

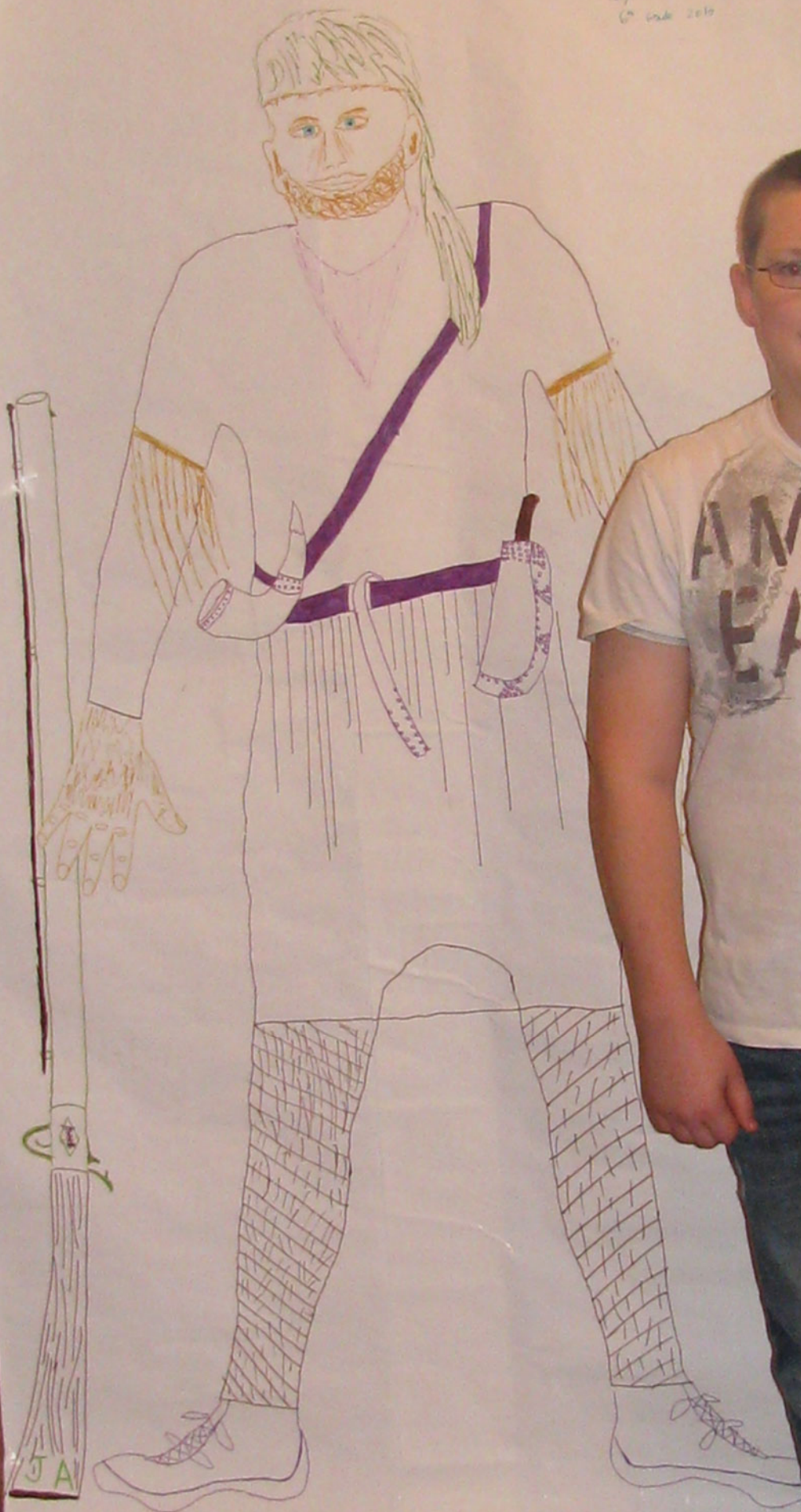
James Aird

1st Person Biography

Along with the biography, Tayler was given the assignment to make a trace of himself and color it to be like his character. He gave this report to his 6th grade reading class at St Clair Public school.

JAMES AIRD

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Taylor Lehmann
Reading
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Do you know of any early Minnesotans who were one of the first to establish trade and commerce in the upper Midwest of the United States? Hi I'm James Aird, an immigrant born in Ayrshire, Scotland and I'm here to tell you all about some of the interesting things I did in my life.

I was born in 1757. Although not well known you may have heard of my cousin Robert Burns, a Scottish poet who wrote the popular News Year Eve song *Auld Lang Zine*.

In 1776, I moved from Scotland to Canada, the British Territory looking to make a living after reading Carver's Journals. Carver had lived with the Dakota Wabasha family and discovered Indian lead mines in Wisconsin and Minnesota in the 1760's.

In 1778, at age 21, I married into the Dakota Wabasha family in the Dakota tradition. My 13 year old bride's name was Grey Cloud or Marplyarotowin. Besides being the woman of my dreams, her influence also helped me establish strong relations with the Dakota nation to setup trade.

That same year I began my career in the Indian trade west of Michilimackinac Island (Mackinaw City, Michigan), where my trading firm owned a large part of the island. Beaver fur pelts were a valuable item back in Europe.

By 1783 I was trading on the Upper Mississippi River (Wabasha's Dakota village) and I re-married my wife in a Catholic ceremony.

In 1786 my family is located at Prairie Du Chien while trading on the St.Peters River or now known as the Minnesota River. I built a good house. It has the honors of being the oldest house foundation still in existence in Wisconsin for over 220 years later.

In 1799 Pierre "Pig's Eye" Parrant became my steersman. Later on Pierre started a trading post by the St Anthony Falls and later his town was renamed to St. Paul, MN.

In 1803 I started a trading venture from Mackinac Island, Michigan to St Louis, Missouri with my brother George. On our first tour south we met with a United States exploring expedition under command of Lieutenant Zebulon Pike. Mr. Pike later recommended me to James Wilkinson, governor of a portion of the Louisiana Purchase, as "a gentleman to whose humanity and politeness I am much indebted."

On September 3, 1806 I was the first European (non-Indian) to meet Lewis & Clark, who were explorers for the United States returning from the their expedition to the Pacific Ocean. I supplied their party with tobacco and flour, as well as with whatever news I could. I heard Lewis & Clark wrote of me in their travel journal "...We landed and found a Mr. James Airs, a partner of a house at Prairie du Chien, who had come from Mackinaw by the way of Prairie Du Chein and St. Louis, with a license to trade among the Sioux for one year...After so long an interval, the sight of anyone who could give us information of our country was peculiarly delightful and much of the night was spent in making inquiries into what had occurred during our absence. We found Mr. Airs a very friendly and liberal gentleman..."

In June of 1807, I met Ramsey Crooks, my clerk and future head of the American Fur Company waiting for me at St. Louis. Our associate John Astor, later became the first American millionaire from the beaver trapping industry and land development. He developed much of Manhattan Island in New York.

During the War of 1812, I tried to remain neutral since I was an American citizen allowing my license to trade beaver pelts. My father-in-law, Chief Wabasha II became a British General and my business partner Robert Dickson became more committed to the British war effort. Mr. Dickson wrote from Mackinac, to another partner in the firm, Jacob Franks, on September 8, 1812 "...Detroit was taken by Gen. Brock on the 16th of last month. Gen. Hull, with 2,400 men, laid down their arms....Poor Hanks, having been detailed by Hull, was cut in two and died instantly....Berthelot and La Croix arrived 2 days ago...Mr. Lawe will proceed with a boat to La Baye to the Mississippi until he meets Mr. Aird and they will arrange for his wintering...Mr. Wilmot is still here..." It was a difficult time, my former son-in-law, Thomas Anderson, also a British General divorced my daughter after being forced to move to Canada instead of becoming an American citizen.

In March of 1815 after the war, some visitors reported that I was starving on the St. Peters River or today known as the Minnesota River, between St Paul and Mankato and the next season began trading for the new firm of the American Fur Company.

In December 1818, my new son-in-law Hazen Mooers along with my granddaughter Jane Anderson visited me during my failing health at Prairie du Chien, WI. She was such a sweet little girl. I wonder if some day her great, great, great grandson will tell his elementary reading class about my adventures.

On February 27, 1819 I died at Prairie du Chien, WI.