

Washington Island Pine

December 1955 marked the end for one of the largest white pines in Wisconsin, a 450-year-old giant that stood on a knoll on the east side of Washington Island. Approximately 150 feet high and about 15 feet in circumference, it must have been a seedling when Columbus discovered America.

The pine was a youngster when the Indians still roamed in peace and plenty under its branches. It witnessed the coming of the white settlers: the Icelandic Colony, the Scandinavians, later the Irish and Scots. Most of its fellow pines were felled for lumber, but, because it was in an inaccessible spot, it remained, coming to stand virtually alone.

Measured and treasured, the Big White Pine was for years a prime attraction for visitors to Washington Island. This was possible because the owner of the land on which it stood, Arnold Wickham, appreciated its age and nobility. Though some advised

him to cut it down for the thousands of board feet of lumber it contained, he refused. Instead he cleared a road to the monarch so that others could be inspired by it. Because of occasional souvenir seekers who took cuttings from the tree, he put up a fence.

After it was fatally damaged by a lightning strike, professional woodsmen came to cut down the Big White Pine in what was one of the largest logging operations on Washington Island in 65 years. Wallace Jensen, chief lumberjack, directing his crew of handpicked men, used special equipment to fell it. The logs were moved out of the woods on a specially constructed skid pulled by a cat tractor. Taken to the sawmill, the lordly monarch became merely lumber. Mr. Jensen remarked that it was a thrill watching those wide pine boards come off the saw carriage.

Source: Conan Bryant Eaton, Washington Island