

Capture of Mackinaw, 1763

By Louis B. Porlier*

On the 14th of October, 1848, Hon. William Medill, commissioner of Indian affairs, called a council at Poygan, Wisconsin, to negotiate a treaty with the Menomonee tribe of Indians. H. S. Baird was appointed secretary to the commissioner. On the morning of the day of the meeting, Oshkosh came to our tent and said to Augustin Grignon, Sr., "I have been notified to attend the council; will you go with me?" Mr. Grignon replied that he would, and they both started towards the council-house. Immediately after I told Augustin Grignon, Jr., to call our men to put up our shanty so as to be in readiness for the annuity payment, which was to take place immediately after the treaty should be concluded. As soon as the shanty was up so they could get along without me, I told the younger Grignon that I was going over to listen to the council, and started towards the council-house.

Just before reaching the place of assembly, I saw Shononee, or Silver—one of the principal Menomonee chiefs, coming out of the council-house, and walking towards a group of Indians who were gathered at a short distance away. I followed him thither, as I knew that he would relate what had been said in the council. He seated himself on a log and they all thronged close around him, anxious to ascertain what was the business of the commissioner.

* This paper is an advanced portion of a work for which Mr. Porlier has long been collecting materials, relative to Indian traditions, history, and prominent chiefs, Indian trade and traders, French and American settlers, and sketches generally of the Fox River Valley, from the earliest settlement of the country. As Mr. Porlier's father, the late Judge James Porlier, settled in the country in 1781, and the son has lived a long and observing life of sixty-four years in the Valley, much engaged among the Indians, and in the Indian trade, and connected with the Grignon and other early pioneer families, he is well fitted to prepare a work of interest and value, which would doubtless meet with a cordial reception by the people of that prosperous portion of Wisconsin.

In a laughing manner he replied: "You don't expect he has come to decorate your ears with silver ear-bobs? No, he comes here simply to get the balance of our country! Not being satisfied with what he has already obtained, he proposes to remove us across the Mississippi, which country he represents to be far better than ours; he says there is an abundance of all kinds of game there; that the lakes and the rivers are full of fish and wild rice." Several of those who were listening, here interrupted the speaker with evident anxiety, saying, "Why don't he go himself and live in such a fine country, where there is an abundance of everything? He is mistaken! and you ought to have told him at once not to say any more about it." Shononee replied: "That is what we did; but you know how the Kechemocoman (or the Great Knife, as they name the American) never gets rebuked at a refusal; but will persist, and try over and over again till he accomplishes his purpose. I left our chief Oshkosh to debate with him, and I will not adhere to any proposition he may make."

Shononee then made running remarks about different tribes of Indians who had been removed from their country to distant lands, referring especially to the Winnebagoes and the Pottowattamies; and in winding up his remarks, said: "We know by those who have come back from the country whither they have been removed, to what dangers they are exposed;" and, after a pause, he added: "It is but the result of what Pontiac had foreseen and foretold." The by-standers inquired who Pontiac was, and what he had foreseen. Shononee then resumed by saying: "Pontiac lived before my time; but I will simply state to you what my ancestors have related to me in regard to him. He was, they told me, a noble-minded Indian; he had come to Milwaukee at one time,* and then and there had assembled different tribes of Indians, and addressed them as follows:

"My Friends! I have come here to consult you in behalf of our common cause. When the white man came across the ocean,

* See Grignon's "Recollections," *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, III, 226, for some reference to this grand Milwaukee assemblage early in 1788. Shononee's tradition shows that Pontiac was its master-spirit, and probably his influence and eloquence so alienated those Indians from the English, that Col. De Peyster, sixteen years thereafter, decimated them as "those rascals of Milwaukee—a horrid set of refractory Indians."

and landed on our shores, he spoke with a sweet and silver-tongued mouth, saying that we had large possessions of land, and that he had none, and asked to be permitted to settle in a corner, and live with us like brothers. We received and admitted them as such; and they lived true to their proposition and promise, until they had gained strength. They then commenced to encroach upon us more and more. Their purpose is plain to me—that they will continue to encroach upon us, until they discover that they have sufficient power to remove us from our country to a distant land, where we will be confronted with all kinds of danger, and perhaps be annihilated. The time is not far distant when we shall be placed in a critical position. It is now in our power to force the whites back to their original settlements. We must *all join in one common cause*, and sweep the white men from our country, and then we shall live happy, and we shall have nothing more to do with the hated race. We shall have no unsatisfied desires, as we have an abundance of game in our forests—our rivers and lakes are teeming with all kinds of fish, fowl and wild rice—we shall live as did our forefathers; we shall with our furs and skins obtain all necessary supplies, and—be happy.”

The inquiry was then made, what answer did Pontiac receive from the assembled nations. “Well,” said Shononee, “with the exception of the Menomonees, they all joined with him, and placed themselves in readiness to take the war-path at the first warning. Mackinaw was the first point to be attacked; and after its capture, messengers were to be sent eastward, and the successive attacks would have been like a large prairie set on fire, with a strong wind spreading the flames in every direction, making the whole one solid mass of fire, destroying everything before it as it rushes along! And this would have been the result; but you are familiar with our customs in regard to incantations. The spirit that gave the power to the war-chief, required of him to make a sacrifice of the officers captured at Mackinaw, before taking any further step. The Chippewa war-chief* succeeded in capturing

* See vol. vii., Wis. Hist. Colls., pp. 188-84, for evidence that Matchewais was the Chippewa chief who captured Mackinaw in 1763. L. C. D.

the post of Mackinaw; but before he could make the sacrifice, *the Bravest of the Brave* came and snatched the officers out of his hands—and the war-chief squatted down, foiled in his purpose.” It was then asked, who was this *Bravest of the Brave*?—and why did the war-chief not stand his ground, and prevent him from rescuing the officers? “The Bravest of the Brave,” said Shononee, “was Aukewingeketawso, or Defender of his Country—Charles Langlade, the grandfather of Augustin Grignon—and he was too well known all over the western world for any one to dare oppose him.”

The Poygan Council continued day after day. On the morning of the fourth day, H. S. Baird saddled his horse, and, as soon as he had had his breakfast, started for Green Bay as angry as he well could be, having lost all hopes that the treaty could be made. The vacancy of secretary was filled by the appointment of Morgan L. Martin; and, when the council was adjourned at the close of the day, Mr. Martin came to our tent and said: “Mr. Porlier, I wish you would tell Mr. Grignon that he had better advise the chiefs to make a treaty while they have an opportunity. They ought to make the most advantageous one they can; for if they should persist in refusing to treat, the president can at his pleasure order their removal, without giving them another chance to make a treaty, and then it would be optional with him whether to give them anything or nothing, because it is provided in the existing treaty, that whenever the president should want their lands, they should relinquish their title—they only possessing such lands as hunting grounds. The president has now sent a commissioner to make a treaty, and they ought to embrace the opportunity to make the most favorable one they can; it is a matter of course that the commissioner cannot give beyond his instructions, but he can give to the utmost limit.”

I told Mr. Grignon what Mr. Martin had advised. “Well,” said Mr. Grignon, “tell Mr. Martin I will attend to it.” Then Mr. Martin told me to go and see Oshkosh, and to tell him that he wanted to see him on business, and further requested me at the same time to go and see the chiefs of the Shawano band, and state to them what Mr. Martin had said. I went on my mission,

and after having given a full statement of Mr. Martin's views and advice, to the Shawano band, I suggested that they should call on the rest of the chiefs and have a consultation on the subject, and to do their best to promote the welfare of their nation, and to be prepared to meet the commissioner in council the next day. They accordingly met in council with the commissioner, and in the course of the day the treaty was concluded.