

Rare book collection now on display

OHSWEKEN — Cultural and historical material not available anywhere else can be seen at the Six Nations Public Library this week. The timely displays are well-suited for Heritage Week.

An extensive Iroquois rare book collection can also be accessed. Assembled by professors of Trent University in Peterborough, this collection draws scholars from all Iroquoian communities. Additional treasures include eight books that were returned last year from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington by Dr. William N. Fenton.

Through the efforts of the late Simeon Gibson, the returned books contain ancient feasts and burial information. Though criticized at the time for his decision to share this knowledge, the irreplaceable contents have been successfully saved for future generations.

Complete editions of past newspapers, such as the Pine Tree Chief and Moccasin News, as well as today's Tekawannake, are available. There are 126 oral history tapes which were made by elders who are now deceased.

"I'm interested in having people come and listen to them," said Ms. Ann General, librarian. "A number of people don't realize they're related to famous people. The young people can see what their relatives achieved."

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Listeners will learn how their elders lived without autos, airplanes, hydro, telephones and TV. They'll find out about education, social life and even what mud roads were like.

Celebrated Six Nations people aren't the only achievers represented. There's printed matter and photos about teenager John Captain when he became world plowing champion. There's also a book about Gilbert Montour, titled Rockhound of the New Jerusalem. A vertical file contains current social and political community issues.

Contributions of North American Indians to society are documented in a 50-minute film narrated by Scott Momaday entitled Bows and

Arrows. It is one of 15 native films out of a selection of 54 available titles.

Others include Race of the Snowsnake, featuring three Porter men, Cornhusk Doll by Deanna Skye, and an early 1940s film entitled People of the Longhouse by Howard Skye. Between the films and a photo display, which dates to 1923, viewers are sure to recognize a relative or two.

The library began through volunteer efforts by the Women's Institute of Ohsweken. Mrs. Gladys Hill cared for 500 books in the double living room of Dr. Davis's house. During its 21 years, titles have increased to 10,000 and in 1981 it moved to its present site in the historic Council House building.

"People just come to look at the building, let alone the displays," says Ms. General.

New library hours are: Tuesday through Friday, 1 to 5 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.; and Tuesday and Thursday evenings, 7 to 9 p.m. Appointments to review the rare book collection can be made by phoning 445-2954.