

*Historical and Influential People from the Past*

## She demonstrated strength, resiliency at early age

Eleanor Lytle McKillip Kinzie, mother of John H. Kinzie, who made a name for himself as the Indian Agent at Ft. Winnebago, showed while still a young girl that she had the mettle to survive and thrive in the harsh environment of the frontier in the 1700s and into the 1800s. Eleanor's father, John Lytle, was a Loyalist during the Revolutionary War, and at one point after the war was imprisoned for his wartime activities, according to Milo Milton Quaife in his introduction in the 1932 edition of Juliette Kinzie's *Wau-Bun*. The events surrounding young Eleanor's kidnapping in 1779 by a small band of Seneca Indians are recounted in Chapter 22 of *Wau-bun*. The story is also retold for young readers in *Little Ship Under Full Sail* by Janie Lynn Panagopoulos. In the account of the captivity, as told to her by her mother-in-law, author Kinzie refers to the leader of the raid as "Big White Man," but Kinzie speculates in a footnote that this chief was "Cornplanter, a personage well known in the history of the time." He had recently lost a brother in a conflict with another tribe, and wanted to have the new captive — Eleanor — to "be to me a sister."

The narrative in Chapter 22 suggests that eventually Eleanor, while she despaired in the absence of her family, she "at length grew contented and happy" with her life among the Senecas. After four years, her release was finally negotiated and she returned to live with her family. *Wau-Bun* author Juliette Kinzie reports that "until the day of her death she remembered with tenderness and gratitude

her brother the Big-White Man, and her friends and play-fellows among the Senecas.

While still in her mid-teens, Eleanor married Captain McKillip, a British officer. He was killed by friendly fire while on a reconnaissance mission near Maumee, Ohio, leaving behind his young wife with three children. Within a few years Eleanor married a second time to John Kinzie Sr. The newlyweds settled in St. Joseph (MI) and later Fort Dearborn (now Chicago) where Kinzie prospered as a fur trader. The War of 1812 upended his business and he suffered heavy losses. That time period is the setting for the August 15, 1812, Battle at Ft. Dearborn, also referred to as the Massacre at Ft Dearborn, when once again Eleanor faced and survived a situation fraught with danger. The event is captured in *Wau-bun* based on information from Eleanor McKillip Kinzie and her family.



*Eleanor McKillip Kinzie, wife of John Kinzie Sr., lived in this dwelling near Fort Dearborn in 1812.*

## Scrapbooks recall early days of restoration

Almost 90 years ago the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Wisconsin (NSCDA-WI) were on the verge of taking a big step: purchasing the Indian Agency House in Portage and committing to its restoration and preservation. A collection of scrapbooks in storage at the Agency House, and compiled by an assortment of Colonial Dames members from those early years reflects the interest in the project that was related through newspapers in Milwaukee, Madison, Chicago, and Portage.

"The Baker farm," as the 165 acre property was known locally, was available for about \$7,000. For a few years, there had been discussion and meetings about the future of the site that all parties acknowledged was historically significant, and eventually its purchase was approved at an Oct. 10, 1930 meeting Wisconsin NSCDA, and by June 13 of 1931 the organization was picnicking on the lawn under towering elm trees.

*Continued on next page*

## Scrapbooks from 1930s

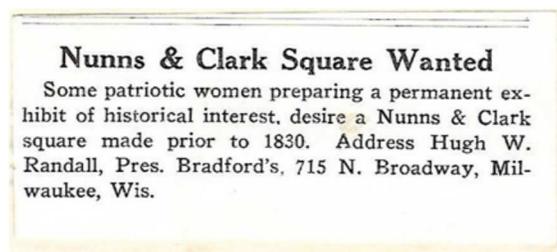
Subsequent newspaper articles report on groups of individuals and couples who “motored” to Portage to inspect the progress on the restoration, directed by Frank Riley, the respected Madison architect who also designed the governor’s mansion in Madison and numerous other elegant and traditional homes in Wisconsin. Several of the newspaper articles mention that luncheon and tea were served in the “charming little caretaker’s cottage,” also referred to as the “hostess house, “set back a short distance from the imposing Agency House.” The cottage continued to charm Agency House visitors through the 2017 season. Many commented on its cozy appearance, especially when lilacs were in bloom and lush greenery nestled around the foundation of the little white building. Unfortunately the interior was in desperate need of extensive repair, and when a large limb fell on the rear of the cottage it became clear that the costs of repair and restoration would be excessive. The cottage was razed late summer 2017.

In the early years after the Agency House opened for tours, newspaper articles mentioned notable visitors. For instance, an undated article from 1931 displays the headline that “Smart Folk Take Tea at Indian House,” and mentions that three women and two men from Milwaukee were fortunate to arrive in Portage on the day that Zona Gale Breese and her husband William made their first visit to the site. The first vice president of the national Colonial Dames group came from New York, and many members of the colonial Dames made repeat trips. Interest in the Agency House was high, and the number of visitors was impressive. In June, 1932, over 500 people visited the Agency House. In fact, the House stayed open for winter tours. A newspaper clipping from 1935 boasts that included granddaughters, great-granddaughters and great-great granddaughters of John and Juliette Kinzie from Chicago and California.



The scrapbooks also add more details to the information that docents have shared with visitors over the years. For instance, a 2” x 1” chip of wallpaper is identified as the original piece used to replicate the original color. The work was overseen by Miss Charlotte Partridge of Thiensville, who was a member of the NSCDA-WI, and the founder (in 1920) and director of the Layton School of Art. Milwaukee artist Robert Halbrook designed the replacement wallpaper, creating linoleum printing blocks and then printing in three shades of blue. A hand press printed the 350 sheets, each 13” x 18-1/2”.

One of the most treasured items in the parlor of the Agency House is the Nunns-Clark piano, said to be exactly like the one that Juliette Kinzie brought from New York as a bride. Correspondence in one of the scrapbooks reveals that Annie Nunns, a brilliant research assistant at the Wisconsin Historical Society who worked side-by-side with historians Lyman Draper and Louise Phelps Kellogg, was the granddaughter of Robert Nunns and the niece of William Clark, who crafted the “square piano” at the store in New York City in the 1830s. Perhaps acquisition of the piano came in response to the notice placed in a 1932 trade journal and reproduced below:



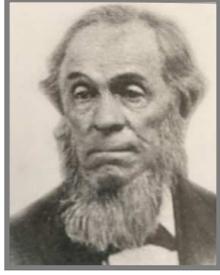
The piano was unpacked at the Agency House on June 27, 1932, and Annie Nunn’s letter to Mrs. McIntosh of the acquisition committee states “I certainly shall very glad to see the piano in place. Miss Kellogg advises me not to go until things are in better shape. If we continue to have the fine weather with which we have been favored so far this season you ought to have a good many visitors at the Agency House.”

And in 2018, we also expect “a good many visitors.”

*This scene was repeated frequently in the years following the purchase of the Indian Agency House by the Colonial Dames in 1930. Members of the organization, eager to see the progress in the restoration of the 100-year-old building made frequent pilgrimages to Portage from the Milwaukee area, and enjoyed picnicking on the grounds with friends and family.*

## Henry Merrell: sutler, postmaster, legislator, and more

Henry Merrell is one of those early settlers who had a knack for putting his varied skills and interests to work in many seemingly unrelated ventures. He is best known in early Fort Winnebago and Portage history as a sutler for the military stationed at the fort, later as postmaster for the area, merchant in Portage, state legislator, and chronicler of his life and times.



Merrell was born in 1804 in Utica, NY. When he was 30 years old “it was proposed to me to remove to Fort Winnebago, and carry on the sutler’s business,” selling supplies to military personnel at the recently established military fort. Early on in to this adventure he encountered the challenges of sudden squalls on Lake Eire, a broken shaft on the boat that resulted in a return to port for repair, and portaging the many rapids on the lower Fox, and finally navigating the upper Fox River. On that trip he had the good fortune to meet individuals who were to have significant roles in his life on the Wisconsin frontier: Judge (later Governor) Doty, entrepreneur Daniel Whitney, and Pierre Pauquette, a fabled character in local history.

In his narrative published in Wisconsin Historical Collections, Vol. VII, Merrell describes arriving at Fort Winnebago, “situated on a beautiful plateau, 40 or 50 feet above the Fox River.” The building, he writes, were about 10 or 15 acres, enclosed by an ornamental picket fence, were laid out in a circular pattern with walkways that were “kept in perfect order.” Captain McCabe was the Indian Agent at that time, but was released from his position due to “palsy” within a few months of Merrell’s arrival. The commanding officer, Major David Twiggs, then served as Agent. Merrell does not mince words when he describes Twiggs: “... a large, portly, pompous man, [who] had the reputation of being an arbitrary, overbearing man.”

Merrell also describes “old chief Dekaury ... [whose] hair was white as wool, and he must have been very old.” Merrell adds that later he was told that the chief’s mother was over 140 years old, though he suspects the report is mistaken.

In his 37-page narrative Merrell recounts some of his travels on the frontier, including the start of a journey to New York, presumably to visit family and purchase more goods to stock for sale. He is accompanied on that trip by “Captain Harris” from Galena, and the first leg of their trip takes them to Rowan’s Inn, about 35 miles from the Fort. After he lies down for the night, he hears “an unearthly squeal and grunt of hogs” in an open space between the two rooms. He said he was later told that Governor Doty once stayed at the same inn, and woke to find a pet pig poking at him. The governor found a seam in the wooden flooring, pried it loose, raised it up, and grabbed the offending pig, thrusting it under the floorboard until morning.

On that trip Merrell met other early settlers, some of them men-

tioned in Juliette Kinzie’s *Wau-Bun*: William (“Billy”) Hamilton and Joseph Rolette.

In his written reminiscence, Merrell provides his interpretation of some of the events in frontier history. He recalls the treaty of 1837 in which members of a Ho-Chunk delegation to Washington, ostensibly to visit their “Great White Father,” were pressured into ceding their land to the government and given inaccurate information about the length of time they would be permitted to stay on their ancestral lands. “And those the poor Red Men were deceived and outwitted by those who ought to have been their wards and protectors,” laments Merrill. “Is it any wonder that we have Indian wars when they are so treated?” he asks his readers.

Merrell admired Pauquette (“I considered him the best specimen of Nature’s noblemen I ever met.”) and writes at length about Pauquette’s role in the community as interpreter, ferryman, legendary strongman, generous neighbor, and trusted friend of the Ho-Chunk people. As justice of the peace, Merrell was responsible for hearing the testimony of those who had knowledge of Pauquette’s murder.

The nomination papers to place the Merrell home on the National Register of Historic Places indicates that the home was built between 1835 and 1837 near Fort Winnebago, or that a second story to the 1835 structure was added in 1837. By 1838, it was also a hotel. In 1867, the building was moved to its current location at 505 E. Cook St. Merrell continued with some level of involvement in merchandising in Portage, but was also probably involved in real estate. In 1863 he had partial ownership of a foundry in La Crosse that produced threshing machines.

The businessman also participated in the civic life of the growing community, serving as clerk of courts and justice of the peace until the late 1830s. He took the federal census in 1840, and represented the first senatorial district of Wisconsin as a Whig in 1848-49. He was founding member of St. John’s Episcopal Church in Portage in 1853, and left a \$1,000 bequest to the church when he died at home in 1876.



The Henry Merrell House at 505 E. Cook St. Built around 1847 at the fort where Merrell was a sutler. The house was moved on skids over the ice to its present site. Here, Henry Merrell’s son and family continued to live. Picture and information donated by Michael Drury Oct. 13, 1969.

## Louise Phelps Kellogg nurtured interest in Indian Agency House

When historian Louise Phelps Kellogg passed away in 1942, an obituary noted that “when the record of contemporary historians is compiled, a place at the pinnacle for scholarly achievement must inevitably be reserved for Louise Phelps Kellogg ...” who devoted her professional life and scholarly research to the study of Wisconsin and the Midwest. Hers is one of three names on the articles of incorporation for the Old Indian Agency House Association, the group formed in January 1930, to purchase and restore the Agency House. In less than a year the group was dissolved when the NSCDA-WI indicated it was interested in assuming the responsibility the property. Kellogg continued to support the effort, volunteering to write the forward to the new edition of *Wau-Bun: Early Days in the Northwest*. She also authored the brochure, still available, about the Indian Agency House, and was a frequent visitor.

Kellogg was born in Milwaukee in 1882, enrolled in Milwaukee College (later Milwaukee-Downer College), and transferred to the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 1897. She was determined to develop her interest in history, and it was reported that at age 33, she knocked on the door at Frederick Jackson Turner’s home, told him that she wanted to become a historian. Turner, born in Portage, was

recognized just a few years earlier for his landmark thesis about the role of the frontier in the development of the American character. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in History in 1932. He mentored Kellogg as she proceeded through her academic studies, which included a fellowship to study in London and Paris. Eventually she started a career at the Wisconsin Historical Society and became a senior research associate. She was a prodigious writer, and a familiar figure at meetings and public events throughout the state. A lengthy biography in a 1979 edition of the Wisconsin Magazine of History observes that the WHS and Kellogg were “perfectly matched and complementary institutions. She even looked the part: bespectacled, bookish and preoccupied. The Society required Miss Kellogg’s talents; she required its resources. And in time it became impossible to think of Louise Phelps Kellogg without thinking of the State Historical Society.”



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