Grand Traverse Anishinaabe History Project
Signage proposal
Submitted to the Village Council of Northport
Emily Modrall (Project Lead), in collaboration with the Traverse Area Historical Society and Northport Public Schools
February 2, 2022

Introduction

The goal of the Grand Traverse Anishinaabe History Project is to install new signage in Traverse City and Leelanau County dedicated to local Anishinaabe history. Signs will be placed at locations - or will describe places - that are significant to Anishinaabe traditions and historical knowledge of the land. They will acknowledge the long history, distant and recent, of the Odawa and Ojibway Anishinaabek in this region, and will describe where and how people traveled and lived both prior to and after European trade and settlement around Grand Traverse Bay and throughout what is now Leelanau County.

Proposed Signs in Northport

In partnership with the Grand Traverse Band, project consultants and contributors, the Traverse Area Historical Society, and the Northport Public School, this project proposes to plan and install signs two to three signs on public property in the Village of Northport. Proposed signs would be located at two of the following parks: Bay Front Park, Marina Park, and/or Haserot Park. A third sign would either be placed at the third park on that list, or at another suitable site on Village property (eg, the Northport Trails Trailhead). In the event that additional signs were requested or proposed on private property, the project is prepared to work through zoning approval processes with private partners.

Existing Public History and Project Background

This project was prompted by the observation that Anishinaabe history and language are all but absent from public spaces and from local history as it is currently presented publicly in the City of Traverse City and in the villages of Leelanau County. Where Anishinaabe-language words are used, they are rarely explained. The text and images on existing history-based signage throughout the region demonstrate a distinct focus, to date, on European settlement – and, even more so, on the industry and development that followed – to the near exclusion of earlier, contemporaneous, and recent history of the Kchi Wiikwedong (Grand Traverse Bay) Anishinaabek. There is, therefore, great opportunity to tell a fuller, more inclusive and complex history of the land and people who have lived here. This project seeks to balance the record through added signage; the text will convey an Anishinaabe perspective presented in two languages (Anishinaabemowin and English).

In the spring of 2021, the Traverse Area Historical Society agreed to act as the fiscal agent for this project. The planning phase was funded by a Rotary Charities Seed Grant, and additional planning funding was secured over the summer of 2021.

Through a generous grant from the Native American Heritage Fund in June 2021, funding was awarded to the Northport Public Schools (acting as the fiscal agent, in this case) to integrate the research questions and signage project into their curriculum this year, and to share resources with Suttons Bay and Leland Public Schools. To secure the Native American Heritage Fund grant, the project was approved conceptually and/or supported by the Suttons Bay Village Manager, the Northport Village Council, and the

Leelanau County Commission. For all grant applications submitted to date, the Grand Traverse Band's Tribal Chairman and Tribal Council have written letters of support, outlining the work that the Tribal Government will do towards the completion of the signs.

In January 2022, the City Commission of Traverse City gave unanimous 'conceptual approval' to this project, thereby clearing the way for sign installation in Traverse City. Much like the proposal here, in Traverse City signs will be installed on City property, and the project coordinator (Emily Modrall) will work with City staff to ensure that signs meet safety standards. In Traverse City, the City is preparing a memorandum of understanding to be signed by the Traverse Area Historical Society and the City of Traverse City to define the process and stipulations.

This project is designed to rely upon its consultants and contributors, all of whom currently are Odawa, Ojibway, or Oneida Anishinaabek. Chris Cornelius, Chair of the School of Architecture at the University of New Mexico, has been hired to design the signs. GIS and mapping help, as well as sign-design expertise, has been sought from Little Traverse Bay Band members and employees (working as consultants), and the Grand Traverse Band Cultural Services department is consulted regularly. Grand Traverse Band community members and elders continue to guide and give shape to this project; they will decide what the signs will say. Input from students and teachers at Northport Schools will be factored into signage text and other decisions about sign locations and messages. The Grand Traverse Band will give final approval to the form and content of the signs.

Historical Sources

Rather than simply replicate or echo histories recorded by European settlers (or written later as an academic exercise), this project aims to prepare signage with text that refers to post-1850 documentation while also reflecting the perspectives, ways of remembering, and history-telling of the local Anishinaabek. One standard academic point of reference for regional history is W.B. Hinsdale's 1931 'Archaeological Atlas of Michigan' (Fig. 1). Others include early state surveys, M.L. Leach's 1883 'A History of the Grand Traverse Region', E. Littell's 1965 '100 Years in Leelanau', and H.H. Tanner's 2009 'Mapping the Grand Traverse Indian Country'. These publications indicate that in the mid-1800s, according to those observers' methods, there was much to note related to regional Anishinaabe life and history, from broad observations to specific notes on land use. While not recorded, the remembered history of the Grand Traverse area is part of Kchi Wiikwedong Anishinaabe traditional knowledge; in signage text, history from this perspective will be treated as equally important as that supplied by published materials.

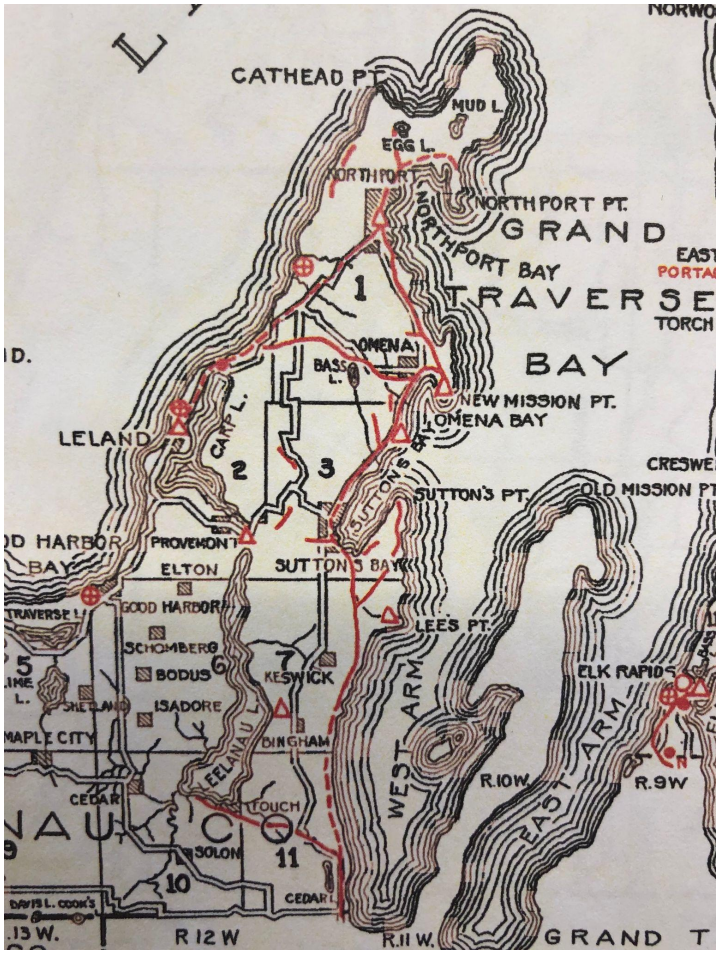
Proposal

- **Two to three new signs to be placed on Village property**
- **Sign design and fabrication costs will be covered by the Grand Traverse Anishinaabe History Project**
- **Installation costs and processes will be discussed with appropriate Village staff; based on other installations on Village property, precedent will be followed if appropriate, or new working agreements formed**
- **Routine upkeep (e.g., mowing, maintenance, re-installation in the event of temporary removal by the Village) to be carried out by the Village of Northport**

Request

Acknowledging that final sign design and texts are pending, and understanding that, in the spirit of this project, sign content should be the purview of the Grand Traverse Band and consultants to this project, conceptual approval is sought from the Village of Northport at this time. With 'in concept' approval, ideally the Village representatives/staff will serve as planning partners, informing the project about logistical parameters and municipal priorities. Under this model, the project and Village would share the common goal of including new Anishinaabe history signage among Village assets and on Village property through the work of this project; no direct (cash) financial contribution will be sought from the Village at any point, although in-kind contributions to installation and upkeep expenses will be considered and defined through the planning process and partnership.

"The past doesn't always define us, but the stories we tell about it do. That's their purpose."
*- Pete Wells (*New York Times*, November 24, 2001, Section D, Page 5)*



EXPLANATION OF CARTOGRAPHIC SYMBOLS

The numbers upon the maps indicate townships, which are listed in Chapter X, "Notes Upon the Archaeological Features of the Counties." The word "vague" beside a symbol indicates that the location was not determined nearer than a section of land.

- Mound
- 4 Figures indicate exact number of mounds in a group
- N Letter N indicates that the number of mounds in group is undetermined
- Circular inclosure
- Incomplete circular inclosure
- Rectangular inclosure
- Incomplete rectangular inclosure
- Irregular earthwork
- Village
- Burying ground
- Garden bed
- Trail
- Trail, location not accurately determined
- Ancient excavation for copper

Fig. 1: From W.B. Hinsdale, 1931: Map (above), Key (below)