Presence of Native Americans

The glaciers advanced and receded, and in their recessions the directions of the Menasha's and Neenah's histories were set. By 10,000 B.C., great glacial deposits of rich soil and rocks covered Wisconsin, including the Fox River Valley. The course of the branches of the Fox River, flowing through the channels of Lake Winnebago and Little Lake Butte des Morts, had been established. Wild fowl and game were attracted by abundance of food-bearing vegetation. All of this lured the first human beings to the area.

Probably the first inhabitants of Wisconsin were the Paleo Indians who had discovered the Wisconsin paradise even before the recession of the last glacier had been completed. These primitives wandered in small groups, hunting such big game as mastadons, woolly mammoths, and giant beavers. Their only weapon was the projectile stone spear. Gradually the Paleo Indians gave way to the Archaic People who had attained a higher level of culture by 5000 B.C. which included food gathering and food preparation.

Artifacts date the presence of the Late Woodland Indians in the Neenah-Menasha area about 2000 years ago. It is these natives who probably built the Indian mounds found on Doty Island and on the north shore of the Fox River in Menasha. Known as effigy mounds, they were erected in the shapes of animals, fowl, and reptiles. They were believed to have been used for burial as well as for ceremonial and religious purposes.

The Mississippi People, who later co-existed with the Woodland Indians probably were the ancestors of the Winnebago, living in the area about 300 to 1100 years ago. They were the first farmers of the Fox Valley area. Since they no longer were as dependent on the hunt, they remained in permanent villages living in wigwams. Although the Woodland Indians introduced pottery, it was the Mississippi Indians who developed a distinctive form. Stone tools became more refined and sophisticated.

It is told that when Jean Nicolet landed on Doty Island in 1634, he was met by the Winnebago Indians, the dominant tribe in the Fox River area. Using a map, previously drawn from the description of visiting tribesmen, Nicolet had sent by
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Samuel de Champlain, the governor of New France in Canada. His mission was to make peace with the Winnebago and Huron Indians in order to open the area for new fur trading sites and Jesuit missionary activity. Holding council with "5000 natives", Nicolet's mission was successful.

However, Indian life would never be the same. Eventually trading hatchets and guns would replace stone weapons; cloth would replace animal hides; and iron pots would replace clay pots. As the Indians became more dependent upon trade items for furs, ancient skills for survival were lost. Obtaining furs became paramount in the lives of Indians.

The name "Winnebago" was a corruption of other synonymous words meaning "filthy water" or "sea water". The tribe was known by 28 different names, the most common ones being "Winibagos", "Puans", "Puants" or "stinkers". It is believed that the tribe had migrated centuries before into the Fox Valley from the eastern shores of the country, escaping the pursuit of enemies and locating new hunting grounds.

The Winnebago Indians were known as an unfriendly and warlike people who frequently ate their captured enemies. Rarely bathing, they lived up to their name "stinking people". However, they were knowledgeable farmers, clearing land of stones, planting corn in hills, and even irrigating.

The first settlement of Winnebago Indians, located at the present site of Garfield Avenue, Menasha, was on Dendo Island where they had a fort. The fort and village were burned by the invading French in 1728. Later a second village and fort were built on the eastern end of Doty Island.

When Jonathan Carver, an English explorer, visited the Winnebago village in 1766, there were 50 houses and a strongly built fortification. The village was ruled by "Glory of the Morning", a Winnebago princess. Married to a French trader, Joseph De Kaury, she became a leading figure in her tribe. She bore three children including two sons who played vital parts in later peace treaties with the United States government. Glory of the Morning's branch of the Winnebago became known as the Decorah clan when they were moved to the Iowa Territory. The last Winnebago chief was Hootschope or "Four Legs". All Winnebago lands in the Fox River Valley were ceded to the United States government in 1827. Well known "Four Legs" died three years later, thus ending the succession of ruling Winnebago chiefs in this area. The remaining Winnebago Indians moved on to a tribal settlement in Portage, Wisconsin. Following the treaty of 1837 in which all remaining Winnebago lands east of the Mississippi were ceded to the government, reservations were established for them.
Presence of Native Americans

in Iowa, in Minnesota, in the Dakotas, and finally in Nebraska. A few of the tribe's people refused to leave and wandered around this area for a number of years.

A second tribe of Indians in this area was the Fox. They probably were the most aggressive of the Indian tribes residing in the Fox River Valley. An Algonquin tribe, they arrived in Wisconsin some time after the Winnebago. For one hundred years the Fox harassed and fought their bitter enemies, the French and their Indian allies.

The name "Fox" was the nickname given to them by the English. The French called them "Renard". The Fox called themselves "Meshkwakihug", a word meaning "red earth people". Other Algonquin tribes referred to them as the "Utugamig" or "Outagamie", meaning "people of the other shore".

It is believed that the Fox Indians migrated from Michigan in order to find a more protective site away from the warring Iroquois. One of the major Fox villages in the Fox River Valley was on the west side of Little Lake Butte des Morts.

The Fox practiced polygamy and were skilled traders. Evidence of European goods brought here before the arrival of the white man may have been the result of the Fox Indian trading arrangements with other tribes in the east. Some have described the Fox Indians as arrogant, quarrelsome, and aggressive.

After the arrival of Jean Nicolet in Wisconsin, other exploration followed and trading with the French began along the Fox River. Furs were the Frenchman's gold in the New World. However, Samuel de Champlain, Governor of Canada, foresaw the need for new trading sites if the fur market were to continue. The Fox and Wolf rivers as a water route and the abundance of fur-bearing animals in the area, provided an ideal setting for further French fur-trading expansion. Although explorers and traders made contact with Indian tribes along the Fox River, no French missions nor trading posts were established in the Menasha and Neenah vicinity.

The Fox Indians soon discovered that the French would challenge their dominance of the Fox River and disrupt their trading arrangement with other Indian tribes. Following a long period of harassment in which the Fox charged tolls or duties or raided the cargoes of French boats along the river, the French decided they must use military force. A series of battles took place, beginning in 1716 and finally ending in 1737, when the Fox decided to move to southeastern Wisconsin. French dominance of the Fox River area ended about the same time.

The Menominee Indians came early to the Fox River Valley and presently remain a tribal unit in Wisconsin. Although the tribe's origin is undocumented,
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it is believed they migrated from Canada to the upper Michigan peninsula and to the Menominee River area between Michigan and Wisconsin.

Descendants of a prehistoric woodland culture (800 to 1000 A.D.), the Menominee tribe wandered into Wisconsin and the lands of the Winnebago Indians with whom they were friendly. It is reported that the Menominee were the first tribe that Jean Nicolet met upon his arrival in Green Bay in 1634. Prior to the Great Council of 1825, held at Fort Crawford in Prairie du Chien, the Menominees controlled all the lands between Lake Michigan and Lake Winnebago and from the lower Fox River south to the Milwaukee River.

The Indians were known in the Chippewa tongue as "Menominee" or "wild rice people". The French referred to them as "folle Avione" or "wild rice eaters". The first European contact with the tribe was favorable for they were handsome, neat, agreeable, peaceful, and ornamentally dressed. Reports of the Menominee's light skin, different from other tribes, may have given cause for Nicolet to believe that, as he ventured into unexplored lands, he may finally have located the century-sought route to the Orient and that the Menominees were indeed Asiatic people.

During their ninety-year rule in the Fox River Valley, the Menominee tribe thrived. Skilled in hunting and trapping, they proved to be favorable trading partners, especially with the Grignon family who dominated the fur-trading enterprises in Wisconsin during the early part of the nineteenth century.

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William F. Herziger
Proposed plan of the Indian Mission.

OLD MAP . . . . . Dated September 28, 1839
Surveyor General Office
Dubuque, Iowa

[A] Little Lake Butte des Morts. [B] Lake Winnebago [C] Menasha Dam *

(1) Farm House. (2) Farm House. (3) 9 Block Houses. (4) Farm House.
(9) 10 Block Houses. (10) 10 Block Houses. (11) Bridge.

Traced from original February 28, 1981
Neenah Historical Society
TREATY
With the Menominee Indians—Concluded at Lake Pow-au-hay-bun-nay, on the eighteenth of October, one thousand, eight hundred and forty-eight.
JAMES K. POLK, President of the United States of America. To all and singular to whom these presents shall come,

Greeting:

WHEREAS a treaty was made and concluded at Lake Pow-au-hay-bun-nay, in the State of Wisconsin, on the eighteenth day of October, one thousand eight hundred and forty-eight, between the United States of America, by William Medill, a commissioner duly appointed for that purpose, and the Menominee tribe of Indians by the Chiefs, headmen and warriors of that tribe, which treaty so words for words as follows—to wit:

Articles of a treaty made and concluded at Lake Pow-au-hay-bun-nay, in the State of Wisconsin, on the eighteenth day of October, one thousand eight hundred and forty-eight, between the United States of America, by William Medill, a commissioner duly appointed for that purpose, and the Menominee tribe of Indians, by the Chiefs, headmen, and warriors of said tribe:

ARTICLE I.
It is stipulated and solemnly agreed that the peace and friendship now so happily subsisting between the Government and People of the United States and the Menominee Indians, shall be perpetual.

Treaty of Oct. 18, 1848, by which the Menominee Indians relinquished their land to the U.S. Government.