

The Grignon Elms

Kaukauna

The stately elms planted around the Grignon mansion in Kaukauna in Outagamie County were, until they fell victim to Dutch elm disease, majestic symbols of one of Wisconsin's earliest and most important families.

The 12-room, three-story house, open to visitors now, was built in the woods about 1837 by Charles A. Grignon, and provided a home for his descendants for almost 100 years. Until the 1970s, many of the elms planted by Charles A. were still standing. The largest one had a crown spread of 140 feet and a circumference of 21 feet 8 inches when it was removed in 1973, another casualty of Dutch elm disease.

Charles A. was the grandson of Pierre Grignon who established Wisconsin's first trading post on the site in 1760. Descended from French nobility, Pierre

married Domitille de Langlade in Green Bay in 1773. Domitille was the daughter of Charles de Langlade, one of the founders of that first permanent white settlement in Wisconsin. Twenty years after the wedding, Pierre's trading post site in Kaukauna was purchased by Dominique Ducharme from the Native Americans for two barrels of rum. The deed legalizing this sale is the oldest such document in the state.

The property, with the Ducharme log home on it, later returned to Grignon hands when Ducharme sold it to Augustin, son of Pierre and Domitille. When it passed to Augustin's son, Charles A., he constructed the elegant Colonial mansion and planted the elms.

The last of the Grignon family, Mrs. Ross Grignon, moved out of the home in 1935, when the old elms were still casting their shade over the spacious grounds along the banks of the Fox River. The property became a historic site shortly afterwards.

Source: Victor Luedtke, Kaukauna



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Wisconsin Historical Society, WHi(X3)1947 (c. 1950)

Excerpted from ***Every Root an Anchor: Wisconsin's Famous and Historic Trees*** by R. Bruce Allison
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