



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS

STUDYING WISCONSIN

The Life of Increase Lapham

early chronicler of plants, rocks, rivers, mounds
and all things Wisconsin

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STUDYING WISCONSIN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



What research methods did the authors employ to study the topic of Increase Lapham? How is their research documented?

How does the book utilize primary documents?

What about Increase Lapham's upbringing prepared him to be a scientist? How did he develop a curiosity about natural phenomena?

Increase Lapham was humble about his accomplishments. Where did his modesty come from, and how did it play out in his scientific and civic pursuits? Did it get in the way of his progress as a scientist? What would you say his definition of "success" might be?

How did Lapham gain knowledge and experience despite not having the time or resources to participate in a formal education? Did a lack of formal education hinder Lapham in any way?

In your opinion, what is the most interesting subject that Lapham studied and why (e.g. botany, geology, archaeology, limnology, mineralogy, engineering, meteorology, and cartography)?

What contributions to science did Lapham make that affected not only Wisconsin but also the nation? Which contributions were most significant?

In 1873, Lapham became director of a new Mineralogical and Agricultural Survey of Wisconsin but was abruptly replaced by a political appointee. How did politics factor into Lapham's life and study and specifically in this incident?

How did Lapham's work help to found the National Weather Service?

Did *Studying Wisconsin* alter your perception of Wisconsin geography or landmarks (i.e. Aztalan, Indian mounds, the lakes of Waukesha County, etc.) that you have experienced previous to reading the book and in what way?

Do you think that a person like Increase Lapham—involved in so many diverse disciplines and fields—could exist today? Why or why not?



Increase Lapham believed in working for the public good and was engaged in numerous civic pursuits, including the planning of the City of Milwaukee, starting the Milwaukee Public Library, and instituting public lecture series. How does his civil service interact with his work as a scientist? What lessons can we take from his interdisciplinary, service-oriented approach to life?

Although his name adorns a hall on the University of Wisconsin campus, an elementary school in Madison, and even a peak in the Kettle Moraine (among others), this is the first full-length biography of Increase Lapham. Why do you think it has taken so long for Lapham to be recognized?

