

Kristen Seas  
English 713  
Professor Stirm  
November 26, 2001

### **Introduction to Manuscript**

Unfortunately, too many students today perceive history as an overwhelming monotony of names and dates to be memorized and recited on exams, a process that often fails to engage a student's interest in the material because they cannot find something in it to relate to personally. The typical survey of history, while a practical compromise for the amount of time and information covered, cannot convey the personalities of those that helped to shape events or elicit a sense of what life was like for those who were alive back then. In addition, a strict focus on just those major figures entrenched in textbooks overlooks the efforts and involvement of the many more obscure men and women who contributed to our local and national histories.

Teachers ought to be given an opportunity to expose students to the personal letters, journals, and official correspondence of those unknown people who made contributions to, or simply witnessed, the historical events of our past. Through this personalization of history, students might come to appreciate the relevance of the events they study for those that lived through them. As a supplement to the traditional survey of facts, these other resources can reveal the subtle human agency of average people who not only changed the fate of local history but also helped to shape the nation itself.

As part of the Charles Francis Xavier Goldsmith Collection, the following letter is just such a resource to personalize history for its readers. Along with the other papers in this collection, this letter is transcribed here primarily for students and teachers concerned not just with learning names but also hearing "voices" that offer fresh perspectives on the large and small

moments of the past. Doing so can breathe life into that threat of monotony and bring students around to an appreciation of history.

### **Biography of the Manuscript's Author**

One of the difficulties of including more obscure people into a study of local or national history are the limitations on the information available to fully account for who they were and what they did. Therefore, I offer here only a very brief biography of a man who had a peculiar position at the boundary between two nations and cultures.

Truman A. Warren was born on April 19, 1827, at La Pointe on Madeline Island off the Lake Superior coast of northern Wisconsin. At the time of his birth, this part of Wisconsin and much of northern Minnesota were still part of the territory of the native tribes of the Anishinaabe, better known as the Ojibwe or Chippewa. Truman's mother, in fact, was three-quarters Ojibwe and the granddaughter of a chief on Madeline Island. Truman's maternal grandfather, Michel Cadotte, was a fur trader of the area and an associate of Lyman Warren, who had come to the northern frontier from Massachusetts with his brother, after whom Truman was named. Lyman and Mary Cadotte had eight children together, six girls and two boys—three of who were born before their marriage in July of 1827. (See the Appendix for a chart of the Warren family tree based on information from [Whipple GenWeb](#).)

There is more known about Truman's family than about Truman himself. For instance, it is known that in 1823, Lyman Warren and his brother had bought out Michel Cadotte's fur trading business on Madeline Island. Lyman stayed in the fur business for sometime, even after the death of his brother, before becoming an American Fur Company agent in charge of that company's northern Wisconsin departments. Therefore, it is likely that Truman spent at least the

first ten years of his life at La Pointe, among frontier fur traders and Ojibwe tribes. According to one source on the biographies of trade families of this era, Truman was even called Makons, or “Little Bear”, which suggests a strong tie to his mother’s tribal background and the local native culture on the island (Trade Goods). When Truman was eleven years old, however, Lyman was appointed to the Ojibwe reservation at what is now Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, as a Sub-agent, farmer and blacksmith. Not much is known about Truman’s childhood after this.

By the time that the following letter was written, Truman had established himself as an official United States interpreter at the age of twenty-nine. His brother, William, had also been an interpreter for the tribes in northern Minnesota, where he lived at the Crow Wing Reservation, wrote for a territory newspaper, and produced a book on the Ojibwe that was published two years after his death. Truman himself seems to have made a similar move to Minnesota. As an interpreter for the Chippewa Agency under the federal government’s Office of Indian Affairs, he was stationed on the Gull Lake Reservation at the time of this letter. However, it is not clear how long Truman worked for the agency. His name appears as an official interpreter for a treaty signed in 1867 between the U.S. government and the Chippewa of the Mississippi, by which Truman himself was allotted a plot of land on the Gull Lake Reservation. His name also appears as an enumerator for the 1880 census of Becker County, Minnesota, in which he was in charge of the population survey for the White Earth Reservation. This reservation had become the last site of the Chippewa Agency in 1872, but it is not clear whether Truman lived here at the time or maintained an official position with the Chippewa Agency throughout this period. However, given what Truman writes in his letter about “looking about for a place, one that will suit me for a farm” it appears that he was not simply a farmer in the years that followed.

Finally, what is even less clear is the information available on Truman's personal life. The Trade Goods biographies, which are quite thorough in naming his mother's family and mentions his father and uncle as major figures in the fur trade of this time, indicates that Truman was married to Elizabeth Aitken, the sister of his brother's wife and daughter of another trader in the area. Yet, this conflicts with the information from the genealogy of his paternal grandmother's Whipple bloodline (available at Whipple GenWeb), which states in detail that Truman was married to Josette Jourdain, who was thirty-one years his junior and by whom he had four children from 1878 to 1884. Then, according to this same source, Truman was married again to Kun-Zie, but no dates or details are given about this second marriage. While the prestige of the Whipple family genealogy and its detail is likely the more credible source, there is a gap in Truman's past (he is 51 when his first child with Josette is born) that might account for a previous marriage to Elizabeth Aitken. However, at the time of this letter, he makes no mention of his own family and only inquires after "Relatives" and "Females" that are presumably part of George's family.

Regardless of this conflict of information, Truman Warren was not to be a father for long. Just four years after his youngest son was born, Truman died on October 31, 1888 at the Red Lake Reservation in Minnesota.

### **Context of Manuscript**

In order to place this letter within the events that inspired its content and to which it makes a direct reference, I include the following brief history and indicate where Truman's own words reveal these events to the reader.

As a branch of the United States Office of Indian Affairs under the Department of the Interior, the Chippewa Agency was a major fixture in the relationship between these local tribes and the U.S. government. Truman identifies himself as Interpreter, a role that draws from his background and his position between these two cultures. In fact, according to Francis Prucha in his book on American Indian treaties, a “great many [interpreters] were mixed bloods” as well as others who had “taken up life among the Indians,” mostly as traders (213-214). As an official Interpreter, however, one might wonder where Truman’s loyalties lay at this time, particularly after he mentions in his letter that he made \$3,000 for his services as an interpreter for a treaty drawn up in 1855, and what appears to be a \$1,000 bribe from traders during the settlements after the treaty. While Prucha defends the officials and interpreters against most charges of misconduct in this delicate relationship with the Indians, some personal advantages were surely felt for figures like Truman Warren placed between the two parties.

The treaty by which Truman made his \$3,000 was the Treaty with the Chippewa at Washington, D.C. on February 22, 1855. The Chippewa tribes concerned were the Mississippi, Pillager, and Lake Winnebogshish under the supervision of the Chippewa Agency. This treaty was essentially a revision of one signed in September of 1854 at La Pointe, in which a section of land in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota was ceded to the United States. In early 1855, the chiefs of most of the tribes involved in the first treaty were called back to discuss an increase in the amount of land to be ceded, which would extend further across Minnesota, and the tribes living there would be moved onto designated reservations.

At the time of this treaty and Truman’s letter, David B. Herriman was the main Indian Agent for the Chippewa Agency, under Indian Affairs Commissioner George W. Manypenny and Secretary of the Interior Robert McClelland. “Old Manypenny” is mentioned twice in

Truman's letter in relation to the commissioner's actions in settling the provisions of the 1854 and 1855 treaties with the Chippewa. According to a *Journal Sentinel* article on a memorial for the famous Chippewa Great Chief Buffalo (Be-sheck-kee), Manypenny was in La Pointe in the summer of 1855 at the time of Buffalo's death "to complete payments to the Chippewa and check on their removal to reservations" (McCann). This is the time indicated in Truman's letter as being simultaneous with George Whiting's appearance at the Chippewa Agency to settle claims between the Indians and the fur traders, by which Truman earns his extra \$1,000 by expediting the negotiations.

This is not to suggest intentional foul play on Truman's part to swindle the Indians, but does provide a new insight into how such transactions among the minor players of history could have long-term consequences. In this case, it skewed the relationship between the Ojibwe people and the United States government by placing people like Truman Warren between them as mediator. This unavoidable human agency, and thus human fallibility, colors our understanding of how terribly complex this period was in American history, and reveals the hypocrisy often found in a closer reading of documents related to Indian affairs, particularly the treaties.

Evidence for the solicitation of an interpreter by traders like the Beaulieu brothers (one of whom is mentioned in the letter) or the swaying of a bureaucrat like Whiting, is not extensively covered in the textbooks—let alone the attention paid to a text available from the pen of one of the parties involved. It is in this capacity that Truman Warren's letter helps to round out a student's historical perception by placing them in the situation as the recipient of this letter and audience to Truman's inadvertent confession of his place in history.

## Bibliography

“1880 Federal Census Becker County, MN.” Becker County, Minnesota Genealogy. Ed. Dick Cambell. 1997. The Minnesota GenWeb Project. 21 Nov. 2001.  
<<http://www.rootsweb.com/~mnbecker/1880.htm>>

“Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1843-1893.” Kate and Sue McBeth: Missionary Teachers to the Nez Perce. University of Idaho Library. 1 Nov. 2001.  
<<http://menolly.lib.uidaho.edu/McBeth/governmentdoc/commislist.htm>>

Hill, Edward E. Office of Indian Affairs, 1924-1880: Historical Sketches. New York: Clearwater, 1973.

Kappler, Charles J. Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1903-1904. The Kappler Project. Ed. Suzanne Holcombe. 1999-2000. Oklahoma State University Library. 1 Nov. 2001.  
<<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/index.htm>>

McCann, Dennis. “Great Chief memorialized at U.S. Capitol.” Online Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: Wisconsin Sesquicentennial. 28 June 1998. 4 Nov. 2001.  
<<http://jsonline.com/news/state/wis150/stories/0708seq.stm>>

Prucha, Francis Paul. American Indian Treaties: the history of a political anomaly. Berkley: U of California Press, 1994.

Trade Goods: Biographies and Histories of Traders/Merchants/Chiefs/Officers/Voyageurs.

1 Nov. 2001. <<http://www.usinternet.com/users/dfnls>>

Whipple GenWeb. 2001. Whipple Family Association. 4 Nov. 2001.

<<http://genweb.whipple.org/>>

“William Whipple Warren, 1825-1853.” Native American Authors Project. The Internet Public Library. University of Michigan School of Information. 21 November 2001.

<<http://www.ipl.org/cgi/ref/native/browse.pl/A202>>