

Museum Notes

by Kristen Parrott, curator
for the week of November 22, 2017

November is Native American Heritage Month in the United States. This celebration doesn't seem to get much attention, but if you go looking for information, it is available.

To begin with, there's a website: nativeamericanheritagemonth.gov. This site connects you to a wealth of useful articles, videos, and images. I wanted to know more about how the month got its designation, so I clicked on "About" and then was directed to the Library of Congress website. There I learned that, "Since 1995 Presidents Clinton, George W. Bush, Obama, and Trump have issued annual proclamations which designate November as National American Indian Heritage Month, or since 2009 as National Native American Heritage Month."

Now I wanted to know why the name had changed, and seeing references to the National Museum of the American Indian, a Smithsonian Institution, I went to its website, nmai.si.edu. Under a list of frequently asked questions, I found the following: "What is the correct terminology: American Indian, Indian, Native American, or Native? All of these terms are acceptable. The consensus, however, is that whenever possible, Native people prefer to be called by their specific tribal name. In the United States, *Native American* has been widely used but is falling out of favor with some groups, and the terms *American Indian* or *indigenous American* are preferred by many Native people."

The reference to tribal names reminded me that Wisconsin Public Radio is running a series of programs about Wisconsin's tribes every Monday in November at 8PM. The programs are also available at the website wpr.org – search for "tribal histories". Of special interest to our region is the program about the Ho-Chunk Nation: "By the banks of the Lemonweir River in what for ages had been Ho-Chunk territory, Andy Thundercloud shares the oral tradition of his people. Thundercloud tells of a traveling people who migrated across the land to become many different tribes, of the importance of maintaining the traditional language, and of the wonderful way of life he has known."

So, bringing the subject to the local level, what information does our museum have about American Indians? An exhibit room on the second floor is devoted to prehistory and to American Indian history. Here you can learn about people who lived in this region during the Paleo era (11,500-8000 B.C.), Archaic era (8000-500 B.C.), Woodland era (500 B.C.-1000A.D.), and Mississippian/ Oneota era (1000A.D.-1650A.D.), and you can see stone tools that were made in those eras. You can also pick up free brochures about the Ho-Chunk of the modern era, covering such subjects as art, education, and commerce.

The museum's reference library contains several useful resources, including *Indian Nations of Wisconsin*, by Patty Loew, and *Wisconsin Indians*, by Nancy Oestreich Lurie. And of course we have a large file and many books about the Black Hawk War of 1832, which ended tragically on the banks of the Mississippi River in what is now Vernon County. A "Black Hawk Trail" brochure is available free at the museum and other locations, and on our website, vernoncountyhistory.org.