

Indian agency blacksmiths on the American frontier

In the early 1800s, lead mining in southwest Wisconsin created friction between settlers and the Native tribes upon whose land the settlers were illegally encroaching. The Bureau of Indian Affairs saw a need to directly mediate this potentially explosive situation.

A treaty was signed in Prairie du Chien in 1829 which stipulated that the United States government would purchase Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) land in the lead mining region for annual payments in specie over thirty years, as well as provide trade goods and blacksmith services. Regional Indian agencies were needed to execute the terms of the treaty. John Harris Kinzie was chosen to lead the sub-agency at Fort Winnebago.

In 1830, funds were appropriated for the construction of three blacksmith shops that would serve the Native populace in fulfillment of treaty obligations: one in Prairie du Chien, one along the Sugar River near Madison, and one at Fort Winnebago in Portage. The



As a fundraiser for the continued preservation of the Agency House, we are selling surplus pieces of the actual bricks (made locally in 1832) which were removed from inside the Agency House's walls during its restoration. Own a piece of history, and help us preserve this valuable historic site for generations to come!

U.S. government considered blacksmith shops to be a key element in their strategy to "civilize" Native tribes and cause them to desire to live like Euro-Americans.

However, while the Natives recognized the utility of complimentary blacksmith services, they were at times reluctant to patronize these treaty-instituted shops, perhaps in good measure because they symbolized their painful losses.



Rhythmic clanging and smoke fills the air as reenactor Nick Hamele demonstrates 1830s-style blacksmithing during the first weekend of the Agency House's community archaeology dig.

A recently-published paper on agency blacksmiths in *Bound Away: The Liberty Journal of History* includes a case study of the Fort Winnebago agency. You may access the article, "Forging Insights: Indian Agency Blacksmiths of the

American Frontier," on the Agency House's website at www.agencyhouse.org/archaeology-2020 or at <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/ljh/vol13/iss1/3>.

Upcoming Events

- Archaeology Dig / Blacksmith Demos, July 25-26
- Speaker Series Lectures, July 21 and 28 at 6:30 pm
- Living History Days, August 8-9: Civil War 1862
- Morning Nature Walk, August 15 with Tony Abate
- Living History Day, September 19: Home entertainment in the 1830s



Lead docent Bobbie Goodman gives a tour on July 3.



Meyer grants fund supplies

Thank you to the George L. N. Meyer Family Foundation for funding the purchase of Covid-19 supplies for our 2020 season and covering ancillary expenses such as hand washing stations for our archaeology dig. We are deeply grateful for the help.

Website (now mobile friendly):

www.agencyhouse.org



Facebook:

facebook.com/historicindianagencyhouse

In-Person Tour Times:

Wed - Sat:
10 am / 11:30 am / 1 pm / 2:30 pm
Sun: 12 pm / 1:30 pm / 3 pm

Virtual Tour Times:

Thu: 8 am
Sun: 5 pm

Covid-19 policies

- No illness, exposure, or positive test
- Social distancing (6 feet / 2 meters)
- Masks required (avail. for \$3 on-site)
- Clean hands
- Maximum 6 people per tour
- Prior registration for some events may be required

Community works alongside archaeologists

Search begins for clues in ground

Thanks to the dedicated work of a group of archaeologists and the sponsorship of General Engineering Company of Portage, we are able to conduct an archaeological excavation in an effort to uncover information about the location and operation of the blacksmith shop which functioned in tandem with the Fort Winnebago Indian sub-agency in the 1830s.

The excavation, led by Dr. Constance Arzigian, offers community involvement in the entire process. Dozens of individuals and families participated on July 18 and 19, the first of two consecutive weekends of the event which concludes on July 26.



Excavating a test unit



Screening soil at the start of the dig

After participating in a five-minute "Archaeology Boot Camp," the archaeologists-in-training are off and eager to put their new knowledge and skills into action. From digging to sifting to cleaning and organizing artifacts, the public receives hands-on education in the field of archaeology.

The professionals assisting with the dig in various capacities are all graciously volunteering their time. Among them are archaeologists Constance Arzigian, John Wackman, Dan Joyce, and Ryan Howell; video series host Monette Bebow-Reinhard; and videographer Tim Hatfield.

UW-Parkside anthropology students and alumni are also pitching in, as well as several individuals from our own Agency House volunteer team.

Live blacksmithing demonstrations take place each day of the excavation, and an outdoor mini museum highlights the history of blacksmithing and exhibits various blacksmithing artifacts.

The test units are thus far yielding some intriguing finds. Come out and be a part of the action during the final weekend of the excavation. Learn more about our discoveries in the next issue of *Wau-Bun Express*.

For additional information and to pre-register for a dig time, please visit our website's archaeology page at www.agencyhouse.org/archaeology-2020.

Season in full swing



Our 2020 season has been marked by both unique challenges and bountiful blessings.

The Covid-19 pandemic postponed our opening date to June 6 and necessitated modifications to our plans and operations.

We are offering in-person tours with Covid-19

precautions, as well as live virtual tours for those who are more comfortable exploring our site from the safety of their own homes.

Exciting events have already taken place, and there are more on the docket for you to enjoy all the way into the fall. The final day of our season is Thursday, October 15.

We are thankful for the grants and donations we have received that have allowed us to continue forward this season. We are grateful for our members who have joined with us in our vision for impacting the community. We appreciate our volunteer team which has enthusiastically invested so many hours in a variety of capacities. Your time, efforts, and financial support are stewarded carefully in order to most effectively carry out the mission of the Historic Indian Agency House.

Respectfully,

Adam Novey
Executive Director and Curator

Meet our 2020 season intern



Katie Schneider is a student who is working on her B.A. in history at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

“History is a major passion of mine for most of my life,” Katie explains.

Katie enjoys learning all she can about history and then sharing what she has learned with others. She comes to the Agency House this season for “the chance to

connect with the community and share a part of history that many people forget about but is extremely important to the basis of America.”

Ms. Schneider is conducting tours and developing programming to be implemented in upcoming seasons.

We are thrilled to have Katie with us this summer. We hope you will get a chance to meet her!



June 6: Opening day ribbon-cutting for new exhibit

(L-R) Adam Novey, Executive Director & Curator, HIAH; Anne Vravick, Museum Properties Chair, NSCDA-WI; Jennifer Kraemer, board member, Greater Sauk Community Foundation; Robin Whyte, Executive Director, Greater Sauk Community Foundation (Not pictured) Jim Petersen, donor of archaeological collection for exhibit

FREE FAMILY ADMISSION

2020 Treat!

Families with school-aged children receive a free tour!

*Thanks to a special philanthropist

HIAH featured on “American Road”

Thomas and Becky Repp, owners and producers of *American Road* magazine, teamed up with veteran radio show host Gary Mantz to do a live half-hour feature on the Historic Indian Agency House for *American Road Trip Talk* on 1150 KKNW Seattle.



Trip Talk is touted as “your chance to discover the backroads that embody true Americana.” The hosts strive to offer road trip planning information for destinations that are “both interesting and

exciting.”

From Graceland to the Crystal Coast of North Carolina; from the Wabasha Street Caves of St. Paul to Acadia National Park; from quirky sites in Seattle to

John Kinzie’s 1832 Agency House right here in Portage, the syndicated podcasts cover a variety of attractions and are available online at www.podcastone.com/american-road-trip-talk.

The Agency House episode aired live on June 12.

Kohler Foundation finances “Stories of the Land”

A grant from the Kohler Foundation has made it possible for us to create an interpretive trailway as part of our “Stories of the Land” initiative.

The signage-guided educational walk along our nature trail is designed to engage hikers with the fascinating history that happened on the soil beneath their feet.

Our historic site is situated on beautiful Ho-Chunk ancestral land which offers valuable educational opportunities.

From examining the culture and history of the indigenous peoples, to discovering prominent historical figures who journeyed here, to exploring applied prairie science and more, “Stories of the Land” enhances our educational offerings

out in nature’s classroom.

Although this initiative was in the works long before the Covid-19



One of the bases awaiting sign installation

pandemic hit, the funding came at a time when outdoor educational and recreational spaces assumed even greater importance. Signage is now in the process of being installed.

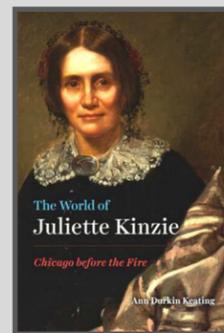
The interpretive trail begins just off the parking lot, adjacent to our Native encampment area which features a traditional Ho-Chunk dwelling called a chipoteke. This trailhead chipoteke was constructed by a Ho-Chunk youth as an Eagle Scout project in the spring of 2019.

The Agency House’s 233-acre site is one of scenic beauty and abundant wildlife. As we are committed to the preservation of the land, we have partnered with Groundswell Conservancy to establish a 100-year conservation easement on a large portion of the property.

The public may enjoy our trails for free. We ask that the land be treated with respect so that it may be enjoyed for generations to come.

Summer speaker series takes center stage outdoors and online

Oshkosh municipal TV station broadcasts this season’s lectures



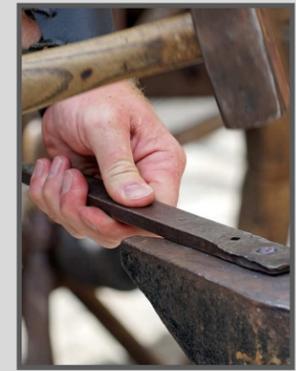
On July 7, author Ann Keating discussed her riveting new book, *The World of Juliette Kinzie: Chicago Before the Fire*, in a live virtual format. Many joined us online for the event. Keating’s book is available for purchase in our gift shop.



Prehistoric archaeology will be the topic at hand on July 21. Constance Arzigian will highlight the critical thinking involved in studying an era before written records. Dr. Arzigian is the lead archaeologist for this season’s excavation at the Agency House.



John Wackman expounded the practice of historic-era archaeology to an eager outdoor audience on July 14. Wackman is an accomplished archaeologist who worked with the Wisconsin Archaeological Rescue Program and led the 1980s excavation at the Agency House.



Agency blacksmiths filled a unique role on the cultural landscape of frontier Wisconsin as they served Native tribes. One such blacksmith was located at the Fort Winnebago sub-agency. Executive Director Adam Novey will discuss the subject on July 28.