

NEW TECH, OLD STORIES

'OLD NORTHWEST FRONTIER TRAILS' E-BOOK SERIES RECOUNTS AREA'S EARLY HISTORY



ENGAGING HISTORY

JEFF BOLLIER | PRESS-GAZETTE MEDIA

DEPERE — Barbara Smits and Herman Bender have turned to the newest technology to tell the oldest stories about Northeast Wisconsin's geologic formation and early settlements.

Their De Pere business, Old Northwest Frontier Tours, this summer launched the first volume of a seven-part series of self-guided e-book tours that explore the history of Northeastern Wisconsin.

The first volume uses photos, videos, audio recordings and related activities to tell the history of Native American and white settlers along the eastern shore of Lake Winnebago in an interactive way. It's currently available to download for \$1 via Apple's iTunes iBooks store.

"Technology has caught up to the point where we can really tell the story the way we wanted," Smits said. "The tours let people see what it was like and experience the history of the region. I don't think there's many tours like it."

What Bender and Smits have been waiting for is technology that can increase engagement in the region's history. Old Northwest Frontier Tours are designed to be self-guided so families, friends or



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Herman Bender shows Barbara Smits their location in Fond du Lac County on Thursday on a map of the area circa 1835. TOP: A map dating back to the 1830s shows the location in Fond du Lac County of Military Road, the first road to cross the state, as well as trails and lakes.

About the series

Who: Barbara Smits and Harold Bender with Old Northwest Frontier Tours

What: Interactive e-books

Topics: Lake Winnebago settlements, Fond du Lac area settlements, the Old Military Road, Native American mounds

On the Web:

<http://www.onwfrontier-tours.com/>

Search the iTunes book store: Lake Winnebago, WI, Circle Tour

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school classes can drive or bicycle the areas at their leisure.

“People seem very excited about it. You can take one chapter and enjoy all or part of it with your friends or family. Who’s going to hesitate on buying a \$1 tour guide?” Smits said. “I wanted to keep it affordable so everyone could enjoy it.”

The e-books will each feature plays, re-enactment suggestions, songs, poetry and other interactive ways to experience the history.

“If you sing a song or act in a play, you never

forget the experience. Or the history,” Smits said.

Smits said all the parks, statues, historic markers and sites referenced in the tours are on public property. All of the historic photos, accounts and writings included in the e-books come from public domain texts and sources.

The first chapter in the series covers the eastern shore of Lake Winnebago. Future chapters will focus on:

- Lake Winnebago and the Niagara Escarpment

- Native American mounds

- The Old Military Road, the state’s first road, which stretched from Prairie du Chien to Green Bay

- The Fond du Lac area

- The western shore of Lake Winnebago

- Plays and other interactive features.

Smits sees the e-book series as an asset for historic tourism that goes beyond other tour books’ focus on food and drink and cities’ landmarks.

From the Military Road to the Grignon Hotel in Butte des Morts and the Stockbridge and Brothertown tribal settlements east of Lake Winnebago, Old Northwest Frontier Tours highlights historical markers, sites, people and settings that helped shape the region’s early history. The series tackles topics such as the French-Canadian voyageurs, mail routes, the

geological formation of the region, early commerce and railroads.

Bender, president of the Hanwakan Center for Prehistoric Astronomy, Cosmology and Cultural Landscape Studies Inc., handled much of the scientific research and writing. Smits curated the public domain artwork and historic records, and worked the video and audio production from her De Pere studio.

“We want to educate people about how much more there is than just eating and drinking,” Smits said. “There’s so much history; you hate to see it ignored.”

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