1. NAME

COMMON: Old Indian Agency House

AND/OR HISTORIC: Congressmen to be notified:

Sen. William Proxmire

Sen. Gaylord A. Nelson

Rep. Robert W. Kastenmeier

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: NE end of Old Agency House Road (Route 1) near NE corporate limits

CITY OR TOWN: Portage

STATE: Wisconsin

53901

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)

□ District

□ Site

□ Object

X Building

□ Structure

X Private

□ Public

□ Both

□ In Process

□ Being Considered

□ Public Acquisition:

□ Unoccupied

□ Unrestricted

□ Occupied

□ Restricted

□ Preservation work in progress

STATUS

ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC

□ Yes:

□ No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

□ Agricultural

□ Commercial

□ Educational

□ Entertainment

□ Government

□ Industrial

□ Military

□ Religious

□ Museum

□ Private Residence

□ Scientific

□ Park

□ Other (Specify)

□ Transportation

□ Comments

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Wisconsin

2742 North Shepard Avenue

Milwaukee

Wisconsin 53211

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:

Columbia County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Portage

STATE: Wisconsin

53901

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE OF SURVEY: 1941

□ Federal

X State

□ County

□ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: District of Columbia

53901

55

021
7. DESCRIPTION

The Agency House, built in 1832, is a handsome structure of "Federal style showing New England Colonial influence." Newcomb describes it as "a forthright, two-story mass, with a two column porch over the door and a story-and-a-half wing at the rear. A recessed porch lets in at one side of this wing. The eaves are close-cropped, and the windows of twelve-pane sash are protected by (louvered) shutters. The framework is of heavy timbers, and the walls have an in-filling of brick, burned near by. Over this, white-painted clapboards were laid, to make a warm house. Hand-split lath were used, and these were covered with plaster made from clamshell lime."^2

The pitch of the roof is shallow and a single massive square brick chimney rises through the ridge at the center. The porch at the front gable end is pedimented and the siding in the tympanum is flush. A similar porch is located at the right rear entrance. There is another large chimney at the gable end of the wing.

Indian Agent John H. Kinzie wrote of his house,... "The house is well built—the work inside is plain and substantial, and very convenient for a family. There, on the ground floor, one room 19 x 19 ft; one 14 x 19; one 10 x 14 and a small Hall. On the upper floor there is a one room 19 x 19 ft; one 14 x 19 ft.; two 10 x 10 and a small hall. The buildings are on Indian land, and well situated for an Indian Agency."^3

A well-built house originally, the structure is a well-preserved survival which was purchased in 1930 by the National Society of the Colonial Dames in the State of Wisconsin and restored with the highest fidelity in 1931-32. It has since been operated as a museum and beginning in 1962, furnishings that dated later than 1833, when the Kinzies left, were removed and replaced with authentic period pieces so that it now represents the American Empire Period and is confined to that period only, its coverage ending before the arrival of machine-made articles of the 1840's and the beginning of the Victorian era.

1. Perrin, Historic Wisconsin Architecture, 21
2. Newcomb, Architecture of the Old Northwest Territory, 127-128
3. Quoted in Kellogg; "The Agency House at Fort Winnebago," 444
6. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Pre-Columbian  ☐ 16th Century  ☐ 18th Century  ☐ 20th Century
☐ 15th Century  ☐ 17th Century  ☐ 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1832

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Aboriginal  ☐ Education  ☐ Political  ☐ Urban Planning
☐ Prehistoric  ☐ Engineering  ☐ Religion/Philosophy  ☐ Other (Specify)
☐ Historic  ☐ Industry  ☐ Science  ☐ khoản:
☐ Agriculture  ☐ Invention  ☐ Sculpture  ☐ Architecture
☐ Art  ☐ Landscape  ☐ Social/Humanitarian  ☐ Literature
☐ Commerce  ☐ Architecture  ☐ Music  ☐ Transportation
☐ Communications  ☐ Military  ☐ Theater
☐ Conservation

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Old Indian Agency House is significant as one of Wisconsin's oldest and finest survivals of frame houses and is an especially fine specimen considering its having been built on the frontier under adverse conditions. The designer is unknown but it seems probable that John H. Kinzie, the Indian Agent for whom it was built, had much to do with it, perhaps with the aid of West Point graduates garrisoned at Fort Winnebago whose education had included drafting and possibly some training in architecture. Kinzie personally oversaw and kept very detailed records of the construction and costs as well as obtaining "mechanics"—carpenters and stonemasons—largely from St. Louis, and probably with the help of influential fur traders like Joseph Rolette and Hercules Dousman. The house was built at a time when the Black Hawk War made Fort Winnebago soldiers unavailable for such work.

Since good lumber was scarce in the area, much had to be brought to Fort Winnebago from Green Bay and the rest from a rapids about 70 or 80 miles up the Wisconsin River. Brick was made and stone quarried near the site of present-day Portage some 2 1/2 miles away, and the lime came from Pierre Pau-quette's farm about 12 miles northeast of the fort. All of this, of course, made the cost of the completed house high, amounting to almost exactly $3500—about twice the cost of a similar house had it been built in the east at that time. Nevertheless Governor Porter of Michigan Territory commended Kinzie for his judgment and economy in building such a house at the least possible cost to the government under the circumstances.

John H. Kinzie, who was born in Canada in 1803 and spent his youth in Chicago and Detroit, began his career in the fur trade on Mackinac Island in 1818 and later gained important experience at Fort Dearborn. He became an accomplished linguist and was one of the few white men ever to master the Winnebago language. He spoke other Indian tongues as well. In 1829, after serving as private secretary to Governor Lewis Cass of Michigan Territory, Kinzie was appointed Indian subagent at Fort Winnebago. He married Juliette Magill in Connecticut in 1830 and they moved to Fort Winnebago in September of the same year. Kinzie, a just and honorable man, was highly successful as an Indian agent and commanded the respect and trust of the Winnebago. His wife, a woman of culture, was equally popular with them. After living for a while within the fort, the Kinzies moved into the old log agency house for a time, often with more than their share of discomforts. Kinzie had earlier requested funds for a new agency house and approval came in 1831. Plans were drawn that fall and winter and the newly completed house was ready for occupancy in late 1832.
9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1.4

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Donald N. Anderson, Assistant Director, Historic Sites & Markers Division
ORGANIZATION: State Historical Society of Wisconsin
STREET AND NUMBER: 816 State Street
CITY OR TOWN: Madison

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is: National [ ], State [ ], Local [X].

Name: James Morton Smith
Title: Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Date: June 15, 1971

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

DATE: FEB 1 1972

DATE: JUNE 14, 1972
OLD INDIAN AGENCY HOUSE

8.

The Kinzies lived in their fine new house a scant eight months, having decided to go to Chicago in July 1833 both because the government refused to raise the sub-Agency to a full Agency or to increase Kinzie's pay, and because Kinzie felt that Chicago offered good opportunities in other pursuits. This happened at a time when there were more Indians than ever to care for and, accordingly, increased responsibilities for Kinzie.

Kinzie enjoyed success in numerous ventures, many of which were involved with governmental duties, and he became a paymaster during the Civil War. His wife Juliette, a gifted and skilled writer, wrote several books, both fiction and non-fiction, about life on the frontier based on her experiences at Fort Winnebago, Fort Dearborn and other places in the Northwest. Her most famous book, Wau-Bun, the "Early Days" in the Northwest, a true chronicle of their frontier life, was first published in 1856, has undergone numerous reprintings, and remains a popular seller yet today.

Five years after leaving the Agency House, Kinzie returned at the request of his former Winnebago charges who, having been induced in 1837 to sell the government all of their lands east of the Mississippi and to promise to vacate them within the ensuing five years, asked that their former "Father" come to make their annual payment at Fort Winnebago in 1838. He did so and advised them to leave in peace. Their removal was completed in 1840.4

Both John and Juliette Kinzie, though they had spent less than three years at Fort Winnebago, occupy an important and permanent place in Wisconsin history. The Old Indian Agency House which they built and lived in is one of the state's most significant landmarks.

2. Ibid., 441
3. Ibid., 443-44
4. Ibid., 447-8
Old Indian Agency House viewed from south.
Photo by P. Richard Bells, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. c. 1970

NFS Number 2-1-72
Title: Old Indian Agency House
Loc.: Columbia, Wisconsin
Viewed from south

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
**1. NAME**

Common: Old Indian Agency House

**2. LOCATION**

Street and Number: NE end of Old Agency House Road (Route 1) near NE corporate limits

City or Town: Portage

State: Wisconsin

**3. MAP REFERENCE**

Source: U.S.G.S. 15' Quadrangle: Portage, Wis.

Scale: 1:62500

Date: 1962

**4. REQUIREMENTS**

To be included on all maps:
1. Property boundaries where required
2. North arrow.
3. Latitude and longitude reference.
### 1. NAME

**COMMON:** Old Indian Agency House  
**AND/OR HISTORIC:**

### 2. LOCATION

**STREET AND NUMBER:** NE end of Old Agency House Road (Route 1) near NE corporate limits  
**CITY OR TOWN:** Portage  
**STATE:** Wisconsin  
**CODE:** 53  
**COUNTY:** Columbia  
**CODE:** 021

### 3. MAP REFERENCE

**SOURCE:** Wis. Dept. of Transportation, Div. of Highways, City of Portage map  
**SCALE:** 1:12370  
**DATE:** 1966 corrected to 1/1/1970

### 4. REQUIREMENTS

**TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS**

1. Property boundaries where required.  
2. North arrow.  
3. Latitude and longitude reference.
## ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

### STATE WISCONSIN

**Date Entered** FEB 1 1972

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### Also Notified

- Hon. William Proxmire
- Hon. Gaylord Nelson
- Hon. Vernon W. Thomson
- Hon. John W. Byrnes
- Hon. Les Aspin
- Hon. Robert W. Kastenmeier

- State Liaison Officer
- Mr. James Morton Smith
- Director
- State Historical Society of Wisconsin
- 816 State Street
- Madison, Wisconsin 53705

**Director, Northeast Region** HR, **NRowland:mm** 1/27/72