

2020

Annual Report

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Mandan, ND 58554
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Panelists left to right: Gerard Baker, Dakota Goodhouse, Donovin Sprague, Tamara St. John, Loren Yellow Bird Sr., Calvin Grinnell

Native Voices Inform Custer House 30th Observance, 1989-2019

Thirty years ago last summer, the Custer House opened at Fort Lincoln State Park so that visitors might journey into the frontier past and reflect upon the hard events that shaped our history. Each year since, thousands of guests have passed through its doors and learned of its place in the story of the West.

To mark the observance, and to recognize its contribution to heritage tourism in the state, a commemorative event was held at the park, July 6, 2019. Coordinated by Matt Schanandore, Interpretive and Events Director at the park, the event was a huge success. More than 1,000 people spent the day at Fort Lincoln, listening to speakers, participating in a Custer Trail hike, revisiting the Custer House, and engaging with reenactors interpreting the past.

Sponsored by the Northern Plains National Heritage Area, through a \$10,000 grant, a Native Voices Discussion Panel capped the event. The NPNHA coordinated with United Tribes Technical College to invite Native historians and traditional knowledge keepers to share in public dialog and expand our point of view.

Gerard Baker, a native North Dakotan and enrolled member of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, moderated the discussion. Now retired from his life-long career with the National Park

Service, Baker served at Knife River Indian Villages, Fort Union Trading Post, and Theodore Roosevelt National Park. He later served as park superintendent at Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, and Mount Rushmore.

Other panelists included Dakota Goodhouse (Standing Rock Sioux Nation), Donovin Sprague (Cheyenne River Sioux Nation), Loren Yellow Bird, Sr. (MHA Nation), Tamara St. John (Sisseton Whapeton Oyate), and Calvin Grinnell (MHA Nation).

During the panel, tribal participants offered their perspectives on Native history. “We do have a culture that’s still vibrant and that people need to know about,” said Yellow Bird, a military veteran who also served as cultural advisor to the 2015 film *The Revenant*.

Baker expanded on that theme. “When George Custer came through here and later on when he took his trip to Little Bighorn, that was difficult times. One thing we have to do as an audience...is we need to learn how to listen...to the stories on both sides.” He asked the audience to “Listen to that wind. Listen to that river. Listen to the voices of the past that were up here. If we do that, we’ll have a lot better future.”



From the President ...



Greetings from the Northern Plains National Heritage Area!

Our heritage area is one of most beautiful and historically rich of the 55 national heritage areas across the nation. Encompassing the longest free-flowing stretch that remains on the Missouri River, our heritage area includes the five North Dakota counties of Burleigh, McLean, Morton, Mercer, and Oliver. This is the land of the Mandan and the Three-Affiliated Tribes, of Lewis and Clark, of Sitting Bull and the Lakota, of Custer and Fort Abraham Lincoln, of the fur trade and steamboats on the Missouri.

But beyond the history, this remains a lived-in landscape with diverse, vibrant communities and peoples. We see our mission as collaborating with those communities and constituents to help make our heritage relevant to local needs.

And that is the key: Heritage Areas, by their charter, cannot take on or support projects on their own. We need to work collaboratively with local groups and support their efforts through matches of monies and in-kind donations of at least a 1 to1 match. We are here to help with worthwhile projects that promote heritage tourism and related local economic development.

Some of those projects include partnering with the Society for the Preservation of the Former Governor's Mansion on educational programming and preservation work; supporting on-going archaeology projects at the Knife River Villages along the Missouri River, such as the 2016 Archaeo-Blitz that involved over 250 local high-school students in archaeological research and field work; and helping provide resources needed for a Native Voices Panel at the recent 30th observance of the reconstruction of the Custer House at Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park.

We look forward to continuing to partner with local community groups in 2020 and beyond to promote economic development through heritage tourism and development, and continue to tell the heritage stories of the past, present and future that flow from our stretch of the Missouri River.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shadd Piehl".

Shadd Piehl
President of the Board

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Knife River Indian Villages
National Historic Site

“To preserve, promote and develop the cultural, natural and scenic resources of the Northern Plains region of central North Dakota along the Missouri River.”

NPNHA Sponsors Archaeological Fieldwork at Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site



Left to Right: Dylan Lambert (Oklahoma State University student); Jay Sturdevant (NPS/Midwest Archeological Center archaeologist); Mark Mitchell (PCRG research director); Rachel Thimmig (PCRG volunteer and Southern Methodist University student); Jess Harrington (PCRG archaeologist); and Britni Rockwell (PCRG archaeologist)
Photo credit: Craig Johnson

Awatixa Village is one of three major Hidatsa settlements preserved at Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site near Stanton, ND, in the Northern Plains National Heritage Area. Also referred to as Sakakawea Village, after its best-known inhabitant, the village was the subject of two archaeological field sessions in 2019, directed by Dr. Mark Mitchell of the nonprofit Paleocultural Research Group (PCRG), headquartered in Colorado.

PCRG, in partnership with the NPNHA, the National Park Service, Minnesota State University-Moorhead, and Oklahoma State University, undertook fieldwork to better understand the settlement's history of occupation and study how riverbank erosion and rodent burrowing impact long-term preservation.



Barry Splawn (PCRG volunteer) working in excavation unit at Awatixa Village site where preservation is under threat from recurring riverbank erosion

According to Mitchell, Awatixa represents the culmination of a long history of Hidatsa economic, social, and cultural development. "This project provides context for understanding the complex interactions between the Hidatsa and European and American explorers and traders who came to the Missouri River in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Knife River Villages is one of the few sites along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail where the explorers' presence is well documented."

Artifact analysis is still ongoing, but the project has already produced significant—and surprising—results. Archaeological excavations in the 1960s and 1970s suggested that Awatixa Village was founded about 1797 and abandoned in 1834. The PCRG research has shown the occupation was far more complex, and longer, than previously believed. It testifies to the resilience of Hidatsa communities in the face of dramatic change that swept the region in the middle of the 19th century.

Research also yielded important information that the NPS needs to minimize impacts of natural processes to the village and help preserve it for the future as part of its adaptive management strategy.

As an added benefit, the public had opportunity to learn all about archaeological research. Visiting adults and children participated in interpretive programs and witnessed archaeology in action, giving them a greater appreciation for the importance of long-term stewardship of cultural resources on public lands.



Oklahoma State University field school archaeologists water screening excavated material from the Awatixa Village site.

Left to right: Skylar Dull-Huttis (Kansas State University student); Andrew Pfaff (PCRG volunteer); and Megan Moscarello (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)





Justin Deegan (l) and Alisha Deegan (r) at the LA Skins Film Festival in 2019. Deegan's Thunder Revolution Studio had two films entered in the festival at Grauman's Chinese Theatre, a movie palace on Hollywood Boulevard in Hollywood, CA.

Thunder Revolution Documents NPNHA Projects Through Indigenous Lens

The Northern Plains National Heritage Area and the Missouri Valley Heritage Alliance share a commitment to elevating narratives that define and describe what happened in our places along the Missouri River in central North Dakota. One of the initiatives has been to partner with Thunder Revolution Studio, LLC, an Indigenous-owned film company. Thunder Revolution is owned and overseen by Justin Deegan, a self-described Arikara and Oglala/Hunkpapa and tribal citizen of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation.

The NPNHA/MVHA partnered with Thunder Revolution to document archaeological investigations at Sakakawea Village at Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, and archaeological investigations at Chief Looking's Village within the Bismarck Parks & Recreation District.

On June 11, 2020, Aaron Barth of the NPNHA/MVHA sat down with Deegan to explore his personal and professional journey, and Barth inquired whether Deegan would be open to sharing some of that conversation. Deegan agreed, and below are some of his own words from that exchange:

Deegan:

“My ancestry is Arikara and Oglala/Hunkpapa. I am a citizen of the Three Affiliated Tribes and my family is from Parshall and White Shield, North Dakota.

So my business name is called Thunder Revolution Studio. It has to do with our spiritual connection to the thunder. And Revolution being an evolutionary response to the way we, Indigenous peoples, are viewed in the wider perspective of society. For the most part we are invisible. Unless of course we are noticed in the marginalized spotlights of poverty porn. Then people notice and make their comments. That's due to the way the other part of society sees us or wants to see us through their own lens.

Well, that's not what we see or how we view ourselves. My business motto, slogan or catch phrase is: ‘An Indigenous Lens for an Indigenous Narrative.’

Which means that because I am indigenous I can effectively share indigenous narratives positively and accurately. Which also means we

will not disparage or mock our own culture. That's important because these stories will be accurately reflected throughout history when our future ancestors look back at what we were doing and how we were interacting with each other during our time period, whether it be through print, online articles, or audio-video media.

I got into all of this because I wanted to be an actor. I auditioned for a short film when I was living in New York City. I immediately landed the part. Production was going to start in a few short weeks. To make a long story short, I found out they made the movie without me. I figured they ran out of money and sunk every dollar they had into their project.

Upon of learning the new information, I called my mother and told her what happened. She then asked me, "What are you going to do?" We were quiet for a few seconds. My response was simply, "You know what? I'm going to make my own movie." That's exactly what I did.

Since then I started my own filmmaking company, and it's been challenging, yet extremely rewarding.



Justin Deegan on film location during an archaeological investigation in July 2019 to locate cultural material in areas susceptible to erosion at Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site. The Knife River is at left, with an open 1x1 meter archaeological excavation unit bottom left.

Among the many challenges I face as an Indigenous filmmaker are tropes, stereotypes within my own society and culture. Because we have been conditioned through colonialism and don't even realize it. Why can't we have an Indigenous hero? Why do we always have to be the side kick? Why must our characters always come from the rez and be impoverished? Why is it when we return from the city do we have to relearn to become an Indian or reestablish our indigeneity?

As an Indigenous filmmaker we have the opportunity to change those tropes. Taika Waititi is a clear example of making a paradigm shift of indigenous cultures in film. Taiki is of Maori ancestry, and he is an Indigenous filmmaker. He's made native New Zealander films from *Where the Wild Things Are* to the highly successful *Thor Ragnarok* as well as Oscar winning film *Jo Jo Rabbit*. Taiki has recently been tapped to direct the up and coming Star Wars film.

In terms of Indigenous heroes or brown skinned heroes, we haven't had a brown skinned superstar since the late Bruce Lee. That is until Jason Momoa showed up and killed at the box office as *Aquaman*. That movie grossed over a billion dollars world-wide in just a few short weeks. I believe it's because brown skinned people around the world are searching for a brown skinned hero they can see themselves. There's Chadwick Bowman as *Black Panther*, which also killed at the movies.

There is definitely a paradigm shift happening. And I think that shift is going to make major changes in the very near future because of what is happening right now in our modern society.

These are just a few examples of how that lens shapes the narrative.”



An indigenous lens for an indigenous narrative is captured here, where Justin Deegan interviews Calvin Grinnell, a United States Marine Corps veteran and historian for the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation. Grinnell serves as commissioner on the Bismarck Historic Preservation Commission, current member and past president of the North Dakota State Historical Board, and on the board of directors for the Northern Plains National Heritage Area.



NPNHA Provides Key Preservation Grant to Former North Dakota Governors' Mansion

In 1884, when early Bismarck businessman, Asa Fisher, built a stick-style Victorian mansion at 320 East Ave. B, its fancy-cut cedar shingle roof made a bold statement about growth and prosperity in the new territorial capital. Serving as the North Dakota Governors' residence between 1893 and 1960, the mansion saw a long succession of updates and remodels that drastically altered its once grand expression.

In 1974 a group of citizens interested in preserving the site organized the Society for the Preservation of the Former Governors' Mansion and supported legislation to transfer ownership to the State Historical Society of North Dakota. Restoration work was completed in 1984, and the mansion was opened as a house museum, returned to its 1893 appearance—almost.

About five years ago, the SPFGM approached site supervisor Johnathan Campbell for a list of projects they might help fund. It was no surprise that restoring the cedar roof became a top priority. SPFGM board member Dick Weber spearheaded a capital campaign that raised nearly \$50,000 toward the \$80,000 project. A \$15,000 grant through the NPNHA was key to that fundraising effort.

Late last summer, architectural project manager Tom Linn brought Jason Eriksmoen and E-Quality Contracting onboard to do the specialized restoration work. As an important historic resource identified in the 2018 NPNHA Management Plan, the Former Governors' Mansion State Historic Site project is a shining example of the economic impact such a public-private partnership can generate.

Lightning Rod Adds Crowning Touch

When SPFGM treasurer, Karen DaSilva, learned of the State Historical Society's wish to replicate the original lightning rod on the front gable of the Former Governors' Mansion, she did what any good volunteer would do—she enlisted family and made her son, Tony, an offer he couldn't refuse. From a line drawing provided by site supervisor, Johnathan Campbell, Tony modeled the design in AutoCAD for a plasma cutter. He then cut the metal, welded the ornamental details, and gave it a few coats of paint. The project was done at the North Dakota State College of Science Fargo Campus in the summer of 2016 under the direction of professors Mitch Van Vleet and Lee Larson.



Left: Original lightning rod as seen in historic 1893 photograph



Right: Tony DaSilva with reproduction lightning rod he fabricated at NDSCS



Top: Detail of diamond patterned, fancy-cut cedar shingles
Center: West side elevation with construction scaffolding
Bottom: Front elevation with construction lift

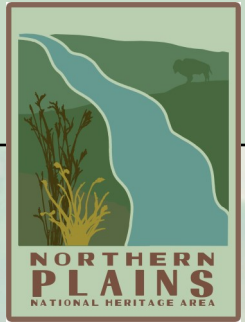


Left: Installation of lightning rod by E-Quality Construction



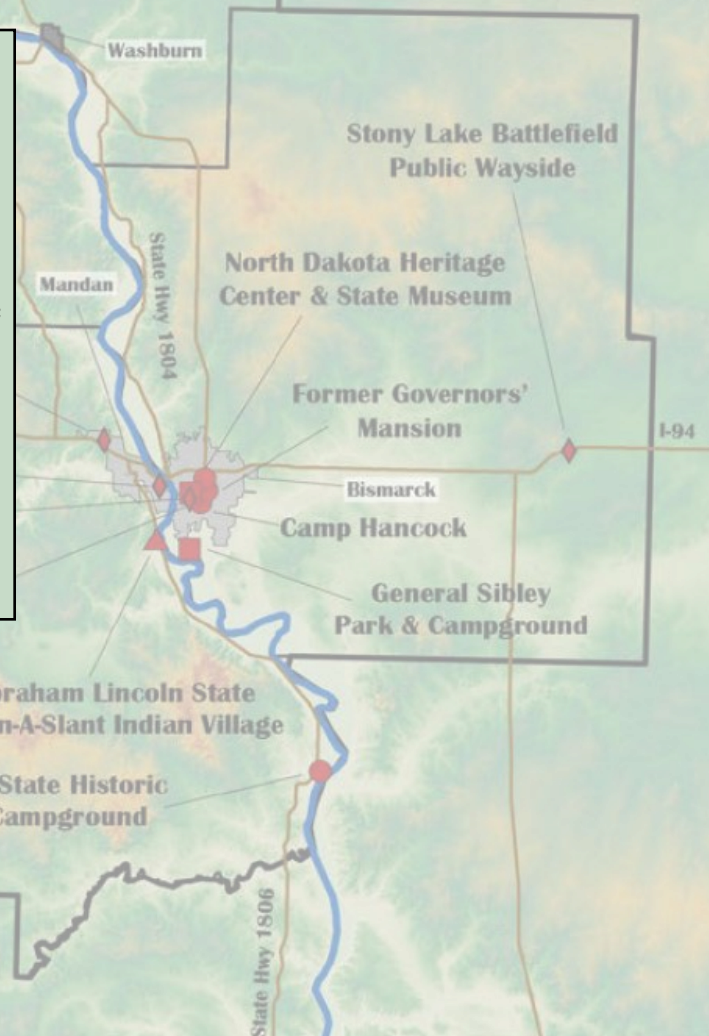
NPNHA 2019 Economic Impact

Federal Heritage Partnership Program \$332,097
Non-federal cash and in-kind match \$769,241
TOTAL IMPACT \$1,101,338



The National Heritage Area Program

The NPNHA is one of 55 National Heritage Areas in the United States. NHAs are designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural, and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. Through their resources, NHAs tell nationally important stories that celebrate our nation's diverse heritage. As lived-in landscapes, NHAs are a grassroots, community-driven approach to heritage conservation and economic development, and are among the most cost-effective programs in the National Park Service budget. Through public-private partnerships, NHAs leverage Federal Heritage Partnership Program funds with local matching dollars to support historic preservation, natural resource conservation, recreation, heritage tourism, and educational projects, fostering pride of place and an enduring stewardship ethic.



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