

Timeline of Hmong in Portage County
Hmong Documentary Project
November 2013

There are currently approximately 1,200 Hmong in Portage County. Hmong people moved to Portage County at different points over the last three decades. However, there were three periods in which larger numbers of Hmong arrived in Portage County. These three “waves” roughly occurred in the mid-1980s, the early 1990s, and around 2004/2005. Below are a few of the events and activities that have affected Hmong people in our community from the Vietnam War to the present.

1960-1973

The US’s “secret war” in Laos begins. The US dropped weapons into Laos for Hmong soldiers and began to provide air support. The Hmong soldiers rescued downed American pilots, provided valuable reconnaissance information, and launched attacks against the Ho Chi Minh.¹ General Vang Pao works closely with the United States from 1961-1973.

1973

The Royal Lao Government and the Pathet Lao signed a ceasefire.

1975

The Americans withdrew from Southeast Asian. The Pathet Lao took control of Lao. General Vang Pao and officers were airlifted to Thailand. There were approximately 300,000 Hmong refugees.

The “first wave” of Hmong arrived in the US between 1975 and 1978.² This is somewhat earlier than the “first wave” in Portage County. Some of this is accounted for by secondary migration. When the Hmong first came to the US, they were sponsored by churches and families throughout the US. However, the Hmong are a clan-based society, and many then moved to other cities to be closer to their families. In other cases, they moved to find better work. Some of the families who came to Portage County were part of this secondary migration.

1976

The first Hmong family (Thao family) arrived in Portage County in 1976 and stayed one year.³

1980

The Lee family moved to Stevens Point. The Vang family (including Jim Vang, then known as Chia Vang) moved to Stevens Point.⁴

1982

Still stuck in Thailand refugee camps and unable to return to Laos, the Hmong began a second wave of migration into the U.S. This wave lasts over four years. The Lutheran church was very involved in the relocating process.⁵

1984

Two members of the Lee family, college students, moved to Stevens Point from Eau Claire to attend the university.⁶

In 1980s twelve Southeast Asian students attended UWSP.⁷

1985

Additional Lee family members moved to Stevens Point.⁸

Second group of Hmong moved to Stevens Point. This included a big group of the Vang clan as well as the Yang clan.⁹

Dan Dieterich and others begin planning the Portage County Literacy Council.¹⁰

1986

There were 15-20 Hmong families in Portage County.¹¹

Many Hmong families began working on cucumber farms in Central Wisconsin. This drew more Hmong families into the community. Hmong worked on these farms from approximately 1986-2008.¹²

The first ESL program was started at Madison Elementary School. Deb Abey, one of the first teachers, had 12 students. In the beginning all students were bussed to Madison Elementary School for ESL.¹³ Janet Swiston was a teacher's aide and later became a teacher. Neng Yang was the first interpreter for Stevens Point Public Schools.¹⁴

Portage County Literacy Council made the first tutor/learner matches with Hmong learners.¹⁵ CAP Services responded to a need voiced by our Hmong community and began offering the Hmong Medical Interpreter Program, funded by Saint Michael's Hospital. The program sought to bridge the "understanding gap" - language and culture - that often existed between Hmong patients and local health care providers.¹⁶

Sue Clark Kubley started as an advisor at UWSP. There were approximately 12 Hmong students at the UWSP at that time.¹⁷

1987

There were 45 Hmong families in Portage County.¹⁸ More Yang and Lee clan families moved to Stevens Point. The Vue clan started arriving.¹⁹ The Cheng family arrived.

Ken Knutson and Jim Vang met. Jim asked Ken for help connecting Hmong families to the community. Ken called together a group of community members to meet at Trinity Lutheran Church.²⁰ The Portage County Hmong Advocacy Group began and met monthly for 14 years.²¹

Donaldson and Woodward Governor companies started hiring Hmong people.²²

Hmong students formed the Southeast Asian American Connection, now known as the Hmong and Southeast Asian American Club (HaSEAAC) at the UWSP. Sue Clark Kubley was the advisor.²³

1988

Eight Hmong high school students who spoke no English were attending SPASH. There was no ESL offered.²⁴

The Hmong Alliance Church of Stevens Point was established.²⁵

Mary Cayford at CAP Services began working with Hmong families.²⁶

1989

There were approximately 47 Hmong families in Portage County.²⁷

CAP Services established the Refugee Advocacy Program. Mary Cayford was the coordinator, and Jim Vang was the Hmong interpreter. The program received a \$40,000 grant from United Way of Portage County as well as funds from Ministry Corp.²⁸

1990

There were approximately 62 Hmong families in Portage County.²⁹

The 1990 census records 232 Hmong in Portage County.³⁰

Hmong elders were concerned about students being bussed to Madison school for ESL. Given their concern and the growing number of Hmong students, the ESL program was expanded to other schools. Hmong students were now able to attend their neighborhood school.³¹

Jim Vang and Ken Knutson made numerous community presentations about Hmong to the police and other groups between 1990 and 2000. They also continued to hold Hmong Advocacy Group meetings once a month.³²

CAP Services creates the Community Education Series to educate Hmong about the law, health system, fishing and hunting regulations. They met once a month from 1990-1996.³³

HaSEAAC continued growing at the UWSP. The group held the first Southeast Asian Educational Conference.³⁴

Shane (Thoob) Thao and Zer Yang were the first Hmong graduates of UWSP in May 1990.^{35,36}

1991

Many Hmong families arrived. There were approximately 97 Hmong families in Portage County by the end of the year.³⁷

The Hmong American Association of Portage County was created by local Hmong leaders.

Another association, called the Point Hmong Assistance Association, was formed by the Yangs and other community leaders and existed briefly before it disbanded.³⁸

The first Hmong Pre-New Year Celebration was held.^{39,40}

The first Hmong students graduated from Midstate Technical College.^{41,42}

A Hmong student was severely beaten by white students on the UWSP campus.⁴³ Some Hmong families were afraid.

1992

There were approximately 133 Hmong families in Portage County.⁴⁴

On Memorial Day, 22 Hmong veterans were honored at Pffifner Park and received certificates of recognition from the President of the local Vietnam Veterans American Chapter. Bill Boston, president of the local VVVA chapter and a former radio operator in the Vietnam War, helped organize the event.⁴⁵

The Portage County Cultural Festival began.⁴⁶

Cho Xiong, known as Walee Xiong, started the Hmong Community News program on Community Access Cable Channel 3.⁴⁷

The Homework Center started and served many Hmong youth.

Stevens Point police report that Hmong are experiencing racism in the community. Hmong youths formed the Asian Knights group, which got into frequent conflicts with a group called the Rednecks, or the Carolinas, which is known to harass Hmong youth.⁴⁸

1993

There were approximately 163 families in Portage County.⁴⁹

There were over 500 Hmong ESL students.⁵⁰

1994

There were approximately 188 Hmong families in Portage County.⁵¹

CAP Services and the Portage County Health and Human Services Department started the Family-to-Family program to match Hmong families and American families so they can learn about one another and development friendships.⁵² The program lasted until approximately 1997. Each pair was required to meet at least once a month to get to know each other and cook for one another.⁵³ Jim Vang and Ron Shave met through this program.⁵⁴

CAP Services started the Refugee Family Strengthening Program with state funding.⁵⁵ Mr. Ron Shavy owned land by Aldi's on Highway 10 East and let Hmong people garden there for 4-5 years (approximately 1994-1998). After the land was sold, they moved the gardeners to other land (by Hwy 66 and J and on Toran Road and split families between the sites). Years later the Hmong bought a farm (80 acres) north of Junction City and rented plots for \$40, but the farm foreclosed so they moved to another garden site on Hwy 54.⁵⁶ Midstate Technical College taught citizenship classes from 1994-1997 to adults ages 18-76. There were two different levels, basic and advanced.⁵⁷ The Lincoln Center offered citizenship classes to the elderly from 1994-1997.⁵⁸ The Hmong radio show at WWSP 90FM started sometime around 1994.

1995

CAP Services organized a meeting to discuss hiring Hmong residents as employees. Donaldson's, which employed 14 Hmong men at the time, talked about the strong work ethic in the Hmong population. Hmong families used the wages to meet daily needs and pay off the \$5,200 typical debt they had to the US government for flying a family of eight from Thailand to the US.⁵⁹ Golden County Foods began hiring Hmong in mid-1990s.⁶⁰

1997

The Clinton administration first recognized contributions of Hmong in Vietnam War and authorized a plaque at Arlington National Cemetery saying that the valor of General Vang Pao's troops would never be forgotten.⁶¹

CAP Services conducted a citizenship drive program to help Hmong refugees gain US citizenship status.⁶²

1998

The Portage County Literacy Council started ESL class for older Hmong at Lincoln Center (28 enrolled) in collaboration with CAP Services.⁶³

2000

The 2000 census records 861 Hmong in Portage County, including 698 in Stevens Point, 26 in Plover, and 137 in other communities.⁶⁴

Representative David Obey (WI) co-sponsored a bill that made it easier for the Hmong refugees to become American citizens.⁶⁵

From 2000-2003 many Hmong teachers were trained at the UW-Stevens Point through Project Forward, a federally funded Title VII grant to prepare teachers of Southeast Asian background for early childhood and K-12 classrooms.⁶⁶

UWSP's HaSEAAC offers first free Hmong language classes to community members.⁶⁷

First Hmong growers started selling at the Stevens Point Farmers Market in the early 2000s.

2001

The Portage County Hmong Advocacy Group changed its name to the Multicultural Advocacy Partnership in 2001.

Stevens Point School Board cuts 60 percent of ESL program funding.⁶⁸

General Vang Pao visited Stevens Point in early 2000s.

The first HaSEAAC dinner was held at UWSP.

Tom Parker was the director of the Portage County Literacy Council from 2001-2008. PCLC completes and distributes ESL video for Hmong learners, "Everyday English for Hmong Learners".⁶⁹

2002

UW-Extension conducts Hmong Educational Needs Assessment in Wisconsin, which included a focus group in Portage County. Two themes were identified: pursuit of identity and communication in relation to generational issues.⁷⁰ Younger Hmong wanted to learn more about their culture and history. Many older Hmong talked about feeling isolated and trying to understand the systems around them.

2003

After negotiating with Thailand, the US government signed a bill to allow 15,000 new refugees to settle in the US.⁷¹

CAP Services told the community that more Hmong families were expected to settle in the area with their relatives.⁷²

2004

The Thai refugee camp, Wat Tham Krabok, was closed and the 15,000 Hmong refugees began to come to the US. Unlike earlier resettlements, these refugees were largely settled with their extended families in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and California through what was known as the Family Reunification Program.⁷³

Local Hmong families sponsored new refugees.⁷⁴ Many families are reunited after long separations. Approximately 108 new Hmong refugees began coming to Portage County midyear.⁷⁵

Portage County organized the Hmong Refugee Welcome Project.⁷⁶

Some were concerned that Hmong families receiving new refugees were violating city ordinances due to the large Hmong families. There was a need for public and private housing for large families. CAP Services worked with city to waive the occupancy regulations for a period of time.⁷⁷ CAP Services also renovated housing to accommodate larger families.

The Portage County Literacy Council ESL program expands, serving 137 learners.⁷⁸ The PCLC also began teaching driver's education classes for Hmong.⁷⁹

Dr. Kevin Yang, the first Hmong family doctor in Wausau, taught St. Michael's Hospital about Hmong expectations, culture, and beliefs and how to treat Hmong patients.⁸⁰ St. Michael's then created videos to teach Hmong refugees about the hospital setting and some of the procedures that are being done.⁸¹

Vieng Xiong was hired as the district's first full-time Hmong teacher. He taught the 2004 wave of Hmong high school students.⁸²

The state workforce development filed a lawsuit against the cucumber farms in approximately 2004/2005 (awaiting confirmation from Louis Molepske).

In December, MN resident Chai Soua Vang shot eight hunters (two dead, two injured) in Rice Lake, WI. The incident resulted in increased racism against Hmong in some communities, and the Hmong in Portage County felt uncomfortable.^{83,84}

2005-2006

The Hmong Migration Education Act, which would require Wisconsin students to learn about Hmong history, was introduced and referred to the Assembly Committee on Education, where the bill was never given a public hearing and therefore died in committee. See Assembly Bill 314.

2007

Cha Vang, a hunter from northeastern Wisconsin, was killed by white hunter (James Allen Nichols) near Peshtigo, Wisconsin on January 6, 2007.⁸⁵ Nichols was convicted of second-degree intentional homicide on October 6, 2007. The Hmong people locally were very aware of this story.

2007-2008: Hmong Migration Education Act introduced and referred to the Assembly Committee on Education, where the bill was never given a public hearing and therefore died in committee. See Assembly Bill 78.

2008

HAAPC held a gun safety class. WaMeng Vang was one of the instructors.

Phong Vang was the Executive Director of the Hmong American Association of Portage County from 2008-2012.⁸⁶

Maiker Vang publishes *Grandma's Hmong New Year Celebration* as a fundraiser for the Portage County Literacy Council.

2009

Hmong Migration Education Act introduced in 2009 and referred to the Assembly Committee on Education, where the bill received a public hearing and executive session were held, but that the bill was defeated in committee on a 6-7 vote in 2010. See Assembly Bill 115.⁸⁷

2010

The 2010 census records 1,232 Hmong in Portage County, including 734 in Stevens Point, 336 in Plover, and 162 in other communities.⁸⁸ The population grew by 43 percent from 2000 to 2010.

2011

On January 6 General Vang Pao died in CA.⁸⁹ The Hmong community in Portage County honored the life of their leader.

On July 17 six people were stabbed at Memories Ballroom in Plover. The suspects were from MN, but the incident caused racial tensions toward the Hmong people in Portage County.^{90,91}

2012

Soua Cheng was elected president of the Hmong American Association of Portage County.⁹²

The Hmong American Association of Portage County was no longer able to fund the position of executive director.

UWSP Student Wisconsin Education Association (StWEA) and Hmong and Southeast Asian American Club (HaSEAAC) members promoted literacy and Hmong culture in area schools.⁹³

The Homework Center at John Drive, which is open for all residents and has a strong Hmong presence, celebrated its 20th anniversary.

2013-2014

Legislation for Hmong Migration Education Act has been drafted and circulated for co-sponsorship, but has not yet been introduced. Rep. Shankland is a co-author of this legislation.⁹⁴

-
- ¹ DC Everest Timeline of Hmong history. Accessed at http://www.dce.k12.wi.us/srhigh/socialstudies/histday/Hmong/hmong_timeline.htm.
- ² DC Everest Timeline of Hmong history.
- ³ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ⁴ Jim Vang discussion. Hmong Documentary Project. January 13, 2012.
- ⁵ MSTC Diversity Committee timeline.
- ⁶ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ⁷ HaSEAAC brochure.
- ⁸ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County. This history lists the Lees arrival in 1985 first permanent Hmong family in Stevens Point. Other sources indicated members of the Lee family moved to the community earlier.
- ⁹ Jim Vang discussion. Hmong Documentary Project. January 13, 2012.
- ¹⁰ Portage County Literacy Council website. Accessed at <http://www.pocolit.org/History.html>.
- ¹¹ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ¹² Xao Chia Cheng interview. Hmong Documentary Project. May 3, 2013.
- ¹³ Deb Aeby interview. Hmong Documentary Project. October 22, 2013.
- ¹⁴ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ¹⁵ Portage County Literacy Council website.
- ¹⁶ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ¹⁷ Sue Kubley interview. Hmong Documentary Project. November 19, 2012.
- ¹⁸ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ¹⁹ Jim Vang discussion. Hmong Documentary Project January 13, 2012.
- ²⁰ Ken Knutson interview. Hmong Documentary Project. February 16, 2013.
- ²¹ Jim Vang handout.
- ²² Jim Vang discussion. Hmong Documentary Project. January 13, 2012.
- ²³ Sue Kubley interview. Hmong Documentary Project. November 19, 2012.
- ²⁴ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ²⁵ Pa Thao. Hmong Documentary Project.
- ²⁶ Mary Cayford interview. Hmong Documentary Project. March 12, 2013.
- ²⁷ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ²⁸ Stevens Point Journal. October 5, 1994.
- ²⁹ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ³⁰ UW Extension and Applied Population Laboratory. Wisconsin's Hmong Population. Accessed at www.apl.wisc.edu/publications/HmongChartbook.pdf.
- ³¹ Janet Swiston interview. Hmong Documentary Project. November 29, 2012.
- ³² Jim Vang discussion. Hmong Documentary Project. January 13, 2012.
- ³³ Deb Abey discussion. Hmong Documentary Project.
- ³⁴ HaSEAAC brochure.
- ³⁵ Sue Clark Kubley interview. Hmong Documentary Project. April 25, 2013.
- ³⁶ Shane Thao interview. Hmong Documentary Project. April 6, 2013.
- ³⁷ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ³⁸ Jim Vang interview. Hmong Documentary Project. July 31, 2012.
- ³⁹ Sai Vang interview. Hmong Documentary Project. May 2, 2013.
- ⁴⁰ Stevens Point Journal. Hmong New Year Celebration Turns 10. September 5, 2001.
- ⁴¹ The first Midstate graduates were Lee Tou Yang and Nhia Tou Yang. Lee Tou Yang interview. Hmong Documentary Project. April 13, 2013.
- ⁴² Stevens Point Journal. Education road to success for first Hmong graduates. 1991.
- ⁴³ The Pointer. March 28, 1991.
- ⁴⁴ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County document.
- ⁴⁵ Stevens Point Journal, May 26, 1992.
- ⁴⁶ See <http://www.artsportagecounty.org/arts-news.cfm?id=52>.
- ⁴⁷ Stevens Point Journal. March 24, 1992.
- ⁴⁸ Stevens Point Journal. March 11, 1992..
- ⁴⁹ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ⁵⁰ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ⁵¹ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ⁵² Stevens Point Journal. June 18, 1994.
- ⁵³ Vang, June 27, 2012.
- ⁵⁴ Jim Vang and Ron Shave interview. Hmong Documentary Project. June 17, 2013..
- ⁵⁵ CAP Services interview. Hmong documentary project. March 26, 2013.
- ⁵⁶ Jim Vang discussion. Hmong Documentary Project. January 13, 2012.
- ⁵⁷ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ⁵⁸ Mary Cayford. History of Hmong in Portage County.
- ⁵⁹ Stevens Point Journal. February 9, 1995.
- ⁶⁰ Intevation Foods / Mark Arend interview. Hmong Documentary Project. June 14, 2013.

-
- ⁶¹ See www.nytimes.com/2011/01/08/world/asia/08vangpao.html.
- ⁶² Stevens Point Journal, February 15, 1997.
- ⁶³ Portage County Literacy Council website.
- ⁶⁴ Hmong Population, 2000 & 2010. Municipalities in Portage County, WI. Prepared by the Applied Population Laboratory, UW-Madison/Extension.
- ⁶⁵ DC Everest Hmong Timeline.
- ⁶⁶ McClain-Ruelle, Leslie, and Kao Xiong. Continuing the promise: Recruiting and preparing Hmong-American educators for Central Wisconsin by Leslie McClain- Ruelle, Ph.D. and Kao Xiong, Hmong Studies Journal, 2005, 6: 1-16.
- ⁶⁷ The Pointer. January 27, 2000.
- ⁶⁸ Stevens Point Journal. Board Majority Shuts Out ESL Debate. September 11, 2001.
- ⁶⁹ Portage County Literacy Council website.
- ⁷⁰ See www.uwex.edu/ces/hmong/documents/assessment.pdf.
- ⁷¹ See <http://hmongstudies.org/Grigoleit.pdf>.
- ⁷² Stevens Point Journal. Hmong Refugees Expected. December 23, 2003.
- ⁷³ See <http://hmongstudies.org/Grigoleit.pdf>.
- ⁷⁴ Stevens Point Journal. Hmong family to sponsor refugees. February 28, 2004.
- ⁷⁵ Stevens Point Journal. Community Addresses Refugee Needs. May 27, 2004.
- ⁷⁶ Stevens Point Journal. June 6, 2004.
- ⁷⁷ Stevens Point Journal. July 1, 2004.
- ⁷⁸ Portage County Literacy Council website.
- ⁷⁹ Tom Parker interview. Hmong Documentary Project. December 27, 2012.
- ⁸⁰ Jim Vang discussion. Hmong Documentary Project. June 27, 2012.
- ⁸¹ Mary Gust, St. Michael's Hospital discussion. Hmong Documentary Project. Summer 2012.
- ⁸² Stevens Point Journal. July 26, 2004.
- ⁸³ Ker Thao discussion. Hmong Documentary Project. July 17, 2012.
- ⁸⁴ Stevens Point Journal. Our View: Hmong Need Help to Ease Tensions. December 13, 2004.
- ⁸⁵ See www.620wtmj.com/news/local/45131417.html.
- ⁸⁶ Phong Vang interview. Hmong Documentary Project. May 9, 2013.
- ⁸⁷ Correspondence with office of Rep. Katrina Shankland. July 18, 2013. See <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2009/proposals/ab115>.
- kss
- ⁸⁸ Hmong Population, 2000 & 2010. Municipalities in Portage County, WI. Prepared by the Applied Population Laboratory, UW-Madison/Extension.
- ⁸⁹ See www.nytimes.com/2011/01/08/world/asia/08vangpao.html.
- ⁹⁰ WSAU, July 17, 2011.
- ⁹¹ Stevens Point Journal. Stabbing Probe Continues. **Date**.
- ⁹² See www.uwsp.edu/urc/uNews/Pages/ChengleadsHAAPC.aspx.
- ⁹³ UWSP Pointer Online. February 1, 2012.
- ⁹⁴ Correspondence with office of Rep. Katrina Shankland. July 18, 2013.