

Pipestone

National Monument
Minnesota

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



The Nicollet Rock

In 1838, Joseph Nicollet brought his mapping expedition to the pipestone quarries. A few of the men carved their initials into one of the rocks. Below are snapshots of who each of these men were.



Joseph Nicollet

Joseph Nicollet (1786-1843)

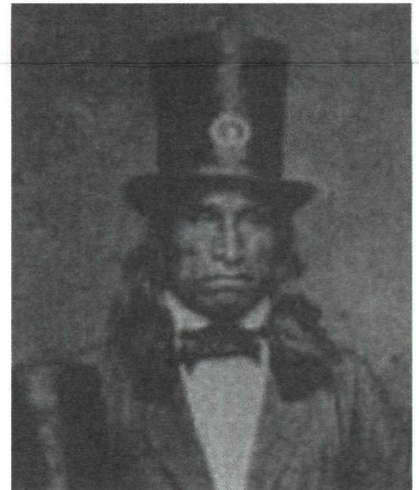
Between 1836 and 1839, French scientist Joseph Nicollet led three scientific expeditions to map the area between the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. In 1838, he traveled to the Pipestone Quarries.

While at the quarries, he and members of his expedition carved their names into a rock near the top of the Winnewissa Falls. Twenty years later, that same rock was used as the center marker of the 1-square mile boundary for Pipestone Reservation. The rock and their inscriptions can still be seen today on the Circle Trail.

Joseph Renville, Jr. (1779-1846)

Joseph Renville Jr.'s father was the French fur trader Joseph Renville (or Rainville), Sr. and his mother, Miniyehe, was a member of the Kaposia band of Mdewakanton Dakota. Renville Jr. grew up to become a fur trader like his father and worked as a guide for many explorers.

In 1838, Renville and his wife accompanied Nicollet on his mapping expedition. Renville generously shared knowledge of Dakota customs, plant uses, and provided his family's personal wagon along with one of his best horses to help the expedition. It was during this trip that he carved his initials into the quartzite rock with the other men.



Joseph Renville, Jr.

John C. Fremont (1813-1890)

This bold explorer caught Joseph Nicollet's eye as he was about to lead his 1838 mapping expedition. Nicollet needed someone to supervise the daily routines and offered 25-year-old Fremont \$4 a day to take on the task. During this trip, Fremont learned skills from Nicollet in cartography that served him his entire life, one day earning him the nickname "The Pathfinder."

In reference to carving his initials in the rock, Fremont wrote "This was a famous place of the country, and nearly all of us, as is the custom in famous places the world over, carved our names in the stone."



John C. Fremont

Joseph LaFramboise (1805-1856)

Joseph LaFramboise was born to French fur trader Louis Joseph LaFramboise and Marguerite-Magdelaine Marcot LaFramboise (granddaughter of Odawa Chief Kewinaquot). LaFramboise followed his parents into the fur trade and served as an interpreter for the Dakota at two treaty signings with the U.S. government.

In 1838, Joseph Nicollet employed LaFramboise as a guide and interpreter. Nicollet wrote that at the pipestone quarries, LaFramboise was "tranquilly engraving his name" on a rock when a man from the Wahpekute Tribe approached him. The two men knew each other and the Wahpekute man was there with three other families to quarry. The three families camped with the expedition during their stay, sharing stories and quarrying together.

Charles A. Geyer (1809-1853)

When Joseph Nicollet was assembling the team for his famous expeditions, he asked German Botanist Charles Geyer to join and even paid him out of his own pocket. Geyer participated in the 1838 and 1839 expeditions, collecting over 400 plants.

Geyer went on to join other explorers and botanists, traveling to Illinois, Missouri, the Iowa Territory, Nebraska, Wyoming, and the Oregon Territory. He collected over 10,000 specimens throughout his career that are currently cared for by the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew in the United Kingdom.

J. Eugene Flandin (~1821-unknown)

J. Eugene Flandin was in his late teens when he accompanied the 1838 Nicollet expedition. The French consul in New York requested that Nicollet let Flandin join the team as a favor. As thanks, the Flandin family sent along an 18-month-old hunting dog and luxury food items, such as 10 lbs. of chocolate. Flandin’s hard work impressed Nicollet and he seemed genuinely liked by the other men on the expedition.

John C. Fremont referred to him as a “pleasant” traveling companion. Nicollet wrote that “Flandin...still so young, shows the most extraordinary and the quickest faculty that I have ever seen for astronomical calculations, matters so important for us who will have so many astronomical results to present and publish as the basis of our geographical work.”

Joseph Nicollet



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