

Baptiste Lake legend re-told at Bancroft library



David and Kaitlyn drum at the Bancroft Public Library on Saturday, February 13, as part of First Nations Library week. Photo by LILY VANCE

By Sarah Vance

The words that we use speak of our origins, and in North Hastings, this includes Algonquin. The Algonquin language and its cultural traditions were shared with patrons at the Bancroft Public Library on Saturday, as part of Family Day weekend.

While colouring pictures, children chattered about the various pow wows they've attended, during the summer season.

'I like to go to the pow wow in Algonquin Park,' said Kaitlyn. 'There is a lake where we swim; later we sit around a fire and roast marshmallows.'

'I've been in Pikwakanagan when we all get to dance together,' said four-year-old Laura.

Using shakers designed and decorated themselves, with materials provided by the library's special events coordinator, Louise Villeneuve, the children then gathered in a circle. They were joined there by Ada and Noreen Tinney, Algonquin elders, for stories and song.

The relationship between Algonquin people and Baptiste Lake, named after Chief Baptiste, was emphasized in these stories.

'In Baptiste Lake grow white water lilies which, according to a legend of the Algonquin people, were once travellers from the stars,' said Noreen Tinney. 'Baptiste Lake has a water lily, rosy and pink, which grows nowhere else in North Hastings.'

The Baptiste Lake Legend tells the story of how these pink lilies came to grow in the body of water which extends to Whitney, and runs through Bancroft as the York River, cascading all the way to the St. Lawrence, and finally to the Atlantic ocean. It is a story of not having a home and finding one. It is also a story of a woman separated from her community.

Described as a 'star maiden,' she climbed the hills, only to find that she was too far from her sisters, who ground the maize she needed for nourishment. Settling down in a meadow, she could hear only silence, when she needed to hear the laughter of children. And the leaves on the trees where she lived prevented her from seeing these children at play.

Although the story is hundreds of years old, it uncannily foreshadows the major twentieth century disruptions of native family life, where children were removed from their communities.

However in the Baptiste Legend, the maiden becomes once again connected with 'a people who had earned her love.'

She finds that in order to be near them, she must make the water her home. So she plants her roots in Baptiste Lake and extends herself down the shores of the York River.

'Did you know that the root of lilies is edible and they are an indigenous food in our area?' asked Noreen, who is also chair of the

Bancroft Public Library board. ?Her roots provided nourishment for her people when all other food sources failed.?
The stories passed down orally at the Bancroft Public Library over family day weekend are an important reminder of the vital role of women and children in Anishinaabe culture.