

Along the Robeson Trail

by Dr. Stan Knick, Director
PSU Native American Resource Center

When most people think about wild rice, they are thinking of that wonderful crop which grows in the vicinity of the Great Lakes. It has been harvested by Algonkian-speaking Native Americans for longer than anyone knows for certain, at least 2500 years. It has been, and remains, a staple food item for many northern Native people. Many modern American recipes have wild rice mixed with the more common, but less tasty, domesticated rice (*Oryza sativa*), which originated in Asia.

Wild rice is actually a kind of grass. The type that grows around the Great Lakes is technically known as northern wild rice (*Zizania palustris*). Not many people know that there is also a southern variety of American wild rice, *Zizania texana*. This southern variety is rapidly disappearing, however, because its native habitat in Texas, in the area along the San Marcos River, is being drastically modified by human activity.

Wild rice is known as *wabanomin* or *manoomin* in Ojibwa. It is a long dark grain which is gathered from canoes. The seedheads of the grass are bent over the canoe and beaten with sticks, causing the grain to fall into the hull of the canoe.

Ricing time was (and is) not just a

time for collecting an important food resource. It has always been an important social and cultural event as well, when families get together and have fun. Ernie Lundgren, an Ojibwa man, says: "There's a feeling you get out there that's hard to get other places. You're close to Mother Nature, seeing things grow, harvesting the results of the water and sun and winds... We sort of touch our roots when we're among the rice plants (in *Enduring Seeds*, by G. P. Nabhan)."

There is clearly a spiritual aspect incorporated into wild rice harvesting by these Native people. At the end of summer, when the rice is ripening, they hold a ceremony to celebrate the "first fruits" in thanksgiving to the Creator. Often a sprinkling of tobacco is placed on the waters during the first ricing trip of the season, as a gift to the spirits of the plants, water and earth.

The traditional way of harvesting wild rice by hand has another positive effect. Hand harvesting takes only about ten or twenty percent of the available crop grain. This means that plenty of rice is left on the plant, or dropped in the water, to be re-sown. One result is that the crop keeps coming back; another is that there is plenty to go around for the several species of waterfowl which also feed on wild rice.

Although it is a wild plant, wild rice's growth has been encouraged by Native people for a long time. One record from 1897 tells of an Ojibwa woman who said the wild rice stands on the Lac Court Oreille River and in some of the neighboring lakes were sown there from rice that Native Americans brought from another lake in Wisconsin. Albert Jenks, an ethnographer working for the Smithsonian, wrote in 1900 that: "The finest harvest field now on the reservation is that of the Lac Court Oreille River. It is a sown field... Awa'sa sowed the grain, and his grandchildren's families now harvest the crop (*Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*)."

In more recent times, wild rice has been sown in the Sacramento Valley of California as a commercial crop. By 1987, California's production of wild rice surpassed the combined harvest of all the wild stands in Canada and the U.S. But some people still prefer the really wild "wild" rice harvested by Native people over the commercial crop produced in California.

For more information, visit the Native American Resource Center in Old Main Building, on the campus of Pembroke State University.

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Further information contact:

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News from Purnell Swett High School

Purnell Swett High School's Chorus I, Concert chorus, concert band and wind ensemble performed a Christmas concert on December 14. Led by Mrs. Ellen Jackson, Chorus I sang "Tis the Season," and "Noel, A Boy Is Born." While Chorus I and the Concert Chorus exchanged places on the risers, they both performed a piece called "Non Nobis Domine." This gave an interesting surrounding affect for the audience. Once on the risers, Concert Chorus sang a number of traditional Christmas pieces, including "Whisper, Whisper," and "Born Neath A Star."

Concern band and wind ensemble performed a combined selection of Christmas pieces. Included in this section of the concert were "The Christmas Songs," "Greensleeves," and "Traditions Of Christmas." A select group of band students, including a wind ensemble and a tuba player. The band was directed by Miss Sheila Lowry throughout the program.

The program was enjoyed greatly by everyone in attendance. by Amanda Locklear, Austin Tyndall and Rembret Oxendine.

The Young Christian Association along with the ninth grade health and p.e. classes collected over 15 boxes of canned goods to be delivered to various homes during the Christmas holidays as a way to show their love for the community and those with special needs during the Christmas season.

A candlelight vigil was held on

December 18 at 6 p.m. in the Art Gallery. Approximately 30 students and 15 adults attended the service. Ms. Frances Altman held the candle light service. In the service, Mr. Wade Hunt to the Christmas story. Mr. Kelvin locklear sang "O Holy Night," and Ms. Debra Lowry led the group in Christmas Blessings. Refreshments were served and gifts were also exchanged.

As part of the special entertainment before the holidays, the wrestling team sponsored a wrestling match. Fred Alexander the wrestling team's coach, explained to the audience various wrestling moves to make a successful pin.

The Spanish Club sang Christmas carols during lunch break. They sang a variety of songs including, "Jingle Bells," "Deck the Halls," and "Feliz Navidad." Ms. Chariza Babcock string class also played several Christmas songs during lunch break.

Ms. Felicia Hunt's first period Business Law Class visited the Lumberton courthouse on December 14. They sat in on a criminal court session that was presided over by Judge Carmichael. This experience was very informative since Judge Carmichael was kind enough to break at intervals during the court session to explain various points of law. Judge Carmichael expressed an interest of seeing other students visit the court room. We, at Purnell Swett, would like to extend our thanks to Judge Carmichael for taking time out of his busy day to accommodate our students.



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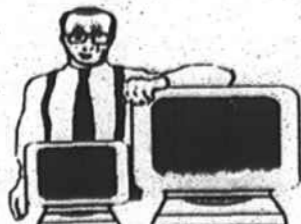
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