Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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On Monday, December 18, 2000, at 11:00 a.m. (EST), Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Kevin Gover will formally open the Ely S. Parker Building, the Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) new facility in Reston, Virginia, with the unveiling of a plaque naming the building for the first American Indian to serve as Commissioner for Indian Affairs. The facility will house the BIA's Office of Management and Administration and Office of Information Technology, and the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Business Center (NBC).

"The Bureau of Indian Affairs and the National Business Center are pleased to have the opportunity to recognize Commissioner Ely S. Parker, a man of great talent and intellect who strived against bigotry and racism to serve his people and his country," said Assistant Secretary Gover, "I consider it a tremendous honor that the Tonawanda Seneca Nation and the Department of the Interior have supported our efforts to remember Do-Ne-Ho-Geh-Weh, Ely S. Parker - in this way."

Ely Samuel Parker (1828-95), a citizen of the Tonawanda Seneca Nation, was born into the Wolf Clan on the Tonawanda Reservation in New York State. Parker, who was made the sachem for his tribe in 1852 and given the title Do-Ne-Ho-Geh-Weh, or "Keeper of the Western Door of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy)," was a remarkable person for his era. In a time when American Indians could not become U.S. citizens and were rarely seen in the professions, Parker represented his nation in treaty matters before the federal government and earned degrees in law and engineering.

While his lack of American citizenship prevented him from practicing law, Ely Parker's engineering degree led to a career supervising public works projects in Galena, Illinois, in the late 1850s. It was there that he met and formed a personal friendship with the future general and president, Ulysses S. Grant. When Grant became commander of the Union Army during the Civil War, he chose Ely Parker as his military secretary, and it was Parker who recorded the terms of surrender that ended the war at Appomattox Court House in Virginia on April 9, 1865. After his election as president, Grant appointed Ely Parker as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in April 1869, where he served until August 1871.

Assistant Secretary Gover will give welcoming remarks and the keynote address. Guest speakers will be Lisa Guide, Acting Assistant Secretary-Policy, Management and Budget, U.S. Department of the Interior; Sharon Blackwell, Deputy Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and Deborah Maddox, Director, Office of Management and Administration, Bureau of Indian Affairs; and Tim Vigotsky, Director, National Business Center.

Special guest speakers will be Norman Hill ("Taa-Wonyas"), Wolf Clan Runner, Tonawanda Seneca Nation, who will give the Nation's "opening words" in the Seneca language; Evelyn Jonathan ("Einjhonesh"), Wolf Clan Mother, Tonawanda Seneca Nation, who will interpret for Mr. Hill and will give the Nation's official greeting; and Bernadette Hill ("Go-Seni-Sas"), Heron Clan Mother, Cayuga Nation.

WHO: Bureau of Indian Affairs and National Business Center, USDOI

WHAT: Grand opening ceremony for the BIA-NBC Ely S. Parker Building.

WHEN: Monday, December 18, 2000, at 11:00 a.m. (EST).

WHERE: 2051 Mercator Drive, Reston, VA (Directions from the Main Interior Building are attached).

Credentials: Please bring your sanctioned media credentials and, if possible, wear on your shirt collar or around your neck for easy viewing. Media are advised to be in place by 10:30 a.m. on December 18. Press seating will be provided.

Tours of the facility will be offered after the ceremony.

Also on Monday, the Department of the Interior Museum will be showing the video "Warrior in Two Worlds," the life of Ely S. Parker, produced by WXXI Public Broadcasting Council in collaboration with the Rochester Museum & Science Center. Viewing times for the 56-minute film are 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. in the Interior Department Museum, which can be reached via the Department’s south entrance at 1849 C Street, N.W. in Washington, D.C. For more information, call Anne James, Assistant Curator, at 202-208-4659.