James Reed was the first permanent non-native settler of Trempealeau, building a two-story log home there with the help of Peter Rousseau in 1850. He farmed in Trempealeau and later Little Tamarack. Although historical accounts of his birth range from 1795 to 1798, census records indicate that the 1795 date is probably the correct one. Like most children of the frontier era, Reed did not receive a formal education, but he could read and write, and he was adept in the school of wilderness survival, knowing how to skin an animal, potch his saddle, and fashion around his waist a belt, and a rifle across the pomell of his saddle.

James Reed was discharged at Fort Crawford on November 22, 1819.

The monument depicts Reed dressed in Native American attire with a blanket over his shoulders and a rifle across the pommel of his saddle.

Located in Trempealeau’s historic downtown district on Reed’s original (1850) 66-acre plot at the approximate location of his original trading post, inn, and home.

BORN A FRONTIERSMAN
James Allen Reed was born in Kentucky to Scotch-Irish pioneers. Reed demonstrated a passion for business. After his service in the War of 1812, Reed operated a variety of businesses throughout his lifetime. While in Prairie Du Chien, Reed worked as a tavern keeper, built homes and was both a trader and dissembler for the American Fur Company.

While in Winona, he was a government farmer, trading with the Wabashaw tribe and helping them learn new farming techniques. Reed also ran a trading post and a hotel named “The Inn.” Reed’s home in Trempealeau was also operated as an inn.

REED’S HOME IN TREMPEALEAU
In 1842, Reed built a log house and moved his family to the banks of the Mississippi, in what became known as James Reed’s Landing and eventually Trempealeau. While living on this site Reed’s second wife, Agathe, died.

James Allen Reed
1795 – 1873
Frontiersman, Army Veteran, Diplomat, Businessman, and Settler
First Permanent Non-native settler of Trempealeau County and Founding Father of Winona

James Reed served as a government farmer until the signing of the Treaty of Ghent in 1815, ending with the signing of the Treaty Of Ghent. He entered the army as a private and was assigned to a Rifle Regiment. Reed’s familiarity with Native American customs enabled him to build relationships with local tribes. Reed was known as “Trapper Reed” throughout the upper Trempealeau Valley. At the time, the region supported abundant elk, deer, mink, marten, otter, raccoon and beaver and Reed caught all of them and when I reached the camp and exhibited my game, a howl of bloodshed, and after shaking hands with my Native American companions, I took my departure on my French train back to Prairie Du Chien.”

James Allen Reed - as recollected by Antoine Grignon From the Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (1914)

James Reed was buried in “Potters Field”, because in the frontier days there was no church or cemetery. The monument depicts Reed dressed in Native American attire with a blanket over his shoulders and a rifle across the pommel of his saddle.

Founding Father of Winona
The city of Winona was formally established in 1851, but nine years prior to 1842, James Reed established the first shop in what is now known as downtown Winona. The shop was located at Second and Center Streets, an 18′ X 24′ trading post, built with the help of Lafayete Basset. As an authorized and licensed agent of the United States Government, Reed traded with the Wabashaw tribe, which was located in the Winona area. When the Treaty of Mendota was signed in 1851, Wabasha’s tribe was relocated. Reed dismantled his store and moved his building down the river, to “Reed’s Landing,” now known as Trempealeau, where his family and home had been since 1840.

Hunting in Dodge
While living in the Little Tamarack, Reed had two hunting dogs which were his constant companions. One day while hunting near the present town of Dodge, they came upon a cougar and chased it into the bluffs, where it seized and dropped the dogs. Reed shot at it, but in his fear of wounding one of his hounds, he hesitated to shoot at it, for he was bound to help them; so, drawing his tomahawk he entered the fray, working his way into the fight. With a well-directed blow, Reed succeeded in killing the animal.

Nightfall in Arcadia
One nightfall while camping in Arcadia, Reed and his fellow companion hunters heard the sound of howling wolves. As the howling became louder and the hunters believed they were surrounded by wolves, Reed began to mistrust the origin of the sounds and called out loudly in the Winnebago language, “If you want our scalps, come and get them.” The howling instantly stopped.
James Allen Reed was a man of medium height and broad shoulders. He had light brown hair and grayish blue eyes. In disposition, he was a kind and genial man yet he was keenly aware of his surroundings and was adept at handling the precarious and mundane situations of his time. He had been such a man as the frontier demanded, while his firmness and fairness won for him the respect of those he encountered.

The notion of a monument for James Reed was first published in 1914 by Eben D. Pierce. The concept was revived with design, build, and placement planning and discussion work initiated by Ronald G. Wanek beginning in 2012. Wanek, a descendant of James Reed (and his first wife Margaret of the Ojibwa tribe), was inspired to move forward with this project due to the moving literature of Eben D. Pierce. His intention was to only build one monument and place it on Liberty Peak (in Perrot State Park) as Pierce suggested.

“Perhaps a future generation will build a monument to this romantic character. If so I hope it will be erected on old Liberty Peak, and will represent Reed mounted on his pony with his rifle across the pommel of his saddle, looking out upon the peaceful bosom of the Mississippi where scenes of his eventful life were enacted. Such a monument, expressive of the pioneer hunter and instinct with the spirit of a departed age, would fittingly grace the noble crest of Trempealeau’s venerable bluff.”

Eben D. Pierce
From the Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (1914)

As complications arose with the Liberty Peak location, it was eventually decided to place the monument in Trempealeau’s downtown district instead. Through these discussions it was also determined - due to Reed’s military background and strong ties to the area- that it would be ideal and fitting to place a second monument in Arcadia’s Memorial Park.

Ron Wanek, the founder and chairman of Ashley Furniture Industries, Inc., solicited help from several members of his design and engineering team to design the base and the monument. Duane Miller (artist) designed the statue. Miller also supervised its production along with Mike Dotta. Benjamin Golden (artist) designed the base, including the limestone material concept; and the surrounding walk and landscape elements. Mike Moran and Gary Bautch coordinated construction. Darrell Stahlecker from Biesanz Stone Company of Winona provided the limestone for the base. Wieser Brothers provided the crane lift. Wegman Construction performed the concrete work for the base and surrounding walk. Dave Hesch provided transportation and Lewiston Monument provided engraved informational stone.

The Monument was donated by Ronald G. Wanek (Great, Great, Great Great Grandson of James Allen Reed) and his family to the Village of Trempealeau in 2019.

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