



Historic Indian Agency House

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 22, 2020

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Registration now open for community archaeology dig at Agency House *General Engineering Company of Portage sponsors event*

PORTAGE, Wisconsin—Registration is now open for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for families to participate in the Historic Indian Agency House’s 2020 archaeological excavation. Advance reservations for time slots are strongly recommended as they are expected to fill up quickly.

The Historic Indian Agency House is in hot pursuit of the hottest place on the hillside this summer: the 1830s agency blacksmith shop. An archaeological excavation is scheduled to take place July 18-19 and 25-26 from 10 am to 4 pm each day. The public is invited to participate right alongside the archaeologists. Live blacksmithing demonstrations are also being planned for those weekends for spectators to enjoy.

Adults and children ages five and up with the direct supervision of a responsible adult are welcomed to try their hand at a variety of tasks from digging to screening and more. Participants will be guided through a 5-minute “Archaeology Boot Camp” to prepare them before they roll up their sleeves to help excavate the site’s buried history.

Advance reservations may be made through Event Smart at <https://agencyhouse.eventsmart.com/>. Participants may reserve one time slot per person per day, for a maximum of four time slots per person over the course of the two weekends. Additional time slots may be reserved at the door pending availability.

While the public may spectate for free, membership is required to 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 2020 season and a free tour which may be taken either in person or in a live virtual format.

Covid-19 policies will be in place, including hand washing stations and the requirement that everyone must wear a mask. Homemade cloth masks are also available for purchase on-site.

Adam Novey, Executive Director and Curator of the Historic Indian Agency House, suggests keeping an eye on the Agency House’s “Archaeology at the Agency” web page for details and updates, especially as the pandemic presents challenges and requires flexibility and understanding on the part of everyone: www.agencyhouse.org/archaeology-2020.

“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 in 1830 to serve the Ho-Chunk tribe. Our goal is to locate the blacksmith shop and find evidence which could reveal some answers.”

Archaeologist Ryan Howell spearheaded the project and orchestrated all of the preliminary work last year, which included a Ground Penetrating Radar survey conducted by Dan Joyce, Director of the Kenosha Public Museum.

“Blacksmiths produce a lot of artifacts. They have a big archaeological footprint,” Howell said. “The kids can get out here and get their hands dirty, live with history, touch it, feel it. It’s the idea of combining public history and public archaeology and education all into one package.”

Dr. Constance Arzigian, a research archaeologist with the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center and a senior lecturer in archaeology and anthropology at UW-LaCrosse, will lead the dig in July. John Wackman who has extensive experience working for the Wisconsin Archaeological Rescue Program will also lend expertise to the project. Wackman previously led an excavation at the Agency House in the 1980s.

General Engineering Company of Portage is generously sponsoring this event which 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,” 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.”

The Indian sub-agency—along with its stipulated blacksmith shop—was established at the Fox-Wisconsin portage to fulfill the treaty of 1829 between the United States and the Ho-Chunk Nation.

“The house and the entire site on which it’s situated hold pivotal and far-reaching significance within the story of America,” Novey said. “We are grateful to the archaeologists, site-prep volunteers, and General Engineering Company for making it possible for the public to experience such a historic place in a unique way this summer.”

Following this season’s theme of archaeology and frontier blacksmithing, the Agency House is offering additional opportunities, including a free online Archaeology Kids’ Camp sponsored by Alliant Energy, a summer speaker series co-sponsored by the Museum at the Portage, and a special archaeology exhibit sponsored by the late Doug Kammer.

The Historic Indian Agency House opened for in-person tours on Saturday, June 6, with Covid-19 precautions instituted. Live virtual tours are also available throughout the season. Thanks to a generous gift from a special philanthropist, the museum is offering free tours for families with school-aged children this season. Tour information may be found at www.agencyhouse.org.

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