Exhibiting Sovereignty: Tribal Museums in the Great Lakes Region, 1969-2010

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

EXHIBITING SOVEREIGNTY:
TRIBAL MUSEUMS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION, 1969-2010

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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BY

MEAGAN DONNELLY MCCHESNEY

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INTRODUCTION

In October 2017, I drove the five or so hours from Chicago to Leelanau County, Michigan to conduct research at the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa’s tribally-run museum, the Eyaawing Museum and Cultural Center. I arrived at the museum early, as I am prone to do, and decided to walk around the building and take in the scene. The museum itself is quite architecturally appealing – a mixture of glass and industrial materials with complex geometric hard lines juxtaposing a metal wave covering the building’s entrance. As beautiful and visually compelling as the building is, the environment around it is truly stunning. Surrounded by bright green grass, several gardens, trees with leaves spanning the scale of fall colors, and an unrivaled view of the crystal clear waters of the Grand Traverse Bay, I could see why the Grand Traverse Band would choose this location to develop their museum. Located on a relatively high traffic road between Suttons Bay and Peshawbestown and a short four-minute walk from the Band’s highly successful Leelanau Sands Casino, many were sure to pass by the museum and few could resist being drawn in by the scenery before me.

Figure 1. Eyaawing Museum and Cultural Center
Credit: Meagan McChesney
Once inside, I briefly met with the museum’s curator before interviewing a museum volunteer as he led me on a tour of the building. “As you can see, we have a really nice view here, and the building is situated so that we are entering through the east here, as we do in life,” he said. The building’s orientation is representative of the tribe’s migration story. According to Anishinabe history, during the time of the First Fire, the First Prophecy delivered to the tribe by the Creator instructed them to follow the megis (shell) in the direction of the setting sun to their new home “where food grows on the water.”

“So, how was the name decided on?” I asked.

“‘Eyaawing’ means ‘who we are,’” he explained. “Explaining who you are [is a] process,” he went on, and “the museum…is kind of an exploration into the people who we were…and who we are.”

A few things about this conversation stood out to me in that moment that have since informed and helped shape my understanding of the motivations for developing tribal museums, and what they strive to do once established. While I had recognized the intricacies of the building’s architecture, the purposefulness and deeper meaning of the structure, organization, and orientation of the building would have eluded me without my tour guide’s interpretation.

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1 Dave, interviewed by Meagan McChesney, audio recording, October 20, 2017. When asked to state his name for the recording, no last name was provided. As such, he is referred to here by first name only.

2 Ibid. According to Anishinabe history, there are Seven Fires or eras, during which Seven Prophecies were delivered. The food that grows on the water refers to the wild rice beds that are unique to the Great Lakes region.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.
The metal wave over the entrance mimics those of the Grand Traverse Bay on a windy day, signifying the crucial significance of the water for the Band. The water not only brought the Anishinabe to the Great Lakes region from the east, but has been central to the tribe’s livelihood ever since. As founding director Laura Quackenbush later explained to me, for the Anishinabe, “water is the most sacred thing there is.”

Fishing, in particular, has been vital not only to the tribe’s physical survival, but cultural survival as well. By situating the building so that visitors enter through the east, they are, in effect, mimicking the tribe’s migration to the region, and are engulfed by a wave of water that stays with them as they move throughout the exhibit space.

Orienting the museum so that visitors enter from the east “as we do in life” also conveys the message that for the Band, their lives as a distinct tribal entity begin with the knowledge, recognition, and practice of their traditional culture. After over a century of enduring various forms of cultural oppression, by the end of the twentieth century, the Grand Traverse Band, like other tribal communities across the Great Lakes region, had lost touch with many important elements of their traditional culture. According to historian Christopher Wetzel, traditional language, sacred history, land, and ceremony are the four universal, interrelated factors used by Great Lakes Native communities to organize and inform cultural distinction.

Before they regained recognition of their federal status in 1980, and even in the decades after, the Grand Traverse Band had, to varying degrees, lost touch with most. By creating a space for reviving the traditional language and learning their sacred history and ceremonial practices, and by locating it

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5 Laura Quackenbush, interviewed by Meagan McChesney, audio recording, December 6, 2017.

on their ancestral lands next to the water that is so vital to their culture, the museum provides a vehicle for members to reclaim their distinct tribal identity.

While facilitating a deeper connection with traditional culture for tribal members, my tour guide’s words also point to the ways in which tribal museums function for a non-Native audience. Identity formulation and articulation involves “exploration,” he explained, and emphasized that this is an ongoing “process.” These words highlight the fact that traditional culture and Native identity, even when contained in a museum space, are not stagnant. They are constantly in process, ever-changing and informed not only by the tribe’s past, but by the larger American past and contemporary circumstances as well. Tribal museums aim to serve their communities, yet all of the tribal museums across the Great Lakes region are open to non-Native visitors and actively seek them out. The Eyaawing Museum and Cultural Center’s location exemplifies this dual purpose. The building is located strategically next to the water, oriented towards the west, yet within walking distance of the Band’s casino. By inviting non-Natives in, tribal museums welcome participation from visitors who enter with their own historical experiences and worldviews. Tribal museums are liminal spaces where identity is in “process” and as such, outsider participation inevitably informs the process of formulating and articulating a tribal identity within the museum space.7

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7 See Patricia Pierce Erikson, *Voices of a Thousand People: the Makah Cultural and Research Center* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 27-28 and Mary Lawlor, *Public Native America: Tribal Self-representations in Museums, Powwows, and Casinos* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 2. Both Erikson and Lawlor apply Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of “contact zones” – social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in situations where power is not equal – to museums. Erikson explains that tribal museums are “hybrid embodiments of Native and non-Native perspectives. As a synthesis of cultural forms, they reveal a process of collaboration between diverse peoples amid conditions of unequal empowerment. American museums/cultural centers are both translators and translations, agents of social change and products of accommodation.”
While drawing in tourists and educating non-Native visitors signifies an active engagement with and involvement in non-Native mainstream society, ultimately, within tribal museums, Native people have authority over the interpretation of their past. Such authority informs their identity in the present and helps shape a direction for the future. At its core, this dissertation argues that the foundation and development of tribal museums in the Great Lakes region is a form of activism – a deliberate action performed for the purpose of inciting positive political, social, cultural, and/or economic change – and that the functions of tribal museums enable Native activism to continue and evolve to reflect and address new historical understandings and contemporary circumstances. While existing scholarship on Native activism leads one to believe that Native activism waned as the 1970s came to a close, I argue that in the Great Lakes region, activism continued and manifested in ways suited to address regionally and tribally-based needs. Control over interpretations of the past have been used as a means of oppression. This dissertation demonstrates how, through the development of tribally-run museums, tribal communities in the Great Lakes region have instead utilized the past as a weapon for regaining power.

While parallels between tribal museum development in other regions may certainly exist, this dissertation is primarily concerned with the unique circumstances in the Great Lakes region that prompted and facilitated the development of the nine tribal museums discussed. The significance of the fur trade and the persistence of the practice of treaty-making in the region enabled Great Lakes tribes to maintain a “middle ground” – a rough balance of power – with Euro-Americans well into the nineteenth century.8 While this balance of power gradually shifted

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away from Native people, tribal leaders strategically utilized a combination of overt resistance and accommodations to avoid removal West (unlike many tribes in other regions of the United States) and remain on a portion of their ancestral homelands. Through treaty negotiations, several Great Lakes Native communities carved out a permanent land base and formed a legal basis for the continuation of traditional practices. Many did so, however, at great costs. For several communities, treaties initiated the federal experiment with allotment in the region long before the General Allotment Act of 1887 implemented the system elsewhere. Seeking to transform the ways Native people related to, understood, and cultivated their lands, the early allotment of Great Lakes reservations into individual parcels of land proved disastrous, resulting in immense losses in Native landholdings. Such losses were compounded in many ways by the advent of government-run Native schools. Before the large network of government-funded Indian boarding schools was complete, Native communities in the Great Lakes were already experiencing both the positive and negative impacts of assimilationist education. The growing encroachment of white settlers with an eye for Native resources, along with a budding tourism industry, further eroded the “middle ground” of the Great Lakes region.

Still, it was clear by the early twentieth century that, though in many ways transformed, Great Lakes Native communities survived. Though largely marginalized and facing multiple attacks on their cultural traditions, tribal distinction remained. Several Great Lakes tribal communities were able to tighten their grip on their sovereignty and distinct culture during the New Deal era with the implementation of the more culturally-pluralistic Indian Reorganization Act. Reorganization was costly and impacted Great Lakes communities unevenly, however, and

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by the end of World War II, the federal government’s commitment to assimilation reignited. It was clear by the 1950s that decades of policies and programs aimed at eliminating tribal distinction had failed to do so. While aiming to finalize the process of assimilation, federal policy inadvertently prompted and facilitated the emergence of a national movement for tribal sovereignty.

The earliest tribal museums in the Great Lakes region – the Menominee Logging Camp Museum, the Arvid E. Miller Library Museum, and the Oneida Nation Museum – were established in the 1960s and 70s amidst the height of the national movement for tribal sovereignty, referred to as the Tribal Sovereignty Movement, that emerged in the decades following World War II. The leaders of this movement, many of whom were from the Great Lakes region, articulated a number of goals aimed at halting and reversing the devastating impact of decades of political, economic, social, and cultural oppression. Specifically, Native activists cited the recognition of tribal sovereignty and treaty rights, reversal of the termination policy, equal opportunity for economic development, and support for the preservation and revitalization of traditional culture as the primary goals of their movement. As the movement gained momentum, tribal activists on reservations recognized the salience of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement’s goals, and sought ways to facilitate the realization of these goals within their own communities. The development of tribal museums empowered tribes to take control over the

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10 The collective actions of these activists are often referred to as the “Red Power Movement,” a name inspired by larger national and international fights for civil rights, and that deliberately speaks to the confrontational nature of several prominent Native activists and activist organizations. While often used to describe the collective activism that arose in the post-World War II decades at large, “Red Power” truly refers to one strand of this larger movement. I have chosen instead to use the term “Tribal Sovereignty Movement” as it more appropriately describes the overarching goal of the national movement, rather than one particular strand or manifestation.
interpretation of their past, determine its meaning in the present, and to revive and perpetuate cultural practices to ensure their survival.

While the national Tribal Sovereignty Movement faded from public view in the 1980s, Native activism did not end. In the Great Lakes region, assaults on tribal sovereignty continued, prompting new manifestations of activism to address regionally and tribally-based needs. The situation for tribes in northern Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota grew particularly contentious over the course of the 1980s and 90s as anti-treaty rights protestors became more vocal and aggressive in their tactics to halt Native communities from exercising treaty-guaranteed rights. To combat treaty rights backlash, tribes across the region recognized the need to look to their past to prove their sovereignty and pave the way for the future. Working alongside attorneys and professional historians, several Great Lakes tribes accumulated a vast array of materials and information about their traditional practices, cultural identity, and legal history with the United States. Armed with more historical, cultural, and legal knowledge, Great Lakes tribal activists shifted away from the protests and demonstrations that defined the public activism of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement and focused instead on building the legal and cultural foundation for sovereignty that would enable them to continue to work towards the realization of their goals.

Beginning with a pivotal ruling by Judge Noel P. Fox in *United States v. Michigan* in 1978, tribes across the region increasingly found success in the courts. Several key rulings came down in favor of treaty rights, reaffirming what tribes across the region already knew – that they were culturally distinct sovereign nations with the inherent right to self-determine their way of life. History, they found, had indeed provided a path forward. Recognizing that the power to
elicit positive change resided in their past, and equipped with a growing collection of historical knowledge and materials, tribal activists increasingly turned to museums as an avenue for addressing the challenges they still faced, and to continue to shape a direction for the future.

While Native activism in the Great Lakes region continued and communities progressively recognized the utility of their past, several national changes contributed to the development of tribal museums in the region as well. Native communities’ growing awareness of their history coincided national trends, as Americans across the country demonstrated a surge in interest in local, community, and ethnic heritage. Due in part to the legacy of the civil rights movements in the latter half of the twentieth century (including the Tribal Sovereignty Movement), mainstream museums across the country increasingly sought collaborative relationships with the groups represented in their museums, and more and more historically marginalized groups began developing their own institutions. Such changes, coupled with the ongoing treaty rights battles that necessitated public education about Native cultural and legal history, helped facilitate the development of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa’s George W. Brown, Jr. Museum and Cultural Center.

Subsequently, several developments and crucial pieces of legislation were passed that enabled the development of museums for tribes in the region who previously lacked the means. The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, enacted in 1988, enabled several tribes to establish legal reservation gaming facilities that, in many cases, drastically altered reservation life and provided some of the financial means for tribal museum development. In 1990, the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was enacted to facilitate protection for and the repatriation of tribal objects and human remains, which helped many Great Lakes tribes to build
sizable collections to house and exhibit in their museums. As more Native communities found the means to begin to develop tribally-run museums, a wave of new professionalization and funding opportunities for tribal museums arose from both Native and non-Native organizations. Collectively, the development of tribal gaming facilities, the enactment of NAGPRA, and the development of various funding and professionalization organizations and opportunities throughout the 1990s and early 2000s fundamentally changed the ways that tribal museums were founded and developed. For many Great Lakes tribes (including the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Bois Forte Bands of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Forest County Potawatomi, the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa), these developments made the foundation of a tribally-run museum possible for the first time.

Since opening, the nine Great Lakes tribal museums discussed in this dissertation have proven effective in enabling tribes to continue to take control over interpretations of their past...
and determine the direction for their future. Founded as sites for facilitating the continuation of activism, I argue that Great Lakes tribal museums have three primary functions: to identify and address sources of collective historical trauma, to facilitate the revitalization and perpetuation of traditional culture, and to articulate a modern tribal identity rooted in tradition yet informed by contemporary lifeways.

**Survey of Existing Literature**

For over thirty years, the New Indian History that emerged amidst the mid-to-late twentieth century rising national interest in ethnic history and heritage, as well as the Tribal Sovereignty Movement that thrust Native people into public view, has dominated American Indian historiography. Intent on understanding Native perspectives, stressing Native agency, and demonstrating the centrality of Native history to American History in general, the work of historians like Richard White and Daniel Richter have directed the growth of the field and increasingly put American Indian History on the radar of American historians at large.\(^\text{11}\) Many universities have established American Indian studies programs, and others have hired historians as American Indian History experts, solidifying the field as its own area of expertise.

In recent years, however, scholars have begun to recognize the myriad issues with the New Indian History of the twentieth century. While claiming to incorporate Native perspectives, most proponents of the New Indian History never actually consulted any Native people. For historians like Devon Mihesuah, who criticize this aspect of the New Indian History, this is problematic because it leads to the conclusion that despite their efforts to demonstrate American Indian resiliency, such historians still believed that Native people’s methods of understanding

history are unreliable and, thus, not as valuable. Furthermore, while practitioners of the New Indian History have made significant contributions to early American history, far less have considered Native history past World War II. This is even more surprising given the fact that, in ways historians of early America cannot, historians of the post-World War II era have the ability to directly consult many of the people, organizations, and/or communities they write about. Yet, this practice remains infrequent. This dissertation hopes to help fill these gaps in the literature by not only incorporating Native people’s voices and perspectives on post-war activism and tribal museum development, but privileging them where available.

While much work remains to be done, some scholars have begun the process. In his 2006 review of Charles Wilkinson’s Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations, historian Brian Hosmer wrote that “it is indeed fortunate that, at long last, scholars of American Indian history have discovered the post-World War II era.” Hosmer is correct in his assessment that progress has been made in acknowledging late twentieth century American Indian History. This is particularly true for Great Lakes Native history, as scholarship on the persistence of Native tribes in the region continues to grow. Works like R. David Edmunds’ Enduring Nations: Native Americans in the Midwest and Patty Loew’s Indian Nations of Wisconsin: Histories of

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12 Devon Mihesuah, Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 1. In addition to this text, Mihesuah has also edited and written for other important volumes that critique New Indian History as it existed in the twentieth century and offer several suggestions for scholars to avoid such pitfalls moving forward. Such works include Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004) and So You Want to Write About American Indians? A Guide for Writers, Students, and Scholars (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

Endurance and Renewal have focused on the tactics used by tribal leaders to maintain their ancestral lands and distinct cultural identity in the Great Lakes region. While neither overtly claim to be about activism, both nonetheless helped inform the interpretation of Great Lakes Native activism presented in this dissertation. The fact that such texts do not utilize the term “activism” in any significance sense to describe Native tactics of survival and cultural resurgence points to another gap in the historiography – the tendency of scholars to relegate Native activism to the 1960s and 70s Tribal Sovereignty Movement, and, most often, to the highly public and more militant “Red Power” organizations such as the American Indian Movement. While they may not use the term, I argue that the actions of Native people described and analyzed by scholars like Edmunds and Loew are, indeed, manifestations of activism.

In addition, several recent studies have concentrated on the highly contentious Great Lakes treaty rights battles of the 1980s, 90s, and 2000s. Robert Doherty’s Disputed Waters: Native Americans and the Great Lakes Fishery and Larry Nesper’s Walleye War: the Struggle for Ojibwe Spearfishing and Treaty Rights are particularly notable for their contributions not only to post-World War II American Indian History and Great Lakes Native history, but also to the history of Native activism.\(^\text{14}\) By focusing on post-1970s Great Lakes Native treaty rights activism, both Doherty and Nesper’s studies point to a move in the right direct. Yet, most scholarship on Native activism still remains heavily concentrated on the 1960s and 70s. Daniel Cobb has focused on amending this oversight (while, significantly, also consulting Native people and including Native voices) with his 2008 Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle

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for Sovereignty and 2015 Say We Are Nations: Documents of Politics and Protest in Indigenous America Since 1887. Both, however, stop short of fully considering Native history and activism since the turn of the twenty-first century.\(^{15}\) Perhaps this is appropriate in some contexts, but in the Great Lakes region, Native activism did not wane in tandem with the Tribal Sovereignty Movement. Instead, as I argue here, Great Lakes Native activism continued and manifested in a variety of ways as challenges to tribal sovereignty, treaty rights, and the perpetuation of traditional culture have continued well into the 2000s.

The fact that most scholarship on Great Lakes Native history and post-World War II Native activism stop short of the twenty-first century has obscured the ways in Native activism continued, both in the courts and through the development of tribal museums (which, as this dissertation shows, increased in the 2000s). Although there are over two hundred and fifty in the United States today, tribal museums have received surprisingly little scholarly attention from historians of American Indian History or Public History.\(^{16}\) While both fields (and the relevant subfields of museum studies and Great Lakes Native history) have continuously expanded to

\(^{15}\) This is true of several other works that have expanded the field of study on Native activism, but primarily in terms of the mid-to-late twentieth century. For example, Joane Nagel’s American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Richard A. Grounds, George E. Tinker, and David E. Wilkins edited volume Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003).

\(^{16}\) This number is a rough estimate based on estimates from The Newberry Library, George Abrams’ Tribal Museums in America (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 2004), and my own calculations. According to some, the term “tribal museum” refers to both tribally-run institutions and institutions run by tribes in conjunction with outside institutions, such as state historical societies. Only tribally-run institutions are considered in this dissertation. In part because of these differing definitions, only an estimate can be given. Additionally, data on the number of tribal museums has not been attempted in several years.
include a wider array of perspectives, voices, and subject matters over the past several decades, significantly, tribally-run institutions have remained largely overlooked.\textsuperscript{17}

There are, however, a few exceptions. Julie Anne Broyles’ 1989 unpublished dissertation \textit{The Politics of Heritage: Native American Museums and the Maintenance of Ethnic Boundaries on the Contemporary Northwest Coast} is possibly the first historical study to focus solely on tribal museums. While Broyles’ dissertation touches on several of the major points expanded on in this dissertation, overall her study rests on the assumption that Native activism “concluded” as the Tribal Sovereignty Movement waned, and that tribal museums are an end “product” of that activism.\textsuperscript{18} In contrast, I argue here that while this movement may have waned in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Native activism did not. Particularly in the Great Lakes region, Native activism has continued, as assaults on treaty rights remain ongoing. I argue, then, that tribal museums in the Great Lakes are not a product, but rather an avenue for activism – a vehicle for promoting social, political, economic, environmental, and cultural change. Tribal museums not only demonstrate the power achieved by post-war activism, but continuously provide a site for reestablishing and gaining power that is still so often questioned or denied.

\textsuperscript{17} While none reference tribal museums or Native activism directly, a few public historians merit attention here for the myriad ways in which their work informed this dissertation. Michael Kammen’s \textit{Mystic Chords of Memory: the Transformation of Tradition in American Culture} (New York: Knopf, 1991) is particularly relevant in informing the changes in American interest in ethnic and local history and heritage in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s \textit{Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen’s \textit{The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), and Edward T. Linenthal’s \textit{Preserving Memory: the Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) all contributed to a central component of this dissertation: the ways in which history and control over interpretations of the past can be used to reclaim power and elicit positive change.

Mary Lawlor’s *Public Native America: Tribal Self-Representations in Museums, Powwows, and Casinos* is perhaps the first published study to touch on tribal museums for any significant length. Lawlor presents a comparative study in which she looks at the ways Native people represent themselves in public institutions and cultural displays. With the increase in tribal gaming and tourism, museums and powwows have had more non-Native visitors and participants, which has forced tribes to make conscious decisions about how they want to represent themselves to the outside world. Lawlor found that tribes use these spaces to convey different but related messages, all with the underlying focus on combatting misconceptions about American Indian life. Immediately following the publication of Lawlor’s book, Joshua Gorman’s *Building a Nation: Chickasaw Museum and the Construction of History and Heritage* traces the development of Chickasaw museum and argues that the Chickasaw museum strategically issues a “re-articulation of [Chickasaw] heritage” as a means of providing “justification for contemporary sovereignty.” Both Lawlor and Gorman touch on some of the reasons for developing tribal museums – to tap into tourism on their own terms, use the opportunity to educate non-Natives and correct historical inaccuracies, and strategically utilize heritage to convey a particular interpretation of their past and present identity. While agreeing with this, I

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20 Joshua M. Gorman, *Building a Nation: Chickasaw Museums and the Construction of History and Heritage* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011), 2. Gorman’s book has been particularly relevant in thinking about the ways that tribal museums facilitate nation-building, as discussed in Chapter Four in reference to the Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library, and Museum.
argue that tribal museums were developed to do much more. Building on such scholarship, I argue that tribal museums were developed to facilitate the realization of the goals first articulated by Native activists involved in the Tribal Sovereignty Movement and to do this, tribal museums have three primary, overlapping functions: to identify and address sources of collective historical trauma, to facilitate the revitalization and perpetuation of traditional culture, and to articulate a modern tribal identity rooted in tradition yet informed by contemporary life.

Arguably the most influential study on tribal museums to date is Amy Lonetree’s *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. Like Lawlor, Lonetree presents a comparative study that considers American Indian representation in a mainstream museum, a “hybrid” museum, and a tribally-run museum (namely, the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways). Lonetree traces the shifts in mainstream museum practice that allowed for increased collaboration between museum professionals and Native people, and influenced many American Indian tribes to open their own museums. While she credits Native activism for enabling this shift, she does not go into much detail about how. Still, Lonetree’s study is particularly notable for her reliance on the museum founders and personnel themselves – an approach I have, where possible, relied upon as well. In ways that Lonetree’s study does not, Kylie Message’s 2014 *Museums and Social Activism: Engaged Protest* relates more directly to the premise of this study, though she only does so for one short chapter. In this one chapter on tribal museums, Message argues that the successes that Native activists achieved

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21 By mainstream museums, Lonetree refers specifically to the National Museum of the American Indian, which, while developed in consultation with tribes, is run by a non-Native institution. “Hybrid” museums in this case refer to museums run in collaboration between a tribe and an outside entity. Tribal museums are defined by Lonetree the same as they are in this study – those that are run by tribal members and reside on or near tribal lands.
throughout the 1960s and 70s gave them a “renewed focus” on “community-based transformations that reiterated the authority of American Indian nations and their governance systems.” Museums, she argues, “were implicated within this process of change.” Message stops short, however, of fully considering the ways in which activism extended past the Tribal Sovereignty Movement and into the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This dissertation seeks to tackle these gaps that remain in the literature by examining the intersection of Native activism and the advent of tribal museum development in the Great Lakes region, and demonstrates how the continuation of tribal museum development beyond the 1970s was part of the continuation of Native activism.

**Approach, Sources, and Methodology**

By focusing on the nine tribally-run museums in the Great Lakes region, this study inherently utilizes a case-study approach. In contrast to most scholarly work relating to tribal museums, this is not a comparative study. Rather than compare these tribal museums to one another, to tribal museums in other regions, or to other types of museums, this dissertation provides an in-depth look at how national developments and regional circumstances prompted and facilitated the development of Great Lakes tribal museums. Parallels to tribal museum development in other regions might certainly be drawn, but that is work for another study. Instead, the uniqueness of the Great Lakes region, as well as each tribe or band’s historical experience, is emphasized.


23 Ibid.
The apparent lack of scholarly work synthesizing materials from Public History, American Indian History, and the history of Native activism has been both a blessing and a curse. Principally, this has made a reliance on tribal museum personnel – their perspectives and their voices – even more crucial. From this dissertation’s conception, I have aimed to avoid the pitfalls of many non-Native historians doing American Indian History before and have pledged to not only to incorporate but privilege the voices and perspectives of those involved in the development and operations of Great Lakes tribal museums. This, I have found, is much easier said than done. In some cases, my inquiries quickly translated into invitations to visit or agreements to meet, which in turn led to the development of several collaborative relationships. In other cases, communication was a challenge. I have had to learn to be creative in my approach to research in ways I never foresaw or considered, having to lean on and utilize resources not found in archives. This is, in a way, oddly appropriate, as I have learned how Native understandings of history and the sources that inform those understandings are often different from those of Euro-Americans.

The sources from which this dissertation is drawn are varied and necessarily multidisciplinary. Interviews with tribal members and particularly museum personnel (conducted by me whenever possible, but also those conducted by other researchers and published elsewhere) are prioritized. In some cases, tribal members and/or museum personnel have preferred to talk off the record or in casual conversation, which have been utilized where permission has been granted. Recorded and unrecorded guided tours (which are, interestingly, largely absent from other studies relating to tribal museums) are prioritized as well. Where interviews were not possible, documentation provided by tribal archives, libraries, and personal
collections are utilized. Only a few of the tribal museums in the Great Lakes region have searchable archival collections and even fewer are made available to outside researchers. In cases where these were available, documentation relating to cultural traditions, the tribe or band’s legal history, resource management, museum development, and tribal member activism have been heavily relied upon. In some cases where archival collections were not available, I was lucky to be given or loaned museum papers or other relevant materials by tribal museum personnel.

Given that these, too, could be hard to come by, tribal, local, regional, and national newspaper archives have been crucial in filling in the gaps. Like guided tours, tribal newspapers have been surprisingly underutilized in many studies relating to tribal museums. In contrast, I have relied upon several tribal newspapers for understanding a tribe, band, or individual’s perspective on relevant subjects. Where appropriate, I also relied on a variety of legal and governmental documentation relating to federal Indian policy, treaties, and the myriad courtroom battles discussed throughout this dissertation.

And, of course, the museums themselves, including materials contained in exhibits, label texts, media, pamphlets, press releases, etc., are heavily relied upon. In perhaps unconventional ways, observational data has also been essential. In most cases, I spent several days on the reservation, chatting with residents and visiting the museum, casino, and other tribally-run establishments. Such experiences informed and shaped this dissertation in significant ways and perhaps enabled a greater understanding of these nine institutions than more traditional research methods could provide.

**Outline of the Project**
“Chapter One: The Road to the Tribal Sovereignty Movement” provides a brief overview of Great Lakes Native history leading to the emergence of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement. Beginning with the treaty-making era, this chapter shows how, through strategic resistance and accommodation, most Great Lakes tribes avoided removal west and remained on a portion of their ancestral lands. Policies and programs like allotment and government-run education aimed to separate Native people from their lands, resources, and cultural traditions. While causing undeniable damage, tribal distinction and elements of traditional culture remained. After World War II, the federal government recommitted to its assimilationist agenda with full force, initiating the twin policies of termination and relocation. By the 1950s, such policies had not only failed to fully assimilate Native people into mainstream society, but had inadvertently prompted and facilitated the emergence of a national movement for tribal sovereignty that aimed to halt and reverse termination, break the federal government’s paternalistic hold on Native life, enforce treaty rights, promote economic progress, and preserve and revitalize traditional culture. To achieve these goals, Native activism manifested in a variety of ways on national, regional, and tribal levels, and significantly, prompted the development of tribally-run institutions dedicated to exhibiting and exercising tribal sovereignty.

“Chapter Two: Great Lakes Native Activism and Tribal Museums to 1980” traces the emergence of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement with a particular emphasis on the crucial roles played by Great Lakes activists, and examines how the earliest tribal museums in the region emerged as an integral part of the post-war fight for tribal sovereignty. Influenced by and taking part in this national movement, Great Lakes activists increasingly applied the goals articulated by the activists of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement to their own communities, utilizing various
avenues through which to do so. By situating the foundation and development of the earliest tribal museums in the Great Lakes region within the context of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement, this chapter demonstrates how tribal activists created these institutions as designated sites for exhibiting the sovereignty they were fighting for, and addressing the issues that prompted the movement.

“Chapter Three: Great Lakes Native Activism and Tribal Museums, 1980 to 1990” traces the continuation of Native activism through the 1980s, and demonstrates how the legacy of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement – both its successes and its shortcomings – enabled, empowered, and motivated Great Lakes tribes to continue to fight for the recognition of their sovereignty and treaty rights, and to revitalize and perpetuate elements of their traditional culture. While developed with similar goals in mind, institutions founded in the decades after 1980 had access to resources not available to earlier museum developers. Tribal museums founded after 1980 benefitted from the achievements of decades of Native activism, as well as ongoing changes in museum practice and an increasing interest in localized heritage. Even with more political power and resources available, very few tribal museums opened during the late twentieth century. This chapter examines why the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center was founded at this time, showing that the particularly contentious treaty rights battles in Lac du Flambeau throughout the 1980s necessitated the completion of the tribe’s museum.

“Chapter Four: Great Lakes Native Activism and Tribal Museums, 1990 to 2010,” examines the landmark changes of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that both prompted and enabled a new wave of tribal museum development. In 1988, the termination policy was legally repealed, and the era of self-determination officially began. Working
alongside Native activists, the federal government not only articulated its support for tribal sovereignty, but increasingly introduced measures to augment its growth. Tribal museums founded in the decades after 1990 had at their disposal an arsenal of resources not available to earlier museum developers. In particular, the enactment of pro-sovereignty legislation like the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, as well as an increase in professionalization and funding opportunities, aided the establishment of these museums and, for some tribes, made a tribally-run museum possible for the first time.

While emerging within this larger context, ultimately, the tribal museums developed in the Great Lakes region after 1990 emerged within a particular set of circumstances unique to the region and each tribe. Litigation over treaty rights continued across the region, and was in many cases compounded by new issues that arose as more tribes developed gaming establishments. The need for various manifestations of Native activism continued despite successes and positive developments. Chapter Four examines how the five tribal museums founded during this period were developed to address the regionally and tribally specific challenges they still faced.

Collectively, the first four chapters demonstrate that for Great Lakes tribes, the act of establishing tribal museums was a form of activism. These institutions were developed with the expressed purposes of inciting social, cultural, economic, and political change within their communities, the region, and to an extent, the larger American society. They emerged as a result of the historical experiences unique to the region, and were established as a means for addressing contemporary challenges. With an understanding of why these institutions were established, the final chapter, “Chapter Five: Activism in Great Lakes Tribal Museums,” examines how they function to achieve their goals. In doing so, I argue that Great Lakes tribal museums have three
primary functions: to identify and address sources of collective historical trauma, to facilitate the revitalization and perpetuation of traditional culture, and to articulate a modern tribal identity rooted in tradition yet informed by contemporary lifeways. These functions facilitate the realization of the goals first articulated by the activists involved in the Tribal Sovereignty Movement that have remained relevant and, in many cases, not yet fully realized. Ultimately, through these three interconnected functions, this chapter demonstrates how tribal museums have continuously enabled Great Lakes tribes to exercise and exhibit sovereignty.
CHAPTER ONE

THE ROAD TO THE TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY MOVEMENT

On March 29, 1951, the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin “rejoiced in their good fortune.”¹ For over twenty years, the tribe had been embroiled in lawsuits with the federal government over the mismanagement of their timber operations and that day, a ruling came down in their favor. Their troubles had begun in the nineteenth century as non-Natives with an eye for Menominee land and resources increasingly moved into the area. In 1905, a tornado passed through the reservation causing extensive damage to the timber supply.² The federal government stepped in to assist, but the salvage efforts were “grossly mismanaged.”³ To assuage the situation, the LaFollette Act was passed in 1908 with the intent of enabling the Menominee to take more control over their lumber operations.⁴ Yet, over the next several decades, federal agents remained in charge and greatly mishandled the tribe’s assets. A mill fire

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³ Ibid.

⁴ The 1908 LaFollette Act required that the federal government manage Menominee timber in line with the sustainable methods dictated by the tribe, and provide employment and training in logging and milling operations so that the tribe would eventually run both. The law did not, however, make clear how officials should accomplish this. For more on the LaFollette Act, see David Beck, The Struggle for Self-Determination: History of the Menominee Indians Since 1854 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 70-72.
in 1924 prompted an evaluation of the tribe’s lumber operations, which revealed the true extent of the government’s mismanagement. Citing its failure to adhere to the 1908 Act, the tribe hired attorneys in 1931 to take the federal government to task. When the ruling came down in their favor, it seemed for a moment that their years of turmoil were finally over. After decades of uncertainty, the tribe was awarded $8.5 million, increasing their tribal funds in the United States Treasury to over $10 million. The Menominee celebrated this unlikely victory, unaware that their “good fortune” would soon be used against them and that within a few months, “their world would again be threatened.”

For the Menominee and many tribal communities across the Great Lakes region, the years following the end of World War II represented a moment of possibility. Many tribes had been able to utilize the more pro-sovereignty legislation of the New Deal era to their advantage and affirm a unified tribal identity recognized by the federal government. Every tribal community in the region had several members who had contributed to the war effort, in many instances gaining the respect of their non-Native military counterparts and building relationships that they believed would foster a greater understanding of Native culture and lifeways back home. When Congress established the Indian Claims Commission in 1946 to enable tribes to address and receive compensation for losses suffered as a result of broken treaties, it seemed possible that a new chapter in tribal relations with the federal government and the non-Native American public was on the horizon.

Yet, even as many found reason for hope in a better future, several of the challenges of the past persisted. Most Great Lakes Native communities lived in arguably some the worst social and economic conditions of any group in the country. With few exceptions, life on Great Lakes

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5 “Menominee Restoration Day Chronology of Events.”
reservations was characterized by high unemployment rates, low incomes, high mortality rates, and lower life expectancy than anywhere else in America.\(^6\) By the 1950s, these challenges were compounded by the realization that the moment of possibility was passing as the federal government made clear its renewed commitment to assimilation. Native communities across the Great Lakes region faced both the reality and threat of the federal government’s increasing political oppression that culminated in the deliberate reversal of the goals of then-Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier’s Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), the cornerstone of the so-called Indian New Deal. In contrast to the culturally pluralistic goals of the IRA, American Indian policy in the post-war years was characterized by the enactment of the termination and urban relocation policies that sought to withdraw federal support from tribes, commodify and sell Native lands, and completely assimilate Native people into mainstream society. As place-based communities with distinct cultural and political practices, virtually nothing could have been more threatening to Great Lakes Native communities than the expropriation of their land and the refusal to acknowledge their right to self-determination. As historian Donald Fixico explains, the termination and relocation policies deliberately “threatened the very core of American Indian existence – its culture.”\(^7\)

This is a story that clearly demonstrates that by the middle of the twentieth century, the situation for American Indians living in the Great Lakes region was dire. One of the purposes of this chapter is to examine how the federal government, through policies and programs from the

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\(^6\) Charles Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations* (New York: Norton & Co, 2005), xii. In this seminal work on the rise of modern American Indian nations, Wilkinson states that the years following World War II “marked an all-time low for tribal existence on this continent.” As an attorney for the Menominee in the 1970s and close friend of prominent Menominee activist Ada Deer, Wilkinson witnessed first-hand the impact of federal policy on Great Lakes Native tribes.

development of reservations in the nineteenth century to the dawn of the termination era, sought
to systematically assimilate Native people into mainstream culture by stripping them of the
essential elements of their Native identity. It is a story that culminates in the implementation of
the post-war policies that led tribal leaders and emerging activists to recognize that unless
something was done, the dissolution of Great Lakes tribal culture would continue to a point of no
return.

Yet, as Oneida historian Doug Kiel aptly points out, through closer examination of the
details of this story, “a counter narrative of innovation, adaptation, alliance, and revitalization
may be heard as well.”8 Although all dealt with enormous losses in land, political autonomy,
control over resources, and important aspects of tribal culture, most tribal communities in the
Great Lakes region avoided removal west of the Mississippi River, and were able to preserve
portions of their ancestral homelands, their sovereignty, and elements of their cultural traditions,
and maintain a distinct (though ever-evolving) tribal identity. Another purpose of this chapter,
then, is to examine how, using a variety of tactics, Great Lakes Native communities survived,
and at what cost. Resistance efforts were constant, but coincided strategic accommodations with
consequences that contributed to the urgent need for the organized action that arose in the post-
war years. For Native communities in the Great Lakes region, this story is one of both cultural
endurance and change. It is a story that is crucial in understanding why Great Lakes tribes, as
part of a larger national and regional movement for sovereignty, developed tribal museums for
the expressed purpose of reclaiming some of what was lost over time, and for conveying the key
message that “we are still here.”9

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8 Doug Kiel, “Introduction: Reframing and Reclaiming Indigenous Midwes,” in The Middle West

9 Jo Ann Schedler, emailed questionnaire to Meagan McChesney, March 5, 2017.
The Treaty-Making Era in the Great Lakes Region

To understand how the situation on reservations in the Great Lakes region reached a point that necessitated renewed and deliberate action to ensure cultural survival in the decades following World War II, it is essential to examine how and why reservation life in the region developed as it did. To do so, it is necessary to briefly review the treaty-making era that produced the creation of reservations in the Great Lakes region.

While the Appropriations Act that officially designated federal funds for the creation of reservations was passed in 1851, the groundwork for this act was laid over the course of the previous several decades. After the War of 1812, it became clear to Native tribes in the Great Lakes region that the “dream of holding back the American juggernaut” was shattering.10 Since first contact with Europeans, a “middle ground” had been maintained in the region in which a “rough balance of power” existed because both settlers and Natives had a “mutual need or desire for what the other [possessed].”11 Contrary to popular narratives of disappearance and decline, Native people in the Great Lakes region were not passive victims but, rather, actively sought to

10 Danziger, viii.

11 White, The Middle Ground, xii. In demonstrating the ways in which contact involved an ongoing and evolving process of negotiation and exchange, White’s foundational text provided an analytical tool through which almost all Great Lakes Native history has since been approached. Daniel Richter’s Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America, for example, builds on White’s argument directly and demonstrates that Native contact with European settlers in the Great Lakes region did not indicate a moment of inevitable decline but rather prompted new cultural productions that incorporated elements of both Native and settler traditions, ideologies, and practices. Both expanding upon and questioning elements of White’s work, Michael A. McDonnell’s Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015) is also notable. McDonnell emphasizes the agency of Great Lakes Native people even more and argues that the “middle ground” described by White exists from the perspective of European settlers, who saw Native communities and culture as becoming increasingly fragmented. McDonnell argues instead that Great Lakes Native communities (particularly the Anishinaabe) were not, from their perspective, fragmenting and remained more firmly in control of Indian-European relations than their French or British counterparts. While questioning elements of White’s argument and approach, McDonnell’s text nonetheless reaffirms White’s assertion that both Natives and settlers had a mutual need for the other and that power gradually shifted away from Great Lakes Native communities into the hands of the emerging American nation.
incorporate European people, practices, and ideas on their own terms, and in ways that, based on traditional cultural practices, made sense to them.\textsuperscript{12} Even in the years following the Revolutionary War, during which Americans began to construct “a world in which Indian nations…had no place,” Native communities in the Great Lakes region maintained a system of cooperation and exchange with non-Natives.\textsuperscript{13} For a time, the economic and political significance of the fur trade had ensured the persistence of a mutually-beneficial (though increasingly unbalanced) system of relationships in the region. With the American victory in the war and the declining significance of the fur trade, however, the balance of power shifted even more as Native people were increasingly viewed as impediments to American expansion and progress.\textsuperscript{14}

Conceptually, the practice of treaty-making implies that the federal government recognized and respected the sovereignty of Great Lakes tribes and that treaties, by definition an

\textsuperscript{12} Richter, 67; 252.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 188. In an article in \textit{The Middle West Review}, Theodore Karamanski argues that the “‘middle ground’ of cooperation and cultural exchange that marked the Great Lakes frontier in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries endured after the conclusion of the second war with Great Britain.” Karamanski goes on to state that the system of exchange and cooperation only “slowly waned” as American dominance (but not total sovereignty) became a reality. Theodore Karamanski, “Settler Colonial Strategies and Indigenous Resistance on the Great Lakes Lumber Frontier,” in \textit{The Middle West Review}, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring 2016), 28.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 149. In the Great Lakes region in particular, Native peoples’ relationships with and understandings of the physical environment were inconsistent with emerging American notions of how the land and resources should be used to facilitate “progress.” In \textit{The Legacy of Conquest: the Unbroken Past of the American West} (New York, Norton and Co, 1987), Patricia Limerick explains how Euro-American settlers sought to impose new understandings of the environment in terms of individual ownership. As this dissertation shows, Native people in the region rejected, resisted, and/or strategically incorporated and altered white notions of resource cultivation and land ownership in ways that led some to the conclusion they were in the way. In \textit{Empires, Nations, and Families: A History of the North American West, 1800-1860} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), Anne Hyde builds on the work of scholars like Richter and Limerick and explains that as white settlement expanded into regions like the Upper Great Lakes, inconsistent ideologies and the increasing desire for Native land meant that by the mid-nineteenth century, “no one in power seemed capable of imagining a shared landscape with Native people.” Hyde, 483.
agreement between nations, would ensure the mutual benefit of all the parties involved. In reality, the process of treaty-making was often wrought with corruption and manipulation, and was increasingly utilized as a means of facilitating the expulsion of Native people from their ancestral homelands and eradicating their cultural distinction. While Great Lakes tribes approached the creation of treaties as a means of solidifying tribal sovereignty, control over land and resources, and guaranteeing the survival of traditional culture, the federal government’s approach to treaty-making was informed by the ideologies of “civilization” and “progress” that were predicated on a “logic of elimination” in which American dominance rested on “the [cultural if not physical] disappearance of indigenous societies.”

This was particularly true for Great Lakes tribes, who, by the middle of the nineteenth century, found themselves engulfed in a multi-pronged battle over control of the region’s resources, lands, and culture. The American “frontier” continued to advance, and Native people were seen as obstacles to this driving expansion. As technology and transportation innovations gradually connected the “middle west” with the rest of the country, the federal government, along with non-Native entrepreneurs, increasingly believed that exploitation of the region’s resources was essential to the future prosperity of the country. Non-native encroachment into the area coincided the emergence of such ideologies about the region’s importance for American expansion, contributing to the public perception that Great Lakes tribal communities were in the

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16 Danziger, 12. Nineteenth century notions of the American “frontier” are embodied in Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis, which describes the “west” (including what we now consider the “middle west,” of which much of the Great Lakes region is a part) as a place that would be “opened” when white settlers arrived and “closed” when the land and Native people were conquered. Danziger demonstrates that as treaty-making persisted, the region was not “conquered” and “closed.” Native people not only remained active participants in the treaty-making process, but strategically shaped the direction development in the region would take.
way. Between 1850 and 1900, for example, Michigan’s population grew by 608% and Wisconsin’s by 678%, leaving Great Lakes Native people a minority on their own ancestral homelands.\textsuperscript{17}

It is important to recognize that even as the “middle ground” increasingly eroded over the course of the nineteenth century, the newly established American government continued to recognize Great Lakes tribe’s political sovereignty and conduct relations with Native tribes on a nation-to-nation basis. Although the federal government made its desire for tribal lands clear, the practice of treaty-making continued to enable Great Lakes tribes to shape their lives and influence the changes occurring throughout the region and the country at large. Engaging in treaty negotiations, coupled with a variety of strategic acts of accommodation and resistance, was central in enabling many of the region’s tribes to avoid removal west, secure a permanent (albeit severely shrunken) land base, and obtain educational resources needed to survive in an increasingly white-dominated world.

\textbf{The Removal Policy and Great Lakes Tribes}

To a greater degree than tribes in any other region of the country, Native communities in the Great Lakes region evaded the impact of the federal government’s removal policy in the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{18} This is in part due to the fact that, as historian Theodore Karamanski


\textsuperscript{18} The federal government’s practice of removing tribes from their ancestral homelands culminated in the enactment of the 1830 Indian Removal Act, which authorized President Andrew Jackson to negotiate with tribes for their removal west of the Mississippi River. Tribes across the South were arguably most affected by Jackson’s removal policy, and have thus been the focus of most scholarship on the subject. While not focused on the Great Lakes region, scholarship like Theda Purdue and Michael Green’s foundational text \textit{The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears} (New York: Penguin Books, 2007) shine light on the motivations behind and justifications for removal, as well as the physical circumstances of the process of removal itself. Perdue and Green argue that prior to their displacement, the Cherokee Nation of Georgia were often considered a model of the success of the “civilizing” efforts that began with European settlement. Perdue and Green explain that supporters of both the “civilizing” cause and removal argued
explains, unlike tribal communities south of the Great Lakes, those in the upper Great Lakes faced less direct pressure from agricultural settlers in the early nineteenth century and were able to “take stock of their relations with the American state and to initiate strategies of resistance and accommodation.” That said, the period of removal resulted in a mixed-bag of successes and devastating losses. Northern Great Lakes tribes were well-aware of the devastating effects that removal had on tribes south of the inland seas. Two Great Lakes tribes – the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin and the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans – had directly experienced the devastating loss of life and culture that inevitably accompanied removal when in 1822, they were forced from their eastern homes to the Great Lakes region through several corrupt and arguably illegal treaties. In the years following the 1830 Removal Act, however, these tribes strategically drew up their long history of cooperation with the federal government, as well as their early acceptance of Christianity, as proof that they were willing and able to “civilize” and acculturate into Wisconsin’s growing white society. Both negotiated with the Menominee and the federal government through a series of treaties to secure residence on what would become their permanent land bases and avoid any further removals west.

that for the Cherokees to give up their land and customs would be beneficial because, without their land and customs, they would have no choice but to continue on the path to complete assimilation and “civilization” by fully adopting the ways of the white man. In addition to problematic notions of “civilization, ” Perdue and Green argue that removal was also driven by white Americans’ desires for the resource rich land that resided within Indian homelands, which certainly applies to tribes outside of the South and in the Great Lakes region as well.

19 Karamanski, 28.

20 Both the Oneidas and Stockbridge-Munsees have been referred to as New England “praying Indians” (in reference to the period after contact and before they were removed to Wisconsin). This term generally refers to Native communities that were organized into villages run by Puritan or Jesuit missionaries and seemed to more readily accept Christianity than others (like the bands of the Iroquois Confederacy). Both also supported the colonists in the Revolutionary War, a fact that ultimately impacted the development of their respective museums and is discussed at greater length in Chapter Two of this dissertation.
For the Potawatomi, the consequences of treaty-making and the federal government’s removal policy were particularly destructive and wrought with ambiguity, confusion, and coercion. As the result of various treaties, by 1829, the Potawatomi had ceded 70% of its original land base across the Great Lakes.\textsuperscript{21} The 1821 and 1833 Treaties of Chicago proved most devastating for the tribe, which lacked a clear centralized governmental body with the authority to speak for the whole, as some members signed over their claim to all tribal lands east of the Mississippi. The majority of the Potawatomi were removed west as a result of the 1833 Treaty on what is now known as the Trail of Death because of the immense loss of life experienced along the way. Others fled north into British Canada and later infiltrated back into the United States or hid in the woods in Wisconsin. Those who refused removal were eventually able to obtain funds promised from the Treaty of Chicago to secure a permanent land base in the region, becoming the Forest County Band of Potawatomi.

While the Forest County Band in Wisconsin evaded removal through outright resistance and/or fleeing north, where interest in Native lands remained relatively less for a time, others, such as the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi in Michigan, utilized wholly different tactics. Understanding the federal government’s increasing commitment to assimilation, the Pokagon Band recognized the potential benefit of appeasing missionaries and at least appearing to embrace “civilization,” and sought out Catholic missionaries in the 1820s and 30s. Without discounting any genuine religiously-motivated intent, this was nonetheless a strategic choice. While Michigan’s Methodist population was growing in number, the Pokagon Band choose to embrace Catholicism in order to evade the control of the largely Methodist Indian agents and maintain elements of autonomy. Yet, by converting to Christianity, the Band was still able prove

that they were willing and able to embark on the path to “civilization.” This tactic worked, and the Pokagon Band was excluded from the 1833 Treaty of Chicago order for removal west, and later were able to negotiate a treaty to secure their own reservation in the state.  

**The Creation of Great Lakes Reservations**

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the heavy financial and logistical burden of removing and resettling populations in the hundreds and thousands had become apparent. Since several Native communities across the Great Lakes had utilized a variety of tactics to successfully evade removal, a large number remained in the region. The evident impact of forced removals, coupled with the increasing desire and ability of the white population to push further west, complicated the federal government’s vision for a distinct, separate Indian territory out West. Still, the desire for Native lands in the Great Lakes region remained. Additionally, in response to the apparent failure of American Indian policy in the first half of the century and seeing communities such as the Pokagon Band seemingly embrace conversion, an increasing number of reformers emerged who, harkening back to the rhetoric of early Jesuit converters, believed “that aboriginal peoples of the Great Lakes and elsewhere in America were capable of learning the English language and of adopting an alternative, superior mode of life.”

To attain the twin goals of “civilizing” and Christianizing Native people and opening up Native lands for the taking, the federal government increasingly turned away from removing tribes from the Great Lakes region to the development of reservations.

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23 Danziger, 22.
While a nationwide policy was not implemented until 1851, the creation of reservations in the Great Lakes region was initiated earlier. The Anishinabe had negotiated the creation of reservations in the 1836 and 1837 treaties with the federal government to ward off removal, for example, agreeing that the reservations would be supported by civilization programs for a set period, after which they would be removed west of the Mississippi River. As removal increasingly seemed less and less viable, the Appropriations Bill of 1851 was passed to further contain rather than remove tribes from the Great Lakes region and beyond. In appropriating funds for the development of reservations, the federal government sought to enclose tribal communities to better facilitate their acculturation into mainstream American society. In contrast to the creation of an isolated Indian territory out West, reservations were created to enable the federal government to further implement “civilizing” programs in controlled conditions in efforts to ensure the cultural dissolution yet physical survival of the remaining Native population—something removal had proven unable to do.24

With the twin goals of eventually attaining control over tribal lands and resources and acculturating Native people into mainstream society in mind, the paternalistic reservation system became the keystone of federal Indian policy for the latter half of the nineteenth century. Great Lakes historian Edmund Danziger compares reservations in the region to “halfway houses,”

24 Ibid. See Robert A. Trennert’s Alternative to Extinction: Federal Indian Policy and the Beginnings of the Reservation System, 1846-1851 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975) for more on the development of reservations. Trennert examines the development of the reservations as a means of addressing the “dire circumstances” that had developed as a result of removal and dispossession. Trennert argues that policymakers recognized the physical repercussions of previous policies on Native people and turned to the development of reservations with the “good intentions” of “preventing the destruction of the aboriginal population.” Trennert makes no claim, though, that the federal government sought to protect Native people’s cultures as well their lives. Instead, he argues that while the reservation system has been, in many ways, a failure, it was devised with the goal of “helping the Indian by acculturating him into the mainstream of American life.” Trennert, 1; 131. While attempting to demonstrate the federal government’s “benevolence,” Trennert unintentionally reveals its ulterior intent of “confining” Native people to implement “civilizing programs” in “controlled conditions.” Trennert, 131.
intended to “temporarily [insulate] Great Lakes Native communities from society at large and simultaneously [enable] federal government officials to control the civilization and assimilation process.” In addition to enabling the federal government to assert a paternalistic hold over Native life, the treaties that created reservations in the Great Lakes also enabled the federal government to severely decrease Native tribes’ land bases. Having faced threats or lived the reality of removal, tribal communities in the region recognized the benefit of utilizing the reservation system to secure a land base, maintain control over resources, and preserve their traditional culture. While the reservation system enabled many to do so, the cost proved to be high.

The process of creating the Lac du Flambeau reservation in Wisconsin provides an illustrative example. Facing a removal order that would force the Ojibwe out of what is now Wisconsin, tribal leaders signed a series of treaties beginning in the 1830s through the next few decades that enabled them to avoid removal by forfeiting huge portions of land and control over resources in designated areas, particularly pine trees and minerals. This disintegration of Ojibwe land and resources continued until tribal leaders from several bands signed a treaty in 1854 that resulted in the creation of four distinct reservations within the recently established state of Wisconsin, including the Lac du Flambeau reservation in the northern central part of the state. While the treaty created the reservation that would serve as a permanent land base and guaranteed the tribe’s right to hunt, fish, and gather on ceded lands, it also decreased the millions of acres of the original Ojibwe homelands to fewer than 275,000. Significantly, in creating only

25 Ibid.
26 Loew, 69.
27 Ibid.
four reservations for the many bands of Ojibwe living in the state, the federal government also sought to impose “new generalized identities on tribal members” in an attempt to decrease the significance of individual band identity as part of the controlled acculturation process.28

While the federal government clearly approached the treaty negotiations that created Great Lakes reservations with a specific agenda, tribes also utilized the process for their own advantage. In addition to avoiding removal, the process of negotiating treaties enabled Great Lakes tribes to take part in dictating what elements of white American culture they wanted to incorporate into their lives on their newly established reservations. While aware that the federal government viewed education as a tool of assimilation, tribes across the region also recognized the importance of education in improving their ability to maneuver within an increasingly white-dominated world. As Great Lakes historian Bruce A. Rubenstein explains, for Native communities, education was seen as “a tool of survival.”29 Native people “had to be able to read and understand deeds, abstracts, and newspaper advertisements to avoid having their land stolen; understanding and speaking English was essential to obtain employment in the white world; and knowing arithmetic was necessary to prevent being defrauded in everyday business transactions.”30 As a result, several tribes appealed to the federal government for education assistance and readily accepted the inclusion of educational resources into the provisions of treaties that created or related to reservation development.31

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28 Ibid.


30 Ibid.

31 For example, Article Four, Section Two of the 1836 Treaty of Washington promised the Ottawa and Chippewa tribes in Michigan five thousand dollars annually for twenty years “for the purposes of education, teachers, school houses, and books in their own language.” “1836 Treaty of Washington,”
While Great Lakes Native people “enjoyed the freedom of adopting only those features of white culture that appealed to them” longer than those in other parts of the country, by the late nineteenth century, “the luxury of selectivity was no longer theirs.”

The manner in which Ojibwe bands were clumped and attributed to reservations in ways that may or may not have made sense to them proves this point. Yet, the implementation of the reservation system was not one-sided. The treaties that created Great Lakes reservations provided tribes with a secure land base (at least for a time), education, control over resources, and, significantly, a legal basis for fighting to assert this control over time. In addition, while the federal government had intentionally developed a paternalistic system in which it assumed it would have control over reservation life, the reality of the demands of outside factors, like the Civil War and expansion, coupled with Native peoples’ strategic acts of accommodation and resistance, meant that elements of traditional culture would not be so easily eradicated.

The Allotment of Great Lakes Reservations and the End of the Treaty-Making Era

According to Diba Jimooyung: Telling Our Story, a tribal history book spearheaded by the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan’s Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, “the darkest days our Anishinabe ancestors ever faced were those between 1837 and 1846.”

Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. II, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904. Knowing that education, assimilation, and conversion often went hand in hand, some couched their appeals to the federal government in religious rhetoric. For example, in his unpublished dissertation, Rubenstein cites an appeal made by forty two “half-blood Ottawa and Chippewa in 1855” to “the Citizens of the United States,” which stated that “in order to reap the greatest advantage in connection with the propagation of the true religion and true enlightenment, we must educate and become acquainted with the arts and sciences, language, manners, and customs of the white man.” Rubenstein, 45. As discussed later in this chapter, though, the federal government increasingly took control over Native education away from missionaries and turned instead to the development of government-funded day schools and later, boarding schools.

32 Danziger, 15.

33 Francis Paul Prucha, The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indian (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 166.
After signing the 1836 and 1837 treaties that created reservations but stipulated their removal, the Anishinabe of central Michigan faced challenges on multiple fronts. The treaty negotiations, questionable at best, had been conducted amidst a smallpox epidemic that continued to affect the communities for years after the treaties were signed. In addition, per their agreement, the United States promised to loan the tribe money to assist in the process of removal, but in the years between, annuity payments were insignificant. Facing poverty, significant land loss, the looming threat of removal, and the increasing encroachment of white land speculators, some Anishinabe bands, including the Swam Creek and Black River bands, resorted to selling their reservations just to survive.

In their time of crisis, many Anishinabe sought new ways to ensure their survival. In doing so, some “found power in the Christian vision.” Methodist missionaries began preaching to the Anishinabe “in our own language, translating the new religion into words that our people could understand.” Seeing the devastating circumstances they faced, missionaries “took the Christian message and made it vital and alive for those Anishinabe who accepted it.” Significantly, missionaries also provided converts with support in the form of tools, animals, and other necessities to “rebuild their shattered lives.” As such, those who chose to convert and

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35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 49.

39 Ibid.
became Christians “were not only responding to the promise of spiritual salvation but also finding physical salvation in their own lifetimes.”

Many of the region’s Native communities also recognized the political advantage of conversion. As the federal government increasingly turned away from removal, officials were left struggling to figure out how to deal with the numerous Native people left in the region. In Michigan, for example, some, like the largely Catholic Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, had obtained a land base, while others, like the Swan Creek and Black River Ojibwe bands, were landless and struggling to survive. Having displayed a willingness to embrace “civilization” efforts, Michigan drafted a new Constitution in 1850 that granted citizenship to adult males who (at least as far as Indian agents could tell) severed all tribal relations. Native votes henceforth became crucial, particularly as Methodist Republicans increasingly saw the state as a “political and religious battleground.” When the Mackinac Indian Agency was created in 1853, it was “from its inception” either “officially or unofficially” under the control of the Methodist church. In the mid-nineteenth century, Methodists were crucial advocates for the political agenda of the Republican Party, and with control over the state’s Indian Agency, had the power and ability to withhold annuity payments or land patents from Native voters who refused to align with their cause. Native citizens were not blind to the fact that Methodist agents sent reports to Washington “stating that Catholic Indians were unanimously drunken, lazy heathens,” whereas

\[40\] Ibid.

\[41\] Rubenstein, 4.

\[42\] Ibid. For the first three years, this agency resided over Native communities across the Great Lakes in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. In 1856, the agency’s area was decreased to encompass most of Michigan, yet it remained one of the largest Indian agencies until its closing in 1889.
Methodist converts were “sober, industrious people trying diligently to learn the white man’s mode of living,” and clearly recognized the advantages of conversion.\(^43\)

Regardless of their motivations, converting and appearing to embrace “civilizing” efforts ultimately enabled many Anishinabe in central Michigan to avoid the removal dictated by the 1836 and 1837 treaties, and remain on a portion of their ancestral lands. Having converted and demonstrated a “strong desire” to acculturate, the Anishinabe were able to garner assistance in appealing to the federal government to renegotiate the terms of their future. With the help of Methodist preacher George Bradley, the Anishinabe began engaging in negotiations with the federal government for a permanent land base – one not yet sold to Americans – on which they could continue their “rapid advancement.”\(^44\) Significantly, in writing to then-senator Lewis Cass on behalf of the tribe, Bradley included that the tribe sought a permanent land base so that they could “own sufficient land to make a farm” and “wish to have it or own it individually.”\(^45\)

Then-Commissioner of Indian Affairs George Manypenny shared Bradley’s interest in creating reservations for the Anishinabe, calling it “the only responsible action the United States could take to correct the disastrous effects of the 1836 and 1837 treaties,” and saw the “benefits” of dividing the land into individually-owned parcels.\(^46\) Many members of the tribe had demonstrated a willingness to acculturate, and Manypenny believed that dividing up the land would accelerate the process of acculturation by eradicating the traditional practice of communal land and resource holding. By turning the Anishinabe into farmers, they would shed their

\(^{43}\) Rubenstein, 6.

\(^{44}\) George Bradley to Lewis Cass, December 23, 1852, in Williamson and Benz, 50.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.

\(^{46}\) George Manypenny quoted in Williamson and Benz, 51.
traditional practices and become “productive members of American society.” Seeing such potential, as well as an alternative to removal, the federal government and the Saginaw Chippewa signed the 1855 Treaty of Detroit, creating the Isabella Reservation, a permanent land base for the Saginaw, Black River, and Swan Creek bands, with the stipulation that the reservation be divided into privately own farms called allotments.

Similar treaties were signed with tribal communities across the Great Lakes region, including the Lake Superior Ojibwe bands in Minnesota, and the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans in Wisconsin, creating permanent land bases with plans to allot individual parcels. Within all of these communities, the results were similar. For tribal communities across the Great Lakes region, traditional worldviews dictated that land and natural resources were held in common and were not “owned” in the Euro-American sense. While allotment mirrored some traditional methods of dividing up the land for different uses, both the idea of individual ownership and the practice of Euro-American style farming were completely foreign.

While the difficulty of drastically altering long-standing traditional understandings of land and resource cultivation certainly impeded the success of allotment in the region, the implementation of allotment by often corrupt, incapable, and/or inexperienced Indian agents was certainly more problematic. On the Isabella Reservation, for example, enforcement of the treaty provisions was “spotty at best.” Insufficient planning and agent incompetence caused significant delays and inconsistencies in the process of selecting and assigning allotments.

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47 Williamson and Benz, 57.

48 Ibid.
allowing time for land speculators to find loopholes in the treaties that were used to their advantage.49

For the Saginaw Chippewa, the situation grew even more problematic because of a new set of stipulations outlined in the new 1864 Treaty. The new treaty was designed to protect tribal members from land speculators with a provision dictating that “competent” Indians – those that could speak English and were considered more acculturated – could sell their allotments, while the allotments assigned to “incompetent” Indians could not be sold without the consent of the Department of the Interior.50 In reality, the new treaty “became the very tool that white lumbermen and land speculators used to steal thousands of acres on the Isabella Reservation.”51

By the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the lumber industry was the most powerful in the state. Within a few years after the new treaty was enacted, white lumbermen had used their political influence to sway Indian agents to determine most Saginaw Chippewa allottees as “competent,” after which many were “immediately set upon by lumbermen offering to buy their land or the right to cut their timber.”52 Lumbermen used a variety of tactics to swindle allottees out their land, including paying off missionaries to convince their Native congregants to sell their allotments to lumbermen well below market value.53 By the time Michigan’s Indian Agency

49 As Karamanski explains, “multiple agents so bungled the allotment process that a decade later there was no certainty who owned what land.” Karamanski, 36.


51 Williamson and Benz, 59.

52 Karamanski, 37. Karamanski explains that having only recently received their allotments, many Ojibwe were unaware of the value of the resources on their land. One Ojibwe, he explains, “who had been declared ‘competent’ sold his timber for $15 to a lumberman who later laughed that the trees were worth $4,000.”

53 Ibid. In his discussion of the Odawa in northern Michigan, Karamanski explains that “it was considered standard practice to snare Indians into debt through the sale of luxury items or the extension of credit at
closed in 1889, the process of allotment had still not been completed and hundreds of thousands of acres of Anishinabe lands had been illegally obtained by non-Natives. From the perspective of the Saginaw Chippewa, “the only winners in this situation were the whites.”

The failure of the experiment with reservation allotments in the Great Lakes region resulted in widespread poverty and a rapidly declining ability on the part of Native people to negotiate with the federal government from a position of power. While allotment had not yet been implemented as a national federal policy, the state of tribal communities on reservations across the country in many ways reflected those in the Great Lakes region. The perception grew that because Native people were now confined on reservations controlled by the United States, they had lost the power to be seen as independent nations. Thus, reformers argued that there was an “incongruity” in treating Native tribes as sovereign nations equal to that of the United States, and increasingly pushed the federal government to end the practice of treaty-making with Native tribes.

While public support for the end of treaty-making grew, alternative paths seemed possible during Ely Parker’s brief tenure as Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1869 to 1871. As both a

usury rates, to threaten property owners with violence, or simply to trick Indians into signing quit-claim deeds.” Agents, he explains were not only ineffective in protecting Native land from lumbermen, but were in many cases “active in profiting from the plunder.” Karamanski, 42. Such fraudulent and corrupt practices by agents and lumbermen was not unique to Michigan, but instead were widespread across the Great Lakes region. In The White Earth Tragedy: Ethnicity and Dispossession at a Minnesota Anishinabe Reservation, 1889-1920 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), for example, Melissa Meyer traces the botched process of allotting the White Earth reservation after the passage of the Dawes Act. As with the Saginaw Chippewa in Michigan, “competency” was attributed to strategically swindle allottees out of their land. Significantly, Meyers ties the hardening of racist lines in American society to the process of dispossessing Minnesota Ojibwe, arguing the “competency” was increasingly justified on absurd “scientific” racist reasoning of blood status. Meyers, 172. Chapter Two of this dissertation goes into the ways in which the lumber industry impacted Native communities, focusing on the ways in which the Menominee in Wisconsin were impacted by the growth of the lumber industry in the state.

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54 Williamson and Benz, 57.

55 Prucha, 164.
government employee and a Seneca tribal member, Parker perhaps surprised many by supporting the end of treaty-making. While Parker has been the subject of much scholarly criticism, recently historians have tended to agree that evidence has shown he did so in order to move between the dominant and tribal worlds to creatively construct a new legal framework that would appeal to both traditional Native leaders and government officials alike. Specifically, while supporting the growing consensus among government officials and the public that the end of treaty-making was the way to go, Parker also advocated for the strict enforcement of any previous treaties signed between Native tribes and the government, regardless of who the beneficiary was. In doing so, Parker seemed to believe that both sides would benefit, thus reinforcing the promises of treaty-making and demonstrating the continued necessity for the federal government to recognize tribes as sovereign nations.

While alternative options may have been possible, the 1871 Appropriations Act ending the practice of creating treaties with Native tribes on a nation-to-nation basis was passed nonetheless. Significantly, however, the 1871 Act contained a clause that guaranteed that any treaties signed prior to the act would be held inviolate, providing the legal basis through which Great Lakes tribes would later assert their sovereignty and affirm their right to perpetuate cultural practices. In the end, the continued creation of treaties with Native tribes was seen as an impediment to United States expansion and the process of assimilating Native people into

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56 Two well-known works reflect the differing interpretations of Parker’s policy. Prucha in *The Great Father* essentially vilifies Parker, quoting him referring to reservations as “a cruel farce.” C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, on the other hand, understands Parker as an unsuccessful political visionary who utilized assimilationist rhetoric to gain support but who ultimately believed in cultural pluralism, though how he wanted to achieve it is unclear. Prucha, 164; C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa *Crooked Paths to Allotment: The Fight Over Federal Indian Policy after the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1.

57 Genetin-Pilawa, 25.
mainstream society. Though seen as necessary, the end of treaty-making created a paradox for the federal government by eliminating the constitutional basis for dealing with Native tribes. The fact was that tribal systems of governance had persisted and so the federal government, in any move affecting tribal life, would need to negotiate and collaborate with tribal leaders. But, with the end of treaty-making, the federal government abolished its legal ability to do so.

The repercussions of the federal government’s decision to end the practice of treaty-making were felt almost immediately. Despite the fact that the disastrous results of early experiments with allotment in the Great Lakes region should have been wholly apparent by the 1880s, the federal government nonetheless remained committed to utilizing allotment to quicken the process of assimilating Native people. Proponents of the policy hoped that, over time, allotment would enable the dismantling of reservations and thus, the dismantling of Native sovereignty over their lands. Without the legal necessity of negotiating treaties in order to implement the policy, the federal government passed the General Allotment Act in 1887.

Also known as the Dawes Act for its champion Henry L. Dawes, the General Allotment Act authorized government officials to survey reservations across the country and assign parcels of land to be selected for individual ownership by tribal members. Once individuals had received their allotments and proven themselves “competent” in white American ways, they were granted citizenship. Significantly, once all land had been allotted to tribal members, the act enabled the federal government to negotiate with tribes to acquire the “surplus” land, which could then be sold to non-Natives. The money paid to the tribe for the purchase of “surplus” land was to be held in trust by the government with the provision that such funds “were subject to appropriation by Congress for the education and civilization of the Indians.”

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58 Prucha, 226. Like Prucha, most historians cite the end of treaty-making and the implementation of the Dawes Act as a clear sign that the federal government had moved away from removal and the creation of
As with early experiments with allotment, the implementation of the General Allotment Act produced largely devastating results. Danziger argues that of all federal policy involving American Indians to date, “none was more disruptive to their economies and community cohesiveness than federal experiments with allotment.”\textsuperscript{59} This was certainly the case for the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin. Having witnessed the impact of allotment since the 1850s on their neighbors, the Stockbridge-Munsees, Oneida tribal members began petitioning the federal government to halt the allotment of their land long before the General Allotment Act was passed. Once the policy was officially enacted in 1887, efforts to avoid allotment intensified. In 1888, for example, in petitioning the President to halt the implementation of the allotment policy on the reservation, the Oneida wrote “now what we ask of our Great Father is simply his protection against these encroachments of his white children…we ask to be allowed to live here in peace on this small spot under the same conditions as we have been living in the time past.”\textsuperscript{60} Such efforts failed and their reservation land was allotted beginning in 1891.

\textsuperscript{59} Danziger, 96. In \textit{The White Earth Tragedy}, Melissa Meyer discusses similar effects of allotment. Meyer looks at the concentration of the Chippewa on the White Earth Reservation, the allotting of parcels of land, and the selling of “surplus” land that substantially decreased the size of the reservation and the resources available for the tribe.

\textsuperscript{60} “Petition of Oneida Opposed to Allotment,” May 30, 1888, in Danziger, 103.
For the Oneida, the results of allotment were “devastating.”\textsuperscript{61} Almost one hundred percent of the reservation was allotted to Oneida individuals and families. While this may appear promising (it did, after all, theoretically ensure that all the land would remain in tribal hands for the time being), in reality, the lack of “surplus” land led policymakers to develop additional means for acquiring Oneida lands. In terminology reminiscent of the 1864 Treaty with the Saginaw Chippewa, on May 8, 1906, Congress passed the Burke Act, officially authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to issue a fee patent to any Native individual deemed “competent and capable of managing his or her affairs” before the end of the twenty-five-year trust period required by the Dawes Act.\textsuperscript{62} As a result, individuals, not the tribe as a whole, received title to the land. Significantly, this made individuals responsible for the taxes that were now required. One year later, Congress passed another law that authorized “the sale of restricted lands of ‘non-competent’ Indians” under a specific set of rules so long as the sales of these lands would “benefit the ‘non-competent’ Indian.”\textsuperscript{63} These two laws were effective in the extracting Native land-holdings because, in many cases, the impoverished and struggling Oneidas were unable to pay real estate taxes, making their lands subject to foreclosure.\textsuperscript{64} Having never dealt with taxes before, most Oneida were also unaware of how taxation on property worked and, as a result, many lost their lands by failing to pay their taxes or falling victim to corrupt land speculators.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{61} Eric Doxtator, interviewed by Meagan McChesney, audio recording, May 4, 2018.

\textsuperscript{62} L. Gordon McLester III and Laurence M. Hauptman, eds., \textit{A Nation within a Nation: Voices of the Oneidas in Wisconsin} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 33. This work builds upon McLester and Hauptman’s earlier text on the ways in which allotment impacted the Oneida in Wisconsin, entitled \textit{The Oneida Indians in the Age of Allotment, 1860-1920} (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006).

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{64} McLester and Hauptman, 35.

\textsuperscript{65} Loew, 128.
Ultimately, as a result of the implementation of the allotment policy and the two laws that followed, by the 1930s, less than five percent of the original reservation remained in the hands of Oneida tribal members.\(^6\)

**Indian Boarding Schools**

Along with the allotment of reservation lands, the federal government supported the widespread development of Indian boarding schools to facilitate Native acculturation and assimilation into mainstream society. As part of the same assimilationist agenda, in many ways, the boarding school experience did to traditional Native culture what allotment had done to Native land.\(^6\) Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century, allotment had severely decreased Native landholdings and exacerbated the systematic oppression and poverty that had begun almost a century before. Simultaneously, the federal government developed numerous Indian boarding schools as an additional way to encourage (and force) Native people to shed the elements of their traditional culture that perpetuated Native cultural distinction and hindered the assimilationist agenda. As founder of the Bois Forte Heritage Center and Cultural Museum Phyllis Boshey explained, the goal at Indian boarding schools was “to make us like them.”\(^6\)

While much scholarship on American Indian education focuses on the advent of the boarding school system in the late nineteenth century, it is important to recognize that in the

\(^{6}\) Ibid.

\(^{67}\) Loew, 70.

Great Lakes region, government-funded Native education was initiated decades earlier. With funding granted as a result of treaty negotiations, missionaries ran many of the first Native day schools in the region beginning in the early-to-mid nineteenth century. For the federal government, day schools were meant to quicken assimilation, yet it became clear over time that for the missionaries that ran the schools, conversion was the primary goal. Per treaty guidelines, as well as to better facilitate understanding of the Christian message, missionaries often conducted lessons in Native languages. Frustrated with the slow pace of assimilation, the federal government began removing day schools from missionaries’ control and putting Indian agents in charge of Native education. As treaty funds allocated for Native education began to dry up, however, the federal government determined to close most of the day schools across the Great Lakes region, believing that “day schools would always fail because children returned each evening to their savage environment.” As a result, education reformers increasingly turned to the development of Indian boarding schools.

69 Rubenstein, 65. The 1836 Treaty referenced earlier, for example, stipulated that education be provided for the tribe in their own language.

70 Ibid.

71 Rubenstein, 64. Rubenstein references an 1869 report to the Secretary of the Interior from a school inspector in Michigan here. He argues that while Indian Department officials “concluded that day schools were a failure because Indians were still only semi-civilized,” Native people “thought them a perfect success” and “were much distressed when the government closed many day schools.” Many Native communities protested the closing of the schools, he explains, which the federal government thought “reflected an increased Indian desire to become assimilated.” In reality, though, Native people protested the closing of day schools because these schools had enabled many “to learn enough to survive in the [white] culture, not to become a part of it.” Rubenstein, 90.

72 It is important to note here that the term “boarding school” is frequently used in reference to government-funding schools located on reservation property. While many attended the school on their own reservation, the term is generally still appropriate because many children boarded at the schools and in many cases, were rarely permitted to return home even for holidays or to visit sick relatives.
The first and best-known of such boarding schools was the Carlisle Indian School, founded in 1879 by Richard Henry Pratt. Pratt believed that if Native children were removed from reservation life and taught exclusively how to live as white Americans, they would shed their traditional cultural ties and, over time, tribal identity would die out. Pratt is credited with coining the infamous phrase “Kill the Indian, Save the Man,” claiming that for Native people to survive physically, their distinct cultures and identities would have to cease to exist. Pratt’s ideology reflected and encouraged that of a growing number of policymakers and non-political reformers, who increasingly saw assimilation as the best way to solve the dual problems of poverty and the persistence of traditional culture on reservations. In 1891, the president of the Friends of the Indians, arguably the best-known group of reformers dedicated to promoting the assimilation, remarked, “we are going to conquer the Indians by a standing army of school-teachers.”

Under this guise of benevolence, government boarding schools subjected Native children to “abuse, discrimination, and ethnocide on a scale never seen.” By the beginning of the twentieth century, the federal government had developed approximately one hundred government-run Indian boarding schools, with over ten percent located in the Great Lakes region. Across the region, few Native people doubted that education was crucial for the future of their communities, preserving their cultural traditions and tribal identities, and protecting from further loss of sovereignty. As such, the initial response to boarding schools was mixed. Some

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75 Danziger, 124.
were hopeful for what this type of organized and well-funded education might bring. The reality of boarding school life, however, was traumatic for many, and the devastating impact of boarding schools on Great Lakes traditional culture cannot be denied.

For the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa, for example, tribal members attribute the devastating loss of their language and traditional culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to government boarding schools more than anything else. In recalling a conversation with a woman who attended the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial School in Mount Pleasant, Michigan, an Eyaawing museum volunteer explained that, “the first thing they [boarding school officials] do is say ‘get in line.’ And so, all the kids, they get in line and they grabbed her by the hair and she said ‘maajiibide,’ which means ‘go away.’ And so, bang! She got nailed. [They] just beat her to show everybody else who’s in charge and that you don’t say those words. You’re never gonna say those words in that language again or you’re gonna be punished…that’s what they were taught.”

Hank Bailey, a Grand Traverse Band fish and wildlife officer, echoed the message of this story, stating that after his father and most of his siblings and friends were sent to the Indian boarding school in Harbor Springs, Michigan, “our traditional language kind of quit in that era. My grandparents on both sides of the family were all fluent speakers, and then the language basically stopped at that point.”

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76 Dave, interview.

Tribal members of the Lac du Flambeau Band community in Wisconsin recall the traumatic experience and devastating impact of Indian boarding schools as well. Tribal elder Gilbert J. Chapman recalled of his time at the boarding school in Mount Pleasant that “it was more like the military. You had a uniform and every place you went you had to march.” Chapman went on to explain that before attending the boarding school “I had an Indian name,” but after years at the school, “I don’t remember it.” In tribal communities across the Great Lakes region and the country, stories of military-like regimented routines, abuse, and prohibiting the use of traditional languages, names, and practices like these are common. Yet, stories of cultural endurance and subtle, strategic resistance emerge as well. In recalling her time at the Lac du Flambeau Government Boarding School, tribal member Cecilia Defoe explained that while the school forbid her from speaking her Native language, she continued to do so in secret and during the summers at home. Ultimately, she explained that rather than teach her that her traditional language was wrong, the boarding school experience conditioned her to keep her culture close to herself, explaining that “what you learn [at home] …you keep that to

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79 Ibid.
yourself…to save the culture.”80 As such, Indian boarding schools unknowingly encouraged small acts of resistance to safeguard important elements of traditional culture.

While more often recognized for the harm done to Native culture as a result of the system’s assimilationist agenda, the legacy of government-funded Indian boarding schools is more mixed than may initially appear. The differing accounts from those that experienced the schools first-hand demonstrate the complexity of the experience for many, who recall both feelings of loss over forced separation from their home and deliberate attacks on traditional ways of life, and appreciation for the skills acquired and relationships forged.81 Significantly, Indian boarding schools provided many Native children with unprecedented opportunities to interact with people from other tribes and parts of the country. Faced with the loss of their accustomed ways of life, students like Esther Horne recall, “we [students] nurtured a sense of community among ourselves, and we learned so much from one another. Traditional values, such as sharing and cooperation, helped us to survive culturally…even though the schools desired to erase our Indian culture, value, and identities.”82 By bringing children together from various communities, government Indian boarding schools unintentionally planted the seeds for the development of a pan-tribal consciousness that ultimately fostered collective action in the post-war years.83

80 Cecelia Defoe in Tornes, 192.


83 Boarding schools not only fostered post-war activism through the bonds that developed between students from various tribes at the schools, but also in the collective impact the schools had on tribal life across the country, both for those who attended the schools and for those who stayed behind. In the afterward for Adam Fortune Eagle’s memoir, historian Laurence M. Hauptman explains that, for students like Eagle, their experience at Indian boarding schools, coupled with the impact of the schools on tribal life at large, contributed to a “Pan-Indian consciousness” that later led to “the creation of regional and
The Indian Reorganization Act

The unintended consequences of Indian boarding schools show that despite their efforts, reformers and policy-makers failed to extinguish Native culture and identity throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the 1930s, it was impossible to ignore that allotment and boarding schools had done considerable damage to Native quality of life and had made the majority of Native people dependent on federal assistance for survival. Yet, neither had succeeded in facilitating the complete assimilation of Native people into mainstream society. As such, the federal government, led by then-Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier, briefly turned to an alternative policy that appeared to reverse its assimilationist agenda.

Although the nuances of American Indian policy may have changed from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, assimilation remained the federal government’s primary goal. While American Indian policy returned to this in the 1940s, during the New Deal era, the federal government briefly sought to reverse assimilation and enable traditional Native culture to strengthen. Initiated by John Collier, the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), the cornerstone of the Indian New Deal, was implemented in 1934. The IRA contained several premises that Collier hoped would enable tribes to reclaim sovereignty and have more control over their land. In particular, Collier hoped that the Indian New Deal would promote economic

national Indian organizations.” Laurence M. Hauptman, “Afterword,” in Adam Fortunate Eagle, *Pipestone: My Life in an Indian Boarding School* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 176. Hauptman was Eagle’s advisor and mentor. Oneida activist and Grammy-winning singer Joanne Shenandoah echoed this sentiment, explaining that boarding schools were “the place[s] where the Pan Indian Movement was born. [They] brought many Native nations together and this is where they began to defend their rights.” Joanne Shenandoah, Email to Louellyn White, August 27, 2012, in *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations*, eds. Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 285.
development on reservations, enable tribes to organize to manage their own affairs, and establish a clear sense of the civil and cultural rights of Native people.84

For many tribes, the IRA provided an invaluable opportunity to politically reorganize and retake control over their own lives. For others, however, the New Deal era proved just as devastating as the previous several decades. While Collier’s policy did, in many ways, promote cultural pluralism and support tribal sovereignty, it is important to acknowledge that the IRA also contained elements that deliberately sought to exclude particular people from the benefits the IRA would provide. In particular, in order for a tribe to be eligible to vote to adopt the IRA and obtain its benefits, it was necessary to prove tribal cohesion and the maintenance of a continuous relationship with the federal government. Furthermore, individual members had to prove that they had the necessary “blood quantum” to be considered “Indian.”85 This was problematic because blood quantum was not measured by scientific means, but rather assessed largely on appearance alone. By the 1930s, many people who identified as American Indian were considered “mixed blood,” and, thus, did not necessarily have the stereotypical physical traits

84 Alison Bernstein, American Indians and World War II: Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). 6. Collier’s Indian Reorganization Act has been written about extensively and is central to any Native scholarship on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Kenneth R. Philip’s edited volume Indian Self Rule: First-Hand Accounts of Indian-White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995) is particularly notable. In addition to consolidating a wide variety of documentation relating to Collier’s policy, Philip dedicates his introduction to analyzing the IRA and its legacy. Philip describes the enactment of Collier’s policy as the moment that initiated modern Indian self-rule by setting a “new course” in Indian affairs. While praising Collier’s intent, Philip emphasizes the shortcomings of the policy, explaining how many tribes were reluctant to accept the policy and/or were disappointed in the way it unfolded in practice. Significantly, he emphasizes the fact that the funds allotted to the implementation of the IRA were vastly inadequate. While he does not address this directly, the lack of funds may explain, at least in part, why some tribes, like the Saginaw Chippewa, were able to utilize the benefits of the IRA while others, like the Grand Traverse Band, were rejected.

85 Melinda Lowery, Lumbee Indians in the Jim Crow South: Race, Identity, and the Making of a Nation (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 125. Lowery explains that in some cases tribal members, even sisters with the same mother and father, were assigned different levels of “Indianness.”
associated with Native people at the time. Many tribes had difficulty providing concrete evidence of their cohesion, as the term was understood by white government officials. Proving a continuous relationship with the federal government was difficult too, as many tribes had certainly had a continuous relationship with the government, but had not necessarily been continuously under government supervision. In practice, the exclusionary criteria for the IRA was often arbitrarily applied. Additionally, while Collier wanted to use the IRA to strengthen Native peoples’ capacities to survive, they had to do so in conjunction with white organizations and thus, had to behave like white organizations in order to obtain the benefits the IRA had to offer.

Across the Great Lakes region, the IRA’s impact was uneven. A look at the Michigan tribes involved in this study illuminates both the positive and negative aspects of Collier’s policy. For the Saginaw Chippewa, the IRA provided the opportunity to rebuild tribal organization, address the extreme poverty that plagued the reservation, and was an important step in solidifying a unified identity. While the 1855 Treaty of Detroit had created the Isabella Reservation for the Saginaw, Swan Creek, and Black River bands, it had also effectively “dissolved” the tribal organization of each band and prevented the development of a legally recognizable tribal government. Such circumstances, combined with constant delays in annuity payments and the rapid depletion of the tribe’s lumber supply by white lumberman “eager to swindle us out of our lands,” left the tribe living in conditions that were “extremely grim” by the

86 Ibid.

1930s. When the benefits of the IRA were extended to the Saginaw Chippewa on May 6, 1937, they were finally able to organize a cohesive tribal government and develop a new constitution.

While the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa had agreed to almost the same conditions in the 1855 Treaty of Detroit as the Saginaw, Swan Creek, and Black River, the Band’s experience with Collier’s policy was very different. The effects of Indian boarding schools, combined with the fact that “neither the federal government nor the State of Michigan nor the local units of government would take any action to assist the Grand Traverse Anishinaabek,” had left the tribe “all but destitute” by the 1930s. When the IRA was enacted in 1934, the Grand Traverse community believed that the act would allow them to reorganize into a tribal government that the United States would recognize and thus enable them to regain their legal tribal identity and secure federal assistance. A mere two months after the IRA was enacted, Grand Traverse tribal leaders began writing to Collier. Though effectively proving that they had had a long history of treaties and dealings with the government as a unified tribe, Collier denied the Grand Traverse Band on the basis that there had been no “government supervision through an official representative” over the tribe since Michigan’s Indian Agency had closed in 1889.

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92 Fletcher, 96.
The inconsistency of the IRA and the degree of criticism it has met is ultimately representative of the varied and competing ideas out of which it was developed. By the 1930s, the devastating effects of the reservation system, allotment, and boarding schools were impossible to ignore. It seemed that with the implementation of the Indian New Deal, the federal government was willing to loosen its control on Native life in order to assist some of the Native population in prompting economic progress to ameliorate the conditions generated largely by previous federal policies. Still, the manner in which the IRA enabled tribes to reorganize and the unevenness in which its benefits were applied shows that while willing to try a new tactic to booster quality of life, the federal government was not willing to completely let go of its assimilationist agenda and fully commit to taking on the substantial cost of bringing all tribes under the IRA.

World War II and the End of the Indian New Deal

While critiques of American Indian policy in the New Deal era are fair and even necessary, for many tribes the 1930s nonetheless represented a reprieve from the destructive effects of forced assimilation. The degree of this reprieve varied from tribe to tribe, but for all, it was short-lived. While Collier’s policy remained in effect throughout World War II, Native peoples’ involvement in the war led to changes in perception and understanding of their place in American society for both policymakers and Native people alike. Over the course of the war, thousands of Native people left to fight and “bound their fates to that of other Americans like never before.” Their involvement in the war signaled a major break with the past for American Indians and white Americans alike because, more so than any time in the past, Native people


94 Bernstein, 39.
worked in close proximity with non-Natives. Thus, in many ways, the war united Native people and white Americans under a common cause.

In addition to fostering a greater understanding of Native culture for white soldiers, by removing Native people from reservation life more than ever before, the war also inadvertently brought Native people into contact with foreign populations for the first time. Seeing their common struggles with those abroad, the war experience heightened Native peoples’ awareness of their systematic marginalization and inequality at home. Wartime brought to the surface an acute awareness of the changes occurring in the United States and the world at large, and made the complexity of their place in it even more apparent. Furthermore, like government boarding schools, World War II brought Native people together from various regions, communities, and backgrounds, enabling many to forge a greater sense of their shared hardships and means for cultural survival. At the same time, having been granted universal citizenship in 1924, more Native people volunteered to serve in World War II than any previous war and took immense pride in serving their country as both Indians and Americans.

Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa tribal member Lex Porter’s experience in the war provides an illustrative example. Although his community faced economic hardships and conflicts over hunting and fishing rights at home, Porter volunteered to serve nonetheless because, “as so many of Native Americans who volunteered,” he “wanted to help preserve freedom” by “defending a country that did not always keep its word.”\footnote{Jane Hollingsworth, “Fond du Lac Code Talker Honored,” in \textit{The Duluth News Tribune}, December 4, 2013, 1; Rhonda Silence, “Lex Porter honored for Service as Code Talkers,” in \textit{The Cook County News Herald}, December 14, 2013, 1. Both articles provide quotes from Porter’s family members, which are re-quoted here.} Shortly after volunteering to serve, Porter became a member of the famed Military Code Talkers, a unit of Native soldiers who utilized traditional languages to develop a secret radio code. Porter was
assigned to Native language communication duty, where he became an “indispensable part [of the] success” of the war effort.\(^{96}\) Despite his significant contribution, Porter, like many Native soldiers, “returned heroes, but without a hero’s welcome.”\(^{97}\) While demonstrating their commitment to the American cause, Porter and other Native soldiers increasingly understood that the war had not eradicated their marginalization in the country the fought to defend.

While Native soldiers like Porter “wore the cloth of our nation” as they fought alongside other Americans in the war, significantly, they did so “in [a] distinctive way.”\(^{98}\) Many thought that the success of soldiers like the Code Talkers had proven the benefits of cultural pluralism, and hoped that their efforts at war would pay off at home. As Native activist, linguist, and anthropologist Ella Deloria explained in 1944, “the war has indeed wrought an overnight change in the outlook, horizon, and even the habits of the Indian people.”\(^{99}\) Tribal leaders like Deloria recognized the sweeping changes to American life brought on by war, developments in transportation and communications networks, and the ever-growing interconnected market. Acknowledging that separation was no longer possible, many tribal leaders saw the end of the war as an opportunity to address inequalities in areas like education and economic opportunity while simultaneously reinvigorating Native culture, reasserting treaty-rights, and solidifying their right to self-determination.\(^{100}\)

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96 Hollingsworth, 1.
97 Silence, 1.
98 Ibid.
99 Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1944), 85.
100 A quote from Donald Fixico is illustrative: “Throughout the history of humanity, war has produced change, the only redeeming aspect of its destructive intent, and with each episode of conflict and the clash of ideologies, new ideals are born. Frequently such ideals foster action, and drastic changes occur sometimes in the name of reform – of improvement for all concerned.” Fixico, ix.
For Native people across the county, the war thus produced a moment of self-evaluation. New experiences and perspectives affected how people thought about their lives, and for many, the post-war years were seen as an opportunity to forge a modern Indian identity that reflected tradition while acknowledging the changes brought about by recent experience. Yet, for lawmakers, Native people’s involvement in the war was largely taken as a sign that assimilation was happening, and that the time was right for the final push to “get out of the Indian business” and eliminate what remained of traditional tribal culture. This line of thinking – that “the Indians had proved their mettle during the war” – ultimately contributed to the reversal of Collier’s more culturally pluralistic Indian New Deal, renewed assaults on treaty-guaranteed resource rights, and a recommitment to assimilation through the interconnected policies of termination and relocation.101

Conclusion

As a result of the numerous and deliberate threats to their tribal sovereignty, traditional culture, and tribal identity, by the end of World War II, it was clear to Native communities across the Great Lakes region that their physical, cultural, and political situation was dire. While the process of treaty-making had long been fraught with corruption and deceit, treaties had enabled Great Lakes tribes to maintain (to a degree) the ability to continue to shape and dictate the terms of their own lives. Through a combination of overt resistance and strategic accommodation, most Great Lakes tribes avoided removal west of the Mississippi River and utilized the treaty-making system to carve out a space (albeit a drastically decreased one) for themselves to remain on their ancestral lands. What many did not anticipate was the degree of control that the federal

101 Peter Iverson, “We Are Still Here”: American Indians Since 1890 (Sussex: John Wiley and Sons, 2015), 120. Barton Greenwood, acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, estimated that 50% of the returning veterans had sufficient experience in working with other Americans away from the reservation to compete with them for jobs. See Fixico, 134.
government and local Indian agents would assert over their lives on the reservations. In the Great Lakes region, arguably more than anywhere else, the federal experiment with allotment produced disastrous results. The devastation brought by the mishandling and failure of allotment was compounded by the development of government-funded Indian boarding schools across the region, which aimed to separate Native young people from their homes and halt the perpetuation of traditional cultural practices.

Still, traditional Great Lakes Native culture persisted. Nineteenth and twentieth century policies aimed at eliminating tribal culture failed to do so. Collectively, federal policy not only failed to assimilate Native people into mainstream culture, but inadvertently prompted and facilitated the emergence of a national movement for sovereignty that aimed to halt and reverse termination, break the federal government’s paternalistic hold on Native life, re-enforce treaty rights, promote economic progress, and, preserve and revitalize tribal homelands and cultures. To achieve these goals, Native activism manifested in a variety of ways on national, regional, and tribal levels, and significantly, prompted the development of tribally-run institutions dedicated to exhibiting and exercising tribal sovereignty.
CHAPTER TWO

GREAT LAKES NATIVE ACTIVISM AND TRIBAL MUSEUMS TO 1980

“To capture the mood of the 1960s and 70s is somewhat difficult task. It was distressing, overwhelming, painful, but also exciting. The tribe was faced with a number of very important decisions but as usual it was bombarded by many outside influences who felt they had all the answers.”

-Menominee Tribal Historic Preservation Office

On the morning of February 8, 2017, the Stockbridge-Munsee Historical Committee, the founding body of the Arvid E. Miller Library Museum, gathered around a wooden table at the Library Museum for their monthly meeting. Much of the two or so hours that morning were spent discussing two issues: the proposed expansion of the nearby Ho-Chunk tribe’s resort and casino, and the Trump administration’s recent decision to approve the completion of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The two issues were discussed in tandem, both viewed as assaults on tribal sovereignty and violations of treaty rights. While embroiled in an arduous and ongoing court battle over the legality of the Ho-Chunk expansion, the Historical Committee determined that February morning that, at that moment, “other tribes and other casinos are not the enemy. Trump is the enemy.” As such, the concluding minutes of the meeting at the Library Museum were spent devising plans to organize a group of tribal members to travel to join the pipeline protests at Standing Rock.

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1 “Menominee Restoration Day Chronology of Events.”

2 Name redacted, Stockbridge-Munsee Historical Committee Meeting, February 8, 2017.
For the Historical Committee, organizing action at the Library Museum represented a fulfillment of the institution’s purpose. Founded in 1975, the Library Museum was developed within the context of national, regional, and locally-based activism, and has served as a site for continuous activism and organizing action ever since. Influenced by the movement for tribal sovereignty and the right to self-determination emerging across the country, Library Museum founders explain that from the beginning, the institution was designated as a site for action, providing tribal members with a space to “rise up and make sure that we asserted our sovereignty.”

That activism goes beyond organizing action and extends into the Library Museum’s exhibits and programming as well. Both were designed to continuously enable activism by reflecting the goals of preserving tribal history, conveying messages of sovereignty and survival, and combatting commonly held prejudices about Native life and culture. As such, when the time came to organize in support of Standing Rock, the Library Museum was clearly the space in which to do so.

This chapter traces the development of the first tribal museums in the Great Lakes region, and examines how these early institutions, like the Library Museum, emerged as an integral part of the post-World War II fight for tribal sovereignty. Facing threats posed by the federal government’s assimilationist agenda, yet armed with more of the knowledge, experience, and support needed to fight back, a new strand of Native activism emerged in the post-World War II decades that has since become defined by the myriad demonstrations, occupations, and militant confrontations attributed to a few emerging pan-tribal organizations intent on garnering public attention to elicit change. Referred to here as the Tribal Sovereignty Movement, this chapter begins by tracing the emergence and continuation of this movement to 1980, and discusses the

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significant roles of several activists from Great Lakes Native communities. Influenced by and taking part in this larger movement, Great Lakes activists increasingly applied the goals articulated by the Tribal Sovereignty Movement to their own communities, utilizing various avenues through which to do so. By situating the foundation and development of the earliest tribal museums in the Great Lakes region within the context of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement, this chapter demonstrates how tribal activists created these institutions as designated sites for exhibiting the sovereignty they were fighting for, and addressing the issues that prompted the movement.

**The Rise of Pan-Tribal Activism in the 1940s and 50s**

On a both a national and local scale, the threat of termination, the impact of urban relocation, and assaults on treaty rights galvanized the modern movement for Native sovereignty and self-determination in the post-war years. While not put into law until 1953, the threat of termination began to cast its shadow years before, so much so that tribal leaders from across the country recognized the need for a national organization to address concerns. As a result, approximately eighty delegates from over fifty tribes gathered in Denver, Colorado in November 1944 to establish the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) as a means of collectively responding to the impending termination and assimilation policies the United States government threatened to “force upon tribal governments in contradiction of their treaty rights and status as sovereign nations.”

As its founding principles, the NCAI vowed to work to “secure and preserve…rights under treaties and agreements with the United States,” “protect…traditional, cultural, and religious rights,” “seek appropriate, equitable, and beneficial services and programs,” “promote the common welfare and enhance quality of life” for Native people, and

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“educate the general public regarding American Indian…governments, people, and rights.”⁵ As such, the NCAI became the first large-scale organization to represent the emerging pan-tribal identity forged throughout the previous decades, and put into words many of the goals continuously articulated by Native activists to this day.

Of the approximately seventy charter members of the NCAI, almost one-third came from the Great Lakes region, initiating the ongoing and crucial involvement of Great Lakes activists in the Tribal Sovereignty Movement throughout the post-war decades.⁶ Several played prominent roles in the organization’s foundation, including Wisconsin Chippewa George La Motte, who served as the first Treasurer, and Minnesota Chippewa Edward L. Rogers, who was the founding Vice President. Other charter members from the Great Lakes included prominent Lac du Flambeau activist Ben Chosa and Stockbridge-Munsee activist Arvid E. Miller, both of whom had experience in tribal leadership and had been central figures in their tribes’ actions under the

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⁶ This figure is based on my calculations from the list of charter members and their tribal affiliations provided on the NCAI’s website. Specifically, twenty-two of the almost seventy charter members are attributed to tribes that are either wholly located in the Great Lakes region, or have bands in the region. Band affiliation is not specified by the NCAI, so this figure is approximate. “Mission and History: Founders 1944 Photo,” National Congress of American Indians, accessed January 30, 2018, http://www.ncai.org/about-ncai/mission-history/Founders_1944_Photo_Captions.pdf.
Indian Reorganization Act the decade before.\textsuperscript{7}

While founded to confront threats posed by federal policies, it is important to acknowledge that for NCAI charter members like Chosa and Miller, working with the federal government had, at times, proved beneficial for their communities. For the Stockbridge-Munsees, for example, working with the federal government had enabled the tribe to obtain a land base in Wisconsin after years of almost constant removal. Perhaps because of such experiences, the NCAI collectively voted in favor of the establishment of the Indian Claims Commission (ICC). From their perspective, the ICC would provide a means of working with the federal government to acknowledge its long history of “less than fair and honorable” dealings with Native tribes and acquire settlements that would enable tribes to work towards the goals articulated by the NCAI founders.\textsuperscript{8} In practice, however, the ICC would, in some cases, also be used to allow tribes to win claims against the government, use their assets to build programs that would further along the assimilation process, and enable the federal government to justify severing nation-to-nation relations with Native tribes.

The federal government’s use of the ICC in moving towards termination was supplemented by the end of Collier’s term as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1945, the creation of William Zimmerman’s so-called ‘Zimmerman Plan’ in February 1947, and the development of job placement programs that laid the groundwork for the implementation of an official urban

\textsuperscript{7} See Figure 4. George La Motte is in the front row, eighth from the left. Edward L. Rogers is in the back row, eleventh from the left. Ben Chosa is in the back row, fourth from the left. Arvid E. Miller is in the back row, fourth from the right.

Without Collier in office, the federal government’s repeal of his Indian Reorganization Act would be much easier, particularly with supporting “evidence” provided by Zimmerman’s survey of tribes ready or soon to be ready for termination of government assistance. Meanwhile, the government planned to expand the urban relocation services already in effect for the Navajo in Arizona and New Mexico to tribes across the country, believing that ties to reservations and traditional life would diminish over time spent in cities. Furthermore, urban relocation and job placement programming provided assimilation’s proponents with an answer for those who questioned what would be done with reservation residents once tribal status was terminated. According to supporters, since assimilation was already happening, it only seemed obvious that those coming from tribes acculturated enough to be terminated would flourish in urban environments away from reservation life.

As the threat of termination pushed closer to reality, NCAI co-founder D’Arcy McNickle emphasized at the organization’s meeting in December 1947 the “need for Indians to stand together against the forces that would deprive them of their rights, their liberties, and their lands.” Despite such efforts to halt it, termination was passed into law with House Concurrent Resolution 108 in 1953 and first put into effect with the Menominee Termination Act in 1954. With the goal of facilitating the assimilation of Native people into American society, in practice, the termination policy ended the federal government’s recognition of tribal sovereignty and trusteeship over the reservation, and ceased tribal members’ exclusion from certain state laws and taxes. Consequently, the implementation of termination provided the impetus for expanding

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9 This was also supplemented by the election of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a proponent of assimilation, and a Republican congress in 1952.

10 Fixico, 135.

11 D’Arcy McNickle quoted in Iverson, 123.
the activist movement started by the NCAI. While proponents of termination in Washington sought to solve the “Indian problem” by “[helping] the Indians” become “a white and delve people,” tribal leaders across the country recognized that termination, arguably more than any other twentieth century policy, threatened the very existence of tribal culture and identity.12

While the threat posed by termination was compounded by the initiation of the Indian Relocation Program in 1956, urban relocation also, in effect, further solidified the sense of urgency for unified, deliberate action boiling across the nation. As termination sought to end federal support on reservations, the Indian Relocation Program sought to further facilitate assimilation by providing assistance for working-age reservation residents to relocate to urban areas. Enacted as mutually supporting policies, lawmakers assumed that as tribal status was terminated and more Native people were moved to cities, separation from traditional ways of life would halt the persistence of Native culture and diminish ties to Native homelands. Rather than abandon their tribal identity once relocated, however, many Native urbanites forged relationships across tribal lines that, in many ways, enhanced a broader ethnic identity as “Indians.”

Commonalities dictated by shared values, a shared history of both injustice and survival, and similar experiences with the poverty and discrimination that all too often defined urban life led to the establishment of places like the Chicago American Indian Center to help Native transplants “cope with the transition from reservation to urban life” and “foster…an active connection with

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traditional values and practices.” Organizations like the Chicago American Indian Center made people more aware that they were not alone in their present hardships or concerns for their communities.

As the fight for sovereignty on the national stage was mounting, in the Great Lakes region, threats posed by termination and relocation were compounded by long-running battles over treaty rights. As early as the 1860s, while treaty-making was still the defining feature of federal Indian policy, the recently formed states of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota began violating treaties between tribes and the federal government by introducing state regulations to criminalize Native hunting, fishing, and gathering in areas ceded in treaties, prohibiting the use of traditional methods for cultivating resources, regulating resource cultivation by state-determined seasons, and calling into question reservation boundaries. Although tribes across the Great Lakes ceded much of their lands throughout the treaty-making era, treaties had also guaranteed rights to hunt, fish, and gather in the ceded territories using traditional methods. The treaties that created reservations across the region had also delineated their boundaries, which in many cases, were almost immediately called into question by the states and/or non-Native developers.

As quickly as states across the Great Lakes region began violating treaties, tribes across the region began fighting back. Many tribal members continued with traditional practices in protest (and at times, out of necessity), leading to a number of court battles that almost always concluded in favor of the states. State interference in the exercising of treaty rights continued throughout the early twentieth century, reaching a new height in 1953 when, enacted in

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conjunction with termination, Public Law 280 enabled certain states to assume legal jurisdiction over reservations. Native communities across the region saw their treaty rights violated even more as tourism became economically significant in northern Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Tribal members continued to protest by exercising their rights as the states, with tourism as a new source of motivation, increasingly sought to regulate, prohibit, and persecute the so-called “violators.”

**The Growth of Militant Activism in the 1960s**

As tribal communities across the Great Lakes region increasingly saw their treaty rights violated throughout the 1950s and 60s, many were prompted to get involved in the growing fight for sovereignty on the national level and became central figures in the development of organizations whose actions are largely understood as the pinnacle of post-war Native activism. As with the NCAI, several Great Lakes tribal activists attended the American Indian Conference at the University of Chicago in 1961. Generally described as a pivotal moment in the collective fight for sovereignty and self-determination, the Chicago conference brought together approximately five hundred Native people from almost one hundred different tribal communities. Supported by the NCAI, conference attendees included several of its charter members, including Arvid E. Miller and Menominee activist George Kenote, who served on the conference advisory committee appointed by organizers D’Arcy McNickle and Sol Tax.¹⁵

Collectively, the Chicago conference attendees developed the Declaration of Indian Purpose, a statement reflecting the culmination of issues discussed at the conference that, for many, reinforced the ongoing fight for sovereignty. The Declaration begins with a resolution stating, “since our Indian culture is slowly being absorbed by the American society, we believe

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¹⁵ Most of the advisory committee consisted of NCAI members.
we have the responsibility of preserving our precious heritage; recognizing that certain changes
are inevitable.”16 While advocating for cultural preservation and the self-determination “to
choose our own way of life,” the Declaration also espouses the rhetoric of the United States
Declaration of Independence, stating, “we believe in the future of a greater America, an America
which we were the first to love, where life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness will be a
reality.”17 The declaration ultimately expresses “the desire on the part of Indians to participate in
developing their own programs,” but, significantly, “with help and guidance as needed and
requested.”18

For some conference attendees, particularly a young, college-educated cohort invited to
observe and learn, the language of the Declaration of Indian Purpose embodied the NCAI’s
tendency to “[go] into that gear of appealing to the Great White Father again.”19 While many left
the conference emboldened by what they learned, others criticized the leadership for being too
submissive to the federal government. For this group, the Chicago conference was the moment
that prompted a shift in the nature of Native activism from the NCAI’s desire to work with the
federal government to elicit change to the more militant, confrontational strand of activism
embraced by groups like the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) and the American Indian
Movement (AIM).

Emerging in response to the Chicago conference in 1961, the NIYC built upon the goals

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16 “Declaration of Indian Purpose,” reprinted in Troy Johnson, Joane Nagel, and Alvin M. Josephy, eds.,

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Clyde Warrior quoted in Daniel Cobb, Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for
Sovereignty (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 54.
expressed by earlier post-war activists, but diverged in its proposed methods. As co-founder Mel Thom articulated in a draft of the NIYC’s preamble, “at this time in the history of the American Indian, we, the younger generation, find it expedient to band together on a national scale in meeting the challenges facing our Indian people.” Thom went on to say that, “the American Indian people are going to remain Indian people for a long time to the future, with every right to that identity.” In its ideals, the NIYC differed little from its predecessors, essentially echoing the NCAI’s understanding that collective action was necessary to combat termination and assaults on tribal sovereignty. The NIYC departed from earlier organizations, however, in its critique of their methods. Recalling the NCAI’s perceived missteps, such as the organization’s support for the Indian Claims Commission, the NIYC founders insisted that change was needed immediately, and that direct, visible confrontation would be more effective than the gradual change working with the federal government might elicit.

In the years following its foundation, NIYC founders and members, such as Potawatomi tribal member Joseph R. Winchester, staged a number of public demonstrations and protests across the country. While few of the demonstrations prompted the immediate change that the protesters wanted, the organization deemed such events successful in their ability to garner support from tribes across the nation, as well as non-Native public figures like actor Marlon Brando. In addition to contributing to the pan-tribal movement, the NIYC’s actions in the early 1960s are significant because they effectively inspired Native people across the country to take a

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20 Mel Thom, “Preamble to the NIYC Constitution,” in *Aborigine* No. 1, August 6, 1961. *Aborigine* was the newsletter for the NIYC. In 1963, the publication’s name was changed to *American Aborigine*. The National Youth Council also had a magazine called *ABC, Americans Before Columbus*.

21 Ibid.

visible, public stance on the issues plaguing tribal communities and to take action to control the public narrative on their history, identity, and treaty-guaranteed rights. In doing so, the NIYC is often credited with inspiring the foundation of the American Indian Movement (AIM), undoubtedly the best-known organization for Native activism.

Founded in 1968 in Minnesota by Ojibwe tribal members Clyde Bellecourt, Vernon Bellecourt, Dennis Banks, and Oneida member Herb Powless, AIM was initially created to combat the police brutality and racism experienced by Native people in urban areas across the Great Lakes region. In its efforts to achieve this goal, the founders quickly recognized that improved living conditions and a stronger sense of self would better enable urban residents across the country to combat the discrimination and economic despair many faced. As such, the founders of AIM developed a list of short-term and long-term objectives, all of which reflected the desire to educate the public “in the area of Indian culture” and the need for economic development, education, and the strengthening of Indian culture and identity through “improve[d] communications between the Indian and [their] community.”

**Great Lakes Native Activism and Early Tribal Museums**

Without discounting the NIYC and AIM’s achievements and significant contributions to Native activism on the national scale, it is important to recognize that the tactics utilized by the NIYC and AIM represent only one of many avenues for activism utilized during the Tribal Sovereignty Movement. As prominent Native activist and historian Philip Deloria explains, “Indians did not discover they were Indians in the early 1970s. We were not reborn; we were

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23 *History of AIM: 1968 to Present* (Minneapolis: American Indian Movement Interpretive Center), 17. This document is a pamphlet produced by the AIM Interpretive Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

24 *Original Objectives of AIM* (Minneapolis: American Indian Movement Interpretive Center), 6.
simply noticed.”25 While putting the significance of the NIYC and AIM into perspective, Deloria does explain that “somehow the publicity accorded…fueled an even greater spirit and attracted back to the fold some who had drifted away when the nation did not think it was so great to be an Indian.”26 As such, the NIYC and AIM are significant not only in their ability to garner public attention, but also in helping to ignite action on a regional and tribal level.

While the more militant tactics employed by organizations like the NIYC and AIM were crucial in bringing Native issues into public view, for those living on reservations, such tactics produced limited results. Although inspired by their sense of urgency and action, tribal leaders across the country recognized that actual change on reservations would take more than public demonstrations. On the regional and tribal level, activism would have to extend into the courts, and into the continuation of traditional practices and the creation of programs and institutions for cultural revitalization if the goals expressed by post-war activists were to be met. For tribal communities across the Great Lakes, treaty rights cases involving land and resources “were [particularly] important” because “that was the way to make the breakthrough” in obtaining “legal protection for the treaties and sovereignty.”27

For tribal communities in the Great Lakes region, culture is deeply rooted in the land and resources. For most, having remained on their ancestral lands for hundreds or thousands of years sets them apart from tribes in other regions who had been subject to removals west. The primary concern of Great Lakes tribes was maintaining their own land base in the region and control over its natural resources. As such, termination and assaults on treaty rights took on a different


26 Ibid.

27 Vine Deloria, Jr., interview with Charles Wilkinson, August 4, 2000, in Wilkinson, 149.
meaning for Great Lakes tribes, prompting action in defense of the land and resources central to their tribal sovereignty and culture.

The Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin

In the Great Lakes region, no tribe felt the threats of the federal government’s assimilationist agenda in the post-World War II decades more than the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin. Facing assaults on their sovereignty and livelihood from almost every direction, the Menominee utilized a variety of tactics that, taken together, are in many ways emblematic of the activism employed by Great Lakes tribes across the board. While termination remained a viable threat for almost every tribal community across the Great Lakes until its repeal, that threat became reality for the Menominee as the first tribe terminated. Largely due to the manipulation of Senator Arthur Watkins, the Menominee “voted” to accept their proposed termination in 1953, and planning for its implementation began within the next year.\(^{28}\) By 1957, the Coordinating and Negotiating Committee appointed to draft the Menominee Termination Plan presented the tribe with four options for what their reservation could become once abolished. Rejecting the conversion of their land into state or national forest, or absorption into Shawano and Oconto Counties, tribal members elected to create a new county, Menominee County, in order to “keep the land intact for the future generations and the general welfare of the members.”\(^{29}\) As a result, then-governor of Wisconsin Gaylord Nelson signed a law making Menominee County the state’s

\(^{28}\) I put “voted” in quotations here because, according to Dave Grignon, Director of the Menominee Logging Museum and Cultural Museum, the Menominee were told at the time of the vote by Senator Watkins that they were to vote on the distribution of funds from the federal government. Watkins argued that by voting to receive their funds, the Menominee had voted to accept termination. Once the tribe realized how they had been “tricked,” a re-vote was called. Upon re-voting, the council unanimously voted against termination, but the damage was already done. Dave Grignon, guided tour for Meagan McChesney, June 15, 2017.

Almost immediately, the Menominee utilized various avenues for activism to ensure the survival of their lands, resources, and distinct tribal identity. In the traditional language, the tribe’s name means “the ancient people,” emphasizing their long tenure on their land base. By extension, protection of the resources on their lands, particularly the thousands of acres of white pine, has been of primary importance for the tribe. Since the Menominee ceded much of their land to the state in the 1836 Treaty, Wisconsin gradually became one of the primary lumber-producing states in the United States. For decades, the lumber business was the backbone of the state’s economy, until years of clear-cutting left most of central and northern Wisconsin cutover. The exception was the Menominee reservation lands. In contrast to the clear-cutting and wasteful practices of non-Native companies, the Menominee had long-practiced a sustained-yield approach to forestry, “harvesting trees to get [only what was needed] for the tribe.” Seeing what non-Natives had done to the state’s timber supply and facing termination that would put their resources at risk, the “major concern” for the tribe “was organizing the tribal lumber business” because “crucial to the issue was the preservation of the forest…as a source of livelihood to tribal members.”


32 Virgil, guided tour for Meagan McChesney, June 15, 2017. Virgil, a tribal elder and expert who volunteers at the museum, explained to me that instead of clear-cutting all usable timber, tribal loggers would cut one section of forest at a time in such a way that by the time that section was needed again, the forest had regrown. He referred to this as “circle cutting.”

33 “Menominee Chronology of Events.”
While the state of Wisconsin chartered the organization of the largely non-Native Menominee Enterprises, Inc. (MEI) to manage tribal affairs during the transition to termination in 1959, the tribe formed Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, Inc. in response to help preserve the tribe’s name while signaling to the outside world that despite the legal termination of their tribal status, they would remain a tribal nation. Two years later, the termination of the tribe was put into effect and immediately had a devastating effect on the previously economically stable and culturally rich community. In large part due to mismanagement by MEI and the newly required taxation of former reservation lands and resources, the Menominee’s liquid assets dropped from over $10 million before termination to approximately $300,000 in 1964. As tribal funding dried up, all health care facilities in the newly formed Menominee County were closed by the mid-1960s, proving particularly devastating when over one-fourth of the

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34 Beck, 156. George D. Spindler and Louise S. Spindler, anthropologists who worked amongst the Menominee for the decades surrounding termination and published a study in 1971, further support this point, stating that “the Menomini are a terminated tribe. This does not mean that the Menomini have ceased to exist as individuals or even as a tribe. This means that a community that existed for over a century with protection and guarantees from the federal government has suddenly had to do without them.” George D. Spindler and Louise S. Spindler, *Dreamers with Power: The Menominee* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1971), 194.

population was effected by a tuberculosis epidemic.\textsuperscript{36} Furthermore, unemployment rates almost doubled as local businesses failed to stay open.

Termination also had a devastating impact on the community’s natural resources, and compounded existing disputes over treaty rights. Public Law 280 was enacted in 1953 to supplement the termination policy and enabled certain states to assume criminal jurisdiction over reservation lands, including Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{37} While the Menominee were initially exempt, the policy was amended in the mid-1950s to include Menominee lands, initiating over a decade of confusion over jurisdiction and management of tribal lands and resources. Contributing to the confusion was the fact that tribal leaders publically acknowledged state law enforcement’s jurisdiction over criminal cases on tribal lands, but denounced state jurisdiction over hunting, fishing, and timber cultivation as dictated by the tribe’s treaties with the United States. This became particularly problematic as tribal members were increasingly arrested for hunting or fishing out of season in accordance with tradition, yet in opposition to state law.\textsuperscript{38} Meanwhile, the tribe faced additional threats to their resources as the state of Wisconsin enacted legislation in 1966 providing free public access for fishing and camping on former reservation lands.\textsuperscript{39}

While facing threats to their treaty rights, the long-feared sale of tribal lands was getting

\textsuperscript{36} “Menominee Chronology of Events.”

\textsuperscript{37} These states included California, Minnesota (except for the Red Lake Reservation), Nebraska, Oregon, and Wisconsin (except, at least initially, the Menominee Reservation). The law was later applied to Alaska.

\textsuperscript{38} For more on the evolving relationship between tribes and the states in which they reside, see Deborah A. Rosen’s \textit{American Indians and State Law: Sovereignty, Race, and Citizenship, 1790-1880} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007). In terms of Great Lakes tribes, the ways in which state law impacted treaty rights and assertions of sovereignty, this dissertation goes into much more depth in Chapters Three and Four.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
underway. By the mid-1960s, MEI, alongside a group of outside developers, began devising plans to dam rivers on Menominee lands to create lakes for the development of tourism-centered communities. The dams and proposed development schemes proved to be the final straw, and roused Menominee tribal leaders to action like never before. The dams, man-made lakes, and large-scale housing and recreation development of the project, called Legend Lake, promised to devastate the Menominee’s ancestral land base and already-declining natural resources. To halt the development and reassert their treaty-guaranteed rights, the Menominee took their fight to the courts, launched a series of protests and demonstrations, and, significantly, founded the Menominee Logging Camp Museum to educate the public on the tribe’s long history on the land, the centrality of the former reservation’s white pines for tribal culture, and the sustainable logging methods utilized by the tribe that had maintained the forest resources prior to outside intervention.

In their fight to retain tribal lands and reassert their treaty rights, several tribal leaders initially appealed to the board of MEI. While proposals surrounding tourism led to conflicts between tribal members, in 1965, tribal leader and Menominee Logging Camp Museum co-founder James G. Frechette explained to MEI’s board of directors that “the majority of the Menominee Indians are interested in holding onto whatever land they still have title to…I am not in favor of letting go of one foot of our country.” Regardless of such appeals, MEI proceeded with Legend Lake’s planning and obtained a permit from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in January 1968 to construct the first of three dams needed to complete the project.

For the tribe, the DNR permit was devastating. Yet, as things seemed to be falling apart, tribal activists found hope for the community’s future in a number of places. In response to the

40 James Frechette quoted in Beck, 159.
series of hunting and fishing related arrests of tribal members and the mismanagement of tribal assets, the Menominee launched a series of legal battles to prove that termination did not abrogate rights guaranteed by previous treaties. As one tribal member put it, “treaty rights cannot be broken. To speak of this as a county is a lie…there’s no law anywhere that gives them legal title to the land, or to anything on it.” In a landmark decision that would ultimately provide the basis for Menominee restoration, the Supreme Court ruled in May 1969 that “the Menominee did not relinquish their hunting and fishing rights when the Tribe was terminated from federal control.” To the Menominee and other tribes facing the threat of termination, the court’s ruling revealed the fragile legal basis for termination.

Although the tribe successfully reaffirmed their treaty rights in the courts, they continued to face threats to their resources and ancestral lands. Less than two months after the Supreme Court ruling, MEI officially entered the Legend Lakes development project with N.E. Isaacson and Associates, a tourism development firm from Reedsburg, Wisconsin. Shortly after, the Department of Natural Resources issued a second permit for the construction of another dam on Menominee lands. Understanding these threats to their land and resources as threats to their cultural identity as well, several tribal leaders, including James G. Frechette, Jerome A. Grignon, and Myron W. Grignon, established a non-profit organization, the Menominee Indian Historical Foundation, to promote “the preservation of the history and culture of the Menominee people.” As their first order of business, the foundation planned the development of a tribally-run logging

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41 Spindler and Spindler, 202. This quote is from an anonymous interview conducted by Spindler and Spindler and is transcribed and printed in the appendix of their text.

42 “Menominee Chronology of Events.”

The Menominee Logging Camp Museum

Founded in 1969, the Menominee Logging Camp Museum is the oldest continuously-run tribal museum in the Great Lakes region, and one of the oldest in the nation. As a tribe of many “firsts,” it is fitting that the Menominee spearheaded the development of a tribally-run museum as a means of reasserting control over tribal history, identity, and the direction of the tribe’s future. For the Menominee, nothing could be more threatening than the loss of tribal lands and resources. As one present-day Menominee descendant explained, ‘We are the forest.’ As MEI took control of the tribe’s logging industry and further threatened tribal timber resources with the Legend Lake development, Menominee activists felt it was “imperative that the rapidly disappearing logging artifacts of the by-gone chapter in [their] history be saved for posterity.”

The circumstances surrounding the development of the Logging Museum highlight a number of internal struggles the tribe faced, particularly in terms of the evolving but ever-present tension between tradition and the reality of change, and differing opinions on outsider involvement in tribal affairs. The founders themselves provide an illustrative example. While all had been involved with the oft-maligned MEI as officers or trustees, James Frechette, who took the lead on the development of the Logging Museum for the foundation, had confronted MEI and

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44 To my knowledge, there are five tribal museums that are older, only one of which fits this study’s criteria of a true tribal museum (those run by the tribe alone, not in conjunction with other tribes or outside institutions). These are the Ataloa Lodge Museum/Bacone College (1932), Tribal House of the Bear (1941), Navajo Nation Museum (1961), Cherokee National Historical Society (1963), and the Three Affiliated Tribes Museum (1964). See Abrams, 6.

45 Anonymous in Loew, 23.

46 “The Menominee Logging Camp Museum History.”
spoke out against plans that threatened tribal control over land and resources.\textsuperscript{47} Nonetheless, he enlisted MEI to help secure the location and initial funding for the Logging Museum. Similarly, while remaining steadfastly committed to creating an accurate representation of Menominee logging history, the founders were also happy to accept donations from non-Native collectors, such as logging-history enthusiast Jacque D. Vallier.\textsuperscript{48} Developing the museum in the midst of termination, the founders recognized the need to strategically utilize the tools termination offered, and to allow outside participation when it could be used to advance their own agenda for the museum.

Amidst such circumstances, the tribe’s goals for the museum took precedence, particularly in terms of representing Menominee logging history while emphasizing the tribe’s environmentally sustainable methods. With the Logging Museum, the Menominee showed that their methods had yielded both economic success and sustainability, demonstrating to visitors the dangers of practices that threatened their environment. By highlighting their unique tribal identity and educating the public on Menominee philosophies and practices regarding resource cultivation, the tribe simultaneously responded to termination and threats to their resources by conveying the message that “we know we are a different race and we want to stay that way,” and showing that “our values are different. Your values are, when you see trees, your first thoughts are, ‘Boy, what money could be made from those trees.’ Our old people taught us, ‘Do not put a


\textsuperscript{48} During my discussion with Virgil, the museum groundskeeper and tour guide, he explained that the majority of the initial materials came from Vallier’s collection. Vallier was apparently not a logger and was not involved with the tribe, but for a still unknown reason, had an affinity for Menominee logging materials. The founders accepted the donation in its entirety, though Virgil explained that they made sure to be clear about what materials were relevant to Menominee history. He stressed that the founders were committed to accuracy.
hatchet in that tree unless you are going to use all of it.” 49 As such, the tribe was able to tap into the tourist industry growing around them, but on their own terms, showing that that in order for the environment to thrive, tribal sovereignty would have to be restored. Given the circumstances in which it was founded, the Logging Museum can thus be understood, as one historian put it, as “both translator and translation,” an “agent of social change and product of accommodation.” 50

In addition to the messages conveyed to outsiders, the Logging Museum was also successful in bringing together people with different ideas about the best direction for the tribe’s future by focusing on the one thing all could agree on – the necessity of holding onto tribal lands and resources for cultural survival. Within a year of the museum’s opening, several tribal leaders, including famous Menominee activist Ada Deer, established DRUMS, a grassroots organization founded initially to combat Legend Lake and the potential loss of their lands and resources. While DRUMS was primarily concerned with prompting local action, the organization was first conceived amongst Menominee urbanites in Milwaukee and Chicago. As historian Nicholas Peroff explains, “the urban origins of DRUMS paralleled national patterns of rising Indian activism in the United States.” 51 As urban life and involvement in the national Tribal Sovereignty Movement made urban Menominees increasingly more aware of the need for action on the local level, they realized that reversing termination would ensure the survival of the strongest basis for tribal identity – their land. As such, DRUMS turned its focus away from simply halting Legend Lake to work on reversing termination and restoring tribal sovereignty.

49 United States Senate Hearings 1965-66, 228.

50 Erikson, 28.

The Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians

While Menominee activists fought to save their lands and resources, educate the public on tribal history and cultural practices, and reverse the termination of their tribal status, their neighbors, the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, faced challenges as well. As one of the tribes listed in Group 2 of the Zimmerman Plan (tribes soon to be ready for termination), the Stockbridge-Munsees witnessed the negative impact of termination firsthand when the Menominee became the first tribe terminated. The tribe’s precarious situation grew even more so when, following the Zimmerman Plan, the House of Representatives asked the Bureau of Indian Affairs to produce a more detailed account of each tribe’s status. The 1952 BIA document echoed Zimmerman’s assertion that the Stockbridge-Munsees would be ready for termination soon, but added that three things would need to happen in order for them to be successfully “free of federal supervision and responsible for themselves”: first, the lands held in trust would need to be divided among members in a new round of land allotments; second, the Farm Security Administration’s 13,077 acres within the reservation needed to be returned to the public domain; and third, the tribe would need to vote to abolish their tribal government and liquidate their assets.  

For the Stockbridge-Munsees, securing their land base was of the utmost importance. Having experienced several removals from the East Coast to Ohio to Indiana and Wisconsin, and been subjected to assimilationist policies that resulted in the loss of much of their historical self-knowledge and altered their traditional practices, the Mohicans had finally settled on their current reservation near Shawno County, Wisconsin in the mid-nineteenth century, and

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reorganized under the IRA as a federally recognized tribe in the 1930s. Though their connection to the land was not long-standing, because of their “storied and difficult past,” it nonetheless ran deep. “The land is a sacred possession,” prominent figure in the national Tribal Sovereignty Movement and Mohican tribal leader Arvid E. Miller said before his death. As his wife Bernice Miller later explained, because of their repeated removals, in the decades after World War II the Mohicans felt that “we have no language, we have no history. We don’t even remember how our ancestors dressed. The white man took it from us.” Because of their historical experience, Miller saw securing the land base as the necessary first step in assuring the cultural survival and revival of his community and dedicated himself to working towards this goal until his death.

In light of the findings published in the 1952 BIA Report, Miller understood that in order for the tribe to have a chance to avoid the plight of their Menominee neighbors and thwart termination, they would need to be strategic and creative in their tactics. Previous strategies had not halted the implementation of the termination policy. As the long-time tribal chairman for the Stockbridge-Munsees and a leader of the NCAI, Miller had decades of experience dealing with federal policy and recognized that in order to achieve the twin goals of securing the tribes’ land base and revitalizing tribal culture, tribal leaders “must be qualified to consider alternative means of attaining [our] objectives, for our goals may not be realized in only one way.”


56 Arvid E. Miller, “Address to the National Congress of American Indians Convention, Bismarck, North Dakota,” Arvid E. Miller Library Museum Archives, 1963. At the time, Miller was the Vice-President of the NCAI. This document is a typewriter-written version of his speech and it is unclear if this is an early or final draft of the address he actually delivered.
the NCAI, Miller had internalized the organizations’ tendency to maneuver within federal policy. He understood that as a tribe facing termination, the Mohicans “must be prepared to stand a sense of loss as well as gain.”

With such understanding, Miller worked to strategically utilize the federal system to avoid termination and secure the tribe’s land base. Specifically, he recognized that the second requirement listed on the 1952 BIA Report (that the reservation lands held by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) needed to be returned to the public domain) provided a loophole through which the tribe could avoid termination. Miller understood that if the Stockbridge-Munsees could get the FSA lands put in trust rather than returned to the public domain, they would effectively expand federal supervision over the reservation rather than reduce it. By increasing the amount of reservation lands held in trust and thus increasing federal supervision, the tribe would become more dependent on the federal government and appear less ready for termination. As such, the tribe would have to “stand a sense of loss” of freedom from federal supervision, but would gain a secure land base on which they could work to rediscover, revitalize, and perpetuate their traditional culture.

As Arvid Miller worked to secure land for his tribe, he simultaneously worked tirelessly to lay the foundation for an institution that would enable the tribe to address the challenges they still faced. As with the Menominee, Public Law 280 extended state jurisdiction over Stockbridge-Munsee tribal lands, leading to decades-long battles over arrests and vigilante

57 Ibid.

58 Although Miller died in 1969, his countless hours of research and skillful legal maneuvering paid off in 1972 when the Stockbridge-Munsees secured the FSA lands located within their reservation boundaries in trust. Two years later, the tribe secured their right to the rest of their reservation lands located within the Bartelme and Red Springs townships. Oberly, 280-281.
violence that violated the tribe’s treaty rights. At the same time, the Stockbridge-Munsees struggled to obtain the material comforts seen in non-Native neighboring communities. As Miller explained to *The Milwaukee Journal* before his death, on the reservation, “the most acute problems are lack of water and sewage facilities, inadequate housing, lack of recreational facilities and lack of money, but everybody has that.”  

Miller referred to the portion of the state where the Stockbridge-Munsee, Oneida, and Menominee lived as a “pocket of poverty” in the post-war decades.  

Concerned about the tribe’s treaty rights and physical welfare, Miller was equally concerned about the lack of historical knowledge and decline in traditional practices that resulted from centuries of Euro-American contact and acculturation. For Miller, securing the land would mean little for the Stockbridge-Munsees if their distinct cultural identity rooted in tradition and tribal history continued to deteriorate. At the time, tribal museums were exceedingly rare, but Miller, accustomed to utilizing “alternative” avenues of activism, made it “his life-long dream to establish a Stockbridge-Munsee Historical Library and Museum on the reservation.” While he would not live to see the museum open or conduct the research necessary to fully understand “who his ancestors were,” he saved “all his papers, letters and documents that related to tribal history and Indian matters” so that “his children [would] know who he was.”

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59 Miller quoted in Osmen, 1.

60 Ibid.


62 Ibid.
The Arvid E. Miller Library Museum

In September 1968, while her husband Arvid continued his fight to secure their tribal lands in trust, Bernice Miller traveled with a small group of Stockbridge-Munsee women some 1,500 miles from their home in Wisconsin to the banks of the Hudson River “looking for themselves.”63 Inspired by Arvid’s tenacity and determination to perpetuate and revitalize traditional culture, these five Mohican women were compelled to travel to their ancestral homelands to uncover whatever they could about “their language, their customs, their religion, their history – all the outward aspects of their Indian-ness that the white man [had] erase[d].”64 Not long after they returned, Arvid E. Miller died, leaving behind a wealth of materials that, combined with the newly acquired research from the East Coast trip, provided a basis through which the tribe could begin uncovering information about their history that had previously been “lost” in the wake of various removals and assimilation programs.65

After a house fire threatened but failed to destroy the growing collection, Bernice Miller, along with her daughter, Leah Miller, and sister, Dorothy “Dot” Davids, recognized the need for a secure location to preserve the materials. The women formed the Stockbridge-Munsee Historical Committee to begin consolidating their resources and working to make Arvid’s “dream” of a museum come true. In 1972, the Stockbridge-Munsees secured their FSA lands in trust, effectively ending the threat of termination and leaving the newly formed Historical Committee even more intent on continuing “the search for a past…which had been taken away

63 Wiley, 1.
64 Ibid.
65 Miller, interview.
so quickly and efficiently.” To that end, the Historical Committee embarked on another research trip that year, returning with a growing understanding of their past and their historically-rooted identity, and even more motivation to share this with other tribal members. “Our [initial] goal was to gather everything about our tribe in one place,” Bernice Miller explained. “Prior to the establishment of our facility, there was no one place that one could go to research and piece together this information,” a document detailing the development of the Library Museum explains. “Tribal members,” the document goes on, “because of their early contact and acculturation in the dominant White society, had much re-learning to accomplish.”

While Arvid E. Miller’s papers and the fruits of early research provided “the initial materials” for the Historical Committee’s collection, in my interview with Library Museum co-founder Leah Miller, she explained that in addition to storing and consolidating the items, the founders “wanted to [develop] it [into] a museum…from the beginning.” In reflecting on the reasons for wanting to develop a museum dedicated to the tribe’s history, Leah described the impact of the goals articulated by activists involved in the national Tribal Sovereignty Movement on tribal members living on the reservation. As the movement grew, Leah explained “gradually, the pan-Indian movement started to work on everybody.” There was “all this feeling that we

66 Wiley, 3.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid. Leah Miller is referred to as “Leah” in the text in order to avoid confusion with her father, Arvid E. Miller, or her mother, Bernice Miller.
71 Miller, interview.
have to rise up and make sure that we asserted our sovereignty,” and so “our tribe began to see [that] we really need[ed] to be more assertive…in learning [our] history,” and in “learning [our] culture.”

“Red power became red pride,” which in turn encouraged activists on the reservation to provide “a means for the Stockbridge-Munsee people to increase their pride in, and understanding of, their historical tradition.” As such, Stockbridge-Munsee activism did not end with the recognition of their sovereignty and securing their land base but rather, such successes gave them a “renewed focus” on the “community-based transformations that reiterated [their] authority” over their own lands, history, and identity.

As a result, the Historical Committee began to work in earnest towards increasing their collections and utilizing the materials at hand to establish a dual library and museum. The museum founders first turned to the Tribal Council to ensure they had their support and that of the tribe at large. After a vote, a resolution was passed on March 3, 1973 declaring that “whereas the history of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans is deeply rooted in the land and has long been entwined in the history of the United States, and whereas our historical and cultural documents and artifacts have through the years been dispersed and scattered, and whereas the Stockbridge-Munsee Historical Committee is making a commitment to gather in these historical and cultural materials and make them accessible to the tribe…now therefore be it resolved that

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72 Ibid.


74 Message, 126.
the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribal Council fully endorses the establishment of the Arvid E. Miller Library and Museum.” 75

With the support of their community and the Tribal Council, the Historical Committee worked tirelessly to generate the funding needed to make their vision for the Library Museum a reality. While the Tribal Council donated a small space for the museum to get its start (appropriately, the space was in the same room Arvid Miller used as an office when he served as Director of Community Action Programs on the reservation), given their economic struggles, the tribe did not have the resources to fully support the initial development and operations. 76 As soon as the Tribal Council approved the development of the museum, the Historical Committee appealed to every funding source they could think of, including the America the Beautiful Fund, W. Clement Stone Enterprises in Chicago, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Wisconsin Indian Resource Council, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Great Lakes Indian Agency, to name a few. 77 In addition, they reached out to various Native and non-Native organizations and received various letters of support, including several from the University of Wisconsin and Rosary College Graduate School of Library Science, who aptly pointed out that the museum would be “an appropriate and timely addition to current Stockbridge tribal activities, and could serve as an excellent model for other tribes as well.” 78


76 “Stockbridge-Munsee Open Museum,” newspaper titled unknown, Arvid E. Miller Library Museum Archives, 1975. Note: the date listed here is handwritten on the document, which contains a partial scan of a newspaper article that obstructs the newspaper’s title. Without the newspaper title, I have not been able to verify this year and it should thus be considered a possible date.

77 This list is just an example of the variety and large number of funding opportunities the founders applied for. The Arvid E. Miller archives has file of copies of many of these initial funding applications, and the list is extensive.

78 Pauline Angione to “Whom It May Concern,” May 4, 1974.
After months of applying for numerous grants, the Historical Committee finally received notice that they had been awarded the funding they were looking for in late 1973. Significantly, the grant that enabled the tribe to finally develop and open the Library Museum came from the Wisconsin American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. The Historical Committee’s application for the Commission’s “Heritage” grant, submitted as the “Stockbridge-Munsee Tribal Historical Project,” first articulated that their goal for their tribal museum was “to make available to tribal members accurate and authentic historical materials so that the people will study their own history and increase their pride in and understanding of their own cultural and historical situation.” The application went on to describe the Library Museum as a project that would have “lasting value through which people can see, enjoy, and appreciate their distinctive cultural and natural heritage,” and foster “greater awareness and appreciation of the extraordinary ethnic diversity of Wisconsin’s population”

While emphasizing the ability of such a museum to foster and perpetuate cultural distinction, it is important to note that the purpose of the Bicentennial Commission’s grants program was “to support bicentennial projects in the state” that would “celebrate,” “observe,” and “pay tribute” to the creation of the United States as an independent republic. Given the tribe’s long and often tumultuous relationship with the United States government, and having


80 Ibid.

only recently thwarted federal policy that would have denied their tribal sovereignty, it is perhaps surprising that the Stockbridge-Munsees would seek involvement with an organization dedicated to celebrating the past two hundred years of American history. For the tribe, however, this decision made sense. While United States policy had left the Stockbridge-Munsees in challenging circumstances time and again, they had seen how strategic accommodation worked to their advantage. In their application and communications with the Commission’s Executive Director Richard Wagner, the Historical Committee consistently referred to the fact that they, along with the neighboring Oneida Nation, had fought alongside the colonists in the Revolution, and had a long history of working alongside the federal government. As such, the Stockbridge-Munsees were able to utilize their history of acculturation as a means of counteracting its negative impact by garnering the funds necessary to establish their tribal museum.

With the space donated by the Tribal Council and necessary funding secured, the Arvid E. Miller Library Museum opened to the public on May 4, 1975. While initially motivated to develop the Library Museum as a space to consolidate their resources regarding tribal history, by the time that it opened, the tribe’s goals for the institution and its functions had greatly expanded. Of primary importance for the founders was to provide a space designed to address the ongoing challenges that the tribe faced, particularly in terms of “striving to regain their lost customs, language, and traditions.” As a dual library and museum, the institution from the beginning

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83 Miller and Miller, 1. Significantly, this proposal included a footnote stating that the reason “special emphasis is given to making materials available to members of the tribe” was because “for many years this material has been available to other citizens through historical societies and museums. Our purpose is to reeducate our tribal members so that they can become knowledgeable resources to other Wisconsin citizens.”

84 Untitled, unpublished document, Arvid E. Miller Library Museum Archives, no date. A handwritten note designates this a “PR document” advertising the opening of the museum.
provided a space where tribal members could both learn about their history and culture, and actively participate in perpetuating and reviving cultural production. Through both its research focus and exhibits and programming, the Library Museum has been “a people library” that is “all about the tribe,” and where “community involvement has…been [consistently] demonstrated.”

While its use for tribal members as a space for revitalizing tribal culture has been the Library Museum’s focus, educating the non-Native public on tribal history and culture has been one of the institution’s goals since its establishment as well. Perhaps more so for the Mohicans than any other tribe, conveying a message of cultural persistence and survival has been an ongoing challenge. Throughout my research for this project, I interviewed several Stockbridge-Munsee tribal members, and without exception, every single interviewee talked about the undeniable damage done to non-Native understandings of Mohican history by James Fenimore Cooper’s 1826 novel *The Last of the Mohicans*. The novel, hailed as an American classic, had been adapted for major motion picture films at least six times by the time the Library Museum opened. As the title suggests, the fictional story concludes with the death of the “last of the Mohicans.” Though based on a fictionalized tribe with few historical similarities to the Stockbridge-Munsee, the novel and its film adaptations have nonetheless dominated public understandings of Mohican tribal history. It has ultimately left the non-Native public with the


86 Jo Ann Schedler, for example, explained to me that “people think we died and went away because of the Last of the Mohicans book. So, it’s [the purpose of the museum] is to tell our story from our perspective.” Schedler, interview.

87 There have been nine major motion picture adaptations of the novel to date, most recently in 1992. I say “at least six” here because two of eight the pre-1970 adaptations were released under a different title and had enough variation from the original story to possibly be considered influenced by the novel, rather than strictly adapted from it.
understanding that the Mohicans no longer exist. As one local newspaper stated while the Library Museum was in development, “it is now 1974 and according to the Encyclopedia Americana, the Mohican Indians do not exist. According to history books, the Mohican Indians do not exist. According to James Fenimore Cooper, the Mohican Indians do not exist. But Mrs. Bernice Miller and 600 other Stockbridge-Munsee know better. They exist.”

![Image of The Last of the Mohicans](source.png)

Figure 6. Cover of James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*
Source: Project Gutenberg

While tribal activists across the country fought to counteract non-Native ignorance, ambivalence, and/or misunderstandings about Native survival and culture, James Fenimore Cooper’s novel created an additional challenge for the Stockbridge-Munsees. As a small tribe with few resources and little public visibility, the Library Museum founders recognized that their tribally-run museum provided a rare opportunity to correct prevalent misunderstandings about Mohican history and demonstrate to the public that they had, in fact, survived. In this endeavor, the research conducted by museum personnel in their efforts to relearn and revitalize traditional culture served a dual purpose by also enabling the tribe to demonstrate a “link” from “the distant

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to the recent past.” As such, by “increase[ing] their own pride in, and understanding of, their historical tradition,” the development of the Arvid E. Miller Library Museum also enabled the Mohicans to convey a message of physical and cultural survival to outsiders, showing that despite removals and strategic accommodations, they had continued to choose to stand “a few paces apart from the white world.”

The Oneida Nation of Wisconsin

On the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin’s reservation today, traditional ceremonies in the tribe’s language are held regularly. “The elders out East, they look at that as a miracle,” Randy Cornelius, a tribal member, explained in a televised documentary in 2014. “That’s a miracle,” Cornelius went on, that “we are able to do them ourselves now…that we – the people from this community here – are carrying on our ceremonies…in the language.”

When taking their historical experience into account, it does, in fact, seem like a miracle that members of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin have successfully revitalized their traditional language and ceremonial practices, and have integrated these as central components of their lives just outside the city limits of Green Bay, Wisconsin. Like the nearby Stockbridge-Munsees, the Wisconsin Oneidas were removed from New York to Wisconsin in the nineteenth century. Having converted to Christianity and fought on the side of the colonists in the Revolutionary War, the Wisconsin Oneidas split from those that more forcibly resisted assimilation and stayed

89 Ibid.


92 Ibid.
on their ancestral homelands in present-day New York. In Wisconsin, the Oneidas, along with the Stockbridge-Munsees, negotiated with the United States and the Menominee for a portion of their land, resulting in the 1838 Treaty of Buffalo Creek that effectively created the present-day Oneida reservation.

After establishing their reservation in Wisconsin, Cornelius explains that the Wisconsin Oneidas were “pretty much…the leaders in terms of the assimilation process.” Having “isolated” themselves from their family and friends back east, the Wisconsin Oneidas, trying to “re-establish themselves as a power,” seemingly “turned their back to…anything traditional, ceremonial.” Like other tribes in the region, Oneida children were sent to government boarding and reservation schools across the Great Lakes region and country, further separating them from their tribal identity and traditional culture and language. In addition, due to the reservation’s proximity to Green Bay, and with a lack of employment opportunities on the reservation, Oneida tribal members began migrating to the city long before the urban relocation programs of the 1950s were initiated, integrating many into mainstream society earlier than many other tribal members in the region.

While the Wisconsin Oneidas appeared to accept assimilation while still in New York and even more so once they arrived in Wisconsin, significant elements of their traditions and worldview remained ingrained in their lives. Although the language used in traditional

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93 In addition to the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin and the Oneida Nation in New York, there is also a sizeable Oneida community in Canada.

94 Cornelius, interview.

95 Ibid.

ceremonies, as well as the number of first-language speakers, greatly diminished, conversational usage continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. \(^{97}\) Significantly, the Wisconsin reservation’s natural resources were similar to some of those available in New York, leading the tribe to perpetuate traditional relationships with, and usage of, the natural world around them. As they had been back East, hunting, fishing, and agriculture using traditional methods remained central to the Oneida way of life in the Great Lakes region. In addition, “when the Oneidas migrated to Wisconsin, their new home was covered largely by White Pine Forest. It was the same great white pine of their creation and their ancestral lands in New York.” \(^{98}\) This not only led to the persistence of several traditions, but also facilitated a greater attachment to their home in the Great Lakes region.

In keeping with their traditional view on natural resources, once in Wisconsin, the Oneida, like the nearby Menominee, recognized the opportunity provided by the copious white pine forest on their reservation, but “only wanted to clear enough land to adequately provide food for their families and to use what timber they needed to build comfortable homes and out buildings for their crops and livestock.” \(^{99}\) As the population of Green Bay grew, however, and as the city’s central place in the expanding Wisconsin lumber industry grew, logging companies increasingly sought access to Oneida timber through both illegal and corrupt means, and through land deals with the increasingly struggling tribe. \(^{100}\) As Oneida tribal historian Loretta Metoxen explained,

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\(^{97}\) Cornelius, interview.


\(^{99}\) Ibid.

\(^{100}\) As the Oneida tribal newspaper explained, “entrepreneurs wanted Oneida timber any which way they could get it.” “Logging and the Oneidas,” in \textit{Kalihwisaks}, February 26, 2009.
“white emigrants looked on the pine of the Oneida Reservation similarly to the way others of them had viewed the gold discovered at Dahlonega in the Cherokee County of Georgia or later the gold of the Sioux Black Hills.”

As a result, by the early-to-mid twentieth century, much of the Oneida reservation had been stripped of its timber resources.

While the Wisconsin Oneida were able to reorganize and solidify their federal recognition under the Indian Reorganization Act in 1937, such success was “unable to counter the harsh economic impact levied by the Depression” and the continuing loss of their natural resources.

The tribe had brought with them a wealth of agricultural knowledge, but the landscape in Wisconsin restricted agricultural output “with the exception of very limited farming.”

Unemployment and declining resources became such a large issue that the federal government sent about 1,500 Navajo sheep to help alleviate starvation, but the sheep were small and did little to help. Although all of the tribes in the area were dealing with similar circumstances, an Indian agent who visited the Oneida reservation callously noted that no one “within this area… is in such dire need of assistance.”

With little timber left and limited agricultural output, by the end of World War II, “the opportunity for employment on the Oneida reservation was virtually nonexistent.”

Compounding the tribe’s unemployment, poverty, and steadily decreasing resources was the

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101 Ibid.


103 Ibid.

104 Hauptman and McLester, The Oneida Journey, 36.

105 Ralph Fredenberg quoted in Hauptman and McLester, The Oneida Journey, 36.

mounting threat of termination. Following an Indian Claims Commission case seeking restitution for the loss of their timber resources, the Oneidas, like the Stockbridge-Munsees, were listed in Group 2 of the Zimmerman Plan, deemed to be ready for termination soon.¹⁰⁷ In 1956, termination almost became a reality for the tribe as tribal leaders were presented with proposed terms for termination of their federal status. Despite the promise of a much-needed lump sum and promises to assist in easing their situation, Oneida leaders rejected the federal government’s terms, arguing that despite their dire need for economic resources and assistance, their sovereignty and treaty rights were not for sale.¹⁰⁸

Having avoided termination for the time being but still dealing with myriad challenges, several Oneida tribal members recognized the value in taking part in the ongoing Tribal Sovereignty Movement. On a national level, prominent Oneida activist Eva Danforth, along with numerous other Great Lakes tribal leaders, attended the Chicago conference in 1961. As a result of her leadership at the conference, Danforth was elected to present the resulting document of the conference, the Declaration of Indian Purpose, to President John F. Kennedy in person. Other Oneida activists took on leadership roles within various national activism organizations, including the NIYC and AIM. Notably, Oneida tribal member and then-tribal attorney Gerald L. Hill was one of the activists who initiated the occupation of Alcatraz Island in 1969.

While several Oneida activists took part in the more militant, confrontational organizations of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement, others, tapping into their long history of selective


¹⁰⁸ For more on this, see Karim Tiro’s article, “Claims Rising” in McLester and Hauptman, A Nation Within A Nation. Despite appearing almost entirely assimilated, the federal government did not seem to push for Oneida termination with the same gusto as other tribes, suggesting that they recognized that the ICC restitution money had not alleviated the tribe’s situation.
accommodation, sought ways to alleviate the tribe’s struggles through federal law, policies, and programs. In the 1960s, tribal activists (namely Irene Moore, Norbert Hill, and Purcell Powless) successfully acquired assistance for the tribe by utilizing federal programs initiated as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty.\footnote{President Johnson’s War on Poverty was initiated in 1964. The legislation essentially expanded the role of the government in education, health care, and social organization in efforts to help alleviate the country’s growing poverty rates. For more on War on Poverty in relation to Native tribes, see Daniel Cobb’s \textit{Native Activism in Cold War America}.} While recognizing some of the government’s programs as “excessively paternalistic,” Oneida activists also recognized that paternalistic or not, such programs could be used to their advantage.\footnote{McLester and Hauptman, \textit{The Oneida Journey}, xlv.} Thus, Oneida activists were able to strategically utilize federal programs to help alleviate the challenges faced on the reservation.

For the Oneida (and for tribes across the country), their history of strategic accommodation paid off when, in 1966, President Johnson appointed Wisconsin Oneida tribal member Robert L. Bennett as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the first Native person to be named as such since Ely Parker. As a World War II veteran and long-time government employee, Johnson saw Bennett as “the right man for the job” because he had already demonstrated “a lifetime of service to the Federal Government” and would “be familiar with” and “thoroughly understand” the “problems” he would be dealing with.\footnote{Lyndon B. Johnson, “Swearing In of Robert L. Bennett as Commissioner of Indian Affairs,” April 27, 1966, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-swearin...-bennett-commissioner-indian-affairs.} Surety to some of his non-Native colleagues, Bennett seemed to exemplify the success of federal assimilation programs. As such, Bennett was named “Indian of the Year” by the Department of the Interior in 1966.\footnote{Bureau of Indian Affairs, “Bennett Named Indian of the Year,” United States Department of the Interior, news release, July 12, 1966.} Yet, the changes initiated during his
tenure as Commissioner of Indian Affairs rather suggest his ability to utilize the federal system
to better the economic and social conditions for tribes across the country. Specifically, two years
after Bennett was sworn in, President Johnson delivered a message to Congress, now famously
known as “The Forgotten American” speech, in which he recognized the failure of the federal
government’s assimilationist programs and proposed “a new goal for our Indian programs: a goal
that ends the old debate about ‘termination’ of Indian programs and stresses self-
determination.”

Bennett’s appointment as Commissioner of Indian Affairs and President Johnson’s
apparent support only fueled the growth of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement, as such successes
empowered Native activists and sent the message that social, cultural, political, and economic
change was possible. In the 1970s, “the tides began to turn” as the public became increasingly
invested in the Native fight for civil rights, and as Johnson’s successor Richard Nixon
increasingly turned his attention to ending termination as the cornerstone of federal policy. In
1975, change arrived with the passage of the American Indian Policy Review Commission Act
and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. The Commission, which
included Wisconsin Oneida tribal activist Ernest Stevens, presented a report with
recommendations for ways to improve living conditions on reservations, including better
programs for education, health care, and economic development. Significantly, the Commission
also presented possible ways to restore tribes that had been terminated, as well as ways that non-
federally funded tribes could seek federal recognition. Ultimately, the two Acts of 1975 set in


114 “Who We Are: A Historical Perspective,” Oneida Nation of Wisconsin.

Through the passage of this series of acts in the latter half of the 1970s, the federal government essentially affirmed what Native tribes already knew – that they were sovereign nations with an inherent right to self-determination. That the Oneidas utilized legal avenues for activism to ensure their cultural survival demonstrates not that the tribe had acculturated, but that tribal leaders carefully chose their course of action to ensure the survival of their distinct cultural identity. As such, Oneida activism can be characterized as a deliberate blend of accommodation and resistance, both undertaken as means of achieving the same outcome.

**The Oneida Nation Museum**

As Oneida activists became more and more involved in the movement towards sovereignty on the national stage, on the reservation, tribal leaders were influenced to “start to look into their past to re-instill that pride” articulated by activists as one of the primary goals of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement.\(^\text{115}\) As the movement increasingly found success reflected in gradual changes in federal policies, more opportunities arose for Native people to address the challenges they faced at home. Undoubtedly aware of the foundation and development of the Stockbridge-Munsee’ Arvid E. Miller Library Museum (the two reservations are less than an hour apart), the Oneidas also applied for a grant from the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. Citing their support for the colonists in the war, as well as their long history of accommodation and working with the federal government, the Oneida were granted funds in 1976.

\(^{115}\) Ibid.
While the Stockbridge-Munsees applied for the heritage grant with the goal of establishing a museum in mind, the Oneidas had not yet determined how to use the funds. After the grant was received, the Oneida Business Committee called a meeting of tribal leaders to determine how the funds should be used. Despite ongoing struggles with unemployment, poverty, and a lack of fundamental resources on the reservation, when then-Vice Chairman Norbert Hill suggested the construction of a museum, the Committee agreed. Recognizing that a museum would provide a space “to preserve, protect, maintain and interpret the Oneida traditions, artifacts, language, customs, and history in a manner that shall promote the dignity and respect of the Oneida people and culture,” tribal leaders saw the development of a museum as a crucial step towards achieving their goals of relearning and reviving their cultural traditions.

After three years of planning and construction, the 1,000 square foot Oneida Nation Museum opened its doors to the public in 1979. Like the nearby Arvid E. Miller Library Museum, the Oneida’s museum was initially developed primarily for the benefit of tribal members. From its conception, the museum has been a “very community based” space, focusing on being “a resource for community members” by taking on the role of “art museum, cultural museum, and community center” all in one space. While tribal member Florence Jones took

116 Doxtator, interview.


118 Like the Stockbridge-Munsees’ Arvid E. Miller Library Museum, the Oneida Nation Museum is relatively small compared to tribal museums founded later, who had more access to multiple sources of funding (as discussed at length in Chapter Four). For comparison, the Saginaw Chippewa’s Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways is 9,000 square feet – approximately nine times the size of the Oneida Nation Museum. As Eric Doxtator explained to me though, “we are fairly small. This floor is only about 1,000 square feet, and that includes the gift shop. It’s small, but we do try to pay in a lot of information.” Doxtator, interview.

119 Doxtator, interview.
the lead on the museum’s development, serving as the institution’s first director, the larger Oneida community was involved from the beginning. The Bicentennial grant provided the means for developing the building and initial operating costs, but as funds became scarce, museum personnel relied on community members for donations to fill the museum’s exhibits.\textsuperscript{120}

Since its opening, the museum has continued to be a space by and for community members. In addition to the donation of collections materials, community members have shaped the interpretation presented in the exhibit space, and have continuously utilized the museum as a space designed to assist the tribe in achieving their goals. In the years immediately following the development of the museum, tribal activism focused on the twin goals of reviving traditional culture and reclaiming the land and resources lost through the oft-corrupt land deals and resource mismanagement throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As such, one of the uses for the museum space from the beginning has been to provide a space for education and organizing to “strengthen and protect our people,” help “[us] reclaim our land,” and “enhance the environment by exercising our sovereignty.”\textsuperscript{121}

By providing a space for community organization, relearning tribal history, and the revival of cultural practices, the foundation of the museum initiated “a momentous decade for the Oneida.”\textsuperscript{122} Shortly after the museum development began, the Wisconsin Oneidas held their first

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{120} For over a decade, the museum relied primarily upon donations from tribal members for its collections. In 1995, the Turtle Museum in New York closed and the Oneida purchased a large portion of its collections. This purchase “essentially doubled our own collection,” then assistant director and collections manager Sara Summers Luedtke said in 2010. In addition, since its enactment in 1990, the Native America Graves Protection and Repatriation Act has enabled the tribe to repatriate some of the objects on loan from the Milwaukee Public Museum. Sara Summers Luedtke, “Indians of the Midwest: Oneida Museum,” The Newberry Library, 2010, https://publications.newberry.org/indiansofthemidwest/indian-imagery/challenging-stereotypes/tribal-museums/video-transcript-sara-summers-oneida-museum/.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} “Oneida Nation Museum Mission Statement,” Oneida Nation Museum.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} “Who We Are: A Historical Perspective,” Oneida Nation of Wisconsin.
\end{itemize}
traditional ceremony since their removal from New York. Relearning and reviving traditional practices compelled tribal members to uncover more about “our beliefs, our customs, our history,” the “things” that “make us distinct from others,” which in turn prompted groups of tribal members to reconnect with Oneida communities in New York and Canada. Collectively, these developments “began the momentum that would make the 1980s” a “progressive decade for the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin.”

Tribes across the country too saw a number of pivotal changes that forever altered the course of the collective future of America’s Native communities. While the more public, national Tribal Sovereignty Movement waned as the 1970s came to a close, federal policy continued to change in ways that reflected the goals articulated by the Native activists that emerged in the post-war years. For tribes across the Great Lakes region, however, the need for collective regional and tribal action did not end even as certain milestones were achieved. For the Oneida, finding ways to reclaim lost lands and reassert control over resources required continuous action throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. For other Great Lakes tribes, a renewed commitment to traditional practices and exercising treaty-guaranteed rights resulted in a new type of often racist, sometimes violent backlash that required tribes to utilize numerous avenues for activism in response. As a result, for tribal communities across the Great Lakes region, the 1980s produced a mixture of promising developments and devastating setbacks that necessitated strategic use of mainstream institutions, and a new sense of urgency to articulate a modern Indian identity rooted in history and traditional culture, yet compatible with the world around them.

123 Randy Cornelius said it had “never been done before 1978.” Cornelius, interview.


125 “Who We Are: A Historical Perspective,” Oneida Nation of Wisconsin.
CHAPTER THREE
GREAT LAKES NATIVE ACTIVISM AND TRIBAL MUSEUMS, 1980 TO 1990

In 2003, the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa’s George W. Brown, Jr. Museum and Cultural Center began installing a new exhibit on the fishing rights conflicts that had dominated tribal activism over the previous several decades.¹ Today, the exhibit is one of the first that visitors approach upon entering the museum, and features a variety of materials from both sides of the conflict, including images from the Band’s protests against anti-treaty rights groups as well as a six-pack of Treaty Beer. Treaty Beer, the label text explains, was the brainchild of Stop Treaty Abuse/Wisconsin, a radical anti-treaty rights group dedicated to using whatever means necessary to abrogate the Lake Superior Chippewa’s right to hunt, gather, and spearfish in off-reservation ceded territory.² In 1983, after years of litigation, these rights had been reaffirmed by the Court of Appeals Fifth Circuit Judge Lester Voigt, escalating decades of social, political, and legal unrest across the Great Lakes region.

¹ I use the phrasing “began installing” because, as is often the case with permanent exhibits, the exhibit has not been stagnant but rather was still a work in progress for years after the installation began. A comparison of the images of the exhibit in Larry Nesper’s 2005 article with my own from May 2018 show that the exhibit has been updated and altered in many ways since it installation began. See Larry Nesper, “Historical Ambivalence in a Tribal Museum,” in Museum Anthropology, September 2005, 1-16. Indeed, in an article responding to several aspects of Nesper’s argument, tribal member Gregg J. Gutherie explains that “the Museum was very much ‘under construction’ at the time of [Nesper’s] writing.” Gregg J. Gutherie, “Through a Mirror in a Riddle: A Response to ‘Historical Ambivalence in a Tribal Museum,’” in Museum Anthropology, March 23, 2009, 2.

First brewed in 1987, Treaty Beer shows that years after the Voigt Decision, its critics had no intention of accepting the cultural importance of spearfishing and the historically-based validity of Chippewa treaty rights. The label on the beer makes its creators’ position particularly clear, depicting a speared and clearly pain-stricken walleye coupled with the phrase “Land Claims, Fishing Rights, Hunting Rights, Water Rights, EQUAL RIGHTS?” sprawled across the bottom. Although Treaty Beer was only brewed for three years, it remains a powerful symbol of the intense and sometimes violent backlash faced by the tribe for exercising treaty rights throughout the 1980s, 90s, and early 2000s.

Figure 7. Treaty Beer Exhibit at the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center Credit: Meagan McChesney

The Lac du Flambeau Band’s decision to foreground a more contemporary conflict in its museum space highlights the centrality of the conflict in prompting the development of the museum. From the perspective of non-Native critics, treaty fishing threatened local tourism and resource conservation, and granted antiquated rights to contemporary Indians who had little in common with those who had co-created the treaties over a century before. Anti-treaty protestors understood treaty rights issues in political terms, and saw the exercise of treaty rights as an abuse of the political power wrongfully granted to modern Native nations. For Native people, however,
politics and culture were (and are) too intertwined to be understood separately. Treaty rights issues are cultural issues, as the exercise of such rights is central to sovereignty in practice, and important to the Lac du Flambeau community’s distinct identity. As such, in a space dedicated to articulating the tribe’s history, culture, and identity, treaty rights are consciously prioritized.

This chapter traces the continuation of Native activism through the 1980s, and demonstrates how the one tribal museum founded in the last decades of twentieth century – the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center – was developed to address the challenges faced by the tribe. While motivated by many of the same underlying goals as earlier tribal museums, institutions founded in the decades after 1980 had resources at their disposal not available to earlier museum developers. Great Lakes tribal museums founded in the 1960s and 1970s were influenced by the actions unfolding on the national stage amidst the height of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement. After 1980, the national Tribal Sovereignty Movement had largely waned, as several goals articulated by post-war activists were realized. This chapter begins by discussing how the tribal museums founded after 1980 benefitted from the achievements of 1960s and 70s activism and how ongoing changes in museum practice and increasing interest in localized heritage impacted the opportunities available for tribes looking to develop an on-reservation museum.

Significantly, even with more political power and resources available, very few tribal museums were developed during this decade. As of 2004, less than 11% of all tribal museums in existence nation-wide were founded during the 1980s. Several tribes began the early stages of developing tribal museums during this decade, but struggling with economic difficulties and a multitude of other issues, most of these museums were not fully realized until after a series of

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3 This is significantly lower to the 20% founded prior to 1980, 20% in the early 1990s, and well over 25% founded in the 2000s. Abrams, 15.
landmark changes in the late 1980s and 1990s that helped facilitate a new wave of tribal museum development. In line with this national trend, it is fitting that only one tribal museum was founded in the Great Lakes region during the 1980s. This chapter examines why the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center was founded at this time, showing that the particularly contentious treaty rights battles in Lac du Flambeau throughout the 1980s necessitated the completion of the tribe’s museum.

The Legacy of Post-War Indian Policy and Native Activism

Through a combination of overt resistance and strategic accommodation, by the 1980s, Native activists saw the realization of a number of their goals. The assimilationist nature of the dual policies of termination and relocation had roused people across the country to unified action and prompted the formation of pan-tribal organizations like the NCAI and AIM. Influenced by the national movement, tribal activists across the Great Lakes formed various regionally and tribally-based organizations through which they worked to halt the threat of termination and reverse the effects of culturally corrosive federal policies. These activists saw their efforts pay off when the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin was restored to federal status with the 1973 Menominee Restoration Act. While the termination policy was not legally repealed until 1988, Menominee restoration signaled to tribes across the Great Lakes and the country that termination would henceforth pose little threat. The enactment of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act in 1975 and the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978 further solidified the shift away

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4 Namely, the formal repeal of termination and recognition of tribal sovereignty, the legalization of reservation gaming, NAGPRA, and the increase in professionalization and funding opportunities for tribal museums. All of these developments are discussed at length in Chapter Four.

5 Other tribes in Wisconsin and tribes throughout Minnesota and Michigan faced similar challenges to those detailed in this chapter. The particular circumstances of those treaty rights battles are detailed in Chapter Four. Those battles went on long into the 1990s and 2000s and coupled with gaming issues, prompted a new wave of activism, part of which was the development of several tribal museums.
from assimilation toward self-determination as the cornerstone of federal Indian policy.\textsuperscript{6} The enactment of Public Law 93-580 in 1975 was particularly indicative of this shift, as it created the American Indian Policy Review Commission and its Federal Acknowledgment Process, through which unrecognized tribes, like the Grand Traverse Band in Michigan, were able to gain the federal recognition denied to them under the Indian Reorganization Act.

For many, such as Menominee activist and DRUMS leader Ada Deer, the end of termination proved to Native people that “you don't have to collapse just because there's federal law in your way. Change it!”\textsuperscript{7} Deer believed that Menominee restoration proved that “Indians…can decide what they want. [They] do not need the Bureau of Indian Affairs or any other group telling [them] what to do. [Indians] can make a decision and work for it.” For Deer, the shift to self-determination proved that through various avenues of activism, “it is possible to bring about social change.”\textsuperscript{8} Others, however, were hesitant to declare such a victory. Native activist and former director of the American Indian Law Center Philip S. Deloria, for example, argued that “the transition of recent federal policy from termination to self-determination reflects only a tactical shift in the fundamental commitment of a society to bring Indians into the mainstream, not a movement toward a true recognition of a permanent right to exist.”\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{6} In brief, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act authorized government agencies to enter contracts with and deliver grants directly to federally recognized tribes, giving tribes the greater control and authority to self-determine how government funds would be utilized. The Indian Child Welfare Act gave recognized tribes jurisdiction over child custody cases on the reservation.


\textsuperscript{9} Deloria in Philip, 191. The American Indian Law Center was formed in 1967 to provide training and technical assistance to tribes, tribal organizations, and tribal courts. It was the first Indian managed and Indian operated legal organization in the United States. “About the AILC,” American Indian Law Center, accessed April 5, 2018, http://ailc-inc.org/aboutus.html.
Deloria, the end of termination did not equate to tribal sovereignty and Native people’s right to self-determination. Instead, his words point to the fact that for tribal communities across the Great Lakes and the country, economic prosperity, cultural revitalization, recognized and exercised tribal sovereignty, and the affirmation of treaty rights were yet to be achieved. As a result, Native activism did not trail off as the national Tribal Sovereignty Movement waned. Rather, the nature of Native activism shifted as activists turned their attention to solidifying a political and legal framework through which cultural and economic progress on the reservation could be achieved.10

It is important to note that even as termination and relocation worked to erode traditional culture, these policies also enabled Native activists to effectively address the challenges faced on the reservation. Urban relocation, for one, had threatened aspects of traditional tribal culture by removing young people from reservation life. Yet, relocation also enabled a significantly larger percentage of Native youths the opportunity for higher education. Acknowledging the opportunity to utilize the circumstances sometimes forced upon them, many sought careers in fields like law, medicine, and education to better equip themselves to effect change back home.

10 President Ronald Reagan’s comments in regard to Indian policy and the ongoing fishing rights battles in Michigan surely contributed to skepticism on the part of Native people. In 1980, while on the campaign trail, Reagan spoke out on the ongoing treaty rights litigation in Michigan, saying that if elected, he would “recognize and support the traditional precedence of the states to manage fish, wildlife, and habitat within their boundaries.” “U.S. vs Michigan: The Settlement,” Clarke Historical Library Archives, https://www.cmich.edu/library/clarke/ResearchResources/Native_American_Material/Treaty_Rights/Cont emporary_Issues/Fishing_Rights/Treaty%20Enforcement_1965-1999/Pages/U.S.-vs-Michigan-The-Settlement.aspx. Years later, in 1988, ironically the same year that termination was repealed, Reagan delivered a speech to students in Moscow and stated, “Let me tell you just a little something about the American Indian in our land…We’ve done everything we can to meet their demands as to how they want to live. Maybe we made a mistake. Maybe we should not have humored them in that wanting to stay in that kind of primitive lifestyle.” Reagan went on to say that “You’d be surprised. Some of them became very wealthy because some of those reservations were overlaying great pools of oil, and you can get very rich pumping oil. And so, I don’t know what their complaint might be.” Alysa Landra, “Today in Native History: Ronald Reagan says, ‘We Should Not Have Humored [Natives],’” in Indian Country Today, May 31, 2017.
Termination too had the unintended effect of contributing to tribes’ abilities to work towards achieving their goals. In fighting to overturn or thwart termination, Great Lakes tribes had, in many cases, discovered or rediscovered aspects of their history and culture that had fallen by the wayside as assimilation policies transformed Native life and as tribal communities transformed themselves in the face of an ever-changing and enlarging world. As a result, as Native activists increasingly focused on affirming treaty rights, asserting their unique tribal identity, and revitalizing traditional culture, what they discovered about their collective past shaped the formation of a contemporary identity.

**Ideological Shifts in Museum Practice**

In addition to the advantages made possible by the legacy of the Federal policies and the Native activist movement of the post-war decades, widespread changes in museum practice and public historical interests impacted the development of Great Lakes tribal museums founded after 1980 as well. Due collectively to the rise of postmodernism after the war, the legacy of Tribal Sovereignty Movement and other civil rights movements of the 1950s, 60s and 70s, and the increase in international discourse on human rights, existing and emerging museums across the country increasingly sought collaborative relationships with the groups represented in their institutions. This new direction in museum development coincided with changing ideas about the purpose of museums as well, shifting from an understanding of museums as exhibitory repositories to an understanding of museums as spaces that both represent and shape politics, culture, and identity. These changes in museum development, practice, and understanding led

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11 For more on these changes, see Amy Lonetree’s *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), Gail Anderson’s *Reinventing the Museum The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift* (New York: Altamira Press, 2012), and Joshua Gorman’s *Building a Nation: Chickasaw Museums and the Construction of History and Heritage*. 11
to more conversations between Native tribes and institutions within the dominant society, leading to an increased understanding of museum practice and development on the part of Native people. This in turn encouraged more Native communities to consider museums as a way to address historical inaccuracies and prejudices about Native life, revitalize traditional culture, publically express sovereignty, and take ownership and control over their own history.

Coinciding with these changes in museum practice, Americans across the country exhibited a growing interest in localized heritage. Prompted by the state and nation-wide American Bicentennial celebrations of the 1970s, historian Michael Kammen refers to this phenomenon as “heritage syndrome” and explains that in part because of the sweeping changes in museum practice occurring throughout the late twentieth century, historical knowledge was being democratized.\textsuperscript{12} The democratization of historical knowledge allowed room for multiple or alternative narratives in existing institutions, and the development of new institutions that were “increasingly specialized and topical but more generally educational than ever before.”\textsuperscript{13} He refers to this 1980s passion for heritage as the “roots phenomenon,” defined as a “dramatic expansion in the diversity of social groups concerned about their past.”\textsuperscript{14} The “roots phenomenon” was triggered by Alex Haley’s 1976 best-selling novel \textit{Roots: The Saga of an American Family}, which told the multi-generational story of an African-American family. It was later made into a hugely popular television mini-series. Together, they set off an American ethnic “cultural revolution” resulting in a huge upswing in interest in genealogy, local history, and in

\textsuperscript{12} Kammen, 620.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
developing an ethnic historical identity.\textsuperscript{15} Even the Bureau of Indian Affairs became caught up in the “roots phenomenon.” In response to a letter from museum co-founder Leah Miller seeking financial assistance for the construction of a new building for the Stockbridge-Munsee’s Library Museum, for example, BIA realty specialist Gregory Miller directly references the impact of \textit{Roots}, stating that “in a time when the whole country is trying to get back to their ‘Roots,’ what a better atmosphere could be found to research, observe, read and learn than a Historical Library and Museum.”\textsuperscript{16} In ways that dominant historical narratives did not, heritage “[signified] the struggles for survival that various groups and subcultures have undergone.”\textsuperscript{17} Tribal museums increasingly came to be understood as sites that could institutionalize heritage in these terms, and visibly display tribally-centered historical narratives in ways that, even as they became more inclusive, non-Native institutions could not.

Within the context of these widespread changes, more and more tribes began to discuss the possibility of developing a tribally-run museum. Surely seeing the development and impact of the nearby Menominee, Stockbridge-Munsee, and Oneida museums, the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa began developing what is now the George W. Brown Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center in the mid-to-late 1980s. Successfully asserting and reaffirming control over their land and resources in the early 1980s, coupled with the intense backlash faced by exercising these reaffirmed treaty rights, heightened the impulse to articulate a modern identity and instill a greater sense of community and connection on their tribal lands. In his study on the development of a Chickasaw museum, historian Joshua Gorman concludes that the


\textsuperscript{16} Gregory L. Miller to Leah Heath, 1978. Heath is Leah Miller’s maiden name.

\textsuperscript{17} Kammen, 623.
Chickasaw museum strategically issues a “re-articulation of [Chickasaw] heritage” as a means of providing “justification for contemporary sovereignty.”\textsuperscript{18} While the circumstances surrounding the development of the Chickasaw museum were different, Gorman’s words ring true for the Lac du Flambeau. In order to examine why the museum was founded when it was, and why the tribe was compelled to use what funds they had to contribute to the development of the museum, it is crucial to first understand the treaty rights battles that dominated every avenue of tribal activism, including the development of the museum, throughout the 1980s.\textsuperscript{19}

**Early Michigan Treaty Rights Disputes**

A crucial moment in the Great Lakes Native fight for the recognition of historic treaty rights was the case of *United States v. Michigan*.\textsuperscript{20} The treaty rights cases in Michigan and Wisconsin (and later in Minnesota) were intimately tied and mutually reinforcing in ways that necessitate discussion of all to fully understand the scope of one or the other. Although a permanent resolution in *United States v. Michigan* was not reached until the early 2000s (to be discussed in Chapter Four), the origins and early rulings in the case predate and inspired the litigation in Wisconsin and, thus, laid the groundwork for the nature of Lac du Flambeau activism in mid-to-late twentieth century. The *United States v. Michigan* case emerged in the early 1970s amidst the height of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement. Native activists across the Great Lakes region were active participants in the national movement towards sovereignty, an

\textsuperscript{18} Gorman, 2.

\textsuperscript{19} It is important to note that while the tribe had begun to develop a gaming institution in the 1980s, ongoing litigation prevented the development of the Lake of the Torches Casino until years after the George W. Brown museum opened. As such, funding from the casino was not available for the development of the museum. Thus, even though the tribe had begun to venture into gaming before the museum opened, it did not directly impact the development. This is why tribal gaming is not discussed until Chapter Four, as it was not directly relevant to this particular situation.

experience that increasingly influenced many to turn their attention inward to address threats to cultural survival at home on the reservation. While influenced by the national movement, Great Lakes activists recognized that the tactics utilized by militant groups like the NIYC and AIM would not be sufficient in fighting for a legal basis for treaty rights. Because they sought legal recognition of rights promised by federal treaties, Great Lakes activists pursued litigation as the best means of achieving this goal. This strategy was less flashy than occupations and protest marches and required patience exercised over many years, but it promised genuine change if successful.

Across the Great Lakes region, perhaps nothing was more threatening to Native cultural (and, to a degree, physical) survival than the states’ denial and persecution of treaty-guaranteed hunting, fishing, and gathering rights. While treaty rights litigation did not come to a head in the courts until the final decades of the twentieth century, the basis for these court battles began decades before. In Michigan, as early as the mid-nineteenth century, increasing non-Native encroachment into the areas around the Great Lakes led to widespread natural habitat destruction as market-driven hunting, fishing, and lumbering devastated the state’s natural resources. Prior to the introduction of the European fur trade, Northern Michigan’s Ottawa and Chippewa bands had maintained the natural balance of their surrounding environment for hundreds of years through subsistence hunting, gathering, and gillnet fishing, yet the invasion of non-Native business interests and later the introduction of more technologically advanced fishing techniques challenged this balance. Significantly, these technological advancements in fishing techniques favored non-Native fisherman as businesses were able to afford more efficient, newer boats and equipment that Native fisherman could not.²¹

In addition to threats to the environment posed by the commercial harvesting of natural resources and pollution, in the twentieth century, the introduction of non-native, parasitic species like sea lamprey and alewife proved to have devastating unintended consequences. To accommodate increasing business interests, new canals and waterways were constructed that connected the Great Lakes to each other and outside bodies of water like the Atlantic Ocean, which ultimately enabled non-native species to gradually enter the Great Lakes. Sea lamprey, a parasitic fish that attaches to a host fish and feeds off the host until it dies, were particularly problematic.\textsuperscript{22} Significantly, sea lamprey prefer fatty fish like lake trout over leaner fish like walleye. As sea lamprey increasingly made their way into the Great Lakes, the trout population favored by the commercial fishing industry began to die out. The decimation of lake trout further impacted the Great Lakes as the population of alewives, a species of herring fish known for its massive seasonal die-offs, exploded without the alewife’s lake trout predator to keep its numbers in check. Alewife seasonal die-offs littered beaches and were accompanied by an unpleasant odor, leaving residents and tourists well-aware that an ecological problem was at hand.\textsuperscript{23}

By the 1950s, these problems – pollution, overfishing by commercial fishermen, and the introduction of non-native parasitic species – left the fishing industry in a such a difficult position that officials realized that “the Michigan economy was no longer benefitting from the commercial exploitation of the resource.”\textsuperscript{24} As a result, Michigan’s Department of Natural Resources shifted its focus to improving the fishery for the rising tourism industry.

\textsuperscript{22} New canals and waterways constructed in addition to existing canals built in the 1850s.


\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
For Native people, the rise of mass tourism across the Great Lakes and particularly in northern Michigan compounded some of the issues brought on by commercial fishing. While the tourist industry began to grow in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the number of upper class vacationers swelled in the 1950s as a result of post-war prosperity.\textsuperscript{25} To encourage tourism, the state of Michigan began implementing programs to restock fish and protect the environment that had been severely damaged by market-driven activities. In particular, the state initiated an elaborate salmon-stocking program in the 1960s that within a few years transformed Lake Michigan into a sport fishing paradise worth millions to the state’s economy.\textsuperscript{26} As a result, rising tourism reached new heights in the 1960s, which, historian Robert Doherty explains, “forced Indians to make much less advantageous economic adjustments” as the state increasingly allocated resources to the tourism industry.\textsuperscript{27}

Tribes in Michigan and across the Great Lakes region had a complex relationship with tourism from the beginning. On one hand, tourism created new jobs, provided new opportunities to increase public understandings of Native life, and brought more money into the region. It did so initially though, Doherty explains, in ways that “seldom helped long-term residents” and instead “hid them behind a façade of affluence.”\textsuperscript{28} Significantly, as the state began to implement programs to restock the fishery for tourism, it simultaneously sought to limit any activities deemed threatening to that effort. The state began enforcing regulations that ultimately sought to

\textsuperscript{25} Doherty, 4.

\textsuperscript{26} Dan Egan, \textit{The Death and Life of the Great Lakes} (New York: Norton and Co, 2017), 92-98. As Egan explains, by the mid-to-late 1960s, the “salmon craze” had resulted in a jump of $11.9 million in local retail sales.

\textsuperscript{27} Doherty, 51.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 58.
eliminate the use of Native gillnets, which were seen as an “indiscriminate lethal fishing device” as opposed to trap nets, which enabled fishermen to return unwanted catch to the water.\textsuperscript{29} As the state increasingly restricted and persecuted Native fishermen for using gillnets (their traditional method of fishing) in off-shore waters, tribal leaders recognized that something had to be done. As such, the state’s efforts to rejuvenate the fishery coincided with an increase in Native fisherman exercising treaty rights.

As clashes between Native fishermen and state wardens grew increasingly more frequent and contentious, federal courts were ultimately compelled to intervene. Litigation in Michigan began in 1971 when Bay Mills Indian Community tribal chairman and treaty rights activist Big Abe Leblanc was arrested for fishing commercially without a state-sanctioned commercial license, and for fishing with an “illegal device,” a gillnet on Lake Superior’s Whitefish Bay.\textsuperscript{30} While Leblanc was found guilty by the Circuit Court of Chippewa County in 1972, the case was moved to the Michigan Court of Appeals, who ultimately ruled in favor of LeBlanc. \textit{Michigan v. Leblanc} was a landmark case for the Bays Mills Indian Community, yet treaty rights activists recognized that the case had to go before a federal judge for the ruling to apply to tribal rights in general, and not just LeBlanc himself, as \textit{Michigan v. Leblanc} was technically a state criminal case, not a treaty rights case. The case was expanded and moved to federal court to determine treaty rights for tribal members across the state, not just LeBlanc and not only in Whitefish Bay.

The case \textit{United States v. Michigan} was filed in the United States District Court in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1973 as a direct result of the state’s restrictions on Native gillnetting in waters off-shore of lands ceded in the 1836 Treaty of Washington, and the precedent set by

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Michigan v. Leblanc}, 399 Mich. 31 (1976).
Michigan v. Leblanc. Significantly, treaties signed with Michigan tribes were largely silent or vague on the subject of rights retained in ceded territory, aside from Article 13 of the 1836 Treaty of Washington, which provided that “Indians stipulate for the right of hunting on the lands ceded, with the other usual privileges of occupancy, until the land is required for settlement.” Attorney Bruce R. Greene, who worked on the case beginning in 1975, explains that the tribes contended that “the treaty’s silence with respect to the Great Lakes fishery meant that they had kept that right and not relinquished it during the treaty transaction.”

Federal law regarding treaties with Native tribes was on the tribes’ side and supported this stance, since “anything not explicitly conveyed by the Indians under the treaty was considered to still be the property of the Indians.” Thus, the right to resources were retained by the “grantors” – in this case, the tribes that signed the treaty. In addition to the right to use gillnets to fish in the ceded territory, the tribes also claimed that they retained the right to fish commercially in such areas. To prove this, they had to show that fish provided a substantial portion of their food resources and that they would likely not have survived without the right to fish in the Great Lakes.

After years of litigation, in 1978, Judge Noel P. Fox delivered his landmark ruling in favor of the tribes, stating that they not only retained the right to use gillnets and fish in the ceded territory, but that they retained the right to fish commercially as well. Judge Fox’s ruling decriminalized a practice central to Michigan tribal culture and in doing so, influenced tribes across the Great Lakes region to utilize the courts to address similar issues. Significantly though,

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31 “1836 Treaty of Washington.”
32 Greene in Cleland, 89.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
Judge Fox’s ruling applied only to tribes in Michigan, and only fishing in the Great Lakes themselves. As a result, the legality of tribal fishing in territory ceded in treaties on inland bodies of water remained highly contested, resulting in the several decades of tensions and court battles discussed in Chapter Four.

The Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

The same year that the landmark case United States v. Michigan was filed, Fred Tribble was a college student at St. Scholastica College in Duluth, Minnesota. He was working hard on the final term paper for his Indian Law course. While researching old documents, Tribble came across a treaty signed by the United States government and the Chippewa bands of the upper Great Lakes. As he scanned the document, an article at the bottom of the page immediately caught his eye. As a member of the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, he, like many other Chippewa youth, had grown up believing that the practice of traditional hunting and fishing methods was illegal outside the reservation’s boundaries. Yet, on the legal document in front of him, the words were clear: “The privilege of hunting, fishing, and gathering the wild rice, upon the lands, the rivers, and the lakes included in the territory ceded, is guaranteed to the Indians.”

“I stopped my instructor and said, ‘Am I reading this right?’” Tribble explains, “it was in the back of my mind that somewhere down the road we would be able to use these treaty rights…to improve our standard of living.”


advised his student that if he wanted to prove the right, “you’re going to have to follow it.”

Tribble approached his brother Mike, a fellow student at St. Scholastica, about spearfishing in the ceded territory. Both decided to take the document and give it a try.

That winter, with the blessing of the Tribal Council, Fred and Mike Tribble crossed the Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation boundary on Chief Lake and started spearfishing, consciously testing the clout of the treaty but likely unaware of how far-reaching and long-lasting the impact of their actions would be on Ojibwe bands across the upper Great Lakes. Unsurprising to the brothers, they were approached by state wardens shortly after setting up their equipment. Fred showed the wardens the document and read aloud the article of the treaty, but to no avail. The brothers were cited and went to court, initiating a decades-long legal battle that, after several setbacks, ended in victory for the tribe in Judge Lester Voigt’s Federal Court of Appeals in 1983.

Figure 8. Fred and Mike Tribble
Source: Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission

37 Ibid.

39 There were elders who were certainly aware of the wording of the treaty, but they also knew state game wardens enforced their rules regardless. Younger tribal members did not necessarily know about the wording of the treaty, as they had grown up with the understanding that fishing in the ceded territory was illegal. It took the Tribble brothers to push the issue anew.

40 The Lac Courte Oreilles band was eventually joined in the suit by other Great Lakes Ojibwe bands, including the Lac du Flambeau. The decision applied to Lac Courte Oreilles, Lac du Flambeau, Red Cliff, St. Croix, and Mole Lake Bands in Wisconsin, and the Mille Lacs and Fond du Lac Bands in Minnesota. Over the course of the next several decades, the state of Minnesota infringed upon these rights, initiating another set of legal battles to be discussed in Chapter Four.
Significantly, the battle over Lake Superior Chippewa treaty rights did not end there. Instead, the Voigt Decision was immediately met with an onslaught of resistance from local non-Indian residents, tourists, conservation groups, and businesses. Resentful of tribal members’ “special rights” and worried that an increase in Native fishing would deplete the resources available for sport and commercial purposes, several anti-treaty groups formed to challenge the exercising of treaty rights through protests, violence, and various legal avenues. As such, it became clear to Native people across the Great Lakes that even as they found success in the courts, much was still left to be done.

By the early 1980s, tribal activists had achieved many of their goals on a national scale, and found themselves better equipped to utilize aspects of the dominant society’s educational, legal, social, and political systems to address lingering challenges on a regional and tribal level.41 While the highly public militancy of the national pan-tribal movement had largely waned, Native activism continued through various avenues. In the Great Lakes region, 1980s Native activism largely took place in courtrooms and on reservations across the region, as nearly every tribe in the region became embroiled in local, state, and regional disputes over the exercising of treaty-guaranteed hunting and fishing rights. As such, the nature of activism shifted from the national fight against assimilationist policies to a regional and tribal focus on treaty rights and cultural revitalization.

The conflict over treaty rights that came to a head in the courts in the mid-to-late twentieth century had been building for over a century. As early as the 1860s, Wisconsin began imposing state regulations on lands ceded in the nineteenth century treaties, even though the

41 Often with assistance from federally-funded organizations like the Native American Rights Fund, as well as Native-founded organizations like the American Indian Law Center, the Great Lakes Intertribal Council, and the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Commission (to be talked about later in this chapter).
1837 Treaty explicitly recognized Ojibwe rights to hunt, fish, and gather on ceded territory using traditional methods. Ojibwe treaty rights were further restricted in 1878 when Wisconsin prohibited Native fishermen from using any method other than hook and line, including the traditionally preferred use of spears. This trajectory continued throughout the early to mid-twentieth century, as the state Supreme Court ruled in 1908 that Ojibwe off-reservation rights were abrogated by Wisconsin statehood in 1848, and began requiring Native fishermen to obtain state fishing licenses in 1933. With the passage of Public Law 280 in the 1950s and the extension of state jurisdiction over tribal criminal cases, the state essentially negated the tribe’s treaty-guaranteed rights and solidified the criminalization of traditional Ojibwe spearfishing both on and off the reservation.42

While racism and discrimination abounded and surely informed the state’s early rulings, conservation and tourism were generally cited as the reasons for increasing state regulation of Ojibwe hunting and fishing practices. In the decades following World War II, as in Michigan, northern Wisconsin experienced a tourism boom. As train lines from urban centers like Milwaukee and Chicago were extended further into the so-called “Northwoods,” and roads on and around reservations were increasingly paved, resorts and clubs catering to outdoor recreation enthusiasts quickly popped up across the area. While the Ojibwe tribes around Lake Superior had enjoyed a sense of relative isolation for longer than the Wisconsin tribes further south (such as the Oneida, Stockbridge-Munsee, and Menominee), the same market forces eventually invaded

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the Northwoods, bringing with it a slew of non-Native residents and seasonal tourists. By the 1980s, tourism had been central to the local economies for several decades.\(^{43}\)

In many ways, tourism compounded issues that Great Lakes Native tribes already faced with commercial resource competitors. Commercial logging had long begun contaminating the waters on and around the reservations, and Native fisherman had become accustomed to competition from large-scale fishing enterprises. With a new onslaught of tourists drawn to the area for its remoteness, “authenticity,” and natural resources, the need to reassert and affirm treaty-guaranteed resource rights quickly became clear to Native communities. As Lac du Flambeau band tribal member Mike Chosa flatly declared, “the conflict over Indians’ hunting and fishing…is about survival.”\(^{44}\) Chosa’s words speak to the fact that in the 1980s, life on the Lac du Flambeau reservation was largely defined by unemployment, poverty, and a persistent lack of opportunity. Many of the elders in the tribally-produced *Memories of Lac du Flambeau Elders*, a collection of oral histories gathered by several elders’ tribal relatives, explained that until the tribe opened its gaming facilities in the 1990s, some families still relied on fishing and hunting as a primary food source.\(^{45}\)

For the Lac du Flambeau, the need to assert fishing rights went beyond any political or economic motivations. Spearfishing is a deep-rooted cultural tradition that is important to the tribe’s collective identity.\(^{46}\) The very name “Lac du Flambeau” refers to the tribe’s traditional

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\(^{43}\) For more on the growth of tourism, see Aaron Shapiro, *The Lure of the North Woods: Cultivating Tourism in the Upper Midwest* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).


\(^{45}\) Ben Chosa and Joe Chosa, for example. See Tornes, 129-151.

practice of using fire lanterns to spearfish. Spearfishing became increasingly central to the tribe’s sense of distinctiveness over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as other traditional practices diminished in the face of culturally corrosive policies and modernization of the tribal nation.\textsuperscript{47} Tribal members also saw spearfishing and historically-based understandings about fishing as crucial for conservation. Unlike tourists and commercial fishermen, Native spearfishers explained that they “respected the spirit of all living things,” and “never take more than we need.”\textsuperscript{48}

While the tourist industry posed an obvious threat to Lac du Flambeau Band fisherman, the tribe’s relationship with tourism was complex. In many ways, the tribe both challenged and tapped into the tourist industry, which propelled and complicated the processes of revitalizing Native culture that were ignited in the post-war years. For example, in 1951, the band used tribal assets to build the Wa-Swa-Gon Indian Bowl, an arena in the center of the commercial district on the reservation within which Native performers staged dances, powwows, and other cultural performances. For tourists, the Indian Bowl provided a sense of authenticity to their experience, leaving them feeling that they had gained intimate knowledge of the ‘exotic’ Northwoods Native community.\textsuperscript{49} For tribal members, however, the Indian Bowl was both “a dilemma and an opportunity.”\textsuperscript{50} For decades after it opened, the Indian Bowl was a financial success for the


\textsuperscript{48} Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, “Enduring Ways of the Lac du Flambeau,” Wisconsin Public Television, 2006. Visitors to the museum can watch this video on a screen provided.

\textsuperscript{49} Larry Nesper, “Stimulating Culture: Being Indian for Tourists in Lac du Flambeau’s Wa-Swa-Gon Indian Bowl,” in Ethnohistory 50.3 (2003), 447-472.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
Band, described as "one of the premier Wisconsin tourist attractions."

In addition, at a time when aspects of traditional culture had been and were continuing to fade, the Indian Bowl required that performers articulate a collective Lac du Flambeau identity. While perpetuating the exoticization of Native people by non-Native visitors, the Indian Bowl was also a rare space in the 1950s that valued and encouraged cultural pluralism and distinction. As Lac du Flambeau band member Ernie St. Germaine explained, "you had to remove yourself spiritually from what you were doing in order to do it," speaking to both the problematic nature of the Indian Bowl and highlighting the control Native performers had over both the personal and collective meaning of their performance and the messages conveyed to their audience.

As with the Indian Bowl, Lac du Flambeau members also tapped into the tourist industry as resort owners and fishing guides. In Memories of Lac du Flambeau Elders, several prominent tribal elders recalled serving as fishing guides for tourists. For many, working as a fishing guide was one of the only opportunities for employment. Tribal member Ben Chosa recalled his time guiding for visitors, including former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and explained that he made about five dollars a day working as a guide. The presence of and reliance on Native fishing guides reinforced local public understanding of Native people as the authority on fishing by privileging their knowledge and long tenure on the land. As such, by perpetuating the Lac du Flambeau’s long tradition of fishing in the area, tourism reinforced the centrality of fishing for the physical and cultural survival of the tribe.


53 Tornes, 123.
While tourism privileged Native fishing knowledge and necessitated that Native fishing persisted, that same industry simultaneously contributed to the criminalization of Native fishing, and to the backlash Native fisherman faced for off-reservation spearfishing once treaty rights were affirmed. After the arrest of Fred and Mike Tribble in 1974, several Ojibwe bands, including the Lac du Flambeau, joined the Lac Courte Oreilles Band in their suit against the state of Wisconsin for the unlawful violation of treaty rights. In 1978, Judge Doyle ruled in favor of the state, citing an 1854 Treaty as proof that the Lake Superior Ojibwe bands had relinquished their off-reservation rights. The tribes collectively filed an appeal to the United States Court of Appeals and in 1983, Judge Voigt reversed Doyle’s ruling and affirmed Ojibwe rights to hunt, fish, and gather on ceded lands using traditional methods.

Immediately, tourists, conservation groups, sportsmen groups, and businesses with commercial interests in the area’s natural resources protested the ruling. Within months of the first off-reservation season in 1985, several anti-treaty groups were formed, including Protest America’s Rights and Resources (PARR) and the more radical Stop Treaty Abuse/Wisconsin (STA/W), arguing that “tribal spearmen, self-described ‘Walleye Warriors,’…poke about in lake shallows for fish to fill their galvanized tubs – weeks before hook and line fishermen get their chance.”

For years after the Voigt decision, tribal fisherman faced aggressive and sometimes violent protestors at the boat landings across northern Wisconsin. Anti-treaty groups showed up by the masses, often holding signs with racially-charged phrases like, “Save a Walleye, Spear an Indian” and shouting “Equal rights!” to drown out Native fishermen’s shouts of “Treaty

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Newspapers across the Great Lakes region frequently reported on the clashes, repeatedly citing that “the anger over Indian spearfishing rises each spring in northern Wisconsin like an ill wind that blows no one any good and will not go away.” Protests on the boat ramps were compounded by anti-treaty supporters in the media. While national news coverage tended to erode on the side of the Lac du Flambeau Band, highlighting opinion pieces like USA Today’s “Keep Promises Made to the Indians,” local news outlets frequently defended the protestors, printing article after article with titles like “Indians Should Give Up Rights to Ease Tensions,” and “PARR Circulating Petition Urging Change in Treaty Rights.”

Figure 9. PARR treaty rights protesters
Source: Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission

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56 Ibid.

57 As well as by more concrete, overt actions against spearfishers, like destruction of property. PARR and STA/W both created concrete walleye decoys that would ruin spears if stabbed. For more information and images of concrete decoys, see the Wisconsin Historical Society’s museum object feature story posting: “Anti-Spearfishing Concrete Walleye Decoy,” Wisconsin Historical Society, May 18, 2006, https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS2741.

While tourism was central to the Lac du Flambeau economy, tribal fishermen’s responses to the backlash over treaty fishing show that the act of fishing held a deeper meaning for tribal members – one that was so crucial to their cultural survival that many were willing to risk facing the protestors, their stake in the tourism industry, and economic progress to ensure that the practice survived. By 1989, the tensions between treaty fishermen and anti-treaty protestors had risen so high that the state of Wisconsin was compelled to intervene. In what was deemed by its supporters a “solution to the rift between the Chippewa and sports fishermen,” the state offered the Lac du Flambeau $49.7 million in state aid and services in exchange for the tribe’s agreement to halt the practice of spearfishing.59 Despite the persistence of poverty and lack of fundamental resources on the reservation, the tribe denied the offer.

While facing backlash for exercising the rights reaffirmed by the Voigt decision put Native tribes in a complicated and precarious position, it did spawn the development of the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLFWC). Founded in 1984 as a direct result of the Voigt decision and spearfishing protests, the GLFWC is a pan-tribal agency developed to assist Ojibwe bands across the Great Lakes in exercising the rights reaffirmed by the Voigt decision, including legal matters, administrative matters, and environmental management. Since its founding, the GLFWC has been instrumental in helping several bands, including the Lac du Flambeau and Fond du Lac, with ongoing litigation involving treaty rights, and in implementing and maintaining conservation and regulatory practices. Significantly, the GLFWC also provides a variety of resources that can be utilized by tribes and, in particular, by tribal museums to better educate the public about treaty rights, tribally-managed resources, and conservation.60

59 Worthington, “Spearfishing Deal’s Defeat.”

60 For more on this organization, see their website: http://www.glifwc.org.
The George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center

The same year that the Lac du Flambeau tribal members voted to reject the state of Wisconsin’s multimillion dollar treaty rights exchange deal, the tribe celebrated the opening of the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center. The museum is a direct expression of the political activism that asserted treaty fishing rights since 1978.

While the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center first opened in 1989, the tribe began conceptualizing the museum years in advanced. In 1985, the first year that the tribe could legally act upon the spearfishing rights affirmed in the Voigt Decision, the Lac du Flambeau Band, along with several non-Native community members, founded the Lac du Flambeau Historical Society and created a Project Summary for the development of a tribally-run history museum. Significantly, it was important for the tribe to involve non-Native community members from the beginning. In the 1985 Project Summary, the Historical Society noted that “the Voigt Decision has allowed prejudice to surface to a point where highly volatile attitudes have virtually stymied inter-community relationships between the Indian and the non-Indian.”61 With a large number of non-Natives living on the reservation and employed by the tribally-owned Simpson Electric Company, and facing attacks for exercising their right to spearfish in the ceded territory, tribal leaders recognized that working with non-Native community members to develop the museum would send a clear message about their goals for the institution. Still, the tribe ultimately maintained control of the project from the beginning, as

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the Tribal Council had final say over any decisions or recommendations made by the Historical Society.\textsuperscript{62}

While attributing too much credit to one group or individual obscures “the role of the Tribe, its council, elders, tribal members, and members of the community,” efforts to develop the museum were spearheaded by the Historical Society along with tribal leaders Gregg Guthrie, Ben Guthrie, and George W. Brown, Jr.\textsuperscript{63} In lieu of the funds offered by the state, the founders worked for years to secure a combination of outside and tribal funding to put into motion the museum outlined in the 1985 Project Summary. By 1987, the tribe had received a Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant of $250,000 for the development of the museum, with the same amount required for matching funds from the tribe.\textsuperscript{64} The Lac du Flambeau Historical Society raised approximately $100,000 for the museum, though it is unclear if this was part of or in addition to the $250,000 required by the HUD grant. As such, the project moved forward with a groundbreaking ceremony in August, 1987. As with the Historical Society, the tribe made sure to include non-Indian community members alongside tribal leaders like George W. Brown, Jr. in the groundbreaking ceremony activities, further demonstrating their commitment to developing an institution that would serve both the tribe and non-Indian residents and tourists.

The opening of the museum, a minimum $500,000 venture, the same year that the tribe rejected $49.7 million in much-needed aid speaks volumes about the significance of the museum.

\textsuperscript{62} Guthrie, 6. Guthrie explains that “it is actually the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians and their democratically elected Tribal Council that had (and has) ultimate authority over the Society's activities and the Museum’s development and exhibits.”

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 1.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 2.
for the tribe, and the primacy of culture over money. “In need of additional space” to store tribal artifacts, such as the traditional dugout canoe that was housed in the tribal library, and “in possession of other artifacts” ready for display, the tribe determined that it was in their “best interest” to finalize development of the museum. In addition to traditional artifacts, treaty rights court battles had necessitated that the tribe unearth a vast amount of historical materials to support the case for upholding treaty rights by demonstrating the centrality of hunting, fishing, and gathering to tribal identity and proving a level of historical continuity. As such, by the mid-1980s, the tribe had both a wealth of artifacts and a wealth of substantiated information on tribal history, culture and identity.

While these materials and historical knowledge prompted initial conversations about building a museum, the tribe’s decision to move forward was ultimately informed by the ongoing backlash tribal members received for exercising treaty rights. Across the board, tribal members recognized that “an increased interest in the past coincided with assertions of reserved treaty rights.” Tribal activist Ernie St. Germaine explained that “along the way, there were a lot of sportsmen who – and, you know, tavern owners and tourists – that were extremely threatened by the idea of Indians exercising those rights in the ceded territory because it threatened tourism.” Those fears, St. Germaine explained, led to “panic,” which in turn led hundreds of anti-treaty protestors to invade the boat landings, “screaming and calling names and shooting rockets at the spearers.” While acknowledging that this was a “very, very ugly time,” St. Germaine also

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66 Tornes, 30.
68 Ibid.
points out that it was “an important time” because anti-treaty rights protests highlighted the historical ignorance of the non-Native public in regard to Native legal history, culture, and identity.69 “People expressed that [anger],” St. Germaine explained, “because they didn’t know the treaties themselves.”70 As a result, he explains that many tribal members understood that to quell discontent, “we knew that [we] had to go about teaching what the treaties said and what they mean and how they’re actually going to protect a lot of things here.”71 In keeping with national movements to democratize museums, tribal members increasingly saw the development of the museum as a way to educate people on their long history in the area, the centrality of spearfishing to their culture, and the nature of treaties made with the United States.

This need to influence public opinion and understanding of the cultural significance of treaty rights became even more important in the years following the museum’s opening. In addition to developing the museum as a space designed to counter treaty rights backlash, the band also fought back against anti-treaty rights groups in 1991 when they filed a lawsuit against Stop Treaty Abuse/Wisconsin “to put a stop to STA’s campaign of harassment of tribal members exercising off-reservation spearfishing rights.”72 Supported by the GLFWC, the Lac du Flambeau Band’s suit against STA/W was ultimately successful and resulted in an order prohibiting any interference with off-reservation treaty-protected fishing.73 Shortly after this case

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.


73 Ibid. In their summation of the case, the Pierson and the GLFWC notably refers to this as a “Civil Rights case,” distinguishing it from treaty rights cases.
concluded, the Treaty Beer exhibit was developed at the forefront of the George W. Brown, Jr. Museum and Cultural Center.

The centrality of the issues surrounding treaty rights to the development of the museum is reflected in the institution’s mission. The mission states that the purpose of the museum is to “preserve, disseminate, and advance the history and tradition of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe, their reservation, and environs.” The mention of the tribe’s “environs” in the mission statement is unique to the Lac du Flambeau’s museum and highlights the centrality of environmental resources to the purpose of the museum. Amid the on-going treaty rights disputes, the tribe faced criticism not only from local non-Natives, tourists, and businesses, but also from local newspapers and well-funded anti-treaty rights groups, whose claims that tribal fishing practices depleted resources dominated public understandings about the controversy. As such, the museum was formed to both educate and convey the message that “we are still here” in order to directly address critics who claimed modern Indians were “abusing” treaty rights granted to “true Indians,” whom they relegated to the past, and demonstrate the ways in which traditional fishing actually conserved rather than abused resources. By highlighting their long-term tenure on the land and use of the area’s natural resources, the tribe sought to demonstrate continuity of traditional culture to validate contemporary exercising of treaty rights.

From the beginning, the museum founders understood that non-Indians had little understanding of Lac du Flambeau culture, and had few opportunities to get accurate information. On one hand, the Voigt decision had allowed for the revival and continuation of


75 “Project Summary.”
traditional practices central to Ojibwe identity through a process that reaffirmed sovereignty, but “on the other hand, the exercise of these rights [was] met with a non-Indian protest movement that damage[d] the social and commercial relationships between the tribal community and the non-Indian communities around it.”76 Seeing lack of information as the root of these problems, the tribe developed the museum “to amend this situation” by “‘amalgamat[ing] the cultures of the Indian and the non-Indian, through interaction and educational programs.’”77 As such, from the beginning, the tribe made it clear that the space would not only educate the non-Indian public who so often protested sovereignty, but also involve and entertain that public in ways in-line with their previous methods of tapping into tourism. In the Project Summary, the Historical Society planned to build the museum near the Indian Bowl to “blend [it] into the community’s tourism attraction facilities,” even as opportunities for economic development were thought of as secondary.78 In recent years, the tribe has even developed plans to connect the museum and the Indian Bowl via an underground tunnel, though funding for this venture has stalled.79

Over the years, the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center has proven to be a worthwhile venture and has significantly contributed to cultural revitalization and public education efforts by the tribe. As with many tribal museums, the museum encountered difficulties acquiring funding for exhibit and programming updates, material acquisitions, and structural updates before and even after the tribe’s new Lake of the Torches Casino opened in 1996. About a decade after the museum opened, tribal members recognized that the museum

76 Nesper, “Historical Ambivalence,” 3.
77 “Project Summary.”
78 Ibid.
was, at times, “fledgling,” and by the late 1990s, the tribal council and curator Gregg Guthrie sought to implement measures that would help the museum “take off” and “fully engage the community in a process of self-representation that would integrate the museum into the community in a new way.”

In doing so, the Tribal Council hired David Wooley from the Wisconsin Historical Society in 1999, where he had been the curator of anthropology since 1995. Wooley was the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center’s first professionally trained museum employee, whom Guthrie initially thought was “a great guy who would take the museum to another level.”

While initially “impressed that a big man from the State Historical Society would come to our museum,” the tribe soon learned that Wooley would not provide the boost they felt the museum needed, and instead would inflict controversy that took years for the museum and the tribe to overcome. Less than two years after Wooley was hired by the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Council, an anthropologist visiting the museum recognized that a recently acquired peace pipe was of Potawatomi and not Ojibwe origin. After alerting the authorities, Wooley was arrested in the Fall of 2000 and eventually convicted on fourteen counts of felony theft for items stolen from the Wisconsin Historical Society (some of which, like the peace pipe, were placed in the Lac du Flambeau Band’s museum) and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Wooley was later convicted and sentenced to three additional years for theft of artifacts from the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center.

For the museum and tribe as a whole, the Wooley controversy was devastating. In

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80 Guthrie, 4; Guthrie quoted in Nesper, “Historical Ambivalence,” 1. The tribe was surely motivated to make improvements to the museum as a result of the influx of tourists visiting the tribe’s business district as a result of the Lake of the Torches Casino.

cooperating with the investigation, the museum was closed for almost a year while police inventoried the museum’s entire collection to identify any additional stolen property. In addition to forcing an almost year-long closing, Wooley left a trail of conflict in his wake. Tribal member and policeman Lt. Ron Mersch, who was involved in the investigation, explained that while at the museum, Wooley had purposefully “created great dissension on the staff” in order to “clear the museum of everyone knowledgeable about the collection” and “one by one they all quit.”

As a result, by the time the investigation had concluded, most of the museum’s original staff and board were no longer involved. “[He] left a wake of distrust,” Gregg Guthrie explained, one that has “blown our community apart.”

**Conclusion**

It took time for the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center to heal from the Wooley controversy, but heal it did. The museum reopened in June 2001, the same year Wooley became the first person banned from the reservation by the Tribal Council. While it has taken time for the museum to get back on its feet, efforts to improve the space began almost immediately after the reopening. The museum’s current director, Theresa Mitchell, began working at the museum in 2002, a time when “plenty of work” was needed to complete the task of “getting it together” after the institution’s struggles. In many ways, the nature of the museum has changed, as the treaty rights disputes of the 1980s have become less problematic for the tribe.

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82 Ibid.

83 Ibid.


Still, Mitchell reiterated that the goals for the institution remain largely the same, explaining that the museum is still focused on showing “the history of how we lived, how we live now, and how we survive now,” and that “our goal is to show both tribal and non-tribal people that our heritage is still alive.”

What has changed the most for the Lac du Flambeau Band’s museum since its development in the 1980s is its ability to acquire funding, reclaim sacred materials, and provide professional training for museum staff. Funding, repatriation of culturally significant items, and training were obstacles that hindered museum growth and prohibited some museums from opening throughout the post-war decades through the 1980s. Tribes’ abilities to face and overcome these challenges changed drastically in the decades after the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center opened in 1989. In particular, the widespread development of gaming facilities on reservations across the Great Lakes region in conjunction with the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and increased professionalization programs for tribal museums have changed the way that tribal museums are founded, developed, and run. The next chapter discusses these changes, and shows how the tribal museums founded afterward were able to utilize these resources to create sites for activism in the face of new and ongoing challenges. For the Lac du Flambeau, and other tribal museums founded in the twentieth century, such changes have made improvements possible and easier. In the words of Theresa Mitchell, “we have stepped it up now.”

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.
CHAPTER FOUR
GREAT LAKES NATIVE ACTIVISM AND TRIBAL MUSEUMS, 1990 TO 2010

In 1989, shortly after the George W. Brown, Jr. Museum and Cultural Center opened its doors, the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) published a collection of documents supporting the message conveyed at the museum that the “debate” over the exercise of treaty rights had “disintegrated into overt displays of racism with Indian people as the target.”¹ The GLIFWC, an organization formed in 1984 “to educate the public and to assist its members in implementing and protecting treaty rights,” hoped that the evidence they provided would encourage “organizations and individuals” to “recognize and confront racially-motivated actions.”²

Almost immediately, the GLIFWC’s publication had its desired effect. In December that year, the Wisconsin Advisory Committee issued a report to the United States Commission on Civil Rights on the role of racism in the ongoing treaty rights disputes in the state. The report, titled Discrimination Against Chippewa Indians in Northern Wisconsin, decisively concluded that racially-based discrimination was a central element in the dispute, and that measures needed to be taken to improve the situation.³ The media, it seemed, followed suit. Though press

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² Ibid.
coverage just a few years earlier varied in support for either the tribes or anti-treaty protestors, Native historian Patty Loew explains that “by 1990, the media generally...framed the dispute as a conflict of cultures, not a battle over resources.”

Loew further explains that in at least one news report, several Chicago-area tourists “stated they would no longer vacation in the ceded territory, not because of spear fishing, but because of the racist displays surrounding it.”

In light of such publications, several legislators began brainstorming new ways to ease the “[still] escalating tensions” over Ojibwe treaty rights. Echoing one of the Lac du Flambeau Band’s reasons for developing their tribal museum, legislators increasingly recognized that educating the public on tribal history and culture could promote a greater understanding of the history of treaties with Native tribes, as well as the centrality of treaty-protected practices to Native culture and lifeways. As a result, the state of Wisconsin implemented an initiative requiring all public schools to integrate the study of Wisconsin Native history, culture, and tribal sovereignty into the curriculum by September 1, 1991. As part of the curriculum, the legislation, known as Wisconsin Act 31, required “that the state superintendent of schools develop a curriculum for grades 4 through 12 on Chippewa treaty rights.” Furthermore, the legislation mandated that the curriculum be developed “in cooperation” with the state’s tribes and Native

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5 Ibid.

6 Label text for “Schooling Our Children,” Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum, Crandon, WI.


8 Ibid.
education organizations.\(^9\)

Since the implementation of Wisconsin Act 31, the state’s education department has worked with tribes to help teachers adhere to the mandate and effectively teach their students about the history and culture of the state’s Native communities.\(^{10}\) In doing so, the tribal museums within the state have become an essential resource. Online tools provided for educators and others interested in Native history by the state promote tribal museums, which, according to current Oneida Nation Museum curator Eric Doxtator, has greatly impacted the amount of visitors tribal museums see.\(^{11}\) In turn, several of the tribal museums in Wisconsin have incorporated information about Act 31 into their exhibit space, creating a mutually-supporting system that continuously reinforces the centrality of Native tribes in the state’s history, cultural development, and present day identity. Inspired by the legislation in Wisconsin, in 2010, the state of Michigan revised its education legislation to enable tribal members to teach public school classes on Native history and culture without obtaining a Michigan teaching certificate.\(^{12}\) While Minnesota has yet to follow suit, the state’s department of education does provide resources for teachers to effectively teach Native history, and encourages educators, students, and residents alike to visit the state’s tribal museums.

The push for educators to engage with and visit tribal museums as a way to mitigate racial discrimination and treaty rights disputes is only one of a series of developments throughout the

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\(^9\) Label text for “Schooling Our Children.”

\(^{10}\) Doxtator, interview.

\(^{11}\) Ibid. In my interview with Eric Doxtator at the Oneida Nation Museum, he explained that in April 2018, the museum had “at least fifteen school groups come through,” which is “a lot” for any museum.

late 1980s and 1990s that have impacted the foundation, development, and function of tribal museums in the Great Lakes region. While motivated by many of the same underlying goals as earlier tribal museums in the region, tribal museums founded in the decades after 1990 had at their disposal an arsenal of resources not available to earlier museum developers. New sources of funding, collections and programming development, and outside support aided the establishment of these museums, and for some tribes, made a tribally-run museum possible for the first time.

As a result of these developments, a wave of tribes across the country (in what is at times referred to as the “Tribal Museum Movement”) developed tribally-run museums with similar goals in mind. While emerging within this larger context, ultimately, the tribal museums that were developed in the Great Lakes region after 1990 emerged within a particular set of circumstances unique to the region, and with a unique set of goals in mind. Though measures were taken to mitigate backlash against the exercise of treaty rights in Wisconsin, litigation over treaty rights continued across the region. Compounding ongoing disputes over treaty rights, new issues arose as more tribes developed gaming establishments, in some cases quickly becoming the largest employers in their area. Furthermore, some tribes across the region were only beginning to obtain the resources needed to revitalize elements of their traditional culture lost or pushed aside as a result of decades of assimilationist policy. As such, the need for various manifestations of Native activism continued despite the successes and positive developments of the late twentieth century.

**Tribal Sovereignty and Indian Gaming**

As tribal sovereignty and treaty rights were increasingly affirmed by federal and state courts, tribes across the country searched for ways to use their sovereignty to enhance the standard of living on reservations in terms of economic progress and cultural revitalization.
Earlier ventures into tourism, like resorts and fishing guiding, had been moderately profitable, but success varied greatly from tribe to tribe. Recognizing that sovereignty afforded them some legal headway, some tribes toyed with ideas of opening smoke shops and other oft-restricted ventures.\textsuperscript{13} In the early years of the self-determination era, Native tribes had an edge over the competition in such ventures because they did not owe state taxes. This edge was taken away, however, as courts increasingly ruled that while tribal members did not owe state taxes, non-Indian customers at tribally-owned businesses did.\textsuperscript{14} As such, beginning in the 1970s and increasingly in the mid-to-late 1980s, tribes across the country began looking to gaming as a potential venture.

Citing cultural precedence as one reason, tribal nations also recognized gaming as a potentially life-changing venture because, theoretically, tribes would be able to maintain a competitive edge.\textsuperscript{15} As sovereign nations, they would be able to offer more extensive gaming options because they would not be subject to state gaming regulations. As more tribes developed gaming facilities, and as facilities in Florida, California, and Wisconsin grew more profitable, states grew progressively frustrated as reservation gaming institutions increasingly competed with state-run gaming operations. Several lawsuits were filed on the part of both the states and the tribes, most of which were ruled in favor of tribal sovereignty and reaffirmed the legality of gaming on reservations.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} Wilkinson, 330.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 331.

\textsuperscript{15} For example, in my conversation with Grand Traverse Band tribal elder Dave, he explained that for the Grand Traverse Band, gaming is “cultural,” something that the tribe has “always done” as part of their “tradition and culture.” Dave, interview.

\textsuperscript{16} Including \textit{Bryan v. Itasca County} in the late 1970s, which affirmed that Public Law 280 gave states jurisdiction over criminal cases only, not civil regulatory issues; the Seminole Tribe of Florida case in the
The success of tribal nations in the early gaming court battles throughout the 1980s signaled a decisive shift in favor of tribal sovereignty. As growth of Indian gaming continued and its legality was repeatedly reaffirmed, several states and tribal nations alike began lobbying for clearer regulation of and statutory basis for Indian gaming. Congress responded with the passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act in 1988, which created the National Indian Gaming Commission to oversee tribally-run gaming operations, shield gaming organizations from crime and “other corrupting influences,” and help gaming operations “promote tribal economic development, self-sufficiency, and strong tribal governments.”

Across the Great Lakes region, the growth of Native-run gaming facilities in the 1980s and 90s provided a new outlook on possibilities for the future. Like other tourism ventures though, tribal gaming brought with it both challenges and opportunities. Tribal gaming exacerbated existing resentment from local non-Indian residents and business owners about the perceived “special” treatment of Native people by the federal government. Gaming enabled Great Lakes tribal communities to draw visitors onto their reservations and, thus, into their worlds, but by virtue of the fact that people enter a sovereign nation on which gaming is legally allowed, tribes necessarily “other” themselves in the process. As such, tribal gaming brought with it a new set of problematic stereotypes, ones that associate gambling with “corruption,”

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late 1970s, in which Judge Norman Roettger ruled in 1980 in favor of Seminole Tribal Sovereignty; and California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians in the mid-1980s, which ruled that state gambling laws were regulatory, not prohibitory, and did not apply to sovereign nations.

“inequality,” and “special rights,” and exposed tribal nations to new scrutiny couched in rhetoric similar to that utilized by anti-treaty fishing rights protestors a decade earlier.\(^\text{18}\)

While inherently problematic, ultimately tribal gaming has positively impacted reservation life across the Great Lakes region and has, in many ways, made possible the realization of the renaissance of traditional culture that post-war Native activists envisioned. Tribal gaming facilities in and of themselves are an expression of sovereignty, displaying to the outside world a tribe’s sovereign authority to self-determine their future path. Significantly, tribal gaming has provided some of the financial resources needed for Native people to shape their society. In the Great Lakes region, as gaming profits have expanded, so too have efforts to revive traditional culture and take control over tribal history. As such, gaming facilities have become spaces that have generated “both economic and symbolic capital.”\(^\text{19}\) Tribal gaming historian Jessica Cattelino refers to gaming profits as the “currency of culture,” meaning that for Native tribes, gaming money often holds more of a cultural value than a financial one.\(^\text{20}\) She explains that gaming enables tribal communities to exercise their sovereignty and transform money’s value in ways that reinforce their social and cultural distinctiveness. Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Tribal Chairman Joseph C. Raphael reinforces this idea, for example, stating that the Grand Traverse Band’s economic development has enabled the tribe to “defend its sovereignty” by providing “financial help for numerous community programs” and “a better

\(^{18}\) Jessica Cattelino, *High Stakes: Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 1. This is complicated by the fact that while “othering” themselves, tribal gaming also further connected tribes, as Mary Lawlor explains, to “the economic and social flows of larger national and global circuits.” Lawlor, 31.


\(^{20}\) Cattelino, 2.
outlook on life.”21 As such, gaming as both subsidized and catalyzed tribal cultural revitalization and production.22

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

In addition to the advent of tribal gaming on reservations, the development of tribal museums was also greatly impacted by the enactment of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990.23 Enacted as human rights legislation to address centuries of exploitation, displacement, and dispossession of American Indian objects and human remains, NAGPRA oversees the processes of repatriation and protection, as well as a number of other duties including the implementation of regulations, grants, training, and education for tribes. While earlier tribal museums in the Great Lakes region relied primarily on donations and occasional purchases for the development of their collections, tribal museums founded after 1990 have been able to utilize NAGPRA to repatriate cultural items held in non-Native institutions. The process has been (and continues to be) problematic in many instances, as oral histories are questioned or disregarded in favor of scientific verification (or lack thereof). Yet, in every case across the Great Lakes region, tribal museums have utilized NAGPRA and their collections have benefitted. In some cases, as with the Bois Forte Heritage Museum and the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, NAGPRA provided the basis for the development of the museum.

As with tribal gaming, the development of NAGPRA demonstrates a decisive shift towards not only recognition of tribal sovereignty, but also significant federal support for


22 Also see Lawlor, 21.

executions of sovereignty. The issues that prompted the development of NAGPRA date back to
the time of European contact, escalating in the late nineteenth century as emerging institutions,
like the Field Museum and the Smithsonian Institution, sought American Indian remains and
cultural materials for scientific and preservation purposes. While seemingly innocuous, both
rationales are inherently problematic, as scientific study of Native remains was initially driven by
the underlying assumption that Native bodies were inherently different (and inferior) to Euro-
American white bodies, and as preservation was initially driven by the assumption that Native
American culture would eventually die out.24 Art Historian Janet C. Berlo further points out that,
as most large museums’ American Indian collections were created between 1860 and 1930, they
were developed during what was arguably one of, if not “the most traumatic period in Native
American history.”25 As such, materials created during this period are represented as the
definition of what is “traditional” or “authentic” and without proper cultural understandings and
historical contexts, their real meanings can be, and often are, obscured.

As the Tribal Sovereignty Movement found success on the national stage, and as tribal
sovereignty and treaty rights were increasingly recognized, tribal activists used their increasing
political power to call for legislation that would enable tribes to address the problematic nature
of mainstream museums’ Native collections, repatriate culturally significant objects and human
remains, and protect Native graves and sacred sites. In light of the changing ideas about the role
of museums and the importance of sharing authority discussed in Chapter Three, many museum

specializes in cultural heritage law, explains that from the Civil War through the late twentieth century,
“the concept of the vanishing Indian shaped [most] collectors’ focus.”

25 Janet C. Berlo, The Early Years of Native American Art History (University of British Columbia Press,
1992), 2.
professionals also sought to address their institutions’ long histories of problematic collections practices. As a result, in 1979, Congress was presented with a report resulting from a mandate of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, which highlighted the illegitimate and at times criminal means of acquiring Native objects. In many cases, acquisition history of an item could not be traced back to the original owner, tribe, or creator, indicating that other means of acquiring the object had been utilized, including war looting, pressure from Indian agents, theft, or sale by people unauthorized to do so. In light of this report, a number of states began enacting protection and repatriation legislation, though none in the Great Lakes region decided to do so.

By the late 1980s, the push for federal legislation accelerated when a number of Northern Cheyenne leaders discovered that almost 18,500 human remains were warehoused in the Smithsonian’s collections. According to historians Jack F. Trope and Walter R. Echo-Hawk, this discovery “served as a catalyst for a concerted national effort by Indian tribes and organizations to obtain legislation to repatriate human remains and cultural artifacts to Indian tribes and descendants of the deceased.”  

Between 1986 and 1990, a number of bills were introduced to Congress to address the issue of protecting and repatriating Native objects, though none were successful until the National Museum of the American Indian Act was passed on November 28, 1989. This act proved to be crucial in obtaining legislation for repatriation and graves protection. In addition to creating the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) within the Smithsonian Institution, the act also required the Smithsonian to inventory all of its American Indian remains and objects in consultation with tribal leaders. Once identified, the act required


that the Smithsonian notify the tribe affiliated with the object and “consider [the item] for return.”

The repatriation provision of the NMAI Act was developed in consultation with several tribal leaders, indicating a shift away from previous practices. Building upon the precedent set by this act, in early 1990, a panel of museum personnel, scientists, and tribal leaders met and discussed options for moving forward with nation-wide legislation that would provide the legal foundation for repatriation and protection beyond the Smithsonian’s collections. Collectively, the panel issued the Report of the Panel for a National Dialogue on Museum/Native American Relations, which was reviewed by the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs. As a result, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act was signed into law on November 16, 1990.

The process of implementing and fulfilling the provisions of NAGPRA has at times been problematic. Conflicts between museums, tribes, and the federal government have arisen consistently since the act was passed, often highlighting significant fundamental misunderstandings about Native cultural and spiritual perspectives. NAGPRA has faced criticism from museum personnel and scientists who argue that items should be retained by institutions with means to study them and ensure safe curation of the collections. Tribes, on the other hand, point out that this argument ignores the cultural significance of sacred items and human remains, often leading to misinterpretation or misrepresentation. Still, NAGPRA has effectively changed the way that non-Native museums and tribes communicate about objects, their history, and their cultural and/or spiritual significance and meaning. NAGPRA has also changed the way that tribal

museums are developed and run, and in cases like the Saginaw Chippewa’s Ziibiwing Center, has provided the impetus for their development.

**The Indian Arts and Crafts Act**

The Indian Arts and Crafts Act (IACA), enacted the same year as NAGPRA, also impacted the development of tribal museums by inadvertently providing support for tribal museum gift shops and thus by extension, tribal museums themselves. The IACA is a truth-in-advertising law that “prohibits misrepresentation in marketing of Indian arts and crafts products within the United States.” By making it illegal to sell any art or craft product in a manner that “falsely suggests it is Indian produced,” the IACA provides not only cultural but legal credence to authentic traditional arts and crafts over similar items produced by non-Native opportunists. In doing so, the IACA has inadvertently supported the development of gift shops, and boosted their ability to provide some financial support for the museum. Thus, many tribal museums have made their gift shops a priority, providing tourists with an assurance that their items are authentic and enabling tribes to intermix educational materials with art and craft products often more frequently coveted by shoppers.²⁹

**Tribal Museum Professionalization and Funding**

The IGRA, NAGPRA, and IACA are direct results of Native activism that was initiated in the post-war years and have had an immense impact on the process of developing tribal museums. All are the result of Native activists’ efforts to assert control over their past, present, and future by maintaining and/or revitalizing traditional culture, asserting tribal sovereignty, creating opportunities for economic development, and improving Native life both on and off the reservation. Significantly, all of these pieces of legislation were not only the result of Native

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action, but were also developed and implemented in consultation with tribal leaders, reflecting the federal government’s acknowledgement of tribal sovereignty and active support for it. This collaboration also reflected a willingness of tribal leaders to work within the mainstream governmental system to achieve their goals, which has in turn been reflected in the use of Euro-American conceptions of developmental, organizational, and managerial best practices by many tribally-run museums. This collaboration between tribal leaders and the federal government coincided with the increasing inclusion of Native voices in non-Native institutions. Collectively, these changes led both tribal leaders and mainstream museum professionals to recognize the benefits of tribally-run museums and as a result, sparked a wave of new professionalization and funding opportunities for tribal museums from both Native and non-Native organizations.

The creation of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) has been particularly influential for tribes looking to develop or improve their own tribal museums. Founded initially with materials donated by artifact collector George Heye, the NMAI was designed and developed over a five-year period from the 1989 enactment of the National Museum of the American Indian Act to the institution’s opening in 1994. Over the course of its development, the Smithsonian worked closely with tribal leaders and tribally-run organizations from across the country. The development process, known as The Way of the People, involved conversations not only about how the museum would effectively share authority with Native tribes, but also how the institution could serve as a site for initiating action to better the lives of tribal people across the country. These conversations surrounding the development of the NMAI influenced many tribes to “[create] the conditions for change in their local tribes and regions, off the National Mall and away from Washington D.C.,” and, at the same time, sparked the creation
Since its initiation, NMAI’s Museum Training Program has provided tribal museum personnel with various professionalization opportunities, including workshops on collections development and management, exhibit development, archival research, language preservation programming, and fundraising, to name a few. The program has also offered technical assistance and a hands-on, on-site museum studies program to “further the experience of individuals currently working in Native museums and cultural centers.” In 2006, the program published a guide to tribal museums and cultural centers in the United States, Canada, and Mexico called *Living Homes for Cultural Expression: North American Native Perspectives on Creating Community Museums*, which was made available for free for tribal museum personnel and provides insight into various tribally-run institutions’ functions and goals. Several Great Lakes tribal museums, such as the Arvid E. Miller Library Museum, have utilized NMAI’s training program and resources to help initiate several projects, including the digitization of the museum’s archives.

While NMAI and its training program have influenced the development of tribal museums and assisted in that development process, its effect has been limited by what many see as its inherently problematic assumption that tribal museums are and should be developed like mainstream museums. Recognizing the need to assess tribal communities’ preservation needs and desires on their own terms, the Department of the Interior directed the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a study in 1990 and report to Congress on “the funding needs for the management, research, interpretation, protection, and development” of historically significant

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30 Message, 126.

materials and sites on reservation lands.\textsuperscript{32} Acknowledging that the Smithsonian’s programs were “designed to assist tribal members in developing and improving museum-related preservation activities,” the NPS report points out that they “do not begin to meet the full range of…needs” specific to tribal communities.\textsuperscript{33} Specifically, the report found that for Native tribes, museum functions and historic preservation are intimately tied in unique ways, and that “history” has a different meaning for tribal communities in ways that significantly shape the goals of tribally-run museums.

The report, initially titled Senate Report 101-85 and since published as \textit{Keepers of the Treasures: Protecting Historic Properties and Cultural Traditions on Indian Lands}, sought to promote greater understandings of the unique wants and needs of tribal communities in terms of preservation of traditional culture and materials, and provided the foundation for the development of the NPS-supported Tribal Historic Preservation Program and the establishment of its grants programs.\textsuperscript{34} Developed in consultation with tribes, various tribally-run organizations, NPS staff, state historic preservation officers, and other federal agencies, the report concludes that tribes “must have the opportunity to participate fully in the national historic preservation program, but on terms that respect their cultural values, traditions, and sovereignty,” implying that they had not been able to do so beforehand.\textsuperscript{35} These terms, as identified by the


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., iii.


\textsuperscript{35} James M. Ridenour to Colleagues, September 13, 1990. Ridenour was the director of the National Park Service and wrote this letter to accompany copies of \textit{Keepers of the Treasures} distributed to his NPS colleagues.
study, must recognize that “historic preservation” as ordinarily practiced by Federal agencies, local governments, and State Historic Preservation Officers, is generally “place-based,” while “preservation from a tribal perspective is conceived more broadly,” in which place is one aspect of many that enable “the retention and the preservation of the American Indian way of life.”

Thus, the study importantly points out that while preservation tends to make one think of structures or sites, from a Native perspective, it includes “the concern for the cultural environment as a whole, including both historic properties and cultural traditions.”

The report also seeks to clarify why preservation of the past matters for tribal communities. In doing so, a break from mainstream understandings of “history” is required, as “history,” from a Native perspective, does not take place in the past but rather is as much a part of the present as the present moment itself. The report explains that in developing museums and in protecting sacred sites, tribes “seek to preserve their cultural heritage as a living part of contemporary life.”

An unnamed tribal representative who was involved in the study explains that in contrast to Euro-American understandings of the past, “the past is as real as us being here right now,” and that thinking of “history” as “a significant past event” is “completely contrary” to Native understandings. As another tribal representative explained, “all the tradition and heritage and

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36 NPS, Keepers, 3.
37 Ridenour to Colleagues.
38 Keith Basso’s seminal study on meanings of the past, places, and historical study in Western Apache communities, discusses this unique perspective at length. While Basso’s book takes place outside of the geographical scope of this study, his findings are in many ways consistent with conversations I’ve had with tribal leaders and tribal museum personnel. History for Native people, he argues, is subjective, and all recollections are equally valid. History is never more than a narration away, and is recalled in order to deepen awareness in the present. Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).
39 NPS, Keepers, i.
40 Ibid., 5.
interdependence with the surrounding world” together make up Native “history,” which is, in effect, “the dynamics of continuing culture.”41 The past, then, is understood as an active part of the present, and history “is seen as a key to fighting contemporary problems” by helping “to restore structure and pride to tribal society” and by “providing direction from the past that is vital to the future.”42

Given this understanding of the past as an active part of the present, institutionalizing history may seem counterproductive. By relegating the past to the past in a sometimes-stagnant museum space, the past is separated from the present by virtue of the fact that it is represented as finished. But, as the report makes clear, “history,” from a Native perspective, encompasses “tradition and heritage and interdependence with the surrounding world.”43 Because interdependence with the surrounding world is an important part of Native history, utilizing Euro-American conceptions of best museum practice was not seen as an issue. Instead, the issue, the report identified, was about control over interpretation. Tribes’ abilities to preserve their culture and “maintain the integrity of their cultures” has been “seriously damaged by past Federal policies, notably those favoring assimilation into ‘mainstream’ Euro-American society, allotment of reservation land to individuals, and termination of tribal status.”44 As a result, the National Park Service report found that “the key issue is control.”45 From their unique perspective and understanding of history and the past, tribal communities were primarily

\[41\] Ibid.
\[42\] Ibid., i.
\[43\] Ibid., 5.
\[44\] Ibid., ii.
\[45\] Ibid.
“interested in studying their past and in interpreting it through their own museums” as opposed to those “over which they have no control” so that they would have the power to “link the study of the past with the present and the future” in ways consistent with traditional understandings.\textsuperscript{46}

In addition to promoting greater understandings of Native perspectives on history and preservation, \textit{Keepers of the Treasures} also reports on the findings of a survey assessing the funding needs of tribally-run preservation programs and institutions. While more tribes were developing gaming facilities that would assist with funding issues over time, the survey found that as of 1990, funding for tribal museums and other preservation programs was extremely limited. The report stated that an estimated $175 million would be needed to make the construction and improvements desired by the seventy-five tribes who were involved in the study, a number wholly inconsistent with the approximately $500,000 in grants NPS awarded to tribes “to preserve cultural heritage” that same year.\textsuperscript{47}

Ultimately, based on its findings, the study made a series of recommendations to Congress for ways that it could effectively assist Native tribes in preserving their unique culture on their own terms. Specifically, the report mandated that “the historical and cultural foundations of American Indian tribal cultures should be preserved and maintained as a vital part of our community life and development,” and that Congress should recognize that “the cultural heritage of Indian tribes differ in character from other American preservation programs.”\textsuperscript{48} As a vital part of the larger American society, and as unique, culturally distinct communities, the report recommended that “federal policy should encourage agencies to provide grants for

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., iii.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 181.
museum…projects” (amongst others), and that federal assistance should be provided, where needed, to “promote and assist in the preservation of the cultural heritage of Indian tribes.”

Finally, as its last recommendation, the study suggested that the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 be amended “to establish a separate title authorizing programs, policies and procedures for tribal heritage preservation and for financial support as part of the annual appropriations process.”

Because of the findings published in *Keepers of the Treasures*, the National Historic Preservation Act was amended in 1992 to create Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) on tribal lands. Each THPO has a federally-employed THPO officer, who works with federal agencies to manage federal assistance for tribal preservation ventures and maintains the responsibilities of State Historic Preservation Officers on tribal lands, but in ways consistent with traditional tribal understandings of history and preservation. By 1996, twelve THPOs had been created and by 2012, over 140 existed across the country. In the Great Lakes region, there are over twenty-five THPOs, including all the tribes involved in this study except from the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa, who do not have a THPO. In almost every case, THPOs are heavily involved in the tribal museum, and in some cases (such as the Menominee Logging Camp Museum) the museum is directed or curated by THPO employees.

In 1998, several THPOs founded the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO) for the purposes of “supporting the culture and heritage activities” of federally-recognized tribes, providing technical assistance to THPOs across the country, “promoting public interest, as appropriate, in tribal historic and cultural preservation,”

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49 Ibid., v.

50 Ibid.
encouraging cultural preservation amongst tribes, providing “a forum for discussion and dissemination of ideas for more effective cultural heritage and preservation programs,” and “increasing public awareness…of the importance of the role of the physical environment in the…preservation of Native traditions and culture.”51

Since its foundation, NATHPO has been supported by the National Park Service and has been instrumental in providing tribal museum founders and staff with the resources necessary to establish, develop, maintain, and improve their museums. In the past several decades, NATHPO has increasingly worked with outside organizations and institutions, including the National Museum of the American Indian, the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences (IMLS), the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), to develop studies, workshops, grant programs, and other support vital to the functions of tribal museums. Significantly, NATHPO has made it a priority to consistently provide tribal museums with repatriation training opportunities and support, as the process has proved to be difficult and, in some cases, emotionally, spiritually, and financially damaging. NATHPO has also been responsible for a number of studies on tribal museums that have been helpful for tribal museum personnel and researchers alike, including George Abrams’ oft-referenced 2003 study *Tribal Museums in America*, developed in association with the AASLH with funding by IMLS. Abrams’ study is particularly notable for providing the impetus for NATHPO’s National Native Museum Training Program, which has provided significant resources and training for tribal museum personnel.

In addition to the opportunities provided by the development of the NMAI and those spurred by the *Keepers of the Treasures* report, tribal museums developed after 1990 also

51 Ibid.
benefitted from the enactment of the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act in 1996. As shown in Chapters Two and Three, grants from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) were crucial in the foundation and development of several early tribal museums. With the passage of NAHASDA in 1996, the process of obtaining HUD grants for cultural organizations was streamlined as the act reorganized the system of federal assistance provided to Native tribes for housing and infrastructure by consolidating several programs into a singular block grant program. This program, the Indian Housing Block Grant program, provides grants for community development enterprises, including the development of tribal museums.52

Collectively, the development of tribal gaming facilities, the enactment of NAGPRA, and the development of various funding and professionalization organizations and opportunities throughout the 1990s and early 2000s fundamentally changed the ways that tribal museums were founded and developed. For many, these developments made the foundation of a tribally-run museum possible for the first time. While these developments altered the possibilities and ways in which tribal museums are established, ultimately, across the Great Lakes region, the underlying goals and reasons for developing tribal museums remained largely unchanged as tribes across the region continued to face challenges to tribal sovereignty and the exercise of treaty rights. Gaming also brought with it a new set of challenges, as old critiques of tribal sovereignty were given new outlets. The increasing economic wealth and stability provided by gaming brought with it the ability to buy back lands lost through treaties, allotment, and bad or

52 For more, see the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act’s website: https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/ih/codetalk/nahasda. While founded outside the scope of this study, it is important to acknowledge the development of the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums in 2010. This organization grew out of a string of conferences funded largely by IMLS and has been instrumental in helping tribal museums obtain grants, training, and information helpful to their endeavors.
corrupt land deals, as well as the opportunity for tribes to take the place of outside businesses as the largest employers on the reservations and in nearby townships. These developments, though, at times met with resistance, and compounded ongoing struggles over treaty rights. With greater understanding of the roles that museums can play in creating social change, and with increased funding, professionalization, and federal support, tribes increasingly turned to the development of tribal museums as a crucial avenue for activism as issues over sovereignty, treaty rights, and cultural revitalization continued to plague Great Lakes Native communities. 53

Ojibwe Treaty Rights Battles in Northern Minnesota

On December 19, 1984, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa tribal member Curtis Gagnon ventured off the reservation in Minnesota into the territory ceded in the 1854 Treaty of La Pointe in search of a moose. Gagnon knew that hunting off the reservation land and outside of the state of Minnesota’s designated hunting season was illegal. He also knew that the recent Voigt Decision that affirmed Chippewa hunting, fishing, and gathering rights in territory ceded in the 1837 Treaty would not have happened had the Tribble brothers not taken the risky and drastic measures that forced the courts to make the ruling. As a result, Gagnon walked off the reservation that day to moose hunt in the ceded territory “want[ing] to be arrested to force a judge to rule definitively” on Chippewa treaty rights in Minnesota. 54

Gagnon did shoot a moose that day and, as expected, was issued a citation from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. In response, Gagnon filed a suit against the state,

53 I use the word “increasingly” here because the majority of tribal museums in the Great Lakes region and across the country were founded after 1990. As of 2003, Abrams’ study reported that over 44% of all tribal museums were founded between 1990 and 2003. Of the museums involved in this study, five out of nine (55%) were founded after 1990. Abrams, 6.

wanting to “force the question” of whether the state of Minnesota would uphold tribal treaty rights as Wisconsin had done the previous year. Gagnon was soon joined in the suit by his band, as well as the Bois Forte and Fond du Lac bands. “The word has to get out,” Gagnon recalled thinking, “that we’re going to stand up for our rights.” Word did get out, as a local newspaper declared Gagnon’s action “The Shot That Triggered the Treaty Rights Battle.”

![Curtis Gagnon](image)

**Figure 10. Curtis Gagnon**  
Credit: Dan Kraker, MPR News

While Gagnon hoped to ignite litigation that would reaffirm the rulings delivered in the Fox and Voigt decisions in Michigan and Wisconsin, he instead found himself enmeshed in “four years of living hell” that proved “getting a final answer” in Minnesota “[wouldn’t] be easy.” Before the court delivered its ruling, the Grand Portage, Bois Forte, and Fond du Lac bands collectively agreed to a financial compromise with the state that guaranteed each band $1.6 million each year in exchange for an agreement that the bands would not fish commercially,

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55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.


or use spears or gill nets during the spawning seasons on the lands ceded in treaties. While Gagnon had been inspired by the litigation in Wisconsin, other Minnesota Ojibwe “did not want to see the conflict…that had erupted in Wisconsin” happen in Minnesota, and decided to settle to avoid the backlash treaty rights activists faced in other parts of the Great Lakes region.59 Although the agreement still reaffirmed Chippewa rights to hunt, fish, and gather in ceded territories, the regulations put in place by the settlements disappointed Gagnon and turned him “into an outsider” on the reservation.60 “I thought rights were sacred,” he said, affirming his position that treaty rights should not be for sale.61

Significantly, Gagnon was not alone in his assessment of the settlement. Directly influenced by the decisions made in Michigan and Wisconsin in favor of treaty rights, as well as Gagnon’s actions in the ceded territory and in the courts thereafter, in the early 1990s, another Ojibwe band, the Mille Lacs Band filed a lawsuit seeking affirmation of their treaty rights in Minnesota.62 While this dissertation is primarily concerned with the situation involving the Fond du Lac and Bois Forte bands and their museums in Minnesota, the cases surrounding all of the Ojibwe bands are intimately tied and thus, some discussion of the highly publicized and contentious Mille Lacs case is necessary.

As part of the 1983 Voigt Decision, the rights reaffirmed in Wisconsin were in theory applied to all the lands ceded in the 1837 Treaty, including those in Minnesota. At the time the

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 As attorney Marc Slonim explained, “it is unlikely there would have been a Mille Lacs case but for the 1983 decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit in the Lac Courte Oreilles case.” Marc Slonim, “Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians et al. v. State of Minnesota et al., District of Minnesota, Case No. 4-90-605,” in Cleland, 132.
Treaty was signed, neither Wisconsin or Minnesota had become a state.\textsuperscript{63} Thus, the 1837 Treaty was made with all the Ojibwe bands living in the territory that now encompasses both Wisconsin and Minnesota. As such, following the Voigt Decision, the Mille Lacs Band contacted the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to discuss the implementation of the rights affirmed by the federal court. Although the Minnesota bands had not been participants in the \textit{Lac Courte Oreilles} case, because the courts’ decision was extended to all signatories of the 1837 Treaty, they “could see no reason to distinguish [their] rights in the Minnesota portion of the cession from the rights of the Lac Courte Oreilles band in the Wisconsin portion of the cession.”\textsuperscript{64} The state of Minnesota, however, did not see things this way. The state responded to the Mille Lacs’ inquires by asserting that because Minnesota was under the jurisdiction of the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals rather than Judge Voigt’s Seventh Circuit Court, the Voigt Decision would not apply to the Minnesota bands. In addition, the state of Minnesota asserted that the 1855 Treaty of Washington had terminated the Mille Lacs Band’s usufructuary rights, meaning “legally-retained rights of tribes to continue to sustain themselves by harvesting natural resources on treaty-ceded lands.”\textsuperscript{65}

At the time of the state’s response, the Minnesota Chippewa bands, like those in Wisconsin, faced widespread poverty and economic instability. While gaming profits had begun to help bands across the state “plow back” toward “economic stability,” former Fond du Lac tribal chairwoman Karen Diver later explained that “one generation of casino profits can’t erase

\textsuperscript{63} Wisconsin became a state in 1848. Minnesota became a state in 1858.

\textsuperscript{64} Slonim, 133.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
multiple generations of historical trauma.”\textsuperscript{66} Despite this precarious financial position, the bands were “intent on preserving [their] culture and heritage,” which “included netting fish [on lakes in ceded territories] for ceremonial and subsistence purposes.”\textsuperscript{67} As in Michigan and Wisconsin, “hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering form the foundation of Chippewa culture” in Minnesota, and so the Mille Lacs and Fond du Lac bands, even “with extremely limited financial resources,” felt it was crucial to their survival to do whatever was necessary to fight the state’s infringement on their treaty rights.\textsuperscript{68}

In light of the state’s refusal to adhere to the Voigt Decision, the Mille Lacs Band recognized that additional materials would be necessary to prove their case. Earlier Great Lakes treaty rights cases in Wisconsin and Michigan had established a precedent of three main principals for winning treaty rights battles in the courts. First, earlier cases had established that where treaty articles were ambiguous on hunting, fishing, and gathering rights, courts were forced to rule in favor of the tribes. Second, courts had mandated that treaties had to be interpreted as the tribes would have understood them at the time, not the federal government. And finally, earlier cases had established a general rule that when in doubt, treaties must be interpreted liberally in favor of tribes.\textsuperscript{69} To do this, the Mille Lacs Band hired a number of attorneys, anthropologists, and historians to help them uncover documentation that would

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\textsuperscript{67} Slonim, 134.
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\textsuperscript{68} Douglas P. Thompson, \textit{The Right to Hunt and Fish Therein: Understanding Chippewa Treaty Rights in Minnesota’s 1854 Ceded Territory} (Duluth: 1854 Treaty Authority Org, 2017), 7. 1854 Treaty Authority is an inter-tribal natural resource management organization that implements the off-reservation hunting, fishing, and gathering rights of the Grand Portage and Bois Forte Bands of Chippewa Indians in the territories ceded in the 1854 Treaty of La Pointe. This document is a report prepared by attorney Douglas P. Thompson to promote greater understanding of the Chippewa rights guaranteed by the treaty, and the allocation and management system of their resources.
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\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
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support their interpretation of the 1837, 1854, and 1855 treaties. In light of their findings, the Mille Lacs Band filed a suit against the state of Minnesota on August 13, 1990.

Like the cases in Wisconsin and Michigan, the Mille Lacs lawsuit garnered media attention as the case roused tensions between the band and their non-Native neighbors. While the Mille Lacs Band was preparing their case and amid much of the media attention, the Fond du Lac Band, inspired by the mounting *Mille Lacs* case, pulled out of the agreement they had settled on alongside the Bois Forte and Grand Portage bands a few years earlier. Following the filing of the *Mille Lacs* case, the Fond du Lac Band filed their own suit in 1992 to begin exercising their treaty rights.\(^\text{70}\)

While the Mille Lacs and Fond du Lac cases were filed separately, the judgments in each case were influenced by the other and the proceedings were consolidated over time. In the first phase of rulings in the Mille Lacs case in 1994, the court reaffirmed the Voigt Decisions’ applicability in Minnesota and found that the Mille Lacs Band not only retained their rights guaranteed by treaties, but that their rights “included the taking of resources for commercial purposes and were not limited to any particular methods, techniques or gear.”\(^\text{71}\) The courts also ruled that these rights applied to the Fond du Lac Band as well, and henceforth all decisions in

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\(^{70}\) As self-identified “proud Fond du Lac Indian” David G. Danielson explained to the press in 2000, just one week after the Fond du Lac Band’s museum opened, “when the Treaty Rights issue came about I initially thought dealing with the State of Minnesota was a good thing…we at Fond du Lac assumed that because tourism is the biggest industry in the state that the state of Minnesota would offer Fond du Lac a huge yearly settlement. After all, fishing alone is a multi-billion dollar industry! The state’s offer was $1.5 million per year. To me, that didn’t seem like nearly enough of a fair settlement.” Danielson goes on to explain that “I knew we needed the money at the time, but I had to weigh the money versus giving up reserved rights in the ceded territory.” In weighing his position, Danielson thought about what his grandfather, a signatory of the 1854 Treaty, would want. “My answer was [he] wouldn’t want it. The Treaty is our most powerful document we possess today and I know the language in it will protect us, as a people, for years and generations to come. We must never sell even a part of it!” David G. Danielson, “Not all Fond du Lacers Happy with Leadership, Lack Thereof,” in *The Native American Press/Ojibwe News*, July 28, 2000, 4.

\(^{71}\) Thompson, 18.
the *Mille Lacs* case were extended to the Fond du Lac Band. In addition, the court extended these rights in Minnesota ceded territories to the six bands of Wisconsin Ojibwe involved in the *Lac Courte Oreilles* case, including the Lac du Flambeau. The United States Supreme Court upheld the state’s decision in 1999.

While the Minnesota bands prevailed throughout the court proceedings of the 1990s, ambiguities about treaty rights remained as the courts repeatedly declared that a formal ruling on the allocation and management of ceded territory resources “was unnecessary at the time.” As such, the Mille Lacs and Fond du Lac’s success in court was clouded with uncertainty as “some issues were left unresolved” for over two decades. Despite maintaining the 1988 agreement with the state, ambiguities abounded in terms of treaty rights with the Grand Portage and Bois Forte bands as well. Enforcement of the agreement was (and is) overseen by the pan-tribal organization 1854 Treaty Authority on the part of the Grand Portage and Bois Forte bands, and simultaneously by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources deputies on the part of the state. 1854 Treaty Authority deputies can, in some case, issue citations to non-tribal members off

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72 While this case extended rights to ceded territories in Minnesota to the Wisconsin bands, Minnesota bands were not able to exercise their treaty rights in Wisconsin until April 2012. “Fond du Lac Opens Access to Wisconsin Ceded Territory,” in *Nahgahchiwanong Dibahjimowinan*, April, 2012, 2. *Nahgahchiwanong Dibahjimowinan* is the Fond du Lac Band’s monthly newspaper.

73 For more on the Minnesota Ojibwe litigation, see James M. McClurken, ed., *Fish in the Lakes, Wild Rice, and Game in Abundance: Testimony on Behalf of Mille Lacs Ojibwe Hunting and Fishing Rights* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000). McClurken’s text provides an overview of the ethnohistorical basis for Ojibwe hunting and fishing rights, including the text of and interpretation of the treaties between the tribe and the federal government, and information about the court testimony that led to the decision to uphold Ojibwe treaty rights.

74 Ibid.

75 “State of Minnesota, Fond du Lac Band Reach Agreement on Treaty Rights,” in *The Duluth News Tribune*, December 8, 2017, 1. An official agreement was finally reached in December of 2017 after decades of ambiguity and disputes over the exercising of treaty rights and the allocation and management of resources.
the reservation in ceded territories, while Minnesota DNR deputies can cite band members as well. This cross-deputizing created confusion for both Native and non-Native hunters and fishermen, which has been further compounded by the agreement’s “less defined terms of what’s allowable and what’s not.”

Despite measures put in place to avoid treaty rights backlash, such ambiguities gave rise to a new onslaught of treaty resistance from various vigilante organizations.

As in Michigan and Wisconsin, bands in Minnesota sought to assert and exercise their treaty rights because, as current Fond du Land chairman explained, “our hunting, fishing, and gathering rights under 1854 Treaty [are] central to the lives, culture, and traditions of the Fond du Lac people. It is inaadiziwin – our way of life.” While the courts determined that the bands in the state had presented ample evidence to prove the legality of the treaties and the centrality of these rights to their culture and history, many non-Native residents, tourists, and businessmen did not agree. As in Wisconsin, several anti-treaty advocate groups were formed in the wake of the Bois Forte and Grand Portage agreement and the court’s decision to adhere to the treaty rights of the Mille Lacs and Fond du Lac bands. While such groups in Wisconsin have generally been perceived as more aggressive in their actions against those exercising treaty rights, groups such as Sportsmen Protecting Every American’s Right (SPEAR) and Proper Economic Resource Management (PERM) in Minnesota rivaled or equaled anti-treaty groups in Wisconsin in their rhetoric, press coverage, and political clout.

PERM, in particular, garnered significant media attention throughout the 1990s and early 2000s due to its ardent support from Bud Grant, former coach of the Minnesota Vikings football

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76 Kraker, “Stand Up for Our Rights,” 1.

77 “State of Minnesota,” 1.
team. Since its founding in 1993, PERM members have been active in advocating their position to the press and in consistently churning out articles on the group’s website. From its founding, PERM has taken PARR’s “equal rights” rhetoric to another level, referring to “Indian policy” and “Indian’s special rights” as “racist” towards white Americans.\(^78\) Grant, often described as a local icon and avid outdoorsmen, got involved with PERM after being inspired by the anti-treaty activism near his vacation cabin in Wisconsin. “We’ve got a form of apartheid right here in America,” Grant said at the time.\(^79\) “We have different laws based on race. Indians can do something we can't do. That's apartheid.”\(^80\)

![Figure 11. Howard Hanson and Bud Grant at a PERM anti-treaty rights protest](PERM.org)

As the *Mille Lacs* case moved from the Minnesota courts to the United States Supreme Court, Bud Grant and his fellow PERM members filed an appeal to have the Voigt Decision’s application overturned. “Ultimately,” Grant explained, “what we're hoping for is a whole new Indian policy.”\(^81\) In early 1999, PERM lost its appeal as the courts again ruled in favor of treaty

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\(^80\) Ibid.

\(^81\) Ibid.
rights. Shortly after, the United States Supreme Court finalized its decision in *Minnesota v. Mille Lacs*, ruling that the Minnesota bands had retained the rights reaffirmed by the Voigt Decision. PERM members and its supporters were “devastated by the ruling,” but as member Howard Hanson wrote in an article for the group’s website, “the battle is over, but the war for equal rights and the resources continues.”82 PERM has stayed true to this sentiment and continues to argue that the Supreme Court’s 1999 decision was “just wrong.”83

**The Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa**

In December 2017, Fred and Mike Tribble traveled the approximately 100 miles from their homes on the Lac Courte Oreilles reservation in Wisconsin to the Fond du Lac reservation just over the state line in Minnesota to celebrate with friends and fellow treaty rights activists.84 Since their arrest in 1978 that prompted the litigation that led to the Voigt Decision, the Tribble brothers have been active in continuing to fight for treaty rights both on and off their own reservation. As members of AIM and symbols of the power of action in their own rights, the Tribble brothers have been influential advocates for tribal sovereignty across the country.85 As such, when the Fond du Lac Band signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the state of Minnesota ending the “25-year-long dispute” resulting from ambiguities over the management and allocation of resources “dating back to a 1992 federal district court case that upheld the Band’s hunting, gathering and fishing rights from the lands ceded under the 1854 Treaty,” it was

82 Howard Hanson, “The Mille Lacs Treaty Case is Over, But Don’t Stop Fighting For What You Believe In,” PERM Articles Archive, no date, https://www.perm.org/articles/a073.html.

83 Souder, 1.


85 Notably, the brothers publically supported the activists protesting the pipeline at Standing Rock on numerous occasions, both on camera and in the press.
only natural that the Band invited the Tribble brothers to deliver a talk at the Memorandum celebration.\textsuperscript{86}

The 2017 Memorandum clarifies the ambiguities of earlier court rulings and builds upon the informal system of data sharing and communications coordination already in place between the state and the Fond du Lac Band since the 1990s.\textsuperscript{87} The Memorandum also determines hunting and fishing harvest levels for the Band in the ceded territory and establishes a conflict-resolution process for disputes between the state and the Band.\textsuperscript{88} While increased cooperation with and regulation from the state seems problematic for some, most tribal members see the Memorandum as a show of the state’s support for the “principles of sovereignty.”\textsuperscript{89} By again reaffirming the tribe’s right to hunt, fish, and gather in the ceded territory, the Memorandum reasserts that “sovereignty is not something that anyone gave to us, or can take away. It is inherent: something Indian tribes have by virtue of the fact that we existed long before there were places called the United States or Minnesota.”\textsuperscript{90}

While the Memorandum of Understanding has provided cause for celebration for Fond du Lac members and Ojibwe activists like the Tribble brothers, until December 2017, the lack of a formal agreement on the management and allocation of the Fond du Lac Band’s hunting, fishing, and gathering rights in the ceded territory resulted in decades of confusion, backlash, and

\textsuperscript{86} Peterson, 1.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{89} Peterson, 1.

\textsuperscript{90} Label text, “Why Treaties Matter,” Black Bear Casino, Carlton, MN. The Black Bear Casino is owned and operated by the Fond du Lac Band.
disputes. Despite losing their 1999 appeal, PERM, for example, continued to lead the fight against treaty rights in northern Minnesota, maintaining an active presence and consistently “using all available means to ban the use of gillnets” and halt “any expansion of ‘treaty harvest rights’,” which they deemed “created.”

In addition to ongoing disputes over treaty rights, the continual decline of the historically significant practice of wild rice cultivation plagued the Minnesota Ojibwe bands as well. Wild rice harvesting had been greatly disrupted by dams built for the logging industry in the late nineteenth century. The Minnesota Ojibwe bands had tried to resist the degradation of wild rice beds at the time, but received little to no support from the government and their objections were swept aside. From that point on, the practice was in continual decline. In strictly environmental terms, the tribe and outsiders alike recognized how problematic this was because unlike the “hybrid” and “inferior” version of wild rice sold commercially in other parts of the country, genuine wild rice “is only found in the Great Lakes.” For the tribe, wild rice’s significance is deeply engrained in their history and identity. Based on “the prophecy and migration [story] that we’ve had that started many centuries ago,” Fond du Lac Cultural Center and Museum director Jeff Savage explains that wild rice “is very important part of our culture and our history…it’s

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94 Thomas Howes, “Wild Rice and Tribal Heritage,” on Aqua Kids, June 17, 2016, https://vimeo.com/193274059. Thomas Howes is the Natural Resources Program Manager for the Fond du Lac Band. Aqua Kids is an educational television show that focuses on uncovering culturally and historically significant information on various people and places across the country.
what brought us here to this Lake Superior watershed area.”95 The Fond du Lac Band’s migration story describes how they were told “we would find our forever home when we found food that grows out of the water.”96 After hundreds of years of migration, the tribe found wild rice growing out of the northern Great Lakes, and settled in the region because of it. Because of its centrality to their identity, “wild rice is sacred,” Savage explains, “and is an essential aspect of Ojibwe culture.”97 As such, the decline of wild rice watersheds on reservation and ceded lands was particularly devastating. By the 1990s, so many of the “wild rice beds [had] disappeared” that this important cultural practice, a “mainstay of life” at Fond du Lac, had almost ceased to exist.98

In addition to issues over treaty rights and the decline in cultural practices such as wild rice cultivation, poverty plagued the community into the 1990s and early 2000s as well. Although the Band had maintained its successful Fond du Luth Casino for several years, various disputes and corrupt deals cut into the tribe’s profits for the casino’s first 25 years. Opened in 1986, the Fond du Luth Casino in downtown Duluth, Minnesota was the first off-reservation Indian gaming facility in the United States. Arguably more than reservation gaming facilities, off-reservation gaming has garnered criticism from states and sovereignty opponents alike, and Fond du Luth has been no exception. Despite criticisms, the tribe was able to acquire the land on


96 Howes, “Wild Rice.”


which the casino resides as an extension of their sovereign nation in the early 1990s, and as such, the National Indian Gaming Commission affirmed its legality. Issues continued to abound, however, as the tribe acquired more property around the casino. A particular point of contention revolved around an initially city-owned parking ramp. In the early 1990s, the tribe acquired the ramp from the city of Duluth, after which the city claimed that it was not sovereign land and that the tribe should be required to pay rent for its use. With few resources to fight back, the Band agreed to an arrangement in 1994 that stipulated that rather than pay rent, a portion of gaming revenues would be shared with the city. Until the 2011 Gaming Commission’s ruling that ended this arrangement and rebuked its legality, the city of Duluth acquired at least $600,000 in gaming revenue that should have gone to the Band.99

With such issues, gaming for the Fond du Lac Band was promising but ultimately provided inadequate revenue to completely alleviate the tribe’s economic position. The casino did provide the tribe with more employment opportunities, but as the population increased throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, unemployment was still high.100

For many tribal members, however, poverty involved more than a lack of money. Fond du Lac Band member Veronica Smith explained that “‘poor’ to American Indians doesn't necessarily involve a lack of money.”101 “Family,” “adequate food,” “health and traditions are what make [us] wealthy,” she explained, and so “the idea of being poor as not having money is more mainstream American thinking than American Indian thinking.”102 As such, when Fond du Lac


100 Peacock, 41.

101 Goerd, 1.

102 Ibid.
tribal members recall their lack of wealth at the end of the twentieth century, the decline in traditional cultural practices is considered as well. To address the cultural impoverishment that plagued their people, the Band initiated efforts to develop a tribally-run museum.

**The Fond du Lac Cultural Center and Museum**

Fond du Lac tribal activist, acclaimed artist, and museum director Jeff Savage is not an Indian artist. “I am an artist for Indians,” Savage clarifies.103 “As an artist for Indians I make items of art that are of traditional importance,” he explains.104 Real art “expresses what you see through life,” and so for Savage, art for Fond du Lac Indians (as opposed to Fond du Lac Indian art) is developed “through the eyes of being a Fond du Lac member” rather than strictly “for sale or market.”105 “That's what will keep our culture and traditions alive,” Savage argues, artwork developed with “deep traditional and ceremonial connections.”106

As the longtime curator and director of the Fond du Lac Cultural Center and Museum, Savage’s view on the ability of art to help revitalize traditional culture has translated to the museum’s collections, exhibits, programming, and overall goals. Founded in 2000, the museum was developed as a “joint effort between the reservation and the Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College.”107 The involvement of the tribal college demonstrates the centrality of

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104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid.

education to the museum’s mission, and the interdisciplinary approach to conveying tribal history and culture that the museum has taken since its founding.

Initiated as “a response” to NAGPRA “urging the return of sacred ceremonial items back to tribal communities,” the preservation and tribally-dictated interpretation of such materials has been paramount to the institution’s purpose.108 Significantly, the preservation and interpretation of repatriated, donated, and purchased cultural materials has coincided the museum’s strong emphasis on reviving and continuing the production of cultural materials, of which artwork has been central. From its foundation, the museum has actively intertwined the past and the present, both in its exhibit space and its programming. The vast array of historically significant materials displayed alongside contemporary artwork speaks to the Band’s understanding of the uninterrupted presence of the past and its centrality in dictating and shaping contemporary Fond du Lac identity and culture.

According to Savage, the museum’s emphasis on intertwining history and contemporary cultural production rests on the understanding that museums are spaces to “learn your culture, learn your language and live them.”109 Facing backlash from treaty rights activism, environmental change and the decline of traditional practices, Fond du Lac tribal member Wanesia Misquadace explains, “to keep our people strong, it is necessary to continue our traditional art forms.”110 Savage also explains that part of the decision to promote contemporary artwork at the museum was based on the tribe’s desire to show Native visitors, particularly

108 Ibid.


youths, that professions in culturally traditional arenas are still possible for those who “don’t want a traditional Euro-style 9-to-5 job.”

Beadwork has been a particularly fruitful outlet for both cultural revitalization and economic development and is displayed throughout the museum space. Phyllis Fairbanks, who has taught traditional beadwork classes at the museum, explained that she teaches and practices beading because, “I wanted to carry on the tradition because I am an Indian person and I don’t want the culture to die out” Traditional beadwork has “long played an important role in the lives of the Anishinaabe people,” and serves as a strong connection between tribal history, culture, and contemporary identity.

“In Ojibwe, the word for beads translated as ‘little spirit berries.’ They were used to record history.” Traditional artwork is also sold at the museum, speaking to two of the goals of tribal museums – to revitalize culture for tribal members, and to utilize tourism to educate the public and promote economic development.

In addition to revitalizing and promoting the production of traditional artwork, the museum was also founded as a site for organizing action against forces that contributed to the decline in cultural practices. Like the tribal museum at Lac du Flambeau, the Fond du Lac Cultural Center and Museum addresses oppositions to treaty rights and sovereignty experienced by the Band, and, significantly, has also organized action to halt or reverse coercive forces. In particular, the museum has been active in supporting the tribe’s Wild Rice Restoration project, both in educating the public about the historical and cultural significance of wild rice, and in

111 Ibid.


114 Ibid.
participating in the project. Perhaps most notable is the museum’s birch bark canoe program, which it has hosted since the early 2000s. Year after year, spearheaded by Jeff Savage, the museum has invited community members to participate in the project, through which they collectively build canoes used to cultivate wild rice using only traditional materials and methods. Significantly, the birch bark canoe projects have garnered significant media attention, and in recent years, have been live streamed so that the general public can better understand the cultural significance of wild rice cultivation and the process of creating canoes by hand.

Through the development of its exhibits and programming, the Fond du Lac Cultural Center and Museum has sought to address ongoing threats to tribal sovereignty, educate tribal members and the public on traditional and contemporary culture, and to make the past an active part of the present. In doing so, the museum has sought to correct mainstream historical inaccuracies and misunderstandings about Fond du Lac history, culture, and contemporary life. As the museum was in the development phase, members of the unofficial Fond du Lac History Group, who were instrumental in the museum’s founding, also published a book called A Forever Story, which contains a number of transcribed oral histories from tribal members. Although the book was completed before the museum opened, their simultaneous development enabled the book to speak to several of the issues the museum would later address. Editor and tribal activist Thomas D. Peacock wrote that in most mainstream historical studies, Native people have been either erased or marginalized in ways that have long obscured real understanding of Native life. “The collective consciousness of American Indian people,” he explains, “has paid dearly for this omission because some of what has been recorded as history is a reflection of only one perspective of the forest of reality, one fraction of the truth.”

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115 Peacock, 17. This edited volume published by the tribe contains several transcribed interviews, excerpts from other texts about the Fond du Lac Band, and reflections from the editor, Thomas Peacock.
History Group felt compelled to write this book and help develop the museum, then, because “tell[ing] our own story…had not been done and needs to be done. Because what had been published in the past as the truth may have been only one fraction of truth.”

**The Bois Forte Band of Lake Superior Chippewa**

In the eyes of her granddaughter, Phyllis Boshey, founder of the Bois Forte Heritage Center and Cultural Museum, is “the definition of an Ogitchidaakwe, a ‘Warrior Woman’.”

Born in 1937 on the Bois Forte Reservation in Minnesota, Boshey has been well-known throughout her life for her activist spirit and commitment to halting forces that threatened traditional Ojibwe culture. From an early age, Boshey was inspired by nineteenth century Bois Forte chief Charlie Sucker, who famously resisted the sale of allotment parcels located in the Vermilion sector of the Bois Forte lands. Her granddaughter recalls Boshey explaining to her of Chief Sucker, “Boy! That’s really great, you know, ‘cause they defied the government. They wouldn’t move. They didn’t get allotments. They might starve. But they wouldn’t move.”

Chief Sucker and the Vermilion Bois Fortes’ “success in staying on the land of their ancestors”

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Peacock’s research and work for this volume was funded by the National Park Service and the Fond du Lac Tribal Council and was produced on behalf of an unofficial group referred to as the Fond du Lac History Group. Significantly, this volume was produced as the museum was being developed.

116 Peacock, preface.

117 Pieratos, “A Granddaughter.”

118 The Bois Forte reservation is comprised of three sectors: Vermilion, Nett Lake, and Deer Creek. In the late nineteenth century, the federal government issued an order for all Bois Forte members to be removed from Vermilion to Nett Lake. The Vermilion residents, led by Chief Sucker, refused, and as a result, the Vermilion sector remains part of the reservation today. In 1889, Chief Sucker explained that the Vermilion Bois Forte could “not part with this section of country” because “those residing here love this place with all their hearts.” J. Kay Davis, “An Insight into a Bit of Nett Lake History,” in *The Bois Forte News*, July 2001, 2.

119 Pieratos, “A Granddaughter.”
sent the message to Boshey “that you can make decisions for yourself and exercise self-
determination, especially when the stakes are high.”

Internalizing the lessons she learned from previous Bois Forte tribal leaders, Boshey
became a prominent activist herself, demonstrating throughout her life that “she would not let
circumstances, people, or institutions – even the federal government – dictate the way of life she
knew was right for her family and her people.” While Boshey was inspired by the
confrontational activism utilized by Chief Sucker in the nineteenth century, she also recognized
the benefits of “cleverly” utilizing available federal programs, policies, and laws for the
betterment of tribal life. Having entered into an agreement with the state of Minnesota to limit
the exercise of hunting and fishing treaty rights in exchange for much-needed monetary
compensation, the Bois Forte Band had avoided some of the treaty rights backlash experienced
by the nearby Mille Lacs and Fond du Lac bands. Building upon this history of strategic
accommodation, Boshey became the “driving force for the Bois Forte gaming enterprise to bring
new economic development” to the reservation and larger area in the 1980s. Boshey saw her
work pay off in 1986 when the Band opened its first legal bingo hall, which was later expanded
into the Fortune Bay Resort and Casino.

The Bois Forte Heritage Center and Cultural Museum

While Fortune Bay has been a notable success for the tribe, contributing millions of
dollars toward tribal programs and creating hundreds of jobs for the area’s citizens, according to

120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
123 Pieratos, “A Granddaughter.”
Boshey, her proudest legacy has been the creation of the Bois Forte Heritage Museum.\textsuperscript{124} Conceptualizing the museum in 1990 and overseeing its development until, Boshey hoped that her activist spirit and the “lessons of her life” would “transcend” beyond her into the museum space, where the tribe could go “to learn about our history and culture,” and hopefully, take away the larger lesson that “we do not have to be asked or invited, that we must learn to stand on our own through our own efforts, and that innovation is necessary for the advancement of the community.”\textsuperscript{125}

These goals led to the opening of the Bois Forte Heritage Center and Cultural Museum in 2002 on the grounds of the Fortune Bay Resort and Casino. Developed largely with funding provided by the casino, in conjunction with a grant from the Bush Foundation, the Cultural Museum is considered by tribal members to be a “modern” institution, yet one “steeped in cultural values.”\textsuperscript{126} Coinciding with the 1980s surge in interest in heritage and local and ethnic histories, Bois Forte Band members began “inquiring about giving or wanted to donate historic items made by…Band members” to help revitalize and preserve the tribe’s history, yet at the time, “there wasn’t any place to display them.”\textsuperscript{127} Phyllis Boshey, long-inspired by previous Native activists to seek creative solutions, presented “her idea of a Museum” to the Tribal Council in the early 1990s, and was “able to convince [them] of its merits.”\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
While Boshey conceptualized the museum, and gained approval from the Tribal Council in the early 1990s, “reaching the goal” of opening the Cultural Museum “took 10 years and a lot of work.” Boshey took the lead, but throughout the process, the Bois Forte community was heavily involved. “Her idea of a Museum resonated with others,” leading many to get involved at various stages in the development. In developing the museum’s collections, many items were repatriated from other institutions after NAGPRA was passed in 1990, while “various items,” including artwork and other historically significant materials, were donated by community members. Bois Forte reservation planner Pete Abbey also reached out to the community on numerous occasions for their assistance in shaping the institution, writing in his column in the Band’s newspaper that “as this project continues to develop, other thoughts will occur and I encourage each of you to share yours with me. Through your contributions, this museum, cultural heritage, and educational center will become unique and totally Bois Forte. In other words, it will reflect what Bois Forte has been, what it is, and will be instrumental in what it will become. This can only happen if we all contribute our ideas, talents and dreams.”

The Bois Forte community answered Abbey’s call, with the collective Band playing a crucial role in “deciding how content is displayed and described.” Since opening in 2002, the Bois Forte Heritage Center and Cultural Museum has “helped effect significant changes…for the

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.


133 “A Vision to Preserve Our History.”
people of Bois Forte.”

Through their emphasis on sharing authority with the larger tribal community, Boshey and the other museum personnel created a space designed to facilitate the achievement of their goal of “bringing the Bois Forte Ojibwe history and culture alive.”

While developed for and by the Bois Forte tribal community, the Cultural Museum engages with the tribe’s tourist ventures more directly than any other tribal museum in the Great Lakes region. Constructed on the grounds of the Fortune Bay Resort and Casino, moving to and from the museum and casino is easy, and made even more so by the valet service offered by the Band for visitors needing assistance to travel between the two establishments. Like several other tribal gaming facilities in the region, the museum is heavily promoted throughout the casino’s space, yet the Bois Forte take this one step further and provide a large and noticeable link to the Cultural Museum’s webpage on the casino’s site.

Given the Band’s history of strategic accommodation, and specifically their decision to relinquish some of their treaty rights to avoid facing the same level of backlash as other tribal communities in the region, the Bois Forte Band’s decision to closely link tourism and tribal culture makes sense. From the beginning, the museum founders “envisioned it as a great tourist destination,” where tribal history would be presented in a nuanced way to educate visitors without assertive confrontation. The Cultural Museum has 3,000 square feet of exhibit space, much of which has been dedicated to “celebrat[ing] the unique relationship the Band has had

134 “Bois Forte Band Plans Unique Heritage Center.”


137 “Bois Forte Band Plans Unique Heritage Center.”
with non-Indians, and how they contributed to the growth of the community.”¹³⁸ In doing so, it has been “the Band’s hope that tourism will spawn a new kind of interaction between Indians and the wider world, one that leads to cultural understanding, not culture clashes.”¹³⁹ In 2006, then-tribal chairman Keven Leecy explained the Band’s approach to tribal history, saying that in “confront[ing] the past as a modern-day Indian, I think you have to say, ‘Don’t feel sorry for me,’” while also encouraging visitors to leave wondering, “What can I do today to make sure that doesn’t happen to us again?”¹⁴⁰

**The Forest County Potawatomi**

On August 10, 2015, the Forest County Potawatomi hosted the Gathering of the Potawatomi Nation for the first time. The annual event, initiated in 1994, “has the feel of a family reunion, and in a sense, it certainly is.”¹⁴¹ Members from all Potawatomi bands across the United States and Canada are welcome at the Gathering, which consists of a variety of language, history, and crafts workshops, traditional ceremonies, and provides the opportunity for all to “come together as one nation to share ideas, thoughts, triumphs as well as challenges that each of their communities have overcome or are still working on.”¹⁴²

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¹³⁸ Pete Abbey in “Bois Forte Band Plans Unique Heritage Center.”


¹⁴⁰ Ibid.


¹⁴² Ibid.
The significance of the event for the Forest County Potawatomi is evident in the Band’s Cultural Center, Library and Museum. After a pair of wall panels provide a brief welcome and introduction to the museum and its purpose, visitors are first guided to an enclave with seating and a large screen playing the short film “The Gathering” on repeat. “The Gathering” provides visitors with a glimpse into the annual Gathering of the Potawatomi Nation, and clearly articulates the significance of the event for Potawatomi nationhood. “We are one people and one spirit,” the video explains.143

Occupying one of the first exhibit spaces in the museum, “The Gathering” leaves visitors to explore the rest of the museum space with an awareness that the Forest County Potawatomi, unique in their historical experience and contemporary circumstances, are part of a larger, fragmented but nonetheless cohesive nation. Challenging the geographical and political limitations that define Euro-American notions of “nationhood,” “The Gathering” demonstrates that for the Potawatomi, collective national identity rests on the historical, cultural, and

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143 Film exhibit, “The Gathering,” Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum, Crandon, WI.
ceremonial ties that form a distinct Potawatomi Nation, despite residing across state and international boundaries.\footnote{144 For more on the ideological basis for Potawatomi notions of nationhood, see Christopher Wetzel, \textit{Gathering the Potawatomi Nation: Revitalization and Identity}.}

While Potawatomi nationhood can be clearly articulated today, from the 1830s until the end of the twentieth century, this was not the case. Many of the factors that enabled several Great Lakes tribes to develop tribal museums in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries – including the legacy of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement, the advent of the era of self-determination, and emerging economic opportunities, to name a few – also enabled a Potawatomi national renaissance to occur. The Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum emerged as a vehicle for fostering this national renaissance, and has undergone two major renovations that reflect the direction of the larger Potawatomi Nation. To understand how and why this institution emerged to foster and articulate Potawatomi nationalism, it is crucial to first discuss the processes that fragmented the tribe in the nineteenth century.

Arguably more than any other Great Lakes tribe, a mixture of federal policies, corrupt treaties, and forced removals fragmented and divided the Potawatomi across state and international lines, resulting in competing understandings of tribal history and identity. Although disagreements within the tribe can be detected in earlier treaty negotiations, Potawatomi bands across the board understand the 1833 Treaty of Chicago as the pivotal moment that initiated the process of national fragmentation that lasted over a century. In the treaty, Potawatomi representatives agreed to relinquish more than five million acres of ancestral lands and to move west of the Mississippi River in exchange for relocation expenses paid for by the US
government, annuities for education, construction costs once relocated, trade goods, and compensatory payments. Significantly, however, these representatives did not represent the wishes of the tribe as a whole. Though long understanding themselves as one tribe, no singular governing body resided over all Potawatomi members. Instead, each Potawatomi community has historically been politically autonomous, and thus did not always enter treaty negotiations with the United States with a singular common goal. Such was the case throughout the 1833 Treaty negotiations. Yet, despite disagreements amongst tribal leaders, the treaty was accepted by the federal government and the Potawatomi slated for removal west.

The federal government’s understanding of the reality of the Potawatomi political structure is evident by the fact that the Potawatomi community living in lower Michigan negotiated independently to remain on their ancestral lands. Potawatomi members living in Illinois and Wisconsin, however, were subject to removal despite any individual or community-based protest to the terms of the Treaty. As removal got underway, the tribe further fragmented as some groups voluntarily moved west, some were forced at gunpoint along what is now known as the Trail of Death, and others escaped to Canada, Mexico, or hid in the woods of northern Wisconsin. Those that remained in Wisconsin were particularly “adamant about remaining in their homelands,” despite being denied the annuity payments guaranteed by the Treaty and becoming, over time, “especially isolated and impoverished.”


146 Wetzel, 30.

147 Loew, 106-108.
Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Wisconsin Potawatomi, known loosely as the “Strolling Band of Potawatomi,” lived in difficult conditions, cut off from the rest of the Potawatomi bands and facing pressure to assimilate. Significantly, however, as an unrecognized band without a permanent land base or control over vast amounts of desirable resources, the Wisconsin Potawatomi did not garner the same amount of attention from those who worked to assimilate the region’s Native population and as such, were able to retain significant elements of their traditional culture, including their language and ceremonial practices. This relative separation from mainstream society gradually ended, though, as northern Wisconsin became increasingly flooded with non-Native residents, tourists, and businesses. Recognizing the need to secure a base on their ancestral lands, the Wisconsin Potawatomi, with the help of non-Native missionaries and legal experts, were able to secure the money promised them in the Treaty of Chicago, and purchased 11,786 acres of lands in 1913, to be allotted according to the Allotment Policy and held in trust for twenty-five years.\(^\text{148}\) Shortly before the trust period ended, the Band reorganized and adopted a new tribal constitution under the Indian Reorganization Act, henceforth “officially [becoming] the Forest County” Band.\(^\text{149}\)

While the reorganization of the Band in the 1930s gave the Forest County Potawatomi a more secure hold on their ancestral land base, access to federal resources previously denied to them, and a basis for establishing a present and future identity as a cohesive band, the fragmentation of the larger Potawatomi Nation only seemed to grow in the decades that followed. In particular, disagreements about the 1833 Treaty of Chicago negotiations resurfaced.


\(^{149}\) Ibid.
as multiple Potawatomi bands filed reparations claims with the Indian Claims Commission in the years following the end of WWII. Described by historian Christopher Wetzel as a disagreement between the “Eastern Potawatomi Bands” (those that did not move west, including the Forest County) and the “Western Potawatomi Bands” (those that were removed from the Great Lakes region), the ICC process resulted in bitter hearings to determine whether those who had refused to move from their ancestral homelands had forfeited their tribal identity and treaty rights.\textsuperscript{150} In the hearing to determine what the United States had understood to be the political structure of the Potawatomi at the time of the Treaty, the “Western Bands” further contended that the Potawatomi were not necessarily a singular entity when the Treaty was signed, and as such, argued that the “Eastern Bands” should not share in the ICC reparations. The “Eastern Bands” disagreed, and so did the federal government. Reparations were paid out to all recognized bands, though arguably unevenly, as the “Western Bands” received seventy percent of the payment.\textsuperscript{151}

While the ICC process brought old disagreements to the surface and had, for a time, re-solidified the fragmentation of the Potawatomi Nation, several national and regional changes brought about in large part by Native activism in the post-war decades created circumstances that enabled a resurgence of Potawatomi nationhood in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and ultimately motivated several Potawatomi bands, including the Forest County, to develop tribal museums dedicated to both band-specific and national culture. The ICC process, though it brought to light regional disagreements and competing interpretations of Potawatomi

\textsuperscript{150} Wetzel, 34.

\textsuperscript{151} Wetzel, 36. Census data for the bands at the time reparations were paid out is either approximate or unavailable altogether, so it is nearly impossible to gather whether the reparations paid were in-line with the population differences of each. The closest approximation I can make is with recent data gathered from each band’s website. As of 2000, there were approximately 41,000 Potawatomi members, about 10,000 (or 24\%) of whom were members of the “Eastern Bands.”
history and identity, had ultimately reaffirmed Potawatomi nationhood with its conclusion in the mid-1950s. Over the next several decades, the Tribal Sovereignty Movement reached its height and through its articulated goals of reaffirming tribal sovereignty and reinvigorating traditional culture, inspired tribal communities across the Great Lakes region to self-determine their own past, present, and direction for the future.

As termination gave way to self-determination as the cornerstone of federal policy, programs that encouraged cultural pluralism motivated Potawatomi communities to reinvigorate aspects of their traditional culture. As Potawatomi members across the United States and Canada made conscious efforts to reconnect with their traditional culture, greater historical understanding undoubtedly led to a greater awareness of their distinct tribal identity and the fact that they shared these cultural traits with Potawatomi communities elsewhere. Such an awareness led Potawatomi communities across the board to reinterpret and reassess the meaning of the historical events that had fragmented the tribe, shifting the focus away from the disagreements that had fragmented them and towards the manipulation that enabled the Treaty to exist, and to the impact of the Treaty.

As the individual Potawatomi bands increasingly reinterpreted their history in ways that better enable each to imagine themselves as part of a larger Potawatomi Nation, opportunities arose for tribal leaders and activists to re-forge personal connections and foster connections between the bands. Historian Christopher Wetzel cites a 1983 meeting as a particularly pivotal moment. That year, St. Joseph County, Indiana, surely inspired by the rising national interest in local heritage and the increasing inclusion of marginalized voices in historical sites and museums, planned to build a Potawatomi living history museum and invited representatives from five Potawatomi bands to consult on the project. While the Indiana Potawatomi site never came
to fruition, Wetzel describes the meeting amongst Potawatomi representatives as “something of a
turning point in the Potawatomi Nation’s lengthy separation.”¹⁵² Periodic meetings from that
point on led tribal leaders to plan the first Gathering of the Potawatomi Nation in 1994, which
has since been held every year.

As the Band that had arguably retained the most of their traditional culture and language,
the Forest County were in a particularly unique position to spearhead the national resurgence of
their nation. Although they are the smallest Potawatomi band, the Forest County have run a
profitable gaming business since opening their first bingo facility on March 7, 1991.¹⁵³ The
profits from their tribal gaming enterprises, coupled with increasing opportunities for outside
funding, provided the means for creating a space designed to foster the cultural revival of both
the Forest County Band and the Potawatomi Nation.

The Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum

Almost immediately following the first Gathering of the Potawatomi Nation, Forest
County tribal elders Clarice Ritchie and Hazel George “originated the idea of a museum and
cultural center” with “determination in 1995.”¹⁵⁴ Having been born on the now-reservation lands
before the tribe reorganized and having attended the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Kokomo
Reservation School, Ritchie was particularly aware of the impact of federal policies on
Potawatomi band and national identity, and as such, took on the role as official historian of the

¹⁵² Wetzel, 39.
¹⁵⁴ Lori Thomas, “Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library, and Museum Holds Their Grand Opening: A
New Addition Includes the Kakendaswen Library – Open to the Public,” in The Potawatomi Traveling
Times, August 1, 2007, 1.
Potawatomi Historical Society throughout the museum development process.\footnote{Obituaries: Clarice M. Ritchie," in The Northwoods River News, June 9, 2016. I have not been able to find any additional information on the Potawatomi Historical Society, and so it is unclear whether this was a Forest County group or a nationwide Potawatomi group.} Michael Alloway, who also attended the inaugural Gathering and has since conducted various workshops each year, took on the role of Museum Director when ground broke for the museum in 1998. As an artist with an Associate’s Degree focusing on art museum management, Alloway “devoted much of his earlier career on museum exhibits development,” playing a large role in determining the structure, layout, and messages to be conveyed throughout the museum space.\footnote{Forest County Potawatomi, “Potawatomi Language Mobile App,” downloaded via Apple App Store (2014), accessed August 15, 2018.}

For the founders, determining the goals and priorities for the museum seem to have been immediately evident. “A lot of the bands kind of look at us as that Band that has retained a lot of the traditions, being that we were the ones that hid from the removal process,” Alloway explained.\footnote{Mike Alloway on “Tribal Histories: Potawatomi History,” Wisconsin Public Television, August 25, 2014, https://video.wpt.org/video/wpt-documentaries-potawatomi-history/.} As such, the Forest County museum founders recognized the need to create a space in which they could facilitate cultural revitalization for the Band and the Nation. As the band with the most fluent Potawatomi speakers, language revitalization was (and is) a primary goal in developing the institution. As such, “of the main focus during planning was the incorporation of the Potawatomi language within the main gallery.”\footnote{“Potawatomi Language Mobile App.”} For the benefit of both non-Native and Potawatomi visitors, the museum founders planned to incorporate their traditional language alongside English on all of “the various text panels outlining significant events of the Potawatomi.”\footnote{Ibid.}
After years of planning and building, the Forest County Cultural Center and Museum opened in 2002. Upon opening, the museum’s permanent exhibit space, entitled “People of the Three Fires,” focused on the history, language and culture of the Potawatomi, as well as their role within the Three Fires Confederacy. This exhibit’s original design contained four main elements: “The Long Walk, A People Who Share a Language, Music and Dance, and Faces – Past and Present, each presenting information on original homelands, treaties, removal, a look into the origins of Bodewadmimwen (Potawatomi language) to today’s celebration and the portrayal through historic and contemporary images on film.” Notably, from the beginning, the museum’s exhibits were designed to inform visitors about not only the Forest County’s historical experience, but the Potawatomi Nation as a whole. Through its emphasis on the outside forces that separated the Nation, as well as those that have brought them together and bind them, the museum from the beginning served as a site designed to foster the growth and understanding of Potawatomi nationalism.

Since it first opened in 2002, the Forest County Cultural Center and Museum has undergone two major renovations. In 2007, the Band added a library to the facility, altering the name to the Forest County Cultural Center, Library and Museum, as it is today. The library addition had long been part of the institutional plans, as it was initialized at the height of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement in the 1970s by tribal elder Ellen Saphenais. The 2007 addition also allowed for a tribal enrollment office, language office and classroom, larger archival and storage space, an east side walkout deck with outdoor fireplace, additional conference rooms, a


161 Ibid.
photography studio and sound room, librarian’s office, and an enlarged gift shop area. In 2011, the facility underwent another renovation, providing updates to the theater where “The Gathering” film is played, as well as updates to the “A People Who Share a Language” exhibit. In particular, the museum added a language kiosk, utilizing newer, interactive technology to enable visitors to learn basic elements of the Potawatomi language.

Today, tribal leaders “agree that the center [has] become a focal point for community gatherings, bringing together both young and old to learn a variety of cultural arts and more importantly, Potawatomi language instruction.” Alloway, who served as the director until his retirement in 2017, explained that “with the addition of the museum…it provided a means for our community to get together more.” While defined as “the heart of the Forest County Potawatomi Community,” the museum has also been instrumental in enabling a renaissance in Potawatomi culture nationwide. “[We] are called upon by the other bands to assist” in cultural revitalization efforts, Alloway explained, “and so we try to help them as much as we can.”

Within the exhibit space, the institution’s role in supporting Potawatomi nationhood is made clear, stating at the beginning that, “the Potawatomi have gathered for celebration, for spiritual

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162 Thomas, 1.

163 Alloway, “FCP Museum Re-Opens with New Exhibits,” in The Potawatomi Traveling Times, October 15, 2011, 1. The grant that enabled the tribe to update the Language exhibit also enabled museum personnel to develop a Potawatomi Dictionary, and the Potawatomi language app, which was released in 2014.

164 “Potawatomi Language Mobile App.”

165 Alloway, “Tribal Histories: Potawatomi History.”

166 “Potawatomi Language Mobile App.”

167 Alloway, “Tribal Histories: Potawatomi History.”
ceremony, and for political purposes…for centuries,” and that now, “[this] cultural center is a new way of gathering the people – to share stories and to learn from one another.”168

Significantly, since its founding, the museum has served not only the Band and the national Potawatomi community by better enabling them to “pass the culture and traditions onto future generations,” it has also served as “the facility” for educating non-Native visitors on Potawatomi history and culture.169 “The Cultural Center and Museum,” Alloway explained in 2014, “that is an avenue today for our community members to get back,” but it “is also not only that ability for our tribal members but that place where local people are given that chance to learn more about our history because, I think in the past, there’s been so much controversy and racism that we had to live through.”170 “Here at the museum,” Allow explained, “that’s what [we] always try to convey – real stories. Because today in America, schools aren’t really teaching about our history. They’re not talking about treaties that were broken with the tribes. They don’t talk about the boarding schools – how our ancestors were put in these places, beaten for talking their language. They’re not talking about removal – the Potawatomi Trail of Death. It’s sad for me to talk about that. It’s sad for me to share that…[but] this is what this building is all about – telling that story.”171

168 Label text, “Emawttheshnewat Bemadsetthek – The Gathering of the People,” Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum, Crandon, WI.

169 Label text, “Purpose,” Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum, Crandon, WI.

170 Alloway, “Tribal Histories: Potawatomi History.”

171 Ibid.
The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe

“The some would say it is a dream come true,” Saginaw Chippewa tribal member Charmaine Benz said of the tribe’s museum, the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways. In an article published in the tribe’s newspaper in 2006, Benz reminisced about the process of developing the Ziibiwing, remembering the time long before the current 32,349 square foot state-of-the-art facility was completed. For years, the Ziibiwing Cultural Society, the founding body of the Ziibiwing Center, worked out of various unconventional spaces around the reservation, including two old farmhouses Benz affectionately dubbed the “Cat House” and “Cow House,” as well as a refurbished old garage. After years of making do with whatever space the tribal council could spare, the current building was completed in 2004, and in May that year, the Ziibiwing Center held its grand opening.

The building that houses the Ziibiwing Center is an impressive one. With a research center, gift shop, changing exhibit space, collections storage, office space, and 9,000 square feet of permanent exhibit space, the Ziibiwing is easily the largest tribal museum in the Great Lakes region. For the Saginaw Chippewa, the dream of developing such a place was made possible by the tribe’s hugely successful Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort. “Our economic success,” the tribe’s webpage explains, “has given us the means to reclaim the history of our people and share it with the rest of the world.” The enormous impact of the tribe’s gaming enterprise is reiterated within the Ziibiwing’s permanent exhibit space as well, stating that “tribal gaming

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173 Ibid.

enterprises have helped many” within the community, as well as “the larger dominant community.” In addition to being the biggest employer in Isabella County, the Saginaw Chippewa’s gaming also benefits the larger community as the tribe gives two percent of the casino’s profits to the county.

For all that the advent of tribal gaming has done for the Saginaw Chippewa, Isabella County, and the larger Michigan economy, it has also brought with it a number of challenges that have necessitated the continuation of tribal activism. While Soaring Eagle has helped improve the overall economy of the area, the tribe’s success has nonetheless incited resentment from some local non-Natives. In addition, the success of tribal gaming in Michigan has rested on agreements with the state, which, not wholly unlike violations of nineteenth-century treaties, have been questioned over the past several decades. For the Saginaw Chippewa, gaming issues in the years leading up to the development of the Ziibiwing Center revolved around the litigation brought against the state by the tribe for the state’s violation of gaming compacts signed with several tribes years earlier. In 1993, seven Michigan tribes signed a gaming compact with the state agreeing to pay eight percent of their electronic video gaming and slot machine profits to the state, as well as an additional two percent to local municipalities in exchange for the exclusive right to operate tribal gaming facilities in the state. From 1994 to 1999, the tribes

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175 Label Text, “How We Are Helped By Gaming,” Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, Mt. Pleasant, MI.

176 Ibid.

177 The seven tribes that signed the compact included the Saginaw Chippewa, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa, Keeweenaw Bay Indian Community, Hannahville Indian Community, Bay Mills Indian Community, and the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.
adhered to the agreement, collectively paying the state $182 million, $95.8 million of which was paid by the Saginaw Chippewa.

While the tribes adhered to the gaming compact, the state of Michigan did not. In 1998 and 1999, the state negotiated new gaming compacts with tribes outside of the seven who, legally, had maintained their “exclusive” rights. While some of the tribes, including the Grand Traverse Band, negotiated settlements with the state, the Saginaw Chippewa saw the state’s violation as a denial of the validity of the tribe’s rights, and decided to proceed with litigation through the Court of Appeals. On February 18, 2000, a judge ruled in favor of the tribe, stating that Michigan had violated the compact and that the Saginaw Chippewa were no longer obligated to pay the state the 8% of profits agreed upon in the compact.

The victory over the state in the gaming compact litigation was certainly a cause for celebration for the tribe, yet gaming issues continued in ways that required ongoing activism. Throughout the gaming compact litigation, the Saginaw Chippewa found it necessary to fight to protect the gaming interests that had become such a vital source of income, employment, and cultural capital. They had seen that the state would not help in this endeavor. As such, the tribe became active in mounting opposition to state and tribal casino expansions (particularly those in close proximity to their own), as well as proposed off-reservation gaming that would surely eat into the Soaring Eagle’s profits. Of particular contention was the Hannahville Indian Community’s proposed off-reservation casino just north of the Detroit Airport, and the

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179 Ibid.
development of so-called “racinos” (i.e. “racing casinos”) at race tracks around the state, including the nearby track in Mt. Pleasant.\footnote{\textsuperscript{\ref{180}}} 

In addition to litigation surrounding tribal gaming rights, the Saginaw Chippewa faced threats to their treaty rights as well. While treaty rights activism for tribes across the Great Lakes region has generally focused on hunting, fishing, and gathering rights, for the Saginaw Chippewa, treaty rights activism throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has revolved around land. While embroiled in litigation with the state over gaming, the Saginaw Chippewa were simultaneously mounting their case against the state’s continuous violations of the treaty-designated reservation boundaries. Citing what they interpreted as “the state’s continuing and unrelenting violation of the Tribe’s sovereignty,” the Saginaw Chippewa argued that “for many years Michigan has refused to recognize the Tribe’s reservation boundaries and has attempted to unlawfully exert state jurisdiction over the Tribe and its citizens.”\footnote{\textsuperscript{\ref{181}}}

Specifically, the tribe argued that the state, in violation of both their treaty rights and federal law, continuously attempted to “regulate Tribal waste water treatment facilities,” “to remove Indian children from their homes,” “to improperly tax Tribal members”, and “to criminally prosecute Tribal members within boundaries of the Tribe’s reservation.”\footnote{\textsuperscript{\ref{182}}}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{\ref{180}}} “Racinos” refer to designated spaces for slot machines within race track complexes. The Saginaw Chippewa opposed the Hannahville’s off-reservation casino not only as another source of competition, but also because, as Public Relations Director Joseph Sowmick explained, “we are not in favor of any other Tribe opening and operating a casino on our ancestral Tribal lands.” “Tribe Plans to Build Casino Near Airport; Sag Chips Oppose,” in \textit{The Tribal Observer}, November 1, 2005.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{\ref{181}}} “Saginaw Chippewa Tribe to Lodge Lawsuit Against State Over Rez Boundaries,” in \textit{The Tribal Observer}, November 1, 2005.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{\ref{182}}} Ibid.
In mounting their case against the state, the tribe recognized the need to look to their past for the cultural basis and legal foundation for some of their claims. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the tribe worked with professional historians to conduct research and gather the information needed to initiate the lawsuit with the state over violations of their rights. Over the course of the litigation, historians compiled a huge collection of documents and reports on the tribe’s history that ultimately enable the Saginaw Chippewa to reach a favorable settlement in federal court in 2010.\footnote{“Settlement Recognizes Treaty Boundaries,” in The Tribal Observer, November 8, 2010; “Research Center Calendar of Research,” Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, accessed October 30, 2018, http://www.sagchip.org/ziibiwing/ZiibiwingCenter/research-calendar.htm. The settlement asked the federal court to recognize the boundaries of the Isabella Indian Reservation established by the treaties of 1855 and 1864, comprising of five full and two partial townships in Isabella County.} As the historical materials continued to mount, the tribe acknowledged the need to find a place to organize and house their developing collection. Recognizing that the materials had “immense value” for the community to “aid us in our continued socio-political development as a sovereign nation,” as well as to both non-Native visitors and tribal members looking to learn about Ojibwe history, the Saginaw Chippewa increasingly sought a way to make their historical materials available for use.\footnote{“Research Center,” Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, accessed October 30, 2018, http://www.sagchip.org/ziibiwing/ZiibiwingCenter/research-calendar.htm.}

At the same time, the tribe was appealing to several non-Native institutions for the repatriation of remains and objects held in their collections. These dual goals, while seemingly separate, both required the tribe to continue to conduct and consolidate historical research to prove the validity for their claims. As a result, the tribe formed the Ziibiwing Cultural Society in 1994. The Society, led by founder Bonnie Ekdahl, immediately began gathering together tribal members who were concerned about potential issues related to NAGPRA and housing historical
collections. Historian Amy Lonetree, who has worked with and extensively written about the Saginaw Chippewa, explains that following the passage NAGPRA in 1990, “inventories from museums and federal agencies began flooding into the office of Ronald Falcon, who at the time was the tribal chairman of the Saginaw Chippewa reservation.” Falcon was overwhelmed by the list of items possibly affiliated with the tribe, and enlisted the help of Ekdahl and the Ziibiwing Cultural Society.

For Ekdahl, seeing the evidence of the enormity of sacred items and remains held in non-Native institutions “was enough catalyst for me, and for a lot of other people, to say, ‘Well, let’s try to do something.’” The problem for the Society, though, was that “you can’t just go out and retrieve and demand without having a plan for what you are going to do when you bring them back.” With a new wealth of information gathered from research for litigation and the opportunity to repatriate culturally-significant items, the Society needed a plan for housing and caring for their growing collection. Thus, at one of their earliest meetings, the Society opened the floor to the community to gather their collective opinion on what the next steps and priorities should be. “And it kept coming up,” Ekdahl explained, “a cultural center.”

The Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways

While the idea for a cultural center emerged shortly after the formation of the Ziibiwing Cultural Society, the Society would ultimately have to take several steps before the development

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185 Lonetree, 126.
186 Ibid.
187 Bonnie Ekdahl in Lonetree, 127.
188 Ibid.
189 Ibid.
of the Ziibiwing Center could begin. In 1995, the Society spearheaded the efforts to create a cemetery in which to bury repatriated human remains and funerary objects. The cemetery represented an important step in establishing the Society as the designated tribal body for handling and caring for historically and culturally significant items, but for the Society, it ultimately brought to light another dilemma – they now had a place to rebury returned remains, but still had to decide what to do with any other repatriated cultural items and historical materials. Again, the Society turned to the idea of creating a museum, research center, and cultural center.

From that point on, the Ziibiwing Cultural Society became the de-facto history and preservation department for the tribe, and continuously took steps towards the development of a museum space.\(^\text{190}\) Significantly, the Society “became involved with the tribal gaming operations in several key ways,” contributing historically-informed designs that were incorporated into the casino space and running the casino’s gift shop.\(^\text{191}\) The gift shop provided a place for tribal artists to sell their arts and crafts and “created an income generator for the [Ziibiwing Cultural Society] that would later play a critical role in its becoming a viable tribal cultural center.”\(^\text{192}\) According to Lonetree, contributing to the casino helped situate the Society as “a valuable source of information in the community.”\(^\text{193}\) Bonnie Ekdahl echoes Lonetree’s assessment, explaining that


\(^{191}\) Lonetree, 128.

\(^{192}\) Ibid.

\(^{193}\) Ibid.
there was “always a need for cultural information,” and with access to the growing wealth of information gathered by researchers, “we became that [source].”

The first major step toward creating the Ziibiwing Center came in 1996 when the Society was awarded $3.5 million in gaming profits from the tribal council. That same year, tribal member Paul Johnson joined Ekdahl in leading the planning of the museum and bringing it to life. While Ekdahl and Johnson took the lead for the Society, both have emphasized that the process of developing the Ziibiwing Center was always a community-wide project. “It’s a ‘we’ concept,” Johnson explained, “so it is all of us together.”

Throughout the process, as they were moved from old farmhouse to old farmhouse, the Society continued “collaborating with the community as it developed plans for all aspects of the center.”

Through the repatriation of items from non-Native institutions, as well as through community contributions and the materials collected by professional historians over the course of the tribe’s land and resource litigation, the Society gathered together the materials needed to develop a museum collection. In 2000, they finally got their chance to make the “dream” a reality when the tribal council allocated another $6.5 million to the Society for the development of a designated museum and cultural center structure. Construction on the current building began in 2002 and just two years later, the Ziibiwing opened its doors to the public. Throughout

194 Ibid.
195 Paul Johnson in Lonetree, 129.
196 Lonetree, 129.
197 Scott Csernyik, “Tribe to Distribute $3.7 million in 2 Percent Funds,” in The Tribal Observer, May 15, 2002. This article explains that, beginning in 1994, the Tribal Council began redistributing a minimum of 2% of casino profits to various social and cultural programs both on the reservation and within the larger Mt. Pleasant community.
the construction process, the Society continued to encourage community involvement and input.

“From the outset,” the Ziibiwing Center “has been a tribally controlled project,” involving the community in as many of the major decisions as possible.198 “We’d like to [keep] the community involved so they may become part of the building and a part of history,” said Paul Johnson, who took on the role of Ziibiwing Center planner.199

From the beginning, the tribe was driven to develop the Ziibiwing Center as a place to store and preserve culturally significant knowledge and materials, and make them available to the community. Even with their ample budget, the tribe’s ambitious original plans for the Center had to be downsized during construction. The founders sacrificed office space to keep the exhibit space and collections area as needed, signaling the tribe’s commitment to preservation, revitalization, and education. The institution’s mission statement further reflects these goals, stating that the Ziibiwing Center “is a distinctive treasure created to provide an enriched, diversified, and culturally relevant educational experience. This promotes the society’s belief that the culture, diversity, and spirit of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan and other Great Lakes Anishinabek must be recognized, perpetuated, communicated and supported.”200

Since its grand opening in 2004, the Ziibiwing Center has served as a “link to the Anishinabek community,” working to “advance the knowledge of our people.”201 For the

198 Lonetree, 126.


community, the Ziibiwing Center has strived to be a “special place” by “combining the best of the past, the present and the future of the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe,” and working to take “our beautiful culture into the future.”\(^{202}\) As such, one of the primary goals of the institution has been to serve as a site designated for the revitalization of traditional culture through education, research, and cultural practice through programming. Educating the younger generation of tribal members has been a particular focus, as the tribe recognizes that “our children represent the future of our great nation,” and since they will be the ones to “carry on our traditions and history…we cannot allow [them] to fall behind in learning and understanding their heritage.”\(^{203}\)

In addition to the Ziibiwing Center’s goals for its community, the museum also seeks to provide a space for educating outsiders. Developed amidst resentment and challenges to their treaty rights and tribal sovereignty, the Ziibiwing Center was purposefully constructed in close proximity to the Soaring Eagle, which attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.\(^{204}\) Before the Ziibiwing’s exhibit space was completed, the tribe recognized that “Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort visitors never get the opportunity to become acquainted with Native American tradition, other than perhaps admiring various pieces of artwork and display cases within the facility.”\(^{205}\) Beyond their desire to educate local tourists, tribal leaders believed (as the activists involved in the Tribal Sovereignty Movement articulated decades earlier) that as both tribal


\(^{204}\) As an example of the Soaring Eagle’s popularity, I have visited the Ziibiwing Center twice and attempted to stay at the Soaring Eagle, but both times it was completely booked for both nights of my visits.

members and American citizens, they had “a responsibility to educate the surrounding communities,” not only “to Isabella County, but to the United States of America.” As then-tribal public relations director explained while the Ziibiwing was in development, “not many people outside the tribe understand that we have a very rich and diverse culture. We’ve never been too strong in sharing that. I think it’s vital for future success and understanding…there’s a lot of things going on here not associated with gaming.” As such, continuing to develop Ziibiwing’s Research Center and make historical materials available to the public has been a central focus. Tribal activism through litigation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries enabled the Saginaw Chippewa to assert their sovereignty by obtaining the materials now housed in the research facility, and in making such materials available to educate the public on tribal culture, such activism continues on.

To achieve these collective goals, the Ziibiwing Center was developed as a “full-service cultural center” that sought to “tell our story in an interesting and truthful manner.” As museum co-founder Paul Johnson explained, “it’s really a building designed for everyone. Our

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207 Ibid.

208 As Ziibiwing Center personnel explain, “the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways is known for its immense collection of historic records and documents,” the “majority” of which “was compiled under contract by Dr. James McClurken, an ethnohistorians specializing in Great Lakes Anishinabe history.” Anita Heard and Shannon Martin, “Ziibiwing Center Archival Assessment Request for Proposals,” Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, April 8, 2018, accessed July 10, 2018, https://miarchivists.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/ziibiwing-archival-consultant.pdf; Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, “Nidakenjigewinoong Research Center: ‘The Place Where You Find Things Out,” Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways Papers, no date. This is from the current brochure for Ziibiwing’s Research Center.

mission is to educate everyone about who we are, and we wanted the building to represent the community in the best way possible.” Ultimately, the message the tribe seeks to convey to both tribal members and outsiders is a message of “survival,” which they believe to be “a message of hope for all people of the world.”

The Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa

As with tribes across the Great Lakes region, treaty rights, cultural revitalization, and economic progress were central to the nature of the Grand Traverse Band’s activism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and to the foundation of their museum, the Eyaawing Museum and Cultural Center. The Grand Traverse Band’s case, however, is unique in important ways. Unlike the other tribes discussed in this dissertation, the Grand Traverse Band’s desire to revitalize their traditional culture, of which the exercise of treaty rights is a crucial part, informed the Band’s fight for federal recognition in the post-World War II decades. As such, a brief discussion of this process is necessary, as it ultimately enabled the tribe to obtain the resources necessary to open the museum, and is central to the goals of and interpretation at Eyaawing.

In the decades following World War II, the Grand Traverse Band was in a particularly dire situation. The band’s federal status was terminated in the late nineteenth century. Unlike the Saginaw Chippewa living a few hours south, the federal government had rejected the Band’s appeals for federal recognition and reorganization under the Indian Reorganization Act in the 1930s. Without the federal benefits granted to recognized tribes, the situation for the Grand Traverse Band rivaled the worst of any Native community in the country. Unemployment rates

210 Ibid.

were “around 60%,” and the community witnessed further losses of their already shrunken land base as Leelanau County acquired more tribal lands due to tax foreclosures in 1954 and again in 1970. Band member Skip Duhamel recalled that when his family moved back to the area in the early 1970s, “we found a community in despair.”

Poor living conditions were compounded by the growing and sometimes violent conflicts over treaty rights comparable to those in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota. Inspired by the growing Tribal Sovereignty Movement and the litigation resulting from the actions of fellow Michigan activist Big Abe Leblanc, treaty rights activist Arthur Duhamel recognized that it would be necessary to take a stand for his community’s treaty rights to be affirmed. As a result, Duhamel was involved in “several showdowns with local law enforcement authorities, state and federal natural resources agencies, and local sport fisherman” before his final arrest in 1974 prompted him to take his fight to the courts. Duhamel appealed to the recently formed Leelanau Indians, Inc., the de facto corporate body of the tribe in lieu of a recognized tribal government, for assistance in taking to the courts the pursuit of federal recognition that would enable the tribe to reassert their treaty rights and legally reclaim their tribal identity.

Spearheaded by Ardith “Dodie” Harris Chambers, Leelanau Indians, Inc. was chartered in 1972 to promote economic development for the tribe and serve as the de facto governmental leaders of the community. Shortly after Duhamel’s arrest, Congress created the American Indian Policy Review Commission to identify unrecognized but historically and culturally cohesive

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212 Dave, interview.

213 Weeks, 151.


215 Fletcher, 103.
tribes, and enable them to petition for federal recognition through the Federal Acknowledgement Process. Leelanau Indians, Inc. was almost immediately identified as the governing body of one of such tribes. As a result of both Duhamel’s arrest and their subsequent identification as a tribe up for review, federal recognition and reasserting treaty fishing rights became the twin “focal points” of Leelanau Indians, Inc.’s activism. For the Grand Traverse Band, these issues were intimately tied. As attorney and historian Michael Fletcher explains, “at its heart, the litigation over the treaty rights to fish in the Great Lakes involved the fundamental question of whether Michigan Indian people retained rights of self-government, or whether the state of Michigan and its citizens had been successful in destroying those rights.”

After years of “[getting] together the documents,” on May 19, 1978, Leelanau Indians, Inc. petitioned for federal recognition as the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, the fourth group nationwide to begin the Federal Acknowledgement Process. On October 18, 1979, the Bureau of Indian Affairs published a note in the Federal Register indicating its preliminary determination that the Band should be federally recognized. That same year, the Fox Decision determined that the Grand Traverse Band, as signatories of the 1836 Treaty, retained the Great Lakes fishing rights guaranteed by the treaty. Less than a year later, on May 27, 1980, the Grand Traverse Band officially became the first petitioner to earn federal recognition under the Federal Acknowledgement Process, bypassing the three earlier

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216 Ibid.

217 Fletcher, 130.

218 Dave, interview.

petitioners. For the tribe, their quick recognition was an enormous victory, but perhaps not surprising. The tribe relied on the ample evidence provided of their continuous and direct contact with the federal government, including the Treaties of 1836 and 1855 and their participation in the development of two annuity rolls in 1908 and 1910 – referred to as the Durant Rolls – that are used to determine tribal membership to this day. Their case was made even more compelling by the fact that they had sought federal recognition as a unified tribe under the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934.

In terms of treaty rights, Judge Fox’s 1979 decision was a crucial moment for the Grand Traverse Band, but as they found time and again over the next several decades, the fight was not over. While the Fox Decision reaffirmed their treaty rights in ceded territories, ambiguities abounded over the allocation and management of the resources. In 1983, the Grand Traverse Band, along with the Bay Mills and Sault Ste. Marie bands, filed a motion to determine allocation and management protocols between themselves and the state. After years of negotiation, an agreement was reached and the bands signed a decree in 1985 to be in effect for fifteen years. Even with an agreement in place, issues remained as Native fisherman using gillnets continued to face backlash from treaty rights opponents, and as the state increasingly made decisions in support of tourism over tribal rights.

By the late 1990s, with the end of the 1985 agreement looming, tensions increased as the tribes argued for increased rights to self-regulate gillnetting activities, while the state, in support

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221 The Band employed the expertise of now-acclaimed historian Richard White, who was then a professor at Michigan State University. White compiled an unpublished report titled Ethnohistorical Report on the Grand Traverse Ottawas in 1979, which was used to determine the tribe’s federal status.
of sportsmen, wanted to increase state management of natural resources. Anti-treaty activists also voiced their opinions, tapping into old arguments about “equal rights” and arguing that by that point in American history, all native-born citizens were “native Americans” and should all be allowed the same rights to resources.\textsuperscript{222} Litigation continued until 2007, when the courts ruled that all five Michigan tribes who signed the 1836 Treaty, including the Grand Traverse Band, would “preserve for all time the right to hunt, fish, and gather on federal and public lands within the territory ceded in the treaty.”\textsuperscript{223}

While the continuous litigation was difficult for the community, Arthur Duhamel explained that achieving federal recognition put the Grand Traverse Band in a much better position to fight and win the battles in the courts. “Without recognition,” he explained, “we would just exist as we always have without control over our own lives – powerless. With recognition, we can exert ourselves and take initiative. We can be sovereign people as we were long ago.”\textsuperscript{224} With recognition, the federal government became a party to the Band’s lawsuits against the state (as well as any lawsuits against private parties). As such, federal recognition made it easier for the tribe not only in providing a legal basis for their claims, but also in securing federal support throughout the litigation.

Gaining federal recognition not only put the tribe in a better position to protect their treaty rights, but also enabled them to utilize federal benefits granted to recognized tribes for

\textsuperscript{222} Ric Zehner, “Instead of Fishing Rights, It’s Discrimination by Feds,” in \textit{Traverse City Record Eagle}, September 7, 1997.

\textsuperscript{223} Fletcher, 147. It is important to note the terminology of the decision. The courts ruled that the Band retained their rights on “federal and public lands” in the ceded territory. The tribes had claimed that they had retained rights on all the lands ceded, including private property. As such, while a victory, this decision was only a partial victory for the Grand Traverse Band.

\textsuperscript{224} Fletcher, 104.
economic progress. In particular, gaining recognition enabled the tribe to develop the incredibly profitable Leelanau Sands Casino in 1991. As writer George Weeks explains, “of all the strides of the Grand Traverse Band since federal recognition in 1980, none is more dramatic than in economic development.”

In the 1970s, the Grand Traverse Band had been “proclaimed…by the State of Michigan to be one of its most economically depressed.”

By the end of its first year of gaming, the Band had rendered a net profit of $6 million, an “astounding leap” in economic progress and quality of life for a tribe “with a long history of subjugation and poverty.”

For tribal members, the quick progression from poverty to self-sufficiency represented much more than just economic progress. One tribal elder explained that for the Grand Traverse Band, tribally-run gaming establishments mean much more than just “the legal authority to have it”; rather, what is most important is that “the exercise of sovereignty is what’s actually occurring.”

As tribal chairman Joseph C. Raphael explained, gaming profits also enabled the tribe to “defend its sovereignty” by providing “financial help for numerous community programs” and “a better outlook on life.”

The Eyaawing Museum and Cultural Center

Ultimately, gaining federal recognition, reinforcing treaty rights, and achieving economic progress through gaming enabled the Grand Traverse Band to allocate funds to enterprises designed to both protect and reinvigorate their tribal identity. Achieving federal recognition and

225 Weeks, 105.

226 Ibid.

227 Ibid.

228 Dave, interview.

229 Weeks, 107.
economic success prompted “a renaissance of Indian culture and pride” that ensured that the Grand Traverse Band’s activism did not end with the recognition of their sovereignty and treaty rights and economic success.230 Rather, such successes gave them a “renewed focus” on the “community-based transformations that reiterated [their] authority” over their own lands, history, and identity.231 In addition, the fight for federal recognition and treaty rights had produced a wealth of historical materials that could now be used to facilitate cultural retention and revival, and to educate the public on tribal history. Thus, while gaining federal recognition and reasserting their treaty fishing rights were the focus of the Grand Traverse Band’s activism in the decades following World War II, Eyaawing founding associate director Mark E. Russell explained that it had also “long been the vision of Tribal members that we have a place in which to share with the people of all nations our culture, language and spirit so that it will be recognized and supported.”232

While the Eyaawing Museum and Cultural Center had its grand opening in May 2009, the process of conceptualizing and developing the museum began years before. During the tribe’s fight for federal recognition, one of the goals expressed by the tribe in seeking recognition was “to consolidate a strong base and voice for Indian people in northwest Michigan.”233 Once recognition was achieved, evidence indicates that the tribe’s focus gradually shifted from seeking to establish their voice in legal terms to expressing tribal sovereignty in cultural and social terms.

230 Weeks, 150.

231 Message, 126.


233 Weeks, 67.
As early as 1990, a year before the Leelanau Sands Casino was completed, Dodie Chambers voiced the tribal council’s desire to “put economic development on the back burner” in order to “put more emphasis on social programs.”

That same year, tribal council member Eva L. Petoskey echoed this sentiment, saying that she would like to see “more emphasis put on education, and involvement of youth in Tribal activities.”

By 1995, the tribe’s conceptualization of the museum began to solidify as the newly formed museum committee applied for and received grants for the purposes of “collecting, cataloging, and preserving significant tribal artifacts for inclusion” in the to-be established “Museum and Cultural Learning Center.” The tribe received its largest grant in December 2005 from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development for $500,000, enabling the tribe to begin drafting plans for the construction of the physical structure. The tribe also received a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services that enabled them to hire founding director Laura Quackenbush. While not a member of the tribe, Quackenbush had long served as the director of the nearby Leelanau Historical Society Museum, and had developed a close working relationship with the tribe over time.

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234 Weeks, 121.

235 Ibid.


238 Quackenbush, interview.
After years of planning, ground broke on the construction of the museum in 2007. While museum personnel reported feeling excited about the opportunity to develop the museum, given their historical experience, many were hesitant about the process. In an interview with a tribal elder and museum volunteer, he explained that those working on the museum’s development had to “overcome…historical tendencies” developed as a result of decades of hardships and lack of opportunities.239 “When you have nothing, you don’t make plans…If you’ve never worked before, you don’t really have the discipline to work. You don’t really understand getting up, preparing for the next day. All those things, they sort of had to be regenerated...It’s different if you were wealthy and then someone bestowed more money on you. You’d know exactly what to do with it. But a lot of it is groping your way through and learning from your mistakes.”240

To overcome these “historical tendencies” and navigate the development of the museum, the founders turned to traditional cultural practices and knowledge systems as their guides. A tribal elder explained that “a lot of people in the traditional ways allowed their dreams to dictate their decisions.”241 Such was the case throughout the museum development process, which meant that decisions on structure and organization “[took] a long time,” but were “[brought] together and coalesced” to create a space in keeping with the community’s vision.242 Founding director Laura Quackenbush echoed this sentiment, explaining that there was “a spiritual component” to every decision made, and that throughout the development process, “we never brought in museum-related things” before tribal members performed the necessary tasks to

239 Dave, interview.

240 Ibid.

241 Ibid.

242 Ibid.
ensure “that they didn’t bring any bad connotation or bad feelings with them.” Quackenbush, as the director but a non-Native, explained that the tribe’s adherence to tradition at times slowed the process, as any non-Native’s involved in the development “couldn’t touch” particular sacred items brought in for display or archival preservation. While perhaps slowing the process of development, ultimately, by adhering to tradition, the Band was able to create “a very sacred place” in which to “preserve their culture” and “tell their story.”

After years of construction, the Eyaawing Museum and Cultural Center opened in 2009 with the expressed goals of “telling our true heritage” by “describe[ing] how [we] encountered roadblocks of survival and succeeded.” While providing a space for programs that would help the tribe revitalize traditional culture, the Band also developed the museum as an “attraction for people coming to visit the casino.” The museum’s mission statement reflects their emphasis on outsider education and tourism, stating that the institution’s purpose is to “promote the Tribe’s belief that the culture, language, and spirit of the Grand Traverse Band shall be recognized, perpetuated, communicated, supported, and shared with the people of all nations.”

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243 Quackenbush, interview. Quackenbush explained that one of the ways in which tribal members ensured that items did not contain “any bad connotation or bad feelings” was through the traditional practice of smudging, which involves the burning of herbs as a means of spiritual cleansing. The Grand Traverse Band traditionally uses sweetgrass for these ceremonial purposes.

244 Ibid. As an example, Quackenbush explained that because she is non-Native, she was not able to touch the taxidermy eagles that are showcased on the ceiling of the main exhibit hall. For the Band, the eagles are sacred and carry symbolic meaning, which is preserved by not allowing non-Natives to interfere.

245 Ibid.

246 Stump, “GT Band’s New Cultural Center to Open.”

247 Quackenbush, interview.

announcing Eyaawing’s opening, then-tribal chairman Derek Bailey echoed this sentiment, stating that the museum would “allow an opportunity for not only members, but visitors to Peshawbestown to come and learn about and appreciate the cultural history and to better understand who we are today.”249

Conclusion

Given the relatively recent affirmation of their tribal status, treaty rights, and recognition of their tribal identity, it makes sense that for their museum, the Grand Traverse Band would focus on educating the public on their history in ways that would further validate and perpetuate the sovereignty they had fought so long and hard to reclaim. Indeed, in tribal museums across the Great Lakes region, the interpretation of tribal history presented to the audience is one that largely emphasizes continuity with the past. From the 1970s on, these museums emerged in tandem with both national developments and within the context of circumstances specific to the region. Such circumstances necessitated that tribes utilize various avenues of activism, central to which was the development of tribal museums. Within institutions of their own creation, over which they have complete interpretative control, each of these tribes presents an interpretation of their history that conveys messages of both physical and cultural survival.

Yet, while emphasizing the persistence of tradition, these museums simultaneously articulate a new, modern American Indian identity – one informed by active participation in two distinct yet coexisting and mutually dependent sovereign nations. While the historical circumstances that prompted the development of each institution on the tribal level varies, articulations of a dual identity that balances historical tradition with the present, as well as tribal culture with mainstream, are conveyed in tribal museums across the region. Through the dual

249 Stump, “GT Band’s New Cultural Center to Open.”
emphases on continuity with the past and articulating a contemporary tribal identity, tribal museums enable these Great Lakes tribes to both exercise and exhibit sovereignty. As such, tribal activism did not end with the waning of the Tribal Sovereignty Movement, nor did it end with the reaffirmations of sovereignty and treaty rights that prompted the development of the nine tribally-run museums in the Great Lakes region. Instead, as former chief of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe explains, “our mission does not end with the protection of our sovereignty. It is only the beginning.”

Thus, as the next chapter will show, Native activism in tribal museums extends beyond the act of developing the museum itself, and into the interpretation presented through exhibits, and in the nature of the programming offered at each institution.

CHAPTER FIVE
ACTIVISM IN GREAT LAKES TRIBAL MUSEUMS

“Even though we may lose all of our battles, and it seems to me we do, we still fight.”
-Jo Ann Schedler, March 13, 2017

On July 28, 2017, the Oneida Nation Museum posted to the tribe’s community blog announcing the development of a new exhibit and appealing for the community’s input. The exhibit, entitled “Tehuttsihkw’a’eks: Lacrosse,” planned to be a “community centered” exhibit focusing on both the cultural and historical importance of the game, as well as the current role of lacrosse in the community.¹

The development of the “Lacrosse” exhibit and its opening less than a year later was timely, both for the tribe and for non-Native visitors. Since the early 2000s, lacrosse has been the fastest growing sport in the United States.² More high schools and colleges around the country have been adding programs every year, and professional programs are gaining more and more airtime on mainstream sports channels. For Native people, the mainstream growth in lacrosse’s popularity has been both promising and problematic. On one hand, talented Native players and successful tribal teams have garnered significant media attention, fostering a new interest in the origins of the game and its cultural and spiritual significance for those whose ancestors created it.


² Based on data from the National Federation of State High School Associations that has been reported by hundreds of national news outlets.
Wisconsin’s Oneida Nation Warriors, for example, won the gold medal at the 2015 State Games of the American National Lacrosse Championship, resulting in a number of local and national news articles profiling the team and interviewing players and coaches about the unique significance of the game for Oneida players.

Yet, on the other hand, the mainstream popularity of the game represents a new manifestation of mainstream American society’s long history of appropriating and asserting ownership over elements of Native culture and history. While Americans have become increasing aware of the damaging impact of racial and ethnic appropriation and commodification, appropriating elements of Native culture has remained surprisingly persistent.3 Protests over Washington’s National Football League team mascot, the “Redskins,” has been heavily contested, yet the name remains.4 Similarly, Atlanta Braves and Florida State Seminole fans continue to perform the “tomahawk chop” at games, and an Amazon search for “American Indian costume” produces over 4,000 results, promoting items like the “Novelty Native American Maid,” the “Men’s Chief Wansum Headdress,” and the “Indian Noble Warrior Costume.” There is a difference, of course, in a stereotyped “Indian” costume and playing a game created by Native people centuries ago, perhaps most discernibly because of Native people’s active participation in mainstream lacrosse. Still, predominately white American sports

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4 Several Great Lakes tribal communities have been active in such protests, including the Oneida Nation’s Change the Mascot campaign.
culture has taken ownership over the game and has assigned its own cultural meaning to it – one that is steeped in still prevalent notions of a quintessentially American masculinity.\(^5\)

For the Oneida, the “Lacrosse” exhibit has provided an opportunity to articulate a different meaning of the game to both Native and non-Native visitors – one that is rooted in cultural and spiritual tradition yet informed by contemporary involvement in the game. The exhibit, opened in February 2018, was almost entirely shaped by the Oneida community. Aside from one lacrosse stick, “every object in here is from a community member,” curator Eric Doxtator explains.\(^6\) The exhibit space is extensive, including a large glass display case, several wall panels, and an interactive touch screen in front.

Across these platforms, the “Lacrosse” exhibit provides considerable information about the traditional uses and meanings of the game, and does not shy away from confronting the problematic elements of contemporary mainstream lacrosse. In contrast to the mainstream cultural meanings associated with the game today, the exhibit explains that traditionally, the game was played to settle disputes in lieu of violence, and for spiritual and medicinal purposes.\(^7\) The exhibit contains a number of historic images and materials with accompanying text that explains its origins and expands on the traditional cultural significance of the game. This past is effectively connected to the present with the display of a sign used to designate a makeshift lacrosse field at Standing Rock during the gathering of tribes standing in solidarity to halt the

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\(^5\) A quick google search on “lacrosse and masculinity” reveals hundreds of news articles about a “toxic” strand of masculinity that is prevalent in programs and is associated mainstream, white notions about the sport.

\(^6\) Doxtator, interview.

\(^7\) Label text, “Lacrosse,” Oneida Nation Museum, Hobart, WI.
Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016. Lacrosse was played at the Standing Rock camp, the label text explains, “to bring medicine to the people of Standing Rock.” Significantly, the exhibit also provides an interpretation of the events surrounding a 2010 controversy in which Great Britain refused the Iroquois Nationals team entry into the country to participate in the World Lacrosse Championships using a Haudenosaunee passport. The team insisted on using Haudenosaunee passports, the label text explains, because “they serve as a form of identity and an expression of Haudenosaunee sovereignty.”

Through the interpretation provided, the “Lacrosse” exhibit moves towards the realization of several of the goals articulated by Native activists in the post-war years, making clear articulations of cultural persistence and revival, ethnic distinction, and sovereignty. It is, in

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8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Haudenosaunee is the traditional designation of the Six Nations Confederacy, which includes the Five Iroquois nations – the Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Cayuga, and Seneca – and the Tuscarora.

11 Label text, “Lacrosse.”
effect, a manifestation of Native activism at work. By educating non-Native audiences about the origins and traditional cultural significance of lacrosse, the exhibit effectively fills in gaps in historical knowledge and corrects common misconceptions about the game. For Native visitors, the exhibit facilitates the forging of a tradition-based connection to the game, and reclaims this important cultural practice as their own. Yet, the exhibit also recognizes the mainstream appropriation of the game, and articulates a sense of pride in Native players’ and teams’ successes in mainstream lacrosse. As such, contemporary lacrosse is informed by Native history and cultural tradition, but is conveyed as belonging to both the tribe and to the larger American society.

Ultimately, the “Lacrosse” exhibit exemplifies the three primary functions of Great Lakes tribal museums: to identify and address sources of collective historical trauma, to facilitate the revitalization and perpetuation of traditional culture, and to articulate a modern tribal identity. This chapter provides an analysis of the exhibits and programming of Great Lakes tribal museums and examines how each fulfill one or more of these primary functions. Previous chapters have determined that the foundation and development of these institutions was, in and of itself, a form of activism. These institutions were developed with the expressed purpose of inciting social, cultural, economic, and political change within their communities, the region, and to an extent, the larger American society. With an understanding of why these institutions were established, this chapter examines how they function to achieve their goals. In doing so, both commonalities and differences in exhibit interpretation and types of programming are examined. Through the interpretation presented in the exhibit space and the programming offered, tribal museums in the Great Lakes region serve these three intimately interconnected functions to address the goals first articulated by Native activists who emerged on the national stage in the
decades following World War II, but in ways that suit their specific contemporary needs. In short, tribal museums enable Great Lakes tribes to continuously exercise and exhibit sovereignty.¹²

**Tribal Museum Organization and Structure**

Before analyzing these institutions, their functions, and how they serve as sites for continuous activism, it is necessary to first identify the ways in which tribal museums are organized, and how they are different from mainstream museums.¹³ While in many ways developed and organized like mainstream museums, tribal museums differ in important ways and thus analysis of their exhibits and programs should be approached somewhat differently.

In an article providing a guide for Museum Assessment Program reviewers tasked with assessing tribal museums, the American Alliance of Museums points out that “the word ‘museum’ conjures a variety of emotions and expectations.”¹⁴ The fact that the word “museum” “embodies authority and ownership of culture” has been particularly problematic for Native

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¹² For the sake of transparency, it should be noted that while each exhibit and program offered at every institution considered here merits discussion, analysis is limited to those that are most common across the board, or that are exceptionally unique to a particular institution. Making generalized decisions about what is important certainly comes at a risk. As an outsider approaching each institution from an academic standpoint and with my own ingrained worldview, the significance of something might escape me. While recognizing this risk, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the ways in which the Great Lakes tribal museums serve as sites for continuous activism. As such, discussion of each and every program and exhibit at every institution, while certainly worthwhile, is not necessary for this purpose. Instead of touching on every exhibit or every program offered, then, a few are highlighted as demonstrative of the ways in which tribal museums are utilized as a means to a particular (though ever-evolving) end.

¹³ The term “mainstream” here is used to designate American museums that are non-ethically or culturally specific, and are not run and controlled by a distinct sovereign nation distinct from but within the United States.

people, as in the past much of that “authority” and “ownership” was assumed by non-Natives.\(^{15}\)

As a result, the word “museum” can trigger an historically-informed sense of distrust for Native people, even when considering tribally-run museums. Highlighting the historically-fraught relationship between Native communities and museums helps explain why community involvement has been so central to the development of Great Lakes tribal museums. Involving the community throughout the development process gradually breaks down barriers of distrust and enables those spearheading the development to earn the support of a community otherwise potentially skeptical. For some Great Lakes tribal museums, this is still an ongoing process. As tribal elder and Eyaawing Museum and Cultural Center volunteer Dave explained, “one of our goals is to…bring things here because it’s safe here, they’ll last longer…and [we can] clean things up and keep it so everyone can enjoy it. But that’s sort of like a step of trust. And that—that’s a bridge that we haven’t completely crossed.”\(^{16}\)

In part because of community involvement, tribal museum exhibits are at times considered less “academic” in the Euro-American traditional sense than those of mainstream museums.\(^{17}\) This perception is particularly relevant in terms of the types of sources that inform and shape the interpretation presented in the exhibit space. Oral traditions (those that rely on generationally-removed histories rather than personal, first-hand recollections), in particular, while becoming more generally accepted by academic historians, have in the past been understood as inherently unreliable. For Native communities, however, oral tradition has been the primary method of passing on information about, and conveying understandings of, the past.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) Dave, interview.

\(^{17}\) “Special Considerations for Reviewing Tribal Museums.”
As a result, in tribal museums, oral traditions are not only incorporated, but are often privileged over other types of historical documentation, many of which have largely been generated by non-Natives.

In addition, tribal museum exhibits may be understood as less “academic” because, in ways that mainstream museums do not, tribal museums must strike a balance between visitor expectation and adherence to cultural traditions. For example, while acknowledging that visitors may expect to see items “stereotypical of Native Americans” such as “the eagle feather, drums, and pipes,” the Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum does not display any of these items because each “hold a high place in our culture, traditions, and ceremonies” and therefore, “being sacred,” these items are not displayed anywhere in the exhibit space.18 As such, historically significant items and interpretation of these items, which may have facilitated greater understandings of Potawatomi culture for non-Native visitors, are withheld for cultural reasons.19

Perhaps the most significant difference between mainstream museums and tribal museums, which is certainly reflected in the tribal museums discussed here, is the nature of and goals of the institution’s programming. Mainstream museum programming is usually open to the general public audience for a fee.20 In contrast, programming at tribal museums is generally

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18 Label text, “Welcome,” Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum, Crandon, WI.

19 Along the similar lines, another principal difference between tribal museums and mainstream museums is the understanding of how collections can and should be used. In terms of best practices, museum archival collections are meant to be preserved, safeguarded, and are not generally open for public access. In tribal museums, however, items in collections are often held in collections for preservation and safeguarding, but are also available for use by tribal members for ceremonial or other traditional purposes.

20 “Special Considerations for Reviewing Tribal Museums.”
geared towards community members and in many cases, is only open to tribal members.

Programming at tribal museums also tends to be free, as most are non-profit and designed to provide the tools necessary for active participation in cultural production. Tribal museum programming ultimately aims to revive and perpetuate cultural practices, through which participants gain a better sense of their individual and community identity. Tribal museum personnel offer programming for tribal members in hopes that participation will enable and encourage more members to teach and perpetuate these practices to ensure their survival.

In addition, it is also important to note that in many cases, the history presented at tribal museums is not done so in chronological order. Instead, tribal history, articulations of traditional culture and worldviews, and information about the present are intertwined throughout the space. Though this can be somewhat disorienting to visitors accustomed to chronological organization generally utilized at mainstream history museums, it is done so purposefully, and speaks to Native understandings of the past as an active part of the present. As discussed in Chapter Three, for example, at the Lac du Flambeau Band’s George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center, visitors approach an exhibit on recent treaty rights disputes before elements of pre-contact and early European contact life are exhibited.

Functions of Great Lakes Tribal Museums

Identifying and Addressing Collective Historical Trauma

One of the primary functions of tribal museums in the Great Lakes region is to identify and address sources of collective historical trauma. The term “collective historical trauma” refers to “a complex and collective trauma experienced over time…by a group of people who share an
identity, affiliation, or circumstance.”

Collective historical trauma crosses generational boundaries, indicating that the emotional, psychological, and physical impacts of trauma are felt by generations beyond those that experienced the moment of the infliction of trauma first-hand. Some scholars have referred to this as a “soul wound,” focusing on an innate and at times unexplainable emotional and/or psychological awareness of trauma inflicted before one’s time. Others have focused on the more tangible ongoing impacts of trauma, such as economic struggles, substance abuse, lack of educational opportunities, racism, and a decline in traditional cultural practices.

Tribal museums in the Great Lakes region address both the “soul wound” inflicted by trauma and its more tangible impacts, though in varying ways and to different degrees. The Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, for example, contains an exhibit panel on “blood memory,” the term the Saginaw Chippewa use to describe the innate, often unexplainable connection that tribal members feel to traditional cultural practices, and the “memory” of forces that sought to interrupt or abolish those practices.

For many American Indian communities, identifying and addressing sources of collective historical trauma on their own terms is considered the necessary first step towards alleviating both its tangible and intangible ongoing impacts. Past and present misrepresentations of tribal history and culture in non-Native or mainstream institutions have perpetuated collective

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22 For more on “soul wound,” see Duran E., *Healing the Soul Wound: Counseling with American Indians and Other Native Peoples* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006).

23 Label text panel for “Blood Memory,” Ziibiwing Center. I put “memory” in quotations here because for most tribal members today, the “memory” of experiences like allotment or boarding schools is not a first-hand memory but rather a community-wide “memory,” or cross-generational understanding of such events.
historical trauma by further marginalizing and oppressing Native voices. As Comanche historian Paul Smith and Ann McMullen of the National Museum of the American Indian point out, “for Native people, history itself” has long been “another battleground, another weapon of conquest.” Through the tribal museums founded since the late 1960s, tribes have been able to assert ownership over their own interpretation of their collective history, and have done so in ways that promote healing by identifying the historical experiences that have continued to impact their communities.

Because some of the sources or moments that inflicted collective historical trauma for American Indian communities are now generationally removed, the trauma that continues to impact Native communities is at times more of a “representation” of the cause of trauma “as opposed to an [actual] event.” As such, how collective historical trauma is interpreted and represented in tribal museums is particularly important, as these institutions are often the only sites that inform and foster understanding of collective historical trauma and its impacts to both tribal members and non-Native visitors. At tribal museums, collective historical trauma is not only identified and represented from the tribe’s perspective, but is also necessarily “connected…to present day experiences and contexts.” How tribal history is interpreted at tribal museums is thus based on contemporary understandings of how the past continues to impact the present situation.

To begin the processes of identifying and addressing sources of collective historical trauma, tribal museums in the Great Lakes region often first communicate to visitors the

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24 Paul Smith and Ann McMullen in Cobb, Say We Are Nations, 1.

25 Mohatt, Thompson, Thai, and Tebes, “Historical Trauma as Public Narrative.”

26 Ibid.
foundations of their tribally-specific traditional worldview, and describe what life was like
before European contact. In doing so, the moment of change – of trauma, in many cases – is
subsequently made apparent, thus effectively showing how life and culture has been impacted as
a result. To do this, the exhibit spaces of several Great Lakes tribal museums begin with, or at
least include early on, traditional creation stories. Creation stories, also referred to as origin
stories, inform the visitor about the worldview that shapes the tribe and/or band’s understanding
of the world around them, and their place and role in that world.

While touring the Oneida Nation Museum with curator Eric Doxtator, he explained that
“we always start with this very large painting behind you that depicts our creation story.”27 The
act of sharing the Oneida creation story is a ceremonial event that, when done in keeping with
traditional practice, is led by tribal elders and takes hours and even days to complete.28 At the
museum, though, information about the creation story is conveyed in three different places at the
beginning of the exhibit space, signifying the crucial importance for visitors to understand the
meaning of the creation story before approaching any other aspects of Oneida culture exhibited
at the museum. In addition to the painting Doxtator refers to at the start of our tour, the Oneida
creation story’s messages and significance are conveyed on a text panel, as well as on two
interactive touchscreen devices located in a replica longhouse (a traditional Iroquois dwelling).
One of the screens plays a video explaining the cultural significance of the creation story and is
mounted on the wall within the longhouse, while the second screen is located on a nearby stand
and is lowered to be accessible to the museum’s young visitors, ensuring that every visitor has

27 Doxtator, interview.
28 Ibid.
the opportunity to internalize the meaning of the creation story before approaching the rest of the exhibit space.

The creation story, Doxtator explained, conveys “our purpose for being here,” which is understood “primarily as the caretakers of the land.”

In a televised interview, tribal elder Randy Cornelius echoed this sentiment, explaining that “our creation story teaches us about respecting everything, and it teaches about responsibility that we have as human beings as the protectors and caretakers of this natural world.” Highlighting the creation story and its message at the beginning of the exhibit space serves multiple purposes. Hearing the creation story connects or reconnects tribal members with its message, reminding or informing Oneida visitors about traditional understandings that have shaped the ways in which they have traditionally approached, related to, and utilized the natural world around them. In addition, emphasizing their role as “caretakers” of the natural world sets the stage for later exhibits that identify moments of collective historical trauma – namely, exhibits that detail the decimation of the reservation’s timber resources by outsiders, and the devastating loss of much of their lands.

Like the Oneida Nation Museum, the Anishinabe creation story is depicted through artwork at the George W. Brown, Jr. Museum and Cultural Center. Several works around the museum depict elements of the creation story, including a painting on the front door of a body of water possibly representing the great flood at the beginning on the story, and various depictions of the turtle, the central symbol of the creation of Turtle Island, the Anishinabe name for what is

29 Cornelius, interview.

30 Ibid.

31 In this way, the interpretation presented at the Oneida Nation Museum is similar to that of the nearby Menominee Logging Camp Museum, which emphasizes Menominee understandings of the land that informed the sustainable logging practices disrupted by outsider intervention. This is discussed at greater length in Chapter Two.
now North America. Unlike the Oneida museum, however, no interpretive text accompanies these pieces. This perhaps speaks to sacred nature of the Creation Story for the Band, as they may not want to share the details of the story with outsiders. The absence of any interpretation could also be a result of the Lac du Flambeau’s contentious relationship with many local non-Natives in recent decades as a result of hunting and fishing disputes.

In addition to creation stories, migration stories are also foregrounded at several Great Lakes tribal museums, particularly those run by the region’s several Ojibwe bands, and also provide the historical context necessary to demonstrate how and why later events or moments caused collective historical trauma. The “Migration” exhibit at the Bois Forte Heritage Center and Cultural Museum provides an illustrative example. Through a label text podium, maps, an artistic illustration, and physical components like a large reconstructed wooden canoe, this exhibit tells the story of Ojibwe migration from the eastern part of the country to the Great Lakes region. Significantly, at the Bois Forte museum as well as Ojibwe museums across the Great Lakes region, the interpretation of the tribe’s migration to the region emphasizes that the migration was initiated by a prophecy that foretold the disastrous impact newcomers would have

32 Like the Oneida creation story, the Anishinabe story is long and the telling of the story is sacred. In brief (and to my best knowledge), the story begins when Kitchi-Manitou (the “Great Mystery” or “Great Spirit”) sent the first people to earth – the Anishinabe or “Original People.” The people began to stray from their harmonious ways and began to fight, and so Kitchi-Manitou purified the earth with a “mushko’-be-wun’” or great flood. Only Nanaboozhoo survived, along with some birds and animals. Nanaboozhoo searched for land and when he found none, he determined to go to the bottom of the water and create a land mass from a handful of earth from the bottom. He could not reach the bottom however, and after several animals tried and failed as well, a muskrat was able to reach the bottom and grab a tiny fistful of earth. He died from lack of air, sacrificing his life for the greater good. The turtle asked that the muskrat’s earth be placed on his back, and once it was, the land mass grew into a growing island that is now North America.

33 As explained in Chapter Two in the discussion on the impact of boarding schools, attacks on traditional culture have made some hesitant to share elements of that culture, leading many to feel that sacred elements should be protected from outside intervention. The Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum’s decision to refrain from the display of any sacred items is also illustrative.
on Ojibwe traditions and way of life if they remained near the large body of salt water (the Atlantic Ocean). The Bois Forte exhibit explains that the migration occurred long ago, and that a “megis” or seashell guided the tribe along the water to the place – the Great Lakes region – where they were meant to create a permanent home. Through this interpretation of the migration story, the Bois Forte museum emphasizes the Band’s long tenure on their present lands, conveying the message that the region had been their home long before the arrival of Europeans, and that this home was pre-destined to be theirs by a higher power.

![Figure 15. Bois Forte Heritage Center and Cultural Museum “Migration” exhibit](image)

Significantly, Ojibwe migration stories conveyed at Great Lakes tribal museums also emphasize that the prophecy that prompted their migration to the region advised them to make their home “where food grows on the water.” As discussed in Chapter Four, wild rice cultivation was central to Ojibwe traditional culture. In Minnesota in particular, much of the Bois Forte and Fond du Lac bands’ activism in recent decades has focused on revitalizing wild rice beds and reintroducing traditional methods of cultivating the rice. This element of the interpretation of the migration story presented at Great Lakes Ojibwe tribal museums provides

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34 Label text, “Migration,” Bois Forte Heritage Center and Cultural Museum, Tower, MN.
35 Ibid.
historical context that highlights why environmental changes have caused perpetual collective historical trauma for Ojibwe communities, and validates efforts to revitalize the practice as a means mitigating the trauma’s impact on their communities.

While articulations of a tribally-specific worldview are often conveyed in the initial exhibit spaces at tribal museums, at the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, articulations of the worldview that shapes and informs Anishinabe culture and historical understandings gradually unfolds as visitors move through the permanent exhibit space. For the Anishinabe, history is divided into seven eras, referred to as the Seven Fires, during each of which one of the Seven Prophecies was delivered. Interpretations of each era or Fire, its corresponding prophecy, and its historical significance for the Saginaw Chippewa are strategically placed throughout the exhibit space in conjunction with the events that coincide the message or prediction of each teaching. For example, the label text describing the Fifth Prophecy delivered during the Fifth Fire explains that when the prophecy was delivered by the Creator to the Anishinabe, it “foretold that the Anishinabek would encounter separation and struggle for many generations;” and that “during the time of the Fifth Fire,” the Anishinabe who “accepted the promise” of the “Light Skinned people” who brought “a promise of joy and salvation” would “abandon the old ways” and would bring “unbalance in our communities.” This label text is placed immediately prior to the museum’s exhibits pertaining to the tribe’s fraught history of treaty-making with the United States, as well as exhibits on the impact of the federal government’s assimilationist policies.

Williamson and Benz, 4.

The strategic placement of articulations of Anishinabe beliefs and historical understandings throughout the Ziibiwing Center’s permanent exhibit space serves multiple purposes. By interpreting historical events as the fulfillment of Anishinabe prophecies, the tribe effectively sends the message to visitors that their history was not dictated by European contact. Instead, the circumstances that emerged as a result of contact are interpreted in line with traditional Anishinabe methods of understanding and making sense of the past. The language utilized also makes clear the precise moment of collective historical trauma. Yet, using the text of the Fifth Prophecy as an example, by conveying the message that the moment of collective historical trauma was predicted, the Saginaw Chippewa also take ownership over the direction of their historical experience. They were not acted upon in this moment of collective historical trauma, but rather, were actors in a moment that promised and produced a devastating “unbalance” still felt by the tribe. In doing so, the tribe simultaneously identifies the moment of trauma, addresses its impact, and negates a commonly held misconception that Native people were “victims” who had little to no agency in determining their own future.

Tribal museums in the Great Lakes region also provide interpretations of elements of pre-contact life in order to demonstrate the ways in which Native culture and lifeways have been altered. Many provide detailed information about pre-contact social and familial organization in ways that highlight the sometimes stark contrasts between Euro-American social organization and that of their own traditional culture. While touring the Eyaawing Museum and Cultural Center, for example, my tour guide explained that in traditional Ojibwe societies, “women did everything.”38 Within Eyaawing’s exhibit space, there is a large exhibit displaying both authentic and replicated materials used by the Ojibwe in their everyday lives, including a replica of a

38 Dave, interview.
traditional lodge. Little textual interpretation accompanies the exhibit, but Dave explained that during museum tours, he always likes to point out to visitors that while using the sweat lodge to induce spiritual visions for guidance was typical for men, women “rarely went into the sweat lodge because they already knew who they were.”

Ojibwe society was “very matrilineal,” he explained, and as a result, women’s roles were clear. This interpretation of traditional Ojibwe social organization highlights one of the ways in which sustained contact with Euro-American settlers uprooted and forever altered Ojibwe life in ways particularly traumatic for women, who traditionally understood their roles in no uncertain terms.

While an emphasis on traditional gender roles and social organizations highlights the traumatic impact of changes brought about by European contact, the interpretation presented in the exhibit space and during the tour also conveys a sense of cultural continuity and creative adaptation. Specifically, elements of the exhibit text and the tour guide’s narration speak to a quality understood as inherent in Native women as a result of their traditional roles within Ojibwe familial and tribal social organization. While explaining elements of traditional Ojibwe social organization, my tour guide abruptly led me across the exhibit space to the opposite side of the room to an exhibit dedicated to tribal activist Ardith “Dodie” Harris Chambers. “This is why I keep mentioning her,” he said, pointing to a photo of Chambers. Because of traditional understandings of women’s roles in Ojibwe society, “it’s not unlike a woman to step forward and be willing and able to do things.” The exhibit itself celebrates Chambers’ activist spirit, and highlights her central role in facilitating the tribe’s federal recognition in 1980. Through her

39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
activism, Chambers represents the ways in which cultural traditions have been adapted to suit present needs, and in doing so, have mitigated the negative impacts of Euro-American invasion. As such, the exhibit and interpretation provided during the tour perform the dual functions of identifying a source of collective historical trauma, yet emphasizing the ways in which tradition, even in an intangible form, has enabled the tribe to overcome the perpetual impact of that trauma.

In addition to the ways in which contact with Euro-American settlers altered social organization and traditional gender roles, several Great Lakes tribal museums also articulate how the advent and decline of the fur trade represents a pivotal period of historical change that inflicted perpetual collective historical trauma on the region’s Native communities. How this is done at the Forest Country Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum and the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center are demonstrative of the complex ways that the fur trade is interpreted at institutions across the region. While the history of the fur trade is articulated in different ways reflecting each tribe’s unique historical experience, both institutions emphasize above all else the ways in which the fur trade and sustained contact altered traditional hunting methods and the tribes’ relationships with the natural world.

At the Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum, articulations about the tribe’s history of trade with European settlers immediately follows the alcove that screens “The Gathering” video on a text panel interestingly titled “Our Great Nation.” As discussed in Chapter Four, articulations of Potawatomi nationalism are present throughout the exhibit space, yet this particular one is surprising. Rather than convey the sense of survival, nation-building, and cultural cohesion present elsewhere in the museum’s exhibit space, the “Our Great Nation” panel discusses the tribe’s initial contact with French trader Jean Nicolet in 1634,
who, the text explains, is credited with initiating Potawatomi trade with the French. While the title “Our Great Nation” conveys a sense of success, the message of the text itself is quite different. Specifically, the label text explains that meeting Nicolet “signaled centuries of forced travel and change for the Neshnebek [Potawatomi]. Entry into trading alliances with Europeans gradually reduced our self-sufficiency as we became more reliant on European technology and trade goods. We were drawn into their military and political alliances. When we were no longer useful to them or to the Americans who succeeded them, we were forcibly moved, and moved again.”

In sharp contrast to the message conveyed by the panel’s title, the interpretation of trade with Euro-American settlers within the text suggests an almost complete lack of power and control over the direction their future would take. There is no “middle ground” or reciprocal relationship present in this interpretation.

While recent scholarship has emphasized a level of Native agency throughout early contact with Euro-Americans, the Forest County Potawatomi museum’s interpretation is much different. In fulfilling the museum’s function as a site for identifying and addressing sources of collective historical trauma, this interpretation makes sense. By emphasizing the devastating impact of conditions forced upon them by outsiders, the tribe’s survival and the revival of an international sense of Potawatomi nationhood is made all the more remarkable. Contemporary Potawatomi national identity rests on a sense of pride, survival, and perseverance. Identifying early contact and trade as a source of collective historical trauma suits this contemporary need by fostering a strong sense of pride in Potawatomi physical and cultural survival.

In ways that the Forest County Potawatomi museum does not, the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center acknowledges the Lac du Flambeau Band’s active and

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42 Label text, “Our Great Nation,” Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum, Crandon, WI.
deliberate participation in the fur trade. Following the museum’s exhibit on the contentious battles over the exercise of treaty-guaranteed hunting and fishing rights, visitors approach a replica of a dwelling within which trade would have been conducted. While little textual interpretation is provided, the physical structure is accompanied by a poster-sized photo of a Euro-American trading post building with a sign in the window advertising Indian crafts and beadwork and four young Native children in front. Exhibiting these together – the image of the Euro-American trading post and the replica Native trading post – suggests mutual participation in the trade.

While acknowledging mutual participation in trade and the existence of a “middle ground,” later textual interpretation at the George W. Brown, Jr. museum emphasizes the changes that the fur trade brought to traditional Ojibwe practices. Specifically, a label text that appears in a later section of the museum describes Euro-American traders as “efficient, ruthless, dashing, and tenacious.”43 The text goes on to say that fur trader’s operations “changed the social, political and economic aspects of Indian culture. Indians became dependent upon the guns, knives, traps, kettles and cloth in exchange for furs, hides, corn, potatoes, wild rice, maple sugar, fish and game. They abandoned their annual migratory cycle to remain in this area where 50% of the best furs were then obtained.”44 Through this interpretation, the museum points to the fur trade as a period that produced irreversible changes, dependency, and damaged the traditional practices that had defined Ojibwe identity before contact.

The complexity of interpreting the fur trade at tribal museums is made even more apparent by the inclusion of stereotyped Native fur trade “face-in-hole” cutout display within one

43 Label text, “Fur Trade History, George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center, Lac du Flambeau, WI.

44 Ibid.
of the fur trade exhibit spaces at the George W. Brown, Jr. museum. Face-in-holes are common at American tourist sites, and can be found within the exhibit spaces of mainstream museums across the country. Generally constructed out of wood or cardboard, face-in-holes are life-sized depictions of a specific, often stereotyped, and generally locally-relevant persona in which the face as been removed to allow participants to look through a hole and from the other side, appear as though they are wearing the outfit, hairstyle, and accessories of the persona depicted. As their most basic function, face-in-holes enable participants to temporarily embody the depicted persona, usually for the amusement of the participant and those around them. At the George W. Brown museum, there are two face-in-holes within the fur trade exhibit space. Visitors first approach a female persona, depicted with dark skin and black hair styled in two long braids with three feathers, wearing a fringed beige dress and accessorized with moccasins, a beaded belt, a deerskin purse, and a turquoise necklace. On the opposite side of the same board, a male persona is depicted with the same dark skin and hair as the female persona, and wears a fur hat adorned with a feather, a beaded sash, an embroidered shirt and pants, and moccasins.

While I toured the exhibit space during my visit, two other visitors were present. I watched as they participated in the activity, temporarily embodying the Native fur traders depicted and amused as they took turns taking photographs. The experience brought to light the fact that the inclusion of face-in-holes in a tribally-run museum is, perhaps, perplexing. As discussed in Chapter Three, the exhibit space at the George W. Brown museum confronts the tribe’s experience with racism, historical misrepresentations, and anti-treaty backlash head-on, making the presence of face-in-holes even more surprising. While attractive for their popularity and ability to garner visitor interaction, face-in-holes invite participants to appropriate the
personas and, in this case, “play Indian” – an activity that runs the risk of confirming the same stereotypes that the surrounding exhibit space works so hard to break down.

Figure 16. Face-in-hole at the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center
Credit: Meagan McChesney

While the risks associated with the inclusion of Native-persona face-in-holes are certainly present, it seems a calculated risk where the pay-off for the tribe is arguably greater. Face-in-holes are popular, common, and enticing to the point that few can resist the urge to momentarily stick their face through the hole provided. Engagement is almost guaranteed. For visitors, this is appealing because it enables them to engage with the space and “play Indian” in a way that, because it is sanctioned by the tribe, perhaps feels less offensive or problematic. While perhaps not immediately apparent, the potential benefits for the tribe are multi-faceted. In a society where “playing Indian” is still so prevalent, providing the opportunity to do so at the museum enables the tribe to assert some control over what the experience will mean to the visitor. In a tribal museum, the tribe controls the historical context, physical environment, and interpretation that informs the visitor’s experience in taking part in the face-in-hole activity.45

45 See Philip Deloria, Playing Indian (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) for more on the history of “playing Indian” and its impact on both mainstream and tribal culture.
In terms of identifying and addressing sources of collective historical trauma, the use of Native fur trader face-in-holes is potentially effective. The activity requires that the visitor not only read and learn about the history of the fur trade from the tribe’s perspective, but subsequently embody it. The activity is risky and certainly has the potential to be trivialized, but for a museum founded out of the backlash of treaty rights, it momentarily puts visitors in tribal member’s shoes. For tribal members, the activity provides an opportunity to physically connect with and understand their ancestors’ historical experience in a way not possible through other mediums. For non-Native visitors, embodying a Native fur trader enables them to quite literally stand in their shoes, and hopefully, facilitates an understanding of how this period of the American past inflicted collective historical trauma that has continued to shape and impact Ojibwe life.

In addition to pre-contact and the period of early contact with Euro-American settlers, Great Lakes tribal museums utilize a significant amount of exhibit space addressing the elements of American federal policy and ideology that have inflicted collective historical trauma on their communities. To a greater degree than any other subject, the experience and impact of Indian boarding schools is addressed in every tribal museum across the region. Tribes across the Great Lakes region were impacted by Indian boarding schools, as children from every tribe were sent, sometimes forcibly so, to schools either on the reservation or in different parts of the region and/or country. The period during which Indian boarding schools operated provides a definable source of collective historical trauma, with many tangible and recognizable impacts. At the Forest County Cultural Center, Library and Museum, for example, Indian boarding schools are directly recognized as a source of trauma, stating that “the historical effects of this trauma are
still shared today by our elders.” The panel text describing Indian boarding schools and their impact on the tribe explains that “by 1900, most Native American children, including Potawatomi, were literally taken from their homes and sent away to boarding schools.” The text goes on to describe that “all of the children would be put into uniforms, have their hair cut off, and be forced to learn white culture, the English language, and Christianity...All of these indignities were an attempt to assimilate the children into mainstream society.”

Through this text, the Forest County Potawatomi museum provides both intangible and tangible evidence of the collective historical trauma brought on by Indian boarding schools, citing the internal emotional and mental distress as well as the physical trauma inflicted on boarding school students. Significantly, the museum also provides physical evidence of the schools’ impact, displaying an image next to the panel text of a barber chair with long black hair covering the floor around it. The small label text accompanying this image explains that “one of the first cruelties endured by the children was to have their hair cut off,” highlighting the simultaneous emotional and physical distress resulting from the physical changes forced upon Native children’s bodies at the schools.

The interpretation of and messages conveyed about Indian boarding schools at the Forest County Potawatomi museum is largely representative of those at tribal museums across the Great

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46 Label text, “Boarding Schools,” Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum, Crandon, WI. While describing the “cruelty” of cutting off children’s hair, the text does not attempt to explain the cultural significance of longer hair for the Potawatomi. It is insinuated, however, that regardless of the cultural meaning, the act was “cruel” in its intent to force Native children to physically alter their appearance to suit mainstream “norms.”

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.
Lakes region. There are, however, some institutions that provide a more nuanced interpretation of the experience. At the Lac du Flambeau Band’s George W. Brown, Jr. museum, for example, the trauma caused by Indian boarding schools is addressed, yet an exhibit honoring deceased tribal elder Louis St. Germaine conveys a sense of pride in St. Germaine’s time at the infamous Carlisle Indian Industrial Boarding School, explaining that at the school, he “became a star athlete on the track and basketball teams,” and “had the opportunity to play alongside the Olympic Medalist Jim Thorpe.”

Similarly, the interpretation of the boarding school experience at the Stockbridge-Munsee’s Arvid E. Miller Library Museum is more nuanced. In the exhibit on Indian boarding schools, the label text cites the reservation’s Lutheran Mission School as the primary reason for the near-extinction of the Mohican language, yet also credits the school with providing the tools necessary for tribal members to integrate themselves into the larger community around them. Having long converted to Christianity, the exhibit also conveys an appreciation for the school’s religious focus. Historian and tribal member Thelma Putnam is quoted in the exhibit saying that the school “did a lot for our salvation.” The National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the school, which stands today and is promoted as a premier tourist destination on the reservation, was prepared and submitted by the Historical Committee that oversees the Library Museum and reflects this more nuanced interpretation. The nomination explains that the school “served as a link between the community and the larger white society” and as such, played “a

50 Label text, “Tribute to a Legend: Louis St. Germaine,” George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center, Lac du Flambeau, WI.

51 Label text, “Lutheran Mission School,” Arvid E. Miller Library Museum, Bowler, WI.
major role in assimilating the Stockbridge” to their changing surroundings in Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{52}

Visitors get the sense that this was both positive and negative, helping members settle into their new home in Wisconsin, yet, as tribal member Lawrence Jones is quoted in the exhibit text, damaging in the “militaristic” manner in which the school “stressed that we learn to live like the white man.”\textsuperscript{53}

As sites for identifying, interpreting, and addressing collective historical trauma, the goal for tribal museums is not necessarily to reinterpret history to uncover a “truth” that has been obscured for the purpose of prompting the dominant society to “apologize for [inflicting] historical trauma.”\textsuperscript{54} Rather, the act of taking ownership of their own historical interpretation is a form of activism in itself – an action undertaken for the purpose of emphasizing and conveying particular messages that inform a contemporary identity based on tribally-determined cultural traditions that suit present needs. This highlights the ways in which tribal museum’s function of identifying and addressing sources of collective historical trauma relates to another principal function of Great Lakes tribal museums – to facilitate the revitalization and perpetuation of traditional culture.

**Facilitating the Revitalization and Perpetuation of Traditional Culture**

Since it was first conceptualized in terms of the American Indian historical experience by Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart in the late 1980s, several studies have been conducted on the ways in which collective historical trauma continues to impact Native communities. Studies in both history and health-related fields have also sought to identify effective methods for


\\textsuperscript{53} Label text, “Lutheran Mission School.”

\\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
initiating healing amongst Native communities. In what is certainly unsurprisingly to Native activists, scholars have repeatedly come to the conclusion that alleviating the effects of collective historical trauma is most successfully initiated by “foster[ing] a reattachment to traditional Native values by incorporating tribally specific ceremonies and cultural teachings” back into tribal life.\textsuperscript{55} In other words, what has proven most effective has been the gradual realization of the goals first articulated by Native activists in the post-war years.

Through interpretations of the history of corrosive American policies and programs like Indian boarding schools, and the collective historical trauma inflicted on Native communities by such experiences, tribal museums across the Great Lakes region highlight the central role of assimilation programs in accelerating the decline of traditional cultural practices, particularly in terms of traditional languages. At the Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum, for example, the Indian boarding school exhibit explains that, “if Native languages were spoken, the children were severely punished. Most of the punishments included beatings at the hands of teachers, administrators and even the clergy.”\textsuperscript{56} In doing so, such exhibits speak to the reason why language revitalization has been a central focus of cultural revitalization efforts at every tribal museum across the Great Lakes region.

The Forest County Potawatomi museum provides an illustrative example of the multitude of ways tribal museums seek to educate both tribal members and non-Natives about the cultural significance of traditional language, and to revitalize tribal members’ use of the language. In a televised interview with Wisconsin Public Television, the museum’s language instructor Jim Thunder explained that historically, the Potawatomi were “more dominated by white people…to

\textsuperscript{55} Lonetree, 125.

\textsuperscript{56} Label text, “Boarding Schools.”
a certain extent” than Great Lakes Ottawa and Ojibwe bands, and as a result, there are fewer fluent Potawatomi speakers.\textsuperscript{57} This is particularly devastating because, as Thunder explains, “without our language, we cease to be Indian.”\textsuperscript{58} For the Potawatomi, the decline of their traditional language is a particularly salient source of collective historical trauma because the language, according to founding museum director Mike Alloway, “is the very definition of our people. It is the core.”\textsuperscript{59} “If it dies off,” Alloway continued, “that is the end of the Potawatomi. Because when you’re not using your language, you don’t know anything about yourself. You don’t know anything about your culture. You’re outside of it.”\textsuperscript{60}

Together, Thunder and Alloway speak to the ways in which the declining use of the Potawatomi language has been a perpetual source of collective historical trauma for the tribe, and emphasize the need to reconnect with the language in order to alleviate that trauma. To do this, the tribe has utilized a variety of tools, including an interactive language kiosk within the exhibit space, the addition of language classrooms in 2011, and the development of a Potawatomi language mobile application.\textsuperscript{61} The museum has also incorporated the language into the exhibit space by providing two translations of each label text – one in Potawatomi, and one in

\textsuperscript{57} Thunder, interview.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{59} Alloway, interview.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61} The mobile application, first released in 2014, is similar to the language kiosk within the exhibit space. The application enables users to select a category, such as “Greetings,” “Clothing,” or “Action Phrases,” for example, where users can then click on a particular word or phrase and hear how to say it in the Potawatomi language. The application also assists users in learning the Potawatomi alphabet, and contains information about the museum. Unlike the application, however, the language kiosk in the exhibit space also enables visitors to listen to tribal members talk about the cultural significance of the language, as well as personal stories about what it has meant to them to lose knowledge of and/or learn and revive the language.
English. Significantly, on each panel the Potawatomi text is on the left and the English follows on the right, privileging the Potawatomi translation as visitors naturally read from left to right.

In similar ways, the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways explicitly connects the decline of the Anishinabe language to assimilationist federal policies and programs, stating that “the effects of colonization are still evident in that many of today’s Anishinabek cannot speak their language.”62 Citing this reason for the declining use of the language, the museum also informs visitors about the cultural significance of the language, stating that “our language is evidence of our philosophy and way of life.”63 Like the Forest County Potawatomi museum, the Ziibiwing Center has also spearheaded efforts to revitalize the language on the reservation, but has utilized somewhat different techniques. Specifically, coinciding the opening of the Ziibiwing Center’s permanent exhibit space, the museum also created a club for tribal members focused on language revitalization, called the Anishinabemowin Club. The success of the Anishinabemowin Club in facilitating the revitalization of the language has prompted additional developments, including the creation of an Ojibway Language Immersion room within the Ziibiwing’s Research Center in 2006, the hiring of a fluent visitor services staff member in 2007 to “help integrate language efforts in all aspects of the center’s services,” and the implementation of the Lil’ Language Warriors Club in 2008 to encourage fluency in young children.64


63 Ibid.

64 Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, “Anishinabemowin: Our Language,” in Ziibiwing Center 4-Year Report, Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways Papers, 2008, 15. Other tribal museums have reported on the popularity and success of language workshops and clubs. The Arvid E. Miller Library Museum, for example, reported in 2006 that the museum’s language workshops were its “most popular” because people have been “excited to learn the language and speak it.” Cindy Jungenberg,
Such efforts are representative of the myriad ways that tribal museums have taken on the role of spearheading language revitalization efforts within their communities as a means of ameliorating the impact of collective historical trauma, and ensuring that their distinct tribal language survives. In doing so, tribal museums across the Great Lakes region have relied on tribal elders for language instruction and guidance, which in turn has perpetuated another aspect of traditional culture – the vital and highly respected role of elders within their communities.  

While represented to varying degrees and in varying ways, several Great Lakes tribal museums dedicate ample exhibit space to celebrating tribal elders, and educating visitors about the crucial role that elders play in their communities. In Great Lakes Native communities, tribal elders are the consummate historians, conveying information about their collective tribal history and, perhaps more importantly, imparting lessons learned from the past. At the Forest County Potawatomi museum, this role is explained quite simply in a panel text that states, “history is what the elders said.” The panel is accompanied by a television screen playing a number of videotaped interviews with tribal elders sharing their experiences on a variety of topics, including Indian boarding schools, growing up on the reservation, and their involvement in tribal activism, to name a few. The Arvid E. Miller Library Museum, the Eyaawing Museum and Cultural Center, and the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center contain similar elements, dedicating exhibit space and utilizing videotaped interviews with elders to contribute to historical understandings and convey a sense of reverence for tribal elders.


65 As Eyaawing museum volunteer Dave explained, “we rely on elders that are so immersed in the language that they understand the deeper meanings of it.” Dave, interview.

66 Label text, “History is,” Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum, Crandon WI.
In addition to language revitalization efforts, Great Lakes tribes and their respective museums also rely on tribal elders for guidance in efforts to revitalize traditional methods of creating art, clothing, medicines, and tools. Since its founding in 1975, the Arvid E. Miller Library Museum has been particularly dedicated to reviving cultural practices, offering a number of workshops for tribal members and maintaining a craft shop within the museum where visitors can purchase tribally-made goods. Such workshops are largely led by tribal elders, whom, in some cases, are the only tribal members with any knowledge of the particulars of traditional practices. Periodically, the Library Museum produces reports on the level of success and participation of such workshops, which have been helpful in shaping subsequent efforts. In 2006, for example, the Library Museum reported on some of the institution’s recent workshops, including those on tribal medicines, regalia and beading. The tribal medicine and beading workshops were particularly popular, according to the report, as tribal members were excited “to learn about their culture and traditions” and “caught on fast.”

For the Stockbridge-Munsees, cultural revitalization programming has been particularly important because, having experienced a number of removals and been subjected to (and in some cases actively accommodated to) several assimilationist policies and programs, the tribe recognizes that “cultural survival…it not a given.” Their nearby neighbors, the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, have a similar understanding, having been removed around the same time as the

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67 Jungenberg, 2-3.

68 Ibid. In pointing out that members have “caught on fast” to traditional methods of creating tribal arts, crafts, and medicines, the report inadvertently points to the existence of what the Saginaw Chippewa refer to as “blood memory,” an intangible but ever-present innate understanding of, and connection to, cultural traditions and tribal ideologies.

Stockbridge-Munsees and had a similar historical experience. As such, the Oneida Nation Museum has also dedicated significant resources to providing workshops focused on revitalizing traditional arts and crafts. The Oneida museum also contains several exhibits that display both historic and contemporary tribal arts and crafts, and educates visitors on the cultural significance of these practices. As is common for tribal museums, the history presented in the Oneida museum’s exhibit space is not linear, but rather organized in such a way that the past is intertwined with the present. In keeping with this organization, within the pottery exhibit, repatriated and donated historic items are displayed amongst contemporary pieces, with a particular focus on acclaimed Oneida potter Jennifer Stevens. On the label text within the exhibit case, a quote from Stevens speaks to the historically-informed significance of pottery for the tribe, and the reasons that reviving the practice is so important, stating that “creating Oneida pottery has changed my life. It is a healing, grounding, spiritual, educational, and beautiful experience that touches me deeper than my flesh. The more I learn about the history of Oneida pottery, the more I learn about my Oneida Haudenosaunee ancestors, I inevitably learn about myself and my identity as an Oneida woman. I believe that education breaks stereotypes and brings you closer to the truth and truth is empowering for our Native American people.” As conveyed through Stevens’ quote, the pottery exhibit highlights the ways in which revitalizing the practice helps alleviate the impacts of collective historical trauma, and simultaneously helps inform and shape a contemporary Oneida identity rooted in cultural tradition and facilitating cultural growth.

Similarly, the Oneida museum contains a large exhibit case dedicated to traditional and contemporary beadwork. The label text within the case explains that “raised beadwork is deeply

70 Label text, “Swahtsya ne’ Ohutsya? – One Handful of Earth,” Oneida Nation Museum, Hobart, WI.
embedded in Wisconsin Oneida culture.”71 The text goes on to explain that “against many odds, the Wisconsin Oneida have worked to strengthen and revitalize their cultural heritage,” specifying that “raised beadwork has been especially important in the community since the late 1990s,” when classes were first offered to tribal members a little over a decade after the museum opened.72 For the Oneida Nation and particularly the band living in Wisconsin, the production of raised beadwork has served as a sign of cultural distinction, informing a particularly unique identity that connects those removed to Wisconsin with their ancestors back East. This important cultural practice went through two periods of decline, the exhibit explains, first in the years following their removal to the Great Lakes region, and again “during the Depression” when “the tourist market declined” and the tribe was forced to focus largely on physical survival at the expense of cultural practices.73 Since the museum began spearheading efforts to revitalize the practice, however, “there has been a tremendous resurgence of interest,” and today “this distinctive art form is an important marker of Haudenosaunee identity throughout the Six Nations.”74

Ultimately, for the Wisconsin Oneida, the revival of the raised beadwork “honors the artistry and survival strategies of the ancestors while shaping the traditions to fit twenty-first century Haudenosaunee life.”75 This particular quote from the “Raised in Beadwork” label text speaks to the ways in which the primary functions of tribal museums are overlapping and

71 Label text, “Raised in Beadwork,” Oneida Nation Museum, Hobart, WI.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.
mutually-supporting. Contemporary raised beadwork addresses two sources or moments of collective historical trauma – the Band’s removal from their ancestral homelands in present-day New York and the Depression era that hit the Oneida community particularly hard – by revitalizing a practice almost lost as a result of these moments, and reconnecting the tribe with this foundational element of their distinct, historically informed identity. At the same time, this exhibit speaks to the function discussed in the next section of this chapter, the ways in which tribal museums enable Native communities to articulate a modern tribal identity that is rooted in traditional practices like raised beadwork, but, as the label text states, shaped to reflect and suit contemporary life.

In addition to the revitalization and perpetuation of traditional languages and arts and crafts, in the Great Lakes region in particular, the perpetuation and revitalization of traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering practices have been particularly important, and particularly contentious. While the sources that contributed to the traumatic decline of traditional languages and arts and crafts threatened tribal culture, those that have threatened traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering practices have, in some cases, threatened tribal members’ physical survival as well. As previous chapters have shown, for some tribes in the Great Lakes region, disputes over the exercise of treaty rights provided one of the primary motivations for developing a tribal museum. Through their exhibit interpretation, tribal museums across the region, such as the Grand Traverse Band’s Eyaawing Museum and Cultural Center, stress the fact that treaty rights are “inherent rights”, not rights that are “given.”

76 Hunting, fishing, and gathering using

76 Label text, “Fishing,” Eyaawing Museum and Cultural Center, Suttons Bay, MI.
traditional methods are “as important to us today as it has been for centuries,” the Eyaawing’s exhibit explains.77

Like the Grand Traverse Band’s Eyaawing Museum, most tribal museums contribute to the revitalization and perpetuation of traditional methods of resource cultivation by educating tribal members about the cultural significance of such practices, and encouraging the younger generations to continue to exercise, protect, and if necessary, fight for their rights to do so. The Forest County Potawatomi museum, for example, contains an interactive exhibit entitled the “Wall of Treaties,” which displays both the text of treaties and provides an interpretation of the treaties from the tribe’s perspective. Other museums, like the Ziibiwing Center, highlight the ways in which the federal government failed to adhere to treaties, explaining that, in an act of cultural “genocide,” the tribes’ “treaties [with the United States] were not honored.”78 Such interpretations are common at tribal museums across the region, and strive to educate and motivate tribal members to carry on these crucial practices.

Significantly, though, some tribal museums in the region play a more active role in revitalizing and perpetuating hunting, fishing, and gathering practices. The Arvid E. Miller Library Museum, for example, has in the past been responsible for issuing hunting and fishing tribal permits that allowed tribal members to hunt and fish out of state-sanctioned seasons and use traditional methods otherwise prohibited.79 In addition, several tribal museums, such as the Fond du Lac Cultural Center and Museum, have spearheaded workshops on building canoes, the

77 Ibid.

78 Label text, “When We Lost Our Ways of Living,” Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, Mt. Pleasant, MI.

traditional vessel used for fishing on the reservation’s lakes. In 2010, for example, the Fond du Lac museum, with a grant from the Administration to Native Americans, embarked on a months-long birch bark canoe project. Through this project, referred to as the Wiigwaasi-Jimaan Project (or Birch Bark Canoe Project in English), the museum sought to “teach the traditional craft” of making birch bark canoes “while promoting language preservation in a learn-while-doing immersion setting.” This project was immensely successful in teaching tribal members how to create and use birch bark canoes using traditional resource gathering, and simultaneously, helped members use their traditional language while doing so.

Figure 17. Birch bark canoe on display at the Fond du Lac Cultural Center and Museum
Source: The Newberry Library, courtesy of the Fond du Lac Cultural Center and Museum

Such practices demonstrate the success of tribal museums in facilitating the revitalization and perpetuation of traditional culture. As a primary function, tribal museums not only educate about cultural traditions, but also provide opportunities for the practice of cultural traditions. In this way, tribal museums are distinct from many other ethnically or culturally-specific museums in that they not only convey information about culture, but actively practice culture as well. For tribal communities, cultural practice refers not only to the revitalization of tangible traditions.

such as the use of tribal languages and the production of traditional arts and crafts, but also to the revitalization of “intangible expressions of spirituality, values, respect, memory, reverence, worldview and cosmology.”81 Collectively, revitalizing both the tangible and intangible aspects of traditional culture and actively practicing culture facilitates the formulation of a historically-informed and culturally-based Native identity.

**Articulating a Modern Tribal Identity**

In helping to foster healing from collective historical trauma and facilitate the formation or resurgence of an identity rooted in tradition, Great Lakes tribal museums strategically emphasize elements of continuity with the past. By demonstrating to visitors that traditional culture was never lost to them but rather oppressed by outside forces, tribal museums provide an interpretation that forms the basis for distinction. Articulations of cultural continuity not only provide the basis for an identity rooted in tradition, but also effectively reaffirm the validity of treaties and justify tribal sovereignty by disproving challenges to tribal sovereignty made under the assumption that tribal communities today are too acculturated, and/or that “real Indians” no longer exist. In effect, such assertions of sovereignty help alleviate the collective historical trauma resulting from sources that sought to eliminate or limit that sovereignty. While emphasizing cultural continuity, Great Lakes tribal museums simultaneously emphasize the myriad ways that their communities have historically engaged with, impacted, and helped shape mainstream American society, and how they continue to do so today. In doing so, tribal museums serve what I consider their third primary function – to articulate a modern tribal

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identity based in tradition yet informed by an active participation in the larger American society, and shaped to suit contemporary needs and desires for the future.

Since European contact, Native communities have had to contend with a multitude of preconceived, often misinformed notions about their history and culture. Since the reaffirmation of tribal sovereignty in the late-twentieth century, misunderstandings about collective tribal identities have abounded, made even more complex by the fact that the processes of Native nation-building are ongoing. Such complexities, combined with long-standing prejudices about Native life, have resulted in a multitude of often conflicting notions about Native identities. Many non-Native Americans continue to relegate Native people to the past, while others argue that contemporary American Indians are too integrated into mainstream society to be distinct. For those aware of Native sovereignty, inconsistencies abound about reservation life, as some Americans assume most tribes are wealthy as a result of tribal gaming and tax breaks while others equate reservation life with inescapable poverty. In reality, Native communities and individuals are as varied as all American populations, yet unique in their sovereignty. Tribal museums provide the opportunity for tribal communities to formulate and articulate an identity that reaffirms distinction yet highlights commonalities. This is done primarily in tribal museums’ exhibit spaces, where, as historian Laura Peers argues, articulations of a modern tribal identity “challenge underlying beliefs about the past that function to legitimate relations between majority society and minority groups” within “the United States today.”

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82 The discussion on the impact of James Fennimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* on the Stockbridge-Munsees in Chapter Two provides an illustrative example.

83 Peers, 216. While Peers’ study focuses on historical sites rather than museums, she makes parallels throughout and points to the ways in which understandings of each are similar. Peers explains that “living history sites,” the subject of her study, “are seen in similar ways to museums by Native people.” Both, she asserts, “reflect not only what we think we know about the past but what we value in it, and thus reflect
is particularly relevant in the Great Lakes region, where anti-treaty rights groups have aggressively questioned and dismissed the legitimacy of contemporary Native culture. In her study on the role of Native actors at historic sites, Peers argues that “myths” or misrepresentations about Native life are clung to in order to uphold a view of tribal history and culture used to justify stereotypes and racism.\(^{84}\) Tribal museums enable tribes to shift understandings of the past to reflect political and social concerns in the present in ways that challenge harmful preconceived notions of American history and Native people’s place and role in it.\(^{85}\)

The task of articulating a modern tribal identity that reflects a balance of traditional culture and contemporary circumstances, and conveys the complex reality of the co-existence of tribal distinction, sovereignty, and American citizenship, is challenging to say the least. To do this, tribal museums employ a number of tactics, providing strategic interpretations of elements of their past and present to better equip tribal members to formulate an individual and tribally-collective identity, and to help non-Native visitors understand the complex factors that inform and shape modern tribal identities. One way that many Great Lakes tribal museums do this is through their interpretation of Native participation in American military conflicts.

At the Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum, the exhibit “Honoring Our Veterans” points out that “Native Americans have enlisted three times more than society today.” As such, she utilizes materials about museums to inform her analysis on living history sites. The reverse is useful to do here as well.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., 231.

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 255.
any other racial or ethnic group, relative to their own population.”86 Several tribal museums across the region also highlight this information because, as director of the National Museum of the American Indian explains, “many of our fellow Americans remain unaware of the major contributions Native Americans have made to our nation’s armed forces.”87 Several scholars have sought to explain why American Indians have volunteered to serve despite over a century of dispossession, broken treaties, and political, social, and cultural oppression. Many explanations have been offered, though a few are strategically emphasized at tribal museums.

Principally, tribal museums emphasize the ways in which American military service has been understood as a continuation of the traditional role of the “warrior.” The label text for the exhibit “Ogitchedaw: Warriors” at the Ziibiwing Center, for example, explains that “ogitchedaw (warriors) dedicate their lives to protect and provide for the people. Ogitchedaw have always been a very important part of our communities. Despite colonization and government plans to exterminate Anishinabek people, Ogitchedaw societies remained very strong throughout the years…Historically, Ogichedaw societies played a significant role in the development of our youth and the protection of the people and land. Today, these same values are common with many Anishinabek Ogitchedaw. We have, and always will, hold our Ogitchedaw in high esteem.”88 The “Ogitchedaw: Warriors” exhibit is accompanied by the exhibit “Zhimaaganak: Honored Soldiers” in the neighboring space. The label text for this exhibit echoes some of the messages conveyed in the “Warriors” exhibit, highlighting the ways in which “warriors” and

86 Label text, “Honoring Our Veterans,” Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library, and Museum, Crandon, WI.


“honored soldiers” have played similar roles in Ojibwe society. Specifically, the exhibit text for “Zhimaaganak: Honored Soldiers” explains that “Zhimaaganak (honored soldiers) are people who have fought for the rights of all Anishinabek and are ready to give their lives for a cause. Many Anishinabek are on the battlefield everyday fight to protect the land, the waters, or for our people’s way of life. Those who protect our tribal traditions like fishing and hunting, or those who work to prohibit toxic waste sites on reservation lands can also be seen as warriors. In the short history of non-Native America, Anishinabek have served honorably in protection of our ‘new country.’”

A few elements of the interpretation provided in these accompanying exhibits stand out. First, in contrast to the persistent and still prevalent image of American Indian warriors as inherently violent and aggressive, the role of the warrior described in the label text is primarily that of protector and provider. While this interpretation does not overtly describe and challenge preconceived notions of the American Indian warrior image, such notions are nonetheless addressed by educating visitors about the traditional role of warriors in Native society, and the ways in which traditional “warriors” are similar to contemporary “soldiers.” Significantly, this interpretation also points to the fact that in taking on the role of American soldiers, American Indian warriors have done so to protect the land and their “new country.” This interpretation sends two simultaneous and complex messages: first, that for some, participation in American military conflicts may have been understood as a way to preserve and protect the land itself, not the dominant political system that presides over it; and second, that for others, the amalgamation of “warrior” and “soldier” has been purposeful, and that military service was undertaken in protection of both the land and the “new country.”

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89 Label text, “Zhimaaganak: Honored Soldiers” Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, Mt. Pleasant, MI.
Significantly, the texts of these complementary exhibits also highlight that, from a Native perspective, “warriors” are not only those who serve as soldiers “on the battlefield,” but also those who “fight to protect the land, the waters, or for our people’s way of life.” The “Zhimaaganak: Honored Soldiers” exhibit explains that from a Native perspective, activists, like those who “protect our tribal traditions like fishing and hunting,” are “warriors” as well. In similar fashion, Oneida lacrosse players are referred to as “warriors” in the Oneida Nation Museum’s “Lacrosse” exhibit, because, in playing and reviving the game, lacrosse players actively protect and perpetuate an important element of traditional culture. At the George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Cultural Center and Museum, those who adhere to the Seven Teachings of the Anishinabe are also described as “warriors” for the ways in which they perpetuate and embody traditional Anishinabe values. With this understanding, tribal museums themselves fulfill the duties of traditional Native warriors, working to protect the people, land, resources, traditional culture, and historically-informed values and worldviews.

At the Oneida Nation Museum, interpretative elements are included in the museum’s representation of veterans that speak to the ways in which American Indian military service in the twentieth century has highlighted the oppression and inequality tribes have faced at home. Following the exhibit on Oneida pottery, the museum contains a large display case dedicated to World War I. The label text within the case emphasizes the Wisconsin Oneida’s long history of contributing to the United States cause, including their support for the colonists in the Revolutionary War and particularly their considerable voluntary involvement in World War I.

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90 Ibid.

91 Label text, “Lacrosse,” Oneida Nation Museum, Hobart, WI.

92 Label text, “Elders,” George W. Brown, Jr. Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center, Lac du Flambeau, WI.
Despite the fact that tribal members were not legal U.S. citizens, numerous Wisconsin Oneidas served in the war, and, as the exhibit text explains, returned to the Oneida reservation after the war and “faced drastic and horrific changes.” 93 The text goes on to explain that “most of the Reservation land, which included their homes, was lost due to the effects of the Allotment Act. Furthermore, the Spanish flu had a devastating effect on the Reservation and the entire state. Many tribal members died when the flu swept through during the summer and fall of 1918.” 94 The Oneidas were particularly devastated by the Depression, and the federal resources needed to alleviate the situation were not sufficiently provided.

Figure 18. Oneida Nation Museum “World War I” exhibit case
Credit: Meagan McChesney

This articulation of the devastating circumstances Oneida veterans found at home in Wisconsin after World War I not only highlights the continued oppression of Native communities in the Great Lakes region, but also makes Native participation in World War II all the more striking. Native people volunteered and served in World War II to a much greater extent than World War I, a fact that Native communities across the Great Lakes region convey

93 Label text, “World War I,” Oneida Nation Museum, Hobart, WI.
94 Ibid.
with pride.\textsuperscript{95} Continued participation in the American military to the present is similarly celebrated, through both exhibit interpretation and through powwows honoring tribal veterans. In many cases, veteran’s powwows are the only programming spearheaded by, or supported by, tribal museums that are open to the public. At the Forest County Potawatomi museum, for example, the exhibit “Honoring Our Veterans” advertises the veteran’s powwow, and in doing so, encourages visitors, both Native and non-Native, to attend and celebrate the tribe’s military service.

By highlighting Native people’s ongoing participation in and significant contributions to the American military, tribal museums convey the clear message to visitors that they are, and have continuously been, active in shaping the political, social, and cultural identity of the country beyond the reservation. Furthermore, while some elements of traditional culture are protected from outside intervention, by inviting non-Native visitors to participate in veteran’s powwows, Native communities across the Great Lakes not only perpetuate involvement in mainstream society but actively seek to increase it. Such actions further solidify the articulation of a complex and dual identity – one that is rooted in tradition but is engaged with and shaped by American citizenship.

Like interpretations of Native military service, exhibits on tribal tourism at tribal museums also help formulate and articulate a modern tribal identity to visitors. Gaming has been a particularly complex and challenging topic for Great Lakes Native communities, and tribal museums provide an opportunity for tribes to examine and explain the ways in which gaming reflects and perpetuates tradition while serving contemporary needs. Invariably, interpretations of gaming at tribal museums across the Great Lakes region stress the ways in which gaming

\textsuperscript{95} As discussed at greater length in Chapter One.
profits are used for cultural development. The exhibit on gaming at the Forest County Potawatomi museum, for example, explains that “many of the services and programs offered to tribal members are made possible with revenues generated from the tribe’s gaming.”96 The Ziibiwing Center provides a similar interpretation, while also stressing the ways in which tribal gaming has helped the larger, non-Native community. The label text states that “tribal gaming enterprises have helped many Anishinabek and the larger dominant community. Tribal members are now employed where before our unemployment rates were as high as seventy-five percent. Today due to the success of the Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort, the tribal membership has its own courts, police, fire, and school systems. The Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort is the biggest employer in the county. Two percent of our profits are given to Isabella County.”97 Through such interpretations, ultimately, tribal gaming is conveyed simultaneously as a tangible manifestation of tribal sovereignty, yet reflective of American capitalism and mainstream culture’s emphasis on consumerism.98

While articulations of a modern tribal identity are prevalent throughout every Great Lakes tribal museum, perhaps none do so as bluntly as the Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum. In the exhibit entitled “How We Live Now,” the label text states,

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96 Label text, “Megawa Shote Gdiymen – We are Still Here!,” Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum, Crandon, WI.

97 Label Text, “How We Are Helped By Gaming,” Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, Mt. Pleasant, WI.

98 Interestingly, several tribal museums in the region do not provide any information about or interpretation of tribal gaming. In most cases, my questions about why this is the case have been deflected or ignored. Museum personnel have seemed more than willing to talk about the ways in which tribal gaming has helped the community and, in many cases, aided in the development of the museum, but few have addressed why no interpretation is included in the museum’s exhibit space. Arvid E. Miller Library Museum Specialist Yvette Malone is an exception. During our interview, I asked why there is no mention to the casino in the exhibit space, to which Malone answer, “I know its mentioned in our brief history in different departments, but I don’t know.” Yvette Malone, interviewed by Meagan McChesney, audio recording, June 15, 2017.
“the Potawatomi live in Forest County, Milwaukee, and many other places. We work as teachers, businessmen, and casino workers. Many of us are employed in tribal enterprises, hard at work trying to make a better life for our people. We live in houses with four walls and running water. We travel in cars instead of canoes, and hunt with guns instead of bows and arrows. But our way of life continues. Many of our tribal members still hunt and fish, and some of us still fish by canoe.”

With a hint of sarcasm, this text pointedly challenges multiple possible inaccurate notions about Potawatomi life all at once, and bluntly explains that while informed by their unique cultural traditions, Potawatomi lives are not unlike those of non-Native Americans.

Ultimately, tribal museums facilitate articulations of a modern tribal identity made possible by a strategic mix of both accommodation and resistance to the infiltration of mainstream American culture. Such articulations counteract the pervasive images of what Laura Peers refers to as “the ‘Indian that never was’.”

Rather than stagnant, relegated to the past, or doused in stereotyped tradition, modern American Indians are, and always have been, active in the American society that has shaped individual and group identities for all American citizens. Yet, Great Lakes Native communities have, against the odds, done so while maintaining and, in recent years, revitalizing elements of the traditional culture that make each community distinct and unique.

Conclusion

Collectively, the three primary functions of Great Lakes tribal museums facilitate the realization of the goals first articulated by the activists involved in the Tribal Sovereignty Movement that have remained relevant and, in many cases, not yet fully realized. Analysis of the

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99 Label text, “Ngom Eshe Bmadsego – How We Live Today,” Forest County Potawatomi Cultural Center, Library and Museum, Crandon, WI.

100 Bataille, 4.
interpretation conveyed through tribal museum exhibits and the programming offered reveals the many ways in which the boundaries between these functions are porous, overlapping, and mutually-supporting. Ultimately, each of these functions is a manifestation of activism, deliberately undertaken to incite social, cultural, and political change.
CONCLUSION

On October 1, 2018, Wisconsin Outdoor News published a letter from Douglas Meyenburg, current president of the Minnesota-based anti-treaty rights group PERM (Proper Economic Resource Management), to Donald Trump, pleading that he issue a Presidential Order overturning Wisconsin and Minnesota Ojibwe treaty rights guaranteed by the 1837 Treaty. “This is the heart of Trump country,” Meyenburg wrote, “[and] revoking the 1837 privileges…would electrify and energize your political base in Minnesota and Wisconsin…As President, you have a rare opportunity to correct the Court, which erred egregiously [in reaching] this unprincipled decision that has done so much damage.”

PERM’s persistence, coupled with Meyenburg’s reference to the 1837 “privileges” rather than rights, demonstrate that despite repeated legal affirmations of Ojibwe hunting and fishing rights, tribal sovereignty and treaty rights in the Great Lakes region remain under attack. While Trump’s response, if any, remains to be seen, PERM appears to believe they have a friend in the White House, and arguably with good reason. Since taking office, the Trump administration has taken several jabs at tribal sovereignty and treaty rights. As discussed in Chapter Two, for example, just weeks after taking office, Trump signed an executive order resuming construction on the highly contentious Dakota Access Pipeline. In recent months, pipeline protests have resumed, but this time in the heart of the Great Lakes region. Tribal members from various Great

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Lakes communities, including several members of the nearby Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa, have gathered just outside of Mackinaw City, Michigan in protest of oil transport company Enridge’s Pipeline 5, which carries millions of gallons of oil under the Great Lakes. According to reports from the National Wildlife Federation, since it was built in 1953, Pipeline 5 has spilled approximately 30 times, releasing over one million gallons of oil into the water and raising concerns from tribal activists across the region.

Such ongoing attacks on tribal sovereignty and treaty rights, coupled with threats to the water and resources that are so vital to Great Lakes Native life, have necessitated that Native activism continues. Since the first were founded amidst the Tribal Sovereignty Movement in the post-World War II decades, Great Lakes tribal museums have proven to be particularly suited for the task of facilitating the continuation of activism. Chapter Two discussed how the Arvid E. Miller Library Museum was utilized by tribal activists as a site for organizing action. Specifically, Chapter Two discussed how the Library Museum was used as the designated site for organizing support for the Dakota Access Pipeline protest. In 2017, the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways utilized a different approach in support of Standing Rock, opening a mixed-media exhibit in its temporary exhibit hall focused on educating the public about the threats posed by the Dakota Access Pipeline. “Standing Rock Solid” featured contemporary artwork from various Native artists addressing the pipeline controversy from their perspectives, shining light on the “very important environmental issues” implicated.²

The different approaches utilized by the Library Museum and the Ziibiwing Center highlight the ways in which tribal museums are uniquely suited to facilitate the continuation of activism. As the Historical Committee’s use of the Library Museum shows, tribal museums in

the Great Lakes region are a direct extension of national, regional, and tribally-based political and social activism. The Ziibiwing Center’s “Standing Rock Solid” exhibit demonstrates, however, that activism in tribal museums extends beyond the organization of action and into the museum’s exhibit space and programming. In ways that many other avenues for activism cannot, tribal museums have the ability to continuously evolve as the needs of the community evolve. While demonstrations and protests may end long before issues are resolved, tribal museums remain, enabling tribes to utilize interpretations of the past to understand, respond to, and shape contemporary circumstances.
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VITA

Dr. Meagan McChesney was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, she attended Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in English/Creative Writing with a minor in History in 2008. From 2009 to 2011, she also attended the University of Alabama, where she received a Master of Arts in History.

While at Loyola, Dr. McChesney has pursued her research interests in American Indian History and Public History while serving as a Teaching Assistant, Public Media Assistant, and Teacher of Record. In 2017, Dr. McChesney was awarded an additional fellowship as a research assistant for two in-process projects. Dr. McChesney is currently working as an adjunct professor at Dominican University teaching Native American History.