



A Wisconsin Fur-Trader's Journal, 1803-04

Michel Curot

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In 1673, Jacques Marquette and Louis Jolliet became the first to record a journey on the Fox-Wisconsin Waterway all the way to the Mississippi River near Prairie du Chien. Frenchmen like Nicholas Perrot continued to ply the fur trade across Wisconsin through the 17th and 18th centuries, but the French made no permanent settlements in Wisconsin before Great Britain won control of the region following the French and Indian War in 1763. Even so, French traders continued to work in the region after the war, and some, beginning with Charles de Langlade in 1764, now settled in Wisconsin permanently rather than returning to British-controlled Canada.

The British gradually took over Wisconsin during the French and Indian War, taking control of Green Bay in 1761 and gaining control of all of Wisconsin in 1763. Like the French, the British were interested in little but the fur trade. One notable event in the fur trading industry in Wisconsin occurred in 1791, when two free African Americans set up a fur trading post among the Menominee at present day Marinette. The first permanent settlers, mostly French Canadians, some Anglo-New Englanders and a few African American freedmen, arrived in Wisconsin while it was under British control. Charles Michel de Langlade is generally recognized as the first settler, establishing a trading post at Green Bay in 1745, and moving there permanently in 1764. Settlement began at Prairie du Chien around 1781. The French residents at the trading post in what is now Green Bay, referred to the town as "La Baye", however British fur traders referred to it as "Green Bay", because the water and the shore assumed green tints in early spring. The old French title was gradually dropped, and the British name of "Green Bay" eventually stuck. The region coming under British rule had virtually no adverse effect on the French residents as the British needed the cooperation of the French fur traders and the French fur traders needed the goodwill of the British. During the French occupation of the region licenses for fur trading had been issued scarcely and only to select groups of traders, whereas the British, in an effort to make as much money as possible from the region, issued licenses for fur trading freely, both to British and French residents.

This book is the daily journal of one of these fur traders, Michel Curot, and contains many interesting interactions with both Indians, trappers, and traders.

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