Jean Baptiste Point du Sable: Chicago's first settler

February's celebration of Black History Month in the United States traces its roots back to the 1920s, although it gained more formal recognition in the '70s. All during February, we'll be sharing stories of holy and often unknown black Catholics.

Having lived in what would become America's "Second City" during the 18th century's last decade, Jean Baptiste Point du Sable is regarded as Chicago's first settler. Not much is known about him before that, though historians claim the fur trader once had been arrested by the British on the Indiana frontier for charges of colonial sympathies.

It is said that the free du Sable survived the threat of enslavement, having lost his identification papers, by taking refuge in a Jesuit mission once he arrived in America. Believed to be from Haiti, it's believed that he came to America by way of France, where he had attended school. While these details lack much documentation, surviving documents prove that du Sable married his wife of Potawatomi descent in the presence of a Catholic priest, and his funeral was held in a Catholic church in suburban St. Louis in 1818.

- Read more about Jean Baptiste Point du Sable.
- Read more about the contributions of black Catholics to the U.S. Church.