

History of St. Croix County

The French were the first white people to step foot on the land which is now St. Croix County. In 1687 Daniel Greysolon du Luth, a French explorer and adventurer, used the Brule-St. Croix waterway as a short route from Lake Superior to the Mississippi River. A year later, Father Louis Hennepin, a priest of the Order of St. Francis, was brought into the St. Croix Territory as a prisoner of the Sioux Indians. It was not, however, until 1689 that Nicolas Perrot took possession of the lands of the present Upper Mississippi, St. Croix and St. Peter Valleys in the name of France.

French rule ended in the Upper Mississippi Valley with the Treaty of Paris of 1763. With the signing of the Peace of Paris in 1783, the land east of the Mississippi became part of the United States. In 1793, Laurient Barth, Jacques Porlier, and Charles Reaume established a fur-trading station on the St. Croix River, land which is now St. Croix County. It was not until peace was fully established with the Indians that this region could be fully settled. In 1837 the Dakota or Sioux Indians ceded to the United States Government all their lands east of the Mississippi River. In the same year a treaty was made at Fort Snelling with the Chippewa or Ojibway Indians whereby they ceded to the United States all their lands east of the Mississippi to near the headwaters of the St. Croix and Chippewa Rivers.

The first settlement was made at the mouth of the Willow River in 1840 by Louis Massey and Peter Bouchea. In the spring of 1839 the steamer Palmyra opened the St. Croix River to trade and travel. The pine forests between the St. Croix River and Minnesota attracted interest in lumbering, and many lumber mills were built in this vicinity in the 1840's. By 1847 frame houses began to appear, and in 1849 Moses Perrin opened a boarding house in what is now the City of Hudson. With the establishment of the United States Land Office at Hudson in 1849, great advances were made in population. As a result the population of St. Croix County, 624 in 1850, had increased to 2,040 by 1855 and 5,388 in 1860. In 1840 the Legislature of Wisconsin created the county of St. Croix, carrying the same name as the bordering river, named from Monsieur St. Croix, an explorer who drowned at the mouth of the river late in the seventeenth century. Another account said Father Hennepin gave this region the French name St. Croix (originally Ste Croix) which means Holy Cross.

The boundaries of St. Croix County have remained constant since 1853. St. Croix County is 30 miles wide in the northern part, increasing to 33 miles in width in the central part, and then tapering down to 30 miles again at its southern extremity. It is 20 miles long and has an area of 729.45 square miles. In 1851 the County Board of Supervisors appointed Ammah Andrews to erect county buildings. This order was rescinded at a subsequent meeting, but an appropriation of \$350 was made for the construction of a county jail. No further progress was made until 1856 when a contract was again made with Ammah Andrews to build a courthouse for \$14,300. The total cost of the buildings, completed in 1856, was \$20,045. These buildings were used with minor repairs until 1900 when a new courthouse, jail and sheriff's residence were constructed at a cost of \$50,000. As demands for more space became apparent, a new jail was erected in 1963 at a cost of \$325,000. Upon completion, the previous jail and sheriff's residence were dismantled and construction commenced on that location for a new county courthouse. Erection of the 1965 courthouse was completed in 1966 at a cost of \$725,000.00.

he rich, rolling prairie lands of St. Croix County were conducive to farming, and by 1881, wheat became the main farm crop, along with oats, corn, potatoes, barley, rye and hay for dairying. Today St. Croix County is well known for its dairy products with milk the most important source of income for its farmers. St. Croix County has a total of 21 towns, nine villages and three fourth-class cities, and two Wards of River Falls located in St. Croix County. The population of St. Croix County in the 1980 census by the Bureau of the Census at Washington was 43,867. The 1990 Census showed a population of 50,261, a 16% increase. There are three county owned parks in St. Croix County. Troy Park, located approximately 5 miles south of Hudson on the beautiful St. Croix River, offers swimming and picnic areas. Glen Hills Park located 5 miles south of Glenwood City offers swimming, boating, picnic area, fishing, golf course, camp sites, snowmobile trails, and cross country skiing. Pine Lake Park located 4 miles north of Baldwin offers a scenic park, fishing, boating, picnic area and recreation. Homestead Park located on Perch Lake is in the process of development with partial use planned for summer of 2001. St. Croix County is also proud to have Willow River State Park located within our boundaries, just 5 miles east of Hudson. Willow River State Park offers beautiful scenery, camping, picnic grounds, water cascades, nature trails, and winter cross country ski trails. There are approximately 100 miles of designated snowmobile trails located in St. Croix County.

In November of 1991 the County Board Supervisors voted to approve construction of a new Government Center and bonding for \$11,500,000. The Government Center opened on June 14, 1993, on Cty. Trunk UU and Carmichael Road. In December of 1994 the old Courthouse was sold for \$400,000 to the City of Hudson for use as a Library and other offices.