



One of first dwellings in Mequon built on one-time Indian trail

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Mequon - A little-noticed, pale yellow house on Cedarburg Road soon will be at center stage and remind Mequon citizens that New England Yankees settled in their community before Old World Germans did.

The Mequon Historical Society has spent the last 10 years and more than \$75,000 restoring the Isham Day House, more commonly known as the Yankee settler's cottage, at 11312 N. Cedarburg Road.

This fall, the Day House is expected to be named to the National Register of Historic Places, primarily because it is the oldest building in Ozaukee County and is considered the best representative example of pioneer life here.

Day is believed to have come to what was the Michigan Territory from Ohio or Pennsylvania about 1835 after the Blackhawk War of 1832, according to research done by Don Silldorff, executive director of the Mequon Historical Society.

Day was a squatter and was not able to buy the land from the federal government.

He completed the house, one of the first dwellings in Mequon, in 1839. But a New Yorker, George B. Warren, is thought to have paid Day for his land claim and the house, Silldorff believes.

The building was constructed alongside an old American Indian trail that extended from Hudson Bay to Florida, Silldorff said.

The Yankee predominance in southeastern Wisconsin was short-lived, and yet they left their mark on many institutions, such as Mequon town government, schools, businesses and the post office, Silldorff wrote.

From 1836 to 1850, the population of the Michigan Territory, which included what was to become the state of Wisconsin in 1848, dramatically increased from 11,683 people to 305,390. Many of the earliest settlers were Yankees. But an influx of Canadians, English, Swiss, Irish, Welsh, Dutch, Germans and Norwegians immigrated to Wisconsin in the 1840s.

Many of the early Yankees left the area to pursue wheat farming farther to the West.

But this early Yankee house remains and may represent a bridge between the early Yankees and the Germans who arrived before and after the Civil War.

On June 16, members of the governor's Historic Preservation Review Board plan to tour the house and will try to assess the origin of the house's architecture, professor Tom Hubka said. He teaches in the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's School of Architecture and Urban Planning and specializes in New England architecture from the 18th and 19th centuries.

"This building poses some special problems," Hubka said, because it has some elements that were not common in New England at the time.

For example, Hubka said, the building has a basement kitchen, and that was unusual for New England dwellings back then.

"People can build new things," he said, when they move from one part of the country to the other. "Although, it is unusual."

The house also used a half-timber type of construction, but the design was different from buildings put up by German immigrants later, according to Silldorff. German half-timber framing usually was done in a grid pattern with corner bracing of diagonal timbers.

The Day House, however, has no grid pattern, but it has some corner bracing. It is framed with narrow, sawed timbers and filled in with fired red bricks.

Silldorff said he believed that Day used sawed timbers from a nearby saw mill, located on Pigeon Creek, and Day may have gotten the bricks from the mill as well.

On Aug. 26, the Mequon Historical Society plans to offer tours of the Day House. The house will be open to other tours by appointment. The society's telephone number is (262) 242-3290.

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