

History Resource Units from the Minnesota Historical Society

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THE MULTIMEDIA MINNESOTA HISTORY RESOURCES UNITS are designed to bring the research of academic history, the processes of social studies learning theories, and the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society to students in intermediate and secondary grades throughout the state. The single-subject kits include student booklets; filmstrips with sound; and reproductions of documents, posters, charts, and biographies. Two units have been completed, *The Ojibwe* and *Minnesota Politics and Government*. The third, *The Immigrant Experience*, will be published in the summer of 1978.

The units are prepared by the Educational Services Division of the Historical Society, which also administers teacher training, adult education, museum lessons, capitol tours, and exhibit programs in the Historical Building and throughout the state. Each resource kit takes about two years to produce: eighteen months for research and writing, and six months for production. Three full-time staff people who have research, writing, and education skills prepare the materials. Contracts are written with graphic designers, audio and visual specialists, and printers, to produce individual items. The production costs are about \$65,000. Funding is provided by the state legislature. The materials are sold to schools and libraries at costs of \$125-\$175.

This article will describe how the society became involved in the program, the important educational and historical assumptions, and the specific development of the Ojibwe unit. It will conclude with an evaluation and an assessment of the impact of the program.

First, some general comments about education programs within historical agencies and archives: to be successful within an institution the programs must be a reflection of the essential strength and character of the agency. While that character may change or evolve, education programs need to be built upon rather than built separately from the integrity of an organization. Institutions must understand that strong collections, well cared for, are of minimal value unless they exist with strong public programs, well conceived and implemented. Too often the question of collections and that of public programs are isolated from each other. They cannot be viewed separately, either from a philosophical or practical point of view. Philosophically, people in the United States have chosen to store their histories in institutions. In other societies the people carry their histories with them. We live in a time when people are individually and collectively looking to the past to understand the forces that have affected their lives.

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They journey to historical warehouses for the answers. Many are people who are unfamiliar with the collections and their use. Education programs should be designed to assist their efforts. Practically, increased public funding and public demand will isolate and exclude those agencies that choose to ignore their opportunities and responsibilities.

The success of the Minnesota History Resource Units is a reflection of the traditional strengths of the Minnesota Historical Society. Throughout the twentieth century the society has placed great emphasis upon scholarly publishing. It has seen the print medium as a major vehicle to fulfill an essential commitment of its charter to disseminate information about Minnesota history. Another important factor is that since the 1940s the institution has sought to develop broad-based public programs and to respond specifically to the needs of teachers and students in elementary and secondary schools. This effort has included a children's magazine that maintained the standards of scholarly excellence within a format inviting to children.

In 1967 the society created an education division with the purpose of evaluating and integrating existing school services. Further, the division was charged with expanding the public programs of the society for school children and the general public. In 1970 the charge focused upon the difficult realities of state history in school curricula. While the subject was required in the intermediate grades, textbooks reflected neither the methodology that was being introduced into classrooms nor the awareness that history as it had been taught slighted most people—Blacks, Native Americans, women, workers, and white ethnics.

While community groups, teachers, and school administrators sought history materials reflecting these concerns, the needs were not being met. Commercial publishers were not in a position to respond because the Minnesota market was not large enough. In addition, school districts were neither prepared nor equipped to support the kind of research necessary to produce materials. Furthermore, state history was viewed as provincial in a time of great national consciousness, with the issues of civil rights and the Vietnam War dominating our collective concerns. Finally, and perhaps most important, historians did not and generally do not find professional satisfaction in preparing materials for children. Anyone familiar with the sophistication of academic research and the primitive content of elementary and secondary school history materials found the discrepancy overwhelming.

Because of its collections and publishing strengths, combined with its commitment to quality teaching and the learning of state history, the society made the judgment that it would embark upon a curriculum resources program. In a real sense it would build upon its staff strengths of research and writing, and act as a broker for integrating the skills of academic institutions and school systems. It was established that the materials would reflect three key considerations: the process of academic history, an understanding of social studies methodology, and the utilization of the range of the society's collections within a multimedia format.

Once these judgments were made, the questions of developing resource kits focused upon the needs of teachers and students. Unless the materials were designed with an understanding of how curriculum programs were developed in school districts and how teachers used the materials in their classrooms, the program would be a wasted effort. Conversations were held with social studies consultants at the state department of education and individual school districts.

A survey was distributed to all districts, asking people to describe the grade levels where state history was included, to outline the subject matter covered, to describe and evaluate the materials being used, and to arrange in order of priority the subject areas for development.

The conversations and the survey reemphasized the autonomy of individual school districts in the development of their own curricula. To respond to the great variation in materials and methodology, we determined first that we would divide Minnesota history into twenty-two topical and chronological areas reflecting the widest range of subjects taught. The subject list included historical geography, urbanization, labor history, Ojibwe people, immigration, conservation and the environment, politics and government, and others. Second, we would develop materials that conceptually could be used at a variety of grade levels. For intermediate students the materials would be used in the required teaching of state history. For secondary students the materials would be designed to fit into the structure of classes in U.S. history. This was based upon the notion that, in Minnesota, students and teachers might use Minnesota examples of major themes in American history. Third, we would prepare for students materials that would provide them with an opportunity to participate in the process of doing history: examining primary sources, evaluating perspectives, arriving at conclusions, and looking to their own families and communities to see how they either reflected or deviated from the norm of the state's experience. Finally, we would develop materials graphically appealing and needing only the most simple classroom equipment to use.

To integrate historical perspectives, committees were formed including academic scholars and others with expertise in an area, along with those familiar with social studies methodologies. The committees helped establish general concepts and provided research guidance and historical review. People to sit on the advisory committees were selected by reason of their knowledge and their sympathy with the following assumptions: (1) history is important to people as it helps them understand their own lives and the forces that affect them; (2) history, to have integrity, must present the choices people have faced within the context of a given group's world view; and (3) history is dynamic and is a reflection that different times and different people ask different questions and, therefore, write different histories.

The general commitment was to do for children what scholars have been doing for themselves. We would raise the important historical questions, go to the primary sources for the answers and insights, and we would introduce those insights at the conceptual levels students could understand. It was on this basis that the fundamental integration of academic scholarship and learning theory occurred. For those who wanted to begin with basic information, the materials provided that. For those who were prepared to isolate and examine competing historical forces, there would be the opportunity to do so. For those who were curious about alternative values and individual choices, that information was also provided. We rejected the idea that children could not respond to sophisticated historical interpretation. We believed that their understanding or lack of it would be based upon our skills in presenting ideas clearly and at different student conceptual levels.

The first unit of the series was the *Ojibwe History Resource Unit*, published in 1973. It was prepared with the assistance of the Ojibwe Curriculum Committee and the American Indian Studies Department of the University of Minnesota.

The committee included Indian scholars, teachers, and community people reflecting urban and reservation areas. The unit's particular assumption was that Ojibwe society would be considered within the framework of Ojibwe values, not in terms of how that society accepted or rejected the values of Western cultures.

Further, the materials were not designed to reestablish the concept of the "noble savage." Rather they would reflect a return to the primary sources asking questions based upon competing historical perspectives. Not: "How did Indians impede European expansion?" but "How did Indian people seek to defend their land?" Not: "In what ways did Indians assimilate into American society?" but "How did Indian people seek to retain their cultural identity?" Not: "Were Europeans good or bad?" but "What were the value systems of the Europeans who journeyed to America?" Not: "Which Indians 'sold out'?" but "What were the alternatives for Indian people?"

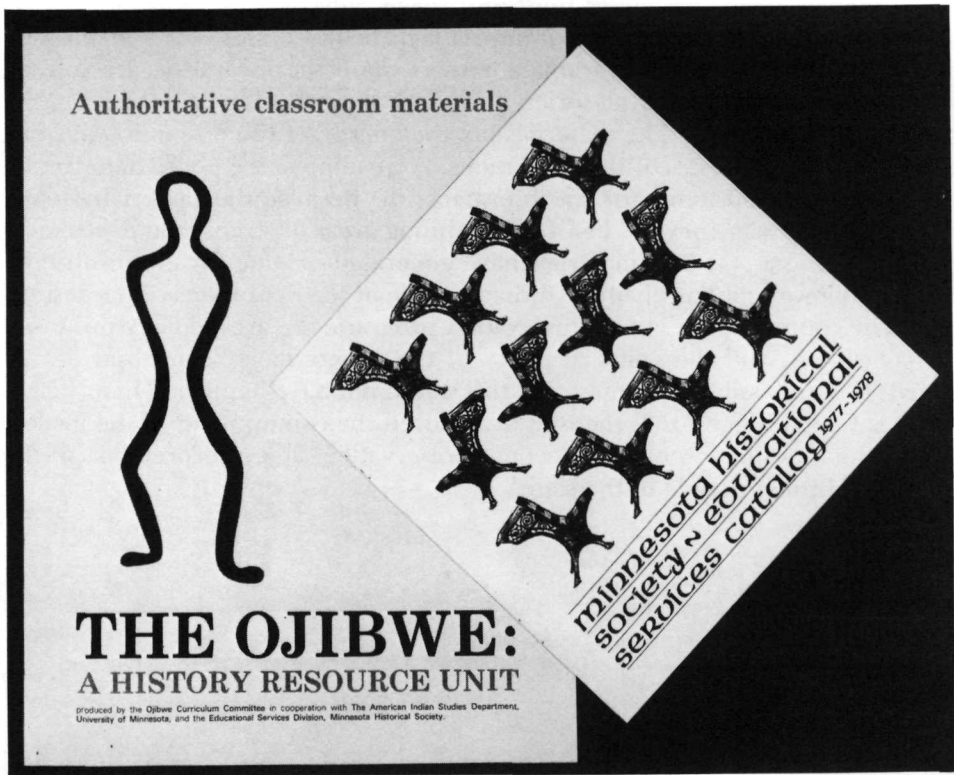
The specific components of the unit are packaged in three sections. The first includes thirty-five intermediate or secondary booklets. The intermediate booklets seek to give an understanding of the traditional beliefs, customs, and life style of the Ojibwe. The secondary booklets show the movement of Ojibwe people across the Great Lakes region, how the land was transferred through treaties, the allotment of reservations, and how the people have retained their identity into the twentieth century. This section also includes the teacher's guide for the unit, and a bibliography. The guide suggests teaching strategies, the objectives of the unit and each component, and inquiry methods for achieving specific conceptual understandings.

The second section has eight filmstrips with records providing the narrations. The titles are: "Life through the Seasons," "Legends and Songs of the People," "To Be One of the People," "Adawagan—Fur Trade: A Meeting of the Ojibwe and the White Man," "The Story of a Treaty: 1837," "The Battle of Sugar Point," "The Melting Pot Myth," and "The Anishinabe: 1930–1970."

The third section includes a variety of loose materials designed for individual student use or classroom display. The items are a word chart; cards describing the uses of birchbark and the processing of wild rice; a chart illustrating plant medicines; and two posters by the Canadian Ojibwe artist Norval Morrisseau, depicting legends of the *thunderbird* and the *little water people*. There is also a poster of Bug-o-nay-ge-shig, the leader at Leech Lake during the Battle of Sugar Point; a time-line illustrating Canadian and United States policies toward Indian people; a facsimile of the 1837 treaty; and a reproduction of a page from an account book of a trader at Grand Portage in 1823–24. A major component of this section is the inclusion of eight biography banners of Ojibwe men and women who had an impact on the history of their people. These resources are designed to complement the information in the booklets and the filmstrips.

The development process for the Ojibwe unit has been used with each succeeding unit. First, a survey of school materials was conducted of the specific subject area, with a determination made as to how the new materials might be integrated into or replace existing materials. At the same time the resources of the Historical Society were reviewed. This was followed by the preparation of an outline of objectives, subject areas to be covered, and specific components. The staff draft was reviewed and modified based upon the recommendations of the committee.

Before extensive research was undertaken on a given component, a general discussion was held with the committee to determine how the piece would fit



into the objectives of the unit, what part of the story would be carried by it, and the perspective it would have. Then the division staff would research and prepare a draft that would be reviewed for historical accuracy and for use in classrooms. If the revisions were minor, they were simply incorporated before production. If they were major, another draft was prepared and submitted for review.

After publication, promotional pieces were distributed to libraries and school districts. Over forty workshops were held throughout the state with elementary and secondary teachers and librarians, acquainting them with the materials and their use. Because of their great concern about the educational tools used in classrooms and their involvement in the development of the materials, the Indian people acted as major advocates in having the Ojibwe unit incorporated into most districts of the state.

While the process was time-consuming, there was no other way to achieve the quality we sought. Evaluation of the Minnesota History Resources series can be made in terms of the Ojibwe unit, which has been used in schools for five years. In many districts, particularly in those that are on or near the seven Ojibwe reservations in the state, and in urban districts with large Indian populations, the unit has largely replaced previously used materials and it complements more recently developed materials. The unit has been positively reviewed by a number of Indian publications and also by *The History Teacher* and *Preview* magazines. The American Association for State and Local History presented the society with its award of merit for the work.

The impact of the resources units and specifically the Ojibwe unit exists on many levels, and in some ways that impact is difficult to assess. (1) These multimedia packages have had a dramatic impact upon the inventory, accounting, and distribution system of the society. The school market is a large one and the demands are great. (2) The materials tax the energy of the research, editorial, and collections processes of the institutions. For example, the photo department prepared over 500 items for the filmstrips. (3) Because the materials survey broad subject areas, they are helpful in defining areas of strength and weakness in the collections. (4) The materials have generated income for the institution. (5) The Ojibwe unit has involved Indian people in the operations of the institution. The council, the historic preservation program, the archaeology program, the collections, and the editorial policy of the society have been positively affected. It is impossible to suggest that this would not have happened in any case. But it is fair to suggest that the unit dramatized the commitment of the institution to the reevaluation of its collection, preservation, and interpretation of the history of Indian people in the state.



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