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STORY OF OLD FORT TOLD TO CONVENTION

Its Recital Given at After-
noon Session Held on
Tuesday

An interesting history of Fort Winnebago presenting a vivid picture of the building and life within the old stockade and activities at the Old Indian Agency house during the days of John Kinzie was given Tuesday afternoon at the Portage theatre by Miss Elizabeth Kelly, history teacher in the Portage high school before several hundred women in session here for the 15th annual council of Catholic women.

In a veritable Indian paradise with rich wild rice fields for harvest along the river banks, Fort Winnebago was constructed at the mid-point of a great waterway system that featured in the history of many Indian tribes.

Predominant among these tribes were the Winnebagoes, who by 1800, occupied the largest portion of all the Wisconsin territory including lands from the south of the Fox river at Green Bay through the present site of Portage to Prairie du Chien.

For Protection of Whites

After the erection of Forts Howard and Crawford at these extremities in 1816, 1825 saw an influx of

white settlers in southwestern Wisconsin. It was for the protection of these whites, lured here by the discovery of lead mines, and other reasons, that Fort Winnebago was built in 1828.

Although actual warfare with the Indians, which resulted from the removal of soldiers from Fort Crawford had ceased with the surrender of Red Bird at Portage, one year before Fort Winnebago was built, the Indians were still considered a menace, Miss Kelly stated.

The government established the Fort also to protect the John Jacob Astor fur interests here.

The First Infantry under the command of Major D. E. Twiggs built the fort on the beautiful hill and commanding site where Red Bird had surrendered. Parties under Lieut. Jefferson Davis went up the Fox to cut the timber for the fort and the bricks were made at the old clay pit.

Stockade Surrounded Fort

The fort was constructed as most parts of that era, but with the stockade surrounding it painted white, it presented such a beautiful sight amidst the trees that it was called the gem of all western forts.

Henry Merrell then had a store across the military road. The blacksmith shop, the carpenter shop and the bake house were near as was the cemetery where now lie buried soldiers from every war in which this country has participated.

Routine life within the fort was relieved by rude frontier sports, Billiards and private theatricals, dancing and music furnished the entertainment. Trips to Forts

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Howard and Crawford were made in canoes and to Chicago on horseback, even by the dainty ladies who called on friends at those distances.

Agency House Remains

Across the river from the Fort stood and still stands the Agency house, which was built in the early days of the fort and has since been made famous by Mrs John Kinzie in her book Wau-Bun.

Visited annually by about 5,000 Indians who received \$5,000 annuities besides presents and rations, during emergencies, the Agency was one of the important keys in controlling the Winnebagoes, Miss Kelly said.

John Kinzie, whom the government sent to the Agency house was the son of John H. Kinzie, outstanding in the early history of Chicago. Mr. and Mrs. Kinzie had a strong influence with the Indians who paid many visits to the agency house and played games in the yard.

The Kinzie home was also the social center of the Fort community as Mrs. Kinzie brought her piano from Chicago.

The fort was evacuated in 1845 and 8 years later the property was sold at auction. Columbia county lost its priceless opportunity of preserving this historic old build-

ing, when the buildings were destroyed later.

Movement for Preservation

As the sturdy old agency house is the only building connected with early Portage and Wisconsin history remaining, a project is now under way to restore the property and preserve it for a national shrine and museum.

The project is being sponsored by the committee on landmarks and history of the Wisconsin Federated Women's clubs with historical societies cooperating; by incorporating a non-profit company to sell shares in the proposed shrine. Miss Kelly urged that the members of the council tell their local organizations about this project and advertise in every way this notable effort to save one of Wisconsin's landmarks.

An automobile trip to historical spots about Portage, following the famous old Wauona trail, including historical monuments, the former home of Mrs. Zona Gale Breese and St. Savior's hospital following Miss Kelly's talk, ended at a tea given by Mrs. Breese.