Accomplice

A Relationship Renewed

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The University of Notre Dame is a school with a rich Native heritage, but few on campus understand how integral the *Pokégnek Bodéwadmik,* the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, were to the school's founding. Jules Downing and Lauren Klein recently conducted an Indigenous People Inclusion Survey where the majority of student participants revealed how little they are taught about the history of the Potawatomi.[1] There have been attempts, however, to make this history more accessible. This year the Student Senate overwhelmingly passed a proposal to include Native history in the first-year Moreau course. Further progress has been made in recent years with the contextualization of the Columbus Murals and renewed interest in hiring Native faculty, but these changes have not been carried out with deliberate speed. Appeals for the student body to understand the context in which Notre Dame was established and continues to exist are not accusations against Notre Dame or any administration; rather, they are meant to teach students the nuanced history of this area. This history reveals that there would not be a University of Notre Dame without the local Potawatomi.

I am calling for a relationship renewed between the University and the Pokagon Band. Notre Dame should celebrate its shared stories with the Potawatomi. The Pokagon are proud of their shared history with Notre Dame and wish this pride was reciprocated. Notre Dame still remembers the Pokagon with annual gifts of food baskets, but their relationship with the tribe has waned in recent years. The baskets they give should not be a singular annual event, but instead part of a larger conversation. To move forward, Notre Dame must renew their relationship with the Potawatomi and include them in conversations about Notre Dame's future, a future where they have a permanent seat at the table, perhaps with elders in residence playing part of that role. Small things the Native American Students' Association at Notre Dame (NASAND) have called for include scholarships for Native students, especially the Pokagons, more recruitment of Native students, a university-backed powwow, the Pokagon flag flown over the football stadium, and a Native center as a foundation for Native students in the future. I am hopeful that the administration will consider these ideas and include the Potawatomi in these discussions.

[1] It's important to note that the majority of participants were AMST or Peace Studies majors and had enough of an interest in Native affairs to fill out the survey. I would imagine the rates would be even lower if the survey was taken by the entire campus.

In this article, I will detail a brief history of the Potawatomi until Badin arrived in 1830 because to understand the history of Notre Dame, one must first understand the history of those who came before us and remain here today. I want to thank a number of people who have helped me in this research including R. David Edmunds (Cherokee), Christopher Wetzel, Blaire Topash-Caldwell (Pokagon), Zada Ballew (Pokagon), Jefferson Ballew (Pokagon), Bob Walls, Ben Secunda, John Low (Pokagon), Will Newkirk and Brian Collier who have all aided in my work and helped me better understand and appreciate not only Potawatomi history but all Native history.

The Potawatomi belong to the Algonquin family, and their story begins long before Badin arrived in 1830, even before French explorers and traders encountered them in the early 17th century. According to some oral traditions, the Potawatomi's ancestors, the *Anishinaabeg*, lived by the coastlines of the Atlantic Ocean before migrating to the Great Lakes area centuries ago.[2] They then split into three groups once they arrived: the Ojibwa (Chippewa), the Odawa (Ottawa) and the Potawatomi. The Ojibwa were known as the eldest brother, the Keepers of the Faith. The Odawa were the middle brother, Keepers of the Trade. The Potawatomi were the youngest brother, Keepers of the Fire. Together, these nations formed the Council of Three Fires, an alliance that negotiated treaties together with the British and early American governments. Other pieces of oral tradition assert the Potawatomi migrated south from modern-day Canada, north of Lakes Superior and Huron, centuries ago or were lowered by the Creator through a hole in the sky along the St. Joseph River.[3] No matter the exact origins, the Potawatomi would inhabit lands in the Great Lakes area south of the Ojibwa and Odawa, and by 1600 Potawatomi lands encompassed most of modern Michigan, northern Indiana, southwestern Wisconsin, and northeastern Illinois.

The Potawatomi consisted of clans represented by an ancestor from the broader world, like a bear or turtle.[4] The Potawatomi's social organization was incredibly strong and complex and was not reliant on an overarching chief. There were multiple *wkamek*[5] within the Potawatomi. To make decisions, *wkamek* needed approval from a majority of tribal adults within public assemblies, with elders wielding the most influence. This early form of republicanism frustrated Europeans and Americans who wanted quick approval from a singular "chief." They often attempted to influence sympathetic or easily manipulated tribal members.[6] These faux *wkamek* were rejected by the Potawatomi, but later governments pointed to agreements these *wkamek* signed as proof land had been given away, even though these members had no right to do so. The frustration these early settlers felt towards the Potawatomi's republican-like government can be encapsulated by a quote from the trader John Kinzie in an 1819 letter to the Governor of Michigan, Lewis Cass, who said:

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[2] Wetzel, Christopher. *Gathering the Potawatomi Nation* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 22.
[3] Low, John. *Imprints: The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians and the City of Chicago.* East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2016), 12, 3.
[4] Ibid., 16.
[5] *Wkama* (s.); *wkamek* (pl.)
[6] Clifton, James A. *The Pokagons, 1683-1983: Catholic Potawatomi Indians of the St. Joseph River Valley.* (New York: Lanham, 1984), 5.

"Divided into small villages, at the head of each . . . a Chief who holds himself independent, on this account it is impossible to get the general consent of their nations without calling a meeting of every individual composing them who are perfectly republican & will not acknowledge anything well done, which is not done by the whole or a majority of them."[7]

Even into the early 19th century there was a fundamental misunderstanding of how different Native communities worked as Europeans tried to overlay their own belief systems on the Native people they encountered.

The first European interactions with the Potawatomi were with 17th century French explorers. The French called them the *Pouteouatami* which they learned from their Ojibwa and Odawa guides, but the Potawatomi referred to themselves as the *Neshnabe,*[8] translated as "human beings."[9] By the mid-17th century, the Potawatomi were already technologically advanced in relation to other Algonquin tribes. Their framed-up canoe technology allowed them to travel long distances via waterway, and their access to birch trees made constructing these canoes possible. By this time, they had already learned horticulture and were able to produce large yields of maize, squash, and beans which created surpluses they could trade.[10] The Potawatomi's system of governance even embraced certain republican virtues that the later United States would extol. This, their agricultural prowess, and craftsmanship distinguished them in European perspectives from nearby tribes.

In the mid-17th century, the Potawatomi were the largest tribe in the Great Lakes region. They entered the fur trade with the French and developed a mutually beneficial relationship. French priests, notably the Jesuit missionary Claude Allouez, were even invited by the Potawatomi in the late 1670s. Allouez established a mission in Niles, Michigan soon thereafter. These "Black Robes," however, would leave the area following the French and Indian War in 1763, and organized Christianity would not return until Badin arrived in 1830. Some of the Potawatomi women conceived children with French men in the region, and the two groups formed political and cultural ties with the French learning the Potawatomi language and trading according to Potawatomi customs for the most part.[11] The children from these marriages would be known as the *Metis*, and they would often serve as intermediaries between the Potawatomi and future colonial governments. An unfortunate consequence of the Potawatomi's growing reliance on the fur trade, however, was their overhunting and over-trapping of beavers which resulted in heightened competition between tribes for depleted resources and the subsequent Beaver Wars of 1641 between the northern Algonquin tribes, including the Potawatomi, and the Iroquois.[12] The Iroquois would force the Potawatomi north until they successfully fought back for their land in the late 17th century.

Conflict did not stop there for the Potawatomi. They were brought into the French and Indian War in 1754 where a majority fought alongside the French. After the British won the war in

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[7] Kinzie to Governor Lewis Cass, Nov. 1819, TP-US 10: 877. Retrieved from Clifton, 4.
[8] *Neshnabe* (s.); *Neshnabek* (pl.) Low, 12.
[9] Clifton, 1.
[10] Ibid., 2.
[11] Low, 18.
[12] Ibid.

1763, the British ceased to engage in the same kinship relationships the French had with the Potawatomi, emphasizing profits over relationship-building.[13] This decision caused the Potawatomi to become even more reliant on trade goods and products from Europe. The British made a key misstep, however, after coming to a peace with the Potawatomi. Previously, the French had a custom with the Potawatomi where they would deliver presents to them during trade negotiations, and this custom held great symbolism within the tribe. General Jeffery Amherst, appointed the new military governor of Canada upon Britain's victory, ordered his officials to stop delivering presents to their new allies.[14] The Potawatomi were deeply offended by this violation, and in 1763 many joined the Ojibwa and Odawa and other allies in Pontiac's War. This resistance was initially successful and within two months every British post west of the Niagara besides Detroit and Fort Pitt was destroyed.[15] The conflict eventually ended in a stalemate after the Indians' defeat at Detroit. The Proclamation of 1763 followed, which declared a boundary between English settlements in the East and Indian lands westward. The English Crown declared only the British government could purchase lands from the tribes and no settlers were allowed to move onto Indian lands. The Potawatomi would still skirmish with the British in the coming years, but a different country would soon cause them more trouble -- the newly established United States of America.

There was great variety in how individual Potawatomi bands became involved in the Revolutionary War. The Detroit bands fought for the British while the Potawatomi at St. Joseph, Illinois and Wisconsin waited patiently to see who they should side with.[16] Many bands would eventually side with the British, including ones at St. Joseph, but others remained neutral and preferred to keep their ties with the Spanish and French in Louisiana. The war ended in 1783, but the Potawatomi and Americans differed on who owned the land in the Northwest. The Americans claimed the Potawatomi had forfeited rights to their land because of their defense of the British. Skirmishes followed as settlers crossed into Indian territory, increasing after Congress enacted the Northwest Ordinance in 1787. This ordinance outlined a mechanism to turn territories into states and demonstrated America's resolve to expand westward.

The Potawatomi, hoping for British support, continued to fight with America and dealt multiple blows to the American military. In 1791, the Potawatomi and other tribes fought against Governor Arthur St. Clair. They delivered one of the heaviest American military defeats in history: 630 American men died and 283 seriously wounded out of a force of 3,000 men. At the time this was almost the entire standing army of the United States.[17] Nonetheless, the Potawatomi and their allies would soon suffer a debilitating loss in 1794 at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, where General Anthony Wayne overran them and made them flee to the safety of the British-controlled Fort Miami. Unbeknownst to the Indians, however, the British were working on a peace treaty with the Americans and refused to allow the

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[13] Low, 19.
[14] Clifton, 24.
[15] Ibid., 25.
[16] Edmunds, R. David. 1978. *The Potawatomis: Keepers of the Fire.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. Page 99.
[17] Clifton, 32.

Indians to take shelter in their fort.[18] The Indians would sue for peace and eventually agreed to the 1795 Treaty of Greenville where modern-day Ohio was ceded to the United States. American forts were established throughout their territory, and the Indians recognized American sovereignty while America recognized the land rights of the Indians. The American government promised to deal with the Indians fairly, and they only allowed land to be sold to the United States government.

Despite these promises made by the American government, more lopsided land sales took place in the coming years, and many Potawatomi grew frustrated. This frustration led some younger Potawatomi to join the pan-Indian prophetic movement led by Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee Prophet, who preached nativist resistance against the white man.[19] In 1806, the Prophet and his brother Tecumseh traveled across the Midwest to recruit members to their cause. They built a village called Prophetstown where hundreds of Natives flocked to resist American expansion, but it was later destroyed by William Henry Harrison at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811. War again erupted between America and the British in 1812, and most of the Potawatomi sided with the British including those aligned with the Prophet and Tecumseh. The British Indian agents after the Revolutionary War kept close ties with the Potawatomi to maintain their near monopoly on the fur trade in the old Northwest and to keep the Natives as a buffer between the U.S. and Canada. At this time, the Potawatomi had been dealing with the British for decades, and since the Americans continued to expand, most of them allied themselves with the British out of self-preservation. The Potawatomi won a key battle at the Battle of Fort Dearborn in 1812, but it is often considered a Pyrrhic victory as it shifted American public opinion towards having the Potawatomi removed after it was dubbed a “massacre” by the American media. Tecumseh would die in the war at the Battle of the Thames in 1813, and his death marked the end of large-scale Potawatomi resistance.[20] The Treaty of Ghent, ratified by the British and American governments in 1815, ended the War of 1812, but Britain largely abandoned the Potawatomi who were reluctant to accept the terms of the treaty.

More American settlers migrated to the West after the Erie Canal was completed in 1825, and land sales continued to occur, often at a fraction of the land’s value. Faux *wkamek* signed some of these sales, and in others American colonizers used whiskey to convince alcoholic *wkamek* to sign over their lands. From 1816-1833, the Potawatomi were a part of over thirty land cession agreements.[21] The Indian Removal Act was signed in 1830 by President Jackson. Leopold Pokagon, a *wkama* within the St. Joseph River Valley Potawatomi, implored Father Gabriel Richard in Detroit to send them a priest that same year. This was a strategic choice; Pokagon wanted to demonstrate to the American government that his band could assimilate. Their Catholicism would be the sole reason the Pokagon band would be allowed to stay in the Michiana area as outlined in the Treaty of Chicago in 1833 that removed the rest of the Potawatomi.

Richard sent Father Stephen Badin to serve the Potawatomi, and two other Catholic missionaries came with Badin: Father Benjamin Petit and Father Louis Deseille. Petit would

[18] Edmunds, 132.
[19] Ibid., 165.
[20] Low, 22.
[21] Ibid., 23.

become a martyr who died on the Trail of Death as he administered to the Potawatomi on their forced removal. Deseille would stand up for the Catholic Potawatomi and directly opposed Indian Agent Abel C. Pepper's attempts to remove them before his death in 1837.[22] These priests defended the Potawatomi when other missionaries and the government advocated for their removal, and Notre Dame should celebrate the lives of these Catholic missionaries. In the early 1830s, Badin purchased the land that would become the University. In 1835, Badin donated these purchased lands to the Diocese of Vincennes who would then turn it over to Father Edward Sorin CSC when he arrived in 1841 on the condition that he found a school. The Potawatomi were the ones who fed and housed Sorin when he arrived in South Bend in the winter. The Potawatomi were likely some of the first students at the school. Notre Dame owes its founding to the Potawatomi who asked for Catholics to come again into this area.

Entire books could be written just on the intricacies of the Treaty of Chicago or the Potawatomi involvement in the Revolutionary War or the War of 1812, and I barely addressed the Trail of Death which many of the Potawatomi were forced on by American colonizers in 1838. This history is important because it reveals that the story of Notre Dame does not start with Sorin in 1842 or with Badin in 1830. It starts with the Potawatomi who asked for and welcomed Catholics into their lands. The Pokagon Band is an anomaly amongst other tribal bands and nations across the country, particularly in the East and Midwest, because they remained in their ancestral lands when the American government attempted to remove them. Notre Dame's relationship with the Potawatomi is an ongoing story, and the Pokagon Band remains in the area today. Notre Dame students are largely unaware of this history, but small steps have been taken in recent years to tell the Potawatomi story and contextualize the Native experience on campus. I am hopeful that Notre Dame will further develop and renew its relationship with the Potawatomi and make the basket-sharing tradition a part of a larger conversation. I am also hopeful that Notre Dame will continue to listen to its Native students and remember the Native heritage that is intertwined with its history. Just as Badin came to serve the Potawatomi, I know that Notre Dame will listen to and serve its Native neighbors and students.

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[22] Clifton, 69.