

PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE AGENDA

***April 20 ~ 5:00 p.m.
City Hall Conference Room***

(Administration, Personnel, Legal, Finance, PEG Access, Municipal Liquor, Police & Fire)

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. FOLLOW UP WITH UPSTREAM TV REPRESENTATIVES
3. REVIEW OF THE CHIEF BEMIDJI STATUE PLAQUES
4. ADJOURN

MISSION STATEMENT

Provide leadership and coordination for the City Council in public policy areas related to:

- *Internal council policies and procedures*
- *External relations to other units of government and service providers*
- *Community governance and civic relations*
- *Advisory boards and commissions*

MEMO

To: City of Bemidji Public Affairs Committee: Ron Johnson, Michael Meehlhause, Reed Olson.

From: Plaque sub-committee: Sandy Kaul, Kathryn "Jody" Beaulieu, Mitch Blessing, Carolyn Jacobs, Mary Ringhand.

Date: April 16, 2015

Re: Chief Bemidji Statue Committee Response to Council Feedback on the submitted Plaque Text

The Chief Bemidji Statue Committee and its plaque sub-committee would like to respond to feedback from several Councilors who expected the text to be more "a celebration of Chief Bemidji." rather than the biography and historical framework we have submitted. We have carefully considered Council feedback and after long and thoughtful discussions, and after careful consideration, we respectfully prefer to retain the text that has been submitted. However, we would like to add several words and sentences to help readers better understand the purpose and meaning of the plaques. The revised plaque text is attached with the additions highlighted in yellow.

"You can't heal from that which you don't understand."

-- Dr. Joy DeGruy, author, lecturer, and consultant in the area of social justice.

Our project includes commissioning a life and a half size bronze statue of Shaynowishkung, constructing a platform and informational signage where the statue would be located, and publishing an educational booklet that will include a broader history, photographs, maps, etc. The plaque theme of "Shaynowishkung and the times in which he lived," has been guiding our research efforts from the beginning. Committee members have been doing historical research for over three years. Our plaques and booklet will contain not only the story of Shaynowishkung's personal life, but an historical framework about the times in which he lived. Our committee feels strongly that by revealing the truth about the history that touched the lives of all Anishinaabe in our region, we can take advantage of this unique teaching and connecting opportunity. We believe that without the truth about our shared history, there can be no understanding, much less healing. It is our belief that truth and reconciliation begins with the truth.

"The information on the plaques is so moving I was brought to tears. Thank you to the committee for bringing this issue to the forefront in our community through a great leader and through art."—Arts Commission member.

In the long process of researching Shaynowishkung, we found a limited amount of verifiable information, most of which we included in the plaque text. The committee painstakingly undertook the process of weeding out niceties about Shaynowishkung that had no citable references, statements that up until now have been carried forth in print and painted a simple story. Understanding Shaynowishkung's life required the reader to understand the time period in which he lived. How do you mention him leaving Bemidji without details about the railroad and survey? How do you interpret his quote about being removed to White Earth if you don't understand the U.S. government's role in removal and reservations? It is understandable that people unfamiliar with this history will have various reactions to it. As part of honoring Shaynowishkung and the Anishinaabe people of our area through a high-quality, durable, respectful statue, the committee felt compelled to honor the experiences of Shaynowishkung and the Ojibwe by telling the truth about what occurred. Truth telling is the beginning of the healing process.

"I thought the text was excellent, although incredibly sad." —Arts Commission member.

It is also our belief that these plaques fall within the Anishinaabe tradition of storytelling and that they reflect our community's desire to improve race relations through actions and education. We believe that Bemidji's Shared Vision group, the Chief Bemidji Statue committee, and the local Truth and Reconciliation efforts put Bemidji among communities who are part of a national and international trend to address the reconciliation and healing of diverse communities.

"The worst thing you can do to a people is rob them of the memory of themselves."

-- Randal Robinson, writer and professor of law at Penn State University, writing in his book *Quitting America*.

Shaynowishkung

He Who Rattles · Chief Bemidji

1834-1904

Shaynowishkung was born about 1834 near Inger, MN. His name in Ojibwemowin means "He Who Rattles." As a young man, he hunted and harvested throughout this area, which had been a village site, gathering place and thoroughfare for thousands of years.

In 1860 he and Gaagige-aanakwadookwe "Forever Cloud Woman" were married. When his wife died in 1882, he moved with his children and other families to the south shore of Bemijigamaag (Lake Bemidji). This Ojibwe place name describes the way the Mississippi River flows crosswise through the lake. As a respected elder in his 50s, Shaynowishkung was present as white settlers moved to this area in 1888. Accounts in newspapers later referred to him as "Chief Bemidji."

He had been living at his home on the lake for over a decade when the Great Northern Railroad surveyed a route directly through his property. To keep his land he tried to secure an allotment, and later attempted to relinquish his tribal affiliation in order to claim a homestead, all to no avail. In 1900 Shaynowishkung and the people of his village were removed to the Cass Lake (Leech Lake) Reservation. Three years later his home was razed to make room for the mill yards of the Crookston Lumber Company.

In 1904, at the age of 70, Shaynowishkung died of pneumonia at his allotment northwest of Kitchi Lake. Hundreds came to Bemidji to honor him. Flags were flown at half mast and businesses were closed. The funeral was one of the largest, most impressive events ever held in the city at that time. His body lay in state at city hall until a large procession, including the city council and several civic societies, marched to Greenwood Cemetery where he was buried with honors. (Bemidji Pioneer, 1904) There are conflicting accounts of Shaynowishkung's burial site; some suggest he was buried in the Mission area near Cass Lake.

Dedicated June 6, 2015

Artist: Gareth Curtiss · Commissioned by the City of Bemidji

The Statue Committee included six of Shaynowishkung's descendants whose input was invaluable.

Promises Made, Promises Broken

"The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians, their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; ..."

- Northwest Ordinance July 13, 1787

Shaynowishkung's life in this region spanned a time of great change for indigenous people in Minnesota and across the country. As self-sufficient sovereign nations the Ojibwe inhabited all of northern Minnesota. Their way of life, tied closely to the land itself, had sustained them for centuries. Settlement and US Treaties threatened this existence.

During this time federal policy toward American Indians resulted in a great loss of land. Many tribes resisted the 1830 *Indian Removal Act* which opened up land for white settler expansion by moving Indigenous Americans to territory west of the Mississippi River. The 1837 *Treaty with the Chippewa* was the first large land cession in which Ojibwe retained usufructuary [inherent] rights to hunt, fish and gather on ceded lands.

By 1880 developing reservoir systems resulted in dams built on Ojibwe lands -without their consent- to benefit business interests throughout the state. Damming the headwaters caused the flooding of Ojibwe graveyards, wild rice beds, cranberry bogs, sugar maple groves, gardens and villages, further threatening the peoples' way of life.

In 1887, the *Dawes Allotment Act* called for individual ownership of communally held tribal lands. The plan was for Indians to become farmers who would assimilate into general society. Remaining lands were opened up to settlers and logging or taken through fraudulent means.

The *Nelson Act* of 1889, entitled "*An Act for the Relief and Civilization of the Chippewa Indians in the State of Minnesota,*" was intended to remove all Ojibwe in the state to the White Earth Reservation. Many resisted such resettlement. The Red Lake Band steadfastly refused allotment and relocation.

Throughout these times the Ojibwe demanded that legal obligations be honored, such as fair payment owed for lands ceded and lands flooded. As treaty promises continued to be ignored, Indian land diminished from 138 million acres in 1887 to 48 million acres in 1934. Claims pertaining to many of these past matters remain unresolved today.

Tragedy and Survival

"Here now, it is winter, and not a dollar of their annuities, which by solemn treaty stipulations...ought to have been paid months ago, have any of these destitute tribes received."

-Minnesota Pioneer, Nov 21, 1850

As the result of many broken treaty agreements Shaynowishkung and the Anishinaabe of this region saw great tragedy including displacement, starvation and death.

The 1850 Sandy Lake Tragedy saw four hundred Ojibwe suffer and die in three months. They were forced to travel to Sandy Lake to receive their annuity payments, yet government agents failed to arrive on the appointed date. In the interim, living conditions deteriorated as a harsh winter set in. The Ojibwe came to know Sandy Lake as the place where they buried their friends.

"We have been called here, and made to suffer by sickness, by death, by hunger and cold. I lay it all to him...the Governor [Ramsey]. Tell him I blame him for the children we have lost, for the sickness we have suffered and for the hunger we have endured. The fault rests on his shoulders."

-December 3, 1850, Eshkibagikoonzh "Chief Flat Mouth"

The 1862 Dakota War occurred when the Dakota wanted their promised annuity payments to be made directly to them, rather than through the traders, whose fairness was in question. When the traders learned of this they refused to sell provisions on credit.

"So far as I am concerned, if they are hungry let them eat grass or their own dung."

-Infamous insult by Andrew Myrick, spokesman for the traders, August 15, 1862.

The Dakota War was the direct result of widespread poverty and starvation. When warfare broke out among the Dakota and the settlers, Shaynowishkung became famous for his speech to assembled Ojibwe braves "when by his reasoning he prevented the Chippewa from joining the Dakota in the historic New Ulm Massacre" in which many hundreds died. -Blackduck American, 1904. Trials and sentencing of over 1000 Dakota led to the hanging of 38 warriors in Mankato on December 26, 1862. This remains the largest mass-execution in US history

The Battle of Sugar Point in 1898 was a result of conflicts between the Leech Lake Ojibwe and the U.S. government over timber sales on the reservation. Timber companies were breaking the law, paying the tribe a fraction of negotiated timber prices. Shaynowishkung is said to have warned Bemidji residents of the pending danger, prompting women and children to move to safety.

Despite unimaginable tragedies and injustices, indigenous people of this region (and throughout the U.S.) survived. Today the Anishinaabe continue to heal and rebuild strong, healthy nations in order to live Bimaadiziwin [a good life].

Leader And Peacemaker

"I wish you would listen in pity to my words for only a few moments. You see that I am now nothing but a corpse, but I will try to speak my mind to you. Regarding...our removal, what shall we do when we get there? ... How shall we manage to get ahead so that we can become self-supporting? ... How shall we subsist when you have anchored us there? We will be very much obliged to you if you will please state to us what we may expect when we get there and what our progress will be."

-Speaking at the Rice Commission Council, August 3, 1889, at Gull Lake, Shaynowishkung questions government officials regarding their attempt to remove all Ojibwe to White Earth

"Look at me, whites...I have a good heart. I heard in Cass Lake today what the paper said about trouble again. I am not one that is going to fight; I don't want to fight."

-Cass Lake Times, June 29, 1899. As an elder, Shaynowishkung speaks about non-Indians having to leave town land they had been illegally squatting on

Newspaper accounts describe Shaynowishkung as an orator, a spokesperson and a man of wisdom and peace who helped address difficult issues facing the people of Bemidji. Shaynowishkung became famous for his speech to assembled braves "when by his reasoning he prevented the Chippewa from joining the Sioux in the historic New Ulm Massacre." Blackduck American, 1904.

Through his words and actions Shaynowishkung exemplified the traditional values of the Anishinaabe: *Humility, Truth, Courage, Honesty, Respect, Love, and Wisdom*

This monument honors Shaynowishkung and the Anishinaabe people and encourages the healing of all people. Truth-telling is the basis for the acknowledgment of injustice and suffering and the restoration of human dignity.

The honor of one is the honor of all.

-The Chief Bemidji Statue Committee

Gitchi-miigwetch to our Leadership Partners

and to all whose gifts made this memorial possible:

City of Bemidji · George W. Neilson Foundation · Beltrami County · Alan Brew · Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe · Joseph & Janice Lueken Family Foundation · Carolyn Jacobs & Chuck Meyer ·

Sanford Bemidji Medical Center