

Indian Agency House and Portage Elms

A very old elm still stands guard near the front entrance of the Indian Agency House off Highway 33 in Portage. The U.S. Government built the house in 1832 for John H. Kinzie, Indian Agent at Fort Winnebago, and his wife, Juliette Magill Kinzie.

Years earlier, John Kinzie's family moved from Sandwich, Upper Canada, to Fort Dearborn in Chicago, where they survived the massacre of 1812. With the assistance of their Indian friends, they fled to Detroit. In Michigan, John learned the fur trade and eventually went to work for the American Fur Company headquarters in Prairie de Chien. Because of his extensive knowledge of Indian customs and languages, John often served as interpreter, including with the Territorial Governor, Lewis Cass, who later appointed John as the Indian Agent to the Ho-Chunk (then called Winnebagos).

John and Juliette Magill were married in Detroit in 1829. They traveled by steamer from Detroit to Green Bay. From there, they traveled by Mackinac boat up the Fox River to Fort Winnebago. Juliette brought all of her belongings with her, including mahogany furniture, silver, china, and a large piano.

When John and Juliette arrived at Fort Winnebago, their house was not ready for them. They stayed in the Fort, where Juliette and her piano were the wonder and joy of both the soldiers and the Native Americans. The Agency House was completed in 1832, and the Kinzies moved in. The dooryard elm, now very old, is still an impressive tree. The Kinzies also planted maple trees for shade, but those trees have since died.

About a mile east of where the maples were planted stood a solitary elm left from a group of three in front of the first tavern/hotel in that part of the country. Situated on the Wauna Trail—the route between the Fox River and the Wisconsin River used by portagers—the Franklin House, as it was called, was owned and operated by Captain Gideon Low. Beginning August 30, 1847, with David Irvin on the bench, the first court in Columbia County was held there. The tavern is long gone, and the tree was cut in January 1963 because of a large amount of decay.

In 1902 the Portage (Waubun) Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution planted elm trees to mark three historic sites: the beginning of the Wauna Trail on the banks of the Fox River, where the Native Americans and *courier du bois* drew their canoes ashore to transport them across the short stretch of land to the Wisconsin River; the end of the trail at the Wisconsin River; and the cemetery of the area's first Catholic Church where Pierre Pauquette, the famous Portage strongman, Winnebago interpreter and carrier of canoes, was buried. These elms are all down. A fourth elm was later planted at the corner of West Cook and MacFarlane Streets where the popular and well-liked Pauquette, a man so strong he could lift a horse, was murdered after a quarrel in 1836.

Sources: Mrs. Maynard Benson, Portage
Rita Fredrick, Portage
Dorothy McCarthy, Portage
Joyce Steward, Madison