

## INTRODUCTION

Detroit is the oldest center of civilization in the vast area of the Great Lakes and the Mississippi Valley. Mission stations, it is true, and sometimes fur trade posts were established earlier at other points in this region—at Chequamegon, Green Bay, Mackinac, Chicago, and possibly elsewhere, but at all of these places the torch of civilization was later extinguished, either temporarily or permanently. The missions at Chequamegon and Chicago were abandoned soon after their establishment, and save for the presence of a few fur traders, the modern settlement of these places dates from the nineteenth century. Mackinac, settled earlier than Detroit, still remains a center of civilization; but there have been several removals of the settlement as originally founded, and the present one on the island dates only from 1780, while the place has steadily dwindled in relative importance from the commercial center of a wide region to a mere summer resort.

Detroit, on the other hand, throughout two and a quarter centuries has steadily maintained that importance which strategic considerations conferred upon her at birth, and is today one of the chief cities of the continent, both in population and in commercial importance. Nor does the interest which attaches to the story of Detroit's history suffer by comparison with that of any other American city. Here was the mildest climate of Canada and here beside the noble river which conveys the waters of the upper lakes to Lake Erie, developed the fairest settlement of Canada outside the lower St. Lawrence Valley. Here for a full generation—from 1760 until 1796—was the principal seat of British authority in the West and the center whence, for almost two decades, emanated the war parties which harried the American frontier from Pennsylvania to Tennessee. By the terms of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, Great Britain conceded to the American nation the territory lying south and west of a

boundary line running through the middle of the Great Lakes, but not until a generation later, when drafting the Treaty of Ghent, did that government finally resign the hope of confining the United States to the south side of the Ohio River and erecting the territory which has since come to be known as the Old Northwest, into a permanent Indian barrier state which should forever be dedicated to savagery and to the mission of keeping the growing American nation at a safe distance from Canada. Fortunately, a better way was found of maintaining peaceful relations between the two countries, however, and over a century has passed since the extended boundary line between them has known other protection than the mutual agreement, honorably observed, drafted by their representatives at Ghent in 1815.

Until 1760 Detroit was, of course, a purely French settlement. The advent of the British conqueror involved the addition to the community of a veneer of English officials and merchants, who intermarried, frequently, with the French element, producing thereby a certain admixture of Anglo-Saxon and Gallic civilizations. But so great was the French preponderance that until the end of the British régime Detroit continued essentially French in culture and outlook. The advent of the American government, in 1796, accentuated the Anglo-Saxon influence, which gradually waxed until in time the older Gallic civilization was submerged by the newer tide of race and culture. Although submerged, it was not banished. As recently as 1860 a well-informed foreign visitor to Detroit wrote that the French language, pronounced "with a decided Norman accent," prevailed in the market place, and he even fancied that the men's cloaks and the headdresses worn by the women resembled those commonly seen on the banks of the lower Seine. Today, as a great and prosperous industrial center, Detroit has attracted to her limits representatives of many races and countries, yet the blood of the early French settlers flows in the veins of thousands of present-day citizens of Detroit, and family names which have been represented here for half a score of generations, are of frequent occurrence in the daily press.

It might reasonably be expected that such a community would be acutely conscious of its historic past and would have attended long since to the due preservation and to the dissemination of a knowledge of its records. In certain ways this historic consciousness is undeniably manifest. The local press carries articles catering to the historical interest of its readers more frequently, probably, than is the case in most other communities, particularly of the Middle West; and even the advertisements frequently exploit some local historical theme. Unless these alert interpreters of public opinion are mistaken, there exists among Detroiters a widespread historic interest which the seller of such prosaic commodities as bonds and real estate does not hesitate to invoke. Yet the fact must be admitted that until recently the community, as such, has done comparatively little in the way of preserving and exploiting its historical records.

Quite different will be the story, however, in the years that are before us. In 1914 Mr. Clarence M. Burton of Detroit, who for upward of forty years had been assiduously engaged in developing the chief library of Detroit local history in existence, presented his great accumulation of material to the Detroit Public Library to be administered by that institution for the public use and benefit. Here is not the place to catalog the Burton Historical Collection, but without detracting from the value of the mass of material in print that has been brought together, it may fairly be said that the real heart of the Collection, at least from the scholar's point of view, is the great accumulation of manuscripts. In these scores of thousands of documents is preserved in large part the story of the past of Detroit and the Northwest. The life of a generation of mankind is short, and its memory is even shorter. The life of the city continues from age to age, and its history is to the community what memory is to the individual. Without memory there could be no civilization and no progress. Here in these records, henceforth to be guarded and fostered by the city itself, acting through the agency of its Public Library, is the memory of Detroit.

Manuscript records, however, are both rare and fragile, and their study and elucidation is in itself a profession. In

the nature of the case the masses of people have neither time nor opportunity to consult them, and their exploitation must be entrusted to certain workers whom the community assigns to this task. Their work it is to make the contents of the records available for the use of scholars generally and for ready reference by any who may care to consult them. Thus it is that practically all enlightened governments maintain historical agencies whose function it is to preserve and publish, with appropriate editing, their historical records, for until these sources of information are made accessible there can be no correct or accurate knowledge of the past to which they pertain.

It becomes a primary duty of the Detroit Public Library, therefore, in discharging the trust reposed in it by Mr. Burton, to publish the sources which are indispensable to those who essay the task of writing the city's history. To this end the present volume has been prepared as the first of a series to be issued under the general caption of the *Burton Historical Records*. In considering the question, which manuscripts should be given earliest publication in the series, there was little difficulty in reaching a decision. The papers of John Askin, a former resident and merchant of Detroit, constitute one of the valuable groups in the Burton Historical Collection. Although not the earliest in point of time, they are among the earlier papers; a more important factor determining their selection is the fact that John Askin's activities over a period of half a century in the Northwest, were so manifold that his personal papers illustrate practically every aspect of the life of his time in the region of the upper lakes, a fact which becomes more evident from a consideration of the outstanding aspects of his career.

Although Askin was a native of the north of Ireland he was of Scotch descent; according to family tradition he was a kinsman of John Erskine, Earl of Mar, who headed the revolt in 1715 in favor of the Old Pretender. As a consequence of its failure, many of those concerned in it left Scotland for Ireland. Among others was the father of John Askin, who settled at or near Strabane in the county of

Tyrone, and changed his name from Erskine to Askin. He married Alice Rea and to them were born three sons (named John, William, and Robert) and two daughters (named Mary and Sarah). For some reason, possibly because of the death of his parents, John was reared by his grandfather, John Rea, who lived within a mile and a half of Dungannon. He died in 1758 and the grandson, now in his twentieth year, turned his back forever upon his native haunts and migrated to the New World. The Seven Years' War was then at its height, and he soon found employment by joining the army. He served at Ticonderoga, and probably in other campaigns against Canada, although of this we have no certain knowledge.

Before long (as early as 1761) the young immigrant was established as a merchant at Albany, engaged largely in the Indian trade. This business involved him in the affairs of the newly conquered western country and papers preserved in the Burton Historical Collection show that he visited Detroit as early as the spring of 1762. They also suggest the likelihood that he was here a full year earlier. In either event he was one of the first British traders to venture into the Northwest after the downfall of New France. At Albany he had as partners, in his various commercial enterprises, James Gordon, Abraham Steele, and Major Robert Rogers. It was a characteristic of the Indian trade that a man might be conducting at one time several different enterprises with distinct partners or groups of partners for each one, and such seems to have been the case with Askin during his business career at Albany. His partnership with Rogers ended disastrously, and not until 1771 did he succeed in freeing himself from the indebtedness incurred by it. Possibly this failure was the chief factor in his removal to a new theater of operations in the western country. The Pontiac uprising of 1763 set a temporary check upon all trading activities, and the precise date of Askin's removal to the Northwest is unknown. It has been stated that he came to Detroit with provisions for the relief of the garrison during the siege of 1763; we have been unable to verify this, but it is certain that in the following year Askin took up his

residence at Mackinac; whether he went there from Detroit or direct from Albany we have not been able to determine.

At Mackinac fortune smiled upon Askin and he soon entered upon a period of steadily increasing prosperity. He held the appointment of commissary in the military department and this official connection undoubtedly forwarded in various ways the prosecution of his main business, the Indian trade. In addition to his own trading operations he engaged extensively in the transport business and in supplying the Montreal traders to the far Northwest with corn and other supplies essential to the prosecution of their operations. He conducted a trading house at the Sault in addition to the one at Mackinac, and near the latter place he developed a farm where, for several years prior to the Revolution, he conducted various experiments in plant cultivation, the earliest by many years of which we have record in the state of Michigan. He controlled a number of sailing vessels and acquired a commanding position in the carrying-trade of the upper lakes. He even contrived, by some method now unknown, to convey his vessels around the rapids of the Ste. Mary's into Lake Superior, an exploit whose very memory had long perished when it was again performed, as though for the first time, by certain enterprising Yankees three-quarters of a century later.

During these early years at Mackinac, Askin formed a number of friendships with men who, for a generation, were among the foremost merchants of Canada—with James McGill, Isaac Todd, Alexander Henry, and many others who are famous in the annals of the western fur trade. These friendships, for the most part, were terminated only by death, and they proved of material advantage to Askin in his later years. He formed friendships, too, with army officers and such other agents of the government as there were in the country, and this process was continued, of course, during his years of later activity at Detroit.

The commandants of the several western posts in the period with which we are dealing, wielded a power well-nigh absolute over the doings and fortunes of those who came within the orbit of their authority. Particularly was this the

case during the troublous years of the Revolution. With most of the commandants with whom he was thrown, Askin lived in harmony. With Colonel Arent Schuyler De Peyster, a notable figure in the western country during the Revolutionary period, who assumed the command at Mackinac in 1774, his relations were particularly cordial. In 1779 De Peyster was transferred to Detroit and the place he left vacant at Mackinac was filled by Patrick Sinclair. Although Sinclair was a man of some real ability, who ultimately attained the rank of lieutenant general, at Mackinac he succeeded in embroiling himself with almost everyone with whom he came in contact. We have no knowledge what the real ground of the enmity he soon conceived for Askin may have been; quite possibly the latter's friendship with De Peyster, of whom Sinclair was almost morbidly jealous, may have been a predisposing factor. At any rate the two men soon quarreled. Askin was deprived of his office as commissary, and in the summer of 1780 was even accused of acts of disloyalty. It is difficult to conceive of a man more ardently attached to his sovereign and government than Askin's conduct and expressions throughout his entire life prove him to have been, and in view of this unwavering record the accusation of Sinclair may unhesitatingly be designated as preposterous. Yet the commandant's hostility made it impossible for him to remain longer at Mackinac. Political considerations aside, there were substantial factors pertaining to matters of trade which suggested a removal to Detroit. In the summer of 1780, therefore, Askin terminated a fourteen-year residence at Mackinac by transferring his family and business to Detroit, where he continued to live until the spring of 1802.

During the Revolutionary struggle the importance of Detroit was materially enhanced. The French residents were largely indifferent to the issues of the war between the colonists and the mother country, but they were at any rate not actively disloyal to the British government. There was no local colonial faction to engineer a revolt, and between Detroit and even the most western of the rebelling settlements lay 300 miles of wilderness. From Detroit emanated

the leadership and the supplies which marshalled the savages of the Northwest for war upon the colonists, and here was the goal toward which all the military efforts of the latter in the West, throughout the war, were directed. It was the logical place, therefore, for one of Askin's extensive commercial interests to reside.

Here for many years his abounding energy was concentrated on the prosecution of his business affairs. The fur trade was a hazardous and far-flung business. London was alike the source of the trader's supply of goods and the market for his furs. At Montreal were certain firms which enacted the rôle of middlemen as between the western merchants and London, procuring from that center the goods which the trader required and receiving his consignments of furs for sale in the London market. As much as three years might elapse between the time when a given shipment of goods left London and that when the furs for which they were given in exchange were received there. But London, in its turn, was but a distributing center for the furs, whose ultimate destination might be Paris, Vienna, St. Petersburg, or even distant China. The conduct of the trade was subject to so many hazards that only the shrewdest and most energetic traders could long continue in it. An outbreak of war on the Continent, a changing whim of fashion, an unexpected supply of a particular kind of fur, these were but some of the contingencies which might arise to set at naught the most patient calculations of the trader, involving him in insolvency and ruin.

But the particular bane of the fur trade was the credit system on which it was conducted. With a period of two or more years required for a single turnover of goods, someone must evidently supply capital for the enterprise. More commonly, perhaps, this was found by the Montreal middlemen, but the cost of the service was paid by the western merchant. He, in turn, frequently parceled out the goods he thus obtained—practically always on credit—among adventurers who traded directly with the savages. The latter in turn received them on credit, and whether they ever paid for them or not depended largely on the outcome



of the winter's hunt. If the hunt turned out badly the Indian regarded it as an act of God for which he himself was not responsible, and from his point of view the debt was discharged. The London and Montreal merchants, naturally, did not thus easily discharge their western correspondents, who must pay the debts they had incurred or undergo financial ruin. It is significant of the hazardous character of the Indian trade to note that at Mackinac (and probably elsewhere, throughout the Indian country) the traders adopted the Indian point of view to the extent of observing, as a settled rule of procedure, the principle that the debts most recently incurred should be first discharged, leaving the earlier creditors to look for their pay to whatever balance might remain after this had been done.

In short, the fur trade was little more than a huge gamble for most of those directly engaged in it. If the trader won, his profits were oftentimes very great; but it is significant of the general situation that at such centers as Detroit, Mackinac, Fort Wayne, and Vincennes, few traders accumulated wealth and the great majority were overburdened with debts, which in many cases they never succeeded in discharging. As for Askin, beginning shortly after the close of the Revolution, the passing seasons rolled up an ever-increasing indebtedness, which for years stood around the relatively enormous figure of twenty-five thousand pounds. Try as he might he could do little to effect the discharge of this incubus. Only the fact that his principal creditors, Isaac Todd and James McGill of Montreal, had been his firm friends since the early adventurous years at Mackinac, saved him from complete ruin and a poverty-stricken old age. They had prospered at Montreal, and McGill was reputed before his death to be the wealthiest man in Canada. Their affection for Askin was such, and their belief in his integrity of character so great, that they accepted, in lieu of the cash due them, various tracts of land in and around Detroit, taken over at valuations far in excess of anything ever realized from them.

Having effected this disposition of his major indebtedness, Askin, as the century drew to its close, prepared to enter

upon a new and final period of his career. Two factors were decisive of the change he now contemplated. The first we have already dwelt upon—his inability to make ends meet in the Indian trade. The second was of a public nature. In 1796 Detroit, which had been for a generation under British rule, passed into the possession of the American nation. Askin's loyalty to his government was such that he had no desire to live under another flag. In advance of the American occupation, therefore, he resolved to abandon his home and establish a new one on the south side of the river where the British flag still waved. For various reasons the actual removal was delayed until 1802, but in the interval since 1796 Askin seems never to have wavered in his design of removing, and never to have entertained the slightest thought of becoming an American citizen.

Among the pieces of real estate which Askin had turned over to Isaac Todd in the process of discharging his indebtedness to the latter, was a tract in the eastern section of what is now the city of Windsor, opposite the lower end of Belle Isle. This tract Askin fixed upon as the site of his new home and when Todd learned of his desire he graciously presented it to Mrs. Askin. Thither Askin removed in the spring of 1802, naming the place Strabane in memory of his north Irish birthplace. Henceforth he lived the life of a farmer, but even in these later years he engaged in various other activities, shipping ventures on the lakes, brick-making, distilling, and supplying lumber and other materials for the government at Amherstburg and other places. He acted also as agent in charge of the local property interests of Isaac Todd and James McGill, and he was almost continuously engaged in prosecuting his own claims to tracts of land over which he had acquired control during the years of his earlier business career.

Although Askin never achieved any widespread renown he was for half a century, successively at Mackinac and Detroit and on the Canadian side, a man of outstanding influence locally. Herein consists his chief historical significance, for so numerous were his interests and so varied his contacts that almost every aspect of the history of the

Northwest in this period is illuminated by his papers. He had few of the arts of the politician and seems never to have sought public office, yet he held over a long period of years several local appointments of public trust. While Detroit still remained under British rule as a part of the Province of Quebec, he served as a member of the Land Board and as local magistrate. In the winter of 1802 when Detroit was incorporated as a town, he was chosen by the legislature of the Northwest Territory, one of five trustees of the town, although it was perfectly well known that he was a British subject and had no desire to change his allegiance. For several years prior to the change of government at Detroit, he was captain of militia and he continued as an officer of Canadian militia during all the years from 1796 until his removal in 1802. He ultimately rose to the rank of colonel of the Essex County militia, a position which he held until advancing age and other considerations caused the government to confer the appointment upon another. Askin was greatly displeased over this demotion and strove vainly to influence the authorities to continue him in the command of the county militia. The government, however, having in view the strong likelihood of war with the United States, was undoubtedly wise in devolving this responsibility upon younger shoulders.

As it was, the War of 1812 brought upon Askin a heavy burden of sorrow and difficulty. Although since 1796 an international boundary had separated the dwellers on the north side of the Detroit from their neighbors on the opposite shore, yet they had a common origin and were still intimately bound together by ties of business interest as well as of blood relationship. In short, around Detroit the War of 1812 bore most of the aspects of a civil conflict. Although Askin's sympathies were wholly British he did not escape the common lot, for while most of his sons and other kinsmen were fighting in the British ranks, one daughter was a resident of Detroit, her husband, commander of the Michigan territorial militia. When on August 16, 1812, General Brock crossed his army from Sandwich to Spring Wells and marched eastward along the river road to assail the

American force, Askin and his wife, from their vantage point on the opposite shore, viewed the entire spectacle, fully anticipating that their sons would presently be locked in deadly combat with their son-in-law, and that in the event of British triumph their daughter and grandchildren within the fort would be exposed to the mercies of the tomahawk and scalping knife of Brock's red allies. The surrender of Hull, of course, prevented these eventualities.

As for Askin himself, during the months of British ascendancy at Detroit, the security of his property and person was unquestioned; with the advent of General Harrison's army in the autumn of 1813, he procured from that commander an order of protection while he should conduct himself as a non-combatant. But the American advent brought other woes upon him. In September, 1812, he wrote that he had four sons, three sons-in-law, and ten grandsons in military service. All but one son-in-law were on the British side; with the Americans in control at Detroit those of them who lived in this vicinity were exiled from their homes. Two sons-in-law in particular, Thomas McKee and Richard Pattinson, fled with their families in the wake of Procter's retreating army, and Mrs. Pattinson, who was Askin's youngest daughter, died during the flight.

Askin did not long survive the return of peace. Toward the end of March, 1815, a "Pacification Dinner" was arranged for at Detroit, and Askin, as an old Detroitter and a leading citizen of the Canadian side, was invited to attend. He declined in a respectful note, giving as his reason his "advanced term of life and weak state of health." A month later he was dead.

Askin was the father of a numerous family of children. The three elder children, John Jr., Catherine, and Madelaine, were by an Indian mother, concerning whom we have no certain knowledge. Nor do we know the definite dates of birth of her children. It is a matter of record that John Askin Jr. was born at L'Arbre Croche, probably about the year 1762. L'Arbre Croche was an Ottawa town, and this fact would favor the presumption that Askin's consort was a member of this tribe. On September 9, 1766, Askin manu-

mitted, at Detroit, Manette (or Monette), a slave woman whom he had purchased from M. Bourassa at Mackinac. We have no further record of this woman, but the act of manumission, taken in connection with the chronological relation between the act and the births of Askin's children, suggests that she may have been their mother.

However this may be, there is no slightest room for doubt that Askin ever regarded the children as legally his own, and discharged for them the complete obligation of a tender and loving parent. All were educated, in so far as lay within his power, reared to civilization, and all contracted honorable marriage unions, one with a member of a French family of Detroit, one with an army officer, and one with a lake captain and (second) with one of the foremost merchants of Canada. Whether Askin's union with the mother was terminated by her death or by a voluntary separation is now unknown; but the known facts concerning Askin's character during his long career are such as to give assurance that his treatment of her was both honorable and kind, judged by the standards of his time and environment.

The commercial relations of Mackinac and Detroit were very close in the period we are dealing with, and Askin, while living at Mackinac, must have paid rather frequent visits to Detroit. One such visit was made in the spring of 1772, when on June 21 he was married here to Marie Archange Barthe, member of an early French family of Detroit. She outlived him several years, dying in 1820. She was French and Catholic; he was of Scotch blood and with no religious connection. By the union Askin, already affiliated with the native race, entered into close relationship with the French element of Detroit. Such an alliance was highly conducive to the furtherance of his social and commercial influence, although we do not mean to suggest that the marriage was dictated by such a motive. Like most of the old French families, the Barthe family was a prolific one, with widespread local connections. One of Mrs. Askin's sisters married Captain Daniel Mercer of the British army, and another Alexander Grant, the "Com-

modore," who for more than forty years commanded the British naval establishment on the upper lakes.

To Askin and his French wife nine children were born, two of whom died in infancy and a third in early manhood. The marriage connections formed by the others are of interest to our story; with them may be grouped the three elder children, who seem to have occupied a family status identical with that enjoyed by the children born to Mrs. Askin. John, the eldest, married at Detroit, Oct. 21, 1791, Mary Madelaine Peltier. He spent his life in the Indian trade and in the service of the British Indian Department; although not especially successful in trade, his Indian blood and connections made him of particular service to the government, especially in the years of warfare which began in 1812. His great influence with the Chippewa and Ottawa tribes was, of course, at the command of his government. He led this contingent in the descent upon Mackinac in July, 1812, and the fall of that post proved a powerful factor in the fall of Detroit the following month. Until the close of the war the British government kept Askin at Mackinac, where his influence over the Indians could be exercised to the fullest advantage. He died at Amherstburg about the close of the year 1819.

Catherine, the eldest daughter, married in 1778, at the age of fifteen, Captain Samuel Robertson, skipper of a sailing-vessel on the upper lakes. He died in 1782 and in 1785 Mrs. Robertson married (second) Robert Hamilton, who some years later located at the foot of the Niagara portage and became the founder of Queenston. William, a younger brother of Samuel Robertson, later became a leading merchant of Detroit and Canada, and he figures prominently in the Askin Papers. Robert Hamilton was a man of great shrewdness, who influenced powerfully all who came in contact with him. He became one of the most influential men of Upper Canada, and one of the wealthiest in all Canada. Madelaine, youngest of the mixed-blood children, became the wife of Robert Richardson, a surgeon in Simcoe's Rangers. They had many children, one of whom was Major John Richardson, who spent many years in the

British army, subsequently distinguished himself as one of Canada's foremost authors, and finally died in poverty in New York, whither he had gone in the vain hope of finding a better literary market than Canada afforded.

Therese, eldest of the children of John and Mrs. Askin, married Thomas McKee, son of Colonel Alexander McKee of the Indian Department, who was one of the foremost figures on the British side in the western theater during the Revolutionary War and long one of the most influential men in western Canada. The career of Thomas McKee was ruined by drunkenness, and although he attained the rank of captain in the Sixtieth Regiment, the marriage of Therese Askin proved more unfortunate, probably, than that of any of her brothers and sisters. Archange, the second child of Mrs. Askin, married Captain David Meredith of the Royal Artillery Regiment. He was soon called back to England, and her charming and vivacious letters to her parents in Detroit serve to vivify many pages of the volumes that follow. Her husband rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel and died at Halifax in March, 1809, this station being the nearest approach to their dream of some day returning to the vicinity of Mrs. Meredith's parents. Mrs. Meredith outlived her husband more than half a century, dying at Bruges, Belgium, in the autumn of 1866.

Of all Askin's children, only Adelaide married an American. In 1802 she became the wife of Elijah Brush, one of the first American lawyers of Detroit. When Askin removed from Detroit in the spring of 1802, Brush became the occupant of his home, which had been the ancestral home of Mrs. Askin, and several years later he bought the property. The names Brush Street and Brush farm, the latter still a familiar designation in Detroit, have served to identify permanently Brush's ownership of the property. At the outbreak of war in 1812 he was in command of the Michigan territorial militia. Following the surrender of the army by General Hull, Brush was paroled and, in February, 1813, departed for Ohio, leaving his wife and children to such protection as Askin could afford them. He died before the termination of his exile, and his family never saw him again.

Charles Askin, next younger than Adelaide, was trained to a mercantile career, but when the War of 1812 began he was developing a farm in western Canada. He served throughout the war with some distinction and at its close returned to the parental home, apparently to assume charge of his father's estate. Until his death over half a century later he resided at Windsor, holding various local offices of public trust and enjoying the reputation of being one of the foremost citizens of his community. He married Monique Jacob, daughter of George Jacob, who was a resident of Detroit shortly after the Revolution, and who, remaining a British subject, served as a captain of militia in the War of 1812. James, the second youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. Askin, also served through the war with the rank of captain. He married Frances Godet *dit* Marentette, descendant of an early Detroit family, and reared a large family, some of whose members have died only in recent years. Alexander, the youngest son, was a lieutenant during the war and died a few years later. Ellen Phyllis, the youngest daughter, married Richard Pattinson of Sandwich, who was for many years prominent in the Indian trade. He accompanied the retreating British army in its flight before General Harrison in the autumn of 1813, and Mrs. Pattinson died en route, at the home of George Jacob on the Thames River.

Of the private papers kept by Askin during his long career, only a portion is known to be in existence. In the Burton Historical Collection are nineteen bound volumes of general correspondence, almost all of which bears date subsequent to 1780. There are also numerous volumes of business records, which likewise pertain to the latter half of Askin's career. The records of his activities at Mackinac and Albany, which would doubtless be no less interesting than those originating after his removal to Detroit, have for the most part, vanished utterly; one fortunate exception to this generalization is the single letter book from the Mackinac period that has survived the ravages of time. Its contents shed much interesting light on the commercial activities of the region concerned in the mid-period of the American Revolution. In recent years the Archives Department in



Ottawa has obtained from a grandson of Askin a great mass of family papers, pertaining largely to Charles Askin's career and activities. Included in it, however, is a considerable quantity of papers relating to John Askin and to certain of his contemporaries, and as many of these as seemed pertinent to our present editorial task have been copied for reproduction. It is possible, of course, that other of John Askin's papers are still preserved and will ultimately come into public knowledge and possession; if such be the case their historical exploitation must be the task of some future editor, since our various endeavors to resurrect such papers have produced only negative results.

The volume now printed comprises selections from the John Askin Papers covering the period from 1747 to 1795 inclusive. Prior to the year 1778, however, it includes but a few scattering documents. It is the present expectation that a second volume, containing selections of the more important papers pertaining to the period 1796-1815, will be published in the near future, and the present Introduction is designed to serve for both volumes, which will comprise a single group of source material illustrating the early history of the Northwest and Detroit.

To some extent every piece of historical editing presents problems peculiar to itself, to whose solution the editor devotes whatever measure of scholarly skill and judgment he may command. A statement of certain problems encountered in the editing of the Askin Papers, together with the solution hit upon, may prove advantageous to the reader who shall have occasion to consult the volumes. In general the printed document aims to present a scrupulously accurate copy of the original manuscript. But since it is impossible to represent in print numerous idiosyncracies of longhand manuscripts, the Editor has steadily endeavored to reproduce the evident intent of the writer, but to escape a slavish adherence to mere pedanticism. In the matter of punctuation, for example, it becomes frequently a matter for editorial interpretation whether a given mark of the penman shall be printed as a comma or as a period. Such interpretation we have not hesitated to supply. Of similar

import, the penman of a century ago often distributed dashes in liberal measure across his page, in a fashion which finds no precise equivalent in modern typography. We have made no pretense of reproducing these except in cases where their representation has some discoverable significance; and where the penman's dash has seemed to signify the equivalent of the comma or period as employed in modern printing, we have reproduced it as such. So too with words underscored in the manuscripts. The equivalent in print of this usage is the employment of italics, and all publishing houses have established rules governing the resort to such usage. But the underscoring of the penman, like his employment of dashes, commonly possesses no discoverable significance, and when such significance has seemed lacking we have not transferred the underscoring into print.

In the matter of footnote annotation some explanation of the editorial policy seems also in order. Few American cities can vie with Detroit in the fullness of the records available for the reconstruction of their remoter past. The fact that Detroit has done comparatively little, as yet, in the way of printing and utilizing these records, but serves to render the opportunity for their present and future exploitation the greater. In initiating the *Burton Historical Records*, therefore, it seems desirable to provide, where possible, somewhat full biographical information concerning the individuals who figure in the documents, and this the Editor has undertaken to do. Probably few readers will ever realize how greatly this conception of the editorial task has served to increase its arduousness. A footnote which may be read in the fraction of a minute may have cost (and frequently has) many hours of toil to prepare. Frequently, too, with the acquirement of additional pertinent information, it has been revised again and again before reaching the form it finally assumes in print. Since the Editor is not omniscient, but must rely upon such sources of information as are open to him, it is not to be expected that these biographical sketches are free from error, or that they are unsusceptible to future elaboration. For both the reasons here suggested, care has been

taken to supply, in almost every case, references to the sources from which the note has been drawn.

The occasion is opportune, in this connection, to pay a much-deserved tribute to the memory of an earlier worker in the Detroit historical garden, whose fame remains unsung. Father Christian Denissen, a parish priest of Detroit, labored assiduously for many years to compile a genealogical record of the Catholic families of early Detroit. It was his ambition to publish the result of his labors, but when, in 1911, death stayed his hand, the cost of publishing the vast compilation of data he had brought together far exceeded the comparatively modest estate he had been able to leave for the purpose. The Denissen genealogies, therefore, still exist only in manuscript, and there seems no present prospect that the dream of their compiler with respect to their publication will ever be realized. Yet they constitute a well-nigh indispensable source of information for all who would delve in the early history of Detroit. In view of the remote prospect of their publication *in extenso*, it has seemed wise to incorporate in the footnotes to the present volume as much of the genealogical data accumulated by Father Denissen as the circumstances of the case permit. We have also brought into the footnotes such additional information procured from other sources as we have been able to find. Aside from the general historical value which may attach to these biographical sketches, they should possess a peculiar interest to the many thousand present-day citizens of Detroit who are the direct descendants of those who resided here in the French and British periods. This consideration, among others, has been responsible for the large amount of effort (and of space in the volume) devoted to annotating the documents.

It seems advisable to inform the reader concerning a problem of peculiar difficulty which has been encountered in the preparation of these footnotes. The correct spelling of the proper names of the residents of French Detroit frequently presents a puzzle whose solution drives the Editor to despair. Perhaps the simplest aspect of this puzzle has to do with the given names: Should Marie Anne, for example, be written

thus, or according to one of the numerous variants which appear in the parish vital records? The priests themselves were not troubled by any urge after consistency, for it is a common occurrence to find the name of a given individual written several different ways in the Ste. Anne's and Assumption church records. The same is true of the surnames: such well-known Detroit names as Campau, Cicotte, Godfroy, Gamelin, and Tremblay are recorded with numerous variant spellings. On occasion, the priest in writing up his baptismal entry, spelled the name of a godfather other than the godfather himself signed it immediately below. Nor can it be said that the signatures themselves are conclusive authority, for it was a frequent practice for members of the same family to spell their inherited surname differently.

To add to the perplexity of the Editor, the residents of French Detroit commonly possessed, in addition to the inherited surname, a nickname; more rarely a citizen might possess two nicknames; and frequently he was better known by his nickname than by his inherited name. This practice finds ancient and respectable precedent in the act of Christ in ordaining his twelve disciples: Finding two Simons in the group, he surnamed one of them Peter; and this example the residents of French Detroit imitated with appalling zeal. For illustrations of this generalization, the reader is referred to almost any biographical footnote in the volume. To contemporaries, who enjoyed first-hand knowledge of their neighbors, the custom presented, apparently, no particular difficulty; to the investigator of a distant generation the case is quite otherwise. In annotating the documents which follow, we have labored manfully to spell the proper names correctly, giving highest authority, ordinarily, to the individual's own usage where it has been possible to determine this; but to achieve entire consistency has proved impossible, and our rendition of an individual's name does not imply that some variant spelling of it may not be equally permissible.

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