Iowa Settlers & Chief Che-Neuse's Band: Familial Exchanges, Meskwaki Exiles, & the Importance of Storytelling

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IOWA SETTLERS & CHIEF CHE-NEUSE’S BAND: FAMILIAL EXCHANGES, MESKWAKI EXILES, & THE IMPORTANCE OF STORYTELLING

by

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The second half of the 19th century was a time of dramatic change for both Native Americans and white settlers in Iowa. Although federal land cessions forced most indigenous peoples out of Iowa, unassimilated, “non-violent” bands remained and regularly contacted settlers through the early 20th century. These interactions emerged from the enforcement of land cessions via military forts along with fundamental differences between each group’s cultural traditions and understanding of land ownership. During an interview on her hundredth birthday in 1980, my great-grandmother Josephine Kelly recalled childhood visits from Native Americans on her family’s farm near Fort Dodge. This interview became the foundation of my thesis.

The group of Native Americans Josephine encountered was almost certainly the Meskwaki band of Chief Che-Neuse (called “Johnny Green” by settlers), who felt the need to improve his clan due to the encroachment of settler colonialism. In addition to Josephine’s tape, I employ sources from living Native and Anglo-American researchers, archival U.S. maps depicting land cession “treaties”, archival newspaper sources, and a settler account from a woman who, like Josephine, recounts childhood interactions with Che-Neuse’s band.

Surprisingly, such interactions reveal nuanced similarities in material culture beyond elucidating the established gender roles of each group, cultural prejudices of the settlers, and differences in material culture. I refer to Marie Louise Pratt’s notion of transculturation, a concept appreciating reciprocity and limited agency in subjugated native peoples as settler populations and colonialism force the adoption of their material culture. By applying the concept of transculturation and recognizing its limits in my project, I demonstrate that both Meskwaki exiles like Chief Che-Neuse and settlers like Josephine exchanged and modified objects of material culture in ways unique to not only material trends of exchange in Iowa between white settlers and the Tama Meskwaki but also typical colonialist dynamics of exchange historically. Along with surveying artifacts involved in these interactions, I analyze examples of Meskwaki storytelling to appreciate native oral traditions, the psychology of Che-Neuse’s band encountering white settlers and colonialist power structures, and way in which settlers and natives used certain objects of material culture and understood their personal past. Beyond identifying patterns of material exchange, I connect Josephine’s memories with those of Meskwaki individuals to identify a shared humanity in how both groups employ storytelling as a natural human response to stress and danger to locate, explain, and prioritize experiences along with the artifacts involved in them.
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I. Introduction

As a young settler girl in the 1880’s and 90’s, my great-grandmother Josephine Kelly lived on a small farm near Duncombe in the greater Fort Dodge area. On her hundredth birthday in May of 1980, my grandparents J.W. “Bud” (Josephine’s son) and Bettie Gormally conducted an interview allowing Josephine to share some of her memories of her early childhood. In my grandfather’s words at the start of the cassette tape, “We’re trying to get some historical facts on life in the early Webster County. She was born in Duncombe. She was born in 1880. And she’s just passed her hundredth birthday, and overall, her health is good.” The first time I heard the interview, I was a young boy. The cassette tape, a yellowed Memorex that my family listens to during reunions, is a treasured, shared point of reference among us. Family members cite the interview as a source of generational pride, a testament to older, simpler days, time-tested wisdom, and the value of hard work. From the first time I heard the tape to now, though, I have realized that the information Josephine provided is just as valuable to the study of a crucial point in Iowa’s early history as what her words mean to my family’s identity. As the interview progresses, Josephine recounts memories concerning the role of women in her household, economic hardships, and the objects of material culture they used.

The role of women in her family consisted of cooking, cleaning, and maintaining the household, in contrast to the duty of the men to work the land and harvest crops. The material culture she mentions ranges from canvas for covering buttermilk as it curdled and turned into cottage cheese in the sun to an old stone stove, which had been in the family for generations. At one point in the interview, Josephine pauses, unable to put her experiences and childhood way of life into words. “You wouldn’t understand all that we did,” she said, her voice trailing off. While explicitly referring to her family’s way of life in her childhood concerning the obsolete, obscure
material culture they employed, this quote speaks directly to the limitations of my research and conclusions in my project. While thoroughly researched and analyzed, I recognize that I simply cannot understand or do not have a basis for interpreting every idea and cultural phenomenon on from Josephine’s childhood well over one hundred years ago.

Josephine’s voice radiates new energy speaking on the subject of childhood visitors. My grandmother Bettie asks Josephine about encounters with Native American bands, which she had briefly mentioned before. Revealing her cultural bias as a member of the dominant settler culture of the time, Josephine recalls her family trading beans, corn, potatoes, cheese, vegetables, and even cake with these indigenous peoples she refers to as “lazy” and “beggars.” In return, the Native American group brought clothes and crafts, especially wool blankets, scarves, and hats. According to my great-grandmother, these native peoples visited regularly for years, not just a few times. Using this tape as the inspiration and foundation for my research, I investigate the identity of these Native Americans as well as the broader historical and political contexts and trends concerning such interactions and trade. Beyond my great-grandmother’s memories, I aim to shed some light on the experiences and material exchanges of both white settlers and Native Americans in central Iowa in general during this time. Lastly, I wish to investigate how both groups locate and describe their use of material culture through storytelling.

Moreover, throughout my project I recognize my own cultural biases along with the prejudices and biases of white settlers like Josephine as cultural outsiders to the indigenous nations and cultures in question. Through a comprehensive body of research and the narrative approach of creative nonfiction, wherein I employ a controlled use of the first-person point of view to facilitate perspective shifts and a significant amount of analysis, I aim to distance myself from my own cultural biases and assumptions as well as foreground my subjectivity and cultural
perspective. This narrative approach also enables me to openly and honestly assess the limitations of my point of view, research, and work beyond such limitations by continually expanding my domain of inquiry to incorporate supplemental perspectives. Though I cannot free myself entirely of my prior assumptions and biases, I understand that identifying and reflecting on them critically are necessary steps along with transcending the cultural prejudices of white settlers in nineteenth century colonial discourse. Furthermore, I use this voice in my project to connect the importance of Meskwaki storytelling with native authors’ use of various items of material culture, including the materiality of written narratives themselves, to frame their understanding of the past with an ethos of indigenousness regardless of what materials they describe, locate, and use in their narratives.

For this thesis, I employ James Deetz’s definition of the key term and concept “material culture” to assist me in my analysis of the nature of interactions between Native Americans and white settlers concerning material exchange. To him, material culture refers to “…that sector of our physical environment that we modify through culturally determined behavior” (Deetz 35). Material culture reflects the practices and beliefs of a society, covering all aspects of life. The idea of material culture explores how a culture expresses their beliefs, traditions, and ways of life through the materials they use, both aesthetically and practically. With this in mind, I attempt to engage the material culture – including literature – of both white settlers and Native Americans I encounter in my research, not with my own set of cultural biases, but rather as the shared human capacities of perception, sensation, and empathy. In this way, I explore how dramatic cultural events, such as forceful displacement and intercultural contact, manifest themselves through changes in material culture.
In “An Iowa Farm Girl Encounters Chief Che-Neuse’s Band, c. 1888,” I employ federal maps along with the history of both Iowa’s military forts and indigenous nations in the territory that would become Iowa to help contextualize encounters between indigenous peoples and white settlers like Josephine. These sources demonstrate how military forts emerged in tandem with federal land cession treaties as white settlers pushed westward into Iowa. In what would become the state of Iowa, the U.S. government forced the Sioux, Potawatomi, and Meskwaki to cede their lands from 1842 to 1851 (Fig. 3), along with the dissolution of an area called the “Neutral Ground,” a swath of land in northeast and central Iowa off limits to all Native Americans, in 1846. Shortly following each of these treaties and purchases, the federal government established military forts to facilitate trade as well as enforce these “agreements.” As Dr. Whittaker writes, “If Europeans were as numerous as leaves in a sprouting forest [in the “new territory” of the U.S.], frontier forts were the earliest saplings” (Whittaker 2). One such fort was Fort Dodge, the final military fort built of those active in Iowa from 1816-1853, which originally served as a buffer between the Sioux and white settlers (Gourley 40). While indigenous groups such as the Sioux were quite familiar with forts as far back as one thousand years (Foster 42-3), though, an understanding of fixed territorial borders and monetary land ownership did not square with their world views, conceptual frameworks, and way of life. As Juliana Barr notes in her landmark essay “Borders and Borderlands,” the problem for these indigenous systems and peoples in north central Iowa during this period was their position of subjugation to the policies of the U.S. government, not their supposed lack of complexity (Barr 11).

After land cession treaties, unassimilated, “illegal” groups of Meskwaki, Ho-Chunk Winnebago, and Potawatomi remained. Archival newspaper sources reveal that a band of Meskwaki led by Chief Che-Neuse, known as “Johnny Green” to most white settlers in Iowa,
regularly interacted with settlers on annual visits through north central Iowa during the same time span as Josephine’s childhood. His band is most likely the band of which she speaks. Che-Neuse excelled as a diplomat through his dealings with white settlers and other indigenous nations and briefly owned land himself as part of the Meskwaki nation, which continues to live on a private settlement in Tama County today. Yet many newspaper sources characterize the chief’s band as primitive, inferior, and dependent on white culture for their existence. In addition to these articles implicitly promoting such prejudices, they even advocate explicitly for modes of action such as the imperialistic *mission civilisatrice*, or “civilizing mission,” and assimilation from their position of power and privilege as part of the dominant settler culture of the time.

In “Cultural Prejudice, Material Culture, & Odd Exchanges,” I approach the broad question of how the material culture of both white settlers and Native Americans changed as both groups experienced a time of travel en masse. While one group pushed westward in search of land on which to settle and make a living for their family, the other struggled to survive and navigate imposed socioeconomic hierarchies as federal land cessions and resettlements forcefully and unjustly exiled them out of their homelands. I begin by investigating a retrospective essay entitled “Johnny Green’s High Ambition” by Lucretia June Hayden, a former schoolteacher in central Iowa. Recording her experiences as a child in Marshall County during the 1860’s, Hayden claims that Chief Che-Neuse stayed with her settler community for at least one year, probably longer, and takes note of the vast array of material culture exchanged between the two groups. Though Hayden expands on the intricacies of Che-Neuse, the members of his band, and their material culture, her cultural biases and prejudices are similar to those of my great-grandmother, namely in viewing Che-Neuse’s band as dependent, primitive, and inferior beggars from a place of privilege as members of the dominant settler culture. From the perspective of
Chief Che-Neuse’s son, the interactions between Hayden’s white settler community and Che-Neuse’s group produced an internalized sense of inferiority and psychological trauma within him due to the boy’s prolonged stay and education within the Hayden household.

In addition to these instances of discrimination and subjugated psychology, the usage and exchange of material culture between both Josephine’s family and Hayden’s community with Chief Che-Neuse’s band appear unique in significant ways to the prevailing patterns of material exchange in Iowa at the time. Foster notes that European goods had largely replaced traditional materials in Native American groups by the late 19th century, and cash crop farming took prominence in white settler farmsteads (Foster 60). Yet Hayden’s settler community does not appear to impose their Anglo-European material culture to such an extent on Che-Neuse’s band and in fact adopts the use of buckskin for certain practical functions, an important traditional material for many indigenous peoples (Hayden 244). Here I place my great-grandmother’s words in conversation with Hayden’s, for Josephine speaks about having a stone stove and her family’s practice of rotating crops, contrary to the material trends and popular farming techniques of the time. From these observations, I suggest that though the cultural biases of Hayden’s community and Josephine’s family towards Chief Che-Neuse’s band were consistent with the prejudices of white settlers towards indigenous peoples at the time, the interactions between Hayden’s community and Josephine’s family did not align with the prevailing material trends of exchange.

At this point in my project, I turn to Marie Louise Pratt’s concept of transculturation to gain a deeper sense of appreciation for these apparent anomalies. Among other applications, to her the term describes how colonized peoples view and absorb materials from the dominant culture of the colonizer. She asserts that while reciprocal exchange between the colonizer and colonized is unequal, the colonized may influence how and what they receive from the colonizer
to a degree (Pratt 6). In multiple instances, objects of material culture, from a slate and pencil to Hayden’s Seth Thomas clock, serve different purposes and have different meanings to Che-Neuse and members of his band than the white settlers in the area. By contrast, the use of buckskin from Che-Neuse’s band did not change from many of its traditional applications upon its acquisition by white settlers. Pursuing these observations, I proceed to a comparative analysis of the most complete collection of traditional Meskwaki material culture known (that of the Field Museum in Chicago) in order to determine whether the material exchanges and interactions of Hayden and Josephine’s families with Chief Che-Neuse’s band followed the material trends experienced by most of the Meskwaki nation as a whole. Not surprisingly, much overlap exists between this collection of Tama Meskwaki material culture and the accounts of Josephine, Hayden, and the newspaper clippings, including the migration patterns of Chief Che-Neuse’s band, some of their uses of buckskin, and possession of wool.

A prominent characteristic of the Field collection is that it clearly reflects a rapid influx of Anglo-European materials into the Meskwaki nation through trade, from practical items of material culture such as clothing and knives to decorative items prized for their aesthetic and expressive value, such as metal and glass beads. Yet in Hayden’s narrative, at least, members of Che-Neuse’s band do not carry knives. They also wear breechcloth and buckskin, though a portrait of Chief Che-Neuse wearing a suit shows that he had access to European-style clothing (Fig. 5). So though they had materials such as Euro-American clothing and wool for crafts, the band did not absorb other outside materials from the settlers and actively retained the use of traditional materials such as buckskin, even influencing white settlers to use buckskin for various practical functions. From this, I argue that instead of reinforcing typical colonialist narratives, a more voluntary and exploratory exchange occurred between Chief Che-Neuse’s band and white
settlers like Josephine and Hayden’s families. This exchange allowed Che-Neuse’s people to retain some of their traditional items of practical material culture and pride in their indigenous knowledge while adopting other more Anglo-European items and materials. Note that the degree to which various Meskwaki groups, including Che-Neuse’s band, absorbed Anglo-European material culture had no impact on the degree or agency of indigenousness such groups possessed and exercised.

Analyzing objects and trends of material exchange between indigenous peoples and white settlers as well as positioning myself in conversation with my great-grandmother, Hayden, and other settler accounts, I realized the importance of stories in processing the memories each group had about their interactions with one other. The role of stories in this regard also includes making sense of material culture, social practices, cultural biases, and understanding of the past they lived through. In “Storytelling & the Truth of the Past,” I examine examples of Meskwaki storytelling from Ray A. Young Bear and Linguist Truman Michelson. Black Eagle Child, a contemporary piece set initially in the Meskwaki Tama Settlement around “Why-Cheer,” Iowa (the actual name of this town is “What Cheer”), Young Bear presents his persona Edgar Bearchild as struggling to reconcile his disappearing communal identity with his individual identity in relation to the omnipresent world of white culture outside the settlement. I then turn to Michelson’s Autobiography of a Fox Indian Woman. The work itself is a translation of an early-twentieth century interview of a Meskwaki woman from the original Meskwaki syllabary into English. The woman speaks of her mid-nineteenth century childhood during exploitative federal land cessions. Aside from further elucidating Meskwaki gender roles, traditions, material culture, and social practices in general, this narrative is especially unique and relevant to my project because it counterbalances Josephine’s interview as she experiences indigenous peoples coming
to her family’s farm during her childhood. In this autobiography, however, the Meskwaki woman’s words frame her childhood experiences as white settlers approach *her* on her native land.

Through these two narratives from the perspective of Meskwaki individuals, I attempt to reconstruct the psychology of Chief Che-Neuse and members of his band as they encountered white settlers and new socioeconomic systems in an uneven power dynamic systematically organized against them. I also want to say something about the role of storytelling in Hayden, Josephine, and Meskwaki individuals such as Young Bear and the woman Michelson interviews as a way of communicating their own understanding of the past. In this way, I illustrate many key concepts at stake in my project concerning both the material culture and instances of storytelling I survey. The idea that the meaning and usage of identical objects of material culture often differ between the settlers and indigenous groups I study is crucial. Furthermore, the ability of material trends and instances of material adoption to carry psychological and cultural impacts beyond introducing practical benefits and changes only is important. Moreover, the insight that though native peoples may employ Anglo-European materials, they fully retain their indigenous identities is necessary to appreciate the various material trends of exchange and exceptions I elucidate. In addition to material exchanges and patterns, though, the notion that storytelling may locate and explain the use of material culture in an engaging way, give agency to indigenous storytellers in doing so, and allow for the possibility of predicting the impact of shifts in material culture on storytelling, and vice-versa, is a meaningful and promising area of inquiry.
II. “An Iowa Farm Girl Encounters Chief Che-Neuse’s Band, c. 1888”

“Fortifications & Self-Sufficiency”

The year is 1888. Eight year-old Josephine Kelly walks into her family’s cabin after spreading curds over a canvas to dry in the sun and covering them with a blanket to stop bugs and flies from feeding. On her family’s small plot of land just outside Duncombe, Iowa, her father John finishes counting the year’s harvest of corn, potatoes, and beans. John’s wife Ellen tends the stone stove that has been in the Kelly family for generations as she bakes cornbread and mixes cake batter. Tasked with the job of preparing cottage cheese, Josephine has just started third grade and is finally old enough to begin learning how to cook and assist her siblings with their chores around the house. Suddenly, she sees a small group of men approaching the farm. They have a few wagons with clothes and crafts bearing intricate designs that Josephine has never seen before. She calls her parents, who approach the men, wary but calm. Josephine watches as the men go inside the cabin with her parents, emerging a while later with basketfuls of food.

These recollections of my great-grandmother Josephine Kelly (later Josephine Gormally) on her one-hundredth birthday are very familiar to me, just as the sounds of construction surrounding Iowa’s first frontier forts must have been to local Native American bands in the 1850s. On an old tape recording that my family drags out on holidays and reunions so that we can all reminisce, my grandmother Bettie Gormally asks, “The woman of the house, how did she manage her day?” Josephine laughs, catches her breath, and replies, “Well, she was very busy no doubt, taking care of the family, making butter and cheese, and everything we ate.” Such sentiments were commonplace among 19th century settler families in the Fort Dodge area, a shared belief in self-sufficiency, reflecting personal sacrifice in service of concerns for the well-being of the family.
Yet my great-grandmother’s self-sufficiency, her family farm, and the accomplishments of other white settlers like her would not have been possible without federal forts, nor would the Native Americans in the area have been so poor or “docile.” The forts that made the lives of Iowan settlers like my great-grandmother viable through military protection, enforcing federal
land cessions, and serving as trade outposts throughout the middle-late 1800s were also familiar to the everyday lives of Native Americans in the area. Historian Lance M. Foster¹, a member of the Ioway nation, notes that “fortifications were nothing new to Native American tribes…prehistoric Indian fortifications were often larger, lasted longer, and housed more people than forts built by European governments,” with such Native American forts in Iowa dating back to the Woodland Period 1000 years ago (Foster 42-3). Archaeologist and Historian William Whittaker asserts that U.S. federal military forts were instrumental in the support of white settlers as they migrated into the territory of indigenous peoples (Whittaker 2).

By contrast, fixed territorial borders and monetary land ownership did not resonate in the same way with the traditions, practices, and teachings of Native Americans in Iowa as they did with settler families and the United States government. In a guided interview, Dr. William Whittaker of the Office of the State Archaeologist spoke to examples of this conceptual dissonance between the social orders of these groups, providing some context to interactions between white settlers and Native Americans as well as the general role of government forts in north central Iowa during the second half of the 19th century. “Well in 1825 the U.S. Government wanted to separate the Dakota from the Sauk, Meskwaki, and Ioway,” he said. “They were always picking fights with one another. So the feds created this twenty-five mile buffer around the Neutral Line [used to separate these indigenous nations from each other] called the Neutral Ground, which was in effect from 1825 to around 1846.” He shook his head and laughed lightly. “It didn’t work. No one was supposed to be in the Neutral Ground, but when the feds realized it was too big an area to effectively manage, they tried to cram the Ho-Chunk – you know, the Winnebago – in there. That was the end of the Neutral Ground.”

¹ For my thesis, I will be using Foster’s spellings for the names of indigenous groups, unless quoted differently from a primary source (newspaper clippings or other sources from white settlers, for example).
Fig. 2: Map of Iowa, 1843, roughly midway through indigenous land cessions. The federal government had already divided the eastern part of the state into counties while documenting extant indigenous territories. Here the term “Sauks and Foxes” (in yellow) denotes the Meskwaki nation, with the Sioux (in green) to the north and Neutral Ground (in red) between the two. What would become the Fort Dodge area (including Duncombe) sits just inside the bottom left corner of the Neutral Ground. To my knowledge, this is the only surviving federal map that depicts land ceded for settlers alongside recognized native territory in Iowa.

Government policies like these would have caused immense chaos and confusion within indigenous leadership systems. According to Historian Juliana Barr, the reason for this had
nothing to do with the supposed simplicity or lack of organization within Native American sociopolitical structures. In her essay “Borders and Borderlands,” she asserts that native geopolitical structures were not arbitrary or ill-conceived, much less passive, but rather complex, sovereign entities recognized between indigenous nations for hundreds of years and capable of regular migration (Barr 11). The problem for these indigenous systems and groups in north central Iowa during this time was not that they were inferior or less developed, but that they operated on a fundamentally different conceptual framework than the policies of the U.S. government. Foster writes that “accepted norms within the family, clan, and tribe... [were] based upon connections to ancestors and traditional territory...not concerned with converting others; [they] were specific within the group. Within one’s lineage, there was a strict covenant between the people, the Creator, and the spiritual forces of the land” (Foster 36). Instead of exercising a material ownership of land based on an authority of possessiveness, native peoples maintained a more holistic understanding of their territory. For them, the land in which they lived belonged to their ancestors and spiritual forces as an interactive entity rather than existing as a place to buy, sell, and inhabit. Given this, Barr’s observation that the boundaries already in place between indigenous nationalities often took precedence over the new borders enacted by European, and later American, governments makes sense (Barr 11). Faced with the pressure to give up their land in a sense they could not conceptualize, these nations deferred to the ways of life in which they had thrived for centuries.

Even with this in mind, I wondered how Fort Dodge facilitated an initial contact zone between white settlers and Native American groups. Which specific bands played key roles in this early history prior to Josephine’s encounters? Primarily a military rather than trading post,
Fort Dodge\textsuperscript{2} was the final military fort built of those active in Iowa from 1816-1853. U.S. infantry established the post on August 2, 1850 (Nagel 186), and according to Kathryn E.M. Gourley, Fort Dodge stood between the Sioux to the north and west and settlers migrating from the south and east (Gourley 40). In 1853, the military role of Fort Dodge ended. From the perspective of Native Americans in the area, Foster observes, the Sioux near the fort believed it was a militaristic, defense-oriented operation and adds that, knowingly or unknowingly, the soldiers that occupied Fort Dodge had built the structure on land considered sacred to the Sioux. The soldiers further irritated the Sioux by constructing recreational areas, including parade grounds, on Siouan burial sites. But even though the Sioux, considered by the U.S government as relatively hostile compared to other indigenous groups in the area, were angry, they did not fight until conditions became intolerable, when the Sioux realized that the federal government and white settlers planned to stay permanently rather than trade temporarily. The Spirit Lake Massacre of 1857 and Dakota uprising of 1862, in which the Dakota Sioux killed hundreds of whites who had settled on their native land, exemplified this breaking point (Foster 52).

Yet the fort held, and by 1853 only small, “illegal” bands of unassimilated indigenous peoples roamed in Iowa (Whittaker 1). In 1854, Major William Williams purchased the barracks and land spanning the fort, laying out the town of Fort Dodge as a permanent settlement (Foster 188). During my interview with Dr. Whittaker, he was certain that the U.S. government had removed all the Dakota Sioux by 1857. He mentioned that settlers tolerated only the Meskwaki, Ho-Chunk Winnebago, and Potawatomi after the Sioux removal and completion of federal land cessions. But why? Where did they live, and more importantly, how did they modify or adapt their behaviors to fit within the acceptable parameters of encroaching settlers?

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{2} Fort Dodge was originally called Fort Clarke for the first ten months of its existence but was renamed due to another fort already possessing the name (Nagel 185).
Yet if the forts enabled my great-grandmother’s self-sufficiency, they also disrupted systems of self-determination shared by Native Americans in the area. I thought of how my great-grandmother would have reacted to visits from a Native American band as Dr. Whittaker pointed at the computer screen showing his visual database of compiled reports of sightings and interactions with Native Americans during the mid-late 19th century, bands who remained after the completion of land cessions. Unlike their relationship to the Dakota Sioux, these groups
tolerated each other. They also attempted to interact with settlers rather than hiding from them, and the settlers viewed them as a benign presence rather than a threat to their property or well-being.

Foster notes that some families managed to live in small settlements for several decades after federal land cessions (Foster 28). Yet according to Dr. Whittaker, they nevertheless appeared peculiar to the settlers, keeping to themselves even as they camped near the Iowa, Missouri, and Des Moines Rivers, and encountered white settlers regularly. “They avoided all conflict and so they became known as a curiosity rather than feared as a menace,” he said. “Sure, in the late 19th century you have free-ranging Indians who are going on hunts, begging, knocking on cabin doors, and they’ll be doing beadwork and selling it in the trinket trade, but by about 1900 the feds really clamped down.” Dr. Whittaker emphasized this point with a sweep of his hand. He noted that the federal government rounded up all the horses in the Meskwaki settlement near Tama in 1900, killing them all to prevent settlement members from roaming the state.

He continued. “Usually these types of visits [in the middle-late 1800’s] occur near the main waterways, but when settlers had a reputation for giving to Indians, and giving well, [native bands] would come back time and time again,” he said. I was puzzled. I knew that Josephine had lived on a small farm plot in Colfax Township just outside of Duncombe, but no major waterways were near. Furthermore, I had no idea what items of material culture families like the Kelly’s would have exchanged with these indigenous groups. Indeed, Dr. Whittaker admitted that the location of the Kelly farmstead was a bit unusual for regular encounters with the unassimilated peoples tolerated at the time. I wondered what would have enticed such bands to visit annually.
Fig. 4: Map of Colfax Township. As seen from the top of the image, the square farm plots within the blue lines denote land within the area of Duncombe. Josephine’s father (John Kelly) appears as owning a small plot in Section 35, just south of Duncombe. This is the exact location of her family farm on which they encountered Chief Che-Neuse’s band.
“From ‘Beggars’ to ‘Tribal Members’”

After the men leave their farm, John and Ellen Kelly wipe their foreheads and turn to Josephine. They tell her that these men are called “Indians” and that they do not speak English. They warn her to never talk to them alone or give them anything without their permission, yet they assure Josephine that these “Indians” would never hurt her. Josephine is confused but promises to do what her parents say. She notices that these so-called “Indians” visit their farm regularly, sometimes with many men, sometimes with only a few, but that they always come begging for food. She cannot understand why her family has worked hard all planting and harvest season only to give away much of their crop. Her parents tell her that they trade the food for blankets, scarves, hats, and other clothing items. Josephine nods but wonders why these “Indians” never bring any possessions with them other than their wagons and trade goods. She wonders why, of all places, they choose to visit her family’s farm.

I listened to the familiar sound of Josephine’s voice and caught a detail I had previously overlooked. My grandmother Bettie asks, “Did you say one time that the Indians came to your house?” I tried to imagine the look in my great-grandmother’s eyes as she tried to remember her childhood experiences nearly a century before. The tempo and pitch of her reply accelerate and crescendo. “Yeah, yes. They were begging, the Indians that came through. They didn’t live in this area. They’d come through, you know, and they’d beg. And if you were good to ‘em, well, they were alright...And they were lazy, you know, they wouldn’t bring anything. They could, but they wouldn’t,” she recounts. I let the tape keep playing, for in my previous sessions with the recording, I had stopped after these words to take notes and begin the arduous task of transcribing the words of Josephine’s faint voice. Yet I had so thoroughly immersed myself in contextual research, I did not think of simply listening to the end of the tape for more leads.

Josephine cleared her throat, as if addressing both my grandmother and I. “They travelled in old wagons, old covered wagons.” My grandmother asked, “Who were these, the Indians?” “Yeah,” Josephine replied. “They’d come up this way gettin’ freedom from the winter...Beggars. Beggars.” She went on to say that these native peoples would keep coming back to her farm...
because of her mother’s cooking, and in exchange for food, her family received wool scarves and blankets. Her family would give them cornbread, potatoes, cheese, vegetables, and even cake, which was a very rare treat at the time. Forced by the U.S. government to disperse from their homelands, these indigenous groups experienced a sudden lack of arable land on which they could grow stable crops, most likely many of the same ones the Kelly’s grew and traded to them. Yet if Josephine’s mother made the fire in their family’s stone stove too intense by adding too much stoked wood, coal, or cobs as fuel, she would have easily burned the dough and ruined the delicate project of baking a cake, which was a day’s work at the time.

No wonder these Native American bands returned year after year. In our interview, Dr. Whittaker told me that during the late 19th century, much of the material culture of these groups was ephemeral, or short-lived, aside from the influx and use of more durable trade goods such as glass, newer kinds of fabric, and brass experienced by both white settlers and Native Americans. And while both white settlers and Native Americans experienced this period as a time of travel and material transition, one group pushed westward in search of land on which to settle and make a living for their family as the other endured federally-sanctioned exile from their homelands while struggling to survive and navigate imposed socioeconomic hierarchies and folk taxonomies. Yet during this period both groups nevertheless produced material culture that was short-lived and quickly made to test or suit the sensibilities and literal tastes of their counterparts. While settlers like my great-grandmother’s family gave food to the indigenous groups that passed through their area, native bands produced trinkets and handicrafts to sell to settlers for money. A clearer picture of what interactions between native bands and white settlers may have been like in Webster County in the late 19th century began to appear, but I still wondered at the identity of native peoples with which the Kelly’s interacted. Dr. Whittaker and I contacted Al
Nelson, an archaeologist and archivist in the Fort Dodge area, for help in this area of inquiry. After many weeks of archival research, strong evidence suggested that the band of Native Americans to which my great-grandmother referred was a group of Meskwaki led by a former Potawatomi named Chief Che-Neuse, known to most settlers in Iowa as “Johnny Green” (Hayden 239).

The March 16, 1871 issue of the newspaper *Iowa Northwest* first records his band in an excerpt from the Dexter (Iowa) *Herald*. The writer of the piece takes inventory of the band and their possessions while describing the perceived purpose of their stay:

I saw smoke ascending from a grove of timber...and to my surprise it was an encampment of a few Indians; remnant of a tribe of the Musquaks, or as they are more familiarly known in Iowa, ‘Johnny Green’s Tribe,’” the article reads. “They were in a squalid, destitute condition, and they were here for the purpose of trapping, hunting, and begging. They had selected a strategic camping ground sheltered by bluffs and timber from the storm and winds, close to a spring of clear water, and they are well provided with wood. Their camp was built in the regular wigwam order, with poles set up on the ground...and brought together at the top, forming a round shaped cone with an opening to let the smoke out, and covered with weeds and tall grass worked together...Their ponies – they had some thirty or forty – were subsisting on hazel brush and the buds of timber surrounding the camp…How can human beings endure the hardships of cold and hunger as these poor creatures do? I am sure our horses and cattle could not live on such as they do. Would it not be a benevolent act for the State to take care of and educate Johnny Green’s people, and to some extent try and mitigate their suffering? (“The Last of the Musquawkas”)
By referring to members of the group as “poor creatures,” comparing them to the livestock of the dominant culture, and appealing to the state to look after the band, the author prominently displays his cultural biases while evoking tropes of imperialist discourse. In addition to implicitly casting Che-Neuse’s band as inferior and utterly destitute without a sense of self-sufficiency or cognizance of their own well-being, the writer invokes the rationale of *mission civilisatrice* by advocating for the assimilation and Westernization of these indigenous peoples as an unequivocally humane course of action.

I continued to walk this paper trail. The December 19, 1872 issue of the Fort Dodge *Messenger* notes this same group camping on a riverbank in Tysons Mills (Lehigh) just outside of Fort Dodge. The writer ends by noticing, “His [Chief Che-Neuse’s] Squaw is there and is eighty nine years old” (“Summer Lodge”). Less than a year later, the May 6, 1873 issue of the Fort Dodge *Semi-Weekly Times* records “eight or ten braves of the Johnny Green tribe” camping next to Gowrie outside of Fort Dodge with a chief named McIntosh (“Brieflets”). In a February 20, 1885, excerpt from the Webster City *Freeman*, the Fort Dodge *Times* reports that “Johnny Green, son of old ‘Johnny Green,’ the Indian chief, passed through this city last week to join his tribe, who are camping down the Boone a few miles. Young Johnny is a bright and vigorous youth, whose savage traits have been subdued by contact with the ‘pale face’ nation” (“Webster City Freeman”). My great-grandmother would have been almost five years old at the time of this insert.

I learned as much about the facts of these encounters as I did the lens of the dominant culture that describes them. For one, the names “Johnny Green” and “Johnny Green’s Band” originated with white settlers and their media outlets, not Chief Che-Neuse or any members of his band. While some evidence suggests that Che-Neuse embraced the name “Johnny Green”
because it brought him closer to and thus more familiar with white culture\textsuperscript{3}, the settlers’ act of labeling the chief and his band speaks to differences in sociopolitical agency exercised between Che-Neuse’s band and white settlers. In “Talking about ‘Tribe’: Moving from Stereotypes to Analysis,” Chris Lowe asserts that the way dominant cultures name subjugated populations – including the codification of the term “tribe” itself in the U.S. and other western nations – does not necessarily reflect the self-naming practices of Native American groups. In fact, he observes that this way of naming “obscures wide historical differences in way of life, political and social organization, and culture among Native Americans” (Lowe 6). According to Lowe, the term “tribe” further reinforces associations of primitivism with native peoples, as these individuals prefer “nation” or “people” outside of legal contexts (6). The name “Johnny Green” along with others designated by white settlers are extensions of this phenomenon and reflect an uneven power structure at the expense of Chief Che-Neuse’s band. Furthermore, the Messenger article uses the term “squaw,” which according to Foster originated from Algonquian nations east of Iowa, adopted by Anglo-Europeans to refer to any Native American woman. “Though it may have Indian roots, the word often carries sexist and racist meanings and is offensive,” he writes (Foster 11). In addition, the wording of the 1885 Times insert describes Johnny Green’s son’s “savage traits” and contact with whites like a patient undergoing treatment. While I appreciated these rich historical accounts, I rebelled against these portrayals of Johnny Green’s band as childlike, inferior, or dependent on the culture of the white settlers now embedded in the area. In hoping to understand Chief Che-Neuse and his members as people, free from my own biases and biases of the dominant culture of the past, I turned to Foster. As a native himself, he offers a humanizing, nuanced account of the Meskwaki as a nation and Che-Neuse’s history as an individual.

\textsuperscript{3} Hayden 239.
Foster’s analysis suggests that Che-Neuse had two choices. He could stay with the “Prairie Band” Potawatomi as their leaders signed the Treaty of 1846, which would move the group onto a reservation in Kansas (Foster 62). Alternatively, he could join the Meskwaki, or the “Meshkwakiuk” as they called themselves, and move with them as they returned to Iowa from Kansas to sell their horses and petition the Iowa General Assembly to purchase land along the Iowa River to live on a settlement of their own (13-4). Che-Neuse took the risk of joining the Meskwaki, following the “fiercely independent” spirit of the nation in their quest to “exist and
define their identity on their own terms” while remaining peaceful to settlers and preserving their own traditions (14-5). The risk eventually paid off, as the Meskwaki succeeded in purchasing land and establishing a private settlement in 1856 near Tama, Iowa (14). Before he shared this accomplishment with the Meskwaki, though, Che-Neuse became popular among settlers as “Johnny Green” during his extensive travels throughout the eastern, central, and north central part of the state. He rose in the ranks of his own nation for acts of diplomacy with other indigenous groups on behalf of settlers and knowledge of the conventions of white culture. In fact, Foster notes that Chief Che-Neuse was the central figure in persuading the Sioux against launching an attack on settlers in central Iowa in 1855 (Foster 63). A short time later, the Meskwaki appointed him as chief of his own band. Note that Che-Neuse achieved these feats while assuming the great responsibilities of meeting not only his own needs but also those of fellow Meskwaki because of the oppressive federal policies associated with westward expansion.

The opposite of a beggar, he was refugee in exile who became an accomplished diplomat under unlikely, unfair, and unasked-for circumstances brought about by a foreign authority.

I realized that Josephine would almost certainly not have been able to view Che-Neuse’s band in such a light outside of her cultural prejudices. Furthermore, though the band carried his instruction, influence, and interacted with settlers through the early 1900’s, Chief Che-Neuse died in 1868\(^4\), so my great-grandmother would have never contacted him directly. I had already demonstrated how military forts aided oppressive federal policies geared towards the acquisition of indigenous land from a variety of sources. The land cession “treaties” had been less a series of agreements and more a series of federally sanctioned thefts. Additionally, I had elucidated how differences in how settlers and native peoples viewed territorial borders and land ownership, though equally sophisticated, point to differences in sociopolitical agency exercised between the

\(^4\) Hayden 243.
two groups. I illustrated how the pejorative views of native peoples from white settlers, including prejudices documented in local newspapers, were widespread, influenced how settlers treated indigenous peoples like Chief Che-Neuse’s band, and spoke to such an uneven power dynamic. Even after developing this historical context surrounding interactions between settlers like Josephine and Chief Che-Neuse’s band, I realized that I needed a more extensive account of the band from a settler who observed and interacted with Che-Neuse himself along with members of his group for a more representative understanding of interactions between white settlers and the chief’s band in north central Iowa. I could no longer listen to the voice of my great-grandmother only and expect to draw substantive conclusions regarding the exchanges that took place between white settlers and Che-Neuse’s band.
III. “Cultural Prejudice, Material Culture, & Odd Exchanges”

“Interdependence, Buckskin, & Chief Che-Neuse’s Introspection”

“Chief Che-me-use, also known by the settlers as Johnny GREEN, decided that he would purchase some government land in Ringgold County. Assisted by a white settler, he entered his claim on April 29, 1854. Not realizing that Johnny GREEN was an Indian, the United States government, on May 25, 18[5]5 granted his land patent for 80 acres located in Section 32 of township 70, range 30 near Knowlton. Unaware of things such as taxes, Johnny GREEN left on an extended hunting trip in Marshall County, Iowa. Upon his return three years later, he discovered that his land had been sold to Henry KELLER for $3.62, the unpaid taxes. Unsure what to do about the situation, Johnny GREEN left Ringgold County and never returned. He settled in Marshall County, establishing a deep and life-long friendship with white pioneers there. He is credited with turning back a war party of Sioux descending upon the fledgling village of Marshalltown. Johnny GREEN died in 1868 and was interred at Albion, a few miles northwest of Marshalltown. In 1918, the Historical Society of Marshall County erected a monument to him, located on a high bluff overlooking the Iowa River. This monument is near the Iowa Soldier’s Home.”

This entry, compiled from mid-nineteenth century records and archived in 1942, adopts a clinical tone in its survey of Chief Che-Neuse’s attempts to purchase land, relationships with white settlers, and diplomatic feats. On the first read, the column appears objective and transparent, if not dry. Yet even from writers compiling numbers and statements from land logs nearly ninety years removed from Che-Neuse’s attempt to purchase land, cultural bias bleeds off the passage. The author assumes that Che-Neuse was wholly unfamiliar with taxes, providing no evidence for this assertion and implicitly relying on the chief’s ethnicity and absence from the land he purchased as proof. Perhaps Che-Neuse knew of taxes from his extensive interactions with settlers but simply did not fully understand their workings, for example, the idea of time-sensitive payments that are binding regardless of whether or not he inhabited the land he purchased. Furthermore, the writer calling white settlers “pioneers,” albeit a subtle detail, strikes

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5 From “Settlement of Ringgold County.” Ringgold County History compiled and written by the Iowa Writers’ Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Iowa, sponsored by Ringgold County Superintendent of Schools, Mount Ayr, Iowa. 1942. Written & submitted online by Sharon R. Becker, 2007.
me as culturally exclusive word choice disregarding the existence of native peoples historically, language failing to evolve from late-1800’s newspaper clippings. While perhaps accurately appraising Che-Neuse’s land holdings and the end result of some of his endeavors, such a stale-sounding entry certainly fails to capture Che-Neuse and his motivations. Instead, the passage perpetuates an identity of displacement and ignorance for the chief towards the workings of white-dominated economic systems while elevating the identities of white settlers to the status of those discovering previously unexplored and uninhabited land.

Seeking to corroborate Josephine’s memories with other settler accounts describing Che-Neuse’s band, I found a curious article published in the April 1944 issue of the *Annals of Iowa* written by an old woman named Lucretia June Hayden around the same time as the entry describing Che-Neuse’s attempts to purchase land. Hayden documents Che-Neuse’s time in Marshall County after he left Ringgold County permanently. A former schoolteacher in central Iowa during the late-19th and early-20th centuries, she vividly recalls her family’s interactions with “Johnny Green and his band” (Hayden 239). While undoubtedly more pronounced in her cultural biases, assuming more about Che-Neuse’s identity than the entry at the beginning of this section, the essay is extremely valuable. This is because Hayden examines Che-Neuse from direct contact with the chief, contrary to my great-grandmother’s account, and expands the domain of material culture exchanged between white settlers and Che-Neuse’s band from both Josephine and Dr. Whittaker’s accounts dramatically.

Hayden begins with a blunt summation of Chief Che-Neuse’s affairs with the white settler community to which her family belonged: “He wanted to be like the white people. He wanted to be civilized and live as others do. He wanted to and did own land in his own name and

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6 A footnote on the first page of the essay indicates that Ms. Hayden presented her paper to the Union County Historical Association during the summer of 1939 prior to her death in February 1940 at the age of eighty. *The Annals of Iowa* published the paper posthumously.
right” (Hayden 239). In light of crediting Chief Che-Neuse’s band with helping to protect the “fine settlements” of inhabitants such as herself from the Sioux, Hayden fondly recalls Che-Neuse’s “squaw,” two sons, and daughter. She adds that her “pioneer” father, S.L. Emerson, “took interest in all that related to the people, both white and red” (239-40). By presenting Chief Che-Neuse as acting for the benefit of the white settlers’ “fine settlements,” interested in learning about white people, and representing her father as an amicable, open-minded explorer on land previously unknown, Hayden presents Chief Che-Neuse as an exception and credit to his people while wanting to become part of white culture out of his own volition alone. This representation of the chief completely disregards the history of his forced exile by federal land cessions. While her account is an insightful and detailed archive of the Euro-American past, her words carry an air of superiority even though she makes a conscious effort to present her family and self as cordial and inviting.

Based on accounts of my great-grandmother from my own family, she, too, held a similar attitude and way of expressing her beliefs regarding Native Americans and other minority groups. In fact, while sharing some of my research with one of my uncles (one of Josephine’s grandsons) last summer, he remarked, “Man, can you imagine? One hundred and one years old when she died, almost one hundred and two.” He laughed. “I’ve got socks as old as you, but one hundred and one? And she still had her memories, even then. But I guess her age showed. She’d always say that when the Indians weren’t satisfied with what her family had to trade, the Kelly’s would just send them away.” He paused, and then shrugged his shoulders. “I suppose the Indians were the ones begging, after all.” I cringed. To me, my uncle’s comments demonstrate the pervasiveness of cultural biases over time. Though explicitly remarking on Josephine’s memories and dealings with Che-Neuse’s band as indicative of her age and prejudice towards
indigenous peoples, his comments nevertheless perpetuate the notion that members of Chief Che-Neuse’s band were indeed beggars while in part excusing the actions of the Kelly’s.

My interest grew as I followed Hayden’s narrative and arrived at a discussion of Che-Neuse’s son. According to Hayden, the boy, called “John Green, Jr.” by her fellow settlers, had learned to speak English very well without any formal instruction through regular contact with settlers. When Che-Neuse’s son expressed his desire to learn in school like white children and asked Hayden’s family if he could stay in their home and work for his keep, Hayden’s father agreed. “Mother made one proviso,” Hayden writes. “John...could not spend the night [with Che-Neuse, his father], for we all knew...that cleanliness and sanitation was not common to them. John always held that against mother” (241). Disturbingly, Hayden remembers that after beginning his studies and stay with her family, Che-Neuse’s son would frequently scrub his hands while washing them, sigh, and remark, “‘Ugh, heap Indian yet’” (241). She remembers, “Father told him he could never wash himself white, but could call himself John White, which he did from that time on…” (241)

Such nuances of Hayden’s family’s interactions with Che-Neuse’s son during his stay struck me as both illuminating of the types and possible instances of cultural prejudice between white settlers like Hayden and my great-grandmother as well as a basis for examining the psychology of Che-Neuse’s son as he lived with white settlers, not just near them. By making their assumption that Che-Neuse’s band did not practice good hygiene apparent to Che-Neuse’s son, Hayden’s family certainly contributed to an internalized sense of inferiority, anxiety, and psychological trauma within the boy, who tried to “remedy” his Meskwaki identity through handwashing. Though he could speak English and knew many conventions of white culture, he probably felt that he needed to distance himself from these assumptions by becoming as much a
part of white culture as possible. In doing so, he must have held his means of communication via writing in such high regard because he recognized the cultural assumptions of white settlers. Hayden’s comments support this notion in light of noting that his prized possession was a slate and pencil, which he treasured above even books, as well as Che-Neuse’s son leaving their home and prairie school to rejoin his sickly father’s band and assume his patrilineal duties as chief that would fall to him after the death of Che-Neuse. She writes, “[H]e gave his beloved slate and pencil to my little brother Lincoln, whom he loved so well” upon departing (242). He had no more immediate need of such devices in Che-Neuse’s clan.

I realized that the air of superiority and authority adopted by Hayden, her family, and other white settlers in the article regarding Che-Neuse’s band as “[doing] the best they could, in their primitive way” (Hayden 242) included allusions to Christianity that these individuals would not have understood. For example, she calls one Native American a “‘Doubting Thomas’” (referencing St. Thomas not believing in Christ’s resurrection until feeling Jesus’ wounds for himself), in light of thinking he was a few ears of corn short upon trading a scarf for two bushels of corn in a transaction with her father (245). Aside from her allusions to Christianity, Hayden grows hostile while she describes the seeming primitivism of Meskwaki individuals as they would occasionally visit simply to hear Hayden’s family’s Seth Thomas clock chime and laugh amongst themselves. Finally, she comments on a series of separate occasions in which one individual, labeled “William,” would visit the family in ceremonial attire and dance in front of their house for their viewing. Hayden remarks, “he was both vain and tricky...He would come and strut back and forth in front of our door, thinking, I suppose, we would envy his grand dress up...Father would get up and give him a handout” (244). Along with applying Christian allusions to Meskwaki individuals salient only to her fellow settlers while framing members of Che-
Neuse’s band as infantile and primitive, Hayden actively dismisses a performative act conveying cultural, possibly even spiritual, meaning as a childlike display for the purposes of begging only. By extension, she dismisses the material culture associated with this act, the man’s “grand dress up,” a deeply insulting and psychologically damaging move, especially as part of the dominant settler culture of the time.

Despite these prevailing characterizations and prejudices insensitive to the social facts, practices, and culture of Che-Neuse’s band (including material culture), Che-Neuse and members of his band influenced these settlers to adopt the use of buckskin. Hayden writes that “John Green, Jr.,” taught his classmates how to make a bow and arrow with a buckskin string for use during hunting season and describes in detail the arrival of Che-Neuse’s band coinciding with their use of a buckskin latchstring for their cabin as a lock for their front door (Hayden 242-4). She remarks that members of the band used buckskin even as government allotments provided them with more Anglo-European apparel and materials (243). Furthermore, Hayden observes the daily use of buckskin in her own household even though, as Foster notes, cloths and canvas had mostly replaced Native American buckskin in Iowa by this time due to the mass depletion of wildlife by settlers migrating westward (Foster 60). As part of this trend, knives had replaced stone tools, firearms circulated to indigenous nations from white trading posts, metal – especially brass – kettles became more widely used than pottery, and in general indigenous peoples and settlers alike depended on European goods such as glass by the late 19th century. Cash crops, which “forced the land to supply their [settlers’] requirements,” grew in popularity. Indigenous peoples even started to build cabins and houses after Euroamerican designs (Foster 60). Yet in describing her family’s use of buckskin, Hayden writes:
Perhaps some will not understand what is meant by the latchstring. A board about two or three inches wide fastened on the middle of the door, reaching across to the opening of the door and falling into a socket on the door frame, made of heavy wood; a buckskin string was tied around the latch and slipped through a hole in the door above the latch; during the day the latchstring was outside the door by which the board could be lifted from the socket, but at night the latchstring was pulled in, and this locked the door. (244)

Surprisingly, Hayden never attributes the use of buckskin as a phenomenon exclusive to Chief Che-Neuse’s band. Instead, she simply describes them as introducing the material and the settlers adopting it for practical purposes such as hunting and securing cabin doors. This mutual use of buckskin stands out in stark contrast to the material exchanges Foster describes as occurring in other contact zones between Native Americans and white settlers. This anomaly led me to revisit James Deetz’s definition of “material culture” and the types of action and phenomena involved with cross-cultural exchange Mary Louise Pratt explains. In Deetz’s view, material culture both reflects the practices and beliefs of a society as well as records dramatic cultural events through aesthetic and functional changes to a particular object or group of objects (Deetz 35). Interestingly, in Hayden’s account the function of buckskin remains almost entirely the same in its practical functions within her settler community as the traditional functions it serves in Che-Neuse’s band with regards to hunting and securing lodge doors. Again, Che-Neuse’s band appear to be the opposite of beggars, exercising agency, ingenuity, and cooperation with Hayden’s settler community rather than a dependency. Perhaps begging formed a larger part of the activities of other unassimilated native groups in Iowa during this time as Dr. Whittaker notes. For Chief Che-Neuse and his band, though, it appears that a more complex, less one-sided
exchange of material culture occurred with settler groups, not begging from a place of complete dependency.

In terms of material exchange within colonial contact zones and objects of material culture not used or viewed the same way between Hayden’s settler community and Chief Che-Neuse’s band, Pratt’s concept of *transculturation* is helpful to making sense of the interactions between the two groups. To her the term allows that while reciprocal exchange between the colonizer and colonized is unequal, the colonized may influence how and what they receive from the colonizer to a degree (Pratt 6). For instance, the function and meaning of objects such as a slate and pencil or the Seth Thomas clock changed as Che-Neuse’s band used and encountered them. While serving the practical functions of aiding elementary education and telling time for the settlers, these items of material culture became vital tools of cultural and self-representation as well as expression and marked an occasion for leisure and fascination, respectively, for Che-Neuse’s people. By contrast, the use of buckskin from Che-Neuse’s band did not change from its traditional applications in the context of hunting and door latches upon its acquisition by white settlers. Given the practical necessities of fashioning weapons for hunting food and securing doors from intruders and weather, the adoption of buckskin by the settlers from Che-Neuse’s band implies a degree of material interdependence and mutual exchange between the two groups. Though settlers like Hayden’s family imposed ideological stereotypes and cultural prejudice on Che-Neuse’s band, practices causing psychological trauma for Che-Neuse’s son and possibly the man they knew as “William”, they did not impose Anglo-European material culture with such force.

I could not explain why the material culture of Che-Neuse’s group, namely buckskin, influenced the lives of Hayden’s family and fellow settlers as profoundly and intimately as her
account indicates. I sought a more comprehensive record of Meskwaki material culture to attempt to account for, compare, and perhaps contrast with these apparent discrepancies concerning trends in the material culture of the various interactions between white settlers and Meskwaki bands of Iowa in the late 19th century. I remembered that my great-grandmother spoke about having a stone stove and her family’s practice of rotating crops with a diversity of plant types even as an influx of newer Euro-American materials, devices, and a boom in cash crops prevailed in Iowa by the late twentieth century. Like Hayden and her fellow settlers, the Kelly’s had not accessed newer Anglo-European goods during the second half of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, their use of a stone stove and practice of rotating crops would have made the Kelly’s more disposed to use a traditional material such as buckskin instead of switching to a newer, albeit Euro-American, material. Between Chief Che-Neuse’s band and settlers like Josephine’s family, the use of hand-me-downs and traditional materials over time was a shared element of two communities that lived a rural existence, far from cities and their manufactured goods.
“Archival Hints & Material Exceptions”

“[The ‘Mesquakie’ Indians are] probably the most conservative representatives of the Algonkin stock remaining. They still retain certain forms of primitive habitations and do not mix with the whites. In their social system a great deal of their primitive customs still exist. They afford, therefore, a very good opportunity for the study of primitive conditions such as existed among the so-called woodland Algonkin tribes.” (VanStone 4)

This excerpt from a March 27, 1907 letter from George A. Dorsey, head of Anthropology at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, exemplifies part of his efforts to convince F.S.V Skiff, the museum’s director, to fund an expedition to Tama County, Iowa for anthropologist Dr. William Jones to study and describe items of Meskwaki (“Fox”) material culture. Dorsey believed that the study would allow Jones to shed light on the Meskwaki nation’s “primitive” habitations, customs, and conditions, due to the insight that the Meskwaki did not intermingle with whites as much as other indigenous nations. This is a surprising observation in stark contrast to the life of Chief Che-Neuse, yet nevertheless well documented. Indeed, concerning the manufacture of material culture, Foster notes that the Meskwaki in particular were famous for their practical and aesthetic handiwork in the traditional style from around the 1800s to the 1960s. “[M]any authentic bowls, belts, beaded items, moccasins, and other objects were readily available...,” he writes (Foster 65).

Born in 1871 on an Oklahoma reservation and of Welsh and Meskwaki descent himself, William Jones’ findings from his study of the material culture of the Tama Meskwaki during the spring of 1907 provided the Field Museum with a stunning diversity of traditional artifacts. Having already purchased Frederick Starr’s private collection of Tama County Meskwaki artifacts in 1905, the Field Museum came to possess arguably the largest and most comprehensive single holding of traditional Meskwaki material culture (VanStone 4). As Foster observes, the socioeconomic status of many Meskwaki people appears in large part to have
provided the context for such collecting. He writes, “cash-poor Indian communities could earn money through these home industries. Usually, women and elders made these crafts at home, while men of working age went elsewhere for wage jobs” (Foster 65). Jones’ collection supports this trend. In describing and contextualizing the collection, Dr. James VanStone observes, “[Jones’] Indian informants presumably were in need of money and were willing to part with material items that were in the process of being replaced anyway” (VanStone 27). Yet in his travels, Dr. Jones noted that while reed mats, otter skin headdresses, and even bear claw necklaces cost twenty-five, thirty to thirty-five, and fifty dollars, respectively, sacred prayer and medicine bundles were never for sale, even as he encountered several in Tama County (5). Even when searching, often desperately, for quick ways to earn money from a position of subjugation because of the oppressive consequences of settler colonialism, no Meskwaki member of the Tama County settlement, no matter how strained financially, would sell sacred items most central to their roots, culture, and spirituality.

In 1997, discovering that no comprehensive study of Meskwaki material culture or archival items had ever been completed “for comparative purposes,” Dr. James VanStone, Curator Emeritus of the Department of Anthropology in the Field Museum, compiled the William Jones and Frederick Starr collections. In his survey, he provides overviews and images of all artifacts in the collections as well as historical context and material trends surrounding their creation and collection (VanStone 1). Desiring to better understand the anomalies of material exchange, household material culture, and interactions between Chief Che-Neuse’s band and white settlers like Lucretia June Hayden and the Kelly’s, I read VanStone’s abstract repeatedly, focusing on the phrase “for comparative purposes.” I decided to follow his lead.
VanStone begins with a survey of travel patterns and materials typical of Meskwaki bands that corroborates Hayden and Josephine’s settler accounts as well as Dr. Whittaker’s comments. According to VanStone, roaming Meskwaki bands were “loosely defined” and mostly lived near rivers in portable mat-covered lodges. He notes, “In the spring and summer horticulture was practiced near the permanent villages, while during the fall and winter there was a dispersed existence” (VanStone 1). He adds that winter hunts were part of a mobile, dispersed living away from the central locus of the nation as a whole (on their Tama settlement) (4). In Josephine’s words, “They’d come up this way gettin’ freedom from the winter...,” and in the Fort Dodge-area newspapers I uncovered, reports of sightings range from December to May. Accounting for travel time, both of these observations are consistent with the Meskwaki practice of roaming the state in the fall, winter, and returning to a more centralized settlement in the summer. In addition, the common practice of camping near rivers resonates with Dr. Whittaker’s observations. Did Che-Neuse’s son feel inspired to teach his peers how to make a buckskin bow during the wintertime due to the practice of winter hunts within the Meskwaki nation and a desire to share his cultural experiences? Also, why did Che-Neuse’s group not return to the centralized Meskwaki living zone of Tama seasonally, choosing to remain in constant contact with white settlers for at least a few of years? Instead of initiating an improvised relationship with settlers out of necessity from a subjugated place, perhaps members of Che-Neuse’s band sought to initiate an extended cultural exchange.

Shifting his survey to objects of material culture, VanStone emphasizes the traditional qualities of Meskwaki hunting bows and notes that such bows are the only featured artifact for hunting in the collection. “A bowstring... has a look at one end tied with strips of buckskin” (VanStone 7). Such a reliance on traditional materials in making hunting bows, especially
bucks

buckskin, supports Hayden’s observation of Che-Neuse’s son doing so as typical of the Meskwaki people. As the only surviving hunting devices from the various contact zones between the Meskwaki and white settlers in Iowa, these bows and arrows, though common, held a high value for their use in acquiring food necessary for the survival of both settlers and Chief Che-Neuse’s band. Especially because they feature buckskin, these bows and arrows were a shared material basis of interaction, common understanding, and source of pride for Meskwaki. This suggests that beyond the materials of buckskin, bows, and arrows themselves, Che-Neuse’s band exchanged hunting methodologies concerning their use, occasions for asserting their indigenous – specifically Meskwaki – ethos behind such knowledge.

Fig. 6: A bow & arrow fastened with buckskin in the traditional Meskwaki style, similar to what Hayden describes.

Furthermore, VanStone’s archival studies support Josephine’s claim that the indigenous peoples she encountered carried clothing items such as blankets, scarves, and hats made of wool. In fact, VanStone’s analysis suggests that Meskwaki individuals, including those of Che-Neuse’s band, used large bags made of wool fiber to carry such woolen clothing items along with food
they had grown themselves or accumulated through trade. He writes, “some of the most useful articles in the material culture inventory of the Mesquakie family were bags woven of natural fibers and wool, which served to contain a great variety of personal possessions,” noting that commercial yarns such as wool replaced native materials such as buffalo hair in the Meskwaki people by the 17th century (VanStone 11). From this, he suggests that the Meskwaki nation had increasing access to European goods in the 17th century into the 18th century (12-3). Though articles such as bags were of wool, they were no less Meskwaki in their designs and use and served some of the same practical functions between the two groups. But while the designs on the bags held a deep cultural significance for the Meskwaki, the settlers probably enjoyed such designs for their aesthetic value only. In this way, the Meskwaki must have experienced a feeling of gratitude as settlers appreciated their cultural emblems in acquiring the woolen bags even though the settlers were appreciating the artistic prowess of the Meskwaki only. This observation stands in stark contrast to how the Meskwaki must have felt upon selling such items to the Anthropologist Jones for quick cash decades later, for this transaction no doubt further reinforced internalized feelings of inferiority and psychological trauma as they struggled to navigate economic systems long established by colonialist power structures.
By contrast to Hayden and Josephine’s accounts concerning the use of traditional materials in Che-Neuse’s band and their own households, VanStone’s survey reflects a rapid influx of modern materials into the Meskwaki nation through trade. This influx included practical items of material culture such as clothing and knives to decorative items prized for their aesthetic and expressive value, such as metal and glass beads. In pivoting to the widespread adoption of Anglo-European trade goods, VanStone’s account corroborates Foster, Whittaker, and even Che-Neuse’s portrait. He writes:

Woodland Indians have not worn native dress for a long time, and information in the literature on traditional and modified clothing is limited...Although details are lacking, the basic apparel of Mesquakie men before the appearance of Euro-American clothing consisted of leggings, breechcloth, moccasins, and a robe or blanket. Women wore a
trade cloth skirt and blouse, leggings, moccasins, and a blanket or shawl. For men, this basic assemblage was augmented by a headdress, armbands, a bear claw necklace, a belt, and one or more pouches or shoulder bags. (VanStone 17)

Consistent with VanStone’s observations, Chief Che-Neuse clearly dons a Euro-American-style suit in his portrait. Additionally, Hayden never remarks on the clothing of Che-Neuse’s son as traditional, “primitive,” unclean, or unfamiliar, by stark contrast to her family’s abundant reactions to his perceived lack of hygiene. Yet according to Hayden, other Meskwaki individuals belonging to Che-Neuse’s band, such as a man the settlers label “William,” wore traditional clothing, including “a beautiful buckskin suit, embroidered with many colored beads…beaded moccasins, face painted in yellow and red stripes, and feathers in his hair” (Hayden 244). Why did members of his band continue to wear traditional dress from materials such as breechcloth, buckskin, and feathers – possibly indicating the wearing of headdresses, as was common, according to VanStone – especially since Che-Neuse himself wore Euro-American dress along with, possibly, his son?
I delved deeper into VanStone’s description of the Jones & Starr collections to see if any common “threads” linked together traditional Meskwaki artifacts with Euro-American items of material culture. He writes, “Decorative ornaments of sheet silver or German silver, an alloy of copper, zinc, and nickel metallurgically defined as containing no silver, were significant items in commercial trade in eastern North America between 1760 and 1850” (VanStone 20). Aside from
decorative sheet metal, practical items such as knives became very common across the Meskwaki nation, and both male and female individuals often wore knives in sheaths at all times (20). Even the Meskwaki, conservative in their adoption of new practices and materials, began to use Anglo-European manufactured goods. Note that even though the metals, knives, and fabrics they absorbed were Anglo-European, neither the Meskwaki nor their traditional items of material culture become less indigenous or Meskwaki for doing so. Yet evidenced by the complete lack of apprehension and mention of himself or any of his members carrying knives, which would have been in plain view or at the least seen a number of times if they were indeed on their person constantly, Chief Che-Neuse’s band did not follow this trend.

Fig. 9: An assortment of items associated with the influx of more modern Euro-American items and materials that which the Tama Meskwaki, but not Che-Neuse’s band (at least with knives), experienced.
Although they had Euro-American clothing and materials such as wool for crafts, the band did not experience an influx of other materials like knives, actively retained the use of traditional materials such as buckskin for door latches when Euro-American materials were available for this purpose, and even influenced white settlers to use buckskin for door latches and bows and arrows. Together with VanStone’s findings, these anomalies suggest that the material culture of Che-Neuse’s band along with their exchanges with white settlers does not fully square with the shifts in material culture experienced by the Meskwaki nation as a whole during the second half of the 19th century. This is significant, given that the Meskwaki nation was relatively conservative of their adoption and modification of their culture, including material culture, in moving to Euro-American materials. Che-Neuse’s band was even slower. Given George Dorsey’s observation regarding the conservative nature of the Meskwaki people in preserving their traditional practices and material culture, this evidence no doubt points to a disposition for Chief Che-Neuse’s band to protect elements of their culture or even resist Euro-American influences. Beyond this, however, by contrast to typical narratives of exchange from the colonizer to the colonized, a more voluntary and exploratory exchange between white settlers and Che-Neuse’s band occurred. This allowed Meskwaki individuals to retain some of their more traditional items of practical material culture while adopting other more modern items and materials, such as Anglo-European metals, glass, wool, clothing, and writing devices. I had now demonstrated that though prejudices among white settlers and settler colonialism remained consistent, the material exchanges between Che-Neuse’s band and settlers like Josephine’s family as well as Hayden’s community allowed more agency for the chief’s Meskwaki band and were slower to adapt newer Anglo-European material culture in general.
I felt fascinated and recognized my privilege of getting to examine and discover such a unique series of events in relation to my family around where I grew up. In positioning myself in conversation with the accounts of my great-grandmother, Hayden, and various other white settler sources, I realized the importance of storytelling in processing memories of interactions with indigenous peoples for such settlers along with making sense of material culture, social practices, and their own biases and understanding of the past they lived through. With this thought, a void in my research confronted me. I realized I had not appreciated the stories of Meskwaki individuals, especially someone from a similar perspective as Che-Neuse, who as chief of his band had to reconcile his communal identity with a sense of individual purpose and desire to interact with white settlers. Furthermore, I wondered, given that I had examined accounts from two white settler women who experienced native peoples approaching them and their “permanent” habitations, what a Meskwaki woman would have thought as she experienced the approach of white settlers onto her native land, using her native language to recount her personal past. I refocused my efforts around a new line of inquiry and research, anticipating the answers to these questions to shed light on the psychology of Meskwaki individuals such as Chief Che-Neuse who attempted to cross cultural borders, revise their terms of self-identification, and in turn see him as an individual apart from my own cultural biases. My analysis of the material exchanges between Che-Neuse’s band and white settlers had foregrounded a discussion about native storytelling, in which Meskwaki individuals could speak to such exchanges along with their own personal pasts, including the place of various items of material culture within such pasts, on their own terms with authority as indigenous authors. I turned my attention to two works: Ray A. Young Bear’s *Black Eagle Child* and Truman Michelson’s *The Autobiography of a Fox Indian Woman*. 
IV. “Storytelling & the Truth of the Past”

“‘Because no other voice should ever/can ever replace the original voice of the American Indian poet, especially one who resides at the place of his birth and not in the city or academia, I merely seek to compose meaningful narratives as experienced within the Black Eagle Child Nation. For too long we have been misrepresented and culturally maligned by an ungrateful country of Euro-American citizens who have all but burned their own bridges to the past. I will not tolerate such transgressions of my being and character. If it is a pacifier these people desire, then I propose they suck on something else...’” (Young Bear 139-40)

Edgar Bearchild’s letter to the Maecenas Foundation of Athens, Greece speaks sharply to his desire to retain agency as an indigenous writer representing his culture in a contemporary context, highlighting the ethos of native writers living on their ancestral lands. Edgar seeks to identify and discredit Euro-American influences as failing to appreciate the identity and past of the (Meskwaki) Black Eagle Child nation. In spite of the letter’s accusatory tone towards an organization that is decidedly Euro-American, Senator Dan Frazier writes to Edgar in response on behalf of the Maecenas Foundation, informing him that the foundation has awarded him a fellowship. “‘Your poems alone symbolize the spirit and tenacity of Americanism,’” the senator writes (140-1). Upon examining the congratulatory, yet distanced, tone of this letter, Edgar recognizes the senator as “a man deathly afraid of words that [are] not his” (141).

Throughout Ray A. Young Bear’s Black Eagle Child, the protagonist Edgar Bearchild is deeply reflective on the relationship between the past and present concerning both his communal memory and status as an indigenous writer. In his narrative, Edgar repeatedly attempts to make sense of the dissonance between his budding individualism, duties to the Meskwaki settlement at “Why-Cheer,” Iowa, and disappearing communal identity. From the outset, he observes that community members are disgusted with themselves for being “Indians” in the first place as they

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7 I initially decided to investigate Ray A. Young Bear’s Black Eagle Child for insight on elucidating the psychology of Chief Che-Neuse after uncovering a curious article in the November 28, 1919 issue of the Fort Dodge Messenger and Chronicle. The article announces Robert Young Bear as succeeding his father Push-e-ton-e-qua, who himself succeeded Che-Neuse in the late 19th century as a new chief in the Meskwaki nation (“New Chief of Mesquakies”).
confront the expectations of the white-dominated world outside the settlement (Young Bear 5). Later in the text, Edgar comes to terms with the true nature of the anxiety and guilt his conflicted identity produces. “Change was unavoidable; yet we blamed ourselves for creating new mythology and rituals from the last traces of old stories, our grandfathers’ ways...We held each of [the elders] in such high esteem that we could never doubt their memories, even if they forgot our own names” Young Bear writes (60-1). Edgar then considers the ceremonies, traditions, and ways of living the elders on the settlement think of as true to the indigenousness of the Black Eagle Child Nation while taking note of other perspectives, especially settlement members from younger generations, who see their indigenousness as more individuated, various, and malleable. “‘He or she shouldn’t have made such and such a rule. It is his or her own and not from the past,’ was the most pervasive criticism,” he observes (61).

In his reconstruction of Stuart Hall’s “Theory of Articulation,” Anthropologist James Clifford asserts that “a western commonsense view of historical development” typically views “true” indigeneity as existing in opposition to modernity. Clifford claims that this presumption is reductive and inadequate to appreciate the way native peoples reinforce and change their identities over time. Clifford writes:

In articulation theory, the whole question of authenticity [of indigenousness] is secondary, and the process of social and cultural persistence is political all the way back. It is assumed that cultural forms will always be made, unmade, and remade. Communities can and must reconfigure themselves, drawing selectively on remembered pasts. The relevant question is whether, and how, they convince and coerce insiders and outsiders, often in power-charged, unequal situations, to accept the autonomy of “we.” (Clifford 479)
Therefore, native identities are not monolithic entities wholly separate from both internal group modifications and contemporary influences outside of indigenous cultural groups, even and especially Euro-American influences, and are no less indigenous for changing in such ways.

In desiring to grasp a sense of how Chief Che-Neuse viewed the world as someone who had identified as Potawatomi, Meskwaki, and experienced white settler culture in an immersive way, I wondered how he and his band defined their own indigenousness and reconciled their identity with the changing world around them. Che-Neuse must have felt not only the pull of changing times while facing the decision of how much of his personal and communal mythology and traditions to maintain but also the nervous condition of not being fully part of the Potawatomi or Meskwaki nations across time and space, let alone part of white culture. Young Bear seems to express exactly this psychological condition in Edgar’s ruminations. “Although we were together as Indians...throughout the country – related in dialects and customs – we were like the rural farmsteads separated from each other by infinite miles. That was a frightening reality. Being compartmentalized but always being apart,” he writes (78). Just as Chief Che-Neuse’s indigenousness was not contingent on his band’s practices and perspectives cohering with the Meskwaki on the Tama Settlement or compromised by the extent to which he adopted practices of white settler culture, Edgar possesses agency to define his indigenousness as an individual from even those around him on the Why-Cheer Meskwaki Settlement. Despite this, Edgar later notes that the Black Eagle Child Nation felt “personified by the whites as one and the same trespasser” in light of crimes committed by a select few settlement members (96). Concerning the apparent impact of white culture on Native American well-being in general from his time outside the settlement, Edgar reflects:
As a student at Luther College for two summers I learned of racial discrimination, the plight of the red, black, yellow, and brown races, and the need to advance ourselves. The trouble was, I forgot there would be nights when one quickly unlearned the rights of others, nights when white America seemed far removed from our vicious vortex...No song of social protest by Janis Ian or Bob Dylan could ever undo the chains and reverse the panorama of the Red Man’s destiny. (97)

With Edgar’s observations in mind, I wondered whether Chief Che-Neuse earnestly desired to be a part of white culture, or if he simply saw the hegemonic influence of white culture as inevitable. To what extent did he want to become part of white settler culture or stand out based on his mixed cultural identity? Based on the life of Che-Neuse and psychological framework and processes of Edgar as presented by Young Bear, I held a strong sense of doubt that Che-Neuse would have been aware of or accepted the finality of being a Native American showpiece within the dominant culture of the second half of the 19th century. In his time and place, though, he would have never been able to be just a diplomat, statesman, or citizen, but an “Indian” diplomat, statesman, and citizen accepted in virtue of the novelty of his language, culture, and ethnicity rather than the merit of his individual character and achievements alone. Young Bear’s text illustrates this phenomenon in a contemporary context, presenting members of the Black Eagle Child Nation as unable to separate their status as “Indians” from stereotypes created by white culture that deny settlement inhabitants a sense of individuality and hope for social mobility.

Concerning his use of storytelling to express his communal and personal past, Edgar shows how being an emerging indigenous writer is markedly different from participating in a collective tradition of oral storytelling. During his efforts to write narratives of his personal past,
Edgar observes, “The long arduous task of pasting paper to every inch of my body had already begun, and all that remained was the wait for it to set like a cocoon. I figured a metamorphosis was my only salvation” (Young Bear 147). Edgar undergoes a deeply metaphoric, yet visceral and material, transformation as an individual in remembering and anticipating his personal past and future, respectively. “At last I was able to document my feeble beginning. Childhood was a precious epoch. How I even ever came to be confounded me...there was indeed a past,” he writes (149). Yet regarding the tradition of storytelling within the Black Eagle Child Nation, Edgar collapses his individual timeline into a communal, then cosmic, one. He notes that his curiosity for storytelling began with listening to his grandmother tell wintertime stories of the “supernatural past” before humans lived (162). Edgar observes that traditional stories also serve as prayers, stories told during certain seasons only (such as the “Winter Stories”), stories that teach history and lessons, and stories during ceremonies in tandem with certain objects of material culture, especially the sacred red willow and tobacco pipe (163-4). In this way, Edgar’s experience of traditional oral storytelling in his culture connects with group occasions as opposed to his personal impetus to write and creatively express his individual history in an ever-changing world, an impulse closely linked with the material of paper.

This insight reminded me of Chief Che-Neuse’s son, who valued his slate and pencil above all his possessions upon entering into white culture and settler colonialism. It also reminded me of VanStone’s observation that anthropologist William Jones could not purchase prayer bundles for any price; if Meskwaki individuals sold these materials, they may just as well be selling their ability to tell stories essential to their cultural heritage and practice. In addition to having this belief, Chief Che-Neuse must have felt conflict between traditional oral storytelling and forms of expressing himself as an individual as he encountered a white settler culture
familiar with written communication and oral storytelling different from the traditional oral storytelling of the Meskwaki. In his dealings with white culture, did Chief Che-Neuse, like Edgar, engage with written storytelling or communication in addition to traditional oral storytelling? Hayden’s account suggests that Che-Neuse’s son, at least, recognized and/or participated in this phenomenon to a degree.

For Young Bear, the relationship between material culture and his Meskwaki storytelling is interactive and doubly immersive. Through his persona Edgar, Young Bear records the significance of objects such as paper and the red willow/tobacco pipe in signaling a shift to recording personal history and recounting his communal Meskwaki history, respectively. In this way, Young Bear’s text tells a story about Edgar, who speaks to the relationship between traditional Meskwaki material culture and storytelling as he himself writes stories about his personal past and engages with paper in a visceral, painful, yet intimate way. Given this fluid, interactive potential between Meskwaki storytelling and objects of material culture, the adoption of new material culture in Che-Neuse’s band must have influenced the storytelling and/or cultural performances of the group, whether in the content of the stories/performances themselves or how the band used materials to signal such practices. Thus, storytelling serves a promising role in both describing objects and trends of Meskwaki material culture and recording the effects new objects of material culture have on storytelling, complementing formal research and archival study in an engaging way.

In exploring how both Meskwaki individuals like Robert Young Bear and white settlers like Josephine used stories to frame material culture, social practices, and their own understanding of the past, an example of storytelling from a Meskwaki woman balances Josephine’s perspective in an intriguing way. While Chief Che-Neuse’s band approached
Josephine on land her family had settled, this Meskwaki woman experienced someone from white culture encroaching onto her native land and approaching her. Dating from 1918, an autobiography of this unnamed Meskwaki (“Fox”) woman⁸ records her memories of early childhood, gender roles, and the role of material culture in finding agency in both of these areas of life. A man named Harry Lincoln originally recorded the woman’s words in the Meskwaki syllabary, and Linguist Truman Michelson translated the interview into English years later (Michelson 295).

Curiously, though Michelson insists that no one influenced the woman regarding what she disclosed, he notes, “at times the original autobiography was too naïve and frank for European [t]aste; and so a few sentences have been deleted...the translation has been made as literal as possible without violence to English idiomatic usage” (Michelson 295; my emphasis). So in translating the woman’s words in apparently good faith, Michelson reveals the irony that his western biases directly impact what he decides to include of the woman’s account due to his privileging English expressions over Meskwaki ones in the interview’s source text. In addition to Michelson’s stated methodology, the mere presence of a white person interviewing her influenced the woman to modify the mechanics of traditional Meskwaki oral storytelling. As previously observed, while communal occasions and history have traditionally called for such storytelling in the Meskwaki nation, here the occasion concerns personal history, though the woman is not writing down her personal history like Edgar Bearchild. From the beginning of the interview, this effort to adapt traditional modes of storytelling for new purposes is apparent in the woman’s speech. “Well, I shall now tell what happened to me,” she says, formally signaling an occasion for telling (297).

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⁸ Michelson tells the reader that her name is “withheld by agreement” and gives no further explanation (295).
As the Meskwaki woman continues, Josephine’s cultural biases appear more prominent than ever. One of her central complaints about the members of Chief Che-Neuse’s band on the tape is their supposed laziness and begging. Yet according to the Meskwaki woman, laziness was an exception in her band and universally detested among the Meskwaki people, from women to men. She speaks of some of her peers growing up as “naughty” in light of her mother’s remark, “[T]hey will not know how to make anything when they grow up…That is the way you will be if you do not try to make anything, if you merely loaf around” (Michelson 297). In this way, the woman presents laziness as a consequence of waywardness and forgetting parental teachings rather than a common trend in her culture, as Josephine asserts. She then catalogs her childhood and adolescence in terms of what she learned how to do because of received gender roles, including cooking, washing clothes, and making bags, rush mats, and moccasins. She remembers her mother saying things like, “Wake up, you may fetch some water” (299). Another lasting piece of advice she remembers is her mother saying, “If you happen to know how to make everything when you no longer see me, you will not have a hard time in any way. You will make your own possessions” (301). By implicitly highlighting the way her mother framed chores as allowances or privileges rather than arduous tasks or obstacles, the woman reveals that her prospective independence was consubstantial with the handling and manufacture of material culture in her upbringing. In this sense, the Meskwaki woman and Josephine are not so different, for like the woman, Josephine remembers learning how to run a household independently as part of both her upbringing and gendered expectations as well as her settler family’s self-sufficiency. “[The woman of the house] was very busy no doubt, taking care of the family, making butter and cheese, and everything we ate,” Josephine observes at the beginning of her interview.

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9 One instance demonstrating this tenet applying to men as well as women is when the woman remembers her mother speaking of a man’s laziness constituting a reason in itself for women not to marry him (Michelson 311).
Moreover, in further contrast to Josephine’s cultural prejudices, the Meskwaki woman, like Chief Che-Neuse, demonstrates an awareness of principles of economic exchange rather than acknowledging begging as a common Meskwaki practice. She remembers her mother saying, “If it is known that you can already sew, [others] will hire you. Not merely that. You will be paid’” (Michelson 309). Following her survey of her mother’s advice in this regard, the woman reflects, “Whenever I made anything I surely was given clothing to wear in exchange. And when I made something, I gave it away” (323). In her interview, the woman indicates a personal and shared awareness of a material, and perhaps monetary, economy within Meskwaki culture as well as philanthropic incentives to the manufacture of material culture, contrary to Josephine’s beliefs about the supposed laziness and begging of the indigenous people she encountered during the mid-late nineteenth century. Chief Che-Neuse, too, had experience with white-dominated economic systems, specifically through his brief ownership of land in Ringgold County, Iowa.

For the Meskwaki woman, storytelling enabled her to record her mother and grandmother’s stories and advice as well as locate objects of material culture from her personal history. In doing so, the woman modifies traditional oral Meskwaki storytelling by signaling an occasion for telling unrelated to communal occasions and history. Through storytelling, she also reveals how the manufacture of material culture such as rush mats, moccasins, bags, and fetching water was a prerequisite to her exercising agency as well as independence. Ironically, the Meskwaki woman’s storytelling displays her mother and grandmother enforcing this way of acting through their own oral stories, instruction, and warnings. Josephine’s storytelling is crucial because her words offer a way to understand the material culture of her childhood in tandem with the pejorative tone with which she characterizes Chief Che-Neuse’s band and
humorous, respectful tone with which she characterizes her family. All told, the storytelling of these two women places the material culture important to them in tandem with their beliefs and memories of the past.

For both the Meskwaki woman and Edgar Bearchild, the role of storytelling in the context of such an uneven power dynamic is instrumental in their attempts at cultural and self-representation. Their manipulation of traditional and personal forms of storytelling, respectively, both contributes to such representations and contradicts cultural prejudices from white culture with authority. Furthermore, storytelling enables Young Bear to create and describe a doubly immersive, interactive relationship between material culture and stories in the Meskwaki culture. In doing so, he shows how storytelling may be used to record and predict the impact shifts in material culture have on storytelling and other performative cultural acts – and vice versa – in a deeply engaging way. The relationship between storytelling and material culture for the Meskwaki woman shows that her prospective independence as a woman in her culture was dependent on her ability to make various items of material culture. Furthermore, in addition to discovering the truth of what my great-grandmother spoke, by presenting the words of Josephine, Young Bear, and the Meskwaki woman side by side, a shared humanity emerges, for these individuals all employ storytelling as a way of exercising agency over their past, including the materials involved in it. The ability of storytelling to display how people from both white settler and Meskwaki groups have understood objects of material culture is valuable for its ability to complement formal, objective, and perhaps more distanced research methods. In this way, the potential of storytelling to accomplish these functions in a deeply engaging way is a promising area of future inquiry for indigenous studies and studying colonial contact zones in general across time.
In response to these examples of Meskwaki storytelling, I marveled at the marked absence of insults even though the Meskwaki individuals I survey actively speak against the cultural prejudices and assumptions of white culture. I remembered that the interviews of the Meskwaki woman and my great-grandmother date to 1918 and 1980, respectively. While both Josephine and the Meskwaki woman were old women at the time of their interviews, Josephine would have been thirty-eight when the Meskwaki woman shared her childhood and young adult memories of her Meskwaki band. I tried to imagine the elder Meskwaki woman contradicting Josephine face to face in reflecting upon her long life. Moreover, I realized that my own words are themselves a contribution to the myriad examples of storytelling emerging from my research for others to appreciate, challenge, revise, and continue beyond the parameters of my own efforts and conclusions. I wondered what Chief Che-Neuse would have said to Josephine. According to Hayden, he exercised one word in English more than any other in his conversations with white settlers. “Honesty,” he would say (Hayden 245). May this be the first thought of all cultural encounters.
V. Conclusion

The meaning of any object of material culture is never static or predetermined. Following Deetz’s definition of material culture, I have been able to better interpret both artefactual and textual content when appreciating each as a process with directionality and intent instead of monolithic and impersonal entities containing hidden meanings accessible only by adopting mindsets and methodologies of the past. Broadly speaking, with the material culture of both the white settlers and Meskwaki individuals I study, I have found that their artifacts, just as our own, change in meaning, purpose, and value as they change contexts and people refigure them.

In this way, Marie Louise Pratt’s concept of *transculturation* is instructive for both its explanatory power and its limits in the context of my project. On one hand, Pratt’s term accounts for the exchange between white settlers like Hayden and Josephine’s families with Chief Che-Neuse’s band, for Che-Neuse’s band influenced and modified what they received from the settlers to a significant extent even though they occupied a position of subjugation in this contact zone as a result of oppressive government land cessions and settler colonialism. The way in which the people from Che-Neuse’s band assimilate and interact with a slate and pencil and Hayden’s Seth Thomas clock in her account supports this. On the other hand, contrary to typical colonialist narratives of one-sided material exchange, Chief Che-Neuse’s band influenced white settlers to adopt traditional Meskwaki materials for practical purposes even though the prejudices and biases of the dominant white culture are consistently pejorative across the settler accounts I survey. Aside from overt slurs and implicitly framing Chief Che-Neuse’s band as inferior, dependent, and primitive, the ubiquitous nature of Che-Neuse’s name as “Johnny Green” to the white settlers most prominently exemplifies this. This point is relevant to the future study of not only postcolonial and indigenous studies but also social studies and political science in
recognizing both the explicit and subtle ways of presenting one group of people as inferior, obstructive, or disingenuous. A recent example of this phenomenon in the context of Native American studies is in articles representing protesters of the Dakota Access Pipeline as misinformed, against industrial growth, or even terrorists.

As demonstrated, Josephine maintained that the rights to the land on which she lived was her family’s and the property of white settlers like her due to their traveling into the territory that would become Iowa, establishing permanent settlements, and farming the land with the support of federal forts. Yet individuals such as Chief Che-Neuse and the Meskwaki woman experienced a swift loss of such lands in the face of foreign conceptual frameworks and motivations. Federal military forts enforced oppressive governmental land cessions masquerading as treaty agreements, turning proud indigenous peoples who had lived on their homelands for thousands of years into exiles. I have demonstrated how such mass displacement offers a rich context for the attitudes and accomplishments of both white settlers and Che-Neuse’s band as they encountered each other in a period of rapid shifts in material culture, facilitating perspective shifts and foregrounding my own subjectivity and cultural biases through the creative nonfiction approach.

Moreover, while I certainly cannot speak for all contact zones between Native American, specifically Meskwaki, groups and white settlers in north central Iowa in the second half of the 19th century, I have shown that the material culture of each group responded to attitudes and social practice impacted by socioeconomic status to a significant degree. Rituals such as giving hand-me-downs as well as earning and conserving money influenced the way each group lived and took risks, including interacting and trading with one another. For settlers like Lucretia June Hayden and my great-grandmother as well as Chief Che-Neuse’s band, I think that the general
adoption of newer European materials and practices in Iowa was relatively slow due to a more intimate and extensive contact wherein each group adopted material culture that was already practical and useable from the other while continuing to use traditional material culture for practical purposes within each of their own groups. Note that for Che-Neuse’s people along with the Tama Meskwaki, their primary activities did not include begging, and both of these groups were no less Meskwaki or indigenous for the extent to which they adopted Euro-American materials.

Hayden’s account of John Green, Jr., writing within their contact zone but not in his own band away from white settlers, her family’s use of buckskin for bows and door latches in the same way as Che-Neuse’s group, and the Kelly’s use of a stone stove and rotation crops through the early 20th century while trading food for wool blankets and clothing items supports my explanation for the exchanges that occurred between Che-Neuse’s band and settlers. Unlike the fragmented, hostile interactions with the Dakota Sioux earlier in the mid-19th century, these contact zones relied on regular, peaceful interactions which contributed to the survival of both groups through the exchange of practical items of material culture. Though internalized prejudices existed in white settler culture, both groups trusted each other to live in close contact, which helped the settlers in the area establish permanent settlements and allowed Che-Neuse’s band to roam freely through Iowa until the early 1900s. With this in mind, I conclude that the material exchanges that took place between settlers such as Hayden’s community and Josephine’s family with Che-Neuse’s people were unique to both material trends of exchange in Iowa at the time as well as typical colonialist power dynamics in general. This point is important in avoiding the tendency to frame Native American and white settler groups with broad,
sweeping statements, making assumptions about swaths of people without regard to differences in culture, area, and individual circumstances.

My study of Young Bear’s narrative in relation to my research on the life of Chief Che-Neuse helped me to appreciate the psychology of Chief Che-Neuse and members of his group as they encountered white settlers. Together, these sources strongly suggest that even though Che-Neuse’s band felt conflicted about the extent to which they should engage with white settler culture and social systems, they nevertheless modified traditional sociocultural and material practices significantly by comparison to the central Meskwaki settlement of Tama. Yet though their cultural practices and sense of identity varied from the Tama Meskwaki because of extensive interactions with and living alongside white settlers, Che-Neuse’s band was no less indigenous than the Tama Meskwaki due to selectively preserving and altering cultural traditions in the face of white culture. Furthermore, Young Bear’s text demonstrates the potential for storytelling to facilitate a doubly immersive experience for the reader in locating and describing objects of material culture important to Edgar Bearchild’s personal and communal past. In this way, storytelling offers a promising way of predicting and measuring how shifts in material culture impact storytelling, and vice-versa. These points are crucial when surveying native peoples about contemporary issues affecting their nations. Though distinct nations and individuals within nations may respond to such issues in radically different ways, each nation and individual is no more or less indigenous, “traditional,” or “modern” for their opinion, nor can we expect all individuals of a particular Native American nation, much less all Native Americans, to always agree on controversial topics in relation to how they impact their cultural traditions, customs, and use of material culture.
My analysis of Michelson’s piece along with Young Bear allowed me to investigate the mechanics of indigenous Meskwaki storytelling, especially the way traditional oral storytelling speaks to collective histories and requires occasions for telling such as weather patterns, events in life cycles, or annual events. Through the materiality of written English, Young Bear’s persona Edgar Bearchild employs storytelling to capture his individual history and indigenousness. Upon contacting white culture, the Meskwaki woman modifies traditional oral Meskwaki storytelling by using the form to communicate her individual past. This woman balances Josephine’s words, for while Chief Che-Neuse’s band contacted my great-grandmother on her family’s farmstead, white settlers contacted the Meskwaki woman on her native land. The Meskwaki woman refutes Josephine’s family’s notion of Che-Neuse’s band as lazy, beggars, and completely unaware of economic principles of material and possibly monetary exchange. Yet though they differ in their cultural beliefs, both Josephine and the Meskwaki woman served their duties as housekeepers based on received gender roles, viewed their self-sufficiency and independence as linked to material culture, and used stories to bridge material culture and memories of their personal past. I have shown how the Meskwaki woman utilizes storytelling to locate and describe objects of material culture in her personal past in tandem with her beliefs and stories of her mother and grandmother themselves. Similarly, my great-grandmother’s storytelling jumps from the materials that were important and familiar to her childhood to her prejudices and affection for native peoples and her family/upbringing, respectively. Overall, the relationship between these two women in my project speaks to the importance of presenting all sides of historical phenomena to reach a representative sense of what the past was like. As part of this imperative, my project has demonstrated the ever-present need to balance one’s own perspective with those of others. In doing so within my thesis and beyond it, I remind myself of
Chief Standing Bear’s passionate appeal to the U.S. government during the height of federal land cession treaties: “That hand is not the color of yours. But if I pierce it, I shall feel pain. The blood that will flow from mine will be of the same color as yours. I am a man. The same God made us both” (Foster preface).
Works Cited

Digital Recording of Dr. William Whittaker, October 2015. Recorded by Keegan Gormally at the Office of the State Archaeologist, Iowa City, IA.

Digitized Tape Recording of Josephine Gormally, c. May 1980. Recorded by J.W. “Bud” Gormally & Bettie Gormally in Fort Dodge, IA, on Josephine’s 100th Birthday


Fort Dodge Times 20 Feb. 1885. Print.


