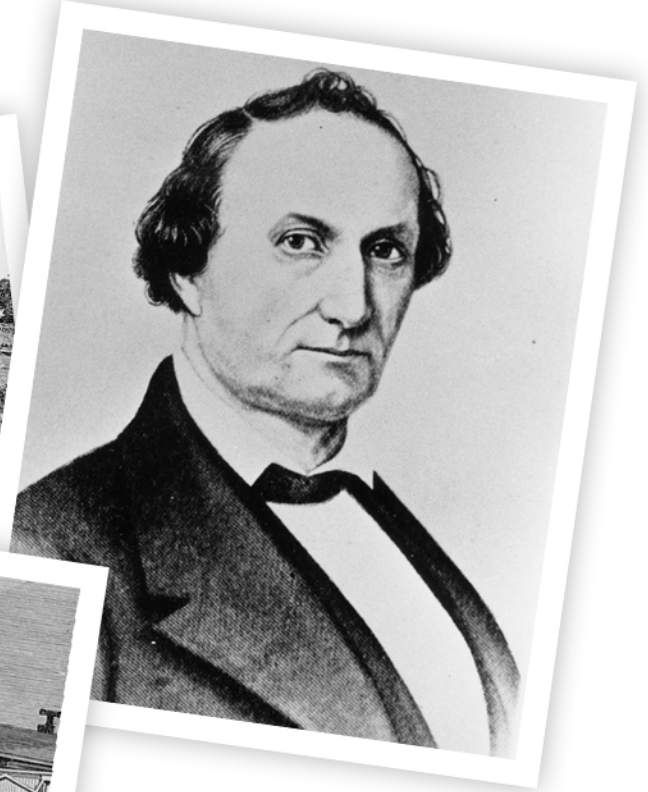


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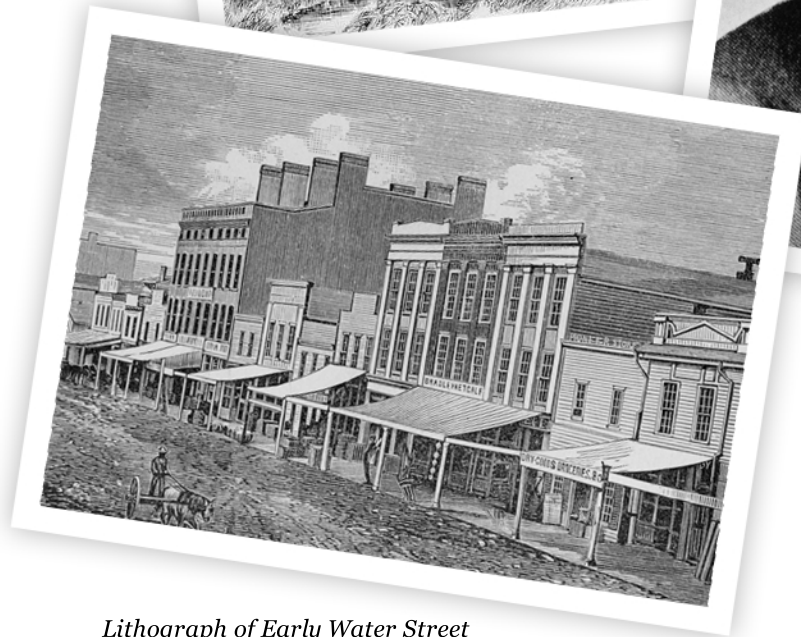
Historical Time Period : 1818-1846

Milwaukee: A Tale of Three Cities

*Log House and Trading Post
of Jacques Vieau*



*Solomon Juneau, one of
Milwaukee's three founders*



Lithograph of Early Water Street

Connecting to “The Making of Milwaukee”

Video Chapters: #2 - New Frontiers

Curriculum Chapter: Gr. 5-12 - Early Milwaukee

Milwaukee: A Tale of Three Cities

The city we call Milwaukee is built on a swamp. Long ago trees, grasses, mud, and water covered the place where Milwaukee's tall buildings and busy streets now stand. Three rivers, the Menominee, the Milwaukee, and the Kinnickinnic came together in that swamp and flowed into Lake Michigan. Many Native American tribes like the Menominee, Potawatomi, Sauk, Fox, Ojibwa, Mascouten, and Winnebago lived along the three rivers.

All that began to change when the French and Canadian fur traders arrived in the 1600's and especially when three white settlers arrived in the early 1800's. The three men were Solomon Juneau, Byron Kilbourn, and George Walker. They became known as Milwaukee's "founding fathers." These men helped turn the swamp into the city of Milwaukee that we know today. Each man settled in a different place along the rivers and those places were called Juneautown, Kilbourntown, and Walker's Point. All three men wanted to see Milwaukee grow. But each man wanted his area of town to grow the most. They disagreed, argued and even fought to develop their own section of the city. Those fights almost caused Milwaukee to remain three separate towns.

Solomon Juneau was one of the first white settlers to come to Milwaukee. He was born in Montreal, Canada, and his ancestors were from France. Juneau, like a lot of other Frenchmen, was a fur trader. He traded goods in return for furs from Native Americans, and other trappers and hunters. He came here in 1818 to work for a fur trader named Jacques Vieau. Solomon soon fell in love with Jacques' oldest daughter, Josette, and they married in 1820. Solomon and Josette built a cabin on the east side of the Milwaukee River on a high, dry spot of land. The couple eventually had thirteen children.

By the 1830's, the fur trading business began to fail. Many of the animal populations that provided fur for the traders were almost depleted because of over-hunting and over-trapping. So Solomon Juneau decided to spend more time buying and selling land to white settlers. As more people began to live east of the Milwaukee River they called the area Juneautown, after Solomon, and built their own churches, post office, and courthouse.

About this same time some of Milwaukee's original inhabitants, Native Americans, were removed by the U.S. Government from Wisconsin. Many Native Americans also died from white men's diseases or were crowded out by white settlers who wanted the Native's land for farming. These events made it possible for more Americans and Europeans to move into the area.

In 1834, Byron Kilbourn arrived in Milwaukee. Things were never the same after Kilbourn came to town. He was born in the state of Connecticut and was known as a Yankee, a person from the Northeastern part of the United States. Kilbourn moved here to become rich by buying and selling land. He settled on the west side of the river, across from Juneautown. Although Solomon Juneau asked Byron Kilbourn if he wanted to be his partner selling land and building a city, Kilbourn refused. He was not about to cooperate. Kilbourn soon built a hotel and general store in Kilbourntown and even started a newspaper called the *Milwaukee Advertiser*. He used it to encourage people to buy land and build homes on his side of the river.

George Walker, the third of Milwaukee's founders, also came to Milwaukee in 1834. Walker came from the state of Virginia and settled on the south side. He was a very big man, weighing 350 pounds and was known as one of the best ice skaters in all of Wisconsin. Like Juneau and Kilbourn, Walker hoped to become rich selling land. The area where Walker settled was one of the best locations for a town. It was at the mouth, or opening, of the Milwaukee River where the water flowed into Lake Michigan. However, Walker had conflicts with people who also claimed land on the south side. These problems caused Walker's Point to develop more slowly than Juneautown and Kilbourntown.

Making one city from three areas, Juneautown, Kilbourntown, and Walker's Point, was not easy. The three men fought to have settlers buy land in their towns. When Byron Kilbourn used the *Milwaukee*

Advertiser to encourage people to buy land on the west side of the river, Solomon Juneau started his own newspaper, the *Milwaukee Sentinel*. His paper, naturally, encouraged people to settle on the east side of the river. When Byron Kilbourn had streets built on the west side of the river, he made sure that they did not line up straight with the streets on the east side of the river in Juneautown. When bridges were built to connect the east and west sides of the river, they crossed the river at an angle. Today, Milwaukee's bridges still cross the river at an angle in order to connect the streets laid out by Juneau and Kilbourn.

The distrust and anger between people who lived on different sides of the Milwaukee River became very serious. In 1840, people from the east side built a bridge across what was then called Chestnut Street, now known as Juneau Avenue. People from Kilbourntown chopped down the Chestnut Street Bridge and sent it splashing into the river. Juneautown fought back. Its inhabitants chopped down bridges that were built by Kilbourntown. Unruly mobs on both sides had many skirmishes. These actions became known as the Bridge War of 1845.

The disagreements and arguments continued until everybody finally realized that they could benefit more from getting along rather than fighting each other. After all, who would want to move to a place where people were fighting all the time? One year later, in 1846, all three areas came together to form the City of Milwaukee. They wrote a city charter, a document that explained the city's rules. After the Wisconsin territorial legislature approved Milwaukee's charter, the people elected their first mayor. It was Solomon Juneau. Byron Kilbourn went on to create Milwaukee and Wisconsin railroad companies, and became embroiled in several scandals. George Walker became Milwaukee's second mayor and created Milwaukee's first streetcar line.

Milwaukee's beginning was not easy. The people of Walker's Point, Juneautown and Kilbourntown fought with each other and even destroyed each other's property. Thankfully, they realized that they needed to put aside their differences and cooperate for the greater good /of the city. Working together, they set the stage for Milwaukee to become a great city where new settlers would be proud to live.