

Ferguson Has A History Museum

Ferguson has a Historical Society and a History Museum. We encourage any people reading this article to join in the conversation. Contact information is at the bottom of this article.

The Spanish were the first – then came the French – then the British and finally (after 1776) the Americans. BUT – that’s not quite accurate. There were people in this area for many thousands of years before the Europeans and Americans – Native Peoples. Who were these people who first inhabited the area we call, Ferguson?

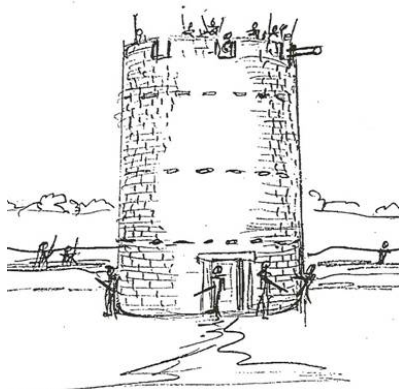


It is hard to know much before the 1500’s since there are no written records prior to the Spanish. We do know that there were at least 8 tribes who lived in the Missouri area – along with many who passed through. With two major rivers, the Missouri and the Mississippi, there was a lot of traffic and warfare among tribes. The major tribes in Missouri were the Quapaw, Illinois, Osage and Missouriia. To learn more about tribal interactions I suggest searching Florissant history. Ferguson’s history begins around 1850 while Florissant’s dates back to before 1780 (near the time of St. Louis – 1764). Florissant history tells of several encounters between Europeans and Indians.

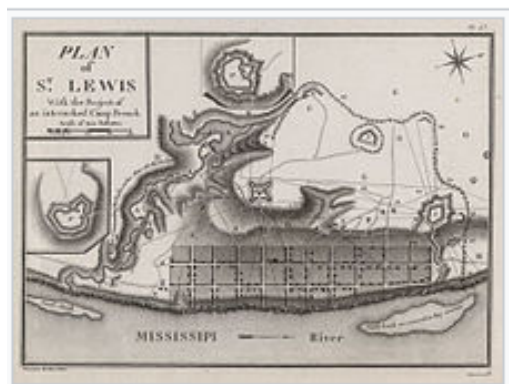
We do know the early inhabitants were mound builders (graves) as the St. Louis area was known as “the Mound City” due to the many Indian mounds (most destroyed as the area grew). The Sugarloaf Mound still exists in South St. Louis City (now owned by the Osage Tribe). Missouri tribes were mainly woodland people who built homes, did farming as well as hunting and fishing. They were boat builders.

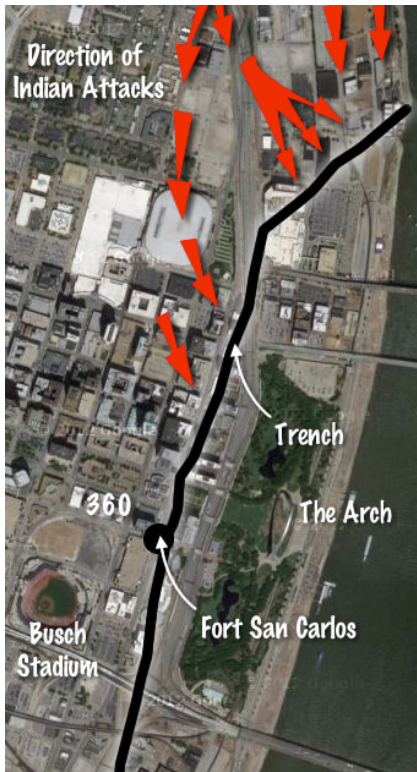


We are going to look at three connections between Europeans/Americans and Native peoples. The first occurred in St. Louis on May 28, 1780. It was the farthest west of all the battles during the Revolutionary War – the Battle of Fort San Carlos. While St. Louis was founded by the French, in 1780 the Spanish controlled the area. Residents were aware that the British were allying with local Indians to gain control of the Mississippi River and Valley. The first stone



tower of a fort was built west of the city (around 4th and Walnut) – as you can see by the map, St. Louis was only about 700 people. Along with the tower, a trench was dug from the north to the south. The battle lasted about two hours with 21 villagers killed and over 70 captured





– but the Spanish succeeded in driving off the British. At the same time a similar attack was on the Illinois side at Cahokia. Virginian George Rogers Clark lead an American army and routed the British. While it may not seem like much of a battle, it was important as it kept the British from controlling the area and especially the river. There is a plaque denoting the fort at the Hilton Ballpark Hotel on Broadway.

Spain had ceded the area over to France after the Revolutionary War. France then sold the Louisiana territory to the United States in 1803. The Lewis and Clark Expedition began exploration of the area in 1804. Their journals give detailed information about the tribes. In 1829, Andrew Jackson became President. Here is the second connection we are going to consider – The Trail of Tears. The Trail, which went across southern Missouri, was the result of the Indian Removal Act which essentially moved Native People to the Louisiana Territory (mainly Oklahoma). By the mid 1830's, there were almost no Native People in Missouri Territory unless they had intermarried or moved to St. Louis. It was a most unjust and brutal time in the history of our country.

Just because Native People had been moved out didn't mean they would not return. Here is the third connection – and this one was in Ferguson. E.R. Schmidt wrote: *For about 6 weeks, in the fall of 1903, part of a tribe of Oklahoma Indians camped east of Ferguson, waiting for their quarters at the World's Fair. The Sell-Forepaugh Ranch sponsored the 10-12 men and women, 2 young boys and a baby girl. They lived in 6 large tee-pees decorated with colorful symbols and designs.*



In the evenings, several cheerful fires took the bite off the chill autumn air, and furnished light for tribal dancing – every night a different dance. From Ferguson, youngsters and adults alike trudged up and down the seven hills on Chambers Road, there, and seven dusty hills back to enjoy this entertainment. They sold beadwork, belts, bracelets and moccasins.



One man was adept at carving his likeness from black walnut shells and sold many of them. Most of the tribe posed for photos if promised a print, but no posing next time if the promise was not kept. Maiketa was their Chief. Students of Ferguson High School in the 1920's had so romantic a notion of our visitors that they named their first several yearbooks, The Maiketa.



This tribe was part of the Indian School Exhibit at the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904. Hundreds of Indians were brought for the fair. All brought their own materials and animals, constructed their own living quarters and lived at the fair. Their job was to represent traditional Indian Life. The photo to the left shows members of the Sioux Nation at the fair. The most famous Native American at the Fair was Geronimo. At the end of the Fair everyone went home and continued their lives.

A lot of us have mementos of the 1904 World's Fair – photo albums, glasses and steins, jewelry or family stories of visiting the fair. My Mom was born in June of 1904 – because people didn't take babies to crowded places, her older sister didn't get to go to the fair. A memory she passed on to future generations. Perhaps you have some items or memories that the History Museum might be able to use – especially if they relate to a Ferguson family.

If you have any suggestions, questions, or items to donate to the Ferguson Historical Society, please contact Jerry Benner at fjbenner@mindspring.com. You are also welcome to visit the History Museum at 1064 Smith (behind the Community Center) by e-mailing the above address. Note: we will need to schedule a date for you, so ask well in advance.

The Indian attack graphic came from "The Battle of Fort San Carlos" by Cameron Collins found at www.distilledhistory.com/battlefortsancarlos/

"The Ferguson Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of Ferguson Missouri. Membership is open to all sharing our interest."