

Lake Koshkonong history

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Paleo Indians inhabited the Koshkonong area as long ago as 12,000 years. Evidence these early Indians was found by archaeologists from Beloit College in 1965 at the Kutz Site. The site is a field across the Rock River from Fort Atkinson.

-- *Hugh Highsmith, "The Mounds of Koshkonong and Rock River."*

Mound builders might have lived on the shore of Lake Koshkonong as early as 2500 B.C. They were supplanted by the Winnebago, Potawatomi, Sauk, Fox and Menominee -- *Hannah Swart, "Koshkonong Country Revisited."*

White Crow's (Winnebago) village was at Carcajou Point. In the early 1800s, it was the largest Indian settlement in Wisconsin. - *Swart.*

"By 1895, the Indian, as a permanent resident of the lake, disappeared, although bands continued to return for the purposes of trapping and fishing." -- *"Early History of Lake Koshkonong," W.H. Bill Rogers.*

"The last Indian burial was in the spring of 1894, when the little son of Moses Decorah died. For several nights before and after the death of the child, the old trees that line the banks of Koshkonong Creek and stand sentinel over the abandoned village echoed the death song of perhaps the last Indian ... For a burial casket, they cut in two one of their canoes, in which little Mose Decorah now sleeps in the Sumner Cemetery." -- *Rogers.*

Fur traders visited Koshkonong earlier. But the first traveler to leave a historical record was Charles Gautier de Verville in 1778. Gautier de Verville traveled from Green Bay, which was already settled. He wrote in his journal: "Fell upon a lake near two villages whose inhabitants one to the number of 100 pnants (Winnebagoes) and the other 200 Sakis (Sacs) had left for winter quarters." -- *Highsmith.*

French fur traders, many of whom had married Indian women, became the first white settlers on Lake Koshkonong, after 1785. -- *Highsmith*.

"First white settlement on the lake appears to have been some fur traders at a place now know as Thiebeau's Point on the east shore." -- *Rogers*.

"Thiebeau had two squaws and died in 1838, reportedly having been murdered by a son and one of his wives." -- *Rogers*.

Black Hawk Island has always been low and wet. Nearly every high piece of land around the lake was the site of an Indian village before 1845. "About the only place at which none was located was Black Hawk Island, because, according to Mr. (Halvor) Skavlem, of the overflow tendencies of this area." -- *Rogers*.

Black Hawk never set foot on Black Hawk Island, Skavlem and other historians say. Black Hawk Island, which is not an island, got its name from inaccurate reports in eastern newspapers.

"...in 1829 when Lt. Jefferson Davis, then a young West Point graduate stationed at Fort Winnebago, traveled overland to Chicago, he could claim to have been the first American to do so. Quite possibly, he was the first American to see Lake Koshkonong." -- *Swart*.

The Indianford dam was raised to 6 or 7 feet in 1846, which raised the level of the lake and drowned much of the wild rice, according to Halvor Skavlem. Other accounts say the dam was not even built until after 1851.

"Why son, I can remember 40 years ago when I used to go to Koshkonong, it was the best place for duck in the whole United States, except Chesapeake Bay. We never brought down anything but canvasback duck. They were there by the thousands....Gone, all gone. What a shame." -- *Sandy Griswold, an Omaha sports editor to Frank Sinclair, sports editor of the Janesville Daily Gazette in 1924.*

"When August came, Lake Koshkonong was like a great magnificent meadow, and later on, as fall approached, it was like a vast grain field." -- *L.B. Caswell, an early settler, in a*

statement made in 1914.

"The wild rice grew in it from five to seven feet high above the water, and so thick all over that it was difficult to push a canoe through it. It was one solid mass of rice. Here and there upon its yellow surface could be seen two Indians in a canoe gathering from the thickest part their winter stock. The vast field was literally alive with wild ducks." -- *Caswell.*

"Lake Koshkonong is 858 acres larger than it was in 1916. The reason is that wave erosion has cut back the shorelines, placing soil in the lake and making it shallower. Future wave erosion may threaten adjoining marsh areas." -- *Wisconsin Conservation Bulletin, July and August 1971, published by Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.*

The Black Hawk Club, a hunting and fishing club, was started by wealthy sportsmen on Black Hawk Island in 1875 and incorporated in 1888. Canvasback duck hunters from across the country to the east joined the club. Great Wisconsin names such as Pabst, Case, Uihlein and Plankinton were on the membership list. -- *1945 article by Walter Frautschi.*

Charley Bluff was named after Alexander Charles Vieux, an early French settler and fur trader who sold furs to Solomon Juneau.

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