

The Great Lakes region has long been the home of the Ottawa people, its forests and waters providing ample resources for their sustenance. Centuries before the first Europeans came to North America, the ancestors of modern Ottawa people fished, raised crops, and hunted with specialized methods developed by the generations who came before them in the Paleolithic, Archaic, and Woodland cultures. The Ottawa lived directly from the resources of the land and developed special knowledge of the plants, animals, and landforms in their environment. Their religion invested the elements of their world with special meaning and powers, and they developed values which preserved the resources for future generations.

The Ottawa's lifestyle provided them with the surest chances of survival in an environment which could be unyielding and dangerous. Theirs was an intimate, personal knowledge of the environment which allowed them to maintain a balance between the number and kind of resources available and the number of people who used them, assuring all Ottawa people a share of food and material goods and minimizing the potential threat of starvation. Survival depended on precise knowledge of the ways of animals, the cycle of the seasons, the properties and uses of plants, and how to turn the resources of the land into useful tools, food, clothing, and shelter. Because the Ottawa relied so heavily on the land and its resources, it is difficult to understand their culture and history without

first considering their relationship to the land as it was from the earliest days and how it changed after the Europeans became part of the social environment in the Great Lakes region.

Ottawa history since the coming of the Europeans is the tale of a native people adjusting to change in their social environment. It is the story of their attempt to hold onto their basic values and traditional ways despite the efforts of others to change their culture and separate them from their land. The land and its resources remained central to the Ottawa way of life until the 1930s when many Ottawa left rural homes for life in Michigan cities, learning new skills for survival in the land of their ancestors.

### The Ottawa and Their Environment

When Europeans first came to the Great Lakes in the early 1600s, one of the first peoples they encountered were the ancestors of the modern Ottawa, who lived in what is now Ontario, Canada, along the Georgian Bay, on the Bruce Peninsula, and on Manitoulin Island. The Ottawa, who did not see themselves as a tribe or a nation as we use the terms today, were organized into four, or possibly more, large families (clans) who thought of each other as relatives. The four groups spoke a common language, held the same beliefs and customs, and made their living in similar ways. Their close cooperation in trade, rituals, and political activities led the French and others to view them as a single, politically united group.

The Ottawa and their neighbors, like all Native Americans who lived in the Great Lakes region before the coming of the Europeans, drew all their food and material goods directly from the resources of their own lands. The climate, soil conditions, vegetation, and animal life in the region played a major role in defining the shape of their society.

The importance of domesticated crops, especially corn, to the lifeways of the Ottawa, and their Chippewa and Huron neighbors, cannot be overstated. Life could be precarious when people relied for their food on hunting, fishing, and gathering wild plants alone. From late spring through early winter, a stable food supply was generally assured. But by late winter, game was not always available or easy to catch, and the plant and fish foods preserved earlier in the year were often spoiled or eaten before spring came. To avert possible starvation, Michigan Indians needed an abundant food source which could be preserved through the lean months of the year. Corn met the requirement.

As a result, the single most important environmental factor which shaped cultures in the



*The Ottawa called their respected leaders Ogema. The portrait of these two Ogema from Mackinac, wearing clothing made from trade cloth, silver ornaments, and traditional hides, was painted about 1815 by Sir Joshua Jebb. Birch bark canoes, such as the one in the background, enabled the Ottawa to travel great distances. (G114384, Public Archives, Canada)*

Great Lakes was the length of the growing season. Chippewa peoples, for example, who lived in Michigan's upper peninsula and northward, had a growing season of only 80 to 120 frost-free days. They could not be sure that the time and effort invested in planting would yield a harvest. Soils were rather infertile, and the conifer forests provided few food-yielding plants. Only sap from stands of maple trees added substantially to their food supplies. Like their Archaic and Woodland ancestors, the Chippewa lived by hunting and fishing.

The Chippewa way of life demanded mobility. To survive on their land, the people spent most of the year living in small family groups, hunting game and gathering wild plants. Only during the fishing season, late summer or early fall, was there enough food in one location to feed large numbers of people. During these months, the family groups lived together in large villages on the lakeshores near their fisheries. In the fall, when all the fish was stored, the large villages once again divided into smaller family groups for the winter hunt.

The Potawatomi and Iroquois-speaking Huron to the south of Ottawa territory lived in a region with 140 to 180 frost-free growing days. Their soils were rich, sandy loams well suited to crop production. The near certainty of a successful harvest encouraged these people to devote time and energy to cultivating crops. Food grown in the

warmer months, along with the richer sources of wild foods provided by their prairies and hardwood forests, sustained large villages for the greater part of every year.

The Ottawa people in their Ontario home, on the other hand, lived in a transitional ecological zone between the mild climate and hardwood forests to the south and the colder conifer forests to the north. In this environment, they built a flexible culture which in some respects resembled the highly fluid ways of their Chippewa neighbors to the north and those of the more settled Potawatomi and Iroquois-speaking people to the south.

The Ottawa way of life was based on growing crops, fishing, and, to a lesser extent, gathering wild foods and hunting. Their Canadian home was too far north to assure a certain corn harvest, but they recognized the importance of corn as a storable food crop. The Ottawa located their villages and fields along the western shores of Lake Huron where the warmth of the water usually extended the growing season long enough for their crops to mature. Most years, a successful corn crop yielded a surplus to be stored for leaner times ahead. This pattern of corn growing and method of land use were so central to their lives that when the Ottawa moved into Michigan's lower peninsula in the 1700s, they again sought lakeshore lands, settling in areas where the warmth of Lake Michigan's waters would aid them in the raising of

their crops. Fish were also important in the Ottawa diet, and extensive fishing with nets and harpoons in the waters of Lake Huron and the Straits of Mackinac added still more storable food to the surplus. The Ottawa also tapped maple trees for sap in the early spring and gathered other wild foods in the summer and fall.

By relying on a variety of foods, Ottawa society would not be threatened as severely if one food source failed. When the corn crop was damaged by bad weather, they could rely on fishing and hunting. When those sources failed, the Ottawa had reserves of corn. It was this stability which the Ottawa sought to preserve and enhance throughout their history.

#### Ottawa Village Life

Much of Ottawa life centered around their semi-permanent villages. In the 1600s and early 1700s, each village was comprised of numerous long-houses, which were rectangular structures topped with barrel-shaped roofs. Constructed of wood frames covered with birch or elm bark, each building was large enough to house as many as nine families. At times, some Ottawa villages may have been home to as many as three hundred or four hundred people. But when the soil of the fields was exhausted or when there was danger of an enemy attack, the Ottawa abandoned their long-houses and built villages in new locations.

*During their summers in northern Michigan, the Ottawa lived in temporary villages in conical, bark-covered tepees. (British Library)*



Each family in the village was represented by a leader who was chosen by consent of all of his family members. Responsible for expressing the opinions and protecting the interests of their families, leaders were chosen for their ability to deal with outsiders and for their generosity to family members and friends. When several families lived in a village, the leaders appointed a head speaker to represent them in dealings with other outside groups. In matters of importance, such as warfare with a neighboring group, moving villages to new locations, or threats to peaceful relations within the village itself, the village leaders assembled in council to decide on a course of action. Decisions were not reached by majority vote, but by the agreement of all members of the council, and most often, by the agreement of the entire family who supported the leader.

Leaders did not rule the village. They could not command anyone to do their will. But since the proper course of action was determined by the agreement of all the people, the decisions of the councils were almost always carried out. Although every village, large or small, was a separate political unit, villages could and often did join together for mutual protection in times of trouble.

Villages served as bases for food gathering, hunting, fishing, and trade. Within the village each person had an important role in procuring food and assuring the well-being of the group. Even children assumed responsibility at an early age as they imitated their parents and learned the skills necessary for survival. Young boys learned how to hunt and fish and make tools; girls learned farming and how to make clothing and other material goods.

Women were responsible for all activities which directly affected the material well-being of their families. Ottawa women, along with men too old to hunt, planted and tended crops of squash, beans, and corn in the fields surrounding the village. They gathered and dried wild strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and nuts. They harvested and dried the cultivated crops, processed them for storage, and prepared the daily meals. Along with clothing and other items essential for survival, they made many goods for trade. These included rush mats woven and dyed in symmetrical designs, baskets, birch bark boxes, and leather bags. Women worked hard at these tasks. By producing more than was required for immediate use, women could give the surplus to others and so gain respect and prestige for their families.

Men had different but equally important roles in providing for the village. As warriors they protected village territory and attacked the villages of their enemies. In summer they left the villages on long excursions to hunt, fish, and trade. The

Straits of Mackinac were a favored fishing ground, and the lower peninsula, which became the Ottawa's permanent home in the mid-1700s, was a regularly used hunting territory. During the winter, groups of eight to ten men would travel long distances to hunt deer, bear, and beaver, using bows and arrows, wooden clubs, or complex traps of their own design. While the men were away, they lived in conical or dome-shaped temporary shelters covered with portable rush mats. Because the men were responsible for protecting the main village, not all of them were away at any one time.

Not all Ottawa families lived in the large central villages. Sometimes, extended families chose to live in smaller villages in other parts of Ottawa territory where there were better fields or richer fishing and hunting grounds. A family might also choose to live closer to relatives who had married into other villages. This gave them the opportunity to strengthen their alliances to people in more distant locations. It also helped assure their survival by allowing them to draw on the other village's resources when supplies in their own region were scarce.

#### Ottawa Values

The first rule in Ottawa society was respect for the individual. No one person could determine the fate of another. Each person was respected because of individual powers and achievements. Personal actions were the result of personal decisions, but proper behavior benefited all members of the village or family group. Decisions which affected the entire group were arrived at by mutual consent. Ottawa leaders did not command; they represented.

The second rule was that all members of the group must share their material wealth, labor, and food. The natural forces of the Ottawa world were uncertain, and survival depended on supporting and being supported by kin. Any number of natural events could disrupt the process of getting food. Yet when food was scarce, the more freely it was given. Sharing was the social security of the day.

The value of trading and gift giving was not only in acquiring goods for oneself, but in the social act of giving. By giving, individuals and families gained prestige and respect. A rich person did not have any more goods than his kinsmen; he simply gave more of what he had. The exchange of gifts was governed by a set of rules which bound giver and receiver. Each gift required some form of return and extended obligations of reciprocity across family lines to other tribes as well. The emphasis on sharing was so strong in Ottawa society that almost no interaction could be carried on without it.

The third concept was the interconnected relationship of human beings with their natural world. All things and beings in the world were created for a special purpose in the cycle of life and nature. Humans took from the animals and plants of the earth what they needed for survival and observed the required ceremonial obligations in return. Every being in the Ottawa world possessed an unseen power or spirit (*manitou*) which was separate from its physical form, and life depended on a proper relationship with all the powers of the natural environment. Every being was treated as though it were a member of the family, and the Ottawa even addressed the more important animals and resources as "mother," "father," "brother," or "sister."

These principles were taught to children from their earliest years by the example of people around them and in the tales of Nanabozho. Nanabozho was a legendary being who was both a buffoon and a hero, and whose actions, like the forces of nature, might help or harm the Ottawa. Nanabozho's pranks — making rivers flow in the wrong direction, for example — caused great harm. Yet his actions could also be noble as they were when he created the earth and everything on it.

Some tales of Nanabozho begin with his birth on Mackinac Island. Like human children, Nanabozho began his life as an uneducated being. He made every possible mistake and broke every rule of behavior until, in the end, he learned what it meant to be human and to be Ottawa. He passed this knowledge on to the Ottawa people. To be Ottawa did not depend on the accident of birth alone. Many people born outside of Ottawa families were adopted into their society. To be an Ottawa meant behaving in accordance with traditional Ottawa principles.

In the small society of the Ottawa, violence was an ever-present danger to the well-being of the group. Because each person was so important in producing food, shelter, and clothing, the Ottawa system depended on cooperation, not competition. If one person or family attempted to assume too much power or wealth, there was a danger for the

whole village. Families whose goals conflicted with those of their fellow Ottawa sometimes moved away and formed their own centers of operation. Individuals who violated the rules faced exile; in extreme cases, such as murder, those who broke the rules risked execution.

### Ottawa Kinship

No person could survive alone in the Ottawa world; survival depended on belonging to a larger family group whose members worked cooperatively to meet each other's needs. The family was the most important social and political unit in Ottawa culture. But the family was more than mother, father, and children. Family relationships were defined by a complex set of rules which, when extended to their farthest conceptual limits, linked all people in terms of kinship. To the Ottawa, for example, the Chippewa were known as "Older brother," a term which recognized the common origins of both groups and the special responsibility which existed between them to share and to protect each other in times of war. The Potawatomi were the "younger brother" and shared in the same familial duties as did the Ottawa and the Chippewa.

In Ottawa society, a person was linked to a family by birth, and families were joined together by ritual beliefs. According to the Ottawa version of the creation, the earth was once covered by the Great Water. Nanabozho created the land from a grain of sand brought by Otter from the bottom of the Great Water to make more room for the animals to multiply and spread. When the first animals died, Nanabozho created human beings from their bodies.

Human groups who claimed descent from the same animal were seen as being related by kinship, and they demonstrated their shared relationship through use of a common *Ododem*, an Ottawa word which means "I have him for my family mark." The *Ododem* (totem mark) was a representation of the animal from which each Ottawa group was descended. This method of counting kinship assured that all people in a village were linked in meaningful ways.

The use of totem marks by the Ottawa may have indicated the existence of a formal clan system. Many different Indian groups had clans, but their importance and form varied from group to group. In some societies, such as the Potawatomi and the Huron, the clan controlled hunting territories, property, or ritual knowledge. Out of such control grew the clan's power to regulate day-to-day interpersonal relationships and to decide, for example, whom individuals might marry, where married couples could live, and who performed the essen-

tial tasks in everyday life. In other societies, like the Chippewa, clans were less formal. Members were simply obliged to offer hospitality to their kin, and clan membership defined who could be called upon for aid in times of crisis such as war or famine.

Indian groups in the Great Lakes traced their clan relationships and descent in two ways — through the mother (matrilineal) or through the father (patrilineal). Matrilineal kinship systems usually operated in agricultural societies like that of the Ottawa's southern neighbors, the Huron. In Huron society, men were traders who spent much of the year away from their large home villages. Women were the main food producers, and Huron kinship ties linked them with strong bonds. Huron women owned the houses, and property was handed down through the wife's rather than the husband's family. Newlyweds lived with the bride's family so that the wife could continue working in the fields with her female relatives. This matrilineal kinship

system and strong clan organization gave Huron society stability. Even in villages with populations of hundreds, all persons knew their proper relationship to the other people around them and the behavior that was expected of them.

The Chippewa peoples to the north were a patrilineal society. Men were the important food producers in a hunting and fishing economy. Their clans were not as strong as those of the Huron because Chippewa villages were smaller and less permanent, and Chippewa lifeways did not require strong clans as a means of binding individual families into larger groupings. Families had to be small and mobile to hunt successfully in the hard, cold, northern winters. When the fall fishery at Sault Ste. Marie ended, two or more nuclear families (mother, father, and children), often headed by brothers, would strike out on their own for the winter hunt and would not rejoin the larger group until maple sugar time in the spring.

The Ottawa, before their contact with Euro-



*Flexible and easy to repair, birch bark canoes, like the one under construction here, were the perfect vehicle for traveling Michigan's streams and lakes. The Ottawa used them to transport hundreds of tons of furs to the British and French colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. (Michigan State Archives)*

## The Ottawa

This family scene, photographed about 1860, illustrates a traditional Ottawa bark-housing style. (Michigan State Archives)



peans, were probably flexible in the way they reckoned their kinship and clan identification. As farmers who lived in large, year-round villages, they may have tended toward a stronger social system like that of the Huron. An early report of Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac, founder of Detroit in 1701, went so far as to say that the Ottawa, like the Huron, had a matrilineal clan organization. But unlike the Huron, the Ottawa could easily live in the fashion of their Chippewa "big brother" — breaking villages down into their constituent families, living in small groups, and emphasizing the male line in determining kinship — all without destroying their Ottawa group identity. In their central location between matrilineal and patrilineal peoples, and with their emphasis upon trade along lines of kinship created by intermarriage with their trade partners, the Ottawa probably maintained a set of social rules which accommodated any situation they encountered, allowing them comfortably to marry into both of their neighboring groups.

In some Indian societies, every village was a separate clan. In other societies, several clans lived in the same village. Each Chippewa village was originally composed of a single clan; large Huron villages were made up of several clans. In the case of the Ottawa, the families living in each large village could have been loosely linked into clans. Two of the four major villages which formed the Ottawa Confederacy — the Kiskakon, or cut tails, a name which refers to the bear, and the Sinago, or black squirrels — were identified by the animals from which their inhabitants claimed descent. Other family groups took their names from a geographic feature of their home territory. The name Sable, for example, meant sand, and Naussaukeuton meant river fork, a reference perhaps to a river fork near their major village or to a homeland along Green Bay. It is also possible that other groups associated with the four main Ottawa divisions in the late 1600s and early 1700s, including the Keinouche, Kinouchepirini, and

Amikwa, may have been separate clans who had married into the larger Ottawa confederation. By the late 1700s there were many Ottawa clan symbols created as small family groups split from larger villages and adopted new animals as their totems.

### Manitos

The religious beliefs of the Ottawa centered about the natural world, the universal supernatural power which shaped it, and their relationship to its forms and forces. Ottawa beliefs defined the acceptable ways to interact with the elements of their world, and worship was not separated from daily life. Everywhere the Ottawa went, and each task they performed, required an understanding of a realm beyond their physical surroundings.

Every element in the Ottawa world, from rocks and trees to animals and human beings, was made up of two basic parts, the body and the *manitou* (spirit). *Manitos* were spirit beings who inhabited the Ottawa world and directly influenced many of the events that took place there. Because the body and spirit were never permanently linked in any being, manitos could change form. Animals could become human and humans could become animals. Forces for good when they were treated respectfully, manitos were capable of doing harm if not dealt with in the proper manner. They required the same respect accorded to the humans in one's own family. Not every tiny pebble, blade of grass, or stick thrown on the fire embodied a manitou, but each one carried the potential. The wise person took no chances and tried to treat all beings in the land, living or otherwise, as though they were kin. The Ottawa used the resources around them and in return offered songs and prayers and other gifts to perpetuate their close personal relationship with the spirit beings.

Some manitos were more powerful than others and played a more prominent role in daily Ottawa

life. The sun and the moon were always good. Their power was essential if the corn was to grow. Thunder and lightning had the power to bring the rain vital for a successful crop. But should thunder and lightning send destruction instead of rain, there would be no food in late winter. Deer, beaver, bear, and fish were essential to Ottawa survival. But these animals could change their forms, or worse, could refuse to give themselves to the hunters. And the underwater serpent who lived in the lakes was capable of capsizing the canoes of Ottawa fishermen and traders. Because all such misfortunes arose from a disruption in the relations between manitos and humans, the manitos had to be honored with their own songs and dances or appeased with the proper offerings.

### Powers

Daily life held many dangers, and every Ottawa, beginning in childhood, needed a manitou who would be a special, personal protector and lend its power to help control the uncertain forces of nature. After each Ottawa child of the proper age observed a special ceremony of fasting and prayer, his or her manitou appeared in a vision in the form of an animal or bird. From then on, the manitou could be summoned to give extra strength in times of crisis or danger, to show the hunter where to find game, or to protect against the hazards of everyday existence.

The power of the manitou who had appeared in the vision was often embodied in a special object carried as an amulet to ward off evil or to bring good fortune. The amulet could be a bird's feather (if the manitou had taken the form of a bird), a squirrel's paw, a stone which resembled the manitou's animal shape, an image etched in birch bark, or even herb medicines. The Ottawa often kept these powerful objects in what are today called medicine bundles, animal pelts taken in a single piece so that they formed a bag.

The Ottawa believed that some individuals were endowed with special powers such as the power to heal or the power to foresee the future. A *Jessakid* had the power to summon spirits to a special lodge in order to determine the source of the problems which had befallen individuals or the village as a whole. The lodge shook when the spirits entered, and the *Jessakid* waited to hear which feasts, rituals, or ceremonies should be performed to restore proper relations between the Ottawa and the spirit world.

The *Wabano* (fire walkers) were men with the power to walk on hot coals or handle burning torches with their bare hands. The *Wabano* could heal sickness, make hunting magic and love charms, and influence manitos. They displayed



*In the late nineteenth century, many Ottawa men earned needed income by spending their winters cutting timber in a logging camp. (Catherine Baldwin Collection)*

their powers at ceremonies of feasting, singing, and dancing. Little is known about Wabanos, their power and how it was used, but their ceremonies were usually held in conjunction with a third kind of ceremony, the *Midewiwin*.

The Midewiwin priesthood was the most important of the special forms of power, and members of the Midewiwin lodge held extremely prestigious positions in Ottawa society. Those already initiated into the lodge's secrets carefully selected new members to join and learn the songs, dances, stories, and herbal treatments that would enable them to become priests and share in the powers of the lodge. Each member paid a fee to learn the secrets of the society, and the process of learning was long and expensive. The Midewiwin was important in unifying the Ottawa throughout their territory. Because men and women from all Ottawa villages could participate in the meetings, the Midewiwin tended to draw them together into a single group.

The Ottawa had many ceremonies before the French and the Jesuit priests arrived in the Great Lakes region. But during the seventeenth century, the Ottawa created formal societies, like the Midewiwin, which borrowed some of the trappings of the missionary priesthood and some of the rituals of Catholic religious services. The Midewiwin society incorporated a larger body of native beliefs into a single ritual which reenacted the Ottawa story of creation and Nanabozho's gift of the megis shell with its power to combat the evil forces of the world. Through song and ritual, the ceremony portrayed Midewiwin priests journeying through a world of evil manitos who tempted them to stray from the proper path. "Shot" with the sacred shell, they died, were reborn, and reached a new level of power with greater gifts given by the sacred manitos.

The Ottawa believed that the ceremony renewed and increased the powers of all who participated. But even in this complex ceremonial setting, power remained an individual matter. Each participant received only as much power as the manitos



*Naumke-Ching-Um-Ie, born along the Grand River around 1800, was one of the first Michigan Indians to pose for a photographer. His clothing demonstrates Indian willingness to incorporate American and European styles while retaining pieces of native dress. (Grand Rapids Public Museum)*

allowed. The power itself was neither good nor evil but could be used for both. There were four levels of priesthood, each with its own knowledge and power. Priests at the fourth and highest level had so much power that they could become dangerous. Able to change their forms to *Windigos* (bearwalkers), they could misuse their gifts to harm rather than help others. Individuals suspected of using their power to harm their kin broke Ottawa rules of respect for others and disturbed the balance of proper relationships. They were ostracized from the village or even executed.

#### **Ceremonies and the Cycle of Seasons**

Ottawa life depended directly on the forces of nature, and each ceremony had to be held at its proper time in the seasonal cycle. Ceremonies were intended to influence the manitos, but they also helped to draw the Ottawa together and unite their society. Ceremonies and religion were not marginal to Ottawa life; they were essential parts



*Mitchell Wagigekik at his house in Middle Village near Good Heart in Emmet County. (Grand Rapids Public Library)*

of all activities. It is impossible to identify all of the ceremonies connected with everyday Ottawa life before the Europeans came to the Great Lakes. We do, however, have some idea of their probable timing in the seasonal cycle.

In the spring, when the maple trees were ready to be tapped, the Ottawa, dressed in their best garments, gathered for feasting, dancing, and singing. Spring was also the occasion for the Wabano, Jessakid, and Midewiwin priests to reestablish the strength of their powers and deal with the problems of their people.

With the coming of warmer weather, Ottawa men were free to travel for hunting, trading, and warfare. Elaborate ceremonies were held throughout the warm season to recruit and prepare warriors, to inspire them to success, and to celebrate their victories.

The sun ceremony took place during the summer when food was most plentiful. The largest feast of the year, the summer ceremonial was held to give thanks for what had been received from the

manitos and to enlist the spirits' continued blessings. There may also have been smaller ceremonies of thanksgiving for the harvest of the first fruits of important foods.

The Ottawa gathered for the Feast of the Dead, in the fall, every three years. This was a long ceremony, complete with athletic contests, songs, dances, feasts, and offerings. At its end, the bones of those who had died since the last feast were buried with elaborate ceremonies in a common grave. The ritual united the spirits of the dead and symbolized the friendship of the living. In the years between these larger feasts, Midewiwin lodge ceremonies may have been held before the coming of the winter. In the winter, no large group ceremonies occurred.

Like the seasons, human life was conceived of as a cycle, and each important division of that cycle was marked with special observances by family members. Ceremonies took place at the naming of a child, after the manitos revealed the child's special power, at a boy's first killing of game, during courtship, and at times of illness and curing. Death was likewise a ceremonial occasion, bringing friends and relatives to a funeral gathering that lasted for days. At its conclusion, the body of the deceased was buried in a temporary grave to await final interment at the Feast of the Dead. At these critical times in an Ottawa's life, as in all other activities, reliance on close personal and family relationships was of primary importance.

### **The French and the Fur Trade**

Trading relationships were also essential to the Ottawa way of life, and the word "Ota'wa'," in fact, means "to trade." Ottawa men traveled the entire Great Lakes region in birch bark canoes, acting as middlemen for the Chippewa to the north and the Huron to the south. The Ottawa supplied the Chippewa with their own and the Huron's surplus corn and received in return the furs that they traded to the Huron. Each Ottawa family owned its own trade route, which was both a geographical path or waterway and a set of relationships with trading partners along the way. So important were these trade relationships that marriages were often arranged to turn trading partners into family members and so extend kinship ties. The trade routes could be used only by the family who pioneered them and who maintained the gift-exchange and kinship ties which assured safe passage for the traders and a supply of goods when they reached their destination. Members of the kin group who owned the route used it only with the permission of the family leader, usually the same man who represented them in council and was respected for his personal powers.

Trespassers along the trade route could be charged a toll of furs, grain, or other native trade goods, or might even be killed for their trespass.

In the 1600s a new element was added to the Ottawa's social environment: the French. The French had come to North America as early as 1523 when Giovanni de Verrazano, in the employ of the king of France, explored the land stretching from Newfoundland to Virginia. French interests in the New World at the time were singularly narrow, concentrated solely upon finding a water route across North America to reach the riches of the Orient. The discovery of such an all-water route, so the French hoped, would fill the royal coffers with precious metals just as Hernando Cortes' expedition to Mexico, culminating in the conquest of Mexico City in 1521, had done for Spain.

In 1534, Jacques Cartier sailed up the St. Lawrence River and visited the Iroquois village of Stadocona near modern-day Quebec. He attempted to build a fort there, but the deaths of many of his men from starvation, scurvy, and exposure forced him to return to France. His second attempt to plant a colony in the same location in 1541 was no more successful than the first. A harsh winter and Iroquois harassment persuaded him to return to France, a failure in his attempts to find great riches.

Samuel de Champlain was the next explorer to reach the St. Lawrence valley and the first Frenchman to have direct contact with the Ottawa. He came to North America as a cartographer, but was later commissioned to explore the St. Lawrence. Champlain and other early French explorers began laying the groundwork for what they hoped would become a powerful French colony in the New World, and they named the territory New France.

In 1608, Champlain founded a settlement near Cartier's deserted outpost, and from there began establishing trade relations with the native peoples along the water routes to the Great Lakes. His earliest trading partners were the Huron, whose territory, called Huronia, was a forty-by-twenty-

mile section of Ontario that lay between Lake Simcoe and Matchedash and Nottawasaga bays near the Bruce Peninsula. The Huron had moved to this territory after raids by the Iroquois had driven them from their previous home in the St. Lawrence valley.

The Huron and the Iroquois remained enemies, and Champlain involved himself in the conflict on the Huron side, deciding that if he was to maintain a profitable trade with the Huron and their allies, he would have to aid them in their raids against the Iroquois. In 1609 and again in 1610, Champlain joined the Huron alliance to defeat Iroquois forces. In 1615, on his way to Huronia to plan another offensive, he met a party of three hundred Ottawa men near the French River. Told the unlikely story that the men were on a blueberry-picking expedition, Champlain continued on his way. For the next twenty-five years the French continued to concentrate on trade with the Huron to support their new colony, and no further mention of the Ottawa was made in French documents of the time.

The paths which eventually brought the Ottawa and the French together in a permanent relationship were the routes of the trade. The French came to the Great Lakes region seeking great riches in gold, silver, and spices from the Orient, but they soon came to realize that the most immediate source of wealth was to be found in something the Ottawa had traded for centuries — beaver pelts.

Felt hats were the height of fashion in Europe at the time, and the beaver pelts were needed to produce the felt. Because the French were too few in number and too weak militarily to take control of the fur trade, they had established trading partnerships with the Huron who lived southeast of Ottawa territory. These partnerships, however, did not interfere with the long-established Ottawa-Chippewa-Huron trade relationships. The Ottawa continued to exchange their corn and other goods for Chippewa furs and to trade the furs for Huron goods. The Huron, in turn, brought the furs to the French on the St. Lawrence River.

Although the Ottawa had little direct contact with the French in those early years, they did see evidence of the European presence. When the Huron traded north, their native crops and crafts were accompanied by metal tools, kettles, beads, and other European manufactured goods. These new goods were highly prized by the Ottawa and their neighbors, but had little impact on the way people lived.

For twenty years, the Huron greatly benefited from the trade in fur and European goods. Their towns grew in size, wealth, and prestige. As trading partners of the Huron, the Ottawa no doubt benefited, too.

## The Iroquois Wars

As more and more Europeans came to the New World during the early decades of the seventeenth century, trade in furs assumed increasing importance to North America's native peoples. The Iroquois of New York and Pennsylvania traded first with the Dutch and then the British, offering furs in exchange for European knives, kettles, axes, and guns. Needing greater access to the northern furs with which they could purchase European goods, the Iroquois found themselves in competition with the Huron and their allies in southern Ontario. Encouraged by European traders who stood to gain or lose fortunes, the Iroquois went to war in the 1640s to destroy the trading networks of their Huron rivals.

At first, the Iroquois were content just to raid Huron villages for furs, corn, and trade goods. But as the Iroquois Wars progressed, the goal became the destruction of the Huron. Over the years between 1640 and 1649, Iroquois war parties destroyed Huron fields and kept the Huron on the move with continuous raids in Huronia. At the same time, a series of smallpox epidemics drastically reduced the Huron population. These disasters, along with the activities of French missionaries, raised Huron doubts about their traditional values, created divisions in their political organization, and sowed the seeds of conflict and dissension among them. Divided, demoralized, and weakened, the Huron were forced to flee their Canadian home.

The Iroquois Wars severely disrupted the northern trading networks. By 1650, Huron society was destroyed, and Huron trading partnerships were broken. But the French traders still sought their fortunes in furs, and the Ottawa and their Huron neighbors had new needs that could be satisfied only through trade.

European manufactured goods had begun to have an impact on the Ottawa way of life. European hoes, knives, axes, sewing needles, and metal kettles were sturdier than the traditional tools of bone, flint, wood, and clay, and made lighter work of daily chores. Without guns and ammunition, the Ottawa were easy prey for enemies such as the Iroquois, and over time, they came to value the gun over the bow and arrow for hunting as well. But the Ottawa had no gunsmiths to repair their weapons, nor did they manufacture their own powder or shot. Increasing Ottawa reliance on European goods and firearms meant increased dependence on European trade.

In 1650, a large group of Huron who had escaped the Iroquois took advantage of their trading-partner relationship with the Ottawa and moved to Ottawa villages for protection. But with the Huron destroyed as a military power, the Ot-

tawa themselves were no longer safe in their Canadian home. Seeking to avoid their Iroquois enemies, whom they called *Nadowe* (the snakes), the Ottawa and Huron moved into northern Michigan and Wisconsin. In 1653, the Ottawa and Chippewa united to defeat their enemy in a battle near Sault Ste. Marie, at a place called Iroquois Point, and so secured a place to live in the northern Great Lakes while the Iroquois Wars dragged on.

The Huron were without their own crops to trade for northern furs and had too few men to transport the furs to French towns on the St. Lawrence. They could no longer trade with the French by themselves. The Ottawa, however, already owned their own northern trade routes and had many other trading partners with whom to exchange goods. The Huron introduced the Ottawa to the French, and for the next fifty years Ottawa men traded directly with the French. They brought furs into Quebec and Montreal and took back the European manufactured goods that their Native American neighbors were so eager to have. Between 1650 and 1700 the Ottawa became the best known and most successful traders in the Great Lakes region, possessing greater wealth and prestige than they'd ever had before.

During the years of the Iroquois threat, the Ottawa were dispersed but not destroyed. Some Ottawa families moved briefly into their old hunting and fishing territories at Mackinac, Saginaw Bay, and Thunder Bay. The Kiskakon and Sinago clans, along with some Huron, went to Green Bay, Wisconsin. In the 1650s, they moved as far west as Lake Pepin near the Mississippi River, only to be driven back east by the Sioux who lived there. By 1660, Ottawa groups were living at Chequamegon Bay on Lake Superior and the Keewenaw Peninsula near the present-day L'Ance reservation.

Wherever they moved, the Ottawa had trading partners who willingly shared their hospitality and who, in many cases, were kinsmen related by marriage. The flexibility of their political organization and their varied subsistence techniques allowed the Ottawa to live in small groups or large villages, hunting and fishing in the northern climates, and farming in the warmer regions to the south. Although the times were not easy for them, the Ottawa adapted to a variety of new locations without sacrificing their cultural identity or losing their strength.

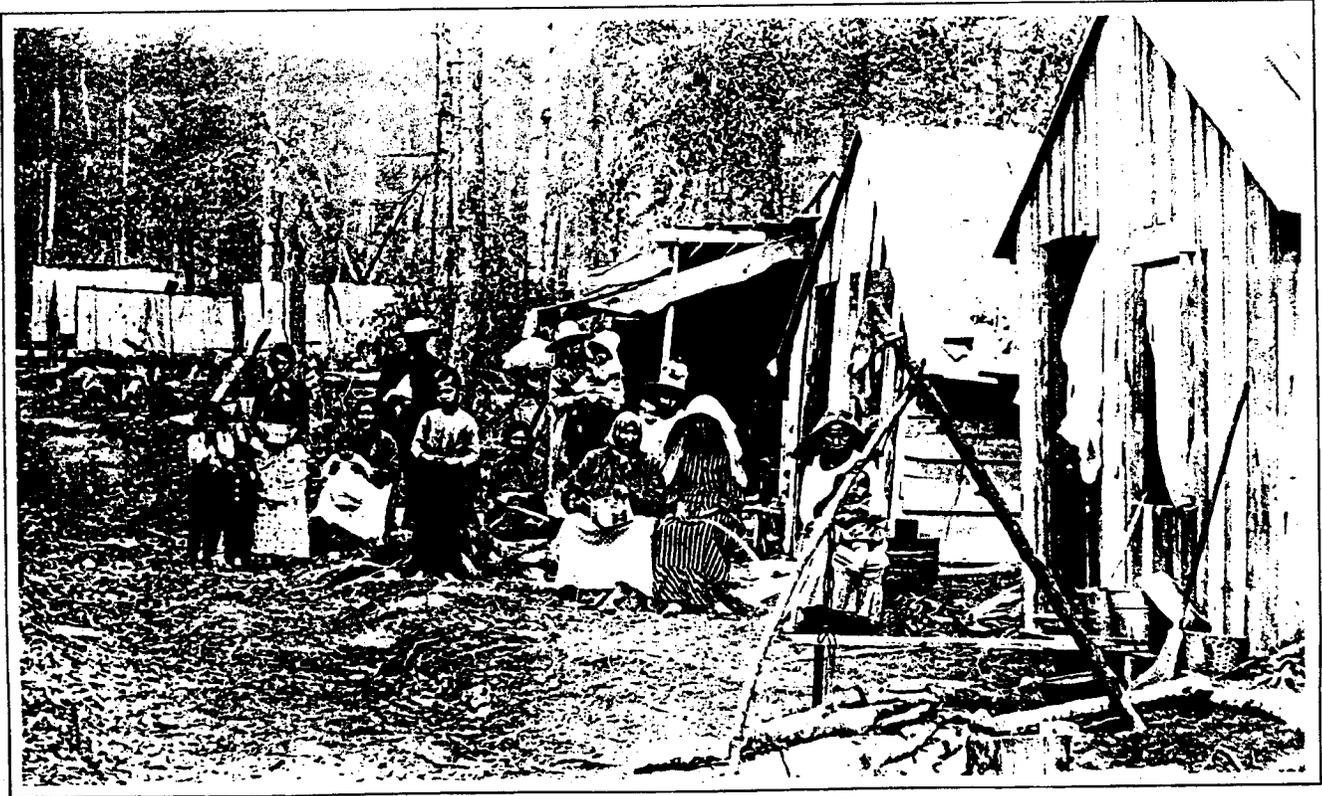
In the 1670s, after peace was finally made with the Iroquois, the Ottawa once again formed their large villages near the Straits of Mackinac. Seeking soil, climate, plants, and game similar to those they had left behind in Canada, the Ottawa built their villages on the banks of rivers flowing into Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, and on the

lakeshores as well. In 1670 and 1671, some Ottawa people, primarily the Sables, returned from western locations to settle on Manitoulin Island. By 1695, the Kiskakons and members of the Sinago, Sable, and Naussaukeuton clans had settled with the Huron at Father Marquette's St. Ignace mission at the Straits of Mackinac, a location which helped secure Ottawa control over their expanded trade networks. In those days, the best way to travel north was by canoe. All Ottawa trade routes passed through the straits, and no one could reach the rich, fur-producing grounds north and west of the Great Lakes without traveling Ottawa routes. Because the Ottawa charged a toll for the use of their waterways, other Great Lakes Indians were discouraged from trading directly with the French. Control of the straits gave the Ottawa a virtual monopoly over the profitable fur trade.

#### The Ottawa-French Partnership

The French population in North America grew slowly between 1615 and 1763. In 1666, only 3,200 Frenchmen lived in New France; by 1673 there were 6,700; by 1759 the number had grown to 76,000. In the opening years of the fur trade, few Ottawa ever saw a Frenchman, but when the Ottawa became leading traders, direct contact inevitably increased.

*Late nineteenth-century Ottawa village in northern Michigan. (Grand Rapids Public Library)*



In the seventeenth century, the French were clearly outnumbered by the native peoples in North America. They could not force the Indians to adopt French customs, but carried on the essential business of the fur trade on native terms. The French learned that the first rule in trade and in all social relationships was gift giving between kin, and they carefully followed the custom. Many French traders learned the Ottawa language, and some even became family members by marriage, further cementing the trading relationship. This was trade on Ottawa terms, a personal relationship governed by rules of gift giving and kinship.

As more Europeans made their way to the New World and the Great Lakes, European conflicts over territory and colonial empires spilled over into North America, and the relationship between the French and the Ottawa slowly changed. The British, who were competing with France for power and territory on other continents, were intent on extending their influence in North America, seeking territory that the French controlled. French and British competition for a North American empire intensified, and the Ottawa found themselves in continually shifting political relationships with the European powers and the native peoples around them, affected by events of which they had no knowledge and decisions in which they had little say.

The fur trade was important to both the French and the British as a principal means of supporting their empires. Both sides wished to expand their share of the income and strengthen their claim to their New World territories. Until the late 1600s, the French relied heavily on the Ottawa to bring them furs. But from the French perspective, such reliance was potentially dangerous; the Ottawa could shift their loyalties at any time, sell their furs to the British, and cripple the French economy in North America.

The French wanted to assume direct control over the fur supply. Instead of using the Ottawa as middlemen, they sent their own traders to exchange goods with the Great Lakes Indians. As the number of French in the region increased, the Ottawa's importance as fur traders declined. By 1700, the Ottawa no longer controlled French access to furs and were no longer the sole suppliers of French manufactured goods to their Native American neighbors.

*Ottawa women at Petoskey, Michigan, washing clothes and grinding corn in the late nineteenth century. (Michigan State Archives)*



The change in trade relations did not mean that the French dominated the Ottawa socially, politically, or culturally. The Ottawa-French partnership, in fact, remained important to both sides. The Ottawa were able to create wealth and convert it to prestige by growing corn, fishing, cutting wood, and doing other jobs that the French did not do for themselves. They also began to hunt and trap more than they had before so that they could continue to buy the European tools, guns, and other goods that had become important to their way of life.

### The French and Indian Wars

The Ottawa and the French also had a military partnership. The Ottawa fought in many of the war parties led by the French against the British and their allies in a long series of conflicts now known as the French and Indian Wars. Throughout the late 1600s and well into the 1700s, the European powers were locked in a struggle for empire and for political and economic control of North America. The French and Indian Wars is the general name for this 80-year conflict which included a series of skirmishes in the 1680s; King William's War, from 1689 to 1697; Queen Anne's War, 1702-1713; King George's War, 1740-1748; and the French and Indian War, 1754-1763.

Although there was never a complete peace during the long years of conflict, the Ottawa did not live in a constant state of war. Recruited by the French for guerrilla warfare, the Ottawa struck against the British and their Indian allies in a series of hit-and-run raids. The main strategy of Indian warfare was to surprise the enemy, do as much damage as possible, take hostages and goods, and then quickly slip away. For the most part, fighting took place in summer when the men could be spared from their other responsibilities. At other times of the year, Ottawa men were needed by their villages to hunt, fish, and engage in trade.

Despite their military alliance with the Ottawa, the French were more determined than ever to assume direct control of the fur trade. In the 1700s, the rulers of France and the officials of

New France tried to persuade the Great Lakes Indians not to trade with the independent French traders who either visited or lived in Indian villages. What the French wanted instead was for the Indians to live together near French towns and to trade only with individuals who were licensed by the French government, an arrangement designed to create trading monopolies which would greatly enrich a few government officials. In 1701, Antoine Cadillac, French colonial governor, founded a French town at what is now Detroit, and he invited the Ottawa, Huron, Potawatomi, Chippewa, and other Indian groups to live there.

The Ottawa saw the benefits of moving their villages into the lower peninsula of Michigan. Being near the Detroit settlement would allow them to continue their comfortable life as traders, supplying corn, meat, canoes, and other needed goods to the French. Moving into their old hunting grounds, they thought, would strengthen their claim to the territory. Some Ottawa moved to Detroit in 1701. By 1712 there were again Ottawa villages on Saginaw Bay, and by 1730 Ottawa families were living on the St. Joseph River. The 1740s saw Ottawa villages on the Grand River and at Grand Traverse Bay. Some Ottawa made L'Arbre Croche on Little Traverse Bay a permanent home in 1742, and Ottawa settled on Beaver Island shortly thereafter.

The relationship between the Ottawa and the French was not always harmonious. As traders, both sides competed for profits. The French sought to limit the Ottawa's contact with British traders and to create a monopoly over Great Lakes furs. For the most part, the Ottawa limited their trade to the French. Shrewd Ottawa traders, however, were not always willing to pass up the opportunity to get better goods at lower prices. In the 1740s and 1750s, some Ottawa settled on the Maumee and Cuyahoga rivers in Ohio to be nearer the British. Ottawa leaders used their traditional skills in dealing with outsiders to make the best possible deals for themselves and their people. Courted by both the French and the British for their ability to sway the balance of power in the Great Lakes, Ottawa leaders chose to support those who met Ottawa interests.

### Ottawa Culture in the French Era

As a result of their century-long partnership with the French, the Ottawa greatly expanded their territory, power, and prestige, moving south and occupying much of Michigan's lower peninsula. There were other, more subtle changes as well.

In almost all of their moves, the Ottawa chose to live in places that closely resembled their original Canadian home. The only exceptions were those

Ottawa who moved to Ohio to be near the English traders, and another group who settled with the Potawatomi south and west of Lake Michigan. Living in their traditional, mixed-resource environment allowed the Ottawa to continue a traditional way of life based on agriculture, fishing, hunting, and trade. The primary difference in the French era was an increased use of European manufactured goods.

The village continued to be the center of Ottawa life. Over the years, the Ottawa's many moves and shifting alliances among families brought Sinago, Kiskakon, Sable, and Naussaukueton clans together in the Ottawa villages or in pan-tribal settlements around French missions and trading posts. By 1760, with political and economic interests linking these groups more closely than before, the separate Ottawa families and villages began thinking of themselves as members of the Ottawa tribe. At the same time there was a proliferation of new villages as families separated from larger settlements to form new homes along waterways in the lower peninsula.

Kinship remained important to the Ottawa, and persons of the same totem, as always, were obliged to provide each other with food, aid, shelter, and hospitality when they met. As the Ottawa traveled and hunted throughout their large Michigan territory, they could be sure that hospitality would be offered whenever a kinsman was found.

Marriage remained an important way of forming kinship and political ties, and the Ottawa extended this practice by marrying French as well as Indian neighbors. When the number of marriages outside their own group increased, the Ottawa revised their criteria for determining who was and was not Ottawa. With the older political order changing, being Ottawa depended more heavily on speaking the Ottawa language and behaving in accord with Ottawa values than upon position by birth. Being Ottawa also included having a sense of shared identity from the time of the creation. At the end of the French period, the Ottawa traced their descent through the father's family as did the Chippewa. Despite the efforts of French missionaries, the Ottawa retained their traditional values and their relationship with the manitos. Strong family ties and the sharing of resources to assure the survival of the group remained the most important aspect of their daily lives.

Gift giving, in the Ottawa tradition, bound giver and receiver into a relationship of personal obligations. Trade with the French did not affect that tradition, but it did alter the Ottawa view of exchange. The Ottawa began to recognize goods as having value in themselves apart from the relationship formed by their exchange. They knew what

their own goods were worth and what they should receive in return, and they sought the best possible deals when trading with outsiders. They did not, however, become a people of unlimited wants. They worked only hard enough and long enough to meet the needs of their kin groups. Within their own families goods were still given freely, shared to help all family members survive.

### The British

The French and Indian War of 1754 to 1763 marked the end of France's North American empire and a turning point in Ottawa history. Michigan Indians had fought well in actions against the British in Pennsylvania and New York. Charles de Langlade, for example, whose mother was an Ottawa, led Ottawa warriors against the British General Braddock and his aide, George Washington, at Fort Duquesne, later named Fort Pitt. Braddock was defeated and more than a hundred British soldiers died in the battle, while the French and Indians lost fewer than thirty men. Despite Ottawa support, France lost the war when Quebec fell to the British in 1759 and Montreal surrendered in 1760. The Treaty of Paris, signed in 1763, placed all of French Canada and the strategic western forts under British control.

British victory in the French and Indian War ushered in a period of crisis for the Ottawa and put Indian leadership to a severe test. Accustomed to being treated as allies and kin by the French, the Ottawa expected similar consideration from the British. The British, however, had other ideas.

Each year the French had given to the Ottawa gifts of clothing, goods, weapons, and ammunition on which they had come to rely for their own provision and which they demanded as a symbol of alliance. The British, however, who were trying to cut the cost of colonial administration, saw no need for the Ottawa to have weapons, and they discontinued the practice of annual gifts. Not only were arms and ammunition soon in short supply as a result, but without the customary annual gifts, the Ottawa were forced to trade for all their needs. Trade rates rose under the British, and higher prices took an increasing portion of the Ottawa's valuable furs.

To the British, the Indians were a conquered people, an obstacle to be overcome before control of the Great Lakes could be secured. The Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi, however, did not consider themselves defeated. All of the battles had been fought outside their territory, and unlike their former French allies, they had not been beaten. The land, they believed, was still theirs, and they had no intention of surrendering their independence to British rule.

*Kanipima (Augustin Hamelin, Jr.), Ottawa leader from northern Michigan, pictured here with his wife, was the nephew of Apakosigan (a name which means a smoking mixture made of the inner bark of the red dogwood), the most important Ogema on Little Traverse Bay in the 1830s. Educated in non-Indian schools in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Rome, Italy, Kanipima served as spokesman for his people on many occasions. (Burton Collection, Detroit Public Library)*



### Pontiac's Rebellion

In the summer of 1763, heeding the call of the Ottawa leader Pontiac, the Indians rebelled against British policies. Insisting that the Indians must give up European-made goods and return to their self-sufficient native ways, Pontiac recruited warriors to take up arms against the British. The Ottawa and members of other tribes — including the Chippewa, Potawatomi, Seneca, Delaware, Shawnee, and Wyandot — pledged to strike the British and drive them out of the Great Lakes and the Ohio valley. Pontiac's strategy was to take British strongholds in Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Michigan by surprise.

At Michilimackinac, the Chippewa under Minevavana set the stage for a surprise attack by engaging the British stationed at the fort in a game of *baggiaway*, a form of lacrosse. On signal, one of the Indian players hurled the ball into the fort. As the players rushed into the fort to retrieve it, they were handed guns by their women who were standing near the palisade with the weapons concealed under their blankets. The Chippewa killed half of the garrison that day and took the rest hostage. It was only through the intercession of the Ottawa of L'Arbre Croche on Little Traverse Bay that any British soldiers survived. The Ottawa were angry that they had not been invited to take

part in the attack. As restitution for this Chippewa oversight, the Ottawa demanded the remaining prisoners as part of the spoils and ransomed them at Montreal.

Forts St. Joseph, Miami, and Ouiatenon were also taken by ruse, but the remaining forts in the Northwest Territory were overcome by direct attack. Between May 16 and June 26, Pontiac's warriors captured Forts Sandusky in Ohio, St. Joseph and Michilimackinac in Michigan, Miami and Ouiatenon in Indiana, and Presque Isle, Venago, and LeBocuf in Pennsylvania. In all these places they killed troops and took hostages. In less than six weeks, the British had suffered a stunning defeat; of all the western strongholds, only Fort Pitt in Pennsylvania and Fort Detroit in Michigan remained in British hands.

On May 7, Pontiac and his men had attempted to enter Fort Detroit by ruse. He armed his warriors with sawed-off muskets which they hid under their blankets, and then asked Major Gladwyn, the fort's commanding officer, for a conference. But Gladwyn had been forewarned. When Pontiac entered the fort, he and his men faced a fully armed garrison ready for the attack.

Unable to surprise the Detroit garrison, the Indians held it under siege. But by November 1, with their supply of ammunition dwindling, the Indians were becoming weary and disillusioned. The

Shawnee and Delaware in Pennsylvania, who had been deliberately infected with smallpox from blankets sent to them by the commanding officer at Fort Pitt, were unable to fight. Men had to return home for the winter hunt or their families would be left without food. A rumor was circulating in the Indian camps that a large contingent of British reinforcements would soon arrive. Finally, no military aid was forthcoming from the French. Although the rebellion had been encouraged by the French civilians still living in Michigan, the French and British governments were officially at peace. Without guns and ammunition, the Indians could not continue their efforts. Betrayed by his old allies, Pontiac had no option but to end both the siege of Fort Detroit and the war.

### The New Alliance

Although Pontiac's rebellion failed, the uprising drastically changed Indian and British relations. The Indians' victories had demonstrated their real power in the Great Lakes, and British policies became less overtly arrogant and more conciliatory. To keep settlers out of Indian territory, King George III of England closed all lands west of the Allegheny Mountains to settlement. Only agents of the British government were allowed to purchase land, a licensed trading system was established, and the practice of giving annual gifts was resumed. The former enemies had become allies of convenience, one supporting the other so long as each side's own best interests were served.

During the American Revolution, 1776-1783, many Ottawa regarded the British as the lesser of two evils because British government policy restricted European settlement on Indian land. The American colonists, on the other hand, wanted unchecked settlement west of the Alleghenies. But because the Ottawa, in their northern location, had not yet felt the pressure of settlers on their land, they saw little reason to fight on the British side. Sympathetic to the British who were supplying them with goods, they nevertheless maintained ties to their French relatives and traders who supported the American cause.

With wartime provisions in short supply, the Ottawa protected their own interests by diplomacy and by trading with both the British and the resident French supporters of the Americans. Ottawa policy throughout the American Revolution was one of ambiguous neutrality. When the British governor of Detroit called upon the Ottawa of the Grand River in 1778 to help stop General George Rogers Clark's advance through Illinois, they excused themselves, saying that they could not leave their women and children without provisions in

their winter camp. The governor sent Charles de Langlade with gifts to persuade the Ottawa to help, but again the chiefs said they could not be ready until spring. When they heard that Clark had defeated the British in Illinois, they decided not to fight at all.

By 1783, the Americans had won their fight for independence, and a peace agreement, the Treaty of Paris, was signed. Although the British lost their jurisdiction over Ottawa land in Michigan, they retained their forts at Detroit and Mackinac. Still in control of Canada, they continued to maintain a weak alliance with the Ottawa well after Americans had assumed control of Michigan territory.

### Meeting the Americans

The American government in 1784 was an institution with big ideas and little power. The new nation, made up of thirteen former colonies perched on the edge of North America, had little money, no strong standing army, and a vast new territory north of the Ohio River and west of the Allegheny Mountains to assert its claim over. The Americans had won nominal control over this western land at the Treaty of Paris in 1783, but they did not have the power to enforce that control. The British continued to hold the major military positions in the territory, including Detroit and Mackinac. The Indians, meanwhile, disputed not only American ownership of the western lands, but the right of the British to have transferred that ownership at all. From the Indians' perspective, they had never been defeated in battle nor had they ever transferred the land or the right to it to the British.

For the next twenty-five years the dispute over the land was the key issue in relations between the Indians and the American government. Some Americans wanted the territory open to settlement despite Indian opposition and British possession of important military posts in the area. But the new federal government realized that the United States could not afford war with the Indians living west of its borders, and Congress passed the Ordinance of 1785. Pledging fair treatment of the Indians, the ordinance gave the federal government the right to buy, but not to seize, Indian land. It promised to set up a boundary line between American land and Indian territory which no settlers could cross. Hoping to weaken Indian trading alliances with the British, the ordinance also allowed Americans and Indians to trade.

The Ottawa and their neighbors saw clearly that the American desire for their land and resources was a threat to their way of life. At the Treaty of Fort Stanwick in 1784, the Americans had attempted to establish a boundary between Indian lands and

their own by persuading the Iroquois to deny their previous claims to land south and west of the Ohio River and to reduce their holdings in New York. In 1785, some groups of Chippewa, Ottawa, Delaware, and Wyandot signed the Treaty of Fort McIntosh, giving up the land they occupied in eastern Ohio. These two treaties were disputed by Indians in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The Fort Stanwick treaty deprived the Shawnee and Delaware of lands in New York and Kentucky that they had used for many years and spurred their hostilities. The Fort McIntosh treaty was not recognized as valid by most groups because it was not negotiated by authorized Indian leaders.

Despite agreements with the Indians, the government could not stop the flow of illegal settlers, land speculators, and traders across the boundary into Indian land in southern and eastern Ohio. For five years following the treaties, the frontier was in a perpetual state of tension which threatened to erupt in renewed warfare between the Indians and the American government. Americans who settled the frontier had little respect for Indian property rights and settled wherever they wished. They drove off game, manufactured and sold alcohol to Indians for high prices, causing many deaths from brawls, and in some instances took it upon themselves to kill Indians directly. The Indians, on the other hand, did not distinguish between those settlers who actually did them harm and those who did not. The Indians raided any settlements on land which they considered theirs and took the lives of innocent people. Each side sought revenge for wrongs committed and perpetuated the bloody cycle of raids and retaliation.

By 1790, the tension on the frontier had grown unbearable for the Indians. In 1791, the Shawnee war chief, Blue Jacket, and the Miami war chief, Little Turtle, led a group of warriors from the Great Lakes tribes, including the Ottawa, against the American General Josiah Harmar. Sent by George Washington to punish the Indians for raids they had made two years earlier, Harmar lost 183 men in battle. In 1792, General Arthur St. Clair did

battle with Ohio valley and Great Lakes Indians. Out of 2,000 soldiers, he lost 683, nearly a third of his total force. After these defeats the untrained, undisciplined American troops retreated from the frontier. Settlers continued moving onto Indian lands, and the Indians continued to fight to hold onto their territory.

Three years later, Indians faced Americans at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in Ohio, south of Toledo. Commanded by General Anthony Wayne, the American troops were carefully trained for frontier fighting. The Indian forces, on the other hand, were heavily outnumbered and lacked a good source of supply. Wayne bided his time, waiting before launching his attack until five hundred Indians left the battlefield in search of supplies. Outnumbered and with no reserve troops, the remaining Indians were forced to flee to Fort Miami, but the British, unwilling to provoke the Americans, refused their old allies entrance and locked the gates. The battle was over, and Wayne claimed victory.

Although casualties on either side were relatively few, the battle was a turning point in American-Indian relations. Having lost faith in their British allies and having been defeated on the field of battle, the Indians had no choice but to submit to American peace demands.

The Treaty of Greenville, signed in 1795, established the terms of the peace. In this treaty, which became the pattern for subsequent treaties with the Michigan tribes, the Indians accepted American control over their territories by acknowledging the United States as the sovereign power in the Great Lakes. In return for ceded Indian lands, the United States recognized tribal ownership of the remaining lands and agreed to pay for land cessions with cash or services. The treaty defined the land left for Indian habitation and allowed Indians to continue using ceded land until it was needed by the United States. Representatives of all the Michigan tribes, including the Ottawa, signed this document.

The Treaty of Greenville, which established American political power over Indian territory, did not end Indian resistance to American occupation of their lands. Following the example set by Pontiac in 1763, the Shawnee chief, Tecumseh, attempted to unite Indians from all over the United States and its territories to stop the violation of agreements and the trespasses on Indian land. In 1807, he began building an alliance of Indian tribes from Michigan to the Gulf of Mexico. Tecumseh's military movement was built around the teachings of his half-brother, Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee Prophet. Tenskwatawa had received a vision which foretold the future. He taught that only those peo-

ple who gave up the ways of the Americans, including guns and other trade goods, all forms of Christianity, and even hunting dogs, could be content in the future world. To a people who were suffering privation as the result of American usurpation of game and other resources, the spiritual component of Tecumseh's movement was a powerful incentive to restore a world in which the Indian fully controlled his own destiny.

The British also encouraged Tecumseh's efforts. With the surrender of military posts in Detroit, Mackinac, and Sault Ste. Marie to the Americans in 1796, British influence in the United States and its territories was waning. But the British wanted the Indians as allies who could help protect Canada if the need arose, and so sought to maintain friendly relations by supporting Tecumseh and his cause with supplies of food and ammunition as well as military advice.

Tecumseh's large following, including many Ottawa, camped at Prophetstown on the Tippecanoe River in Indiana. The number of warriors gathered there at any one time varied from fewer than one thousand to more than three thousand, and the town was a thorn in the Americans' side. In 1811, with Tecumseh away from Prophetstown seeking to win additional support, Governor William Henry Harrison of Indiana decided to march troops and break up the settlement with a show of force. Tecumseh had left Tenskwatawa in charge of Prophetstown and specifically instructed him not to fight the Americans, but the Potawatomi and Winnebago persuaded their fellow warriors to attack. Harrison counterattacked, destroying Prophetstown and driving the Indians away.

Scattered but not beaten, Michigan Indians once again rallied around Tecumseh to join the War of 1812 on the British side. Relations between the United States and Britain, which had never been any more than lukewarm, had seriously deteriorated in the early years of the nineteenth century. Following the revolution, the United States was continually angered by the British refusal to place the western forts under American control, by their continued dealings with the tribes of the Great Lakes region, and by their general unwillingness to treat United States citizens in a manner befitting America's status as an independent nation.

The opening of the nineteenth century was a time of war in Europe as Britain and France contested for the expansion of their empires and trade. To man their seven hundred-ship navy, the British stopped American ships on the sea and impressed (kidnapped) American sailors for their fleet. Between 1809 and 1812 some 6,057 instances of man stealing were recorded. The

American government was also convinced that the British were the sole cause behind the Indian problems in the Great Lakes and that Tecumseh was merely one of their agents. These irritations, along with the desire of some Americans to capture Canada and add it to the Union, led Congress to declare war against Great Britain in 1812.

Tecumseh and the Great Lakes Indians fought on the British side to defend Canada from American invasion and to disrupt American supply lines. Indian forces took Detroit, Mackinac, and Fort Dearborn from the Americans and for a time controlled the upper Great Lakes. Through much of 1813, the Michigan Indians fought successfully in raids and major battles, but on September 10 of that year, Lieutenant Oliver Perry defeated a British fleet on Lake Erie and cut the supply routes to Detroit. Knowing they could not hold Michigan, the British retreated to Canada.

Protecting the withdrawing British forces were Tecumseh and some of his staunchest supporters — among them the Ottawa Chiefs Nawequageezhig (Noonday), and Sagima, from the Grand River; and Kewaycooshcum, who lived on Little Traverse Bay at the time and later settled near the present-day city of Lowell. On October 5, Tecumseh shamed the fleeing British into making a final stand at Moraviantown, Ontario. He was killed in the ensuing battle, taking Indian hopes of military resistance with him. Noonday said that Tecumseh was killed by a bullet wound in the chest and was carried from the field by his followers. When he fell, the Indians stopped fighting, and the battle ended as they mourned his death. With Tecumseh dead and the British defeated, the Ottawa would never again be able to protect their interests by military force.

### Facing American Rule

Victorious in the War of 1812, the Americans moved to strengthen their hold on Indian land and establish policies for governing Indian peoples. As it had done since 1783, the federal government sought to purchase tribal lands through the standard mechanism for dealing with foreign nations — treaties. The treaties, on paper at least, recognized the Indians' claim to ownership of the land and stipulated that the government must acquire Indian land by purchase rather than conquest. These documents demonstrated, in the government's point of view, its own just treatment of American's native peoples. And, when the Indians were still a military force to be reckoned with, official policy was to prevent settlers from moving onto unceded Indian lands. But high ideals often took second place to economic interests; settlers and government alike wanted Indian lands open to

settlement, and one by one the treaty agreements were broken.

Indian land cessions created another dilemma for the government: what to do with the Indians who were being displaced. Americans saw Indians in general as a problem, an obstacle standing in the way of settlement. Americans also believed that their own way of life was the finest ever conceived; if cultural changes were to be made, it was the Indians who must make them.

In the early 1800s, the Americans attempted to solve the Indian problem with what was called the "civilization" policy. This policy was based on the premise that once the Indians were made aware that their own culture was inferior, they would willingly adopt a new way of life, becoming Christian farmers, blacksmiths, and craftsmen, even marrying Americans and blending into American society. The work of civilizing the Indians was usually financed by the federal government and assigned to missionaries who soon learned that Indians did not want to give up their identity or change their traditional ways. The plan was destined to fail.

While some Americans were trying to civilize the Indians, others wholeheartedly supported the removal of Indians from settled lands. In some cases, the desire for removal stemmed from racist attitudes and the belief that Indians were a mentally and physically inferior people who could never be part of American society because of their limited capacity to learn American ways. Others argued that unless Indians were moved away from Americans who robbed, killed, cheated, or corrupted them, they would vanish as a people. Still others simply coveted Indian land. Whatever the justification, the desire for Indian removal was ultimately enacted into law.

The idea of moving Indians away from settlers was not new. Thomas Jefferson suggested it, in fact, as early as 1803. In 1825, President James Monroe encouraged the Indians living east of the Mississippi to move voluntarily to lands west of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. Despite conflicts with their American neighbors and the growing difficulty in making a living as game disap-

peared from their diminishing estates, the Indians, with few exceptions, chose to stay. Five years later, with Andrew Jackson in the White House, that choice was no longer legally theirs to make.

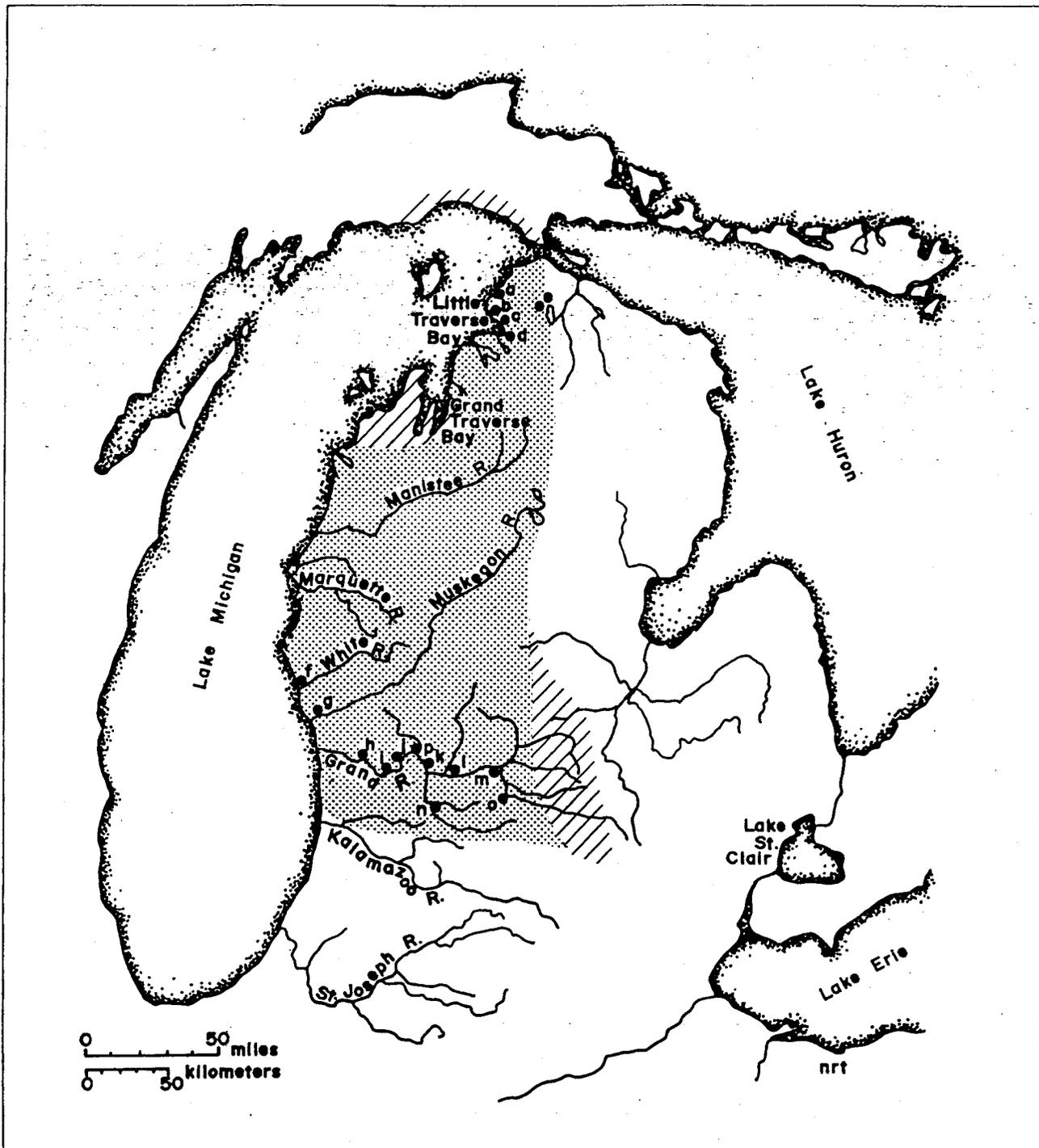
In Jackson's view, the Indians were conquered, dependent peoples fully subject to regulations imposed by Congress. In 1830, at Jackson's urging, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. The new law required Indians to leave their lands in the east and remove to territory west of the Mississippi. In the west, they would be protected from undesirable settlers and encouraged to form their own self-governing Indian territory. This policy effectively removed almost all Indians from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. It also posed a great potential danger to the Ottawa.

### The Treaty Era — Meeting the Challenge

The years of the treaty era were difficult for the Ottawa people. One by one, a series of treaties marked the cession of their lands, concentrating them in progressively smaller territories, limiting access to the natural resources on which their way of life depended, and bringing them one step closer to removal. For the Ottawa, the treaty era began with the Treaty of Greenville in 1795 and ended with the Treaty of Detroit in 1855. The challenge of the treaty era was to maintain use of a sufficient portion of land and resources to provide them a living, to remain in Michigan despite the government's removal policy, and to retain their cultural identity while Americans deliberately sought to alter their way of life.

By 1820 the Ottawa lived in four major concentrations — on the Maumee River in Ohio; on the Grand River and between Little Traverse Bay and Mackinac in Michigan; and on Manitoulin Island in Canada. Small Ottawa villages were also located between the Grand River and Grand Traverse Bay, as well as among the Potawatomi and Chippewa of Illinois and Wisconsin. The latter groups were politically linked by kinship and joint interests and became known as the United Bands of Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi.

The Ottawa in southern locations were the first to come under intense pressure to remove. Theirs was rich land with a growing season well suited to intensive agriculture and was more highly valued by American farmers than was the land of the more northerly Ottawa. The treaties of 1817 and 1831 had reduced the lands of the Ottawa of the Maumee to only a few small reservations and even these were coveted by American settlers. For many years the Ottawa of the Maumee had lived separately from the Michigan Ottawa. The political and social bonds of kinship between the two groups were weak, and when their land was sold the Ohio

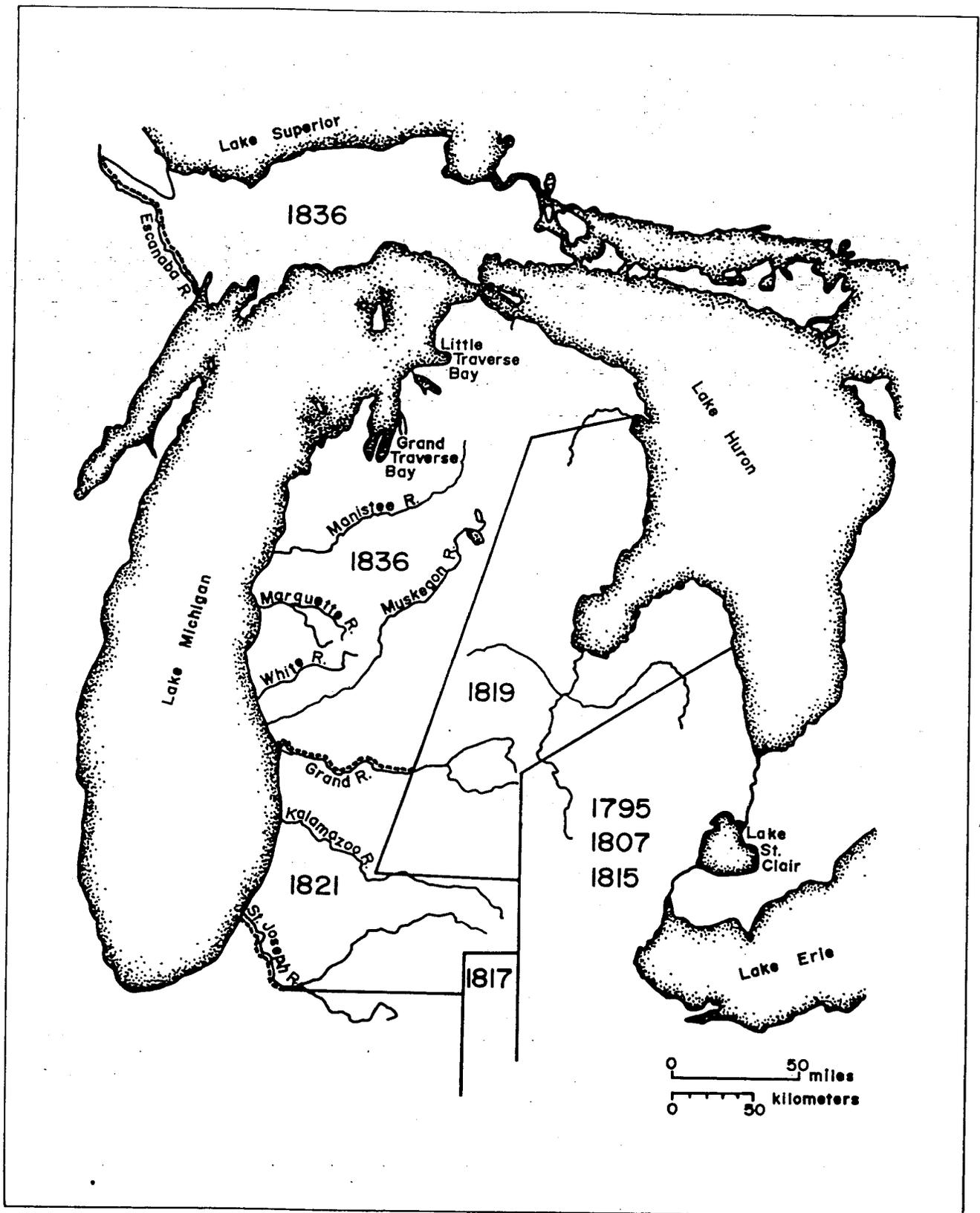


**Michigan Ottawa villages.** Shaded area indicates the range of Ottawa territory after the War of 1812. Cross-hatched areas are hunting and fishing territories shared with the Chippewa.

Between 1812 and 1836, the Ottawa inhabited the following large, permanent villages between Mackinac and the south shore of Little Traverse Bay: a. Cross Village (Ah-numa-wau-tink-unmig, or Pray Tree Place); b. Middle Village (Ahp-tun-wa-ing, or Half Way Place) c. Harbor Springs (Wee-kwi-ton-sing, or Bay Place); d. Petoskey (Bee-dahss-ah-ga-ing, or Approaching Light Place); e. Cheboygan Village, later called Burt Lake Village.

Southern Ottawa villages were: f. White River Village; g. Muskegon River Village; h. Fort Village; i. Mackatosha's (Blackskin's) Village; j. Bowting (Rapids); k. Nongee's (or Thornapple River) Village; l. Cobmoosa's (or Flat River) Village; m. Maple River Village; n. Middle Village (also called Shingobeeng); o. Misheminikong (Apple Place or Orchard); p. Prairie Village.

The above villages were places of permanent residence. The Ottawa inhabited many other seasonal sites for collecting maple sugar, fishing, and hunting. (After McClurken 1986: 50. Ottawa names and translations by Wesley Andrews.)



*Michigan treaties. Between 1795 and 1836, treaties with the United States government opened Michigan to American settlement and restricted its Indian population to a few special reservations.*

Ottawa could not rely upon the hospitality of the Michigan Ottawa. They had no choice but to move west. In 1833 they made a final treaty with the United States and agreed to move to Kansas. The Ottawa of Illinois and Wisconsin, along with their Chippewa and Potawatomi kinsmen, negotiated treaties which removed them first to a reservation at Council Bluffs, Iowa, and later to Kansas.

The Ottawa of Manitoulin Island lived in British territory and were in no danger of removal. Maintaining their old policy of friendship with the Michigan Indians, the British continued the practice of annual gifts as payment for the Indians' part in the War of 1812 and invited their old allies to move permanently to Canada. Manitoulin remained a refuge for those southern Ottawa and Potawatomi who wished to leave American territory rather than move west.

The many treaties concluded between 1795 and 1833 with other Indian groups did not seriously disrupt the daily lives of the Michigan Ottawa. Although the Chicago Treaty of 1821 had taken the hunting grounds between the Kalamazoo and Grand rivers that they had shared with the Potawatomi, the Ottawa still held important fishing grounds, fields, and hunting territories north of the Grand River. Their traditional tasks and skills provided them with an adequate living, while their annuities (yearly cash payments from the federal government for ceded lands) gave them another source of income. Treaties with other tribes in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois had given the United States enough land to satisfy temporarily the settlers' demands, and the government did not move quickly to treat with the Michigan Ottawa. But the government policy of removal was a continuing threat, and the economic and cultural pressures against the Ottawa intensified.

The Ottawa were in frequent contact with American traders. Years of hunting had taken their toll on Michigan's animal populations, but in the early 1800s there was still a profit to be made in furs. The traders knew that overhunting would drive many animals to extinction, but profit was a more important consideration than the preservation of the Ottawa's food sources. The Ottawa needed and wanted the goods the traders offered. Requiring furs as commodities for trade, they had no choice but to hunt and trap. As the fur supply dwindled, the Ottawa were largely without the means of paying for the goods the traders supplied. The traders, however, allowed or encouraged them to run up large debts, expecting to be paid when the Ottawa sold their land.

Government officials attached to the Office of Indian Affairs, a federal agency, were charged with protecting the Ottawa and their neighbors from

abuse by traders and with keeping settlers from taking unceded Indian lands. At the same time, however, these agents often sought to purchase as much land as the Indians were willing to sell. Such purchases would give the United States room to grow and would force the Indians to become Christian farmers by reducing the number of resources they could use to make a living. This policy and course of action were designed to completely transform Ottawa culture as quickly as possible by upsetting the Ottawa's relationship with the environment and by teaching them to live as other Americans did.

Traditional religious beliefs and values were also vulnerable to the pressures of missionaries intent on converting the Ottawa to Christianity and to a new way of life as well. Missionaries wanted the men to give up hunting and to live on individually owned family farms, doing the work that women had done for centuries. They wanted the Ottawa to send their children to school to be taught a new language and jobs that were foreign to Ottawa culture. Although the missionaries had little success in changing Ottawa beliefs, their activities often caused divisions in Ottawa villages. Many Ottawa, who did not wish to change their way of life, opposed the missionaries. Others adopted Christian religious practices in exchange for the material goods the missionaries offered.

Every Ottawa band faced unique pressures for change. However, the story of the Grand River Ottawa illustrates the way innovations were accepted or rejected and their impact on Ottawa culture. In 1821, the United States government hired the Baptist missionary Isaac McCoy to establish permanent relations with the Ottawa of the Grand River and to open a combined mission, school, model farm, and blacksmith shop somewhere near present-day Grand Haven. Before McCoy could launch his operation, he received an invitation from the powerful Ottawa leader Nawequageezhik to locate his proposed mission among the Ottawa at the rapids of the Grand River. Opposition from a neighboring Ottawa village led by Blackskin put a halt to these plans, but Nawequageezhik persisted.

Three years later, McCoy visited the rapids at Nawequageezhik's invitation and was again urged to establish a mission there despite Blackskin's opposition. Nawequageezhik probably saw the mission as a way of increasing his own prestige. Missionaries brought with them not only religion, but cattle, metal tools, oxen and plows to clear the land, government-supplied provisions, and other material goods. The prestige of an Ottawa chief rested on the resources at his disposal and the generous redistribution of this wealth among his people. To Nawequageezhik, the coming of the

missionaries may have represented an opportunity to gain access to and control over mission and government resources while preparing for a future dominated by Americans.

What Nawequageezhik saw as a benefit, Blackskin's band read as trouble. For one thing, a rise in Nawequageezhik's prestige would limit the influence of neighboring leaders. Moreover, these opponents of McCoy's mission had been affiliated for years with the French Catholics and did not wish to invite the Baptists into their lands. Many of them, in fact, did not want any contact with Americans at all. Nor did the French traders in the area support the coming of Protestant missionaries who opposed their primary means of making a profit—the sale of whiskey to the Indians.

In 1826, McCoy finally succeeded — despite the opposition and a failed attempt on his life — in establishing a Baptist mission on the west bank of the Grand River near the rapids. The new mission made an impressive start. By 1827, the 160-acre compound boasted several log houses, some with plank floors and glass windows, a sawmill financed with treaty funds, a farm, agricultural tools, and fenced pastures for the fifty-five head of cattle supplied by the government to begin Ottawa herds. Living on the premises were farmers to teach the Ottawa American-style agriculture, carpenters to build their houses, and a missionary, Leonard Slater, to minister to their spiritual needs and supervise mission operations.

In the eyes of the American government, the Ottawa were making significant strides toward the American ideal of civilization. The Ottawa, for their part, accepted the changes, but on their own terms. Many Ottawa liked the goods offered by the missionaries and had no objection to using them. The Americans interpreted the wearing of European-style clothing as a sign of civilization; the Ottawa saw it as adjusting to fashion. Long accustomed to living in large, stable, agricultural villages, they had little difficulty in adjusting to mission life. The government-built log houses required less maintenance than their traditional birch bark and cattail lodges, and agricultural tools made

women's work lighter.

To receive these benefits, the Ottawa had to profess Christian beliefs. Since all church services were held in English, with occasional crude translation into Ottawa, the concepts of Christianity remained vague. Compliance meant attending chapel and receiving a good dunking at the pond of baptism, acts the Catholics had introduced in the mid-1600s with little impact. To a people whose own religious ceremonies involved dancing, singing, and feasting, church services were often boring and tiresome. But they were a time of social gathering, and most Ottawa could tolerate them in return for the goods and services the missionaries supplied. The Ottawa, however, did not accept Christian teachings. They incorporated Ottawa meaning into Christian forms, and they preserved the essential concepts of their own religion.

While the Ottawa were adjusting to mission life, the population around the mission grew. Trader Louis Campau and several other French-speaking individuals moved to land on the east side of the river opposite the mission in 1827. Their relations with the Ottawa were not always harmonious. The Ottawa expected these newcomers to share their wealth in the Ottawa tradition. But what the Ottawa saw as sharing the French regarded as stealing, and violence occasionally ensued. The new settlers also aggravated an already tense situation by supporting one side or the other in factional disputes.

The Baptist mission itself was a continuing source of friction among the Grand River Ottawa. Some Ottawa were dissatisfied at the way Slater divided their government-provided goods and services. Some opposed Nawequageezhik, and others preferred the less dictatorial Catholic way of life. Then, in 1833, the French-speaking inhabitants of the area invited Father Frederic Baraga to found a Catholic mission in the Ottawa village just south of the Baptist mission. By 1835, Baraga had constructed a church, houses, and other buildings on the site and had begun ministering to the Ottawa who lived in the village of Kewaycooshcum and Megisinini. Resulting tensions between Catholic and Protestant Ottawa weakened the bonds of traditional Ottawa cooperation and lessened their ability to deal with other problems as a unified group.

Baptist mission founder Isaac McCoy himself came to regard his work as a failure. McCoy had hoped to turn the Indians into carbon copies of virtuous Americans. Instead, he had challenged traditional cultural values and helped to open the frontier to less-than-righteous individuals who made their livings selling whiskey to the Indians. The combination of alcohol dependency and fac-

tional strife tore at the fabric of Ottawa society. Without realizing his own role in creating serious divisions in the Ottawa community, McCoy blamed traders and frontier ruffians for hindering Indian advancement toward "civilization." He came to believe that the only way to save the Indians was to remove them from evil influences by resettling them west of the Mississippi River.

### A Divided Society

By 1833, as the result of government treaties with the Chippewa and Potawatomi, the Ottawa were surrounded on the south and east by settlers eager for more Indian land. When steamboats began making trips across Lake Huron and Lake Michigan, a good deal of the wood burned to produce the steam was cut from Ottawa land. In time, Americans and their boats began competing for lake fish, another major Ottawa resource. The Ottawa on the Grand River had the most trouble with settlers who cut their forests, drove away their game, and even robbed them of their personal possessions.

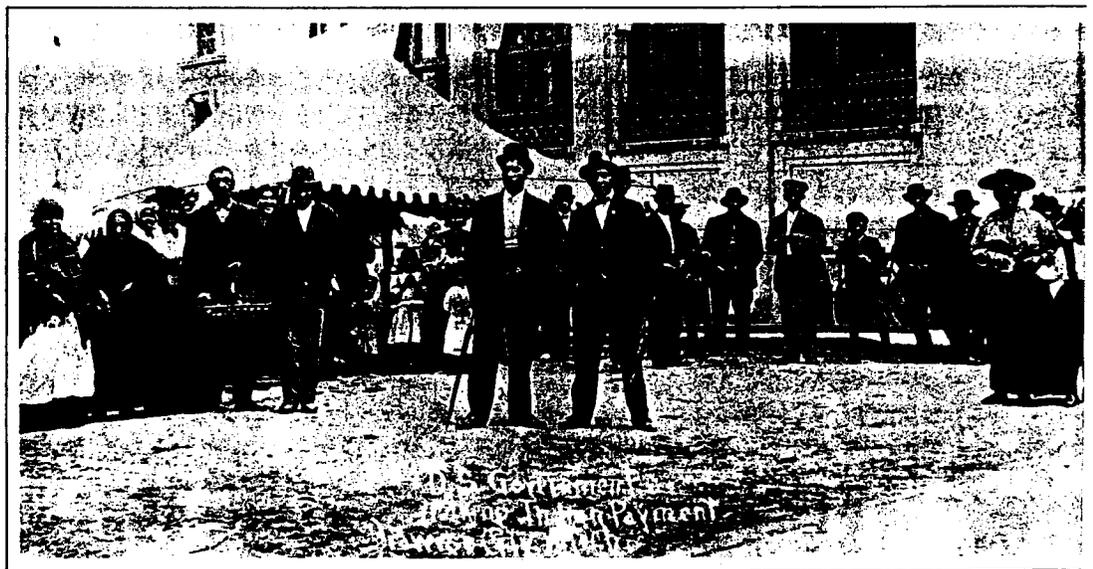
Solutions to these problems did not come easily to the Ottawa. Politically dominated by the powerful institutions of the United States government, the various bands were often unable to agree among themselves which course of action best suited their needs. Traditionally, each Ottawa family and each Ottawa village acted in its own best interests, arriving at decisions by consensus. Family and village leaders, in turn, carried out the wishes of their people. Although every Ottawa village was a separate political unit, villages did often act in concert when their interests coincided.

In the centuries before the Europeans arrived, traditional Ottawa political organization worked well. Its flexibility allowed the Ottawa to make good use of the resources in their environment. But by the nineteenth century the problems facing the Ottawa were becoming more and more complex. Consensus within families and villages was increasingly difficult to reach, and individual villages were no longer as closely allied as they had been in the days of the French. The interference of missionaries and traders, with their own interests to protect, combined with an assortment of economic problems to create serious divisions among the several Ottawa factions. Some Ottawa living around L'Arbre Croche, for example, were willing to cede land in exchange for annuities; the Grand River Ottawa were not. Beset by a wide range of economic problems, divided as to the solutions, the Ottawa found it difficult to act as a united political force to meet the challenge of the Americans and their policies.

In 1835 a smallpox epidemic swept through the Grand River valley. The Ottawa had no immunity to this often-fatal European disease. Some fled in its wake, abandoning whole villages to the sick and dying, and carrying the devastating virus to others of their kinfolk who took them in. There are no accurate counts of how many Ottawa died in the epidemic, but the Chippewa of Saginaw were reduced by more than one-third as the disease spread west in 1837.

In a society where each person had a specific and important role in food production, losses of this kind could cripple an entire population. Since infectious diseases take a higher toll on children

*Land cession treaties, beginning with the Treaty of Greenville in 1795, called for Indians to receive annuity payments for many years in return for the land they gave up. Although their final annuity payment was made in 1870, this group of Ottawa and Chippewa gathered in Traverse City in 1910 to receive one last payment due them from the 1855 Treaty of Detroit. (Catherine Baldwin Collection)*



and the aged, the Ottawa no doubt lost many of their most influential leaders, the very leaders they needed to unite them politically and pass the traditional values on to the young. Native healers, whose power was the basis of their influence in social and political matters, were unable to cure or protect their people against the ravages of the disease. Their loss of credibility and respect represented another serious challenge to fundamental Ottawa lifeways.

When it came to dealing with the Americans, however, the Ottawa possessed several important advantages that other native peoples did not have. For one thing, the traditional Ottawa homeland in the northern transition forest was not the most favorable place for farming and American settlement. Because lands in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois were preferred by farmers for their rich soils and long growing season, the Ottawa were able to hold onto their territories longer than were the Potawatomi, Wyandot, Shawnee, Delaware, and other Indian groups. The Michigan Ottawa used the additional time to develop strategies for coping with the Americans.

Also in their favor was the fact that, unlike their northern Chippewa neighbors, the Ottawa never lived strictly by hunting. Relying as they did on a combination of fishing, hunting, and crop raising for food and trade, the Ottawa did not require as much territory or mobility as the Chippewa did. By the 1820s, many of the game animals used for food were depleted, and hunting peoples often starved. The Ottawa's mixed economy did not totally prevent hunger and hardship, but it did provide a source of food when other peoples were without. Because the Michigan Ottawa maintained major features of their traditional way of life in a familiar environment, their cultural beliefs retained more integrity and force in their daily lives than did the beliefs of those many peoples who left their woodland homes for the prairies of Kansas, Iowa, and Oklahoma. The Ottawa's successful use of their environment provided a way to make a living and the basis for a changing but continuing sense of distinct Ottawa cultural values. It was those

values which united the Ottawa against the American policy of removal from their Michigan homes.

### The Treaty of 1836

By the mid-1830s, pressure on the Ottawa to cede their land was mounting from all sides. Many traders were anxious to recoup their cash for Indian debts and wanted a treaty which would pay them. Settlers were pouring into southern Michigan, encroaching on Ottawa fields and destroying Ottawa forests. The Territory of Michigan was about to become a state and wanted clear title to Ottawa land so that settlement could continue. In 1835, the Ottawa met in councils to consider a land sale. Tempted to sell their lands and use the cash to purchase needed food and clothing, they were nevertheless united in their opposition to removal west of the Mississippi.

In the winter of 1835, a delegation of Ottawa from L'Arbre Croche went to Washington prepared to sell only their title to Drummond Island and some upper peninsula land they claimed jointly with the Chippewa. The annuities received from the sale of these marginal lands, they hoped, would see them through hard times.

Michigan Indian agent Henry Schoolcraft saw the proposed sale as an ideal opportunity to approach the rest of the Michigan Ottawa about selling their lands and moving west, but the Grand River Ottawa rejected his offer of a treaty. Instead, they sent to Washington a delegation charged with stopping the L'Arbre Croche Ottawa from selling their lands. Although the young men chosen for the delegation had no authority to act as treaty negotiators, their trip to Washington played right into Schoolcraft's hands.

Schoolcraft told Secretary of War Lewis Cass that the Ottawa had come to Washington to sell much of their Michigan land. Cass ordered him to assemble as soon as possible a delegation of chiefs authorized to negotiate a treaty and to purchase for a just price as much land as the Indians were willing to sell. Because the Chippewa were recognized as joint owners of land at such places as Grand Traverse and the eastern part of the upper peninsula, they were to be invited as well.

Schoolcraft, who had underestimated the strength of the Ottawa's desire to remain in their homes, had a difficult time gathering enough Ottawa leaders to make a treaty. He even enlisted the aid of traders in persuading the chiefs to attend the treaty negotiations. It took weeks of considerable pressure before the delegation was formed. Even then, for those leaders who finally did join the delegation and go to Washington, the purpose was less to sell land than it was to avoid

the possibility of being moved west. The Ottawa were not anxious to sell their land in the first place, and they were encouraged both by missionaries and traders not to do so until the agreement included terms which provided funds for future mission work and generous payments for Ottawa trading debts.

The treaty negotiations lasted for weeks as the delegates were wined, dined, and counseled in the nation's capital. Every gracious effort was made by Lewis Cass, his friend Henry Schoolcraft, and President Andrew Jackson's representatives to persuade the Ottawa to cede all of their land in the lower peninsula and the land in the upper peninsula east of the Chocolate River. Only twenty-one of the more than one hundred recognized Ottawa and Chippewa chiefs signed the treaty.

The Treaty of 1836, as it was originally negotiated, made the best possible agreement under the circumstances. Lands north of the Grand River and along the Manistee River and Little Traverse Bay were set aside as Indian reservations, and the Ottawa retained the right to continue using ceded land until it was needed by the Americans. The treaty paid Ottawa debts and gave them yearly annuities along with agricultural equipment, missions, schools, blacksmiths, fish barrels and other needed goods. Most important of all, the agreement preserved their fields and fishing grounds and did not require them to move west.

The United States Senate did not approve the treaty until a provision was added stipulating that the Ottawa and Chippewa could remain on their reservations for only five years. At the end of that period, the reservations were to be sold to the United States unless the government gave the Indians permission to stay longer. The Senate also added a provision calling for Ottawa and Chippewa removal to land west of the Mississippi when and if they chose to go.

After many councils the Ottawa reluctantly decided to sign the treaty. Anticipating that American settlers would not want their northern lands for farming, they believed that the ceded territory would be theirs to use for many years to come. The wording of the removal clause said they were to move west only if they desired, and they did not. Government annuities would supply them with needed cash, and the five-year clause would give them time to make new plans and adjustments.

Immediate adjustments were necessary for the Grand River Ottawa. Because their lands were too close to the settlement line to have been reserved by the 1836 treaty, the Ottawa of the rapids were promptly required to leave their homes and improvements behind. A number of Grand Rapids set-

tlers inherited ready-made houses, farms, and a working sawmill, all at Ottawa expense.

Other Ottawa from other locations had to make adjustments, too. Those who chose to live in their old manner moved to Manitoulin Island in Canada. The rest would stay to form a new relationship with their environment and the Americans in it.

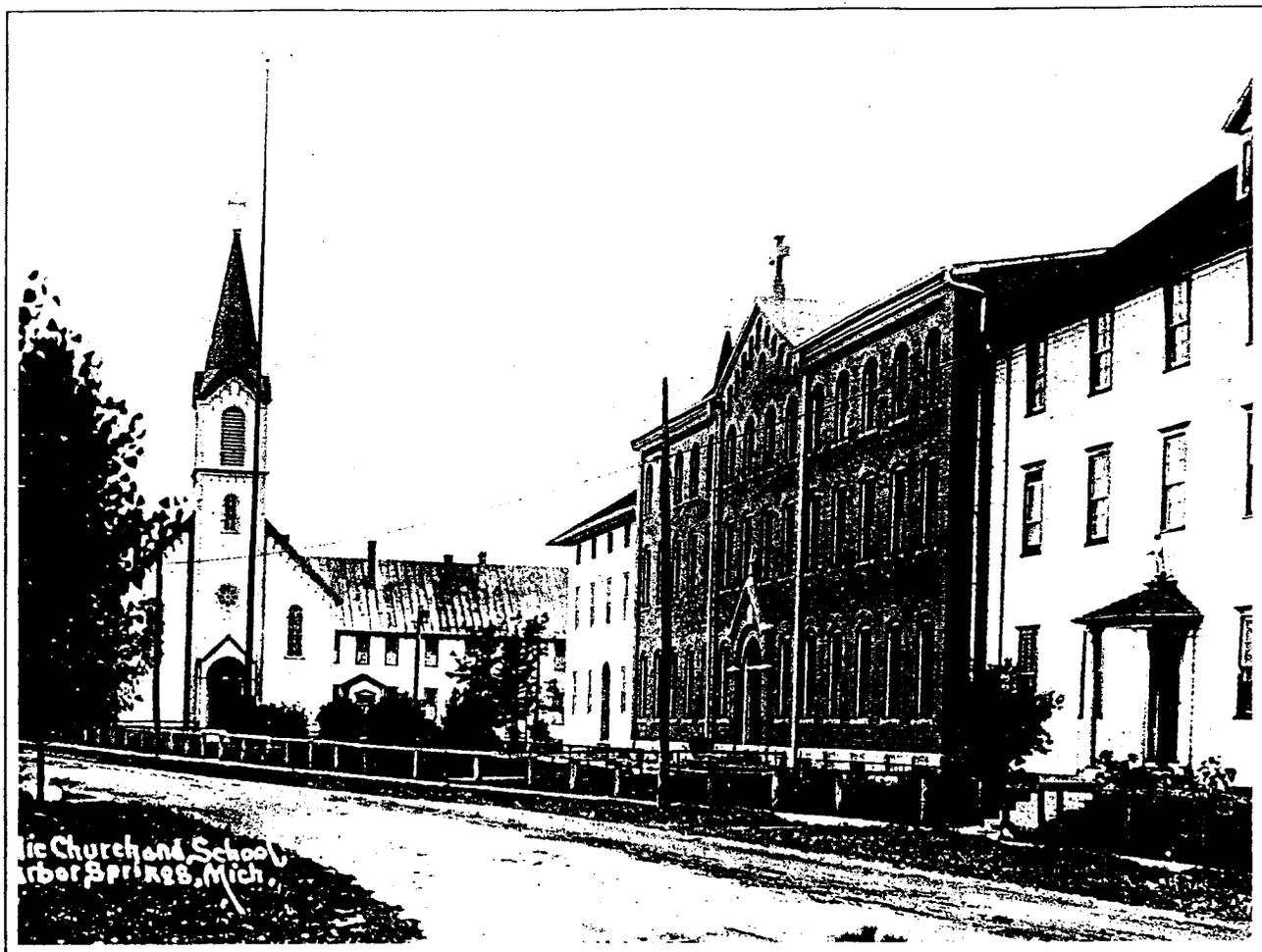
### Shaping the Future

After the Treaty of 1836 was signed, the Ottawa did not sit idly by and allow others to run their affairs. Instead, they actively worked to make a place for themselves in Michigan and to prevent, once and for all, the possibility of removal. Their first tactic was to adapt their skills in crop growing, fishing, food gathering, and crafts to the American economy, producing goods to sell to the Americans who were moving into the state. They also used their annuity money to purchase land in the vicinity of their villages as it came on the market for public sale. As Indians they were still subject to treaty provisions, including the removal clause, but as landowners they also had inviolable rights to enjoy the use of their property. That implied the right to remain in Michigan.

Ottawa people understood very well the process of making allies for their own benefit. As part of their campaign to remain in Michigan, they made allies of those missionaries who opposed removal and supported Ottawa efforts to purchase land. In the process, they learned that so long as they attended church services, the missionaries would help them build farms and supply them with food, clothing, and medicine. Some Ottawa adults even went to the missionary schools to learn to read and write so they could conduct their own affairs in American society.

The Ottawa also developed friendships and business relationships with people who could help them transact their land purchases. Some of these allies were Americans married to Ottawa and so obligated by bonds of kinship. Others aided the Ottawa because they were opposed to the policy of removal or because they perceived the injustice of taking Indian land without helping the Ottawa adjust to a new way of life. Traders aided the Ottawa, often because of the annuities paid by the government in return for ceded land. The Ottawa had become valuable cash customers whom the traders did not want to lose. The Ottawa, in turn, needed the traders' political connections to help them stay in Michigan.

Some of the first Ottawa land purchases were transacted by missionaries for the people who attended their church services or who lived in villages near the mission stations. The Ottawa provided the missionaries with cash from their an-



Many Ottawa elders living today were educated — and schooled in Catholicism — at Holy Childhood School in Harbor Springs. (Holy Childhood School)

nuities and the missionaries registered their claims at the Ionia land office. Several Ottawa families from the Grand Rapids area who had no reservations in the south and did not wish to move to the northern reservations gave the Baptist missionary Leonard Slater cash to buy land on their behalf in Barry County near Bradley. Others settled on the Black River near Lake Macatawa in Allegan County on land purchased for them by a Congregational missionary named George Smith. Purchases of land near missions were also made by the Presbyterians at Grand Traverse Bay and by the Catholics at L'Arbre Croche.

Family groups from the Grand River to L'Arbre Croche who were not connected to missions frequently pooled their annuity payments and purchased land, often in the names of their leaders. Some of these groups lived as extended families, sharing the land and its resources much as they had always done. Others chose to conform to the

American system, living in small, immediate-family groups made up of husband, wife, and children. Some Ottawa congregated on reservations on Grand Traverse and Little Traverse bays. Still others remained on ceded lands without making purchases. These people were most vulnerable to the pressures of settlers and to the threat of removal.

The government's first serious attempt to remove the Ottawa from Michigan came in 1838 when Henry Schoolcraft sought to begin the removal process. Schoolcraft's plan was to assemble an exploring party made up of Indian leaders most likely to approve the plans of government officials. The delegates were to visit Kansas in the spring when the prairie plants were green, return with a favorable report, and urge their people to remove there. Schoolcraft, however, was barely able to assemble a delegation. He finally persuaded twenty-four men to go. Of this group,

there were only five chiefs, and then only one who had signed the 1836 treaty. The Chippewa refused to send any representatives at all, and the Ottawa of L'Arbre Croche consented only after Schoolcraft applied considerable pressure.

Those who went to view the Kansas lands were not impressed. They reported that there were no streams good for fishing, no sugar maples, and the climate was unhealthy — bitter cold in winter and too hot in summer. Nor were they anxious to engage plains tribes like the Sioux in warfare as the Potawatomi who had gone west were forced to do.

A nearly united front against the initial exploring party gave the Ottawa more time to purchase land and remain in their Michigan homes. Some Ottawa, however, panicked by the very rumor of planned removals, fled to Canada in 1839 and 1840, and for good reason. Removal to Kansas was a very real possibility. In 1840, acting under federal orders, General Hugh Brady attempted a round up of the Ottawa's near neighbors, the Potawatomi in southern Michigan. He captured several families and sent them to Kansas under armed guard. The Pokagon band of Potawatomi hired an attorney who successfully sought a court injunction which put a halt to the removal attempt.

Henry Schoolcraft never completed his plans to remove the Ottawa west. In 1841, Robert Stuart became the new Indian agent in Michigan. Unlike his predecessor, Stuart was opposed to removal and favored Ottawa attempts to become farmers in the American fashion. Some Ottawa made rapid progress toward Stuart's goal, building log houses and barns, raising livestock, and expanding their fields to grow new crops including potatoes, turnips, and wheat. The natural environment continued to supply them with fish and maple sugar, two commodities which found ready markets among the Americans.

The one remaining problem for many Ottawa was their uncertain political status in Michigan and their tenure on the reservations. According to the terms of the Treaty of 1836, the Ottawa could not remain on their reservations after 1841 without the permission of the government. If they invested time and effort in turning their reservation lands on Grand Traverse and Little Traverse bays into farms, they had no guarantees that the farms would not be placed on the market by the government to be claimed and purchased by squatters. The Ottawa continued to purchase smaller parcels of their ceded homelands as they were surveyed and released to the land office, but they took another approach as well, turning to the Michigan legislature for support.

Eighteen forty-one was an important year in American national politics. The Whig party, which

had long opposed the policies of Andrew Jackson and his successor, Martin Van Buren, saw its candidate Zachary Taylor elected president. With the Whigs in power, Michigan legislators who supported Ottawa efforts to remain in the state could voice that support without offending party leaders and jeopardizing their own positions.

In 1841 the Ottawa petitioned the Michigan legislature to aid them in their attempts to remain in the state and grant them citizenship status. Citizenship, they argued, would give them stronger legal rights and guarantee that they could not be forcibly removed. The legislature, in turn, petitioned the United States government to grant citizenship to Indians who had farms, saying that the state had joined the Ottawa and Chippewa in opposition to removal.

The Ottawa petitioned again for citizenship in 1843 and 1844. The Michigan legislature unanimously supported their efforts as did many American settlers who had come to recognize the benefits in having the Ottawa remain. Many Ottawa were now farmers, and others were becoming wage laborers in commercial fishing enterprises which operated throughout the Great Lakes in the 1840s. With a support group among the Michigan citizenry, the Ottawa were finally immune to removal pressure.

In 1850, the Michigan constitution granted the Ottawa citizenship and the right to vote, but only on condition that they renounce their tribal affiliation. This was another effort to turn the Ottawa into Christian farmers, and in effect called on them to give up their cultural and political identity.

### Changing Values

The period between 1836 and 1855 was a time of difficult choices for the Ottawa. Basic cultural values and traditional practices which had been handed down since prehistoric times were being challenged and subject to change. Individuals and families had to choose between the old ways and the new, keeping the traditional ways they valued most and adjusting their way of life to fit into American society.

American-style farming was something new for the Ottawa. Growing crops was certainly basic to the traditional Ottawa way of life, but farming had always been primarily the work of women. While the women worked in the fields and gathered wild foods, the men spent much of the year away from the main villages, hunting, fishing, and trading over a large territory and maintaining contact with kinsmen in other locales. The American way of farming and keeping livestock demanded that men give up their role as traveling hunters and fishermen to become tillers of the earth who re-

mained in one place all year long. Some Ottawa found this adjustment difficult. Even more difficult was the change from sharing among kin to the individual accumulation of wealth necessary to build successful farms. This change was one most Ottawa were unwilling or unable to make. Families most often continued to live near each other and work cooperatively on their properties.

The Ottawa's religious beliefs had long served them well, explaining the forces of the natural world around them and establishing a pattern for their relationship to that world. But even these most fundamental beliefs were shaken — by the epidemics that reduced the Ottawa's numbers, by the economic and political problems with which they were ill equipped to deal, and by the attempts of missionaries to convert them to Christianity.

Some Ottawa did indeed accept the teachings of the missionaries; others simply attended church services and accepted goods from the missionaries along with help in building farms, buying land, and dealing with the Americans. Christianity, by demanding the surrender of the traditional religious beliefs, ceremonies, dances, and rituals which helped to unite the Ottawa, introduced a disruptive element to Ottawa society, creating divisions among those who accepted the teachings and others who remained traditionalists.

Ottawa parents also had to decide whether or not to send their children to the mission schools. Sending children to learn to read and write was a more difficult decision than it appeared on the surface. Traditionally, teaching was the responsibility of every family member. Children hunted, fished, and farmed alongside their elders, acquiring the skills they would need as adults and learning the values that had been handed down through generations. Rarely subject to physical punishment, Ottawa children had the freedom to learn by experience. But formal schooling made it necessary for children to spend time away from their families, often with missionaries who did not understand their beliefs and who disparaged the ways of their ancestors.

As long as the Ottawa were secure on their land

and could practice their traditional lifeways, they chose to keep their old culture and ways of doing things. But by the end of the treaty era, the extent to which Ottawa people could maintain their previous way of life and values was severely limited. On a political level, they were merged into a broader American system as voting citizens. Reduction of their land base required them to make a living in much the same fashion as did the Americans who came to their land. Culturally, however, the Ottawa remained ethnically distinct. They were separated from their neighbors by their skin color, their language, and, in many instances, by their continued belief in the virtue of reciprocity among kin at the expense of individually accumulated wealth. The old value of personal ties and relationships continued to unite a dispersing population. Those Ottawa people who sought to break away from this traditional value system found the task difficult if not impossible.

### The Treaty of 1855

In 1855, the Ottawa made their final treaty with the United States. The treaty legally ended the threat of removal and made provisions for the allotment of land. First, reservations were established in Mason and Oceana counties and on Grand Traverse and Little Traverse bays. Next, the reserved land was to be divided among individual Ottawa. Each head of a family was entitled to receive eighty acres; each person over the age of twenty-one but not the head of a family received forty acres; and each family of orphaned children under the age of twenty-one also received forty acres. The Indians had five years in which to select their individual parcels and file their claims. The land would then be held in trust by the federal government for ten years. During that time it could not be taxed; nor could it be sold without the permission of the President of the United States. When the ten years were up, the deeds would pass from the government to the individual Ottawa landholders.

Under this and other treaties negotiated between 1854 and 1855 by the United States with the Ottawa and Chippewa of Michigan, 776,320 acres of land near their homes on Lakes Michigan and Superior were set aside to be divided among Indian people. Eligibility to receive this land under the articles of the treaties was determined by the Indian agent, who was to submit a list of prospective landholders to the newly formed federal Bureau of Indian Affairs no later than July 1, 1856. Anybody not recorded by that time was not entitled to patent (register) a claim at the government land office. When the Indian agent completed his list, the Indians were to select the lands of their



*Now prized by collectors, baskets were woven from black ash wood splints and sold to supplement meager family incomes. (Catherine Baldwin Collection)*

choice, provided there were no Americans already living on them, and that the land was not included in any federally protected areas.

The location, quality, and resources of the lands were important factors in the Ottawa's selections. They chose locations well timbered with pine, oak, ash, and, especially, sugar maple. The importance of the natural resources to the Ottawa is illustrated by the case of the Ottawa of the Grand River. In 1856, two factions of Ottawa disputed the wisdom of moving to the lands their treaty makers had reserved in Oceana County. One group refused to move there, giving as a reason the lack of hardwoods and the poor, sandy soil, and stating its desire to live instead among the Chippewa at Saginaw. Although the Commissioner of Indian Affairs refused their request, many Grand River families did settle, against his orders, on the Chippewa reservation in Isabella County.

In the fall of 1857 some eight hundred Ottawa and Chippewa from the Grand River valley moved to their Oceana County reserves near the present-day town of Pentwater. Lacking the financial resources to pay for the move, they had petitioned the government to hire transportation for themselves, their possessions, and their livestock. The

government agreed to provide steamboats at Grand Haven. Indians today still recall stories of their grandparents and great-grandparents loading their belongings in canoes or driving their livestock along the banks of the Grand River to assemble at Grand Haven and board the steamboats for the journey to their new homes.

The Treaty of 1855, like the Treaty of 1836, was a crucial document for the Ottawa. While the Treaty of 1836 took from them almost all their lands, the agreement averted removal and preserved Ottawa rights to hunt and fish on ceded territory, legal rights which the Treaty of 1855 did not set aside. The Treaty of 1855 protected Ottawa ownership of individual parcels of land but divided tribal holdings. Earlier treaties had recognized Indian tribes as politically sovereign, independent groups, but the Treaty of 1855 dissolved Ottawa tribal status. No longer would land be held under tribal ownership, and no longer would tribal leaders be able to negotiate with the government on behalf of their people as a single political entity. Each person was expected to present his own case and represent his own best interests in dealing with neighbors and with the federal and state governments. This loss of

political status made it difficult for the Ottawa to defend themselves against those Americans who sought to abuse them.

### Loss of the Land

Much of the land set aside for the Ottawa under the Treaty of 1855 never made its way into Indian hands. At Grand Traverse, for example, more than 25,640 acres of the 87,000 reserved acres were excluded from Indian settlement by federal laws before the Indians began to select land. Selections made between 1856 and 1857 were not registered with the federal government because of bureaucratic mix-ups. When they finally were registered with the proper office, many of the better parcels chosen by the Ottawa were no longer available, having been claimed by American settlers under preemption laws. These laws basically said that any settler who had moved onto Indian land and made "improvements" by clearing the land for farming and constructing buildings had first claim on that parcel when it was placed on the open market for sale. Eleven percent of the selections registered by Indians were declared invalid because of errors in the certificates. In the end, only 23 percent of the reserved area at Grand Traverse was in Indian possession.

Even when the Ottawa did receive title, they often did not hold onto it for long. The average Ottawa family at Grand Traverse retained title for just 6.3 years, and by 1880, two-thirds of the allotted land at Grand Traverse had passed through Indian hands. The reserved land at Little Traverse Bay and in Oceana and Mason counties was lost by at least the same rate and probably faster.

Traditional lifeways had not prepared the majority of Ottawa people for participation in the American land-tenure system. Nor did the agricultural skills and education they had received in the 1830s and 1840s prepare them for life in a society which valued individual accumulation of wealth, competition, and physical labor beyond the limits necessary to meet the immediate needs of one's kin.

Quite simply, the Ottawa were neither ready nor

completely willing to accept American styles of life. Accustomed to living as extended families whose members worked cooperatively to support one another, they did not know what to do with the small parcels of land which were often located some distance apart from the land of other family members. As a result, they sold the land — some 75 percent of it — freely and for less than it was worth. On the average, the Ottawa received \$3.53 per acre for the sale of their land; Americans selling similar land received \$6.95 per acre.

Some Ottawa fell prey to land speculators, merchants, and settlers who used a host of deceitful and illegal means to separate them from their land at low prices. A few Ottawa themselves were involved in fraudulent dealings. More interested in private gain than group welfare, these Ottawa acted as middlemen, buying land cheaply from their elderly and disabled kinsmen and selling it at a profit to speculators.

Unskilled in protecting their own interests against sharp operators, some Ottawa were easily taken advantage of. Dishonest speculators, for example, arranged to buy the timber on Ottawa land for what appeared to be a fair price. After the Indians signed the documents allowing the timber sales, however, they found that they had actually signed quit-claim deeds relinquishing all title to the land, again, for far less than its actual worth.

Government officials did little to remedy the situation, and even their own government representatives took part in defrauding the Ottawa. In Mason County, for example, the tax rate was set at twice the amount paid by American settlers, a price the Ottawa could not always pay. Because of such practices, more Indian land was confiscated for back taxes after the ten-year tax-exemption period than was lost by Americans for nonpayment.

This is not to say that all Americans mistreated or took advantage of the Ottawa at that time or at any other. The Ottawa still had friends and allies who did all they could to protect Indian property and rights, but their efforts were often thwarted by more powerful political and economic interests. By the 1860s, for example, Michigan's increasingly powerful lumber companies and railroads had established working relationships with state officials who turned their heads as Ottawa land and timber were taken.

Losing the land and its resources had an impact on Ottawa economics. Located on land of limited quality, most Ottawa never succeeded in building farms large enough to earn their livings from agriculture alone. They continued to raise gardens for family use and earned only small incomes from the sale of their crops. To supplement their cash

supply, many adapted their traditional skills for living in the forest to lumbering. Although cutting vast quantities of timber was alien to traditional Ottawa practices, lumbering provided the Ottawa with desperately needed cash, and it was work at which the men excelled. Their families accompanied them to the areas marked for cutting, and there in the forest they lived something of a traditional life. Until the great virgin stands of trees were gone at the turn of the century, logging provided some degree of prosperity for Ottawa families.

As early as the 1830s the Ottawa had begun selling fish to American settlers. In the 1850s many Ottawa men continued to use their maritime skills to harvest this resource. Fishing remained a profitable occupation until the supply of lake fish became severely depleted around 1910.

Participation in these two early Michigan industries changed the Ottawa from near self-sufficient workers to people who labored for others to earn wages. This made them still more dependent upon the Americans around them than they had been at any time in their past. As lumbering and fishing employment declined, the Ottawa could not go back to their former way of life any more than their eighteenth-century leader Pontiac was able, by rebellion, to turn the clock back to the days before the arrival of the French traders. The Ottawa did farm work and took on odd jobs for local farmers, merchants, and anyone else who could afford to pay. They continued to pick berries and to make and sell baskets and quill boxes. These jobs earned income, but even by the standards of that day, the pay was low.

### Preparing for the Future

The Americans and the Ottawa both came to see education as the key to Indian survival in the future. In the second half of the nineteenth century no one knew better the value of writing and arithmetic than the Ottawa whose land was being taken. They saw education as a means of increasing their chances of survival and bettering their economic and political position in the state. Education, to their way of thinking, would provide them with the skills needed to supplement and support the ways of their own culture. The Americans, however, saw education as a means of replacing Ottawa culture by instilling Christian values and the ideals of individual enterprise and hard labor, and even by changing the students' physical appearance. At school boys were forced to cut their long hair, and only American-style clothing could be worn.

Ottawa leaders were dissatisfied with the missionary boarding school education their children

*During World War I, many young men like Eno McSawby (Amiksuabi, or "underwater beaver"), shown here on the right, volunteered for U.S. military service even though their status as U.S. citizens was called into question by some Michigan residents and government officials. (Catherine Baldwin Collection)*



received in the late 1830s and 1840s. They argued convincingly with federal officials that for all the thousands of dollars reserved for Indian education in the Treaty of 1836, few if any children could read or write, and that the money was actually used to train American students and *metis* children (of mixed American and Indian parentage) who had closer ties to their American kin than to the Ottawa.

The Ottawa argument prevailed. As a result, the Treaty of 1855 removed control of Indian schools from the missionaries and placed the responsibility for Ottawa education firmly in the hands of the federal government.

In 1857, the government agreed to close all mission boarding schools and open day schools near Ottawa villages. The children attended school on weekdays to learn basic reading, writing, and arithmetic, then returned home on the weekends to their parents and their own cultural environment, an arrangement which pleased parents and children alike. The Mackinac Agency, which served the Ottawa and Chippewa living in Michigan, was singled out as a model for other Indian education programs in the United States. The agency chose to invest large sums of cash in Ottawa and Chippewa schools because of the great progress — compared with many other Native American groups — that the Michigan Indians had made towards living in a manner similar to that of their American neighbors. The investment was also made because the Ottawa and Chippewa themselves saw education as a means of reaching economic self-sufficiency in American society and had requested such schools.

Of the country's forty-eight federally supported Indian schools, twenty were in Michigan, located at Onawmeceeneville, Eagletown, Grove Hill, Pine River, Bear River, Little Traverse, Middle Village, Cross Village, Cheboygan, Iroquois Point, Sugar Island, Garden Island, and in Isabella, Mason, and Oceana counties. Schools were staffed with the best people available because teachers were paid high salaries and competition for teaching positions was strong. By the time of the Civil War, in the 1860s, the Michigan Indian school system was

one of the finest in the country, surpassing the quality of most public schools. Some schools even provided free lunches, books, and school supplies. More than one thousand Ottawa children were enrolled in 1863, and 45 percent attended regularly, about the same percentage as American students attending public schools at that time. The Ottawa believed these schools were a great success.

The government, however, thought otherwise. Indian agents complained that students attended too irregularly, that their parents kept them out of school for planting, trapping, harvesting, and berry picking. Public schools did not show as high a rate of absenteeism primarily because they were open only between October and March, while the Indian schools operated from September through June. According to American officials, the Ottawa, despite the education they were receiving, remained only partially civilized, continuing to hold onto their core values and to speak their own language. This was another indication to Americans that the school system they had created was a failure.

The 1880s brought a change in government policy on Indian education. To remove Ottawa children from the influence of their parents and to promote their adoption of American culture, the government closed most day schools and opened boarding schools where all aspects of the children's lives could be strictly supervised. Federal officials contracted the services of Holy Childhood School and its staff at Harbor Springs, and founded the Indian industrial school at Mount Pleasant in 1893 to train Ottawa children in American values, academic skills, and manual labor. Perhaps no single effort to change Ottawa culture had as much impact as did the boarding schools.

Parents knew that the aim of the schools and their staffs was to change the values of their children. They disapproved of the methods and they objected to the aim, but they had no other way to teach their children the academic skills necessary to live in American society. Young people were sent to the boarding schools at an early age. Away from their parents, verbally abused and physically punished, they lived a life of military regimentation. Ottawa elders who attended these schools have vivid memories of the loneliness they felt and the mistreatment they received. Although many of the students knew no other language but Ottawa, they were not allowed to speak it and were punished when they were caught. Since all teaching was done in English, many students had a difficult time with their studies. When some of those same students became parents, they spoke

English at home rather than Ottawa to spare their children the unhappy school experience they had undergone. At school, the children were taught that Indian ways were inferior to those of Americans, and some never again lived in traditional Ottawa fashion. The majority, however, drew comfort from knowing that they were Indians going through the ordeal with other Indians. No matter how bad Indian schools were, they were better than facing the discrimination so widespread in the public schools. When the Mount Pleasant school closed in 1933, some Ottawa people regretted the loss of its services.

Industrial boarding schools often prepared students for nonexistent jobs in a society which did not allow them to participate equally in the job market. Boys were taught such trades as carpentry, mechanics, sign making, painting, and farming, but rarely did they get jobs for which they were qualified, and when they did they were often paid less than they deserved. Girls spent much time learning social and technical skills that were drawn from and were more appropriate to middle-class American lives than to the lives they led.

The upward mobility enjoyed by their American neighbors was often denied to Indian graduates throughout the second half of the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century. And when Indians could no longer earn a living by lumbering and fishing, there were few other occupations open to them. Stereotypes of drunken Indians and lazy Indians blocked the Ottawa from many good-paying positions and forced their continued reliance on harvesting and selling the natural resources in areas where the vegetation and animal populations had not been destroyed.

Although their way of life changed in the twentieth century, the Ottawa accepted American ways on their own terms, infusing American institutions with their own ideas and meanings. They listened to Christian teaching, but interpreted the messages in terms of Ottawa beliefs in the cycle of life. By 1910, probably less than 10 percent of all Ottawa people accepted the Christian belief in a single God. The Ottawa replaced their summer ceremonial with camp meetings which allowed the Indians to come together, renew family ties, and emphasize their own identity. Other ceremonials were replaced by pageants and powwows, where songs and dances which were once obligations were reenacted as customs to be preserved and taught to new generations.

Teaching the young and handing down traditional beliefs and values remained the responsibility of elders. As the elders repeated the tales of Nanabozho, the young learned proper Ottawa be-

havior and were encouraged to act accordingly. More important, they learned that being Indian was something to be proud of and that the past continued to link all Ottawa with the bonds of a shared heritage.

Until the 1930s, most Michigan Ottawa continued to live on small pieces of land around Indian settlements at such places as Peshawbestown in Leelanau County, Harbor Springs, Cross Village, and Elbridge. But with the Great Depression, jobs were increasingly difficult to find in rural areas, and many Ottawa began moving to larger cities — Detroit, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Muskegon, Saginaw, and Traverse City among them. Lacking experience and education, the Ottawa were unable to find good-paying jobs in the cities. Discrimination by teachers and students in city schools prompted many Ottawa teenagers to drop out without learning the skills they needed if they were to compete successfully in the job market. Even where discrimination was not a problem, the lack of programs which understood or met Indian needs also led many students to leave school. Many Ottawa continued to work at jobs which paid far less than they needed to live comfortably.

Until the 1940s, few efforts were made to improve Indian living conditions, and these were begun at the initiative of the Indian people themselves. Working first in urban centers, they began organizing into a political force to press their demands for a greater share of the benefits of American society. In 1941, the Detroit North American Indian Center was founded to provide a social center for Indian people in the city. Since this beginning, the number of Michigan organizations working directly to benefit Indian people has grown to more than thirty-eight. Those serving the Ottawa include the Northern Michigan Ottawa Association, the Grand Rapids Inter-Tribal Council, the Leelanau Indians, Inc., and various other urban centers throughout the state.

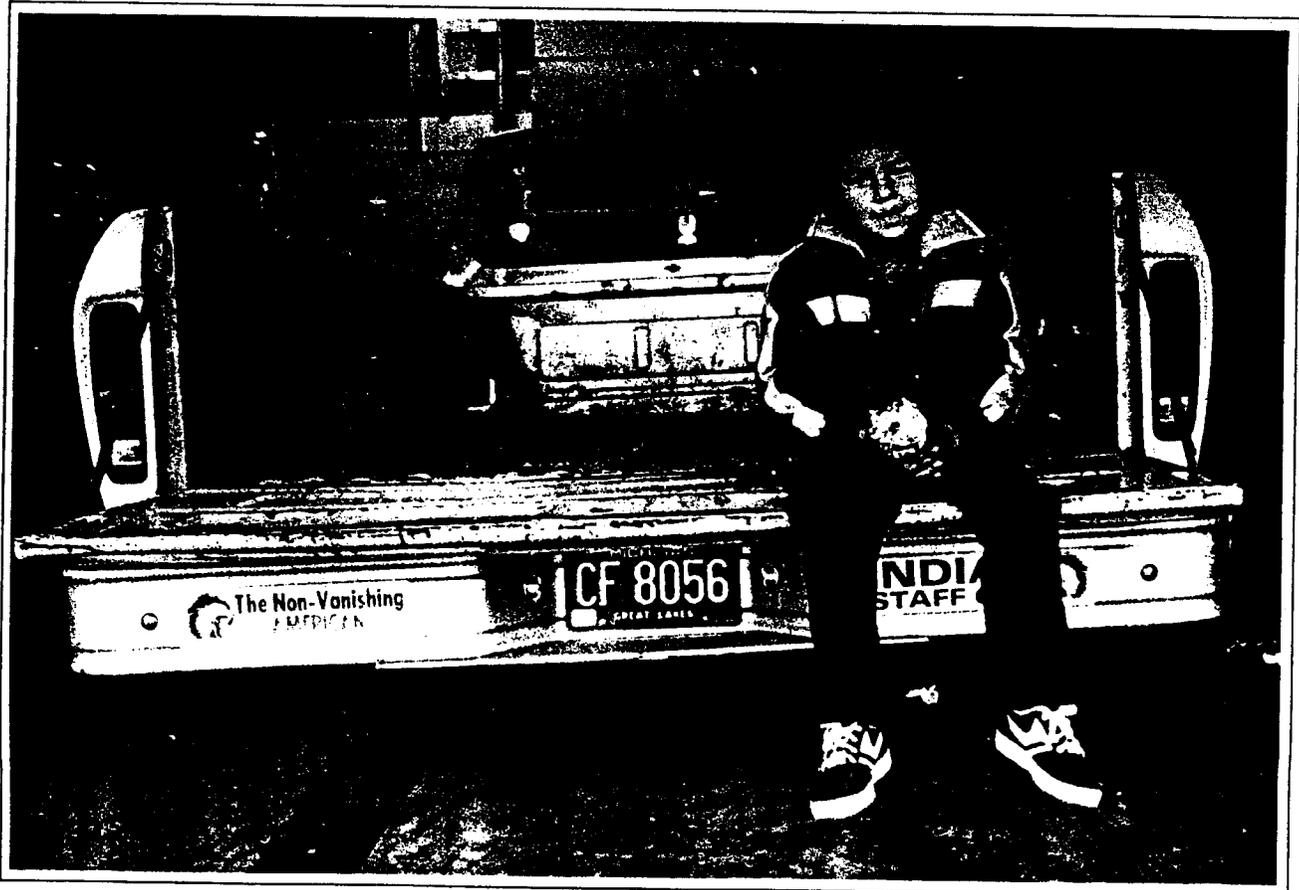
Over thousands of years, the ancestors of today's Ottawa adjusted to changes in their social and natural environment, preparing a future for each

## The Ottawa

new generation. Today, the Ottawa are working to make a living in a new environment and to pass the legacy of their ancestors on to their children. Some descendants of the ancient Ottawa now use their skills to work in factories, offices, schools, and in many other modern occupations. Others continue to farm and fish, using the skills of their ancestors daily and preserving a part of their in-

heritance from the past. They still face the pressures of poverty, discrimination, and the ignorance of others, but the descendants of the Sinago, Kiskakon, Sable, and Naussaukueton continue to face the world in a manner distinct from that of their neighbors while preparing the way for the next generation in the cycle of life.

*Michigan's Indian population is growing. As with all state residents, the Indians' greatest assets are their dreams for their children.*  
(Jeremy Thomas Connolly,  
Grand Rapids Inter-Tribal  
Council)



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# PEOPLE OF THE THREE FIRES :

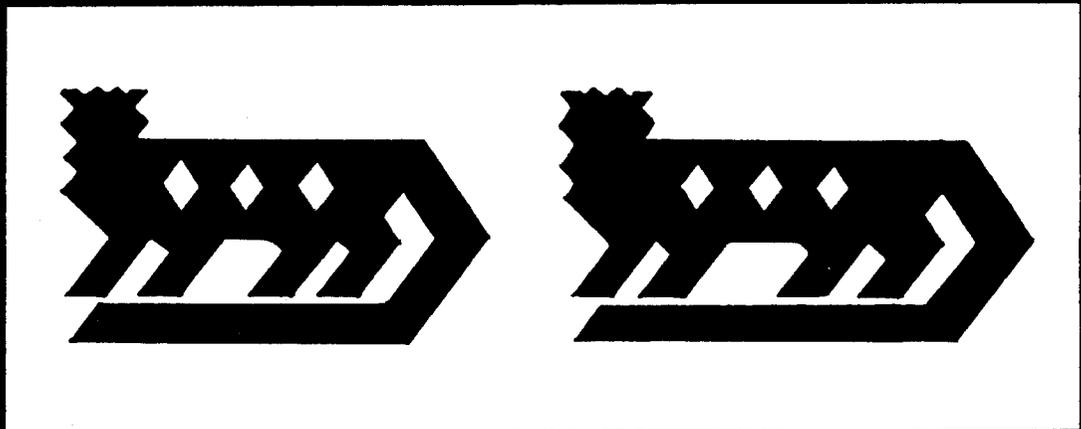
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# THE OTTAWA



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