

**ANTOINE OUILMETTE, A RESIDENT OF
CHICAGO A. D. 1790-1826. THE FIRST
SETTLER OF EVANSTON
AND WILMETTE (1826-1838) WITH A
BRIEF HISTORY OF HIS FAMILY AND THE
OUILMETTE RESERVATION**

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Antoine Ouilmette, a resident of Chicago A. D. 1790-1826. The first settler of Evanston and Wilmette (1826-1838) with a brief history of his family and the Ouilmette reservation by Frank R. Grover

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FRANK R. GROVER

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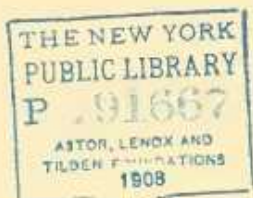
By FRANK R. GROVER

MEMOR

EVANSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1908

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SEVEN years ago (1901), in a paper read before this society entitled: "Our Indian Predecessors—the First Evanstonians," much of the information here given respecting the Ouilmette family and Reservation was presented for the first time from original sources and research. Since then further information has come to my hands from time to time, and the purpose of this pamphlet is to preserve for this society in concise form what has been thus acquired.

While at the present time few residents of this vicinity or of the North Shore are uninformed, at least to some extent, regarding Antoine Ouilmette and his family, still, for the convenience of the future student of local history, this monograph may be found an improvement on tradition embellished and handed down by the ever present "Old Settler."

F. R. G.

Evanston, Ill., May 1st, 1908.



North Shore Residence of Antoine Oullmette and Family (1828-1844). See page 19

*From water color drawing
by Mr. Charles P. Westcfield*

ANTOINE OUILMETTE.

The primeval beauty of that ancient forest that stood on the western shore of Lake Michigan immediately north of Chicago, and covering the ground that now constitutes the northern portion of the City of Evanston and the Village of Wilmette, has passed away. Many of its towering elms and great oaks that have stood for centuries of time remain to indicate in some measure what was the real beauty of that forest in the days when this Illinois country was unknown to white men.

In the place of much of that forest stand costly dwellings; public buildings; paved streets and all the evidences of individual and public effort that illustrate so graphically the advance of our western civilization, and especially the rapidity of growth and enterprise of Chicago and its suburbs. There is probably no spot in America where such rapid and marked change has taken place, for there are many young residents of that part of Illinois known in these later days as the "North Shore" who have observed step by step these changes that have transformed this wild woodland into the suburban home of thousands of Chicago's citizens.

In the midst of this former forest was the "Ouilmette Reservation." Those two quoted words have a peculiar significance to the few old settlers yet living who knew Antoine Ouilmette and his Pottawatomie squaw Archange. To the few lawyers and others who have to do with land titles and county records they indicate only the legal description of a tract of land. It is my purpose to relate as briefly as possible what I have been able to learn of its first proprietors:

The Ouilmette Reservation and its former occupants and owners have been the subject of much solicitude and investigation, not entirely for historical purposes, but more especially that the white man might know that he had a

good white man's title to the Indian's land. Its southern boundary was Central Street, or a line due west from the Evanston light-house; the eastern boundary, Lake Michigan; the northern boundary a little south of Kenilworth (Elmwood Avenue, formerly North Avenue, Wilmette), and the western boundary at the western terminus of the present street-car line on Central Street in Evanston and Fifteenth Street in Wilmette, from which boundaries it will be seen that some 300 acres of the Reservation falls within the city limits of Evanston, while the remainder includes the greater portion of the Village of Wilmette.

The Reservation takes its name from its original owner, Archange Ouilmette, wife of Antoine Ouilmette, described in the original Treaty and Patent from the United States as a Pottawatomie woman. The name given the village—Wilmette—originates from Antoine himself and from the phonetic spelling of the French name "O-u-i-l-m-e-t-t-e," and is said upon good authority to have been first suggested as the name of the village by Judge Henry W. Blodgett, late of Waukegan, who was interested in the very early real estate transactions of the village.

There are many interesting facts regarding Ouilmette and his family. Antoine, the husband, was a Frenchman, who, like many of his countrymen, came to the West in early days and married an Indian wife. He was one of the first white residents of Chicago; some of the authorities say that, with the exception of Marquette, he was the very first. He was born at a place called Lahndrayh, near Montreal, Canada, in the year 1760. His first employment was with the American Fur Company, in Canada, and he came to Chicago in the employ of that company in the year 1790.

This striking figure in our local history, and in the very early history of Chicago, is sadly neglected in most, if not all, the historical writings. Almost every one in this locality knows that the Village of Wilmette was named after him; many misinformed people speak of Ouilmette as an Indian chief; a few of the writers merely mention his name as one of the early settlers of Chicago. And that has been the beginning and end of his written history.

Ouilmette's occupation cannot be more definitely stated

than to say that, after his employment by the American Fur Company, he was an employe of John Kinzie at Chicago, and thereafter in turn Indian trader, hunter and farmer. He was a type of the early French voyageurs, who lived and died among their Indian friends, loving more the hardships and excitement of the Western frontier than the easier life of Eastern civilization.

Archange Ouilmette, wife of Antoine, was a squaw of the Pottawatomie tribe, belonging to a band of that tribe located at the time she was married at "Gross Point," or what is now Evanston and Wilmette, although the band were constant rovers over the territory which became later the states of Illinois, Michigan, Indiana and Wisconsin. While Archange was of the Pottawatomie tribe, her father, it is said by one authority, was a white man, a trader in the employ of the American Fur Company, and a Frenchman, bearing the rather striking name of Francois Chevallier. Archange was born at Sugar Creek, Michigan, about 1764, and died at Council Bluffs, Iowa, in 1840. (Authority, Sophia Martell, daughter, and Israel Martell, grandson.)

Ouilmette had eight children, four sons and four daughters, viz.: Joseph, Louis, Francis, Mitchell, Elizabeth, Archange, Josette and Sophia; also an adopted daughter, Archange Trombla, who, on August 3, 1830, married John Mann, who in early times ran a ferry at Calumet. (Authority John Wentworth and Sophia Martell, the only surviving daughter of Antoine Ouilmette. She was still living in 1905 on the Pottawatomie Indian Reservation at St. Mary's, Kansas.)

If a detailed account of all Ouilmette saw and did could be written we would have a complete history of Chicago, Evanston and all the North Shore, during the eventful fifty years intervening between 1790 and 1840, and it is certain that he and his family bore no unimportant part in the history of Illinois during that half century of time.

OUILMETTE AT CHICAGO—THE FORT DEARBORN MASSACRE.

It appears from a letter signed with "his mark," written and witnessed by one James Moore, dated at Racine, June

1, 1839 (corroborated also by his family), that Ouilmette came to Chicago in 1790. A fac-simile of this letter, which is addressed to Mr. John H. Kinzie, appears in Blanchard's History of Chicago (p. 574), and contains some interesting facts, both historical and personal. He says:

"My home affairs are such that I cannot leave to see you at present.

"I came into Chicago in the year 1790 in July witness old Mr. Veaux . . . and Mr. Griano . . . These men were living in the country Before the war with the Winnebagoes. Trading with them I saw the Indians Brake open the Door of my house and also the Door of Mr. Kinzie's House. At first there was only three Indians come. They told me there was Forty more coming and they told me to run. I Did So. in nine days all I found left of my things was the feathers of my beds scattered about The floor, the amount Destroyed By them at that time was about Eight hundred Dollars. Besides your father and me Had about four hundred hogs Destroyed by the Saim Indians and nearly at the Saim time. Further particulars when I See you. I wish you to write me whether it is best for me come there or for you to come hear and how son it must be Done"

"Yours with Respect"

his
Antoine X Ouilmette"
mark

"Jas. Moore"

The original letter was furnished to Mr. Blanchard by Mrs. Eleanor Kinzie Gordon of Savannah, Georgia, a daughter of John H. Kinzie.

Ouilmette owned and occupied one of the four cabins that constituted the settlement of Chicago in 1803. The other residents were Kinzie, Burns and Lee (Kirkland's Story of Chicago, Andrea's History of Chicago, Mrs. William Whistler's letter, written in 1875).

Ouilmette was in Chicago at the time of the massacre of the garrison of old Fort Dearborn in 1812 by the Pottawatomies, and his family was instrumental, at that time, in saving the lives of at least two whites. Mrs. John H. Kinzie in her historic book, "Wau-bun" (The Early Day), describes the circumstances:

"The next day after Black Partridge, the Pottawatomie Chief, had saved the life of Mrs. Helm in the massacre on the lake shore [commemorated by the monument recently erected at the place], a band of the most hostile and implacable of all the tribes of the Pottawatomies arrived at Chicago and, disappointed at their failure to participate in the massacre and plunder, were ready to wreak vengeance on the survivors, including Mrs. Helm and other members of Mr. Kinzie's family. Mrs. Kinzie says (Wau-bun, pages 235, 240):