

Trading Post Oak

Lake Mendota

A big red oak marked one of the most historical sites in Dane County on the northwest shore of Lake Mendota where an early trading post once stood. It is most famous as the place where Colonel Dodge, accompanied by Colonel Gratiot, spoke to more than 5,000 Winnebago Indians in 1832. Runners, sent out by Dodge, had brought the Indians together during the crisis of the Black Hawk Rebellion. Dodge



Trading Post Oak

Robert Keller (c. 1980)

exhorted the Winnebago to keep the peace as the Sauk war leader Black Hawk and his 1,000 or so followers—men, women and children—retreated through the area on the Sauk Trail after a futile attempt to regain their lands on the Rock River. Commemorating the spot, along with the oak, is a granite boulder. The inscription on its bronze plaque reads:

*Site of the Rowan-St Cyr fur-trade post
1832-1837*

*Site of city of Four Lakes
Colonel Henry Dodge met
Winnebago Indians here
In council May 25, 1832*

The location is now 3119 Waconia Lane in Middleton.

Trader Wallis Rowan originally built the shack, then sold it to trader Michel St. Cyr, son of a French Canadian father and a Winnebago mother. St. Cyr, noted for his honesty and fair dealing, made many improvements. Because there were so few dwellings in the county, the trading post often served as an informal hotel, with travelers spending the night for \$2, a fee that did not make St. Cyr rich.

Among the overnight guests at the St. Cyr cabin were Moses Strong, who platted the city of Madison, and his party. They enjoyed their host's specialty, muskrat pie. James Doty, territorial governor, stayed there also and built a hunting lodge on the property. The hunting lodge still stands. So scattered were habitations that in 1837 St. Cyr's overnighters included two men who were famished after traveling more than 36 hours without food except for a few cold potatoes found in an unoccupied Indian wigwam. St. Cyr's muskrat stew must have tasted mighty good to them.

In 1834, Col. William B. Slaughter, register of the land office in Green Bay and also involved in the organization of Wisconsin Territory out of Michigan Territory, arranged a deal to register St. Cyr's lot. Slaughter paid the trader \$200 for the improvements he had made and became an owner. St. Cyr subsequently conveyed an interest to James Doty as well. Slaughter, Doty and Morgan L. Martin of Green Bay then platted out the city of Four Lakes around the red oak and the trading post, hoping it would be chosen as the capital of the new state. Like Belmont, Four Lakes came close, but missed out. Doty had, of course, ensured his own success by selling Madison

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property to several territorial legislators as well.

Reportedly St. Cyr, a carpenter as well as trader and hosteler, helped to build the first post office in Madison, a log edifice located on the Capitol Square. He eventually moved on to Minnesota where he died in 1859.

Source: E. G. Kromrey, Middleton