
November 17, 2003

WEST VIRGINIA BULLETIN NO. WV-230-4-1

SUBJECT: EOP- American Indian Heritage Month-November

Purpose: Employee awareness of American Indian Heritage Month

Expiration Date: This bulletin expires December 30, 2002.

The Effort to Establish a Day of Recognition for American Indians

What started at the turn of the century as an effort to gain a day of recognition for the significant contributions the first Americans made to the establishment and growth of this Nation has resulted in a whole month being designated for that purpose. But, it has been a long and winding trail that has taken many turns during the last 84 years that has not resulted in an “official day” of recognition.

For many years, Indians and non-Indians have urged that a special day be set aside to honor America’s first citizens. From time to time, legislation was proposed in the U.S. Congress that would designate the Fourth Friday in September of each year as American Indian Day. There has also been legislation that would establish a Native Mercian Awareness Week the fourth week in September. Introduction of these bill, none of which were passed by Congress, resulted in modern day almanacs listing the fourth Friday in September as American Indian Day under the heading “Day usually observed—not legal holidays”.

One of the very first proponents of an American Indian Day was Dr. Arthur C. Parker, A Seneca Indian, who was the Director of the Museum of Arts and Science, Rochester, NY. He persuaded the Boy Scouts of America to set aside a day for the “First Americans”, and for three years they adopted such a day. In 1915, the annual Congress of the American Indian Association meeting in Lawrence, Kansas, formally approved a plan. It directed its President, the Rev. Sherman Coolidge, an Arapahoe, to call upon the country to observe such a day. He issued a proclamation on September 28, 1915, which declared the second Saturday of each May as

an American Indian Day and contained the first formal appeal for recognition of Indians as citizens.

The year before this proclamation was issued, Red Fox James, a Blackfoot Indian, rode horseback from state to state seeking approval for the celebration of a day in honor of Indians. He later presented the endorsements of 24 state governments at the White House on December 14, 1915. However, there is no record of such a national day being proclaimed.

The first American Indian Day in a state was declared on the Second Saturday in May 1916, by the Governor of New York. Several states celebrate the fourth Friday in September. In Illinois, for example, it became that day by legislation enactment in 1919. In Massachusetts, in accordance with a law passed in 1935, the Governor issued a proclamation naming the day that will become American Indian Day for any given year. Presently, several states have designated Columbus Day as Native American Day, but it continues to be a day we observe without any recognition as a legal holiday.

If you have any question or would like additional information, please contact Vicki Scott, American Indian/Native Alaskan Program Manager at (304) 457-4516.

/s/

**LILLIAN V. WOODS
State Conservationist**

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