

The History Corner By Beth Carvey
Twelve Moons: A Year with the Sauk and Meskwaki,

For many months there have been articles in the Foundation's newsletters about the book we are working on that will serve as a companion to the Hauberg Museum's exhibits of Sauk and Meskwaki seasonal activities. Work on the book is progressing well and we are on target to meet our deadline of April 28, 2012 where the book will be unveiled at a Book Signing Party at the Lodge. This month's History Corner features the Introduction to the book. The Introduction is meant to serve as the set up piece to the seasonal themes covered in the book. The illustration accompanying this article will be the book cover. We are excited about this project and are looking forward to its completion.

This book is about the Sauk and Meskwaki people. It follows them through one year, 1817 to 1818. The Sauk and Meskwaki ordered their lives by the cycle of the seasons, performing different tasks at different times of the year. In the summer they lived all together in large towns, growing the crops that provided food for the coming year. In the fall, after the harvest, they left their towns, broke up into small groups and scattered for the winter to hunt. In the late winter the men continued hunting while the women went to make maple sugar at the sugar groves. When sugaring season was done the different groups came together and returned to their towns to begin the cycle all over again. It was an age old rhythm of life and they had lived this way for thousands of years.

The Sauk and Meskwaki had no clocks or calendars. They measured time by the phases of the moon. Each lunar month began with the new moon and ended when that moon had "died." They also regulated their activities by the position of the stars and had names for the major stars and constellations. The lunar month coupled with the seasonal positions of the stars and other natural phenomena told the people when it was time to plant and harvest their crops, when it was time to depart for the winter hunt and the sugaring camps, and when it was time to rendezvous on the Mississippi to return to their summer towns and start their year all over again.

The Sauk and Meskwaki were the last two tribes of native people who occupied the Mississippi River valley on the 400 mile stretch from the Wisconsin River to the Missouri River. They lived here from 1735 to 1831. They had not always lived here. The two tribes originated in eastern Canada. Many centuries ago they were forced from their native lands by the Iroquois. The Sauk and Meskwaki slowly migrated westward and by the 1650's were living along Green Bay and the Fox River in what is now Wisconsin. They first met French fur traders and missionaries in 1666, forever changing their way of life. In 1700, the French and Meskwaki became involved in trade wars which lasted for the next 30 years. By 1733, the French had nearly exterminated the Meskwaki. In order to survive, the Sauk and Meskwaki became allies and left their Wisconsin homes for the Mississippi River valley. Here they found a place of rich opportunity and stability, a place of breathtaking beauty and contentment after so many years of being driven from one place to the next. This was truly a promised land offered to them by Creator and here was a place they would remain.

The book begins in March 1817, at the end of the sugaring season. The people have been separated for many months into small hunting and sugaring bands. Now that winter was over it was time to rendezvous with other of bands and await the time to return to their summer towns.