

From
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HISTORY OF PORTAGE COUNTY

Original Territory Now Apportioned to Other Counties.

The Journal presents its readers herewith a skelton map of the territory composing the original county of Portage. It will take only a glance at the map to show to those who know the county as it is today that we have been shorn of much valuable land since territorial days. The map was prepared for a little historical work on Columbia county recently published at Portage by A. J. Turner of that city, Columbia county being one of the tracts since carved out of the original Portage. The title of Mr. Turner's book is "The Family Tree of Columbia County."

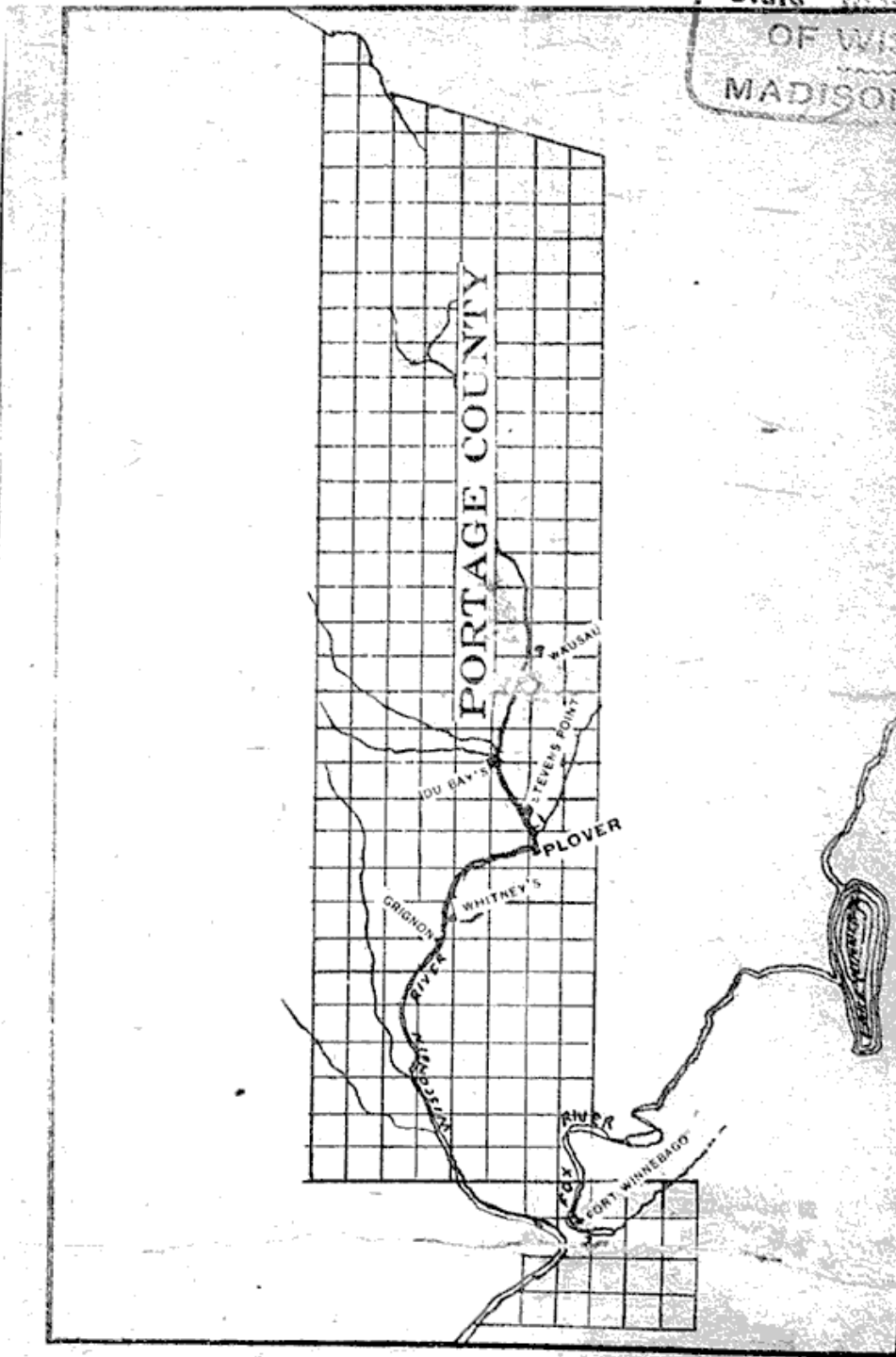
The lands comprised in Portage county became with the rest of the "Northwest Territory" a part of the United States in 1787 and remained a non descript wilderness, indefinitely designated as Northwest territory, from 1787 to 1800, when it became a little more formally organized under the name of Indiana territory. From 1809 to 1818 it was part of Illinois and from 1818 to 1836 a part of Michigan, Wisconsin territory was organized in 1836 and for the next twelve years considerable progress was made in local geographical organization, crystalizing in the admission of Wisconsin as a state in 1848.

The original Portage county had its southern boundary a few miles below the celebrated Winnebago Portage and embraced the territory on either side of the Wisconsin river northward to Lake Superior and was of an almost uniform width of 50 miles. It embraced parts of the counties now known as Adams, Juneau, Wood, Taylor, Price, Iron, Columbia, Marquette, Waushara, Portage, Marathon, Lincoln, Langlade, Oneida and Vilas, and possibly unmentionable strips off the boundaries of other contiguous counties.

This was the county as originally set apart by the territorial organization and survey in 1836. In 1841 there was some slight rearrangement of the boundaries and a formal county organization was effected with a temporary and not very definite county seat in the old town of Fort Winnebago, two or three miles north of the present city of Portage. Jefferson Davis, later president of the Southern Confederacy, was at one time stationed at Fort Winnebago and was therefore for a time a sojourner in Portage county. Soon the question of really settling the county seat definitely came up and was presented to the people for their discussion at the spring election of 1844.

As to the election the Hon. George W. Mitchell, now of Milwaukee, who lived in the county at that time, is quoted as follows:

"As to the vote on locating county seat at Plover I will say it was taken at the spring election of 1844, at a time when the pinery was full of men from Beloit, Rockford, etc., who came up to run down the river every spring and we availed ourselves of their presence and they all voted for the location of the county seat at Plover; of course there was no opposition, if so it was not counted. I think the name Plover was not named as the county seat, but a certain 80 acres of a certain section, town and range. Had it been contested it would have been void but that part which is Columbia county preferred to let it go and get set off by the next legislature, which was done. Annual elections were then held in August or September and Nelson Strong of Grand Rapids was elected the first sheriff against Jacob Low—later of Lowville. Strong was a Democrat and Low a Whig. All parties in the pinery voted for Strong while what Democrats there were in what is Columbia voted for Strong also and that saved him for when the raftmen were out of the country we were in the minority."



Boundaries of Portage County as Established by Act
of Legislature, Feb. 18, 1841

As suggested in the above interview the first secession of territory came shortly. On Feb. 3, 1846, Columbia county was set apart as a separate organization, and gradually one after another the counties now occupying the above territory were hewn out and formally organized. Plover up to 1872 and since then Stevens Point, being the county seat of "Portage"

county, that name naturally stuck to the territory surrounding said county seat. Even with all its great losses of territory Portage still remains one of the "big" counties of the state, comprising approximately 822 square miles, ranking twenty-seventh in area among the 70 counties.

For the above map we are indebted to the Portage Daily Register.