

Lewis and Clark State Historic Site To Commemorate Explorers' 1803 Arrival At Camp River Dubois

by Benjamin Pollard

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HARTFORD – The 220th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark Expedition’s arrival at their Illinois winter encampment will be commemorated with “Arrival at Camp River Dubois” Dec. 9-10 at the Lewis and Clark State Historic Site in Madison County.

Activities will take place from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. inside the site’s interpretive center. The event is free and open to the public.

Reenactors and demonstrators will interpret life for the Lewis and Clark Expedition soldiers while wintering at Camp River Dubois from December 1803 to May 1804. Visitors will see how the training and preparation at Camp River Dubois forged the Corps of Discovery and prepared it for a strenuous journey.

Soldiers in period uniform will be on site. Lewis and Clark Expedition uniforms can be seen on demonstrators of the White Pirogue boat. The War of 1812 artillery unit will display and interpret their cannon and equipment. Some of the Expedition soldiers went on to serve during this conflict.

Exhibitors will share unique elements of the Expedition and the early 19th century. Jeffrey Edison will explore York’s role as the only enslaved member of the Expedition and his many contributions. Artisan Barb Miner will share her skills and crafting knowledge to help visitors create their own reed and craft paper holiday decorations. Steve Bollini will discuss the hunting and fishing at Camp River Dubois. Others will present on scientific research of the Expedition, clothing of the period, and the role of the washer woman in camp.

St. Nicholas will make an appearance at the event, as well. Children are invited to get their pictures with St. Nicholas and see how gifts would have been brought to children in the early 1800s. They may even get a treat from St. Nicholas himself. This tradition goes back to the French communities living in early Illinois.

The Lewis and Clark State Historic Site is in Hartford in Madison County. The interpretive center and reconstructed Camp River Dubois reveal the important role Illinois played in the Corp of Discovery’s preparations as they wintered from December 1803 to May 1804. The site’s winter hours 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday.

The site is operated by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and supported by the Lewis and Clark Society of America.