

**Interpreting World Heritage Conference 2006
Using Interpretation to Create Sustainable Heritage Tourism
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**OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES:
THE POLITICS AND ETHICS OF INTERPRETATION**

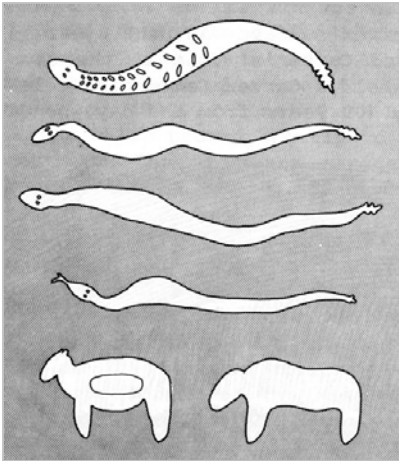
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Interpretation acts as an effective tool in economic development along urban riverfronts, particularly if there is broad input in the planning process. In the case of Native American history, the descendants of those people should be invited to play an active role in decision making and planning. Expanding the planning process and interpretive output to include the broader community, particularly of those people whose stories you are telling, can help increase the economic returns for a project or organization, by expanding sponsorship opportunities. The questions, *Who controls the stories of place?* and, *Who has the right to tell them?* are complex ones. In order to embark on a truly multi-cultural or cross-cultural planning effort, there are some key components that should always apply: be patient and realistic - show goodwill and respect – embrace accountability - be prepared to be surprised and overcome stereotypes. This paper will share two examples where interpretive planning has included extensive collaboration with Native people, each of which have had quite different outcomes.



The City of St. Paul and community partners are creating the 27-acre area Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary on the banks of the Mississippi River. The Environmental Protection Agency and National Park Service, and a wide range of philanthropists and local agencies provided generous support. The creation of the sanctuary involves environmental cleanup from former railroad contamination, restoration of vegetation and wetlands, construction of trails, and the development of interpretive elements, including on-site interpretation and a new interpretive center. During preliminary planning some very significant cultural resources were identified in the sanctuary.

An ancient cave, known to the Dakota as Wakan Tipi (translated as *house of the great spirit*), lies in the bluffs. After the British explorer Jonathan Carver documented the cave and its petroglyphs in the late 1800s the cave became known as Carver's Cave. Carver wrote about a council consisting of at least three communities gathered in an encampment near the cave. Carver's journal states that the dead were brought to the nearby burial ground, and that there were "many strange hieroglyphycks" in the cave.

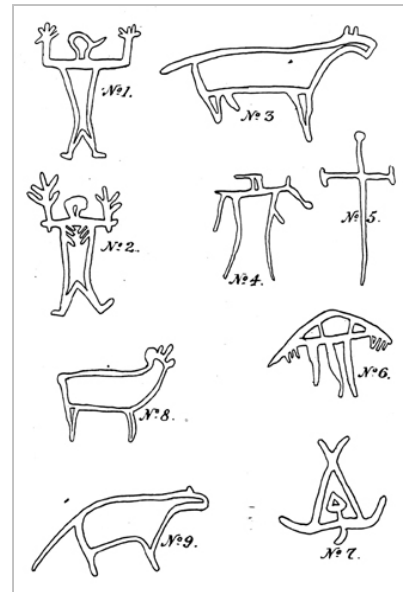


The images include rattlesnakes, a bear, men, and birds, and other animals. Dakota elders shared that the presence of petroglyphs within the cave indicates the sacredness of the place. In particular, the snake petroglyphs indicate that it is a site for healing ceremonies. Caves, in and of themselves, are sacred places because they allow one to enter simultaneously into the earth and darkness. This is why sweat lodges and some vision quests also occur in darkness. The presence of a spring within the cave emphasizes this as a place for healing, as, according to some Dakota elders, “water is the most powerful medicine in the world.” Water is also associated with the UN KTE HI, god of the

waters and underworld. One Dakota elder who visited the cave in the 1940s, recalls that his grandfather, Running Walker Boy, would not let him go far back in the cave because the UN KTE HI lives in the lake at the back.

During the decades following Carver’s publication, the cave that bore his name became a sought after landmark on the edge of the burgeoning city of St. Paul. Carver’s Cave has a history of being covered by rock fall from the bluff and later being “re-discovered.” The cave was last opened in 1977, but at the request of representatives from the American Indian Movement, the cave was closed with metal doors to protect this sacred place.

Another cave within the sanctuary, Dayton’s Bluff Cave, also contained petroglyphs but these are reportedly from another, earlier era. Unlike Carver’s Cave, Dayton’s Bluff Cave did not attract attention during the exploration period. Theodore Lewis was the first to systematically document this cave in 1878. Lewis recorded nine petroglyphs near the entrance. He described the petroglyphs as: 1) man with uplifted hands; 2) [a second] man with uplifted hands; 3) animal; 4) probably a bird; 5) a cross; 6) headless bird; 7) bird with heart; 8) animal; 9) animal. Lewis noted that other, less well-preserved petroglyphs were also present on both sides of the cave and on the roof.



A Dakota elder identified figure 1 as a Dakota person, while figure 2 was prophetic of the coming Europeans. Figure 4 indicates “something is coming back.” Figure 5 is a prophecy of the coming Christians. Figure 6 is symbolic of a change or evolution that occurred in plant life and may represent a mushroom. Figure 7 is an eagle. Figure 9 is a beaver, which is a symbol of health. Petroglyphs such as these are “very ancient.” The entrance to this cave is now hidden by sloughing from the bluffs, and is thus less of a management concern.

A third cave along the bluffs within the sanctuary is known as Brewery Cave. It was carved and altered to function as storage for one of the earliest breweries in St. Paul; the North Star Brewery, founded in 1855. It was described as being “picturesque as a castle on the River Rhine.” The complex, which brewed ales and porters and malt vinegar, developed to be the largest brewery in Minnesota at that time. One of the early partners was the young brewmaster, Jacob Schmidt, a Bavarian immigrant. Under Schmidt’s direction, the brewery flourished, and began producing lager. Lager differs from beers and ales in that it must be kept cool while it is fermenting and prior to consumption, thereby making the caves in the bluff an ideal location. The mouths of these caves are natural, but the interiors have been carved into connecting chambers with vaulted ceilings.

After fire struck in 1900, operations were moved to the much larger Jacob Schmidt Brewing Company complex, a National Register listed property in St. Paul. Schmidt is identified in his obituary as the “oldest brewmaster in the Northwest,” and a “pioneer German citizen.” His story and that of his business endeavors are an important part of the history of the city and region.



Archaeological excavations revealed that the stone foundations of the brewery complex survive beneath extensive layers of modern fill and railroad-era deposits. The excavations revealed not only the stone foundations of the main brewery structure, but also interior features such as brick floors and machinery pads. The development and operation of the North Star Brewery is not extensively documented; therefore, the foundations and interior features of the brewery serve not only to illustrate

and complement the known history of the brewery and increase our understanding of the development of the brewing industry in St. Paul, but also provide evidence for the evolution of the North Star Brewery prior to available plans. The remains of the North Star Brewery provide a powerful interpretive resource for telling some important stories.

The official opening ceremony for the sanctuary was a landmark event, with participation from community partners, politicians and many Native people. Prayers and speeches were made, drummers played, and there was a tangible sense of a collective vision and desire for a rebirth of this land and a sharing of its important cultural and ecological history. This ceremony inspired our state representative to seek major state funding.



Yet, a challenge has emerged in the interpretive planning process. As the brewery's archaeological and historical record were uncovered, one American Indian leader expressed strong concerns about the association of alcohol with this sacred place, and declared that any interpretation of the brewery and its history would be inappropriate and disrespectful. As is well known to most of us, the introduction of alcohol by Europeans had a devastating effect on Native people.

So, what to do? Ignore part of the EuroAmerican history of the place, or risk offending some members of the Native community. Just because a history or event may be painful, should not result in hiding the story. There are many ways a story can be told and I do not know of a brewery site that has yet been interpreted from the perspective of the impact alcohol has had on the indigenous population. This new nature sanctuary and park provides a great opportunity for all – an opportunity to tell a broader story that places a new perspective on an age-old problem, namely alcoholism – an opportunity to heal old wounds by acknowledging the damage done by Europeans to the indigenous people – an opportunity to not be so fearful of acknowledging aspects of the EuroAmerican collective past, and use it as a means to build new alliances and partnerships. The interpretation must be done in collaboration with Native people for obvious reasons, but Americans of European descent should not be fearful of confronting painful and complicated aspects of our collective history. All those involved in interpretive planning must be sure to approach the process of interpretation with respect and caution, and as a learning process for all involved. Sometimes the mistakes of the past were harmful in ways not intended or even anticipated.



The goal of this project was to augment and extend the historical interpretation already taking place on the historic Minneapolis Riverfront, through the support of programs that explore the history and culture of American Indians as related to the St. Anthony Falls area. The intended use of this programming and planning document was to: assist interpretive planners to develop materials and programs for visitors; assist interpreters at the Mill City Museum and Mill Ruins Park with appropriate responses

to questions regarding American Indians; and lay the groundwork for potential museum displays that relate to American Indian themes along the riverfront.

Unlike any other ethnic community living in the United States today, American Indians have at least a 12,000-year history of living on this land. The words “at least” are used here to denote the fact that for many Native peoples, oral histories claim that they have lived here forever, since the beginning of time.

As EuroAmerican settlers began to use the Mississippi River, the power of the falls was trapped into locks and dams, concrete spillways, bridges, power lines, and poles. The great Mississippi River was harnessed into hundreds of wing dams and closing dams; 29 locks and dams were built on the upper Mississippi alone; cities were built; millions of tons of freight moved up and down as cargo; channels were constructed; hydroelectric stations were erected. The Dakota were expelled from their ancestral homes and sacred sites and within only 100 years, the river that they had traditionally canoed on and fished in, lived beside and honored, had been radically, and irrevocably altered.

In a sense, both culture groups – Native and European – may be seen as putting the river to similar use. Both groups turned to the Mississippi for food, fur-trapping, transportation, inspiration, and economic livelihood. The difference lies in how this was done; how heavy-handedly and at what, and whose, expense.

The genuine interest in learning to appreciate cultural difference, and similarity, is a relatively recent development. We all must learn from the mistakes of the past. True learning and appreciation of another culture requires the suspension of comfortable familiarity and preconceived assumptions. Indeed, part of learning about another culture involves the self-awareness and recognition of how the world is viewed through one's own cultural lens. Any impression of a group of people, a culture, a race, a nationality, depends on what is learned through history. However, the history taught in North American schools, books, and on television, often begins with and focuses primarily on the period of European arrival and influence. As we all know, the dominant, mainstream historical narrative is the history of the victors.

As part of this project, team members interviewed American Indian elders and leaders, researched documents, maps and photographs, and reviewed the archaeological record for the project area. In the end, there were no specific Native stories associated with this area, relatively few reliable documents that tell the Native story of this place, and there are no Native archaeological sites in the riverfront area.

There are three possibilities that may explain the lack of specificity of information. First, it is possible that more stories survive but there was unwillingness to share them. Even though project team members included European and Dakota people who are well respected, no one should assume that oral histories will be handed over to be written down and repeated, particularly by non-Native people. Second, often the oral histories and stories for a place no longer exist. Given the well-documented U.S. government policy to destroy the language, culture, religion and homes of the American Indians, it is remarkable that any stories or traditions survive. Therefore, it is maybe not so surprising they do not survive in such a heavily industrialized area as the Minneapolis riverfront. Another possibility is that the Falls were not hugely significant to the Dakota. Perhaps it is a Western assumption that because the Falls were so important to the Europeans, because of the power that could be harnessed, that they therefore must be equally significant to the American Indians.



There is only one known story specific to the falls and Native people - The Legend of Ampato Sapa. This story tells of how a Dakota woman killed herself and two children after her husband took a second wife. She paddled her canoe over the falls and plunged to her death. Her spirit is still said to haunt the place. This story, while popularly cited, is seen as problematic in the eyes of American Indians because it supports and perpetuates an unsubstantiated suicide myth. Without exception, any Native person

consulted stated that this legend should not be perpetuated.

At the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary the request to not tell the brewery story is not comparable with the unanimous request to not perpetuate the Legend of Ampato Sapa. The brewery existed in that place, and its significance to the history of the city and region is irrefutable. The Legend of Ampato Sapa is precisely that – a legend. Many cultures around the globe have similar stories with negative connotation; this emphasizes the need for caution in repeating this story when the source of the legend is unknown. Interpretation at the sanctuary provides a challenge in finding new and appropriate ways to interpret actual facts and events in the past; the other perpetuates damaging myths and legends that should not be part of our current interpretive ethics.

So to answer the question - *Who controls the stories of place?* – my belief is that in spite of project or resource management, cultural affiliation, or land ownership, no one has rights to control a story. The only way to develop meaningful and respectful interpretation of another culture or people is to respectfully and openly embark on a planning process of dialogue and collaborative consultation. My answer to the question - *Who has the right to tell the stories?* – is that everyone does, provided that the planning process and interpretive outcome is based on goodwill and respect, and all participants are willing to be held accountable and are prepared to overcome stereotypes. This may mean obtaining permission from a Native elder, or providing co-authorship on a document; certainly acknowledging the partnerships and sources of information is essential. Multiple stories have multiple voices, which should not be told in parallel, but be interwoven. As interpreters, we must not be afraid to reflect the hardship and realities of history through interpretation. Broader involvement in the planning effort will result in broader interest by the descendants of a place or event, the visiting public, and potential project sponsors. Then the results will be rewarding, innovative, and meaningful.