



Historic Indian Agency House

1490 Agency House Road, Portage, WI 53901 | 608-742-6362
historicindianagencyhouse@gmail.com | www.agencyhouse.org

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: Adam Novey
Executive Director and Curator

She's a celebrity in their book

Ann Kemnitz's 90-year history with the Agency House honored during its 90th season as a museum

PORTAGE, Wisconsin—Ann (Roberts) Kemnitz's visit to the Historic Indian Agency House in Portage on September 30 was no ordinary affair for the 94-year-old or her hosts. It was a homecoming of sorts.

Kemnitz's father, H. Roger Roberts, was a Caledonia farmer who, in 1931-32, was hired as a foreman under Madison architect Frank Riley to oversee the restoration of the 1832 home of Indian subagent John H. Kinzie and his wife, Juliette. Ann, herself, is perhaps the only person still alive to recall the June, 1931, unofficial grand opening of the house. At age four, her name and those of her parents appear under June 13, 1931, in the museum's guest book, sharing the page with some prominent folks of the day, including Mrs. H. H. Bennett of Kilbourn City; Louise Phelps Kellogg of Wisconsin Historical Society Fame; and Ada Baker, the daughter of the last private owner of the agency property who was at one time the mayor of Portage.

"This is the Agency House's 90th season as a museum, which is no small feat in itself, but to have the additional privilege of walking down memory lane with someone who remembers being here at the museum's grand opening was really something," said Adam Novey, director and curator of the Historic Indian Agency House.

During the visit, Kemnitz said that being there brought back many memories. She still remembered the tall clock in the hallway and even the stories which caretaker Walter English told during her childhood visits to the stately old home. She also recalled her father's stories.

"They had wanted my father to be the first caretaker of the house, but he said he couldn't. It was too far for me to walk to school," Kemnitz said.

When the Depression hit in 1929, Kemnitz' father, Roger, found himself having to move the family into town. Upon finding work restoring the historic home, Roberts facilitated some of the fascinating discoveries in the museum's early history. One of these finds which Kemnitz has remembered for the past 90 years was when her father, using the knowledge of old-timers in the region, began to meticulously peel back the wallpaper which had built up on the parlor wall over the years. His effort paid off in his discovery of the original wallpaper pattern brought West by the Kinzies a century earlier.

Kemnitz' September visit gave her an opportunity to see the very section of wallpaper, brick, mortar, and plaster which was carefully preserved by her father at the time of the 1930s restoration.

"I've been hearing about that wallpaper my whole life," Kemnitz declared. One can imagine the satisfaction she felt when the artifact was brought out from storage for her to see.

“She was able to see something that her father had worked on 90 years ago. It was an accomplishment that had meant so much to him,” Novey said.

Kemnitz and her daughter, Judy Kemnitz Lalor, brought with them some photographs to share. One depicts four-year-old Ann at the Agency House in 1931 on the lap of a “Mrs. Hotchkiss,” likely a member of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Wisconsin which headed up efforts to restore the house as one of Wisconsin’s first private museums, a remarkable story which has recently been recorded in detail in the addendum of the 2021 Historic Preservation Edition of *Wau-Bun*, a book which was first published in 1856 by the Agency House’s first resident, Juliette Kinzie. The NSCDA-WI carries on the legacy today as they continue to steward the nationally-significant historic site which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

“We are now concluding our 90th season which is themed on ‘Remembering,’ focusing on the ways in which history is preserved and passed down through time,” Novey said. “Mrs. Kemnitz’s visit has rounded off our year in an unexpected and wonderful way.”

The Historic Indian Agency House remains open for tours Wednesday through Sunday through October 15. One more event, their 15th annual Kiddie Christmas, is scheduled for December 11. Information may be found at www.agencyhouse.org/events.

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Picture #1 (AnnKemnitz1931): Ann (Roberts) Kemnitz, age 4, sits on the lap of Mrs. Hotchkiss on the Agency House porch in 1931. Contributed by Ann Kemnitz via the Historic Indian Agency House.

Picture #2 (AnnKemnitz1932): Ann (Roberts) Kemnitz with her parents Roger and Mary at the Agency House in 1932. Contributed by Ann Kemnitz via the Historic Indian Agency House.

Picture #3 (AnnSept2021): Ann (Roberts) Kemnitz and her daughter Judy Kemnitz Lalor visit the Agency House on September 30, 2021. Contributed by the Historic Indian Agency House.

Picture #4 (AnnWallpaper): Agency House director and curator Adam Novey shows an artifact from the restoration to Ann (Roberts) Kemnitz on September 30, 2021. Contributed by the Historic Indian Agency House.

Picture #5 (AnnGuestBook): Four-year-old Ann (Roberts) Kemnitz’ name, along with those of her parents, is written at the bottom of page 17 in the Agency House’s 1931 guest book. Contributed by the Historic Indian Agency House.



Mrs Hotchkiss and Ann Roberts

the Mrs. Letson taken at Annapolis, Md.



Roger, Mary & Ann Roberts
The day Roger turned Keys over at Agency House
1931-1932





The miners will follow the lead where it goes into the heart of a(n) Indian Tribe. Unless the lead district can be bought, they and the lawless lead miners cannot long be at peace.

Joseph Reed 1828

I am not an Indian alarmist, but I am satisfied from many circumstances that difficulties are fast approaching in that quarter, which must be met by strenuous action.
-Gen. Crook, 1828

Archaeology at the Agency
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