



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Fort St. Joseph Archaeology

Partnering with the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi

Western Michigan University anthropology students and citizens of the Pokagon Band have begun to identify areas of shared interest that can be pursued in building a relationship to create more inclusive histories in the St. Joseph River valley.

A HISTORY OF COLLABORATION IN THE ST. JOSEPH RIVER VALLEY

The Potawatomi have a long history of collaborating with non-Natives to achieve their goals. Beginning in the 17th century, their ancestors interacted with fur traders and Jesuits at Fort St. Joseph, a local trading post and mission occupied from 1691 to 1781. The Natives traded furs for imported goods, formed political alliances, and intermarried to solidify their close relationship. By the early 19th century, the Potawatomi had assimilated to some European practices like Christianity and plow agriculture. These so-called “civilized practices” helped some Potawatomi retain their land when the 1833 Treaty of Chicago called for the removal of Natives from the Great Lakes area. A group led by Leopold Pokagon, the chief of the Potawatomi of the St. Joseph River valley, resisted removal. The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi are descendants of this group.



The Band's seal tells the story of a hawk that brought the Potawatomi a piece of the sun, which was the gift of fire. Photo courtesy of the Pokagon Band.

SHARED INTERESTS BETWEEN THE POKAGON BAND AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS

By doing collaborative research, anthropologists create bonds with communities like the Pokagon Band. Collaborative research is mutually beneficial for communities when common interests are identified. Engaging in collaborative projects demonstrates how the discipline of anthropology has become more inclusive and accountable to community groups. Since anthropologists are interested in culture, past and present, they can assist groups like the Pokagon Band in recovering their history and keeping their traditions alive. Together they can work to disseminate knowledge about Native culture to the public.



Furs that would have been traded with Europeans displayed the Archaeology Open House. Photo by Barb Cook.



A wigwam at the Dowagiac Area History Museum's Potawatomi exhibit. The Museum and the Band work together to teach the public about Potawatomi culture. Photo courtesy of the Dowagiac Area History Museum.



Wampum (bead made from shell) found at Fort St. Joseph. Photo by LisaMarie Malischke.



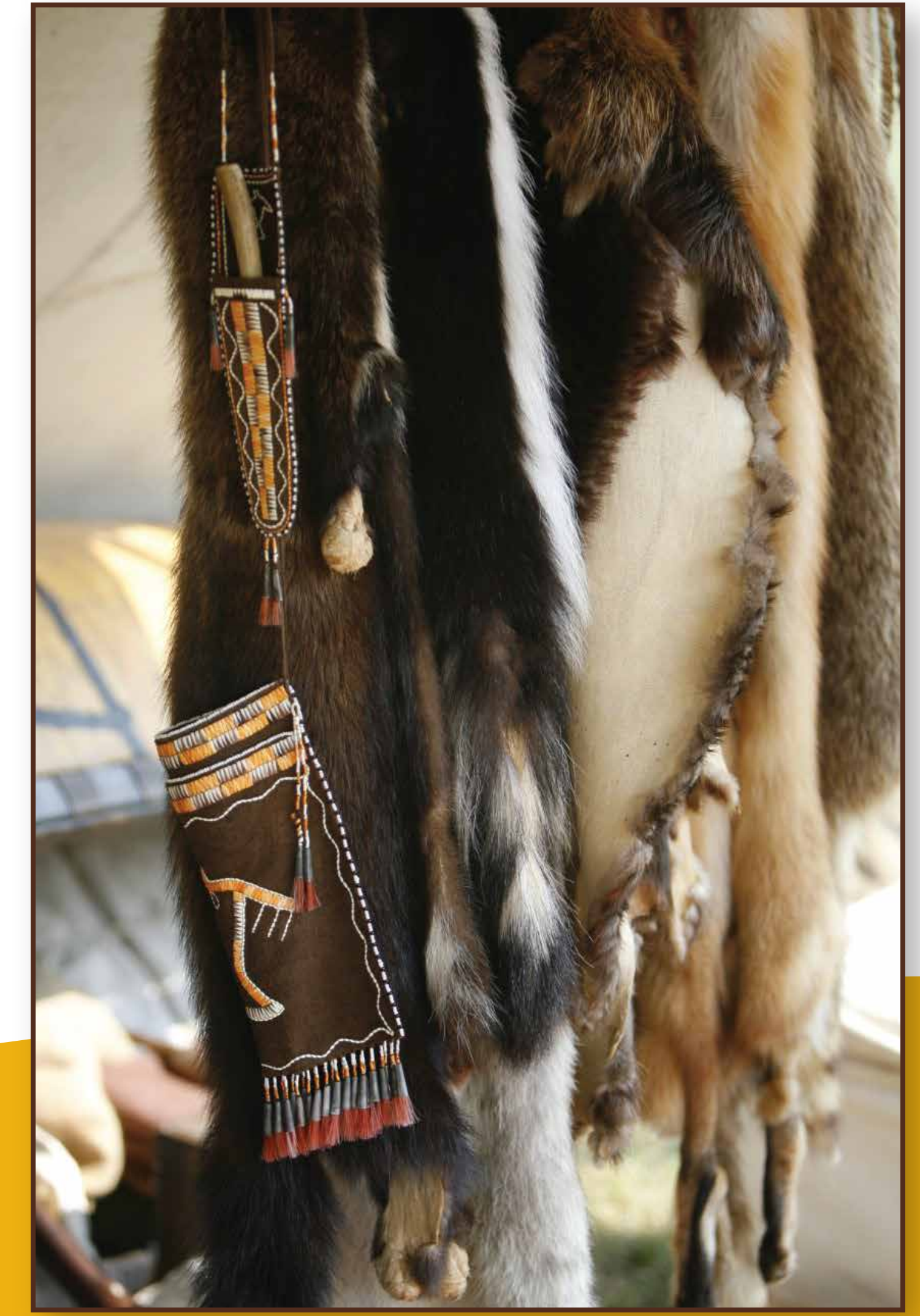
Map depicting the location of Fort St. Joseph and other French sites that were important to Native peoples in the 18th century. Map by Jan Underwood.

WORKING TOGETHER

The Pokagon Band is represented on the Fort St. Joseph Archaeology Advisory Committee and participates in Project activities. Efforts can be made to strengthen the partnership by exploring new areas of shared interest. Both the Pokagon Band and archaeologists are interested in recovering the hidden histories of the Native peoples in southwest Michigan. Collaborating with the Pokagon Band can provide an understanding of their values and their perspectives on the interactions that took place during the fur trade era in the St. Joseph River valley. Both communities are interested in Fort St. Joseph because the site was a multi-ethnic settlement inhabited by both French and Native Americans. Collaboration between anthropologists and Native Americans promotes positive interactions between two groups whose histories were often seen as separate rather than entangled. Furthermore, Native Americans were often marginalized in historical documents, so learning about their history through archaeology and in their own words can challenge current understandings of this chapter of American history.



Basket weaving has remained an important tradition among the Potawatomi. Photo courtesy of the Pokagon Band's Public Archives.



Furs that would have been traded at Fort St. Joseph.



Basket weaving has remained an important tradition among the Potawatomi. Photo courtesy of the Pokagon Band's Public Archives.



A wigwam built by citizens of the Pokagon Band using traditional methods for the Archaeology Open House in 2015. Members of the Advisory Committee were involved in planning for the Open House. That year's theme was architecture. Photo by Genevieve Perry.

KEEPING TRADITIONS ALIVE AN MOVING INTO THE FUTURE

Citizens of the Pokagon Band are interested in preserving and communicating Potawatomi language, culture, and history. It is important to them to revive and maintain traditional values. Native peoples possess knowledge passed down from generation to generation that can assist anthropologists in creating new understandings of the past. Potential collaborations between the two communities include the Next Exit History application, which would be a novel way of sharing history and material culture uncovered at Fort St. Joseph with a wide digital audience. Another partnership could be a lecture series co-hosted by the citizens of the Band and members of the Project. Lectures could feature presentations of interest to both groups such as the ways in which braided knowledge is created about Native and colonial history, traditional practices, oral histories, traditional medicine, and spirituality. Moving forward in collaboration with the citizens of the Pokagon Band can foster connections that will allow for greater knowledge and discovery in the future.



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This exhibit was created and designed by members of the Anthropology in the Community class (ANTH 5030) in Spring 2017 (Jenifer Blouin, Chris Carpenter, Amber Coniglio, Stephanie Flounory, Alyssa Gunn, Stefan Hubble, Hailey Maurer, Jeffrey Nau, Kourtney Potts, Josh Schneider, Kyle Sicotte, Ashley Sussmann, and Meghan Williams under the supervision of Michael S. Nassaney). It was produced with support from the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project, a partnership between Western Michigan University and the City of Niles. Thanks to our community partners who assisted, especially Christina Arseneau, Steve Arseneau, Mary Ellen Drolet, Roger Gregorski, Sharon Gregorski, Christian Johnston, Bob Myers, Sanya Phillips, Ken Sarkozy, Monica Topash, Marcus Winchester, and Michael Worline.