

PRESS RELEASE: **New Madrid Earthquake Bicentennial Exhibit at the Bolduc House Museum –
December 16, 2011 – February 7, 2012**

Over 500 aftershocks were recorded in Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, between the first of the New Madrid earthquakes on December 16, 1811 and the second huge event on January 23, 1812. Many of the vertical log French colonial style homes in this oldest town in the state weathered and withstood these tremors. As far north as Herculaneum, Missouri, chimneys collapsed but further south whole towns were devastated: New Madrid and Little Prairie, to be specific. Little Prairie, where Caruthersville is today, was totally destroyed. The vibrations traveled through the continent being felt in Colorado as well as causing church bells to sound in Boston according to the contemporary records.

The circa 1792 Louis Bolduc House is the perfect venue for a bicentennial commemorative exhibit of these earthquakes. Not only did this structure survive; its builder, Louis Bolduc, lived through the quakes as well. Like many who shared his background, this native of Quebec experienced more suffering than any of us can imagine. His first home was burned by the British army in St. Joachim, New France, after the 1759 Battle of Quebec which probably caused him to move his first wife and baby son to Ste. Genevieve. Both mother and child died en route near that “stinking field of onions” where Chicago is today. He arrived in the “Old Town” of Ste. Genevieve and soon married Agatha Govreau. They had four children. The fourth, Jean-Baptiste, died at around four months of age. So did his mother. Soon Louis married for the third and last time, Marie Courtois. She bore him two sons, both of whom died as babies. Next, the *poteaux en terre* vertical log house that Louis built for Agatha in the “Old Town” was flooded to the rafters by the Mississippi River during that “Year of the Floods”, 1785. It flooded again in 1787. By 1792 the town had relocated *en masse* to its present site and Louis Bolduc had become one of the wealthiest of its citizens, named in the Spanish records as Upper Louisiana’s lead producer of six commodities: wheat, indigo, tobacco, lead, salt, and pork. The house he built here is expansive and sturdy. It still retains its original vertical log walls, Norman truss system, and the original floors –even after the 1811-1812 series of New Madrid earthquakes certainly rattled it and perhaps collapsed the chimneys. Besides overcoming the psychological and physical effects of war trauma, fire, the deaths of two wives and four children, and multiple catastrophic flooding- not to mention other horrifying events such as discovering five men killed and scalped in the hills, Louis Bolduc survived the New Madrid earthquakes by three years. It is fitting to commemorate the earthquakes at this National Historic Landmark site which he built.

The Bolduc House Museum’s New Madrid Earthquake Bicentennial Exhibit includes information about the 1811-1812 earthquakes: what happened, where, when, who recorded what kinds of observations, and how would the same information be collected and disseminated today. The exhibit focuses on the contemporary responses to the quakes: the naturalist’s response, the artist’s response, the journalist’s response, the humanitarian response, the spiritual response, the governmental response, the criminal response etc. In addition to the contemporary responses, we are thrilled to have prints of etegami images created by Dosanko Debbie, a graduate of Washington University in St. Louis and a resident of Hokkaido, Japan. Her paintings were inspired by the recent Japanese earthquake and tsunami and feature folk images along with intensely evocative narrative text on display at the Bolduc House Museum’s Linden Hall Gallery. The exhibit will also contain photographs of the damage done in the 2010 Haitian earthquake as well as a description of a humanitarian response to bring clean water to that nation in the aftermath of its earthquake. These images will be on display in the Bolduc-LeMeilleur

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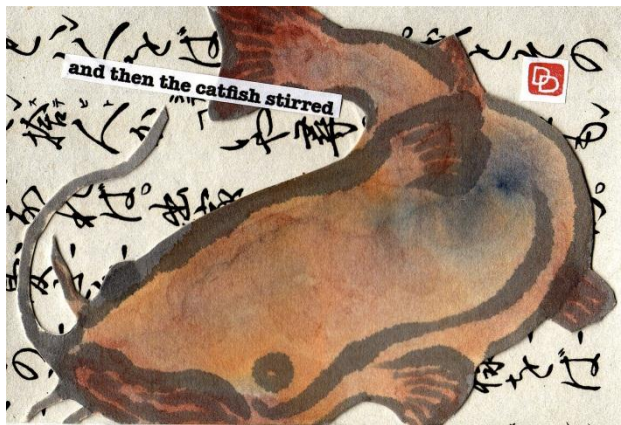
House which, incidently, was built by Rene LeMeilleur, who owned a sugar cane plantation in Haiti and fled that nation after the successful slave revolt.

Special proqraming will happen on January 22, 2012, which has been dubbed, “Earthquake Sunday.” Emily Jaycox of the Missouri History Museum Library will speak at 1:00 on “Aftershocks in the Courtroom-New Madrid Land Claims & the Genealogist.” Dr. Frank Nickell of the Center for Regional History will speak at 2:00 on “The New Madrid Earthquakes in Historical Perspective.” At 3:00 we will host a “Sing” by the St. Louis Shape Note Singers which will feature hymns that were inspired by the New Madrid earthquakes. A suggested donation of \$10.00/person will help defray the costs of Earthquake Sunday and includes general admission to the Bolduc House Museum.

Homeschooled students in kindergarten through fifth grade are invited to attend an Edible Earthquake Demonstration & More on Tuesday, January 4, 2012, from 10:00-Noon. The cost per participant for this will be \$4.00 with a maximum of \$10.00/family.

The exhibit opens on December 16, 2011 and will be on display through February 7, 2012, which is the day that the Mississippi River is said to have flowed north. Details are available at the Bolduc House Museum’s website: www.bolduchouse.org.

Submitted by Lesley Barker, Director, Bolduc House Museum, which is owned and operated by The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Missouri.



In Japanese folklore, earthquakes are caused when a giant catfish moves. This image is one of 15 etagami images by Dosanko Debbie on display at the Bolduc House Museum through February 7, 2012. Her etagami images are posted online at <http://etagamibydosankodebbie.blogspot.com/>. (Used by permission)