

Ignace Pelott, Odysseus of the Great Lakes

by Vic Johnson

The literature of the 19th century fur trade on the Great Lakes has many stories of canoe voyages and portages, of the rough life of voyageurs and engagés and of Indians in the trade. There are few personal narratives that might be called romantic stories.

But one such by Mary Hartwell Catherwood was published in Mackinac and Lakes Stories in 1899 and in 1986 in Tales of the Great Lakes. It is also available on line at Project Gutenberg.

The Skeleton of Round Island, an epic tale combining romance, adventure and the supernatural, wraps its narrative around 4,100 words told by voyageur Ignace Pelott.

Pelott, the son of a métis Chippewa mother and French father, died in 1897 at the age of 93. "He was full of stories," wrote Mrs. Catherwood.

When The Skeleton of Round Island begins, Pelott is 30, single and the sole support of his mother (maman), brothers and sisters. Pelott begins his tale:

"I am to carry Mamselle Rosalin of Green Bay from Mackinac to Cheboygan that time, and it is the end of March, and the wind have turn from east to west in the morning. A man will go out with the wind in the east, to haul wood from Boblo [Bois Blanc Island], or cut a hole to fish, and by night he cannot get home—ice, it is rotten; it goes to pieces quick when the March wind turns.

"I am not afraid for me—long, tall fellow then; eye that can see to Point aux Pins; I can lift more than any other man that goes in the boats to Green Bay or the Soo; can swim, run on snow-shoes, go without eating two, three days, and draw my belt in. Sometimes the ice-floes carry me miles, for they all go east down the lakes when they start, and I have landed the other side of Drummond [Island]. But when you have a woman with you—Oh God, yes, that is different."

Mackinac Island is located in the strait between lakes Michigan and Huron. Pelott's journey would take him from Mackinac south between Round Island and Boblo Island into the south channel of the strait. Cheboygan lay further south, on the Michigan shore.

Pelott's friends tell him it is too late in the day, and the strait is dangerous, but with Mamselle Rosalin, "crying to go to Cheboygan, because her lady has arrive there sick, and has sent the letter a week ago."

Pelott cannot say no. He loads her on his "traino" (Train-augalise—a birch sledge with dogs. It is flat, the front turned up like a toboggan)... "I wrap her up in the fur, and she thank me and tremble, and look me through with her big black eyes so that I am ready to go down in the strait...."

Pelott heads south across the ice to the east shore of Round Island. He then enters the passage between Round Island and Boblo. On the shore of Round Island, Pelott notices an old Indian burying ground on a hill. He is transfixed by a vision of a skeleton sliding down from a grave to the beach. "It hangs staring at me... I cannot tell how that make me feel!"

He tells Rosalin he needs to stop and cut a stick to mend his whip handle, but it is a pretense. Pelott feels compelled to bury the skeleton. At the same time he sees the ice in the channel is breaking up.

"We are strand on this island!," says Mamselle Rosalin. "Oh, what shall we do?"

Pelott tells her he will build a fire that can be seen from Mackinac Island. And a boat will be sent as soon as the ice is gone. Pelott unhitches the dogs, builds the fire and a rough shelter for Rosalin.

Night comes on, Rosalin hears a noise and rushes to the fire. Pelott knows that it is a wildcat in the bushes.

"I take all the branches from Rosalin's house and pile them by the fire, and spread the fur robe on them. And I pull out red coals and put more logs on before I sit down away off between her and the spot where she hear that noise... And all the time I have a hand on my knife, and the cold chills down my back where that hungry wild-cat will set his claws if he jump on me. Old Sauvage [lead sled dog] is uneasy and come to me, his fangs all expose, but I drive him back and listen to the bushes behind me."

The wildcat pounces on Pelott. Sauvage attacks the wildcat and both animals die. "And then Rosalin throw her arms around my neck and kiss me," said Pelott. "It is many years I have tell Rosalin she did that. But a woman will deny what she know to be the trut. I have tell her the courtship had end, and she begin it again herself, and keep it up till the boats take us off Round Island. The ice not run out so quick any more now like it did then. My wife say it is a long time we waited, but when I look back it seem the shortest time I ever live—only two days.

"Oh God, yes, it is three years before I marry the woman that not want to marry at all; then my brothers and sisters can take care of themselves, and she help me take care of maman."

Pelott will see the skelton twice more. First, when his son, Gabriel, dies after coming home from the Civil War, "I see the skeleton on Round Island again. I am again sure it is wash out, and I go ashore to bury it, and it disappear." —and again—"Then before Rosalin die I am out on the ice-boat, and it give me warning. I know what it mean; but you cannot always escape misfortune."

The Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting local history. Monthly meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month March through December. Museum hours are 1 to 4 p.m. on the first and third Sundays of each month, March through December or by appointment. Visit bourbonnaishistory.org, on Facebook at [facebook.com/bourbonnaisgrove](https://www.facebook.com/bourbonnaisgrove) or call 1-815-933-6452.

Bradley artist exhibits in New York

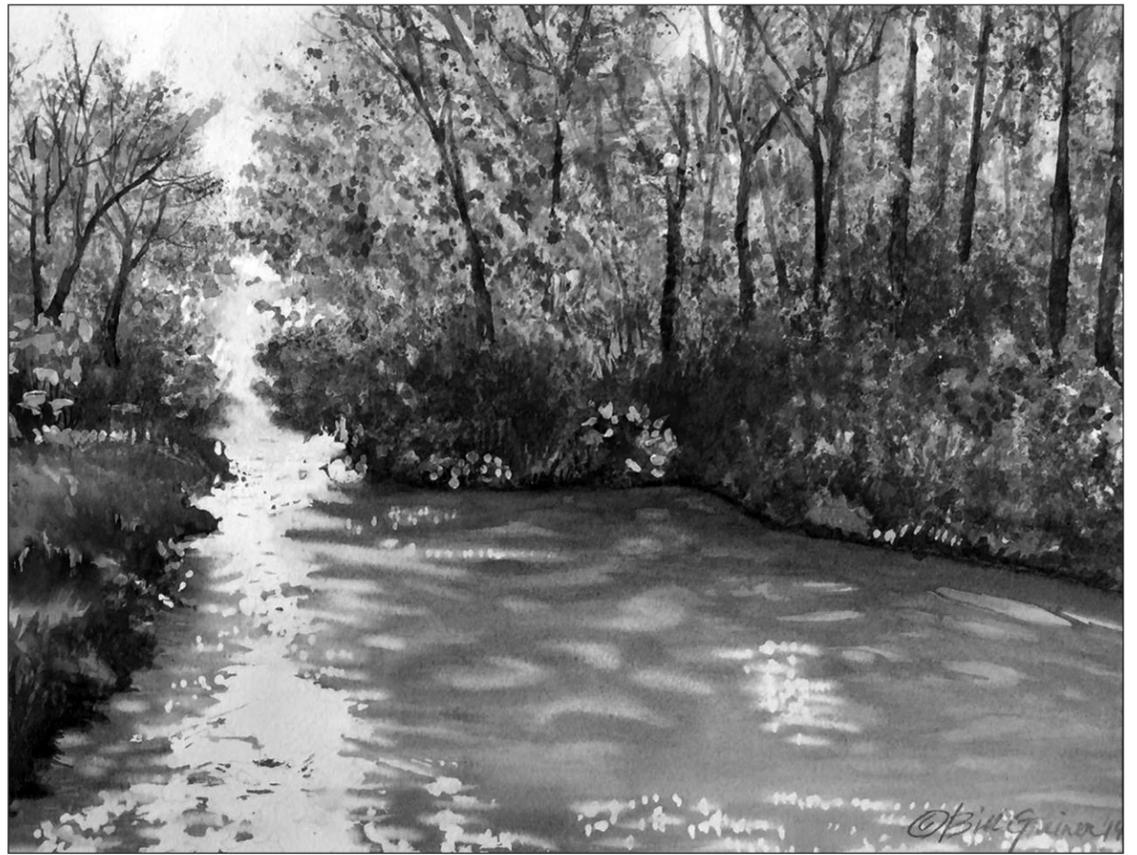


Photo courtesy of Agora Gallery

Chelsea's Agora Gallery in New York will feature the original work of Bradley artist Bill Greiner in Contemporary Perspectives. The exhibition will open May 19 and run until June 9, 2015. The opening reception will take place Thursday, May 21, from 6 to 8 p.m. "Painting allows me to express my theories of color and attitudes toward life," Greiner said. In his paintings, done in watercolors on paper, he uses his skill at handling color, line and composition to express nature's ever-changing qualities. His images have a three-dimensional sense of depth and openness. The artists in the exhibition, Contemporary Perspectives, are masters at distorting or reproducing dimensionality to invent captivating worlds of acrylics, pigments, oils and watercolor. With the occasionally abstracting element, these artists explore the universes of nature and humanity in landscapes, still lifes and human scenes. Other artists in the exhibition include Dianne Bernstein, Grace Dam, Loovan, Alexandra Weidmann, Nancy Klos, Gerry Defries and Jerry Anderson.

Kankakee County job growth

The Kankakee-Bradley Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which shares boundaries with Kankakee County, experienced the strongest job growth in the state of Illinois over the last year. According to preliminary data released April 23, 2015 by the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) and Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Kankakee County added 1,000 jobs from March, 2014 to March, 2015, which translated to growth of 2.3 percent, the greatest increase among met-

ros statewide.

The unemployment rate fell in Kankakee County in the same time period, from 9.7 percent to 6.9 percent. This represents the lowest rate that the metro has experienced since November of 2007. Neighboring Will and Grundy counties registered 6.8 percent and 8.1 percent unemployment rates in March, respectively.

The not seasonally adjusted rate for the state of Illinois was 6.3 percent in March. This was the 13th month in a row that unemployment rates fell in

every metro area in the state compared to a year ago.

"Unemployment is a key barometer of economic health that our office tracks," remarked Kankakee County Economic Alliance president/CEO Mike Van Mill. "There are many variables that affect joblessness, certainly, however we're always encouraged when we see positive employment trends and signs of growth."

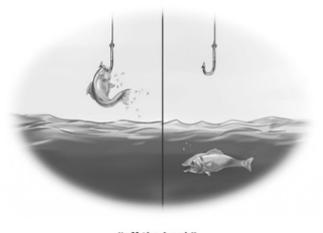
The Kankakee-Bradley MSA is currently ranked the number one Small Metro in Illinois by Milken Institute in its Best-Performing Cities index, which measures economic vitality. The county is also currently ranked ninth nationally among small metros for cost of doing business by Forbes.

The Economic Alliance of Kankakee County is a public-private partnership that works to create jobs and expand the economic base by improving the local business climate. For more information, visit kankakeecountyed.org or call 1-815-935-1177.

Super Crossword

Answers

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"off the hook"

You may not understand everything kids say. But that's ok. You don't have to be perfect to be a perfect parent. Because kids in foster care don't need perfection. They need you. AdoptUSKids.org

