TEACHER RESOURCES: William Conner and the Conner Homestead
(Grades 2-8)

Thank you for choosing to come to Conner Prairie for your field trip experience. We have put together some
resources and activities that will:

- Prepare students for a visit to the Conner Homestead.
- Show Conner’s impact on development of this area (Hamilton County) and identify why it is
  important to know about past figures such as Conner.
- Help students understand the importance of historic preservation.

Indiana Academic Standards: see last page

This packet contains:

- Information about the Conner Homestead and William Conner.
- Activities and questions

Resources
Thompson, Charles N. Sons of the Wilderness, John and William Conner, Noblesville, Indiana: Conner
Prairie Press, 1988. **Note: This book is now available online at
http://archive.org/stream/sonsofwilderness12thom#page/n21/mode/2up.

Lauritz Larson, John and David G. Vanderstel. Agent of an Empire: William Conner on the
Indiana Frontier: 1800-1855. Bloomington: Indiana

Prairie, 1993.

Indiana Historical Society: http://www.indianahistory.org

The Indiana Historical Society Local History Services provides a listing of all of the known historical societies
and archives in the state of Indiana http://www.indianahistory.org/lhs/

Michigan Historical Society: http://www.hsmichigan.org

Ohio Historical Society: http://www.ohiohistory.org

Illinois State Historical Society: http://www.historyillinois.org

Kentucky Historical Society: http://history.ky.gov
THE LIFE OF WILLIAM CONNER

Timothy Crumrin

William Conner lived his life in two different worlds. He lived and dressed both as a white settler and as a Native American. Because he lived as both a White man and an American Indian, William Conner understood the two different ways of life and how they affected each other.

William was born near Lichtenau, Ohio in 1777, to parents Richard and Margaret Conner. His father was a trader and tavern keeper. They lived with Moravians in Schoenbrunn, Ohio. Moravians were missionaries among the Delaware Indians. The Conners traveled with them to Michigan where William grew up. Then the Moravians and Delaware decided to return to Ohio. Richard Conner and his family stayed in Michigan. He established a trading post and helped others settle in the area.

By 1795, at only eighteen years old, William was trading with the Native Americans in Michigan. In the winter of 1800-1801, William and his brother John came to Indiana to become fur traders.

SETTLING IN

Both men settled among the Delaware and married Delaware women. According to legend, William's wife, Mekinges, was the daughter of Chief Anderson, but no one can be certain. Traders often found it helpful to marry into the tribes they traded with. For Conner, it gave him more power and control over the tribe’s actions. It also meant that the other Delaware trusted him more. Like Conner, traders often became the link between Indians and the white world.

William Conner built a log home and a trading post. He began his family with Mekinges. Conner traded with the Delaware. His brother John had a store in Connersville that sold the goods William used in trade. As with most Native American relations, the new white settlers first wanted what the land provided. Then they wanted the land itself. The same thing that happened over and over again in the East happened in Indiana. The Indians depended on trade. The government took advantage of their dependence to convince the tribes to give up their land.

VARIED ACHIEVEMENTS

Even though Conner was married to an Indian wife and lived among the Delaware Indians, he did many things to help the American government during the War of 1812. He became a soldier, scout, interpreter and spy for the government. Among his duties were keeping the Delaware loyal during the war and identifying Tecumseh’s body after the Battle of the Thames.

During these times, Conner continued his trading and farming activities. His home on the White River became a gathering place for Native Americans. It was also a stop for white travelers. Even
the people choosing Indiana’s new state capital met at his cabin.

THE GREAT NEGOTIATOR

Meanwhile, Conner’s family and success continued to grow. He made money from trading and participating in treaties. Conner had been a part of eight treaties with the Native Americans. One was the Treaty of St. Mary’s in 1818, where the Delaware gave up their land in Indiana for land west of the Mississippi River.

William Conner helped figure out what it would take to get the tribes to accept the treaty. He also helped convince the chiefs to accept the treaty. Conner made money from the removal by providing the Delaware with supplies for the trip. When the Delaware signed the treaty, they were agreeing to leave Indiana.

The Delaware gathered at Conner’s trading post in the summer of 1820 to prepare for their journey. When the Delaware left, Conner’s wife Mekinges and their six children left as well. He provided his family with horses and goods. Conner's family and the Delaware began their trek in the summer of 1820. William Conner rode a day with his family, then said goodbye and returned to his land.

STARTING OVER

Three months after his family left, Conner married 17-year-old Elizabeth Chapman. She was probably the only young unmarried white woman in the area. With this, Conner took steps to move into the white world. He did so by building his brick home in 1823, which became the center of activity in the growing area. It was a stopping point for many travelers, businessmen, and politicians. Indianapolis lawyer, Calvin Fletcher thought the home and surrounding lands were beautiful. The Conner home was also the center of the newly formed Hamilton County government. It hosted the County Commissioners, Circuit Court, and served as a "post office."

These activities strengthened Conner’s role in the white world. He helped others settle in the area. He bought and sold land and became a rich man. With the help of Josiah Polk, Conner mapped out the town of Noblesville in 1823. Later, Conner and Polk mapped out, or platted, the towns of Alexandria and Strawtown. At one point, Conner owned about four thousand acres in Hamilton County. In addition to farming, he also owned or invested in stores, mills, and a distillery.
LATER LIFE EXPERIENCES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Conner had become a respected figure. He was involved in politics as a Whig and served three different terms in the state legislature from 1829 to 1837. He was also a founding member of the Indiana Historical Society.

Conner continued living in the world of both American Indians and White settlers. William kept working as an interpreter for treaties between the government and Indian tribes, working with the Miami and Potawatomi. He helped ethnographer C.C. Trowbridge with his study of Delaware Indian culture. Conner also served as a guide for a group of Indiana militia in the Black Hawk War.

Six of William and Elizabeth Conner's ten children were born in the brick home now owned by Conner Prairie. In 1837, at the age of sixty, Conner and his family moved to Noblesville. Here he continued to oversee his business, but allowed others to do much of the work that he had done before. When Conner died in 1855, many of the trails he walked had become roads and many of the forests he traveled had been cut down to build towns.
THE LIFE OF WILLIAM CONNER- READ AND RESPOND

1. William Conner lived his life in two different worlds. After you read the article, name two ways he lived in the world of the Native Americans and two ways he lived in the world of the white settlers.

2. What was William Conner’s role during the War of 1812?

3. Why did William Conner’s Delaware family leave Indiana?

4. William Conner’s brick home was more than just a house. What other uses did it serve in early Hamilton County?

5. Name two ways William Conner helped early Hamilton County to grow.
# William Conner Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>Thomas Jefferson writes the Declaration of Independence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1777</td>
<td>William Conner born to Richard and Margaret Boyer Conner near Lichtenau, Ohio.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1795</td>
<td>William Conner trades with Native Americans around Saginaw Bay, Michigan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1800-1801</td>
<td>William and his older brother, John, arrive in Indiana as agents for a fur trader.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1801</td>
<td>William Conner marries Delaware woman, Mekinges.</td>
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<td>1803</td>
<td>The United States gains 828,000 square miles of land west of the Mississippi River in the Louisiana Purchase.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>William Conner begins working with the government as a liaison between the government and Native Americans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1811-1814</td>
<td>War of 1812, also known as the Second War for American Independence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>Indiana becomes a state.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>William Conner acts as interpreter and liaison at Treaty of St. Mary’s, which ceded Delaware lands in Indiana for lands west of the Mississippi River.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1820-summer</td>
<td>William Conner’s wife and six children leave with Delaware for land gained by treaty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1820-fall</td>
<td>William Conner marries Elizabeth Chapman.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>The state legislature approves the site of Indianapolis as the new state capital.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>William Conner begins construction of his brick home (located at Conner Prairie).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>William Conner and Josiah Polk plat Noblesville.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1823-winter</td>
<td>C. C. Trowbridge visits William Conner’s home.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>William Conner assumes responsibility for large country store in Indianapolis upon the death of his brother John.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>William Conner serves as interpreter for treaties with Miami.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1829-1837</td>
<td>William Conner serves three non-consecutive terms in Indiana state legislature.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>William Conner serves as interpreter for treaties with Potawatomi.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>William Conner serves as guide for Indiana militia in Black Hawk War.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>Indiana’s section of the National Road is completed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>William and Elizabeth Conner and family move to Noblesville.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>The first steam locomotive in Indiana carries Governor James Wallace on a 15-mile trip.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Samuel Morse sends the first telegraphic message.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>William Conner dies.</td>
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Activities and Questions:

1. Map the route with locations where William Conner and his family lived during their time in Ohio, Michigan and Indiana. Map outline is included with this packet.

2. Locate and map the following locations on the provided map: Conner House (Fishers), Connersville, Indianapolis, and other towns founded by William Conner (Alexandria, Noblesville, Strawtown). Be
sure to add a compass rose that indicates which way is north. You may have to refer to another map to figure this out.

3. Many people have helped to shape the cities, towns and communities where we live today. Who is the “William Conner” of your community? Find a person in local history that has made an impact on your community. Where would you be able to find this kind of information? To get started, use the resources listed at the beginning of this packet.
Areas at Conner Prairie Interactive History Park that help tell the story of the life of William Conner.

**The Conner Homestead**
The Conner Homestead consists of the Conner House, a large barn, the Loom House, and the candle-dipping activity.

The Conner House was built in 1823 and is on its original site. The first floor of the house is open for visiting and exploring.

The Conner Homestead barn is the location for the Animal Encounters experience where you can get an up-close look at baby and adult farm animals. The candle-dipping activity is located next to the barn. In the Loom House, you can find out about textile processes such as spinning, weaving, and dyeing.

To learn more about the restoration of the Conner House by Eli Lilly, please go to: http://www.connerprairie.org/Learn-And-Do/Indiana-History/Conner-Prairie-History/Conner-Estate-History.aspx

**Lenape Indian Camp**

At the Lenape Indian Camp, there will be plenty of hands-on opportunities as you explore the history and culture of the Lenape Indians (also known as the Delaware) who lived in Indiana from 1795-1820. The Lenape were the Native American people William Conner settled and traded with.

Guests may participate in activities such as story-telling, learning to start a fire using flint and steel, and setting an animal trap. Adjacent to the wigwams you will find McKinnen’s Trading Post. The trader may discuss fur trading, land speculation, Indian affairs and statehood.

Questions and activities for your visit:

1. What do historic buildings teach us about local history and our past?

2. Where are some other historic homes in your community? What stories do they tell about the community and its people?

3. What kinds of things does one need to do to preserve something that is very old?

4. What would you want people in the future to know about you and your family here in the 21st Century? Create a “time capsule” containing 10 objects that represent what your life was like. Please explain how each object is important to defining who you are.

5. Identify the different cultural groups that William Conner belonged to. How did he fit into those groups? In what ways did he not fit into those groups? Compare and contrast the Native American culture of Conner’s first wife Mekinges and the Lenape with the white, settler culture that he also embraced.
Regional Map of Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio.
INDIANA ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Social Studies
2.1.1: Identify when the local community was established and identify its founders and early settlers.
2.1.3: Identify individuals who had a positive impact on the local community.
2.1.7: Read about and summarize historical community events using libraries and a variety of information resources.
3.1.2: Explain why and how the local community was established and identify its founders and early settlers.
3.1.4: Give examples of people, events and developments that brought important changes to the regions of Indiana.
3.1.6: Use a variety of community resources to gather information about the regional communities.
3.1.8: Write and illustrate descriptions of local communities and regions in Indiana past and present.
3.2.7: Use a variety of information resources to gather information about local, state and regional leaders and civic issues.
4.1.6: Explain how key individuals and events influenced the early growth of and changes in Indiana.
4.1.15: Create and interpret timelines that show relationships among people, events, and movements in the history of Indiana.
4.4.7: Identify entrepreneurs who have influenced Indiana and the local community.
8.1.1: Identify major Native American Indian groups of eastern North America and describe early conflict and cooperation with European settlers and the influence the two cultures had on each other.

English/Language Arts
2.7.9: Report on a topic with supportive facts and details.
3.2.2: Ask questions and support answers by connecting prior knowledge with literal information from the text.
3.7.1: Retell, paraphrase, and explain what a speaker has said.
4.7.1: Ask thoughtful questions and respond orally to relevant questions with appropriate elaboration.
5.2.3: Recognize main ideas presented in texts, identifying and assessing evidence that supports those ideas.
7.7.1: Ask questions to elicit information, including evidence to support the speaker's claims and conclusions.
8.2.3: Find similarities and differences between texts in the treatment, amount of coverage, or organization of ideas.

Common Core
3.RI.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
3.RI.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, at the high end of the grades 2-3 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

4.RI.1 Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

4.RI.10 By the end of year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, in the grades 4-5 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.