

Voice on the Water: Great Lakes Native America Now – a Book Publication Chronicle

by Grace Chaillier, Project Editor

For two-and-a-half years I worked on evolving stages of the American Indian anthology that is titled *Voice on the Water: Great Lakes Native America Now*. The project was a longtime dream of faculty and staff of the Center for Native American Studies (CNAS) at NMU and it came to fruition as a Michigan Humanities Council (MHC) grant-driven endeavor with NMU more than matching MHC's funding. The attainment of the grant is, in itself, a significant part of our story.

Those of us involved in this undertaking all consider the acquisition, selection, and publication of Indian testimony, stories and art to be exemplary acts of indigenous preservation and continuity. Writers and artists who sent us their work, and we who compiled it, support the indigenous peoples of Michigan as we meet the goal stated in the grant proposal to “prepare an anthology that will introduce Michigan residents to the contemporary yearnings that concern and impact the modern lives of Native Americans in our state.”

Indians living in Michigan have proven themselves to be wonderfully talented once again. We received submissions from an exceptionally diverse group who eagerly shared their words, language, art and humor. The works that appear in the book we've published and distributed deepen readers' comprehension of who Michigan Indians have become in the 21st century, even as the effort that brought the book to the public strengthened the cooperative kinship among those of us involved in its production.

Backstory

The idea of producing a book through the CNAS at NMU first came under discussion in 2002. As a project, the idea got off the ground several years later when the then Assistant Director of the CNAS was tasked with contacting all Native American NMU alumni with a request to send submissions for a forthcoming book. Hundreds received that first call for submissions; I was among them. Some of us were immediately interested in the project, yet only six prose and poetry manuscripts were initially received. Thereafter, the project languished.

Over the next five years, every once in a while, I'd say, "I wish we could revive our anthology project. It'd be an accomplishment for the Center and wonderful for everyone whose work is published." Our director of the CNAS, April Lindala, always agreed with me. She had supported the project from its inception. Then, early in April of 2009, the NMU Communications and Marketing Department announced a series of four, intensive Grant Writing Boot Camp meetings that would be taught by the NMU Grants and Research Department throughout the upcoming month of May. The CNAS director encouraged faculty in our department to participate and three of our educators chose to write separate grants. A deciding element for me was a discussion that I had with April during which I asked, "What would I want to expend that much time on – all the time that it would take to finesse a grant?" At the time I wasn't even considering that the grant might actually be funded. April immediately responded, "How about the anthology?"

“Yes, of course, that’s it. We could revive the anthology project,” I answered. Now I was excited and I was in.

I worked on initial aspects of the narrative section of our grant proposal at all four Grant Writing Boot Camp meetings and became acquainted with Andrew Smentkowski and Sandy Gayk, the Associate Director and Grants Coordinator, who work in the NMU Grants and Research office. They both helped me tremendously, as did April, who produced our grant’s budget section and is this grant’s director and principal investigator. In mid March of 2010, after over 120 joint hours of labor, we submitted the grant proposal to Michigan Humanities Council and began waiting.

Funding and the Call for Submissions

On Friday, May 14, 2010, we learned that the grant had been funded. After a flurry of congratulatory emails and imaginary high-fives all around, I began to consider how best to proceed. As is so often the case in academia, when in doubt as to how to proceed, schedule a meeting. Since it was already summer on our academic calendar, which meant that several of the scholars I had written into the grant proposal as collaborating experts were scattered all over the world, three of us met – April, Shirley Brozzo, the Associate Director of the Multicultural Education and Resource Center at NMU, and me, all Native women and all writer/graduates of the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program at NMU. We discussed the fine-tuning of the Call for Submissions, mailing lists of prospective contributors,

and the scheduling of meetings for the larger group later in the year, along with a number of other topics. Six drafts and six weeks later, the first Call for Submissions was uploaded to the University of Pennsylvania Call for Papers and to H-Net (Humanities and Social Science Online cfp hosted by Michigan State University).

Using project-specific mailing lists and longstanding alumni lists owned by the CNAS, we mailed 1,030 hard copies of the Call for Submissions, along with a cover letter, to NMU Native American alumni, Education Directors of the twelve federally recognized tribes in Michigan and to directors of Native American Studies programs and writing programs at colleges and universities throughout our state. We also uploaded the call to 2,300 subscribers on two Michigan library list serves thanks to two library partners written into the grant and NMU's Communications and Marketing Department delivered press releases to Michigan and Native American news media statewide. In response we received over 200 submissions of artwork, photographs, poetry, prose, song and stories. We accepted nearly 90 of those entries and solicited several dozen more in the form of artwork to embellish the 254 pages of our publication. We exceeded our projected range of 125 to 225 pages stated in the grant by 29 pages.

End of Calls for Submissions

Two Calls for Submissions spanned five months from mid 2010 to January 2011's end. As we'd expected, the second submissions round resulted in the acquisition of far less work.

However, we did receive some important pieces that we subsequently accepted and that made the second call well worth the effort and the publication delay.

Following the end of the second call, we sent rejection notifications via email and then crafted a carefully worded congratulatory email that was sent to those whose work had been accepted. The acceptance email requested a 75-word maximum, electronic biography and informed writers and artists about a US Postal Service mailing coming to them containing a contributor's contract and Michigan W-9 tax forms, along with deadlines for our receipt of all three. NMU required W-9s since each artist received two copies of the book as remuneration for their participation. Beginning with receipt of the first submission, CNAS student workers and I had copied, listed and organized contributors' works, readying them for reading by the editors committee and I created a master contact list of contributors.

Northern Michigan University Press, housed in NMU's Communications and Marketing Department was excited about our project upon learning of it and they inquired about our need for a publisher. They were written into our grant, which we believe weighed in favor of the grant's eventual funding. Since our venture is Michigan-centric, it's a good fit with NMU Press given that the press's history reveals the publication of more titles in regional studies than in any other field. The university editor and the project's production editor, Becky Tavernini, who works with the communications and marketing group, began initial edits, creating altered submissions that were sent via email to authors for their approval. Upon receipt of agreements to edits from authors, Becky began the long process of line editing each textual submission.

The Editors Committee

The acceptance or rejection of submissions was accomplished by a committee of seven scholars – two members work as administrators and faculty, six are professors of Native American Studies, English or Art and Design, and one is an elder from the community who has published a book and led a fascinating life. We are six women, including Shirley Brozzo, Grace Chaillier, Echoe Deibert, Amy Hamilton, April Lindala and Jaspal Singh and one man, Mike Letts; three of us are Natives and four are non-Natives. Each scholar was provided with copies of all of the submissions to read, edit and vote on. The scholars met twenty-four times throughout the process to discuss each submission, to consult on the physical look of the book, and to share marketing and promotion ideas. Decisions for submission inclusion were made by simple majority with less than a dozen submissions eliciting anything even approaching intense discussion – remarkable among a group of highly opinionated academics, writers and artists. Exhibiting genuine concern for the quality of outcome, the scholars understood that the authenticity of individual American Indian voice, along with the legitimacy of the few non-Indians whose work was selected, was crucial to the writers whose work was under the red pen and to the integrity of our end product.

It has occurred to me that our process has been somewhat magical. The scholars committee and the production editor displayed a crucial motivation that I and the other American Indians spoke about early in the process. All these key individuals were willing to see through another's eyes and hear through another's ears in order to set aside their own

perspectives whenever they might have been limited by personal experience. Their egalitarian, communally-minded choices admirably served the positive outcome of the anthology. The members of the scholars committee and the production editor were exactly who they should have been to best serve the inherent interests of the project.

Text Production

Over the summer of 2011, after much discussion, we chose the book's title – *Voice on the Water: Great Lakes Native America Now*. Concurrent with work on front matter (dedication, table of contents, acknowledgements, preface, and foreword) and back matter (glossary of terms and author biographies), we also began looking at mock-ups of the front and back covers and the book's spine, that slim few inches that is capable of catching the eye or not while standing on a shelf among other books. The first mock-ups were provided by Becky but, eventually, most of this work was accomplished by a young, Ojibwe student artist attending NMU, Cory Fountaine. Cory also produced a map page of federal and state recognized tribes of Michigan and local tribe clan drawings at my request, along with many additional illustrations used throughout the text. I worked closely with Cory on cover art production since the book's outer surfaces certainly affect consumer awareness and initial reception. With that in mind, I critically researched and scrutinized book covers more judgmentally than ever for months before we decided on ours.

With Becky's help and that of Cindy Paavola, the Director of Communications and Marketing and NMU Press, we chose book size, paper weight and color, folded-in cover flaps, fonts, text justification and spacing on the page, image inclusion, page-by-page section headers and more, some of which determined design layout for each of the many sections of the text. These decisions were made concurrently with ongoing line editing and cover planning. Eventually, with all the decisions completed, on November 3, 2011, Becky sent the electronic files and they arrived at McNaughton & Gunn, the Michigan printer.

Distribution

We received the first press run on Tuesday, November 29, 2011.

Two free, open-to-the-public Book Launch Readings (one in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and one downstate) were hosted on November 30 and December 2 by the CNAS during which authors read their published submissions and artists discussed their work. These events generated news about the anthology, involved the public, served as an opportunity to record and post video and still photographs on the Internet, celebrated the author/artists, brought exposure to the Michigan Humanities Council, the CNAS, and NMU and provided opportunities to gather initial feedback from the public.

The NMU Office of Communications and Marketing created and implemented a far-ranging advertising and publicity campaign to announce and promote the anthology. Native

American media picked up announcements about the book and reran them. CNAS staff updated the anthology's page on the CNAS website.

Upon receiving the first press run of the finished text, we began organizing the process of giving away copies to education directors of the twelve federally recognized tribes in Michigan, to select colleges and universities in Michigan with Native American Studies programs, to select Indian associations and organizations in the state such as the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe's Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, to the Michigan Council for the Teachers of English (MCTE), and select public libraries statewide. These giveaways were required by our Michigan Humanities Council grant and dovetailed nicely with American Indian traditional ways of being. The first mailing sent two gratis copies to each published contributor.

Additional book copies will be presented as gifts at various tribal and nontribal events including but not limited to: the Upper Peninsula of Michigan Indian Education Conference, Michigan Council of Teachers of English Annual Conference, and the NMU Learning to Walk Together Traditional Powwow. It is important to note that many of the participants at these events are not Indian.

The project's intended audience is a broad assortment of the Michigan populace, including the general public, secondary and higher education teachers and students, along with scholars and readers of humanities literature who embrace the artistic productions of marginalized groups. We hope the anthology will also be adopted and employed by many outside our state. Copies of *Voice on the Water* are available for purchase through the NMU

Bookstore at www.nmubookstore.com or by contacting the Northern Michigan University Bookstore at bookstore@nmu.edu. Their phone numbers are 906 227-2480 and 1 888 458-8668. In Marquette, Michigan, *Voice* may also be found at Snowbound Books on Third Street. Do inquire about it at your local bookstore.

Our intent is that our book will become a trusted resource and sought-after teaching tool in high schools and colleges, while also being of general interest to readers attentive to contemporary texts about American Indians. We look forward to educators, students, scholars, historians, anthropologists and interested readers endorsing the anthology as a resonant chronicle of modern American Indian lives.

We view this as one method of capturing some modicum of control within educational institutions that instruct Native students and, thereby, influence Native communities. The use of *Voice on the Water* as a curriculum tool will foster the integration of Indigenous knowledge in school systems. Students and interested readers will acquaint themselves with who contemporary Indians in Michigan have become, with their present-day concerns, aspirations, amusements, and joys. Students, elders, activists, teachers, and artists honored us with the submission of their earnest accounts and artistry; they shared their experiences of cultural recovery, survivance, renewal, and continuity. We look forward to passing this understanding on, as our people have since time immemorial, so that those who read and view our achievements in *Voice on the Water* will learn who we are now.

--- December 20, 2011