



# FORT WINNEBAGO

## SURGEONS QUARTERS HISTORIC SITE

Wisconsin Daughters of the American Revolution

***"Preserving Wisconsin's Territorial Past for Citizens of Tomorrow"***

***FWSQ Mission: To honor the history of the Wisconsin Territory through preservation of the historic Fort Winnebago Surgeons Quarters property and the period specific collection***

### **INFORMATION TO ANSWER QUESTION:**

### **WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT FWSQ HISTORICAL SITE?**

The log house of Fort Winnebago Surgeons Quarters was built in 1816-1819 by fur trader/portager and 'metai' Francois LeRoi on the hill overlooking the portage in what is now Portage, Wisconsin. The U-shaped building with a central courtyard is a French post-and-log construction. The asymmetrical gabled roof having the shorter slope on the inside courtyard side is also French. The cabin was built of hand-hewn tamarack logs with wide chinks. It consists of two front-gabled wings, each with two rooms, connected by a passageway. The bournig room is above the kitchen. There is a trap door in the front fur trading room with storage in a crawl space. The four room log house was occupied by the Le Roi family until 1828.

#### **Geographically:**

The area surrounding FWSQ is an anomaly. Here between the two rivers, The Fox and The Wisconsin, is a continental divide. A continental divide is when a natural, not a man-made, boundary separates the flow of waters and causes the waters to flow into separate oceans. The Fox River is one of the few rivers in North America that flows north into the Atlantic via the St. Lawrence River. In Portage, at the head of the Fox River was the 'take-out' point for portage to the Wisconsin River. The portage was a 1.4 miles land journey . The Wisconsin River flows south and empties into the Mississippi River and then the Gulf of Mexico.

### **Historically:**

The Native Americans protected this water passage. They had used these waterways for thousands of years to access tribal lands in the west. The area of land connecting the waterways was called "wauona" by the Native Americans.

Fort Winnebago Surgeons Quarters overlooks the site where Louis Jolliet and Father Jacques Marquette left the Fox River to portage to the Wisconsin River in 1673. The area is called "le portage" by the French. "Le portage" is on the 1673 Joliet-Marquette historical map.

### **Militarily:**

The Native Americans, British, French, Spanish and Americans all wanted to control the portage for fur trading and western expansion. An 1812 British-era cannon was found in the Fox River in the 1960s and is on display near FWSQ. The British moved from Fort Mackinac through the 'portage' during the War of 1812. The log books show they had six cannons going west and four returning east.

The site for Fort Winnebago was chosen in 1828 and built as the last in a chain of three forts along the Fox, Wisconsin, and Mississippi Rivers. Fort Winnebago garrisoned 200 soldiers until 1845 when the troops left for the Mexican- American War. The Army saw no military conflict during its tenure at Fort Winnebago, but they did leave the Fort to serve in the Black Hawk War of 1832 at the Battle of Bad Ax in western Wisconsin.

In December 1853, Jefferson Davis as Secretary of War ordered the buildings and property to be sold.

In 1856, a fire at Fort Winnebago destroyed more than one third of the buildings. The remaining buildings of the fort were razed in 1866.

### **Medically:**

A hospital was built in 1829 inside Fort Winnebago. In 1834 a larger hospital was built near the Surgeons Quarters. It was there on the FWSQ Historical Site, the Army Surgeons served the military troops, the Native Americans and settlers traveling from hundreds of miles away. The three forts were the locations of the only doctors in the whole of the Wisconsin Territory. It was where men of recognized training practiced the art of healing in the wilderness. Thus, it can be said FWSQ Historical Site was the birthplace of medicine in Central Wisconsin. The hospital carriage block-stepping stone

engraved with the date 1829 for the Old Fort Winnebago Hospital sits at the entrance to FWSQ Cabin as a visual reminder of this medical history. FWSQ has on display significant medical artifacts including a surgeon's table used at the hospital. John Graham MD donated his extensive medical book collection to the FWSQ Historic Site and others have donated many medical tools and instruments for the collection. P.S. The Smithsonian wanted the surgeon's table. The DAR feels we need to keep it in Wisconsin for Wisconsin Citizens of Today and Tomorrow to see and ponder our history.

### **Culturally and Life Style:**

Blacksmithing was a valued skill and a lucrative occupation in the early 1800's. Fort Winnebago provided blacksmithing services to Native Americans as dictated by Federal Treaties. The original bellows from Fort Winnebago is displayed in the cabin as well as a plethora of blacksmithing artifacts.

FWSQ, the building, is one of two buildings of the Wisconsin Territory on its original foundation. The building is a time-capsule of pre-statehood Wisconsin History. It has been used for fur trading, a sutlers store, a home for a portager, an army surgeon home, immigrant worker housing and now a historic tourist site. The building was not burned in the fire of 1856 as it was outside the grounds of Fort Winnebago.

The WSDAR vision is "Preserving Wisconsin's Territorial Past for Citizens of Tomorrow". The WSDAR has designated that the interior of the cabin and the displayed artifacts should reflect the era of 1800-1850.

The intent is that FWSQ captures a sense of the beginning of the settlement of Central Wisconsin and the life of the early pioneers, the embryonic stage of medicine, and a glimpse into the life of army surgeons and their families as well as the trade and crafts of our early ancestors before Wisconsin became a state in 1848.

The front room of the cabin is set with artifacts from the fur trading era to 1828. The room also was used by the families of the surgeons as a bedroom. It houses a Milwaukee-made rope bed of the 1830s and a 'standing desk' used by soldiers.

The 'military-medical' room displays a Tar Bucket or Bell Shako Helmet worn by Captain Gideon Lowe during the War of 1812. The Lowe family coatee is on display. Also to be viewed is a Hall 1831 rifle, a large fort lantern, a hand carved eagle that is said to be at the gate of Fort Winnebago, which is tinged with smoke from the

1856 fire. A copy of the original plans can be viewed. Some special medical artifacts are listed above under Medical.

The kitchen of the cabin portrays an eating area, a fireplace with cooking tools and pottery from the era. A wooden cradle holds the LeRoi family hand-loomed wool baby blanket with embroidered name. Other items include a candle mold, coffee grinder, iron and crimper, queen bee box, and much more.

The parlor is filled with furniture, some used by Captain Lowe and family. An original piece of Fort Winnebago Officers' china with blackening by smoke from the Fort fire in 1856 can be viewed. Displayed on the Low sideboard is a calash bonnet worn by Mrs. Gideon Low. Other items include: a subscription Bible printed in 1813; two samplers, one dating to 1803 made by a 12 year old girl and a leaded pewter collection.

### **Meet a small group of men and women of FWSQ:**

Francois LeRoi and family, the first occupants, Major David Twiggs, builder of Fort Winnebago; 1st Lt. Jefferson Davis delivered government plans for building of the Fort; John Kinzie, Indian Agent at Fort Winnebago; Juliette Kinzie, author of *Waubun: the Early Day at the Northwest*; Captain Gideon Low Commander of the Fort; Margaret Low, wife of Gideon; Lt. Horatio P Van Cleve married Charlotte Ouisconsin first child of all white parentage born in the Wisconsin Territory. The first surgeon was Lucius Abbot who arrived with Major Twiggs in 1828 – January 1833; Surgeon R. S. Satterlee served from February 1833 to July 1833; Then Assistant Surgeon Charles McDougall August 1833 - October 1834; Lyman Foote, Surgeon, had a five year tenure November 1834-September 1839 and C. H. Laub, Surgeon October 1839-August 1845. There are two surgeons who served during furloughs of assigned surgeons: Surgeon Clement Finley and Surgeon Edward Worrell.

***Compiled from documents, speeches, books by Judy N. Mason January 30, 2021***