



Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

Advancing the political agenda of Caribbean Americans

C-PAC Celebrates Black History Month and celebrates the contributions of Caribbean nationals to the United States. Unlike most new immigrant groups, Americans of Caribbean heritage have been in this country since the enslavement of black people.

This week we look at another Caribbean American who has contributed to American history, CPAC Chat spotlights Jean Baptiste Pointe Du Sable.

Jean Baptiste Pointe Du Sable



Du Sable is regarded as the Father of Chicago and the first non-indigenous person to settle there.

According to some accounts, Du Sable is thought to have been born in St. March, Sainte-Dominique (which is now Haiti) in circa 1750 to a French father and a black, enslaved mother.

Although little historical information of his life before 1770 is known, it is believed that he was taken to France by his father to be educated. He moved to New Orleans with a friend in 1764. They became traders and traveled up the Mississippi and through the Midwest. During this period, Du Sable married a member of the Potawatomi tribe and became part of the group. They had two children, a son, Jean, and a daughter, Susanne.

Sometime after 1770, Du Sable moved to the area known as Eschecagou, which visitors mispronounced as "Chicago." He constructed a trading post at the mouth of the local river, near where the Tribune Tower now stands.

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Du Sable's loyalty to the French and the Americans led to his arrest in 1779 – during the American Revolutionary War - by the British. He was eventually released, and from the summer of 1780 to 1784, he managed a tract of woodlands on the St. Clair River in present-day Michigan. He lived with his family in a cabin at the mouth of the Pine River in what is now the City of St. Clair.

Sometime in the 1780s, after the America had won its independence from England, Du Sable returned to area now known as Chicago. He reclaimed his Chicago property. Besides a 22x40-foot residence, two barns, a mill, bakery, dairy, workshop, henhouse, and smokehouse. He sold pork, bread, and flour. As an adopted Potawatomi he also enjoyed good relations with the native peoples, many of whom worked for him.

The Potawatomi called him the "Black Chief." By 1790, Du Sable's had established himself as a successful, wealthy trader.

In 1800 Du Sable abruptly sold his holdings and lived near Peoria for about ten years, until the death of his wife. Then he moved in with his daughter to St. Charles, Missouri until he died on August 28, 1818. He was buried in an unmarked grave in St. Charles Borromeo Cemetery. A granite marker was erected on the site believed to be his grave by the Illinois Sesquicentennial Commission on October 12, 1968.

Chicago's first recognition of Du Sable came in 1912, when a plaque was placed on a building near his cabin site. Later a high school named for him was erected on Wabash Avenue. In 1961, a group of Chicagoans came together and formed a museum named after him and dedicated to the history of African Americans in the U.S. In 2006 the Chicago City Council officially recognized Du Sable as the founder of Chicago. In 2009, an outdoor bust of Du Stable was erected on Michigan Avenue, just north of the Chicago River, right near his old front door.

Sources: The Father of Chicago: Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable: <https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-blogs/the-father-of-chicago-jean-baptiste-pointe-dusable/24858f5f-0620-4003-9b84-ac3fe294e1c3>

Jean-Baptist-Point Du Sable: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Baptist-Point-Du-Sable>