

MENOMINEE IRON RANGE – NATIVE AMERICAN LEGENDS

[Compiled and Transcribed by William J. Cummings]

The Florence Mining News, Florence, Marinette County, Wisconsin, Volume I, Number 12 [Saturday, March 19, 1881], page 3, columns 4-6

No lake in this country has any standing in respectable society, unless it has an “injun” legend attached to it. Lately we have faithfully and carefully examined the records, in the archives of the Indian Department, on the shores of the romantic Lake Chicagon, and have finally succeeded in ascertaining, why our beautiful crystal gem of translucent water, on the south side of Florence is called Fisher Lake.

It seems that long years ago, when the pine trees bore pine apples and cedar trees bore cacao [*sic – cacao*] nuts, that there dwelt on the banks of this lake, on an outcrop of dioritic schist – which commanded a magnificent view of the turbulent water before him – an ancient chieftain of the name Skit-a-wau-boo. Around him dwelt a numerous tribe, the names of nearly all of whom, we could give from the parish register, but as some of them are necessarily very long – being in the old style of spelling – we shall omit putting them in print. Many decades of lunar phenomena, they dwelt in peace and contentment. The waters abounded in frongs, ells and plesiosaurians, the forests were filled with megatheriums, mastodons, glyptodons, iguanodons, and the Indians’ heart was glad. But at last came trouble. The old chief one day got on the war path, and while whooping it up, struck a senior deacon of the tribe on the snoot and felled him to the ground. The friends of the gray haired patriarch, made a split in the party and pronounced the act, one of unparalleled atrocity. A general tribulation ensued, which after lasting many years, resulted in the complete demoralization of Skit-a-wau-boo. At this the great Indian god *Hooternoo* became very wrathful,

because of the discord among his people and determined to inflict a terrible punishment. Calling up his aiddecamp [*sic – aide de camp*], he ordered him to manufacture a lot of the most approved and latest style of thunderbolts, filled with glukodine: these he dropped on the heads of the rebellious people, as they were assembled in church, theatre or skating rink. The consequence was they were nearly all demolished, and for many a long year afterwards, ruin and desolation brooded over the surface of this charming sheet of water. Finally when but a few lingering remnants of the once powerful tribe remained, a “pale face” wandered in and took up his temporary abode on its banks. Next day he gobbled a canoe belonging to one of the remnants, and essayed to take a sail in it. After getting out a few rods from shore, retributive justice got after him and in the excitement of the moment, he dropped his gold mounted meerschaum pipe overboard. As the water was clear, he saw it distinctly on the bottom, which was apparently not over three feet in depth. “I’ll fish her out,” he said aloud as he stepped overboard to recover the treasure. But terrible to relate, the treacherous bottom gave way, and he disappeared forever from sight. The owner of the canoe had rushed to the bank just in time to catch a portion of the words so recklessly spoken, which were the center ones “fish her.” After swimming out and recovering his canoe and also the pipe, acting under the impulse of a superstitious feeling, he and the balance of the tribe left the diggings – skunned [*sic*] out. The mysterious words which he had heard the white man utter, lingered in his memory, and in aftertime when speaking of the strange occurrence, he would locate it by calling this sheet of water “Fish her” Lake, which words as the years rolled on, became

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contracted into “Fisher,” which name it bears at the present time.

The Florence Mining News, Florence, Marinette County, Wisconsin, Volume I, Number 37 [Saturday, September 10, 1881], page 3, column 3

A LEGEND exists in the Indian archives at Lake Chicagon, that in the dusky labyrinths of time long past, a birchen canoe, loaded to the gunwales with native silver, from a forgotten mine, in the far northwest, undertook to cross the stormy waters of Fisher Lake, and that the wild waves engulfed [*sic – engulfed*] the same, and that it reposes quietly, at the present time, covered over by the crystal element. Experienced divers will be engaged to recover the long lost bonanza. The treasure trove is said to represent a value of \$175,000,000, making allowance for typographical errors. The MINING NEWS is not connected with the enterprise.

The Florence Mining News, Florence, Florence County, Wisconsin, Volume IV, Number 28 [Saturday, July 12, 1884], page 4, column 1

A SPREAD EAGLE SPOOK.

INDIAN LOVERS IN A BIRCH CANOE HAUNT THE BEAUTIFUL CHAIN OF LAKES.

It is not generally known that the Bad Water Indians regard the Spread Eagle chain o’ lakes as haunted and look upon them with mingled reverence and awe. It is a fact that they seldom visit the lakes. Their story goes as follows: Some years ago, before their primeval homes were invaded by the rude feet of the pale faces and the

red deer was only startled by the whirring arrow, a certain chief had a beautiful daughter named “Singing Wind.” This Indian maiden was wooed by a young brave belonging to a tribe far to the north. His name was “Slay-the-Bear,” and his deeds of prowess were many. While indulging in the grand fall hunt, the two tribes became involved in a dispute and the braves donned their war paint. All intercourse between the clans was forbidden by the respective chiefs and this caused much pain to “Singing Wind” and “Slay-the-Bear.” The young brave was determined to continue his visits to his brown-faced betrothed, notwithstanding the fact that he knew death for his disobedience, and ridicule, which he regarded as worse than death, for his weakness, awaited him if discovered. He would join “Singing Wind” and the two would go out on the Spread Eagle lakes in a birch canoe and make love in real civilized style, bidding fear begone and feasting on the joys of each other’s countenance. One night, just as the silvery new moon was peeping down upon them through the treetops, they were surprised by a war party. Sooner than survive to be separated they leaped into the water, clasped in mutual embrace and sank to arise no more. Ever since that night the Indians claim that the loving children of the forest appear upon the lakes in a birch canoe with the advent of the new moon, and glide over the shimmering surface of the miniature sea from one extremity to the other, in the position of lovers. At the end of the lake the canoe sinks, carrying with it the wooing spirits, to appear no more until inspired and accompanied by the next infant crescent. Fred John, the Spread Eagle guide, says he has never seen the apparition, but says if he does he will take to his heels and be seen in Florence at midnight.

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Iron Mountain Press, Iron Mountain, Dickinson County, Michigan, Volume 18, Number 40 [Thursday, February 19, 1914], page 7, columns 1-2

LEGEND OF LOWER TWIN FALLS

There is no more beautiful scene in all the northwest than the swirling waters of the lower Twin Falls on the Menominee, and there is nothing more awe-inspiring, more weird, than the mournful cry, almost wail, that at times seems to come forth from the whirlpool at the foot of the falls. It is a plaintive cry, and according to an old Indian legend, was the mourning of the Great Spirit for the soul of a hero, who in desperation was driven to seek refuge in the waters of the falls.

Old Chief Go-wan-ge-seh used to tell the tale of the heroic rescue of a band of braves who had been made captive by the Indians and French, who were being carried from the winter quarters to the French fort, then at Green Bay, by an Indian maiden, the daughter of a brave, and who, when driven to desperation, had with her faithful Indian lover, taken refuge in the bosom of the river.

The Twin Falls are on the Menominee between Florence county, Wisconsin, and Dickinson county, Michigan, and is [*sic – are*] one of the most beautiful sights on the entire river. Tumbling down from the upper falls the water rushes onward and downward, one quarter mile to the lower falls. Sweeping into the midst of the high cliffs, the river swings quickly and the water whirls in a half circle fall, high on both sides, with a great grove in the center, rushing into a giant whirlpool at the bottom of which it rages in unlashd fury through the narrow passage into the wide sweep of the river beyond. It was into this that O-che-kaw of

the Foxes, who had by her presence of mind, strength and bravery, saved the last few men of her tribe from imprisonment and slavery.

She saved them then, but they were driven backward to the forests, without shelter, pursued by the unrelenting French traders, until one by one they dropped off and O-che-kaw and her Indian lover, rather than permit themselves to go into slavery, hurled themselves into the stream, and were carried down into the whirlpool, no trace of them to be seen, nothing to tell of their fate but the mournful plaint of the waters and the tales carried back by their persecutors.

There had been a feeling between the Foxes, the Sauks, and others of the Wisconsin tribes against the encroachments of the pale faces. Across the lakes from the north, by the rock-spirit, Michapaux, in the straits of Mackinaw, they had come, wending their way down into the forests of the Menominees, the Winnebagos, mixing with the Ottawas and the Pawnees. They became friendly with the Indians and establishing trading posts, were lavish in their presents and in return only asked that the red men bring to them their surplus skins. They were not stingy, those white men, from the red man's way of thinking. And they had firewater in abundance, firewater which the Indians wanted. They grew in favor, and grew in power and soon almost ruled the Indians and their chiefs.

But the Foxes disputed the rights of the new comers. They had no right to come in and take the lands of the Indians. The country was theirs. It had been their fathers' and their fathers' before them and they did not wish to see the strangers come in and take possession, growing to power over the neighboring tribes.

Often the French traders would ply their way down into the central and southern

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country, up the Fox river, only to be turned back by the hostile inhabitants. Often fights would occur in which the invaders would suffer loss.

Over at Green Bay Capt. Morand was in charge. He had been there for some time, coming from Canada, and bringing with him a band of trained Indian fighters and backwoodsman, men who knew the Indians as well as they knew themselves, who knew their ways and the woodcraft. He resented the action of the Foxes and often threatened them. But threats were met by defiance and the Indians continued to thwart his plans and drive his men back from their country.

They were in an advantageous position, those hostiles. They held the key to the entire northwest route and Morand wanted the fur trade of that section. He wanted to build up a business that would compare with that of any of the great fur companies of the continent, to bring back to France a wealth of furs to prove his efficiency.

Exasperated, Capt. Morand at the head of a large body of French and Indians, started out to drive the Indians from their village, or compel them to accede [*sic – accede*] to his terms. Dividing into two bands, Morand took one section in canoes and the other was to come in from the rear. The canoes were covered with oilcloth, to give the appearance of loads of provisions or goods. All unsuspecting the Foxes saw the canoes pulling up the river. Lightly armed, and unprepared, they watched Capt. Morand direct the canoes toward the shore and along the banks of the river. They swept into line.

Suddenly, throwing aside the oilcloth, rifles were fired into the unprepared and completely surprised savages. Almost at the same time the detail appeared in the rear and swept the Indians with a cross fire. Demoralized they fought back, helplessly, finally fleeing to the forests. Morand

destroyed the town, burning everything, and making habitation there impossible. Contented, he started back for the fort. Along the way they were surprised by a few small attacks from small bands of avenging Indians, but in all cases the attacking party disappeared rapidly into the forests.

Retiring back to the northward the Foxes reunited and recovered. They returned to their town, and rebuilt their wigwams. Defeated, but unconquered, they tried to swing the Indians of the country from the French, showing them what the outcome of the French invasion would be. In a few cases they succeeded, and Morand, hearing of their activities again decided to punish them. Hastily gathering his band of French and Indians he started across the forests for their camp. Moving rapidly and by night they again fought the Foxes unsuspectingly and drove them to the woods. This time the Foxes were completely demoralized. But they returned to the northwest and settled for the winter.

Capt. Morand was unsatisfied. He knew that as long as the defiant Foxes were free they would make trouble for him. Therefore, in the dead of winter, with a strong band of hardy followers, he started on his third attack.

Few in numbers, the Foxes had gathered in a small camp where they were awaiting the coming of spring before returning to the lower country to their old camp. While playing at their winter games in the middle of the day, with no arms at hand[,], unsuspecting, unprepared, they found themselves between the two fires of the attacking party. But few escaped, and many were killed. About forty braves were taken prisoners, together with the squaws and children. Morand had the prisoners bound and then started back for the fort.

Chief Min-ne-kan-nee, an ally of the whites, was guarding the party. Trailing along the wilderness, the warriors leading,

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and the prisoners in charge of the chief bringing up the rear, hope seemed all but gone. They were to be taken to the fort from whence they were to be sent out to the friendly tribes that would put them in slavery.

Min-ne-kan-nee, becoming thirsty, stopped at a spring to get a drink. While down on all fours, with his head in the water, O-che-kaw noticed his helplessness from attack. Springing quickly upon him, she had his head down in the water. He tried to grasp *[sic – gasp]* out only to have his mouth filled with water. Pushing him further down she held until his struggles ceased. Taking his knife she cut the bonds of her tribesmen. They hurried into the forest to make their escape.

Morand was furious. He could do nothing, however, and went on to the fort, determined to pursue his enemies and completely exterminate them.

Finding that they were not pursued the Foxes went back to their destroyed camp, rebuilding it and, taking no chances on again being surprised. O-che-chaw, daughter of a brave, was made a chieftess, an honor seldom bestowed upon any of the members of her tribe, and their children after her were to become chieftans *[sic – chieftains]*.

Te-pak-e-ne-nee, one of the young braves, had long been her lover, and the brave, now taking her for wife, became virtually the chief of the tribe. But the prowess of O-che-kaw was not forgotten and hailed as a deliverer she was obeyed in *[sic]* her every word.

Their happiness was not for long, however. With the breaking of spring, news came of the advance of the French and Indian aliens to again attack them. With O-che-kaw at their head, and Te-pak-e-ne-nee as their fighting chief, they went forth to meet their enemies. The battle was short, and outnumbered the Foxes were

scattered, and few who were not killed or taken prisoners fled to the northward.

O-che-kaw and Te-pak-e-ne-nee, *[sic]* together made their way northward, Morand closely behind. They tried all the tricks of the Indian crafts to throw the pursuers off their tracks, but the Indians could not be thrown off. They were finally brought to bar. Hiding in the rocks on top of the bluff overshadowing the lower Twin Falls of the Menominee, without ammunition, without friends, they saw that death or capture faced them.

Morand and his followers were suddenly surprised to see the Indian lovers, and last of their tribe, suddenly appear in plain view on the rocks a few yards away. Knowing he had them at his mercy Morand did not fire. They stood still for an instant, then walked together to the edge of the cliff. Locking arms they jumped from the cliff.

Morand hastened forward, but all that could be seen to mark the escape of O-che-kaw and Te-pak-e-ne-nee were a few feathers floating on the waters of the whirlpool. These, too, circled and soon disappeared from view.

And while she stood on the cliff above silently watching the raging waters, there rose upward a low, mournful plaint, the greeting and the sorrow of the waters for the brave ones who had been engulfed in its bosom.

[NOTE: The fort at Green Bay referred to in this legend was probably Fort La Baye.

On a mission for Samuel de Champlain, the governor of New France, Jean Nicolet was charged with finding a route from the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River. In 1634 he arrived at La Baye des Puans, where the Fox River empties into Lake Michigan, and claimed the region for France. But La Baye did not gain importance until 1669 when Jesuit missionary Father Claude Allouez, who

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established a mission there, traveled the length of the Fox River and discovered a waterway to the Mississippi River, indirectly linking the St. Lawrence and the Gulf of Mexico.

La Baye became a fur-trading center and its future importance was secured when Nicolas Perrot was made commandant of La Baye. Perrot was an effective diplomat who made alliances and trade agreements with Native Americans. The lands of the upper Mississippi became the possession of the French Empire when a formal agreement was signed at Fort St. Antoine in 1689, turning a lucrative fur trading region over to the French. But when Perrot was recalled to France in 1716, his diplomatic policy was replaced by a military regime. The resulting tensions developed into warfare with the Fox Indians that continued until 1740, when fur trading again prospered and permanent housing was constructed.

In 1745 Augustin de Langlade established a trading center on the bank of the Fox River; his relations with Native Americans were built on trust and respect. Langlade's large family controlled the region's trade, owned large parcels of land, married Menominee tribe women, and lived independent of French rule. During the French and Indian War, the Langlades left La Baye to fight against the British in Ohio and Canada. The British gained control of what was known as the Northwest Territory and captured Fort La Baye, which they rebuilt and renamed Fort Edward August. The British also renamed the area Green Bay, after the green-tinted streaks that stripe the bay in springtime. Trade flourished for both French and English settlers during the period of British rule and continued to prosper after the Northwest Territory was transferred to the U.S. government after the Revolutionary War.

It was not until after the War of 1812 that financier John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company secured control of the fur trade. Fort Howard at Green Bay and Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chine were built to protect U.S. commercial interests. The opening of the Erie Canal, linking the Great Lakes to New England, further advanced Green Bay as a trading center. Daniel Whitney platted one part of present-day Green Bay in 1829 and named it Navarino while Astor platted an opposite section and built the Astor Hotel to attract settlers. Astor priced his land too high and when the hotel burned down in 1857 his company relinquished claims on the land. Farming was soon replaced by lumber as the dominant economic activity in Green Bay and in 1853, the year the city was incorporated, 80 million feet of pine lumber were milled.

Fort St. François (also spelled St. Francis) was originally known as French Fort de la Baye des Puants, a frontier outpost and trading post built by Nicolas Perrot. A fortified French Jesuit mission (St. François Xavier) was first established here in 1669. The fort was rebuilt and renamed in 1717. It was destroyed by Indians in 1728, and was not rebuilt for five years. It was abandoned in 1760. In 1761 it became British Fort Edward Augustus but was abandoned during the Pontiac Uprising. The original site is on the west side of the Fox River at the foot of the Dousman Street Bridge, marked by a flagpole. A reconstruction is on display at Heritage Hill Park in Green Bay.

Fort Howard, a federal stockade with four log blockhouses, was built on the site of Fort St. Francis/Edward Augustus. The original site is on the west side of the Fox River at the foot of the Dousman Street Bridge, marked by a flagpole. It was rebuilt with frame buildings beginning in 1831, and was abandoned between 1841 to 1849 for

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the Seminole War in Florida. The post became a local mobilization center during the Civil War, but was then sold off in 1869. Two original buildings (mess and 1834 hospital) and two reconstructions (a fur trader's cabin and Officer's quarters) are on display at Heritage Hill Park, moved there in 1975.]