Online History Series Offers Multi-Dimensional View of History
Probing the past enriches understanding

Exploring History in 3-D

History is not flat and stagnant. It has many facets that intersect to produce an increasingly comprehensive and fascinating picture when we pick it up, turn it around, and view it from all different angles. There is always more to learn and understand. Each year, we produce an online series that adds more color, depth, and life to the historical and cultural narrative. Throughout the year, each installment is posted on our Facebook page. All of the posts are also archived on the Online History section of our website: www.agencyhouse.org/explore-history

On Location: The 1832 Landscape

Beginning in January of 2022, we will take a look at the historic landscape which was the homeland of the Ho-Chunk Nation. The series will feature present-day footage from several locations related to the 1832 story of our Fort Winnebago Indian Agency. The series dovetails with our new outdoor exhibit, “A Landscape of Families,” to be dedicated next May.

History Rediscovered: Browsing the Archives

Our present (2021) series dusts off the HIAH archives and explores curiosities from old scrapbooks, unique documents, and more. Posts will continue to be added twice per month through December.

Vintage Viewpoints: Voices from the Past

The audio series developed in 2020 allows listeners to immerse themselves in the real conversations of the early 1800s via primary sources. The selections reflect varied perspectives on the complex and emotionally-charged issue of the forced removal of America’s Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands.

Artifact Ambassadors: An Online Exhibition

In 2019, artifacts from our collection acted as “ambassadors” in relaying the stories of their own time to us living today. Each artifact progressively contributed to the storyline from the pre-Columbian period all the way through the lives and work of the Kinzies in the 1830s.

1931 - 2021

The NSCDA-WI gathers for a luncheon at the Agency House in 1931. The house was in the process of being restored and would officially open as a museum in 1932.

Ninety years onward, the NSCDA-WI remains committed to the preservation of the historic site. (Sept. 2021 NSCDA-WI luncheon and volunteer appreciation day)

SUCCESS IS...
Making a difference

Doing more

“To do more for the world than the world does for you—that is success.” — Henry Ford

“When you learn, teach. When you get, give.” — Maya Angelou

These sentiments are at the heart of what we do. Our goal is for each person who visits our historic site to learn something they didn’t know before and to be impacted in some way by the lessons gleaned from the history presented here. Our hope is that each will take insights with them that will influence the quality and scope of their own involvement in their local communities.

www.agencyhouse.org/mission

A Nonprofit Museum

HIAH is a private 501(c)(3) nonprofit museum. We do not receive financial support from the state or county. Our ability to do what we do depends on the generosity of people who believe in the importance of our mission. Will you consider helping us with a tax-deductible financial gift? We strive to carefully steward every penny received.

www.agencyhouse.org/donate

Putting it in perspective

In 1931, a statewide coalition of civic-minded citizens saved an abandoned home in Portage, Wisconsin, restoring it as a museum. The home’s worth lay not in architectural grandeur nor association with famous personages. Rather, its significance lay in the history forged within its walls during its early years as a frontier Indian Agency—or embassy—between the Ho-Chunk Nation and the United States government at a critical period of Westward expansion and the development of Jacksonian Indian policy.

Located at the ancient trail between the legendary Fox and Wisconsin Rivers, this 1832 building survives as a poignant reminder of the juncture at which the Ho-Chunk Nation was forcibly removed from their homeland. It was a time of intense political debate, social change, conflict, opportunity-seeking, moral testing, trauma, and new beginnings. A swift and stark transformation of the historical, cultural, and physical landscape ensued.

For 90 seasons, tourists from across the nation and around the world have visited this nationally significant historic site. Our mission is to preserve, interpret, and educate about the history that happened here; to expand the site’s importance within the larger story of America; and to foster a multidimensional understanding of the period. Our shared history and diverse cultural heritage are vital to remember, preserve, and pass along generation after generation. Understanding how our past has affected the present helps us better shape the future.

We hope that this season of “Remembering” has been one of lasting impact among the many who traveled here and participated in our range of offerings. Thank you to all who made this 90th season possible. We are looking forward to rolling out some exciting and meaningful programming and exhibitions in 2022!

Respectfully,

Adam Novey
Executive Director and Curator

The Historic Indian Agency House, 1490 Agency House Road, Portage, WI 53901
608-742-6362 — www.agencyhouse.org — historicindianagencyhouse@gmail.com — Follow us on Facebook

Volunteer opportunity: Artisan Ambassadors

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15th annual Kiddie Christmas

Last year’s outdoor history treasure hunt was so popular, we’re doing it again with all new clues and treasures. Children ages 5 through 12, accompanied by a responsible adult, should bring a bag to collect their goodies. Drop in any time between 1 and 3 pm on December 11. The event is free.

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The Newsletter of the Historic Indian Agency House

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What we are learning
Archaeological discoveries add pieces to the puzzle

Around 200 participants and spectators converged at the Agency House over the course of this year’s two-weekend archaeological dig in July.

The season’s excavations produced some important clues. While all the test units yielded artifacts, one of the units showed evidence of a prolonged, intense fire which heavily burned and reddened a bed of sand into a hardened mass containing bits of white mortar and brick. This evidence, along with other artifacts in the area, indicates that this may be a kitchen hearth. No other type of fire would seem to be able to produce such a substantial feature which appears consistent with early descriptions of the clay chimneys built into the blacksmith’s house in the 1830s.

While we have not yet located the 1830s blacksmith shop, this evidence, pending analysis and another round of excavations which we hope to do next year, may indicate the rediscovery of the location of one of the other Agency buildings which has been missing from the landscape for more than a century and a half.

The range of artifacts discovered in the test units represented various time periods through the layers of soil, including white clay pipe stems, cut nails from the early 1800s as well as nails from a later period, 19th century window glass and other glass items, a variety of ceramics, stone artifacts, cut animal bones from someone’s dinner, a tiny doll’s arm, and more.

“Archaeology at the Agency” is a valuable opportunity for the public to personally contribute to the scientific quest to understand the historical development of the Agency and the land around it. Participants are given the opportunity to experience the work of professional archaeologists head-on.

Documentation, interpretation, preservation
Update on potential fort structure

In our July newsletter, we announced an unexpected rediscovery which may possibly have been a part of Fort Winnebago. The structural remains have been deemed by historic preservation specialists to be no longer structurally viable. The current owner is sympathetic to the history and hopes that portions may be preserved and shared in some way but does not have the capacity to do so himself.

Therefore, we have organized a volunteer group consisting of an archaeologist, a licensed architect, a local historian, the present owner of the structural remnants, and the director/curator of the Agency House. We are producing detailed documentation of what remains; interpreting it in light of historical records; and preserving examples of key architectural features to curate as an exhibit at the Agency House. More to come.

www.agencyhouse.org/fort

TAKING AN ECOLOGICAL LOOK

Conservation specialist Tony Abate led a fascinating and informative nature hike on our “Stories of the Land” trail in July.

SEPTMBER AT THE AGENCY

(Above) The Galena Living History Society highlighted ways in which frontier folks entertained themselves. (Below) Scouts BSA troops from Portage and Nekoosa earned the Historic Trails Award during “Campout & Cultures” weekend. Congratulations, and thank you for your hard work on trail restoration and chipotke repair. Thank you to Associated Bank for their sponsorship.

IMPARTING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE TO ANOTHER GENERATION

Many historical skills and techniques would be lost to time were it not for those who continue to practice and research them to this day. Enduring Skills Weekend allowed almost 200 participants of all ages to try their own hands at more than twenty different skills that have endured through the centuries or have been re-created through research and experimentation. By popular demand, we plan to bring the event back again next season with even more skills to try!

www.agencyhouse.org/enduring-skills

EXPERIMENTAL CANOE PROGRESSING

After several burns throughout the season, our fire-wrought dugout canoe is taking shape. The massive ash tree was harvested by volunteers early in the spring and hauled into place by Blystone’s Towing prior to the season. We have kept an online diary of our experiments and progress. Our final scheduled burn was in September, but we may have some extra “pop-up” burns this fall. Keep an eye on Facebook. We will continue to construct the canoe with traditional tools and methods next season and hopefully achieve a final result.

www.agencyhouse.org/dugout-canoe

JULY SPEAKER SERIES FOCUSED ON “WISCONSIN’S HISTORY KEEPERS”

Adrienne Thunder and Peter Shrike gave intriguing lectures on Ho-Chunk oral history and Milo Quaife. Rob Nurre presented an engaging first-person portrayal of Increase A. Lapham earlier in the season, and Adam Novey finished the series with a talk on Portage’s Frederick J. Turner.