

A Tribute to our Fishermen...

Minaadowenjigaaziwaat Gidoo giigoonkeninii-minaanik...

Fishing in Keweenaw Bay has a lineage centuries long. Beginning with the early Great Lakes Indian trade networks, followed by 17th century commercial activity participation, and continuing into today's commercial fishermen ways, Keweenaw Bay fishing has endured. All have felt the freedom and excitement offered by *Gitchigami*, some have struggled with the hardship and heartache a fisherman's life can comprise, while still others have tragically sacrificed their lives on the water in order to sustain this traditional harvest and lifeway. The Keweenaw Bay Indian Community commercial fishermen, women, and their families have touched the lives of many.

Legacy of the First Fisherman

Although the legacy of the Great Lakes' first fisherman has existed for thousands of years, recorded legacy extends back to the 16th and 17th centuries when European explorers, tradesmen, and missionaries came to the region. From their descriptive writings shaped the glory of the Lakes as well as the image of the Indian living in the Great Lakes region: he was a *fisherman*. An abundance of generosity, sharing, and gift-giving became the epitome of the Indian character shown through fishermen and their subsistence communities.

Stewards of the Environment

What modern-day society defines as 'sustainability' has been rooted in Anishinaabe traditions and legends for nearly a millennia. The core of the cultural fabric originates from the people's relationship with the environment and all its resources, all things living and non-living, all things physical and spiritual, all things mutually respected and dignified; this lifeway represents the cultural continuity from the past to the present. Centuries of environmental knowledge, beliefs, and values would (remain) become the foundation for protecting homelands, expressions of sovereignty, and affirming treaty rights. Over the course of several decades the Anishinaabe people would face powerful opponents: discriminating and decimating federal policies, commercial fishing exploitations and the export of an ancient subsistence, the discovery of copper and logging industries, and a desperate attempt to survive within a foreign worldview. The threats were always real but so was the spirit of the fisherman.



Leadership as a Precedent

Leadership would arise among Lake Superior Bands of Chippewa, within the Great Lakes region tribes, and would set the precedence for Indian revitalization and political self-determination within the United States. The Tribe would define their own sovereignty and authority; specify reserved rights in the 1842 Treaty of La Pointe; combat removal and termination by establishing a homeland in the Chippewa Treaty of 1854; achieve federally-recognized self-government on December 17, 1936; and later, stand up for and reaffirm their treaty rights in the landmark Michigan Supreme Court decision of 1971, the *People v. Jondreau*. In every instance it represented a momentous first feat among Native American tribes; each victory effectively established the legal framework for several other tribes to claim victories of their own throughout the United States. Renewing the spirit of sovereignty, decade after decade, leader after leader, precedent after precedent, this is the tribal fishermen.

A Fishing Community

The relationship between the Tribe and the environment has existed since time immemorial; each and every family today is woven to fishing in some way. As their ancestors did before them, subsistence fishermen continue harvesting for their families and community members as well as provide for both ceremonial and communal feasts. Fishing is the strand of the cultural core that ties history to present day to future; it is a vital part of the foundation for cultural beliefs and values, traditional lifeways, and even individual identity. To truly understand the Tribe requires an understanding of the significance of the fisherman. The fisherman of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, *all* are connected. As they all did before you, say a prayer, offer (lay) your tobacco, and be thankful for the generations of generosity by the fisherman. With hearts as deep as *Gichigami*, they must all be remembered.

By Valoree Sherick Gagnon