

June
2022

The Chronicler

MISSION STATEMENT

Preserving the past for future generations by collecting a unique and enduring collection of Polk County history shared with the public through programs, exhibits and research.

MUSEUM HOURS

2022 Season: 5/26 – 9/5
Thursday - Sunday
Noon to 4pm
Open on Memorial Day and Labor Day

ADMISSION

No fee for admission.
Donations appreciated.

102 Main Street
PO Box 41
Balsam Lake, WI
54810

715-485-9269

Email:
info@polkcountymuseum.org

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The French Era: Voyageurs

Can you imagine an empire, carved out of the Canadian wilderness, moving south down the Mississippi? This was the world and domain primarily controlled by the French for fur trading purposes. The two key trading posts were centered at Fort Michilimackinac and Grand Portage. A great system of waterways, connected by portages often spanning ten miles, aided in the quick transportation and settlement.

Fort Michilimackinac stood at the crossroads for all the French fur trade. To the west, Grand Marais also became an important site for traders. Boat loads of furs were brought and traded for supplies each summer as many Europeans in the area were begging for all that could be provided. French, and later British, companies were given exclusive trapping rights. We are still trying to locate some nearby trading posts, however briefly they may have existed.

Imagine the trappers, chanting French songs, with boundless energy and without complaint—even in frigid temperatures—working for a year, then heading for the trading posts. It was arduous and dangerous work, but it paid off for many.



Check out our
website!

www.PolkCountyMuseum.org

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Board Meetings are held the 1st Thursday of each month at 6:00 p.m. at the museum.

Daniel Greysolon de la Dulhut

We will briefly look into the life of a French soldier from de Laval, who lived from 1636 to 1710. He was involved in a major campaign at Seneffe, Belgium in 1674, but immediately afterward desired to go to New France in what is now Canada and North America. He and a brother would receive financial help from his uncle Jean Patron.

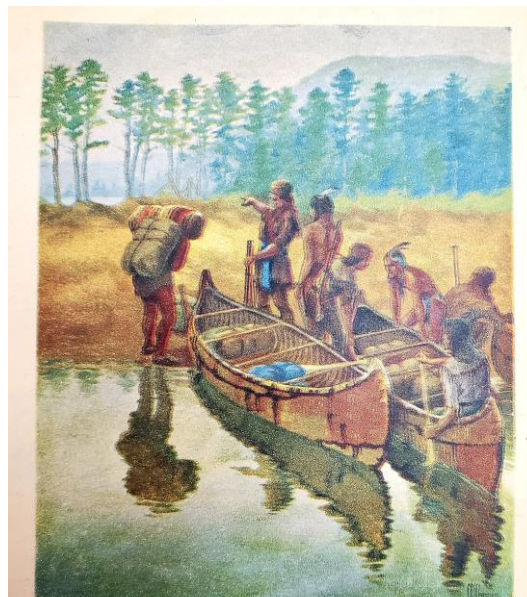
Living in Montreal for a few years, he came to take an interest in conflicts between the French and the Iroquois and thought about how to solve them. Consequentially, he was drawn further inland to establish lasting relations with other tribes.

Setting out in September of 1678, his party consisted of seven Frenchmen and three slaves. He recorded in his personal journal that his goal was to “make peace with all the other nations around Lake Superior... under our invincible monarch.” Was he urged on in this project by Governor Frontenac or doing this of his own accord? It appears that two weeks after leaving for this trip, he was exercising exclusive rights over decisions made.

He wintered near Sault Ste. Marie, likely for fur trading. The following summer he headed to Little Portage, on the western edge of Lake Superior, then arrived at Mille Lacs on July 2, 1679. Returning to Fond du Lac (Duluth), he met with two tribes for a treaty lasting 57 years. To cement the agreement, several marriages between the French and the Indians were arranged.

The next year on June 25, 1680, Greysolon’s canoe party of five began to follow the St. Croix River to the Mississippi. Along the way, they were called upon to rescue Father Hennepin and others. Greysolon’s fair treatment of western tribes earned him respect and lasting friendships from the Indians.

Upon returning to Quebec, he faced charges of illegal dealings with the English. La Falle, who was then in charge of the West, branded him “the king of the outlaws.” He ended up returning to France to clear his reputation. His life dream of becoming the ruling “seigneur” of the West was destroyed. Greysolon’s final life work was to build needed forts near Michilimackinac and around the Great Lakes.



Long credited with being the first white man on Minnesota soil, and perhaps still entitled to the honor, Daniel Greysolon, Sieur du Luth, is pictured arriving in 1679 at the head of the lakes (Fond du Lac). On July 2, 1679, he planted the French flag at Lake Mille Lacs.

Painting by Francis L. Jaques, reproduced courtesy Minnesota Arrowhead association.

“Mah-kée-mee-teuv, Grizzly Bear, Chief of the [Menominee] Tribe” by George Catlin, 1831.
~ Smithsonian Institute



Calvin Coolidge in Polk County

A century has passed since a President has set foot on Polk County soil. In August of 1923, Calvin Coolidge became the President of the United States, following the death of Warren Harding. Those years were peaceful and prosperous, but lifestyles were changing as the boisterous “Roaring Twenties” unfolded.

Apparently, Coolidge is still recognized as the only President to visit Polk County. In a recent article, Coolidge is said to have stayed on the Bois Brule River near Superior, led by a guide named John LaRock. Interesting photos of his time spent there show the President in his full business suit while in a canoe or wading knee-high in the water.

Between June 15 and September 10, 1928, Coolidge took his final vacation while still in office. When the President stepped off the train, he found himself at his destination, Seven Pines Lodge in Lewis, just a few miles northeast of Balsam Lake. While at the lodge, they would listen to Country and Western music, often facilitated by a group of lively fiddlers. It seems that security and telegraph services were bolstered for the occasion. The Lodge is now in the National Registry.

It is important to remember our local heritage not just for the sake of remembering, but also to better understand why and how we got to where we are today. What is the significance of Calvin Coolidge visiting Polk County? Perhaps it is that the beauty of the local flora and fauna captivated the attention of someone who could have traveled anywhere but chose here. It could be a number of other things. All I know is that our local history is more dynamic and exciting than watching a good movie and I’m looking forward to discovering more. Who’s with me?



“Wiskonson” as a Territory



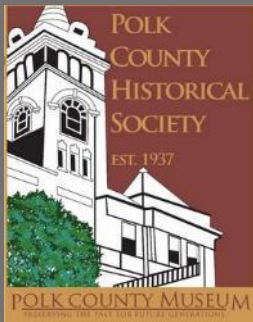
Let us transport our minds to an earlier era as a new territory was taking shape, circa 1836. Some unusual names were used as what we know as the state of Wisconsin became a territory with borders. “Wiskonson” and “Mesconsing”, the Native American name for the territory, were used before settling on the name for a state in 1848. These historic names can be found on title deeds of land parcels sold in the early 1800s.

Soon came the founding of lumber mills, towns, post offices, schools, and farms. These advancements came as a result of land cession treaties signed with the Ojibwe in 1837 and 1842 (the last one being signed in 1854, giving all Ojibwe land to the U.S. and establishing reservation territories). Within the “Wiskonson” territory, three counties had been established prior to Polk County: Chippewa, Crawford, and St. Croix. It is worth noting that the original territory consisted of all of what is today Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and the Dakotas east of the Missouri River.

The early settlers were a mix of former soldiers from Fort Snelling, land speculators, lumbermen, and farmers. By 1839 two sawmills were operating, one at Marine on the St. Croix, the other at Falls St. Croix. The 1840 census of these settlers totaled 351. That same year a petition was brought to the legislature to create a new county (St. Croix) in order to have a county court closer than Prairie du Chein. Two signatures on that petition belonged to William S. Hungerford and Washington Libbey, residents of Falls St. Croix. August 3, 1840 was the first county election with Falls St. Croix sending Calvin Tuttle to serve as one of three commissioners. Later that year, two legislative candidates were elected: J.R. Brown and Theophilus LaChapelle (both Democrats).

Within the next few years, a lumber mill was also established and operating in Osceola. The population in the wider St. Croix County grew to 970 by 1842. Numerous male settlers arrived to work at the mills.

We encourage our readers to visit our local museums and libraries to fill in events of the early times of Polk County and beyond. We hope this information inspires you to keep digging for interesting facts about the county, keeping the appreciation and heritage of Polk County alive and able to be passed down to future generations.



Please consider helping to support the Polk County Historical Society by sending donations to:

Polk County Historical Society
PO Box 41
Balsam Lake, WI
54810

Welcome our new Director

Shaila Johnson joined the Polk County Historical Society, in May of 2022. She was born here in Polk County and currently lives just north of St. Croix Falls, in Eureka Township. She is married to another Polk County boy, and together they have three kids, who all attend the St. Croix Falls School District.

From a young age, Shaila was immersed in the family genealogy, and took a great interest in both family and local history. A membership to the Amery Swedish Club, and a board seat at the New Home Cemetery seemed a good fit. She is also the Treasurer for the Township of Eureka.

She is very excited to be here at our beautiful museum, and is thrilled to see the strong solid foundation of volunteers that help make the museum run. With a strong foundation, the Polk County Historical Museum, can “shoot for the stars” and continue to be a strong asset to the citizens of Polk County. She encourages all Polk County residents, from the four corners in Polk of Sterling, Lorain, Farmington to Clear Lake, and everyone inbetween, to venture on into the museum this summer, and see what a great place it is!

Museum Highlights

We have made some exciting changes in the museum since last season! We have a new exhibit in progress featuring hunting, trapping, and fishing paraphernalia from Polk County’s past. A big thank you to Tom and Reid Binfet and Bob and Kyle Swanson for donating their time and resources to build and curate this exhibit.



Our theme for this summer is “Lake Life” in Polk County. We will be featuring items and information on resorts in our county’s history as well as various lake-themed items from local history that are sure to inspire a day on the water. Come check it out Memorial Day through Labor Day!