

MANUSCRIPT PROJECT



INTRODUCTION, TRANSCRIPTION, AND
BIBLIOGRAPHY
FOR LETTER 2 FOLDER 2 OF
CHARLES FRANCIS XAVIER GOLDSMITH'S
COLLECTED PAPERS

BOX 1 OF 1; EAU CLAIRE MSS BS 6/3F

Intended audience: Graduate students or adults interested in Northern Wisconsin history,
Indian affairs, or the C.F.X. Goldsmith letters.

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Eng. 713
Dr. Stirm
11-19-2003

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Introduction

The original, handwritten version of this letter is part of the Charles Francis Xavier Goldsmith collection (Box 1 of 1; Eau Claire MSS BS 6/3F). This particular selection is Letter 2 of Folder 2 found in the UWEC Special Collections Department. This letter has been transcribed as part of a project for Eng. 713. The purpose of this assignment is to provide future graduate students and those interested in Wisconsin history a first hand view, through actual correspondence, of what life was like in the trapping and pioneering days.

I chose to research and transcribe this particular letter for several reasons. First, it was fairly easy to read. The handwriting was clear and straightforward. In addition, there were no cross-outs or edited sections, which made transcribing the letter easier. Second, the content of the letter intrigued me, particularly the repeated mention of Boissette and the problem with a wolf eating all the fish. However, even though the letter was fairly easy to read and I was able to find ample information on most of the people and places mentioned, I did encounter several problems.

My most pressing problem was discovering who had written the letter and to whom it was addressed. I originally believed that it was a letter from James Ermatinger to one of his sisters. I proceeded on that belief for several weeks, only to later find out I was quite wrong. Eventually I discovered that the letter was addressed *to* Mr. Ermatinger, which then presented me with the problem of discovering who the true author was. Here I ran into more problems as the signature of the letter was a combination of abbreviations and scrawled handwriting. Ironically, after flipping through a Wisconsin history book during the high school speech class I teach, I discovered the author was a man named Jean Baptiste Dube. The information presented in the book matched the circumstances in my letter. I discussed the pronunciation of the last name with our French teacher and she assured me that it was pronounced Dubay. I became very excited because Lake DuBay is just north of the town I live in and I knew I'd find some interesting information.

The next significant problem I encountered was locating any information on the names Boissette and Dufort. Unfortunately, these men were apparently fairly minor employees of the American Fur Trading Co., and therefore were not mentioned in any sources I could find.

Finally, it became difficult to place the letter in a proper context. Unlike other letters of the collection, there was no mention of any war or treaty, so I was at a loss to explain what was happening at the time. Fortunately I stumbled across a website that provided a great deal of help.

It is my hope that this transcription and the included information will prove useful to any who wish to continue research on the Cadotte and Ermatinger families, as well as the Wisconsin fur trade business.

Context of Letter

As mentioned in my introduction, I found placing this letter in the proper context to be a significant challenge. Although I had a date and year, no mention was made of any wars or treaties, so that provided no assistance. However, the lack of provisions for both parties was mentioned numerous times, which led me to wonder if something else was amiss. After much thought, I realized that the weather may have something to do with their dire situations. Little did I realize how difficult it would be to research weather from over 150 years ago!

During my research I stumbled across a website that provided an online copy of a book which had a record of weather in Minnesota from 1820 to 1869! Although most of the people and places mentioned in my letter are from Wisconsin, it has been my experience that the weather patterns between Minnesota and Wisconsin have been fairly similar.

According to Charles Fisk, the month of February in 1835 (the date of my letter) was bitterly cold. In fact, there were two very harsh arctic blasts that occurred one right after the other, which could account for a lack of all types of provisions. Because of the inclement weather, it is likely that more people would be seeking shelter at the forts, thus ensuring a lack of many provisions, namely food. In addition, trapping and trading would decline due to the harsh weather, therefore wasting good fur and preventing the acquisition of new provisions. Since Mr. Ermatinger and Mr. DuBay were both obviously out of provisions, and all other documents I found implied that they were intelligent, practical men, I concluded that they had both fallen on hard times, most likely due to the unseasonably harsh weather.

Biography of the Manuscript's Author

Jean Baptiste Dube (aka John B. Dubay) was reportedly born on July 10, 1810. However, the exact year of his birth is unknown as there is conflicting data. Some sources say he merely moved to Wisconsin in 1810 (Krug 4), while others say he was born in Wisconsin in 1802 or 1809. Regardless of his date of birth, Dube's family resided in Green Bay for a period of time during his childhood.

Dubay left Green Bay around 1823 or 1824 to work in Saginaw, MI. Next, he moved to Sault Ste. Marie and established a trading post for the Hudson Bay Company. (The Hudson Bay Company was the number one rival of the American Fur Trading Co, for which Dubay would later work.) Dubay eventually set up a trading post for the AFT Co in Lac Flambeau. This post was his headquarters until about 1838 or 1839. (Krug 21)

Jean Baptiste Dube was a very prominent and well respected person by both the whites and the Indians that he encountered. Besides being a prodigious trapper and pioneer, Dube was also involved in council with the Chippewa and Sioux Indians. Since Dubay was himself a half-breed, Indian and French, this shows that he respected and acknowledged both parts of his ancestry. One source says that neither Dubay nor his wife could read or write (Perret 108), but that is hard to believe as the following letter exists and Dubay was often used as a government interpreter and was known as a linguist (Krug 12-13).

Dube did a lot of trading with many of the Chippewa tribes. They called Oskaatawananee (the Flourishing Young Trader) (Krug 27), and he was reported to have been the son-in-law of Oshkosh (the head chief of the Menomonee tribe). Dube's wife's name was Madeline "The Princess" (Perret 108) and together they had six children.

An interesting part of his history is that Dube reportedly shot and killed William Reynolds at Ft. Winnebago over a property dispute. He was charged with first-degree murder and endured two trials (in 1857 and 1858). Luckily for Dube, both juries were unable to reach a verdict and he was released on a technicality (Krug 89).

Jean Baptiste Dube lived a very busy life. His many encounters with different people and his attitude towards them all led to his being favorably remembered through history. As he grew older, his health began failing (Krug 319). Jean Baptiste Dube died on January 11, 1887.

As is obvious, Dube (or Dubai: he wrote his name both ways) spent a good portion of his life traveling over the states of Wisconsin and Michigan. Unfortunately, records regarding the exact dates of his journeys are obscure, conflicting, or just plain unavailable. Although Dube was a highly respected man and was fairly prominent during his lifetime, it is hard to hear the "voice" of the man whose activities and movements are outlined above. Historical sources may provide the basic biographical information, but they don't provide access to the man's inner workings. The following letter gives us a clue to Jean Baptiste Dube's mind, how he wrote, and how he interacted with his peers.

Brief Biography of the Manuscript's Recipient

James Ermatinger was a prominent fur trader in Northern Wisconsin for many years. He was born in Michilimackinac, MI in 1808, although various sources conflict regarding the exact date of James' birth. His parents were George Ermatinger and Catherine McKee. James was familiar with the fur trade industry as his father was a fur trader for many years in Sault Ste. Marie, MI. His father traded for the American Fur Trading Co., for which James would later work.

James married Charlotte Cadotte (widow of Truman A. Warren) on August 1, 1829 in Chippewa, MI. They had six children together. Charlotte's family were prominent traders and post leaders for the AFT Co.

James and Charlotte eventually moved to Vermillion Falls (or Rapids) where he established a trading post. James was very involved with the village's affairs, even acting as Justice of the Peace for Chippewa County in 1855 (and possibly longer). Due to his contributions to the town, Vermillion Falls was eventually renamed James Falls (and then later Jim Falls) in honor of James Ermatinger.

Apparently fur trading is not all that Mr. Ermatinger was interested in. Several sources mentioned that his father was involved in the army for the British War of 1812 and James himself was Captain of the cavalry during the Rebellion of 1837.

James eventually died in 1866 at Jim Falls.

Notes on Transcription

- All page breaks, line breaks, punctuation, and grammar are consistent with the original letter. Leaving the text in this form does not hinder reading or understanding, and I felt it was important to preserve the integrity of what the author had written. This letter has been transcribed word for word.
- Words that were illegible have been marked as such, indicated in ()s.
- Misspelled words remain as they appear in the text. I have indicated those words by following them with [sic]. I elected to keep the spelling as it was because I believe it gives the reader a more pronounced feeling of authenticity.
- Capitalizations have been left as the original letter indicated.

I chose to edit this letter in this fashion because I believe doing so lends an atmosphere of reality to the author. Rather than getting an “edited and corrected” version, we get a transcription of what was actually written. The only changes (i.e. the glosses at the bottom of each page) are done so with intention of improving understanding.

Lac Duflambeaux¹ [sic]
February 19, 1835

James Ermatinger²

Dear Sir,

Your of the 14th inst.³ was handed to me by Dufort on the 18th by which you request ammunition, therefore I send you 22 ½ # Powder, 12 ½ # Tobacco, 12 ½ # Tallow, and the flannel and soap that you want for your own use.

Has⁴ for provision⁵ our situation is so that we can't spare any at present, we have had the misfortune that the wolf ate a feast of our fish at Lac Cassetite which has been cause [sic] by Boissette in detaining our man at Sandy Lake⁶ while he had no wright [sic] to do it. Those men had been ordered by Barbeau⁷ to come back immediately, now Boissette is the cause that we have no wood here, and not only that, if Boissette had sent that man back with the others, we should be able to let you have the provision you want, and we should not be in a state of starvation ourselves, now there is the Wisconsin People that are out of provision to [sic]. They haven't had your advantage now we'll be oblige [sic] to let them too pass the spring below have a little provision, if Boissette had made use of a little more Economy with the \$30 that were sent to your place you would have had provision Enough to last till spring, it is not with Pork and flour and Butter that he ought to spend his money if he had Bought corn & Greens it would last him longer,

I am told by your man that you intend to go below if we don't send you provisions, I would advise you not to, till you here [sic] news from Mr. Warren⁸, has I shall go to the Lake about the 20th of this Month & hope to be

Back

¹ Lac Flambeau post was originally under control of Dr. Charles W. Borup. Borup had later established a headquarters on Yellow Lake, thus turning the management of Lac Flambeau over to Dube. One account says this was done in 1834.

² 1808-1866. Married Charlotte Cadotte at Chippewa, MI in 1829. James was a prominent fur trader with the American Fur Trading Co. He traded and died at Jim Falls, WI.

³ Abbreviation for instant or instance. Means either an urgent entreaty or of the present month. (OED)

⁴ Obsolete version of "as". (OED)

⁵ Probably referring to food, since all other items appear to be attainable. February of 1834 was extremely cold with temperatures reaching as low as 30 below zero.

⁶ Located near what is now St. Paul, MN.

⁷ Peter P. Barbeau. (6-29-1800 to 10-17-1882) A prominent merchant and community leader in Sault Ste. Marie. Operated trading posts for the American Fur Trading Co. at Grand Marais and LaPointe on Lake Superior.

⁸ Lyman M. Warren (1794-1847). Ran American Fur Trading Co. in LaPointe, WI. Later moved to a post above Chippewa Falls where he built a sawmill with Jean Brunet.

back about 15th March, if you should be in want of something for your trade such has Goods ammunition Tobacco every thing except provision, You can then send a man if you can spare without injuring your trade, start him about the tenth of March if you want anything.

I feel sorry that you were oblige [sic] to give furs for Provision below and that you haven't done much, you ought to have send [sic] us a list of your furs that you have made below and what Boissette made at Sandy Lake so I could make my report to Mr. Warren, has for Dufort I can't spare him I don't see how you should want him at your Place being out of Provision and no work to do, You say that you was oblige [sic] to let fur go on account of your order to not sell less than three skin I think I told you before you went away last fall that you could sell for two skins that is to say 2 Otter, 6 Martins⁹, or 2 Bears therefore I shall give you further news when I'll be back from the Lake on that subject, and I advise you to sell at this Point Present has you have opposition from all quarter

Therefore I will start Beaulieu¹⁰ tomorrow with the articles that I have mention [sic] before, also 1 Large axe

I shall close this in telling you to try and make up this spring what you have lost last fall

My Respect to all your people and I remain

Yours (illegible)

J. Bte. Dube¹¹

P.S. I will once more urge you to send a man about the 10th of March so to be here the 15th, I may by that time be able to let you have provision, it depends entirely whether Mr. Warren made use of the corn that I left LaPointe¹² last fall, if he did not I may be able to give you a little, and we shall have further news by that time about the spring business, so don't fail to send if you want anything, for it is impossible for us to send

J. Bte. Dube

⁹ A martin (or marten) is a slender, chiefly arboreal carnivorous species that lived in northern forests. They have a glossy coat and bushy tails. Their fur is generally a dark brown and they look similar to a mink.

¹⁰ Bazil Beaulieu. Previously a trader at Lac du Flambeau in 1818, but later moved to La Pointe.

¹¹ Jean Baptiste Dube (pronounced DuBay). 1810-1887. Worked for the American Fur Trading Co. Had posts in Saginaw and Sault Ste. Marie, MI and Lac du Flambeau, WI. Set up a fur trading post in Central Wisconsin around 1830. Lake Dubay is named after him.

¹² A prominent trading post located on a small peninsula in Lake Superior. Often called the "Old Fort."

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