

## Classroom Activity- Famous Waukeshonians

### Was It Worth It? Economic Impact of Famous Waukeshonians

**Objective:** Students will learn about basic economics through an example of one of Waukesha Counties earliest settlers and fur traders, Amable Vieau. Ideas such as economic costs, economic benefits, and unintended consequences will be discussed and evaluated during this activity.

#### Curriculum Standards:

- SS. Econ1. a. i
  - Use economic reasoning to compare and contrast the costs and benefits of a decision
- SS. Econ2. b. 4-5
  - Assess the roles of consumers (demand), producers (supply), prices, non-price factors (e.g. drought or fad item), and competition in product market
- SS. Hist1. b. i
  - Use evidence to draw conclusions about probable effects of historical events, issues, and problems

#### Materials:

- Paper
- Pencils/pens

**Back Story:** The first section of this program covered the early farmers, settlers, fur traders and natives of the Waukesha area. People such as these are usually known as founders, founding fathers, and creators of an area. They are also credited with setting up towns, establishing economies, and forever impacting the area. The actual affects of these impacts are less talked about. What did fur traders and natives get out of the fur trade? What cost did they pay to set up this trade to begin with? What were the long-term effects of this program on the environment?

#### Activity:

- Step One: Have the students break up into groups of four to five. This can change based on how many students are in the class. The groups should be big enough to have a lively discussion, but small enough for each student to be able to speak.
- Step Two: To get an idea of what they are talking about read the passage below that gives an example of costs, benefits, and unintended consequences of an action.
  - When Asa Clark moved to Pewaukee, Pewaukee Lake was known as snail lake. He dammed the lake in order to build a mill where he could turn wheat into flour. This allowed the citizens of Pewaukee to have flour in their town without buying it from Prairieville or Milwaukee. It also allowed Asa Clark to make money. This is known as a benefit. To build the dam and mill, he had to purchase or find wood, stone, and other construction materials he did not have at the time. He also had to take time to build the dam This is known as a cost. Damming the lake, however, created the problem of regular flooding, as the water did not flow through snail

lake as it did before the dam was built. Farmland around the area was destroyed due to this flooding. This is known as an unintended consequence.

- Step Three: Now that they have examples of what costs, benefits, and unintended consequences are, they will now be given a scenario. Read the following Scenario:
  - Amable Vieau established a fur trade depot in what is now Muskego in 1827. Natives and other fur traders would hunt beaver, otter, minx, and muskrat. They would trade this fur in return for tobacco, tools, guns, and ammunition. The more animals that were hunted, the more goods they could trade for. Amable Vieau would take the furs and sell them in cities like Green Bay for which he could invest more into his business. By the late 1840's the trade was all but ended. What would the costs, benefits, and consequences of this scenario be from Amable Vieau's perspective?
- Step Four: Allow the students to discuss the costs, benefits, and unintended consequences of this scenario for about five minutes. Have the students write down their answers, as they will be discussing them.
- Step Five: Have the teams share the answers they came up with. Some possible Answers include:
  - Costs
    - Buying trade goods
    - Transporting the furs to Green Bay
  - Benefits
    - Receiving furs
    - Making money
    - Natives become dependent on trade
  - Unintended consequences
    - Destruction of biodiversity
    - Extinction of several species from the Waukesha area such as beaver and otter.
    - Extinction of several larger species dependent on the smaller species such as bears and bobcats
    - Long term destruction of the fur trade
    - Long term change of the environment
- Step Six: Read the conclusion
  - When Vieau set up his depot, the natives started to hunt down as many beavers, otters, muskrat, and minx as possible. Instead of hunting the animals at a stable rate, they overhunted them to the point that most of them went extinct in the area. This ended up killing off larger species that lived off the smaller creatures such as bears and bob cats. This directly affected the biodiversity of the area changing the environment of Waukesha county to this very day.

### **Activity Vocabulary:**

- Cost
- Benefit

- Unintended Consequences