

The Cram/Houghton Blaze Tree

Vilas County

The first white people to set foot in Wisconsin weren't all explorers, fur traders, soldiers or lumberjacks, although it is often these types about whom tales are told. A great many were surveyors who had the responsibility of marking the boundary lines for the entire territory, a necessary prerequisite for statehood.

Thomas Jefferson Cram was such a surveyor, and he came to Wisconsin Territory in 1840 on a mission to check an earlier surveyor's work: the northeastern boundary, as described in the enabling act for Michigan. According to Cram's reconnaissance report to the War Department, the previous survey line was inadequate. In March 1841, Congress ordered a second survey and Cram came again to Wisconsin to carry it out, bringing with him Douglass Houghton, later to become the well known engineer for whom the city of Houghton, Michigan, was named.

They had an incredible task: surveying a boundary over 100 miles long. Both men endured great hardships during the work. Several years later a souvenir of their efforts was discovered. On a large pine tree growing on the shore of Trout Lake in Vilas County, on a blaze two feet long and one foot wide, had been cut the words: "XIX T. J. Cram D. Houghton Aug. 11, 1841."

Unfortunately, lumbermen did not spare the tree, but the slab with the inscription was saved and presented to the Wisconsin Historical Society by John B. Mann of Minocqua.



Cram/Houghton Blaze Tree in the Wisconsin Historical Museum

B-Wolfgang Hoffmann (1982)