

HISTORICAL DETROIT.

HENRY A. FORD.

I.

An old town like Detroit seldom fails to present many historic sites and other points of special interest to the antiquary, or to any citizen or stranger of average intelligence. This city, from its age, its occupation by several nationalities at the different periods of its earlier history, and its character from the beginning as a military post, is peculiarly fortunate in the number and interest of its historical associations. The central lower part of the city, for several blocks along and near the river, is replete with them. The plan has been mooted of marking, by inscription on metal plates or otherwise, after the fashion of old European cities, the more interesting of these localities; and the praiseworthy suggestion will doubtless materialize soon or late in the hands of a society formed for the purpose, or by private beneficence. Meanwhile, in a brief series of papers devoted to our historic localities, we will do what we can to deepen the interest and heighten the pleasure of citizen or visitor, in his casual walks about the ancient burgh.

Let us take position at the postoffice, and proceed thence. The observer here, or at the intersection of Congress and Woodward, is apt to notice with some surprise a phenomenon not common in river towns—that he is at the bottom of a long and gentle slope from the northward, corresponding to a similar rise of ground between him and the river. Obviously, he is in the bed of an old-time stream—in this case the Savoyard river (more anciently the Rigolet des Hurons), named from a native of Savoy, who had a pottery upon its banks in the early days. This brook—for it should hardly be dignified as a river—took its rise several blocks east of Woodward avenue in a willow swamp on the Guoin farm, near the present meeting of Riopelle and East Congress streets. It flowed in an irregular course near the line of Fort atreet east, crossed Woodward avenue at Congress, where it was spanned by a rude wooden bridge, and thence ran in general parallelism to the Detroit, which it entered at about Fourth and Woodbridge, in a bay which then stretched

along the fronts of several of the old farms. It was bordered by rather narrow belts of low, marshy ground, upon one of which, the southern, the post-office now stands. Within a little distance to the west and south, on the higher bank back of the pickets of the old fort, stood a lofty oak whose hollow trunk held an image of the Virgin, and which was said to mark the spot where Father Constantin del Halle, founder of the church of Ste. Anne's, perished during an Indian attack in 1705. So the legend goes at least.

Setting our faces toward the river, and walking down to the corner of Griswold and Jefferson, we are directly upon the primitive French settlement about Fort Pontchartrain. In a little cove at the foot of Griswold, Cadillac landed with his queerly costumed band of soldiers and colonists, July 24, 1701. The hamlet he commenced was built upon the contracted plan of old world towns, so that within the 120 feet that measure the breadth of Jefferson avenue were comprised two French streets and the little blocks of dwellings between them. The fire of 1805 swept them all away, and the last of their immediate successors, the famous Campau house, disappeared a few years ago from the site, No. 140 Jefferson avenue, now occupied by the stately Palms building. Mr. Campau is said to have built upon or very near the ground occupied by Cadillac's headquarters. Between this and the southwest corner of Griswold, upon the north side of the old Ste. Anne's street, of 15 feet width, and within 20 feet of the present south line of Jefferson, stood the later Ste. Anne's church, built in 1723 of logs, with two modest spires and two bells. It followed its predecessors in a fiery ordeal; and its successor upon the same site, built in 1755, was burned in the fire of 1805, but men are still alive who can remember the ruins that long marked the spot. The first Catholic cemetery in Detroit adjoined the church directly in the modern avenue. All burials previous to 1723 were probably in the military cemetery, just back of the First National Bank.

Still standing upon Jefferson avenue and looking westward to the intersection of Second, one could formerly have seen the sparkling waters of the Detroit, as they here came up to the high bank that formed the front of the Cass farm. In those days the river margins of the Cass, Jones, Forsyth, Labrosse, Baker and Woodbridge farms abutted on a beautiful though not deep bay, long since destroyed by the filling and "made ground" which began with the improvement of the Cass farm for residence and business. The banks were high, with a good road near the brink, and furnished a favorite promenade and driveway to the Detroiters of bygone generations.

The solid little building used by the First National Bank has an interest of its own, having been erected in 1836, the "wildcat" days, for the bank of Michigan. It was bought by the United States in December, 1842, for

\$32,000, and long used for the postoffice and federal court house. It stands as is well known, upon the site of the east gate of the stockade about Fort Pontchartrain, which acquired special renown as the "Pontiac gate" after the failure of the treacherous Indian attempt in 1763. From this gateway, on the 31st of July in that year, marched the red coats under Capt. Dalzell to the massacre at Bloody Brook, and through it fled back the remnants of that ill starred band after their terrible repulse. The stockade of 1807, built by Gen. Hull, extended far beyond this, reaching from the Cass to the Brush farm near the Biddle house, and from the fort on the second terrace, whose site is now crossed by Fort street, to the river. It had gates and block houses on each side on the line of Jefferson avenue.

Walking down Griswold street from the bank corner, we have on our right the site of the "King's palace" and garden, names which mark the later English regime, when the palace or official residence was built for Gov. Hamilton, the "Hair-buyer General," as George Rogers Clarke designated him in the Vincennes campaign of 1778, from his offer of premiums for scalps of American patriots. The site is now partly covered by the fine buildings on the south side of Jefferson avenue.

Turning westward on Woodbridge, we are at once upon the historic ground where the beginnings of Detroit were made. Somewhere here, upon a site that can not now be precisely identified, was the first St. Anne's church, piously commenced only two days after the landing. Nor are the exact limits of Fort Pontchartrain probably now to be defined. Mr. Farmer, in his "History of Detroit," says that this first of the Detroit military works stood between Jefferson and Woodbridge, on the west half of the block between Griswold and Shelby, probably crossing Shelby and occupying a part of the ground now covered by the Michigan Exchange. In 1760-61 the tract contained within the stockade reached from the present line of Griswold to 50 feet west of Shelby, and from the alley between Larned and Jefferson to Woodbridge. Twenty eight years later, in Revolutionary times, when the citadel was at the corner of Jefferson and Wayne, and just before the Fort Lernoult (afterwards Shelby) was built, all the ground between Griswold and Cass, Larned and the river, was included. The original fort—a rude log affair, but strong enough for its purpose—was about 200 feet square. About 1858 the stumps of some of the cedar pickets enclosing it were found by workmen making excavations in the rear of the Michigan Exchange. The council house stood near the river, between Griswold and Shelby.

II.

The close of the first article of this series left our pedestrian upon the site

of old Fort Pontchartrain and the original French settlement, about the intersection of West Woodbridge and Shelby streets. Near this spot stood the first building occupied (1838) by a public free school in this city. It was a plain two story frame, 40 by 80 feet, not built for the purpose, and having a convenient grocery in the first story, with outside stairs leading to the school room in the second. The house was erected on piles, upon the primitive river bank, a site now just east of the old Board of Trade building, on Woodbridge street. Passing along that street to the corner of Wayne, we are upon ground where once were the waters spanned by the narrow plank road or causeway leading out to the first dock pushed from the adjacent shore into the Detroit—a small and very simple affair, on light piles, and composed of timber, logs, and loose stones. With the increase of commerce and the advent of steamers, new and more substantial wharves were constructed, and this was suffered to fall into decay. The space it occupied, and more in the vicinity, was transformed into "made ground" many years ago by the enormous filling of 25,000 cubic yards of earth.

In the new volume of Mr. Parkman, "Montcalm and Wolfe," an extract is made from the narrative of Father Bonnecamp, chaplain to the expedition of Celoron to the valley of the Ohio in 1751. He was here for a day, on his return from the expedition, and records that "the situation is charming. A fine river flows at the foot of the fortifications," which, as we have seen, extended but little below Woodbridge. From this point, or a few rods beyond, the river trenched rapidly upon the present shore, forming the beautiful bay mentioned in our first number, which was skirted by a high bank. At First and Second streets the waters encroached upon the line of Jefferson avenue; and north of it, in a superb site upon the bank, stood the old Cadillac or Cass house, destroyed in 1882, which had to be moved but a short distance to reach its final resting place on Larned street.

The name given to Jefferson avenue, like so many others—would there were more—in the city, is itself historic. It is one of five Presidential names given to our principal avenues by the governor and judges of Michigan territory, in their replatting of the town after the sweeping fire of 1805—Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Madison and Monroe. It begins with the entrance of Woodbridge at First street. Starting from the ancient shore of the Detroit at this point, and now facing eastward, we pass presently the location of the citadel or arsenal at the northwest corner of Jefferson and Wayne, connected with Fort Shelby by a covered way. The house of the military storekeeper, for a long time Capt. Perkins, was a small frame a little below, on the avenue, where Mrs. Perkins became as noted for the floral beauty of her front yard, as her husband for the neatness of his buildings

and grounds, with their piles of ordnance, shot, and shell. Between Wayne and Cass stood one of the old time block houses, on the line of the Hull stockade, the last one built; and, after the fire of 1805 this was used as the public jail. At the northwest corner of Jefferson and Cass stood the dwelling of Judge May, built of stone from the chimneys left by the fire. This succeeded the block house in use as a jail, but by 1815 it was abandoned for an old wooden building on the same side of the avenue a little beyond Shelby. The May residence was enlarged and became the excellent and widely reputed hostelry known for many years as the Mansion house. A small frame part of it, removed to another part of the city, was in existence only seven or eight years ago. On the opposite, the northwest corner, in the old Newberry building, afterwards the Garrison house, was the first telegraph office opened in the city, for the Speed line, some time in the 40's.

At Jefferson and Wayne the bluff bank was finely utilized by Lieutenant Anderson for the placing of his 24-pounders, August 16, 1812, to resist the advance of Brock's force from Springwells; but the cowardice of Hull prevented the effective resistance he had planned.

Passing now rapidly the former site of Ste. Anne's church in the avenue, between Shelby and Griswold; of the Campau house of 1805, at No. 140, with Cadillac's headquarter's site thereon not far away, and of the guard-house and east or "Pontiac" gate of the old fort, where the First National Bank now stands, we come in a block further to the crossing of Woodward avenue, just below which, in Woodward, long stood the primitive market-house of the city. One of the old Godfroy homesteads stood opposite to the eastward, on Woodward and Woodbridge. The police station on the latter street stands upon the exact site of the Godfroy barn.

At Jefferson and Randolph, where Fireman's hall now stands, was the government council house of the later dominations, opposite the notable two story brick residence—the only one in town when built—of Gov. Hull, on the Biddle house corner. Looking down to the northwest corner of Woodbridge and Randolph, we see another of the old time hotel sites, where Woodworth kept an inn as far back as 1812, and where his famous Steamboat hotel long flourished. At the foot of Randolph were the original city water works, on the Berthelet wharf, with the reservoir in rear of the Fireman's hall. The last relics of the latter water works, with the well remembered round tower, have but lately disappeared from the foot of Orleans.

At or near Brush street ran the east front of Hull's stockade, with a gate and block house here. The old church at the corner of Beaubien, occupied as a carriage factory and warehouse, was the First Congregational, built in 1845. Next beyond St. Antoine, on the south side, is a noticeable row of old

dwelling, dating back to the 30's and 40's. A number of venerable mansions remain on the avenue, though most of them are much changed by modern reconstructions. The oldest are probably the Trowbridge house, at No. 494, built about 1826, and the Brush homestead at 462, put up in '28, and reconstructed in '70. Part of the Van Dyke house, at No. 308, was built in 1836; and the Moran residence, 393, is also an old one. But would you see the older Moran home, the most venerable building in Michigan? Drop down from Jefferson on Hastings one short square, turn to the right a few steps, and there, at No. 182 and 184 Woodbridge east, half hidden behind a wilderness of weeds and with one or two of the ancient pear trees still towering above it, is the ruinous old building of 1734, wherein the late Judge Charles Moran was born.

Returning to Jefferson avenue, little of historic interest, save an old mansion here and there, presents itself until the Pontiac tree is reached, in the valley of Bloody brook, the last visible memorial of the Indian massacre here wreaked by the great Ottawa chief and his painted braves upon the English troops, July 31, 1763. Alas! that is no lodger a surviving memorial. Its partial decay was observed last year, and this spring it totally refused to put forth buds and leaves. Its wood is already beginning to be worked up into souvenirs. A few rods below, upon ground now deeply covered, stood one of the early mills, whose ruins, Judge Campbell says, could still be seen forty to fifty years ago.

In Mount Elliott cemetery, a little off the avenue, the grave of Major Hamtramck may be visited, and a mile or so beyond, near the river, at the southeast corner of the Wesson place, with a grand old elm still dominating it, may be seen the quaint little dwelling built for him by one of the Chapotons in 1802, and where "The Frog on Horseback," as Hamtramck was called from his small size and singular appearance when riding, died the next year.

Upon the site of the present water works until lately stood one of the last of the old French dwellings, known as the Van Avery or Chauvin house. It was built by Thomas Stewart and Jean Limare, in 1769, with a solidity and honesty that never failed to command the admiration of visitors. The great pear trees near it, planted in 1790, were known as the "Twelve Apostles."

The traveler thence to Grosse Pointe will pass the scene of the terrible battle in which an Indian tribe was almost annihilated in 1712, at Presque Isle, now Windmill Point, and will find some old habitations at Grosse Pointe and about L'Anse Creuse, the little bay beyond.

III.

The saunter along Jefferson avenue brought us to one or two points of antiquarian interest at the crossing of Woodward. Only a square below this, at the southwest corner of Woodbridge and Woodward, opposite the Mariner's church, is the first known site of the Detroit postoffice, where Judge Abbott, who held the postmastership from 1806 to 1831, dispensed for many years the hatfuls of letters and papers that made up the mail for the settlement. The office afterwards occupied the first floor of a building on the Mariner's church corner. A few rods below this and seventy seven feet above Atwater street, was the margin of the river in the days preceding the improvements along a few blocks of the city front.

Walk now two squares up Woodward, turn to the right on Larned one block, and view with reverent regard the oldest church building, by far, left standing in the city, and still occupied for religious purposes.* The present Ste. Anne's church, at least the fourth or fifth of the name in Detroit, is lineal descendant of the little log-and-bark building whose erection was begun by Cadillac's people within the stockade about Fort Pontchartrain the second day after landing. The venerable stone pile at Larned and Bates was commenced in 1817, but not finished till 1832, though occupied long before. The devoted Father Richard, whose statue appears on the east front of the city hall, contributed his entire pay as delegate in Congress towards its building. A Catholic cemetery of an acre's size was located here in 1797, and in it the remains of Colonel Hamtramck first reposed. Along here, between Bates and Randolph, Larned and Michigan Grand (now Cadillac Square), the ground was perhaps fifty feet above the general level, forming the original "Piety Hill," a name since appropriated for a locality far up town, near Cass park.

A little north of Ste. Anne's, on the west side of Bates, near Congress, was the first building, a very plain affair of twenty four by fifty feet, occupied by the University of Michigan in 1817, and for a few years thereafter. Passing on to the southwest corner of Randolph we are upon the site of the original Ste. Mary's hospital, opened by the Sisters of Charity, June 9, 1845, in a much older log cabin; and, looking down to the northwest corner of Jefferson and Randolph, we may see in our mind's eye the little one story brick building which held the Detroit bank as long ago as 1806.

Facing now westward on Larned, our pedestrian may go on to Wayne, where, at the northeast corner, flourished the Washington market from 1835 to 1852. At Nos. 164 and 166, between First and Second streets, stood, until August,

* Ste. Anne's was demolished in the early summer of 1886.

1882, the strongly built frame dwelling which tradition affirmed to have been erected on the banks of the Detroit, then but a little way to the southward, by Cadillac, for the chief of the Hurons, one hundred and seventy nine years before. The whole ancient part of it, with its massive oak and pine beams and sills, was in admirable condition when torn down to make way for the present brick buildings.

Returning to Woodward and pausing on the west side of the avenue, we face the first church row, and the only one ever erected in Detroit. On the northeast corner stood the original Presbyterian church edifice, a rather stately one for its time, as may be seen by the picture of its burning, now hanging on the east wall of the public library. Next and north of it was a little building of brick, occupied for a session room; beyond that the first St. Paul's Episcopal church; and finally, on the other side of Congress, the Methodist meeting-house of a generation ago. At an earlier day the Protestant cemetery of the petty hamlet here included a part of the avenue in this locality, between Larned and Congress. Above this, to the city limit, Woodward avenue presents little of historic interest. It is worthy of notice, however, how closely the First Methodist church has clung to this avenue. Its next building, torn down but a year or two since, stood on the southwest corner of State and Woodward, and the superb edifice now occupied is just beyond the Grand Circus at Woodward and Adams. The original building occupied by this society, but never dedicated, I believe, was put up in 1834, only two squares west of Woodward, and was abandoned because it was so far out "on the commons," and difficult to reach in bad weather. It is now occupied as a dwelling, at the southeast corner of Gratiot and Farrar. On the flat-iron lot close by, upon which is the public library, long stood the county jail, which was succeeded by the Clinton street prison. Opposite it, on the site of the First Presbyterian church, was erected the gallows for the execution of the Indian, Kishkawkon, who defeated its purpose by suicide in his cell. At Farmer and Gratiot stood the old Pontiac depot, removed in 1842 from the site of the first railway station in the city, at Dequindre and Jefferson, where it was established in 1838. About 1850 the cars coming down Gratiot avenue stopped upon the opera house site, on the Campus Martius, which was finally abandoned for the Brush street depot. The Central depot, for the ten years 1838-48, was on the site of the city hall, the trains moving in and out on Michigan avenue.

Fort street, historically, is one of the most interesting of Detroit thoroughfares, as its very name suggests. Near its western terminus, on the river bank, may be visited a well preserved, though small, enclosure or fortification of the mound-builders. Upon and near the ground now covered by Fort Wayne

were the copious natural fountains or springs that gave the name to Springwells; and, in the vicinity, several interesting burial mounds could be seen forty or fifty years ago. Hereabout were pitched the wigwams of the Pottawatomie village, whose site was granted by the tribe to Robert Navarre, "son of the scrivener," one of the most notable of the early French residents. The Huron village was on the Jones farm, now a long way within the city limits. Not far from Twenty fourth street ran Knagg's creek, at the mouth of which, on the Detroit, stood his old red windmill, erected in or before 1795, and remaining until this century was well advanced. The late Mrs. Hamlin made it the scene of one of her entertaining "Legends of Le Detroit." From this shore it is worth while to cast a glance across to the spire of the Sandwich church, marking the site of the Huron mission removed thither by Father Potier in 1747, upon the enforced abandonment of the mission on Bois Blanc island.

At Fort and Fourteenth streets, on the northwest corner, may be observed with some interest the venerable Piquette house, occupied in 1874 as the Little Sisters' Home for aged poor. Three squares beyond, at the railway crossings, some traces are left of the banks of Campau's Mill river, later Cabacier's and finally May's creek, which entered the Detroit not far from the Central depot. The mill—a *maulin banal*, or public mill, in the earliest times, for grinding grain—stood at this crossing. Precisely at Cass street we strike the west line of the military cantonment attached to Fort Shelby in 1815, and at Wayne the boundary of the fort itself. This was built in 1778 by the British troops under their commandant here from whom it was originally named Fort Lernoult, and extended from Wayne to a line about half way between Shelby and Griswold, and from Lafayette nearly to Congress street, the glacis running well down to the bank of the Savoyard river. During the war of 1812-15 its name was changed to Fort Shelby, in honor of the gallant governor of Kentucky, who personally led his troops at the battle of the Thames. Fort and Shelby streets, of course, derive their names from it. The stump of the flagstaff, a well kept fragment of Norway pine, now in the public library, was dug up a few years ago, during excavations for the cellar at the residence of the Hon. John Owen, No. 61 Fort street west. The military cemetery was a little to the northwest, between Lafayette and Michigan avenues.

Another fortification, but a petty circular affair of about forty feet diameter, with a parapet ten feet high, was thrown up in 1806, in consequence of an Indian scare, far out in the woods, near the northeast corner of Park and High streets, and was called Fort Croghan, sometimes Fort Nonsense.

At the crossing of Fort and Griswold, on the northwest corner, one may

recognize the old First Baptist church, now occupied for business purposes. Looking up Griswold we see the old Territorial and first State Capitol of Michigan on State street, reconstructed to its present shape as the high school building in 1875, three years after the city hall was finished. Not far to the northwest of this, at No. 43 West Park, near Grand River, stood the first building erected by the Detroit school board—a small wooden affair costing \$540.

Pushing several blocks out on Fort street east, between Rivard and Russell, on the south side at No. 253, is the plain frame dwelling in which the young Lieut. Ulysses S. Grant resided when stationed in Detroit, away back in the 40's. Returning by Congress street, the house No. 185, between Hastings and St. Antoine, may attract attention as the place of meeting between John Brown of Osawatomie and some of his Detroit sympathizers, Dec. 12, 1859, before he made his ill starred attempt at Harper's Ferry. At the corner of Beaubien is one of the old Beaubien homesteads, to the rear of which was removed, from the site of Charles Busch's hardware store, the Dr. Brown house, one of those built next after the fire of 1805. If the wanderer cares now to walk far enough up St. Antoine to reach Elizabeth, he will find on the northwest corner another of the ancient Beaubien houses, now occupied by the House of Providence.

Farmer's "History of Detroit" has been the chief source of information for these papers, although free use has been made of Roberts' "sketches," Mrs. Hamlin's "Legends" and many other publications.—*The Detroit News.*