Introduction

"Indian Extraction"

On the occasion of his ninety-fifth birthday, Louis Barrette (Figure I.1) gave an interview to a reporter from the Crawford County, Wisconsin, *Press,* laying out his personal and family history, and that of his community. It was 1919, and the unnamed reporter was impressed with the old man's longevity and spunk, commenting, "Louis Barrette is a wonderfully preserved old gentleman and although he is about to begin his 96th year of life he is quite spry; has fairly good sight and a good appetite; he delights to help about with the chores on his son's farm"[1] Barrette was forthright about his origins, explaining that he "was born in what is now the city of Prairie du Chien," in 1824. He added, "His mother before him was born here, too, as was also his grandmother, the latter of Indian extraction, and he and his children, grand-children and great-grand-children are proud of it."[2]

[1] "Lewis Barrette to Celebrate His 95th Birthday," Crawford County [WI] *Press*, Prairie du Chien, February 26, 1919, Wisconsin Historical Society Library, F 902/3BA, 44.

[2] "Lewis Barrette to Celebrate." During the period of our study, people in the Great Lakes region and elsewhere used the terms "Canada" and "Canadian" in sometimes vague ways to refer to the lands and peoples of northern sections of French North America, and later of that same region after it came under the government of Great Britain. Governmental administrative units changed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries before the creation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867. During the nineteenth century, the British Province of Quebec became Upper Canada (a region north of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario) and Lower Canada (a region along the St. Lawrence River). In the Wisconsin region, the word Canadian referred to people from those areas, or even the Red River region northwest of Prairie du Chien. D.G.G. Kerry, *Historical Atlas of Canada*, 3rd rev. ed. (Don Mills, Ontario: Thomas Nelson, 1975); William G. Dean et al., eds., *Concise Historical*

FIGURE I.1. Louis Barrette, age ninety-five, 1919. Courtesy of Phil Barrette.

Barrette was born into one of the town's many fur trade families. "There were very few whites in 'Prairie des Chens' [*sic*] in those earlier days," he explained, "but there were Indians a plenty from the various tribes of the northwest who came here to barter with the tradesmen." Louis's wife, Caroline Powers (Figure I.2), was also a local woman, the daughter and granddaughter of Meskwaki women and Canadian fur trade workers. Louis and Caroline had lived through an era of amazing transitions in this pivotal village. From an eighteenth-century Native marketplace and French Canadian trade center, the community had gone through intense political, economic, and demographic changes to become

Atlas of Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Helen Hornbeck Tanner, ed., *The Settling of North America: The Atlas of the Great Migrations into North America from the Ice Age to the Present* (New York: Macmillan, 1995), 59; J. M. Bumsted, *A History of the Canadian Peoples*, 4th ed. (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2011), 107.

FIGURE I.2. Caroline Powers Barrette and children. Courtesy of Mary Barrette.

a bigger, busier, and more diversified "American" commercial center and farm town.

There were other fur trade communities undergoing these transitions, towns such as Green Bay, Detroit, St. Louis, Vincennes, and Sault Ste. Marie. Over fifty centers around the Great Lakes region had been created during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when market towns were established by European and Euro-American (and a few African American) fur traders, most of them French speakers. They married local Native women, raising families of mixed-ancestry children and developing a multi-ethnic Creole culture.[3] A very conservative estimate

[3] Jacqueline Peterson, "The People in Between: Indian-White Marriage and the Genesis of a Métis Society and Culture in the Great Lakes Region, 1680–1830" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, 1981); Jacqueline Peterson, "Many Roads to Red River: Métis Genesis in the Great Lakes Region, 1680–1815," in *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, edited by Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985; rept., St. Paul: Minnesota Historical

puts their population at 15,000. Prairie du Chien was just one of these peltry centers.

Diverse communities and multi-ethnic families were common in many parts of North America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, according to the scholarship of the past three decades. In numerous studies, we have come to see that American towns and crossroads and kinship networks were much more complex in their gender and ethnic relations than we once realized.[4]

Society Press, 2001). Population data are on p. 63. On Métis and fur-trade families and communities, see also Jennifer S. H. Brown and Theresa Schenck, "Métis, Mestizo, and Mixed-Blood," in *A Companion to American Indian History*, edited by Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 321–338; Sylvia Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur-Trade Society* (Winnipeg, MB: Watson and Dwyer, and Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980); Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980); Rebecca Kugel, "Reworking Ethnicity," in *Enduring Nations: Native Americans in the Midwest*, edited by R. David Edmunds (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 161–181; Tanis Chapman Thorne, *The Many Hands of My Relations; French and Indians on the Lower Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996); Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Native Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Catherine J. Denial, *Making Marriage: Husbands, Wives and the American State in Dakota and Ojibwe Country* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2013); and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers: Indians, Métis, and Mining in the Western Great Lakes, 1737–1832* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

[4] Anne F. Hyde, *Empires, Nations and Families: A History of the North American West, 1800–1860* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Fredrika J. Teute and Andrew R. L. Cayton, eds., *Contact Points: North American Frontiers, 1750–1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Tiya Miles, *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Jean M. O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650–1790* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997; rept., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003); O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Daniel H. Usner Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Jay Gitlin, *The Bourgeois Frontier: French Towns, French Traders and American Expansion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Antonia Castañeda, "Presidarias y pobladoras: Spanish-Mexican Women in Frontier Monterey, Alta California, 1770–1821" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1990); Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa*

Today, more than three million Americans who are not tribal members descend from Native American ancestors, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.[5] The actual number is probably much higher. Many of them descend from these Great Lakes Creole communities of the nineteenth century. While we know a great deal about the tribal histories of the nineteenth century, and while scholars are beginning to identify and describe the forgotten, diverse families and communities of that era, there has not been much in the way of a systematic look at how these multi-ethnic people fared after Anglo-American settlers became the majority and their institutions gained control.[6] This project aims to address that lack.

Historically, most colonization has consisted of projects designed to enrich a parent country by exploiting the resources of another region, including the labor of its people. In addition, many of these projects sought to cultivate the indigenous people as a market for consumer products, religion, and other cultural change, while preventing other nations from gaining a foothold in the region. The French and British colonial

Barbara and Southern California, 1848–1930 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979, 1996); Douglas Monroy, *Thrown among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Peterson, "Many Roads to Red River: Métis Genesis in the Great Lakes Region, 1680–1815"; Deena J. González, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820–1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Anna-Lisa Cox, *A Stronger Kinship: One Town's Extraordinary Story of Hope and Faith* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Albert L. Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers: Sex, Gender, and Culture in Old California* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Gary Nash, "The Hidden History of Mestizo America," *Journal of American History* 82, no. 3 (Dec. 1995): 941–964.

[5] The 2010 Census counted 2.9 million people who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, and 2.3 million others who gave that as their race in combination with one or more additional races. The Bureau of Indian Affairs states that it serves 1.9 million American Indians and Alaska Natives who are members of federally recognized tribes. Thus, there are at minimum 1 million Native people who have been detribalized or whose tribes are not recognized by the federal government, and at least 2.3 million others whose mixed-ness challenges demographers and historians trying to fathom the complex patterns of their lives and relations. This does not begin to count the many other Americans with Native and other ancestors who today identify as white, African American, Hispanic, or Asian American. U.S. Census Bureau, "Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010," March 2011, http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf, consulted Nov. 16, 2012; U.S. Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs, "Who We Are," http://www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/index.htm, consulted Nov. 16, 2012.

[6] Among the few are Sleeper-Smith, *Native Women and French Men;* Bruce M. White, "The Power of Whiteness, or the Life and Times of Joseph Rolette, Jr.," *Minnesota History* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1998–99): 179–197; Thorne, *The Many Hands of My Relations;* Gitlin, *The Bourgeois Frontier*; Martha Harroun Foster, *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006); Jean O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees,* and Linda Waggoner, *The Civilized Band: The Minnesota Ho-Chunk Who Became Naturalized Citizens in 1870* (forthcoming).

projects in the Great Lakes area had been related to the fur trade and had focused on exploiting as natural resources the pelts of mammals in a system that recruited indigenous people to gather the furs and to process them in a preliminary way before they were shipped to Europe. Native hunters, trappers, and hide-processors were needed to make the system work. But a new phase of exploitation, settler colonialism, was introduced when the regime changed. Settler colonialism specifically targets the land and seeks to remove the indigenous people so that colonizers can move onto that land to create permanent societies.

Enormous change came to the old fur trade communities of the Midwest, as the War of 1812 clamped U.S. sovereignty onto the border regions of Wisconsin and Michigan, which had been considered part of New France until 1763, and then the British Province of Quebec until the American Revolution. Within a generation, settler colonialism brought a rush of land-hungry migrants as the opening of the Erie Canal and termination of the Black Hawk War prompted thousands of English-speaking Yankees (that is, New Englanders and New Yorkers) and western Europeans to swarm into the region.

But people were already here: thousands of American Indians lived in their own communities, while in the old fur-trade towns thousands more fur-trade families were composed of Native wives, Euro-American husbands, and children of mixed ancestry.

While previous colonization had brought small numbers of men intent on buying and exporting animal peltry without displacing Indian people, now migrants sought to force the tribes to the margins and plant themselves on Native ground. Government, economy, gender, and social relations – all were overturned or shaken. As the United States took control of the Great Lakes area in the early nineteenth century, territorial officials established its government in the old francophone fur-trade communities.

What this meant for the residents was that they eventually became minorities in their own communities. The "Americans" brought a new government and court system, English as the court language, Protestant churches, and different forms of business and other economic practices. They also backed this up with the presence of the army and pressed thousands of the Creoles' Indian relatives to give up their lands and move away. The fur trade went into decline.

I became interested in this history while working on a previous book about the Wisconsin and Illinois frontier during the century before the Black Hawk War of 1832. Inspired by new research into the fur trade and its communities and families, I began to wonder what happened to them

during the changes of the mid-nineteenth century. Were their experiences similar to those of the Anglo-American and western European "pioneers"? Intrigued by apparent similarities between this midwestern borderland and the American Southwest after the Mexican-American War, I wondered, what was it like to become a minority in your own hometown? Did the new government feel like a protective cloak or a restrictive leash? Was it hard to keep the land? How did the old fur-trade families respond when the commerce in peltry shifted to the northwest and declined? How did the new régime affect gender roles and women's status? Then, as I read more about similar families north of the Canadian border in the mid- to late nineteenth century, about the Riel conflicts of 1869–70 and 1885, I wondered why the mixed ancestry peoples *south* of the Canadian border did not develop an identity as *Métis*, like their northern cousins. In western Canada, some people of Indian and European ancestry who had been brought together by the fur trade became a separate group with a clear indigenous ancestry, and they are recognized today as aboriginal by the government and society. In the United States, however, this was not the case, although some of the descendants of Canadian Métis refugees became part of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians of North Dakota or migrated to Montana.[7]

Prairie du Chien, it turns out, provides a fine opportunity for a case study. Considered the second oldest non-Native town in Wisconsin, it is well documented in numerous archives. Local and state historians and archivists preserved many of the town's records in the Wisconsin Historical Society's several libraries and in local repositories during both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The old courthouse and register of deeds office, both located in Prairie du Chien itself, still hold myriad useful documents. More information is scattered in courthouses and libraries around the Midwest, while descendants of some families have collected and saved family treasures and traced their private histories with the help of talented genealogy librarians and researchers, and have kindly shared them.[8]

Community Study

Community studies like this one can show how regional, national, and international forces, events, and institutions (colonization, the War of

[7] Foster, *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana*.
[8] The Barrette and Valley families have been especially generous.

1812, democratic territorial governments, for example) played out at the ground level. They offer opportunities for scholars to explore the impacts of larger trends on the lives of individuals, families, and local groups. In some ways, this book follows paths blazed by a range of earlier scholars, people who have written about new communities at different locations and in different time periods in American history.[9] Like them, I have narrated key events in Prairie du Chien's transitions, such as the establishment of local government, participation in territorial politics, and the creation of the court system, and have examined occupational and farming developments. I have retold the most interesting and significant stories I have found, but also described and analyzed the salient economic, social, and demographic trends, using quantitative as well as qualitative sources. To tie these themes together, I focus on a few important and representative kinship groups: the Rolette-Dousmans, the Brisboises, and the Antaya-Powers families, but of course their many neighbors play significant roles in this study as well.

As a community study, this project provides new insight into a number of arenas. First, while it examines the introduction of American-style democracy and the implementation of governmental forms emerging from the Revolution as well as related social and economic adaptations, it complicates these topics by introducing variables of race, ethnicity, and culture in unusual ways. Second, gender dynamics are central to this analysis, consistently impacted by issues of indigeneity. Third, this community's history has the added significance of experiencing multiple waves of conquest, colonization, and settlement. Rather than starting from "scratch" like other settlements created by Anglo-Americans, the Yankees who arrived with and after the War of 1812 grafted their society and institutions onto an established community that was already integrated into an international economy. And during the course of the nineteenth century, massive demographic changes took place, including federal government policies to remove the American Indians living

[9] For example, Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (New York: Norton, 1970); Merle Curti, *The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959); Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825–70* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978); John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986); John L. Brooke, *Columbia Rising: Civil Life on the Upper Hudson from the Revolution to the Age of Jackson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society.*

nearby, the very people whose economic activity had sustained Prairie du Chien for a century. Thus, this study of Prairie du Chien's old fur-trade families provides both a standard community study and additional layers of complexity.[10]

Borderlands

The old Midwestern fur-trade towns had much in common with other communities across North America, whose founding pre-dated American settlement, places such as colonial Santa Fe, New Mexico; Santa Barbara, California; St. Augustine, Florida; and New Orleans, Louisiana, where people of many cultures came into contact and contests of social, economic, and political control were played out. A few decades later, after the Mexican-American War, Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico would experience some of the same conflicts and challenges faced by Creoles in the north. Like these other borderlands, the Great Lakes region experienced multiple waves of colonization and immigration, having been part, first, of New France, then of British North America before the United States took control in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

It is also helpful to consider this topic in the context of the major demographic transitions taking place in the Americas. After thousands of years as the western hemisphere's only peoples, Native Americans' absolute and proportionate population decreased after the arrival of Europeans and Africans, due both to imported diseases and to the violence of conquest and colonization. In the late eighteenth century, Native people became a minority of the overall population of the Americas.[11] These demographic changes, of course, were played out with many variations at the local and regional levels, based on local and regional events.

[10] Historian John Mack Faragher has argued that projects of this sort are valuable for facilitating the comparison of various frontiers, in part because of their scale. In a 1992 essay, he pointed out, "A community approach also has the advantage of focusing on groups that encompass within their manageably small spheres a critical mass of interrelating social and cultural parts that reflect their larger societies." He went on to compare in a preliminary way American open country farm settlements such as Sugar Creek, Illinois, with Mexican villages and métis communities. The present study should contribute to this larger comparative project. John Mack Faragher, "Americans, Mexicans, Métis: A Community Approach to the Comparative Study of North American Frontiers," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, edited by William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York: Norton, 1992), 92.

[11] Colin McEvedy and Richard Jones, *Atlas of World Population History* (New York: Facts on File, 1978), 280.

Where there were multiple waves of colonization, intermarriage, and several immigrant groups, the dynamics of population changes became complex and created conflicts over the control of resources and politics.

The mixed-ancestry peoples of two different regions invite comparison with the experiences of the fur-trade families in the Great Lakes and northern Mississippi River area. They are first, the Métis of what became the Canadian West and, second, the Californios, Hispanos, and Spanish-Mexican residents of the U.S./Mexican border region. In New Spain, the Great Lakes Region, and the areas north and west of the Great Lakes, people had experienced the multiple "cycles of conquest" (referenced in the title to Edward Spicer's classic study of Indian-white relations in the Southwest from 1533 to 1960).[12] In all three geographic areas, Europeans had created colonial societies among indigenous people and had developed mixed cultures. Later, all three regions were re-colonized by Anglo-American or Anglo-Canadian settlers bringing the domination of different nations and raising questions about the future roles of border residents in the new régimes.

But although Great Lakes Creoles experienced settler colonialism in some of the same ways, there were key differences, which led to alternate outcomes for them in terms of identity, rights, and assimilation. Northwest of the Great Lakes, many fur-trade families of mixed ancestry identified themselves as Métis, rose up against the Canadian government, and became racialized as non-white aboriginal peoples – a very different situation from the experiences of the Creoles in the American Great Lakes region.[13] In the American Southwest after the Mexican-American War, Spanish-Mexican and mestizo peoples became stigmatized as non-white and/or non–Anglo-Saxon, and suffered racist discrimination. Both the Métis and the Hispanics would be chronically impoverished through the

[12] Edward H. Spicer, *Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico, and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533–1960* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1962).

[13] Harriet Gorham, "Families of Mixed Descent in the Western Great Lakes Region," in *Native People, Native Lands*, edited by Bruce Alden Cox (Ottawa, Canada: Carleton University Press, 1988), 37–55; Jennifer S. H. Brown, "The Métis: Genesis and Rebirth," in *Native People, Native Lands*, edited by Bruce Alden Cox (Ottawa, Canada: Carleton University Press, 1988), 136–147; Jennifer Brown and Theresa Schenck, "Métis, Mestizo, and Mixed-Blood," in *A Companion to American Indian History*, edited by Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 321–338; Chris Andersen, "*Moya* '*Tipimsook* ('The People Who Aren't Their Own Bosses'): Racialization and the Misrecognition of 'Métis' in Upper Great Lakes Ethnohistory," *Ethnohistory* 58, no.1 (Winter 2011): 37–63.