

Old Fort Led to 'Discovery' of Capitol Hill

By IVAN CLYDE LAKE

Old Fort Winnebago had something to do with the "discovery" of the elevated site on which Wisconsin's capitol was built in the Four Lake country in 1837.

One day in 1828, Col. Ebenezer Brigham, Dane county's first permanent white settler, made a trip from his homestead at Blue Mounds to Fort Winnebago. His object was to find a trading place nearer home than Mineral Point where he ordinarily bought goods.

He found what he wanted at Fort Winnebago: groceries, particularly, and some dry goods to stock the little store he kept in his log house at the foot of the East Blue Mound. His was the northernmost outpost of the lead regions, and lead mining in his day gave to southwestern Wisconsin an industrial and political importance superior to other points of the territory.

Leaving Fort Winnebago, he took a different route from the one he had traveled in coming here: he went southward toward Taycho-pera, the Winnebago name by which the Four Lake country was known. He reached the isthmus between Third and Fourth lakes, in present Madison, toward nightfall, and there, on a eminence over-

grown with scrub oak and underbrush he decided to pitch tent for the night. His shelter, made of blankets, was put up on the eastern edge of the elevation.

The colonel was given to prophecy, he later told friends, inspired as he was by the beauty of his surroundings. Dusk settled over the forested region, followed by a sunset of varied hues over the lake to the west and moonrise of silver over the lake to the east.

In the evening quiet, broken only by the sounds of lapping waters and of homing birds settling in their nests for the night, Brigham stood under the clear sky, silver with moonlight, lit with myriad stars. He stood there musing, looking about him, feeling the beauty of it all; and then suddenly prophetic words came to him.

"Someday," he said, "a beautiful city will be built between these lakes and on this spot where I now stand will be erected the capitol of a new state."

Later he claimed that he was the first white man to visit future Madison, but that claim was also made by Lieut. Jefferson Davis—the same Davis who became the first and only president of the Southern Confederacy. He was stationed for a time at Fort Winnebago as well as at Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien.

But granting the Davis claim over that of Brigham, old Fort Winnebago still had something to do with the "discovery" of the place which the Belmont legislature later selected for the capitol city, and of the elevated site on which three capitol have been since erected.