

Meet our board

For nearly a century, the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Wisconsin owned and diligently stewarded this important historic site. In the fall of 2024, as the NSCDA-WI was in the process of retiring, the site officially transitioned to the care of an independent 501(c)3 organization: The Historic Indian Agency House Association.

The initial board of the new organization consisted of former NSCDA-WI board members for continuity. Three-year terms were staggered to allow for the future inclusion of new board members such that no more than 1/3 of the board would come up for re-election at any given time.

One of the NSCDA-WI members who retired from her role this year after two decades of dedicated service is Barbara Zaiser. Former NSCDA-WI members who continue to serve on the current board include Barbara Meyer, Margaret Meyer, and Dr. Anne Vravick. Executive Director Adam Novey also serves on the board in an ex officio capacity.

Two additional individuals have recently been appointed to join the board. Historian Peter Shrake is an archivist at the Parkinson Library and Research Center in Baraboo. He wrote *Silver Man: The Life and Times of Indian Agent John Kinzie*. Author and historian Mary Elise Antoine of Prairie du Chien has spent decades researching, writing, speaking, and working at historic sites. She has also previously served as the Wisconsin Ambassador for the French Heritage Corridor, of which the Agency House is a participant, as well as on the board of the Wisconsin Trust for Historic Preservation.

Gaining ground on prairie restoration

When farming ceased on our historic site in the 1940s, prairie species recolonized the open land. Parts of this rare natural prairie remain to this day on the preserve surrounding the Agency House. This unique ecosystem stands at the intersection of environmental stewardship and education. This landscape is part of our history because our history is in several ways rooted in the land. Investing in this landscape helps us to both responsibly manage our natural resources and tell our story.

From 2021-25, over a dozen acres of invasive black locust trees, which had overtaken large areas of our prairie, were cleared. A new partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has now accelerated progress significantly by helping us attack large swaths of additional acreage.

"Partners for Fish and Wildlife" is a USFWS program designed to help private land-owners, including non-profits, improve the wildlife habitat on their land. The program helps us meet extensive front-end goals and lay the groundwork for our museum to then perpetuate these major gains long-term.

A massive forestry mulching operation was undertaken this past year to remove new patches of invasive species and eliminate stumps in existing restoration areas. Applications of broad-spectrum

herbicide were applied to prepare roughly 24 acres for planting.

The USFWS has contributed cost-share funding as well as expertise in designing a strategy and coordinating contractors. Other partners include the Alliant Energy Foundation's Giving for Good program; the Natural Resources Foundation's C.D. Besadny Conservation Grant; Enbridge's Fueling Futures grant; the Community Foundation of South Central WI; and the Cissy VD Bryson Fund at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation in memory of Cissy Van Dyke Scannell Bryson.

Over the past few years, our volunteers/staff have invested well over 1,500 hours to the project. This year it included spot-applying herbicide in several places, hauling away logs, and burning slash piles which the mulching equipment didn't get to. In preparation for this overall effort, volunteer Tygh Stewart spent extensive hours cutting down dead ash and scrub trees. Volunteers/staff continue to be on the front lines with maintenance of the reclaimed land.

The focus of our 2026-27 efforts is to plant prairie seed in the prepared areas and prevent regrowth of invasives. It is fascinating to see the transformation which is taking place.

Our phase 5 video can be accessed here: www.agencyhouse.org/grounds



agencyhouse.org

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Textiles get comfortable

For the past two years, our collections volunteers and staff have been diligently cleaning, documenting, and systematically rehousing the unique textiles in our collection.

New archivally sensitive mounts and boxes have been custom-fashioned to more effectively address the preservation needs of each textile during its time in storage.

Wau-Bun Express

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Dear Friends,

Our 2026 season themed on "The Big Picture" has now come to a close. It has been a fascinating time of exploring the broader connections of this special place. We are thankful to all of you who came alongside us in supporting this outreach through your time and support. As a private 501(c)3 nonprofit, we depend upon the contributions of those who champion our museum's mission to preserve history, educate the public, and spur meaningful reflection on this site's lessons. This 194-year-old Indian agency is a unique reminder of a poignant and pivotal era. The stories it embodies are worth remembering.

Let's continue to impact the community together. Thank you for your partnership!

Respectfully,

Adam Novey
Executive Director and Curator



Volunteer spotlight

This season, we were pleased to welcome new faces to our team of volunteers. Nicole Reickman is one of them. Nikki comes to us with a personal interest in archaeology and collections care at a time when preparations are being made for a major archaeology collections rehousing project. Nikki has also dipped her toes into community education. In July she researched, prepared, and led an engaging hands-on historical birch bark etching station at Enduring Skills Weekend. Do you have a talent or interest you would enjoy sharing with our museum? Opportunities vary widely. Let us know!



"THE BIG PICTURE" reached the community in BIG ways



Exhibit moves to public library

Although our season has wrapped up, the special exhibit, *Métis Portage*, is scheduled to be available for public viewing at the Portage Public Library, 253 W. Edgewater St., through the end of November.

During the 1830s, mixed Indigenous/European families (Métis) constituted the resident majority at the Fox-Wisconsin portage beyond the walls of Fort Winnebago, second only to a larger seasonal Indigenous presence. This largely forgotten community played a vital role in the region's past.

Enjoy the video series & new Métis Points of Interest driving tour, too!

<https://www.agencyhouse.org/metisportage>

...and a BIG thank you goes out to our partners

Thank you to those who partnered with us to make this season's programming, research, exhibits, and preservation endeavors possible:

- Chipstone Foundation
- Cissy VD Bryson Fund at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation
- Community Foundation of South Central Wisconsin
- Enbridge "Fueling Futures"
- General Engineering Company
- "Healthy Community Partnership Grant" from the SSM Health St. Clare Fdn.
- Ho-Chunk Nation Museum & Cultural Center
- Kohler Foundation
- Museum at the Portage / Portage Hist. Soc.
- Pflanz Mendrala Funeral Homes
- Portage Area Community Fund of Madison Community Foundation
- Portage Tourism / City of Portage
- Terrytown Plumbing
- US Fish & Wildlife Service "Partners"
- Wisconsin Humanities

...and all of YOU who contributed your support!

Gifts were received in memory of:

- Barbara B. (Bobbie) Collings
- Marilyn Grady
- David Hestad
- Mr. Francis J. Hogan
- Nancy Kamlukin
- Fred Langbecker
- Jordan Mueller
- Carole Nye
- Ted Rebholz
- Ernest and Martha Schroeder
- George and Lydia Vierheilig
- Wyocena State Graded School Trips

...and in honor of:

- Parker and Peylen Kowalke
- Nancy Langbecker
- Barbara Joan Meyer
- Margaret Meyer
- The Novey Family / Adam Novey
- The Portage Métis and métis
- Dr. Anne Vravick
- John Wackman
- Mary Zimpelman

Métis descendant gathering event draws large crowd

Every season, it seems, opportunities that we could not have anticipated arise and take shape. This season was no exception!

Early in the year, we developed a 7-part video series, *Métis Portage*, which explores a community of people who made significant contributions to history here in the early 19th century. At the same time, we got in touch with several descendants, resulting in an additional 13-part video series, *Echoes of Métis Portage*, featuring intriguing descendant interviews.

Fast forward to September 26 when over 70 descendants of Por-

tage Métis families gathered at the Agency House for a whole day of opportunities to explore their roots and meet others who share their unique ancestral history.

The gathering ended with a campfire to which the public was invited. History was explored and memories were made during this special day.

