

ARCHAEOLOGY NEWS

CONNECTING THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND THE FUTURE

What a busy year it's been! Besides our ongoing contract, research, and preservation work, we've had a great year for public outreach, including:

- **143** presentations reaching **6,695** people
- **467** public outreach contacts
- **69** videos with over **61,301** views last year
- **114,668** pageviews on our website

We've really been enjoying the return to in-person events and contacts, and we're also excited about our expanding online and digital outreach. New videos are in the works (and ideas for future videos are always welcome!) and we'll keep sharing information through other avenues as well. Our thanks for staying involved and interested in what we do and why—and as always, please feel free to contact us anytime!

Archaeology News is a publication of the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center.

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EVENTS

We're already hard at work planning our 2024 outreach events, including long-time favorites such as public lectures, the Artifact Show, and the Volunteer Field Survey. Make sure we have your current contact information so you can stay informed!

MVAC AVAILABILITY

MVAC is usually open during regular business hours, but if you would like to visit, we recommend emailing or leaving a voicemail in advance to make sure someone will be available (mvac@uwlax.edu or 608.785.8463).



UPCOMING 2024 EVENTS

March 2: Artifact Show

March 19: Lecture - Research & Community Engagement Projects in Serbia & Wisconsin - UWL Archaeology Faculty, Amy Nicodemus & Heather Walder

May 4: Volunteer Field Survey

Visit www.uwlax.edu/mvac/events-display/events for more information on these and other events.



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HISTORIC INDIAN AGENCY HOUSE EXCAVATIONS 2023

CINDY KOCIK, MVAC RESEARCH ARCHAEOLOGIST, AND CONNIE ARZIGIAN, UW-LA CROSSE ARCHAEOLOGY & ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT/MVAC ARCHAEOLOGIST

In what is becoming a much-anticipated annual event, archaeologists Connie Arzigian (MVAC, UW-La Crosse), Dan Joyce (Director Emeritus and Curator of Archaeology, Kenosha Museum Campus), Cindy Kocik (MVAC), and retired archaeologist John Wackman led over 110 members of the public in the 4th year of excavations at the Historic Indian Agency House (HIAH) in Portage, Wisconsin, on August 5–6 and 12–13. HIAH Executive Director and Curator Adam Novey organized the event. The Agency House was built in 1832 for Indian sub-agent for the Ho-Chunk John H. Kinzie. While the house still stands, less is known about other structures, such as the military barracks, and the blacksmith shop established to serve area Ho-Chunk (and possibly Euro-Americans). The excavation program seeks to provide a fuller picture of the Agency House's historical context and add to knowledge from the historical record, including the Wau-Bun narrative written by Kinzie's wife, Juliette.

Attendees signed up for one-hour blocks to excavate, with many registering for several slots on multiple days. Some participants returned for their second, third, or fourth year, eager to refresh their excavation skills and uncover new finds. Before getting to work, volunteers received instruction in excavation techniques, screening soil through ¼" mesh to recover artifacts, and identifying historic Euro-American and Indigenous artifacts. Temporary outdoor displays and a demonstration of traditional blacksmithing by Nick Hamele enhanced the experience.

The 2023 fieldwork concentrated on a smaller area than in past years. Previous excavation units were spaced far apart to explore different locations Dan Joyce's remote-sensing investigations suggested could contain archaeological remains. This year work continued on a cellar or pit feature southwest of the Agency House that was only partially excavated last year, to discover if it relates to a structure—perhaps the blacksmith's shop or house. Two new units (Units 20 and 21) were started about 1.5 m west

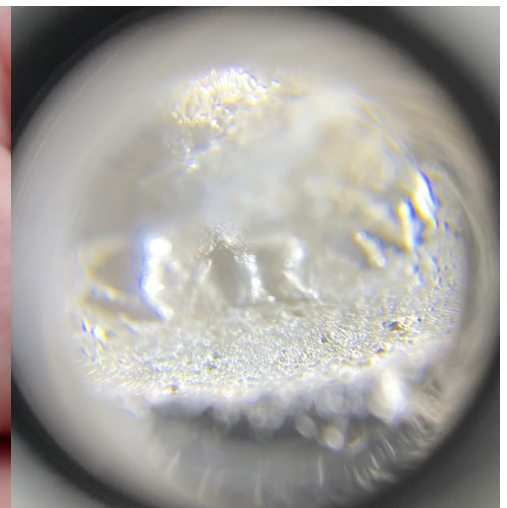
of and just north of the cellar or pit, respectively.

The cellar or pit was excavated to its base, with artifacts such as brick, glass, mortar, metal, and ceramics recovered. The feature appears to be an infilled pit that slumped in over time, with layers of dumping dating to disparate time periods, including the 1830s.

Unit 20 measured 2 x 2 m and was divided into four 1 x 1 m quadrants. The northeast quadrant was saved for future excavation and to provide enough room for volunteers working in Unit 21. Toward the end of the last day, multiple postmolds were uncovered in Unit 20, but there was not enough time to fully document and excavate them. Ho-Chunk people were known to camp near the Agency House while waiting for annuity payments (Kinzie 1968:60), and the postmolds might relate to their camps or earlier Indigenous habitation—or they could be from our long-sought blacksmith's structure. Excavations in 2024 will hopefully reveal more!



Glass bottle fragment dating to 1893 from L-1, Unit 21 NW. Photo courtesy of Dan Joyce.



Pewter military button with eagle insignia just after excavation (left) and magnified while under analysis (right). The button dates to 1821 to the 1830s, which overlaps the time of the Agency House's use. Left – Photo courtesy of Connie Arzigian. Right – Photo courtesy of Dan Joyce.

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Unit 21 began as a 1 x 2 m block, with room to expand south to create a 2 x 2 m unit adjacent to the units containing the pit feature. The two quadrants in the 1 x 2 portion were excavated at the same time. On the last day, the unit was expanded 1 m south and excavated into the upper layer of topsoil to investigate possible connections with the pit feature to the south. This work encountered hardened, possibly burned soil, mysterious fist-sized concretions that appeared to contain mortar and melted glass, and historical artifacts. What might lie in deeper levels, and whether that will be consistent with the infilled pit to the south as predicted, remains uncertain.

Historical artifacts were found throughout the units. Structural materials included nails, mortar and brick fragments, and window glass. Importantly, some large pieces of mortar had impressions of wood

framing, indicating that they are indeed from a structure. Domestic or kitchen debris included fragments of white clay pipe stems, ceramics (including yellowware crocks and some finer whiteware), pins, buttons, lantern glass, a doll head fragment, and bones from animals such as turtles, birds, and mammals. A pewter military button with an eagle insignia dates from 1821 to the 1830s, overlapping the active use of the Agency House. Many other artifacts date to around the 1830s Agency House era, but hand-wrought nails and other possibly pre-1830s artifacts might indicate earlier activity. Still other artifacts, such as certain types of window glass and wire nails, likely postdate the Agency House. A limited number of stone tools and waste flakes from flintknapping recovered throughout the dig seasons provide insight into the Indigenous presence in the area.

Plans for next year's excavation are underway. The intriguing postmolds in Unit 20, the unexcavated depths of Unit 21, and the search for more mortar fragments with wood-framing impressions provide exciting avenues to explore in 2024! Watch the MVAC Events page and the HIAH website (<https://www.agencyhouse.org/archaeology>) for information on the 2024 dig as it becomes available.

The HIAH dig was supported by General Engineering Company and the H.L. Palmer Masonic Angel Fund.

Reference:

Kinzie, Juliette. (1968) Wau-Bun: The "Early Day" in the Northwest. The National Society of Colonial Dames of America in the State of Wisconsin, Menasha. [<https://www.agencyhouse.org/wau-bun>]



2023 excavations at the Historic Indian Agency House, Portage, Wisconsin. Photo courtesy of Connie Arzigian.



2023 excavations at the Historic Indian Agency House, Portage, Wisconsin. Photo courtesy of Historic Indian Agency House.



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If you haven't already, please consider renewing your support for MVAC's ongoing mission of discovery, research, education, and preservation. If you would prefer, you can make your donation with our **secure online donation** option through the UWL Foundation. Your support is greatly appreciated!

MVAC EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS ARE SUPPORTED IN PART BY:

- The United Fund for the Arts and Humanities
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