Evolution of Wisconsin's State and County Boundaries

WCSA Annual Meeting
Kalahari Resort and Convention Center
Wisconsin Dells, WI
January 31, 2020

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4th Principle Meridian- WI

Wisconsin Point of Beginning-

In 1831, Lucius Lyon was appointed to survey the northern boundary of Illinois established by Congress to be at 42° 30′ north latitude.

Late in 1831, one crew extended the 4^{th} principle meridian north from Illinois, while another crew went to Dubuque, lowa to determine and mark the northern border of the State of Illinois. Bad weather caused considerable delays for the crews to determine an astronomic latitude of 42° 30'.

Finally on December 10, 1831, the intersection point of the two lines could be determined on the ground and a post marking the point was set in a 6'x6'x6' dirt mound was set and the crews stopped for the winter.

In February, 1832 Lyon began GLO surveys of the Michigan Territory north of the border. They resumed the border survey in October and finished in December of 1832.

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4th Principle Meridian- WI

Wisconsin Point of Beginning-

In the late 1960's (1968) Bill Wambach a WisDOT Civil Engineer, UW-Madison Graduate Student James Swiggum and others attempted to recover the Initial Point of the 4th Principle Meridian.

Based on existing evidence, they concluded a location for the initial Point of the 4th Principle Meridian

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Facts to Consider

- Wisconsin State boundary is defined in The Congressional Enabling Act and repeated in Article 2 of the WI State Constitution
- Counties boundaries are defined in Chapter 2 of the Wisconsin State Statues
- Counties can only be created and merged/abolished by the Legislature per article 4 of the constitution.
- Depending on the date, Wisconsin counties were created by the Michigan Territorial Legislature (1818–1836), the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature (1836–1848), or the Wisconsin State Legislature (after 1848).

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| State boundary is defined in The Congressional Enabling |
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| Act and repeated in Article 2 of the WI State Constitution |

CHAP. LXXXIX. -An Act to enable the People of Wisconsin Territory to form a Constitution and State Government, and for the Admission of such State into the Union. Session 1 of the 29th Congress August 6, 1846

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the people of the Territory of Wisconsin be, and they are hereby, authorized to form a constitution and State government, for the purpose of being admitted into the Union on an equal footing with the original States in all respects whatsoever, by the name of the State of Wisconsin, with the following boundaries, to wit:

Beginning at the north-east corner of the State of Illinois- that is to say, al a point in the centre of Lake Michigan where the line of forty-two degrees and thirty minutes of north latitude crosses the same;

thence running with the boundary line of the State of Michigan, through Lake Michigan, Green Bay, to the mouth of the Menomonie River;

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State boundary is defined in The Congressional Enabling Act and repeated in Article 2 of the WI State Constitution



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State boundary is defined in The Congressional Enabling Act and repeated in Article 2 of the WI State Constitution

thence up the channel of said river to the Brule River;

thence up said last mentioned river to Lake Brule;

thence along the southern shore of Lake Brule in a direct line to the centre of the channel between Middle and South Islands, in the Lake of the Desert; thence in a direct line to the head-waters of the Montreal River, as marked upon the survey made by Captain Cramm;

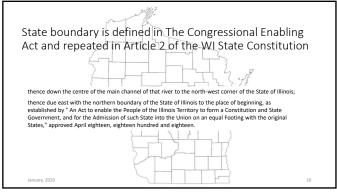
thence down the main channel of the Montreal River to the middle of Lake Superior;

thence through the centre of Lake Superior to the mouth of the St. Louis River;

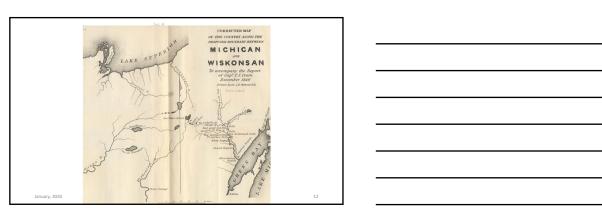
thence up the main channel of said river to the first rapids in the same, above the Indian village, according to Nicollet's map;

thence due south to the main branch of the River St. Croix; thence down the main channel of said river to the Mississippi;

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From Polk County Government History Website

What Could Have Been

Wisconsin was admitted in 1848 as the fifth and last state of the old-Northwest Territory, set up by the Ordinance of 1787.

When Illinois achieved statehood in 1818, Wisconsin lost 61 miles off the southern border, a band that extends West from the shore of Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River and includes Chicago, Freeport, Rockford and Galena.

In 1848, when Michigan was admitted to statehood, the whole Upper Peninsula was included with Michigan against their will. It had been pledged to Wisconsin by an artificial boundary.

In 1848, when the St. Croix River was fixed as our Western State line, as well as the Western border of St. Croix County, we lost to Minnesota the large triangular tract between the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers, an area that today includes most of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

From Polk County 1/28/2020

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Counties are defined in Chapter 2 of the Wisconsin State Statues CHAPTER 2

DIVISION OF THE STATE INTO COUNTIES, AND THEIR BOUNDARIES

- 2.01 County boundaries. The state is nichoid aim to the counties hermatic manuel, and they are respectively bounded as follow, to the state of the s

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| | Wisconsin State Statues |
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| 2.01 | County boundaries. |
| 2.02 | Construction of boundary descriptions. |
| 2.03 | Jurisdiction of counties on boundary streams. |
| 2.04 | Jurisdiction of counties on boundary lakes and state boundary waters. |
| 2.05 | Brown County records. |
| 2.06 | Records of Iron and Forest counties. |
| 2.07 | Transcribed records of Rusk County. |
| 2.08 | Transcribed records of Menominee County. |
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Counties are defined in Chapter 2 of the Wisconsin State Statues

2.02 Construction of boundary descriptions.

Whenever the boundary line of any county is described as running north or south on any range line, or east or west on any township line, the said boundary line shall be deemed to run on such lines as are established by the United States survey, making such offsets, where said range lines and township lines are not continuous straight lines, as are made by such United States surveys.

2.03 Jurisdiction of counties on boundary streams.

Whenever 2 counties are separated from each other by a river or a creek, the middle of the main channel of such river or creek shall be the division line between them, unless otherwise provided in the description of the boundaries of such counties. The counties so separated shall have common jurisdiction of all offenses committed on the waters between them, and all writs and process issued in any such county may be executed at any place on the waters of such river or creek opposite the county from which it was issued.

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Counties are defined in Chapter 2 of the Wisconsin State Statues

2.04 Jurisdiction of counties on boundary lakes and state boundary waters.

The counties now or hereafter organized upon the westerly shore of Lake Michigan shall have jurisdiction in common of all offenses committed on the lake.

The counties now or hereafter organized on the shores of Green Bay shall have jurisdiction in common of all offenses committed on Green Bay.

The counties now or hereafter organized on the southerly shore of Lake Superior shall have jurisdiction in common of all offenses committed on the lake.

The counties now or hereafter organized on the easterly shore of the Mississippi River shall have jurisdiction in common of all offenses committed on the river.

The counties now or hereafter organized on the shores of Lake Winnebago shall have jurisdiction in common of all offenses committed on any part of the lake.

The counties now or hereafter organized on the easterly shore of the St. Croix River or lake shall have jurisdiction in common of all offenses committed on any part of the river or lake

Counties are defined in Chapter 2 of the Wisconsin State Statues 2.05 Brown County records. The record in Brown County, made prior to January 1, 1840, of any such conveyance or instrument mentioned in s. 889.17, affecting lands situated in any other county at the time such record was made and duly certified copies thereof, shall be received in evidence with the same effect as if the same had been duly recorded in the county where the land was situated...

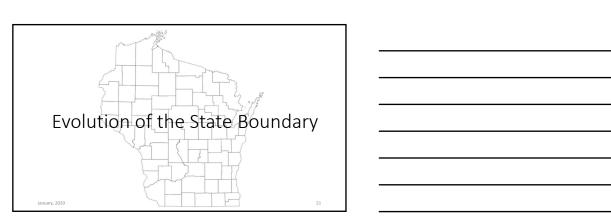
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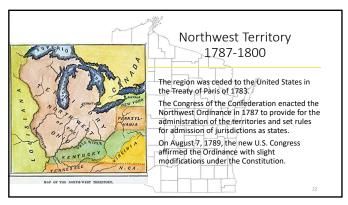
Counties are defined in Chapter 2 of the Wisconsin State Statues

2.06 Records of Iron and Forest counties. The records of Iron and Forest counties, which have been or may be transcribed from the original records of other counties, ... shall be received in all courts as prima facie evidence of the matters therein contained in the same manner as now provided by law for the reception of record evidence...

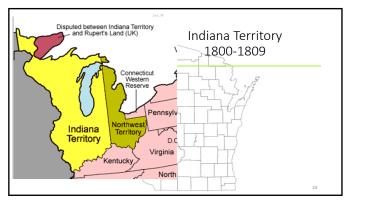
2.07 Transcribed records of Rusk County. The transcribed records of Rusk County, which have been or may be transcribed from the original records of other counties, ... shall be received in all courts in this state, as prima facie evidence of the matters therein contained, in the same manner as now provided by law for the reception of record evidence.

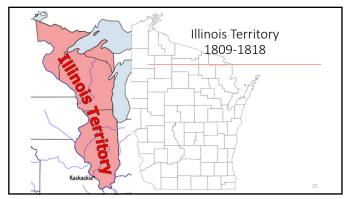
2.08 Transcribed records of Menominee County. The records of Menominee County, which have been or may be transcribed from the original records of other counties, ... shall be received in all courts as prima facie evidence of the matters therein contained in the same manner as now provided by law for the reception of record evidence. It lie in grantees of the United States to lands situated in Menominee County shall become valid as of the effective date of the patent to such grantees, and no action or proceeding shall be commenced in any court in this state to question the validity of title passed by the patent when the patent has been duly recorded with the register of deeds of Menominee County. This section shall not affect any rights of this state.





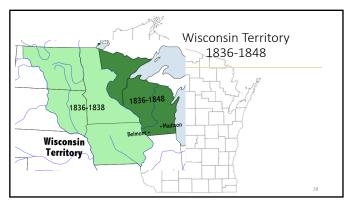






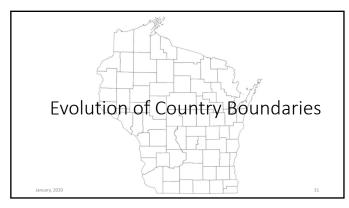


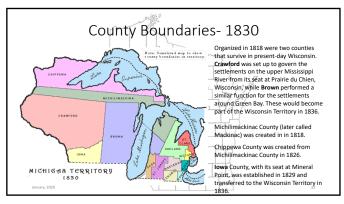


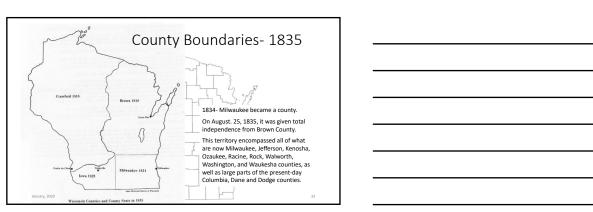


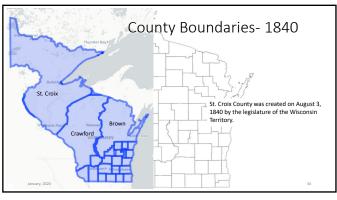


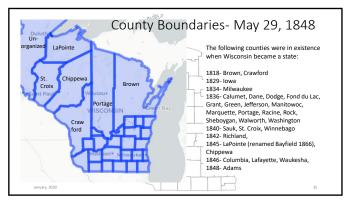


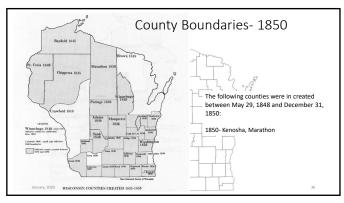


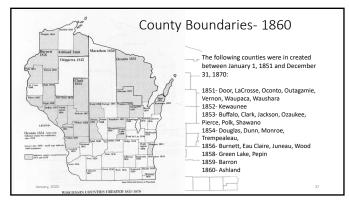


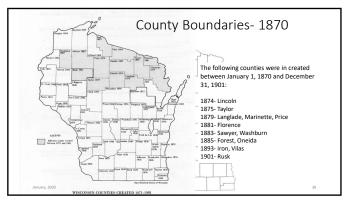


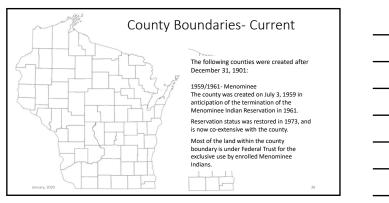












Oddities to Consider

- Wisconsin earned the nickname "Badger State," not because of its proliferation of badgers, but because its earliest white inhabitants were itinerant lead miners who burrowed into the hills for shelter rather than waste time and resources on a more permanent structure.
- Wisconsin was the last state entirely east of the Mississippi River to be admitted to the Union.

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