

**Information on land acknowledgements
for consideration by the City of Northfield Human Rights Commission
July 9, 2020**

Northfield and the Dakota Nation

Northfield is located in Dakota territory. The area currently known as Rice County was originally stewarded by the Wahpekute Band of the Dakota Nation. Throughout the early 1800s, the federal government engaged in treaties (often negotiated through deceitful practices) that dispossessed Dakota people of their homelands. After the 1851 Treaty, the Dakota Nation retained only two areas of land on the Minnesota River. Northfield was founded in 1855, just seven years before the U.S.-Dakota War and concurrent with the treaty period (1805-1858).

Drastically reduced territories meant food shortages for Dakota people. When the federal government failed to uphold the terms of the treaties, Dakota people experienced widespread famine. Tensions grew between Dakota people and the local traders who, complaining of delayed federal payments, denied Dakota people food and allowed it to rot. This led to a two-month conflict known as the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. In response to the conflict, President Lincoln ordered the mass execution of 38 Dakota men in Mankato. It remains the largest mass execution in the history of the United States.

At the end of the war, Minnesota exiled Dakota people from the state. To enforce its order, the government pursued, arrested, and marched more than a thousand Dakota women and children to Fort Snelling, where they were held in unsanitary conditions for months. Many died in the camps, and those who survived were then further removed to South Dakota and Nebraska.

Northfield's two colleges, Carleton (founded in 1866) and St. Olaf (founded in 1874), were established within a few years of Minnesota's removal of Dakota people. While we are still working to document the relationship of Dakota people to the area now known as Northfield, Dakota expulsion from southern Minnesota undoubtedly facilitated settler expansion in this area.

Today, our current closest Dakota neighbors belong to the Mdewakanton Band of the Dakota Nation: the Shakopee Mdewakaton Sioux Community's tribal offices are located in Prior Lake (45 minutes), the Prairie Island Indian Community's tribal offices are located in Red Wing (40 minutes), and the Lower Sioux Indian Community's offices are located near Morton (2 hours). Another Dakota nation that shares geography with southern Minnesota today is the Upper Sioux Community, whose tribal offices are located near Granite Falls (2 hours, 45 minutes). Dakota people also still live in the territories to which they were exiled in Nebraska and South Dakota, and some Dakota people (the descendants of those who escaped to Canada) live in Manitoba.

For more on the history of the Dakota Nation, see:

- Dakota Wicohan
- *Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota*, by Gwen Westerman and Bruce White
- Why Treaties Matter, from the Minnesota Humanities Center
- Our Home: Native Minnesota, from the Minnesota History Center
- The Bdote Memory Map, from the Minnesota Humanities Center

Land acknowledgements

Over the last few years, a growing movement across the United States and Canada has sought to acknowledge the ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples and the violent history of land theft. Such statements follow Indigenous protocols to begin gatherings in a respectful way, and they affirm that our presence on Indigenous territories was facilitated by the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from these lands.

There are a host of government-, university-, non-profit-created documents to guide this process. Looking across the many suggestions, a handful of principles have emerged to guide the creation of these statements:

1. They must tell an honest story about colonialism and the forced dispossession of Indigenous peoples.
2. They should emerge from meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples (tribal historic preservation officers, or THPOs, are good contacts with whom to begin this process).
3. They must include both the past and the present, acknowledging Indigenous peoples' ongoing relationship to these territories.
4. They must go beyond words to include meaningful actions. Otherwise, they become performances that undermine their true purpose.

A task force in Northfield recently gathered to draft a potential land acknowledgement for the city of Northfield. In full, it reads:

We stand on the homelands of the Wahpekute Band of the Dakota Nation. We honor with gratitude the people who have stewarded the land throughout the generations and their ongoing contributions to this region. We acknowledge the ongoing injustices that we have committed against the Dakota Nation, and we wish to interrupt this legacy, beginning with acts of healing and honest storytelling about this place.

A shortened version has also been suggested which omits the final sentence. Following the end of the task force's work, two Carleton faculty suggested amending the first sentence to read "We stand on the homelands of the Wahpekute and Mdewakanton Bands of the Dakota Nation" to reflect our current proximity to our Mdewakanton neighbors.

For comparison, here are some sample land acknowledgements from other institutions across the United States:

- **University of Minnesota – Duluth:** We collectively acknowledge that the University of Minnesota Duluth is located on the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of Indigenous people. The University resides on land that was cared for and called home by the Ojibwe people, before them the Dakota and Northern Cheyenne people, and other Native peoples from time immemorial. Ceded by the Ojibwe in an 1854 treaty, this land holds great historical, spiritual, and personal significance for its original stewards, the

Native nations and peoples of this region. We recognize and continually support and advocate for the sovereignty of the Native nations in this territory and beyond. By offering this land acknowledgment, we affirm tribal sovereignty and will work to hold the University of Minnesota Duluth accountable to American Indian peoples and nations.

- **AMAZEworks in St. Paul:** We acknowledge that AMAZEworks is located on the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of Indigenous people. Our St. Paul office resides on land that was cared for and called home by the Dakota. Taken from the Dakota through an unauthorized and illegitimate “treaty” in 1805, this land holds great historical, spiritual, and personal significance for its original stewards. Sacred sites, such as Eháŋna Wícháhapi (burial mounds at Indian Mounds Park), Wakháŋ Thípi (Carver’s Cave), and the village of Kap’óža surround us. We are just downriver from Bdoté, the place where two rivers meet and most importantly, the center of Dakota spirituality and history. We recognize and continually support and advocate for the sovereignty of the Native nations in this territory and beyond. By offering this land acknowledgment, we affirm tribal sovereignty and will work to hold ourselves accountable to Native peoples and nations.
- **The MacRostie Art Center in Grand Rapids:** The MacRostie Art Center is honored to be in Gaa-ginwaajiwanaag, *Grand Rapids*, located between the Leech Lake, Fond du Lac, Bois Forte, and Mille Lacs reservations. We acknowledge the generations of elders and youth; past, present, and future whose experiences of this place inform us of our responsibilities to each other as relatives. We also acknowledge the traditional knowledge keepers of this territory including Oceti Sakowin Dakota Oyate and Metis people. We acknowledge that we are located within homeland of the Anishinaabeg Ojibwe Nation. We acknowledge that we are located on land ceded in the Treaty of Washington, commonly known as the 1855 Treaty, which affirms the reserved rights doctrine and the inalienable rights of Ojibwe people to uphold their interminable relationship to the landscape as originated from Gichi-Manidoo. We are a grateful guest and strive to be good stewards of place and privilege.
- **The Newberry Library in Chicago, Illinois:** The Newberry Library is situated on the aboriginal homelands of the Council of the Three Fires: the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi Nations, and the Illinois Confederacy: the Peoria and Kaskaskia Nations. Many other nations including the Myaamia, Wea, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Thakiwaki, Meskwaki, Kiikaapoi, and Mascouten peoples also call this region home. Indigenous people continue to live in this area and celebrate their traditional teachings and lifeways. Today, Chicago is home to one of the largest urban Indigenous communities in the United States and this land remains an important place for Indigenous peoples. As a Chicago institution, it is our responsibility to acknowledge this historical context and build reciprocal relationships with the tribal nations on whose lands we are situated. The Newberry has a long history of partnering with tribal communities to promote Indigenous studies from an Indigenous perspective. The library remains committed to continuing that legacy by educating its users about the history of dispossession and settler colonialism.
- **Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois:** Northwestern University is a community of learners situated within a network of historical and contemporary

relationships with Native American tribes, communities, parents, students, and alumni. It is also in close proximity to an urban Native American community in Chicago and near several tribes in the Midwest. The Northwestern campus sits on the traditional homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires, the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa as well as the Menominee, Miami and Ho-Chunk nations. It was also a site of trade, travel, gathering and healing for more than a dozen other Native tribes and is still home to over 100,000 tribal members in the state of Illinois. It is within Northwestern's responsibility as an academic institution to disseminate knowledge about Native peoples and the institution's history with them. Consistent with the University's commitment to diversity and inclusion, Northwestern works towards building relationships with Native American communities through academic pursuits, partnerships, historical recognitions, community service and enrollment efforts.

- **University of Kansas School of Social Welfare in Lawrence, Kansas:** The School of Social Welfare acknowledges that the University of Kansas resides on the ancestral territory of several tribal nations, including the Kaw Osage, and Shawnee peoples. Specifically, the University occupies land ceded in an 1825 treat with the Kaw Treaty and a later treaty with the Shawnee treaty enforced in 1854. This land acknowledgement recognizes that Native Americans are traditional guardians of the land and that there is an enduring relationship between Native peoples and these traditional territories. Our School recognizes, advocates, and supports the sovereignty of the four-federally recognized tribes of Kansas, the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, the Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas, the Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska and the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska.
- **University of Washington School of Education in Tacoma, Washington:** The School of Education community here at UW Tacoma acknowledges that we learn, live, reflect, and teach on the ancestral lands of the Coast Salish people. As our campus is specifically situated on the traditional homeland of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, we will make intentional efforts to create inclusive and respectful partnerships that honor Indigenous cultures, histories, identities, and sociopolitical realities. We in the School of Education also have a moral responsibility to fully acknowledge our Indigenous connections, as well as critically reflect on the histories of dispossession and forced removal that have allowed for the growth and survival of this institution. Let us continue to advocate for and partner with our Indigenous neighbors as we continue our lifelong work together as a dynamic and inclusive community of educators, leaders, and learners.

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