



WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY HISTORIC SITES & MUSEUMS IN 2021: BACK OPEN AND BETTER THAN EVER!

Thanks to the receipt of \$1 million in American Recovery Act funds, the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) was able to reopen all of its 12 historic sites and museums across the state for the 2021 season.

More than 91,000 guests have visited our sites in-person throughout 2021, as of early October.

Circus World alone shattered projections by attracting a whopping 35,267 guests despite opening a month later than usual. Still, each day's attendance surpassed its 2019 total. That overwhelming response speaks to both the thirst among guests for entertainment as well as the value proposition of bringing the Baraboo attraction into the Society family of sites. In addition to the enthusiastic in-person response, tens of thousands more continue to connect with the Society virtually. Our historic sites and museums are vital to the tourism economies and the quality of life of their communities and we are pleased that this funding was provided to help us open our doors to guests.

Even when in-person engagement was temporarily paused due to the pandemic, the Society devised new ways to allow citizens to remain connected to the sites. New initiatives such as virtual tours, online programming and regular social media content proved extremely popular, opening new pathways for engagement and connecting our sites to new audiences. Ultimately, this challenging and historic moment has strengthened our organization for future growth. The new, robust virtual platforms, as well as physical improvements to the sites completed during the temporary pause, have paved the way for significantly improved guest experiences. We are building on this momentum by working to add new online ticketing infrastructure and increasing marketing support for the sites in 2022.

The following pages offer highlights from each site. The Society is grateful for the continued support of the State Legislature as we continue our 175-year mission of collecting, preserving, and sharing history.



VILLA LOUIS

The Society's historic site in **Prairie du Chien** hosted its 40th Annual Carriage Classic (left) after re-opening, attracting 3,008 spectators over three days and 127 competitors from 17 states, the most ever represented! In fact, Friday's attendance of 344 was three times higher than average. Meanwhile, earlier in the summer, workers (right) replaced the walkways around the National Landmark mansion, utilizing historic rehabilitation standards, to improve accessibility for all guests.





H.H. BENNETT STUDIO



WADE HOUSE



OLD WORLD WISCONSIN

Black Point Estate & Gardens (Lake Geneva)

Reopened in-person: June 1

- Emerged from pandemic shutdown with robust summer 2021 attendance and record revenue (June 1-Sept. 30), beating the previous mark set in 2019 by 4.8 percent.
- Developed new programs, including neighborhood walking tours and a boat tour, and redesigned outreach programs for virtual platforms.

Circus World (Baraboo)

Reopened in-person: June 1

- Partnered with Sauk County Health, the City of Baraboo, and Baraboo Fire/EMT to utilize parking lot as a host location for weekly community COVID-19 testing.
- Big Top performances returned with safe, socially distanced seating options, resulting in near-record attendance of 35,267 despite opening a month later than usual and with only 40% of traditional budget.

First Capitol (Belmont)

Reopened in-person: July 22

- \$81,000 in capital improvements underway.
- Began restoration of interpretive

markers on site, including three state historic markers.

H.H. Bennett (Wisconsin Dells)

Reopened in-person: July 26

- Launched the Digitype Experience as a historic photographic alternative to the in-person Tintype Experience, which provided an added safety option during the pandemic as well as a new opportunity for revenue.

Madeline Island Museum (La Pointe)

Reopened in-person: July 22

- Launched a major accessibility project to ensure equitable access to the museum and historic grounds. Work included new and refurbished ramps, button-activated door entries, and paving of the parking lot and pathways to outdoor program areas.
- Created a walking tour of historic La Pointe as a safe, outdoor program for groups to explore the layers of history in the community.

Old World Wisconsin (Eagle)

Reopened in-person: June 1

- Introduced new guided tours in 2020 to accommodate COVID-19 pandemic precautions, one of which offered rare access to the second floor of the Four Mile House.

- Launched new virtual field trips, featuring animal ambassadors and other elements of in-person field trips.

- Offered a new signature event called “Family Fun Drive” that provided drive-thru access of the grounds in fall 2020 and spring 2021, with staff demonstrations of seasonal farm life and trades.

Pendarvis (Mineral Point)

Reopened in-person: Aug. 16

- \$631,000 in capital improvements underway or completed.
- Completed a Historic Structure Report to document building conditions and outline work priorities and cost estimates for future restoration.
- Began work on interpretive panels at the 43-acre Merry Christmas Mine Hill Trails and Prairie, which saw significant increase in usage during the pandemic. The panels will better connect hikers to the site’s history of lead and zinc mining operations.

Reed School (Neillsville)

Reopened in-person: July 26

- Planned for historic and continued grounds restoration projects
- Began the process to revamp



PENDARVIS



MADLINE ISLAND MUSEUM



STONEFIELD

multimedia experiences in the lower-level exhibitions.

Stonefield (Cassville)

Reopened in-person: Aug. 16

- \$382,000 in capital improvements underway or completed.

- Enhanced the visitor experience inside the State Agricultural Museum with new interpretive panels that explain the founding of the museum and technology changes to farming in Wisconsin.

- Significant capital projects focused on the rural village, with building repairs, enhanced ramp accessibility to the one-room school, and roof repairs to the printing shop.

Villa Louis (Prairie du Chien)

Reopened in-person: Aug. 16

- \$1.6 million in capital improvements underway or completed

- Projects included restoring the walkway around the mansion and outbuildings, which replaced the bricks and stonework to historic standards while vastly improving accessibility to the site's National Historic Landmark buildings.

- Resumed signature events, including the 40th annual Carriage Classic, held in September.

Wade House (Greenbush)

Reopened in-person: Aug. 16

- Installed over 1,000 feet of ADA-standard gravel pathways between the historic buildings, improving accessibility for all visitors.

- Began work on planning and engineering to significantly enhance the arena for horse-drawn carriage events.

Wisconsin Historical Museum (Madison)

Reopened in-person: June 1

- Offered a variety of walking tours around the Capitol Square, providing a safe outdoor group experience in addition to in-person exhibits.

- Opened our first bilingual exhibit, *Hmong in Wisconsin*, to coincide with the release of the Wisconsin Historical Society Press book of the same name.

- Offered new virtual education programs to schools across the state.

- Successfully re-envisioned the National History Day program for a virtual format with regional, state, and national competitions. Thousands of student competitors connected and presented entirely through this virtual platform.

Hmong

IN WISCONSIN



Mai Zong Vue

WHS HISTORIC SITES 2021 IN-PERSON ATTENDANCE

Circus World.....	35,267
Old World Wisconsin.....	21,423
Wis. Historical Museum.....	10,045
Black Point Estate.....	6,986
Madeline Island Museum	5,443
H.H. Bennett.....	4,709
Villa Louis	4,366
Wade House.....	1,502
Stonefield.....	564
Pendarvis	465
Reed School.....	186
First Capitol	180
TOTAL.....	91,136

* Figures are calendar year, through Oct. 11



CIRCUS WORLD

SPECIAL EXPERIENCES AT THE SITES IN 2021

In addition to general admission, the Wisconsin Historical Society's reopened historic sites offer many special experiences, including these. **Please join us for those still to come and experience the excitement our guests have come to love!**

- Wade House** Blacksmithing Workshops..... Saturdays, July through October
- H.H. Bennett** Tintype ExperienceVarious dates through September
- Villa Louis** Carriage Classic..... Sept. 10-12
- Wade House** Tavern Night.....Oct. 8
- Old World Wisconsin** Legends & LoreOct. 15-16, 22-23
- Stonefield** Safe & Spooky Halloween.....Oct. 23
- Villa Louis** Victorian Home for the Holidays..... Dec. 3-4, 10-11
- Old World Wisconsin** Home for the Holidays.....Dec. 4-5, 11-12, 18-19
- Wade House** Christmas Program.....Dec. 10-11



For more information, contact:

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