

Museum Notes

by Kristen Parrott, curator
for the week of November 18 – 24, 2018

November is Native American Heritage Month, a time to focus on the history of American Indians. This is a subject so big, covering thousands of years, that it can be quite difficult to try to grasp. Narrowing the focus, to just the history of American Indians in the land now called Vernon County, is helpful. The prospect is still a little daunting, in part because of a lack of definitive information, but we can make a start.

An obvious place to begin is with the stone markers along the Black Hawk Trail through the southwestern section of the county. Most of these markers follow the story of the final days of the Black Hawk War of 1832, which involved a band from northwestern Illinois. But a few of the markers are about Indians who lived here in this area, people from the Ho-Chunk tribe.

One of these is titled, “Site of Red Bird’s Village”. It’s located along the Mississippi River on Hwy. 35, between the villages of Genoa and Victory and just south of the point at which the Bad Axe River empties into the Mississippi. Red Bird was a Ho-Chunk leader who lived from about 1788 to 1828. His village was probably not a permanent settlement, but more of a seasonal, temporary village. The community might have moved to this site along the river in the summers, and then moved away from the water in the winters.

Another of the stone markers is titled, “Winneshiek’s Landing”. It’s also located along the Mississippi River on Hwy. 35, just north of the village of De Soto. Winneshiek’s Landing was an earlier name for the place now called De Soto. Several Ho-Chunk leaders have been named “Winneshiek”, both now and in the past.

Some other time we’ll look at the stories told on these two markers. The markers were created in the 1930’s, and we have more information and a different perspective now, so we should read them critically. For now, it’s a start to know that they are about Ho-Chunk Indians who lived here long ago.

The winter holidays are quickly approaching, and the Vernon County Historical Society is preparing for its annual Candy Cane Tour of Homes. This year’s tour will be held on Sunday, December 2, from 1 to 5PM. The tour begins at the museum, where you can purchase tickets (\$10 each), pick up a map of the tour route, and enjoy holiday treats and decorations. On the tour this year are two homes and a senior living facility in the city of Viroqua, and two homes in rural Viroqua – all decorated for the holidays. Proceeds from this event benefit the Historical Society.