

## More Ojibwe History

Today the Anishinaabe-Ojibwe people constitute the second largest tribe in North America. With reservations and communities living on our ancestral homelands the Ojibwe are spread out across five American States and three Canadian Provinces- a geographical area unmatched by any other tribe. The Anishinaabe-Ojibwe are primarily a woodlands people. Because the western-most Ojibwe, known as the Plains Ojibwe or Plains Chippewa, as well as their Métis (“mixed blood”) kin, have adapted and absorbed many of the traditions of the Plains Tribes such as the Dakota Sioux in Montana (Rocky Boy) and North Dakota (Turtle Mountain), and the Nakota and Assiniboine in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, this series focuses on the history and culture of the woodlands Ojibwe of the Great Lakes Region, specifically the 19 Ojibwe or Chippewa bands in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. However, the shared cultures of all Ojibwe people around the Great Lakes, in Canada and the U.S., as well as the common histories they share and the enduring familial ties that transcend artificial boundaries, extends this series well beyond these 19 Ojibwe bands. Furthermore, it is important to remember that all Anishinaabe-Ojibwe tribes, and most of the Indigenous peoples of the western hemisphere for that matter, shared similar world views and cosmologies, and unfortunately faced the same threats from Europeans and Americans: namely the federal Indian policies of cultural genocide designed to separate them from their land, their culture, and their identity as aboriginal peoples. This series, while focusing on the Anishinabe-Ojibwe, reflects the story of many North American Tribes—a story of survival against all odds and endurance into the future.

### The History of the Ojibway People An Excerpt from “The Land of the Ojibwe” Minnesota Historical Society, 1973

The fundamental essence of Anishinabe life is unity. The oneness of all things. In our view history is expressed in the way that life is lived each day. Key to this is the belief that harmony with all created things has been achieved. The people cannot be separated from the land with its cycle of seasons or from the other mysterious cycles of living things - of birth and growth and death and new birth. The people know where they come from. The story is deep in their hearts. It has been told in legends and dances, in dreams and in symbols. It is in the songs a grandmother sings to the child in her arms and in the web of family names, stories, and memories that the child learns as he or she grows older. This is a story of the spirit - individual and collective. There is another story of the Ojibway people. This story tells of how European nations with overwhelming power and numbers swarmed across the land, reshaping it for themselves and destroying the natural balance within which the Anishinabe people had always lived. It tells of trade and wars and treaties, of laws and governments, and above all of the long, stubborn struggle through which the Anishinabe tried to preserve their own ways and their own identity.

In the language of the Ojibway, "Anishinabe" means "one of the people," "original people," or "original man." "Anishinabe" is how the Ojibway people identified themselves. The meaning or origin of the name "Ojibway," by which they are known to others, is uncertain. Two distinct meanings have been generally attributed to the origin of the word. One theory has it translating from the Ojibway word for "puckered up," referring to the puckered style of their moccasins. The other theory suggests that the translation stems from the early history of warfare between the Anishinabe and their enemies such as the Eastern Dakota. The Ojibway allegedly had a reputation for roasting their enemy captives until they "puckered up." Since European contact many spellings of "Ojibway" have occurred. Depending on how it sounded to the ears of French and English speaking people, it has been written as "Otchipwe," "Ojibewa," "Ojibwe," "Chippeway," or "Chippewa." Because I am from Canada, near Thunder Bay, I will use the "Ojibway" spelling which is common in that area.

The Ojibway are part of a large language group of Native American and First Nation people known as the Algonquin "family." This is the most widespread though perhaps not the largest native language group in North America. Its members can be found from Newfoundland to the Rocky Mountains and from Hudson Bay to North Carolina. There are some Ojibway Scholars as well as Ojibway Elders who believe that this common language points to an historical relation between such diverse tribes as the Ojibway, Algonquin, Blackfeet, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Miami, Micmac, Delaware, Shawnee, Potawatomi, Menominee, Sauk and Fox, Cree and Ottawa. In fact, according to Ojibway Oral Tradition, the Ojibway were actually part of the confederacy known as the Three Fires of the Anishinabe. The Potawatomi and the Ottawa were the remaining two "Fires" of that confederacy.

Today, most of the Ojibway people still live on the land their ancestors settled before the coming of Europeans, although that land base has been drastically reduced. The original homeland of the Ojibway was immense, stretching from the northern reaches of the plains to the southeastern shores of the Great Lakes. In Canada it extended from Central Saskatchewan to southern Ontario, and in the United States it included the northern corner of North Dakota, northern Minnesota and Wisconsin, most of Michigan and part of northern Ohio. The Ojibway regarded their land as a gift from the Great Spirit to their people, and it belonged to everyone in the tribe. They lived upon it and loved it and resisted any who tried to drive them from it.

In modern times, four main groups of Ojibway people have been distinguished by location and adaption to varying conditions. They are the plains Ojibway, the northern Ojibway, the southeastern Ojibway, and the southwestern Ojibway or Chippewa.

The plains Ojibway live in Saskatchewan, western Manitoba, North Dakota, and Montana. Although they were originally a woodland people, this group of Ojibway changed their way of life when they moved into the open lands and borrowed many of the customs of other plains people. Today, most of them work at farming and ranching. Many live in reservation communities, known in Canada as "reserves," and some have moved to the city of Winnipeg.

The northern Ojibway live in the remote forest country between the Great Lakes and Hudson Bay. This area is also inhabited by the Cree people. The term "Oji-Cree" actually refers to a distinct mix of Ojibway and Cree people living in this area. From earliest times, the Ojibway in this region have had to depend on hunting for a living and have separated into small family communities or clans because the land could not sustain large groups living together. A few still make income by hunting and fur trapping. Some are now guides or work in the timber industry, and a number of northern Ontario reserves now have provincially chartered business corporations.

The southeastern Ojibway often mingled with related peoples like the Ottawa and Potawatomi, whom according to Anishinabe Oral Tradition they are in fact a part of. Some of these Ojibway along with other Michigan and Ohio Indian people were forced out of their homeland by the United States Military and resettled on reservations in Kansas. However, there remains a large number of Ojibway people in Michigan's upper peninsula, as well as smaller reserves in central Michigan. However, there are no longer any organized Ojibway communities in Ohio. Today, the majority of the southeastern Ojibway are in southern Ontario, particularly around some of the shores and islands of Georgian Bay in Lake Huron.

In Minnesota, Wisconsin and upper Michigan reside the southwestern Ojibway, where they are generally referred to as "Chippewa." They traditionally lived by hunting, trapping and fishing, and by gathering wild rice and making maple sugar. Today, some Ojibway in these areas still earn a living from these activities. The Chippewa in the United States form the largest group among the Ojibway, and they have the most highly organized community and tribal life. Most of them live on reservations in northern Minnesota and Wisconsin or in the cities of Milwaukee, Minneapolis, St. Paul and Duluth.

As mentioned earlier, according to the Oral Traditions of the Anishinabe, the Ojibway, Potawatomi and Ottawa people were once a single "people" known as the Three Fires of the Anishinabe. Accordingly, the Ojibway people say that they originated in the northeast and lived by the great sea. This was probably near the mouth of the St. Lawrence River. When they reached what is now known as the Strait of Mackinac, where Lakes Huron, Michigan, and Superior almost come together, the three tribes or branches separated. This tradition was first written in English by William W. Warren, an Ojibway historian in the 1850s. It was told to him by the elders of the tribe as their fathers had told it to them.

In the first half of the seventeenth century French explorers and missionaries entered the land of the Ojibway and wrote down the earliest vague historical accounts. These men reported a community of Indian people living by the falls of the St. Mary's River ("Sault Ste.. Marie" in French), through which the waters of Lake Superior pour into Lake Huron. The French called them "Saulteurs" - "People of the Falls." Most of the bands of Ojibway in this area visited Sault Ste.. Marie from time to time in order to fish and meet their friends and relatives. Because this spot was already a gathering place, it soon became a trading center also, where European goods were exchanged for furs.

Although we know little of what happened in these years of early French contact with the Indians of upper Great Lakes, the bits and pieces of the story that we do have show the widely separated, loosely allied groups of Ojibway coming together and becoming a more united people. The village of Sault Ste.. Marie grew in size and became a meeting place and a center for shared religious ceremonies, while the leaders of the independent bands more often acted together in their dealings with the French and others. There was need of this unity, for great changes were already beginning for the Ojibway people.

From 1650 to 1680 trade, warfare and migrations greatly affected the homeland and way of life for the Ojibway people. The fur trade with Europeans introduced new tools and weapons as well as liquor into the lives of Ojibway people. The newly acquired reliance on these foreign commodities gradually forced the Ojibway to spend more time and energy securing and preparing the furs necessary for this new trade. Many other activities were quickly crowded out; such as pottery making, basket weaving, quill embroidery, and birch bark work. Before long the traditional balance of Ojibway life was altered and whole bands were making a large part of their livelihood by exchanging fur for the white man's goods.

Trade rivalries among the French, the Dutch and later the British led these nations to ally themselves with different Indian groups on the eastern seaboard. Each tribe needed new and larger hunting grounds as fur-bearing animals in demand by Europeans became scarce. The pressure for hunting territory led to wars among the tribes, and these wars were encouraged by their white allies. The effects reached far into the interior of North America, especially for the Ojibway.

After the Iroquois defeated their traditional enemy the Huron in 1650 they turned their attention to the neighboring tribes such as the Ottawa. In the years that followed the Ottawa refugees along with some surviving Huron fled to Green Bay on the western shore of Lake Michigan. There they joined other recent refugees from the Iroquois including the Potawatomi, Sauk, Fox and Menominee - mostly from southern Michigan. At this time, the easternmost Ojibway - the Amikwa and Nipissing were also attacked by the Iroquois. These Ojibway bands were forced to flee north and west. For more than 15 years this band lived on the eastern shore of Lake Nipigon periodically sending out warriors to fight the Iroquois to their south and east. When peace returned in 1667 most of the Nipissing Ojibway went back to their old homes.

The Amikwa along with the Missisauga joined their Ojibway tribesman at Sault Ste... Marie, and it was here in 1653 that the conquering Iroquois met their first serious setback. Armed with traditional clubs and arrows, this group of Ojibway destroyed an Iroquois war party that carried steel knives, tomahawks, and muskets. In 1662, the Ojibway along the southern shores of Lake Superior again encountered a large group of Iroquois near Sault Ste.. Marie and drove them from their country.

While these years of trade, warfare and migration destroyed some tribes, they seem to have also strengthened the growing solidarity of the Ojibway. After this time French

writers seldom mention the separate bands. Small groups still hunted by themselves in the winter, but the custom of returning to large villages in the summer for safety, trade, and religious gatherings had become an accepted way of life.

The disruption of traditional ways, the movement of large groups of Indian people, and the ever-growing desire for European weapons and tools all increased the importance of trade in Ojibway life. To the west, tribes like the Dakota, the Assiniboin and the Cree were eager to get more of the guns, knives, and other goods that made the neighboring eastern tribes so powerful. For this items they were willing to pay a high price in furs and the French quickly exploited this situation. In the spring of 1679 the French trader Daniel du Luth persuaded leaders of the Ojibway at Sault Ste.. Marie to attend a council with the Dakota at the far western end of lake Superior. There, an alliance was made between the Ojibway and Dakota. The Dakota agreed to let the Ojibway hunt upon the eastern fringes of their country in return for bringing then French traders and French goods. This arrangement lasted for more than 50 years. During this time the Ojibway spread westward across northern Wisconsin along the shores of Lake Superior. They built a large village on Madeline Island at the mouth of Chequamegon Bay where the French also established a fort and trading post called La Pointe in 1693.

In time this village replaced Sault Ste.. Marie as a gathering place for the Ojibway, and at Chequamegon the Ojibway seem to have found life better than before. Fur was plentiful; fishing was good among the nearby islands, large patches of corn and squash was cultivated, and wild rice grew in the lakes and streams. Once the French abandon their trading post at La Pointe, the Dakota had no choice but to obtain European goods through their new neighbors the Ojibway.

Smaller towns popped up along the lake shore from Fond du Lac on the west to Keweenaw Bay on the east, and in the winter months hunting bands traveled deep into Wisconsin woods to the south. But each summer Ojibway people from the whole area as well as from the north shore of Lake Superior, came to Chequamegon for the Medewiwin (Grand Medicine) ceremonies. These religious gatherings of the Ojibway nation were held in a great lodge which is said to have stood in the village on Madeline Island.

Meanwhile, there was much of the same sort of westward movement on the north side of Lake Superior. The Ojibway Bands that lived here joined by other more eastern Ojibway bands pushed towards the southland west. In 1683 Du Luth built a post (Fort La Tourette) at Lake Nipigon and another (Fort Kaministiquia) near present-day Thunder Bay, Ontario. Here, also the Ojibway prospered as go-between in the trade between the French and the tribes farther to the west. These were mainly Cree and Assiniboin, both of whom were at war with the Dakota. The northern Ojibway had strong ties with the Cree and took their side in the continuing conflict with the Dakota. Meanwhile the the Ojibway near Madeline Island, who were still allies with the Dakota at this time, sometime joined in expeditions against these northern enemies. Form the most part, the Ojibway were neutral and could travel safely in the country between the warring tribes. This included the chain of lakes and streams that leads west from Lake Superior along what is now the

international boundary. In time Ojibway villages grew up at Grand Portage, Saganaga Lake, Rainy Lake and elsewhere.

During the period when the Ojibway pushed westward around Lake Superior, other sections of the tribe were moving to the south. Although war continued with the Iroquois until 1700, the tide had turned and the Iroquois bands no longer threatened the people of the upper Great Lakes, including the Ojibway. To the south and east the lands where the Huron and Ottawa had formerly lived lay empty and inviting. Early in the 1700s the Missisauga Ojibway saw their chance and moved in. After a few skirmishes with the Iroquois these Ojibway made peace and their people spread through out what is now southern Ontario, between Lake Huron and Lake Erie. These years also saw the migration of Ojibway people into what is today upper Ohio.

In 1712 war broke out between the French and Fox Indians. Although the Fox were an Algonquin tribe and had not been enemies of the Ojibway before, the two tribes were already at this time competing for hunting grounds in northern Wisconsin. Soon, the newly established bands of Ojibway near Green Bay and the Chippewa river pressed south from their homes along the shore of western Lake Superior onto what had been Fox hunting and trapping territory. So when the French urged their Ojibway allies to attack the Fox, the Ojibway were quite willing. After many battles between the two sides, the Fox were ultimately crushed in a battle with the French in central Illinois. The remaining Fox fled south to the closely related Sauk Indians. This opened the way for further Ojibway settlements in northern Wisconsin and northeastern Minnesota. Some years passed however before permanent villages could be established here, for soon a new threat from the west emerged.

In 1736 the long-standing peace between the Ojibway and Dakota was shattered. French traders had by this time pushed northwest from Lake Superior as far west as the Winnipeg River and had formed a solid friendship with the Cree and Assiniboin, bitter enemies of the Dakota. Hoping to stem the supply of guns flowing to their foes, the Dakota slew a party of Frenchmen and Cree on an island in Lake of the Woods. The Ojibway took this attack on their allies as a declaration of war. Although the Dakota would make peace with the French a few years later, the enmity between the Dakota and Ojibway continued until the time when both tribes moved onto reservations.

Despite their fierce rivalry, however, each tribe continued to respect the other. The half century of peaceful exchange had left its marks: from the Dakota the western Ojibway had learned to hunt the buffalo, and in return they had taught the eastern Dakota how to make birch bark canoes. The Dakota also borrowed from the Ojibway some of the ceremonies of the Midewiwin. Especially in the St. Croix Valley the tribes had mingled, and there had been many marriages between them. Here the coming of war meant the painful tearing apart of families and whole villages, and always afterward the bands in this area made truce more often and kept it longer than elsewhere. Ties of blood reached even to the leadership of the two tribes. The first of the famous Dakota chiefs named Wabasha was half-brother to the noted Ojibway chief Ma-mong-e-se-da, who led the people of Chequamegon for many years.

Between 1740 and 1760 three decisive battles between the Dakota and Ojibway took place in which the Ojibway defeated the Dakota and pushed on into northern Minnesota as far west as the Mississippi River. Probably the most important of these battles was fought on the southwestern shore of Mille Lacs Lake near present-day Vineland, where the Ojibway drove the Dakota from a large village called Izatys. This is said to have been the tribal center for the eastern or "Santee" Dakota. The Dakota fled after a fierce three day battle which most historians put at about 1745-50. Another battle took place at the mouth of the St. Croix River on the site of what is now Prescott, Wisconsin. The success of these two battles made the pine forests of northern Wisconsin safe at last from enemy attack, and about this time or shortly after the first permanent Ojibway villages were established at Lac Court Oreilles and Lac du Flambeau.

The third crucial battle of this period opened the way for the Ojibway to move into the country around the sources of the Mississippi in northern Minnesota. It was fought on Big Sandy Lake at the western end of the Savanna Portage, which had been from earliest times the main route of travel from Lake Superior to the upper Mississippi. Here an Ojibway force drawn from bands as far east as Sault Ste. Marie attacked a Dakota village and in the words of William W. Warren, "Put out the fire" of that tribe on Big Sandy Lake. The leader of the expedition was Bi-aus-wah, a noted Ojibway war chief whose father had been slain by the Fox and who lived in the village of Fond du Lac. Before long, Bi-aus-wah took his people westward to light the Ojibway council fires at Big Sandy Lake. This new settlement and the rich hunting grounds around it drew Ojibway people from both the northern and southern shores of Lake Superior.

The Dakota people living at Winnibigoshish, at Cass Lake and at Leech Lake soon found themselves pressed upon by their enemies from three directions. Ojibway came north up the Mississippi from Big Sandy Lake and south from Rainy Lake. From the west came the Cree and Assiniboin along with a few Ojibway who had already moved as far as the Red River. At some time, probably in the 1760s, the Dakota abandoned their last stronghold on the islands of Leech Lake. The bands that had lived there, who were probably those known as the Sisseton, withdrew to the headwaters of the Red and Minnesota Rivers, the area where the three states of Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota now meet. The Dakota might have resisted their enemies longer, but they were influenced to move for other reasons as well. By the mid-1700s horses were becoming plentiful on the northern plains and were transforming the lifestyle of the people there. Already western bands of Dakota had taken to the free, proud life of mounted buffalo hunters, following the great herds that roamed across the grasslands. Many, however, remained in Minnesota and Mississippi River valleys, and their raids still made the lakes of the upper Mississippi unsafe for the Ojibway.

After a time hardy people from different Ojibway bands formed several settlements in the Leech lake area. There are many stories as to just when and how these people came to be called the "Pillager Band", but there is no doubt that they were known for their warlike behavior and bravery. They had need of such qualities, for the eastern Dakota made several determined efforts to regain at least part of their country. On one such expedition,

probably in the 1770s, they raided the Ojibway villages around Leech Lake and Cass Lake and at Sandy Lake but were defeated by a force of Ojibway who ambushed them at the mouth of the Crow Wing River as they paddled down the Mississippi. About 1780 or a few years later, the Dakota joined with the Sauk and Fox to once more drive the Ojibway from the valleys of the Chippewa and ST. Croix rivers. They were met at St. Croix Falls by some three hundred Ojibway under Chief Waub-o-jeeg of the Chequamegon band and were decisively - and finally - defeated!

*To learn about the history of the Ojibwe, contact the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, MN to purchase "The Land of the Ojibwe."*