

THE OLD INDIAN AGENCY HOUSE AT FORT WINNEBAGO

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Almost all the eastern states have preserved and restored historic homes of the early day. Sometimes this has been accomplished by the state, more often by groups of historically minded people or by patriotic societies. To mention only a few, Mount Vernon, the cherished home of our first president has been saved for posterity by the Mount Vernon Association; Monticello, the house Thomas Jefferson designed and built on the "little mountain" above Charlottesville, Virginia is now a national shrine. Massachusetts has preserved many memorials of Revolutionary days, notably the Quincy homes of the Adams family. The literary shrines of the Wayside Inn at Sudbury, the House of the Seven Gables at Salem, the Thomas Bailey Aldrich home at Portsmouth are all now treasures for public visitation. Turning to the Mississippi Valley, we find that Tennessee has saved the Hermitage near Nashville sacred to the memory of Andrew and Rachel Jackson. In Kentucky the Lincoln birthplace cabin has been enshrined in a marble temple, while the "Old Kentucky Home" stands as it stood when 'twas summer.

Ohio keeps open the birthplace of General Grant on a lovely site beside the Ohio River. At Vincennes, Indiana, the William Henry Harrison home has been saved for posterity. Illinois has kept the Lincoln home at Springfield as it was when the president left it in 1861 for Washington, while a

Heritage. Historic houses

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few miles from Springfield, the earlier home of the martyred president has been restored and the entire village of West Salem has become an historic treasure.

Wisconsin is rich in historic lore and some of Wisconsin's historic homes have already been preserved. At Green Bay the oldest house in the state, a relic of the days of the French régime, has been saved and placed in one of the city parks. Recently the Old Indian Agency House near Portage has been purchased and is being restored as a shrine of historic memories for Wisconsin's people.

What is an Agency House, may well be asked? The home of an Indian agent, appointed to guard the welfare of the Indians considered the wards of the nation. There were several old Indian Agency houses in Wisconsin, the Agency House of greatest renown was built one hundred years ago at Fort Winnebago, when that military post was erected to guard the Fox-Wisconsin waterway and make it safe for passage. One hundred years ago and before that for two centuries everyone in Wisconsin traveled by water; there were no roads or railways and the waterways were the safest and most convenient means of travel. The great waterway through Wisconsin led from Lake Michigan via Green Bay, then along the Fox River until in its windings it approached within a mile of the Wisconsin, coming from the north, hastening to join the Mississippi River, thence to pour its waters into the Gulf of Mexico. The narrow place between the two Rivers was called a portage, or as the French said "unportage"

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a place where boats were carried across from one river to another. This portage was first discovered in 1673 by Louis Jolliet, when he and good Father Marquette started to find the Mississippi River. Thereafter boats and travelers went up and down through all the French regime, and after 1763 when Wisconsin was transferred to British authority fur traders used this portage to go to the land of peltry. An enterprising trader kept a team of oxen at the portage and finally built a long wagon on which the boats could be placed to carry them from the Fox River to the Wisconsin or back the other way.

It was not until after the Second War with England that the United States government paid attention to what is now Wisconsin. During the War of 1812 all Wisconsin Indians had been acting for the British and when in 1814 an expedition was organized at St. Louis and came up the Mississippi the first American fort in Wisconsin was built at Prairie du Chien and called Fort Shelby. Over this hastily constructed log fort the American flag, our beautiful Stars and Stripes, floated for the first time in what is now our state. Only for a few short weeks did the Americans hold the fort. The British at Mackinac heard of the invasion, gathered a great host of voyageurs and Indians, hastened to Green Bay, up Fox River, across the portage, down the Wisconsin to Prairie du Chien. Then they summoned the little garrison of Fort Shelby to surrender. It was honorable surrender or indiscriminate massacre, and Fort Shelby yielded; then they changed its name to, Fort McKay, which flew the British

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flag for fifteen months thereafter.

With the close of the war the American government decided to occupy Wisconsin, and an expedition with a number of regular army troops was sent to enlarge and occupy Fort McKay, which now became Fort Crawford. At the eastern end of the waterway at Green Bay, Fort Howard was built in the same year (1816) and the Fox-Wisconsin route was safe guarded for travelers.

Matters rested in that way for eleven years, when the Winnebago Indians, who had always been restless and semi-hostile, suddenly went on the warpath. They were disturbed by the lead miners who had begun encroaching on their territory, which covered all of southwest Wisconsin; they also had villages on Rock River, Fox River, and on the upper Mississippi. Gov. Lewis Cass, who happened to be in Wisconsin at the outbreak of Red Bird, the Winnebago chief, hastened along the Fox-Wisconsin and St. Louis, whence he dispatched a small army to the portage to overawe the Winnebago. Red Bird determined to surrender himself and save his tribe. The following account of this most dramatic event was written by the commissioner of Indian affairs from Washington, who was present at the time:

"About noon of the day following there were seen at the portage, a body of Indians--some mounted some on foot. Two American flags in front and rear and the one in the center was white. They bore no arms. They approached within a short distance of the King crossing of the Fox River when we heard sing-

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ing 'It is the death song' 'It is Red Bird singing his death song.' All eyes were fixed on Red Bird and well might be-- for of all Indians I ever saw he is the most perfect in form, in face and gesture. In height he is about six feet; straight, but without restraint. His proportions are those of the most exact symmetry. His very fingers are models of beauty. I never beheld a face that was so full of all the enobling and at the same time the most winning expression. It appears to be compounded of grace and dignity, of firmness and decision, all tempered with mildness and mercy. His face was painted one side red, the other mixed green and white. Around his neck he wore a collar of blue and white wampum, with the claws of a wildcat forming its rim. He was clothed in a suit of dressed elk or deerskin nearly white. On one shoulder a beautifully ornamented feather nearly white, on the other one nearly black. At the tip of one shoulder a tuft of horse hair, dyed red. Across the breast bound tight to it his war-pipe three feet long. In one hand he held the white flag and in the other the calumet or pipe of peace. There he stood. Not a muscle moved nor was the expression of his face changed a particle. He appeared conscious that according to Indian law he had done no wrong.

"The commanding officer approached and he spoke 'I am ready' 'Let me be free. I have given my life away-- it is gone (stooping and taking some dust on his hand and blowing it away) like that. I would not take it back.'

"A platoon stepped forward, the prisoners were placed under guard. Later they were sent to Prairie du Chien, and placed in the military prison where Red Bird, unable to bear confinement and chains soon died."

(Wis. Hist. Colls. V, 172-175.)

After this brief tragedy was ended the government decided it would be wise to place a post at the portage and Major David Twiggs of the First United States Infantry was sent from Fort Howard to build the new fort, which was appropriately named Fort Winnebago. There was also created a sub-Indian agency at the same place to conciliate the Winnebago and to assure that they kept the terms of the treaty made at the close of the Winnebago War.

Governor Cass nominated for the agent at Fort Winnebago a young Westerner, who had spent his life on the frontier. John Harris Kinzie, son of an early settler at Chicago had grown up among the Indians, spoke their languages, and understood their customs. Kinzie had lived at one time at Prairie du Chien and had studied the Winnebago language with care. He made an excellent agent was kind, firm, sympathetic with the tribesmen, and familiar with their ways. The Winnebago for their part were very fond of their young agent. They called him Shaw-nee-aw-kee, the silver man, because in early days, his father had made silver jewelry for the tribesmen.

Agent Kinzie had not been long at Fort Winnebago when he asked for leave of absence to go to the eastern states on a visit. It was granted him and he set forth with a happy heart for he

was going on one of the happiest erreands he could imagine-- he went to claim his promised bride, young Juliette Magill. The way they had met was this. When John Kinzie was a boy, living near Fort Dearborn, Chicago, his elder sister married the Indian agent there whose name was Alexander Wolcott. On one of his visits to his old home Wolcott took his young brother-in-law with him and there introduced him to his niece, Juliette Magill. John and Juliette seemed made for one another. John was a handsome youth, brave and courageous and in Juliette's eyes embodied all the romance of the frontier. To John Juliette was a superior being; she had much more education than he had had, having been at Emma Willard's school at Troy, New York, having learned Latin, French, and Italian. Juliette was also an accomplished musician and something of an artist, and was endowed with a bright, happy temperament and a keen sense of humor. Now after being betrothed for several months John went East to claim his bride and to bring her to his home at Fort Winnebago. Few brides of today set out with brighter anticipations than did Juliette Kinzie; true the way West was long and arduous, but she had married the man of her choice and was going to the region she had longed to see-- the illimitable West with its vast prairies and forests, its strange wild men, and its primeval conditions.

John and Juliette came West by way of the Erie Canal to Buffalo, then around the Great Lakes on a steamer, stopping to visit John's friends at Detroit and Mackinac. Finally they arrived in Green Bay in August, 1830, 101 years ago this month. There John had so many friends that a series of festivities began tea parties and dances, and everything that could delight and honor the bride.

While at Green Bay arrangements were made to transport Juliette's belongings, consisting of a fine new piano, some good mahogany furniture, as well as boxes and baskets containing her clothes and personal belongings. Two boats were finally chartered in one of which was placed the piano, without its legs, then mattresses were piled on it on which the travelers could recline. On this boat Agent Kinzie and his bride started for Fort Winnebago. The second boat with the trunks and the furniture came later.

The Kinzies had not gone far when they met a band of Winnebago Indians who were overjoyed to see their agent, the loved Shawnee-aw-kee. When he introduced his wife they all accosted her as "Mamma."

"Why do they call me that?" she asked her husband.

"Oh," he replied, "I am their agent so they call me Father; then you must be their Mother."

Juliette laughed and thought it a great joke for a young bride to have acquired such a big family at once.

At last they reached Fort Winnebago. The friends at the Fort could see them a long distance away and met them at the landing. As there was no house for the agent, Mrs Twiggs, the commandant's wife insisted that John and Juliette should live with her in the fort. She showed Juliette the officers' quarters that had been built by a young lieutenant named Jefferson Davis, Just from West Point. There was no closets in the rooms so Davis had made huge wardrobes, called "Davises" from his name. He also made beds big enough, Juliette thought, for Og, King of Bashan with Mrs. Og and the children into the bargain. John and Juliette passed a very happy winter at Fort Winnebago, but often looked with longing across to Agency Hill which lay beyond the Fox River opposite the fort, where one day they hoped to have a home.

"I have written the govern ment ," John told his wife, "asking for funds to build an Agency House on yonder hill." And the winter they dwelt in the fort they built in imagination many a home on Agency Hill.

In March, 1831, John had to go to Fort Dearborn on business and Juliette decided to accompany him. It would be a long hard journey he assured her, for they must go on horseback, and would have to go away down to Dixon to get across Rock River for there was a ferry, and the Rock in March would be a mighty stream. Juliette had the garrison tailor make her a riding habit and set forth bravely along the trail past the Four Lakes,

Blue Mounds, and to Hamilton's, where a son of Alexander Hamilton lived. After many adventures they reached Chicago when after two months John's mother and sister decided to return to Fort Winnebago with them. They came overland in the first carriage ever driven through Wisconsin.

Now with an enlarged family John and Juliette more than ever longed for an Agency House. The government had had some old barracks on Agency Hill fixed up for a blacksmith. The blacksmith preferred to live at the fort, so the Kinzies went over and took the old shack. The mistress had to wear her bonnet when it rained, the roof was so leaky. At last word came that the government had appropriated money for a good house for the blacksmith, so in the summer of 1831 that was built and the Kinzies had a whole roof over their heads, but the house was very small and crowded for their larger family.

In June John heard that the government would allow him a thousand dollars for an Agency House. That would not build a good house in this distance country, but John decided to go on with the building and trust the government to make good the amount it cost.

We do not know who was the architect of the Agency House, which still stands where the Kinzies built it in the summer of 1832. (It could not have been Jefferson Davis for he had removed in 1831 to Fort Crawford.) There were several young officers at the post, who had studied drawing and architect-

ural details at West Point. Some of them may have helped with the plans for the house. In the spring of 1832 John ordered a number of good workmen to come up from St. Louis to Fort Crawford, then on to Fort Winnebago to work on the Agency House. Before these imported workmen arrived the foundation of the Agency House was laid. Kinzie reported that it cost \$92.50. Stone was obtained at Stone Quarry Hill and lime was burned twelve miles east of the fort. Then the frame was raised and the timbers cut and squared for the sides and roof.

Before these could be finished the Black Hawk war began and John had to ride away south to keep the Winnebago from joining the hostile Sauk Indians. No one thought Fort Winnebago would be endangered, but the ladies of the Agency Hill crossed the footpath and the bridge each night to the fort, and at last it was decided that the women and children must go to Green Bay for safety. The building was entirely stopped for a time. After the war closed early in August Juliette came back, the workmen took up the work and by November the house was finished.

It was a beautiful house, there was no such house anywhere in central Wisconsin. It was two stories high with a story and a half kitchen at the rear, had four fireplaces, besides the kitchen chimney. When Juliette's

beautiful piano and mahogany furniture were moved in and some of her own paintings of Wisconsin scenery hung on the walls the place was very attractive and homelike . Each week she had a musicale and all the families of the fort were invited. The Indians came to visit their agent at the house and danced on the lawn in front of the house. There too Juliette had some trees planted on the lawn and three of them yet remain shading the house with their wide spread limbs.

John reported that the house had cost \$3,497.18; of that amount the government had already appropriated \$1,500. The balance was paid by Governor Porter, who at the same time warmly commended Agent Kinzie for his efficiency , justice, and good judgment both towards the Indian wards and in the building of the house; the latter he said the government might be proud to own. The Kinzies did not remain in their home quite a year. Chicago was growing and John's mother wanted him to return there and care for their property. Juliette was very loathe to leave her new house on Agency Hill, but the time had come for her to go. She bade her Indian children farewell with deep reluctance, and so well did she love her first Wisconsin home that afterwards she wrote a book about her life at Fort

Winnebago. This s he named Wau-Bun, which means the early day.

Wau-Bun is a classic of early Wisconsin history, every one who lives in Wisconsin and loves its beauties should read it. It has also been decided to preserve this Agency House as a trophy of the early day. Every trace of Fort Winnebago has vanished, save for one building (now a barn) and the military cemetery. But on Agency Hill still stands the beautiful Agency House foursquare to all the winds, secure in its charms of site and setting. It has known many vicissitudes since the departure of the Kinzies; one time it was used for a tavern, then it became a peaceful farm house, until this year when the Colonial Dames of the State bought the farm in order to save the house. The Agency House has now been restored by a skillful architect, who has rebuilt the chimneys, opened the fireplaces, and repaired the siding, the roof, and the windows. A caretakers' house adjoins and the Agency House is now secure possession of the state for all future time and for the heritage of our children. There is much yet to be done to complete the work and all interested are invited to assist. The house should be furnished as nearly as possible in the style of 1830 when Juliette Kinzie came West.

The Agency House is the one historic shrine of central

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Wisconsin. It is easily reached from Portage and is open to visitors, dedicated to the memory of Wau-Bun -- the Early Day In Wisconsin.

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