



Fort Dearborn



INSTRUCTOR NOTE

Ask students to locate the first star on the Chicago flag. Remind students that this star represents Fort Dearborn. In 1803, the United States built a fort near what is today the Chicago River. One of the people who lived at the fort was Rebecca Heald, the wife of the captain of Fort Dearborn, Nathaniel Heald. This historical fiction narrative is told in her voice. Prior to reading the narrative, review the following vocabulary words with students.

Vocabulary

allies—groups of people who fight on the same side during a war

cede—to yield or grant, typically by treaty

explorers—people who travel for adventure or to discover new things

settler—someone who moves to a new area and lives there

wealthy—rich

merchant—someone who buys and sells things

established—started

mill—a building where grain is turned into flour

trading post—an area where people meet to buy, sell, and trade things

port—a place where boats come to load and unload things

fort—a trading post protected by soldiers

evacuate—leave

abandoned—left empty

mementos—small objects that are important to a person and remind them of past events

extraordinary—special



Narrative

Before I was married, my name was Rebecca Wells. As a young girl, I knew very little about the area that became Chicago. Little did I know that it would be my future home as a newly married woman. Of course you have heard about the brave explorers Louis Jolliet and Jacques Marquette. In 1673, American Indians guided these two French explorers to a river that opened onto a large fresh water lake. **1 Can you guess the name of the river? What is the name of the lake that Chicago sits on?**

The first nonnative permanent settler in these parts was Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable. DuSable, a man of French and African descent, came to Chicago in the 1770s. **2 DuSable had traveled a long way to come to Chicago. What are some reasons why people you know have traveled to live in a new place?** DuSable established his home, most likely as a farm and perhaps a fur-trading post, and became very successful. His property had many buildings, including a mill, a bake house, a dairy, a horse stable, and a workshop as well as his own five-room house.

The United States recognized the strategic importance of this portage area and wanted to control it. In 1803, several years after DuSable left this area, the United States Army built a fort called Fort Dearborn. When the fort was completed it had two blockhouses (buildings that are used for defense), barracks where the officers and soldiers could sleep, parade

grounds, a garden and stables, and even a shop where firearms were made and repaired.



The first Fort Dearborn, 1803–12

In 1811, the man whom I would marry, Nathaniel Heald, became the captain of Fort Dearborn. A diverse group of people lived at the fort, including traders, and the military staff and their families. Even though the fort was a busy place, Nathaniel found it lonely. Nathaniel and I met when he took a trip to Fort Wayne, Indiana, where I was visiting my uncle, William Wells. During his stay in Fort Wayne, Nathaniel asked me to marry him. After our wedding in Louisville, Kentucky, I packed my clothes and most treasured belongings in a trunk made of pine board and covered with deer hide. **3 If you could only carry one trunk, what would you pack?** I had no idea what my life would be



Rebecca Heald's trunk



Narrative

like at Fort Dearborn, but I was excited to find out.

Shortly after we settled into Fort Dearborn as husband and wife, war between the United States and Great Britain broke out. Many Chicago-area Indians—such as the Potawatomi and their allies the Ottawa and Chippewa—were worried about the future. Clashes with the U.S. government in this region had resulted in the burning of Tecumseh's village, Tippecanoe, which was located just south of Fort Dearborn in Indiana, and William Henry Harrison had forced Indians to cede land all the way through northeast Illinois. Many American Indians in this area were farmers who grew corn, squash, and beans. They were deeply concerned about losing access to land that was vital for farming and hunting. During the war, many American Indians chose to become allies of the British, who promised to help the Indians gain back their land. Other American Indians fought on the side of the United States.

As the war intensified, my husband decided that we should evacuate Fort Dearborn and travel to Fort Wayne, which was larger and offered greater protection. On August 15, 1812, our party of ninety-six soldiers and civilians left Fort Dearborn under the protection of a group of allied Indians, including the Miami. Unfortunately, we never made it to Fort Wayne. Shortly after leaving Fort Dearborn, we were attacked by a group of American Indians allied with the British. My dear husband, Captain Heald, his soldiers, and our American Indian allies fought bravely, but it was no use. The captain finally surrendered to Chief Blackbird. During the fight-

ing I was badly wounded, and some people were killed. Many of us were taken captive but eventually ransomed back to the United States. After the battle, the Indians burnt the fort to the ground. I could hardly believe what had happened to my home. Chief Blackbird received a medal from the British for his victory.

Today, I still have my trunk. Inside I keep mementos, like my hair combs, of my extraordinary life. Although I never lived in Chicago again, I was pleased to hear that in 1816, a second Fort Dearborn was built on the site of the original.



Portrait of Rebecca Heald



Activity

Explain to students that they are going to imagine that, like Rebecca, they are taking a long trip to an unknown place to start a new life. They can only pack one trunk. What will they take with them?

- 1 Review with students some of the facts from the narrative about early Chicago and Fort Dearborn.
 - **Who were the French explorers that first came to Chicago?**
 - **Who was the first nonnative permanent settler to live along the Chicago River?**
 - **What was the name of the fort the United States built?**
- 2 To prepare students for creating the contents of their own trunk, help them imagine the preparations necessary for taking a long trip.
 - **How do you think Rebecca felt about leaving her home? How would you feel about starting a new life in a place far away? What would you pack?**
- 3 Ask students to turn to the *Pack Your Trunk!* page in their scrapbooks. Instruct students to write a list of what they would pack if they were about to start a brand new life in a place they had never seen. After students have their lists, ask them to draw the contents in their trunk, or they can cut pictures from old magazines and newspapers and glue them into the trunk.

MATERIALS

- *Pack Your Trunk!* student worksheet (one for each student)
- pencils
- colored pencils
- crayons
- old magazines and newspapers (optional)



Pack Your Trunk!

Imagine, that, like Rebecca Heald moving to Fort Dearborn, you are taking a long journey to move to a new home and you can only pack one trunk. What will you take? Complete your packing list, then draw the items in the empty trunk.

Bind your scrapbook here.

