

The First White Boy In Milwaukee.

Incidents of the early settlement
of Wisconsin. (MILWAUKEE)

By E. H. Cleveland, Trempealeau, Wis.

My grandfather, Horatio (Johnson) Cleveland, was born, 1790, near Harper's Ferry Va. was married, 1813, near Sackett's Harbor, N.Y. to Cynthia Barley, a daughter of Quartus Barley, whose wife's maiden name was Rebecca Smedley. Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland raised to maturity a family of thirteen children of whom my father, Charles Josiah Cleveland, was the seventh, born in 1823. My father and mother (Lydia Mabie) were married in June, 1849 at Belvidere, Illinois, and I was born July 4, 1850, on an Indian reservation near Pine river in what is now Waushara County, Wisconsin.

The following incidents were related to me personally by my father as happenings in his early life.

In the summer of 1833 my grandfather came by sailing vessel (then the only means of transportation.)

from Greenstone Island in the river St. Lawrence to "Fort Dearborn", now Chicago. Contrary winds and other circumstances made traveling slow and the vessel did not arrive at the fort until October 12. ¶ There was no wharf at Fort Dearborn then. No lighthouses, lighters, barges, skiffs nor any of the later-invented conveniences for handling freight and passengers. The only way the schooner "Mackinack" could discharge cargo was to anchor a mile off shore opposite the mouth of the river, lash several Indian canoes together^{and} deck these over with boards, thus forming a "float" on which was loaded a few hundred pounds at a time and tow the load ashore with the yawl boat, impelled by oars.

¶ At the time the Cleveland family landed there were assembled about four thousand Sac and Fox Indians to receive their first payment of money from the United States Government

after the close of the Blackhawk war.

"Charley" Cleveland, then about ten years old, soon scraped acquaintance with some of the younger Indians and often, with them, paddled a canoe over the localities where now stand some of Chicago's largest business blocks.

My grandfather, desiring to penetrate still farther into the almost unknown west, in the spring of 1834 formed a party to open a road through the eighty miles of wilderness from Fort Dearborn to "Juneau's," now Milwaukee.

This party consisted of Horatio J. Cleveland commander, his son Henry, aged 19,

Harry Cleveland (brother of Horatio, ~~their~~ half brother Timothy Hale, brother-in-law Quartus G. Barley, Andrew Lansing and Rodney J. Currier.

These seven men, with three pairs of oxen and two wagons, one carrying their camp equipage and provisions arms and ammunition, the other the tools implements etc. necessary for the

work, made their way slowly northward plowing a furrow to mark the track.

They forded the smaller streams, built rough bridges of logs over the deeper ones and camped wherever night-overtook them.

Thus, ever forward day by day, this little band of pioneers opened the way where now runs the magnificent - "Lake Shore Railroad," being nine weeks on the journey which is now run by trains in about two hours.

¶ Arriving at Juneau's, Harry Cleveland filed a claim on what is now known as the "Kilbourn Addition" on the west side of the Milwaukee river. The rest of the party returned to Fort-Dearborn where some of them, of whom my grandfather was one, helped get out the timber, build and launch the schooner "Jesse Smith," the first-craft, larger than a canoe, built at "Chicago."

¶ This vessel was innocent of bolts, spikes or nails, being put-together complete with

pins of hard dry wood which swelled from the moisture in the holes where they were driven and held firmly. On this craft, in the spring of 1835, my grandfather loaded his family and property, bound for "Milwaukee" as the Indians had named Juncos's trading post.

My father having gained a little knowledge of the Indian language persuaded an Indian boy in a canoe to take him ashore ahead of the others who landed from the schooner, thus being (as he often boasted afterwards), "The First-White Boy In Milwaukee".

Having landed my father soon found employment - helping his father and uncle Harry build a sawmill for a Mr. Bockford, who came to Milwaukee in the interest of the government - about the same time as the Clevelands, and in doing errands for Solomon Juncos, the Frenchman who, as a licensed Indian trader, was the headman of the place.

My grandfather soon became a close friend of Solomon Juncos and, with his brother Harry, took the job to cut and hew the timbers for Juncos' frame dwelling-and-warehouse combined, the first frame to be erected in Milwaukee. Rodney J. Currier and Andrew Lansing did the framing and the Clevelands, my father included, helped to raise the frame. The heavy "bents" were set up by means of pike poles, levers and other crude but effective contrivances.

The news, that "the whiteman was going to set up a big wigwam", soon spread among the Indians and; on the day of raising, fully three thousand of the red-skins assembled to see the operation. First a circle of papposes, then of squaws with the bucks in the background, all at a safe distance, surrounded scene of operations and, each signal of Heave-on-heave" would be repeated by the Indians with bursts of derisive laughter.

¶ Mr. Juneau tried to induce some of the young braves to help lift - at - the pike-poles but in vain. No offers, not even of "heap whiskey", would elicit more than a shrug of the shoulder and a contemptuous "Ugh!" from the noble redman. My father used to say "they were about as worthless, a lot as ever struck any place".

Shortly after Juneau's building was completed work was begun on Milwaukee's second residence, "a balloon frame", situated between Bockford's mill and Juneau's store. In the month of June, 1835, my father assisted in building Breed's store, the first store in Milwaukee aside from Juneau's trading-post. My father's uncle, Harry, got out the timber for this building, also.

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half-blood children represented the only civilization between Fort Dearborn and Green Bay so far as the western shore of Lake Michigan was concerned.

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Horatio J. Cleveland afterwards built a school-house at Kenosha, in which was held the first public school in Wisconsin Territory.

The stay of the Clevelands in Milwaukee was shortened on account of litigation over their claims. While they were there Byron G. Kilbourn, a civil engineer sent thereby the government, arrived and, seeing the probability of a city there in the near future, bought up all the floating claims he could get hold of. By reason of some private "pull" at the land office in Washington Kilbourn obtained a grant

which overlapped the claims of the brothers
 Cleveland. Rather than risk losing money
 in litigation Horatio J. Cleveland gave up
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 removed to a place in Racine county called
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 by Harry Cleveland getting title to about
 eight acres opposite Juncaris and about
 where the Plankinton House was located.
 Harry Cleveland sold this land to Brown
 for twenty-six thousand dollars in gold.
 Brown hired the money to pay for the land
 but the hard times and panic of 1837-8
 brought him to bankruptcy and he died insane.
 Horatio Cleveland sold his home in Racine
 Co. crossed the state with ox teams to the

Mississippi River where he built a house-boat and "floated" to New Orleans. From there the family, on a coasting vessel, went to Matagorda, Texas, where Mr. C. and his son Solomon rendered the State good service in the war with Mexico, and where the elder Cleveland died in 1864.

Solomon C., my uncle, was killed in battle, a Confederate officer, in the civil war.

My father, Charles J. Cleveland, on attaining his majority came back to Wisconsin and became a lumberman ~~and~~ pilot on the Wisconsin River and afterwards on Black river.

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Transcribed by Judy Henderson
3rd great granddaughter of Horatio J. Cleveland
Friendswood, Texas
June 13, 2009

Cleveland, E. H., "The First White Boy in Milwaukee," Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. They hold the original handwritten manuscript, soon to be digitized.

About the author:

E. H. (Eugene H.) Cleveland was born in 1850 on Pine River in Wisconsin. He was the oldest of seven children born to Charles Josiah Cleveland and Lydia Mabie. By 1878 he moved his family to Minnesota and lived there until the early 1900s when he moved back to Tempealeau, Wisconsin where he grew up. He died after 1930 in his home town.

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1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930 Federal Census records for Wisconsin and Minnesota.

1885, 1895 Minnesota State Census.

Informal Observations of the Horatio Johnson Cleveland By Judy Henderson

Horatio Johnson Cleveland was a true American pioneer and adventurer. He was born in New York State in 1790 reportedly in Harper's Ferry and died in 1864 in Texas. He arrived in Jefferson County, New York in the Thousand Islands area in the early 1800s just as it was being settled. Then this manuscript tells of his pioneer adventures in helping to settle Milwaukee, Wisconsin. From there he moved to the new Republic of Texas and received a Land Grant in Fayette County in Central Texas, Another undeveloped area. It appears that he thrived on opening up new territory.