



Matt Blessing slated to speak August 9

- Website:  
[www.agencyhouse.org](http://www.agencyhouse.org)
- Facebook:  
[www.facebook.com/historicindianagencyhouse/](http://www.facebook.com/historicindianagencyhouse/)
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- YouTube Channel:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZnvcuYoCCOMx1wLFQKOhfg/videos>



Volunteers lend a hand to prairie restoration

## Upcoming events abound with variety

**Speaker Series:** 2nd Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.

**July 10:** Tracey Lee Roberts—The Old Lead Mine District: A Flash Point on the Cultural Landscape

**August 9:** Matt Blessing—Reading the Landscape: Aldo Leopold’s Use of History

**September 13:** Patrick J. Jung — Eyewitnesses: Early Explorers of the Fox-Wisconsin Corridor

**Prairie Rebirth Guided Prairie Walk:** July 9, 10 am, w/ guide Tony Abate

**Enduring Skills Weekend:** July 30-31 [agencyhouse.org/enduring-skills](http://agencyhouse.org/enduring-skills) (also ice cream/lemonade fundraiser)

**Voyageur Canoe Excursions:** July 30 [agencyhouse.org/enduring-skills](http://agencyhouse.org/enduring-skills)

**Archaeological Dig & Blacksmithing Demonstrations:** Aug 6-7 & 13-14 [agencyhouse.org/archaeology](http://agencyhouse.org/archaeology)

**Living History:** Frontier Tavern September 17

**Scouts BSA “Camping & Cultures” Badge Weekend:** September 23-25

**Free Tour Day:** October 15

**“Reflections” Campfire:** November 5

**Kiddie Christmas:** December 10

## Interns passionate about public history

We are pleased to welcome two interns to our staff this year.

Chloe Foor (left) is majoring in history and computer science at UW-Madison.

“My eventual goal is to work in a museum or archive, and the experience I gain [from this internship] will prove invaluable to my dreams!”

Natalie Hamm is a May graduate from Coe College with degrees in history and Spanish. She aspires to further her education and experience in museum studies.

“I have a passion for sharing my knowledge of history with others and would love to continue pursuing the field of public history.”

Thank you to the NSCDA-WI for providing the scholarship funds that make these vital internship opportunities possible.



## Historic prairie rebirth in progress

When the Agency House was constructed in 1832, the area of the Fox-Wisconsin portage was part of a prairie landscape dotted with occasional stands of hardwoods. Several acres of the historic prairie still exist on our property, but invasive species have been aggressively encroaching upon it.

Over the winter, several hundred highly invasive black locust trees were cut down by volunteers and their stumps treated with herbicide to deter regrowth. Volunteers also raked roughly two acres of cleared land; cut up and burned enormous piles of branches; and helped spread prairie seed in the spring.

In the coming months, we hope to secure the equipment necessary to keep our reclaimed prairie area mowed in order to give the new prairie seedlings an opportunity to become established and compete with the non-native

species.

We also hope to implement prescribed burns in the near future to revitalize and strengthen the existing prairie ecosystem.

A prairie is being reborn — a vision of conservation legend Aldo Leopold who in 1942 reported on the great restoration potential of this property. Thank you to those who are making it possible, including our hard-working volunteers, as well as those who provided grant funding: the Alliant Energy Foundation and Sally and Michael Connelly.

Enjoy watching footage of the area’s dramatic transformation from black locust woods back to reclaimed prairie:

<https://youtu.be/YzZPO5G24Hg>



## Access & opportunity

Our “Access and Opportunity” initiative improves accessibility to our site’s educational programming and exhibitions. In 2018, the Edward C. Lenz and June M. Lenz Charitable Trust funded an ADA-compliant sidewalk, providing handicap access to our visitor center with its exhibits, meeting room, and gift shop.

In 2020, we installed equipment to enable those who cannot physically navigate some or all of the historic house to tour those areas by video from the visitor center.

This year, Lenz funding allowed us to replace the uneven boardwalk leading to the house and add small exits for better wheelchair access to the grounds. The two public doors of the visitor center now have ADA-friendly hardware, and the side door itself was replaced entirely to allow for ease of use. The outdoor exhibit area also has benches with a supplemental educational module. The trust further covered a Zoom subscription to provide live virtual tours to those who cannot visit the site in person.

Thank you to the Edward C. Lenz and June M. Lenz Charitable Trust for helping us in our efforts to provide access for all.

The Historic Indian Agency House

# Wau-Bun Express

Volume 22, Issue 2, July 2022

## Remnants of the 1832 landscape Ft. Winnebago exhibit makes its debut

*Rediscovering Fort Winnebago* is a brand new exhibit displaying some of the recently rediscovered remnants of an early 19th century Fort Winnebago officers’ quarters. Funding for this initiative was provided by the Community Foundation of South Central Wisconsin and Michael and Sally Connelly.

Vestiges of a building with an intriguing oral history identifying it as a structure from Fort Winnebago prompted a salvage and documentation effort at a Columbia County farm. Employing the methodologies of buildings archaeology, a physical and historical analysis of the remains was conducted to assess the veracity of the claim.

The oral tradition identifies the structure, which had been used as a barn since the latter half of the 19th century, as having been part of the fort complex. The building was said to have been hauled intact on 12” square by 70’ long timbers fitted on either wheels or sledge runners from Fort Winnebago prompted a salvage and documentation effort at a Columbia County farm. Employing the methodologies of buildings archaeology, a physical and historical analysis of the remains was conducted to assess the veracity of the claim.

When conducting research for a 1975 newspaper article about the barn, local historian Ina Curtis found that a vague oral tradition existed among older Portage residents regarding a fort building that had, indeed, been relocated intact. A 2008

PBS documentary on Portage history more widely relayed the local tale.

A few years later, the aging building was dismantled by a man who hauled the structural elements piece by piece with a horse-drawn trailer to his nearby farm with the intent of reconstructing and revitalizing the building as a hay barn for his property. However, the cost calculated for reinforcing the aging joinery and replacing the missing materials outweighed the benefit. The pieces remained sheltered on his property where they had been carefully staged for a decade. In 2021, researchers convened at the site to document, study, and preserve if possible that which remained.

While no direct written documentation exists which can fully trace the story of the building, the body of empirical and historical evidence largely validates the claims of the oral story.

First, the dating of the original hardware and construction methods — combined with information about the area’s

Please see **EXHIBIT**, page 3



## HIAH joins French Heritage Corridor

### New initiative highlights French history and heritage in upper Midwest

“The French Heritage Corridor was conceived and is led by the Chicago Chapter of the French Heritage Society,” explains historian Mary Elise Antoine, Wisconsin representative on the French Heritage Corridor leadership team. “The Corridor initiative has the support of H.E. Phillippe Entienne, Ambassador of France to the United States; the French Consulate of Chicago; and the Québec Delegation in Chicago. So the Corridor initiative is reaffirming cultural and economic ties between the Midwest, France, and Québec Province.”

According to the French Heritage Society, “The initiative comprises seven states [Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin which were once part of *la Nouvelle France*—New France]. While French history and heritage of eastern Canada and of Louisiana is typically well known and understood by the general public, the region comprising the French Heritage Corridor which lies between them is not as universally appreciated. [The initiative] is dedicated to developing synergy and raising the collective awareness about the rich French history and heritage that has, since the 17th century, melded with the vibrant multicultural landscape in what is today the Midwestern United States.”

One of the first steps in laying the groundwork for sustainable tourism, education, and other opportunities throughout the Corridor is the production of a web page portal with an interactive map and calendar of events. The Historic Indian Agency House is featured under the “Native American / French” category on this new site: [www.frenchheritagesociety.org/fhc/](http://www.frenchheritagesociety.org/fhc/)

In her memoir, *Wau-Bun*, Juliette Kinzie—wife of Indian sub-agent John H. Kinzie—colorfully describes the distinctive way of life of the French voyageurs and French-Indigenous métis at the portage in the early 19th century.

Join us on Saturday, July 30, for a taste of French heritage. At one of the Enduring skills stations, try canoe paddle shaving. Then take an exciting excursion in a French voyageur canoe on the Fox River adjacent to our property! Pick up a copy of *Wau-Bun* in our gift shop, too.

## CAP assessment valuable

The Historic Indian Agency House was awarded a CAP (Collections Assessment for Preservation) grant for a general conservation assessment which took place in March. Conservation assessors Danielle Euer and Craig Deller completed an extensive study of our collections, buildings, building systems, and collections care practices and produced a report with prioritized recommendations for caring for our historic site and its collection. We are so grateful for their guidance in preserving our history for future generations.

Photos (opposite and front page header): “A Landscape of Families” exhibit grand opening, May 14: [www.agencyhouse.org/landscape-of-families](http://www.agencyhouse.org/landscape-of-families)

## Enduring Skills Weekend — July 30-31 —



### Stations for adults & kids ..with even more skills to try!

Try your own hand at an exciting sampling of more than 20 historical skills. This year, we have several brand new stations for ages 5 to adult, including Native American-style flute making, canoe paddle shaving, ancient cordmarked pottery, and more. Bring your family and friends and make a whole weekend of it! FREE.



### Voyageur canoe excursions

Become a French voyageur as you paddle a voyageur canoe with reenactors on the legendary Fox River. Generous sponsors have already paid for your ticket (a \$20 per person value!). Reserve your seat ahead of time. Saturday only (11am | 1pm | 3pm excursions).

...ice cream & lemonade, too.

[www.agencyhouse.org/  
enduring-skills](http://www.agencyhouse.org/enduring-skills)

## EXHIBIT

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pattern of settlement and evidence of intensive reinforcement around the time of the purported relocation — confirms with little room for doubt that the structure was built earlier and relocated from elsewhere during the time span indicated by the oral story. While this evidence does not specify from whence the building originated, the only structures of this nature within a feasible radius at the apparent time of its construction were the timber frame structures of Fort Winnebago at the portage.

Second, the building is constructed using resources and methods which were premised on the availability of a large labor force that could provide for the transport of non-local materials and contribute the vast man hours required to fabricate a hand-hewn product. Fort Winnebago’s garrison offered both the manpower and engineering expertise to accomplish something of this nature.

Finally, with evidence confirming a number of fort structures available for relocation around the time of the presumed move, direct comparisons may be drawn to two specific officers’ quarters within the fort complex. These quarters are known from documentary evidence to have the same dimensional footprint; utilize the same materials and processing methods; and boast the same hardware and joinery as the structure being studied. Hints of prior use match a number of particulars of the officers’ quarters right down to sundry details where evidence still exists.

While the limited body of surviving evidence cannot empirically resolve every question, the direct and contextual evidence largely affirms the oral tradition. Considered alongside the plans and letters left behind by Jefferson Davis, as well as accounts of settlers and travelers through the area, the dimensions and construction techniques evidenced by this building have no parallels outside of a Fort Winnebago provenance. An application of the process of buildings archaeology and historical research supports the conclusion that a Fort Winnebago officers’ quarters has eluded the public eye for nearly 200 years, surviving into modern times.

The new exhibit may be viewed admission-free during the Agency House’s regular seasonal hours. [www.agencyhouse.org/fort](http://www.agencyhouse.org/fort)



### August 6-7 and 13-14 Dig with archaeologists

You and your family are invited to work alongside professional archaeologists and contribute to an important scientific and historical endeavor. The search continues for the 1830s blacksmith house and shop on the Agency House property.

Thank you to General Engineering Company who is for a third year generously sponsoring this event, as well as to the H.L. Palmer Masonic Angel Fund for its additional support.

We recommend pre-registering for your dig times as time slots fill up quickly.

[www.agencyhouse.org/  
archaeology](http://www.agencyhouse.org/archaeology)

