

Iroquois history exhibit on display at museum

By Vicki White, Expositor Staff *Feb. 2/91*

People planning to catch the Snowsnake tournament at the Woodland Cultural Centre this weekend might also want to stop at the Brant County museum's Iroquois history exhibit.

The multi-media display combines material from the Royal Ontario Museum and the Brant County museum to give visitors a glimpse of Iroquoian and Ontario history from about 500 A.D. to today.

Included in this history is the traditional Iroquoian sport of snowsnaking, a test of strength and accuracy for the men.

The roots of Iroquoian sport aren't the only things that are explored through the exhibit, called *The Ontario Iroquois — History through Archaeology*.

Anne Byard, the museum's curatorial assistant, said visitors will learn local native history, which helps explain the current wave of native activism sweeping the country.

"If they only understood this, that this is how it was, then they'd understand what was going on today."

The exhibit traces the path of three Iroquois bands — the Huron, the Petun and the Neutral — who lived in what is now known as Ontario long before Europeans arrived in North America.

The path is illuminated by a 30-minute video, photos of villages in Ontario recently uncovered by archaeologists, and a number of tools and cooking implements.

The artifacts show the ingenuity of the people and their ability to make use of almost any mate-

rial. Bone was used to make a netting needle, an antler was transformed into an arrow shaft straightener and clay was used to create everything from pottery to pipes.

After the arrival of the Europeans, these Ontario Iroquois people were almost wiped out by diseases and warfare.

That was when different Iroquois people known as the League of the Iroquois — now the Six Nations — started moving into the area from their homeland in Upper New York.

This period of contact is documented by some fascinating items from the Brant County Museum's collection.

There's a buckskin trunk in excellent condition, which was used by John Thomas in the 1780s while he was building the Mohawk Chapel. Alongside that is a shiny copper kettle, which Joseph Brant traded to get two white pigs for a feast.

The most captivating display is a collection of masks which stands in the middle of the room, with eyes which seem to follow every visitor's movement.

In the background, a tape of Mohawk songs gives life to the tiny leather drums which are still used in ceremonies and traditional singing.

Ms. Byard says these items should have special relevance for citizens of Brant County.

"They're not just objects, they're part of Brant County history and part of the history of the Iroquois people."

The exhibit runs until the end of March. The museum is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday to Friday and from 1 to 4 p.m. on Saturday.