Cheboygan’s “First People” Part I
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By Rick Wiles

Dr. Charles Cleland, a retired Michigan State University professor of anthropology and author of the book, Rites of Conquest, has stated that the northwestern Michigan’s “Traverse Corridor” was in use by early Native Americans beginning thousands of years ago.

The “Corridor,” from Grand Traverse Bay to the Mackinac Straits, and inland along the natural waterway from Little Traverse Bay northeast to the Cheboygan River (and into Lake Huron), was home to a Woodland Indian “Canoe Culture.” Artifacts of that culture have been discovered dating back to 8,000 B.C.

The “First People” in the Tip of the Mitt area were mostly summer visitors, coming south from Canada, and north from the Ohio Valley, in an annual warm-season migration. Once here, they would use birch bark canoes to fish along the Upper Great Lakes shoreline, and the many inland lakes of the region. They would hunt, gather, and grow some crops in their summer villages.

The first known permanent village of the Tip of the Mitt, where its residents remained during all months of the year, was the settlement on Lake Cheboygan (now Burt Lake), near the opening of the Maple River.

The word “cheboyganing” is an Algonquin language term for passing through, or passageway. Native American’s traveling the river highway by canoe from Lake Michigan inland, through a series of rivers and lakes, would pass through Lake Cheboygan on their way to Lake Huron (or vice versa). By traveling the inland water route, the birch bark canoers escaped the treacherous waters of the Straits of Mackinac.

By the early 1770s, the Tip of the Mitt region was home to various Bands of Native Americans. They had migrated west from the eastern areas of North America.

At the time of first contact (Native American with Europeans - the 1600s), the French had encountered North America’s “First People” (Anishinaabe) living near what the French soon called, the Ottawa River. It flowed east to west from near a large lake, later named Nipissing, into the St. Lawrence River.

These “First People” were soon recognized by the European newcomers as those who would trade their wares of cornmeal, furs, sunflower oil, skins, baskets, rugs, mats, medicinal roots and herbs with other
Cheboigian Lake

Indian Village (1820s-1900)

- Indian Point
- Brutus
- City of Cheboygan
- Indian River
Bands. The French named them “Ottawa,” and Algonquin language term for trader. As they moved further west, the French encountered many other Bands of “First People,” one being the Ojibwa (Ojibweg), an Algonquin term for “those who record information by drawing glyphs (pictographs) and signs on birch bark (visions).

By the mid 1700s, the Ottawa, Ojibwa (and Potawatomi), “First People” had migrated west from the eastern coastal area of upper North America (Land of the Dawn or Bitter Water) into the Upper Great Lakes region where they formed an alliance referred to as the Council of Three Fires. The alliance was in response to rivalries with the Iroquois to the east, and the Dakota to the west. The trading nature of the Ottawa, and their extensive trade network in the interior of the continent soon introduced the French to many various Bands of Anishinaabe.

Dr. Dennis Albert’s 1987 horticultural study of Indian Point, along the Inland Waterway’s Lake Cheboigaming (Bur Lake), found signs of Anishinaabe culture that dates back to the 1300s. Dr. Helen Tanner, in her 1986 research book titled, Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History, found most Native American villages in the upper Great Lakes were located along a Great Lake shoreline, or inland, along a stream, river, or sheltered bay of a lake. Always, they were located where fresh water was readily available.

In the case of the Cheboigaming Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, that village was located on a long peninsula (Indian Point) extending into Lake Cheboigaming, in the center of Michigan’s “Tip of the Mitt” area. A “river highway” or inland water route existed in this Tip of the Mitt area. Those in canoes traveling southwest or northeast would pass through Lake Cheboigaming and its shoreline Indian Village. Henry Francis Walling, a noted University of Indiana cartographer, and author of the, Atlas of the State of Michigan, according to the book The Diary of Frederic Baraga, located a permanent village of the Cheboigaming Indians on Indian Point by 1720:

Upper Great Lakes Region Indian Village - 1830s

“The village, also called Sheboygan, is located on the western side of Burt Lake in Cheboygan County. From Little Traverse one could canoe via Round Lake and Round Lake River, Crooked Lake and the Crooked River to an area of the Maple River, which empties just south of the Indian village. The location was a permanent settlement since c. 1720.”

Dr. Helen Tanner, places the permanent settlement as being in place by the 1760s. It was the first permanent, non-migrating settlement of Native People in northern Michigan. The settlement of Indian Village, near the inlet of the Maple River, which flowed into Lake Cheboigaming from the wetlands of northern Michigan, and from Douglas Lake to the immediate north. That river provided year round open water, as well as a year around fish supply for the village.

Instead of migrating south to winter hunting grounds, the Cheboigaming Band stayed put at their village. Soon, surrounding trees were girdled, and burned, to provide open pasture land where crops could be grown. Eventually, close to 200+ acres of open land were in use as fields for corn, potatoes, squash,
Native American treaty negotiators in Washington, D.C.
and pasture land. The local maple trees were also harvested for their sap-syrup every spring. The village was self-sustaining. Everyone, as was tradition, looked out for each other.

The homes along the shoreline of Lake Cheboiganning were most likely first constructed using pole frames, covered with large sheets of elm, or birch bark, or even rush mats woven together for winter survival. The village was populated with about 50 individuals, made up of children, adults, elders, and a headman or woman (Ogima-Chief).

During the summer the pieces of tree bark could be replaced by woven reed mats. By the 1830s and 1840s, most Indian settlements saw the erection of log cabins. That did not happen at Indian Village until the late 1840s and early 1850s. Eventually, the resident farmers, hunters, gatherers and fishermen of Indian Village possessed cows, hogs, and horses. A large dog population was also most likely found on Indian Point.

With the passage of President Andrew Jackson's administration's Indian Removal Act in 1830, all Native People east of the Mississippi River were subject to forced removal to west of that river. The completion of the Erie Canal, linking the Hudson River with Lake Ontario, brought a rush of European settlers into the interior region of the Great Lakes. At first, these settlers remained in southern Michigan, but soon they began to push northward.

The Cheboiganning Band's leader Chief Chingassimo, like many other Michigan Indian Band leaders, knew that they had only their land to trade to the government. Their survival as a people was based on their ability to adapt. Chingassimo and other Ogmis were looking to negotiate the trading of their ancestral land for money, education, farming equipment, and the right to stay on some part of their homeland.

The French had been driven out of North America as a result of the French & Indian War. In the 1763 Treaty of Paris, the British gained control of all the Upper Great Lakes Region that include Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin-Minnesota. The British did not take the same approach in their dealings with the Anishinaabe people as had the French. New France, in North America, was sparsely populated by the French Europeans. Only a small number of French officials, members of the military, Jesuit priests and farmers had come to the New World. Over time, many Frenchmen intermarried with Native women and that would produce a new culture, the "Metis" culture (1/2 French - 1/2 Native). Also, a distinct culture of French-Canadian evolved in the New World. Fur trading, not farming or settling, was the overall goal of the French people in the New World. It was the fur trade that brought iron skillets, pots, pans, metal knives, axes, and guns to the "First People, the Anishinaabe. It changed their lives forever.

The French, and then the British, also brought with them to the idea that the New World's Native People owned the land they were living on. It had to be negotiated for, and not overtly taken by military force. That meant diplomacy had to be used within a government to government relationship. Thus, treaties were first negotiated between France and the "First People." The same was true of the British and later, the Americans.
Washington, March 31, 1836

Sister, I am an old man and cannot write well, but you will find my sentiments in this letter. I am sorry to find that the Iroquois have disagreed among themselves. Those Father, and sentiments are, that they will allow others to assert my people, the people. I wish you would inform the Governor in behalf of the reservation (100,000 acres) which was offered in any place, on any terms, you may agree when among others, and I hope that you will do it. Encourage the Mission. Father, we hope you will be charitable to us of our families — and Father, I fear that some Chief love their Indians, I wish to let them have a piece of land — I also Father love mine, I desire you to let him if he, his daughter have a piece of land, for we give you plenty of it Father.

Ke che ne gos e mon (Chingassimo)
for Tyler. He stated there were no plans to remove the Michigan Bands, "Consistent with the obligations of the United States to these Indians... no steps have been taken in relation to their removal..."

Meanwhile, the Michigan House of Representatives member from Mackinac Island, representing the entire county of Michilimackinac, which included in 1844, the area of Indian Village on Lake Cheboygan, suggested in a November 12, 1844, letter that Indian Bands in his state district be allowed to buy their ancestral land parcels. In his letter to Robert Stuart, Acting Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Michigan, Representative William Norman McLeod wrote:

"...I have been informed that the Missionary Francis Pierz, of Arbre Croche, has recently purchased a few sections for public lands in his own name which he holds as trustee of the Bands of that station... I would advise that the government should allow the Indians to purchase lands, and by a liberal exemption law secure to them against seizure and confiscation for any debts..."

Following the advice of Father Francis Pierz, and Michigan legislator William McLeod, Chief Kie-She-go way and his Band members pooled together a total of $355 of individual treaty annuity payment money. Chief Kie-She-go way then took it to Mackinac Island where it was given to Acting Indian Agent James H. Stevens. On October 1, 1845, Mr. Stevens wrote to

William Richmond, his superior, stating:

"I send you this day three hundred and fifty-five dollars. Money left this day by the Chief (Kie She go way) of the Cheboygan (sic) Band of Indians for the purpose of purchasing land on or near Cheboygan Lake. It is for the use of said band of Indians according to a memorandum taken by you at the time of the payment. I send also a profile and explanation left with me. I have given the Chief a receipt for the money to be applied as above."

William A. Richmond of Grand Rapids, Michigan was appointed Superintendent of the Mackinac Indian Agency in Michigan in April of 1845. Prior to his appointment he had worked in the Ionia, Michigan, federal land office. Richmond was written to by James Stevens (Acting Indian Agent-Mackinac Agency-Mackinac Island) on February 2, 1846.

In his letter Stevens said:

"Kie She go way is very anxious about his land and has asked several times if I have heard from you on this subject. The Indians are very busy putting up houses on the land selected by him. They have put up 5 or 6 already and are still at work getting timber for more..."
Ionia, Michigan - General Land Office

Federal land Patents No. 5697-5698-5699-5700-6293-7095=611 acres
The Governor of Michigan in trust for the Sheboygan Indians of whom Kie-She-go way is Chief

To all to whom these Presents shall come, Greeting:

Whereas the Governor of Michigan in trust for the Sheboygan Indians of whom Kie-She-go way is Chief

ALL SIX LAND PATENTS place the Indian Village land in trust to the office of the Governor of Michigan and his successors.
The Band of Cheboigan Indians at Indian Village own their land titles by 1850. All six are written “In trust to the Governor of Michigan and his Successors forever for Chief Kie She go qwe of the Cheboygan Indians.”
By 1855 there was a village of 200 or so Odawa located on Burt Lake with cultivated land, orchards, a large 'sugarbush (maple grove),' two dozen homes (more or less), and a small Catholic church & rectory. With the exception of livestock, the village held undivided property, including some tools furnished under government treaty.
deposited in the General Land Office a certificate of the Register of the Land Office at Ionia . . . full payment has been made by the said Governor of Michigan . . . said tract has been purchased by said Governor of Michigan In Trust for the Sheboygan Indians of whom Kie-Shipogoy is Chief . . . the United States of America . . . do give and grant unto the said The Governor of Michigan and his successors in office, In Trust for The Sheboygan Indians . . . forever."

James K. Polk, President of the United States

On the very same day, June 1, 1848, the General Land Office of the United States issued a land patent No. 24587 to "John S. Barry, Governor of Michigan, and his Successors in Office Forever, In Trust for a Certain Band of Indians residents of Calhoun County Michigan, of whom Muggaw is now Chief. . . ." Governor John S. Barry, in response to northern Michigan's Michigan legislator in Lansing, William Norman McLeod, and Michigan's Superintendent of the Mackinac Indian Agency, William A. Richmond, agreed to have the southern and northern Indian Band's ancestral homeland land patents placed in a trust to the Office of the Governor and his successors – forever, in order that no alienation of their homelands could ever take place.

Over the next two years, Land Patent No. 5698 for 80 acres at Indian Point, No. 5699 for 80 acres, No. 5700 for 65 acres, No. 6293 for 71 acres, No. 7095 for 61 acres were all issued by the General Land Office of the United States "In Trust to the Governor of Michigan and his successors-forever." By the summer of 1855, there was a settlement of 200 Ottawa and Chippewa Cheboiganing Band members at Indian Village, Lake Cheboiganing. A small Catholic Church (St. Mary's), a small log cabin rectory, two dozen cabins, and cultivated fields, orchards, along with a maple sugar tree grove was also in existence.

From 1860 on into the 1890s, the Cheboiganing Band of Ottawa & Chippewa lived on their ancestral homeland at Indian Point, Lake Cheboiganing, in self-sufficient peace. However, the world began to rapidly change for them after the American Civil War. By the year 1900, their world would be turned upside down.

**PART TWO in next month's edition of the Mackinac Journal**

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