



**Gitchi Bizhikee (*Great Buffalo*)**  
or  
**Gitchi Waeshke (*Great First Born*)**



**Gitchi Bizhikee c1759-1855**  
(Wisconsin Historical Society, Madeline Island  
Museum collection # MI1983.237.311)

Gitchi Bizhikee was a highly-revered chief of the La Pointe Band of Ojibwe on Madeline Island and hereditary leader of the Loon Clan. He was respected widely as a great civic leader, warrior, statesman, peacemaker and orator who represented the Lake Superior Ojibwe in negotiations with the U.S. government. Bizhikee was signator of the 1795 Treaty of Greenville, the 1825 Treaty of Prairie du Chien, the 1837 Treaty, and the 1842 and 1854 treaties that were negotiated on Madeline Island. Bizhikee was a charismatic individual of “strong mind and unusual intellect” who possessed “great oratorical powers.” He was described as “grave and dignified, indicating a great thoughtfulness.” His friend Benjamin Armstrong characterized him as “a temperate man in all things and very industrious: a man of immense frame and iron constitution.”

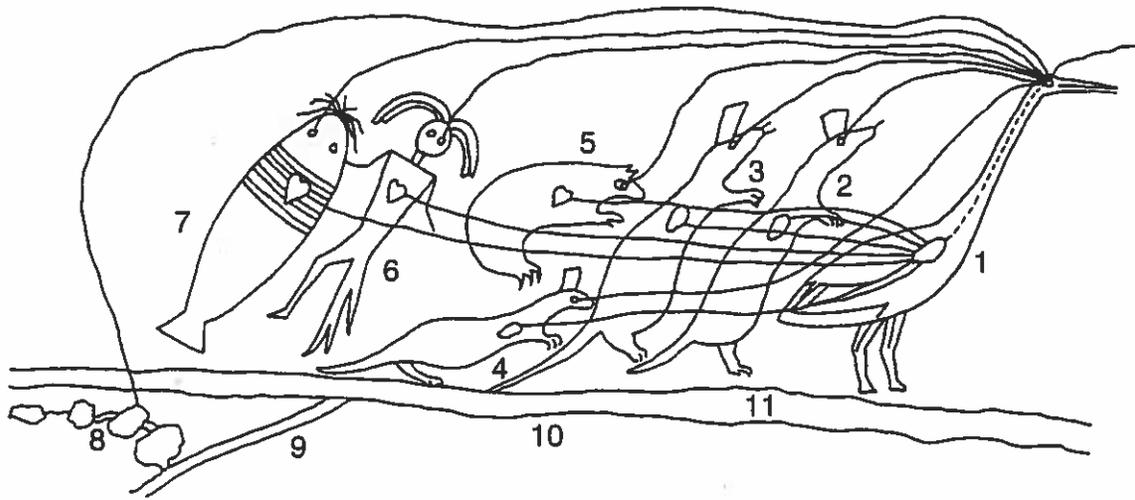
Bizhikee is most remembered for his determination to keep the Ojibwe here in their ancestral lands rather than be removed to the west. In 1850, President Zachary Taylor ordered the removal of all Ojibwe people from their homelands to Sandy Lake, west of the Mississippi River in the Minnesota Territory. Bizhikee protested the Removal Order, but many Ojibwe made the mandated journey to Sandy Lake in late October. There, many young and elderly Ojibwe fell ill from spoiled rations and inadequate supplies while awaiting their annuity payments that didn't arrive until December. Harsh weather then delayed and hindered the journey home, as government agents had hoped. About 150 Ojibwe died at Sandy Lake and 230-250 perished en route back to their homes. As a result of the Sandy Lake Tragedy, the usually peaceful Ojibwe came close to waging war against the U.S. government. Bizhikee decided to travel to Washington, D.C. and personally petition the president to suspend the Removal Order and allow the Ojibwe to remain in their homeland. As the ice thawed in the spring of 1852, 92-year-old Bizhikee and his party set out from Madeline Island in canoes for the nation's capital. With him was Chief Oshoga, interpreter Benjamin Armstrong and several prominent warriors. Traveling along the south shore of Lake Superior, they gathered signatures from prominent settlers and businessmen on a petition asking for the Removal Order to be rescinded. From Sault Ste. Marie, they traveled by ship to Detroit and Buffalo, then by rail to Albany and finally, Washington, D.C. Despite many attempts by government officials to stop their mission, a chance meeting with Representative George Briggs of New York secured the delegation a successful meeting with President Millard Fillmore who decided to suspend the Removal Order.

Two years later, Bizhikee was a signator on the Treaty of 1854 that was negotiated on Madeline Island. It established permanent reservations in the region for the Ojibwe and guaranteed hunting, fishing and gathering rights for future generations. Bizhikee died at age 96 and is buried on Madeline Island where ceremonies are still held in his honor.

A Historic Site Owned by the Wisconsin Historical Society

226 Col. Woods Avenue P.O. Box 9 La Pointe, Wisconsin 54850 tel. 715.747.2415

[madelineislandmuseum.org](http://madelineislandmuseum.org)



### SYMBOLIC PETITION OF CHIPPEWA CHIEFS, 1849

During the late 1840s, rumors circulated around Wisconsin that the Chippewa Indians who inhabited land near Lake Superior were destined to be removed from their homes and sent to inland Minnesota. In 1849 a Chippewa delegation traveled to Washington to petition Congress and President James K. Polk to guarantee the tribe a permanent home in Wisconsin. These delegates carried this symbolic petition with them on their journey. The animal figures represent the various "totems," as determined by family lineage, whose representatives made the historic appeal. Other images represent some features of the tribe's beloved north woods. Lines connect the hearts and eyes of the various totems to a chain of wild rice lakes, signifying the unity of the delegation's purpose.

This print is part of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin's 1993 observance of the centennial of Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis, which holds that the existence of an ever-advancing frontier shaped the American character and made it unique among the world's cultures. No commemoration of that still-debated premise would be complete without recognizing the dramatic, often tragic, effects that the westward-moving frontier had on Native Americans. This pictograph, originally rendered by the Chippewa on the inner bark from a white birch tree, was redrawn by Seth Eastman and appears in Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States, Vol. I* (1851). This book is part of the State Historical Society's rare book collection. The following legend details the pictograph's numbered images and what they represent:

1. Osh-ca-ba-wis — Chief and leader of the delegation, representing the Crane totem
2. Wai-mit-tig-oazh — He of the Wooden Vessel, a warrior of the Marten totem
3. O-ge-ma-gee-zhig — Sky Chief, a warrior of the Marten totem
4. Muk-o-mis-ud-ains — A warrior of the Marten totem
5. O-mush-kose — Little Elk, of the Bear totem
6. Penai-see — Little Bird, of the Man Fish totem
7. Na-wa-je-wun — Strong Stream, of the Catfish totem
8. Rice lakes in northern Wisconsin
9. Path from Lake Superior to the rice lakes
10. Lake Superior shoreline
11. Lake Superior