

This Day in History... December 4, 1674

First Building in Chicago

On December 4, 1674, Father Marquette erected the first building in what would later become Chicago.

Born in France in 1637, Jacques Marquette joined the Jesuits at the age of 17. He spent several years working and studying in France before being sent to New France as a missionary to the Native American population.

In 1668, Marquette was tasked with traveling down the St. Lawrence River in the western Great Lakes to establish new missions. During this trip, he created missions at Sault Sainte Marie and La Pointe. While in La Pointe, Marquette learned from the natives about a major trade route along the Mississippi River. The locals encouraged him to travel down the river to spread his mission, but a brewing war between the Hurons and Ottawa of La Pointe and their Lakota neighbors forced him to leave the area and return to the Straits of Mackinac.



Issued for the 100th anniversary of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition.

Once there, Marquette told his superiors about the Mississippi River and requested to take an expedition to explore it. In 1673, he received approval and was sent on an expedition led by Louis Jolliet. They traveled along the east coast of Lake Michigan to Green Bay where they went up the Fox River to the area of modern-day Portage, Wisconsin. The town is named for the historic two-mile-long path connecting the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers there. The Miami natives encountered there helped Marquette's expedition make the portage.

Marquette and Joliet then continued on their journey, becoming the first Europeans to explore the northern Mississippi. They came upon a tribe of Peoria that warned them not to go further because some of the other tribes may not be friendly. Marquette thanked them for their concern but said that he had to continue because "the salvation of souls was at stake, for which I would be delighted to give my life." The Peoria chief gave Marquette a calumet, a sacred pipe used by many Native Americans in ceremonies and a symbol of peace. He advised Marquette to display it to indicate his peaceful intentions.

The group resumed their exploration and eventually made it to where the Arkansas River flowed into the Mississippi. The Native Americans he found there once again warned Marquette from going further south. They told him that the people he would encounter would be hostile towards anyone they thought might threaten their existing trade deals and were well armed. The expedition had begun to see items of European origin upon the natives and decided the risk of encountering Spanish colonists was too great, so they turned around. On the return trip, they were informed of a shorter route back the Great Lakes by way of the Chicago portage. There they encountered a group of Kaskaskia who invited Marquette to return and establish a mission.

After returning home, Marquette embarked on another missionary journey.

In late 1674, Marquette returned to the Illinois Country, as it was then called. He and two companions were caught in a bad winter storm on Lake Michigan. On December 4, they built a log cabin to protect themselves from the elements – creating the first temporary European settlement in what would eventually become Chicago. Marquette and his companions spent the winter there, befriending some of the local Native Americans, who called him the "black-robed chieftain." During his time there, he created the Immaculate Conception Mission, fulfilling the promise he'd made on the earlier journey. Father Marquette died the following year at the age of 37 from dysentery.



Trans-Mississippi stamp pictures Father Jacques Marquette preaching to a group of Native Americans.



Stamp honoring Marquette's exploration of the Mississippi.



Stamp issued for the 100th anniversary of Chicago's incorporation as a village.

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