



Worthington

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Ashley sifts stereotypes from history

WORTHINGTON— Girdled with a wreath of leaves, a man holding a bow, wearing feathers in a head dress, has the words printed around him, “Come Over and Help Us.” This was the original seal of Massachusetts. It was the Puritans’ propaganda to sell New England by saying come over here and help the Indians. In 1830 a new seal was designed using a Dakota Indian, wearing buckskins to symbolize the Native Americans of New England.

Stereotypes verses history is what George Ashley of Holyoke Community College History Professor Emeritus presented at the Historical Society on Sunday, June 19. Pat Kennedy introduced Ashley and talked briefly on their combined interest in Native American literature and history at HCC.

A small group of twenty plus people, who were intently interested, attended the lecture. Professor Ashley began with an informative explanation of Native Americans in New England before the Europeans’ arrival. Several large villages, sometimes up to 500 people with outlying communities, were along the rivers. One such village along the Connecticut River was located where the State Police Barracks is on Route 5, Northampton. While another south of this, was where Main Street Springfield is now. Yet another on the Deerfield River was on the northern end of the now Old Deerfield Village.

Ashley explained about water travel and the rivers’ plentiful supply of food for those people. And he explained about their

agricultural means of corn, beans, squash and tobacco. There were wise men and wise women who directed decisions for the village. The pilgrims and puritans were not the first Europeans to have contact with the Native Americans, but the Portuguese fishermen were. These fishermen spread diseases among the tribes who had no resistance to the European pathogens.

By the time English Europeans appeared, many of the villages were abandoned. Ashley continued on about the tribes’ coexistence with the Europeans. The Indians desired the cotton cloth manufactured by the Europeans. In turn the Europeans desired beaver fur for waterproof hats. Then there was the European livestock, which caused a huge change of the landscape. According to Ashley, hogs ran wild in the forests, while cows, goats and sheep grazed on open meadows. There were many more details about their sharing, and the conflicts of the land and situations that developed between them.

As questions were asked, Ashley elaborated to completely answer each question. That lead to another question and further discussion. One remark developed in to a lengthy discussion about the King Phillips’s War and the hostilities, which lead to the breakdown between the Indians and the Europeans.

Ashley was extremely knowledgeable and shared that information with his audience. He could have continued, and did after the lecture adjourned, with extended discussion over choice strawberry desserts.