

ish boiled together.¹⁶
with cranberries. It
A small handful is

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The value of wild rice to the Wisconsin Indians of early days can scarcely be estimated.¹⁹ They were barely beginning to turn their attention to agriculture.²⁰ The abundance of this crop, the ease with which it was harvested and transported to their homes, and the facts that it required no labor in preparing the ground and no care while coming to maturity rendered it easily their most important vegetable food. It was one of their staples of subsistence, far more important to them than corn.²¹

There were two centers of Indian population in the district that is now Wisconsin—one along the southern shore of Lake Superior, well toward its western end, and the other in Fox River valley. The first was composed chiefly of Ojibwa, and the latter of Menomoni, Potawatomi, Sauk and Fox, Mascoutin, Miami, and Kikapu, in straggling order. Both regions were very good for fishing and fair for the hunting of large game, but undoubtedly the prime cause of the location of the Indian villages was the great crops of wild rice to be obtained in each place with the outlay of little labor.²² The immense acreage and the dense growth insured a bountiful harvest to every one who was willing to work. In some parts of Fox river this grain grew so densely that passages for boats had to be cut through it, and in one place it spread over an area five miles long by two miles wide.²³ When we read of one small lake which would furnish a supply for 2,000 Indians, and then realize that this region was full of lakes and streams choked with wild rice, it comes forcibly upon us that here in truth was an Indian paradise.

¹⁹ See Warren, *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 156, and 175; Parkman, *La Salle*, etc., p. 52, note; Newberry in *Pop. Sci. Monthly*, vol. xxxii, p. 39.

²⁰ See Marquette, *Relation*, 1671; also Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 40. For general discussion, see the admirable chapter on Aboriginal America in E. J. Payne's *History of America*, vol. 1.

²¹ Rev. C. Verwyst in a personal letter. My half-blood friend also writes: "It is presumed to have been the main source of food outside of meat, maple sugar, and fish." See also *Relations*, 1658, p. 21.

²² S. S. Heberd. *Wisconsin under French Dominion*, p. 36.

²³ G. W. Featherstonhaugh. *Voyage up the Minnaw-Sotor*, p. 184.