

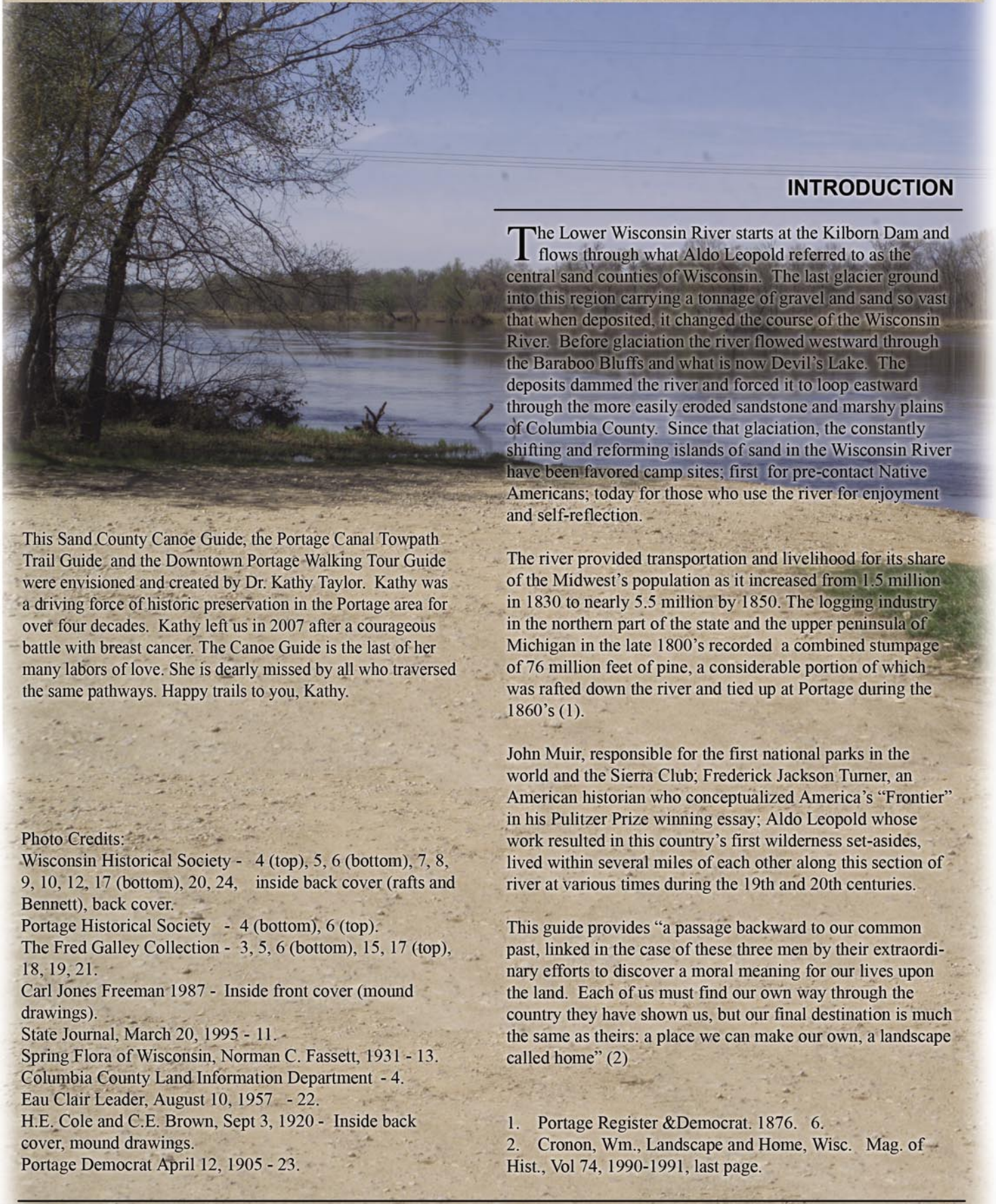
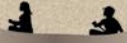
# Sand County Water Trail



Wisconsin Dells to Portage

By K. Taylor and J. McKay





## INTRODUCTION

The Lower Wisconsin River starts at the Kilborn Dam and flows through what Aldo Leopold referred to as the central sand counties of Wisconsin. The last glacier ground into this region carrying a tonnage of gravel and sand so vast that when deposited, it changed the course of the Wisconsin River. Before glaciation the river flowed westward through the Baraboo Bluffs and what is now Devil's Lake. The deposits dammed the river and forced it to loop eastward through the more easily eroded sandstone and marshy plains of Columbia County. Since that glaciation, the constantly shifting and reforming islands of sand in the Wisconsin River have been favored camp sites; first for pre-contact Native Americans; today for those who use the river for enjoyment and self-reflection.

This Sand County Canoe Guide, the Portage Canal Towpath Trail Guide and the Downtown Portage Walking Tour Guide were envisioned and created by Dr. Kathy Taylor. Kathy was a driving force of historic preservation in the Portage area for over four decades. Kathy left us in 2007 after a courageous battle with breast cancer. The Canoe Guide is the last of her many labors of love. She is dearly missed by all who traversed the same pathways. Happy trails to you, Kathy.

The river provided transportation and livelihood for its share of the Midwest's population as it increased from 1.5 million in 1830 to nearly 5.5 million by 1850. The logging industry in the northern part of the state and the upper peninsula of Michigan in the late 1800's recorded a combined stumpage of 76 million feet of pine, a considerable portion of which was rafted down the river and tied up at Portage during the 1860's (1).

John Muir, responsible for the first national parks in the world and the Sierra Club; Frederick Jackson Turner, an American historian who conceptualized America's "Frontier" in his Pulitzer Prize winning essay; Aldo Leopold whose work resulted in this country's first wilderness set-asides, lived within several miles of each other along this section of river at various times during the 19th and 20th centuries.

This guide provides "a passage backward to our common past, linked in the case of these three men by their extraordinary efforts to discover a moral meaning for our lives upon the land. Each of us must find our own way through the country they have shown us, but our final destination is much the same as theirs: a place we can make our own, a landscape called home" (2)

### Photo Credits:

Wisconsin Historical Society - 4 (top), 5, 6 (bottom), 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 17 (bottom), 20, 24, inside back cover (rafts and Bennett), back cover.

Portage Historical Society - 4 (bottom), 6 (top).

The Fred Galley Collection - 3, 5, 6 (bottom), 15, 17 (top), 18, 19, 21.

Carl Jones Freeman 1987 - Inside front cover (mound drawings).

State Journal, March 20, 1995 - 11.

Spring Flora of Wisconsin, Norman C. Fassett, 1931 - 13.

Columbia County Land Information Department - 4.

Eau Clair Leader, August 10, 1957 - 22.

H.E. Cole and C.E. Brown, Sept 3, 1920 - Inside back cover, mound drawings.

Portage Democrat April 12, 1905 - 23.

1. Portage Register & Democrat. 1876. 6.

2. Cronon, Wm., Landscape and Home, Wisc. Mag. of Hist., Vol 74, 1990-1991, last page.



## NATURAL HISTORY AND GEOLOGY NOTES

The sand area of central Wisconsin was laid down by shallow inland salt seas half a million year ago. The upper layers of the deposited sand became compacted and cemented into limestone in later epochs. Exposed to eons of erosion and reworked by glacial melt waters 70,000 to 100,000 years ago, this limestone was broken down into the region's sand. The last Wisconsin glaciation reached its furthest southwestern extent at the Dells and Baraboo hills 15,000 years ago. It was the recession of this glacial shoulder whose maw dropped gravel and sand, temporarily damming the 1,800 sq. mi. ancient Lake Wisconsin north of the Dells. The melt water, when released, rapidly cut the 7.5 miles of narrow gorges at the Dells that today remain 52 to 100 ft. wide and 40 to 80 ft. high. The presently existing river banks are the last of three channels. The first drained further to the west through Devil's Lake and then south through the Baraboo River channel. The second flowed straight south between the first channel and the present one. Terminal moraines left by receding glacial remnants blocked both these channels, forcing the river east around the Baraboo range where the water cut rapidly into the sand plains as far eastward as The Portage. The Portage became a periodically navigable 1.5 mile channel to the Fox River. Attempts to formalize this periodic channel with a canal and control it with levees, are still threatened by the Wisconsin River at flood stage, being drawn into the Fox.



The modern river constantly shifts its sandbars and erodes its banks. This region between Kilborn and Portage has flood plain and wet soil areas where a high water table is often within inches of the surface. The sands of this region coincide with the boundary between the prairie and hard woods to the south. This tension zone, a band ten to thirty miles wide, marks the northernmost limits of many southern species and likewise the southernmost limit of many northern species<sup>1</sup>. Remaining in the ancient sandstone gorges and cliffs as the glaciers receded, many species now survive nowhere else in the upper midwest than in the fragile often sunless habitat soaked by the river's mist and temperature-buffered by its water.

The noted writers, artists, naturalists and historians who have captured the beauty of this landscape include August Derleth, Zona Gale, Bernard Durwood, John Muir, and Rueben Gold Thwaites. It is again Aldo Leopold, the father of modern ecology, who cautions us most urgently to be respectful of the river's geologic and natural history, that "...in [our] headlong stampede for speed and ciphers we are crushing the last remnants of something that ought to be preserved for the spiritual and physical welfare of future Americans, even at the cost of acquiring a few less millions of wealth.... Something that has helped build the race for such innumerable centuries that we may logically suppose it will help preserve it in the centuries to come."<sup>2</sup>

1. Lange, Kenneth I. 1976. *A County Called Sauk*. 3-5
2. Leopold, Aldo. *The River of the Mother of God, and other essays*; (edited by Flader and Callicott, University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, pp 123-127)

## THE GREEN WATERSPIRIT AND THE SERPENT

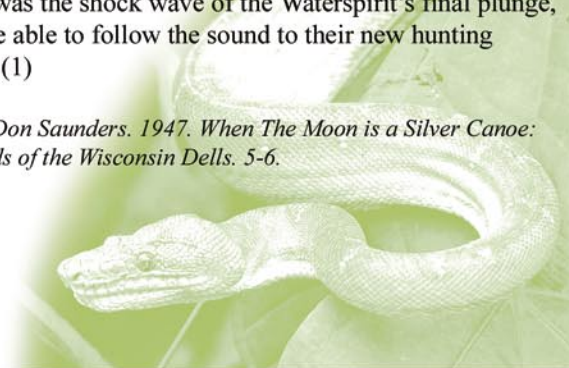
### CREATION MYTHS OF THE WISCONSIN DELLS

Related by Albert Yellow Thunder and

Retold by Richard L. Dieterie

The People prayed to Earthmaker to give them better hunting grounds, so the Creator sent a green (tco) Waterspirit to a lifeless land of snow and ice. The warmth of the Waterspirit melted the ice, and by dint of great effort he clawed and bit out channels for streams and lakes. When the melt collected, the Waterspirit churned up from his body all the game that anyone could want. He fired green quills from his skin, and they became trees that stood in the thousands from one horizon to the next. Thus was created the Wisconsin Dells, which is called Nic-haki-sutc-ra, 'Where the Cliffs Strike Together'. When he finished his great work, the green Waterspirit leapt into the bottomless depths of Devil's Lake (De Wakatcak). Even though the Hotcagara were far distant, so great was the shock wave of the Waterspirit's final plunge, they were able to follow the sound to their new hunting grounds. (1)

1. Capt. Don Saunders. 1947. *When The Moon is a Silver Canoe: Legends of the Wisconsin Dells*. 5-6.







**KILBOURN CITY (WISCONSIN DELLS)**

Byron Kilborn established Kilborn City as the site of the railroad crossing of the Wisconsin River. The Wisconsin River Hydraulic Company then platted Kilborn in 1856, and it was incorporated as a village in 1875. Despite the presence of the railroad, the city expanded slowly in the 1850's and '60's, serving local trade with a sawmill, planing mills, gristmill and brewery. In 1869, LeRoy Gates began tourist excursions along the Wisconsin River on an irregular basis. By the 1870's H.H. Bennett's photographs began to attract tourists. Steamboat excursions were offered by Captain A. Wood and others. Five hotels stood in Kilborn by 1879. Cottages, hotels and other tourist services burgeoned in the early 1900's. Photographer Bennett's brother-in-law, George H. Crandall, purchased seven miles of the Upper Dells shoreline and razed existing buildings to protect its natural beauty. The city changed its name to Wisconsin Dells in 1931. The upper dells property was transferred to the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation in 1954.

Kilbourn Train Station (WHS)



The Dells Landing and Boat Dock (PHS)

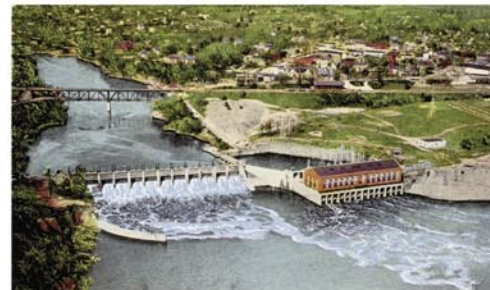


**THE KILBORN DAM AND POWER PLANT**

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Dells has been the site of dams since the late 1850's. The first timber dam blocked log rafts at the end of the treacherous channel and was partially removed by lumbermen in 1859. Replaced in 1872, it was again breached in 1883 and '89. Proposed in 1905, long after the demise of the logging industry, the hydroelectric dam met resistance from the growing tourist industry which feared it would diminish the



Exterior - Dam and power plant - top side (WHS)



Interior - Turbines (PHS)

channel's beauty if allowed to raise the water level 17 feet. Despite opposition, the South Wisconsin Power Company constructed the 350 feet long, 55 feet high, concrete dam and power plant from 1907 to 1909.

To provide stability, both the pressed brick powerhouse and dam were placed on timber cribbing which rested directly on potsdam limestone.

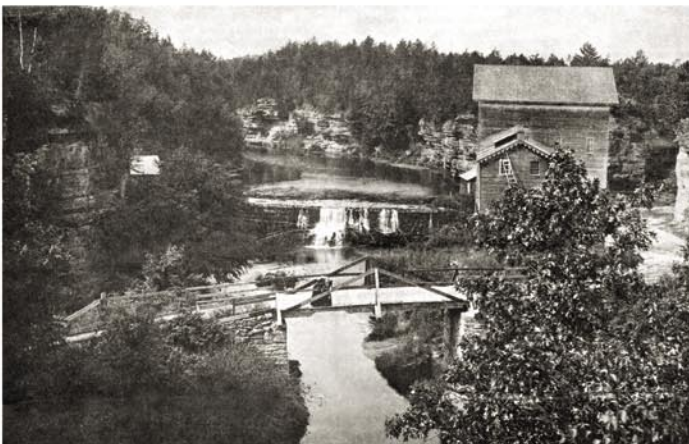
The concrete superstructure of the dam was built with a spillway for floodwaters. McCormick-type turbines ran the generators. The power produced by the plant was carried over high transmission wires to Portage where the lines were joined by others from Prairie du Sac and continued on to Milwaukee to run its trolleys. Failing to make sufficient profit, the plant was sold in 1917 to Samuel Insoll's Middle West Utilities, the forerunner of the power grid inherited by the Wisconsin Power and Light Company.





### LAKE DELTON

Located along Dell Creek near its entrance into the Wisconsin River, Lake Delton was once a noted, early manufacturing center. The village was platted in 1850. Its industries clustered along a series of mill ponds formed by damming Dell Creek at the lower mill site in 1850 and the upper mill site in 1860. In 1850, Fox and Topping established their sawmill. During the 1850's, its industries grew to serve agricultural settlers including: a flour mill; a wagon manufacturer known as Thompson & Holmes; a manufacturer of fanning mills; the Clement & Adams foundry; a machine shop noted for its cast iron stoves and hop presses; and a second foundry in 1862. A grist mill was established at the upper mill site in 1860. As mass produced goods transported by the railroad brought manufactured goods to central Wisconsin beginning in the 1870's, the demand for hand-crafted, local products declined. Also, the transition from wheat to dairy production decreased the demand for many goods produced at Lake Delton. However, the tourist industry which began to replace the factories with small cottages revived the community's economy by the early 1900s.



Lake Delton, Mirror Lake (PHS)



### NEWPORT- A LOST CITY

The site of Newport lays two miles south of Kilborn primarily along the east, but also along the west banks of the Wisconsin River. Joseph Bailey settled at the site in 1849, and it was platted in 1850. As the Milwaukee and LaCrosse RR approached from the east in the early 1850's, land speculation drove this boomtown at a meteoric pace. Between 1850 and 1852, business and residential buildings quickly lined the streets.



At the end of the logging run through the Dells where rafts were reassembled, Newport quickly became a stopover and supply point for raftsmen. It became the northern-most destination for steamboat traffic. By 1852 with a population of 2,000, its enterprises included taverns, a brewery, at least 13 retail businesses, 3 large hotels, commercial warehouses supplying goods to the pineries and the local area, a sawmill, and a female seminary. Genuine skullduggery caused its demise. Byron Kilborn, president of the railroad, controlled where the railroad would cross the river. He placed it two miles upriver at Kilborn in 1856, unbeknownst to the citizens in Newport with whom he had signed contracts to locate it in Newport. The town collapsed, many buildings were moved to Kilborn or demolished from the late 1850's through early 1860's, and the post office closed in about 1865. Now, only a few cellar holes, the Newport Lutheran Church and adjacent Dawn Manor remain <sup>1</sup>.

1. Stark, William, 1988, *Wisconsin River of History*, pp 205-213.





BURIAL OF YELLOW THUNDER

A stone monument commemorating the life of Yellow Thunder stands near his burial located 5 miles north of Baraboo and south of the Wisconsin River. Yellow Thunder (1774-1874), a leader of the Winnebago, held great respect among his people. In the work "Waubun", Julia Kinzie notes the visit of his wife Madam

Yellow Thunder (WHS)



Washington, to Fort Winnebago at the east end of The Portage in the early 1830's. Although the Winnebago did not recognize the Treaty of 1837 as valid, the U.S. Military forcibly removed them from central Wisconsin west of the Wisconsin River to an Iowa reservation beginning in 1840. Like a small number of Winnebago, Yellow Thunder subsequently returned to Wisconsin, went into hiding and later attempted to purchase land. He eventually located on 40 acres in section 36 of the Town of Delton (T13N, R6E). On the land he placed two cabins for use by his own and several other families as well as a five-acre garden of corn, beans and potatoes. This land became a gathering place for the Winnebago. Yellow Thunder died in 1874 and was buried on his own land as were and his wife, several other Winnebago, and perhaps a few Euro-

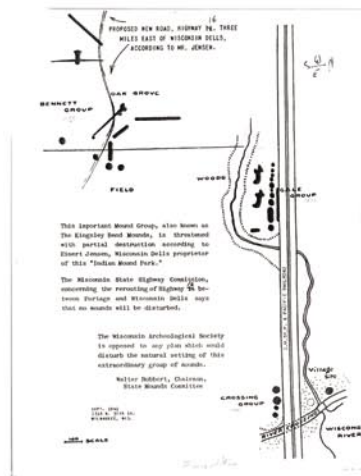
Americans. To prevent obliteration of the grave by plowing, the Sauk County Historical Society moved the grave to the county park (section 2, T12N, R6E) in 1909. He was reentered in a cairn marked by a cobblestone pillar.



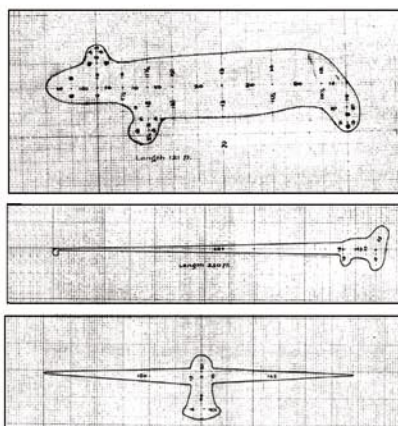
Yellow Thunder Rock Cairn (WHS)

THE KINGSLEY BEND MOUND GROUP

Consider this section of river as a major mid-continental travel route, a central artery along which, starting with copper in the late Archaic (3000-1000 B.C.), along with chert, obsidian, copper ore and ochre, were transported for trade. Along these routes, late Woodland (AD 400-1100) earthworks contribute to a continuum of archeological information about Native American ceremonial practices, social identity and



spiritual existence over a 4000 year period. The earthwork effigies that composed this once extensive site at Kingsley Bend represent the realms of earth (bears), water (waterspirits or panthers) and air (Thunderbirds and owls). (1) Today only the highly stylized waterspirit is open for public view via a wayside on Highway 16 (there is no access from the river). The ten mounds of the nearby Bennett Group and 3 unnamed groups comprised more than 21 additional zoomorphic conical and linear mounds in the area. While peoples affiliated with



the Effigy Mounds of BC 600-110 constructed parts of all these groups, as early as 600 BC, others were made by Late Woodland peoples from AD 400-1100.

Scale drawings of bear, panther and bird from "proposal New Road, Highway 16" by a Mr. Jensen. Sept. 1941

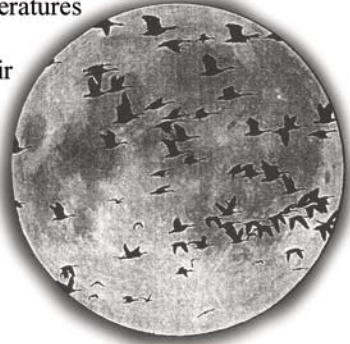
1. Birmingham, Robert A and Leslie E. Eisenberg. 2000. Indian Mounds of Wisconsin. University of Wisconsin Press. 134, 195.





## THE RIVER IS A NIGHT-TIME FLYWAY

From July to September, migratory songbirds and shorebirds rarely migrate during the day, but rather take flight to their wintering sites at night. Birds that don't rely on updrafts generated by the sun heating the earth can be seen taking advantage of the cooler temperatures at night. Lower nighttime temperatures help relieve their overheated bodies from their task at hand. Keep your eyes and ears open especially just before dawn.



1. Wisconsin State Journal. March 20, 1995.

## PASSENGER PIGEON

John Muir (1838-1914), naturalist, prolific inventor, and writer remembered the Passenger Pigeons thus: "Of all God's feathered creatures that sailed the Wisconsin sky, no other bird seemed to us so wonderful...I have seen flocks streaming south in the Fall so large that they were flowing over from horizon to horizon in an almost continuous stream all day long, like a mighty river in the sky, widening, contracting, descending like falls and cataracts..." (1).

Aldo Leopold, like Muir, mourned the loss of the passenger pigeon. "...We grieve because no living man will see again the onrushing phalanx of victorious birds, sweeping a path for Spring across March skies, chasing the defeated Winter from all the woods and prairies of Wisconsin." (3).



An estimated 136 million pigeons in 1871 made up the last great nesting the state was

to see (2). The passenger pigeon became extinct in 1914, the year of John Muir's death.

1. "The Wilderness World of John Muir", ed, E.W. Teale, 1954, pp45-46.
2. Leopold, Aldo. A Sand County Almanac, Ballantine Edition, 1986, pg. 116.
3. The Kilborn Mirror: April 24, 1871. Front page.
4. The Environmental Protection act. established in 1973 came too late for the Passenger Pigeon.



## NATIVE CROPS GOOSEFOOT AND JEWELWEED

The 17.5 miles of earthen levees along the Wisconsin River between The Dells and Portage not only protect fields and homes on the other side, but also protect the original floodplain forests, fens and marshes. This rim of naturally cycling plant life includes wild plants that pre-contact Native American foragers and horticulturalists used.

Goosefoot (or Lamb's Quarter) is an ancient indigenous seed plant that aggressively colonizes open and recently disturbed habitats such as these flood plains.



From Muenschler, Walter C., End ed. 1980, Cornell University press, pg. 184

Between 2,000 and 2,500 years ago, they may have been not just harvested, but domesticated and grown as crops. While you are in the remnants of this ancient floodplain try some Native American seed plants for lunch. Goosefoot's tender spring greens and fall seeds are edible and could calorically sustain a family of 10 for up to six months. (1) Seeds can be ground into flour and made into bread.

Jewelweed (*Impatiens biflora*, also *capensis*) or Touch-Me-Not, is a colorful, succulent herb that grows in moist, rich areas of the river's floodplain and dunes.

Native Americans used it as diuretic, emetic, and cathartic. The fresh clear juice of the whole plant was rubbed on skin exposed to stinging nettle and poison ivy to prevent dermatitis. A poultice made of the crushed plant can be applied to bruises, sores, and sprains and helps relieve the itch of insect bites. Pale Touch-Me-Not, *I. pallida*, has bright yellow flowers and very similar uses. Both species yield a vibrant yellow dye for wool, with iron rust added to the dye bath to produce deeper shades of orange long used by Native Americans and more recently by Euro-Americans. <sup>2-4</sup>



1. Smith, B.D., The Sciences, 1991, pg 34.
2. Kindscher, Kelly. 1987. Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie: An Ethnobotanical Guide. Pp 25, 79-83, 248.
3. Kavasch, Barie, 1983, Medicinal Plants in American Indian Life, exhibit booklet with "Native Harvests", Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C.
4. Niering, William A., Wetlands, National Audubon Society Guide, Alfred A. Knopf, N.Y., pp 456, 457.





## OLD DE-KAU-RY'S VILLAGE AT WAGGONER'S BLUFF

Shortly after 1793<sup>1</sup> the elder De-kau-ry, Ho-Chunk Chief Chou-ka (himself half-French), founded a settlement 3 miles north of Portage, past which you may be gliding.<sup>2</sup> The extraordinary number of his family members and their commanding presence in territorial history demands recognition.

A French officer, Sabrevoir DeCarrie (later corrupted to De-kau-ry, then Decorah), served in Canada as early as 1699. Apparently resigning his commission, he appears among the Green Bay fur trade records by 1729.<sup>3</sup> He married the Head Ho-Chunk Chief's sister, Ho-po-ka-we-a, Glory of the Morning, with whom he had 3 children. In the 100 years following this marriage, fur trade operations moved deep into what had become Ho-Chunk territory...to The Portage. Four of the five traders living at The Portage between 1810 and 1825 were married to DeCarrie's vigorous and handsome descendants.<sup>4,5</sup> John Jacob Astor, and other Euro-Americans



before him established the Native American fur trade but wrested progressively more control over the trade by the 1820's, especially at The Portage. Names most prominent through those years of economic struggle are: One-eyed (Wadge-hut-ta-kaw, meaning Big Canoe), and Spoon Decorah, (pictured here), who served among the English in the War of 1812; White Eagle, seized by troops in 1827 was held under a death

threat until Red Bird surrendered at The Portage; Wild Cat, Raisin, Buzzard (Cah-post-ka-kaw) Black, Star-Walker, Rascal, Thunder Hearer, White French (Hope-ne-scha-ka) and a family member identified only by the Decorah last name signed the "Peace and Friendship Treaty" at Prairie du Chein in 1825.<sup>5,6</sup> It was Chief Four Legs, also a Decorah, who in 1827 beseeched the U.S President to stop the unlawful overtaking of their lands by lead miners, asking him "to reach out his long arm and draw them back".<sup>7</sup> It was also Chief Four Legs who later "died of the extreme prosperity of indulgence" and was buried at The Portage (~1829) according to Indian Agent John Kinzie.<sup>8</sup> These are but a few.

The Ho-Chunk traveled long distances in small groups during the Fall and Winter, trapping and trading furs and returning to large summer agricultural villages such as this one, so long ago erased. Their gardens included corn, beans, potatoes, melons, cucumber and tobacco. This particular village at Waggoner's Bluff, was thought to be occupied by as many as 300 and was re-occupied frequently through the early 1830's<sup>9</sup>

Frontier history does not record these first four generations of Decorah's as one of America's most successful Native American trade families, nor were they included as settlers or counted in the first county census of 1846. (10) Their land claims, villages, gardens and knowledge of their elders' names often do not predate the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The Lucrative fur trade made a millionaire of John Jacob Astor, where as Native Americans did not perceive trade as we do. The Decorah's probably gave away, (distributed) most of what they acquired.

1. Turner, A.J. 1904. Family Tree of Columbia County, Wisc.. 45.
2. Columbia County History. 1880. 339-340.
3. Grignon, Porlier and Lowe. WisSHS Archives. Fur Trade Records. Boxes 1 & 2. 1792-1895.
4. Trader John B. Lecuyer's wife was the elder Chief De-kau-ry's sister; Francis LeRoy married LeCuyer's daughter Therese (who was also Elder Chief De-kau-ry's niece); Perrish Grignon married another of the 5 De-kau-ry sisters; and John J. de la Ronde married Whitehead De-kau-ry's daughter, [only Laurent Bath and Lavoin Grignon at The Portage at the time, were not married to members of the Decorah family. See ref. 5.
5. Columbia County History. 1880. Pioneer Reminiscences. 390-446. Particularly John T. DeLa Ronde pp 393-404, Western Historical Society Co., Chicago (Also Turner, A.J. Family Tree of Columbia County, 1904. 55-56.)
6. Ratified and Unratified Treaties. Record Group 75. Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives microfilm, reel 1.
7. Diedrich's "Winnebago Oratory", Treaty Journal, 23, 1827, obtained through WisSHS Archives.
8. Kinzie, Juliette Augusta. 1932 [1856]. Wau-bun. Lakeside Press, Chicago.
9. McKay, J. 2003 draft. Sesquicentennial History of Portage. Chapter on Native American History, unpublished; Waggoner's Bluff is in section 10 re A.J. Turner's ref #10, pg 45.
10. Turner, A.J. 1904. Family tree of Columbia County, Wisc. 45, 75, 86.







## PINE ISLAND

The Pine Island Wildlife Area consists of 5,025 acres of upland prairie and river bottom forest, and includes all the islands along 7 miles of the Wisconsin River. The Levee Road, designated a state Rustic Road, runs the full extent of the Wildlife area paralleling the river, provides access to the boat ramp, and borders Caledonia for seven miles.

The property was named after the largest island, Pine Island, in 1873. Before the area was settled, the island had significant stand of white pine. “The temporary barracks (of Fort Winnebago) were constructed of logs obtained principally on what is known as Pine Island”.<sup>1</sup> The floodplain between the Wisconsin and Baraboo Rivers was farmed through the 1950s courtesy of the levee, which also leaves a vast floodplain on the riverward side. A private businessman, Mr. Ross Bennett from Portage was influential in promoting this wildlife area. In 1952, the wildlife area was established by the Wisconsin



Conservation Commission. The management plan aims at re-establishing native plants in the floodplain and associated marshes. Sedge, reed, canary marsh, brush marsh, willow and dogwood are common. The area is managed as waterfowl habitat as well as for other birds and mammals. About 1,400 acres have been planted with prairie grasses.

Wildlife viewing opportunities include white-tailed deer, bald eagle, osprey, heron, beaver, sandhill crane, mallard duck, blue-winged teal, wood duck, Canada goose, and wild turkey. “Waterfowl Closed Areas” are posted and entry is permitted by boat only. Fishing, deer hunting, game hunting, and trapping are regulated by the DNR. Prohibited activities year round include camping, fires, and off road vehicles. Picking or collecting nuts, berries, fruits and mushrooms is allowed without a permit. Removal of firewood requires a state permit, as does marsh hay cutting. For more information call DNR Conservation Warden in Portage 608-742-3169.

1. Turner, Andrew Jackson, “Family Tree of Columbia County”, 1904.



## ALDO LEOPOLD’S SHACK

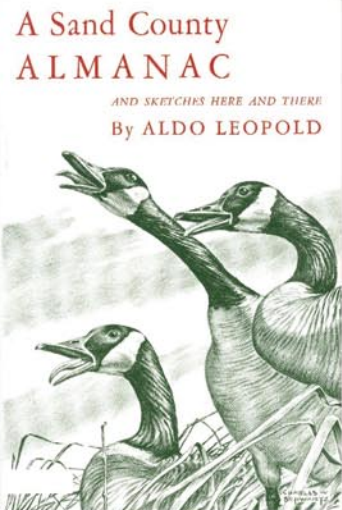
Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) first visited what he later described as the Sand Counties of Central Wisconsin and purchased this derelict, 80 acre farm. “In the 1870’s, soil could not compete with the virgin prairie frontiers further west in the game of wheating the land to death. I suspect this farm played its share.”<sup>1</sup> He converted a chicken coop to a shack, a family retreat, where his reflections about the landscape became the Sand County Almanac, published posthumously in 1948.



Leopold initiated the first Forest Wilderness Area in the United States, and was one of the founders of the Wilderness Society. He implemented contour plowing, the concept of game management, the discipline of field ecology, fought draining wetlands, and helped make timber a renewable resource through forest management.

At his shack, Leopold planted extensive tracts of pine to restore the ecological diversity of the overgrazed lands burned over by repeated fires that ravaged the sand counties after heavy logging.

1. Leopold, Aldo. 1949. Sand County Almanac, pg. 21.





HEY, WHERE'S THE CHANNEL?

In order for the Portage canal to work, the river had to work...to contain it between flood and exhaustion required maintaining a high flow channel with wing dams, partial dams between sand bars and the far bank, and constant dredging. The 1877 map of the Army Corps of Engineers shows the wing dams that worked periodically to maintain a navigation channel. Keeping the river dredged and navigable was as costly if not more so than keeping it within its banks at flood-stage. As this one section of the Wisconsin's waters alights over its first 30 miles of sand, it has consumed enormous human resources in being the most persistently mapped and measured segment in state history. Sections were washed out and engineering documents were recalculated and remeasured at an amazing rate to keep the water in the river and canal, and out of land that could be settled, ploughed, built on, taxed and railroaded over.



The first series of several earthen dikes and ditches built by Lewiston farmers in 1866 deflected flood waters with some intensity toward the opposite bank downstream. The Fairfield levees retaliated in 1884 and 1885, and Caledonia levees in 1885. Waters were shunted with a vengeance into Portage and its canal, whose levee was built in 1889. Like a giant skipping down the river kicking holes in the banks, the levees were clapped into place to fill the holes almost as fast as the giant could skip.

After watching our marginally functioning levees contribute heavily to the devastating floods along the Mississippi in 1993, the State of Wisconsin and the Army Corps of Engineers have taken action to reduce the potential of this happening again. One result, among many, is the reappearance of sand bars in the river— better reflecting it as it was before 1866. You now drag your canoe across the genuine river.

SITE OF THE FIRST WISCONSIN RIVER BRIDGE

Former operators of the adjacent ferry, Silas & Jared Walsworth, William Armstrong and townsite promoter Hugh MacFarlane formed the Portage Bridge Co. in 1851. Unable to complete it, a new charter was taken out in 1855 but failed yet again. In 1856 the Portage and Town of Caledonia took over the charter and contracted with Hall and Lee of Philadelphia to build a 650-foot long bridge, which was completed in 1857. This original wood bridge- after several replacements from flood and wind damage -was replaced with a Howe Truss bridge in 1868. In 1869 the truss bridge was enclosed, and was destroyed in 1905. The Pan American Bridge Co. constructed a steel bridge in 1906. <sup>1</sup> The fourth bridge built in 1924 was replaced in 1968 by the current concrete and steel bridge. <sup>2</sup>



1. McKay, J. 1993. Historical and Architectural Survey of Portage. 47-48.  
 2. WisDOT District 1, Bridge management Division, April 2003 letter.



MAP 14 PORTAGE

As you round the last bend in the river you will see that the city of Portage intrudes little into the river vista. There are but a few residential blocks where homes sit directly on the riverbank preceding the dike protecting the canal lock in the heart of downtown.

Reuben Gold Thwaites, an avid outdoorsman and head of the Wisconsin State Historical Society wrote of his observations upon disembarking the train at the Portage station in 1907.

*“A German housewife, with red kerchief, cap and tucked-up skirt, stood out in the water on the edge of a gravel spit, engaged in her weekly wrestle with the family wash.- a picturesque, foreign-looking scene. On the summit of a sandy promontory to our left, two other German housewives leaned over a pigyard fence and gazed intently down at these strange preparations. Back of us were the wooded sand-drifts of Portage, once a favorite camping-ground of the Winnebagoes; before us, the dark treacherous river, with its shallows and its mysterious depths....”*<sup>1</sup>



The Wisconsin River flows within 1.5 miles of the Fox River at Portage. With the construction of the canal, it became the first continental divide bridged by a waterway north of Chicago. Before the canal, overflow from the Wisconsin into the Fox made the portage navigable at times of high water.

*“The Fox and Wisconsin Rivers were used as highways of travel by Native Americans back into the dawn of time beginning soon after the melting of the last glacier. The Winnebago call the place Wau-wau-o-na the two rivers come so close to one another, ‘Wau-wau-o-na’- ‘the place where one takes up his canoe and carries it on his shoulders’. With high water, this wouldn’t have been necessary, for then the Indians could have paddled even a loaded canoe from one river into the other.”* (2) The earliest Native American culture at this site is dated from copper tools at 3000 to 1200 BC.

According to the eminent local historian Andrew Jackson Turner, Jean Nicolet, the first known European man to visit Columbia County, did so in 1634 and reached the terminus of the portage on the banks of the Wisconsin River. Nicolet turned around and returned to Quebec, kept no journal and made no maps, so that his journey is known only through the reports he made to others.<sup>3</sup> It was almost 40 years later, in June of 1673 that the “portage” found a place on the maps and from its geographical position assumed importance to Europeans. That June “Pere Jacques Marquette and Sieur Louis Joliet banked their canoes on the Fox, and after making the portage, launched their barks on the Wisconsin. Here was discovered a natural route connecting the Great Lakes with the waters coursing the vast territory to the south and west.”<sup>4</sup> The following year, after a communication from Joliet, LaSalle portaged the same flooded meadow, as did Hennepin, Tonti, Menard, LeSeur, Perrot, du L’hut (Duluth), and finally Jonathan Carver in 1766.

La Salle’s ‘flooded meadows’ have disappeared under the influence of the [Portage levee]..., and the ‘oak groves’ have mostly given place to beautiful homes. Avenues shaded with elms, maples, lindens, etc..., mark the Wauonah where the [Native Americans] toted on their shoulders the barks of Marquette and Joliet in 1673”<sup>5</sup>

1. Thwaites, Reuben Gold, “Down Historic Waterways”, 1907 from “Wisconsin River revisited” by Richard Durbin. Wisconsin Trails. May/June 1989. pg. 47.
2. Lange, Kenneth I 1976. A County Called Sauk. pg.15
3. Turner, A.J. Family Tree of Columbia County, Wis., 1904. Pg 131-133.
4. Turner, pg 89.
5. Turner, pg 90.

Cook St. Looking West, Portage, Wis.







## THE VILLAGE OF WHIRLING THUNDER

The Village of Whirling Thunder was a Ho-Chunk summer village that once sat along the north bank of the river north of the state highway 33 bridge in Portage. Noted historian Reuben Gold Thwaites described this site in his 1887 canoe trip: “Back of us were the wooded sand-drifts of Portage, once a favorite camping ground of the Ho-Chunk.” During the existence of the village in the late 1790’s, the Ho-Chunk controlled the Portage selling the right to transport boats across it to Laurant Barth and others. While the villages decreased in size as the Ho-Chunk became more mobile, with their increasing participation in the fur trade, the number of villages climbed from 6 in 1805 to 36 in 1829. Unlike some Native American groups, the Ho-Chunk maintained a strong identity after 1800:



“The larger portion of the [Winnebago] tribe is on the government reservation established for them in Nebraska, but Columbia County continues to be the abode of straggling bands of them from whose camps the descendants of DeKaury, Yellow Thunder, Black Hawk’s son and Mi-ja-jin-a-ka annually depart for the blueberry plains and cranberry marshes to replenish their finances, and to trap on the Neenah in season.”

1. Thwaites, Reuben Gold, 1907 “Down Historic Waterways, End Rev. Ed.
2. Turner, A.J. 1904. Family Tree of Columbia County. 48.



## THE PORTAGE CANAL AND THE FOX-WISCONSIN WATERWAY



As you draw near the Canal you see the link between the Fox-Wisconsin Waterways. A gateway to the great forests and prairies of America’s interior from the 1630’s through the 1830’s, the Fox-Wisconsin Waterway links Lake Michigan with the Mississippi River. Sparked by the successful completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, Wisconsin turned its efforts to connecting its major river routes to improve transportation and encourage settlement. Commercial navigation of a continental divide once crossed only by canoe became a major effort of the Fox-Wisconsin Improvement Project. The system spanned 250 miles and entailed dams and 26 locks on the Fox to break the river’s 200 feet fall into Green Bay, and a canal at Portage to connect it to the Wisconsin



in order to reach the Mississippi. The Wisconsin sits eight feet higher than the Fox, with spring floodwaters frequently creating a navigable channel to the Fox. A concept of a permanent canal first drafted on paper in 1829, yielded construction in 1835 of an easily flooded shallow canal along Wauona Trail, the traditional footpath of The Portage. The canal was dug at its current site as a shallow canal from 1849-51. Both early constructs were critical commercial successes, first for Durham boats hauling lead, and later for shallow draft steamboats also transporting raw materials to Great Lakes and New England ports. The Fox-Wisconsin project was completed in 1876. One of the improvement project’s biggest economic impacts was in addition to the locks and canal for shipping, the construction of dams for water power, which played an important role in the growth and development of the urban Lower Fox. Many of the Upper Fox communities starting with Portage had their initial development boosted by waterpower.

The Portage and Fox River locks that remain are unique among navigational systems in the U.S. in being built for steam powered boats. With a labor-intensive series of wing dams the Wisconsin bore its share of steamboat traffic, although less so than the Fox. The Waterway is part of a 250 mile linear Heritage Corridor that invites you to share in the resources within it.



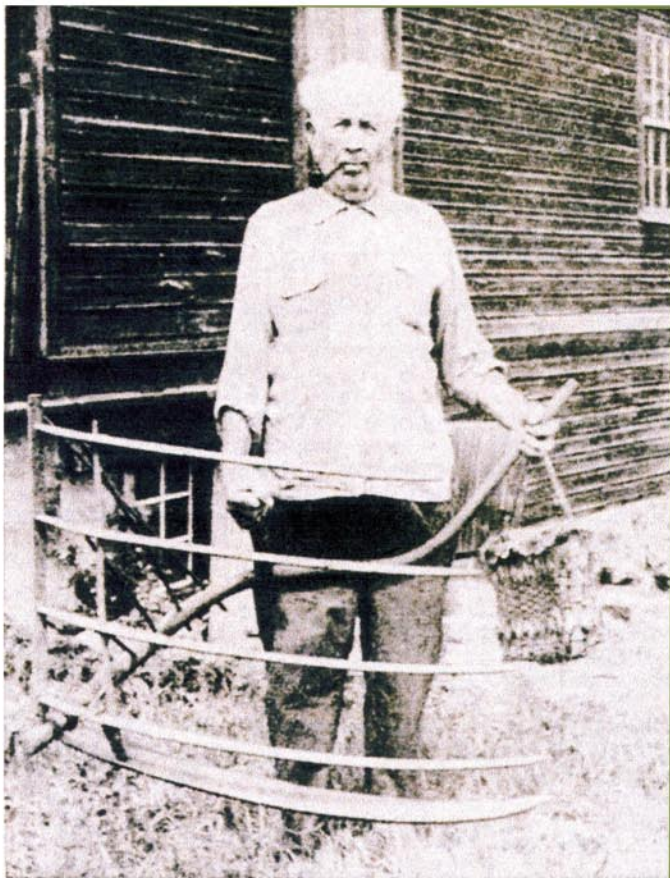


**PAUQUETTE HOMESTEAD AND FERRY**

**P**ierre Pauquette, 1795-1836, was born near St. Louis of a French voyageur and a Winnebago woman. His early years were spent trapping and trading furs with the Southwest Fur Company which had opened a fur post at the east end of the Portage near the Agency House by 1808.

In 1818, Pauquette married Therese Crele, daughter of Joseph Crele (reputed to have lived to the age of 141). On what became the Barden property, on the north side of the river, he established a trading house, dwelling, and two or three farm buildings. Pauquette also ran a ferry from the south side of the river, and served travelers heading west across the Wisconsin.<sup>1</sup>

Pauquette was the “government farmer”, instructing the Ho-Chunk in agriculture at the Indian Farm in Caledonia. “So familiar was [he] with Indian character, he was held by them in almost superstitious idolatry, that his control over them was almost boundless”.<sup>2</sup> Pauquette, famous for his strength, built the first church between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi for the Dominican Missionary Samuele Corto Mazzuchelli, in 1831, which once stood in Portage near the corner of Adams and Conant Streets.<sup>3</sup>



Grandson Moses Pauquette, ca. 1957, Eau Claire Leader

Pauquettes death in 1836 was over a disputed bill according to his grandson Moses Pauquette:

*“An Indian owed my Grandfather at his trading post in Portage. The Indian claimed the bill was unjust and insulted my Grandfather and knocked him to the floor. On his way home that night, my Grandfather passed the hostile Indian’s camp. When the Indian came forward with a gun, Pierre opened his shirt and spoke “then shoot and watch a brave man die”.”<sup>4</sup>*



From: Portage (Wis.) Democrat, April 12, 1905.  
Sketch by Mr. A.J. Turner

In *Mau-zau-mau-ne-kah v. U.S.*, the prisoner was sentenced to be executed on Sept. 1st, 1837. Because the murder took place on land belonging to the Menomonee, over which the U.S. Courts did not have jurisdiction, *Mau-zau-mau-ne-kah* went free.<sup>5</sup>

Pauquette is credited with cementing relations between Native Americans and Europeans more so than any pioneer in our history and remains a central figure in the founding of Portage.

1. Potter, Wallace, 1897 letter to editor, A.J. Turner, Portage Register, Feb. 9.
2. Turner, A.J., Portage Democrat, April 12, 1905. Mazzuchelli.
3. Turner, A.J. Portage Democrat, April 12, 1905.
4. Eau Claire Leader, Aug. 10, 1957. PAGE? Reporter?
5. McCarthy, Dorothy, “Old, New Lights on Pierre Pauquette”, Portage Daily Register, DATE?.





## LOG RAFTS ON THE WISCONSIN



Large raft operations brought rough-cut lumber down the river from the Wisconsin mills in the Pineries north of Wisconsin Rapids to finishing yards along the Mississippi River and in Chicago. From the late 1830's through 1883, Portage participated in the northern lumber milling industry as a supply and service center. Its commercial enterprises such as the large groceries and mercantile stores wholesaled goods to the lumber operators. Particularly in the 1850s and 1860s, Portage procured its reputation as a overnight stopping place for lumber rafting operations. During an evening, as many as twenty fleets of rafts with up to 500 raftsmen literally lined the north bank of the Wisconsin between the end of Prospect or Prospect Hill Point to Riverside Park in the First Ward. Although many raftsmen ate and slept on the rafts, they patronized Portage's services including its taverns, hotels, and groceries. By the 1840s onward, these businesses occurred along the Wisconsin River south of the canal. These facilities also served the raftsmen as they traveled upstream to their work, and some maintained their permanent residences in Portage by 1850 into the 1880s.



businesses occurred along the Wisconsin River south of the canal. These facilities also served the raftsmen as they traveled upstream to their work, and some maintained their permanent residences in Portage by 1850 into the 1880s.



## Aldo Leopold Conservationist and author

Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), author of the posthumously published *Sand County Almanac* decried the passing of wilderness, soil erosion and flooding, and wasted timberlands resulting from the ecological imbalances so evident during the depression era of the 1930's. He advocated the need for man's stewardship of the natural world and all its ecological diversity. His "Land Ethic" made man and land a single community: "We abuse the land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see it as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."<sup>1</sup> Leopold's shack along the Wisconsin river just upstream from Portage, was his retreat which inspired much of his writings.



1. Leopold, Aldo. "A Sand County Almanac" 1949, Part IV.

## Frederick Jackson Turner Historian

Born in Portage, Wisconsin, Turner spent most of his early adult life at the University of Wisconsin. He received his B.A. in 1884, then his M.A. in History in 1888. After a year of study at Johns Hopkins (Ph.D., 1890), he returned to join the History Department faculty at Wisconsin, where he taught for the next 21 years. He later taught at Harvard from 1910 to 1924 before retiring. "



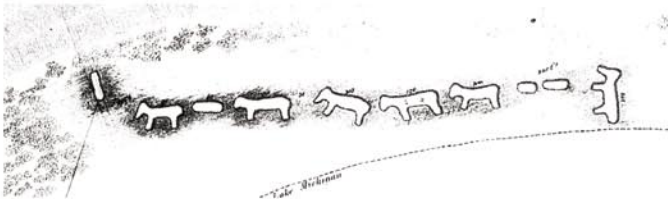
"In 1893, Turner presented his famous paper, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. His ideas on the development of American culture's distinctive qualities generated debate and influenced historians for decades. Throughout his career, he continually elaborated and nuanced these ideas in both classes and writings. His books included *Rise of the New West* (1906), *The Frontier in American History* (1920) and *The Significance of Sections in American History* (1932), which was awarded a Pulitzer Prize the year after Turner's death."<sup>1</sup>

1. SOURCES: Webster's American Biographies; Cambridge Dictionary of American Biography. <http://us.history.wisc.edu/hist102/bios/15.html>



**EARLY NATIVE AMERICAN SITES**

Native Americans built geometric and effigy mounds in south central Wisconsin roughly from 3000 BC through 1200 A.D. Compared with European presence here of under 500 years, the Native American culture's dominance is remarkable. Clusters of mounds were built on prominent landforms and sometimes around villages. The mounds are usually several feet high and those surviving have been badly eroded by farming, flooding, tree growth, and vandalism and construction of highways and cityscapes.



A 2000 review by the Wisconsin Archeological Society estimates that 15,000-20,000 sites were present in the early 1800's in what later became Wisconsin. Only about 4,000 remain today (Birmingham & Eisenberg). Regarding mounds along the Wisconsin River, although more than 80% of them no longer exist in the landscape, their former distribution pattern is, from one perspective, intended to create spiritual insight into a once dominant ceremonial feature. The only mound complex open to the public for interpretation in Columbia County, the Kingsley Mound Group, is on the Wisconsin River several miles below Wisconsin Dells.



*Form of an Ancient Mound  
On Sect 3 T. 10. N. R. 7 E. 240 feet  
from tip to tip of Wing.*



**Henry Hamilton Bennett  
Photographer**

H. H. Bennett, one of the founding fathers of modern photography, immortalized the beauty of late 19th and early 20th century central Wisconsin through the use of his "fast shutter", allowing him to photograph objects (and people) in motion. His studio at 215 Broadway in Wisconsin Dells is on the National Register of Historic Places.



He used his high speed shutter to photograph in great detail the last rafts descending the Wisconsin before the completion of the Kilbourn Dam. He also photo documented the scenic beauty of the river before the dam raised the water level by 17 feet.

**John Muir  
Naturalist and Conservationist**

John Muir is widely regarded as the father of America's National Park system. "Farmer, inventor, sheep-herder, naturalist, explorer, writer, and conservationist –[Muir] was born in 1838 in Dunbar, Scotland. Until the age of eleven he attended the local schools of that small coastal town. In 1849, the Muir family emigrated to the United States, settling first at Fountain Lake and then moving to Hickory Hill Farm near Portage, Wisconsin." <sup>1</sup>

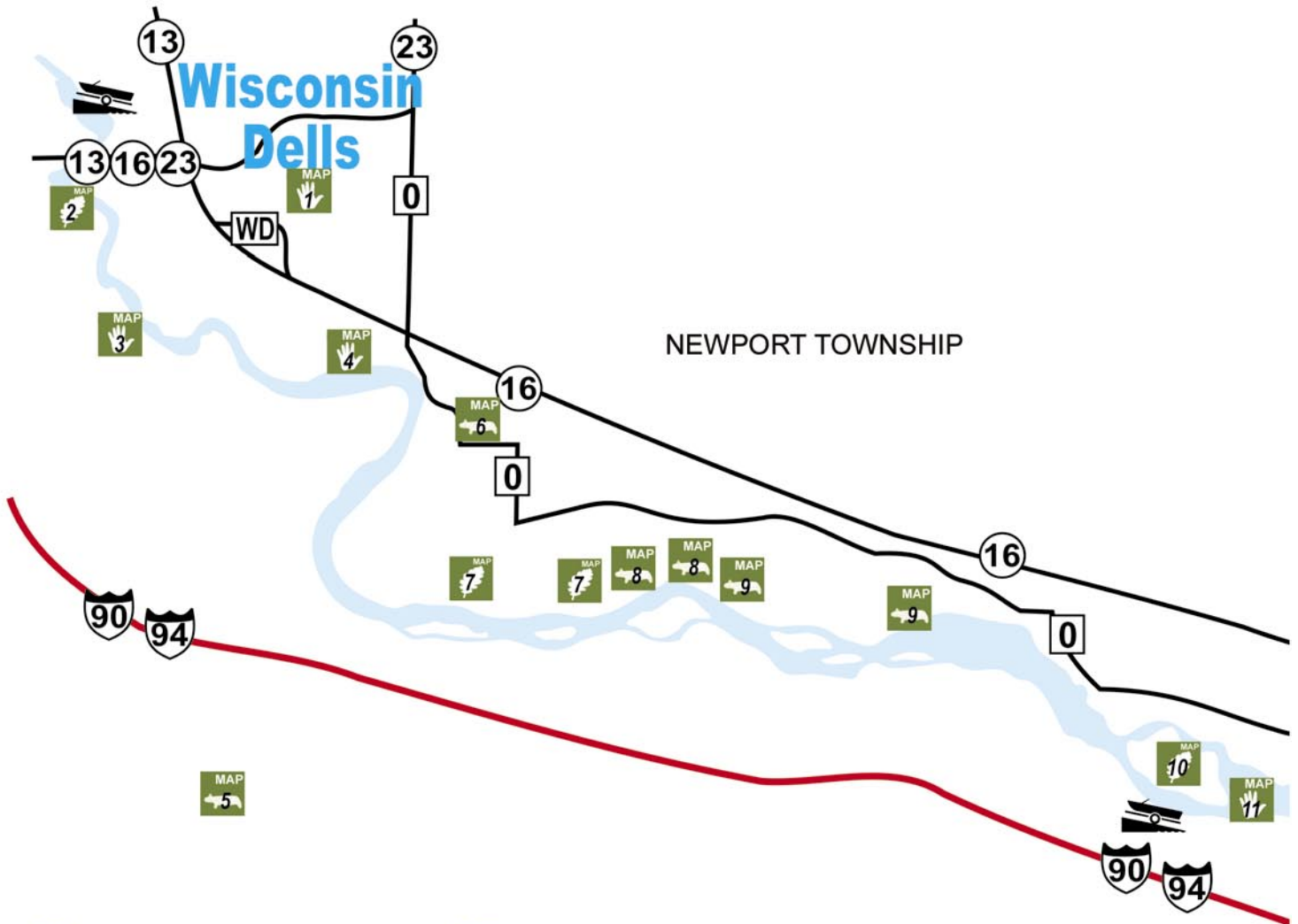


"John Muir was perhaps this country's most famous and influential naturalist and conservationist in having won the battle to save Yosemite, the Grand Canyon and the Sequoias. He taught the people of his time and ours the importance of experiencing and protecting our natural heritage by obtaining passage of the 1890 U.S. Act of Congress that established the world's first National Parks. His words have heightened our perception of nature. His personal and determined involvement in the great conservation questions of the day was and remains an inspiration for environmental activists everywhere." <sup>1</sup>

1. [http://www.sierraclub.org/john\\_muir\\_exhibit/frameindex](http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/frameindex).

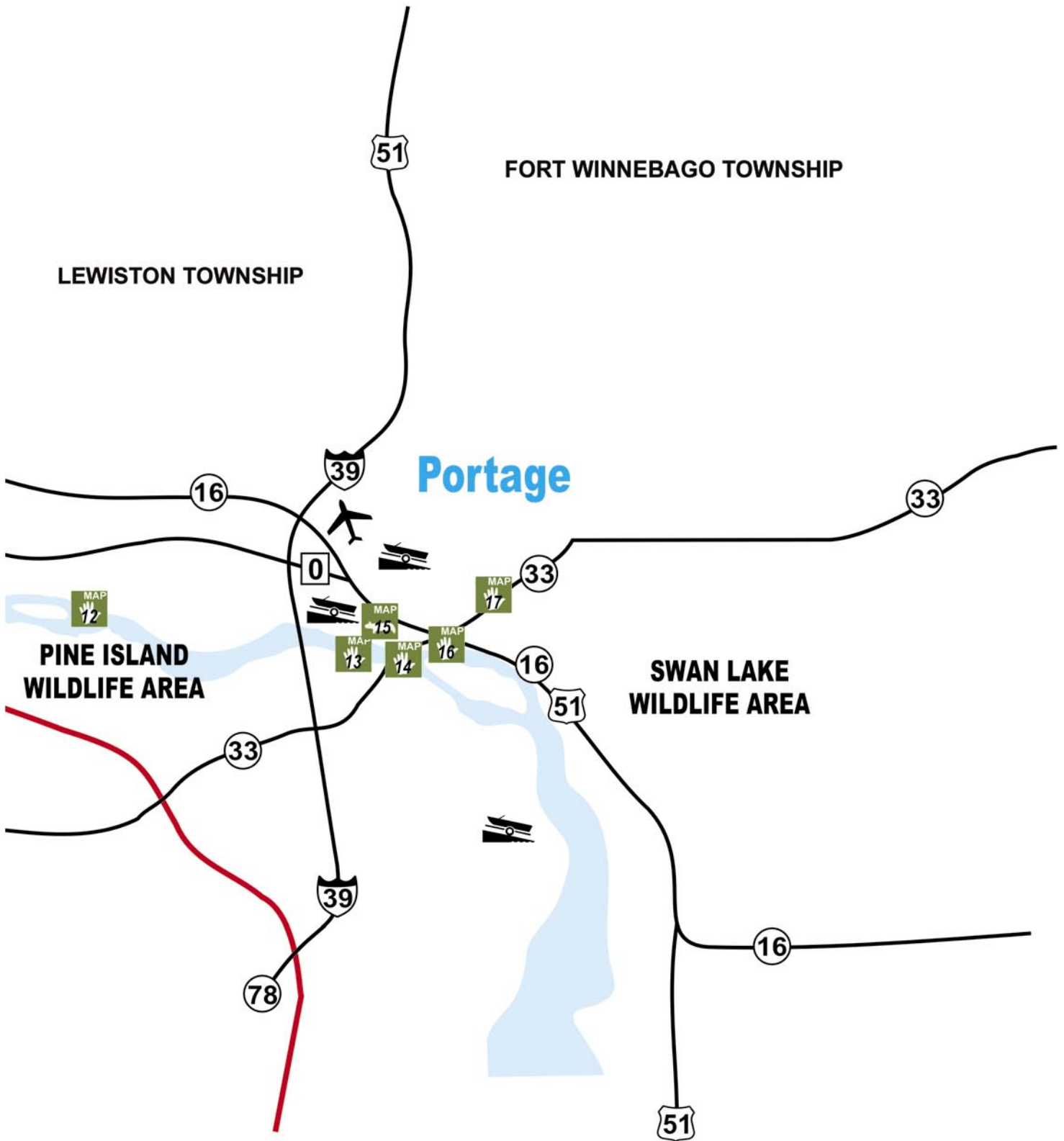


# Sand County Water Trail



- |  |                         |  |                              |
|--|-------------------------|--|------------------------------|
|  | KILBORN CITY            |  | PINE ISLAND                  |
|  | KILBORN DAM             |  | ALDO LEOPOLD's SHACK         |
|  | LAKE DELTON             |  | WHERE's THE CHANNEL?         |
|  | NEWPORT                 |  | FIRST WISCONSIN RIVER BRIDGE |
|  | YELLOW THUNDER          |  | PORTAGE                      |
|  | KINGSLEY BEND           |  | VILLAGE OF WHIRLING THUNDER  |
|  | MIGRATORY SONGBIRDS     |  | PORTAGE CANAL                |
|  | NATIVE CROPS            |  | PAUQUETTE HOMESTEAD & FERRY  |
|  | OLD DE-KAU-RY's VILLAGE |  |                              |









PORTAGE AREA TRAILS HERITAGE SYSTEM  
THE PATHS VISION

The PATHS Vision proposes to link all the natural and historic wonders of the Portage area into a comprehensive system of foot and bicycle paths and roadways allowing for increased recreational, economic, environmental and health opportunities for all. This plan, designed for both residents and visitors would allow a route between such elements as The Indian Agency House, the Portage Canal, Surgeon’s Quarters at Fort Winnebago, Pine Island Wildlife Area, Duck Creek, the Historic Downtown and Residential Districts, and the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers.

The Portage Trails Team needs your help with continuing the planning of the PATHS system and the improvement or repair of existing trails in the area. Contact Tim Raimer, Portage Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department, 806 Silverlake Dr., Portage WI 53901. Phone: 608-742-2178. For more information about the Portage area, visit these websites:

- [www.portagepaths.com](http://www.portagepaths.com)
- [www.mainstreetportage.org](http://www.mainstreetportage.org)
- [www.portagewi.com](http://www.portagewi.com)
- [www.portagecanalsociety.com](http://www.portagecanalsociety.com)
- [www.co.columbia.wi.us](http://www.co.columbia.wi.us)

Brochure design provided by a grant from the National Park Service Challenge Cost Share Program.



- Additional funding or support:
- The Fox-Wisconsin River Heritage Corridor
  - The Portage Chamber of Commerce
  - City of Portage Tourism Council
  - Portage Canal Society
  - Portage Historical Society
  - Columbia County Land Information Department
  - Main Street Portage
  - and other private donors.

FOX-WISCONSIN RIVERS



HERITAGE CORRIDOR

