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The Ojibwe Journals of Edmund F. Ely, 1833–1849

The OJIBWE JOURNALS OF EDMUND F. ELY, *1833–1849*

EDMUND F. ELY

Edited and with an introduction by
Theresa M. Schenck

University of Nebraska Press | *Lincoln and London*

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Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Ely, Edmund Franklin, 1809–1882.
The Ojibwe journals of Edmund F. Ely, 1833–1849 / Edmund F. Ely ;
edited and with an introduction by Theresa M. Schenck.
p. cm. Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8032-7140-1 (cloth : alk. paper) 1. Ely, Edmund Franklin, 1809–1882—Diaries. 2. Ojibwa Indians—Missions—Wisconsin—Fond du Lac. 3. Presbyterians—Missions—Wisconsin—Fond du Lac. 4. Missionaries—Wisconsin—Fond du Lac—Biography. I. Schenck, Theresa M. II. Title.
E99.C6E43 2012 977.004'97333—dc23
2012021980

Designed and set in Garamond Premier Pro
by A. Shahan.

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Introduction

On July 5, 1833, a young divinity student and teacher of vocal music bade farewell to his colleagues and friends of the Fourth Presbyterian Church in Albany, New York, and set out for a new life as a missionary teacher to the Ojibwe of western Lake Superior. He traveled by rail, canal, stage, steamship, schooner, canoe, and even by foot, finally reaching his assigned destination, Sandy Lake on the Upper Mississippi River, on September 19. He was to spend the next sixteen years living and working among a people he most often described as "poor heathen," a people his strong religious convictions told him needed to be led to Jesus Christ and eternal salvation.

Edmund Franklin Ely was born on August 3, 1809, in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, the eldest of four sons of Judah Ely (1780–1826) and Lucia Sisson (1791–1830). In 1824 his family moved to Geauga County, Ohio, following his maternal grandparents, who had moved there two years earlier. Young Frank, as he was called by his family, did not remain long on the family farm, and by the end of 1825, at the age of sixteen, he appears to have gone to Rome, New York, perhaps to the home of his father's great-uncle, Rev. Henry Ely, a retired pastor of the Congregational Church in North Killingworth, Connecticut.[1]

Religion played an important part in the lives of these New England natives. The Ely genealogy contains numerous names of "Deacons" as well as a few "Reverends," indicating an active participation in the church. Most were Congregationalists or Presbyterians, but Methodist societies were growing throughout the Northeast, and even in the small town of Wilbraham a Methodist church was established before the end of the eighteenth century. Ely's maternal grandfather, August Sisson, was himself one of the principal founders of the Methodist-Episcopal church in Hambden, Ohio.[2] And while there were similarities among the tenets of each denomination, there were differences, too. Congregationalists and Presbyterians stressed the need for man to overcome his sinful nature; Methodists emphasized a doctrine of general redemption and free grace.[3] Edmund F. Ely was heir to both traditions.

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[1] Ely, *Records of the Descendants*, 43; 226–27.

In 1824 the evangelical movement, animated by the powerful preaching of Charles G. Finney, had begun to sweep across New York State and was especially strong in Oneida County. Opposing the rigid Calvinist position officially held by the Presbyterians, Finney preached the gospel of salvation, that men and women are not predestined for eternal life but, with God's grace, can overcome their sinful nature, change their own hearts, and achieve salvation. He emphasized the Bible as the true word of God and taught that only by following its precepts can one be saved. People must have a deep conviction of their own sinfulness and commit themselves totally to Jesus Christ and the word of God. True conversion, turning to Christ, necessitated a spirit broken before God and a new heart.[4]

Ely himself tells us that it was on January 4, 1826, that he was converted at one of Finney's revivals in Rome, New York. In his commitment to his newfound religious spirit, Ely determined to undertake to spread the word of God as a preacher and, like the eighteenth-century missionary David Brainerd before him, convince the "poor benighted Indians" to accept the Christian idea of salvation. As preparation for entering the ministry, he attended Oneida Institute in Whitesboro, New York, and later the divinity school established by Rev. Edward Norris Kirk at the Fourth Presbyterian Church in Albany, New York. Like many young men of the time, he needed to support himself, and he appears to have spent his vacations teaching voice and conducting the choir at churches first in Utica and then in Albany to earn money.[5]

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[2] Sisson and Sisson, *Descendants of Richard and Mary Sisson*, 169.

[3] Gorrie, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 72.

[4] Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney*, 47–51.

[5] Miscellaneous Notes, Edmund Franklin Ely and Family Papers, Northeast Minnesota Historical Center.

In 1833 Ely learned of the work of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM), whose missionaries were already spreading the Gospel among the Native people of the United States, as well as in Asia and Africa. For reasons of health that he never revealed, he decided to leave the studies that would prepare him for the ministry and instead enter into the missionary field as a teacher. He wrote to David Greene, secretary of the board, asking for an appointment to one of the Indian missions. Results were immediate. Greene notified him of his acceptance on June 28, 1833, and by July 5 Ely was on his way to join the Lake Superior Mission.[6] There, over a period of sixteen years, he would write of his life and adventures, his observations and labors, his religious experiences and doubts, in twenty journals, eighteen of which are published here for the first time. And while they vary in subject matter and detail, they do give a picture of missionary life, as well as Ojibwe life, at a little known time and place in American history.

The Ojibwe of Western Lake Superior

The Ojibwe, or Anishinaabeg, as they call themselves, were first known to the French as inhabitants of Sault Ste. Marie.[7] Long before the French met them, however, they had been moving west in small hunting bands around both the northern and the southern shores of Lake Superior. At the end of the lake, or Fond du Lac, they encountered the Dakota Sioux, and there ensued more than one hundred years of warfare, punctuated by brief periods of peace, as they struggled for the same resources. It was from Fond du Lac that the Ojibwe leader Biauswah made his incursions against the Dakota, finally reaching Sandy Lake about the middle of the eighteenth century.[8] From the village he established there, small bands of Ojibwe warriors continued to move onto Dakota lands, first in hunting parties and then as "settlers." Hence, there was always a connection between the Ojibwe of Sandy Lake and the Ojibwe of Fond du Lac, just as there was a connection between the Ojibwe of Sandy Lake and the Ojibwe of Mille Lacs, or between the Ojibwe of the Mississippi and the Leech Lake Ojibwe. Still, they were not a single tribe.

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[6] Memoranda of Letters written by Mr. Greene while on his way to Mackinac, Papers of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (hereafter ABCFM), ABC 1.3.1. (Reel 1). All quotes from the ABCFM Papers are by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

[7] Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 51:61.

[8] Warren, *History of the Ojibway People*, 120.

The Anishinaabeg at this time were a band society, that is, living in loosely organized and flexible groups often held together by kinship. Although they did not form permanent, year-round settlements, they did move seasonally within a specific area, as they carried out their traditional economic activities of fishing, hunting, and gathering. Some bands joined together to form larger villages, but primarily government was by band leader. There was no principal chief: it was simply not the Ojibwe way. It sometimes happened, however, that the French, and later the British or the American government, designated one person to speak for the whole, often endowing them with a medal, a flag, and even a coat. But since the time of the French, chieftainship also brought with it certain advantages and rewards: more and better gifts, trips to Montreal or Washington, and often marriage of the chief's daughter to an important trader.[9] The role of chief became a prize to be sought, and a struggle between two claimants, Maangozid and Nindibens, figures importantly in the Ely narrative (February to June 1836).

The Ojibwe, Missionaries, and the Fur Trade

European fur traders had been coming to western Lake Superior at least since the mid-seventeenth century, although the aboriginal people of the area had been trading in furs even earlier. Neither trade nor the economic value of furs was unknown to them. By the late eighteenth century one fur trading company in particular, the North West Company, had established trading forts in the western Lake Superior area (Kaministiquia and Fond du Lac) as well as in the Upper Mississippi region. The Hudson's Bay Company was giving them some competition, but the Indians generally preferred to deal with the North West Company, whose employees often married Native women, and sometimes even stayed in the village after their term of service was completed.[10] Gradually, after Jay's Treaty of 1794 defined the U.S. border in the region, the North West Company withdrew and left the field open to American traders. In 1816 the newly established American Fur Company began to send men into the area and also hired the former employees of the North West Company. Soon it had a monopoly on the fur trade of western Lake Superior south of the border.

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[9] Stewart, *Ermatingers*, 28.

[10] See Schenck, *All Our Relations*. Of the 154 claims filed at La Pointe, more than half were filed by descendants of former North West Company employees, or by men who had themselves been employed by the North West Company.

Missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions came at the invitation of two prominent traders, William A. Aitkin of the Fond du Lac Department, which included the headwaters of the Mississippi, and Lyman M. Warren of La Pointe, which included the region south of Lake Superior.[11] These men were mainly interested in the education of their mixed-blood children, and it was the mixed-bloods who became the primary subjects of instruction. Missionary establishments were at first located at trading posts, and their classes, both secular and religious, were generally attended by fur trade personnel and their children. Missionaries were dependent on the traders for supplies, travel, and communication with the Natives, and their success could be tied to the success of the trader. Fur trade employees, many of them herein nameless, played a significant role in Ely's life as a missionary teacher, and in these journals we meet nearly all the Fond du Lac traders, clerks, and voyageurs of the 1830s. Some of them were among Ely's first students; others figure, either positively or negatively, in his efforts to bring Christianity to the wilderness.

Ely arrived in the waning days of the fur trade, which during two centuries had nearly depleted the animal resources of the western Great Lakes. The Ojibwe had, to some extent, become dependent on European goods, especially guns, cloth, knives, blankets, and kettles, and it was often the need for these objects that encouraged the Indians to hunt for the traders who provided them. Still, they would not hunt more than necessary, since they had no need for more goods than they could carry or use. Yet throughout these years the Indians could and did maintain their traditional way of life. There was a season for everything: fishing, hunting, religious ceremonies, gathering wild rice, and making maple sugar. During his career as a missionary teacher Ely witnessed, and was sometimes part of, these traditional activities.

But while traders wanted the Indians to hunt, trap, and move from camp to camp, the missionaries wanted them to settle, practice agriculture, and become Christians. Missionaries and traders did not have the same objective, and this eventually led to the separation of mission from trading post, a pattern found at Yellow Lake, Snake River, and eventually at La Pointe.

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[11] Lyman M. Warren to David Greene, March 8, 1833, Northwest Mission Manuscripts.

The decline in furs, the development of the lumber industry, the interest in mining for copper and iron, and especially the introduction of alcohol all contributed to changes in the traditional Ojibwe way of life. As miners and lumbermen encroached on Ojibwe lands, the U.S. government became more interested in making this land available for its own people. Move over, Ojibwe. And they did, but not without a struggle.

The Ojibwe Response

When Ely arrived amid the Sandy Lake Ojibwe on September 19, 1833, he found a people firmly established in their own religious traditions, traditions developed over thousands of years of residence on this continent. At first they were willing to listen politely to the newcomer, for the Ojibwe were a welcoming people, and always open to new ideas. Ely informed them that he had come to teach them the word of God, and they were, of course, curious. The name that missionaries had much earlier suggested for the Judeo-Christian God was *Gichi-Manidoo*, Great Spirit, for they had seen that these people acknowledged a world imbued with all kinds of spirits or powers.[12] But *manidoog* generally spoke to the Ojibwe through dreams and visions, and now they were mildly interested in finding out what the Great Spirit said to the pale-skinned newcomers. They actually enjoyed coming to hear the word of God, not because it was Gichi-Manidoo who spoke to them, but because they were listening to stories, stories of wondrous events, even ordinary events, but certainly stories from another world. Not only are Ojibwe great storytellers themselves, but they also love to hear stories, and they know a good one when they hear it. They were easily able to adapt many of the missionary stories into their own repertoire.

For Ely the Christian missionary, however, it was not the stories that were most important. It was the Ten Commandments, and especially the commandment to "keep holy the Sabbath." This took primary importance in the missionary message. The Indians should not fish or hunt on the Sabbath (a concept totally outside the bounds of nature), nor should they even paddle a canoe. They should rest (although they were often accused of resting too much), listen to the word of God, and pray. All day.

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[12] See Schenck, "Gizhe-Manidoo, Missionaries, and the Anishinaabeg."

The Christian religion was so much associated with this idea of prayer, especially common prayer, that those who became Christian (or even tried it out) were called "praying Indians," and Christianity was *anamiewin*, the praying religion. Perhaps the Ojibwe, who did not need a special place or time to pray, thought that praying was all that was visible of this new religion. At any rate, Ely believed that the Ojibwe did not really pray, even though he had been present at ceremonies at which prayer was spoken. "Harangues" or speeches, he called them, but seldom prayer.

Another important message of the Christian missionary was the need to acknowledge one's own personal sinfulness. "All mankind are corrupt by nature," Ely wrote on May 15, 1836. Since sin was considered to reside symbolically in the heart, one must seek a "broken heart" to get rid of the sin. The Ojibwe, however, were reluctant to accept that they were born in sin, that their hearts were bad. They acknowledged that they sometimes did wrong, but it did not render their hearts full of evil. They had no need of the salvation the missionary was offering them.

From the Ojibwe viewpoint, the practice of medicine was an aspect of religion, and they expected the newcomer who brought them the word of God to also bring healing. Ely was frequently called to the bedside of the sick or dying. And while he did share his limited knowledge of early nineteenth-century medicine with the Ojibwe who needed help, he neither understood nor respected Ojibwe healing ceremonies. He did, however, make use of Ojibwe knowledge of herbs and, on at least two occasions, the sweat (March 9, 1836; Jan. 4, 1838).

Ely actually began his teaching with music. He was himself a musician, and as he tells us, he had led the choir of the Fourth Presbyterian Church in Albany. Early in his voyage west he had noticed that "the Indians are very fond of music, especially of a lively, animating character" (Aug. 2, 1833). Armed with an early (1829) Ojibwe hymn book by Rev. Peter Jones, he commenced his missionary career by drawing people together to sing. "Have been singing with Indian women and children," he wrote on September 20, 1833, the day after he arrived at Sandy Lake. Music was not only an important part of the curriculum, but it was also a means of teaching Christian beliefs and behavior. Thereafter, singing was a part of every "meeting," as they called these religious gatherings. It also happened, however, that the Indians went only to sing, leaving when the reading (or proselytizing) started (Feb. 17, 1837).

Rev. Sherman Hall, superior of the La Pointe mission, described Ely as "a man of ardent temperament" who had "a happy talent for teaching."[13] It was in this chosen occupation of teaching that Ely at first found the most satisfaction, and he was both practical and innovative in his methods. Later, believing that his fellow missionaries were not dedicated enough to their goal of converting the Indians, he chose to "itinerate" with them to convert them and teach them agriculture by example.

Conflict

At first, on the surface, these journals may seem like a day-by-day account of the daily life of a young missionary in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. But they are in reality a story of conflict, a deep and all-pervading conflict between two vastly different but equally valid religions, each with roots going back thousands of years.

Religion, in its most basic sense, is the human response to the great mysteries of existence: the origin and functioning of the world about us, life, death and an afterlife. It is a part of the cultural heritage of a people. Like culture itself, it does not stand still, but grows and develops, and it can be understood only in its cultural context. Adherents to Christianity have commonly seen it as the one true religion, holding that it alone possesses the means to attain eternal (happiness in the next) life. It is one of the few religions that proselytize, trying to gain adherents and spread throughout the world. In so doing, Christians have sometimes failed to recognize the cultural foundations of religion, seeking to impose a set of rules and rites that may be—and often are—culturally irrelevant to those whom they seek to convert.

The original people of this continent had developed appropriate responses to their world long before they were exposed to Euro-American ideas of Christianity. They saw a world filled with powers, powers that could help them or annihilate them. They already knew how to speak to these powers, listen to them, respect them. American Indian religion is especially concerned with power: recognizing it, honoring it, and even acquiring it.

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[13] Hall to Greene, January 1, 1836, Papers of the ABCFM, ABC 18.3.7. (Reel 765).

At first the Ojibwe saw books as power, the power of the written word, and from the very outset they were interested in acquiring this power. Many Indians, both old and young, came to Ely's classes, and some of the adults did learn to read and write. But as they saw his efforts to change their behavior and teach them to pray in the Christian way, as they realized his opposition to their traditional practices, they began to resist. Class size dwindled, and the missionary teacher had to go after them in their lodges.

For whatever reasons the Ojibwe agreed to let the missionary enter into their lives, they were soon disappointed. The powers Ely brought to the Ojibwe did not make their lives better, although he did assist in burying the dead and healing or caring for the sick. The healing power of medicine was a power the Ojibwe understood and respected, but the word of God that the missionaries brought had little meaning or relevance in their lives. It was not long before the Ojibwe were telling Ely that they would let their children learn to read and write, but there was to be no praying (May 22, 1836). And although he might help to ease the passing of children, he was not to pray for them; parents wanted their children to go to the Indian afterlife (Oct. 23, 1838).

For a while Ely believed he had been successful in converting the Fond du Lac chief Maangozid. He spent much time with him, reading, praying, discussing. And Maangozid said all the right things to convince Ely of his intent and his sincerity. But in the end, Maangozid turned away, Maangozid the powerful medicine man who thought perhaps to gain more power through Ely's Christianity, who complained that Ely did not even share his house with him. In the end he saw that his own people cared more for him than the man in black (May 21, 1837).

The conflict over religious belief and practice extended to one of the most fundamental of all Ojibwe traditions: generosity. Food was to be shared in times of plenty as well as in times of want. Ely, however, while providing flour or soup for the sick, did not share at the level the Ojibwe expected. In

Ojibwe terms, he did not show mercy. When visitors came, he did not offer food. When the young men said they were hungry, he merely reminded them that there were fish in the river (June 11, 1836; June 12, 1837). He was adamant about teaching the Ojibwe to be self-sufficient, to provide for themselves and plan for the future. These were American values, indeed, but contrary to those of a society that placed the group above the individual.

Ely's conflict with Catholic beliefs and practices was as deep as his conflict with Ojibwe culture. The "ignorant, wicked Catholics" so dominant in the fur trade were "little better than heathen" (Dec. 16, 1833; Feb. 14, 1834). They were sinners who believed they had only to confess their sins to a priest to obtain forgiveness. Theirs was a false Christianity (Nov. 22, 1835), while his was the truth. And when he saw Catholic missionary Frederic Baraga baptizing Indians in both La Pointe and Fond du Lac, Ely compared it to Satan bringing converts into the Catholic Church. "Let not the ungodly (Catholics)," he prayed, "pervert thy truth to the ruin of the blind heathen (Feb. 5, 1836)."

Like many evangelical Christians of his time, Ely was intensely devoted to his religious convictions and had little tolerance for those who did not share his beliefs. From the very outset, even on his voyage west, he showed himself to be rigid and self-righteous in his relations with others. Disgusted with the vulgar language and practices of his traveling companions, as well as of the fur trade personnel, he frequently sought refuge in his Bible. As a member of a missionary community, he did not bond well with his peers and eventually grew to criticize the worldliness of the two ordained ministers, Sherman Hall and William T. Boutwell.

Almost two years after his arrival on Lake Superior, Ely met the woman who was to become his wife. Catharine Goulais was only seventeen when she arrived at La Pointe on June 30, 1835, sent as a helper in the missionary endeavor. The daughter of a French voyageur and an Ojibwe woman identified as Josette Grant, she had been raised at the Mackinac mission school since she was eight and given the surname of a prominent donor to the ABCFM, Josiah Bissell of Rochester, New York.[14] It was their common dedication to the Christian cause that drew the two young people together and sustained them throughout their marriage.

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[14] Ely, *Records of the Descendants*, 226.

Catharine was Ely's partner and helpmate. At first it was intended that she assist him in interpreting both from and into Ojibwe, but Ely soon discovered that "she possesses a rather limited knowledge of the language."[15] Nevertheless, she accompanied him on visits to the Indian lodges, conducted classes when her husband could not be present, and did her best to help bring the word of God to the Fond du Lac people. She bore thirteen children, eight while they were living in missionary lodging, and five after they left the field. Only seven survived to adulthood.

Failure

The Ojibwe tolerated Ely as long as they thought he did good. But when he openly preached against the Midewiwin, their most sacred rite, and scoffed at their most fundamental beliefs, they began to oppose him. "Scarce a day passes but the Indians show their hatred or opposition to us," he wrote on June 6, 1838. They resented his residence among them, his use of their resources, his refusal to furnish food for a graveside feast. They shot his cattle, they stole ribbon to adorn the girls in a Midewiwin ceremony, they no longer listened to him when he came to their lodges to read Scripture (June 5, 1837). It was almost more than he could bear when Madweweyaash, the young man he was educating as the first fruit of his missionary endeavors, apostatized and returned to his pagan life (May 2, 1839).

It was not only Indian hostility that was making life difficult for Ely at Fond du Lac. The Ojibwe had heard rumors of the American government's dealings with other aboriginal nations, and they feared the loss of their lands, too. They distrusted the missionaries as emissaries of the government, or at least as people knowledgeable about the government's plans. In addition, Fond du Lac would never become an Indian center: there was simply not enough arable land there to encourage agriculture. Furthermore, the post was becoming less important, as the number of fur-bearing animals in the western Lake Superior region declined and the American Fur Company turned to fishing on the north shore, as they called that part of the Iowa Territory northeast of Fond du Lac. The Indians were no longer spending the winter close to the post but were obliged to go far inland to survive.

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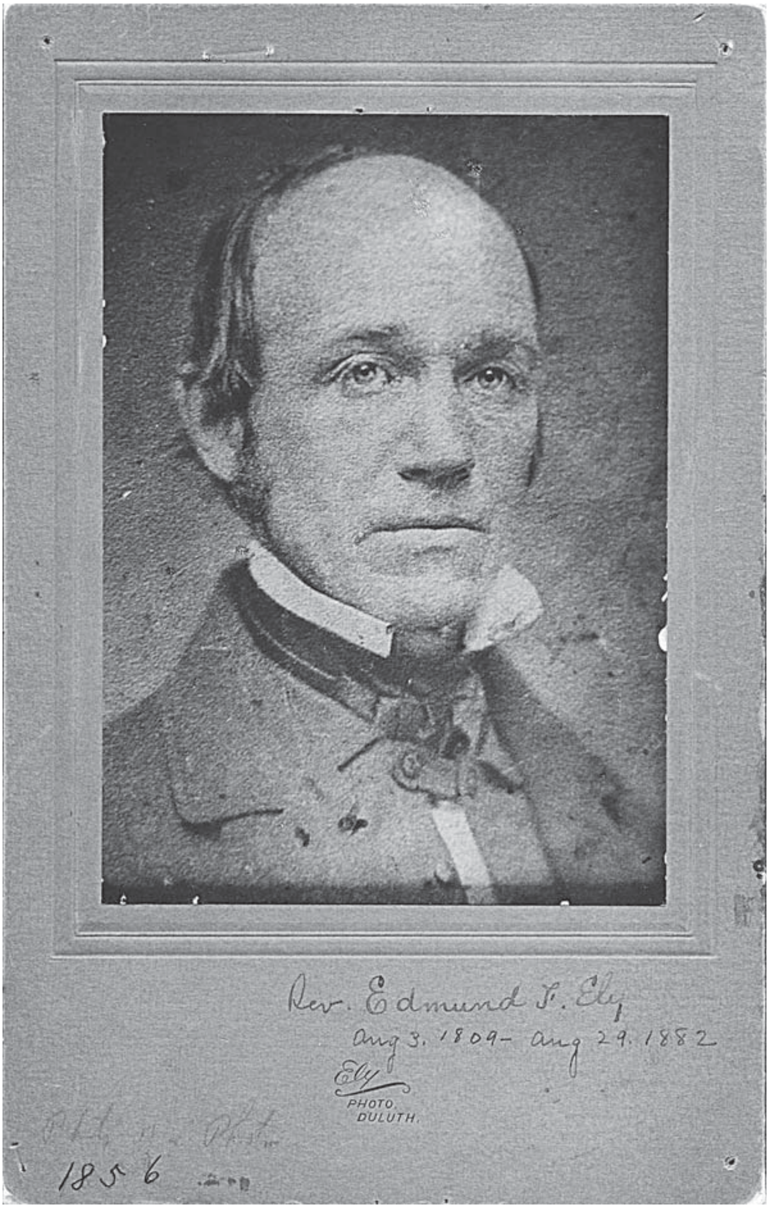
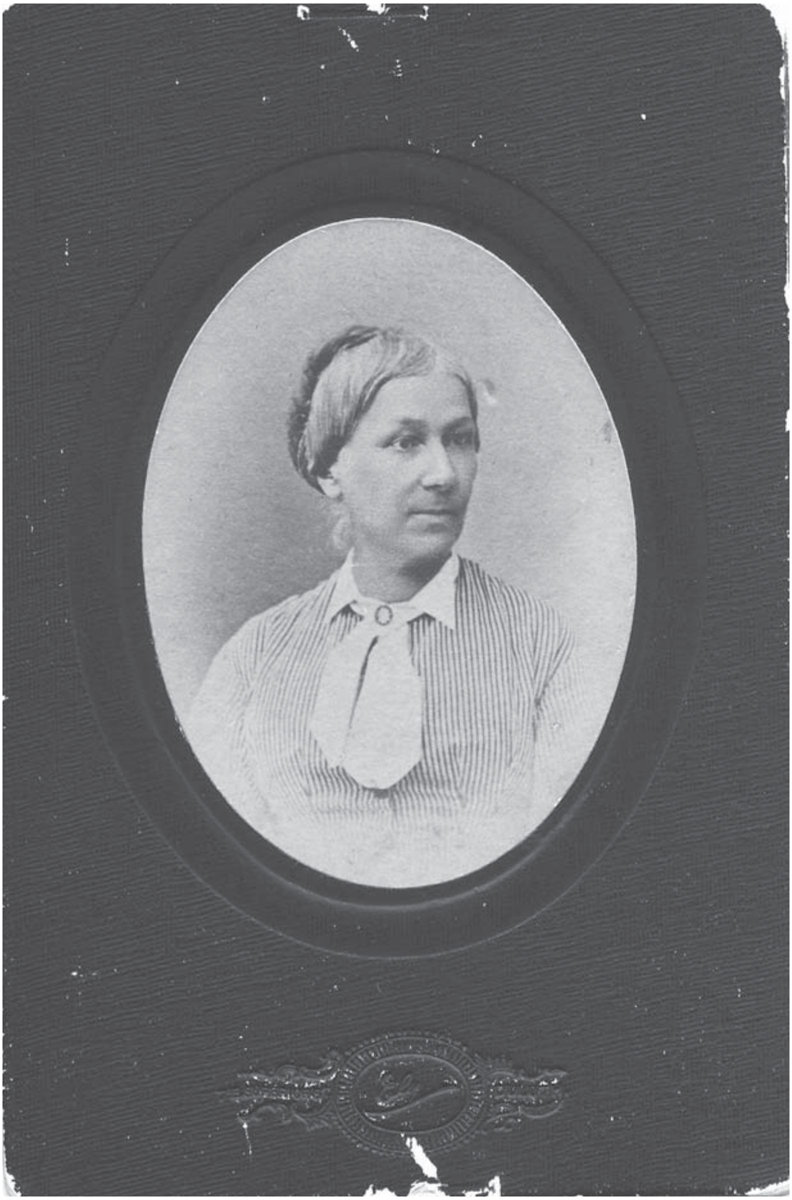
15. Ely to Greene, December 31, 1835, Papers of the ABCFM, ABC 18.3.7. (Reel 765).


Rev. Edmund F. Ely
Aug 3. 1809– Aug 29. 1882
Ely
PHOTO.
DULUTH.
1856

1. Edmund F. Ely, c. 1856. Photo courtesy Northeast Minnesota Historical Center, Duluth, Minnesota, s3045, Edmund F. Ely Papers.



2. Mrs. Catharine Ely. Photo courtesy Northeast Minnesota Historical Center, Duluth, Minnesota, s3045, Edmund F. Ely Papers.

Ely's school had scarcely any students. "Were I to be left alone here again, I should consider it my duty to leave the field," he wrote on September 11, 1838.

The decision was not his to make. At a meeting of the missionaries dependent on La Pointe in June 1838, it was decided not to continue the Fond du Lac mission. Ely would join William T. Boutwell and Frederick Ayer at Lake Pokegama on the Snake River, where Ayer already had a small group, three or four families who cultivated fields and formed a church. There Ely taught school and "itinerated" with the Ojibwe when they were in their winter and sugar camps. In May 1841 he was witness to a fierce attack by the Dakotas, which resulted in the dispersal of the Snake River Ojibwe and the abandonment of the mission.

Ely continued to live with and support the few families who had fled with him from Pokegama. Discouraged when they abandoned the Christianity in which he believed, he decided to take his wife and young family with him to the East for the first vacation he had had in his more than twelve years of service. Upon his return he was stationed at La Pointe, where he remained somewhat reluctantly for three more years. When he petitioned for release from his commitment to the ABCFM in 1849, he was already making preparations to leave and begin a new life, at first at Lake Pokegama with his little Ojibwe community and then in the newly burgeoning community of St. Paul.

Once the Indian title to the land around the mouth of the St. Louis River had been extinguished, Ely, who was so familiar with the country, helped lay out the towns of both Superior, Wisconsin, and Oneota, now New Duluth, Minnesota. He returned to St. Paul for a time, and in 1873 he retired to California, where he died in 1882, two years after the death of his wife.

Learning and Teaching the Ojibwe Language

> We are foreigners in the Ojibwe language and ever shall be,
> and need all the help we can get.
> *Sherman Hall to David Greene, May 4, 1843*

When missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions first arrived at Mackinac in 1822, they had no knowledge of the Ojibwe language. They taught all their classes in English, since they had no books in Ojibwe, and used interpreters whenever possible. Students were mostly "mixed-bloods," people of mixed descent, Ojibwe and Ottawa, French, British, and American. It was, however, a basic tenet of these missionaries that the Indians must be taught in their own language, not in English, and therefore the teachers had to learn the native language and produce books in that language.

But Ojibwe is not an easy language, as the missionaries soon discovered. Unbelievably rich in vocabulary, grammatical inflections, and potential for derivatives, Ojibwe has thousands of verb forms that make it difficult to master. English words and concepts are not easily translated into Ojibwe words with identical meaning. "They have few or no religious ideas, and of course, no terms in which to express religious ideas," wrote the Rev. Sherman Hall after more than three years in the Lake Superior mission.[16] Ojibwe concepts of power and spirit beings simply eluded him, just as the missionary's beliefs about sin and a Judeo-Christian God had no equivalent in Ojibwe thought.

One question all these missionary linguists had to answer was how to represent Ojibwe sounds with symbols. The English alphabet presented a problem in that a single vowel might stand for three or more sounds (e.g., the *u* in *fun*, *put*, *rule*, *muse*), or a single sound might be represented by two or more letters (e.g., the vowels in *some*, *but*, *was*). In 1820 linguist John Pickering had proposed a single orthography for all Indian languages, in which each letter would have a single value. He suggested a cedilla to indicate a nasal, and the possibility of other symbols to represent sounds unique to individual languages.[17] One of the first to attempt to develop a written system of Ojibwe was Dr. Edwin James, army surgeon at Fort Brady in Sault Ste. Marie. Long interested American Indian languages, he began a study of Ojibwe in 1830 and soon developed an acceptable system of orthography in which sound values were represented by the spelling of their nearest equivalent sound in American English. With the assistance of the Rev. Abel Bingham and Miss McCoumber of the Baptist mission, he then began to translate books of the New Testament into Ojibwe.

Meanwhile, a young man who had served the ABCFM in its Hawaiian mission and had worked there on developing a written system for the Hawaiian language arrived in Mackinac in 1830 to teach for the missionary cause. During his two years there Elisha Loomis prepared a spelling book and developed yet another system of Ojibwe orthography, this one based on Pickering. It was received favorably at first, and both Sherman Hall, ABCFM missionary at La Pointe, and Edwin James agreed to accept it. However, William Ferry, superior of the Mackinac mission, dissented over the representation of diphthongs as well as the various sounds of *a*. He went to Sault Ste. Marie to consult with Dr. James and Indian agent Henry R. Schoolcraft, who was considered an authority in matters of Indian languages. They (Ferry, James, and Schoolcraft) came up with a new alphabet that Loomis found defective, in that the same sound was represented by different characters, and not all sounds were represented. Worse still, they had adopted numerous diacritical marks to represent distinct sounds, rendering the system more difficult to learn than any other. Still, it was the system first used by Ely and the other missionaries of the ABCFM.[18]

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[16] Hall to Greene, October 17, 1834, Papers of the ABCFM, ABC 18.3.7. (Reel 765).

[17] See Pickering, "Essay on a Uniform Orthography."

After sending the manuscript of his spelling book to the printer, Loomis discovered the symbol *v* used by the ABCFM missionaries to the Choctaw to represent the vowel sound in but. This was later adopted by the ABCFM missionaries for the Ojibwe language in the spring of 1835, when they met and agreed to simplify their system. The change in orthography is reflected in Ely's journals beginning at this time, although the change is also found in few pages of Journal 4 that were written over in blue later.

Spelling books were the principal means of teaching Ojibwe children to read and write, but they bore no resemblance to the spelling books used in schools today. The books began with a chart of the system of orthography used, letters or symbols and sound value, followed by lists of words and sentences that the students read aloud. They did not write in the books, but on slates furnished by the ABCFM. It was quickly seen that the spelling book written by Elisha Loomis was of little use to teachers who had developed a different orthography. Eventually the ABCFM missionaries would develop a new spelling book.

It was generally agreed that Indians should also be taught the precepts

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18. Loomis to Greene, April 3, 1832, Papers of the ABCFM, ABC 18.3.7. (Reel 765).

and "truths" of the Bible. Therefore, once a writing system was accepted, it became imperative to translate the Bible into Ojibwe using the same orthography. Those parts of the New Testament that had already been translated into Ojibwe by Edwin James were useful to the missionaries, who read them aloud at meetings, since none of them could yet preach in Ojibwe. James's entire New Testament became available in 1834 and was much appreciated by the ABCFM missionaries, who then began to transcribe it into their own orthography. The Ojibwe New Testament soon became invaluable as a resource for the missionaries themselves to learn the language and was often used as a reader for the more advanced students.

Methodists in Upper Canada had already begun their work among the Mississauga Ojibwe of Grand River (southern Ontario). One of their first converts was Peter Jones (1802–56), who was responsible for translating several books of the Bible into Ojibwe, as well as many other religious works and hymns. From their mission among the Ojibwe of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, they soon extended their missionary work along the south shore of Lake Superior and even into the Upper Mississippi. The orthography that they developed, however, was not considered useful to the ABCFM-missionaries, who spent much of their time transcribing the Methodists' works into their own system.

The Manuscript Journals of Edmund Franklin Ely

The manuscript journals of Edmund Franklin Ely reside in the Northeast Minnesota Historical Center at the University of Minnesota–Duluth. They consist of twenty separate volumes, some scarcely more than hand-bound notebooks, others in ordinary student writing books; all are in fragile condition. A few were written by candlelight during canoe trips, others in the comfort of Ely's lodge. Some parts are faint and written over in blue. A few pages are so faded that they cannot even be read. For the first four years the journals were kept meticulously; they are thorough accounts of the day-to-day activities of Ely and the people with whom he interacted. Thereafter it seems that he maintained his journals somewhat sporadically or only for specific occasions. They nevertheless present a unique picture of a missionary's life, his reflections on the state of his soul, and his observations of a people little known at the time. Only the first eighteen journals are published here, because they are the ones written during his life as a missionary teacher among the Ojibwe. I have also included a series of letters written to his wife as a journal in March 1848.

The following is a list of the journals with their dates and locations as recorded in each. Only the first eight were numbered by Ely. For the sake of clarity and continuity I have assigned numbers 9 to 20 to the subsequent journals according to the dates of their entries. In most cases Ely himself indicated where they should be placed.

Journal 1: July 5–September 28, 1833, Albany to Sandy Lake.
Journal 2: September 29–December 7, 1833, Sandy Lake.
Journal 3: December 8, 1833–May 4, 1834, Sandy Lake to Leech Lake.
Journal 4: May 4–June 23, 1834, Leech Lake to Fond du Lac, and November 17–December 28, 1834, Fond du Lac.
Journal 5: June 23–November 16, 1834, La Pointe to Yellow Lake to Fond du Lac.
Journal 6: January 1–September 21, 1835, with the following exceptions:
Journal 7: January 18–March 5, 1835, Journey to Yellow Lake and return to Fond du Lac.
Journal 8: March 11–May 15, 1835, Fond du Lac to La Pointe and return.
Journal 9: September 20, 1835–May 1841, with the following exceptions:
Journal 10: January 4–February 16, 1836, Fond du Lac to La Pointe and return.
Journal 11: January 14–March 8, 1838, Voyage to Pokegama.
Journal 12: April 4–May 3, 1839, Voyage to Pokegama.
Journal 13: May 16–June 18, 1839, Voyage to Pokegama.
Journal 14: August 7–October 20, 1839, Voyage from Pokegama to La Pointe and back.
Journal 15: February 25–March 25, 1840, Voyage from Pokegama to St. Peters.
Journal 16: March 19–23, 1841, Journey to Knife Lake.
Journal 17: January 17–July 10, 1842, Pokegoma to the Little Portage.
Journal 18: September 14–October 21, 1846, La Pointe to Pokegama and back.

Journal 19: May 1847–September 13, 1848, La Pointe. This is a record of liquor smuggling at La Pointe.
Journal 20: March 17–June 20, 1854, St. Paul to Superior, after he left his missionary work.

Catharine Ely also maintained a journal for a short time, sporadically, between 1835 and 1839. Although most of her entries concern the progress of her first child in the first year of her life, there are some interesting observations regarding their life at Fond du Lac. Catharine Ely's journal is included in the appendix and may sometimes be used to amplify Edmund Ely's corresponding entries.

The journals, along with letters and other papers, were first borrowed by the St. Louis County Historical Society in 1923 and later acquired by the Minnesota Historical Society. Aware of their immense value, not only to historians but also to students of Ojibwe life and culture, curator of manuscripts Grace Lee Nute had them copied by her assistant, Veronica Houle, almost immediately. Dr. Nute oversaw the work of transcription and made corrections and interpretations as needed. When the transcription was completed in 1925, she wrote in *Minnesota History*:

> Only by reading these Ely Papers themselves can one fully appreciate what a treasure trove was unearthed when their existence became known. Fortunately it is probable that in the not too distant future that privilege and pleasure will be available to the reading public. . . . The reader will then perceive what he may have doubted before, that the daily entries of a humble missionary to the Chippewa may prove in time the most valuable of all extant records for an understanding of an important but neglected chapter in Minnesota history.[19]

While economic constraints make it impossible to publish all twenty journals and the numerous letters and other papers, it is hoped that the journals annotated and published here for the first time will serve the interest and needs of a public interested in both the history of the Upper Midwest and the life and culture of the Ojibwe people.

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19. Nute, "Edmund Franklin Ely Papers," 354.

It is with deep gratitude that I acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Roger Roulette, Ojibwe teacher, thinker, linguist, and friend, without whom the Ojibwe portion of this work would be incomplete. He has labored over obscure meanings and spellings, he has transcribed many puzzling words, and through our discussions he has led me to a greater understanding of Ojibwe thought. I also wish to thank my friend and colleague Jennifer S. H. Brown, Canada Research Chair at the University of Winnipeg, whose careful reading of the manuscript has resulted in a much-improved text. Likewise, I am grateful to many others who have given me of their time and knowledge: Rand Valentine, Ojibwe linguist, friend, and my colleague in the American Indian Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison; Charles Cohen, professor in the Religious Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison; Stephen Best, of the First Presbyterian Church in Albany, New York; Maureen Mathews, CBC journalist and producer of a series of award-winning radio documentaries on Ojibwe cosmology; Patricia Maus, curator of the Northeast Minnesota Historical Center in Duluth and guardian of the Ely Papers; James Hansen, of the Wisconsin Historical Society Library, who can always be called on to locate the most obscure sources of information needed; Larry Luukkonen, for sharing with me his knowledge of Sandy Lake and the portages; and the two students who began the difficult work of transcription, Tammy Goss and John James Clements.

Editing the Manuscripts

The transcription of the Ely journals has been made easier because of the earlier work of Grace Lee Nute and Veronica Houle. They had access to the journals at a time before the writing had faded as much of it has now. I have verified my transcription with theirs, comparing both with the disks of the original Ely Papers made for me by Patricia Maus of the Northeast Minnesota Historical Center. Some errors and omissions have been found, and some previously illegible words have become clear, due to the high resolution of the copies on disk.

In editing the manuscripts, I have followed the rules proposed by Grace Lee Nute in 1935 and adapted in 2004 by Lydia Lucas in her pamphlet "Transcribing Manuscripts," keeping in mind that the purpose of annotation is to explain what is necessary to understand the meaning of the document at the time it was written. I have adhered to the original in format, spelling, and punctuation as much as practical. Ely wrote with an overabundance of dashes, both within and at the end of sentences. Those that do not serve a purpose I have omitted; those at the end of sentences I have converted into periods, and some have become commas. I have added or omitted punctuation only to facilitate comprehension, and I have deleted the period that Ely commonly placed after numbers and the letter *I*. I have not added the apostrophe that Ely frequently omitted, because the possessive is clear from the context. I have inserted into the text those words and phrases that he placed above a sentence as afterthoughts or explanations. Ely's own additions in parentheses have been retained, and when helpful, I have supplied missing words or translations in brackets.

It has sometimes been difficult to interpret Ely's use of capital letters. It is not known whether he merely wrote a larger letter at the beginning of words, or if he actually intended a capital. I have decided to employ lower- and uppercase letters according to contemporary usage in order to make the reading of the manuscript easier. To avoid the distracting *sic*, I have taken out words unintentionally repeated and have corrected only those spellings that might confuse the reader.

The most difficult part of editing this document has been transcribing Ojibwe words. Until early summer 1834, Ely used an older system of Ojibwe orthography, with numerous diacritical marks. I have omitted many of these subscripts and superscripts, retaining only those that are significant in pronunciation. The later system is much easier: it adds only one letter not found in the English alphabet, *v*, and allows for a distinction of the nasal sound at the end of words. However, even after 1834 Ely continued to mix the two systems for some time. And while some readers may not approve of Ely's inconsistent spelling of proper names, it must be allowed that Ely himself did not always hear the words correctly and was often writing under difficult circumstances, hurriedly, and late at night. Besides, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between his *o* and *a*, *u* and *n*, and *u* and *v*. The result has been a great variation in the spelling of Ojibwe words. With the assistance of Ojibwe scholar Roger Roulette and the unpublished dictionary of Rand Valentine and Patricia M. Ningewance, as well as the dictionary of Frederic Baraga and that of John Nichols and Earl Nyholm, I have been able to transcribe more exactly what Ely wrote, and I have included translations when he did not provide them. Ojibwe words that are not explained in footnotes are found in Appendix C, along with translations and a transcription in the more accepted Fiero orthography. For the purpose of clarity, I have standardized Ely's spellings of Ojibwe proper names in the footnotes, and I have identified as far as possible most of the Ojibwe place-names in the text and in the index.

Since the journals do not cover the greater part of the years 1840–1849, I have inserted relevant information from Ely's letters and those of his associates, and I have connected some of the later journals with a narrative of the interim events.

The annotation I have provided is intended to explain, clarify, and give background to the text. Without it the entire narrative is cloudy, characters appear without relevance, and much of the message is lost. It is especially important to remember that both Ojibwe and Christian thought have undergone many transformations since the first half of the nineteenth century, and explanations are required, both for Ojibwe and others who may not be familiar with Christian concepts, and for readers who may not be familiar with Ojibwe thought.

It is hoped that these valuable documents will provide not only a window into the past, but also a mirror by which we can find relevance with the present, when many Ojibwe are seeking to understand and revive their religious traditions, and Ojibwe history is undergoing a revision based on a new understanding and appreciation of the Ojibwe viewpoint. And just as these journals served Ely as a means of reflecting on his own spiritual state, it is my fervent wish that they may offer to all who read them an opportunity to reflect on the importance of honoring and respecting all religious beliefs and values, no matter how different from one's own. It is indeed fitting that the writings of a missionary seeking to replace Ojibwe religion with Christianity should now serve as a record of those ancient traditions and a means to their renewal, offering us valuable insights into Ojibwe religion and the people who lived it.