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What's New at Mackinac State Historic Parks?

MACKINAW CITY, MICH. — Opening day for Mackinac State Historic Parks' sites is less than three weeks away, which means the debut of new exhibits, galleries, demonstrations and tours.

Fort Mackinac saw the most extensive work over the winter, with the complete renovation of two spaces, the North Blockhouse and Office. The *Redcoats on the Frontier* exhibit at Colonial Michilimackinac saw a complete overhaul of the kids' interactive space in the Soldiers Barracks.

“All three of our new exhibits will hopefully help our visitors better understand the complexities and realities of life at Mackinac in the past,” said Craig Wilson, Curator of History for Mackinac State Historic Parks. “These projects cover themes that range from the seemingly mundane, like administrative work at Fort Mackinac, to the dynamically dramatic like the 1812 capture of Fort Mackinac in the North Blockhouse, but they all help us more fully tell the story of our sites.”

The North Blockhouse will immerse visitors in a multimedia presentation, allowing them to step back in time to the War of 1812 and experience the confusion and fear resulting from the British capture of Fort Mackinac on July 17, 1812.

The Office, formerly known as the Post Headquarters, will feature two updated period settings and two completely new gallery spaces interpreting the training and duties of Fort Mackinac's officers. Exhibit panels and interactive elements will help visitors explore officers' roles in the fort's daily operations as well as the administration of the Mackinac National Park.

Fort Mackinac will also debut revamped or updated walking tours, such as the “Women of the Fort” tour a “Fort Mackinac: 1780-1895” timeline history tour, and a new Bayonet Demonstration. The

Tea Room at Fort Mackinac, operated by Grand Hotel, will feature new menu items for the 2019 season, and, as always, will feature one of the most stunning views in Michigan. The venerable fort also saw some physical updates, with buildings painted, boardwalks replaced, and chimneys repaired.

The Soldiers Barracks interactive space at Colonial Michilimackinac will allow visitors to step back in time to experience the lives of British soldiers in the 1770s. Guests are invited to try on uniforms of soldiers of the 8th Regiment, sit at a mess table, climb into a communal bunk (two soldiers per bed!), or help a military interpreter clean their equipment or cook a meal in the working fireplace.

“Two of our projects, the Michilimackinac barracks room and North Blockhouse, will immerse our visitors in the past,” Wilson said. “By touching, smelling, seeing and hearing a glimpse of the past, I hope our guests will come away with a better appreciation of what the people who lived here historically went through.”

Every season, Colonial Michilimackinac interprets a new year of the American Revolution. This year, as you are walking through the site, you are stepping back in time to 1776, as the American Revolution spread. A new program, “Michilimackinac 1776: First Strike,” will take place throughout the 2019 season. Additionally, Colonial Michilimackinac will serve as host to several themed weekends, with topics ranging from gardens to trades to games. A full list of theme weekends can be found at mackinacparks.com.

The Mackinac State Historic Parks’ archaeology program will celebrate its 60th anniversary in 2019. Work will continue in House E of the Southeast Rowhouse at Colonial Michilimackinac. Archaeologists will be out daily (weather permitting) starting June 5 through August 24.

The exterior brickwork at Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse received extensive restoration during the 2018 season, and work will continue in the second floor of the house throughout 2019. Guests to the lighthouse will have the opportunity to experience fun and educational tower tours, the new Science and Technology exhibit, the Straits of Mackinac Shipwreck Museum, as well as demonstrations of the Fog Signal Whistle.

Over at Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park, a new guided nature hike will take place at 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. daily, showcasing to guests the abundant beauty of the site. An updated Water Power Station will also debut during the season, and visitor's can still experience the rush of the Adventure Tour.

The Richard and Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum on Mackinac Island will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2019. A new juried exhibition, "Visions of Mackinac," will debut May 2 and will be on display until October 6.

Major projects were funded, in part, by Mackinac Associates. Visit mackinacparks.com for a complete listing of updates and projects at Mackinac State Historic Parks. The season begins at Colonial Michilimackinac on May 1.

Mackinac State Historic Parks, a family of living history museums and parks in northern Michigan's Straits of Mackinac, is an agency within the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Its sites—which are accredited by the American Alliance of Museums—include Fort Mackinac, Historic Downtown Mackinac, The Richard and Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, and Mackinac Island State Park on Mackinac Island, and Colonial Michilimackinac, Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, and Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park in Mackinaw City. Mackinac State Historic Parks is governed by the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, established in 1895 to protect, preserve and present the parks' rich historic and natural resources for the education and recreation of future generations. Visitor information is available at (231) 436-4100 or on the web at www.mackinacparks.com.

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