Kaye Whitefeather Robinson

Our speaker this month really needs no introduction. Kaye Robinson is our Dixie Archeology president. She is a superb story teller and has enhanced her storytelling by studying archaeology for the past thirty years. Her latest research is in archaeo- astronomy, which is her real passion.

Ms. Robinson’s parentage is interesting in that her father came from the Blackfeet heritage and her mother came from Liverpool, England. She embraces both her Native American culture and her Anglo culture.

Her Native American heritage lead her to study with seven different tribes: the Blackfeet, Chumash, Hopi, Lakota, Navajo, Paiute, and Seminole.

What is archaeoastronomy? It is a fairly new science that observes how ancient people interacted with astronomy. It is the anthropology of astronomy. Archaeoastronomy is concerned with the culture of the people practicing this science long ago. By studying the clues the people left behind such as their surviving mythology, the artifacts and religious spaces, and the structures that still stand today; archaeoastronomers answer questions about ancient beliefs and how these people related to their world.

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.” Feather tells us that all things are connected…earth and sky and people. Astronomy was deeply woven into ancient people’s lives. They focused on the sun and the moon, but their primary focus was on the stars.

Alignments were paramount. Tipis and lodge placements and mountain and landscape alignments were crucial to their lives. For instance, the Pawnee Earth Lodge had an opening in the top to see the Orion stars. For people who were dependent on seasonal changes for their prosperity, the alignments and astrological occurrences were essential to knowing when to harvest and gather in order to have both successful food supplies and social interactions.

Calendar medicine wheels are fascinating. The wheel at Majorville is at 51 degrees North latitude, has twenty-eight spokes, and is twenty-seven meters in diameter. Stonehenge is also at 51 degrees North latitude. Not a coincidence!

The Moose Mountain Medicine Wheel in Saskatchewan, Fort Smith Medicine Wheel in Montana (1840-1850), and the Bighorn Calendar Medicine Wheel in Wyoming (1200 CE) all had wheels lined up with the same stars.

Tribes affiliated with the wheel are The Sheep Eaters/Shoshone, the Crow, the Cheyenne, the Gros Ventres, the Shoshone, and the Blackfeet.

The Lakota learned to dance with the stars. Their ceremonies had to line up with the constellations and a physical place. Lakota stories started about 2000 years ago and were tied to the stars. Stories were traditionally told in the wintertime.

The Big Horn Medicine Wheel as a circular calendar keeps track of stars as they move across the horizon. The moon tracks days. The sun tracks seasons. The planets track years and decades. Only the stars track thousands of years. This system is a more accurate skywatching calendar device than the calendars we hang on our walls today.