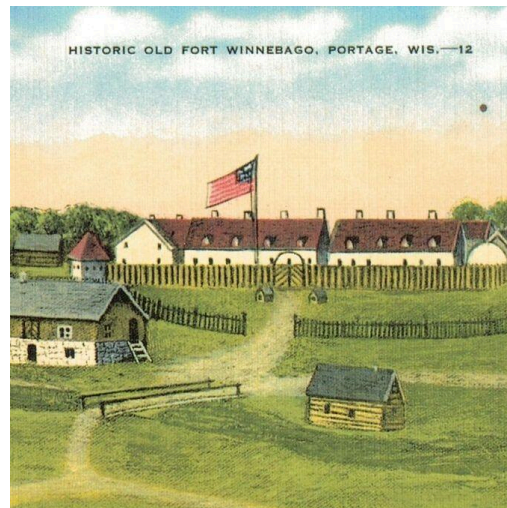


National Registry of Historic Places

Fort Winnebago

Corner of State Highway 33 & County Highway F
Portage, Wisconsin

In the autumn of 1825, a permanent fort was built on this site by the First Regiment of the United States Infantry under the command of Major David E. Twiggs, later a general in the Confederate Army. The fort was constructed primarily to control the important Fox-Wisconsin portage and to protect American traders from interference by the Winnebago Indians. Lieutenant Jefferson Davis, later president of the Confederacy, served here after graduating from West Point. The fort was garrisoned until 1845 and was destroyed by fire in 1858. The only remaining portion is the restored Surgeons Quarters on the hill across the highway. Not far from here (entrance road a half mile west on this highway) is the fully-restored Indian Agency House built in 1832 by the government for Indian agent John Kinzie and his bride, Juliette. Mrs. Kinzie's book "Wau-Bun" contains many interesting episodes of life at Fort Winnebago and in the surrounding community.



Date Listed: May 17, 1979

Fort Winnebago Surgeons Quarters

1824 State Highway 33
Portage, Wisconsin

Fort Winnebago was established in 1828 and built both to with the Indians and protect the fur traders, from whom the Indians were starting to exact increasingly high tolls for the use of the 1.5 mile portage between the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers, an important link in the water route from Green Bay (Fort Howard) to Prairie du Chien (Fort Crawford), Wisconsin's earliest settlements and most important trade centers. The presence of the fort was also meant to encourage settlement in the area of the portage. The fort was successful in all these phases of its mission. Although Fort Winnebago was of strategic importance due to its location, it was never a heavily fortified garrison and never engaged in fighting actions of any consequence. It did not figure directly in the Black Hawk War of 1832. However, the troops stationed at the fort were responsible for building the portion of the Green Bay - Prairie du Chien military road extending from the portage to Green Bay. The life of the fort was relatively short; it was garrisoned only from 1825 to 1845. During that period, the fur trade disappeared, the Winnebago were removed from their lands in Wisconsin, the Military Road from Green Bay to Prairie du Chien was completed, the Wisconsin Territory was created, and there was an attempt to dig a canal to connect the Wisconsin and Fox Rivers.



Date Listed: October 28, 1970

Fox-Wisconsin Portage Site

Wauona Trail from State Highway 33 to U.S. Highway 51/16
Portage, Wisconsin

The site is a two-mile crossing (“portage”) from the upper Fox River to the Wisconsin River then to the Mississippi River used by Native Americans, French fur traders, Marquette & Joliet, and British soldiers, before there were roads or railroads through Wisconsin.

Date Listed: March 14, 1973



Zona Gale's Home

506 West Edgewater Street
Portage, Wisconsin

Zona Gale's roots remained in her native Portage, although she was a prodigious traveler, and her best works, some of which were composed in the house, centered about the type of life readily found in a small midwest community. The style of the house also lends considerable architectural sophistication to the Portage area.

Gale was only a minor literary figure at the time of the construction of her home in Portage. Built in 1906 as a gift to her parents, the house was also her own retreat from the pace of her literary career and life in New York City. Gale carefully supervised the arrangement of the house, providing herself with a study and furnishing it with mementos of her Wisconsin childhood. She also installed a writing desk, which faced out toward the Wisconsin River. Gale lived either in New York or Portage, until her marriage in 1928 to William Breese, a local banker and businessman. Gale, as a writer, is best known for her works that mirror the qualities of life typified by small towns like Portage. This would include the romantic stories and novels of her Friendship Village series, as well as the more realistic play, “Miss Lulu Bett” for which she won the Pulitzer Prize in 1921. During the latter part of her life, Gale wrote less and became more involved in Wisconsin public affairs. Between 1923 and her death in 1938, she was a member of the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents. She was also, for a time, a supporter of the Lafollettes and an active follower of the Progressive Party in Wisconsin. After her death, her old Portage home was given by her husband to the Portage Women's Civic League.



The Zona Gale House, imposingly situated against the Wisconsin River, is a grand Neoclassical residence of a solemnity seldom seen in the state. Friends of Gale reported that the writer hired an architect friend from New York to produce the design. Compared with the more rambling Colonial Revival-Style houses of similar scale built in Portage in the same era, the house is a testament to the urbanity of its architect and original owner. The formal exterior design conceals a freer, more open plan more typical of turn-of-the-century country houses. The plain oak door frames and moldings, open stair with included bench and closed, paneled balustrade, window seats and nooks, and unadorned screened porches suggest that a more rustic living space was desired. In his biography of Gale, author and friend August Derleth suggests that Gale arranged the interior to recall her own childhood memories; the dignified "colonial" exterior she meant to be a tribute to her Eastern-born parents.

Date Listed: October 24, 1980

Henry Merrell House

505 E. Cook Street
Portage, Wisconsin

The house was originally built for Henry Merrill (also spelled 'Merrell') in Fort Winnebago, Wisconsin, where it served as a residence and hotel, along with housing Merrill's mercantile business. Merrill the house moved to its current location in 1867.

The Henry Merrell House gains significance in the area of architecture. Representing the development of the Greek Revival style in the Portage area, the dwelling has significance at the local level. Elaborated with cornice moldings, frieze boards, cornice returns, gable motif, and sidelights and overlight surrounding the front door, the dwelling represents a simple interpretation of the Greek Revival style. Its period of significance is 1835 to 1839, its estimated building date. The building possesses significance because of its early building date, high level of physical integrity for a building dating to the late 1830s, and its fine representation of the Greek Revival style.

Date Listed: July 8, 1993



Old Indian Agency House

1490 Agency House Road
Portage, Wisconsin

The Indian Agency House was built in 1832 to house Indian sub-agent John H. Kinzie and his wife, Juliette. This sub-agency was established as a means of fulfilling the treaty of 1829 between the United States government and the indigenous Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) tribe. A lead mining boom had caused such an influx of settlers on Ho-Chunk lands that the government resolved to forcibly purchase the area from the tribe in order to squelch conflict and open up the land to further settlement and development. This resulting treaty promised the tribe a yearly annuity payment in silver along with blacksmithing services and goods in return for their land east and south of the Wisconsin River.



Located at the ancient trail between the legendary Fox and Wisconsin Rivers, this building survives as a poignant reminder of the juncture at which the Ho-Chunk Nation was forcibly expelled from their homeland. It was a time of intense political debate, social change, conflict, opportunity-seeking, moral testing, trauma, and new beginnings. A swift and stark transformation of the historical, cultural, and physical landscape ensued.

In 1931, a statewide coalition of civic-minded citizens saved the abandoned home in Portage, Wisconsin, restoring it and opening it as a museum in 1932. The home's worth lay not in architectural grandeur nor association with famous personages. Rather, its significance lay in the history forged within its walls during its early years as a frontier Indian agency—or embassy—between the Ho-Chunk Nation and the United States government at a critical period of Westward expansion and the development of Jacksonian Indian policy.

Date Listed: February 1, 1972

Portage Canal

Between the Fox River and the Wisconsin River
Portage, Wisconsin

The Portage Canal was built to connect the Fox River and Wisconsin River at Portage, Wisconsin, along the Fox-Wisconsin Waterway¹ For a time, it completed a route from the north Atlantic Ocean, through the St. Lawrence Seaway and down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico, and back to the Atlantic.



Numerous attempts were made to build the thin Fox-Wisconsin connection through the marshy land, beginning in 1837 with the formation of the Portage Canal Company. Digging and hauling by hand through two and a half miles of muddy terrain, the project was quickly abandoned. A second project, started in 1849, managed to cut a path usable by canoe, but not viable for commerce. The final project, complete with locks to raise the water level of the Fox River to that of the Wisconsin River, was not completed until 1876 by the Army Corps of Engineers. Unfortunately, by then, the railroads were quick on their way, followed soon thereafter by the automobile. The Portage Canal acquired a new steel gate and concrete lock in 1926 due to a rupture of the 1876 wooden gate and the quoin post of the west gate of the lock in April 1926. A local contractor, M.E. White Company of Chicago, was awarded the bid in August 1926. The firm completed the repairs of the lock and replaced the 1876 wooden gate under the supervision of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Milwaukee. The 1926 Portage Canal Lock was the first steel and concrete lock on the Fox River. The subcontractor for the steel gate was the Lakeside Bridge and Steel Company of Wisconsin. During the reconstruction process, the Engineers were faced with containing underground springs beneath the lock, which caused considerable delays. The White Construction Co. repaired the fallen wall and dismantled the remaining wall of the lock, which were re-laid and constructed according to the original configurations of the 1876 construction. The White Construction Company used 9,000 barrels of Portland cement to build the locks. The canal lock and new gate were completed in May 1928.

The use of the canal as a major means of commerce lasted only a few decades, though pleasure craft, including steamboats, continued to use the narrow waterway. In following years, the canal began to degrade through lack of upkeep. The canal was used until 1951 when the Fort Winnebago Lock was bulldozed in, and the Wisconsin River Locks were welded shut.

The canal has undergone a significant restoration project to clean up and restore the canal, revitalizing it as a community asset. Beginning in 2020 and continuing into 2021, the Wisconsin Dept of Natural Resources, in collaboration with the City of Portage, removed 30,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment from the canal, addressing the legacy contamination from years of heavy industrial use, primarily heavy metals. Additionally, 1.3 million gallons of contaminated water were treated, seven storm sewers were extended to maintain stormwater management, and 40,000 tons of material were placed to construct the base for the foundation of an Ice Age Trail addition.

Continued efforts are being made to restore the remainder of the canal to its original condition, and the Portage Canal Society is actively working to raise funds and make further improvements to the canal.

Listed Date: August 26, 1977

Church Hill Historic District

Bounded by Adams, Pleasant, Lock & Franklin Streets
Portage, Wisconsin

The Church Hill Historic District gains local significance in the area of architecture and social history. The district contains both representative and distinctive examples of the residential Gothic Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne, American Foursquare, Georgian Revival, and Colonial Revival architectural styles and ecclesiastical examples of the Romanesque Revival, Neo-Gothic Revival, Richardsonian Romanesque Revival, and Colonial Revival styles. The district also acquires significance in the area of social history because its five churches strongly contributed to the unification of the community. By associating members in many areas of the community, these churches socially crosscut the community. While the Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Christian Science Churches contained a diverse membership, the Lutheran and Evangelical churches served the German community. Because of the social importance of the religious denominations which these churches represent, they gain local significance. The period between 1855 and 1933 represents the beginning and end building dates of contributing buildings in the district: 214-218 W. Howard Street (the former Methodist Church) and 517 W. Wisconsin Street (the former Church of Christ Scientist).



Dated Listed: January 25, 1997

Industrial Waterfront Historic District

Junction of E. Mullet & Dodge Streets along Portage Canal
Portage, Wisconsin

The Portage Industrial Waterfront Historic District gains significance in the area of industry and architecture. The district illustrates the development of an industrial area of concentrated industrial and commercial buildings within a medium-sized Wisconsin city. It includes examples of a stylistic utilitarian industrial and commercial and a vernacular commercial retail building. The district acquires significance at the local level as an example of the growth of a community's industrial area. The period of significance and the significant dates span the period between 1862 and 1936.



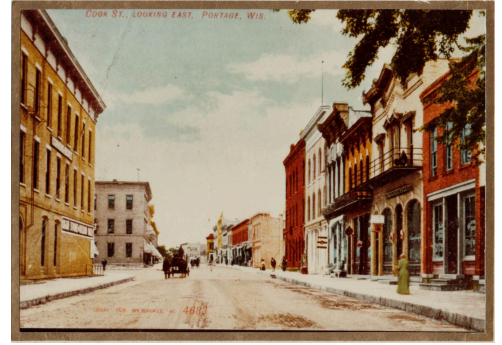
Date Listed: March 17, 1995

Portage Retail Historic District

Roughly, Cook Street from Wisconsin to Main Streets, Wisconsin Street to Cook Street.

Portage, Wisconsin

The Portage Retail Historic District gains significance in the areas of commerce, entertainment/recreation, and social history and in the area of architecture. The district illustrates the kinds of nineteenth and early twentieth century retail businesses, small industries, professions, and crafts which occupied Portage's main retail center. The rapid expansion and shift in emphasis of these types of enterprises indicate the ways in which the city's economy shifted to first take advantage of available opportunities such as the logging industry and then compensate for its loss. Its development also shows the tremendous impact of the arrival, expansion, and decline of the railroad industry on the city's economy. The halls above some of the retail buildings represent the importance of voluntary organizations within the community. These halls and the Portage Theater also illustrate ways in which the community of Portage informally associated itself for recreation under the context of entertainment/recreation. In the context of architecture, the Portage Retail Historic District preserves a concentration of Italianate commercial and vernacular commercial architecture in addition to the small number of Period Revival commercial and Art Deco style buildings. Of particular significance is the large number of 1860s and 1870s examples of the Commercial Italianate style buildings. Because the Portage Retail Historic District illustrates a typical Wisconsin late nineteenth and early twentieth century retail district, it gains significance at the local level. The period of significance between 1855 and 1934 represents the beginning and end building dates of the contributing buildings in the district.



Date Listed: April 27, 1995

Society Hill Historic District

Roughly bounded by West Wisconsin, Cass, and W. Emmett Streets. Portage, Wisconsin

This 137 building district is bounded, in part, by Emmett, Cass, Wisconsin and MacFarlane streets. Most of the houses were constructed between 1870 and 1910, and are in the Italianate and Queen Anne architectural styles.

Society Hill reflects the wealth and prestige of Portage's early prominent families who lived here because of its convenience to the downtown and the railroad. Located just south of the large Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad complex, the district housed many skilled railroad workers. The district contains the homes of two Pulitzer Prize winners - Zona Gale and Frederick Jackson Turner.



Date Listed: March 5, 1992
