

## **Paper and the Land of the Menominee (06 09 06) John Phillips**

The U. S. A. is the world's largest per capita consumer of paper. It devours one third of global paper products and devotes 7% of its manufacturing capacity to the papermaking industry. Wisconsin is America's number one paper producing state. Its paper mills employ over 50,000 people to generate 700 miles of paper per hour, which amounts to 6.4 million tons of paper per year. These are workaday fibres; toilet paper, note and office paper, coated sheets for celebrity magazines etc. At the heart of this multi-billion dollar industry, with the highest concentration of paper mills in the world, is the valley of Fox River, the ancestral home of the Menominee.

In the summer of 1634 Jean Nicollet crossed the North American Great Lakes in search of a route to Asia. He travelled by canoe, up the St Lawrence River, across lake Huron and lake Michigan. He journeyed west along the Fox River to lake Winnebago, and possibly reached the Mississippi. When he landed in Green Bay, on the northern shore of Lake Superior *'He wore a grand robe of China damask, all strewn with wild flowers and birds of many colours'*, and was the first ambassador from the world of paper to reach the Menominee Nation. Nicollet was born in Cherbourg northern France in 1598. In the summer of 1634 he was far from home and lost. But in public memory, and in the words of Franklin D Roosevelt, he was the first of those *'men and women who established civilisation in Wisconsin and in the Northwest'* of America <sup>ii</sup>.

The Menominee, a nation of approximately 4,000 people, had lived in Green Bay for 10,000 years or more <sup>iii</sup>. Their oral history contains no tale of migration. Their origin story begins at the mouth of the Menominee River. They called themselves "Kiash Matchitwuk" the ancient ones, or the "Mamaceqtan" the people who live with the seasons. To their neighbours they were the "Menominee", the wild oat people, whose staple diet was wild rice, (*Zizania aquatica*). They ate lake sturgeon, which spawned in abundance in the local rivers. They hunted white-tailed deer and the occasional bison, and lived alongside timber wolves, beavers and black bears, otters, elks, muskrats, minks, and martens. The Menominee attributed great power and importance to visions and dreams, which were interpreted by those with special powers, the *Wábano*, the men of the dawn. The earth, the deciduous forests, the wetlands, the tall-grass prairies and oak savannahs were central to their life. But this was no Eden-idyll. Where winter temperatures can fall to minus 48° centigrade <sup>iv</sup>, living with the seasons meant living with adversity.

No Europeans returned to Green Bay for over thirty years. But their presence on the American continent had begun to affect the Menominee long before Nicollet's dramatic arrival, in Chinese gown and indigenous canoe. In 1608 the French settled in Quebec, and in 1613 the Dutch established a trading post on Manhattan. In 1616 a smallpox epidemic decimated the indigenous population, which had no immunity to this imported plague. Trade with the Europeans transformed local economies, and guns disrupted the fragile balances of power. Thousands of refugees fled westward, seeking to avoid the devastation wrought by the alien civilisation that had landed on their shores. Thousands more entered the Great Lake region seeking to profit from

the European fur trade. The Algonkin, who were allied to the French, fought the Iroquois who were allied to the Dutch, and Colonial conflict by proxy reeked havoc throughout the region. When the first group of French troops and traders arrived in Green Bay in 1667 they estimated the Menominee to number around 400 individuals. Approximately 90% of the population had perished in the three decades since Nicollet's visit. The Menominee became beaver hunters for the French, and Nicollet's expeditionary route, from the St Lawrence Seaway to Lake Winnebago, turned into a major artery for the trade. Commercial hunting transformed indigenous social structures. Villages fragmented into hunting bands. European goods replaced traditional artefacts, reliance on trade narrowed the basis of subsistence, commercial acumen displaced more ancient ways, and missionaries created schisms in beliefs.

In 1664 English colonists displaced their Dutch counterparts from New Amsterdam, and renamed it New York. They then encroach on French colonial territories. In 1761 the English reached Green Bay, and the Menominee switched trading partners. The Crown Authorities issued paper permits to regulate exploitation of their new resource. In the winter of 1765 Alexander Henry became the first British adventurer to be granted exclusive trading rights to Lake superior,.

*'The fur trade, he informs us, 'was subject to a variety of regulations, established and enforced by Royal Authority, ... No person could go into the countries lying north-west of Détroit, unless furnished with a licence: and the exclusive trade of particular districts was capable of being enjoyed, in virtue of grants from military commanders'.<sup>v</sup>*

Beaver hide was the local currency, *'other furs and skins'*, he explained, *'are accepted in payments, being first reduced to their value in beaver. Beaver was at this time two shillings and six pence per pound'<sup>vi</sup>*. The provisions for Henry's first trip filled four canoes and were purchased on twelve-month credit for *'ten thousand pounds weight of good merchantable beaver'<sup>vii</sup>*. This amounted to the not insubstantial sum of £1,250, or 4.46 tons of beaver fur. A meal at the local 'cantine' could be purchased for *'a marten's skin*, which was the equivalent to two thirds of a beaver. A white blanket cost eight beavers; a pound of gunpowder, or an axe, two beavers; a knife, one beaver, and a gun, twenty beavers, On 26 July, accompanied by twelve men working for the fee of *'one hundred pounds weight of beaver'<sup>viii</sup>* each, Henry set out for his winter camp at Chagouemig. On arrival he engaged a hunting-team of one hundred families for the communal price of three thousand beaver skins. Having constructed a shelter Henry settled in for the winter, and awaited his hunters' return. This began on the 15th of May the following year when *'fifty canoes, almost every one of which had a cargo of furs'<sup>ix</sup>* returned. In total Henry received 15,000 pounds weight of beaver plus 25 packs of otter and marten skins. His hunting team retained for themselves a further 10,000 pounds weight of beaver. <sup>x</sup> This single winter haul amounted to a little over eleven tons of beaver fur. But Alexander Henry was not alone. Scores of licensed, and unlicensed traders operated throughout the northern region. But where did these tons of beaver go?

Fur had long been a prestigious accessory in European fashion and courtly display. In Jan van Eyck's double portrait, (1434), the Italian merchant Giovanni Arnolfini sports a luxurious fur gown. Holbein's *Ambassadors*<sup>xi</sup> (1533), stand resplendent in exotic animal-skin coats. Rembrandt's self-portrait, (1658)<sup>xii</sup>, depicts the artist regally bedecked with golden robe and luxurious fleece. But the mass-consumption of fur, which first propelled the European invasion of North America, is less evident in seventeenth century paintings, because it is neither fluffy nor fawn. It is black felt. Rembrandt's *Sampling Officials of the Drapers Guild*<sup>xiii</sup> (1662) are the embodiment of sobriety. Dressed in darkened suits, and white starched collars, they sit before their ledger. On their heads are wide-brimmed hats made from beaver fur. Beaver felt is supple and tough. It holds its shape in the rain. By the early seventeenth century the European beaver had been hunted almost to extinction. So the American northeast, with its dense beaver population, was exploited for the hatter's trade. Floppy-brimmed cavaliers, military bicorns and tricorns, puritan sugar loaf's and bourgeois top hats were all made from beaver felt. The production of which held its perils. The pelts were treated with mercury, which roughened the hair and strengthened the fibrous bond. But continual exposure to this metal's fumes causes brain damage and the hatters all went mad. Viewing the landscape of the Great Lakes region today you might rationally conclude that their customers went equally insane, but their madness was induced by paper.

One of the great divides, which separated the American colonialists and the indigenous population of North America, and rendered both communities incapable of comprehending the other, was their divergent approach to memory. The Americans wrote things down on paper, and forgot. The indigenous people remembered. For the settlers America was an uncivilised wilderness, inhabited by savages. For the "Kiash Matchitwuk" the ancient ones, there was but one world, and they were the bearers of its memory, and protectors of its spirit.

In the nineteenth century the American States pressurised, cajoled, threatened and fought the indigenous peoples, and drafted papers to claim the world in which they lived. Across the continent tribal elders scoffed contemptuously at the whitemans' ludicrous ideas. How, they wondered, could you buy and sell the land, or allocate its possession to a single man. Like air, water and other forms of life, the earth belonged to everyone and no one. First Nations acknowledged traditional territories, but boundaries were flexible and blurred, reciprocal land-use was negotiated, and mutual support was recognised. Hunters moved from place to place. They exploited game when it was abundant, and left it to replenish in their wake. Agriculturists nurtured changes in the life of plants, and encouraged abundance in vegetables and fruits. Groups marked sacred sites, and symbolically inscribed stories onto stones. Some peoples shaped the ground to create spiritual monuments of gargantuan proportions; serpents, otters, elk and deer, mingled with mythic men and birds, whose wings spanned more than six-hundred feet. The first settlers in Wisconsin observed thousands of these mounds, whose earth shadows can still be seen despite one and a half centuries of attempted erasure by the homesteads' ploughs.

By 1820 there were sixty settlers in Wisconsin. Within forty years their numbers had risen to over one million. The Menominee signed their first treaty with the United States in 1817. During the next four decades, they signed several more, and were compelled to cede approximately 17,500 square miles of their ancestral lands to the New Nation, at an average price of 13.5 cents an acre<sup>xiv</sup>. The Menominee were confined to a reservation comprising 235,000 acres of forestland, which the whites deemed too poor for cultivation. This Reservation is approximately 2% of Menominee traditional territory. In the early 1850's the Wisconsin State surveyed the Menominee lands, and sold them for around \$1.50 an acre, or 1000% more than the price awarded, although not necessarily paid, to the Indians. Farmsteads, that cleared the forests, would see the value of 'their' land increase to \$10 or \$20 an acre. In other words, to the world of paper, the destruction of the forest amounted to an immediate minimum return of 10,000% profit. To the Menominee Nation it was the devastation of the world, and the erasure of memories reaching back 10,000 years, or more.

When land is abstracted to paper, nature's interconnecting links are broken. Rigid grids divide complex interlaced environments, and reduce intricate natural forms to homogenous units. Federal surveyors employed this method, called the *Township and Range System*, to divide the indigenous territories, and parcel them up for sale. They employed instruments, with names evocative of slavery: rods, chains, links and transit to fragment the world into squares, and capture it on paper. The basic unit of this system measures one mile north-south by one mile east-west, and is called a Section. A larger six-mile square, comprised of thirty six Sections, is called a Township. Sections are divisible into six hundred and thirty two separate acres. These grids are evident on roadmaps today. They are the basis of American town planning, and the foundation of the Blocks from which its cities are built. They can be seen from space, where satellite photographs reveal the grided pattern of land ownership through the varied distribution of crops. The units are named in respect of their location relative to a Principle Meridian and a Baseline. T2NR2W, for example, is an abbreviation of the location: Township Two, North of the baseline, Range Two West, relative to the Principle Meridian. Thus the surveyor's papered world erased local habitations and names, obliterated the poetry of place, and the intertwining of landscape and memory. It replaced them with a logical sequence of letters and numbers, but unable, or unwilling, to live in this logical space the settlers once more inscribed a system of names. They frequently called these places after the tribes and people whose world they had forcibly obtained: Milwaukee, Winnebago, Detroit, Oneida, Oshkosh, Menominee, and so on.

Lake Winnebago has a surface area of a little over 200 square miles. The Fox River enters the lake on its eastern shore, and flows out from the north. The Fox then falls rapidly over the course of 39 miles to spill through the largest fresh water estuary in the world, Green Bay<sup>xv</sup>, and on into Lake Michigan. During the nineteenth century this vast drainage system powered the saw-mills that transformed the forest into the settlers' timbered homes. During the 1880's 3.4 billion board feet of timber was extracted annually from Wisconsin,

and sawdust slicks many miles long could be seen floating across Green Bay. Over-fishing, combined with this pollution, severely depleted fish populations. Then, in the 1900's when paper, manufactured from wood-pulp, became the dominant industry, large quantities of sulphate residues spilled into the river, causing further environmental damage. But the most severe pollution occurred in the late twentieth century. It was caused by carbonless copy paper. Surface-coated inks applied to this product contain highly toxic chemicals known as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's).

PCB's are potent carcinogens. They cause skin, brain, breast and lung cancer. They affect foetal growth, precipitate miscarriages, and premature births. PCB's alter the development of reproductive organs, weaken the immune system, lower intelligence, initiate mood disorders and damage liver and heart tissue. When combined with high levels of Mercury, a cocktail that occurs in the Fox River system, health problems raise exponentially. PCB's accumulate along the food chain. Their low concentration in water becomes high concentration in flesh. They pass through cell membranes and are absorbed into tissues. Fish, ducks and other wildlife are their natural vacuum cleaners, but PCB's also rise from the water and are carried by air. They are absorbed through skin and lung. Locally farmed pork and poultry are affected, and the animals at the top of the food chain, including human beings, inevitably receive the highest dosage. But not everyone is equally affected. People who can't afford water filters, or imported supermarket food; people who rely on local home-grown products and catch fish, or hunt for subsistence and the maintenance of traditional ways, are far more open to exposure. This includes indigenous peoples, 70 to 80% of whom regularly consume contaminated wildlife and fish. Today thousands of people living around Green Bay are exposed to extremely unsafe levels of toxic chemicals. US EPA estimates that Great Lakes fish consumption alone will result in an additional 38,255 cancers over next 70 years.<sup>xvi</sup>

There are an estimated 67,000 pounds of PCB's in the Fox River's sediment muds, and a further 69,000 pounds distributed along the southern part of estuary. The paper industry has transformed the Fox River and Green Bay into a liquid dump of hazardous waste, which could take up to 100 years to disperse. For the past twenty years environmental groups have been campaigning for a clean up programme, which if implemented today would take another ten years to complete. They are demanding that the paper industry pays up to \$1.4 billion to cover this cost.

But PCB's are only a part of the paper blight. Millions of pounds of other toxic wastes are released each year into the environment. These include; chlorine compounds, used to bleach and delignify pulp, and biocides, which in the past included mercury, employed to inhibit bacterial growth in pulp and finished products. Carbon dioxide, nitrous oxides and carbon monoxides are released into the air, contributing to acid rain, global warming and respiratory disorders. Recycled paper causes problems too. The fibres become weak if frequently reused, and are therefore mixed with inks, coatings and plastic films to form paper sludge, which is dumped in landfills and spread on cropland, raising additional concerns about the accumulation of trace elements in soils, and

run-offs into rivers, streams and lakes. Then there are the odours, like rotten eggs or cabbage, from sulphides and ammonias. These cause headaches, nausea, and an irritation to the eyes that makes you weep.

From the small town of Green Bay paper's poisons flood into the estuary, and beyond to Lake Michigan and the Great Lakes waterways. But a few miles to the north-west the landscape suddenly changes and time appears to turn back to where yellow birch, aspen, cedar, maple, hickory, ash, and oak shelter wild turkeys, bobcats, wolves, bears and deer. Tall 200 year-old trees stand alongside saplings, as if no human hand has gridded and ordered the forest growth, and above the forest canopy ospreys, red shouldered hawks, and eagles fly once more. Within this small enclave there are a dozen discrete habitats, with distinct combinations of trees and flora, and hundreds of miles of lakes and flowing waters. Yet this ancient forest is also home to around four thousand people. It is the Land of the Menominee.

In November 1852 the scattered bands began to settle in the Reservation. The families travelled in birch-bark canoes across rivers and lakes that had already begun to seal-over with ice. By 1854 they numbered a little under 2,000. The beaver population was virtually extinct. The territory of ten townships was insufficient to support a nomadic culture that was accustomed to ranging across 17,500 square miles in the search for food. The land did not support crops. Early farming experiments failed. Much of the payment for territories ceded to the government never arrived. Indian agents cheated on the Federal rations. The food that did arrive was deplorably low-quality. Many people died of malnutrition.

A diplomatic schizophrenia lies at the heart of the paper agreements between America and the northern continent's First Nations. For the Government treaties were a temporary administrative ploy, pending assimilation. For the Indians treaties offered a final and permanent recognition of their independent status, which would permit self-determination and assure bi-lateral co-existence for two distinct societies. But the terms of these treaties, which were always drafted in the European tongue, included mechanisms to erode indigenous values and supplant them with America's view of progress. The Menominee treaties were no exception.

The Treaty with the Menominee, Feb 8 1831, for example, makes the following provisions:

*'The above reservation being made to the Menomonee Indians for the purpose of weaning them from their wandering habits, by attaching them to comfortable homes, the President of the United States, as a mark of affection for his children of the Menomonee tribe, will cause to be employed five farmers of established character for capacity, industry, and moral habits, for ten successive years, whose duty it shall be to assist the Menomonee Indians in the cultivation of their farms, and to instruct their children in the business and occupation of farming. Also, five females shall be employed, of like good character, for the purpose of teaching young*

*Menomonee women, in the business of useful housewifery, during a period of ten years... under the direction of the Secretary of War'*

Children were removed from families and educated in boarding schools, where English and Christianity were enshrined in the curriculum. The 1854 treaty, which established the present Reservation, did not grant the Menominee full-rights to manage their lands. They were permitted only to harvest dead and fallen trees for their own use. Throughout the second-half of the nineteenth and whole of the twentieth centuries the United States Government pursued policies to destabilise the community, rescind agreements, avoid commitments and erase Menominee culture. The Menominee adapted and changed in the process. Yet the "Kiash Matchitiwuk" the ancient ones, and the protectors of the forest, have remained. Today they employ data-bases linked to geographic information systems' software, to monitor habitats and write business plans for logging management. They run colleges and schools, community centres and a Las Vegas style casino. But the ethics and spiritual values, which bind their society to the land have not changed. When the tribe first arrived on the Reservation their chiefs offered the following advice.

*'Start with the rising sun, and work toward the setting sun, but take only the mature trees, the sick trees, and trees that have fallen. When you reach the end of the Reservation, turn and cut from the rising sun and the trees will last forever.'*

For the past one-hundred and fifty years they have followed this wisdom. Over two billion board feet of timber has been harvested from their forest during this time. Yet it contains a greater volume of timber today than was growing in 1854. The Menominee have developed a communitarian forest industry, which is ecologically and socially sustainable, and economically feasible. It is based on the following principles:

- 1) *the forest must be sustainable for future generations*
- 2) *the forest must be cared for to provide for the needs of the people*
- 3) *we must keep all the elements of the forest to maintain diversity*

The management plan of the community owned Menominee Tribal Enterprises elaborates these principles.

*'The Menominee have long recognised the need for balance between the environment, community and economy, both in short term and for future generations. Menominee culture and traditions teaches us never to take more resources than are produced within natural cycles so that all life can be sustained...*

*These traditional beliefs are the foundation of the management practices and principles of today's Menominee Tribal Enterprises (MTE) operations...*

*sustainability means thinking in terms of whole systems, with all their interconnections, consequences, and feedback loops. This way of thinking avoids artificial and often misleading categorisations such as humanity versus nature or jobs versus environment'*

Today the Menominee are an independent Nation. Their Reservation, which is visible from hundreds of miles above the earth, is a state within a state. On satellite photographs it stands-out like an emerald isle, surrounded by a sea of rectangular papered plots.

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<sup>i</sup> Vimot, Father Barthelemy, 'Jesuit Relation of 1642', Reuben Gold Thwaites Trans. Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, 1896-1901, vol. XXIII, p279.

<sup>ii</sup> Franklin D Roosevelt, speech at Green Bay 9 August 1934.

<sup>iii</sup> Beck, D. 2002, cites evidence indicating the Menominee entered the region following the end of the glacial period, p2

<sup>iv</sup> Couderay, Wisconsin 1996

<sup>v</sup>Alexandra Henry. *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories, Between the Years 1760 and 1776*, Pub. I Riley, New York, 1809, p 191-192

<sup>vi</sup> Alexandra Henry, 1809, p 192

<sup>vii</sup> Alexandra Henry, 1809, p 192

<sup>viii</sup> Alexandra Henry, 1809, p 192

<sup>ix</sup> Alexandra Henry, 1809,, p 203

<sup>x</sup> Alexandra Henry, 1809,, p 204

<sup>xi</sup> National Gallery, London

<sup>xii</sup> . Frick Museum, New York

<sup>xiii</sup> Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

<sup>xiv</sup> Encyclopaedia of North American Indians: Menominee

<sup>xv</sup> 120 miles long, average 23 miles wide

<sup>xvi</sup> Ref A Risk Analysis of Twenty Six Environmental Problems U.S. EPA, Region V, Dec 1991