

The Harvey Oak

Madison

Until the 1990s, when it was taken down because of defects, a black oak tree stood at the southwest corner of Camp Randall in Madison with a plaque inscribed: “Dedicated to the memory of Governor Harvey.”

Louis Powell Harvey became governor of the state in 1862. He was the second Civil War governor (Randall was the first). Harvey had a deep concern for Wisconsin soldiers wounded at the Battle of Shiloh. His compassion led him to organize a journey to the military camps on the southern rivers where the Wisconsin men were being cared for in makeshift hospitals.

Crossing from one steamboat to another in the night, he lost his footing and was drowned in the Tennessee River. His body was finally discovered more than 60 miles downstream.

His wife, Cordelia, hoping to carry on her husband’s work, was appointed sanitary agent to the Union Army. She visited all the hospitals along the Mississippi River. The shocking conditions led her to collect signatures on a petition that she carried to President Lincoln in Washington. Her hope was to have hospitals established in the healthier climate of the North. After long debate with Lincoln, she succeeded in getting her wish. The first such hospital was established in Madison, in an octagonal building on Lake Monona.

Perhaps the black oak should have had a dedication to Cordelia Harvey, too.



Harvey Oak

Mary Frances Schjonberg (1976)