

Chippewas were confined to land over which they once had ruled

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By treaties in 1836, 1837 and 1842 the Chippewa ceded all of their land in Wisconsin to the government and had "gone on the dole."

They were allowed to remain on their land at the pleasure of the president, but that "pleasure" was short-lived. Due to pressure from mining and logging interests, the government decided in 1849 to remove them to land reserved for them in northern Minnesota Territory.

To force them to move, the payment of annuities in October 1851 was transferred from La Pointe to the Sandy Lake Agency, about 60 miles west of the western end of Lake Superior.

The Chippewa sent a large delegation to collect the annuities and inspect the land, but they had to wait until November for the Indian agent who was to make the payments to arrive. Many died from malnutrition and disease, and the survivors returned to Wisconsin determined to resist removal.

Matters were at an impasse because the government would not withdraw the removal order, while the Chippewa were adamant about not moving. Finally, with violent resistance by the Indians looming, a delegation of Indians made an arduous journey to Washington in the spring of 1852 to petition federal officials to withdraw the removal order, which they finally accomplished through the intervention of President Millard Fillmore.

The delegation was led by Benjamin G. Armstrong, a white man who married the niece of Buffalo, an important chief of the La Pointe Chippewa.

In August 1854 the chiefs of the numerous bands of Chippewa dispersed throughout northern Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota were called to meet with government Indian agents at La Pointe.

At this "treaty council," the titles of the Chippewa to their lands west of the Mississippi River, containing incalculable riches of timber and minerals, were finally extinguished. In return the Chippewa were to receive annuities for two decades, to include "five

thousand dollars in coin; eight thousand dollars in goods, household furniture and working utensils; three thousand dollars in agricultural implements and cattle, carpenter's and other tools and building materials, and three thousand dollars for moral and educational purposes."

Reservations were established in the Chippewa home territory in northern Wisconsin at Red Cliff, Bad River, Lac Court Orielles and Lac du Flambeau.

"For the La Pointe band, and such other Indians as may see fit to settle with them," Article 2 of the treaty specified the boundaries of a reservation that encompassed most of the drainage basin of the Bad and White rivers and several creeks, amounting to 124,234 acres.

The reservation also included 100 acres on the northeastern tip of Madeline Island. For "The Ontonagon band and that subdivision of the La Pointe band of which Buffalo is chief," Article 2 provided that they each may select, "on or near the lake shore, four sections of land ... the boundaries of which shall be defined hereafter."

The Indians selected land along the southeastern coast of the Bayfield peninsula, and the president's executive order confirming their selection, amounting to 13,652 acres, was issued on Feb. 21, 1856. On Sept. 30 the treaty was signed by 85 Chippewa chiefs and the representatives of the government in front of the Charles Oakes house at La Pointe, which henceforth was known as Treaty Hall. It was duly approved by the United States Senate and came into effect in January 1855.

With the Senate approval of the treaty, the Indians at La Pointe moved to the designated reservations, those who were Catholic going to Red Cliff and the remainder to the Bad River reservation.

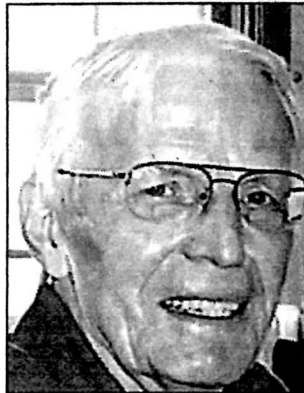
A few Indians who were steadily employed at La Pointe were allowed to remain there. The Protestant missionaries left La Pointe, and the center for Protestant missionary work shifted to the mission at Odanah (in later years it was taken over by a Roman Catholic mission).

A Catholic missionary priest remained at La Pointe to continue work among the Indians there and at Red Cliff, and to serve the spiritual needs of the whites and "mixed bloods," many of whom were of French-Canadian descent and Roman Catholic.

Since the reservations at Red Cliff and Bad River and at other locations in northern Wisconsin could not support the traditional hunting-fishing-gathering subsistence culture of the Indians, they were forced to rely on handouts from the government and to submit to acculturation.

As one observer noted, "when the chiefs touched their pens to the La Pointe treaty the bands began a new journey down the white man's road. For nearly a century it was a road without turning, a one-way street to cultural disintegration and crushing poverty."

Thus the great historical tragedy of Native Americans was continued among these remnants of the Chippewa, who were confined to forlorn reservations on the shores of the mighty lake over which they had once held dominion.



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