



Museum to Immortalize Kickapoo Grand Village with Historic Marker at West Park

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For Immediate Release:

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. (June 12, 2023) -- The McLean County Museum of History, in partnership with the Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas, Illinois State Historical Society, and McLean County, is proud to announce the dedication of a new historic marker created to share the story of the Kickapoo in McLean County.

All are welcome to attend the dedication ceremony on Thursday, June 22, at 10:00 a.m. in historic West Park, east of LeRoy, located at 30590 E 750 North Rd, Le Roy, IL 61752.

The dedication will celebrate the installation and creation of the new state historical society marker, the preservation and relocation of the Kickapoo Grand Village Memorial Boulder, and the county's refurbishment of the pavilion at West Park.

Located north of what we now know as LeRoy, the Grand Village of the Kickapoo was approximately 600 acres (about the area of Central Park in New York City) of gathering space established by the Kickapoo in 1725.

"The Grand Village site speaks to the vital role the Kickapoo people played in Central Illinois history," says Museum Librarian Bill Kemp. "For much of the 18th and early 19th centuries, the Kickapoo were the dominant power in this stretch of Illinois, and the Grand Village was a vital base for the tribe."

The U.S. Army burned the village in the early part of the 19th century, and by 1832, the entirety of the Kickapoo Nation had been forcibly removed from Illinois.

In 1998, Bill and Doris Emmett welcomed the Kickapoo Nation back to their ancestral land near LeRoy for the first time since 1832. As recently as 2019, inter-tribal Pow Wows were hosted at the site, bringing together thousands of Native peoples to celebrate their history and culture.

When the Emmetts could no longer care for the land, they sold it to the Vermaats, who continued to host the Pow Wows until 2019. Unfortunately, the Vermaats sold the property in 2021 (despite the Kansas Kickapoo Tribe's best efforts to negotiate and purchase their ancestral land) to an LLC that intended to clear the land and threatened to dispose of the memorial boulder.

The Museum retrieved the boulder before the land was cleared and relocated it to historic West Park -- a fitting home for the marker, given Simeon H. West's advocacy for native preservation.

Simeon H. West came to Illinois in 1851 and became an influential figure of his time, establishing West Township alongside his father. In 1908, West donated 20 acres (about the area of Chicago's Millennium Park) of virgin timber to McLean County to establish West Park.

During his speech at the dedication of the park in 1908, West said, "So many only see dollars and cents when they cut down the trees in order to get in a corn crop. In setting apart this stretch of twenty acres of timber to preserve as a forest reserve, I feel that I am doing good for future generations." He continued, "People will come and go, but this pile of granite will stand forever."

West also co-commissioned a marker denoting the location of the Kickapoo Stockade Fort with George P. Davis (son of David Davis) and the McLean County Historical Society in 1906, just a mile northeast of West Park. That marker now sits in the middle of the same farmer's corn field.

In 2022, the McLean County Historical Society co-deeded the land it owns under the Kickapoo Stockade Marker to the Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas. Sharing this 1,225 square-foot plot of land with the Kickapoo is more symbolic than practical but is yet another small step towards beginning to reckon with the institution's role as a part of a larger colonial project. The Museum is honored to be able to continue working in partnership with the Kickapoo in preserving and sharing the stories of this land – and historical markers are one way of doing just that.

These efforts to create, install, and preserve Kickapoo historical markers coincide with the Museum's Historic Marker Matching Gift Initiative, encompassing eleven initial projects and over \$70,000 donated from the community. Please visit mchistory.org/participate/historic-marker-matching-gift-initiative to learn more.

Land Acknowledgement: The land we call McLean County is the ancestral land of many Native groups, beginning with the Paleoindians 12,000 years ago and, most recently, Algonquin-speaking groups, including the Kickapoo, who were forced west from this area in the 1830s. Other groups in this area include (but are not limited to) the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Piankashaw, Wea, Miami, Mascouten, Odawa, Sauk, Kickapoo, Mesquaki, Lenape, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Chickasaw Nations. These lands were and are the traditional territory of these Native Nations before their forced removal; and these lands continue to carry the stories of these Nations and their struggles for survival and identity.

[Click here to access the media kit.](#)

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The McLean County Museum of History is a 501(c)3 nonprofit dedicated to preserving, educating, and collaborating to share the diverse stories of the people of McLean County. For more information, please visit mchistory.org or stop by our nationally accredited museum located in the heart of historic downtown Bloomington on the Museum Square.