Researchers come to visit collection of Native American artifacts

Laurie Drazek of Paxton with Native American artifacts collected by her father, the late Robert S. Drazek, a longtime North Brookfield resident.

Tribal treasures

By Bradford L. Miner
TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

NORTH BROOKFIELD — The hundreds of Native American artifacts on display, the result of decades of searching by amateur archaeologists, were not the only items researchers came to see.

A treasure trove of information welcomed Kevin McBride, director, and Ashley Bissonnette, research consultant for the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center in Connecticut, as well as a group of other historians.

The two researchers received a $72,000 grant from the National Park Service’s American Battlefield Protection Program in July to document the Pequot War, 1636 to 1638, and King Philip’s War in Massachusetts, 1675 to 1676.

The daylong visit Monday featured an up-close and hands-on look at the hundreds of arrowheads, artifacts, stone tools and shards of pottery collected by Robert S. Drazek, a longtime North Brookfield resident and retired physical education teacher with a passion for collecting Native American artifacts, from the towns of the Quaboag Plantation. After checking out the artifacts at the home of Native American artifacts from the collection of Robert S. Drazek.

Mr. Drazek’s daughter, Laurie Drazek, in Paxton, the group looked at battlefield sites from the two wars throughout the Brookfields and then went to the North Brookfield police station for a discussion on what they had seen.

Mr. Drazek was fatally injured in a pedestrian accident while on a 2006 hunting trip to New York State, and his daughter, while not sharing her father’s enthusiasm for looking Turn to Artifacts/Page A4
down and scratching the dirt for arrowheads and the like, valued the collection for sentimental reasons.

Looking over the hundreds of items in display cases, it was the items in a box yet to be sorted that held the most interest for Mr. McBride, who suggested at one point during the visit that a medium to channel Mr. Drzewiecki's spirit would be most helpful, because he had more questions than answers about what he was looking at.

He did find one fluted point spearhead that he estimated to be between 10,000 and 11,000 years old. Other items did not appear to be from local tribes, but either collected by Mr. Drzewiecki during visits to other parts of the country, or arriving here in trades with other tribes at the time.

Monday afternoon's discussion with a dozen or so local historians, authors, collectors of artifacts and amateur archaeologists piqued the interest of the researchers as much as what they had found.

Jeffrey H. Fiske of New Braintree, Donald Duffy of Palmer, Joseph Craig Jr. of New Braintree, Anthony Holway of North Brookfield and Robert Wilder of Brookfield took turns talking about sites across the Brookfields, New Braintree, Warren and Palmer where significant collections of Native American artifacts had been collected for decades.

From the well-known sites such as Foster Hill, to less well-known locales on the shore of Quaboag Pond and generations-old farms in Warren, the men talked openly about their passion for collection.

Joseph Craig's collection of more than 11,000 artifacts resides in the Springfield Museum, along with a similar collection of the late Barker D. Keith who mined the area around Quaboag Pond with great success.

"I've been blown away by what I've seen and heard today," Mr. McBride told the group, asking William Jenkins of West Brookfield for an after-hours peak inside the Quaboag Historical Society Museum, before he and Ms. Bissonnette returned to Connecticut.

A Native American wooden bowl, carbon-dated by the Massachusetts Archaeological Society at 6,000 years old, was of particular interest to the researchers, who took down the contact information for several like-minded historians and collectors who were not at the discussion. One of those sources of information was the last medicine man of the Wampanoag tribe living in Brookfield.

While not spoken in so many words, it was evident — that the interest of Mr. McBride and Ms. Bissonnette in documenting key sites from battles more than three centuries ago will have the two returning to the region for a closer look at the interaction of early settlers and the Quaboag tribe.
Pequot Museum pays visit to North Brookfield