

Century Old Book to Save H

Vivacious Little Bride Who Was First Mistress of 'Agency House' at Portage, Wrote Account of Her Adventures, Which Now Is to Be Reprinted to Provide Funds for Landmark



IF THE movement to preserve the old Agency House at Portage is successful, it will be due in great part to the personality of its first mistress.

She was Mrs. John A. Kinzie, who came as a bride in 1830 to old Fort Winnebago with her husband who had been named Indian agent. In 1831, while the Kinzies were living at Fort Winnebago, the agency house was built, part of it under direction of Mrs. Kinzie while her husband was away from home.

The girl wife who came to the log fort in the wilderness must have been an ardent, vivid little creature. For the book in which in later years she wrote her experiences in the wilder-

ness is one of Wisconsin's most colorful historical documents.

It is called "Wau-Bun," which is Ojibway for "The Dawn." Dedicated to the Hon. Lewis Cass, and illustrated with sketches by the author, it was published in 1855. For many years it has been out of print.

Now, members of the American Association of University Women plan to publish a memorial edition of "Wau-Bun," the proceeds to be applied on the purchase price of the land on which the Agency House stands.

Fort Winnebago, which was on the opposite side of the portage from the Agency House, has long since disappeared, so the house where the author of "Wau-Bun" lived, is today all that remains to recall the interesting series of events at Fort Winnebago in the early thirties.



Two stories high, 30 by 24 feet, with an attached kitchen wing, it stands exactly as it did in the days when Mrs. Kinzie moved her piano and her mahogany furniture into its long living room and felt herself a queen in the wilderness. Until a short time ago the house was occupied, and builders who have examined its rafters, sills and studding, say that with proper care the old house may be preserved for many years.

The suggestion has come from Charles E. Brown of the state historical society that the Agency House be made a repository of historical objects connected with Fort Winnebago.

If it becomes public property it will be placed in the condition and setting in which it was when Mrs. Kinzie lived in it. A circle of trees similar to the one she planted will be set out, and as nearly as possible it will be brought back to "Wau-Bun" days.

Home of Writer



IT WAS on an October afternoon in 1830 that Mr. and Mrs. Kinzie left their little craft at Fort Winnebago after a long voyage by steamer from Detroit to Green Bay and by canoe up the Fox, accompanied for part of the journey by Judge Doty. Maj. Twiggs, in command at the fort, made them welcome and insisted hospitably, that they take up their residence for the time being in quarters on the opposite side of the hall from his own.

The lively little Mrs. Kinzie hurried to inspect her new home. She laughed over the huge bed which she said was "big enough to accommodate Og, the king of Bashan, and Mrs. Og and the children into the bargain."

It was in this sleeping room that Mrs. Kinzie found the huge "press," constructed by Lieut. Jefferson Davis and which she, an easterner and used to built-in closets instead of movable wardrobes, immediately christened a "Davis."

Almost at once she found herself in the midst of unconventional situations. The Winnebago chief, Four Legs, had just died and throughout the day and during all of the first night, "the sound of instruments, mingled with doleful lamentations and with discordant whoops and yells filled the air," she says.

"To these were added occasionally the plaintive sounds of the Indian flute, upon which the young savage plays when he is in love. Grief and whisky had made their hearts tender and the woods resounded to the melancholy strains."

Early the next morning, the be-reaved squaw and her kinswomen made a formal call upon their "Mama" as they called the young wife of the Indian agent. And after breakfast the principal chieftains of the Winnebagoes waited upon their new "mother," some of them dressed in all the finery of beads and feathers and silver bracelets that they could muster.

The little bride watched with dis-

may the ashes falling from the long pipes of the Indians as they squatted on the floor. "What is to become of my pretty carpet, if this is the way they are to act when they call upon me?" she wondered.

A little later came the Canadians and the half breed women. By this time the piano, brought on a flat boat

from Green Bay, had been unloaded and set up in the temporary quarters.

"Eh-h-h! Regardez donc! Quelles merveilles!" they ejaculated.

Mrs. Kinzie played for the astonished women. And one of them, seeing the reflection of her fingers in the name board, thought she had discovered the hidden machinery by which the sounds were produced.

IN A FEW days the boats with the furniture arrived, causing great excitement at the fort. The young officers volunteered to unload the cargoes and, eager to see once more the kind of furnishings they had left behind in their homes, opened the boxes. In place, the handsome sideboard, the soft carpet, the knick knacks on the mantelpiece, the white curtains and the dining table and chairs made the former bare room seem a palace to men hungry for the accompaniments of civilization.

The little bride, on her part, was as thrilled with the ways of the wilderness. The first Indian payment at which she was present, was like a drama, the actors not merely "Indians" but interesting people.

It was then that she became acquainted with the "Washington Woman," so called because she had once accompanied her husband on a visit to the president.

"She had a pleasant, old acquaintance sort of air in greeting me," Mrs. Kinzie wrote, "as though to say 'You and I have seen something of the world.'"

When Mrs. Kinzie displayed articles at sight of which the other Indian women clasped their hands in ecstasy, the Washington Woman's manner plainly said, "Yes, yes, children, but I have seen all of these things before."

In the first winter Mrs. Kinzie helped welcome a new baby in the family of the commanding officer across the hall and in February, with her husband, she set out for Chicago on horseback, a most difficult journey and one which tested the good sportsmanship of those who made it.

WHEN the Kinzies, several months later, returned to Fort Winnebago, they decided since there had been an influx of married officers, it was best to take up quarters in the "agency," which was the old log barracks, built for the officers and soldiers when the fort was erected two years before.

"It was surprising how soon a comfortable, homelike air was given to the old dilapidated rooms, by a few Indian mats spread upon the floor," Mrs. Kinzie wrote, "the piano and other pieces of furniture ranged in appropriate places and a few pictures hung against the logs."

But the new house for the agency was already underway, a building consisting of a parlor and two bedrooms on the ground floor, two low chambers under the roof and a kitchen in the rear. "It seemed a palace," wrote Mrs. Kinzie.

Before the new house was completed Mr. Kinzie received notice that money—some \$15,000—for the coming Indian payment, was at Detroit. He was obliged to leave at once to superintend its transportation. "Content yourself in the old quarters until I return," he said, as he bade his wife goodbye. "When I come back we will soon have things in order."

But how was an eager, enthusiastic woman to wait? The canoe had hardly gotten out of sight before she ran to where the workmen were busy. "The logs are out and hauled," she said.

"The squaws have brought bark for the roof. What is to prevent our finishing the house and getting moved and settled to surprise Monsieur John on his return?"

"To be sure, Madam John," replied the carpenter, "provided the one who plants a green bough on the chimney-top is to have a treat!"

One day, before it was time for Mr. Kinzie to return, his wife received a summons to come to the new house. There was the carpenter astride a small keg on the roof, close beside the kitchen chimney on the very summit of which he had planted a green bough. "To this he held fast with one hand while he exultantly waved the other and called out to Madame John, asking for his promised treat!"

COOKING in the "new" house which is the "old" agency house of today, was done at a fireplace. In a rain the fire would become extinguished, and since the bark on the roof in a pelting rain failed to do its duty, the dwellers in the house were often deluged, beside being compelled to eat cold food. "But in spite of these adverse circumstances, we enjoyed our new quarters exceedingly," the mistress of the new house wrote.

The Indian women brought their "mother" presents, wooden bowls and venison and berries, and a fawn that became a family pet. From the new house she viewed Indian dances. She planted a vegetable garden, setting out currant bushes brought from Chicago tied in a bundle at the back of the carriage.

The first improvement that suggested itself after Mr. Kinzie's return was the removal of a circle of unsightly pickets about some Indian graves in front of the house.

"Such was the reverence in which these burial places are held," said Mrs. Kinzie, "that we felt we must approach the subject with great delicacy and consideration."

Communicating with relatives of the Indians buried there, they finally se-

cured permission to replace the pickets with a neat platform about a foot high. "It was touching," she wrote, "to witness the mournful satisfaction with which two or three old crones would come regularly every evening at sunset to sit and gossip over the ashes of their departed relatives. On moonlight nights, too, there might often be seen a group sitting there and enjoying a solemn hour for they believe that "the moon was made to give light to the dead."

WHENEVER one of the Indians died, it was customary for a deputation to visit the agent, asking for presents to "help them dry their tears."

One day shortly after the payment, Mr. Kinzie received such a request. An Indian had been fishing and having taken too much "whiskey" had fallen in the water and been drowned. Nothing had been found but his blanket.

"Their father," writes Mrs. Kinzie, "presented them with tobacco, knives, calico and looking glasses, and from some trader they procured a keg of whisky. Then, assembled in a circle about the keg not far from the scene of the catastrophe they commenced their mourning. The more they drank the more clamorous became their grief.

"In the midst of these demonstrations, a bent and muddy figure, staggered into the circle. With a countenance full of sympathy the newcomer asked who was dead.

"Who is dead?" they repeated. "Why, you're dead. You were drowned in Swan lake. Did we not find your blanket? Sit down and help us mourn." The old man did not wait for a second invitation, but proceeded to drink and weep and lament as bitterly as any of them."

THE Sauk war took place while the Kinzies were living in their new house, and the cession of the Winnebago lands to the government, and the surrender of Winnebagoes accused of depredations, to be tried by white man's law. Mrs. Kinzie describes dramatically the picture of the Indian procession on the portage road with the prisoners, dressed in white cotton, in token of their innocence, in the midst of the train.

And she tells of a scalp dance in the moonlight in front of the agency house. And of the escape of the Indian prisoners. And of the famine that overtook both whites and Indians in the spring of 1833 when the government failed to send supplies, and of the ecstasy of people of both colors when the boats laden with corn were seen in the river.

Finally she tells of the sorrow of the Winnebagoes when on July 1, 1833, she and her husband and their baby bid goodbye to Fort Winnebago and left for Chicago. "You will never come back to see your brothers again," an old chief said to the baby, tears coursing down his cheeks.

Groups of Indians accompanied their "father" and "mother" across the portage. "When we were well on our way we could see the procession winding along the road and hear their lamentations at a parting which they foresaw would be forever," is the last sentence in Wisconsin's most vivid story of pioneer days.