

Museum Notes

for the week of November 15-21, 2020

by Kristen Parrott, curator

November is Native American Heritage Month. The land we now know as Vernon County is the ancestral homeland of the Ho-Chunk, some of whom continue to live here today. This region was also used as hunting grounds by the Kickapoo in the late 1600's.

In October I attended the Wisconsin Historical Society's annual history conference, which of course was held on-line this year, and was able to attend a couple classes taught by and about American Indians.

Aaron Bird Bear, the Tribal Relations Director at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, spoke on the subject of "Settler Colonialism and the Objects Around Us". In August he gave a similar presentation when he participated in the Wisconsin Historical Society's webinar series on "Markers, Monuments, and Meaning". These webinars are available free to the public from this webpage: <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS16419>

Bird Bear is of Mandan, Hidatsa, and Diné ancestry, and is an enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold Indian Reservation. The Mandan and Hidatsa are two of the Three Affiliated Tribes, and Fort Berthold is in North Dakota. The Diné are also called Navajo, and live in the southwestern U.S. So, Bird Bear has roots elsewhere, not in Wisconsin, and brings that perspective to his work here.

He told us that the goal of "settler colonialism" is replacement, to replace the indigenous people with colonists. This was made plain in Wisconsin's original motto, "Civilization Succeeds Barbarism", which envisioned the territory as a space for "civilized" Euro-Americans, cleared of "barbaric" Natives. (Our state's current motto is "Forward".) Many of the tribes that used to live in Wisconsin were pushed west and south by settlers, but 12 American Indian Nations live here today.

Bird Bear also emphasized how new the United States is, with just a few hundred years of national history. By comparison, there is evidence of native people living here, in what is now Wisconsin, over 12,000 years ago. The "objects around us" include linear, conical, and effigy mounds constructed by native people many hundreds or thousands of years ago.

These mounds are the markers and monuments of earlier times, like the statues and plaques of today. Some of the mounds are burial sites. Most mounds were destroyed by the settlers and by modern construction, but some remain today, including here in Vernon County. Among other places, mounds can be seen at Riverside Cemetery along the Mississippi River just north of Genoa, and of course at Effigy Mounds National Park across the river in Iowa.

You can learn more about Wisconsin's Native communities, both past and present, here at the Vernon County Museum. Our current public hours are Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, noon to 4PM. The museum will be closed for Thanksgiving on Thursday, November 26.