



Module 5 Talking Points

- The Baraboo River is the reason that the city of Baraboo is here today. Today the river is used for kayaking and canoeing but once it was used to turn machines and even make electricity.
- The Baraboo River is the fourth largest tributary of the Wisconsin River.
- What is a tributary? A tributary is a river that flows into a larger river or lake.
- The Baraboo River starts in Monroe County and travels through parts of four counties before reaching the Wisconsin River. Most of the Baraboo River is in Sauk County.
- The Baraboo River watershed, or the area of land that drains into the river, covers just about 420,000 acres.
- The Baraboo River is reported to be 120 miles in length but it has many twists and turns. So, it may be longer than this if stretched out straight.
- European settlers began settling on the shores of the Baraboo River in the late 1830s.
- Today there are ten villages and cities along the Baraboo River. The city of Baraboo is the largest of these communities with just over 12,000 people.
- After this area was opened up for European settlement in 1837, the first westward settlers to the Baraboo area were primarily American citizens originally born in Eastern States such as Kentucky, Vermont, New York, and Virginia.
- A few early settlers were born in Europe and had come to the United States to seek new opportunities.
- Early European settlers were adaptable, not only to living conditions but also to different ways of making a living.
- European settlers often looked for natural resources that could be harvested like trees, iron ore, lead or even copper. Some settlers looked for flat land without a lot of trees for farming.
- Areas like the Sauk Prairie were settled first. Other settlers looked for business opportunities which often meant finding sites with the potential for harnessing water power.
- The Baraboo area was the first place along the river chosen for settlement by European settlers.



- The rapids that exist in the area of the city of Baraboo give us a clue that the river is dropping in elevation. From the west side of Baraboo to the east side the river drops 43 feet in elevation.
- If this drop was all in one waterfall instead of stretched out it would be taller than a four story building, about as high as Sauk County's West Square Building.
- Early settlers knew that if the river was dropping dams could be built to harness the water and create power.
- In the days before electricity and even steam power, water power was used to run things like saw mills, flour mills and factories. If water could be controlled it could be used to turn wheels and turbines which would in turn operate machinery.
- Dams were needed to hold back the water and create a dependable supply of water that could be run to the water wheels or turbines.
- The drop in the river in Baraboo meant that this location would be an easier place to build a dam and back up the water to an area where the river ran level.
- Mr. Canfield's map of Baraboo shows a drawing of the Baraboo River with four of the five dams that were built in the Baraboo area.
- The shortest dam created a drop of 7 feet and the tallest dam created a drop of 14 feet.
- Besides the rapids, the river also has two sharp bends which created unique situations for building more water power. The two bends are called oxbows because from the air they look like part of the yoke for a pair of oxen.
- A yoke for oxen consisted of a strong timber that was made to fit across the top of the neck and a U-shaped piece that went under the neck.
- A dam was built on the upstream side of an oxbow and then a millrace was dug for the water to flow across the land inside the oxbow.
- Water rushing down the millrace turned a water wheel at the mill. The water then returned to the river on the downstream side of the oxbow.
- The bigger the drop in water in the millrace the more water power there was.
- The water rushing down the millrace could operate a larger water wheel or operate more than one water wheel.
- At the lower oxbow a long millrace was cut across land.



- This created a drop of 14 feet. At one location in Baraboo a dam was built with a millrace on each side of the river to operate more than one mill.
- The first dam on the Baraboo River was built in 1840 on the east side of the upper oxbow. Today this would be along the river walk below Ochsner Park.
- The dam was made out of logs which were laid down in a criss-cross fashion. This old photo of a dam at Mirror Lake shows the type of dam first constructed in Baraboo.
- The first dam in Baraboo was built by two settlers named Abe Wood and Wallis Rowan. Abe Wood also built the first settler's home in Baraboo in the fall of 1838 or 1839 on the hill above the river and the dam.
- Abe Wood was born about 1800 in Kentucky and came north at an early age. By 1837 he lived on Lake Monona near Madison before coming to the Baraboo Valley.
- Wood built a log cabin which was about 12 feet by 12 feet and had a dirt floor inside.
- Abe Wood lived in this cabin with his wife Sarah and her daughter Hannah from a previous marriage and their daughter Margaret. Sarah Wood was part Ho-Chunk.
- The cabin disappeared many years ago but the spot is marked at Ochsner Park with a boulder.
- Wallis Rowan was born in Kentucky about 1800 and married Elizabeth "Betsy" Metcalf in 1818 in southern Illinois.
- The couple had at least nine children and the family moved every few years as Wallis Rowan tried his hand at various jobs. Rowan was known as a miner, Indian trader, innkeeper, scout, farmer and mill owner.
- In 1839 Wallis Rowan partnered with Abe Wood to build the first dam and saw mill along the Baraboo River. In 1840 Wallis Rowan brought his wife and family to live in the area which was then just woods.
- This picture shows the construction of a similar log cabin to the one that Rowan would have built.
- The construction of the first dam on the Baraboo River began the settlement in this area of the first settlers of European descent.
- They chose the same spot as the Ho-Chunk and the Native Americans who built the effigy mounds here.



- Different groups of people have lived here in what we now call Baraboo for a long time under different circumstances and different ways of life.