

The Chief Richardville House

In each issue of Fort Wayne Living, we will feature a historic building, business or landmark in northeast Indiana. Have an idea for this feature? Send it to our editor, Amber Recker, at arecker@businesspeople.com.

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article by Lauren Caggiano
photo by Jeffrey Crane

Fort Wayne is rich in Native American culture, and one local structure is a testimony to more than 175 years of living history.

The Chief Richardville House, at its original site at 5705 Bluffton Road, bears several monikers, including the oldest Native American dwelling in the Midwest, the first Greek Revival Style house in northeast Indiana, and the oldest house in northeast Indiana. Perhaps most notable is that it was home to the wealthiest man in Indiana at the time of his death in 1841.

Indeed, the man who lived between these four walls was one of great influence. According to Todd Pelfrey, executive director of the History Center, Indian Chief Jean Baptiste de Richardville was known as a “shrewd businessman and negotiator.”

The son of a Frenchman and Miami Indian woman, Richardville knew how to make decisions in his favor. Case in point: his negotiating skills garnered him nearly 23 million dollars in liquid capital by the time he died.

The Chief Richardville House was lavish by 1827 standards, with its nine rooms and 2,100 square feet. In its heyday, the home was a mansion and considered an honor to visit.

“Generations of Richardville’s descendents lived in the home for years, so the structure has naturally changed over time,” Pelfrey notes.

In 2004, the home was restored to its former glory, a proper tribute that reflects the unique taste and status of its prominent resident. The \$360,000 exterior restoration was made possible through a combination of federal and state grants. The interior, however, has not been touched in an attempt to preserve its historical integrity.

While inside, visitors should note a significant display: the Chief’s 18th century personal safe. Thought to be from Quebec, Pelfrey considers this artifact “a touchstone to the Chief known for firm resolve and sagacity.”

The house is open to the public six days a year, the first Saturday of the month May through November. For more information about the Chief Richardville House, visit www.fwhistorycenter.com. **FWL**



photo provided by the History Center