

## The Bird Expedition Part 2: Milwaukee to Sun Prairie

There are numerous accounts of the Bird Expedition. All of these accounts center on the actual naming of Sun Prairie. There are many differences in the published accounts of the expedition with the oldest written account by Johann Georg Kohl in 1855.

The Centennial plaque from 1937 that is in front of the Museum located at 115 East Main Street is as follows:

SUN PRAIRIE  
IN MEMORY OF THE PIONEERS WHO GAVE THIS COMMUNITY ITS  
NAME WHEN THE PARTY OF AUGUSTUS A. BIRD COMMISSIONER, AND  
CHARLES H. BIRD, LATER THE FIRST SETTLER, PASSED THIS WAY FROM  
MILWAUKEE TO ERECT THE FIRST CAPITOL AT MADISON. AFTER NINE  
WEARY DAYS OF RAIN THEY WERE THRILLED WITH SUNSHINE UPON THIS  
PRAIRIE AND CARVED "SUN PRAIRIE" ON A BURR OAK TREE ONE MILE  
AND A HALF EAST OF THIS VILLAGE

JUNE 9, 1937

ERECTED BY  
THE CITIZENS OF SUN PRAIRIE  
1937

This is the basic description of the event. The map is based on an 1833 map of the North West Territories. None of the cities along the route of the Bird Expedition existed in 1833. There were communities in other parts of the state. Milwaukee was a trading post for the Native Americans in 1833. Several hundred people lived in Milwaukee by 1837. That year, under a mandate from the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature to incorporate, Milwaukee and other settlements in the state became villages. [Source: City of Milwaukee Website, May 29, 2012]

The map as printed with the route of the Bird Expedition was produced by Lynn and Mike Wirl with the assistance of Continental Mapping Consultants, Inc. of Sun Prairie. Continental Mapping donated the Bird Expedition map to the Sun Prairie Historical Library and Museum. The triangles on the map indicate where cities now exist along the route the Bird Expedition traveled. We know the expedition left Milwaukee in late May and reached a lobe of a small prairie where the name "Sun Prairie" was carved on a burr oak tree on June 9, 1837.

There were four women in the expedition. Tabitha (Tobitha) was probably not a member of this expedition. Josiah Pierce was listed as the cook. His wife, Ruth and their daughters, Rhoda and Marcia assisted with the cooking and gathering of firewood.

Daniel S. Durrie in an 1874 book on Madison lists Isaac H. Palmer and wife on the trip. Isaac's wife was Ann.

The expedition used ox carts to carry the equipment needed by the carpenters and mechanics to build the capitol, rooming houses, etc. for lodging and food. Madison as the site of the new Territorial Capitol was on a plat map drawn by James Doty the developer of Madison.

Most of the men actually walked from Milwaukee to Sun Prairie. There simply wasn't enough room in the wagons for the men. Only one of the accounts ["In Honor of Tobitha"] includes the following information: "They were a company of about forty, (Indian guides, workmen, caretakers, and officials made up the crew)" This is the only account that mentions Indians as guides: this is also the last of the accounts, written in 1968 by Mrs. Wayne Doty Bird.

#### Photographs

The map used for the journey from Milwaukee to Sun Prairie is based on an April 1, 1833, "North America Sheet V The Northwest and Michigan Territories published by Baldwin & Cradock under the superintendence of the Society of Useful Knowledge and was printed by Russell Penge." The map is in the collection of the City of Sun Prairie Historical Library and Museum.

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