events* of June 2, 2007 announced the easement, and a subsequent editorial expressed support for the action.

Creation of the conservation easement was also celebrated by a luncheon gathering at the Louis' Bluff farmstead on September 3, 2007. As reported in the *Dells Events* of Sept. 8, the gathering totalled about 80 people, including "hordes of representatives from the DNR, land trusts and conservation groups. Others included Mayor Eric Helland, Rep. Sheryl Albers, Stewards of the Dells President Debbie Kinder, and Bud Gussel of the Dells Country Historical Society." Also included were representatives for each of the three families (Dupless, Hacker, Teisberg) who previously lived at the bluff, various "craniacs" from the International



Jim Welsh addresses celebrants of the Louis' Bluff Conservation Easement

Crane Foundation and Operation Migration flight team, and other Dells neighbors and townspeople. In brief remarks to the group, Mariana Weinhold expressed the sense of the landowners: "Nobody can own Louis' Bluff. You share its beauty with the world."

As the newspaper report continued:

*In a surprise speech immediately following, DNR Conservation Biologist Thomas Meyer presented the Weinholds with a sign acting as an official promise to dedicate Louis' Bluff as a State Natural Area ...*







*From there, participants explored the picturesque land by foot or by boat. The area includes pristine plant life, rare rock formations, marshland and the Dupless family grave site.*

With these measures taken, the highest available level of long-range protection under Wisconsin law is assured for Louis' Bluff.

**Footnote to Chapter 10**

[1] 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 at UW-Madison.

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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).

*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.

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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
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

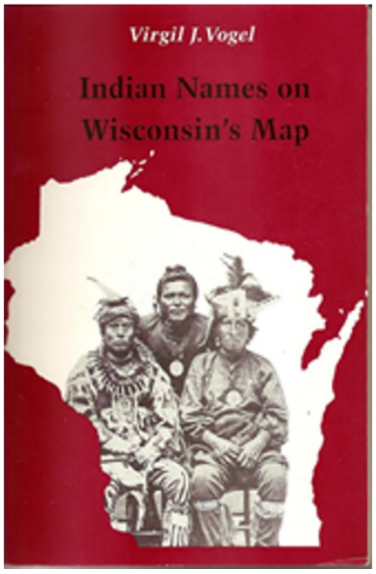
4, 199 (Black Hawk capture); 7, 75 (Kilbourn City river port); 9, 336 (hops raising); 12, 95 (Lyndon Station mission); 18, 389 (hops raising); 21, 445 (Wisconsin Dells ferry); 22, 268 (H. H. Bennett, recruits at Delton); 23, 247 (recruits at Kilbourn City); 24, 174 (Jefferson Davis); 25, 169 (rafting 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)

## APPENDIX A: WISCONSIN'S PLACE NAME

### Introduction: The Puzzle

Persistent mystery surrounds the origin and meaning of the name "Wisconsin" now attached to the swatch of land that became the 30th state of the USA in 1848. As stated in the current *Wikipedia* entry for the state (accessed September 5, 2021):

> *The Algonquian word for Wisconsin and its original meaning have both grown obscure. While interpretations vary, most implicate the river and the red sandstone that lines its banks. One leading theory holds that the name originated from the Miami word* Meskonsing*, meaning "it lies red", a reference to the setting of the Wisconsin River as it flows through the reddish sandstone of the Wisconsin Dells.*[1] *Other theories include claims that the name originated from one of a variety of Ojibwa words meaning "red stone place", "where the waters gather", or "great rock".*[2]




In addressing this puzzle, author Virgil J. Vogel in his book, "Indian Names on Wisconsin's Map,"[3] sums up the situation as follows:

> *Of all the states of the American union, none has a name that has been spelled in more ways, or interpreted more variously, than Wisconsin.*

The diverse spellings (such as *Meskousing, Mesconsin, Mishkonsing, Ouisconsens, Ouisconsin, Ouisconsing, Ouiskonsin, Owisconsing, Quiconsing, Weeskonsan, Wisconsan, Wishkonsing, Wiskonsin, Wiskonsan*,...) can largely be understood in terms of a few misreadings of cursive handwriting, but the diversities of interpretation (such as *lodge of a beaver or muskrat, wild rushing channel, river of flowery banks*, or others gathered by Stark[4] and Derleth[5]) seem to challenge rational explanation.

### Points of Broad Consensus

It is instantly clear that the various "meanings" or "interpretations" offered by early native speakers cannot be understood as literal *synonyms* in the dictionary sense, because the quoted phrases are manifestly inconsistent with one another. At best, each serves as an *alternative characteristic descriptor* of a riverine site having such multiple attributes. Indeed, "river" is the uncontested commonality that underlies all such intended descriptors, for it was clearly understood by all knowledgeable authorities that the state's name is drawn from that of its principal river, the largest and longest that lies entirely within the boundaries of a single state.

What then is the origin of the "Wisconsin River" name? Again, all authorities concur that this derives from the name first heard by French priest Jacques Marquette and fur-trader Louis Jolliet from their two Miami guides, enlisted from a camp near Green Lake. The Marquette-Jolliet party then embarked on this river in June of 1673 for the descent to the first European glimpse of the "Father of Waters" at present Prairie du Chien. Many of Marquette's written records were lost in a subsequent canoe overturn, but those of Jolliet are transcribed on his map of 1674, which includes the *"Riviere miskonsing*" designation of the river in the segment reproduced below (Figure 1):[6]



Louis Jolliet (1645-1700)



Jacques Marquette (1637-1675)




**Figure 1.** Except from L. Jolliet's map of 1674, showing the course from "*Baye des puans*" (Green Bay) via present Fox River to "*portage*" and descent via "*Riveriere miskonsing*" (past "*mines du fer*") to the Mississippi.

As shown in Jolliet's 1674 map, there is no ambiguity in how "*miskonsing*" is spelled. However, in the original hand-scrawled notes of Jolliet's diary, cursive "m"




**Jolliet's rendering of the river's name from his map of 1674**

was mistaken for "w" and ensuing "n" for "u," leading to multiple variants that came to cloud matters. However, no such ambiguity clouds the hard "k" of the second syllable that survives in present pronunciation of "Wisconsin." This alone serves to discount a later historian's[7] linguistic attempt to render the name as "*missi-ossin*" ("great rock"). McCafferty's rendering[1] of the Miami word "*Meskonsing*" is much closer, particularly in the strong association of initial "*Mesk*" with "red," but his direct conjecture for the state's namesake (Red Granite, a site near Appleton, far east of the Wisconsin River) contradicts iron-clad evidence that the proper "red" referent must be on the Wisconsin River, not one of the many other water features of the State.

Indeed, there is strong consensus for associating "Meskonsing" (or "Miskonsing") more specifically with the *Dells* of the Wisconsin River, by all accounts the most distinctive feature of the entire river course. This association is strongly promoted by the current website of the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS), which features a postcard view of the iron-rich sandstone formations that draw innumerable tourists to this section of the river each year. Many phrases offered in the past as the "meaning" of Wisconsin can be recognized as describing scenic features that are regularly pointed out by Dells tour guides, viz.,

> Gathering of the Waters: The Wisconsin River drains about 20% of the state's land area, yet its sprawling, many-channel character changes abruptly as the river "turns on its edge" (Chap. 1) to plunge through the narrow gorge at the head of the Dells.
>
> Red Cliff: To travellers from upriver, this term could suggest the ruddy mural sandstone walls that rise dramatically and seem to wall in the river at the Dells (cf. Merrell, Chap. 3); as several writers have remarked, 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 (Chap. 5), in marked contrast to the river's typically languid character elsewhere.
>
> 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 (Chap. 8). 19th-century guidebooks often labelled upriver views from Prospect Point as "The Islands" for this unusual feature of the riverscape.
>
> Lodge of a beaver or muskrat: As previously mentioned (Chap. 9), Louis' Bluff has such shape and was envisioned to be inhabited by "Beaver People."
>
> 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 with banks where birds nest: Although the eye-level "Swallows Nests" near the dam are most often pointed out by tour guides, such nests abound at Louis' Bluff and other cliffs in the Dells.

All these results seem to support the conclusions of the WHS website and to resolve apparent inconsistencies between the interpretations of knowledgable native informants who were questioned in settlement times. From this viewpoint, the explanation of the puzzle of Wisconsin's placename simply reduces to, "Wisconsin is an old native name for the Dells."

**Nagging Questions**

However, two important questions are left unanswered by this rather vague "resolution" of the puzzle:

(Q1) Why doesn't the Wisconsin River follow the example of other leading watersheds (e.g., Chippewa, Menominee, Fox, and others farther west of the Mississippi) whose names identify the tribe known to control the river's resources at the time of first European contacts? Such tribe-based identification of a foreign river might be the expected terminology for the Miami guides. In 1673, the Miamis were allies of the French, who in turn were strongly opposed by the Fox Indians then in control of the Fox-Wisconsin portage and other strategic points of the western fur trade.

(Q2) Why does the proposed solution ignore what the author of a standard reference[3] on Indian placenames in Wisconsin considered to be the most significant clue offered by an authoritative native source of early settlement times -- Chief Wapello of the Fox Tribe of Iowa? In a speech delivered to other tribal chiefs in the Indian Agency at Ottumwa IA on Oct. 16, 1841, Wapello states in direct declarative terms that "I remember Wisconsin when it was ours, and now it has our name."



**Chief Wapello (1787-1842) of the Meskwaki Tribe of Iowa**

The final question points to some direct connection to the Fox Indians, a tribe with no significant presence in Wisconsin during the last two centuries. Possible solution of the placename puzzle therefore involves a digression into pre-statehood times when the Foxes ruled supreme over the principal waterways of future "Wisconsin."

**Fox Indians in Wisconsin**

Historically, the Fox people were known by a variety of names to the early European explorers and settlers. The "Fox" name is recognized as an early interpretation blunder that mistakenly confused a clan name with that of the entire tribe. The Fox people were also identified as "Renards" (French for "Fox") or "Outagamies" (as in the Wisconsin county name), but to themselves they are the

*Meskwaki* ("Red Earth People," also spelled *Mesquakie, Miscoquis, Miskwkeeyuk, Muskwaki, Musquakie*,...). Their "red earth" self-description was said to stem from long-time habitation in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York, a glaciated terrain with outcroppings of the same "Potsdam sandstone" geological stratum as forms the Dells.



**Potsdam sandstone outcrop near Raquette River of upstate New York**

Under the pressures of the Iroquois uprisings of the early 17th-century, the *Meskwaki* were forced westward of their traditional homelands, first into Michigan and by the 1650s into Wisconsin. There they occupied large villages, initially along the (now) Fox River, but subsequently at strategic points of the fur trade along the entire Fox-Wisconsin corridor,[8] stretching on the Wisconsin side from the Dells-Portage area to Prairie du Chien and the lead diggings to the south. In this key region of the lucrative western fur trade, a series of clashes with the French induced King Louis XV to order the genocidal "Fox Wars" of the early 18th century, which reduced the Fox population from its estimated highpoint (ca. 6500) to about 100 survivors by 1733.

The small number of surviving Foxes took refuge with the closely related Sauk tribe ("Yellow Earth People") and were thereafter considered minority members of the single integrated "Sauk and Fox" tribe. This persisted into the time of the Black Hawk War, which led finally to complete removal of Sauk & Fox peoples from Wisconsin in the 1830s. Only the small Fox contingent that settled at Tama, Iowa under Chief Wapello remained nearby to recall the time when the mighty Fox claimed dominion over the major trade routes of what later (1848) became "Wisconsin."

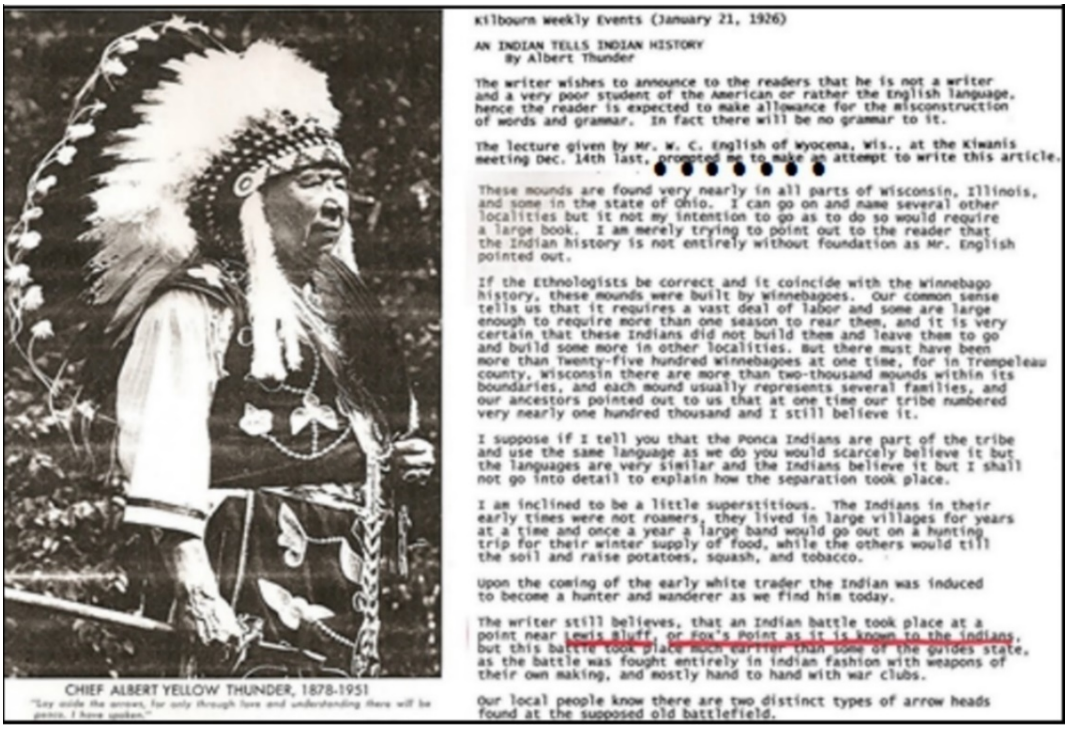
**A Proposed Solution**

From this brief account of Fox/*Meskwaki* "Red Earth People" dominance of the Wisconsin River trade route in early contact times, it makes perfect sense that a Miami-speaking guide would identify the river as something equivalent to "Red Earth River" or "River of the Red-Earths," in full accord with linguistic analysis of the Miami place name given to Marquette and Jolliet. In particular, the strong emphasis on "red" (*Misk-* in the *Algonquian-Miami* dialect, vs. *Mesk-* in the Meskwaki's own dialect) is virtually dictated by known linguistic regularities among dialects of the Algonquian language group. Even to the Dakota (Dhegiha Sioux-speaking) peoples of the west, the Fox were identified as "*Meshkwa kihig*," a name with similar phonetic values.

Furthermore, this association of the river's name with the dominant tribal group occupying the watershed then becomes strictly consistent with Chief Wapello's declaration that "our name" (*Meskwaki*) is the source for what the Miami guide identified (in his own dialect) as the name "*Miskonsing*" for the river. In this view, "Fox" is exactly synonymous with the "Red Earth" inferences of McCafferty's linguistic analysis.[1]

But how is this to be reconciled with the many apparent associations with the Dells?

A hint of this association can already be seen in Jolliet's map of 1674 (Fig. 1). The map clearly depicts the gently undulating southwesterly track of the downriver passage from Portage to Prairie du Chien (ca. 110 mi.) that was actually traversed by Marquette and Jolliet. But the map also gives clear representation of the hairpin-like bend at the Portage and northwest-trending track upriver (a stretch of ca. 50 mi., by the scale of the map) that would have carried the party through the Dells and beyond, perhaps stretching to the old rapids now buried under Castle Rock Lake. This upriver stretch could only be directly known to the Miami guides, who perhaps described it to Marquette and Joliett as an integral segment of the "Miskonsing" domain they were about to enter. To the early *Meskwaki* who first ventured into the Dells region (barely 20 mi. above the Portage), it must have evoked powerful emotion to find themselves once again among familiar "red earth" sandstone features of their ancestral homelands.



CHIEF ALBERT YELLOW THUNDER, 1878-1951

Kilbourn weekly Events (January 21, 1926)

AN INDIAN TELLS INDIAN HISTORY
By Albert Thunder

The writer wishes to announce to the readers that he is not a writer and a very poor student of the American or rather the English language, hence the reader is expected to make allowance for the misconstruction of words and grammar. In fact there will be no grammar to it.

The lecture given by Mr. W. C. English of Wyocena, Wis., at the Kiwanis meeting Dec. 14th last, prompted me to make an attempt to write this article.

These mounds are found very nearly in all parts of Wisconsin, Illinois, and some in the state of Ohio. I can go on and name several other localities but it not my intention to go as to do so would require a large book. I am merely trying to point out to the reader that the Indian history is not entirely without foundation as Mr. English pointed out.

If the Ethnologists be correct and it coincide with the Winnebago history, these mounds were built by Winnebagoes. Our common sense tells us that it requires a vast deal of labor and some are large enough to require more than one season to rear them, and it is very certain that these Indians did not build them and leave them to go and build some more in other localities. But there must have been more than Twenty-five hundred Winnebagoes at one time, for in Trempeleau county, Wisconsin there are more than two-thousand mounds within its boundaries, and each mound usually represents several families, and our ancestors pointed out to us that at one time our tribe numbered very nearly one hundred thousand and I still believe it.

I suppose if I tell you that the Ponca Indians are part of the tribe and use the same language as we do you would scarcely believe it but the languages are very similar and the Indians believe it but I shall not go into detail to explain how the separation took place.

I am inclined to be a little superstitious. The Indians in their early times were not roamers, they lived in large villages for years at a time and once a year a large band would go out on a hunting trip for their winter supply of food, while the others would till the soil and raise potatoes, squash, and tobacco.

Upon the coming of the early white trader the Indian was induced to become a hunter and wanderer as we find him today.

The writer still believes, that an Indian battle took place at a point near Lewis Bluff, or Fox's Point as it is known to the Indians, but this battle took place much earlier than some of the guides state, as the battle was fought entirely in Indian fashion with weapons of their own making, and mostly hand to hand with war clubs.

Our local people know there are two distinct types of arrow heads found at the supposed old battlefield.

**Figure 2.** Excerpt from letter by Albert Yellow Thunder to *Kilbourn Weekly Events* (Jan. 21, 1926), identifying "Lewis Bluff" with "Fox's Point".

A more specific description of the Dells/*Miskwaki* association was given in a strong public pronouncement by Ho-Chunk leader Albert Yellow Thunder[9] (Figure 2). In a "letter to the editor" of the *Kilbourn Weekly Events* in early 1926, Albert Yellow Thunder responds to the skepticism recently expressed in a public lecture concerning the authenticity of pre-historical events as recounted by Indian guides on the Dells boat tours. In the course of this rebuttal, Albert Yellow Thunder states that[10]

> *...an Indian battle took place at a point near Lewis Bluff, or Fox's Point as it is known to the Indians*

This remark firmly indicates that Louis' Bluff was still remembered by Ho-Chunks for its ancient associations with the long-departed Fox tribe, even though the bluff had acquired its own Ho-Chunk religious appellation (*Hay-wakha-chunk*, "Sacred Mound") in the intervening ca. 200 yrs. of Ho-Chunk dominion.

Strong confirmation of the Fox/Louis' Bluff associated was communicated to the author by Frank Hacker Jr., eldest son of the Frank and Marie Hacker family that owned the farm at Louis' Bluff from 1908-1960. Shortly before his death in 1995, he prepared a sketch of the old farmyard as he remembered it from boyhood (Figure 3). Across the top of the sketch is the bluff itself, with the dual names "*Louies Bluff or Fox Mound*" clearly written across the bluff's outline.

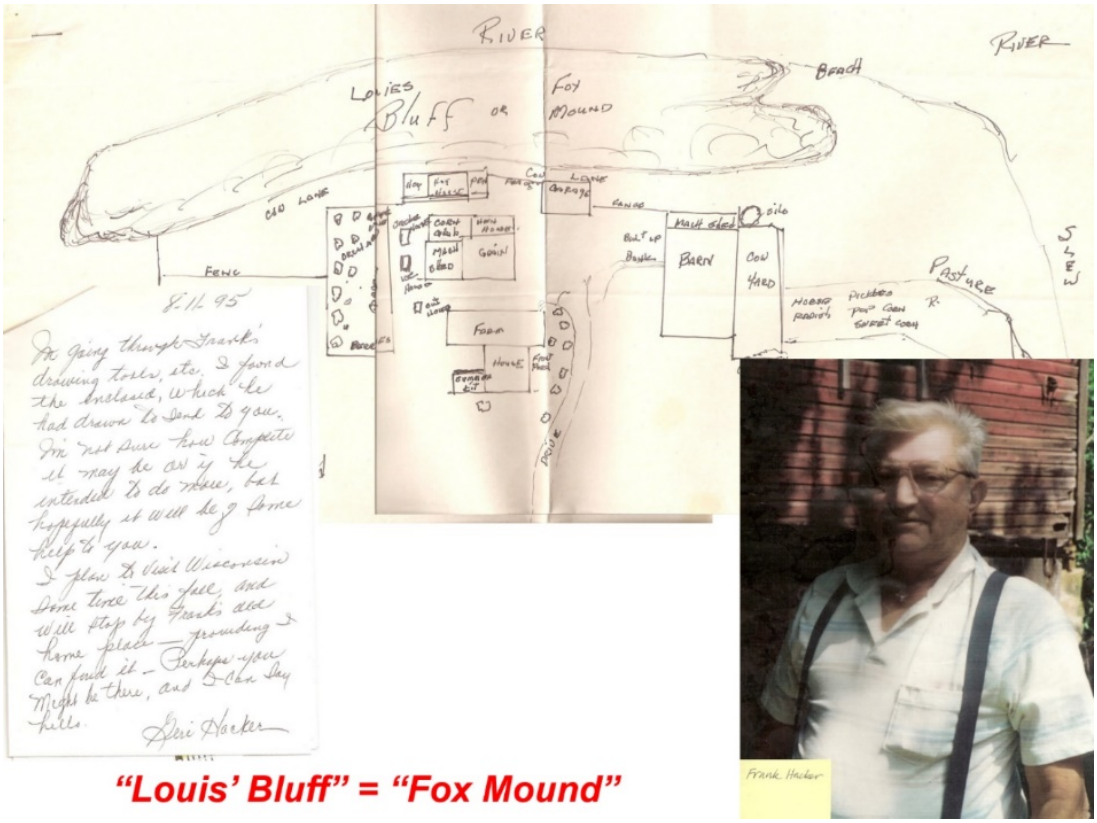
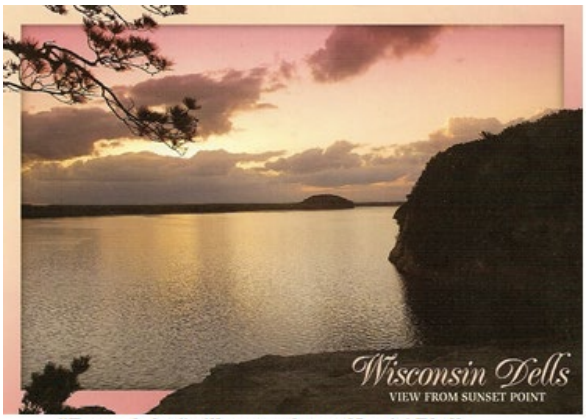



**Figure 3.** Sketch of the farmyard at Louis' Bluff as later recalled by Frank Hacker (1923-1995), showing "Louie's Bluff" or "Fox Mound" as names of the bluff.

In 1993, Frank Hacker had returned with wife Geri (from their home in Rosiclare, Ill.) to visit his old homestead at Louis' Bluff. At that time he related many memories of his younger years there, including his blood-brother relationship with Miles Yellow Thunder, a son of Albert Yellow Thunder Sr. (who also came frequently to the bluff). The Hacker family had always heard that an important Fox chief was buried at the bluff, and in earlier times a delegation of Indians (from Tama?) arrived regularly each year in full regalia for some ritual purpose atop the bluff, with one standing guard below to assure that none of the Hackers came up to watch. All these recollections appear fully consistent with Albert Yellow Thunder's assertion (Fig. 2) and serve to further reinforce a specific association of Louis' Bluff with important personages and events of pre-settlement Fox history in the Dells region.



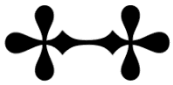
**"Beaver lodge" silhouette shape of Louis' Bluff, as seen in postcard view from Sunset point**

Finally, it may be recalled that among the many old interpretations of "Wisconsin" quoted above, all but one could be applied rather generically to multiple sites, features, or aspects of the Dells. However, the one remaining -- "*lodge of a beaver or muskrat*" -- is indisputably *unique* to Louis' Bluff. This alone serves to single out Louis' Bluff as most likely namesake for the original "*Misconsing*" or the current "Wisconsin."

It seems probable that "*Misconsing*" referred in its time to the entire village site at Louis' Bluff, headed by a principal Fox chief and thus symbolic of the broader Fox Nation that controlled the riverway (in much the same manner as the word "Washington" or image of the Capitol building might symbolize the USA). Over the centuries, the Foxes and Ho-Chunks were often living in proximity to one another,


**View from the north point of Louis' Bluff ("Fox Mound"/*Misconsing/Hay-wacha-chunk*) toward Fox Point**

with similar lifeways and material goods. Archaeological evidence to distinguish earlier Fox occupancy of the village site at Louis' Bluff from its later Ho-Chunk use as a seasonal campsite may be difficult to obtain, but seems the best way forward to gain rigorous support (or disproof) for the arguments presented here.



**Footnotes to Appendix A**

[1] Michael McCafferty, "On Wisconsin: The derivation and referent of an old puzzle in American placenames," *Onoma* **38**, 39-56 (2003).

[2] Virgil J. Vogel, "Wisconsin's name: A linguistic puzzle," *Wis. Mag. Hist.* **48**, 181-186 (1965).

[3] Virgil J. Vogel, *Indian Names on Wisconsin's Map* (U. Wisconsin Press, Madison WI, 1992).

[4] William F. Stark, *Wisconsin, River of History* (Worzalla Publishing, Stevens Point, WI, 1989).

[5] August Derleth, *The Wisconsin, River of a Thousand Isles* (Rivers of America series, edited by Stephen Vincent Benet and Carl Carmer, J. J. Little and Ives Co., New York, 1942).

[6] Encyclopedia of Chicago, "Jolliet's Map of New France, 1674" (Chicago Historical Society); http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/11574.html

[7] C. W. Butterfield (ed.), *History of Columbia County* (Western Historical Co., Chicago, 1880). Consul W. Butterfield edited a variety of "History of *X* County" volumes with similar introductory discussion of Wisconsin's name.

[8] H. H. Tanner, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History* (U. Oklahoma Press, Norman OK, 1987), p. 42ff.

[9] Albert Yellow Thunder (Sr.) was a grandson of Chief Yellow Thunder (1774-1874), who had led the Ho-Chunk tribe through the tumultuous removals and returns of 19th-century settlement times. At his death in 1951, an obituary reported:

> "*Winnebago Chief Dies At The Dells*
>
> *Wisconsin Dells, Wis. — (AP) — Albert Yellow Thunder revered chief of the Winnebago Indian tribe and a Spanish American war veteran died Thursday following a heart attack. The 73 year old tribe leader was well known throughout the middle west as a principal figure in the Dells Standing Rock Indian ceremonials each summer. He and Mrs. Yellow Thunder had been married 51 years. Other survivors are 10 children and three grandchildren*." (Sheboygan Press, 5 Oct 1951, p. 13.)

[10] Note that “Fox Point” remains on current Wisconsin maps as the name for the smaller companion bluff that lies just to the northwest (also sometimes called “Pody Bluff” among locals), but Albert Thunder clearly intends to assign primary “Fox” identification to Louis’ Bluff. No other geographic feature with similar “Fox” associations is found along the entire length of the Wisconsin riverway.

## APPENDIX B: ELIZABETH WALKLIN AND HER FAMILY

The Walklin family name is among the oldest in Oxfordshire, spanning the records of more than five centuries. The Oxfordshire Walklins of Elizabeth Walklin (Dupless) are particularly linked to the vicinity of Cumnor, in the former domain of the Earl of Abingdon, lying virtually within view of the splendid college towers on the western outskirts of Oxford. The family line of Elizabeth Walklin can be partially traced through records of the Cumnor church[1] and a family history prepared years later by one of Elizabeth's cousins in South Dakota.[2] The subsequent family history in Wisconsin is traceable in fragmentary territorial census and land records, particularly for Waukesha (earlier called "Prairieville"; before 1846, part of Milwaukee Co.), Sauk, and Juneau Counties.

Like much of Europe at the turn of the 19th century, Oxfordshire and surrounding counties were gripped by the Industrial Revolution, compounding the miseries of a dying feudal system that had ruled British peasant life since the middle ages. The rampant exploitations and dislocations of this period are most famously documented in the works of Dickens and Marx, but no less eloquently in the swollen passenger lists of immigrant ships bound for the Americas with the "tired...poor...huddled masses, yearning to breathe free; the wretched refuse of your teeming shore..." Elizabeth E. Walklin, then nine years old, was one such immigrant, crossing to America in 1836 with her parents and two younger siblings.



Esther East Walklin, mother of Elizabeth

Elizabeth's parents were James T(hompson?) Walklin (born in 1803) and Esther East (born about 1809 to Samuel and Elizabeth East of Owlington, also in Hill End), who were married at Cumnor on July 18, 1825 (witnesses: William Woodcock and Elizabeth East). It is recorded that only James could write his name. In the year of emigration, their young family apparently consisted of Elizabeth (b. 1827), her younger brother Edwin (b. 1833), and an infant sister. It was during their 1836 voyage that the family struck up acquaintance with the young French emigrant Louis Dupless, bound for Louisiana, and told him of their intended destination in Wisconsin. However, further details of the voyage or the family's first years in the Americas are unknown.

Elizabeth's paternal grandparents were Thomas Walklin Sr. (b. 1775, d. 1856) and Elizabeth (*maiden name?*) Walklin (b. 1777 Seacourt, d. 1851). Thomas Sr. was identified in 1821 as a laborer, residing at that time at a cottage and garden at Hill End in the Parish of Cumnor (where he is reported in the "Poor Rate Assessments" as being in arrears on his rentals to the Earl of Abingdon). He is also identified as a laborer at Filchampstead (presumably the cottage and garden at Hill End referred to above) when he was granted a prayer book by the parish Vicar in 1807, and again in 1810 when a Bible was granted to young James Walklin, "son of Thomas Walklin senior, laborer." By 1842, both Thomas Sr. and wife Elizabeth were recorded as living in the Cumnor poorhouse, and from the time of his wife's death in 1851 Thomas Sr. was designated a pauper.

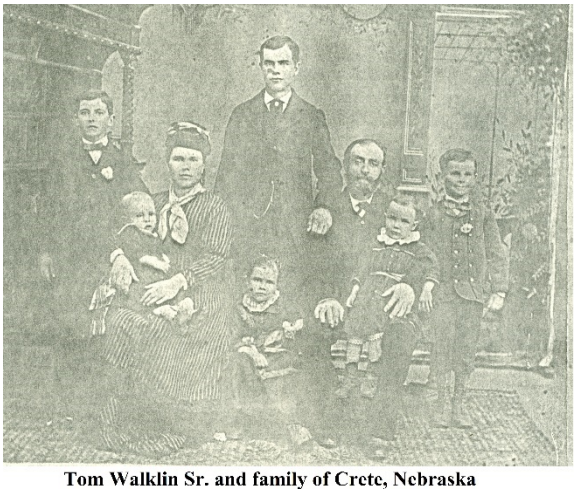
By 1821, Thomas Sr. and Elizabeth had six children -- William (age 19), James (age 18), Thomas Jr. (age 13, born Christopher, but later apparently the namesake for their first child, b. Apr. 7, 1799, d. Feb. 18, 1805), Mary (age 10), Martha (age 7), and Silence (age 4) -- living at Hill End, as recorded in the parish census.[3] In the same year, the 18-year old James is apparently occupying cottage and land at Froghole la near Wood End in Cumnor village (where he is listed as two shillings and sixpence in arrears). The reference to "land" indicates that James had already taken up a career in farming, as his subsequent life in Wisconsin was to confirm.

Thomas Walklin Sr.'s second son, James T. Walklin (b. 1803), was the first member of the family to set sail for America, embarking in 1836 with his wife Esther and three children for the remote Wisconsin territory of the "Old Northwest." The region was just opening up to settlement after the 1832 Black Hawk War had largely extinguished the threat of further Indian hostilities. Just how and when the Walklins arrived and established themselves in the Waukesha region is unknown. Common immigrant routes in those days passed through New York or Quebec City, thence on to the Great Lakes for passage to the leading inland ports at Milwaukee or Chicago, and foot or stage travel beyond. Arriving immigrant family often stayed with relatives or former neighbors from "the old country," picking up whatever jobs were available, while the head of household hired a guide to scout the surrounding countryside by horseback for suitable land to claim. The usual first steps were construction of a "claim shanty," barely sufficient to cover a little rude furniture, then acquisition of an oxen "breaking-team" for the arduous task of breaking ground (perhaps 10-20 acres per year), until a garden and fields, frame house, and other improvements could eventually be added.[4] Formal land patents from the newly established Milwaukee Land Office were not

required before 1839, and earlier claimants may well have further delayed legalizing (and paying for) their pre-emption claims until the increasing pressures of settlement forced action. Walklin's later appointment by the Old Settlers Club of Waukesha[5] to resolve priority claims of early settlement in Eagle township indicates (as does Dupless family history) that he was indeed there from about 1836 onwards. Whatever the sequence of these earliest events, James acquired the patent (document of first-time transfer) for his first land purchase on March 3, 1843, consisting of 80 acres in Sec. 2 (E-1/2 of the SE-1/4) of T5N R16E, in what was to become Eagle township, just west of Mukwanago in the far southwestern corner of the future Waukesha County. Three years later, on July 1, 1846, he acquired patent to the adjoining 40 aces in Sec. 35 (SW-1/4 of the SE-1/4) of T6N R17E. Another 40 acres was purchased by the time the earliest plat-map of Waukesha Co. was published in 1859, showing the 160-acre J. T. Walklin farmstead in Sec. 2 of Eagle township. The Walklin children must have developed an especially close relationship in the shared isolation and tribulations of these pioneer days, until Louis Dupless arrived to take 20-year old Elizabeth with him to Louis' Bluff in the spring of 1848.

Other close relatives of James T. Walklin were also to follow his lead to Wisconsin. His elder brother William remained in England and died there about 1831, leaving a widow Mary (Fisher) Walklin (d. 1855 in England) and five sons (William, b. 1823; Thomas, b. 1825; Michael, b. 1830; Matthew; Frances, b. 1834) who went to the Abingdon workhouse in 1841. Of these, the fourth son, Matthew (b. Feb. 4, 1832), remained in England until 1852, then emigrated to the Honey Creek area of Sauk County Wisconsin, close to his cousins Elizabeth and Edwin, who had in the meantime settled near Louis' Bluff, just across the Juneau county line. Matthew subsequently married Mary Patterson (b. Aug. 23, 1869), daughter of John and Sarah Patterson of Mukwanago, within a few miles of the Eagle township farm where his uncle James T. had lived since at least 1843. Thus, tight family connections linked the Eagle, Honey Creek, and Lyndon branches of the Wisconsin Walklins, all of whom had grown up among the Cumnor cottages near Oxford. Matthew's family remained in Sauk Co. through the 1860s hops boom and 1870s railroad boom, but subsequently left Wisconsin in 1879 for Hamlin County, South Dakota, where he became a prominent landholder in Castlewood township on the banks of the Sioux River. The seven Matthew Walklin children born in Sauk Co. [Annie (Cole), John, Mary

(Bartholomew), Matthew, Libbie, Frank] and two later born in Hamlin Co. (Edwin, Sarah) became ancestors of Walklins found in South Dakota today.


Tom Walklin Sr. and family of Crete, Nebraska

Another line of immigrant Walklins was descended from another "Thomas Walklin" who was born October 18, 1841 in England, probably another nephew of James T. through younger brother Thomas (born Christopher). This Thomas Walklin came to Wisconsin with his wife Fannie (Nee Woodcock, born about 1848; identified in the 1861 Cumnor census as "Fanny," fourth child of William and Sarah Woodcock of Dean Court cottage) and is identified in the 1880 census as a "Sexton" (church official overseeing property) living at Crete, Nebraska, in close proximity to Elizabeth's younger brother Edwin, who was then age 47 and employed as a "Machine Agent" at Johnson Creek, Nebraska (also in Saline Co.). The children of Thomas and Fannie Walklin -- John W. (b. 1869), Matthew S. (b. 1875), and Edwin S. (b. 1878) -- became progenitors of the several Nebraska Walklins of recent times, whereas Edwin and Mary C. Walklin apparently died childless.

**Footnotes for Appendix B**

[1] http//:www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/external/cumnor/documents. Many other details can be found on this exquisite website of the Bodleian Library.

[2] Biography of Matthew Walklin, from "Memorial and Biographical Record; An Illustrated Compendium of Biography, Containing a Compendium of Local Biography, including Biographical Sketches of Prominent Old Settlers and Representative Citizens of South Dakota..." (G. A. Ogle & co., Chicago, 1898), pp. 416-417.

[3] Another "James Walklin" (age 37, presumably a nephew of Thos. Walklin Sr.), was at the same time living in the nearby Stroud cottages (Botley Pound) with his wife Mary (age 41) and children Thomas (age 12), William (age 8), Martha (age 7), James (age 5), and Sarah (age 2), and another "Thomas Walklin" (age 19) was recorded as a servant for John Costar in Whitler. Thus, there were at least four distinct "Thomas Walklins" and three "James Walklins" living near Abingdon in 1820, rendering some identifications tenuous. Those in Elizabeth's direct line are unambiguously numbered 2932 (Thomas) and 2936 (James) in the cumulative Cumnor parishioners index:
www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/external/cumnor/families/walklin.htm

[4] See the account of neighbor Edwin Allen (James T. Walklin's later father-in-law) in the Biographical Sketches, Town of Genesee, History of Waukesha County (1880):
www.linkstothepast.com/waukesha/biosgenesee.html

[5] "History of Waukesha County" (Western Historical Company, Chicago, 1880);

Old Settlers Club Waukesha County, Wisconsin; original Waukesha County Residents - Waukesha County WI (linkstothepast.com)

## APPENDIX C: DUPLESS CIVIL WAR LETTERS



William Griffing ("Griff") -- Spared & Shared Webmaster

In June of 2021, a treasure trove of Civil War-era letters between Louis and Elizabeth Dupless appeared on the website, "***Spared and Shared: Saving American History One Letter at a Time***," courtesy of webmaster William Griffing. Griffing's inspiration is to offer Civil War memorabilia dealers a free "transcription service," thereby increasing the interest, accessibility, and marketability of their letters in return for permission to freely post the transcription and a digital copy of the original letter on the website. He normally has no inkling where the letters came from, nor where they end up. But at the end of day, the letters are "spared" (from disposal when the family storage chest no longer seems worth the moving cost) and "shared" with the world-wide web.

The Dupless collection consists of fifteen letters from Louis to Elizabeth and one ("Letter 15") return letter from Elizabeth, all sent during Louis' brief service with Company G of the 6th Wisconsin Infantry during the final stages of the Civil War, Nov. 29, 1864-July 14, 1865. The letters include descriptions of a close encounter with Abraham Lincoln at Petersburg and suggest his presence at or near the final surrender of General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Courthouse. But they also expose the financial and emotional anxieties of Louis and Elizabeth as they attempt to grapple with the personal limitations and circumstances of separation.

We summarize below some background and details of each letter from Louis as transcribed by Griffing. We also attempt a full transcription of the one letter from Elizabeth that was left untranscribed on the *Spared & Shared* website, with the scan of Elizabeth's original handwritten letter included for comparison.

[A note on spelling: Spelling was not a strong suit of these pioneers. In the one letter from Elizabeth, she clearly signs her own name as "Elizabeth," consistent with what is written on her tombstone (and used throughout this book). However, Louis variously addresses her as "Lis" or "Liz." In the website transcriptions, her surname is mistakenly given as "Walkin." Louis always writes his own name as "Dupless," but the website transcriptions give it as "DuPless."

Letter 1 (from Louis to Elizabeth): Madison, Wisconsin, December 3, 1864

**Synopsis:** In this brief letter, written about a month after being "mustered in" at Camp Randall, Louis first reports on his schemes to escape guard duty and gain a furlough, then includes instructions on how his expected $580 payment for "substitution" should be allocated among thosel to whom he owes money.

**Griffing Transcription:**

*Dear Lis,*

*I am in Madison well and in pretty good spirits but I would have liked to see you once again before I left this place. I arrived here last night dark and this morning was called on to go on guard but told the sergeant to let me alone as I was going to see if I would get a furlough. I went to the Colonel of the camp, Cha____ by name, but he told me that I would have to write to the Secretary of War in Washington to get one as it was not in his power to let me go. So here I am. Shall I go without seeing you or the children again? No, no I will not, but how will I help myself? I don't know at present but I will write again tomorrow.*



Camp Randall Arch in reception for Civil War veterans

*Sunday, I am in town because I bribed the sergeant to let me go. It is very sharp here at present because so many substitutes run away. I sent five hundred and fifty dollars to join and pay Fred Marten 1 hundred, Topping 25 dollars, and John Shultz gets 73 dollars. If Shultz wants it, he may have 12.50 dollars more which is Frank Repler's money. Let him give you his note stamped. You understand for the amount and it is right. I will write more tomorrow and in hopes in seeing you again.*

*I remain affectionately, Louis F. DuPless*
*Kiss the children and tell them to be good*

Letter 2 (from Louis to Elizabeth): Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, December 30, 1864

**Synopsis:** Now in full uniform, Louis muses on how "our circumstances compelled me" to accept "a few hundred dollars [for which] I may have to lay down my life, may never see you or the children again." He reiterates instructions for how various debts should be repaid, "and then I shall meet my fate cheerfully -- whatever it is...I am determined to do my duty."

## Griffing Transcription:


PRIVATE, U.S. INFANTRY,
FATIGUE MARCHING ORDER.

*Dear Lis,*

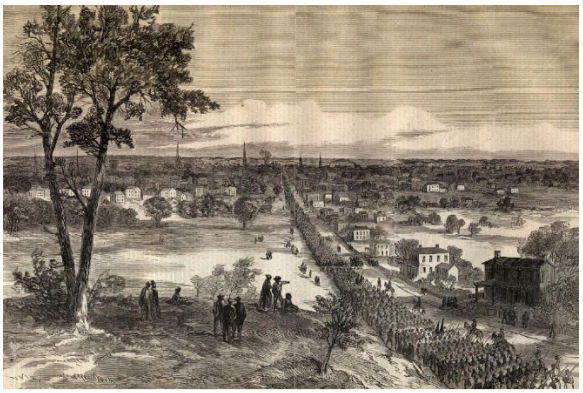
*At last I have put on the blue coat and may I never be sorry for it. I cannot help it for our circumstances compelled me to take this step. You may believe that it cost me a hard struggle to do it but I believe it may turn out for the best. When I think that for the sake of a few hundred dollars I may have to lay down my life, may never see you or the children again, I could in my inmost heart curse this selfish world, and wish then what might have been avoided, to everlasting damnation. But enough! I went as substitute for the sum of five hundred and eighty dollars (580). It was considerable trouble to get in but I managed it pretty well, I believe. Tomorrow we will have to go to Madison and will not receive a cent till we leave this place. I shall take the money to Madison and send it by Express to you—very likely 550 dollars—to Killbourne and send my clothes likewise there and I believe that by Monday you may look for the money.*

*Pay Fred Marten and Topping at once, and how o use the rest of the money I shall direct you in my next letter. We will pay up everyone and then I shall meet my fate cheerfully—whatever it is. Look out to home for our interest and don't let the folk do to our premises as they see fit. Get for yourself and the children all necessary clothes. Don't suffer for you will have over a hundred dollars for your own use. Try and keep the children under subjection, but bless their little hearts, don't find always fault with them. Kiss them for me and tell them I want them to be good children. I want them to learn their books and obey their mother. I shall feel pleasure in hearing they do.*

*I shall write again I think by Friday when I think I shall send the money. My heart is full. I want to stop writing and I think I shall write calmer next time. I will and shall try to see you before I leave and if I have to go without furlough. But you may come to Madison if I cannot come and see you. We will see. As I said before, I write again on Friday. I am well. Hope you and the children are so likewise. Greet our neighbors that is human. Let the rest slide.*

*I wish I was with you all but don't think I feel sorry for the step I took. My teeth is set and I shall meet my future destiny with an unflinching heart. I am determined to do my duty. Greet Marten's folks and all our friends heartily. Receive my love for you and the children and may God help us. Remember me kindly and I shall always think of you with a loving heart.*

*Your loving husband, — Louis F. DuPless*



Civil War camp near Petersburg, Virginia

Letter 3 (from Louis to Elizabeth): Camp before Petersburg, Virginia, January 5, 1865

**Synopsis:** Louis laments bitterly that he has still received no reply from Elizabeth, remarking that "Even if you are sick, you may get somebody to write for you" and "End this suspense or I shall go mad..." After further remonstrations he concludes, "If I wrong you no doubt, I receive my [just] desserts."

## Griffing Transcription:

*Dear Elisabeth!*

*I do not know what to make of it that I receive no letters from you. How you can let me wait so long without hearing from you and the children is beyond my comprehension. Even if you are sick, you may get somebody to write for you. It is cruel to neglect writing and if even you only send one line it would set a person's mind at ease. I cannot tell you how disappointed I felt when every day letters arrive and none for me. It begins to create talk even in the company. It is a shame that whatever it is that keeps any letters from reaching me is not known to me. Let the matter be what it is, let it be known to me or by all the Gods in heaven I may take a step and appear in Wisconsin that will make the living tremble. If you are sick, let it ne known to me. If you are dead, which God forbid, is there no neighbor with a spark of human feeling left that will tell me the truth?*

*End this suspense or I shall go mad, for by heaven, I can not bear it much longer. I am in good health but in a awful temper so that one of our companies felt the power of my hand. I forgot to mention in my last letter that I let Gottliev Guyer have five dollars which amount you may collect of the old man Guyer. The old man Guyer wrote to me that you expected to find my likeness in my pants pocket. I wrote no such thing to you but saw I said I sent you a box of Cheeseman Pills and I would send you may likeness as soon as possible. If I receive no letter from you this week, I will have to stop writing to you and trust to God that I may someday return and see my poor children once more.*

*If God never had put them in the worked I do not know but it would have been better for I must think that if you are alive, you must have very little feeling for the father of your children. If you can account for your neglect, may God forgive you—I cannot. God bless my poor children and keep them pure and that I may see them once more in this life is the wish of their father.*

*— Louis F. DuPless*

*I don't care to write anymore, therefore I leave this space vacant. If I wrong you no doubt, I receive my deserts.*

## Letter 4 (from Louis to Elizabeth): In Front of Petersburg, January 6, 1865

**Synopsis:** Louis has finally received a reply (evidently penned by renter John Gebhart) and says "I feel terrible about you being sick as you do not state in your letter that you are out of danger." He reports on his generally good relations with other soldiers, stating "I felt it all along that I would have to be a soldier and here I am and shall do my duty." He expresses sympathy over some of the news he has learned, and mentions, "If you cannot write, let John Gebhart try again. He done very well in the letter I received." He adds other ideas for improving communications, expresses hope to soon receive a promised "likeness" (perhaps that shown on page 26), and closes with "Kiss the children for me and may God bless you and let you soon recover is the wish of your affectionate husband."

**Griffing Transcription:**

*Dear Elisabeth,*

*I received your letter dated the 29th December yesterday while I was on guard and wrote these lines after roll call—that is [when] our names is called. You may judge that I feel terrible about you being sick as you do not state in your letter that you are out of danger. Neither do I know the nature of your sickness but I can guess it. May God help you. That is all I can say. I suspected as much. This was the first letter I received and you may guess that I was not in a very amiable mood so that one of our company felt the weight of my hand which is forbidden to do, but I have first rate officers and I am well liked by all. I am a soldier and drilling is only play for me. I am not sorry that I am a soldier, I felt it all along that I would have to be a soldier and here I am and shall do my duty.*



**Scene at Siege of Petersburg (1864-1865)**

*But you and the children, you are troubling me. I always think of you and the little ones when I stand in the night time alone on guard. But I am glad to think that you are well off in worldly matters and that you and the children are sound asleep when I am walking my lonesome watch, But I am cheerful, full of life, generally in good heart. If you only keep in good health, I will do well enough.*

*You write about Joseph Weber wanting 40 dollars, but that won't do because I consider my first duty is to look to your welfare. If I was to home, I would help the poor fellow, but I don't know I may be taken out of this world and I would not want you to put the money on a insecure place and he has enough to do with the debts he has on hand. I will write to hi.*

*I am sorry for Mrs. Shultz. I send a letter to him. If you let him have the money, you must take notes from him. That is the way to do business. They must be stamped.*

*You was mistaken in regard of likeness. I sent none and there is no opportunity. You see here nothing but soldiers. I have seen no citizen since I arrived here. Sometimes I wish to see something else than the blue coats and the everlasting drum beating and bugle. You give my best respects to Genhart and wife, hoping they are well and doing the best for themselves as well as for us. Did you get any letter from your father or his wife? What is the news otherwise? Has your brother come to see you since I left or not?*

*Send the letters of Franz Depler to me and if there come any more, send them to me as soon as possible. Write to me again as soon sas possible and if you can do no better, write only one line saying I and the children are well—but write. If you cannot write, let John Gebhart try again. He done very well in the letter I received. Don't let me wait again so long for a line from you. You may judge by the enclosed letter of my feelings. I would not send it off to you. I know it was a hard letter but I felt very bitter. Don't let Weber take any letter out of the office for you. If he keeps them that length of time, he may leave them in the Post Office. I think Schultz might see that you get the letter sometimes. Send somebody every week to Lyndon for letters if fair weather. If not, there is no need as I have nothing important to write.*

*And now I must leave you in the hands of God hoping you may soon be well. Don't trouble yourself about your likeness but send it when you can in a month or two. Kiss the children for me and may God bless you and let you soon recover is the wish of your affectionate husband, — Louis F. Dupless*

<u>Letter 5 (from Louis to Elizabeth): In front of Petersburg near Hatcher's Run, Feb. 28, 1865</u>




**Synopsis:** Although his troop is stalled in muddy conditions, Louis expresses his delight in receiving the "likeness," liquor, and other sundries of a box delivery. He addresses each of the children ("Freddy," "Emmy," "Caroline," "Thresa") in loving terms, then adds, "don't you fret too much about me. If I keep my health, I hope to see you soon again. Still I expect a desperate struggle yet with the Johnnies this spring." He closes with a salutation to his Lyndon neighbors: "Greet the neighbors that is kind to you from me, and tell them Louis remembers a kindness done his family while he is absent, but let the mean ones look out for thunder when I return."

**Griffing Transcription:**

*Dear Elisabeth!*



**Soldier's hut, Petersburg battlefield**

*God be praised I am well and hearty laying here in our quarters—little log huts which we had to build again. No one can tell how long we will be here. That depends on circumstances but as we have here now plenty of rainy weather, the roads are bad and [there is] no prospect of moving. No matter though. What will be the next move, we are all in the hands of the Almighty. He will shape things in the best way and even what looks bad to us may in the end be for our good. I hope you will be reconciled, trust in God, and hope for the best.*

*I hope likewise that you and the children are well. This causes me a great deal of anxiety—especially if I get no letter from you often enough. If you all were well, I could be contented. I should not be troubled much. I have no fear for death and if I feel a longing for you and the children, I am strong minded enough to suppress all weak thoughts and stand up bravely against bodily enemies as well as enemies of the mind (I mean my thoughts).*

*I received the box with your likeness, tobacco, a small flask of liquor from Fred Marten, yarn &c. and pleased I was, you may be sure. Your likeness—I have before me now—is the cause of my getting the liquor. All boxes are examined. They found the liquor and intended to confiscate it but the Provost Marshal knowing me and the sergeant of my company being just at Division Headquarters where everything is examined, he wrote to me [the following:] "Soldier, I could not find in my heart to confiscate the bottle with liquor after looking at the picture." Signed, Provost Marshal. It looks sad but I love it. I carry it in my shirt pocket right over my heart. If a ball, which God forbid, should pierce my heart, it would have to go through your likeness first.*

*My dear little Freddy. He looks well. First rate. God bless you, my son. May the day come soon that I will have the pleasure of folding you to my heart. I think Freddy will have to bring you two apples when I get home, but one fourth of the time is gone. Three months are past—only 9 remaining. Be hopeful. Franky, have you been thinking of papa often? If so, I know you must have been a good boy. Come my little man, be good and papa will be pleased and be a kind pa to you. Now try and do good. Learn your book and prayers well.*

*Emmy dear, your little face is below me. I wish I could see you and have a talk with you. I know you would be a good little girl if they don't plague you. Does little Emmy wish for her papa? Can you pray and beg God to send your papa back to you? Caroline I know is good and loving [her] father. My good girl, do please me, and learn well. How much I should like when I come back to find you a good scholar. Theresa, you are the oldest of you and you can be a good girl if you*

*have a mind too. Won't you please your father by being not only good, but very good. You must learn well. Whenever you have time, you must learn to write. How I should love to get a letter from you. Learn well and a father's blessing rest on your head. Do Theresa dear, do what Ma tells you and I shall be glad. And you all dear children think of father, pray for him and God may be merciful to send me back to you.*

*Now dear Lis, don't you fret too much about me. If I keep my health, I hope to see you soon again. Still I expect a desperate struggle yet with the Johnnies this spring. Even if they are pushed to the wall, they will not give it up so they are deserting fast, but we will have to fight and hard. Anyhow, I should if I was in their place. That is my nature. I would give battle to the last. I can't help thinking sometimes that they may take a bold stand to the last moment till the spring opens, when they see that we are ready to pounce on them, knowing their cause is failing. Gen. Sherman driving them before him up to our lines, I sometimes think they ,ay knock under but it is doubtful.*

*We have much rain here now so there is no likely chance of any move at present and by rights we ought to lay 2 months inactive yet/ Wagons sink up to the axles in mire. I never believed this was such a peculiar soil here. [ ] fooled, and a loaded wagon sinks down in a twinkling of the eyes before you expect it. It is a sandy clay.*

*If you would send the children's likenesses, send them if possibly without frame. It is easier carried, or send them all in one picture which I think is better yet. Did you get them 8 dollars of Guyer yet? I expect to get one month's pay in a day or so which is needed because our food is pretty scanty that now I wish God will take care of you all and trust in Him. As for me, believe me, I shall always be kind to you as far as my nature allows me and do the best for you I can. Greet the neighbors that is kind to you from me, and tell them Louis remembers a kindness done his family while he is absent, but let the mean ones look out for thunder when I return.*

*And now farewell. Remember me kindly and kiss the little ones that have been good for me.*

*Your affectionate husband, — Louis F. DuPless*

*I shall try to send my likeness in my next letter. If you send anything to me, write thus: Louis F. DuPless, 6th Regt. Wis. Veteran Vol., 3rd Brigade, 5th Corps, Washington D. C.*

Letter 6 (from Louis to Elizabeth): In camp before Petersburg, March 23, 1865

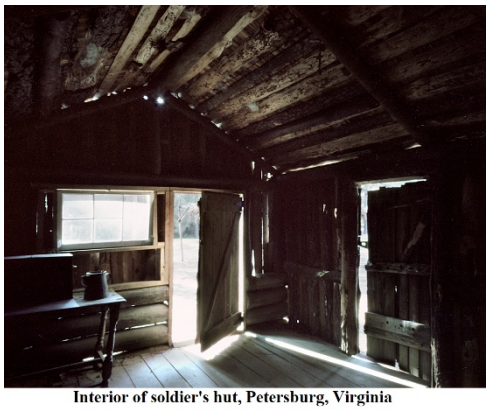
**Synopsis:** Still stuck in muddy conditions near Petersburg, Virginia, Louis writes a chatty letter describing the tolerable conditions of camp and his satisfaction at having completed one-third of his expected year-long commitment. He complains that a

certain "John Schultz" has not answered his letters, and he gives Elizabeth further advice on how to handle monies that are received or owed. He closes with greetings to the children ("My little chickens, how are you all?") and hopes that all are well at home.

**Griffing Transcription:**

*Dear Lis,*

*During a tremendous storm do I write this letter. The wind unroofed a good many of our cabins—the sand blinding a person almost. But I sit tolerably comfortable in my lodge, my tent mate reading and I writing, the coffee pot on the fire, no fear of any disturbance—only the sand coming flying into the cracks. Our cabin is logs with tent roof, fireplace, and bunk. Comfortably I assure you. On a shelf to the left of me lays about 6 pounds good beef and plenty of crackers, pork, and before me a shell with tin cups, plates and knives, fork and such things. I write on a small table made of a cracker box and have my pipe and tobacco near me. Over my head hangs my rifle in the peak of the rook and a small shelf almost touching my head lays our dress coats, hats, papers, and that small box Fred Marten sent. By and by there was no paper nor envelopes in the box. I have plenty now. From this short description of my situation you may judge that I am pretty well located. O yes! there is nothing wanting but—but—no—no, I would not say, "But you and the children" because the surroundings would not agree. But I must say that if I had this little shanty with your and our dear children in it in a place where peace and love between neighbors rules, I dare say we would have a happy day.*



Interior of soldier's hut, Petersburg, Virginia

*But good courage, by the time you have this letter, 4 month s of my time will be gone—only 8 remaining, and who knows but peace may bless us before that. I am of the opinion that I will remain here for a month at least but no one can say how soon there may be a move. But it is impossible to bring wagons or artillery forward. They will sink in the ground axle deep. It is a peculiar soil here—clay mixed with sand. I like Wisconsin much better than I do Virginia—at least all I have seen of it. The land appears like going to Lyndon Station—lots of pine and the land rolling. But on this pine land, the soil is clay which surprised me very much. Water in every hollow and if you go 200 rods in any direction, you have water for your coffee.*

*I have been drinking my coffee and resume my pen. I did not get any letter yet of anybody else but you, but no matter. Only I think Mr. John Schultz might have wrote before this. I think I should not think so much of him as I did. Very likely now that I am gone, somebody else is more in his graces. Let them go it. I would*

*have been satisfied if he had wrote one word. I shall not correspond with him until I receive news from him. You know me and my ways. Those to remember you, that as soon as possible you will see, that everything is burnt around n spring. Get the neighbors together and don't depend on Gephart of doing it. I wrote a letter to Ranny. If you will be guided by his advice about moneys, if you have any, I am satisfied. You must know that here I am unable to say how money stands or what is best to do. You may just as well keep the money in your hands. Get United States bills and keep them if you see fit. Still if lenders come, you may say you took bonds for your spare money or do as you have a mind to. I am perfectly satisfied with whatever you do.*

*I have nothing particular to write but I love to talk to you and always imagine I see the little faces of the children turned up to yours while you are reading. I can think how they ask questions and likewise I think that getting a letter from me and hearing from me ought to be a pleasure ad put you in a good humor for a day or so. My little chickens, how are you all? I am well. I hope you are. I guess you are wishing for summer and warm weather because the house is not as warm as when your father is home. But hold on, next winter the old fireplace shall steam again. And what do you think I was going to say? A barrel of apples in the house to roast them at our pleasure. Would that be nice? We will see. You remember me on it when I come home.*

*We have to be our own cook. I had a good beef soup today but don't imagine it to be like home. Still have fried some excellent beef steaks sometimes. We are living like fighting cocks now. We have plenty to eat now. I hope my dear Lis you and children are well. Take care of yourself and them. That is all I ask. Your affectionate husband and father — Louis F. DuPless*

Letter 7 (from Louis to Elizabeth): Front of Petersburg, Monday, March 27, 1865



**Synopsis:** This letter offers gripping details of the Battle of Fort Stedman, the decisive Union victory of the Siege of Petersburg in the waning weeks of the Civil War. A highlight of the aftermath was arrival of President Abraham Lincoln on horseback to review the marching troops at a distance of about 60 feet from Louis, who "took a fair look at him." The troops remained ready for further action, but as Louis writes, "Don't you tremble for me at all.... I should judge the rebel leaders must know their last day is come." The letter closes with exhortation to "Cheer up and be proud you have a brave husband."

## Griffing Transcription:

*Dear Liz,*

*I am writing these lines in good health hoping you will receive them likewise in good spirits.*

*Our lines were attacked on Friday night by a heavy force of rebels and our lines broken and 3 forts taken. Our troops, in short order, got on the ground, closed on the Johnnies, retook the forts and gave them a handsome flailing. The battle lasted more or less on the line till Saturday night at dark.*

*We were marched (our 5th Corps) near the scene of action in heavy marching order—that is, all our traps on our backs—and in the afternoon passed review before our President Abraham Lincoln. I liked the appearance of him first rate and he is by no means such [a] homely fellow as the pictures [of] him. I marched within 4 rods of him and took a pretty fair look at him. He was on horseback of course.*



**Scene from the movie "Lincoln," depicting the events near Ft. Stedman on March 24, 1865.**

*After review we went closer to the battleground but did not come in fire. We are in reserve at present and have to go wherever we are needed along the whole line. We are in camp again but are ready to march on a moment's notice. I do not anticipate any great danger now. The Johnnies got a severe lesson but I can not say how many they lost. There are so many different yarns about it. Our boys give 'em fits. It is said what Lincoln and the ladies thought when they reviewed us under the thunder of cannons and roar of musketry, I guess, was this; poor fellows. How many of you will lay low before long. There is no doubt there was the human feeling touched—especially as one of our company, right in front of the President while we were marching along under our torn and tattered colors, broke rank and knelt right before the ladies coach. He is half-witted only, or light-headed.*

*I cannot write [more] particulars because we don't know every moment may call us and I have to bring the letter quite a ways. Don't you tremble for me at all. I am in fighting trim and don't fear anything. Remember what I wrote to you in my last letter. Don't believe any yarns. I believe though that there is no trouble at present. I should judge the rebel leaders must know*



*their last day is come. Our army is in good spirits. The rebels are desperate and if a wonder don't safes them and a great fortune of war favors them, in three months they are done for and in less time.*

*The weather is splendid. I hope it will remain so, If we have to fight, it better be done now before they strengthen themselves and warm weather commences. God help you and our children and protect all. I know he will me. Cheer up and be proud you have a brave husband. We all are in God's hands. Bless you and our dear children. Your affectionate husband, — Louis F. DuPless*

*After finished writing everything is still on our line. I think the rebels have their belly's full. But some think that they will leave their lines soon, Richmond and all.*

Letter 8 (from Louis to Elizabeth): In camp, April 10, 1865

**Synopsis:** This short letter begins with announcement that "Gen. Robert Lee surrendered yesterday with all his forces to us." He reports that on March 30th, "Fearful scenes I went through...We was surrounded -- that is, our regiment -- and lost 113 men. One-third." He closes with, "God protected me to be with you...I am in a hurry. Peace will be soon, I hope."



**Surrender of Robt. E. Lee to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse (Apr. 9, 1865)**

**Griffing Transcription:**




*Dear wife and children!*

*I am well and hearty and hope you are likewise. I got safe through all danger and as Gen. Robert Lee surrendered yesterday with all his forces to us, I expect peace will be established and I hope that in 2 months or sooner I will be with you, God willing. You see Providence protected me so far. Hope for the best.*

*Fearful scenes I went through—one the 30th of March. We was surrounded—that is, our regiment—and lost 113 men. One-third. Next day at it again and so on. God protected me to be with you. Greet all good friends.*

*I am in a hurry. Peace will be soon, I hope. I don't see how any more battles can be fought by us as Virginia has laid down arms. We are waiting for orders and resting as our Army Corps is very needy of it. Move soon. God help you and me. Yours affectionately, — Louis F. DuPless*

Letter 9 (from Louis to Elizabeth): Three miles from Washington D. C., May 13, 1865



**Synopsis:** Louis complains bitterly about having to endure a long stall near Richmond, then a forced march (125 miles in 7 days), ending in a drenching storm with little fuel for warmth ("such a hard night I never experienced my whole lifetime"). "Damned be our Corps Commander General Griffin," he exclaims, and (after further details of the debacle), "Once more damned the Corps Commander...Curse him the day—double damn him." Turning to home affairs, Louis postpones dealing with some quarrel involving Mrs. Gebhart, but says, "I am well satisfied with your last letter and with the management of affairs...only let me alone with your woman troubles until I get home." He closes more cheerily with, "We ought to be grateful that there is a prospect of us meeting soon again, so let us rejoice and be thankful, and hope for good and better times and likewise that we may be able to make each other's path through life less thorny than formerly."



**General Charles Griffin (1825-1867)**

## Griffing Transcription:

*Dear Wife!*

*A soldier's life is a uncertain thing as you will see because when I wrote last I thought it strange if they should let us lay at Richmond as long as 10 days. Last Saturday we started from there and last night Friday we came here—a pretty fair*

*march of 125 miles, and that is a pretty long one in 7 days after such a hard campaign as we went through. On the night from Friday to Saturday, we suffered shamefully through rain and wind. I walked the ground the whole night wet through and such a hard night I never experienced my whole lifetime. We could not keep warm as we was scarce of fuel.*

*Damned be our Corps Commander General Griffin. He ought to had let some of us in camp an hour sooner and then we might have made us more comfortable. I had my blankets, rubber, and tent carried on the supply train—a privilege for me only—and the train did not get up that night and there I was without anything. The rest did not fare much better as the ground was soaking wet before they could pitch tents. Most all could not make fires, but I had a cup of coffee. Once more damned the Corps Commander. Many a soldier will have his health wrecked through him. Curse him the day—double damn him.*

*I do not know what will be the next move but expect in a short time to see home. I shall not be sorry as I suffered enough and wish to rest and be my own master again. I cannot be satisfied when I see things going on around me as they do but the short time I have to serve will soon be over.*

*I don't think I shall write to Gebhart as you requested me—that he was sorry and the like. I shall not trouble Gebhart nor be angry with him. All they need to do is what is right and I will be satisfied. I shall not quarrel nor trouble him, nor anybody else, but everyone must use us right or I shall clean 'em out. I hope you and the children are well and that things are going on otherwise satisfactory. I am well satisfied with your last letter and with the management of affairs generally and what should I grumble for to be sure, I ought to be satisfied and so I am—only let me alone with your woman troubles until I get home and then you may tell me all and everything as long and as many times as you want to. You have my love as well as the children's so therefore, you ought to be satisfied and I guess you are. I long to see you and the children but I do not think of such things too much. It would make me downhearted.*

*We ought to be grateful that there is a prospect of us meeting soon again, so let us rejoice and be thankful, and hope for good and better times and likewise that we may be able to make each other's path through life less thorny than formerly. Let us try and we may succeed.*

*So farewell to you all. I am in hopes to be home at my birthday. God bless you all and take care of you. Gebhart news not be in a stew. Tell him I have principle so there, let him be satisfied. Goodbye children. God bless you. You will soon see me, I hope. Be good and kind to each other. Farewell, dear Liz, and do the best you can and that is enough.*

*From your loving husband and father, — Louis F. DuPless*

Letter 10 (from Louis to Elizabeth): Near Washington D. C., May 18, 1865

**Synopsis:** Louis tries again to settle matters at home involving Mrs. Gebhart, advising "This is the last time I hope to write about her. Let it rest." He then relates details of yesterday's visit from Governor Lewis of Wisconsin, who reviewed the regiment and "had spoken to all -- President and Cabinet" about securing payments and final release for the soldiers. Smoldering pockets of rebellion ("a small cloud down in Texas and Mississippi") had delayed matters, but the Governor assured the troops "that the people of Wisconsin tendered us through him their gratitude that the state was proud of her sons and we should march to Madison, Wisconsin, with our arms and accoutrements and soon." Louis looks forward to being home for springtime and closes as usual with questions about the children and expressions of hope for the future.

## Griffing Transcription:

*Dear wife and children!*

*I am well and hearty, hoping you are the same, which is all I could wish as your welfare lays nigher my heart than my own. I consider it nothing but my duty to see that you are well provided for, even if it is a hard way of doing it a soldiering, but it was my choice and eve if anybody could buy my past experience, I would not sell it for a thousand dollars. But I hate to be trouble with trifles and therefore I had to write to you, what may appear unkind words. I was battling for life and death, and you only for a mere straw compared with mine. If Mrs. Gebhart used any unbecoming language to you, I hope you understand what I mean. She may answer for it. Let her look out. If anybody had the mark of God's anger on him or her, let her look to herself. God showed his mercy to us in keeping me safe through this war. This is the last time I hope to write about her. Let it rest.*

*We are resting here and we need it, I assure you. But my old iron frame stands it first rate. I am getting more fleshy than I have been and it needs to for one time I was all bone. I guess after two weeks or so I shall look well.*



Gov. James T. Lewis (1819-1904)

*Yesterday our Governor Lewis of Wisconsin was here and reviewed our regiment. He said that he had tried his best to get us home but all the answer he could get was as soon as possible we should go home. He had spoken to all—President and Cabinet—and he thought the day was not distant that we could go home. He had seen the Secretary of the Treasury that morning and was informed that he had fifty millions of dollars ready to pay us and expecting to receive the order to do so every moment. But there was a small cloud down in Texas and Mississippi and that as soon as that disappeared, we would go to our peaceful [homes]. That the people of Wisconsin tendered us through him their gratitude that the state was proud of her sons and we should march to Madison, Wisconsin, with our arms and accoutrements and soon. Now then, you may judge for yourself how we stand and how long it may take before I will be home. My opinion is this spark in Texas and Louisiana will soon disappear. Then we will go to Madison but it may take a week or two, or three before we get through there. Still I believe I will be home only birthday.*

*I foretold most everything correctly aforehand and I believe I will not shoot far from the mark now. But patience it will all come right. I think spring will soon make its appearance in earnest by you and I shall be pleased to be home soon as early spring is the time I like best to look at. How are the children working and learning? Well I hope. But I shall soon see for myself. I hope they obey their mother. If I ask you when I come home if you did, can you say yes in truth. If you cannot, try and do better so that you may say you was good most of the time. I don't expect if the worst comes to pass that I will have to stay longer than June. Then my idea is we will be home in short order. I expect to hear the order everyday to go home. May the day not be distant. I hope for your sake that things go on better than formerly and that there will be raised something. If there is not, there is more ways than one to get along in the world.*

*I must close and I hope the next time I write will be from Madison. I wish you all good health and spirits and don't be fretting. I guess you will have to make garden yourself. Hoping to be with you soon. I am yours always, — Louis F. DuPless*

Letter 11 (from Louis to Elizabeth): Washington D.C., May 31, 1865

**Synopsis:** Louis reports that the troops are still stalled in Washington "laying idle doing hardly anything." He exults (over-optimistically), "And now I can tell you with a glad heart...[that] we are to be mustered out here and to be sent to Madison and paid immediately," based on the assurances of Adjutant General Gaylord and Secretary of State Fairchild. Louis muses on the possibility that Elizabeth might come to see him in Madison before formal release, but judges that "for a woman to come in a soldier's camp where no doubt the men will be wild with drink or joy or some other such thing, would not be agreeable for a man of my temper." He laments the present sparse food rations in Washington, and remarks that if the situation persists in Madison, "I tell you, they are without money and if a soldier wants anything to eat or drink, he is bound to have it." He explains that delays occurred because "the Rebel General Kirby Smith held out longer than I thought." His letter closes with genial "Well, my little children, I will soon be with you again in a few weeks at latest and shan't we be all so glad?"



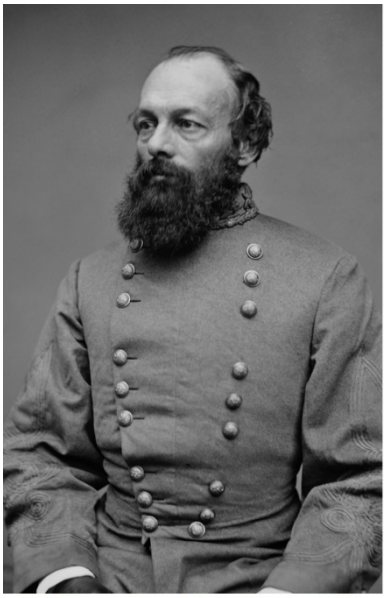
**Lucius Fairchild (1831- 1896)**

## Griffing Transcription:

*Dear Lis,*

*Here we are still and as far as I am concerned, well and hearty, hoping you and our children are in good health which is my earnest wish and only desire for you all to be so and in good spirits. We are laying idle doing hardly anything whatever—only one half hour dress parades evenings and every week once going on guard. But as the 12 neatest, cleanest dossiers out of 24 are always excused from doing even guard duty, I never done even that. Only slicked myself up, marched to the parade ground, and was sent back again to follow my own inclination which is to sleep, dream, in fact, do nothing. You see we have pretty good times but we want to go home. Home is our desire and nothing else will do us.*

*And now I can tell you with a glad heart and I believe you will be rejoiced to hear that we are coming home and soon. By the time you read this letter, I firmly believe I will be on the way to Wisconsin, if not before. We are only waiting to bring the necessary papers in order and then for home, which I firmly believe we be in—on the way, I mean—say about 3 days. We are to be mustered out here and to be sent to Madison and paid immediately and as the Adjutant General of the State of Wisconsin Gaylord [said] last Sunday—likewise, Secretary of State Fairchild—told us in a speech a great welcome awaits us in Wisconsin. I don't care about that—few do. I want my welcome when I come home. I don't care for empty show because I know that a soldier is not so much honored as they would have us believe. I should not think that you have any idea that if you'd hear that I was in Madison, you would come to see me. I wished you to remain at home till I come. I am anxious to see you and our dear children but you may judge that in Madison would be no room to be had, to have you anyways comfortable and for a woman to come in a soldier's camp where no doubt the men will be wild with drink or joy or some other such thing, would not be agreeable for a man of my temper. But if the soldiers knew that you was my wife, not the least insult would be offered and I rather think it is more pleasant to meet you and children at home, except it was you were to come in company with say, your father. But know we will not stay in Madison a week. It is for the town folks interest to see us home as quick as possible because if they expect us there over three days, the soldiers will play the deuce. I tell you, they are without money and if a soldier wants anything to eat or drink, he is bound to have it. We have not enough to eat now. A pound loaf a day which answers for two meals. Where is the third to come from? I may err but I believe in 14 days the latest of the 20th of June, I am with you.*



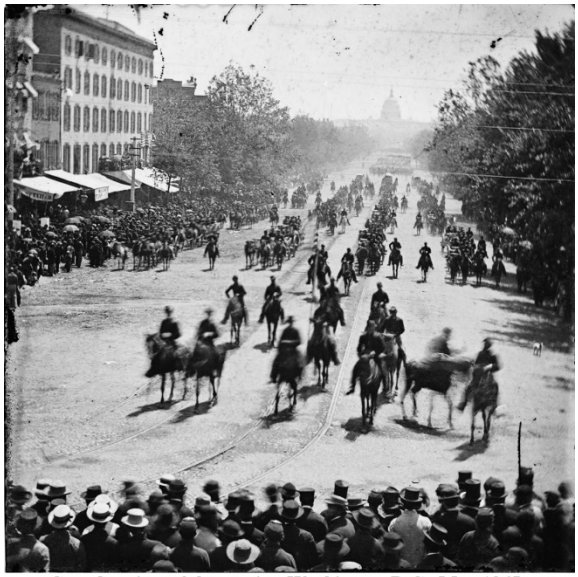
**E. Kirby Smith (1824-1893)**

*The Rebel General Kirby Smith held out longer than I thought he would else I should have been home by my birthday. No matter. I will see you soon. We must have patience. The band is playing now but I am disgusted with that soon.*

*A regiment left for home from our Corps yesterday. We have had some warm weather here and I hope you will have favorable weather by you so as to grow something, if it is only for Gebhart's sake. I hope he will do well. He need not to think that I shall make any trouble with him or his wife. Let them go the straight road and I shall do so likewise. I shall be just and do right to everybody. All they need to do is not fair and upright and let her not put on too many airs. I am coming.*

*I would like to hear from you and the children and I think you better write instantly. The letter will follow me. Well, my little children, I will soon be with you again in a few weeks at latest and shan't we be all so glad? I have been thinking*

*what I should bring home for you. I guess I shall have to let mother pick out the presents for you and I shall pay for them. I think if you have been good, brave children, I shall give you 5 dollars apiece. I will have that much money left I hope when I come out of my earnings. If you have not been good, what all I do then? My dear Lis, to you I guess I bring myself. That is all the present you need at present. For the rest we will see. Hoping to see you soon, as we count days now, not months. I am your affectionate husband, — Louis F. DuPless*



**Grand review of the armies, Washington D.C., May 1865**

Letter 12 (from Louis to Elizabeth): Washington D.C., June 6, 1865

**Synopsis:** Writing on his 44th birthday, Louis laments that "things don't work as favorable as I thought." Due to a rescheduled sequence for releasing ("mustering out") enlistees, he now expects release by the 4th of July, adding that "I think I would do better in haying and harvest and I am tired of this damned drone life." He judges that, "We all want to go home with the exception of some of the officers who draw large pay and would like to keep this track regiment in service." He has just been ordered to Louisville, Kentucky, which will bring him "about 7 or 800 miles nigher to you." He expresses the "hope you keep on writing. I wish to hear from you," but reveals, "If I get home soon, I guess I will have about money enough to dress myself well and give the little ones their presents. That will be all. I am borrowing money now to buy bread and such things because I don't get enough to eat. It's a shame."

## Griffing Transcription:

*Dear Elisabeth*

*This is my birthday—44 years old. I though a while back that should have been home by this time but things don't work as favorable as I thought. The government decided to muster out the one year men whose time expired by the first of October and I am not included in this class. As soon as they are through with that class, I think they will muster them out whose time is out by the first of January next and therefore I have faith that by the 4th of July I may be home. It may be sooner but I am thinking it will take that time before I can be home. However, don't get discouraged. With God's help, I may see you soon.*

*Our troops are sent home no doubt as soon as the government can spare them, and I hope my turn will come soon. I long to be out of this. There is no pleasure in laying here idly, far from you and our little ones. Of course I have nothing to do and manage to get enough to eat drawing sixteen dollars per month which may come in some day. My due is now about seventy dollars but I'd rather be at home. If I can be home as I believe, we will be haying and harvesting. We shall be well enough. I don't mean to lay idle after a short repose, It is said today that all western troops are to be sent to Louisville in Kentucky and the one year men to be mustered out there, which may be. That I will be mustered out of the service soon, I don't doubt, but some unforeseen circumstances may yet keep me longer from you than at present I know of.*

*There is hundreds of false reports here but I know what I have to believe. Seventy-five men of our regiment are mustered out here today, therefore I think I will soon have my turn coming. We are all dissatisfied. We all want to go home with the exception of some of the officers who draw large pay and would like to keep this track regiment in service. They would have to keep three year men but never could keep the one year men. I don't care so much about serving my time out, but I think I would do better in haying and harvest and I am tired of this damned drone life.*

*The order for going to Louisville, Kentucky, arrived just now at Headquarters. Still we may lay here a day or more yet before transportation is ready. This would bring me about 7 or 800 miles nigher to you. I am now eleven hundred from you.*

*I hope you received my clothes which I sent to Lyndon Station. I hope I made no mistake in sending it there. I think they must cost nothing as I sent them by the Christian Commission. If you write to me, don't say anything but what anybody may read as I may not get them now and they would have to be destroyed, I hope you keep on writing. I wish to hear from you. I wish to know how you are getting along and if you and children are well, if you live without more trouble, and how things do prosper with you. I would not mind it so much them if I had to stay my time out. I would earn something, If I get home soon, I guess I will have about money enough to dress myself well and give the little ones their presents. That will be all. I am borrowing money now to buy bread and such things because I don't get enough to eat. It's a shame. I am well otherwise and hope you are likewise as well as the children.*

*...Yours affectionately, husband and father, — Louis F. DuPless*

Letter 13 (from Louis to Elizabeth): Washington D.C., June 15, 1865

**Synopsis:** Nine days later, the company is still in Washington, "a very discontent set." Louis reports details of a "rebellion...on account of our food" that was mounted against Colonel Kellogg. Fortunately, the order came to move out, else "there would have been trouble this afternoon as Major Daly wanted us to drill this afternoon and the boys swore they would to drill anymore. I tell you the soldiers are mad...I am so tired of this cursed Virginia and I would mostly wish the City of Washington with all

things in it in the lowest depths of hell." The sole consolation is that "my pay goes on and if crops look so poor as you say, you must wish of course that I should earn all I could doing nothing for it." As usual, the letter ends tenderly with "Farewell dear wife and children. God protect you. Don't worry but look for me patiently, not eagerly, and kissing you all in imagination..." (with final note that he leaves tomorrow at $4^{AM}$ for Kentucky).

## Griffing Transcription:

*Dear Elisabeth,*

*We are here yet and till within one hour back, we did not know when we should get transportation for Kentucky. Louisville or Lexington is said to be our destination.*

*We are a very discontent set at present and I tell you, the officers have their trouble. Day before yesterday we had a small resolution or rebellion here on account of our food. About 20 of ours and one other company went up to Brigade Headquarters, General Morgan, and stated our case. Our Colonel Kellogg felt offended for not coming to him first, and ordered the boys to his tent and [placed a] guard over them. They told him he would have to get more guards. They were not able to keep us. You may be sure I was between them. When the sergeant of the guard wanted to take us to the guard house, we made about face and with a yell started for our tents. The Colonel called 120 men guard and threatened to bring us forcibly back if we did not come peaceable. The boys spring to their arms and would not go but the officers and myself prevailed on them but I made them understand it was not fear that made us got and I told the officers that no guard whatever should come nigh us or they would have trouble. We went up, had a talk with the Colonel. He was quite mild then. Said he would investigate matters but he thought we had insulted him and so forth. As last we told him that if he wanted us to remain there, we should do so, but we would not allow a guard over us. The result was he sifted things through, found we had cause of complaint, and their things ended.*

*If there had not come orders for us to move, there would have been trouble this afternoon as Major Daly wanted us to drill this afternoon and the boys swore they would to drill anymore. I tell you the soldiers are mad. They want to go home and I should not wonder at all if before long there will be a disturbance through the whole army. It is a pity that the government would not have sent the soldiers home sooner, but now the government lost the good will of the soldiers.*

*I am glad we are to leave here soon. I am so tired of this cursed Virginia and I would mostly wish the City of Washington with all things in it in the lowest depths of hell. I don't think that we will be long in service more. No one can tell though anything about it. The officers are as wise as the privates, but I can do no otherwise but believe that I am home the latest by harvesting but my idea is sooner for government means to hold us only long enough till the regular army is strong enough . Likewise do I expect to see a call come out soon for more of the one year men to be discharged and I am sure I will be between them, so you will have to try to content yourself a little longer. Still you may hope to see my every day coming home as I think myself I will not be long more till I am with you.*

*Furthermore my pay goes on and if crops look so poor as you say, you must wish of course that I should earn all I could doing nothing for it, and I do not feel as if I could [get] back into hard work right off when I come home except it is haying and harvesting through which I think I will*

*curse all I possibly can. Be contented for a while and hope for the best. I am doing all I can. There is no fear in my mind for the future and I think that you will see me soon….*

*Well my dear children, I am coming about seven hundred miles nigher to you in a few days and I hope I will soon be with you…I hope you have my clothes I sent to the Station. Farewell dear wife and children. God protect you. Don't worry but look for me patiently, not eagerly, and kissing you all in imagination, I am your affectionate husband and father, — Louis F. DuPless*

*The order is for us to start for Old Kentucky tomorrow morning 4 o'clock.*

Letter 14 (from Louis to Elizabeth): Jeffersonville, Indiana, July 1, 1865



Harper's Ferry, West Virginia

**Synopsis:** Two weeks later, and now in Indiana, Louis is "pretty well reconciled to no matter what may happen." He reports that "I had my leg hurt on the cars to Harpers Ferry...I am limping a little yet but intend to do no duty for a week." He complains again that "Our officers, it is sad to say, try to keep us in service as long as possible." Some discussion ensues concerning Elizabeth's brother Edwin (with whom Louis evidently had differences), renter Gebhart (expected to have further difficulties paying the rent), and the role of luck in farming or the military. He remarks, "I as the owner of the place must be lucky or I would not have gone through five battles, foremost into it, under a storm of bullets unscathed," and furthermore, "If I had been a brick in the battles, I should not have promotion [to corporal] pressed on me—a substitute of 6 months service– when we have men enough in our regiment—privates that served 4 years..." Declaring that "No such thing as bad luck can be our lot. I will bury that word unlucky in a coffin," Louis concludes with additional (somewhat obscure) remarks on brother Edwin and renter Gebhart.




Jeffersonville IN on the Ohio R. (near Louisville KY)

## Griffing Transcription:

*Dear Elisabeth and children!*

*Here we are yet and no one knows what is to be done with us. I am pretty well reconciled to no matter what may happen. I am done fretting and as our companies has twice rebelled and the rest of the regiment left us in the lurch, I am determined to council peace because I see it is no use. We must abide our time.*

*And I don't think it such a misfortune if I have remain my time out. I could not work if I was at home. Few soldiers will dare to work hard. They would not stand it, and the change of food when they are discharged is dangerous in the summer. Winter time there is no danger.*

*I had my leg hurt on the cars to Harpers Ferry. Nothing serious. I am limping a little yet but intend to do no duty for a week yet. I am well as usual otherwise and hope to God you and the children will be and remain so. This is my greatest trouble—the thought of your health and welfare.*

*The 7th Wisconsin is going home today or Monday. They are luckier than we are. My hope was always to go with them but there is no such thing. They will be in Madison by the 4th or 5th of July. Our officers, it is sad to say, try to keep us in service as long as possible. Of course they have good wages and easy times. If they go out of service, they—most of them—have nothing to live on and must go to work. Don't you lose your courage. I have hopes yet to see you soon and if I see I cannot get my discharge inside of 2 months, then I will take a furlough and be with you by the 4th or 5th of August—depend on that—that I shall not be much longer away from you. I must see how you are getting along and it will cost me only about $25 dollars to go and come, as my pay goes on, and I receive on furlough half pay for rations.*

*But I know that the highest they will keep us in service is 3 months but I offered a bet this morning for 5 dollars to eat and drinks that by the 1st of August our regiment would have orders for the State of Wisconsin. So I say have patience. No one took my bet, I forgot to mention.*

*You say that Edwin is seeing you once in awhile and he is doing well. I am glad to hear he does well. May he prosper. I never done him any harm nor wished him harm, and shall always be pleased to hear that things is prospering with him, even if we cannot be friends. The reason is plain why. Poor Gebhart, I pity him and especially he got linked into such a superstitious family. It will be hard for him now to begin on his own farm. There was a way for him to go along but if crops look bad, he will have a hard road to hoe. If I would like to help anybody, it is Gebhart but his surroundings is not as they might be. In ordinary times, if he was stirring, he ought to do well on our farm, but if bugs and water trouble, no one is to blame for that. We are not to blame nor lose by it. I cannot give him the use of the far, for nothing if he has bad luck. Of course he don't expect that. Look out for No. 1 shall be my motto after this. I guess his folks thinks ours is a lucky place. But I think bad luck is often the effect of bad management, and I know that the saying of unlucky days and places is humbug. I as the owner of the place must be lucky or I would not have gone through five battles, foremost into it, under a storm of bullets unscathed. And a lucky man is not the owner of an unlucky place. He would not be lucky if he was. If I had been a brick in the battles, I should not have promotion [to corporal] pressed on me—a substitute of 6 months service– when we have men enough in our regiment—privates that served 4 years and are smart soldiers. I am a lucky man to live to return to you and our little pickaninnies and cannot own an unlucky place.*

*Be of good cheer, dear Lis. No such thing as bad luck can be our lot. I will bury that word unlucky in a coffin. You say that bugs is in the crops again. That is a misfortune. I hear that other parts of the state are affected likewise. If hay only gets good, if I get home, I see see how things are to be managed. If the grass is anyways decent, I wish Kelly to cut it before harvest and bring it into the barn. If not good before, as soon as possible whatever Gebhart will cut, let him cut but he need not let other people cut on shares. Father, here all you can get cut. Why you might speak to Edwin as he could not run the river then nor harvesting but by [ ].*

*...So hoping for the best and trusting to good luck as I have had, I rest contented and may God bless you and our dear children and keep you safe and well. So farewell and remember your affectionate husband and father, — Louis F. DuPless*

Letter 15 (from Elizabeth to Louis): Lyndon Sta. [Wisconsin], July 1, 1865

**Synopsis:**

Elizabeth's impoverished education becomes heartbreakingly evident in this letter ("If I could spell and write as you can, I have so much to ask and talk about that my thoughts run away with me"; "I should write often if I could write your address, so if you please also put an envelope in your letters, I would be glad"). As best the text can be made out, she expresses her own and the children's disappointment that Louis is still absent, reports that the crops have improved with recent rainfall, and updates Gebhart's condition. Her heart spills out deep emotions and anxieties ("God bless you, Louis Dear. All I need is you... God help me, I hope, and bless our little children and give me good health") as she gamely describes baby Fred's fever, cut-worms in the garden, and the condition of milk cows and calves, before expressing her embarrassment over difficulties of writing ("It is a task for me to write, you know, so you must excuse me for bad spelling"; "God help a poor scholar, wherever they are, and God help me, I hope"). She closes with "a kiss from the children, I won't say how many from me" and suggests that Louis write to Gebhart.

**Weinhold Transcription:**

*Dear Louis,*

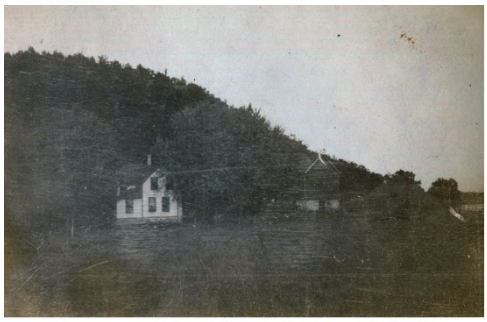
*I received your letter yesterday and we were sadly disappointed. We had been looking for you home by the fourth of July for sure. Uncle Jack said he was looking for his son home this week and of course I thought you would be home. We must hope for the best, but it is hard to think so we must be satisfied. The poor children are very disappointed. They were rejoicing Pa would be home by the fourth of July, they would [receive] their five dollars. God speed you home I hope.*

*The time hangs heavy. We are all well, thank you, and hoping you are the same. This is my fear. God help us if anything should happen to you. Be careful of your health there, I beg of you in the name of God, for we want you many years to come.*

*You want to know how the crops look. They are doing well now, since the rain everything looks well. [I]f we have plenty of rain, I think we will have a good harvest. The bugs were in the wheat. If we have rain as we have had, they can't do much. There is a good prospect for hay. Gebhart is going to begin to cut next weekend. The low bottom he thinks to cut it all. He has left his own marsh to Trumbles.*

*I wrote in a former letter what bad luck Gebhart had. He lost his home by fire. His stable's fire gets three hundred dollars insurance. He feels very bad about it. It brings them a little to their senses. We get along very well. I don't trouble any of them if I can help myself.*

*God bless you, Louis Dear. All I need is you. I don't like the care of everything on my mind, but that is little alongside of your cares. God be with you, I hope, and send you home to us safe and sound. This is my prayer. God help me, I hope, and bless our little children and give me good health. Our little Fred was very sick in his head. I thought we would go crazy but towards morning it broke. He now is bright as ever, talking about Pa. They want to see you very much.*



**Farmyard at Louis' Bluff in the early 1900s**

*The gardens are suffering with the cut worms. They have destroyed everyone's garden far and near. We have planted just(?) five times in gi__it(?) many thing that we could. There is nothing like trying. We have plenty of cabbage plants out. They look well. We watch the garden, pick the worms out of it. Now I guess I have bothered you long enough about the garden.*

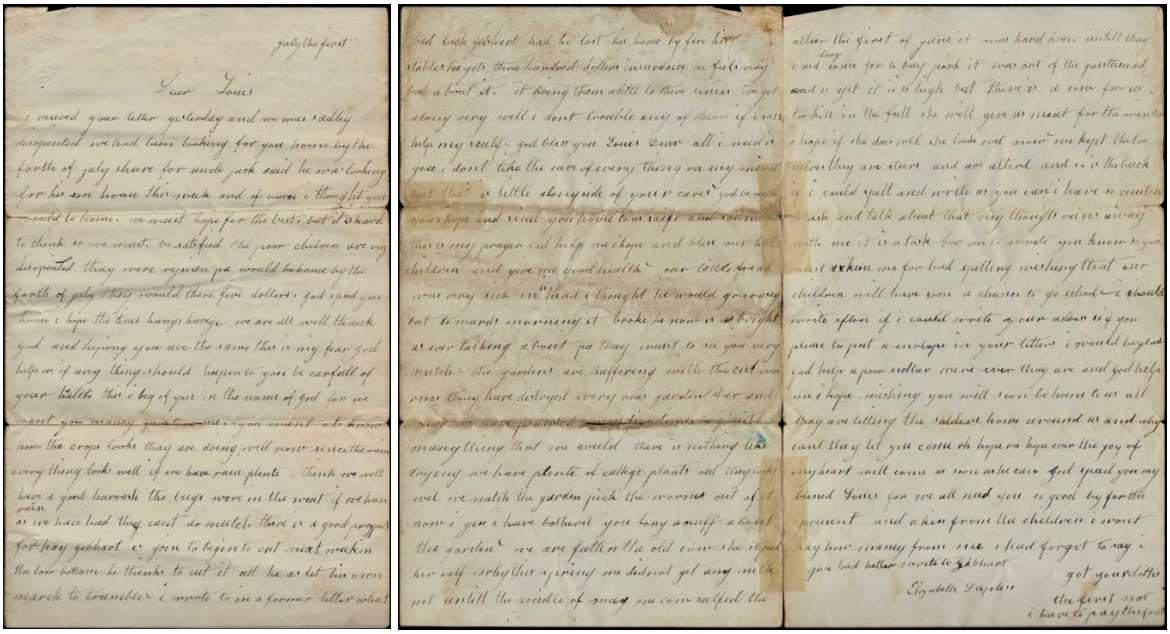
*We are fattening the old cow. She weaned(?) her calf early this spring. We did not get any milk, not until the middle of May. One cow calved then(?), the other the first of June. It was hard even until they said they came for to buy pork. It was out of the question and is yet. It is so high but there is a cow for us to kill in the fall. She will give us meat for the winter. I hope she does well. She looks well now. We kept the two calves. They are steers and are altered and so is the buck.*

*If I could spell and write as you can, I have so much to ask and talk about that my thoughts run away with me. It is a task for me to write, you know, so you must excuse me for bad spelling. Wishing that our children will have soon a chance to go (to) school. I should write often if I could write your address, so if you please also put an envelope in your letters, I would be glad. God help a poor scholar, wherever they are, and God help me, I hope.*

*Wishing you will soon be home to us all. They are letting the soldiers home around us, and why can't they let you come? I hope on hope ever the joy of my heart will come as soon as he can. God speed you, my blessed Louis, for we all need you, so goodbye for the present, and a kiss from the children, I won't say how many from me. You had better write to Gebhart.*

*Elizabeth Dupless*

*I had forgot to say I got your clothes the first, not I have to pay the first.*



Letter 16 (from Louis to Elizabeth): In camp, Jeffersonville, Indiana, opposite Louisville, July 7, 1865

**Synopsis:** In the last letter of this collection, Louis announces joyfully that his own (6th) Regiment has finally been ordered to prepare for discharge. He describes conditions as "awful hot" but expresses his pleasure that "I got your letter dated the first of July last night and some how it was the most welcome letter I thought since I entered the service." He then recounts the revelry of discharges as the departing 7th Wisconsin Regiment "came with a torch light procession in our camp. There were three cheers given for their colonel and our boys gave three groans for our Colonel Kellogg." Apparently in the regimental jockeying for discharge, "Our company gets blamed for all. The next morning our Lieutenant Colonel Daly said so and gave the boys hell." In closing, he adds gleefully, "Since




**Wisconsin (2nd/6th/7th), Indiana (19th), and Michigan (24th) infantry divisions of the famous "Iron Brigade," which suffered the highest percentage of casualties of any brigade in the Civil War.**

the children requested me on the 4th and also their 5 dollars, I conclude they have been good. That is right, my little chickens, and you shall soon see me and the 5 dollars likewise."

## Griffing Transcription:

*Dear Elisabeth and dear children,*

*At last I can write the joyful news to you that I will soon be home with you for good. Day before yesterday the 5th, the order was read to us that we are to be mustered out of service as quick as our papers can be made out and then to be sent to the State to get our pay and finally to be discharged there out of service. All this may take a month yet but I hope not and I believe we will be in Madison by the end of next week. Any way, I am home by the 10th of August, I believe, and hope sooner. So have patience a little longer.*

*It is so awful hot here but I don't do anything but eat, lay down, bathe or such things. I am well and God knows how pleased I am to hear that you are all well. I got your letter dated the first of July last night and some how it was the most welcome letter I thought since I entered the service. I was not in a cheerful spirit [when] out came.*



**Col. John Azor Kellogg, 6th Wisconsin**

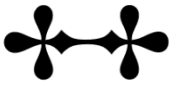
*We have has some stirring times in our regiment. The other day the 7th Wisconsin Regiment went home, The boys of said regiment came with a torch light procession in our camp. There were three cheers given for their colonel and our boys gave three groans for our Colonel [John Azor] Kellogg. It was reported he tried to hold us as long as possible in service which I don't believe. Both regiments went to Division Headquarters and done the same. Our company gets blamed for all. The next morning our Lieutenant Colonel Daly said so and gave the boys hell. But now I think all trouble is done with.*



**Lt. Col. Dennis B. Dailey (1840-1898)**

*Since the children requested me on the 4th and also their 5 dollars, I conclude they have been good. That is right, my little chickens, and you shall soon see me and the 5 dollars likewise. I am glad to know that in a short time I shall be with you. Till then, God protect you and keep you safe. So farewell and keep patient. From your affectionate husband and father, — Louis F. DuPless*

*Give the lines to Gebhart. My respects to them that deserve it. Don't write till I write from Wisconsin.*



## APPENDIX D: 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.



Bud Gussel with WRHC Minutes Book

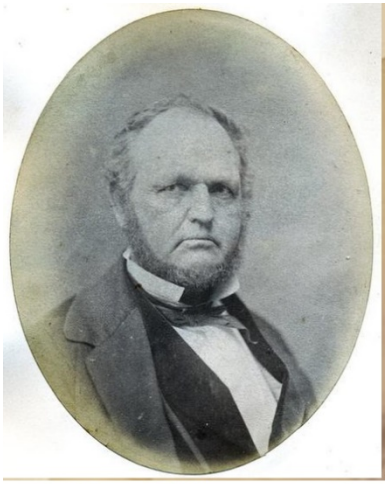
In its heyday, the WHRC's operations were cloaked in secrecy that prevented even the town's closest observers from grasping the full scope of its nefarious influences. However, the discovery of the original "minute books" of the hydraulic company (in an old barn scheduled for demolition)[1] has cast 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 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



**Byron Kilbourn**

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.




**Vliet St. marker in downtown Milwaukee**

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 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."



**Andrew Dunn**

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.



**Former hotel along stagecoach road in ghost town of Newport**

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

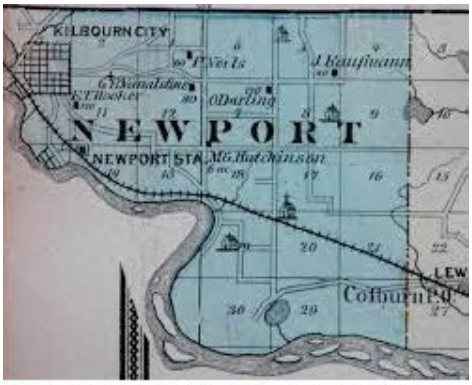
over two $100,000 bonds guaranteeing that the LaC&M would cross at Newport. However, the charter obligation to build a dam at the Dells (apparently only a 'kicker' in the main deal) soon became a financial albatross to Kilbourn, as property owners boasted openly of the exhorbitant settlements that would be demanded for "flowage damage" caused by the dam.

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.[13] 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]



"Dawn Manor" in the Lower Dells, last survivor of the ghost town of Newport

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




Railroad map showing "Newport Sta" where LC&R was expected to make the first railroad crossing of the Wisconson R.

has been assembled from these corporate minutes and companion records of the day.[14]

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 [15] as Secretary, and Andrew Dunn as Treasurer. Resolutions were adopted to (1) authorize stock subscriptions; (2) authorize the company president to purchase lands 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[16] 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[17] the other with Charles Teshner,[18] Jason Weaver,[19] and W. Riley Smith[20] −−for what would later become the site of Wisconsin Dells.[21]

[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),[22] 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 superintendant 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,[23] John Tanner,[24] and George F. Noble[25]) 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,[26] Charles

Teshner, and Moses Strong.[27] 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.[28] As mentioned earlier, from the time of the hydraulic 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.[29] 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[13]). 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 $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 Superintendant 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 Superintendant) 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.

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.

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 judgement 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 Superintendant), G. D. McAllaster as Sec.-Treas., and A. Holly and E. T. Hooker as "auditors." Pursuant to dam construction, Superintendant 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 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 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. Vliet (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 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 Superintendant 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 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.

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*
>
> *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:

> *" . . . 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 contingincies 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 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 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 Superintendant 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.

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.

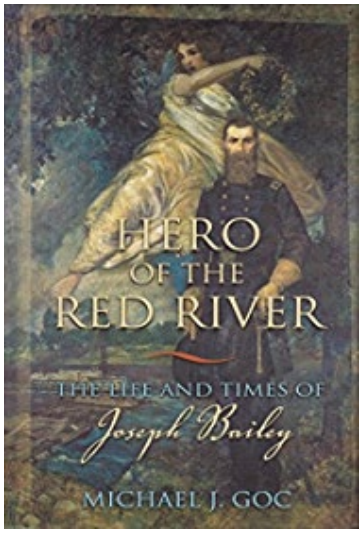
At the WRHC's last regular meeting, on December 20, 1861, the board came full circle as John B. Vliet was nominated and elected to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of William Vliet. A resolution was presented asking that

> *" . . . 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.[10] 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.

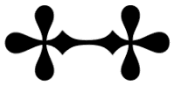
He drifted off to a sheriff's job in Missouri and was killed by bushwackers a few months after taking office.

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.



**Footnotes to Appendix D**

[1] The handsome leather-bound "Rececords" 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 Wisconsin" (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] 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-intereest 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 exhorbitant flowage settlements and the superior topographic features of the upper site were instrumental in the decision to relocate the dam and rail crossing.

[14] 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.

[15] 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.

[16] 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.

[17] Abram Vliet was the youngest son of Garret Vliet; died in 1882.

[18] 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*.

[19] 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. [20] 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] W(illiam) Riley Smith (1807-1860) was a former lawyer, district attorney, and judge from Warsaw, New York (also the former home of Alanson Holly) who came to Milwaukee about 1852 "mainly for his health" and died there in 1860 of "consumption" (tuberculosis).

[21] 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.

[22] For further details, see Chapter 6, “Railroading and the Birth of Kilbourn City.”

[23] 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 . . . “).

[24] 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.

[25] 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.

[26] 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.

[27] Moses Strong (1810-1894) 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).

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

[29] 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 . . . "

[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.

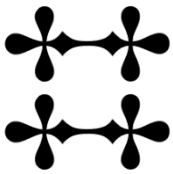
[49] W. S. Candee (1831-1905) was a Milwaukee dry goods merchant, associated with the firm of Candee & Dibble. The 1881 *History of Milwaukee* (vol. 2, p.1099) records that in 1858 his "health became impaired and he sold out his business." In 1863 he married the daughter of Supreme Court Justice A. D. 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.



**PHOTOS/ITEMS NEEDED:**
**John B. Vliet**
**John T. De la Ronde**
**Jacques Porlier**
**Amable Grignon**
**J. B. McEwen**
**Menominee name for Louis' Bluff (in 1673)**
**(Menominee place names in Wisconsin, Mike Hoffman)**
**"Menominee Clans Home, UWSP Library)**
**715-346-2858**
**Reflections in Blazier Creek**
**Fred Blaser**
**Helene Blaser**
**Robert V. Allen**
**Alanson Holly**
**Russ Porter RR Depot picture**