

Wildlife Trail and Heritage Cabin built to pass on learning

by Cindy Thomas - staff reporter

With a fire stoked in a small wood stove warming the small red pine cabin, and while a pot of corn soup warmed on the stove top, Mona Staats filled the kettle to boil water for tea. She was waiting for Paul General of the Wildlife Management to come by and identify some tracks in the snow along her trail.

"They're trying to identify various animals on the reserve," she explained.

"It's important," she said, "so the young people know which animal makes what type of track while the snow is on the ground and can be clearly seen."

She showed Turtle Island News some pelts that had been donated to the "cabin" as she calls it, along with pelts she had picked up at thrift stores and a muskrat she picked up as "road kill."

She wanted to get some of them identified while Paul was there, which he did do. She also served up some hot tea and corn soup to her visitors, which included Gary Hussey from Brantford, who was doing a video tape of Mona.

Paul told her she had a Martin or fisher pelt, which Mona said is a "fierce fighter."

"Our people used to wear them as collars" during the cold weather, she said as she demonstrated with the fur around her neck.

"When it got warmer out, they would use a smaller pelts," she said. "If they got too warm, they would hook them to their clothing," she continued saying her mother used to have one made of a raccoon.

"I'm glad people realize what I have here and are willing to donate," she said.

The cabin was funded through the economic development department of the Six Nations

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Council, Mona said. It was erected two days after the funding came through, she said.

The trail was cut in 1989, by a young man from Brantford, "who did a good job, for three meals a day," she said.

"I always long to be in the woods," she said. "We used to go through the woods to go to public school."

"It was a beautiful time, the best of both worlds," she said. "We

learned about the animals going through the woods and then reading, writing and arithmetic, the three R's, at school."

"When I speak to groups, I talk about yesterday, today and tomorrow," she said. "I'm thinking about tomorrow, with Gary making the video," she said. "It's history in the making, when I'm not able to do it any longer."

"As an elder, I realize the values of the Native culture," she said.

She showed one of her dolls in her corn husk collection.

"She's well into her senior years," Mona said as she talked about the beadwork and print cloth dress on the doll.

She told a story of how she and her late twin brother came across a Mallard duck family when they were children. They hatched a plot to each catch a duckling and started their approach.

"The Mother Mallard gave a shrill call and the ducklings ran off in all directions," she said. "It wasn't a straight line to the mother, but they scattered, and



you know, we couldn't catch one."

Mona said there is so much to learn about the Native Culture, which is why she started to collect "Native artifacts".

She said her first teacher was Miss Emily C General, who was "a wonderful teacher, but strict."

"She wasn't a teacher long because she refused to sign the civil service agreement," Mona said. "I always admired her for standing up for her Native rights."

"I try and impress that on the young people, who are our future," she said.