



Indian Half-way Tree

Rich Rygh, *The Capital Times* (1980)

The Indian Half-Way Tree

Green County

To the Indians, the large bur oak on the farm located on old Highway 81 just past the Brodhead airport in Green County marked a point halfway between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River. In the 1800s, every spring, according to the old-timers, the Indians, possibly Oneidas, passed north along the Sugar River. They usually divided their party, some ascending the river in canoes, others riding horseback or walking along the bank. The Half-Way Tree naturally was a favorite camping spot for the Native Americans and became one for early white settlers as well.

Charles M. Warner, who lived on the farm then, remembered that one year the Indians had with them a 100-year-old woman. She had a tent all to herself in deference to her age. The Indians made their last trip in the spring of 1878, and there were only two of them, a father and son.

The Warner family acquired the 200-acre farm in 1857. About ten years later, young Charles saw an Indian chief standing at the door of his father's blacksmith shop. Pointing to the oak tree, the chief made them understand that it should never be cut.

It never has been. The tree has weathered some vicissitudes, however. Its bark has been much hacked by tomahawks and one year a drought dried up nearly all the leaves.

A marker placed by the road points to the tree 300 yards away. It reads: "This bur oak marks the half-way point between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River, paced off by Indian runners and confirmed by a U.S. survey in 1832."

According to present-day experts, the tree is off by about six miles, but there is disagreement about the methods of measurement. At any rate, the old tree still stands, protected through the years by various owners, and still marks the half-way point, or close enough to it, along the ancient Indian trail.

Sources: Lillian C. Allen, Brodhead
Dorothy Gessert, Brodhead
Michael J. Williams, Milton

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