



## National History Day in Wisconsin Topics

### **Jean Nicolet – Myth versus Reality**

Time Period: Early 1600s

Type of History: Political, Economic, Native American, Early Explorers

What is this about?

Jean Nicolet was a French Canadian explorer credited with being the first person of European descent to set foot in what is today Wisconsin. As the story goes, Nicolet was searching for the rumored Northwest Passage, a water-route across northern Canada that would lead to the Pacific Ocean. When arriving on the shores of Green Bay, Nicolet disembarked from his canoe wearing Chinese silk robes, fired his pistols into the air, and was immediately disappointed to realize he was not, in fact, in China. New research by Patrick Jung has uncovered the truth behind these myths, discovering that much of Nicolet's story has been misinterpreted and miscommunicated through the ages as historians added their own "facts" to the story.

Keywords: Jean Nicolet, Samuel De Champlain, Etienne Brule

Where to Start? *The Misunderstood Mission of Jean Nicolet* by Patrick J. Jung:

<https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9912596113802121>

Turning Points from the Wisconsin Historical Society:

<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-006/#tid2>

### **The Lead Rush and the Treaty Era**

Time Period: Early 1800s – 1848

Type of History: Political, Economic, Native American

What is this about?

The story of how we became the Badger State is familiar to most schoolchildren. Lead was "discovered" in the southwestern portions of the state, and miners came from all over the world. Many of them were from Cornwall, England. In fact, so many miners came that soon we had enough voters to go from territory to statehood. In 1848, Wisconsin was voted into the Union. This Eurocentric perspective of Wisconsin statehood ignores the Native American story in Wisconsin—the dozens of treaties, forced removals, and broken promises made by the US Government. The true history of lead and its uses by Native peoples reaches back in time long before the Treaty of 1837 stripped the Ho-Chunk of their ancestral lands and forced them out of Wisconsin. This more comprehensive picture of our history brings needed perspective to the story of the Badger State.

Keywords: Ho-Chunk, Treaty of 1837, Lead Mining, Badgers

Where to Start? *Lead Mining: Turning Points* from the Wisconsin Historical Society

<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-026/#tid6>

Treaty Councils: *Turning Points* from the Wisconsin Historical Society:

<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-013/#tid3>



## **The Black Hawk War**

Time Period: 1800–1830s

Type of History: Political, Military, Social, Economic, Native American

What is this about?

The Black Hawk War of 1832 names the conflict between the Sauk Indians, led by Chief Black Hawk, and the United States government. After ceding their land in an 1804 treaty, the Sauk were finally ordered to leave in 1829. When the US Government failed to deliver on its promises of supplies, Black Hawk led his nation back onto their former homeland. Due to a miscommunication, attempts to negotiate ended up in shots being fired and fatalities on both sides. The war ended with the Massacre at Bad Axe with the deaths of over two hundred of Black Hawk's followers at the hands of US soldiers and state militia.

Keywords: Black Hawk War, Sauk Nation, Treaty of 1804

Where to Start? *Life of Black Hawk*

<https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/999575609102121> *Turning Points* from the Wisconsin Historical Society: <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-012/>

## **The Fugitive Slave Act and Joshua Glover, Sherman Booth, and other abolitionists**

Time Period: 1850–1860s

Type of History: Political, Social, Economic, African American

What is this about?

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was an attempt to find a compromise between free states and enslaver states regarding the institution of slavery in the United States and its territories. At the most basic level, the act allowed for the capture and repatriation of enslaved persons caught anywhere in the United States, even free states of the north. This act led to a growth in abolitionist sentiment in the country and contributed to the growth of the Underground Railroad.

Keywords: Slavery, US Civil War, Fugitive Slave Act

Where to Start? *Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 (full text)*

[https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/fugitive.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/fugitive.asp)  
*Turning Points* from the Wisconsin Historical Society:  
<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-021/>

## **The Underground Railroad**

Time Period: 1840s–1860s

Type of History: Political, Social, Economic, African American

What is this about?

The Underground Railroad was a coalition of abolitionists in the north and south that provided safe havens for freedom seekers looking to escape enslavement in southern states. Abolitionists were called conductors and had a series of codes used to communicate with each other and enslaved persons as they made their way north. For



many enslaved persons, the ultimate destination was Canada, which, as part of Great Britain, had abolished slavery in 1833.

Keywords: Slavery, US Civil War, Underground Railroad, Abolitionist

Where to Start? Codes of the Underground Railroad: <http://www.harriet-tubman.org/underground-railroad-secret-codes/>

The Underground Railroad in Wisconsin from the Wisconsin Historical Society: <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS566>

### **Letters from Home**

Time Period: Varies (1860s; 1918–1919; 1940s)

Type of History: Social, Military

What is this about?

Soldiers on the frontlines have relied on letters and packages from home to boost morale, keep up with their friends, and maintain long-distance relationships. Reading those letters today gives us a glimpse into the everyday lives of those on the frontlines and those left at home. In letters sent home from the US Civil War, World War I, and World War II, soldiers both explained their views of war and shielded their loved ones from the daily horrors of it. In letters sent to the front, you can see how families, friends, husbands, wives, and children encouraged their soldiers while maintaining homes, working new jobs, and enduring rationing and other hardships.

Keywords: Civil War Letters, War Correspondence, Homefront

Where to Start? Wisconsin Women in the War Between the States by Ethel Hurn: <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9910153779802121>

The Civil War Homefront from the Wisconsin Historical Society: <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-024/#tid5>

### **Logging and the timber industry**

Time Period: 1820s–1920s

Type of History: Social, Economic

What is this about?

When Europeans first arrived in what is now Wisconsin, over one-third of the land was covered in forests. These forests were a valuable resource that Europeans and later the Americans wanted. Native nations in Wisconsin were forced to cede their land to the United States government. With the Native peoples removed from their ancestral homes, the lumber industry grew quickly. Logging companies bought the land and hired men known as timber runners to survey it. Logging crews were sent into the heart of the Wisconsin forests to log the old-growth white pines. They worked in freezing temperatures, blizzards, and howling rainstorms. In the spring, men surfed floating logs down flooded rivers to sawmills. There wasn't much in the way of entertainment, so loggers and lumbermen had to invent their own. Telling tall tales was one way to pass the time. As these tales were told and retold, they changed with each storyteller.

Keywords: Lumber Baron, Paul Bunyan, Logging, Timber Runner



**Where to Start?** *Out of the Northwoods: The Many Lives of Paul Bunyan* by Michael Edmonds: <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9910079192802121>  
*Logging and Forest Products* from the Wisconsin Historical Society:  
<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-027/#tid6>

## **Women's Suffrage**

Time Period: 1840s–1920s

Type of History: Social, Economic, Political

What is this about?

The right to vote is fundamental to democracy, and the successful struggle to expand suffrage to include women was built over time through the efforts of generations of activists. Wisconsin's Progressive political movement produced local and national leaders in the Woman's Suffrage movement, including Ada James, Belle Case La Follette, Robert La Follette Senior, Carrie Chatman Catt, Theodora Youmans, and many more. Using a wide variety of methods from protest marches to hunger strikes, men and women suffragists worked to guarantee women to vote, culminating in the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

Keywords: Suffrage, Suffragists, Nineteenth Amendment, Progressives

**Where to Start?** *On Wisconsin Women: Working for Their Rights from Settlement to Suffrage* by Genivieve McBride:

<https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/999725503002121>

*The Woman's Suffrage Movement* from the Wisconsin Historical Society:

<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-032/#tid7>

## **The invention of the typewriter**

Time Period: 1860s–1890s

Type of History: Social, Economic

What is this about?

Christopher Latham Sholes invented the first working typewriter in 1867. The complex machine would revolutionize how people communicated and who did the communicating. While the original machine proved expensive to build and lacked features we take for granted, it still proved faster than penmanship and was soon adopted in many business settings. Mass production was done by E. Remington & Sons, who also made sewing machines and firearms. The influence of sewing machines could be seen in the typewriter's foot pedal carriage return and floral decorations. As typewriters became commonplace, so too did women entering the workforce. Women began replacing male clerks as secretaries. This transformation enabled women to seek careers in many corners of the business world, which had previously been closed to them.

Keywords: Typewriter, Christopher Latham Sholes, E. Remington & Sons

**Where to Start?** *First Practical Typewriter*

<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS2697>



*Wisconsin Magazine of History – The Original Typewriter Enterprise:*  
<https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/wmh/id/17858>

### **Wisconsin's Civil Rights Leaders Speaking Truth to Power**

While many people associate the civil rights movement of the 1950s–1970s with southern states and southern leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Wisconsin also has a proud history of strong civil rights leadership. Alderwoman Vel Phillips, the first African American woman to be elected to Milwaukee's City Council, Father James Groppi, the white Catholic priest who became the spokesperson for the youth NAACP, and Representative Lloyd Barbee all played important roles in leading Milwaukee's civil rights movement.

Keywords: Representative Lloyd Barbee, Father James Groppi, Madam Alderman Vel Phillips, MUSIC, Milwaukee Civil Rights

Where to Start? *The March on Milwaukee* from UW Milwaukee:

<https://uwm.edu/marchonmilwaukee/>

*Desegregation and Civil Rights – Turning Points from the Wisconsin Historical Society:*

<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-049/#tid10>