Figure 3-1. The Town of Munnomunne, located on a map of Wisconsin depicting the Fox, Mississippi, and Wisconsin waterways.
CHAPTER 3:  
THE PLAN OF MUNNOMUNNE

In May of 1824, the young circuit judge James Duane Doty packed his belongings into a canoe and left Prairie du Chien in order to satisfy his obligation to open a court session in Green Bay, Brown County. The Green Bay in which Doty arrived on a summers day in 1824 was little more than a ragged collection of log dwellings lining the banks of the Fox River, the mouth of which was protected by the white washed timber stockades of Fort Howard. Built in 1816, Fort Howard was one of several forts built under order of the Federal War Department in the period following the war of 1812. The initial intention of Fort Howard was to block British access to the navigable Fox at the river mouth, thus protecting vast interior lands and river commerce in the most efficient way possible. But like Fort Crawford in Prairie du Chien, Fort Howard played an extremely significant role in the life and development of the territory, disproportionate to its small size and limited initial intentions. Soldiers were used to build roads, act as a police force in both Indian and white affairs and in general provide a stable environment for trade and settlement. It was certainly this element of stability that brought the young Judge Doty to purchase several parcels of land along the Fox from a Mr. John Lawe and attempt to plat the parcels into lots for sale to investors and settlers. As Doty had attempted in Prairie du Chien, he endeavored at Green Bay to use his position and influence to increase the value of his purchases. The same territorial act that had required Prairie du Chien to construct a courthouse on Doty’s land, also contained provisions requiring that a seat of justice be established in Brown County. Doty used this provision to again donate to the county a parcel of land in the center of his holdings, such that his surrounding lands might be increased in their value.
Figure 3-2. Plat of the Town of Munnomunne, Wisconsin: 1824. State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
Doty's drawing for the Town of Munnomunne survives, and is reproduced as Figure 3-2. Located south of Fort Howard, Doty's land was bordered to the west by the Fox River and to the east by an existing highway. The major feature of Doty's plan for the property is a proposed "public street", 65 feet in width, connecting the river with the existing highway. This roadway is specified in the plat text to run "at a right angle from the river to the established highway." Fronting onto this street are the major components of the plan: a lot reserved for the "courthouse, jail and other public buildings", a lot for churches, a lot for schools, as well as numerous private lots, from the sale of which he hoped to derive income. A second public street is proposed along the rivers edge, which would have had utility as a public landing for river commerce. Doty takes advantage of this potential commercial activity by halving the size of the lots at the meeting of the two streets and the waterfront. By this move, two additional lots are created close to this important intersection. Finally, ten additional lots are subdivided along the existing highway. The plan lacks the clarity and elegance found in Doty's Prairie du Chien courthouse square, as there is little attention paid to the shaping of the public open space. But this was only Doty's first attempt at Munnomunne, for within a year he developed a much more ambitious scheme for the town.
Figure 3.3. Plat of the Town of Munnomnee, Wisconsin: 1825. State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
Doty's 1824 plan of Munnomunne was a failure in development terms. Doty's plat was simply too far away from the activity of Fort Howard, and in addition his ownership of the land on which the village was platted was an unconfirmed claim. Doty's initial failure seems not to have dampened his enthusiasm, since in the following year he was involved with landowner John Lawe, in yet another village plat called Munnomonee. Located some distance closer to the fort than Doty's previous incarnation of Munnomunne, the new site also featured the advantage of being surrounded by existing homesteads, which might help convince investors that the village was well located. Outlining the circumstances of the development, a bicentennial publication of the Brown County Historical Society reads:

"...Judge Doty persuaded John Lawe, who owned most of the land, to lay out a planned village in the vicinity of the present state reformatory, for which Doty wangled the county seat from the Michigan legislature. They named the settlement Menomineeville, although most of the residents continued to call it Shantytown..."

The 1825 plat survives and is reproduced as figure 3-3. In the late 1820's Doty assisted numerous Green Bay area residents in acquiring secure deeds or patents for their unconfirmed land claims in exchange for a portion of those same lands (usually a quarter or third share). Lawe and Doty had entered into such an arrangement in other holdings, and it is probable that they had a similar arrangement in this case. This would explain Doty's interest in assisting Lawe in laying out the village.
Figure 3-4. Conjectural reconstruction of Doty's 1825 scheme for Munnomomee.
The plan is an interesting and well developed one, possessing formal symmetries akin to the plan of Prairie du Chien of 1824. Located on a bulge or promontory reaching into the Fox, the plat centers around a large reserve intended for the courthouse square. With frontage on the public highway, the courthouse square is surrounded by speculative lots, which change orientation in order to maximize the number of parcels facing the square. Also defining the square is a parcel set aside for construction of a "Christ Church", completing a compact grouping of church, state, and community, with state functions clearly in domination over those of the church. The overall street and block arrangement is very fine in grain, with eleven small city blocks being proposed. The widest street, Chippewau, is located on axis with the courthouse square, thereby directly connecting the square to important river traffic. Like Chippewau Street, the other streets are all given Indian names, a somewhat unusual maneuver in a time when most proprietors named streets after important white patriots. Doty had recently spent much of an entire winter season as a student of the Chippewau tongue, and had developed an unusual degree of respect for Indian place-names and lore, a respect that would be maintained throughout his career. Unfortunately, the second plan of Munnomonee was a failure as well, as it was unable to attract investors and settlers. It seems that this site was also deemed too far from the fort to merit settlement, and investors placed their monies elsewhere. This was especially true since the courthouse, planned as the driving force of the scheme, was not forthcoming.