

St. Germain dit Gauthier House ***Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin***

History:

- Built circa 1830 on Lot No. 7 in the Main Village of Prairie du Chien, fronting on Water Street.
- Located on land owned by Jean Baptiste Caron, a French-Canadian engaged in the upper Mississippi fur trade.
- Constructed of hewn timbers in French-Canadian method
 - *Pièce sur pièce*
 - Earliest form of house construction in upper Midwest
 - Knowledge and skill came with French-Canadians who worked in the fur trade
- Purchased by Magdelaine St. Germain dit Gauthier 1838. She, her husband Guillaume, and their family lived in the house until 1890.
- About 1900 house purchased by Charles Gremore and moved to present location on Fifth Street.
- Purchased by Mary Nugent 1901. She married George Coorough and their family lived in house until the Island Relocation in the 1980s.
- Ownership transferred to the City of Prairie du Chien.
- 2017 City of Prairie du Chien gave the house to the Prairie du Chien Historical Society.

Historical Importance

- From 1780s to 1850s, the Main Village of Prairie du Chien was the center of the fur trade in the upper Mississippi Valley
- Earliest homes in the Main Village and the other two villages at Prairie du Chien were constructed by men from French Canada all of who made a living in the fur trade.
- These early homes were all constructed of hewn logs in pièce sur pièce method
- The St. Germain dit Gauthier house is only one of two remaining houses hewn log in the former Main Village, and the earliest of the two.
- All the former owners of the house (Caron, St. Germain dit Gauthier, Gremore and Coorough) either engaged in the fur trade or their ancestors had engaged in the upper Mississippi fur trade.
- Houses like the St. Germain dit Gauthier house were built at Green Bay, La Pointe, and Prairie du Chien and trading locations on the upper Mississippi. Prairie du Chien has the greatest number of surviving French-Canadian pièce sur pièce houses in Wisconsin and the upper Mississippi.
- The St. Germain dit Gauthier House is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Restoration

- The Prairie du Chien Historical Society has contracted with Artisan Restoration of Kasota, Minnesota to restore the house to structurally stable condition.
 - Stabilization of foundation

- Support of floor joists and repair of wood first floor
- Replacement and/or repair of rotten hewn logs
- Reconstruction of historic windows and doors
- Reconstruction of original stairway
- Removal of inappropriate chinking and installation of correct chinking
- Treatment of all wooden members with boron
- Application of sealant to preserve wood
- Restoration of original window sash, fabrication of new sash to replicate original, fabrication of three wood doors using 19th century door of Cherrier house as model by Wadsworth Construction of Waukon, Iowa.
- Installation of a heating, air conditioning, and ventilation system by Mezera Heating & Air Conditioning, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin
- Update and extend existing electrical system by Wagner Electric, Wauzeka, Wisconsin
- Replace existing roof with cedar shingles by Rock Church Construction, Livingston, Wisconsin

Interpretation

- The house will be restored to circa 1840 when occupied by Magdelaine St. Germain dit Gauthier.
- The two first floor rooms of the log structure will be furnished circa 1840. The furnishing is guided by two original documents
 - 7 March 1840 inventory of the furnishing of the home as stated by Magdelaine Gauthier
 - Bill of sale dated 22 May 1840 listing the furnishings sold by Joseph Rolette to Magdelaine Gauthier
- The frame west wing will be an exhibit area, explaining the Main Village of Prairie du Chien and the history of the house.
- The house will be open to the public for specific hours and during any historic events held in the community, with an interpreter present.
- Special programs will be held on the lawn adjacent to the house with costumed interpreters engaged in and demonstrating aspect of the French-Canadian, Métis and fur trade cultures of the upper Mississippi
- Programs will be held in conjunction with and to complement programs of the Villa Louis State Historic Site, located west of the St. Germain house
- The house will be available to rent for weddings, private personal occasions, etc.

Long-Range

The restoration and interpretation of the St. Germain dit Gauthier House by the Prairie du Chien Historical Society is the first phase of a long-range plan to create a center for the preservation and interpretation of the French-Canadian and Métis cultures of western Wisconsin and the upper Mississippi River Valley.