

# The Land, People, and Landscape of 1776

Jayne Hoffman

# 1776: Two Worlds, One Year

## While a New Nation Was Being Born...

- The American Revolution had begun.
- The Declaration of Independence was adopted.
- About 2.5 million people lived in the thirteen colonies.

## ...The St. Croix Valley Followed a Different Path

- The region was Indigenous homeland of the Dakota and Ojibwe nations

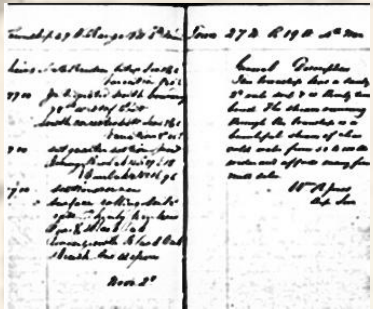
# What River Falls Looked Like 250 Years Ago

## A Landscape Shaped by Nature and Indigenous Stewardship

- Tall grass prairie, oak savanna, wetlands, and wooded stream valleys

Much of the upland was open, with scattered bur and white oaks

standing among grasses that often grew waist-high or higher.



### General Description

*This township has a sandy 2nd rate soil & is thinly timbered. The stream running through the township is a beautiful stream of clear cold water from 5 to 100 links wide and affords many fine mill sites.*

*W. A. Jones*





### Original Oak Savanna

Before settlement there were 5.5 million acres of savanna in Wisconsin. Today less than .01% remain.

# The First Peoples and the Changing Land



In 1776, the River Falls area was part of a shared homeland and borderland used by both Dakota and Ojibwe peoples.

The St. Croix Valley was a place of trade, travel, cooperation, and sometimes conflict. Indigenous nations had deep connections to the land long before American settlement.

# The Dakhóta Oyáte, (Dakota Nation or Sioux)

The Dakota people had deep and long-standing ties to the St. Croix and Mississippi River region. The future River Falls area lay within a region used by Dakota families and bands for hunting, fishing, gathering, travel, and trade.



**Dakota Sioux Indian Camp (ca. 1875). Published by Joel E. Whitney of St. Paul, Minnesota**

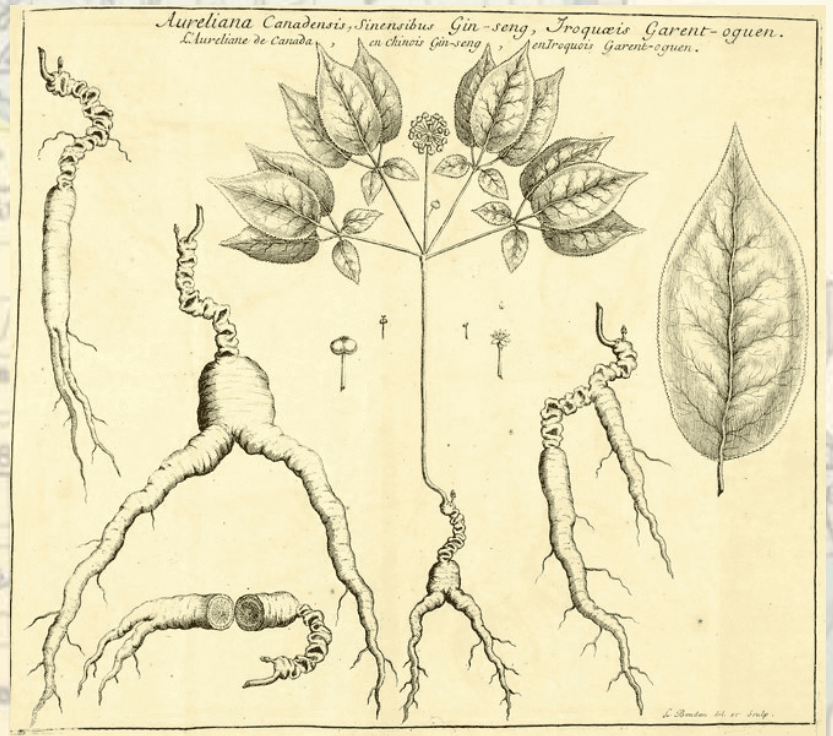
Ojibwe camp along  
the St. Croix River,  
Minnesota, c.1885

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## **The Anishinaabeg, (Ojibwe or Chippewa)**

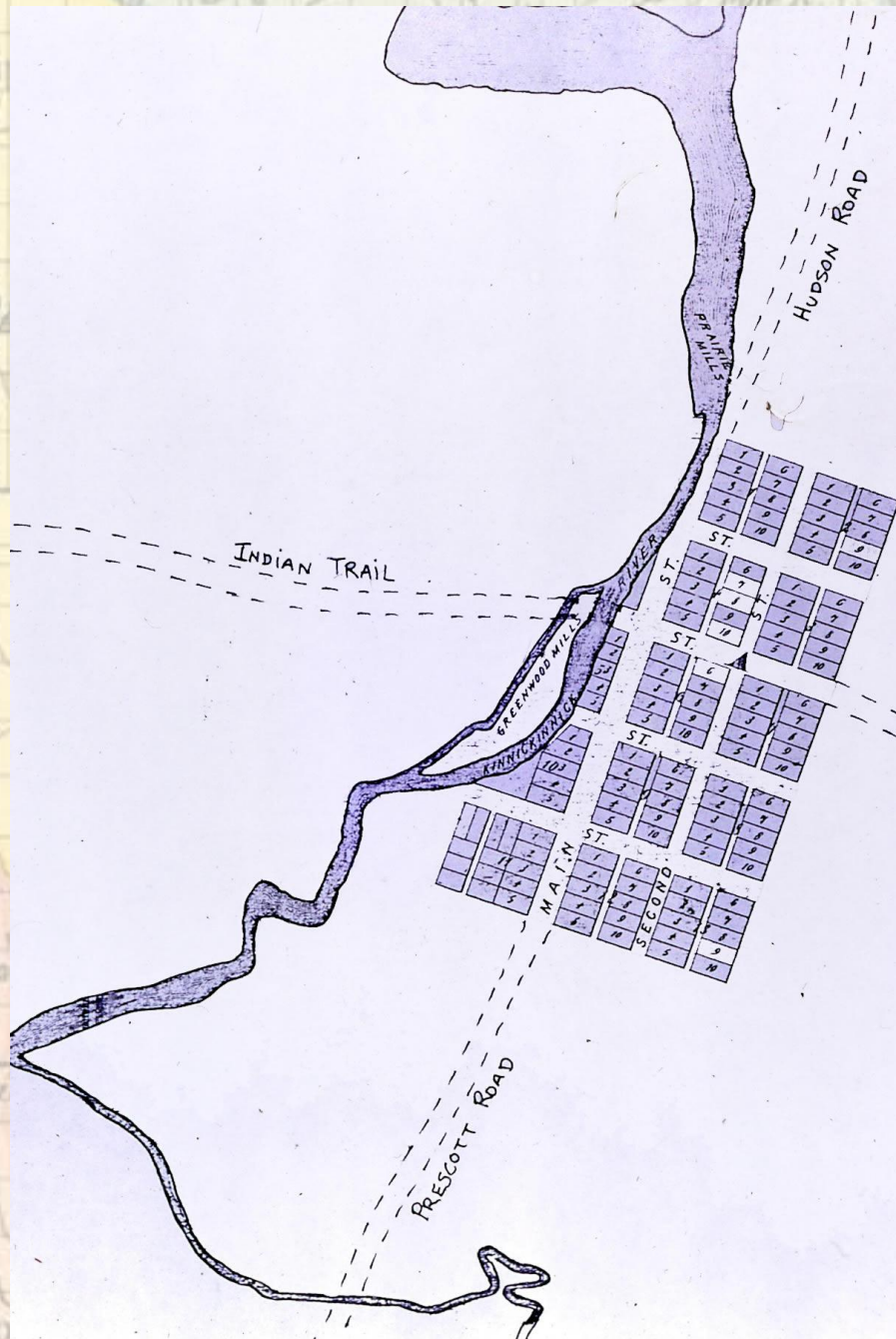
By the 1700s, Anishinaabeg/Ojibwe people were also present in the St. Croix Valley. They traveled, hunted, trapped, fished, gathered wild foods, and traded throughout the region.





Indigenous trails connected communities throughout the region long before roads and towns existed

**The Powell Bros., who it will be remembered had located at what is now the site of River Falls, had erected a dwelling house on Section 1 town 27 Range 19 near the old Indian Trail from Maiden Rock to the mouth of the Willow River. Source: Allen Weld Spring Valley sun 12-22-1904**



The name *Kinnickinnic* comes from an Algonquian word often translated as “that which is mixed.”



*Traditional Tobacco*



*Dogwood*



*Smooth Sumac*



*Willow*



*Bearberry*

Throughout the Great Lakes region, Indigenous peoples used the term for traditional smoking and ceremonial mixtures made from locally available plants. While recipes varied among communities, these mixtures played important roles in social gatherings, diplomacy, trade, and spiritual practices.

# THE THIRTEEN ORIGINAL COLONIES IN 1774.




Three new provinces, Quebec, East Florida, and West Florida, were made out of the territory acquired from France and Spain.

The Proclamation Line, 1763, divided the territory of the colonies on a line drawn around the heads of the Atlantic-flowing rivers. The territory west of this line was reserved for the Indians.

The Quebec Act of 1774 provided that the territory west of the Allegheny Mountains to the Mississippi River and north of the Ohio River should be a part of the Province of Quebec.



- 1) 1787: Implied by Northwest Ordinance
- 2) 1805: Sliver of U.P. taken for Michigan Territory, based on extension of Ohio/Indiana border
- 3) 1817: Taken by Illinois as preparation for Illinois statehood (amber is approx area required for continental divide canal)
- 4) 1836: Given to Michigan in exchange for Toledo Strip
- 5) 1848: Final Shape. Land reserved for future state of Minnesota

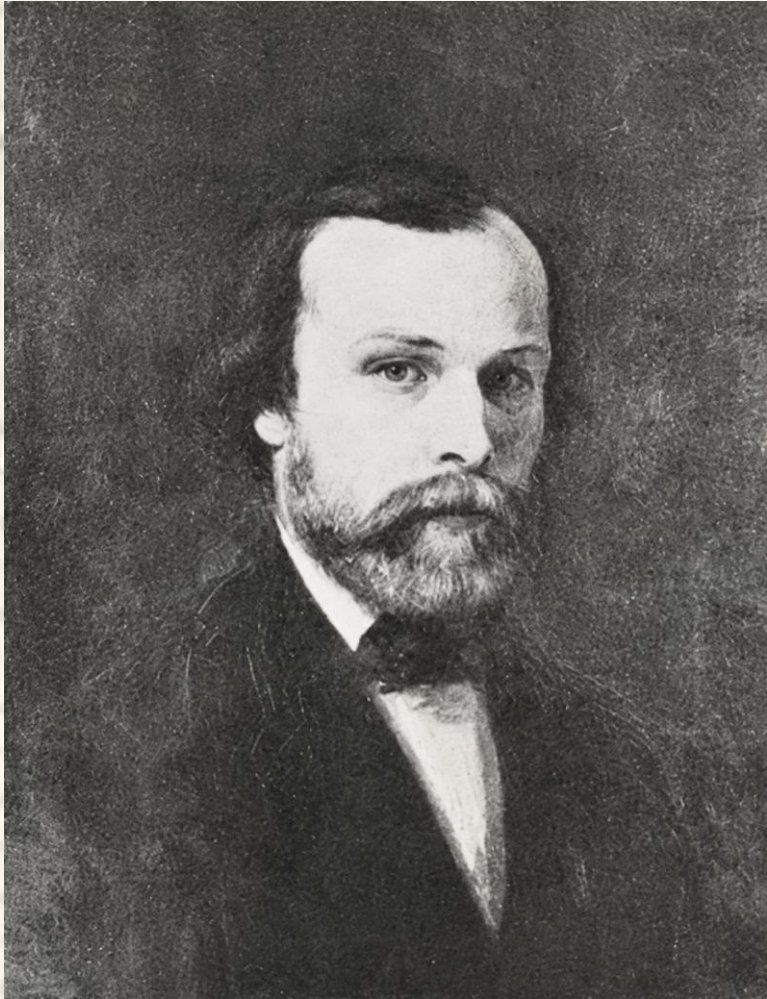


During the late 1700s and early 1800s, federal treaties and policies gradually transferred Indigenous lands to the United States.

By the 1837 treaties, the land that would become Pierce County was opened to large-scale non-Native settlement

- **Land Act of 1820 (3. Stat. 566)**
- **First Treaty of Prairie du Chien**
- **Indian Removal Act of 1830**
- **1837 Land Cession Treaties with the Ojibwe & Dakota.**
- **1842 Wisconsin Land Cession**

# Henry Lewis 1847



*C.B. Graham Lith.*

NATURAL WALL OF SANDSTONE, (F.29c)  
*Near the Kinnickinnic River — From a Sketch by M<sup>r</sup> Lewis.*

# THE MONUMENT

is a historic sandstone formation in the Town of Kinnickinnic, northeast of River Falls. Long before it became a destination for local residents, the formation was a prominent landmark of the Kinnickinnic Valley. Different generations and communities knew the site by different names, including Great Manito, Pulpit Rock,



# THE MONUMENT

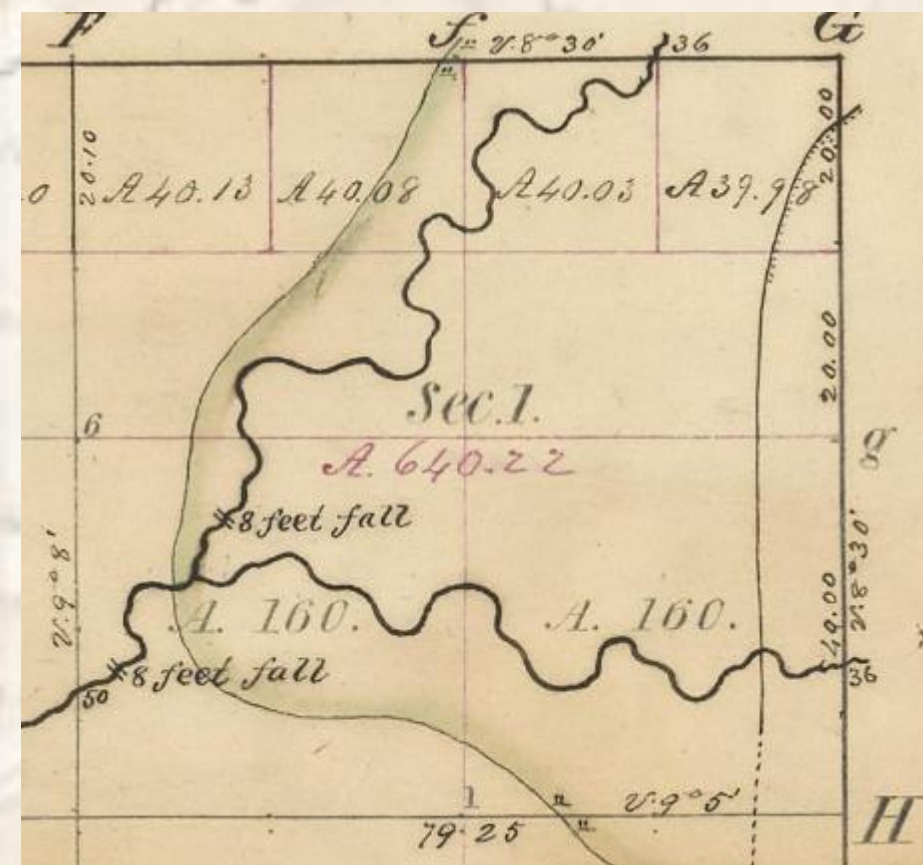
is one of the most distinctive natural landmarks in the Kinnickinnic River Valley. It is composed primarily of St. Peter Sandstone, a rock formation deposited about 450 million years ago during the Ordovician Period, when much of present-day Wisconsin lay beneath a warm, shallow tropical sea.

The sandstone consists of nearly pure quartz grains that began as beach and shoreline sands along that ancient sea. Over millions of years, these sands were buried, compacted, and cemented into rock. Later, a thin layer of limestone was deposited on top of the sandstone.



Township 27 N. Range 19 W. 3<sup>rd</sup> Mer. Town. 27 N. R. 19 W. 4<sup>th</sup> Mer.

Chains with Random Sides 586 Variation 75° E	General Description This township has a sandy 2 <sup>d</sup> rate soil & is thinly tim- bered. The stream running through the township is a beautiful stream of clear cold water from 50 to 100 ft. wider, and affords many fine mill sites.
77 00 Int. to north boundary 78 <sup>th</sup> west of Post South corner to Sec 586 Variation 8° 46' E	
37 00 set quarter section from Beany Run at 12889 E 15 Black Oak N 51 E 96	
77 00 Section corner surface rolling soil rate. Thinly timbered with Black Oak Undergrowth Black Oak Brush. And Aspen River 2 <sup>d</sup>	W. A. Jones Dep. Surv.



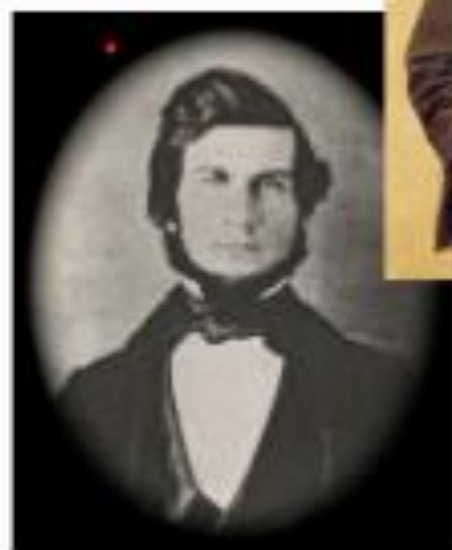
"2nd rate soil" meant moderately fertile, average-quality agricultural land. Surveyors ranked land by quality to help the federal government evaluate its suitability and value for settlement and sale.

**Surface rolling, soil 2nd rate.  
Thinly timbered.  
Oak & Black Oak.  
Undergrowth Black Oak Brush and  
Aspen.**



Joel Foster

Nathaniel



Oliver



Lyman



Powell Brothers

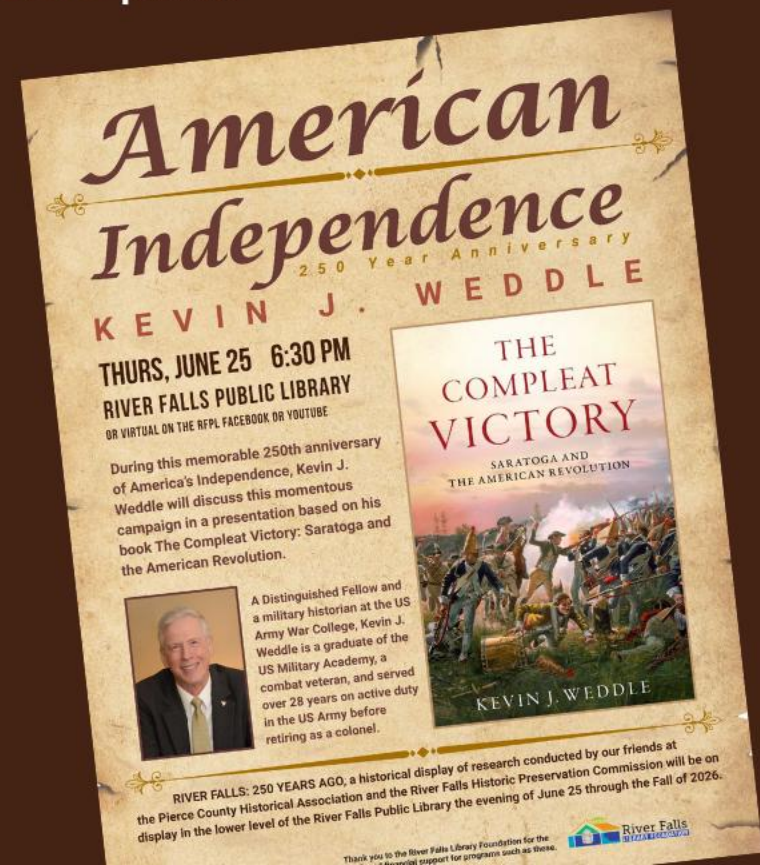


# RIVER FALLS 250 YEARS AGO

# Display Opens

**THURS, JUNE 25 6:00 PM**

Kevin J. Weddle  
presentation to follow at  
6:30 p.m.



**American Independence**  
250 Year Anniversary  
**KEVIN J. WEDDLE**

**THURS, JUNE 25 6:30 PM**  
RIVER FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY  
OR VIRTUAL ON THE RFPF FACEBOOK OR YOUTUBE

During this memorable 250th anniversary of America's Independence, Kevin J. Weddle will discuss this momentous campaign in a presentation based on his book *The Compleat Victory: Saratoga and the American Revolution*.

A Distinguished Fellow and a military historian at the US Army War College, Kevin J. Weddle is a graduate of the US Military Academy, a combat veteran, and served over 28 years on active duty in the US Army before retiring as a colonel.

**THE COMPLEAT VICTORY**  
SARATOGA AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION  
KEVIN J. WEDDLE

RIVER FALLS: 250 YEARS AGO, a historical display of research conducted by our friends at the Pierce County Historical Association and the River Falls Historic Preservation Commission will be on display in the lower level of the River Falls Public Library the evening of June 25 through the Fall of 2026.

Thank you to the River Falls Library Foundation for the financial support for programs such as these.

River Falls  
PUBLIC LIBRARY





- In 1776, the River Falls area was part of a shared Indigenous homeland used by both the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples.
- The St. Croix Valley served as a borderland where cooperation, trade, travel, and sometimes conflict occurred.
- Indigenous trails connected communities throughout the region long before roads and towns existed.
- Federal treaties and policies between 1783 and 1842 gradually transferred Indigenous lands to the United States and opened the region to non-Native settlement.