

To Resist and Adapt: Tribal Narratives of Community, Sovereignty, and
Treaty Rights at the Squaxin Island Museum, Library and Research Center
and the Mille Lacs Indian Museum

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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December 2013

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Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful for many things in my life. I feel very fortunate to have been born an Ojibwe person with loving parents. I am thankful for my brothers and their families (for my “Half-Chunk” nieces and nephews), my son Ozhigaabo, all my relatives at both LCO and Grand Portage, growing up on my reservation at Lac Courte Oreilles in Wisconsin (in both the K-Town and Boulevard communities), attending tribal school where my parents taught; hearing the Anishinaabe language being spoken by elders in my youth; engaging in cultural activities as a child; dancing at powwows, and knowing both my LCO grandma and my Grand Portage granny. My grandma Susie White (Ozhaawaashkoobineshikwe) was fifth degree Midewiwin and my granny Amelia LeGarde taught language and culture for many years in the Duluth Public Schools. I have been inspired by both women’s commitment to their education and I hope to gain the same level of wisdom and knowledge they both possessed when they entered into the spirit world. I am also thankful for the fact that wherever I travel and live, I know I always have a place to call home. Lac Courte Oreilles will always be an important part of who I am. I feel blessed that I can visit my parents and other relatives who still live on the family’s original allotment land.

This doctoral program would have been more difficult without my first encounter with graduate school. If I had not taken the plunge to apply for the museology program at the University of Washington in Seattle, I would not have gained the experience of working as a tribal museum curator for the Squaxin Island Tribe in the South Puget Sound. I am indebted for my UW professors who supported my work by introducing me

to the Squaxin Island Museum, Library and Research Center, where I met Charlene Krise, Dale Clark, Liz Yeahquo, Jeremiah George, Theresa Henderson, Dale Croes, Margaret Seymour-Henry, Joe Seymour, and many others in the community who positively influenced my direction in life. I am always happy to visit the Squaxin Island Tribe and attend the Canoe Journey events whenever I can. At Mille Lacs, I would like to acknowledge all of those who work at the Mille Lacs Indian Museum and affiliated with the Minnesota Historical Society.

This second venture into graduate school at the University of Minnesota has been quite the journey. My son Isaac was only four months old when I walked into the American Studies department and into my first class. I would especially like to thank my advisor, Brenda Child and my committee members Pat Albers, Jeani O'Brien, Kevin Murphy, and John Borrows, for their support and feedback along the way. Miigwech to those in the American Indian Workshop who read portions of my work and offered their feedback as well. Also, miigwech to John Nichols, Edna Day, and others in the American Indian studies department for helping me in my RA or TA work over the years. Miigwech also to Bruce White, Marc Slonim, and Erik Redix for their scholarly expertise on Ojibwe history and treaty rights. Most importantly, I am extremely grateful to have been a part of the best cohort ever. I could not have continued on without their support, advice, volunteer child care, and overall love. I am glad to be life-long friends with Jasmine Kar Tang, Emily Smith-Beitiks, Catie Watson, and honorary cohort member Jessica Guisti. Isaac and I miss and love you all.

I have been fortunate to receive funding to support my research from a number of different sources, beginning with the University of Minnesota Community of Scholars Program for the DOVE Fellowship (a one-year and a summer research grant), the American Family Empowerment Fund of the Minneapolis Foundation (for a short-term child care grant), the Graduate Research Partnership Program Race and Ethnic Studies Summer Grant, the National Academies Ford Foundation Pre-Doctoral and Dissertation Fellowship, the University of Minnesota Diversity Pre-Doctoral Diversity Teaching Fellowship at Morris (special thanks to Noro Andriamanalina), the American Studies Summer Dissertation Research Grant, and the Northland College Native American Studies Teaching Fellowship.

Chi-miigwech to my friends and family who have supported me during this long and often arduous process. My parents always believed in my ability to get through school and remain strong throughout my life's endeavors. Their love and support has been tremendous. I believe what kept me going was knowing that even if I failed they would always be there for me and for my son. Miigwech to my brothers Odawa and Charles and their families for their love and perspectives on Native education. To all my other relatives at Lac Courte Oreilles and Grand Portage—miigwech to all my uncles, aunties, cousins, and family friends from powwows and Big Drum for your support. To everyone mentioned in this paragraph, I continually admire your strength to persevere throughout difficulties. You have all inspired me in many ways and will always have a special place in my heart. Miigwech for the past, present, and future memories.

To my friends at the Squaxin Island Tribe and my relatives at Mille Lacs.

*I am inspired by your courage and I look forward to teaching my son
and others about the history of your community.*

Abstract

The power of Western institutions, namely the museum, lies in their colonizing agendas to deny contemporary Native identities and cultures. Standard colonial museum narratives have supported non-Native notions of authenticity and cultural representation, which federal and state governments utilized to attack the rights of tribal nations as stipulated by treaties. Many tribes built museums to preserve and revitalize their cultures, assert their own tribal and cultural identities, and maintain their inherent sovereignty. Tribal museums serve as a central site in which to consider larger narratives of colonialism, conflict, resistance, adaptation, identity, sovereignty, and empowerment.

This dissertation examines and compares the struggle for treaty rights as an assertion of sovereignty in two reservation communities—the Squaxin Island Tribe in Washington State and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe in Minnesota— through their tribal museums. I explore their cultural landscapes and histories, treaties, perceptions of sovereignty, and complex relationships with federal and state governments and local non-Native communities. This project reveals how Native nations have at times recreated and reconstituted their tribal and cultural identities through tribal museums in an effort to further their most significant political causes aimed at maintaining their inherent tribal sovereignty. Comparative analysis of these community's histories, their historical struggles to retain treaty rights, and their museum structures reveals important insights into the place of tribal museums within broader sociopolitical relationships. The museum is one way tribal nations are simultaneously resisting and adapting to their socio-political, legal, and economic circumstances throughout history and into the present.

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Introduction

Prologue

The first time I drove down from Seattle to the Squaxin Island Tribe was early in the morning, about 7 am. It was a gray, misty day in January 2001, like all January days in the Pacific Northwest. I went to get some coffee down the street at a local coffee shop I frequented, turned on my radio to 90.3 KEXP, and headed out in my “new” 1991 Ford Tempo I had recently bought for \$800, which I eventually nicknamed “Sunshine.” As I drove down I-5, I felt apprehensive as to whom I would meet at Squaxin, wondering if the people there were like the Tsimshian girl from Alaska in my Native cinema/feminist class who reiterated with disdain at how different she and her people were from “plains” or “powwow” Indian people. I had previously interned at the Suquamish Museum, which from Seattle, is a half hour ferry trip across to Bainbridge Island. But I only met a few people at Suquamish, all of whom were friendly, although the director of the museum cringed when people called the museum asking, “When is the Chief Seattle Day Powwow scheduled for this year?” She would curtly answer, “We do not do powwows here.”

Many of the other Native people I met at the University of Washington in Seattle were from Eastern Washington tribes (who “do powwows”) and elsewhere. Nevertheless, I received consulting work from the Squaxin Island Tribe through two of my professors. I veered to the right off of Highway 101 in Olympia towards Port Townsend. As I passed the State Capitol, I noticed the heavy fog in the evergreen trees. The fog seemed to thicken as I got closer to the south Puget Sound inlets located a little further in West Olympia. At the time, I did not realize how important these inlets were to the local tribal people; I had only noticed large holes of mud. Later on, I would typically see the tides go in and out of the inlets and once out, the bays remain muddy, which is the time shellfish can be gathered by tribal people and other family members according to regulations. Little did I know then at the time of my first trip to Squaxin Island, just how much my life would become entwined with those I would meet that day...I eventually realized just how much their livelihood depended on the natural resources derived from their traditional waterways. The Squaxin Island people reminded me of Ojibwe people who also relied on the lakes and waters for subsistence. Our Native identities are similar, as they are very much connected to the water, and I came to appreciate their way of life and their culture and history as much as I appreciated my own...[Excerpts from author’s personal journal, January 21, 2002, and afterthoughts written October 2, 2007].

My experiences with the Squaxin Island Tribe as tribal museum curator provided me with much personal reflection as an Ojibwe person from the Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation in northwestern Wisconsin. While conducting research and talking with

Native people in the Pacific Northwest, I discovered just how much they engage in their traditional cultural ways on a daily basis, and I learned more about my own Ojibwe identity and connection to my home reservation. A few years later, I returned to Lac Courte Oreilles briefly to work as an archivist at our tribal community college prior to entering into the University of Minnesota American Studies Ph.D. program. During my return home, I gathered maple syrup and wild rice just as I did in my youth. As a result of my brief time at home, I felt a renewed sense of pride at how we once lived as Ojibwe people. This re-awakening and renewed appreciation of our cultural activities, such as processing wild rice by hand, served as motivation for my creation of a small wild ricing exhibit for the tribal college's cultural center.

Fishing, hunting, and gathering wild rice and maple sugar has long been a part of our lives as Ojibwe people, whether we directly partake in these activities or not. Indirectly, we are shaped by these activities when we participate in ceremonies where we eat these foods, some of which are considered sacred, and/or offer and receive bags of rice or jars of maple syrup in "giveaways." We ensure that we also share our deer meat, bear meat, walleye and other fish, wild rice, and maple sugar with our families, friends, and visitors throughout the year regardless of a ceremony. At Squaxin Island, they do the same with their deer meat, salmon and other fish, and shellfish. Our cultural activities are significant to all of us as Native people to some degree and are always inherently a part of who we are; they define and differentiate us. These cultural activities provide not only tangible evidence of our continuing ways of life, but they also serve as spiritual evidence as we continue to offer our thanks to the Creator for these foods through prayer and

tobacco offerings prior to procuring and eating them. It is no wonder why both of our tribal nations, as well as many others, have relentlessly fought to retain our way of life against local governments, non-Native citizens, law enforcement, and corporations. Those who signed the treaties understood what precisely was at stake and subsequent generations of Native people would become even more determined to find ways to maintain their treaty rights, which represent the right to live, exist, and remain connected to our environments and cultures. Our right to exercise our treaty rights means so much more than just being able to fish, hunt and gather. Legal scholar Charles Wilkinson reminds us, “For American Indians, their survival as a people—mark down those words, survival as a people—ultimately depends on 19th-century treaties...a special trust relationship with the U.S.; and ultimately, the principal of tribal sovereignty.”¹

Many tribal nations decide to utilize the concept of a tribal museum as a means to transmit our histories in our own way and convey the significance of these cultural activities in continuing of our ways of life. This dissertation tells more of the story: it is about resistance, struggle, adaptation, politics, law, history, identity, sovereignty, culture...most importantly it is about Native people and communities.

Yet he knew that people’s immersion under the structures of others was not always from a failure of effort to make it otherwise. He knew this from stories like those heard at his grandparents’ house. His Mishomis [Grandfather] helped him understand that Indians were not passive objects in the sweep of colonial history. His Nokomis [Grandmother] taught him

¹ Ronald N. Satz, “The White Backlash and Beyond,” in *Chippewa Treaty Rights: The Reserved Rights of Wisconsin’s Chippewa Indians in Historical Perspective*, 2nd printing (Madison: Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, 1994), 116.

that Indians exercised their will to contest and sometimes subvert institutions and ideologies imposed on them. Despite their best efforts, he also knew his people encountered great difficulties in turning those intrusions around. They were buried under levels of law and bureaucracy that had little to do with their understanding and aspirations for their place in the world. –John Borrows, *Drawing Out Law: A Spirit's Guide*²

This dissertation examines the specific ways Native nations assert their *inherent* tribal sovereignty through the tribal museum.³ I explore the history of two reservation communities in the United States that have fought to exercise their right to hunt, fish, and gather via treaties made with the federal government in the mid-nineteenth century. Since then, the Squaxin Island Tribe in Washington State and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe in Minnesota have engaged in a struggle against American colonialism as they continue to assert their tribal sovereignty.⁴ Like nearly all Native groups across the U.S., they have faced challenges from the federal and state governments and local non-Native people and corporations who desired to reshape and suppress significant aspects of Native peoples' lives, most importantly the exercise of their treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather. However, as Canadian Ojibwe legal scholar John Borrows contends, Native

² John Borrows, *Drawing Out Law: A Spirit's Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 21.

³ Throughout, I use David E. Wilkins and Tsianina Lomawaima's definition of inherent sovereignty in their book *Uneven Ground: American Indian Sovereignty and Federal Law* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 250. They assert that it has always been entrenched into the political organization of Native nations even prior to European contact and the United States Constitution; it is located "outside" the Constitution and as such it is logical to assume it can and should only be reduced or abolished only by Native peoples themselves.

⁴ According to indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, colonialism is linked with European imperialism beginning in the sixteenth century for economic expansion, which "could be tied to a chronology of events related to 'discovery,' conquest, exploitation, distribution and appropriation" of indigenous peoples. She notes, "Colonialism facilitated this expansion by ensuring that there was European control." In her *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 21.

people were not passive and continued to challenge these intrusions of their rights. This resistance took place not only at the local level, but also at the national one, primarily through the court system.

In my dissertation, I examine the history of treaty rights struggles in both communities beginning after the treaty-signing era in the mid-nineteenth century to illustrate the continuous effects of a legacy of settler colonialism aimed predominantly at extinguishing Native peoples' rights and access to their land and resources.⁵ As I point out, Native people endured steady race-based harassment by state law enforcement officials while exercising their right to hunt, fish and gather, and received little or no protection from the federal government despite its duty to provide it under treaties, and as even as the U.S. Supreme Court legally mandated this protection in the early nineteenth

⁵ Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolfe points out that in the nineteenth-century U.S., frontier settler's lawless actions against Indians that included homicide and the racialization of Native peoples as 'Indians,' in addition to federal Indian assimilation policies (land allotment, religious conversion, boarding schools, etc.), all served to eliminate Native peoples' access to territory in order to open it up for settlement and industry. There is a commonly-held assumption that Native people only experienced colonialism through the federal Indian policies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whereas many other factors prior to this era were at work in settler colonialism. These factors served to promote America's master historical narrative of nation building and progress, and where Native people inevitably and naturally 'disappeared.' See Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409. Fred Hoxie discusses settler colonialism as a way to understand indigenous peoples' "encounters with modernity as an ongoing struggle with colonial rule, whereby settler colonialism produces an ideology that extended citizenship to indigenous peoples." He describes it as a mutual economic, political and social system where indigenous people should not be considered merely as tragic victims in stories of national expansion, but had a major role in shaping the history of America. Both Wolfe and Hoxie argue that historical events and their effects are more complex than how it has been presented; settler colonialism is still ongoing. See Frederick E. Hoxie, "Retrieving the Red Continent: Settler Colonialism and the History of American Indians in the U.S.," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 6 (2008): 1153-1167.

century.⁶ My dissertation demonstrates that after at least a century of state and federal abuse with regard to treaty rights and inconsistencies of numerous court decisions, Native nations, borrowing the Western museum concept, increasingly viewed the tribal museum as one mechanism through which they could retain their treaty rights and affirm their inherent tribal sovereignty.⁷

The tribal museum serves as a central site in which to consider the larger narratives of colonialism, conflict and struggle, resistance, adaptation, identity, sovereignty, and empowerment. My primary research question digs deeper into the political context of tribal museums. The effects of settler colonialism have negatively impacted tribal communities in various ways; however, through the tribal museum, tribal nations are asserting agency by articulating their own identities and forming their own historical and cultural narratives. Native communities consider the tribal museum as one place, and not the only place, to tell their own story to a broader public audience in order

⁶ Referred to as the Marshall Trilogy, three U.S. Supreme Court cases, *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, 21 U.S. (8 Wheat.) 543 (1823), *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. (5 Pet.) 1 (1831), and *Worcester v. Georgia*, 31 U.S. (6 Pet.) 1 (1832), affirmed the legal and political status of Indian nations. The first held that private citizens could not buy land from Indians, the second recognized the threat of states to Indians and ruled that Indians nations were “domestic dependent nations,” i.e. tribes were like a “ward to its guardian” (the guardian as the federal government), and the last case opined that the federal government, not the states, had authority over tribes. These major court cases established the trust relationship that exists between the federal government and tribes.

⁷ In various places throughout this dissertation, I discuss ‘the museum’ as a Western colonial institution of power. I also refer to it as a Western museum or modern museum and in some cases, the public museum, all of which refers to one that has been designed by tradition to highlight democratic ideals, national identity, and progress of a nation-state, but also one that may or may not unintentionally promote social hierarchies and practice exclusionary practices based on race, culture, gender, etc. as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. I have consciously chosen not to refer to such museums as ‘mainstream’ like many museum scholars because I fear use of this term may indirectly center and privilege this type of museum. With regard to tribes’ unique status, tribes are sometimes described as ‘semi-sovereign’ or ‘quasi-sovereign,’ meaning they have the power to determine membership and exercise authority over members within their territory, which is subject to the authority of the federal government, but not state governments. I contend tribal nations are inherently sovereign. Chapter Two elaborates on the subject of tribal sovereignty.

to further their most significant political causes and express what they value most. The history of treaty rights and the cultural context of hunting, fishing and gathering are vital to Native identity and tribal community life. In the tribal museum, Native communities engage in a larger ‘public history’ project in which there is always a political agenda.⁸ As my dissertation illustrates, Native people utilize the tribal museum to communicate certain aspects of their tribal histories for very strategic purposes. With a great deal at risk, those who work in tribal museums may have differences of opinion with regard to the subject matter and how it is presented, as discussed in later chapters.

In addition to examining tribal and individual political agendas, I explore the ways in which the tribal museums at Squaxin Island and Mille Lacs have benefitted their communities by examining their initial goals and how they may have changed as a result of shifting tribal infrastructures and/or redirected political and socio-economic objectives. I gauge the success of two tribal museums in their endeavors and inquire how the concept of the museum, historically being a Western institution, is affirming their unique political status as sovereign nations in their emphasis on certain cultural, historical, and political themes in their exhibits. Although I do not engage in formal audience surveys, I conducted informal analyses of the exhibits and interviewed tribal museum workers in order to assist to other tribes who wish to benefit their communities with a tribal museum.

⁸ The idea of public history began in the 1950s and 1960s, but became a more formal discipline in the 1970s. Public historians utilize their knowledge in such public settings as museums, archives, historic sites, historical societies, libraries, and government agencies, etc. where they are called to study, preserve, and interpret historical records and artifacts to help shape our collective understanding and knowledge of the past. Public history differs from academic history in its emphasis on audiences.

A comparative analysis of these two community's histories, their struggles to maintain their treaty rights and sovereignty, and their museum structures, reveals important insights into the place of tribal museums within broader sociopolitical relationships. By comparing the two Native communities to each other, I illustrate their similarities even though they are located in different regions of the U.S.; despite their cultural differences, they are linked through their relationships to the land, historical circumstances derived from treaties and federal and state policies, and their tribal museum activities, in particular the development of their historical and cultural narratives. It is of particular interest to note that the Mille Lacs Band collaborated with the state Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) for their current museum and the Squaxin Island Tribe built their museum with little outside assistance. The similarities between these two communities, coupled with the difference in their museum structures, makes for a valuable comparative study in order to determine how different tribal museums function.

I specifically chose these two communities and their museums because of my familiarity with them. While receiving my Master of Arts degree, the Squaxin Island Tribe hired me to help complete the exhibit design process for their newly-built Museum, Library and Research Center (MLRC). As for Mille Lacs Band, throughout my life as an Ojibwe person from a neighboring reservation, I have attended powwows and ceremonies hosted by Mille Lacs people, one of whom is married to my uncle. From very early on in my life, I recall the impact of the Mille Lacs Indian Museum (MLIM), which stimulated my interest in museums and tribal museums in general.

An ongoing study on the sociopolitical impact of tribal museums on their communities before and after their formation needs further development in current museum literature, which tends to focus on Native peoples' relationship with non-Native museums and/or cultural representation in exhibits. The subject of cultural representation drawing from the framework of colonialism is most recently employed by scholar Amy Lonetree in her demand for national and tribal museums to resist traditional museum exhibit practices by adopting a decolonization strategy of "speaking the hard truths of colonialism and thereby creating spaces for healing and understanding."⁹ While her argument is something to keep in mind when creating tribal museum exhibits, I contend that what Native people choose to convey about their tribal histories and the reasons behind their choices is not that simple. The history that tribal community members and Native people tell each other is very different from the history that tribal museums tell to non-Native audiences. As indigenous public history institutions, tribal museum staffs tend to contemplate multiple audiences and consider how best to maintain and further their tribal nation's political agendas and maintain their inherent tribal sovereignty.

I agree with Fred Hoxie that scholars, like Lonetree, who use the colonial framework has been "a valuable start...but [the] formulation—like the literature it criticizes—conflates a wide variety of indigenous (and colonial) experiences into a single

⁹ She argues that with "truth telling," our tribal communities can address "the legacies of historical unresolved grief" or historical trauma. By doing so, the process can assist in promoting and empowering a health community and further nation building. See Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 5.

phenomenon.”¹⁰ Like the field of history about American Indians, museum literature about Native representation and more recently, critiques of national and tribal museum exhibits, tend to focus on the history of confrontational relationships between the colonial structure and indigenous peoples, where indigenous peoples are cast solely as victims of colonialism. Using Patrick Wolfe’s analysis to argue against this strategy, Hoxie claims:

...the settler colonial framework has structured much of Native experience in these new nations. Certainly earlier indigenous traditions and values have persisted, but the expanding presence of the settler state [U.S.] has formed a central theme in the modern history of Native peoples. Embedded in that theme is the ongoing threat posed by settler states whose existence is predicated on the replacement of the ‘deficient’ communities that preceded them...As a consequence, the complex mixture of resistance and adaptation is a permanent feature of indigenous life within settler colonial states.¹¹

Viewing American Indian history using this type of settler colonialism framework proposed by Hoxie establishes Native people as agents or “participants in an ongoing contest with settler colonialism in the US,” which aimed at both the displacement and inclusion of Native people.¹² As I discuss in early chapters of this dissertation, throughout the twentieth century Native people not only resisted threats to their ways of life and inherent tribal sovereignty, but also strategically adapted to adverse situations in

¹⁰ Hoxie, “Retrieving the Red Continent,” 1157.

¹¹ Ibid., 1160.

¹² Ibid. Both Wolfe and Hoxie describe settler colonialism as non-Native immigrants who invaded Native country and stayed, and Wolfe succinctly refers to this invasion as “a structure rather than an event.” Wolfe, 390. The idea of Native people as agents or participants does not intend to circumvent or downplay this structural process by which the settler states have attempted to maintain its hegemonic control over Native peoples to the present day; it does however consider placing Native people on a more level playing field, as the federal government recognized by initiating treaty negotiations with Native nations.

order to survive. Keeping this in mind, I argue that the deployment of the tribal museum is one way we are simultaneously resisting and adapting to our sociopolitical, legal, and economic circumstances throughout history into the present. By using the Western museum apparatus to develop exhibit narratives that not only inform the public, but also challenge hegemonic cultural ideologies, we can further position ourselves to take control of our own destinies now and for the future.

My criticism about the trends in recent tribal museum literature does not aim to discount the work about tribal museums and the issues of cultural representation.¹³ There are two dissertations that specifically address the Mille Lacs Indian Museum and its exhibits; they include both tribal and non-tribal perceptions and ideas surrounding cultural identity and self-representation.¹⁴ My project complements and builds off of these dissertations and other literature on tribal museums. The substance of my work involves the use of archival materials, as well as oral histories and community interviews,

¹³ Some additional notable literature written about specific tribal museum s and representation includes: Larry Nesper, "Historical Ambivalence in a Tribal Museum," *Museum Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (2005): 1-16; Patricia Pierce Erickson, "Welcome to This House: A Century of Makah People Honoring Identity and Negotiating Cultural Tourism," *Ethnohistory* 50, no. 3 (Summer 2003): ; Patricia Pierce Erikson, *Voices of a Thousand People: The Makah Cultural and Research Center* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); John J. Bodinger de Uriarte, *Casino and Museum: Representing Mashantucket Pequot Identity* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2007); Mary Lawlor, *Public Native America: Tribal Self-Representation in Museums, Powwows, and Casinos* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006; Gwyneira Isaac, *Mediating Knowledges: Origins of a Zuni Tribal Museum* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007); and all chapters in Susan Sleeper-Smith, ed., "Part 3: Tribal Museums and the Heterogeneity of the Nation State," in *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 251-337.

¹⁴ Amy Lonetree, "Displaying Indians: Museum Representations of Native American History and Culture (PhD diss., University of California-Berkeley, 2002); and Jennifer Stampe, "'You Will Learn about Our Past': Cultural Representation, Self-Determination, and Problems of Presence," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2007). In 2012, Lonetree authored her new book, which includes a chapter derived from a large portion of her dissertation on her work as a temporary exhibit researcher with the Mille Lacs Indian Museum from June to December 1994 and a few periodic research trips since that time. For further information about her research methods, see Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 31-32.

some of which I completed for my unpublished Master's thesis project and my employment with the Squaxin Island Tribe from 2001-2004. Since my departure from the Squaxin Island MLRC, I have maintained my friendships with tribal and community members and employees. As my budget would allow, I conducted interviews and archival research intermittently with the Squaxin Island Tribe and at the National Archives in Seattle from 2008-2012. My work at the Mille Lacs Indian Museum began in 2012, although I gathered archival research at the National Archives in Kansas City, Missouri in the summer of 2010. While at both regional archives, I collected historical documents as specific as possible on both the Squaxin Island Tribe and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe focusing on the complexity of their treaty rights struggles in the twentieth century. However, the interviews I gathered are critical to my work due to the nature of my primary research questions that involve the two tribal communities and their museums as they function today.

Throughout the dissertation process, I have been committed to pursuing a research paradigm that creates new knowledge that is with, by, and for Native communities rather than on or about them. In some areas of this dissertation I have been more successful at this endeavor. At times, I have felt hesitation at the process due to an inherent balancing act of being a Native person from a reservation community and an academic researcher. At every step of the way, I engaged in significant personal reflection and reflexivity about the manner in which I initiated contact and collected interviews with acquaintances, colleagues, tribal employees, friends, and relatives. Another area of concern involved the presentation of interview information. I desired to convey the

information in a way that was not only respectful to the individuals involved and their communities, but also in a manner that has relevance to an academic audience. Coming to terms with my responsibilities to Native people and communities, knowing full well the history of the controversial relationship between indigenous communities and academia and museums, is always an ongoing practice as I engage with these audiences frequently, if not on a daily basis.

The contentious relationship between indigenous peoples in general and academic institutions and museums has been what indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith deemed “a history that still offends the deepest sense of our [indigenous peoples’] humanity.”¹⁵ Smith writes extensively about the ways in which Western researchers and intellectuals have inadequately articulated indigenous peoples in the last two centuries in history, research, and writing. She criticizes the superiority of Western knowledge in academic research, which historically dismisses or excludes indigenous forms of knowledge and indigenous peoples’ accounts of history. The ways in which Western research and knowledge has silenced indigenous peoples is evident in early historical and anthropological texts, which tend to include only false or one-sided accounts and misinterpretations of Native people that omit the diversity of our cultures, histories, values, customs, and identities.

Continuing misrepresentations and omissions have served to diminish the contemporary existence of indigenous peoples and reinscribes old stereotypes. The result has led to acts of land encroachment, natural resource disenfranchisement, and continued

¹⁵ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 1.

treaty rights violations, among other destructive acts that marginalize indigenous peoples. Indigenous research efforts to reclaim our languages, cultures, our stories and oral accounts, which “are stored within genealogies, within the landscape, within weavings and carvings, even within the personal names that many people carried,” has been on the rise since the mid-twentieth century.¹⁶ Scholar Christian McMillen argues that the Hualapai land case in the U.S. Supreme Court directly effected the writing of American Indian history as in the 1940s the Hualapais’ took control in telling their own tribal history of occupancy in their fight for their land. McMillen contends how his particular case led to a new consideration of American Indian historical writing and facilitated the establishment of the field of ethnohistory.¹⁷ Even with the development of new academic fields such as ethnohistory, some reluctance to accommodate and accept indigenous forms of knowledge still persists within the academy.

As a result of this dissertation process, I have come to terms with the fact that I am both an insider and an outsider in academia and in Native communities. I realize that overlap of belonging to both groups occurs for many of us who struggle to place where our research is positioned or where it should be located. With every word, sentence, paragraph, page, and chapter written, I am cognizant at all times of how it may sound to

¹⁶ Smith, 33.

¹⁷ See *United States v. Santa Fe Pacific Railroad Company*, 314 U.S. 399 (1941). Although much more is going on here, I also use this argument to introduce the idea of how the Hualapais’ case became the basis for tribes to adopt a similar evidentiary process in late twentieth century treaty rights cases, as observed in Chapter Two of this dissertation. Ethnohistory or the study of Native and indigenous peoples utilizes written archival documents, material culture, oral histories, and ethnographic information. Christian W. McMillen, *Making Indian Law: The Hualapai Land Case and the Birth of Ethnohistory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

both an academic and an indigenous reader. Smith accurately describes our dilemma as indigenous researchers:

There are a number of ethical, cultural, political and personal issues that can present special difficulties for indigenous researchers who, in their own communities, work partially as insiders,...and partially as outsiders, because of their Western education or because they may work across clan, tribe, linguistic, age and gender boundaries. Simultaneously, they work within their research projects or institutions as insiders within a particular paradigm or research model, and as outsiders because they are often marginalized and perceived to be representative of either a minority or a rival interest group.¹⁸

Smith admits there are no correct answers but that we must be reflexive during the process. She suggests that we must also be clear about our intentions when we approach indigenous communities and individuals. Lastly, we must frame our research methods, theories, and questions produced from our work in ways that dismantle the system of colonization, or to decolonize, which she also cautions is not a complete rejection of Western knowledge. However, we should engage in “centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes.”¹⁹

Following Smith’s advice, I am further reassured to approach writing from my own perspective. For the final half of the writing of this dissertation, I chose to return back to my Ojibwe community at Lac Courte Oreilles in Wisconsin for not only family support, but also to reaffirm my relationship to my Ojibwe culture and landscape. My

¹⁸ Smith, 5.

¹⁹ Ibid., 39.

return home has further empowered my work about tribal museums despite my own community's lack of an official tribal museum. However, even with my background as a tribal member raised in a reservation community, I am mindful that my perspective does not become what Smith refers to as an "official insider voice."²⁰ My experiences are not "official," i.e. they do not reflect those experiences of all people who live on a reservation and/or have ties to reservation communities.

Some additional issues that arose during the writing process that directed me to proceed with caution. I struggled with finding ways to convey the complexity of complex internal tribal politics and the often difficult relationship dynamics between individuals and groups of people in reservation communities, which are also symptomatic of the realities of daily life in all small, rural communities in general. Yet, there is the added layer of the long-term effects of colonization present in reservation communities; how each individual deals with each situation it is different. One thing is certain: we all continue to resist and adapt to the myriad ways in which colonization and colonialism affects us. By far, the most challenging issue for me as an insider/outsider in both academic and Native communities has been to critically analyze personal interviews and cultural descriptions often deemed to be taken at face value. Since childhood, I have learned that it is not proper to question the beliefs of elders and community leaders and to be respectful of others' opinions. It has been a major struggle to find a balance as an academic to provide a critical analysis yet to be considerate of those I mention in my dissertation. I hope that I am successful at articulating their opinions and suggestions in

²⁰ Ibid., 139.

thoughtful ways. In those areas where I may be misconstrued, I offer my apologies as it has not been my intention to be disrespectful. Overall, crucial goals of my dissertation include: considering the history of Native peoples' relationship with academia and museums; expanding standard methodologies to include indigenous perspectives; and share the potential benefits of my work for the benefit of these two Native communities and others.

Organization of the Dissertation

In Chapter One, I provide a foundation to the dissertation: an overview of the origin of the Western museum and the trajectory of early American anthropology's role in collecting Native peoples' cultural materials. I then consider the historical and contemporary roles of the Western museum as an institution of power by concentrating on the display of ethnographic objects and the role of authenticity in standard narratives of Native cultural representation. Next, I give a brief introduction to the paradigm shift beginning in the 1970s and the rise of collaborations between Western museums and Native people. Lastly, I discuss the formation and proliferation of tribal museums. Here, I describe the meaning of tribal museums, and their objects and exhibits, including the process of adapting them for not only Native audiences, but for the broader audience as public indigenous institutions intent on furthering tribal political agendas aimed at maintaining and asserting their inherent tribal sovereignty.

In Chapter Two, I introduce both sites of my inquiry: the Mille Lacs Indian Museum and the Squaxin Island Museum, Library and Research Center. To begin, I

briefly describe the meaning of tribal sovereignty, i.e. political, legal, and cultural, as a main incentive for tribal nations to adopt the Western museum concept. The assertion of tribal sovereignty is significant to the tribal museums movement in the last few decades. I then provide the historical background of the Squaxin Island Tribe and the Mille Lacs Ojibwe, along with other nearby tribes or bands signed important treaties that included their treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather.

For this chapter, I begin with the treaty era, the negotiations of the treaties (the Treaty of Medicine Creek and the 1837 Ojibwe treaty), and the subsequent creation of both reservation communities. The Squaxin Island Tribe's history includes the federal government's designation of a small island in the South Puget Sound as the official Indian agency for a number of years prior to moving to the neighboring Puyallup reservation. Likewise, the history of movement of the Mille Lacs Ojibwe people and the formation of the reservation community today is central to their contemporary struggle for treaty rights and the ongoing struggle against colonialism in the latter half of the twentieth century. The Band's treaty rights struggle negatively altered relationships between local Native and non-Native people and between the Band and the State of Minnesota.²¹ Both tribal nations were involved in major treaty rights cases that often culminated into tense confrontations with non-Native groups. I consider events leading up to the U.S. Supreme Court cases, which eventually affirmed that both Native nations could continue with hunting, fishing and gathering as stipulated by the treaties. These

²¹ Yet, despite the treaty rights controversy between Band and State at the time of the formation of the Mille Lacs Indian Museum, the collaboration process yielded a tacit understanding between representatives that it exist as a site of negotiation, as detailed in Chapter Four.

court decisions proved pivotal for both tribal communities in discussions about building a tribal museum and the exhibit planning process.

In Chapter Three, I concentrate on the formation of the Squaxin Island MLRC and discuss the ways in which the people of the Squaxin Island Tribe has redefined and rearticulated their tribal cultural identity through their public relations materials and the MLRC's exhibits and public programs. More specifically, I explore the "Hall of the Seven Inlets" design and the corresponding gallery spaces. I then discuss the conflicting notions of cultural authority and tribal identity as I consider the agendas of key stakeholders involved in the MLRC exhibit design process. Although an official tribal narrative had already been established in the public relations materials, people in the community initially differed in their opinions about what information to include and how to convey it. Finally in this chapter, I consider the new 'trend' in tribal museum literature calling for decolonization.

In Chapter Four, I focus on the Mille Lacs Indian Museum, beginning with the origin of the collection's objects to the MLIM building that exists today. Next, I describe and analyze the current exhibits by exploring the tactics used to illustrate the Band's contemporary presence and survival, as well as complications that have arisen as a result of the institution's dual identity as an official state historic site and a tribal museum with a responsibility to the Mille Lacs people. Despite being operated by the Minnesota Historical Society, many view it as a tribal museum because the exhibits privilege the voices of band members involved in the design process. It has been referred to as one of the first successful collaborations between a tribal nation and a state, embracing new

museum theory and resisting Western museum exhibit practices misrepresenting Native people. This collaboration is remarkable considering the Band's 1990 legal filing against the state over the exercise of their treaty rights. However, since the 1996 opening, the MLIM has changed very little and important omissions in the original design plan have not yet been addressed. Finally, prior to a more thorough discussion of the MLIM's functions and futures, I assess the Four Seasons Room, which is deemed to be the centerpiece of the MLIM.

To conclude, this dissertation asks questions about the role of the tribal museums today and offers suggestions beyond the strategies utilized by these two tribal museums to assert their treaty rights and inherent tribal sovereignty. From the beginning of this project, one of my primary goals has been to conduct a comparative analysis of these two Native nations. Despite major regional, cultural, and historical differences between the Mille Lacs Ojibwe and the Squaxin Island Tribe, both groups believe their cultural and tribal identities to be synonymous with water and fishing. Today, the Squaxin Island tribal people refer to themselves as "People of the Water" because of their long history of fishing, netting, and shellfish gathering on the waters of the South Puget Sound. The Mille Lacs Ojibwe people have always fished in the plentiful lakes of the Mille Lacs region. Both tribal groups believe that their main source of food and spirituality originates from their surrounding waters. This traditional way of life, the struggle for treaty rights, and the role of the tribal museum as a mechanism used to help maintain these rights is what links these two reservation communities together. To end the dissertation, I raise questions about the future of tribal museums and the direction of

exhibits, exploring issues of tribal identity, community, and decolonization; however, first I begin with laying the groundwork for the origin of museums.

**Chapter One:
Western Museum Origins, Collecting Native-Made Objects
And Tribal Museum Meanings**

Ample literature exists on the origins of the modern Western museum.¹ This chapter provides the historical and theoretical background of the museum institution, as well as tribal museums. By examining the history behind conventional museum collecting and display practices of Native peoples and cultures, I reveal why many tribal nations believe the creation of their own museum is essential; tribal museums are not only a response to counter these past practices, but are also a primary tool used to maintain their inherent tribal sovereignty. I begin with an outline of Western museum origins and American cabinets, then provide a history of collecting Native cultural objects and human remains in the U.S. A discussion of the Western museum as a powerhouse in U.S. society follows, along with a dialogue about notions of authenticity and representation in exhibits. Next, I explore the problems of a standard ethnographic display of Native cultural objects, the museum effect, the display of ‘Others,’ and recent developments including the paradigm shift of Western museums to move toward more collaborative efforts with Native people. Finally, I examine the origins and meanings of tribal museums and the reasons behind considering different audiences in the exhibit design process.

¹ Throughout this chapter, unless I specifically discuss a certain type of museum (art, natural history, science, ethnographic/anthropological, etc.), I refer to the Western museum, modern museum, or public museum as representative of all of the types of museums that display Native cultures and objects.

Western Museum Origins and American Cabinets

The modern Western museum that exists today has its roots in ancient Greece. The idea took hold in Western Europe throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Age of Enlightenment. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European Kunst-und Wunderkammer, or “cabinets,” were rooms that held private collections of fine art and objects considered to be strange or exotic from all parts of the world. These included historical or scientific objects, such as animal and insect specimens and fossils, but also objects deemed later to be ethnographic, such as clothing and hunting implements from non-European cultures. Private collectors sought these objects as a symbol of their wealth and power. Explorers from European countries collected objects in the name of ‘discovery’ because such objects signified conquest. For similar reasons, powerful dictators like Napoleon in the late eighteenth century, viewed museums as a way to promote their nationalist agenda. To garner support for his regime, Napoleon believed that items confiscated from war should be placed in museums in France as a way to instill national pride in the French people. Around this time, museums went from private to public to reflect a larger political agenda aimed at showcasing human progress through science. Thereafter in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the museum became democratized, transforming into spaces for educating and entertaining the public masses

or the ‘common people.’ This transformation became the basis for the modern or public museum as it exists today.²

During the eighteenth century, a few colonial museums opened in America with the same types of objects as those in Europe. Charles Willson Peale became an early innovator of the American museum and created the natural habitat display of plant and animal specimens still found in many natural history museums. Like Peale, Thomas Jefferson utilized the Linnean classification system as a way to organize and catalogue all of his scientific and natural history specimens in his private cabinet/museum at Monticello.³ Scholar Joyce Henri Robinson discusses Jefferson’s motivation for the creation of his “American Cabinet of Curiosities” and writes, “The arrangement of Jefferson’s collection of art objects, natural history specimens, and the ethnographic curios was deliberate,” arguing that his “Indian Hall” reflected his views on Native Americans at the time.⁴ Henri Robinson’s description of Jefferson’s collecting practices, the arrangement of the hall, and his own written descriptions of Native ethnographic objects reveals important insights into his political agenda pertaining to Native people. Jefferson believed that Native people, although savage and primitive, were capable of

² For more information on the history of the modern museum, see Mary Alexander and Edward Porter Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums* (Rowman: Altamira, 2007), 5-15. See also Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

³ The Linnean classification system of taxonomy is still used today to describe plant and animal species in scientific terms, as well as humans. Swedish botanist Carl von Linne (Linnaeus) also divided humans or the *Homo Erectus* into distinct races.

⁴ Joyce Henri Robinson, “An American Cabinet of Curiosities: Thomas Jefferson’s ‘Indian Hall’ at Monticello,” in *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, ed. Leah Dilworth (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 19.

becoming civilized with a program incorporating European-American ideas of progress. His ideas became basis for federal policies aimed directly at the extinction of Native cultures and Native peoples' complete assimilation into American society.

Many European-Americans at that time held Jefferson's beliefs about Native people. While the museum phenomenon initially began in Europe, the practice of exhibiting the 'exotic' curiosities of non-European peoples became prevalent in American museums by the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Americans disparaged Native people as bloodthirsty savages, or romanticized them as children of nature who could easily be assimilated into mainstream America. Yet another stereotype emerged resulting from changes in the field of anthropology where concerns arose about the so-called disappearing cultures of Native people. Anthropologists and ethnographers understood a large percentage of the Indian population had been decimated by European-introduced diseases. By the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, interactions between Native and non-Native people occurred through trade, employment, and intermarriage. However, federal assimilation policies seeking to eradicate Native cultures, such as land allotment and the implementation of boarding schools for Indian children, became contributing factors leading to the disappearing Indian anxiety.⁵ Anthropologists and other collectors in salvage mode believed Native cultures and traditions would vanish unless they intervened to record them and collect as many materials as possible.

⁵ For more information on the effects of Indian boarding schools on American Indians and their families, see Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Call It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); and Clifford E. Trafzer, *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Education Experiences* (Winnipeg: Bison Books, 2006).

Simultaneously, attitudes of romantic nostalgia for the Indian of the past became a national symbol for an America that desired to distinguish itself from Europe.⁶

Collecting Practices in the U.S.

The disappearing Indian imagery and salvage ideas provoked wealthy American investors to fund expeditions for a number of anthropologists and ethnographers to journey across the nation onto Indian reservations to gather as much material culture they could find. They collected different types of ethnographic objects: clothing, utensils, tools, craft items, ceremonial items, hunting implements, languages, songs, and other similar objects in an effort to preserve what they perceived to be the last vestiges of Native American cultures. They also took photographs and wrote field notes based on observations and conducted informant interviews. In the late nineteenth century, anthropologists such as Franz Boas collected what they considered to be genuine or authentic Native objects characterized by detailed craftsmanship and intricate aesthetic design, which he argued paralleled other works of Western fine art.⁷

⁶ On the history of Native American imagery and the repercussions on Native peoples, see Robert Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian From Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Brian Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1982); Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁷ In his 1927 book *Primitive Art*, he illustrates this claim with 323 photographs, drawings, and diagrams of examples of Northwest Coast Art. Franz Boas, *Primitive Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927). His arguments not only raised these objects' value, but helped create the structure of a high-end Indian art market still in existence today.

However, anthropologists and ethnographers did not only collect objects and cultural information. In the mid-nineteenth century, the rise of the field of physical anthropology gave ammunition to theories already begun in the century before of placing humans into distinct races. By measuring the size of different types of peoples' crania, Dr. Samuel Morton, founded the "American School" created to study and trace the origins of races. In 1839, Morton published his *Crania Americana*, in which he compared skull size to rank intelligence.⁸ Morton determined certain behavior traits of Caucasians, which he believed to have the biggest brain capacity, as well as Asians, Blacks, and Indians, whose intelligence he considered to rank well below that of Caucasians. For Indians specifically, he claimed that since the Indian brain was deficient, they had no capacity for becoming civilized.⁹ As such, he declared Indians to be doomed to extinction. His theory about Indians greatly influenced federal Indian policies and

⁸ Samuel Morton, *Crania Americana: A comparative view of the skulls of various aboriginal nations of North and South America* (Philadelphia: J. Dobson, 1839).

⁹ Morton's ideas and the weight of physical anthropology continued into the early twentieth century where the federal government relied on the testimony of physical anthropologists, Drs. Albert Jenks (Professor of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota) and Ales Hrdlicka (Curator of the Physical Anthropology Division at the Smithsonian) in cases brought by the federal government against lumber companies, entrepreneurs, and banks who defrauded land allotments from full-blooded Ojibwe people at White Earth in Minnesota considered to be incompetent (as competent, mixed-blood Ojibwe people could sell their land allotments). Jenks and Hrdlicka believed they could distinguish between full-blooded and mixed-blooded Ojibwe people based upon physical examination of skin and hair. For more information, see David L. Beaulieu, "Curly Hair and Big Feet: Physical Anthropology and the Implementation of Land Allotment on the White Earth Chippewa Reservation," *American Indian Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1984): 281-314.

bolstered ideas about the ‘Manifest Destiny’ of European-American expansion and control of the Western Hemisphere as inevitable and justified.¹⁰

To further inform his theories, Morton collected almost 900 human skulls, many of them Native American. Morton specifically sought specimens from grave robbers, Indian agents, and military personnel, all of whom he paid in the rising market of exhuming Native American bodies for scientific study. About the impact of such activities, scholar Robert Bieder states, “The bodies of Indians became important for the investigations of ethnologists and anthropologists throughout the nineteenth century...It was this growing awareness of the body out of which American ethnology was born.”¹¹ The U.S. Army Medical Museum, founded in 1862, collected hundreds of Indian remains. Following suit, other major museums collected Indian remains at an increased

¹⁰ For more information on Dr. Morton and the American School, see William Stanton, *The Leopard’s Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815-1859* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 24-53; David Hurst Thomas, “A Short History of Scientific Racism in America,” in *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 36-43; Ann Fabian, “The Curious Cabinet of Dr. Morton,” in *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, ed. Leah Dilworth (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 112-137; and Robert E. Bieder, “The Representation of Indian Bodies in Nineteenth-Century American Anthropology,” in *The Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains?*, ed. Devin A. Mihesuah (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 19-36.

¹¹ Bieder provides a thorough articulation of the meaning of the body and concepts of power within American anthropology. He describes how the field constructed certain representations and imagery about Indians that in turn constructed a political narrative for those in power to not only disenfranchise Native people from their cultures, lands and resources, but shift all of the blame of the Indian plight from Americans to weak Indian biology. For more in depth analysis, see Robert E. Bieder, *Science Encounters the Indian, 1820-1880: The Early Years of American Ethnology* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986).

rate. Since then, many major museums across the U.S. studied and stored Native skulls and bones in addition to ethnographic objects on their shelves for decades.¹²

Instead of hiring anthropologists and ethnographers, some businessmen and captains of industry avidly collected Native American ethnographic objects on their own. George Gustav Heye (1874-1957), a wealthy New York banker, collected over 800,000 objects from Native people across the Americas. While not a scientist, like anthropologists, he held the belief of the time that Native people were on the verge of disappearing. He made it his life's ambition to collect as many materials as possible. By doing so, his vast collection led to the creation of the Museum of the American Indian-Heye Foundation in 1916, which eventually became the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). Heye has been presented as an obsessive collector. He eventually withdrew from the banking industry to focus entirely on collecting, spending approximately ten million dollars of his fortune for new acquisitions in his already existing collection. Accepting the belief in the vanishing Indian, he also hired anthropologists, such as Franz Boas, to travel on expeditions to collect Native objects.¹³

¹² It was not until 1990 that Congress passed the Native American Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), a federal law that provides museums and other federal agencies to return certain Native American human remains and cultural items, such as funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony to lineal descendants and culturally affiliated Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian organization. For information on NAGPRA and more specific provisions, see "Frequently Asked Question," National Park Service, accessed September 12, 2013, <http://www.nps.gov/history/nagpra/FAQ/INDEX.HTM>.

¹³ Clara Sue Kidwell, "Every Last Dishcloth: The Prodigious Collecting of George Gustav Heye," in *Collecting Native America, 1870-1960*, eds. Shepard Krech III and Barbara A. Hail (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 232-258.

After the mid-nineteenth century treaty era and into the early twentieth century, the federal government established reservation lands for Native peoples. In different regions of the U.S., the government also formed Indian agencies, which administered all Indian affairs and enforced assimilation policies such as land allotment, farming, and schooling. Many Native people lived on the reservations in order to receive land and other services provided by the U.S. government. During this era, the U.S. Supreme Court determined Indians to be “wards” of the government.¹⁴ However, many Native people continued to live off the land in their original villages and territories instead of the reservation. Despite diseases, warfare, and assimilation policies, many Native people chose to continue practicing their traditional ways of life.¹⁵ Anthropologists were not entirely inaccurate about the loss of culture. Certainly, government agents, educators, Christian missionaries and reformers, and local non-Native populations negatively influenced the practice of traditional lifestyles.

Along with working at farms, mills, logging facilities, and other companies that paid money for hard labor, some Native people sought economic opportunities arising from tourism and anthropologists’ interest in their culture. Many supplemented their

¹⁴ During Chief Justice John Marshall’s leadership of the U.S. Supreme Court, he authored three major cases that established a trustee/ward relationship between Indian nations and the federal government still in existence today. Often referred to as “The Marshall Trilogy,” these cases were in response to attempts by states to exercise power over Indian nations and tribal governments. For specific details on the cases, the cases are cited as: *Worcester v. Georgia*, 31 U.S. 515, 8 L.Ed. 483 (1832), *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. (5 Pet.) 1 (1831), and *Johnson v. M’Intosh*, 21 U.S (8 Wheat) 543 (1823).

¹⁵ With regard to the effects of disease, for instance Alexandra Harmon notes that in 1877, the Indian agent supervising the Point Elliott Treaty area in what is now Washington State estimated that as a result of periodic epidemics, these groups dwindled from seven or eight thousand people to three thousand in twenty years. Alexandra Harmon, *Indians in the Making: Ethnic Relations and Indian Identities Around Puget Sound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 105. More discussion of this history is in Chapter Two.

incomes by selling their art and craft items. For example, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Mille Lacs Ojibwe people's talents in birch bark basketry and beadwork led to a popular tourist industry for collectors of highly decorative traditional and non-traditional items. In the Pacific Northwest, Indian hop pickers who worked the summers in fields used the hop harvest to reach "a ready market of basket buyers and carving collectors... [as] the sale of handmade items provided important income for the Aboriginal pickers."¹⁶

Scholar Paige Raibmon, who writes about historical origins of the notion of Indian authenticity, discusses relationships between Native and non-Native people during this era. She claims the construction of binaries, such as white vs. Indian, authentic vs. inauthentic, and traditional vs. modern, helped Native people obtain income as 'Indian craftspeople' and 'Indian artists,' but these constructions also served to disenfranchise Native people from their land and resources. Raibmon argues if Indians were viewed as too assimilated, it meant they could no longer be considered 'authentic' and thus, they could be excluded from the category of 'Indian' and no longer be eligible for allotment lands and federal assistance. She notes, "Only a handful of people worked as policy makers, but everyone who engaged in colonial interactions participated in the manufacture and popularization of notions of authenticity."¹⁷ Raibmon confirms that

¹⁶ Paige Raibmon writes more specifically about Native hop pickers and how they obtained supplemental income from not only hop picking but also through their performance for tourists, anthropologists, and photographers like Edward S. Curtis, who chose the hop pickers as some of his first subjects. They received money for not only their handmade souvenirs, but also in posing for photographers. Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter From the Late-Nineteenth Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 74-97.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

Native people displayed some degree of agency by exploiting non-Native notions of authenticity (e.g. performing dances and selling craft items for tourists who wanted to ‘see Indians’ and own an item of material culture) in order to gain income. In this scenario, Native people did in fact become “cultural collaborators.”¹⁸ These collaborations eventually transformed the contemporary Native art market into a continuous exchange between wealthy collectors, major museums, and private auction houses. Collectors, like George Gustave Heye, controlled numerous objects worth a great deal of money that today still exist in the world of art auctions.

The Western Museum as Powerhouse

Western museums around the world have a long tradition of collecting Native peoples’ objects and displaying them as curios or works of fine art. In museums of natural history, history, and anthropology in the U.S., historically non-Native anthropologists and historians exposed visitors to their own interpretations of the cultures and histories of Native peoples. Traditionally, the Western museum functioned as society’s warehouses and keeper of the nation’s cultural treasures. Museums are the products created by and for what American Studies scholar David Noble calls the “transnational bourgeoisie,” who utilize them to endorse imperialism and nationalism. In America, museums also support the notion of “exceptionalism” which he defines as the way history has been “thought and written as if the United States was absolutely

¹⁸ Ibid., 3.

independent, standing apart in its uniqueness from the rest of human experience.”¹⁹ Like Napoleon’s plan to use French museums to promote his nationalist agenda, many nation-states designed and transformed museums to reflect the political and social mores of the elite, upper classes. As such, museums are considered miniature models of how the majority citizens have imagined themselves to be. It is no surprise that a museum is often viewed as a “ceremonial monument,” used as a way to promote a single, national identity.²⁰

Scholar Carol Duncan argues Western museums have historically reflected the values of typically white, wealthy and educated men in power, who have used museums to showcase their conquests and achievements.²¹ As such, American museums promoted one national identity that either has excluded minority people entirely, or distorts history to correspond with the national narrative of progress and civilization. An example is to either whitewash or ignore altogether the history of colonization and its impact on the

¹⁹ The term “transnational bourgeoisie” is used by American Studies scholar David W. Noble as a way to explain the modern, middle class elites who have more commonalities with each other across nations than with a majority of those within their own nations. See David W. Noble, *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). Noble has devoted his career to making us think more about nationalism and to question this idealized view of U.S. history, which served to relegate the histories of those considered ‘others,’ or people who did not fit within the particular rhetoric of American exceptionalism. Moreover, he asserts that American Studies came out of intellectuals who believed in a “national culture...grown out of a [sacred] national landscape.” Native people and other marginalized peoples were obviously not part of this national landscape. It was not until the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s that post-nationalist American Studies scholars began to diverge from promoting the idea of one national American identity and one American national experience for everyone. For more information, see also David Noble, *The End of American History: Democracy, Capitalism, and the Metaphor of Two Worlds in American Historical Writing, 1880-1980* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 7.

²⁰ See Carol Duncan who articulately writes about “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 90.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 88-103.

nation's treatment of indigenous peoples. Scholar Donna Haraway confirms these roles in one of the largest and most prolific of Western museums in America, the American Museum of Natural History. She states, "The American Museum, relatively unbuffered from intimate reliance on the personal beneficence of a few wealthy men, is a peephole for spying on the wealthy in their ideal incarnation."²²

In the last two centuries, it can be argued that the economic and political elite in power used museums to appeal to the public masses in ways that aimed to transform them into subjects of the nation-state. Michael Ames verifies, "...public owned and publicly accessible museums identifying with the state or the nation in a secular rather than religious sense, expressing and authenticating established views, are a new phenomenon, probably no more than a hundred to two hundred years old."²³ Since then, the public museum had become an important site for Western identity formation.²⁴ Using Marxist theory, French philosopher Louis Althusser claimed certain institutions (religious, educational, cultural, communications, etc.) function by the ideology of the ruling class, which holds state power. For example, media can work as a "communications apparatus by cramming every 'citizen' with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc..."; he called this process "interpellation," where

²² Donna Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936," in *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 56.

²³ Michael Ames, "The Development of Museums in the Western World: Tensions between Democratization and Professionalization," in *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992), 22.

²⁴ For more on the museum as a critical site for identity work, see Sharon J. Macdonald, "Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities," *Museum and Society* 1, no. 1 (2003): 1-16.

the state hails an individual to become its subject and then adopting an identity complete with certain expectations or social rituals endorsed by the state.²⁵ In using Althusser's (and David Noble's) theory, the Western museum employs staffs, who are traditionally members of the ruling class (or transnational bourgeoisie), to design museum exhibits and public programs in ways that hail museum visitors to become subjects of the state.

Since the nineteenth century, the Western or public museum has become a place where the nation's subjects could learn their roles as citizens. Museums have aspired to provide high culture to the public masses and create a sense of belonging for visitors. It is here where individuals could view themselves to be a part of an "imagined community," united by similar interests even though they do not know each other or interact with each other on a daily basis.²⁶ The power lies in the creation and reproduction of a single national narrative in the museum. According to museum scholar Tony Bennett, the imagined community (nation) is "essentially unified by an underlying commonality of tradition and purpose—nations exist through, and represent themselves in the form of, long continuous [never-ending] stories...stretching the national past

²⁵ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (1972; reprint, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 85-126.

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; Reprint, London and New York: Verso, 2006). Similarly, using Michel Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon and Antonio Gramsci's perspectives of the state and power, Tony Bennett discusses the museum as similar to the prison as a site that also produces self-disciplining bodies. "In seeing themselves from the side of power, both the subject and the objects of knowledge, knowing power and what power knows, and knowing themselves as (ideally) known by power, interiorizing its gaze as a principle of self-surveillance, and hence, self-regulation." In other words, museum visitors see themselves as not only the subject on display, but also as the object and respond accordingly with 'appropriate' behavior and manners deemed 'normal,' as discussed throughout this section. See Bennett, 63.

rooted in deep time...”²⁷ However, differences and discrete boundaries of identity also emerge out of this imagined, theoretically unified community. Those who envision themselves to be a part of this community, content with the status quo, in turn knowingly or unknowingly separate themselves from other communities comprised of people who are judged not to belong because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc. For example, through museum exhibits, other ethnicities or cultures are viewed as separate or outside of the imagined, ideal community. This strategy creates an implicit set of power relationships, one that promotes a hierarchy, be it economic, political or social, that forms the basis for modern ideas about citizenship and nationalism.²⁸

Moreover, through the museum the ideal community can establish its power under the guise of objective, scientific truth and knowledge. Twentieth century French philosopher Michel Foucault’s work encompasses a wide range of discourses about the relations of power derived from knowledge (the “regime of knowledge”) that exists in nation-states.²⁹ According to Foucault’s theories, those in power who created institutions such as the prison or university, promoted certain types of classification systems in order to relegate some human subjects. This way, certain types of people and their objects remain below the powerful. As discussed previously, the field of anthropology created and sanctioned the classification of human races. Its counterpart, the modern museum,

²⁷ Bennett, 148.

²⁸ For more discussion on the “position of self-inspection” in the museum and its role in producing social hierarchies and ideas of the inclusion and exclusion of different publics, see Tony Bennett, 99-102.

²⁹ See Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, eds. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 2003), 126-144.

corresponds with a Foucauldian institution in that it indoctrinates the values of the nation-state through the use of the Linnean classification system and cultural exhibitions. In this museum, people considered ‘non-Western,’ such as Native Americans, are strategically positioned and set apart from the rest. About anthropology, Henrietta Lidchi writes:

Using a Foucauldian perspective suggests that anthropology emerged as a distinctive type of knowledge at a defined historical moment (the middle of the nineteenth century) and was inscribed with particular relationships of power (Empire and colonial expansion) and therefore largely depended in some measure on the unequal encounter of what has elsewhere been called ‘the West and the Rest.’³⁰

Nowhere is this set of power relations more evident than in the ethnographic display of ‘Others’ so prevalent in early modern museums that it exists as a permanent feature of cultural group exhibits in many museums today.³¹

³⁰ Henrietta Lidchi, “Captivating Cultures: The Politics of Exhibiting,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 2003), 186. The phrase ‘The West and the Rest’ originates from Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: discourse and power,” in *The Formations of Modernity: Understanding Modern Societies*, ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (Cambridge: Open University Press/Polity Press, 1992), 275-332.

³¹ “Others” is derived from the concept of “othering,” which has been defined and examined by twentieth century postmodern, postcolonial and subaltern studies theorists, such as Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha, etc. Othering is the process by which those in positions of power justify their domination over those unlike themselves according to race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, ability, or geography. It is from this process that subverted groups are marginalized from the larger society by these identifiers through various tactics as will be discussed. One widely-discussed critique of the ethnographic display of others includes the performance art of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Pena, who became the “Couple in a Cage (1993).” They exhibited themselves as caged “AmerIndians” originally untouched (having been bypassed by Columbus), but now obsessed with modernity and technology. It was meant to be a satirical commentary on the early museum practice of exhibiting humans, but many people actually believed they were real captives/Natives.

Authenticity and Representation in Western Museum Exhibits

Natural history, anthropology, science, and art museums, which utilize many Native peoples' objects, only display about ten percent of their collections in active exhibits. Many Western museum collections contain a large number of Native peoples' ethnographic objects and tend to use only the most authentic and/or aesthetic pieces to display. Conventional museum exhibits have depicted Native people only in the pre-contact to mid-nineteenth century distant past, usually in dioramas, cultural group life displays, in natural environment settings, or as purely art displays. Such Western museum exhibits reinforced the assumption that Indians disappeared. Furthermore, they placed Native objects in glass display cases without any contextual information other than small labels describing only their function and purpose. Historical photographs of Native people did not indicate their names and at times only referred to them under generalized anthropological groupings such as 'Plains Indians' or tribe, e.g. 'Navajo.' These and other outdated practices failed to give reference to Native peoples' contemporary lives. Naturally, the Western museum as an institution of the U.S. nation-state did not reference anything about engaging in acts of imperialism and colonialism. The exploitation of Native peoples, objects, and cultures in collecting practices and museum exhibits helped make American museums the powerhouses they are today.

The Display of Ethnographic Objects and the Native Art Market

The departure from the conventional displays of objects in cabinets as curiosities to an ordered, classified scientific evolutionary display began with modern anthropology. In the late nineteenth century, anthropologists such as Franz Boas promoted ethnographic installations that exhibited 'artifacts' in the original context from which they came, i.e. the cultural group life diorama. Anthropologists hired as museum staff believed a natural environment setting would provide more meaning of the objects for museum visitors in opposition to their display as art pieces based solely on their aesthetic appeal. In the latter display, they feared museum visitors could easily place the objects out of context and misconstrue their original function and purpose.

More than a few decades ago, Native people had relatively little input in how museum curators and staffs displayed their items. In many instances, museum staffs had no knowledge of who made the objects due to the hasty salvage collecting of Native-made objects by anthropologists and private collectors. However, as the Native art market began to gain momentum at the turn of the twentieth century and with more significance placed on the origin and makers of these objects, collectors and anthropologists/curators made some effort to locate the people who made them, but this practice was minimal. Staffs maintained their focus on localized groups or tribes and continued to emphasize aesthetic characteristics in displays.

Scholar Margaret Dubin writes about the historical collecting of Native art objects and notes that during this time, increased tourism led to the further expansion of the

Native art market. She claims that “made-for-market items of various qualities raised the status and price of pre-contact objects,” which demanded a team effort between art dealers and anthropologists.³² Art dealers needed anthropologists to validate the authenticity of an object and anthropologists needed the dealers for access to rare objects. In other words, those in the art world used anthropologist/ethnographer’s research to select which Native objects could be considered art. They chose objects deemed to be aesthetically pleasing or interesting enough to be able to stand on their own on par with Western museum objects.

Despite Boas and other anthropologists’ view against such ‘trendy’ practices, a movement to view ethnographic objects as fine art, albeit “primitive” or “ethnic” art, evolved into what Michael Ames calls a “formalist perspective” used by museums as a display technique. In this scenario, museums sought to place non-Western works alongside or on equal footing with formal Western works of art.³³ Some early modern and contemporary anthropologists criticize the use of the term “primitive” because it implies savagery or simplicity and it appropriates these objects into a Western art category where they are venerated for their authenticity. However, as such, the complexity of Native peoples’ cultures and identities become diminished. Dubin notes that the beautifully-mounted Native objects, referred to as non-Western and primitive art

³² Margaret Dubin, *Native America Collected: The Culture of an Art World* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 19. Missing from this equation are Native people, the actual makers.

³³ Ames, “How Anthropologists Stereotype Other People,” in *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes*, 52-53.

pieces in their short descriptive labels, become “containers of race.”³⁴ This descriptor reinforces popular notions of Native authenticity and promotes stereotypes that have been and continue to be detrimental to contemporary Native peoples’ identities. Before I explore the subject of authenticity a bit further, I provide an example of a typical object on display and what it conveys to museum visitors.

The Museum Effect

Take the following mask:



Figure 1: Alderwood Gull Mask

The pose of this “Alderwood Gull Mask” from the Pacific Northwest is displayed in a traditional manner: it is isolated, drawing attention to its singularity and its

³⁴ Dubin, 11.

exceptional nature.³⁵ In a glass case, it becomes unique and mysterious, gaining a sort of reverence because it has been chosen worthy of display. It can be admired and perhaps even feared. Modern Western museums with Native objects in their collections like this mask or tailor their exhibitions to accentuate their aesthetic features instead of their value and significance to the culture of origin and maker. Visitors get the message that because it is in a glass display case, it must be treasured. The museum display of objects as fine art is what scholar Svetlana Alpers refers to as “the museum effect,” or the “tendency to isolate something from its world, to offer it up for attentive looking and thus to transform it into art like our own.”³⁶ The museum effect is accomplished with the choice of lighting, design, the arrangement of the objects in display cases, as well as the content of the exhibit text labels. The curator or exhibit designer who implements the museum effect chooses to display them in a traditional manner, which often neglects the identity of the maker or oversimplifies the object’s cultural function and purpose. Such tactics cause museum visitors to dissociate from the people who made the object. As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill verifies, “It is easy to forget the humanity of these displayed pieces [as] museum techniques objectify the remains, treating them as specimens in the ways in

³⁵ Stephen Greenblatt writes about the display techniques of the modern art museum, which tends to draw this sensation of singularity, uniqueness and ‘wonder’ about the work or masterpiece of art with its power to “stop the viewer in his or her tracks.” He instructs art museums to also create ‘resonance’ with voices (historical and ethnographic narratives that translate relationships and ask questions) for visitors. Stephen Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 42.

³⁶ Svetlana Alpers, “A Way of Seeing,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 27.

which they are catalogued, documented, and placed in glass cases as part of a narrative.”³⁷

When a visitor enters the museum exhibit, his/her interest is initially piqued by what is on view in glass cases called vitrines. In this initial encounter, the object may or may not resonate with the visitor’s previous knowledge and cultural background. Two agents are at work in this scenario: (1) the museum staff person (curator and/or exhibit designer) with his/her own ideas of what to display and what contextual information is included in the exhibit label; and (2) the visitor who attends the exhibition with his/her own preconceived notions about what is on display and the person or people that made it.³⁸ Two curatorial challenges of displaying Native objects exist in the Western museum. One is of contextualization and the other is of representation, i.e. how curators can enable the public to connect with the objects originating from a specific culture/group and how to represent the culture/group, respectively. The type of display technique can transform the ethnographic object, which begins as a utilitarian, neutral item like a fish hook or a

³⁷ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 114.

³⁸ Michael Baxandall instructs exhibitors to consider “three cultural terms” involved in the exhibition process, the two mentioned here and one more being the maker of the object or artifact. He explains how all three interact simultaneously in the moment of viewing in the intellectual space (via labels) between the object and the viewer. See “Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 33-41. Although this third agent is at work in contemporary exhibitions, I focus here on the first two to discuss exhibits as they were traditionally designed.

clay bowl and ends as an object of visual interest and/or technical wonder for museum visitors.³⁹

Curators tend to construct the exhibit assuming visitors are unaware of the types of objects on display and the cultural activities of the people who made and used the objects; therefore, in traditional museum displays, including little contextual information has been the norm. This tactic can result in visitor confusion and/or ambivalence for such information, as visitors may resort to focusing only on the aesthetic qualities of the object. Another curatorial problem is the tendency to present an ethnographic object as a product derived from ‘Others.’ The object moves from intangible (an object’s relationship to the ‘Other’s’ spirituality, values, worldview, etc.) to tangible (a solid, visible, aesthetic object). With this transformation taking place, the object becomes a catalyst for viewers to experience the ‘Other’ culture, which is different from their own.⁴⁰ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out the pitfalls of the museum effect in the display of ethnographic objects and notes that it “transform[s] how people look at their own immediate environs.”⁴¹ In other words, when those visitors who are part of the majority

³⁹ I use Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s notion of an object of ethnography, in that they are “created” by ethnographers in the acts of “being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away ethnographers,” i.e. they take on another meaning from the original intention in how they are presented. She discusses these ideas in great detail in her essay, “Objects of Ethnography,” in *Exhibiting Cultures*, 386-443 and in her book *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁴⁰ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill’s chapter, “Objects and Interpretive Processes” is valuable for curators to think more about the meaning of objects from the materiality or physical character of objects. She discusses strategies of interpretation that involve both the senses and the body and the mind. By considering both body and mind, she argues that curators can create more meaningful encounters with objects that result both cognitive and emotive responses from the visitor. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 103-123.

⁴¹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Exhibiting Cultures*, 410.

or the ideal, imagined community view the ethnographic object in the museum, they subconsciously reflect on their own identity and the identity of the makers as different from themselves. One of the main museum controversies in the last few decades has been the display of ethnographic objects and the cultures of those who are distinct from the museum majority.

Ethnographic Objects and ‘Others’ on Display: More on Authenticity and Cultural Representation

James Clifford, in his essay comparing four Northwest Coast Museums, notes the following as the general characteristics of the “majority museum,” which:

1. Searches only for the “best” art or the most “authentic” cultural form;
2. Finds interesting exemplary or representative objects;
3. Owns a collection of objects that are considered treasures of the nation (national patrimony; and
4. Tends to separate (fine) art from (ethnographic) culture.⁴²

Upon looking at past collecting practices, the first three statements are accurate. As discussed previously in this chapter, the collecting of authentic, exemplary objects as well as ownership of national treasures has mainly been based on aesthetic characteristics.

However, Clifford’s last point on the distinction between Native art and culture may be somewhat blurred when considering today’s museum display as it depends on the type of

⁴² James Clifford, “Four Northwest Coast Museums: Travel Reflections,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 225.

museum and the contextual information provided to visitors. In representing a specific culture group on display, curators typically arrange the best of what the museum holds in its collections, regardless of conscious attempts at separating art from culture.⁴³ Even in ethnographic displays where objects are scientifically classified, visitors typically perceive what is on display is ‘art,’ and moreover, that it is located in the past.

On the whole, Western museums have done little to counter the stereotype that Indians exist only in the past, as evident in the prolific use of hunting and gathering images. Native museum scholar James Nason poignantly writes, “By the time many of us complete our secondary education we have seen elegant nature dioramas, seemingly endless arrays of projectile points, and the always-favorite massive dinosaur constructions, as well as the delightful, yet eerie, miniature dioramas of whole Indian villages.”⁴⁴ Native people are often placed in the distant past, as if viable, flourishing cultures no longer exist. On a similar note, Donna Haraway explains the politics of reproduction surrounding taxidermy, which “fulfills the fatal desire to represent, to be

⁴³ Many scholars have noted that the exhibition practices of ethnographic objects moved from singular displays to taxonomic groups or categories, which is still visible in modern natural history and culture museums; however, Philip Fisher contends that there is more of a tendency in today’s modern art museum to historicize works of art in their arrangement and contextualization. I believe this notion is particularly accurate when it comes to the display of Native objects as fine art. With the emphasis on the museum effect and more contextualization (e.g. Native art derived from specific general cultural regions) in today’s standard Native art exhibition of ethnographic yet aesthetic objects, it can be difficult for visitors to separate Native art from culture. See Philip Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art: Modern American Art in a Culture of Museums* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), as discussed in Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 44.

⁴⁴ James Nason, “‘Our Indians’: The Unidimensional Indian in the Disembodied Local Past,” in *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures*, ed. Ann Kawasaki (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 30.

whole.”⁴⁵ Although taxidermy is often considered to be about the reproduction of dead animals and the entirety of their natural habitats, it also applies to humans and their natural habitats. Many group life dioramas of both animals and humans reproduced at museums imply those on display are either inaccessible or no longer exist. Scenes of Native cultural groups, at times incorporating animals, also tend to misrepresent contemporary Native people as inauthentic to museum audiences.⁴⁶

Conventional museum exhibits, such as the diorama, have separated Native people from the so-called sacred national landscape, as these exhibits juxtapose the primitive to progress and civilization. One of the most venerated Western museums in existence is the British Museum, which holds in its collection the above Alderwood Gull Mask. The British Museum’s *Handbook to the Ethnographical Collections*, published in 1925 (originally in 1910), notes:

...yet there is some advantage in the exhibition of ethnographical specimens under one roof with those illustrating the art and industry of the great ancient civilizations. It is now realized that these civilizations...arose gradually from primitive stages of culture; the instruments and utensils of savage or barbarous peoples are therefore not without their relation to the study of antiquities.⁴⁷

This passage illustrates that Europeans (and Americans) viewed indigenous objects as savage or barbarous, i.e. as anathema to progress. The exhibition of such objects,

⁴⁵ Donna Haraway, 30.

⁴⁶ There are a few exceptions to this argument, one of which is discussed further in Chapter Four at the Mille Lacs Indian Museum.

⁴⁷ *British Museum Handbook to the Ethnographical Collections*, 2d ed. (England: Oxford University Press, 1925), 1-2.

alongside those from the “great ancient civilizations” preceding present modern Western societies, emphasizes the story of progress and conquest.⁴⁸ The juxtaposition creates the dichotomy of savage versus civilized. As a result, Native people are placed within categories that promote such binaries as ‘traditional’ vs. ‘modern,’ ‘authentic’ vs. ‘inauthentic’ and ‘cultural’ vs. ‘non-cultural’ or ‘assimilated.’

Anthropologist Eric Wolf writes extensively about the binaries produced by the discipline of anthropology. Anthropologists (and museum staffs) turned to the study of living cultures; they became focused on performing fieldwork using an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ approach. In doing so, they distinguished between what they considered to be traditional or primitive cultures of indigenous peoples and the modern Western society based on progress, science, and technology.⁴⁹ The notion of bounded and discrete cultures and tribal identities flourished as a result of these binaries. Even those museums attempting to acquire and display more contemporary objects continued to represent Native people as past peoples. As a result of museum and other representations in popular culture, Americans began to perceive actual Native people as no longer authentic or real Indians because of the deeply-rooted image of the Indian of the past, e.g. warrior in ‘Sioux’ headdress, living in teepees and riding on a horse in full regalia.

⁴⁸ Tony Bennett designates a chapter on “Museums and Progress,” which further explores the origins of the nineteenth century museum as a “backteller” with exhibitions emphasizing an evolutionary narrative of primitiveness to civilization through the spatial order of artifacts and the exhibitions themselves. He cites Henry Pitt Rivers and his typological arrangements of ethnological collections in his museum, among others, as examples for his argument. See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 177-208.

⁴⁹ Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

In the field of “classic ethnography,” Renato Rosaldo explains a sense of mourning felt by agents of colonialism for what one has destroyed.⁵⁰ In their yearning, these agents “often display nostalgia for the colonized culture as it was ‘traditionally’ (that is, when they first encountered it)...At one more remove, people destroy their environment and then worship nature. In any of its versions, imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of ‘innocent yearning’ both to capture people’s imagination and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination.”⁵¹ Rosaldo believes that imperialist nostalgia attempts to establish one’s innocence despite racial domination and at the same time offer a means for talking about and examining what one has destroyed. This idea clarifies another impetus for the Western museum display of Native cultures and objects that is more subtle than the display supporting notions of ‘savage’ versus ‘civilized.’

Similarly, the ethnographic display of ‘Others’ is an example of a discursive formation raised by Michel Foucault and what Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and other postcolonial scholars refer to as “epistemic violence,” which occurs in systems of colonialism and imperialism. It positions Western ways of knowing as dominant and thereby destroys non-Western ways of knowing. Spivak describes subaltern peoples, or those considered without human agency as a result of their social identities (race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.), as forced to exist in the margins. As such, they become people

⁵⁰ Ethnography is a type of sociocultural anthropology in which research is obtained by observation, recording, and engaging in the daily activities of a cultural group. Subsequently, he or she then writes about their findings. For more discussion of “Ethnography and Interpretive Anthropology,” see George Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 17-44.

⁵¹ Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 107-08. Also in Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

without a voice.⁵² The emphasis of *difference* and the process of *ambivalence* at work in the formation of a cultural, historical, racial stereotype provide clarification in the production of colonial discourse surrounding ‘Otherness.’⁵³ The museum exhibition of Native peoples and cultures as different has tended to create negative stereotypes and situates Native identities as fixed and relegated to the past, causing visitors to feel ambivalent. In standard museum exhibitions, an epistemic violence of defining and redefining Native identities has occurred, which is detrimental. Various academic fields (anthropology, ethnography, history), along with museums, have promoted antiquated ideas of Indian authenticity, which Native people still confront and resist.

Recent postcolonial discourses are significant in examining the authenticity and the production of an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ tactic deployed by Western museums in their exhibitions of Native and indigenous peoples.⁵⁴ These discourses call for academic disciplines in the social sciences, such as history and anthropology/ethnography, to be more reflexive, thereby instructing those who study other cultures to look more at the process by which information is obtained, for whom it is obtained, and why certain cultures need to be studied in the first place.⁵⁵ Goals include identifying the problems of

⁵² Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-316.

⁵³ In his work, Homi K. Bhabha calls for the “mode of representation” or the “fixity” of racial, cultural and other social identities to be questioned. See “The Other Question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism,” in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge Classics, 1994), 66.

⁵⁴ I am speaking about discourses from the 1980s and 1990s.

⁵⁵ For more discussion on the politics of representation in ethnography, see James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

representation and then transforming past practices of objectifying ‘Others’ by becoming more inclusive and forming collaborative relationships. Historically in Western museum exhibitions across the U.S., Native people lacked a voice in authoring tribal histories and were excluded in the construction of cultural displays.⁵⁶ It has not been until recent decades that curators and exhibit designers have made concerted efforts to remedy outdated practices in the exhibition of Native peoples and cultures.

Recent Developments and Collaborative Efforts

Conventional museum display techniques practiced beginning in the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century rarely included consultation with Native people.⁵⁷ As I have argued, the prevalence of the diorama of an Indian village or the chronological display of ethnographic objects from prehistoric to modern, likely causes

⁵⁶ This trend was not isolated in the U.S., but in postcolonial nations around the world and their national museums in which indigenous peoples have been excluded from this process. The ways in which these museums interpret their national histories and national identities continue to be the subject of much scrutiny, controversy, and debate. An excellent source for discussions drawn from scholars in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the U.S., see Darryl McIntire and Kirsten Wehner, *Negotiating Histories: Conference Proceedings* (National Museum of Australia in association with the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research and the Australian Key Center for Cultural and Media Policy, 2001).

⁵⁷ One major exception has been the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), which actively sought to counter past museological practices detrimental to contemporary Native peoples. As a result of two decades worth of planning to move toward what Miranda J. Brady calls a “dialogic response,” the NMAI on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. opened its doors in 2004. Brady notes that NMAI sought to “question dominant history through a more dialogic approach to communication, which targeted the inclusion of multiple Native voices and a multicultural dialogue in its curatorial processes that focus on Indigenous community collaborations and utilization of a variety of communications technologies, such as video and pictorial testimonials, digital kiosks, and multisensory devices to help evoke certain visitor reactions.” For more discussion on NMAI’s goals and communicative approaches to exhibition, as well as some of NMAI’s contradictions, see Miranda J. Brady, “A Dialogic Response to the Problematized Past: The National Museum of the American Indian,” in *Contesting Knowledge*, 133-55.

visitors to disconnect from contemporary Native peoples. Traditional exhibition techniques reinforce discrete boundaries of ‘us’ and ‘them,’ and relegate Native cultures as ‘primitive.’ Unfortunately, some of these display practices remain prevalent in Western museums today. However, in the post WWII period and into 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement, minority and ethnic groups sought to change the way society functioned by attempting to ensure their equality and inclusion. As a result of the postcolonial critique and the rise of revisionist history and public history movements in the 1960s and 1970s, the history profession expanded outside the academy. Scholars in the social sciences and humanities began to further engage in non-academic activities to respond to the needs of the various communities who had been historically underrepresented and/or misrepresented.

In addition, community-based museum initiatives and neighborhood or ethnic museums arose from the 1960s and 1970s social movements.⁵⁸ To reflect a changing society, some major museums took note as they changed their primary function from existing only as temples or monuments to offering a democratic forum for discussion and debate on the presentation of the past. They adopted and redefined the roles of becoming ‘public,’ ‘civic,’ ‘pluralistic,’ and ‘democratized’ in order serve the masses, many of

⁵⁸ Moira Simpson discusses “cultural empowerment and the rise of culture-specific museums” or “neighborhood or community-based museums” established by ethnic groups in the 1960s/1970s who desired a center to benefit members of their own communities. These museums serve very specific local communities and are also run by members of the ethnic or cultural group who seek community involvement to “deal with issues of social, political and economic importance to the community.” Moira G. Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (London: Routledge, 1996).

whom who were originally excluded from the traditional museum audience.⁵⁹ To challenge conventional museum functions, activities ranged from reconfiguring museum governance and leadership, institutional priorities, museum management and responsibilities, and communication tactics in exhibitions and programs, in an attempt to reach out to all public audiences. In recent decades, this “paradigm shift,” continues to focus on how museums provide many types of audiences with cultural, scientific, historical, and anthropological information.⁶⁰ How information is conveyed has been in the process of shifting toward offering postcolonial and multicultural perspectives and interrogating the traditional power relationships that have existed in museums.⁶¹

Some Western art, history, natural history, and anthropology museum across the U.S have made efforts to challenge existing definitions of cultural and ethnic groups and to include the multiple perspectives of Native peoples represented in museum exhibits. For instance, the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, Washington

⁵⁹ See Duncan F. Cameron’s important article on this topic, in which he discusses to role of all museums including science, art, history, natural history or anthropology. Duncan F. Cameron, “The Museum, a Temple or the Forum,” *Curator: The Museum Journal* 14, no. 1 (1971): 11-24. See also Michael Ames, “The Development of Museums in the Western World: Tensions between Democratization and Professionalization,” in *Cannibal Tours*, 15-24.

⁶⁰ For a series of essays on this “paradigm shift,” see Gail Anderson, *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2004). Similarly, Kylie Message refers to the emergence of a “new museum” as “a result of substantive changes in thinking, approach and development” to reflect more postmodern or “new modern” discourses that convey the image of the museum as being more reflexive and engaging in politics and cultural discourses. For more discussion, see Kylie Message, *New Museums and the Making of Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 8. In her book, she offers case studies of the “new museum” being reconfigured into “[the] new museum-as-cultural centre [which] acts self-consciously as a political agent and displays an advocacy role in the reconstruction of cultural identity and the promotion of crosscultural dialogue,” as they aim to connect more with communities. Message, 198-199.

⁶¹ For more discussion and debate on the politics of museums and their relationships and accommodations with various ethnic communities of study and exhibit, see the compilation of essays in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Creamer, and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Museums and Communities* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1992).

ensures collaboration with various tribes in Washington State in creating exhibits and educational programming. In 2003, the University of Washington established the Bill Holm Center for the Study of Northwest Coast Art at the Burke Museum aimed at continuing Bill Holm's legacy as an artist and scholar of Northwest Coast art. The Center's primary goals include: launching a global research center, promoting scholarly research on Native art, increasing Native and public access to research resources, and cultivate understanding of Northwest Coast Native art. With local Native artists on its advisory board, it seeks to become one of the premier centers for the study of Native arts of the Pacific Northwest Coast.⁶² Another example is the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), which established an Indian Advisory Committee (IAC) comprised of representatives from all Minnesota Indian tribes to review all Ojibwe and Dakota-related research, publications, collections issues, educational programs, and exhibits. In this review process, MHS departments present their proposals to IAC members, who after much discussion, approve or disapprove their activities, or offer suggestions for improvement. Many other museums and historical societies are taking notable strides in this direction; however, this movement has only been recent and it is not perfect.⁶³ Many exhibits on Native peoples are still conceptualized by non-Native exhibit designers and curators. At times, Native people are only minimally involved from the start and/or they

⁶² For more information, see: "Bill Holm Center," Burke Museum, accessed September 12, 2013, <http://www.burkemuseum.org/bhc/about.html>.

⁶³ For other examples of collaborations between Native communities and Western museums, see Ruth B. Phillips, "Community Collaborations in Exhibitions," in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, eds. Laura L. Peers and Alison K. Brown (London: Routledge, 2003), 155-170. See also *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture.*, eds. Ivan Karp, Christine Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992); and *Museums and Their Communities*, ed. Sheila Watson (New York: Routledge, 2007).

are included only at the end of the process in an afterthought to the exhibit design process. In some cases, as a result of miscommunication or disagreement, the exhibit regresses back into the use of traditional display techniques. As a result of a contentious history with Western museums, many tribal nations have decided to take control of their own representation by creating tribal museums.

Tribal Museums: Origins and Meanings

The explosion of tribal museums and/or cultural centers across the U.S. is evidence of their commitment to reclaim their own tribal histories, cultures, as well as material objects and even human remains.⁶⁴ One of the first tribal museums in the country opened in 1938 in Pawhuska, Oklahoma. Around the same time, the Osage Tribal Museum began as a project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and is currently on the National Register of Historic Places. Since then, scholars discuss three waves of tribal museum proliferation that grew out of political movements in Indian country.⁶⁵ The first wave developed from the 1960s

⁶⁴ Many Native people desire to use the term *cultural center* instead of *museum*, which is still negatively associated with the Western modern museum as discussed in earlier sections of this chapter. They consider cultural center more appropriate to describe a community-oriented museum-like entity that emphasizes public history education with less of an emphasis on object-driven exhibits. The cultural center concept is derived from the idea of the ecomuseum, is a concept originating out of the 1970s by Georges Henri Riviere, a French museologist, who believed that museums should reflect a sense of place and cultural heritage. For more details about ecomuseums, see Peter Davis, *Ecomuseums: A Sense of Place*, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011). See also subsequent chapters of this dissertation for further conceptualization.

⁶⁵ For more discussion on the origins and history of tribal museums, see Brenda Child, "Creation of the Tribal Museum," in *Contesting Knowledge*; Lisa Watt, "Today's American Indian Tribes and Their Museums," in *American Indian Nations: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, eds. George Horse Capture, Duane Champagne, and Chandler C. Jackson (Lanhan, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007), 70-84; and Moira G. Simpson, "Native American Museums and Cultural Centers," in *Making Representations*, 135-169.

era of American Indian activism. Although tribal museums were not a new creation in the 1960s and 1970s, this era was a major turning point for Native activism and the assertion of tribal self-determination. Native leaders and intellectuals, and activists like those in the American Indian Movement (AIM), challenged previous notions of Native peoples in addition to the academic practices that promoted them. A larger movement of cultural awakening and Native pride ensued. The second wave of tribal museum creation occurred during the 1970s President Nixon era with the Indian Self-Determination Act.⁶⁶ The federal government, along with tribal nations, viewed tribal museums as a way to promote job growth and tribal economic development.

Throughout these two waves, many Native people questioned the role of the Western museum and called for the repatriation and return of Native objects and human remains from major U.S. museums. Although a few tribes began smaller versions of a tribal museum within tribal administrative offices or cultural resources departments, many did not initially have the capital to create a tribal museum. In the 1990s and 2000s, a number of tribal nations built casinos on their reservations after the passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) in 1988, which regulates Indian gaming on reservations. As a result, they became principal employers in their small populated counties. An example is the Squaxin Island Tribe's Little Creek Casino, which opened in September of 1995. It became one of the largest employers in Mason County comprising

⁶⁶ In this 1975 act, major federal agencies and departments made contracts with Indian tribes to administer their own affairs. The federal government transferred grant funds directly over to tribes to assist in this process.

of a staff of several hundred employees by 2002 and many more since then.⁶⁷ With the opening of their casino, the Squaxin Island Tribe began to further envision plans for a tribal museum, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Despite controversy surrounding Indian gaming, casinos have been beneficial to reservation communities to a large degree. It cannot be argued that the proliferation of tribal capital through casinos has provided tribes with more economic, political, and social agency. In 1990, the federal government finally passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Tribal nations increasingly sought to build their own museums as a means to repatriate their ancestors' human remains and associated funerary objects, sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony from Western museums.⁶⁸ This last wave has been a particularly significant for the increasing tribal museum movement. There are now approximately 120-150 tribal museums in the U.S., including display cases with objects in the main lobby of tribal administrative buildings.⁶⁹

Many Native nations find it critical for asserting self-determination and tribal sovereignty to control of their own objects of material culture and tribal historical narratives through a tribal museum/cultural center. They endeavor to offer alternative

⁶⁷ Theresa Henderson, Andi VanderWal, and the Squaxin Island Heritage and Culture Committee, "Squaxin Island," in *Native Peoples of the Olympic Peninsula: Who We Are*, ed. Jacilee Wray (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 96-97. See also Squaxin Island Tribe, *Paddle to Squaxin 2012* (Shelton: Squaxin Island Tribe), 15.

⁶⁸ For essays discussing the more specific provisions and case studies with regard to NAGPRA, see Devon A. Mihesuah, ed. *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains?* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). For latest developments, see the National NAGPRA website: <http://www.nps.gov/nagpra/>.

⁶⁹ Lisa Watt, 71.

readings of tribal cultures and histories that reject antiquated narratives and racist ideologies; instead, they strive to move toward autonomy and authorship. In the early conceptualization of their museums, they prioritize the values of their communities. The end result is conveyed through its architecture, landscaping practices, the acquisition and display of objects provided by community members, collection management and preservation policies, and historical and cultural narratives in the exhibits. James Clifford notes that the tribal museum has different agendas than those of Western museums:

1. Its [the tribal museum/cultural center's] stance is to some degree oppositional, with exhibits reflecting excluded experiences, colonial pasts, and current struggles;
2. The art/culture distinction is often irrelevant, or positively subverted;
3. The notion of one unified or linear History is challenged by local, community histories; and
4. The collections do not aspire to be included in the patrimony but to be inscribed within different traditions and practices, free of national, cosmopolitan patrimonies.⁷⁰

The formation of tribal museums is deemed especially vital today as tribal nations face language decline and other pressing cultural issues. In response, they aspire to establish one central site to preserve their cultures, histories, and languages, and celebrate contemporary communities and cultural identities. Lisa Watt interviewed tribal museum workers across the country to learn some of the reasons why tribal members view the tribal museum as essential to their communities. Among the reasons listed, she found

⁷⁰ James Clifford, "Four Northwest Coast Museums: Travel Reflections," in *Exhibiting Cultures*, 225-6.

that Native people desire to reinforce tribal culture and traditions, instill a healthy tribal identity, communicate what is important to their community, define tribal territory, exert tribal sovereignty, maintain treaty rights, and serve as a public relations vehicle for the tribe. She describes tribal museums as “expressions of sovereign nations.”⁷¹ As such, in the tribal museum/cultural center, tribal nations are now telling their own stories in their own ways, which often fuses past with present, and defining for themselves who they are.

Many tribal museums are like Western museums in that they have a mission statement, are based on a permanent collection, have a collections policy and strategy in place, care for the items in the collection, and exhibit and display the objects from the collection. They also emphasize tribal history and cultural education for their community members as the priority over the education of other audiences; however, as I argue in this dissertation, they are also mindful of the public education of a broader audience in order to further their political agendas. By utilizing the Western museum model, Native nations feel they are better equipped to reclaim their right to promote their own version of a tribal self-identity and educate their history and culture through interpretive, interactive exhibits and programs. Tribal museums allow Native nations to assert a more collective and cohesive tribal narrative in an effort to empower their tribal members to learn more about who they are and engage in social and political activism aimed at asserting their inherent tribal sovereignty. Tribal museum staffs are typically considered educational resources and consultants for internal and external entities who request their input on

⁷¹ Lisa Watt, 74.

tribal history and culture as a way to ensure more accuracy in Western museum exhibits and educational programming.

Today, collaborations between Western museums and tribal nations like those described earlier are considered responsible museum practice. Often in this scenario, there are a series of team meetings between tribal representatives and Western museum exhibit designers and curators. In an effective collaboration, tribal representatives who are knowledgeable about Native cultures, languages, and histories, are brought into the exhibit design process early and remain involved until the exhibit opens to the public. As scholar Brenda Child states, “Tribal museums have been an important site of collaboration, one that has successfully engaged a new generation of tribal leaders and Indigenous intellectuals.”⁷² Today, the increase of Native curators and exhibit designers working in both tribal museums and Western museums are changing the field in positive ways.

Tribal Museum Objects and Exhibits: Considering Different Audiences

Many tribal museums focus on the public education of their tribal communities and may seek assistance from Western museum staffs in the development of exhibits and programming. However, tribal museum personnel strive to convey their own local tribal histories and culture. James Clifford confirms that tribal institutions are “aimed at local audiences and enmeshed with local meanings, histories, and traditions.”⁷³ Many tribal

⁷² Brenda Child, “The Creation of Tribal Museums,” in *Contesting Knowledge*, 252.

⁷³ James Clifford, “Four Northwest Coast Museums,” 225.

museums seek to develop a tribal narrative that expresses a collective and cohesive tribal identity, which they can then display prominently in exhibits and in marketing materials. Conflicts may arise as to who holds the authority to define tribal identity and provide final approval of tribal narrative content. The issue of assigning cultural authority to certain individuals and not to others extends beyond tribal museums and is reflective of experiences in larger Western museum.⁷⁴ The ways in which each tribal nation constructs their exhibits is different; however, as “contact zones,” many tribal museums have similar goals aimed at developing a cohesive community and educating the broader public as a way to further their political goals through their exhibits and programs.⁷⁵

To build upon James Clifford’s earlier observations of tribal museum agendas, in my work as a curator I discovered tribal museums and their exhibits tend to: (1) be more thematic than object-centered; (2) take on more controversial subject matter such as historical trauma and the effects of colonialism that are often completely ignored by

⁷⁴ The assignment of cultural authority and the implications of a collective tribal and cultural identity in one tribal museum are elaborated upon in Chapter Three.

⁷⁵ James Clifford uses Mary Louise Pratt’s description of a frontier as a contact zone where there are ongoing relationships forged between people with different relations or notions of power. He writes, “When museums are seen as contact zones, their organizing structure as a *collection* becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship*—a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull.” James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 192.

Western museums;⁷⁶ (3) engage in strategies of survivance to the present;⁷⁷ (4) host community history programs such as family photograph days and other events and integrate the results of these programs into exhibits and programs; (5) convey contemporary presence using personal quotes and oral histories about a variety of such themes as: daily life, childhood stories, historical and contemporary family photographs, the transmittal of Native knowledge of plants and food preparation, use of historical and contemporary versions of objects and tools, the significance of speaking Native languages, and contemporary art practices derived from traditional art styles and processes; and (5) utilize community volunteers and hire tribal artists, historians, and intellectuals to provide tours and lectures on exhibit subject matter.

These activities ensure a continuity of traditions and empower Native communities to learn and practice their cultures and languages. Therefore, more emphasis is placed upon thematic or narrative-driven exhibits, rather than object-driven exhibits; however, this is not always the case. Both the theme or narrative and the object can be successfully merged in tribal museum exhibits for tribal audiences. For these

⁷⁶ As discussed further beginning in Chapter Three, Amy Lonetree extensively critiques the NMAI and those scholars who co-opt “the language of decolonization...who assert that this institution is a decolonizing museum.” She claims it does little to discuss colonization and “face this nation’s genocidal policies that had, and continue to have, a devastating impact on Indigenous people,” in her essay “Museums as Sites of Decolonization: Truth Telling in National and Tribal Museums,” in *Contesting Knowledge*, 322-23; see also “Missed Opportunities: Reflections on the NMAI,” *American Indian Quarterly* 30 (2006): 632-645; “Continuing Dialogues: Evolving Views of the National Museum of the American Indian,” *The Public Historian* 28 (2006): 28-62; Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb, *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008); and Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

⁷⁷ The term “survivance” coined by White Earth Ojibwe author Gerald Vizenor, means for tribal people to exist in the mode of both survival and resistance. See *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

visitors, cultural objects on display establish familial and kinship association, and in many circumstances, visitors can grasp an appreciation for the construction of the object that has aesthetic qualities.⁷⁸ Although objects are still placed in tribal museum display cases, they symbolize much more for tribal community members. They are not considered only as aesthetically-pleasing fine art pieces. Tribal community engagement with the object tends to be on a more emotional level. An example of this exchange is an exhibit on Native basketry, where a tribal member's basket is placed next to one made by his or her great-grandmother, along with family photographs and oral history quotes. This type of display becomes a source of pride at the continuity of traditional basket making in his/her family. However, although such an exhibit emphasizes the family, non-Native audiences tend to also appreciate and feel more connected with the Native people who made the baskets if they are exposed to the stories of the people who made them.

In a tribal museum, some cultural objects become classified as culturally-sensitive if they have religious or spiritual characteristics, and are not intended for display. Some objects are not meant to be preserved, as in the case of totem poles of Pacific Northwest tribes. Currently, many Western museums follow NAGPRA protocols and are respectful of requests by Native people to take down displays or keep certain items on the shelves

⁷⁸ There is dignity in equating many of these objects with works of art as defined by the fine art world as in the case of Pacific Northwest Coast art; however, many communities consider the artwork to be cherished objects representative of their cultures, histories, and kinship relationships. For more discussion, see a variety of works by Native and non-Native artists and art historians on the subject of the art and culture distinction in the Native art world, e.g. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*; Janet C. Berlo and Ruth Phillips, *Native North American Art* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and a number of essays in Jackson Rushing III, ed., *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century: Makers, Meaning, Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999).

and away from public viewing. In many, if not all cases, tribal museum staffs seek advice from community elders and other knowledgeable tribal people about what to display and not display. Many of these types of object also remain stored and do not enter the public domain.

What is considered accessible to the public is a contentious issue in many tribal museums. Many establish museum missions that include becoming a primary research center for tribal culture and history. Similar to sacred cultural objects, archives containing documents and photographs of certain aspects of tribal culture and history may be considered sensitive by elders and/or other culturally-knowledgeable people. In some situations, they may disagree about what to allow for public access. Furthermore, tribal people who are well-aware of the legacy of ‘salvage’ anthropology and the collecting of objects and knowledge by academia and museums, are rightfully concerned about how information is utilized. They want to know if the knowledge gained is beneficial or detrimental to their communities. If the academic reaps all the rewards of the study with a published book or paper, the community receives little benefit.

However, making information accessible to researchers can be rewarding in asserting legal and political claims for tribal nations. Scholar Mary Lawlor emphasizes the importance of difference “as a feature of identity and the central roles that tribal museums play in publicly representing the historical and cultural experiences that demarcate difference.”⁷⁹ This delineation of difference is significant to “secure specific

⁷⁹ Mary Lawlor, 19.

tribal benefits having to do with (federal) recognitions as well as material profit.”⁸⁰ As sovereign nations, tribes prioritize economic development in their communities. In the tribal museum/cultural center planning process, they consider the tourist market that is often generated by their tribal casino or a neighboring tourist site or park, depending on where the reservation is located. Bus tours and other groups regularly visit casinos so there is some impetus to offer tourist packages to draw visitors into the museum. While economic development is important, one of the main goals for tribal museums/cultural centers is to demarcate difference for political rights and recognitions. By doing so, tribal nations are further empowered to assert their treaty rights and tribal sovereignty, which is the subject of the next chapter.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 25.

Chapter 2:
Situating Landscapes at Mille Lacs and Squaxin Island:
Treaties, Reservations, and the Struggle for Treaty Rights

*...Both the young and the old timers
Were once again seeking the Songs,
Their People's oldest medicine
To sustain and guide them.
Nothing could stop this.
Nothing can stop it now,
Unless the People forget who they are,
Forget the land that they stand on,
Forget the waters that they fish,
Forget the words and Songs entrusted to them,
Forget their own children.
Nothing can silence this Voice now,...*
--Excerpt from "A Time For Deciding," Poem by Beverly Peter, Swinomish¹

Each individual tribal nation adopts different ways to express their inherent sovereignty in their tribal museum. Historical circumstances and cultural values determine what they choose to specifically exhibit. As discussed in Chapter One, tribal museums aim to resist traditional Western museum displays that apply notions of authenticity to Native people and reinforce stereotypes of Native cultures as non-existent or static. Instead, tribal museums seek to reclaim their tribal identities, histories and cultural property, and emphasize contemporaneity. They aspire to transform their museum concept into something similar to an ecomuseum or a living cultural center to

¹ Patrick J. Twohym, *Beginnings: A Meditation on Coast Salish Lifeways*, 2nd ed. (Seattle: Rainier Color, 2003), 84-86.

benefit their communities in very distinct ways.² As such, the museum is one tool tribal nations utilize as a means to both resist and adapt to their socio-political and economic circumstances and further their overall tribal agendas.

For the Makah Cultural and Research Center on the coast of the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State, they chose to showcase the discovery of thousands of artifacts from an ancient Makah village at the Ozette wetsite for visitors “to experience the life of pre-contact Makah people.”³ About 500 years ago, a mudslide partially buried the village and the discovery of this site allowed for the Makah people to establish their connection to their land and reaffirmed their contemporary lifeways,⁴ both of which are significant claims to sovereignty. Most importantly, the museum displays a number of contemporary whaling, sealing and fishing gear and information about their most recent treaty rights issue, the right to whale. The federal government prevented the Makah from practicing this important traditional cultural activity for over seventy years. In 1999, the federal court acknowledged the tribe’s right to whale, which was a major victory for the

² The ecomuseum emphasizes the development of local communities, integrating physical landscapes, economies, social relationships, and political issues by linking the past with the present. For more information and how the concept has been applied to a Native community, see Nancy J. Fuller, “The Museum as a Vehicle for Community Empowerment: The Ak-Chin Indian Community Ecomuseum Project,” in *Museums and Communities*, 327-365. This concept is explored in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

³ Makah Cultural and Research Center, “Welcome,” accessed September 12, 2013, <http://www.makah.com/mcrchome.htm>

⁴ I define the term “lifeways” as all the ways Native people have lived their lives throughout history, from the beginning of time to the present. In other words, it means the existing connection between the ways of life of contemporary Native peoples and that of their ancestors.

tribe. Therefore, the Makah Tribe is asserting its sovereignty by reaffirming its cultural traditions and contemporary treaty rights through their cultural and research center.⁵

Tribal museums tend to emphasize contemporary tribal and cultural identities in the exhibit narratives. The Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation in Connecticut built their Museum and Research Center, a “state-of-the-art 193-million-dollar public facility constructed to present the history and contemporary community of the Mashantucket Pequots.”⁶ John Bodinger de Uriarte (an anthropologist hired by the tribe to plan and install the museum’s exhibits) explains that tribal members desired to stress not only their tribal history, but their contemporary community in response to the myth that Eastern tribes in the U.S. disappeared, either merging with other tribes farther west or simply leaving the area and assimilating into European-American life. Many Eastern tribal people, like the Pequots, maintained a connection to their traditional homelands and continued to practice their traditional ways of life into the present. In 1983, the Mashantucket Pequots eventually achieved federal recognition status, which has been criticized by those who believe in the disappearing Indian myth. They are unaware of Eastern tribal histories, as well as the historical construction this stereotype based on

⁵ For more information on the Makah Cultural and Research Center history and exhibits, see Patricia Pierce Erikson, “Welcome to This House: A Century of Makah People Honoring Identity and Negotiating Cultural Tourism,” *Ethnohistory* 50 (2003): 523-547; Janine Bovechop and Patricia Pierce Erikson, “Forging Indigenous Methodologies on Cape Flattery: The Makah Museum as a Center of Collaborative Research,” *American Indian Quarterly* 29 (2005): 263-273; and Patricia Pierce Erikson, *Voices of a Thousand People: The Makah Cultural and Research Center* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

⁶ John J. Bodinger de Uriarte, *Casino and Museum: Representing Mashantucket Pequot Identity* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2007), 3.

notions of Indian authenticity that pervades the American consciousness.⁷ The Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation designates spaces throughout their museum to emphasize contemporaneity to demonstrate both presence and resistance. By highlighting different features of their tribal history and culture, the Makah Cultural and Research Center and the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center are asserting the inherent sovereignty of their tribal nation. For this dissertation, I focus on the political context of two tribal museums: the Squaxin Island Tribe's Museum, Library and Research Center and the Mille Lacs Indian Museum. Like the Makah and the Pequot tribal nations, I contend these two museums also serve as a catalyst for tribal sovereignty in similar yet different ways.

Prior to a brief description of tribal sovereignty, which is the basis for the existence of modern tribes and tribal nations, I introduce my two sites of inquiry, both of which are the examined in more detail in subsequent chapters of this dissertation. For the remainder of this chapter, I provide brief histories of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and the Squaxin Island Tribe, including the background of major treaties signed by both nations and reservation formation. Next, I examine these two communities' historical struggle for their treaty rights from the late nineteenth century to the present, beginning with the Mille Lacs Ojibwe. I illustrate that prior to the major court cases affirming treaty rights for both tribal nations in the late twentieth century, the states of Washington

⁷ For more about this historical construction and effects on Eastern tribal nations, see works by Jean M. O'Brien, including: *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) and *Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650-1790* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

and Minnesota consistently interfered with their exercise of treaty rights.⁸ On a regular basis, state law enforcement officials confiscated Native-owned equipment and arrested and fined Native people who continued to fish, hunt, and gather both on and off the reservation.

However, even after a least a century of race-based harassment by both state and federal officials (who deferred to the state, doing very little to protect Indians) did not deter Native people from continuing with their traditional ways of life. The extent of Native peoples' knowledge of treaty rights from generation to generation is remarkable. The "fish-in" protests in the Pacific Northwest in the 1960s, motivated by a national civil rights movement, empowered tribes to demand federal action through the courts to resolve the issue of treaty rights. Ojibwe people in the Upper Midwest also initiated court cases lasting well into the 1990s. Today, members of both tribal nations still experience the residual impact of American colonialism, but they also recognize the lasting effects of these events and court cases on their lives and their communities. This historical struggle to assert treaty rights played a central role in the affirmation of tribal identities shaped by these experiences, as well as in the direction of political and cultural sovereignty, which is revealed in the Squaxin Island Tribe's Museum, Library and Research Center and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Indian Museum.

⁸ *US v. Washington*, 384 F. Supp. 312 (W.D. Wash. 1974) and *Minnesota v. Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians*, 526 U.S. 172 (1999).

The Squaxin Island Museum, Library and Research Center



Figure 2: The MLRC

The Squaxin Island Tribe Museum, Library and Research Center (MLRC) is a relatively recent project for the Squaxin Island Tribe, as 2012 marked the completion of the final stages of the original planning. However, according to the MLRC Director, it was always a dream of the elders to build a museum for future generations of Squaxin Island people since before the tribe officially reorganized in 1964 under the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934.⁹ In 1993, the Squaxin Island Tribe Heritage and Cultural Advisory Committee, whose members assisted tribal department directors with cultural program development, planned for the new museum. By February of 2001, the MLRC completed its 501 (c) 3 or federal non-profit status application, formed the Board

⁹ Also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act, it aimed at improving conditions for tribes by: eliminating the allotment of lands to Indians and restore tribal lands; offering financial assistance to tribes to set up formal governments with constitutions and by-laws and economic development plans; and create programs for maintaining tribal cultures. It was meant to strengthen tribal self-government for tribes to manage their own affairs. From 1934 on, tribal members elected the leadership in tribal governments by vote and tribes were required to draft and finalize in meeting minutes the results of their meetings.

of Trustees, and secured funding for the construction of the building through grants and tribal funds. The Board then established its mission in which it dedicated itself overall to “the preservation, study and exhibition of the life, the languages, literature, history and arts of the Squaxin Island people.”¹⁰ By the fall of 2002, the MLRC opened to the public. Today, it operates not only as a tribal museum, but also as a community center for all, as will be detailed in the next chapter of this dissertation.

The Mille Lacs Indian Museum



Figure 3: The MLIM

The Mille Lacs Indian Museum (MLIM) had been around for decades beginning with the Mille Lacs Indian Trading Post owned by Harry and Jeannette Ayer. In the early twentieth century, the Ayers obtained as many as 3,000 Ojibwe cultural items throughout the years 1919-1955 made by local Mille Lacs people. The Ayers built a number of

¹⁰ Squaxin Island Tribe Museum, Library and Research Center, “Grant Proposal for the Squaxin Island Tribe ‘People of the Water’ Exhibit” (Shelton: Squaxin Island Museum, Library and Research Center, 2001), 11.

additions to their trading post to display their increasing collection of basketry and beadwork items. When they eventually retired from business in 1959, they donated their entire collection, along with the trading post and other resort buildings at the site, to the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS). In 1960, the new “State Indian Museum” opened to the public. Since then, MHS has had a long tradition of hiring Mille Lacs Ojibwe community members as managers, tour guides, museum shop clerks, and craft demonstrators, such as esteemed elders Batiste Sam and Maude Kegg. Both women were members of the Mille Lacs Reservation Curriculum Committee in the early to mid-1980s and helped to plan the new building and the current exhibits with MHS staff and outside consultants. Construction began on the new museum building in 1992 and ended in 1996 with the May 18th opening ceremony. Although the MLIM is an official state historic site, the Mille Lacs Ojibwe people consider it as a part of their community as it reflects their history, culture and sovereignty as transmitted by elders, many of whom are no longer living.

One of the most fiercely-fought battles Native nations have engaged in is the historical struggle to maintain their treaty rights. Both the Squaxin Island Tribe and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe people have a common fishing tradition existing for centuries prior to treaties made in the nineteenth century with the U.S. government in which they reserved the rights to hunt, fish and gather. According to scholar Charles Wilkinson,

fishing rights disputes existed for decades prior to court cases beginning in the 1970s.¹¹ To protect recreationists, lakefront homeowners, and other groups such as sport and commercial fishermen, state game wardens attempted to thwart Indian fishing (as well as hunting and gathering) in the name of conservation, falsely claiming that Indians took too much fish and game. Throughout the twentieth century, the situation exploded as non-Indians vehemently opposed what they considered to be ‘special privileges.’ Native people endured acts of settler colonialism, racism, and a constant undermining of their ways of life, which they continued to resist. They demanded federal protection of their rights as spelled out in the treaties, but did not receive it. The most violent conflicts over treaty rights occurred in the Pacific Northwest and in the Great Lakes region. Wilkinson argues, “Perhaps more than any other issues, fishing rights disputes epitomize the tribes’ struggle to revive traditional cultures, treaty rights, and sovereignty.”¹² Throughout this particular struggle and others against American colonialism, Native people declared their inherent tribal sovereignty.

Tribal Sovereignty

The word ‘sovereignty’ is ubiquitous when it comes to Indian tribes. Many people may know that tribal sovereignty means self-government. Most Native people have a general idea of what it is, but may not necessarily know its political-legal foundation. Today, for most Native people, having tribal sovereignty generally means

¹¹ Charles Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005), 156.

¹² *Ibid*, 151-153.

that a tribe can determine its own membership criteria, hold tribal elections for tribal council, have its own educational system separate from the state public school system, oversee tribal natural resources, issue licenses for tribal members to exercise their treaty rights, have its own tribal police department and tribal court system, and much more. It took centuries of legal court proceedings and legislative actions to reach this point in understanding tribal sovereignty's functions on daily tribal life.

The origins of sovereignty date back before the establishment of the United States when European countries recognized tribes as powerful entities and sovereign nations during the treaty-making process. Scholars David E. Wilkins and K Tsianina Lomawaima assert that tribal rights come from the doctrine of “inherent sovereignty,” which predates the Constitution.¹³ The U.S. Constitution recognizes Indian tribes as separate nations; however, since then a number of federal policies and Supreme Court cases diminished this distinction.¹⁴ Despite treaty promises, the federal government did not protect Indian treaty rights against the states and continued to enforce detrimental policies at the end of the nineteenth century into the mid-twentieth century.¹⁵ The

¹³ David E. Wilkins and K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *Uneven Ground: American Indian Sovereignty and Federal Law* (Norman: U of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 5.

¹⁴ Through the Major Crimes Act of 1885 (23 Stat. 362) and *Ex Parte Crow Dog*, 109 U.S. 556 (1883), and then *U.S. v. Kagama*, 118 U.S. 375 (1886) and *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock*, 187 U.S. 553 (1903), Congress and the courts established the Plenary Power Doctrine, providing the federal government to hold absolute power and control over Native nations, thereby limiting tribal sovereignty. Here, both federal policy and the law are linked, working against Native people.

¹⁵ Three Supreme Court cases, *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, 21 U.S. (8 Wheat.) 543 (1823), *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. (5 Pet.) 1 (1831), and *Worcester v. Georgia*, 31 U.S. (6 Pet.) 1 (1831), known as the “Marshall Decisions” or “Marshall Trilogy,” recognized the threat of states to Indians tribes and established the current “trust relationship,” between the federal government, whom the court mandated to serve the interests and protect tribes from state governments.

federal government's policies of allotment and assimilation, which began with the Dawes or Allotment Act of 1887, turned out to be particularly devastating for Native people. This act provided Native people with individual pieces of land as a way to dismantle traditional ideas of communal land ownership.¹⁶ Another act under the federal assimilation policy forced Indian children to attend boarding schools where non-Native officials and teachers stripped them of their cultural ways in order to make them 'civilized.'¹⁷ Such policies demanded that Native people renounce their traditional ways and embrace European ideas of farming and land ownership, like the settlers and pioneers and other Americans citizens surrounding them.¹⁸ Colonialism, imbued with racism, worked against Native people in various ways through federal policies and a variety of interactions with European and American settlers, state and local governments, and corporations, which drastically transformed Native nations into their current form.

Wilkins and Lomawaima outline a number of historical doctrines that affect tribes or Native nations today. If the federal government 'recognizes' tribes under its criteria, they are considered 'legitimate' and are therefore accountable to the federal

¹⁶ In short, the government assigned 160-acre sections to be allotted to individual Indians with the surplus land going to non-Natives. The government held the profits in a federal trust for tribes for a 25-year period.

¹⁷ For more information on the effects of the boarding school (a major component of federal assimilation policies) on American Indians and their families, see Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Call It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); and Clifford E. Trafzer, *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Education Experiences* (Winnipeg: Bison Books, 2006).

¹⁸ A few sources on American Indian citizenship, see Vine Deloria and Clifford Little, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); David E. Wilkins and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesik Stark, *American Indian Politics and the American Political System*, 3rd ed. (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2011); and Kevin Bruyneel, "Challenging American Boundaries: Indigenous People and the 'Gift' of U.S. Citizenship," *Studies in American Political Development* 18 (2004): 30-43.

government.¹⁹ For example, although tribes may begin the process of establishing membership criteria, the federal government's Department of the Interior-Indian Affairs ultimately approves it. The Bureaus of Indian Affairs and Indian Education also settle issues pertaining to land allotments and provide tribes with funding for education, among other services. Wilkins and Lomawaima argue that relationship is erroneous in that according to the legal and political history between Native people and the federal government, tribal nations should be considered inherently sovereign. Thus, they instruct tribes to learn more about this history in order to protect their right to self-government and self-determination, which are prone to constant attack by states and local governments, as well as corporate entities.

Other scholars believe tribes must promote self-government and self-determination by reforming their tribal governments. In their book, Vine Deloria and Clifford Lytle explain that tribal governments, which are currently modeled after U.S. governments, should strongly utilize traditional ways of leadership. They refer to this concept of self-determination as "Indian nationhood," which "implies a process of decision making that is free and uninhibited within the community, a community...that is

¹⁹ The Office of Federal Acknowledgement within the Office of the Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs of the Department of the Interior implements the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 83 of Title 25, "Procedures for Establishing that an American Indian Group Exists as an Indian Tribe," by which petitioning groups that meet the criteria are "acknowledged" as Indian tribes and their members become eligible to receive services provided to members of federally recognized Indian tribes. See <http://www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/AS-IA/OFA/>. Recently, scholar Brian Klopotek produced a compelling study of the relationship between federal tribal recognition policy and American Indian racial and tribal identities, focusing on the experiences of three central Louisiana tribes that have petitioned for federal acknowledgment. Brian Klopotek, *Recognition Odysseys: Indigeneity, Race, and Federal Tribal Recognition Policy in Three Louisiana Indian Communities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

almost completely insulated from external factors...”²⁰ Deloria and Lytle believe that tribal governments as they exist today are useful because tribes have more leverage when dealing with the federal and state governments. However, they caution, “Until Indians accept responsibility for preserving and enhancing their own knowledge of themselves, no institution can enable them to remain as Indians.”²¹ They advocate for tribes and tribal people to proceed with a program of cultural resurgence to learn their cultures, histories, and languages, in order to assert their own cultural self-determination as existing outside of federal descriptions and distinctions. In other words, cultural knowledge must be strengthened before they are able to make considerable gains with any economic, political, or legal endeavors.

Canadian Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred argues that sovereignty as Native nations perceive of it today only serves colonialism. He rejects Western ideas and institutions such as tribal sovereignty and self-government in the form of contemporary tribal governments as being ineffectual for Native peoples due to their Western origins. He instead calls for a renewed political and social life based on traditional values. He writes, “In fact, it is not possible to reach those goals [harmony, balance, and peaceful coexistence] in the context of Western institutions, because those institutions were designed within the framework of a very different belief system...”²² Alfred instructs tribes to more closely utilize their traditional values and belief systems and to think of

²⁰ Vine Deloria, Jr. and Clifford Lytle, 14.

²¹ Ibid, 250.

²² Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1999), 41.

another way to view tribal government, one he hopes will “lead to a renewed political and social life based on our traditional values.”²³ While valid, the error of his argument is that he assumes that Native nations, although radically transformed by colonialism, have not maintained their distinctiveness as sovereign entities. Moreover, he assumes that Native nations, borrowing Western concepts and institutions such as the tribal museum, have not already reconstituted and adapted them to further their own political, legal, economic, and social goals.

In recognizing the significance of traditional values and belief systems to maintain sovereignty, many tribal nations like the Squaxin Island Tribe and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, have taken steps to identify, preserve, and reaffirm their histories and cultural identities by building a tribal museum. They plan meaningful exhibits and programs not only for their own tribal community, but to educate the broader public in very purposeful ways in order to assert their sovereignty. Throughout their museum processes, both the Mille Lacs Ojibwe and the Squaxin Island Tribe strategized to include and exclude certain portions of their tribal histories for specific reasons identified by their planning committees. As with many Native nations, their histories are complex in telling the larger narrative of the effects of colonialism. Historical episodes such as land loss, displacement, forced cultural assimilation, and continued attempts by state and local government officials to abrogate treaty rights are common to many Native communities. In order to maintain their treaty rights and assert tribal sovereignty, it is imperative for Native nations to learn more about their own histories and cultures in particular as state

²³ Ibid., xii.

attorneys in court proceedings have used notions of Indian authenticity to question the legitimacy of existing tribes and tribal identities, as discussed further in Chapter Three.

Although located in different regions of the U.S., the Mille Lacs Band and the Squaxin Island Tribe have histories in common in their struggle for treaty rights. I begin their stories with a description of each tribal history and then transition into the challenges each nation faced in exercising their treaty rights throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The impact of their historical treaty rights struggles on how they define themselves—their tribal identities and communities today—is significant. Knowledge of tribal culture and history plays a key role in advocating for overall self-determination and tribal sovereignty.

Mille Lacs Ojibwe History

According to William Warren’s *History of the Ojibway People* published in 1852, Ojibwe people migrated west to the Great Lakes from the Atlantic over the course of several centuries. By the seventeenth century, Ojibwe people established themselves in western Lake Superior. The occupation of Mille Lacs (lake) was a source of conflict for nearly two centuries between the Ojibwe and Dakota people, who pursued its abundant wild rice beds and plentiful fish. Prior to Ojibwe possession, a band of the Dakota called the Bdewakantunwan (Spirit Lake People) dwelled at Mille Lacs.²⁴ According to Ojibwe oral tradition, peace existed between the Dakotas and the Ojibwe until Dakotas at Mille

²⁴ Warren refers to this band of Dakota as “M’de Wakan.” Here, I use the accepted spelling today. For the entire story of “The Taking of Mille Lacs By the Ojibways,” see William W. Warren, *History of the Ojibway People* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1984), 155-162.

Lacs murdered four sons of a respected elder of the Fond du Lac Ojibwe Band. This man formed a war party, which in turn attacked Dakotas living at Mille Lacs. Their forced evacuation left the Mille Lacs area open for Ojibwe possession and settlement. Warren also details periods of peace and intermarriage between the Ojibwe and Dakota after the Ojibwe occupation of Mille Lacs. Most notably, Warren notes the prevalence of the Wolf clan at Mille Lacs, and discusses how this clan came into being as the result of Dakota men marrying into Ojibwe communities in the second half of the eighteenth century. Warren goes on to point out that two of Mille Lacs chiefs at the time of his writing in the mid-nineteenth century were of the Wolf clan and therefore descended from Dakota people: Negwaanabi and Manoominikeshiinh.²⁵

In 1825, U.S. Commissioners brought together 3,000 Indians from the western Great Lakes to Prairie du Chien to establish boundaries under the guise of resolving hostilities.²⁶ However, these boundaries did little to slow Ojibwe-Dakota warfare near Mille Lacs (nor anywhere else). The Treaty of Prairie du Chien only served to facilitate future land cessions to the government throughout the western Great Lakes. Historian Charles Cleland notes that the Ojibwe-Dakota war period consisted of periodic raids and ambushes in a “contested zone” comprised of prairie land that attracted hunters from both

²⁵ Ibid, 165 and 335. Warren spells Negwaanabi “Na-guon-abe” and Manoominikeshiinh “Mun-o-min-ik-a-sheen.” On the meaning of Manoominikeshiinh see John D. Nichols and Earl Nyholm, *A Concise Dictionary of Minnesota Ojibwe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 78.

²⁶ At this treaty negotiation, Negwaanabi represented the Mille Lacs Band. In the Treaty, he is referred to as “Nagonabe.” Warren, 22-23.

groups.²⁷ Despite this attempt to set boundaries between the Ojibwe and Dakota, hostilities between the two increased, which did not end until the mid-nineteenth century with the beginning of the Dakota War.²⁸

In 1837, the Ojibwe ceded lands in east-central Minnesota and northern Wisconsin to the U.S. government via treaty. This included the territory of the Mille Lacs band. However, the Mille Lacs retained rights to hunt, fish, and gather in the territory ceded “during the pleasure of the president.”²⁹ Mille Lacs Ojibwe also participated in The Treaty of La Pointe in 1842 where Ojibwe people ceded lands in along the south shore of Lake Superior in Wisconsin and western Upper Peninsula. This treaty also guaranteed fishing and hunting rights within the territory ceded but added the qualifier “until required to remove by the President.”³⁰ However, as Cleland conveys, Indian Agent Robert Stuart went to great lengths to assure the bands that removal would not occur in their lifetime. However, talks of removal began shortly the treaty. Cleland

²⁷ Charles E. Cleland, “Preliminary Report of the Ethnohistorical Basis of the Hunting, Fishing, and Gathering Rights of the Mille Lacs Chippewa,” in *Fish in the Lakes, Wild Rice, and Game in Abundance: Testimony on Behalf of Mille Lacs Ojibwe Hunting and Fishing Rights*, ed. James M. McClurken (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000), 21-23.

²⁸ Ibid, 24. The Dakota War was caused by the increasing encroachment of settlers onto Dakota land and the forced exile of Dakota people from the state of Minnesota by the federal and state government. The war lasted six weeks and it ended on December 26, 1862 when 38 Dakota were hanged in the largest mass execution in U.S. history. After, the government forced many Dakota to leave the state. For more information on the Dakota War, see Kenneth Carley, *The Dakota War of 1862: Minnesota’s Other Civil War*, 2nd ed. (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001) and Gary C. Anderson, *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988).

²⁹ More specifically, Article 5 reads as follows: “The privilege of hunting, fishing, and gathering wild rice, upon the lands, the rivers and the lakes included in the territory ceded, is guaranteed to the Indians, during the pleasure of the President of the United States.” Treaty With the Chippewa, July 29, 1837, 7 Stat., 536, Article 5.

³⁰ Treaty With the Chippewa, October 4, 1842, 7 Stat., 591, Article 2.

convincingly argues that the non-Indian settlers, who only numbered in the hundreds at the time, did not seek removal. Instead, local government officials, hungry for economic gain, drove the removal effort. In particular, Governor Alexander Ramsey desired to bring the revenue from annuity payments to Wisconsin and Michigan Ojibwe to Minnesota.

In 1850, U.S. President Zachary Taylor issued the executive removal order. In the meantime, territorial Governor Ramsey made Sandy Lake an agency in order to facilitate Ojibwe removal to Minnesota.³¹ Ojibwe bands from Wisconsin and Michigan as well as Minnesota were assembled-for the annuity payment at Sandy Lake on October 25, 1850. However, as historian Bruce White details, Ramsey and Sandy Lake Indian Agent James Watrous intentionally schemed to keep the Ojibwe in Minnesota by delaying the payment so that waterways would be frozen by the time the annuities arrived, forcing the Ojibwe to remain in Minnesota. Unfortunately, Sandy Lake did not have enough provisions for the over 4,000 Ojibwe people that arrived for the payment resulting in death of 170 Ojibwe at Sandy Lake. When the Ojibwe decided to leave well into the winter season, it is estimated that another 230 died on the return home to Wisconsin.³² Ojibwe scholar Brenda Child describes the Sandy Lake Tragedy as “an

³¹ Bruce M. White, “The Regional Context of the Removal Order of 1850,” in *Fish in the Lakes, Wild Rice, and Game in Abundance: Testimony on Behalf of Mille Lacs Ojibwe Hunting and Fishing Rights*, ed. James M. McClurken (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000), 185.

³² *Ibid.*, 192-193.

episode of ethnic cleansing.”³³ She notes that twelve percent of Wisconsin Ojibwe succumbed to the difficult winter with no food and supplies and actually more than the recorded 400 Ojibwe died as documented by Leech Lake missionaries.³⁴

Despite this tragedy, Governor Ramsey did not back off of plans for Ojibwe removal to Sandy Lake in 1851, but it never came to fruition as Wisconsin Ojibwe people resisted removal from their homelands. Ramsey focused his attention on removing the St. Croix and Snake River Ojibwe to Mille Lacs, resulting in a huge increase of the Ojibwe population at Mille Lacs. Through meticulous historical research, White confirms that the Mille Lacs were never subject to the president’s removal order as it was not intended to affect the hunting, fishing, and gathering rights reserved for the Ojibwe under the Treaty of 1837. Moreover, White asserts that subsequent treaties in 1854 and 1855 explicitly reversed the removal order. The treaty of 1854 set for the boundaries of reservations including the Mille Lacs Reservation on land ceded in the Treaty of 1837. It did not include a “reversal of the provisions of the 1837 treaty concerning rights to hunt, fish, and gather throughout...”³⁵ Although the 1855 Treaty did not specifically deal with treaty rights, Article III did provide for blacksmith services and Indians to receive shot and twine for fish nets. Cleland notes, “It was so obvious to all concerned that these

³³ Brenda Child, *Holding Our World Together: Ojibwe Women and the Survival of Community* (New York: Penguin Group, 2012), 65. See also Ronald N. Satz, “The Removal Order and the Wisconsin Death March, in *Chippewa Treaty Rights*, 51-59.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

³⁵ Bruce White, *Fish in the Lakes*, 281.

[treaty] rights would not be impacted that the entire record of negotiations does not even mention the subject.”³⁶

For the Mille Lacs people, the 1850s were traumatic as they continued to experience settler colonialism with further encroachment on their lands by white settlers and lumbermen, as well as traders selling alcohol to Ojibwe people in order to gain further access to land. These groups sought to further reduce Ojibwe lands and prevent the exercise of treaty rights by complaining to government officials about Indian misconduct, which turned out to be false. Throughout the 1860s, Mille Lacs people believed they had the right to remain on their reservation lands as stipulated by treaties despite government attempts to remove them farther north to the White Earth Reservation. They continued to hunt, fish and gather, both on and off-reservation.³⁷ However, by the late 1870s, the Mille Lacs people lost more of their reservation lands, which the federal government illegally sold to timber companies.³⁸ Despite settlers’ claims to reservation lands and numerous attempts by the federal government to remove the Mille Lacs Ojibwe throughout the 1880s, they refused to leave.

Historian James McClurken refers to the 1880s in particular as “a time of crisis” for the Mille Lacs people because the federal government did nothing to protect their interests from land fraud and dam building, which threatened their wild rice beds and

³⁶ Cleland, 96.

³⁷ Ibid, 100- 102.

³⁸ Roger Buffalohead, *Against the Tide of American History: The Story of the Mille Lacs Anishinabe* (Mille Lacs: Mille Lacs Local Curriculum Committee, 1985), 61.

other natural resources.³⁹ After Congress passed the Dawes Act in 1887, the State of Minnesota pushed for Congress to pass the Nelson Act in 1889, which forced all Minnesota Ojibwe except those White Earth and Red Lake to cede all reservation lands to the federal government and be removed to White Earth; however, later provisions allowed them to take their allotments on their home reservations.⁴⁰ When the Mille Lacs Ojibwe agreed to the Nelson Act, they believed they would be allowed to stay on their land and their treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather both on and off the reservation would remain intact.

Some families who signed the 1902 Nelson Act Agreement agreed to remove themselves to White Earth due to continued harassment from local people and the state government. But many families stayed on the Mille Lacs Reservation, even without allotments and federal government protection. Those who stayed lived in a number of places surrounding the lake (Vineland, Isle, Milaca, and Onamia) and in villages further away near what is now Wisconsin (East Lake, Sandy Lake region, and Lake Lena closer to the St. Croix River). These groups chose to stay because of their strong ties to the land they had been fishing, hunting, and gathering in for hundreds of years. Many who left to live at White Earth did not stay away for long. Local non-Native people failed to realize the importance of place and home to the Ojibwe people. Roger Buffalohead writes, “The old people said that there was a spiritual bond between themselves and the [Mille Lacs]

³⁹ James M. McClurken, “The 1837 Treaty of St. Peters Preserving the Rights of the Mille Lacs Ojibwa to Hunt, Fish, and Gather: The Effect of Treaties and Agreements since 1855,” in *Fish in the Lakes*, 383.

⁴⁰ The Mille Lacs people, who made repeated attempts to secure their allotments, did not receive them until 1925. See McClurken, 405.

lake,” which could never be broken, and continued, “They would not break the spiritual ties which bound them to the Lake and the land, no matter what might happen.”⁴¹

Despite the federal government’s threats to not provide allotment land or payments/annuities, the Mille Lacs “non-removable” Ojibwe would not leave. Non-Indians claimed reservation lands as their own well into the twentieth century, as more and more people arrived and settled within the state’s boundaries. In 1914, Congress finally recognized that the Mille Lacs people could not be removed and purchased land for a small reservation. By World War I and into the late 1920s and 1930s, local townspeople and resort owners frequently complained about living among the Mille Lacs Ojibwe people. Conflicts over treaty rights intensified and continued throughout the entire twentieth century. Even with the formation of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe after passage of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934, the State of Minnesota and the federal government did nothing to intervene on behalf of the Mille Lacs and other Ojibwe people who attempted to exercise their treaty rights.⁴² During this time known as the Great Depression, the gathering of wild rice, as allowed under the treaty, became an even more important food staple for Ojibwe people.

⁴¹ Buffalohead, 69-70.

⁴² Prior to this passage, the federal Consolidated Chippewa Agency, located in Cass Lake, Minnesota, had authority in all Indian matters in Ojibwe country in the State of Minnesota. In 1934, the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, comprised of representatives from White Earth, Leech Lake, Grand Portage, Nett Lake (Bois Forte), Fond du Lac, and Mille Lacs, began to serve as the official governing body to deal with the State of Minnesota and the federal government.

A Thunderstorm Brews: Early Twentieth Century Ojibwe Treaty Rights Disputes

Despite damaging federal policies aimed at assimilation, many Native people maintained significant aspects of their traditional economies and cultural activities. Some Mille Lacs people entered into the American labor market in the early twentieth century working as lumbermen or craftspeople and many worked as commercial fishermen. Buffalohead notes that in the early twentieth century, state game and fishing laws restricted Ojibwe fishing out of season and/or off the reservation; yet, Mille Lacs people continued to fish “out of necessity.”⁴³ The small amount of land the federal government provided to the Ojibwe was inadequate for hunting; therefore, many Ojibwe families relied on commercial fishing as their primary source of income, much to the dismay of local non-Native people.⁴⁴ The federal government deferred to state and local authorities on all treaty rights matters, granting power to the state and its hunting and fishing laws. Federal officials continued to ignore Ojibwe complaints that state law enforcement prevented them from practicing their treaty rights.⁴⁵

⁴³ Buffalohead, 74.

⁴⁴ In a 1995 report written by Bruce White for the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe entitled “Early Game and Fish Regulation and Enforcement in Minnesota, 1858-1920: A Report Prepared for the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe” (located at the Minnesota Historical Society and provided to the author by Bruce White), he discusses the opposition by local people and sport fishermen to the commercial fishing at Mille Lacs Lake. In April 1920, in the name of conservation, the State Commissioner of the Game and Fish Department Carlos Avery refused to grant permits to commercial fishing in the lake, pointing indirectly at Indian commercial fishing, which he claimed depleted the fish population. White notes no evidence existed indicating that commercial fishing by band members depleted the fish. See White, 156.

⁴⁵ Other subsequent treaties after the 1837 treat exist with the Ojibwe people in northern Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. This dissertation is primarily concerned with the 1837 Treaty, as it specifically applies to the Mille Lacs Ojibwe.

Local non-Native citizens inundated the Superintendent at the Consolidated Chippewa Agency with letters inquiring about 1837 Ojibwe treaty rights off the reservation. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. often responded with answers such as the following: “We do not question the authority of the State to enforce its [game] laws,”⁴⁶ or “We do not know of any treaty with the Chippewa Indians in Minnesota under the terms whereof they have the right to hunt or fish on land under State jurisdiction [ceded land] without complying with the State Game Laws.”⁴⁷ The Commissioner of Indian Affairs sent the latter to a reporter of *The Village Recorder* in Onamia, Minnesota, responding to the arrest of John Benjamin and John Miss-qua-daze for hunting without a state license outside the reservation in the fall of 1928.⁴⁸ Three months later, the Superintendent of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency intervened and informed the Commissioner that two Ojibwe men pled guilty of game violations. The District court fined them each \$25.00, which the Court suspended.

The Superintendent of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency did not always attend to such matters in Indian peoples’ favor. At one point on November 1, 1929, Mille Lacs member Tom Hill wrote to the Commissioner himself on behalf of the Mille Lacs Indians. He began:

⁴⁶ Letter dated August 30, 1924, from E. B. Meritt, Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs to P.R. Wadsworth, Superintendent, Consolidated Chippewa Agency, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)—Kansas City Branch, Record Group 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

⁴⁷ Letter dated December 18, 1928, from Charles Burke, Commissioner of Indian Affairs to W. J. Eynon, Village Recorder, NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

⁴⁸ Letter dated December 18, 1928, from Charles Burke, Commissioner of Indian Affairs to W. J. Eynon, Village Recorder, NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

Dear Sir:

We the Mille Lacs Indians has just realized the way the white man has treated us for the last five or ten years. Now the white men has just deprived us our rights in hunting. C.A. Luces, the game warden, is forever on watch. Any one caught hunting he is either sent to prison or made to pay a fine.

And we would like to know why the white man should have the rights to deprive us our rights to hunt the wild game that was given to us by God to live on. God gave us Indians the wild game to live on here the white men comes and take everything away from us...⁴⁹

On December 19, 1929, Superintendent E.A. Allen responded, "Mr. Hill does not tell the truth...Relative to the right of the white man to deprive the Indians of the privilege of hunting, your Office understands that he is challenging the authority of the game laws of the State of Minnesota..."⁵⁰

The federal government's general sentiment with regard to treaty rights is evident in correspondence from a Mille Lacs Ojibwe man named D.F. Porter to C.J. Rhoads, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, on December 30, 1930. Porter wrote:

Dear Mr. Curtis:
To your honor sir.

I take the levity writing to you. I thought I would let [you] know how we are surved by the game wardens. If we are cought with game or fish we are arried put in jail and find. Last fall there was two old squaws widows. They went out set their net in the Lake next morning the game warden caught them and he took their nets away from them & kept them. Those old women had nothing to eat. There is one Indian by the name of Alax Moose. They have him in jail at Onamia, Minn. for killing a Deer. Last year there was two Indians arrised for killing Deer to eat not to sell. I

⁴⁹ NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

⁵⁰ NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

understand they won out.⁵¹ Dear sir I beg of you to send me a copley of the game law on the Indian Reservations. I get it printed and destriby to the Indians...⁵²

This letter demonstrates not only the level of desperation felt by many of the Mille Lacs Ojibwe, but also their willingness to cooperate with the state if the federal government could also intervene on their behalf. The Superintendent advised the Indians at all times to obey the state game and fish laws and stay out of trouble. He wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, “ In spite of repeated warning and many convictions in state courts, many of the Indians still entertain the idea that they can hunt and fish at will, without regard for state law, under the authority of old treaties, made by their forefathers.”⁵³ Backed by the Superintendent, the Commissioner responded to Mr. Porter, “We endeavor to do everything possible to help Indians out of trouble if arrested by the State Authorities for acts committed within their restricted reservation. It is not possible, however, to help them if arrested for hunting or fishing without a State license or out of season on ceded or other land from which the restrictions have been removed.”⁵⁴ This assistance meant little to the Mille Lacs people who needed to hunt and fish away from their small reservation containing inadequate hunting grounds. Throughout the 1920s, the State concluded that as long as the Indians had allotments, they should be

⁵¹ Porter is referring to the case of Benjamin and Miss-qua-dace.

⁵² Letter dated December, 1930, NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

⁵³ Letter dated January 2, 1930, NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

⁵⁴ Letter dated January 19, 1931 from C.J. Rhodes, Commissioner of Indian Affairs to D.F. Porter, NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

considered full citizens subject to the same laws as all people; therefore, they had to abide by the state game and fish laws.⁵⁵

The late 1920s and early 1930s brought particular hardship to all people across the nation as they felt the effects of the Great Depression. Historian Brenda Child notes that “decades of land loss and violations of hunting, fishing, and gathering rights were deeply felt and left the Ojibwe with few resources to navigate the perils of the 1930s.”⁵⁶ Government Works Progress Administration (WPA) programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)-Indian Division and Federal Writer’s Project assisted some Native families in hiring able-bodied men to work in lumber camps and Indian writers to record reservation statistics. Despite such job opportunities, many Ojibwe people relied on their treaty rights to feed their families and obtain income through selling fish, game, maple syrup, and wild rice. The late 1920s and 1930s were also the time when many more Ojibwe people began to view the tourist industry as an opportunity to sell their traditional craft items for income. In 1927, the Consolidated Chippewa Agency conducted a survey at Mille Lacs of “worthy native industries,” which included, “Art: Beadwork, buckskin work, basketry, mat weaving, and the making of bows and arrows.”⁵⁷ The survey included resort work as the number one vocational opportunity.

⁵⁵ All American Indians officially became American citizens in 1924 after passage of the Snyder or Indian Citizenship Act.

⁵⁶ Child, 100.

⁵⁷ “Survey at the Mille Lacs Reservation,” General Superintendent’s Circular No. 5, Consolidated Chippewa Indian Agency, Cass Lake, Minnesota, 1927, NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

These activities, along with participating in Indian powwows and pageants for tourists, continued in the decades beyond the 1940s.

At Mille Lacs, the Ayers' Trading Post benefitted from these weekly powwows and the selling of local Ojibwe peoples' bead and crafts. Throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin, the tourism industry flourished in the post-World War II era of economic prosperity. Tourists, attracted to a simpler life of vacationing and fishing in the plentiful lakes, visited the area in large numbers. Located only ninety minutes northwest of the Twin Cities, Mille Lacs became popular with its many lakeside resorts and fishing guides. Ojibwe people at Mille Lacs increasingly took advantage of the tourism industry by selling their beadwork and birch bark at roadside stands.

Due to the rising number of tourists and sport fishermen to the area during this time, local state game wardens increasingly confiscated Indian nets, boats, and other equipment for fishing at a higher rate. They issued numerous citations and took fish and deer from individual tribal members. In the 1940s, the matter of treaty rights became more complex with regard to the types of land Ojibwe people hunted, fished and gathered upon. State game wardens made Indians comply with the game and fish laws in areas off the reservation (ceded land) and understood that Indians would not be subject to these laws upon their own allotment lands. Yet, Indians, tribal attorneys, Minnesota Chippewa Tribe representatives, Minnesota non-Native citizens, and government officials frequently exchanged correspondence with questions as whether or not Indians could hunt and fish on other reservation lands (not allotments), take game from one part of the reservation to another, and fish and trap in public waters adjacent to allotted land.

Another primary question asked was whether or not Indians were subject to laws if they fished and hunted for personal use or for commercial purposes.

Recent court decisions on such matters at that time generated further confusion. Edward Rogers, then tribal attorney for the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe who attended a meeting of the Chippewa Indian Tribal Executive Committee, relayed to the U.S. District Attorney a major decision with regard to treaty rights at the time.⁵⁸ The Minnesota State Supreme Court cases of *State v. Joe Bush, Sr.* led Rogers to believe that Indians did not have the right to fish upon public waters.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the case demonstrated that only non-patent fee Indians, or those who had not received a patent fee for allotments (still living on an allotment held in trust by the U.S.) and whose land was still under federal jurisdiction, only had the right to exercise their treaty rights without punishment or fines.⁶⁰ This ruling also theoretically applied to Mille Lacs Removal Indians (those families who did not stay at Mille Lacs) who received a patent fee for their allotments.⁶¹ Similarly, in 1942 Washington State authorities convicted Sampson Tulee, a Yakama

⁵⁸ It seems that Edward Rogers was a tribal attorney with the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe housed in Walker, Minnesota according to a letter dated July 7, 1942; however, by June 16, 1944, a letter from F.J. Scott, Superintendent of Consolidated Chippewa Agency addresses him as the County Attorney in Walker, Minnesota (Cass County), Box 62, NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

⁵⁹ *State v. Joe Bush, Sr.* 195 Minn. 413 (1935). The Supreme Court affirmed the district court's opinion that Joe Bush, a White Earth member, violated state game laws as an Indian who received a patent fee for his allotment became subject to the laws after trapping muskrats in navigable public waters out of season.

⁶⁰ Letter dated June 16, 1942 to Honorable Victor H. Anderson, United States District Attorney, Box 62, NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

⁶¹ In a 1940 report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in D.C., the Mille Lacs Non-Removable Reservation numbered 336 Ojibwe who claimed to "do fishing within a given area of Mille Lacs Lake for their own consumption." See Letter dated March 7, 1940 from M.L. Burns, Superintendent of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency, Box 70, NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

Indian, of catching salmon without a state license. The Washington Supreme Court reversed the lower court's decision and held that the State did not have the power to require Indians to pay a fee for fishing.⁶²

Throughout the 1940s, numerous complaints by Ojibwe people came across the desks of the Superintendent of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency, the Secretary of the Interior's BIA, and the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, demanding action about the repeated state interference of their treaty rights. In a letter dated June 14, 1944, Mrs. Jennie White from Federal Dam wrote:

Dear Mr. Scott [Superintendent of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency]:

Just to tell you that they picked up my nets last night at 8:00 o'clock that guy from Walker and one from Crosby, Minn. They just took it off from George's hands, and had his gun ready to shoot. This Crosby guy won't give his name at all. And George told them this was a reservation and that guy told him it wasn't. Us poor Indians want some of that fish too, not only the white people. We don't have meat like that, that's all we have is fish. I want my nets back or they have to pay \$16.00, that's how much they cost me.

Thanks. Mrs. Jennie White⁶³

In response to Mrs. White, Cass County Attorney Edward Rogers informed Charles Bonga, the Field Aid at the Indian Service in Onigum that Leech Lake Indians could not net fish in the waters of Leech Lake without a State license or else they would be arrested

⁶² See *Tulee v. State of Washington*, 315 U.S. 681, 62 S.Ct. 862, 86 L.Ed. 1115 (1942). This case became the basis for dictating the relationship between states and Indian tribes with regard to treaty rights from then on until the late 1960s.

⁶³ Box 62, NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

and their nets confiscated. Furthermore, he indicated, “Indians must comply...They are in the same class and will be treated the same as other citizens of the State...”⁶⁴

State officials held this same opinion throughout the 1950s and 1960s when they further ignored the treaty rights of the Ojibwe and other Indians across the U.S. Federal policies throughout the 1950s bolstered these actions. In 1953, Congress passed Public Law 280 (PL-280), which authorized six state governments (Minnesota being one of them) to assume civil and criminal jurisdiction over reservation Indians. Although PL-280 did not apply to treaty rights, it nevertheless demonstrated to state game wardens, Indians, and the public the power of states over Indian affairs. During this time, Congress also passed a resolution to terminate the federal dependency status of tribes.⁶⁵ By dissolving tribal nations’ status as wards to the federal government and eliminating Indian lands held in trust, Congress believed Indians would be forced to assimilate into American society. Federal relocation programs assisted individual Indians to move off of reservations and into urban areas. With these federal actions, the state Department of Game and Wildlife and its wardens became further empowered to take control of Indian affairs, paying particular attention to treaty rights.

From 1951-1954, Ojibwe people at Leech Lake made several complaints to Minnesota Chippewa Tribe representative James Wakanabo, who then wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the area BIA Director, and the Superintendent of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency, about one particular overzealous game warden, Officer

⁶⁴ Letter dated June 16, 1944, Box 62, NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency.

⁶⁵ House Concurrent Resolution 108 of 1953.

Greig. They claimed that Greig repeatedly came onto reservation lands and seized numerous nets in addition to deer meat from tribal members, many of whom were poor and elderly. Greig would also not issue formal citations and instead kept their fishing nets. At times, he arrested them and forced them to pay a fine or sent them to jail, telling them he had authority to come onto the reservation as a 'federal' game warden. Both Wakanabo and Ed Wilson, who was the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe President in 1954, wrote letters calling for dismissal or transfer of the game warden as he continually "exceeded his authority as Game warden by indiscriminate arrests and other acts beyond his authority."⁶⁶

In early January of 1954, the BIA Area Director wrote to Chester Wilson, the State Commissioner of Conservation, for the return of deer hides and meat confiscated by Greig who entered the home of a Leech Lake Indian.⁶⁷ The area director requested a meeting with the state department; however, it seems that the department did not meet with the BIA and instead only instructed Greig to return the deer meat and hides. He did so on January 25, 1954, eighteen days after he took it from the Leech Lakers. F.W. Johnson, Supervisor of the Warden Service wrote to Frank D. Blair, Director, Division of Game and Fish that he "had a personal interview with Warden Greig and informed him

⁶⁶ Letter dated May 22, 1952 from James Wakanabo to Superintendent of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency, NARA, Record Group 75, Letters of the Consolidated Chippewa Agency. It is uncertain if the State Department eventually dismissed or transferred this game warden but he stayed in his position for at least these three more years.

⁶⁷ Letter dated January 7, 1954 from Don Foster, Area Director, Minneapolis Area Office, BIA to Chester Wilson, Commissioner of Conservation, Department of Conservation, Game and Fish Division, Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Department of Conservation, Commissioner's Office, General Correspondence, 1937-1970, Indian Service File, Box 104.K.18.6.F.

that the new laws passed by Congress relative to the Indians do not take away from them their rights to hunt and trap or fish as they may do this at any time when they stay on their own reservation or Indian allotment.”⁶⁸

Similar incidents occurred throughout the state and the Ojibwe felt the effects into the 1960s, but many cases of race-based harassment and abuse by state game wardens went unreported as Ojibwe people believed they would not receive federal protection of their treaty rights. In particular, the small, scattered Ojibwe communities around Mille Lacs lived relatively isolated from larger towns, which meant they had less of an opportunity to issue complaints about illegal game warden activity. On October 15, 1968, J. Thomas Scheid, Executive Director of the State of Minnesota Indian Affairs Commission, wrote to Mr. Jarle Leirfallom, the Commissioner of the Department of Conservation, to request a meeting about treaty rights. He contended, “These 6 bands strongly maintains that the Conservation Department does deprive them of the right and privilege to hunt, etc. in Indian country as described by Federal Statute, as well as treaty as interpreted by the courts.”⁶⁹ Although the six bands signed two different treaties, they all experienced the same arrests and equipment confiscation while attempting to exercise

⁶⁸ Office Memorandum dated January 29, 1954, Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Department of Conservation, Commissioner’s Office, General Correspondence, 1937-1970, Indian Service File, Box 104.K.18.6.F.

⁶⁹ Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Department of Conservation, Commissioner’s Office, General Correspondence, 1937-1970, Indian Affairs File, Box 103.H.5.6.F.

their treaty rights, even while fishing or hunting on their own reservations or allotments.⁷⁰ At that time, the state considered it a requirement for Indians to possess a state permit for hunting, fishing, and gathering off the reservation. However, the situation began to take a turn with the emergence of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement.

During the early 1960s, people from racial and ethnic communities across the nation demanded their equality and civil rights. The Red Power Movement empowered Native people to take political action and seek remedies for injustices. Continued state interference in the exercise of hunting, fishing, and gathering rights preserved by treaties became a high priority to the Ojibwe and tribes in the Pacific Northwest. Throughout the 1960s, Indians in the Pacific Northwest organized protests to protect their fishing rights secured by treaty. One tribe, the Squaxin Island Tribe, formally organized as a tribal government in 1965 primarily to retain their treaty rights.⁷¹ Like the Ojibwe, the numerous small bands of Salish people around the South Puget Sound also wanted to ensure their treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather. Although the landscapes are different in the Pacific Northwest than in the Upper Midwest, the stories of the Squaxin Island Tribe and the Mille Lacs band are similar.

⁷⁰ The White Earth and Leech Lake Ojibwe people are technically under a different treaty than the Mille Lacs. The Treaty of 1855 establishes their reservation and while there is nothing in the treaty that discusses the preservation of treaty rights, it had long been considered by federal officials and the state in the mid-twentieth century that they would retain their rights within the boundaries of their reservation without state interference. While these Ojibwe continued to engage in hunting, fishing and gathering on their reservation throughout the twentieth century, in 1971 the U.S. District Court affirmed their treaty rights. See *Leech Lake Band of Chippewa Indians v. Herbst*, 334 F.Supp. 1001, 1002 (D.Minn.1971). In 1991 the State and the Leech Lake revised their agreement to assume authority of conservation laws including the issuing of permits for tribal members, which is still in place.

⁷¹ As early as 1928, members held meetings to establish themselves as a formal tribal government. In 1965, they tribe proceeded to reorganize themselves as a federal tribe under the Indian Reorganization Act. With the assistance of the BIA, they drafted a tribal constitution and by-laws, and elected a tribal council.

People of the Water: Squaxin Island Tribal History

According to anthropologist Marian Smith, the Puyallup, Nisqually, and other Salish people of the South Puget Sound originally called themselves by the names of their fishing territories, affirming that they “were supremely conscious” of every characteristic of the water and land surrounding them.⁷² Historically, they lived in small villages in sites located at head or mouth of a stream that entered into the Sound. These Native groups traveled upon the waterways with different types of canoes and fished extensively for salmon and other fish. They also gathered shellfish in addition to hunting in the open areas for deer and elk. Each village included four to six families in not more than three longhouses. A certain village site and the accompanying drainage usually had the same name and the people there called themselves by the village site name plus a suffix that meant “people of.”⁷³ Because of their cultural connection to the seven inlets, waterways, and tidelands, the Squaxin Island Tribe today refers to themselves as “People of the Water.” They are descended from the other, smaller village bands or groups of those who signed the Treaty of Medicine Creek on December 26, 1854.

Ezra Meeker, one of the first pioneers who came into the region on the Oregon Trail as a boy in the early 1850s, wrote about the peaceful relations between non-Indians and Indians at that time prior to the treaties. He also noted the extent the Indians fished for subsistence and trade. In his *Pioneer Reminiscences* written in 1905, Meeker claimed that less than 900 Indians showed up to sign the treaty in late December of 1854. A year

⁷² Marian Smith, *The Puyallup-Nisqually* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 2.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 3.

prior to this negotiation, the government created the Washington Territory. Meeker believed that nearly 800 of the Indians were Nisqually and Puyallup, and only about 100 represented the remaining seven or so tribes listed on the treaty. He admitted the Superintendent of Indian Affairs appointed his own chiefs to sign the treaties, proclaiming that “the whole proceeding was a farce.”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Governor Isaac Stevens negotiated the first three treaties with the Puget Sound and Olympic Peninsula tribes in a little over a month from December 1854 to late January of 1855.

Through treaty negotiations, Governor Stevens intended to open up the land for settlement and industrial development. Prior to these negotiations, he agreed with his advisor George Gibbs, the lawyer-ethnologist who served as a member of the treaty commission on Indian Affairs, that Native people should be able to continue fishing at their original sites, even though he thought farming would eventually supplant fishing.⁷⁵ The Medicine Creek Treaty commission believed the Indians would sign this first treaty without question, but they did not. It took three days of negotiation because the Indian groups did not want to move from their accustomed places near their villages. Eventually, they signed and ceded away 2,240,000 acres to the United States for \$32,500 to be paid over twenty years.⁷⁶ Articles I and II of the Medicine Creek Treaty include a descriptions of those lands and the three reservations reserved for the tribes to move onto

⁷⁴ Ezra Meeker, *Pioneer Reminiscences of Puget Sound and the Tragedy of Leschi* (Seattle: Lowman & Hanford Stationery and Printing Co., 1905), 232.

⁷⁵ American Friends Service Committee, “Uncommon Controversy: An Inquiry into the Treaty-Protected Fishing Rights of the Tribes of the Northwest Coast,” Published Report (National Congress of the American Indians, 1964), 21.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 23.

within one year after ratification.⁷⁷ Most importantly, the treaty contains a provision for the right of Indians to fish where they always fished prior to the treaty. Article III reads:

ART. III. The right of taking fish at all usual and accustomed grounds and station is further secured to said Indians in common with all citizens of the Territory, and of erecting temporary houses for the purpose of curing, together with the privilege of hunting, gathering roots and berries, and pasturing their horses on open and unclaimed lands: *Provided, however,* that they shall not take shell fish from any beds staked or cultivated by citizens, and that they shall alter all stallions not intended for breeding horses, and shall keep up and confine the latter.

According to anthropologist Barbara Lane, the evidence seems clear that the Medicine Creek Treaty Indians intended to continue to fish after their removal to the reservation. The government even assisted them in this process as Indian Agent Michael T. Simmons, a member of the original treaty commission, supplied fishing equipment to the Indians in order to fulfill the treaty provisions.⁷⁸

Several groups of Salish people lived on the seven inlets of the south Puget Sound at the time of the treaty, which named them separately (e.g. "...in the preamble of the treaty, viz., Squawksin, Steh-chass, T'Peeksin, Squi-aitl, and Sa-he-wamish tribes and bands of Indians..."⁷⁹). The government grouped some of the bands together and assigned them to an island reservation, which officials referred to as Klah-che-min Island. In the late 1850's, Indian agency headquarters on the island included a blacksmith

⁷⁷ These reservations were the Nisqually, Puyallup, and Squaxin Island.

⁷⁸ Barbara Lane, "Anthropological Report on the Identity, Treaty Status and Fisheries of the Squaxin Tribe of Indians," October 6, 1972: 12. Hired as an expert witness by the fourteen treaty tribes in *U.S. v. Washington*, Lane compiled historical and ethnographic information from archival sources about the history of the tribes affected by the case.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

station, a church, and a school. The reservation established on Klah-Che-Min Island then became referred to as 'Squaxin' Island, named after the first-mentioned group on the treaty who lived on the North Bay at what is now known as Case Inlet. All of the other small bands became known as one band: the "Squawksin" or "Squaxin."⁸⁰ There are several interpretations of Squawksin in the Southern Lushootseed language. One is that it means 'split apart,' where the land opened by force and made a bay. Another interpretation includes in between or refers to the piece of land or an isthmus used to cross over into another bay.⁸¹ The island itself is approximately 4 ½ miles long and ½ mile wide (approximately 1,496 acres).⁸²

Article VI of the Medicine Creek Treaty originally provided for larger reservations, but in the end the government reduced the amount of Indian land in order to accommodate non-Native settlers. This decision became one of several reasons for the onset of the so-called 'Indian War.' Although they considered them to be friendly Indians, the government confined the South Puget Sound people to the Squaxin Island reservation around the time of the second negotiated treaty for the duration of the war.⁸³

⁸⁰ Lane asserts, "...that the peoples of Henderson, Budd, Eld, Totten, and Hammersley inlets [of the South Puget Sound] did not suddenly become extinct, but rather that their names and numbers were thereafter subsumed under the single entry "Squawksin." Lane, 3.

⁸¹ Ibid, 1-2.

⁸² Today, as owned entirely by the Tribe, it exists as a safe haven for the people used for fishing, hunting, shellfish gathering, camping, and cultural activities. Only tribal members are allowed on the island, but the tribe's natural resources department can issue permits to non-tribal friends. Theresa Henderson, Andi VanderWal, and the Heritage and Culture Committee, "Squaxin Island," in *Native Peoples of the Olympic Peninsula*, 86.

⁸³ For the second treaty, the Treaty of Point Elliott, about 2,300 Native people met and signed, ceding 2,560 acres of land in exchange for goods, services and the retention of their fishing rights at *usual and accustomed grounds and stations*.

The War began in 1855 and lasted until 1856. Immediately after the first two treaty negotiations, Native people became dissatisfied with the treaty provisions; they had not received compensation in a timely manner and the idea of a reducing Indian lands even further than what had been originally negotiated led to considerable discontent among some within Medicine Creek Treaty bands who decided to fight with local militia and non-Native settlers in a series of brief skirmishes.⁸⁴ Nisqually Chief Leschi, in refusing to sign the treaty, claimed that Governor Stevens forged his and other Indians' signatures. Eventually, the government made him the scapegoat and hanged him for inciting violence and committing murder, which many Native and non-Native people at the time believed he did not commit.⁸⁵ Chief Leschi's execution served as an example to other Puget Sound Native people of what would happen if they rebelled against the new territorial government and violated the treaty agreement of remaining friendly to U.S. citizens.

After Medicine Creek: The Ebb and Flow of Early Treaty Rights Conflicts

Native people who signed the treaty considered hunting, fishing, and gathering at their usual and accustomed places as a necessary part of their present and future

⁸⁴ Congress ratified the Medicine Creek Treaty on March 3, 1855, but the Treaty of Point Elliott was not ratified by until March 8, 1859.

⁸⁵ For more information on Chief Leschi and the "Indian War" in Puget Sound, see Cecelia Svinth Carpenter, *Tears of Internment: The Indian History of Fox Island and the Puget Sound Indian War* (Tahoma Research Service, 1996); Lisa Blee, "Framing Chief Leschi: Narratives and the Politics of Historical Justice in the South Puget Sound," (PhD diss, University of Minnesota, 2008); and Richard Kluger, *The Bitter Waters of Medicine Creek: A Tragic Clash Between White and Native America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

economic and cultural survival.⁸⁶ After treaty negotiations, Indian agents attempted to force the Squaxin Island Indians to become farmers, but farming could not compete with their traditional ways of fishing, hunting, and shellfish and berry gathering. Not only was the land on the island unfit for farming, but Native people in the area were unaccustomed to a sedentary lifestyle as farmers. Since the Squaxin Island people could only fish and work off the reservation, by 1862, so few residents lived and remained on the island that the federal government moved the Indian agency headquarters to Puyallup near Tacoma. Under treaty provisions, the government allotted lands beginning 1874 on both the Squaxin Island and the nearby Skokomish reservations before the General Allotment Act of 1887.⁸⁷ Land allotment disrupted the traditional individual or family right to fishing locations and clam beds, but this did not deter the Squaxin Island people from exercising their treaty rights. Moreover, in the few decades after the treaty, non-Native settlers and the territorial and state governments left Indian fishing rights in the Pacific Northwest relatively undisturbed. Native people continued to fish as their main source of food and income. In fact, historian Alexandra Harmon asserts that into the 1880s, the Squaxin Island Indians survived entirely by fishing and occasional work for settlers.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ They fished mainly the five species of salmon and steelhead trout in the Puget Sound region. Fishing has always been a significant way of life, past and present, for Pacific Northwest Native people, for not only year-round subsistence purposes, but is also fundamental to their spirituality as demonstrated in cultural ceremonies (potlatch and other storytelling events and songs), as well as in their art forms.

⁸⁷ The Skokomish Reservation is located in the same county as the Squaxin Island Reservation; however, they spoke a different dialect of language, were considered to be a different cultural group (Twana), and negotiated with the federal government under the Point-No-Point Treaty of 1855, not the Medicine Creek Treaty.

⁸⁸Alexandra Harmon, 119.

By the end of the nineteenth century, conflicts over fishing rights between Indians, non-Indians, and state officials escalated. The earliest case in the Pacific Northwest where Native people attempted to seek an affirmation of their treaty rights through the courts occurred in 1887 when a homesteader named Frank Taylor built a fence around his land along a significant Indian fishing site on the Columbia River near the Yakama Reservation in the south central part of Washington. Since the fence blocked access to these fish, the Yakama Indians took the case all the way to the Washington Territory Supreme Court, which eventually ruled in their favor.⁸⁹ In 1897, the Lummi Indians in northern Washington attempted to assert their fishing rights and lost in *United States et al. v. Alaska Packers Association*.⁹⁰ Although the Lummi filed an appeal that eventually came before the U.S. Supreme Court, they lost when the Court dismissed the case.⁹¹ In the South Puget Sound, beginning in 1899 the State of Washington tried to lease the Squaxin Island tidelands rich with shellfish. Officials claimed they could do so since so few allottees remained on the island. To secure their allotment land, the Squaxin people who lived nearby across the island in Kamilche filed in court to retain full ownership of the tidelands and four years later, they won the right to control access to the island.⁹²

⁸⁹ Fay G. Cohen, *Treaties on Trial: The Continuing Controversy Over Northwest Indian Fishing Rights* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 54-55.

⁹⁰ *United States et al. v. Alaska Packers Association*, C.C. Wash. 79F 152 (1897).

⁹¹ Cesare Marino, "History of Western Washington Since 1846," *Handbook of North American Indians Book 7*, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 175.

⁹² Henderson, etc., 89. See also *U.S. v. O'Brien*, 170 F. 508 (W.D. Wash., 1909).

Squaxin Island and many other Puget Sound Native people maintained their traditional way of life into the twentieth century with few changes to their economy. Some Squaxin Island people worked in hop and berry fields and many of the women also made cedar baskets and doll to sell in the Port of Olympia where steamer ships came to Squaxin Island every Saturday morning to pick up the goods.⁹³ However, they continued to harvest salmon, smelt, herring, clams, and oysters in their usual and accustomed places. In fact, Barbara Lane quoted the 1904 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, which specifically mentioned the Squaxin Island people:

At Squaxin Island little or no improvement has ever been done since they received their allotments, and, while the land is not very valuable, still some of it could be used for farming purposes when cleared, and this is now being done. Very few of these Indians have lived on their lands, as it brought them no income. Their principle occupation is that of fishing for the market and working in logging camps.⁹⁴

A year after this report, the U.S. Supreme Court issued one of the most significant decisions related to Indian fishing rights. In *U.S. v. Winans*, the court upheld the provisions concerning the Yakama to fish at their usual and accustomed places, but created the ‘reserved rights doctrine.’⁹⁵ The court affirmed that the government did not *grant* treaty rights to Indians; they are rights that Indians already possessed and *reserved* via treaty for their present and future use. Yet, despite this doctrine in favor of Native people, the court acknowledged that Indians could still be subject to state fishing

⁹³ Ibid, 88.

⁹⁴ Annual Report, Commissioner of Indian Affairs (1904), 354. As quoted in Lane, 12.

⁹⁵ *U.S. v. Winans*, 198 U.S. 371 (1905).

regulations. This case would eventually become an important one in future treaty cases as it addressed treaty interpretation, i.e. what Indian treaty signers understood at the treaty negotiations.⁹⁶ The court confirmed the federal government had the responsibility to protect Indian fishing rights; however, federal officials continued to overlook state and local violations and the race-based harassment of Native people.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, other factors impacted Indian fishing and the exercise of treaty rights. In a short period of time, settlers and farmers, attracted to the vast forests, majestic mountains, oceans and waterways, and rich farmlands, flocked to the Pacific Northwest. With the invention of the salmon canning process in the nineteenth century, canneries around the Puget Sound increased exponentially. Construction began on the Northern Pacific Railway in 1870, which opened up the area even more to facilitate travel, trade, and settlement. Clear-cutting, logging, dam-building and farming all associated with industrial development negatively affected the salmon runs.

Like its policy with the Ojibwe, the federal government did little to intervene on the behalf of Pacific Northwest Native peoples during the late nineteenth century as the territory/state began to impose its conservation laws against Indian fishing at their traditional sites, many of which were located off-reservation.⁹⁷ The territorial government attempted to regulate all fishing beginning in the 1870s by limiting times and

⁹⁶ Cohen, 55-56.

⁹⁷ Marino, 175.

places where fishing could take place.⁹⁸ In 1915, the state passed its first fisheries code, which restricted certain methods of fishing, such as spearing and snaring, which Native people practiced frequently.⁹⁹ Regulations directly targeting Indian fishing reflected the state's elevated anti-Indian sentiment, propelled further by the federal government's apathy about the subject.

Throughout the early twentieth century, the federal government did very little to help resolve conflicts about Indian fishing. State game wardens frequently interfered with Indian fishermen who attempted to fish at their usual and accustomed places.¹⁰⁰ The following letter illustrates Native peoples' frustration at this continued harassment. On May 15, 1916, the Committee for Muckleshoot Indians wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Wash., D.C.:

We the Indians of the Muckleshoot reservation have for many years depended upon the salmon caught in Green River for a portion of our food supply. Now this year the State Authorities have forbidden our spearing salmon in this said Green River and threatened us with arrest and imprisonment if we were apprehended in taking fish in this manner.

Now according to the Article III of the Medicine Creek Treaty, we believe that the right to take fish on these grounds was secured to us and that we have a right to take salmon in said Green River for our own use without interference from the State.

⁹⁸ In 1889, Washington became a state and in 1890, the legislature created a Department of Fisheries which controlled both commercial and game fishing until 1932, when a State Game Department formed. See Cecelia Svinth Carpenter, "The Troubled Waters of Medicine Creek: An Investigation Into the Nature of the Fishing Rights Arising From the Medicine Creek Indian Treaty of 1854," (Master's thesis, Pacific Lutheran University, 1971), 40.

⁹⁹ Cohen, 43.

¹⁰⁰ For more detailed analysis of the state's activities to hinder Indian fishing, see Donald L. Parman, "Inconstant Advocacy: The Erosion of Indian Fishing Rights in the Pacific Northwest, 1933-1956," *Pacific Historical Review* 54, no. 2 (1984): 163-189.

We would respectfully request that this matter be taken up with the State Authorities and this fishing right which we believe is ours by treaty be protected.¹⁰¹

On July 25, 1916, the Superintendent of the Indian Agency responded to the Resident Farmer at the Puyallup Agency about the situation:

I request that you inform the Indians that if they should engage in fishing in any stream outside of the reservation they are subject to arrest and prosecution by the state authorities. This is in accordance with the recent decision of the State Courts and will be a law until that decision has been overruled...¹⁰²

Many Puget Sound tribal people sent similar letters to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, but their requests went unheeded. State officials and wardens interpreted the *Winans* case as free rein to issue citations and fines and conduct arrests if they caught Native people fishing without a state license. About the federal government's lack of involvement in treaty rights issues throughout the early part of the twentieth century Historian Alexandra Harmon states, "They [Indians] had sought or submitted to government protection. But instead of lending them strength, that protection had ensured

¹⁰¹ By Executive Order in 1857, the government established the Muckleshoot reservation for many of the other smaller bands mentioned in the treaty that were not subsumed under Squaxin. The village groups that eventually were combined to form the Muckleshoot Tribe signed both the Treaty of Point Elliott and the Treaty of Medicine Creek because they were so close in proximity. These bands lived near the White and Green Rivers just northeast of the Puyallup reservation near Tacoma. Letter from Bob James, John Newhauken, Frank Ross, and Joe Bill (Committee for Muckleshoot Indians), National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)—Pacific Alaska Region, Record Group 75, BIA Puyallup Indian Agency—Tacoma, Correspondence with the Muckleshoot Residential Farmer, 1912-20, Box 1, Series 4.

¹⁰² The ruling mentioned in this letter is not specifically cited, but is either: *State v. Towessnute*, 89 Wash 478 (1916) or *State v. Alexis*, 89 Wash 492 (1916), as described below. Letter from Chas. A. Reynolds, Agency Farmer, to T.B. Wilson, Superintendent, Cushman School, NARA, Record Group 75, BIA Puyallup Indian Agency—Tacoma, Correspondence with the Muckleshoot Residential Farmer, 1912-20, Box 2, Series 4.

and signified their weakness and low status.”¹⁰³ In 1916, officials arrested Towessnute, a Yakama Indian for fishing without a license and other infractions within a mile of a dam, all of which were against state regulations. In another 1916 case, officials also charged Alexis, a Lummi Indian, with violating state regulations. In both cases, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled against Native people, seeking to limit Indian fishing for conservation purposes. The court, viewing Native people to be subject to the same state laws as non-Native people, declined to acknowledge Indian fishing at their ‘usual and accustomed places’ as stipulated by treaty.

The year before these court cases, the state passed the 1915 fish code, claiming it necessary to protect the salmon runs; however, Native people did not cause of the problem of salmon depletion. Numerous operating salmon canneries and other industrial development activities destroyed the runs. By then, sport fishermen entered the scene in great numbers, which also negatively affected the runs. In competition with Native people and sport fishermen, European immigrants and American settlers who depended on fishing for food and income fished without restraint, resulting in overfishing.¹⁰⁴ Still, despite the unjust application of the state fishing code to Native fishing, Native people attempted to abide by it; however, state game wardens rigorously set out to seize equipment and issued citation after citation. On November 4, 1919, the Superintendent

¹⁰³ Harmon, 189.

¹⁰⁴ Unlike Native people who fished with traditional conservation methods in mind, these new fishermen did not and went further out to sea where the salmon originated, catching immature fish in large numbers. The salmon did not have the opportunity to reach the inland rivers where Indian people typically fished. Cohen, 41-42.

of Indian Affairs conveyed to the Indian Agency Farmer in Auburn just how dismal the situation had become for Indian subsistence:

The law of 1915 permits the Indian to fish for his own use in any stream on the reservation and in streams within five miles of his reservation, except within four hundred feet of a hatchery. They are permitted to spread their nets not farther than one-third across the stream. Contrary to this law, the wardens are depriving the Indians of their natural and lawful means of supplying themselves with their winter's store of food...¹⁰⁵

As the 1930s approached, Pacific Northwest Native people increasingly experienced state interference with their fishing rights (in particular during the salmon runs when they worked with weirs, canoes, spears, fish traps, and nets). The Superintendents of the Indian Agencies deferred to the state rules and regulations and intervened in very few instances. On December 31, 1928, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and Superintendent William B. Sams of the Taholah Indian Agency on the central west coast both wrote in response to a letter from the Assistant U.S. Attorney to the Attorney General at Washington, D.C. Their concerns came from Indians at Quinault and Squaxin Island who requested the U.S. intervene on their behalf against private companies who monopolized Indian fishing sites.¹⁰⁶ The Assistant U.S. Attorney had taken the position that the Indians did not have a right to fish in these particular sites. In response, Sams argued, "It is clear...that the State of Washington has not the authority to

¹⁰⁵ NARA, Record Group 75, BIA Puyallup Indian Agency—Tacoma, Correspondence with the Muckleshoot Residential Farmer, 1912-20, Box 2, Series 4.

¹⁰⁶ See *United States v. McGowan*, 2 F. Supp. 426 (W.D. Wash. 1931) (Quinault).

exclude the Indians from fishing,” based on two U.S Supreme Court cases, *Seufert Bros. & Co. v. U.S.* and the *Winans* case of 1905.¹⁰⁷ He further contended:

If Governor Stevens had declined to grant their [Indians] request to fish at their usual and accustomed places they never would have signed the treaty...Fishing is their living. 90% of the food of the Indians of the western part of Washington is fish they take from the streams. To give the state authority to close the streams of Western Washington to all fishing including the Indians for periods of eight, ten, fifteen or twenty years would be nothing less than a nullification of the treaty...¹⁰⁸

Sams directed the Office of Indian Affairs “to influence the Department of Justice to assist the Indians in their fight with the State of Washington for the preservation of their rights to fish in their usual and accustomed places.”¹⁰⁹ However, neither the Department of Justice nor the Office of Indian Affairs took any action on behalf of Native people whose continued livelihood depended on fishing in their traditional off-reservation sites as prohibited by the state.

On May 2, 1929, Supervisor Chas R. Pollock of the Washington Department of Fisheries and Game sent out a general notice of Chapter 106, Laws of 1929, which allowed the director of fisheries and game “to exercise all the powers and perform all the

¹⁰⁷ *Seufert Bros. Co. v. United States*, 249 U.S. (1919) (Yakama). In both *Seufert* and *Winans*, the court defined “usual and accustomed” grounds as places where Indian fished before the execution of the treaties.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Superintendent W.B. Sams, Taholah Indian Agency to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington, D.C. dated December 31, 1928, NARA, Record Group 75, Western Washington Agency, Tribal Operations Branch, General Correspondence (Old Taholah/Tulalip), ca. 1914-51, IRA – 921, Box 258.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 3.

duties now vested in and required to be performed by the fisheries board.”¹¹⁰ Indian Superintendent Sams subsequently wrote to Governor Hartley reminding him of Article III of the Medicine Creek Treaty, as well as two U.S. Supreme Court cases that provided for Indians their right to fish. He conveyed that the Indians wanted the Governor assist them “to secure consideration by the State officers and that they be permitted to take fish for their own use and that of their families from their usual and accustomed fishing grounds. They are willing to abide by the rules and regulations in regard to open and closed seasons...”¹¹¹ This statement proves the willingness of Indian people to negotiate and follow the state laws of not selling fish commercially during closed seasons, as long as they would not be arrested if fishing for their own purposes. During this time, the change in federal policy toward Native people may have influenced Superintendent Sams to further address the issue treaty rights on behalf of the Indians more so than his predecessors. Four years after Congress passed the Citizenship Act of 1924, the Institute for Government Research published the Merriam Report. The Merriam Report detailed the poor economic and health status of tribes and critiqued the government’s previous policies of assimilation and land allotment. As head of an Indian agency, Sams most likely read the report and received confirmation that Indians heavily relied on the exercise of their treaty rights for subsistence.

¹¹⁰ Notice dated May 2, 1929, NARA, Record Group 75, Western Washington Agency, Tribal Operations Branch, General Correspondence (Old Taholah/Tulalip), ca. 1914-51, IRA – 921, Box 258.

¹¹¹ Letter dated May 9, 1929, NARA, Record Group 75, Western Washington Agency, Tribal Operations Branch, General Correspondence (Old Taholah/Tulalip), ca. 1914-51, IRA – 921, Box 258.

Yet, Sams' later correspondence indicates his mounting disapproval of Indians taking fish for commercial reasons during a closed season because it violated state law. In one instance, he responded to a letter dated March 15, 1930 from Governor Hartley, who discussed the recent meeting with Indians from various Western Washington tribes and Charles Maybury, the Director of Fisheries and Game. This letter came after the arrest of Chehalis Indians. They determined that Indians were to be "accorded every privilege...under the Treaties; that the state officers would not molest any Indians taking fish for their own use [only]."¹¹² To appease Maybury, Superintendent Sams agreed to Indian fishing in their "well known and noted fishing grounds," but would do anything in his "power to have the Indians abide by the state law in all of their fishing outside of the reservation."¹¹³

In the early 1930's, N.O. Nicholson arrived as the new Superintendent at the Taholah Indian Agency in Hoquiam, which is located on the central west coast of Washington State. His initial opinion about fishing seemed to be more accommodating toward Indians, pronouncing that Indian fishermen had the right to take fish and do with their catch whatever they pleased. On April 7, 1931, he wrote to the Sheriff of Thurston County who arrested Nisqually Indian Ernest Ross for catching fish *on* the reservation and intending to sell them to the East Side Fish Company in the State of Oregon. Citing the State of Washington Supreme Court case *Pioneer Packing Co. v. Jack Winslow* (a

¹¹² Letter to Charles Maybury dated March 19, 1930 re: Chehalis Indians arrested by Fisheries Department and the return of a Quinault Indian's equipment, NARA, Record Group 75, Western Washington Agency, Tribal Operations Branch, General Correspondence (Old Taholah/Tulalip), ca. 1914-51, IRA – 921, Box 258.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 2.

Quinault Indian), Nicholson defended Ross stating that the case “clearly sustains the Indians’ right to take fish and to sell and dispose of them in markets open to such sale, and that in no event is there any question as to the right of the Indian to take and have possession of fish.”¹¹⁴ With time, Nicholson’s stance changed. In 1933, he requested the Indian Agency Superintendents in Washington to meet with the Food and Game Fish Departments to come to a resolution to “Indian problem.” Although Nicholson believed in the right for Indians take game and fish for their own food needs, he did not believe in granting them further “special rights” to violate state and county game laws.¹¹⁵ Superintendent Nicholson realized that Indians needed to fish and hunt as always had done so in years past as they found it “difficult to adjust themselves top the rapidly changing conditions of the white man’s civilization,” but with limitations that their hunting and fishing should only extend “in and near their homes for their own use.”¹¹⁶

In the 1930s, the Great Depression brought economic devastation for many people across the board, but Native people already knew what it was like to struggle. They could always rely on hunting, fishing and gathering to feed their families. However, as state law enforcement grew more aggressive, Native people suffered further by having their equipment confiscated, being jailed, or paying fines. Many took the risk of

¹¹⁴ See *Pioneer Packing Co. v. Winslow*, 159 Wash. 655, 294 P. 557 (1930). Letter to Sheriff of Thurston County dated April 7, 1931, NARA, Record Group 75, Western Washington Agency, Tribal Operations Branch, General Correspondence (Old Taholah/Tulalip), ca. 1914-51, IRA – 921, Box 258.

¹¹⁵ Letter to Governor Martin dated February 7, 1933, in response to the Governor’s February 4th letter to Superintendent Nicholson (unobtained), NARA, Record Group 75, Western Washington Agency, Tribal Operations Branch, General Correspondence (Old Taholah/Tulalip), ca. 1914-51, IRA – 921, Box 258.

¹¹⁶ Letter to Governor Martin dated May 18, 1933, NARA, Record Group 75, Western Washington Agency, Tribal Operations Branch, General Correspondence (Old Taholah/Tulalip), ca. 1914-51, IRA – 921, Box 258.

punishment out of necessity and some were outright defiant, adamantly asserting their rights stipulated by treaty. Some IRA tribal reservation councils, fueled in part by the era of John Collier's administration as Commissioner for the BIA, complained to the federal government that non-Native people came onto their reservation to hunt and fish.¹¹⁷ In 1935, the Chehalis Reservation Council wrote to Collier to call "attention that white people come in hunting, fishing and trapping on our Reservation, which we don't want."¹¹⁸ Collier deferred to Nicholson, who then made a weak proposal directing the Chehalis and other tribes to inform encroachers that they would be issued a citation if they continued to hunt and fish on reservation lands. Without any formal policing, the Chehalis and other tribes could not enforce their own fishing regulations against non-Indians who violated them.

¹¹⁷ Under Franklin D. Roosevelt, John Collier served as Commissioner of the BIA from 1933-1934. He is best known as a major figure for Indian reform as a result of the published results of the Meriam Report. Meriam, Lewis, ed. *The Problem of Indian Administration: Report of a Survey made at the request of Honorable Hubert Work, Secretary of the Interior, and submitted to him February 1, 1928* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1928). The report contained information to help pass the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934. Many of the Puget Sound tribes accepted the IRA: Skokomish, Nisqually, Squaxin Island, Tulalip, Port Madison, Puyallup, Muckleshoot, and Swinomish Reservations and the Skagit-Suiattle and Nooksack districts. Many did not. Harmon writes about the lack of any real bearing of the IRA on Puget Sound tribes: "The IRA embodied simplistic and inflexible notions about Indians, tribes, and tribal membership— notions that had little relevance to the diverse, scattered, and interconnected people around Puget Sound who considered themselves Indians." Harmon, 198-199.

¹¹⁸ Letter to John Collier stamped received March 18, 1935, NARA, Record Group 75, Western Washington Agency, Tribal Operations Branch, General Correspondence (Old Taholah/Tulalip), ca. 1914-51, IRA – 921, Box 258.

Tribal councils encouraged individual Indians on behalf of their tribes to appeal to the courts, like Sampson Tulee did in 1939 and members of the Makah Tribe in 1951.¹¹⁹ However, many Native tribal groups in the region did not immediately organize a more formal government after passage of the IRA. According to Alexandra Harmon, several groups did not create a constitution and by-laws for many years after, as it had “little initial impact on Indians’ conceptions of themselves or on community relations around Puget Sound.”¹²⁰ In 1942, the Nisqually people formed a council. On December 4, 1942, Superintendent Floyd Phillips of the Taholah Indian Agency reminded members of the Nisqually council that, “Accordingly, [in view of both cases *Tulee* and *Makah Tribe*] you are advised that all fishing done by Indians outside of the Reservation boundaries must be done in accordance with Washington State laws and regulations, except that Indians are not required to pay fishing license fee while fishing in usual and accustomed fishing places.”¹²¹ He then warned them he would instruct game wardens to check Nisqually fishing areas frequently.

¹¹⁹ *Tulee v. Washington*, 315 U.S. 681 (1942). In *Makah v. Schoettler*, 192 F.2d 224 (9th Cir. 1951), the Makah Tribe on the northern coast of the Olympic Peninsula brought suit against the state’s interference with Indians who netted in their usual and accustomed off-reservation fishing places. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals struck down the ban on net fishing they claimed was necessary for conservation. See Cohen, 61-63.

¹²⁰ Harmon, 204-205. She lists the Nisqually, Squaxin Island, and Muckleshoot, among a few others, who did not have “wealth-generation resources” as motivation for formal organization. Harmon also claims that with formal organization, tribes had to commit to demarcating tribal membership, which in this region due to the small, overlapping communities and history of trade and kinship ties, made many Native people uncomfortable.

¹²¹ NARA, Record Group 75, Western Washington Agency, Tribal Operations Branch, General Correspondence (Old Taholah/Tulalip), ca. 1914-51, IRA – 921-End, Box 259.

The off-reservation fishing situation did not improve for all Puget Sound Tribes as the U.S. entered into World War II. Indian economies changed as Native men and women joined the armed forces and many worked in home front factories. In the Pacific Northwest, navy ship yards and the Boeing airplane company employed many Puget Sound Indian people. Although the war took them away from their tribal communities, many remained active in hunting, fishing, and gathering despite possible arrests and fines. During and after the war, more tribes began to formally organize under the IRA, which impacted Indian fishing in various ways. With formal organization, tribes became better equipped to respond to complaints against the state; however, they also made complaints against each other. In a series of letters, Indian Superintendent Phillips addressed complaints made by the Nisqually members about other tribes and bands party to the Medicine Creek Treaty, namely the “Skokomish, Puyallup and Squaxin Island bands...[who] are now coming onto the Nisqually reservation and are fishing in the Nisqually river which runs wholly within the reservation boundaries...they have no tribal or treaty rights to fish there.”¹²² It is evident from this correspondence that tribes were not all in agreement about territory boundaries; the Nisqually made territorial claims in order to conserve fish for their own tribal people.¹²³

¹²² Letter dated January 15, 1943 from Floyd Phillips, Superintendent of the Taholah Indian Agency to Kenneth Simmons, District Council, U.S. Interior Department-Indian Service, NARA, Record Group 75, Western Washington Agency, Tribal Operations Branch, General Correspondence (Old Taholah/Tulalip), ca. 1914-51, IRA – 921, Box 259.

¹²³ This struggle over who has the right to fish what still exists today with regard to Medicine Creek Treaty tribes as evident in recent years with regard to tribal geoduck negotiations and regulations. Personal interview with Joe Seymour, Squaxin Island Tribe Geoduck Diver, October 31, 2012.

Despite these local disputes, tribes continued to band together to resist a new policy aimed at terminating the federal responsibility to tribes. In 1945, John Collier resigned as Commissioner and whispers of termination became louder in Congress. According to Alexandra Harmon, many of the larger Puget Sound tribes rejected the idea of termination for fear of losing more land and fisheries, but Squaxin Island found it acceptable as long as they could continue on with exercising their treaty rights.¹²⁴ In 1953, Congress passed the House Concurrent Resolution 108 to terminate federal responsibility to tribes and Public Law 280 (PL-280), granting states criminal jurisdiction over tribes within reservation lands. Congress also designated funds to relocate Native people from reservations to urban areas. Although PL-280 exempted fishing rights, increased state restrictions on their treaty rights led to further citations, arrests, court appearances, fines, and equipment confiscation. This federal policy became the primary reason for Native people to form new collective organizations, such as the Intertribal Council of Western Washington Indians in 1954, the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) in 1961, and the Survival of the American Indian Association (SAIA) in 1964.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Harmon, 209. She notes that most positive responses came from “small, poor, and unorganized” communities who did not receive much help from the federal government to begin with.

¹²⁵ Harmon discusses the dynamics of relationships between the federal government and inter-tribal organizations formed in the early to mid-twentieth century in this region, which she claims remained initially weak. One of the reasons may have been the difficulties of Pacific Northwest Native people to commit to a cohesive, singular tribal identity as many people had affiliations with multiple tribes and other racial groups; therefore, tribal membership criteria was often difficult to determine. With such complexity in the history of Native relations around the Sound, the state challenged the existence of certain tribes, such as the Muckleshoots, who claimed to be treaty Indians under the treaty with the Duwamish, Suquamish, and other Upper Puyallup bands on the White River and the Sound within twenty miles of Seattle. For Muckleshoot history, see <http://www.muckleshoot.nsn.us/about-us/overview.aspx>

In the next dramatic turn of events occurring in the Pacific Northwest, these organizations turned out to be vital in the battle over Indian fishing.

Enough Is Enough: The 1960s Pacific Northwest Fish-Ins

Throughout the 1950s, South Puget Sound tribes responded to state interference of their fishing rights with attempts at “conciliation and compromise,” as the numbers of Indians who fished illegally at that point remained small.¹²⁶ Those who did fish did so out of economic necessity; some had a political agenda, refusing to accept the state’s overzealous attempts to curtail their fishing granted under the treaties. In 1954, when Puyallup tribal members Robert Satiacum and James Young fished in the river, state law enforcement arrested them. The lower courts convicted them and they appealed to the Washington State Supreme Court, resulting in a 1957 split decision affirming the Puyallups’ right to fish off the reservation. Yet, the court allowed the state to increase its surveillance and continue with its program of citations, arrests and equipment seizure.¹²⁷

Nevertheless, not long after in 1963, the State Supreme Court dismissed the *Satiacum* case in *Washington v. McCoy*, allowing the state department to close fishing seasons for conservation purposes. The state conveyed the impossibility of getting the tribes to cooperate with them about off-reservation fishing. As a result of *McCoy*, the state became further motivated to act against the tribes; officials withdrew any previous

¹²⁶ Gabriel Chrisman, “The Fish-in Protests at Franks Landing,” Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/fish-ins.htm>.

¹²⁷ *State v. Satiacum*, 50 Washington Reports 2d 513 (1957).

agreements with regard to off-reservation sites they may have had with other tribes. The state departments used the media to paint a bad picture of Native people, referring to them as ‘anti-conservation’ and ‘rebels’ who just wanted to take all the fish for themselves. The state falsely claimed that if Indians were allowed to pursue their treaty rights, there would be no limit on the amount of fish they could take from the waters.¹²⁸

The state cited conservation as the primary reason that necessitated their excessive authority over Indian fishing. However, with the post-war boom propelling the tourism industry in Washington State, it became more profitable for the state to ensure the conservation of fish in Washington waters for sportsmen and tourists. A vocal opponent of Indian fishing, the Washington State Sportsmen’s Council (WSSC) formed in 1934, in response to non-Native concerns over the state’s progressively restrictive fishing conservation measures. The organization strongly advocated against both on and off the reservation Indian fishing because they believed that since Indians took all the fish, they caused the increase in state conservation laws. The WSSC particularly opposed the treaty phrase, “in common with all citizens of the Territory,” which they took to mean that all citizens (Indians included) had the right to fish equally, and it did not grant Indians special fishing rights.¹²⁹ However, by the 1940s and into the 1950s, the WSSC made few formal resolutions to curtail Indian fishing despite the steady rise of Indian challenges to state restrictions into the 1960s.

¹²⁸ Chrisman.

¹²⁹ Cohen, 120.

As a result of Indian challenges, in June of 1962 the WSSC decided to debate Resolution No. 6 raised at the previous March meeting. This resolution indicated what WSSC and many non-Native people believed with regard to Indian fishing at the time. It proposed the purchase of all hunting and fishing rights under the Medicine Creek Treaty.¹³⁰ The WSSC declared:

“the alleged rights of Indians to carry out these practices [fishing and hunting]...without regard to State Conservation Laws...are detrimental to the people of the State of Washington and the entire U.S...the situation is becoming so aggravated and non-Indians so incensed over the defiant attitude and acts of a minority of irresponsible Indians...it is feared bloodshed will result unless remedial action is taken promptly...”¹³¹

The WSSC further proposed to petition State Senators and Congressmen to define the degree of Indian blood of those hunting and fishing to ensure they are at least 25% Indian and to terminate the division of treaties as they relate to fishing and hunting outside reservations at usual and accustomed places. According to the WSSC Indian Affairs Committee meeting minutes, it appears that although the Committee included no Native people, a number of local Native people attended the meeting to dispute the resolution. The Committee had previously decided to provide tribes with ninety days to adopt a conservation plan of their own. The Native people present at the meeting responded it was too short of a deadline. The following statement of a WSSC member represents the

¹³⁰ Similarly, two years later, the State petitioned Congress in 1964 to resolve the controversy; therefore, U.S. Senate Joint Resolution 171, if passed, would have extinguished the tribes' right to fish off the reservation through purchase. It did not pass due to a lack of factual information about the effects of Indian fishing on the salmon industry. Cohen, 171-172.

¹³¹ Resolution No. 6 discussed at 112th Quarterly Meeting, General Session Meeting Minutes, Washington State Sportsmen's Council Records, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Accession No. 2580-001, Box 2, Folder No. Min. 1962.

general WSSC attitude about the Indians' reply. He responded, "The real problem is that the Indians cannot get along [enough to meet the ninety-day deadline]."¹³²

In reality, WSSC members did not always agree since there appeared to be much debate and dissent with the proposed resolution. It seemed the WSSC adopted Resolution No. 6 as amended and as substituted in some milder form, without the blood quantum requirement.¹³³ In 1964, the WSSC passed a similarly malicious resolution to direct the state department to destroy the fish runs on those rivers where Native people organized fish-in protests by this time. This influential organization, with members numbering between 20,000 and 30,000 statewide, gave the State Department of Fish further backing to restrict Indian fishing.¹³⁴

For many Native people in the South Puget Sound and Pacific Northwest, enough was enough. On December 23, 1963, Indian protesters, many of whom eventually formed the Survival for the American Indian Association (SAIA), marched on the state capital in Olympia against state and public backlash over the exercise of their fishing rights. The consistent lack of tribal and federal response to assist those individual tribal members arrested at this march also went unnoticed. The inter-tribal SAIA became an instrumental organization in the defense of Indian fishing rights. Sioux-Assiniboine activist Hank Adams and others from the NIYC, including local Nisqually and Tulalip people Al and Maiselle Bridges, Billy Frank Sr. and Jr., and Janet McCloud, founded the

¹³² Indian Affairs Committee Report dated June 16, 1962, Washington State Sportsmen's Council Records, University of Washington Libraries.

¹³³ 112th Quarterly Meeting, General Session Meeting Minutes, Washington State Sportsmen's Council Records, University of Washington Libraries.

¹³⁴ See Chrisman.

SAIA.¹³⁵ Their protests, called “fish-ins,” garnered media attention and drew some major celebrities, like Marlon Brando, Jane Fonda, and Dick Gregory, to the Pacific Northwest to show their support of Indian fishing rights.¹³⁶

Throughout 1964-1965, state law enforcement conducted raids and arrested many Indian protesters at Frank’s Landing on the Nisqually River.¹³⁷ In 1965, the protests became progressively confrontational and violent. Many Native people needed legal representation for their defense. In 1966, the U.S. Justice Department decided to test the waters by representing a few Native people in their legal cases arising from the fish-ins throughout the 1960s, but such actions were infrequent. In fact, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Commissioner responded to Janet McCloud’s request for federal intervention on behalf of arrested Indians with the statement, “Much of our effort has been directed at preventing litigation rather than defending Indians after their arrest... We believe that effective tribal regulation of treaty fishing rights will go far toward resolving the

¹³⁵ See Chapter Three for a description of Maiselle’s donation of her collection to the Squaxin Island Museum, Library and Research Center in 2011.

¹³⁶ At one protest, actor Marlon Brando was even arrested for net fishing on the Puyallup River and held for two hours before his release. The next day, he appeared with 1,000 Native people to march at the state capital in Olympia before meeting with Governor Albert Rossellini, which did little to motivate the state to back down. See Chrisman. For more information on Hank Adams, the SAIA, and the NIYC, see Paul Rosier, *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Daniel Cobb and Loretta Fowler, eds., *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and Activism Since 1900* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007); and the David E. Wilkins, *The Hank Adams Reader: An Exemplary Native Activist and the Unleashing of Indigenous Sovereignty* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2011).

¹³⁷ For detailed events from the perspective of the Frank family, see Charles Wilkinson, *Messages from Frank’s Landing: A Story of Salmon, Treaties, and the Indian Way* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).

differences...”¹³⁸ Without the federal government’s willingness to intervene, the tribes finally decided to step in as the rate of arrested tribal members continued to multiply.¹³⁹

In *Puyallup Tribe v. The Department of Game, et. al*, (1968), the court initially favored the state in its suit brought against Nisqually and Puyallup tribes to regulate Indian fishing argued by the state to be necessary for conservation purposes.¹⁴⁰ The tribes appealed to the Washington State Supreme Court, which affirmed in part the trial court’s decision. In “Puyallup II,” the case went to the U.S. Supreme Court, which reversed the State Court’s decision. The Court recognized the state net ban discriminated against Native people because it only served to open the river up to non-Indian sport fishermen. The Court expressed the need for the state to accommodate Indian fishing, but also acknowledged that Indian fishing should not be allowed to destroy the runs. The state decided to allocate 45% of steelhead to Indians and 55% to non-Indians. In “Puyallup III,” the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the allocation. Similarly, in nearby in Oregon, in 1969 the U.S. District Court recognized the fishing rights of tribes were

¹³⁸ Letter dated November 4, 1964 from Commissioner of the BIA to Janet McCloud, President-Survival of American Indians Association, NARA, Record Group 75, Law and Order Correspondence and Reports, 1962-1968, Box 314, File Hunting and Fishing Rights 1964.

¹³⁹ At first, tribal councils such as the Nisqually Tribal Council were hesitant to become involved because they considered the small number of protesters to be “renegades;” however, as the number of member protesters increased, they felt they had to intervene on their behalf. Mike Conant, “Indian Band Defies Game Department,” *Daily Olympian*, January 22, 1964, accessed February 5, 2013, <http://www.yelmhistoryproject.com/?p=640>.

¹⁴⁰ *Puyallup Tribe v. The Department of Game, et. al*, 391 U.S. 392 (1968). This case was the first in what is referred to as the “Puyallup Trilogy.” Citations for Puyallup II and III are: *Washington Game Dept. v. Puyallup Tribe*, 414 U. S. 44 (1973) and *Puyallup Tribe, Inc. v. Department of Game*, 433 U.S. 165 (1977). For more information, see Pamela Madson and William Koss, *Washington Salmon: Understanding Allocation* (Olympia, WA: House of Representatives, Office of Program Research, 1988), http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/salmon/wa_salmon_understanding_alloc.pdf.

separate and distinct from those of non-Indians; however, tribes were only allowed to take a “fair and equitable share of all fish which it [the state of Oregon] permits to be taken from a given run.”¹⁴¹ The Courts ultimately allowed the states to regulate Indian fishing in conjunction with tribal fisheries.

Meanwhile, in the mid-1960s, Ojibwe people also protested against state interference of their treaty fishing rights and filed court cases of their own. Buck Chosa and Fred Dakota of the Keweenaw Bay Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe in Upper Michigan heard about the protests and fish-ins in the Pacific Northwest. Determined to do something about their own Ojibwe fishing rights, they met with tribal officials, one of whom was tribal chairman Bill Jondreau, to initiate similar protests. On June 1, 1965, state officials arrested Jondreau for illegally taking four lake trout out of Keweenaw Bay. He cited his treaty rights, pled not guilty, but the trial court convicted him.¹⁴² After the

¹⁴¹ *Sohappy v. Smith*, 302 F.Supp. 899 (D.Or. 1969), as quoted in Cohen 80-81.

¹⁴² *People v. Jondreau*, 384 Mich. 539 (1971) affirmed based on a previous case involving Buck Chosa’s father fishing off-reservation in 1930, *People v. Chosa*, 233 N.W. 205 (Mich. 1930). See Charles Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle*, 156-157.

court of appeals affirmed the trial court's decision, Jondreau appealed to the Supreme Court of Michigan, which reversed his conviction in 1971.¹⁴³

In 1970, Puget Sound tribes took further action in defense against the often-violent scare tactics by state law enforcement.¹⁴⁴ Tribes desired to see the entire treaty fishing issue, with its past history of inconsistent court decisions, resolved once and for all. After one particular violent protest, seven tribes encouraged the U.S. Department of Justice to file a lawsuit against the State of Washington in U.S. District Court. Later, seven more tribes entered the lawsuit against the state, although three tribes considered not yet federally recognized also awaited approval to join in the proceedings. Judge George H. Boldt would hear the case and decide if the tribes could continue their treaty rights after a century of state interference. After three and a half years of background preparation, legal research, and testimony, Judge Boldt issued his momentous decision.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ A number of cases involving the treaty rights of the Ojibwe people in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan followed throughout the 1970s, such as *State of Wisconsin v. Gurnoe*, 53 Wis.2d 390 (1971) and *People of Michigan v. LeBlanc*, 248 N.W. 2d 199 (1976). Decisions in these cases continued on into the 1980s, eventually culminating into what has been referred to as the "Voigt Decision," in which the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals ruling affirmed the exercise of off-reservation Ojibwe treaty rights in 1983 until the final judgment in 1990. See *Lac Courte Oreilles v. Voigt*, 700 F.2d 341 (7th Cir. 1983). For some more specific information on Ojibwe treaty rights in general, see Ronald N. Satz, *Chippewa Treaty Rights*; Larry Nesper, *The Walleye War: The Struggle for Ojibwe Spearfishing and Treaty Rights* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); and Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) Publications, including Charlie Otto Rasmussen, *Ojibwe Journeys: Treaties, Sandy Lake & the Waabanong Run* (Ashland, WI: GLIFWC, 2003). For more publications, see <http://www.glifwc.org/publications/index.html>.

¹⁴⁴ For further details about the fish-ins, see Chrisman; Cohen, 69-82.

¹⁴⁵ Meanwhile, in 1973 the High Court reviewed the Puyallup case again and struck down the state ban on Puyallup net fishing, but again allowed the states to regulate Indian fishing for conservation purposes. The state agreed to allow Indians 45% of the harvestable runs of wild steelhead. Cohen, 81-82. For case details, see *Washington Game Dept. v. Puyallup Tribe*, 414 U.S. 44 (1973).

U.S. v. Washington

On August 27, 1973, Federal District Court Judge George H. Boldt ruled in *U.S. v. Washington* for the fourteen Plaintiff tribes to continue to regulate and manage their own fishing rights under five treaties.¹⁴⁶ Judge Boldt's decision consisted of the following: (1) the treaties reserved hunting, fishing and gathering rights distinct from other non-Native United States citizens; (2) Indians under treaty could fish off-reservation in those usual and accustomed places; (3) Indians had reserved rights to a fair share (fifty percent) of harvestable fish on the reservation if taken for ceremonial or subsistence reasons;¹⁴⁷ (4) the state had a claim on off-reservation fishing only for conservation purposes but it could not limit treaty rights to state-preferred times and fishing methods; (5) the state classification of steelhead as game fish restricted Indian fishing rights and violated treaties; and (6) the fourteen tribes under the treaty with three more awaiting federal approval, were entitled to share in this particular decision.¹⁴⁸ The tribes put their faith in the judicial system to confirm their reserved rights to fish under the treaties and prevailed.

Squaxin Island Tribal member Cal Peters testified in *U.S. v. Washington*. According to Alexandra Harmon, Peters became one of sixteen tribal members from all of the fourteen tribes in the case who took the stand to testify about tribal fishing, Indian practices and culture, and the future of tribes. He answered questions related to their

¹⁴⁶ *United States v. Washington*, 384 F. Supp. 312 (W.D. Wash. 1974).

¹⁴⁷ Judge Boldt said that when tribes agreed to fish "in common with" citizens, they did not receive a right from non-Indians but thought they were going to share access to their resources with each other.

¹⁴⁸ Marino, 176-177.

Squaxin Island tribal identity, blood degree of ‘Indianness,’ and his views on tribal membership.¹⁴⁹ Peters and the other witnesses provided testimony about their tribal histories in order to prove their modern tribes legitimately descended from the original treaty tribes. In a 2006 interview, Peters claimed the state’s attorneys tried to get Native witnesses to misquote themselves by asking the same questions repeatedly until Judge Boldt finally put a stop to the state’s line of questioning.¹⁵⁰ The state attorneys attempted to argue that since individual Indians and tribes were not the same as those who lived and existed during the treaty era, they should not be allowed to have those particular treaty rights today. Judge Boldt rejected their argument.

By affirming the treaty rights of the three additional tribes, Judge Boldt made BIA recognition a condition of claiming treaty rights, which compelled tribes to define their own membership criteria.¹⁵¹ On one hand, what became known as the ‘Boldt Decision’ confirmed tribal peoples’ connection to their ancestors as signatories to the treaties and protectors of their treaty rights; on another, the decision also determined their modern legal and political identities as members of tribes officially ‘recognized’ by the federal government. Under the law, the latter supersedes any spiritual or cultural connection to treaty fishing experienced by a descendent not enrolled in a tribe. In this scenario, the descendent is excluded from exercising any treaty rights because he or she does not meet the criteria as an ‘official’ tribal member protected under the treaties. These same criteria

¹⁴⁹ Harmon, 235-244.

¹⁵⁰ Cal Peters, Interview with Rick Peters, *The Squaxin Island Tribe and Their Relationship to the Environment*, directed by Thomas McCullough (Shelton, WA: Squaxin Island Tribe Museum, Library and Research Center, 2006).

¹⁵¹ Harmon, 242-244.

apply to the Mille Lacs Band and other enrolled Ojibwe people affected by the court decisions securing their hunting, fishing, and gathering rights.

While Pacific Northwest tribes celebrated this decision, some Native people and non-Native people on both sides criticized the compromise. Fay Cohen notes that Native people believed the Court decision should have gone further in affirming their treaty rights.¹⁵² The tribes created the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission to manage Indian fisheries and monitor harvest runs. However, tribes still received backlash from non-Indian fishermen and resistance from state officials, who appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1979, the Court upheld most of Judge Boldt's decision, with the exception of including all fish caught off the reservation in the 50% allocation.

The Squaxin Island Tribal people continued to be met with resistance when attempting to gather shellfish in the 1980s. In 1989, the tribe filed suit against the State of Washington in the Ninth District Court, citing the 'Boldt Decision.' In the "Shellfish Case," as it has become known, the tribe requested the court to interpret the shellfish provision of Article III, which is: "The right of taking fish at all usual and accustomed grounds and station is further secured to said Indians in common with all citizens of the Territory...*Provided, however,* that they shall not take shell fish from any beds staked or cultivated by citizens...[emphasis added]." After 4,000 hours of negotiation with numerous state departments, including the Department of Health responsible for issuing shellfish licenses and regulations to ensure shellfish safety for consumers. Prior to the case decision of the interpretation of the proviso, all parties negotiated the Shellfish

¹⁵² Cohen, 16.

Sanitation Decree, which Judge Rafeedie signed into law. On December 20, 1994, Judge Rafeedie ruled for the tribes that all public and private tidelands within the case area are subject to treaty harvest, except for those held in artificially created beds.¹⁵³

Minnesota v. Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians

Another landmark treaty rights cases occurred almost twenty years after the ‘Boldt Decision.’ As detailed previously, like in the Pacific Northwest, the concern over growing tourism and sport fishing industry prompted increased state regulations of Ojibwe fishing. Throughout the twentieth century, the state punished Mille Lacs and other Ojibwe people for violating these regulations. In 1991 and 1992, the Mille Lacs band opened two profitable casinos. According to legal scholar Karl Krogseng, this action led to more resentment among the local non-Native population. In 1983, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals reversed a lower court ruling, holding that the rights reserved by the treaties of 1837 and 1842 had not been revoked or terminated. The ‘Voigt Decision,’ as the ruling came to be known, ordered that Wisconsin and Michigan had no right to regulate tribal members off the reservation.¹⁵⁴ However, while the Mille Lacs Ojibwe people participated in these same treaty negotiations, the Court held that the ruling did not apply to the band since the state of Minnesota lies outside the jurisdiction of the Seventh Circuit.

¹⁵³ Rick Peters, *The Squaxin Island Tribe and Their Relationship to the Environment*.

¹⁵⁴ *Lac Courte Oreilles v. Voigt*, 700 F.2d 341 (7th Cir. 1983).

In the late 1980s the Mille Lacs Band, weary of state measures to regulate their treaty rights and emboldened by the ‘Voigt Decision,’ attempted to negotiate with the state.¹⁵⁵ A series of negotiations throughout the 1990s ultimately failed. Similar to events in Wisconsin, the Mille Lacs Ojibwe received violent backlash from non-Native individuals, sport fishermen, and anti-treaty organizations. The band previously filed suit against the state in federal district court in 1990. The court ruled for the band but instructed the two parties to reach an agreement to work together to enforce regulations. In 1997, the Court of Appeals affirmed the district court rulings and the state filed in the U.S. Supreme Court.¹⁵⁶ The state raised three issues in support of their argument: President Taylor’s 1850 Removal Order, the 1855 Treaty, and the effect of Minnesota’s statehood on treaty rights, all of which the state argued terminated the band’s 1837 treaty rights.¹⁵⁷ After years of testimony, in 1999 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 voted

¹⁵⁵ The Mille Lacs Band initiated this action despite the eruption of violence in northern Wisconsin in the mid-1980s where enraged non-Indian protestors appeared at boat landings in repeated attempts to stop Ojibwe people from spearfishing and exercising their court-affirmed treaty rights. These protestors often became physically violent. Their tactics included throwing rocks and garbage, issuing death threats and other racial slurs, and destroying fishing equipment. Many Ojibwe people even heard gunshots while spearfishing/fishing. The intensity of the extreme violence is detailed in: Rick Whaley and Walt Bressette, *Walleye Warriors: An Effective Alliance Against Racism and For the Earth* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 2003).

¹⁵⁶ Karl Krogseng, “Minnesota v. Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians,” *Ecology Law Quarterly* 27:77 (2000) 771-777.

¹⁵⁷ The Band’s scholarly and historical testimony of these issues is located in *Fish in the Lakes, Wild Rice, and Game in Abundance: Testimony on Behalf of Mille Lacs Ojibwe Hunting and Fishing Rights*, ed. James M. McClurken (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000). See also Charlie Otto Rasmussen, *Ojibwe Journeys*, “Challenges in Minnesota,” 35-42.

for the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe to retain their hunting and fishing rights guaranteed to them under the Treaty of 1837.¹⁵⁸

Conclusion

“Our forefathers knew that the people must remain tied to our natural resources, the resources that sustained us for thousands of years. The resources must be protected if we were to hold onto our identity and culture.” --Rick Peters, Squaxin Island Tribal Member¹⁵⁹

From the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth centuries, the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and Squaxin Island Tribe were two of many tribal nations whose people found it difficult to practice their off-reservation treaty rights due to constant state interference. For the Mille Lacs and Squaxin Island people, fishing in particular has always been an important source of subsistence and a significant part of their cultural identities. After treaty negotiations, Native people could continue to exercise their treaty rights; however, the federal government refused to take a stand on Indians' behalf when the states of Washington and Minnesota prevented them from doing so. Fish continue to be a vital resource to the Ojibwe and Pacific Northwest Salish peoples. Their struggle to assert their treaty rights has been a long and arduous one. What is most compelling is the level of determination demonstrated by Native people to continue fishing, hunting, and gathering as reserved by their ancestors who lived during the treaty era. For well over a

¹⁵⁸ In Minnesota Institute Legal Education, *Mille Lacs Band Fishing Decision* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Institute Legal Education, 1999): Section II, 1-19. See *Minnesota v. Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians* 526 U.S. 172 (1999).

¹⁵⁹ Rick Peters, *The Squaxin Island Tribe and Their Relationship to the Environment*.

century, many Native people continued to exercise their treaty rights despite the federal government's failure to intervene on tribes' behalf while state authorities continued to exceed their authority and attack their inherent tribal sovereignty.

Although tensions persist today between Native and local non-Native people and state departments about the subject treaty rights, Native people believe the preservation of these rights has been significant for asserting their self-determination and inherent tribal sovereignty. Native children who were not yet born when the courts issued these momentous decisions can attest to how much of a role treaty rights plays in their lives, as they prepare to hunt, fish, and gather with their parents, grandparents, and other relatives, just as their ancestors had done for centuries. As with many tribal nations, for both the Squaxin Island Tribe and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, their museum acts as a central site to educate tribal members and non-Native public audiences about the importance of their relationship with their land and resources, as well as treaty rights, which are significant to their tribal and cultural identities. By developing an exhibition narrative that incorporates a collective identity, tribal nations believe they are better equipped to defend themselves against federal and state government actions that seek to diminish their treaty rights and inherent tribal sovereignty.

For the tribes in the Pacific Northwest, throughout the twentieth century, it was especially difficult to at first unite these communities on the issue of treaty rights because they were very small in number and tribal affiliations tended to overlap. However, the historical struggle for treaty rights and subsequent court proceedings necessitated the

recreation and reaffirmation of their tribal and cultural identities, in particular through a tribal museum. Historian Alexandra Harmon confirms:

After the 1950s one provision of the century-old treaties...became the predominant emblem of Indian identity in western Washington—the provision for off-reservation fishing. But to say this is not to assert that fishing and treaties were previously unimportant...But the twentieth century was more than half over before they focused almost single-mindedly on the treaty reserved right to fish as the best expression of their relation to non-Indians and thus a cardinal symbol of their Indianness.¹⁶⁰

Like Ojibwe people in the Upper Midwest, Pacific Northwest Native people took pride in their ancestors' efforts to reserve these rights for future generations. Harmon claimed *U.S. v. Washington* created “a shared conception of Indian identity” revolving around fishing rights, which considering the “western Washington Indians’ diversity, internal divisions, and uncertainty about the bases for the identity they claimed,” united all of these groups into the present.¹⁶¹

Despite any initial differences, the similarities of Western Washington Salish cultural traditions are prevalent today in their traditional stories and ceremonies, such as the First Salmon Ceremony and the Annual Canoe Journey.¹⁶² Such events provide evidence of their commonality as treaty tribes, as well as their commitment to a

¹⁶⁰ Harmon, 218.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 232.

¹⁶² The traditional story has many variations, yet all communities today still practice some rendition of the First Salmon Ceremony. Usually held in August, the community follows certain steps from catching to eating the salmon a certain way at a feast. This ceremony, along with other traditions connected to the salmon, illustrates their cultural connection and respect for the fish so that they would return the following year. The annual Canoe Journey began in 1989 where paddlers from Pacific Northwest tribal nations meet and host potlatches. The next chapter of this dissertation provides more details on the Canoe Journey.

continued relationship with their land and resources and their treaty rights. In the following chapters of this dissertation, I explore these concepts further by examining one major act of asserting inherent tribal sovereignty: the creation of a tribal museum. For the Squaxin Island Tribe, their Museum, Library and Research Center embodies all of who they are as South Puget Sound Salish people, honoring their past, present and future generations. Their museum formation, the challenges, and the benefits of this tribal museum are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3:
**Home for Sacred Belongings: Sovereignty and the Politics of Tribal Identity
at the Squaxin Island Museum, Library and Research Center**



Figure 4: Paddle to Squaxin, 2012 (Photo courtesy of Picassa Gallery)

“We are such a small tribe that struggled for so long to stay alive...But our people held on. The teachings of our elders were strong enough to maintain our future. Now we have all this positive energy from hosting the canoe journey to carry us into the future.” –Charlene Krise, Squaxin Island tribal member¹

Paddle to Squaxin

Beginning on July 12, 2011, South Puget Sound newspapers in Western Washington State ran the press release “Squaxin Island Tribe and the Evergreen State College Longhouse Receive \$100,000 “Our Town” Grant From the National Endowment for the Arts.” The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) awarded both the tribe and the Longhouse major funding for the project entitled, “Our Tribe: The People of the

¹ John Dodge, “Banner Week for Squaxin Island Tribe,” *The News Tribune*, August 5, 2012, accessed November 15, 2012. <http://www.thenewstribune.com/2012/08/05/2242428/banner-week-for-squaxin-island.html>.

Water.”² The NEA awarded only fifty grants nationwide in support of what they deemed “creative placemaking, through which partners from public, private, nonprofit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities...[it] animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.” The \$100,000 would support half of the total project cost of \$200,000 for documentation, installation, and exhibition of Native art throughout tribal facilities including the museum, in conjunction with the 2012 Annual Canoe Journey on the South Puget Sound.³

The Evergreen State College Longhouse in nearby Olympia and the Squaxin Island Museum, Library, and Research Center provided the remainder of the funds. The purpose of the project instructed “participant artists [to] create works to further establish a sense of Squaxin Island tribal identity, people, and place...by teach[ing] their art forms to an intergenerational group of emerging artists and will create art to establish identity of people and place during the Tribal Canoe Journey event.” The Squaxin Island Tribe

² The Evergreen State College Longhouse Educational and Cultural Center located in Olympia, Washington, opened in 1995. For more than a decade, the Longhouse mission is to “promote indigenous arts and cultures.” At first, they worked only with the six local tribes and their artists, but they now work with indigenous artists throughout the Pacific Northwest region, the U.S., and with other Pacific Rim indigenous peoples. The Longhouse frequently hosts artist in residency programs, facilitate grant programs, and organize exhibitions and sales of indigenous works of art. <http://www.evergreen.edu/longhouse/home.htm>.

³ The annual tribal Canoe Journey began in 1989 to correspond with the Washington State centennial. Nine canoes participated in the “Paddle to Seattle.” The next one occurred in 1993 and has since been an annual event, with one tribe in charge of hosting the event each year. <http://paddletosquaxin2012.org>.

hosted the Annual Canoe Journey with the final landing in the port of Olympia on July 29, 2012 and potlatch protocol scheduled from July 30th until August 6th on the reservation located twenty minutes from Olympia.⁴ It was a spectacular event for the tribe with nearly 100 tribal canoes from all over the Pacific Northwest and Alaska landing at Budd Inlet, one of seven inlets located in the South Puget Sound. The tribe hosted thousands of visitors for an eight-day celebration, with over 5,000 breakfast and dinners served each day and more than fifty tribal groups singing, dancing, and drumming all day and into the early morning hours.⁵ The Squaxin Island Museum, Library and Research Center and its staff played a pivotal role in the Canoe Journey event. In fact, the Canoe Journey provided incentive to complete the original museum plans that began in the late 1990s and early 2000s. With the exception of an outdoor amphitheater, the tribe built an outdoor canoe shed and created a small pond replicating a shoreline beach, which became the main seating area for the Canoe Journey gathering of tribes.

This chapter concentrates on the Squaxin Island Tribe's Museum, Library and Research Center (MLRC), where I served as an outside exhibit consultant from January to May 2002 and as museum curator until my departure for another job opportunity in

⁴ Today, up to 100 tribal canoes with 8-15 pullers per canoe begin at different points (a public beach or a tribal landing) in Alaska, British Columbia, Washington State, and elsewhere. The pullers paddle for at least one day to another point where each canoe family camps overnight. In the evening, there is a rather large potlatch held with traditional foods served and then singing, dancing, and storytelling activities.

⁵ John Dodge, "Banner Week for Squaxin Island Tribe."

December 2003. First, I discuss how the MLRC came to fruition and the events leading up to the opening, including some issues that arose in the formation of a tribal identity and the presentation of tribal knowledge in the exhibits.⁶ Here, I convey the political agendas of key stakeholders involved in the process to illustrate that despite efforts to define such terms as ‘tribal identity’ and ‘tribal community’ within the MLRC, tensions emerged surrounding self-representation and cultural authority. Although tribal museums often find it challenging to create a narrative of a homogeneous identity, it is considered a necessary component to help further a tribal nation’s political objectives. I examine the Squaxin Island Tribe’s narrative as conveyed in the tribal museum, which is fundamental to considering future possibilities and discussions surrounding tribal self-representation(s) in the exhibit design process.⁷ In the context of the ‘Paddle to Squaxin Island,’ I argue that the significance of the MLRC to convey the identity of the Squaxin Island people as “People of the Water,” both internally within the community and externally to the local non-Native public, has benefitted the tribe in not only empowering its tribal members, but also in protecting their treaty rights and asserting their inherent

⁶ I refer to ‘tribal’ identity in this chapter, which includes a tribal nation’s history, politics, culture, and traditional economy; however some Native people may disagree with the use of the modern anthropological and sometimes legal term, ‘tribe’ or ‘tribal,’ unless it is part of their official title under treaty and/or federal acknowledgement process with the federal government. In an interview with a tribal council member, she makes reference to the *tribal* community and *tribal* people.

⁷ Scholar Christina Kreps discusses the appeal behind the formation of a community identity in museums in general. She identifies identity as “the totality of images that a group has of itself, its past, present, and future. The role of the museum is to put a population in a position to visualize, be aware of, and name these images, which are manifested at the material and non-material levels of everyday life. By identifying and naming [these], people realize their right to their own local and regional identity, taking possession of their world and gaining control over it.” Christina F. Kreps, *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation and Heritage Preservation* (London: Routledge, 2003), 10. Tribal nations, like Squaxin Island, are drawn toward building tribal museums/cultural centers for these reasons as discussed throughout this chapter.

tribal sovereignty. Through this discussion, I contend that the Squaxin Island Tribe's ability to recognize the tribal museum as one primary mechanism in which to demonstrate both resistance (asserting agency in telling their own story) and adaptation (to tell it in a way that considers how to best further their political goals).

According to scholar Brenda Child, tribal museums have “the potential to be an important lens for understanding tribal communities’ views of their own pasts, their conflicts and resolutions, and their dynamics of cultural and political sovereignty.”⁸ Many tribal nations strive for unity and cohesiveness in their community. Since tribal members are connected within and outside the boundaries of a reservation to the local non-Native communities and vice versa, tribal nations find the museum as a place for their community and the broader public to learn about their culture and history in order to bridge the gap. The tribal museum also serves as one primary location to consolidate all cultural knowledge and reaffirm tribal identity for tribal members. The MLRC does exist as a central site for tribal and other community members. Admission is free to tribal members so they can attend as often as they like, particularly if they are doing research using the library and/or archives. Here, tribal members and their relatives can walk through the doors of their museum and feel empowered that they are part of a community that has endured despite centuries of colonialism. While I contend that the creation of a unified, collective tribal identity (or tribal narrative) in the museum is considered by tribal nations to be essential for asserting sovereignty, the process is not met without

⁸ Brenda Child, “Creation of the Tribal Museum,” in *Contesting Knowledge*, 253.

complications. In some cases, the entire tribal museum project may be delayed until problems are resolved.

One critical issue that tends to arise concerns cultural authority, i.e. who can make decisions about tribal identity and the content of a tribal narrative. Typically, the tribal council or a designated group in the community, which may include a few select elders along with the museum board and/or staff, typically determine how tribal identity is depicted in the exhibit narrative.⁹ Disagreement may occur among members of the tribal community as to who is placed on this committee and whether or not these particular people possess the cultural authority to determine their tribal nation's narrative. Many times, youth are rarely considered to take part of the process, nor are people who are not enrolled as tribal members but are descendants who live in the community and attend tribal gatherings. In addition, the final version may not be put to vote in a large forum to ensure all members have an opportunity to express their opinion on the matter. The end result may not account for individual differences and experiences of all tribal members.

Despite the exclusionary nature of this process, many tribal nations view it necessary to author a tribal narrative in the form of a unified, homogeneous identity in order to protect and assert their sovereignty. As discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, the significance of the Squaxin Island Tribe's relationship to their natural environment and the continued exercise of treaty rights are fundamental to their tribal identity and continued existence as Squaxin Island tribal people. For these reasons, the

⁹ This collective tribal identity in the form of a narrative throughout the museum may consist of cultural, political, economic, social and legal information, both historical and contemporary, about the tribal nation, i.e. whatever the committee or those with authority decide is most pertinent for their members and the broader public to learn.

community primarily envisioned the creation of a museum to honor past Squaxin Island tribal people, and to educate present and future generations of Squaxin Island and non-Native people about who they are.

The Formation of the Squaxin Island MLRC

The November 2002 issue of the *Klah-Che-Min*, the monthly newspaper of the Squaxin Island Tribe, advertised the Grand Opening of the Squaxin Island Museum, Library and Research Center (MLRC) to be held on Tuesday, November 25, 2002, at 2:00 PM. Prior to this Grand Opening, the newspaper indicated a “community-only celebration” to take place on Saturday, November 16th with doors open to the tribal community at noon to preview exhibits and a scheduled program at 2:00 with staff and board presentations, guest speakers, and drumming and dancing in the storytelling circle. The following month’s issue of the *Klah-Che-Min* published the front page headline, “Squaxin Island Tribal Museum Library and Research Center Opens With Celebrations.” Referring to the opening as a success, the article included numerous photographs and quotes from key people about the opening. The Tribal Chairman indicated, “The feeling I got today when I walked through these doors today is indescribable. There are no words. A lot of hard work went into this and we are very proud.” Dr. James Nason, who at the time was on the MLRC Board, proclaimed, “I am very impressed. Welcome to the

professional community of museums.”¹⁰ The MLRC executive director gave special thanks to the staff for ensuring its completion for the Grand Opening and to the former tribal archivist for her twenty years of hard work in “keeping the dream of our ancestors alive.”¹¹

According to the MLRC executive director, after tribal reorganization in 1965 and the 1974 treaty rights decision in *U.S. v. Washington*, it had always been a dream of the elders to build a museum for future generations of Squaxin Island people who continued to practice the ways of their ancestors.¹² Following the affirmation of their treaty rights in *U.S. v. Washington*, or what has become known as the “Boldt Decision,” the MLRC director claimed that “it was like a calling back home where many of our people started to return back to Squaxin Island.”¹³ After passage of the Indian Self-Determination Act in 1975 and throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, the small tribe’s membership

¹⁰ At the time, in addition to directing the Museology program at University of Washington (UW), Dr. Nason’s position included Curator of Anthropology and New World Ethnology at the UW Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle. He agreed to be on the MLRC Board beginning in 2001 until 2002. Prior, he assisted in the early museum exhibit design process. Since then, the MLRC has had an ongoing partnership with the Burke Museum as a result of Dr. Nason’s initial involvement.

¹¹ *Klah-Che-Min*, December 2002.

¹² In the body of this dissertation, I chose to specifically refer to people I interviewed by their position or title and not their real names for their protection. As a former employee at the MLRC from 2002-2004, I continue to correspond regularly with my Squaxin Island friends and visit them as often as possible; therefore, I feel I have an obligation to protect their identities in the event that any information may be deemed controversial.

¹³ Personal Interview, October 29, 2012.

increased.¹⁴ With more members, they worked to strengthen their infrastructure in the areas of economic development, administration, housing, and tribal fisheries. At that time, endorsed by the court's confirmation of their treaty rights, many tribal members openly fished, hunted, and gathered shellfish for subsistence and/or to supplement their income.¹⁵ The MLRC director reflected on her life as an example of the lives of many tribal members in the 1970s and 1980s:

At that time, I was so into fishing and [being a] shellfish harvester and that pretty much was my life. It was all about fishing and through the off-months, which would be January through June, I would be shellfishing and during not shellfishing, I would be working on my gill nets. I would hang my nets, [and] take care of my cork line, my lead line...¹⁶

¹⁴ The federal government passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act in which it would issue grants directly to federally-recognized tribes who would then determine themselves how to utilize the funding, as opposed to being overseen by the Bureau of Indian Affairs or another federal agency. According to the U.S. Census by 1990, the Squaxin Island Tribe had 489 members enrolled and in 2000, there were 746 members (<http://www.census.gov/aian/>). In 2012, there were 1,034 members (Theresa Henderson, "Tulip Tribes Charitable Fund Grand Application," February 24, 2012, <http://theresahendersoncapstone.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/water-feature-proposal-copy.pdf>).

¹⁵ Shellfish have always played a major role in the lives of the Puget Sound Salish as a food source and historically used for trade purposes, and for utensils and jewelry. As discussed in Chapter Two, shellfish gathering or "clam-digging" has been a significant treaty rights activity for tribal members, reaffirmed in the "shellfish case" of 1994. Today, with shellfishing regulations in place, the tribe determines when they can dig for clams as a group when the tide is out. Squaxin families and individuals will all go at once, usually wearing waders with buckets and forks to dig a certain amount, which they are compensated for to supplement their incomes. It is not only an economic activity, but a social one as well.

¹⁶ Personal Interview, October 29, 2012.

In 1988, the tribe became one of the first tribes in the nation to enter into the Self Governance Demonstration Project with the federal government.¹⁷ Also in 1988, Congress passed the passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, which allows states to regulate Indian gaming through gaming compacts with the tribes.¹⁸ According to the MLRC director, the Squaxin community offered bingo and “Reno Night,” which helped to negotiate a compact with the state to open a tribal casino in 1995.¹⁹ With the increase in tribal funding, the tribe concentrated further on their historical and cultural preservation. In the 1980s, the tribe hired an archivist who began collecting a small collection of historical photographs, documents, and cultural items for the elders’ dream of building a museum. By 1993, the Squaxin Island Tribe began concrete plans to establish the tribal museum, most likely further motivated by the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990.²⁰

¹⁷ Beginning in 1988, “Under a Self-Governance Compact, an Indian Tribe can administer and manage programs, activities, functions and services previously managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Also, it acknowledges Tribal authority to redesign those programs and services to meet the needs of their communities, within the flexibility of allocating funds based on Tribal priorities.” For more information, see Self-Governance Communication and Education Tribal Consortium website at <http://www.tribalsegov.org>.

¹⁸ Although referred to as a process of negotiation, many tribes must give a large percentage of their casino profits to the state in order to operate. Despite these compacts, many tribes still choose to open a casino to create economic development opportunities and employment for tribal members. Renee Ann Cramer, *Cash, Color, and Colonialism: The Politics of Tribal Acknowledgment* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 86-89.

¹⁹ Personal Interview, October 29, 2012.

²⁰ In 1990, Congress passed the Native American Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), a federal law that provides museums and other federal agencies to return certain Native American Cultural items, such as human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony to lineal descendants and culturally affiliated Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian organization.

As discussed in Chapter One, tribal museums were not a new phenomenon and the “tribal museum movement” gained further momentum in the 1960s and 1970s during the era of American Indian activism.²¹ In his book *Custer Died For Your Sins* (1969), Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. critiqued the field of anthropology, which he argued exploited Indians people and perpetuated stereotypes.²² He called for the cease of digging up Indian bones for research. Scholar David Hurst Thomas notes that two years after the book’s release, members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) confiscated field notes and the equipment used for an archeological excavation in Welch, Minnesota, in protest of the disturbance of Indian graves.²³ Many Native people joined in the struggle to reclaim the bones of their ancestors taken by anthropologists and archeologists throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s and stored on museum shelves and in boxes for scientific study. The Squaxin Island people, like many other tribal people, were aware of these activities and viewed the building of a tribal museum necessary for the return of their ancestors’ bones and other sacred and cultural objects.

In 1993, the Squaxin Island Tribe designated the newly-formed Heritage Committee to provide cultural assistance to tribal department directors and staff with program development and culture-related questions. In 1996, the tribe then began a two-year community based strategic planning process. One of the primary outcomes of this project was the realization that many members of the community desired to have a tribal

²¹ See Lisa Watt and Brenda Child’s explanation of the history of this tribal museum movement in Chapter One of this dissertation.

²² See Vine Deloria, Jr. *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, (1969; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988).

²³ David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars*, 198-201.

museum as soon as possible in order to preserve their culture and language. The tribe hired a grant writer and instructed the Heritage Committee to organize a more strategic effort to build a tribal museum. This process lasted five years.²⁴ In 1997, the tribe decided to form a separate Heritage and Culture Department, which focused on maintaining its cultural resources. They simultaneously expanded their Heritage Committee in which members of this department, along with others interested in culture and cultural resources, met on a regular basis. They created the following mission:

To create a legacy guided by the wisdom of our ancestors through collection, preservation and interpretation of the culture of the original seven bands of the Squaxin Island Tribe. To ensure Tribal involvement, input and guidance in all aspects of the Heritage and Culture Department...

The department's first report included the primary goals of: "1) formalizing the department; 2) promote cultural awakening; 3) fully experience who we are as a tribal community by coordinating cultural activities; 4) create an organization based on traditional values; and 5) provide and enhance general community services."²⁵ Goal number two included sub-goals of implementing cultural projects, developing Cultural Resources and NAGPRA ordinances which were already in their final stages, training tribal members and staff in historic site identification and restoring cemeteries, and

²⁴ Squaxin Island Tribe Museum, Library and Research Center, "National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Implementation Grant Proposal for the Squaxin Island Tribe 'People of the Water' Exhibit Walkthrough: The Hall of the Seven Inlets," (January 2001), 11-12.

²⁵ Squaxin Island Tribe, *Annual Report FY 98* (Shelton, WA: Squaxin Island Tribe, 1999).

completing the canoe project, all of which would be an ongoing process in the years to come.

Three of these sub-goals are significant as they relate to the formation of the tribal museum. The Heritage Committee concluded the repatriation of objects back to the tribe through NAGPRA would have to be deferred until adequate storage could be secured and proper procedures put into place through the tribal museum.²⁶ Upon completion of the museum building, all materials would be centralized in one location for community access and the department could then continue to work with the Heritage Committee in the further development of the tribal museum.²⁷

In December 1998, the Tribal Council approved of the Heritage Committee's By-Laws in which they were given the authority to "provide advice and recommendations to the Tribal Council and the Heritage and Culture Department" in the areas of history, culture, and traditions of the tribe. The tribe instructed the selected chairperson to submit an annual report to the tribal council to work "in cooperation with the Heritage and Culture Department."²⁸ These two groups worked with the tribe's main planner in all facets of museum planning, which included a capital campaign with a concert and fine arts auction.²⁹ By January of 1999, the proposed architectural plan provided the details

²⁶ Unfortunately, many Western museum workers still believe that once objects defined under NAGPRA are returned back to tribes, tribal people will not adequately care for them unless they have a tribal museum and trained staff.

²⁷ Squaxin Island Tribe, *Annual Report FY 98* (Shelton, WA: Squaxin Island Tribe, 1999).

²⁸ Squaxin Island Tribe Resolution 98-118 and approved By-Laws, Article VII.

²⁹ Squaxin Island Tribe, *Annual Report FY 99* (Shelton, WA: Squaxin Island Tribe, 2000).

on the Ta Ha' Buts Cultural Complex and the Squaxin Island Museum, Library, and Research Center.³⁰ The Heritage Committee, along with a new Capital Campaign Committee, involved the larger tribal community with a museum planning workshop. The tribe envisioned the museum to become a 'living museum' or 'ecomuseum,' which would complete in Phase II (the first being the completion of a longhouse referred to as the "Intergenerational Cultural Center" in 1997).³¹ They described their vision of an ecomuseum as a "communal place of integral relationships-one of organisms living in harmony with their own past, present and future environment."³² The tribe made plans to include storytelling and dancing in the outdoor amphitheater, a carving shed by the man-made pond simulating a beach, and traditional art demonstrations such as basket-weaving and beading in the museum. In 1999, the tribe's Capital Campaign reported receiving a total of \$600,000 in state and federal grants for this entire project but still needed to raise a total of \$1.5 million for the cost of the museum building and exhibits.³³

In the mid-1990s, the tribe had teamed up with the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle for consultation and assisting in initial fundraising

³⁰ According to the promotional brochure, The Tribe intended the original Ta Ha'Buts Cultural Complex to represent a "Northwest Native American fishing village...[consisting] of three cedar longhouses adjacent to a small pond...but designed with natural landscaping to present the image of a shoreline..." to be completed in three phases. Thereafter, the name Ta Ha'Buts became attached to what is now the Learning Center currently "provides services to tribal members and descendants that include youth activities, summer recreation, tutoring/mentoring, school counseling and higher education awards." <http://squaxinland.org/government/departments/learning-center/>.

³¹ Again, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, the ecomuseum emphasizes the development of local communities, integrating physical landscapes, economies, social relationships, and political issues by linking the past with the present.

³² Squaxin Island Tribe, "A Proud Tribe Reclaiming a Cultural Legacy: Squaxin Island Museum Library & Research Center [Promotional Brochure]," 1999.

³³ *Klah-Che-Min*, Vol. 7, Issue 1 (January 1999).

purposes (the Burke hosted an art auction for the tribe). As it became closer to finalizing plans in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Burke Museum staff, including Dr. Nason, met frequently with tribal representatives to discuss site and building design, audiences, collections management, and exhibit and program ideas. Along with the distribution of promotional materials and brochures for the MLRC, the tribe also officially hired an architect to oversee the physical development of the museum. Schacht-Aslani Architects in Seattle, whose major museum projects included the Burke Museum, the Tacoma Art Museum, and the Bellevue Art Museum, began to conceptualize the building. In the summer of 2000, Vi Hilbert, an Upper Skagit elder and fluent Lushootseed speaker, suggested four Lushootseed names for the museum. The tribal community eventually voted for *kwedigws?altxw* or “Home for Sacred Belongings.” By February of 2001, the MLRC completed its 501 (c) 3 application (which officially makes an organization into a non-profit) and formed the Board of Trustees. The board finalized a mission statement:

The Squaxin Island MLRC is dedicated to the education, preservation, study, and exhibition of the life, languages, literature, history, and traditional skills of the Squaxin Island People. The MLRC works in collaboration with the Squaxin Island Community and other Native Peoples in protecting and reaffirming traditions and beliefs, encouraging contemporary artistic expression, and empowering the Indian voice; ensuring that the knowledge of our ancestors, past, present, and future will survive and flourish for present and future generations.³⁴

Furthermore, the MLRC listed a number of specific objectives for its 13,000 square foot building. These included: offering cultural and historical exhibits and public

³⁴ Squaxin Island Museum, Library and Research Center, Brochure (Shelton, WA: Squaxin Island Museum, Library and Research Center, 2002).

programming; serving its community members and visitors both educationally as a research center and recreationally as a place where people can sit in the comfortable seating areas to read a book about the exhibits; and becoming a place of gathering for the community by hosting a number of storytelling, drumming, singing and dancing events and traditional ceremonial events and celebrations, as well as contemporary performing arts. The classroom would host weaving, carving, painting, and language classes throughout the year. With the archives, the MLRC would offer opportunities for both genealogical and scholarly research by allowing tribal community access to historical documents and photographs. As an educational resource, the MLRC staff would actively seek out partnerships with local and regional schools to develop engaging programming for all ages. The board and staff also anticipated the “conservation and preservation of repatriated and locally owned tribal artifacts following cultural resources policies in coordination with established museum practices and standards.”³⁵ Many of these same MLRC objectives are still in effect today.

The MLRC board continued to secure funding for the construction of the building through state and private foundation grants and tribal funds. The MRLC organized additional major fundraising activities, such as an art auction and benefit concerts held at the Little Creek Casino. In 1999, 2000 and 2001, Rita Coolidge and Branscombe Richmond (the character Bobby Sixkiller) from the former TV show *Renegade*

³⁵ Squaxin Island Tribe, “Museum, Library and Research Center: Building a Home *kwedigws?altxw* for Sacred Belongings [Brochure] (Shelton, WA: Squaxin Island Tribe, 1999/2000), 7.

performed. With the construction of the building ending in July of 2001, newly-hired MLRC staff turned their attention to the interior design.



Figure 5: The MLRC front entrance (author's photo)

The final result of years of planning and collaboration is a combination of a museum and library inside a contemporary interpretation of a traditional plank house. Plank houses were long cedar homes with large cedar planks used as the roof to protect numerous families inside from the rain. The entire exterior of the building at the front entrance is designed to replicate a thunderbird, a central protagonist in Coast Salish legends. The building includes exhibit/gallery spaces, collection and storage areas, a large classroom, comfortable seating areas, a small library with a number of books and computer workstations, an archival room with research space, a museum gift shop, a large storytelling area, and administrative offices with a conference room. With the exterior design of the MLRC and such interior features as a storytelling area and a classroom for cultural activities, the tribe wanted to emphasize the value of creating a space specifically for tribal members.

During this time, an exhibit planning committee met regularly throughout the winter of 2001-2002. This committee included members of the MLRC Board of Trustees, the Heritage Committee, the tribal archivist, director of education for the tribe, Dr. Nason from the Burke Museum, and other knowledgeable community members and elders appointed by the Squaxin Island Tribal Council. They created the initial conceptual plan for the interior of the building and the permanent and temporary exhibits. Other museum planning efforts continued with the Board of Trustees who organized the following sub-committees: executive, development, governance, programs, collections management, public relations, building and grounds, and finance.³⁶ Beginning in the spring of 2001 and into 2002, the board hired five full-time staff members: the executive director, development officer, librarian/archivist, museum curator, and NAGPRA coordinator.

Although an independent organization because of its non-profit status, the MLRC and its staff had the ongoing responsibility through a joint agreement to keep the lines of communication open with the Squaxin Island Tribal Council and report all museum activities at regular council meetings. The tribal council contributed to the MLRC by providing a little over one-third of the MLRC's funding for maintenance, security and operational costs with the understanding that the MLRC staff would also actively seek additional outside funding.³⁷ Today, the tribe still provides funding for these activities.

³⁶ Dale Clark, "Squaxin Island MLRC Operation Plan," (Shelton, WA: Squaxin Island Museum, Library and Research Center, 2000), 10-11.

³⁷ Squaxin Island Tribe Museum, Library and Research Center, "National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Implementation Grant Proposal," 15.

In 2001, National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) awarded the MLRC a substantial grant for the initial exhibit design phase entitled “The Squaxin Island Tribe ‘People of the Water’ Exhibit.” For the first year, the MLRC designated some funding to museum planning and hired a tribal member as museum curator; however, due to the delay in hiring staff and uncertainty over exhibit content, the building remained virtually empty with the exception of a small double-sided five-panel exhibit entitled “The People of the Water” about tribal history. Meanwhile, while the library staff person developed the library and gift shop portions, the MLRC hired outside consultants to assist the curator in developing the exhibits.

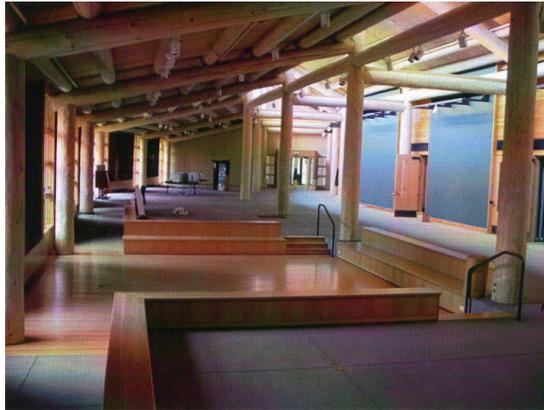


Figure 6: Empty interior, winter/spring 2002 (author's photo)

By 2002, the archival collection consisted of twenty years’ worth of photographs and copies of text documents acquired by the former tribal archivist; yet, very few three-dimensional objects existed in the collection. The tribe displayed much of what did exist (about 40-50 objects) in glass display cases located in the tribal administration building

and other facilities for eventual transfer to the MLRC. Prior to the construction of the building, the MRLC completed an initial assessment of items existing in the community and estimated that tribal members owned several hundred objects in their homes. In addition to what the MLRC had in its collection and archives, the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture committed to transferring a number of miscellaneous South Puget Sound objects from its collection on loan to the MLRC.

An important discovery of the ancient village in one of the nearby South Puget Sound inlets in 1999 propelled the tribal museum project even further as questions surfaced about the storage of the excavated objects. At the time of museum construction, the tribe's Cultural Resources Department worked with the South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC) Anthropology Department to study the archeological objects discovered at this wetsite in Mud Bay. The resulting study revealed details of Native people living in the South Puget Sound region thousands of years ago. When college and tribal officials excavated a small portion of the site, they discovered ancient fish traps, tools, fire-cracked rock, basketry materials, and shell middens (pits where tribal people stored old shells after use). One major discovery was an ancient gillnet (a large fish net) made of cedar bark. At the time, only three others had been found in the entire Pacific Northwest and Canada.³⁸ The MLRC designated one of four exhibit areas to display these objects collected from the wetsite, in addition to replicas on loan from the Burke Museum.

³⁸ Squaxin Island MLRC Brochure (2002), 8.

Establishing Tribal Identity in the MLRC Exhibit-Design Process

Although the physical collections are an important part of the MLRC exhibits, the Squaxin Island Tribe and the MLRC needed to deal with another major task. They had to produce a single, collective tribal narrative for the exhibits to not only be inclusive of different members' cultural and historical knowledge, but also be mindful of maintaining (and not dismantling) the tribe's already-achieved political sovereignty, e.g. treaty rights. In the 1990s, the tribe sought to revise and reclaim its history using tribal members' own words in order to develop a clearer, cohesive tribal identity. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the newsletter editor of the *Klah-Che-Min*, along with Heritage Committee members, various elders, tribal council members, and administrative personnel met as a group to author what scholar Kristina Ackley calls a tribal "official narrative" as a "marker of identity." In her article on the Oneida Nation Museum (ONM), Ackley writes, "By giving a tribally sanctioned and official narrative coherence to their history and culture, the ONM operates as a touchstone through which tribal members can affirm the Haudenosaunee identity."³⁹ With a similar goal in mind, the Squaxin Island Tribe established a tribal narrative for grant purposes and public relations utilizing older narratives compiled by previous tribal governments and other research. In 2002, this final narrative materialized into a chapter entitled "Squaxin Island" in a book on Native

³⁹ Kristina Ackley, "Tsi?niyukwaliho?tA, the Oneida Nation Museum: Creating a Space for Haudenosaunee Kinship and Identity," in *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives*, edited by Susan Sleeper-Smith (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 260.

peoples in the Olympic Peninsula, which the MLRC decided to use as much as possible for its permanent exhibits.⁴⁰

As discussed in previous chapters, tribal museums exist in part as a response to the ways in which modern Western museums have misrepresented Native people. By creating their own tribal museums and exhibit narratives, Native people are making efforts to tell their own stories about their culture and history in their own ways, thereby asserting their tribal nations' sovereignty. Typically, while brainstorming ideas for exhibits, the question of tribal identity appears in the process. Answering 'who we are' is complex and can become controversial if differing opinions, viewpoints, and memories about tribal history and culture exist among tribal members. The issue may be further problematic if a tribe is small, like Squaxin Island, where there is a lack of written history to begin with from early non-Native historians and anthropologists, who routinely placed all culture groups in the area under the broad category of 'Coast Salish' or 'Northwest Coast Indians,' thereby ignoring local histories and the cultural differences of each tribal group in the region.

A significant source of tribal history originates from elders telling stories. For communities like Squaxin Island, these oral histories are nearly their only source of local history combined with a few written regional sources. However, some academics discredit the validity of oral histories due to the privileging of written Western sources, such as government reports, diaries or journals, newspapers, etc. Furthermore, Native history is often primarily viewed as the history of Indian-white relations, which they

⁴⁰ See Theresa Henderson, Andi VanderWal, and the Heritage and Culture Committee, "Squaxin Island," in *Native Peoples*, 96-97.

consider the ‘real’ history.⁴¹ To challenge this notion is to question widespread beliefs about American national identity and its origins (e.g. Manifest Destiny) as discussed in Chapter One. However, in recent decades, academia and Western museums are moving toward a ‘paradigm shift’ with collaborative efforts and partnerships to be more inclusive of Native perspectives about issues of representation.⁴²

For Squaxin Island’s official tribal narrative, the tribal archivist and the Heritage Committee researched information using treaty documents, Indian agent documents, and other written accounts from non-Native historians, as well as oral histories of tribal members collected since the 1960s. They utilized one primary document written by anthropologist Barbara Lane on the Squaxin Island Tribe written in 1972 for the treaty rights case, *U.S. v Washington* (issued in 1974). For this significant case, all fourteen tribes hired Lane to research and provide testimony on their cultural and tribal histories. The decision reaffirmed treaty rights for all the tribes involved and influenced all subsequent treaty rights court cases, such as those for the Ojibwe in the Upper Midwest. In Lane’s document, the first sub-heading is entitled “Squaxin Identity.”⁴³ I contend that the tribe utilized the document for their official narrative in order to ensure consistency with the content of her report on the treaty rights case. By using the same language, the tribe would not risk dismantling their treaty rights.

⁴¹ Donald L. Fixico, “Ethics and Responsibilities in Writing American Indian History,” *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing About American Indians*, ed. by Devon A. Mihesuah (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 86-89.

⁴² For a series of essays on this “paradigm shift,” see Gail Anderson, *Reinventing the Museum*.

⁴³ Barbara Lane, “Anthropological Report on the Identity, Treaty Status and Fisheries of the Squaxin Island Tribe of Indians” (Washington 1972).

To further protect their treaty rights and sovereignty for the future, the tribe adopted a more specific marker of identity, referring to themselves as “People of the Water.”⁴⁴ In the last several decades, the tribe has included this marker on all their public relations materials, including the 2012 Canoe Journey pamphlets, the tribal website and MLRC homepage, all brochures and promotional materials developed by the tourism department (e.g. casino report), and the tribal newsletter. The tribal council and the MLRC board ensured the tribe’s identity as “People of the Water” throughout the MLRC’s permanent exhibits. In November of 2000, the tribe held a “Museum Building Celebration” after the timber company erected the main logs on tribal land. The person who was eventually to become the MLRC executive director declared, “The People of the Water will be the main theme of the museum. The water is our home...”⁴⁵

To supplement the already existing official narrative, the MLRC board requested more historical research to be completed for the MLRC exhibits. For months prior to and after the museum construction ended in 2001, an outside consultant developed some preliminary concepts for the main permanent exhibits, but these plans did not move forward. The board’s primary goals for the exhibit design plan included a strengthening of the tribe’s identity and the elimination of Native stereotypes, more specifically those

⁴⁴ It is unclear when the tribe first adopted this marker, but it may have been further developed in the 1990s with the era of cultural resurgence for many tribal nations, and the emphasis on the preservation of culture and cultural resources after the passage of NAGPRA. During this time, the organization of the annual Salish Canoe Journey by area tribes, further motivated Squaxin Island people to learn more about their culture, language, and history, and to stress to outsiders their cultural alignment with their waterways considered to be the most significant characteristic of their historical and contemporary identity. In the 2012 Paddle to Squaxin Island brochure, the tribe confirms, “Our relationship with the natural environment is the foundation for our cultural identity.” Squaxin Island Tribe, “Paddle to Squaxin 2012 [Brochure],” 7.

⁴⁵ *Klah-Che-Min*, December 2000. The board did not officially hire the director until April of 2001.

associated with the broad terms used to refer to all tribal groups in the region, regardless of cultural and linguistic differences. From the beginning, the MLRC board and staff admitted that while overlap does exist among the Squaxin Island people and other South Puget Sound or Coast Salish or even Northwest Coast groups, they preferred the exhibits to contain specific local history and culture. With this objective in mind, the board and staff chose to concentrate first on the main exhibit for the MLRC, the Hall of the Seven Inlets.

The Hall of the Seven Inlets: To Fuse Past, Present, and Future

The exhibit planning committee desired to have seven large wall murals or panels that represented each of the seven inlets of the South Puget Sound. The MLRC board determined this particular exhibit to be the focal point of the museum, and as such they intended it to be a “grand, visual experience” for all museum visitors.⁴⁶ The focus on the visual would require each panel to be less text-driven. To celebrate their community and educate others, the board and staff wanted to convey certain themes of their tribal history and contemporary cultural traditions, as well as traditional legends to be displayed in both the English and Lushootseed languages. Throughout the entire museum planning process, the MLRC board and staff identified the fusing of past, present and future as the primary objective of all of the exhibits. However, to provide a more visual experience for all visitors, the panels had to incorporate strong imagery in the form of historical and contemporary photographs, colorful graphic images or paintings, and/or maps, one of

⁴⁶ Squaxin Island Tribe Museum, Library and Research Center, “National Endowment for the Humanities Implementation Grant Proposal,” 19.

which needed to contain “an overall image that represents the ceded area...” to show how much of the land initially belonged to tribal people.⁴⁷

The outside consultant hired in 2001 assisted the exhibit planning committee in developing the following themes for each panel: 1) Who we Are; 2) The Waterways Are our Highways; 3) First Contact; 4) The Earth is Our Mother; 5) We are one with the spirit world; 6) A Returning People; and 7) Our Livelihood. The committee brainstormed a number of sub-themes related to these titles and drafted a few accompanying educational messages. Due to the longhouse construction of the building, they desired the spaces across from each panel to become separate exhibits reflecting the subject matter of each panel. The board brought in the architect and decided the spaces to be in the following order: 1) the gift shop; 2) library; 3) exhibit space; 4) exhibit space; 5) storytelling area; (6) exhibit space; and 7) exhibit space. The *MLRC Exhibit Walkthrough* drafted in 2001 for a major NEH grant (eventually awarded) also provided details of sample artifacts/objects and their accompanying contextual information for each of the four exhibit spaces. For example, across the third panel on First Contact, proposed plans included a longhouse re-creation with life-size figures of people practicing traditional cultural activities, such as basket-making and other exhibits related to language and

⁴⁷ Ibid., 19. Initially, the exhibit planning committee considered the idea of using the map as the background of each panel.

cultural resources complete with interactive kiosks and voices of tribal people speaking in Lushootseed.⁴⁸

Following the development of the *MLRC Exhibit Walkthrough*, the outside exhibit design consultant created examples of some of the panels and text, which did not work for the mission of the museum in fusing past, present, and future. For example, the introductory panel, “Who We Are,” focused on tribal history with little reference to the contemporary community. It is unclear what happened to the original consultant who worked on these examples, but by December 2001, the Board decided to hire other consultants to assist in the exhibit design process. In January 2002, the MLRC board hired Rod Slemmons, a University of Washington museum studies professor whose specialty is exhibition production and use of photography in exhibits. They also hired me, a second year museology Native graduate student. Together for four months, Slemmons and I developed a detailed version of the exhibit design plan for the seven wall panels, which the Board provisionally approved in late spring of 2002.⁴⁹

We incorporated many of the ideas in the original *MLRC Exhibit Walkthrough* to comply with the NEH grant, but we re-envisioned the theme of each panel and the content of the opposite exhibit spaces and the subspaces or what we referred to as ‘niches’ (smaller gallery spaces where wall display cases could be placed). Each panel

⁴⁸ The third large wall panel is Eld Inlet Watershed or Squi-Aitl. The original plans drafted by the exhibit design consultant and the exhibit planning committee prior to the *Exhibit Walkthrough* suggested the main image of the panel to be of the first recorded encounter with Captain Peter Puget in 1792. Squaxin Island Tribe Museum, Library and Research Center, “National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Implementation Grant Proposal,” 21.

⁴⁹ At the time, this project of designing the seven wall panels became my Master’s thesis in Museology at the University of Washington-Seattle. I graduated and received my M.A. in June 2002.

focuses on a theme of Squaxin life—the tribe’s history and contemporary cultural heritage—and contains subthemes that pertain to the main subject matter. We decided to use both historical and contemporary photographs and/or graphics and maps, and three to five paragraphs of interpretive text. The content of these paragraphs is based on the historical research I conducted and the content of oral history audio-tapes located in the archives. We made sure to include the names of all of the people in the photographs and if we could not locate this information on a particular photograph, we simply did not use it. The purpose of the panels is to expose visitors to a sense of the tribe’s history and contemporary culture by balancing information derived from both oral histories/interviews and the history found in documents and books. We utilized the oral histories of elders as much as possible in many of the text portions of the panels and interspersed elsewhere in other exhibits.

After conferring with MLRC staff, in our final design plan, we decided the main titles and themes for the Hall of the Seven Inlets to be as follows:

1) Henderson Inlet—S’Homamish/Noo-She-Chatl: Who We Are—the welcome/introductory panel that includes historical and contemporary photos of past and present tribal members in collage form. The mission of the Squaxin Island Tribe and the MLRC is displayed. Prior to installation, we added a description of the tribal government, tribal departments, and commercial enterprises today (or in 2002) later, along with Lushootseed greetings. Legend: The Great Flood

2) Budd Inlet—Steh-Chass: Traditional groups and kinship ties, the waterways are our highways/inlets of the South Puget Sound and the connection to natural resources with historical and contemporary photos of fishing, shellfish gathering, and hunting, as well as canoes. In the final version, we emphasized traditional groups and kinship ties and added the importance of family, making a living, and housing. We decided to move

the connection to natural resources to Panel Three. Legend: The Great Earthquake

3) Eld Inlet—Squi-Aitl: This was originally on families and traditional family values, as well as making a living. Due to the location of the Mud Bay Wetsite, staff decided in the end to change the subject matter to “People of the Water,” the Qu’gwes⁵⁰ (Mud Bay Wetsite) and tribal fisheries today. Legend: The Clam Legend

4) Totten Inlet—Sawamish/T’Peeksin: Religion and spirituality with a chronology of the different beliefs but no sensitive details would be provided. In the final draft, we briefly described the original spiritual beliefs and adaptation, as well as the impact of the Indian Shaker Church.⁵¹ Legend: The Star Child

5) Hammersley Inlet—Sah-Heh-Wa-Mish: Originally, we planned this to include only legends and stories, with local and regional artists’ artwork pertaining to these legends. We also planned to display historical and contemporary photos of social gatherings, such as the potlatch and other community events. However, we decided to use this opportunity to focus on: Assimilation and the Survival of Culture, Squaxin Island Cultural Activities, and the Canoe Project/Journey. Legend: Mason Lake and the Crying Loon

6): Case Inlet—Squawksin: Our original plans included information on contact, treaty issues, boarding schools, and the survival of the community. The final version contains the sub-headings of: Treaty of Medicine Creek and the Establishment of the Reservation, Indian Boarding and Contemporary Schools, and Treaty Rights. Final Legend: The First Salmon

7) Carr Inlet—S’Hotl-Ma-Mish: The original was reserved for temporary exhibition serving as its introductory text, prompting it be changed out

⁵⁰ This means “Gathering Place” in the Southern Lushootseed language.

⁵¹ John Slocum, a notable Squaxin Island cultural leader from the Sa-Heh-Wa-Mish band, founded the Indian Shaker Church in 1881, a new church that combined Christian and traditional beliefs. In 1910, it became incorporated and in 1995, the Squaxin Island Tribe re-acquired Church Point where the original church was built. Squaxin Island Tribe, “Paddle to Squaxin 2012 [Brochure],” 22-23.

often. Instead, due to the panels being too distant from the exhibit space, it remained blank.⁵²

For the final versions, we attempted to incorporate many of the ideas presented by the original exhibit planning committee, the NEH's *MLRC Exhibit Walkthrough*, and meetings we had with the board and staff. However, Rod Slemmons and I also saw this opportunity to resist conventional exhibit techniques. We decided the first panel theme should emphasize the contemporary Squaxin Island people today, blending historical and contemporary photographs of tribal members, and primarily using traditional legends and oral history quotes in the main narrative. The text paragraphs I drafted would serve to confirm or supplement the stories told by tribal people. We also opposed the use of a chronological timeline extending continuously across the panels beginning with the pre-contact era, as some board members and others suggested. We felt that providing a chronological timeline would reinforce the notion of Indians existing only in the past. In addition, with such a timeline, visitors would not see contemporary tribal people until the very end of the exhibit and by then, they may experience what is known as visitor fatigue, where visitors become bored or tired of reading too much information in one exhibit. Instead, we wanted to 'hit' them with the contemporary first. Each panel has its own timeline, combining both the historical and contemporary of each heading and sub-theme.

Differences of opinion immediately surfaced with the board, Heritage Committee members, and other tribal members. Some disputed the elimination of the chronological

⁵² Author's notes, 2001. Recently, the MLRC completed the 7th panel to showcase the history of Squaxin Island, or the original reservation island located across from Kamilche, where the current reservation is located. The Legend featured is entitled, "The Little Girl."

timeline, the mention of spirituality and religion, the use of photographs of some families over others (as discussed later in this chapter), using imagery of pre-contact life, and the idea of including text on the panels. To be more specific, some tribal members did not want any mention of religion, some wanted a village re-creation of pre-contact life somewhere in the museum either in a panel or in the form of a physical diorama, and some did not want the panels to contain any text, believing that they should rely solely on visual imagery.

Despite these minor challenges, in the end our exhibit design plan persevered with minimal changes and the board approved them in the summer of 2002. The MLRC then hired a tribal artist to complete a graphic design version of a tribal legend for each panel. His rendition of the legend would serve as the backdrop and the main visual component. The small team consisted of the graphic design artist, the executive director, the editor of the *Klah-Che-Min*, and me as acting curator. By then, Rod Slemmons had moved from the area for a new position. After the board approved of the design plans, we moved forward quickly with the other exhibits. Staff hired a firm to install Hall of the Seven Inlets weeks before the museum opening in November 2002. Meanwhile, during the printing of the panels, we turned our attention to the four exhibit gallery spaces.



Figure 7: First panel, 2012 (author's photo)



Figure 8: Third panel, 2012 (author's photo)

The MLRC Gallery Spaces

For two months prior to the museum opening, the exhibit design team worked diligently to set up the other four exhibit spaces and the niches located across from the panels. The librarian/archivist organized the space across the first panel, which became the gift shop. She also set up the second space, which became the library complete with books and computers. Coordinating with the South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC) Archaeology Department, where the Mud Bay website objects had been stored since 1999, we arranged for the third space and the niches. We placed 500-1000 year-old

delicate partial baskets, cedar hats, hunting and fishing tools, stakes from fish traps, and nets into display cases alongside nineteenth and early twentieth century replicas of similar items on loan from the Burke Museum and contemporary tools used by tribal members for hunting, fishing, and gathering. We simultaneously displayed the historical and contemporary objects together as much as possible to illustrate the continuity of traditions practiced by Squaxin Island tribal people today.⁵³ The SPSCC and the Squaxin Island Tribe Cultural Resources Department hired a local artist from a nearby tribe to construct a contemporary cedar hat replica to be placed alongside a partial hat found at the wetsite.



Figure 9: Wetsite cedar hat reconstruction, 2002 (author's photo)

For the fourth space, staff desired to create a seating area with custom leather chairs and a loveseat next to custom carved wooden tables. The furniture designer painted Coast Salish designs directly onto the leather and carved them into the tables. In October of 2002, the MLRC secured a permanent loan from the Burke Museum, which

⁵³ Some tribal fishermen donated their fishing implements and gear for use in the exhibit.

consisted of a variety of nineteenth and early twentieth century South Puget Sound Salish objects, such as awls, cattail mats, knives, wooden spoons, gambling bones, beads and beadwork items, baskets, a spindle whorl, and miscellaneous projectile points. In addition to using some Burke objects in the Mud Bay website exhibit, we placed many of these items in two large display cases built to contain reference books on the lower shelves. We made sure the cases were within arm's reach of the leather chairs for visitors to view the objects and sit in comfort with books containing more information about them.

As for the storytelling area with built-in seating, a Squaxin tribal member painted a large circular Coast Salish design. We decorated the niche in this area with various works of art, such as paintings, masks and drums completed by tribal people in the area.



Figure 10: Storytelling area, 2012 (author's photo)

In the sixth and seventh space, we acquired a temporary art exhibition entitled “Hiteemkiliiksix: ‘Within the Circle of the Rim’: Nations Gathering on Common Ground,” which showcased a selection of art work made in the 2001 “Gathering of

Indigenous Artists from the Pacific Rim” at the Evergreen State College Longhouse. The gathering included 71 artists from 38 indigenous nations. With the wide variety of mediums of different types and sizes, we decided to utilize both exhibit spaces for this important traveling art exhibition. The MLRC’s display of this art exhibition lasted from the time of the opening in November 2002 until January 31, 2003. I recruited and coordinated many volunteers from SPSCC, the Evergreen State College Longhouse, and the tribal community to assist in the development and exhibition installation in the few months prior to the Grand Opening event. With their help, the MLRC opened on time in November.

Subsequent Exhibits and Programs

A few months after the Grand Opening, we de-installed the first temporary art exhibit and organized a Salish weaving exhibition entitled “SQ3Tsyayay: Weaver’s Spirit Power,” which opened on February 8, 2003 until July 30, 2003. It featured various contemporary wool textiles such as blankets and clothing woven in the traditional manner by local and regional Salish artists in the Salish Weaving Artists Guild. These artists provided their own photographs and biographies for the exhibition. We also displayed both historical and contemporary looms and tools used in the weaving process. To complement the exhibition, members of the guild taught weaving classes in the MLRC classroom and conducted on-site demonstrations. For the opening of the exhibition, the MLRC hosted an intertribal ceremonial event with a feast, drumming and storytelling. After the weaving exhibit, I then organized another temporary exhibit consisting of

baskets made by tribal members. With the help of local tribal youth serving as summer interns, we completed the exhibit at the end of summer 2003. Again, the MLRC held basket making classes and demonstrations in conjunction with the exhibit.

After my departure in December of 2003, the executive director served as curator, utilizing volunteers on a regular basis to assist in curatorship duties involving the exhibits. During this time, a White Earth Ojibwe student at SPSCC began working with the website artifacts. She also volunteered frequently through internships with the Evergreen State College. In 2004, the MLRC contracted with her for a number of years until they hired her through a library grant as half-time Risk Evaluation and Emergency Planning Manager and half-time Curator in October of 2011. Throughout these years, she has provided research, documented and interpreted items brought into the collection for display, assisted in changing some permanent exhibits and rotated objects, created storage mounts, acquired outside temporary exhibitions, and coordinated public programs related to the exhibits. In October 2012, the MLRC hired her as a full-time curator. From that time, for over a year she has been diligently processing a major collection donated in June 2011 by treaty rights activists Theresa “Maiselle” McCloud Bridges and her daughter Alison Gottfriedson from the Frank’s Landing Indian community in nearby Nisqually. These two women donated over 700 items to the MRLC. Many are currently on display in two of the exhibit areas and will be rotated periodically for a number of years as staff processes them.⁵⁴ Two of the gallery spaces are planned for showcasing

⁵⁴ Personal Interview, October 30, 2012.

items from this collection, as well as highlighting background information on Bridges and Gottfriedson.



Figure 11: Baskets from the Bridges/Gottfriedson Collection, 2012 (author's photo)

As of 2012, the Mud Bay website exhibit remains virtually the same as originally organized for the MLRC opening, but with some newer acquisitions of objects found at the site in recent years. The Hall of the Seven Inlets also remains on display; however, other miscellaneous Coast Salish objects with text labels are currently placed in additional display cases near the panels. An MLRC graphics person printed and installed large historical photographs from the University of Washington and the Squaxin Island tribal archives throughout the MLRC. Prior to my 2003 departure, I drafted an exhibit plan pertaining to a theme of tribal history, such as treaty rights or Native plants. However, due to the new Bridges and Gottfriedson acquisition, the curator believes that new exhibits cannot be planned for quite some time due to concentrated efforts on processing and displaying these items. There is also lack of funding for new exhibits. However, plans are in place to secure a traveling exhibit in 2013 from the Burke Museum

entitled “Salish Bounty: Traditional Native American Foods of Puget Sound.” To supplement this exhibit, the MLRC intends to incorporate tribal members’ involvement in teaching and learning about traditional foods from gathering to processing and cooking. The curator may also add a basketry and language component to this exhibit as well.⁵⁵

Typically, once permanent exhibits are completed in many tribal museums, a lack of consistent funding prevents the construction of rotating temporary exhibits or the purchase of traveling exhibits on a regular basis. As a result, many staffs turn their attention to community and public programs. For the first time in the MLRC building, the MLRC held its Native Art Auction in May of 2003.⁵⁶ The art auction is still one of the largest fundraising events featuring a number of works from premier Northwest Coast artists. This annual event is still one of the larger community events of the year with a feast and drumming, singing, dancing and storytelling. Due to the smaller size of the building, major community MLRC events are held elsewhere in the Little Creek Casino or in the Community Kitchen, which opened in 2012 for the annual Canoe Journey held as Squaxin. Another important MLRC event is the annual Holiday Bazaar in which tribal and other local Native vendors sell their handmade products. One of the main goals for the MLRC has always been to bring a number of community members into the museum building to participate in cultural activities and public programs.

⁵⁵ Personal Interview, October 30, 2012.

⁵⁶ In the mid-1990s, the Burke Museum in Seattle held the first Native art auction, with all proceeds going toward the MLRC. Thereafter, it was held periodically at the Little Creek Casino after it opened in 1995.

As part of the mission, the MLRC remains active in collaborating with the Squaxin Island community. It is important to note here that community for Squaxin and many other tribal nations means communal life in which Native people tend to consider themselves a part of a singular community. Although perhaps problematic as it implies homogeneity, it is nevertheless empowering for many Native people who are located in close proximity to each other on a reservation or urban neighborhood, attend tribal or community social events, work with each other in Native organizations, and have kinship and family ties to one another. Native people tend to be very community-oriented, thinking not only of themselves as individuals, but also having responsibilities as a member or part of a community. However, in designing museum exhibits, it can be difficult to represent all members of a community if differences of opinion exist.

Conflicting Notions of Cultural Authority and Collective Identity at the MLRC

Like all organizations with many people, there are bound to be differences of opinion concerning implementation of projects and activities. It is common in many communities for disagreements to occur about museum exhibit content, and this phenomenon is not just isolated to tribal communities. Yet, it is important to examine these issues in order to provide a complete analysis of the exhibit design process. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the tribal museum aims to represent the entire tribal community and this goal can become difficult. There are many Squaxin tribal members who have knowledge of different facets of tribal history and culture, whether it comes from stories provided by family members or from doing their own individual research. In

fact, the MLRC Director stated that while fishing from the 1970s on, she listened to elders not only from Squaxin Island, but from nearby Skokomish, Nisqually, and Puyallup reservations tell stories about their history. She took notes about ancestral places, tribal history, and information about traditional plants on her tribal fishing tickets, which further motivated her interest in tribal history and culture.⁵⁷ In the MLRC exhibit design process a number of people, from tribal council to the Heritage Committee and the elders group, did not entirely agree about what should be featured in the exhibits. Existing tension, along with a delay in hiring enough people to complete the job, hindered the development of the MLRC exhibits for many months after the construction of the building.

In the Squaxin Island tribal community, some friction existed at the very beginning of the process. The means of establishing a tribal identity or an official narrative for a tribal museum can become controversial due to the high stakes involved in completing such a task. A lack of political consensus increasing among MLRC board members made the process especially difficult. Some tension existed between some board members and the executive director, who previously chaired the Heritage Committee. The tribal community recently elected the executive director to tribal council, which further complicated relations. It is my belief the lack of political consensus grew from some debate about who possessed more cultural knowledge and authority since some members of the board consisted of employees from the Cultural Resources Department and the Education Department, as well as tribal members on the

⁵⁷ Personal Interview, October 29, 2012.

Heritage Committee. Because the duties of the Cultural Resources and Education Departments intersected with the MLRC goals of prioritizing tribal history, culture, and community education, clear boundaries between all three entities did not yet exist. Confusion arose about the role of the Heritage Committee because its chairperson then became the MLRC executive director.

One of the main issues raised involved the use of photographs of tribal members. In designing the Hall of the Seven Inlets, we decided to include a variety of historical and contemporary photographs. Some of the descendants of the original families of the seven inlets believed that one particular family from one inlet would be featured more than others. Some inlets are more abundant in resources than others; therefore, it is safe to assume that the bands living in these rich inlets may have had more wealth and status than those from other inlets. Wealth and status has long been characteristic of Puget Sound Native communities and in some communities, hierarchies historically existed between different classes of people.⁵⁸ When I asked the MLRC executive director how they wanted the families at Squaxin represented, she initially stated to me that the photographs used must include many different tribal members and their ancestors. The curator at the time and the executive director agreed that since Rod Slemmons and I were outsiders unfamiliar with the family politics at Squaxin, we would be unbiased in choosing the photographs for the panels. However, a few events we held at the MLRC

⁵⁸ For more discussion on this topic, see W.W. Elmendorf, *The Structure of Twana Culture* (Pullman, Wash.: Washington State University, 1960), 317-347.

requesting families to bring in their family photographs for scanning were not successful, meaning many in the community did not trust us as outsiders.

In the spring of 2002, Slemmons and I met with the director of the Cultural Resources Department, who was also an MLRC board member, to determine the status of using the Mud Bay wetsite objects in the exhibits. She was initially uncooperative. She stated her concerns about our involvement and our exhibit ideas because we were outsiders and many people in the community felt the same way. After we explained we would do our best for all in the community, she seemed receptive and expressed her main concern about families. She wanted to ensure that we knew that there are only seven major families, including her family, in the community who identify themselves with each one of the seven inlets. When I spoke to MLRC staff later, they indicated that it was not that simple and explained the controversial nature of this topic amongst members of the Heritage Committee and the tribe overall. The executive director informed me that many different families exist today and to focus on only seven families would exclude some tribal members. She also indicated that associating a certain family with one inlet only would increase competition between families. When I asked her how we should depict the families, she decided that we should choose both historical and contemporary photographs of cultural events that included many tribal people together. The staff approved of a collage of different tribal people, past and present, chosen arbitrarily by us as outside consultants.

Another situation occurred at the time with the curator who was a member of the Heritage Committee since its inception. In May of 2002, the board made the decision to

dismiss her as curator, a job she had for only a few months, due to personal issues. At the time, I was still involved with the exhibit design plans as an outside consultant and finishing my MA degree. The board decided to appoint me as ‘Acting Curator’ to replace her. For the next few months, the former curator argued that since I was not a Squaxin Island tribal member, she should be reappointed to her position. By August of 2002, the board made a drastic decision to complete the exhibits and open the MLRC as soon as possible. Although I was not a tribal member, the board and staff believed I was competent enough as a Native person trained in museum studies to complete the task, but they gave me only a three-month deadline. The board informed me that I would eventually be hired permanently with the understanding that I complete all of the exhibits by the time of the museum opening, which they planned for mid- November of 2002.

In August, I moved quickly to finalize the exhibit plans with the assistance of Rod Slemmons, who via an email dated August 1, 2002, instructed the executive director “to convince the board that until a political consensus is accomplished, it is not wise to spend money on either design or production of exhibits...Without that consensus, you are going to continue to run into paralyzing obstructions every time you try to do something.”⁵⁹ He offered suggestions on how to proceed, which she followed. Although competing ideas between board members and the staff about exhibit content persisted, the board eventually reached a consensus after the August meeting and approved our plans for the Hall of the Seven Inlets.

⁵⁹ Rod Slemmons, Email message to the MLRC Executive Director, August 1, 2002.

For the seven panels, the board and staff decided to use the text we drafted as consultants. Although we did not get the opportunity to present it to the entire community for approval due to the short timeframe for the museum opening, it did contain much of the original language from the official tribal narrative already approved by the elders and others in the community. Some tribal members volunteered to help install the exhibits. On November 16, 2002, the MLRC hosted a special preview and ceremony, which included a community storytelling event and feast. On November 26, 2002, the MLRC opened its doors to the general public. It was an impressive event, one which celebrated and empowered the community despite any tensions and conflicts that previously existed. On opening day, even some of those who initially disagreed with the direction of the exhibits, came to participate in the event and appreciated the result of years of planning.

Decolonization at the MLRC

Chapter One provides details about standard, conventional, and traditional museum practices in exhibitions with regard to Native peoples. It is not only crucial to resist standard Western museum practices where colonial agendas are present, but it is critical for tribes to reclaim their tribal history and culture. Recently, some Native scholars argue that tribal nations must confront difficult truths as well. Amy Lonetree calls for “truth telling in exhibitions” as a decolonizing and healing strategy for Native communities. She claims that museums should not only concern themselves with countering stereotypes but to expose visitors to the negative impact of colonialism. In

her discussion of the Saginaw Chippewa's Ziibiwing Center for Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways, she claims the Center embodies a decolonizing museum with exhibits privileging of oral tradition and conveying "the difficult stories of land, theft, disease, poverty, violence, and forced conversion at the hands of Christian missionaries." While Lonetree does acknowledge such a narrative in tribal museums may mean subscribing to the language of victimization or reinforcing stereotypes, she asserts that it is necessary for healing Native communities. One example is an exhibit that hits visitors hard with difficult truths, but then is followed by an exhibit space that promotes reflection and peace.⁶⁰ However, as I contend in the Introduction, the issue is much more complex than what Lonetree asserts when taking into consideration the structure of settler colonialism, where a long history of interactions and reciprocities between both Native and local non-Native communities exists. Many of these same relationship dynamics are still present in these communities today. The decolonizing tactic Lonetree promotes must bear in mind whether or not the tribal community really does desire to present a "hard-hitting analysis of colonialism" in their museum. If they choose to create exhibits to tell these types of "truth-telling" stories, they may want to consider whether or not doing so will further or hinder their socio-political, legal, and economic goals. If they choose not to "address

⁶⁰ Amy Lonetree, "Museums as Sites for Decolonization," in *Contesting Knowledge*, 322-335. See also Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

unresolved grief” in the manner in which she proposes, they should not be perceived of betraying their principles.⁶¹

Back in the early 2000s, exhibit strategies aimed solely at decolonization as Lonetree defines it had not officially appeared in museum scholarship. Scholars and tribal museum staffs tended to focus more on the survival and celebration of culture and tribal identity. At the MLRC, we did not want to ignore the devastating policies Squaxin Island people had been exposed to under federal assimilation, such as boarding schools and loss of culture. For instance, a text paragraph introducing Panel Five is entitled “The Assimilation Policy and the Survival of Culture.” It reads:

From the treaty period of the mid 1800’s until the 1930’s, the U.S. government attempted to force all Native people to become like European-Americans. This policy, referred to as assimilation, required that our ancestors be educated in federally-run boarding and training schools, become farmers, and convert to Christianity. Our ways of life were seen as savage. Although we have lost much as a result of this federal policy and those that followed, we have maintained our identity and kept many of our tribal traditions. In the past few decades, we have seen a resurgence of Native pride and tribal identity and many of our people participate in the traditions of our ancestors.

In Panel Six, we decided to confront more specific issues about the Medicine Creek treaty, the establishment of the reservation, and boarding schools using historical text and oral histories from elders who went to boarding school. For example, we used a quote from a tribal elder born in 1916, which reads:

⁶¹ Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 70. More discussion of this topic is located in the Conclusion of this dissertation.

They sent us to government school, a Catholic school over there at Milton (St. George's)...past Fife going towards Seattle...I was probably about 6 or 7 when they sent us there. We had to go...and after we were there for a while, then they changed the schools and sent us to Tulalip...and that was a long way from home...that's where I got the measles. I didn't even have my mother to sit by me...we didn't cry or nothing, we just knew that it had to be and we just went along with it.

In addition, we applied photographs of children in boarding schools, and Indian agency quotes that negatively described Native peoples' lifestyles in contraction to their program of assimilation to illustrate their attitudes toward Native people at the time. For instance, the Instructor of the school on the Squaxin Island Indian Agency wrote on July 1, 1858:

“...I feel confident that ultimately great good can be done towards civilizing the rising generation, but so long as the children continue to live with their parents..., and subject to the evil influences of their demoralized mode of living, no hopes need be entertained of...civilizing them...”

We also included information about the 1854 treaty and *U.S. v. Washington*, but did not provide specific details. In retrospect, we could have further engaged in this history, as well as offering more discussion on the residual impact of devastating federal assimilation policies on the Squaxin Island people. We did not think to overtly name and define colonization or colonialism; instead, we chose to emphasize a more celebratory narrative of what Gerald Vizenor calls *survivance* of the Squaxin Island people.⁶² This approach remains the norm in the construction of tribal museum exhibits today and the degree to which survivance is demonstrated varies depending on the opinions of staffs,

⁶² Again, the term “survivance” coined by White Earth Ojibwe author Gerald Vizenor, means for tribal people to exist and in both survival and resistance. See *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

tribal councils, elders, tribal and important community members, and museum boards.

Reaching a consensus everyone can live with is critical to the process.

Conclusion

According to Brenda Child, “[tribal museums are] a reminder that Indian people live in a complex world, where politics often inform decisions and influence our narratives of history...In this struggle, the tribal museum is an important Indigenous space...”⁶³ Throughout the museum process, the Squaxin Island Tribe worked consistently to define its primary cultural goals for its community and assess how their tribal museum can assert its sovereignty for future generations. The formation of a tribal identity or an official tribal narrative is significant to developing a tribal museum and exhibits, but tribal nations must ensure that it does not remain fixed or static but can transform, particularly as it conveys aspects of culture and contemporary tribal people. As one tribal member noted, “I don’t like the fact that the exhibits are so static, so stagnant but now that we got [a new curator] in there, hopefully now we can bring in more pieces from the Burke, [or] maybe we can partner with the Seattle Art Museum and get into their collections and bring in Coast Salish Work...I think it would bring in more community members...”⁶⁴ Yet, with any changes in exhibit content, tribal museum staffs must be diligent in thinking about the representation of their community so it does not dismantle their treaty rights or separate status as sovereign nations.

⁶³ Brenda Child, “Creation of the Tribal Museum,” in *Contesting Knowledge*, 256.

⁶⁴ Personal Interview, November 1, 2012.

Although this chapter may have portrayed the Squaxin Island MLRC's path to their tribal identity formation as arduous at times, their story is one of success. The MLRC has become a model tribal museum in the Pacific Northwest for other tribal museums in the area. The Hibulb Cultural Center at Tulalip opened in 2011 and in the summer of 2012, the Suquamish Museum opened to the public. Both museums reflect many of the same characteristics as the MLRC, such as exhibit techniques and architecture. Similar to the MLRC, both museums illustrate the value they place on history, cultural activities, and contemporary tribal people. With the exhibits, visitors are easily able to grasp the significance each tribe's very specific local tribal identity. As a result of much planning and the effort made to reach a consensus on issues over cultural authority and identity, the MLRC opened its doors to a better future for the tribe and the Squaxin Island people. As one of the main objectives at inception, the MLRC still functions as a community gathering place for many tribal members, acting more like a cultural center than a museum. When asked about the MLRC's own identity, the current curator verified that although it is a museum, it is not a "museum-museum" with only exhibits; it is a living museum where teaching and learning about activities such as drumming, singing, dancing frequently occur and where artifacts on display or in storage like cedar hats can be used in ceremonial events.⁶⁵

Today, many Squaxin tribal members firmly believe that the MLRC celebrates not only their history, but most importantly their contemporary lives as it is known as the hub for many of the tribe's cultural activities. In her description of the tribal museum

⁶⁵ Personal Interview, October 30, 2012.

formation process, the MLRC director's statement succinctly encapsulates what many tribal and community members feel about the museum and its role in the community:

...We wanted to make sure that the museum had its own character, own atmosphere so we relied on our elders who said it will be past, present, future, it will be alive. We want the museum to be alive, not just about the past. So with that, we made the decision that we would have the voices of our people in it so if ever there were to be a demonstration, it would be tribal members that would have the feeling this is my house, [that] I'm going to sit here in this chair or I'm going to do this weaving. So we wanted the atmosphere of this museum to have the feeling that this belongs to you as a tribal member so the name of the museum *kwedigws?altxw* implies home of sacred belongings and in our history, homes were very important. We had longhouses that were like our colleges and universities where you could go there and you could gather teachings from elders and in our society...⁶⁶

Similarly, another Squaxin Island tribal member described what he likes best about the MLRC, "I like best the fact that we get to sing and dance in there on a regular basis. It makes it more feel more than just a museum. It makes it feel more like a house or a home."⁶⁷

It is this house or home where many Squaxin tribal people turned to when the Canoe Journey took place summer of 2012. For the year prior to the event, the Squaxin Island canoe family (what they call members of each tribe who organize and participate in the Canoe Journey) met regularly to make preparations for the 'Paddle to Squaxin.' The MLRC staff, many of whom are part of the canoe family, became central figures in organizing this event, writing grants with the tribe to secure funding for the outside canoe

⁶⁶ Personal Interview, October 29, 2012.

⁶⁷ Personal Interview, November 1, 2012.

shed, pond, and the Community Kitchen used to cook the traditional foods for the gathering. For many months prior to Annual Canoe Journey, the MLRC held numerous weekly workshops and classes on traditional cultural activities, such as making dance regalia, cedar hats and cedar headbands, drums for singing, as well as gifts for guests, including miniature baskets, canoe paddles, and other small carvings. The Canoe Journey, with the MLRC as a central location, empowered tribal and other community members to participate and learn about their history and cultural identity.

As hosts, the tribe wanted to reaffirm Squaxin Island tribal identity to all those in attendance, including other canoe families and Native people, as well as local non-Native people. The tribe expected an unprecedented number of non-Native tourists to attend the canoe landing in Olympia and the potlatch in the heart of the reservation. The tribe saw the Canoe Journey as an opportunity to educate non-Native people and establish important partnerships with the local, state and county governments and other non-tribal organizations, which would assist in furthering their tribal sovereignty. According to the MLRC director, it has always been important for the tribe and the MLRC to educate local people that, “our people have resided in this are for thousands of years” and maintained a connection to the land and its natural resources. Reflecting on the significance of the historical struggle for treaty rights, the director stated, “When we talk about treaty rights, the way I look at the treaty rights is I try to think about the way our ancestors fought way back then when they were signing these treaties, it was more about the quality of life, the right to live, the right to be able to provide for the family.”⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Personal Interview, October 29, 2012.

The MLRC conveys this quality of life throughout its exhibits, which were intended from the very beginning to firmly distinguish the Squaxin Island tribe as “People of the Water.” MLRC staff strongly believes that the more non-Native people learn about the Squaxin Island and other Native people, the more they can understand their reliance on the land and why they consistently fought against American colonialism to maintain their treaty rights, as detailed in Chapter Two. As I contend throughout this dissertation, tribal museum staffs take into consideration multiple audiences depending in their socio-political, legal, and economic situation. The Squaxin Island people’s relationship to the local non-Native community influenced their decisions about the content of the exhibits. They demonstrate the MLRC is one way, but not the only way, they are telling their tribe’s story, proving how they are simultaneously resisting and adapting to their present circumstances.

The Ojibwe people in the Upper Midwest also have a similar quality of life as the Squaxin Island and other Pacific Northwest Native people. The Ojibwe have a special relationship to the land and its resources and depend on the reserved treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather, which they also fought to maintain. One band of Ojibwe, the Mille Lacs Band, has a museum on their reservation, but the circumstances behind its creation and the direction of the exhibits and the exhibit design process were different than those at the MLRC, as detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Collaboration between State and Band: Political and Social Meanings of the Mille Lacs Indian Museum

Having grown up at the nearby Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe reservation in Wisconsin, I attended the annual powwow at Mille Lacs Reservation off and on since childhood. State borders have had little effect on the social and kinship ties between Ojibwe groups of people who have always frequently moved between communities. The 1990s brought the Grand Casinos to the Mille Lacs Band and thereafter, these revenues supported numerous economic development projects and helped to establish some of the band's major political and cultural endeavors.

In 1996, I remember my first visit to the Mille Lacs Indian Museum. I recall thinking how wonderful it was to have a tribal museum for people to learn about Ojibwe culture and history. The interaction between the elders demonstrating beadwork and other cultural activities to the broader public is particularly memorable. The four seasons room fascinated me because the tour guide provided the background information of some of the things I participated in as a child, such as wild ricing. The tour further elucidated the history and cultural background for me and I found myself instilled with a sense of pride at how our ancestors lived and survived throughout the year. I realized the determination of the Ojibwe people to maintain our cultural knowledge for future generations. The sovereignty exhibit brought insight into how this cultural knowledge translates into where our tribal nations stand today.

Yesterday, [on April 7, 2012], I brought my seven-year old son to the MLIM because it was opening day and I wanted to view the new temporary art exhibit. With my son, I reflected on many of the same exhibits I originally viewed as a young adult back in 1996, but now it seemed more significant with him there and he asked many questions... [Excerpts from author's personal journal, April 8, 2012]

May 18, 1996 marked the grand opening of the new Mille Lacs Indian Museum (MLIM). The front page of the June 1996 issue of *The Mille Lacs Band News* featured then Chief Executive Marge Anderson's reaction to the opening. She explained that the opening of the MLIM for band members felt like, "...coming home...It's a place where we feel comfortable, a place where we recognize our surroundings, a place where we

grew up, and where we would like to raise our children.”¹ This idea of the ‘museum as home’ is not unique to many Native people whose reservations have a tribal museum. As discussed in Chapter Three, the Squaxin Island Tribe in Washington State voted to call their tribal museum *kwedigws?altx*, which incorporates the concept of home in the Lushootseed language, as it functions as a central site for community gatherings and tribal functions. As scholar Brenda Child notes, “They [tribal museums] are museums, but they are also significant centers for community life today.”² In our communities, we strive to make our tribal buildings reflective of our own homes, which provide us with a sense of comfort and ownership as we convey who we are and how we live in very distinct ways. Through Marge Anderson’s statement, we gain a sense of what the MLIM may mean to the band and its members. After all, many Native people, like those I interviewed from the Squaxin Island Tribe, feel their tribal museum is their home away from home. They can be places to not only learn about their tribal history and traditional culture, but also their sovereignty. At the tribal museum, they gain a sense of pride in the accomplishments of their own community. Tribal museums are also places where the broader local non-Native public can also learn about Native issues and specific tribal and cultural information. But what if the tribal museum is not a tribally-run organization?

This chapter concentrates on the site of the Mille Lacs Indian Museum, which interestingly is one of twenty-six official state of Minnesota historic sites and museums,

¹ Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, “New Mille Lacs Indian Museum Opens to the Public,” *Mille Lacs Band News*, 3, no. 6 (June 1996).

² Brenda Child, “Creation of the Tribal Museum,” in *Contesting Knowledge*, 253.

and as such was built in partnership with the State of Minnesota Historical Society (MHS). What is particularly remarkable is that the plans for the new building resumed throughout the 1990s, despite the band's lawsuit against the State of Minnesota. The federal court eventually ruled in favor of the band to retain their hunting, fishing, and gathering rights guaranteed to them under the Treaty of 1837. In 1997, a year after the Museum grand opening, the Court of Appeals affirmed the court's rulings. The case eventually led to the 1999 U.S. Supreme Court decision for the Mille Lacs Band.

Although planning efforts for the new Indian Museum began prior to the court filing in the early 1990s, the treaty rights struggle in Wisconsin during this time and the advent of Indian gaming impacted the direction of the Indian Museum's exhibit content. In this chapter, I begin with the background of the MLIM and then provide a description of the current exhibits. Next, I attend to the ways in which the MLIM has chosen to engage in dialogue on band history, traditional Ojibwe activities, treaty rights, and tribal sovereignty. The 1980s planning committee identified their primary goal of creating exhibits that focus on contemporary survival, thereby taking a more celebratory approach in its official tribal narrative. As mentioned previously, some critics argue that this approach does some disservice to Native histories and contemporary communities as it overlooks the difficult truths of colonialism and its negative impacts to tribal communities.

Despite this critique, many Native nations with a tribal museum choose to emphasize cultural survival as a way to empower tribal members and use it to help further their cultural, social, economic and political objectives in ways that are beneficial

to their communities. I contend that while tribal museums are viewed in part as a reaction to negative Western museum representation, this does not take precedence over the creation of tribal museum exhibits made for and by a tribal community for very specific reasons. Throughout this chapter, I explore how the community-driven MLIM and its exhibits influences claims surrounding self-determination and tribal sovereignty in its identity as a state-run institution with a responsibility to the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. Since the beginning, the MLIM has acted as a site for negotiation and compromise between a state and a tribal nation; yet, the elders involved in the planning process ensured that it also be a site for conveying Ojibwe survival and cultural resurgence. The MLIM illustrates the band's ability to both resist and adapt to its present circumstances. It reflects a thoughtful consideration of its different audiences for very strategic purposes relating to furthering their socio-political and economic goals. The MLIM's official tribal narrative as conveyed in the exhibits has served to influence the Mille Lacs Band's claim to their treaty rights and helped to reinforce their inherently sovereign status. However, uncertainty does exist about the intended exhibit messages and how they are interpreted by museum visitors, both Native and non-Native. A central question relates to the MLIM's target audience: is the target audience band members or the non-Native public? Today, it does seem to function in some capacity as a meeting place for band members, similar to the Squaxin Island Tribe's MLRC. I discuss the MLIM's unclear role in the Mille Lacs community, which may be the result of its identity as a state institution with a responsibility to the Mille Lacs Band. This identity began with the Trading Post and Museum's long history of collecting local Ojibwe craft items.

MLIM Beginnings

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Mille Lacs people's talents in birch bark, sweet grass, black ash, and porcupine quill basketry and beadwork propelled a tourist industry of highly decorative traditional and non-traditional items for sale. During the early twentieth century, Harry and Jeannette Ayer, who owned an Indian Trading Post at Mille Lacs, obtained about 1,400 items from many of these artisans throughout the years 1919-1955 while they operated their business. According one of the first MLIM project managers, Sarah Libertus, the Ayers' entire operation consisted of a fishing resort with cabins on the lake, a boatworks, a restaurant, and fishing guides for tourists and sport fishermen. The Ayers built a number of additions to their trading post in order to display their increasing collection of tools and equipment, birch bark basketry, traditional clothing, and beadwork items.



Figure 12: Birch bark basket racks, Mille Lacs. Photographer: Monroe P. Killy, MHS Photograph Collection 9/2/1946, Loc. no. Collection I.69.165



Figure 13: Indian Trading Post at Mille Lacs. MHS Photograph Collection ca. 1915, Loc. no. MM6.7M p44, Neg. no. 34674

When they eventually retired from business in 1959, they donated their collection, along with the trading post and other resort buildings at the site, to the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS). Since that time, MHS developed interpretive exhibits and made other improvements to the old Ayers site. In 1960, the new “State Indian Museum” opened with a crowd of 1,500 ceremony attendees and thereafter, MHS hosted regular powwows and continually added new exhibits over the years. In the 1980s, the staff determined to move the entire Ayers collection to a climate-controlled storage area at an MHS facility in the Twin Cities due to the deterioration of the Ayers building.³

MHS had a long tradition of hiring Mille Lacs Ojibwe community members as managers, tour guides, museum shop clerks, and craft demonstrators. Esteemed elders Batiste Sam and Maude Kegg, both of whom were instrumental as members of the Mille Lacs Reservation Curriculum Committee in the early to mid-1980s, helped plan the new building and the exhibits that exist at the site today. These elders, along with other

³ Sarah Libertus, “Preview: The New Mille Lacs Indian Museum,” in *Minnesota History* 55, no. 1 (1996), 34.

community members, worked in collaboration with the larger MLIM Planning Committee.⁴ The MHS senior curator at the time, who was a member of the 1984 committee noted, “When you walked in, it was such a treat to see Batiste or Maude sitting there, demonstrating their skills for everyone who came through the door.”⁵ This committee included other key MHS employees to plan the new museum building and exhibits.

According to the *Planning Study for a New Mille Lacs Indian Museum and Cultural Center* published by the MHS in 1984, five years prior MHS reviewed the program at the Mille Lacs Indian Museum as part of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). At the time, MHS and MLIM staff believed that the “Exhibits...were narrow in scope and occasionally inaccurate or insensitive and, most important of all, did not communicate a sense of the enduring spirit of tribal life which has survived some 5,000 years to flow strongly through the present-day Mille Lacs Indian community.”⁶ In 1984, with funding from NEH and the Mardag Foundation, MHS developed the preliminary report with the Reservation Curriculum Committee using five outside museum or history consultants to offer suggestions on the future direction of the MLIM. After meeting and working numerous hours, they chose identified three main goals:

⁴ Minnesota Historical Society, *Planning Study for a New Mille Lacs Indian Museum and Cultural Center* (St. Paul, Minn.: Mille Lacs Planning Committee, Minnesota Historical Society, 1984), 11-12.

⁵ Personal Interview, June 2011.

⁶ Minnesota Historical Society, *Planning Study*, 1.

- 1) To improve and expand interpretation and programming at the site, relying much more heavily on Indian perspectives, to do justice to the long and at times tragic story of the persistence of tribal life in the Mille Lacs area.
- 2) To maximize the use and protection of the valuable Ayer collection by providing suitably safe environments for its display and storage.
- 3) To take strong, positive steps to improve relations with the local Indian community by offering it meaningful opportunities to participate in the planning process and a major, ongoing role in the telling of its story.⁷

In this first phase, MHS planning committee members met only with each other, then with the Reservation Curriculum Committee comprised of elders designated to represent the Mille Lacs Band. Two months later, a team of five consultants visited the site for two days to present their suggestions. The planning committee hired the following consultants: Carey T. Caldwell, the Director of the Suquamish Museum in Washington State, Dave Warren, Director of Cultural Studies at the Institute of American Indian Art, George Horse Capture, Curator of the Plains Indian Museum, John Nichols, a Professor of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba, and Freda McDonald, Supervisor of the Native Encampment at Old Fort William. Their role included evaluating MHS proposals for a new facility; offer their impressions of the site and its history; convey their opinions on how to tackle “technical historical subjects”, such as treaties and federal government policies in exhibits (discussed later); suggest how to discuss the relationship between the Ayers and the Mille Lacs people; share their

⁷ Ibid., 7-8.

experiences with craft demonstration and visitor surveys; and answer other pertinent questions about possibilities of exhibits and programs.⁸

From these results, the MHS Planning Committee produced a colorful summary booklet entitled *A Concept Plan for the New Mille Lacs Indian Museum and Cultural Center and Kathio Historic District, National Historic Landmark, 1984-1985*, which served to not only consolidate the findings and summarize the plan, but also to assist in fundraising activities with the Mille Lacs community and the state legislature. The report indicated a total project cost of \$4,596,795 with construction costs of \$3,503,320, non-construction costs of \$875,580, and a contingency of \$218,895.⁹ With the plan for the building and exhibits underway, an MHS staff person documented and cleaned the recently-moved items from the Ayer collection to be used in the exhibits and organized others to be stored in the new museum building.

According to Libertus, in 1987 the MLIM secured funding from the Minnesota state legislature, which appropriated \$4 million for the project. Other funding came in from the Economic Development Agency, the U.S. Department of Transportation, as well as the NEH and other private foundations. The Mille Lacs Band provided in-kind donations of utilities, parking, and tribal member hours on the project.¹⁰ In 1988, U.S. Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, which paved the way for the building of Indian casinos on reservations. For the Mille Lacs Band, a small bingo hall

⁸ Ibid., 13-15.

⁹ Minnesota Historical Society, *A Concept Plan for the New Mille Lacs Indian Museum and Cultural Center and Kathio Historic District, National Historic Landmark* (St. Paul, Minn.: Minnesota Historical Society, 1984-1985), 14.

¹⁰ Libertus, 39.

transformed into the Grand Casinos in 1991 and 1992, both complete with a restaurant, hotel, convention center, and an entertainment space, which brought more tourists to the area and drastically shifted the local economy. According to anthropologist Jennifer Stampe, with these developments MHS and the Mill Lacs Curriculum Committee became further determined “to tell a new story...to emphasize dynamism and change.”¹¹ It was then that they conceptualized the building plans into an actual physical building. The old building closed in 1992 and shortly after, construction on a 22,810 square foot building began with a museum opening scheduled for 1996.



Figure 14: The Trading Post today, April 2012 (author's photo)



Figure 15: Side view of MLIM front entrance, April 2012 (author's photo)

¹¹ Jennifer Stampe, “‘You *Will* Learn About Our Past’: Cultural Representation, Self-Determination, and the Problems of Presence,” (PhD diss, University of Minnesota, 2007), 88-89.

In 1995, the Mille Lacs Band developed an informational brochure about the band's history, tribal departments, and economic development projects. On the last page, the band included a brief section on the MLIM, which would "feature exhibits on traditional and contemporary Mille Lacs culture," and would include a crafts training and demonstration room, an outdoor program space to demonstrate maple sugar processing, wild rice harvesting, canoe construction, and other traditional skills, as well as an area for seminars and lectures throughout the year.¹² In the late 1980s, the committee originally envisioned an auditorium and projection room, a library/study room, collections storage and study, a museum shop and storage, in addition to staff offices, a staff workroom, a guide room and lounge, and general storage.¹³ Using the suggestions of the five consultants, the Mille Lacs Curriculum Committee directed MHS to create exhibits that would integrate the landscape as the home of the Mille Lacs people in order to illustrate the continuance of the culture and traditions and emphasize survivance and presence of the contemporary community.

A Tour through the Exhibit Galleries

On opening day April 7, 2012, upon entering the Mille Lacs Indian Museum glass doors and paying the entrance fee at the desk located on the left, I became immediately drawn to the area to the right past the lobby. I walked forward, keeping to the right

¹² The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, "The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Indians," (Onamia, Minn.: The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, 1995), 19.

¹³ Minnesota Historical Society, *A Concept Plan*, 14.

where sunlight glistened through the large glass windows illuminating that part of the museum. The beadwork and other artwork inside of the glass display cases seemed to glow brighter as I moved toward them. As I walked closer, I realized the pieces inside the cases were part of an exciting new temporary exhibit entitled “Mni Sota: Reflections of Time and Place,” on display until May 18, 2012. The exhibit featured Minnesota’s most premier Native artists who embraced both contemporary and traditional styles in their work. Staff installed different types of artwork from paintings to beadwork along the walls and in glass vitrines placed sporadically throughout the hallway. They also transformed the conference room into a temporary exhibit space.¹⁴ The Four Seasons Room is located next to this conference room/exhibit space. The doors to the Four Seasons Room are typically closed to prevent visitors from entering the room on their own. The sign outside the doors indicates the times of guided tours. The Four Seasons Room is known to be the main attraction to the MLIM.

The Four Seasons Room

The Four Seasons Room is situated to the left from the entrance toward the back of the building from the entrance. Its location implies it is to be the last exhibit for visitors to view. Once visitors enter, they see an impressive life-size diorama. The tour guide indicates it is reinstalled from the old museum building, originally created in 1964 to depict Ojibwe seasonal activities at the time after European contact around the fur

¹⁴ Another example of a temporary exhibit at MLIM is “Sacred Legacy: Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian” opened after this one and was on view from June 26, 2012 until September 16, 2012.

trade era. Activities such as hunting, spearfishing, processing maple sugar, gardening and berry picking, and harvesting wild rice are featured. Members of the band posed for the mannequins, which MHS installed in 1972. Today, some band member employees guide visitors through this room every hour during the tourist season or as requested by individuals or tour groups throughout the off-season in winter. The mannequins are modeled after real people and the intricacy of historical details attest to the high level of community involvement and their collaborative partnership with MHS.



Figure 16: Four Seasons Room, Summer (author's photo)



Figure 17: Four Seasons Room, Fall (author's photo)



Figure 18: Four Seasons Room, Winter (author's photo)



Figure 19: Four Seasons Room, Summer (author's photo)

The Other Exhibits

Unless an MLIM staff person is about to give a tour of the Four Seasons Room, visitors are directed to a self-guided tour on the intended path clockwise from the entryway. Upon entry, visitors will most likely see a large birch bark canoe. Here, visitors learn Naawakwegiizhig (Jim Hanks, Sr.) and his mother Gwade(n)s constructed it in 1940. The exhibit label is titled “How to Build a Jiimaan (Birchbark canoe),” and also contains photographs of Jim and his mother making it in various steps.

Walking to the left of the canoe, the visitor then sees a small exhibit on *Food and Medicine* with samples of medicinal plants, such as Ogosimon (Squash Rings) and Mashkiigobag (Labrador Tea), enclosed in a custom-built wooden display case with labels in Ojibwe and English. To the right of this display, a large chronological timeline of Mille Lacs Ojibwe history begins with a label on the occupation of the Dakota in the area prior to Ojibwe settlement in 1750 and ends with the year 1999. Stools are located beneath the timeline for comfort while reading. Maps, diagrams, historical photographs, and small labels supplement the timeline on the wall. Positioned near the timeline is a large glass vitrine with a small diorama of a pre-contact Ojibwe village with archeological fragments found at the “Big Lake” (Mille Lacs).



Figure 20: Timelines, 2012 (author's photo)

The visitor then notices immediately to the right of this case, a number of life-size cardboard cutouts of Mille Lacs people, past and present (mid-1990s), attached to the wall with the first large panel label entitled, “*Our Strength and Our Hope,*” emphasizing the resilience of the Mille Lacs people. Other large text labels discuss clans and kinship

ties; the origin and distinction of the terms ‘Anishinaabe,’ ‘Ojibwe’ and ‘Chippewa;’ Ojibwe migration from the East; and the Three Districts of Mille Lacs today that includes a map.¹⁵ Freestanding glass vitrines are located sporadically in this area and contain items such as beadwork belts, moccasins, birch bark containers, cradleboard, dolls, and a contemporary, partially-beaded baseball hat. Information about the makers, a description of uses, and historical and contemporary photographs of the makers’ families are placed in front of the objects. Interspersed among the glass cases are freestanding wooden panels with text labels containing photographs of elders and quotes, many of which are conveyed in both Ojibwe and English. A wall with a quote from [Chief] Wadena in 1912 separates this exhibit area from the next. It reads, “Many Generations of Our People Have Lived Here; Our Children Were Born Here; The Bones of Our Fathers Rest Here.”



Figure 21: Our Strength and Our Hope (author's photo)

¹⁵ MLIM staff added this text panel in 2006.



Figure 22: The end of the first exhibit (author's photo)

In the next exhibit area, to the right is a bowl game and moccasin game display with a glass case containing game items and a television screen showing a 1947 recording of elders playing the game made by Monroe Killy, an amateur ethnographic photographer of many Minnesota Ojibwe communities from the 1930s-1950s.¹⁶ A wall ‘phone’ is located to the right where visitors can hear elders Millie Benjamin and Jim Clark describing the games. Directly across this display is a wall panel label introducing the exhibit entitled “*Our Living Culture,*” which includes a photograph of former Chief Executive Marge Anderson who states, “Our Living Culture is what the Mille Lacs Band is all about.” The label conveys the importance of music, language, dance, and indicates, “Our culture is the foundation of all we do.” Next to this panel label is a replica of a travel trailer typically used as fry bread stands at powwows. A television kiosk with a touch screen is placed on the trailer, along with a cardboard cutout of Mille Lacs band member (and former museum worker), Kenny Weyaus, Sr., who owned the stand.

¹⁶ Bruce White, *We Are At Home: Pictures of the Ojibwe People* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007), 99.



Figure 23: Our Living Culture (author's photo)

The fry bread stand text panel introduces the content of the entire area: the origin and meaning of contemporary powwows and regalia. To the right of the stand, is a crescent-shaped diorama with mannequins posed and dressed in the different types of regalia used at powwows today (in the mid-1990s). Interactive kiosks in front of the mannequins and along the walls point to a space where visitors can sit and read and press buttons on the subject of Ojibwe music and dance. Behind this exhibit gallery, television kiosks with push buttons highlight traditional Ojibwe singing by elder Fred Benjamin and the local Nay Ah Shing School singers, as well as flute music by band member Darren Moose. A display case with old hand drums and flutes is located on the back wall to the right. Next to this case, are enlarged beading looms for visitors to try and another kiosk featuring language with push buttons organized according to subject matter, including animals, days, months, body parts, numbers, family, clothing, buildings, food, etc.



Figure 24: Powwow mannequins (author's photo)



Figure 25: Ojibwe language kiosk and beadwork station (author's photo)

As the visitor proceeds, he or she notices the large glass wall cases to the right highlighting pieces from the Ayer collection including beaded leggings, a bandolier bag, cradleboard, roach, birchbark containers and canoes, pipe bag, potter jar, buckskin dress, porcupine quill containers, among other items and information about the Ayers and their collection with enlarged historical photographs from the MHS Photograph collection. A Mille Lacs veterans' exhibit entitled, "*Modern Warriors*" is located directly across from these cases. To the right, small wooden plaques of all of the veterans who served in all of the wars are attached to the wall; below is a table with more information and photographs, as well as phones to hear voices of veterans talking about their experiences.

Another panel label and a display case with a uniform are located to the right of these plaques, along with a large photomural of veterans walking with flags in a Grand Entry procession at a powwow.



Figure 26: Ayer Collection, April 2012 (author's photo)



Figure 27: Modern Warriors exhibit (author's photo)

The next exhibit area is entitled, "*Nation Within a Nation*," focusing on tribal sovereignty and nationhood. It is a circular space with a central round table and stools. In the middle of the table is a standing large panel display with historical information in the middle (although sometimes this panel display is placed on the floor). Flip cards with questions and answers about the meaning of sovereignty and treaties for instance are placed around the table. To the left is an area about the contemporary community,

including a slot machine and a Grand Casino silk jacket, the door of a tribal police car and police coat, information about the school and clinic, and enlarged color photographs of Mille Lacs Band members and buildings, among other contemporary items and information.



Figure 28: Nation Within a Nation (author's photo)



Figure 29: Nation Within a Nation (author's photo)

Across from this display is a large map of all tribal nations in the U.S., Mille Lacs tribal license plates, and an interactive display on sovereignty in which visitors are asked what their rights are if they are citizens of a sovereign nation. To the left of this map, are chairs and a table with booklets on treaties, the 1837 treaty conservation code, and a compilation of a few newspaper articles about the treaty rights case won by the band in

1999. Maps and enlarged copies of the original treaties are located above on the walls. To the left of this table are enlarged photographs of notable Mille Lacs leaders, such as Migizi, Sam Yankee, and Marge Anderson, who was the first woman elected as Chief Executive in 1991. A large free-standing blue wall separates this section from the next with only a quote from Wewinabi (Arthur Garbow), former tribal chairman elected in 1972. In 1988, he stated, “Our Sovereignty Is As Sacred As Our Land. It is Our Right and Ability to Control Our Own Destiny.”



Figure 30: Panels of leaders and seating area to the right (author's photo)

Past this blue wall separator, the final exhibit is called “*Making a Living*,” which describes the resourcefulness and ability of the Mille Lacs people to survive through hard times. Emphasis is given on the types of occupations and work they did, from harvesting wild rice and other seasonal work to procure food to selling craft items at road stands to working in tribal departments. In this same area, a few display cases contain both contemporary and traditional tools for hunting and fishing or for other subsistence purposes. According to Jennifer Stampe, some of the traditional tools, such as arrowheads, bows, and fishing lures, originate from the Ayer collection, which had been

displayed in the old museum in an exhibit entitled “Hunting Meant Food to the Indian.”¹⁷ The current exhibit, organized by season, has eliminated the outdated references of the old exhibit and implemented the use of the Ojibwe words and personal narratives of Mille Lacs Band members about subsistence and occupations. The old tools are placed next to contemporary ones, such as carved wooden fish hooks and twine and modern nylon fishing twine and lures used by band members today. One particularly compelling display is a replica of a roadside stand of birch bark birdhouses and other birch bark items, which are a distinguishable feature in the history of the Mille Lacs Ojibwe economy. The exhibits end with the Ojibwe phrase “Gagwe gikendadaa gaapi izhiwebak,” which is translated, “Learn About Our Past: The Story of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe.”¹⁸ After touring the exhibits, I wondered what visitors learn about the Mille Lacs Ojibwe story and whether or not it resonates with them in the way it was originally intended by the 1980s Mille Lacs curriculum committee and MHS staff involved in the planning process.



Figure 31: Replica of roadside stand (author's photo)

¹⁷ Stampe, 100-101.

¹⁸ In her dissertation, Jennifer Stampe describes this sign being located at the entrance of the MLIM’s exhibits after Hanks’ large birchbark canoe. Ibid., 94.

An Exhibit Analysis: Contemporary Presence, Institutional Identity, and Important Omissions

According to Sarah Libertus in a 1996 MLIM preview, “The new exhibits depict the people of Mille Lacs as a vital, thriving community with strong ties to their past and great hope for their future.”¹⁹ This assessment is accurate; a majority of the exhibits do strongly convey this intended message. At that time, the partnership between MHS and the Mille Lacs Band was viewed as significant for both parties as a model for future partnerships between a state and a sovereign nation, which are both typically politically at odds with each other. Today, it is still as an important partnership as the MLIM remains one of twenty-six state historic sites. In fact, as a result of the original MHS planning committee and the Mille Lacs curriculum committee’s efforts in 1984, the Museum was able to secure considerable funding from both public and private sources. Although it remains a state site, there is no question that the state and band put considerable effort into the exhibits, ensuring that the band identified and asserted itself as an inherently sovereign nation, even despite the band’s treaty rights lawsuit filed against the state in 1990.

The Mille Lacs Indian Museum exhibits offer significant facets of tribal history and culture, past and present. It is a model of one tribal nation’s perception of their own tribal sovereignty, aiding in distinguishing themselves as culturally and politically distinct not only from the rest of society, but from other nations, tribes, or Ojibwe bands. Yet, are visitors receiving this intended message after viewing the MLIM exhibits?

¹⁹ Libertus, 38.

Jennifer Stampe attempted to answer this question in her dissertation, which examines non-Native visitor response and the roles of the state and tribe in indigenous cultural representation and production. She found through visitor surveys that a large percentage of visitors did not understand the message of the Mille Lacs Band's contemporary presence as the original planning committee intended.

Although MHS staff may have helped direct the exhibits using standard exhibit design techniques, the band's desire to assert their own autonomy (and therefore sovereignty) is demonstrated in the exhibit design process. Band members and elders not only approved of the final exhibit content, but they also provided their objects for display, their photographs, or oral histories via audio/video in the interactive kiosks. At the forefront of tribal museum exhibit design at the time, the MLIM utilized some techniques that are now commonly used in many other tribal museums: bilingual text panels, written oral history quotes from tribal/band members, and painted murals or patterns designed by tribal/band members, in addition to the inclusion of audiotaped accounts and the placement of contemporary tools used for subsistence activities next to traditional ones. The exhibits at the MLIM are presented from band members' own point of view with a curatorial voice in the first person plural using "we" and "us" in many of the labels, despite the presence of non-Native MHS exhibits staff. However, Stampe argues that the MLIM conveys "mixed messages" to visitors resulting from its inherent "identity problem" as both a state-run institution and a tribal museum, which some refer to as "either quasi-tribal" or "quasi-state."²⁰ However, the current MLIM site manager is not

²⁰ Stampe, 67.

concerned about the identity problem and stated, “We’re generally thought of as a tribal museum by other tribal museums. The Smithsonian...invited a bunch of tribal museums out and we got invited...”²¹ He added that the public generally perceives of the MLIM as a tribal museum, since it addresses tribal history, employs band members, and showcases exhibits authored by, with, and for the community.

As a result of this collaborative process, MLIM proves to be exemplary of a “contact zone” described by James Clifford as a site of complex cultural reciprocity and a forum for the negotiation. Being a contact zone may add to the identity problem addressed by Stampe, who notes the reservation curriculum committee’s primary goal of depicting themselves “as a modern though tradition-oriented people focused on the welfare of their community and its prospects for a bright future. Above all, the committee wanted to represent the Band as a contemporary presence.”²² As such, they did not want to focus on the negative aspects of the past and instead to present their history in ‘a conciliatory tone’ conveying a message of survival and to dispel stereotypes and misperceptions that Native people exist only in the past. In an article about the MLIM planning efforts, band member and former museum employee Joycelyn Wedll corroborates these goals: “When people walk into our museum, we want them to see that we are a community that is alive, vibrant, and growing, and not just something from the

²¹ Personal Interview, March 7, 2013.

²² Stampe, 89.

past. We want them to see that we are a community with a future in front of us.”²³

Although significant for countering the stereotypes of Indians existing only in the distant past as discussed in Chapter One, some scholars criticize such strategies employed by the MLIM and other tribal museums, pointing to the omission of historical events considered controversial or uncomfortable. They claim such omissions ‘whitewashes’ history, which they contend is a disservice to tribal histories and contemporary communities overall.²⁴

Due to MLIM’s designation as a state historic site, the elders and community members on the original 1984 planning committee may have been hesitant to explore topics of historical trauma, such as the effects of boarding schools, loss of reservation lands and removal efforts prompted by state officials in the nineteenth century, or treaties and treaty rights. The tribal museum consultants hired to answer the question of addressing “technical historical subjects” recommended that these subjects be addressed to be more informative, rather than controversial, and to focus on the band’s survival. Perhaps it was just the wrong time for engaging in controversy as the band had filed its treaty case against the state in 1990 and attempted negotiations to resolve it ultimately failed. Therefore, the band’s elders and others in the community involved in the process

²³ Joycelyn Wedll, “Learn About Our Past to Understand Our Future: The Story of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe,” in *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 97.

²⁴ Stampe interviewed MHS staff who informed her that some members in the East Lake community felt the MLIM was more concerned with public relations than with presenting the history of all of the band’s communities, although overall many band members felt the original committee represented their interests well. Stampe, 90. For more on historical omissions in tribal museums, see Larry Nesper, “Historical Ambivalence in a Tribal Museum,” *Museum Anthropology* 28:2 (2005); Amy Lonetree, “Museums as Sites of Decolonization: Truth Telling in National and Tribal Museums,” in *Contesting Knowledge*, 322-33; and Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

may have decided to proceed with caution in how they presented difficult subject-matter to the broader non-Native public. The final exhibit presentation of Mille Lacs history and contemporary issues illustrates how this particular museum chose to simultaneously resist and adapt to their socio-political, legal, and economic circumstances at the time. The MLIM embodies a site of negotiation and conciliation.

Again, the MLIM remains owned and operated by the State of Minnesota, which experienced a series of sizable budget cuts throughout the decades since its 1996 opening. As a result, the permanent exhibits have changed very little. However, a limited MHS budget should not justify the omission of critical events in Mille Lacs Band history. In particular, the lack of updated information in the exhibits about major treaty rights case decided in 1999 is a major oversight. Currently, the only mention of this momentous decision is in the exhibit *A Nation Within a Nation*, where a separate table is located underneath maps of land reserved for the Ojibwe in Minnesota in Wisconsin under the 1837 Treaty and text panels zooming in on parts of the Treaty of 1837. On the table, a large laminated book includes excerpts of newspaper articles discussing the progress of the court case, along with bound booklets of the *1837 Treaty Conservation Code* and *Government Treaties Affecting the Mille Lacs Band, 1826-1867*. On the large, central circular table exhibit, a flip card asks visitors, “What’s a Treaty?” and “Why are Indian treaties still in the news?” Another flip of the card provides the answer:

Courts still refer to treaties when settling disputes involving Indian tribes. Indian treaties carry the same weight as federal statutes. That means a violation of an Indian treaty is a violation of federal law. The Mille Lacs

Band is currently involved in a court case involving the interpretation of a treaty.

This court case is the major treaty rights case in which the U.S. Supreme Court reaffirmed the band's treaty rights in 1999. MHS has not updated this exhibit to incorporate the results of the final decision of whether or not the courts upheld the Mille Lacs Band's treaty rights and the impact of this decision on band members since 1999.

The first large exhibit gallery with the historical timeline along the wall is another area where information about the treaty rights case should be included. A description of the treaties including the Treaty of 1837 is located at the beginning of the timeline; however, it is not until 1994, that a text label on the treaty rights court case appears. This brief label reads:

The Mille Lacs Band's suit against the State of Minnesota over 1837 treaty rights to govern hunting, fishing, and gathering in a 12-county section of Minnesota is settled. United States District Court Judge Diana Murphy rules in the Band's favor; State officials vow to appeal the decision all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, if necessary.

Above this label is a photograph of elders and other band members at the treaty rights trial. A subsequent text label reads:

The U.S. Supreme Court affirms the Mille Lacs Band's rights—along with the rights of seven other Ojibwe bands—to harvest under tribal regulation up to half the fish and game on public land in east-central Minnesota. The nine-year legal battle between the Band and the State of Minnesota is over.

Over the years since this 1999 Supreme Court decision, as mentioned previously state budget cuts have significantly diminished the number of MHS staff. In general, state historic sites have suffered in terms of staff layoffs and the reduction of public and educational programming. Yet, the MLIM site manager claims, “Indians are not a priority with the Minnesota Historical Society. Since I’ve been here, everything they had to make cuts, they cut the Indian sites. [In 2008], they cut this site funding almost in half. The first thing I had to do that first year was lay off a couple people and not bring back a bunch of people that worked at the trading post and two janitors.”²⁵ With staff being let go, MHS has not prioritized updating the MLIM’s permanent exhibits. The MLIM has not been exempt from the lack of funding available for MHS, which fully operates the site; however, the lack of exhibit content about this major court case decided over a decade ago is a serious oversight due to its significance for the daily lives of band members who hunt, fish, and gather throughout the year in the last fourteen years since the court issued the decision.²⁶

Historian Larry Nesper writes about “historical ambivalence” at the George Brown, Jr. Museum and Cultural Center at Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin, where he observes an important omission in the exhibits:

One might think that [the Ojibwe] reservation with a French name...in English ‘Lake of the Torches’...which refers to the practice of using

²⁵ Personal Interview, March 7, 2013.

²⁶ As an MHS historic site, a lack of state funding may delay an update. The current site manager acknowledges the need for exhibit updating and is working towards this goal in addition to further programming. However, he believes he can only acquire more funding by building revenue through the trading post that sells Indian-related goods. Personal Interview, March 7, 2013.

birch bark torches in canoes to ‘firehunt,’...would organize their monumental self-representation around this activity...One might think that the spring spearing of walleyed pike at night...would take pride of place amongst the various indices, icons and symbols of a whole, ancient, and local way of life that the museum houses especially given the magnitude of the social conflict that took place in the 1980s over the band’s exercise of that practice. It doesn’t...²⁷

Like the Brown Museum, the MLIM, more specifically MHS, illustrates this same historical ambivalence toward the presentation of Mille Lacs Band treaty rights. MHS has offered no direction in adding this important piece of history to the exhibits. The MLIM site manager, who is Ojibwe but not a Mille Lacs Band member, refers to the treaty rights case as “a pretty big deal for people here at Mille Lacs.”²⁸ In response to a question about why he thought MHS did not pursue the matter further, he acknowledges the “the landmark case that...didn’t just impact Mille Lacs, [but] impacted Indian country. From an Indian perspective, that was a monumental case and the fact that the state lost, it might be considered opening old wounds. There are a lot of raw emotions here still...”²⁹ However, it is surprising is that the band has not pushed MHS to update the exhibits to include more information about the 1999 treaty rights decision and its subsequent effects on the local Ojibwe and non-Native communities.

Another reason for MHS and the band not approaching the issue further may be an economic one. Nesper attributes the lack of controversial information at the Brown Museum to a variety of reasons, mainly so as not to disrupt the “social and commercial

²⁷ Nesper, 2.

²⁸ Personal Interview, April 7, 2012.

²⁹ Ibid.

relationship between the tribal community and the non-Indian communities around it... [since] tourism had been an important source of income for some tribal members for nearly a century at that point.”³⁰ His argument can also apply to the Mille Lacs Band where a long tradition of Ojibwe participation in the tourist economy in the area has persisted into the present. Once the band exercised its sovereignty to fight for their treaty rights and open two casinos in 1991 and 1992, many in the band and local non-native community expressed fear over further deterioration or complete loss of working relationships between these groups. Stampe observed through documents authored in 1986 that the planning committee primarily desired to see MLIM become “a crossroads where local Indian people and visitors to the area will meet, a source of pride for Ojibwe, and an educational resource for visitors.”³¹ It is evident that MHS staff and members of the reservation curriculum committee believed that by updating the museum to incorporate more detailed information about the court case originally filed in 1991 might re-open old wounds between the Mille Lacs Band and the non-Native community. However, the elision of this court case and the lack of discussion about subsequent treaty rights activities since 1999 is what scholar Amy Lonetree calls a “missed opportunity.”³²

Another missed opportunity relates to the tragedy that occurred in Sandy Lake in 1850. There is no mention of this tragedy anywhere in the MLIM exhibits. The site

³⁰ Nesper, 3.

³¹ Minnesota Historical Society, *A Coordinated Plan*, 1986. As quoted in Stampe, 89.

³² Lonetree, “Museums as Sites of Decolonization,” 322.

manager admits it “should definitely be mentioned somewhere here.”³³ As discussed in Chapter Two, by the Treaty of 1837, Ojibwe bands ceded lands in east-central Minnesota and northern Wisconsin to the U.S. government with the understanding they would retain their hunting, fishing, and gathering rights. Talks of Ojibwe removal from Wisconsin and Michigan to Minnesota began shortly and local government officials believed Ojibwe removal to Minnesota would bring federal revenue to the territory. Historian Bruce White claims Governor Ramsey made Sandy Lake an agency in order to facilitate Ojibwe removal to Minnesota.³⁴ Ojibwe bands from Wisconsin and the Mississippi were assembled for the annuity payment at Sandy Lake on October 25, 1850. However, as White details, Governor Alexander Ramsey and Sandy Lake Indian Agent James Watrous intentionally delayed their payment until the waterways froze, forcing the Ojibwe to remain in Minnesota. Unfortunately, hundreds of Ojibwe people perished in the winter without provisions.

The tragedy at Sandy Lake is not mentioned on the chronological historical timeline on display in the MLIM, nor in any of the other exhibit areas. By not acknowledging the Sandy Lake tragedy, which occurred near District II the Mille Lacs Band’s East Lake community near McGregor, Minnesota (a little over an hour from District I where the Mille Lacs reservation is located), the MLIM eliminates this significant piece of Ojibwe history as if it never occurred. The Sandy Lake Band of the Mississippi Ojibwe, as they were historically referred to in the Treaty of 1855, eventually

³³ Personal Interview, April, 7, 2012.

³⁴ Bruce White, *Fish in the Lakes*, 185.

integrated into the Mille Lacs Band, despite some East Lake community peoples' desire to distinguish itself from the other two districts as a separate federally-recognized band.³⁵ The site manager believes it is time to tell the Sandy Lake story. He conveyed, "By exposing or telling the story, you're not necessarily trying to stir things up or portray a negative image, but you still have to tell it. It affected the people that live here and affected a lot of relationship and where reservations ended up so there's a lot around that history that resulted from it."³⁶ To help remedy the lack of information in the exhibits, in the near future he wants to show the DVD "The Sandy Lake Tragedy," which is distributed by GLIFWC.³⁷ He plans to show it every half an hour in the meeting room next to the Four Seasons Room. Whether or not MHS would be amenable to visitor exposure to the Sandy Lake tragedy is questionable.

For the MLIM to designate attention to controversial issues, such as the tragedy at Sandy Lake or the Mille Lacs Band's struggle for treaty rights, would be reflective of the direction of some tribal museums to embrace efforts to decolonize. Scholar Amy Lonetree argues that the National Museum of the American Indian, "fails to serve as a site of truth telling and remembering...[and] this silence [does not] assist Native

³⁵ In fact, some members of the East Lake community in District II today want to achieve federal recognition separate from the other two districts of the Mille Lacs Band. The MLIM site manager conveyed that in 2012 he wanted to bring a traveling exhibit entitled "Why Treaties Matter" authored and distributed by the Minnesota Humanities Center in 2010, but the Mille Lacs Chief Executive at the time opposed it being displayed in the community. The site manager believed that her fear of inciting District II members to demand separation prevented the exhibit from traveling to Mille Lacs at the time. However, the current Chief Executive in office has recently expressed willingness to bring the exhibit to the MLIM in summer of 2013.

³⁶ Personal Interview, March 7, 2013.

³⁷ Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC). *The Sandy Lake Tragedy*, DVD. Directed by Lorraine Norrgard (Odanah, WI: GLIFWC, 2007). See <http://www.glifwc.org/publications/index.html>.

communities in recognizing how colonialism has affected all areas of their lives, including how to embark on the necessary changes to move toward decolonization and community healing.”³⁸ As discussed in Chapter Three, she points to the Saginaw Chippewa’s Ziibiwing Center for Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways as an effective model using this tactic because it exposes the tragedies experienced by Native people and offers spaces for reflection and healing.

But how do band members feel about MLIM exhibits diverging from the elders’ decision to emphasize messages of contemporary survival in a positive and conciliatory tone? Moreover, do they agree that the MLIM should continue to serve as a crossroads site or a site for negotiation and repairing relationships between the band and non-Native communities? In talking with band members about the MLIM’s original goals identified back in the 1980s and 1990s, it is evident that while they believe the role of the MLIM should stress their contemporary survival, it should also begin to address controversial issues or contentious historical narratives, such as the struggle for treaty rights and the tragedy at Sandy Lake. One MLIM employee and band member who provides regular tours stated, “I think [that information] would be helpful...overall, it’s educational. It may be controversial but it’s still educational and it’s still getting the word out there...I think exhibits [like that] would be good and it’s just making more people aware because it happened.”³⁹ Another band member who works for the band in historic preservation and is on the MHS Indian Advisory Committee agreed, “The Sandy Lake tragedy, that’s

³⁸ Lonetree, “Museums as Sites of Decolonization,” 324. See also Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*.

³⁹ Personal Interview, March 7, 2013.

part of our history so it should be up there.”⁴⁰ Overall, band members agree that the exhibits are seriously in need of updating with the exception of the Four Seasons Room, which they believe accurately depicts cultural activities that many band members and Ojibwe people engage in today.

Assessing the Four Seasons Room: The Cultural Diorama and Guided Tours

After paying the entrance fee at the MLIM, the desk staff immediately informs visitors the time of the next tour of the Four Seasons Room, which is the only tour-guided exhibit. If patrons click on the on-line media room on the MHS website prior to their visit, they will note that MHS refers to the exhibit as the “centerpiece” with “life-size dioramas depict[ing] early Ojibwe lifestyles.”⁴¹ As discussed in Chapter One, many scholars critique the life-size or group life diorama emerging from the era of Franz Boas in the nineteenth century. In particular, they argue the display of Native culture groups in natural, pre-contact environment settings has reinforced the notion that Native peoples are no longer living and such real life imagery leaves an indelible imprint on the memory of an average visitor long after they leave the museum building. Critics claim this effect is detrimental to the contemporary existence of Native peoples. Scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett examines the mimesis of an ethnographic display or the “in situ” approach to installation and argues, “they are not neutral...those who construct the

⁴⁰ Personal Interview, March 8, 2013.

⁴¹ Minnesota Historical Society. “Media Room: Mille Lacs Indian Museum and Trading Post,” <http://events.mnhs.org/media/Kits/Sites/mlim/background.htm>.

display also constitute the subject...Just as the ethnographic object is the creation of the ethnographer, so, too, are the putative cultural wholes of which they are a part.”⁴² She distinguishes in situ from “in context,” where objects are classified and arranged and require a context or framework for visitors. The Four Seasons Room could be considered an in situ diorama as it does not include labels and reconstructs Ojibwe life as it was in the fur trade era with mannequins molded in the 1970s from real Mille Lacs people who also contributed to the content of the display. However, it could also be an in context diorama as guides provided detailed tours of the Four Seasons Room.

Despite any potential negative messages dioramas may send or how the Four Seasons Room fits in with other dioramas, the elders and other band members who were on the planning committee in the 1980s decided to keep this exhibit intact for the new museum and maintain it as the centerpiece for visitors. Band members today claim the significance of its accurate representation of Ojibwe lifeways. If any potential negative messages or misunderstandings exist, the MLIM seeks to counteract them by offering frequent guided tours and the opportunity for visitors to ask questions. An important component of this exhibit is the presentation of history and cultural practices by tour guides. They are typically band members who “perform Ojibwe presence.”⁴³ According to the site manager, the MLIM ensures the tours be given by a band member from the area as much as possible, although at times the tour may be given by a non-Native person

⁴² Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 389.

⁴³ Stampe, 218. She claims that the mission of the museum is to support Ojibwe self-representation and demonstrate Ojibwe presence and as such, the performance of giving a tour by the tour guides is fundamental to this mission.

if a band member is unavailable. MLIM strives to hire young band members who are descendants of those elders and others who provided their faces for the ‘real’ mannequins.⁴⁴

Although MLIM developed a tour script with the elders, the guides can supplement the script with personal information about their relationship to the people in the diorama and/or their own practice of the cultural traditions on display. The site manager and one of the tour guides who is a band member noted that tours given by band members offer more authenticity to the diorama for visitors than when non-band or non-Native employees give the tour.⁴⁵ The site manager conveyed, “I think that adds a lot to the whole experience if they can have that connection with somebody that actually has connections to these lifeways or to the people in the museum, to the stories they’re hearing.”⁴⁶ In my repeated observations of overall visitor activities, the Four Seasons Room is undeniably the main attraction of the MLIM as visitors do not typically interact with tour guides or museum staff in other exhibit areas. Stampe confirms in the original Four Seasons exhibit in the old museum in 1964, Mille Lacs Ojibwe guides would

⁴⁴ The last two tours I took in the summer of 2011 and 2012 were given by young band members. In my interviews, I discovered they both had never stepped foot into the museum before they were hired as interns and tour guides, despite the fact that both had a relatives who posed for the diorama. One guide even went to the nearby tribal school until graduation. See a later discussion about community use of the MLIM.

⁴⁵ In my tours from both band members and one non-Native employee, I noticed that non-Native visitors asked just as many questions of the non-Native guide as the band member guides, although the questions were more general about cultural activities, as opposed to questions about personal memories and way of life on the reservation. The non-Native tour guide did introduce himself as a non-Native employee. MLIM employees acknowledge the desire of non-Native visitors for an authentic experience. It is interesting to note that in my observations, visitors frequently referred to Ojibwe people in past tense. MLIM employees noted how visitors asked questions in ways that linked contemporary Ojibwe people to the past (e.g. “Do Indians still live in these lodges?” or “Do you have buckskin clothing like what those on the mannequins are wearing?”). Personal Interviews, March 7, 2013.

⁴⁶ Personal Interview, March 7, 2013.

actually step into the scenes and demonstrate some of the cultural activities prior to the use of the ‘real’ mannequins that exist today.⁴⁷ The performance of Ojibwe presence in the form of a live exhibit with elders who spoke fluent Ojibwe presumably impacted visitor understanding in tremendous ways.

With this legacy, the Four Seasons Room represents what the exhibit label indicates; it is the “Heart of the Museum” aimed to “nurture...knowledge of, and appreciation for, Ojibwe History and culture.” As such, the impressive diorama pays keen attention to detail of the cultural activities on display. It is a visually stunning exhibit with the manual backdrop painting of each season, the use of real stuffed animals and birds, as well as materials such as furs and tanned leather, in addition to the Ayers’ ethnographic objects. When visitors enter the room, it is as though they are transported into a past village site organized around the separate seasons, although the seasons are presented in a seamless manner. Sounds of birds, wolf cries, and wind can be heard during the tour. The serene museum effect is situated by the cooler air, the quiet setting, and the dim lighting, all of which indirectly informs visitors that they have entered a special, sacred space.

But does the Four Seasons diorama generate feelings of reverence for visitors because it is familiar and meets visitor expectations of museum displays of Native people? According to MLIM employees, many visitors are non-Native who frequent museums or possess some knowledge of Native history, and they expect the conventional museum displays seen at early twentieth century natural history museums, as described in

⁴⁷ Stampe, 228.

Chapter One. Jennifer Stampe notes that despite efforts by MHS and the band to counter the stereotypes that categorize Native people as static or vanished, overall MLIM visitors are still receiving “mixed messages” and do not “get” the original planning committee’s primary goal to demonstrate the band’s contemporary presence. In her analysis, Stampe fears that despite the tour guides’ attempt to disrupt visitors’ expectations about Native people, the Four Seasons Room may actually leave visitors breathing a sigh of relief that their preconceived notions about ‘Indianness’ has been restored.⁴⁸ Despite any misperceptions that may arise, the skillful recreation of past Ojibwe life, the immersive experience it offers, the visual impact and use of ‘real’ mannequins, and the interaction with tour guides who offer a personal connection, are what visitors recall most about the Mille Lacs Indian Museum.⁴⁹

While the tour guides’ connection to the ‘real’ mannequins may authenticate the display of the Four Seasons Room, another issue may arise about visitor comfort level with the use of likeness of people who are no longer living. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discusses the long history of using wax models in human displays for the teaching medicine and anatomy, as well as developing theories on racial typologies, evolution, and non-Western cultural groups, popularized by the field of anthropology in the nineteenth century. For example, in Peale’s Museum in 1841, Nathan Dunn installed a gallery representing Chinese life using wax life-size figures in costume doing typical

⁴⁸ Throughout this chapter, I refer to “visitors” as non-Native. When I discuss Native visitors or band members who visit the museum, I specifically refer to them as such.

⁴⁹ In fact, some band members only recall the Four Seasons Room in elementary school trips to the MLIM and the opportunity to connect with elders/relatives through the mannequins or photographs. Personal Interviews, March 7, 2013 and March 8, 2013.

Chinese activities. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes Franz Boaz's resistance to the use of realistic wax mannequins in ethnographic displays because while not in motion "they were so lifelike they were deathlike." To assuage this effect, Artur Hazelius used detailed paintings to create sentimental scenes to encapsulate an ideal, dramatic moment in time of Swedish folklife in his Skansen or open-air museums. Here, a typical Hazelius display may include Swedish peasants in traditional dress, participating in a festival among buildings, plants, animals, musicians, and artisans.⁵⁰

One can argue that the serene quality of the visually vibrant scenes depicted in the Four Seasons Room, with such attention to detail in the paintings and use of aesthetically visually-stunning materials and objects, detracts visitors from the real mannequins, which may not necessarily stand out in conventional cultural group dioramas.⁵¹ MLIM employees note that visitors do not seem to experience any awkwardness when they are told the mannequins are modeled after real people, but this may be subverted by the tour guides memories of these elders and band members who provided cultural demonstrations and contributed to the MLIM. The site manager verifies the meaning of the Four Seasons Room for non-Native visitors and band members:

...it makes it more real for them to know they're real people... if you can bring them outside to the four seasons room and show them all the black and white photos to see these are the people, people feel more connected or it feels more authentic to them...I think in that regard...the connection

⁵⁰ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 401.

⁵¹ Stampe listened to interviews conducted by MHS staff of elders Batiste Sam and Maude Kegg who provided their views on the use of their images for the mannequins. Sam bemused it was at first funny to see herself but then became used to it. She was grateful that people would remember them. Stampe, 231.

with band members, that's probably the main thing I see that connects band members to this site. Even with Nay Ah Shing [school tours], the kids recognize their family and have a real connection to it...⁵²

Band members believe the Four Seasons Room accurately depicts important Ojibwe cultural activities. They believe the significance in the diorama lies in the role of elders in contributing to the display beginning in the 1960s.⁵³ Since then, band members desired to maintain the Four Seasons Room at the MLIM perhaps as a way to illustrate the continuity of these activities for the ongoing struggle to assert their treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather, all of which are represented in the seasonal diorama. The diorama helps in linking the Mille Lacs Ojibwe to the importance of treaty rights and their ties to the land, which further substantiates their claims to self-determination and inherent tribal sovereignty.

Conclusion: MLIM Functions and Futures

Despite any historical ambivalence, missed opportunities, or critiques of the Four Seasons seasonal diorama, the exhibits at the Mille Lacs Indian Museum do honor the band's contemporary survival with attention to veterans, band members, and tribal elders throughout the space. The exhibits focus on traditional arts such as beadwork, basketry, and dance regalia, as well as language and Ojibwe kinship ties, all of which are still a part of the everyday Mille Lacs community. Tours and hands-on workshops ensure an

⁵² Since 1975, Nay Ah Shing Schools serves local Mille Lacs Ojibwe school children from all three districts of the Mille Lacs Reservation. It provides preschool to Grade 12 education services with an emphasis on Ojibwe culture and language. Personal Interview, March 7, 2013.

⁵³ Personal Interview, March 7, 2013.

opportunity for visitors to interact and engage with Ojibwe people and the culture, language, and history.

The final exhibit, *Nation Within a Nation*, brings the cultural activities on display in the Four Seasons Room to the present by initiating dialogue surrounding treaty rights and tribal sovereignty, despite the fact that sovereignty is not an easily explainable concept. On one flip card on the same table, visitors are asked, “What is Tribal Sovereignty?” When the visitor flips to the next card the answer is, “Sovereignty’ means ‘independence from all others.’ Tribal sovereignty is the right of Indians to govern themselves and control their own affairs.” As explained in Chapter Two (and in the next flip cards), tribal nations today possess sovereignty that predates European contact and has been upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court; state governments must obey treaties and laws enacted prior to statehood, such as in the case of treaty rights. These complex legal relationships are explained in simple terms for visitors to understand; however, the exhibit text makes no explicit effort to connect the exhibits to each other, which if done, would link Ojibwe cultural activities and relationship to the land expressed in the Four Seasons Room to contemporary notions of tribal sovereignty and treaty rights court cases.

According to Jennifer Stampe, the ‘disconnect’ or mixed messages some visitors experience may be the result of the museum’s identity problem and the planning committee’s primary goal to make it a site of negotiation. The collaborative museum process spanning over twenty years attests to the level of MHS commitment to assist the Mille Lacs Band in presenting its culture and history, at least initially. As the institution

administering the affairs of the MLIM as a state historic site, the MLIM serves as an example of MHS attempting to fulfil its promise as a democratic, liberal institution endeavoring to philosophically detach itself from the state government as a whole.⁵⁴ Yet, despite how MHS views itself, Stampe writes about the contradiction of MHS to place the MLIM and Trading Post Historic Site with its other twenty-five sites, many of which represent expansion, settlement, and industrialization: “The museum signifies in two directions: on the one hand it presents an indigenous counter-modernity in its story of communal life lived in the face of encroaching change; but on the other its narrative supports a well-established story of national technological progress as seen from the vantage point of Minnesota.”⁵⁵ With competing interests between the state (with sites ranging from the State Capitol and Fort Snelling, which is a highly contested site representing Dakota colonialism) and the Mille Lacs Band, the collaborative end result at a time of political upheaval with a pending major treaty rights case is a remarkable accomplishment.

The MLIM exhibits are foundational to the band’s sovereignty because they carve out political distinctiveness for the band and for Ojibwe people in general.⁵⁶ However,

⁵⁴ Jennifer Stampe discusses how MHS staff as a whole refers to themselves as not a part of the state, but of the territory as MHS predates Minnesota statehood by nine years. To confirm Stampe’s experience with MHS as a consultant on various projects for MHS, I have also noted that many staff members tend to be politically liberal and profess dedication to multiculturalism, diversity and issues of social justice. They deem MHS as autonomous of other state government agencies or departments typically adversarial to communities of color and the non-elite public, as in the case of treaty rights issues. See Stampe, 108-109.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 107-108.

⁵⁶ The George Brown, Jr. Museum at Lac du Flambeau has a similar Four Seasons diorama modeled after the MLIM’s Four Seasons Room, which demonstrates the emphasis of conveying the significance of Ojibwe ties to the land.

caution must be given in collaborative processes in that once exhibits are completed, they do not remain static. There must be an ongoing effort to link the past to the present. The fact that the MLIM has not been updated since its opening cannot be ignored. The progressive decline of funding over the years has been a major setback for MHS. While band members believe the Four Seasons Room, created in collaboration by such elders Maude Kegg and Batiste Sam, should remain intact to keep their memories alive for present and future generations, it is clear that they desire to see the other exhibits updated.

One band member felt strongly that the MLIM needs to reach out more to the community and that it should become a place for the community to gather on a regular basis.⁵⁷ On repeated visits, I noticed the absence of band members visiting the museum. The current site manager verified it has been an ongoing dilemma to get band members through the doors, which he feels could easily be solved if the exhibits could be periodically changed, yet the lack of available funding is a real problem. He believes that a low-cost solution to the problem would be for MHS to return the items given to them by Maude Kegg, Margaret Hill, Batiste Sam and others to the Mille Lacs Band in the last few decades for a rotating display case to replace the Ayers' exhibit. He further claims that since very few band members remember the Ayers, there should be less focus on the couple and more on the elders who contributed to the museum. With more emphasis on

⁵⁷ This band member claims the MLIM used to be more so a place for community gathering when the elders were still alive, but today it is entirely separate from the band because band members do not feel welcome there. Personal Interview, March 8, 2013.

these elders, he believes their families would be compelled to visit the museum more often.⁵⁸

For many tribal nations such as Squaxin Island, their museum does function more as a central site for community gatherings with the primary audience identified as the tribal community. The Mille Lacs Indian Museum does host some band events involving various tribal departments at times, but band members are rarely actively engaged in the museum on their own accord, even when the MLIM offers cultural workshops.⁵⁹ In talking with a former band employee, she gathered that band members feel proud that the museum exists, but it is "...viewed more as a symbol of sovereignty; it is not utilized by the community as one would think it should be."⁶⁰ George Horse Capture, one of the 1984 consultants hired to assist planning committee in the design process, noted then about the lack of community involvement is relevant to the situation today:

The most serious deficiency faced by the Minnesota Historical Society at Mille Lacs is no visible community support. This condition manifested itself at the reception, when no outside community people participated. Conditions and events leading up to this condition are easily seen. The Ayer's legacy is probably a negative one that will cast its shadow for years. But other limitations contributed. Little or no community oriented projects or programs have ever been associated with the museum, and ultimately the Minnesota Historical Society. As a cultural institution in an Indian community one might expect many related activities, but there seem to be no programs for elders, oral history efforts, satellite or

⁵⁸ Personal Interview, April 7, 2012, and March 7, 2013.

⁵⁹ The site manager and a band member employee attribute the lack of interest to the high cost of the workshops and/or the day of the week they are offered, which are usually Saturdays.

⁶⁰ Personal Interview, March 3, 2012.

traveling exhibits, no changing exhibits, no nothing. What reason does the community have to support the museum?⁶¹

It is up to MHS and the band to come together once again to create change for the MLIM and to bring it out of its static form.⁶² In the current political climate, dialogue surrounding the history of band controversies, such as the 1999 treaty case and the Sandy Lake tragedy, is pertinent and even necessary. Attending to these issues corresponds with recent politics in Ojibwe country, such as the impacts of mining on the environment, continued treaty rights concerns, and participation in worldwide indigenous political movements such as Idle No More.⁶³ By doing so, the MLIM will better reflect the ways in which it can both resist and adapt to the Mille Lacs community's changing circumstances in order to protect and assert the band's inherent tribal sovereignty. With more tribal capital than they had in the 1990s, the band has the means to intervene and find ways to bring more members into the building, while still considering its original mission as a site of negotiation. Then again, as one band member stated, it may be as simple as offering a community feast "with some frybread and wild rice soup" from time

⁶¹ George Horse Capture, Minnesota Historical Society, *Planning Study*, 58. The Ayers' legacy he mentioned is discussed further in the Conclusion of this dissertation.

⁶² However, according to the site manager, MHS did approach the band a few years ago to inquire whether or not the band wanted to take over the site and the band declined. He did not know the precise reasons why the band chose to not pursue the MLIM takeover, but believes it was due to the amount of responsibility that would come with it, and the band probably has more pressing issues, such as housing and providing jobs for band members. Personal Interview, March 7, 2013.

⁶³ Idle No More is a Native and indigenous rights movement that has exploded internationally since October 2012, beginning when the Canadian government proposed a bill, known as C-45, which included provisions to exploit environmental resources and undermine indigenous sovereignty. Native and indigenous peoples organized numerous round dances in the form of flash mobs at malls in protest of C-45 and other similar bills catastrophic to and in support of indigenous rights. Similar protests extended to South America and around the world.

to time to reach out to the community.⁶⁴ In tribal communities that privilege oral histories and storytelling, as well as informal gatherings, Mille Lacs band members should be made to feel once again what Marge Anderson referred to at the 1996 grand opening: “like coming home.”

⁶⁴ Personal Interview, March 8, 2013.

Conclusion:
Tribal Museum Debates and Future Considerations

When I was out there on the waters of our ancestors, I would always be wondering how my ancestors would live in these waters. And some of the places are so beautiful and the sunsets, the sunrises that I got to witness and be part of, even the elements, the water, the wind, the storms, to me are all beautiful and it's [all a] part of who we are as Native people. I can understand after going fishing in the night and being part of the early morning hours, that joy of wanting to greet the morning sun and having that song inside and that song isn't just a song of joy, but it's a prayer song of thanksgiving that I'm so grateful that this day is about to happen. And I can even hear the birds in the early morning hours and they have a song. So I understand the spirituality of our people when we as a tribal nation, we talk about spirituality and the political side of non-tribal people, they can't understand that connection you know because it's separation of church and state. But for tribal people, it's not so much about the church, but it's about what we sense, that sense of place of who we are, of what we touch from our very feet into the sand in the beach or maybe it's the rocks, to hearing the whisper of the wind in the trees to the smell of cedar or searching of herbs to what's going on in the different seasons. That's who we are as Native people and that's part of what's so important to us, is that quality of life of being able to participate in it.
—Charlene Krise, Squaxin Island Tribe¹

Many Native people who have fished on the rivers, lakes and other waterways can attest to the feeling Charlene Krise articulates. Similarly, for the Mille Lacs and other Ojibwe people, it is customary to offer tobacco next to a living tree or in the water before they fish, hunt and gather to give thanks to Gichi-Manidoo (the Great Spirit) for the food they are about to receive. The concepts of taking only what one needs for food and ceremony, as well as using as many parts of the fish or animal as possible, are indicative of the high level of respect Native people have for what is provided by the surrounding environment. These activities are passed down from generation to generation as Native fishermen/women, hunters, and those who gather berries, wild rice, shellfish, and

¹ Personal Interview, October 31, 2012.

medicinal and other food plants instruct their children and grandchildren about these ways of honoring so as not to take these resources for granted and to ensure the following year's supply, as in the case of wild rice. Hunting, fishing, and gathering required the use of systematic, meticulous, and efficient methods for centuries. State attorneys in Washington and Minnesota, as well as Wisconsin and Michigan, argued that because Native people no longer used treaty era traditional methods, the high courts should not allow Native people to exercise their treaty rights. In response, tribal attorneys hired and used numerous scholars, tribal members, and elders to provide testimony of the continued historical and cultural significance of having these rights on their contemporary economic survival, tribal identities, sovereignty, and spiritual and cultural lifeways.

The historical struggle for treaty rights to fish, hunt, and gather in these two communities of study and other Native communities is reflective of a larger indigenous movement to preserve cultural activities, languages, and spiritual beliefs that have served to distinguish, maintain, and strengthen our tribal nations. Tribes have created various departments to assist in these processes and many have built tribal museums or cultural centers as one of the main tools in which to assert their self-determination and inherent tribal sovereignty. Tribal nations who support such activities desire to preserve and affirm their cultural continuity and illustrate their survivance. By creating an official tribal narrative for the exhibits, they are exercising their agency in establishing their own histories and cultural identities. Tribal museums are not unlike traditional Western museums, but differ in many ways, the most important being a resistance to traditional Western museum practices that tend to privilege Western research and knowledge

systems. Instead, they prioritize community involvement and oral histories, preserving and revitalizing cultural heritage, and stress the inherent sovereignty of their community.² However, the argument arises about the tribal museum replicating and embodying many of the same ideas as the Western museum institution (described in Chapter One).

Indigenous scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith believe in the strength of indigenous histories. Although these histories have been transformed by colonization and colonialism, she claims it is nevertheless important for indigenous peoples to learn Western ways of knowing in order to use them to their advantage. To know the history and politics of the institution of the Western museum is to know how to act with and against it in order to unravel its colonial practices. Other scholars like Canadian Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred outright reject Western ideas and institutions such as sovereignty and self-determination in the form of contemporary tribal governments. He claims sovereignty and tribal governments are problematic due to their Western origins and instructs tribes to more closely utilize their traditional values and belief systems based on the power of the individual.

Alfred would be particularly critical of tribal museums that replicate Western museums. In particular, he would probably criticize the Mille Lacs Indian Museum's exhibit *Nation Within a Nation* about the Mille Lacs Band's self-determination and tribal sovereignty. The exhibit explains how the contemporary Mille Lacs community

² Linda Tuhiwai Smith defines Western research as that "which brings to bear, on any study of indigenous peoples, a cultural orientation, a different conceptualization of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialized forms of language, and structures of power." Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory," in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 42.

conceptualizes these ideas and incorporates them into their tribal departments, organizations, and business enterprises. Alfred condemns the nation within a nation model as it stands today because he believes the notion of sovereignty is “an inappropriate concept” because it constructs an unequal power relationship of the state over indigenous nations. Furthermore, he argues, “...so long as sovereignty remains the goal of indigenous politics, therefore Native communities will occupy a dependent and reactionary position relative to the state.”³ He may view the chosen exhibit content as reflective of the band’s acceptance of the legal and political relationship of tribal nations existing within the U.S. nation-state, which functions as a guardian over its ward.

However, upon closer inspection, Alfred may discover the ways in which tribal nations are using tribal museums to maintain and affirm their cultures and languages aims for an improved “cultural sovereignty” based on traditional values and belief systems.⁴ In the *Nation Within a Nation* exhibit, the notion of sovereignty is defined largely by former tribal chairman Wewinabi (Art Gahbow) in 1988 as “...our right and ability to control our own destiny.” The exhibit includes an introductory panel that describes sovereignty as the “freedom from outside control” to operate schools, courts, a police force, a tribal government, and a network of community programs and services. Words

³ Alfred, 59.

⁴ “Cultural sovereignty” is described in Amanda J. Cobb’s work on the NMAI as an act of asserting cultural sovereignty. She quotes Beverly Singer’s explanation of cultural sovereignty as a way to make “old ways a part of contemporary life.” Cobb writes, “In the case of NMAI, that means integrating the old ways and core cultural values and traditions into the very concept of what a museum is and can be—changing what has historically been a cabinet of curiosities into a community-centered gathering space for the celebration of living cultures.” See Amanda J. Cobb, “The National Museum of the American Indian as Cultural Sovereignty,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (June 2005): 489.

like *independence*, *self-determination*, *self-governance*, and *inherent rights* are prevalent throughout the exhibit. Despite Alfred's likely critique of *Nation Within a Nation*, the goal of the exhibit is to inform the public about the complex legal and political relationship between tribal nations and the United States established in the last two centuries. The rest of the exhibit highlights evidence of self-government on the reservation, such as the school and clinic. The emphasis on these tribal structures, formed and staffed by the band, reveals the understanding the band possesses about its inherent right to self-determine its own destiny. The exhibit conveys a sense of how the Mille Lacs people define their own sovereignty and nationhood. Alfred's critique, while valuable to instruct Native people to learn (and exercise caution) about the political-legal basis of sovereignty, it can also dismiss the very real ways that sovereignty today serves to empower Native people and Native communities.

Whether it is inappropriate or not, sovereignty as it exists today is meaningful for Mille Lacs Band and Squaxin Island tribal members who live it daily, whether they work in a tribal department, shop at their casino gift store, or attend community events and ceremonies where traditional foods are cooked and eaten. Such activities are effectively conveyed to the broader public through their tribal museum exhibits. By privileging band and tribal member voices, the exhibits demonstrate their desire to create their own version of their tribal identities, which honors language and music, contemporary powwows, potlatches and storytelling, veterans, cultural activities, the relationship to the land and resources, community histories, family ties, and daily reservation life, among other topics. The choice in exhibit themes represents what the Mille Lacs and Squaxin

Island community find significant about themselves, despite the difficulties both tribal museums face in regularly changing their exhibits and updating their narratives to include recent events.

Most notably, at the MLIM, the 1999 decision to uphold the treaty rights of Mille Lacs members whose lives are interwoven with fishing, hunting, and gathering must be included in the exhibits. Although band members are very much aware of the impact of this court decision of maintaining their tribal sovereignty, the broader non-Native public may not realize the significance of this case to Mille Lacs Band tribal history. The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe must step forward and provide funding for updating the exhibits in order to reflect the current political issues in Ojibwe country and more specifically, to respond to the band's socio-political, legal, and economic circumstances. Similarly, the Squaxin Island Tribe's MLRC's lack of continuous funding has also made it difficult to update their exhibits over the years since its 2002 opening. However, an outdoor veteran's exhibit near the museum building, a major recent donation of objects, and the hosting of the 2012 Canoe Journey have rejuvenated the exhibit program.

Both museums' exhibits provide tribally-authored historical and cultural narratives; however, for some museum scholars, the ways in which these narratives are presented may not extend far enough to explicitly address the effects of historical trauma. These scholars may consider both the MLIM and the MLRC to be too politically neutral, celebratory, or 'soft' on engaging in controversial subject-matters. They may agree that using only words like *protecting*, *reaffirming*, *encouraging*, and *empowering* (as the MLRC did in the mission statement), ignores the history of colonization and colonialism.

For instance, at the MLRC, although some members of the community believed the exhibits should not overlook important topics such as boarding schools or treaty rights, staff did not explicitly connect them to the residual effects of colonization and colonialism as acts of genocide, as some scholars propose for tribal museums. Instead, like those involved in the MLIM exhibit process, we sought to emphasize the positive aspects of tribal community life in accordance with the mission statement and the current socio-political and economic circumstances at the time, which we could argue is one way to “decolonize,” albeit not the way these scholars define it.

Amy Lonetree writes about the necessity of a “decolonizing museum practice,” which she defines as a practice concentrated on fully addressing historical trauma and “unresolved grief by speaking the hard truths of colonialism.”⁵ While Lonetree does acknowledge the MLIM as a successful collaboration between a tribal nation and a state and one of the forerunners of tribal museums to put new museum theory into practice, she criticizes the reluctance on the part of the exhibit designers, including band members, to engage in controversial subject-matter.⁶ Like the Squaxin Island MLRC, the MLIM instead chose to focus on its survivance and community strengths to empower band members and educate the broader public about their history and culture, past and present.

While Lonetree takes issue with celebratory exhibit strategies, she claims the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan’s Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe and Lifeways “advances a decolonizing agenda by framing the entire exhibition within the

⁵ Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 2-3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

context of the Anishinabe oral tradition, and it also presents the hard truths of colonization in its exhibitions to address the legacies of historical unresolved grief.”⁷ Furthermore, its exhibitions “disrupt colonial constructions of Native history and culture, engage in truth telling, and honor Indigenous understandings of history and contemporary survival” to promote community healing.⁸ While this exhibition strategy has merit, I contend that it may be difficult for many tribal nations to incorporate in the same manner as the Ziibiwing Center due to their present socio-political, legal, and economic circumstances. For instance, as I contend in Chapter Four, the Mille Lacs Band determined the MLIM to become a site of negotiation between Native and non-Native audiences as a result of the current political climate surrounding treaty rights and Indian gaming.

This particular tribal museum debate reflects a larger one in Indian country about whether or not to confront difficult truths, as many Native people believe that by doing so can reinforce negative stereotypes of Native people and/or lead to feelings of victimization.⁹ Lonetree examines the subject of victimization in her book, stating that while she respects these concerns, she does not agree and is surprised by “how unwilling many of our communities have become to present a hard-hitting analysis of colonialism

⁷ Ibid., 26-27.

⁸ Ibid, 122.

⁹ The “difficult truths” and stories she identifies are “land theft, disease, poverty, violence, and forced conversion at the hands of Christian missionaries.” Lonetree, 133. More specifically, Lonetree uses Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart’s definition of historical trauma as a psychological pain that leads to social problems that “continue to plague Indian country, such as ‘substance abuse...self-destructive behavior, suicidal thoughts and gestures, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, and difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions.’” Lonetree, 124.

in our exhibitions within museums.”¹⁰ As a tribal member from a reservation community and a former tribal museum curator, I am not surprised by the reluctance on the part of tribes and community members to embrace Lonetree’s strategy of addressing historical trauma. It may not be what many tribal community members want to see in their museum. In conversations with relatives and friends on my own reservation, they believe a tribal museum or cultural center should empower them and to be a place to step away from the negative realities of daily reservation life, such as poverty and violence that unfortunately many experience. One person asked, “Why would we want to go somewhere that’s supposed to be about the good things of our history and our culture [only] to be educated about why things are so bad on the rez? I don’t need to feel bad in our museum. I want to feel good and learn about how we once lived and how we survived...I want to go there to feel proud of being an LCO Ojibwe.”¹¹ Some believe, like those elders at Mille Lacs and staff at the MLRC, the tribal museum should function as a bridge between communities; however, all believe it should focus primarily on preserving and revitalizing tribal culture and language *for* community members. One person asked, “How much should a tribal museum’s roles overlap with the roles of a social service agency?”¹²

If a tribal museum decides to confront the difficult truths and adopt the decolonization agenda as defined by Lonetree, it needs to be approached very

¹⁰ Ibid., 6-7.

¹¹ Personal Interview, July 27, 2013.

¹² Ibid.

strategically. Using the settler colonialism framework, I suggest tribal museum staffs acknowledge the complex, diverse relationships that exist between Native and local non-Native people, corporate interests, and local and state governments from the time of American settlement, which have impacted local community dynamics into the present. Moreover, tribal museums should not just view local Native history as only the history of U.S-Indian relations. In the historical struggle for treaty rights, Native people experienced decade after decade of race-based harassment by all of these entities while attempting to exercise their right to hunt, fish, and gather. As I argue in this dissertation, when building a tribal museum, many tribal communities do take into considering these relationship dynamics when they determine how the exhibit will affect their socio-political and economic goals. With the growth of Indian gaming and other economic enterprises, tribal nations may view it necessary to cultivate positive working relationships with local non-Native communities, organizations, and corporations. Therefore, they believe establishing a cohesive, official tribal narrative for their community and the broader public will make them better equipped to confront the political challenges to their sovereignty from competing outside interests.

Tribal museum staffs must be deliberate in their planning for an exhibit narrative by outlining clear goals and educational messages. They must weigh the benefits and disadvantages of committing to a decolonizing narrative as defined by Lonetree and the message must be conveyed in a way as to not offend or disengage visitors. In reading Lonetree's assessment of the Ziibiwing Center, I am impressed by the history of NAGPRA activism as a motivating factor for building their cultural center and their

courage to adopt a decolonizing strategy to address the legacies of historical unresolved grief from the outset. Lonetree states that the Center's choice to do so has been met with success as visitors have provided a favorable response.¹³ However, while I agree with Lonetree that tribal museums need to help visitors understand all aspects of their tribal histories, even those considered controversial, what seems to have worked in this particular museum, may not work well in others.

Over the years, the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe has earned a considerable amount of revenue from casino profits and economic enterprises. Lonetree does admit that during the mid-1990s the tribe's gaming successes produced individual per-capita payments to enrolled Saginaw Chippewa tribal members and that an award of \$3.5 million came in 1996 for their museum project, although she does not indicate who provided the funding. Lonetree does convey that in 2000, "the tribal council awarded an *additional* \$6.5 million for completion of the cultural center [emphasis added]."¹⁴ The total museum project cost approximately \$10 million dollars and Lonetree seems to suggest that the tribe provided most, if not all, of that funding. Most tribal museums, like the Squaxin Island Tribe whose casinos are not as profitable as the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe's Casino, depend on outside foundations and government grants to fund their museum. It could be presumed that the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe's financial independence derived from their success reinforced a decision to implement a decolonizing agenda in the form of an exhibition entitled "Effects of Colonization" in

¹³ Although Lonetree only gauges this success through conversations with staff members who indicate that visitors "respond very favorable to the museum's exhibitions." Lonetree, 166.

¹⁴ Ibid., 128-129.

which Lonetree applauds as it “relates a painful story” of “loss of land, disease, poverty, violence, and forced conversion at the hands of Christian missionaries.”¹⁵ It is evident that Ziibiwing Center staff believed it was a good time to tell this painful story; however, the situation of each tribal nation and reservation community is different. Having financial independence makes a difference in what aspects of history a tribal nation will choose to convey in its official museum narrative and/or other exhibits. Tribal museum staffs must determine their degree of need for cultivating positive local non-Native relationships, keeping in mind their tribal socio-political and economic circumstances and goals. They must ascertain whether adopting a decolonizing agenda as defined by Lonetree for their official museum narrative and/or other exhibits will positively or negatively affect their reservation community.

It is important to note here that reservation life means communal life to many Native people who often refer to themselves as members of a ‘tribal community’ of one tribal nation. Although the idea of nationhood is equated with notions of homogeneity or essentialist or totalizing notions of identity, it can nevertheless be empowering for many Native people. Native people in tribal communities are located in close proximity to each other on a reservation, attend tribal social events and work with each other, and have kinship and family ties to one another; therefore, they tend to be very community-oriented. However, it is also important not to romanticize the idea of ‘community’ as innocent, pure, traditional or authentic as doing so creates a binary of isolated reservation or tribe vs. outside world. It does not mean that Native people in reservation

¹⁵ Ibid., 138, 146.

communities are not affected by the political, social and economic milieus outside reservation boundaries. In fact, people on the reservation are very much entrenched with the local non-Native community and vice-versa.

Scholar Duane Champagne refers to the small towns near reservations as “border towns.” Although these towns are at times considered hostile places toward Native people, Champagne argues they can also be “places of opportunity, regeneration, creativity, and education.”¹⁶ Tribal people are not detached from these border towns and moreover, non-Native people also tend to live in or near tribal communities. It is important to keep these relationship dynamics in mind when creating tribal museum exhibits, as many tribal museums collaborate with public schools and colleges, as well as local tourism organizations, such as Chambers of Commerce, Visitor Centers, or other non-profit cultural or historical societies. Both the Mille Lacs Indian Museum and the Squaxin Island MLRC depend on positive working relationships to draw visitors into the museum and they host local meetings and events for a large percentage of museum income. Although the education of tribal members about their own local history, culture, and identity is primary, the tribal museum staffs at MLIM and the MLRC believe in the importance of educating the broader non-Native public visiting the museum about tribal history and who they are.

Many Native people admit that knowing one’s tribal culture and history is crucial for their Native identity. However, many recognize the difficulty of combining individual identities into one single, homogeneous tribal identity for the official museum

¹⁶ Duane Champagne, “Border Towns,” in *Social Change and Cultural Continuity Among Native Nations* (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2007), 167.

narrative. There are bound to be conflicts while developing one cohesive narrative that speaks for all tribal community members. Some people who do not necessarily conform to this identity that is chosen for them may condemn the process as exclusionary. In her book about the persistence of community located within the confines of capitalism, Miranda Joseph argues against “celebratory discourse of community.” She states, “While identity is often named as the bond among community members, it is a false name in that communal participants are not identical and many of those to whom an identity is attributed do not participate in communal activities.”¹⁷

It may be difficult to reach a consensus between all individuals in the community to create or reformulate an official tribal museum narrative, as seen in the case of creating exhibits at the Squaxin Island MLRC. However, tribal nations must think about the benefits of doing so as imperative to further asserting their inherent tribal sovereignty. Historian Alexandra Harmon confirms that even in those tribal nations with long-established boundary markers such as reservations, community members differ about the characteristics and traditions that define them. However, while academics, mainly historians [and tribal museum consultants] who assist tribal nations in this process, should acknowledge the idea of Indian identity as fluid and formed at the community level, it is critical to be aware that identity is also used as a strategic weapon and shield, which means the stakes are high.¹⁸ With so much at stake, it may become a difficult

¹⁷ Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), viii.

¹⁸ Alexandra Harmon, “Wanted: More Histories of Indian Identity,” in *A Companion to American Indian History*, eds. Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 248-265.

process; however, the result often becomes a source of pride, like at the Squaxin Island MLRC and the MLIM, even if some members initially disagreed over the narrative's content. So how do we successfully account for differences of those groups of people who believe they are underrepresented and those whose voices may be omitted (e.g. tribal youth, certain families, people who do not possess enough blood to be considered tribal members, or two-spirited people¹⁹), yet are considered members of the community? In these cases, tribal museum staffs must be cognizant of these groups and individuals and be open to at least listen, if not include, their viewpoints. Tribal museum staffs may seek the advice of elders, but it may still become difficult for everyone to agree on the content of the narrative.

One concern lies in who possesses the cultural authority to author this tribal narrative. I suggest using a variety of resources and historical sources, such as archival documents and photographs, oral histories, family photographs, and interviews with living elders, artists, storytellers, those knowledgeable about cultural activities such as hunters and fishermen/women, traditional ceremonial leaders, tribal government and department leaders and entrepreneurs. Doing the research up front and seeking the perspectives of all key people in the community (who are easy to find after talking to others), are critical in preventing later complications in exhibit narrative development. It is also important to make attempts at including the perspectives of Native youth and people who may not conform to the identity created for the tribal narrative. By following

¹⁹ Two-spirited people are Native people who typically identify themselves as members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community.

these suggestions from the very beginning, the process will be thorough enough for a consensus to be reached quickly to proceed with initial and subsequent exhibit construction, if funding is available.

Many tribal museums exist as small, local museums with exhibits that rarely change due to a lack of funding. Instead, many function as centers of community life, offering culture and language classes and hosting tribal social events, such as at the Squaxin Island MLRC. The MLRC's mission from the very beginning identified its primary audience to be the "Squaxin Island People," but also serving other visitors through its exhibits and public programming. The MLIM chose to showcase the culture and history of the Mille Lacs Ojibwe people, but it has not become a center of community life as the elders had originally envisioned. According to band members, when those elders were alive, they demonstrated cultural activities and brought the community together in the building.²⁰ It is evident that MHS, having experienced a major reduction in its budget, will not be providing funding in the future for changing the exhibits or offering more public programming than what is already offered. The current site manager and many band members want to see new exhibits and community events offered at the MLIM. Although the initial collaboration between MHS and MLIM has

²⁰ Personal Interview, March 8, 2012.

considered one of success, over the years there has been little collaboration other than keeping the site open and the occasional hosting of an MHS or band event.²¹

Despite budget issues, the exhibits are the MLIM's strength. They are visually stunning, offering powerful imagery and engaging text about the history and contemporary culture and lifeways of the Mille Lacs people. Complicated topics such as tribal sovereignty are presented in ways visitors with any level of knowledge of Native people and contemporary issues can grasp. To a high degree, the exhibits at the MLIM and at the Squaxin Island MLRC do challenge many of the misperceptions and stereotypes that exist about Native people in popular culture with their emphasis on contemporary culture and community. But it took many years of planning to move past the difficulties of reaching a consensus in creating a tribal narrative of history and culture for the exhibits in these particular tribal museums. Although the creation of this narrative is crucial when first developing a tribal museum, one must also recognize that tribal identity is fluid and tribal museum staff should make room for changes in the exhibits and programs as time progresses. Many tribal museums create mission statements that acknowledge the past, present and future at the same time within an exhibit, which attests to tribal peoples' belief that culture is living and subject to change.

Tribal museum staffs must learn more about the historical constructions of Native representation in order to oppose entrenched misrepresentations reinforced by Western

²¹ In her chapter on MLIM, Amy Lonetree writes about the deep-seated distrust that still exists between MHS and the band originating from the Ayers' donation of the land, buildings, and artifacts to MHS. She notes that there has always been some distrust with regard to the colonial relationship between the Ayers and the Mille Lacs Ojibwe people. Lonetree, 69. According to the site manager, many Mille Lacs Ojibwe people question how the Ayers obtained their land in the first place, implying that the Ayers obtained it dishonestly. Personal Interview, March 8, 2013.

museums and popular culture. Also, museum staffs must make sure they are not placing tribal people only in the static past in order to satisfy a non-Native public's preconceived notions about Indians. Staffs can resist this by consciously not reinforcing stereotypes (e.g. per our suggestion, Squaxin Island decided not to use a linear chronological timeline beginning with pre-contact to the present in the seven panels) and instead present their contemporary tribal cultures and identities to visitors as soon as they walk through the door. We realize our cultures are not static. In many tribal museums today, staffs desire to change contemporary exhibits as much as possible, but the lack of funding may prevent exhibits from changing. For instance, Squaxin Island advocated for a temporary exhibit space to highlight art and cultural items created by contemporary tribal people, but it has been difficult to acquire funding to change in-house exhibits or rent traveling exhibits from other museums. Tribal nations must do what they can to help their tribal museum avoid becoming static; providing regular financial support is crucial for tribal museums to continue to tell their community's histories and reflect their changing circumstances.

What Native people tell each other about our histories is different than what we may tell the broader non-Native public. The tribal museum is one way and not the only way we are simultaneously resisting and adapting our socio-political, legal, and economic circumstances throughout history and into the present. As such, tribal museum staffs tend to consider multiple audiences as they think very strategically about how best to further their tribal nation's goals. They are also careful not to dismantle any of the historical struggles endured by their ancestors, such as the struggle for treaty rights.

Tribal museums have great potential to benefit the community for whom they are built. Both the Mille Lacs Indian Museum and the Squaxin Island MLRC are excellent models to consider the ways in which to express what many tribal communities consider important—tribal identity, culture, community, historical struggle (colonialism), education, survivance, and their inherent tribal sovereignty.

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