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CEREMONIAL WAR BONNET COMES BACK TO THE COMANCHE TRIBE

LAWTON, OKLAHOMA – December 21, 2009 –An early 20th century ceremonial war bonnet once belonging to former Comanche Tribal Leader, William Karty, will soon be on display at the Comanche National Museum and Cultural Center thanks to a generous loan from his family. The headdress was originally loaned to Lawton’s Museum of the Great Plains for display.

According to his family, Karty received the headdress as a gift in the 1930’s when he was active in the Comanche tribal government. The war bonnet is adorned with rare Golden Eagle feathers which are attached to a 4 ½ foot long broad cloth trailer. It is embellished with horse hair accents, hand-sewn ribbons, and beadwork that includes two side medallions made from cut beads. “The headdress is in good condition considering the age of it,” said museum Cultural Specialist, Bambi Allen. “The broad cloth is old style. It’s a different grade than the synthetic blend that is used today. It’s the real deal.”

Karty was born on West Cache Creek in 1909 during a time when the local Indians did not have surnames. Karty was given his last name by Buffalo Bill Cody whom he met while Cody was filming a movie on Fort Sill. Typos and clerical mistakes were common practice in the government offices at that time and his name was changed from “Cody” to “Karty” as his paperwork made its way through the Indian agencies. In addition to his work with the tribe, Karty was also active with the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache Inter-Tribal Council and the American Indian Exposition. In the 1940’s, he recruited seventeen Comanche men to take part in a top secret military operation for the U. S. Army. Those men used their native language to communicate critical messages during World War II. They would later be known as the Comanche Code Talkers. Following a stint in the military, Karty used his G.I. Bill to study Soil Conservation. He spent the next 30 years working for the Department of the Interior on various Indian Reservations. He died in 1998. He was 89 years old. “We are so grateful to the Karty Family for trusting us with their father’s headdress,” said Phyllis Wahahrockah-Tasi, Executive Director. “We are humbled by the fact that they would loan us something so meaningful. We know our material culture exists but some of our Comanche families are hesitant about loaning out their family items. This family understands that the only way to preserve our tribal history is to tell the stories of our ancestors. This war bonnet is a great asset to our growing collection,” Wahahrockah-Tasi said.

The museum graciously accepts Comanche items for loan from the public. A legal agreement is signed for each item and kept on file at the museum. The owner has complete say on the length of the loan. Each heirloom is fully insured and properly stored. “Our doors are always open to anyone who would like to loan us their Comanche items,” Wahahrockah-Tasi said. “Displaying our material culture allows us the opportunity to put aside what we learned in school or read in books. We welcome the input of our people. We want this museum to be a showplace for the Comanches, a place to tell our story,” Wahahrockah-Tasi said.

Anyone interested in loaning or donating items is asked to call the museum at 580-353-0404.

For more information or to schedule an interview, contact Candy Morgan at 580-353-0404.

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