

The History of the Feast of the Hunters' Moon

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Many early efforts were made by to find the exact location of Fort Ouiatenon after it had faded from memory. In 1887, after locals discovered "several silver crosses and a silver disc inscribed with arms of France," community leaders formed the Historical Society of Tippecanoe County. Surface finds and studies of original French documents pointed to the site of current Fort Ouiatenon Historic Park as the location of the original fort.

In 1907, the local chapter of the DAR erected a monument on the future park site. The 1925 centennial celebrations of the founding of Lafayette helped generate renewed interest in the renamed Tippecanoe County Historical Association (TCHA). Richard B. Wetherill, the president of TCHA, purchased 8.91 acres of land where researchers of the time believed Fort Ouiatenon was located. Wetherill presented the deed to TCHA with hopes that the site would be preserved from development and opened to the public. One of his goals was to reconstruct an "old blockhouse and palisades."

1929-1966

In March 1929, TCHA held a pageant at the site, Boy Scouts provided a Native American-style dance, and a paper was delivered detailing the history of the fort. Locals portrayed French traders, peasants, a priest, and Native Americans. This event may be the first recorded reenactment relating to Fort Ouiatenon. Wetherill's dream of a reproduction fort on the site came into reality when the Blockhouse was dedicated on June 14, 1930. In 1958, a fall "members only" event began, called the Feast of the Hunters' Moon. The event featured a picnic, a dramatic reading, music, and Boy Scouts demonstrating Native American-style dances.

1967-2017

The October 19, 1967 event was the first public Feast. In 1968, TCHA co-sponsored the event with the Rossville Junior High History Club. This event featured Native American-style dances, French folk songs, a flea market, vendors selling fall produce, flintlock gun firing, historical displays, and historical tours by the Rossville students. In 1968 the original site of Fort Ouiatenon was located and confirmed through archaeological investigations. Dr. James H. Keller, who had recently excavated at the fort site, gave presentations about the excavation.

The Feast expanded to a two-day event in 1969. Poles were erected near the blockhouse to fly flags that represented the eight European and American nations or groups of settlers that occupied the area in various eras. Members of the Ottawa, Ojibwa, and Miami tribes demonstrated tribal crafts, customs, and ceremonies. The 1971 Feast featured the first church services on Sunday and the first appearance of the voyageur canoes; both traditions continue.

Through the 1970s, the flea market aspect disappeared. More appropriate period crafts appeared as research continued to improve the knowledge of the TCHA staff and participants who sought to make the event authentic.

The first military reenactment units appeared in 1973. Their efforts made the Feast like a living period community and helped TCHA's continued push for authenticity. Period-appropriate foods were introduced, and the Feast Steering Committee encouraged community groups to work on authentic costumes. The American Bicentennial brought an expanded interest in local history, reenacting, and rediscovering the preindustrial past. Because of these changes, the grounds expanded to meet the needs of the increasing participation and attendance. The 1977 Feast demonstrated increasing national attention, as participants began to come from many states. The number, variety, and authenticity of food booths continued to rise during this period, as did the military units, voyageur brigades, sutlers, traditional craftspeople, and reenactors.

By 1979, an estimated 1000 participants in historic dress prepared and served food while 115 musicians, 50 dancers, 280 members of military units, 70 muzzleloaders, 40 booth traders, 75 traditional craftspeople, 100 sutlers, and many other participants engaged in other activities. During this time, various contests began, such as

tomahawk throwing, a voyageur canoe race, a flintlock reliability competition, and a costume authenticity competition.

As the 1980s began, the number of participants was approaching 5,000. The Children's Trade Blanket was introduced in 1981, and in 1982 the Native American woodland camp was established. The Feast planners from that period believed the success of the event was due to the location, the unique theme, the constant striving for authenticity, as well as the loyalty and dedication of the participants.

By 1987, participation was so high that the grounds had reached capacity. Two years later, with perfect weather, 67,000 visitors attended being catered to by over 5000 participants. The grounds were expanded to 24 acres in 1990. In 1995, the grounds were expanded by 5 acres on the western side to provide a military drill area and a performance area at the voyageur encampment.

In 1998, the educational purpose of the Feast expanded as 4th graders came on Friday for a School Fun Day to learn about 18th century life in Indiana, and in 2000, Thursday was designated as Special Kids Day, which allowed area students with special needs to come to a day designed for them to enjoy more one on one interaction with Feast participants. The 2001 event began on a somber note. The nation was still in shock over the terrorist attacks of 9/11, which led to heightened security. After a week's worth of rain, that Feast made history as the wettest on record. Some thirty years later, the evolution of what is "authentic" continues as new scholarship and interpretation of sources change. This festival is enlivened by generations of families, churches, civic groups, reenactment units, and scout troops who have remained loyal participants.

Over the years many musicians, period entertainment acts, military reenactors, voyageur brigades, living history interpreters, and Native American cultural educators have added to the exploration of the history and heritage of the 18th century in this area, as presented at the Feast.



The Feast is celebrating its 50th year in 2017. Thousands of people have contributed time, talents, and expertise in putting this amazing event together year after year. The TCHA staff, Feast Steering Committee, and volunteers behind the scenes and in the booths have worked to keep the event fresh and enjoyable. The fifty non-profits who provide food and other services, the craft demonstrators,

security and medical staff, performers, living history interpreters, the sutlers, and the public all make the Feast a memorable and successful event year after year.

Come "Feast" with us!

