Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Symposium on cultural property protection brings international professionals to Fort Drum

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (May 16, 2022) – The Fort Drum Cultural Resources Program team recently hosted an international group of military and civilian professionals during a weeklong symposium at LeRay Mansion.

Dr. Laurie Rush, program manager, said that the symposium grew out of a request from a foreign officer who wanted to learn more about her work on cultural property protection. This was followed soon after by another request, and so she extended the invitation to other subject-matter experts – historians, educators, monuments officers and archaeologists – from France, Canada, the U.S., Italy, Austria, Greece, the Netherlands and the U.K.

Rush said that attendees brought a wealth of experience in their fields, which led to ample discussions on property protection, civil-military relations and cultural affairs during a full week of tours and presentations.

“The symposium succeeded beyond anything I dared hope,” Rush said. “I am sure I learned as much or more than our guests did – plus their interest and enthusiasm has encouraged me to continue talking about the importance of cultural property.”

The symposium began with site visits to some of the most important archaeological sites on post, to include where a Clovis Point – a sandstone abrading tool – and other artifacts were discovered during a survey in the mid-1990s.

The Fort Drum Cultural Resources Program also tracks sacred sites, and the staff has an ongoing consultation partnership with the Oneida Indian Nation, the Onondaga Nation and the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe for the responsible management of these ancestral places. Fort Drum Assistant Fire Chief Steven LaRue explained to the group how the fire department assists with the coordination for camping and a campfire for ceremonies at the sacred site.

Later, the group met with Ron Patterson, cultural program coordinator at Oneida Indian Nation, who provided them a tour of the heritage center and introduced them to Haudenosaunee culture and the clan family structure.

“His key message was something we have been talking about a lot, and that is to listen to the host nation,” Rush said. “Listen to the indigenous people when you’re deployed if you are to learn anything at all about where you are and what you can do. This really resonated with all of us, because I think we all have experienced that at one time or another in our work.”

Patterson also spoke about the importance of sharing cultural heritage and traditions with the next generation.

Maj. Robert Friel, from the British Army’s CPP unit, latched onto this theme during a roundtable discussion when he spoke about the copper wrist band he inherited from his grandfather. When the band broke, he went to great lengths to fashion a duplicate of the same design. From the broken piece, he had two rings made for his daughters to wear on their necks as a reminder of their great-grandfather.

“My grandfather was probably the key real influence in my life when I was young,” Friel said. “When he passed, I got his band and wore it every day until it snapped. To me, that’s as important as anything to my cultural heritage.”

That preservation of cultural identity, and the job of historians and archaeologists to record it accurately weighed in during a stop to the 10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Museum. Sepp Scanlin, museum director, noted that the exhibits highlighting Native American heritage in the North Country were approved by representatives of the Indian Nation partners, after they provided input into what should be displayed.

“The artifacts are from Dr. Rush’s collection, but we are able to put them on public display in the museum to help tell the history,” Scanlin said. “That’s kind of a unique, because a lot of my peers do not have that relationship between the military museum and cultural resources.”

The symposium concluded with a visit to the Akwesasne Cultural Center and the St. Regis Catholic Church in Hogansburg. The church was established by French Catholic priests in the Akwesasne district in 1796, and it is one of the oldest buildings in the North Country. The church represents both Christian faith and Mohawk traditions.

“The church is beautiful, and it reflects a combination of Catholic beliefs with indigenous cultural and religious beliefs,” Rush said. “There are even clan animals built into the wall of the church and represented above the altar. The Mohawk women were so friendly and they answered all sorts of questions about their religious beliefs and culture. They even provided a detailed description of how to properly prepare Indian corn to make soup.”

Maj. Will Fitzsimons, a Civil Affairs Army Reservist who holds a doctorate in African history and linguistics, appreciated the time to explore the indigenous culture surrounding Fort Drum. As a civilian historian with the Air Force, he said the time spent discussing CPP with symposium members was equally informative.

“I think this has been fantastic getting to spend this much time with NATO partners who are working on similar types of projects, and getting a chance to network and build that community with them,” he said. “I learned a lot about the different nuances between how the U.S. thinks about cultural property protection for the Army and how NATO does. We’re all working toward the same thing but by using slightly different approaches.”

Photo Caption:

1 - Chaplain (Maj.) Charles Cottle, 10th Mountain Division Artillery chaplain, spoke about the unit ministry team’s function in cultural protection and religious advisement to commanders during the Cultural Symposium at LeRay Mansion on May 5. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

3 - The Fort Drum Cultural Resources staff hosted a Cultural Symposium, May 2-6, with international military and civilian professionals participating in a series of site visits, presentations and discussions centered on cultural property protection. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

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