

The Indian Game Trees

Winnebago County

Coffee trees in Wisconsin? A grove of Kentucky coffee trees on the farm of Minor Harris on the north shore of Rush Lake, Nepsuskun Township, in Winnebago County began growing over 100 years ago. How did these trees, which are native to the southern states, find their way to Wisconsin?

Indians. It would appear that the Native Americans who passed through the area brought coffee tree pods with them, and the result is a natural Kentucky coffee tree plantation containing nearly 50 individuals.

Why were the Indians carrying around coffee tree pods? Because they used them as dice in a gambling game. The seeds probably came from players who camped on the banks of Rush Lake. The seed pods are six to eight inches long and contain large seeds about the size of shelled hazelnuts, only flatter.

The man on whose land the coffee trees are growing never knew what they were until two horticulturists told him. He had been wondering for over 50 years. There are larger individual specimens of Kentucky coffee trees growing in Wisconsin. But the Harris farm boasts the only plantation in the entire state.