

The Fur Traders—1795-1834

In the great canoe with pinions
Came, he said, a hundred warriors,
Painted white were all their faces,
And with hair their chins were covered!
—*The Song of Hiawatha.*

ALTHOUGH a great deal of trading had been done with the Indians in the neighborhood of Sheboygan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, still a post was not established definitely within the confines of the present county until 1795. In that year Jacques Vieau, the first permanent white settler of Milwaukee, was sent out by the Northwest Fur Co. to explore and establish posts on the west shore of Lake Michigan. Vieau was a full blooded Frenchman, born in lower Canada in 1757, and married to the niece of Onaugesa, a Pottawatomie chief. He had traded with the Indians for many years and knew the wilds of Wisconsin as a French trader alone can. Setting out immediately on his journey, he established posts at Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Milwaukee and Sheboygan, where the post was located at the foot of the rapids. A clerk was left in charge of the three "jack knife" posts, while Vieau personally took charge of the station at Milwaukee. Each spring, after packing up the winter's peltries and buying all the maple sugar obtainable from the Indians, he left Milwaukee to return to Mackinaw. Upon this trip he stopped at the several "jack knife" posts, collected their furs and maple sugar and often relieved the men stationed at them. Each August he returned to Milwaukee, distributing goods along the way to the secondary posts. The trading post at Sheboygan existed for several years under the general superintendence of Vieau.

In 1814 William Farnsworth, who later became the leading pioneer settler of Sheboygan, visited the Indian village located at that point. What his object was in coming here or how long he stayed is not known. It may have been that he was seeking a new place to ply his trade, for in 1818 he returned and spent several months here as a trapper and trader. The writer of the historical sketch of Sheboygan county found in the "History of Northern Wisconsin" states that "In the same year (1818) a Frenchman, Andrew Vieux by name, built a hut on the east side of the Sheboygan River near its mouth, and had born to him there the first white child born in this county." This evidently is an error and as far as the author is able to discover is without any foundation. Col. Abram Edwards, a merchant of Detroit, who accompanied Major Philips to the military posts along the lake shore in the spring of 1818, on passing this place, saw the shore lined with Indians spearing whitefish. But neither he nor William Farnsworth say anything regarding the residence here of Andrew Vieux, which they unquestionably would have done had such been the case.