

The year is 1763, and the French and their Indian allies have lost the French and Indian War to the British. Many Indians, however, do not accept this outcome. The British Empire, with its colonists occupying North America in far greater numbers than the French ever threatened to do, spells the eventual end of the Indian way of life. Fort Detroit, now under British control, has been attacked by a coalition of tribes led by Pontiac, the Ottawa chief. Far to the north, at Fort Michilimackinac, where Mackinaw City is today, the Chippewas are also planning an attack against the British.

The following is an account of the Chippewa attack on Fort Michilimackinac. An English merchant named Alexander Henry, who was about 24 years old at the time, describes the attack as well as its immediate aftermath. This account first appeared in 1809 in Henry's own book, *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories*.

Massacre at Michilimackinac

(Captured by the Indians: 15 Firsthand Accounts, 1750-1870, edited by Frederick Drimmer, Dover Publications, 1961, pages 74-78, 80, 82, 84-86.)

When I [Alexander Henry] reached Fort Michilimackinac, I found several other traders who had arrived before me from different parts of the country. They declared the mood of the Indians to be hostile to the English, and even feared an attack. M. Laurent Ducharme distinctly informed the commandant, Major Etherington, that a plan was afoot for destroying him, his garrison, and all the English in the upper country.

But the commandant believed this and other reports to be without foundation, proceeding from ill-disposed persons with a tendency to do mischief. He expressed much displeasure against M. Ducharme and threatened to arrest the next person who should bring a story of the same kind.

The garrison, at this time, consisted of ninety privates, two subalterns and the commandant; the English merchants were four in number. Thus strong, few were concerned about the Indians, who had no weapons but small arms.

Meanwhile the Indians, from every quarter, were daily assembling in unusual numbers, but with every appearance of friendship. They visited the fort and disposed of their furs in such a manner as to set almost everyone's fears at rest...

Shortly after my first arrival at Michilimackinac in the preceding year, a Chippewa named Wawatam, had begun to come often to my house, showing me strong marks of personal regard. Wawatam was about forty-five years of age, of an excellent character among his nation, and a chief.

After this had continued for some time, he came on a certain day with his whole family, bringing a large present of skins, sugar, and dried meat. Laying these in a heap, he informed me that some years before he had, according to the custom of his nation, gone off alone into the wilderness and observed a fast. By this he hoped to obtain from the Great Spirit protection through all his days.

On this occasion the Great Spirit had given him a dream in which he adopted an Englishman as his son, brother, and friend. From the moment he first beheld me, he had recognized me as the person the Great Spirit had pointed out to him for a brother. He hoped I would not refuse his present, and said he should forever regard me as one of his family.

I could do no otherwise than accept the present and declare my willingness to have so good a man as this appeared to be for my friend and brother. I offered a present in return, and Wawatam accepted it. Thanking me for the favor that he said that I had rendered him, he left me and soon after set out on his winter's hunt.

Twelve months had now elapsed, and I had almost forgotten my "brother." Then, on the second day of June, Wawatam came again to my house, visibly melancholy and thoughtful. He told me he had just returned from his wintering ground. I asked after his health.

Without answering my question, he said he was very sorry to find me at Michilimackinac, and wished me to go to the fort at Sault de Sainte-Marie the next morning, along with him and his family.

Wawatam also asked whether the commandant had heard bad news, adding that during the winter he had been frequently disturbed with "the noise of evil birds." He suggested there were numerous Indians near the fort, many of whom had never shown themselves within it.

Crediting much of what I heard to the peculiarities of the Indian character, I did not pay Wawatam's entreaties and remarks all the attention they deserved. I answered that I could not think of going to the Sault so soon, but would follow him there later. Finding himself unable to persuade me, he withdrew.

Early the next morning he came again, bringing his wife and a present of dried beef. He expressed, a second time, his fears because of the numerous Indians around the fort, and earnestly pressed me to consent to an immediate departure for the Sault. As a reason for this request, he assured me all the Indians intended to come that day to the fort, to demand liquor of the commandant, and he wished me to be gone before they should grow intoxicated.

I had made much progress in the Chippewa language, but the Indian manner of speech is so figurative that only a perfect master can follow it entirely. Had I been further advanced I think I should have gathered from my friend's remarks the design of the enemy, and been enabled to save others as well as myself.

As it was, I turned a deaf ear to everything. Wawatam and his wife, after long but ineffectual efforts, departed alone with mournful faces, and not before they had each let fall some tears.

Later that day the Indians came in great numbers into the fort. They purchased tomahawks and frequently desired to see silver armbands and other valuable ornaments I had for sale. These ornaments they did not purchase, but after turning them over, left them, saying they would call again the next day. Their motive, as it afterward appeared, was to discover where I kept them so they might lay their hands on them quickly in the moment of pillage.

At night I turned over in my mind the visits of Wawatam. Though they were calculated to excite uneasiness, nothing induced me to believe serious mischief was at hand.

The next day, the fourth of June, was the King's birthday. The morning was sultry. A Chippewa came to tell me his nation was going to play at baggatiway with the Sauks, another Indian nation, for a high wager. He invited me to witness the sport, adding that the commandant was to be there and would bet on the Chippewas. Disturbed by this news, I went to the commandant and argued that the Indians might have some sinister end in view. The commandant only smiled at my suspicions.

Baggatiway, called by the Canadians "le jeu de la crosse," is played with a ball and a bat, curved and terminating in a sort of racket. Two posts are planted in the ground at a considerable distance from each other, as a mile or more. Each party has its post, and the game consists in throwing the ball up to the post of the adversary.

I did not go to see the match, which was to be played outside the fort, but employed myself in writing letters. Even when a fellow-trader, Mr. Tracy, called upon me, saying that a canoe had just arrived from Detroit and I should go with him to the beach to inquire the news, I still remained to finish my letters, promising to follow in a few minutes. He had not gone more than twenty paces from my door when I heard an Indian war cry, and a noise of general confusion.

Going instantly to my window, I saw a crowd of Indians within the fort, furiously cutting down and scalping every Englishman they found.

I had in the room a fowling piece loaded with swan shot. This I immediately seized and held for a few minutes, waiting to hear the drum beat to arms. In this dreadful interval I saw several of my countrymen fall, and more than one struggling between the knees of an Indian who, holding him in this manner, scalped him while yet living.

The game of baggatiway is attended with much violence and noise. Nothing could be less liable to excite premature alarm than that the ball should be tossed over the pickets of the fort, nor that, having fallen there, on the instant, by all engaged in the game, all eager, all struggling, all shouting. This was the stratagem by which the Indians had obtained possession of the fort. To be still more certain of success, they had persuaded as many as they could to come outside the pickets, particularly the commandant and garrison.

No resistance was made to the enemy. Realizing my own unassisted arm could do little against four hundred Indians, I thought only of seeking shelter. Amid the slaughter that was raging, I observed many of the Canadian inhabitants of the fort calmly looking on,

neither opposing the Indians nor suffering injury. From this I conceived a hope of finding security in their houses.

Between the yard door of my own house and that of M. Langlade, my neighbor, there was only a low fence, over which I easily climbed. At my entrance, I found the whole family at the windows, gazing at the scene of blood before them. I addressed myself immediately to M. Langlade, begging that he would put me into some place of safety, until the heat of the affair should be over.

M. Langlade looked for a moment at me; then turned again to the window, shrugging his shoulders. He felt he could do nothing for me.

This was a moment for despair. But, the next, a Pani Indian woman, a slave of M. Langlade's, beckoned me to follow her. She brought me to a door, which she opened, telling me that it led to the garret, where I must go and conceal myself. I joyfully obeyed her directions...

This shelter obtained, if shelter I could hope to find, I was anxious to know what might still be passing without. Through an opening that afforded a view of the area of the fort, I beheld the ferocious triumphs of the barbarian conquerors. The dead were scalped and mangled, the dying were writhing and shrieking under the knife and tomahawk. From the bodies of some, ripped open, their butchers were drinking the blood, scooped up in the hollow of joined hands, and quaffed amid shouts of rage and victory.

...At sunrise I heard the family stirring and, afterward, Indian voices informing M. Langlade they had not found me among the dead and supposed me to be concealed somewhere.

...[M. Langlade's wife] declared to her husband, in French, that he should no longer keep me in his house but deliver me up to my pursuers, or the Indians might revenge it on her children.

M. Langlade resisted at first, but soon allowed her to prevail. He informed the Indians that I was in his house, and he would put me into their hands. Then he began to ascend the stairs, the Indians following upon his heels.

I now resigned myself to the fate with which I was menaced. I arose from the bed and presented myself full in view to the Indians who were entering the room. They were all in a state of intoxication and entirely naked except about the middle.

One of them, named Wenniway, whom I had previously known, and who was upward of six feet in height, had his face and body covered with charcoal and grease, only that a white spot encircled either eye. This man seized me with one hand by the collar while in the other he held a large carving knife as if to plunge it into my breast. His eyes meanwhile were fixed steadfastly on mine.

After some seconds of the most anxious suspense he dropped his arm, saying, "I won't kill you!" He added that he lost a brother whose name was Musinigon, and I should be adopted into the tribe in his place and be called after him.

A reprieve, upon any terms, placed me among the living. But Wenniway ordered me downstairs, and informed me I was to be taken to his cabin. There and everywhere the Indians were mad with liquor; death again was threatening, and not as possible only, but as certain. I mentioned my fears to M. Langlade, begging him to point out the danger to my Indian master. M Langlade did not withhold his compassion, and Wenniway consented that I should remain where I was until he found another opportunity to take me away.

...At ten o'clock in the evening, I was roused from sleep and once more asked to descend the stairs. Major Etherington, Mr. Bostwick, and Lieutenant Lesslie were in the room below.

These gentlemen had been taken prisoner while looking at the game outside the fort and immediately stripped of all their clothes. They were now sent into the fort under a guard of Canadians, because the Indians had resolved on getting drunk and the chiefs feared the prisoners would be murdered if they continued in the camp. Lieutenant Jemette and seventy soldiers had been killed, and but twenty Englishmen were still alive.

...Toward noon [on June 7] Menehwehna, the war chief of the village of Michilimackinac, and Wenniway were seated in the lodge. My friend and brother, Wawatam, suddenly came in. In passing by, he gave me his hand, but went immediately toward the chief and sat down. Uninterrupted silence prevailed, while each smoked his pipe. Then Wawatam arose and left, saying to me as he passed, "Take courage!"

An hour elapsed, during which several chiefs entered and preparations appeared to be made for a council. At length Wawatam re-entered the lodge, followed by his wife. Both were loaded with merchandise, which they carried up to the chiefs and laid in a heap before them. Some moments of silence followed. Then Wawatam spoke.

"Friends and relations," he began, pointing to myself, "see there my friend and brother among slaves—himself a slave! You all know that long before the war began I adopted him as my brother. Because I am your relation, he is therefore your relation, too. How, being your relation, can he be your slave?"

"On the day the war began you were fearful lest, on this very account, I should reveal your secret. You requested, therefore, that I would leave the fort and cross the lake. I did so after you, Menehwehna, gave me your promise you would protect my friend, delivering him safely to me.

"The performance of this promise I now claim. I come not with empty hands to ask it. I bring these goods to buy off every claim that any among you may have on my brother.

Wawatam ceased. The pipes were again filled. After they were finished, a further period of silence followed. Then Menehwehna arose.

“My relation and brother,” said he, “what you have spoken is the truth. We accept your present, and you may take him home with you.”

Wawatam thanked the chiefs and, taking me by the hand, led me to his lodge, which was a few yards away. My entrance appeared to give joy to the whole family, which consisted of the wife of my friend, his two sons, of whom the eldest was married, and whose wife and daughter completed the list. Food was immediately prepared for me, and I now ate my first hearty meal since my capture. I found myself one of the family and, but for my fears as to the other Indians, I felt as happy as the situation could allow.

The next morning I was alarmed by a noise in the prison lodge. Looking through the openings of the lodge in which I was, I saw seven dead bodies of white men dragged forth. I was informed that a certain chief, having been absent when the war began, was desirous of showing the Indians he approved of what they had done, and had gone into the prison lodge and with his knife put these seven men to death.

Shortly after, the Indians took the fattest of the bodies, cut off the head and divided the whole into five parts. These were put into five kettles hung over as many fires. A message came to our lodge for Wawatam to take part in the feast.

Wawatam obeyed the summons, taking with him his dish and spoon.

After about half an hour he returned, bringing in his dish a human hand and a large piece of flesh. He did not appear to relish the repast, but told me it always had been the custom, among all the Indian nations when returning from war, to make a war feast from among the slain. This, he said, inspired the warriors with courage in the attack.