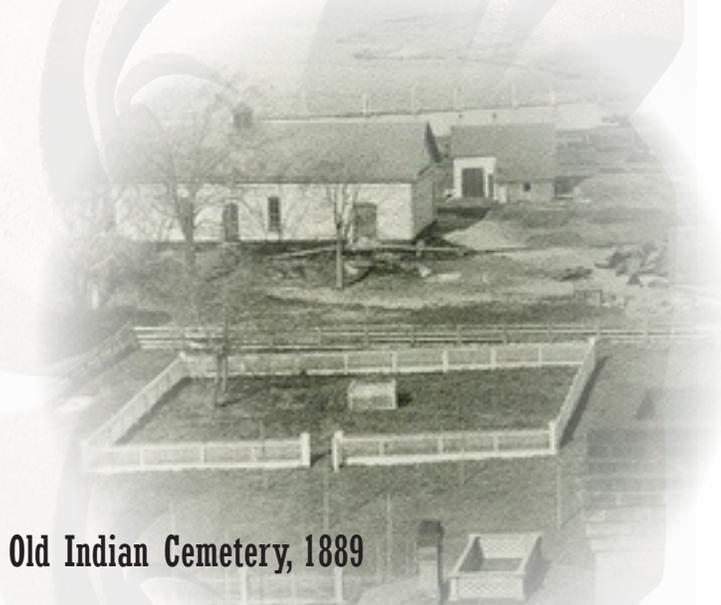


HONORING HERITAGE PRESERVING HISTORY

AN INSTALLATION OF PUBLIC ART ON THE GROUNDS OF THE OLD INDIAN CEMETERY

The Old Indian Cemetery, located in downtown Muskegon on Morris Avenue overlooking Muskegon Lake, has a history interestingly entwined with eighteenth century Michigan Indian history, nineteenth century Muskegon lumbering history, and Muskegon's twentieth century industrial history. It is believed that The Old Indian Cemetery was already established when the first white man came to this area, according to the State Historic Registry. The site had been used by the Ottawa Indian Tribe as early as 1750 according to research, and is known to have continued to be an active burial ground throughout the first half or so of the nineteenth century by both Indians and settlers of the area.

In the 1830's, Louis Badeaux, a French fur trader, obtained a large swath of property where he operated a trading post which encompassed the land on which sits The Old Indian Cemetery, which he continued to allow some of his Indian patrons to use to bury their dead. In 1856, Badeaux deeded the burying ground to Martin L. Ryerson, one of Muskegon's highly successful lumber barons early on, but by then a major Chicago industrialist with ties to Muskegon he never forgot.



Old Indian Cemetery, 1889





Old Indian Cemetery, circa 1940

One might wonder about Martin Ryerson's interest in a small, almost forgotten Indian Cemetery in a small, scrappy town of his earlier life in West Michigan. Mr. Ryerson, who was born near Paterson, N.J., in 1818, came to Grand Rapids, Michigan at 16, where he began trading with the Indians, and forming deep ties with them. In 1837 he embarked in the lumber business in Muskegon, and became a mill owner in 1845. By 1851 he opened his lumber yard in Chicago, becoming, by the time of his death, one of the largest industrialists in the Midwest.

Based on research for the public art installation planned for the Cemetery, it has been discovered that Mr. Ryerson's interest and regard for the Indians of West Michigan was personal. From the Ryerson genealogy, when quite a young man, "far from civilization in Michigan", he married a woman known only in the record as Indian woman Ryerson who bore him a daughter in 1843, named Mary. The mother died shortly after the birth but the daughter lived and was the first of ultimately Mr. Ryerson's two heirs. It is rumored that this first wife of Martin L. Ryerson may have been buried in The Old Indian Cemetery, although this is not verified. However, the white picket fence and a wooden cross installed in those early times of his owning the property certainly could give that impression.

Ryerson then went on to marry another woman, whose parents were primarily of Canadian Indian descent, Louisa Duvernay. Both Louisa and her infant died in childbirth in 1855 and are buried in a single grave in Grand Haven.

Mary Anne Campeau of Grand Rapids became the third Mrs. Martin L. Ryerson and bore Martin's second child, a son, Martin A. Ryerson, born in 1856.

Martin Ryerson continued to own the Muskegon property, holding The Old Indian Cemetery, eventually passing it on to his son Martin A. Ryerson, Jr. In 1926, Martin A. Ryerson, Jr. deeded the property to the City of Muskegon and donated \$5,000 for the perpetual care of the cemetery.

Most recently, in our own time, in 2009, there was a repatriation of Indian remains estimated to be "pre-contact" (determined to be older than 1600), that had been unearthed by unknown individuals of Muskegon and Oceana counties. The remains had been in the possession of the Lakeshore Museum Center since the 1940's. After exhaustive research and intense efforts to repatriate them as authorized under the federal Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, the LMC successfully facilitated a ceremony led by Joseph Genia, a Muskegon resident and member of the Grand River Band of Ottawa Indians.

The intersection of Muskegon's first peoples with its lumbering past and then its early industrial days that lies in The Old Indian Cemetery makes this historic site something to treasure and honor.

The Muskegon Museum of Art, the Downtown Arts Committee, the Community Foundation of Muskegon County, and the City of Muskegon are collaborating on the commission of a monumental black granite sculpture, 16 feet tall, to be accompanied by four hand-carved benches, all created by noted Michigan Anishinaabe artist, Jason Quigno. The installation of this monumental sculpture will make this remarkable historic site a place of respect and contemplation for our entire community titled "All My Relations."

Jason Quigno has been carving stone since the age of 14. He believes it is his purpose in life to tell the stories and values of his Anishinaabek people in stone, through his art, so that future generations, hundreds and even thousands of years from now, will know the beautiful values and way of life of the Anishinaabek. Working in all types of stone including granite, marble, alabaster and soapstone, Quigno creates works of art ranging from table top to monumental sculpture. He has been commissioned for several public works of art throughout Michigan; is represented in multiple museum collections; shows regularly in museum and gallery exhibitions, and has been the recipient of various honors and awards.

This project is estimated to cost approximately \$95,000 including installation on site. The Community Foundation for Muskegon County has committed \$15,000 so far, and has submitted a grant to the Michigan Council for Art and Cultural Affairs for \$30,000, with a decision to be announced in September. Donors to this project (\$1,000+) will be recognized on signage at the site.

Dedication of this work is planned to be the spring of 2018.



Proposed Installation. "All My Relations"



Examples of
Hand Carved
Benches

