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THE BRIGHTON AREA AND THE SESQUICENTENTIAL OF MICHIGAN

Altho' Brighton Area History begins generally around 1830 and Michigan became a state in 1837, the actual history of the white man's appearance in the area began over 200 years earlier. By 1608 the general area we know as Canada was occupied and governed by the French. The Governor, Samuel de Champlain, sent Etienne Brule' and a companion Grenoble, west with instructions to find a water route to the Pacific. Paddling their canoes it is believed they reached Lake Superior about 1622. Jean Nicolet, also sent by Governor Champlain, traversed the Straits and explored into Lake Michigan within the next several years.

These venturesome explorers, treated and supported as guests by the Indians, were soon followed by trappers and traders who brought rich cargoes of furs to Quebec, the center of French rule in North America. Missionaries accompanied the early trading expeditions which resulted in Jesuit Father Jacques Marquette establishing, at Sault Ste. Marie, the first mission in 1668. (Which means the 'Soo' has a history of over 300 years.) Just three years later, St. Ignace became the site of his second mission.

These two northern missions became the major sites at which the Indian and the white man, the French, had contact. Michigan history was shaped and bound to the French for almost a century and the life of the Indian was never the same again.

The British, traditional enemies of France in Europe, claimed all the land along the Atlantic from Maine to the Carolinas. Always vying for more lands and influence these two enemies tried to extend their territories in the New World. The French by being generous with gifts to the Indians were able to count on them as allies and therefore were able to keep English influence and control out of this vast inland empire until the mid 18th century.

The reliance of the Indians' way of life on the French technology forced them to depend on the missions, trapped furs for the French, became enslaved to alcohol, and fought successfully with the French in the battles against the British. In June, 1671, the French king claimed the Great Lakes and all lands "bounded on the one side by the Northern and Western seas and on the other side by the South Sea including all its length and breadth." Within the next 11 years, French explorers had descended by the Mississippi all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

To demonstrate more than a ceremonial possession of the land, forts were established at the southern ends of Lakes Michigan and Huron during the 1680s and 1690s. These military outposts were abandoned in 1698 because the French king feared a failing fur market and the Jesuit missionaries successfully argued against the alcohol to which the Indians had access. (to be continued. Condensed and edited from: "A Scrapbook of Michigan Memorabilia" by Wm. Pless; "A Short History of Michigan" by John Kern and "War 1812" by George S. May.)

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