



## Native American Heritage Month

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In 1983 under President Ronald Reagan, May 13 was proclaimed American Indian Day. <sup>1</sup> Dr. Arthur C. Park was one of the leaders of setting aside an American Indian Day. He was a Seneca Indian. He was also the Rochester, NY Museum of Arts and Science Director. For three years, the Boy Scouts of America designated a day to celebrate the “First Americans”. This occurred for three years. The Annual Congress of the American Indian Association had an annual meeting in 1915 where they approved an American Indian Day plan, which was presented by their President Rev. Sherman Coolidge who identified as an Arapahoe to seek observance of an American Indian Day. <sup>2</sup> On September 28, 2015, Coolidge issued a proclamation declaring the second Saturday of May as American Indian Day. However 24 state governments initially sought a day to honor and celebrate Indians on December 14, 1915. <sup>3</sup> This initiative was led by Red Fox James who was a Blackfeet Indian. New York is recorded as celebrating the first American Indian Day in May 1916. The fourth Friday of September was celebrated as American Indian Day in many states. Illinois started to recognize the day in 1919. In fact, many states have begun celebrating Columbus Day as Native American Day. President George H.W. Bush actually designated November as National American Indian Heritage Month in 1990. Today November is recognized as National Native American Heritage Month. Since 1994 proclamations have been issued yearly as Native American Heritage Month and National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month.

There are roughly 3.2 million Native Americans in the United States. <sup>4</sup> Several states host various events to honor the culture of Native Americans. This includes festivals, teaching of history, and performances. Traditional Native American dishes include “sweet potato soup, pemmican and prairie turnips, fish and cattails, and tanshpaashofa.” Native American musicians include “Annie Humphrey, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Shelley Morningsong and Steven Rushingwind.” Well known Indian authors include “Leslie Marmon Silko, Sherman Alexie and Louise Erdrich.”

St. Louis Native American history is traced to Cahokia. <sup>5</sup> “The 20,000-person metropolis thrived from AD 700 until sometime after AD 1300. When European explorers first mapped the Mississippi River in the 1500s, the great city of Mound Builders had been abandoned.” Mastodon State Historic Site is located in Imperial, Missouri, which is south of St. Louis. Missouri and Osage tribes dominated the St. Louis area. In the 1820s, most tribes were westward bound. Cherokee Indians were forced from the East to the West. This is known as The Trail of Tears. About 3,500 Native Americans gather for powwows in St. Louis. The Museum of Westward Expansion at the Gateway Arch offers some Native American history. Some of the notable attractions are “animatronic figure of Chief Red Cloud and an exhibit of Indian Peace Medals.”

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.com/national-native-american-heritage-month-fun-facts-about-why-we-celebrate-november-2438975>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nativeamericanheritagemonth.gov/about/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.com/national-native-american-heritage-month-fun-facts-about-why-we-celebrate-november-2438975>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.com/national-native-american-heritage-month-fun-facts-about-why-we-celebrate-november-2438975>

<sup>5</sup> <https://explorestlouis.com/discover/multicultural-heritage/the-first-st-louisans/>