

# A museum on a mission

A mission statement is a charted course along which an organization resolves to travel, providing a blueprint for its pursuits and facilitating the best use of its resources and energies. A mission statement is the filter through which all decisions are made, from financial expenditures to staff efforts to programming ventures to exhibit design.

The Historic Indian Agency House's mission statement is worth unpacking as it describes who we are, what we do, and why we do it.

**Who we ARE:** *"...nationally significant historic site... importance within the larger story of America..."* We are not merely a local historic house. The house and the entire site on which it is situated hold pivotal and far-reaching national significance within the story of America. We are deemed Nationally Significant on the National Register of Historic Places.

**What we DO:** *"...preserve, interpret, promote...educate the public..."* Historic preservation of the house and collection, including all aspects of curation and archiving, constitute our starting point. Interpretation builds upon that foundation via scholarly analysis and the presentation of information through exhibits, speakers, newsletters, programming, academic curriculum, website and social media posts, and published works. Promotion takes it a step further into community outreach in the form of school visits, mobile museum booths, public speaking, participation in local events, and collaboration with other museums and organizations. The main thrust of what we do is to educate.

**Our central STORY:** *"...cultural and historical context surrounding John H. Kinzie's 1830s commission as United States Indian Sub-Agent to the Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) Nation..."* We are not myopically focused merely on home furnishings, architecture, and genealogy. Instead, as we relay the story of the Kinzies and the Ho-Chunk Nation, we place their narrative within its broader context of time and place. Included within this context are the cultural underpinnings that influence the making of history. Incorporating a look at the culture (anything from art to religion to music to social mores) puts

flesh on the historical framework, bringing history to life. The overall context brings meaning to the specifics. We need both the microscope and the binoculars to convey history.

**Our goal of BALANCE:** *"...foster a multi-dimensional understanding of the period..."* Our story is not flat or one-sided. As cultures, ideas, and ways of life converged, it was in some ways a melting pot and in other ways a bull fight.

Each player brought something to the table, from the Natives to the missionaries to the fur traders to the military to government representatives to the lead miners to the Euro-American settlers. Diverse viewpoints and cultural intersections shaped America as it is today. Our goal is to tell the story with balance, representing the various viewpoints and contributions so that patrons may hear, consider, discern, and understand the complexity of the time period, including the difficulty of the decisions that had to be made in the face of competing pressures. We endeavor to present the story in a way that is comprehensive,

clear, immersive, and educationally accessible to visitors of all ages.

**WHY we do what we do (our PURPOSE):** *"...inspires and shapes the quality of civic responsibility among those who contemplate the lessons of history."* It is not ours to determine the precise effect our museum may have on individual visitors, but we do hope that each will take with them something that will influence their own involvement in their community, as well as inspire a love for our country and a desire to serve its greater good. We believe that we are responsible to one another in a civic sense as we sojourn through our corner of the world at this time in history. These sentiments are at the core of why the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America (NSCDA) exists. They are the very reason why the Wisconsin Society of the NSCDA even cares about preserving a nearly 200-year-old structure of wood and brick in the first place. The ultimate hope is that visitors are impacted, affected, inspired, shaped, changed in some way by having contemplated the lessons garnered from the historical story we present. That is why we do what we do.

The mission of the Historic Indian Agency House is to preserve, interpret, and promote this nationally significant historic site in order to educate the public about the cultural and historical context surrounding John H. Kinzie's 1830s commission as United States Indian Sub-Agent to the Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) Nation; to expound its importance within the larger story of America; and to foster a multi-dimensional understanding of the period that inspires and shapes the quality of civic responsibility among those who contemplate the lessons of history.