

Mikwendaagoziwag Memorial at Sandy Lake

Mikwendaagoziwag in Ojibwe means:
We remember them.

One hundred and fifty years after the Sandy Lake tragedy, the descendants of the 1850 annuity bands gathered to dedicate a memorial to those who suffered and died. Perched on a glacial mound overlooking Sandy Lake, the Mikwendaagoziwag Memorial is situated near the resting places of the Ojibwe of 1850. The memorial stands as a tribute and invites visitors to reflect on the past.

The following 12 tribes, as modern-day successors to the 1850 annuity bands, helped to design and fund the memorial:



Minnesota

Fond du Lac Band
Grand Portage Band
Leech Lake Band
Mille Lacs Band

Michigan

Keweenaw Bay Indian Community
Lac Vieux Desert Band

Wisconsin

Bad River Band
Lac Courte Oreilles Band
Lac du Flambeau Band
Red Cliff Band
St. Croix Band
Sokaogon Band

For more information
contact GLIFWC:
P.O. Box 9
Odanah, WI 54861
Phone: 715-682-6619
E-mail: pio@glifwc.org
Web site: www.glifwc.org



SANDY LAKE

Tragedy & Memorial



"Tell him I blame him for the children we have lost, for the sickness we have suffered, and for the hunger we have endured. The fault rests on his shoulders."

— Flat Mouth, Leech Lake Ojibwe
Speaking of Territorial Governor Alexander Ramsey

Timber, Minerals, and Treaties

Recognizing indigenous bands as sovereign nations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Upper Michigan, the United States made treaties with the Ojibwe (Chippewa) of the Lake Superior region to gain access to the land and the natural resources.

Dominated by massive pine forests, wetlands, and rugged terrain, there was little interest from white Americans in settling this region. United States leaders, however, sought raw materials like timber, copper, and iron ore to fuel western expansion and engaged Indian leaders to push for land acquisitions.

In 1837, Ojibwe chiefs and government officials met near present-day St. Paul, resulting in the sale, or cession, of 13 million acres in east-central Minnesota and northern Wisconsin. The transaction was contingent on the Ojibwe retaining rights to hunt, fish, and gather on the newly ceded territory. These reserved rights are commonly called "treaty rights." An additional provision to the treaty required the United States to make annual payments called annuities to band members for 25 years. Annuity payments generally included cash, food, and everyday utility items.

Five years later, Ojibwe headmen and government representatives agreed upon a 10-million-acre land cession that included portions of northern Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. The treaty opened the south shore of Lake Superior to lumberjacks, along with iron and copper miners. Similar to the previous 1837 arrangement, the 1842 Treaty guaranteed the Ojibwe's hunting, fishing and gathering rights and promised annuity distributions.



Ojibwe land ceded to the United States through the treaties of 1837, 1842 and 1854.



Annuity payment at Sandy Lake Indian Sub-Agency, 1850.

Attempted Removal to Minnesota

Most Wisconsin and Upper Michigan Ojibwe bands which negotiated the 1837 and 1842 Treaties received their annuities by early autumn at La Pointe on Madeline Island—a cultural and spiritual center for Ojibwe people. Some government officials in the Minnesota Territory, however, wanted the distribution site moved out of Wisconsin in order to reap the economic benefits of a large, concentrated Indian population.

Territorial Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Minnesota, Alexander Ramsey, worked with other officials to remove the Ojibwe from their homes in Wisconsin and Upper Michigan to Sandy Lake, known to the Ojibwe as Gaamiitawangagaamag. The flow of annuity money and government aid to build Indian schools, agencies, and farms would create wealth for Ramsey and his supporters in Minnesota.

Pressured by Ramsey and others, United States President Zachary Taylor issued an executive order in February 1850 that sought to move Ojibwe Indians living east of the Mississippi River to their unceded lands. Initially stunned by the breach of the 1837 and 1842 Treaty terms, Ojibwe leaders recognized that the removal order clearly violated their agreement with the United States. Soon, a broad coalition of supporters—missionary groups, newspapers, businessmen, and Wisconsin state legislators—rallied to oppose the removal effort, and band members refused to abandon their homes.

The Tragedy of 1850-51

President Taylor's removal order had failed. Nevertheless, Ramsey and Indian Sub-agent John Watrous had a scheme to lure these Ojibwe into Minnesota and trap them there over the winter. They informed band members that the treaty annuity distribution site had changed from La Pointe to Sandy Lake, some 285 canoe miles to the west. If the Ojibwe hoped to receive anything that year, they were instructed to be at Sandy Lake by October 25, 1850.

While band members from Michigan and some eastern reaches of Wisconsin refused to travel with winter fast approaching, more than 5,500 Ojibwe journeyed to Sandy Lake that autumn. They arrived fatigued and hungry after the arduous journey, only to find no one there to distribute the supplies. Wild game was scarce, fishing was poor, and high water had wiped out the local wild rice crop for the second consecutive year. For the weary travelers and those Ojibwe who resided at Sandy Lake, living conditions deteriorated rapidly.

"Frequently seven or eight died in a day. Coffins could not be procured, and often the body of the deceased was wrapped up in a piece of bark and buried slightly under ground. All over the cleared land graves were to be seen in every direction, for miles distant, from Sandy Lake."

-Rev. John H. Pitezel, Methodist Episcopal missionary

Over a six-week period as harsh winter conditions set in, band members waited near the newly established Indian sub-agency. Without adequate food or shelter, disease and exposure ravaged Ojibwe families. More than 150 died at Sandy Lake from complications caused by dysentery and the measles.

A partial annuity payment was finally completed on December 2, providing the Ojibwe with a meager three-day food supply and no cash to buy desperately needed provisions. The following day most of the Ojibwe broke camp, while a few people stayed behind to care for those too ill to travel. With the canoe routes frozen and over a foot of snow on the ground, families walked hundreds of miles to get back home. Another 250 died on that bitter trail, and the Ojibwe vowed never to abandon their villages in Wisconsin and Upper Michigan for Sandy Lake.

The Sandy Lake Legacy

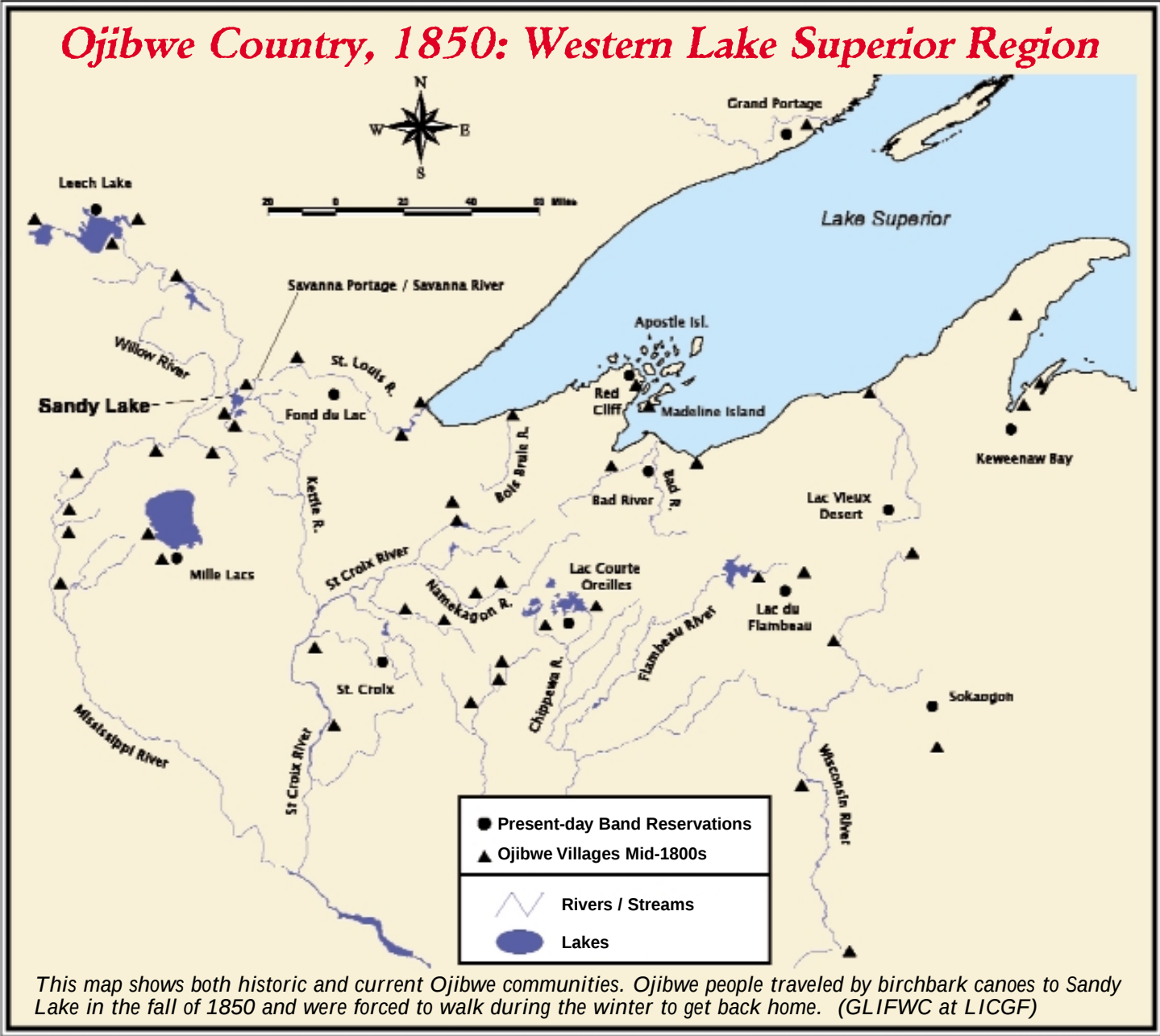
In the years following the Sandy Lake tragedy, Ojibwe bands and their non-Indian supporters vigorously opposed further attempts at removal from Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. Newspaper editors and missionaries rallied public support for the Ojibwe. Ramsey and Watrous tried again to bring the bands to Sandy Lake in 1851, but were rebuffed by survivors who called the annuity payment site a "graveyard."

A delegation of Ojibwe chiefs and headmen traveled to Washington, D.C. in the spring of 1852 to protest Ramsey's removal efforts and the needless suffering that occurred at Sandy Lake. Led by Chief Buffalo of La Pointe, who was well into his 90s, the Ojibwe requested an official end to removal efforts. After meeting with tribal leaders, President Millard Fillmore agreed to rescind the removal order and pledged that overdue and future annuities would be made at La Pointe.

Two years later when the United States sought Ojibwe land in Minnesota's Arrowhead region, the Ojibwe of the Lake Superior region agreed to cede more territory in exchange for permanent reservations in Upper Michigan and Wisconsin through the Treaty of 1854. Driven by the events at Sandy Lake and a love for the homeland and graves of their forefathers, these Ojibwe were resolved to stay in their traditional villages.

Ceded Lands in the 21st Century

Few American Indian tribes successfully reserved hunting, fishing, and gathering rights on land they ceded. Only those Ojibwe tribes who participated in the 1837, 1842, and 1854 treaties retain those rights to harvest natural resources in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota as recognized by federal courts. Ojibwe Indians continue to hunt, fish, and harvest wild plants within the ceded territory boundaries. With the assistance of intertribal agencies like the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission, Ojibwe tribes co-manage these natural resources with states and the federal government.



Public lands within the ceded territories provide Ojibwe people with limited harvest opportunities.