

Turning Point

The War of 1812 from the Native American Perspective

The War of 1812 is sometimes called the “forgotten war” in American history. Compared to the Revolutionary and Civil wars, this conflict often falls through the cracks of history. But for the tribes of the Great Lakes, this was one of the most significant periods in their history. This war effectively ended all armed resistance for the Indian Nations of the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley against incursion onto their traditional homelands and ushered in the Treaty Era for these tribal nations. Life would never be the same for tribes in the Great Lakes after the War of 1812, as American occupation became a reality in their aboriginal homelands.

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Exhibit on display June 15, 2013 through May 2014



The Turning Point exhibit is made possible in part by a grant from Michigan Humanities Council, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this project do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities of Michigan Humanities Council.

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Thank you!

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Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria

Michigan Humanities Council

Odawa Casino

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The Center of Existence

The Anishnaabek in the Great Lakes

The Anishnaabek, comprised of the Odawa, Ojibway and Potawatomi, have called the Great Lakes home for a number of centuries. Oral histories of the Anishnaabek place themselves in the Great Lakes at an unknown origin in time and spanning thousands of years; their territory covering vast areas of peninsulas, islands, shorelines and dense woodlands.

Areas we know today as Michigan, Ontario, Quebec, Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin and Minnesota saw the Anishnaabek as the overwhelming majority. The Anishnaabek could freely carry out their living of hunting, fishing, planting and trading in these ancestral homelands. The relationship with the natural world was a precise and delicate one, one that the Odawa fashioned their lives around, not vice versa. The Anishnaabek saw everything having purpose, being filled with life and spirits being part of everyday life. In order to maintain this delicate balance with the environment and the spiritual beings that dwelled there, proper actions had to be performed accordingly. The dead were buried at sacred locations and honored each year through ceremony. Other sacred areas were also revered and respected by means of ceremonial interaction. Islands relating to origin, land formations created by divine intervention, homes of spirits and hallowed battle grounds were all part of the Anishnaabek universe in Gitchi Gamik (Great Lakes).

This way of life for the Anishnaabek was demanding yet rewarding and meaningful at the same time. For millennia, this balance was kept in the Great Lakes. Resources were plentiful and renewed with each season. The Anishnaabek lived healthy and free—diseases were uncommon. They lived with intention and their gift was calling Gitchi Gamik home. Their place in the world was the Great Lakes. And their place was something they fought to keep.

Through war, marriage and trade, boundaries with other tribes were established before the arrival of Europeans in the early 1600s. The Anishnaabek language, Anishnaabamowin, more commonly known as Algonquin, was spoken in various dialects throughout this vast region, which extended from the Atlantic Coast to Saskatchewan. This sharing of traditions and beliefs united the tribes in times of conflict and helped forge the bonds of tribal unity for the Odawa and their Anishnaabek kin. Unfortunately, war was a common occurrence for the Odawa. The bounty of natural resources in their homelands attracted war parties, soldiers, militia, armies and other armed forces, determined to wrest control of such bounty from the aboriginal caretakers: the Anishnaabek.



The Great Lakes and the Ohio, ca. 1800
Image courtesy William L. Clements
Library, University of Michigan

A Complex Community: The Little Traverse Odawa at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century

Like any group bound together by common heritage, culture or beliefs, the Little Traverse Odawa witnessed divisions amongst its people. Differences in religious faiths, allegiances and political opinions all impacted the Little Traverse Odawa as the 19th century progressed. Some differences were so drastic that Odawa chiefs removed their villages from Emmet County into Canada.

At that time, the entire Great Lakes region was in social, political and even spiritual upheaval. Many tribal communities were divided on whether to fight with or against the Americans. War rearranged communities, disturbed traditional land use and disrupted everyday life for Odawa villages.

Prior to war being declared in 1812 between the United States and Britain, tribes from the entire Great Lakes region were preparing to go to war against the United States. War belts were being circulated, alliances formed and leaders emerging. One such leader during the turn of the 19th century was the Shawnee Tenskawata (He Who Opens Doors), or the Prophet. The Prophet was the brother of Tecumseh. While he was not the warrior like his brother, for a short time, the Prophet held considerable sway due to his self-proclaimed spiritual powers and ability see into the future. Entire villages in the Great Lakes were struggling with the rapid and immense changes shaping their communities. Diseases, war and loss of lands made some tribes seek divine intervention to remedy the problems plaguing their communities. The Prophet, whose peak influence was between 1805-10, spread his message of spiritual revitalization throughout the Great Lakes. His message to abandon everything American and drive all Americans out of North America was quickly adopted by many tribes seeking to restore their traditional way of life.

One Odawa from Little Traverse, the Trout, was a devout follower of the Prophet. In 1807, the Trout visited the Prophet and returned to northern Michigan to spread the new messages and teachings. One strict rule was to abstain from consuming alcohol. Also, dogs were not permitted to be used for hunting, any American goods were to be abandoned and fires were not to be extinguished at camps. Christians were encouraged to abandon that faith and also follow the Prophet. The Odawa at Little Traverse had three distinct religious followings: traditionalists, followers of the Prophet and Christians. Some would blend together certain elements of each. Others would not.

Some of the teachings caused tension in the Odawa communities but none the less, a great many followed them, hoping to restore their lands and way of life. A fur trader commented in 1807 that "All the Ottawas from L'abre au Croche adhere strictly to the Shawnee

Prophet's advice." One such Odawa who took interest in the Prophet was a prominent chief from Little Traverse, the Little King. In 1809 he made a journey to the village of the Prophet, Prophetstown.

Traveling with nearly 200 Odawa and Ojibway, the Little King heard the Prophet and the group ventured back home. But before reaching northern Michigan, more than half of the party died from an unknown illness, including the Little King. The remaining Odawa and Ojibway were convinced the Prophet had poisoned them. The warriors arranged a large party on the Grand River and were set on destroying Prophetstown. Other tribal leaders and the Governor of the Indiana territory William Harrison intervened, preventing a horrible, inter-tribal war. The Prophet lost any influence with the Odawa at this point but Tecumseh's remarkable willpower and leadership would bring the Odawa back into the alliance against the Americans by 1812.

Mookmanish

Mookmanish (Little Bad Knife or Little Knife Nobody Cares About) was described by Assiginack as an "eminent war chief who distinguished himself during the late American War."

During the Prairie du Chien battle in 1814, Mookmanish and his warriors engaged and killed nine American soldiers. One American, who had severely wounded Mookmanish in the knee, was captured and taken prisoner. The war party wanted to take the life of the prisoner for wounding their war chief, but Mookmanish forbade the killing of a captive. His humane actions would later be recognized and rewarded. On June 8, 1815, the British Commander at Fort Mackinac, Lt. Col. Robert McDouall, described Mookmanish as an "Indian of the most respectable character, a brave warrior and has always been distinguished." Lt. McDouall presented Mookmanish with a sword for his actions of humanity during times of war. This sword is currently on display at the Canadian Museum of War.



The theme of humanity amidst cruelty would later become a hallmark of leaders such as Tecumseh, Shab-eh-nay and Mookmanish. The War of 1812 was known for barbaric actions committed by both American and Indian forces against each other. On several occasions, the killing of prisoners and civilians was halted by these war chiefs.

In the tradition of Odawa warriors, Mookmanish most likely followed the ceremonies and protocols of warriors going on the war path. The paint, hairstyle and tattoos adorned by the war party are all traditional signatures of Odawa men heading into battle. In addition,

Odawa warriors preparing for war would partake in important ceremonies to prepare themselves. Such ceremonies were fasting, participating in specific dances and songs, as well as large community feasts. All of these actions were taken to invoke courage and call upon help from the Manidiouk (spirits) that would guide the Odawa. Two very powerful Manidiouk, the Underwater Panther and Thunderbird, are represented on the canoe on which Assiginack and his warriors traveled the Great Lakes. These Manidiouk served these Odawa warriors well, as they survived multiple battles and returned home to northern Michigan.

Shab-eh-nay

He Who Paws Through (Shabonay, Shabbona)

(c. 1775-1859)

Although he was likely born near the Michigan and Indiana border, Shab-eh-nay was an Odawa with family ties to Little Traverse including his nephew, the well-known Odawa historian Andrew J. Blackbird.

The famed Shawnee war Chief Tecumseh counted Shab-eh-nay as one of his good friends and staunchest allies during the War of 1812. Both fought the Americans together on multiple occasions, including at Detroit in 1812 and 1813. Shab-eh-nay also accompanied Tecumseh on his legendary trips across the eastern United States, in hopes of recruiting other tribes to fight against the Americans.

Like Tecumseh, Shab-eh-nay was against the killing of civilians and prisoners of war. Two occasions of Shab-eh-nay's humanity and courage during and after the War of 1812 prove this Odawa warrior's valor. After the Potawatomi attack on Fort Dearborn (Chicago) on August 15, 1812, a small number of Americans managed to make their way to the house of a local trader. Shab-eh-nay, along with Black Partridge and a host of other warriors, agreed the prisoners were to be delivered to Detroit. But other vengeful warriors wanted kill the Americans. Shab-eh-nay and his group guarded the house until Sauganash, a principal Potawatomi Chief, arrived. He and the others persuaded the angry warriors to halt their hostile actions towards the American women and children.

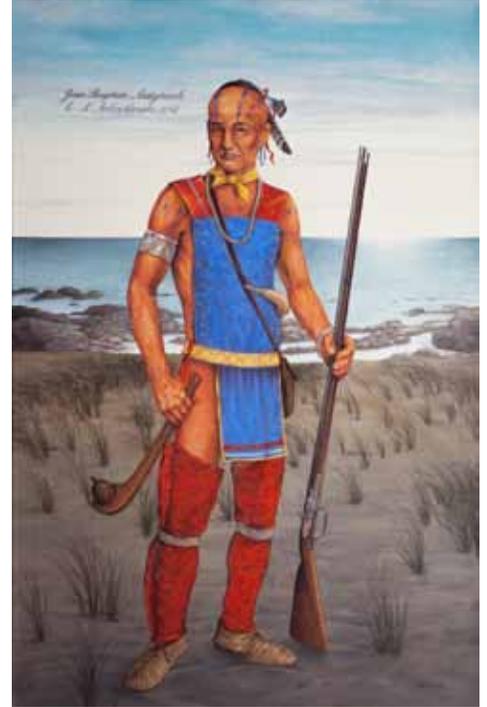


For Shab-en-nay, valor would not be reserved for the battlefield. After the War of 1812, Shab-en-nay chose a path of peace instead of war, a decision that was tested by the Sauk war chief Black Hawk. Black Hawk's War of 1832 saw frontier violence erupt again in Illinois and Wisconsin. Sauk and Mesquakie warriors lashed out at American settlers. Black Hawk tried to persuade Shab-en-nay to help him fight but he refused.

Jean Baptiste Assiginack (1768-1866)

Born in Waganakising (Middle Village) in 1768, Odawa warrior and orator Assiginack led his war party from the shores of Little Traverse Bay to fight in the Niagara Theater in the War of 1812.

Assiginack's war party included Mookmanish (Little Bad Knife), Kishigopenasi (Day Bird), Makadepensi (Blackbird), Eshquagonabe (Looking Back) and Clap of Thunder at Night. The war party traveled by canoe to fight American soldiers throughout the Great Lakes. Assiginack and his warriors followed a long lineage of Odawa warriors who fought against the Muschodesh, Fox, Iroquois, Winnebago, Chickasaw, British and American forces.



Jean Baptiste Assiginack
Original painting by Jane Cardinal

Assiginack was a renowned orator for the Odawa, once giving a speech from sunrise to sunset for the purpose of securing warriors to fight the Americans. In addition to his speaking skills, Assiginack also led by example. He successfully led warriors from Little Traverse into combat, including the Niagara Theater. The Odawa war party was successful in every battle they fought in. After the war ended, Assiginack recognized new enemies that must be confronted, one of which was the disastrous effects alcohol had on his people. On one occasion, Assiginack got word that a boat planned on bringing a large quantity of rum to his village. Assiginack quickly gathered his warriors, boarded the vessel and dumped all the rum overboard.

At the conclusion of the war, Assiginack became an interpreter for the British on Drummond Island, Michigan. Assiginack returned to his home at Waganakising in 1827 to help create a Catholic mission at Little Traverse along with his brother Apawkausegun. Apawkausegun was instrumental in helping the Little Traverse Bay Odawa negotiate the treaty of 1836. American policies were not favorable to Assiginack so, by 1832, he had already removed his village to original Odawa homelands on Manitoulin Island, Ontario. Assiginack and his brother constantly worked to improve their tribe's position and rights, whether it was through battle, treaty negotiations or finding a more suitable village location.

Tecumseh: Shooting Star or Panther Across the Sky (c. 1768-October 5, 1813)

The most recognized and influential war chief during the War of 1812, Tecumseh used his oratory skills and strong will to unite vastly different tribes in the common cause of protecting their land.

A Shawnee from along the Scioto River in Ohio, Tecumseh's people originally covered a vast territory, ranging from Georgia to Ohio. But American forces had repeatedly forced the Shawnee further west off their lands. During Tecumseh's childhood, his villages were overrun, burned and destroyed five times. As a child, Tecumseh witnessed killings and barbaric atrocities committed against his people. His survival was due to Shawnee warriors engaging American forces attacking their villages and he being fleet of foot. Tecumseh would lose his father and older brother to violence on the frontier. But as a man, many commented on the humane and noble character that he displayed over and over, often times halting the killings of prisoners and civilians.

Upon a heated council with Indian Territorial Governor William Harrison in 1809, Tecumseh replied to Harrison's comment that the President was unlikely to give them the lands they desired:

"Well, as the Great Chief (the President) is to determine this matter, I hope the Great Spirit will put some sense into his head to induce him to direct you to give up this land. It is true, he is so far off. He will not be injured by the war. He may still sit in his town, and drink his wine, whilst you and I will have to fight it out."

Tecumseh's name translates into "Shooting Star" or "Panther Across the Sky." Tecumseh was a great hunter, warrior and leader. His oratory skills became renowned, as he travelled tirelessly across eastern United States, trying to build a confederacy of nations. Tecumseh's efforts and honor were admired by allies and foes alike.

Always the first in battle and last to leave the fight, Tecumseh ultimately led by example and not solely by his words. When the great warrior was killed at the Battle of the Thames River on October 5, 1813, the hopes of a Great Indian coalition died with him. To this day, the whereabouts of Tecumseh's burial is unknown.

The Origins of Conflict

The years leading up to 1812 in the Great Lakes were years filled with tribes coping with the displacement of their villages, attacks on civilians and the loss of resources and land. Great Lakes tribes began to wage war against American incursion onto their lands, with conflicts spanning from New York to Wisconsin.

By 1800, numerous tribes from the eastern United States were pushed out of their homelands, due to an exploding American population hungry for land. The Shawnee and Delaware were two such tribes that were continually forced west by American expansion and attacks on their villages by American militia and frontiersmen. Tired of being displaced, the Shawnee, Delaware, Wea, Wyandot and other tribes made their last stand in Indiana and Ohio.

Between 1774 and 1794, Indian villages in New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana and Ohio were constantly being attacked by the American army and militia. The Shawnee, Delaware, Iroquois, Miami, Odawa, Wyandot and Mingo of these areas saw unspeakable violence committed against their villages during this time period.

Over 100 Indian villages were burned and destroyed, leaving an unknown number of civilian casualties. The most notorious frontier massacres occurred on March 8, 1782 on the Upper Sandusky River in Ohio, at a village known as Gnadenhutten. Over 90 Delaware Indians, the majority women and children, were returning to the village to gather food supplies. These Delaware, known as the Moraviantown Indians, were Christian and pacifist. Upon reaching their village, the Delaware were rounded up by Col. David Williamson and the Pennsylvania militia. Two out buildings served as slaughter houses where the Indians were led, two at a time, to their execution.

The Gnadenhutten massacre was only one of many atrocities committed against Indian villages in the Great Lakes at the hands of American forces. Warriors from various tribes would remember what had happened to their villages and those of their kin, resulting in revenge killings that would later be dark reminders of the War of 1812. Two such incidents in 1813—the attack on Fort Dearborn and the aftermath of the Battle of the River Raisin—saw American civilians and prisoners perish at the hands of vengeful Great Lakes warriors. The escalation of violence and the need to repay grievances in bloodshed were strong contributors for tribes going to war in 1812.



Image courtesy William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan

Principal Warriors

The Odawa from Waganakising were not alone in their endeavors to protect their homelands. Warriors from tribes throughout the Great Lakes banded together to try and keep American expansion in check. Many times, tribes would put aside their grievances with another to work together on the battlefield.

Tribes in the Great Lakes Represented by dozens of villages (c. 1770-1870)

By State	Circa 1770	Circa 1812	Circa 1870
Michigan	Odawa, Potawatomi, Ojibway, Huron	Odawa, Potawatomi, Ojibway, Huron	Odawa, Potawatomi, Ojibway retain multiple villages in Michigan. Some villages are removed.
Ohio	Odawa, Ojibway, Huron, Delaware, Shawnee, Mingo, Miami	Odawa, Shawnee, Huron, Munsee, Delaware	None. Tribes removed to Oklahoma or Kansas.
Indiana	Wea, Piankeshaw, Potawatomi, Miami	Wea, Miami, Delaware, Potawatomi, Shawnee	3 Miami villages, 1 Shawnee village. Tribes removed to Oklahoma or Kansas.
Illinois	Kickapoo, Mascouten, Potawatomi, Sauk, Illinois, Peoria, Kaskaskia	Potawatomi, Odawa, Ojibway, Kickapoo, Winnebago, Sauk, Mesquakie, Kaskaskia	None. Tribes removed to Oklahoma or Kansas.
Minnesota	Ojibway, Dakota (Sioux)	Ojibway, Dakota (Sioux)	Ojibway and Dakota retain multiple villages
Wisconsin	Ojibway, Winnebago, Mesquakie, Sauk, Potawatomi, Menominee	Ojibway, Winnebago, Potawatomi, Menominee, Odawa, Mesquakie	Potawatomi, Menominee, Ojibway, Winnebago, Oneida retain multiple villages. Some villages are removed.
Ontario	Odawa, Ojibway, Cree, Algonkin, Iroquois	Ojibway, Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, Onondaga, Munsee, Tuscarora	Odawa, Ojibway, Mohawk, Iroquois, Huron, Algonquin
New York	Iroquois (Seneca, Oneida, Onondaga, Mohawk, Cayuga, Tuscarora)	Cayuga, Onondaga, Mohawk, Seneca, Oneida, Delaware, Tuscarora	Seneca, Onondaga, Mohawk, Oneida, Tuscarora
Pennsylvania	Delaware, Seneca, Munsee	Seneca	None. Tribes removed to Oklahoma or Kansas.

Main Poc

This Potawatomi war chief from northern Illinois was called by Indian agent William Wells the “most feared warrior on the frontier.” Often described as a “barbarian,” “rogue” and “blood-thirsty savage”, Main Poc was infamous for his brutality against his enemies, his ability to win battles and his spiritual powers. From the French term meaning “puckered hand,” Main Poc had a deformed left hand, which he attributed to a wound from a previous life as a warrior. He claimed that, because of his strong warrior spirit, the wound carried over into his next life.

While Tecumseh abstained from the killing of civilians and also of drinking alcohol, Main Poc did not. The Potawatomi was also notorious for attacking Osage villages and American settlements. His warlike actions coincided with the War of 1812. Americans, British and tribal leaders all courted Main Poc in efforts to gain his influence and his ability to gather warriors to the battlefield. Main Poc did share some qualities with Tecumseh, such as being a strong speaker and using his battle experience to draw young warriors to follow him into war. Despite their differences, however, the two leaders would fight alongside each other on several occasions.

Neskotnemek/Mad Sturgeon

Another Potawatomi war leader with a propensity for extreme violence towards American settlers. The brother-in-law to Main Poc, Mad Sturgeon was also from northern Illinois. Mad Sturgeon was instrumental in the Fort Dearborn Massacre of August 15, 1813 and led a number of raids against American settlers in Illinois and Wisconsin. Warriors like Mad Sturgeon and Main Poc were the equivalent to the Kentucky militia: ruthless, cruel and unwavering in their fight. He was one of the warriors at Tecumseh’s side when the great Shawnee was killed at the Thames River.

Stayeghta/Bark Carrier

Commonly known as Roundhead. Nicknamed because of his bullet shaped head, Roundhead was a steadfast warrior and chief of the Wyandot/Huron tribe. He signed the Treaty of Greenville in 1795. A brave warrior, Roundhead was also counted on for his diplomatic skills with both tribes and settlers.

Black Hawk

The most militant of the Sauk chiefs, he would lead over 800 Sauk and Mesquakie warriors from Wisconsin to fight near Detroit. After the war of 1812 concluded, Black Hawk remained hostile towards American encroachment on Sauk lands in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. He went on to fight the Americans in 1832 in what is now called Black Hawk’s War.

Other Great Lakes warriors who fought with Tecumseh against American forces:
 Naiwash (Odawa, Tecumseh's second in command)
 Billy Caldwell/Sauganash (Mohawk & French)
 Sanatchewin/Stone Roller (Potawatomi)
 Waubunsee/Foggy Day (Potawatomi)
 Black Partridge (Potawatomi)
 Waxiniwa (Shawnee)
 Pasheto (Shawnee)
 Shingwaukonse/Little Pine (Ojibway chief from near Sault Ste. Marie)
 Chief John Sunday (Ojibway)

In the News

Essex Register, Salem, Massachusetts,
 Wednesday, August 19, 1812



Courtesy Mackinac State Historic Parks

Montreal (L.C.) Aug. 4, 1812 – The following letters have been received from U. Canada:

Makina, July 12, 1812

Dear Sir – I am happy to have it in my power to announce to you, that Fort Mackinac capitulated to us on the 17th inst. at 11 o'clock, A.M. Capt. Roberts at our head, with part of the 10th R.V. Battalion. Mr. Crawford had the command of the Canadians, who consisted of about 200 men; Mr. Dickenson 113, Seoux, Fortavoins, and Winebagoes, myself about 280 men, Attawas and Chippewas – part of the Attawas of L'harb Croche, had not arrived. It was a fortunate circumstance that the fort capitulated without firing a single gun, for had they done so, I firmly believe not a soul of them would have been saved. My son, Charles Longlade, Augustine Nolin, and Michelle Cadotte, jun. have rendered me great service in keeping the Indians in order and executing from time to time such commands as were delivered to me by the commanding officer. I never saw so determined a set of people at the Chippewas were.

Since capitulation, they have not drank a single drop of liquor, nor even killed a fowle belonging to any person, (a thing never known before) for they generally destroyed everything they meet with. I am, dear sir, your obedient servant.

*John Askin, Jr., Str. Keepr. Dep., The Hon. Col. W. Claus, &c.
 Fort George.*

Words of the Warriors

This speech made by the great Chief Blackbird to the Indian Superintendent in Council at the Ten Mile Creek, 18th July 1813 throws an instructive light on this matter. Chief Blackbird (Makadepenasí) was Odawa and hailed from Little Traverse.

Blackbird in council rose and said: "Brother, we have listened to your words, which words come from our father. We will now say a few words to you. At the foot of the Rapids (The Grand Rapids, Michigan) last spring we fought the Big Knives and we lost some of our people there. When we retired the Big Knives got some of our dead. They were not satisfied with having killed them, but cut them into small pieces. This made us very angry.

My words to my people were: 'As long as the powder burnt, to kill and scalp,' but those behind us came up and did mischief. Brother, last year at Chicago and St. Joseph's the Big Knives destroyed all our corn. This was fair, but, brother, they did not allow our dead to rest. They dug up their graves, and the bones of our ancestors were thrown away and we could never find them to return them to the ground.

Brother, I have listened with a good deal of attention to the wish of our father. If the Big Knives, after they kill people of our colour, leave them without hacking them to pieces, we will follow their example. They have themselves to blame. The way they treat our killed, and the remains of those that are in their graves in the west, makes our people mad when they meet the Big Knives. Whenever they get any of our people into their hands they cut them like meat into small pieces. We thought white people were Christians. They ought to show us a better example. We do not disturb their dead. What I say is known to all the people present. I do not tell a lie. Brother, it is the Indian custom when engaged to be very angry, but when we take prisoners to treat them kindly.

Brother, we do not know the value of money; all I wish is that our people receive clothing for our prisoners. When at home we work and hunt to earn those things; here we cannot. Therefore, we ask for clothing. Brother, the officer that we killed you have spoken to us before about. I now tell you again, he fired and wounded one of our colour; another fired at him and killed him. We wished to take him prisoner, but the officer said 'God damn', and fired, when he was shot. That is all I have to say."

William Kirby, *Annals of Niagara*, Lundy's Lane Historical Society (Welland, 1896), pages 197-8.

Just two weeks before he was killed in battle, Tecumseh delivered a rousing speech which ended as follows (Sept. 18, 1813, at Fort Malden):

"Father! You have the arms and ammunition which our Great Father (the King) sent for his red children. If you have an idea of going away, give them to us, and you may go and welcome

for us. Our lives are in the hands of the Great Spirit. We are determined to defend our lands, and if it is his will, we wish to leave our bones upon them.” The warriors responded by raising their tomahawks and yelling in approval.

Andrew J. Blackbird (son of Chief Blackbird) describing his youth at Little Traverse, circa the 1820s:

“Then I never knew my people to want for anything to eat or to wear, as we always had plenty of wild meat and plenty of fish, corn, vegetables and wild fruit. I thought (and yet I may be mistaken) that my people were very happy in those days, at least I was happy, as a lark”.

History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan, Andrew J. Blackbird, 1887, p. 11

Picturing History

These remarkable images were drawn by an Odawa student at Little Traverse circa 1838. The drawings tell the story of Odawa Shimagnesheg, or warriors, from Waganakising fighting the Americans during the War of 1812. It is very possible the artist of these drawings had a relative who fought in the war and passed down the stories of warriors which made their way into this artwork.



The drawing top left represents Odawa warriors preparing to go into battle. Warriors participated in ceremonies prior to departure, to ensure success and call upon their Anishnaabek spirits to guide them. The Powagun (pipe), dwegun (drum) and sinbangshkimet (animal skin pouch) were all important ceremonial items utilized in preparation for the warpath. Once the proper ceremonies are concluded, the warriors embark on their journey, in their canoes. The Odawa warriors utilized canoes to make the journey to fight at the Niagara and Prairie du Chien battles.



The drawing bottom left shows more ceremony given to the warriors, this time in the form of a dance. The sinbangshkimet is once again utilized, infusing the warriors with courage and power. The middle row depicts the Odawa defeating the Chi-Mookman (Big Knives) or Americans, in battle. The Odawa, with their Indian and British allies, were successful in defeating the Chi-Mookman at both Niagara and Prairie du Chien. Upon their victory, the Odawa Shimagnesheg return home with the American flag, proclaiming their victory. The musket and traditional war club are carried by the warriors.

Drawings courtesy Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria

The Aftermath of 1812: The Odawa at Little Traverse face great adversity

The changes that were to occur for the Odawa at Little Traverse happened almost immediately. Within twenty years of the war's conclusion, the tribe was faced with the threat of removal to Kansas, as well as many Odawa leaving Emmet County and relocating to Manitoulin Island, Ontario. Religious divisions strained the community, and the transition to American culture, society and rule would push the tribe to its very limits of existence.

After the war, Assiginack and his other brother Apawkausegun (Smoking Mixture) continually requested to have a priest and church established at Little Traverse. These requests for a Christian establishment were in stark contrast to the great number of traditional Odawa living at Waganakising. In 1829, tensions between Christian and non-Christian Odawa at L'Arbre Croche became so great that Assiginack and other Christian Odawa would later remove their villages to Wequetonsing (Little Bay Place) or today known as Harbor Springs. Eventually, family bonds and kinship would overcome religious differences and both factions of the Odawa community would coexist.

The Treaty Era An Era of Long-Lasting Change

The biggest challenge the Odawa had to face after the War of 1812 was the acceptance of American hegemony in the Great Lakes. For centuries, the Odawa were treated as an independent nation, with a vast amount of territory and natural resources to utilize. The previous European powers, the French and English, could not force the Odawa to change their customs and abandon their territories. This entirely changed for the Odawa once American rule became a reality in Michigan.

National policy changed against Indians in 1829 with the election of President Andrew Jackson. Immediately President Jackson was able to have a devastating law enacted: the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The Indian Removal policy stated that Indians living east of the Mississippi River were to be removed to lands west of the Mississippi River. These lands in the west, which were designated as "Indian Territory," were primarily the states of Oklahoma and Kansas. A multitude of tribes were forced west.

The most infamous instance of removal was with the Cherokee tribe of Georgia. Gold was found on their reservation lands in 1829, causing a gold rush onto Cherokee lands.

The result was the Cherokee being forced off their lands in Georgia in 1838 under the Removal policy. During a brutally cold winter, 7,000 Cherokee began the 1,000 mile trek to Oklahoma, under the guard of the American army. Nearly 4,000 died on the journey.

Removal occurred in the Great Lakes as well, with Odawa from Ohio and Potawatomi from southern Michigan and Indiana being removed to Oklahoma. The Odawa from Little Traverse did not want to be removed to Oklahoma or Kansas. The territory was barren to them, without the hardwoods, lakes and rivers that they were accustomed to. The burials of their ancestors were throughout the Great Lakes. The Odawa made tremendous changes to their lives in order to stay home.

Part of these changes to avoid removal was to build towns, become farmers and adopt Christianity. The Odawa hoped that if these changes were taken seriously by the American Government, they would be able to retain some lands in Michigan. The appearance, social customs, religion and the very language of the Odawa began to change during the 1830s.

The Treaty of 1836

On multiple occasions following the war, the Odawa petitioned the Government to hold council regarding treaties. They also held councils amongst themselves and the Ojibway. The Odawa knew they must enter into a treaty agreement in order to secure lands in Michigan. In 1835, a delegation of Odawa leaders from Little Traverse departed on an uncertain trip to Washington D.C. in the hopes of creating a home for future generations of Odawa in northern Michigan.

Odawa historian Andrew J. Blackbird was a child when this delegation of leaders departed. His father, Makadepenasai, was amongst them. Blackbird gives this account in his history:

“In the fall of 1835, I was clear at the top of those trees, with my little chums, watching our people as they were about going off in a long bark canoe, and, as we understood, they were going to Washington to see the Great Father, the President of the United States, to tell him to have mercy on the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians in Michigan, not to take all the land away from them. I saw some of our old Indian women weeping as they watched our principal men going off in the canoe. I suppose they were feeling bad on account of not knowing their future destinies respecting their possession of land. After they all got in the canoe, just as they were to start, they all took off their hats, crossed themselves and repeated the Lord’s prayer, at the end of the prayer, they crossed themselves again, and then away they went towards the Harbor Point. We watched them until they disappeared in rounding the point.”

The result of that fateful trip and a subsequent return visit was the Washington Treaty of 1836. With the fear of removal, the pressure of a growing American population in Michigan and strong desire to stay in their homelands, the Odawa and Ojibway from northern Michigan agreed to the treaty, which was in draft form at the time. The United



Indian land
cessions in the
United States,
comp. by Charles
C. Royce

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Geography and Map Division

1836 Treaty



1855 Treaty

States Senate would have to ratify it and in addition, the Ojibwa would not sign the final treaty until it was brought back to Michigan, where the respective Odawa and Ojibwa communities could witness their leaders put their seals upon it.

The Treaty of 1836 ceded to the United States nearly 16 million acres of land in the Upper and Lower Peninsula (Royce Map, above right). Reservation lands would be chosen within those ceded lands. Hunting and fishing rights, education, money and services were also important stipulations of the treaty. The treaty was by no means favorable to the Odawa. It was the best the tribe could do with tremendous odds against them.

1836 Treaty Revealed

In the summer of 1836, the treaty was brought back to Michigan and the ceremonial signing took place on Mackinac Island. Handling the negotiations for the government was a man deeply mistrusted by the Odawa: Henry Schoolcraft. Schoolcraft's ambition and policies aimed to alienate the Odawa and Ojibwa from their lands, while at the same time, securing large amounts of money for his friends and other fur traders. Provisions in the treaty plainly stated that certain amounts of money will be paid to traders whom the Odawa and Ojibwa had debts to. When the treaty was revealed, the Odawa found that a new provision had been added by the Senate in their absence:

Article Two: "From the cession aforesaid the tribes reserve for their own use, to be held in common the following tracts for the term of five years from the date of the ratification of this treaty, and no longer; unless the United States shall grant them permission to remain on said lands for a longer period."

This small paragraph had huge implications for the Odawa and Ojibwa. At any point after five years, they could be removed from Michigan by the United States government. The terms had changed for the Odawa from lands in perpetuity to a mere five years. They were left with an impossible decision: Sign the treaty and buy another five years. Or, not sign and face the real threat of removal. The Odawa signed and immediately began taking action.

After the 1836 treaty, the Odawa used treaty monies paid to them to purchase lands. The Odawa also requested to have their citizenship recognized by the government. These efforts, in addition to their attempts to live like Americans with help from the church, prevented the Odawa from being removed to Kansas. The Odawa were able to agree to a new treaty in 1855, which eliminated the threat of removal. But the price was steep for the Odawa of Little Traverse. Assiginack, Mookmanish and Chingassimo, all important chiefs of the tribe, left Little Traverse and went back home to Manitoulin Island. Frustrated and disappointed with the American government, these chiefs took approximately 250 Odawa with them. The community at Little Traverse lost a great number of people. The new Odawa community on Manitoulin Island was named Wikwemikong or Bay Place.

Boarding Schools

Before the War of 1812, Odawa culture and customs went through changes that were, for the most part, voluntary. Various Odawa families would adopt Christianity; others would not.

Dress was chosen by function and preference, many times mixing traditional materials with European and American goods. Men still wore their hair in the fashion of warriors, along with piercings, tattoos and body paintings. Women and extended family were the primary care givers in the villages. Anishnaabamowin was spoken by the vast majority of Odawa at Little Traverse. All of these characteristics changed rapidly after the War of 1812. One mechanism that greatly accelerated these changes was boarding schools.

The first mission school at Little Traverse was built in 1829 and was a collaboration of the local Odawa and missionaries. During the next two decades, Catholic schools would be built at Cross Village, Middle Village and Burt Lake. In 1887 Indian education became dictated under federal standards which included the boarding school system. Odawa children, along with all Indian children across the United States, would be subject to some of the most intense assimilation in American history. Odawa children at the boarding schools would not be permitted to speak their native language or to participate in ceremonies or cultural activities. Prolonged stays at the school were common, sometimes years on end. The long absence from family and community, in conjunction with the strict rules of the school, resulted in a loss of language, culture and history for the tribe. The Holy Childhood boarding school in Harbor Springs opened in 1889 and ceased operation in 1983.

In the words of the founder of the American boarding schools Richard Pratt, “that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him and save the man.” What Pratt and others did not count on were the powerful bonds that would form at boarding schools and the fact that Indian culture would manage to survive.



HSAS Archives

The Treaties and the Tribe Today

The Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians entered into their first major treaty with the United States in 1836. The tribe would not have their status as a federally recognized Indian tribe acknowledged by the United States until 1994. This 158-year battle for acknowledgement of the tribe's federal status was waged by many warriors, both men and women. The conclusion of the War of 1812 was only the beginning of another battle the Odawa would be engaged in with the Americans.

On December 5, 1835, Odawa head man and interpreter for treaty negotiations Augustin Hamlin wrote this impassioned letter to Lewis Cass, then Secretary of War under President Jackson:

“The principal objects of our visit here, are these: we would make some arrangements with the government of remaining in the Territory of Michigan in the quiet possession of our lands, and to transmit the same safely to our posterity. We do not wish to sell all the lands claimed by us and consequently not to remove to the west of the Mississippi...

“It is a heart-rending thought to our simple feelings to think of leaving our native country forever, and which has been bought with the price of, their native blood, and which has been thus safely transmitted to us. It is, we say, a heart-rending thought to us to think so; there are many local endearments which make the soul shrink with horror at the idea of rejecting our country forever—the mortal remains of our deceased parents, relations and friends, cry out to us as it were, for our compassion, our sympathy and our love.”

The long struggle of the Little Traverse Odawa to have their treaty rights recognized has resulted in new responsibilities, opportunities and brighter future for the tribe. The tribe currently utilizes an Executive (Chairman), Legislative (Tribal Council) and Judicial (Tribal Court) to govern themselves.

The tribe's ability to exercise its sovereignty and right to self-government has led to new economic development, educational opportunities, natural resource use, hunting and fishing rights, as well providing services to its membership. Such services include these tribal departments: education, law enforcement, tribal courts, social services, archives, natural resources, language, housing and many others. Most importantly, the tribe does all of this in its native country, the Odawas' home along the shores of Little Traverse Bay.

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