

About Sauk County

Governor DeMont claimed the section of land that would eventually become Sauk County in South Central Wisconsin, around the year 1603. The Council for New England accepted the territory in a grant in 1620 and the Massachusetts Bay Colony set claim to the area in 1629.

The French claimed and colonized it until they relinquished it to the British in 1763. The land was next annexed to Canada in the Quebec Act of 1774. It again became American territory through the Treaty of Paris in 1783 and was then claimed by both Massachusetts and Virginia.

Sauk County became part of the Old Northwestern Territory when Virginia ceded its claim in 1784 and Massachusetts hers in 1785. Indiana then claimed it in 1789, Illinois in 1810, Michigan in 1820 and finally it became a part of the Wisconsin Territory in 1836.

In 1840, the official census count for Sauk County was 102. The county was "laid off" and attached to Dane County for county and judicial purposes.

In order that boundaries could be established for settlement the Federal Government surveyed the state from 1832 to 1865. Wisconsin was divided into a grid consisting of 1,554 townships, each six miles square. Each township was also subdivided into four-quarter sections of 160 acres.

These were further divided into quarter-quarter sections of 40 acres, a common unit of farm size in those days.

General Land Offices were located at Milwaukee, Mineral Point and Muscoda. Here settlers came to buy land from the United States Department of Interior. The county of Sauk was surveyed in the year 1844.

The Territorial Legislature of Wisconsin, in 1840, passed an act to establish Sauk County and define its limits. On May 29, 1848,

Wisconsin became the 30th state to join the Union and the Northwestern Territory was officially declared a part of the new state of Wisconsin.

On January 11, 1840, an act was passed to establish the County of Sauk and describe its limits.

How Sauk County received its name

Early on there existed an Indian Village on the banks of the Wisconsin River where the present city of Prairie du Sac is now located. The native inhabitants referred to themselves as Saukies. The terms Sacs, Sauks and Saukies are synonymous. It was the French who referred to them as "Sacs," the identical pronunciation being retained. The county got its name from "Prairie du Sac", but spelled it S-A-U-K. The occupants of the city have changed the pronunciation to "Prairie du S-A-C-K". Thus translated, "Sauk Meadow."

In 1842, Richland County was established. Law also fixed its boundaries. The creation of Richland County cut off four towns from Sauk on the west, leaving Woodland still attached to Sauk County,

although surrounded by four other counties.

The Supreme Court decided to constitute a county, which is organized with the machinery for carrying on its judicial and civil affairs; so in reality, the area never became a county until 1844. The act that organized Sauk County also provided that the first election should be held on March, 2 1844. Joshua E. Abbott was elected sheriff at that election and was succeeded six months later by John Woodruff.

Also during the 1848 legislative session, authorization was established to lay out a new territorial road from Madison, via



Next came Sauk County

Palmer's Mills (Lodi), to Adams (Baraboo), county of Sauk. At the same time, a franchise of keeping and maintaining a ferry across a navigable stream was granted to Chester Matson for crossing the Wisconsin River on section two, town ten, range seven, east (Merrimac).

The County Commissioners finally approved the act to establish the boundaries of Sauk County in 1849 and established six townships therein (see map). The new towns were called Honey Creek, Prairie du Sac, Eagle, Brooklyn, Kingston and Baraboo. The present boundaries of the townships in Sauk County are also shown on the map.

Determining a location for the County Seat

August Derleth published an outstanding book in 1942, *"The Wisconsin, River of a Thousand Isles"*. In this book he traced briefly the history of the efforts to locate the Sauk County seat. Portions of the following were taken from his book.

Following the French down the Fox-Wisconsin Rivers in the 1840's were lead-miners on their way to Illinois. It was probably 10 years before the influx of settlers started to appear in the lower Sauk prairie. These settlers were upper and middle-class Germans in a large part, many of them aristocrats who had dropped their titles. The majority of them belonged to either the Humanist Society or to the Roman Catholic faith.

There soon began an invasion of the upper Sauk Prairie by a large group of Swiss, including among others, the Ochsners, the Ragatzs, and the Kindschis. About the same time, large numbers of Protestant easterners bearing such fine Yankee names as Mather, Perkins, Fairchild and more began to arrive. These "Yankees" tended to settle in close knit communities.

Seeing that the German immigrants had already settled in the lower prairie known as Haraszthy's town, the Yankee Protestants gravitated toward to the north and the Swiss to the adjacent prairie farming area.

It was not long before the seeds of distrust between the two villages took root. About this time it was decided by the legislature in Madison that Sauk County needed a county seat and as much as the villagers distrusted each other there was a consensus that common sense would dictate that the villages should unite to secure the seat. There was open space between the two settlements where a courthouse could be constructed but distrust of each other took hold and all cooperation unfortunately ceased.

Sauk City offered Count Haraszthy's store, valued at \$3,000, for a courthouse. Prairie du Sac, which had risen on the northern border of Sauk City, countered by offering several vacant lots upon which the court house could be constructed.

The seat was eventually awarded to Prairie du Sac but there was a fly in the ointment. It was discovered that there was a provision in the vacant lot gift that stated under certain conditions some the lots offered for the construction of the courthouse could revert to the donors. Upon hearing this, the residents of Sauk City mobilized with the residents of Baraboo in demanding that the county seat be relocated. The result of this uproar was that after some exploration of the area north of the bluffs, it was decided to move the county seat to the future circus city.

1850

Baraboo did not long enjoy her county seat laurels in peace and quiet. About 1850 Reedsburg became an aspirant for county honors. The Reedsburg citizens claimed that their town was nearer the center of the county as it was then divided. The contest waxed warm for some time and finally reached a climax in 1851 when the citizens of Reedsburg took the position that no raft or logs should pass over their dam in route to Baraboo. The U. S. Deputy Marshall was called on to settle the quarrel and the dam was partially cut away and the logs went down the river to Baraboo.

Later, the question again rose as to the location of the county seat. It was brought up to the legislature, and Baraboo came off victorious. **Charles Armstrong**, who lived at 135 Walnut, was a member of the legislature at the time.

About Sauk County

Following is a list of Sauk County sheriffs in chronological order. Thanks to Butterfield's *History of Sauk County* and the Sauk County Sheriff's Department's *Law Enforcement History* written in 1994.

Recommended reading: *SAUK COUNTY A Centennial History* by August Derleth 1948

1844-Abbott, Joshua E., 1844-Woodruff, John B.; 1846-Crossman, H.F.; 1848-Dunlap, William; 1850-Baxter, David F.; 1852-Wheeler, Daniel W.; 1854-Martin, Ebenezer; 1856-Donavan, John E.; 1858-Martin, Ebenezer; 1860-Strong, R. M.; 1862-Stewart, N.; 1864-Burdick, S. M.; 1866-Jones, Eli; 1868-Stewart, N.; 1870-Paddock, Benjamin G.; 1872-McGinnis, Alexander; 1874-Hudson, William; 1876-Wheeler, R. A.; 1878-Young, John; 1880-Perry, O. H.; 1882-Perry, O. H.; 1884-Ashley, J. B.; 1886-Harris, W. H.; 1890-Miles, J.; 1892-Doty, B. S.; 1894-Hubert, H. H.; 1896-Meyer, C. J.; 1898-Nichols, E. E.; 1900-Stackhouse, W.; 1902-Corbin, S.; 1904-Hill, W. C.; 1906-Stackhouse, W.; 1908-Dryer, J.; 1910-Meyer, L.; 1912-Welk, W.; 1914-Hale, H. L.; 1916-Welk, W.; 1918-Tarnutzer, W.; 1920-Neitzel, H. C.; 1922-Ode, W. H.; 1924-Neitzel, H. C.; 1926-Ode, W. H.; 1928-Mueller, E. C.; 1930-Mueller, E. C.; 1932-Wheeler, F. M.; 1934-Erickson, G. E.; 1936-Erickson, G. E.; 1938-Mattice, C.; 1940-Mattice, C.; 1942-Wilcox, C. H.; 1944-Wilcox, C. H.; 1946-Stone, R. J.; 1948-Hayes, J. W.; 1950-Hayes, J. W., 1952-Gavin, J. W.; 1954-Gavin, J. W.; 1956-Spencer, M. A.; 1958-Spencer, M. A.; 1960-Spencer, D. M.; 1962, Spencer, M. A.; 1964-Spencer, M. A.; 1966-Spencer, D. M.; 1968-Hearn, R. J.; 1970-Hearn, R. J.; 1972-Hearn, R. J., 1974-Shanks, A. B.; 1976-Shanks, A. B.; 1978-Shanks, A. B.; 1980-Shanks, A. B.; 1982-Shanks, A. B.; 1984-Shanks, A. B.; 1986-Hiller, D. E.; 1988-Steinhorst, V. H.; 1999-Randy Stammen, 2011-Chip Meister;