

Indian Head Rock subject of independent film set for KET, KET2

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FRANKFORT — The battle over Indian Head Rock, the eight-ton sandstone bolder that once sat in the Ohio River between Portsmouth and South Shore, is the focus of a new independent film airing on Kentucky Educational Television.

“Between the Rock and the Commonwealth,” airing at 9 p.m. July 3 on KET and 8 p.m. July 9 on KET2, details the controversial removal of Indian Head Rock from the river in 2007, and the ensuing legal battle between Ohio and Kentucky about ownership rights.

First described in an architectural publication of the 1840s, Indian Head Rock originally sat in the Ohio River roughly 60 feet from the Kentucky shoreline near South Shore. Prior to being submerged in the 1920s, when dams raised the river level, the rock had been a gathering point for generations of visitors, many of whom carved their names or initials into its face.

In 2007, the rock was removed without permit by a local historian, who donated it to Portsmouth. A legal battle over the rock’s rightful place soon erupted, gaining national attention via outlets, including National Public Radio, CBS News and The New York Times. Ultimately, the rock was returned to Kentucky, where it is housed in a Greenup County storage facility.

“The story of the rock goes far beyond its removal from the river and the subsequent legal battle over ownership,” said Steven O. Middleton of Morehead, an instructor at Morehead State University and the film’s producer.

“Indian Head Rock is a rock that for eons was a gathering spot for travelers, explorers and different cultures. The rock always seems to find a way to re-emerge every century or so to let folks know that it is still around and has not gone away,” Middleton said.

“Researching the history of the rock was like treasure hunting. The more I discovered about its long and storied past, the more fascinating the project became for me.”

“Between the Rock and the Commonwealth” is an independent production of State Run Media Productions.