



"Both died simultaneously and Sheboygan's fair daughter was left without a lover."—See "Indian Tales"

The Explorers—1634-1795

“There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society where none intrudes,
By the deep sea, and music in its war.”

—*Childe Harold.*

UPON a summer's day in the year 1635, a long birch bark canoe slowly skirted the shores of Lake Michigan and glided past the gloomy pine forest that stood in solemn grandeur upon the site of the present city of Sheboygan. Jean Nicolet, the illustrious French explorer whom history knows as the discoverer of Lake Michigan, and seven sturdy Huron braves were the occupants of that canoe. Nicolet was returning from a voyage of exploration in the Fox River Valley and Illinois regions conducted by the orders of Samuel de Champlain, governor of New France. He, the first recorded white man in what afterwards became the Northwest Territory, therefore, was also the first recorded white man to see the site of Sheboygan.

Almost half a century passed by, before another white man dared to brave the waters of Lake Michigan for an extensive voyage of exploration. In the late summer of 1673, however, two other famous French explorers, the Sieur Louis Joliet and his priestly companion James Marquette, returning to Green Bay after their memorable discovery of the Upper Mississippi River, made their way in two canoes, paddled by five voyageurs, along the western shore of Lake Michigan. Although numerous landings were made, it is not known whether or not this locality was among the number. In November of the following year Marquette again faced the storms of Lake Michigan and proceeded southward along Wisconsin's dreary shore with two white companions and a number of Illinois and Pottawatomies to establish a mission at Kaskaskia. His object was never to be attained however; for on May 18, 1675, this brave missionary gave up his soul, hundreds of miles from the nearest white settlement.

In 1679 another French adventurer, Robert Cavelier or La Salle as he is known to history skirted the Wisconsin coast of Lake Michigan and stopped at several Indian villages, none of which have been positively identified.

All these hardy French adventurers had seen the site of Sheboygan; some of them may have landed there, but the descriptions which they have left behind of the places at which they stopped are too meagre for absolute identification. In the autumn of 1699, however, a white man is actually known to have landed at what is now Sheboygan. This man was the Father St. Cosme, a native of Quebec who had been ordered to the lower Mississippi by his missionary chief. Compelled, by the warlike spirit of the Foxes, to abandon the Fox-Wisconsin route, he followed the old course of La Salle, along the western shore of Lake Michigan. On his way he stopped at a small Pottawatomie village, which Reuben G. Thwaites, the historian, has identified as the site of Sheboygan, "where the Reverend Father Marest had wintered with some Frenchmen and planted a cross."

No doubt scores of other adventurers, fur-traders, voyageurs, soldiers and priests traversed this region in the seventeenth century; but unfortunately only meagre records of their travels have been preserved. The *coureur de bois* in particular was a very important factor in the exploration of Eastern Wisconsin. The dangers of the Wisconsin forests appealed with peculiar fascination to his French temperament. "Divested of all the proprieties of his former civilized life, painted and tattooed, with feathered hat and beaded garments, he gaily danced with the braves or gravely smoked the calumet at the council of the tribe." By the beginning of the eighteenth century, therefore, the region comprising Sheboygan county had been seen or visited by most of the great figures in the history of the Lake Region and of New France.