

gestive of an ever-ready welcome to friends and strangers alike; when the last morsel of food or family raiment was cheerfully divided with those who were in need, and when a man's word was his bond. He was an exemplary Christian, devoted to his family and friends and to things righteous. He was a member of the Catholic Church and was ever zealous in his religious duties up to the time of his death.

THEODORE H. BEAULIEU

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### A LAWYER'S VIEW OF THE KENSINGTON RUNE STONE

That the truth or falsity of the inscription on the Kensington rune stone will ever be proved to the satisfaction of all investigators is very doubtful. The available evidence is too meager to admit of a final solution of the problem in accordance with the canons of historical criticism. Interest in the subject continues unabated, however, and justifies the publication of the following argument by Mr. Charles C. Willson of Rochester, Minnesota. In a letter accompanying the manuscript Mr. Willson states that, as a member of the Minnesota Historical Society, he is "not content to rest under the presumption" that he agrees with the conclusion of the museum committee of the society as set forth in its report in volume 15 of the *Minnesota Historical Collections*.

MR. OLE W. ANDERSON.

DEAR DOCTOR:

On November 8, 1898, on the farm of Olof Ohman on the southeast quarter of section fourteen, Solem Township, Douglas County, Minnesota, about three miles northeast from Kensington, was found a slab of flinty rock with an inscription in runic letters cut into it, which, literally translated, reads as follows:

"Eight Goths and twenty-two Norwegians upon a journey of discovery from Vinland westward. We had a camp by two skerries one day's journey north from this stone. We were out fishing one day. When we returned home we found ten men red with blood and dead. A V M, save us from evil.

“Have ten men by the sea to look after our vessel fourteen days’ journey from this island. Year 1362.”

In the fall of 1866 the first railroad to the north or west from St. Paul was completed to St. Cloud. At that city extensive quarries of granite were opened and large quantities of their products have since been manufactured and sold. Some years over half a million dollars have been realized. Many of the quarrymen and stonecutters have been emigrants from Norway, some with a fairly liberal education and no doubt familiar with the runic alphabet. In 1879 the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad was completed to Ortonville at the foot of Bigstone Lake, where other granite quarries were subsequently opened and extensively worked with employees of like origin and attainments.

In the region to the north of Kensington, in Pope, Douglas, and Otter Tail counties, are more than fifty lakes, each exceeding a hundred acres in extent, and all of the purest water and abounding in fish. There are no stones in position. The surface is about two hundred feet higher than at St. Cloud or Ortonville, where the valleys are down to primitive rock. The subsoil is clay, holding the rainwater and making these lakes possible. Some have outlets running eastward into the Mississippi; the outlets of others flow westward into the Red River of the North. Most of the lakes are smaller now than they once were, as their outlets have worn deeper channels through the clay subsoil. On their banks in the fishing season many people from St. Cloud and from Ortonville have been accustomed to camp and fish and spend an unconventional outing, sleeping in tents or in wagons and enjoying primitive life. Among them those Norwegian stonecutters were not wanting.

Doctor, you are well aware that your countrymen in Minnesota hold with tenacity to the legendary belief that the old vikings discovered North America before Columbus and that they give credence to every seeming corroborating circumstance. Some St. Cloud or Ortonville stonecutter could easily have fashioned this Kensington stone in his home shop from observations made on previous fishing trips, and, on his next trip, have taken it out and planted it, set out a tree over it, and so disposed the whole that, when the land came to be cleared off and plowed, the stone would

be discovered and would become seemingly a further evidence of early Norse exploration of this region. In the higher schools in Norway the runic alphabet is well known. It can be found even in the larger English dictionaries.<sup>1</sup> Some of the stonecutters in these granite quarries at St. Cloud and Ortonville were no doubt familiar with the characters, and were capable, with their engraving tools, of cutting the inscription upon the stone. To some men such a trick would seem a pleasant and innocent diversion. It appears likely, then, that the Kensington stone had some such origin.

While this stone was in the rooms of the Minnesota Historical Society at St. Paul, I carefully examined it. Its straight unweathered surface, its sharp corners, its length as compared with its thickness, all seem to testify to a modern separation from its original situs. It had not been weathered and rounded like the boulders of the glacial period found in the vicinity. It is said that there are no other stones like it in texture, shape, and scant weathering in the region of those lakes.

In the fall of 1868, accompanied by William McCullough and Rodney Whitney, I went to St. Cloud and obtained from the United States land office plats of several townships on the southern and eastern borders of this undinal region. We employed an explorer with his team, covered wagon, dog and gun, filled his tin-lined chest with boiled ham, roast chicken, bread, pies, cake, canned fruit, and coffee, and went northwest over the unbroken prairie. For a week we lived out of doors. We ate from our store, standing around our wagon, and at night slept under it, rolled in buffalo robes.

We selected fifty quarter sections located up and down the prairie and returned to the land office and entered them with agricultural college scrip issued to the state of Connecticut and sold by it for less than one hundred dollars a quarter section. To-day two or three acres of that land are worth as much as Connecticut got for one hundred and sixty. Our teamster and others at St. Cloud in the summer were engaged in the business of taking fishing, hunting, and land-seeking parties out to this lake region, and in the winter were employed in the pineries to

<sup>1</sup> *The Century Dictionary*, 8: 5273 (1913 ed.).

the east on Rum River hauling logs to the streams to be floated out in the spring freshets. My observations, made during that week, lead me to believe that the Kensington stone was not brought by glaciers or other natural processes to the vicinity where it was found in 1898, but that it came there by wagon from St. Cloud or Ortonville. I saw no stones similar to it in shape, character, or scant weathering on that outing.

Advocates of the authenticity of this runic inscription generally agree that the twenty explorers could not have come by a route other than by Hudson Bay. Professor George Bryce of Winnipeg, in his history of the Hudson's Bay Company, says: "The swampy treeless flats that surrounded the Bay simply change from the frozen snow-clad expanse which stretches as far as the eye can see in winter, to the summer green of the unending grey willows and stunted shrubs that cover the swampy shores. For a few open months the green prevails, and then nature for eight months assumes her winding sheet of icy snow."<sup>2</sup> The whole country south and west of Hudson Bay for more than two hundred miles is alternately swamps and barren rocks. It remains to this day for the most part untraversed and unknown. Those twenty explorers in the year 1362 could have come to Kensington only by ascending the Nelson River in row-boats about four hundred miles to Lake Winnipeg and thence south up that lake two hundred and fifty miles to its head, and from that point, after hiding their boats in the willows, by pushing on toward the south over the level prairie three hundred miles. Lake Winnipeg is over six hundred feet above the sea and the Nelson River is swift and turbulent, running in a rocky and tortuous channel, with a fall of six hundred feet in four hundred miles. No other river of like volume on the continent makes so great a fall in so short a distance. The Mississippi makes no greater in its two thousand miles from Lake Pepin to the Gulf of Mexico. If the Kensington inscription be genuine, these twenty men ascended that river, rowed up the lake, and marched south, leaving near a thousand miles between them and their vessel at the sea, which the inscription states was only fourteen days'

<sup>2</sup> George Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, 373 (Toronto, 1900).

journey back. How did these men subsist? They could have brought in rowboats up the swift current of the river and over the lake no surplus food for their sojourn on the prairie and for the return voyage. They could have had only the spear and the bow and arrows for game. Firearms had not at that time been invented. No experienced army officer would admit that twenty men could make the return journey in fourteen days or subsist, while traveling through such a country, by hunting and fishing.

Ten of the explorers were found dead in their camp near two isolated boulders. They were presumably murdered by savages while the other ten were away fishing. Instead of retreating towards their ship, the ten survivors continued a day's journey to the south, heedless of savage enemies, and employed the time in engraving on this flinty stone. The savages no doubt plundered the camp and carried away arms, clothing, and equipment, and watched for the return of the fishermen with the desire to slay them also. Yet the survivors go a day's journey farther into this hostile country. The instinct of self-preservation seems to have been suspended.

These adventurers must have carried engraving tools with them through all their vicissitudes, and the ten survivors must have taken the steels with them on the fishing excursion so that they did not fall into the hands of the savages who plundered the camp. Can it be that among these ten hardy adventurers there were one or more scholars, who were skilled in stone engraving as well? At that early date not one man in a hundred was able to read and write.

The expedition for discovery from Vinland westward must have been provided with a staunch sea-going vessel fitted out with food and maritime supplies, a crew enlisted, and their wages secured. Some patron must have incurred this expense with a purpose of planting a colony, discovering ores, or seeking some other means of gaining profit. The king was usually such a patron, and a memorial left in the land discovered or explored would not fail to state the name of the king or other patron and of the vessel and its captain and to claim sovereignty by right of discovery. Nothing of this character appears upon the Kensington stone. Those explorers of 1362 could have had no other pur-

pose in raising this stone than to engrave on it some or all of these details. The absence of such information can not be accounted for if the inscription be genuine. For more than two hundred years prior to 1362 runic letters had gone out of common use. In the eleventh century the Roman alphabet succeeded them in Norse literature. Why should these ten surviving explorers engrave this stone in characters no longer in use? In the stress of their circumstances it seems highly improbable that they should spend days cutting an inscription or make use of letters long forgotten in order to inform posterity of their visit to these lakes.

More than five hundred years elapsed between the date of the supposed engraving upon this stone and its discovery in 1898. The inscription is cut not over a quarter of an inch in depth, yet it remains nearly as clear and distinct as if it had been made but twenty years ago; not a word or even a letter is blurred. In New England, where the weather conditions are similar to those in Minnesota, inscriptions on tombstones exposed for one hundred years are very much effaced and often illegible. Repeated freezing and thawing and the action of acids in the decaying surface soil in which the Kensington stone was found should, in five hundred years, have utterly obliterated all inscriptions upon it. Volume 15 of the *Minnesota Historical Collections* contains an excellent two-page half-tone reproduction of a photograph of the Kensington stone, showing the clear preservation of the inscription.

When a seed brought by the wind from its parent tree lodges in congenial soil and feels the warmth and moisture of spring, it germinates and sends one sprout up into the air and another down into the soil. If either meets obstruction, it does not divide and part go around on one side and part on the other. The whole goes to the one side or the other, and this rule of vegetable development operates as uniformly below the surface as above. If either sprout be severed, the young tree may die or two or more shoots may start out to take the office of the severed part. When the Kensington stone was discovered in 1898, a poplar tree five or six inches in diameter was growing above it with two main roots of equal dimensions, one at either side. A reproduction of a pencil sketch of these roots is shown in the report published

by the Minnesota Historical Society.<sup>3</sup> To one familiar with tree culture the presumption is strong that this poplar tree had been transplanted fifteen or twenty years before the stone was discovered, the central root cut out, and small lateral branches trained to either side of the stone to grow in rivalry for the office of the severed central part. The poplar tree is of rapid growth and short life, and there is nothing to indicate that this tree had its origin earlier than the fishing visits of the stonecutters from Ortonville and St. Cloud.

Knowing of my fifty years' experience in the trial of questions of fact before juries, you have asked my impressions of the Kensington stone. I have now tersely stated some of the principal facts that the evidence furnishes, and indicated my opinion. I submit the case for your verdict.

CHARLES C. WILLSON

ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA, February 26, 1917

#### RELATIONS WITH WESTERN CANADA

The discovery of the papers of Consul James W. Taylor and the publication of a sketch of his career in the *BULLETIN* for November, 1915, threw a new light upon certain phases of the relations between the United States and western Canada. The following address of the Pioneers of Rupert's Land to Consul General Jones, on the occasion of his departure from Winnipeg in 1913, tells of the close connections and friendly relations between the pioneers of the old Hudson's Bay territories and those of Minnesota, and shows the interlocking of the economic development of the two regions. It was prepared by Mr. Isaac Cowie of Winnipeg, secretary of the association, who came to western Canada in 1867 as an apprentice clerk of the Hudson's Bay Company. Mr. Cowie is well versed in the history of the western country and has written a narrative of his seven years' service with the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Qu'Appelle, from 1867 to 1874, entitled *The Company of Adventurers* (Toronto, 1913). Dr. John Edward Jones, to

<sup>3</sup> *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 15: 245.



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