

Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs



Mark Mitchell, Chairman
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Commission Members
Jeanne A. Brink
Tim Richard de la Bruere
Hilary Caillas
Judy Dow
Charlene R. McManis
Donald Stevens

Meeting Minutes from November 30, 2006

Present were: Chairman- Mark Mitchell, Don Stevens, Charlene McManis, Judy Dow, Jeanne Brink, Tim De Le Bruere and Hilary Casillas.

Also present were: John Moody, Jeff Benay- Former Chair of Governor's Commission on Native American Affairs, Ellen Maxon- Human Rights Commission, John Churchill- Abenaki Tribal Council, Nancy Gallagher, Fred Wiseman, Jedd Kettler- County Courier, and Heidi Britch-Valenta-Board Secretary.

1) CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was brought to order at 1:00pm by Chairman Mark Mitchell at the Title VII Indian Education Office 49 Church St., Swanton, Vermont.

Mitchell asked if Commission members had reviewed meeting minutes from October 26, 2006. The Commission gave consensus for approval of the minutes.

Mitchell went on to welcome new Commission member Hilary Casillas who will be filling the empty seat left by the resignation of Howard Lyons. Casillas hails from Oklahoma and holds a position with the Cancer Society as Government Liaison.

2. UPDATE ON MEETING WITH SIGRID LUMBRA, SOCIAL STUDIES COORDINATOR

Judy Dow gave an update on the meeting with Sigrid Lumbra, Social Studies Coordinator; Department of Education, which took place on November 1st in Montpelier. Dow noted the surprisingly low attendance to the meeting which included Charlene McManis, herself, and one other educator.

The purpose of the meeting was to gain a vision for a curriculum which will be embedded with Native American voices and within the General Grade Expectations. Dow explained that the work must be submitted soon to be implemented in the 2007 curriculum as they must allow time for acceptance and training of teachers. A main focus will be on teacher development which will occur at quad meetings.

Dow went on to explain that the goal was to create a readily accessible curriculum which will not require more research from teachers. This user friendly ease will be crucial to the success of the curriculum.

One very positive development from the meeting was the offer by Lumbra for the Commission to utilize the *Social Studies Currents Newsletter* to promote their cause. Dow emphasized that the

Commission jumped at the opportunity. They pulled together several articles for the November issue in a very short period of time which was fortuitous as November was American Indian Heritage Month. Articles titled: ***Deconstructing the Myths of "The First Thanksgiving"***, ***An American Indian Heritage Month Message***, and ***Distinguished Native Americans*** all appeared in the November issue which was sent to every school in the state.

3. UPDATE ON QUADRICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

Fred Wiseman was present to update the Commission on the progress in the Lake Champlain Centennial Celebration scheduled for 2009. Wiseman has long been associated with this effort and has been entwined in several committees. Wiseman let the Commission know that as the celebration gains momentum it will behoove the Commission to become more involved in the committees to ensure accurate representation of the Abenaki experience.

Wiseman described the plans for a canoe-cade on Lake Champlain similar to one which occurred in 1959. Canoe occupants will be in costume and the Maritimes Museum will contribute a canoe circa 1969 as well as a replica of Champlain's shallop. The canoe-cade is expected to be open to the general public but is hoped that the birch bark canoe will lead the pageant.

Other ideas for the commemoration were for a pow-wow, guided hike, reenactment of attacks, and a Tent of Many Elders. Wiseman pointed out that the Committees have little money at this point and Federal funding is limited. While the 1909 celebration of Lewis and Clark's exploration was centered in Burlington, the 2009 event will be more dispersed with events scheduled for far more communities. Wiseman also noted that the previous event was very Native American centered and that it would be prudent to collaborate with other Nations to establish a cadre of Native American advisors to proceed with the planning.

Don Stevens stressed the need to use all marketing sources to publicize the event including rest areas, magazines, and newsletters. Wiseman agreed and mentioned the series of signage anticipated to be reevaluated for this purpose.

Wiseman then presented the Commission with this first proposed Logo for the event. He pointed out that the focus would be on *The Region, the People, and the Lake* and less so on Samuel D. Champlain. The Commission recognized the depiction of "Marge" in the poster. Wiseman stated the goal of the image was to avoid using the traditional representation of the buckskin Indian and to portray a more modern image of a Native American. Jeff Benay shared his disappointment that art donated by local Native American artist Felicia Gagne was not selected for this draft. Wiseman acknowledges that this was still a work in progress. The Commission expressed curiosity on the topic.

The crux of the discussion was that indeed more presence was necessary on the various committees. Wiseman informed them of the next full Quad meeting which was scheduled for January and several Commission members committed to joining the team. Charlene McManis expressed interest in

becoming a part of the Commemoration team. Judy Dow offered to join the team which would be focusing on Education, and Jeanne Brink stated her desire to aid in the indigenous celebration preparations.

Wiseman noted that there would still be a gap in the team which would be handling the decision surrounding infrastructure. There are plans in the works for interpretive center. John Moody spoke of his past involvement in this discussion and that he had stressed a need for Native American artifacts to be stored below ground level to honor the spiritual beliefs system. Mark Mitchell offered to establish contact and request a position on the committee. Moody noted the name of Duncan Wilky, archeologist for Agency of Transportation (AOT).

Wiseman then moved on to share his disappointment and frustration at the application and acceptance of a grant by Vermont Public Television (VPT) and the Division for Historic Preservation- Museum and Library Division, for which the topic would be Champlain and the Native American interaction. Wiseman pointed out that he was made aware of the project due to a request for his expertise in the creation of the video. Wiseman pointed out that this was very presumptuous of the Applicants without the input or notification of the Commission on Native American Affairs. It was also noted that Brink is on the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) for VPT and was not notified of this project. Stevens pondered if the Division of Historic Preservation was charged with aiding and supporting the Commission, then they should be able to get a copy of the grant. Brink committed to bringing up the issue at the next meeting of the CAC and to note the unease of the Commission at being usurped. Wiseman agreed to send the information to Mitchell who would prepare a missive and copy all members. Those members wishing to have input in the final draft must respond to Mitchell by the 10th of December. The letter will outline that all future Native American coverage of the celebration should be channeled through the Commission.

Wiseman closed by saying that the video he had prepared for the celebration will be previewed at the “Big Moon” event at the Mary Babcock Elementary School in Swanton from 5-9pm on December 8th.

4. PRESENTATION BY NANCY GALLAGHER

Nancy Gallagher presented to the Commission her opinion, based on years of research and experience, that the Abenaki Experience must overcome basic road blocks in perception to reach a general audience through the schools.

She explained the extreme barriers to understanding due to the difference in techniques for sharing history between the Native Americans Community and the current learning systems. She emphasized the use of oral history in Native American culture and suggested the inclusion of stories as a foundation for the proposed curriculum. She also pointed out the significance of the family within the band.

Gallagher explained that many Native Americans hid their identity to avoid discrimination, public wrath and the eugenics program and that resulted in a “hole” in history. She noted a local settlement named “moccasin village” which is not known to anyone but the Native American population.

She used an anonymous quote to exemplify her point, “The Land is the Written Language, and the land is the book of life.”

5. REVIEW AND DISCUSSION ON DRAFT CRITERIA FOR ARTS AND CRAFTS

Mitchell informed the Commission that he had been contacted by the Governor’s office to see if Mitchell would meet with Assistant Attorney General Bill Griffith as he expressed an interest to assist the commission with the arts and craft policy. A meeting has been set for December 12 @ 4:00 with Bill Griffith to discuss the draft Commission policy.

Stevens asked to move forward with the discussion on the exact wording. Mitchell suggested they postpone the discussion until after the meeting with Bill Griffith in case he has significant input for the task. Stevens agreed with this logic but asked Commission members to ponder the question of recognition for organizations

Mitchell thanked Stevens on behalf of the Commission for the great work that he had done on this project as this Commission has the duty to include the Abenaki Experience and promised to devote the entire December meeting to working on this issue.

6. OTHER BUSINESS

A.) Mitchell very enthusiastically shared a recent development which he felt would bring a whole new level of accessibility to the Commission. Mitchell explained that he thought it was too difficult to find the Commission members on the Governor’s Website and once located felt it served no purpose. He explained that he had contact Housing and Community Development via e-mail and requested \$200 for the development of a website for this Commission. They did not respond his e-mail so Mitchell decided to take matters into his own hands, and contacted Jesse Larocque, owner of a local computer business, and Abenaki Basket Maker together they got a website up and running.

Mitchell was very pleased to relate that there had been over 200 hits in a few days with much great feedback. The new website address is www.vcnaa.com. Mitchell felt the Board could be proud of the fact that no tax dollars were used to create the website. Mitchell was in the process of trying to work with the County Courier to also get a link on their website, other State Commissions and Agencies, Native publications, etc.

B.) Jeff Benay shared with the Commission a recent *Weekly Reader* issue that he felt showed an egregious disregard for Native American history, or culture. He handed out copies of the Thanksgiving edition of the school news issue which is circulated throughout the County. The Commission agreed that the pictures were disappointing.

Benay also brought up the issue of the protest at Dartmouth surrounding the racial slur “*The Natives are getting Restless*” which was printed in the paper *the Dartmouth Review* as a cartoon. Mitchell stated he has utilized the web site to alert the native community of this issue.

Conversation flowed to another politically incorrect and erroneous headline in the Burlington Free Press which touted “*Vermont low in Diversity*” The Commission agreed to write a letter to the Free Press to make them aware of the rich diversity within its readership area. Stevens also suggested contacting the census to inquire into the process for data collecting and suggesting changes to include the large portion of the population that may not be 100% Native but are not Caucasian. John Moody suggested meeting with the Free Press to discuss the ways that the Headlines are selected.

McManis and Hillary Casillas will draft a letter to the Burlington Free Press that offers information and builds connections within the community. Casillas suggested it was time to have a good working relationship with the Free Press.

Mitchell asked for consensus to close the meeting. The Commission agreed it was time and the meeting adjourned at 4:05pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Heidi Britch-Valenta
Secretary

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