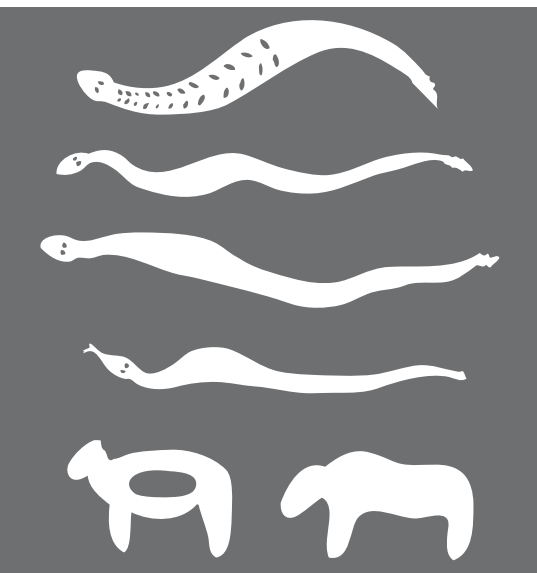


Partnerships and New Interpretations of Neglected Native American Stories and Places



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INTRODUCTION

Native peoples in North America have not only been neglected by EuroAmerican society for over 100 years, they have also been rendered as largely invisible. Their experience has long been poorly understood and their stories have gone largely unheard by non-Native ears. As we enter the 21st century, however, exciting changes are afoot. Signs of hope and interpretive opportunities are emerging as the EuroAmerican community begins to work *with* and *for* the Dakota people to learn how to collaborate in telling their story—to learn how to better educate an increasingly interested public.

Today, five different places and projects will be discussed. Each project demonstrates how partnerships and collaborative efforts are leading to exciting and meaningful interpretation of places that hold great cultural, historic, archaeological, and/or spiritual significance to the Dakota and Ojibwe people. Of course, each of these projects has had its own set of challenges and successes. My observations and experiences shared here today are personal and honest: they are the products of over a decade of work in this field. As is the case in any complex dialogue or cross-cultural effort, others surely have different interpretations of the processes, the outcomes, and the ways in which collaborative success is measured, but today I shall try and present as balanced and inclusive a view as possible.

NATIVE PEOPLE IN MINNESOTA

Before beginning, I ask you to consider, for a moment, what immediately comes to mind when you hear the word 'Indian' or 'Native American.' In many cases, the images and thoughts that materialize are bound within a EuroAmerican framework of reference and in turn, the negative and clichéd often supersede the positive and genuine. Common understandings of Native culture are often grounded in:

1. History textbooks that present Native Americans as a defeated people
2. Hollywood's pop culture: from John Wayne to "Dances With Wolves"
3. Alcoholism, impoverishment, and casinos

Conflict and struggle are often the central elements in these types of knowing. Yet what is so largely missing is a *depth* of understanding. When most people think of the history of the Midwest, they think of a relatively new region 'Ancient' is a word associated with the pyramids of Egypt and the Paleolithic cave paintings of southern France, but ancient is rarely a term related to the Midwest. Yet, Native people and their ancestors are very much an ancient people. The temporal depth of their experience on the land is profound and thousands of years old.

To provide some background historical context and to illuminate where the process of neglect began, I turn to the Upper Midwest during the 17th century. When French fur traders first arrived, the land was occupied by the Ojibwe, the Dakota, and other tribes. In contrast to the European system of land ownership, the tribes did not believe that land could, or should, be owned by individuals or handed over by a piece of paper. This fundamental difference in perception colored agreements between Native people and Europeans for the next two centuries. As settlers demanded more land, more tribes were cheated, lied to, and in some cases their land was blatantly stolen. An Episcopal bishop and friend to the Dakota, Bishop Henry Whipple, noted, *“The treaty is usually conceived and executed in fraud. The ostensible parties to the treaty are the government and the Indians; the real parties are the Indian agents, the traders and politicians.”* In the 1830s, most Native people were pushed west of the Mississippi River. In 1862, the Homestead Act unleashed swarms of settlers on lands previously home to Native people. After much hardship and coercive relocation, the Dakota started drifting back to Minnesota 20 years later.

This very cursory overview of history is not ancient history to Native people; it is as real and vivid as if it happened just yesterday. Therefore, it greatly affects and challenges the process of interpretation of Native stories and history by the descendants of the colonizers.

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

The process to develop interpretive and collaborative programs with Native peoples involves some essential ingredients that should be anticipated and planned for in advance of any project. These so-called ingredients are based on lessons I have learned from a range of interpretive planning projects and they inform the collaborative process:

- 1) Show Goodwill & Respect**
 - Decades of suspicion and mistrust can be overcome if there is goodwill among the participants.
 - Be respectful without being defensive, overly apologetic, or hostile.
 - Allow people to voice their frustrations but not hijack the process.

- 2) Be Patient & Realistic**
 - Patience is an essential component, for all participants.
 - Be realistic about the time frame—dialogue and decision-making cannot be rushed.

- 3) Be Held Accountable**
 - Be prepared to be challenged and held accountable for “the sins of our fathers.”

- 4) Organizational Commitment**
 - Be realistic about each organization’s commitment of time, resources, and energy.
 - Consider if the organization leading the process or project has the interest and political will for the long haul.
 - Beware of any tendencies to lean towards lip service in lieu of real communication and partnership.

- 5) Be Surprised & Overcome Stereotypes**
 - Be prepared to be surprised—strange friendships and alliances can develop.

- The audience and stakeholders may expand in unexpected ways.
- Stereotypes are often broken and overcome.

It is worth noting here that a Dakota colleague and friend reviewed this paper and noted the resonance between these ingredients and "the four virtues of wisdom, generosity, courage, and patience/perseverance"—elements so valued and revered within his community and by his ancestors.

My plan now is to present a brief overview of each of the five collaborative projects that I have been involved in.

PROJECT 1: BRUCE VENTO NATURE SANCTUARY AND *WAKAN TIPI*

On the east side of St. Paul, at the base of an impressive bluff line, is a cave that is known to the Dakota as *Wakan Tipi* and to EuroAmericans as Carver’s Cave. This cave has long held importance for both cultures.

Originally, *Wakan Tipi* was centrally located at the intersection of the Ho-Chunk, Anishinaabe, and Dakota tribes. According to Dakota elders that we spoke with, the presence of petroglyphs within Carver’s Cave indicates that the cave was a location for council meetings and sacred ceremonies. Elders told us that petroglyphs are “very ancient” “stories” made by man and spirits that indicate “the power of the place.” While petroglyphs of men, birds, animals, fish, and turtles were recorded within the cave, the largest and most notable petroglyphs within *Wakan Tipi* were large rattlesnakes that appeared to be pointing to a common point directly over the widest part of the cave. The snake is an icon of healing, power, and medicine and thus the presence of the carved snake motifs indicates that the cave was likely a place for healing ceremonies.

Furthermore, caves, in and of themselves, are sacred places because they allow one to enter simultaneously into the earth and darkness. Darkness is linked to both birth and death, which in turn are linked to Grandmother Earth. An elder who visited the cave in the 1940s or 1950s recalled that his grandfather would not let him go very far back in the cave because the UN KTE HI, the spirit who resides in water, lives in the lake in the back of the cave.

As already implied, the cave was also significant to early European travelers and settlers. In the fall of 1766, Jonathan Carver, a self-taught English mapmaker from Connecticut, set out to explore the Upper Mississippi. Carver wrote in his journal:

This day we arrived to the great stone cave called ... Waukon Teebee, or in English the House of Spirits. This cave I found to be a great curiosity.

Carver’s descriptions of the cave and its “many strange hieroglyphycks” were included in his published journals, which later compiled into a popular book. The “great cave” became a widely known landmark along the Mississippi River. Over time, popular interest in the cave became so piqued that the cave was eventually sealed shut with metal doors, prohibiting access to both Native and non-Native visitors.

A 27-acre area along the Mississippi River that includes *Wakan Tipi*/Carver’s Cave was transferred from railroad company to the City of St. Paul for development of a nature sanctuary.

While planning for the nature sanctuary, an extensive consultation process was initiated among tribal representatives, the City, community, and 106 Group.

Patience has been a critical part of the success of the nature sanctuary's planning efforts. Direct input from Native peoples has been critical in the treatment and interpretation of this nationally significant, and some say internationally significant, site. Often, different representatives would be present at different meetings and would express different opinions from the earlier meetings. Consultation rarely if ever provides a forum for unanimous agreement: on the contrary conflicting opinions, differing versions of a story, and opposing claims of authority on a given subject were the norm. Meetings often did not start on time because Native people were traveling from a great distance. Time kept by the clock is a relatively modern, Western concept. It is important to be aware that when we express frustration at meetings starting late, we are expressing a post-industrial concept of time that is not necessarily shared by traditional, Native, non-European people.

PROJECT 2: HISTORIC MURPHY'S LANDING AND CHIEF SAKPE'S VILLAGE

Historic Murphy's Landing was developed 40 years ago as a chronological assemblage of historic buildings representing the period 1840 to 1890 in the lower Minnesota River Valley. However, the site of Historic Murphy's Landing includes portions of the location of the 19th-century Dakota village of Chief Sakpe, many of whose descendants live at the nearby Shakopee Mdewakanton Dakota Community. The area surrounding Murphy's Landing is rich in archaeological and historic resources, including numerous burial mound groups; archaeological and cultural sites associated with Dakota activity and belief systems.

With focus resting only on 19th-century historic buildings, an integral part of the place's history was absent in the museum's European-centric interpretation of place; long-time Native use of the land had been neglected and left invisible. In addition, an on-site Halloween attraction, *Spooky World*, had previously laid electric cables through a burial mound so that the Haunted House might have lights and "spooky" smoke. Not surprisingly, subsequent relations with the Dakota tribe were thereafter greatly upset.

Under new museum management, this situation was changed. The 106 Group was hired to develop an Interpretive Plan and Concept Master Plan for the museum. Historic Murphy's Landing broadened its mission to "interpret and preserve 19th-century life in the Minnesota River Valley." Due to the long-term relationship of Native American settlement on this land, the Native story became a major component of all planning efforts. A partnership with the Shakopee Mdewakanton Dakota Community was deemed necessary for the continued preservation and interpretation of the resources. However, it was not until near the end of the planning process that the local Dakota community expressed interest in cultivating that partnership and participating in the development of on-site interpretation.

As was the case with *Wakan Tipi*, the community made clear that the highest priority, after years of neglect, must first and foremost be protection of the resources. They also made it quite clear that they did not want to see any reconstruction of a Dakota Village placed on the landscape to counterbalance the pioneer village. Such reconstructions too often portray Native culture in a stereotypical way, reminiscent of Wild Bill Hickock shows and early Hollywood westerns.

The new managers were anxious to try to rebuild better relations with the local Dakota community, but it was going to be a long and uphill struggle. Having said that, the new museum managers and Dakota community nevertheless have maintained a cautious sense of potential—it would take a long time to heal wounds, but there was a glimmer of the possibility to make amends for the errors of the past, and a new possibility for a partnership to tell a shared story. From the beginning, the museum has shown patience and respect towards the time it may take to genuinely build and establish a true partnership with the local Mdewakanton community. I suspect that in a sense the museum managers are being tested. If those responsible for these sites do as they promise, and protect the resources for which they are responsible stewards, then the future groundwork for improved dialogue is in place. It serves us all to remember that after decades of broken promises and lies, it will be a long time before Native people actively participate in sharing their stories and traditions beyond the most cursory way.

Organizational commitments are essential. One of the most symbolic examples of an agency's serious commitment to adopting a more appropriate multi-cultural story about a place is found with the name: *Historic Murphy's Landing*. Deciding that the name was not inclusive enough, it was changed, by a board vote, to "The Landing" in order to reflect the inclusiveness of all time periods of the site and to de-emphasize the EuroAmerican aspects. The name change was a symbolic statement to the Dakota community that the museum acknowledged, in a very public way, the significance of their ancestors and the roles they played in shaping the history of the place.

In our 21st century world of timelines, and demand for instant gratification, notions of a 'long haul' and 'unpredictability' can be unsettling. Before embarking on interpretive planning projects with Native peoples, organizations and agencies must give careful consideration to the level of effort and resources they have available and the desire to commit to such an undertaking.

PROJECT 3: SPRING LAKE PARK RESERVE

Situated along the Upper Mississippi River is a beautiful area called Spring Lake Park Reserve, home to some of Minnesota's most spectacular archaeological sites representing an 8000-year history of human occupation. As a result of river contamination from a local refinery, funds acquired by the county from a legal settlement are now being used to build a new Cultural Center. The extensive cultural history of the river corridor is one of the most unique characteristics of the reserve. Sites include cave shelters, ancient villages, hunting encampments, burial mounds, historic farmsteads, and other building foundations.

During preparation of an Interpretive Plan for the reserve, input and collaborative commitments from local Native communities were sought out. Several tribal representatives participated in planning workshops. In the first, when development was being discussed, one elder shared the following lesson: he explained that Native culture does not condone digging in the earth past the elbow. To do so puts the digger and the world as a whole at risk of releasing the "rainbow" or "multi-colored" serpent; a creature who, if disturbed, can wreak havoc on the earth. A metaphor for oil, the rainbow serpent symbolizes a warning to avoid avarice and greed; it represents the potential harm of taking too much from the earth. The story, however, did not put an end to conversation with regards to future development. It was not shared to thwart

plans to build a long-lasting, durable, solid-upon-the-earth Cultural Center. On the contrary, dialogue and the sharing of ideas began there—they did not end there.

Also of note are the local collectors of this cultural history. A small handful of residents of the Spring Lake area have compiled personal collections amounting to several thousand artifacts that are kept in garages or displayed over fireplace mantles.

The Spring Lake Park Reserve interpretive planning workshops revealed a most unusual alliance. I had been nervous when planning the workshops because sitting at a table was a prolific artifact collector, a local resident who had gathered thousands of artifacts from the land and possessed skeletal remains in his basement. For those of you who work with or alongside archaeologists and/or Native people, you will know that such a mix can result in extremely strong differences of opinion. Just look at the controversy over Kennewick Man.

Not only were the workshops cordial and highly participatory, but afterwards, I was truly astonished to learn that the artifact collector and an elder from the nearby Prairie Island Dakota Community had formed... a friendship. I had the unique opportunity to observe what happens when a pottery hunter meets a living ancestor of the pottery maker. Their shared interest in the history of this place, in different stone tools, old stories, and hunting techniques sparked an alliance. It is one of the most poignant examples of the breakdown of stereotypical barriers that can be possible, if the time and opportunity are right.

PROJECT 4: AMERICAN INDIAN INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMMING ON THE MINNEAPOLIS RIVERFRONT

The Minneapolis Riverfront developed around the St. Anthony Falls. The area contains remnants of the city's milling history; it also contains substantial challenges for Native American interpretation of place. This is the case because the industrialized riverfront symbolizes, to many local tribes, the decimation of a people and the destruction of a place once deemed sacred. As the Europeans were nothing less than awe-struck when they first came upon the sight of the St. Anthony Falls, by the mid-1600s the Mississippi River was transformed into one of the principal routes of European trade and exploration.

With new use of the river, the falls were 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.

Planners for a riverfront museum and the riverfront park wanted to incorporate Native American themes into permanent exhibits and programs. However, in the process of planning for new Native-based programs a major challenge emerged: the need to 'set the record straight' about one of the few Native myths and legends that still survive in European documents about the St. Anthony Falls.

Respect is a word we hear so much these days we often grow weary of it. But it is undeniably at the very core of any successful dialogue. There is often a long path to tread before even

reaching neutral ground, before all those around the table can feel equal in the decision-making process.

A story, popularly known as the Legend of Ampato [Anpetu] Sapa, tells of how a Dakota woman killed herself and two children after her husband chose to take a second wife. She paddled her canoe over the St. Anthony Falls and plunged to her death. Her spirit is still said to haunt the place. This story is seen as highly problematic in the eyes of American Indians. They perceive this suicide myth to be exactly that—a “myth.” Moreover, they made clear that they did not want this story perpetuated. Based on their response, the museum decided—albeit with some regret—to not use the single Native story that had been in the public record for years. Honoring Native community requests must happen if there is to be any hope for future dialogue between different people—even if it means we have to rethink our programming efforts and planned interpretive materials.

PROJECT 5: DIAMOND POINT PARK

Lastly, the fifth project is an important undertaking on the shores of Lake Bemidji in northern Minnesota. The city sought to redevelop Diamond Point Park on the shores of the lake. But the park is special for its layers of cultural history—the park was known to contain a 3,000-year-old archaeology site and reported burial mounds. The archaeological record attests to a long-time occupation by indigenous people in this area, as well as the presence of early EuroAmerican pioneer families.

The potential for conflict between the Native and EuroAmerican community was great. We approached the project on a parallel track—conducting archaeological investigations that would inform park design and minimize physical disturbance to key resources and features, while at the same time working with a newly formed American Indian Advisory Group to look at effective ways to interpret Native history in the park and tell the hidden stories of this place. We recommended that interpretation at Diamond Point Park focus on the overlap, and, to some extent, the blending of three cultural periods: Native American; the contact period between fur trappers, traders, and indigenous people; and the European period, when early settlers first came to the area to make new homes. When multiple historical events converge in a place, the most powerful form of interpretation is one that explores those intersections.

- *“The Lure of the Water’s Edge.”* For over 3,000 years, people from different cultures have been drawn to this shoreline. People have gathered by the beaches of Diamond Point Park for many of the same reasons visitors come today: beauty, recreation, and comfort.

Applying some simple principles of goodwill and respect led to an outcome for this project that has been tremendously successful, resulting in protection of the archaeological resources, a new-found understanding of shared interests and desires through collaborative interpretation, and some new bridges built between the Native and EuroAmerican community that can be used for future planning efforts.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to share with you a powerful example of what the future looks like. Last summer, a friend and colleague who is part Dakota, part European, held a traditional Dakota ceremony on the eve of his wedding at the mouth of *Wakan Tipi*. This cave, a place of historical significance for two cultures, a touchstone of both ancient times and modern times, a place of healing, and a symbol of what successful collaboration can create and preserve, provided a meaningful backdrop to the start of a new marriage. I can think of no better symbol to express respect for the past, a gaze forward to the future, and a renewed visibility and appreciation of Native culture in contemporary society.

Pidameya - Thank you.