

REMEMBERING HISTORY

Participants of All-American Indian Days celebrate past

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BIG HORN — Joy surrounded the remembrance of All-American Indian Days, celebrated at The Brinton Museum Wednesday and continuing into Thursday at the WYO Performing Arts and Education Center.

Surrounded by natural beauty, organizers, historians and participants celebrated Native American history and culture with fellow friends and what most consider family.

A deep historical look from humanities scholar Janine Pease.

Recollections of religious services and judging the Miss Indian America Pageant from Father Peter



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Sarah Luther, right, presents Father Peter Powell with a certificate of recognition and a gift after he presented to more than 100 people for the All-American Indian Days Remembrance event at The Brinton Museum Wednesday, July 14, 2021.

Powell. Event stories told by family participants.

And questions from a crowd of more than 100, asking what happened? Where did it go? Why did it leave?



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Humanities scholar Janine Pease hugs former Miss Indian America Vivian Arviso after Pease presented to more than 100 people for the All-American Indian Days Remembrance event at The Brinton Museum Wednesday, July 14, 2021.

HISTORY: Featured myriad events

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In history becoming more well-known in the region, All-American Indian Days began in Sheridan in 1953, at a time when Native American lives were likened to that of dogs, and neither were allowed in the bars downtown.

From 1953 to 1984, members of both Sheridan and Crow Nation cultures began to learn about one another and educate each other through a festival equally thrilling and full as Sheridan WYO Rodeo Week, which event encompasses the beginnings of All-American Indian Days. Adoring fans clapped Lucy Yellowmule into the Sheridan WYO Rodeo Royalty spotlight as queen in 1951, thus sparking the beginning of All-American Indian Days.

The event featured myriad events, including music, dancing, parades, religious services, Miss Indian America Pageant, host families, prayer, camps, food, games and other festivities.

Pease shared the broad history, taking particular note of the significance in timing of the festival week — a week she said served as one of the most comprehensive forms of humanities of all kinds — as wars waged between Natives and Whites, the majority population eliminating Native American culture by ignoring age-old treaties and terminating entire tribes' culture.

"How hard would that be? That, together, they set forward, bringing culture, bringing music, bringing beauty," Pease said.

The event served as a resurgence of life for those lost tribes and lost cultures.

"This is vitality," Pease said. "This is breathing life



Sheldon Spotted Elk takes a group selfie with Father Peter Powell during the All-American Indian Days Remembrance event at The Brinton Museum Wednesday, July 14, 2021.

into culture, demonstrating and showing to all those who have come."

Powell added to Pease's lecture, posing a question he asked all Miss Indian America Pageant contestants throughout his several years as a judge.

"How can you keep your identification as a Native person under the pressures that come from the dominant White culture?" Powell said he asked each contestant every year. "We knew that Native people could do this, thank God. This is why our people have not only survived but are so gloriously (living) for all these days."

Powell saw a change in Sheridanites through the event. He said the hosts "saw the goodness of Native people."

So why did it end?

Pease, while not claiming expert testimony, said several other similar events began popping up in Oklahoma, New Mexico, Colorado and North Dakota, where Sheridan's All-American Indian Days

migrated to after 1984.

Cultural events returned to tribes throughout the United States, and cultural celebrations arose regionally and nationally through events like Crow Fair in the fall and Native American cultural events integrated still into Sheridan's biggest festival of the year, the Sheridan WYO Rodeo. Rodeo Week usually features Crow Tribe dancers at the First Peoples' Powwow and in the parade, teepee villages at the Sheridan County Fairgrounds and the World Championship Indian Relay Races.

Now, the All-American Indian Days Remembrance event and a Crow parade scheduled for Saturday have been added to that list of celebrating Native culture.

The remembrance event also furthered the goal of the All-American Indian Days Honoring Project, which group members aim to raise money to erect a statue across from the Historic Sheridan Inn commemorating the event's legacy.