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A Gathering of Rivers

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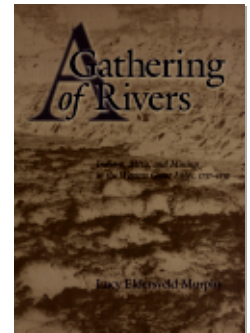
Published by University of Nebraska Press

Murphy, Lucy Eldersveld.

A Gathering of Rivers: Indians, Metis, and Mining in the Western Great Lakes, 1737-1832.

University of Nebraska Press, 2000.

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A Note on Sources

This research is based on a wide range of documents and artifacts, each presenting challenges as well as opportunities to fill in missing pieces of a large picture. Memoirs, travel accounts, government agents' official correspondence, personal letters, speeches, and even oral histories recorded in the nineteenth century were extremely helpful. These were supplemented with court records, portraits and other art, maps, artifacts, land claims testimony, and account books and other financial records. I even came face to face with the skeleton of one of my subjects thanks to the helpful archaeologist who was examining the remains prior to their reinterment.

The most straightforward sources provided basic information that could be linked into patterns. Account books, packing lists, and other documents revealed numbers of shirts purchased, pairs of moccasins sold, and so forth. Unfortunately, they are not complete, but they do give a sense of the variety of production and exchange that regularly occurred. Early-nineteenth-century portraits of Indians by George Catlin, James Otto Lewis, Peter Rindisbacher, Anna Maria von Phul, Karl Bodmer, and others give faces to the individuals and illustrate the uses of many trade goods as well as each person's pride in self-adornment. Church records from Prairie du Chien and Mackinac Island along with land claims testimony of the 1820s—including 248 cases—helped reconstruct the ethnicity and social and economic relationships of the region's Creole communities while clarifying land use patterns going back to the late eighteenth century. Court records before the 1820s are few, but those existing for the lead region in that decade helped illuminate conflicts, particularly between blacks and whites and between women and men. The 1810 estate inventory of Julien Dubuque provided important information about the different economic activities that took place at the Dubuque settlement.

One of the greatest challenges has been finding documents that express the views and voices of the Indians and Métis people themselves. Because most of the records were made by outsiders—that is, people of

a different culture and usually speakers of a different language—these sources must be approached with care.

One type of problem is presented by translations. When words were spoken in an Indian language but written in English or French, the reader is at least once removed from the speaker and at the mercy of the interpreter. Some were better and more experienced at translation than others; multilingual men and women who had lived in the region for a long time were the most trusted, especially those of mixed ancestry. The Winnebago language is Siouan and bears virtually no resemblance to the region's other Native languages, such as Mesquakie, Ojibwe, Odawa, and Kickapoo, which are all Algonquian. Bilingual people who spoke French, Ojibwe, or both were common enough for most pre-1812 political, economic, or even social encounters to be relatively smooth. Communication was most difficult between Winnebago-speakers and Anglos who were monolingual as there were few good interpreters who spoke both languages (the reasons for which were discussed in chapter 5).

Speeches such as Hųwanįkga's were spoken, translated by a second person, written down hurriedly by a third person, and later edited—possibly by a fourth person—before being presented to a reader in either handwritten or printed form. Indian memoirs and interviews, which have provided rich stores of information, have also been filtered through others. Black Hawk's lengthy autobiography was translated from the Sauk language to English by Métis interpreter Antoine LeClaire and taken down and edited in 1833 by a young Anglo newspaper editor, John B. Patterson.

There are three shorter interviews of Winnebago men. The earliest and probably purest was a brief biography of Hųwanįkga, written in 1831 by veteran fur trader and Indian agent John H. Kinzie, who spoke the Winnebago language and, according to a descendent, "considered The Little Elk one of the finest Indians in the Winnebago Nation."¹ Although it is written in the third person, it reads much like an oral history and has the advantage of being only once removed from the subject. Reuben Gold Thwaites (corresponding secretary of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and editor of the Society's *Collections*) and interpreter Moses Paquette conducted two interviews in 1887 with elderly men who had been children early in the century: Mauchhewemahnigo (Walking Cloud) and Cųgiga (The Spoon) Decorah.²

Although we must keep in mind when using translated sources that what the speaker intended to say and what we ultimately receive may differ to some extent, we can still learn a great deal about the speaker and his or her world if we proceed cautiously using standard gauges of au-

thenticity. For example, we may consider whether the transcriber or editor has anything to gain by distorting an Indian's words. We should also try to determine how experienced and knowledgeable the transcriber or editor may have been about Indian culture, economy, and politics. Furthermore, the speaker, interpreter, or editor may alter the message for his or her anticipated audience, because people tend to express their ideas in terms they believe will be familiar, and/or acceptable, to their listeners.

For example, Hųwanįkga was speaking before a crowd of Indians, most of whom were likely to agree with him, but also to U.S. government officials who were expecting to force the Winnebagos to cede land during the treaty negotiations of the upcoming few weeks, and his message was one of outrage. However, the speech ultimately found its way into print two years later in a memoir published in Columbus, Ohio, by Caleb Atwater, one of the treaty commissioners who had negotiated for Winnebago removal from the lead lands. Atwater probably anticipated an audience of potential emigrants interested in geographic information about Wisconsin and to a lesser extent in colorful stories and ethnographic data. In addition, Atwater was bitter that he had never been paid for his work, grouching about this in his volume. As we would expect, much of the book is self-justification and self-aggrandizement. But Hųwanįkga's speech as presented in the book is completely different: its tone, themes, patterns, and central message differ so strongly from Atwater's words that we must conclude that Atwater's memoir somehow became a vehicle to bring us something of Hųwanįkga's *voice*. One wonders whether Atwater realized that Hųwanįkga's speech argued implicitly that the land cessions Atwater facilitated were not honorable. Furthermore, there is the problem of vocabulary. Atwater's text of Hųwanįkga's speech used the word "squaw," a nineteenth-century synonym used by Anglos for "Indian woman" but presently carrying a pejorative and even racist connotation, certainly not what the Winnebago orator intended. In any case, Hųwanįkga probably used the Winnebago word for woman, *hinuk*, not *squaw*.³

Besides the problems with translated sources, it has been a challenge to find information about women, particularly about their intentions and values. With regard to Indian women, we must rely on the reports of others because virtually nothing remains in their own words. In their official reports, Euro-American men generally said little about women. Memoirs, travel narratives, and personal letters, however, sometimes provide useful information—often ethnographic—while account books and other trade-related sources tell us what women produced, bought,

and sold. Naturally, sources written by outsiders must be used with care since some are ill informed, biased, incomplete, or all three. Reports about what women *did* tend to be more reliable than those suggesting what they thought, although we catch glimpses of women protesting or joking from time to time.

Some documents, particularly memoirs, written by Anglo women who came into the region during the last decade considered in this study have proven helpful in providing their perspectives. Juliette Kinzie's memoir of the early 1830s, for example, provides a white New England native's viewpoint.⁴ Unfortunately, few white women lived in the region before the War of 1812 and only a handful of documents produced by Métis women exist.

One wonderful source is the lengthy memoir written by Elizabeth Thérèse Baird in English—her fourth language after Ojibwe, Odawa, and French. This Métisse published her reminiscences as a serial in a Green Bay newspaper in 1886 and 1887; they provide rare information about this Creole town's Indian, white, and Métis inhabitants and their social and economic relationships.⁵ A lengthy interview with Augustin Grignon provides a Métis man's point of view.⁶

A few sources provide information on the small number of African Americans, most of whom came into the region during the 1820s. One, Jim Beckwourth, came with the first group of Anglo miners, stayed a short while, and then migrated west, writing a famous memoir in later years. Other blacks appear in court records, miners' registries, newspaper articles, and private correspondence. A former slave, Swanzy Adams, was interviewed for a local history in 1878 and told briefly about buying his freedom and later being kidnapped.⁷

In addition, I was fortunate that Lyman Draper and Reuben Gold Thwaites of the Wisconsin Historical Society collected a large number of reminiscences by whites during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and published them in the *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*. An unpublished memoir by Esau Johnson and the reminiscences of the Langworthy brothers published in the *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* were also extremely helpful in providing information and Anglos' perspectives on the lead rush.⁸ Memoirs also illuminated the experiences of immigrants from other parts of western Europe.

As might be expected, letters, official reports, and travel accounts proved to be useful. The latter often provide much ethnographic information, assuming no prior knowledge on the part of the reader, but must be used with caution since the traveler seldom spoke local lan-

guages and was sometimes misinformed or misinterpreted what he or she saw. Official reports were made by men who often had some experience in their region, but their correspondence tended to be self-aggrandizing. These officials portrayed themselves as very knowledgeable about the local Indians but frequently only knew what the Indians wanted them to know; one must take these reports with a grain of salt. Certain agents such as Thomas Forsyth and John Kinzie, who spoke Native languages and had lived many years in the area, are more reliable than outsiders like Zebulon Pike or newcomers like Joseph Street. Personal letters are more frank but sometimes assume much knowledge on the part of the reader about previous correspondence and current events. Still, they provide intimate glimpses, such as Horatio Newhall's friendship with the Mesquakie leader Old Buck, who tried to arrange a marriage between his daughter and Newhall (according to the Anglo's letters to his brother back east).⁹

Historical memory varied widely from group to group and even from person to person. Hųwanįkga viewed the past in terms of a precontact utopia followed by stages of European and Euro-American immigration, and in the rhetorical moment all but the last were benign. Black Hawk also differentiated between colonial regimes, even making comments about enemies he respected, and was able to provide in his memoir more nuance and detail. Yet he interjected in exasperation: "Why did the Great Spirit ever send the whites to this island, to drive us from our homes, and introduce among us *poisonous liquors, disease and death*? They should have remained on the island where the Great Spirit first placed them."¹⁰

Lucius H. Langworthy, a white miner who had moved to the Fox-Wisconsin region during the lead rush, had a very different view of the past. He concluded his lecture to the Dubuque Literary and Scientific Institute on 26 February 1855 with pride in the history of the community named after Julien Dubuque:

We have seen Dubuque as it was at first, with no white settlers upon our soil, at the time when the aboriginal inhabitants gave way before the invading force [of] Anglo-Saxon enterprise, and leaving behind them only a few rude memorials of their race and history. We have traced the progress of our settlement down to a time when our city may justly take its place among the first of western cities, with a population of nine or ten thousand thronging its streets. Our prosperity seems to point to a glorious future. Our progress has been steady, and the importance of our location is now settled beyond a question. Some future historian will collect the facts we have referred to, notice our progress in the present, and record the history of Dubuque as a part of our national

greatness. Perhaps some of our legends will be sung in poetic lays, and help to swell the anthems of a nation's melody.¹¹

As that future historian, I have gathered those rude memorials, facts, and legends and blended them into an alternative historical narrative, one more critical than these others but, I hope, more finely textured, complex, and inclusive.