



Ellen Schieber demonstrated spinning at the annual Living Windows event in downtown Portage on behalf of the Portage Historical Society, and Vicki Vogts, PHS vice-president, greeted the crowds at the holiday parade with PHS president John Waldman behind the wheel, and Lila Waldman navigating.



December 2018



# Portage Historical Society Museum at the Portage

804 MacFarlane Rd., Portage, WI

## Thanks for your support in 2018!

### Save these dates on your 2019 calendar

4/15/19 Annual dinner & meeting at Trails Lounge, program by Dr Marc Seals, UW Baraboo, on "The History and Reception of Zona Gale's *Miss Lulu Bett* as Novel, Play and Film."

5/8/19 "Genealogy: Everyone's a Beginner" by Lori Bessler of Wisconsin Historical Society, 6 pm

6/12/19 "Architectural Styles" by Judy Eulberg, 6 pm

8/17/19 "Friendship Village"

9/11/19 "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald: the Ship, the Storm, the Song" by Prof. Steve Ackerman, UW Madison College of Letters and Science, 5:30 pm

10/9/19 History of Curling in Columbia County, Mark Curtis, 6 pm

Portage Historical Society  
804 MacFarlane Rd.  
PO Box 727  
Portage, WI 53901

#### Pierre Pauquette

Shirley Abrahamson  
Idella Anacker  
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Donald Hebl  
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Dennis & Maribeth Dorn  
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Bob & Bobbie Goodman  
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Stevens James  
Betty & Bill Kutzke  
Robin & Mike Kvalo  
Mr & Mrs. Fred Langbecker  
Sean & Peggy Malone  
Pflanz Mantey Mendrala Funeral  
Home  
Nan Rebholz  
John & Florence Schieber  
Dorothy Schultz  
Stewart & Melody Taylor  
Bill & Eleanor Voigt  
John & Lila Waldman

You'll be receiving a sponsorship renewal mailing in January, but your renewal is welcome anytime!  
Pierre Pauquette level: \$20-\$49  
Ansel Clark level: \$50-\$99  
Zona Gale level: \$100+



# The historic portage, in others' words

The Winnebagos told him (Jean Nicolet) about their country and spoke of a great river in the west. So he was lured ... into the green valley of the Fox River flowing south and west from the foot of Green Bay. ... Nicolet kept on till the river shrank to a creek chocked with wild celery and wild rice, and the Indians pointed to the portage path that led to a west flowing river. Perhaps Nicolet portaged there, over the mile wide strip of land, as the Indians had done for generations. Some historians believe his moccasined step was printed in that ancient trail (where now a highway parallels an unused canal) and that he saw the Wisconsin river on its way to the Mississippi.

Walter Havinghurst in *The Long Ships Passing* (The Macmillan Company 1942, rev. 1975)

The next day, the 10<sup>th</sup> of June, two Miami guides embarked with us in sight of a great crowd, who wondered to see just seven Frenchmen in two canoe dare to undertake so strange and hazardous a voyage. We knew that just 70 miles from the Mascoutens there was a river called Meskousing [Wisconsin River] that empties into the Mississippi. ... but on the way [on the Fox River] was so cut up by marshes and little lakes that it would be easy to go astray, especially when the river was so covered with wild rice that you could hardly see the river ... So we had a good need of our two savage guides who led us safely to a portage. They helped us carry our canoes to Wisconsin River, after which they left us alone, in an unknown country, in the hands of Providence.

Father Jacques Marquette, 1673

The next morning we proceeded up the Fox River, which was very serpentine. We came to a shallow lake where

we could not see water except in the canoe track. The wild rice was so thick that the Indians could hardly get one of their small canoes into the rice to gather it. Vast numbers of wild ducks fatten there on the wild rice every fall. When they rise, they make a noise like thunder. We killed as many as we chose, fat and good. The canoe track was so narrow that it took most the next day to proceed about three miles with our large canoes ... The next day we proceeded up the river which is slack water but very serpentine. It is so winding that we had to paddle three miles to advance one. ... That night we reached the carrying place [the site of Portage, Wisconsin] and for two days of hard labor, we carried our canoes and goods over the bank of the River Wisconsin.

Peter Pond, fur trader, 1825

At day-break, two ox carts, which I had ordered in the evening, came, and took our baggage across to the banks of the Fox River. The canoes were carried over by the different crews. On reaching the banks of the Fox River, I concluded to stay for the purpose of breakfasting. I added to the stock of eatables, a bag of potatoes, and some butter and milk purchased from a Frenchman, who resided here. It was about nine o'clock AM when we embarked on the Fox, and we began its descent with a feeling not widely different from those of a boy who has carried his sled, in winter, up the steep side of a hill, that he may enjoy the pleasure of riding down. The Fox River is serpentine, almost without a parallel; it winds about like a string that doubles and redoubles, and its channel is choked with fields of wide rice, from which rose, continually, immense flocks of blackbirds."

Henry Schoolcraft, August 26, 1825

We now had 70 miles to pass through a country perfectly monotonous and uninteresting, the distastefulness of which was aggravated by the knowledge that we could, that had we been provided with horses or a carriage, have crossed over to the Portage through a pleasant country in little more than three hours. ... The wild rice abounds to the extent in many places, that it almost completely obstructs the progress of even a moderate-sized boat, so that a passage through its tangled masses is with difficulty forced by the oars. .... When the Fort (Winnebago) was first pointed out to me, I ex-

claimed with delight, "Oh, we shall be there in half an hour!" "Not quite so soon," said my husband, smiling. "Wait and see." We sat and watched. We seemed to be approaching the very spot where we were to disembark. ... And to be sure, our course now turned, and we set setting in our first direction. In this manner, after tacking to right and left, and putting backwards and forwards during the greater part of two hours, we at length reached the little landing, on which the assembled party stood ready to greet us.

Juliette M. Kinzie, *Wau-Bun: the Early Day in the North-West, 1856*

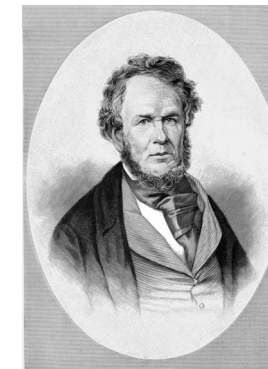
Beyond Lake Winnebago the river twined like a dropped cord, Indian mythology said that once a huge snake decided to leave its home in the Mississippi for a visit to the Great Lakes, The trail the monster left collected rain and became the Fox River. Occasionally the meanders widen into wide shallow lakes, The mucky bottoms of some of these lakes sprouted acres of tall rushes which the Indians wove into mats; other lakes produced such tight stands of wild rice that in the fall boats would scarcely push through the heavy-headed stalks. Indians harvested canoes-full of the kernels and ducks, which congregated in unbelievable flocks on the small lakes, grew so that they could scarcely fly. On either hand stretched rolling prairies broken by groves of trees. It was the heart of what eventually would be called the dairyland of America. The coils of the upper river grew so tight that at the long canoes and bateaux of the later fur trade would have difficulty negotiating the bends, Finally, near present Portage, the Fox bent almost completely back on itself. Less than two miles beyond the tip of the this hairpin curve lay another river, the Ouisconsin, later refined to Wisconsin. The intervening land was low and swampy. During some spring floods, canoes could actually float across the stretch. Still it was property called, in the idiom of the times, "a height of land," a divide between major watersheds."

David Lavender, *"The Fist in the Wilderness"* 1964

This subtle rise of land known to geographers as the Mid-Continental Divide separates the watershed of the Great Lakes, running east to the Atlantic via the St. Lawrence, from the watershed of the Ohio-Mississippi Missouri river system, which drains the center of the continent south into the Gulf of Mexico. In the 15 thousand or more years since arriving in North America from Asia, Native Americans had discovered the most efficient places to portage canoes across this divide, laying out their waterway equivalent of the Interstate Highway System, and along which centuries later, they guided the first Jesuit

missionaries and voyageurs. Following one of these ancient Indian travel corridors the Overland Party now paddles down Lake Michigan to Green Bay, to the Fox River, and portage over a short stretch of marshy ground that marks the Mid-Continental Divide in central Wisconsin. They then relaunched their birch-bark vessels on the smooth, steady current of the Wisconsin River's tea-colored waters.

Peter Stark, *Astoria: John Jacob Astor and Thomas Jefferson's Lost Pacific Empire: A Story of Wealth, Ambition and Survival* 2014



Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and Juliette Kinzie, two early chroniclers of their travels in central Wisconsin.



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