



Historic Indian Agency House

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community gearing up for rare opportunity to participate in archaeological dig

PORTAGE, Wisconsin—The Historic Indian Agency House invites to public to participate in an archaeological dig right alongside professional archaeologists on July 10-11 and 17-18 from 10 am to 4 pm each day. The objective of the excavation is to locate and better understand the 1830s blacksmiths shop which was part of the Fort Winnebago agency complex.

Adults and children ages five and up with the direct supervision of a responsible adult are invited to try their hand at digging and screening after participating in a five-minute “archaeology boot camp” on site. Advance reservations may be made through Event Smart at <https://agencyhouse.eventsmart.com/>. Pre-registration is strongly recommended as dig times fill up quickly. Dig times may also be reserved at the door pending availability.

While the public may spectate for free, membership is required to physically participate in the dig. Memberships may be purchased ahead of time or at the door. The cost is \$15 for an individual or \$36 for a family. Memberships also include free admission to all on-site events during the 2021 season and a free tour. Tours of the Agency House will be available each day of the archaeological dig.

“Being able to participate alongside professional archaeologists is a rare opportunity for the community,” said Adam Novey, director and curator of the Agency House. “Our objective through archaeological inquiry is to more holistically understand our site’s historic structures, as well as foster within participants an appreciation and basic understanding of this important scientific process by which history is preserved and interpreted.”

Live blacksmithing demonstrations will take place each day, as well, to allow visitors to explore the history and techniques of blacksmithing.

“Written records alone can’t answer some important questions about how John Kinzie’s Indian sub-agency worked,” Novey said. “Our main inquiry this season is how the Agency blacksmith functioned. A smith was established here at the Fox-Winnebago Portage in 1830 to fulfill a stipulation of an 1829 treaty between the United States government and the Ho-Chunk Nation. Evidence in the ground may reveal answers that help broaden our historical interpretation.”

Dr. Constance Arzigian, a research archaeologist with the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center and senior lecturer in archaeology and anthropology at UW-LaCrosse, returns to lead this second season of excavation. John Wackman, who conducted an excavation at the Agency House in the 1980s through the Wisconsin Archaeological Rescue Program, also continues to lend expertise to the project. Dan Joyce, Director Emeritus of the Kenosha

Public Museum, again contributes his services via GPR surveying and archaeological supervision throughout the dig.

General Engineering Company of Portage is generously sponsoring this event for a second year as it allows the community to be on the front lines of discovery in a place where consequential history happened.

“We were immediately excited when we heard about this project [last year],” General Engineering President Brad Boettcher said. “As engineers, we recognize the importance of preserving history while developing community improvements. We are thrilled that the public will have the opportunity to participate alongside an archaeologist to see firsthand the important work it takes to preserve history and artifacts.”

Novey suggests keeping an eye on the Agency House’s “Archaeology at the Agency” web page for details and updates: www.agencyhouse.org/archaeology-2021.

Additional July events at the Agency House include a “Wisconsin’s History Keepers” speaker series every Tuesday night beginning at 6:30; a dugout canoe workshop on Friday, July 30, from 6 to 8 pm; and a nature walk on Saturday, July 31, at 10 am led by Tony Abate, Conservation Specialist with Groundswell Conservancy. All of these events are free, compliments of the Antiquarian Society of Wisconsin in memory of Olive “Cissy” Bryson. Details may be found at www.agencyhouse.org/events.

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Picture #1: Archaeologist John Wackman demonstrates techniques to participants during the 2020 archaeological dig. Contributed by the Historic Indian Agency House.

Picture #2: Amber, age 8, displays a discovery during the 2020 archaeological dig. Contributed by the Historic Indian Agency House.

Picture #3: A family enjoys learning how to screen during the 2020 archaeological dig. Contributed by the Historic Indian Agency House.

Picture #4: Participants of all ages participate in the 2020 archaeological dig under the supervision of archaeologist Dr. Constance Arzgian. Contributed by the Historic Indian Agency House.

Picture #5: Nick Hamele demonstrates blacksmithing techniques during the 2020 archaeological dig. Contributed by the Historic Indian Agency House.