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OPENING FEBRUARY 4 – JUNE 5, 2022

PEOPLE OF THE PRAIRIE: 12,000 YEARS IN DUPAGE COUNTY

New exhibit at Elmhurst History Museum uses archaeology to gain an understanding of early Native cultures

ELMHURST, IL — History in Chicago’s suburbs didn’t begin when the first white settlers arrived around 1830. Long before that, since the end of the Ice Age about 12,000 years ago, people have taken advantage of DuPage County’s location and natural environment to provide for the needs of their families and communities. Never static, the area’s population has ebbed and flowed over thousands of years, changing with the climate and in response to new technologies, ideas and conflicts.

To put it in perspective, Euro-American communities have existed in this area for less than two percent of all the time people have lived in northeastern Illinois. So how do we unravel the stories of the Native people who lived here before the arrival of European settlers?

To answer that question, the Elmhurst History Museum will use an archaeological lens to gain a deeper understanding of the vibrant Native cultures and communities of the earliest inhabitants in their latest exhibit, **“People of the Prairie: 12,000 Years in DuPage County.”** The exhibit opens on February 4 and runs through June 5, 2022 at the Elmhurst History Museum, located at 120 E. Park Ave. in downtown Elmhurst.

Developing the Exhibit

Elmhurst History Museum's Curator of Exhibits, Dan Bartlett, has been developing this exhibit over the past few months and he is passionate about the exhibit's content and themes. "I am obviously a historian, but I have a deep respect for the many ways the scientific methods of archaeology can provide us with clues to the past," said Bartlett. "The two disciplines go hand-in-hand, and in this exhibit we will use findings from archaeological sites throughout the area to piece together a historical picture of the experiences of Native people in northeastern Illinois."

"My goal with this exhibit is to inspire visitors to consider how these Native communities lived in this area," Bartlett added. "How did they use the environment? How did they adapt to things like climate change and new technology? How did they get along with their neighbors? These are all things we are grappling with today, too."

"I also want people to take away a deeper understanding of the devastating impact that European-American settlers and the U.S. government displacement policies had on nearly eliminating local tribes from our area," Bartlett continued. "My hope is that we can honor these people whose descendants maintain their vibrant cultures to this day."

To create the exhibit, Bartlett tapped numerous resources to develop the storyline and procure loans that add meaning and texture to the exhibit. "We are very grateful to a number of key exhibit partners including archaeologist Sara Pfannkuche, Illinois State Museum, Midwest SOARRING Foundation, LaSalle County Historical Society, and several local museums that have graciously loaned materials for the exhibit."

Exhibit Artifacts and Highlights

The museum tapped into a number of resources from throughout the state to curate a diverse array of objects for this exhibit, including:

- A variety of stone tool types from the Fox and DuPage River valleys that show how tool technology changed over thousands of years.
- Materials from the site of the Grand Village of the Kaskaskia at Starved Rock where Marquette and Joliet stopped in 1673 on their way up the Illinois River, including fragments of European trade goods that arrived at the site before the French explorers.

- Artifacts illustrating Potawatomi life at the edge of removal from the Windrose archaeological site near Kankakee, which was home to a Potawatomi village ca. 1800-1830 and one of a very few 19th century Potawatomi sites excavated in Illinois.
- Objects recovered from an archaeological dig of the circa 1830-1860 Euro-American Thompson Paxton Farmstead. Paxton was an early settler near the present-day DuPage County Big Woods Forest Preserve, and the Big Woods Congregational Church was founded in Paxton's cabin in 1835.
- Three oversized, contemporary metallic print photos by Potawatomi photographer Sharon Hoogstraten taken for her "Dancing For Our Tribe" project to document contemporary Potawatomi Indian regalia.

In addition to the artifacts on display, "People of the Prairie" will also feature:

- A timeline of the different archaeological periods of northeastern Illinois featuring graphics and objects that allow comparisons as to how people lived, ate and interacted with their neighbors.
- An "archaeology lab" where visitors can find out about the scientific methods used by archaeologists to locate and excavate sites and make sense of the evidence they discover.
- A digital map that graphically depicts the swift displacement of Native people in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Exhibit-Related Programs

The Elmhurst History Museum will expand on the "People of the Prairie" exhibit themes with an array of engaging programs for adults and families in the coming months. **All programs are subject to change, and the latest information on these and more programs can be found at elmhursthistory.org/320/Programs.**

February 6: Journeying Through the American Indian Way of Life, Free, 2 p.m. — On the exhibit's opening weekend, award-winning Ojibwa author Kim Sigafus Mclver will interweave history, storytelling, songs and drumming to discuss tribes that once inhabited Illinois and share their traditions and cultures. An Illinois Humanities Road Scholars program.

March 6: Gallery Talk with the Curator, Free, 12 p.m. — Curator of Exhibits, Dan Bartlett, will lead participants through highlights of the "People of the Prairie: 12,000 Years in DuPage County" exhibit.

March 28-April 1: Spring Break Activities for Families — Families are invited to participate in different programs including a free *Meet an Archaeologist!* drop-in day, an off-site workshop at St. James Farm called *From Atlatl to Archery: Ancient Hunting Technologies* (\$5 per person), and a free *Three Sisters*

Make-and-Take Activity where participants will learn to grow corn, squash and bean plants together following Native traditions.

April 10: Billy Caldwell and the Great Lakes Trail Lecture, \$5/Free, 2 p.m.: Author Susan Kelsey shares the intriguing story of Billy Caldwell, a Chicago man of Native and Irish descent caught between two nations. Books will be available for purchase and signing.

May 15: Elmhurst Museum Day, Free, 1-5 p.m.: Elmhurst's annual Museum Day celebration will feature exhibit tours, craft activities and members of Midwest SOARRING with Native dancers, crafts, drumming and more. Additional event partners include Elmhurst Art Museum with free tours and a hands-on art project and Isle a la Cache Museum in Romeoville with a "Voyageur for a Day" activity.

Exhibit and Visitation Information

"People of the Prairie: 12,000 Years in DuPage County" will be on display from February 4 through June 5, 2022 at the Elmhurst History Museum, located at 120 E. Park Avenue in downtown Elmhurst.

Museum hours are Sunday and Tuesday through Friday from 1 to 5 p.m., and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The exhibit is sponsored by Feze Roofing. Admission is free, and limited free parking is available.

For the latest information, please visit www.elmhursthhistory.org.

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The Elmhurst History Museum is a department of the City of Elmhurst supported by the Elmhurst Heritage Foundation, a 501c3 non-profit organization. The Museum is located at 120 E. Park Ave. in downtown Elmhurst. General admission is free. For more information, call 630-833-1457 or visit our web site at elmhursthhistory.org.