

Wisconsin Historical Society: Villa Louis announces May 24 season opening and upcoming events

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Prairie du Chien, Wis. – [Villa Louis](#) – one of the most authentically furnished Victorian houses in America – reopens for the season on May 24, offering guests an up-close look at the gilded age lifestyle of the fur trader and land speculator, Hercules Dousman. An Italianate style mansion built in 1871, this National Historic Landmark is a jewel along the Great River Road route, which follows the Mississippi River.

This season, Villa Louis will offer a range of special events including a new Prohibition event, a speaker series, breakfast in a Victorian kitchen, and the 42nd annual Villa Louis Carriage Classic Weekend.

Set on a 25-acre site, the Villa Louis grounds comprise more than a dozen historic structures, including buildings from the Fur Trade and the foundations of Fort Crawford, where Wisconsin's only battle in the War of 1812 took place.

The season runs from May 24-October 29, Wednesday-Sunday from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tours run on the hour from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Special ticketed behind-the-scenes tours are offered on select Fridays.

Tickets are \$15 per person, \$13.50 for seniors, \$8 for children ages 5 to 12 and free for children under five. A grounds pass is \$10 per person. Wisconsin Historical Society members receive free general admission and a 10 percent discount on special events.

Upcoming Events:

- **Historic Prairie du Chien Riverfront Walking Tour - June 9, July 14, Aug.18, Oct.6, 10:30 a.m. to noon**

Visit historic buildings and landmarks and hear captivating stories of the people who shaped the city's history, including the Ho-Chunk Nation, whose ancestral land the city was founded on. Stops include the homes of fur traders, the War of 1812 battlefield, and the remains of Fort Crawford. The cost is \$25 per person.

- **Behind-the-Scenes Tour - June 30, July 28, Aug.23, Sept.29, Oct.27, 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.**

Discover the day-to-day inner workings of the estate including the care and keeping of different objects from the family's various collections and peek into the mansion's nooks and crannies, from the basement to the attic. The cost is \$30 per person and advance registration is required.

- **Villa Louis Speaker Series - July 9, Aug. 13, Sept.17, Oct.15, 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.**

July 9 – Mary Elise Antoine will discuss her book “Enslaved, Indentured, Free”, a true story of five Prairie du Chien women, and the history of slavery in the Upper Mississippi River Valley.

Aug. 13 – Scott Spoolman, author of “Wisconsin Waters: Ancient Histories of Lakes, Rivers, and Waterfalls”, will discuss the Badger state's intriguing waterways and their impact on the region's historical development.

Sept. 17 – James Hibbard, UW-Platteville's university archivist, will explore the region's indigenous history and the region's early European settlement.

Oct. 15 – Dr. Eugene Tesdahl, UW-Platteville history professor will speak about the early Black Wisconsinites and the impact of slavery in the state.

The speaker series is a free event with general admission. Pre-purchased tickets are not required.

- **31st Annual War of 1812 Battle for Prairie du Chien Living History Encampment - July 15-16, 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**

With the roar of the cannons and marching of soldiers, Wisconsin's only War of 1812

battle comes to life on the lawn of Villa Louis. Enter the recreated military encampment and discover the story behind the British assault on Fort Shelby on July 17, 1814. Participate in a battlefield walking tour at 10:30 a.m. and listen to a battle narration at 2:30 p.m. New in 2023, a French-Canadian fiddler and dancer showcase Canadian and French Indian dances and music. The single-day cost is \$17.50 per person and \$12.50 for children ages 5-12. The weekend cost is \$20 per person and \$15 for children ages 5-12. Free for children under five.

- **Secret Prohibition Happy Hour- Aug. 19, 4 to 7 p.m.**

Explore Villa Louis' prohibition past during this new, exclusive behind-the-scenes experience. Sample wines kept in Louis Dousman's wine cellar before retiring to the basement for the hidden party where bootleg liquor was once purchased and sold during Prohibition. Advance registration is required, and guests must be 21 and over to attend. Ticket price available June 8.

- **42nd Annual Villa Louis Carriage Classic - Sept. 8-10, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

Some of the region's finest horses and more than 100 new and restored carriages will compete in a variety of arena and cross-country events. Learn how this event descends from the Dousman era when Villa Louis was known as Artesian Stock Farm and was home to one of the Midwest's finest rare horse farms. Single-day admission is \$17.50 per person, \$10 for children ages 5-12. The weekend cost is \$27.50 per person, \$15 for children ages 5-12. Free for children under five. Admission includes a tour of the Villa Louis mansion.

- **Breakfast in a Victorian Kitchen - Sept. 30, Oct.14, 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

Cook up a little history at this special workshop. Use the foods, utensils, and technology of the Victorian era to craft a family-style breakfast and then enjoy a tour following breakfast. The cost is \$65 per person and advance registration is required.

For further information, visit villalouis.org

Click [here](#) to access the photo gallery.

About Villa Louis

Villa Louis Historic Site is one the of Wisconsin Historical Society's 12 historic sites

and museums. Located in Prairie du Chien, the historic Villa Louis mansion is the centerpiece of a grand Victorian estate built by the family of Hercules Dousman, a frontier entrepreneur who amassed a fortune in the fur trade and other frontier investments. The mansion has finished a top-to-bottom documentary restoration that has returned the Dousman home to the splendor of its 1890s heyday, using British Arts and Crafts interior designs inspired by famed designer William Morris. Visit villalouis.org or call 608-326-2721 for more information.

About the Wisconsin Historical Society

The Wisconsin Historical Society, founded in 1846, ranks as one of the largest, most active and most diversified state historical societies in the nation. As both a state agency and a private membership organization, its mission is to help people connect to the past by collecting, preserving and sharing stories. The Wisconsin Historical Society serves millions of people every year through a wide range of sites, programs and services. For more information, visit www.wisconsinhistory.org.