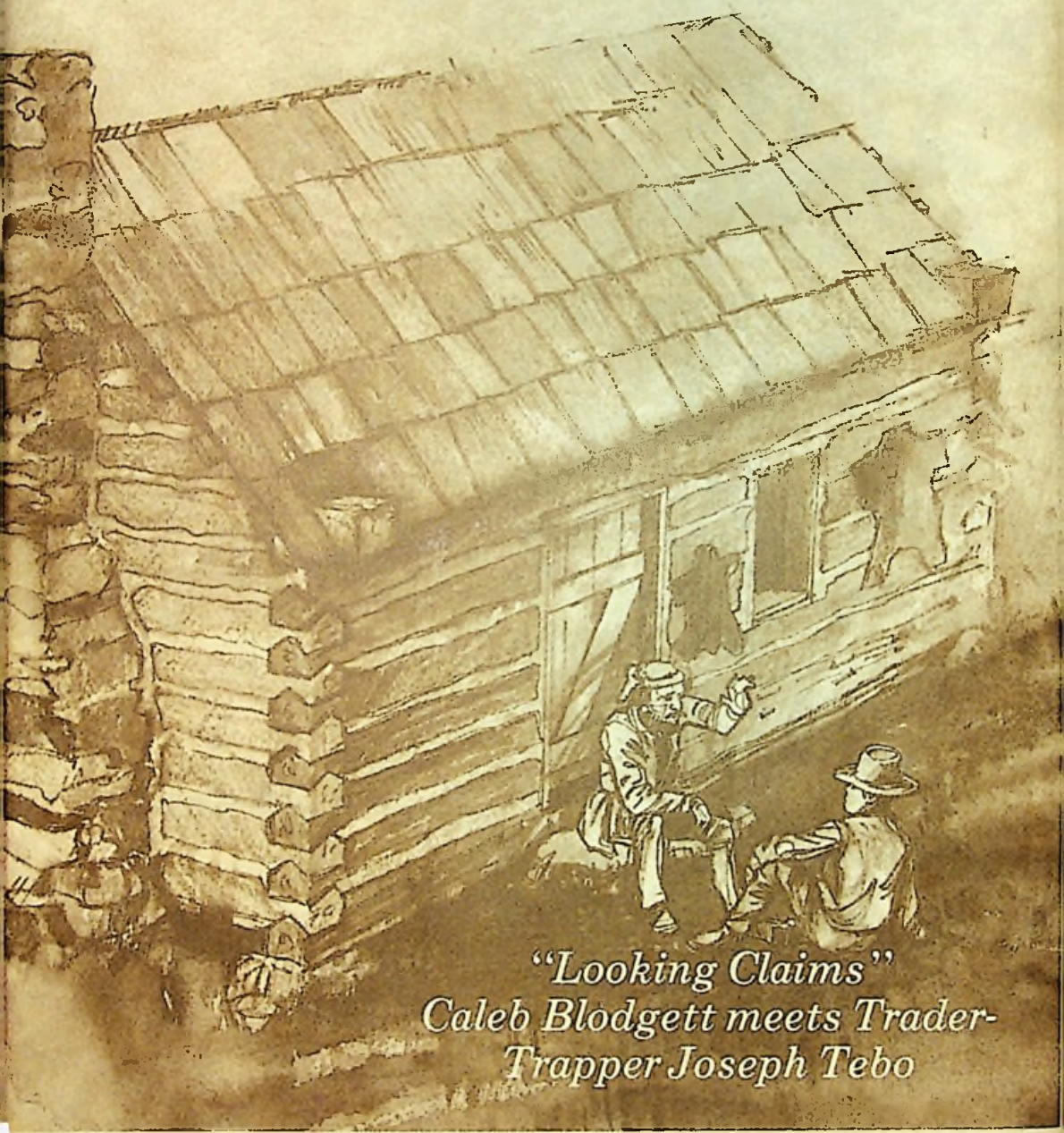
PIONEER BELOIT

Arthur L. Luebke



"Looking Claims"
Caleb Blodgett meets Trader-
Trapper Joseph Tebo

PIONEER BELOIT
1830 — 1839

With 44 Illustrations

HOW A WISCONSIN CITY WAS BORN
and
THE STORY BEHIND ITS NAMING

PART I

The story of the Turtle Village during the last years of Indian occupancy and the Black Hawk war, the coming of the trader-trapper Joseph Tebo, and the determined efforts of Caleb Blodgett, Dr. Horace White, and a few score friends and neighbors to carve out a New England-type village at the confluence of Rock river and Turtle creek during the first two years after their arrival.

A painstaking reconstruction of life as it was actually lived at New Albany, later Beloit, almost on a day-to-day basis, gathered from pioneer documents, some newly discovered, others long-since forgotten.

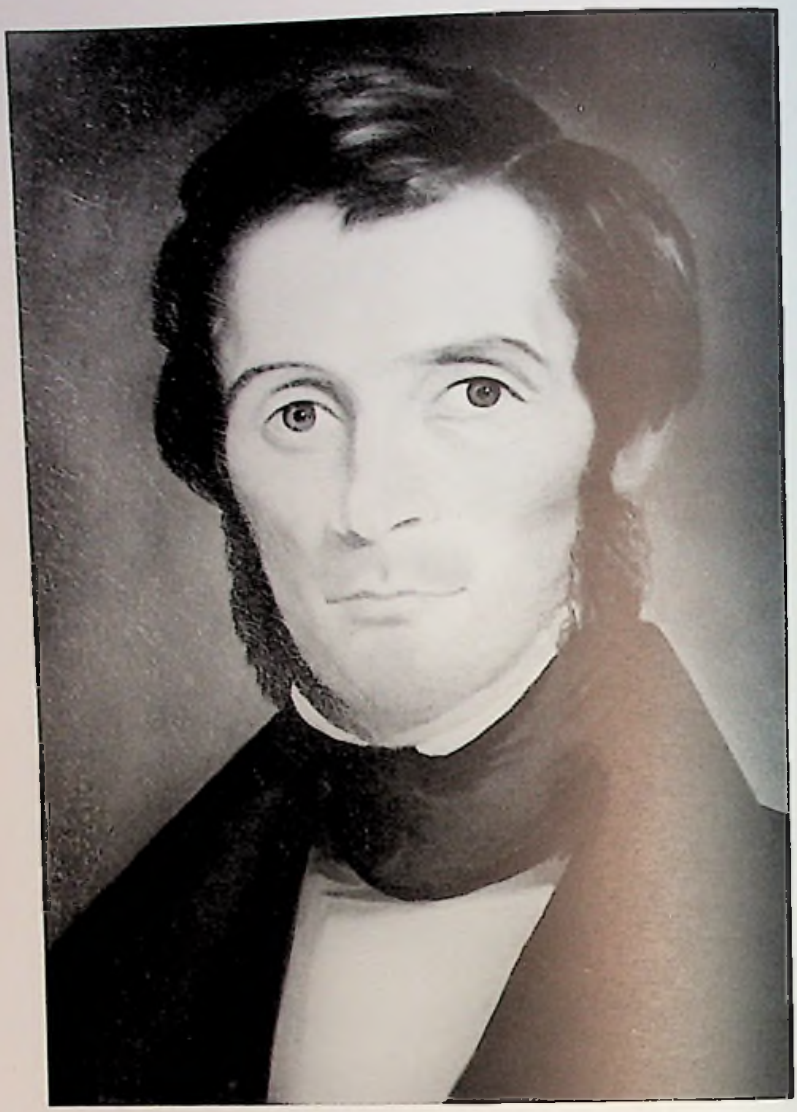
PART II

The chronological story of a century-old dispute over who named Beloit, what year it was named, and how the name was actually arrived at. The author reviews a fascinating controversy extending over several generations that at times assumed the proportions of a scandal, involving the veracity of several distinguished first settlers.

By carefully marshalling all the pertinent evidence available, the author frees the record as much as possible from obvious historical errors and needless confusion, before summing up the evidence dealing with the mystery of Beloit's naming.

15. 0
13. 5

PIONEER BELOIT



Dr. Horace White

PIONEER BELOIT

by
Arthur L. Luebke

Beloit Historical Society
Beloit, Wisconsin

Second Edition
1977

Third Edition
1985

Acknowledgment

The author wishes to express his appreciation to those who assisted in the preparation of this book, including Robert D. Thompson and my son, Arthur J. Luebke, for artwork, photography and technical counsel; Fan Brunelle for artwork; Robert H. Irrmann, Richard P. Hartung, Ruth Jecklin, Frank Caleb Blodgett, Hannah Swart, R. H. Batterman, Jr. and Kathryn Lillyman for research materials furnished; and Helen L. D. Richardson, J. Raymond Walsh, Joseph W. Rhodes, Mickey Baker and Elmer Geishirt for their constructive suggestions and counsel.

In addition, the author is grateful for the assistance furnished by the facilities and personnel in charge of the libraries and archives of Bartlett Museum, Beloit College, Rock County Historical Society, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Rockton Historical Society, Chicago Historical Society and the Area Research Center of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

THIRD EDITION SPONSOR — ROBERT H. SOLEM

CONTENTS

APPENDIX

Note To The Reader

Wherever a plus sign (+) appears in the text at the end of a paragraph of quoted material, it designates that the following paragraph was arbitrarily created by this author, where none exists in the original, for clarification or easier reading today.

Footnote citations in the text frequently contain abbreviated titles relating to basic source materials. The *Bibliography* section of this book should be consulted for more detailed information as to any cited work.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Part I
Pioneer Beloit
1830 - 1839

Preface To Part I

The pioneer history of the Beloit area has been told before in fragmentary ways. As with most local histories, it is a sometimes inconsistent story scattered through books, newspapers, journals, diaries, and miscellaneous documents written by several generations. Much of this material is reasonably reliable, some of it is erroneous, and still more is simply inaccurate.

Local histories are often distinguished more for their unquestioning repetition than for original research. Legend, gossip, yarns, and the irresistible urge to repeat a good story — combined with careless research — sometimes in the retelling confuse fact and fable for later generations. In this manner historical errors grow into solid fact as they are perpetuated each generation by local historians busy borrowing uncritically from their predecessors.

The accounts of local historians are seldom distinguished by documentation or acknowledgment of sources. Hence the critical reader has no way of learning where an author obtained his information, how reliable was his source, or to what extent his story has been embellished in the retelling. Inevitably our local histories contradict each other or ignore disputed details. This is unfortunate because many such inconsistencies could still be clarified or eliminated by further research. Early documents often survive, buried away in archives, libraries or private collections, that may be conclusive or at least corroborate a disputed question.

This book represents the writer's attempt to authenticate the early pioneer beginnings of the Beloit area, primarily the years 1836 and 1837, when the community was born. It re-examines in depth, compares, and evaluates all previously used sources; then it searches out new material — ancient documents long overlooked or previously lost to history. The result hopefully is a definitive history resting on a solid historical foundation, providing both a comprehensive yet authentic view of how the Beloit community began. In the telling, readability has had to yield to historical accuracy and necessary documentation. This was an early decision the writer felt obliged to make. Good history must prevail over a good story in any confrontation between the two.

Local historians (invariably amateurs) share one joy with their professional brethren. Both thrive upon the exciting discovery of lost, overlooked, or newly discovered documentary evidence — letters, diaries or papers, for instance, — that shed new light on old events. In this manner half-truths, legend, error and ignorance are gradually stripped away from historical fact.

The discovery of a previously unknown document is the obscure enthusiasm of the historian. For instance, how else describe the excitement and anticipation the historian experiences when he uncovers an unknown or unrecognized document that sheds new light on some old historical dispute and whose true significance he alone comprehends?

Early Beloit history is unique in several respects. Unlike many communities whose beginnings went largely unchronicled, Beloit was fortunate to have several early historians set down in detail their recollections of dates, places, names and events. Some of these accounts were never published and today are generally unknown; but they do exist and can be uncovered by the persistent researcher. Others have been buried in old newspaper and magazine files waiting to be rediscovered.

In order to preserve such historical data before more of it is lost to history, this writer has endeavoured to evaluate what is merely second-hand, and reconcile where possible the inconsistent; enumerate sources, and otherwise separate as much as possible historical fact from undocumented accounts of succeeding generations of amateur historians who assumed that what was often repeated must be true. In the process he has learned that some accounts are entitled to much greater weight than others, and he has emphasized such distinctions for the benefit of future writers.

Disputed versions have been evaluated and given an appropriate niche whenever justified. This approach is simple: how can a certain claim or statement be supported? Who said so? How well was a writer in a position to know? In the absence of satisfactory documentation, this writer has attempted to search out and identify what is obviously unreliable and emphasize that which is more trustworthy.

Initially the writer was concerned primarily with unravelling the mystery surrounding the naming of Beloit. Since this involved studying the credibility of various first-settlers, it soon became evident that credibility could be better evaluated if we knew the circumstances of the founding of Beloit and the reputations and motives of the various participants when the naming occurred.

Thus, in order to present a definitive study of the naming of Beloit, it was necessary to examine the founders themselves with painstaking care. Who were they? What roles did they play in the community? How were they regarded by each other? Characters, personalities, and possible motives had to be evaluated.

This book is therefore divided into two parts, each independent of the other, each telling its own story, but interrelated. Part 1 tells the story of Pioneer Beloit and mentions the naming of Beloit as an historical incident. Part 2 deals solely with an exhaustive study of how Beloit came to be named in 1837, and the subsequent controversy and confusion that has survived to the present day. It attempts to list chronologically everything of importance that has been said on the subject and evaluate the nature of the dispute.

Part I stands alone as history. Part II deals with a baffling controversy and draws upon the former for certain insights with respect to the personalities involved. Let us begin by looking at history as it was lived in the 1830s.

CHAPTER ONE

Turtle Village — Indian Occupancy

1. The Naming Of Rock River

According to one authority, the old Winnebago Indian name for Rock River was *E-neen-ne-shun-nuck*, or "river of big stones."[1] However, the early Algonkian Indian name of *Assini-sipi*, or "stone river," is better recognized today. To the Indian it seems to have meant clear-flowing rocky river. It was also a generic term which meant rocky river. In 1784 Thomas Jefferson had proposed that a portion of the territory "through which the Assenisipi, or Rock River, runs, shall be called Assenisipia."

This history, derivation and development of the name for the stream we know as Rock River is perhaps best shown by maps printed in the 200 year period preceeding the coming of Caleb Blodgett:[2]

Date	Map	Rock River Designated as
1643	Boisseau's New France	(not shown on map)
1673	Marquette and Joliet (Dutch printing)	Kicapoue R.
1674	Joliet	(not shown on map)
1683	Louis Hennepin	Seignelai R.
1703	Lahontan	(not shown on map)
1703	William De L'Isle	R. a la Roche
1718-1721	Sennex	Assenini or R. a la Roche
1720	(English)	Assenini or R. a la Roche
1754	(English)	Assenisipi R.
1755	John Mitchell, London	Rocky R.
1755	Le Rouge, Paris	Assenisipi R.
1778	Hutchins	Riviere a la Roche
1783	(U.S.)	R. a la Roche or Stoney R.
1783	Faden	Rocky R.
1795	Debrett	Rocky R.
1790-1820	(American and Foreign)	R. Assenisipi Rocky R. Stoney R. R. Roche
1825	J. Warr., Jr.	Rock River

---

[1]Brown, Charles E. and Theodore T. "Indian Village and Camp Sites of the Lower Rock River in Wisconsin," *Wis. Archeologist*, IX, No. 1 (N.S.), Oct. 1929, p. 8.
[2]Ibid., 9-10.

2. Turtle Creek

Long before 1830 a large Winnebago Indian village was known to exist at the confluence of Rock River and Turtle Creek. Probably its exact size and location varied considerably with the years and the fortunes of its leaders. Early writers and mapmakers refer to it variously as Turtle River, Turtle Village, and Turtle Creek.[1] The name The Turtle appears to have been still later in time.

The floodplain between the two streams at their confluence was a focal point for commerce and traffic by land and water. Here land trails, or traces, met on the east bank, usually where there was a ford or crossing to the west bank of Rock River.[2] Here both Joseph Tebo and soon thereafter Caleb Blodgett would build their log cabins where the two floodplains converged and pioneer Beloit would evolve thereafter. Here, too, periodic spring floods would drive the Indians to the oak groves on the high bluffs overlooking the Rock and Turtle bottoms.

What is now State Street was a dense thicket of oak and elmwood trees, with a heavy growth of hazel brush. The bluff east of the river displayed a vigorous variety of oak, hickory, and some walnut — an open forest extending to Beloit Junction.[3]

Beloit Junction marks the joining of the Milwaukee and Janesville railroad tracks immediately east of 1890 Sherwood Drive, where Turtle Creek approaches the Hillcrest bluffs of Beloit close by the old headgates of the mill-race that once skirted the bluffs. Referring to 1832, the date of the Black Hawk War, one usually reliable writer pinpointed the main Indian site.

The Turtle Village, we now know, stood on the bluff at the present site of Beloit Junction.[4]

The origin of the name The Turtle, and also Turtle Creek, is obscure. On the edge of another bluff, where the Beloit College observatory once stood, was once a large Indian effigy mound in the shape of a turtle. Perhaps this was the source of both names. No one really knows. As with

---

[1]Turtle River: An 1829 reference by John R. Kinzie, quoted in *Wis. Arch.*, XII, No. 1, 16, (June, 1913).

Turtle Village: Journal of Henry Gratiot, quoted in *Miss. Valley Hist. Review*, XII, No. 3, 396-401.

Turtle Creek: Moses Strong, *Hist. of Wis. Terr.*, 264; also *Beloit Free Press*, Dec. 4, 1844 (John Hackett interview); and *Wis. Arch.*, VI, No. 3, 150 (1907).

[2]Humphrey Clark claimed all trails converged to a point or crossing where the present-day dam is situated by Pleasant St. Barrett Smith, *Shopiere History*, 104.

[3]Buckley, Cornelius, *Manuscript*, (c. 1925).

[4]Way, R.B., *The Rock River Valley*, I, 118, quoting Cornelius Buckley.

so many Indian and pioneer names they are lost to history. Speaking of the campus, one writer says:

At the very corner the moundbuilders had set a giant turtle, with his head toward the beautiful river scene . . . I cannot undertake to answer for the motives of the mound-builders in shaping their totem at this commanding point, but I know that wandering Winnebagoes, long after the settlement of Beloit came and took a look at their turtle . . . [5]

Ira M. Buell described this turtle mound as being very symmetric in appearance: about 75 feet long, 30 feet wide, and less than two feet high.[6] Possibly its strategic location so near the two streams assured its importance to generations of Indian travelers and helped establish the identity of the area.

Scattered references are made by early settlers to several Indian sites. In addition to the already mentioned Hillcrest bluff east of Sherwood Drive, another is mentioned as being in the vicinity of Prairie Avenue and Switchtrack Alley on a high bluff overlooking Turtle Creek. Still another was located at Riverside Drive and Henry Avenue on the bluffs near the Beloit Plaza.[7] All were situated on high ground, near water and fertile lowlands, and provided good viewing of the surrounding area.

Archeologist Stephen D. Peet, a member of the first graduating class of Beloit College, offers this description of the area before the Black Hawk War of 1832:

There was a council house and garden beds at Beloit. The garden beds were situated on the bank of the Rock River, near where the Northwestern depot formerly stood.[8] *The first settlers raised their first vegetables on the spot where the garden beds had been. There were corn fields on the bottom of Turtle Creek, near where the athletic grounds are at present.*[9] *A council house built of bark, forty feet square, with poles in the center supporting the roof, stood near Turtle Creek, where the road to Shopiere crosses the creek with wigwams around it.*[10] *There were trails which led*

---

[5]Whitney, Henry M., *Proceedings of the State Hist. Society* (1899), 130. See also Phalen, James, *Sinnissippi* (1942), 55.

[6]*Wis. Arch.*, "Beloit Mound Groups," XVII, No. 4 (Nov. 1919), 121-122. See *infra*, Ch. 7, sec. 2.

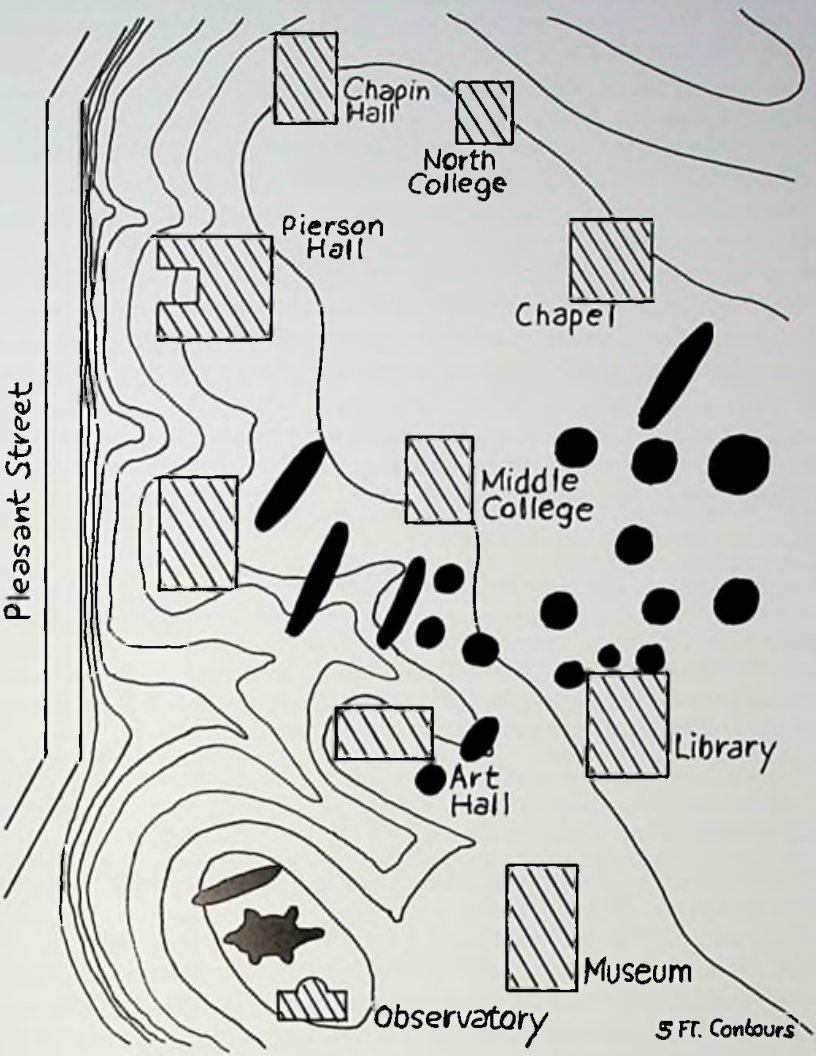
[7]Possibly Standing Post Village, mentioned by John Kinzie as having one lodge and 17 people, and ruled by Coming Lightning. Jipson. *Wis. Arch.*, "Winnebago Villages and Chieftans," II, No. 3, N.S. (1923), 128. Jipson also mentions Round Rock Village, presided over by Little Chief, at Janesville.

[8]The area immediately south of Shirland Avenue.

[9]Strong Stadium area.

[10]Bennett's Bridge, also called Murphy's Bridge.

Part of 1829 Chandler map, inaccurate in detail, but showing correctly the *Winnebago vil.* (Beloit) south of the Illinois state line. Turtle Creek appears but is not named. The *Chicago Trace* was an important Indian trail crossing Rock River at the Turtle. Wisconsin was then a part of Michigan territory. A few years later a surveyor's error shifted the state line southward almost to the mouth of Turtle Creek.



Beloit College Mounds (c. 1892)

Shows large Turtle Mound on present Neese Theater site that may have given Turtle Village and Turtle Creek their names.

to Rockford and to Janesville, on each side of the river, and another leading across the prairie toward Delavan Lake. One of these crosses the campus through the group of mounds.[11]

The council house was evidently a prominent meeting place for the Indians of the area. Its origin is unknown. Writing about 1900, Barrett Smith located it on the west bank of Turtle Creek near Bennett's Bridge on Shopiere Road at the northeast edge of Beloit:

This Council House stood a little north of the west end of the bridge, where it now stands. It was about 18 × 30 feet in size and 8 or 10 feet high, built of posts and poles, and covered with bark, both sides and roof, and was a very comfortable shelter.[12]

However, Smith wrote later that Humphrey Clark said the council house stood about a mile north of Bennett's Bridge on the west bank, and added:

It was surrounded by about two feet deep of debris, consisting of corn cobs, bones, and remains of Indian feasts.[13]

Still later, without naming her source, Annie McLenegan also placed the council house near the bridge:

. . . It stood on the high bluff where the present successor to the old Bennett-Murphy house now is and commanded a view of the Turtle Valley from Tiffany to near Beloit ... Shopiere Road was then an ancient Indian trail, which led from the council-house down the steep bluff and plunged across the creek where the bridge used to be. For many years, this was a ford for the pioneers as it had been for the Indians.[14]

The exact role of the council house in the lives of the Indians of the area is not known. One early account states the country was covered with trails leading in every direction from it.[15]

The only land thoroughfares were of course the Indian trails, many of which centered at The Turtle and were worn several inches deep by years of frequent use.[16] They would vary from a few inches to several feet in width. When the first settlers arrived they used, and sometimes improved and widened, these trails for their wagons. They were valued highways, showing the way, avoiding swamps, and usually leading to the best fords at rivers and streams.

---

[11] *Prehistoric America* (1898), II, 391.

[12] *Beloit Free Press*, Nov. 2, 1899.

[13] *Shopiere History*, 104.

[14] *Notes on Turtle and the Blackhawk War* (c. 1935), Beloit Hist. Society.

[15] *Shopiere History*, op. cit.

[16] *Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 66, quoting Deacon Henry Mears.

A trail from Fontana, at the western edge of Lake Geneva, ran to Beloit. This was the Chicago trail. Fontana was the location of chief Big Foot's Potawatomi Village. Its curving course was at different points from two to six miles south of Turtle Creek.

At a distance of about three miles east of the present limits of Beloit the trail was intersected by a trail running west from the site of Delavan. This trail crossed the Creek and ran in a southwest direction to the mouth of the Creek in Beloit . . . [17]

The Chicago trail, also called trace, was a direct route from Chicago to the lead mines in the Shullsburg area. From Beloit it continued northwesterly to Centerville on Sugar River, near Brodhead, and thence southwesterly to what is now Monroe.

Another trail went north along the east bank of Rock River from Rockford to Beloit to Janesville. Where the Chicago trace and the north-south trace intersected, near the confluence of Rock River and Turtle Creek, Joseph Tebo would later build his cabin, at the present-day site of State Street and Shirland Avenue.[18] Less than a year after Tebo, Caleb Blodgett would arrive and build his own cabin nearby.

Perhaps the earliest known reference to the Turtle Village is found in an 1822 letter from Thomas Forsyth to Territorial Governor Cass, in which he reviews the danger of Indian hostilities at the time:

... In my opinion, nothing is to be apprehended from any of the Indians in my agency (Fort Armstrong), but I cannot say as much for the Winnebago who have a village about sixty or seventy miles east of the lead mines on a branch which falls into the northern fork of Rocky River and is called Paystalon.

Dr. N. W. Jipson, who quoted this Forsyth letter, states that on the basis of his study he was satisfied that this reference must have been to the Turtle Village. Before that we have only the silence of unrecorded history.[19]

3. White Crow

In the decade before the arrival of Tebo and Blodgett, several individuals are mentioned as being chiefs of the Village. However, the frequent moving of Indian families from one site to another up and down Rock River makes it difficult to determine who lived where at a particular time. Fortunately, a

---

[17] *Wis. Arch.*, IX, N.S., No. 1, 12.

[18] "These trails crossed or came together at the north end of the old race bridge on State Street." *Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 66.

[19] *Wis. Arch.*, II, No. 3, N.S., 128, (July, 1923).

few scattered references, mostly by Indian agents, afford us clues. Interestingly enough, we know more about the physical features and characteristics of some of these leaders than we do of either Caleb Blodgett or Joseph Tebo.

In 1829 Turtle Village had a population of six hundred Winnebago Indians who occupied 35 lodges.[1] How much area the village embraced is not known but it may have extended for two or three miles along both streams, mostly on the east bank of Rock River and the west bank of Turtle Creek. That same year Kinzie's annuity list says that Koshkonong had only 57 Indians. Evidently the populations of these two principal villages varied from year to year, depending in part upon where their leaders chose to live.

The most distinguished Winnebago chieftan in the entire area was White Crow. How long he lived at The Turtle is not known. He seems to have moved about considerably and had many followers. According to one account:

____ White Crow appeared to be about fifty years of age. He was about five feet, ten inches in stature, straight and erect; and of a mild and pleasant countenance for a savage. He was a fine and fluent speaker, and the spokesman of his band on all important occasions.[2]

Juliette Kinzie describes him further:

Then there was Kau-ray-kaw-saw-kaw, "the White Crow", or Rock River Indian, who afterwards distinguished himself as the friend of the whites during the Sauk war. He was called by the French "leBorgne", from having lost an eye; and the black silk handkerchief, which he wore drooping over the left side of his face to disguise the blemish, taken with his native costume, gave him a very singular appearance.[3]

In commenting upon events at The Turtle in 1829 Dr. Jipson adds:

White Crow, the diplomatic genius and born leader of the Winnebago, now presided over this village. Many aspersions, most or all of which are entirely unwarranted, have been cast at the memory of this chieftan.[4] *... I can find no documentary evidence to prove that White Crow was anything but a loyal friend to the white man, and I am convinced that, in common with*

---

[1] Jipson, *Wis. Arch.*, II, No. 3, N.S. (1923), 129.

[2] 10 *Wis. Hist. Coll.* (1888), 190.

[3] *Wau-bun* (1856), 91. Mrs. Kinzie also saw White Crow at Fort Winnebago (Portage) in October 1832, immediately after the Black Hawk War when a number of Indians were brought there to face charges of having aided Black Hawk, *id*, 458-459.

[4] One critical account says: "... White Crow was an Indian of bad character, tall, slim, with a hawk nose, and with as much of a sinister look as a man could have who had only one eye, for one of his eyes had been put out in a brawl. He was addicted to gambling, fighting, drinking, and other disreputable practices ..." 10 *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, 253. However, this is definitely a minority report.

Shaubena, the well known Potawatomi chieftan, the memory of White Crow should be cherished as a true friend of the pioneer settlers with whom he came in contact...

That White Crow was not an hereditary chieftan, but by sheer force of personality and merit became the chief spokesman of the Winnebago, may indicate the reason why Turtle Village had a large population in 1829, while the population of Koshkonong had diminished, simply showing the large personal following of people who desired him to be with their chieftan.[5]

White Crow's name also figures prominently in the Black Hawk War of 1832, the year that marked the permanent abandonment of the Turtle Village by the Indians. During his flight northward along the east bank of Rock River toward Wisconsin Territory, with General Atkinson and his soldiers following in pursuit, Black Hawk captured and carried off two white girls, Sylvia and Rachel Hall, 17 and 15 years of age. According to Lawson:

White Crow was sent to Black Hawk's camp by Henry Gratiot, sub-agent for the Winnebago, to purchase the freedom of the two Hall girls who had been taken to his camp alive from the slaughter at the Davis farm near Ottawa, Illinois. He purchased their freedom for $2000.00 in trinkets and horses. They were delivered to Gratiot at Blue Mounds Fort June 3, 1832 by a party of fifty Winnebago headed by White Crow.[6]

Another account tells us more:

... After he had secured the Hall girls from the Potawatomi, who held them subsequent to their capture in the Blackhawk War, and delivered them safe and sound to the whites, Gen. Dodge said to him, "Your treatment of the girls was, as admitted by the girls themselves, noble, kind and humane. No man, either civilized or savage could have acted with more delicacy of feeling than you have done on this occasion[7]...

White Crow has also been described as "... the Cicero among Indians, for his powers of oratory and eloquence."[8] He was not a war chief; rather, he acted as a civil chief and statesman, apparently moving about extensively through many or all of the Winnebago villages. We know he signed treaties

---

[5]Jipson, *op. cit.*, 129-130.

[6]Lawson, P.V. "The Winnebago Tribe." *Wis. Arch.*, VI, No. 3, 153-154. The two Hall sisters, Rachel and Sylvia, were the only survivors of the Indian Creek massacre of May 20, 1832 in which fifteen settlers were killed. The two girls were brought to Black Hawk's encampment as captives, marched north with the Indians into Wisconsin, apparently were not mistreated, and finally were ransomed through the intercession of White Crow. Stevens, Frank E., *The Black Hawk War*, Chicago (1903), 149-154.

[7]Jipson, *op. cit.*, 129.

[8]10 *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, 185.

at Butte des Morts in 1827, at Green Bay in 1828, and at Rock Island in 1832 at the conclusion of the Black Hawk War.[9]

Remarkably enough, several examples of White Crow's eloquence still survive from notes taken at the time:

. . . At the Prairie du Chien Council of 1828, White Crow was the chief orator for the Winnebago. In one of his speeches he made this assertion to Governor Cass: "Father! Since I have known good from evil, no white man can say I have done him harm. I speak before the Great Spirit who knows what I say. I hold you fast by the hand." He prefaced one of his speeches by the following remarks to Governor Cass: "Father! You who are before us, we look upon as we do the Great Spirit. He has placed a pen in your hand; he has made your skin white. But he has made us red, poor, and objects of pity."[10]

Following the abandonment of Turtle Village and the end of the Black Hawk War in the autumn of 1832, White Crow and many of his followers moved to a village on the northwest shore of Lake Mendota where Pheasant Branch stands today. He died about 1834 and was buried near Cross Plains.[11] By almost every account he was one of the great leaders of the Winnebago people.

4. Whirling Thunder

By 1832 White Crow was evidently associated with several Winnebago villages as a civil chief and elder statesman, more concerned with diplomacy and counseling than acting as war chief or village leader. These later duties appear to have fallen upon Whirling Thunder (Waw kaun ween kaw) who was about 35 years of age and was, according to one account, " . . . morose and sullen in his appearance, and had the reputation of being cruel. He was short and thick-set, not more than five feet eight inches in height."[1] Another writer tells us more about him:

During the Black Hawk War, although Kinzie's annuity list shows him to have been living at Turtle Village, White Crow was not the principal chieftan. Perhaps the duties incident to his tribal leadership had caused him to resign as village chieftan. Under date of December 22, 1832, Henry Gratiot, sub-Indian agent writing to Governor Cass, designated Whirling Thunder as head chief of Turtle Village. Whirling Thunder was said to be a man of great reputation for sagacity and wisdom in council. At the close of the Black Hawk War, Whirling Thunder, with a large band of his Rock River followers, went to Iowa County, Wisconsin.[2]

---

[9]Lawson, *op. cit.*, 153.

[10]Jipson, *op. cit.*, 130.

[11]Lawson, *op. cit.*, 153.

[1]Peter Parkinson, Jr. "Notes on the Black Hawk War," *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, X, 191 (1888).

[2]Jipson, *Wis. Arch.*, II, No. 3, N.S. 130-131. See also Parkinson, op. cit., 253.

Black Hawk

Lithograph first published in history of Indian Tribes of North America . . . By Thomas L. Kenny and James Hall (1842) Vol. II.

State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Whirling Thunder was also the war chief at The Turtle at the time of its abandonment in June, 1832. A few weeks later he aided White Crow in obtaining delivery of the kidnapped Hall sisters who were ransomed from Black Hawk's band.[3] Later that summer, as a principal Winnebago war chief, he was one of the three leaders ordered held as hostages for the good behavior of the Winnebago tribe after Black Hawk's downfall.

At one time Whirling Thunder evidently had his village near Lake Koshkonong. By 1836 he was occupying a village on the Wisconsin River near present-day Portage. He died in Iowa.[4]

5. Walking Turtle

According to Mrs. Kinzie, the principal chief of the Winnebago was Walking Turtle, whose name she gives as Naw-kaw, or Kar-ray-mau-nee. Lawson claims that this chief had a village at Turtle Creek in 1832.[1] More likely, this was but one of several villages under his jurisdiction as a civil chief. Whether he did more than merely visit the Turtle Village from time to time is unknown.

Walking Turtle is described by Mrs. Kinzie as "... a stalwart Indian, with a broad, pleasant contenance, the great peculiarity of which was an immense under lip, hanging nearly to his chin."[2] His age is not given. Since both a father and son by this name figure prominently in Winnebago history, we cannot be certain which is mentioned here.

Lawson says Walking Turtle signed treaties in 1816, 1825, 1829 and 1832 and was known in 1832 as the "Counsellor" of the Winnebago, and adds:

When Walking Turtle, the companion of Tecumseh, went to his grave is not recorded. It is only certain that one of the name has been prominent for a century in the stirring border days. J. O. Lewis painted the portrait of the elder "Kere mo nee" at the treaty of Little Butte des Morts, in 1827.[3]

---

[3]Parkinson, *op. cit.*, 185-186.

[4]Lawson, *Wis. Arch.*, VI, No. 3, 156.

[1]Lawson, *Wis. Arch.*, VI, No. 3, 151.

[2]Kinzie, *Waubun*, 89.

[3]Lawson, *op. cit.*, 152.

Walking Turtle
State Historical Society of Wisconsin

6. Old Soldier

Dr. Jipson also makes a brief reference to still another Indian chief, Old Soldier, who was evidently associated with Turtle Village before the Black Hawk War forced the community to flee in 1832:

The treaty of Fort Armstrong compelled the Indians to leave the Rock River, and they were loath to go. Undoubtedly, according to their custom, many a suppliant Winnebago retired far from the haunts of his fellow man, and for days abstained from food trusting that some favoring spirit would appear to him in a dream and promise him an eventual victory over the whites. That they had received such a promise was evidenced by the statement of chief 'Old Soldier', of Turtle Village who told Henry Gratiot that they were not pleased with the treaty, and "before we move we will carry our wampun to the neighboring tribes; then we will return again. The Great Spirit is mad with the whites and when they gather again to come against us, he will send a sickness among them that will destroy them and we will remain on Rock River in peace."[1]

7. Juliette Kinzie Visits Turtle Creek, 1831

Although the fact has apparently gone unnoticed for more than a hundred years, Mrs. John H. Kinzie (Juliette), author of the classic account of frontier life in Wisconsin, *Wau-Bun*, mentions visiting The Turtle in 1831 before the Black Hawk War. Down through the years readers of *Wau-Bun* did not realize that the site known as The Turtle in 1836 was referred to as Turtle Creek in the early 1830s. Hence the significance of her references to Turtle Creek was probably unrecognized by Beloit area readers. Actually, in 1831 a reference to Turtle Creek could be either to the stream or to the Indian village located at the confluence of Rock River and Turtle Creek.

In *Wau-Bun* Mrs. Kinzie twice mentions Turtle Creek in such a manner as to establish quite clearly that she had in mind the Winnebago Indian village. Her first reference deals with the locations of some of the Winnebago tribes in the area:

The principal villages of this division of the tribe was at Lake Winnebago, Green and Fox Lakes, and Barribault, Mud Lake, the Four Lakes, Koshkonong, and Turtle Creek.[1]

This first reference is important only to show that Mrs. Kinzie was aware of and referred to this large Winnebago village as Turtle Creek. Much later in her book she mentions visiting this village. But first we must know the setting for her visit.

---

[1] *Wis. Arch.* II, No. 3, N.S. 138-139.

[1] *Wau-Bun*, 99.

In a return trip she made from the hamlet of Chicago to Fort Winnebago (Portage) in 1831, a year before the Black Hawk War, Mrs. Kinzie affords us a rare and idyllic view of a sensitive and impressionable young woman's journey through this area. Leaving Big Foot's Indian village (present day Fontana) on what is now Lake Geneva:

... and having remunerated our friends to their satisfaction, the goods and chattels were collected, the wagon repacked, and we set off for our encampment at Turtle Creek.[2]

From these two references and from what follows, it is reasonably clear that Mrs. Kinzie and her party traveled the old Indian trail, called the "Chicago tract", from Fontana to Beloit, approaching present-day Beloit from the east somewhere between the high bluffs of the State Line Road on the south and Milwaukee Road on the north.

After climbing the high hills west of Big Foot's beautiful lake (leaving Fontana), Mrs. Kinzie's party continued their westward journey to the "encampment at Turtle Creek";

The exertions and excitement of our laborious ascent, together with the increasing heat of the sun, made this afternoon's ride more uncomfortable than anything we had previously felt. We were truly rejoiced when the "whoop" of our guide, and the sight of a few scattered lodges, gave notice that we had reached our encamping ground. We chose a beautiful sequestered spot, by the side of a clear, sparkling stream, and having dismounted, and seen that our horses were made comfortable, my husband after giving his directions to his men, led me to a retired spot where I could lay aside my hat and mask, and bathe my flushed face in the cool, refreshing waters ...

The Indians had brought us, as a present, some fine brook trout, which our Frenchmen had prepared in the most tempting fashion, and before the bright moon rose and we were ready for our rest, all headache and fatigue had alike disappeared.[3]

Whether the Kinzie party went as far as the main Indian village at the confluence of the Rock and the Turtle is doubtful. From Mrs. Kinzie's description, and the fact that the party was en route to Lake Koshkonong, it is more likely that they camped along the Turtle near the bottom lands, which the Indians farmed in primitive fashion, before crossing the Turtle and proceeding northwesterly to Rock River and thence north to Koshkonong.

Exactly where the Kinzies camped that night will never be known. Since she said they could see the lodges of Turtle Creek as they drew near, the

---

[2] *Ibid.*, 322.

[3] *Ibid.*, 322-323.

party may have approached from the high ground overlooking the stream, veering northwesterly as far as present-day Turtle Ridge before camping and crossing the stream.

Be that as it may, a close reading of *Wau-Bun* makes it reasonably clear that its charming author camped at the site of today's Beloit in 1831, the year before the inhabitants of the great Winnebago village at Turtle Creek deserted it for the last time.

8. War Clouds, 1832

On April 6, 1832 the Indian leader Black Hawk crossed the Mississippi from the west with a band of about 400 Sauk and Fox warriors and perhaps a thousand women, children and old men, with all their domestic belongings, in a desperate and tragic effort to resettle again in the Rock River valley from which they believed they had been wrongfully excluded by unjust treaties over many years.

Exaggerated reports about the size and intentions of the Indians quickly led to panic throughout Illinois and the midwest. Diplomacy was ignored and hostilities soon followed. The governor of Illinois and the United States government over-reacted by calling up the state militia and regular army troops under General Henry Atkinson to pursue and crush the Indian dissidents.

During the summer of 1832 Black Hawk led his half-starved, weary, and bedraggled company of men, women and children up Rock River into what would soon be Wisconsin Territory, while Atkinson with over two thousand troops followed relentlessly behind.

The two lasting results of the War would be the final humbling of the Indians of Illinois and Wisconsin and the advertising to the rest of the nation of the beauty and fertility of the Rock River Valley and Wisconsin Territory.

Henry Gratiot, the sub-agent, affords us an almost unknown glimpse of the Turtle Village in his *Journal* for 1832 when he visited the area to determine the attitude of the Indians there towards Black Hawk. According to his *Journal:*[1]

April 16 — Received a letter from Gen. Atkinson informing me that the Saukees had crossed the Mississippi and assumed a hostile attitude.

April 17 — Started to go into the interior of the Winnebago nation, to try to ascertain wh(e)ther they are apprised of the movements or intentions of the Saukees or not, and to endeavour to counteract and prevent any

[1]The original Journal is in the National Archives, Washington. The following portions appear in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* XII, No. 3, 396-401.

influence which the Saukees may have used or may attempt to use. — Take two white men (Joseph Morell and George Cubbage) with me to be used as expresses if necessary.

April 19 — Arrived at Turtle Village[2] *and found the Indians preparing for a great religious ceremony.*

April 21 — Gave them some presents and had a talk with them. Learned that the Saukees had sent the wampum[3] *to them three different times in the course of a few months. They say that they refused to accept it and are determined to remain at peace. They wish, they say, a few of their principal men to go to (the) Prophet*[4] *and once more invite him and his band to come and live with them. I approbate this, but lest the Saukees might induce them to join in the war, I think it necessary to accompany the party.*

Apparently small pox had been raging among the Winnebago Indians for several months in 1832 and the Turtle Village was seriously affected. Gratiot's *Journal* continues:

April 22 — Gave relief to two families the men of which have died of small pox. In the course of our stay here Mr. Cubbage vaccinated about three hundred persons.[5] *Sent one express (Morell) to inform the frontier settlers of the apparent peaceable disposition of the Winnebagoes. The other man (Cubbage) goes with me to take a letter from the Prophet's village to Gen. Atkinson if necessary. Started with 26 Winnebagoes . . .*

Among the 26 Indians Gratiot had accompany him from Turtle Village on his trip down Rock River to the Prophet's Village, on the site of modern-day Prophetstown, a short distance from the Mississippi, was the famous chief and diplomat, White Crow. Gratiot's account continues:

April 24 — I find many individuals of this band disposed to incorporate with the Winnebagoes and be peaceable but the Prophet himself is very sullen. The Saukees[6] *are encamped a short distance below.*

April 25 — This morning the Winnebagoes hoisted a white flag at the top of the tent which we occupy. The Saukees came and took it down and hoisted the British flag[7] *at the end of the tent. I told them that the white flag was mine and demanded the reason for taking it down, — they replied that I might travel with a flag, but should not keep it up while here. I, nevertheless*

---

[2]Site of present-day Beloit.

[3]An Indian invitation to join the Sauks in making war.

[4]The Prophet was an influential leader, although not a chief, of a Winnebago village 40 miles above the mouth of Rock River. He also had a large religious following.

[5]One clue to the size of the Turtle Village in 1832 before it was abandoned.

[6]Black Hawk's forces.

[7]Black Hawk was pro-British. His followers were described as the British Band.

ordered my Winnebagoes to raise it again — they did so — and the Saukees raised theirs by the side of mine.

They danced their war dance and exhibited evident signs of hostility, especially towards Mr. Cubbage.

Gratiot did not indicate whether or not he talked with Black Hawk but states that he and his Turtle Village Winnebagoes ignored the hostility of the Saukees and continued down Rock River to Rock Island where they met Gen. Atkinson. Here the chiefs assured him of their peaceful intentions.

A month later the *Springfield Sangamo Journal* in its May 31, 1832 issue described the foregoing diplomatic mission of Gratiot and White Crow in more dramatic fashion. According to this secondhand (and perhaps embellished) news account, Black Hawk and his band met up with Gratiot on April 26, hoisted the British flag, fired guns in the air, sounded war whoops, and acted as if they were about to attack Gratiot who was in a nearby lodge with White Crow and his Turtle Village Indians. However, the newspaper report stated, instead of attacking, Black Hawk and some of his men suddenly dismounted and entered the lodge and shook hands with Gratiot. Then, according to the newspaper:

. . . They formed a circle within his lodge, holding their spears and other war implements, looking very angry and unfriendly. After sitting sometime and talking among themselves, a friendly Winnebago chief ("White Crow") who went with Mr. G. from Turtle Village, rose, went to his blanket, took two plugs of tobacco and gave them to the war chief of the hostile band, after which the war party left the lodge, leaving only the Black Hawk . . .

The newspaper account concludes by stating that Black Hawk told Gratiot the Indians would not cross the Mississippi back to the west bank where Atkinson demanded. Instead the Indians would fight if Atkinson brought his troops after them.[8]

The stage was set for the Black Hawk War. Soon the old chief and his men, burdened by their families, would begin their tragic march up the Rock River Valley with the army of General Atkinson in hot pursuit and in two more months the Turtle Village would be deserted and cease to exist.

9. The Black Hawk War And Stephen Mack

In late May and early June of 1832 Black Hawk and his warriors with their families had begun their northward flight up the Rock River Valley ahead of the pursuing forces of General Atkinson.

---

[8]An even more exciting version of this incident is given by E.B. Washburne, *Wis. Hist. Collections,* X, 253-254 (1888), purportedly based on an account Gratiot gave to his sons. This version had Gratiot escaping from the Indians in breath-taking fashion. Which account is true history: Gratiot's own journal? A newspaper account a month later? Or Washburne's third-hand version?

Probably about this same time the great Indian village located at the confluence of Rock River and Turtle Creek, called Turtle Village, had begun to disintegrate in anticipation of the coming arrival from the south first of Black Hawk's band and then Atkinson's soldiers, the former group desperate and hungry, the latter vengeful and suspicious. The neutral Indians of Turtle Village prudently decided to abandon their home before the arrival of pursued and pursuers.

Meanwhile northern Illinois along Rock River was in turmoil as bands of new Indians moved into the area ahead of the combatant forces farther south. Stephen Mack, the trader, whose post in 1832 was situated on Rock River two miles south of present-day Rockton, appears to have been the only white inhabitant in the area. In May, Mack left his trading post for the security of Fort Dearborn and the village of Chicago. There he wrote two letters to a sister in Detroit which have recently come to light and provide us a fascinating glimpse of life in the area during the Black Hawk War. Mack was not an illiterate frontiersman; he had good schooling in the east and was a man of considerable character and ability.

In one letter, dated May 30, 1832, Mack writes:

. . . I left my wintering ground or trading station[1] *on the 9th inst. and as I left it the Sacks took possession of my house but were prevented from injuring me or my men by the Winnebago Indians who claimed me as their friend and trader.* +

Immediately on my arrival at this place I joined with the inhabitants of this place, took up arms and garrisoned Fort Dearborn and we have been able by that means to afford protection to all of the inhabitants of the surrounding country that could get in in season but I am sorry to say that our force was too small to enable us to go to the assistance of such as could not get in in season to save themselves, and in consequence three families consisting of 14 persons were killed and several houses burned. +

After being reinforced by those who got in from the outer settlements we went out in pursuit of the murderers but could not find them and after burying the dead we came back to wait for reinforcements to enable us to fight our way through to the main army (which was last heard from near my trading post on Rock River) and assist in punishing the marauders . . . [2]

Two weeks later, in a letter dated June 13, 1832, Stephen Mack wrote again to his sister:

---

[1]Mack's Rock River post was near what is now the Hononegah Forest Preserve. The site was later known as Bird's Grove, after an early settler.

[2]Rockton Historical Society, Archives.

. . . I have been out on an expedition against the Sack Indians since my last letter but we could not find them where we expected and were obliged to return and wait for reinforcements to enable us to penetrate further into the country.+

General Atkinson will be on the move again in a few days and General J. R. Williams (now at this place) will probably move on to his assistance, in that case I shall join him with a few volunteers (mounted Riflemen) from this place.+

You need be under no apprehension on my account for I can assure you that all of the accounts that you receive from the seat of war are very much exaggerated. It is really amusing to me who see all the operations and know perhaps better than almost any one the real danger, to read the accounts of manouvers of the enemy never thought of by them, and of battles never fought. And then to sit down and listen to the remarks of the raw yankees who have lately emigrated to this country one would think that Napoleon Bonepart had risen from the grave and presented himself in the person of the Blackhawk and that the spirit of his millions of heros were concentrated in the 5 or 600 warriors led by that chief.+

I by no means wish to undervalue our enemies. They are brave and subtle and it may be dangerous to encounter them without an overwhelming force, but I can by no means approve of the tardy operations of our chief officers for it gives time to the nimble footed Indian to ravage our frontier settlements and bathe their homes in the blood of helpless women and unsuspecting infants — had more prompt measures been pursued in the commencement I have no doubt but many lives should have been spared and we should have been at this moment in the full enjoyment of peace . . . [3]

10. Black Hawk Stops At Turtle Village

Although accounts vary as to the day the forces of General Atkinson crossed Turtle Creek and entered the deserted Indian village known as Turtle Village or Turtle Creek, the best evidence indicates that it was on July 1, 1832. The diary of Lt. Albert Sidney Johnston (later a distinguished Confederate general) contains the following entry for July 1:

Marched to Turtle Creek today and encamped on the plain between Rock River and the creek. [1]

Johnston was an able officer whose diary was intended to serve as an itinerary record of the movements of Atkinson's forces. Presumably it was kept on almost a day-to-day basis. Both the original and a copy he made later in his own handwriting give the date as July 1st.

---

[3] *Ibid.*

[1] Johnston *Diary*, Tulane Univ. Library. The Ill. Hist. Society, Springfield, has Gen. Atkinson's copy of the same.

Map drawn by William Clark on July 6, 1832 after General Atkinson's troops passed through the Turtle Village on the east side of Rock River in pursuit of Black Hawk. This rough sketch correctly locates the state line north of the Indian Village as Congress had intended.

National Archives, Washington

However, in 1834 John Wakefield, who served as a scout in the Black Hawk War, wrote an excellent account of the entire event, relying in part upon his memory and the accounts and records of others. On the whole his research was thorough, but minor errors inevitably crept into his story because much of his information was second-hand. Wakefield said the troops entered The Turtle on June 30th (a day earlier than Johnston's diary says). Wakefield's book was read and quoted; Johnston's diary was not. Hence the June 30th date was copied by local historians who saw no reason to question it. According to Wakefield:

The 30th, we passed through the Turtle Village, which is a considerable Winnebago town, but it was deserted. We marched on about one mile, and encamped in the open prairie near enough to Rock River to get water from it. We here saw very fresh signs of the Sac Indians, where they had been apparently fishing on that day. General Atkinson believed we were close to them, and apprehended an attack that night. The sentinels fired several times, and we were as often paraded, and prepared to receive the enemy, but they never came. But from what the sentinels gave into the officers of the day, there was no doubt that Indians had been prowling about the camp.+

July first, we had not marched but two or three miles before an Indian was seen across Rock River at some distance off in a very high prairie,[2] *which no doubt was a spy, and likely was one that had been prowling about our encampment the night before . . .* [3]

Frank E. Stevens, a student of the Black Hawk War, was also aware of this one day discrepancy between the diary of Lt. Johnston and the latter book of John Wakefield. He says that Johnston's journal, written on the spot, must be considered more reliable. Stevens also indicated that there was other corroborating evidence gleaned from the itinerary of the marchers to support the conclusion that the Turtle Village was entered on July 1st.[4]

A few days later, a messenger, William Clark (son of William Clark of Lewis and Clark fame), wrote the following letter:

Head Qtrs.
Army of the Frontier
July 6, 1832

My Dear Father:

. . . Black Hawk camped a little above Turtle Village and there danced the scalp dance around a pole surrounded with straw which looks like it had been burnt. At a tree near there was a dance around the two young women,[5] *we saw where it appeared they had been tied, at another tree the young white dog was hung up and tobacco, etc., tied to his tail we saw his carcass, etc.*[6]

---

[2]Bill Hill Park?

[3]Frank Everett Stevens, *Wakefield's History of the Black Hawk War,* Chicago, Caxton Club, (1908), 76-77.

[4]Frank Everett Stevens, *The Black Hawk War,* 287. The June 30 date appears on the Lincoln marker, situated at the Riverside Drive — Lawton Avenue intersection in Beloit.

[5]The captive Hall sisters.

[6]National Archives (Army), Wash. D.C. The Fort Atkinson Hist. Society has a copy. See also Swart, Hannah. *Footsteps of Our Founding Fathers,* 15.

Clark mentioned that Coshkononk Lake was about 20 miles above Turtle Village. His letter of the 6th was a recapitulation of events of the preceding days. By the 6th the soldiers were in the vicinity of the "Coshkononk" searching for Black Hawk.

In his July 1st entry Wakefield states that after leaving the Turtle Village campsite:

. . . We proceeded a few miles further and came to the place where the Indians who had taken the two Miss Halls prisoners had stayed several days . . . [7]

11. Black Hawk's Trail

The exact route of Atkinson's troops in crossing Turtle Creek and passing through the city-limits of present day Beloit is unknown. For many years early settlers mentioned seeing the trails, wagon ruts and other evidences of the small army that time and plowing gradually obscured forever. Actually, there may have been two or more trails. It is unlikely that Atkinson had his entire force following only one path.

Cornelius "Con" Buckley, colorful Beloit attorney and historian, wrote in the *Beloit Daily Free Press,* October 8, 1891, describing the route of Atkinson's troops through the Turtle Village in pursuit of Black Hawk. Although Buckley does not explain how he determined the route taken, he was a reliable historian and undoubtedly had done his homework. Since his account appeared only in the newspaper and is almost unknown, it is repeated here in large part:

". . . The army moved in a northerly direction, up the east side of Rock River . . . passing one mile east of the present city of Rockford, and through the towns of Harlem and Roscoe, crossing the state line at or near the south-east corner of the corporate limits of the present city of Beloit, probably at the foot of the bluff on the State Line Road, and on what was formerly the Rood farm, and which, years ago was known as the "Far Hill," thence across the Turtle Creek, and across the Turtle flats, in a slightly southeasterly direction to the point of bluff now owned by the Sherwood estate, where is now Beloit Junction, very near the old "Head Gates" at the head of Brooks' Race.+

A few rods to the west of this corner, or point of bluff, may still be seen a narrow ravine or pass, leading to the top of the bluff. Up this ravine the trail led to the top of the bluff, and then in a northwesterly direction through the present Catholic Cemetery grounds, and the farm of Hon. Clinton Babbitt, toward Rock River.+

---

[7]Stevens, *Wakefield's History, op. cit.,* 77. Whether Clark and Wakefield are referring to the same campsite is not certain.

The exact spot where the troops encamped is very near the northeast corner of the southwest quarter of section 25, town 1 and range 12, and is 480 rods west of the Janesville prairie or telegraph road, and 203 rods east of the east bank of Rock River. The place in question is directly north of the old fairgrounds, on land formerly owned by the late William Rood, Esq., and at present owned by Mrs. Ella Adams, daughter of the late Hon. John Hackett.

Anecdotes relative to the movements of Black Hawk in the vicinity of Beloit, must necessarily be meagre, and to some extent unreliable, for two very apparent reasons:

First, there was no depredation committed in the immediate vicinity of Beloit, and no conflict between the Government forces and the Indians under the Hawk took place here. Indeed, in 1832, there was not living — so far as I have been able to ascertain — in what is now Rock County, a single white inhabitant, except, possibly some French trappers in the service of the Astor Fur Company.

Dane county had, I believe a few itinerant white inhabitants but no prominent settlers, or settlement. The adjoining county of Winnebago, in the state of Illinois, had, certainly one white inhabitant prior to the Black Hawk War, in the person of Mack, a native of Vermont, who had married a Winnebago woman. He lived as you well remember, near the present village of Rockton where he died years since.

Second, the soldiers under General Atkinson were United States regulars and Illinois volunteers . . .

The fact, therefore, that no Wisconsin soldiers served in the immediate commands of either Atkinson, Henry or Alexander . . . and that no conflict occurred here, nor anything else to attract special attention, necessarily make accounts of the troops, and of the Indians under Black Hawk, in this vicinity, very scarce, and for that reason, the more precious and desirable.

While the Black Hawk War did little to enhance the military reputations of its leaders in our history books, it was distinguished by the participation of an unusually large number of young officers who in later years would become national figures. Several politicians later exploited their modest roles for their political advantage.[1]

Abraham Lincoln, however, was not impressed by his own achievements. In Congress in 1848, he poked sardonic fun at General Cass whose political supporters had pictured him as a dashing Indian fighter, by saying:

---

[1]Future presidents, statesmen, and generals were names on the muster rolls: Abraham Lincoln, a captain of Illinois Mounted Volunteers, and a private in two later companies; Colonel Zachary Taylor; Lieut. Jefferson Davis; Major General Winfield Scott; Lieut. Albert Sidney Johnston; Henry Dodge, later governor of Wisconsin; and three other later governors of Illinois, to name only a few.

If Gen. Cass went in advance of me in picking whortleberries, I guess I surpassed him in charges upon the wild onions. If he saw any live, fighting Indians, it was more than I did — but I had a good many bloody struggles with the mosquitoes; and although I never fainted for loss of blood, I can truly say I was often very hungry.[2]

12. A Beloit Legend Revisited

The 1832 Black Hawk War later gave rise to an early Beloit legend that not one but two armies had camped at The Turtle on the same night while in pursuit of Black Hawk. Two newspaper accounts — in 1866 and 1878 — mention the incident and confess their perplexity. Evidently it was a topic of considerable interest to the first settlers. Probably surmise and conjecture added to the legend. As the oldtimes died the story appears to have been forgotten, partly because no later books preserved the newspaper accounts. Possibly no one ever offered a definitive answer.

The *Beloit Journal* in 1866 recounted the legend:

It is said by the first settlers of the town, though with what belief we know not, that on a particular night there were two armies encamped within sight of this city — one the army of General Atkinson, the other that under General Scott. The latter coming up from the south with his army, passed from Roscoe in a straight line northward and encamped on the bluff near the point where the Racine railroad cuts it at the head gates of the upper race — General Atkinson came down from the region of Fort Atkinson in pursuit of the Indians and encamped the same night on the prairie north of the city.

The only proof that we have of this myth is that which all myths have to depend upon, namely, the traces left upon the face of the earth . . . It is certain that as late as 1844 the double track of an army trail was distinctly visible upon the prairie, showing clearly the course which the army wagons took across the country. This track was in a straight course from Roscoe to the north, passed east of the city, down the bluff beyond the valley of the —— and across the bottom land to the old ford which is near the head gates of the race. The frames and tent poles of the army of General Atkinson are said also to have been seen on the prairie north of the city[1] . . .

Twelve years later (1878) Robert Crane repeated the legend in another newspaper article, purporting to explain exactly what happened — correct in local details but wildly inaccurate in correlating troop and Indian movements. Crane's explanation:

As there were signs of the movements of our army plainly to be seen when I came here, I will say a few words in reference to it. As tradition has it, General Scott was moving against the Indians along the Mississippi, below

---

[2]Austin, H. Russell. *The Wisconsin Story,* The Journal Co., Milwaukee (1948), 87-88.

[1]"Early History of Beloit," undated 1866 clipping, Ch. 4.

and near the mouth of Rock River. General Atkinson was stationed at the head of Lake Koshkonong, on this river, 35 miles north of this place, and General Dodge at Mineral Point, 75 miles west.+

A large party of Indians who were connected in the war with Black Hawk, became separated from his main force which crossed the Mississippi near Quincy, Ill. This party came north, keeping up on the east side of Rock River to this point. General Scott with his army followed them, and General Atkinson at the same time came down from the north. To avoid meeting him they crossed to the west side, still going northward.+

The two armies meeting here, the one, (General Atkinson's), camped one mile north on the prairie, leaving tent stakes and other signs on the ground, and the next day forded the river to follow the Indians.+

General Scott camped with his army about one and a half miles east, on the bank of Turtle Creek, and the following day returned the way he came. This army trail remained for years, till destroyed by cultivation . . . [2]

Both accounts agree that Atkinson camped north of the city as it was a hundred years ago. This we know Atkinson did. Also both accounts agree on the site of Scott's camp: ". . . encamped on the bluff near the point where the Racine railroad cuts it at the headgate of the upper race . . ." and ". . .camped with his army about one and a half miles east, on the bank of Turtle Creek..." Scott's site can be pinpointed at the vicinity of 1880 and 2000 Sherwood Drive.

However, the basic element of the legend — that both armies camped at The Turtle the same night — was erroneous. They both camped here, but more than a month apart. We know, for instance, that all or a portion of Atkinson's army was at The Turtle on July 1 and then moved northward never to return by this route. Further research provides the answer for the movements of Scott's forces.

The historian, Rufus Blanchard, in an 1880 history tells us exactly what General Scott did and when. According to Blanchard, Scott was forced to remain at Fort Dearborn where his troops were sick with cholera. Over 90 of his men died.[3] It was not until about July 20 that Scott moved out with his command, including a baggage train of about fifty wagons and horses to draw them, pausing at Riverside[4] for a time. Then, Blanchard continues:

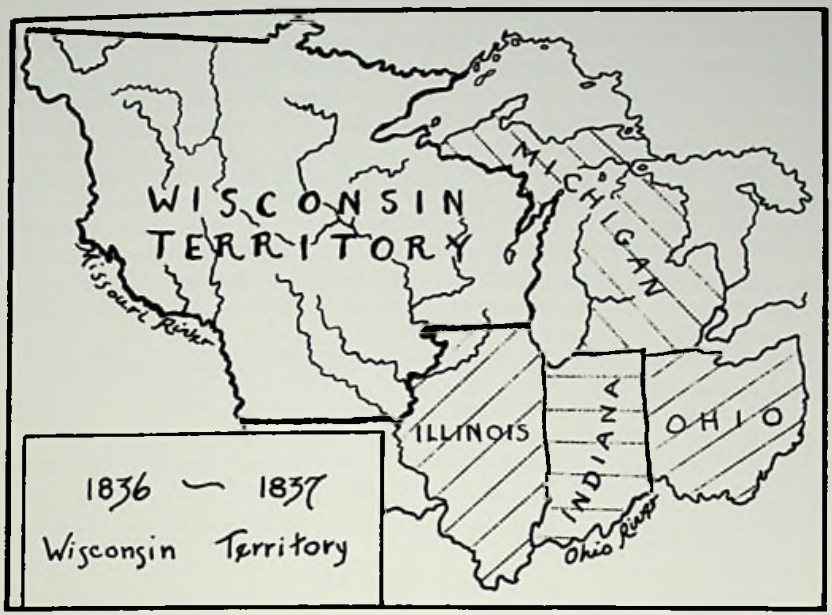
. . . General Scott, with 12 men and two baggage wagons, had started in advance, leaving Cole and Cummings in command of the main body, which was to follow as soon as the health of the soldiers would permit. In ten days

---

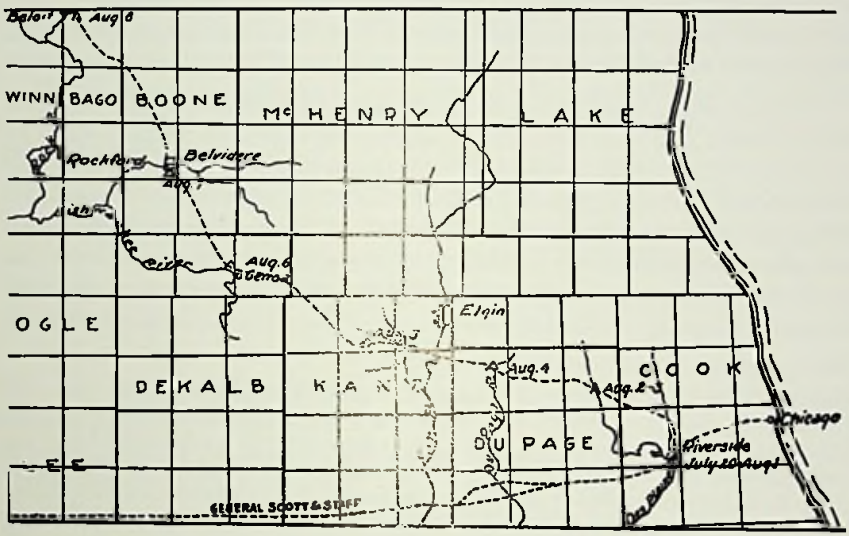
[2]Robert Crane, *Beloit Free Press*, Jan. 24, 1878.

[3]*Discovery and Conquests of the Northwest*, 389.

[4]Riverside was due west of Chicago on the Des Plaines River.



Northwest Frontier when Caleb Blodgett arrived at the Turtle.



General Scott's army trail from Chicago to the Turtle Village, August 1832. The dates indicate where the troops camped on the march. From the manuscript map of Albert Scharf.

the train started, carrying in the wagons, the few sick soldiers who had not yet sufficiently recovered from cholera attacks to stand the fatigue of marching. Their route lay through Gilbert's Grove, on the Du Page, across the Fox River three miles below Elgin; thence through the Pigeon Woods to the present site of Belvidere; thence to an old Indian village at the present site of Beloit. Here the train rested a week, during which time a messenger came to the commanding officer, informing him of the battle of Bad Axe, with orders to proceed to Rock Island.[5]

From the above we learn that Scott's force did not arrive until early August at The Turtle, more than a month behind Atkinson. Also, Scott's men stayed a week, not just one night. Black Hawk's pitiful defeat at Bad Axe occurred about August 2nd. The Black Hawk War was over. Scott's men could only retrace backwards the footsteps of Indians and soldiers made some five weeks earlier.

Probably this is the answer to the mystery of an old Beloit legend. But even this account does not make it clear whether General Scott himself came to The Turtle. Actually, Scott went to Dixon while only a wing of his army was sent to The Turtle.[6] In any event, the legend had a solid basis in history.

13. Talcott Diary, 1835

On July 24, 1835 Thomas Talcott and his father, William, the first settlers of Rockton, camped near the deserted Turtle Village before proceeding down Rock River to Stephen Mack's trading post, then located about two miles downstream from where he would later settle at Macktown on the west bank of the river. Carr's *History of Rockton* quotes from Thomas Talcott's diary:

. . . About nine o'clock we came to a beautiful little lake and an old Indian village, called Big Foot Lake[1] *and village. There were no Indians there for most of them were wandering in the woods towards Chicago, to be ready for their payment from the government, which comes next month. We were here somewhat puzzled to find the right trail as there were so many which put out from the village. We finally make up our minds to go west south-west, but found the trail bearing to the south, followed on and came to a small creek*[2]

---

[5]Blanchard, *op. cit.*, 401.

[6]Quaife, Milo M. *Chicago's Highways Old and New*, 94-96. From the Lake Koshkonong area Black Hawk had fled westward in desperation to the Wisconsin River and thence downstream to the Mississippi where his tattered band was overwhelmed, first by the soldiers, then by their Sioux enemies, near the mouth of the Bad Axe River. Black Hawk surrendered at Fort Crawford, later travelled to the East coast where he met President Jackson, dictated his autobiography *Life of Black Hawk* in 1833, then retired peaceably to a lodge of peeled bark near the Iowa River where he died in 1838.

[1]Lake Geneva.

[2]Turtle Creek, east of present-day Beloit.

meandering through a fine strip of bottom prairie which looked like the bed of some ancient river that was very large. The weeds and grass high. It was now nearly night and no signs of inhabitants, and it looked like showers. We came to an old Indian camp and made us a shelter of barks and poles, struck up a fire and ate our pork and bread.*

*(Note by editor Carr: *To a person acquainted with the location of the land he can readily see that this Indian camp was the Turtle Village deserted in Black Hawk's time, and by recrossing the Turtle Creek and following down its south bank, our travellers would soon come to Rock River, which they crossed to the high banks on the west side. The Indian they followed took them down to the Goodwin Ford and thence to Mack's in Bird's Grove.)*

The Talcotts appear to have approached The Turtle from the east and camped for the night on the west side of the creek, possibly in the vicinity of Calvary Cemetery.[3] Thomas Talcott then continues his diary:

Saturday, July 25th. After we stopped last night we saw several Indians cross the flat and one came over to us to beg some whiskey. He was a Pottawatomie and we learned from him that there were white folks within a few miles.[4] We took his directions and started along, crossing the stream again.[5] When we had got down a little way we came to a large river[6] which an Indian had just crossed. We saw where he went out and started in after him. Soon found the water so deep that it came up almost to our horse's back. We turned around and tried again, found shallow water, crossed and went up and onto the bluff to a camp of Indians[7] but could not understand them much. One of them took a tin kettle and started and motioned for us to follow him. We did so, came to the river and forded it again,[8] crossed a small prairie, went into the woods and came to Stephen Mack's Indian trading establishment, and once more put up with a white man who had a squaw wife.+

Found we were on the bank of Rock River, two miles below the mouth of the Pecatonica[9] and six miles south of the line of Wisconsin territory. We also learned that there was no dependence to be placed on our maps. Our map placed the mouth of the Pecatonica twenty miles south of Wisconsin, when it was but four miles.[10] Rock is a beautiful river, said to be navigable

---

[3]Payne, Lillian. "Early Settlers of Beloit." *John Emery Papers*, Wis. Hist. Society, archives.

[4]Further evidence that Joseph Tebo had not arrived in July.

[5]To the east bank of Turtle Creek.

[6]Rock River, probably south of the mouth of Turtle Creek.

[7]On the west bank of Rock River.

[8]To the east bank.

[9]At Birds Grove, present-day Hononegah Forest Preserve.

[10]Talcott was evidently using the 1829 Chandler map.

150 miles above this place, and the Pecatonica 100 miles. The land is very good and at the mouth of the river.[11] *is in the hands of Mack and Bradstreet, of Albany, N.Y., where they calculate to lay out a town,*[12] *and I think the prospect is fair for a large place to grow up here. There are no buildings at present.*[13]

---

[11]Where the Pecatonica meets the Rock.
[12]Macktown.
[13]Carr, *History of Rockton* (1898), 20-21.

CHAPTER TWO

The Story of Joseph Tebo

1. Origins

History today remembers Caleb Blodgett as founder and first permanent resident of the settlement later to become known as Beloit. Actually, Blodgett was preceded by the trader — trapper, Joseph Tebo, who sometime after the Black Hawk War of 1832 erected a cabin near the confluence of Rock River and Turtle Creek, near what is now the southwest corner of State Street and Shirland Avenue. Time: probably about autumn, 1835, several months prior to Blodgett's arrival.

What kind of man was Tebo? As we shall learn from later fragmentary accounts, physically he was tall, quite slender, about fifty years of age when the first settlers arrived. He was a French — Canadian, trusted by the Indians, and recognized as honest and reliable; but he also had a reputation as a periodic heavy drinker who when drunk was violent and brutal to his family.

In 1837 Tebo had two Indian wives, one about his own age, the second young and quite pretty (all accounts emphasize her attractiveness). The family included three or four children, the eldest named Francis (or Frank), perhaps in his middle teens; a baby by the younger wife; the others undescribed.

According to Robert Crane, a first-hand acquaintance of the Tebo family:

He had a son by a former squaw — wife (now dead), a lad of 14, very intelligent, who spoke good English, and it was said he could speak French fluently, and three different Indian languages.

He had two squaws living with him at the time I first knew him, one apparently 40 years old, the other 18, the latter a rather fine-looking half breed, complexion light and fair, who was mother of a babe.[1]

Tebo's origins are shrouded in history. According to one account, he had trapped on the banks of the St. Lawrence and throughout Canada before wandering to Milwaukee and presumably the Koshkonong area, thence to The Turtle to build his cabin in 1835.[2] Solomon Juneau, an agent of the American Fur Company, had established a trading post at what was later to be Milwaukee, and we know that Tebo worked for the Company for many years and dealt with Juneau.

---

[1]Robert Crane, *Beloit Free Press*, Jan. 10, 1878. Old memories differ. Lucian Caswell will later say Frank was about 25, the young wife about 30.

[2]Butterfield, *Rock County History* (1879), 682-683. The rest of that account may not be historically reliable. See the remarkable letter of criticism by Ezra Goodrich inserted by the editor on the last page of that book.

Robert Crane, who in early 1837 shared Tebo's cabin, years later said Tebo told him that he "had been twelve years among the Indians, trading and trapping. He was from Canada."[3]

Crane's statement, made in 1878, was evidently completely misinterpreted a year later in a county history which assumed that Tebo's twelve years among the Indians had been spent at The Turtle, and that therefore Tebo had established himself here about the year 1824. But this is not what Crane said or meant.[4]

It is extremely doubtful that Tebo did more than visit The Turtle on trading missions until 1832 at which time the Indians hastily abandoned their village just before Gen. Atkinson and his soldiers pursued Black Hawk northward through the then empty village. From 1832 to 1835 the great Winnebago village known as The Turtle or Turtle Creek appears to have remained deserted. In 1835 two accounts of early landseekers who stopped here make no mention of seeing Tebo or his cabin before August of that year.

In all probability much of the Rock River was Tebo's range during the 12 year period from 1824 to 1836. French traders are known to have kept posts around Lake Koshkonong and the Four Lakes (later Madison) area.

Since Stephen Mack was well established on Rock River at Bird's Grove, two miles south of present-day Rockton, from about 1829 to 1835, Tebo may have worked the areas along the Rock both north and south of Mack's post. Almost certainly Tebo was often in the Koshkonong area.

Mack and Tebo were both longtime employees of the American Fur Co. which had a branch post at Chicago and whose trading area included the Rock and Fox Rivers as well as the wilderness around Chicago. In all probability Chicago was their headquarters. For instance, the 1830 Chicago poll books show that both Stephen Mack and Joseph *Thibeaut* were among 32 men who voted in an early territorial election. Many of the 32 voters were French traders and trappers.[5]

Tebo evidently had no formal education and could not write his own name. A fragment of two legal documents glued together, uncovered in 1970 at Rockton,[6] contains the only known signature of Joseph Tebo — an X — that he wrote as a witness in 1834 to a conveyence of some kind from a group of Indians to Stephen Mack. This rare document reproduced herein, probably for the first time anywhere, clearly shows Tebo's name as one of the witnesses, in this interesting fashion:

---

[3]*Beloit Free Press*, Jan. 10, 1878.

[4]*Butterfield, op. cit.*, 324. Repeated in *Wis. Hist. Coll.* IX, 152; *Wis. Arch.*, IX, No. 1, 16 (Oct. 1929); and by others.

[5]Blanchard, *Discovery of the Northwest* (1880), 339, 365.

[6]Discovered among old family records by Mrs. Ruth Jecklin, granddaughter of John Hulett who was administrator of Stephen Mack's estate.

above named and specified. We therefor require and c
all of us from the scenes of this life before the full accom
us an authority to comply with the above and effect the s
caused this instrument or bond of gift to be made and the
finding the same to be a full expression of our free will
third day of August A.D one thousand eight hundred and thi

In presence of — Wm Him Charah his X mark or his

Attest —
Geo H Walker
Solomon Juneau
J O G e e
Joseph Thebeau his X mark

We the undersigned Chiefs & Warriors of the Winnebago Na
day of August A.D. one thousand eight Hundred and th
Services rendered us by Stephen Mack during the expe
Trader among us and for the many losses which he
ways. We do confirm the above bond given to him for
the third day of August A.D 1834. and that we do now
same manner One Section of land to and for Louisa Mack.
to and for Ho-no-ne-gah. the Mother of said Chilo
to Ho-no-ne-gah (deceased) and that we will cause Pate
aforesaid grants and said patents to be delivered to s
said women and Children — We do further agree and

Portions of Indian grants to Stephen Mack witnessed by Joseph Tebo (here spelled Thebeau). Other witnesses: Solomon Juneau, founder of Milwaukee, and J. Ogee, first settler at Dixon, Ill.

his
JOSEPH X THEBEAU
mark

The X mark was a commonly used method for people who could not write their own names to sign legal documents.[7] Only the X, of course, would be Tebo's own handiwork. Even so, it makes him much more real to us today and is doubly interesting because of the famous pioneers who signed their names to it — Solomon Juneau, J. Ogee, Joseph Tebo and Stephen Mack.[8]

Whether the correct spelling of Tebo's name was *Thebeau*, as shown on this 1834 document, or *Thibeaut*, as shown on the 1830 Chicago poll list, is conjectural. Most of the early settlers later spelled the name simply *Tebo*, obviously as a matter of convenience. In view of the spelling variance in the only two known documents containing his signature, the author had adopted the Tebo spelling of the pioneers.[9] Others have spelled it variously as Thiebeau, Thiebau, Thebalt, Thebolt, Thiebault, and Thibault. Possibly Tebo himself was unsure of the original spelling of his name and cheerfully assented to any approximation when asked.

2. *Arrival At The Turtle, Summer 1835*

On the 14th of July, 1835 John Inman of Pennsylvania and William Holmes of Ohio left Milwaukee "to spy out the land" of the Rock River Valley of which they had heard glowing accounts. After examining areas around what is now Fort Atkinson and Janesville, on or about July 19th:

. . . They went south across the prairie to the mouth of Turtle Creek, the present site of Beloit; and here solitude reigned — not a cheerful countenance to greet them, not even old "Tebo" with his two Indian wives was here (Tebo made his claim, however, at Beloit soon after).[1]

---

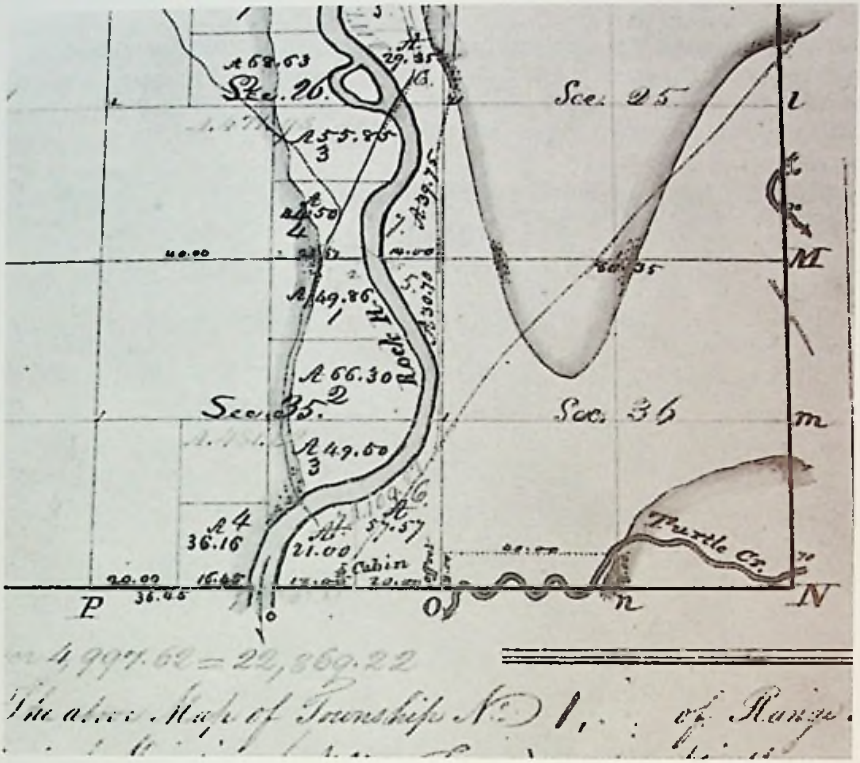
[7]Careful comparison of this fragment shows that it is really two related documents glued together. Tebo marked his X on the first as a witness on August 3, 1834. The fact that its historical significance to Beloit did not come to light until 136 years later is eloquent evidence why historians never give up searching for unrecognized documents.

[8]In 1834 Stephen Mack was still located two miles downstream from present day Rockton, operating his trading post near what is today the Hononegah Forest Preserve. Solomon Juneau, founder of Milwaukee, was a representative of the American Fur Co. and had many business dealings with Mack and Tebo J. Ogee was almost certainly Joe Ogee (or Ogie), an Indian interpreter of French extraction who also had an Indian wife (as did Mack and Tebo). In 1828 Ogee started a ferry on Rock River and sold his interest in Ogee's Landing in 1830 to John Dixon. Dixon's Ferry later became Dixon. The Indian chief, White Breast (also called Stone Man), lived earlier on Sugar River. His forbears lived on Lake Koshkonong. Jipson, *Wis. Arch.*, II, No. 3 (1923), 125, 132, 139.

[9]The Tebo spelling appears in the 1839 diary of G.W. Ogden and the 1836 journal of Issac Smith, early Milton area residents. State Hist. Society, archives.

[1]*Rock County History* (1856), 29.

The 1856 *History* does not give the source of this account but it appears to be a relatively reliable one. On the strength of this statement later writers have assumed that Tebo's cabin was not built until after July 1835, apparently convinced that Inman and Holmes would not have overlooked the cabin had it been erected.



Part of original government survey of Rock County (1835-1836) showing Tebo's "cabin". A surveying error shifted the state line to its present position about 1200 feet farther south at Beloit than Congress intended. Also shown are what appear to be Indian trails and river fords.

It is possible, of course, that Tebo's cabin was there but went unnoticed by Inman and Holmes because of trees and heavy brush. It was July, vegetation was full, the area large, and the exact route of Inman and Holmes unknown. Tebo and his family might have been temporarily absent. A silent cabin in the wilderness could be overlooked. Robert Crane has said that a heavy grove of timber covered the area. The two men may have inadvertently failed to see what was there.

Fortunately, there is other evidence supporting the conclusion that Tebo still had not settled at The Turtle in late July 1835. We have already noted that after this visit of Inman and Holmes — on July 24, 1835 — Thomas Talcott and his father, William, the first settlers of Rockton, camped near the Turtle village overnight. Although Thomas Talcott kept a detailed and meticulous diary, he made no mention of Tebo or anyone else living at The Turtle.[2]

Thus, while we cannot establish the exact month with certainty, the evidence strongly suggests that Joseph Tebo constructed his cabin near the southwest corner of present-day State Street and Shirland Avenue, almost upon the Illinois state line, soon after July 1835.

Present location of Joseph Tebo marker northwest corner of State and Shirland since 1969. (Original site of Joseph Tebo marker was at southwest corner of State and Shirland 1932-1969.)

[2]Carr, *History of Rockton*, 20-21.

Admittedly, the 1879 *History* does make a contrary statement:

. . . His cabin is noted in the plat of the government survey of the township in 1834.[3]

Later histories have repeated this 1834 date. However, further investigation by this author reveals that the survey in question was begun in 1833 and was not completed until early 1836. Since the field notes of the surveyors are completely silent as to when the cabin was observed, the 1834 date mentioned in the 1879 *History* assumes too much. Autumn, 1835 is a reasonable guess, based upon the known fact.[4]

3. Tebo's Cabin

Inasmuch as Tebo's cabin was located within a few feet of the Illinois state line, and was torn down before 1850, the question inevitably arises: how can it be proved that it was located in Wisconsin and not in Illinois?

Although Turtle Creek meanders in Illinois at the point where State Street merges into Black Hawk Boulevard at the bridge near where Tebo's cabin was situated on the north bank, early accounts all refer to the cabin as being in Wisconsin. The best evidence is perhaps contained in the official government survey which places the cabin along the state line on the east bank of Rock River. Here, happily for the historian, it is actually marked "cabin" on the surveyor's map and clearly appears north of the state line, exactly where early accounts described it.[1]

Several early settlers described the location of the cabin. Piecing these together we are able to pinpoint the approximate spot from their eyewitness documentation recorded in widely scattered, little known accounts.

Deacon Henry Mears, an 1837 settler, is quoted from an early undated document he prepared as saying that Tebo's cabin was situated:

---

[3]p. 324.

[4]The plat itself in its legend shows the survey was made in the 1st quarter of 1833, but the public land survey of the south boundary of the township was not executed until the 4th quarter of 1845, and the subdivisional lines were surveyed in 1836. Thus, as far as the plat is concerned, the cabin could have been built as late as 1836 and still show in this survey. The survey was executed by Mullet and Brink, deputy surveyors, in the 4th quarter of 1835, while the subdivisional lines were surveyed by Orson Lyon in the first quarter of 1836. The cabin being situated so near the state line, either survey party could have observed it and made the notation on the map.

[1]Oddly enough, the state line at Beloit is established today about 1200 feet farther south than latitude 42° 30′ where Congress intended it to be. The first surveyor, Lucius Lyon, set out wooden monuments in the Beloit area south of the correct line. However, the rules of the office of the Secretary of the Interior provided that the line as monumented by Lyon during the surveys of 1833 to 1836 should stand as the legal boundary. Illinois was the loser in the Beloit area but gained ground elsewhere.

. . . near the intersection of Indian trails centering here from the south and east; These trails crossed or came together at the north end of the old race bridge on State Street.[2]

Writing in 1878, Robert Crane, who lived for a time in Tebo's cabin in 1837, said:

This cabin stood near the old mill-race, just below the bridge across it . . . [3]

Lucian Mears, son of Henry, in an 1888 account was more specific:

. . . it stood just about where the office of Messrs. Peet and Keeler now stands, or, as we are writing history, and should define for those who may read a hundred years hence, to the right of State Street, a few rods this side of where it crosses the line into Illinois.[4]

William Fiske Brown, writing in 1900, added:

Thibault's log cabin, sixteen feet by twelve, was near the bank of Turtle Creek at the south end and west side of Turtle Street, now State.[5]

Finally, in 1910 Ellery Crane, who undoubtedly saw the cabin many times as a small boy, specified further:

This cabin stood between the old mill-race and Turtle Creek, about on a line with State Street.[6]

In 1931 the Beloit Historical Society officially dedicated a stone marker for the Tebo site beside a tree on the southwest corner of State Street and Shirland Avenue immediately south of the lumber company office building. Here it remained until 1969, at which time it was moved to a small park area on the northwest corner of the same intersection, apparently to make it more accessible and observable as a public monument. In any event, it now stands about 150 feet due north of its previous location.

The site of Tebo's cabin was carefully chosen. Not only was it located near the confluence of two waterways on the site of a once-prominent but now deserted Indian village, but, equally important, it was at the intersection of two Indian trails, one running north and south along the east bank of Rock

---

[2]As quoted in *Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 66.

[3]Lucian Mears, "Historical Address," *First. Cong. Semi-Centennial Book*, 16.

[4]*Beloit Free Press*, Jan. 10, 1878.

[5]*Past Made Present*, 29.

[6]*Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 29. However, five years later Ellery Crane contradicted himself and everyone else, in what was obviously a slip of the pen, by placing Tebo's cabin on the east side of State Street, instead of the west side where it obviously was located. Without attempting to correct any earlier account, Crane mentioned casually in a letter to the editor " . . . This cabin stood upon the *easterly* side of the road to Rockton and between the creek and the old mill-race . . ." (emphasis supplied). *Beloit Daily News*, Aug. 2, 1915.

River, the other running east and west across the Rock from Chicago to Sugar River and thence to the lead mines near Mineral Point.

To an able and respected trader such as Tebo, who one writer described as a "magnet" for the Indians, it must have seemed a natural spot to do business. Only the encroaching land-hunters probing out from the ports of Chicago and Milwaukee threatened his domain.

4. The Tide Of Emigration Begins

According to Henry Janes, the founder of Janesville, he visited The Turtle — probably in January, 1836 — but he made no mention of Tebo whose cabin was evidently then built. Janes was exploring the entire area preparatory to making a claim. Tebo's presence and asking price for his squatters claim may have discouraged Janes from giving The Turtle further consideration. In February 1836, Janes decided to settle on the east bank of Rock River in what is now downtown Janesville.[1]

On March 9, 1836 the first recorded meeting with Tebo occurred. William Holmes, his wife, daughter and two sons arrived at The Turtle on their way to present-day Janesville. The daughter, Catherine, (later Mrs. Volney Atwood) is quoted as saying that "she remembers well the dirt floor of Thibault's cabin and its big fireplace, built of sticks plastered over, with a log burning in it."[2]

According to Mrs. Atwood's account, as reported many years later, the Holmes family followed an Indian trail To Rock River:

. . . We stopped at three different places between Chicago and Janesville, the only houses on our way.

The party consisted of nine people, five males and four females; three two-horse wagons, yoke of oxen, two saddle horses, six cows, calves, pigs, etc. Previous to the starting of our party there were sent ahead six loads of provisions and household goods and a rowboat . . .+

We stopped at Turtle, now Beloit, to get warm, at the cabin of Thebeau, the Frenchman. He had several squaw wives which he turned out of doors, but, full of curiosity, they were constantly peeping in at every crevice. . . +

At Turtle there were many Indians camping, of the Pottawatomies and Winnebago tribes . . . [3]

---

[1]In a letter to the editor of the *Janesville Weekly Gazette*, Feb. 7, 1867, Janes said that when he made up his mind where to settle " . . . I carved my initials, HFJ, on a tree on the east bank of Rock River, on what is now known as Myers Block . . . " near the bridge on East Milwaukee Street.

[2]Brown, *Rock County History* (1908), 130.

[3]*Ibid.*, 454. Evidently the Indians were on the west bank across from Tebo's cabin.

5. Tebo Meets Caleb Blodgett

Joseph Tebo was a trader and trapper, not a farmer or land speculator. By the spring of 1836, it must have been obvious to him that with land hunters and squatters building cabins at the confluence of the Rock and Pecatonica rivers only a few miles south of The Turtle, and a dozen miles to the north in the vicinity of the Big Rock (present-day Janesville), others would soon come and not be deterred by his shadowy claim to large areas of land around The Turtle that he was neither improving nor farming.

However, Tebo still had one advantage over anyone who wanted to lay out or plan a village. He was at The Turtle first. With his cabin and his family and the established friendship of many Indians, Tebo's claim to ownership of the entire area could not be lightly disregarded and would certainly be a cloud on the already dubious color of title any squatter might hope to acquire.

Therefore, when enterprising Caleb Blodgett appeared in May, 1836 "looking claims" Tebo probably recognized him for what he was — a man determined to found a community. Perhaps Tebo decided it was time to take what he could get from a man who was willing to buy his nebulous claim, rather than risk being simply ignored by those who would follow Blodgett. Besides, a trader — trapper fared better on the frontier.

The journal of Issac T. Smith gives us a rare and authentic glimpse of both Tebo and Blodgett in May 1836:

On Sunday, the 22nd I was at St. John's[1] *and there saw Mr. Caleb Blodgett, and some others, that were looking claims; and while there a Frenchman, of whom they had hired some horses, came for them as they had been retained beyond the time engaged, and he became uneasy about his pony stock. Seeing the ponies feeding on the flat, he caught them before coming to the house; and when he came he was very angry; but a little soft sawder, and the milk of human kindness, put all right; and the old man told us much about the country and the Black Hawk War, as he was here all through it, and said that he and Gen. Scott made the treaty at Rock Island.+*

Blodgett bought the old man's claim, where Beloit now stands; he had previously moved to the foot of Lake Koshkonong where I afterwards was well acquainted with him. He often told me that he was an interpreter in making the treaty spoken of. I think he spelled his name Joseph Thebalt, but

---

[1]According to Smith, "Samuel St. John lived nearly a mile below where Milwaukee Street bridge now stands" in Janesville. *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, VI, 422-423.

he was called Tebo, or Thiebeau.[2]

In conveying his squatter's claim to Blodgett in May or June of 1836, Tebo did keep his cabin, probably to insure his family a place to live and carry on his trading business with the Indians until he could decide where to resettle. During the next nine months, while Blodgett built his own cabin and a slow stream of settlers trickled into the area to stay, Tebo evidently completed arrangements to move farther north to the Lake Koshkonong wilderness where the Winnebagos still congregated.

6. Departure From Blodgett's Place

About April 26, 1837, Robert Crane and Otis Bicknell, the first members of the New England Company to stay, purchased Tebo's cabin.[1] Tebo immediately left Blodgett's Place, as The Turtle was then being called, and removed with his family to Lake Koshkonong where on the east bank he built another cabin at a place still known as Tebo's Point. By the summer of 1837 he was again trading with the Indians. Apparently he returned to The Turtle only once thereafter.

Robert Crane, who knew Tebo and his family personally and lived in the cabin after Tebo's departure, never asked him exactly when he built his cabin.

. . . How long Thebolt had occupied this hut I never learned, but long enough for it to have rather an untidy look . . . [2]

In the manuscript files of the State Historical Library, the author uncovered a letter from Aaron Walker to his sister in Vermont which contains several references to Joseph Tebo shortly after his arrival at Lake Koshkonong where Walker says he has bought a claim:

Janesville W.T. May 24, 1837

. . . This spring there was a frenchman jumped it . . . The Frenchman would not leave it. I bought Mr. B's chance and gave him 2 hundred doll. Then I gave the Frenchman Fifty more to give it up. He is an old Indian Trader.

---

[2]Tebo's claimed role in the 1832 Black Hawk War and with Gen. Scott remains unverified. While Tebo may have been at Fort Armstrong (Rock Island), it is doubtful that he played a prominent role when the treaty between the U.S. and the Winnebago nation was signed on September 15, 1832 by Commissioners Winfield Scott and John Reynolds and about 40 Indian representatives, including White Crow. The Indians all signed by making an "X". Among some 28 witnesses to the signing appear the names of at least two interpreters, Pierre Paquette and Antoine Le Claire. There is no mention of Tebo or any variation of the name. Stevens, *Blackhawk War*, 178-184.

[1]*Ellery Crane Manuscript*. 28.

[2]*Beloit Free Press*, Jan. 10, 1878.

Has a squaw & 4 children. He built a cabin on it. When he goes away I shall have a house.

Later in this same letter, which Walker resumed on June 10, 1837, he makes two specific references to Tebo and one referring apparently to the younger of Tebo's two wives. He continues enigmatically:

. . . I would given an interest in Tebo Town for a drink of water from your Spring . . .

. . . I am intending to make a Town up the River and I want some kind of a squaw to keep wigwam for me. There is one there now but she is not quite white enough. I told Tebo he must take her away.[3]

7. Koshkonong — Tebo's Strange Disappearance

According to sketchy historical accounts, Joseph Tebo later disappeared at Koshkonong. It was soon rumored that he was murdered by members of his own family. The date of his disappearance has always been a subject of disagreement. Some accounts say the winter of 1837-1838; others 1838-1839; still others 1839-1840. The exact details — when, why, and how — seemed lost to history.

The 1879 *History,* written while some who had known Tebo were still alive, summarized the generally accepted version regarding Tebo's puzzling disappearance:

He finally settled on Lake Koshkonong, at a place called Thiebault's Point, where he was, it is believed, murdered in the winter of 1837-1838[1] *by his son and one of his wives. This crime is attributed by some to the anxiety of his family to follow the Indians west of the Mississippi, while he wished to remain where he was, devoting himself to the peaceful pursuits of agriculture.+*

Others maintain — and the weight of the evidence appears to be on their side — that his death was due to the instinct of self-preservation. From these statements, it appears that Thiebault indulged in "periodical drunks", on which occasions he was monstrously brutal to his family — wives and children. (Mr. Charles M. Messer, one of the earliest settlers, who had lived for many years among the Pottawatomies, and who was about the only white man to whom Thiebault's wife and son could speak in their own language, has frequently known of their being compelled to fly from their hut at the dead of night, to escape his drunken fury).+

---

[3]William Walker Papers.

[1]Incorrect. Tebo disappeared in December 1838.

Whatever the motive which prompted the crime, Thiebault was probably murdered, and his body disposed of by cutting a hole in the ice and throwing it into the lake; and though the deed was never fixed upon the son and the squaw-wife, suspicion was so strong against them that the citizens warned them to leave, and they went to the Indians beyond the river, where it was reported the son was for many years employed as a Government interpreter.[2]

Lucien B. Caswell, a distinguished Koshkonong area pioneer, who as a boy lived in his father's cabin near Tebo's place, was quoted sixty years later by William Fiske Brown:

I knew Thibault (Tebo), the Indian trader, well. He had two log cabins about a mile and a half above the mouth of Lake Koshkonong on the south side. He was a Frenchman with two Indian wives, one quite old, the other about thirty and very attractive. Thibault was, I should judge, about fifty, quite tall and slender. +

He kept a stock of goods suitable for his trade with the Indians, such as blankets, ammunition, traps and other articles, which he exchanged with the Indians for their furs. He was said to be a fur buyer for Solomon Juneau, of Milwaukee, and well off, and we always found him honest and exerting a good influence among the Indians. He kept nothing intoxicating for the Indians and sold them only such goods as they needed. +

Unfortunately, however, he had a reckless grown-up son named Frank, who gave him no small amount of trouble. Frank and the younger wife were greatly attached to each other. +

In the winter of 1839-1840[3] *the old gentleman disappeared, which fact was not made known by Frank for several weeks, till finally he came to our house and told us his father had been missing for sometime, giving no intelligent story about the disappearance. Suspicion at once rested upon the young people and an extensive search was made for some trace of foul play. Persons came from a great distance and examined the surrounding thickets and the ice of the lake and tried to discover, if possible, any hole cut in the ice where his body might have been put through into the lake, but without success, and the search was finally abandoned.* +

In the spring of 1840[4] *Frank stored up some of their household goods and articles of food with my people and, with the two wives, went away west of the Mississippi River. After some months Frank came back and took away his goods, and this is the last we heard of them . . .* [5]

---

[2]Pp. 607-608.

[3]Also incorrect.

[4]1839.

[5]1908 *History*, I, 129-130.

In his unpublished *Reminiscences,* completed a few years after the foregoing account, Caswell added a few more details, saying that Frank "was about the age of the young wife, and probably gave her more attention than she received from the elder Thiebault." Caswell also mentioned that the family explained that Tebo was last seen "going towards a thicket, on the border of the marsh."[6]

Caswell, of course, was only a lad in 1838 when Tebo was his neighbor. However, these unpublished *Reminiscences,* finished in 1914 in his old-age, mention a story that may or may not be true but which purports to explain exactly what happened to Tebo. Although he doesn't say so, this story may have been the basis for the apparently widely-held notion that Tebo was murdered by some of his own family. Caswell gives the following account:

There was one story told some months afterwards by a small boy by the name of Leveck, a half breed, who lived at that time with the family. He stated that Frank and the young wife wanted to move away and go among the Indians west of the Mississippi River; while the old people did not want to go, though the old lady was willing to go if the others concluded to. +

That one evening they made the boy go to bed quite early. He did not go to sleep, but kept an eye out, for he was afraid something unusual was contemplated. That about midnight, they threw a blanket over the boy's head, supposing he was asleep. He removed the blanket till he could see what they were doing, and he saw them strike the old man with a hatchet several blows, till apparently he was dead.

Then they carried him out and that was the last he saw of the body. To corroborate this story, the bones of a man were finally found in the thicket a half mile from the house on the border of the marsh. No arrests however were made and the crime dropped out of mind. +

Frank and the two women however, soon packed up their goods and wild rice held in store, and moved away, sending the little Levex boy to his father, who lived somewhere near the four lakes, now Madison. It was not till long after the Thebault family had gone, that the boy told this story, fearing he said to do so, before they moved away, as he was afraid they would kill him if he did so.[7]

This is the story of a small boy, perhaps with a large imagination, as remembered by an old man of prominence.[8] Apparently Caswell is the only one who reduced the story to writing. Certainly it is almost unknown today.

---

[6]Caswell, *Reminiscences,* 21, Wis. Hist. Library, archives.

[7]*Ibid.,* 21-22.

[8]Caswell was a student at Beloit College in 1850 when he quit school to serve as a law clerk for Beloit's great lawyer, Matt Carpenter. Later Carpenter moved to Milwaukee and was elected U.S. Senator. At the same time Caswell, his former law clerk, was elected to the House of Representatives.

While searching for additional documents to cast further light on this intriguing mystery, the author fortunately uncovered several old diaries and journals at the State Historical Library, either never before published or long-since forgotten. These provide first-hand answers to some of the questions, as well as tantalizing glimpses of history being lived at Koshkonong in the late 1830s.

Caswell's memory of his boyhood knowledge of Tebo was somewhat in error on the matter of whether or not Tebo furnished liquor to the Indians. The diary of George Ogden, a neighbor of both, twice refers to the problem:

Fri. May 4, 1838

. . . The indians are having a drunken frolick today, get their liquor at Teboes'.

Again, four months later, in almost identical language in his diary, Ogden writes:

. . . The indians are having a drunken frolick tonight. Tebo furnishes them liquor.[9]

8. New Light On An Old Mystery

Ogden's diary also settles the question of the year of Tebo's disappearance. In addition, it provides a dramatic glimpse into some of the circumstances surrounding the disappearance and Ogden's own initial reactions. Apparently the diary has gone unnoticed by local historians for over a hundred years. History comes alive in the following entries, probably published for the first time:

Thurs. Jan 3, 1839

D. Smith came here today and said that Mr. Tebo left home very strangely about a week ago and has not been heard of since. We talk of going to search for him tomorrow.

Fri. Jan. 4,

Gust and Elias and I went up to Tebos and met D. Smith Giblet and Hall. We searched about there till two o'clock but made no discoveries, then agreed to wait a few days and if we don't hear from him we are to make a general turnout and make a general search for him.

---

[9]Tebo may be one of the traders referred to in the following grim account contained in an early letter: " . . . There are several traders on the Four Lakes and on Rock River, instead of keeping clothing and provisions, to trade to the Indians for their furs, they keep nothing but whiskey, with this they get everything the Indian has. They buy his horse (if he has one) and if he has no horse, his blanket, in short, anything he has to sell or pawn, goes to the trader for whiskey . . . " Letter of Lt. Alexander S. Howe to Major John Green, March 25, 1836, *Territorial Papers of the United States,* Vol. 27, edited by John Porter Bloom (1969).

Mon. Jan. 7,

. . . Went up to Tebos to buy horses but is missing yet so they could not trade.

Wed. Jan. 9,

. . . Then went up to Teboes he has not been heard of yet. His folks are fixing to clear out tomorrow and want to leave something with us.

Fri. Jan. 11,

. . . They say they have had a hunt today for Tebos but made no discovery but suppose he is dead.

Sun. Feb. 10,

. . . Went to Tebos, his habitation is deserted, no discovery has been made of him.

Mon. March 11,

. . . Francis Tebo and an Indian came here tonight. They are going down the river hunting.

Sun. March 17,

. . . Francis and the Indian Tantebuck came back tonight. They killed 10 muskrats since they were here last.

Mon. March 18,

Francis and Tantebuck camp up at Tebos house a few days. I traded guns with them this morning.[1]

Thus, we see that if Ogden suspected foul play, his contemporaneous diary entries made no mention of it. In all probability there was gossip and speculation, but no evidence to act upon. Later the story of the little Leveck boy, mentioned by Caswell, may have confirmed suspicions and became the generally accepted version.

Some 16 years later, Ogden briefly summarized Tebo's disappearance and gave his own final evaluation of the disappearance:

---

[1]*G.W. Ogden Diary 1837-1841,* Wis. Hist. Library, manuscript file. A typescript copy is at the Area Research Center, UW-Whitewater.

The Milton Historical Society has a flintlock gun on display at the Milton House which Ogden acquired from Tebo. The gun was donated by one of Ogden's descendants. It is quite possible that Ogden's diary reference is to the same gun. Illustrating the long reach of coincidence, a month after the author came across the Ogden diary, he visited the Milton House and unexpectedly noticed the Tebo gun and Ogden acknowledgment.

Joseph Tebo's flintlock rifle, courtesy Milton Historical Society.

Photo by Robert Thompson

Thiebeau, (pro. Tebo.) a Canadian, the former and earliest proprietor of Beloit, with his two Indian wives, resided near my claim, on what is now known as Thiebeau's Point. He with his family — he had three or four children — remained here until the winter of 1837-1838,[2] *when he was murdered, no doubt by his son Francis and his mother, one of his wives. This resulted from a family quarrel; he wishing to remain here and cultivate the land, they were anxious to follow the Indians west of the Mississippi.*[3]

However, another neighbor, Issac T. Smith, apparently felt there was no foul play and offered his own guess as to what had happened to Tebo:

. . . Thebault died or disappeared that fall or winter and no one knows exactly what became of him. Some think that he was murdered by his family, but I do not think so. But he was crazed from a big drunk in Chicogo, and I think he dropped into a spring in the marsh or lake. Thebault was an honest man and would not take a dollar from any man wrongfully.[4]

---

[2]1839 is correct. Ogden probably failed to check his own diary.

[3]Willard and Guernsey, 1856 *History*, 42. The 1879 *History*, 682-683, gives additional hearsay data concerning the search for Tebo, but is inaccurate in some details.

[4]*Narrative of 1838 trip by I.T. Smith*, Wis. Hist. Library, manuscript file, page 2 of unsigned, undated copy.

So end the story of Joseph Tebo, not quite respectable enough as the husband of two Indian wives and as a periodic hard drinker to be recognized by the moral and abstemious New Englanders who followed him as the founder of their attractive and straight-laced village; but who nevertheless claimed a squatter's right to present day Beloit and South Beloit and some of the adjacent townships, and who was paid hard cash by Caleb Blodgett for his claim as an actual occupant before Tebo moved away.

Had Tebo cut a more respectable figure and met a less scandalous demise, he might today be known as the father of Beloit. For instance, had it been Abe Lincoln who returned to The Turtle after the Black Hawk War to build a cabin and trade with the Indians before selling his claim to Blodgett in 1836 and moving back to Sangamon County to study law, can there can be any question who would be known as the founder of Beloit? Probably not Caleb Blodgett.

CHAPTER THREE

Caleb Blodgett

1. Spring, 1836

The cabin of Joseph Tebo stood alone in relative solitude at The Turtle in the spring of 1836. A scattering of lob cabins, usually many miles apart, reached out from the port of Milwaukee in several directions across southern Wisconsin, then called Michigan Territory. In Illinois tiny hamlets and solitary cabins extended northward, thinning out into nothingness near the Territorial line in the vicinity of Squaw Prairie (Belvidere), Midway (named Rockford on October 17, 1835, but still called Midway by many[1]), and Pecatonic, or Pecatonica (Rockton). Some 27 adults lived in the area of Midway. About 11 adults were settled in the vicinity of Pecatonica.[2]

North of The Turtle, near the Big Rock, was Holmes Rapids, and nearby the paper towns of Wisconsin City and Rockport, and a little farther north, Janes Ferry. Other communities then appearing, or soon to appear, would be Four Lake (Madison), New Mexico (Monroe), Centerville (Brodhead), and Waterloo (Shopiere).[3]

In its initial emigration, Beloit, and, to a lesser extent, Janesville, enjoyed an influx of stable and relatively educated New Englanders, church-going and law-abiding. According to one account, the area south of Pecatonica and around Rockford had problems with a rougher, less moralistic element. Many dubious characters drifted into the area and periodically caused the permanent settlers considerable alarm.[4]

Within a year after Joseph Tebo had built his cabin at The Turtle in the autumn of 1835, another pioneer of more heroic stature — Caleb Blodgett — visited the area at the confluence of the Rock and Turtle streams and soon decided to make it his home. Tebo, the wandering trader-trapper was succeeded by a man determined to carve out a new settlement from the wilderness. Caleb Blodgett was a man of vision, imagination, boundless energy, and indomitable will: a rugged individualist and self-made man, unlettered but resourceful, possessed of good instincts and sound judgment

---

[1]Church, Charles A., *Rockford Past and Present,* 17; Nelson, C. Hal, *Sinnissippi Saga,* 50. The name Midway still appears on Abel's 1838 *Emigrants Guide to Wisconsin Territory.*

[2]*History of Winnebago County, Illinois* (1879), 236, Kett and Co., Chicago.

[3]"The first laid out Territorial road in Green County was one from Janes' Ferry (Janesville) in Rock County, through Rockport, on Rock River, to 'Centreville' and New Mexico, in Green County, thence to White Oak springs and so on westward to the Mississippi. It was 'blazed' in the woods and 'staked' in the prairies in the spring of 1837, but nothing further done." Butterfield, C.W., *History of Green County* (1884) 251.

[4]*History of Winnebago County,* op. cit., 262.

— a fitting leader for a new community to draw courage from in the first year of existence.

When Blodgett arrived, what is now Rock County was then a part of Milwaukee County. On December 7, 1836, about the time he moved his family into his log cabin, the Territorial legislature detached this western portion from Milwaukee County and created Rock County, as we now know it.

. . . It took its name from the 'big rock' on the north side of the river, now within the limits of Janesville, which had been for years one of the recognized land-marks of the country to the Indians, the traders, and later to the settlers, as indicating a point where the river might be safely forded.[5]

2. Blodgett Looks Claims

In all probability Caleb Blodgett first visited The Turtle in May of 1836, perhaps on or about May 22 when Issac T. Smith mentioned in his diary that he met Blodgett and some others "looking claims," south of present-day Janesville, with horses they had rented from Joseph Tebo.[1] Nathan Allyn may have been in Blodgett's company.[2] Also, present on this occasion may have been Blodgett's son-in-law, John Hackett, and one or two of Blodgett's sons, Daniel, age 19, and Nelson, age 18.[3]

The following account, never before published, was uncovered by the author in the journal of Lucius Fisher. In Fisher's handwriting, it is part of a six-page narrative that was obviously intended to be part of a longer history Fisher was writing about 1854 and never finished. It is of particular importance because it is the only known account that attempts to describe Blodgett's first visit in any detail:

. . . Caleb Blodgett and John Hackett first visited present site of Beloit in fall of 1835[4] *with an ox team. Mr. Hackett acting as cook. They had Bacon*

---

[5]1879 *History,* 357. This prominent rock is visible today from the Montery bridge, looking east.

[1]6 *Wis. Hist. Coll.,* 422-423.

[2]Blodgett and Nathan Allyn arrived at The Turtle on the same day, according to Albert Allyn, Nathan's son. *Beloit Free Press,* Nov. 27, 1899. Nathan soon made a large claim near Shopiere.

[3]Robert Crane, first settler and friend of John Hackett, said Nelson Blodgett accompanied his father on the first visit to The Turtle. *Beloit Free Press,* Feb. 7, 1878. The 1879 *History* states that both Nelson and Daniel came with their father, but this may refer to Blodgett's second trip.

[4]Fisher is probably in error. 1836 appears to be the correct date. See Appendix (D). There is also good reason to believe that Fisher furnished the 1835 date to the editors of the 1856 *History.*

and Ham for provisions and a covered wagon for their hotel. They camped two weeks upon the present site of the Goodwin House.[5]+

The rich valley of the Rock River was then adorned with a profusion of flowers and rich in (?). There were then about 300 Sac and Fox Indians of Blackhawk's tribe upon the ground with a Frenchman by name Thiebau who had lately arrived and whose wife was a squaw.

Mr. Blodgett was delighted with the spot and the surroundings and soon concluded a bargain with Thiebau for the peaceful possession of the location and all adjoining Territory with pledge that the Indians should not disturb him or any friends accompany him in his later visits to the place and for which he paid him $250.[6]

All accounts agree that Blodgett liked what he saw at The Turtle and that he acted promptly to purchase all of Tebo's vast claim, except his cabin, probably in the last week of May, 1836.

By his purchase Blodgett hoped to secure his squatter's claim to as much of Tebo's nebulous grant as he guessed he could hold. He knew he would have to convince future land seekers that they would have to purchase from him if they were to avoid clouding further the already shaky title claim of a squatter. But first he or John Hackett, or perhaps both, may have returned to Meachams Grove for additional supplies and equipment and to make arrangements for moving their families to The Turtle later that fall. For certain they spread word to others who were interested of the opportunities awaiting them in Wisconsin Territory. A number of their friends would follow within the next year.

How much Caleb Blodgett paid Tebo for his claim is unclear. Several early accounts, probably as good as any, say it was $250.[7] Another pioneer believed it was $200.[8] Lucius Fisher once said $250 but years later said it was $500.[9] John Hackett, perhaps in the best position to know, recalled it as " . . . a trifle, say $200 or $300."[10] Later accounts appear to have borrowed from these. No details of the transaction were ever mentioned. No document or receipt has ever been found.

---

[5]405 East Grand Ave. today. A year later Blodgett began building his boarding house (Rock River House) on the same site. The *Beloit Journal,* Dec. 27, 1866, also mentions Hackett being with Blodgett.

[6]The six page narrative from which this is taken was found in Lucius Fisher's journal at the Wis. Hist. Library, Madison. Referred to as the *Fisher Fragment,* it may have been written in 1854, possibly to assist the compilers of the 1856 *History.*

[7]Fisher Fragment; 1856 *History;* 1857 *Chicago Magazine,* 75; 1866 *Beloit Journal,* Ch. 6, undated clipping.

[8]Henry Mears, passage quoted in *Ellery Crane Manuscript,* 66.

[9]Fisher, *Pioneer Recollections* (1883), 274.

[10]*Beloit Free Press,* Dec. 2, 1884.

Blodgett made no claim to the west bank of Rock River. Land on the west side had already been sold by the Government at earlier land sales to eastern speculators. However, until bridges were constructed to span Rock River, the free lands on the east side served as an irresistible magnet to oncoming emigrants. The relatively inaccessible west bank would not be occupied until several years later.

3. Tebo's "Three Looks"

There is a colorful Beloit tradition that Joseph Tebo sold Blodgett his squatter's claim at The Turtle by describing it as "three looks" of land. Presumably this meant Tebo claimed everything on the *east* bank of Rock River for as far as one could see from his cabin in any direction, then going to such a point and looking a second time in the same direction, and then repeating the process a third time. Obviously, such a description would be almost meaningless to a land buyer such as Blodgett. If this is a true tradition, then Tebo may have considered the huge area embraced by his "three looks" as representative of his hunting and trapping domain where he moved about and traded with those Indians who lived within its irregular boundaries.

What Blodgett undoubtedly wanted was to eliminate Tebo as a claimant from any area Blodgett by hard work and imagination might be able to exercise dominion over sufficiently to compel prospective purchasers to deal with him. Blodgett had no way of knowing how fast settlers would move into The Turtle area or how far he and his sons and hired hands could plow their furrows and act like owners.

Regrettably, Tebo's deed to Blodgett has never been discovered. Presumably a shrewd and experienced land-buyer such as Blodgett would have had something in writing, possibly a simple form of quit-claim divesting Tebo of all right, title and interest to any lands in the vicinity, except for Tebo's cabin which we know Tebo reserved for himself.[11] While Tebo may have described his ownership as "three looks", Blodgett most certainly would have translated this into miles or some form of measurement which could be subdivided into fractional interests for later purchasers.

Further research raises some question about the authenticity of the "three looks" tradition. The 1856 *History* and the 1857 *Chicago Magazine* accounts both fail to mention it. In fact, the first known reference to "three looks" appears 31 years after the event in an 1867 issue of the *Beloit Journal* newspaper which quotes a respected first settler, Charles Messer, as saying that George Goodhue, who had purchased part of Blodgett's claim in late 1836 or early 1837:

---

[1]Robert Crane and Otis Bickness purchased Tebo's cabin for the New England Co. on April 26, 1837. *Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 28.

. . . had claimed the land for 'three looks' around the mouth of the Turtle. (A 'Look' is a term used by the Indians, and means the distance you can see). . .[2]

Messer in 1867 was recalling an 1837 conversation he had with Horace White at Chicago at which time he urged White to investigate prospects at The Turtle. At the time Messer evidently thought Goodhue, not Blodgett, had acquired The Turtle claim. But the importance of this is that Messer knew in 1837 about the "three looks", even though he didn't write about it for publication until 30 years later. From all early accounts, Messer was a dependable witness.

The next reference to the "three looks" — and undoubtedly the one from which all later histories borrow — is the widely-published 1879 *History* statement:

. . . Thiebault, in 1835, claimed to be the owner of a vast tract of land extending for 'three looks' in every direction from his cabin.[3]

Again, this appears to be information obtained from Charles Messer. On the same page the editor of this history quotes Messer on another matter. In any event, the "three looks" story was now well established and was vouched for by an exceptionally reliable first settler.

In evaluating Messer's reliability, it should be noted that he once served as an Indian interpreter, that he knew the Tebo family well in 1837 before they departed from The Turtle, and that he conversed with Tebo's wives in their own language. Certainly the subject of 'three looks' could have been repeated and emphasized enough to remain in Messer's memory.

4. Blodgett's Claim

Exactly how much land Caleb Blodgett decided he had purchased from Tebo will never be known. Perhaps it changed from month to month in Blodgett's own mind that summer and autumn of 1836, depending upon how respectful new land-seekers were of his claimed ownership of so much land. The 1856 *History* says Blodgett acquired four square miles.[1] That would amount to about 10,000 acres. No effort was made to describe the shape of this parcel of land.

In 1866 a *Beloit Journal* writer gave a more specific description:

---

[2]Chap. IX, Early History of Beloit, newspaper clipping for 1867, exact date unknown.

[3]Pp. 607 and 609.

[1]P. 47. A year later *The Chicago Magazine* also said Blodgett purchased four square miles. I, 75.

... the furrow which marked Blodgett's claim ran from the State line far to the east of the city, northward two or three miles, and thence westward until it struck the river in the neighborhood of Burchard's farm.

The writer of this remembers seeing a high post out on the prairie, near the Janesville Road which was pointed out as one of the posts marking "Blodgett's claim".

In order to make good the whole of this claim the old man is said to have preempted in the name of his son, or in the name of a hired man, and had his breakings scattered in little pieces, in various sections.[2]

However, in 1878 Robert Crane, one of the first-settlers who knew Blodgett well, describes a much larger claim:

(Blodgett) had claimed a tract of country lying on the east side of Rock River, extending south some three miles in Illinois, and north in Wisconsin five miles, and east in some places three and in others five miles, embracing some 20,000 acres pleasantly divided into prairie and woodland, watered by many springs and rivulets and nearly equally divided by Turtle Creek, along which are the richest bottom lands.[3]

20,000 acres! If Robert Crane was correct, then Blodgett's audacity is stunning. There are 640 acres in a square mile. This would be a parcel more than five miles square, all on the east side of Rock River.

Lucius Fisher, who also knew Blodgett well, gave a much more conservative figure. He believed Blodgett "claimed some three miles square by plowing a furrow around and putting up several shanties."[4] Three square miles would amount to less than 6,000 acres. Horace White, without specifying his authority, stated that Blodgett thought his claim approximated 7,000 acres.[5]

Perhaps as the summer of 1836 passed, Blodgett had time to evaluate his domain and decide upon its manageable dimensions. John Hackett, who worked more closely with Blodgett than anyone else during this period, years later said the claim embraced about four sections of land.[6] That would be about 2,500 acres, or the equivalent of two square miles, Blodgett tried to control as "boss of these diggins".[7]

---

[1]Crane, Robert. *Beloit Free Press*, Feb. 7, 1878; 1879 *History*, 609.

[2]Blanchard, Rufus. *History of Du Page County* (1882), 274-275.

[3]Crane, *op. cit.*

[4]Fisher, Lucius. *Recollections* (1883), 274. Also, Ellery Crane letter to *Beloit Free Press*, dated July 18, 1910.

[5]*Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 41. John and Samuel Langdon were two of the twenty voters at Pecatonic (later Rockton) for the Nov. 7, 1836 election. Carr, *History of Rockton, 24.*

In any event, he must have known that the Government would never recognize a preemption of this much land, even if prudently divided among his numerous children, relatives and hired hands. Obviously, Blodgett intended to sell much of his claim as quickly as possible to the eager land seekers he knew would soon follow. Many of these would be happy to pay a modest sum for part of a choice claim belonging to the undisputed first squatter, thereby establishing a fairly good chain of title for their own squatter claims. Once again Blodgett was right.

5. The Turtle Becomes Blodgett's Place

We have seen that it was in early June, 1836, that Caleb Blodgett had left his wife, Chloe, and some of his family behind at Meacham's Grove (near what is now Wheaton, Illinois) and in company with his sons, Nelson and Daniel, traveled to The Turtle with his "breaking team" — two yokes of large oxen, — a plow, and the equipment and provisions needed to hold and fortify his new claim in the wilderness.[1]

From Meacham's Grove there was an ". . . Indian trail, leading from Chicago to the great Winnebago village, where Beloit, Wis. now stands."[2] Presumably this was the path Blodgett and his family members would use in the months ahead in traveling back and forth.

Little is known about how Blodgett went about his business that summer and autumn of 1836, although Robert Crane said Blodgett ". . . broke 100 acres or more in all, on different sections here and there, touching as many quarter sections and eighty's as he could, so as to hold, as claims, as much territory as possible."[3] The plowed land would also serve as an inducement to prospective settlers and land purchasers.

Blodgett first constructed two small shanties or log huts, one about a half-mile north of the Tebo cabin on the east bank of Rock River (near the present dam), the other about a mile downstream in Illinois.[4] They were occupied by two Langdon families. The Gideon Langdon family lived in the north cabin until about March, 1837. John Langdon and Samuel P. Langdon occupied the south cabin.[5] They and perhaps others may have been "looking claims" for themselves and were satisfied to find temporary employment with Blodgett.

---

[2]Early History of Beloit, Dec. 27, 1866.

[3]*Beloit Free Press,* Jan. 10, 1878. Years later Ellery Crane repeated his father's estimate of 20,000 acres. *Ellery Crane Manuscript* (1908), 24.

[4]*Pioneer Recollections* (1883), 274.

[5]*Commencement Address,* (1897); Brown, *Past Made Present* (1900), 29; Brown, 1908 *History,* I, 135; *The Book of Beloit,* (1936), 7.

[6]1879 *History,* 609.

[7]Crane, Robert. *Unpublished Narrative* (1877), 7, Beloit Historical Society.

Who else was with Blodgett those latter months of 1836 while he staked out his claim, put some bottom lands under the plow, built the two Langdon shanties over a mile and a half apart, and began construction on his own log cabin? We know Joseph Tebo and his family still occupied the Tebo cabin at the confluence of Rock River and Turtle Creek. Whether any of them helped Blodgett is not known. Blodgett's teenage sons, Nelson and Daniel, were with him all or part of the time. His son-in-law, John Hackett, was with him some of the time but also may have returned to Meacham's Grove for supplies and equipment and to look after other members of the Blodgett family. One early account mentions that Hackett "kept house" for Blodgett at The Turle.[6]

Finally, there were the Indians who came to trade with Tebo and who paused to watch with mixed feelings Caleb Blodgett's determined effort to carve out a new community from the wilderness. By treaty they were obligated to leave the Rock River Valley, the land of their fathers, for new homes west of the Mississippi or farther north in the Territory. Many would linger behind for as long as they dared.

6. The Blodgett Cabin

By autumn of 1836 Blodgett had turned his attention to the construction of a substantial log cabin to house his own family before winter set in. On the east bank of Rock River, between the present-day Grand Avenue and Broad Street bridges, he

"*. . . with the assistance of Indians and squaws built a double log cabin on the bank of the river. This unpretentious and primitive dwelling was divided into two rooms, one of them a comparatively large one, for his own family, and the other, much smaller, served the various purposes of dining room, office and sleeping room for land-hunters, hired hands, etc.*"[1] *The two rooms were separated by a passageway.*[2] "*The roof was made of oak staves which were kept in their place by poles.*"[3]

Blodgett is quoted as saying that the Indians helped him roll up the logs for his cabin.[4] They were evidently a band of Winnebagos who were camped on the west bank of Rock River, awaiting removal instructions from the Government.[5]

---

[6]*Beloit Journal*, Dec. 27, 1866.

[1]1879 *History*, 609-610.
[2]1908 *History*, 132.
[3]*Beloit Journal*, Dec. 27, 1866.
[4]Brown, *Past Made Present* (1900), 29.
[5]1908 *History*, 33.

Into this rude cabin Caleb Blodgett moved his wife and several of his children in the month of December, 1836. We know it had no floor all that winter.[6] Perhaps straw, skins and mats served as a cover over the frozen ground. Sawed lumber for a floor would not be ready until Spring when the saw mill would be ready to operate. Whether the cabin had any windows is not known. No picture or sketch is known to exist although it was still standing as late as 1845.[7]

However, Horace White, Jr., who lived in the Blodgett cabin as a small boy, gives us a further description:

. . . It was a rectangular collection of trunks of trees from which the branches had been removed. Four logs were placed on the surface of the ground in the form of a square, the ends being fitted and morticed together with wooden pegs. Then four more were placed on top of these, and so on till a square space one storey high was enclosed. Then a peaked roof of timbers was erected over the empty space. The crevices between the logs were stopped by any kind of clay or mud that the ground supplied . . .

My earliest recollections of Beloit or of anything are associated with this primitive structure. It was a double house with a door in the centre, and was most commonly occupied by two families . . . The joints of this mansion had not been very tightly closed and hence it was not unusual in the winter time for my parents to find themselves in the morning under an extra counterpane of snow which had sifted through the crevices during the night. The ceiling was usually frescoed with dried pumpkins in strips ready to be converted into pies.[8]

The approximate location of Blodgett's log cabin can be determined today with considerable accuracy. Hopefully the Beloit Historical Society will mark its site with an appropriate plaque.

Horace White, Jr. said the cabin was located ". . . on the bank of the river near the foot of what is now Broad Street." White was writing in 1913.[9]

Robert Crane, writing in 1877, said the cabin ". . . stood on the bank of Rock River near where A.L. Waterman's back warehouse now stands."[10]

---

[6]*First Cong. Semi-Centennial* (1888), 19.

[7]*Beloit Journal, op. cit.*

[8]White, *The Founding of Beloit* (1913), 6-7. Dr. White moved into the Blodgett cabin with his family in 1838 after Caleb Blodgett moved his family into his newly-constructed boarding house (later called the Rock River House). "The southern end, which Dr. White occupied, consisted of one square room which served as kitchen, dining room, sitting room, bedroom and doctor's office." Id.

[9]*Ibid.*

[10]*Unpublished Narrative* (1877).

Lucian D. Mears (1888) placed it ". . . down by the river bank in the rear of Mr. J.B. Gordon's hardware store."[11] That same year S.G. Colley said it had been situated "west of John Gordon's store."[12]

William Fiske Brown placed the site at the rear of 322 State Street on the bank of the river.[13] Actually, all accounts are in substantial agreement. With the above data, and using both contemporary and old maps, we can pinpoint the site today.

7. Chloe Blodgett Arrives

All accounts agree that Caleb Blodgett moved his wife Chloe and some of their children from Meacham's Grove to his new cabin on the east bank of Rock River in December 1836. Quite possible they observed Christmas in their new home.

John Hackett, their son-in-law, lived with the Blodgett family. His wife, Cordelia, age 22, did not come in December.[1] However, Blodgett's two grown sons, Daniel, 20 and Nelson, 18, who had come to The Turtle that past summer, were evidently in his employ. Two daughters, Sarepta, 14 and Orinda, 12, may have also come with their mother. One usually reliable account says they both accompanied her,[2] but another states that the girls were in school in Ohio.[3] Two young sons, Andrew, 8, and Edgar, 5, may or may not have come with their mother that first winter. Three older sons, Brainerd, 28, Tyler, 26, and Selvy, 24, did not move to The Turtle until later.[4]

---

[11] *First Cong. Semi-Centennial,* 16; also, *Ellery Crane Manuscript* (1908), 66.

[12] Colley to *Beloit Free Press,* April 19, 1888.

[13] *Past Made Present* (1900), 29; 1908 *History,* 132. By then the store was known as Fredrick Hardware.

[1] L.D. Mears said Mrs. Hackett came in July, 1837. *First Cong. Semi-Centennial* (1888), 20.

[2] 1879 *History,* 615. "The first white woman in Beloit was Mrs. Caleb Blodgett who was accompanied by her two daughters, aged, respectively, thirteen and fifteen years.

[3] *Beloit Daily News,* Sept. 18, 1931, quoting Mrs. C.A. Emerson, grand-daughter of Caleb and Chloe.

[4] Annie McLenegan's *Town of Turtle Centennial,* 172, names a child Edwin who died in infancy. The Blodgett Bible, however, mentions no such child. Posibly she confused Edwin with Elvin. The puzzle persists because several accounts refer to a son Brainerd. The probate court records of Rock County for 1840, when Caleb died show the signature of a surviving son, E. Brainerd Blodgett, evidently Elvin. Whether anyone died in infancy is not clear.

The *Fisher Fragment* also mentions Brainerd by name. In addition, Fisher makes a puzzling reference to Caleb's "second wife" but gives no name and leaves a blank space for her birth and death. Caleb died two years after Chloe. This is the only reference to a second wife. Fisher appears to have simply erred.

Robert Crane tells an interesting story about Selvy Blodgett's coming to Beloit that also explains how frontier families could separate and even become lost to each other:

In the fall of 1838[5] *Mr. Blodgett said to me, "I am going to buy hogs, and I am going to find my son, if possible, who has been absent eight years" — left home when in Ohio a single man — had not heard from him since. He did not know whether he was living or not. He went south the year previous, had heard of a man that answered the description of this son, and should try to find him . . . +*

Accordingly he went, and in due time returned with a drove of some 200 fat hogs, which he slaughtered here. After he was through with this he called on me again, saying he had seen that son, (Selvy K.) he was married, had a little son, and was living in the Des Moines valley, and that he had persuaded him to come here to live. Accordingly the wife and the little son of 3 years came early in June, 1839, on the first steamer up Rock River from the Mississippi.[6] *Mr. S.K. Blodgett came in the fall of that year and is now one of our most prominent and successful business men . . .* [7]

8. Family History

Caleb Blodgett was born near Randolph, Vermont April 15, 1785.[1] He was said to be a descendent of Thomas Blodgett who came to America from London in 1635 and settled at Cambridge, Massachusetts. A family account mentions that by the time of the Revolution the Blodgett family had grown so large that it contributed 114 soldiers to the Revolutionary armies.[2]

Chloe Kidder, Blodgett's wife, was born December 6, 1783. They were married on Christmas Day, 1807. Perhaps the most accurate summary of their life before coming to The Turtle is furnished in the following account:

. . . In early manhood he left for the West. On getting into the extreme western part of New York State, he found employment for a time; finally took up land for himself, it being then new. He then returned to Vermont, married his wife, got Selvy Kidder, his wife's brother, and others interested to come with him, and they together laid the foundation for a village.

This was evidently near Alexander, New York, perhaps during the decade 1810 to 1820, or a few years longer. The same account continues:

---

[5]Probably 1837 is correct.

[6]Probably 1838. We know the steamer *Gypsy* made its first trip to Beloit that year. See Ch. 7, sec. 7.

[7]Robert Crane, *Beloit Journal,* Feb. 21, 1878.

[1]According to the family Bible. Some accounts say 1786 but cite no source.

[2]R.B. Way, *The Rock River Valley,* II, 435, gives a biography of several generations of the Blodgett family, but has no new information about Caleb or Chloe.

After a few years, he sold out and located in Kelloggsville,[3] Ohio. There after several years of hard effort, he succeeded in becoming the owner of a large hotel, etc., became an extensive mail contractor, owning a large number of stages and mail routes, which brought a great amount of travel to his house. To this he added merchandising and finally distilling. After expending a large amount of capital in his distillery, it took fire and burned down. This last made him bankrupt.

Nothing daunted, he resolved to try a new country again. Accordingly, he started for Chicago, arriving there at a time when speculation had been overdone — very little encouragement left for him. He, therefore, went into the interior some twenty-five or thirty miles, selected Government land for a farm, at a place known as Meacham's Grove, built him a log house, got his family on, and with the help of his sons, broke up a large number of acres ready for a crop.[4]

Along the way Blodgett appears to have investigated the small but rapidly growing settlement of Chicago whose possibilities probably did not escape his shrewd judgment. However, speculators were already charging inflated prices for lands in the area. After their Ohio financial losses, neither Blodgett nor his son-in-law, John Hackett, was probably able to finance any sizeable investment.

Instead, Blodgett decided to locate about 25 miles west of Chicago at a beautiful site, then known as Meacham's Grove, in Bloomingdale Township, Du Page County, near present-day Wheaton.[5] The time: 1834, possibly 1835.[6] But even here Blodgett may have felt he had come too late. Within a year he had decided to prospect into Wisconsin Territory along Rock River, looking for government land where he might carve out a settlement of his own.

No authenticated picture, painting or daguerrotype of Caleb or Chloe Blodgett has ever been discovered. Actually, we know nothing about the appearance of either one. No account gives us a single clue. The Beloit Historical Society did for a short time display two photographs purporting

---

[3]Also referred to in other accounts as Monroe and Conneaut, in Ashtabula County. Monroe was an early name. *First Cong. Semi-Centennial,* 28; Frank H. Blodgett, *Blodgett Genealogy.*

[4]1879 *History,* 609. This account repeats almost word-for-word Robert Crane's account in the *Beloit Free Press,* Feb. 7, 1878. Crane obtained his information from Blodgett's son-in-law, John Hackett, who was also forced into bankruptcy at that time. Hackett, however, prospered in Beloit and was eventually considered the wealthiest man in the area.

[5]Bateman, *History of Du Page County* (1913), 665-666.

[6]*Fisher Fragment;* 1908 *History,* 132.

to show Caleb and Chloe Blodgett[7] but this appears to have been an error. Caleb died in 1840 and Chloe predeceased him in 1838. In 1840, the daguerrotype, the first photographic process, had just been introduced as a new art form to America from France. It was still in an experimental and primitive stage. Commercial photography was not yet born. Further investigation shows that Caleb's picture is actually that of his son, Selvy K., taken many years later.[8] Chloe's 'picture' remains unidentified.

Caleb Blodgett died August 7, 1840 at age 55. Nothing is known of the circumstances. He and his family then were living in their home on the northeast corner of Turtle and School Streets (now State and Grand). The building would later be known as the Rock River House.[9]

Blodgett's estate was one of the first to be probated in Rock County. Dr. Horace White also served as judge of probate court. John Hackett, Blodgett's son-in-law, was named administrator. According to Hackett's inventory, Blodgett's assets amounted to less than $4,000. while his debts exceeded $8,000. No real estate is mentioned. He may have conveyed some of his lands earlier to his children. His brother-in-law, Selvy Kidder, was owner of record of the family home.[10] The two mills Blodgett had built we know belonged to the Goodhue family.

In any event, the toil and imagination of Caleb Blodgett appears to have left him with only a modest measure of worldly goods. Perhaps he gave away more than the record shows, but this seems hardly likely for a man of his integrity to do when in debt. More likely, he did not live long enough to profit as others would from the fruitful growth of the village of Beloit.

9. Founding Father

Despite all we know about the remarkable personality and character of Caleb Blodgett, no writer gives us any clue as to his physical appearance, not a single word. In the summer of 1836 he was 50 years old and had only four more years to live. Tall or short, handsome or homely, bearded or smooth-shaven, smiling or solemn — we can only speculate. Inexplicably, no local historian remembered to describe Blodgett's appearance for future generations. But all accounts agree that he was a remarkable man and many offer us intriguing glimpses of a simple man with an instinct for leadership. From scattered recollections of early settlers, something of a portrait emerges:

---

[7]Both "pictures" appeared in feature articles of the *Beloit Daily News,* Oct. 26 and Nov. 6, 1971. Another "picture" of Caleb Blodgett was shown in the *News,* July 21, 1966, but is identifiable as the photograph of John Hackett.

[8]The same photo appears in the *Blodgett Genealogy* where it is identified as Selvy's.

[9]Lot 1, Block 47, Hopkins Survey of Beloit, 1840.

[10]Kidder seems to have furnished the capital for some of Blodgett's many enterprises.

. . . By the accounts of all his contemporaries who yet survive, Blodgett was a man specially endowed by nature with the gifts and qualities to fit him pre-eminently for a "pioneer". Possessing but the rudiments of an education obtained in boyhood in his New England home, he had a keen, vigorous intelligence, a shrewd insight into character, a quick perception of the possible ultimate results of "a trade", or of any proposed line of action, combined with industry that was literally indefatigable and a resistless energy that carried everything and everybody before him or with him.[1]

Robert Crane, a careful historian who knew Blodgett well, described him further:

. . . Mr. Blodgett was, for one of his years, very elastic and of quick motion. Rising early in the morning, he would have his arrangements for the day all made, so that there was little delay in placing his men, no matter how many .

. . . I have often thought he was best adapted for a new settlement of any man I ever knew. After our village was surveyed and division made, if a man wished to buy a village lot or claim, or anything he had, and if the man could not pay just as he preferred, he would shift and manage to adapt his terms to suit, and in some cases he has been known to give outright a village lot, if he felt the man would be a good acquisition to the neighborhood, rather than not have him among us.[2]

Another early writer says he was "a peculiar man", possessing "practical sagacity", adding "Mr. Blodgett was a man who, when he had his mind set upon an object, was not easily turned from it until it was secured".[3] Ellery Crane agreed: "He was a man of quick motions, determined and persevering in whatever he undertook to do; naturally kind and neighborly; But when the attempt was made to force him against what he believed to be for his interest, he felt it most keenly".[4]

In some of his private notes, never published but which still survive, Robert Crane tells us a bit more about this unusual man:

. . . [Blodgett] talked loud, giving orders to his sons & hired men (he usually had several) often saying he was "Boss of these diggins". Daniel resembled him most in his looks. Many were the times of amusement we enjoyed because of his peculiarities . . . [5]

Despite his efficient manner, Blodgett evidently did procrastinate and forget on at least one occasion, according to a neighbor who recalled ruefully:

---

[1]1879 *History,* 609. John Hackett appears to have furnished this description.
[2]*Beloit Free Press,* Feb. 7, 1878.
[3]*Beloit Journal,* Dec. 27, 1866.
[4]*Ellery Crane Manuscript,* 21-22.
[5]*Unpublished Narrative,* (1877), 7.

I was at the raising of the saw mill.[6] *Lived in Beloit then and a whole load of people came up on the invitation of Mr. Blodgett, with flags flying, and expectation of a big feed. We worked hard all day and raised the mill, when Mr. B. returned us his thanks, and said that as it was a hard time for women, he would defer our feast until the Fourth of July, but it never came.*[7]

10. Blodgett Anecdotes

The resourcefulness and enterprise of Caleb Blodgett was legendary among the early settlers. Jokes and stories, some true, some apocryphal, inevitably found their way into otherwise sober historical accounts. Probably most of them were based on actual incidents, embellished somewhat in the retelling. One story describes Blodgett's cabin crowded with land-seekers and hired hands who had exhausted the Blodgett larder before going to bed.

There were twenty who had supped at that table the night before, and who were then sleeping in the undisturbed confidence that they should find the morning repast at the same board, when Mr. Blodgett was posed by a test which made an occasion to display the resources of his generalship. The end had come — there was nothing in the bag and nothing in the barrel; one hour would bring the breakfast time, and the material basis of that ceremony was yet to be found. But he rose with the occasion; his expedients were prompt and equal to the emergency; and, marching out to the yard where the steers were resting from the toil of plowing yesterday's claims, he planted a blow upon the head of old Bright which operated as a final discharge from the renewal of similar toil, and in a few minutes he reappeared, bearing a full supply of steak for the occasion.[1]

Another story claims to tell how Blodgett dealt with one eager land-seeker who like so many others preferred to buy a squatter's interest from Blodgett rather than surveyed land on the market:

Tradition relates that such a land seeker arrived at Beloit in the afternoon with a span of horses which were for sale. Blodgett liked the horses, and made no objection to the price; indeed he would purchase them and give for them a claim to a quarter-section of land. This offer the owner concluded to accept. As soon as the bargain was made, Blodgett had the horses harnessed to a plow, and with his new team drove out and plowed, in three hours, the furrow which perfected the claim which the morning following he gave in payment for the horses.[2]

---

[6]Probably the grist mill. The saw mill was already completed.

[7]Justus Swingles Narrative, *Shopiere History*, 74.

[1]1856 *History*, 48.

[2]*Ibid.*

The land on the west bank of Rock River had been sold by the Government at auction before Blodgett's arrival at The Turtle. Hence Blodgett's vast claim was limited to the east bank. Here, although but a squatter "he proceeded as if his 'claims' were all impregnably defended by patents from the land office in Washington."[3] How Blodgett managed to keep his huge claim credible to new purchasers is suggested in the following:

. . . The mode of establishing a claim was to make some improvement upon the ground, and to effect this, the readiest plan was to plow a furrow on the prairie. But as the amount of land which can be so claimed by one individual in his own name, was by general consent limited to 320 acres; and as such an amount of land bore no proportion to the enterprise of Blodgett, nor to the unbounded claim which he had acquired from Thiebeau, it became necessary to extemporize men for the exigency.+

Men of straw were accordingly found. Greenings, loafers, and those whose youngness incapacitated them from seeing that they might just as well carve a portion for themselves, all were hired into the employment of Blodgett. They prospected and made claims in their own names, but really on his account. Thus, while in the transaction all the glory came to them, all the profit finally inured to him . . . [4]

Ellery Crane mentions still another Blodgett joke, probably passed down from his father Robert:

. . . On one occasion when services were being conducted in Caleb Blodgett's kitchen; the singing, which was of the congregational type, seemed rather lacking in power, especially the treble or soprano part; at the conclusion of the opening verse, J. Bradford Colley, who at the time was directing the singing, spoke out, "Can't we have a little more air here?" Mr. Blodgett immediately said with a loud voice, "Daniel, open that door." [5]

So much for pioneer Beloit humor. While the New England Company members may have smiled indulgently upon the retelling of such stories in later years, there is little question that it was Blodgett's leadership and resourcefulness upon which the struggling new community depended in the first year of its existence.

Years later someone remembered an early story about John Hackett during those first months at The Turtle, long before he rose to prominence and affluence in his new home:

It is said that Hackett in preparing his meals, was accustomed to fry his pork in a skillet over a fire, and then opening the bag of flour, and scooping a

---

[3] 1879 *History*, 610.

[4] 1856 *History*, 47.

[5] *Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 65.

hollow place in the flour with his hands, would pour the water into the bag, and mix up a batter and then using his hands for a spoon, would take out the cakes, and fry them in the fat.

Whether our townsman will own this primitive style of cookery to have been his or not, we presume that he will acknowledge this to have been the first office which he held in this place.

He served the "city fathers" well, and took his first lessons in "scooping out".[6]

Primitive it certainly was at Blodgett's Place as the family settled down in their cabin as the year 1836 ended and winter began. But Caleb Blodgett was planning ahead. He had already negotiated with a newcomer, George Goodhue, for the purchase of an interest in his claim. G.W. Lawrence also wrote of a sale Blodgett made to his father that fall:

... Of him my father purchased a couple of "claims", one very near the village of Beloit, the other a few miles out... [7]

Lawrence added, however, that his father then returned to Pennsylvania, without fortifying his claim sufficiently, and when he returned the following spring his claim had been "jumped" by someone else.

Eastern landseekers had already located at Pecatonic (Rockton), the Big Rock (Janesville), and Squaw Prairie (Belvidere). The coming year was filled with promise and Blodgett was not the man to be found wanting:

... His keen sagacity at once appreciated the immense possibilities of such a location. The broad prairie presented fruitful fields already cleared, the "burr-oak openings" would supply the timber for fuel, fences, and an inferior kind of timber, which might be made to do duty in the construction of temporary houses for the settlers, till more fitting materials could be obtained elsewhere, while Turtle Creek and Rock River would furnish the motive power for both grist and saw mills.

His sanguine temperment was fired by the boundless opportunities such a place opened before him, and he at once determined to secure possession of this northwest Eden. Convinced that he would have little difficulty in attracting other settlers to a spot promising so many advantages to those seeking to improve their fortunes in new homes in the "Far West".[8]

---

[6] *Beloit Journal*, "Early History of Beloit", Dec. 27, 1866.
[7] 1856 *History*, 32.
[8] 1879 *History*, 609.

CHAPTER FOUR

1837 — Birth Of A Village

1. The Goodhues

By December, 1836, or before, the first member of the Goodhue family — George Goodhue — visited The Turtle and purchased part of Blodgett's vast claim for the family business of Goodhue and Sons.[1] He had evidently heard about Blodgett's purchase while at Meacham's Grove. However, instead of locating immediately at The Turtle after his purchase, Goodhue first set up a small shop or trading post at Midway, or Rockford as it had just been named.[2] It was at Rockford that Dr. Horace White found George Goodhue living in February, 1837 when White first stopped there on his way to The Turtle. Robert Crane also mentioned seeing Goodhue at Rockford in March when he arrived.[3]

George was the son of Squire Charles F. H. Goodhue of Sherbrooke, Lower Canada, once a member of the Canadian Parliament, and a man of considerable means. The Goodhue family was the first to invest substantial capital in Caleb Blodgett's dream of a new community. Squire Goodhue followed his son to Wisconsin Territory early in 1837. Another son, William, age 14 (Beloit's first mayor in 1856), also came in 1837.[4] The rest of the family arrived in 1838, including a third son, Charles, Jr., the Squire's wife, and two daughters, Clarissa and Elizabeth.[5] Mrs. Goodhue and Clarissa are later mentioned as the first communicants of Beloit's new Episcopal Church.[6]

In the early years of its existence Beloit probably regarded the Goodhues as one of its distinguished families. Today there are on display at Bartlett Museum in Beloit original oil portraits of Squire Goodhue, his young daughter Elizabeth, and brother-in-law, Tyler Moore. Elizabeth would later marry another pioneer settler, Dr. Charles H. Bicknell.

Early accounts tend to greatly confuse the activities of Squire Goodhue and his eldest son George. Both are usually referred to indiscriminately as Goodhue. However, as nearly as we can reconstruct these early accounts, it is reasonably clear that George left Canada first, ahead of his father, in the company of his uncle, Tyler Moore, looking for business opportunities on the western frontier. By early 1837 he and his uncle had made investments at Chicago, Rockford, The Turtle, Belvidere, and Watertown.[7]

---

[1] 1908 *History*, 132.

[2] *Beloit Journal*, undated 1867 clipping, "Early History of Beloit," Ch. 8.

[3] *Beloit Free Press*, Feb. 21, 1878.

[4] *Rock County Album* (1889), 817.

[5] *Beloit Free Press, op. cit.*

[6] *Album, op. cit.*

[7] Sometimes the Goodhues erred in their speculations. "There being so little prospect of their property in Chicago increasing in value, being then nothing but a mud-hole, they permitted it to be sold for taxes." *Album*, op. cit.

The early 1857 *Chicago Magazine* corroborates George Goodhue's 1836 arrival date. It says "Goodhue" (presumably George) bought part of Blodgett's claim in August 1836.[8] A later source says Blodgett sold part of his claim to Goodhue "even before getting settled in his new home" [9], which we know occured in December. Hence it is reasonably certain that George had inspected The Turtle in the fall of 1836 and liked what he saw.

Exactly how much of Blodgett's claim was included in the Goodhue purchase is unknown. The price was evidently $2,000.[10] Three early accounts agree that George bought one-fourth of Blodgett's claim.[11] However, two later writers give it as one-third.[12] Other accounts give still different fractional purchases.[13] No documentary evidence for these and other early conveyances ever survived.

When George Goodhue first appeared at The Turtle, or Blodgett's Place, as some called it, only Caleb and two of his sons, Nelson and Daniel, and probably John Hackett and a few hired hands, such as the Langdons, were there to greet him. Joseph Tebo and his family still occupied his cabin on the state line, but he had already sold his claim to Blodgett and would soon be moving to Koshkonong.

In early 1837 when Squire Charles Goodhue joined his son, they were busy with plans for Watertown and Rockford as well as The Turtle. The Goodhues were speculators and may have preferred to watch developments throughout the Territory before deciding where to make their home. Ultimately the family settled in Beloit although their extensive business interests eventually extended all the way to St. Louis.

Soon after his own arrival Caleb Blodgett had begun work on a saw-mill. Part of the Goodhue purchase evidently included this saw-mill. Thereafter its construction was carried on by Blodgett and the Goodhues jointly.[14] With the arrival of Squire Goodhue, Blodgett may have felt that the tiny community now would have the investment capital needed for its rapid growth.

The *Beloit Journal* affords us a rare glimpse of Squire Goodhue and one of his enterprises:

---

[8]Vol. 1, 75.

[9]1908 *History*, 132.

[10]Only one account disagrees on the price. The 1867 *Beloit Journal, op. cit.*, said $1,500.

[11]1856 *History*, 50; 1879 *History*, 610; Fisher, *Pioneer Recollections* (1883), 275.

[12]Ellery Crane, *Manuscript*, 26; Horace White, *Semi-Centennial Address* (1897); *Book of Beloit* (1936), 8.

[13]*Chicago Magazine* (1857), *op. cit.*, says one-half; *Beloit Journal, op. cit.*, one-sixth.

[14]1879 *History*, 610.

Tyler H. Moore

Charles F. H. Goodhue

Elizabeth Goodhue

Legend has it that Miss Goodhue, displeased by the plainness of her portrait, poked her finger through the canvas (see mended tear beneath her left eye), then persuaded her father to have her sit for a second, more glamorous, pose (below right). Both oil paintings are on display at Bartlett Museum where the visitor may guess which captures the true Elizabeth Goodhue, age 11, of 1837, shortly before coming to Beloit.

Mr. Goodhue, the father of Mr. Charles Goodhue, was a fine looking man, tall, portly, and dignified. He might well be called "a gentleman of the old school." He was somewhat stately and reserved in his manners but always correct and courteous in his deportment. He was an enterprising business man, and besides the mill built a distillery on the same race below, which was afterward removed to the town of Newark 8 miles west.

This was I think the first distillery in the county and perhaps in the State. Whether Mr. Goodhue realized any profit from it or not, it proved to be a great curse to the inhabitants of Newark.[15]

Mr. Goodhue was a man of strict honesty and integrity as a business man and enjoyed the respect of his fellow citizens though I believe he was never a professing Christian.[16]

Although Squire Goodhue and two of his sons, Charles Jr. and George, appear to have had periodic business contacts with Caleb Blodgett in early 1837, the father evidently did not locate in Beloit until autumn. After April the saw mill, built by Blodgett for the Goodhues, was the hub of community activity:

The Sawmill was doing its best, the old fashioned up and down saw driven by a flutter wheel, was laboring night and day, still the people were clamoring for more lumber.[17]

Soon after moving to Beloit, Squire Goodhue next began work on a flouring mill, situated immediately west of the saw mill on the millrace. Before the mill was placed in operation Rock County residents were obliged to travel to Elgin or farther to have their wheat ground. For a time the grinding was done without bolting and many of the inhabitants lived on buckwheat cakes and such fish or game as they could catch.[18]

2. Nathan Allyn

We have already noted that Caleb Blodgett had been "looking claims" with a few companions as early as May 22, 1836.[1] One of these companions

---

[15]Whether the Goodhues moved this distillery from Beloit to the Town of Newark because of community pressure is not known. Early Beloit is remembered as more straight-laced than its sister communities. Barrett Smith reports that Caleb Blodgett also built a distillery at Waterloo (Shopiere). "By turning [wheat] into good pure whiskey it could be consumed and at .25 cents a gallon it ministered to the happiness and truth compells us to state as a faithful historian that very few of the early pioneers failed to appreciate this article of home manufacture." *Shopiere History*, 64.

[16]*Beloit Journal* (1867), *op. cit.*

[17]Ellery Crane, *Manuscript*, 39. The saw mill was still standing as late as 1847.

[18]*Beloit Journal, op. cit.* This flouring mill is usually called the grist mill. Later accounts refer to it as the Red Mill.

[1]*Wis. Hist. Coll.*, VI, 422-423.

appears to have been a man named Nathan Allyn. Little has been written about Allyn, but he is important to our history because he is mentioned as one of the members of a committee that gave Beloit its name. He is referred to in early accounts as a Mr. Allen. However, additional research clears up his identity and tells us much more about his role at The Turtle.

Nathan Allyn's son, Albert, years later described his father's arrival to the *Beloit Free Press:*

When Mr. Allyn, Albert's father, came to Beloit, Thebault's — pronounced Tebo — shanty was the only building there. Caleb Blodgett came the same morning and laid claim to that section of county . . . [2]

After Blodgett purchased Tebo's claim, Nathan Allyn evidently decided to make his claim farther up Turtle Creek in the vicinity of present-day Shopiere. A letter written by S. F. Phoenix, an early settler in the Delavan area gives us more information and also a firm date, July 17, 1836, Phoenix mentions that a friend told him:

. . . He had been informed that a Maj. or Col. Allen of Connecticut had come out as agent for a number of emigrants and had made about fifty claims along the Turtle, and had built a good many houses, ploughed considerably, and was soon to go back to urge on the settlers some this fall, and that he had claimed a large grove of excellent timber on this little creek, said to be the best timber in all that region, and that in the next spring he proposes putting up a mill . . . [3]

Nathan Allyn apparently claimed about a thousand acres that summer in the Shopiere area[4] and then returned east to Hartford, Connecticut for his family. That fall he brought his family to Rockford. About January 1, 1837, he and his son Albert, with a James Chamberlain, left Rockford with a horse and sled loaded with tools, provisions and blankets and headed north towards the Turtle or Blodgett's Place, en route to his own claim. Caleb Blodgett had just moved his family into his newly completed log cabin. The only other dwellings in the area were Tebo's cabin and the two Langdon shanties that Blodgett had constructed for some of his workers.

. . . Reaching Beloit they staid all night with Caleb Blodgett. Leaving Blodgett's at daylight, they reached with difficulty the Indian Council

---

[2]Nov. 27, 1899. Albert's obituary quotes from an earlier 1884 interview he gave to B.H. Smith, the editor. Nathan Allyn and Caleb Blodgett may have travelled from Meacham's Grove to The Turtle together.

[3]1836 Document file, Archives, State Historical Museum, p. 19 of Phoenix letters. Allyn served in the Conn. militia in the War of 1812.

[4]*Beloit Free Press, op. cit.* "Father came in Spring of 1836 and claimed section 3, east half of section 4, whole of section 2 in Turtle, and Section 27 and 28 in town of Bradford. These claims were made for a colony . . . " See also Appendix (E), infra.

House at what is now called Bennett's Bridge, finding the snow from three to four feet deep on a level, with a hard crust, through which the horse was constantly breaking . . . [5]

Bennett's Bridge stood near where the present-day bridge crosses Turtle Creek on the Shopiere road on the northeast edge of Beloit. This council house had once been a meeting place for the Indians of the area. At this site Nathan Allyn and his companions bored 3½ feet through the ice for water. Eventually they reached the area of Carver's Rock where they inspected the area.

Finding the snow too deep for operations, after a sojourn of a couple of days they returned to Blodgett's where Messrs. Chamberlain and Albert Allyn commenced work on the Red Mill at $1.50 per day and board, while the elder Allyn returned to Rockford.[6]

That Spring Nathan Allyn returned to his claim in the Shopiere area and constructed a block house of logs near Carver's Rock. No other references are made to him in early accounts of The Turtle, except in connection with the naming of Beloit. He died suddenly on September 16, 1838 at age 57.[7]

3. Major Charles Johnston

One of the first pioneers at The Turtle was Charles Johnston who had earlier served in the Vermont militia. His name is frequently spelled Johnson and he was also addressed as Colonel. He was a bachelor, born in Newbury, Vermont, October 13, 1787,[1] and was 49 when he arrived at Blodgett's Place about January, 1837.

Johnston may have been induced by Blodgett to visit The Turtle while living in Meacham's Grove even as we know several others were.[2] He was a man of some means and is referred to in one account as a capitalist.[3] Another mentions that he and Cezar Jones were engaged in an iron work contract for the saw-mill, upon which construction had been commenced.[4]

---

[5]Albert Allyn obituary, *Beloit Free Press*, Nov. 2, 1899.

[6]Not the Red Mill. This was a grist mill that was built later. The writer probably means the saw-mill then under construction.

[7]McLenegan, *Turtle Centennial History*, 28, 123; Smith, *Shopiere History*; 1856 *History*, 93; *Beloit Journal*, ch. 9, "Early History of Beloit", undated 1867 clipping; Ellery Crane letter, *Beloit Free Press*, May 19, 1910.

[1]Ellery Crane, letter to *Beloit Free Press*, May 19, 1910.

[2]Way, *Rock River Valley*, I, 395.

[3]1879 *History*, 610.

[4]*Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 27. "Cezar Jones, his brother Don and W. Delamater or Delamather, were blacksmiths, and came there from Michigan to make and put in place the iron work for the mills." *Ibid*, 29.

Apparently Johnston and a John Doolittle purchased half of the Goodhue family claim.[5] Ellery Crane describes Johnston as "a man with money to invest in western property".[6]

Although everyone agreed that Major Johnston was the chairman of the three man committee that named Beloit later in 1837, relatively little is known about him, other than that he lived in the Tebo cabin (a bachelor haven of sorts), and that in November he was one of the two men who canoed down Rock River to the Mississippi, and thence to Burlington, with a petition to the Territorial legislature for a charter to establish a seminary of learning.

Johnston died August 20, 1838. His early death, less than a year after Beloit was named, may explain why so much confusion arose years later over the manner in which Beloit was named. A second reputed member of the naming committee, Nathan Allyn, died a month after Johnston. The third claimed member, Caleb Blodgett, lived only until 1840. If these three were in fact the men who named Beloit, their lips were sealed before they ever wrote about it.

4. The New England Emigrating Company

One day in February, 1837, Dr. Horace White of Colebrook, New Hampshire arrived at The Turtle with his horse and cutter. It would prove to be a momentous visit. Dr. White was the 27 year old agent of The New England Emigrating Co. who had come West in search of land for new homes for the members of the Company. Upon the recommendation of friends along the way, he had decided to come to Wisconsin Territory to view The Turtle. Here, he had been told, an enterprising man named Blodgett, supported by money from a Goodhue family, was planning to build a saw mill and start a community.

Dr. White was a native of Bethlehem, New Hampshire, born March 17, 1810, the son of Benjamin and Betsey White. He had studied medicine and received his degree at Dartmouth College, then began his medical practice at Colebrook, and in 1833 married Elizabeth Moore at Bedford. A year later, Horace White, Jr. — destined one day to become Beloit's most famous son — was born. But opportunities were limited in the Colebrook area and by 1836, amid hard times, there was talk among the younger men of opportunities elsewhere.

. . . Northern New Hampshire was . . . not a very inviting region, bleak, stony and forbidding, situated among the foothills of the White Mountain

---

[5]1879 *History*, 610. Lucius Fisher said Johnston and Doolittle bought 2/12 of the entire Blodgett claim, *Pioneer Recollections*, 275.

[6]*Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 27.

range. The soil was stubborn and the climate severe in winter but salubrious in summer. Benjamin White migrated thither to find unoccupied land in which to better his condition in life. His son Horace moved away from it about forty years later for the same reason.[1]

During the third week of October, 1836, a meeting had been held in the home of Dr. White to discuss organizing a company to explore the new West in search of a more promising location in which to build their homes and enjoy greater opportunity for their families. One of those attending the meeting was Robert Crane:

I had grown to manhood while living in the town of Colebrook, State of New Hampshire, and from accounts coming from the West I had decided to take a look for myself. O.P. Bicknell, my wife's brother, decided to travel with me. Accordingly, we were ready to commence our journey by the middle of October, 1836. But we were requested to defer a week, as a number in the vicinity wished to "go West", and they proposed to call a meeting of such, to form a colony and seek for sufficient room to locate together on Government land.

The meeting was called; we waited to attend it. Those present were Capt. G.W. Bicknell, Horace White, M.D., Geo. W. Bicknell, M.D., Horace Hobart, A.L. Field, Edwin Bicknell, O.P. Bicknell, and myself. Doctor White was elected Agent to have $100 per month, a horse furnished and all expenses borne, to travel through Illinois, southern Wisconsin, and Iowa as it now is. This company was to be known as the New England Emigrating Company, afterward numbering sixteen male members, (several unmarried), each assessed $20 to pay traveling expenses of the agent.[2]

In addition to his compensation of $100 per month, plus expenses, Dr. White was provided with a horse and sleigh for his journey. However, Robert Crane and Otis Bicknell decided to leave ahead of Dr. White and use whatever transportation was available along the way. The three arranged to meet or leave word of their doings at prearranged sites en route to the New West, as they called the area beyond Lake Michigan.

Crane and Bicknell left Colebrook on October 24, 1836, stopping at the homes of friends and relatives on their way to Chicago. Dr. White evidently did not leave in his sleigh until early January, overtaking Crane and Bicknell at Ann Arbor, Michigan on January 25th. Leaving Crane to follow behind, Dr. White and Bicknell then took the cutter to Calumet, near Chicago, where Bicknell was to wait for Crane while White traveled ahead to explore the area around Rockford, a promising site on Rock River. Also, at Calumet, White had been told about a place called The Turtle, north of Rockford in Wisconsin Territory.

---

[1]Horace White, Jr. unpublished manuscript (c. 1913), Beloit College Archives.
[2]Robert Crane, *Beloit Free Press*, Jan. 3, 1878.

5. Dr. White Visits Blodgett's Place

While no account of Dr. White's February, 1837 visit to The Turtle is known to exist, we do know something of the events that led to his decision to inspect the area with horse and cutter in the middle of winter. Charles Messer, who was then working at a trading post at Calumet, near Chicago, described White's arrival there:

I knew him (White) as soon as I saw him. He told me what he was wanting to do. The company[1] that sent him directed him to go to Plumb River[2], in Illinois. I told him they might as well stay at home as to go there. I had been there, opposite its mouth, on the west side of the Mississippi, and had seen nothing there handsome, but a blacksnake. I had been up the river in a steamboat as far as that, and I knew about the country from what the Indians had told me. They belonged to the Pottawottamie tribe, and knew the land well.

I knew the Goodhues, too, at Chicago; and told White that George Goodhue had been there, and was building a sawmill, and had claimed the land for "three looks" around the mouth of the Turtle.[3] (A "Look" is a term used by the Indians, and means the distance you can see.) I told him to hurry up and buy in with Goodhue, unless he wanted to go farther west, for settlers were going in very fast.

White went on, and found Goodhue at Rockford. He then went up to "Blodgett's Place," as it was called, and liked the country, but did not purchase. Concluding to go farther, the better to carry out the wishes of the company, he went down to Plumb River, (now Savannah,) and into Iowa, but returned, and fixed on this place. Still he wouldn't purchase until he had seen Bicknell and Crane.[4]

On his initial visit to The Turtle in February Dr. White presumably talked with Caleb Blodgett. According to another early account:

He visits the site of Beloit, plows a furrow here with his own hand in February, returns to Rockford favorably impressed with the locality, but, the better to satisfy the company, explores as far as the Des Moines River Valley, Iowa, returns to Rockford again and waits the arrival of Messrs. Crane and Bicknell before deciding.[5]

---

[1]The New England Emigrating Co.

[2]Plum River.

[3]This 1867 reference by Messer to "three looks" is the earliest known. Messer was a good interpreter and knew the Indians well.

[4]*Beloit Journal*, undated 1867 clipping, "Early History of Beloit, Ch. 9". See also 1879 *History*, 610.

[5]*First Cong. Semi-Centennial* (1888), 17.

Horace White, Jr.

Son of Dr. Horace White, Beloit College graduated 1853, distinguished Chicago and New York newspaper editor, reported Lincoln-Douglas Debates.

Apparently the February plowing by Dr. White was a well-established Beloit tradition. The 1867 *Beloit Journal* writer gave it special emphasis:

. . . He returned to Colebrook, and gave a glowing description of the beauty and prospects of the country, and especially of the fact that he had ploughed in February.[6]

6. Robert Crane and Otis Bicknell Arrive

Meanwhile Robert Crane and Otis Bicknell traveling westward across Michigan finally reached Chicago. Years later, relying upon his old diary and a fading memory, Crane described early Chicago as he remembered it:

February 25th, 1837, arrived at Chicago, after ten days travel, from Michigan. Found it to be little more than a "trading post" garrisoned with soldiers as a protection from the Indians, who were quite numerous, the Pottawotamies, a large tribe, having their center at Calumet, twelve miles south of Chicago, the Winnebagoes, and others, all receiving their annuities here.+

Population of Chiago then said to be 600 with three common class hotels, one on the north side and two on the south side of the river; Water Street mostly filled (one side) with cheap balloon buildings; sidewalks, plank. Lake Street was about one-fourth built up. The old American House on the north side of this street, about one-fourth mile from the lake and nearly the most westerly building on the street, except at the extreme west end at the South Branch of the river stood the U.S. Hotel. Less building on south side of street than on north side. East end of Lake Street, as far west as the American House, was covered the entire width with plank; mud very deep, so that it was impassable without it. Afterward the whole street was covered with plank . . . [1]

. . . The only chance we had now of getting to Rockford Ills., was on foot, there being no stages or teams of any kind passing on our route, which was via. Elgin and Belvidere.

February 27th, 1837, we left Chicago in a thick snow squall, and walked 12 miles to the first house. This was on the O' Plane River. Houses generally varied from five miles to twenty miles distant from each other the rest of the way. We arrived at Rockford, Illinois, on Rock River, (a beautiful stream), March 4th, 1837, making six days from Chicago.+

There was a small store owned by George Goodhue, eldest son of Esquire Goodhue, who afterward located in Beloit, then known as "The Turtle". Dr. White, agent of our company, was in Rockford waiting for us. Rockford then

---

[6] *Op. cit.*

[1] *Beloit Free Press*, Jan. 3, 1878.

boasted of two two-story frame buildings in process of erection for hotels, two log houses, one board shanty, and a saw mill at the mouth of a small creek on the west side of Rock River.

Dr. White had been south as far as Quincy, Ills., and crossed the Mississippi following up the Des Moines valley; he had also visited "The Turtle" at the request of Geo. Goodhue, he being concerned with Caleb Blodgett in building a saw mill here. He had not fully decided where to select, but was predisposed in favor of "The Turtle", on the Rock River, some eighteen miles north of Rockford, on the State line between Illinois and Wisconsin.[2]

After resting a few days from the rigors of their winter walk from Chicago to Rockford, Crane and Bicknell were prepared to walk again, this time to The Turtle that might just possibly be the site they had come so far to find. Leaving Dr. White at Rockford to wait for George Goodhue to join them, the two young men set out on foot for Wisconsin Territory, undaunted by swollen streams and muddy trails. Dr. White stayed at Rockford with Harvey Bundy, another old friend, who was employed at Goodhue's store or trading post.[3]

. . . Thursday, March 9, 1837, Messrs. Crane and Bicknell walked to the "Turtle", crossing five streams on the way. The melting snow, with recent rain, had made them quite formidable. One they found bridged by a fallen tree, another stream, twenty feet wide and two feet deep, they were obliged to wade; The remaining three, including Turtle Creek, were crossed with the help of a canoe.

At Roscoe, there were three log cabins, which had recently been built near the stream called Kinikinick, two of them occupied by families. Just north of Roscoe, in the bend of the river, Robert Cross was living, having located there with his family the previous year. A little further north, near what has been called the Dry Run, lived Mr. Bird, a Contemporary with Esquire Cross.

No further signs of civilization were noticed until the Pecatonica, a large tributary to Rock River from the west, was reached. Messrs. Thomas and Sylvester Talcott (brothers) had built a log cabin on the east side and in the bend of Rock River, in anticipation of the arrival of their parents, with the remainder of their families; There was also a log cabin on the west side of Rock River, where lived Stephen Mack . . . [4]

Robert Crane and Otis Bicknell evidently approached The Turtle somewhere in the vicinity of the present-day bridge on Black Hawk Boulevard

---

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Horace White, Jr. *Commencement Address*, (1897).

[4] *Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 14-15.

where it crosses the creek into Wisconsin, "not knowing but we might see one or more large turtles hanging on a pole, or some prominent place as a sign, showing 'land hunters' where the city was, or was to be." [5]

Years later, borrowing from his diary, Robert Crane described his arrival in detail:

March 9th, 1837. — As we came to the creek we were wondering how we could cross; the water was at full banks, but a French halfbreed was on hand to set us across.[6] *Shortly we were in the city limits.*[7] *Our whole journey had taken thirty four traveling days.* +

At the saw mill — a mere frame recently put up in place, the flume built and the race having been dug during the winter — we found Caleb Blodgett with a force of men repairing the race at the bulkhead. To try it, he had let water in; the banks being light and frosty, as soon as the frost dissolved, the earth washed away at the place named and other points above, flooding the low ground between the race and Blodgett's log house, which stood on Rock River bank, back of where A.P. Waterman's store now stands.[8] *The land along the river being higher, a large pond was formed, and freezing made a skating rink but for the brush . . .* [9]

Ellery Crane, who had access to his father's papers, describes the first meeting with Blodgett:

On greeting the new comers, he enquired if they belonged to the New England Emigrating Company, and being assured they did, added, go to the house and lay by your baggage . . .

In getting to the log house, Messrs. Crane and Bicknell were obliged to cross on the ice this artificial pond, made by the water escaping from the millrace; and with the stumps, brush and logs protruding up through the ice, the outlook did not seem to them specially attractive.[10]

In this flat bottomland The Turtle was beginning to grow into Blodgett's Place. Here stood the cabins of Tebo and Blodgett and the frame for a sawmill for which a flume had been built and a race dug. The only other dwellings were two log huts occupied by the Langdons, one a half-mile to the north, one about a mile to the south, both on the east bank of the river.[11] The

---

[5]Robert Crane, *Beloit Free Press, op. cit.*

[6]Francis Tebo, teenage son of Joseph Tebo, whose cabin was across the creek on the north bank.

[7]The city limits of 1878, when Crane was writing.

[8]Rear of 322 State Street.

[9]Robert Crane, *op. cit.*

[10]*Ellery Crane Manuscript,* 23-24.

[11]*Ibid.,* 17.

bottomland described is the area bounded by State Street, Shirland Avenue, Rock River, and the present 300 block of East Grand Avenue. Robert Crane described its appearance that day further:

A grove of heavy timber covered the lower ground near the settlement; the higher table lands were burr-oak openings. The city of Beloit now occupies these two elevations. The large trees in the above mentioned pond had for timber purposes been felled, and the tops and undergrowth remaining, gave it rather an uninviting aspect.[12]

According to one account, Blodgett built a small dam on Turtle Creek about a half-mile from his cabin, which would locate it in the general vicinity of the bridge linking East Grand Avenue to Dearborn Street.[13]

. . . The raceway was dug along under the south side of the bluff and extended southwestward along the south side of what was afterward Race Street, now called St. Paul Avenue, until it led into Turtle Creek at the site of his mill, three or four rods west of what is now South State Street.[14]

Crane and Bicknell boarded with the Blodgetts and son-in-law John Hackett. Possibly Major Johnston was also a boarder. Whether the workmen on the mill and race all boarded with Blodgett is not known. Some may have stayed with Tebo or the Langdons. But these were the only inhabitants of Blodgett's Place before Horace White returned.

. . . Messrs. Crane and Bicknell not wishing to remain idle, immediately entered the employ of Mr. Blodgett, the following day after their arrival; Mr. Crane working on the Logway at the Sawmill Friday and Saturday, March 10, and 11.[15]

7. Blodgett Observes the Sabbath

The Sabbath came to Blodgett's Place on March 12, 1837 when Robert Crane says he confronted Caleb Blodgett with its importance to the tiny but soon to grow community. Ellery Crane repeated the charming and undoubtedly authentic story first printed by his father 30 years before. Ellery quotes his father in the following fashion:

Our first Sabbath at the Turtle seemed quite lonely. The boarders, workmen, etc., took walks, some to see the surroundings, others with their rifles in hand sauntered out for a hunting expedition, anything to amuse themselves and pass away the time. It was a frequent remark there that "Sunday had not got west of the Lakes".+

---

[12] *Beloit Free Press*, Jan. 3, 1878.
[13] 1908 *History*, 132.
[14] *Ibid.*, 132-133.
[15] *Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 24.

All the men folks had left the house excepting Mr. Blodgett, his son Daniel, aged twenty years, Otis Bicknell and myself; Mrs. Blodgett was a very good Christian woman and I enjoyed passing the time with the family.+

While sitting looking out on the river we saw Otis and Daniel launching a large canoe for a ride, soon they were out in the stream working with paddle and pole to stem the current up the river. Although they put forth their best efforts, very little or no headway was made, and they soon landed the boat and gave up the proposed ride.+

I remarked to Mrs. Blodgett that we ought to commence in our new home to show a proper regard for the Sabbath; Yes, she replied, wish you would speak to Mr. Blodgett about it.+

I immediately started on my errand, found him in the boarder's room packing the pork which Daniel had brought home in bulk the evening before, and while he was pounding it down in the barrell with an axe, I said it seems to me highly important that we commence our new settlement right, in regard to keeping the Sabbath; that we ought to discourage all loose habits in reference to it; that if we observed the day properly, it would have a tendency to attract citizens of good moral standing among us; and on the contrary, if we paid no attention to the day, treating it as a holiday, or no better than other days of the week, we would repel the better class from us.+

I then referred to the boys in the canoe, and others out hunting, and closed my argument by saying the character of our future neighbors would depend very much on the habits and doings of those who settled here first.+

Although giving attention to what was said, Mr. Blodgett continued packing his pork, But evidently appreciated the force of my remarks, replied yes, we must keep the Sabbath, it will not do to disregard it; We want the right kind of people to come here and must try to induce them to come and stay with us.+

It was at this juncture that Otis and Daniel came in from the river, and turning to them he said, boys this won't do, we must keep the Sabbath and while continuing packing his pork gave them a good lecture on Sabbath breaking; Daniel soon walked away, But Otis remained enjoying the moral point made on their conduct by the Senior member of the family, who, while delivering his lecture, was creating a still greater breach in the moral code.+

After finishing packing the pork, Mr. Blodgett retired to the family room where he remained for the rest of the day.[1]

8. Dr. White and Caleb Blodgett Make A Deal

Meanwhile Dr. Horace White, upon whose shoulders rested the responsibility of finding a satisfactory new home for the New England Emigrating Co., waited in Rockford to see George Goodhue who had already invested in The Turtle and would evidently be involved in the pending real estate transaction. The evidence suggests that Blodgett was building the saw-mill for the Goodhue family. The unfinished saw-mill obviously would figure heavily in everyone's plans for the future.

Finally Dr. White appeared at The Turtle, or Blodgett's Place, as it was also being called. Ellery Crane continues:

The following week, probably on Monday March 13, Dr. White arrived from Rockford, and in company with him, Messrs. Crane and Bicknell took a walk for inspection of the claim, going about three miles in a northeasterly course they reached a point on a bluff north of the present Milwaukee Road, from which the view was to them perfectly enchanting; North they could see as far as Shopiere on Rock Prairie; West, across Rock River, and south, nearly to Roscoe. The appearance of the landscape was smooth, gently undulating and pleasing to the eyes of our eastern land hunters.+

After inspecting a considerable portion of the land held under the claims of Mr. Blodgett consisting in all of about 20,000 acres, located on the east side of the river, extending five miles north from the State Line, Three miles south in Illinois, and from the river east, three to five miles. Messrs. Crane and Bicknell who had previously made excursions in other directions, were so much pleased with the country, they encouraged Dr. White to secure an interest here, if it could be done reasonable; Believing it would prove of special advantage to the Company to acquire a portion of the land already broken up ready for tillage and also to be convenient to a sawmill, as well as a gristmill soon to be built; especially as other members with their families were expected to arrive during the coming summer and fall...

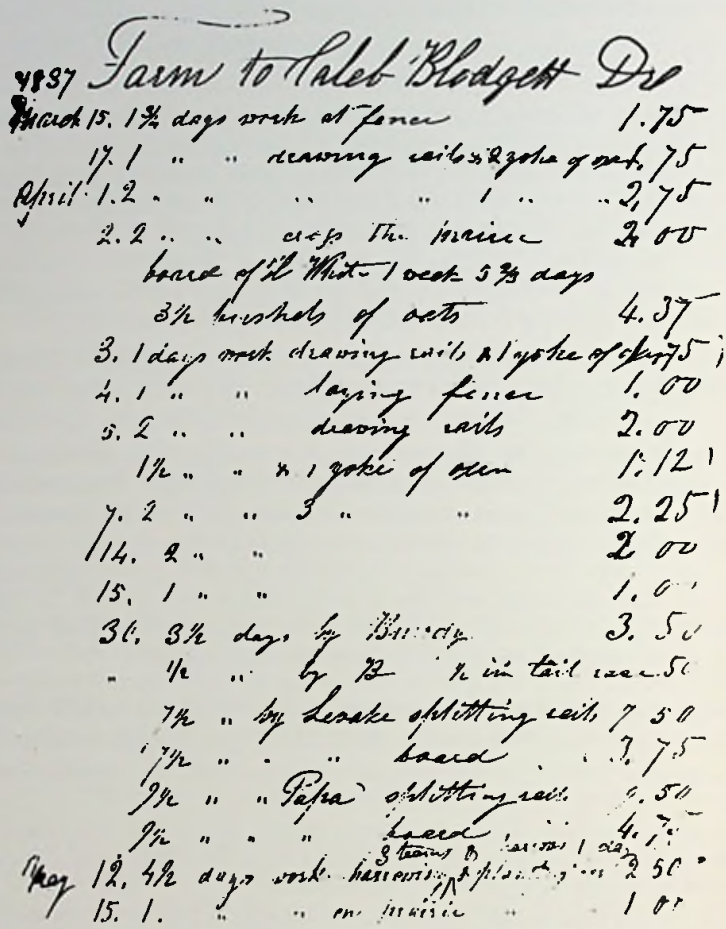
After careful inspection of the location under consideration, Dr. White and his two associates seemed satisfied that the sanitary conditions were good;

---

[1]*Ellery Crane Manuscript* (1908), 19-21. Robert Crane first mentioned this incident in the *Beloit Free Press*, February 7, 1878. Undoubtedly it was a cherished, often-told story in the Crane household.

Lucian Mears reports that he was unable to learn whether Mrs. Blodgett ever belonged to any church. She died in 1838. Mears stated that Ellery Crane believed she would have been a member of the Congregational church had she lived until its organization. *First Cong. Semi-Centennial* (1888), 18.

no swamps or malaria-breeding marshes were found; the banks along the streams for the most part were high and free from all signs of unhealthiness; while the current of the streams seemed strong and rapid. At this time the banks of Rock River were well filled, and as the great body of water swept along in its rapid course to join the great father of waters, with scarcely a ripple on its surface, the impression made on the minds of those pioneers seemed to be that it was the grandest and most beautiful stream they had ever seen; in fact the whole valley, in so far as they had been able to explore it, greatly impressed them with its rich soil for cultivation, and its charming view of landscape.+


1837 Farm to Caleb Blodgett Dr
March 15. 1½ days work at fence 1.75
17. 1 " " drawing rails & 2 yoke of oxen 1.75
April 1. 2 " " " 1 " " 2.75
2. 2 " " cap the house 2.00
board of Ill White 1 oxen 3 days
3½ bushels of oats 4.37
3. 1 days work drawing rails & 1 yoke of oxen 1.75
4. 1 " " laying fence 1.00
5. 2 " " drawing rails 2.00
1½ " " & 1 yoke of oxen 1.12
7. 2 " " 3 " " 2.25
14. 2 " " 2.00
15. 1 " " 1.00
30. 3½ days by Bundy 3.50
" ½ " by B " ½ in tail race .50
7½ " by Lesake splitting rails 7.50
7½ " " " board 3.75
9½ " " Papa splitting rails 9.50
9½ " " " board 4.75
May 12. 4½ days work [illegible] 2.50
15. 1. " " on house 1.00

First page of New England Emigrating Company's account book, March 15, 1837.

Bartlett Museum

After some further consultation, negotiations with Mr. Blodgett were entered into, and the following agreement reached.[1] *The New England Emigrating Company should have one undivided one-third of the entire Caleb Blodgett Claim, with the exception of the Mills, for the sum of two thousand five hundred dollars;+*

This amount to be paid by the company in installments, with the understanding, however, that a tract of land just north of the state line, one mile square, should be reserved from farming purposes and platted for a village, the same to be owned by each party, company or individual interested in the original claim, and the lots to be divided among the individual members of the company and others interested, in proportion to their ownership acquired in the farm lands, by paying the government price, one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre, whenever the land should be placed on the market at the land office, (which was about two years later).

This purchase gave the N.E.E. Company the right to occupy and use one third of the one hundred acres of prairie and bottom lands, that had been broken up the previous summer, together with the farm improvements connected therewith.

... Dr. White must have concluded the trade for the Company on Tuesday, March 14, 1837, for on Wednesday, March 15, accounts were opened between the New England Emigrating Company and Caleb Blodgett; Also a farm account was opened with various other persons as well as members of the company.[2]

In the late winter or the early spring of 1837 Blodgett had divided his own claim into twelfths and completed several major land transactions, all without benefit of title or even a substantial show of possession. According to Lucius Fisher:

. . . That spring a Major Johnson[3] *from Newburg, Vermont, and John Doolittle from Holley, Lower Canada, had reached Beloit and purchased 2/12ths of Blodgett's claims and lived in the Thibault shanty. Charles Goodhue from Sherbrooke, Lower Canada, and his brother-in-law, Tyler H. Moore, had purchased 3/12ths before and had begun the race and a saw mill on Turtle Creek when I reached the place. The interests were as follows then: Blodgett and sons 3/12ths, New England Company (so called) 4/12ths, Goodhue and Moore 3/12ths, Johnson and Doolittle 2/12ths . . .* [4]

---

[1]On March 14, according to Dr. White's son, *Horace White Manuscript*, 5. Ellery Crane concurs. Both friends studied the Company account book.

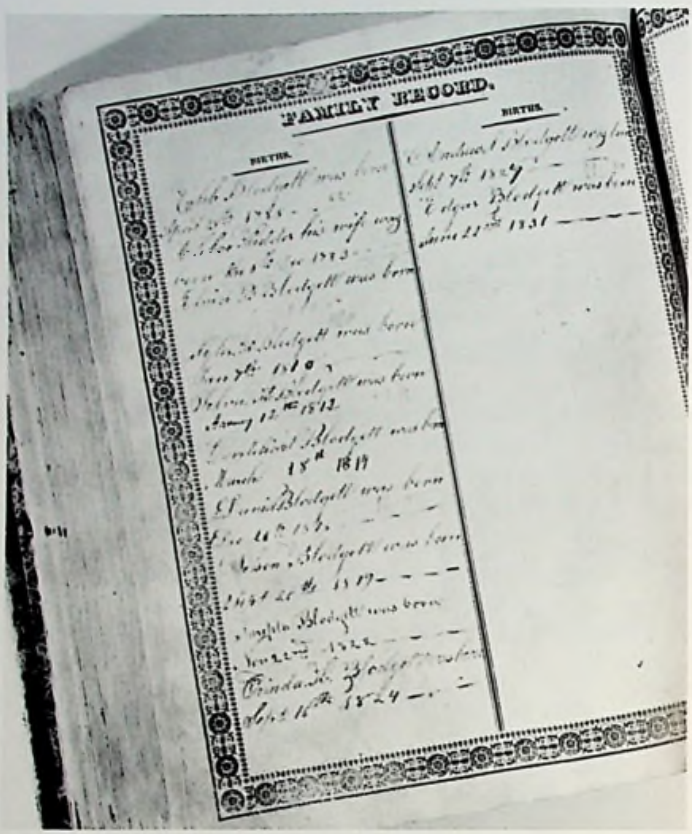
[2]*Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 24-26.

[3]Charles Johnston.

[4]*Pioneer Recollections* (1883), 275.

9. Blodgett Reads The Bible

On his second Sunday at Blodgett's Place, Robert Crane saw his suggestion that the Sabbath be more faithfully observed bear further fruit. Ellery Crane again quotes from his father's account of another amusing but also significant religious observance by Blodgett on March 19th:



Caleb Blodgett Family Bible

The following Sabbath was not very pleasant, in fact rather uncomfortable out of doors, consequently the boarders remained inside. Doubtless acting on suggestions made the previous week, Mr. Blodgett took his large family Bible, and seating himself in the room occupied by the men, began to read from the place where he chanced to open the book; it was in the old testament, the book of Job.

Before sitting down with his Bible, he had given directions to Daniel and one of the hired men to take two yoke of oxen with a sled and draw up some hay from a stack half a mile down the river.

While reading from the Bible[1] *with due solemnity, Daniel came to the door calling out, Father from which stack shall I take the hay? Mr. Blodgett answered telling which one without a pause or changing the tone of his voice, and continued reading, connecting it all together, as if taking it from the book before him; a hearty outburst of laughter went around the room; But Mr. Blodgett retained his sober dignity, while the reading was continued for nearly an hour, at the close of which the meeting was dissolved.*

Soon Daniel arrived with the hay, and Mr. B. went out to give instructions as to where it should be unloaded. . .[2]

10. More Arrivals

On April 6, 1837 several residents-to-be of the Clinton area arrived at Blodgett's Place. They were former acquaintances of Blodgett at Meacham's Grove, near Chicago, looking for good farm lands to locate upon. Their names: Chauncey Tuttle, Dr. Dennis Mills, Milton S. Warner, Charles Tuttle, and William Murray. An early account describes the difficulty of their travel:

The journey to "Blodgett's place," now Beloit was accomplished after five days of hard toiling through mud, sloughs and unbridged rivers and creeks. It was necessary many times in the course of each day for one or more of the company to wade into the sloughs nearly waist deep and lift at the wheels, to enable the horses to draw the load through. The river at Belvidere, and Turtle Creek at Beloit, from recent rains and melting snows, were up to high water mark and had to be crossed in a "dug out," or canoe, carrying over a wagon wheel, or barrel of pork, or barrel of flour at a time, consuming several hours' time at each place in crossing.+

The day of arrival at Beloit was rainy and cold and the place presented anything but an inviting appearance to the stranger. The soft side of a burr-oak puncheon was the best sleeping or lodging accomodations the place afforded; that, at California prices, was obtainable at the house of Caleb

---

[1]The Blodgett Bible has been preserved by members of the family. Lucian Mears mentions that Caleb's grandson, Selvy, possessed it in 1888, *First Cong. Semi-Centennial*, 18. In 1948 Frank H. Blodgett, Caleb's great-grandson, said it was one of his prized possessions. *Blodgett Genealogy*, 2-3. Upon his death in 1949 it was given to his grandson, Frank Caleb Blodgett of Minneapolis, a member of the 6th generation, who was born in Janesville.

[2]*Ellery Crane Manuscript*, (1908), 21-22, which closely follows Robert Crane's account of the incident in the *Beloit Free Press*, Feb. 7, 1878.

Blodgett, the enterprising founder of Beloit. This, with the exception of Monsiour Tebo's shanty, occupied by himself and two Squaw wives, was the only house in the place. This was a roughly built, commodious, "double yolked" log house, or, in other words, two stories on the ground. A part of the first saw mill frame was raised, and the digging of the race commenced.+

On the 8th, the company, piloted by Mr. Blodgett, visited Jefferson Prairie, and determined upon locating there. On the 19th with the aid of Tebo and his little canoe, recrossed Turtle Creek with their effects, and commenced a settlement on the west side of Jefferson Prairie, within the present limits of the town of Clinton.[1]

11. Saw Mill Operations Begin

Deacon Henry Mears, one of the earliest settlers, described his first glimpse of Blodgett's Place:

On the 15th day of April, 1837, when I arrived upon the ground, I found three log houses in the place. No streets had been cut out, and save the primitive road through the trees between Tebo's shanty and the log house of Mr. Blodgett, the only throughfares were Indian trails many of which centered here and were worn deep by constant use.

Of inhabitants, I found Mr. Blodgett and family, a Mr. Langdon whose log house stood near where the Rock River Paper Mill now stands and who was about leaving the place, Mr. Crane, Otis Bicknell, Maj. Charles Johnston and several men who worked at the saw-mill of George Goodhue, on the old Red-Mill site.

The land where the town now stands, on the east side of the river was covered with a fine grove of black and white oak and hickory timber, excepting a spot near where the Northwestern Freight depot now stands, which the Indians had cultivated as a garden.

I can give but a faint idea of the beauty of the country then in a perfect state of nature as it was. There was not one thing that was not wild. Not a spear of grass, nor a plant ever cultivated by man was to be seen; All was new and fair as from the creative hand of its maker. Even the sounds were wild; not one familiar bird was seen except the meadow larks. In the morning and often at night the air would ring with the crowing of the prairie hen or the shrill trumpet tones of the sandhill crane or high up in the air would be heard the ringing notes of the wild swan on the way to the far north. The prairies were one continual flower garden from March until frost came in the fall.[1]

---

[1]1856 *History*, 70-71.

[1]Henry Mears, "A Sketch of the Formation of the First Congregational Church," *Ellery Crane Manuscript* (1910) 67-68.

The arrival of Deacon Henry Mears and his wife at Blodgett's Place also coincided with the commencement of operations at Goodhue's saw mill. Their son, Lucian, later mentioned the occasion:

. . . The date of the first sawed board can be given, April 15, 1837, for on that day my father and mother arrived and remembered it. Those first boards from that mill were taken to make a floor in Mr. Blodgett's log house, which, I think, must mean that they had lived in that house, during the winter of 1836-1837, literally on the "ground floor". Father remembers seeing the ox team standing at the house loaded with the boards . . . [2]

[2] *First Cong. Semi-Centennial* (1888), 19.

CHAPTER FIVE

Blodgett's Place Becomes New Albany

1. Life At Blodgett's Place

On April 26, 1837, after boarding at the crowded Blodgett cabin for several weeks, Robert Crane and Otis Bickness purchased Joseph Tebo's 12 by 16 log cabin for the New England Company in order to have their own quarters. Tebo and his family left immediately for Lake Koshkonong.[1]

Here at the former Tebo cabin, Bicknell and Crane were in the late spring of 1837 joined by other boarders: Charles Johnston, Don Jones, Cezar Jones, W. Delamater, and Alfred Field. The two Jones and Delamater were blacksmiths who had been hired to make and put in place the iron work for the saw-mill and an anticipated grist-mill. Field, a newly-arrived Company member, had brought provisions, oxen, tools and much-needed money for the enterprise.[2]

Robert Crane gives us his own first-hand description of daily living at Blodgett's Place that May and June, beginning when he and Bicknell took possession of the Tebo cabin:

. . . The first to be done was to take out the old puncheon floor, it being coated with considerable depth of soil, and substitute some new oak boards from the mill, which began to work about this time. We obtained an old style bake-kettle with cover, through the motherly kindness of Mrs. Caleb Blodgett, who was always ready to do a favor when she could. Mr. B[3] *furnished us with 10 pounds of pork to start with. He could spare the room for berths for just four, but there being five of us, one necessarily had to lodge on the floor. Those favored with berths procured some "prairie feathers" (hay) to lay in the bottom, making it very comfortable.* +

None of us now had money, but when the blacksmiths had a job amounting to 50 cents or $1.00, as was occasionally the case, our stock of provisions being soon exhausted, they became our bankers. When any deposits were in Bank, our paper would be discounted, and drawing our money, some one would volunteer to take a walk to Pecatonica, (now Rockton), four miles, where a few pounds of tea, coffee and sugar could be had, the little stock being so managed as to keep as much on hand as we found cash to buy with, at a time. +

Whenever these little parcels were presented to our cook, the countenances of all present would light up at the prospect of once more tasting a little tea

---

[1] *Ellery Crane Manuscript* (1908), 28.
[2] *Ibid.*, 29, 35.
[3] Caleb Blodgett.

or coffee, as the case might be. The seasoning of our beverages was somewhat deficient, as our larder furnished no milk, much less butter.+

The flume of the old mill furnished us our meat for several weeks in the form of fish, (red horse), large schools of them, weighing from two to four pounds each, running in every night and we taking out our supply in the morning for each day.+

We by chance learned there was a barrel of pork for sale at Rockford, so we thought to try our credit on that. Accordingly one of our number went with them to find it. When found, it proved to be only a parcel of small, lean hams taken from mast-fed hogs, thrown loosely into the barrel. This could be had for nothing less than $31, and being the last, there was no alternative. On the return of our team, the barrel came. As needy as we were, no one felt to rejoice much at such a possession, more than half of its weight being made up of brine. Our cook said he had to fry some red-horse with it, or it would burn on the pan, not being fat enough to cook itself. It was gone, however, before we could get more.[4]

Here Robert Crane's account ends. However, years later Ellery Crane wrote further from his father's notes:

. . . June 7, Mr. Crane drove to Rockford with a span of horses and wagon, to try his financial status, returning the next day with one pound of tea, at one dollar, six pounds coffee, thirty-seven pounds of bacon at seventeen cents per pound, one yard cotton cloth ten cents per yard, one-half bushel of salt, two and one half pounds sugar.+

A few days later Mr. Bicknell made another trip to Rockford, returning with two barrels of flour at eighteen dollars per barrel, five pounds sugar, one-half bushel salt and another wash bowl, and a few other articles incident to good housekeeping.

The Company Boarding house in the Log Cabin, was continued in operation from April 26, to June 23, at a net expense of $114.01. A portion of the time there were eight men supplied with board at this cabin, at an average expense of thirty-three cents per day, per man . . .

While this the first N.E.E. Co. Boarding House was being conducted on the cooperative plan, the work of plowing, planting, sowing and fencing the farm lands, also the hewing of heavy timber to be used in constructing the frame building that was to constitute the second Company Boarding House, was being pushed forward with all possible vigor.[5]

---

[4]*Beloit Free Press*, Jan. 10, 1878.
[5]*Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 31-32.

2. The Rock River House And Beloit House

A week after his arrival in March, Robert Crane was assigned the duty of constructing a large building to be used as a boarding house for the members of the New England Emigrating Company and their families who it was anticipated would be arriving at The Turtle later in the year. As agent for the Company, Dr. Horace White probably made the final decision where and how to build. Crane as a carpenter would be in charge of the project and do most of the work. According to Robert Crane, work was

. . . to be carried forward as fast as scantling, lumber, etc., could be had from the mill, which was not yet running. Commenced framing square timber March 16th, working at it at intervals between sewing and planting, tending corn, etc., . . . [1]

This Company Boarding House, as it was first called, later became widely known as the Beloit House, one of the more distinguished inns of the area. It was erected on the site of the present-day Beloit Daily News plant on the southeast corner of State Street and St. Paul Avenue.[2] The press of farming and other construction work evidently slowed completion of the two and one-half story Boarding House.[3] It was not ready for occupancy until January 1838.[4]

At the same time, in the early spring of 1837, Caleb Blodgett began construction of a large home and boarding house combined for his own family. This building, later to be better known as the Rock River House, was erected at the northeast corner of present-day State and Grand, where the Goodwin House would stand until recent years.

Oddly enough, during the past fifty years, these two illustrious monuments to pioneer Beloit have been assumed by recent writers to be one and the same, sometimes identified as the Rock River House, sometimes the Beloit House, and built by Blodgett.[5] Such is not the fact.

Caleb Blodgett's new home was a two story frame house with an ell one story and a half high at the eastern end for a kitchen. This ell part was readied first and was occupied during the winter of 1837-1838.[6] When Blodgett and his family left their log cabin that winter to move into the

---

[1] *Beloit Free Press*, Jan. 10, 1878.

[2] *First Cong. Semi-Centennial*, L.D. Mears, Historical Address, 19.

[3] *Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 42.

[4] Ellery Crane letter, *Beloit Free Press*, July 21, 1915.

[5] *The Book of Beloit (1936)*, 11, shows a picture of Blodgett's "Beloit House". Subsequent writers have repeated this error.

[6] Ellery Crane, *Manuscript*, 19.

kitchen area of their new home, Dr. Horace White and his wife and their small son, Horace, Jr., moved into the vacated Blodgett cabin.

Blodgett dwelt in his new home during the next two years until his death in 1840. Apparently, in addition to his immediate family, relatives, hired hands, and numerous visitors lived with him in what rapidly became a boarding house. It was not until after his death that it became known as the Rock River House.[7]

However, the New England Company's boarding house was even larger. According to Ellery Crane:

. . . [It] was to be quite a sizeable building, two stories and one half in height; Therefore requiring considerable lumber in its construction; and while a certain portion of it might be used direct from the saw, it was necessary to have stock somewhat seasoned for the finishing work, the making of doors, sash, etc.; and a crude kiln was constructed for seasoning the amount needed; Shingles had to be made, and Messrs. Cass and Willey set about riving and shaving them; Lime also was in demand, Edwin Bicknell and John Willey attending to that service, they burning the first lime and mixed the first mortar used in the settlement.

The place in which they quarried the stone, and where they built the kilns, was about one mile south of the Turtle, a little distance east from the river, at the dividing ridge of land separating the bottom land extending to the river, and the higher or timber land, on what was the Field and Hobart Farm, or Langdon Claim, afterwards known as the Brook's Farm.[8]

Actually, a third boarding house, belonging to the Goodhues and situated immediately south of the New England Company's boarding house, appears to have been finished first. However it goes almost unmentioned in early accounts. It was evidently intended to house Goodhue employees working on the sawmill and later the grist mill.

An 1867 copy of the *Beloit Journal*[9] summarizes the building of the two boarding houses:

Fortunately two Hotels had been erected before the emigration began to come in. They were raised the same day amid the exultation of the citizens. They went up harmoniously together, the one at one end of State Street, the other at the other end, on the spot where Hotels still stand. The same men helped to raise both, and were christened the "Beloit House" and the "Rock River House."

---

[7]Ellery Crane letter to *Beloit Free Press*, July 21, 1915.

[8]Ellery Crane, *Manuscript*, 42.

[9]The date of this 1867 clipping is missing. Beloit College Archives, Peet Scrapbook, captioned Ch. 12.

The birthright of the twins properly belongs to the Beloit House, though the younger has now supplanted the elder, and boasts a fine brick front, while the elder is still the simple plain Beloit House.

The two Houses at the outset tacitly represented the two chief interests of the town.

The Beloit House was put up by the New England Company as a boarding house for the company as well as Hotel, while the Rock River House was put up by Mr. Blodgett to show that he still claimed to be proprietor in the place.

The Beloit House was soon filled with the members of the New England Company, as they came on and boarded until they could get into houses or shanties of their own.

David Bundy was the first landlord, and served the public well in this capacity.[10]

The Rock River House served for a home for Mr. Blodgett's large family of boys. He had his breakings on the "Turkle",[11] *and the wing could be used for the storeroom where he could keep his grain. The House was built near the "Steamboat Landing"*[12] *and was intended to serve as both lighthouse and steamboat Hotel. Besides being already warehouse, Hotel, depot and lighthouse, it could serve for a schoolhouse and a church.*

3. First Baby

The first child born in the new community appears to have been Nancy Wadsworth, daughter of the Royal Wadsworths, who kept for a time the Goodhue boarding house, while the saw mill and grist mill were being built

---

[10]Ellery Crane says that a Mr. Shaler was the first landlord "but a very short time" and was succeeded by J. Bradford Colley and his sister Mrs. Atwood. Then came David Bundy and wife in 1838 or 1839. *Beloit Free Press,* July 21, 1915.

[11] "Turkle" was evidently a pioneer name for Turtle Creek — perhaps based on a mispronunciation, perhaps merely a nickname. Another reference appears in Aaron Walker's diary for September, 1836. He refers to "Turkle Lake" in Walworth County and also to "Turkle Creek". *William Walker Papers,* Wis. Historical Library, Archives, diary, pp. 29 and 24.

[12]Kelsou's 1837 Survey shows a "Public Landing" immediately west of Blodgett's Rock River House — the area along the river occupied by the new First National Bank complex.

in 1837 and 1838.[1] The Wadsworths moved to Manchester in 1838 and their early departure may explain why later writers overlooked the birth of their daughter some time in June 1837. After Chloe-Blodgett and Mrs. Henry Mears, Mrs. Wadsworth may have been the third woman to live in the community.

The first boy born was unquestionably Lucian D. Mears on March 29, 1838. His arrival was evidently well-remembered:

All the people regarded this birth as an event — the women were proud and jubilant — the news ran through the whole circuit of New Albany[2] — the fathers of the settlement were tickled; they congratulated the parents, suggested an illumination, talked more at large of giving a lot to bless the boy and encourage the parents, (the lot was even designated); but the week passed, the excitement subsided, they became first prudent, then oblivious, and like many genial promptings, the benevolent thought blasted in blossoming, and perished from memories on the spot where it sprang . . .[3]

4. Lucius Fisher Visits New Albany

July 15, 1837 marked the arrival at New Albany of a 28 year old Vermonter who was destined in the next three decades to play as influential a role in the development of the community as anyone.

Caleb Blodgett and Dr. Horace White both left their stamp on the character of the town, but they were soon dead, and it was Lucius G. Fisher more than any other single individual who would guide and shape its growth until 1866, when he left Beloit in search of greater opportunity in Chicago.

Fisher was born in Derby, Vermont, August 17, 1808 and died in Chicago, March 5, 1886. He was buried in Beloit. By every account a man of strong character, commanding appearance, and great talent, Fisher left his Vermont home in the depression of 1836 to seek his fortune in the west. For a few years previous he had been employed by the Fairbanks family of St. Johnsbury, Vermont to sell their newly invented platform scales. By an intriguing coincidence he would come west to a community that some fifty

---

[1]Ellery Crane letter, *Beloit Daily News*, dated July 23, 1910. Evidently Sarah Jane Langdon at one time was led to believe that she was the first area child born. She understood she was born on February 16, 1837, the daughter of Gideon and Maria Langdon who lived near the present-day dam on Rock River. She said her father wanted to name her Beloit. However, Beloit wasn't named until about September 1837. Crane believed she was born a year later than she thought, February 16, 1838. A notation after an 1867 newspaper clipping in the *Stephen D. Peet Scrapbook* also agrees with Crane.

[2]New Albany was already Beloit when Lucian was born.

[3]1856 *History*, 52. The writer, Rev. H. Lyman, was not aware of the Wadsworth baby.

years later would see that same Fairbanks Company locate in and eventually become its largest industry.

In 30 years at Beloit, Fisher would move ahead in many roles: merchant, land speculator and developer, first sheriff of Rock County, bank president, alderman, state legislator, influential trustee of Beloit College, railroad developer, and later prominent Chicago businessman.[1] He was also widely reputed to be the man who gave the village of New Albany its new name, Beloit; but that is another story — a long and sharply disputed story — to be told later.

It was also Fisher who retained Abraham Lincoln to represent him and the town of Beloit in 1855 in defending the land titles of the first settlers against an ingenious attack by lawyer, Matt Carpenter, who then lived in Beloit.[2]

Fisher had left Vermont during the panic of 1837 that then gripped the nation. In his *Pioneer Recollections* he tells us something of the times and the circumstances that motivated so many men in their twenties to leave the east and, as he described it, look for "that better country" in such places as Wisconsin Territory. Sent westward in New York to collect accounts due the Fairbanks Company he soon learned the extent of the panic:

. . . All banks suspended specie redemption and for the time no paper money was current or debts paid. All confidence was destroyed between business men, and such a financial panic was never seen before or since in our country. When I reached Buffalo I had not collected a cent from $27,000 in notes against the best business men on the line of the Erie Canal. In Buffalo I collected in bank bills $70. Here I was with but little money and all business prostrated. I could not see in prospect a time when I could hope to engage in the commission business with success. I had nothing in Vermont to return to. I was lonely and desolate. Young men were being discharged from stores and factories in great numbers, and business men were failing everywhere.[3]

In desperation Fisher decided to visit Chicago, whose population he estimated at 3,000 in July 1837. Finding no business opportunities there he travelled by steamer to Milwaukee:

---

[1]Fisher tells his own story in superb fashion in his 1883 "Pioneer Recollections of Beloit and Southern Wisconsin", *Wis. Mag. of History*, Vol. 1, 266 — 286 (1917-1918).

[2]For the complete account of this remarkable incident in Beloit history, see Appendix (F).

[3]Fisher, *op. cit.* 267-268.

Lucius G. Fisher

John Hackett

. . . I found Milwaukee with a population of about 1,000, the west side of the river mostly under water, many of the houses built on stilts, abandoned, and doors open, most of the population of 1836 having left the place by reason of the panic . . . I had but little money and several young men boarding at the Leland House had often to borrow of me to pay for their week's washing. All had been speculating in lots and were broke. None of us knew what to do or where to go.[4]

Finally, Fisher says he decided to go across country to Galena and go mining for lead. Arriving at Rock River, in the vicinity of present-day Watertown, tired, sick, and discouraged, he fortunately stumbled upon old friends, Squire Charles Goodhue and two of his sons.

I remained with Mr. Goodhue and sons a few days and was persuaded by them to visit what was then called New Albany (now Beloit) before going to Galena, they representing it as a very desirable point for a town and offering me an interest in claims which they had recently purchased there. I accepted the proposition to visit Beloit . . . [5]

---

[4] *Op. cit.*, 270.
[5] *Op. cit.*, 272.

With Squire Goodhue and his son, George, and two other companions, Lucius Fisher travelled down Rock River some 60 miles to New Albany in a large canoe purchased from some Indians for five dollars and a gallon of whiskey.

Fisher described his arrival at New Albany in his *Pioneer Recollections:*

It was Sunday morning, the fifteenth of July, 1837. I found Caleb Blodgett and family there in a log house and we slept upon the floor two nights while there, in the only house except a log hut which had just been vacated by an Indian trader, by name Thibault, whose wife was a squaw. The first day, Sunday, I took a walk up where the College now stands and on to the banks of Turtle Creek where I saw many Indian mounds, some of them still preserved and where I had an uninterrupted view of prairie such as I had never had before. I said to my friend with me that it was the most beautiful view that I had ever seen. Quite a number of Indian wigwams were standing upon the prairie near the creek and hurdles for drying their corn, which had been raised for years upon the Turtle bottoms.[6]

Where did Fisher take this dramatic view? No one can say for sure. Present-day Chapin Street runs due east from the College to Milwaukee Road. Perhaps it was here on the high Hillcrest Bluffs overlooking the vast bottomlands of Turtle Creek where Strong Stadium now stands. Perhaps it was a bit further north and east where Emerson extends into Sherwood Drive along the bluff as it reaches close to the creek, where we know a number of mounds were located. Here Fisher would have had a panoramic view in three directions. Wherever he stood, Fisher was obviously thrilled by what he saw.

Fisher's memory, however, was partly at fault. He states that only Blodgett's and Tebo's cabins were built. Actually, we know the two "Langdon" cabins, or huts, or shanties, whatever they were, were occupied in July. But in 1837 they would seem far removed from the settlement proper huddled along the trail from Tebo's cabin north to Blodgett's second home upon which construction had just begun. In between would be Blodgett's cabin, where he still lived; the completed saw-mill; the partially completed shanty of Robert Crane and the New England Company's boarding house; and the almost completed Goodhue boarding house.

. . . The lower bench of Beloit or between the bluff and river was still covered by heavy timber and underbrush, but little having been removed. The owners had broken some acres on the bottoms and were breaking 160 acres where Slaymaker now resides[7] *and 100 acres in the high ground south of him . . .* [8]

---

[6] *Op. cit.*, 273.

[7] The vicinity of Highway 15 and Interstate 90 today.

[8] Fisher, *op. cit.*, 275.

Impressed though he was by the New Albany site and the opportunities it appeared to offer, 28 year old Lucius Fisher wanted to see more of the area before deciding where to settle. But he did make one decision:

. . . On Monday after my arrival I purchased of Goodhue and Moore one-fourth of their interest for $400 and I paid for my share of the ploughing which was to be cultivated in common until a division of claims was made. I did not expect to locate there but bought on speculation.[9]

On Tuesday July 17, less than three days after his arrival, Fisher left New Albany to visit Chicago and then Milwaukee again. In September, he later said, he returned again to New Albany for another four weeks, during which time, according to Fisher, he played a key role in the changing of its name to Beloit. In October, he said, he returned again to Milwaukee for several months.[10]

5. More First Settlers

By August, 1837, the emigration of families from the east was underway. As an old man Ellery Crane described his own arrival at New Albany while a baby in his mother's arms:

It was on Friday, the fourth day of August, 1837, that Captain Thomas Crosby, with his load of weary travelers, drove up to the door of the Thibault log cabin, at this time the property of the company; it having been purchased of the French trader.

. . . The vehicle was a good sized farm wagon, drawn by three horses, one of the four horses with which they left Colebrook, N.H. having died on the way hither.

Names of the party, Deacon Horace Hobart, Captain Thomas Crosby, James Crosby, a brother of Thomas; Mrs. Thomas Crosby and her baby, George; Grandmother Crosby, Mrs. R.P. Crane and baby, Ellery, and Mrs. James Cass. Seven adults and two babies, each of the latter about nine months old. They had reached the promised land after a tedious journey of about twelve hundred miles.[1]

---

[9]*Op. cit.*, 275. In an earlier account, Fisher wrote: "Doolittle and Johnson were here and had bought in with Blodgett and Goodhue. I bought one-twelfth of the claim . . . " *Beloit Journal*, 1867 undated clipping, "Early History of Beloit", Ch. 11.

[10]*Op. cit.*, 278-279. Fisher obviously intended to document his movements in September and thereby answer for the historical record critics, such as Robert Crane, who years later insisted that Fisher was living in Milwaukee when Beloit was named.

[1]Ellery B. Crane, letter to Editor, *Daily News*, dated August 2, 1915.

The privations endured by this party on its arduous trek westward were too much for Mrs. Crane. Like many women who traveled by wagon she sometimes had to walk and carry her baby on her back when the horses mired in mud or sand. She apparently never recovered from the exhausting trip and died a few years later at the age of 33.[2]

Robert Crane had hoped to build a shanty before his wife and child arrived, but it was not yet ready for occupancy. This shanty was situated on the northeast corner of what is now State and St. Paul, across the street from the New England Company's boarding house (later called the Beloit House) located on the southeast corner. Crane, who was working on both structures at the same time, tells us further:

My shanty was 12 × 16 feet on the ground, the roof slanting all to one side made the attic sufficiently high that a person could stand erect on the higher side. Fireplace of stone; chimney carried out with sticks. This plan was adopted universally, as no stoves could be had. Our ovens were built of mortar, out a little from the shanties, answering every purpose of a brick oven.+

In due time it was ready; a dish cupboard in one corner by the side of the chimney, our bed in the corner opposite. A large box was used for a table, and some hastily made benches in place of chairs.+

We had three gentlemen boarders, they having their sleeping apartments in the attic, a few loose boards having been laid there for a floor. For stairs a few slats were nailed to the studding at the sides, so that no room was taken up by them, for with five grown people and a child, in so small a room, all our plans had to be arranged with economy.[3]

For the first week after the arrival of his family, before the shanty was finished, Robert Crane was sorely pressed to find room for everyone. The boarding house was far from ready and the Company had only the Tebo cabin, where he had been living, and the former Langdon cabin south of the village along Rock River in Illinois. Another decision had to be made:

... We therefore opened some of our goods boxes, got out some under beds, filled them with "prairie feathers", placed them in an ox wagon, and seating the ladies on them left for an unoccupied log house situated a mile down the river, in Illinois, the husbands present going with their ladies, and those who were without families present remaining at the Thebolt hut.+

This arrangement was continued, using the log houses as lodgings, our meals taken daily at the Thebolt mansion until other more convenient arrangements could be made.

---

[2]Brown, 1908 *History*, I, 138.
[3] *Ibid.*

Built in 1838 by Robert Crane, northeast corner of today's State and St. Paul.

Looking north from state line? Two large buildings on right would be Beloit House and Rock River House in distance.

Two sketches by Sereno T. Merrill

6. A Religious Meeting

With the Crane shanty nearing completion, it was agreed to hold a formal gathering there to observe Sunday church services in a somewhat organized fashion. Ellery Crane, drawing from his father's notes, described the occasion:

. . . The first religious meeting in the place was held Sunday, August 13, 1837, in Mr. R.P. Crane's Shanty; it was a prayer meeting led by Horace Hobart, later known as Deacon Hobart.

Ira Hersey, on being called upon, offered the first prayer, and also started the singing of the first tune at the meeting.

At this time Mr. Crane's family had not taken possession of the shanty, it not being quite in condition to receive them.

There must have been present, Horace Hobart, R.P. Crane, wife and child, Ellery, Alfred Field, Ira Hersey, Mr. and Mrs. Caleb Blodgett, Mr. and Mrs. John Hackett, Thomas Crosby, his mother, wife and child, George H., and others whose names are not now at hand.[1]

Lucian Mears, relying upon his father's account, described the following Sunday:

This first religious meeting was not allowed to be the last. The next Sabbath, Aug. 20, another was held in the same place. At this meeting my father and mother were present. They did not hear of the previous meeting in time. Father being down from his claim during the week had learned, as Mrs. Crane with joy had told, of the previous meeting . . . There was a larger attendance than on the previous occasion. Singing led by Mr. Field. This was a reading meeting. Mr. A.L. Field read a sermon, and, being a good reader, often performed this service in the weeks to come until they had a minister. Mr. Hersey offered the closing prayer.[2]

During the week between these two meetings Robert Crane had moved his family into his shanty, which consisted of one room (12 by 16 feet), but there was not enough furniture on hand to interfere with holding meetings. The Sunday meetings continued.

The New England Company's boarding house 'the Beloit House', still unready for occupancy, was the site of the first visit by a minister of the gospel. It was thought that Robert Crane's shanty would be too small for the number who would attend:

. . . The company's forces were now fairly well provided shelter and food while work on the boarding house, with the additional help of Hobart, Howe and others, was carried forward more rapidly; so that on Sunday, September 10, the building was enclosed, and by providing a temporary floor of loose boards, a meeting was held there. Professor Seth Spencer Whitman, from Belvidere, Ill., conducting the service. His was the first sermon delivered in Beloit by an Ecclesiastic . . . [3]

---

[1] *Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 62.

[2] *First Cong. Semi-Centennial*, 21.

[3] Ellery Crane, *op. cit.*, 41, 62. Whitman had been professor of Hebrew in New York. One of the first settlers of Belvidere in 1835, he later became pastor of its Baptist church, rose to considerable prominence in the area, and had extensive land holdings. 1867 *Beloit Journal* undated clipping, Ch. 13, "Early History of Beloit".

Robert P. Crane

Almira Crane

Alfred L. Field

7. Charles Messer

One of the busiest men in the settlement of New Albany (or Albany) during the month of August was certainly Charles Messer. In addition to being able to communicate with the Indians in their own tongue, Messer was a versatile jack-of-all trades, and an exceptionally good one. Ellery Crane tells of Messer's first role after his arrival:

Mr. Messer was a very useful and handy man. He had been a clerk in a store in the little town of Calumet, a few miles south of Chicago, but had now relinquished his job there to join some of his former friends and acquaintances in building up the new town at the Turtle. He could make bedsteads, bookcases, shingles, in fact do almost anything in the line of carpenter work . . .

Mr. Charles Messer early devoted his time to the making of bedsteads for the company and the first one sold by the company was delivered to James Cass Aug. 16, 1837, and charged to Dr. Horace White for whom Mr. Cass worked. The next day another bedstead was charged to Dr. White and delivered to Captain Thomas Crosby who was also in the employ of Dr. White, the labor performed by both Cass and Crosby being placed to the credit of Dr. White's account with the N.E. Emigrating Company.+

This same day, Aug. 17, Deacon Horace Hobart was charged with a bedstead. Aug. 19, Dr. George W. Bicknell was delivered a bedstead, and on August 22, Dr. G.W. Bicknell was charged with the making of a bookcase, the work being performed by Mr. Charles Messer. This bookcase was the first one made by the company and presumably the first piece of furniture of its kind made in that neighborhood, there being at that date very few collections of books requiring a case to put them in for convenience or safety. Alfred L. Field purchased a bedstead of the company on Aug. 24.[1]

By late August then we have indirect evidence to indicate that the first settlers were gradually escaping the rigors of frontier living and were once again sleeping in beds. Messer meanwhile turned to other jobs:

. . . And on September 11 he worked a half day on the company boarding house (afterwards known as the Beloit House,) and also a "half day surveying the town." By this entry we infer this work of Mr. Messer was the initiative in preparing for the town plot . . ."[2]

Charles Messer lived in the Beloit area for many years. Probably some of his furniture still survives, unrecognized artifacts of Pioneer Beloit.

---

[1]Ellery Crane, letter to *Beloit Free Press* editor, March 4, 1905.
[2]*Ibid.*

CHAPTER SIX

1837 — New Albany Becomes Beloit

1. Two Letters of Horace Hobart

Shortly after his arrival in August, Horace Hobart wrote the first of three letters whose contents survive because they were reprinted in part in an 1866 newspaper article. They are of particular significance for two reasons. First, they furnish an extremely rare first-hand glimpse of a burgeoning frontier community in the first year of its existence. Any 1837 letter written by a Beloit first-settler thoughtfully describing actual events is to be cherished.

Secondly, and even more important in our case, is the fact that the headings of these three letters furnish us our best evidence for determining the approximate date Beloit received its name. Hobart's first letter bears the heading *Albany* (not *New Albany*, as was probably more customary). Hence we know that the naming of Beloit had not yet occurred when Hobart wrote on the following date:

ALBANY, Aug. 28, 1837.

When I came here there had never been a religious meeting in the place. We have now had three, increasing in numbers weekly. Some families who attend come five, others seven miles, with ox teams. I think they promise great good. I am sensible that this is an important crisis in this rising community, and never felt so sensibly my responsibility as at the present time. I know I have some influence here, and fear lest it should not be exclusively on the side of christianity. There are a number of very good men here, and I think if we live consistently with our profession our prospect for a religious community is very flattering. Mr. Tenney arrived here last week. Mr. Howe also, one day later, from the South.[1]

Horace Hobart's second letter, six weeks later, bears the heading *Beloit* and is dated October 9th. It was also reprinted in the 1866 newspaper. Whether these two letters still exist today is unknown. While this second letter is not first-hand evidence, it nevertheless remains the earliest known reliable reference to the name *Beloit* that the author has uncovered. Thus, we know that Beloit undoubtedly acquired its name some time between August 28 and October 9, more likely than not in the month of September.

Although other first-hand evidence of the name *Beloit* appears in the year 1837, the Hobart letters are all we have to pinpoint the approximate time. Unfortunately, Hobart makes no reference in these letters to the naming. His second letter reads:

---

[1] *Beloit Journal*, June 28, 1866.

BELOIT, Oct. 9

I am well, and have not so much as taken the least cold, neither has anyone been sick here since I came. I believe, as ever, that it is healthy as any other place.

We have no mill in operation within fifty miles. We have not all the luxuries, but most of the necessaries of life. Our furniture is not the best, but better than the houses in which we live; but have a large boarding house so nearly finished that I think we shall get into it in a week or two.[2]

Our meetings continue interesting, and are pretty well attended.

When will these fields and these lawns hear the sound of the church going bell, and many be trained to join God's sacramental hosts?

Tomorrow we expect to commence the survey of our town. We are anxious for a general division, that each one may know his own and take care of it.

We have harvested, I think, over a hundred bushels of corn, some wheat, some hundreds of oats; also, of potatoes.

I am still well pleased with the country. Have no wish to return to the East to remain, and I believe this is true of every individual here.[3]

2. The Naming of Beloit — An Historical Account

Shortly after Horace Hobart wrote his letter from *Albany*, dated August 28, 1837, but no later than October 9th, when he addressed another letter from *Beloit*, we know that the town must necessarily have received its permanent name. Although most history books give the date as 1838 for the naming, it can be stated conclusively that the 1837 date is correct. Newly discovered territorial newspapers for the year 1837 have corroborated the Hobart letters.

However, a frustrating and perplexing mystery still surrounds the question of exactly who named Beloit, why this particular name was selected, and how the naming was done. Part 2 of this book will be devoted to an exhaustive analysis of the entire history of the remarkable controversy surrounding the naming incident. In the present chapter we will limit our historical account of the naming to undisputed or generally recognized facts and then summarize the principal features of the two conflicting versions of how Beloit was named, and insofar as possible harmonize some of the details.

In the early 1830s, before Blodgett's arrival, the Indian site at the confluence of the two streams was known variously as The Turtle, Turtle

---

[2]The Beloit House was ready in January.

[3]*Beloit Journal, Ibid.*

Village, Turtle Creek, Turtle River, and Turtle.[1] Next referred to as Blodgett's Place in early 1837,[2] the tiny but growing community soon became known as New Albany,[3] which Hobart for his part chose to modify to Albany.

New Albany was Blodgett's choice[4] but was not well received. Apparently Waterloo, Blodgett and Albany were other suggestions. Several residents wanted either a more original or more distinctive name than New Albany. By September 1837, when Kelsou commenced the first survey, an agreement was reached to hold a meeting to determine what permanent name the town should wear.

"New Albany And Some Of Its Neighbors"

---

[1]See Ch. One, sec. 2.

[2]1856 *History*, 71; *Beloit Journal*, 1867 undated clipping, "Early History of Beloit," Ch. 9.

[3]Robert Crane, *Beloit Free Press*, Feb. 14, March 28, 1878; Fisher, *Pioneer Recollections*, 272, 274.

[4]Fisher letter to *Beloit Free Press*, March 28, 1878; 1879 *History*, 612.

Lucius Fisher was the only writer to specify the exact location of this meeting. He wrote that it was held at the New England Company's boarding house, then under construction, which would later be known as the Beloit House.[5] Since no one ever disagreed with him or named a different place, we can reasonably assume this was the location.

Whether it was a daytime or evening meeting is unknown. Robert Crane said all the men in the community, about 20, attended.[6] Fisher put the number present at 20 or 30.[7] No woman seems to have been included. Who actually called the meeting or presided at the gathering is unknown. However, it must have proceeded without serious disagreement or prolonged discussion because years later no writer ever demonstrated a clear recollection or gave a detailed statement of what happened. Nor did anyone ever list the names of those in attendance.

In Part 2 of this book we will learn from scattered writings the names of about a dozen of the 20 or more who attended the meeting. All of the following either claimed they were there or have been identified by others as being present: Major Charles Johnston, Caleb Blodgett, Nathan Allyn, Lucius Fisher, Horace Hobart, John Hackett, William Jack, A.B. Howe, Daniel Tasker, Daniel Blodgett, Charles Messer and A.L. Field. Others who had arrived by September, 1837 and who may have been present were Robert Crane, Nelson Blodgett, Otis Bicknell, James Cass, Thomas Crosby, Benjamin Tenney, Tyler Moore, George Bicknell, and Edwin Bicknell.[8]

According to Robert Crane, everyone was invited to come to the meeting prepared to suggest possible names. About 60 names were proposed and all were voted down. Then Crane said a committee of three, consisting of Major Johnston, Caleb Blodgett, and a Mr. Allen (Nathan Allyn) was selected in some unspecified manner to consider the problem of a name and made a recommendation to those in attendance.

Lucius Fisher also described the meeting but said nothing about a preliminary discussion of possible names. He also contradicted Crane and said that he (Fisher) and Horace Hobart served with Major Johnston on the committee. This would mean that Caleb Blodgett and Nathan Allyn were not members, as Crane claimed.

---

[5]The famous Beloit House was located at the southeast corner of present-day St. Paul and State Streets, site of the Beloit Daily News building. The Beloit House should not be confused with Blodgett's Rock River House, also under construction in 1837, situated on the northeast corner of State and Grand where the Goodwin House later stood.

[6]*Beloit Free Press*, Feb. 14, 1878.

[7]*Pioneer Recollections*, 279. Robert Crane said there were about "28 males" present. *Unpublished Narrative*, (1877).

[8]Crane never specified whether or not he was at the meeting.

In any event both accounts agree that various names were considered during the meeting. Some of the names proposed appear to have been Turtle, Turtle Creek, New Albany, Albany, Waterloo, Blodgett, Colebrook, Plymouth, and Detroit.[9]

Three times Lucius Fisher gave in writing his story of the naming of Beloit in which version he assumes the major role. The following is perhaps the most illuminating Fisher account:

Major Charles Johnson, Horace Hobart, and L.G. Fisher were chosen, and retired to a shanty nearby, to find a name. Major Johnson, although from New England, was exceedingly jealous of the influence of the New England Company, of which Dea. Hobart was a member. The Major and myself left the room in advance of Dea. Hobart, and on our way to the shanty, he said to me, "Now let us get an original name; Hobart and that N.E. Co. will want Colebrook or Plymouth, or the common name of some old New England town." I was quite amazed at this sly attempt of Major Johnson to electioneer me, and replied, "Certainly, we will get something new, if possible."+

After Dea. Hobart joined us, one of the three proposed to put the letters of the alphabet into a hat, and see what we could get by drawing letters. Major Johnson suggested that Ballote, a French word signifying handsome, grand, would be a good name. Not understanding the French language, he had not selected the word he wanted, and while he was sounding that and other words, I spoke "Beloit," "Detroit," and inquired "Why not take Beloit, as it is a new word, and I like the sound of it?" The others at once assented, and we reported it, and it was unanimously adopted.[10]

However, Robert Crane, John Hackett, and apparently several others who had been first settlers flatly contradicted Lucius Fisher's version and insisted he was not a member of the committee. In fact, some said he was not even at the meeting and had gone to Milwaukee. While all agreed that Major Johnston (the correct spelling) was chairman of the committee, those who disputed the Fisher version said the other two members of the committee were Caleb Blodgett and a Mr. Allen (later identified as Nathan Allyn). Fisher was completely ignored.

---

[9]Turtle: Robert Crane, *Beloit Free Press*, Feb. 14, 1878.
Turtle Creek: John Hackett, *Beloit Free Press*, Dec. 4, 1884.
New Albany: 1879 *History*, 612.
Albany: Horace Hobart letter, Aug. 28, 1837.
Waterloo: 1879 *History*, 612.
Blodgett: Fisher, *Pioneer Recollections*,
Colebrook, Plymouth: Fisher letter to *Beloit Free Press*, March 28, 1878.
Detroit: mentioned in all accounts.

[10]*Beloit Free Press*, March 28, 1878. Also, Fisher letter to *Beloit Free Press and Journal*, July 1, 1869; and *Pioneer Recollections*, 279.

The anti-Fisher version, which might be called the Crane-Hackett account, was stated in this fashion:

. . . At this meeting, a good many names were suggested, none of which proved acceptable, and it was finally decided to appoint a committee of three of the oldest residents to report a name or names from which the meeting would make a selection by a majority vote. The committee consisted of Major Charles Johnson, Caleb Blodgett and Mr. Allen.+

After a brief absence the committee returned, and through its chairman, Maj. Johnson, reported to the meeting that a name had been agreed upon in committee which it was believed would prove acceptable to all present, for the reason that it was peculiar, distinctive and descriptive; it had been obtained by compounding French words, and its significance in English was beautiful and the junction of two streams, and he presented for the consideration of the meeting the name Beloit. The report of the committee was enthusiastically adopted.+

A few days after this meeting, John Hackett encountered Maj. Johnson on the street and was asked how he like the new name of the village. Mr. Hackett replied that he liked it amazingly; it was just what a village name should be, different from any other place and singularly and appropriately descriptive, whereupon Maj. Johnson laughed heartily.+

Being asked the cause of his merriment, he replied that it was because of the good joke they had on the two or three French scholars who were present when the name was proposed and adopted. He (Johnson) knew nothing whatever about French, but he had been thinking over this matter of a name for the settlement for a long time and finally puzzled out the word Beloit, which, so far as his knowledge went, was no more French than it was Hebrew, and was utterly devoid by any meaning whatever, except that it was now the name of a village in Wisconsin.[11]

Robert Crane also claimed in another account that Charles Messer had told him about meeting Major Johnson before the meeting day and Messer noticed:

. . . that at different times, in passing Mr. Johnson prior to the said meeting, he noticed him to be in a deep study. He would see his lips moving, and when near enough, could hear him pronouncing words, first, "Detroit" then "Betroit". Then he would change other letters in the word Detroit, evidently to try the sound.+

Mr. Johnson was very partial to that name; had proposed it to some others as the name for this place; it being object to, he then took that as a founda-

---

[11] 1879 *History*, 612.

tion out of which to make another word of similar length and sound, and finally brought out, after some weeks of study, the word "Beloit"... [12]

In some manner such as this, frontier democracy had spoken. Despite the genial deception of Major Johnston, the name Beloit was apparently well received and ended further disagreement. But as a precaution the members of the committee agreed not to discuss the subject for a safe period of time. Such prudence, and the death of all three committeemen within a few years, may explain why years later no one seems to have had a clear memory of events on that occasion. Johnston and Allen died in 1838, Blodgett in 1840. If they indeed were the three responsible for the name, as the weight of the evidence suggests, then the long silence and lack of information on the naming is more understandable. But that is another story.

3. The Settlement Surveyed

In September Goodhue's boarding house, the New England Company's boarding house (later to be known as the Beloit House), and Blodgett's Rock River House were under construction. Presumably they were linked together by a rough road running northerly from the state line. According to Ellery Crane, on "September 11, 12, 13 and 15, a preliminary survey was made by Charles Messer, Horace Hobart, A.L. Field, and Ashael B. Howe, and one street laid out and called Turtle Street (now State Street) in order that a few buildings might be located with proper regularity."[1]

This appears to be corroborated by another even earlier account found in a recently uncovered newspaper clipping from the *Beloit Journal* in 1867:

The first surveying done in the city was done by a man from Vermont who happened to be there. He ran out the line for Turtle, now State Street, and the inhabitants began to build on this street.[2]

Ellery Crane continues:

Soon as the lines of Turtle Street were established, In September, 1837, Mr. Crane[3] *began the construction of his frame house, sixteen by twenty-seven feet square, one and one-half stories high, on the north east corner of Turtle and Race Streets. There were to be two square rooms and a pantry on the ground floor, and three bedrooms on the second floor.* +

His intention was to have one room ready to occupy before cold weather, and remove from the shanty into it; But through the unavoidable delay in

---

[12] *Beloit Free Press*, May 16, 1878.

[1] *Ellery Crane Manuscript* (1908), 43.

[2] Chap. X, "Early History of Beloit," exact date unknown. Beloit College Archives.

[3] Robert Crane.

getting lumber, winter weather found the family living in the shanty. As the cold weather advanced, a small second hand Cookstove was purchased, and set up at the westerly end of the room with the pipe running over head in the shanty to the chimney at the opposite end; and by getting between the stove and the fireplace, having plenty of fuel, the inmates could, by running very hot fires, keep from freezing. Here the Crane family and their boarders were obliged to remain during the winter of 1837 and 1838.[4]

By October a man named Kelsou (or Kelso) from Roscoe had been obtained to survey the entire proposed village. The story of Kelsou's little known survey is best told in a never repeated 1867 *Beloit Journal* article. It appears to be the story of Charles Messer as told to the *Journal* editor. The editor mentions Kelsou's coming and continues:

Messer says: "He came and I helped him. The company[5] *agreed to run a line from the river along the State line to a point half a mile east, and then north half a mile, and then west to the river, making in all 70 acres to be plotted.*

We measured from the river east, until we came to Turtle, or State Street. The bottom land east of that point, was grown up to cattails and alder bushes, and we couldn't run through them. We therefore concluded to make an "offset". The offset line was the line south of Broad Street and the plotters divided off from this line as their "base", making fractional lots as they struck the State line.

The upper end of Broad street was crooked and remained so for a number of years. It was made so in this way; Kelso's compass was defective. The top of the arms was bent, so that when he used the lower sights, as he would in measuring on a level, the line was straight, but as he began to rise at the upper end of Broad Street, he used the upper sights, and run the street north of a straight line. This line being the base all the lots were divided crookedly from it. Kelso plotted the village. Hopkins afterward resurveyed it in 1839, after the land sale. In surveying it however, he followed Kelso's description and finding the cause [illegible] scribed it as an angle, so that the lines which mark the streets and lots north and south of Broad Street are still as they were run out.

This error, and the error in the government surveys make a jog of ten feet in the additions east of the original plot.

The corner post for Bushnell's farm is ten feet further west than it should be by reason of the mistake of the surveyor. The mistake in Broad Street was corrected at the time that the "Tree Association" was formed. This

---

[4]*Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 44.
[5]The New England Co.

association was formed in 1847. Rev. Stephen Peet, was prominent in the movement. They taking two points in the street farther west, one at the corner of State Street, and the other at College Street run the line straight through. The corner on College Street, marked the corner of Crane's fractional 60 acre lot, of which we shall speak hereafter.

Doolittle, the county surveyor from Racine undertook to describe the plot so that it could be recorded, but he only described [illegible] and followed the old line.

In plotting the village, a large public square was left for the purpose of building churches and school houses.[6]

Dea. Hobart who was a man always interested in the churches of the place, said that, "He was anxious to have a place [illegible] so that a number of churches might be built on the line of the bluff overlooking the city.

Messer told him "that if it was devoted to a public common, it could never be used for private purposes. The Deacon answered, "we can do as we are a mind to with the land."

His wish however, seemed prophetic, for though the common was not, and could not be used for this purpose, yet the good man was permitted to see the beautiful church[7] *which his own hands helped to erect, standing near that very common, and overlooking that very bluff where he imagined it to stand.*

Mechanic's Green was also left as a public square in the survey. It was originally intended to dam up the Turtle, and bring the water over the bluff and have a heavy fall south of the green.[8] *With this expectation the Goodhues gave 1-5 of the square which was their claim, and six lots south of Broad Street for the mill yard.*[9]

Ellery Crane, who had access to the New England Company's account book, verifies the 1837 date of the Kelsou survey as given by the *Beloit Journal* in the foregoing account:

Mr. Kelso commenced boarding here on Monday, October 16th, and left on Wednesday, after breakfast, November 15th, 1837, and was charged with

---

[6]Now Horace White Park.

[7]The First Congregational Church.

[8]The Kelsou map shows present-day Central Ave. as Canal Street. Apparently in 1837 Blodgett, the Goodhues, and others seriously considered changing the course of Turtle Creek so as to flow down Central Ave. (Canal Street) and drop abruptly to Mechanic's Green. We must remember no streets existed then and the terrain may have made such a plan feasible. The idea was soon abandoned as too expensive.

[9]Chap. X, "Early History of Beloit," *op. cit.*

twenty nine and one-third days board at fifty cent per day, ($14.84), at which time he must have completed his survey of the Town Plat.[10]

. . . Although this survey furnished a basis for a settlement of the company's affairs and a division of the lands claimed by the parties interested; it was not, in all particulars satisfactory; There was apparently too much waste land, too much given to public parks and the canal scheme for taking water from up the Creek to furnish power, looked expensive and objectionable.[11]

4. Sharing A Pastor With Pecatonica

In the autumn of 1837 a member of the Talcott family from Pecatonica (now Rockton) visited the newly-named community of Beloit to propose that the two villages share the services of their new pastor, William Adams, who had come to Pecatonica in September at the solicitation of William Talcott to organize a Congregational church.[1]

The Talcott representative ". . . suggested that Mr. Adams be employed to preach here one half day each Sabbath, while the people of Pecatonica would employ him the remaining half. Subscription papers were circulated and two hundred dollars secured at each place, for which Mr. Adams preached alternately the forenoon at Rockton and the afternoon in Beloit," [2] beginning November 5, 1837.[3]

Ellery Crane says that a large share of his congregation followed Rev. Adams from one community to the other each Sunday, some walking the distance, others riding:

Mrs. R.P. Crane frequently went on horseback carrying her babe, Ellery, her husband walking by her side; Oxteams and horse-teams were brought into service, carrying the people to and from Church. Meetings were held at private homes, wherever room could be found; Company's Boarding House, John Hackett's house, corner of School and State Street and other places.[4]

Rev. Adams himself gives us more information in a letter that still survives. Writing from "Peckatonica" (later Rockton) on March 7, 1838, Adams says:

---

[10] *Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 43. The *Beloit Centennial Book* (1936), giving 1838 as the date of the Kelsou survey, is evidently in error.
[11] *Ibid.*, 57.

[1] Carr, *History of Rockton* (1898), 30-31. Rockton was then known as Pecatonica or Pecatonic. The name soon became unpopular because the river of that name was believed to be unhealthy for people living near it. By 1847 the Illinois legislature changed the name by request to Rockton.
[2] *Ellery Crane Manuscript* (1908), 63.
[3] *First Cong. Semi-Centennial*, 23.
[4] Crane, *op. cit.*

. . . I resumed preaching in this place and at Beloit, four miles up the river, in the Territory.

An effort was made for my temporal support, and considering that both settlements are in their infancy, it succeeded better than was anticipated. The audiences in both places has been increasing and has manifested a deeper interest on the subject of religion . . .

Our society is small, but rather distinguished for its intelligence and morality . . . [5]

Lucian Mears also described these early Sundays:

Half-time meetings, then, on the Sabbath. Yes, but they were largely whole time after all, for the people were pioneers, you know, and the prominent characteristic of the pioneer is that he makes light of difficulties and they did of this. They were not afraid of taking trouble to go to meeting. Half a day here and to Pecatonica for other half and the people of Pecatonica, turn about, coming here. On foot if they had no teams, or with ox teams if they had no other. Mr. Colley used to do both, come down with his ox team from his farm, leave it here, and go afoot to Pecatonica. As the ladies of Rome used to go pleasure-riding in the streets of that city, in ox carts, so ladies to meeting here in ox teams.[6]

According to Mears at least one meeting was held in Caleb Blodgett's new barn:

. . . (My) father remembers a meeting there amidst the fragrance of new mown hay. Mrs. David Carpenter, of Rockton, then living on the north or west side of the river there, tells of coming up on that side, leaving the team in the brush, stepping from bog to bog down to the river's edge, where the west end of the bridge now is, and crossing — which must have been in a canoe — to a meeting in Mr. Hackett's house . . . [7]

This arrangement was continued for about two years, with meetings also being held in private homes, until the fall of 1839 when a school house was built. Here all religious and civic meetings were held until churches were erected.[8]

---

[5]Beloit Hist. Society, archives. Carr says Adams preached in the two communities for four years, organizing the Congregational church in Pecatonica (Rockton) on March 23, 1838, and the Beloit church on December 30, 1838 in the kitchen of Caleb Blodgett's new boarding house. Crane, *op. cit.* 63.

[6]*First Cong. Semi-Centennial*, 24.

[7]*Ibid.*, Hackett lived on the southeast corner of today's State and Grand.

[8]Robert Crane, *Beloit Free Press*, Feb. 21, 1878.

The first religious organization in the town was the Methodist when a class of five members formed on Thursday evening December 27, 1838, in Tyler Blodgett's Shanty, and the Rev. Albert Tuttle a Methodist local preacher officiated there occasionally.[9]

5. Petition For a Seminary of Learning

On November 10, 1837 Dr. Horace White returned to Beloit for the first time since his departure for New Hampshire in late March. During those months he had closed out his medical practice in Colebrook, disposed of his property, raised more funds for the New England Emigrating Company, encouraged friends and relatives to move west to Beloit, and made arrangements for his wife and two small children to follow him to Beloit the next Spring.

Dr. White had intended to move into the Company boarding house (the Beloit House), but since it was still not ready he moved into the crowded Robert Crane shanty. Here in a 12 by 16 foot area seven adults and a baby now made their home.

Perhaps it was no coincidence that the day after Dr. White's return the tiny community made its initial move to arrange for the establishment of a seminary at Beloit:

The first application made by this infant community to the legislative power for any purpose whatever was a petition for a charter for a seminary of learning. On the 11th of November, 1837[1] *Major Charles Johnson and Cyrus Eames started to Burlington, Iowa, the then seat of the territorial government of the country now embraced in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota, to obtain such a character. In a dug-out they paddled down Rock River to the Mississippi, taking with them for provisions a supply of smoked suckers and cornbread, and then went by steamer to Burlington. They were successful and returned to Beloit with their charter on December 5 of the same year.*[2]

Actually, the charter followed a bit later. An act was passed by the legislature and approved by the Territorial Governor on December 27, 1837, reading in part:

Be it enacted by the Council and House of Representatives of the Territory of Wisconsin:

That there shall be established at Beloit, in Rock County, a Seminary of learning for the instruction of young persons of either sex in science and

---

[9]*Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 78.

[1]Date given in the *New England Co. Account Book* (1837), 33.

[2]White, *Semi-Centennial Address* (1897).

literature, to be called The Beloit Seminary, and that Charles Johnson, W.H. Bailey, Henry F. Jones,[3] S.H. Moore,[4] Geo. Goodhue, Caleb Blodgett, A.L. Field and their associates be, and they are hereby created, a body corporate and politic by the name and style of Beloit Seminary.[5]

The high priority given by the first settlers to such a charter for the education of their families is also reflected in the prophetic naming of College Street on the 1837 Kelsou survey, ten years before the first college building was erected.

However, this seminary for "young persons of either sex" did not spring into immediate existence in such a tiny community. According to Horace White Jr., it was not until about 1843 that classes were first held in the basement of the newly completed Congregational church which was then situated on the northwest corner of Broad and Prospect Streets. Here classes for girls would be held separately in a "Female Seminary".

Actually, the first school of any kind in Beloit was held in 1838 in the kitchen of Caleb Blodgett's new home at the northeast corner of Turtle and School Streets (now Grand and State). John Burroughs of Orange County, New York was the first teacher. In the following year a school house was constructed of wood by private subscription at the northeast corner of School (E. Grand) and Prospect Streets.[6]

Ellery Crane gives us a glimpse into both schools:

The previous winter[7] *school was kept in the east room of Caleb Blodgett's hotel, which stood where the Goodwin House now stands. The teacher was John B. Burroughs. He was lame, one leg being shorter than the other. He was also an eccentric person and although a sober, dignified man, his oddities frequently called for jocularity from the men as well as the boys. In the first school house the scholars sat on rude wooden benches on rather long stools with long desks in front of them, the boys on the east side of the room and the girls on the west side. Sometimes for punishment the girls were sent over to sit with the boys, but more frequently the boys were sent to the girls' side of the house.*

Another mode of punishment used was the dunce stool, on which the recreant scholar would be placed decorated with a tall paper cap. There was

---

[3]Henry F. *Janes*. Janes was the founder of Janesville.

[4]T. H. Moore? Tyler Moore, educated in the law, was a relative and business associate of the Goodhues. His oil portrait hangs in Bartlett Museum.

[5]*Fisher Proceedings* (1894), 13.

[6]White, *op. cit.*

[7]The winter of 1838-1839.

not much whipping at this first school house.[8]

6. Indian Neighbors

Throughout 1837 a considerable number of Indians continued to live in the vicinity of the new settlement of Beloit. Apparently it was a peaceful co-existence. No early settler mentions any serious problems ever arising. Robert Crane fortunately tells us something of their presence in that year.

They were quite numerous, living and dressing in their native style. Most of them belonged to the Winnebago tribe; frequently, however, we met those who claimed to belong to the Pottawatamies.[1] *The men of the latter tribe were tall and straight, and of a very dignified deportment, with features much finer than those of the Winnebagoes, who are shorter and heavier built, with high cheek bones, and when painted in war style were hideous looking — especially after taking a little "fire-water." At such times they were apt to be very noisy, though they did not dare to do any mischief, except to steal, and that but once, as I remember.* +

In the fall of 1837, Capt. Bicknell had killed a couple of hogs and hung the hams and shoulders to smoke in the shanty fire-place. Father and sons all went to their work at some distance, though not out of sight of his shanty. By and by, some half dozen Indians were seen coming toward the hut. Their object was suspected, and one of the sons started, that if possible he might get to the hut or "shanty" before they did. But they were too quick for him. Two of them rushed in, took each a ham, put them under their blankets and were off with their booty.[2]

By 1837 the bow and arrow had evidently already been replaced by the rifle. Robert Crane continues:

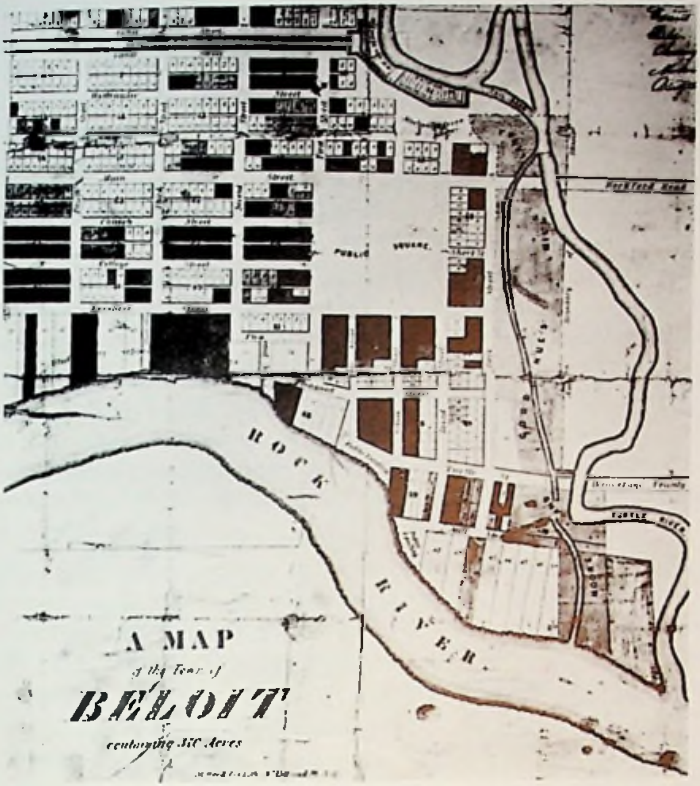
In the Fall of this year we would often hear rifle reports, when fine weather, along the river. A squaw would sit in the stern of a canoe, with her paddle, moving along wherever her liege lord directed, while he stood in the bow, rifle in hand, ready to take any muskrat that might show himself. I have watched and wondered at the quiet ease with which the squaw moved her craft, up or down this river, where the current was so strong. +

---

[8]Letter to *Beloit Free Press*, c. 1908. Crane continues: "Beloit was not without her private schools, as early as the spring and summer of 1839, Miss Sarah T. Crane kept a school for small children in the east room of the R.P. Crane house on Race St., corner of State St. Perhaps this was as early as any of the private schools." Another account states that Ann Atwood taught a few boys at her own house before Burroughs was hired. 1879 *History*, 615.

[1]The area later known as Rock County had traditionally been claimed by both of these tribes. 1879 *History*, 327.

[2]*Beloit Free Press*, Jan. 24, 1878.



1837 Kelsou Survey

Unrecorded first plat with public square larger than later adopted.

Beloit College Archives

Also in the Fall of 1837, when the prairie grass had become old and dry, smokes were seen rising on the prairies, some days in one direction, other days in a different direction. It was ascertained that these fires were started by the Indians for hunting purposes. Whenever they wanted to take deer, a rifle party would go to a selected point, when the party behind would start a long line of fires which soon extended for several miles, being driven by the wind, and as the flame approached the deer they would bound along to get away from the fire, and thus rush toward the riflemen and be shot down.[3]

---

[3] *Ibid.*

During the summer of 1837, we had frequent calls from Indians bringing fresh fish to exchange for bread. In such calls the whole family, or perhaps several families, would be along, the women carrying the burden always, the men having only their rifles and hunting accoutrements. +

Their dress was composed of buckskin leggings and moccasins, with a Mackinaw blanket thrown over the shoulders, or in warm weather over only one, leaving one, usually the right arm, free. The women wore a piece of broad cloth wound arround them, belted at the waist, forming a skirt, and blanket over the shoulders, feet encased in moccasins, their heads ornament with a tilting silk stovepipe hat.[4]

As 1837 drew to a close, Robert Crane and some of his friends decided to tease a few of the Indians:

A little later in the season, as it grew colder, a dozen or more, to get some protection from the winds, set up their wigwams near us in the grove. We by chance had a snare drum in our mess, and one evening a party of us thought we would serenade them and hearing the sound of a drum they would be reminded of the Black Hawk War, which closed some four years previous. +

About nine in the evening we set forward, marching single file, our drummer at the head beating quick time. As we approached them none were to be seen. We filed past the wigwam — the doorway was open. They evidently had retired for the night, but for all the rattling of the drum (and our drummer did his best) not one was inclined to move. We therefore concluded not to disturb them afterwards. +

These and others remained in our neighborhood all winter; some of them had ponies or mules and as winter progressed we had snows, so that by February, 1838, it was a foot or more deep, and the weather very cold. Their ponies having to paw the snow to get to grass, had scant feed, and some of them died. The Indians seemed also short of supplies, as they were seen daily to go to one of the dead ponies, as long as it lasted, to get some fresh meat from it, being nicely buried under snow.[5]

Horace White remembered similar encounters with the Indians as a small boy:

My memory includes the figures and faces of a few Indians, belonging to the tribe of Winnebagoes, who occasionally presented themselves at our windows, flattening their noses against the glass, and making signs to show that they were hungry. Usually my mother found some scraps of food sufficient to induce them to move on. They were quite harmless. In the

---

[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*

absence of other labor their physical strength was sometimes employed in handling logs for housebuilding.[6]

In an effort to eliminate any doubts as to the validity of the title held by the United States to the lands on both sides of Rock River, a treaty was proclaimed at Washington on June 16, 1838, whereby "the Winnebago Nation of Indians cede to the United States all their land east of the Mississippi River." This was the last of a series of treaties intended to oblige the Indians to leave forever the Rock River valley. Robert Crane describes some of the consequences:

In the Spring of 1838, the Government ordered all the Indians that were here to go northward, as they were quite an annoyance to settlers. A military force was accordingly sent to compel them to leave. There were many evidences showing this place to be a very favorable spot for the Indians. Their trails leading in all directions — all converging to this as a center.+

Their dead were buried here for many generations. They had two cemeteries of considerable extent, one northeast near Turtle Creek, two miles distant, the other, one and a half miles north, on a high bluff on the east side overlooking Rock River.+

Their mode of burial was not very deep; after the earth had been covered back upon the grave, they set up slabs split from logs four feet long, arranging them on either side of the grave so as to form a sharp roof over it, especially if the deceased was a person of note. They also deposited wampun, beads, German silver trinkets, etc., which were dug in large quantities by those who sought them. Many others were buried here and there, only one in a place.+

Notwithstanding the efforts of the Government to drive them off, they would frequently return in hunting parties, or families, and when they passed the places of the dead they seemed reverential and awestricken. I saw a party of some five or six warriors who had just passed their largest cemetery in coming here; they very soon began to speak and make signs showing a sadness of feeling in reference to being obliged to leave their dead and the place they had so long called their home. Perhaps another reason for their coming was the fact that a Mr. Mack[7] *who married a squaw, still lived at the mouth of the Pecatonica, four miles down Rock River, whom they always visited.+*

On one occasion a party of seven or eight came to our hut[8] *just at dusk,*

---

[6]White, *The Founding of Beloit* (1913), 8.

[7]Stephen Mack and wife, Ho-no-ne-gah.

[8]Robert Crane then lived in a shanty at the north-east corner of present day State and St. Paul, while building his home next door.

and wanted to stay all night. We were full; could not accommodate them. They disliked it, left rather sullenly, and went to Mr. Mack's, but next morning came back. They probably had taken fire-water enough to feel cross, and when they found the man who the evening previous had told them they could not stay, they said, "No good chemocoman (white man), no good. Not let Indian stay. But he laughed at them, as they saw he did not fear them, they gave it up.[9]

7. Proof Beloit Was Named In 1837

Part 2 of this book will review in detail the general confusion that has existed for more than a century over the naming of Beloit and the year it was named. Today, for instance, almost every historical account readily available to the reader will give the year of naming as either 1838 or 1857, this latter date being an obvious but remarkably persistent error.

The 1838 date, however, has been generally accepted by local historians as an act of faith simply because most of the books still in existence give 1838 as the year. The remaining books mention the year 1857 (the unhappy result of a misprint in the *Beloit Centennial Book*), but most local historians recognize this for what it is. The fact of the matter is that Beloit was named in 1837, as the first settlers themselves agreed in early newspaper articles. Unfortunately, the newspaper articles soon disappeared from memory while the books containing the incorrect 1838 and 1857 dates remained accessible on library bookshelves.

But, the reader may ask, what is the proof? Memories are fallible. Local histories are burdened with numerous errors based on faulty memories and careless research. Where is the documentary proof to support the unequivocal claim that the naming of Beloit occured in 1837, particularly when so many histories say otherwise?

Here the historian must turn detective. The discovery of the 1866-1867 *Beloit Journal* newspaper clippings in the Beloit College archives furnished the first solid clue — not conclusive, but certainly strong evidence. Here in one article were found the reprints of three 1837 letters originally written by Deacon Horace Hobart, one headed *Albany,* another *Beloit,* presumably narrowing the time of naming between the two dates given in these headings.[1]

---

[9] *Beloit Free Press,* Jan. 24, 1878.

[1] These three Hobart letters are set forth in Ch. 6, Secs. 1 and 8. They were printed for their historical significance by the *Beloit Journal.* Apparently the editor did not recognize their significance in fixing the approximate date of naming.

Parts of these letters were also printed, without the heading or date being included, in *First Cong. Semi-Centennial,* pp. 21, 23, and 24. The *Peet Scrapbook,* Beloit College Archives, has the clipping.

Although such new material is powerfully persuasive, it still remains secondary evidence because we don't have the original letters themselves. It is possible that the *Beloit Journal* writer in 1866 could have misread the date as being 1837; or the typesetter may have erred; or the letters might not be genuine.

Similarly, the old and long-overlooked newspaper accounts of Lucius Fisher and Robert Crane, disputants over the naming of the community but nevertheless in firm agreement on the 1837 date of naming, could have been in error.

What was needed to establish conclusively whether the 1837 date was correct was an 1837 newspaper that still survived and also mentioned Beloit as an existing town in Rock County. That would be firsthand evidence, probably the best evidence that a historian might ever hope to find, to corroborate the Hobart letters. But where to look? Green Bay? Prairie du Chien? Milwaukee? Chicago? Galena?

That prompted the key question, Where did the Territorial Legislature meet in 1837? Wouldn't that community have had an official paper to publish its enactments — an official newspaper likely to be preserved as an official record, and still surviving? And, if so, might it not contain references to New Albany and Beloit, a part of Wisconsin Territory?

A quick search by the author disclosed that the Territorial Legislature met at Burlington (now part of Iowa) in 1837. Further search through the old newspaper index file at the State Historical Library in Madison revealed — as hoped — that not only had there been a territorial newspaper in 1837 but the Library had the original 1837 issues all neatly bound and preserved for the researcher.

The search was almost over. Nothing remained but to go over the pages of each weekly issue of the territorial newspaper as calmly as possible and look for any reference to New Albany or Beloit. The search was a success. Not one, but two references to Beloit were uncovered for the year 1837. There in faded type in the original newspapers was the unmistakable name *Beloit*, printed some 139 years ago. The obscure enthusiasm of the amateur historian had been rewarded.

Any question that the naming of Beloit occurred in 1837 is conclusively resolved by the following two items taken from the *Wisconsin Territorial Gazette and Burlington Advertiser*, published at Burlington, Iowa in Wisconsin Territory, which reported the minutes of the Territorial Legislature.

The name *Beloit* first appears in the *Gazette* issue, dated November 25, 1837, where in reporting the minutes of the Council it is stated:

Nov. 20, 1837.

Mr. Knapp presented petitions from citizens of the Territory . . . the second praying the establishment of a Territorial road from Beloit to the head of Johnson's Rapids,[2] *on Rock River, which were read and referred to the committee on Internal Improvements.*[3]

In the very next issue, dated December 2, 1837, the *Gazette* reported the minutes of the Council, as follows:

Monday, Nov. 27.

Mr. Knapp presented the petition of citizens of Rock County, praying the establishment of a seminary of learning at the town of Beloit in said county — Read and referred to committee on Schools, with instructions to bring in a bill in accordance therewith.[4]

The newness of the name *Beloit* in late 1837 is illustrated by the next issue of the *Gazette*, dated December 9, 1837, where evidently a somewhat older petition from Rock County was finally being considered in the House of Representatives of the Territorial Legislature:

Fri. Dec. 1, 1837 Mr. Durkee presented several petitions of inhabitants of Rock County, praying for an act to organize said county, and for a Territorial road leading from New Albany to the mouth of Crawfish River. . . [5]

This reference to *New Albany* in a later issue than the previous two papers which mention *Beloit* dramatically illustrates why history researchers must be guarded in their conclusions. Anyone reading only the third issue, immediately above, might draw the reasonable inference that Beloit was still New Albany in December, 1837, whereas the two older issues that fortunately survive conclusively prove otherwise.

New Albany had for a fact become Beloit in the fall of 1837.

8. Horace Hobart's Third Letter

The third of Horace Hobart's 1837 letters provides another rare glimpse of history being lived in Beloit as the tiny settlement's first year of existence drew to a close. During that year The Turtle had seen its name replaced by Blodgett's Place, then New Albany, and finally Beloit. Its population numbered less than a hundred. Happy and optimistic, Hobart in this third letter wrote:

---

[2]Near present-day Watertown.
[3]Vol. 1, No. 20
[4]Vol. 1, No. 21.
[5]Vol. 1, No. 22.

BELOIT, Dec. 15, 1837

. . . There are constantly ten or twelve men in our family, with the two Mrs. Crosbys to cook our board in a cabin eleven by thirteen. This contains two beds and is the only apartment. We lodge in a little log house that I have possession of, and shall occupy this Winter, boarding myself. I shall make preparations for building early in the Spring. Dr. White, Mr. Eames, and Mr. Beech arrived about the first of November. About a dozen young men have flocked in here from New Hampshire, this Fall, and we are running over.

We have nearly completed a large two story house, designed for a tavern and boarding house.[1] *It is rented to a man from Rockford,*[2] *who is prepared to fill it well. We have also built a good house three miles east of here which Mr. Crosby's family will occupy this Winter and board those that attend to the rail business.*

Mr. Bundy and others are expected here with their families next season.

You will be glad to learn that we are favored with the preaching of the gospel here.

Our reading meetings were well attended till about the first of November when a Congregational minister came to a neighborhood four miles south of us,[3] *where he had acquaintances, and a gentleman*[4] *came to see if we could not take measures to procure his services on half of the time in each place, for the coming year. I had but little hope of success, but told him we would try. We circulated subscription papers, and obtained about two hundred dollars in each place. He now preaches alternately in each place and will remain. He appears to be a worthy man, and a good preacher, and I feel that we are highly favored of the Lord. The preaching of the Word, in a rising community like this, is of vast importance, and I am sensible we cannot be too thankful that it is enjoyed at so early a period. It is true, some of us pay pretty high, but should it prove a savor of life unto life to immortal souls, we should consider no sacrifice too great.*

There has been no sickness or death within many miles of here, with one exception. A brother of Mrs. Mears who lives three miles north of here, arrived there a month since, was seized with inflammation of the

---

[1]Soon to be known as the Beloit House, located on the present site of the Beloit Daily News building.

[2]Named Shaler, according to Ellery Crane.

[3]Rev. William M. Adams of Rockton (then called Peckatonica or Peckatonic).

[4]William Talcott.

bowels, and in a short time was a corpse. His funeral was attended here, and the first Sabbath in December was rendered me memorable by our newly selected burying ground receiving its first occupant.[5] *It was a solemn day; may its good impressions be lasting.*

We have had a fine Summer and Fall; no frost until the 13th of October. The ground froze up the 10th of December. Some cold days since, and to-night a little snow.

We have a well executed plat of our town now completed.[6] *I believe it is quite satisfactory.*[7]

9. First Cemetery

The "newly selected burying ground" mentioned by Horace Hobart in the preceding letter stood in the northwest corner of the Public Square (later Horace White Park). At a meeting in the First Congregational Church in 1888, Henry Mears added a few details:

. . . we may speak of the first death in the new community, that of my uncle, Horace Clark, who had come with his sister Maria, and died after two weeks residence and an illness of four days, Dec. 2, 1837. . . That burial was just out here on the Public Square a few rods from this church. Less than a year later, Mrs. Caleb Blodgett, the first white woman to arrive, was also buried there, the remains of both afterwards removed elsewhere. . . [1]

In an earlier account, Lucius Fisher mentions a third burial, that of a Mr. Allen (perhaps Nathan Allyn[2] who settled near Shopiere), and added:

The cemetery had been located on the bluff where Mr. Grimes house now stands, but after those funerals the proprietors of the Town concluded that the village might extend so far north as to bring it into unpleasant proximity to the cemetery & the present one was located,[3] *& the remains of the three above named removed to it.*[4]

Presumably by early 1839 the decision had been made to discontinue the cemetery in the Public Square, or Public Common as it was also called.

---

[5]This first cemetery was located in the northwest corner of what is now Horace White Park.

[6]The Kelsou plat of October and November.

[7]Hobart's 1837 letter was reprinted in the *Beloit Journal*, June 28, 1866.

[1]*First Cong. Semi-Centennial*, 24.

[2]Nathan Allyn died Sept. 16, 1838. Chloe Blodgett died November 3, 1838.

[3]Oakwood Cemetery.

[4]Fisher, *Fragment.* Neither account mentions Major Charles Johnston who died Aug. 20, 1838.

10. Years End

In the fall of 1837, John Hackett evidently began construction upon his own house, situated on the southeast corner of present-day State and Grand Avenue (400 East Grand), across the street from his father-in-law, Caleb Blodgett's new home, also under construction.[1] However, Hackett's dwelling may not have been finished until the spring of 1838. According to Ellery Crane:

In the spring of 1838, John Hackett built a one story and a half frame house, with two rooms and chambers above, on the south east corner of School and Turtle Streets; He lived in the rear room, and used the front room for a grocery store during one year; It was the first place where such goods were put on sale in the town, and was also the first Post Office, Mr. Hackett being the first Post Master at Beloit.

Prior to January, 1838, Chicago was the distributing office of the mail for the settlers here; Families having household goods to be transported from Chicago to the Turtle and vicinity, would have an oxteam sent for them, requiring two weeks time to make the trip; Through such means of conveyance, mail matter was carried to and from Chicago. During the year 1838, a mail route was established between Chicago and Rockford, thence by carrier on horseback to Roscoe; the people at the Turtle then united in the expense of continuing the route to their Post Office in Mr. Hackett's store.[2]

By June, 1838 Rock County had four postoffices: Turtle Creek, Hume, Janesville and Outlet Koshkonong.[3]

Hackett's modest grocery store was soon followed by another operated by Alfred Field and James Lusk in early 1838, located on Turtle Street (State) immediately south of the New England Company's boarding house (later called the Beloit House).

. . . There was little more than a good driveway separating the two buildings. The business was temporarily held here while they had built for them a larger commodious building on the opposite side of State Street at the southwest corner of Race . . . Soon as the new quarters were ready the goods were placed there and for many years the firm of Field and Lusk conducted an extensive trade. They kept a general assortment for a country store and their stock was first opened in June 1838 . . .[4]

---

[1]Robert Crane, *Beloit Free Press*, Feb. 14, 1878; 1908 *History*, 153.

[2]*Manuscript*, 47.

[3]Strong, *History of the Territory of Wis.*, 264. Henry Janes refers to Hume's Ferry as being near Janesville, *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, VI, 426.

[4]Ellery Crane letter to *Beloit Free Press*, dated Nov. 14, 1910. Crane also said Field returned east in May to marry Elizabeth Lusk, his partner's sister, and brought her to Beloit on a wedding trip, before their new store was opened.

Caleb Blodgett's Boarding House (1838), later named Rock River House, situated northeast corner Turtle and School Streets (now State and Grand). This photo was taken many years later after alterations.

The Public Landing, from an unknown artist's sketch, once displayed at the Hyde and Brittain Bank. Actually a bridge was built before Middle College was erected.

Perhaps this latter store on the southwest corner of what is now State and St. Paul was the first real store in Beloit. Their first store across the street, and Hackett's before it, were earlier in time but may not have been regarded as actual business establishments by the first settlers.

How travellers from the east and south crossed Turtle Creek in order to reach Beloit is not clear. Apparently no real bridge existed until late November, 1837. Probably makeshift logs and planks were sufficient to enable horses and wagons to cross the relatively shallow stream of summer and autumn. The main point of crossing the Turtle was apparently about where it is today, close to Tebo's cabin on the trail south to Pecatonica (Rockton). With winter drawing near, the need for a safe bridge over the Turtle became imperative:

During the month of November, from the sixteenth to the thirtieth, J. Bradford Colley, Crane, Cass, Grimes, Parker, Willey and Beach, constructed a Bridge over Turtle Creek, near the foot of State Street.[5]

In 1837 it was Turtle Street, the only substantial street in town, and the bridge was about where the present-day bridge links with Black Hawk Boulevard as it continues south into Illinois.

---

[5]*Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 43.

In December the New England Company's boarding house was finally nearing completion. The Company members by this time were impatient to move into more adequate quarters after weeks and months of being crowded into the few cabins and shanties available.

Alfred Field drew the brick for the chimneys, J.L. Parker and John Willey built them, and plastered the rooms in the house the early part of December (the 1st to the 15th), 1837.

The following month it was pronounced ready for occupancy. Alfred Field having secured a stove, Mr. Shaler and wife, formerly of Boston, Mass. but then of Rockford, Ill., were engaged to take charge of it. Mr. Shaller and wife did not remain at the head of the house long, subsequently returning to Boston.

Soon as the Boarding House, afterwards known as the Beloit House, was opened for business, Dr. White went there to board. During the months of November and December a stable was built as an accessory to the Boarding House.[6]

The year 1837 had seen some sixty families move into the area where when the year began only the Blodgetts, Tebos and the Langdons had settled.[7] In that year the Indians site known as The Turtle had been succeeded by Blodgett's Place, then New Albany, and finally Beloit. Caleb Blodgett's vision and leadership had been well rewarded. In the coming year Dr. Horace White and his associates from New Hampshire, Vermont and lower Canada would labor mightily to create an attractive and picturesque New England town on the east bank of Rock River.

---

[6] *Id.*, 42-43.

[7] 1879 *History*, 611.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1838 - 1839 Vignettes

1. Dr. Horace White — In Retrospect

Dr. Horace White lived only six years in Beloit and died at the age of 33. Yet perhaps more than anyone else he stamped his personality and character upon the new community. If Caleb Blodgett furnished the initial leadership in the development of The Turtle from a deserted Indian site into a thriving frontier settlement, it was Dr. White who seems to have gradually assumed the role of leader. Apparently without seeking authority he found it given to him by his appreciative neighbors.

In addition to the striking oil painting of Dr. White that still survives, several early writers give us an additional description of the man. J.J. Blaisdell, for instance, says:

. . . The picture of Dr. White, as described by those who remember him, is unique, — tall and slender in figure, pale in countenance and quick of glance, his hair and eye dark, his garb plain almost to negligence.[1]

Lucius Fisher, who for over 40 years had associated with able men in business, education, and civic circles, and who himself was not given to idle praise, had this to say about Dr. White:

. . . (He) was a good physician and a man of great business capacity, and one who had great command of language and would say more in the fewest words than any man that I have ever known. He was a man of sound judgment. He was a reserved man making but few confidants. We were more intimate than brothers usually are. We had no secrets that were withheld by either from the other. . . [2]

In a newspaper letter, Ellery Crane summarized Dr. White's role in the community, beginning with his leadership of the New England Emigrating Company:

To him was given the responsibility of the financial affairs of the company, the raising of the money, the making of the payments to Mr. Blodgett, the surveying of the village plot and other lands, providing money with which to meet the payment at the Land office, and to furnish farming utinsels and to build the company's boarding house, etc., for the first year, or until a division of the property was made. The company furnished everything, and when that time came, he rendered the accounts and apportioned the farms. Village lots, crops raised, in fact everything in the shape of property the company owned, among the several members of the company. And no word of fault or criticism was heard from any quarter regarding his acts.

---

[1] *First Cong. Church Semi-Centennial* (1888), 119.
[2] *Pioneer Recollections* (1883), 280.

He was an able leader and director of public affairs; just and impartial, quick to see what was for the public good and ready to act promptly. He arranged matters for entering the company's lands; engaged Mr. Robert P. Crane and Otis P. Bicknell to each enter a portion, and the remainder he personally attended to. He gave the land for Mechanic's Green and set apart the land for the public park,[3] *attended to the building of the first town's schoolhouse, started the greatest undertaking thus far assumed by the inhabitants — that of building a meeting house, and saw it nearly completed when he was called to relinquish life's burdens . . .* [4]

Prof. Blaisdell provides further intriguing insights into the personality of this remarkable man:

. . . He was a physician by profession, and, though, as I am told, he was not in love with his professional duties, he was, in addition to many trusts put upon him by his fellow citizens, actually engaged in their discharge. The impression I receive is that Dr. White had been averse to religious truth up to this time; but becoming a Christian and uniting with the church early in the year, later in which began Mr. Clary's ministry, his piety became as active in the service of Christ as had been the natural principles of his character active in secular enterprises. To him was due more than to any other person the building of our first church edifice.[5]

The extent and circumstances of Dr. White's conversion are not clear. His own thoughts are not preserved. However, there can be no doubt that his role in the building of the new church was crucial. Blaisdell continues:

. . . Alert, frutiful in resources, sagacious, going forward to achieve where others hesitated, plain and simple in his address, he seems to have stood in the front in supplying the means for carrying forward the new undertaking. Turning to his accounts with his patients, and allowing them to be paid in barter, he was able with difficulty to gather at intervals money needed, until at length, by the combined efforts of all, the church was provided with a home.[6]

However, in his unpublished notes, Robert Crane alludes somewhat critically to a more severe side of Dr. White's personality. How objective Crane was in this matter we cannot tell, but he describes to his son an incident that tells us vividly that the members of the New England Co. occasionally had their differences:

. . . White sent two plaster masons who were finishing the old "Boarding House" to get dinner with us. They had been assigned to Cass' family and

---

[3]Later named Horace White Park.

[4]*Beloit Free Press*, June 10, 1910.

[5]*First Cong. Church Semi-Centennial* (1888), 118-119.

[6]*Ibid.*, 119.

always brought their dinners with them before this so we had not prepared for them. White & all our boarders had eaten & gone & very little left on the table. We did the best we could however — they said they were satisfied. We told them at this time that it would be impossible for us to get them a dinner hereafter. Because your mother was not able to do it. Her health had been very poor ever since her first arrival — and we felt that White was forcing a burden upon her that she could not endure — and being a physician he ought to know it. As Doct. George Bicknell had doctored her all the time, often consulting with him — during the time she had been here — she really was not able to do what she must for those already with us. +

The day following after our dinner was over — the table cleared away, these men came again for their dinner saying White sent them. Your mother felt so weak said she could not be on her feet to get another meal then. They said they did not blame us & left without. When they saw White they made their report. And as he claimed to be vested with full command he must be obeyed. He soon came to me declaring we must do as he wished or there would be no more provisions furnished me. I told him that would suit me best. I did not want any more furnished. I felt he was unreasonable. He said many things we did not like. He went away in a rage . . . [7]

Today Dr. Horace White is almost an unknown figure in Beloit history. His famous son, also named Horace White, is far better known. Most Beloiters are perhaps unaware that Horace White Park is named for both father and son. The distinguished son has too long eclipsed his father's memory. But consider the words of the son, when the son himself was an old man, writing about his father who had died so young:

I was not old enough at the time of my father's death to form an independent judgment of his character, although I have some remembrance of his personal appearance. This is faithfully depicted in the oil portrait of him which hangs in the First Congregational Church. From my mother and from the earlier settlers of Beloit I have learned that my father possessed the best medical training and equipment of the period in which he lived, and was a man of intellectual power and heroic mould. His profession required him to go to the sick at all hours of day or night, summer and winter, storm or calm, often through miles of drifted snow and cutting wind. My mother was convinced that the exposure which he was compelled to face in the thinly settled country, and from which he never shrank, caused his death at the early age of thirty-three. He gave his life willingly for the alleviation of pain and suffering among his fellow men. [8]

Brave words from a proud son, but they appear to be no exaggeration. If

---

[7] *Unpublished Narrative* (1877), 7, Beloit Hist. Society Archives.

[8] Horace White, *The Founding of Beloit* (1913?), 10-11.

any of the first settlers stands out in the pages of our history as an heroic figure, it is Dr. Horace White who had accomplished so much while still so young. His unrealized greatness we shall never know, but his portrait suggests its presence.

2. Horace White Jr.

Writing about the strict religious atmosphere of Beloit in his boyhood days, Horace White, Jr. years later recalled wryly:

The requirements of religion were more severe in Beloit in the forties of the last century than they are now. We youngsters of the Congregational communion were not allowed to learn dancing, or go to balls, or to a circus, or theater, or to play cards, or billiards, or ten pins. Cards might lead to gambling, billiard rooms and ten-pin alleys were places frequented by rowdies who used profane language, and where liquor was sold. I never knew why the circus was taboo . . .

These rules were part of the local unwritten law, but there was a little Episcopal church under the hill[1] *whose members openly practiced dancing and indulged in novel reading. They were considered by us as standing on slippery ground. Unitarians and free thinkers of every grade were classed together as infidels. That the Roman Catholic church was the scarlet woman of Babylon we had no doubt. Tempora mutantur.*[2]

White also reminds us that life was simple:

Other old fashions were in vogue. Friction matches had not then come into general use. Tinder boxes were scarce in our community, and we had no stoves. In order to keep the precious fire from going out it was necessary to bank the ashes over the live coals in the open fire places at bed time. Even then the fire would sometimes be extinguished before morning. Then we would have to go to a more fortunate neighbor and borrow a few live coals. The spectacle of a man or woman running from one house to another with a burning brand preparatory to breakfast was not uncommon. Every house was a possible temple of Vesta for the whole community.[3]

William Fiske Brown tells a story about young Horace White and his experience with the hand-operated ferry that was used to cross Rock River for several years until a toll-bridge was constructed in 1842. According to Brown:

A large tree, jutting out from the bank at the north end of the public land-

---

[1] A small brick meeting-house, built in the early 1840s, situated on the south side of present day Public Ave., east of the former YMCA building.

[2] *The Founding of Beloit* (1913), 13-14.

[3] *Id.*, 7.

ing, north side of Public Avenue, held the east end of the ferry rope, which was fastened at the other end to a similar tree on the west side of the river. The rectangular, flat-bottomed ferry boat was attached at both ends to this rope by two similar arrangements of rope and pulley and grooved wheel, one for each end of the boat, both wheels moving easily on the long ferry rope and affording a kind of moveable anchorage. When the west end attachment was shortened up, making that end of the scow point diagonally up stream, the force of the current would slowly push the boat across to the west bank. Then, after the wheel rope at the west end was lengthened and that of the other end shortened, causing the east end of the boat to point up stream, the current of the river flowing southward would gradually work the boat back to the east bank. This was a New England way of harnessing the stream, reproduced by the New England men here.+

One day when the ferry boat had been left at the east bank, unattended but duly arranged for return, little Horace jumped aboard and unexpectedly began to move out from shore . . . The future journalist, however, with instinctive appreciation of the value of a want ad, well published, at once raised his voice in unmistakable expression of desire for help. His ad was answered promptly. When the ferry boat reached the west bank a gentleman there, who had noticed the situation, met him with soothing assurances, readjusted the boat ropes for his return and, persuading him to stay on board, started it back. In a few minutes the friendly current had pushed the ferry boat to the east bank and little Horace, springing ashore after his foreign travel, no doubt ran home a happier and wiser lad.[4]

The rope-ferry boat is also mentioned in an 1840 diary entry of a Beloit visitor who described in some detail his impressions of the community:

Sat. June 13, 1840 . . . The sky was clear, & a stiff walk of two miles bro't me to the door of the Beloit Hotel.[5] *I was charmed with the appearance of the place. It contains about 400 inhabitants, is bounded on the west by Rock River & south by the Turtle Creek, at the mouth of which is a Grist mill & saw mill. There is on(e) Hotel, 2 stores, 1 church school house & a number of small but neat dwellings in the place.+*

It is laid out in a grove & is at once a smart, healthy, romantic & delightful place. The Banks on the opposite side of the river are high Bluffs, supported by level & extensive prairie. The river is at this place a clear and gravelly bottomed stream about 5 feet deep and 20 rods wide, & I here first saw the

---

[4]1908 *History*, I, 139-140.

[5]Probably the Beloit House. This suggests that Blodgett's Rock River House was still more of a boarding house than hotel.

self-propelling rope-ferry boat . . . [6]

3. Indian Mounds

The location of Indian mound groups in the Beloit area as they existed in Caleb Blodgett's day was illustrated by Ira M. Buell in a 1919 article in the *Wisconsin Archeologist.*[1] Today almost all of these mounds have disappeared under the plow and shovel of modern man.

Upon one of his maps, against a background of 1919 roads and section lines used for points of reference, Buell attempted to pinpoint the location of the mound groups north of the Turtle Village along the east bank of Rock River and the west bank of Turtle Creek. In another drawing, showing the outlines of then existing campus buildings, Buell provided an overall view of Beloit College's famous conical and linear mounds, some of which no longer exist.

Speaking of the Beloit college mound group, Buell tells us something of their history:

This mound group was mapped by Dr. Lathrop in 1851, and its delineation published in Lapham's "Antiquities of Wisconsin" in 1855. The original map shows fourteen conical and five linear mounds. One of the linear mounds platted by him has disappeared, its location being the site of the present Gymnasium. A turtle mound on an adjacent lot not then a part of the campus was not included. This was added in the next map, drawn by Dr. Wilson, and published in Dr. Peet's book, but the effigy was not correctly located. Another mound, on lower ground between the campus and the river was added to the group by Dr. Peet, and when the group was replotted by Mr. Dixon, another, a few rods east of the campus was added. In this representation a very distinct linear mound about 80 feet long on the brow of the bluff bearing the turtle effigy has been added to the group. These mounds on the undisturbed surface have been carefully preserved. There is a legend that when one of the first buildings was located on the site of a mound the earthwork was carefully removed and its form restored on the adjacent surface. If this be true its removal is not manifest from an examina-

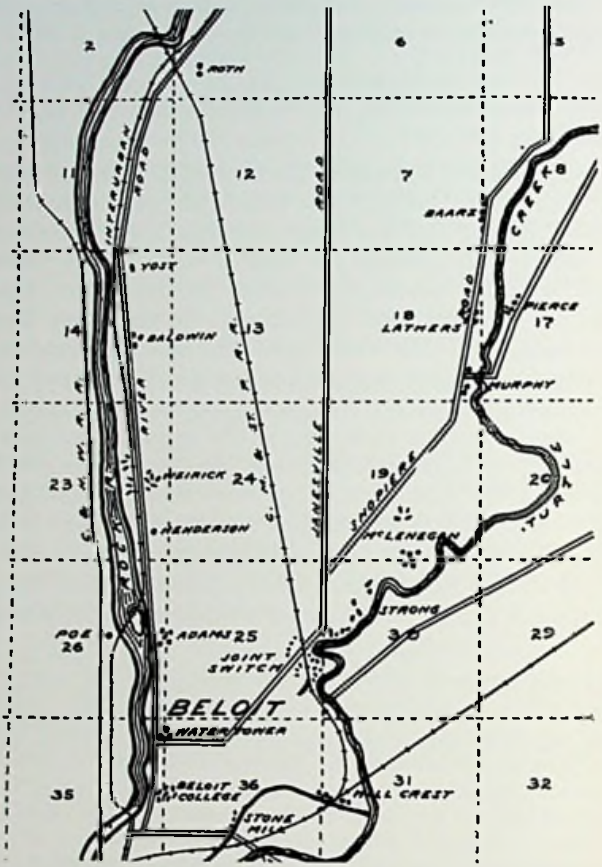
---

[6]Starin, "Diary of A Journey to Wisconsin in 1840," *Wis. Magazine of History,* VI, 208. The rope ferry was soon succeeded by a bridge in 1842. "J.P. Houston also helped frame our first wagon bridge over Rock River. A trestle structure, placed where the bridge is now, which was then called the foot of School Street. That bridge was built by the Beloit Bridge Co., Selvy Kidder, A.L. Field, C.F.H. Goodhue, Horace White, D.J. Bundy and others, in the summer of 1842, as a toll bridge. Soon afterwards, however (about 1845), this corporation gave it to the village on condition that it should be permanently maintained at public expense as a free bridge. Brown, *Past Made Present* (1900), 32.

[1]Vol. 18, No. 4, (Nov., 1919), "Beloit Mound Groups."

tion of the original plot. The road mounds are from 20 to 40 feet in diameter and from one and one-half to three feet high. The four linear mounds among the round mounds are from 60 to 100 feet long, 10 to 20 feet wide, and 2 feet high at their highest part. The turtle mound is a very symmetric effigy. It is about 75 feet long and 30 feet wide, but less than two feet high.

Only such excavations have been made in these mounds as were necessary to determine their nature. Some rather interesting bones were recovered from the mound disturbed in the erection of the Old Chapel building in 1858 and these are preserved in the Logan Museum of Beloit College. The nature of the mound enclosures having been determined the policy of preserving these groups intact has been wisely adhered to.[2]



Beloit Area Indian Mound Sites

Wisconsin Archeologist
Nov., 1919

Robert Crane described the mounds he remembered, including two prominent ones located in the downtown area.

We found a good many mounds here on this tract, lying between Rock River and Turtle Creek, extending from the state-line some two miles north, on the river, thence eastwardly two miles to the creek and three miles from this point forming a triangle. All I have discovered were found inside the above limits. They were made up in a variety of forms, indicating some design, or purpose. +

There were several in the central part of our present city. In surveying out the streets, one of these mounds, some 60 or 70 feet long, and about 12 feet broad at its base, and 6 feet high, was found lying diagonally across Pleasant, and just out of, and north of School Street,[3] *obstructing the street so that it was necessary to cart it entirely away in order to make the street clear. I saw it whilst being dug away, there were no curiosities found in it; nothing but black earth, like the soil around it.* +

To the northeast, some 20 rods distant, or more, on the brow of the bluff,[4] *was another, near the same size and length, lying parallel with this, ranging north-west and south-east, on which, and near its center, stood a white oak tree about 1½ feet in diameter. Near this tree a hole was sunk to a level with the mound's base, but nothing was found except the bones of a human being far advanced in decay.*[5]

Robert Crane wrote this account of the mounds he encountered as a first settler for the newspaper in 1878. Since the article was never republished and it does have historical significance, we will quote it further:

In passing along Turtle Creek to the north-east, a mile and a half from its mouth, we found quite a number of mounds, some very similar in form to those already mentioned. Those which attracted our attention most were perfectly round, some five in number, arranged in a direct line, standing twelve or fifteen rods apart, the first smaller and not as high as the next, so on to the center one, the size and height increasing in proportion the one to the other, while those beyond the center diminished in size on a regular grade to the end, corresponding to the first. They seemed to have been flattened by time. The diameter at the base of the center one was some fifteen feet, the height about six feet, those at the extreme ends eight or nine feet in diameter and not more than four feet high. In looking at them one was reminded of hay-cocks which had been standing through a long rain-storm. +

---

[2] *Ibid.*, 121-122.

[3] School Street is now East Grand Ave. This location would be just north of its intersection with Pleasant Street, perhaps in front of the Public Library entrance.

[4] On Beloit College land, possible in the vicinity of former Schoville Hall.

[5] *Beloit Free Press*, Feb. 14, 1878.

About 1½ mile farther to the north-east, not far from the creek, we found another cluster, quite different. These were some forty or fifty feet long and from three to four feet high. In one place four were so arranged as to form a quadrangle with an opening at one corner of some six feet. A short distance from this, three others of about the same height and length formed three sides of a square, leaving one side entirely open. Each of these was about six feet broad at the base.+

There were many conjectures as to the use of these; some claimed that they were fortifications, others were of different opinions. Cultivation has nearly obliberated them all.+

Two miles north, near this river, we discovered another mound, formed so as to give a very natural representation of a large turtle, giving the head, legs and tail; with perfect symmetry. The body, I should judge, was twenty feet wide and thirty feet long, the head protruding some five feet beyond, the feet four feet, and the tail eight feet. The depth of the body at the highest point was some four feet as it seemed to me at the time it was discovered. I passed it repeatedly in those early days.+

There were many other mounds in this vicinity which seemed less peculiar than those here mentioned. Individuals differ much as to the object of their construction. Some claim to believe they were designed to bury the dead in. But I have not seen or heard of skeletons found in them enough to warrant such a belief — only here and there one — while large numbers were found buried entirely away from them. The object of them, and by whom built, remains a mystery. The Indians could give no account of the use of them, but seemed to have a tradition that a race built them who occupied this country long before their time.[6]

4. The Settlers Eat Fish

In 1838 the residents of Beloit suffered from haphazard commerce and frequent breakdowns in transportation from the east. Acute shortages in food, medicine, and household supplies contributed to the hardships of every household. Several early accounts describe how the first settlers managed to eke out an existence:

. . . Owing sometimes to improvidence, but more frequently to badness of the roads, the market became bare, and the citizens had to make their

---

[6]*Ibid.* Even today the mound builders remain a mystery people. Some archeologists date the mounds to the period 700—1300 A.D. There are three basic styles of mounds. One is the conical or dome-shaped mound; a second is the linear mound — long and narrow; and the third is the effigy mound, resembling one of the forms of wild animals then living in the area. Andrew Whiteford and Paul Nesbitt, "They Were Here First," *Book of Beloit* (1936), 15-17; Peet, *Prehistoric America* (1898), Vol. 2.

wits serve as a committee of ways and means. At first, flour came from Ohio and New York. The ports at which Beloit traded were Southport,[1] *Milwaukee, and Chicago, One week was the time consumed in a round trip. The state of the roads might easily double that time.*

When from any cause supplies ran short, resort was had to the river. Goodhue's race was made to overflow its banks, and no small portion of the solid matter left upon the flats after such an occurrence consisted of suckers. Whoever can recall the events of 1838 — 1840 will not fail to find suckers and hoecake in the grouping. In the spring of 1838 — 1840 will not fail to find suckers and hoecake in the grouping. In the spring of 1838 the member representing the commissariat of each of the families then in Beloit might be seen with baskets on the flats gathering suckers for breakfast. The modern citizen can but poorly sympathise in the gusto of the joke when some aboriginal citizen now directs a boy, peddling suckers, to "carry them to Mr. Bundy, or Mr. Colley, who is very fond of them and will surely buy the lot."[2]

This locality abounded in game, such as deer, otter, mink, muskrat, ducks and prairie chickens. The streams also afforded an abundance of fish of various kinds. The most numberous were the "red horse," rather coarse-grained and less palatable than other kinds found here, especially in summer, when the water was not cold. They ran in large schools in the early summer, when they were easily speared. This was the only way the Indians used to take them. I have seen large places fitted up by them for drying fish. They set up posts in the ground in rows some six feet apart, extending them as far as they wished, each post having a fork at the top in which poles were laid lengthwise, then straight, slim brush long enough to reach across from one pole to the other, to hold the fish, on which they were spread to dry after being opened. After they had become perfectly dry, they could carry them without difficulty. The finer kinds of fish found here are Rock bass, black bass, pike and pickerel. A few, supposed to be of the latter kind, very large, have been caught here — one 4 feet in length, others nearly as long. Some called them "muskalunge." Be that as it may, they were excellent when baked and seasoned well. Some catfish were caught, weighing 15 to 20 pounds. These streams doubtless furnished the Indians a large part of their living.[3]

But in 1838 pioneer life on the frontier of Wisconsin Territory continued to be austere, both for the earliest settlers and the newer emigrants who were now arriving almost daily from the east:

---

[1]Later Kenosha.

[2]1856 *History*, 50-51.

[3]Crane, Robert. *Beloit Free Press*, Jan. 24, 1878.

These early settlers, although located in a beautiful prairie country, where wheel carriages could be driven in almost all directions, had many hardships to endure. They were charmed with the country. When they pitched their tent, and built their shanty, not reflecting that it was seven days' journey to the nearest place where provisions could be obtained.+

Poor flour and rusty pork were great luxuries, at $30 and $40 per barrel, transported with ox teams from Chicago, Ottawa, Galena or Milwaukee, over the prairie, without places of entertainment, or bridges to cross the streams; having to cook their provisions, camping on the ground, under the wagon; frequently seven days on the road between this place and the nearest point where they could get supplies.+

Potatoes and other sauce could not be got at any price for seed. Rutabagas stood high in the market. After the mill was built at Beloit and grinding done without bolting, many of the inhabitants lived on buckwheat cakes, with such game as they could catch. Their hardships were small during warm weather, to what they were in the winter, when streams had to be forded, or the family suffer for want of provisions at home.[4]

5. The New England Company's Account Book

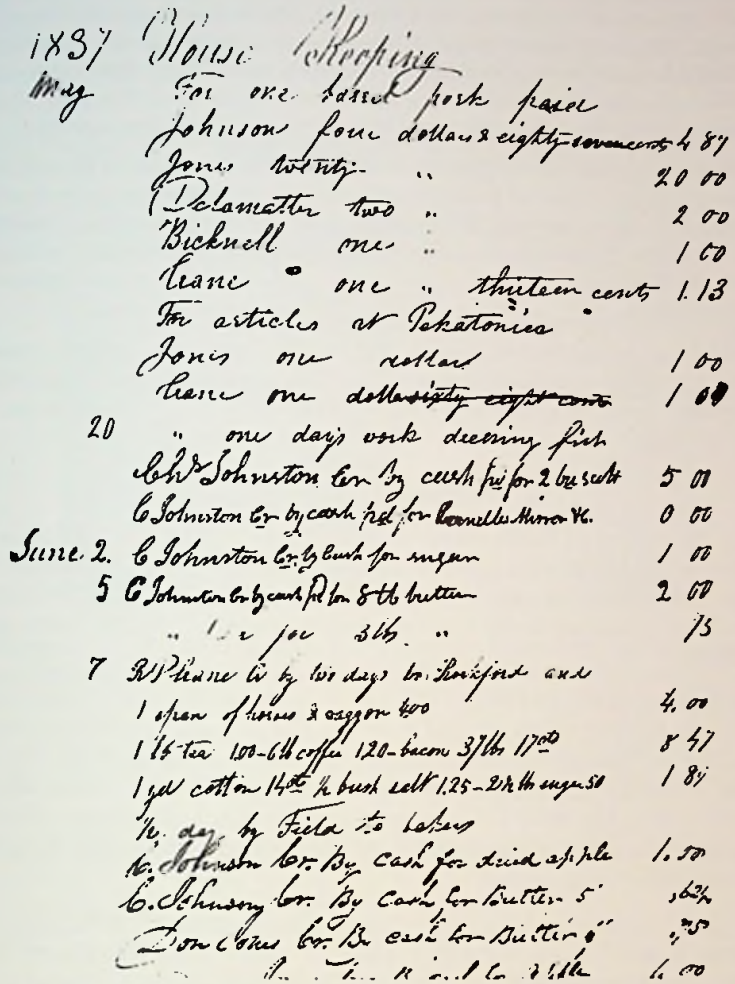
Perhaps the most cherished artifact in the possession of the Beloit Historical Society is the original account book for the years 1837 and 1838, belonging to Dr. Horace White, in which were recorded the daily transactions of the New England Company. Sixty years later, at the 1897 Beloit College commencement, another Horace White, this time the distinguished newspaper editor and son of Dr. White, attempted to set the record straight concerning the work of the Company:

. . . I have been permitted to examine an old account book, hitherto unpublished, much of which is in my father's handwriting and the rest in his [Ellery Crane's] father's handwriting. This book contains the business transactions of the New England Emigrating Co., which was formed in Colebrook, New Hampshire, my native place, in October, 1836, and of which Dr. Horace White, my father, was the agent.+

Much has been published about this Company and a good many guesses have been made as to the exact number and identity of the members. The book of which I speak, and which Mr. Crane has rescued from the teeth of time, sets at rest all disputes on these two subjects. It shows that the Company consisted of 14 members and that their names were Cyrus Eames, O.P. Bicknell, John W. Bicknell, Ashael B. Howe, Leonard Hatch, David J. Bundy, Ira Young, L.C. Beech, S.G. Colley, G.W. Bicknell, R.P. Crane, Horace Hobart, Horace White, and Alfred Field.+

---

[4]1856 *History*, 93.



1837 House Keeping
May For one barrel pork Frazier
Johnsons four dollars & eighty cents 4 87
Jones twenty " 20 00
Delamatter two " 2 00
Bicknell one " 1 00
Keane one " thirteen cents 1.13
For articles at Pekatonica
Jones one dollar 1 00
Keane one dollar sixty eight cents 1 68
20 " one days work dressing fish
Chr Johnston Cr by cash pd for 2 bu salt 5 00
C Johnston Cr by cash pd for Camellus Mirror &c. 0 00
June 2. C Johnston Cr by cash for sugar 1 00
5 C Johnston Cr by cash pd for 8 lb butter 2 00
" " for 3 lb " 75
7 R Keane Cr by his days labor Breaking and
1 span of horses & waggon 400 4. 00
1 lb tea 100-6 lb coffee 120-bacon 3/lb 17.00 8 47
1 yd cotton 14 cts 1/2 bush salt 1.25-2 lb sugar 50 1 89
1/2 day by Field & Ladders
C. Johnston Cr. By cash for dried apples 1. 50
C. Johnson Cr. By Cash for butter 5' 62½
Don Cows Cr. By cash for Butter 6" 75
[illegible] 4. 00

Page 22 of New England Emigrating Company's account book mentioning names of early settlers. May, June, 1837.

Bartlett Museum

The book shows, to a cent, how much each man contributed to the funds of the enterprise, the whole amount being $7,067.27, and how the lands and other property were distributed, how much and what kind of work each one did and what credits he received for the work done. These fourteen names and no others appear and reappear as copartners in the enterprise, although others are found in other relations to it.+

These men were not speculators. They did not belong to a roving class. They had no thought of taking up claims on public lands and selling out to somebody else at a higher price. They intended to create an agricultural community like the New England village from which they sprang, and new homes like the old ones which they still loved. They were the kind of stuff that enduring communities are made of, as this fair city today attests . . .

It should be added that there is no indication in the book, or in any letter or memorandum, so far as I have been able to discover, that there ever was any dispute or disagreement among the members of the Company touching money matters or the eventual settlement of the joint enterprise. Each one had entire confidence in the good faith of the others and in the correctness of the bookkeeping . . . [1]

White's listing of the names of the 14 members of the New England Emigrating Co. is probably correct. Earlier writers had disagreed in attempting to name them, and White presumably was trying to set the record straight.[2]

6. The Canal That Never Was

Why, the visitor to Beloit may ask today, was Mechanic's Green Park laid out only a block removed from the much larger Horace White Park? The answer dates back to the beginning of Beloit and someone's bold and imaginative proposal to harness the water power of Turtle Creek to its maximum.

The Kelsou survey of 1837 - 1838, the first plat of the new village, makes fascinating reading when studied in detail. For instance, the Public Square (later Horace White Park) was originally planned to be larger than it is now. On the south it was intended to extend to Broad Street (instead of East Grand), and to the west to Prospect Street (instead of College). Pleasant Street ran only a few blocks north along the river and then ended. Two large boat landings were provided.

Of particular interest is Canal Street running north and south at the top of the map where Central Avenue is situated today. In the center of Canal Street is the Great Mill Race. According to Brown, the canal was proposed to start three miles north-east on Turtle Creek and run south across Mechanic's Green Park where it would enter the tail race of Turtle Creek and presumably take care of the water power needs of the community.[1] The Kelsou map clearly shows the anticipated mill yard along the race at the foot of Canal Street.

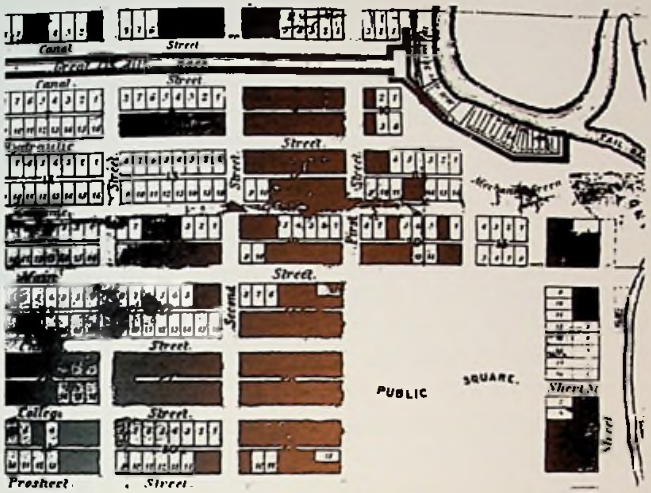
---

[1]Horace White Jr., Beloit College Commencement address, 1897.

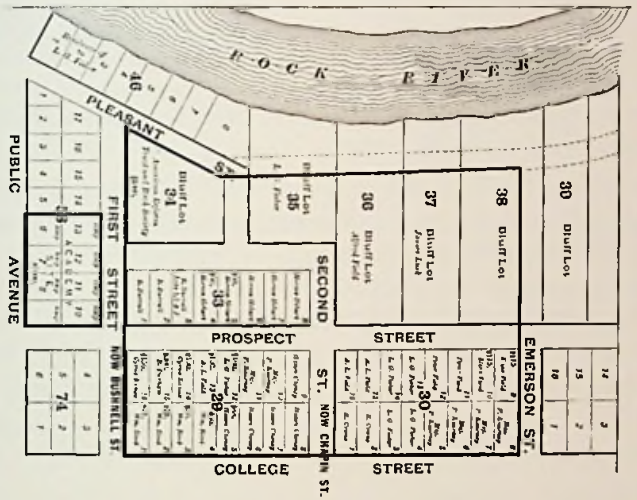
[2]For others named as members, see 1856 *History*, 48-49; 1897 *History*, 610-611; Fisher, *Recollections*, 274.

[1]Brown, *Past Made Present* (1900), 43.

It was an ambitious plan, but quickly abandoned, for exactly what reasons it not clear. Only two or three references to it are known to exist. Were it not for the Kelsou map the canal and the Great Mill Race would have passed completely out of mind. The only other reference of any consequence appears in the *Beloit Journal* 30 years afterwards:



Enlargement of 1837 Kelsou survey, showing proposed mill race running down Canal Street (Central Avenue) with 30 foot drop near Mechanics Green.



Lands acquired by gift or sale for Beloit College. Heavy lines enclose campus and academy site.

Mechanic's Green was also left as a public square in the survey. It was originally intended to dam up the Turtle and bring the water over the bluff and have a heavy fall south of the green. With this expectation the Goodhues gave 1-5 of the square which was their claim, and six lots south of Broad Street for the mill yard.[2]

And that is the explanation for the peculiar existence of today's little jewel of a park, Mechanic's Green, only a block away from Horace White Park. The Great Mill Race never materialized and the residents of Central Avenue today are spared a canal in their front yards; but tiny Mechanic's Green still endures, showing off its two score different varieties of trees to all who pause to admire.

7. Steamboat on the River

The prospect of steamboat traffic on Rock River from the Mississippi to Wisconsin Territory was a topic for discussion in the late winter of 1838 in many communities along Rock River. Just how far north a steamer could venture on such a relatively shallow river was unclear, particularly during summer months. Obviously, the high waters of springtime would afford the best opportunity to find out.

In the Rock River valley the horse and wagon was the basic means of transportation. The prospect of moving freight and passengers by water on flat-bottomed boats more quickly and cheaply was intriguing to contemplate. Bold entrepreneurs and speculators appeared on the scene and civic-minded settlers were found who would listen. Talk of a canal from Milwaukee to Rock River near Watertown raised the exciting vision of travel from the Mississippi River across Wisconsin Territory to Lake Michigan. Transportation by water might yet be the key to frontier development and prosperity.

In a letter, dated March 7, 1838, Rev. William Adams, writing from "Peckatonica" (later Rockton) says:

. . . *Some gentlemen from Ohio are here now negotiating respecting a steam boat to run on the river — Some of the stock is taken here, and it is expected she will commence her regular trips early in June.*[1]

Shortly after April 16, 1838 The Gypsy, the first stern wheeler to ascend Rock River, arrived at Rockford. Its appearance must have created a happy sensation in each tiny community along its route north. We know there was dancing, excursion parties and sight-seeing.[2]

---

[2]Undated 1867 newspaper clipping, Ch. 10, "Early History of Beloit."

[1]Beloit Hist. Society Archives.

[2]Church, *History of Winnebago County*, (1916), II, 653-654. See also Nelson, *Sinnissippi Saga* (1968), 51.

The Gypsy was described as being not less than 100 feet in length and perhaps 30 feet in width. It had a cabin above the hold and an upper deck, open and uncovered. There were also several staterooms.

Charles A. Church describes the exciting moment when The Gypsy arrived at Rockford, as remembered by an eyewitness:

. . . He was rewarded by the sight of dense, black smoke, near Corey's bluff, which seemed to be moving up the river. Soon the Gypsy came in sight, and the people gathered on the banks of the river and cheered the boat as it ascended in fine style until nearly over the rapids, when it suddenly turned, swung around, and went down stream much faster than it ascended. It rounded to and tried it again, and soon turned down stream a second time. After several attempts, with the aid of a quantity of lard thrown into the furnaces, the boat ran up the swift current, and soon tied up to the bank . . . [3]

After unloading eleven tons of merchandise for one store owner, according to Church, the steamboat was readied for its trip north some 15 miles to Pecatonica. Then, if we are to believe Church, more excitement began:

. . . The people came in from the country, and chartered the boat for an excursion up the river, and carried passengers. The captain said he never witnessed such a scene before. They danced all night, and kept the cabin in an uproar day and night until they reached Rockton.[4]

Carr's History of Rockton next tells us about The Gypsy's arrival at Pecatonica:

. . . Stephen Mack heard the steamer's whistle as she came around the bend in the river, and hurried down to the shore to drive a stake for them to tie up to on his side of the river.[5] *George Stevens, just across the river, heard the steamer also, and seeing what Mack was doing; hurriedly drove a stake on his side, and was greatly pleased to have the boat tie to his stake, which the steam boat men thought was the best landing place . . .*

It was then thought that the steam boat trade was going to build up the river towns, and the mouth of the Pecatonica especially. The coming of his boat created considerable interest, and some money was subscribed by the river towns to buy a steam boat for local trade. It was understood that such a boat was purchased, but it never came up the river as far as Rockton.[6]

The next stop was to be at Beloit in Wisconsin Territory. The date, probably April 17, 1838:

---

[3] *Ibid.*, 654.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] The west bank, near Macktown.

[6] P. 32. Carr gives the date as April, 1837, instead of the correct 1838.

. . . A merchant at Beloit had shipped ten tons from Rock Island to Beloit, which were to be delivered at that point.[7]

Aboard the Gypsy may have been Selvy Blodgett, Caleb's eldest son, and his wife, coming to Beloit for the first time after long separation. According to Lucius Fisher:

. . . Selvey K. Blodgett joined his father in Beloit in 1838 coming with his wife from [illegible] on the first steam boat that ever ascended Rock River.[8]

No one appears to have marked the Beloit arrival of the Gypsy. The 1837-1838 Kelsou map shows two boat landings where it would have moored, one on the east bank where the First National Bank now stands, the other also on the east bank farther south in the area of today's Broad Street bridge. If Fisher was correct, then Selvy Blodgett, the long lost son, was home at last.[9] His portrait hangs today in Bartlett Museum in the city his father founded.

Meanwhile the Gypsy continued north up Rock River in the direction of Janesville;

. . . This was an "event" to the settlers along the river, and availing themselves of the opportunity of a steamboat ride, it was found by the time she arrived at Wisconsin City[10] *her decks were pretty well crowded with passengers; but "rounding to" at East Wisconsin City, she took on Dr. Heath and family, and other gentlemen stopping with him, and made her way up the river. It was thought by many that her engines had not sufficient power to overcome the "St. George Rapids,"* [11] *and that it would be best not to attempt their passage, but a majority thinking otherwise, it was determined to make the attempt. The boat succeeded admirably, and went on beyond the present site of Janesville, where it spent some time and then returned to the Mississippii.*[12]

---

[7]Church, *op. cit.*, 654. Who was the Beloit merchant? Quite possibly Alfred Field and James Lusk. They opened the first large store in Beloit in the Spring of 1838. Ch. 6, sec. 10.

[8]*Fisher Fragment* (1854); Frank Blodgett, *Family History*, 9.

[9]Robert Crane remembered it differently. He said Selvey's wife ". . . and the little son of 3 years came early in June, 1839, on the first steamer up Rock River from the Mississippi. Mr. S.K. Blodgett came in the fall of that year . . . " But Crane is incorrect on the dates. Selvey Jr. was born in Beloit June 10, 1838, two months after his mother arrived.

[10]Wisconsin City was a "paper town" that never grew, situated on the west bank of Rock River, below the rapids that extends downstream from today's Montery bridge. East Wisconsin City was across the river on the east bank, about a half-mile below the present School for the Visually Handicapped.

[11]Near the Montery bridge?

[12]1856 *History*, 146. Both this account and the 1879 *History*, which copies the former almost word for word, give the date as June, 1836. However, this appears to be incorrect. The April, 1838, date of the Gypsy's trip is too well corroborated.

Whether the trip was regarded as a success or failure, or merely inconclusive, is not reported. Carr's account suggests that it encouraged considerable hope and some financial investment. Certainly the preparation of the Kelsou map in the same period, with its two prominent boat landings provided for, hopefully anticipated all kinds of river traffic.

Several other steamboats did make their way up Rock River from the Mississippi to Beloit and points farther north. However, by 1845 bridges and mill-dams had begun to obstruct the river to such an extent that steamboat navigation was no longer feasible. The bright dream of 1838 had ended.

8. Beloit, November 1838

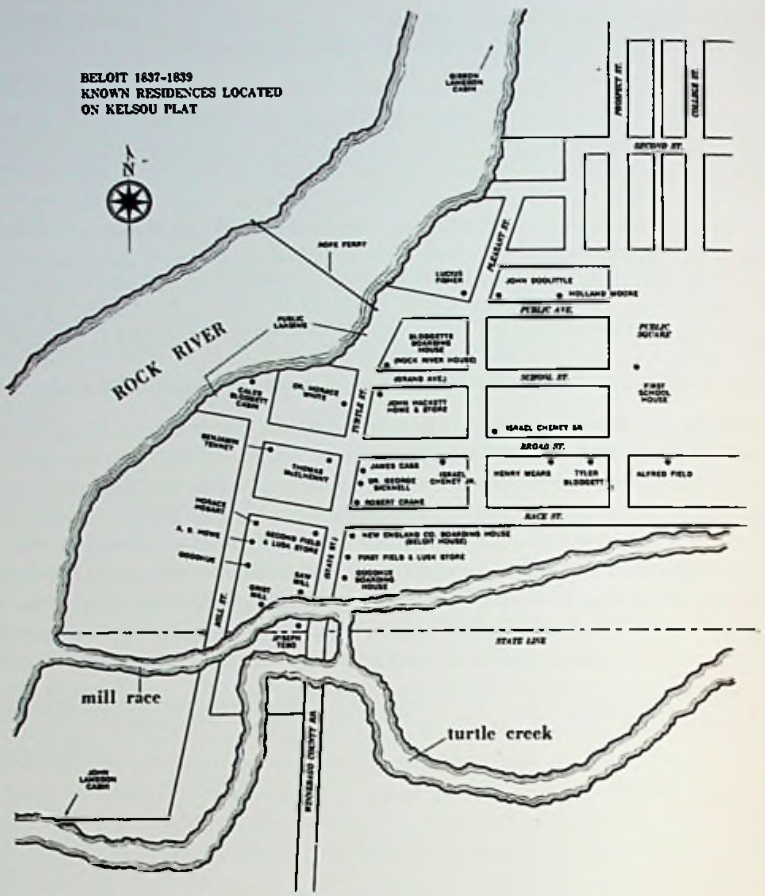
S.G. Colley, an early settler who arrived in Beloit in June 1838, years later in a letter to the *Free Press* editor carefully described who was living where in the new settlement. This long-forgotten letter affords us a reliable picture of Beloit on November 26, 1838 when Robert Crane entered Lots 6 and 7 in Section 35, according to the government survey, containing 78 acres of land:

Before Mr. Crane entered this land from the government the parties had made a plat of the land and apportioned it among the parties interested. Caleb Blodgett took possession of block 47, according to Hopkins' plat, and built a hotel where the Goodwin House now stands. The same house now stands north of the Goodwin House on the northwest corner of the same block. Charles F. Goodhue and his family had built a grist mill on the State line, which is remembered as the "old red mill" which burned some years ago. The south half of block 48 was assigned to David Bundy, the north half of the block was assigned to John Hackett . . .

T.H. Moore built a saw mill near where the bridge is that crosses the old race on the Rockton road. Field and Lusk had a stock of goods in a frame building south of the Beloit House which was occupied by D.J. Bundy as a hotel. Dr. White lived in the log house built by Caleb Blodgett west of John Gordon's store. Maj. Johnson, Chas. and Robert Bell lived in the old Thiebault shanty. Hiram and Marvin Hill had a blacksmith shop near the old red mill. Deacon Hobart was living in a house he built, I think the one now owned and occupied by Wm. Shaw. A.B. Howe also lived in a house nearby. John Hackett lived where Winslow & Rosenberg's store now stands, where he kept the post office, he being the first postmaster, where we had to pay 25¢ for a letter. J.B. Colley and his sister, Mrs. A.J. Atwood, lived in a house east of where A. Bittel now lives. Old Mr. Israel Cheney lived in a shanty where the Collins house now stands. Young Israel, his son, lived in another shanty nearby his father, Holland Moore and his family were on Pleasant Street near where Mrs. Moore now lives. There were several other families also living on this land at the time it was pre-empted by Mr. Crane.

The Goodhue family had a residence where the gas works now are. Before Mr. Crane entered the land there was a population not less than 200 in

number upon the same land he afterwards entered... [1]



9. Crane's Pre-Emption

As 1838 drew to a close, the land squatters at Beloit were still awaiting the public sale by the government of their lands on the east bank of Rock River. Originally scheduled for November in Milwaukee, the public sale had been postponed until the early spring of 1839. Lucius Fisher was chosen to attend the sale and he was authorized to bid off the village lands for the different claimants.

---

[1] *Beloit Free Press*, April 19, 1888.

This delay of three or four months did little to allay the fears of some of the residents that perhaps something would go wrong with their expectations that each settler would be able to bid in his own claim at the rate of $1.25 per acre. For instance, it was known that the government had agreed to provide lands for a large group of exiled Poles somewhere on Rock River. Some feared that the Beloit area might be affected by this government promise. Washington was far away and was perhaps unaware of the squatters at the confluence of Rock River and Turtle Creek. The danger of powerful speculators bidding against them was discussed. While their fears might be largely imaginary, the settlers dared not be complacent.

Robert Crane was living at the time on a quarter section of land that included a part of the town plat. Apparently a number of the villagers were persuaded to let Crane pre-empt all of the plat of some 78 acres by signing an affidavit that the land was his homestead. Before going to Milwaukee to prove his claim, Crane signed papers that he would deed back to the various lot-owners their respective lands. On November 26, 1838, at Milwaukee, Crane presented his affidavit and was given a preemption certificate that would entitle him as occupant of a homestead to bid first for such property at the coming land sale.

However, the dim outline of still another possible problem evidently was felt to exist by at least one observer:

In their haste to secure a village as a business and industrial center of the little community, the settlers at what is now Beloit acted in direct and apparently irremediable contravention of the law governing the occupation of public lands. The act of Congress approved May 29, 1830, amended by the act approved June 22, 1838, was specially designed to prevent speculation in village lots, and prohibited in express terms the pre-emption of public lands for any other than farming purposes. The people of Beloit, after deliberation, decided to pursue a way out of their difficulty and secure a legal title to their land, by selecting some settler in whom the entire community had confidence, and quit-claiming to him every foot of ground embraced in the village, and allowing him to pre-empt it in his own name, and, after he had obtained title, receive from him a re-conveyance of their titles.

This plan was carried out to the letter. The various lots in the village were quit-claimed to R.P. Crane, and at the land office in Milwaukee, Crane made the affidavit required by the pre-emption law, and entered under his claim of pre-emption, on the 26th day of November, 1838, Lots 6 and 7 in Section 35, Town 1, Range 12 east, containing seventy-eight and fifty-seven one-hundredths acres, according to Government survey. He then, before receiving a patent from the General Government, deeded to the original owners, in accordance with a private survey made under the direction of Dr. White, for the New England Company and other land owners.[1]

[1] 1879 *History*, 611. The survey referred to is undoubtedly Kelsou's.

As a result of this maneuver, the Milwaukee land office records now showed R.P. Crane as the pre-emptor of the 78 acres which the first settlers of Beloit hoped to make a village. Presumably, as soon as the Government put the lands on the east bank of Rock River up for sale, Crane as pre-emptor would be given first opportunity to bid in this 78 acres at the minimum price of $1.25 per acre. Since he had already conveyed back to his squatter friends their respective lots in this 78 acre parcel, their titles would be secure as soon as Crane received a government patent after the purchase. But in the meantime all of the settlers in the 78 acres, including Crane, were still squatters, subject to the worries and apprehensions of men and women who did not own the land they lived upon.

10. A Dispute Over Pre-Emption

One highly respected but crusty first settler many years later questioned the ethics of all concerned who participated in Robert Crane's pre-emption of the village lots. In 1888, fifty years after the event, S.G. Colley wrote:

. . . It is at the present time a question in the minds of some people how Mr. Crane could make proper affidavit to this land as a homestead for farming purposes, when at the same time the land had been platted as a village and he under bonds to redeem to the different persons who at the time had erected buildings and were living on this same land . . . [1]

Ellery Crane, the son of Robert Crane, immediately attempted to answer Colley's blunt question and defend his deceased father and his New England Co. colleagues:

. . . It was a transaction in which they all were profoundly interested, and I am not going to believe from such an insinuation . . . that Mr. Crane performed any unlawful act in connection with the pre-emption of that tract of land. Neither shall I believe without further evidence that such men as Dr. Horace White, Deacon Peter Field, Deacon Horace Hobart, Mr. Ashael B. Howe, Benjamin Tenny, John P. Houston, Cyrus Eames, Chauncey Tuttle and others would for a moment become a party to an illegal transaction or even a questionable one in connection with the entering of that land. +

They all know just what Mr. Crane would have to do when they selected him as their agent, and he went to perform a special service in the interest of the persons who sent him. That he performed the task assigned him according to the satisfaction of every member of the company, there seems no reason to doubt, and were not the men who sent

---

[1] Letter, dated Jan. 30, 1888, to Editor, *Beloit Free Press.* publication date unknown.

him in a measure responsible for the acts of the agent they had selected with careful forethought and fitted out to fulfill a special mission the carrying out of which was to bring them no trifling benefit.+

It might be inferred from reading Mr. Colley's article that not only the land had been laid out into lots, but that many houses had been erected, and that Beloit was then a town of some size. To be sure a plat of the village had been made. But as yet the town was only on paper, scarcely a street had been laid out, and only when it was necessary to enable settlers to go from one claim to another was there a path to be found. It was still wild land, the people had but laid claim to it, with the expectation of having a farming village or settlement. Nearly all of them before removing west had been tillers of the soil. None of them knew what might happen. Still, the general expectation was that it might very likely remain a farming community as it then was in November, 1838, and continued to be for some time afterward.+

The writer can see no reason why that land could not have been pre-empted for homestead and farming purposes. It was the design of the claimants to erect homes for themselves, and the land was not entered for the purpose of speculation. Members of the company were actual settlers, and it could not have been the design or intention of the government to withhold public lands from the possession of such persons. It would seem a very strange construction to put upon that law governing the pre-emption of public lands to say that the pre-emption of that land was a questionable transaction. It is in no way likely that the government intended to prohibit the actual settlers from taking up land for villages or towns, but rather to prevent a wanton and reckless speculation in lands by non-residents and persons who had really no intention of becoming settlers, who were mapping out towns on paper and carrying on a system of premeditated, deliberate swindling . . . [2]

Colley apparently could not accept Ellery Crane's reasoning. He quickly continued the debate:

. . . Before Mr. Crane entered the land there was a population not less than 200 in number upon the same land which he afterwards entered . . . It is true that some of the members of the New England Company had been farmers, but the land entered by Mr. Crane was not intended for farming or agricultural lands at all, but for a village or city, and it was sub-divided into lots for residences and business houses.[3]

Obviously neither Ellery Crane nor Colley was convinced by the other's simple logic. Crane, however, did manage to have the last word in their debate:

---

[2]Letter to editor, *Beloit Free Press*, April 12, 1888.

[3]Letter to editor, *Beloit Free Press*, April 19, 1888.

. . . Mr. Colley, in presenting his history, almost at the starting point, conveys the idea that Beloit was a populous village having in 1838 a considerable number of houses, that a town or city was the object to be attained by the early settlers. That I think is where he is mistaken. No one could then tell what the future success of the settlement might be. The N.E. Company went there ostensibly for the purpose of locating homes and farms, expecting to engage in the pursuits of agriculture, that was to be their chief employment and support . . .

. . . It was all to be used for farming and homestead purposes; they were actual settlers and hoped to remain such. But they were liable to be molested unless certain measures were adopted to secure their titles, and the company selected Mr. R.P. Crane to pre-empt a certain portion of this land. He went before the proper authorities and pre-empted the land in his own name, having a house on it where he and his family then resided. This act of my father secured to those settlers the first right to purchase this land whenever it should be placed on the market by government . . . [4]

11. Squatters on Government Land

As late as 1839 the residents of Beloit were still "squatters" upon their lands, possessors of no legal title, trusting not without some apprehension that when the lands on the east bank of Rock River would be sold by the U.S. Government that they (or Robert Crane) would be given first opportunity to bid upon their own parcels and acquire title at the minimum price per acre. But what about non-resident land speculators who might demand the right to outbid squatters for their often valuable and improved lands? Despite assurances to the contrary, many Beloiters were apprehensive about what might go wrong at the Milwaukee land sale.

. . . But the [squatters] were a determined class of men, ready to maintain their rights, or what they deemed their rights, even though their defense involved a technical violation of the law and some degree of personal danger. In addition to this, they had for years protected themselves, and success had given them confidence in their organization. When informed of this danger, therefore, they became boldly defiant, called meetings in the several settlements, and selected one individual in each, who should attend the sale as the representative of the several committees, and make a bid for each tract of land, as it was offered, at its minimum price, in the name of the squatter who had claimed it.+

This done, they caused the speculators to be notified that they would not be permitted to run up the price of the lands they had squatted on, and that, if they insisted upon bidding in spite of this notification, the bidder would bring a fight upon his hands certainly, whether he secured the coveted piece

---

[4] Letter to editor, *Beloit Free Press*, May 3, 1888.

of land or not. Nor did they content themselves with this precautionary notification. They attended the sale in large bodies, with arms in their hands, and, by force of numbers and their manifest determination, so overawed their competitors that but little opposition was made to their purchasing their claims at the lowest Government price.[1]

Lucius Fisher was designated by the villagers to represent not only Robert Crane, who was the ostensible owner of the 78 acres comprising the community of Beloit, but also the other settlers who had pre-empted lands adjacent to the village. Years later Fisher described his role:

In March, 1839, the first land sale took place in Milwaukee, and I was chosen bidder for all claimants in the south half of Rock County east of Rock River, the lands on the west side having been brought into market before at a land sale in Milwaukee. The claimants all secured their lands, they standing by me and permitting no one to bid but me on their lands, and I got all for them at the upset price of $1.25 per acre . . . [2]

In many areas boundaries were poorly marked and inadequately surveyed. Disputes with newcomers, desiring land, and lacking money, quickly arose:

As the country was fast filling up, and to prevent collisions among them, the settlers banded together, agreeing to protect each other from any stranger who might covet and therefore try to force himself on to a claim some one had already taken. Such were called "jumpers." Land-hunters and jumpers were quite numerous in 1837-1838, especially the latter year.+

There were some half dozen cases of "jumpers" in our settlement, where they attempted to get possession by putting up a shanty; and by getting some others outside to help them, prepared to defend themselves. It was not long before they had a chance to show their valor, for no sooner was it known that one of our neighbor's rights was thus infringed upon, than a sufficient number of volunteers were ready and off to the contested spot. A hot, determined effort soon routed the enemy, — his shanty torn down and scattered, and he leaving as fast as his feet could carry him. There were no lives lost, but some got sore heads, and were glad not to return.[3]

12. Pioneer Farming

Apparently much of the area around pioneer Beloit, such as the bottom lands and prairies adjacent to Turtle Creek and Rock River, were relatively free of trees and obstructions to farming. One early account states:

---

[1] 1879 *History*, 357.

[2] Fisher, *Pioneer Recollections*, 281.

[3] Crane, Robert. *Beloit Free Press*, Jan. 3, 1878.

. . . When the first settlers came here the broad plain was ready for the plow; and thousands of acres were covered with grass, and other thousands were outspread around without a root to obstruct or a stump to mar the scene. The crops were put in and matured without the protection of fences, during the first two years.[1]

We know that resourceful Caleb Blodgett brought his own ox team with him to haul heavy equipment and plow his fields. However, most of the first settlers arrived without horses and had no farm animals to begin farming operations. Robert Crane explained one method of dealing with such a problem:

It may be asked how the first settlers, who came to take up farms, could get along without any teams, and no money to buy with, and still worse, when there were none about here to be bought, as very few brought teams with them.+

To supply this deficiency there were jobbers from the southern part of Illinois, ("Egypt"). Also, some from the Wabash Valley, Indiana, the latter called "Hoosiers." Indeed, those from Indiana and "Egypt" appeared like the same class.+

They came with teams of from four to six oxen each, and plows cutting a furrow 18 to 22 inches wide. Their plows and tools for repairing same, also provisions, (usually corn meal), and lodgings, all brought in a large wagon, the body curving up at the ends like a flat bottomed boat, and a canvas top drawn over bows. These wagons were known as "prairie schooners."+

These jobbers always had a saddle-horse to hunt up oxen with when they strayed, and generally a cow, furnishing milk, "Mush" and milk, bacon and "corn dodgers," made up their diet.+

They would break up prairie for $3 per acre, till the end of the season. Small farmers, when their land joined, contracted together, breaking as many acres on each as they wanted. For the first two years very little fence was needed, there being so few cattle; afterwards, fences were necessary, as several large droves of cows and other cattle, coming from the South, had been brought in and sold to settlers.[2]

Rev. G. W. Lawrence described his first visit to Wisconsin Territory in July of 1838:

Beloit was my first stopping place The harvest of 1838 coming on, I went into a wheat field near Beloit, owned by Caleb Blodgett, the largest I have ever seen, embracing, I should think, from 80 to 160 acres. Here I took my

---

[1] 1856 *History*, 52.

[2] *Beloit Free Press*, Feb. 7, 1878.

first lessons in raking and binding wheat. J. Hackett, Esq. who was the worthy postmaster at Beloit in those days, was in the habit of exercising himself in a similar manner. In the lapse of eighteen or twenty years he has become rich, I suppose; but I presume he is not ashamed of his early history as a worker . . . During the period to which I refer it was fashionable to work — I mean with the grain cradle, the mowing scythe, the axe, the shovel and the hoe . . . [3]

13. First Wedding

The first wedding in the village was not without a bit of suspense and perhaps even some misgivings, according to Ellery Crane:

Mary Moore, sister of Mrs. White, married in Beloit Mr. Harvey Bundy.[1] *It was the first wedding in the town and took place on Christmas Eve at the home of Dr. White, Dec. 24, 1839. Let me quote what she wrote about it in a letter dated July 2, 1896:*

The Rev. Mr. Adams of Rockton was requested to perform the ceremony and not until the guests were assembled was it discovered that he was not empowered to marry us, and as Samuel G. Colley was one of the guests, just elected justice of the peace, and an old schoolmate, he performed the ceremony, and the pastor offered the prayer. It was rather annoying at the time but made little difference, so we were married in heart and life which we truly were." [2]

The White family was then living in their newly finished home on the west side of Turtle Street, known today as 318 State Street.

14. A Beloit Visitor's Diary

In October 1839 the little village of Beloit had a young visitor who stopped at the Beloit House for a few days. Fortunately for later generations, this visitor kept a detailed and wonderfully observant diary of his visit which gives us a rare first-hand view of the burgeoning new community.

The identity of the diarist is not conclusively established but there is considerable evidence to support the opinion that he was John Watts de Peyster who would have been visiting Beloit on behalf of Phillip K. Kearney (later a distinguished Civil War general) in order to investigate prospects for real

---

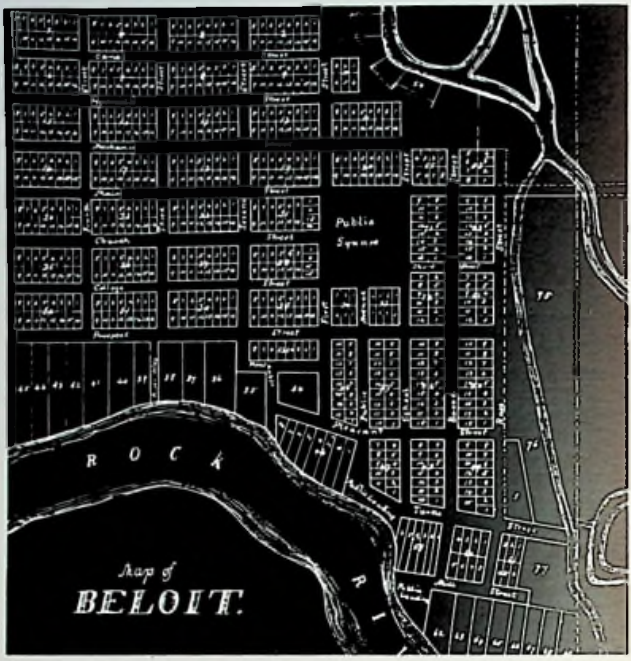
[3] 1856 *History*, 33.

[1] Some early accounts give the name as Harvey Bevedy, but Bundy is correct.

[2] Ellery Crane letter, *Beloit Free Press*, July 12, 1910. Probably Rev. Adams could not perform marriages in Wisconsin Territory.

estate investments in the area.[1]

Aside from the brief excerpts from the letters of Horace Hobart that have survived,[2] this diary provides us with our only known contemporaneous account of pioneer Beloit. The following excerpts have never before been printed and only came to light in 1966 after the diary was donated to the Chicago Historical Society. The Beloit portion of the diary begins on October 15, 1839 as de Peyster (?) travelling north from Rockford describes approaching Turtle Creek:



1840 Hopkins Survey
Original Plat of Beloit

Here the public square is reduced to its present dimensions — two public boat landings — no bridge — no west side development — no Pleasant Street along river — mill race eliminated from Canal Street (Central).

---

[1]Kearney, a one-armed Union general of great promise, was killed early in the War when trapped behind Confederate lines. As a young man of considerable means, he invested in Beloit real estate, later donating some of his land to Beloit College for its campus. Lucius Fisher acted as Kearney's agent. Apparently Kearney never visited Beloit. Fisher, *Recollections*, 281.

[2]Ch. 6, Secs. 1, 8.

. . . at 12 A.M. crossed the boundary of Illinois north — & entered Beloit on the confines of Wisconsin South line — which place is very prettily located at outlet of Turtle River & its Junction with Rock — on a flat bottom land — laid out in City lots — containing 2 mills — Tavern — store — & some 36 (?) houses — partly built of wood — the Turtle is a rapid little current of some 20 to 21 ft wide & 2 deep — clear — & fine tasting water — gravelly bottom — the Rock R. here is rapid wide — but rather shallow —

The Inn — Eastern Yankees — & social & enterprising — there seems to be considerable activity in the place — was much taken with B — put up at Bundy's Tavern & paid Mr. Judd for my agreeable ride & full of incident — [3]

after arranging my toilet a little & while Dinner preparing — walked up Turtle st to L.G. Fishers Cottage to whom had letter — has a very pretty 1½ story house located on bank of River — [4] *was not in, met him on my return to Village at Field & Lusks Store — handed letter — very glad to see me — animated talk — gave me invite to his house — is a good looking — social & think honest man — from general appearance am much pleased with him — & Mr. Field —*

after Dinner spent afternoon in roving about Village & along banks of both streams — more & more pleased with the locality — fine hunting & fishing — home to tea, some leg weary — saw a most splendid Sun set — warm & rich as in August — soon requested a light to bed — when Landlord show'd me to room containing 6 double beds look'd in amazement & then ask'd him if he had a Buffalo Skin — as I would prefer that & a hard board to such a room full — he bethought him a minute — & then replied — he guessed he had a single bed in a curtained recess — & he led the way — di (?) & slept well — & awoke — early — Oct 16 — 6 A.M. — after dressing & going outdoors — found weather very windy — hazy — but not cold — Mr. F.[5] *called on me to say would take me to see farming country if could procure horses — walked into breakfast at ringing of bell — found table as usual — full — abundant but no neatness — nor system — Strange meddly of folks to table but that did not hurt my appetite — which par bonheur is always good on road side —*

at 10 A.M. horses brought to door — Mr. F. & myself mounted & on our way — through glade and forest — upland & prairie — fording streams & anon tramping o'er rich bottoms Indian corn lands — never wish to see a finer — or more picturesque Country — for 5 or 6 miles saw many fine farms

---

[3]Evidently our visitor was staying at the New England Company's boarding house, later called the Beloit House. We know David Bundy was its proprietor in 1839. Ellery Crane letter, *Beloit Free Press*, July 22, 1915.

[4]Lucius Fisher's home was located at the northwest corner of present-day Pleasant and Public Streets, facing the former. After prospering, Fisher built a handsome home next-door and his father lived in the cottage.

[5]Fisher. The diarist also refers to him as L.G.F.

— & Country well watered — in passing through the Oak Openings the deer would bound before our path — & ever & anon the prairie hen would rise in fright from its hiding — am charmed with land — scenery & all I see in this section — think would like to settle in it — perhaps — there is some drawbacks to all this Elisium — having taking a wide range of Country in our ride — sun warm & appetite warning us of Dinner turned our horses — head towards home — which we reached after a smart gallop across Prairie of an hour —

after Dinner finding wind very blustering went to room to write letter to N.Y. — & make some notes — towards evening walkd forth to observe the passing scene — many daily coming to place to make purchase of village or farm lots — upon which to settle — Mr. Hopkins — among number — in evening took tea Chez. L.G.F.'s saw his two sisters — two rather tall slender & gauche damsels — of no particular beauty — & a Duck[?] which paying attention to one of them spent evening some agreeable — took my hat & off — glad to get to bed — this evening a bed room to myself & a very neat one —

Oct. 17 — turned over in bed, took a peep from window found weather — clear & warm — sun high up in heavens — & thereupon left my couch — hurried on my garments — & sought the open air — to catch the balmy breeses before Brekf — am perfectly at home as if had lived here for years — hearing the ding-dong of bell — home & then to that vulgar employment eating — which makes e'en angels things of earth —

sat me down to write ? an Epistle to P.K.[6] *— in relation to his affairs — on whose business came — also wrote young Butterfield of Chicago — think of sending Storrs of Prarie du Lac*[7] *a letter — but felt a lassitude that made me lazy —*

I went forth & found the weather excessively warm — even for month of July — blistered my fingers in exercising — I then walked to bank of river to amuse myself in pistol practice — enjoyed it well — frightened all the birds but no damage to their numbers — never saw in Oct. weather equal to present — so glowing warm & rich — must be like the rich Autumnal Sun setts of Italy — the sky presenting just such a mellowed tint — & after sun had gone — to its rest — the starrs & moon shed forth their mild and balmy light — all things soothing to the mind & soul inspiring — fit for the Poet — in the beauty of the scene lingered — forgetfull of the tinkling bell of Supper — & lowing herds — returning to their fold — this is happiness of rustic life

---

[6]Phillip Kearney? These initials, plus the fact that Kearney and de Peyster were related, and that Lucius Fisher was later Kearney's real estate agent in the area, suggest that the diarist is de Peyster. However, a handwriting expert doubts that de Peyster wrote the diary entries.

[7]An area east of Milton.

— but one used to city life wants more — he needs Society & of a peculiar caste —

After Supper Sauntered about Village — air balmy & mild as in days of Summer — but the heavy dew that falls in this Country after Sun down — the year round set me to seek my health in my room — and some tired from variety of days employment Sought my couch —

Oct 18 the weather windy & hazy — did not turn out before 7 A.M. — & after going through the ablutions of the morn' descended — to breath the morning air before eating & found it quite windy & much cooler than yesterday — the sun quite hazy & red & enlarged two fold — didn't myself feel so well — caught a cold — have concluded to take my departure to day — but find it very difficult to get a conveyance — at last after much racing & running — & assistance of Mr. F. I was furnished with a one horse waggon & driver in which putting my traps — left with feelings of regret — the pretty[8] *— quiet Town of Beloit —*

So ends the diary account of a sophisticated but obviously charmed 1839 visitor's stay in Beloit. After only three years the tiny settlement obviously presented a character and quality that held considerable promise for the future. Other early accounts would continue to emphasize its refinement, respectability and culture at a time when some communities would be troubled by rougher and even lawless elements.[9]

15. Letters From Beloit

Few pioneer letters survive today and those that do are frequently stored away in private collections where they are largely lost to history. Those letters that are uncovered often furnish a fresh look at history being lived and provide a touchstone for corroborating or correcting dates and events. The families of Robert Crane, and his son Ellery, mindful of history, preserved many of their letters and papers that today enrich the archives of the Beloit Historical Society.

On August 28, 1839, Robert Crane wrote a letter to a cousin in the East:

. . . [Beloit] has a very fine water power now improved, propelling a saw and grist mill which runs day and night for the most part of the year . . . We have a village laid out here, lots are from $20 to $100 each. We can number about 200 inhabitants, some very comfortable dwellings, most of them painted white — but many live in rude shanties as lumber could not be had to supply as fast as wanted. +

---

[8]Whether the diarist uses the words "the pretty" in a special sense is uncertain. In 1850 the *Kenosha Telegraph* is quoted as saying Beloit was surnamed "The Pretty." Ch. 8, Sec. 2.

[9]Church, *Winnebago County History*, (1916), II, 678.

Our citizens are all well disposed and mostly N. Englanders. Society good. A Congregational church as been formed here of some 25 or 30 members. A settled minister preaches here and to a church 4 miles down R. river on every alternate sabbath.[1] +

We have a school house raised and enclosed this summer and to be finished for keeping school in the winter . . . Sarah[2] *has a school of some 8 or 10 small scholars in one of our rooms this season. A seminary is located here by the Senate of the Territory. When our settlement is sufficiently advanced we shall build for that.* +

We've one tavern, two stores and the third to be built this fall, a boarding house to be opened the first of Sept. Our water is good; no fever and ague except some few solitary cases where people have taken it in these parts and brought it with them . . . [3]

Another letter from Robert Crane survives, dated March 16, 1840, addressed to Charles Peck of New York:

. . . We have no diseases peculiarly appropriated to us as I know of. There have been some few cases of ague in some parts of the county, no cases of consumption . . . Our place has the name of being the most healthy of any portion of the west. I have been here three years and I have never seen less sickness in any place old or new . . . +

We have had two months perhaps of sleighing which is more than usual, yet not very cold and freezing. First rate sheep country. They will keep fat through the year with very little corn in the winter. You had better land at Chicago as there is more accomodation to this place and a regular stage route. There you will also find teamsters who make it their business to carry emigrants into the country which probably will be your best way.

There is not quite as much good timber here as could have been wished, but Rock River brings us a supply from a very heavy timbered country which commences within about 35 miles of us . . . +

If you settle in this village as I hope you will you cannot think you will be alone when I tell you there are thirty families now on a half mile square, and about all of the first rate Society. Many are happily disappointed when they become acquainted with the society and the business done here. There is a tin maker, cabinet, two tailors, blacksmith . . .

Crane's sister, Sarah, a member of the household, also describes life in Beloit in a letter dated September 14, 1840:

---

[1] Rev. William M. Adams of Pecatonica (Rockton).

[2] Crane's sister.

. . . You cannot conceive the mass of emigration to the West and also to this place, it is filling up fast. It is astonishing how well pleased people are in coming here, their eyes are satisfied with seeing and ears with hearing, on walking or riding out they exclaim Oh! how beautiful, how beautiful. . . +

17 houses have been erected since April last and 6 or 8 more are in the works, also a store of a man named Rood. . . +

I would not forget to mention that we have enjoyed a revival of religion much to our felicity, there was some 20 or 25 conversions, 7 men heads of families, Dr. White was one of the number. . .

Several years later, in 1845, another visitor would express his impressions of Beloit in a somewhat similar fashion:

. . . This has very much the appearance of a New England village, and powerful moral and educational influences are here felt. An Episcopalian and a Presbyterian Church are erected. The latter is built of stone. The thrift and beauty of this place are matters of notoriety. The Presbyterian and Congregational churches of Wisconsin and Northern Illinois are about to erect a college here of the first order. Seven thousand dollars contributed by the villagers are to be laid out immediately in buildings for this purpose.[4]

A year later on another visit he would add further:

. . . It is a most attractive village . . . The society, I am told, is remarkable for its intelligence and refinement. There are twenty stores here, three public houses, three churches and a flourishing female seminary. A college is soon to be erected. . . [5]

But these are hints of a later Beloit mentioned only to show that the bright promise of pioneer Beloit in the 1830s was real. Our story largely ends with 1838. The courage and indomitable spirit of Caleb and Chloe Blodgett had prevailed. By then the character and moral leadership of men such as Dr. White and Deacon Hobart had shaped its standards. Skilled craftsmen such as Robert Crane and Charles Messer were building well; and talented young businessmen, led by Lucius Fisher and John Hackett, were providing leadership for a gracious New England-type community, already dreaming of having its own college high on the east bank of Rock River where College Street stood waiting.

---

[4]Hopkins, I.A. *Sketches of the West or the Home of the Badgers* [illegible]

[5]*Ibid.*, 37.

Part II
The Naming of Beloit
1837 — 1976

Preface To Part II

Few people are aware of the century-old dispute surrounding the naming of Beloit that to this day has never been satisfactorily explained. For instance, who deserves credit for giving Beloit its distinctive name? When and under what circumstances the name *Beloit* came into existence has been the subject of remarkable debate and confusion ever since the first claim to the honor was made in 1856. Part 2 endeavours to trace painstakingly the story behind this puzzling dispute over the naming of Beloit.

Now we shall see how two of Beloit's most distinguished pioneer citizens created a minor scandal by flatly contradicting each other in claiming how the community was named. Through the years many respected citizens were drawn into the controversy, not always without creating new error and additional misunderstanding. Probably fading memories and rationalization, combined with hearsay and wishful thinking, have obscured forever what should have been a simple and charming story. As a consequence, readers for generations have unknowingly accepted the version of some book or newspaper they happened to read, unaware that other books and articles gave conflicting accounts of the same incident.

It is this writer's purpose to bring together every reference of any consequence to the naming of Beloit from 1837 to the present day. In doing so every known original source has been consulted in an effort to check its authenticity and eliminate or call attention to the more obvious errors. In the process the writer has uncovered a considerable amount of new data probably never before considered. Literally thousands of early issues of newspapers and personal letters have been examined in an effort to find new clues or run down obscure leads. Hopefully, some misinformation and a number of inaccuracies existing in later accounts have been pinpointed, particularly those which are second or third-hand in the telling.

In the hindsight of history it is remarkable that such an intriguing century-old dispute appears to have evoked almost no original research over the past hundred years by local historians before they accepted either of two conflicting versions. This may be partly explained by the tendency of local historians to accept without independent research the published statements of earlier histories, probably because the original sources were buried in newspaper articles or letters of unknown date scores of years before.

We must also bear in mind that all of the data in this account was never available to any previous writer. Therefore, although Part 2 will present everything in chronological order, the reader must remember that these earlier writers were for the most part writing independently without the benefit of a step-by-step record such as this account will utilize.

Here then is a new kind of historical detective story with a distinguished cast of characters — an unsolved mystery story that will search for motives, analyze circumstantial evidence, separate firsthand knowledge from hearsay, examine the credibility of witnesses, listen to character witnesses, and albeit still end with an unresolved and perplexing riddle.

Essentially this is the story of a baffling disagreement between two of Beloit's most honored pioneers, Lucius G. Fisher and John Hackett — probably the two foremost figures in the first thirty years of the community's history. It is also the story of three prominent Beloit historians, Robert P. Crane, himself a first-settler, and his son, Ellery Crane, both outspoken supporters of the Hackett story, and William Fiske Brown who was an influential defender of the Fisher story. If this summary in the end is inconclusive, it is hoped that it will at least serve as a source book of both old and newly-discovered references to the dispute before some would otherwise be lost to history.

Who named Beloit? The reader must decide.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Early References To The Naming Of Beloit

(1837 to 1878 — first credit given to Lucius G. Fisher — vague intimations of disagreement over the naming — the name Beloit said to be derived from a French word — or a variation of the name Detroit? — 40 years pass without a public contradiction of the Fisher claim)

1. 1846 — Delightful To Look Upon?

The earliest known reference of any kind to the naming of Beloit is found in a letter, dated October 6, 1846, written by Lewis Taylor after his arrival in Beloit to his brother Calvin in Mississippi. Since the letter has never been published before and is particularly descriptive of the ten year old community, it is here set forth at some length:

I left home on the 15th Ultimo and came as directly to this place as a voyage by the upper Lake would bring me here — landed at Racine and came across the country to Rock River. The word, Beloit is of French origin, and signifies "Fine Sight," "Beautiful situation," Delightful to look upon.[1]

The Village is mostly on the east side of Rock River. It is not very compactly built, but spread over a large surface, and many of the houses are small. Nine years ago it was in a state of nature. It now contains 1700 inhabitants — one con. and one Episc. Meeting house furnished — one Baptist and one Methodist meeting house partly up — two flouring mills . . . two saw mills, two taverns, eighteen dry goods stores, a good assortment of groceries, shoe shops, machine shop . . .

I am making short excursions into the neighboring towns conversing with the most intelligent farmers that I can meet with, endeavouring to learn their methods of farming, the health and resources of the country. I have talked with several who say that they have travelled all over the territory in order to find the best place and have settled down in the vicinity of Beloit, satisfied that there is no better place . . .

I spend my time with Sereno Merrill who is principal of the Academy. He came out in May and has been teaching about six weeks . . .

I find here a beautiful and productive country — and a delightful climate — the streams are white clear water running over hard Pebbly bottoms . . . [2]

2. 1850 — Belloeit, A Meeting Of Waters?

Four years later the second known reference to the naming of Beloit appears in the August 22, 1850 issue of a four-page weekly newspaper, the

---

[1]Emphasis supplied.

[2]State Hist. Society, Archives.

Beloit Journal, of Politics, Literature and General Intelligence.[3] The *Journal* editor begins by reprinting a paragraph he had taken from the *Kenosha Telegraph:*

If we were thinking of looking up a place to enjoy good society, see a beautiful river running over clean rocky bottom, have a place where the boys could be liberally educated away from the vicious influence of our large lake shore cities, where the means of living can be obtained, wholesome, abundant and cheap, we don't know a spot more likely to attract our attention than the place which has been surnamed "The Pretty."+

We believe Beloit must have been taken from the French, Bellot. If we are mistaken in our derivation of the name, we hope the Editor of the Journal will set us "all right" again. If we are not mistaken, we hope those interested will take measures to have the name restored...

The *Journal* editor then answers the above quotation with an explanation for his Beloit readers:

Our neighbor is not exactly right in his anticipations concerning the name of our town. Its orthography is not correct, however, as it is. It has a very frequent and natural supposition here, that the French word "Bellot," (pretty, nice, delicate) was the one originally designed. But the true word was "Belloeit," (also from the French, signifying the meeting of waters), and so it should doubtless be written. The present mode of spelling was adopted through misapprehension, but we hope the correct orthography may be restored, for we may as well have a pure and proper cognomen as an improper one.

3. 1856 — Lucius Fisher Credited With Naming Beloit

The third known reference to the naming of Beloit was made by Rev. Huntington Lyman in the first Rock County history, published in 1856, less than twenty years after the naming. According to Lyman:

The name, Beloit, originated with a committee appointed by a convention of citizens who were not satisfied with New Albany, the name which for a few months the town wore. The story is as follows: The committee having the matter in charge, being in consultation, one of its members was at labor to shape a French word to an English termination, when another member, Mr. L.G. Fisher, catching by the ear a sound somewhat analagous, pronounced the word Beloit, which was agreed upon in committee and adopted by the convention. Such was the origin of the

---

[3]Beloit College, Archives

distinctive and euphoneous name, Beloit.[4]

The source for Lyman's statement is not given; no date of naming is mentioned; and the only member of the committee identified was a prominent Beloit citizen, L.G. Fisher. This 1856 *History* was widely distributed and a number of copies still exist. Whether Lyman's version of the naming provoked any immediate reaction or disagreement among the early settlers, some of whom had actually participated in the event, cannot now be determined from any known letter or newspaper.

4. 1857 — Fisher's Name Omitted

The first clue pointing to a possible disagreement concerning the naming of Beloit appears in 1857, and then only indirectly, in an article about Beloit appearing in the *Chicago Magazine.* Its significance is related to what is not said rather than what it does say.

From the tenor of this feature article and that of the earlier *Kenosha Telegraph* account, it appears that Beloit already enjoyed considerable distinction among its neighbors, not only because of the natural beauty of its setting at the confluence of the Rock and the Turtle, but particularly for its prominence in cultural and religious leadership to a degree unique among early Wisconsin settlements. The author of this rare and almost unknown article refers to the naming of Beloit without mentioning Lucius Fisher, as follows:

In January, 1837, Dr. Horace White, as agent for the New England Company, bought of Moore and Goodhue one-third of their purchase. The accessions made that year, through this agency, to the new settlement were of a nature to establish permanently the character of the place. To this source, more, perhaps than any other, is the eminent social position Beloit now holds among the thriving towns of the west to be attributed. +

About this time the name of the village, which had for a few months been called New Albany, was changed to the more euphoneous one of Beloit, which notwithstanding its classical sound, has neither the merit of being significant of anything, like ancient names, or of following the more ruling passion of fastening some pompous quotation from antiquity to most incongruous and inapt transitions from time past to the time present. +

It was, as we are informed, or we should rather say perhaps, an "inspiration" of one of the "seers" who were on a certain day convened together in

---

[4]Guernsey and Willard, *Rock County History* (1856), 46. Fisher himself probably furnished this information. Inside Fisher's own journal containing his handwritten *Personal Recollections* were found six loose pages also in his handwriting containing the first chapter of a Beloit history. He lists the names of all Wisconsin governors to 1853 Wis. State Hist. Society, Archives.

the capacity of a "committee" for a christening, making sorry attempts to jumble English and French together.[5]

The writer of this 1857 *Chicago Magazine* account also acknowledged that he had the assistance of several well-known Beloiters (Lucius Fisher not being named) in the gathering of data for his story, mentioning as one informant, John Hackett, who will play a significant role in the later dispute.

Although this 1857 writer must have been familiar with Rev. Lyman's account of the year before (both writers, for instance, use the word *euphoneous* in describing the naming incident), his failure to include Fisher's name while enumerating several other names throughout his Beloit story appears to be a significant omission. Whether the writer had been made aware of some disagreement over Rev. Lyman's recent account of the naming is a matter of interesting conjecture.

Omission of Fisher's name from such an account, unless deliberate, would be unlikely for another reason. In 1857 Fisher, in addition to being one of Beloit's leading merchants, was also an alderman, former sheriff, a key trustee of Beloit College, bank president, land developer, railroad organizer, and civic leader.

A man of strong character and striking appearance, Lucius Fisher was a natural leader who would rise to prominence in any new settlement. In 1857 he was also something of a local hero. As a property owner, Fisher, acting upon the title opinion and advice of a rising Illinois lawyer named Abraham Lincoln, had taken the lead a few years before in successfully defending the land titles of many local residents against a bold and ingenious attack by that giant among Wisconsin lawyers, Matt Carpenter, who was then practicing law in Beloit.[6]

In any event, the *Chicago Magazine* writer did not see fit to credit Fisher, or anyone else, with naming Beloit. In the search for clues, mention of the name of John Hackett and omission of that of Lucius Fisher under these circumstances should be kept in mind by the reader.

5. 1866 — A Puzzling Silence

Nine years later, but still before any public controversy appears of record, the weekly newspaper *The Beloit Journal* published a series of 13 articles entitled "Early History of Beloit." These articles, despite an extensive treatment of personalities and events during the precise period when the naming of Beloit occurred, are strangely silent about how it happened.

---

[5]*Chicago Magazine, The*, Vol. I, 75 (1857), Chicago Historical Society.
[6]See *Appendix* (F).

This silence becomes inexplicable when we notice that Lucius Fisher himself wrote Chapter 11 of this series of articles, a chapter dealing extensively with events at the very time of the naming. In the light of subsequent developments we can reasonably assume that the omission of any reference to the manner in which Beloit was named was deliberate and not unintentional on the part of the editor of the *Beloit Journal.* It is quite possible that Fisher described the naming and his role in it only to have such references edited out before publication. We do know that Fisher moved to Chicago in 1866 before the series of articles appeared in print.[7]

However, these 1866-1867 *Journal* historical accounts do furnish one important piece of almost conclusive evidence as to the year and even the month when Beloit was named. Unfortunately, later writers on the subject were unaware of this newspaper's series of stories.

For instance, Chapter 5 of the *Journal* series quoted from three letters written by Deacon Horace Hobart shortly after his arrival in Wisconsin in 1837. Fortunately for later historians, the article included the address and date at the top of each letter as printed and thereby unintentionally gives us today excellent documentation for the date of Beloit's naming. The three Hobart letters reproduced in the 1866 *Journal* article were dated respectively:

Albany, August 28, 1837[8]
Beloit, October 9
Beloit, December 15, 1837[9]

Thus we can deduce from these three letter dates that the naming of Beloit occurred in or about the month of September 1837, and not in 1838 or 1857 (yes, 1857), as several later history books have stated.[10] We have already seen in Part One conclusive proof that the year was 1837. For

---

[7]Milo M. Quaife in a footnote to Lucius G. Fisher's *Pioneer Recollections of Beloit and Southern Wisconsin,* written in 1883, states: "Fisher left Beloit for Chicago in 1866, where with Ralph Emerson he built a block at the southeast corner of State and Washington Streets on the site of the present Columbus Building. Although burned out in the great fire of October 9, 1871, Fisher prospered in Chicago and became comparatively wealthy." *Wis. Magazine of History,* I, 266 (1917-1918).

[8]Emphasis added.

[9]*Beloit Journal,* June 28, 1866. Stephen D. Peet Scrapbook, Beloit College, Archives.

[10]The erroneous 1838 date, widely repeated, appears in *Rock County History* (1879), 612; Brown's *Past Made Present* (1900), 34; and *History of Rock County* (1908), I, 141. These three books are mainly responsible for perpetuating the 1838 error. The horrendous 1857 date (a typographical slip) appeared in the widely distributed *Book of Beloit* (1936), 12, and has been innocently repeated by casual historians ever since.

instance, the *Wisconsin Territorial Gazette and Burlington Adviser* newspaper refers to *Beloit* as a community in Rock County in both its November 25, 1837 and December 2, 1837 issues, copies of which still survive.[11]

6. 1869 — Fisher States He Named Beloit

Three years after Lucius Fisher moved from Beloit to Chicago, he wrote a letter to the *Beloit Free Press and Journal* and gave for the first time so far as is known what purported to be an exact account of how the naming of Beloit happened. He also named the members of the committee. It would be reasonable to guess that Fisher was perturbed over the curious silence of the 1866-1867 newspaper articles on the subject. It is quite possible that this letter to the editor was reiterating a version he had submitted in his article for the 1866-1867 series only to have it deleted by someone. Certainly Fisher appears anxious to fortify in print the claim first staked out for him in the 1856 *History* by Rev. Lyman. In the July 1, 1869 issue of the Beloit newspaper Fisher wrote:

Editor of Free Press & Journal:

It has occurred to me, that the origin of the name of your city might be interesting to many who are ignorant of it, and I will give it for insertion in your paper if you think it worth publishing. In doing this I trust I shall not be charged with a desire for notoriety. I give it as a historical fact, known to no one living but myself. +

When I reached Beloit in 1837 I found Caleb Blodgett there. He had given the place the name of New Albany. After quite an addition in numbers to the settlement, and in the summer of 1838, the name was found to be unsatisfactory to nearly all, and the citizens met in council to select another. A committee of three was chosen, consisting of Maj. Charles Johnson, Deacon Horace Hobart, and myself to report a name. +

After retiring for consultation one of our number proposed placing the letters of the alphabet in a hat, and drawing them, making words until we found one unlike any known one in use as the name of a town. +

While preparing for this process, Maj. Johnson said there was a French word signifying "handsome ground," which might be a good one for a name, if he could remember it. He commenced a pronunciation of words. When he sounded Ballotti, I said Beloit, Detroit, why not take Beloit, is it not as good as Detroit, and like that, unlike any other name? The other gentlemen assented and it was reported to the meeting, and unanimously adopted, and the place has known no other name since.

There are some yet living in Beloit, and other places, who were at the

---

[11] Wis. State Hist. Society, Newspaper file. See also Ch. 6, secs. 1, 8, supra.

meeting and voted upon our report. Maj. Johnson died the same season and Deacon Hobart but a few years since.

L. G. Fisher

For the first time in print, we learn from this letter that Beloit was named by a committee of three men, and we are told their names — Johnson, Hobart and Fisher himself.

Whether Fisher's letter provoked any discussion in the pages of the *Free Press* is unknown. No subsequent issues of the paper for the balance of 1869 and all of 1870 are known to exist. Judging by subsequent comment of the disputants, there was evidently no retort or challenge printed, although Fisher will mention many years later that he wrote two letters to the editor during this period. The author has not been able to locate the second newspaper letter.

Fisher's letter marks several firsts. In addition to learning for the first time the names of the committee members, we also are told for the first time the year in which the naming occurred — 1838, according to Fisher. [12] In addition, for the first time, reference is made to *Detroit* as having had some bearing upon shaping the name Beloit, although Fisher does reaffirm the French derivation mentioned in the earlier accounts.

In retrospect, it is remarkable that this information did not become a matter of public record until 1869, thirty-two years after the event itself. Undoubtedly the subject was often discussed during those years; for some reason little was written about it.

7. 1873 — Fisher Mentioned Again

The next known reference to the naming appears in the 1873 *Atlas of Rock County*, a delightful plat book volume filled with illustrations of local homes, businesses, farms and public buildings. Obviously borrowing from the 1856 *Rock County History*, the *Atlas* repeats Rev. Lyman's version which we have seen gives all credit to Lucius Fisher.

The *Atlas* account is significant primarily because it tends to show that no public disagreement existed as late as 1873 sufficient to alert the editor of the *Atlas* to any need to qualify his remarks. Instead, it appears that he simply borrowed what he needed from Lyman, presumably a definitive source, unaware of possible disagreement as to its accuracy. According to the *Atlas:*

This place was originally called New Albany; the name originated with a committee appointed by a convention of citizens who were not satisfied with

---

[12] Probably the origin of the incorrect 1838 date. Fisher will later correct it to 1837, but too late to avoid confusion.

the old name. The committee having the matter in charge being in consultation, one of its members was laboring to shape a French word to an English termination, when Mr. L.G. Fisher, a member of the body, catching a sound somewhat analogous, pronounced the word "Beloit," which was at once agreed upon, and adopted as the name to be worn by the city in the future..[13]

Thus, 35 years after the naming of Beloit took place, L.G. Fisher had twice been cited in prominent local history books as the man who coined the name Beloit. Furthermore, no clear evidence of any dispute over the naming is known to have existed, although we have already remarked upon the puzzling omissions of credit to anyone in both the 1857 *Chicago Magazine* article and the 1866-1867 newspaper series in the *Beloit Journal.*

Finally, writing from Chicago, Fisher had unequivocally claimed the honor for himself in his 1869 letter to the Beloit editor, confirming and elaborating upon the earlier published accounts.

It is a truism that history is written by the survivors, and certainly as far as history shows — regardless of any unrecorded rumblings of discontent over the Fisher claim that may have been taking place among some of the other first settlers — the written record is clear that Lucius Fisher as late as 1877 was the man publicly credited with naming Beloit. For forty years no one else appears to have claimed otherwise in print.

---

[13]Page 8.

CHAPTER NINE

Controversy Over The Naming

(Robert Crane gives a different account of the naming of Beloit, ignoring Lucius Fisher — Fisher promptly contradicts Crane — Crane replies to Fisher with a lengthy documentation of his version — John Hackett sides with Crane against Fisher — Fisher fails to name a single supporter of his own claim).

1. 1878 — Robert Crane Contradicts Fisher

It was not until 1878 — more than 40 years after the naming occurred — that unmistakable evidence of controversy over the naming of Beloit finally appears of record. That year Robert P. Crane, one of the earliest settlers and like Lucius Fisher (who had left Beloit for Chicago eleven years earlier) long active in local affairs, published his own lengthy memoirs in a series of newspaper articles entitled *The Early History of Beloit.* In describing the naming, Crane gave a startling different story which flatly contradicted both Lyman's 1856 version and the 1873 *Atlas* account, as well as Fisher's own story.

Ignoring without a word of comment or explanation these earlier accounts, which we have seen gave Fisher credit for naming Beloit, Robert Crane instead listed the names of three different committee members whom he said had selected Beloit for a name (Fisher's name not being mentioned), as follows:

The name "Turtle," the first by which this place was known, did not suit the settlers very well, therefore some proposed to call it "Albany." This did not take any better than "Turtle" and so it was decided in the fall of 1838 to call a meeting to settle the matter, each man to bring one or more names.+

Accordingly the meeting was held, (about twenty present, being all of the men in the settlement). Some sixty names were presented, and all voted down. Then a committee of three were appointed, Viz: Col. Johnson, Caleb Blodgett and — Allen.+

After retiring they found it very difficult to agree on any one name, so they commenced to form one by changing the letters of some other name. Col. Johnson suggested "Detroit," from which by changing the letter D to B and the T to L with the R left out, they had the name, "Beloit" (This method of making the name was kept a secret for a long time, but finally it got out.)+

The committee on their return presented this name to the meeting which was adopted unanimously. The object was to select such a name as had not been applied to any other place. Hence the readiness with which it was adopted.[1]

---

[1] *Beloit Free Press,* Feb. 14, 1878.

In this casual fashion — 40 years after the event — when many of the first settlers were dead or moved away, and when memories were dimmed by time, Robert Crane's new story brought into the open what must have been a long simmering controversy in certain Beloit circles.

For the first time of record we are now confronted with the names of a different committee: Col. Johnson, Caleb Blodgett, and a man known or remembered only as Allen.[2] Also, according to Crane, Col. Johnson was the one principally responsible for devising the name Beloit. Lucius Fisher is not even mentioned. Finally, Crane says the year was 1838 and repeats Fisher's earlier error.[3]

Crane's account is interesting in another respect. He ignores the French derivation of the word, mentioned in the earlier accounts, and stresses the importance of the word Detroit in the committee's deliberations.

Two weeks later in its February 28, 1878 issue the *Beloit Free Press* published two additional communications commenting upon the Crane series of articles, as follows:

Mr. Editor:

No doubt all old residents and new residents are reading with pleasure Mr. Crane's accounts of the early days in Beloit. Such records from eye-witnesses are invaluable to the historians, and are not without their value in cultivating among us a disposition to make an honorable city record in the future.

. . . The late A.B. Howe used to give the origin of the city's name in a somewhat different way. He said that he attended the meeting when the matter was discussed, and that the name Beloit was "made by the Committee out of a French word for beautiful," their idea being to get a word that should be short, absolutely new, and agreeable in sound. +

The French belle, (from the later Laten bellus) would be the word that Mr. Howe had in mind, unless, the committee happened to know of the comparatively rare French bellot, which also means beautiful. May it not be that both Mr. Crane and Mr. Howe were right, — the committee starting with the word Detroit and shaping it toward the belle or bellot, that they might often hear from Thebolt or some other French halfbreed, or that might have been suggested to them by some student of French?

Y.

Mr. Crane's Reply

---

[2]This Mr. Allen remains a mystery figure for many years. He was almost certainly Nathan Allyn who located near Shopiere and died in 1838. See Ch. 4, sec. 2.

[3]Crane, like Fisher, will later correct this 1838 date to the proper 1837 year, but too late to prevent the 1879 *History* from repeating the error in book form.

To the Editor of Free Press:-

The suggestions of Y, as to the process of arriving at the name Beloit is doubtless the most natural one, for a student or linguist. But when I look at the members of that committee — all men of advanced years — the chairman having barely a common school education, such as was enjoyed fifty or sixty years ago, in the northern part of Vermont, and the other two members just able to read and write, that they would take up a French word as a base to build upon — to such as were aware of this, it is quite amusing, for Col. Johnson the chairman, confessed that he knew not a word of French — certainly the others did not. It was Greek to them all. How then could they have taken the word belle or bellot and given its definition? So long as they did not know there were such words.+

As for Thebolt he was one of the class of uneducated Canadian French, and we bought his interest, and he left at least three months before Mr. Howe came here, and nearly a year and a half before any discussion was had on the name Beloit.[4] *Therefore he knew nothing of it — had no interest in it.+*

One may say then, how come Col. J. to define the word Beloit as a French term, if he did not understand it? The reason, as he afterwards gave it, was that he must say something in order to have it take with the people and from the fact that Turtle Creek unites with Rock River, he said it meant "the union of two streams."+

Mr. Howe must have been mistaken as to the term "beautiful" being used. Various definitions have been given. Some had said, Beloit meant "Here I take my stand." It may be that some of these classical definitions have been given through some gazetteer that has been published for Beloit. I am satisfied the statement as I gave it is correct. If any one is still in doubt, I will refer him to Hon. Jno. Hackett and Mr. Daniel Tasker, both of whom attended that original meeting.

R. P. Crane

Robert Crane's above reply is of particular significance in one respect. He submits the names of two early settlers, John Hackett and Daniel Tasker, as being present at the original meeting and implies that they are the source of his information. Both were still living and Crane was obviously satisfied that they would corroborate him.[5] In the case of John Hackett this would be

[4]Crane errs in saying a year and half. He is relying on the mistaken 1838 naming date. We know Tebo left Blodgett's Place about May 1, 1837. Howe arrived Aug. 22. The naming occurred about September.

[5]Robert Crane apparently did not attend the meeting at which the naming of Beloit resulted. He never claimed that he was present or was relying on his own memory of that night. In all their writings on the subject, neither he nor his son, Ellery, offer any explanation for this presumed absence.

of particular weight. Perhaps no other men were more prominently identified with the day-to-day life of the Beloit community during its first 40 years than John Hackett and Lucius Fisher.

2. 1878 — Fisher Defends His Claim

A month later the issue was joined. From Chicago where he had lived and prospered for 12 years after leaving Beloit in 1866, Lucius Fisher addressed a reply to the editor of the *Free Press* which appeared in the March 28, 1878 issue beneath the following (sardonic?) caption:

MORE "EARLY HISTORY"

L. G. Fisher Tells How the Name
"Beloit" was selected.

Major Charles Johnson, Horace
Hobart and L. G. Fisher did it
in their Little Shanty.

EDITOR OF THE FREE PRESS - Dear Sir:-

The origin of the name of your town and city is a matter of interest to your citizens, I doubt not. I have twice[6] *in the last ten years given to your paper its true origin, and ask the privilege again, as I see that in Mr. Crane's "Early History of Beloit," he is in error on that question.*

In the autumn of 1837[7] *at a meeting of the citizens then at New Albany (the name given to the place by Caleb Blodgett) held at the Beloit House, a committee of three was appointed to select and present a name for the place. Major Charles Johnson, Horace Hobart, and L.G. Fisher were chosen, and retired to a shanty near by, to find a name.+*

Major Johnson, although from New England, was exceedingly jealous of the influence of the New England Company, of which Dea. Hobart was a member. The Major and myself left the room in advance of Dea. Hobart, and on our way to the shanty, he said to me "Now let us get an original name; Hobart and that N.E. Co. will want Colbrook or Plymouth or the common name of some old New England." I was quite amused at this sly attempt of Major Johnson to electioneer me, and replied, "Certainly, we will get something new, if possible."+

After Dea. Hobart joined us, one of the three proposed to put the letters of the alphabet into a hat, and see what we could get by drawing letters. Major Johnson suggested that Ballote, a French word signifying handsome, grand,

---

[6]One was his 1869 letter. The second, never located, may possibly have been a reply to some question or challenge. *Free Press* files before 1871 are incomplete.
[7]Finally, the correct year.

would be a good name. Not understanding the French language, he had not selected the word he wanted, and while he was sounding that and other words, I spoke Beloit, as it is a new word, and I like the sound of it. The others at once assented, and we reported it, and it was unanimously adopted.

I am the only one of that committee now living. Before the death of Dea. Hobart, the origin of the name was published in the "History of Rock County,"[8] *and in the main, correctly.*

Chicago *L.G. Fisher*

Fisher repeats, as he did in 1869, the names of the same three committee members. Johnson, Hobart and Fisher — not Johnson, Blodgett and Allen, as Crane had just claimed. Thus, Johnson is the only man both disputants agree upon.

Although Fisher's letter was prompt, detailed and unequivocal, he unfortunately failed to name any living first-settler as a supporter of his version. In fact, he never does in any of his writings.

Fisher's last paragraph reference to the fact that Deacon Hobart, whom he says was a member of the committee, was still alive when the 1856 *History* gave credit to Fisher actually proves nothing. The 1856 *History* mentioned only Fisher's name, not Hobart's. Therefore, if Hobart had not been a member of the committee (as Crane contended), Hobart would have had no reason to correct the 1856 account. Hence Fisher's reference to Hobart as a silent corroborator is meaningless. Hobart apparently never had anything to say on the subject during his lifetime, at least not in writing.

3. 1878 — Robert Crane Documents His Case Against Fisher

Robert Crane's reply to Fisher soon followed and was published in the *Beloit Free Press,* May 16, 1878, and appears to have ended the debate which must certainly have attracted considerable interest in the community. Aside from also correcting himself that the year of naming was 1837 (as Fisher had), instead of 1838, Crane proceeded to introduce the names of other early citizens in support of his version and in repudiation of Fisher's claim. It is a long letter never before published in any book and it summarizes impressively the case against Fisher. In reading the caption of this letter and comparing it with the preceding one for Fisher's letter, we can detect the editor's mild bias in Crane's favor:

"BELOIT"

More as to How the Early Settlers
Found the Name

---

[8]Guernsey and Willard, 1856 *History,* 46.

Mr. Crane Presents a Strong Array of
Evidence in Proof of His Original Statement.

Editor of the Beloit Free Press:-

In your paper of March 28th, Mr. L.G. Fisher undertakes to correct my statement in giving the origin of the name Beloit, also claims that he was one of the committee chosen at a meeting of the citizens to select a name, etc.+

I regret very much to have a controversy with Mr. Fisher, as I always have felt we were friends. But to take his version of the case, it would appear that my statement, as to the way, and by whom the name was obtained, as well as some of the names of those who composed that committee, was clearly and positively false. I therefore feel compelled to reply.+

I have waited longer than I intended, to get testimony that possibly I might show the correctness of my statement as I first gave it, except as to the year. I think I put it in the fall of 1838, as the time that original meeting was held. I should have said in the fall of 1837.+

But the facts as to who constituted that committee, and their doings, as I gave them in my extracts, I am satisfied are substantially correct. There are several persons living who were then here and knew of that original meeting, its doings, etc.; also others who did not attend the meeting. But hearing the whole transaction relative to this subject so often repeated by different individuals, in the months and years immediately following, this whole matter was perfectly understood by all the early settlers. Some have gone from us and are now living in Massachusetts, Kansas, Southern Illinois and Northern Wisconsin, besides others living nearer.

I have not had returns from all that I had hoped to, hence the delay. I have permission to refer to a number of names in proof of my statement, which I can give if necessary, besides those now given. Previous to giving the names of that special committee their acts, etc., I consulted the Hon. Jno. Hackett, who said his recollections were very clear as to place of meeting and the names of the committee, the mode of obtaining the word Beloit, and the definition given of it at that time; all being more firmly fixed in his mind by the remarks made by Col. Johnson, chairman of that committee, in a subsequent conversation to which reference was had in my sketches.+

Mr. Fisher gives the chairman the title of Major. I call him Col. Johnson. I am not advised as to whether he ever held a military commission or not. It is often the case that certain men in a given community are known by some civil or military title, though they may never have held such a position. I state this that the reader may know that the same person is meant.+

Mr. Hackett is well known in this community as a high-minded, worthy gentleman. He can have no motive whatever for stating anything false about his matter, as he would gain nothing by it.+

Besides, it is seriously questioned by many with whom I have recently conversed, whether Mr. Fisher was here at all when the above named meeting was held. He had been here, (came in July '37), spending but a short time and returned to Milwaukee; as his sisters remarked the year following, to a gentleman now living in Massachusetts, that he stayed long enough to make some arrangements for the coming of his father and family. His father arrived here in December '37, expecting to find him here, but did not. The father then went to Milwaukee and there found him with a sprained ankle, it is said. Mr. Fisher will recollect how it was. He stayed there most of the winter following.[9]+

To show the justice of Mr. Fisher's claim to being the author and producer of the word Beloit, I will give statements coming from several of those who were pioneers at this place, some of whom were located here before Mr. Fisher claims ever to have been here.

First, I will give a true copy of Deacon Mears' statement, which was written and signed by himself, dated April 15th, 1878 and is as follows: "Having been requested by Mr. Crane to make a statement of what I know about the origin of the name, Beloit, I well remember this, that I then lived out on a claim three miles from town, and seeing Mr. A.L. Field soon after, he told me this, that a meeting was had and a committee appointed to select a name and report to the meeting, and that Maj. Johnson being on that committee proposed the name Beloit, and said it was a French word, meaning 'junction of two rivers'; and this he said to make it take, not knowing anything of French. I also had conversation with Daniel Blodgett a short time before his death and he told me the same story, and further said that L.G. Fisher was not here at the time, but had gone back to Milwaukee. I remember he did go back then and was gone several months, and when he came back again, brought some stoves, and I bought one, — the first stoves that were ever in Beloit."

I will here state that Mr. Mears said to me that he or Mr. Blodgett had seen in some print, that Mr. Fisher had claimed to have been the first one to get up the word Beloit, and believing his claim to that honor to be groundless, was the occasion of that conversation.

Mr. C.M. Messer came here in July '37. Says he has no recollection of seeing Mr. Fisher here during the summer, after he (Messer) came. Would have known Mr. F. had he seen him, for he had previously known him in Vermont. Still, it was possible he might have been here a short time, but is certain he was not here at the time of the said meeting. He first saw Mr.

---

[9]Fisher apparently intended to answer Crane's accusation that he (Fisher) was in Milwaukee at the time of the naming. In his *Pioneer Recollections* (1883), 277-278, Fisher states that he returned to New Albany in September, 1837, for a stay of about four weeks, during which time the naming occurred.

Fisher here in the latter part of February '38. He had just come in from Milwaukee. The land sale which was to have been held in November, '37 had been adjourned till early in March, '38. Mr. Fisher stayed only a few days, when they together took passage for Milwaukee, to be at the adjourned sale. Also he says, that at different times, in passing Mr. Johnson prior to the said meeting, he noticed him to be in a deep study. He would see his lips moving, and when near enough, could hear him pronouncing words, first, "Detroit" then "Betroit." Then he would change other letters in the word Detroit, evidently to try the sound. Mr. Johnson was very partial to that name; had proposed it to some others as the name for this place; it being object to, he then took that as a foundation out of which to make another word of similar length and sound, and finally brought out, after some weeks of study, the word "Beloit." Having these facts, we can see more clearly the true origin of the word, — that it was not taken on account of any French meaning at all; all speculations made upon that amounts to nothing.

Mr. Wm. Jack says he came here the latter part of October, '37 that he was here in time to attend the said meeting; that Mr. Fisher was not here when he came. Is positive Mr. Fisher did not attend the above meeting.[10]

It was well known that Mr. Fisher had remained in Milwaukee for some time before coming here, and that was his home till such time as his father could get his family out here, about the 1st of March, 1838.

It cannot be said that any one making these statements here given, can have any other motive than to bring out facts relative to finding the name "Beloit," and this is all the interest the writer has. If Mr. Fisher was really the author of the name, I certainly would be as ready to accord the honor to him as to any one. But so long as I have so much evidence to believe he is wrong, I shall hold my present opinion. I have called on many of the first settlers to learn what they recollected in regard to the name "Beloit" — by whom it was introduced, and nearly every one was ready to say Mr. Johnson proposed it. Not one named Mr. Fisher of all that were here at that time. +

Several said to me: Why is it that Mr. Fisher is so tenacious in claiming to be the author of the name Beloit, when there are so many still living, who know to the contrary? If other meetings had been held (and I know of none) and had Mr. Fisher attended such, (if any) it would not confirm his claim to that honor, for all that was said, or done previous to the last meeting was only preliminary to it, at which the committee were chosen, the name proposed and adopted.

---

[10]William Jack was the only settler to be quoted by both sides. In 1900, as an old man, it will be claimed that he said Fisher was a member of the committee. However, Jack evidently did not come to Beloit until November, some two months late for the naming.

I think I have already produced evidence enough to convince any reasonable mind, First, That Col. Johnson, without aid, produced the word "Beloit," as already described; second, That Mr. Fisher could not have been on that committee, from the fact that it is pretty evident he was not present at that time when they were chosen and the business done.

Now, Mr. Fisher says he is the only one of that committee now living. Suppose we should admit that. Are there not others living that know the entire transactions as well?

Now, were I to make a list of all the names who know and dare to speak the truth in regard to this matter he might be astonished. I have no desire to say more, and think it would be better for all concerned to let the whole subject rest where it is.

R.P.C.

The implied threat in Crane's last paragraph is unmistakable: say more, and I will back up what I say with more names and statements. For reasons of his own, Fisher did not reply to Crane's summation of the evidence and listing of witnesses against him. His subsequent silence in the face of Crane's detailed contradiction must have been vexing to such a proud man as Lucius Fisher. Although residing in Chicago, Fisher was still a trustee of Beloit College and a prominent figure in both communities. His failure to respond to Crane's blunt charges is certainly an argument against the Fisher claim.

In his first letter to the editor, printed February 28, 1878, Crane had clearly implied that John Hackett and Daniel Tasker, both present at the 1837 meeting, were not only on his side but had supplied him with the information for his refutation of Fisher. In his second letter above, Crane again calls upon Hackett as his authority and in addition quotes Deacon Mears and C.F. Messer as supporters. Crane also implies that Daniel Blodgett and William Jack agree with him that Fisher had nothing to do with the naming of Beloit.

Significantly, in all the writing on the subject it does not appear that Lucius Fisher ever named or claimed a single first settler as a corroborator of his story. Rev. Lyman who gave the honor to Fisher in the 1856 *History* was not a first settler. Even here we have seen that Lyman probably received his information from Fisher himself. Why Robert Crane waited so many years to publicly dispute Fisher, however, will always remain a puzzle.

4. 1879 — A History Book Supports Robert Crane

A year later in 1879 Butterfield's *The History of Rock County, Wisconsin* was published, the second Rock County history in book form, and the first since the 1856 *History* in which Lyman's account giving credit to Fisher had appeared. Its description of the naming of Beloit ignores Fisher and follows faithfully the Robert Crane account, elaborating somewhat upon the circumstances:

Shortly after Blodgett settled here he named the place New Albany, and it was so called until the fall of 1838, though the name had never been acceptable to the majority of the settlers. It was proposed to change the name to Waterloo, but this we also objected to. Finally, about the time above mentioned, a meeting of the settlers was called for the special purpose of deciding upon a name by which the village would thereafter be known. +

At this meeting, a good many names were suggested, none of which proved acceptable, and it was finally decided to appoint a committee of three of the oldest residents to report a name or names from which the meeting would make a selection by a majority vote. The committee consisted of Major Charles Johnson, Caleb Blodgett and Mr. Allen. +

After a brief absence the committee returned, and through its chairman, Maj. Johnson, reported to the meeting that a name had been agreed upon in committee which it was believed would prove acceptable to all present, for the reason that it was peculiar, distinctive and descriptive; it had been obtained by compounding French words, and its significance in English was beautiful and the junction of two streams, and he presented for the consideration of the meeting the name Beloit. The report of the committee was enthusiastically adopted. +

A few days after this meeting, John Hackett encountered Maj. Johnson on the street and was asked how he like the new name of the village. Mr. Hackett replied that he liked it amazingly; it was just what a village named should be, different from any other place and singularly and appropriately descriptive, whereupon Maj. Johnson laughed heartily. +

Being asked the cause of his merriment, he replied that it was because of the good joke they had on the two or three French scholars who were present when the name was proposed and adopted. He (Johnson) knew nothing whatever about French, but he had been thinking over this matter of a name for the settlement for a long time and finally puzzled out the word Beloit, which, so far as his knowledge went, was no more French than it was Hebrew, and was utterly devoid by any meaning whatever, except that it was now the name of a village in Wisconsin.[11]

In wholeheartedly following and expanding upon the Crane version of the naming of Beloit, Butterfield unfortunately allowed the erroneous 1838 date to slip in. Obviously he overlooked Crane's own correction of the date back to the proper year 1837. As a consequence the 1838 error has persisted in book form to the present day, unlike newspaper errors that are usually soon forgotten and never reappear except to the occasional researcher.

By 1879 then, 42 years after the event, at a time when some of the original participants were still alive, and after the nature of the controversy was

[11] 1879 *History*, 612.

widely known and its merits had been extensively debated, the challenge of Robert Crane would seem to have prevailed over the long-standing claim of Lucius Fisher. The comprehensive and more carefully compiled 1879 *History of Rock County* had flatly reversed the 1856 *History* without even bothering to mention that Fisher had a different version.

In retrospect, if the 1856 *History* had the advantage of being both first and closer in time to the event reported, when memories would presumably be fresher, it had the evident disadvantage of having been compiled without awareness of the existence of possible disagreement. The 1856 reference by Lyman, as we have seen, was brief, bare in detail, and mentioned only Fisher's name without giving any clue as to its source.

5. 1883 — Fisher Reaffirms His Claim

In 1883 a few years before his death, Lucius Fisher, by then in his seventies, wrote in longhand his unpublished memoirs. Whether he subsequently showed his manuscript to any of his Beloit friends is problematical. We have no record of its being published in any form prior to 1917 at which time the journal containing the narrative was given by a grandson to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Although it contributes nothing new to the debate, it is important as the only known document stating Fisher's position after the shocking dispute of 1878.

After mentioning in his journal that Blodgett had first called the community New Albany, Fisher says that he returned to Beloit after a trip to Chicago and Milwaukee some time in September, 1837 and that during the next four week period the naming occurred.[12] In Fisher's words:

. . . a meeting of the settlers was called at the Beloit House, which was at that time enclosed and partly finished, to give a better name to the place. Major Johnson, Deacon Hobart, and myself were appointed a committee to report one and we proposed several and finally agreed to place the alphabet in a hat and see if we could not get a combination of letters that would give us a name that would be a new one. While proposing this, Mr. Johnson undertook to sound a French word for handsome ground and in trying he spoke "Ballotte," and I said after him "Beloit," like Detroit in sound and pretty and original I think. All sounded it and liked it and we reported it to the twenty or thirty who had sent us out and it was unanimously adopted; and it has ever since been Beloit and not New Albany.[13]

However, it must be emphasized that the above account was privately

---

[12]Here Fisher designates the date of naming (about September 1837) with great accuracy, the first writer to do so. Unfortunately, although both he and Crane agree on the date, their earlier errors have survived to confuse the year for posterity.

[13]*Pioneer Recollections*, 266.

written as a part of a biography for Fisher's family and his descendants. As far as we know, it went unpublished for over thirty years after his death.

Fisher's complete silence from 1878 until his death in 1886 in the face of Robert Crane's documented charges must have puzzled some of his Beloit friends. His further failure to name anyone as a possible corroborator may very well have appeared as a default on his part. Certainly Crane's undisputed documentation must have been galling to Fisher in his last years. Advanced in age and living in Chicago, he appears to have retreated into dignified silence. Not a single first settler ever came forward to support Fisher in print.

6. 1884 — John Hackett Contradicts Fisher

One more damaging blow to Fisher's claim was yet to come. *The Beloit Free Press* on December 4, 1884 published an item of its own, entitled *Origin of the Name "Beloit,"* giving credit to John Hackett for its information. Hackett had come to The Turtle with Caleb Blodgett himself and was a towering figure in the first fifty years of the community's existence. Hackett's account squarely supports that of Robert Crane and the 1879 *History* in all essentials:

Caleb Blodgett was the owner of all the land now embraced within the city limits of Beloit. He purchased it of a Frenchman by the name of Thebolt in the summer of 1836, for a trifle, say $200 or $300. In 1837 there came to this place the New England colony, prominent among whom were Dr. Horace White, Messrs. Hobart, Houston, Colley and Fisher.+

The new settlement was called Turtle Creek, New Albany, etc., none of which names were satisfactory. Finally a meeting was called of the settlers in the latter part of the year 1837, for the sole purpose of fixing upon a name. Some wanted it to be called Blodgett. Finding that one proposed one name and another, no agreement could be arrived at a committee consisting of Messrs. Johnson, Blodgett and Allen was appointed to retire and to report upon a name.+

In the committee room the name of Detroit was considered, and then it was suggested that a word might be manufactured to sound like it, and putting their wit and rhyming into play the word Beloit was soon evolved. It had a pleasant sound and they agreed to present it before the Council.+

Doing this one man, not a member of the Committee, arose and seconded the motion to adopt the report, saying that the committee had been most fortunate in their selection, for the word Beloit was from the French and meant the meeting of two streams, and here we have, my fellow settlers, the Turtle Creek flowing into the Rock. What could be more appropriate? The speech took. The report of the committee was carried unanimously.+

And it was not until a day or two afterward that the fact became known

that the seconder of the motion had played a trick upon his audience, and that the word Beloit had no more French about it than it had Hebrew; in fact, was but a mere combination of letters producing a pleasant sound and had no classical significance whatever.+

Hon. John Hackett is authority for the above version.[14]

Thus, by 1884 the debate seemed settled at last. It now looks obvious from this and other scattered clues that Robert Crane had always had the staunch support of John Hackett in his dispute with Fisher. By 1885 it would appear that Crane and Hackett, with the assistance of the 1879 *History,* had largely discredited Fisher's claim to have named Beloit.

7. 1886 — Death Silences Fisher, Crane and Hackett

At this stage death played a role in the debate by removing the three key participants. Robert Crane had died in 1882 at age 76. In 1886 John Hackett died, aged 78. Three weeks later Lucius Fisher died, also aged 78. All three distinguished first settlers were buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Beloit. Their dispute, however, would not be forgotten by the next generation. It would live on and be strenuously renewed some fifteen years later by two sons of first settlers who were amateur historians and also disagreed over the naming of Beloit.

The death of Lucius Fisher in Chicago was the signal for an impressive memorial article in the *Beloit Free Press.* Probably no Beloit man had achieved greater prominence and recognition than Lucius Fisher in so many fields. It is perhaps safe to say that during the years 1837 to 1866, while Fisher lived in Beloit, he played a larger role in the shaping and developing of the community than any other individual. His subsequent business success in Chicago was also impressive. In reviewing Fisher's life, the writer of the *Free Press* eulogy said inaccurately in part:

. . . With Mr. Charles Goodhue, he embarked in an Indian dug-out and sailed down Rock River on an exploring expedition. At the site of our city, which had a handful of settlers who were calling it New Albany, they stopped and both became identified with the early development of this town. Mr. Fisher purchased of Mr. Blodgett an interest in a squatter's claim, and with Blodgett, Dr. White and John Hopkins, plotted that part of the town east of the river.+

The question of a name was reopened, and catching from the lips of the old Indian trader a French word for a pretty place, Mr. Fisher devised and

---

[14]This article appears to have been adapted from a letter written by Rev. Fayette Royce. The Beloit Hist. Society has a copy of a letter closely paralleling the above *Free Press* account, captioned "Origin of the Name of Beloit by the Rev. Fayette Royce, after talking with John Hackett, Beloit Pioneer."

suggested the name "Beloit," a pretty name for a pretty place — which was at once adopted, and which has been transferred to several other states . . . [15]

The best that can be said for the above account is that it was an obituary written without research. Neither Fisher nor Crane, nor anyone else, had ever given such a version. The reference to the old French trader (Joseph Tebo) is not supported by any other first-hand account, although it may have had a degree of popular acceptance based on speculation. Actually, we know that Tebo had moved to Koshkonong some three months before Fisher's first arrival. The newspaper story is interesting for two reasons. It illustrates the unreliability of hurriedly assembled obituaries. More significantly, it demonstrates that Lucius Fisher was still associated with the naming of Beloit, notwithstanding all that had been written against his cause since 1878.

8. 1886 — Two Letters From Crane's Widow

On March 17, 1886 the widow of Robert Crane addressed a letter from her home in Florida to her 49 year old step-son, Ellery Crane, who then was living in Massachusetts. This letter still survives and gives us a rare glimpse into the human side of the long debate which mere newspaper articles and history books have failed to capture. Part of this never-before published letter reads as follows:

Kind friend

I think I don't owe you a letter. I want you to do a favor for your father altho he is not here to reply to an untruth made in the Free Press. I will send the paper to you. +

Lucius Fisher is dead. The one that wrote the Memorial has told a falsehood in saying that Mr. Fisher named Beloit. I think the son of Pres. Chapin has written it so to make Mr. Fisher appear well with the public. I like to have you say why did not Mr. Fisher deny Mr. Crane statement. Why did this friend of Mr. Fisher wait 3 years until he was dead, then put it in the paper that he did name Beloit. +

Mr. Hackett told your father that Mr. Chapin came to him and said is that true that Mr. Fisher did not name Beloit he said that was so. Some one is bold enough to write it knowing that Mr. Crane and Mr. Hackett are gone and think there is no one to deny it. You have your father's reply and in that is Dea. Mears name, Mr. Wm. Jack-they are living. +

Years ago when the History of Rock County was written[16] *Mr. Fisher told that he named Beloit. When your father told who did name Beloit he*

---

[15] *Beloit Free Press*, March 11, 1886.

[16] Lyman's account in the 1856 *History*.

thought if he said through the paper that he named it it would make that in the book true . . . His niece in Chicago said that Uncle Fisher keeps thinking he did, so finally say he did . . . [17]

In the above letter Mrs. Crane speculates that the memorial article was written by the son of President Chapin of Beloit College. If correct, that would be Robert Coit Chapin. Certainly the College owed a great debt of gratitude to Lucius Fisher who was one of the prime-movers at its creation and who had served as a trustee for over thirty years. Fisher was also a brother-in-law of President Chapin.

About a month later the *Beloit Free Press* in its issue of April 22, 1886 published the following anonymous letter signed simply "C", almost certainly penned by Ellery Crane in response to his step-mother's request:

. . . It is quite possible that the writer of the "In Memoriam" of Mr. Fisher had only general memoranda furnished, from which to work, and did not write from personal knowledge. If so it would be very easy in making up an article of that nature, without actual dates for verification, to make statements which might be misleading, if not partially incorrect . . . +

The second point is the part attributed to Mr. Fisher in naming the town. I am surprised at that statement, for the reason that matter was so fully discussed in the columns of the Free Press during the months of March and May, 1878. When it was positively shown that Mr. F. was not a member of the committee chosen to supply a name, and further than that, he was not in the town at the time of the meeting when the name was selected and adopted.

As far as we know, C's letter provoked no further response and there the matter rested — for the time being. However, a follow-up letter from Mrs. Crane to her step-son Ellery also survives in the Crane letter file of the Beloit Historical Society. Referring again to the Lyman account in the 1856 *History*, Mrs. Crane says in another never-before published letter:

. . . Mr. D. Blodgett told your father of it and lent it to him. Mr. Fisher's name was in it saying that he named Beloit and when he saw in the Free Press that Major Johnson named Beloit then Mr. Fisher had to put it in the paper that he Mr. Crane was mistaken he named it. +

I was so glad that Mr. Hackett told your father to put his name in the paper that Major Johnson named it. I regret that I did not put in the paper what Mr. Hackett wrote me he said my loss was irreperable. I had not only lost a kind and loving husband but an upright honest man free from guile he had known him long and valued him as he knew him they were friends from the first time they meet till your father died he wrote your father after he came here he said Mr. Hackett was the truest man in Beloit . . .

---

[17] Crane family file, Beloit Hist. Society.

This second letter is undated but was probably written also in 1886. It directly confirms what could otherwise only be guessed. John Hackett and Robert Crane stood shoulder to shoulder in their opposition to Lucius Fisher.

9. 1888 — A Kind Word For Lucius Fisher

Some two years after the death of Lucius Fisher and John Hackett, the First Congregational Church was the scene of services commemorating the 50th anniversary of its founding. On December 30, 1888, Prof. J.J. Blaisdell of Beloit College in his memorial address honoring those who had played key roles in the life of the Church spoke glowingly of Lucius Fisher as an individual and added:

. . . It is among our traditions that the suggestion of the name of our city is due to him . . . [18]

Blaisdell of course was circumspect and refers discreetly merely to a tradition, but he also in effect became a character witness for Fisher in emphasizing his impressive record and reputation.

In the same address Blaisdell also mentioned the name of Robert Crane who was a founder of the First Congregational Church but who later left it to help found the First Presbyterian Church. Blaisdell's comments about Robert Crane are restrained at best and somewhat unflattering.[19]

Another speaker at the anniversary celebration, Rev. L.D. Mears, gave a long historical address but avoided mention of the naming of Beloit although he reviewed the life of the community in 1837 at considerable length.[20] His silence in the face of such a provocative subject involving two prominent former members is probably a tribute to his tact on such a nostalgic occasion.

Understandable as his silence was in the non-controversial atmosphere of a church anniversary celebration, Mears thereby deprived today's historian of the benefit of a highly qualified observer's opinion. The younger Mears was a good historian and he had researched his topic carefully and objectively. As a son of the still-living first settler, Deacon Henry Mears, he probably knew a great deal about the naming controversy. Robert Crane had mentioned his discussing the subject with the elder Mears. The avoidance of the subject by the younger Mears in his historical address is enigmatic.

In any event, by 1890 an era had ended. Lucius Fisher, John Hackett and

---

[18] *First Cong. Semi-Centennial*, 128.
[19] *Ibid.*, 108.
[20] *First Cong. Semi-Centennial*, 15-55.

Robert Crane, three founders of Beloit and the three key disputants in the naming dispute, were dead. Evidently a few of the settlers still survived in Beloit or elsewheres, but they apparently never went on record.

As matters now stood, the claim of Lucius Fisher would seem badly tarnished. The greater weight of the first-hand testimony clearly suggested that he had claimed too much. His failure to produce corroborating evidence from others while it was still available is difficult to explain. To the friends of Lucius Fisher at Beloit College, who were articulate, influential and undoubtedly eager to help their friend in Chicago, this must surely have been distressing. But Fisher evidently limited himself to writing his *Pioneer Recollections* in his journal. The confusion and misunderstanding surrounding the naming of Beloit would linger on.[21]

---

[21] A whimsical note is added by Elizabeth Baird, writing in 1887 about a visit she made to Beloit in 1842, when she explained how the naming had occurred: "We were taken to Beloit which then was a very small place. Had we gone in the proper season, there was a chance in the city limits to find the berries for which the city is named — the huckleberry. The French called it *au beloit* . . . " *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, XV, 259, (1900). However, it is probable that her handwriting was misinterpreted by the editor. She may have meant that the village was noted for its huckleberries, which apparently was so. Mrs. Baird was a former school teacher, spoke fluent French, was reared in a French-Canadian background, and would never equate huckleberry and *au Beloit*.

CHAPTER TEN

Another Generation Renews The Controversy

(The Second Generation Revives The Name Dispute — William Fiske Brown Accepts The Lucius Fisher Version — Ellery Crane Reinforces Robert Crane's Arguments Against Fisher.)

1. 1894 — William Fiske Brown and Ellery Crane

During the next twenty years two sons of early Beloit settlers were busy writing about the history of Beloit. Ellery Crane, son of Robert Crane, who had arrived in Beloit in 1837 — the year Beloit was named — as a babe in his mother's arms, wrote numerous newspaper articles about Beloit's early history. He also wrote an unpublished history (referred to as the *Ellery Crane Manuscript*) which borrowed from his father's 1878 newspaper series. From 1878 to 1920 the letters of Robert and Ellery Crane to the Beloit newspaper furnished Beloiters with detailed information about persons and places in their community's heritage.

Although Ellery Crane had moved to Massachusetts, where he later served in the state legislature, his interest in Beloit lasted throughout his life. He maintained elaborate scrapbooks of Beloit newspaper clippings and he had an enormous fund of Beloit history (sometimes inexact) always on hand for a letter to the Beloit paper. He was also determined to repudiate the claim of Lucius Fisher that he had named Beloit.

Another local historian, son of a prominent early settler, Rev. William Fiske Brown, lived in Beloit and Janesville and published two popular and widely distributed histories still found in many private libraries in the Beloit area. Brown repeated the pro-Fisher naming account in both books that continue to be repeated to this day, whereas, if it were not for the Ellery Crane scrapbooks of newspaper clippings preserved at the Beloit Historical Museum, the Crane-Hackett story would perhaps have disappeared into obscure newspaper files.

One minor incident in the history of the naming dispute occurred in 1894 at the 50th anniversary ceremonies of Beloit College when Lucius Fisher, Jr. of Chicago contributed a large quantity of valuable Greek sculpture casts, exhibited the previous year at the World's Fair by the Greek government, to the College in memory of his father. To this day it is referred to as the Fisher Collection. Glowing tributes were paid to Lucius Fisher Sr. by Sereno T. Merrill, the first instructor of the freshman class, and Prof. Joseph Emerson who had been primarily responsible for obtaining the gift from Fisher's son.

Significantly, although the speakers traced the early beginnings of the city and the College at considerable length, emphasizing the vital role of Lucius Fisher in the development of both, no mention was made by anyone of the old tradition that Fisher had named Beloit. Not even the "tradition"

that Prof. Blaisdell had mentioned six years earlier at the First Congregational Church anniversary celebration was alluded to. So much restraint on such a sentimental occasion devoted to praise of a distinguished friend and trustee of the College is an indication that the naming dispute was not forgotten. Certainly to credit Fisher with naming Beloit at such a ceremony in his honor would have been highly cherished by his family and friends. That no word was said on the subject is indicative of the lingering controversy that persisted.

Interestingly enough, Ellery Crane, living in Worcester, Mass., was also invited to prepare a paper for the occasion, entitled *Early Beginnings of Beloit.* Crane's paper was not read at the presentation services because of the length of the program but was printed in a bound volume of the entire proceedings assembled later.[1] Both Ellery Crane's father and Lucius Fisher had donated land to the College for its campus. Perhaps the invitation to Ellery Crane was a deliberate effort to heal old wounds and give recognition to the contributions of his family.

In his prepared paper Crane took pains to emphasize that Fisher was not in Beloit in the fall of 1837, the time when we know the naming occurred. While probably few readers, if any, comprehended the significance of his remarks in this respect, Ellery Crane had a sense of history and was undoubtedly writing for the record when he emphasized Fisher's presumed absence from the village during this period in the following oblique fashion:

Mr. Lucius G. Fisher, son-in-law of Deacon Peter Field, came first to Beloit from Milwaukee in July, 1837, and after a brief stay returned to that place. In February 1838 he again appeared in Beloit, and March 31, purchased a building lot . . . [2]

Thus, as had his father years before, Ellery Crane claimed that during the latter part of September and early October of 1837, Fisher had been away from the village, presumably in Milwaukee. However, more likely than not, there was an express or tacit understanding that no speaker or writer would refer to the naming dispute during the program.

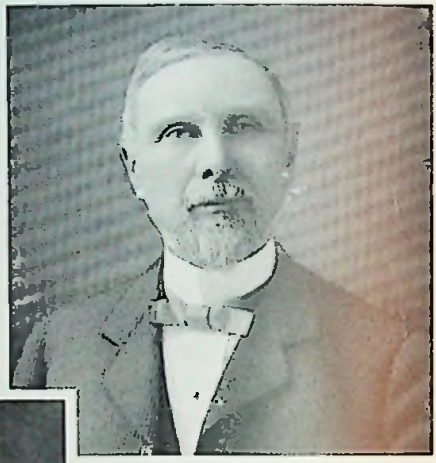
2. 1897 — Horace White, Jr.

Beloit College observed its semi-centennial celebration in 1897. Horace White, famous editor of the New York Evening Post and former editor of the Chicago Tribune, who had come to Beloit at the age of three in 1838, and graduate of the College in its third class in 1853, was invited to give the commencement address. His subject was "The Beginnings of Beloit."

---

[1] *Proceedings at the Presentation of the Fisher Collection of Antique Greek Sculpture*, June 20, 1894.
[2] *Ibid.*, 70.

William Fiske Brown



Ellery B. Crane

Cornelius Buckley

Three Beloit Historians

Although White made no reference to the naming of Beloit, he did mention both Robert Crane and Lucius Fisher, and acknowledged his indebtedness to his close boyhood chum, Ellery Crane, for furnishing much of his information. It is interesting to speculate whether these old Beloit chums, White and Crane, then both living in the east, had discussed the naming question at the time White prepared his talk. Probably they did, particularly when we consider the topic and Ellery's past interest in the debate and the role he would soon play in the future. Horace White's failure to make any reference to the naming of Beloit in his talk probably was a deliberate effort to avoid opening old wounds among Fisher's friends at the College.

Thus, at the turn of the century Lucius Fisher's claim stood in a questionable light. Robert Crane, John Hackett and the 1879 *History* had flatly contradicted the early 1856 *History*, Fisher's chief support, while Fisher himself had failed to answer his critics convincingly while he lived. Some sixty years after the naming there now seemed to be little left for Fisher's friends to say.[3]

3. 1900 — Brown Names Lucius Fisher Again

Fourteen years of relative silence over the subject of who named Beloit ended dramatically in 1900 with the publication of Rev. William Fiske Brown's book *Past Made Present, Presbyterians in Wisconsin in 1830-1900.* Rev. Brown was the son of the early merchant Benjamin Brown and was a contemporary of those other two sons of early settlers, Horace White and Ellery Crane. Brown, probably deliberately, revived the naming controversy of 1878 in provocative fashion at page 34 of his book:

The early villagers, disliking Caleb Blodgett's name for the settlement, New Albany, as too fast and the Indian name, Turtle, as too slow, held a public meeting at the Beloit House in the fall of 1838 for the purpose of choosing something better. After many names had been proposed and voted down, a committee of three was appointed to consult and report some final name.+

R.P. Crane's account, published in our Beloit Journal[4] *Feb. 1878, gives as that committee, Col. Johnson, Caleb Blodgett and Mr. Allen.+*

L.G. Fisher Esq. of Chicago, in a letter published by the Beloit Journal March 28, 1878, says that the committee chosen were Major Charles Johnson, Horace Hobart, and himself.+

---

[3]Prof. Henry M. Whitney of Beloit alluded sketchily to the Fisher version in an address at Madison, Feb. 22, 1899. Citing no authority, Whitney stated: "It was he [Fisher] who, starting with *Belle* and *Detroit*, evolved the present name [Beloit]. *Proceedings of the State Historical Society* (1899), 132.

[4]Brown meant the *Beloit Free Press* article.

William Jack who attended that meeting and is now living in Beloit, states that Mr. L.G. Fisher was certainly a member of that committee. Fisher adds that when this committee had retired to a shanty nearby, one member proposed drawing letters of the alphabet by lot. Major Johnson suggested Ballote as a supposed French word, meaning handsome.

As many of the early settlers had pleasant remembrances of Detroit, Mr. Fisher proposed that they have a name sounding like that and spoke the words, Balloit, Beloit, the latter name was approved in committee, reported to the settlers by Major Johnson and unanimously adopted.

Brown's *Past Made Present* was a well-prepared book, profusely illustrated with an excellent selection of photographs, and was widely distributed. Unfortunately, his account of the naming of Beloit revived once more the old error of the 1838 date which had appeared to be finally corrected to everyone's satisfaction fifteen years before. Brown offered no authority or explanation to support his use of the 1838 date which both Fisher and Robert Crane, the only men to claim it, later had readily admitted was wrong. In the light of all that is now known, we may safely assume that it was an inadequate research error by Brown, rather than an intentional change based on any new evidence he had uncovered.

Nevertheless, Brown's statement in this book served notice to those interested that the claim of Lucius Fisher was not dead. *Past Made Present* as a book on hundreds of library shelves would be read long after the newspaper articles of Robert and Ellery Crane disappeared into obscurity.

It is interesting to note that as a supporting authority Brown calls upon William Jack for corroboration. Jack was then an old man, the same William Jack whom it will be remembered Robert Crane had claimed is support of his 1878 newspaper version some 22 years before. His aboutface, without explanation impairs his credibility on both occasions, particularly when Jack had failed to ever repudiate or correct Crane's use of his name as a supporter in 1878 when he was younger. The fact remains that during Jack's later years both sides claimed him as a supporter.

4. Ellery Crane Repudiates Fisher

Eight years passed before Ellery Crane finished his own history of early Beloit and answered Brown. Unfortunately, Crane's manuscript was never published in book form. Whether more than a handful of friends ever read it is problematical. Certainly it never entered the mainstream of public discussion as did Brown's book *Past Made Present.* It is printed here only to show Ellery Crane's viewpoint after Brown's revival of the Fisher story. The unpublished *Ellery Crane Manuscript,* as we refer to it, restated his father's old position:

"Turtle," The name first given to the place, was not satisfactory to a

majority of the settlers; several names were brought forward, among them Albany, New Albany, Detroit, etc.; They were not accepted, and it was finally decided, in the fall of 1837, to call a meeting to settle the matter, each man to bring one or more names; about twenty men were present, all there were in the settlement at the time.+

About sixty names were presented, all of which were voted down; Then a committee consisting of Major Charles Johnson, Caleb Blodgett, and Mr. Allen were selected to retire and report a name; Major Johnson liked Detroit but the rest of the committee wanted a new name unlike those they were familiar with, so they began to transpose letters in various names, until Beloit was produced by Major Johnson; The committe were agreed on this name and reported it to the meeting, when it was adopted.+

This statement as to the finding of the name "Beloit" and its adoption has been endorsed by the late Deacon Mears, Hon. John Hackett, Charles Messer and others.[5]

Again, we must bear in mind that the above account was never published in book form. Hence the Fisher version stated in Brown's *Past Made Present* presumably still stood unchallenged by anything new on the bookshelves of a new generation of Beloit readers.

5. 1908 — Brown Speaks For Fisher

About the same time Ellery Crane was preparing his manuscript for a publication that never came, his nemesis William Fiske Brown was busy compiling data with the help of many contributors for the publication of a definitive two-volume history of Rock County. Brown would be the editor-in-chief. Whether Brown's preparations, which must have extended over several years, had spurred Crane on to complete his own manuscript first we cannot say for sure. Possibly Brown had even invited Crane to submit material for his (Brown's) book. Perhaps Crane had hoped to influence Brown in what he would finally publish on the naming of Beloit. In any event, Crane's history, drawn from his voluminous files of source material, would languish in manuscript form, while once again a Brown history would enjoy the permanence and status of appearing in book form.

When published, Brown's history gave the following account of the naming of Beloit, largely repetitious of his earlier version eight years before in *Past Made Present*, except for one staggering error:

. . . Those early villagers, disliking the Indian name, Turtle, as too slow, and Blodgetts name for the settlement, New Albany, as too fast, in the fall of 1838[6] *held at the Beloit house several public meetings for the purpose of*

---

[5] *Ellery Crane Manuscript*, 48.

[6] Brown repeats the erroneous 1838 date.

choosing something better. As no agreement could be reached the matter was finally left to a committee of three.+

Mr. R.P. Crane, then in Florida, wrote to the Beloit "Journal" in February 1878, that this committee consisted of Johnson, Hobart and himself.[7]*+*

L.G. Fisher, Esq., of Chicago, in a letter published by the Beloit "Journal" [8] *March 28, 1878, said that the committee chosen were Major Charles Johnson, Horace Hobart and L.G. Fisher.+*

Mr. William Jack, who was present when the name was reported, personally stated to the editor in Beloit in the year 1899, that Mr. Fisher was certainly a member of that committee. (There may have been two committees, appointed by different votes or parties of settlers.)+

L.G. Fisher states that the committee retired to a shanty nearby and at first, one of them suggested that a name be made with letters of the alphabet drawn by lot. Major Johnson proposed Ballote, hinting that it was the French for beautiful. As many of the settlers had pleasant remembrances of Detroit, Mr. Fisher wanted a name which would sound like Detroit, and spoke the words, Balloit, Beloit. The latter name approved in committee, was reported to the assembled settlers by Major Johnson and unanimously adopted... [9]

Brown thus makes it emphatically clear that he still accepted the Fisher version, not that of Robert Crane and John Hackett, as the best one to explain how Beloit was named. His decision is of great importance if for no other reason than that it appeared in what was surely intended to be the official Rock County History, presumably the final word in scholarship and research in the eyes of future generation.

Actually, Brown repeated the errors of *Past Made Present* in this short account and added two more, one of them a grave blunder that completely distorts the record. The carelessness evidenced in the preparation of this account is inexplicable. For instance, Robert Crane never claimed he was a member of the committee. Crane always referred to a Mr. Allen, and so did John Hackett, as being the third member of the committee. While certainly done in good faith by Brown, it does raise a question as to his carefulness as a researcher in dealing with so sensitive and important a subject.

6. 1910 — Ellery Crane Reviews The Record Against Fisher

We can only guess at the shocked disbelief Ellery Crane must have experienced when he first read Brown's statement that Robert Crane claimed

---

[7]Crane named Johnson, Blodgett and Allen.

[8]*Beloit Free Press.*

[9]Brown, 1908 *History*, I, 141.

he was a member of the committee naming Beloit. For over thirty years he and his father had attempted to set the record straight from their point of view by newspaper articles, only to have Brown's two books, both obviously destined for a long life, undermine their entire thesis which had seemed so securely established a quarter century before.

But try once more Ellery Crane did, in 1910, by a letter of rebuttal, which also presented some new evidence, never before disclosed, to the *Beloit Free Press*. The letter is long but it summarizes the entire Crane-Hackett argument against Lucius Fisher with considerable care. Inasmuch as it appears in no book and is almost unknown (as with most of the Crane materials), it is set forth here in its entirety. The anti-Fisher case may be said to rest squarely on what Ellery Crane says in this long-forgotten letter to the editor:

Since the year 1878 when the subject was thoroughly thrashed out till the recently published history of Rock County by Messrs. C.F. Cooper & Co., of Chicago, came to my notice, I had supposed every native of Beloit was knowing to the facts concerning the origin of the name Beloit.

Certainly if the theme could be decided upon the weight of evidence presented years ago, the decision would not confirm the statements made by the writer of the account given of page 141 of Vol. 1 in that work...

The editor of the late publication then quotes from a letter written by Mr. L.G. Fisher March 28, 1878, describing the process by which the word Beloit was coined, etc.

Had this editor in his possession, at the time of penning those lines, a copy of Mr. Crane's letter in answer to Mr. Fisher he might have presented a different statement. Mr. Crane took occasion to correct the date for the meeting to the fall of 1837, but held he was correct in giving the names of the persons constituting that committee as Charles Johnson, Caleb Blodgett and Mr. Allen. And presents the names of Hon. John Hackett, Deacon Henry Mears, Mr. Charles W. Messer and also Mr. William Jack, who agreed with him in the makeup of that committee.

Fearing that silence may, to the reader of the late Rock County work, be taken as an acceptance of the statement there given, I feel called upon to make the following criticism:

In the first place, I was not aware that Turtle is an Indian name. Second, Mr. Crane did not go to Florida till 1881, three years after answering Mr. Fisher's communication. He was at home in Beloit interviewing the early settlers — those competent to furnish reliable information and bent only on securing facts bearing on the history of the town of preservation — in answer to a solicitation from myself.

And the manuscript he prepared is at the present time in my hands.

Within the thirty and more intervening years, I have been adding what might be acquired to swell the interesting story.

All accounts agree that Charles Johnson, as the name is erroneously spelled, was a member of that committee.

It should be Major Charles Johnston. The title of Major was earned by service in the militia of Vermont. He was the son of Col. Robert Johnston, who served in the old French war, also in the Revolutionary War, and one of the most prominent men of his day in northern Vermont. Charles was born at Newbury, Vt., Oct. 13, 1787, and Representative in 1822 and 1826. He died unmarried August 20, 1838. His will was filed for probate, Horace White, judge, October 15, 1839, and may have been the first will to receive attention in Judge White's court, Caleb Blodgett's estate being the third to come to that court. He also served on that committee.

The remaining member of that committee was a Mr. Allen, or as it may have been spelled Alyn, Allyne. He was not a permanent settler in the town but soon removed and located a farm in the northerly part of Shopiere or in the edge of La Prairie.[10]

As I have collected some evidence of later date than that presented my father, I trust you will be willing to give it space with the hope that the information may prove conclusive:

Beloit, January 1, 1885

Mr. Ellery Crane, Worcester, Mass.

Dear Sir:—In reply to your favor of the 30th ult., I have to say that the articles in the Free Press were by persons who personally had no knowledge of what they wrote and are hence no authority. Your father was correct as to his dates and the events as stated by him in a series of articles for the press. I came here before Mr. Mears did, but the exact date I cannot state as I did not keep a journal or memorandum of events; your father did, and hence the reliability of his statements.

The names of the committee who reported the name of Beloit for this locality were Caleb Blodgett, Charles Johnston, and — Allen, whose first name I am unable to give; he did not settle here but located just above what is now Shopiere.

The name (Beloit) was presented to the meeting for adoption and adopted, no one making any remarks except Mr. Johnston himself, who to make the name acceptable, said it was a French word and signified the meeting or junction of two streams.

---

[10]For the first time we learn who the mysterious Mr. Allen was. His correct name: Nathan Allyn.

Your father has given a correct version of the matter in his writing as far as my recollection goes.

Very truly yours,
JOHN HACKETT

Beloit, June 2, 1886

Dear Sir:—Since your letter was received, I met President Chapin on the street and told him that I discovered some mistakes in account of Fisher[11] *and one was with regard to his opening the first store in Beloit, which was done by Field and Lusk in June of '38, and I had old account to prove it and he asked if it was not Field, Lusk and Fisher. I told him no, Fisher had nothing whatever to do with it. But that Fisher did bring a load of stoves from Milwaukee in the fall after, and the man who drew them for him is still living near Boston. The other was with respect to the name of the town, which was not suggested by Fisher, but by Major Johnston, and told him of Hackett's testimony to the fact. And he said Fisher did not claim to have been a member of the committee; but that he had some consultation with Tebo about it. Oh, said I, that could not be for Tebo went away before I came and never came back but once and that was early in the spring before Fisher came. And he had to give it up. He could say no more and we parted pleasantly as usual.*

Yours truly,
H. Mears

Hon. S.T. Merrill, to whom I went to scool when a lad, wrote, asking about some matters relating to the early history of Beloit and the establishing of the college there. And in a little later sent on a printer's proof of an article he was publishing for me to look over.

During our correspondence, he sent a letter from which the following is an extract:

Beloit, Wis. Sept. 13, 1894

Mr. E. B. Crane:

My Dear Sir:—Mr. Lyman gives Mr. Fisher the credit of giving Beloit its names — a statement that I was not able to verify — in fact, I found it contradicted in another larger and later history of Rock County. Mr. Fisher, I doubt not, gave Mr. Lyman data for his article.

Truly and cordially yours,

S.T. Merrill.

---

[11]Evidently referring to the inaccurate *Beloit Free Press* obituary fo Lucius Fisher of March 11, 1886. See Ch. 9, Secs. 7 and 8.

Mr. R.P. Crane never, by implication or otherwise, stated or even inferred that he was a member of the committee to name Beloit.

Thanking you, Mr. Editor, for past favors.

I remain, most heartily yours.

ELLERY BICKNELL CRANE

Worcester, Mass. May 9, 1910.[12]

As the father Robert Crane had done in 1878, so the son Ellery Crane had now attempted to do again in 1910 — namely, refute once and for all time the claim of Lucius Fisher. Unfortunately, father and son both used a newspaper letter to summarize the detailed evidence against the Fisher account.

Once again the efficacy of a book over a newspaper in matters of history was to be demonstrated as the years passed. William Fiske Brown's 1908 *History* and his 1900 *Past Made Present* would survive on numerous Beloit bookshelves, easily accessible to anyone interested in research, whereas Ellery Crane's newspaper articles would soon join his father's articles in relative oblivion.

Thus ends for all practical purposes the original and immediate second-hand references to the naming of Beloit. Incomplete, mixed with heresay, and inaccurate as such accounts may be, they are still the best evidence uncovered by extensive research. What will follow after 1910 will be largely third and fourth generation stories, for the most part merely repetitious of earlier accounts and devoid of any signs of original research. They will be set forth in limited detail simply to complete the record and clarify a few minor points before we attempt an analysis of what it may or may not tend to prove.

---

[12]*Beloit Free Press*, May 19, 1910.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Conflicting Accounts Of Later Writers

(The Naming of Beloit as seen by Later Generations — The Perpetuation of Old Errors — The Creation of New Errors)

1. 1916 — Beloit Pageant

After 1910 the story of the naming of Beloit would seem to beg for original research. Ellery Crane and William Fiske Brown had once again laid bare a puzzling disagreement that should have been a direct challenge to local historians to attempt to clarify while many early documents and letters touching on the question might still be located, and before death would silence other descendants of early settlers who might have been able to furnish additional clues. Instead, the dispute appears to have trailed off into embarassed silence as the two old men of the second generation lived out their declining years.

In 1916, after time had stilled the controversy between Crane and Brown, and when yet another generation was emerging in Beloit, the famous Beloit Pageant was held near Rock River on Riverside drive immediately north of the Fairbanks, Morse Plant.

This Pageant celebrated the 80th anniversary of the founding of the community and the 70th anniversary of Beloit College. Hundreds of Beloiters, young and old, participated as members of an elaborately costumed cast dramatizing historic events and personalities of Beloit.

An ambitious play was composed for the occasion entitled *From the Turtle to the Flaming Wheel.* Its authors were Theodore Lyman Wright and Marion Hawthorne Hedges, faculty members of Beloit College.[1]

In writing the Pageant play, Wright and Hedges were obviously aware of the Beloit naming dispute. With considerable care and feeling for the problem presented, they made a skillful and imaginative effort to harmonize the Fisher and Crane versions for a pageant of such historical significance and good feeling. The key scene is described in this fashion:

Time, an afternoon in summer, about 1840.[2] *Place, yard of the Rock River House,* [3] *Caleb Blodgett, proprietor...*

---

[1]Three years later Hedges would publish his controversial book *Iron City* (Boni and Liveright, New York, 1919), which was generally accepted as a thinly disguised and unflattering story about Beloit, its college, its industries, and local personalities. *Iron City* has long since become a collector's item of Beloitana.

[2]The 1840 date was probably not intended to be precise.

[3]Not Blodgett's Rock River House. The actual location was the unfinished boarding house of the New England Co., later known as the Beloit House.

Hobart: Any more business?

White: I move you, Mr. Chairman, that a committee of three be appointed to suggest a new name for the settlement, instead of the Indian name, Turtle — far too slow!

Cheney: I second that motion.

Hobart: (puts the question). The ayes have it. I name Major Charles Johnson, Mr. Caleb Blodgett, Mr. Allen.

Johnson: May we beg you, Mr. Hobart, and also Mr. L.G. Fisher, to act with our committee?

(The committee come down to the front and confer; the larger assembly falls into conversing groups).

Major Johnson: Gentlemen, a number of names have already been suggested, among them Waterloo, but none to my mind seems fitting for our city.

Allen: Why not retain Mr. Blodgett's name for it, New Albany?

Blodgett: No, no. The election settled that. I am willing to make the change.

Johnson: Some have suggested Harrison.

Blodgett: No politics here.

Allen: Detroit, a little Detroit.

Fisher: We are not going to be little long, and we want something new; Detroit sounds well, though. Let's see; Detroit, Cetroit, Betroit, Beloit? How about Beloit?

Blodgett: Just the thing.

Allen: An inspiration.

(The committee returns)

Johnson: Ladies and Gentlemen: We propose the name of Beloit. By ballot and by lot we've chosen Beloit.

(Cheers and applause. Children throw up caps and shout, "Hurrah for Beloit").

Voice: Janesville will say "Below it."[4]

White: Mr. Chairman.

Hobart: Dr. White.

White: I congratulate the committee on their scholarly choice. I take it that there is a fit symbolism in this new name Beloit; it no doubts springs from the French and means beautiful meeting of streams.

(Applause).

Johnson; Mr. Chairman, I plead not guilty. Beloit may be Hebrew as far as I know; I know no French, neither does Blodgett nor Allen.[5]

The thoughtful reader of the history of the Beloit name controversy cannot help being charmed by this tactful account which so adroitly summarizes and reconciles the two versions. Except for the inaccurate time and placesetting, it is a work of happy inspiration that might well stand as the best account of the naming of Beloit.

2. 1926 — Royal Brunson Way

It is doubtful that some ten years later in 1926 when Prof. R.B. Way of Beloit College prepared his comprehensive three volume history. *The Rock River Valley* that he made any particular analysis of the name dispute. Certainly he does not appear aware of the old newspaper articles of Robert and Ellery Crane touching on the controversy. Otherwise it is difficult to explain how Prof. Way in accepting the Fisher version for his book could neglect to even mention the obvious fact that an ancient dispute had existed upon the subject, one involving highly reputable Beloit citizens on both sides of the question. Apparently accepting and borrowing from Brown's 1900 *Past Made Present,* Prof. Way states:

Disliking the Indian name, Turtle and Blodgett's name, New Albany, the earlier village held in 1838 several meetings to decide upon another name. As related by L.G. Fisher, one of the committeemen in the selection of a name, the suggestion was first made that a name be made with the letters of the alphabet drawn by lot. Major Johnson then proposed Ballots hinting that it was the French for beautiful. Fisher because of their many pleasant recollec-

---

[4]This amusing single line in the play is probably the source of the sometimes heard today explanation the Beloit was simply intended to mean *Below it* — that is, Below Janesville. Perhaps Janesville partisans should be forgiven for considering this as a plausible explanation of the naming. Others have speculated that *Below it* may have been inspired by the French word *Belloeit* — the meeting of waters; but this was most likely a mere afterthought by later writers straining for an explanation.

[5]Wright and Hedges, *In Pioneer Days,* Episode 2, scene 2, 22-26.

tions of Detroit, desired a name sounding like Detroit. He thereupon spoke the words Balloit, Beloit. The committee approved the latter name . . . [6]

In the following the Fisher version of the naming, Prof. Way also perpetuates the erroneous 1838 date. The use of this date and the acceptance of the Fisher version without a word of explanation would indicate that Way had no new information upon which he relied. To have been familiar with the extent of the controversy and be in possession of new information without commenting upon his reasons for accepting the Fisher account, plus the incorrect 1838 date, appears highly improbable. More likely, Way was content to accept the conclusions of such a well known local historian as Brown, who presumably had already evaluated fully any conflicting data dealing with the naming.

Once again we see demonstrated how quickly the newspaper accounts of Robert Crane, John Hackett and Ellery Crane, contradicting the Lucius Fisher story, were forgotten or overlooked by the casual reader or researcher. On the other hand, Way's handsome three-volume history would further perpetuate in permanent fashion the Fisher story in hundred of libraries, exactly as the two books of William Fiske Brown had already done for over twenty-five years.

3. 1927 — May Bauchle

A year later in 1927 the *Beloit Daily News* printed a series of four articles on early Beloit history written by May Love Bauchle, a local historian and president of the Beloit Historical Society. Ignoring without explanation both Prof. Way and Edwin Fiske Brown, Mrs. Bauchle went back to the Crane version and offered her own explanation of who the mysterious Mr. Allen was:

Some time before, Blodgett had changed the name of the place to New Albany but this was not acceptable to the New Englanders and in 1838 a committee was appointed to select a name. Many stories have been related as to this selection but Mrs. Mary Sweet of Shopiere whose father, Capt. Albert Allyn (not Allen as has been said) was one of the committee, is responsible for the following version of the affair:

"We have a name," the report read, "which we believe will be acceptable to every one. It is peculiar, descriptive, distinctive. It has been obtained by compounding French words and it means 'beautiful' and the junction of two streams. The name is Beloit." A few days afterward John Hackett met a member of the committee on the street and told him how much he liked the new name. The committeeman laughed, "Good joke on you French scholars, it is no more French than it is Hebrew but we had to do something to settle

---

[6] Way, The Rock River Valley, I, 395.

the matter."[7]

In ignoring the Fisher claim Mrs. Bauchle also repeats the erroneous 1838 date. Although demonstrably incorrect, the 1838 date is firmly imbedded in too many books not to be accepted by the average reader.

However, the Bauchle account is most important for its identification of Mr. Allen as Cjapt. Albert Allyn of Shopiere. Actually, her informant, Mary Sweet, was probably partly wrong. The evidence overwhelmingly indicates that the committeeman, Mr. Allen, was not Capt. Albert Allyn but rather his father, Nathan Allyn, who died in 1838 a year after the naming.[8]

Nathan Allyn had come west with his two sons, Albert and Lucius, evidently to claim land as agent for a Hartford, Conn. company. In 1836 he had arrived at the present site of Beloit almost the same day Caleb Blodgett did. Both men were interested in developing new communities in the Wisconsin wilderness. After Blodgett purchased Tebo's huge claim, Nathan Allyn later made claim to some 1600 acres in the present day Shopiere area.

Caleb Blodgett, Nathan Allyn and Major Johnston (the three committee members, according to Crane and Hackett) had much in common. All three were among the first arrivals at the Turtle in 1836; they were mature men in their fifties; and, perhaps significantly, all three died soon after the naming — Johnston and Allen in 1838 and Blodgett in 1840. Thus, if they were the three members of the committee, death soon sealed their lips.[9]

4. 1928 — Edward Dwight Eaton

In 1928 Edward Dwight Eaton, former president of Beloit College, published his book *Historical Sketches of Beloit College.* Eaton repeated Lucius Fisher's version of the naming of Beloit exactly as Fisher had set it forth in his 1883 manuscript *Pioneer Recollections.*[10]

---

[7]*Beloit Daily News,* July 25, 1927. Mrs. Bauchle repeated the above account again in 1936 in her paper *Early Beloit and its Houses,* 6-7, Beloit Hist. Society.

[8]Albert Allyn was only 20 years old in 1837, no more than a hired hand for his father. Furthermore, Albert lived in the Shopiere area until 1899 and apparently never claimed publicly that he had helped name Beloit. His lengthy obituary in the *Beloit Free Press,* Oct. 26, 1899, makes no such claim. His pioneer reminiscences, published in the *Free Press,* Nov. 27, 1899, made no mention of the naming of Beloit, although he discussed the 1837 period in great detail. Years later, in talking to Mrs. Bauchle, Mary Sweet could have confused the role of her father, Albert, with that of her grandfather, Nathan Allyn.

[9]The shadowy figure of Mr. Allen (Nathan Allyn) emerges more distinctly in several accounts: McLenegan, *Turtle Centennial History,* 28, 123; Guernsey and Willard, History (1856), 93; *Beloit Journal,* undated 1867 clipping, Ch. 9, "Early History of Beloit;" and *Beloit Free Press,* May 19, 1910, letter of Ellery Crane.

[10]Eaton, 17. In 1957 Emily S. Leavitt quoted Eaton's account in her article "Vermonters who Helped Establish the City of Beloit," *Vermont History,* Oct. 1957, Vol. 25, 330.

President Eaton's account ignores or shows no awareness of the serious nature of the naming dispute. His uncritical acceptance is understandable. The supposedly definitive books of Prof. Way (1926) and William Fiske Brown (1908) gave the honor to Fisher. The anti-Fisher newspaper versions, persuasive though they might be, were buried in relative oblivion. The only anti-Fisher book, the 1879 *Rock County History*, would presumably be outdated by later research.

Perhaps most important of all, the name of Lucius Fisher loomed tall in the history of Beloit College. As Eaton points jout, it was Fisher's determination and boldness that made the College a reality during its shaky beginnings when he contributed land, money and materials for its initial construction while others hesitated or procrastinated. Later Fisher had served for many years as an influential trustee. His son was a student at Beloit and was later (1894) a benefactor of the College. Small wonder that Eaton worried little about any vague anti-Fisher naming accounts he might have heard.[11]

5. 1936 — The Book Of Beloit

Beloit's Centennial celebration in 1936 was highlighted by the publishing of the highly popular and widely distributed *Book of Beloit* under the sponsorship of the Beloit Daily News. Researched and edited by an able staff under the direction of Mason H. Dobson, it is the best known of Beloit histories. It deals with the naming dispute in knowledgable fashion and summarizes at page 12 the entire question succinctly and accurately, except for one grievous typographical error as to the date:

Until the autumn of 1857[12] *the new town was called Blodgett's Settlement, the Turtle, or New Albany, and one man's name for it was as good as another's, or practically so. But a new town demanded a new name. No one will know for certain who it was that chose for Beloit the name it now bears, for among those at the meeting when a name was chosen there is disagreement and two committeemen later claimed the honor. The Crane manuscript says it was Major Johnston and that the good Major wanted a name as*

---

[11]In 1932 a five volume history of old Milwaukee County, which at one time included what is now Rock County, reprinted the Fisher version uncritically, including the discredited 1838 naming date. *Southeastern Wisconsin; A History of Old Milwaukee County*, V. II, 619-620.

[12]Certainly not 1857. Undoubtedly the editor had intended the correct 1837 date. This typographical slip in such a popular and widely quoted sourcebook is now being faithfully perpetuated even more than the erroneous 1838 date. Today the *Beloit Telephone Directory* and *Polk's Beloit City* Directory still repeat the 1857 date in their civic history sections. See also *Know Rock County*, published by the Rock County Board of Supervisors (1947), 62; and Stewart H. Holbrook, *The Yankee Exodus* (MacMillan Co., 1950), 113. How many high school historians have faithfully accepted the 1857 date is perhaps better left uncounted.

nearly like Detroit as he could induce his companions to accept.

Lucius G. Fisher says in his memoirs that Major Johnston "Undertook to sound a French word for handsome ground" and that his pronunciation sounded like "Ballotte," said Fisher: "And I sounded after him 'Beloit,' like Detroit, and pretty and original, I think. All sounded it and liked it and we reported it to the 20 or 30 who sent us out and it was unanimously adopted; and it has ever since been Beloit and not New Albany." So it has been.

In the above account Editor Dobson carefully puts the naming dispute into its proper perspective. A new generation is reminded that there is a disagreement for which there is no conclusive answer. Barring the discovery of new documents, we must accept the validity of his judgment. Aside from the inadvertent 1857 printing error, the *Book of Beloit* evaluates a century-old dispute in admirable fashion.

6. 1942 — Robert K. Richardson

A few years later the distinguished historian, Prof. Robert K. Richardson of Beloit College, in preparing an article for *The Beloit Community Register,* showed his awareness of the seriousness of the naming dispute but made no effort to evaluate its merits. Instead, he dwelt on the supposed derivation of the name itself:

The origin of the name "Beloit" is in some doubt, but in all likelihood the name results from the blending, at a settler's meeting in the fall of 1838, of some half-remembered French word meaning "fair," presumably bellot (feminine, bellotte), with Detroit . . . [13]

7. 1942 — James Phalen

That same year James M. Phalen in his book *Sinnissippi,* the story of Rock River, gave a similar account. Citing no authority for his own ingenious explanation of the name derivation, Phalen stated:

. . . A committee for the purpose pondered over a suitable name. They weighed the French terms belotte, small and pretty, and detroit, a piece of land between two waters, and combined the two in the name Beloit. [14]

A beautiful story, but Phalen is probably merely exercising someone's educated guess. None of the early settlers ever claimed such a precise knowledge of French. Quite the contrary, Major Johnston, whom everybody agreed was chairman of the naming committee, seems to have ridiculed the whole theory.

---

[13]Richardson, Helen L.D. *Robert Kimball Richardson,* (Beloit, 1958), 56.
[14]George Banta Co., Menasha, p. 60.

8. 1944 — L. Taylor Merrill

The steady rehabilitation since 1900 of the Lucius Fisher version for the naming of Beloit was given further impetus in 1944 by Prof. L. Taylor Merrill of Beloit College in a paper given before the Third Annual Convention of the State Historical Society at Beloit. Apparently relying upon William Fiske Brown and a bit of imagination to embellish a good story, Prof. Merrill continued the uncritical restoration of the Fisher tradition:

Beloit's first sawmill, gristmill, and blacksmith shop were early in operation. The founders were building well. But what would they name their settlement? Caleb Blodgett had lived for a time in New York State. He wanted to name the town New Albany. That seemed too fast for some, just as the Indian name Turtle was too slow.

So in 1838 a public meeting was held to choose a new name, with a committee of three delegated to perform the task. What a narrow escape we had from traveling under some meaningless monstrosity of nomenclature, because one member of the committee recorded that when he and his colleagues had retired to a shanty near-by for deliberation a committeeman proposed forming the new name simply by drawing and compounding letters of the alphabet by lot. Then according to the William Fiske Brown history:

Major Charles Johnson a member of the committee suggested Ballote as a supposed French word meaning handsome. As many of the early settlers had pleasant remembrances of Detroit, Mr. Lucius G. Fisher another committee member proposed that they have a name sounding like that and spoke the words Balloit, or Beloit. The latter name was approved in committee, reported to the settlers by Major Johnson and unanimously adopted.

Thus the origin of a name Beloit has worn with satisfaction for 106 years, and one which has been copied by communities in at least three other states.[15]

Evidently Prof. Merrill was willing to accept the Brown book as the definitive word on the naming of Beloit. His failure to mention the fact that a sharp controversy existed over the naming question supports the inference that he did not research the subject to any great extent.

9. 1950 — Stewart Holbrook

Stewart Holbrook's popular book, *The Yankee Exodus*, repeated the erroneous 1857 naming date, presumably borrowing from the centennial *Book of Beloit* misprint; but, more importantly, asked an interesting

---

[15] *Wis. Magazine of History*, Vol. 28, 150-151. Again the 1838 date.

question: did the name Beloit evolve from the French *belle endroit?* Holbrook says:

For the next twenty years[16] *the thriving village was known variously as Blodgett's Settlement, New Albany, or simply as The Turtle. In 1857, so local tradition goes, one of the Yankees proposed an original name, and his attempt to pronounce the French words which he said meant "handsome ground" (was it belle endroit?) came out something like Beloit; and Beloit it was and is . . .* [17]

Again we must bear in mind John Hackett's insistence that Major Johnston and his committee knew no French and that he good-naturedly pretended otherwise in order to impress his townsmen that the name Beloit had a special meaning. Hackett mentioned Major Johnston laughing over his little joke in 1837 when he deceived the French scholars in attendance at the meeting. Over a hundred years later the good Major was still having his joke.

10. 1954 — E. Bruce Thompson

Several men who achieved national fame lived part of their lives in Beloit. One of them, Matt Carpenter, the renowned lawyer who later became a U.S. Senator and leader in President Grant's administration (and who was widely regarded as of presidential stature himself), began his youthful career in Beloit from 1848 to 1858. E. Bruce Thompson in his biography *Matthew Hale Carpenter — Webster of the West* makes a passing reference to the name Beloit:

. . . it was precisely what its French name implied "a situation delightful to behold." [18]

11. 1959 — Agnes Powers Millen

Lastly, Agnes Powers Millen, writing in the *Rock County Chronicle,* illustrates the never-ending nature of the conflicting versions surrounding the naming of Beloit. She ignores the revived Fisher account and repeats once again the Crane story, but also employes the incorrect 1838 date:

It was finally decided to appoint a committee of three of the oldest residents to report a name or names from which the meeting assembled

---

[16]From 1837 to 1857 presumably. A regrettable but logical assumption, if the *Book of Beloit* was Holbrook's source for the 1857 date.

[17]Holbrook, Id., 113.

[18]P. 22.

could make a selection. The committee consisted of Major Charles Johnson, Caleb Blodgett, and a Mr. Allen.[19]

12. Enigma

Thus, well over a hundred years after Lucius Fisher first received credit from Rev. Lyman for the naming of Beloit, we have come full circle and the issue remains as deadlocked as ever, turning largely upon which earlier account later writers have happened to read. Obviously, almost all readers and writers have been only dimly aware of the nature and extent of the dispute, except for those of the 1878-1888 and 1900-1910 eras when the issues were fully developed by both sides in books and newspapers. Almost without exception, later accounts are distinguished mainly for their faithful acceptance of whatever accounts their authors chanced to read. What then is the answer?

---

[19] "Sketch of the Life of John Hackett," p. 1, Rock Co. Hist. Society.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Case For Lucius Fisher Naming Beloit

Did young Lucius Fisher in 1837 give Beloit its name while serving on a committee with Major Johnston and Horace Hobart? There are many reasons to believe he did and some of them are summarized, as follows:

1.

Fisher deserves the benefit of the doubt. He was the first man publicly given credit for the naming in the 1856 *History* when memories were less dimmed by time and while it would have been relatively easy to contradict or refute a spurious claim.

2.

In 1869 Fisher himself publicly claimed credit for the naming in a newspaper and listed the names of the other two men (Johnston and Hobart) who served on the committee.

3.

It was not until 1878, forty years after the naming occurred and twenty-two years after Fisher was publicly given credit, that Robert Crane first disputed in a newspaper the truth of Fisher's claim. This is a long time to delay challenging the record.

4.

Repetitious, unresearched, undocumented, and uncritically prepared or not, the published history books for the past hundred years, with only one exception, give credit for the naming to Lucius G. Fisher. For instance, the 1856, 1900, 1908, 1924, 1927, and 1936 histories name Fisher. Only the 1879 history disagrees.

5.

Lucius Fisher was no ordinary claimant. From his arrival in 1837 until his departure for Chicago in 1866, probably no man was more active and influential in the development of Beloit than he was. From all accounts, he was a man of outstanding personality and character and a natural leader. It is difficult to believe that a man of his stature and reputation would risk contradiction and humiliation by asserting a false claim when others still lived who knew better.

6.

Robert Crane was not necessarily as neutral toward his old

acquaintance Lucius Fisher as he claimed. In 1855 Crane had permitted Matt Carpenter to use him in a clever lawsuit Carpenter devised to challenge the legal title of many Beloiters to their lands. Crane had sustained criticism by some for his role in the suit, as a dupe or otherwise. It was Lucius Fisher — who else? — who had led the fight against Carpenter (with the legal advice of no one less than Abraham Lincoln) and ultimately prevailed over Carpenter in the courts. Crane was evidently embarrassed; Fisher, on the other hand, emerged as the knight in shining armor who had slain the crafty dragon Carpenter. How impartial and scrupulously objective was Crane in building his case against Fisher?

7.

John Hackett might have been mistaken in his recollection of events. The support of the venerable and highly respected Hackett was the strongest argument Robert Carne had. Instead of Hackett using Crane as a mouthpiece for an attack on Fisher, is it possible that Crane took advantage of Hackett and put words in his mouth?

8.

Robert Crane claimed William Jack as a supporter of the anti-Fisher ;ory in 1878. Yet William Fiske Brown in his 1900 book claimed Jack old but still living) as a supporter of the pro-Fisher version. Did Crane claim too much?

9.

It seems highly questionable that Nathan Allyn (the Mr. Allen named as a member of the committee by Crane), who apparently never settled in Beloit and who seems to have been busy staking a huge claim in the Shopiere area in 1837, would have been named to such a committee. Allyn figures not at all in early Beloit accounts. In fact, Robert Crane and John Hackett had forgotten his first name and couldn't spell his last. They apparently didn't know that Nathan's son, Capt. Albert Allen, still living in Shopiere, was his descendant.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Case Against Fisher

Opponents of the Lucius Fisher claim, led by Robert Crane and John Hackett (who said the naming committee consisted of Major Johnston, Caleb Blodgett, and Mr. Allen), in a debate based upon the record might summarize their arguments, as follows:

1.

Lucius Fisher moved into the vacumn created by the early deaths of the three committee members named by Crane. Major Johnston and Nathan Allyn died within a year of the naming in 1838; Caleb Blodgett died in 1840. Their deaths so soon after the naming would explain the unusual silence and lack of information on the subject that obviously existed until 1856 when Rev. Lyman gave credit to Fisher.

2.

Considerable circumstantial evidence suggests that Fisher himself gave Rev. Lyman his information for the 1856 *History's* initial story of the naming of Beloit. It is also significant that Lyman evidently was not told the names of the other committee members. In 1856 Horace Hobart was living and could have agreed or disagreed. It was not until 1869 that Fisher first named in writing the three members of the committee: Major Johnston, Horace Hobart and Lucius Fisher. By that time Hobart was dead. Johnston, of course, had died in 1838, soon after the naming.

3.

If the real committee consisted of Johnston, Blodgett and Allyn, as Robert Crane maintained, these three were all deceased by 1840, three years after the naming. It is possible that Fisher thereafter may have gradually asserted a claim that he had coined the name and found himself uncontradicted. Emboldened as the years passed without contradiction, he may have announced it as a fact to Rev. Lyman for use in the 1856 *History*.

4.

If Fisher did name Beloit, why did he wait until 1856 before arranging to say it in writing? All indications are that the local newspaper never published any such account. Fisher was not a shy or retiring man. To have named Beloit would be a mark of distinction that he would not minimize or modestly hide. Fisher was a community leader — by 1856 probably *the* community leader — and a man of great influence and considerable reputation. To have remained publicly silent for twenty years (1837 to 1856) and permit confusion to gradually grow on a subject that he personally knew all about does not seem in keeping with the strong personality of Lucius Fisher.

5.

It is possible that Fisher did suggest the name *Beloit* to Major Johnston in a conversation some hours or days before the meeting was called to order. Perhaps the conversation occurred in a shanty as Fisher said; perhaps Horace Hobart was also present. Years later, the more he thought about it, Fisher may have felt it only fair that he should take credit for the name Johnston liked so much and later proposed to the authorized committee of Johnston, Blodgett and Allyn. But this would not make him a member of the committee charged with picking a name.

6.

The curious silence of the *Chicago Magazine* article in 1857, which ignored Fisher completely only a year after the Lyman story appeared in the 1856 *History,* and the even more remarkable silence of the 1866-1867 *Beloit Journal* series of newspaper articles on pioneer Beloit history, strongly support the inference that a community disagreement then existed over Fisher's role in the naming.

7.

Robert Crane and John Hackett stated flatly in newspaper articles in 1878 and 1884 that Lucius Fisher was not a member of the committee. Crane also listed the names of several other first settlers, while they were still living, as supporters of his version. Presumably they would have contradicted Crane had he misquoted them. Their names: Daniel Tasker, Deacon Henry Mears, and Charles Messer — three prominent residents. Crane also implied that Daniel Blodgett and William Jack agreed with him.

8.

Even when challenged by Crane in 1878, Lucius Fisher never mentioned the name of a single living first settler as a supporter of his claim. Nor, despite the airing of the dispute in the *Beloit Free Press,* does it appear that any first settler came to Fisher's support in writing while Robert Crane, John Hackett and Lucius Fisher still lived.

9.

The 1879 *History* was written about the same time as the great controversy of 1878 was thoroughly aired on both sides, and enough had been said to make everyone mindful of what was rapidly assuming the proportions of a scandal. For the first and perhaps only time in the community's hisjtory most residents were aware of exactly what the argument was all about. The 1879 *History* was to be the definitive history and it was assembled by professionals after consultation with the first

settlers still living in the Beloit area. The fact that it entirely ignores the Fisher claim under these important circumstances, without so much as a passing reference to Fisher, is persuasive evidence of what the judgment of Fisher's peers was.

10.

The outspoken backing of Robert Crane by John Hackett, one of the pillars of the Beloit community for 50 years and a man of outstanding integrity who was also personally present at the 1837 meeting, gives great weight to the anti-Fisher argument. In fact, both the 1857 *Chicago Magazine* article and the 1879 *History* accounts bear unmistakeable signs of Hackett's influence. It can even be argued that Hackett used Robert Crane as his spokesman.

11.

Caleb Blodgett, Major Johnston, and Nathan Allyn (the committee named by Robert Crane and Hackett) were three of a kind and had much in common. They were among the first to arrive at The Turtle; they were mature men in their fifties. They were men of substance, leaders by nature, who quickly claimed large parcels of land in the area.

Certainly it would have been surprising to omit Blodgett, the founder of the community and its spokesman, from the committee. Since he was the dominant force at this time behind the tiny community's development, and had the most to gain or lose, his presence on the committee would seem almost a foregone conclusion.

12.

Lucius Fisher and Horace Hobart (claimed by Fisher as committeemen with him) appear to be less plausible choices. Both were then young men in their twenties of relatively modest means. Both were, by comparison with the three older men, Johnnys-come-lately to New Albany. Fisher didn't arrive until July 15, 1837; Hobart came even later on August 4th. The naming occurred soon after, probably about September. It seems improbable that two young newcomers would be named to a committee of three to carry out such a controversial assignment after so brief a presence.

13.

There was doubt in the minds of some of the anti-Fisher faction that he was even living in the community when the naming took place. Fisher himself stated that he left Beloit soon after the naming and spent the winter of 1837-1838 in Milwaukee. Crane claimed that Fisher left before the naming. Others apparently agreed. It is possible, if this be true, that Fisher

might have suggested the name Beloit to Johnston before he left for Milwaukee.

14.

The naming of Mr. Allen as a member of the committee has a certain plausibility about it — otherwise why would Crane and Hackett name someone they had to admit was so little remembered that his first name was forgotten? Their admitted confusion over the exact name has a ring of truth about it. Conspirators would scarcely be so unsure.

Actually, years later the shadowy figure of Mr. Allen emerges as the very real Nathan Allyn who settled in the Shopiere area and died in 1838. Certainly this explains his being so soon forgotten. Significantly, Blodgett and Allyn arrived at The Turtle looking claims on perhaps the same day in May 1836. Blodgett may have been happy to have Allyn on the committee as a reliable friend to provide a majority vote against what he might deem an unwise name.

15.

The revival of the pro-Fisher claim by William Fiske Brown and others from 1900 to the present day should perhaps be regarded as inconsequential because it adds almost nothing by way of new evidence or documentation. The real battle was fought in the years from 1878 to 1884, while the participants were alive, and everything thereafter is largely repetitious. As far as the naming of Beloit was concerned, Lucius Fisher appears to have been seriously discredited at the time of his death in 1886.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

How Was Beloit Named?

Stripped of repetition and disregarding what is undocumented or based on speculation, what significant conclusions can we draw today from the dispute over the naming of Beloit?

First, the record clearly indicates that for 20 years after Beloit received its name (from 1837 to 1856) no one stated publicly or wrote what he claimed was an exact account of how the naming occurred. This in itself is a remarkable circumstance. It was later explained that the committee selecting the name agreed to keep silent, presumably to minimize the possibility of further argument or grumbling from those disenchanted by the name and who might seek to change it once again.

In view of the somewhat haphazard and amusing manner in which the name was created, such prudence may have been justified. Certainly it was an unusual name. Hence a discreet silence for a few months or a year can easily be appreciated.

But why such a lack of precise information as the years went by? For instance, the *Beloit Journal* editor in his 1850 newspaper article, while purporting to explain the naming of Beloit for the benefit of the Kenosha editor, exhibits a degree of vagueness inappropriate for the circumstance. He quotes no one as his source, mentions no names, and writes in terms of a tradition rather than as one with a documented story at his fingertips.

No writer ever referred to any oral or written claim or explanation made by anyone before Lyman's article in the 1856 *History*. No early letter has been uncovered describing what happened at the meeting.

Part of the difficulty in remembering the events of the meeting that took place about September, 1837, was probably due to the fact that the meeting must have gone so smoothly and provoked so little argument that the details surrounding the discussion soon passed out of mind. It must have been an informal gathering with no one keeping minutes or any kind of record. Although between 20 and 30 men were present, no one seems to have ever compiled a list of those present. For instance, even Robert Crane never claimed that he was one of those in attendance, although he had been living in Beloit for several months. Possibly he was ill or absent from the area. Good diarist and historian that he was, had he been present he would undoubtedly have known more details than he did. For some puzzling reason no one ever wrote about the meeting except in the barest detail.

Certainly during those first 20 years there must have been considerable discussion concerning the naming. Newcomers were pouring into the area

by the thousands and many of them would want to know how the name was arrived at. Probably several versions were circulated. Some confusion may have already existed before 1856. But why should there be confusion or uncertainty so soon after the event?

One plausible explanation comes readily to mind. If the committee did in fact consist of Major Johnston, Caleb Blodgett and Nathan Allyn, all three were dead by 1840 and could not give the easy answers explaining what had happened. On the other hand, if the committee consisted of Johnston, Horace Hobart and Lucius Fisher, then why did Hobart and Fisher never speak for the record during those 20 years? Actually, Hobart never claimed he participated as a member of the committee, and Fisher did not name Hobart as a member until 1869 after Hobart was dead.

During the critical period of the dispute — that is, the years 1878 to 1884 — the real battle over who named Beloit was fought, and the anti-Fisher forces led by Robert Crane and John Hackett seem to have had all the better of it. During these critical years of intense discussion none of Robert Crane's claimed supporters ever publicly disavowed him; and John Hackett came boldly to his aid. Lucius Fisher, however, failed to ame a single corroborator of his version; and no one appears to have ome forward to support publicly his cause.

Everything written after 1910 on the naming was sheer repetition and adds no new insights into the problem. No new documents were uncovered. In fact, the dispute must be resolved almost entirely on what was written before Fisher and Hackett died in 1886. What was said by Ellery Crane and William Fiske Brown in the interim, 1887 to 1910, mentioned little that was new. Brown, in fact, complicated the record by adding erroneous data that tends to weaken some of his conclusions in support of Fisher.

Nevertheless, Lucius Fisher must have had something to do with the naming of Beloit. It seems incredible that a man of his stature would have attempted to brazen out an absolute lie. In view of the strong evidence against his claim, what then is the most likely explanation or theory of his role?

There is one guess that would explain both sides of the controversy. We know that John Hackett insisted that he noticed Major Johnston (the one man both sides agree served on the committee) making sounds like *Detroit* before the day of the meeting. Is it not possible that Fisher suggested *Beloit* as a likely name for Johnston's consideration shortly before the actual meeting, perhaps even in a shanty as Fisher said, and with Horace Hobart present?

Under this theory, Johnston, Blodgett and Allyn thereafter could have

been selected as the official committee (as Crane and Hackett insisted) and quickly have adopted the name Fisher had earlier suggested to Johnston — that is, *Beloit,* which the Major so obviously wanted.

Then, as the years passed — with Johnston, Blodgett and Allyn soon dead — Fisher may have begun to mention that he had coined the name *Beloit,* merely explaining that he had suggested the name to Johnston; and then gradually he could have rationalized that the committee comprised Johnston, Hobart and Fisher. We must remember that Fisher did not name the members of the committee until 1869, over 30 years after the naming. If Fisher did in fact suggest the name Beloit to Johnston, while Hobart was present, then his proprietary interest in the name is understandable. The name was his and he deserved the credit for it. Under this theory the adoption of the name by the Johnston — Blodgett — Allen Committee was a mere formality at the Boarding House meeting.

Be that as it may, no one today can say for certain which committee named Beloit and whether Lucius Fisher was right, half-right (as suggested by this writer), or wrong.

Some day the riddle will probably be answered by an old diary or letter, perhaps in some library file back in New Hampshire or Vermont. Some of the settlers in 1837 must have described the meeting in letters to relatives or friends. Whether anything still survives is the question. Some library collection, some attic, some file of forgotten papers may have the definitive answer buried away — but where?[1]

---

[1]For the author's own account of the Naming of Beloit, see Ch. 6, sec. 2, pp. 85-88.

Appendix
and
Bibliography

APPENDIX

(A) Questions For The Student Of Beloit History

1. In 1836 and 1837 where were these settlements located: New Albany, Midway, Pecatonica, Wisconsin City, Rockport, New Mexico, Centerville, Squaw Prairie, Four Lakes, Southport, Prairie du Lac, and Jefferson Prairie?
2. Beloit is said to have been named in 1837, 1838, 1840, and 1847. Which date is correct?
3. Where precisely were the cabins of Joseph Tebo and Caleb Blodgett located?
4. Who first said Caleb Blodgett purchased "three looks" of land from Tebo?
5. Did Beloit celebrate its Centennial in 1936 a year too late?
6. Was the name Beloit derived from the French, or was it a variation of the name Detroit?
7. What committee of three men chose the name Beloit?
8. During the Black Hawk War did the forces of Gen. Atkinson and Gen. Scott camp the same night at the Turtle Village within a mile of each other?
9. Does any painting, sketch or photograph of Caleb or Chloe Blodgett exist?
10. How did the name of Rock River evolve?
11. What other names besides Beloit did the first settlers consider?
12. Who were some of the Indian chiefs identified with The Turtle?
13. What pre-1840 Beloit diaries, letters and documents are known to exist?
14. Who were the original members of the New England Emigrating Co.?
15. Which Horace White is Horace White Park named for?
16. Who was the Mr. Allen that may have helped name Beloit?
17. What happened to the proposal to build a canal down present-day Central Avenue to Mechanic's Green?
18. Where did Juliette Kinzie, the author of Wau-bun, camp overnight at The Turtle in 1831?
19. What is the earliest date that the name Beloit appears on a presently existing document?
20. Why is the state line so irregular in the Beloit area?
21. When did Tebo build his cabin at The Turtle?
22. When did the Sabbath come to Blodgett's Place?
23. Where was the first cemetery located?
24. In what year did the dispute over the naming of Beloit become a matter of public record?
25. What is the story of Joseph Tebo's disappearance?
26. When did the first steamboat from the Mississippi visit Beloit?
27. Who won the battle of Waterloo?
28. What was the name of Beloit's first street? What is its name today?

29. Did Lucius Fisher create the name Beloit?
30. Where were the Indian mounds located?
31. Where were the principal Indian trails (traces) at The Turtle?
32. Why was the Indian village called The Turtle?
33. How accurately does the Abraham Lincoln marker at Lawton Street and Riverside Drive designate his 1832 camp site?
34. Where were Beloit's two steamboat landings located?
35. Who plowed a furrow of ground in February at The Turtle?
36. What method of locomotion did the Rope Ferry utilize in crossing Rock River?
37. When did the moundbuilders live at The Turlte?

(B) Chronological List Of First Settlers Before 1838

Based Upon Incomplete And Frequently Conflicting Early Accounts

Approximate Date Of Arrival	Name	Background	Origin
Late summer, 1835	Joseph Tebo and Family	Age 50, trader, trapper	Canada, Koshkonong
May, 1836	Caleb Blodgett	51, farmer, land developer, merchant	Vermont, New York, Ohio, Illinois
	John Hackett	28, Blodgett's son-in-law	
	Daniel Blodgett	20, son	
	Nelson Blodgett	18, son	
	Nathan Allyn	55, farmer (Shopiere)	Hartford, Conn.
Autumn, 1836	Gideon, John, and Samuel Langdon	Blodgett employees	
Dec. 1836	Chloe Blodgett & some children	53, Caleb's wife	
	George Goodhue	26, merchant (Rockford), Investor for Goodhue Family	Sherbrooke, Canada
	James Carter	Millwright for saw-mill and gristmill	
Jan. 1837	Charles Johnston	49, Investor	Vermont
February	Dr. Horace White	27, Physician, agent of New England Emigrating Co.	Colebrook, New Hampshire
March 9	Robert P. Crane	29, Carpenter	Colebrook, N.H.
	Otis W. Bicknell	23	Colebrook, N.H.

March, 1837	Caesar Jones Don Jones W. Delameter Abraham Levake Barrett Platt Austin Shaver Johnathon William Bundy	Blodgett employees mentioned in early 1837 as doing construction work on saw mill, farming, or labor. Presumably they did not settle.	
April 15	Henry Mears	Farmer	Vermont
	Louisa Mears	Wife	
Spring	Royal Wadsworth and wife	Managers, Goodhue boarding house	
	Charles F.H. Goodhue	51, Business man and investor	Sherbrooke, Canada
	Charles Goodhue, Jr.	20, son	
May	Paul Bonaparte Field	8 oxen and plow for hire	Michigan
June 5	Alfred L. Field	28, Merchant	Colebrook, N.H.
June	Chauncey Tuttle	41, Farmer	New York
July	Cordelia Blodgett Hackett	23, wife of John	
July 3	Ira Hersey	35, Grist mill operator	Brunswick, Maine
July 4	Hiram Hill	Blacksmith	Ohio
July 13	Leonard Hatch		Stratford, N.H.
July 15	Lucius G. Fisher	28, Merchant	Vermont
July 20	George W.Bicknell	28, Doctor	Canaan, VT.
	Edwin Bicknell	22	
	James Cass & Wife	27, Farmer	Colebrook, N.H.
	John Willey	Mason	
August 4, 1837	Almira Crane Ellery Crane Sarah Crane	Wife of Robert infant son daughter	Colebrook, N.H.
	Thomas Crosby & Esther, his wife	32, Farmer	Colebrook, N.H.
	George Crosby James Crosby Grandmother Crosby	Infant son Brother of Thomas	
August 9	Horace Hobart	35, Carpenter	N.H.

August 10	Charles M. Messer	27, Carpenter, Surveyor	N.H.
August 21	Benjamin J.Tenney	30, Carpenter	
August 22	Asahel B. Howe	35, Carpenter, Merchant	Groton, N.H.
Sept.	Tyler H. Moore	42, Brother-in-law of C.F.H. Goodhue, Merchant	Vermont
	William Goodhue	14, Son of C.F.H. Goodhue	Sherbrooke, Canada
	——— Kelsou	Surveyor of Beloit	
Sept. 15	Harvey W. Bundy	Clerk	
Sept. 27	——— Ellis		
Autumn	John Doolittle	42, Farmer, Merchant	Canada
	Daniel Tasker		
November 8	J. Bradford Colley	21, Cabinet-maker, Farmer	Bedford, N.H.
	Ann Jane Atwood	Colley's Sister	
	J.L. Parker		
	William Grimes	21, Mason	Colebrook, N.H.
November 10	Dr. Horace White	(Second arrival)	
	Lawrence C. Beach	36, Farmer	N.H.
	William Jack	22, Farmer	Sherbrooke, Canada
	Cyrus Eames	33, Tanner & Currier	N.H.
	——— Stebbin		
November	Horace Clark	(Died Dec. 2)	
	Maria Clark	Horace's Sister	
	John Reed	51, Merchant, Papermaker	Derby Line, Canada
December 3	John P. Houston	39, Millwright	Bedford, N.H.
December, 1837	George Fisher	Father of Lucius	Vermont
	Tyler Blodgett	28, Eldest son of Caleb	
	——— Shaler	Inn Keeper	Mass.
	Walter Warner		

(C) Where Did Abraham Lincoln Camp At The Turtle In 1832?

On July 1, 1832 Private Abraham Lincoln camped near The Turtle with the troops of General Atkinson.[1] Precisely one hundred years later the Beloit Historical Society dedicated a marker at Riverside Drive and Lawton Avenue, near the Fairbanks, Morse gate, which reads as follows:

LINCOLN
CAMPED HERE
JUNE 30, 1832
MARKED BY
BELOIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
1932

Lincoln marker, northeast corner of Riverside Drive and Lawton Avenue, near factory gate, visible from highway.

Photo by: Robert D. Thompson

[1]July 1 is probably the correct date. See Ch. One, sec. 10. Lincoln enlisted April 21 at New Salem, where he had been working as a store clerk. Years later he wrote: "I was elected a Captain of Volunteers -- a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since." After a month of service his company had been discharged, and he had re-enlisted as a private in another company. When his second enlistment expired he re-enlisted for 30 more days as a private in an independent spy company. At Lake Koshkonong Lincoln was mustered out in mid-July and returned to Dixon, Ill. For a detailed account of Lincoln's service, see Harry E. Pratt's summary in "Lincoln, 1809-1839," *Lincoln Day By Day* series.

In his dedicatory remarks, Simon G. Strong mentioned how that particular site had been selected:

. . . The Beloit Historical Society are dedicating this boulder which has been placed here to remain for all time to commemorate the place where our Martyred President, A. Lincoln, camped just 100 years ago.

Some may wonder and say are you sure this is the spot. We are sure, for 27 years later after Lincoln's speech here in Beloit which was Oct. 1st, 1859, he arranged to be taken to Janesville to keep another engagement. Upon entering the carriage before leaving he asked to be driven to the east limits of the city and then out by way of the upper road. According to newspaper accounts of that time he located this spot where he camped and related this story of his overnight stay, which occurred in the Spring of 1832 during the Black Hawk War. . . [2]

Alas for the good intentions of the Beloit Historical Society! A week later the July 8th issue of *The Beloit Independent* featured the following article:

LINCOLN MARKER NOT IN RIGHT
PLACE SAYS CORNELIUS BUCKLEY

The correctness of locating the Lincoln camp site marker at the corner of Lawton Avenue and Pleasant Street is questioned by Attorney Cornelius Buckley in a letter addressed to this newspaper. Inasmuch as Attorney Buckley is rated by experts as the greatest living authority on Black Hawk history it is reasonable to assume that his communication should be called to the attention of the association who located the marker. The letter appears below:

To the Editor:

. . . As an actual fact Lincoln camped that night a full quarter of a mile northeast of the site of the marker.

In Vol. 12, page 247, Wisconsin Historical Reports, you will find an article written by R.B. Thwaites, secretary of the society, in which he quotes in a footnote of mine from an article in the Beloit Free Press of October 15, 1891 and January 21, 1892, when the site of the camp was placed near the northeast corner of the southeast quarter of Section 25, 480 rods north of the state line, and directly north of the old fair grounds. [3]

. . . The site of that encampment is beyond question on the four corners of Park and White Avenues. I have known this fact for 50 years. I have conversed with men, long since dead, who saw in early days the relics of the old

---

[2]Beloit Hist. Society, Lincoln file.

[3]See Ch. One, sec. 11, for Buckley's earlier account.

encampment. William R. Rood, the grandfather of Counsellor John C. Rood, owned, in my young day, the entire tracts, including the Timberland, from the prairie road to Rock River. Luman F. Wood, proprietor of the old American House, gave me long ago his recollections of the old camp site.

. . . A monument may be erected anywhere. A marker only where the actual event occurred. No criticism can be too severe on an epitaph lettered in bold relief on the face of a granite rock, which records an absolute false declaration.

CORNELIUS BUCKLEY

Whatever the historical fact may be, the Lincoln marker has stood its ground. Perhaps its location was deemed reasonably accurate in view of the fact that no one could say how much area the 1832 camp actually embraced. More importantly, the marker stands near the highway to Janesville and Rockford where it could be observed by future generations of travelers, and this may have outweighed the objection of a historical purist who could also conceivably be wrong.

(D) Did Beloit Celebrate Its 1936 Centennial A Year Too Late?

Although the record seems clear that Caleb Blodgett first visited The Turtle in the spring of 1836, probably about the month of May when Issac Smith said he saw Blodgett "looking claims,"[1] the fact remains that several early histories state that he first came in the fall of 1835, that he soon thereafter purchased his claim from Tebo, and then proceeded to build his cabin in the last months of 1835.[2]

These early accounts cannot be summarily ignored, first, because they are old and were written soon after the event, and, secondly, because later accounts giving the year as 1836 did not mention that the 1835 date was erroneous. Had they said so we would be more satisfied. Their silence about the discrepancy must give us pause.

Does it really matter much whether Caleb Blodgett came to The Turtle in 1835 or in 1836? Perhaps not to the casual reader who examines one account and is interested merely in the story of how a tiny settlement in which he is interested came into existence. However, it is a matter of concern to the history-conscious reader who wants to reconstruct that past as accurately as his available information permits, particularly when he is aware of conflicting versions that require evaluation.

Whether Blodgett founded present-day Beloit in 1835, instead of 1836, is

---

[1] *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, VI, 422-423.

[2] 1856 *History*, 47-49; *Fisher Fragment* (1854?); *Chicago Magazine* (1857), 75. Many later accounts also repeat the 1835 date.

of particular importance for another reason. Beloit celebrated its Centennial in 1936. Certainly it would be disconcerting, as well as embarrassing, to learn that the city celebrated its own Centennial a year late. Obviously this is a challenge that a history of pioneer Beloit should dispose of definitively.

The 1856 *Rock County History,* important because of its age and wide distribution, in substance stated that Beloit was founded in 1835, as follows:

The year 1835 marks the first step towards the settlement of this town . . .

Caleb Blodgett was the first of the settlers. He found at his first visit to this place in 1835, Thiebeau, a Frenchman . . .

Blodgett, in 1835 and '6 bought the somewhat nebulous claim of Thiebeau, for the sum of two hundred and fifty dollars.[3]

The entire narrative gives the clear impression that Blodgett immediately purchased the land after his arrival, which would be 1835, and then fortified his claim by plowing furrows around as much land as he could as quickly as possible.

However, other first settlers stated flatly that Blodgett came in 1836. A careful examination of all the evidence strongly supports the 1836 date. The *Book of Beloit* (1936) does say that Blodgett and his son "prospected" at The Turtle in 1835 before returning in the spring of 1836 to stay. This is possible. The Centennial Book cites no authority. Probably it reflects an effort to reconcile the two dates by assuming that the 1835 "visit" was just that and nothing more, and that Blodgett didn't really come to stay until the next spring, presumably in May, 1836.

In retrospect, we may safely accept the 1836 date for Blodgett's settling of The Turtle. In addition to the old historical accounts of Robert Crane, the 1879 *History,* Ellery Crane, and William Fiske Brown, which all agree on the 1836 date, we have several independent circumstances to support this conclusion:

(1) According to John Inman and William Holmes, who visited The Turtle on July 19, 1835, and Thomas Talcott, who stopped there overnight on July 24, 1835, no one — not even Tebo — was living there.[4]

(2) Catherine Holmes Atwood described the arrival of her family at Tebo's cabin on March 9, 1836 on their way to present-day Janesville but makes no reference to Blodgett, although under the circumstances she would have certainly mentioned him had he been settled at The Turtle.[5]

---

[3]Pp. 47, 49.

[4]1856 *History,* 29; Carr, *History of Rockton,* 20-21.

[5]1908 *History,* 130.

(3) The diary of Issac T. Smith for May 22, 1836 mentioned that he saw Blodgett "looking claims" on a horse he had borrowed from Tebo.[6]

(4) The Reminiscences of Albert Allyn state that his father Nathan came to the area in the spring of 1836, when Tebo's shanty was the only building, and that "Caleb Blodgett came the same morning and laid claim to that section of county . . ."[7]

Conclusion: The 1836 date is correct and Beloit did not err in celebrating its centennial in 1936. While it is unfortunate that the 1856 *History* was never specifically corrected by later writers, the 1835 date was simply an error that was automatically corrected by better research. It is merely the first of many examples in this book illustrating why careful readers must treat local histories with both deference due to age and occasional reservation.

(E) The Battle Of Waterloo (Or Would You Believe Shopiere?)

Nathan Allyn — the Mr. Allen who was said to be one of the three members of the committee that named Beloit — settled in the vicinity of Shopiere in 1837. Soon thereafter the Allyn family were participants in a frontier skirmish, later known as the Battle of Waterloo, before Shopiere had been named.

Allyn's family had taken possession of the north bank of Turtle Creek (where Sweet-Allyn Park is situated today by the Shopiere dam), directly across from the Meeks family who occupied the south bank. B.E. Mack, tongue in cheek, a few years later recorded this battle for posterity:

. . . [The Meeks] family, which consisted of Father, Mother, five sons and five daughters, was rather remarkable for size — the whole number averaging about 200 lbs. each. They belonged to that class, in the western country, that keeps a little ahead of civilization — known as "Borderers," a sort of connecting link between civilization and barbarism . . . This class of people can never do too many kindnesses for their friends nor too many injuries to their enemies. +

About this time a company was formed in Connecticut, and claimed on the north side of the Turtle, opposite Shopiere. This colony [the Allyns] was composed of people of an entirely different character and disposition, having brought along with them many of those peculiar notions, for which that State is noted . . . +

Things went on without any open rupture until the latter part of the summer of 1837, when both parties commenced cutting hay on the bottoms

---

[6] *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, VI, 422-423.

[7] *Beloit Free Press*, Nov. 27, 1899.

on the north side of the stream. The yankees proving to be the smartest workers, were like to monopolize all the hay, and thus rob old Brindle — the only stock possessed by the Meekers — of her rights, and subject her to a winter of browsing . . .+

Uncle John [a Meek], from his cabin door discovered the true state of things, and sounded the bugle for a general parade of the colony. They got together all the fire-arms about the premises — charging them heavily — and a log, extending from one corner of their cabin eight or ten feet, served as a resting place for their muskets and rifles — all ready for a discharge upon the offending yankees — while he, with stentorian voice, worthy of a general officer, ordered them to disperse and leave the hay, or in case they neglected to obey, he would discharge a broadside into them; but the yankees, reckless of consequences, did not obey the threat; but continued the work of raking and carting off the hay.+

Matters were now coming to an "awful" crisis. It was thought best to hold a council of war at the "Meeker fort," when it was thought best to dispatch a detachment consisting of the old lady and her five daughters to attempt to drive the marauders from the ground, while Uncle John and the five sons were to keep possession of the "fort." The old Lady, armed with a long-tined pitch fork, the daughters each with a fish speer, actuated by the strongest sympathy for "poor old Brindle," presented no mean battle array on the south bank of the Turtle, each one full six feet in their shoes.+

Having arrived at the stream the heroine thus addressed her daughters: "The infernal yankees are the pest of our lives . . . and now I am determined to make a stand and fight, for I will not go any further."+

"Go to it, mother, we will follow you," was the unanimous response; when, brandishing their weapons, they started to ford the stream. The yankees, observing the warlike movements on the opposite side, had not been idle; but heroically acting up to the exigency of the circumstances, made choice of [one of the Allyns] to command the defense. He at once ordered the hay wagons to be arranged for a breast-work, and thus addressed his compeers: ". . . [N]ow prepare yourselves to defend your rights; to fight the Meekers individually and collectively — males and females . . ."+

By this time the assailants had approached the breast-works. The old lady ordered her valiant daughters to charge upon the company, while she made an individual onset upon the Captain, which she did, approaching him with a long-tined fork. The Captain drew a pistol and ordered here to stand — to advance at the peril of her life; but she was well aware of her safety under cover of the guns at the "fort"; — so nothing daunted, she pricked him out from behind the ramparts — he continuing to step backwards as she advanced — still threatening to fire if she advanced "another inch," until ere he was aware, he backed off the bank of a bayou of the stream, with eight feet of water. She, observing her advantage, gave him a severe thrust as he

went down the bank, when he dove and swam beyond the reach of her fork.+

The rest of the company — assailed by the girls — stood their ground, courageously defending themselves, until they saw their Captain fall; and supposing that he was killed; hastily retreated, and left the field to the undisputed victors. They hurried to the settlement to break the sad news to the widow, who, being just in the act of fainting, was joyfully relieved by the presence of the Capt., all dripping with mud and water.

The trophies consisted of three rakes, one fork, one pail of rations, containing four yankee johnnycakes, eight cold potatoes, one jug of whiskey, &c. From the above mentioned battle the place was ever after known as Waterloo, until changed — on the establishment of a Post Office — to the present name of Shopiere.[1]

(F) Beloit Land Title Dispute

Perhaps significantly, the two key figures in the 1878 dispute over the naming of Beloit, Lucius Fisher and Robert Crane, also were participants in an earlier controversy in 1856 that aroused statewide interest and concern.

The roots of the controversy reached back to the first settlers. An 1830 Act of Congress, subsequently amended, in order to discourage speculation in village lots prohibited the pre-emption of public lands for any other than farming purposes. Beloit's first settlers attempted to circumvent this restriction by having one of their number, Robert Crane, claim all the lands embraced in the plat of the village as his, with the understanding that he would later reconvey all of the lots to their real owners.

In November 1838 Crane filed his pre-emption of a quarter-section (160 acres) of Beloit land; and then, before receiving the actual patent (the equivalent of legal title) from the government, Crane deeded back the lots to those who had originally claimed them, as had been agreed.

Years passed and Beloit grew and prospered. In 1855 Matt Carpenter, the brilliant young Beloit lawyer, who later became a U.S. Senator and a national figure, conceived the idea that because Crane had conveyed the lands in 1838 and 1839 before he himself had received a government patent that Crane was unable to pass title back to his friends. Therefore, Carpenter argued, Crane was still the legal owner of all the lands he had pre-empted back in 1838.

In some manner, never explained, Carpenter persuaded Crane to quitclaim any interest he might still have in these lands to Carpenter's father-in-law, Paul V. Dillingham, a former governor of Vermont. Then Carpenter, to the chagrin and alarm of his Beloit neighbors, sued in court to establish the

---

[1] 1856 *History*, 130-132.

superior title of his father-in-law to the eastside of the community of Beloit. Carpenter's motives are still obscure. Perhaps he was intrigued by the legal excitement that he knew would ensue.

Since the practice of conveying title before a patent had been received was quite common on the frontier, the residents of Beloit were joined by others across Wisconsin and the nation in watching the case as it moved into the courts. While people may have reassured themselves that Carpenter's brazen audacity would never prevail, they could not be certain of the legal outcome.

In quitclaiming to Dillingham, Robert Crane appears to have been Carpenter's innocent dupe. In any event, Crane undoubtedly angered many of his fellow Beloiters. Into the breach moved Lucius Fisher, the town's most forceful leader and spokesman in 1856. He retained a prominent Illinois lawyer, Abraham Lincoln, to study and evaluate the merits of Carpenter's legal action. Lincoln's carefully researched brief supported the position of the Beloit landholders on both legal and equitable grounds. Lincoln's fee was $100, a not inconsiderable amount in 1856.

Frank Flower, Carpenter's biographer, captures some of the emotions of that day:

Beloit at the date of the commencement of this action was a village of considerable wealth and pretensions. The people, therefore, when Carpenter brought the title to their real estate into question, wrought themselves into a certain state of excitement . . . Some thought Carpenter should be pursued with sticks and staves, others were for personal chastisement, and others still for inviting him to leave the village. While the ugly were at their ugliest, a public meeting to consider the matter was held, one warm evening, in the open space in front of the church known as the "stone-pile." A large crowd was present, which was addressed by Carpenter from the steps of the edifice . . . One old character shouted: "We can hang you, can't we?" Instantly Carpenter retorted: "Yes, indeed, you can hang me, but that will only settle me, the attorney in the case". . . The chief desire, he then went on to explain, was to test the practice of conveying lands before final title had been vested in the party making the conveyence, and to settle the title to the lands in Beloit, so that subsequent deeds should be valid . . . He did not care to make anything out of his friends and neighbors, but, in case of success, he might squeeze the speculators, who, living in other cities, held unimproved lands in Beloit for the purpose of profiting by the industry and thrift of its residents . . .[1]

Another Carpenter biographer summarizes the outcome:

---

[1]Flower, *Life of Matthew Hale Carpenter* (Madison, Wis., 1883), 93.

Involving as it did vast propertied interests, the ensuing litigation, which ran the gamut of the lower courts to the Supreme Court of the United States, attracted an extraordinary array of legal talent . . . The counsel for the plaintiff [Carpenter] had the law on their side, but in the face of an outraged public opinion all the lower courts rendered verdicts in favor of the defense. Finally, after the United States Supreme Court had decided a similar case from Louisiana adversely to Carpenter's theory, Dillingham withdrew his case. Carpenter lost, and inherited a legacy of ill feeling in Beloit . . . [2]

As a successful litigant in protecting Beloit interests, Lucius Fisher was something of a hero. Robert Crane, on the other hand, sustained criticism for allowing himself to be used by Carpenter. Years later Fisher and Crane would once again be on opposite sides in their dispute over the naming of Beloit.

(G) The Horace White Park Memorial

Speaking at the morning services of the First Congregational Church, October 3, 1955, Helen L.D. Richardson answered the question countless Beloiters have asked upon entering Horace White Park from Public Avenue and observing the memorial monument in their path ahead:

You will all have heard the name Horace White if only as the name of the park opposite our church. You may also have observed a monument on the west side of the park, and if you looked at it, you will have discovered that there were two Horace Whites, father and son, and that the bronze likeness of them interrupts a running inscription in Greek. This, translated by Robert Richardson and Floyd McGranahan together, reads: "How contented are those who do all things finely; they rest as those thrice blessed." And beneath the bronze is cut an inscription in English, the first sentence of which every Beloiter should have in his memory:

"There came westward in the winter of 1836-7 the emissary of a New England community who chose this spot for a home and gave this park to adorn the town thus founded."

The son, although born in New Hampshire, grew up here, was graduated from Beloit College, of which he was deeply, even sentimentally, fond, and became a noted editor, of the Chicago Tribune and then of the New York Evening Post . . . He did not forget to visit his town and his college and contributed to the latter money, books, and very good speeches . . .

Mrs. Richardson then went on to tell us something more of the history of the oil painting, reproduced in this book, of Dr. White;

---

[2]Thompson, E. Bruce. *Matthew Hale Carpenter, Webster of the West* (State Historical Society of Wis. 1954), 39. For a detailed analysis of the title dispute, see Irrmann, Robert H. "Beloit's Debt to Abraham Lincoln," *Alma Mater* VI, 1957-1958, April 1958 (Beloit College), 11-16.

Horace White Park Memorial to Dr. White and His Son

Photo by: Robert D. Thompson

Dr. White. *My son, shall you and I give to this new town, Beloit, a wide garden for children to play in, for always?*

Horace W. *Oh, yes, father, on the hill side.*

Dr. White. *Shall we keep the field, Horace, for you and your little sister, Libbie, or make it an open park for everybody?*

Horace W. *An open park for everybody, — for me and Libbie, and George Crosby, and Ellery Crane, and Jonas Bundy, and everybody, with flowers, and paths and lilacs and snow-balls, and statues too, father, statues!*

Dr. White. *My boy, we'll do it. But you can never have a great house in a great garden. Well, the coming city must have air and space or we doctors will get too rich . . .*

The Beloit Pageant,
June 2nd and 3rd, 1916,
Page 31.

It is the father, Dr. Horace White, with whom we are concerned today. I wish that we could do honor to the painter of this portrait. The Findlay Galleries of Chicago, where it was restored, have a high opinion of it as a painting. We are not sure who did it. His granddaughter, Abigail White Howells, is of opinion that it was painted during his lifetime. She has the mate to it in a painting of his wife. Just this morning a member of the choir has come forth with the suggestion that the artist might have been her great great uncle, George Robertson of Rockford; and I think the suggestion not unlikely. The picture was given to the church by Horace Jr., as attested by a letter of thanks to him in our records, dated June 15, 1893. We are fortunate to have it and should learn to know it and value it . . .

I now dedicate this restoration to the memory of Robert Kimball Richardson, who did more than any other in the church recently to make us conscious of our heritage from the past and who considered this portrait one of the most precious historical possessions in the city of Beloit.

(H) The Rock River House

The *Beloit Daily News,* May 1, 1918, tells us more about Caleb Blodgett's home and boarding house after his death in 1840:

. . . It was back in 1837 when Beloit was but a mere village and was scarcely on the map that the old Rock River House, Beloit's first hotel came into existence. It was a historic place, this frame building on the corner of State Street and Grand Avenue, a building which sheltered in its life as a hotel such men as James Buchanan, Stephen A. Douglas, Abraham Lincoln and Edwin M. Stanton, all national figures prior to and during the Civil War. Earlier than that even, other men of national importance were entertained at the Rock River House, but there is no record of their visits and no definite information on them can be had.

The ancient register, which recorded the guests in the early days as they stopped for a night's lodging in the queer old frame structure has long since been destroyed and all records which deal with the famous characters who have, at diverse times, spent a night or nights under the home-like and low hanging gables, have disappeared with the passing of the early hostelry.

The old Rock River House was constructed in 1837 by Caleb Blodgett, an early contractor of Beloit. It first made its appearance at the corner of Grand Avenue and State Street as previously stated, and remained there until the early sixties when it was skidded back to State Street and Public Avenue to make room for the new Goodwin Hotel now one of the principal business blocks of the city. It served as an annex to the Goodwin building for a time and was later converted into a children's seminary for which it was used for several years.

Horace White Park Memorial to Dr. White and His Son

Photo by: Robert D. Thompson

Dr. White. *My son, shall you and I give to this new town, Beloit, a wide garden for children to play in, for always?*

Horace W. *Oh, yes, father, on the hill side.*

Dr. White. *Shall we keep the field, Horace, for you and your little sister, Libbie, or make it an open park for everybody?*

Horace W. *An open park for everybody, — for me and Libbie, and George Crosby, and Ellery Crane, and Jonas Bundy, and everybody, with flowers, and paths and lilacs and snow-balls, and statues too, father, statues!*

Dr. White. *My boy, we'll do it. But you can never have a great house in a great garden. Well, the coming city must have air and space or we doctors will get too rich . . .*

The Beloit Pageant,
June 2nd and 3rd, 1916,
Page 31.

It is the father, Dr. Horace White, with whom we are concerned today. I wish that we could do honor to the painter of this portrait. The Findlay Galleries of Chicago, where it was restored, have a high opinion of it as a painting. We are not sure who did it. His granddaughter, Abigail White Howells, is of opinion that it was painted during his lifetime. She has the mate to it in a painting of his wife. Just this morning a member of the choir has come forth with the suggestion that the artist might have been her great great uncle, George Robertson of Rockford; and I think the suggestion not unlikely. The picture was given to the church by Horace Jr., as attested by a letter of thanks to him in our records, dated June 15, 1893. We are fortunate to have it and should learn to know it and value it . . .

I now dedicate this restoration to the memory of Robert Kimball Richardson, who did more than any other in the church recently to make us conscious of our heritage from the past and who considered this portrait one of the most precious historical possessions in the city of Beloit.

(H) The Rock River House

The *Beloit Daily News,* May 1, 1918, tells us more about Caleb Blodgett's home and boarding house after his death in 1840:

. . . It was back in 1837 when Beloit was but a mere village and was scarcely on the map that the old Rock River House, Beloit's first hotel came into existence. It was a historic place, this frame building on the corner of State Street and Grand Avenue, a building which sheltered in its life as a hotel such men as James Buchanan, Stephen A. Douglas, Abraham Lincoln and Edwin M. Stanton, all national figures prior to and during the Civil War. Earlier than that even, other men of national importance were entertained at the Rock River House, but there is no record of their visits and no definite information on them can be had.

The ancient register, which recorded the guests in the early days as they stopped for a night's lodging in the queer old frame structure has long since been destroyed and all records which deal with the famous characters who have, at diverse times, spent a night or nights under the home-like and low hanging gables, have disappeared with the passing of the early hostelry.

The old Rock River House was constructed in 1837 by Caleb Blodgett, an early contractor of Beloit. It first made its appearance at the corner of Grand Avenue and State Street as previously stated, and remained there until the early sixties when it was skidded back to State Street and Public Avenue to make room for the new Goodwin Hotel now one of the principal business blocks of the city. It served as an annex to the Goodwin building for a time and was later converted into a children's seminary for which it was used for several years.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

By Author

Abel, Henry L. *Travellers and Emigrants Guide to Wisconsin and Iowa Territory.* Philadelphia, 1838.
Pocket-size guide book with unfolding color map of Wisconsin Territory on one side, and unfolding text describing life and area conditions on opposite side. Beloit is named in text but does not appear on map.

Adams, Rev. William M. Copy of letter to a friend, dated March 7, 1838. Archives, Beloit Hist. Society.
Pecatonica (Rockton) pastor mentions beginning church services in Beloit.

Bauchle, May L. The Story of Beloit. *The Wisconsin Magazine,* III, No. 1 (April, 1925).
Short magazine article by Beloit historian. Mrs. Bauchle also contributed numerous newspaper articles on early Beloit history, some of which are cited in footnotes.

Becker, Robert H. Turtle Creek Mounds and Village Sites. *The Wisconsin Archeologist,* XII, No. 1 (June, 1913).
Maps, sketches, photos, and text by a Beloit college graduate, later a well-known writer for the Chicago Tribune.

Blodgett, Frank H. *History and Genealogy of the Blodgett Family* (1948).
34 page manuscript, with photos, in possession of Frank Caleb Blodgett, sixth generation descendant of Beloit's founder.

Brown, Charles E. and Theodore T. Indian Village and Camp Sites of the Lower Rock River in Wisconsin. *The Wisconsin Archeologist,* IX, No. 1 (N.S.), Oct., 1929. Illustrated text.

Brown, William Fiske. *Past Made Present.* I, Beloit (1900).
Hard-cover history of first fifty years of the Presbyterian Church, with much early Beloit history, containing numerous photographs of early Beloiters, 276 pages.

Brown, William Fiske. *History of Rock County.* Cooper and Co., Chicago (1908), 2 Vols.
Hard-cover county history; important source book for Beloit history, reliable in outline but inaccurate frequently in detail. Note: Cited herein as "1908 *History.*"

Buckley, Cornelius. *Manuscript* (c. 1924), 17 pages. Archives, Beloit Hist. Society.
Written account of early Beloit and some individuals, including Capt. Thomas Power.

Buell, Ira M. Beloit Mound Groups. *The Wisconsin Archeologist,* Vol. 18, No. 4, (Nov., 1919).
Documented and extensively illustrated summary of area Indian mounds.

Butterfield, C.W. *History of Rock County, Wisconsin.* Western Historical Co., Chicago (1879), 879 pages.
Detailed and carefully compiled while some first settlers were available to give first-hand accounts.
Cited herein as "*1879 History.*"

Carr, Edson I. *The History of Rockton, Winnebago County, Illinois.* Herold Printing Office, Rockton (1898).
Contains early diary references to The Turtle, Stephen Mack, and early Pecatonic (later Rockton).

Caswell, Lucien. *Reminiscences* (1914). Typed manuscript, Archives, Univ. of Wis. — Whitewater.
Recollections of a neighbor of Joseph Tebo's mysterious disappearance (pp. 20-22).

Crane, Ellery B. *History of the Settlement of Beloit* (1908). Typed Manuscript, 115 pages. Archives, State Historical Library, Madison.
Important narrative of pioneer Beloit which borrows extensively from his father's little-known 1878 newspaper articles, but also contains much additional material gleaned from years of research. Ellery came to Beloit in 1837 as a babe in his mother's arms, attended Beloit College, later lived in the east, retained a life-long interest in Beloit's history, wrote scores of lengthy letters to Beloit newspapers on historical matters, and was usually accurate in his data. Note: Cited herein as "*Ellery Crane Manuscript.*"

Crane, Ellery B. *Six Scrapbooks of Beloit Newspaper Clippings.* Archives, Beloit Hist. Society.
1. 1878 — 1885
2. 1885 — 1888
3. 1888 — 1890
4. 1890 — 1902
5. 1907 — 1915
6. 1915 —

Selected newspaper clippings relating to contemporary and pioneer activities and personalities. A rich source of Beloit history.

Crane, Robert Prudden. The Early History of Beloit. *The Beloit Free Press* (1878).
Nine newspaper articles, published January 3, 10, 24, 31; February 7, 14, 21, 28; and March 7, 1878. State Hist. Library, Madison.
Long-forgotten but key account of pioneer Beloit, written by a first settler in part from his diary notes. Except for minor memory lapses 40 years after the event, it appears to be a careful history of events as they were lived.

Crane, Robert Prudden. *Narrative* (1877). Archives, Beloit Hist. Society.
10 pages of a handwritten draft of Crane's 1878 newspaper series, including additional material evidently omitted from the publication because of its personal nature.

Crane Family Papers. Archives, Beloit Hist. Society.
1839 to 1920 collection of letters, biographies, genealogies, and research materials relating to early Beloit.

Eaton, Edward Dwight. *Historical Sketches of Beloit College.* Barnes and Co., N.Y. (1928), 309 pages.
Includes considerable material about pioneer Beloit.

Emerson, Mrs. C.A. *Blodgett Family Account* (1931), 3 pages. Archives, Beloit Hist. Society.
Compiled by grand-daughter of Caleb and Chloe Blodgett.

Fisher, Lucius G. *Fragment of an Unfinished History of Beloit* (c. 1853)
6 page handwritten account, believed to be Fisher's found inside his journal, possibly written about 1853 (lists governors to that date) and used by Rev. Lyman for his chapter on Beloit in the 1856 Rock County History. Contains hither-to unknown account of Caleb Blodgett's first visit to The Turtle.
Cited herein as *Fisher Fragment.*

Fisher, Lucius G. *Pioneer Recollections of Beloit and Southern Wisconsin* (1883). Wisconsin Magazine of History, Vol. 1 (1917-1918), 266-286.
Excellent short autobiography written by a first-settler who for 30 years was a leader of the Beloit community. The original journal, written in 1883 and containing much unpublished material, is at the State Hist. Library, Madison.

Guernsey, Orrin and Willard, Josiah F. *History of Rock County and Transactions of the Rock County Agricultural Society and Mechanics Institute.* Doty, Janesville (1856), 349 pages. Informal, fascinating county history prepared only 20 years after the first settlers arrived. Invaluable source book, prepared by many hands, filled with errors, insufficiently researched, but albeit a historical gem.
Cited herein as "*1856 History.*"

Hagan, William Thomas. *Black Hawk's Route Through Wisconsin.* State Hist. Society of Wis. (1949), 35 pages.
Hard cover, with diagrams.

Hayes, Mrs. William. *Our Golden History. South Beloit, Illinois 1835-1967.* 124 pgs.
Comprehensive, well-researched, with considerable pioneer history, and numerous photographs.

Hopkins, I.A. *Sketches of the West or The Home of the Badgers.* 2nd Ed., Milwaukee (1847), 48 pages.
Rare pamphlet collection of early letters, two of which describe pioneer Beloit in complimentary fashion.

Jipson, N.W. Winnebago Villages and Chieftans of the Lower Rock River Region. *The Wisconsin Archeologist.* Vol. 2, No. 3 (N.S.), July, 1923.

Lawson, P.V. The Winnebago Tribe. *The Wisconsin Archeologist,* Vol. 6, No. 3, July, 1907.

Leavitt, Emily S. Vermonters Who Helped Establish the City of Beloit, Wisconsin. *Vermont History,* Vol. 25, No. 4 (Oct., 1957). Pages 321-343.

Merrill, Louis Taylor. The First Settlers of Beloit. *Wisconsin Magazine of History.* Vol. 28 (1944-1945).

McLenegan, Annie S. *Centennial History of the Town of Turtle*, 1836-1936. 192 pages.
Illustrated and carefully compiled with a loving hand.

Millen, Agnes Powers. Sketch of the Life of John Hackett. *Rock County Chronicle*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1959), 8 pages.

Ogden, George W. *Diary, 1837-1841.* Archives, State Hist. Library, Madison.
Typed copy of a Milton area pioneer's diary, containing many references, heretofore unknown, to Joseph Tebo.

Richardson, Helen L.D. *Robert Kimball Richardson*, George Banta Co. (1958).
Includes Prof. Richardson's 1942 reflections upon early Beloit and its founders, in his essay "To the Newcomer to Beloit," pp. 51-56.

Smith, Barrett H. *History of Shopiere* (c. 1900), 134 page typed and bound manuscript. Archives, Beloit Hist. Society.
Compiled by a former editor of the *Beloit Journal* who after the Civil War lived on a farm near Shopiere. Several writers contribute information about the pioneer Shopiere — Beloit area.

Smith, Issac T. Early Settlement of Rock County, *Wis. Historical Collections*, VI, 416-425, (1872).
Smith quotes from his 1836 diary about meeting Caleb Blodgett "looking claims" and encountering Joseph Tebo on May 22, 1836.

Way, Royal Brunson. *The Rock River Valley*, Clarke (1926), 3 vols.
Much pioneer Beloit material skillfully edited, but relatively little that is new.

White, Dr. Horace. *Account Book of the New England Emigrating Co.*, 1837-1838. Archives, Beloit Hist. Society.
Original day-by-day record book in the handwriting of Robert Crane and Dr. White, detailing the operations of the Company's members, commencing with their arrival at Blodgett's place.

White, Horace Jr. The Beginnings of Beloit. *Semi-Centennial Anniversary Beloit College*, Cham. Ingersoll, Printer, Beloit (1897), 98-112
Published address dealing with White's boyhood memories of pioneer Beloit and the role of the New England Emigrating Co.

White, Horace Jr. *The Founding of Beloit* (c. 1913), 16 pages, Beloit College Archives.
An updating of White's 1897 address, with added reminiscences.

Whitney, Henry M. The Settlement of Beloit as Typical of the Best Westward Migration of the American Stock. *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, 46th Annual Meeting (1899).

Wright, Theodore Lyman and Hedges, Marion Hawthorne. *The Beloit Pageant: From The Turtle to the Flaming Wheel* (1916), 46 pages.
Booklet commemorating the 80th anniversary of the City and the 70th anniversary of Beloit College, featuring a play written by the authors dealing with the origins, traditions and ideals of the community. Included is a dramatic account of the naming of Beloit. Possibly the source of the phrase *Below it:* that is, "Janesville will say Below it."

No Author or Editor Named

Atlas of Rock County (1873). Everts, Baskin and Stewart, Chicago.
Excellent maps, pictures and drawings of homes and public buildings, with some historical text material. Large-sized plat book.

Beloit Journal, The. "Early History of Beloit." 13 newspaper articles published in 1866 and 1867. Beloit College Archives, Stephen D. Peet Collection.
Little-known, undated clippings, containing important source material assembled by several authors in separate articles, designated as chapters.

Book of Beloit, The. Daily News. Pub. Co. (1936), 312 pages.
The Centennial Book, a must for any Beloit library.

Centennial Trails (1936). Beloit Hist. Society, 16 pages.
Small-size booklet prepared for the Centennial, listing historic sites and points of interest for walking tours.

Chicago Magazine, The. I, (1857). Chicago Hist. Society.
Feature article in first issue was entitled "Beloit, Wisconsin" and described its history. The writer was obviously impressed by the community's New England flavor and culture.

First Congregational Church, The. Semi-Centennial Anniversary 1838-1888. Capitol City Pub. Co., Madison, 152 pages.
Several excellent articles on early Beloit and vignettes of individual first-settlers.
Cited herein as *First Cong. Semi-Centennial.*

Know Rock County (1948). Published by Rock County Board of Supervisors, 86 Pages.
1848-1948 history for high school students.

Portrait and Biographical Album of Rock County. Acme Pub. Co. Chicago (1889), 1033 pages.
Numerous biographies and portraits of individuals up to 1889, but relatively little new material relating to early Beloit.

Proceedings at the Presentation of the Fisher Collection of Antique Creek Sculpture. Beloit College, 1894, 73 pages.
A collection of speeches and essays in honor of Lucius G. Fisher and his son, including considerable commentary on early Beloit personalities.

Non-Beloit Materials Of Specific Interest

Blanchard, Rufus. *The Discovery and Conquests of the Northwest.* Cushing, Chicago (1880).
Early Chicago area history. 1830 reference to Joseph Tebo and Stephen Mack as voters. Describes march of Gen. Scott's troops to The Turtle in 1832.

Davidson, J.N. *In Unnamed Wisconsin.* Chapman, Milwaukee (1895).
References to pioneer Beloit and its naming.

Gregory, John G. *Southeastern Wisconsin: A History of Old Milwaukee County.* Clarke, Chicago (1932), 2 vols.
Much early Beloit material, repetitious of other accounts.

Holbrook, Stewart H. *The Yankee Exodus.* McMillan, New York (1950).
History of the westward Yankee migration. Mentions the New England Emigrating Co. and Beloit, 111-114.

Kinzie, Mrs. John H. *Wau-bun.* Derby and Jackson, New York (1856).
An American classic. Account of a young wife's life in the Territory, 1830-1833, including a reference to Turtle Creek (The Turtle) and a visit there.

Logsden, Joseph. *Horace White, Nineteenth Century Liberal.* Greenwood, Westport, Conn. (1971), 393 pages.
Definitive biography, includes chapter on Horace White Jr.'s boyhood and college years at Beloit.

Nelson, C. Hal. *Sinnissippi Saga.* Wayside Press, Mendota, Ill. (1968).
Illustrated history of Rockford and Winnebago County, including South Beloit area.

Peet, Stephen D. *Prehistoric America.* II, American Antiquarium office, Chicago (1898).
Includes an analysis of effigy and emblematic Indian mounds in the Beloit area. Fascinating, but speculative. in many of its interpretations. Illustrated.

Phalen, James M. *Sinnissippi.* Banta Co., Menasha (1942).
The story and lore of Rock River from Horicon to Rock Island.

Quaife, Milo M. *Chicago Highways Old and New.* Keller, Chicago, (1923).
Early trails and roads of the area, including one from Chicago to Beloit. Refers to Meacham's Grove where the Blodgetts and friends lived before coming to Beloit.

Smith, Alice E. *The History of Wisconsin,* I: From Exploration to Statehood. Wis. Historical Society, 1973.
A definitive study of pioneer Wisconsin.

Starin, Frederick J. "Diary of a Journey to Wisconsin in 1840." Wis. Magazine of History, Vol. 6 (1922-1923).
Mentions an 1840 visit to Beloit.

Stevens, Frank Everett. *The Black Hawk War.* Chicago (1903).
Definitive account, with 300 portraits and views.

Strong, Moses M. *History of the Territory of Wisconsin.* Democrat Printing Co., Madison (1885).
Documentary account of government, politics, and commercial development of the Territory.

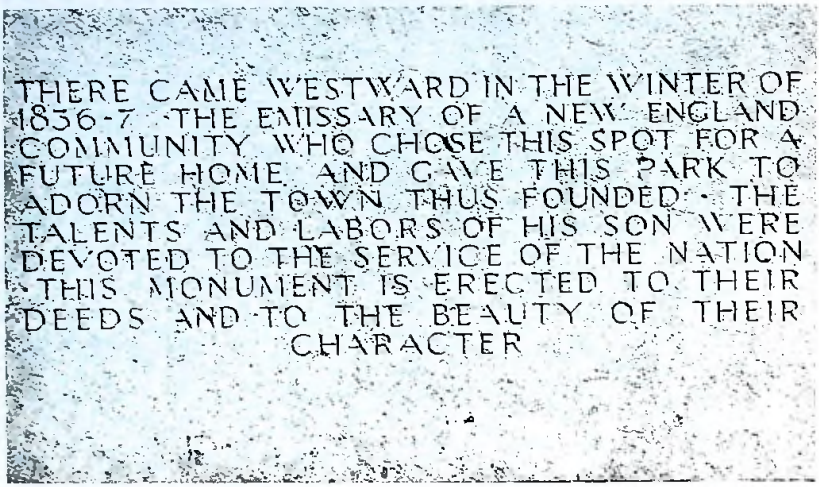
Swart, Mrs. George. *Footsteps of Our Founding Fathers.* Hoard and Sons, Fort Atkinson (1964).
Story of the Black Hawk War in Wisconsin, with references to The Turtle in 1832.

Confluence

Sculptor — O.V. Shaffer

U.S. Bicentennial Sculpture
Dedicated November 21, 1976
Beloit Public Library

Symbol of the coming together of Rock River and Turtle Creek, where pioneer Beloit began and grew into a major Wisconsin city, and today draws strength from the uniting of the rich diversity of its people and institutions.



Inscription on stone monument in Horace White Park.

THE AUTHOR

Arthur L. Luebke, past-president of both the Beloit and Rock County Historical Societies, is a fourth generation Beloiter. As Circuit Judge, he also serves as Chief Judge of Wisconsin's 2nd Judicial District, comprising Rock, Green and Walworth counties.

While a student at Beloit College, Luebke's interest in the campus Indian mounds later broadened into speculation over where Beloit's first settlers had located their homes and how the community had grown from the wilderness. His book is the culmination of years of research and the seeking out of new source materials dealing with pioneer Beloit.

"Beloit has a uniquely-rich heritage," the author emphasizes, "and much of it has been preserved in the superb archives of the Beloit Historical Society and Beloit College. In an era of rapid and seemingly endless change and its attendant cultural shock, it seems appropriate to be reminded that Beloit's roots go deep, and that our area residents should have an opportunity to know about some of our traditions and memorable personalities, if we care."

Jacket Design by Robert D. Thompson
Cover Illustration by Suzanne Whiteford
Third Edition Sponsor - Robert H. Solem