

John Tanner's Troubled Years at Sault Ste. Marie

John T. Fierst

Tanner was a singular being—out of humor with the world, speaking ill of everybody, suspicious of every human action, a very savage in his feelings, reasonings, and philosophy of life. —Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Personal Memoirs

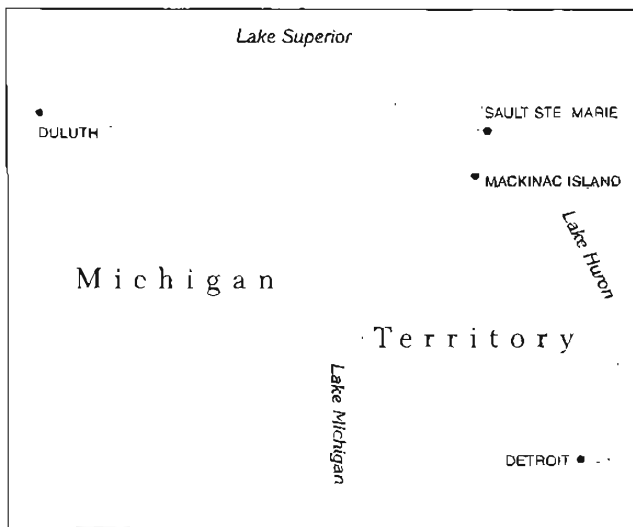
JOHN TANNER and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft are names often encountered when reading about the history of northern Minnesota. While Schoolcraft is given credit for having discovered the headwaters of the Mississippi River and is celebrated for his pioneering work in North American Indian ethnology, Tanner, who served Schoolcraft as interpreter at the United States Indian Agency in Sault Ste. Marie, is remembered for the account he published in 1830 of his 30 years as an Ojibway captive, mostly in the vicinity of the Red

River. Yet more than geography and official responsibilities at the Indian agency tied these two men together and determined the nature of their relationship. For, in addition to historical setting, Schoolcraft and Tanner shared two potentially explosive traits of character: an excitable temper and an unusual degree of determination. Given these traits, and the tension which, at the time, characterized relations between Indians and whites in frontier settlements like Sault Ste. Marie, it is not surprising that there grew up between the agent and his interpreter something less than friendship and trust.¹

Tanner's story is familiar to anyone with an interest in the Great Lakes fur trade. In 1789 when he was only nine years old Tanner was carried off by a band of Saginaw Ojibway from the claim of land his father was homesteading along the Ohio River near present-day Petersburg, Kentucky. From his father's farm Tanner was taken north into Michigan Territory and eventually sold to Netnokwa, an Ottawa woman who led the band at Arbre Croche on the northern tip of Michigan's lower peninsula. Thereafter he grew up with the Ottawa, spending most of his "captivity" with them hunt-

¹ Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs of a Residence of Thirty Years with the Indian Tribes on the American Frontiers: with Brief Notices of Passing Events, Facts, and Opinions, A.D. 1812 to A.D. 1842* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1851), 315-316; Richard G. Bremer, "Henry Rowe Schoolcraft: Explorer in the Mississippi Valley, 1818-1832," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 66(Autumn, 1982):40-59; Edwin James, M.D., ed., *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner (U.S. Interpreter at the Sault De Ste. Marie) during Thirty Years Residence among the Indians in the Interior of North America* (reprint of 1830 edition, Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1956).

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ing and trapping among the Ojibway at Rainy Lake, Lake of the Woods, and in the Red River country west of Lake Superior. Tanner dramatically described his life during this period, a time when the demands of the fur trade and a scarcity of game were forcing the westernmost bands of the Ojibway to expand their hunting grounds onto lands still held by the Dakota: westward onto the prairies, that is, and southward in the direction of the St. Peter's (Minnesota) River.²

On account of the narrative left behind by Tanner, the years he lived as an Ottawa-Ojibway (1790 to 1820 roughly) have received much attention from historians. The same, however, does not hold true for his later life, the less adventurous, more controversial years he spent among his white kinsmen after returning to the United States. This period, which saw Tanner as a trader, an interpreter, and finally an outcast, has been described as his worst period and has been treated as an unfortunate epilogue to his years among the Ojibway. What has been written about Tanner's later life has been focused, almost without exception, on two related events, both of which occurred at Sault Ste. Marie. One was the removal of Tanner's wife from that settlement; the other, the killing of Henry Schoolcraft's younger brother, James, who was shot from ambush in 1846 on the same day that Tanner was last reported seen.³

On the day of James Schoolcraft's murder local citizens quickly concluded that Tanner had laid the ambush, that he had killed the younger Schoolcraft in retaliation for the part Henry Schoolcraft had played years earlier in helping Tanner's wife to flee from him. And from a distance their unproven theory seems close to the truth, even though Tanner's guilt has never been demonstrated conclusively, and even though a death-bed confession to the murder was supposed to have been made years later by Lieutenant Bryant Tilden, an officer stationed at Fort Brady when the murder took place.⁴

The shooting of James Schoolcraft has excited considerable interest over the years, and yet the larger question of why Tanner would kill Schoolcraft in the first place has been all but ignored. The immediate answer to that question lies in Tanner's relationship to the Schoolcrafts, and especially in his bitter relationship to Henry Schoolcraft, who dismissed Tanner from service at the Indian agency in 1830. That relationship has often been looked at only from Schoolcraft's point of view, which would have it that his former interpreter was a vagabond, a pest, even a reincarnation of Shakespeare's Caliban.⁵

Yet the descriptions of Tanner found in Schoolcraft's memoirs are not to be relied upon; Schoolcraft set out to vilify Tanner, and in places in the memoirs the passion of his disgust for Tanner is scarcely concealed. These denunciations tell us as much about Schoolcraft's attitudes as they do about Tanner. Schoolcraft's Tanner exhibits many of the traits that whites have often used to characterize the "ignoble savage." Tanner of the memoirs is cowardly and idle, lying and suspicious, bad-tempered and cruel, treacherous and warring, degraded and revengeful, "so inveterately savage" that he cannot "tolerate civilization."⁶

To counter this picture, however, there exists a letter addressed to President Martin Van Buren in 1837 that lays out Tanner's own grievances against Schoolcraft. The letter, signed by Tanner himself, was taken down by one of his daughters. A reading of it suggests that an injustice was done to Tanner, that his side of the controversy deserves to be told. In re-examining the Schoolcraft-Tanner relationship it becomes clear that the image Schoolcraft left behind of Tanner does not square with reality. Schoolcraft's picture mixes cultural assumptions about American Indians with a private need to protect his own image against the unflattering reality of his behavior toward Tanner in the late 1820s and early 1830s.⁷

² Harold Hickerson, "The Genesis of a Trading Post Band: The Pembina Chippewa," *Ethnohistory* 3(Fall, 1956):289-345.

³ See, for example, Walter O'Meara, *The Last Portage* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1962); Angie Bingham Gilbert, "The Story of John Tanner," *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections* 38(1912):196-201.

⁴ The case is not strong in Tanner's favor. See page 36, below.

⁵ Schoolcraft, *Memoirs*, 316, 343, 601.

⁶ Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 28; Schoolcraft, *Memoirs*, 316.

⁷ Tanner to Martin Van Buren, November 11, 1837, Office of Indian Affairs (OIA), letters received, 1831-80, Michigan Superintendency, National Archives Record Group (NARG) 75, microfilm copy in Minnesota Historical Society (MHS).

Sault Ste. Marias Michigan
November 10th 1837

Sir

Father Mr. Van Buran,
President of the United States

I take oportunity this day to reach my words to you with tears calling upon you for help. because of my long Sufferings by the hand of Mr. Henry Schoolcraft. It is 7 years past since he lays his hands upon me. Governor Cass placed me hear to be a Iterpreter for Government. and Mr. henry Schoolcraft took the office away from me on purpose to give it to his Brother in law George Johnson And He took my Daughter away from me also which was keeping house for me and stript me alone and throw me down to the dust. and I was agoing right down to Washington to make Com-plaint to the President but Governor Cass stopt me there in Detroit.

And it is 5 years now since my Wife was taken out of my hands by force by two Soldiers. Fort Brady Major Wilcocks Company. I was walking along in the street leading my Wife along in love [?] on visiting with my Daughter and a young Child in my arms which was only 3 months old and which was very dear to me. and 2 soldiers came running in the street and one went between me and my wife and took her out of my hands by force and the Soldiers ran off[f] with her and I saw them Carrying her in the baptist Mission house and I went up to the house and lookt for my wife but I could not find her Mr Elder Bingham minister shut her up in upstairs room and next day Mr Bingham and Mrs Bingham & Mrs Davis & Miss Rice all the Bapttist Missionary family walkt down with my wife to the shore and sent her on board the vessel in the hand of Mr Schoolcraft and sent her away. Mr Bingham and Mr John Hulburt setler fort Brady and Mr Ashman and several Soldiers and they all gave mony to my wife sending her away and after 8 or 9 months past I went down to Detroit to look for my family and fifty miles back in the country to Detroit I find her the name of the village was Dexter but I couldnt find the young Child and they said to me we heard you was comeing yesterday and we kill it and we buryd it yesterday evening and I stopt two days there and I beged to see the grave but no one wouldent show it to me and they said to me if you want your Child we Will go and dig it out the ground and gve it to you & you Could take it home and raise it So I dont know now what is become of my

Child if it is dead or liveing I know not. and my wife said to me Mr Bingham & Mr John Hulburt they wrote to me to do such thing and she said to me I've got nothing against you I done Just what the peopele made me do. and I was employed as a Interpreter fo[r] the bapttist Mission and so I could not remain any longer I must Come back to attend to my duty and I had only 15 Dollars with me and I gave 10 Dollars to my wife and kisst her and she kisst me and so I started on my way home and I had only five Doll^r to pay for my stage passage to get to Detroit. and then I sufferd a great deal at Detroit 3 days without eating because I had no mony When a methodist Mission at black river on Can-ada side heard of my situation they sent for me and board me Comfortable 3 days till I got passage to get back but when I got home Mr Bingham said to me two or three times a strong word your wife is in my hands you shall never see her again as long as you live. and moreover Mr Bingham & and Mr Hulburt they Cast me in pri[son] last year without any Cause and they kept me in prison on forty 8 days and my windows was broke open [?] and my house was robbed very bad a hundred and [?] Doll^r worth of my property was de-stroyd.

Now Father if you plase to get my family out of these mens hands and restore them up to me so I may live if not I am sure it will be my end my family is Dear to me more than my own life I lost three of my Daughters by the hand of man one was killd by Ojipiway Indians she was shot with a gun she was 20 years of age and I lost another one on Mackanaw iland she was 16 years old and I dont know what is become of her and all this brings my heart down weak since my wife was taken awy from me my tears never stop running one day not one night yet. and I call upon you to do something for me for my liveing I cant do any kind heavy work becaus I am cripple by Ojibyuyay Indians when I was a pri-sonor among them only interpreting thats all only one thing I could do. if you pleas to excus our bad hand writing this is my little Daughters handwriting She is only 18 [?] years of age. thats all I say to you Father.

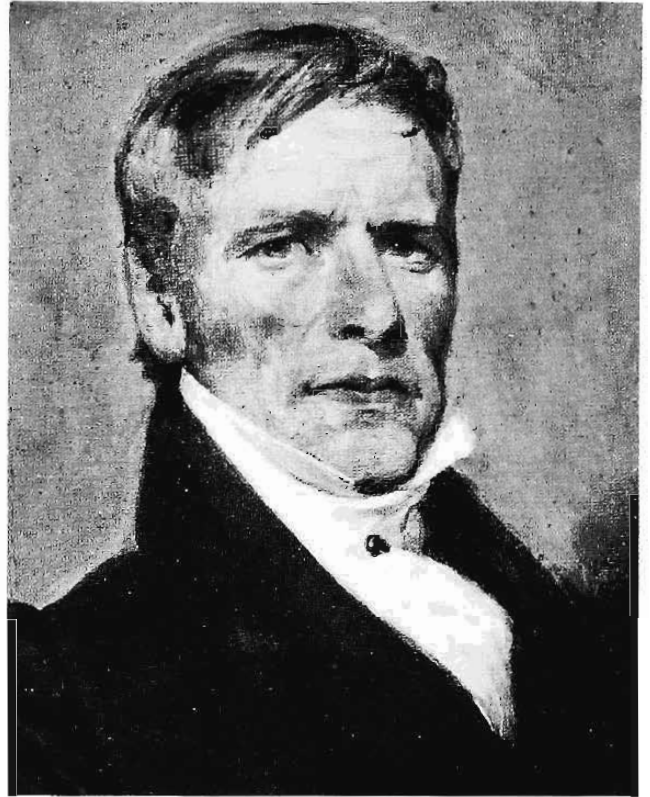
John Tanner

The complexity of the relationship between the two men is reflected in the dissension to be found from 1829 to 1833 within the white community itself. Schoolcraft's problems with Tanner, and vice versa, originated in a struggle between the Indian agency and the Baptist mission—between Agent Schoolcraft (a Presbyterian) and the Reverend Abel Bingham—to determine who would control the finances of the mission school built at the Sault in 1829. This quarrel, which divided the small settlement, took place in two phases, both essentially attempts on Schoolcraft's part to wrest from Bingham control of a government annuity granted to the Ojibway. The first, or political, phase of the controversy was fought primarily through official channels—the War Department—and raised questions about civil authority in the community. The second, or religious, phase was fought primarily through unofficial channels and raised questions about religious authority in the community. Schoolcraft in the end failed to win his objective: control of the annuity. Therefore it could be said that Bingham won out—although to the missionary it could hardly have felt like victory, his zeal having been sorely tested by the long trial.⁸

The backgrounds of the main participants in the quarrel, the quarrel itself, and its effects upon Tanner will demonstrate that of the three principal actors in this drama the controversy had its most damaging effect upon the least powerful and the least protected: Tanner.

SCHOOLCRAFT had been living at Sault Ste. Marie longer than either Bingham or Tanner when the controversy took place, having been appointed Indian agent there in 1822, following earlier discouragements as a glass manufacturer and as a writer of Western exploration. As agent, Schoolcraft held the highest position of civil authority in the settlement, to which he added local respectability when he married into the community's first family—taking as his wife Jane Johnston, the daughter of John Johnston, a merchant successful in the British fur trade, who had married Ozhah-guscoday-wayquay, a daughter of the Ojibway chief Waub-o-jeeg.⁹

Further strengthening Schoolcraft's influence at Sault Ste. Marie, Schoolcraft's brother James and sister Maria moved there from the family home in New York, each also eventually marrying someone of local prominence. James Schoolcraft married Anna Marie Johnston, and Maria Schoolcraft married John Hulbert, the sutler at nearby Fort Brady and later a supporter of Bingham's cause. It is therefore not surprising that when Michigan Territory's Chippewa County was laid out in 1827, Schoolcraft was named chief judge; Hulbert, associate judge and sheriff; and James Schoolcraft, register probate and clerk of the court.¹⁰



JOHN TANNER, from the 1828 Henry Inman painting

The second participant in the quarrel, the Reverend Abel Bingham, arrived at Sault Ste. Marie in 1828 after having spent six years in Tonawanda, New York, as a missionary to the Seneca. He had been sent into Michigan Territory by the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions to open and conduct the mission school that the United States had promised to the Ojibway two years earlier in the Treaty of Fond du Lac. To establish the school, which was "to be located upon some part of the St. Mary's river," the treaty commissioners had set aside an annual sum of a thousand dollars, authority over which Congress later assigned to the Baptist board. The board in turn assigned responsibility for establishing the school to Bingham, a pious, industrious servant, who brought to his task a disadvantage common among missionaries: he could not speak the language of his charges and therefore had to rely on a translator. The

⁸ For interaction between missionaries and agents, see Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *Salvation and the Savage: An Analysis of Protestant Missions and American Indian Response, 1787-1862* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), 90.

⁹ Bremer, "Schoolcraft," 50-51. See also Charles H. Chapman, "The Johnston Family," *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society Collections* 32(Lansing, 1903):305-353.

¹⁰ Francis Audrain to George Johnston, Mar. 27, 1827, in the George Johnston Papers, Burton Historical Collections, Detroit Public Library.

translator he came to depend upon was John Tanner.¹¹

In 1818 Tanner, the third participant, left the wilderness and returned to his relations in Kentucky and Missouri. Finding life there unsuitable, he finally settled with his Indian wife and children on Mackinac Island, some 40 miles southwest of the Sault. In the early 1820s, he took a job with the American Fur Company and returned to Red River, his underlying purpose being to bring the children of his first marriage back with him to Mackinac. This attempt to reclaim his children, resisted by his first wife, was unsuccessful. Although the children were surrendered to Tanner, on the journey back he was ambushed by an Ojibway in league with his first wife. While ascending a rapid in the Maligne River east of Rainy Lake, Tanner was seriously wounded and his children were returned to their mother. A year later Tanner returned to Mackinac alone.¹²

On the island Tanner was appointed interpreter to Colonel George Boyd, the government agent. There he also came into contact with Dr. Edwin James, an army medical officer who had served on Major Stephen H.

¹¹ John Cumming, ed., "A Missionary Among the Senecas: The Journal of Abel Bingham, 1822-1828," *New York History* 77 (April, 1979):157-193 and "A Puritan among the Chippewas," *Michigan History* 51(Fall, 1967):213-215. On the annuity, see Charles J. Kappler, *Laws and Treaties* 2(Washington, D.C., 1904):268.

¹² The record of Tanner's marriages is both contradictory and confusing. He is reported to have had four wives and at least ten children. With his first wife he had three children, a son and two daughters; by his second wife (Therezia, the wife who accompanied him to Mackinac) he fathered Mary, Martha, James, Lucy, John, and Mary Elizabeth. But on Mackinac Island Therezia converted to Catholicism, thereafter refusing to recognize her marriage to Tanner. Tanner's third marriage was to the white woman whose removal from the settlement at Sault Ste. Marie so enraged him. He and this wife had one child, the infant Tanner referred to in his letter to Van Buren. Tanner is also supposed to have married a fourth time, another Ojibway woman. Tanner, *Narrative*, xii-xv, 234-260; Elizabeth T. Baird, "Reminiscences of Early Days on Mackinac Island," *Wisconsin Historical Collections* 14(Madison, 1914):47-55.

¹³ John Harold Humins, "George Boyd: Indian Agent of the Upper Great Lakes, 1819-1842," (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1975), 82-84; Tanner, *Narrative*, xvii-xviii.

¹⁴ Maxine Benson, "Schoolcraft, James, and the 'White Indian'," *Michigan History* 54(Winter, 1970):316-318.

¹⁵ Boyd changed his mind about granting Tanner a six-month leave of absence "because the interpreter was on bail for an appearance at the District Court for threatening a man's life." Humins, "George Boyd," 82-84. This incident is probably connected to the general fight Tanner was waging to re-establish custody over his children; see page 30, n. 26 below.

¹⁶ Here and two paragraphs below, see Schoolcraft, "A Statement respecting the claim of J. Tanner," Feb. 18, 1832, and Schoolcraft to James, Dec. 13, 1831, both in Schoolcraft Papers, Library of Congress, microfilm copies in MHS.

Long's 1819 expedition to the Rocky Mountains. James, impressed by Tanner's spirit and intelligence, later described him in words consistent with the portrait of Tanner by Henry Inman. "His face," James wrote, "which was originally rather handsome, bears now numerous traces of thought and passion, as well as of age; his quick and piercing blue eyes, bespeak the stern, the violent, and unconquerable spirit, which rendered him an object of fear to many of the Indians." About Tanner's notions of honor James would later provide this insight: "He has ever been found just and generous, until injuries or insults have aroused the spirit of hatred and revenge; his gratitude has always been as ardent and persevering as his resentment."¹³

James was of the opinion that Tanner's story could "be made worth the telling," and began putting Tanner's adventures into manuscript form. The work was completed in the spring of 1828, after James had been transferred to Sault Ste. Marie; upon its completion Tanner left the Sault for New York, where he sold his book to G. & C. & H. Carvill and where his portrait was done by Inman.¹⁴

Tanner's request for a leave of absence in connection with his book had brought him into conflict with Boyd and led to his dismissal at Mackinac.¹⁵ Yet when Tanner returned from New York to Sault Ste. Marie in the fall of 1828, he was given another interpretership: Schoolcraft—thanks to the influence of Governor Lewis Cass—agreed to hire Tanner. (It is important to note here that Tanner was nearing 50 years of age and that he was partly crippled from injuries suffered in the wilderness; his later anxieties over securing a position as interpreter are partly explained by his age, his isolation, and his somewhat crippled condition.) If the War Department approved the arrangement, Tanner was to interpret at the subagency of La Pointe the following spring. In the meantime he was to "attend" at the agency in Sault Ste. Marie.¹⁶

TANNER began attending at the Sault agency on October 10, 1828, receiving as pay two daily rations, a dollar a day for services, and \$9.50 a month for house rent. But that winter Schoolcraft was instructed to cut agency expenses, owing to fiscal problems at the War Department, and therefore recalled to the agency his brother-in-law George Johnston, the subagent stationed at La Pointe. Hence, plans to station Tanner at that place as interpreter had to be canceled.

Tanner was paid through February, 1829, and would have been dismissed altogether had he not volunteered to work at the agency without pay, an offer prompted perhaps by his sense of honor as much as by his desire to secure a more favorable position later on. Schoolcraft agreed to Tanner's attending at the agency an hour each morning, and in return Tanner's rations (issued at

nearby Fort Brady) were continued. As a result, Tanner worked at the agency without pay, save for his rations, from March through December that year.

During this period Schoolcraft could have made—and probably did make—wide use of Tanner's skills as an interpreter. To an agent such as Schoolcraft, whose authority extended as far west as the Mississippi River and whose interests were in natural sciences, Indian mythology, and Indian languages (he was compiling an Ojibway grammar), Tanner's familiarity with the tribes and the country west of Lake Superior would have been very useful. Indeed, Tanner's experience, intelligence, and perseverance made him popular as an interpreter. The same qualities that recommended him to Dr. James and Schoolcraft also recommended him to Bingham. "I expect to be able to obtain Mr. John Tanner for an Interpreter," Bingham wrote the Baptist board. "He set his price at \$2.50 per week. If he is employed, he is to interpret for me on all occasions when he can be spared by the Agent."¹⁷

Despite his interest in Tanner, Bingham at first decided it better to have as translator Schoolcraft's sister-in-law, Charlotte Johnston. Tanner was in want of religious instruction, Charlotte had volunteered her services without charge, and Bingham that winter was taking his meals with the Johnston family. This seemed a satisfactory arrangement at first. Tanner began attending Sabbath meetings to hear Charlotte's translations (unwilling to accept pay until certain he could translate Bingham's words correctly) and interpreted for Bingham on other occasions. In addition, as a kind of apprenticeship or instruction, Tanner was also filling up his time helping Edwin James translate the Gospels into Ojibway.¹⁸

It was at this point that the seeds of the future controversy were actually planted, for although it had never been Bingham's intention to give Charlotte a permanent position, her appointment proved to be the issue that first brought Bingham and Schoolcraft into conflict. "Mr. S. seemed to drink in an idea that I spoke of her as a permanent Interpreter," Bingham recorded in his journal on February 20, 1829. The following day Bingham had a conversation with Charlotte in which she agreed that she had not made a permanent engagement but had volunteered to interpret at Indian meetings "while it might be convenient." Hearing of this from Charlotte, Schoolcraft reacted with a caustic letter to Bingham, one which chastised the preacher for his refusal to acknowledge that he had engaged Charlotte on a permanent basis. "I must be permitted to say," wrote the incensed Schoolcraft, "that my recollection of what you advanced is perfectly distinct, & that but one import could be given to it. . . . Truth & candour are inestimable more especially in the character you have assumed in . . . this remote frontier."¹⁹



BAPTIST
missionary
Abel Bingham

It is possible, but unlikely, that Bingham was distorting the truth. For, as developments will show, of the two men Schoolcraft would prove to be the more artful. That something other than Charlotte's appointment was at stake here is suggested by the tone of Schoolcraft's letter. One suspects that the real issue was over Tanner—that the real question was who had claim to Tanner's services. Was Tanner to help Bingham to spread—and James to translate—the Gospels? Or was he to aid in advancing Schoolcraft's scholarship? Indeed, the time Tanner spent at the agency in 1829 was to become a central issue between the opposing camps. Assuming that Schoolcraft's real concern was with Tanner, not Charlotte, then from the very beginning Tanner stood at the center of the controversy between the agency and the mission.

ON January 1, 1830, Schoolcraft appointed Tanner Ojibway interpreter to the agency. Henry Sewakee, the

¹⁷ On Schoolcraft's Ojibway grammar, see Lt. C.F. Morton to George Johnston, Feb. 20, 1827, Johnston Papers; see also Abel Bingham to Lucius Bolles, Oct. 29, 1828, Correspondence of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS), microfilm in the American Baptist Historical Society, Rochester, N.Y. Historians have generally overlooked this valuable repository of early Baptist missionary activity.

¹⁸ Bingham to Bolles, Nov. 12, 1828, Feb. 14, 1829, ABFMS. Bingham described the conditions of employment in a letter to Bolles, Nov. 9, 1832.

¹⁹ The bulk of Abel Bingham's journals and papers (1822-55), including the letters he received from the corresponding secretaries of the Baptist board, is held by the Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant. Schoolcraft's letter is transcribed in Bingham's journal.

man he replaced, was apparently dismissed for carrying on an affair with Sophia Cadotte, a servant legally bound to the Schoolcrafts, who ran off from that household about the time Tanner assumed his new position. Sewakee's affair with Sophia, however, was less important than Schoolcraft's disproportionate response. He claimed Sophia had invented stories about himself and his relations to justify her unsanctioned departure. The stories, regrettably, were not recorded. Recorded were Schoolcraft's campaign to destroy Sophia's reputation and his enmity toward her sympathizers. The affair divided the settlement into two camps, those who sided with Schoolcraft, and those who refused to denounce Sophia—there being to Schoolcraft's way of thinking no middle ground.²⁰

Consequently the agent flew into a passion when four months later Bingham permitted Sophia to attend the mission school as a day scholar. As his subsequent actions prove, he determined to take measures against Bingham. Schoolcraft sent a letter to Thomas McKenney, superintendent of the Office of Indian Affairs. Disguising anger at Bingham as official concern over the annuity, he complained to McKenney that Bingham was not required by the Baptist board to keep a record distinguishing the annuity from other missionary funds. By this Schoolcraft meant to make it seem that Bingham was mishandling the annuity.

Schoolcraft at the time was preparing to leave for Detroit; the Legislative Council for Michigan Territory, of which he was a member, held session that year from May 12 to August 1. From Detroit he wrote McKenney a confidential letter that made a stronger claim: Bingham had misapplied the annuity by admitting boarders who were not such as the 1826 treaty specified. It was not the purpose of the treaty, Schoolcraft claimed, "to benefit worthless vagabonds & runaways of the Indian race, who turn a deaf ear to the instructions of government." Sophia of course was his case in



HENRY ROWE SCHOOLCRAFT

point. According to Schoolcraft, by admitting so corrupt a person into the mission school Bingham was counteracting Schoolcraft's own efforts to help the Indians.²¹

The letters had their effect, but the response was not quite what the agent must have anticipated. Schoolcraft apparently wanted permission to countersign annuity expenditures to ensure their proper use. Instead McKenney promised Schoolcraft that the matter "*would all be put right*" and forwarded both of Schoolcraft's letters (all confidentiality aside) to the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions.²²

Reaction followed quickly. Lucius Bolles, corresponding secretary of the Baptist board, sent a letter to Bingham that contained excerpts from Schoolcraft's confidential letter. Surprised, Bingham wrote back to Bolles, giving the situation of the mixed-blood children he had taken into the mission and explaining that the burden of Schoolcraft's complaint rested upon Sophia: "The circumstances of her leaving Mr. Schoolcraft's house & the consequences which followed," explained Bingham, "produced much excitement in the place and caused a division in our little society, which to me was extremely painful: but the course I designed to pursue was perfectly neutral." Bingham felt that to have Schoolcraft countersign expenditures as proposed would "ruin the interests of the Mission."

Nor was Bingham without support. Led by School-

²⁰ Sophia Cadotte, the daughter of Saugemauqua (an Indian woman married to Jean Baptiste Cadotte) and a man whose name the sources do not reveal, was given up in early childhood to John Johnston, Schoolcraft's father-in-law, and raised as a servant in his house. Two letters written by John Hulbert suggest Schoolcraft had Sophia arrested for running off. As sheriff, Hulbert opposed Schoolcraft's treatment of the servant girl. Hulbert to Schoolcraft, Jan. 12, 19, 1830, and Schoolcraft to Bingham, Aug. 30, 1830, Schoolcraft Papers; Hulbert *et al.* to Bolles, Aug. 2, 1830, ABFMS.

²¹ Schoolcraft to Bingham, April 26, 1830, and to McKenney, May 1, Aug. 25, 1830, Schoolcraft Papers. See also Bolles to Bingham, June 22, 1830, Bingham Papers. Sophia, by the Fond du Lac Treaty, was perfectly entitled to attend the mission school.

²² Here and below, see McKenney to Schoolcraft, June 10, 1830, Schoolcraft Papers; Bingham to Bolles, July 26, 1830, ABFMS.

craft's brother-in-law John Hulbert and Edwin James, a group of citizens wrote to the Baptist board in his defense. Schoolcraft learned of their letter after returning from Detroit in August; outraged, he immediately shot off two letters, one to Superintendent McKenney and another to the Baptist board. In his letter to McKenney, Schoolcraft warned the superintendent not to trust any statements that had as their source John Hulbert *et al.* In his letter to Bolles, Schoolcraft argued that past actions proved how devoted he was both to the welfare of the mixed-blood population and to the success of the missionary cause.²³

The same day that Schoolcraft wrote to the board, Bingham himself began a correspondence with Schoolcraft, a correspondence which Bingham's small son Judson hand carried between the mission house and the Indian agency. Bingham was concerned about the impressions Schoolcraft's letters had left upon Secretary Bolles and Superintendent McKenney and wanted his name cleared. He claimed he did not feel it his duty to judge Sophia's character. Schoolcraft, on the other hand, wanted an admission of wrongdoing from Bingham. As a result, and by no means a surprise, the controversy was not settled to anyone's satisfaction. Schoolcraft never cleared Bingham's name, and Bingham never agreed to Schoolcraft's countersigning expenditures.²⁴

TANNER would have been little affected by the controversy over the servant girl had Schoolcraft not reacted angrily when Bingham permitted Sophia to attend the mission school. Tanner by that time had become attached to the mission; James was reading their translation of the Gospels at meetings; and Tanner was now Bingham's regular interpreter. As a result, Tanner was caught in an awkward position: interpreter to both agent and missionary, with the agent increasingly suspicious of his loyalty. Eventually Schoolcraft came to feel betrayed by Tanner, who, he felt, was serving more than one master and countenancing "evil reports" (presumably Sophia's stories).²⁵

Thus while Schoolcraft was in Detroit that spring not only did he send his "confidential" letter to McKenney, he also pushed through the Legislative Council a law empowering the sheriff of Chippewa County to remove Martha Tanner from the custody of her father. According to the law, Martha, if she consented, was to be taken to a missionary establishment or place of safety and "any threats of the said John Tanner to injure the said Martha Tanner, or any person or persons with whom she may be placed" were to be "punishable by fine and imprisonment, at the discretion of the court." The wording suggests that Tanner was mistreating Martha and that this was the reason the law was enacted. Yet the story behind the law remains hidden.

The few available records pertaining to it fail to verify whether indeed he was mistreating his daughter.²⁶ At any rate, whether he was or not, it is difficult to believe that Martha's welfare was uppermost in Schoolcraft's mind when he introduced the law into council. Rather, given Schoolcraft's anger, one could argue that the law in actuality provided him, as chief judge of Chippewa County, with an effective means to punish Tanner for his perceived disloyalty.

The law passed through council at the end of the legislative session on July 30, 1830. By no small coincidence the day Schoolcraft dismissed Tanner as Ojibway interpreter came only 13 days later—August 12—and shortly after Schoolcraft had returned from Detroit. Schoolcraft, one guesses, was in a hurry to take measures against Tanner, discharging him for "conduct & language grossly disrespectful, followed by an immediate & continued withdrawal from the office, and all its duties, for a space of three days, during the height of the business season."²⁷

These charges were probably true, but Schoolcraft was not telling the whole story. If he had had Martha removed from her father's house, Tanner's anger would be understandable and—had Tanner gone in search of Martha—so would his absence. Something like this took place, as a letter from Governor Cass to Schoolcraft confirms: "Tanner's daughter has arrived and is desirous of remaining with us. I asked her if her father was willing, and I understood that he was unwilling she should go. Whether he wished she should come here, if she came down, I am desirous of knowing. . . . I am unwilling his daughter should remain, if he has any objections. . . . Be good enough to let him know this view, and my feelings upon the subject. I believe him a very upright man, and I would not, on any account, do anything, he might conceive as injury."²⁸

A second letter makes it clear that Tanner continued

²³ Hulbert *et al.* to Bolles, Aug. 2, 1830; Schoolcraft to McKenney, Aug. 25, 1830, and to Bolles, Aug. 26, 1830—all in Schoolcraft Papers.

²⁴ Bingham to Schoolcraft, Aug. 25, 31, 1830, and Schoolcraft to Bingham, Aug. 30, 1830, Schoolcraft Papers; Bingham to Bolles, Oct. 22, 25, 1830, ABFMS.

²⁵ Bingham to Bolles, June 4, 1830, ABFMS; Schoolcraft to James, Dec. 13, 1831, Schoolcraft Papers.

²⁶ Michigan Territory, *Laws*, 1830, p. 65. On Tanner's sad and unsuccessful efforts to keep his family and on Martha's story, see John E. McDowell, "Therese Schindler of Mackinac: Upward Mobility in the Great Lakes Fur Trade," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 61 (Winter, 1977-78): 125-143; Baird, "Reminiscences," 47-55. See also Martha's baptismal record, June 7, 1836, Edward Jacker Papers, Burton Historical Collections, Detroit Public Library.

²⁷ Schoolcraft to James, Dec. 13, 1831, Schoolcraft Papers.

²⁸ Here and two paragraphs below, see Cass to Schoolcraft, Aug. 17, Oct. 18, 1830, Schoolcraft Papers.

to search for his daughter and that he assumed Cass the one responsible for Martha's removal as well as his own dismissal: "He seemed to suppose that I had 'stolen' her," Cass wrote Schoolcraft, "and also that I had discharged [him] from office." Either Schoolcraft had confused Tanner on these matters or the interpreter's own distrust and volatile temperament had led him to jump to wrong conclusions. Cass responded with understanding, however, and encouraged the agent to restore Tanner: "I told him I knew nothing of his dismissal, but advised [him] to apologize for all that was wrong and to go to you and promise to do well. . . . Since then I have reflected upon his situation, and perceiving not the least feeling on account of the improper expressions he used, but attributing them to his grievance and perhaps some constitutional warmth of temper, I really pity him very much. He seems to me a forlorn heart broken man."

The second letter also contains the first mention of Tanner's difficulties with the agency over money. Here again Tanner's suspicions and Cass's concern are apparent, Cass in this instance entreating Schoolcraft to clear all debts owed Tanner: "He [Tanner] wrote me also that he had four months pay due and speaks as tho I kept

²⁹ Bingham to Bolles, Nov. 9, 1832, ABFMS.

³⁰ Research has failed to unearth her name. Bingham to Bolles, Aug. 3, 1831, ABFMS.

³¹ Within a year of Sunday's arrival no less than eight Methodist missionaries (both an American and a Canadian contingent) would take up residence at the Sault: Frederick A. Norwood, "Conflict of Cultures: Methodist Efforts with the Ojibway, 1830-1880," *Religion in Life* 48(Autumn, 1979):360-376; Bingham to Bolles, Aug. 2, 1832, ABFMS. On Tanner's baptism, see Bingham, Journal, Aug. 21, 1831.

LEWIS CASS, governor of Michigan Territory



the money from him. . . . But I find by your August account that he is unpaid for the last quarter, and conclude that your funds are exhausted. For the amount due to him please draw a draft in the usual form but leave the endorsement blank. But I beg you to pay him, even if you have to borrow money, on your own credits or mine, as I would not for any consideration, that the poor man should suffer for his money."

SCHOOLCRAFT refused to take Tanner back, as might be expected. Nonetheless, the interpreter remained at the settlement from the fall of 1830 to 1831, spending most of his time translating the Gospels with Edwin James. Bingham, however, also made use of Tanner, and increasingly the mission was becoming dependent upon his services. At various times he could be found interpreting at meetings or working with the children at the mission school or instructing other missionaries temporarily sent to the Sault to study Ojibway. At other times he journeyed with Bingham to the Indian encampments that lay 20 and 30 miles away along the shore of Lake Superior. All this Tanner did "cheerfully"—and without "reasonable compensation"—expecting that "he should soon be wholly employed in the service of the mission," for he was, in Bingham's words, laboring "under serious impressions."²⁹

By August, 1831, Bingham could write the Baptist board of some "cheering prospects." "We trust the Lord has given us our Interpreter. Mr. Tanner has recently obtained a hope, has offered himself to the Church, and is now a candidate for Baptism." Bingham asked the board to approve "funds to employ Mr. Tanner at least one half of the time," having "no doubt but that we . . . should find a rich reward in his labours." He also reported that Tanner had recently been married "to a respectable young widow from Detroit."³⁰

Tanner's baptism in the St. Mary's River on August 21, 1831, before a "multitude" of persons, took place the same month that John Sunday first visited Sault Ste. Marie. Sunday, or Shahwundais, a Canadian Ojibway-chief-turned-Methodist-preacher, was one of several native evangelists working out of the Methodist mission established on Grape Island in the Bay of Quinte, Lake Ontario. Touring the region around Mackinac and stirring up much "religious excitement among the Indians," Sunday soon proved to be a force with whom Bingham and the Baptists would have to reckon. When Sunday's tour brought him to Sault Ste. Marie, the Baptists welcomed him "with all the kindness of brethren" and invited him to preach. Baptist diplomacy, however, failed to dissuade Sunday from his intention of establishing a Methodist mission; soon after his arrival Sunday set up his own meeting for the Indians which drew them away from Bingham.³¹

Schoolcraft took advantage of Sunday's presence to extend his controversy with Bingham and to make life more difficult for the Baptists. Using his authority as agent, Schoolcraft promoted Sunday's aim of establishing his own mission at the Sault. Encouragement came in the form of a secret memorial, or petition, to Congress, which supposedly originated with the local chiefs and was signed by them on September 30, 1831. In it the chiefs requested that Congress approve their granting a section of land on nearby Sugar Island to Sunday and his assistants, and that Congress allow the Indians a sum of money to establish a school on the island—the money to come from either the civilization fund or *the Fond du Lac annuity*.³²

Bingham only learned of the Sugar Island memorial much later, but he nonetheless had grounds to suspect that Schoolcraft was once again working hard against Baptist interests. For one thing, he had heard rumors that the agent had collected the Indians in council to make arrangements for establishing Sunday at Sault Ste. Marie. For another, when Sunday and his assistants temporarily departed that fall, to return the next year, Charlotte Johnston and her sister, Jane Schoolcraft, set up a weekly meeting for the Indians "which had never been before." Furthermore, in late November another missionary, Jeremiah Porter, visited this already crowded corner of the vineyard. Porter was a recent graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, an appointee of the American Home Missionary Society, and for the length of his stay in Sault Ste. Marie a guest of the Schoolcrafts. In fact it was Schoolcraft and several army officers (the nucleus of what would become the Presbyterian church at the Sault) who anxiously requested help to counter the Baptist presence.³³

IN THIS jealous atmosphere Bingham was persuaded that having his interpreter on hand was a necessity. He had Tanner and his family move into the mission house, and though expressing reservations about Tanner's fiery temper, he also urged his board to employ the man fully. "I must now be allowed to bring up the case of Mr. Tanner again," he wrote. "We now see the happy results of our labours, when we can have him steadily with us; although we wish by no means to attribute the work to human agency, yet human agents and means must be employed to to [*sic*] carry it on." To advance the work without Tanner's help, Bingham feared, "would be like setting a man to mowing without a scythe."³⁴

But the atmosphere did not improve as the season progressed. When in late November Bingham and Porter decided to join together—to work "hand in hand"—this moment of religious harmony turned out to be nothing more than a prelude to the gathering storm that would break over the settlement in January.

Schoolcraft opposed the idea of Porter sharing a pulpit with Bingham and enlisted enough support among the citizens who had invited Porter to the Sault to suppress the idea of union with the Baptists.³⁵

Schoolcraft's continued animosity naturally upset Bingham's supporters, and none more so than Edwin James, who was so angered that he sent a note to the agent the day before union was voted down, informing him that in the near future he could expect to receive a list of queries relating to his conduct of the agency. James sent his queries to Schoolcraft that December, and three of them concerned Tanner, suggesting that Schoolcraft had taken advantage of Tanner while he was working at the agency.³⁶

In answer to these charges Schoolcraft related the history of Tanner's employment, claiming that Tanner had been treated fairly at the agency. According to his own account, Schoolcraft had not withheld pay but had fulfilled the agreement he and Tanner had made in 1829—rations each day in exchange for an hour of work. Nonetheless, James's charges ring true. Evidence shows that in 1829 Tanner did work more than an hour a day for the agency and also that when cutbacks at the War Department forced Schoolcraft to recall Johnston to Sault Ste. Marie the agent not only continued to pay Johnston as subagent but paid him Tanner's salary as Ojibway interpreter as well.³⁷

In addition, James suggests that Schoolcraft and his brother James were acting together to defraud Tanner. It becomes clear from the queries that Tanner had fallen into debt in 1829 and that his creditor was none other than James Schoolcraft, the man he would allegedly kill 17 years later. The younger Schoolcraft, who lived something less than an exemplary life at Sault Ste. Marie, apparently served the settlement as its unofficial loan officer, the nature of his financial dealings being

³² The memorial to Congress is enclosed in Schoolcraft to George B. Porter, Sept. 30, 1831, OIA, letters received, 1831-1880, Michigan Superintendency, NARG 75.

³³ Bingham to Bolles, Aug. 2, 1832, ABFMS; Jeremiah Porter, "Journal," *Michigan History* 38(Dec., 1954):322-370 and "Sketches of a Pioneer Ministry," *Michigan Historical Collections* 4(1883):84-88.

³⁴ Bingham to Bolles, Dec. 19, 1831, Aug. 2, 1832, ABFMS.

³⁵ Porter, "Journal," 331; James to Schoolcraft, Nov. 29, 1831, Schoolcraft Papers; Benson, "Schoolcraft, James, and the 'White Indian,'" 321-323.

³⁶ James to Schoolcraft, "Queries Addressed to H. R. Schoolcraft, Indian Agent for the United States at the Sault Ste. Marie Michigan," Dec. 9, 1831, Schoolcraft Papers.

³⁷ Here and below, see Schoolcraft to James, Dec. 13, 1831, Tanner to Schoolcraft, Aug. 31, 1829, and United States to George Johnston, Dec. 31, 1830, all in Schoolcraft Papers. For more on the withholding of position and reimbursement, see Tanner to Cass, Nov. [5?], 1830, OIA, letters received, Michigan Superintendency, NARG 75.



DR. EDWIN JAMES

suggested in the queries. According to Edwin James, when Tanner did begin receiving pay for his services in 1830, he encountered “various vexations and injurious delays” when it came time to collect his salary. When he was reimbursed he got certificates which could only be “negotiated at a discount or received in payment for merchandise at advanced prices” in James Schoolcraft’s store. In other words, James Schoolcraft was using the agency to collect his debt from Tanner; in some manner he had gained control over Tanner’s wages, not unlike the way traders commonly laid claim to Indian treaty payments.

Poor Tanner! If Schoolcraft could compare him to *The Tempest’s* Caliban, he in turn could rightly have perceived the agent and his scheming brother as Antonio and Sebastian. Tanner’s services were not fairly compensated. His position went to George Johnston, Schoolcraft’s brother-in-law. And he had fallen into debt to James Schoolcraft, a debt the latter had col-

lected from the agency payroll. No wonder Tanner felt so “out of humor with the world.”

THE CRISIS over John Sunday, which had given rise to James’s queries, climaxed on January 3, 1832. Tanner learned of the Sugar Island memorial from Oshawanno, a local chief, and conveyed this information to Bingham. The missionary invited Oshawanno and a second chief, Wayishki, into his study after prayer meeting that same evening, and there they signed a statement certifying that the idea to establish John Sunday as their missionary had originated with the agent. Two days later when Schoolcraft learned about the conference, he called Oshawanno and Wayishki into the agency and had them sign a second statement to counter the one they had signed for Bingham. And then on the following day he sent Bingham a note, letting the missionary know that he was aware of “the secret transaction” that had taken place in Bingham’s room and that he understood an attempt had been made to blacken his character, “public & private, by a process of no very delicate, or sparing kind.” In a furor, Schoolcraft drew up a list of charges against Bingham (inspired, it seems, by James’s list of queries) and called a public hearing to resolve the matter.³⁸

The hearing resolved so little that it is difficult to see what purpose it served other than that of gratifying Schoolcraft’s pride. The referees, all Schoolcraft supporters, in their final report limited themselves to establishing whether or not the statements against Schoolcraft’s character had actually been made—and by whom—carefully avoiding the real issues between Bingham and the agent.

While the referees found that four of the statements about Schoolcraft’s character were “acknowledged by John Tanner, as having been said by him without the knowledge or consent of Mr. Bingham,” they did not consider the truth of them. Thus Tanner became the focus of the final report, the scapegoat, while everyone else left the hearing feeling vindicated. That day, January 14, Jeremiah Porter recorded in his journal that “The whole evil seems to have originated in the jealousies of Mr B[ingham]” who “has suffered Tanner to push inquiries among the Indians & use such arguments as he pleased.” But according to Bingham, “In the examination it was made to appear by his [Schoolcraft’s] own evidence, that the plan for getting Sunday here did not originate with the Indians at this place, but with the white people; and also that Mr. S. was the very person who first suggested the idea of taking a part of the Fond du Lack annuity from this Mission, and giving it to the Methodists.”³⁹

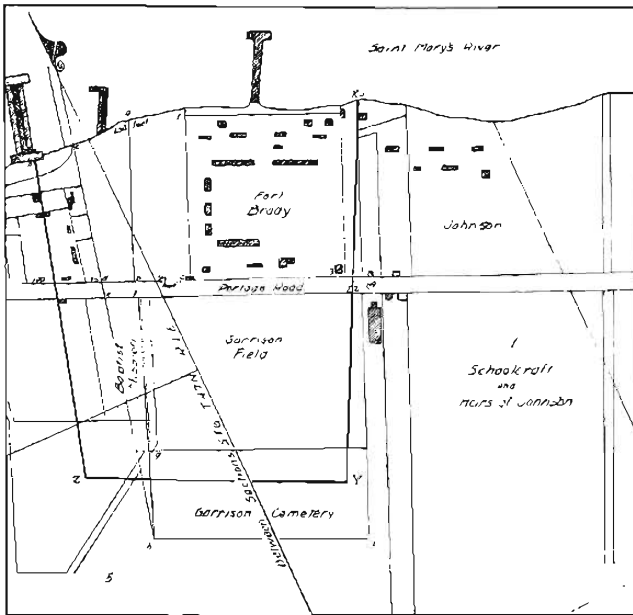
This, briefly, was the quarrel between the agency and the mission. The public meeting supposedly closed the matter. Yet for Tanner troubles were far from over.

³⁸ Here and below, see Bingham, Journal, Jan. 3, 9, 1832; Shawweno’s testimony, Jan. 3, 1832, Bingham Papers; Schoolcraft to Bingham, Jan. 6, 1832, statement signed by Oshawanno and Wayishki, Jan. 5, 1832, and Schoolcraft’s charges against Bingham, Jan. 11, 1832, all in Schoolcraft Papers.

³⁹ Report of referees, Jan. 14, 1832, Schoolcraft Papers. See also Porter, “Journal,” 346.

Instead, the anxiety he was feeling over his inability to discharge the debt he had incurred gave rise in the next year to new conflict, this time with Bingham.

AT THE OUTSET of 1832 Tanner not only expected to recover his lost wages (Schoolcraft, at James's insistence, having filed a claim for Tanner with the War Department) but also expected to be appointed full-time interpreter to the mission. He would thus be in a position to pay off his debt and to establish himself



THIS PLAN of Sault Ste. Marie, copied from an 1833 map, shows the mission and Schoolcraft properties.

securely. The prospects for Tanner achieving his goals looked bright at first. His new wife, along with two soldiers from the fort, was baptized that winter, clearing the way for the Tanners' closer participation in the mission family; the American Bible Society expressed an interest in printing his and James's translation of the New Testament; and Bingham was again appealing to his board to "fully employ Mr. Tanner in the Mission." This time the board responded enthusiastically: "respecting Mr. Tanner . . . [we] sho[uld] be glad to learn from him the terms on which he will become interpreter to the mission . . . Let him write me on the subject, & we will reply without delay."⁴⁰

Tanner wrote to Bolles in May about the same time that James left Sault Ste. Marie for Boston. There the doctor met with the Baptist board to discuss plans for publishing his and Tanner's translations. The board finally decided to employ Tanner for \$300 a year. Bingham was to name the period when Tanner's salary would begin and inform the interpreter of the decision.

"I should write Mr. Tanner," explained Bolles, "but owing to the shortness of the time, cannot by this opportunity.—Hope you will give him the above information relating to himself, and that it may be acceptable to him."⁴¹

This letter did not arrive at Sault Ste. Marie until October, 1832. Had it reached the mission house earlier Tanner's fortunes might have turned out quite differently, for, as Bingham explained to the board, its failure to respond to the letter Tanner had sent them in May had been a "means of fretting and chafing his [Tanner's] mind." Bingham believed the problems that arose that fall between Tanner and his wife might have been avoided had Tanner received word of his appointment sooner.⁴²

The incident Bingham was referring to in his letter was one that most enraged Tanner against the community and one that needs some clarification: the removal of Tanner's new wife from the settlement. According to Porter, present when Tanner made a confession of sin to the members of Bingham's church, Tanner indeed was behaving badly at the time. Tanner's cruelty had caused his son to run away from home, the church to consider disciplinary steps, and his wife to speak of leaving him. Jealousy was the reason Porter gave for Tanner's behavior. His wife had been receiving visits from the soldiers with whom she had been baptized the preceding winter and to whom she had become attached "as Christian friends," and Tanner had become convinced that she was in love with these friends.⁴³

One day at the mission house Tanner became upset when his wife went into another room "to speak of her grievances." He then left the mission house, walked in the direction of the village, and on the way to the village came upon his runaway son to whom he adminis-

⁴⁰ Tanner's claim was disallowed; considering Schoolcraft's prejudicial statement against it, which the agent had submitted to the War Department a few months earlier, this decision could scarcely have surprised the agent: Herring to Schoolcraft, April 6, 1832, OIA, Letters Received by the Agent at Sault Ste. Marie, NARG 75; Schoolcraft, "Statement," Schoolcraft Papers. For the quotations, see Bingham to Bolles, Jan. 26, Aug. 2, 1832, and Bolles to Bingham, Feb. 7, 1832, Bingham Papers.

⁴¹ Bingham to Bolles, Aug. 2, Sept. 13, 1832, and Bolles to Bingham, July 3, 1832, Bingham Papers. The army reassigned James to duty in Annapolis shortly after his New York trip.

⁴² Bolles to Bingham, Aug. 25, 1832, Bingham Papers; Bingham to Bolles, Sept. 13, 1832, ABFMS.

⁴³ Here and below, see Porter, Journal no. 8, Oct. 6, 1832, Chicago Historical Society. This particular one (Autumn, 1832) has not been published. It should be kept in mind, however, that Porter's sympathy for Tanner was not great, also that Porter did not witness the removal of Mrs. Tanner firsthand.

tered a severe beating. For this he was arrested and jailed. His wife, hearing of the arrest, considered it an answer to her prayers, and the next day—friends having paid her passage on a vessel bound for Detroit—she fled the Sault, thankful to get away with her life.

This was hardly Tanner's point of view. In his letter to Van Buren, Tanner failed even to mention the beating of his runaway son and his own subsequent arrest. For him the central issue was the intruding of white authorities into his world. According to Tanner, he and his wife that day were separated in the street by two soldiers and his child taken forcefully from his arms. Moreover, it had not been his wife's desire to be separated from him. He related that later, when he found her again in a small village outside Detroit, she told him that the idea to leave him had been Bingham's.

Tanner's letter to Van Buren, read next to Porter's journal, provides a rare opportunity to compare different cultural perceptions of the same event. Tanner's perceptions are those of the Ottawa-Ojibway being displaced by American settlement; Porter's, those of the American colonist on the Michigan frontier. Porter emphasizes Tanner's cruelty, as do other white accounts of the incident. For Tanner, on the other hand, the issues are the breaking up of his world, the loss of his integrity, his powerlessness and displacement, and the suffering caused him by white authorities. Indeed, the hand of authority is an image repeated throughout the Van Buren letter, a document which makes clear that the departure of his wife not only deeply disturbed him, but marked the beginning of his complete estrangement from the community. Her removal confirmed his suspicions that Bingham, Schoolcraft, the mission family, the entire settlement, perhaps the "civilization" to which he had returned, were darkly opposed to him.⁴⁴

THAT FALL Bingham performed a "painful duty" and informed the board that "we have severe trials with our Interpreter Mr. Tanner . . . whom we have now every

⁴⁴ For other versions of Tanner and his white wife, see J. Fletcher Williams, ed., "Reminiscences of Mrs. Ann Adams," *Minnesota Historical Collections* 6(1894):112-115; Ann H. Hulbert and Sophia H. Buchanan, "Sketches of the Life of Rev. Abel Bingham," *Michigan Historical Collections* 2(1877):155.

⁴⁵ Here and below, see Bingham to Bolles, Sept. 13, 19, 1832, ABFMS.

⁴⁶ Bingham to Bolles, Nov. 9, 1832, ABFMS. Tanner was restored on Nov. 3, 1832, according to Jotham Meeker, Journal, in Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka. Meeker was at the time assigned to Bingham's mission.

⁴⁷ Bolles to Bingham, Feb. 11, 1833, Bingham Papers; Bingham to Bolles, April 5, 1833, ABFMS.

⁴⁸ Bingham to Bolles, June 12, 1833, ABFMS. See also Tanner to Van Buren, p. 25, above.

reason to fear we shall be obliged to exclude. . . . How the Lord will provide for us we know not but we trust he will provide in some way." Provide an *interpreter* was what Bingham meant, one with Tanner's manifest skills. For shortly afterward not only did John Sunday return to spend the winter in Sault Ste. Marie, he returned with his associates. Bingham feared that Sunday's influence, together with that of Porter and the Presbyterians, would "carry a pretty heavy tide" against the mission, unless the Baptists could be assured of "an interpreter by whom we could explain the scriptures properly." Urgently Bingham wrote Bolles, without waiting for a reply to his previous letter. He was "now indulging some hope that the affair with Mr. Tanner will be settled." His church had met to investigate the subject, and Tanner had shown "a desire to remove the difficulties by confession." Bingham asked the board to leave to his discretion the decision to employ Tanner.⁴⁵

Soon Bingham happily informed Bolles that Tanner had been restored to "fellowship and confidence"—a mercy to Bingham who had not learned Ojibway. With competition from Sunday's Indian meetings, there had "never been a time when his [Tanner's] services were more needed." Bingham argued that, under the circumstances, and considering Tanner's previous labors, the sum allowed the interpreter earlier was insufficient. Tanner had been unemployed for over two years "and rather than to leave the mission, and translating, he has remained here when he has had encouragement of employment elsewhere, and with all his industry has fallen in debt between 2 & three hundred dollars. Now he wants to be able to discharge his debts and live, and that is all he requires." Bingham asked an allowance of \$400 a year until Tanner could subsist on less and recommended that his salary start November 1, 1832.⁴⁶

But just as it had done previously, the board waited and then failed to confirm Tanner's salary. By the spring of 1833 it was evident that Tanner's patience was wearing out and that his relationship to the Baptist community had again reached breaking point. "Our interpreter discovers a bad spirit," jotted Bingham in his journal for April 20, "& we have great reason to fear that we shall be constrained to fully dismiss him." The entry for May 31 is similarly depressed: "We could not find it in our heart to withdraw fellowship from him, but hold him on suspension for a time, and requested our Pastor [Bingham?] to write to his wife requesting her to return with him."⁴⁷

It was at this time that Tanner made a trip to Detroit in search of his wife, returning July 4. Bingham meanwhile had again written to Bolles in regard to Tanner's salary, complaining that he had "received no other information of the approval of that Bd. for our doings with Mr. Tanner, & of the allowance made him."⁴⁸

But still no word came from Boston, and finally in September Tanner demanded payment for his services. Bingham paid him but had to borrow money to do so. Beset with other problems (the Methodists had settled permanently on the Canadian side, the Presbyterians had started a school in competition with Bingham's own school) and perhaps hoping against hope to retain Tanner—Bingham did not inform the board of his settlement with Tanner until October 15. On that day, however, he forwarded the discouraging news. "Men filling any important station in Zion must have their trials," he grieved. "If I mistake not, in my last, I hinted at severe trials with our Interpreter. I may now say that our trials with him for some time have been pretty severe; and the 4th Inst. we excluded him from our fellowship, and have dismissed him from the service of the Mission."⁴⁹

WITH Tanner's exclusion from the Baptist church in October of 1833 his traces become more difficult to follow. Until the "Tanner Summer" of 1846, records permit only fleeting, disappointing glimpses. These suggest growing isolation and despair and even raise

questions about Tanner's sanity. In 1842 he was reported living in a small white house on government ground below the fort, surviving on the produce—potatoes, cabbage, turnips, carrots, and beets—of four acres of ground. His hair by that time had grown considerably gray, and his face had thinned and was turning tawny. He was suffering from a disease of the heart, convulsions, pains in his head. He was also suffering from loneliness, wishing to return to the Ohio region to be with his sister, but having no money. Unable to endure his life any longer, he visited Bingham shortly before the murder of James Schoolcraft and implored the missionary to allow him to move into the mission house, entreating Bingham to accept him again as his interpreter.⁵⁰

But this was not to be. There was really no chance that Tanner, an Indianized white man, would ever gain a position of equality among the whites at Sault Ste. Marie. Hostility toward Indians in general and attitudes of cultural superiority assured this. Yet more often than not Tanner's failure to regain entry into that world has been blamed on Tanner himself, attributed to his temperament and divided loyalties. There can be no doubt that living across cultures created problems of self-image for Tanner. Yet this simple assertion does not go very far toward actually explaining his troubles. It leaves out of account his age and failing health, the impossible transformations expected of him as a Christian convert, and the protracted difficulties he encountered when it came to collecting payment for his services. Neither does it take into account the personality of Henry Schoolcraft, whose own problems of self-image caused difficulties with his peers at Sault Ste. Marie and drove him first to cheat and then to discredit John Tanner.

TANNER'S LATER YEARS

- | | |
|--------|--|
| 1837 | Suspected of killing a cow belonging to mission. Arrested and confined for threats against Bingham: while he is in jail, his house broken into and \$100 taken. |
| 1838 | Again suspected of killing mission livestock; again arrested. Confrontation with Henry Schoolcraft in a canoe house where the agent had gone to inspect government merchandise. |
| 1840 | Sometime during this decade married an Ojibway woman from the village at Little Rapids. |
| 1846 | Resumed threats, this time against Bingham, Schoolcraft, Hulbert, Methodist missionary William H. Brockway, and a mixed-blood man named Tasock. |
| June | Requested reinstatement as Bingham's interpreter; visited by Dr. Charles Lee, who wanted to discuss the state of medicine among the Indians. Lee described Tanner's expression as "demoniac." |
| July | Tanner's house set on fire; burned to ashes. |
| July 6 | Tanner last reported seen near the mission house; the son of Tasock fired upon (but missed) with a charge of a ball and two buckshots. Shortly after noon, James Schoolcraft, walking out of view from his farmhouse, is shot at close range and killed by a charge of a ball and two buckshots. |

⁴⁹ Bingham to Bolles, Sept. 17, Oct. 15, 1833, ABFMS.

⁵⁰ For this paragraph and the accompanying chronology, see Bingham, *Journal*; Schoolcraft, *Memoirs*, 601; Tanner, letter headed "Sault Ste Marie July 26 1842," Draper Manuscript Collection, Series O, vol. 2. in State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison; Bingham to Solomon Peck, July 31, 1846, ABFMS; Charles A. Lee, "John Tanner, The Supposed Assassin of James L. Schoolcraft," *Lake Superior News and Miners' Journal* (Sault Ste. Marie), Aug. 29, 1846; Gilbert, "John Tanner," 199; Hulbert and Buchanan, "Life of Abel Bingham," 155; Anna Marie Schoolcraft to Henry R. Schoolcraft, July 27, 1846, Schoolcraft Papers.

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