

The Neenah Treaty Elm

At Neenah, in Riverside Park, at the mouth of the Neenah-Fox River, there used to stand a remarkable elm, the Treaty Elm or Council Tree, so immense in size it was used as a guide by boatmen and steamer pilots on Lake Winnebago. It was also a place where chiefs of neighboring Native American tribes gathered in council.

In 1815, beneath the massive trunk's spreading branches, Winnebago Chief Four Legs began to halt all boatmen on the lake and exact tribute. The Fox Indians had done the same thing a century earlier.

One day in 1819, General Henry Leavenworth, making his way with a convoy of U.S. soldiers up the rapids, encountered Chief Four Legs standing under the tree. The Chief said to the General, "You cannot go through here. The lake is locked!"

The Chief looked imposing in his ceremonial robes, but the General stood up in his boat, lifted his rifle and cried, "So! The lake is locked. Then here is the key in my hand. I will unlock it and go on!" And he took good aim at the Chief, who replied, "Very well. Then you may pass through!"

The Neenah Treaty Elm stood until 1890 when it became necessary to take it down in order to widen the channel of the river. There is, however, a photograph of this old elm in the Wisconsin Historical Society at Madison, and a slab from its wood has been made into a table top in Governor Doty's old cabin at Neenah, preserved as a relic of pioneer times.



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