

The Potawatomis of Shikaakwa, Naunongee and the Michigan Avenue Bridge House—

The announcement of the Mellon Foundation grants funding the initiatives of Chicago Monuments Committee for eight select monuments, spurs me to defend another monument on the CMC list of 41 before it's too late. Potawatomi Chief Naunongee on the SW Michigan Avenue bridge house is an important part of Indigenous history—the last desperate push for returning sovereignty to Chicago's First Americans.

"YOU ARE ON POTAWATOMI LAND" indeed. Even with the installation of artist Andrea Carlson's epic mural on the Chicago River, many residents don't know that this is Potawatomi country. Fewer know that **we are still here**. The Potawatomi lived in Chicago before Fort Dearborn, the soldiers, or the settlers. The very name of Chicago derives from Shikaakwa, a Potawatomi reference crudely translated as Stinky Onion. Phonetically, the French wrote this as Chicagoua, which ultimately became Chicago.

As a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation as well as a descendant of Archange Ouilmette, I am deeply concerned by the decision of the monuments committee to target the frieze on the SW Michigan Avenue bridge house. There have been strong objections expressed regarding "Defense" by Henry Hering because of the depiction of 'the dead Indian'—considered by many well-meaning people to be insensitive to Native people. Allow me to present a different perspective. While I acknowledge the intention, I'm offended by the recurring reference to the dead Indian. Correctly identified, this is a slain Potawatomi, an essential reminder of Native battle fatalities. When I was taught about the Battle of Fort Dearborn (identified as the Fort Dearborn Massacre in those days), the only losses mentioned were of helpless women and children killed by crazed savages. Without reservation, the rage and reckoning that transpired on that day resulted in a loss of life that was tragic and brutal. Indeed, the preceding Tribal Councils went on for days with older chiefs advocating for diplomacy versus younger warriors—foreseeing a future that would deprive them of their lands, autonomy and very right to exist—insisting on a fight.

How many Chicagoans know that the scene portrayed is actually part of the Battle record? Sergeant Otho Hayes in hand-to-hand combat with Potawatomi warrior Naunongee; their engagement portrayed with an equality that is not typical in historical works of art. These warriors mortally wounded each other. Naunongee was the only chief to die in the Battle of Fort Dearborn. The Potawatomis won this battle and for the next two years the only non-Indian resident of Chicago was Antoine Ouilmette who lived with his Potawatomi wife Archange and their children—his neighbor, Jean Baptiste Point du Sable having departed Chicago with the building of Fort Dearborn. Archange, arguably the 'Mother of Chicago', was the daughter of Chopa and granddaughter of Naunongee.

These are my ancestors and I do not pass this monument without a touch and a word to my grandfather Naunongee. Archange and Antoine had eleven children and many of their Potawatomi descendants are alive today along with the descendants of her seven siblings. 'Defense' is a pictorial testimony of the day when Potawatomi warriors believed they might wrest their land and future from the control and dictates of an encroaching army.

Let's examine the sculpture's title "Defense". Two groups battled each other: One in defense of their homeland and the other in retreat. Which was which seems clear to me. Do I believe that the artist was defending the Potawatomis? It wouldn't be the first time a classical artwork was quietly subversive. I choose to side with the defenders just as I choose to believe the angel is shepherding ALL the lost souls from that day, not just the white people. (Although arguably the angel appears to travel in concert with the Potawatomis.)

There is very little historical reference to the Potawatomi visible in Chicago. Most Native figures are depicted as anonymous symbols, yet in Naunongee, we have a rare *specific* figure of Native history. Let's reconsider what this touchstone means to many Potawatomis, and investigate a new SW bridge house narrative. The undeniable offense lies in the biased, colonial, and now barely visible inscription on this monument. By collaborating on a narrative accurately describing this pivotal event in our city's history with a new plaque, Potawatomis, our many Indigenous residents, Chicagoans, and visitors may better comprehend a defining and true story of Chicago.

As I was taught by my elders, "That's all I have to say. Ahau."

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Inscription: DEFENSE - FORT DEARBORN STOOD ALMOST ON THIS SPOT. AFTER AN HEROIC DEFENSE IN EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND TWELVE, THE GARRISON TOGETHER WITH WOMEN AND CHILDREN WAS FORCED TO EVACUATE THE FORT LED FORTH BY CAPTAIN WELLS. THEY WERE BRUTALLY MASSACRED BY THE INDIANS. THEY WILL BE CHERISHED AS MARTYRS IN OUR EARLY HISTORY.

CHOPA Alias: Chopa Naunongee | Marianne Chevalier | Chopa was the daughter of Naunongee, respected warrior and leader among the Calumet Potawatomi of southern Lake Michigan. She was also the aunt to famed warriors Mad Sturgeon, White Sturgeon and Clear Day. Upon her marriage to François Chevalier, she took the Christian name of Marianne. Receiving several land grants from the 1833 Treaty of Chicago, the couple settled around the Chicago area and had several children.

CITATIONS

CHICAGO MONUMENTS COMMITTEE:

[HTTPS://WWW.THEARTNEWSPAPER.COM/2021/02/18/CHICAGOS-LIST-OF-41-PUBLIC-STATUES-FOR-REVIEW-INCLUDES-DEPICTIONS-OF-NATIVE-AMERICANS-AND-SEVERAL-MONUMENTS-OF-ABRAHAM-LINCOLN](https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/02/18/chicagos-list-of-41-public-statues-for-review-includes-depictions-of-native-americans-and-several-monuments-of-abraham-lincoln)

Andreas, A.T. 1884. *History of Chicago: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time*

Citizen Potawatomi Nation Cultural Heritage Center. 2005. *Wilmette Family Manuscripts*

Kappler, Charles J. 1904. *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, II*

Keating, Ann Durkin. 2012. *Rising Up from Indian Country: The Battle of Fort Dearborn and the Birth of Chicago*



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