



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY



HEY, WISCONSIN!

These pages are packed full of information about an important step in creating a solid NHD project: picking a topic with lots of resources that interest you.

Why a Wisconsin Topic?

There are thousands of stories in Wisconsin history that would make excellent projects related to this year's theme. This packet is a starting point for research and to introduce you to stories that you may have never heard before. (Of course, you always have the option to select a national or world topic.)

Choose Local

Researching a state or local topic provides you the opportunity to learn more about the place you live. Becoming personally connected to the story you are telling makes the research even more interesting. There are fascinating stories waiting to be discovered and told about the people, places, and things you see every day!

Resources, Resources, Resources

By choosing a topic focusing on the history of your own state or community, you will have a much easier time tracking down *primary sources* than if you chose a national topic with sources that may be out of easy reach. Primary sources such as letters, diaries, documents and interviews with witnesses are extremely important to successful research projects.

More Ideas

To discover even more Wisconsin topic ideas, visit your local library or historical society or explore our website. We have listed online resources and printed material that can provide more detailed information for each topic.

Online Resources

- Go to nhd.org for help with general National History Day information.
- Visit wisconsinhistory.org to view collections at the Wisconsin Historical Society.
- Head to wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/ to learn about important topics in WI.
- *Wisconsin Magazine of History* at wihist.org/2hs1Ewt has great ideas.
- The Friendly Finding Aid friendlyfindingaid.com has La Crosse area topics with primary sources!
- Recollection Wisconsin recollectionwisconsin.org has digitized WI archival materials.

Collecting, Preserving, and Sharing Stories since 1846
816 State Street Madison, Wisconsin 53706

wisconsinhistory.org

Topic Suggestions

Treaties As fur traders explored the Midwest and settlers built homes, the federal government expanded the territory of the United States. Treaty negotiation and communication with Wisconsin's first people became essential. As the policy of Indian removal during the nineteenth century forced the relocation of major Native American groups, how did cultural and linguistic differences affect the treaty-making process? Take a closer look at one of the major treaties in Wisconsin history. Were there triumphs and for who? Who suffered tragedies?

- For information about one of the rarest documents in the Wisconsin state archives representing the Native people's perspective on treaties with the U.S. government between 1825–1864 see "These I Do Not Sell" by Harry Miller, *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, wihist.org/2vc0ISi Summer 2001 edition.
- For major treaties negotiated between Indian nations and the U.S. government that resulted in land cessions in Wisconsin and a detailed account of the Prairie du Chien Treaty of 1825, go to wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints and glifwc.org/TreatyRights/ to see Turning Points in Wisconsin History.
- Check out Chief Buffalo (Kechewaishke) as a major leader for the Ojibwa in resisting forced migration.

Native American Mission Schools In the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church extended its network of missions and schools among Native Americans in Wisconsin. Missionaries built schools on reservations to educate children and convert them to Christianity. These mission schools cooperated with federal Indian education programs that removed children forcibly from their families and placed them in government-run boarding schools. At the time, did anyone see this as triumphant? Why is it tragic to take away children from their parents and their culture? What is the lasting impact of that?

- For information and primary documents relating to mission schools see Turning Points at wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints to learn more.

The Conservation Movement As settlement increased across the state, so did the demands imposed on Wisconsin's natural resources. Wisconsinites began to recognize the value of biodiversity and introduced new programs to preserve the environment and protect animals. Does perspective change whether the movement was a triumph or a tragedy?

- Visit wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints for information and sources relating to Wisconsin's conservation movement.

"Black Thursday" On November 21, 1968, students led by the Black Student Union (BSU) at the Wisconsin State University of Oshkosh (now UW–Oshkosh) protested discriminatory treatment by the university. Ninety-four student demonstrators were arrested and 90 demonstrators were expelled from UW–Oshkosh.

- Visit wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints to learn more.
- More information here blackthursday.uwosh.edu/blackthurs.html at UW-Oshkosh.

1912 Suffrage Referendum in Wisconsin Wisconsin women came close to getting the vote in 1912. Male voters were able to vote on extending the right to women. How did this moment in time demonstrate the triumphs of decades in the movement? From whose perspective was the outcome a triumph and why?

- Ada James Papers online wihist.org/2vpzCI7 in the Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Collection.

Wisconsin Industries Past and Present As technology and economic factors changed, industries have faced challenging times. Some have stayed, some have closed, and some have moved out of the state. Look at a historic or modern industry or business in your community. What factors contributed to its rise or fall? How have conflicts and developments in industry at the state, national, or international level affected the fortunes of companies? Consider researching one of Wisconsin's industrial giants, such as Allis-Chalmers, GM Janesville, American Motors, etc.

- For information and sources relating to Wisconsin industry see wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints for Turning Points in Wisconsin History.

Hmong Immigration The Vietnam War and the Secret War brought Hmong immigrants to the United States, including many to Wisconsin. The “Secret War” is exactly what it means: a war kept secret by the United States government. This war led to the deaths of thousands of Hmong people and left tens of thousands more looking for a new home. After tragic events in their homeland, groups began bringing Hmong fighters and their families to the United States.

- Read *Mai Ya's: Long Journey* by Sheila Terman Cohen.
- Visit wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints for original documents and primary sources on Hmong immigration to Wisconsin.

3

Ice Bowl On December 31, 1967, the Green Bay Packers played the Dallas Cowboys in what later became known as the “Ice Bowl.” At the beginning of the game, the temperature in Green Bay was a whopping 13 degrees below zero. When the Green Bay Packers scored the game winning touchdown hours later with four minutes left on the clock, the temperature had dropped to 18 degrees below. Who “won”? Who “lost”? And, why does it matter?

- Wisconsin Magazine of History, Winter 2017—2018, “Run it, and Let’s Get the Hell Outta Here.”
- You can also check out the [Journal Sentinel](http://JournalSentinel.com) to read more about this event.

Liberace Born in West Allis, Wisconsin in 1919, Wladziu Valentino Liberace would later become one of the most influential performers of the 20th century. Known professionally as Liberace, he was a child prodigy that began studying piano at the Wisconsin College of Music at only seven years old. He would later take his talents to the big and small screens, in addition to playing concerts all over the country. At the same time, this gifted performer struggled with having to conceal his identity in a time when being gay was not accepted. How did Liberace balance the consequences of his triumphs?

- *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Winter 2008-2009, “Liberace: The Milwaukee Maestro.”
- Also be sure to check out the UW and Wisconsin Historical Society libraries and archives for books, photos, and videos.

Les Paul Born in Waukesha, Wisconsin, Les Paul was a respected guitarist and inventor. While his music career began with country, it was jazz that would bring him fame, playing with the likes of Nat King Cole, Rudy Vallee, and Bing Crosby. In 1941, Paul's tinkering led to the invention of the solid bodied electric guitar, revolutionizing the music industry. One of his biggest triumphs was that he is the only person to have been inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame *and* the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame! What did his road to triumph look like?

- Les Paul is featured in two books by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press: *Les Paul: Guitar Wizard* and *Wisconsin Riffs*.
- See also this historical essay wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS540 in the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

Governor and Cordelia Harvey Louis Harvey became the seventh governor of Wisconsin in 1862 after serving as both a senator and Secretary of State. He was considered to be a kind and generous man, making him popular among all classes of society. This kindness drove him to Tennessee in 1862 to visit the wounded from the Battle of Shiloh. Tragically, during the trip Harvey drowned while trying to cross a river. His wife, Cordelia, took up her husband's cause and became invaluable to the war effort, shipping supplies to the front, organizing volunteers, and serving as the official "state sanitary agent" for Wisconsin's troops. She triumphantly used her position to better the conditions for thousands of soldiers in army hospitals in the South, and even convinced President Lincoln to open a hospital in Madison. Can tragedy become a triumph?

- Read *Cordelia Harvey, Civil War Angel* by Bob Kann.
- "Wisconsin's Reluctant Heroine", featured in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* in the Winter 2011-2012 issue.
- Also check out Wisconsin Historical Society archives for two historical essays wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS1620 and wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS1621 on both Cordelia and Louis Harvey.

Evergleam Christmas Trees The Evergleam Christmas tree was invented in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Made from aluminum, the trees rose to stardom during the 1960s, coming in several different colors and designs. They became so popular they were even referenced in *Charlie Brown* (which was a triumph and a tragedy for the trees)! While Aluminum Specialty stopped making the trees in the early 1970s, they have recently seen resurgence in popularity. What is the difference between tragedy and triumph? What does triumph look like for businesses?

- For more information, check out wpt.org/University-Place/evergleam-aluminum-christmas-tree and wuw.com/post/remember-aluminum-trees-wisconsin-made-evergleams-are-making-comeback#stream/0 the Wisconsin Historical Society's own Joe Kapler discussing the history of these trees on WUWM and WPT.
- View the historical essay here wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS2763 featuring the Pink Evergleam tree at the Wisconsin Historical Museum.

Old Abe The eagle that would become the most famous animal mascot in US military history was captured from his nest as a youngling by a Native American man named Ahgamahwezhig, or “Chief Sky”. He was traded several times before finding a home with Captain John E. Perkins, commander of the Eau Claire Militia. Named after Abraham Lincoln, Old Abe became a symbol of pride for the company, traveling with them wherever they went. During the Civil War, this eagle witnessed 37 battles! After peace was announced in 1865, Old Abe lived the next 15 years of his life in the basement of the Wisconsin Capitol, attracting thousands of visitors. He died in a fire in 1881, and has been remembered fondly ever since. Why were military mascots important in war? Were soldiers more triumphant on the battlefield? Find this and other information at:

- The Wisconsin Historical Society Archives has pictures, newspapers, and more!
- The Wisconsin Historical Society Press has published a book on this famous eagle titled *Old Abe the War Eagle: A True Story of the Civil War and Reconstruction*.
- The [US Military website](#) has more information as well.

Jl Case In 1842, Jerome Increase Case founded what was then known as Jl Case Threshing Machine Works, a farming machinery company in Racine, Wisconsin. His business quickly became a leader in tractor technology. In 1869, the Jl Case company triumphantly produced the first ever steam engine tractor, beginning their legacy as innovators in the agricultural industry. In 1910, the company was merged with several others to form the International Harvester Company. Since then, the company, now known as Case IH, has continued to be a leader of the farming industry, regularly developing new tractors and equipment. In 2017, this Wisconsin company celebrated 175 years in business! How does a company sustain itself for 175 years? How do they leverage tragedies?

- The Wisconsin Historical Society Archives has numerous photographs and pamphlets relating to this company.
- Be sure to check out Case IH’s company website for more information!

Obreros Unidos (United Workers) In 1966, Jesus Salas, a migrant farmworker, along with other Wisconsin workers took action and formed the Obreros Unidos in order to send a message about poor working conditions and establish a fair wage. He became a leader in Wisconsin and organized numerous rallies and campaigns similar to Cesar Chavez’s efforts in the United States Southwest. This was not the only statement migrant workers made in their fight to improve conditions. In 1969, migrant workers organized a grape boycott to spread the message across Wisconsin. What was Salas’ idea of triumph? How can people move beyond tragedy and be victorious?

- Find photographs at [wisconsinhistory.org](#) of organizers and events.
- Workers on cucumber fields in Wautoma, WI were a big focus, read more here [wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS3760](#) about this issue.