

**Manitoulin Island Summer Historical Institute (MISHI) 2017  
Does Wisdom Sit in Places? Sites as Sources of Knowledge**

**Post-Institute Report  
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“Manitoulin Island Summer Historical Institute (MISHI) 2017: Does Wisdom Sit in Places? Sites as Sources of Knowledge” was a five-day summer institute held from August 14-18, 2017, focused on understanding how place-based knowledge shapes an Anishinaabe-centred history of Manitoulin Island and its environs. Co-sponsored by the History of Indigenous Peoples (HIP) Network, a research cluster embedded within the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies at York University, and the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation (OCF), an organization devoted to Anishinaabe history and culture, the summer institute brought together 25 established and emerging historians, graduate students, administrators, artists, Elders, and knowledge-keepers to explore the history through landscapes, stories, and documents. Event organizers were Carolyn Podruchny (co-founder of HIP Network, York University), Anong Beam (curator and acting executive director of the OCF, M’Chigeeng First Nation), Lewis Debassige (Elder and co-founder of the OCF, M’Chigeeng First Nation), Alan Corbiere (former Executive Director of the OCF, M’Chigeeng First Nation) and Boyd Cothran (co-founder of HIP Network, York University). The first co-sponsor, the HIP Network, has a mandate to encourage and support the research of the histories of Indigenous peoples, primarily among graduate students and faculty members at York University and neighbouring institutions. With a membership of close to 200 people, the Network holds bi-weekly workshops for members’ scholarship-in-progress, talks by visiting speakers, film viewings, an annual Elder Event, and a fieldtrip series. The second co-sponsor, the OCF, represents six First Nations (Aundek Omni Kaning, M’Chigeeng, Sheguiandah, Sheshegwaning, Whitefish River, and Zhiibaahaasing) and is dedicated to nourishing and preserving Anishinaabe history, arts, language, and spirituality. MISHI builds on a partnership developed between the OCF and the HIP Network over the last three years through fieldtrips, workshops, and lectures.

**Attendees**

We had a total of 25 participants, with one from India, one from Arizona, two from British Columbia, one from Saskatchewan, and the rest from southern Ontario. Eight participants were of Indigenous heritage, and of these two were from Manitoulin Island. The participants comprised 7 professors, 9 PhD students, 4 MA students, 2 undergraduate students, 2 educational administrators, and 1 artist. Participants also brought family members, so at various times the institute included two infants, two children, and five spouses. The presence of family members contributed significantly to building an atmosphere of trust and intimacy, which mirrored Anishinaabe learning spaces, and helped everyone feel comfortable immediately. In addition, every MISHI event was attended by at least two Anishinaabe staff members of the OCF, which contributed significantly to building bridges between Anishinaabe and academic communities. Participants came together in Toronto and carpooled to and from the island, with at least half taking the ferry from the

Bruce Peninsula one way and driving around the north side of the island over the swing bridge in Little Current on the other way.

### **The MISHI Program**

The MISHI program was organized around land-based Anishinaabe history on Manitoulin Island and its environs. Situated in northern Lake Huron, Manitoulin is the largest fresh-water island in the world and has been home to Indigenous peoples for more than 12,000 years. Today it has six Anishinaabe reserves, the residents of which share close relations with First Nations on the north shore of Lake Huron, including Whitefish River, Sagamok, and Serpent River. Knowledge-keeper Alan Corbiere and Elder Lewis Debassige (both from M'Chigeeng) were the main instructors of the Institute. Other presenters included scholars, artists, and local knowledge-keepers with distinct views of land-based pedagogies, including story-telling, hiking, cooking, and creating art.

The schedule of the summer institute was comprised of presentations, outings, workshops, and working at the OCF. We recorded most of these sessions for the OCF archival collections and to be aired on Gimaa Radio (CHYF 88.9 FM), an Anishinaabemowin talk-radio station based on Manitoulin Island.

- **Day 0.5, August 13:** In the evening participants and organizers met for a welcoming dinner provided by Carolyn Podruchny and her husband Mark in the Providence Bay Tent and Trailer Park. Carolyn welcomed everyone to MISHI and counseled all attendees about the ethics of working in Indigenous communities, reminding everyone that we were guests to the island and must treat its occupants and stewards with respect. Elder Lewis Debassige opened MISHI with a discussion about the creation of Manitoulin Island and a discussion of the meaning of his name. After participants introduced themselves, Lewis guided us in a Thank You prayer for our meal.
- **Day 1, August 14:** The day began with Lewis Debassige officially opening MISHI with a prayer. Anong Beam and Lewis introduced everyone to the OCF, discussing its history, mandate, and its many projects. Participants then introduced themselves to the OCF staff. The rest of the morning was devoted to initiating work assignments at the OCF, which included creating booklets on various topics to be used in reserve school curriculum and as material for the general public; organizing the recording of sessions and interviews with Lewis; and transcribing oral histories contained in the OCF archives. Participants also toured the OCF museum and art gallery. After lunch provided by the OCF, the group left at 12:30 for a four-hour long tour of the central part of the island lead by Lewis and Alan Corbiere, with an explanation of the creation and distribution of current reserves and discussion of the significance of place names. The group visited an art installation “Replenishment” (of sculpted boulders placed in the Kagawong River) by Michael Belmore, which represented replenishment of environments, developed for 4elements Living Arts. The group met for dinner at an Anishinaabe-run restaurant, Abby’s, on the M’Chigeeng First Nation.
- **Day 2, August 15:** After spending the morning working at OCF, participants visited Whitefish River First Nation, immediately north of Manitoulin Island. On Birch Island, Deborah McGregor (CRC in Indigenous Environmental Justice, Law and Environmental Studies, York University, and member of Whitefish River First Nation) met us on the reserve’s ceremonial grounds to give us a lecture on understanding Anishinaabe epistemologies and relations with land. Her mother, Marion McGregor,

joined us as well to discuss her perspectives on treating lands and creatures as relatives. Deborah then led the group on a hike to the sacred site of Dreamer's Rock, where for millennia Anishinaabeg gathered for ceremonies, sweat lodges, and vision quests. (Note that we gained permission from the Whitefish River Chief and Council in advance to visit the site and we made no recordings on the site). In the evening we participated in a community feast of corn soup and Three Sisters soup organized by the OCF and attended a story-telling session with Elder Willie Trudeau on the Seven Prophecies of Anishinaabe history and spirituality.

- **Day 3, August 16:** We met our bus at OCF in the morning and travelled to Manitowaning at the site of the signing of the 1836 and 1864 treaties, and the annual gift-giving ceremonies of the British government and area's Anishinaabe Nations. Using reproductions of site-specific wampum belts, Alan Corbiere discussed the role of wampum in Anishinaabe treaties and diplomacy, discussed the history of treaties and diplomacy on the island, and read from primary sources of treaty signings. In the afternoon we travelled to the eastern part of the island to the large, unceded reserve of the Wikwemikong First Nation. We ate take-out lunches from Ed's Family Restaurant on the reserve, before meeting with knowledge-carrier Steve George of Wikwemikong. He discussed his own family's history on the island, explained the history of the reserve, and taught us about how spirits resided within large landscape features. We then travelled to the ruins of a residential school and an industrial school, which has been transformed into an open-air theatre by the De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group. Here participant Peggy Pitawanakwa (a former chief of Wikwemikong First Nation) and her granddaughter Natalia presented each of us with sweet grass they had harvested earlier in the week as a symbol of welcome and good health. We then visited the Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church, which is a model of mixing Anishinaabe spirituality with Catholicism. In the evening we ate dinner at the M'Chigeeng Wellness Centre, an assisted living facility for elderly reserve residents. The chief of M'Chigeeng First Nation, who is also the band manager, Linda Debassige, visited us during dinner to welcome us to the First Nation and to discuss the community's engagement with energy production in the form of reserve-owned wind mills, and their resistance to fracking and other environmentally-damaging development pressures.
- **Day 4, August 17:** The morning was devoted to learning about the roughly 10,000-year-old ancient village site located in Providence Bay. We started in the Mutchmore Gallery to view powerpoints and listen to Anong Beam who taught us about ancient Anishinaabe ceramic techniques and the travails of trying to find all of the objects from the site that disappeared after a 1980s dig. Next, William Fox, an archaeology professor from Trent University who has worked on the site, gave us a broad-ranging lecture about the ancient history of southern Ontario and discussed the significance of the ancient village in displaying thousands of years of long-distance trade carried out by Anishinaabeg living on the shores of the Great Lakes. After a take-out lunch from Lake Huron Fish and Chips, the group braved the rain to walk to the village site to view it in person, guided by William. In the mid-afternoon we convened at the OCF for a bannock-making workshop conducted by knowledge-carrier Patsy Panamick (widely known as the Scone Queen), a member of the M'Chigeeng First Nation, and the group prepared the base for Indian Tacos for the evening's community feast preceding the art opening of Anishinaabe artist Nico Williams. In describing his show "Spirit Transformation," consisting of beaded sculptures, Nico explained the

Anishinaabemowin word for beads translates to spirit berry or seed. His small, delicate sculptures contained stories of Anishinaabe sacred legends blended together with his own life history, to highlight the blending of ancient, traditional, and contemporary in everyday Anishinaabe lives. His beaded paintings were rooted in the land around Manitoulin Island and contained images of waterscapes and water spirits.

- **Day 5, August 18:** Ongoing rain meant we had to cancel a boat tour to Collins Inlet in Killarney to view sacred petroglyphs. Instead the group spent the morning at the OCF working on our assignments and participating in beaded-ring workshop in honour of PRIDE (this was the first time PRIDE was celebrated on the island) led by Nico Williams. We had an OCF-catered lunch at the Rectory of the Roman Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception at M'Chigeeng First Nation, and then viewed the Anishinaabe-centred church, which is perfectly round with a thunderbird sculpture positioned in a skylight at the top, Anishinaabe scenes painted by local artist Leland Bell for the stations of the cross, and a smudge station on the centre altar. In the afternoon we listened to a lecture by Alan Corbiere on material culture constructed from island resources, focusing particularly on basketry. Participants took some time to themselves to hike the Cup and Saucer trail or visit art galleries on various reserves. After a closing feast at the OCF, MISHI concluded with a presentation by OCF's artist-in-resident, Anishinaabe Michael Belmore (member of the Royal Academy of Arts and MISHI participant), who discussed how use of technology has impacted on our relationship with the natural environment through a narrative of his own sculpting career. Focusing specifically on an art piece named "Bridge" (the signature image for MISHI), which utilizes copper and aluminum beads (representing the 1s and 0s of ASCII) woven into a wampum belt, he explained the forgotten codes that are the basis of our contemporary realities that serve to connect, and sometimes divide, our communities.

In total, the MISHI program had 2 main instructors, Lewis Debassige and Alan Corbiere, and 11 guest speakers. These were, in order of appearance, Carolyn Podruchny, Deborah McGregor, Marion McGregor, Willie Trudeau, Steve George, Linda Debassige, Anong Beam, William Fox, Patsy Panamick, Nico Williams, and Michael Belmore. Of these 13 people, 11 were members of Anishinaabe communities (excluding Carolyn Podruchny and William Fox). We achieved a good gender balance with 7 men and 6 women.

### Supporters

MISHI 2017 could not have been possible without the generous assistance of many supporters. The most important is the OCF, whose staff devoted countless of hours in preparation for our visit and worked tirelessly during the event to ensure its smooth success. A special acknowledgement is due to OCF's Acting Executive Director Anong Beam who was an important leader throughout. Likewise, MISHI received early, enthusiastic, and generous support from the Robart's Centre for Canadian Studies at York University, which included cash, website space and programming, and administrative support. A special acknowledgement is due to Laura Tanman, the centre's coordinator, who has helped particularly with the complex financial planning. York University's Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies (LA&PS) provided extremely valuable personnel and financial support. Research Officer Janet Friskney lent her extensive and brilliant counsel in grant applications, and both the LA&PS Events Fund and the Global and Community Engagement Fund generously granted us much-needed cash. Pat Ellis of LA&PS has been

very helpful in setting up accounts and initiating payments. We thank the Provost's Office for support from the Indigeneity in Teaching and Learning Fund and the Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation for generous financial support. In addition, the Department of History donated funds to help with the initiative. We were extremely fortunate to have been awarded a SSHRC Connections Grant, which meant that participants did not have to pay their own way.

Many individuals donated their time to making MISHI possible and successful. Four graduate student volunteers should be especially recognized: Daniel Murchison (PhD student, History, York University), Victoria Jackson (PhD student, History, York University), Chandra Murdoch (PhD student, History, University of Toronto), and Anne Janhunen (PhD student, History, University of Saskatchewan). They took charge of recording talks during MISHI, managing the data, organizing transcription projects, and herding our group along its exacting schedule. In addition, we thank Mark Guertin (spouse of Carolyn Podruchny), who cooked the welcoming dinner on the first night, managed the snacks and drinks throughout the week, fixed a flat tire, took Carolyn to the hospital on the first day, and carried everything. And we conclude by thanking all of the co-organizers of the event, in particular Elder Lewis Debassige, who came up with the idea for an Institute, pushed us all to make it happen, and knitted everything together with his grace and wisdom. Chi migwetch to all!

## Conclusion

MISHI 2017 was a great success in terms of attendance, programming, and relationship-building between First Nations communities and university members. MISHI 2017 achieved its three goals of 1) teaching participants about Anishinaabe history on Manitoulin Island and its surrounding areas; 2) having participants volunteer at the OCF by recording talks to add to the archives, transcribing talks, and creating booklets on aspects of Manitoulin Island history for both reserve schools and the general public; and 3) building bridges between Anishinaabe communities and universities (particularly York University). Group members are working on their transcriptions and booklets for the OCF, and VK Preston and Carolyn Podruchny are organizing a transcribe-a-thon for later this autumn to complete outstanding transcriptions. Participants' booklets will cover the topics of treaty history on the island, explaining why Wikwemikong is unceded, wampum, the spirits embedded in island landscapes and waterscapes, the importance of including children in educational programming on reserves, women chiefs, and ceremonial performance. Participants are also working on co-written and sole-authored blog posts about their experiences during the Institute, which will be published on the OCF website, the Robarts Centre Website, and ActiveHistory.ca.

Immediate outcomes of the bridge-building are: 1) on September 1, 2017 Alan Corbiere will be starting his PhD in History at York University; 2) Anong Beam will be starting her MA in History at York University; 3) Lewis Debassige will be speaking at a HIP Network Workshop at York University in November 2017; and 4) York undergraduate student Violet King will be volunteering at the OCF during the 2017-18 academic year. Numerous other collaborations between OCF members and university-based attendees are currently brewing.