

The Fort Howard Elm

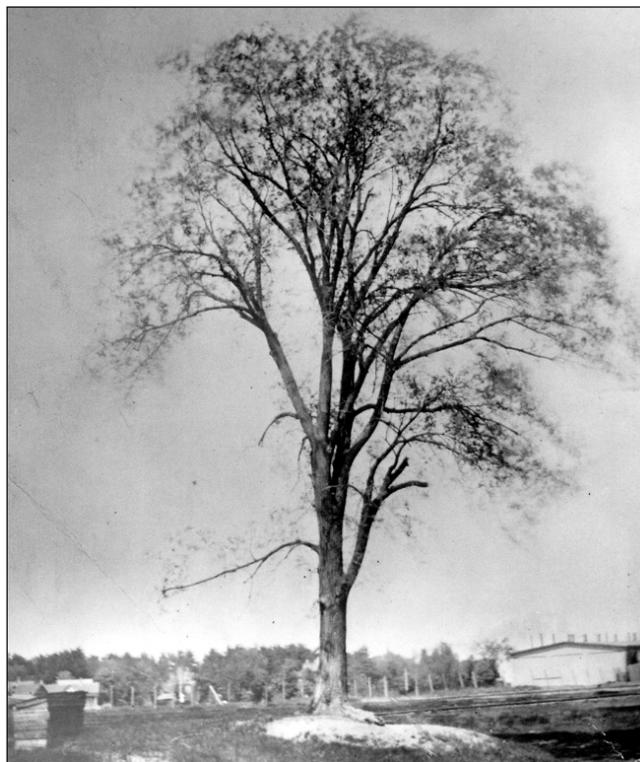
Green Bay

It died in the midst of the Great Depression, not in the military surroundings of its heyday, but in the Green Bay yard of the Chicago and Northwestern Railway, inside a protective fence marked with a stone tablet reminding viewers of the large part in history played by the Fort Howard elm.

People had come to view the tree because they could look at the 200-year-old living monument and glimpse, in their mind's eye, what the tree had actually witnessed. Now we have only a photograph, filed in the Wisconsin Historical Society, to remind us of its past.

Undoubtedly, during its military phase, the tree was multilingual. It marked the site of the very first fort in Wisconsin, established by the French about 1718, and witnessed the succession of rule over the territory around Green Bay by France, England and the United States. It loomed over battles of the Fox-Indian Wars, saw the boom in the fur trade, listened in on Pontiac's Conspiracy in 1763, and finally presided over the establishment of the permanent U.S. garrison at Fort Howard in 1816.

Eventually, as settlement progressed, the garrison was dismantled, the land and buildings sold. Opposite the tree, the commanding officer's quarters was torn down. Major Zachary Taylor, who was to become a president of the United States, had stayed there while commandant of the fort. The property became the railroad's, and the fence and the marker went up. And then, there was only the photograph.



Fort Howard Elm

Wisconsin Historical Society, WHi(X313)2141 (1900)