

Hiking through history

The land reveals its stories

The acreage surrounding the Agency House is not just a beautiful place to explore. It is steeped in rich and fascinating history.

On August 29 and October 3, participants enjoyed morning guided history hikes on the Agency House's brand-new "Stories of the Land" trailway. As the groups traversed several different ecosystems and areas of historical significance, they learned about the remarkable stories connected to the soil beneath their feet.

The "Stories of the Land" trailway, funded by the Kohler Foundation, was completed in mid-August and is ready for your enjoyment.

Begin your self-guided journey at the trailhead off the parking lot and follow the Outer Loop Trail to immerse yourself in the history of the area.

Our trails are free. We ask that you respect the land so that it can be preserved for generations to come.



Hikers explore history on the prairie

Cemetery walk premieres at HIAH

On September 19, the City of Portage Historic Preservation Commission premiered their 2020 cemetery walk on a large outdoor screen on the Agency House lawn.

The annual performance – which is normally held live with actors in the Silver Lake Cemetery – went virtual this year due to COVID-19.

The cemetery walk is now available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRLm6OJnG6s>



A visitor watches the virtual cemetery walk

Dear Friends,

We are grateful to have had a great 2020 season despite the challenges involved with operating in the midst of a pandemic, thanks in no small part to the faithful contributions of time, talents, and resources from so many of you.

Our hope is that all who were able to take advantage of our offerings – whether in-person or online – enjoyed experiences of notable value.

Preparations are now being made for the 2021 season. Thank you for your patronage and your commitment to helping us fulfill our mission as a museum. We look forward to seeing you in the spring!

Respectfully,

Adam Novey
Executive Director and Curator



Enjoying a 2nd Cup



The Powder Magazine historic site in Charleston, South Carolina, featured the Historic Indian Agency House in its 2nd Cup Conversations program on September 17.

This series of "relaxed discussions of Great American Treasures & more" takes place live via Zoom for free. For more information on upcoming featured speakers, go to www.powdermagazine.org.

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Path" will be structured similarly to Paul Harvey's "The Rest of the Story." Readers will be captivated by each narrative as they attempt to determine who or what is being described.

"In the Know" will be posted on both our website and Facebook page around the 15th and 30th of each month during our off-season (January through April). To find "In the Know" on our website, go to the "Learn" tab and click on the "Explore History" section. There you will find the archive of all of the history series from 2019 through the present.

KIDDIE CHRISTMAS
OUTDOOR TREASURE HUNT!
Saturday, December 12 from 1 to 3 pm
Find all the details here:
www.agencyhouse.org/events



Website:
www.agencyhouse.org



Facebook:
www.facebook.com/historicindianagencyhouse/



Instagram:
www.instagram.com/agencyhousewi/?hl=en



Twitter:
www.twitter.com/AgencyHouseWI



Wau-Bun Express

Volume 20, Issue 3 - October 2020

Archaeological test units identify areas of interest

The soil surrenders clues

Around 75 individuals rolled up their sleeves and dug with us into our site's buried history over the course of two weekends in July. Many signed up for multiple dig times as they learned the process of archaeology firsthand. Almost every participant uncovered at least one artifact.

Three 1-meter by 1-meter test units were excavated under the direction of a team of professional archaeologists. The units were arranged based upon the results of a ground penetrating radar survey completed last year. All of the units yielded some artifacts, but units 1 and 3 – which were placed



8-year-old Amber is decidedly hooked on archaeology after unearthing a tinkling cone



Participants uncover artifacts from the 1800s

adjacent to one another – ended up being the foremost areas of interest.

Among the artifacts discovered were small amounts of charcoal and coal, cut bone, tableware fragments (early transferware), glass (both bottle and flat), a tinkling cone, modified chert and flakes (from the making of stone tools), a piece of a harness buckle, and a significant quantity of blacksmith-crafted square-headed nails.

A mottled area of compacted soil at around 20 cm extended down to sterile red clay. This may indicate a disturbed area associated with a building which could possibly be the blacksmith's house.

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History in living color

Two Living History weekends took place at the Agency House this season despite having to be scaled back due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On August 8 and 9, the Historical Timekeepers depicted year two of the American Civil War, as well as the 1862 Dakota War in Minnesota. It was a privilege to be able to host the group as almost all of their usual engagements were canceled this year.

A member of the Galena Living History
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The Historical Timekeepers portray the year 1862

In the know

History off the beaten path

Each year, we produce a history series to educate by various means those who visit our website. An online exhibition entitled "Artifact Ambassadors" was produced in 2019, followed by an audio history series called "Vintage Viewpoints" this year.

In 2021, we will explore some little-known tidbits from history related to the Agency House and the Portage area in general.

"In the Know: History Off the Beaten
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Jon Theissen demonstrates blacksmithing

Some participants also sifted one of the sand piles that had been deposited from when the Agency House's foundation was repaired during its 2012 restoration. Artifacts such as flint and brick were recovered from this area, as well.

One participant remarked that it is an amazing thing to hold in your hand something that has not been seen or touched by anyone for almost 200 years or even more.

Reenactors demonstrated the techniques and shared the history of blacksmithing as the search for the 1830s Agency blacksmith shop was underway. Although the shop itself remains elusive, further investigation



A plethora of artifacts was unearthed

is on the docket as we plan to host another community dig in 2021.

Between now and then, we are cataloguing and preserving what has already been found, completing this year's dig report, applying for a state permit for next year, and doing additional study and prep work.

Dr. Constance Arzigian again plans to lead the 2021 excavation with the assistance of archaeologists Dan Joyce and John Wackman. It may entail opening up additional test units or perhaps even utilizing a different method such as one which involves a trench.

Find more information on our website: www.agencyhouse.org/archaeology-2020.



A homecoming

Family ties to the Agency House

When Nick Hamele, a high school science teacher in Fort Atkinson, learned of an opportunity to demonstrate blacksmithing at the Agency House's archaeological dig, he jumped at the chance.

Hamele is an instrumental part of the annual Fort Koshkonong Rendezvous, reenacting the blacksmith trade from the 1830s, which is the same time era John H.

Kinzie served as Indian sub-agent here in Portage. It is also the time period of the blacksmith shop which is the present subject of archaeological inquiry. With family roots firmly planted in the early days of Portage, and with his grandfather's blacksmith tools in tow, Hamele was a perfect fit for the Agency House event.

...but there's even more!

Hamele's family ties to Portage extend back to the 1840s. When his great-great-grandparents' home burned down, they were said to have lived in both the Agency House and the Fort Winnebago Surgeon's Quarters for several years until their new home was built. Hamele's great-grandfather was born at the Surgeon's Quarters, and two of his great-grandfather's siblings were born at the Agency House.

Hamele's grandmother recorded Portage history as recalled by her husband, Eugene Hamele, Sr. We are thankful to Nick for sharing this history with all of us.

Virtual tours extended

Live virtual tours will continue to be available during our off-season (Oct. - May). We have special rates for school groups and for groups in care facilities, such as assisted living homes and nursing homes. Families, civic groups, and other large groups are also invited to join us online. Spread the word!



www.agencyhouse.org/online-tours

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Society depicted 1830s blacksmithing on September 19. Next year, the whole group is enthusiastic about their plans to perform a melodrama and demonstrate ways in which our ancestors entertained themselves in the 1830s.

Historical treasures showcased

The Historic Indian Agency House has recently become a part of a national collection of 60+ historical properties known as Great American Treasures.

These treasures offer an inside look at the big picture of America's past. To find our museum's page and many other fascinating historic sites which trace America's early history, visit www.greatamericantreasures.org.



An account of early Portage: Eugene James Hamele, Sr.

As recorded by his wife, Thelma "Ruth" Hamele

My husband's great-great grandfather, Vincent John Hamele (Vinzenz Jean), came to Portage in the 1840s. He was a stonemason and whether he came to work on the docks I do not know but he did quarry and cut the sandstone blocks for many of the foundations of the old homes and buildings in Portage from the quarry which was on some of his land. He owned quite a bit of land around the old Fort. The home he built for himself and died in is still in use. It is owned by Alex Milanowski. There was quite a settlement around it at one time. Even a small bowling alley. But it stands by itself now. His grandparents built their first home by the crossing of the Fox below the Surgeon's Quarters. It burned and they moved into the Surgeon's Quarters which was empty, until a new house could be built. While they were there my father-in-law was born. Grandpa Hamele did not build the new house right away and they moved into the Agency House where they lived for 7 or 8 years and where Uncle Billy and Aunt Harriet were born. Uncle Billy later was the last lock-tender on the canal. They then built their new house: which is the Calvin Breezer home now.

The things I am going to tell you are scattered and unrelated items as my husband remembers them from his grandmother, his father and uncles. Many are of no historical value but they have been interesting to me.

For instance Grandma said that the "Old Portage Trail" used by the Indians and the Traders, was not along the route we call Wauona Trail but that it started right below the S.Q. [Surgeon's Quarters] and followed the high sandy ridge across where the septic tank now is, behind Vilian Paske's home, past the Milanowski house which was great-great-grandpa's house where it angled toward the fairgrounds and on to the Wis. River. Along this sandy ridge was where all of the Indian arrowheads, war clubs and other relics were found. There was even a child's skeleton found there. My husband found many and his uncles Howard and Ed gave him the ones they found. Uncle Sylvester gave his to Mrs. Andrews who I believe gave them to the Historical Society. The present Wauona trail was on low, marshy ground.

Grandma said that many times Indians would stand with their noses pressed against the windows looking in but never caused any trouble.

The canal was first started to be dug much closer to Fort Winnebago. Parts of this first canal can still be seen north of Eddie's Service Station on Highway 33 and south of 33 right beside the Wauona Trail. This was about 1/4 mile shorter than the finished canal but they ran into some kind of difficulty, perhaps too much water, and they started over and completed it at the present site.

"Dockwalkers" were men who walked up and down the canal on the sides or docks as they were called to keep muskrats from undermining them. The docks of the canal were made of huge timbers about 2 feet by 2 feet thick which were laid horizontally and held in place by posts driven down in front of them. Some of these posts remain close to the Agency House. These docks were wide enough to form a walk along the canal.

The first R.R. tracks were completed into Portage on Dec. 31, 1856. They come from Fort-Horican up behind the S.Q. and along the edge of the park which was known as the City Pasture (where the rail bed can still be seen) past Eddie's Service Station and crossed the canal north of Broesch's house. The Old R.R. bridge abutment is still there, it then went along East Albert St. a short way and on across by Mud [?] Lake.

This was called the Northern Div. The main line between Columbus and Portage was completed in 1864.

After the R.R. was completed, the canal was completed in 1876, and due to the much faster transportation of the RR, shipping on the canal did not live up to expectations. It was not used for much except pleasure boats after 1917.



My husband remembers, as a small boy, that his mother would pack a large picnic basket and they would walk down to the canal and board a double decker steam boat and take the trip down the lower Fox. The boat would stop anywhere and let you off wherever you decided to have your picnic and pick you up on the way back.

Years ago many of the townspeople had barns and their own horses and cows. My father-in-law, as a boy of 10 would walk into town every morning and gather the cows. Old Dr. Meecher was one of his clients. He would then drive them out to the City Pasture. In the evening he would drive them all back to town and then walk home. My father-in-law left at 17 and went to work on the railroad. He took a room at the Old Farmers and Merchants Hotel which stood by the canal on East Wis. Street. There was a long porch around it and everyone would sit with feet perched on the rail and watch the boats.

At that time Barboz's Saloon which is now the Tradewinds had large rooms upstairs with row upon row of hammocks, such as the old sailing ships used where many of the railroaders slept. Some of the old hammocks were still there when the Tradewinds was remodeled.

At one time an engine with Eng. Snow at the throttle went through the opened drawbridge into the canal and he was killed. When the new RR drawbridge was being built, the waterglass from the old wrecked engine was found. Incidentally, the new bridge was opened only once, and that was to see if it worked. It cost the RR thousands to build it at the command of the government.

I was lucky enough to find a large poster or billboard of double decker paddle wheeler boat "The City of Portage" and today Mrs. Helen Krier brought me some pictures of the construction of the new locks. She found them in Bob Monteufel's house which they recently bought.

[Additional hand-penciled notes could not be made out.]

This is all that we could get together from the things my husband remembers. I wish he could have told you himself as they are much more interesting that way.