



The Wisconsin Dells Singers & Dance Troupe of the Ho-Chunk Nation performed June 28.

Sauk County / HIAH to Present at WHS Conference

Paul Wolter, Executive Director of the Sauk County Historical Society, and Adam Novey, Executive Director of the Historic Indian Agency House, are scheduled to lead a breakout session at the Wisconsin Historical Society Local History & Historic Preservation Conference on Friday, October 18, at the Ho-Chunk Gaming & Conference Center in Baraboo.

Titled "Outdoor Interpretive Signs: Concept to Completion," the session will focus on the unique roles outdoor exhibits can play. Attendees will investigate the nuts-and-bolts of producing and utilizing this impactful tool to expand outreach. Tips and tricks related to the various facets involved from start to finish will be shared using real-life examples and experiences from the two organizations.



UW-Madison lecturer Thomas A. Rider speaks at our Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon in June.

** Thank You **

Alliant Energy Foundation
Chipstone Foundation
Cissy VD Bryson Fund at the
Greater Milwaukee Found.
C.D. Besadny Conservation Fund
Community Foundation of South
Central Wisconsin
Dennis Grady
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Kohler Foundation
Portage Tourism/City of Portage
Terrytown Plumbing
The Myrtle Fund at Vanguard
Charitable
USFWS "Partners" Program
Wisconsin Humanities

Remembering: Cissy Van Dyke
Scannell Bryson; Robert
Goodman; Marilyn Grady;
David Hestad; Jordan Mueller;
Carole Nye; Pierre Pauquette
and Family; Edward (Ted)
Rebholz; Polly Stone; George
and Lydia Vierheilig

Honoring: Mr. & Mrs. William S.
Carpenter, HIAH Volunteers,
A. Novey



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Agency House-specific material culture research project underway



An accumulation of physical objects is a byproduct of human existence: fixtures to sit on and sleep in; vessels to store, organize, and preserve in; equipment to cook and eat with; tools to make and repair a variety of objects; and countless other sundry items associated with every-

day living. A person's accumulation of such "stuff" can be influenced by their geographic location, their personal preferences, their role in society, and overall cultural factors. It is fascinating to think about what we personally have and *why*. A person's belongings can say something about the individual. It's difficult to even picture a living environment apart from the objects that furnish it. This is why historic sites use antique objects to recreate the setting in which persons of historic significance lived.

Some rare historic sites are literal time capsules in which the historic figure's belongings are all still present and intact, just as they owned them. But what about cases where those materials aren't surviving? The bulk of the possessions of John and Juliette Kinzie, who lived at our site during its period as an Indian sub-agency, burned in the great Chicago fire of 1871. Only a few individual artifacts, such as the strong box pictured above, survive. In circumstances such as ours, how can a household's assemblage of material culture be recreated? That is a question which our site has faced and researched over the past 90+ years, and one which we are excited to investigate with fresh eyes and meticulous techniques this year.

In autumn of 1932, the Historic Indian Agency House had just been restored to its 1832 appearance and opened as a museum by the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of WI (NSCDA-WI). During the repairs to the physical shell of the structure, the "stuff" factor had not been overlooked. Old furniture, tools, and belongings came flooding in to make the house once again into a furnished home. The home's interpretation at that time focused heavily on the story of Wisconsin's settlement and pioneer generation. The objects which were collected reflected that focus

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Fall campfire series to feature fascinating stories

We are eagerly anticipating the debut of our fall campfire series, which is free for the whole family. Mark your calendars for these three dates which feature storytellers that both adults and children can equally enjoy. Bundle up and hear stories around a warm, crackling campfire just like people did in the "old days." Our presenters are looking forward to spending time with you!



Saturday, Sept. 13 @ 6:30

Juliette Kinzie lived at the Indian Agency here in Portage in the early 1830s. Join Kathe Crowley Conn around the campfire to hear her tell Juliette's fascinating firsthand stories about what it was like to live in this place in 1832.



Saturday, Oct. 4 @ 6:00

French voyageurs were a unique lot with their own captivating hearth & home customs. Hear "Jacques Largillier" (Glenn Gorsuch) tell in first-person what voyageur life was like.



Saturday, Nov. 8 @ 5:00

Hear accomplished storyteller Andi Cloud (Niizuwii, "Rain Woman") tell traditional Ho-Chunk tales. Winter storytelling has been part of Ho-Chunk life rhythms for centuries, and the stories themselves have something to say about life.

Collections

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with some coming from descendants of early settlers and others collected to recreate the days of old in general. This emptying of attics produced an eclectic assemblage of old objects of varying periods and styles which nevertheless fit the part nicely for the time being. Over time, however, an emerging field of early American material culture scholarship strove to understand the nature and nuances of the young nation's material culture. This field of research intersected with furnishing efforts at the Agency House in a big way during the 1960s.

The primary inspiration for change can be traced to 1962 when Polly Stone, a second generation Colonial Dame, became a member of the NSCDA-WI's museum furnishing committee. Stone brought with her a fascination for antiques and a vision for museum curation with expertise in the

field of decorative arts collecting to back it up. When Stone was appointed to the furnishings committee, she believed that historic furnishings were the key substance in what she termed "three-dimensional history." If the furnishings were inaccurate (for example when Victorian-era furnishings ended up in an early-1830s house), the museum experience suffered.

Between 1962 and 1963, Stone assembled a team of researchers from within the Dames' membership with the goal of refining the Agency House's furnishings to exclusively reflect objects from prior to 1833. While the "de-Victorianizing" project was taking place at a time when knowledge of historical decorative arts had burgeoned, that knowledge was only yet available to those willing to spend long hours researching.

By 1965, Stone announced that the furnishings which were too early or too late for the house's cutoff date had been re-homed. Refurnishing in keeping with the time period was underway. This process was aided by the assistance of professionals from the nation's leading museums, including Colonial Williamsburg and Henry Ford's Greenfield Village. An abundance of artifacts were donated by members of the furnishings



Visitors create black ash baskets with renowned Ho-Chunk basket maker Kim Crowley at Ho-Chunk Cultural Arts Day

committee and community. Once the key pieces were put in place, Stone extended her artifact search to not only furnish an era, but also to realistically support some particular stories from *Wau-Bun* – a memoir written by Juliette Kinzie (wife of Indian sub-agent John H. Kinzie) about their experiences here in the early 1830s. Thus, the Agency House entered the 1970s back at the head of the pack in terms of furnishings and immersive museum philosophy.

Period accuracy had been addressed in a big way, but there remained an additional factor in the quest to make the historic home a reflection of the people who once lived within. Thinking back to the basics, we know that a person's individual tastes, cultural background, social status, and geo-



Discover Wisconsin films at HIAH archaeology dig
Discover Wisconsin host Apurba Banerjee and crew joined us to experience our public archaeology program on June 15. Portage is one of four communities featured in an upcoming episode highlighting the Ice Age Trail.

Meet our intern

Sitara Ihlenfeld Paulson is our 2025 season intern. Sitara, who is from Madison, is majoring in history and minoring in politics at Lake Forest College in Lake Forest, Illinois.

Ms. Paulson has always been interested in public history, so this opportunity greatly appealed to her. We are happy to have her on board for the summer!



Natalie Hamm on Agency House 2025 staff

Natalie Hamm (2022-24 intern) isn't a new face around here, but what is new is her position during this season as an Education and Collections Specialist. Natalie has degrees in history and Spanish, along with a vibrant skillset.

This important opportunity has been made possible in part by the partnership of the Chipstone Foundation.



graphic place all factor into one's accumulation of belongings. For example, that which a quaker family in Pennsylvania sought to own (or had available) was going to be different from what a family in French Canada possessed, and both were perhaps equally differentiated from the belongings found in a Southern plantation house.

But these are such nuanced factors. *Is it possible to get that specific?* Rather than just furnishing the Agency House to a specific period, can we take our research a step further and understand the specifics of what was geographically available at this specific time/place; what matched the Kinzies' cultural tastes; and what is consistent with the home's historic use as an Indian sub-agent? Can we establish a new standard to aim toward? That is the question our staff and volunteers are energetically probing during this "Hearth & Home" season.

Our site offers some unique resources to aid in this endeavor. Juliette Kinzie wrote extensive stories of her life at Portage during the early 1830s and threw in copious references to materials she and others around her were using. These nuggets sometimes directly describe objects, such as Juliette's "Nunns & Clark" piano, while at other times they imply the contents of a particular toolkit available at this home.

Juliette also wrote fiction books which may provide additional clues to the material culture with which she was personally familiar. Archival materials,

such the home inventories of region-specific fort officers' quarters; probate inventories; comparative archaeology; writings of Kinzie family members; and more may also serve as wells of information which have not previously been plumbed. The goal is to create a thoroughly researched inventory of this specific household.

Considering the early results of this effort, we are excited about not only the prospect of increased accuracy, but also of the potential interpretive stories encapsulated in some of the indicated materials. Objects in museums serve as tangible pathways into the narratives and concepts of the past, and we are eager to see what a researched inventory of this unique household can offer to visitors. Our site stewards valuable stories, and we believe this project can offer an important means by which to preserve these stories and make them accessible to our modern generation.

In 1984, Polly Stone wrote to her Agency House furnishings chair successor, enclosing a list of materials "mentioned in *Wau-Bun*." She regretted that she had not had the opportunity to expand further on this line of inquiry in her own refurnishing efforts and hoped that the avenue might prove productive for the future. Now in 2025, we are pleased to take up the torch on this effort and see where it leads!

A must-do July event

Enduring Skills Weekend July 26-27

Roll up your sleeves for some hands-on history!

Adults and children ages 5 and up are invited to try their own hand at a wide variety of skills and heritage arts. Admission is free.

Back for a fifth year, this unique event features more than two dozen stations, many of which are brand new this year. New opportunities include paper quilling; block printing; sprang (an ancient fiber art); timber framing; limberjack playing; 19th century toy-making in which kids can make a wooden horse and a set of paper dolls; letterpress printing; Victorian kids' crafts; and 1860s military ration cooking. Check out our website for a full list of returning stations, as well!

www.agencyhouse.org/enduring-skills

What makes this event special is its hands-on nature, which brings the past to life today. Our station leaders are passionate about what they do, and they love engaging with the public. We all look forward to this family-focused event each year!



EXPLORE ALL EVENTS:
www.agencyhouse.org/events