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Exploration of Lake Superior; the voyages
of Radisson and Groseilliers, by Henry
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RADISSON AND GROSEILLIERS.

Daring and hardy far more than most of those voyageurs who have filled the annals of the Northwest with romance and adventure, Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Medard Chouart des Groseilliers are to the history of the Lake Superior country what Jean Nicolet is to the history of the Lake Michigan region.

A few words about the first visits of white men to the upper lakes. In 1634 Nicolet,¹ leaving his home on the St. Lawrence River, ascended the Ottawa River to Lake Nipissing and descended French River to Lake Huron, whence he went as far north as Sault Ste. Marie. Without, so far as history records, catching a glimpse of the great fresh water sea which pours its flood over those falls, Nicolet turned his face westward, in search of the Orient, and came to our own state, ascending the Fox River as far, perhaps, as Berlin.²

Just twenty years later, following in the footsteps of Nicolet, there came to Wisconsin two nameless voyageurs, who, according to the Jesuit Relations of 1656, returned to Quebec in August of that year from a voyage of two years to the region of Green Bay. In the Jesuit Relations of 1658 we learn more about this voyage, but on the whole the details are so meager that one becomes curious as to just how and where the explorers spent the two years of their daring pilgrimage.

In August, 1660, as we learn from the Jesuit Relations of that year, there returned to Quebec two nameless voyageurs who had explored the southern shore of Lake Superior, had visited the Hurons—fugitives first from the Iroquois and then from the Sioux—near the headwaters of the Black River, in northwestern Wisconsin, and who had been guests of honor in the skin lodges and mud cabins of the Sioux of northern Minnesota, these latter Indians, by the way, having most copiously wept over the Frenchmen, a custom that Radisson is the first writer to describe.

For more than two hundred years the two Frenchmen who were the pioneer explorers of Lake Superior have remained nameless. It is now certain that they were Radisson and Groseilliers. The identity of the earlier explorers, they who visited the Green Bay region

1. Hunterfield, "Discovery of the Northwest in 1634."

2. Thwaites, "The Story of Wisconsin."