

LOWER WISCONSIN

RIVER ROAD

FROM THE EMPIRE PRAIRIE
TO THE MIGHTY MISSISSIPPI

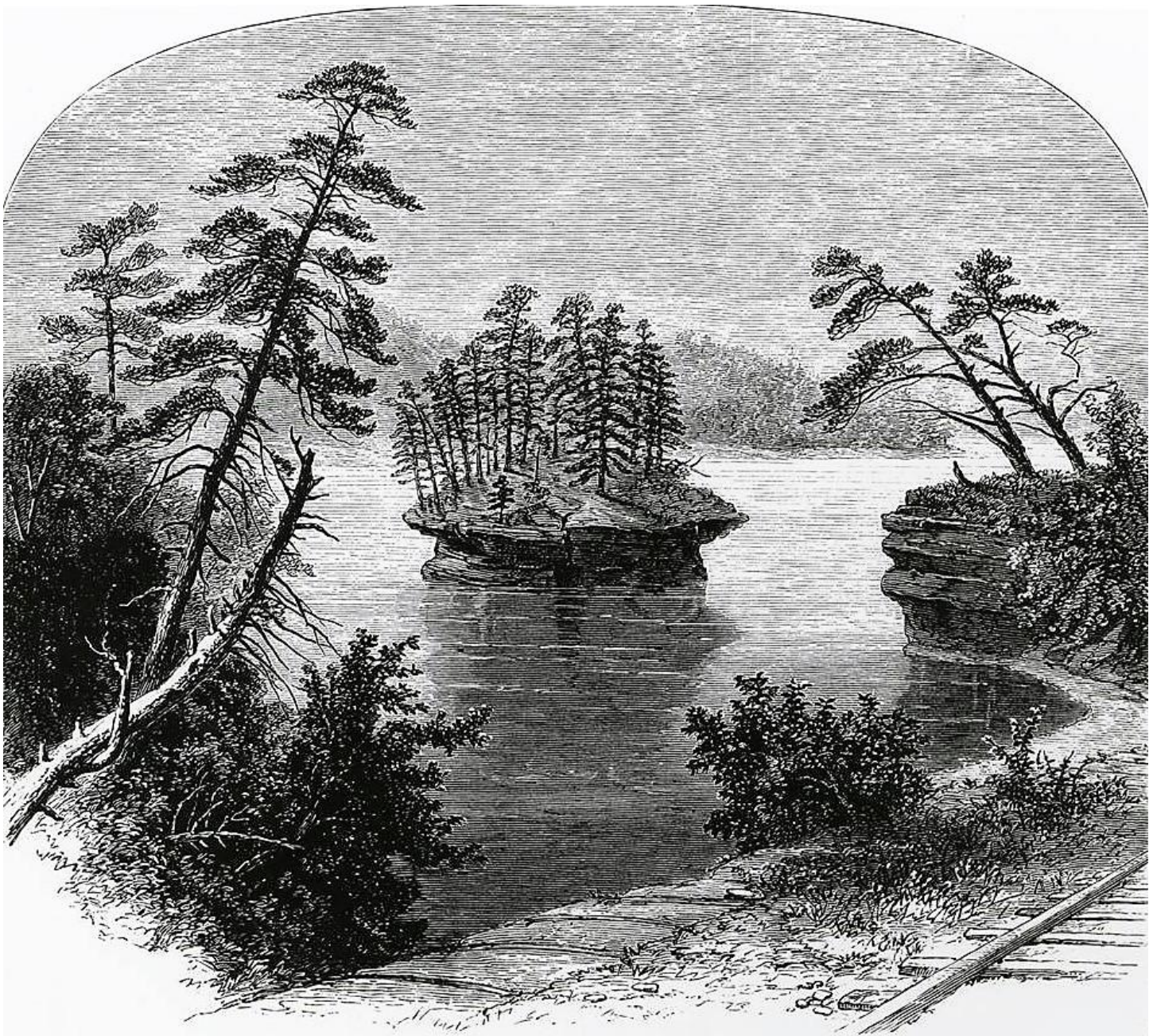
Lower Wisconsin River Road State Hwy 60 Richland County.

The essence of rural Wisconsin, the beauty of the Driftless Region and the splendor of the lower Wisconsin River Valley is revealed along this byway. Thousands of acres of public lands present opportunities for canoeing, camping, angling, hunting, archeological pursuits and wildlife watching. Historic river towns with contemporary flavor offer various lodging options. Rich in history, the byway holds many stories of days gone by. During the Black Hawk War of 1832, several battles were fought in the valley. Historical markers along the way recount the failed escape route taken by Chief Black Hawk and his followers.

From the Empire Prairie to the Mighty Mississippi, Wisconsin's 100-mile Scenic Byway 60 follows the graceful curves of the Lower Wisconsin River. This portion of the state with the wild beauty of Nature left to its own devices for thousands and thousands of years resembles "the way it was" before European settlement. Hundreds of effigy mound earthworks stand today as spiritual gifts and messages from those who peopled this land in the past. Prominent bluffs crop out of hills and valleys that roll into rushing streams which empty into the Wisconsin River. These waters beckon fishermen, canoeists, kayakers, and boaters. Here birdwatchers and botanists are able to experience a wide variety of plants and animals while, chances are, an eagle is watching them. The more recent settlements on the Byway route from Lodi to Prairie du Chien have tried to complement rather than conflict with the pristine qualities of Driftless Nature. Each has its own enticing history and contemporary flavor. They offer a rich range of camping, lodging, dining, outdoor and indoor recreation, archeological pursuits, and other learning options. They welcome both the seriously energetic and those who seek some serious relaxation. They invite families to experience together this special, unique place.

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BYWAY





Lone Rock, Wisconsin River.

Lone Rock, Wisconsin River. From Bryants' Pictorial America (1872).

The north shore of the Wisconsin River marks the earliest settlement of Richland County. The village of Lone Rock - At one time a massive piece of sandstone stood a short distance from the north bank of the Wisconsin River. The rock became a landmark for early river rafts-men and was known as 'Lone Rock' from which the town took its name. The rock was cut and used for basements and foundations in the village. It is estimated that the rock, in order to be seen by the rafts-men, had to be at least 80 feet high or roughly twice as high as it is now. The early rafts-men seldom tied up at "Lone Rock" because the river was very swift, making it hard to navigate, and there was always the rocky cliff on the south bank which gave rise to the name, at this turn in the river, of the "Devil's Elbow".

The village of Richland City - once of considerable importance as a river port- was located on the southeast quarter of section 31, town 9, and range 2 east. The original proprietors of the village plat were Isaac Wallace and Garwood

Greene, who laid out the village in 1849. The Wisconsin River eventually eroded the stream bank so seriously the village was abandoned and many of the buildings were moved to Lone Rock and the village of Gotham.



In 1878 Colonel Hugo W. Bock built his “mansion” in Richland City. The Richland County Observer of June 6, 1878, described the new home, built at a cost of \$3,500. “H.W. Bock of Richland City is building a fine residence on the bank of the river. The main building is 28 feet square with a kitchen 16x24 feet in size. A porch extends the entire length of the front. The ceilings downstairs are eleven feet high with upstairs ten feet four inches...The home is elegantly furnished throughout. When finished the house will be the finest residence in the county.” The house was relocated in Gotham.

In the early 1870s a company was formed whose purpose was to “promote the development of the Pine River Valley and Stevens Point Railroad.” It was composed of some of Richland Center’s most enterprising and well-to-do citizens and was headed up by George Krouskop and David and Norman James were to “hold and operate the same until paid for.”



The Gotham train depot is now a short-term tourist rental. SandHill Marketing photo.

It was meant to be quite the railroad but never quite worked out as planned. It remained a narrow gauge setup which ran on wooden rails and never did progress any further north toward Stevens Point than the sixteen miles from Lone Rock to Richland Center. It did however, create a link to the outside world and ushered in an era of prosperity in Richland County. In 1880 these new owners realized it was a bad investment and sold the Pine River Valley & Stevens Point Railroad to the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad and it became a branch of their Prairie du Chien Division. There were four depots on the short line; Lone Rock, Gotham, Twin Bluffs and Richland Center.

Below: The 1860 Henry Fielder house located in the Village of Orion was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986 as an example of local sandstone construction from the mid-19th century. The house is representative of the small scale construction typical of the era and is a good example of Wisconsin's distinctive stone construction traditions.



The town of Orion was initially known as Richmond and was the first county seat of Richland County before being located at Richland Center. Shortly after the county seat was moved, the decline of Orion began with many of the businesses migrating to Richland Center. Fiedler remained in Orion dedicating his time and energies to his farm and home buildings. A spacious lawn and garden plot were set aside as well as an orchard and vineyard where Fielder and his wife created a veritable park. The grounds of the Fiedler house appear to be largely original. The road to the west of the property is lined with silver maple trees on one side and a low stone wall on the other which is flanked large walnut trees, suggesting that parts of the original landscaping remain.

During the Woodland period (about 500 B.C. to A.D. 1100), earthwork or “mound” construction, generally associated with burial of the dead came into being. For many hundreds of years, the Native peoples of Wisconsin built mounds out of rock and dirt. Some were shaped like cones or domes, and some were long and lean. Just over one thousand years ago, people began to make effigy mounds shaped like animals and even people. In the past, archaeologists dug into the mounds to find what was inside them. This is not done anymore, in order to respect the wishes of the Native Americans who are descended from the effigy mound builders. It’s known from past excavations that most mounds contain human bones and some contain special deposits of charcoal, ashes, animal bone, shell, or rock. Some people buried in the mounds were buried with arrows, pottery, and pipes. Richland County and Southern Wisconsin is where thousands of earthen monuments in the shapes of animals, spirit figures and human were built by these ancient peoples.

Internationally famous, the mounds have few items deliberately included that might help to explain them, which adds to the mystery. The mounds were built 1,000 years ago, between A.D. 750 and 1050. Most, but not all, of the effigy mounds contain human burials. All mounds are regarded by Native American people as being sacred. The Shadewald Mound Group (sometimes called Elder Group), located near the intersection of State Hwy 60 and 193, is well-preserved and easily assessable thanks to Frank Shadewald, who purchased the land with the sole purpose of preserving the mounds. (Mr. Shadewald is now deceased). There are two clusters of mounds located here. One is located on top of Frank’s Hill and consists of, among others, an eagle and bison effigies.



Frank's Hill - Shadewald Mound Group - Mark Cupp photo.

Eagle Cave is an onyx cave located near Blue River in Richland County just off State Hwy 60. Eagle Cave is known as Wisconsin's largest onyx cave and was the first cave to be commercially owned and operated in Wisconsin. The cave was discovered in 1849 and opened to the public in 1938. It is a popular camping destination, especially during the fall, winter, and spring months, when youth group campers are allowed to camp inside the cave and participate in their cave exploratory program. The cave exploratory program has been operating since 1954. Eagle Cave was discovered in 1849 by Peter Kinder and an

Irishman named Murphy, when they were chasing a bear. They had followed the bear tracks in dense snow from the river bottoms up the hill and into the woods to the cave entrance. The entrance hall is rather huge and was easy to access.

Several local businessmen formed a cave development corporation in spring 1937. They were granted permission by the State of Wisconsin to open the cave for the public. The development took only a year and it was inaugurated on May 29, 1938, being the first show cave of Wisconsin.

The cave has several large rooms and passageways, and some formations. It is called Wisconsin's largest onyx cave which tells a bit about the size and formations of other Wisconsin caves. The cave is still entered through the original entrance, but it is left through a second entrance in a quarry.

The cave is a very popular place for scouts and camping activities. A special feature is sleeping in the cave, on weekends the entrance hall hosts up to 250 people.

This village of Port Andrew was named in honor of Capt. Thomas Andrews, who settled here in 1841. He kept a small store and succeeded in having the post office moved to this place from Sand Prairie. In 1850 he laid out four blocks of village lots. On the 14th of November, 1854, the plat was enlarged by what was known as the Andrews & Miller addition, which contained fourteen blocks. In 1856 Port Andrew had grown to be a flourishing village with several stores, shops, groceries, saloon, schools, churches but the railroad was built on the south side of the river, steamboats ran down, until in 1884 the place had almost become a thing of the past, containing only two stores, a blacksmith shop, shoe shop, high school and church.

Thomas Andrews, usually called Capt. Andrews, was born near Quincy, Ill., in 1823. His parents were natives of Ireland but were reared in South Carolina. The father died and the mother married again, and in 1830 came to Wisconsin and settled near Mineral Point. Here Capt. Andrews followed mining until 1841, when he crossed the Wisconsin River and settled at the port which afterward took his name. Capt. Andrews served as pilot on the river and afterward purchased the boat Wisconsin. He next built the Zouave, which he traded for the Minnehaha. He spent the most of his time upon the river until the time of his death, March 22, 1880.



John Coumbe house - Wisconsin State Historical Society photo.

Port Andrew is adjacent to the John and Sarah Coumbe Homestead - Jct. of WI Trunk Hwy. 60 and Co. Trunk Hwy. X, Town of Richwood, Port Andrew, Richland County – 1861-1888. Aka: Tippesaukee Farm Rural Historic District National Register of Historic Places – 1992 - 1996. The Coumbe homestead, home of John Coumbe, the first white settler in Richland County, who came to the site in 1838, was built in 1861-62; the original buildings were log structures. John Coumbe, a native of England, was the first Euro-American settler in Richland County. Coumbe named his farm "Tippesaukee" after the Ho-Chunk village he found on the site. Having established himself as a successful farmer, in 1849 Coumbe married Sarah Ann Palmer. In 1863 Coumbe constructed the present gabled-ell form farmhouse. The wood frame house rests on a foundation built of stones collected in the nearby fields. The narrow clapboard siding was sawn at a nearby mill from basswood trees that grew on the farm. The interior is finished with white ash floorboards and black walnut trim and doors. With minor exceptions, the exceptionally intact interior retains much of the original floor-plan and finishes. Wallpaper, drapery and carpeting dating to the 1880s adorn the interior.

The river valley in this area is rich with effigy mounds, evidence of long use, and the land where Coumbe would stake his claim was home to a Ho-Chunk village called Tippesaukee. "He was surprised that there were parts of the tribe still here, using the village as a seasonal camp," said Coumbe's granddaughter, Mary Moffat. A treaty that opened the land to settlement had required them to move west across the Mississippi River. The Ho-Chunks' reaction to Coumbe's arrival

was not recorded, but his first two cabins burned to the ground, and Moffat said the Indians were believed to have been involved. Coumbe appealed to the soldiers at Fort Crawford in Prairie du Chien for help getting the Indians to leave. Despite the cabin fires, the drowning of his oldest son in the Wisconsin River and the other hardships of frontier life, Combe persevered and prospered.

