Biography written by:

Becky Marburger
Educational Producer
Wisconsin Media Lab
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Life</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life on Mackinac Island</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Baird</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Bay</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peshtigo Fire</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elizabeth Fisher Baird was an early Wisconsin settler. She taught herself English and wrote about her life during the 1800s. Elizabeth also helped her husband at his law firm and ran her family’s farm. She raised four children and helped people after the famous Peshtigo Fire. She helped us learn what life was like in early Wisconsin.
Early Life

Elizabeth Fisher was born on April 24, 1810, in Prairie du Chien. At that time, Wisconsin was frontier land. It did not become a state until May 29, 1848.

Henry Fisher was Elizabeth’s father. He worked as a fur trader. So did her grandmother and her great-aunt.

Elizabeth’s Great Aunt Madeleine ran her husband’s fur trade business after he was murdered. She always wore Odawa clothing.

Elizabeth’s Grandmother Thérèse was the granddaughter of an Odawa Chief named Kewinaquot, which means Returning Cloud.
In 1812, Elizabeth’s mother Marienne took her to visit Elizabeth’s grandparents on Mackinac Island. A war broke out shortly after they arrived so Marienne and Elizabeth stayed. Elizabeth did not see her father much after moving to the island.

Elizabeth lived with her mother and grandparents on Mackinac Island. Her mother opened a school for fur traders’ daughters. The students were Métis or American Indian. Elizabeth was not interested in learning at her mother’s school.

Mackinac Island (Mack-i-naw) is part of Michigan and is located northeast of Green Bay, Wisconsin. Native people originally named the island Matchimackinac, which means “big turtle” before the French renamed it Michilimackinack. The English later shortened the name to Mackinac.
Most people spoke French on Mackinac Island. The mail came only once a month. Fur traders traveled to the island. They traded their goods for furs from the American Indians.

Elizabeth liked to ride in her dog sled during the winter. She stayed warm by wearing her brown cape, beaver hat, and buckskin mittens and moccasins.

In early March, Elizabeth sometimes went with her family to a nearby island for sugar camp. There people boiled maple tree sap into sugar.

Sugar was a scarce resource when Elizabeth was young. This is a sugar camp in Michigan. Elizabeth’s family’s sugar camp might have looked like this.
Fur Trade

The fur trade era began in Wisconsin when fur traders from France and French-speaking Canada arrived in the area in the early 1600s. The beaver pelts they sought were popular for use as clothing. The French did not hunt beavers themselves. Instead, American Indians living in the area would trap animals and trade the pelts for goods such as metal knives, metal cooking pots, jewelry, wool blankets, guns, and ammunition. They would also exchange wild rice, fish, venison, canoes, and trade route information to the fur traders for the goods. The era ended in the mid-1800s when overhunting caused the fur trade to shift west and out of Wisconsin.

Beaver pelts were made into waterproof hats that kept the wearer warm and dry. The pelt could also be shaved, pressed, and made into a hat or clothing.
Elizabeth met a young lawyer named Henry Baird. Henry did not plan to live on the island long. He hoped to move back to Ohio to live near his family. But he stayed to become a lawyer in the new frontier.

Elizabeth and Henry married at her home on August 12, 1824. She was just 14 years old. The couple moved to Green Bay, Wisconsin, the next month.

In 1805, 5-year-old Henry immigrated to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania from Dublin, Ireland, with his father (Henry), mother (Ann), and three older siblings (Eliza, Robert, and Thomas) (1856).
GREEN BAY

Elizabeth’s lifestyle changed when she moved back to Wisconsin. On the island people traveled on paved streets. In Green Bay they used dirt footpaths. There were no grocery stores or bakeries nearby either.

The Bairds bought a home in a small settlement along the Fox River called Shantytown. Henry worked all day. Elizabeth did not know how to keep house. So the Bairds hired a young maid to help with the housework. Elizabeth soon learned how to bake, cook, and care for her home.
But Elizabeth felt lonely even though her neighbors visited her. They spoke English and she only spoke French. So Elizabeth taught herself English. She had never attended school but she knew how to read and write a little in French. This helped her learn to read, write, and understand English. Once she mastered the language, she helped at Henry’s law office as the interpreter for his French clients.

The Bairds moved to a farm in 1832. Henry thought he could be both a lawyer and a farmer. He could not. So Elizabeth took the lead. She grew crops and cared for the animals. She also raised four daughters named Eliza, Emilie, Elinor, and Louisa.
Lumbering was a major industry in Wisconsin in the mid-1800s. Trains carried lumber from the area. Sometimes they caused sparks that set fire to nearby brush.

The huge Peshtigo Fire started on the evening of October 8, 1871, near Peshtigo, Wisconsin. Many people lost their lives and homes.

After the fire, people asked Elizabeth and Henry to help. People from all over the United States sent clothing, medicine, supplies, and money to the Bairds for the victims. The once-spoiled child was now a leader people depended on.

It is unknown how many people were killed by the Peshtigo Fire. Some estimate between 1,200 and 2,500 people lost their lives.
The Peshtigo Fire turned approximately 1.5 million acres to ash.
Elizabeth grew to be a leader while Wisconsin grew into a state. She died on November 5, 1890.

Elizabeth wanted to share her life’s stories so that others could learn what life was like in the 1800s. She wrote articles in the local newspaper in 1886 and 1887 about her adventures on Mackinac Island and in Wisconsin. Her writings were then put into two books. We know what life was like in early Wisconsin from her writings.

Wisconsin Historical Society. WHi-5210.

Elizabeth Baird wrote about her life so that future generations could learn about their history. What can you do so that future generations learn what life was like for your generation? (1879)
Glossary

frontier (n): unsettled land with few people and businesses

fur trader (n): a person who exchanged European goods like beads and cloth for American Indian goods such as wild rice and animal pelts

generation (n): a group of people born and living during the same time period

goods (n): materials such as clothing, weapons, food, etc.

immigrate (v): to move to a country to live there

interpreter (n): a person who translates words into a different language

Métis (n): a person of both American Indian and European heritage

moccasin (n): a soft leather shoe

settlement (n): a newly established place to live in frontier land

settler (n): a person who moves to and lives in a new frontier