

# City of Portage Municipal Historic Register

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## **FORT WINNEBAGO SURGEONS QUARTERS**

W8687 State Highway 33  
Portage, Wisconsin 53901

Tax Parcel: 4009  
Date listed on Municipal Register: 7/20/2010

Fort Winnebago Surgeons Quarters is a nationally-registered historic site and museum located in Portage, Wisconsin, and owned and operated by the Wisconsin Society Daughters of the American Revolution. The site features two historic buildings: the Surgeons Quarters (where the U.S. Army Surgeons of Fort Winnebago resided from 1834 to 1854) and the Garrison School (a one-room schoolhouse that served the local population from 1850 to 1960). Each is stocked with early 19th century artifacts and documents, including medical equipment, books, furniture, blacksmith items, clocks, crockery, glassware, children's toys, and more. Open for tours May through October each year.



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## **MUSEUM AT THE PORTAGE**

804 MacFarlane Road  
Portage, Wisconsin 53901

Tax Parcel: 1512  
Date listed on Municipal Register: 3/19/2013

The Museum at the Portage is housed in the Georgian Revival-style home author Zona Gale shared with her husband, William Breese. Upon her death in 1938, her husband deeded the building to the City of Portage as a memorial to his wife. The city converted the building to a public library, a function it served until 1995 when a new larger library was built. Zona's former home now serves as the Museum at the Portage, and visitors are able to step into Zona's study where she wrote many of her books and short stories. The woodwork in the study is exquisite and it's easy to imagine the author at her desk. Other unique features of the building include leaded glass windows, a sunken sun porch with mosaic fountain, a hidden bathroom in Zona's study, barrel ceiling in the upstairs bathroom, and well-maintained rose garden. Open to public May through October each year.



## **GRANDSTAND AT COLUMBIA COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS**

405 Superior Street  
Portage, Wisconsin 53901

Tax Parcel: 0141  
Date listed on Municipal Register: 1/21/2014



The City of Portage purchased a 40 acre tract in the 1st Ward of Portage between Thompson, Griffith and Superior Streets and Wauona Trail and presented the lands to the fair board or its successor under an indefinite lease. The County Agricultural Society constructed a wooden grandstand in 1887 and replaced it in 1898-1899.

Although the City of Portage tabled a resolution to buy the grandstand and educational building at the county fairgrounds, it did approve a federally supported, Depression Era project to improve the adjacent 20-acre athletic field on May 8, 1934. Work did not begin until the spring of 1935.

In the fall of 1935, Works Progress Administration (WPA) supplied the City of Portage with 70% of the funding to complete projects at the fairgrounds. Project 6.31 involved remodeling the county fair buildings and improving the grounds in the athletic field. John Allmendinger was selected as the superintendent in charge of the WPA projects at the fairgrounds. He was responsible to a committee chaired by Alderman Van Epps who in turn was responsible to a WPA district director in Madison. The city acquired this funding to pay wages to workers completing the project and to buy necessary materials. The project costs totaled \$30,000. In September 1935, work on the fairgrounds employed 32 men. Eventually, the project employed 390 men over a period of four months. Prior to construction, WPA laborers demolished the former wood grandstand. New construction included a poured concrete, Art Deco grandstand, additional frame buildings, a new lighting system, and landscaping. The grandstand accommodated 1,500 spectators. Underneath and at the west elevation of the structure were housed the concession stands. New construction also included two locker buildings and completion of the board fence along Wauona Trail. These projects concluded in March 1936. Improvement of the athletic field in 1936 involved landscaping and grading for the three tennis courts, three softball diamonds, a baseball diamond, a football field, and a track. This portion of the project reached completion in August 1936.

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## **SUNSET PARK TENNIS COURT**

1200 Block of Prospect Avenue  
Portage, Wisconsin 53901

Tax Parcel: 2063  
Date listed on Municipal Register: 2/1/2017



Walker was born on March 21, 1899, in Columbus, Wisconsin. In 1921, she was the only female to graduate in her class from the University of Wisconsin Law School. Upon being admitted to practice law in Wisconsin in February 1922, Walker began working at the Portage law firm of Grady & Farnsworth, where she became a partner before long. At the age of 23, she was elected the District Attorney of Columbia County - the first woman in Wisconsin to hold such a position.

After serving part-time as district attorney for two terms, Walker devoted herself full-time to private practice, and in 1938 she opened her own firm. She earned a reputation in the legal community for the care with which she prepared cases on behalf of her clients. She served on the Special Committee on Women Lawyers and assisted, along with 100 other women, in planning Wisconsin's Centennial Celebration. In 1974, Walker became the first woman to receive the Distinguished Alumni Faculty Award from the University of Wisconsin Law School Alumni Association. She continued practicing law right up until her death at age 84. Walker donated her tennis courts near her home to the City of Portage to be included in Sunset Park.

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## **DUBAY TRADING POST SITE**

1490 Agency House Road  
Portage, Wisconsin 53901

Tax Parcel: 2457 & 2460.01  
Date listed on Municipal Register: 5/2/2018



John Baptiste DuBay was born on July 10, 1810, in Green Bay, Illinois Territory, the son of a French trader and a Menominee Indian. At the age of 15, he started working for the sutler at Fort Detroit, and shortly thereafter began working for the American Fur Company in Saginaw. In 1840, he was appointed Indian agent at Fort Winnebago at the portage between the Fox and Wisconsin river valleys, and he operated a grocery there. DuBay's homestead in Knowlton was his primary home for the rest of his life, although he frequently traveled back to Fort Winnebago on business. During this period, aside from the trading post, DuBay engaged in several other enterprises, including running a stage line from Portage to Stevens Point. Despite being illiterate, DuBay knew four Indian languages, and at various points during this period he was employed in treaty negotiations, mostly in the employ of the government but sometimes by the Indians.

In 1857, while on business in Portage City (as Fort Winnebago became known as), DuBay shot a man in a property dispute. It was a high-profile and sensational murder case. The dispute involved the fact that the

American Fur Company had established quarters which DuBay assumed gave him preemption rights. However, preemption could not be granted to business entities, only to individuals, and separately the title was acquired by a Mr. Nelson McNeal, who sold the property to the company of Reynolds & Craig. On the night of August 15, DuBay and William Reynolds, one of the principals in Reynolds and Craig, had a confrontation. Accounts vary as to what happened next. The contemporaneous story in the *New York Tribune* (reprinting the Portage City Record) described it this way:

*DuBay was in town and was intoxicated, it is said. During the day, he told several people that "he would shoot a man before night" and "he would teach the boys a lesson" and other expressions.... DuBay returned from the city, saw the building, took his ax, and commenced chopping it down.... [I]ntelligence was carried to Mr. Reynolds of what was going on, who hastened to the spot and called DuBay a scoundrel. DuBay went into the house, brought out a double-barreled shot-gun ... pointed at Reynolds [and shot him] just below his heart, and killed him almost instantly.*

However, according to his obituary in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* in 1887:

*One day on his return from a hunting expedition with a party of Milwaukee men, he found the frame of a mill was already erected within his enclosure. After supper, he proceeded to cut it down, and a moment after it fell, a mob of 30 men, headed by Reynolds appeared with axes. [DuBay] stood in the door with a double-barreled shot-gun. He pushed Reynolds away several times, but he at last seized a weapon and at the point of striking, DuBay fired, killing him instantly.*

DuBay was arrested almost immediately by the sheriff, who then was confronted with an angry crowd who wanted to lynch DuBay. The sheriff and several other leading citizens were able to convince the crowd to let the law perform its justice, although according to the *Sentinel* account one of the citizens urging the immediate lynching was one "Judge Guppy."

The trial was moved to Madison, and DuBay was defended by the prominent lawyers Moses Strong and Harlow Orton. Three former Wisconsin governors — James Doty, Nelson Dewey and Henry Dodge — testified on his behalf,<sup>1</sup> and twice the jury could not agree on a conviction. A third retrial attempt was made but the proceedings were eventually dropped.

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