

Native and Indigenous People in Northfield, Research and Actions Land Acknowledgement and beyond

The work the Northfield Human Rights Commission (HRC) has done in the past two years concerning Native American history, heritage and representation in our community started in 2017. Recognizing the need to showcase a history that is usually absent from the public discourse in our city and surrounding area, a group of residents started planning the International Day of Peace Celebration to be centered on Indigenous People with a special focus on the Northfield history.

It was in the context of the celebration of the International Day of Peace, Friday, September 21st, 2018, that the speakers brought to light the history of the area, the Doctrine of Discovery and possible actions, such as work towards an Indigenous People's Day Proclamation in Northfield and spreading the word about the original people that lived in the Northfield area, the Wahpekute, a Dakota band, and the Dakota name of our river, Inya Bosndata or River of the Standing Rock in Castle Rock among other actions.

Presented to the City Council the resolution to recognizing the second Monday of October as Indigenous Peoples Day was approved on Tuesday, October 2nd, 2018 (included at the end of this document). Subsequently, the first Indigenous Peoples Day was celebrated on Monday, October 8th, 2018. The first and second celebration of the Indigenous Peoples Day have been about healing, telling stories of the immigrant stories of newcomers that came thinking the land was free but were unaware of the injustices committed against the Dakota and Ojibwe people in Minnesota.

Shortly after the proclamation was passed the HRC, at its February 14, 2019, meeting, received the visit from college representatives, Bruce King and Joe Hargis with a proposal to work with the City of Northfield on drafting a Land Acknowledgement. The college students wanted their colleges to create such a statement as other colleges around the country had done, Macalester College, The University of Minnesota, among others, were ahead of Northfield colleges.

From the meeting minutes:

Their respective Presidents and City Mayor had discussed the desirability of a more intentional recognition of the fact that the land we live and work on was taken from its original inhabitants, mostly Dakota tribes who were pushed out and settled westward of this area. It was suggested that this be brought to the HRC and include other community entities like the School District, Historical Society, etc. The goal would be that Indigenous peoples will be recognized at official city and community gatherings, as well as at the colleges.

Out of that first contact and in the context of the work of the HRC on Indigenous Peoples Day, a subgroup of community members, college members and HRC members was created to work on this important goal to ultimately create connections between Northfield and its past and present with their Native American history and neighbors.

The group met with Sue Garwood, Rice County Historical Society Director to explore what are the historical records of the Native American inhabitants of this area before the European settlers arrived. The history is rich and forgotten except for its presence at the Rice County Historical Society Museum in Faribault. In Northfield the only mention in the public arena of the Wahpekute is in the banner around the mural inside the Post Office.

Why is there a need for a Land Acknowledgement?

For too long, communities in the US have been silent about past injustices and only focused on the history of the conqueror, the European, the white people. The historic injustices of land displacement and massacre of local Native Nations have been largely absent from the public discourse. The growing research and work on decolonization is taking place not only in Academia but in the work on non-profits and others in the United States and elsewhere. There is a need to set the record straight and include the voices that have been silent for too long.

The land acknowledgement is a tool, but never should be the only one, that allows for communities, realities and histories largely omitted to enter the public discourse. What it cannot be is a feel-good performative and superficial performance. It has to rather be an honest and open review of history and despite the painful conversations that will ensue it can be a powerful tool of healing and reconciliation between people. It also serves as a way to address the generational trauma that permeates Native American communities in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

As part of the work of Professor Meredith McCoy at Carleton, she herself Native American, her students put together in the Fall of 2019, information that addresses the invisibility of the Native American experience. It also shows animated maps that portray the loss of land by the Nations that lived in North America for thousands of years prior to the arrival of the Europeans.

Meredith McCoy class project: You Are on Dakota Land:

<https://sites.google.com/carleton.edu/amst231-f19/home>

Northfield Land Acknowledgement Statement

Out of the many meetings to explore our history and create a statement that the Colleges and the City of Northfield can use the group finally created a statement, a full version and a shorter version. The Colleges still have to have full approval by their respective boards, but it will most certainly be embraced and used by both.

Here is the full statement:

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.

Both colleges want to use the first part and share the full version with groups within their communities to use as they see fit. Their view is that the second section may be more difficult for some people to accept and embrace. Beyond the colleges the rest of the members of the group that worked on this goal expressed their full support of the full version as the act of healing and honest storytelling is really meaningful and much needed.

First section to be officially used by the colleges:

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.

The work continues with the goal for next year's Celebration of the Indigenous Peoples Day to be the unveiling of the plaque by the river telling the story of the real name of the river and how, by mistakes and accident became the Cannon River. It went from a name based in nature and the importance of the river as a transportation channel, when the French called it the river of canoes (canot in French). The English settlers probably by mistake read the name wrong and started using cannon, a war name, far from its origins in nature.

One of the actions that have been mentioned is to continue to work towards creating meaningful connections with the tribes that are close to us and bring speakers, artists in residence to Northfield. Visits to the wonderful Hokokata Ti Community Center for the Mdewankanton in Shakopee is highly encouraged as well as the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul exhibit "Our Home" centered around the difficult history of the Dakota and Ojibwe in Minnesota after the 1800.

<https://shakopeedakota.org/>

<https://shakopeedakota.org/culture/hokokatati/>

We continue to work towards bringing light into a painful past but at the same time a rich and meaningful past with the Dakota history of creativity and deep connection to the land. One of the reviews as part of a soul-searching section of this work is to consider the elementary school Sibley choose a different name for the school. The historic figure of Henry Hastings Sibley, Minnesota first governor is controversial because his participation in mass executions, notably the infamous execution of 38 men in Mankato.

<http://www.usdakotawar.org/history/aftermath/trials-hanging>

From the Minnesota Historical Society:

<https://www.mnopedia.org/person/sibley-henry-h-1811-1891>

Sibley's role in the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 remains the most controversial aspect of his career. While working for the release of hostages, he made promises to the Dakota that he failed to keep. He had been told by Major General Pope to treat the Indians "like wild beasts" and bowed to public demands for a mass execution.

Sibley set up a military commission that conducted brief trials of Dakota prisoners. He approved death sentences for more than three hundred men. Tension in the state mounted when President Lincoln limited executions to only thirty-eight prisoners shown to be guilty of murder or rape. Despite threats of mob action, Sibley's forces preserved order. The mass hanging was carried out according to law.

Next steps

The objective to work with our Native American neighbors and residents within our area and beyond doesn't end with a Land Acknowledgement nor with the celebration of the Indigenous Peoples Day. It has to be a

conscious, honest and true work towards repairing the way a community that has largely been erased from history, is acknowledged and treasured.

This work can continue to be led by the Human Rights Commission and other groups interested in this objective. Hopefully one day the relationships will be formed, and the true history of our area will be showcased everywhere in our cities for the future generations learn, from a young age, to appreciate the people, cultures, sovereignty and legacy of the nations of people that lived in this country before the Europeans arrived.

CITY OF NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA
CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2018-098

RECOGNIZING THE SECOND MONDAY OF OCTOBER AS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY

WHEREAS, the City of Northfield was established in 1856, after Indigenous Dakota and Ojibwe Peoples of the region were forcibly removed from the lands upon which they had lived since time immemorial; and

WHEREAS, the United States federal government, the State of Minnesota, and the City of Northfield recognize Columbus Day on the second Monday of October, in accordance with the federal holiday established in 1937.

WHEREAS, the idea of Indigenous Peoples Day was first proposed in 1977 by a delegation of Native nations to the United Nations sponsored International Conference on Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations in the Americas; and

WHEREAS, in 1990 representatives from 120 Indigenous nations at the First Continental Conference on 500 Years of Indian Resistance unanimously passed a resolution to transform Columbus Day into an occasion to strengthen the process of continental unity and struggle towards liberation, and thereby use the occasion to reveal a more accurate historical record.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL THAT:

1. The City Council that the City of Northfield shall recognize Indigenous Peoples Day in addition to Columbus Day on the second Monday in October annually hereafter.
2. The City of Northfield encourages businesses, organizations and public entities to recognize Indigenous Peoples Day on the second Monday of October, and “seek to promote practices and policies that honor the state's Indigenous roots, history, and contributions and reflect the experiences of Indigenous Peoples to insure greater access and opportunity”. (Governor Dayton's Indigenous Peoples Day Proclamation, October 2016).
3. That Indigenous Peoples Day shall be used to reflect upon the history of how Indigenous Peoples have been treated over time, to celebrate the contributions to the thought and culture of the region made by Dakota, Ojibwe, and other Indigenous nations, and to consider the ongoing struggles and sacrifices of Indigenous people on this land.

PASSED by the City Council of the City of Northfield on this 2nd day of October 2018.

ATTEST

City Clerk

Mayor

VOTE: ___ POWNELL ___ COLBY ___ DELONG ___ NAKASIAN
 ___ NESS ___ PETERSON WHITE ___ ZWEIFEL