

A 17<sup>th</sup> century voyage to the Great Lakes  
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28 August 1660 to spring 1661 – **René Ménard, S.J.**, left New France with **Charles Albanel, S.J.**, **Jean Guérin**, **Claude David**, **Sébastien Hodiau dit Lafèche**, **Adrien Jolliet**, **François LePoutrel sieur des Coulombiers**, **Pierre Levasseur dit Lespérance**, **Antoine Trottier sieur DesRuisseaux** and a group of **Ottawa**. Although **Charles Albanel, S.J.**, attempted to leave with the group, the **Ottawa** refused to take so many men and **Albanel** was left in Montréal. Shortly after they left Montréal, they encountered 100 **Onondaga** who were stationed below the great falls. The **Onondaga** captured three **Ottawa** when they strayed too far ahead of the main party, but the remainder of the party passed unharmed because the **Onondaga** found that they were outnumbered by the 300 **Ottawa** in the expedition. **Ménard** scarcely caught sight of his fellow French Canadians during the voyage. **Ménard**'s voyage was especially difficult because he was not treated well by the **Ottawa** canoeists. Although the **Ottawa** promised to help **Ménard** because of his age and infirmities, they forced him to help with the portages. On another occasion after they didn't think that he had paddled swiftly enough, they threw his breviary in the water. **Ménard** wounded his arm and foot as he passed "over rocks and frightful precipices" on another portage. His wounds bothered him for the rest of the voyage, especially because it was necessary that they remain barefoot in order to jump into the water periodically to lighten the canoe. At night, they rested on rocks and rough pebbles, covered only with rough branches, if they were available. **Ménard's Native-American** companions ate all of their food at one meal and left nothing for future meals. They survived on rarely found fruit or a soup made of black moss. Some **Native Americans** ate moose skins. After **Ménard** arrived on Lake Superior, a tree fell on his canoe and shattered it. **Ménard** and his three **Ottawa** companions survived for the next six days on a soup made of animal bones and blood, or dried flesh. On the sixth day, a group of **Native Americans** arrived and agreed to transport them to the rendezvous. They all arrived in good health at Bay Ste. Thérèse (present-day Keweenaw Bay, Michigan on Michigan's Upper Peninsula on Lake Superior) on 15 October. **Kinongé**, the local **Ottawa** chief, treated **Ménard** very poorly and forced him to make a hut of fir branches. Although the winter weather was mild; food was very scarce. They were often forced to share one fish with four or five others and eat soup made of moss (*tripe de roche*) or fish bones, tree bark, or acorns.<sup>2</sup>

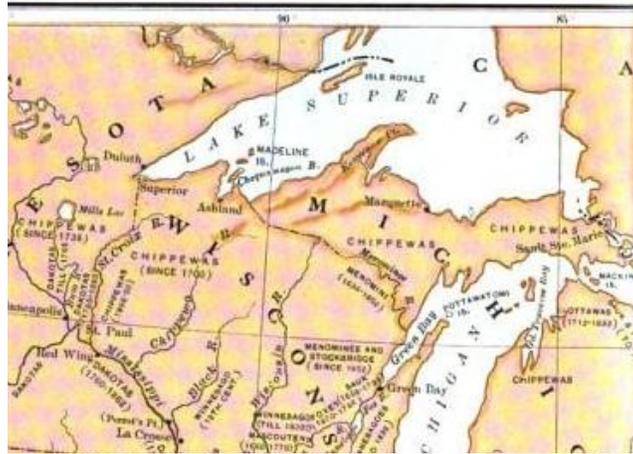
Spring to May 1661 – Although **Ménard** was able to baptize a few **Ottawa**, the rest of the tribe were not receptive to his teachings. During the spring **Ménard** decided to go to the Bay of St. Esprit located at Chequamegon Bay, where the **Native Americans** held a rendezvous every spring. They left Bay Ste. Thérèse on Easter Sunday on their journey towards Chequamegon Bay, which they reached some time in May. As they continued their westward voyage, they received visits from a few Christian **Huron** who eagerly asked **Ménard** to visit them and promised that the whole tribe would convert after they received instructions. In May, **Ménard** learned from a **Huron** that members of the **Huron Nation** were starving. He also learned that the **Iroquois** had attacked a group of Native Americans around the Great Lakes; that

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this summary originally appeared in *Michigan's Habitant Heritage* in April 2010 in a timeline covering fur trading, exploration, and missionary work in the Great Lakes during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> *JR*, Vol. 45, pp. 13, 161, 162; Vol. 46, pp. 79-83, 118-119, 125-145 (Ménard's June 1661 letter); (Hodiau and Levasseur are only referred to by their *dit* names; Trottier was read as Brotier); Vol. 47, p. 305; Vol. 48, pp. 113-119, 256-263; *French Régime in Wisconsin*, 114-117 (Kellogg identifies all of the men except for Hodiau *dit* Lafèche. Kellogg believed that the traders wintered in Chequamegon Bay, but I could not find any indication in the *JR* that they separated from Ménard, in fact in *JR*, Vol. 46, 139, Ménard stated that "we decamped from our winter quarters"), 147-152; Marcel Trudel, *Catalogue des immigrants 1632-1662* (Montréal: Editions Hurtubise HMH, Limitée, 1983), pp. 163 (identifies David as having taken part in the voyage; it also identifies him as an armorer); 169 (identifies Trottier as having taken part in the voyage 231-232 (identifies Hodiau as having taken part in the voyage). Author's note: I have devoted more time to this voyage than might seem warranted because Claude David, Sébastien Hodiau, Pierre Levasseur, and Antoine Trottier are ancestors of numerous French Canadians who settled in present-day Detroit, Michigan and Essex County, Ontario.

the **Sioux** and **Huron** were at war with each other; and that the **Potawatomi** were dying of dysentery. Prior to departing for the **Huron** village, **Ménard** begged **Pierre Levasseur dit Lespérance**, **François LePoutrel, sieur des Coulombiers**, and **Antoine Trottier** to visit the village elders with gifts and to assure them that **Ménard** would follow as soon as they sent him an escort.<sup>3</sup>



Portion of a modern map illustrating Lake Superior and The Michigan and Wisconsin shorelines<sup>4</sup>

May to early June 1661 – **Levasseur**, **Le Poutrel**, and **Trottier** left with the **Hurons** and three **Potawatomi** with gifts for **Sasteretsi**, a **Huron** elder; they also hoped to obtain a little corn from the tribe whose village is believed to have been located on the Black River in present-day Taylor County, Wisconsin. The traders learned from the **Slawak** tribe that the **Algonquin** were moving further west after they had repulsed the **Huron** in battle. When they reached the **Huron** village, the traders found that all of the **Huron** were starving and so weak that they were unable to move or stand. **Levasseur**, **Le Poutrel**, and **Trottier** left to return to Chequamegon Bay after they realized that they could not obtain any food from the **Hurons**. The two-week return journey was very hazardous; their **Huron** guide was forced to turn back because he was starving and their canoe was stolen from them. Having built a canoe to replace the stolen one, they departed once again, sustaining themselves on turtles and catfish. Although the Christian **Native Americans** in Chequamegon Bay were very kind to **Ménard**, they were as desperate for food as the **French Canadians** who did not even have enough food for the following day. **Adrian Jolliet** and **Sébastien Hodiau dit Laflèche** left on 2 June for Kataoutrank. **Ménard** and his companions made their camp within a gunshot distance from 80 cabins of Native Americans. After **Levasseur**, **Le Poutrel** and **Trottier** returned to Chequamegon Bay they tried to discourage **Ménard** from undertaking his mission to the **Hurons**.<sup>5</sup>

June – July 1661 – After they returned to Chequamegon Bay, **Levasseur**, **Le Poutrel**, and **Trottier** described the hazards such as rapids, waterfalls, and long portages involving climbs over large rocks that **Ménard** would encounter on a mission to the **Huron**. In addition to these hazards, **Ménard** would be starting on his journey with few provisions and traveling over large arid tracts where he would not be able to find any food. In spite of these warnings, they could not dissuade him embarking on his mission to the starving **Huron**, as well as three other populous nations who lived 200 – 300 *leagues* from Chequamegon

<sup>3</sup> *JR*, Vol. 48, pp. 121-126, 263-273; *JR*, Vol. 46, pp. 125-144.

<sup>4</sup> Blair, inside front cover.

<sup>5</sup> *JR*, Vol. 46, pp. 125-144 (Ménard's June 1661 letter; many of the tribes are not further named, such as the Algonquin, the Slawak are not given a modern name and Ménard does not indicate whether Kataoutrank refers to a tribe, chief or physical location. None of these terms are defined in the footnotes). *JR*, Vol. 48, pp. 126-131 (voyage to the Huron village); Kellogg, *French Régime in Wisconsin*, p. 149. Note: Kellogg states that Sasteretsi was the hereditary title of the Huron/Petun or Tobacco nation, but the *JR* refers to them as simply Huron.

Bay. His voyage to the other nations would require him to bring all of his food and travel through great swamps infested with mosquitoes. He departed on his voyage on 13 July, expecting to die *en route*, with one companion, **Claude David**, the armorer, and several **Hurons** who had come to trade with the **Ottawa**. Part way through the journey, the **Hurons** left **Ménard** and **David** by a lake because they were starving and they wanted to get some strong young men to escort **Ménard** and **David** to their village. After a two week wait for their **Huron** escorts, **Ménard** and **Claude David**, whose provisions were running low, departed in a canoe found in the bushes, intending to try to find the village on their own. Sometime between 7 – 10 August, **Ménard** was separated from **David**, got lost in the woods and starved to death or was killed by **Native Americans**. Some of his belongings were later found among the **Native Americans**. When **Claude David** realized that **Ménard** was lost, he set out for the **Huron** village, was himself lost, but led to the village by a **Native American**. Although he hired a **Huron** to search for **Ménard**, the man returned within two hours crying that he had seen the “enemy.” Although **David** continued to search for **Ménard**, he was not successful, nor was he able to enlist the help of the villagers.<sup>6</sup>

Winter 1661/1662 – 5 August 1663 - **Jean Guérin**, **Claude David**, **Sébastien Hodiau dit Laflèche**, **Adrien Jolliet**, **François LePoutrel sieur des Coulombiers**, **Pierre Levasseur dit Lespérance** and **Antoine Trottier sieur DesRuisseaux** spent a harsh winter on Chequamegon Bay, subsisting on the fish they caught on Lake Superior. They returned from some of their fishing expeditions with frozen hands and feet; while on other fishing expeditions, the storms were so violent that the wind blew snow so thick that the man steering the canoe could not see his companion in the bow. When a fishing expedition was successful they smoked and stored some of their fish for future use. **Jean Guérin** was accidentally killed in September by a gun shot by one of his companion. While they were on Lake Superior, the French Canadians saw a large nugget of copper which they believed to weigh more than 800 pounds. The Native Americans set fires on this nugget and then hewed pieces out of the copper with their axes. In addition to the copper, they saw blues stones, “thought to be turquoise;” green stones “like emeralds;” a variety of red stones, including an ox-blood colored one that was used to make calumets for smoking tobacco. They also reported the presence of “diamonds,” but they did not see where they were found because the Native Americans would only take them there if they were paid. The French Canadians returned to Montréal on 5 August 1663 in a convoy of 150 in 35 canoes. Unfortunately, they did not bring enough furs to pay for the expedition.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *JR*, Vol. 47, pp. 247-263, 305; Vol. 48, pp. 113-141, 256-277 (portions of Ménard’s 2 June 1661 letter; the text, however, states it was written on 2 July); *French Régime in Wisconsin*, p. 149 (Kellogg uses the mistaken 2 July date to state that they left on 13<sup>th</sup> of July). Author’s note: Kellogg mistakenly states that Ménard was accompanied by Pierre Levasseur *dit* Lespérance, “the armorer.” *JR*, Vol. 46, p. 143, states that Claude David mended the weapons with his vise. In the *DCB*, Claude David was identified as an armorer and the biography specifically states that he accompanied Ménard on this voyage; Timothy J. Kent, *Rendezvous at the Straits Fur Trade and Military Activities at Fort de Buade and Fort Michilimackinac, 1669-1781* (Ossineke, Michigan: Silver Fox Enterprises, 2004), p. 17 (identifies Claude David as a gunsmith, although he doesn’t identify the other men who accompanied Ménard). Author’s note: One of the primary advantages that can be gained by reading this two-volume set is the fact that Kent has translated 19 previously unpublished or mistranslated 17<sup>th</sup> century documents (including numerous *engagé* contracts); he also provides 25 maps, charts, contract facsimiles, and illustrations from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>7</sup> Vol. 47, p. 305 (Guérin’s death); Vol. 48, pp. 119-121 (fishing and the description of wild rice), 141-151 (Guérin’s death); Kellogg, *French Régime in Wisconsin*, pp. 114-117, 147-152 (Kellogg adds information about the Native American movements during this timeframe. The details are not found in the *JR*.); Pierre Boucher *sieur* de Boucherville and Edward Louis Montizambert (translator), *True and Genuine Description of New France, commonly called Canada, and of the Manners and Customs and Productions of that Country* (Montréal: George E. Desbaretts and Company, 1883), pp. 82-83 (information the French-Canadians gave to Pierre Boucher, after they returned from a three years voyage, regarding the copper and stones on Lake Superior). This book in an English translation of the 8 October 1663 report Pierre Boucher prepared for Minister Jean Baptiste Colbert.