

THE MYTH WAWATAM

- or -

Alex. Henry Refuted

Being an Exposure of Certain

Fictions

Hitherto Unsuspected of The Public



With Which Are Also Found

Some Remarks Upon The

Famous Old Fort

MICHILLIMACKINAC

All of which is herein written &

publish'd from the notes of

Henry McConnell, Gent..

by

H. Bedford - Jones

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A Few Copies

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Inscribed to
The Memory
of
Wawatam

Garrulous old trader, sitting with a jerum
Close beside your elbow, and tobacco blowing free,
Easy 'tis to picture you, spinning to a quorum
Of pop-eyed New York burghers your tales of devilry!
How you must have made them palpitate and shiver
As you warmed up to your narrative of blood and
massacree!

How you must have chortled as you saw 'em shake
and quiver
To your tale of shocking escapades by trail and lake
and river ---

I'm afraid you were a liar, but you knew how to deliver
Your auditors of Gotham from the shackles of ennui!

THE MYTH
WAWATAM


or

Alex. Henry Refuted

BY

H. BEDFORD-JONES



ORE than a hundred years ago, appeared in New York an octavo volume bearing the following title: "Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories between the years 1760 and 1776 by Alexander Henry Esq."

This book has become an authority and the base of all relations of the massacre at old

Fort

Fort Mackinaw. Parkman terms its authenticity unquestioned. From its pages Chief Wawatam has passed into history.

But, by comparing Henry's story with contemporary records, such as the Boquet papers, we shall make some discoveries.



The tale of Henry need not be recapitulated here save in brief sequence of comparison. He infers that he was the first English trader to reach Mackinaw, yet we know that Bostwick was a year ahead of him.

In the winter of 1760 our hero had, as his interpreter, a sergeant of the 18th or Royal Irish --- a regiment which only came to America seven years later!

Reaching the "Sco", Henry went with Ensign Jamet's party to Mackinaw. His account of the trip is ludicrously inaccurate; and from

Point

Point Detour, finding the lake open, our hero pushes on and sends back aid --- but fails to say how he crossed the open straits!

The report of Captain Etherington, in the Boquet papers, recounts the accident which had crippled Ensign Jamet, and which Henry ignores; gives entirely different dates; and adds "as the Lake is fast I intend sending an Indian slay for him tomorrow."



Arriving at Mackinaw, Henry sets forth the speech of one Mina-va-va-na, war chief of the Chippewas. Not grasping Henry's powers of invention, historians have identified this chief with the Grand Sauter mentioned by Carver. This "war chief" is unknown elsewhere. A son of Matchekewis, captor of Mackinaw, told Schoolcraft that the name was entirely strange to him.

“At noon, three hundred troops of the sixtieth regiment, under Lieutenant Lesslie, marched into the fort.” --- Henry, p. 51.

The first British tooops on these upper lakes reached Mackinaw in September, 1761; they comprised 120 men of Gage's Light Infantry as escort to the post garrisons --- sixty of the 60th or Royal Americans.

Two days later Captain Balfour, in command, went on to Green Bay; leaving under Lieut. Leslie, at Mackinaw, a sergeant, corporal, drummer and 25 privates. In the following year Etherington assumed command.



Henry says that he came to Mackinaw May 20, 1763, in company with Sir Robert Davers --- a gentleman who, as more reliable records inform us, had been killed near Lake St. Clair on May 8th!

After

After the historic Chippewa ball game, and the massacre of Jamet, trader Tracy, and fifteen men, semi-friendly Ottawas rescued the survivors. Etherington summoned the garrison from Green Bay, and returned to Montreal, abandoning the country. Henry and two soldiers alone remained in Chippewa hands.

But Henry, speaking of his fellow traders, says: "Mr. Ezekial Solomons and Mr. Henry Bostwick were ... after the peace carried down to Montreal and there ransomed. Of ninety troops about seventy were killed; the rest together with those of the posts on the Bay-des-puants, and at the river St. Joseph, were also kept in safety by the Ottawas until the peace." So speaks Henry; but with what truth?

The two traders accompanied the troops; of the thirty men at Mackinaw, seventeen were slain; and as we have seen, the garrison of

Bay

Bay-des-puants or Green Bay was unmolested. That of St. Joseph was slaughtered, four men alone surviving.

How Mr. H.'s reputation for veracity has so long endured, is a marvel.



Henry's story, in brief, is that during the massacre he was sheltered in the house of Langlade, which was twice searched by the Indians ere they captured him; that a few days later Wawatam appeared, claimed Henry as a friend and brother, and bought him from the war chief. Henry put in a miserable winter, returned to Mackinaw in the spring, and was then restored to his friends.

Henry in glowing terms hails Wawatam as his preserver; forgetful that, except for this intervention, he would have gone home with the troops. The name of this noble red man
has

has been eagerly honored by the worthy folk of northern Michigan, and is embalmed in song and legend, in names of ships and parks, and in the veneration of the press.



Langlade had led the Ottawas at Braddock's defeat, held the French king's commission, had fought in all the battles of the old French War, and was a prominent man among the tribes. It is highly improbable that the Indians would dare to search Langlade's house, or that he would allow the liberty.

Who was this heroic Wawatam? No more than a creation of fancy. Upon returning later to Mackinaw, Henry not only fails to reward his rescuer, but never so much as mentions him.

Like Mina-va-va-na, Wawatam exists in the pages of Henry alone; even Schoolcraft the diligent

diligent could find none among the redskins or habitants who had ever heard of Wawatam; the name was unknown --- non est inventus!

Let us take another brief glance at the historian Henry.

Reaching Niagara, he says that he was given command of the Chippewas attached to Bradstreet's expedition for the relief of the frontier; that the force numbered three thousand and left Fort Erie July 15th, arriving at Detroit on August 8th; and that 300 Canadians went on to Mackinaw.

History says otherwise. Bradstreet employed no Chippewas; had 2289 men; left Ft. Erie August 9th and reached Detroit the 27th; and sent but 80 of the Canadians north.



What is the charge against Alexander Henry --- that he was a gratuitous liar? Not
in

in the least: his tale is palpably unfit to be taken as truth, however.

Wawatam was a myth in toto; the folk of the northland have been too gullible. The actual facts probably were that Henry remained a captive until the reoccupation of Mackinaw, and that he invented Wawatam to lend interest to the tale.



Mackinaw, today a tourist center, has found it profitable to encourage such wild legends. That of "Robertson's Folly" has even deceived Dr. Thwaites; for the tale is as false as the tale of Wawatam --- Robertson did not die at Mackinaw in 1787, but at his daughter's home in Montreal, in the winter of 1810.

Henry, after the examples of Carver, Long and Mackenzie, doubtless thought to put out a popular and saleable book on the great

west; which would account for his indifference to facts and dates.

Henry mightily embellished his tale, an art which by no means died with him. We writers are all in the same boat. If the public insists upon treating our tales of fiction as sober history --- why, so much the worse for the public!



Some Remarks
Occasioned by a Visit
to
The Site of
OLD FORT MACKINAW



WHEN Edgar Conkling, indulging his dream of a city that was to rival Chicago, platted Mackinaw City in 1857, he set aside a strip of land as a public park.

This strip contains twenty acres and about half the old fort site. Now a state park, intended to preserve all that makes noteworthy the name of Mackinaw, it egregiously fails in
this

this object. A boulevard, at present a wheel-track, bounds the park on the south; if ever graded, it would destroy the most interesting of the old fort lines.

This bush-grown spot was once the metropolis of the northwest. De Lignery transplanted it from St. Ignace in 1720, and sixty winters later it was removed to the island.

The site is much as when abandoned in 1781. To the west are De Peyster's sandhills "like snow drifts," now being overgrown with bushes. Forty years ago the dune area was double its present size; and in 1779 Sinclair mentions "every sandhill and hollow within 600 yards." To the east is the "plain in front of the fort," scene of the historic ball game.



The fort lines may easily be traced; the north and south palisades were slightly angled, making

making the fort hexagonal. Mounds of earth mark the bastions terraced by Sinclair. In the S. E. angle shows the interior redoubt, erected before the post followed the church to the island. On the south and east is plainly visible the banquette; the north line followed the bluff, the west line, a sand-ridge.



The curtains of the fort measured 250 ft. in length and were of pickets; a bastion at each corner mounted light six-pounders.

Inside, the buildings formed a square facing the parade, whose gun platform is now but a mound. The barracks formed the south side of this square; to right and left were the officers' quarters.

At the north angle was the water gate; at the south, the land gate. Midway of the east line a thirty-foot break in the ridge marks the

the main gate; from this is a gentle slope to the landing and King's wharf. From here the King's Highway circled eastward then ran direct to Chippewa Point, where was located the Indian encampment.

Where the highway straightened was the post cemetery, with the village beyond. The houses were to the south of the road and in a continuous line facing the water.



Across the plain east of the main gate is the saw-pit first used. Another saw-pit is dug from the lake bank farther east; on the Phillips plat this is termed an "ancient entrenchment." Sinclair notes that in the winter of 1780 the red men sawed out sixteen thousand feet of lumber; a prodigious quantity considering the circumstances.

These are but part of the remains; more
may

may be easily traced. The site is unique; it is the only frontier post of its time to be in existence.

This state park, with its broken flagstaff and cement walk, its tawdry cannon and its picnic grove, is a statesmanlike disgrace. Both inefficient and insufficient, it forms neither a safeguard nor a fitting monument.

FINIS

Here Ends
The Dissertation Upon
The Myth Wawatam
- and -
Old Fort Mackinaw

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