

Native American Heritage Month

By Gary Martin, Lock and Dam 16

In 1994, President Clinton issued a proclamation based on Senate Joint Resolution 271, designating the month of November as National American Indian Heritage Month.

Bush and Reagan also issued these proclamations, but what is interesting is each president issued a proclamation in different months, from September to December.

One of the very first proponents of an American Indian Day was Dr. Arthur C. Parker, a Seneca Indian, who was the director of the museum of arts and science, in Rochester, N.Y. He persuaded the Boy Scouts of America to set aside a day for the first Americans and for three years they adopted such a day.

In 1915, the annual Congress of the American Indian Association met in Lawrence, Kan., and formally approved a plan. It directed its president, the Rev. Sherman Coolidge, an Arapahoe, to call upon the country to observe such a day.

He issued a proclamation on Sept. 28, 1915, which declared the second Saturday in May as American Indian Day, and it also contained the first formal appeal for recognition of Indians as citizens.

The year before this proclamation was issued, Red Fox James, a Black Feet Indian, rode horseback from state to state seeking approval for the celebration of a day in honor of the Indians. He later presented the endorsements of 24 state governments at the White House on Dec. 14, 1915. However, there is no record of such a national day being proclaimed.

The governor of New York declared American Indian Day on the second Saturday in May 1916. Several states celebrated the fourth Friday in September. In Illinois, for example, it celebrated that day by legislative enactment in 1919.

In Massachusetts, in accordance with a law passed in 1935, the governor issued a proclamation naming the fourth Friday in September American Indian Day for any given year. Presently, several states have designated Columbus Day as a legal American Indian holiday.

In Indian Country, there is a little Indian humor, they declare Columbus Day as the American Indian Day of



Mourning.

The Elders of the Seneca Nation of Indians, Salamanca, N.Y., said only in America would you declare a holiday for an individual who left Spain not knowing where he was going. When he arrived, he didn't know where he was, and when he returned, he didn't know where he had been.

What started out as an effort to gain a day of recognition and honor has resulted in a month being designated to recognize Native Americans for their significant contributions and the sacrifices they've made to help make this country as great as it is today.

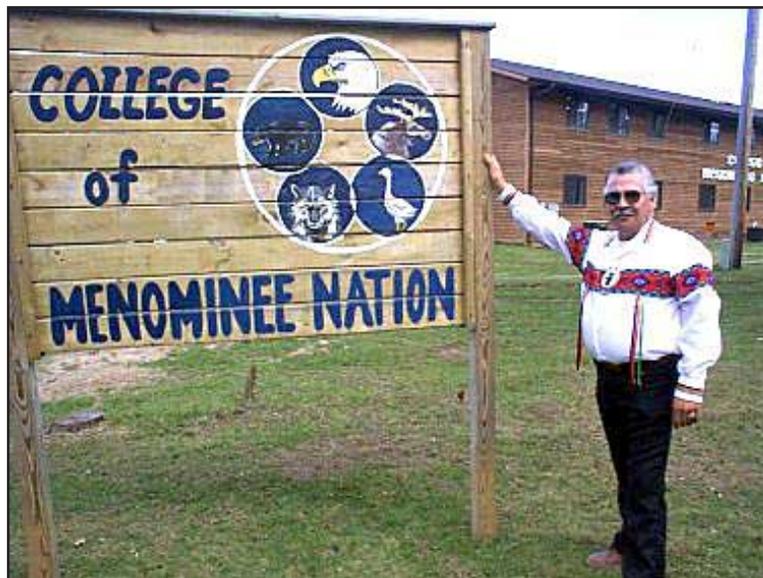
To this day, and during the last 84 years, there still is not an

official day of recognition.

Until that day comes, we ask all Americans to celebrate and reflect upon this country's first inhabitants, their legacy, culture, and spiritual heritage.

In November, remember and honor us by giving thanks to the Great Spirit who has seeded Mother Earth, who is a living entity, and a giver of life. Her resources are gifts we have not inherited, but only borrowed from our children.

In the language of my people, the Menominee Nation, we say wa-wannin (thank you). 🙏



Alan Caldwell, director, Menominee Culture Institute, stands next to the entrance to the College of the Menominee Nation in Keshena, Wis. Caldwell will speak to Rock Island District employees during a lunch-n-learn program to be held at the Clock Tower Building Nov. 14.

Lunch-n-Learn at the Clock Tower

A Native American Heritage Lunch-n-Learn is scheduled for Nov. 14 at 11:30 a.m. in Conference Rooms A, B and C at the Clock Tower Building. The Special Emphasis Program Committee event will feature speaker Alan J. Caldwell, director, Menominee Culture Institute, College of the Menominee Nation, Keshena, Wis.



Find out more about the Menominee Nation at:

www.menominee.edu/culturemain/culturehome.html